

IMPORTING WINE

Both the United States government and the state government, for us Texas, are involved in the importation process. The United States approves the label and tests the wine itself before a wine may be imported. (On later actual sales, the government collects a small tax.) The state of Texas licenses importers only by licensing wholesalers, who may import without further action. The wholesaler/importer must arrange for the foreign producer to obtain a license from Texas, which is not difficult. This also means an importer is bound by the regulations applicable to Texas wholesalers. In Texas, wholesalers act directly as agents of the state in policing alcohol distribution, which is not true of Texas' own wineries nor of retailers except for age checking.

Depending on the point of view, the United States imports the most wine from either Australia or Italy. Here are the breakdowns:

- (1) Most wine of any type, in quantity: Australia, Italy second
- (2) Most wine that is in bottles, in quantity: Italy, Australia second
- (3) Most wine of any type, in \$Dollars: Italy, France second
- (4) Most wine in bottles, in \$Dollars: Italy, France second

There were huge drops in the amount of bulk wine (not in bottles) imported this year compared to last from all countries. The amount of wine imported from Italy, Germany, New Zealand and Spain went up, while the amount of dollars paid went up for Argentina, Italy, Spain, Germany and New Zealand. Australian wine went down a great deal in quantity, but in dollars spent was flat.

The quality of the wine produced in Italy, Spain and Argentina has risen dramatically in the last few years, and so the activity of importers has increased in these areas as demand has increased in the United States for these wines. For Argentina, a large force is the rise in interest for the Malbec grape, which is a Bordeaux grape, but which grows so very well in Argentina it is used as a varietal rather than solely for the mixing use it gets in Bordeaux.

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Written August 15, 2010