

The Wines of Maryland

Written by Terry Connor
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I'm as guilty as the next person. When I drink wine as an accompaniment to food, or to just have a glass with friends, I usually think of California, Italy, Spain, or whatever. Certainly not Maryland...Until now! Our number two daughter lives in Sykesville, Maryland. Thankfully she lives near a wine store. I have shopped in that same wine store for ten years and have always selected wines that I habitually purchase. I was not avoiding the Maryland Wine Aisle. I just did not know that it existed. Dinner with friends in the restaurant next to the wine store cured that. One of the guests at the dinner works at a Maryland winery called Linganore. He offered to take me next door to the wine store for a look at the line-up of Maryland wines. So after dinner we went wine shopping. It was embarrassing. In the store I was looking at, with no exaggeration, 35 feet of shelf space devoted to only a few Maryland wines. All that I could think of was, "How did I miss it?" Any retailer tries his best to maximize shelf space. Thirty-five feet is a more than generous amount, therefore the demand must be there. Lesson learned! Always go down the aisle that has the local wines on display.

Wine has been produced in Maryland since the early 1600s. The emphasis was on local consumption for over 300 years. It still is. In 1930; Philip Wagner, a columnist with the Baltimore Sun Newspaper, published a book titled "American Wines and How to Make Them." The title was later changed to "Grapes into Wine." This book became the definitive book on winemaking in America.

Maryland has been blessed with a wide array of climates for a state of its size. There is the eastern half of Maryland, which includes parts of Baltimore County and the eastern shore. This is called the Atlantic Coastal Plain. Here the soil is very sandy and muddy, which is well drained, and has The Chesapeake Bay to moderate its temperatures. There are a numerous variety of grapes grown in this region.

In the center of the state is a region called the Piedmont. The climate there is very hot and humid in the summer and moderately cold with significant snowfall in the winter. The Piedmont features two very important "wine trails," the Frederick Wine Trail and the Mason-Dixon Wine Trail. Both of these trails will take you to wineries that feature Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, Cabernet Franc, Chardonnay, and Pinot Gris.

The next region is called the Southern Region. The Southern Region consists of Anne Arundel, Prince George's, Calvert, Charles, and St. Mary's Counties. The region is significant because, during the summer, the temperature gets quite hot and stays hot day and night. This may not be good for some varietals, however many Southern Italian and Mediterranean varietals are found

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in this region. Some examples are Sangiovese, Montepulciano, Vidal, and Chardonnay.

The last region I should mention is the Western Mountain region, reaching almost into West Virginia. Grapes grown in this region must be cold-hardy and able to withstand long winters and a short growing season. Somebody must be doing something that agrees with Bacchus because there are several vineyards and two thriving wineries. Varietals found in this area include Cabernet Sauvignon, Chardonnay, Norton, and Vidal.

I spoke with the Maryland Wine Association a short time ago. They have a three-word expression wherein they call Maryland "America in Miniature." They are, of course, referring to the many and varied soils from the growing regions that I mentioned above. Maryland is a small state that seems to have it all; soil, ideal micro-climates, many different grape varieties, and very serious and talented people.

The wines of the Terrapin State are, for the most part, consumed within the state itself. Wineries have met with great success selling wines through distributors to retail stores or at the winery itself. Most wineries feature tasting rooms, and these are well attended. One very successful promotion is the "Weekend Wine Trail Traveler." Simply look for a wine trail on the internet and follow it to your chosen winery. There seems to be little or no effort to market outside the State. Maybe it is in the future winds.

New York has the very famous Westminster Show. Maryland has its own version of the Westminster each year in the town of Westminster, located in Carroll County. The Maryland Wine Festival showcases Maryland wine on the third weekend of September. It has been held each year since 1985, and it plays host to 25000+ people sampling over 200 wines. (Maybe Franco and I could get the parking concession.)

Maryland wines range from the mouth-puckering dry to the very sugary sweet. Take your pick. With 52 varieties of grapes, how can you not find something to suit your palate? Cabernet Sauvignon, Chardonnay, Merlot, Pinot Gris are in abundance. Sweet wines made from grapes or other fruits are available. All of these, and many more, made possible by the very creative winemakers.

I am able to say firsthand that tooling around Maryland in your Porsche Cayenne, going from

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winery to winery, is not a bad way to enjoy a day off. Actually my Porsche is 2011 Lincoln SUV that Franco allows me to use on occasion.

WINESPEAK. I am able to report that Maryland is a leader in Sustainability. Sustainability is defined as using methods, systems and materials that will not deplete or harm natural cycles.

Next stop is New York. First the lakes region and then Long Island

Cheers.

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