

# Fred Tasker, The Thrill of the Hunt

By Victoria Elliot Pesce

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Fred Tasker has the white beard and apple red cheeks that lend him the look of a kindly college professor or maybe a moonlighting Santa Claus.

Though he is most recognizable for his down-to-earth wine advice on-line and in papers around the country, Tasker's paying job is actually as the medical writer for The Miami Herald. In between articles on stem cell research and flu vaccines he scours the world for unfamiliar labels and vintages often judging wine competitions in order to get a couple of hundred swirls and spits at a shot.



Throughout his four-decade career at the paper, he has covered religion, aviation, finance, consumer electronics and local government but his driving passion is the fermented grape.

Wine was at first just a curiosity, a passion that found him rather than the other way around. If his dad had had his way, Fred might still be sipping milk.

His first taste in Junior High School was pilfered from an open bottle of the cheapest, Post World War II Chianti in a straw covered bottle that Fred's dad had slyly slipped into the fridge. When young Fred took the bait, he reminisces "I puckered mightily and didn't taste another wine until my senior year in college."

He got serious about the juice some time in the early 1970's thanks to buddy Fred Barger, who invited him to a meeting of Les Amis du Vin, The Friends of Wine, a wine-tasting chapter run by wine guru Chip Cassidy.

"Soon we were drinking buttery California chardonnays, regal French Bordeaux, mysterious, unpronounceable wines from Portugal and Yugoslavia."

It was then that Tasker decided that somehow, someway he would taste a glass of wine from every state, region and country in which the stuff is made—preferably in situ.

His lust for Bacchus's beverage has taken him to the vineyards of California, Washington, New York, and sipping at industrial parks at the airport in Indianapolis, Italy, France, Spain, Chile, Argentina, South Africa when apartheid ended and even Uzbekistan. A long way from the Michigan farm where he was raised.

His weekly column, which might include advice on pairing wine with Thai food or comparing box wines runs in dozens of papers around the country. In addition, this roving oenophile can also be heard on Food News & Views, with Linda Gassenheimer every Thursday from 1:30 to 2 p.m. on Joe Cooper's Topical Currents on WLRN, 91.3 FM, the local NPR affiliate.

Oh, BTW, his favorite bottle? "The one I'm about to try that I've never had before. It's the thrill of the hunt."

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Check out his blog:  
*Wine Beneath the Palms*  
[www.miamiherald.com/284/](http://www.miamiherald.com/284/)

## *About the author:*

*Victoria Pesce Elliott is the Restaurant Critic for the Miami Herald. She is also the Consulting Editor for the Zagat Survey, on the Restaurant committee for James Beard House, Board member of the United States Sommelier Association and holds a Masters Degree in Journalism from the Columbia University School of Journalism in New York City.*