

# sips along the way

## The Rise of Regional and Organic Wines Many Wineries Are A Day Trip Away

by Doc Lawrence

One of the most enjoyable weekend trips is a drive up through the winemaking and vineyard regions of Georgia, North Carolina and Virginia. With just a little planning ahead, you can visit some very magnificent destinations, learn a lot about the history of wine in America and in the South and taste some of the best wines in the country. Likewise, just a little smart shopping in places like Whole Foods and select retail wine stores leads to the discovery of organic wines from not only America but also other countries such as Spain.

Georgia's wine country is primarily located in the Blue Ridge Mountains, and two—**Persimmon Creek** and **Tiger Mountain**—have carved out an enviable reputation for outstanding winemaking. In August of 2000, Sonny and Mary Ann Hardman found the perfect place for a 110-acre vineyard estate, tucked amidst the tulip poplars and white pines on the gentle hillsides along the banks of the rippling Persimmon Creek. There, they set out to raise a winery unlike other local wineries. Here, the grapes are 100 percent estate-grown in the cold climate conditions of Northeast Georgia's Persimmona Creek Valley.

Sultry Seyval Blanc is an ideal cold climate grape. Persimmon Creek has perfected this grape, resulting in a masterpiece positively bursting with aroma and flavor—suggesting fresh citrus, wildflowers and an intriguing, flinty minerality—with sugars to spare and plenty of balancing acidity. The outcome is an almost perfect hot weather white wine.

John and Martha Ezzard, co-owners of acclaimed Tiger Mountain Vineyard in Rabun County, Georgia, specialize in wines from varieties of grapes suited to the climate of the southern Blue Ridge Mountains: the American Norton and the vinifera red grapes of the Loire and Rhone River valleys of France; Cabernet Franc, Malbec, Tannat, Mourvedre and the white Viognier; as well as the Portuguese Touriga Nacional and Tinta Cao.

Only 105 cases of Tiger Mountain's dynamite wine, TNT, were produced. Just released, this special wine is a rich, smooth blend of two of Tiger Mountain's most elegant and unusual wines: the Portuguese Touriga Nacional and the French Tannat, both '05 vintages, barrel aged for more than two years.

North Carolina's **Shelton Vineyards**, located in the Yadkin Valley, is approximately 200 acres in size, one of the largest on the East Coast. The location provides the ideal climate and soil conditions. Shelton Vineyards' commitment to sustainable farming practices and hands-on attention enables production of many award-winning wines. The vineyard employs sustainable, organic and environmentally friendly practices with some wonderful wines like Cabernet Franc, Cabernet Sauvignon, Chardonnay, Merlot, Pinot Noir, Petit Verdot, Riesling, Sauvignon Blanc, Syrah and Viognier.

With one of the most colorful names, **RagApple Lassic Vineyard** in Boonville, North Carolina, is just under the western gaze of Pilot Mountain (for Andy Griffith fans, this is Mount Pilot) and a modern testament to a legacy began 150 years ago when North Carolina produced more grapes than all other states combined. This



Mary Ann Hardman and husband Dr. Sonny Hardman own and manage Persimmon Creek Vineyards, nestled around lakes Burton and Rabun in the Blue Ridge Mountains of Northeast Georgia. Photo courtesy of Persimmon Creek Vineyards

beautiful river basin offers some of the finest, full-bodied, appealing wine grapes grown on the eastern seaboard. RagApple Lassic offers consistently fine wines. A visit is mandatory for those who revere the glory of the grape.

**Brushy Mountain Winery**, the fulfillment of Matthew and Ann Mayberry's dream and hard work, is located in historic Elkin, North Carolina, and a visit makes a tour of North Carolina wineries even more enlightening. A refreshing "social sipper," Booger Swamp White Wine, showcased on "The Jay Leno Show" last October, is their signature blend of Vidal Blanc and Chardonnay, with a touch of Niagara and Riesling, and is named after a local rural legend. Here's a delightful wine to enjoy on the front porch while the sun is setting.

### Emerging Organic Wines

Nearly 250 different chemicals can be found in the making of conventional wines — chemicals that are not only present in the wine itself but that also affect the soil, vines and the environment as a whole. Organic and biodynamic wines from the United States and abroad are becoming more available as consumers demand them. Both the American Culinary Federation and the National Restaurant Association recently declared that organic wine is a hot trend that is here to stay.

Organically grown grapes are increasingly being embraced by winemakers due to higher-quality grapes, healthier vines and a belief that the resulting wines are superior. One of North America's leading importers of the finest natural and organic wines is Natural Merchants, whose program highlights more than 150 wines from Spain, Italy, Austria, France and Portugal, grown in unique organic *terroir*. The portfolio of organic wines, in-

cluding magnificent Tarantos from Spain, can be found in Whole Foods, Trader Joe's and other stores in the Charleston area.

The Tarantas brand name was inspired by the free-flowing, open art form of Flamenco song and dance of the same name, celebrated in Southeast Spain. **Tarantas Organic**, red and rose, is produced by Bodegas Iranzo, Spain's oldest estate bottled winery, by renowned winemaker Paco Galbardón, Professor of Enology at Spain's oldest School of Enology. Tarantas has enjoyed tremendous success over the past few years with Whole Foods, earning the distinction as one of the chain's best-selling overall wines.

The wines from North Carolina, Georgia and Spain pair nicely with the cuisine of South Carolina's Lowcountry. Pouring any of these for guests is a sure bet to start some interesting conversation. Wine enthusiasts love to be introduced to new enjoyment.



Tiger Mountain partners/owners sample the inventory at their renowned North Georgia winery sipping and toasting in the Tiger Mountain Vineyards barrel room. Left to right, Bill and Ledie Stock and Martha and John Ezzard. Photo courtesy of Tiger Mountain Vineyards

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