



Uncorked!

Secrets to navigating Ohio's premier wine festival

STORY & PHOTOGRAPHY BY LAURA WATILO BLAKE



*V*intage Ohio is an experience for the senses: wines from the state's award-winning producers, gourmet food, music, and seminars and exhibits from industry experts. It's a great place for wine drinkers with a sophisticated palate, but it's also the ideal place for newbies who want to learn about wines without any hint of pretentiousness. Here's a primer on what you can expect at the event—held August 7-8 at Lake Metroparks Farmpark, located 25 miles east of Cleveland.

"You really need to go to Vintage Ohio with a plan," advises Doniella Winchell, the executive director of the Ohio Wine Producers Association, which organizes the event. First and foremost, wear comfortable shoes. "It is an outdoor event in a farm field," she says. "I've seen people come dressed to the nines and ruin an expensive pair of shoes."

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As you enter the event, you are handed a wine glass and tasting card, upon which you can jot notes about the wines you try. Before you stick your glass under the first bottle of wine you come across, heed this general rule of thumb from Winchell: “Drink dry before sweet, and white before red.”

When it comes to sampling wines, there are also guidelines for drinking certain varietals before others, albeit for different reasons.

“Typically, you always want to do dry first because there’s no sugar, and sugar usually camouflages the flavors you should have in your mouth,” explains Beth Debeve from Debonné Winery in Madison, Ohio. “It’s like eating pie before you have dinner. It doesn’t jive.”

Red wines are typically sampled last, she adds, because they contain “all the flavor and heavier aromas” that would overpower a white wine.

With these considerations in mind, a tasting strategy can be approached vertically or horizontally.

“If people have a specific varietal they like—for example, chardonnay—they can start there,” Winchell suggests. “Wander the field and look for chardonnays, take a break, then wander looking for some ries-

lings.” After that, she says, try white blends or blushes, followed by reds.

An alternative approach is to taste two or three different wines from a couple of different wineries to compare the style of wine that each produces.

Above all of these recommendations, though, is to leave behind any preconceived notions you may have of Ohio wines. Past perceptions were based on history, but things have changed.

When prohibition struck the United States in the early 1920s, many vineyards turned to growing grapes suited for juice production. After prohibition, growers converted the grapes they were growing into wine, but found the taste to be inferior. That’s when the region’s reputation for quality wine took a hit. However, with the introduction of French-American wine grapes in the 1960s, along with funding for research and development in the 1990s, today’s Ohio wines are now competing on the world stage—and winning.

“When we started Vintage Ohio 15 years ago, Ohio was just emerging,” says Winchell. “Once in awhile, one of our wines would win a medal in California and there would be a huge brouhaha. Now, if we

Tie One On



Let’s face it, you may feel unhip walking around with a wine glass dangling around your neck at a chichi party, but at a wine festival, it’s practically a necessity. Wine glass lanyards like this one from mobilegrape.com offer hands-free convenience when sampling food or shopping. Some Vintage Ohio regulars like Jenny Jones and Rosine Tishman, both of Fairview Park, Ohio, make their own wine holders out of wire coat hangers and string, then spruce them up with beads and ribbons. If you don’t have the time or talent to make your own wine holder, you can buy one at Vintage Ohio at the Wine Caddies booth.



don't win a couple medals in every competition—and there are many of them—all of us are disappointed. We have become much more able to compete in the world market.”

The quality of Ohio wines hasn't escaped the notice of Jennifer Collins-Chelbina of Bath, Ohio. “We are converts to Ohio wine,” she says, crediting a weekend she and her husband, Larry, spent last summer at Geneva-on-the-Lake. “We tasted wine

from Ferrante Winery and ended up buying six bottles. I tell all my wine-connoisseur friends that they'd be pleasantly surprised.”

The best thing to do is try the award-winning wines for yourself at Vintage Ohio, which has been named one of the nation's top wine and food events by *Wine Spectator* magazine, *USA Today*, and *Bon-Appetit* magazine. Come thirsty, and prepare to go home a convert to Ohio wines. ≡

Info to Go

Vintage Ohio

August 7-8, 2009

Lake Metroparks Farmpark
8800 Chardon Rd.
Kirtland, OH

(800) 227-6972

visitvintageohio.com

Hours: 1 to 10 p.m.

Cost: Adults: \$22 in advance / \$25 at the gate; Two-day adult taster in advance: \$40; Designated driver: \$10; Children under 18: \$3



**KELLEYS ISLAND CHAMBER
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