



Landscapes Of Bacchus: The Vine in Portugal

Dan Stanislawski

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In a country of disparate parts and of long, unbroken historical experience, there may be one dominant feature, a clue to the character of its regions. In Portugal the vine serves as this clue.

The vine has been an important aspect of the Iberian landscape since prehistoric times, and farmers still use Roman methods of cultivation that have been adapted to regional physical conditions and to socioeconomic structure. Southern Portugal today is almost vineless, but in the north three areas can be distinguished by their vine forms and their products. Dan Stanislawski examines these areas in detail.

High tree-vines surround plots of grain in the Minho Province. The grains and the slightly acid Green Wines provide subsistence and cash for the densely settled area of owner-operated small farms.

In the hanging garden terrace of the Douro, vines grown on tawny, baked schist slopes yield world-famous Port Wine, a product that must conform to strict quantity and quality controls supervised by the central government.

Mature table wines are produced in the Dão, an isolated cul-de-sac where cordons of vines are planted on small, individually owned plots. Control of wine-making is exercised by a central governing group and by producers' cooperatives.

Various wines originate in central Portugal. The lesser demarcated zones of Setubal, Colares, Carcavelos, and Bucelas yield fine wines. In other parts of the central region several wine types are produced in bulk. Some are used for blending and some for aging into quality table wines, but none is distinguished as a wine whose character is derived from its geographical location.

Dan Stanislawski demonstrates that vine form differences—and differences in the resulting product, wine—mirror the Portuguese historical experience and indicate regional distinctions in Portuguese life styles.

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