



Fact Sheet **“Wine for the Table”**

“Wine for the Table” is part of “FOOD: Transforming the American Table, 1950 – 2000”, the museum’s first major exhibition on food history, exploring some of the major changes in food and eating in postwar America. Among the topics on the 3,800-square-foot exhibition’s menu are changes in food production and processing, in who cooks and why, where and when meals are consumed and what people know (or think they know) about what is good for them.

The “Wine for the Table” section of the exhibition narrates the fascinating and little known history of wine and winemaking in the United States. Focusing primarily on developments over the last 50 years in postwar America, it highlights the innovations and shifts in attitudes that led to the production of wine in all 50 states by the year 2000.

Wine—the fermented juice of grapes or other fruit—has been part of European life for centuries, but in America, wine traditions struggled to take root. From Thomas Jefferson’s failed efforts to cultivate French grapevines in Virginia to the onset of Prohibition, the desire to produce wine for the table on American soil seemed beyond reach. But in the second half of the 20th century, a community of California dreamers would spark a revolution in a bottle that not only realized Jefferson’s vision, but changed the entire world of wine.

While California remains at the forefront of the transformation of American wine, winemakers in other regions also revived and reinvented vineyards and wineries. Few regions in the United States share California’s climate and environmental conditions for growing grapes. Yet the desire to produce fine table wine has been a longstanding dream for many Americans, including Thomas Jefferson, whose attempts to plant vines imported from Europe (*Vitis vinifera*) were foiled by the humidity and cold winters of Virginia’s climate. Instead of trying to replicate California’s successes with varieties such as Cabernet, Chardonnay, and Pinot Noir, Virginians discovered and embraced different types of grapes that thrive in their state.

The section starts with an overview of the early struggles involved in establishing wine traditions in America- from Thomas Jefferson’s failed efforts to cultivate French grapevines in Virginia to the onset of Prohibition with the passage of the Eighteenth Amendment in 1919 .

After examining the devastating effects of Prohibition on the wine industry, the exhibition delves into the industry’s slow recovery following the Repeal of 1933. Wine Advisory Board booklets produced during the 1950s and 1960s help visitors understand the purposeful efforts taken to promote wine as a positive addition to the American table.

Finally the section explores how the postwar spirit of experimentation and innovation drove and shaped the development of the wine industry, particularly in California. Home winemaking

equipment used by an Italian immigrant's family will allow visitors to get a sense of how wine was typically produced before and during Prohibition, prior to innovations in both the vineyards and wineries.

Selected objects on display in this section:

- Repeal Ribbon, 1932
- Home winemaking equipment used by an Italian immigrant's family in New Jersey, 1910s – 1960s: grape box, crusher, quarter barrel, press, sulphur strips, bottle
- Poster, "Wine Land of America," 1965
- Wine Advisory Board booklets: *Wine Tasting Party*, *Wine Cookery the Easy Way*, *Magic in Your Glass*, 1960s
- Highway sign for the Oakville district and To-Kalon Vineyard of the Robert Mondavi Winery, 1993
- Wine bottle, 1974 and Budding knife and picking knife from grape rancher Nathan Fay
- Colorimeter and laboratory timer used by enologist Andre Tchelistcheff
- Hydrometers, carrier, and carboys used by researchers at UC Davis
- French oak barrel and papers, 1990s
- Wine wheel, 1984
- *Time* magazine featuring Ernest and Julio Gallo, 1972
- Bottle of 1973 Chateau Montelena Chardonnay, which placed first among red wines at the 1976 tasting in Paris
- Suitcase, viticulture textbooks, beret, and ebullioscope owned by vintner Mike Grgich
- Winery notebook and vineyard and winery tools from Stag's Leap Wine Cellars
- Bottle of White Zinfandel, about 1975 (loan); Zinfandel festival poster, 1998; Zinfandel aroma wheel
- Biale family grape box (loan) and wooden punch, about 1950
- Aluminum punch used by Joel Peterson, Ravenswood, 1976; Ravenswood poster, 1976, two staff T-shirts from Ravenswood harvests
- Chair, hat (loan), budding box, and budding knife used by the Robledo family in Sonoma
- Grape picking basket and knife used at Chrysalis winery in Virginia

###