

## Great Road Trips: Virginia Wineries Worth Visiting

*Veritas and Barboursville offer tasty wines, lush settings*

By Teresa Tobat

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Virginia's Veritas Winery has been pouring award-winning wines since 2002. Veritas is at the forefront of Virginia's growing wine scene.

In the past few years, Virginia wine has really taken off. The state is the fifth largest wine-producing state and is home to more than 200 wineries. Although that number may seem small, when you consider that there were only six in the entire state in 1979, that's a pretty big jump. To bring added awareness to Virginia's contribution to the nation's wine scene, the Virginia Wine Board held the Virginia Wine Summit on Oct. 27 and 28. After I attended the summit in the state capital of Richmond, the Virginia Wine Board took a handful of people to visit two of the state's top wineries, Barboursville and Veritas.

About one-hour-and-a-half from Richmond, Barboursville is a former plantation that overlooks Virginia's gorgeous Piedmont region. The winery even has its own outdoor deck so you can soak up the lush scenery while you eat outside. Inside, the tasting room is outfitted almost entirely in wood and comes complete with soft, rustic lighting. But the highlight here is the on-site restaurant Palladio. That afternoon, I enjoyed dishes prepared by a chef who's been invited three times to cook at the prestigious James Beard House alongside wines from the vineyard.

Before the beginning of each course, the chef would discuss what plants she had just pulled from the garden to give each plate a true "farm-to-table" feel. For starters, the bread basket was even worth mentioning. I especially enjoyed the charred flatbread with fresh olive oil. Our meal officially began with a fresh bowl of pasta topped with shrimp and tomatoes. The noteworthy sauce was creamy, but not too heavy. Next, we moved on to a tasty beef plate that looked like a work of art. The just-tender-enough beef was splashed with red sauce that brought out the succulence of the meat. According to a tweet the winery sent me, the head chef is a Miro fan. And it shows.

The last course was a humble cheese and honey plate. The star of that dish was the dessert wine, which tasted like "electrified honey," to quote another dinner guest. I usually despise dessert wines (too cloying and syrupy), but this one was sweet without overdoing it. It made the perfect pairing.

Next we headed to Veritas (about a 30-minute drive from Charlottesville, Va.), another winery with a picture-perfect setting. The wrap-around porch attached to the tasting room comes complete with tables and even fireplaces so you can stay warm outside when the temperatures drop. And the view is just awe-inspiring. It looks like a scene out of a novel about living in the country — rocking chairs included, thank you. Plus, you can't go wrong with the Blue Ridge Mountains as a backdrop. One couple we saw even appeared to be having their engagement shots taken here — it's that kind of place. The centerpiece of the lobby is even the word "love" spelled out in corks (see photo above).

After a few sips in the tasting room, our tour guide told us more about the process of winemaking. She showed us where the grapes are crushed and took us downstairs where the wine is stored. She explained the science behind creating wine and even had us try "lees," dead yeast cells that are a byproduct of winemaking. Lees are sometimes used to help give wine its texture. This was evident when our tour guide poured us wine aged at different stages to showcase how the lees appear less and less prominently as the wine ages. My personal favorite at Veritas was its full-bodied and almost-spicy cab franc.

Although overshadowed by California wine, Virginia has a tremendous amount to contribute to the national wine scene. I started drinking wine in Italy and for years considered myself an Old World wine snob. But my opinions have since changed. No, Virginia wine doesn't taste like what you'd find in Europe. It has its own distinct flavor. But that doesn't mean it's not as good. Not to mention, it's one of the prettiest states (excuse my Virginia-native bias, please). If you're an oenophile traveling through Virginia wine country, check your biases at the door, and visit Veritas and Barboursville. You won't be disappointed. I promise.