

TRAVEL + LEISURE

American Vintage

After years of being in the shadows, Virginia's winemakers are finally getting the attention they deserve.

IF SOMEONE SHOUTED "Virginia" in the middle of a word-association game, "fine wine" might not be your first response. Even some of the state's winemakers confessed to me that they had, in the past, found many Virginian wines forgettable—or, in some cases, undrinkable. Oh, how times have changed.

Being an underestimated wine region for so many years has turned out to be one of Virginia's superpowers. If all eyes have been focused on Napa Valley or the Bordeaux region of France, Virginia's wines land somewhere in the middle, geographically and stylistically. Young winemakers, especially, have been expanding their knowledge and skills and creating an identity found only there.

The industry's growth is astounding: in the mid 1990s, there were about 50 wineries in Virginia; there are now around 300, with more than 4,000 acres under cultivation. Wine contributes more than \$1.7 billion to the state's economy, not only from sales but also from visitor experiences at wineries, hotels, and restaurants. I wanted to find out if the Virginia wine story was about more than just quantity. We all know the slogan "Virginia Is for Lovers." But is it for wine lovers?



1. Linden
2. Early Mountain
3. Boxwood Estate
4. Early Mountain
5. Barboursville
6. Michael Shaps
7. Veritas



I BEGAN MY journey just about a mile down the road at **Boxwood Estate Winery**. John Kent Cooke, former owner and president of Washington, D.C.'s NFL team, has always had a love for Bordeaux, so at his estate, 26 acres are planted with Merlot, Cabernet Sauvignon, Sauvignon Blanc, and other Bordelais varieties. In partnership with French wine consultant Stéphane Derenoncourt, the Boxwood team has created a crisp Sauvignon Blanc, as well as its locally known Topiary blend of Cabernet Franc, Merlot, and Petit Verdot—all varieties that express the terroir of Virginia.

