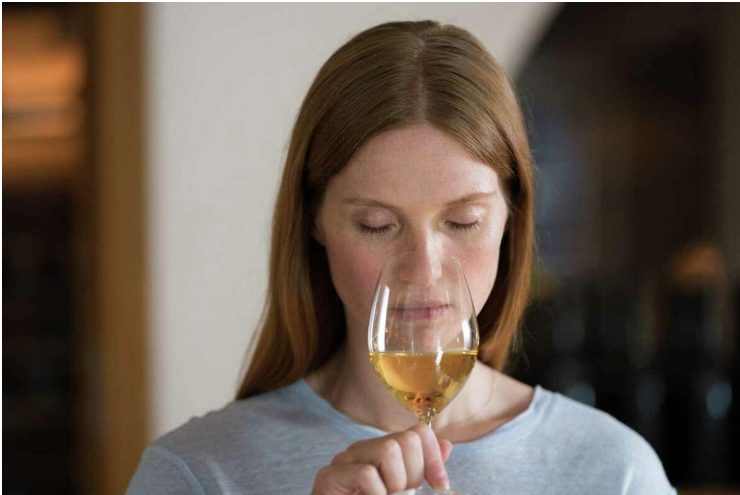


Wine TV shows are usually bad. But this new one is excellent



The actress Fleur Geffrier as Camille Leger in " Drops of God, here blind tasting a glass of white Chateauf du Pape.

Provided by Apple TV+

Only a few years ago, wine was so scarcely featured on TV that I'd get excited if I saw a blurry label featured in the corner of the screen. That's changed recently, as a number of shows have aired that not only feature wine but are actually *about* wine: " Grand Crew, " Kings of Napa and " Promised Land [all debuted last year](#), and straight-to-streaming movies have premiered like " [Pretty Problems](#) and " [Uncorked](#) .

As a wine nerd, I'm always excited about shows like these. The thing is, most wine TV shows have not been very good. (Some of them are actively bad corny, melodramatic and often [riddled with factual errors](#) .) And so, as I tuned into the first episode of the latest wine-centric series, " Drops of God on Apple TV+, I was wary.

But I'm happy to report that, unlike most of its wine-show predecessors, " Drops of God is gripping, beautifully shot and insightful. The story is moving, focused as much on themes of trauma, memory and family as it is on [Merlot](#) and Grenache. Even with a somewhat outlandish premise, it manages to capture certain elements of fine-wine culture in a very realistic, and revealing, way.

The series is based on a cult-hit Japanese manga, which spans 44 volumes, by Tadashi Agi (a pseudonym for siblings Yuko and Shin Kibayashi). Apple's show departs from some key elements of the original, notably by turning the lead character, a Japanese man named Shizuku Kanzaki in the comic, into a French woman named Camille Leger in the screen adaptation.

But the basic conceit is the same: The owner of the world's largest private wine collection has died. To determine who will inherit his trove valued in the show at \$148 million he stipulates in his will that a blind wine tasting competition must take place. The two competitors are his estranged child and his student protegee. The student is a polished, wine-savvy wunderkind; the child despises wine (in the show, a medical condition causes her to get sick if she drinks a drop of alcohol).

A cutthroat contest like this is a [classic manga set-up](#), and it also rings true for the world of competitive fine wine, rife with daunting



[sommelier exams](#) and impossible-sounding [tournaments](#). If a few of the details feel a little hard to believe such as when the protegee, Issei Tomine, blindly identifies a wine as a 2017 [Chateau le Puy Cuvee Barthelemy](#) *by the smell alone* the overall spirit is true. There are indeed sommeliers like Tomine, who devote their lives to perfecting the art of blind tasting and who become astonishingly skilled at it. Unfortunately, outside of passing the master sommelier exam or impressing friends at parties, this skill is seldom useful in real life. But imagine if it could suddenly yield a \$148 million windfall!

Representations of competitive wine tasting I'm thinking primarily of the "[Somm documentary series](#)" tend to have a gawking quality. Maybe rightfully so: To a layperson audience, being able to guess a wine's vintage, producer and grape variety comes across as both very impressive and very frivolous. But "Drops of God" doesn't gawk. It celebrates the passion of its wine-lover characters, depicting them as serious, studious and ambitious. That generous portrayal may be indebted to the fact that the authors of the manga are themselves true wine lovers, the [owners of a 3,000-bottle collection](#) that the New York Times reports is protected by an earthquake-warning system.

And yet "Drops of God" also manages to celebrate the elements of wine that transcend the frivolity—the contests and parlor games and one-upmanship. In the second episode, the winemaker Philippe Chassangre explains to Camille how the movements of the Rhone River over time formed the strikingly rocky soils of his vineyard in France's Chateauneuf du Pape. "It's thanks to these rounded pebbles that our wine is what it is," Philippe says.

"You need to see behind the alcohol, Camille," he continues. "Wine—it's the earth, it's the sky, it's the humans. Wine is nature, Camille."