

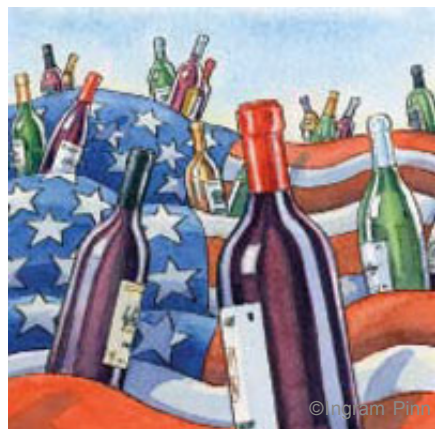
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Young Americans



By Jancis Robinson

Every one of the 50 states now makes wine, even Hawaii and Alaska. North Dakota was the last to succumb



To his contemporaries Dustin Wilson, 33, has a dream job. A Maryland boy, he is now a Master Sommelier and wine director at Eleven Madison Park, one of New York's most admired restaurants. Previously he worked for such luminaries in the world of the grape as Rajat Parr of RN74 in San Francisco and Bobby Stuckey MS of Frasca in Boulder, Colorado. And he knows how lucky he is. "Right now is a really exciting time to be involved in wine in this country," he told me recently. What particularly excites him is that so many young Americans are so actively interested in his chosen subject. He is also stimulated by

the current revolutionary fervour in a new generation of producers who are offering wines that have never before been made in the United States.

I have been observing the American wine scene since 1976, when I reported on the novelty of the French, in the form of Moët & Chandon, investing in the Napa Valley. By the 1990s Napa Valley was one big vineyard, but the wine industry was under threat from those it called neo-Prohibitionists. Warning labels on bottles had been declared mandatory and producers and retailers seemed ever more constricted.

Today things are quite different. The US has long been by far the biggest producer of wine outside Europe (so the fourth biggest in the world), but it has recently become the single biggest market for wine, consuming more in total than the former old soaks of France and Italy. Not only that, but wine as a subject is also enjoying unprecedented status in the US.

Unlike Europeans, Americans see wine as something novel and exciting, so they are delightfully proactive in their interest in it. Wine classes and tasting groups proliferate. Wine tourism has never been more popular, and in many cities wine tourists don't even have to travel further than the suburbs where many an urban winery has been established, giving city dwellers hands-on experience of tasting, blending and even making wine. An interest in wine seems particularly marked among those in their twenties and thirties. At a public talk I gave recently in New York, I spotted hardly anyone over 35 in the audience, and all the questions came from

young women.

Not surprisingly, this flowering of consumption has been matched by one in production. A keen interest in drinking wine can all too easily lead to a desire to make it, a desire that can be relatively easily realised in a country as rich in land and capital as the United States. I long ago lost count of the number of Americans who had decided to devote a portion of the fortune they had made elsewhere to the dream of owning a vineyard.

The total number of bonded wineries in the US has risen from under 3,000 at the turn of the century to approaching 8,000 today. And these are not just in the three Pacific states so well known for their wine production – California, Oregon and Washington. Every one of the 50 American states now makes wine, even Hawaii (from various hybrid vines and tropical fruits) and Alaska (also from local fruits and imported grape juice). North Dakota up on the Canadian border in the Midwest was the last state to succumb to the charms of wine production and like several states with similarly vicious winters, had to resort to winter-hardy hybrid vines.

My American wine travels have been confined to the west coast, New Mexico, New York, Vermont and Virginia, but whenever I have had the chance I have always gone out of my way to taste wines from as wide an array of states as possible. Massachusetts Merlot? Tennessee Traminette? You betcha!

There is still no shortage of pretty awful wine made in what the campaign called Drink Local Wine (drinklocalwine.com) calls “The Other 47”. But the exciting thing is that the proportion of good or very good wine made somewhere other than on the Pacific coast has been increasing markedly recently. My new book *American Wine* celebrates this revolution, and was written with Linda Murphy, a former wine editor of the San Francisco Chronicle and frequent judge at wine shows all over the US. No state is too obscure for Ms Murphy, fortunately for me since she has done by far the lion’s share of the work involved in the book.

I have tasted very respectable wines from Arizona, Colorado, Texas and New Mexico, and there are exceptional producers all over the country, but for us the hotspots of really top quality wine are the Finger Lakes of New York and the southern shore of Lake Michigan for fine Rieslings; Long Island for a wide range of rather European wines; and Virginia for increasingly fine red Bordeaux blends, Viognier, Petit Manseng and Petit Verdot. And it is possible to find decent Chardonnay virtually everywhere.

Things are changing in Oregon, Washington and particularly California too. Much to the delight of Dustin Wilson and the tight-knit posses of sommeliers on the American coasts, there is a perceptible pendulum swing away from turbocharged versions of a handful of international grape varieties towards much fresher, lighter wines that are more expressive of individual



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vineyards than cellar techniques. And they are made from a significantly wider range of grape varieties than used to be the case.

The trend was there but it has been encouraged by a succession of cool growing seasons in California – perhaps the result of climate change. In the panel I list a few of the newer producers associated with this trend, but I am well aware that newcomers on the wine scene have been sprouting just like the bright yellow spring crop of mustard between California's blessed vines.

Tasting notes on Purple Pages of JancisRobinson.com

Stockists from winesearcher.com

'American Wine: The Ultimate Companion to the Wines and Wineries of the USA' by Jancis Robinson and Linda Murphy is published by Mitchell Beazley

Some new(ish) names to watch

- A Tribute to Grace
- Cep
- Ceritas
- Copain
- Kutch
- Lieu Dit
- Matthiasson
- Rhys
- RPM
- Sandhi
- Sans Liege
- Small Vines

- Soliste
- Tatomer

California wine is never cheap but **Sandhi's Santa Barbara Chardonnay 2011** (£26.95 from Roberson, 020 7381 7870) can well withstand comparison with white burgundies at the same price



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