

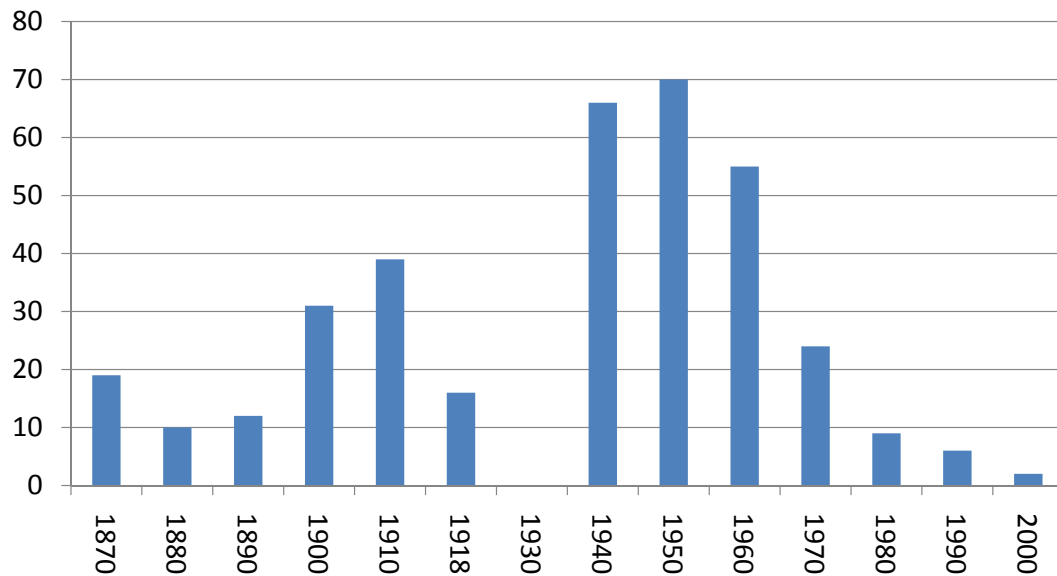
From **A**ngelica to **Z**infandel (Port): A brief history of California dessert wine production

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Two Caveats

- “Dessert wine” = “Sweet Wine” = “Fortified Wine” for the purpose of this lecture. The terms have been used interchangeably by U.S. producers.
 - Functionally they are wines over 14% alcohol, whether the alcohol came from fermenting high sugar grapes or from spirits.
- My use of terms such as “Port” and “Sherry” do not indicate my approval of the terms.

Percent Sweet Wine U.S. Consumption



Sources: Shear and Pearce pre Prohibition; Wines and Vines post Prohibition

Topics

- Dessert Wine Production Pre Prohibition
 - Angelica, Sherry, Port, Muscatel, Madeira, Tokay
 - Taxation, Demand, Production
- Dessert Wine Production Post Prohibition
 - Sherry vs. Port
 - Quality and decline
- New Possibilities?

Reasons for Early Popularity?

- Consumers:
 - Sweet
 - Source of Calories
 - Alcohol
- Producers
 - Inherently stable
 - Easier to “sophisticate” (less subtle than dry table wines)

Maynard Amerine on Dessert Wines

“The direct contribution of the variety to the quality of dessert wines is masked by the relatively large influence of fortification and post-fermentation practices...(which) tends to mask the contribution of any single variety. ..This... explains why dessert wines are easier to fake or to sophisticate than table wines.”

From “Dessert Wine Production Problems” *Wines and Vines*, January 1952

California Desert Wine Types

| Fine Matured Bottling Wines | | "CALWA" BRAND | | |
|--|--------------------|--------------------|---------|---------|
| | | Per Case of | | |
| | | 12 | 24 | 48 |
| | | Large | Half | Quarter |
| | | Bottles | Bottles | Bottles |
| RED | | | | |
| WINEHAVEN—A Matured Table Claret..... | \$4.00 | \$5.00 | \$6.00 | |
| LA LOMA—Fine Burgundy type | 6.00 | 7.00 | 8.00 | |
| HILLCREST—Finest Old Cabernet Claret..... | 8.00 | 9.00 | 10.00 | |
| WHITE | | | | |
| GREYSTONE—Good Light Hock type | 4.00 | 5.00 | 6.00 | |
| ROCKDALE—Chablis type | 4.00 | 5.00 | 6.00 | |
| CERRITO—Fine Dry Sauterne type | 6.00 | 7.00 | 8.00 | |
| GLENRIDGE—Fine Haut-Sauterne type..... | 8.00 | 9.00 | 10.00 | |
| VINE CLIFF—Finest Riesling..... | 8.00 | 9.00 | 10.00 | |
| DESSERT WINES | | | | |
| WAHTOKE—Good Old Sherry type | 8.00 | 9.00 | 10.00 | |
| MADRONA—Fine Old Port type | 8.00 | 9.00 | 10.00 | |
| DULZURA—Finest Old Tokay type | 8.00 | 9.00 | 10.00 | |
| CALHETA—Malaga type | 8.00 | 9.00 | | |
| SAN MARTINHO—Madeira type | 8.00 | 9.00 | | |
| ANGELICA—Finest Old..... | 8.00 | 9.00 | | |
| BRANDY | | | | |
| Finest Old Calwa Brandy | 15.00 | 16.00 | | |
| Fine Muscat Brandy | 12.00 | 13.00 | | |
| SPARKLING WINES | | | | |
| RUBY CLIFF—Sparkling Red Burgundy type | 11.00 | 12.00 | 11.00 | |
| GOLD CLIFF (Sec)—Sparkling Muscat type | 11.00 | 12.00 | 11.00 | |
| GOLD CLIFF (Brut)—Dry Champagne style | 11.00 | 12.00 | 11.00 | |
| Assorted Cases of any of the above at proportionate cost. | | | | |
| The fine dry "Calwa" Wines are exclusively supplied in bottle, but the fine Dessert Wines and Brandy are also supplied in bulk on the following terms: | | | | |
| | | Per Gallon | | |
| "Calwa" Port, Sherry, Tokay, in Casks..... | | \$2.50 | | |
| "Calwa" Muscat Brandy, in Casks..... | | 4.00 | | |
| "Calwa" Finest Cognac type Brandy, in Casks | | 5.00 | | |
| The Charge for Casks Holding | | | | |
| 5 Gallons, \$1.00 | 10 Gallons, \$1.35 | 15 Gallons, \$1.85 | | |
| 20 Gallons, 2.25 | 25 Gallons, 2.25 | 50 Gallons, 2.90 | | |
| CALWA WINE VINEGAR—Red or White..... \$2.50 per Case | | | | |

- Angelica, Sherry, Port, Tokay, Malaga, Madeira, and Muscatel all became popular wine types.
- Port and Malaga were red—the others considered to be white

Angelica



- Produced prior to Statehood from the Mission grape
- Brandy added to unfermented Mission grape juice
- Mission was low in color, so Angelica was lightly colored
- Named for Los Angeles?

Sherry Production 1880s

Spanish

- Ferment ripe sherry grapes to dryness
- Fortify (if necessary) to above 15%
- If flor yeast develop, incorporate into Solera
- Age in Solera, and fortify to 17% when removed
- Result: Aged, dry wine with nutty characteristic

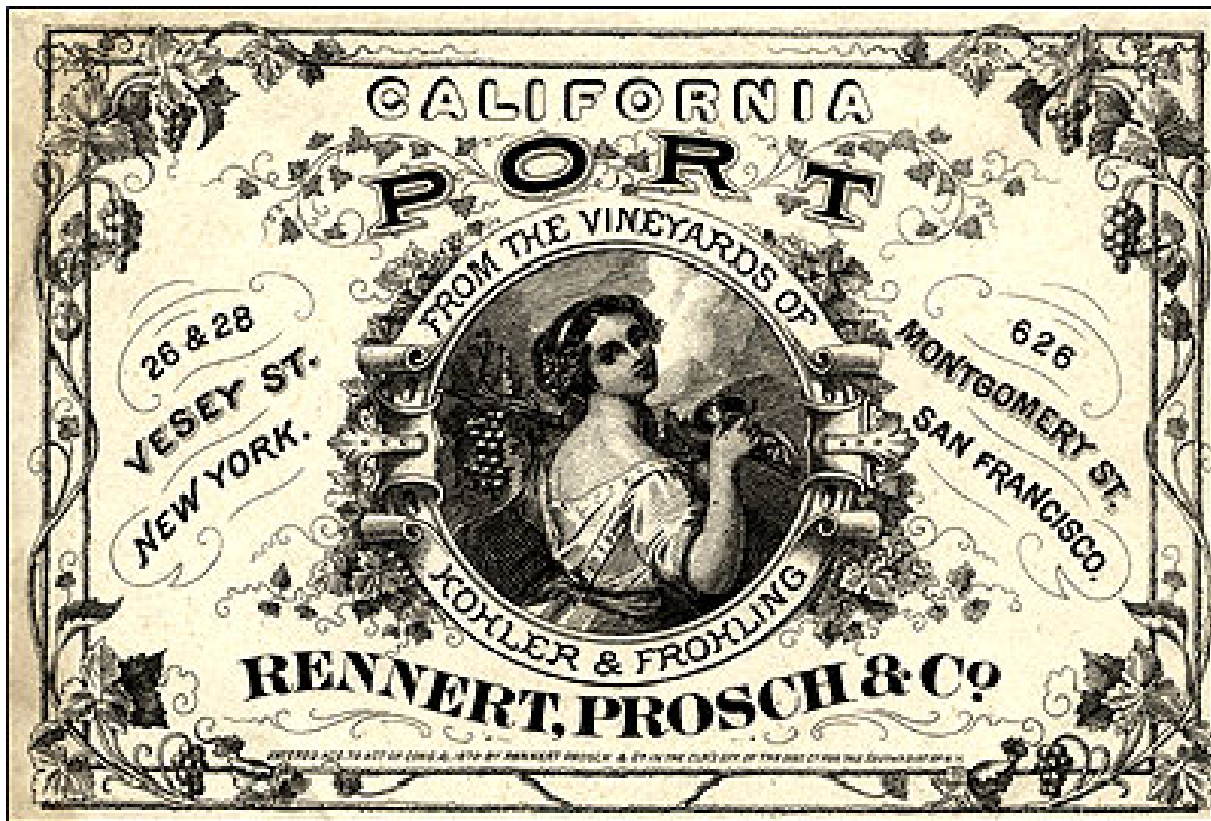
California

- Ferment ripe white grapes (or mission) to dryness.
- Add concentrate, spirits and (in some cases) flavorings.
- Heat or bake wines to speed oxidative reactions
- Result: sweet, alcoholic, oxidized wines—ready within a year

Sherry Production 1878

Keller asked how a particular sherry was made.

Mahoney replied: “All I know about it is that it was made of white wine, Spirits, Grape Syrup, Hickory nut infusion, Quassia, Walnut infusion, and Bitter aloes, the proportions I could not tell you to save my life.”



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Port Production 1880s

Portugal

- Ferment red port varieties in shallow tanks, tread by foot to extract color
- Stop fermentation after a few days by adding spirits to 19-20%
- Barrel age depending upon style
- Result: Reddish, sweet wine with distinct aromatics

California

- Ferment any red variety to dryness (perhaps run fermenting juice over pomace to extract more color)
- Sweeten with concentrate
- Fortify to 19-20%
- Perhaps age in barrels or heat
- Result: Sweet alcoholic wine. perhaps bitter and caramelized

Eugene Hilgard on California Port (1889)

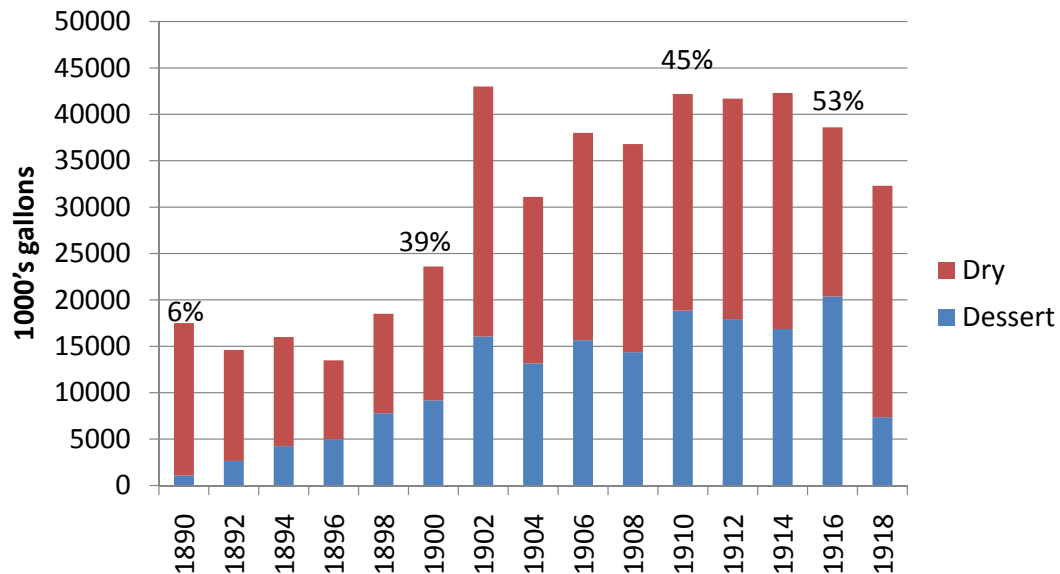
“In general in California, the process for making this kind of wine has been carried on in a somewhat imperfect manner. . . In most cases the impression is that any fair red wine, properly sweetened with grape syrup and fortified constitutes a port wine. Commonly, also, sick wines are transformed into ports, and then a very unsatisfactory result is obtained.”

1891: An eastern consumer's view

“A great deal had been expected from California vineyards . . . Instead. . The East was deluged with Hocks, that had nothing in common with hock except the color; . . . Sherries that had no show of flavor whatever, being merely a ropy, sub-acid vinous fluid; and ports that were only port after the definition of Dr. Johnson: Sir: it is sweet, it is black, and it makes you drunk.”

C. Bissel “The Vineyards of California” 1891

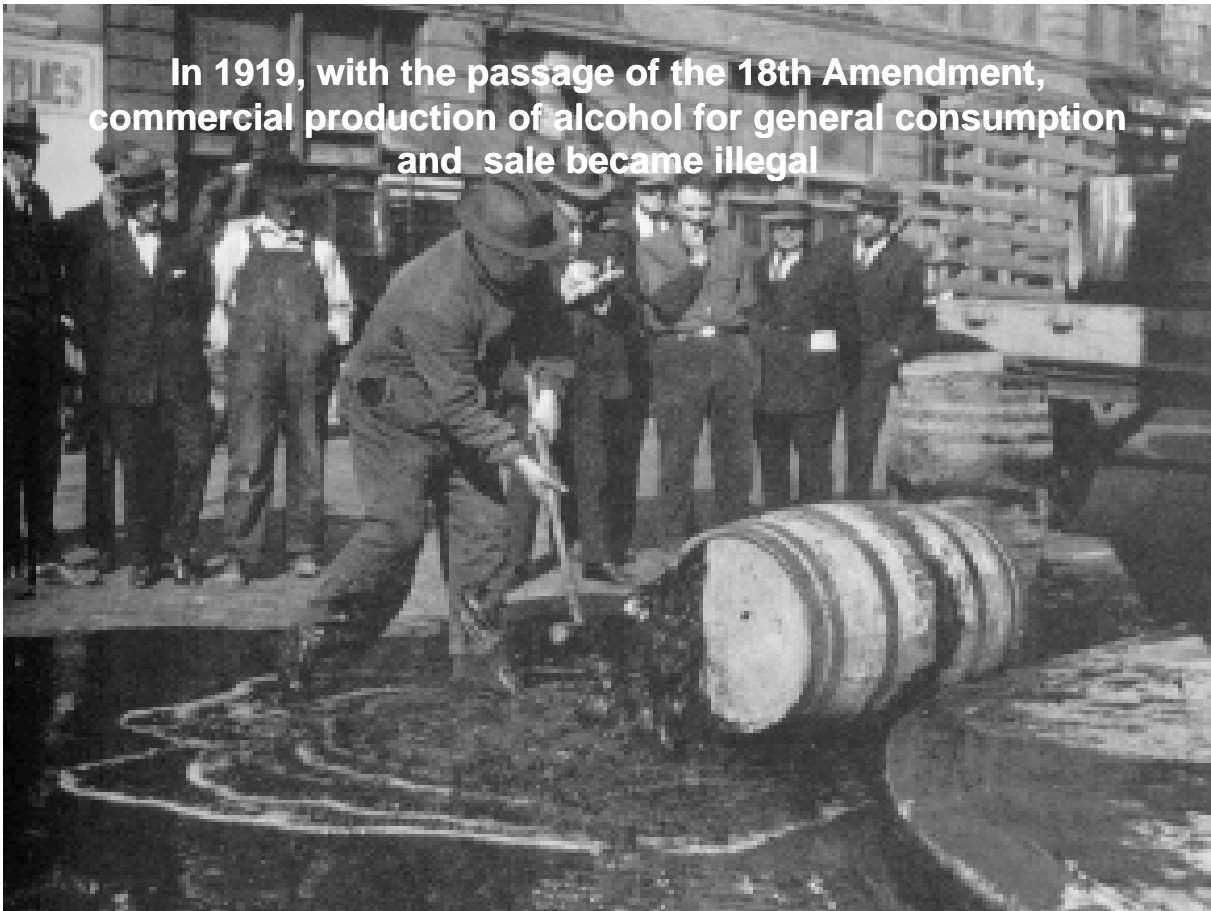
California Wine Production 1890 to Prohibition



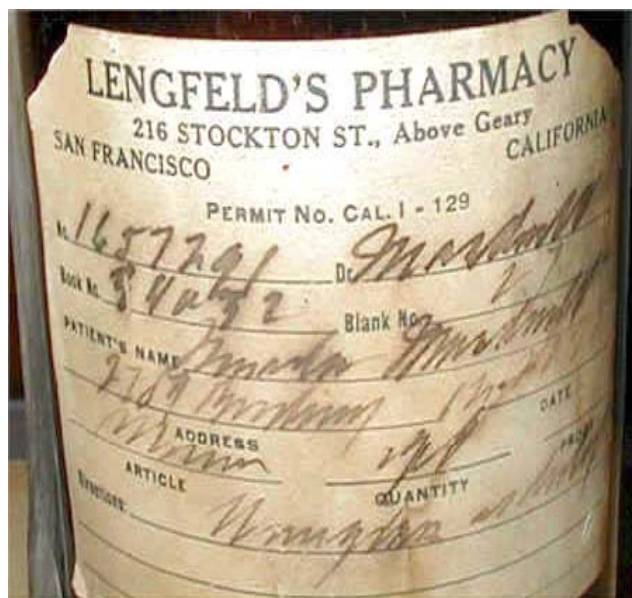
Why the increase?

- 1865 Congress exempted wine from excise taxes
- 1875 Tariff put 40 cents/gallon on imported bulk wine
- 1883 tariff increased 25%
- 1890 eliminated the \$1.10/gallon excise tax on fortifying spirits as long as the fortifying material was produced by the winery
- Result: Fortified wine became the cheapest form of alcohol and sales increased dramatically

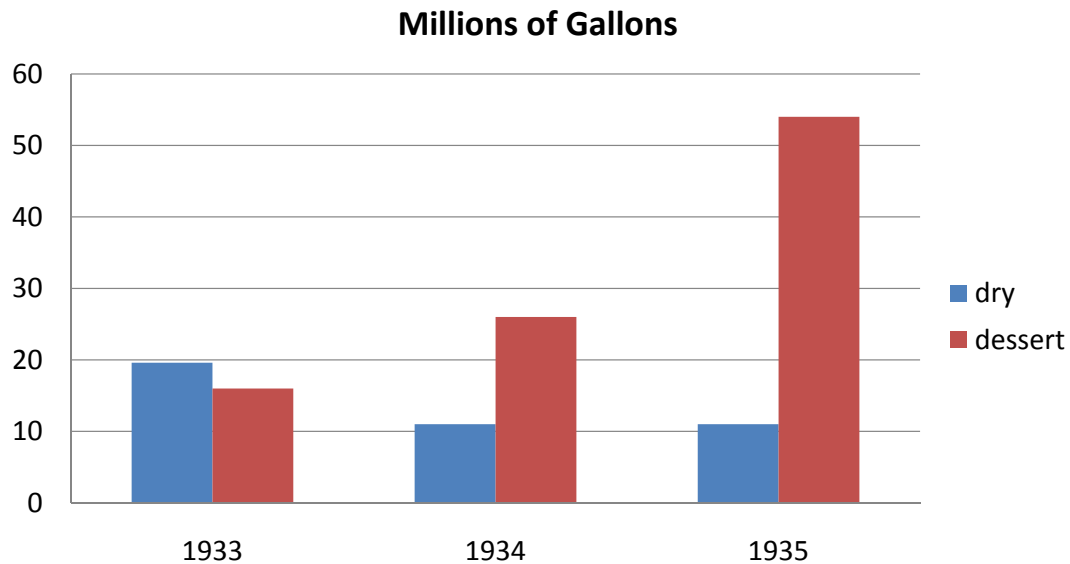
In 1919, with the passage of the 18th Amendment, commercial production of alcohol for general consumption and sale became illegal



Well, for the most part



U.S. Production Following Repeal



E.M. Shehaan--1936

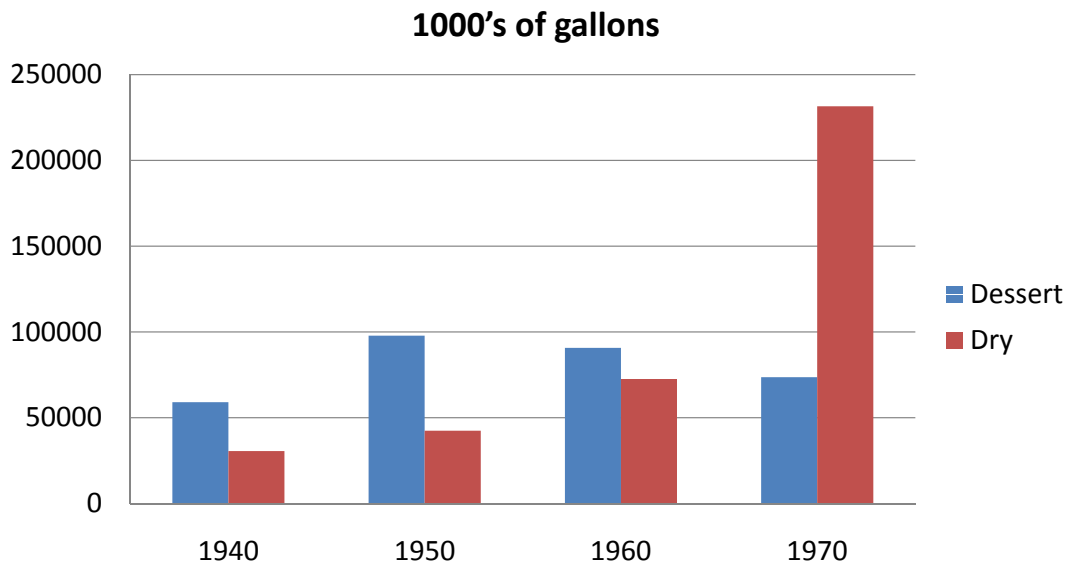
“Many changes developed during thirteen years or more of prohibition and during the period of inhibition a new generation had come into maturity. The Nation had changed into an alcoholic-consuming class of drinkers where potency and power seemed the main objective. . . . Then came the repeal of the constitutional amendment, and whatever break in the direction of wines was noted along the lines of the highest alcoholic vintages, resulting in a greater demand for Sherries of all types. . . . There is no particular explanation of this switch [from port to sherry] or preference excepting that a new generation of wine consumers had developed and with newer ideas of what they wanted to use.”

Following Repeal Dessert Wines WERE the California wine industry

“Nearly 90 per cent of the tonnage and dollar value of grapes crushed every year in California go into the production of dessert wines. From practically every standpoint—employment, payrolls, taxes, capital investment, purchase of outside goods and services—dessert wines completely dominate the wine industry’s economic fabric.”

Louis Petri, Petri Wine Co. 1951

U.S. Consumption



Quality was a Problem

- “culls, rain-damaged grapes, cold storage rejects and raisined fruit are employed for making wine. . . Even though their defects may be reduced by processing, such as the massive use of charcoal and ardent baking, **the wine will be deficient, if not defective**, in character.

Maynard Amerine, *Wines and Vines*, 1952

Amerine wasn't alone

“ “Port” may be made anywhere, out of any grapes, including native Eastern varieties, or even table grapes, raisin grapes, or culls. It may be well and properly aged in oak, or it may, and often does, go to the consumer when under six months old. There is no guide to quality other than the rather untrustworthy one of price, and the producer's name or band.”

Frank Schoonmaker, 1969

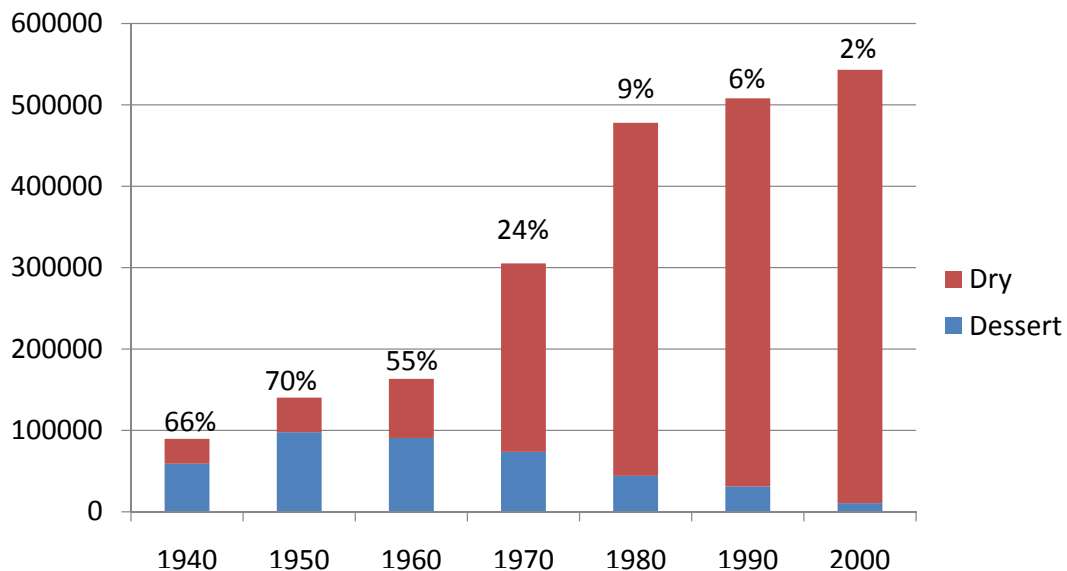
And what of California Sherry?

“California alone produces nearly four times as much “sherry” as Spain, and only the vaguest sort of regulations cover its origin, its manufacture and its ageing. Most of it is made from raisin or table grapes, then “baked” at a high temperature to give it its special flavor, sweetened with grape concentrate, fortified with high-proof brandy, and sold when less than a year old. It is popular only because it contains a minimum of 20% of alcohol (which is more than it should) and because it is cheap.”

Frank Schoonmaker, 1969

U.S. Consumption (all sources)

(1000's gallons)



Why the increase in dry wines?

- Table wines dramatically improved in quality
 - New technology and varieties created aromatic white wines, fueling the boom of the 1970s
 - Barrels, varietal choice, controlled ML all improved red wines which grew dramatically in the 1990s
- Dessert wines perhaps perceived as either “old fashioned” or “skid row.”
- 100s (now 1000s) of producers brought enthusiasm and personality to the market

The 2005 Market (M. Shanken)

- Total 4.5 million cases
- 3.5 million domestic
 - Dominated by Gallo and Constellation brands (3.1 million of the 3.5) at low prices
- 1 million imported
 - 415,000 cases of Port
 - 286,000 cases of Sherry
 - Higher price points
- Few small domestic specialty producers

Things to remember

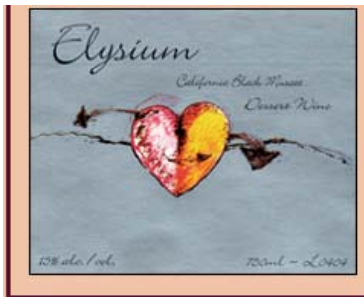
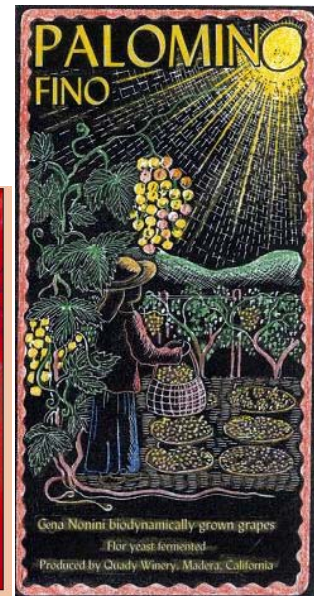
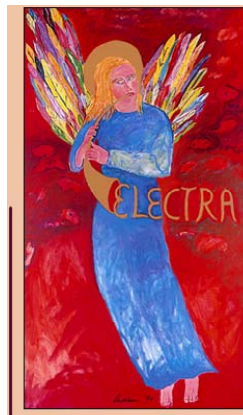
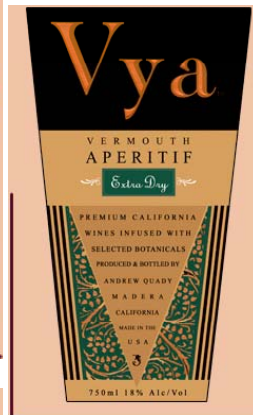
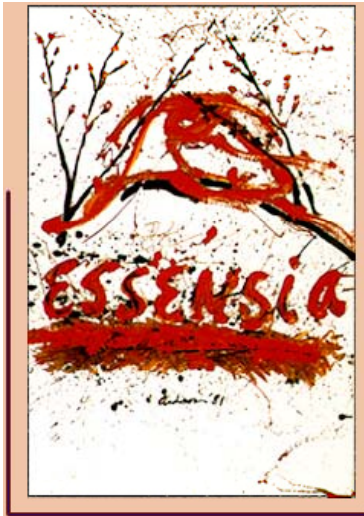
- Small wineries must sell relatively expensive wines (>\$15) through 3-tier distribution or sell direct (smaller volumes) to receive full profit.
- Higher-end consumers want:
 - Quality (intensity? purity? balance? place?)
 - Imagery (positioning? name? graphics?)
 - Passion (real people, real story, artisanal)
 - Either a pedigree or something innovative

What of Zinfandel Port?

“First there were two – Andrew and Laurel Quady left crowded southern California and their jobs in pyrotechnics and merchandising to pursue their dream: a non-urban way of life making wine. Returning to school, Andrew graduated with a Masters in Food Science-Enology from UC Davis and Laurel became a licensed CPA. **In 1975, at the urging of friend Darrell Corti, they made their first port from Amador County Zinfandel** at the now defunct Lodi Vintners where Andrew was working as an assistant winemaker.”

“Keeping it Sweet since 1975” —Quady Winery Website
<http://www.quadywinery.com/sweet.html>

Got Wine?



Conclusion

- There is a market for sweet wines
- The wines have to be of high quality
- They need to display personality
- They need to captivate
- They need to have soul

- Good luck!