



**Barboursville Vineyards,
near Charlottesville**

Virginia by the Glass

The wines of the **Old Dominion** are quickly becoming new crowd favorites.

By Scott Jones

★ | Virginia has a long and historic tradition of grape growing. Native grapes were cultivated in Jamestown by the early colonists almost 200 years before Thomas Jefferson envisioned the picturesque hills around Charlottesville planted with his favorite European varieties. Inhospitable weather and vine-loving pests decimated Jefferson's Monticello vineyards, dashing any hopes of

producing top-notch wine in his lifetime. But his winemaking spirit lives on, and today Jefferson would be happy to know his dream is now a reality.

In fact, Jay Youmans, a wine expert based in Washington, DC, characterizes the improvement in the state's overall quality as "remarkable." A bold statement, to be sure, but Youmans knows a thing or two about the subject — he's one of only a handful of people (297 to be exact) in the *world* to have earned the prestigious Master of Wine designation. "I think the top third of the state's 208 wineries are producing stuff — particularly the reds — that can easily stand up to the best the West Coast has to offer."



**Bluestone
Vineyard,
Bridgewater**

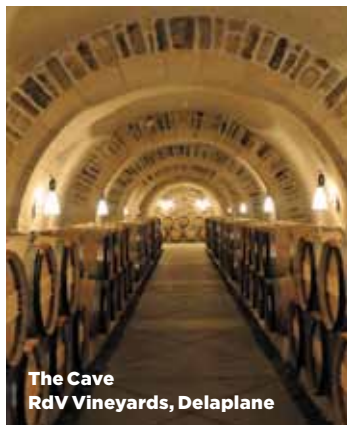
Wine & Dine |

And like any good pairing, the state has plenty of other outstanding attributes to complement a visitor's wine country experience. There are miles of scenic roads lined with stone walls, breathtaking vistas of the Blue Ridge Mountains and Shenandoah Valley, and a vibrant culinary scene celebrating local artisans and farmers.

Getting Better All the Time

"The level of quality has really gone up in the last ten years, and a lot of that has to do with the fact that wineries have a much better understanding of the various grapes and where they grow best," says Sheri Morano, who, like Youmans, is a Master of Wine and bona fide authority. Another key factor, according to Morano, is smarter site selection, especially at higher elevations. New growing strategies are delivering immediate results and showing promise for the future.

Red Bordeaux varieties, specifically cabernet franc, are showing great potential, as demonstrated by the results of this year's prestigious Governor's Cup Wine Competition. Of the 13 gold medals awarded, ten were reds with a Bordeaux pedigree, including the overall Governor's Cup winner, Glen Manor Vineyards 2009 Hodder Hill Meritage, a blend of four Bordeaux varieties (the wine has since



The Cave
RdV Vineyards, Delaplane



Tasting at
Barboursville Vineyards



King Family Vineyards,
Crozet

sold out). As for the whites, chardonnay and viognier continue to lead the way, in terms of acres under vine and excellence in the glass.

Typical of young wine regions, Virginia has taken its lumps over the years for bottling juice without the necessary finesse or balance to play with the big boys. But thanks to time,

technology, and plenty of tenacity, recent vintages have transformed many of those lingering perceptions into praise. The state's best wines display freshness and complexity rather than extra ripeness and alcohol — a style, says Youmans, more similar to something you'd drink in France than in California.

TWELVE TO TRY

Virginia has more than 200 wineries to choose from. Start exploring what the state has to offer with the award-winning selection of reds and whites below. Virginia's consumer-friendly wine laws allow for shipping up to two cases directly from any winery. (Note: AL, AR, KY, MA, MS, MT, PA, and UT do not allow direct shipping.)



Red

- Boxwood Estate Winery**
Topiary, 2010
- Barboursville Vineyards**
Octagon, 2007
- King Family Vineyards**
Meritage, 2010
- Bluestone Vineyard**
Cabernet Sauvignon, 2010
- Villa Appalaccia**
Toscanello, 2007
- RdV Vineyards**
Rendezvous, 2009

White

- Tarara Winery**
Honah Lee White, 2010
- Trump Winery**
Kluge SP Blanc de Blanc, 2008
- Michael Shaps**
Viognier, 2008
- Thibaut-Janisson**
NV Blanc de Chardonnay
- Gabriele Rausse**
Pinot Grigio, 2010
- White Hall Vineyards**
Gewürztraminer, 2011

PHOTOS (CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT) COURTESY OF RDV VINEYARDS; BARBOURSVILLE VINEYARDS; TARARA WINERY; BY KIMBERLY HUFFER/WHITE HALL VINEYARDS; BARBOURSVILLE VINEYARDS; AND BY HATHIEU FINOT/KING FAMILY VINEYARDS

Follow That Trail

Wine-focused tourism — eagerly supported by local municipalities all the way up to Governor Bob McDonnell — has helped raise Virginia's profile well beyond its borders. Washington continues to be the primary wine-country entry point, but the number of visitors from Maryland and North Carolina is steadily increasing.

Once inside the state, 24 "wine trails" weave an impressive path through nine designated wine regions and six American Viticultural Areas (AVAs). A few trails focus on beer and whiskey production (Nelson 151, Blue Ridge "Whiskey Wine" Loop) or incorporate historic sites (the General's Wine and History Trail, Jefferson Heritage Trail). Most trails feature three to five wineries — ideal for a day trip. The Loudoun Wine Trail (Upper Northern Region), Fauquier County Wine Trail (Mid Northern Region), Monticello Wine Trail (Monticello AVA), and Chesapeake Bay Wine Trail (Northern Neck George Washington Birthplace AVA) corral the most wineries and tasting rooms and are best for a weekend or multi-day visit. 🍷

Scott Jones, former executive editor of Southern Living, is the president of Jones Is Hungry (jonesishungry.com), a culinary media company.

Next Step For a complete list of trails and downloadable maps, visit virginiawine.org/regions.



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