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TITLE INFORMATION

EXPLORING WINE REGIONS - THE CENTRAL COAST OF CALIFORNIA

Michael Higgins

International Exploration Society (436 pp.)

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BOOK REVIEW

Higgins takes readers on a tour through the winemaking culture of central California.

The author, a photojournalist, wine connoisseur, and writer (*Exploring Wine Regions - Bordeaux France: Discover Wine, Food, Castles, and the French Way of Life*, 2020), guides readers through the vineyards of the Central Coast region of California, focusing on the counties of Monterey, San Luis Obispo, and Santa Barbara. The region, which boasts over 600 wineries, is divided into American Viticultural Areas (AVAs), grape-growing territories with common environmental characteristics. Higgins organizes his exploration of each county by AVA, identifying which grapes flourish in each area. Rather than choosing wines based on the type of grapes used, Higgins advocates for the consideration of terroir—the environmental and human factors that shape a particular wine’s flavor. The concept of terroir is the primary theme of the guide: “The more precise and specific we can be about terroir, and the grapes that are growing in that terroir, the better chance we are going to be drinking more exceptional wines.” Higgins begins each section with a general overview of the county, cataloging its largest cities, notable attractions, and transportation options before narrowing the focus to specific AVAs. Helpful charts list the wineries within each county, indicating the availability of different types of wines, restaurants, lodgings, tours, and other amenities. More in-depth profiles of Higgins’s favorite wineries provide information about each winery’s history, owners, noteworthy innovations, and specialty wines. Higgins also recommends restaurants and attractions in each area, supplying contact information, price guidelines, and photos of sample dishes. The descriptions are the standard stuff of travel guides (“As you enter the building, the design of the walkways and the entrances sets you in the mood of quality”), with a tendency towards repetition; Higgins’ photographs are the real highlight, vividly capturing vineyards, wines, and accompanying cuisine with rich colors and skillful use of light. Wine enthusiasts are unlikely to find a more informative resource for exploring Central Coast vineyards.

A useful and attractive travel guide for oenophiles.

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