

[PDF] An Uncommon History Of Common Things

Henry Petroski, John Thompson, Bethanne Patrick - pdf download free book



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Description:

About the Author Bethanne Patrick is a writer and book critic. Her features, profiles, and reviews have appeared in the *Washington Post*, *Publishers Weekly*, *People* magazine, and other publications.

John Thompson is the author and co-author of more than a dozen books including *Dakotas*,

Excerpt. © Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved. The Uncommon History of Wine

- From the Latin Vinum (Wine)
- Popular types: Red, White, Sparkling, Dessert
- “Variety” in winemaking is the type of grape used

Wild grapes have existed for millions of years. Make that tens of millions—the oldest fossilized vine is dated at about 60 million years old. However, wild grapes are small and sour. The first grapes to be made into wine were domesticated, made possible by cultures that had settled and begun to grow annual crops. The oldest wine container finds have been in what are now modern-day Georgia and Iran (where it was called mei). University of Pennsylvania researchers now believe the domesticated grape may first have been planted in Georgia, then spread south.

Just one grape, *Vitis vinifera*, is the species responsible for 4,000 varieties around the world, but only a relatively small percentage of those are cultivated into wine. Wine production dates back about 6,500 years in Greece, and both red and white wine were important in ancient Egypt. Wine became a commodity in ancient Rome, where barrels and bottles first were used for its storage. The oldest existing bottle of wine is from a Roman colony near what is now Speyer, Germany. That bottle contains some olive oil, an early method of preserving the fermented grape juice, before corks came into use.

After winemaking spread from the Roman Empire throughout western Europe, wine became a preferred beverage in nearly all of those countries, with regional types like sherry (from the port of Jerez), Riesling (grown along the Rhine), and Tokay (a sweet Hungarian varietal) gaining favor, too.

All of these varietals were placed in jeopardy in 1863 when the North American root louse *Phylloxera vastatrix* was brought to Europe, decimating European rootstocks for decades. After a Texan horticulturist named Thomas Munson realized the way to save European vines was through grafting them to American stock, the great vineyards were saved, albeit forever changed.

Nowadays, wineries have become much more than the place where the grapes are grown and the wine made. Many wineries are tourist destinations with overnight accommodations and tasting menus that pair foods with wines. They may also act as wedding sites and corporate conference venues.

Most winery-area real estate is expensive. Modern farming techniques have helped wineries figure out ways to get more mileage out of their acreage while not weakening the soil. Such techniques as vertical shoot positioning (VSP), in which the growth of the vines is highly controlled, results in a very neat, tight canopy. Rather than allowing vines to sprawl, VSP promotes sustainable growth. It's also healthier for the vines, making them less susceptible to disease and able to get shading from their neighbors and leading to more uniform quality.

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