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**Sideways (DVD) Review**

**By Britt Gillette**

Nominated for five Academy Awards, and winner of Best Screenplay adapted from an outside

source, Sideways turned out to be one of the surprise blockbusters of 2004. Based on the Rex Pickett novel of the same name, Sideways is a clever comedy about wine, life, and a group of friends – each in search of his unique identity. Unlike the plot-driven movies that traditionally dominate Hollywood, Sideways is one of those rare pictures which actually "reads" like a novel. The film resembles Seinfeld in that it's really about nothing, but it's about everything all at the same time. With very little to speak of in the way of plot, the movie relies heavily on the development of its quirky characters, and in this aspect, Sideways is an overwhelming success. Something about this movie (which I can't quite put my finger on) makes me love it, and I'm willing to bet that you'll enjoy it too...

Paul Giamatti plays the role of Miles Raymond, a middle-aged, recently-divorced high school teacher struggling to publish his novel, *The Day After Yesterday* (which is, of course, "today" – but it's not the same). The film begins when Miles picks up his college roommate Jack (Thomas Haden Church) for a one week bachelor party excursion into the vineyards of Napa Valley. With one week left as a single man, Jack is set for a week of drunkenness and debauchery – but Miles stands in his way. Suffering from a mild depression, Miles wants to savor wine rather than chug it, talk to a woman rather than sleep with her, and generally act as a drag on any of Jack's plans.

But when Jack pushes Miles to chase after his waitress friend Maya (Virginia Madsen), life takes a turn for Miles. Meanwhile Jack carries on a torrid affair with Maya's friend Stephanie (Sandra Oh), neither of the women knowing of Jack's impending marriage. When the truth about Jack's wedding slips out, the tidbit threatens to destroy each character's relationship with the other...

Oftentimes hilarious, sometimes deeply symbolic, Sideways runs the gambit of human emotion. In addition, the lack of a manufactured plot template serves the purpose of keeping the audience on edge. You never quite know what to expect next. Thomas Haden Church (formerly of Lowell Mather fame on *Wings*, one my all-time favorite sitcoms) shows his diversity as an actor in his fascinating portrayal of the aggressive, hormone-driven Jack. Determined to live out a wild week of drunken sexual conquest before his wedding day, Jack's self-destructive binge behavior stands in stark contrast to the paralyzed, low risk attitude of Miles. Together, Haden Church and Giamatti create an unforgettable

screen combination.

And it's this powder keg mixture of relationships between Jack, Miles, Maya, and Stephanie that give Sideways its enticing cinematic flavor. Virginia Madsen received her own Academy Award nomination to go along with Thomas Haden Church, but the Oscar nominations could just as easily have gone to Paul Giamatti and Sandra Oh. In short, Sideways wanders the hills of California wine country as well as the peaks and valleys of the human experience. It's a film about life and decisions and relationships and happiness and everything else. More importantly, it's one of the most interesting and entertaining films of the last several years, and that's why Sideways is a definite must-see film...

Britt Gillette is author of The DVD Report (

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), a blog where you can find

more reviews like this one.

### **Recordable DVD formats explained**

**By Kenny Hemphill**

#### **Recordable DVD formats explained by Kenny Hemphill**

Picking your way through the ton of information available on recordable DVD formats can be a nightmare. To help you out, we've done our best to distill it into this summary.

There are five recordable versions of DVD; DVD-R for General, DVD-R for Authoring, DVD-RAM, DVD-RW, and DVD+RW. None of the formats is fully compatible with the other although there are drives which will read, and in some cases write to more than one format.

DVD-R for General and DVD-R for Authoring are essentially DVD versions of CD-R. And DVD-RW is a DVD version of CD-RW. All three formats can be read in standard DVD-ROM drives and in most DVD video players. The difference between DVD-R for General and DVD-R for Authoring is that DVD-R for General is a format intended for widespread consumer use and doesn't support 'professional' features such as piracy protection or duplication in mass duplicators. The Pioneer DVD-RW drive which is the most popular PC device for writing to DVD uses the DVD for General format. And as the case with CD, DVD-RW is essentially the same as DVD-R except that it can be erased and written to again and again.

DVD-RAM is slightly different as it is a sector based disc which mounts on the desktop of a PC when inserted into a drive. Files can then be copied to it in the same way as any other mounted media. Some single-sided DVD-RAM discs can be removed from their caddy and inserted in a DVD-ROM drive which will then be able to read the content of the disc.

## Sideways (DVD) Review

There are DVD video recorders which use the DVD-RAM format. This enables them to pull off clever tricks like timeshifting - where you can watch the beginning of a programme you have recorded while you are still recording the end on the same disc.

DVD+RW is the newest format and not supported by the DVD Forum, the body which sets the standards for DVD. However, it is supported by some of the biggest electronics and computer manufacturers, and is therefore likely to stick around.

It is also the format used by Philips in its DVD video recorders. Despite not being authorised by the DVD Forum, DVD+RW is claimed by its supporters to be compatible with more DVD video players than DVD-R and DVD+RW writers are found in PCs from quite a few manufacturers.

Kenny Hemphill is the editor and publisher of

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