



Photographs: Tim Fitzharris/gettyimages; Mick Rock/Cephas; Ken Howard/Alamy; Maps: Maggie Nelson



Left: October is the best time to visit Virginia if you want to enjoy the landscape in full autumnal regalia

Top: Barboursville has won more awards than any Virginia winery, and was served at last year's Royal wedding

Above: you might be invited to lend a hand picking grapes if you time your visit to Gray Ghost Vineyards right



Six of the best wineries to visit

- ★ **Barboursville Vineyards**
The winner of more awards than any winery in the state. Try the Octagon, velvety Cabernet Franc Reserve and Barbera Reserve. Leave time to explore the historical ruins on the property and finish with a three-course tasting lunch at the winery's Palladio restaurant. www.barboursvillewine.com
- ★ **King Family Vineyards**
Watch the Sunday polo matches on the field flanking this sprawling vineyard. Then be sure to sample French winemaker Matthieu Finot's world-class Petit Verdot and Seven, a Port-style Merlot, fortified with brandy and aged in bourbon barrels. www.kingfamilyvineyards.com
- ★ **Gray Ghost Vineyards**
Winemakers/owners Al and Cheryl Kellert produce everything from award-winning late-harvest Vidal Blanc to Riesling, Gewurztraminer and Cabernet Sauvignon. Visit during harvest and you'll be invited to pick the grapes – it's a community effort. www.grayghostvineyards.com
- ★ **Pollak Vineyards**
The large tasting room here overlooks a lovely pond; mountain vistas make up the background. Award-winning Viognier and lush, integrated Merlot are stars. www.pollakvineyards.com
- ★ **Veritas Vineyards**
Originally from England, owners Andrew and Patricia Hodson moved to Virginia because of the area's beauty. Their daughter Emily, voted US Woman Winemaker of the Year in 2007, crafts balanced and artful sparkling wines, Chablis-style Chardonnay, ageworthy Bordeaux blends and Petit Verdot. www.veritaswines.com
- ★ **Jefferson Vineyards**
This property is the original site of Thomas Jefferson's first vineyards. Today the elegantly balanced Viognier 2010 and the Meritage 2008 are the estate's flagship wines. www.jeffersonvineyards.com



The *Decanter* travel guide to

Virginia, USA

FACT FILE

Total planted area 1,214ha
Number of wineries 220
AVAs Eastern Shore, Monticello, Northern Neck, North Fork of Roanoke, Rocky Knob, Shenandoah Valley (Rappahannock is not yet an AVA)
Grapes (in Monticello and Rappahannock) Viognier, Chardonnay, Vidal Blanc, Gewurztraminer, Cabernet Franc, Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, Norton, Petit Verdot

After a history of setbacks, Thomas Jefferson's Virginia is now on the cusp of a viticultural renaissance. Visit now before the masses catch on, says Katie Kelly Bell

STANDING ON THE sweeping expanse that is the front lawn of Thomas Jefferson's Monticello estate, one can appreciate his desire to bring viticulture to Virginia. With her gentle slopes and long growing season, this southern state seems ideally suited for winemaking. Yet despite 30 years of effort, America's third president never bottled a single vintage. Virginian winemaking continued to suffer

setbacks long after Jefferson's death, with the onset of the Civil War and, later, Prohibition. But today's Virginian winemakers have proven that Jefferson's vision was spot on. The Monticello AVA now comprises a third of Virginia's 1,214 vineyard hectares. Of the 220 wineries, more than 20 have garnered some form of national and international acclaim for their wines. Prince William and Kate Middleton even served Barboursville's Bordeaux blend, Octagon, at their wedding last year.

Well-kept secret

Winding down the hillside from Jefferson's estate into the dewy lush glades below, it becomes clear why the fantastic wine touring in Virginia is a well-kept secret among the locals. Curvaceous

'The Blue Ridge mountain chain anchors Virginia's pastoral landscape, where apple orchards and vineyards line the hillsides'

hillsides trimmed by white fences, dotted with horses, wildflowers and pine unfold in a carpet just beneath the Blue Ridge mountain chain. Softened by time, the forested mountains anchor this pastoral landscape where llamas stand guard over flocks of sheep, and apple orchards and vineyards line the hillsides. Tucked in along the way are antique shops, roadside farm stands, farm-to-table restaurants, and even a few brewers and distillers crafting whiskey and speciality beers. This is indeed a land of artisans; whether they're chefs, dairy farmers or winemakers, painstaking devotion to craft is the religion here.

At the centre of the Monticello AVA is the college town of Charlottesville, home to the University of Virginia, which Jefferson also designed. From here,

four main wine trails radiate out, making it an ideal base from which to explore. Almost every winery has a tasting room that's open daily, no appointment necessary. Because most wineries are small and produce very limited quantities, it's also likely that you'll meet the winemaker in the tasting room – pouring the wines, meeting guests and answering questions.

The main varieties here include Merlot, Cabernet Franc, Petit Verdot, Cabernet Sauvignon, ➤

How to get there

By plane to Washington DC From Dulles International, the drive to Charlottesville is two hours, or flights to Charlottesville are 20 minutes. Otherwise, connect to Richmond, Virginia, which is an hour's drive from Charlottesville.



'This is a land of artisans; whether they're chefs, dairy farmers or winemakers, devotion to craft is the religion here'

bit more loosely with grape varieties, so expect to try everything from a late-harvest Vidal Blanc, a Port-styled Norton or a Gewurztraminer.

European-style wines

Given the fertile offerings around Monticello and Rappahannock, each day of your visit could easily contain several winery visits along with a historical detour punctuated by a fabulous meal. Try to visit in October: the foliage will be in full autumnal splendour, harvest will be winding down, and temperatures will still be mild. Visiting during the week is best, thereby avoiding the throngs that crowd the tasting rooms on the weekends. Accommodation ranges from private rental homes and basic hotels to more luxurious choices such as The Clifton Inn and Keswick Hall.

Despite her charm, the Virginian terroir is a demanding mistress. John Delmare of Rappahannock Cellars notes: 'We learn fast what works and what doesn't, and we're still learning. The fruit is very different in Virginia and as a result the wines are more delicate than those from the West Coast; ours are definitely more European in style.' And, he adds, 'We spend far more time in the vineyard coping with rain and humidity than any West Coast grower.'

As for wine, most winemakers agree that Viognier, Chardonnay, Petit Verdot, Cabernet Franc and Merlot are Virginia's strongest varieties. That could easily change; the region is a mere 30 years young. Indeed, experimentation is part of the evolution in Virginian wine... and the main reason why a trip here promises to be a tasty adventure. **D**

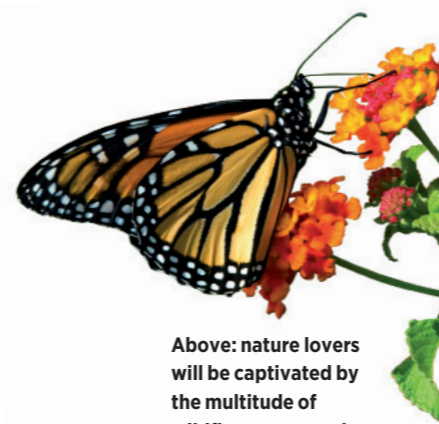


Above: Virginian producers worth visiting include (from top) Veritas Vineyards, Gray Ghost and Pollack Vineyards

Above left: Veritas is run by Emily Hodson Pelton, a former US Woman Winemaker of the Year

Left: the grounds of Monticello, Thomas Jefferson's estate

Katie Kelly Bell is an Atlanta-based writer specialising in food, wine and travel



Above: nature lovers will be captivated by the multitude of wildflowers around Virginia's Blue Ridge mountains

Virginia

WHERE TO STAY, SHOP, EAT AND RELAX
Quaint inns, fine dining, architectural treats and retail therapy

HOTELS & RESTAURANTS
Keswick Hall



Plush accommodation including a spa set amid a golf course fringed by jogging trails. This small luxury resort showcases the state's exceptional produce in the hotel's award-winning Fossett's Restaurant. www.keswick.com

The Clifton Inn



Rooms with mountain views provide a intimate setting for a romantic escape. Make sure you find time to savour a fine meal at the restaurant - the best seats are at the Chef's Counter where you'll be right in the heart of the action. www.cliftoninn.net

Below: the University of Virginia, designed by Thomas Jefferson, is well worth a visit



Inn at Mount Vernon Farm

This lovingly restored turn-of-the-century home is on a hillside overlooking the sustainable farm. Before fly fishing on the private riverfront, enjoy breakfast made from farm produce. www.theinnatmountvernonfarm.com

Blue Rock Inn

Farm-to-table dining with a Provençal twist in a turn-of-the-century farmhouse. The four guestrooms are lovely for a night or two. www.thebluerockinn.com

Inn at Little Washington

The area's only Forbes 5-Star lodging and dining boasts a raft of accolades including a place in the *International Herald Tribune's* 'Top 10 Restaurants in the World'. Playful twists on luxury defines this countryside gem. www.theinnatlittlewashington.com

SHOPS
Market Street Wine



Charlottesville's oldest wine shop boasts a large selection of Virginian wines complemented by fresh pastas, and local breads and cheeses. There's also an artisan beer selection and wine accessories. www.marketstreetwine.com

The Virginia Shop

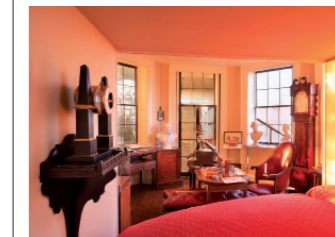
This purveyor of everything Virginian has it all, including local jams, coffees and chocolates. The wine selection represents Virginia well, and you can pick up a locally crafted souvenir from the Jefferson Brass Company. www.thevashop.net

Historic Downtown Mall



This is not a typical American mall, but rather an outdoor pedestrian shopping experience complete with antique shops, booksellers, clothing boutiques, live music, cafes and wine bars. www.charlottesville.org

TOURIST TRAIL



Monticello

Thomas Jefferson's home is a rewarding visit for its architectural features and the intimate peek it provides into the life of a great US president. You could easily spend three hours here, so plan accordingly. www.monticello.org

Montpelier

The estate of President James Madison - the Father of the Constitution. Tour, walk the gardens and forest trails, visit the archaeological sites or bring a picnic lunch and enjoy the views. www.montpelier.org

University of Virginia

One of Jefferson's greatest architectural achievements, embodying his vision for academics and learning. Daily tours of the beautiful grounds include visits to the Rotunda, Academical Village and Pavilion Gardens. www.virginia.edu

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