



For a New Taste of the Old World,

GET THEE TO A MEADERY... OR CIDERY

by Linda Barrett

Virginia's wine culture is growing by leaps and bounds, and with the publication of the 2013 Virginia Winery Guide, there are two new categories: Meaderies and Cideries. According to the ABC Board, both fall under the broad category of "Virginia farm wineries."

"We're proud to have both mead and cider under the Virginia wine umbrella," says Annette Boyd, director of the Virginia Wine Board. "Each has a unique offering, like craft beers, and is providing some really unique, high-caliber products that are worth exploring."

So, let's explore them.

Mead

The first time I heard about mead was in the epic poem *Beowulf*. The second time was in Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*. This time I got to taste it myself at one of Virginia's own meaderies. Mead is one of those "interesting-to-taste" items that is fun to compare.

Mead, or honey wine, is one of oldest-known fermented beverages and is created from the fermentation of honey. The kind and quality of the honey determine the final taste, and its alcoholic content may range from about eight to 18 percent.

"Traditional mead is just fermented honey," explains Colonel Locklear, owner and meadmaker at **Stonehouse Meadery** in Purcellville (opening Summer 2013), who has been raising his own honeybees for the past seven years. "Different mead flavors depend on the type of honey you're using. You get different flavors from clover, orange blossom, mango blossom, mesquite and other honeys." Honeys he harvests from his Virginia property include clover, wildflower, and special crop honeys.

There are other ways of flavoring mead as well. Mead that contains spices or herbs (cloves or lavender, for example) is called a **metheglin**. A mead containing fruit (raspberries, blackberries, etc.) is called a **melomel**. And mead fermented with grape juice is called a **pyment**.

Locklear's mead is fermented in the traditional way wine is made. "It is oak-flavored and processed the same way as if I were making a chardonnay or cabernet and can be dry, medium dry, medium sweet, or sweet." The meadmaker begins tasting anywhere from six to eight months in the second fermentation and expects the final product to come out of the barrel in approximately ten to 12 months.

He will premier five meads which will average in the 11.5 to 12.5 alcohol percentage range when he opens his tasting room this summer.

As with wine, mead pairs nicely with foods. It goes best with lighter foods like chicken, seafood, pork, and anything made with honey. Locklear recommends serving traditional mead chilled and sweet meads, like dessert wines, not chilled.

Mead also holds a place throughout history. It originated in diverse cultures in Europe, Africa, and Asia, and, in fact, the term "honeymoon" originates from mead. In Medieval times, a newly-married couple was given mead and encouraged to drink a glass every night for the first month (or moon cycle) of their marriage. If the wife became pregnant and bore a son, the mead maker was congratulated for his fine brew and held in high esteem throughout the community. Thus, the honey-moon.

Another positive aspect of mead-making is the preservation of bees. Bees are so vital to our natural cycle of plant life in the world that we want to encourage their well-being. Preserving lands for the raising of bees can help them come back and stay healthy.

Cider

"200 years ago, there were probably 75 cider varieties in the U.S.," Boyd says. "You have to remember that people were unsure of the caliber of the drinking water, and people drank wine, ciders and mead instead. They didn't know about boiling water to sanitize it, and the alcohol content in these beverages protected harmful bacteria from growing in it and acted as a preservative."

Cider was once one of the three most common alcoholic beverages in our country, along with beer and wine, but it has faded from our culture until recently. Back in the beginnings of our country, people ate what they grew, and apples in Virginia were plentiful, so in Colonial America, fermented cider was the drink of choice. President John Adams attributed his health and long life to a tankard of cider that he drank before breakfast, and Thomas Jefferson was famous for his champagne-like cider created from the Virginia Hewe's crab apple.

As the grapes used for making jams and jellies are not the same ones used for making wine, the best apples for creating cider may not be the best eating apples. Cider makers look for tannins and high acidity in apples like the Pippin or crabapple to make the finest cider. In apples, sugar levels are about half that of grapes, so when they are fermented, their alcohol levels are about half. Ciders generally contain approximately five to seven percent alcohol.

Again, the process reflects winemaking. "The press differs because apples need to be ground, but once the juice is in the tank, the process is virtually identical," explains Charlotte Shelton, principal at **Albemarle CiderWorks** in North Garden (near Charlottesville).

"Any fruit juice is sweet off the press, but in fermentation the yeast eats the sugars," Shelton continues. "Our ciders are quite dry, crisp, sparkling, and food-friendly. They are superb with American cuisine, cheese, and seafood and offer sweet and fruity refreshment."

"They also contain higher alcohol and have a rounder mouth feel than the sweet commercial ciders. We pay the same attention to tannins and the balancing of acidity and sweetness as one would in a fine wine."

Opened in 2009, Albemarle CiderWorks began from an interest in collecting and preserving heirloom apple trees. They now have about 250 varieties of apples and are one of the few sources for heirloom apple trees in the U.S.

"Cider is such a hot topic now," adds Boyd. "I read recently that within five years, cider could become five percent of the beer market." And what people may not know is that all cider is hard. There is no such thing as a non-hard cider, that "hard cider" was a term created during prohibition in the U.S., she adds. To everyone else in the world "cider" is fermented apple juice.

With over 230 wineries, 25 wine trails and nine winemaking regions, visiting wineries is a popular weekend activity throughout Virginia. Be sure to add meaderies and cideries to your "must stop" picks for a delightful new experience. Judge the quality of our home-grown products for yourself by using the same tasting notes as with wine: appearance, aroma, flavor, and overall quality.

So there you have it. Two more great reasons to hit the trails outlined in the 2013 Virginia Wine Guide.

Meaderies

Blacksnake Meadery (Blue Ridge)

605 Buffalo Road
Dugspur, VA 24325
www.blacksnakemead.com

Misty Mountain Meadworks (Shenandoah Valley)

1531 Pack Horse Road
Winchester, VA 22603
www.mistymountainmead.com

Stonehouse Meadery (Northern VA)

36580 Shoemaker School Road
Purcellville, VA 20132
www.stonehousemeadery.com

White Oak Mountain Meadery (Southern VA)

455 East Store Lane
Chatham, VA 24531
www.whiteoakmead.com

Cideries

Albemarle CiderWorks (Central VA)

2545 Rural Ridge Lane
North Garden, VA 22959
www.albemarlecederworks.com

Blue Bee Cider (Central VA)

212 W. 6th Street
Richmond, VA 23224
www.bluebeecider.com

Bold Rock Cider (Central VA)

1020 Rockfish Valley Highway
Nellysford, VA 22958
www.boldrock.com

Castle Hill Cider (Central VA)

6065 Turkey Sag Road
Keswick, VA 22947
www.castlehillcider.com

Foggy Ridge Cider (Blue Ridge)

1328 Pineview Road
Dugspur, VA 24325
www.foggyridgecider.com

Old Hill Cider (Shenandoah Valley)

17768 Honeyville Road
Timberville, VA 22853
www.oldhillcider.com

Potter's Craft Cider (Central VA)

4699 Catterton Road
Free Union, VA 22940
www.potterscraftcider.com