

Virginia's Governor's Cup Winners

Virginia wine country isn't just a beautiful place to visit, it also has many good wines to entertain the palate as well as the rest of the senses. For proof, just look at the results of the Virginia Governor's Cup Wine Competition. Earlier this year, over 40 judges participated in the annual wine competition where over 400 wines were submitted for evaluation. While the wines ranged from traditional table wines to fruit-centric dessert wines, all of the wines must be produced from using only fruit grown in Virginia in order to participate in the competition. All of the wines were tasted "single-blind" – that is to say that the judges were only allowed to know the varietal composition and the vintage. The winemaker and region were hidden behind coded glasses.

The Virginia Wineries Association, in partnership with the Virginia Wine Board & the Virginia Vineyards Association, recently announce the winners and put together a "media case" of the winning wines for wine journalists and critics. I used my case as an opportunity to see how these wines fare with some wine-loving consumers. I assembled a panel of amateur wine enthusiasts and asked them to evaluate the wines in the Governor's Cup case. The wines were evaluated based on appearance, aroma, taste and overall quality. I kept the identity of the wines concealed until the end of the tasting.

Here are four of the top results:

Nestled in a valley near Purcellville, Two Twisted Posts Winery owners Brad and Theresa Robertson planted a beautiful vineyard surrounded by neighboring mountains. Their 2012 **Two Twisted Posts Winery Chardonnay** was aged on the lees, which helps to promote a creamy richness and smooth maturation. It was aged in 100 percent new oak barrels, producing a complex wine featuring flavors of tropical fruit, green apple and nectarine. Vanilla and toasted oak notes are highlighted throughout the palate on the way to a buttery finish. **\$23**

As the saying goes, you can take the winemaker out of Piedmont, but he will likely bring his grapes with him. Evidently, Barboursville Vineyard's winemaker, Luca Paschina has found a slice of Piedmont in Barboursville, Virginia where he has found that the Nebbiolo grape lends itself to a Barbaresco style. The **2010 Barboursville Vineyard Nebbiolo Reserve** is aged for at least a year in barrel, and then another year in bottle before release. The result is an elegant and complex wine with aromas of black cherry, cola and violets. Full bodied flavors of dark berry, saddle leather and tobacco fill out the palate on a rich finish sustained by firm tannins. **\$35**

Serial entrepreneur and scientist, Mike Canney and his wife Dianne, decided to slow down and smell the grape must when they founded Sunset Hills in 1999 with just three acres of grape vines on a ten acre property in Loudon County. Today, the estate has expanded to 150 acres and is now the 5th largest vineyard in Virginia. The **2010 Sunset Hills Vineyard Mosaic** is a blend of Merlot, Cabernet Sauvignon, Cabernet Franc and Petit Verdot. It is a super-rich wine featuring youthful aromatics of strawberry, rose petal, and pomegranate. The palate is rewarded with lush and juicy flavors of black cherry, blackberry, dark plum and hints of dried herbs on the medium-bodied finish. **\$50**

Family-owned and operated King Family Vineyards is a boutique winery located in Crozet, Virginia whose goal is to make great wine from quality fruit with minimal intervention from winemaker, Matthieu Finot. Mission accomplished with their **2011 King Family Vineyards Meritage**, a blend of Merlot, Cabernet Franc, Petit Verdot, and Malbec. Aromas of red cherry, raspberry and earthy notes on the nose lead to intricate flavors of blackberry, blueberry, cherry and baking spices on the mid-weight palate. Aged for 18 months in oak barrels, the firm tannins provide a lengthy finish and ageable structure. **\$31**