

I wish that Franco would purchase a map of the United States. He insists that we go to the wineries of Virginia. This is not a bad idea, however we are in Texas. Oh well! I should not complain. It is his car and he is determined to see the USA and most of the wineries that are contained therein. Answering the question “Why Virginia?” was the easy part. Not long ago Bruce Schoenfield, writing for *Travel and Leisure Magazine*, pointed out that Virginia is one of the top five wine touring areas along with Italy, Chile, Spain, and New Zealand; and that it should be on the “must-see” list of any adventurous wine traveler.

Taking Mr. Schoenfield’s advice, we decided to start in Charlottesville. This is the Home of Thomas Jefferson’s famous Monticello Estate. Taking time off from his duties as Ambassador to France, Jefferson toured extensively throughout the major wine regions of Europe. He was fascinated at the way Europeans took such care to prepare their food and marry it up with the correct wine. His notes were extensive and he passed them on to one of his slaves, James Hemings. He promised Hemings his freedom if only he would teach French Cooking to the other slaves at Monticello. Jefferson returned from France with new fire in his spirit. He had high hopes of producing wine from *Vitis Vinifera*, A common grape vine native to the Mediterranean region, Central Europe, and Portugal. Notice that the list did not include America. The cuttings failed in American soil, and after many attempts not one bottle of wine was produced. Our first President met with the same failure. After 11 years of experimentation, not one bottle of wine was produced by George Washington at Mount Vernon.

Out of failure comes success. It was not easy and it took a long time. In the 1820s, wines made from a native grape called NORTON met with great success. The Norton Grape yields a zinfandel type wine, the quality of which is surprisingly high. Nortons are deeply colored, age-worthy wines with rich, fruity flavors. They complement red meat, smoked meats, wild game, and many cheeses. Sometimes called the “Virginia Claret” the wine went on to collect awards. The first was “best red wine of all nations” at the Vienna World’s Fair of 1873 and the second was the Gold Medal at the 1899 World’s Fair in Paris. The secret to the success was GRAFTING. Vintners discovered that grafting European vines with Native Virginia vines would allow the vines to grow healthy and produce quality fruit.

Like everyone else in the Alcohol Industry, Virginia was forced to survive Prohibition. This it did quite well and today the count is up to 200+ wineries from a low of 15 just after Prohibition was repealed. Virginia now produces red and white wines that will stand proud in any competition. In the total picture you will find Cabernet Franc, Merlot, Cabernet Sauvignon, and Norton in the red arena. In the white arena you will find Chardonnay, Riesling, Sauvignon Blanc, and Viognier. If this is not enough, you will also find Sparkling, Rose, Fruit, and Mead (made from Honey). The choices are many and the quality is good.

Summer is coming and that means the travel season is near. If gas is not \$4-5 per gallon, and you should happen to be in the Williamsburg area, I recommend that you stop in to tour the Williamsburg Winery. You may try any of the reds or whites however do not fail to try the Chardonnay. There are three levels: the John Adlun at \$10/bottle, The Acte 12, at \$18/bottle, and the Vintage Reserve at \$24/bottle. Call ahead to reserve a tasting time. The personnel in the tasting room are cordial and knowledgeable. They will fill you in on all the details of storage, flavors, and such. If you go you will not be disappointed. However, you may come away somewhat poorer as it is difficult to resist purchasing a few bottles.

The second wine that I want to highlight is Viognier from Virginia. Vintners statewide in Virginia have discovered that the Viognier grape will survive quite well just about anywhere. I have often mentioned that I consider Viognier to be an exceptional alternative selection to Chardonnay. Evidently the commonwealth of Virginia agrees with me as there is a proposal to make Virginia Viognier their Signature Grape. This proposal is completely justified in that the grape has been the recipient of numerous awards. It is also perceived to be a springboard to conversations about all Virginia wines. I hope that the proposal is successfully adopted. Viognier is a good accompaniment to lobster, veal, cheeses, pork, and any food prepared with a rich sauce.

WINESPEAK. Karen MacNeil, Author of *The Wine Bible*, loves folklore tales. She tells the story of the revival of the Norton Wine. It was accomplished by Hortons Vineyard in 1991 in an effort to bring Norton Wine back in to commercial production because of its historical significance. So now we have "Horton's Norton." If you find yourself on US 33 in Gordonsville, Virginia this summer, stop in for a taste or two of a terrific Zinfandel style wine.

Next Stop: The Hilton Head Food and Wine Festival.

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