

WINE ENTHUSIAST

A Wine Lover's Guide to Newport, Rhode Island

BY MEREDITH BETHUNE



If you mention Newport, Rhode Island, it inspires images of massive yachts, beaches that capture the majesty of the Atlantic Ocean and stately Gilded Age mansions. But while the city has earned a reputation for rollicking summer nightlife, Newport may not necessarily make you think of wine, despite the existence of regional wineries here since 1975.

Those wineries are experiencing growth, which is particularly visible at **Newport Vineyards**. Recently, it underwent a \$4 million upgrade, spurred in part by a 23% increase in tourists' dollars going to Rhode Island between 2012–17.

“Newport has done a great job of attracting visitors year-round,” says John Nunes Jr., co-owner of Newport Vineyards. Events like the springtime **Waterfront Oyster Festival** and the **Newport Mansions Wine & Food Festival** in September attract off-peak visitors. “[The city is] agriculture-meets-tourism. It’s been a nice fit and use of some of the open space here,” he says.

Newport’s location at the southern end of Aquidneck Island, surrounded by the Atlantic Ocean, Narragansett Bay and a tidal strait called the Sakonnet River, means that spring and fall temperatures are a bit milder than much of the Northeast.

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“All of Aquidneck Island has a great microclimate,” says Nunes. “The water really helps us. If you go inland, you don’t have the benefit of the water in the spring. Once you go inland, you have to grow different kinds of grapes, but we’re able to grow a lot of vinifera here for this reason.”

While the long, cool growing season allows for white wines that pair nicely with fresh seafood, regional producers chose not to spread their focus.

“We’re never going to make a punch-you-in-the-nose Zinfandel,” says Nunes. “That’s never going to be our style.” Thankfully, Newport’s numerous restaurants and bars have you covered for all things wine.



Bars Where the Wines Rival the Views

22 Bowen’s Wine Bar & Grille

The opening of [this alfresco Portside bar](#) on the dock of busy Bowen’s Wharf heralds the arrival of summer in Newport. Watch the tour boats launch and sip one of the 34 wines available by the glass like sparkling rosé from Westport Rivers Vineyard, located just east of the state border in Massachusetts. The wine list excels in big, bold Bordeaux to complement a top-notch steak selection, but there are many aromatic whites to pair with sea fare like the chilled New England shellfish sampler piled with lobster, littleneck clams, shrimp and oysters.

Castle Hill Inn

In a city full of exceptional waterfront views, the perch from the Lawn at [Castle Hill Inn](#), located on a 40-acre peninsula near Ocean Drive, is unmatched. The wine selection focuses on easy-drinking whites to enjoy as sailboats glide across Narragansett Bay. Inside the historic 19th-century inn, the wine cellar spans five rooms that boast more than 7,000 bottles. Executive Chef Lou Rossi’s tasting menus include dishes like miso-glazed sablefish with black trumpet mushrooms or dry-aged beef sirloin with potatoes and Gorgonzola dolce.

Forty 1° North

This space, the former home of beloved restaurant Christie's of Newport, has been revived as a chic restaurant and hotel located on the harbor. Grab a seat at the rectangular Pavilion Bar right on the marina or lounge on a plush sofa or armchair. There, you can choose from more than 15 pours from France, Italy and the United States. There's also a Fermentation Class offered Wednesdays at 6:30 pm at the Oval Bar. Reserve in advance to taste five themed wines, which are accompanied by small food pairings.



Wine Shops

Newport Wine Cellar & Gourmet

Owner Maria Chiancola has overseen the selection at **this boutique wine shop/food market** for more than 10 years. The wine shop focuses on small producers, as well as specialty spirits and craft beers, while the food market offers counter service for lunch and specialty products. Chiancola also sources grapes from Napa to produce wine under her own label, Topsy Rose. Complimentary tastings of one to four wines are held Friday and Saturday evenings from 4–7 pm.

Bellevue Wine & Spirits

The wine selection at **this shop**, located across the street from the International Tennis Hall of Fame, is extensive, thanks to owner John Callaghan's three-plus decades in the wine and spirits business. While most of the shelf space is dedicated to wine—the Bordeaux and Champagne selections are robust—there's also spirits and craft beers.



Restaurants with Great Wine Lists

Bouchard Inn & Restaurant

Inside a historic Georgian-style house on pedestrian-heavy Thames Street, [Albert Bouchard](#) serves dishes like crab salad with asparagus and tarragon pesto, and seared scallops over brown butter celeriac purée. His exquisite French cuisine has made the restaurant one of Newport's premier fine-dining destinations for more than 20 years. The extensive wine list also leans French, but there's also an impressive number of New World selections.

Cara at The Chanler at Cliff Walk

Experience the Gilded Age at [the only hotel and restaurant](#) located in one of Newport's famed mansions that overlook the stunning Cliff Walk and Easton's Beach. The wine list is as grand as the setting at Cara, which offers three- and six-course Mediterranean-influenced tasting menus with optional pairings. The Cafe, the hotel's more casual restaurant, offers the same wine selection.

The Mooring Seafood Kitchen & Bar

Belly up to one of two convivial bars at [this Newport waterfront mainstay](#). Grab a table and feast on a seafood platter that brims with oysters, littleneck clams, shrimp, lobster and crab. Jennifer Backman's menu is classic New England cuisine with a modern twist, exemplified by the "bag of doughnuts," which are lobster and shrimp fritters served with chipotle-maple aioli. Most of the wine world is represented on an extensive beverage list that offers more than 25 selections by the glass.



Local Wineries

Greenville Vineyards

The bucolic farm that's now **Greenville Vineyards**, located just five miles outside Newport on Aquidneck Island, has been family-owned and operated since 1863. A lovingly restored former stable anchors 27 acres of land that overlooks the Sakonnet River. The winery produces approximately 3,500 cases per year of red and white wines, including an Albariño and a Vidal Blanc. Jazz concerts are held Saturdays from May through September, and tours are offered on weekends year-round at 2 pm, and by appointment during the week.

Newport Vineyards

Sitting on more than 100 acres, **this expansive property** completed a multi-million-dollar renovation recently that included an expansion of the tasting room and addition of a restaurant, store and brewery. Order salads, sandwiches and snacks in the brewery café, while Brix, the adjoining restaurant, offers dinner with a view of wine tanks and vineyards. Andy Teixeira's New American cuisine not only complements the estate wines, but they're also sometimes integrated into dishes like the roasted littleneck clams cooked with garlic, chouriço and Chardonnay.

Carolyn's Sakonnet Vineyards

You'll have to leave the island to visit **this winery** that's been in operation since 1975, but the 25-mile drive along the Sakonnet River waterfront to Little Compton is one of the most beautiful in New England. The 30-acre vineyard is equally stunning. Bottles include the White Lotus, made of 100% Gewürztraminer, and the Siren, made from Vidal Blanc.