



## It's for (wine) lovers

### **Blue Ridge, Monticello - names that seem just made for labels. And yes, Virginia has wine trails to wind through.**

By Katherine Calos

For The Inquirer

My California friends were just being polite. I'd brought a bottle of Virginia wine with me on a visit - a chardonnay named for the owner's grandson at a tiny winery west of Fredericksburg. Amused more than impressed, they suggested, "Let's take it with us for dinner."

> So, at a restaurant overlooking the Pacific Ocean, the sommelier popped the cork and poured a rich, golden wine into our glasses. The Californians seemed surprised at their first taste of Jacob Christopher Chardonnay from Rogers Ford Farm Winery.

> "That's good," they said.

> It's a surprise that's happening more frequently with Virginia wines. There are more than 130 wineries sprinkled throughout the state, from the sandy soil of the Eastern Shore to the rocky sides of the Blue Ridge Mountains. The largest, the Williamsburg Winery, produces 60,000 cases a year and opened a deluxe hotel last year. Rogers Ford, by contrast, produces about 700 cases and has its tasting room in a former farm cottage.

> Wine trails in each of the state's eight regions are routes to sample the fruit of the vine and explore the picturesque countryside steeped in history.

> There's the Monticello Wine Trail, for example, made up of 21 wineries surrounding Thomas Jefferson's estate in Charlottesville.

> The Northern Neck Wine Trail, east of Fredericksburg between the Potomac and Rappahannock Rivers, showcases six wineries that mesh with the lifestyle of the Chesapeake Bay. At White Fences Vineyard, you can stomp the grapes in August to celebrate the harvest.

> And the Blue Ridge WineWay, an hour west of Washington, bills itself as Virginia's version of the Napa Wine Trail. It winds through the land of steeplechase races and rock-fenced fields, a place where the five-star menu and decor of the Inn at Little Washington are a fitting accompaniment. At Oasis Winery, I splurged on the award-winning Celebration!!! Cuvee D'Or Brut (now \$125 a bottle) to toast the new millennium.

- > Also in this region, Loudoun and Fauquier Counties have trails of their own, featuring a few of the wineries on the Blue Ridge trail and others that are smaller or newer. Rogers Ford Farm, which produced the chardonnay that surprised my California friends, is on the Fauquier trail.
- > One warm Saturday, a Virginia friend and I decided to sample the wines at Rogers Ford, one of the smallest and oldest vineyards in the state, and Potomac Point, one of the newest and potentially largest wineries. Each is within a half-hour of Fredericksburg.
- > ■
- > Rogers Ford's vineyard is only 3.5 acres. Its oldest vines were planted in 1980, but it did not start making its own wine until five years ago.
- > "We're about as small as they come," owner John Puckett says as he leads a midday tasting and tour. "We sell 99 percent of our wine out the door here," with a small amount going to a few local restaurants.
- > "The wines we make are mostly dry, because that's what we like," Puckett says. "If it doesn't sell, we have to drink it, so we have to like it."
- > Wines are named for grandchildren, such as the Jacob Christopher Chardonnay that I took to San Diego; for the neighborhood, such as a Sumerduck rosé; or for the variety, such as a Barrel-Select Seyval.
- > Puckett often leads tours himself. The family nature of the operation is as clear as the tricycle sitting on a concrete crush pad outside the room that holds the wine press, four stainless-steel tanks, eight oak barrels, and the bottling machine.
- > Puckett was excited about the fall harvest: "It's an excellent year for grapes for us, the best crop since 2001."
- > ■
- > Potomac Point is huge, with a 250-person ballroom and 2,200-square-foot patio in addition to the tasting room and winery. Its vines are just sticks in the ground around the 13-acre site. Juice from 47 acres of leased vineyards filled its gleaming tanks for the first time last fall.
- > The tasting room, which opened in June, features wines made at other wineries under the direction of Potomac Point consultants. The first resident winemaker arrived from France in the fall to oversee the first on-site production.
- > Releases range from a Norton red made with native Virginia grapes and a Chianti-style Abbinato to a port-style Rabelos Virginia Dessert Wine. The signature white wine, La Belle Vie, is named for a statue of a woman that greets visitors.
- > Owners Cindi and Skip Causey expect to produce about 6,500 cases of wine this year and to reach 10,000 cases by 2011. The eventual target is 20,000 cases.
- > The project is "a hobby gone wild," says Lisa Marek, tasting room manager, as she leads a group tour. "Skip and Cindi started 10 years ago volunteering in a winery. Cindi gave him a Christmas gift of a wine-making kit, and it got out of hand."

> The Causeys studied grape growing and winemaking, toured 88 wineries around the state, and traveled to California, Italy and Spain. Once they had a plan, Cindi Causey retired early from her state job in disaster management to supervise construction and run the winery.

> A U-shaped building has the tasting room and shop on one side and the ballroom on the other. In a courtyard in the center, umbrella-shaded tables are arranged around a fountain.

> Staff includes college students behind the wine-tasting bar on busy weekends. A table holds samplings of specialty olive oils flavored with blood oranges or lemons.

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> Virginia's wineries are not just for connoisseurs - they're for anyone who likes a creative approach to food and fun. More than 300 annual winery events include a Fly Fishing and Wine Tasting Festival in Waynesboro April 19 and 20; monthly May-through-December four-course feasts at Barbourville Vineyards near Charlottesville; and the Black Dog Wine and Blues Festival at Chateau Morrisette off the Blue Ridge Parkway on July 12. You can even get a passport to document your stops and compete for prizes.

> Just as Thomas Jefferson dreamed, great American wine is thriving all across his home state.

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## Vineyard Delights

> Virginia also has some of the most interesting tasting rooms around, and these can be as much of a treat as the wine itself.

> The tasting room at **Tarara Winery** in Leesburg ([www.tarara.com](http://www.tarara.com)), for example, is known by the appealing name of Bacchus Gallery and sits next to a 6,000-square-foot cave where you can learn the ins and outs of wine "construction."

> Meanwhile, the tasting room at **Hume's Stillhouse Vineyards** is in an 18th-century farmhouse ([www.stillhousevineyards.com](http://www.stillhousevineyards.com)).

> Or your vineyard trip could have a feminist theme. There are several women-owned vineyards, including the well-regarded Breaux Vineyards in Purcellville ([www.breauxvineyards.com](http://www.breauxvineyards.com)).

> Virginia's wine trails

> **Monticello Wine Trail**

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[monticellowinetrail.org](http://monticellowinetrail.org)

> **Northern Neck Wine Trail**

> [northernneckwinetrail.com](http://northernneckwinetrail.com)

> Potomac Point Winery

> [potomacpointwinery.com](http://potomacpointwinery.com)

> 540-446-2266

> **Blue Ridge WineWay**

> [www.BlueRidgeWineWay.com](http://www.BlueRidgeWineWay.com)

> **Loudoun Wine Trail**

> [www.loudounfarms.org](http://www.loudounfarms.org)

> **Shenandoah Valley Wine Country Trail**

> <http://svwga.org>

> **Bedford Wine Trail**

> [www.bedfordwinetrail.com](http://www.bedfordwinetrail.com)

> **Fauquier County Wine Trail**

> [visitfauquier.com](http://visitfauquier.com)

[wineries.html](#)

> Rogers Ford Farm

> [rogersfordwine.com](http://rogersfordwine.com)

> 540-439-3707

> **Wine Trail of**

> **Botetourt County**

> [www.botetourtwinetrail.com](http://www.botetourtwinetrail.com)

> More information

> Wine & Spa Getaway page at Virginia's tourism Web site, [www.virginia.org](http://www.virginia.org).

> **Virginia Wineries**

> **and Vineyards**

> [www.virginiawines.org](http://www.virginiawines.org)

> - *Scott Vogel, Washington Post*

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