

AMERICA'S WINE REVOLUTION

Beyond Napa, Washington and Oregon, an undiscovered world is emerging from the fine wine corners of the United States that until now have been hidden in the shadows, writes JAMES SUCKLING

When Asian wine collectors – and, indeed, those in the rest of the world – think about American wine, the focus is almost entirely on the West Coast. Producers from Napa Valley, mainly, but also the states of Oregon and Washington dominate not just the thinking, but the buying too. Collectors and wine lovers battle for big names like Screaming Eagle, Harlan, Colgin, Schrader, Dominus Estate (California/Napa Valley), Nicolas Jay (Oregon), and B.Leighton (Washington), neglecting other high-quality wineries around the country.

The truth is that wine is produced in all the states of the Union. For example, Colorado may seem like an extremely unlikely place to make wine, but the state has 198 wineries and many outstanding quality wines exist.

The JamesSuckling.com tasting team looked at wines from top producers in the west (Idaho, Colorado, Arizona, New Mexico and Texas), the east (North Carolina, Virginia, Maryland, Pennsylvania, New York and New

Jersey) and the centre (Ohio, Michigan and Missouri) while tasting nearly 900 bottles, documenting not just quality but also the remarkable stylistic and varietal diversity that's emerging across America. Many of these wineries are revolutionising their winemaking to make truly excellent bottles that are often a fraction of the price of the bigger names from the West Coast.

Our top-scoring dry white was the 2016 The Knoll, a rich and highly structured dry Riesling from Red Newt on the east bank of Seneca Lake in the Finger Lakes region of New York that we rated 96 points. We compare it to the legendary white of Alsace, Trimbach Clos Ste Hune. The difference is that Clos Ste Hune retails for about US\$175 and The Knoll costs just US\$40.

And to give a sense of the pioneering creativity going on in these wineries, Red Newt owns no vines. The Knoll comes from a single block at Lahoma Vineyards on Seneca Lake planted in 2008.

“The dedication of grape growers like Harlan and



RDV VINEYARDS

INSIDE THE FERMENTATION ROOM
AT VIRGINIA'S RDV VINEYARDS



FROM LEFT: THE RDV WINERY IN DELAPLANE, VIRGINIA; A BLIND-TASTING SESSION; THE ROAD TO BARBOURSVILLE VINEYARDS IN VIRGINIA



white in the Finger Lakes in 2017 from the Rkatsiteli grape, a native of Georgia in the Caucasus Mountains, that rated 93 points. In the same year, Galen Glen made a dry Grüner Veltliner – the signature grape of Austria – in the Lehigh Valley of Pennsylvania that’s brimming with yellow melon and peach aromas and that rated 92. We also loved the vibrant red that Red Fox made in the Grand Valley, Colorado from the Teroldego grape of northeastern Italy in 2016. It has a ton of wild berry character and rated 91 points. This complex picture is another reason why these wines are underreported.

So yes, the wines of the American West Coast are great and will command attention. But the adventurous spirit and collegiate camaraderie of winemakers elsewhere is seeing them emerge from the shadows, with bottles exploring new ideas and priced attractively. **W**

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Kenny Fulkerson of Lahoma Vineyards is the foundation of everything we do,” says Kelby Russell, winemaker at Red Newt. “Whether from working harvests in Tasmania and the Barossa Valley in Australia or from visits to colleagues in Germany and Alsace, the joy for me is in connecting the winemaking ideas to meet the high standards we have for each vineyard site.” That combination enabled him to develop a radically new style of dry Riesling in the Finger Lakes.

Our top red wine, the 2016 Lost Mountain from RdV in Delaplane, Virginia, also rated 96. It’s much more expensive, at US\$150, but this Cabernet Sauvignon-based blend has a stunning combination of concentration and fine-grained tannins. If you find some cult California Cabernets a bit too heavy, then you should find Lost Mountain more than exciting. It has the fruit purity of Napa with the finesse and structure of Bordeaux.

Rutger de Vink, owner at RdV, was a platoon commander in the US Marines until 1996. “The Marine Corps wasn’t a job for me but a way of life, and I wanted to find that feeling again,” he says. “So in 2001 I worked the harvest at Linden Vineyards in Northern Virginia and I fell in love with working in the vineyard. After a three-year search I bought the land in Delaplane and started RdV in 2004.”

Beyond these magical bottles, we found dozens of other outstanding white, sparkling and red wines with outstanding quality and most sell for between US\$15 and US\$40 a

bottle. Tasting the American wine revolution doesn’t have to cost a fortune.

The idea of American wine from places other than California, Washington State and Oregon is exciting. It illustrates America’s pioneering spirit as well as the trend for authentic food and gastronomic experiences from heirloom vegetables to craft beer.

Not coincidentally, our tasting also showed the power of *terroir*. The highest ratings went to wines from producers who let their vineyards speak. This represents a sea change in American regional wines over the last few decades. Gone are the days of modest goals, no longer are “standard” and recognisable varietal flavours – sometimes created rather than grown from haphazardly selected sites – de rigueur.

The best producers across America know their sites and plant genetics as never before. And they don’t limit themselves to conventional wisdom about what to grow.

The diversity of these American wines reflects the vast climatic and geological range across America. It’s a wine continent, just like Australia or Europe. On top of that, dozens of grape varieties are cultivated, many of which have a great significance in just a couple of locations.

For example, Dr Konstantin Frank made a striking dry

OUTLANDISH AMERICANS

JAMES SUCKLING’S FIVE RECOMMENDED “ALTERNATIVE” AMERICAN WINES



**RDV VINEYARDS VIRGINIA
LOST MOUNTAIN 2016**
SCORE: 96

This is a tight and linear red with very fine tannins and beautiful subtlety and finesse. Full-bodied and very sophisticated. Energetic acidity. Precise and focused. Extremely finely crafted and subtle. A blend of 97 percent Cabernet Sauvignon and 3 percent Merlot.



**RED NEWT CELLARS
RIESLING FINGER LAKES
THE KNOLL 2016**
SCORE: 96

Intense aromas of honey, white peaches, green mangoes and limes, leading to a palate that has a succulent, deeply flavoursome core of limes and grapefruit. The acidity balance is scintillatingly precise and the overall impression is seamless. Amazing fruit intensity here. Drink now.



**ANTHONY ROAD
RIESLING FINGER LAKES
DRY 2017**
SCORE: 95

Very impressive limes, grapefruit and tangerines with a pristine, fragrant edge. The palate has exceptional length and balance with terrific concentration of lime and lemon flavour. Explosive mineral depth. Wow! Drink now.



**BARBOURSVILLE
VINEYARDS VIRGINIA
OCTAGON 2016**
SCORE: 95

A linear and tight red with currant, spice, walnut and sweet-tobacco character. Full-bodied, refined and polished. Very driven and pretty. Lovely length. Excellent potential. Wait until 2021.



**ROANOKE VINEYARDS
CABERNET SAUVIGNON
NORTH FORK OF LONG
ISLAND STRIKING
DISTANCE 2015**
SCORE: 95

A seriously elegant Cabernet Sauvignon that proves this grape is capable of greatness on Long Island, given the right vintage and an uncompromising commitment to quality. Stunning concentration and seamless balance through the very long, poised finish. Drink or hold.