

Treating Water Like Wine

At some luxury hotels, asking for a simple glass of water no longer leads to a basic pitcher from the kitchen. At a famous hotel in Beverly Hills, the “house water” may come from treated wastewater, purified to hospital standards. In New York, a stylish hotel pulls moisture directly from the air and serves it from a designer machine in the lobby. Meanwhile, at a small French restaurant in northern England, diners can skip the wine list and choose from a dedicated water menu: seven different bottled waters, some costing more than a decent bottle of wine.

All of this is happening for a liquid that is clear, flavorless, and absolutely ordinary. It keeps us alive, but beyond that, it doesn’t ask for attention. Yet in today’s wellness-obsessed, status-obsessed world, even water is being upgraded, curated, and sold back to us as something that must be optimized. At some point, it’s fair to ask: are we trying to perfect something that doesn’t really need improvement?

The modern “water revolution” has a public face: the water sommelier. Martin Riese, a German expert, insists that water has its own unique character shaped by geography—the idea that where water comes from creates a specific taste, like in wine. He points to minerals such as magnesium, calcium, and sodium as the key to flavor and “mouthfeel.” High-mineral waters taste heavy and salty; low-mineral waters feel light and soft.

Chefs like Joseph Rawlins of La Popote in England were skeptical at first. A water menu sounded like a joke. But after tasting different waters and pairing them with cheese, ham, or chocolate, they noticed real differences. A salty French mineral water complements cured meat; a gentle spring water works better with delicate desserts.

There’s nothing wrong with being curious about taste, but there is a thin line between appreciating differences and turning a basic necessity into a luxury performance. When restaurants charge \$20 or more for bottled water with minerals, they are not just selling hydration. They’re selling identity and exclusivity. The “perfect water” becomes a status symbol—a way for people to announce: I am the kind of person who cares about such things.

The obsession extends to the container itself. The Okapa, a high-end water bottle by Swiss entrepreneur Hardy Steinmann, took ten years to design. Built from medical-grade glass inside a protective aluminum shell, with titanium pins and a carefully shaped mouthpiece, it costs roughly \$300. Steinmann argues that ordinary bottles trap bacteria and absorb odors. But a basic reusable bottle for \$20 will also keep water safe and clean. The Okapa isn’t about function—it’s hydration as fashion, a statement that you have both money and taste.

So why are people willing to pay for premium water? Many consumers worry about microplastics, old pipes, and contaminants. Companies respond by promising “reverse osmosis” and “medical-grade” materials. Younger generations, drinking less alcohol, also see premium water as a respectable alternative to wine or cocktails—something sophisticated to order at dinner. Hotels have seized on this trend as well, installing high-tech filtration systems that

reduce plastic waste but also turn water into a branded experience. Water, once invisible, becomes visible as a luxury amenity.

None of this is inherently evil, but the water trend shows how easily genuine worries can be turned into marketing opportunities. “Perfect” water promises safety, sophistication, and self-control, all in one sip.

Enjoying a cold glass of mineral water is not a crime. The problem is perspective and scale. While designers spend a decade perfecting a \$300 bottle, millions of people around the world struggle to get any clean, safe water at all. Even in the United States, 2.2 million people don’t have access to clean indoor plumbing. In that context, our search for the “perfect” sip looks less like progress and more like a distraction—even an insult.

Water is extraordinary because it keeps every living thing on this planet alive. It doesn’t become more magical because it has tasting notes or expensive engineering. Maybe the reasonable middle ground is this: use a reusable bottle you like and enjoy a fancy sparkling water occasionally. But remember that water’s job is simple. It doesn’t need to be perfected or curated to be valuable. In fact, the more we try to dress it up, the easier it is to forget what really matters—that everyone should have enough of it, clean and uncomplicated, to drink in the first place. That is the only perfection water actually needs.

- 1) How common is it to see premium water products or filtered water systems in homes and restaurants?
- 2) Would you pay for a specific water to pair it with your food?
- 3) Have you ever felt ‘scammed’ by a product that sounded premium but wasn’t really different?
- 4) Is there a difference between the different brands of water, or is it just marketing?
- 5) Is this a positive health trend, or just a new way to sell us things?
- 6) At what point does ‘optimization’ become ridiculous?

Amenity	(n)	a useful or pleasant feature or service provided in a building or place	The rooftop pool is the most popular amenity at the hotel.
Complement	(v)	to go well with something and make it look or taste better	The fresh salad will complement the rich pasta dish nicely.
Dedicated	(adj)	designed or used for one particular purpose only	The company created a dedicated customer support line for VIP clients.
Exclusivity	(n)	the state of being limited to a select group and not available to everyone	The club’s strict dress code added to its sense of exclusivity.
Moisture	(n)	a small amount of water in the air, on a surface, or inside something	There was so much moisture in the air that the windows fogged up.

Osmosis	(n)	a process where water passes through a membrane to separate out impurities	Many home filters use osmosis to produce cleaner drinking water.
Pull	(v)	to draw or extract something from a source	The machine can pull cool air from outside into the building.
Purified	(adj)	made completely clean by removing harmful or unwanted substances	She only drinks purified water when traveling abroad.
Seize	(v)	to quickly take advantage of an opportunity or situation	The company was ready to seize the chance to expand into a new market.
Shape	(v)	to influence or determine the character or form of something	Early experiences can shape a person's attitude toward money.
Shell	(n)	a hard outer covering that protects or supports something inside	The laptop's metal shell helps protect it from damage.
Sommelier	(n)	a trained expert who advises customers on wine or other drinks in a restaurant	The sommelier recommended a light white wine to go with our seafood.
Treated	(adj)	processed with chemicals or methods to make something safer or more usable	The treated water from the plant is safe enough to drink.