

BOOK AND FILM REVIEWS

Jessica Dupuy: *The Wines of Southwest U.S.A.*

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This is one in the excellent series of books about wine regions in the Infinite Idea Classic Wine Library. Several of these books have been reviewed in this journal, and my impression is that the books have been uniformly admired. This book is no exception.

The wine regions of the southwestern United States cover an enormous area (Dupuy, a native Texan, is fond of pointing out that the land mass of Texas is greater than that of France!). Having just finished a road trip from West Texas to Los Angeles myself, I can vouch for the many thousands of miles Dupuy traveled to complete this book. It would only be surprising if she did not miss something!

Although the “Southwest” usually includes parts of California, Nevada, and Utah, Dupuy makes the sensible decision to stick with New Mexico, Texas, Arizona, and Colorado. Each state takes up a chapter and is divided into sections on history, climate (and problems therefrom), producers, and tips on where to stay and dine. I found all of these helpful, including during a drive across New Mexico. There are many pleasant surprises awaiting those who are willing to travel the distances required in this vast area.

Also scattered throughout the book are sidebars with personal vignettes or history, quite often unrelated to wine. My favorite was a brief history of the Apache leader Cochise, who managed to stay out of the hands of the U.S. Army most of his life. Today, Cochise County is home to a thriving set of wineries, and the famed town of Tombstone, and its OK Corral.

The author does not discuss the fact that the wine areas of the Southwest have some common features that make visiting them a challenge. First, although it is nice to think of local wineries as part of a locavore or farm-to-table movement, it takes some imagination to bridge this gap in the Southwest. In all four states, the main population centers, homes to farm-to-table restaurants, are hundreds of miles from where the grapes are grown, and where the wine would logically be made. For example, Denver, the biggest city, is in the far east of Colorado, but the wines and grapes come from the other side of the Rocky Mountains in the West. Grape growing in New Mexico is found mainly near Deming in the Southwest, while the best and wealthiest customers are far

away in Santa Fe in the Northeast. Even in the picturesque Texas Hill Country, north of San Antonio and west of Austin, wineries use grapes that are often sourced from 400 miles away in the High Plains country. This all puts considerable stress on claims for locavore status.

Some wineries have found clever ways to work around these vast distances. Luna Rossa in Deming, operated by Italian born Paolo D'Angelo and his American born son Marco, opened what is legally a tasting room in Las Cruces, but is in fact a full scale Italian restaurant. Ten dollars get you a flight of five wines, including a delicious Nebbiolo, and another fifteen get you a good pizza, as well. The large D.H. Lescombes winery, also in Deming, has French bistro/tasting rooms in Alamogordo, Albuquerque, and Las Cruces.

Another problem wineries of the Southwest face is the difficulty of gaining local consumer acceptance. Unlike France, where local wines will be served in local restaurants and shops, even when they are from obscure appellations, this is rarely the case in the U.S.A. This is no doubt due in part to the archaic American three-tier distribution system, which incentivizes the development and sale of big "brands," but also the national wine media, which has no room for local products that are not nationally distributed. The gradual disappearance of locally based publications has certainly not helped.

There are two serious weaknesses in a guide book such as this. First, publication lags virtually guarantee that it will be incomplete, especially in regions where the wine industry is expanding. New editions can help, but I think a better solution would be to make use of the Internet. This would require a pay wall, but it would also permit continuous updating of a permanent record.

Second, there is little in the book that will help a reader/traveler to separate the best wines from those that are mediocre or worse. In growing wine regions, where reputations have not been established, readers need some help in curating their selections, and wineries may also face useful incentives to pursue quality and value. Despite these weaknesses, Dupuy has produced a book that is useful for friends of local wines and travelers alike.