

BITE-SIZED by Summer Block

Michael Waddington

score scandals

The *New York Times* recently devoted two articles to analyzing the 100-point score printed next to wines in high-profile magazines like *Wine Spectator* and *Wine Advocate*. These scores, which also make their way onto retail store shelf labels and sites like Wine.com, do much to determine a wine's commercial success. That said, the score's variance is so small that shoppers may find themselves debating the merits of a 91 wine versus a 92. What's more, many wine experts don't believe such a fine distinction is useful, or even possible. They argue that every bottle and tasting experience is unique, so one man's 94 sipped on a given day, won't necessarily taste the same as another man's 94 sampled on a different day.

Nevertheless, these controversial little numbers are influential. Indeed, some say they have increased the popularity of certain perennially high-scoring grapes and styles to the detriment of variety and experimentation, creating wines that please the small group of critics who tally the scores in the *Spectator* or *Advocate*.

Simon Tam, director of Hong Kong's International Wine Centre, says that "there are a lot of wine producers worldwide who deliberately chase [a high rating] by customizing their winemaking techniques. Not all are successfully rated but they leave behind a trail of homogenously-styled wines for consumers. This could propagate a never-ending cookie cutting cycle and make it even more impossible for quality-minded winemakers to make their mark."

On the other hand, Tam adds that the 100-point wine rating system has provided thousands of new Chinese wine lovers with instant quality recognition. "It is a good guide for beginners," he says, "but is fast becoming obsolete to the vast number of consumers who want more than just a number. Chinese consumers are also frustrated by the American-based 100-point system because it does not reflect Chinese cultural taste preferences." ■

**techy tastes**

Sitting at your desk, hungry and waiting for quitting time? These gourmet websites will tide you over until dinner.

Chowhound and CHOW. The perfect place to post your own queries, be they 'Help me ID wild chanterelles' or 'Best pho in Toronto?' on regional posting boards (including China). Or enjoy Jim Leff's features and podcasts on topics like 'Cuckoo for Kugel' or 'Cubicle Cuisine'. Sister site CHOW is full of recipes and gonzo how-tos. Editor-in-chief Jane Goldman explains: "Most reviews are about 'lovely meals in lovely surroundings with lovely people ...' We like fun. And we like real."

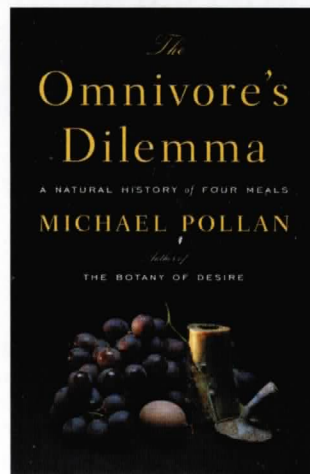
www.chowhound.com, www.chow.com.

Epicurious. A staggeringly comprehensive online recipe site, with an added bonus: trailblazing readers can try their hand at any recipe and then report back with annotations and suggestions for whomever tries it next.

www.epicurious.com.

The Food Section. Josh Friedland (*The New York Times*, *Washington Post*) maintains this elegant compilation of news, tips and recipes. Much of the content is centered on the Big Apple, but the *Moveable Feast* section features the best of international cities. The *Mobile Menu* posts cell phone snapshots of amusing eats submitted by readers.

www.thefoodsection.com. ■



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ethical eating

In *The Omnivore's Dilemma*, Michael Pollan investigates the implications and origins of four meals: a McDonald's fast food fix, a supper of organic ingredients from a health food supermarket, a repast fresh from a utopian farm, and a dinner made entirely from items foraged from the wild. His voracious research and level-headed approach cast words like "organic", "healthy" and "natural" in a whole new light. ■

**super silicone**

Silicone bake ware is quickly catching up to traditional materials like metal, ceramic and glass. Once considered a trifle tacky, the latest plastic pots and pans are being turned out by venerable companies like Le Creuset. The silicone muffin trays, cake molds and loaf pans are nonstick, durable and flexible enough to twist and pop out stubborn baked goods. So what's the catch? Sturdiness. The same wiggle factor that allows you to eject a stuck cupcake with ease also means batter will be splashed all over your kitchen. ■