

Read Your Way to a Food and Wine Destination

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The term "armchair travel," calls to mind the quaint image of sitting in a well worn easy chair within the halo of a brass reading lamp, dog-eared book in hand. Certainly today we do a lot more "laptop travel," skipping around travel sites to find flights, hotels, restaurants and sightseeing options. It is hard to believe that not that long ago -- in the 21st century, in fact -- we drove around Italy, France, and Spain with a stack of guidebooks in the back seat of our rented Fiat, and if a destination fell short of our expectations upon arrival we would turn to the printed page to help decide our next move.

Despite the easy access of information on the web, we are still fans of paper and longer form narrative, and turn to books for inspiration in travel. Many of our trips involve visits to vineyards and wineries, but we also enjoy cities for their combination of history, culture and great food. Saturday, May 11, 2013 is the inaugural Wine Tourism Day in the USA, and if you don't have enough time to plan a vacation to a wine region, you can always set aside a portion of the day to curl up in a comfortable chair with a book that will inspire your next grape getaway.

M.F.K. Fischer is considered one of the greatest food writers of the 20th century, and with good reason. Fisher's writings combine the best elements of memoir within a framework of food, wine and travel. A recent collection of her essays, *M.F.K. Fisher: Musings on Wine and Other Libations*, edited by Anne Zimmerman, takes us to the two places that Fisher lived in, California and France, both of which include wine destinations on any traveler's bucket list.

Fisher lived in Napa, Sonoma, Burgundy and Provence at various points in her long life, and through personal vignettes she brings the people, customs, food and wine of the places she called home to life. The opening quote gives amazing insight into a woman who has inspired generations of writers in the worlds of food and wine: "I can no more think of my own life without thinking of wine and wines and where they grew for me and why I drank them when I did and why I picked the grapes and where I opened the most procurable bottles, and all that, than I can remember living before I breathed."

Brigit Binns -- who has penned 26 cookbooks to date -- gives us a taste of California's Central Coast in *The New Wine Country Cookbook: Recipes from California's Central Coast*. Filled with lush photographs of dishes, vineyards and sun-drenched landscapes, Binn' cookbook, like any good dinner party, starts with light appetizers, in a chapter called "Magic-Hour Grazing," and then moves through dishes based on main ingredient, such as "From the Ranch," and "From Garden and Orchard." She enlists local winemakers, chefs and sommeliers from Santa Barbara and Paso Robles to offer wine pairing suggestions, and winery profiles are interspersed between recipes and photos. This is armchair wine travel at its most mouthwatering, and even if you get no farther than your own kitchen the trip will have been worth it. But trust us, this is so much more than a cookbook that you will be booking your flight to California before your Spit-Roasted Lavender Chicken with Fresh Fig Romesco is off the grill.

Jancis Robinson is one of the most famous wine critics and writers in the world; her career spans three decades. Her most recent tome, *American Wine: The Ultimate Companion to the Wines and Wineries of the United States*, co-authored with Linda Murphy, is filled with history, geography, and detailed information about wine regions in the USA. Wine is now being made in all 50 states, and Robinson and Murphy discuss regions, wineries and wine styles in astute detail. The overall size, four-color photography, and comprehensive maps cry out, "Coffee Table Book," but we dare you to resist flipping through and planning out your next visit to the wine region nearest you. It was Robinson who first informed us about Wine Tourism Day, and in a recent interview, when asked about

the best possible U.S. wine destination besides those on the west coast, she told us, "Virginia is a great tourism destination, because it looks so pretty and has so much history. The state's governor could not be more pro-wine, and he is pushing wine tourism for the whole state. I would strongly recommend anyone on this coast to give it a go. The best wines I have tried there are Bordeaux blends, and I have enjoyed Chardonnay and Viognier as well." Robinson also informed us that her co-author is "very keen on Michigan -- it's a very pretty tourist destination, and they are making good wine on the shores of Lake Michigan."

Many of us come to wine first through visits to urban restaurants -- we become aware of wine regions by the way wine lists are broken down, and we can eat and drink our way around the world in international cities such as New York, San Francisco or London. Nicholas Lander, a former restaurateur and the current restaurant critic for London's *Financial Times* (who is also Jancis' Robinson's husband) wrote *The Art of the Restaurateur* because he believes that great restaurants often owe their being to the people behind the concept and business rather than just the chef behind the stove. Between the pages you will find intriguing narratives of the people responsible for some of the world's finest restaurants, including Joe Bastianich, Danny Meyer, Drew Nieporent, Sam and Eddie Hart, and Marie-Pierre Troisgros. We interviewed Lander as well, and one of the most interesting points that he made is that the 20 restaurateurs featured in his book "...are the world's finest, who changed our cities, the way we eat, and the way we appreciate food." As a Londoner, Lander thinks that New York is the most exciting destination for food lovers, and on the idea of reading and armchair travel, he stated, "One of the most extraordinary things about my book -- and about Jancis' book -- is that it is so aspirational. One of the points of writing a book like this is to take people on the journey." We couldn't agree more!

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