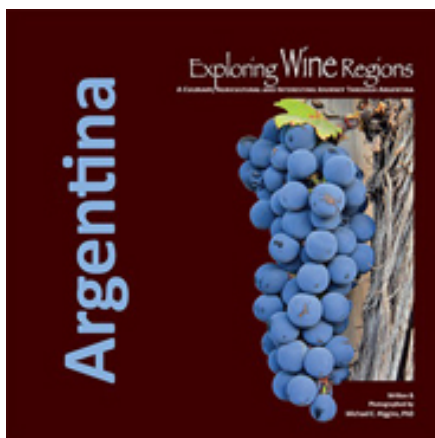


The US Review of Books

Professional Reviews for the People



Exploring Wine Regions: Argentina

by Michael C. Higgins, PhD
International Exploration Society

Reviewed by: John E. Roper

"Picture naturally breathtaking snow-capped Andes Mountains as a backdrop for a strikingly modern, minimalist structure, that rises from rich green vineyards."

Some people dabble in their interests; others, like the author, completely immerse themselves in them. Higgins is passionate about wine, an amateur in the original French sense of the word in that he is a lover of his subject matter. His ardor has led him into the world of winemakers and wine connoisseurs, taken him into the vineyards to work alongside the harvesters, and into the process of making his own wine. He has sampled the finest vintages with celebrity chefs, attended wine auctions and special wine events, and tasted countless varieties. In short, he has become so knowledgeable about wine that he has come to the realization that he actually knows very little. To make up for this lack he has crafted a plan: he will journey around the globe to discover firsthand the secrets of the world's wine regions. Thankfully, he is happy to share his findings with us.

In this, the first book in a new series, Higgins travels to Argentina to learn the answer to such questions as why there has never been a Malbec that he didn't like. The reason, we discover, is due mainly to the ideal growing conditions for the grapes. For example, in the country's Mendoza wine region a consistent wide range in temperatures give the fruit a naturally balanced acidity. The vines are watered exclusively by the pure snow-melt from the Andes Mountains. The soil consists of just the right blend of materials, while the perfect combination of a high desert altitude and a very dry climate make for vines that are free of many of the diseases and insects that plague other wine regions. The result of all these factors are extremely healthy grapes which, in the hands of a skilled vintner, can be transformed into liquid magic. Of course, Malbec and Mendoza are just the start of Higgins odyssey. His travels take him to Salta, the highest wine growing region in the world and home to vineyards which reach an elevation of 10,000 feet above sea level. Here one finds "The Liar," the white grape varietal Torrontés, which earns its nickname from the discrepancy between its fruity, ripe peach smell and its deceptively dry, grapefruit-like finish. Then later Higgins is off to Patagonia, where the cooler climate is perfect for classic wines such as Pinot Noir, Chardonnay, Merlot, and Cabernet Franc. Along the way he regales his readers with fascinating tidbits about local winemaking history and tantalizes them with his culinary exploits in some of the country's best restaurants. In addition, he helpfully provides descriptions of area attractions and gives advice on places to stay for visitors who follow in his footsteps.

Much of what makes this book stand out is the professional experience the author brings to his project. Higgins worked for 20 years as the publisher of *Flying Adventures*, a lifestyle travel magazine geared for those who own their own planes and enjoy good food and wine. This background is evident in his overall design of the book which rivals the best travel guides on the market. He combines his own high quality photographs with short, engaging articles which offer just the right amount of information to satisfy the reader's interest in a particular topic without belaboring the point. Attractive, informative, and entertaining, Higgins' book is an excellent beginning to what promises to be a superb series.

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