

The Wines of Massandra

by Bella & Anthony
of Valley Mall Wines & Liquors, Inc., Napanoch

Despite their differences in politics, Nicholas Romanov (Russia's last czar) and Communist dictator Joseph Stalin had at least one thing in common: their thirst for the sweet Massandra wines produced in Crimea, just south of Yalta. Prized in Russia for more than a century, Massandra is still among the best selling brands there. Now, these historical and unusual wines are becoming available in the United States.

Massandra was a small hamlet located close to Yalta that has been in existence for many hundreds of years. It was the site of an early settlement over 2,000 years ago; excavations have shown that muscat grapes were grown in this area well before this time. The winery is situated on the outskirts of Yalta within a beautiful park; it is protected on three sides by mountains and facing south to the Black Sea that lies down the slopes beyond Yalta. The cellars, cut by hand by the local miners, are the finest in the world, exceeded only by those in the Champagne region of France. The conditions within the cellars are ideal and the condition of the wines stored there is outstanding.

Czar Nicholas founded the Massandra winery in 1894 to provide wines for his summer palace at Livadia, along the southern Crimean coast. The historical records show, however, that a winery had existed on the site since 1849. In 1936, the Massandra Collective was formed, incorporating the same nine state-owned wineries that are part of Massandra today. All told, they produce one million cases per year from 4,400 acres of vineyards. Wines are vinified at each of the wineries and cellared at Massandra, in seven 500-foot-long tunnels excavated in the 1890s.

In addition to this annual production, Massandra also has an inventory of old wines, a collection started in the late 1800s by Massandra's first wine-maker, Prince Lev Golitzin. In 1920, the Red Army

took control of the Crimea and discovered the collection. Over the years, Stalin gradually moved most of the wines found in the czar's Russian palaces back to Massandra and added them to the collection. During the Second World War, the entire collection was evacuated as Germans advanced, but after Yalta was liberated in 1944, the wines were returned in time for the historic Yalta conference in February 1945.

Today, the Massandra collection consists of 200,000 cases of wines dating back to 1775. Except for vintages prior to 1891, the majority of the collection is available commercially. Some of the older vintages range from \$275-\$10,000 per bottle. Among the best of the winery's current releases are dessert and fortified wines such as White Muscat, Pink Muscat, and Black Muscat.

The wines have survived revolutions, earthquakes, and world wars. They are available today in the Imperial-shaped bottle. On February 1, 2003, you are invited to *Valley Wines & Liquors* in Napanoch for tasting of the White Muscat and Kagor of Massandra. According to the description of "Wine Advocate": "medium gold/amber in color, this super fruity, honeyed, exotic wine reveals copious quantities of glycerin and sweet rich powerful flavors, yet no heaviness..." You are welcome to experience these fantastic wines with us and to learn about their powerful medicinal properties.

For more information, e-mail us at:
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