

## THE GEOGRAPHY OF WINE: HOW LANDSCAPES,

Cultures, Terroir, and the Weather Make a Good Drop

by Brian J. Sommers,  
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Brian J. Sommers is a Professor of Geography at Central Connecticut State University; he has taught a course on the geography of wine for many years. Sommers' goal is to help the reader become more aware of the geography that goes into the production of a bottle of wine, as in the book's subtitle '*How Landscapes, Cultures, Terroir, and the Weather Make a Good Drop*'. He also uses the book to demonstrate the broader context of the field of geography, i.e., more than just the memorization of places and mapmaking.

Sommers' approach is to provide information about the environmental and social science of viticulture, the growing of grapes and oenology, or wine production as they relate to the field of geography. His main reason for the writing of this book (it was originally proposed to the publisher as a textbook), is to provide an introduction to geographic principles that in turn provide for a greater understanding of wine. He states that "it is a good accompaniment to the other wine books you have on your shelves." The methodology used is that of a social scientist; he uses a thematic approach, taking into consideration "how climate, geology, biology, culture, politics and economics affect wine and how the geographies that relate to these factors have an impact on wine regions." Sommers has done an admirable job of writing a book that is informative and rooted in geographic principles and yet accessible and of interest to a general audience. He helps us, as a good geographer can, synthesize the various factors that go into making a place unique, in the sense of a viticultural or winemaking region.

Sommers guides the reader to better understand the geographical attributes, both physical and human, that lead to wine being grown and produced in particular regions and places in the world. A unique aspect of this particular book is the chapter on the use of geographic information systems (GIS) and its applications in the choosing of appropriate grape growing land parcels for vineyards.

Although the book could be used as a supplement for a course on the subject of wine (geographical or not), it is a pleasantly educational read for the wine connoisseur/enthusiast.

The book is structured so that the first seven chapters have heavier emphasis on the physical geography of grape growing and wine production, e.g., soils, climate, terroir, biogeography,

and natural hazards. Then he devotes two chapters which discuss the technical tools used in geography and their connection to grape growing and wine production. The remaining chapters link the human and cultural aspects of the geography of wine. He wraps the book up by sharing some personal reflections of wine places and experiences. The reader certainly does get to travel and tour vineyards around the world in this book, as promised.

Surprisingly, the book only has one map and just a handful of black and white photographs. A reader deciding to buy this book might very well be expecting more maps and photographs and the author, being a geographer, certainly would have done well by providing more. The website for the book promises to do more in this regard.

Sommers states that “there are no technical texts in the geography of wine that are comparable” and in that regard, this book holds an important place in the literature of its subject. He underlines the fact that understanding the concept of *terroir*, which is crucial in one’s understanding of wines and the world of wine, is “a natural for geographers”. Understanding grape production, wine making and wine producing regions is all about the relationships between humans and their environments, and this is what a geographer does best. This book should be a must read for anyone interested in the subject and definitely for anyone going into the industry.