



Vineyards, Wineries and Wines of Southeast Pennsylvania

It is amazing what can happen right under your nose and until you stop to smell you have no idea. The last time this happened, Daniel Roberts from Integrated Winegrowing came to look at soil pits in Lancaster County and told me what a dummy I was for not realizing that the Bedington soils here are ideal for growing wine grapes because of their high and deep rock content. In this case, you had to dig deep to get the whole picture and find someone smart enough to recognize it. It's easier to survey the wine landscape by just going around with my own palate taste and eyes to see the vines. I spent some time in vineyards and wineries around Chester County last week and it turned out to be a bit of a revelation for me.

The Brandywine Wine Trail has become very successful. Its proximity to the big cities certainly offers advantages. Chaddsford Winery, our biggest and consistently one of the best producers has always anchored the wine industry in the area but now lots of new players are popping up like mushrooms around Kennett Square.

Now is actually a good time to look at vines. A naked vine without leaves reveals its architecture starkly and completely. Cane length and diameter, internode length, shoot positioning, canopy width, and many other canopy qualities are all exposed. It is pretty easy, even for an unskilled eye, to judge the balance of a vine right now. As I explored vineyards from Oxford west into Montgomery County it became quite apparent that the level of sophistication of viticulture is improving dramatically in Pennsylvania, even to the point of rivaling our west coast colleagues. I am constantly astonished at the accomplishment of viticulture by self-taught growers who figured out what works best on their site and then implement best practices. We are just neophytes at exploring and exploiting our terroir but we are definitely moving in the right direction. The wines are still in need of certain refinement but that will come with time. I'm past being surprised when I encounter a really nice Pennsylvania, now it is more matter of nuance or degree of quality. And the wines can only get better as we continue to refine viticulture (see Terroir article) and improve our vineyard site selection process.

Not that there is absolute agreement on how to grow fine wine between these producers. There are different philosophies and practices from wide to close spacing, divided and single canopies, training and trellis systems and practices vary widely and just about every other aspect of viticulture. What is common is the total commitment to quality. This is becoming more commonplace in our vineyards and the results are showing up in the bottle.

Maybe what caught my attention most on this circuit were the prices being commanded by some of the best wines in tasting rooms. That Pennsylvania wines have risen past the \$50

mark for our best red wines represents significant milestone. The customer is the ultimate arbiter of quality and value and while there is a lot that goes into the price of the wine, the bottom line is always if someone will walk out of the door with it. If that is happening with \$50 wines, we have come a very, very long way.

The \$50 level is an important benchmark for wine prices, especially because it is, in the case of our small wineries, full retail price and every one of those dollars goes back to the producer. The trickle-down economics of the wine business means that the bottle price determines what can happen upstream from the cash register in terms of viticulture and enology, i.e. the quality of viticulture that can be applied to grow a great wine and the equipment and skills necessary to make it into one in the cellar. At \$50 retail, the wine grower has a lot of options. And isn't that what wine growing or running any business is really all about, having options? This is a capital intensive business and having investment capital translates into choices that can make even better wines.

If the wine consumer is the final arbiter of quality and value, the wine pundits, retailers and restaurateurs are the purveyors of the good news of Pennsylvania wines to the larger public. Unfortunately, the retail system in Pennsylvania, for the most part, is not a partner to the industry and can be discounted from any positive, functional form for promotions and sales with a few exceptions. It is my belief that getting our wines into the better restaurants, mainly in the city and suburbs but also country dining establishments, and poured by the glass, is the path to popularity and acceptance. I'm pretty sure this is how Oregon Pinot Noir entered into the wine consumer consciousness. Wine critics and the press always drag along behind consumer preference while restaurateurs are the most adventurous experimenters and adopters of new food trends. The realities of the "new economy" only help to position any locally grown food or drink products for wide-scale local acceptance. Why shouldn't a customer in a fancy Philly restaurant chose a local red wine over one from France or California because of the carbon footprint and the relative value and quality of the wine choices they have?

The following is a list of some of the vineyards and wineries I visited recently. They are fine examples of the growth and potential of wine in Pennsylvania, and they represent a small slice of one region in the state. I have no doubt that there are exciting examples in every corner of the state.

Many of you are familiar with the vineyard of Jan and Kim Waltz in Manheim, either having attended a viticulture workshop there or purchasing their outstanding grapes. Jan has always dabbled in wine making and he is one of those persons whose amateur wines are often better than many commercial wines. There is no surprise here since the vineyard is one of the most meticulously maintained anywhere. It is easy to connect the quality dots in this case... great fruit can yield great wines. There is a reason I use it as my default teaching vineyards so growers, especially new ones, can soak in the vision of what a fine vineyard looks like and get exposed to Jan's knowledge. It was inevitable but Jan and Kim have built a beautiful winery and tasting room on the property. It's not quite done yet but wine was made there this vintage. I had a chance to taste the 2007 and 2008 wines and they are remarkable. Jan had a vision of Sauvignon Blanc growing were Merlot also

excelled and has planted it along with Semillon. The sauvy is a shining example of the versatility of what this variety can do, from the absolute fruit forward New Zealand version to the more restrained, creamier, nutty, barrel fermented white Bordeaux or California style. While I'm not a big chard fan in general I think we can do very fine Chardonnay in SE PA and I might have to change my tune. Jan's blend of three Dijon clones, stainless steel and barrel fermented versions were both incredibly fruit-driven wines with pure flavors of honey, apple, citrus, full and rich in the mouth, these are truly reminiscent of Pouilly-Fuisse, especially the barrel wine with its toast and smoke. Sauvy and Chard both appear to be well suited for our region but they are both rot prone so they need great viticulture to succeed consistently. I guess we are just a white wine region. That is, until I taste his reds. The 2007 estate Merlot is deep in color and full in body with layers of dark fruit flavors, great structure and balance. Merlot is a fruity red that, I believe, needs blending to add complexity. That is a practice that I think we can improve upon, maybe by getting some help from outside. Jan's could easily stand alone as a varietal but I think it could be even better with some Cabernet Sauvignon for structure, Cab Franc for that herbal note and Petit Verdot for rusticity but I don't know how to do it. His Cabernet Sauvignon is a surprise and delight. This block took it hard in the shins during the '04 freeze but they have brought it back and the 2008 is nice and ripe but with that savory quality that Jim Law describes in his reds and a character of Bordeaux. No one will mistake it for a cult Napa cab but who would want to anyway? This is a foodie's wine and it had me thinking of what to pair it with. Okay, well, by now you know I wear my palate on my sleeve when it comes to the Waltzes. These wines couldn't happen to a nicer and more deserving family.

Further south Tony and Karen Mangus are doing a magnificent job with their 12-acre all-vinifera Historic Hopewell Vineyard in Oxford. The vineyard is exceptionally well-developed and managed, trained to VSP and Scott Henry. They currently sell their grapes but are planning to build a winery. This is a vineyard to watch.

Tony and Karen Vietri are making exceptional, mostly Italian varietals and blended wines at Va La Vineyards in Avondale. They renovated a beautiful old stone barn into one of the coziest tasting rooms in the region. The viticulture here is meticulous on the unusually spaced 5 x 7 (5' between rows) vineyard, VSP, with severe crop management. On a weekend there is hardly anything in the world more enjoyable than the smell of garlic and tomato sauce wafting down from the art/café into the tasting room where they also sell local artisan cheeses and chocolates. It is the full sensory overload experience.

Paradocx Vineyard is one of our biggest, mostly vinifera vineyards in Landenberg, owned and operated by the four "docx" it has hit its stride and is making delicious wines in a new winery built into a hillside. Here, too, canopy management is beautifully executed by vineyard manager Ana Castillo. The tasting room is on Rt 1. I tasted two delicious Chardonnays from local vineyards – the old vines at Haywagon Vineyard and Old Stone Farm.

I wrote about Penns Wood Winery earlier in the year and my opinion of Gino Razzi's wines is still in force after visiting his new tasting room in an old house on the former

Smithbridge Vineyard property (the winery is in Eddystone). Gino has taken one of the oldest vinifera vineyards in the state and breathed new life into it and, along with purchased grapes from the outstanding Waltz Vineyard, is making some truly delicious wines with depth and character. I'll say again that his winery is now a standard for small wineries in the region and I continue to wonder about the value, importance and practicality of rotary fermenters for red wines in our region. The Cabernet Sauvignon is ripe and delicious, the ultimate test for wine in our region.

Chaddsford Winery still is the standard measure for wines in Pennsylvania. Brett Mihalsik manages the daylight out of their vinifera and hybrid vineyard in northern Chester County so regardless of vintage variation, great grapes always appear on the crush pad. The wines include an eclectic mix of Bordeaux and Italian varieties and blends, along with Pinot Noir and Chardonnay along with delicious hybrids, including vineyard designated Chambourcins. I recently participated in a reserve tasting and also tasted a flight of Pinot Noirs and found all the wines to be full and flavorful – the Merican and Due Rossi are standouts.

Further to the east Karamoor Estate near Fort Washington has 17 acres of various clones of Bordeaux red varieties and Dijon clones of Chardonnay managed by Nelson Stewart. I have always been skeptical of the ability of Cabernet Franc as a stand-alone variety in Pennsylvania. The Karamoor '08 has changed my mind about that. It is deep, layered, complex, and elegant. I would love to see Michel Rolland construct a Bordeaux blend from these materials. Wow! This is currently the most immaculate vineyard that I have seen in the state. If viticulture matters to the quality of a wine, then this is the acid test for that theory. With the help of Lucie Morton, this is modern viticultural methodology put into practice with quite stunning results. Wines are not yet available and no visitors are permitted but if you ever have a chance to talk with Nelson he is a viticultural encyclopedia.

Rich Blair's home vineyard is in Mertztown but his new vineyard north of Kutztown takes your breath away. On the PVSAS scale it's probably a 9+ out of 10 (the home vineyard is a 7+). It was one of our first vineyard sites selected for its viticultural potential and, more specifically, the ability to grow Pinot Noir and Chardonnay. Beautiful exposure on rolling hills with gentle to steep slopes and rocky soils this site seems to have it all. Rich will prove the point in the coming years and the early results from young vines are full of promise. Gewürztraminer and Chardonnays from a blend of Dijon clones are vibrant and delicious. The Pinot Noirs are softer and reminiscent of Volnay. Some new methods and winery equipment will help to bolster these wines. This is a very exciting new project and Rich, who is also the current president of PAW, is full dedicated to quality.

There are many other wineries and vineyards in the region and it seems like more vineyards and wineries appear each week. This is a great day trip for anyone living in the SE PA area. My favorite BYO is chef-owner Nick Farrell's Sovana Bistro in Unionville.

I think, in the end, what these wine producers represent is the basic formula for making a fine wine... taking a good to outstanding site and applying terrific viticulture to it then

handing off to a talented wine maker and letting the cellar do its work. On both sides of the equation good equipment and facilities are necessary. The key in the vineyard is that the fruit get fully mature. In most cases this mean combining meticulous canopy management with yield regulation. There is definitely vintage variation and it is easy to taste between some of the wines in 2007 and 2008 but some '07's are better than '08s and vice versa. Vintage variation will always be a part of Eastern wine growing but it should never be an excuse for mediocre wines. As in Europe, we have the knowledge and tools to mitigate the effects of a poor vintage. Vintage should add character and variety to our wines.

We can really do very nice white wines in the different regions of Pennsylvania, like those in the Endless Mountains, around Erie and across the Lehigh Valley. Black Ankle Vineyard's Albarino and Gruner Veltliner and Elk Run's Gewurztraminer in central Maryland are two other examples of the region's white wine prowess. I know there are countless other Pennsylvania examples that I have not mentioned. Whites are generally more forgiving and malleable in the vineyard and cellar. As we continue to work on and refine the reds, they will certainly get much better. We can make "food friendly" reds which used to be a pejorative term for a wine but now refers to a wine with balance, restraint and class, one that doesn't blow the food off of the table. But this is very exciting news for our industry and most of all for wine consumers.

I'll clearly have to come down here more often to check out what's going on since the wine scene changes every day. All of the above is just my humble opinion and few will agree with everything I say. I am hoping that it may make you curious enough to get out there and try survey the wine landscape around the state and region. I think it is pretty important that people involved in the wine industry along with wine consumers and critics explore these vineyards, wineries and wines because they appear to represent the vanguard of quality in the state. It is good for all of us to calibrate our progress against those who appear to be most aggressively pursuing it.

A good place to start looking for information is the web site for the Brandywine Wine Trail at <http://www.bvwinetrail.com/>

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