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Extra Virginity: The Sublime And Scandalous World Of Olive Oil



Synopsis

For millennia, fresh olive oil has been a necessity - for food, medicine, beauty, and religion. Today's researchers continue to confirm the remarkable, life-giving properties of true extra-virgin, and "extra-virgin Italian" has become the highest standard of quality. But what if this symbol of purity has become deeply corrupt? Starting with an explosive article in The New Yorker, Tom Mueller has become the world's expert on olive oil and olive oil fraud - a story of globalization, deception, and crime from ancient times to the present, and a powerful indictment of today's lax protections against fake and even toxic food products in the United States. Extra Virginity is an inspiring account of the people who are defending the extraordinary oils that truly deserve the name "extra-virgin".

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

An interview with author Tom Mueller on NPR's "Splendid Table" program led me to buy the book. Mueller is just as passionate in person about his subject--great olive oil--as he is in his writing. He is equally strong in chronicling his outrage over what the greed of producers and distributors is doing to undermine the quality of the product. All of this is laid out at length in "Extra Virginity". And it is the extensive investigatory reporting on the greed and criminality that makes the book drag considerably. Still, it does make his warnings and buying counsel to consumers of olive oil the more convincing, even if it makes the book more difficult to read. What I (gratefully) did get from this book were some great sources to find authentic extra virgin olive oil and a persuasive argument that quality in the product does matter for culinary and health reasons. These are two good reasons to

buy Mueller's book. And here's a tip to perspective readers who might, like me, tire of the long passages about Italian oil criminality or semi-cryptic descriptions of olive oil's chemical makeup: you can skip to page 221 of the book where begins Mueller's detailed Appendix, and where you will find all of the information you need to locate, buy and appreciate authentic extra virgin olive oil of any origin. It includes what to avoid as well as how and when to purchase. I have used the information and bought my first Mueller-recommended oil--a Spanish label, Castillo de Canena, that is every good thing that Mueller promised it would be, including crushingly expensive. Finally, here are a few important things that the reader will get from this book: most extra virgin olive oil sold in the U.S.

At a conference in Córdoba, Spain last summer Tom Mueller addressed a gathering of politicians, olive oil producers, scientists and journalists and urged them to repeat the words "extra virgin" three times slowly. The words soon become, he said, "not a food, but a strange religious cult, a language of initiation, or some place on the internet where you really would not want your children to go." He should know. Mueller is the investigative author whose 2007 piece in The New Yorker, Slippery Buisness: The Trade in Adulterated Olive Oil, forever changed the discourse about olive oil quality by uncovering plenty of places you wouldn't want your children to go. Extra Virginity: The Sublime and Scandalous World of Olive Oil is Mueller's first book and, while the title emphasizes the weight and complexity of those words, it's all about people. Mueller is driven by a profound respect for the dedicated people who make good olive oil and a disdain for the fraudsters and profiteers who have always had their way with us. But much more than just getting in the faces of the good guys and the bad guys, he tells why it matters. And then you get it -- you understand what olive oil really is, and why so many care about it so deeply. After 256 engrossing pages that go by way too quickly, someone who never contemplated the tin of olive oil on the kitchen counter will know why it has brought out the best, and the worst in people for thousands (yes thousands) of years. I tore through the book, then went back to the beginning and tore through it again. The only times I paused were to read a passage over to take it in a second time, marveling at Mueller's way with words.

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