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## Whisk your favorite oenophile to wine country without leaving home

BY CHERISH WHYTE

### The next best thing to being there

Learn more about and purchase *Exploring Wine Regions: The Central Coast of California* by Michael Higgins at [exploringwineregions.com](http://exploringwineregions.com). Follow Higgins on [Instagram](#) and [Facebook](#)@exploringwineregions.

Over the holidays many folks will no doubt be headed to the storied vineyards of the Central Coast, stretching from Monterey County south to Santa Barbara. San Luis Obispo County is particularly alluring given Paso Robles' star status as the country's top wine region this year, according to *USA Today's* 10 Best Readers' Choice Awards.

Due west, the county's SLO Coast American Viticultural Area, producing standout chardonnays and pinot noirs from the state's coolest wine region, are also on the radar of oenophiles.



- Photo By Cherish Whyte
- **PHOTOGRAPHIC FEAST** More than 800 color photographs bring *Exploring Wine Regions: The Central Coast of California* to life. The 436-page book covers wineries, restaurants, and more from Santa Barbara, San Luis Obispo, and Monterey counties.

Wine aficionados might also enjoy a journey through the region's vineyards and tasting rooms via a good book. Options abound, but one that tops many lists is *Exploring Wine Regions: The Central Coast of California* by Pasadena author, photojournalist, and publisher Michael Higgins.

Released in October, it's already winning awards, including Best Travel Guide and Best Photography Book of 2023 in American Book Fest's 20th Annual Best Book Awards.

The book—the third in Higgins' Exploring Wine Regions series, after Argentina and Bordeaux, France—dives deep into San Luis Obispo County, with substantial coverage of Monterey and Santa Barbara counties as well.

Its 436 pages include more than 800 photos highlighting 102 wineries from 27 sub-American Viticultural Areas. Higgins also provides recommendations for dozens of restaurants with suggested food and wine pairings.

"The Central Coast offers a world-class wine and food experience, yet remains an under-the-radar destination for many," Higgins said. "I aim to unveil the depth of the region's offerings—from its exceptional wines to its farm-to-table cuisine—all enriched by the personalities who make it special."

Higgins spent two years getting to know the who's who of Central Coast wine country, with a section featuring Paso icon [Gary Eberle](#), who began his viticultural career in 1973 and turns 80 in March.

In his book, the author said: "Gary is at the winery seven days a week. Typically, he's sitting out front with a bottle of cabernet sauvignon—his favorite wine. Gary loves nothing more than greeting people at his winery with his two adorable black standard poodles, Sangiovese and Barbera."



- Courtesy Photo By Michael Higgins
- **POODLE PATROL** *Exploring Wine Regions: The Central Coast of California* transports readers to landmark estates such as Eberle. Mascots Barbera, left, and Sangiovese patrol nearly 17,000 square feet of winding caves beneath the Paso Robles property.

The winery will celebrate a holiday open house with chocolate and cheese pairings and cave tastings on Dec. 9, as well as a Valentine's dinner with chef Peter Haller on Feb. 10.

While Higgins' book dedicates extensive space to Paso, he also delves into the SLO Coast region, which pleasantly surprised him.

"I found it interesting that the grapes are being grown up by the ocean in Cambria and even more interesting that there is a warm wine region in Arroyo Grande where they are growing excellent zinfandel from 100-year-old vines," he said. "It's important to know that the SLO Coast AVA and Edna Valley AVA is the coldest appellation in California, making it particularly great for chardonnay and pinot noir often made in Burgundian style."

The true heart and soul of the book, though, is the people he interviewed, he continued.

"I wanted to share the stories of the people who have their feet on the ground and contribute to both the rich history and the dedication to the future," he said. "Ultimately, my books are about the camaraderie and the discovery of romance in each glass, each place, and each conversation." Δ

*Flavor Writer Cherish Whyte enjoyed her trip to wine country via pages and pours from home.*

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