

On the Wine Trail in the Delaware River Valley Region Beneduce Vineyards – Pittstown New Jersey



By George Parkinson
Certified Sommelier

The Delaware River Valley Region is expanding in vineyard development and wine culture. The river stretches from its headwaters in New York and through New Jersey, Pennsylvania, and Delaware before emptying into the Atlantic Ocean and is comprised of four separate shelves as it travels south. This region (in my opinion) deserves an AVA (American Viticultural Area) status and is now home to almost 60 wine producers and hundreds of acres of vineyards producing notable wine grapes.

On a perfect sunny and cool autumn day, we ventured out to visit Beneduce Vineyards. Nestled in the bucolic town of Pittstown, New Jersey, it's not far from the winding Delaware River and located among many a winding country road and area farm. The land, previously a dairy farm, was purchased in 2000 and founded as a winery in 2009 while winemaker Mike Beneduce was studying Viticulture and Enology at Cornell University.

During this time, his family researched the farm's terroir—the soil makeup, climate, and other factors that can determine what wine grapes best suit the site. Their research revealed that the area is similar to Austria. Heavy red soils full of iron and climate similarities warranted a trip to that region. As Mike explains, "I visited winery after winery tasting wine and discussing vineyard options and wine-making techniques to select the right type of wine grapes for our vineyard." Upon his return, he planted varieties such as Gewürztraminer, Riesling, and Blaufrankisch, which is a key red

grape in many northern and eastern European wine regions.

There are presently 20 acres under vine at Beneduce Vineyards, and the property is also home to a small lavender farm and multiple greenhouses. Wine grapes being cultivated along with the Blaufrankisch and Gewürztraminer include Chardonnay, Pinot Noir, and Cabernet Franc.

Upon our arrival, the wine-tasting room was filled with rich yeasty and jammy notes coming from the recently punched-down open-top containers of fermenting red wine that include Malbec and Sangiovese (both purchased fruits). It was, to say the least, invigorating and set the mood for a tasting of their wines. The open-top fermenters quickly reminded me of my first experience in a California winery in Mendocino punching down Zinfandel. The winery is a family endeavor, and we were warmly received upon arrival.

Among the wines we tasted was the Chardonnay, Dry Riesling, Gewürztraminer, Pinot Noir, and Blaufrankisch.

The Chardonnay was classic with notes of pear, apples, and cream. The dry Riesling showed many layers of stone fruit melon and spice yet finished bone dry—a perfect autumn wine. The Pinot Noir had notes of cherry cola nut and coco.

My most favorite wine here was the Estate Grown Blaufrankisch—maybe because I'm a sucker for the unique, and many area wineries don't grow or produce this fruit. Blaufrankisch is known around the world by more than 50 other names including Franconia in Northern



Italy, Borgonja in Croatia, Gamay Noire in Bulgaria, and Limburger in Germany and the U.S. The grape can be susceptible to early frost and powdery mildews since its buds break early in the spring and ripen later in the fall. The vine can produce high yields of fruit with wines that are high in tannin and offer notes of mountain berry. The most famous example of wine produced using this grape is the "Bulls Blood" or Egri Bikaver from Hungary, and I suggest you find an example of this wine from your local wine shop to understand how great these wines can be.

I found the Beneduce production of this wine a wonderful surprise with notes of blueberry, currant, and cedar. The mid-palate showed layers of coco and candied walnut with a finish that was supple and silky. Also of note was the dry-style Gewürztraminer with layers of honeysuckle, lychee fruit, and peaches. It's a perfect wine for spicy Thai or Spanish style foods.

Beneduce has a basic tasting of five wines for \$5 offered along with a \$15 option that includes a charcuterie board of meat and cheese. Either tasting option is worth the price, and the surroundings lull one into a sense of comfort that will keep you there all day. All the wines we tasted were great options for your holiday dinner table.

Tours are available during the growing season from April to October. The tasting room is open on Wednesday, Thursday, and Sunday from 12-6 pm and Friday and Saturday from 12-8 pm. The vineyard hosts live music year-round on Saturday evenings from 6-9 pm (full band, \$10 cover) and Sundays from 2-5 pm (solo artist, free attendance).

George Parkinson is presently the Sommelier for the historic Peacock Inn, Princeton NJ. He is an active member of the Court of Master Sommeliers, Americas and is studying for his advanced level. George has over 30 years of experience in the wine and hospitality industries and lives in Hilltown Township PA with his family.

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If you enjoyed this article, you may now find more like it on my new blog site vinehiker.com.

The site is dedicated to exploring vineyards and wineries as I trek around the globe. Past articles will be archived there as well, and winery details and updates may be found weekly. Group tour opportunities and tasting events will soon follow.

I started this column in the winter of 2006 and today marks the completion of 12 years as the wine columnist for the *Bucks County Women's Journal*. Special thanks, infinite gratitude, and love need to go to Publisher and owner Robin Coppinger for her eternal patience and support. I would not have this opportunity, audience, or platform if it were not for Robin's undying loyalty and professionalism.

Have a blessed Holiday Season!
Cheers!

