



BOTTLE SERVICE

The Five Best Wine Road Trips in the U.S.

Five fantastic wine regions to discover—no passport required.

By **Food & Wine Editors** | May 03, 2021

Virginia

Winding roads, wonderful wines.

I've been fortunate to travel to many wine regions, but somehow I have never fully explored the one right outside my door: Virginia. After being shut in for months and on

the brink of going stir-crazy, though, I decided it was time to escape D.C. for greener pastures—ones that included wine. Virginia wine country is vast, with over 300 wineries and 4,000 acres of grapes, but I narrowed it down with this plan: I would visit only wineries with wines I had never tasted before. After achieving a deep, deep familiarity with the walls of my home, I was definitely in search of something new.

Casanel Vineyards & Winery, my first stop, was a little over an hour from home. Tucked down a winding road near Leesburg, in the heart of Virginia horse country, Casanel is run by the DeSouza family; here, Katie DeSouza Henley and Tyler Henley craft some of Virginia's best Petit Verdot. Though the DeSouzas also grow Chardonnay, Pinot Gris, and Cabernet Sauvignon, they focus on the grapes they feel best serve Virginia: Petit Verdot, Carmenère, and the native grape Norton.

Winemaker Katie DeSouza Henley feels Petit Verdot has the potential to be a signature Virginia wine: "The grapes are smaller, darker, and might not produce as much as Merlot, but it's concentrated. And it's considered an underdog, just like Virginia. People discredit it, but we don't. I feel we can take this blending grape and make an elegant varietal wine that is inherently Virginia."

From Casanel, the short drive to Otium Cellars was as scenic as they come: stone and brick homes, winding roads, horses grazing. Otium owner Max Bauer is a rare bird in Virginia because he concentrates on Austrian and German grape varieties—Blaufränkisch, Zweigelt, Grüner Veltliner, and Grauburgunder (the German term for Pinot Gris). The winery's Blaufränkisch and Grüner Veltliner were particularly delicious, with softer peppery notes than their Austrian counterparts; I feel they should be on everyone's radar.

Charlottesville's The Wool Factory is a historic wool mill complex from 1868 recently converted to restaurants, shops, and an event space. Inside, Selvedge Brewing offers craft beers and more casual fare, while Broadcloth (opening soon) will be fine dining from executive chef Tucker Yoder and executive pastry chef Rachel De Jong. The unpretentious lunch I had felt like a home-cooked meal, but one made better by the lineup of wines, such as a crisp Blanc de Blancs Traditional Méthode Traditionnelle (made by acclaimed Virginia winemaker Claude Thibault). Paired with chicken liver mousse, it was a divine

combination of fat and salt. And if the smoked mushroom tacos are on the menu, they are a must-try.

After lunch, it was time to head to Gabriele Rausse Winery. Rausse is considered the "father of Virginia wine" and did stints at Barboursville Vineyards and Jefferson Vineyards before branching out on his own in 1997. My wine rack thanks him because his 2017 Baer Ridge Vineyards Cabernet Franc Reserve is now on constant rotation in my glass. I also highly recommend hiring a driver to visit Ankida Ridge. The winery is quite a distance from downtown Charlottesville, about a 75-minute drive, but more than worth the trek. Co-owner and vineyard manager Christine Vrooman will welcome you as a member of the family, and the wines match her personality: vibrant, expressive, and focused.

Listen, I am not a member of the anything-but-Chardonnay club. I love Chardonnay, and Hark Vineyards makes one that truly represents Virginia. It doesn't have the warmth-driven richness of California nor the finesse of Burgundy, but it's round and fragrant, with a savory character that lingers. "This is Virginia wine and speaks to Virginia," winemaker Jake Busching told me. "So when you start drinking this Chardonnay, it's complex and interesting because for most people it's an entirely new terroir."

Even so, I admit that at Fleurie restaurant later that night in Charlottesville, I cheated on Virginia with a glass of Champagne Bauget-Jouette, at least until wine director Melissa Boardman suggested a side-by-side comparison of Virginia and a few of the many international wines on her list during dinner. Linden Vineyards' Late Harvest Petit Manseng and a Domaine Rousset Peyraguey Sauternes both paired beautifully with chef Jose de Brito's crème brûlée and proved yet again that Virginia wines can go head to head with wines from anywhere else in the world.

The Quirk Hotel Charlottesville (*rooms from \$200, [destinationhotels.com](https://www.destinationhotels.com)*), where I stayed during my trip, blends modern and vintage touches. A boutique art hotel and a great home base for a Virginia wine trip, it has paintings and sculptures from national and regional artists on display around the property, as well as a substantial gallery. After enjoying a Pink Breeze—vodka, cucumber, raspberry, lime, and Prosecco—in one of the rooftop bar's heated igloos, I headed to dinner at the Pink Grouse restaurant, just off the

hotel lobby. After all, I didn't want to stay out too late—I still had to pack up all the wine I'd purchased before heading home.

—*Julia Coney*

Five Virginia Wines to Try

2018 Stinson Vineyards Wildkat (\$28)

This aromatic Rkatsiteli, an unusual white variety originally from the Republic of Georgia, is thirst-quenching in the best way.

2017 Gabriele Rausse Baer Ridge Vineyards Cabernet Franc Reserve (\$34)

Rausse's Cabernet Franc is elegant and ageworthy but also tastes so good that it deserves to be opened now.

2017 Hark Vineyards Chardonnay (\$36)

Balanced and complex, this white has a whisper of oak—ideal for less-is-more Chardonnay fans.

2017 Casanel Vineyards & Winery Petit Verdot (\$46)

This juicy, darkly fruity Petit Verdot reminds me of blackberry cobbler laced with rich tannins. It makes you wish more people made single-varietal Petit Verdot; luckily, Casanel does.

2018 Ankida Ridge Pinot Noir (\$52)

Simply one of the best Pinot Noirs coming out of Virginia, this bottle is bursting with red fruit and texture.

Texas

A wine drive through Hill Country.

If Napa Valley is California's quintessential wine country, then the Hill Country plays that role for Texas. Getting here is as simple as a quick weekend flight to Austin, and with wildflower season in full swing, late spring is the perfect time to visit—cowboy boots and convertible rental car optional.

On a recent trip, I based myself at Camp Lucy, just outside of Dripping Springs. Don't let the name fool you: Camp Lucy is a luxe outdoor hideaway on nearly 300 acres of untouched wilderness. With exquisitely decorated cabins and a lengthy menu of amenities and activities (hatchet throwing, anyone?), the place is simply enchanting.

My first morning, I headed out U.S. Highway 290, the central corridor for Hill Country wineries, making my first stop at Ron Yates Wines, where I snagged a shady seat on the outdoor patio. Yates, with his long hair, full beard, and flip-flops, roamed from table to table, doling out splashes of a newly bottled 2019 Merlot. "I grew up in a place where everything was always comfortable and easygoing," Yates, who's originally from nearby Marble Falls, told me. "I wanted to bring that same feeling of casualness to our guests."

Just a few miles away, at Sandy Road Vineyards (run by Yates' associate winemaker, Reagan Sivadon), a treehouse platform overlooking the vineyard proved the perfect spot to sip a fruity pét-nat rosé made from the Spanish Prieto Picudo variety.

That evening, I returned to Camp Lucy for dinner at Tillie's restaurant, which was built from a reclaimed 19th-century Vietnamese town hall with towering ironwood rafters that had been transported to central Texas. A plate of orange-chile-sauced fried brussels sprouts followed by an entrée of red snapper in a creamy Meunière sauce proved a soulful meal, and I strolled back to my cabin beneath the hypnotic humming of cicadas.

Day two brought me to William Chris Vineyards, where, at a shady table overlooking the lush estate vineyards, I lingered over a floral blend of Blanc du Bois, Malvasia Bianca, and Moscato Giallo called Mary Ruth. At Ab Astris Winery, a newcomer located just over the glimmering Pedernales River, I encountered a mineraly 2019 Clairette Blanche that made me hungry for fresh oysters. And at Texas stalwart Pedernales Cellars, I stretched out on a picnic blanket on the sprawling lawn and sipped on a tropical 2018 Albariño.

But my last appointment proved to be the most spectacular. Southold Farm and Cellar has one of the most stunning hilltop views in the entire Hill Country. The tasting room sits atop a lofty rise that offers a panoramic view of the region. Surprisingly, the winery got its start in Long Island in 2012 but transitioned to Texas' warmer climes in 2016, and winemaker Regan Meador has swiftly garnered a following for his lively, low-intervention wines. As I gazed out over rolling hills from the cozy porch swing of the farmhouse tasting room, I savored his nutty, skin-fermented Sing Sweet Things Albariño and thought to myself that when it came to Southold, New York's loss was definitely our gain.

—Jessica Dupuy

Five Texas Wines to Try

2018 Pedernales Cellars Texas Albariño (\$20)

Fragrant, crisp apple and tropical fruit notes are the heart of this white.

2019 Ab Astris Aurora Rosé (\$22)

A deep rosy hue leads to red-berry aromas and broad yet lifted flavors.

2017 Ron Yates friesen vineyards Tempranillo (\$30)

This standout single-vineyard Tempranillo has rich dark fruit and tobacco notes.

2018 William Chris La Pradera Cinsault (\$32)

An easy-drinking, playful red with cranberry and pomegranate flavors.

2018 Sandy Road Sangiovese (\$34)

This earthy Sangiovese is elegantly structured, with rich notes of Bing cherry, mushroom, and savory herbs.

Michigan

Great lakes and greater grapes.

I may be biased as a native Michigander, but northern Michigan is one of the best-kept secrets in the country. Whenever I need an escape from it all, I head to the upper left corner of my mitten-shaped state to spend time amid the sweeping sand dunes, pristine lakes, and one of the most exciting up-and-coming wine regions in the country. Until recently, Michigan's wines had a reputation for being cloyingly sweet: Think ice wines and super-sugary Rieslings. Now, thanks to a group of ambitious winemakers, there has never been a better time to drink them.

There are two main wine trails in this part of the state: Old Mission Peninsula, which runs up the middle of Grand Traverse Bay, and the Leelanau Peninsula, which runs along the west side of the bay. In the middle, at the bottom, sits Traverse City, an ideal base for winery-visiting. On a recent trip, hotel options were middling at best, but Airbnb options abounded. I rented a renovated farmhouse on the outskirts of the city, a three-minute drive from Farm Club, a photogenic place that's a restaurant, brewery, bakery, and market—and a great spot to grab snacks like locally made cheese and crackers.

I set off the next morning armed with a hefty chilaquiles-stuffed burrito from Rose & Fern café and a foamy cappuccino from Mundos, a great local roaster, for Mission Point Lighthouse, the northernmost point of Old Mission Peninsula. I worked my way down, stopping off to try several wines from 2 Lads, where Oregon winemaker Thomas Houseman recently relocated. My favorite? A sparkling rosé that made a chilly day feel

like summer. I kept driving, at times pulling over just to stare in awe at the breathtaking views of Lake Michigan, and finally arrived at Mari Vineyards. An impressive operation, it feels straight out of a Dan Brown novel thanks to the Knights Templar iconography on the building. This is where winemaker Sean O'Keefe spends his time, exploring hands-off winemaking techniques. Mari also happens to be just up the road from Chateau Grand Traverse, the first winery in the region, which O'Keefe's father founded in 1974 and his family still owns.

A day of wine drinking, I found, is best sopped up with plates of housemade pasta and clever salads, like one crafted from paper-thin slices of celery and mushroom, from Stella Trattoria, which is arguably the most famous restaurant in the area, and for good reason. I woke up the next morning hungover—not from wine but instead from the sheer amount of carbohydrates I had managed to consume.

But I hauled myself out of bed regardless. It was time to head up the Leelanau Peninsula, which has nearly 30 wineries. First, I headed down a shady lane, to Shady Lane cellars, one of the only operations in the area with a female winemaker. I found their canned wine selection incredibly charming and grabbed a few before heading to one of the best-known vineyards in the area, Mawby. There, brothers Michael and Peter Liang make two labels: Mawby, which is known for sparkling wines with raucous names like Sex, and BigLittle, their younger label, which makes a number of easy-to-drink still wines.

Vineyards dot the landscape all the way north until you hit the towns of Leeland and Suttons Bay, either of which could be the setting of a Hallmark movie. Between them sits 9 Bean Rows, a tiny bakery that makes the best almond croissant I've ever had. Proprietors Nic and Jen Welty also operate a pizza oven out back. I grabbed a fresh pie topped with artichoke hearts and a generous amount of mozzarella: the perfect road trip companion for the drive back down to Traverse City.

—Khushbu Shah

Four Michigan Wines to Try

2019 Biglittle Open Road Rosé (\$17)

Crisp red fruit notes make this easygoing rosé hard to resist.

2017 2 Lads Sparkling rosé (\$28)

Winemaker Thomas Houseman crafts this bright, lime-scented sparkler almost entirely from Chardonnay. (It's 1% Pinot Noir.)

2017 Shady Lane Cellars Blaufränkisch (\$28)

Black-fruited with velvety tannins, this will win over anyone who's never had Blaufränkisch before (basically, everybody).

2017 Mari Vineyards Simplicissimus (\$36)

This bubbly from Sean O'Keefe is not quite a pét-nat, but not quite a traditional sparkling wine, either. One thing it definitely is, though? Delicious.

New York

Long Island wines hit new heights.

Potatoes. On Long Island's North Fork, those Cabernet vines you see? That land once grew potatoes. Merlot? Potatoes. Cabernet Franc? Chardonnay? Sauvignon Blanc? Potatoes, potatoes, potatoes. And while I'd be hard-pressed to make a choice between wine and french fries as something to strike from my life, I'm going to be bold and say that when it comes to a reason to visit a region, wine grapes win over spuds every time.^[P]_[SEP]

This assessment crossed my mind while I was sitting in one of the newly erected bungalows at Macari Vineyards, drinking a glass of the winery's tangy Lifeforce Cabernet Franc (so dubbed because it ferments in a concrete egg) and eating truffle mac and cheese from local go-to caterer Lauren Lombardi. The bungalows are snazzy canvas tents where you can relax with your group in a socially distanced way. Like the catered lunch, the decor inside is locally furnished, and if you fall in love with the wool throw tossed

over your chair or the serving bowl filled with farro, arugula, and roasted butternut squash salad, it's probably for sale.^[P.P.]_[SEP]

So, an admission: I hadn't spent a weekend in Long Island's wine country in way too long. For a New York City resident (and a wine writer!), that's unconscionable. But that gap did make me aware of how much has changed here: how the North Fork has drawn in some of Montauk's Brooklyn-by-the-sea cool; how its towns are burgeoning with excellent restaurants and boutique hotels; how many wineries have popped into existence (or changed hands); and, particularly, how good the wines are right now.

At Rose Hill Vineyards, formerly Shinn Estate Vineyards, I eavesdropped on a local couple who'd stopped in after nine holes of golf. They were chatting with Jon Sidewitz, a tasting room server. "I can't believe all the homes going up out there," the woman said. The winery's nonvintage red (current offering: a blend between 2017 and 2018) had the distinctive tobacco-sweet cherry scent of Cabernet Franc; it was something nice to sip while pondering how one result of plague panic has been a boom in house sales here.

Wineries have done oddly well, too. Every one I visited reported being swamped during the summer of 2020. "By October, we were exhausted," Jerol Bailey, director of sales at Lenz Winery, told me. "We're busy even now." Lenz is acclaimed for its old-vines Merlot, arguably the red grape that does best in Long Island's variable maritime climate, and the 2013 was rich with spice and kirsch notes. But the real surprise for me was a lovely, lychee-scented dry Gewürztraminer, lime-zesty and vibrant. Winemaker Thomas Spotteck said, approvingly, "It's got those punch-you-in-the-face aromatics." It certainly did, if getting punched in the face was a really great thing.

Despite the changes, the North Fork is still nothing like the Hamptons. It hasn't lost its agricultural roots, and in the summer, farmstands line the roads, selling sweet corn, ripe berries, leafy greens, and, yes, even potatoes. Local seafood is equally good, and at the Suhru Wines Tasting House in Cutchogue, over a glass of the only Teroldego I've ever seen outside of Northern Italy—inky purple, earthy, peppery, delicious—sales and marketing director Shelby Hearn told me, "At least once a month I find a new oyster farmer. It's like eggs. You stop by the side of the road and pick up a dozen."

Chef Stephan Bogardus uses all this abundance in his superb cooking at The Halyard, located at Sound View Greenport (*rooms from \$195, soundviewgreenport.com*), a 1950s seaside motel recently spiffed up into early 21st-century cool. Bogardus adds depth to a local fluke tartare with miso and hijiki; his seared Long Island duck breast was exquisitely tender thanks to six days of dry aging. If you're offered the salty "biscuits with really good butter," say yes—the butter is indeed really good, and the biscuits are even better. Smuggle them out for breakfast the next morning. I did.

Then there's the North Fork Table & Inn, a much-loved local icon recently taken over by exceptionally talented NYC chef John Fraser. Dishes like his mysteriously light tempura squash, decorated with flower petals from the biodynamic farm just down the road, are not to be missed. Nor is beverage director Amy Racine's impressive list, which splits 50-50 between local bottles and international choices. Initially, she planned to skew more toward Europe, she told me, but "the guests were much more interested in local wines than I expected. And I was really blown away by a lot of them, too. Like some of the old Macari Bergen Road reds I tasted and then put on—those wines have aged beautifully."

Fraser is emblematic in a way of how much is going on out here: He's also opening a 20-room hotel this summer just down the road, right on Peconic Bay, and a market-café just down the same road but in the other direction. Yet for all the new ventures, nearby Southold Fish Market still brings in porgies, stripers, day-boat scallops, and more off the fishing boats every morning. And in Greenport, while I loved staying at the boutiquey Menhaden hotel (*rooms from \$559, themenhaden.com*), with its roof deck looking past flitting gulls to the sea; I also loved the fact that it was right next to the town's straight-out-of-the-1950s George D. Costello Senior Memorial Skating Rink. As Fraser had said to me: "We're not dealing with the perfectly polished Hamptons thing here. And that's great."

—Ray Isle

Four Long Island Wines to Try

2016 Lenz Winery Gewürztraminer (\$20)

With its telltale scent of lychee fruit, this white is one of many fine bottles in the Lenz portfolio. Don't miss the winery's graphite-scented Estate Selection Merlot, either.

2019 Macari Horses Sparkling Cabernet Franc (\$26)

This lightly fizzy sparkler has lovely red fruit flavors, and the name is a nod to the bluffs at the edge of Macari's property, which suggest the shape of a horse's head—and were used by 1920s bootleggers as a covert route to the sea. ^[P]_[SEP]

NV Shinn Estate Vineyards Red Blend (\$25)

A classic Bordeaux-style blend, this red is plump with ripe cherry fruit and lifted by a dried tobacco note; for this release, longtime winemaker Patrick Caserta blended wines from the 2017 and 2018 vintages.

2019 Suhru wines Teroldego (\$30)

Teroldego is an unusual enough grape in Italy, where it grows almost exclusively in the northern Trentino region. So, Long Island Teroldego? If this earthy, spicy red is any indication, the grape has found an excellent second home.

Arizona

Red rocks meet red wine.

Last summer, desperate to go somewhere (anywhere!), I rented an RV. ^[L]_[SEP] A visit to the Grand Canyon was on my bucket list, so I made it the starting point for a weekend in Arizona's wine country, which promised to marry an encore of dramatic landscapes with distinct and travel-worthy wines. ^[P]_[SEP]

I started my jaunt in Verde Valley, one of the state's three wine regions. A morning's drive from the canyon landed me at Merkin Vineyards Tasting Room & Osteria, opened by Maynard James Keenan, the frontman of the rock band Tool turned winemaker of Merkin Vineyards and Caduceus Cellars. While digging into pillowy gnocchi blanketed in

a sage-scented cream sauce, I sampled a brambly red called Tarzan and a dry rosé called Jane. Stuffy, Arizona is not, I decided—an impression reinforced on the welcoming open-air patio of nearby Chateau Tumbleweed, which makes focused, refreshing wines like a mouthwatering Vermentino that smelled deliciously of lemon peel, and Willy, a garnet-colored Grenache blend with fine tannins. From there, I headed to D.A. Ranch, an estate winery where the inky wines and verdant property felt like a mirage after a day of desert landscapes—though I admit it did make me briefly regret the RV. ^[1]_{SEP}

For day two, I headed south to the Sonoita region. The towering rock formations of central Arizona had given ^[1]_{SEP} way to undulating grasslands before I pulled up to ^[1]_{SEP} Callaghan Vineyards, where winemaker Kent Callaghan has been relentlessly experimenting, changing what he grows every year, for three decades now. "The soil here lends itself to ageworthy wines," he said—a claim that his 2014 Lisa's, with its apricot aromas, backs up. Callaghan's innovative approach is reflected in the work of those he's mentored in the region, including Todd and Kelly Bostock of Dos Cabezas. At their tasting room, a wood-fired pizza truck turns out pizzas to pair with their boundary-pushing wines, which included an unlikely but delicious white blend, Meskeoli, made from Albariño, Viognier, Malvasia, Roussanne, Petit Manseng, and Kerner, and a "perpetual cuvée" containing vintages from 2015 through 2019. "These would not have found love anywhere but Arizona, 'cause other places got rules," Todd said with a laugh.

^[1]_{SEP}

The exploratory mindset of the state's winemakers makes Arizona a thrilling place to visit and taste right now. Pavle Milic, beverage director and co-owner of Scottsdale's FnB restaurant, embodies that exuberance at Los Milics, his new winery in Elgin. I stood with Milic among his vines, ringed by mountains, as he described his vision: the tasting room that will immerse guests in the vineyards, the guesthouses that will drink in the star-filled sky. "It will be a little suspension of reality," he said. Then we went inside, and I tasted his vibrant wines straight from the barrels—dry, flinty Grenache and lush Tempranillo—and promised myself I'd be back as soon as they opened this summer. But this time hopefully by plane.

—Karen Shimizu

Five Arizona Wines to Try

2018 Chateau Tumbleweed Mourvèdre (\$36)

Mourvèdre excels in Arizona, something shown by the fresh acidity, red fruit flavors, and lightly spicy edge of this wine.

2019 Merkin Vineyards Jane Pink (\$20)

Maynard James Keenan's light-bodied rosé delivers beautiful strawberry aromas and crisp, green-apple acidity.

2014 Callaghan Vineyards Lisa's (\$28)

This easy-drinking white blend's aromas of apricot and orange make it a favorite for sipping in Arizona's warm weather.

2019 Dos Cabezas Meskeoli (\$28)

For a unique taste of place, you can't go wrong with this singular white blend from Todd and Kelly Bostock.

2019 Los Milics Betty's Grenache (\$36)

A high-toned red from sommelier Pavle Milic, whose Elgin tasting room will open this year.

Do You Know Idaho?

Fond of visiting Oregon and Washington wineries? Well, why not keep going?

Idaho's emerging winery scene is smaller than those of its neighbor states to the west, but ambition and ideal weather have made it well worth checking out. The state's 60 or so wineries make impressive Cabernets, Syrahs, Rieslings, and other varieties—plus its two main wine regions, the Snake River Valley and the Lewis-Clark Valley, both happen

to be beautiful. In the Snake River Valley, east of the Oregon border, head to Williamson Orchards & Vineyards (willorch.com) to try the lime-zesty 2019 Williamson Vineyard Albariño (\$23), among others. Across the valley at Telaya Wine Co. (telayawine.com), don't miss the 2018 Turas Red (\$46), a powerful, peppery blend of Syrah, Petit Verdot, and other varieties. Finally, if you find yourself farther north, in the Lewis-Clark Valley AVA along the Washington border, drop in at Rivaura Wines (rivaura.com) to try its inky-purple, blackberry-rich, gravelly Syrah (\$38). Those are just a few top possibilities; there are many more.

—Ray Isle

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The 2021 Wine Lover's Guide



Big Wine Is Over. Here's What's Next