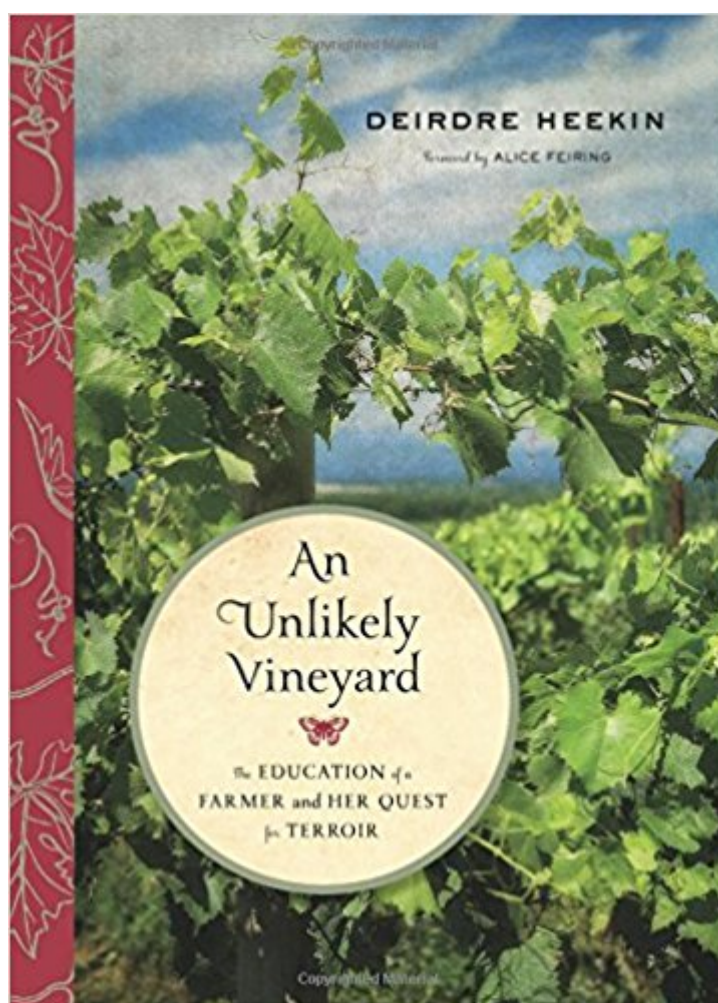


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# An Unlikely Vineyard: The Education Of A Farmer And Her Quest For Terroir



## Synopsis

Named one of the Best Wine Books of 2014 by The New York Times, *An Unlikely Vineyard* tells the evolutionary story of Deirdre Heekin's farm from overgrown fields to a fertile, productive, and beautiful landscape that melds with its natural environment. Is it possible to capture landscape in a bottle? To express its terroir, its essence of place—geology, geography, climate, and soil—as well as the skill of the winegrower? That's what Heekin and her chef/husband, Caleb Barber, set out to accomplish on their tiny, eight-acre hillside farm and vineyard in Vermont. But *An Unlikely Vineyard* involves much more. It also presents, through the example of their farming journey and winegrowing endeavors, an impressive amount of information on how to think about almost every aspect of gardening: from composting to trellising; from cider and perry making to growing old garden roses, keeping bees, and raising livestock; from pruning (or not) to dealing naturally with pests and diseases. As Eric Asimov, chief wine critic for The New York Times, writes, "I love this book, which conveys beautifully why the best wine is, at heart, an agricultural expression." Challenged by cold winters, wet summers, and other factors, Deirdre and Caleb set about to grow not only a vineyard, but an orchard of heirloom apples, pears, and plums, as well as gardens filled with vegetables, herbs, roses, and wildflowers destined for their own table and for the kitchen of their small restaurant. They wanted to create, or rediscover, a sense of place, and to grow food naturally using the philosophy and techniques gleaned from organic gardening, permaculture, and biodynamic farming. Accompanied throughout by lush photos, this gentle narrative will appeal to anyone who loves food, farms, and living well.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"I won't mince words about *An Unlikely Vineyard: The Education of a Farmer and Her Quest for Terroir* (Chelsea Green, \$35), Deirdre Heekin's chronicle of establishing a farm and vineyard in Vermont. I love this book, which conveys beautifully why the best wine is, at heart, an agricultural expression. While living in Italy, Ms. Heekin and her husband, Caleb Barber, fell in love with Italian food and wine culture. On returning to Vermont they established an osteria, then developed their small farm to provide vegetables, fruits, flowers and wine for the restaurant. Her husband cooks; Ms. Heekin is the sommelier and farmer. In her farming she takes a holistic approach, regarding wine as produce. She is naturally drawn to biodynamic agriculture, which views a farm as a self-sustaining unit in which the various elements all harmonize and reinforce one another. This method of farming requires meticulous powers of observation and attention to detail. It also imbues Ms. Heekin's writing with a tactile, almost earthy quality and a well-grounded sense of wonder. The book is not solely about grape-growing. Ms. Heekin places wine in the context of a diverse farm, an alternative to the agricultural and critical view of wine as a monoculture. In the end, she writes, what's most important is 'the shared experience around the table that is defined by the culture of food, wine, friendship, ideas and heart.' If you can find her soulful wine, produced in tiny quantities and labeled La Garagista, it resonates with every sentiment in the book. --Eric Asimov, Chief Wine Critic, *The New York Times* Midwest Book Review- *An exceptionally well written and engaging account that is beautifully illustrated throughout with full color photography. An inherently fascinating and entertaining, An Unlikely Vineyard: The Education of a Farmer and Her Quest for Terroir, is very highly recommended for personal reading lists and would prove to be an enduringly popular addition to community library collections.*"

In *An Unlikely Vineyard*, Deirdre Heekin spins a wonderfully practical account of realizing her vision of a living farm with a table at its center. Her tale balances rural romance with the real concerns of sinking hands into dirt, of partnering with nature to bring beauty and life to her 'unlikely vineyard' in the hills of Vermont. Filled with tips and inspiration for the existing gardener, it will have armchair green thumbs ready to run off and buy a tractor." --Christy Frank, owner, Frankly Wines, New York City

A writer should write what she knows; lucky for us, Deirdre Heekin knows a lot about a lot of different things. Her latest book is about a rather unlikely subject—planting a vineyard in Vermont (!)—but being an enormously skilled writer, it is a powerful lens through which she tells a much broader story, encompassing such diverse subjects as biodynamics, the history of roses, and, most importantly,

her search for a sense of place. "An Unlikely Vineyard" is highly recommended for anyone interested in the very intimate side of growing a garden, whatever form it might take. --Randall Grahm, founder and winemaker, Bonny Doon Vineyard, and author, "Been Doon So Long: A Randall Grahm Vinthology" "Not only does Deirdre Heekin take us on her own, personal path to this "unlikely vineyard," but she also offers us "as a vigneronne" the chance to understand something more universal: that authentic wine, with soul, can be crafted if one observes and takes care of one's terroir and vines. By choosing a most demanding yet most rewarding way of farming "the biodynamic way in Vermont" she is an inspiration both for farmers and for every wine lover who seeks in the taste of a grape a place, a landscape, a climate, a history." --Pascaline Lepeltier, master sommelier, "Rouge Tomate, New York City" "Deirdre Heekin's new book is a rural romance that's part memoir, part how-to, part coming-of-age story. As carefully thought out and set down as the neat rows of La Crescent, Blaufrankisch, and Riesling vines that populate the unlikely vineyard of the title, it's sure to be welcomed by a new generation of farmer-philosophers who will find not just inspiration but direction in its pages. --Stephen Meuse, America's Test Kitchen Radio "An Unlikely Vineyard is a rare blend of scholarship, storytelling, and poetry. Deirdre Heekin's enthralling tale of sinking roots into her land will inspire and enable anyone who ever dreamed of growing food, making wine, or bringing beauty out of the soil around them. This meditation on the cultivation of place is an elegant rallying cry in a world that too often settles for placelessness." --Rowan Jacobsen, author, American Terroir and Apples of Uncommon Character "Deirdre Heekin has written a colossal book here "something of a monument in its field. The author tells, in her earnest way, the entire story of establishing a biodynamic farm and orchard and garden and vineyard, under improbable circumstances. An Unlikely Vineyard speaks to a determination and passion fueled by Deirdre's wonderful, stubborn love. The sheer level of detail may intimidate some casual readers, yet those who do read it will surely concur that it's going to become one of the Great Books of the movement. --Terry Theise, author, Reading between the Wines

Deirdre Heekin is the author of *An Unlikely Vineyard*. She is the proprietor and wine director of Osteria Pane e Salute, an acclaimed restaurant and wine bar in Woodstock, Vermont. Heekin and her husband and head chef, Caleb Barber, are the authors of *In Late Winter We Ate Pears* (Chelsea Green, 2009), and she is also the author of *Libation: A Bitter Alchemy* (Chelsea Green, 2009) and *Pane e Salute* (Invisible Cities Press, 2002). Heekin and her husband live on a small farm in Vermont, where they grow both the vegetables for their restaurant and natural wines and ciders for

their la garagista label.

Extraordinary and unexpected life story of farm building told in beautiful and often poetic prose. Read it and start your own farm or vineyard, or both!

Here's a long overdue book -- one on organic, biodynamic gardening practices in the vineyard, the orchard, the kitchen garden and elsewhere on the sensibly sized homestead -- something less than, say, 10 acres. The author's educated herself through readings, workshops overseas, and the nuts and bolts of everyday failures and successes. Her approach is that each piece of land with its unique characteristics, has its own "terroir" and only a person sincerely immersed in that land will eventually find ways to live harmoniously with it as a producer of whatever has sensibly been chosen to grow thereon. Plenty of examples of what to do, what didn't work. At my tiny vineyard, I was disappointed to learn that black rot ruined my crop this year. I was a bit buoyed by Ms. Heekin's report that she too had black rot, but unlike me, she dug into the problems and found ways to combat them without resorting to chemical warfare--she found biodynamic ways to bring the dreaded black rot under control. That's the kind of book it is -- from apples to grapes to the whole of a good small farm. Indeed the integrating of garden into the vineyard, a holistic concept, strikes me as quintessential working biodynamics. Bravo, Deirdre! Good book.

A beautiful, informative, and well-researched book. Anyone passionate about food and wine (as I am) should read this. I've had a few of her wines, and they are amazing! Now, my hope is to visit their Osteria this summer.

A charming well written journey through the creation of a vineyard.

Just received my pre ordered copy of what is so obviously a labor of love and a beautiful history. The writing is divine, the photographs are perfect complement. I'm so excited to read this book!

Not very interesting. Thought it would be more informative and intriguing.

An Unlikely Vineyard, by Deirdre Heekin, © 2014. I'm into this beautiful book because I've been a weekend grapevine grower in Virginia for 26 years, long enough to know that Virginia is NOT where you'd plant grapevines if you know what you're doing. If you MUST, go ahead but don't

expect much. Vermont has to be a hundred times worse, but if you MUST, go ahead but don't expect much. The lady is obviously sincere, but there are at least two problems quickly manifest. The photos are home-grown and good enough in their own way, BUT, there is an annoying disconnect between the subject at hand and the photos that accompany the text. The book can be talking about Moonrise Over Hernandez and the accompanying photo will be of Time's Square on New Year's Eve. A minor annoyance. Not to worry. THEN, there is the abundance of bad grammar\*, for which there can be no excuse. Do people write lavish books like this one and NOT get someone who is conversant with our language to have a look before it goes to press? Amazing. I got this book because I was intrigued by the words, "her search for terroir" on the cover, but the book amply demonstrates an ignorance of what the word means. "Terroir" is not something one can "search for". It's what is. Everywhere, in your backyard and mine, wherever you are. You CAN look for more permeable soil but you CAN'T look for terroir. The last person to go looking for "atmosphere" they had to lock up as both a danger to himself and to others. I'll drop back when I finish the book. Update. I take that back. I don't have even an academic interest in Biodynamic teas. I might suggest you buy the book and put it on your living room coffee table but as picture books go, this is not notable. Summary: a VERY specialized book that does not live up to its promise. Three Stars; decide for yourself. \* Re, Bad Grammar, and to satisfy my followers: note these examples:page 10. a friend mentioned that he had heardpage 13. the old farmer had gotten too old to work the landpage 15. a potting shed that had once been usedpage 16. by the time we had tucked in our first winepage 21. my mother had planted extensive flower gardenspage 27. we had learned enough to know that the vicious cyclepage 30. I had tasted the difference in wines grown this wayALL of those seven 'had's don't belong where they are and there are MANY more like them..brad.06november2015.

I was expecting a tale of falling in love with viticulture and winemaking, but was sorely disappointed. Wish I could rate it more highly, but it was very dryly written--not compellingly enough for me to read further than the first chapter. Wish it had less arcane exposition and sociological polemicism and more of the personal aspects that made other first-person education-of-a-farmer-or-chef tomes such as, say, *Shucked* and *Heat* such good reads. Perhaps a ghostwriter--or a protagonist more passionate about her newfound profession--might have made a difference.

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