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The Wine Industry Regions Of Southern California

By Melinda Carnes

California is a state that produces 90% of all wine in the US, and the vineyards in the north, in

Sonoma and Napa, are among the most famous in the world. However, they do not have the only quality vineyards in the state. The wines from the younger southern California wineries are on an equal par to their cousins of the north.

The majority of southern California wine is produced in two areas, the vineyards of Santa Barbara, 100 miles north of Los Angeles, and those close to San Diego, 100 miles south of the city. Both areas have been deeply involved in the growth of the California wine industry, an industry that now ships over 450 million gallons of wine a year to the US and other countries.

Santa Barbara's Vineyards

The costal mountains east-west positioning creates the valleys that open onto the Pacific Ocean. The flow of fog and breezes that result from this bit of serendipitous geography produce the perfect conditions for the world-class varieties of wine that are the pride of Santa Barbara. The moderate climate produces the most favorable conditions that grapes need for optimal sugar and acid levels. There are also several "micro-climates" near the Pacific Coast and the Pala Mesa mountains.

The fifty mile coast from Point Conception to Rincon forms the longest east-west shoreline on the west coast. The vines here grow on anything and everything, from the rolling hillsides to the exceptionally warm valleys, where summer temperatures often reach 100F or 38C. This climate allows the vintners to work throughout the four seasons: the pruning and weeding is done during the winter, new planting begins in the spring, canopy management in the summer and finally the annual harvest in the fall. This area has a comparable climate to the Rhône valley in France, and the winemakers have responded similarly. One particular vineyard is situated on a hillside 1,000 feet above sea level, with ideal northern exposure making it the perfect location for the Rhone varietals that are grown here.

There are an abundance of European grapes: Chardonnay, Pinot Blanc, Pinot Gris, Sangiovese and Syrah. This diversity is made possible by the large number of micro-climates in the region. For example, the cool-climate Chardonnay does well because of the occasional snow on the mountains. In

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contrast, the heat-loving Syrah thrives in the warmer micro-climates. The winemakers also took on the bold challenge of growing the difficult Pinot Noir, a wine resonant with strawberry and herbal aspects.

While there were almost no vineyards in the county twenty-five years ago, today the wine industry is a \$100 million dollar business. The Santa Ynez and Santa Maria valley alone grew to 8,000 acres under cultivation in the twenty years between 1975 and 1995. Between 1995 and 2000, the number jumped to 18,000. Today there are over 21,000 acres of these vineyards and half of the grapes are being shipped to winemakers outside of the county.

Temecula

The cultural rivalry between northern and southern California is also reflected in the wine business. This is a young industry here; the majority of the southern vineyards didn't exist 20 years ago. The first wines were produced in Temecula in 1971.

Twenty-two miles from the Pacific Ocean, the 1,400-foot Temecula plateau is situated between peaks of the Coastal Mountain range. The afternoon breeze blows the smog away, and the unique micro-climate in the area benefits from a higher solar intensity than Napa Valley.

The vineyards of Temecula are kept moist by large underground aquifers. The soil itself is high in decomposed granite. This helps drainage and keeps the soil free of Phylloxera, an invasive insect that destroyed large numbers of old European wine regions. It still remains a problem today.

Close by is Shadow Mountain vineyard. Located in the mountains above San Diego, this is the highest winery in California at 4,400 feet above sea level.

All grapes grow in Temecula, including Chardonnay, White Rhône, Syrah, Grenache, Cabernet and the Italian Nebbiolo, which is harvested as late as November. The region produces a wine with a fruity character, in contrast to the woodiness which found in other California vintages.

The religious men of the Mission of San Juan Capistrano were the first winemakers in southern California, and after 200 years, the industry is now in full-bloom. Due to the partnership between wine scientists and winemakers, the 1,800 acres of commercial vineyards of southern California are more successful than ever.

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Fine Wine Italian Style: The Beauty Of Italian Wine.

By Jim Kapowski

Fine wine often brings to mind images of French rolling hills and elegant dinners; however, Italy's twenty regions bring to the pallet an array of fine wines for your dining pleasure.

Italian wine making enjoys tradition rich in both modern and rustic methods, although much of the country's wineries now employ scientific and technological tools to create quality wines. The country's wines are made primarily from two types of grapes, Nebbiolo and Sangiovese. The Nebbiolo grapes are used in the northwestern part of the country, creating the red wines Barolo and Barbaresco. The Sangiovese grapes create one of the better-known Italian wines, Chianti, and are native to the central Tuscany and Umbria regions.

Italy's wines are divided into four categories based on origin, quality, and purity. When shopping for a fine Italian wine, look for those with the designation of "Denominazione di Origine Controllata e Garantita D.O.C.G.," which is awarded to wines with a solid reputation. This designation considers region, production yields, and a DOC of at least five years. DOC indicates the origins of a wine, the type of grapes used in making the wine, and the methods of production. DOCG is a designation following stricter guidelines than the DOC, which includes a guarantee of origin.

The five regions of the Northwest produce over a quarter of the country's DOC wines, but only about twenty percent of the country's total wine production. This, then, is a good place to begin when shopping for Italian wine, as many wine sellers group Italian wine by the region, whether in general terms, such as Northwest, or by specific region, such as Piedmont. The Piedmont region creates a number of DOC and DOCG wines.

The Northeast region is home to two of Italy's wine schools, and generates about a third of the country's DOC wines. The three regions create about a fifth of Italy's total wine production. Veneto, one of the regions, now produces the most wine of any region in the country.

Central Italy, comprised of six regions, accounts for about twenty percent of both wine production and DOC wines. The tradition of wine making in this region has often been traditional, the region is moving toward more contemporary wine making methods, and the overall quality has improved. Some wine experts believe that this region will continue to make great strides in wine making, so for those who love red wine, this is an area worth watching. Tuscany creates the well-known Chianti wine, as well as a variety of other

Tuscan reds.

The Southern region, which includes the islands, is comprised of six regions. These regions produce about forty percent of the total production, but only about fourteen percent of DOC and DOCG wines. The region is focusing on overall quality, and this, too, is a region worth watching. For those interested

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in consistent quality wines, many of the region's production offer just that.

For those new to Italian wine or wanting additional information, there is an abundance of sources. An importer specializing in Italian wine is one of the best sources for information on fine Italian wines, and can provide suggestions based on your individual preferences. You can also do your own research and

wine tasting based on your style and preference. As with many things Italian, the wines are among the finer indulgences.

Italian Wine Facts is an information site that contains articles, a directory and other Italian Wine Resources. It can be found at:

<http://www.italianwinefacts.com>



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