

Discovering the Bucks County Wine Trail, Pennsylvania, USA

As oenophiles, we have traveled the world in search of the grape. We have spent weeks driving through the **Burgundy region**, have passed many happy hours tasting in the **Rhine region**, have journeyed great distances to wineries in **Switzerland**, to the **Chianti region**, to **Sicily, Malta, Cyprus, Canada**, and the **United States**. Sometimes, we forget about the wineries close to home, namely the **[Bucks County Wine Trail](#)** in **[Bucks County, Pennsylvania](#)**.

Mention wineries in the United States, and most people think of California: Napa, Sonoma, and the Russian River Valley where the red wines are often bold and the chardonnays are usually oaky; Washington state and Oregon roll off the tongue, as well as to some extent the New York wine regions, namely the Finger Lakes and the North and South Forks of Long Island. Although many states make wine including little known wineries in Arizona, Texas, Louisiana, Connecticut, and Rhode Island, all of which we have discovered and experienced, we must admit that we had forgotten about Pennsylvania.

We originally "discovered" Pennsylvania wines back in 1989, and filed that information away in our minds the way that wine collectors will cellar a bottle of wine for many years and wait for the results.

On a bright and beautiful, warm sunny day on April 1, 2010, we decided to return to Pennsylvania and re-discover its wines and see how they had fared since our last visit. **Bucks County**, located 90 minutes from New York City and 45 minutes from Philadelphia, has steadily gained a reputation for its wine ever since **Jerry Forest**, founder of **[Buckingham Valley Vineyards](#)**, followed his dream and planted his first vines back in 1966 and set the ball in motion.



Buckingham Valley Vineyards Vines

Soon, the idea of Pennsylvania as a potential wine region grew with many other intrepid individuals eagerly following in Jerry's footsteps, planting vines on former farmland; today there are over 140 wineries in the state of Pennsylvania and 8 wineries that make up the **Bucks County Wine Trail**.

On this trip, we experienced 4 of the 8 Bucks County Wine Trail wineries, which included visiting owner, and vintner **Jerry Forest**, the first of the winemakers in Pennsylvania, which was an enlightening education.

While at the University of Pennsylvania, Wharton School of Business, Jerry had the dream that when he graduated he would either like to have a career playing the guitar or owning a vineyard; it was the 1960s, when people dreamed large and the idea of creating a vineyard where none had previously existed, made perfectly good sense to Jerry.

He began by planting 37 varietals in 1966 in a trial and error method to learn what would grow best in the rich soil, kept his fingers crossed, and was amazed when 10 or 12 of the varietals actually succeeded.

Created by: Debra C. Argen and Edward F. Nesta

Since then, his dream has flourished and the family-owned and operated 40-acre **Buckingham Valley Vineyards** has steadily grown in both reputation and sales amounting to approximately 200,000 bottles, (18,000 cases) sold over the counter each year.



External Stainless Steel Tanks

As a winemaker, he embraces both old world methods to create his wines as well as state-of-the-art technology including computer operated wine presses, an automatic 396-bottle champagne riddling machine, computerized stainless steel tanks, and a cross flow membrane filtration machine that can take a cloudy or fermenting wine and make it crystal clear without stripping the wine of flavor. Jerry had the first cross flow membrane filtration machine in the United States back in 1988, learned how valuable this tool could be, and is now on his third cross flow membrane filtration machine.

Buckingham Valley Vineyards focuses on creating red wine, white wine, Rosé, fruit, and flavored wines, sparkling wines (Methode Champenoise), and their just released Ruby Port. In addition to the usual Merlot and Cabernet Sauvignon, they also produce Chambourcin, which is a dry oak-aged full-bodied red, Chancellor, which is a dry, medium-bodied red; and DeChaunac, which is a dry, full-bodied red. Jerry Forest's philosophy is make drinkable, approachable wines, and he has only one defining criteria, the wines must taste good.



Buckingham Valley Vineyards Tasting Room

Buckingham Valley Vineyards is located in **Buckingham** and is open Tuesday through Saturday from 11:00 am until 6:00 pm, Sunday from 12:00 pm until 5:00 pm, and closed on Monday. Visit their website for additional information.

*Buckingham Valley
Vineyards*

BuckinghamValleyVineyards

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Brothers **Paul** and **Joseph Maxian**, the owners of [Sand Castle Winery](#), grew up in Bratislava, Czechoslovakia surrounded by vineyards. They too, dreamed of producing quality wines in Pennsylvania and purchased their 72-acre estate in 1974. They planted their first vines in 1985, and sold their first vintage to the public in 1988.



Sand Castle Winery Vines

We drove up a large hill to the vineyard late in the day, and there at the very top stood an impressive sand-colored castle complete with fountain. It was almost mirage-like with the just awakening vines bathed in the late afternoon sun and the castle glimmering in the magic hour sunlight.

Inside the castle, we met with vintner Joseph and his wife Magdalene and enjoyed sharing many stories as well as tasting his wines. Joseph Maxian is a passionate man, who loves watching his vines blossom, and whose approach to winemaking is to create old-world style wines.

Sand Castle Winery focuses on making three different styles of Johannesburg Rieslings, as well as Chardonnay, Rosé, Claret, Cuvee Blush, Cabernet Sauvignon, and a lovely Alpine Spice wine that is perfect for the holidays or just sipping in front of a blazing fire in the winter.



Sand Castle Winery Tasting Room

Sand Castle Winery is located in **Erwinna**, approximately 12 miles north of New Hope, and is open Monday through Saturday from 10:00 am until 6:00 pm, and on Sunday from 11:00 am until 6:00 pm. Visit their website for additional information.



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Vintner Tom Carroll, Jr. of [Crossing Vineyards](#) was an unusually precocious child; while most kids were dreaming of growing up to be an astronaut, superhero, rock star, or other equally impressive and usually unattainable career, at the age of 10, young Tom, Jr. decided that it would be really cool to own a vineyard someday.



Crossing Vineyards Vines

That idea was born when his father and mother **Tom** and **Christine Carroll** purchased a 200-year old property in the heart of the budding Bucks County wine region back in 1985. Little by little, Tom, Jr. planted the idea in his parents' minds of transforming the property into a vineyard. In 2000, he realized his dream when the Carroll family established **Crossing Vineyards** and produced their first vintage two years later in 2002.

Since then, the family owned and operated Crossing Vineyards has garnered kudos in the form of medals in international competitions. When I asked Tom, Jr. how it felt to realize a lifelong dream, he modestly said, "I am a professional janitor who maintains the quality of the fruit, as the quality of the fruit dictates 95% of the result of the wine." As for Tom and Christine Carroll, they love being in the business of creating wine with their son.

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Crossing Vineyards Tasting Room

Crossing Vineyards focuses on producing Cabernet Sauvignon, Cabernet Franc, Merlot, Pinot Noir, and Chambourcin, as well as Chardonnay, Viognier, Riesling, Late Harvest Vidal Blanc, and specialty wines such as Wild Berry, Le Nouveau, and Brut Ros   wines.

Crossing Vineyards is located in **Washington Crossing** and is open daily from 12:00 pm until 6:00 pm. Visit their website for additional information.



Crossing Vineyards

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Website:             www.CrossingVineyards.com

Although owners **Richard** and **Deborah Fraser** of [Wycombe Vineyards](http://www.WycombeVineyards.com), established in 2005, are new to the winemaking business, their 65-acre estate has been in Deborah's family since 1925. Like the other wine families, they, too, had a dream of creating fine wines in Pennsylvania. In 1999, Richard and Deborah transformed the former farmland by planting their first vines, which were classic Vitis Vinifera.



Wycombe Vineyards Vines

Their approach at Wycombe Vineyards is to create fine wines using handpicked estate grown grapes and use Bordeaux style pruning. Richard explained that the American soil is so rich that although you can get volume, without pruning there is uneven ripening of the grapes and with pruning you get a lower quantity of

grapes but the quality is better.

Wycombe Vineyards focuses on creating red wines that include Chambourcin, Cabernet Franc, and Cabernet Sauvignon, and white wines that include Spring Blossom, Traminette, a semi-dry wine similar to Gewürztraminer, Riesling, Vidal Blanc, Naked Chardonnay, crisp with green apple notes and made without oak, and Just Married, a semi-dry, medium body wine with citrus bouquet. Much like the wines themselves, the labels on the bottles have their own stories to tell and feature interesting old vintage family photographs.



Wycombe Vineyards Tasting Room

Wycombe Vineyards is located in **Furlong** and is open Wednesday through Friday from 12:00 pm until 5:00 pm, Saturday from 12:00 pm until 6:00 pm, and Sunday from 12:00 pm until 5:00 pm. Visit their website for additional information.



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So, how did the wines on this trip compare to our memory of them from our last visit so many years ago? As a good wine should, they have aged beautifully, maturing under the watchful care of their impassioned owners. Are the wines comparable to more established areas? Some are there and beyond, some are like a young red wine that still need a bit of aging, but the potential is definitely there.

To understand the passion of the vintners of the Bucks County Wine Trail, you must experience it. Take a drive, taste the wine, and if you have the chance to chat with the vintners, do so, as the vintners' stories are every bit as fascinating as the wines that they create. Cheers!



Bucks County Wine Trail Awaits

Sand Castle Winery

Read about **Bucks County** in the [Destinations](#), **Restaurants:** [Logan Inn](#), [Marsha Brown Creole Kitchen and Lounge](#), and [The Bridgetown Mill House](#), and **Chefs' Recipes:** [Chef Pete Gialias - Logan Inn](#), [Chef Caleb Lentcher - Marsha Brown Creole Kitchen and Lounge](#), and [Chef Michael Sujansky - The Bridgetown Mill House](#).

For information on **BucksCounty**, please visit the website: www.VisitBucksCounty.com.

For information on the **Bucks County Wine Trail** please visit the website: www.BucksCountyWineTrail.com.

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