

California Wines

There is a great deal of snobbery with regard to wine. The assumption has been that the wine growing regions of France produced the best wine and could not be equaled. Californian wines have blown this assumption away but it has taken a long struggle for wines from the New World to be accepted. Wine is produced in every US state but Californian vines make up the majority and are superior.

There is actually a long tradition of growing wine in areas such as the Napa Valley in California. The first vineyard in the state was planted by a Franciscan missionary in 1769. From this beginning, a commercial enterprise was in place for Californian wines by the start of the 20th century. Unfortunately, the government introduced prohibition. The impact of the dry period between 1920-1933 was devastating for the wine industry. Some producers were allowed exemptions if they were in the health tonic market or if they supplied sacramental wine to the church, but most growers went bust. A black market serviced the bootleggers and people who secretly made wine in their back parlors. The industry took many years to recover after the National Repeal of Prohibition came too late for most suppliers.

The following decades saw a determination to produce high quality vines and to put the state on the map. World class wines had been developed by the 1960s and 1970s but a wall of resistance was put up against this intruder. Californian wines needed a world stage on which to shine. This came about when producers entered the prestigious Paris Wine Tasting of 1976 competition. The all French jury, in a series of blind tasting sessions chose California's entrants to be superior every time. People began to re-think their whole attitude to the industry and the state finally got the respect it had been striving for.

Just to show that the Paris competition was no fluke, some of the same wines were re-tested in contests in 1986 and 2006, and were judged to have aged better than the French equivalents! Not only do wine experts now think that Californian wines are equal to the French, but that they are often found to be superior. The word was out and careful marketing ensured that these wines became best sellers all over the world. There is no room for snobbery now and the experience of California has opened up markets for other wine producing countries such as Chile, Australia and South Africa. The Franciscan missionary didn't know he was starting a revolution back in 1769. Today, we can enjoy the best of that the region has to offer in varieties such as Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, Dolcetto, Chardonnay, Pinot Gris and Zinfandel.