

# Eduardo Dingler, Wine to Sake: The many wines of Mexico

EDUARDO DINGLER - as published in the Napa Valley Register on Jul 14, 2022



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After traveling through the wine regions of Mexico, Eduardo Dingler combined his impressions into this collage.

It is half the size of Napa Valley, but more than 125 varieties of grapes are grown in the Valle de Guadalupe in Baja California, Mexico.

Vineyards in the Valle de Guadalupe in Baja California, México, near Ensenada. The valle's vineyards were first planted in 1834, with about 50 wineries in the vicinity.



Camillo Magoni

Camillo Magoni, a native Italian, has just celebrated his 58th vintage in Valle de Guadalupe, Mexico.

When we think about the beverages of Mexico, wine is not always the first thing that comes to mind. Tequila, mezcal, and sotol are taking the world by storm, and Mexican beer is already a staple of bars worldwide. "But what about Mexican wine?" you might ask.

I was fortunate enough to join the importer Tomás Bracamontes for a whirlwind few days to find Bracamontes, a former music industry producer and Napa Valley resident, founded La Competencia Imports and has been on an unstoppable mission of telling the stories and sharing the wines of Mexico.

La Competencia Imports' Mexican Wine Boot Camp was held in Valle de Guadalupe, which hosted guests from throughout the United States.

Mexico's wine production is deeply rooted in various parts of the country. Valle de Parras in Coahuila is home to the oldest winery on the American continent, and evidence shows that vines have been planted in the state of Querétaro since before the 15th century.

Wine is not only part of the Mexican tradition, it has continued to grow throughout the country. Young, driven producers and winemakers are committed to elevating the standard and breaking the mold.

Let's start with one of the most prolific regions, Baja California, roughly an hour and a half south of San Diego and about 10 miles from the Pacific Ocean and at relatively low altitude as compared to central Mexico.

Worth noting is the elevated dining and lodging. These features are partially responsible for Baja's commercial success and worldwide attention.

Some of the most relevant areas within Baja are Valle de Guadalupe, Valle San Vicente, Valle Ojos Negros, Valle de la Grulla and Valle de Santo Tomás. The soils are dominated by sandy loam, sand and clay, including some mineral-rich red soils in the southern region of San Vicente where white grapes thrive.

Speaking of varieties, the latest count supports evidence of more than 125 grape varieties grown in the region. Total production is estimated under 2 million cases and the yields are quite small, at under 2 tons per acre on average. A few factors are responsible for the light crops, including extremely low precipitation and older vines. This results in concentration and captivating flavor.

While diversity is the name of the game in Baja, the most relevant wines are produced with Nebbiolo, Tempranillo, Cabernet Sauvignon and Malbec in the reds, and Chardonnay and Sauvignon Blanc for the whites. A personal favorite just might be the Verdejo grown in San Vicente.

Baja California is home to more than 250 wineries. Some of the largest and most renowned wineries include Domecq, LA Cetto, Monte Xanic and Santo Tomás.

Other region-defining producers include Bruma, Lechuga, Adobe Guadalupe, Llano Colorado (which is also one of the largest growers), Palafox, Henri Lurton, Viñas de la Erre and Bodegas Magoni.

International influence is key throughout Baja, and we cannot talk about the region without mentioning Camillo Magoni. He is a native Italian who has just celebrated his 58th vintage in Valle de Guadalupe. His enthusiasm and experimental nature are highly contagious. Aside from Bodegas Magoni, Camillo is responsible for the underground favorite TRESOMM brand.

### Camilo Magoni

Another force of nature in the valle is the Ensenada-born and Bordeaux-trained Lulu Martinez Ojeda. She learned winemaking in France with the Lurton family and returned home to spearhead a handful of

wineries. Her work is celebrated at Bruma Vinicola, Palafox, Lagrimas by Llano Colorado and Viña Verraco, among others.

Chilean-born Daniel Lonnerberg, who has spent 20 years in Mexico making wine, excels at the iconic Adobe Guadalupe, founded by the Netherlands native Tru Miller. Lonnerberg also puts forth wine under his own label Vinsur. This winery also delivers an epic Nebbiolo.

## **Coahuila**

Moving up into the mainland, let's talk about Coahuila. Driven by the Valle de Parras and Arteaga, the latest data shows 35 producers and just under 2,500 acres planted. Elevation reaches up to 5,000 feet with a semi-desert climate, which gives it a unique terroir combined with sand, silt and clay soils.

Some of the most prominent grapes planted in Coahuila include Cabernet Sauvignon, Cabernet Franc, Merlot, Syrah and Caladoc as well as Chenin Blanc, Viognier, Chardonnay and Sauvignon Blanc for whites.

Some of the key players in the region include the oldest winery in America, Casa Madero. A recipient of countless international awards and a champion of Bordeaux varieties, Casa Madero has carved the way for other producers of stature like Hacienda del Marques, Parvada, Viñedos Don Leo in Parras, and Los Cedros, based in Arteaga.

## **Winemaking in Guanajuato**

Moving south from Coahuila and northwest of Mexico City is the state of Guanajuato. It is home to 34 wineries, altitude over 6,700 feet, and rain is a key factor with 14 to 17 inches of rain annually. More than 900 acres planted on clay loam and sandy loam soils characterize the wines from this region. Cabernet Sauvignon, Malbec, Syrah and Tempranillo along with Caladoc dominate the production in Guanajuato.

Among the well-established producers, the first in the region is Cuna de Tierra, and two relative newcomers particularly stand out. One is Vinos Guanamé, owned and operated by the Torres Family, who have owned and operated a dairy farm in the ranch since 1975. They have spared no expense in their quest for quality, from vineyard guidance to barrel selections. The other newcomer is Tres Raices, which celebrated its first vintage in 2016, and includes an *agroturismo* element with a handful of guest rooms and a restaurant.

## **Querétaro**

Due east of Guanajuato is Querétaro, another region for quality wine production. Freixenet, the Spanish sparkling wine house, set shop in the region in the 1970s, and this has inspired others to follow suit. Currently there are 38 wineries in the state.

At an altitude just over 6,500 feet in a semi-desert climate, Querétaro's calcareous, clay loam soils are home to the oldest plantings in Mexico. Some theorize that conquistadors required natives to plant vines, which were mostly destined for brandy production.

While the growing region lies on a tropical latitude, the high elevation creates ideal conditions for wine grapes. Just over 1,200 acres planted are mostly dedicated to traditional Cava varieties like Xarel-lo, Parellada and Macabeo as well as Marselan, Malbec, Syrah and Tempranillo.

Some standouts include the value-driven El Bajío line, which produces a vibrant sparkling, a Viognier, and a fruity yet powerful Marselan. Other producers of note include Vinaltura, which makes a wide range of bottlings from sparkling to small-batch reds, and San Juanito, whose focus is red wine.

### **Up-and-coming regions**

San Luis Potosí, just north of Guanajuato, is another up-and-coming region of relevance to the world of wine. With 370 acres planted and counting, and a dry and semi-desert climate at about 5,500 feet of elevation, wine production is on the rise.

Sand, silt and clay soil series provide an excellent platform for Syrah, Merlot, Cabernet Sauvignon, Nebbiolo, Gewürztraminer, Viognier and Sauvignon Blanc. Producers of note include Cava Quintanilla and Pozo de Luna, which are deeply rooted in this region that is otherwise dominated by mezcal.

Although the state of Hidalgo has never been known for wine, that is changing. Vinicola Jamädi debuted recently under Argentinian winemaker Agustina Astegiano, whose expertise and attention to detail paired with ideal soils deliver excellent wines.

Hidalgo has an altitude over 7,500 feet and clay-driven soil and Jamädi happens to be the closest winery to Mexico City. Grapes planted are Colombard, Viognier, Syrah, Cabernet and Grenache.

In essence, the Mexican wine industry is thriving and offers something for every palate. With a long tradition, innovative producers and driven importers, it is likely these wines will end up in your glass soon. Salud!

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