

Books etc

All sake-d out, our regular reviewer is pleasantly surprised by a self-published book on the wines of Japan

REVIEWS SOPHIE THORPE

After my spotlight on sake books, the Japanese theme continues this month with a new guide to the country's wines. I stumbled across this self-published work on Instagram (a reward for my hours of mindless scrolling). Nick Rowan – aka @winefogg on the platform – isn't an industry veteran, but has clearly fallen hard for the world of wine in recent years, undertaking WSET courses and setting up a blog (winefogg.com). And now, he's published a book: **Japanese Wine: History, Regions, Wineries (and Cheese)** (£49 Wine Fogg, December 2025).

Rowan, who previously lived in Japan, has put an extraordinary amount of thought and work into the book. A true labour of love, it's a comprehensive guide to the wines of Japan (as well as a nod to the country's nascent cheese industry), written with the tourist in mind. It offers a broad-brush introduction to the country's wines – the history, main grapes and styles, viticulture and winemaking – before diving into profiles of

each prefecture and the producers; but you'll also find shortlists of wine shops, bars and restaurants in every area covered, as well as useful travel tips. (A note for those who are as confused as I was at first: MBA doesn't stand for Master of Business Administration, but Muscat Bailey A, otherwise Bailey A, an outstanding sibling for Melon B in the Spice Grapes band I'm compiling.) The appendices include an array of additional information – from the estates with the best winery cats/dogs/goats/chickens and statistics on wine production to a (very) brief guide to parsing Japanese.


Dear reader, you may be aware that I don't always gush with praise when it comes to self-publishing – and it certainly comes with limitations. Inevitably, there are a few more typos or formatting quirks than in traditionally published books; the design may leave a lot to be desired; and the imagery can be awful. Editors are generally very helpful in shaping a book – and can be sorely missed.

Rowan, however, has managed to dodge the worst of these potential pitfalls. His book is stripped back



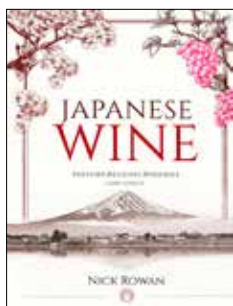
Nick Rowan tasting at Tomi Wine Chapel, Nagano, Japan

– text heavy, but for good reason. This isn't a coffee table book, nor one you're likely to read cover to cover, but rather a solid reference guide – and ideal if you're planning a vinous tour of Japan. An editor would likely have cut the best winery animals from the appendix; I'm glad there wasn't one to do so.

If you buy the book directly through Rowan's site (rather than Amazon), you can add a custom wine stain, made with a specific Japanese wine of your choice – a curious yet creative way to tip an amateur author if ever I saw one. 



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The romance of wine

Not many wine journalists stray into fiction – and those who do tend to have rather mixed results – but Eliza Dumais, whose writing has featured in *Decanter*, recently published her debut novella **Grape Juice** (£8.99 831 Stories, December 2025).

Set among the vines at harvest-time in Alsace, New Yorker Alice finds much more than nascent ferments

on her vintage adventure – with the handsome Henri. An escapist read for romantics, effortlessly sprinkled with wine references, it's well worth packing for your next beach holiday.