

The wines of Canada

Rod Phillips

The big (undiscovered) country for wine lovers

What springs to mind first when you think about Canada? Mounties? Maple syrup? Michael Bublé? Chances are it is not fine wine. But as a new book by wine expert Rod Phillips reveals, Canadian wine's star is in the ascendant, with a 250 per cent increase in the number of wineries since the turn of the century and a growing export market that sees Canadian wines popping up on high-end wine lists in the USA, Europe and Asia. So just what is driving this surge in popularity?

First of all we should probably avoid getting carried away. Although Canadian wine output has increased greatly over the last fifteen years it is still a small drop in the world's total production of wine, at just 0.5 per cent. And much of this is not exported although producers have had their efforts bolstered by the activities of the Canadian Wine Initiative, a government programme designed to promote Canadian wines internationally. As Phillips notes, Canadian wine is very much on the up and we can expect to see more of it appearing on wine lists and in retailers outside Canada over the coming years: 'I am generally very optimistic about Canadian wines. Producers have made great strides in the last decade or two, ... there is good reason to think that as they improve their understanding of their sites and varieties, their wines will only improve.'

One problem exporters have faced is a preconception that the Canadian climate is ill-suited to viticulture – people are surprised that there is a Canadian wine industry at all. The idea of Canada as a country permanently covered in a layer of snow has not been helped by the country's only well-known wine export: icewine. Made from grapes harvested at night in freezing temperatures, this sweet wine has long been the core

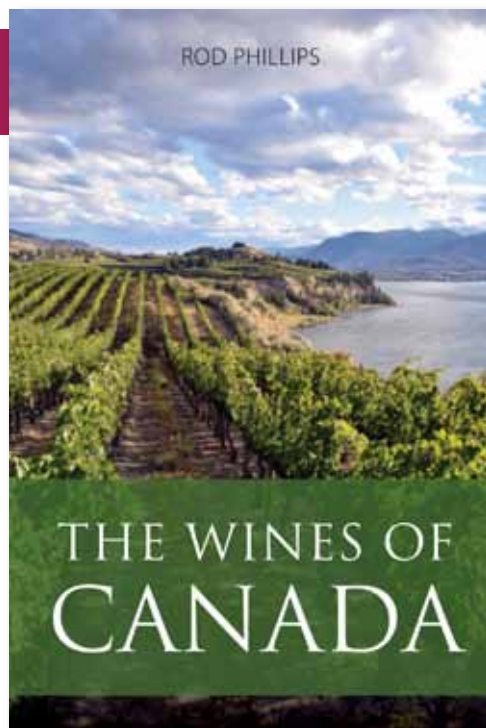
of the Canadian wine industry. But Canada has a range of climates, and even in icewine territory summers can be warm – how else would those grapes ripen?

Canadian wine producers can be found in seven of its ten provinces, from the border with the United States to as far as 50° north (roughly the same latitude range as France's wine growing regions), so it should not come as a surprise that as well as icewines a range of table and sparkling wines is also made. Although there are roughly 700 producers making wine, in *The wines of Canada* Phillips presents a selection of around 50, those he believes represent the country's variety of viticultural and winemaking techniques and wine styles best, and those whose wines are most likely to be found outside Canada. 'Think of them,' he says, 'as an aperitif to whet your appetite as you seek out the many excellent wineries of Canada.'

The wines of Canada presents a thorough history of wine production in Canada and assessment of its future, putting the country firmly on the wine map. So next time you think of Canada, don't think Bublé – think wine.

About the author

Rod Phillips is a professor of history at Carleton University, Ottawa, Canada. He has written a number of books on European history, and, more recently, on the history of food and drink, with books including *A Short History of Wine*, *Alcohol: A History* (named a Book of the Year for 2014 on jancisrobinson.com), and *French Wine: A History*. General Editor of the forthcoming six-volume *A Cultural History of Alcohol*, he writes regularly for the wine media and also judges in wine competitions.



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