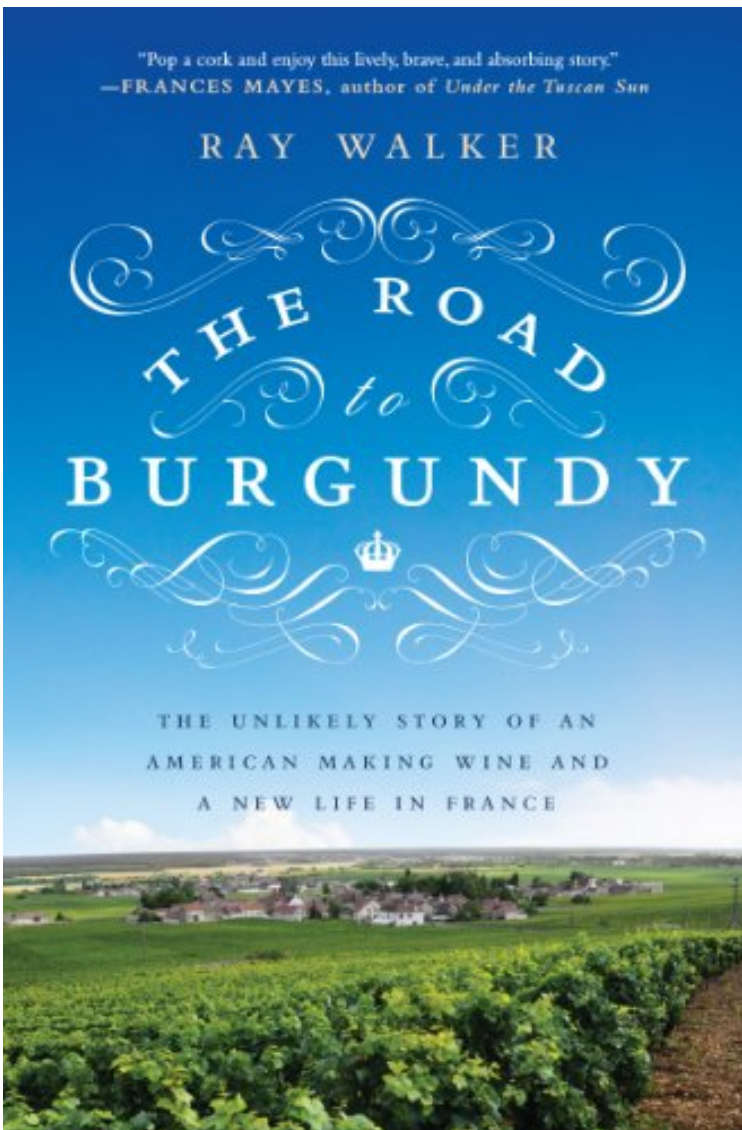


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The Road to Burgundy: The Unlikely Story of an American Making Wine and a New Life in France



Par Ray Walker
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Description :

Prsentation de l'diteurAn intoxicating memoir of an American who discovers a passion for French wine and gambles everything to chase a dream of owning a vineyard in BurgundyRay Walker had a secure career in finance until a wine-tasting vacation ignited a passion he couldnt stifle. He quit his job and moved to France to start a winerywith little money, limited command of the French language, and no winemaking experience.

He immersed himself in the extraordinary history of Burgundys vineyards and began honing his skills. Ray shares his journey to secure the regions most coveted grapes. The Road to Burgundy is a glorious celebration of finding ones true path in life and taking a chance whatever the odds.

Chapter One

My bag was packed. One small black suitcase placed next to our front door. The house was still dark in the moments just before the sun would come up. There was a chill to the house, a briskness that kept me too alert for that time of morning. I tiptoed out, trying not to awake my wife and my one-year-old daughter, Isabella. It was four in the morning, but they had just fallen asleep a short while ago. They wanted to see me off, but when their eyelids started getting heavy we had said our good-byes. Kissing my daughters forehead and my wifes lips hours before made me realize that I would miss them the moment my hand touched my luggage. Good luck, honey, said Christian. Shed said it a million times to me before that moment. Shed said it before my meetings with potential clients, before starting on a long drive, before any task that required strengthened resolve. But this time was different. I wouldnt hear her voice in person for another three months. I shut the door quietly behind me and felt surprisingly calm. I knew my family was safe. And I knew that while I was entering into a situation filled with endless possible outcomes, I was undoubtedly walking toward a much brighter future. Until now, every part of my life had been in the United States. Everyone I knew was here, the boundaries of my experiences were defined by this country. I only thought about going to France, not of leaving California. It was as if I had closed my eyes on the flight up to altitude only to notice how high we actually were above ground just as I was leaping from the airplane. Suddenly, I was feeling more excited than ever before. While planning everything leading up to this moment, I never gave into this feeling. I worried that it might jinx it. But the moment was finally here, and once I got into the car taking me to the airport, there would be no turning back. I would be calling Burgundy home. As the driver pulled away from the curb I prattled manically about the turn of events that put me on this path wine, history, movies, learning French, the possibility that every aspect of my familys life was changing during that car ride. You know, Im from Brazil, he said. I came here with a dream as well. Im a musician but I also own this shuttle company. My friends at home were telling me that it would be tough on me and my family. But I believed that what I felt in my heart was the right thing. And that this feeling was best for my family. Im sure itll work out for you. His words echoed the sort of mantra that had been playing on repeat in my brain for the past eight months. Hearing it spoken aloud by somebody else made me feel better about the giant leap of faith I was about to take. Arriving at SFO, I found the Air France desk and queued behind a young French couple with their young daughter. I leaned in toward them, hoping to make out a bit of their conversation and hoping to validate my months of studying. Id stayed up late every night watching old French movies and reading antiquated books about Burgundy. Now, eavesdropping as best I could, I celebrated a small victory every time I caught a word or phrase I understood. This was the first time Id be going on an international flight by myself. Gone was the fuss of getting Bella situated with toys and videos and other distractions, or helping Christian get her carry-on in the overhead bin. I was traveling light just a few pairs of jeans, some T-shirts, and a wallet that had seen fuller days. Practical, yes, but perhaps more so if Id also packed some formal winemaking training or experience beyond one brief harvest in California. Or maybe a location to produce wine. Or tools, equipment, the basics. Barring that, even having a place to live once I got to France would have been nice. That, or grapes. Or a visa. But this was my last chance. It was the only chip I had left. Failing in Burgundy would mean going back to a life that wasnt mine. It would mean working on someone elses time, for someone elses dream. Theres no way I could go back to sitting at a desk hemmed in by monitors and memos and bad coffee, suits and ties, and central air; not after Id gotten a taste of freedom. I got comfortable and closed my eyes, but opened them again when I noticed the woman next to me needed help lifting her bag above our seats. Jumping up to help her I accidentally elbowed the headrest of the guy in front of me. Je me excuse, pardon. It seemed like every passenger turned around to see who was recklessly destroying the grace of their language. Youre American? the womans husband inquired. You speak . . . lovely French. Really? Its not too bad? He offered an even wider smile, but saying nothing, glanced nervously at his wife as she sat down between us. What are your plans in France? Im going to Burgundy, I answered, a bit relieved we were switching tracks from praising my clearly subpar mastery of his language. Burgundy? he said. Why not Paris? Well, Paris is nice, but they dont have any wine. And what do you know about Burgundy? the man and woman seemed to ask at the same time. I cant say that I know a lot, but I love Burgundy enough to change my life for it. Were from Champagne. It is quite close to Of course I know Champagne! I explained that my wife and I had traveled there just months before with our baby girl. It was just over two hours away from Burgundy, but at the same time, they were worlds apart. To my mind, the

fussy estate-riddled Champagne lacked the grounded, rich, agriculture-centric culture of Burgundy, but even I knew better than to say so. That's not a bad place to live! I said, making my envy apparent to even those a few rows over from us. I might not have wanted to make wine there, but you couldn't beat the scenery. Burgundy is beautiful as well. Have you been? Just once. I went there with my family earlier this year, in January. So, you will be living in France? In Burgundy? Well, that's the plan. Well, actually, I don't really have a plan, but that's where I would like it all to end up. Oh, well, we must speak more French then.

You need to practice right away. That is she looked at the Wine Spectator on my lap unless you are too busy. No, I'm not busy at all, I said, throwing my magazine under my seat as if I were in grade school and clearing the baseball cards off my desk before the teacher came back into the classroom. For the rest of the flight we spoke in French. We exchanged thoughts about wine, food, their life in Champagne. I loved watching how alive they were when they spoke, so animated. Their eyes would open in excitement or for emphasis only to close narrowly to convey the gravity of a pronouncement. You must visit the market on Saturday! [eyes wide] And then be sure you try the poisses. [eyes narrow] Their hands too said nearly as much as their lips did opening, closing, widening, waving above them, or tightening down to a point with a finger pressed into their lap tray. I'd try to mimic the fluidity, repurposing their words in an attempt to learn more nuanced expressions. They were patient and kind, and seven hours later, we'd learned an incredible amount about one another, perhaps to the chagrin of those trying to sleep around us. The ease I felt in speaking with them erased much of my nervousness. They weren't French people waiting for me to slip up on a French word, they were just good people. *Revue de presse* An LA Times editor's pick Wine lovers,

Francophiles and anyone who roots for dreamers will want to raise a glass to Ray

Walker. *USA Today*.com An intoxicating tale Mr. Walker's story is sure to inspire a few more leaps of faith. *The Economist* In this rich account, Walker chronicles his five-year journey from Northern California to the French countryside with self-deprecating humor and earnestness. . . . Wine geeks will enjoy Walker's blow-by-blow account of the winemaking process. Those less inclined to appreciate wine's back story can revel in his descriptions of Burgundy's food and lifestyle. Walker's tale evokes the exquisite thrill of finding and following your passion, no matter how crazy it might seem. *Publishers Weekly* Walker's energy and warmth lift this book. *Booklist* "The main appeal is the amazing story of how someone was able to realize his seemingly far-fetched dream." *New York Journal of Books* "True oenophiles will love it. . . . a great summer read." *Biographile.com* "Readers who share his passion for fine wine will be entertained by his detailed descriptions." *BookReporter.com* "The Road to Burgundy is an extraordinary story told by an extraordinary person set in the world's most extraordinary of wine regions. If Ray Walker's journey had been told in a work of fiction--or film--it would be frankly, unbelievable. He set his mind to doing just about the stupidest, most difficult and unlikely thing an American could do. And emerged victorious. His story, like his wine, is a triumph of idealism, determination and integrity. You will never drink Bordeaux again." *Anthony Bourdain* "There are many great stories in the history of wine, but none as astonishingly and eye-bulgingly improbable as that of Ray Walker's. In a page-turning memoir that will convince anyone that their dreams, no matter how harebrained, can be realized, Ray Walker delivers up a thrilling, picaresque, and insightful look into the heart of one man's obsession. An absolute must read for any lover of Pinot, or any aficionado of wine, period." *Rex Pickett*, author of *Sideways* Salut, cin-cin, and cheers to Ray Walker, who followed his passion for wine to Burgundy. Pop a cork and enjoy this lively, brave, and absorbing story. *Frances Mayes*, author of *Under the Tuscan Sun* A Conversation with Ray Walker, author of *The Road to Burgundy* Q: When did you first start appreciating wine? I was 23 years old when I had the first glass of wine that I paid any attention to. I really had no interest in wine until then. I didn't grow up surrounded by the world of fine dining, and truthfully, I didn't see what wine could do that beer couldn't do better. One wine tasting changed my view of wine forever when I was introduced to wines from Burgundy for the first time. I'd never known that drinking wine could be that kind of intense, all-consuming experience. After that day, I couldn't think of anything else. Wine was constantly on my mind. Q: What is so special about Burgundy? Terroir is one of those holy grail concepts in wine that so many talk about but not everyone truly understands or experiences. In Burgundy, because wine is generally made with one type of red grape and one type of white grape, you can focus more attention on the staggering differences present in the soil. On top of all of this, there is an amazing wealth of history here in Burgundy. The history, coupled with the uniqueness of the land, makes Burgundy unlike any other wine region in the world. Every place is special, but Burgundy captured every part of me after I took that first sip in 2005. Q: A lot of us dream about quitting our job and moving somewhere exotic, but you actually did it. What finally led you to totally upend your life? So much of my

life had started to feel closed in. People around me were focused on a mountain of material things, shallow interests, and empty short-term goals. And I was starting to become that kind of person. It scared me to think that if I was successful in my business career I wouldn't end up with much in the end besides those hollow achievements. I saw where my life was going and how far it had drifted away from something concrete, something more worthwhile. Going after my dream started to seem like actually a practical thing to do with my life.

Q: When you were starting out on this new adventure, your wife and daughter were not with you in France. How did you handle that separation?

Christian was back home with Bella, still working a full time job, and her mother was lending a hand as well. It was tough on everyone, but something just kept pulling me toward Burgundy. I had a gut feeling our life would eventually be the life we wanted there. I didn't know what was going to happen but I believed that I had to trust in that feeling and just hold on to see it through.

Q: Why did you think you could pull all of this together without speaking French or knowing how to make wine?

It was a wild journey and I just focused on holding onto the rope that was dragging me along. I figured that until I was left with no other moves no more options for buying grapes because I was out of people to ask, no more locations for a wine making facility I'd just keep going since every step forward could potentially bring a new opportunity. I knew it was going in the right direction I just didn't know how long it would take to get me all the way to where I wanted to be. It was risky, but it was also an adventure.

Q: What did you find most useful in terms of making wine that first time?

The land and culture of Burgundy played a tremendous role. If I'd been trying to make wine in a different place, I may have thought more of myself and perhaps made the mistake of thinking I was talented. The truth is that in Burgundy, it doesn't matter if I am the best wine maker in the world or not. You just need the ability to not mess up, to care, and to be mindful. Anything else is about aesthetics and it's not necessary.

Q: What was the toughest part about starting your winery in Burgundy?

The paperwork was daunting. It is incredibly hard to set up a business as an American in France. But though it was a long and frustrating process I knew it was a concrete problem that had a solution I'd eventually find. The most difficult thing was finding the fruit. The fruit is the most important piece of the puzzle the quality of your fruit decides everything about the quality of your wine.

Q: When did you know that everything in France was going to work out?

When Christian came and visited me the first time in Burgundy, she came with Bella. She tried the wine while it was still in the tank. Before she said a word, I knew, from years of studying her face, that she was tasting something amazing and she was proud. It was the exact reason why I had to be in Burgundy. That look, that moment. It spoke volumes. It lasted a fraction of a second but it was a solid dividing point in my life.