

Michael C. Higgins Turns Passion for Travel and Wine into Award-Winning Book Series

By: Chris Manning, IBPA



Michael C. Higgins draws on decades of publishing experience to craft books that bring the world's wine regions to life, blending immersive travel, striking photography, and authentic storytelling.

For more than 20 years, author, photographer, publisher, private pilot, and multiple IBPA Book Award winner **Michael C. Higgins**, has built a career at the intersection of publishing, travel, and storytelling. After launching *Flying Adventures magazine*, a lifestyle magazine for people who own and travel by private airplane, Higgins expanded his vision through the acclaimed **Exploring Wine Regions** book series. Drawing on thousands of days spent in vineyards, cellars, and kitchens around the globe, he has pruned vines, picked grapes, judged wines, and shared countless meals with world-renowned winemakers—all while capturing these experiences through his photography. His work has been honored by the Independent Book Publishers Association: *Exploring Wine Regions – México* received the Gold IBPA Book Award in Travel and the Silver IBPA Book Award in Regional categories in 2025, *Exploring Wine Regions – Bordeaux France* earned a Silver IBPA Book Award in Travel in 2021, while *Exploring Wine Regions – Argentina* was awarded the Gold IBPA Benjamin Franklin Award in Travel in 2017.



Michael C. Higgins

IBPA: Hi Michael, thank you for joining us! Exploring Wine Regions has become such a unique and immersive series. What originally inspired you to blend travel, wine, and storytelling into a single project?

Michael Higgins: Thank you for the kind compliment. I've been a "travel-wine story blender" for a long time through my editorials and feature stories in *Flying Adventures*, the lifestyle travel magazine I published. Blending these elements is in my blood.

IBPA: How many books have you published in the series and what are they?

Michael: I've published four books so far and am preparing the fifth for release in 2026. They are:

- *Exploring Wine Regions – Argentina*
- *Exploring Wine Regions – Bordeaux France*
- *Exploring Wine Regions – California Central Coast*
- *Exploring Wine Regions – Mexico*
- *Exploring Wine Regions – Greece (coming in 2026)*

IBPA: You began your journey as a photographer and publisher. How did your background in these fields shape your vision for *Exploring Wine Regions*?

Michael: My love is creating beautiful photography. I am an author and write these books because books need words. And I'm very happy people love my writing style. It is the photography though, with the books printed on museum quality art paper to enhance these photographs, that makes the journey as a photographer so rewarding. As a publisher, I have decades of experience in magazine publishing, so I'm quite knowledgeable on how to produce quality books. What is different is the distribution, and I have created excellent relationships with a top-level book distributor and a public relations firm.

IBPA: How are your books distributed?

Michael: I am fortunate to have a great relationship with a large distributor, Baker & Taylor Publisher Services, who believed in me from the beginning, and it's so nice to see distribution grow and the sales multiply. Also, regarding distribution, the wineries and hotels who are in each issue of the book also sell books. This has become a big part of our distribution.

IBPA: We're curious about your prior experience in publishing. Tell us what you did in publishing before this.

Michael: So I published *Flying Adventures* magazine. I started this publication from scratch and built it up to over a million readers. It's been a very exciting journey. What I find interesting is that I started in publishing at the very bottom, at ten years old as a paper boy for a major newspaper. I had to beg them because of my age to let me build a paper route, which I made very successful. From paper boy to publisher of a magazine, and now a book series.

IBPA: You've visited some of the world's most celebrated—and emerging—wine regions. Which region surprised you the most?

Michael: Mexico was a surprise. We all think of Mexico for tequila, but Mexico is producing excellent, award-winning wines. Having lived in Southern California my entire life, I'm shocked I had never been to Valle de Guadalupe—their primary wine region, in Baja California—until working on the book *Exploring Wine Regions – Mexico*. And I'm a Wino! This was a great discovery, and I've been back now several times.

IBPA: One of the strengths of your books is how they convey not just technical knowledge about wine, but also a strong sense of place. We imagine that you make multiple visits and

drink a whole lot of wines in the regions you write about. Do tell us more about your research process!

Michael: Everything in my books is from my personal experiences. So yes, somebody has to travel to these wine regions, drink the extraordinary wines and indulge in the delicious cuisine. I wouldn't want anyone else to have to suffer all this, so I go! And my trips are anywhere from one to two months long. And numerous trips to each destination. It takes this kind of immersion to really know the place, get the spectacular photography, and give my readers authentic recommendations.



A vineyard guide leads visitors through the vines, offering the kind of immersive experiences celebrated in the Exploring Wine Regions books.

IBPA: From Bordeaux to Mendoza to Baja California, you balance iconic and lesser-known regions. Where are you headed next, and why?

Michael: Creating the Bordeaux France book was very important to the series as Bordeaux is the center of the universe for wine in the world. What is the most exciting to me, though, is exposing those lesser-known wine regions. I did not create a California book on purpose, instead a California Central Coast book, which is a much lesser-known wine region, yet they produce wines as awesome as Napa Valley, the cuisine is as excellent as you find in Beverly Hills and the landscapes are stunningly beautiful.

Same story with Mexico. Nobody thinks of Mexico for wine and yet they are producing award-winning premium wines. My next book is Greece. They have been making wine for

7,000 years, yet people don't think of them for wine. Due to circumstances you will read about in my book, they are coming back on the scene of worldwide quality winemaking just a century ago. They are catching up and the wines are unique and extraordinarily good.

IBPA: Let's talk about the production side. Your books are beautifully designed—large format, filled with stunning photography, maps, and editorial content. Is there a struggle between balancing your high production costs and offering a price point that the market can bear? Can you speak a bit about your book pricing strategy?

Michael: Thank you for your very nice compliments. My objective is to produce beautiful books, and I love it when this is appreciated. So, thank you again. I don't have high production costs as I keep most of the production in house, I have reasonable vendors, and I print overseas in Korea. As far as the price point, my objective is to keep it reasonable so that everybody can afford the books. The books are only \$34.95 or \$44.95 depending on the size of the book. I know the price is low for the size and quality of the book, I just don't want price to be in the way of the purchase.

IBPA: What's been most effective in marketing your books?

Regarding marketing, I find having a public relations firm, obtaining opportunities for editorials in publications, as well as radio and television, is very important. Appearances have made a big difference. I also do advertising in selective places, which IBPA offer some very good choices. Further, obtaining lots of reviews and getting awards expresses the high-quality and love for our books.

IBPA: Finally, what advice would you give to indie publishers hoping to create a travel, photography, or narrative series?

Michael: My most important reason for doing these books is living the lifestyle of traveling the world and hanging out with winemakers and chefs. That is worth more than any profits. It sure would be helpful if they have the skills of photography, writing and publishing, or have partners so collectively they have a team to keep it in house.

IBPA: I've really enjoyed learning about your adventures and discoveries. Thanks for sharing with us, Michael!

About the Independent Book Publishers Association (IBPA)

Founded in 1983 to support independent publishers nationwide, the Independent Book Publishers Association (IBPA) leads and serves the independent publishing community through advocacy, education, and tools for success. With over 3,000 members, IBPA is the largest publishing association in the U.S. Its vision is a world where every independent publisher has the access, knowledge, and tools needed to professionally engage in all aspects of an inclusive publishing industry. For more information, visit [ibpa-online.org](https://www.ibpa-online.org).