



**Attention: Brilliant Students**  
Our guide to classic gem cuts **D3**

# OFF DUTY

**Hands-On Education**  
A kit that coaches you to build a portable game **D15**

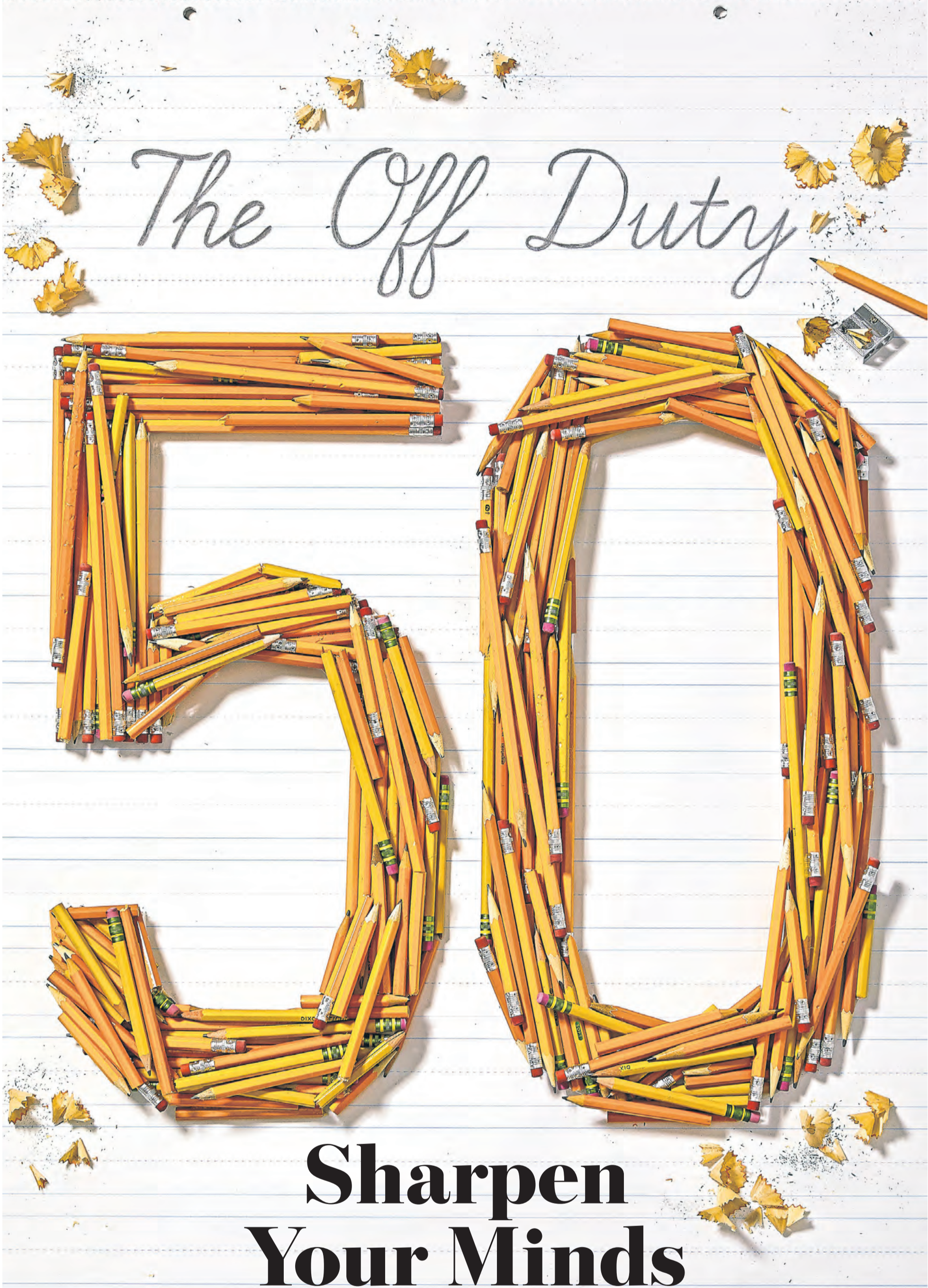


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THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

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Saturday/Sunday, September 14 - 15, 2019 | **D1**



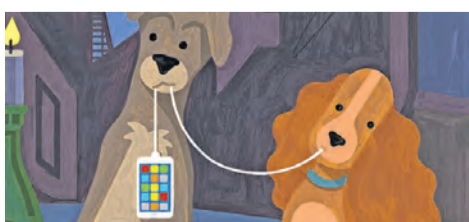
Those idle, summer days are over. Here, 50 diverting ways to get studious again this fall—from nerding-out on Beethoven in Vienna to mastering Japanese home-cooking. Pencils ready?

F. MARTIN RAMIN/ THE WALL STREET JOURNAL. STYLING BY BLAKE RAMSEY MURRAY

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## THE FALL OFF DUTY 50 | EATING &amp; DRINKING



ON WINE / LETTIE TEAGUE



## Point, Click and Drink In a Little Erudition

**LEARNING** about wine online seems easy enough—not to mention affordable. Yet after exploring all manner of internet wine education, I'm not ready to declare it the ideal forum—at least not yet.

Many self-styled “wine educators” online claim to be certified sommeliers, but that doesn't mean they have worked in a restaurant. Others are winemakers, adjunct professors or simply oenophiles with a pedagogical bent. Whether via video or podcast,

the education they offer tends to fall into two categories: basic (grape names, how to hold a glass) or wonky (the role of tannins, grapevine blights).

The educational content actual wine professionals produce mostly falls into the latter camp, and podcasts appear to be the preferred format. The decidedly wonky “**Guild of Sommeliers Podcast**” ([guildpodcast.com](http://guildpodcast.com)) features sommeliers such as Geoff Kruth and Kelli White interviewing top talent. In an epi-

sode last fall, Mr. Kruth and Virginia Wilcox, winemaker at Vasse Felix in Western Australia, discussed tannins in a surprisingly lively chat. “I think you can make or break a wine by getting the tannins wrong,” Ms. Wilcox said. She enumerated various categories of tannin, including “astringent,” “squeaky,” “toothy,” “tongue” and “green”—the ones that “push to the back of your throat.” I learned a lot and plan to invoke the term “squeaky tannins” very soon.

Another sommelier turned podcast host, Levi Dalton, records conversations with wine professionals in his professedly “tiny living room” in New York. His show, “**I'll Drink to That!**” ([illdrinktothatpod.com](http://illdrinktothatpod.com)), features conversations on topics nonprofessionals might find abstruse. A conversation between Mr. Dalton and Benjamin Leroux, a young Burgundy vigneron, was a far-ranging, rather baggy discourse on topics including

root stock and pruning.

The audience for these wonky podcasts is clearly presumed to be more knowledgeable than the one targeted by Philadelphia-based sommelier Marnie Old with her video series “**Wine Simplified**” on YouTube. Her style is crisp and engaging, and though her videos were produced several years ago, the topics, such as “How to Taste Wine Like a Pro,” are evergreen.

I liked the videos of a few other sommeliers, including Steven Grubbs, whose smart, breezy series, “**Wine's Cool**” was created to educate the staff of Empire State South and Five & Ten restaurants, in Atlanta and Athens, Ga. “We decided to make a series of short, unimposing videos that would (hopefully) take people quickly from square zero to having a little working background,” he wrote in an email. After Mr. Grubbs uploaded them to YouTube, Mr. Grubbs discovered that other restaurateurs were using them. “If anyone else learned from them, great,” he said.

While the above offerings are available for free, some online courses can be rather pricey. For instance, Napa Valley Wine Academy conducts courses that cost hundreds of dollars, including a “Napa Valley Wine Expert” certification for \$395. Since that was more than my last round-trip ticket from New York to San Francisco, I enrolled instead in “**Get Wine-Smart**” ([udemy.com](http://udemy.com)), taught by John Boyer, a geography professor at Virginia Tech. The course, from online-learning platform Udemy, cost me a mere \$12.

Mr. Boyer's energy is equaled only by his flamboyant, invariably plaid wardrobe, and his pedagogical style is informational with an emphasis on fun. His videos cover all the basics—from grape varieties to buying, storing and serving wine—as Mr. Boyer tastes and riffs

along with sidekick Randall Horst of Vintage Cellar wine shop in Blacksburg, Va., where some of the series is filmed.

Less fun but more famous, wine critic James Suckling has joined top chefs (Gordon Ramsay) and movie directors (Martin Scorsese) at MasterClass, among the most hyped online courses. “**James Suckling Teaches Wine Appreciation**” ([masterclass.com](http://masterclass.com)) cost me \$90 (\$180 buys an all-class yearlong pass).

**Her style is crisp and engaging, and the topics are evergreen.**

“This class is going to be like staying with me for the week,” Mr. Suckling promised early on in the series of videos, and he was right—the day I devoted to his 11-lesson course felt like a week. The series alternated between picturesque scenery and shots of Mr. Suckling tasting wine after wine, rating his satisfaction numerically.

An Italian Sauvignon Blanc was “super steely, fresh, layered” according to Mr. Suckling. “I'm 94 on that,” he pronounced—meaning he awarded the wine a 94-point score. In Lesson Four, he tasted the Super Tuscan Tignanello with Albiera Antinori, president of the wine company Marchesi Antinori. When they got to the 2015, he let her know he'd rated the wine 98 points. “It hasn't been published yet so keep it to yourself,” he admonished.

My online education yielded plenty of information, some of it useful, some not so much. I remain in search of the ideal combination of content and delivery. And I won't be adopting the phrase “I'm 94 on that” anytime soon.

► Email Lettie: [wine@wsj.com](mailto:wine@wsj.com)

### Be True to Your School

Kolsvart, a small maker of gummy candies in Malmö, Sweden, gets specific with its Swedish fish taxonomy, offering sour blueberry Piggvar (shaped like turbot), sour raspberry Rödning (arctic char) and elderflower Gäddan (pike). These chewy sweets derive their jewel hues from grape-skin extract, carrot concentrate and turmeric, and happen to be vegan and gluten-free. A portion of the proceeds from the Piggvar and Gäddan benefits the Swedish Anglers Association, which promotes clean waters and healthy fish populations. \$12, [bonny.com](http://bonny.com)—G.G.



### Put Another Pin in Your Flavor Map

Chef Jing “Jenny” Gao launched her Fly by Jing line of sauces and seasonings to school the world in the authentic flavors of her native Sichuan. Full of er jing tiao chiles and rare peppercorns, her Sichuan Chili Crisp enlivens eggs or pizza. Use the Mala Spice Mix to umami-bomb popcorn, or the slow-brewed Zhong Dumpling Sauce to upgrade frozen pot stickers. Preorder all 3 for \$46, [flybyjing.com](http://flybyjing.com)—E.P.



### Bake Like an Engineer

The Silpat Perfect Pastry Mat is a boon for any baker thwarted by clingy dough. Unfurl it to create an instant nonstick surface. Made in France of silicone-coated fiberglass mesh, it's so effective you don't even need to dust the surface with flour. The mat also doubles as an educational pastry blueprint, with ruled borders and stenciled circles ranging from 6 to 12 inches—an invaluable assist when a recipe calls for absolute precision. \$40, [williams-sonoma.com](http://williams-sonoma.com)—G.G.



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