



# A NEW MISSION FOR CALIFORNIA MAKERS

Mission, the first wine grape planted in California, is unknown to many wine lovers—possibly because the variety had been nearly wiped from the Golden State all-together. But this may not be the case much longer. An impassioned handful of winemakers has begun working to bring the grape to greater attention. Read on to learn more about its history and get a look at where it's headed. —*Jess Lander*

## A PIOUS PAST

The grape was introduced to present-day California, then Spanish-occupied Mexico, in the 18th century by Spanish Catholic missionaries who arrived with religion and established harsh regulations for native populations. Wine made with the grape typically came in two styles for sacraments at all of the area's 21 missions: a semi-sweet still wine, and a fortified wine called Angelica. Dubbed "the native grape," it would spread beyond these religious outposts and monopolize California's grape production until the mid-1800s.

## A RUSTIC REVIVAL

Today, just a few hundred acres in the state are devoted to Mission, used primarily in fortified wines or bulk blends. Recently, however, a small club of young, experimental winemakers began to craft a brighter future for the grape.

They seek out old vines to produce wine that tends to be dry and light in style, low in alcohol, pale red in color and ultimately easy drinking, with just enough spice. Some say it's best served chilled.

"There's a rusticity that takes you back 150 years, and that, to me, is part of the charm of the wine," says Tegan Passalacqua, proprietor of Sandlands Vineyards, who sources about one ton of Mission from Deaver Vineyard in the Sierra Foothills. The vines are more than a century old. "At the end of the day, what it speaks to in humans is a bit of authenticity."

## A FUTURE FULL OF POTENTIAL

This small renaissance is most concerned with preserving history. "It's simple [and] delicious, but it's never going to be a wine that transcends," says winemaker Rajat Parr, who also works with Mission from Deaver Vineyard.

There are a few wineries, though, that invest in the grape's future. Sonoma's Scribe Winery is one of them. After discovering it was produced by the estate's pre-Prohibition founders, Scribe's team grafted Mission onto two acres of vines.

"It has a deep history here, and a reputation that is just beginning to be challenged," says Andrew Mariani, cofounder of Scribe. "It's still early, everyone is still exploring and figuring it out year by year."