



 **STARRED REVIEW**

Exploring Wine Regions: The Central Coast of California

Michael C. Higgins, PhD

International Exploration Society, 436 pages, (paperback) \$44.95, 9780996966047

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In this sumptuous book with more than 800 photographs, Michael C. Higgins takes wine enthusiasts on an in-depth tour of the wineries of Central California.

Unlike the many books devoted to Napa and Sonoma, this book—third in the Exploring Wine Regions series—looks at the lesser-known wine regions of Monterey County, San Luis Obispo (including Paso Robles) and Santa Barbara County. More than just a wine guide, it includes detailed information on travel routes, restaurants, inns, even points of interest in the various winery towns. Additionally, he notes, “I look for interesting experiences, like horseback riding through the vineyards, cooking with chefs, wine blending with oenologists, and overnight accommodations in the vineyards.”

With more than 600 wineries to choose from in the area, the author has culled them to the best of the best: “Who is out?” he writes of his choices, “If all they do is offer a tasting? Boring!... If the wine is not excellent? Why bother?... “

Higgins seems to have thought of everything, with maps, indexes and even advice on how to navigate the book’s pages. He includes basic facts about a winery on one side of the page (price range, address, phone number, website, hours, wines) with a more detailed narrative about the winery – its history, interesting facts about it, ambiance, etc. – next to it. If anything, there’s almost too much information to absorb, with pages packed tightly with photos and type.

With this coffee-table-beautiful book and its luscious photography, Higgins has basically done the work for travelers by getting there first. As he writes, “...I am ahead of you in the expedition so you can know in advance where you want to go to drink the best of what you want to try...” His book is a stunning project, sure to inspire oenophiles and adventurers alike to tour this enchanting region.