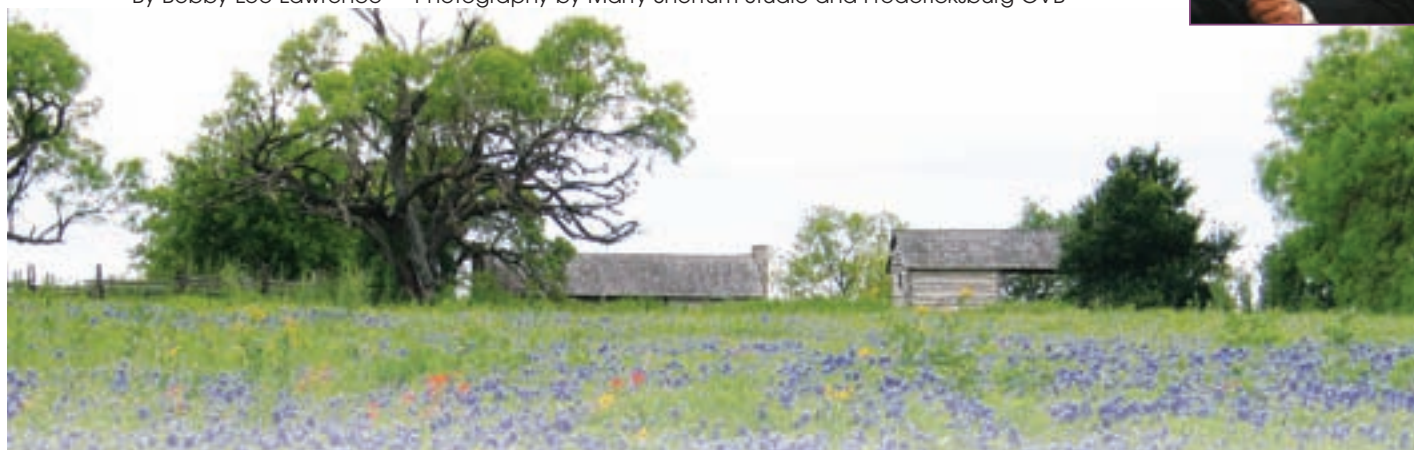


## WINE CONNOISSEUR

# TEXAS WINES BIGGER & BETTER!

By Bobby Lee Lawrence    Photography by Marty Shortum Studio and Fredericksburg CVB



**W**e all know Texans brag that everything's bigger in Texas, and they may not be exaggerating when it comes to their burgeoning wine industry. Texas is now the fifth largest wine producer in the country; last year they produced over 1.5 million gallons, most of which was consumed in Texas. To put this in perspective, California still produces almost 90 percent of the wine consumed in the U.S.

I recently attended a wine seminar in Dallas at the annual convention of the IACP (International Association of Culinary Professionals) hosted by Wes Marshall. Wes is a fifth generation Texan and a wine writer for *The Austin Chronicle*. The seminar included nine of the top winemakers in Texas. During the seminar, we blind tasted nine different wines, one from each winemaker's vineyard and previously selected by Wes; even the winemakers on the panel were not told in advance which wine was which. As each winemaker evaluated the wines, it was apparent that the overall quality was world class. It was interesting that only one winemaker selected his own wine as the best. This confirms what I have always maintained - everyone's taste is different.

Having access to the "horse's mouth", so to speak, was a great opportunity to get the real skinny on what was going on in the Texas Wine industry. I learned that one of the main issues driving industry growth in the state is the recent court ruling allowing additional interstate shipping of wine; as more consumers in an ever-widening area have access to the wines, the demand increases. New wineries are opening annually as the expertise in growing grapes and producing wine advances. Texas currently grows many of the red varietals including: Pinot Noir, Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, Zinfandel, Sangiovese and Syrah. In the white grape varietals, Chardonnay, Riesling, Muscat Canelli, Sauvignon Blanc, and even Viognier, are planted as well.

There are currently sixty producing wineries in Texas. The most picturesque wine producing area is referred to as The Texas Hill Country. Texans will tell you it's as close to paradise



as you can get. The climate, soil and pleasant surroundings set the scene for producing some great wines. Most of the wineries are clustered west of Austin and north of Dallas/Forth Worth. This is a wonderful region for visiting wineries, but keep in mind that a tour of this area will take some time, so plan well and enjoy!

One of my personal favorites is Alamosa Wine Cellars, located on County Road 430 in Bend, Texas between San Saba and Lampasas. The winemaker is Jim Johnson. He is an honor graduate of the University of California at Davis and his résumé includes experience at St. Francis and Heitz wineries in California. He left California and returned to Texas to become the winemaker at Becker Vineyards, all the while searching for land to start a new vineyard. Now, under his own flag, Jim has created some of the most respected wines in Texas, most notable is his "El Guapo" (loosely translated it means "Handsome Man"), a blend of Tempranillo, Cabernet and Garnacha. Loaded with tannins, it pairs nicely with any of the classical Mexican dishes.

Speaking of Becker, travel a little south and visit their vineyard, located between Fredericksburg and Johnston City in Stonewall. Richard and Bunny Becker had the honor of having their wine served at a White House dinner when President



Bush hosted Russian President Vladimir Putin. I have personally tasted what I consider one of Becker's best offerings, Viognier. The Viognier was very aromatic with flavors of peaches and pears. It may rank as one of the best wines made in Texas. While you are there, sample their Cabernet Sauvignon Reserve, Estate Bottled. It is outstanding, with flavors of chocolate, dried cherries and coffee. Because it is 92 percent Cabernet, it has true varietal flavors and a smooth finish. Serve this with your next steak or roast for an almost perfect pairing.

Staying in the neighborhood, travel to Driftwood Vineyards, located on Ranch Road 12 in Driftwood. Here, winemaker Gary Elliot is an example of what hard work and a belief that good fruit will result in good wine can achieve. Gary, previously a grape grower selling his grapes to Becker and Dry Comal wineries, decided to produce his own wines - this turned out to be a good decision. Of the eight varietal wines Gary currently offers, the Chardonnay stands out as his finest. Unlike some of the heavily oaked California Chardonnays, this one is fresh and fruity with a buttery finish; though dry, even sweet wine lovers will enjoy it.

The largest wine producer in Texas is not located in the Hill Country, but closer to El Paso and eastern New Mexico. St. Genevieve's Vineyards stretch across 1,000 acres in the Fort Stockton area. They have been producing wine since 1987 and recently released an award-winning Cabernet Sauvignon, Peregrine Hill. Visit their Web site at: [www.texaswinetrails.com/gen.htm](http://www.texaswinetrails.com/gen.htm).

Here are a couple of events you might consider if you plan to travel to the Texas Hill Country. In October, Fredericksburg hosts The Fredericksburg Food and Wine Festival. Information can be found at [www.fbgfoodandwinefest.com](http://www.fbgfoodandwinefest.com). In December visit the Holiday Wine Trail in the Hill Country. That information can be found at [www.texaswinetrail.com/calendar.htm](http://www.texaswinetrail.com/calendar.htm).

Wherever you decide to visit, great wine, scenery, and people can be found in the Texas Hill Country. Enjoy your trip, and don't indulge too much before getting behind the wheel and heading to the next vineyard! 🍷

# TEXAS DECLARES WAR ON NORTHERN CALIFORNIA

IT'S TIME FOR TEXAS WINES TO GET SOME RESPECT. WHILE WE WON'T ARGUE THE MERITS OF A QUICK WEEKEND JAUNT TO CALIFORNIA, WE CAN'T AGREE THAT IT'S THE ONLY WAY TO GET A WINE COUNTRY EXPERIENCE. COME VISIT US ON OLD RT.28 AND WE'LL BE HAPPY TO PUT OUR WINES WHERE YOUR MOUTHS ARE.




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