

# SommelierINDIA

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# WINE

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## MAGAZINE

## The Great Indian Wine Tasting

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# REALISING JEFFERSON'S WINE VISION

What Thomas Jefferson dreamt of for Virginia's vineyards is now coming true. **Michèle Shah** takes a look at the prospects for wine from Virginia

Thomas Jefferson's support for the establishment of an American wine industry and his attempts to grow *vitis vinifera* grapes at Monticello have led him to be described as America's "first distinguished viticulturist" and "the greatest patron of winegrowing that this country has yet had." He believed that wines could be made in Virginia that would rival the best in the world. While Jefferson was not successful in his day, he serves as the first advocate of Virginia's current burgeoning wine industry, the first grapes having been planted at Monticello as early as 1774.

One of the most successful and pioneering wineries in Virginia, which has testified to the success of quality-driven Virginia wine is Barboursville Vineyards, nestled within sight of the Blue Ridge Mountains. Spread over more than 800 acres and owned by the Zonin family of Italy, it is also the site of the ruins of the home of James Barbour, designed by Thomas Jefferson, who was his friend.

Luca Paschina, general manager and winemaker of Barboursville Vineyards since 1990, is one of the pioneer winemakers whose passion and expertise have contributed to putting Virginia on the map as an emerging wine region with a sense of history, and viticulture which is linked to old-world varietals and styles.

The best grape varietals found in Virginia are Cabernet Franc, Petit Verdot and Viognier. Among the international plantings, Chardonnay and Merlot constitute the highest acreage, while Syrah, Cabernet Sauvignon, Pinot Noir,



Left: The Barboursville vineyards in the foreground of the Blue Ridge Mountains. Inset: Thomas Jefferson's house at Monticello where he planned to grow *vitis vinifera* grapes



Malbec, Tannat, Petit Manseng, Pinot Gris, Riesling and Sauvignon Blanc are produced in minor quantities. From the old world, varietals such as Nebbiolo can rival the best from Italy in quality, but not enough is grown in Virginia to be of much significance. Virginia also boasts a number of indigenous varietals such as Norton, Concord and Niagara, in addition to hybrids of which Vidal Blanc, Chambourcin and Traminette are the most popular.

Virginia is bounded by the Blue Ridge Mountains to the west and the Atlantic Ocean and Chesapeake Bay to the east, showing minor regional differences. Yet, possibly, the most difficult condition that the grape growers have to work with is the climate. Humidity can be quite high and will differ from West to Central to East Virginia. Typically, harvest is up to two weeks earlier in the southern part of the state.

Though the history of winemaking in Virginia dates back approximately 400 years to the time of the colonial settlers, it is only in the last decade that Virginia's wine scene has grown by leaps and bounds, in part thanks to the enthusiastic support of Virginia's governor, Bob McDonnell, and the First Lady of Virginia, Maureen McDonnell, to develop wine as a "new" industry. In 2007, there were approximately 130 wineries throughout the state; now there are over 200 – a 54% growth over five years.

Over the last 20 years Paschina has witnessed the steady progress of wineries, built on constantly expanding, shared knowledge. Some wineries, like The Boxwood Winery, have retained well-known Bordeaux winemakers such as Stéphane Derenoncourt (who is also wine consultant to Alpine Winery in Bangalore). King Family Vineyards works with Matthieu Finot, the resident winemaker from Crozes-Hermitage. "Wineries have sprouted up everywhere in the state. Some have been successful and a few have gone out of business; what we need is time and experience, and the benefit of shared knowledge and experiences," says Paschina. "We are living in exciting viticultural times here in Virginia with a tremendous drive around wine and food." Richmond, the state capital of Virginia, has become a major restaurant city. In fact, it is second after San Francisco.

"Fifteen years ago, there were just a couple of decent restaurants. Today there are nine hundred," says Bartholomew Broadbent (the son of *Decanter's* veteran columnist, Michael Broadbent MW) who has his own distributorship of Virginia wines, Broadbent Selections. "The Jefferson Hotel's renovation



Luca Paschina, general manager and winemaker, Barboursville vineyards

of Lemaire Restaurant was a catalyst," he says. The trend of fine dining is, as Broadbent says, a catalyst to fine drinking.

#### THE HISTORY OF WINEMAKING IN VIRGINIA DATES BACK APPROXIMATELY 400 YEARS TO THE TIME OF THE COLONIAL SETTLERS

Christopher Parker, founder and managing director of New Horizon Wines from London, has over the past 25 years made Virginia his home and today exports Virginia's wines to the UK. So impressed was he with the best wines produced in Virginia that he decided to introduce them to the UK and open the door to international recognition for them. Says Parker, "I have had the opportunity over the years to taste many wines of Virginia and have selected – based not on one or two good vintages, but on consistent winemaking – the styles that are appreciated in the UK and other European countries. I believe the work of Virginia winemakers over the last 35 to 40 years has established a strong foundation upon which the industry is growing. This is the compelling story behind the label."

Consistency in quality is what the market needs to attract



Above: Barboursville cellar with its acclaimed Octagon wine ageing in barrels. Left: Wine from Church Creek, Flying Fox and Williamsburg wineries

#### Virginia wine industry snapshot

- Number of wineries: 200
- Number of grape growers: 386
- Cases of wine produced: 439,500
- Grape bearing acres: 2,700
- Retail value of wine sold: \$ 73 million
- For more information visit [www.virginiawine.org/](http://www.virginiawine.org/) and [www.virginia.org/](http://www.virginia.org/)

#### Michèle's selection of Virginia Wines REDS

- King Family Vineyards 2010 Meritage (Merlot; Cabernet Franc; Petit Verdot; Malbec)
- Flying Fox Vineyards 2006 Petit Verdot
- Barboursville Vineyards 2009 Octagon (Merlot, Cabernet Franc, Cabernet Sauvignon; Petit Verdot)
- Barboursville Vineyards 2009 Petit Verdot
- Williamsburg Winery 2007 Adagio (Merlot; Petit Verdot; Cabernet Franc)
- Chatham Vineyards 2008 Church Creek Cabernet Franc (85% Cabernet Franc; 12% Merlot; 3% Petit Verdot)
- Boxwood Estate 2010 Trellis (Merlot; Cabernet Franc; Malbec)
- Boxwood Estate 2010 Topiary (Cabernet Franc; Merlot)

#### ROSÉ

- Boxwood Estate 2011 Rosé (Malbec; Cabernet Franc; Petit Verdot)

#### WHITES

- King Family Vineyards 2011 Viognier
- Jefferson Vineyards 2011 Viognier
- Chatham Vineyards 2011 Church Creek Chardonnay
- Breaux Vineyards 2010 Viognier
- Tarara 2010 Charval

#### DESSERT

- Breaux Vineyards 2010 Nebbiolo Ico



international acclaim and increase exports. For now, Virginia wines are still by and large sold on the national and regional markets. Prices, when compared to wines from other international markets are on the high side, offering poor encouragement for export, so only time will tell what the export potential is for Virginia's wines in the future.

"Balancing supply and demand will be a challenge over the next few years," says Parker. Currently Virginia's total production is approximately 5.4 million bottles, mostly sold locally.

Parker's is the first commercial venture to export Virginia wines.

There is potential for significant growth and some wineries have already planted more acreage to meet increasing demand. "We work closely with each winery to determine our plans for each

Right: 2010 Charval, Tarara winery and 2010 Meritage from King Family vineyards



## Q&A with Bartholomew Broadbent, CEO Broadbent Selections, Inc

### How truly enthused are you about Virginia wines?

I moved to Virginia five years ago and my enthusiasm for its wine has been a catalyst in that we became the first company to represent a Virginia winery nationally and you can now buy Virginia wines in every state in the country. I represent Barboursville winery in every U.S. State outside of Virginia. What with the press being targeted abroad and across the nation, the world and America are waking up to Virginia simultaneously.

### What is Virginia's potential to rival Napa?

Why would they want to? Napa has gone away from their grassroots. Napa is making a style of wine which, with the exception of a few, is not internationally acclaimed. Virginia should strive to rival Sonoma, Oregon or Washington. However, more than any of those states, Virginia is capable of making wine that is loved by the English palate, loved by east coast drinkers of European wine and loved by those who yearn for the Napa wines of the 1970s and 1980s. They can do it.

year," explains Parker who has received enquiries from Germany, France, Sweden, Belgium, and Denmark and is now delivering wines to customers in most of these countries.

Promotional activity is at the centre of Virginia's marketing strategy. Recently, the Virginia Wine Summit was held on October 2, 2012, and the internationally acclaimed British wine authority and *Sommelier India* columnist, Steven Spurrier, was the keynote speaker. During his presentation, Spurrier lauded Virginia's wine industry and said that Virginia is now solidly competing in the global wine market. The Summit involved a comparative blind tasting of seven Virginia wines against top wines from other globally recognized wine regions. The tasting included Viognier, Cabernet Franc, a Bordeaux blend, Petit Verdot, Cabernet Sauvignon, Nebbiolo and Touriga Nacional. Spurrier concluded his overview of the Virginia wine industry with the following remarks: "Before coming out here, I knew already that Virginia could stand tall for the product. But in just three days I now know that the place and the people fit perfectly into the equation and that Virginia stands tall on all three and will continue to do so for the foreseeable future." ♦

### What is Virginia's potential to increase exports and engage with the export market?

The quality of Virginia wine is being recognized and there is no reason why, given time, the State won't rival Oregon and Washington. Given the ease of communication now, its image and reputation will be broadcast much faster and it will catch up faster than if we had been in an age prior to Twitter.

### Do you think Bordeaux blends are the better way forward rather than mono-varietal bottlings?

Bordeaux blends are fantastic, as judged in the Virginia Wine Summit. But as Argentina is to Malbec, and New Zealand is to Sauvignon Blanc, so Virginia needs to concentrate on Petit Verdot, Cabernet Franc and Viognier.

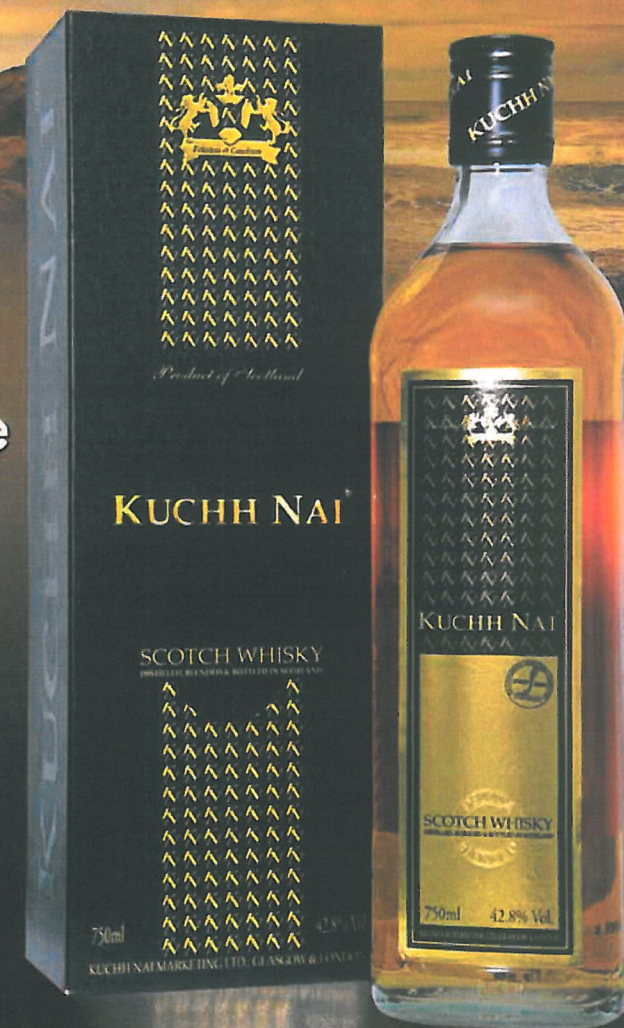
### Which would be your preferred estates?

Barboursville is leagues ahead of the crowd. They make great wines some years and good wines every year. Other wineries occasionally make great wines but they have not yet achieved consistency.

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