

# Natalie MacLean

Wordsmith, wine pro and lifelong highland dancer, Natalie MacLean is not your average sommelier. This charming vinophile, named World's Best Wine Writer by World Food Media Awards in Australia, sat down with *Publix Grape*, talking whiskey, winter, the world's greatest wines and the secrets to top-shelf imbibing without breaking the bank.

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**WELL-SPENT YOUTH** I grew up in a Scottish family, with beer and whiskey on the table and highland dancing every summer, so wine didn't come to me early in life. But one night during grad school, I tasted a Brunello. I knew I loved it, but I didn't have the words to describe it. So I took one wine course—then another and another—to find the right words.

**DOMAINE DE LA ROMANÉE CONTI, BURGUNDY** Pinot Noir is one of my favorite grapes, so visiting this premier Burgundy estate, standing among the vines and in the cobwebbed cellars with the winemaker, was unbelievable. I was so nervous about dropping anything!

**NOSE FOR A BARGAIN** I've experienced some equally special moments with far less expensive wines. My new book is about finding the best price-to-quality ratio in wine. In general, my principal is to "go south": from Bordeaux to Languedoc, from Napa to Santa Cruz, from Brunello to Sicily.

**THE WRITING PROCESS** I'm a messy writer—if I were a painter, I'd paint a seagull in one corner, then a clump of clover in another corner. I'd splash on the page every impression I have, then edit, edit, edit.

**WINE & FOOD** The best pairing is between you and a wine you like. But as far as food pairings go, the fun is in experimenting, choosing whether to complement or to contrast. A robust steak complements a full-bodied, robust wine; a rich, creamy dish becomes even more luxurious when contrasted with the acidity of a Sauvignon Blanc.

**ANOTHER WAY TO PAIR** I love pairing wine with books—for instance, *The Grapes of Wrath* with a California Zinfandel, or Dan Brown's *The Da Vinci Code* with an Italian Chianti.

**A GRAPE ON THE RISE?** Torrontés from Argentina. It's a lovely, floral white that many wine lovers haven't yet discovered.

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**WHEN THE WEATHER IS FRIGHTFUL** A Bordeaux with fork-tender filet mignon.

**STRANGEST PAIRING:** Champagne and potato chips: sublime!