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The Wining of America

From California and Beyond

By Fred Tibbitts Jr.

Most wine consumers from abroad consider California to be the extent of the wine industry in the United States: They have no idea that wine is now cultivated to some degree in every state of the Union. But what is even more telling of the public's lack of understanding as to what constitutes "Wine America" is that most Americans know little more than their overseas counterparts with regard to the primary wine growing areas of the United States outside of Napa and Sonoma — plus now as a result of the hit movie "Sideways" — maybe Santa Barbara.

Before I continue on this track, let me pay some necessary respect to the amazing evolution of the California wine industry. If it were not for the many award winning wines from the Golden State, imports would dominate the U.S. market far more, and wine consumers the world over might look past

our shores as a source of superior quality and value for fine wine.

Yes, Napa and Sonoma dominate the California consciousness for the majority of wine consumers outside the United States, Old World but increasingly with new appellations becoming better appreciated and promoted — such as Santa Barbara, St. Louis Obispo, Mendocino, Carneros, various versions of Coastal and even just California.

California is experiencing a Renaissance in winemaking techniques, better appreciation of the Old World concept of "terroir" or place, and now the culinarians are achieving far greater success in the art of pairing the best American cuisine with the best American wines.

Vintage Vineyards

Wine has been cultivated in America since the arrival of the Pilgrims in the Massachusetts Bay Colony. And while it is true that California produces by far more premium wine than any other state, New York, Washington State, Oregon, Virginia, Texas and Pennsylvania are just a few of the other states that also produce premium wine.

The real story is the wining of America or the explosion of small, family wineries from coast to coast that are encouraging consumers to try a glass of the pride of their home state or region.

New York State, with the Finger Lakes, the Hudson Valley and then the several appellations on Long Island combine to make one of the top wine-producing states in the Union.

The North Fork and the South Fork are by far New York's hottest appellations, and their top-rated wines have become the darlings of some of Manhattan's finest restaurants.

I was a participant at the Hotel School at Cornell University a few years ago in a blind tasting of European, California and New York Hamptons and North Fork wines. We were told that one of the wines was Lafitte Rothschild, and they dared us to identify it. I picked a North Fork wine to be Lafitte, and I was confident without reservation of the correctness of my vote. When the wines were stripped of their brown paper bag covers and the truth revealed, I was in utter disbelief: And that was the point of the tasting. New York has developed some really fine wines, such as those from Bedell Cellars, Palmer Vineyards, Pindar Vineyards and Schneider Vineyards that compete rather nicely with their counterparts from Europe and the "New World", including California.

Washington State is a standout with boutique stars such as Barnard Griffin, DeLille Cellars, L'Ecole No 41, Leonetti Cellar, Woodward Canyon Winery, Co-





lumbia Winery and Covey Run Winery. The largest wine company, Stimson Lane, is the largest producer of wine in Washington State with their primary label being Chateau St. Michelle, but even they produce vineyard specific wines that compete with the best in the state, such as their project at Canoe Ridge, overlooking the Columbia River.

For several years, Seattle hosted The World Vinifera Conference, which brought together some of the world's top wine authorities, wine educators and industry professionals for a

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three-day wine and food fest at Seattle's top restaurants and hotels. Today "A Taste of Washington" has taken the show on the road and tours the country, bringing with it some of the best examples of what's hot in Washington State.

Oregon is the Burgundy of America, producing some of the finest examples in America of Pinot Noir, Pinot Gris and Chardonnay. One of the foremost wineries in Oregon (and the United States for that matter) is King Estate and their Pinot

Noir and Pinot Gris are legendary. King Estate is committed to going all organic and their Domain series, especially their Pinot Gris is superb. The top growing regions are the North and South Willamette Valleys, Umpqua Valley and The Rogue Valley with nearly 200 wineries in production.

And so the wining of America is full-steam ahead and showing no signs of slowing down, because people are traveling and learning that a good glass of wine is a must if their food is to be fully appreciated. So the next time you are away

from home, look at the wine list and see what is available from that state, locality or region. You

never know, it might be the best glass of wine you have ever tried.

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Fred Tibbitts Jr., a member of the Advisory Board of Oxford Publishing Inc., is the foremost wine-by-the-glass consultant to chain hotels globally. He is president of his own global beverage consulting agency, Fred Tibbitts & Associates Inc. Visit him online at fredtibbitts.com.



"No one will ever have the creative cocktail knowledge of Stephen Kirtredge Cunningham, so who can be without this essential guide to bar connoisseurship? Must reading—and doing!"
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