



Méridional: Looking Toward the Sun

We are told that the origins of wine are found in the East: the eastern Mediterranean, the Levant, Mesopotamia, or east of the Black Sea in the foothills of the Caucasus mountains, or even as far east as the mountains of ancient Persia. But for our purposes, wine culture begins with the Phoenicians, the Greeks, and the Romans, who sailed the Mediterranean, bringing first wine, and then grapevines to the coasts of what are known today as Italy, France, and Spain.



A NEW MAP OF EUROPE (DETAIL), EDWARD WELLS, 1700, WITH THE MÉRIDIONAL AREA HIGHLIGHTED

Long before today's political distinctions came to be, though, they were gathered in many different polities: Navarre, Aragon, Catalonia, Languedoc, Provence. The peoples of this region shared a common language, Occitan, and a common culture, which we recognize as Mediterranean. Think of the olive, and the scent of wild herbs under the warm summer sun, and you'll know what I mean.

Long before the Romans had travelled up the Rhône and then the Saône to Burgundy, and before they went down the Garonne to Bordeaux, they had planted vineyards along the coast of the Mediterranean Sea and then inland, on the dry, sunny hills. This is where modern wine begins.

Grape varieties have travelled widely—witness the New World—thus, as the culture of the vine found its way along the coast of the Mediterranean, so too, did selections or varieties make that same journey. These would be the vines that yielded the most pleasing wines according to local growing conditions and local tastes. The descendants of those vines, such as Grenache and Mourvèdre, are still found across the south of France, and into north-eastern Spain. These give us wines we love.

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