

California, Washington and Oregon might be leading the charge, but they are not the only US states capitalising on wine production.

**David Furer** investigates the lesser-known American wine regions worthy of attention

# DIFFERING STATES

It's been just over a decade since North Dakota, the final state to host a winery, joined the party, adding to the substantial growth of many states' wine tourism and consequent direct consumer sales. California's primacy remains constant, though its share of US production continues to slide from what 20 years ago constituted 95% to approximately 89%. "State-riotic" has been the catchphrase, with many states reaping not only the direct tax and labour revenues generated by this agricultural engine, but also the ancillary economic benefits associated with wine production – such as tourism and gastronomy. Here is just a small sample of what is going on Stateside.

↑ NEW YORK  
STATE'S FINGER  
LAKES WAS  
RECENTLY NAMED  
AMERICA'S NUMBER  
ONE WINE REGION  
BY USA TODAY

## ► NEW YORK

In promoting it as the world's finest region for cool- and cold-climate viticulture, the New York Wine and Grape Foundation's new executive director Sam Filler asserted 2017's harvest was a record year for quantity and quality, confirming the Empire State's position as the US's third largest in production. However, 2018 had a wetter than normal growing season with warmer night temperatures bringing increased humidity, which was a contributing factor to both noble and sour rot, leading to both average quality and quantity.

"Due to the wide array of wine styles and 17 vinifera varieties we work with, harvest is a marathon, not a sprint," says general manager Meaghan Frank of her family's Dr Konstantin Frank winery. Riesling has long been its focus, although it also receives attention for Rkatsiteli and Saperavi, a nod to its Ukrainian ancestry. In September, USA Today ranked it as one of the 10 Best Tasting Rooms in America, hailing its Finger Lakes location as America's #1 Wine Region.

Also benefiting from similar publicity are Riesling-focused wineries on opposite sides of Seneca Lake. On its north west side, Franken-born Johannes Reinhardt studiously applies himself to 2.5ha of Riesling and Pinot Blanc at Kemmeter, across the road from his friends and one-time employer at Anthony Road. Ryan William, of his namesake operation on the lake's south east side, is a bit more expansive at 16ha of vines, with many more hosting his naturally raised Angus cattle.

While Riesling rules in the Finger Lakes, a third each of grapes planted upon coastal Long Island are Merlot and Chardonnay. The former president of the Long Island Wine Council, Charles Massoud of Paumanok Vineyards (which in July acquired the Palmer estate), sees the necessity to publicise its newfound heterogeneity and maturity.

"Marketing has vastly improved and we benefit from working with Cornell College rather than looking to California for guidance," he says.

Methoxypyrazines in Bordeaux varieties which plagued Long Island during the boom of the 1990s have been drastically reduced from applied research done upon leaf removal and irrigation timing.

Merlot and Chardonnay may rule the roost, but others apply hope to the likes of Albariño (Palmer), Teroldego (Sannino), Tocai (Channing Daughters), Pinot Blanc and Pinot Gris (Lieb) and Grüner Veltliner (One Woman). Wölffer Estate is celebrating its 30th anniversary and marking the occasion by releasing an Amarone-style 2014 red Claretto along with a non-alcoholic rosé to add to its fast-selling line of three rosés.

New York's representation in the UK includes Dr Konstantin Frank, Fox Run Vineyards, Red Hook Winery, Forge Cellars, Nathan K Wines, and Red Newt Cellars whose Dry Riesling 2015 was chosen by Jancis Robinson to launch her wine glass collection. More UK support came at a London SITT Masterclass where Jamie Goode presented eight examples of Riesling and Cabernet Franc from the Finger Lakes and Long Island.



"Due to the wide array of wine styles, harvest is a marathon, not a sprint"

Meaghan Frank, Dr Konstantin Frank

## ► PENNSYLVANIA

Autumn 2017 was the longest stretch of dry weather Allegro Winery's Carl Helrich had seen for more than two decades. "The wines enjoyed more concentration and full tannin structure," he says. A sentiment echoed

by Sarah Rhodes-Troxell of Galen Glen Winery, who referred to 2017 as "a dream vintage in stark contrast to 2018 when most days you couldn't see your shadow".

The Riesling- and Grüner Veltliner-focused Lehigh Valley winery has seen a surge of interest from Philadelphia sommeliers and restaurant guests asking for local wines, "a phenomenon common in other parts of the US, but here in Pennsylvania it's new".

Penns Woods Winery owner Gino Razzi is an importer and distributor with 50 years' experience. When asked if Pennsylvania has a signature variety or style he says: "Not yet, though I haven't found any variety difficult to plant nor to make into good wine."

He insists viticulture practice here has to improve before Pennsylvania can know what it can do best. "There's not enough of a tradition, although I take a lot of notes and am setting up a process that will help us in a decade or so," he says. Work done by Gino and daughter Carley has paid off in their first Pinot Noir, a 2016 from three clones, garnering praise from outside commentators.

Elsewhere, fractured schist, quartz and sandy loam comprise the top six inches at Ed Lazzerini's Vox Vineti site. His 2016 Nebbiolo is macerated for three weeks in steel before being transferred to neutral French oak, with the resultant wine ripe and balanced without aggressive tannins.

## ► VIRGINIA

Luca Paschina arrived in Virginia from his native Piemonte in 1990 to oversee Zonin's US outpost of Barboursville Vineyards. As with much of the eastern US he views the 2018 vintage – characterised by a mild to warm spring with early and plentiful bud break and hampered by excessive early summer rainfall – as one of his most challenging ever. Although he is "very satisfied with the results of all the whites and some of our parcels of Merlot, Petit Verdot, Nebbiolo and Cabernet Franc", he casts doubt as to whether Barboursville's signature red blend, Octagon, will be bottled this year.

According to the Virginia Wine Board's Annette Boyd, 2017 was close to an ideal year, characterised by unusually high temperatures and lower than average precipitation throughout the year, accounting for a harvest 14% higher than average, assisted by a 9% increase in vineyard plantings over the past five years.

Having acquired the wine bug after settling in Virginia, British expat Chris Parker's objective became placing its best wines with UK speciality

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Carl Helrich, Allegro Winery



## FEATURE USA: regions

stores and on-trade with his New Horizon Wines. "We had been working in partnership with Zonin UK, eventually transferring distribution of Barboursville to them. The Brexit referendum and the subsequent drop in the exchange rate halted other negotiations, and we went into a holding pattern," he says. Since then Parker has launched the WSET-approved Virginia Wine Academy in conjunction with Veritas Winery co-owner Andrew Hodson.

This June saw the passing of Dennis Horton who, at his namesake Virginia winery, pioneered the planting of Rhône varietals in the US to the point of having the greatest planting of Viognier until it was surpassed in 1994 by California.

### ➤ MICHIGAN

The linking of locally produced beer, wine and spirits is no better defined than in Michigan, where the state government has dictated that support for all three sectors be merged into one organisation – the Michigan Craft Beverage Council. Fortunately the transition will remain seamless for the wine sector, with its long-time council director Karel Bush assuming this overarching role.

Adjacent to this is the Michigan Wine Collaborative, an industry-led organisation formed in 2016 to support wineries and growers. "Michigan's wine industry has grown to the point where it can sustain a member-based organisation," says Bush.

Comparatively successful next to its Atlantic neighbours, Mari Vineyards winemaker Sean O'Keefe considers 2018 his "Beatles White Album vintage, where I'm working with a very wide range of red and white varieties and drawing upon inspiration from winemaking styles from Collio to Yarra."

His Old Mission Peninsula AVA sites were 10-12 days ahead of normal "seeming like winter shifted straight to a hot, very dry summer, bypassing spring", which had the effect of diminishing yields by 30%-40%. Though selling most of the annual 10,000-case production directly from the winery, Mari distributes into Chicago and will soon start in Detroit, New York and Washington DC.

His winemaking neighbour is Aussie Dominic Bosch at Bonobo Winery, one of four nearby producers to make a splash at Anderson Valley's 2016 Alsace Varietal festival in California. Bonobo's Pinot Blanc is its lead medal winner, which is reflected in the 2017 vintage benefiting from what he describes as a "lightly cold summer with an early autumn warm spell giving intense flavours".



"[I am] very satisfied with the results of all the whites and some of our parcels of red [this year]"

**Luca Paschina,  
Barboursville  
Vineyards**

"I'm working with a wide range of red and white varieties, drawing on inspiration from Collio to Yarra"

**Sean O'Keefe,  
Mari Vineyards**



### ➤ NEW MEXICO

The Land of Enchantment's first national wine media tour earlier this year was a collaboration between its wineries association and its largest player by far, the sparkling wine house of Gruet. Joining winemaker Laurent Gruet as indispensable to its wine production is Luna Rossa's Paolo D'Andrea who, with his recent Udine enology graduate son Marco, supplies grapes and grafted new vines to wineries throughout the state and beyond. According to Marco his dream to make sparkling wine will soon be a reality, and Luna Rossa has bottled its first varietal Negroamaro.

With a winery, three wine bars, and a full restaurant, bar and gift shop, Jasper Riddle of Noisy Water Winery has built a mini-empire in the mountain town of Ruidoso, a popular tourist destination. With 2018 an above average year, he expects excellent Malvasia Bianca, Riesling and Ribolla Gialla for a sparkling base. In light of an anticipated 100,000 cases of production by 2020, Riddle has signed with major US distributor Republic National.

### ➤ TEXAS

With 2018's harvest experiencing an early finish due to spring and uncharacteristically high summer heat waves even for Texas, yields weren't as high as hoped. However, they are nowhere near as scant as during the string of drought vintages earlier in the decade.

With its Hill Country wineries drawing in swathes of visitors, a first-ever trade tasting in New York City of 14 Lone Star State wineries (organised by your author) and the launch of the eight-member Texas Wine Growers, wineries such as William Chris and Llano Estacado have crossed borders. These wineries are now seeing distribution in Louisiana, Chicago, California and New York, and it is estimated that Texas's wine industry is responsible for adding more than US\$13 billion to the state's economy. ■