



local flavor

Amber Falls Winery & Cellars,  
Maury County, Tenn.

# Toast of the *South*



BY DIANA LACHANCE

Over the last few years, wines from both Alabama and Tennessee have been quietly making a name for themselves – and it seems the secret is out.

“Winemakers in Tennessee win awards every year, competing against thousands of wines from not only the United States, but other countries as well,” says Elizabeth Owen, a marketing consultant who works for the Tennessee wineries. “In fact, grapes are the fastest growing cash crop in the state.”

Yet despite this explosion of local wines, Owen says the industry here is still small enough to afford “the nuance and detail a smaller winery can produce.”

And while she adds that wine lovers will “find many of their favorites such as Pinot Grigio, Sangiovese, Chardonnay and Cabernet Sauvignon, they will also be delighted by names that might not be so familiar but are equally delicious.”

Indeed, it’s precisely these less-common names, or varietals, that make Tennessee and Alabama wines such a treasure.

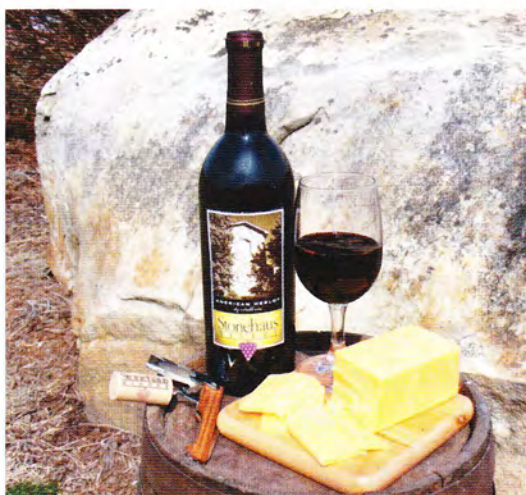
Just ask Beth Farris, a distributor for Grassroots Wine, based in Birmingham and South Carolina.

“What makes local wines so special, no matter what part of the country one is referring to, is the unique grapes that are best grown in that area,” she says.

In Alabama and Tennessee, that’s often Muscadine, lovingly called to “God’s gift to the sunny South.”

But there are plenty of others. “Chardonelle, Seyval Blanc, Vidal Blanc and Norton are other interesting grapes produced Alabama and Tennessee wineries,” says Farris. “And we are also well known for fruit wines such as peach, blackberry, and blueberry.”

Even though many wineries use these same basic grapes, the resulting wines have their own unique flavors. For example, says Judy Zaunbrecher, co-owner of Amber Falls Winery & Cellars in Maury County, Tennessee, “each winery that produces a Muscadine wine, which can range from dry to very sweet, does so in a little different style, giving each its own special character.”



Stonehaus Winery,  
Crossville, Tenn.



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- Beth Farris,  
Grassroot Wines

Keg Springs Winery displays awards won at competitions like Wines of the South.

## WINE TRAILS, SOUTHERN STYLE

Both Alabama and Tennessee are home to wine trails that connect the various wineries and vineyards across the states.

The **Alabama Wine Trail**, which is sponsored by the Alabama Wineries LLC, includes Bryant Vineyard, Hidden Meadow, Hodges Vineyard, Jules J. Berta, Morgan Creek, Ozan Vineyard, Pepperplace, Perdido Vineyard, Vizzini Farms, Whippoorwill, and Wills Creek. You can get details on each and print a map at the Alabama Wine Trail website, [www.alabamawinetrail.net](http://www.alabamawinetrail.net).

The **Tennessee Wine Trail**, sponsored by the Tennessee Farm Winegrowers Alliance, features 12 wineries located in the eastern part of the state, including Tennessee Mountainview Winery, Savannah Oaks Winery, Tennessee Valley Winery, Rocky Top Organic Vineyard and Winery, Blue Slip Winery, Hillside Winery, Apple Barn Winery, Mountain Valley Winery, Sugarland Cellars, Bootleggers Homemade Wine, Countryside Vineyards & Winery, and Corey Ippolito Winery. Get details on each and print a map at [www.tennesseeewines.com](http://www.tennesseeewines.com). You can even get a Tennessee Wine Trail app for your iPhone or Android.

Still others, she says, “produce excellent dry red and white wines, which, in some cases, are their specialty.” Zaunbrecher says she’s had many visitors to the winery who are “surprised to find dry wines with such sophistication in Tennessee.”

But sweet or dry, Gerald Hamm, owner of Keg Springs Winery in Maury County, Tenn., says it’s important to judge them in their own right, rather than comparing them to wines from better-known regions like California or France. After all, he says, “if two wineries are five miles apart but a state line passes between them, do we still lump them in with their other compatriots in the same state, some of which could be hundreds of miles away?”

The key is in pairing them properly. For example, he says, “blackberry wine is a great complement to certain salads.” And don’t be afraid to experiment. “Think everything from brunch to dessert: shrimp and grits, eggs Florentine, barbecue, or a basic cheese and fruit plate,” says Farris. “These wines are very versatile and often overlooked, so get creative!”

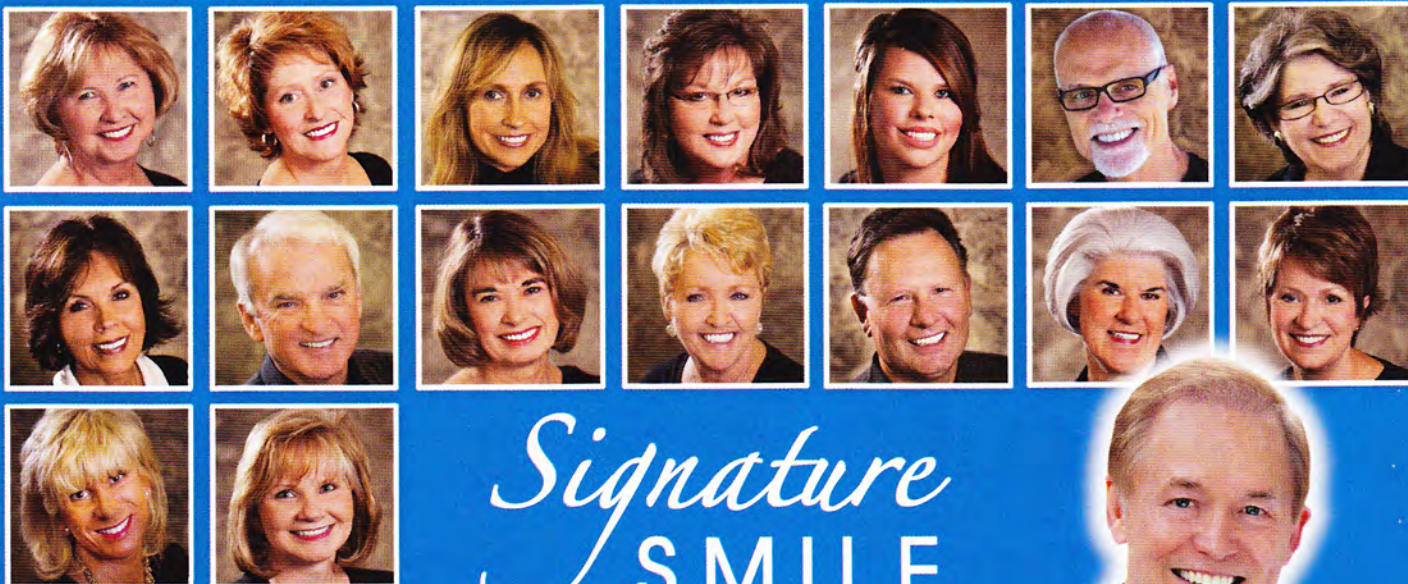


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– Gerald Hamm,  
Owner, Keg Springs Winery



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Fortunately, because local wineries are just that – local – it's easy to pay a visit and figure out exactly what you like before you buy.

"Wineries give people the wine experience," says Hamm. "There they can taste and talk about wines, pair wines with food, have dinner in a wine cave, and the list goes on."

There are plenty to choose from: Alabama alone has 12 wineries across the state, and Tennessee has 32. But even with all those options, "every winery has well-crafted wines that are worth checking out," says Farris. "Tennessee's Monteagle Winery in Monteagle and Stonehaus Winery in Crossville are both worth visiting, depending on how far one wants to travel. And for those who want to taste Alabama wines, I suggest taking the Shelby Trail Wine Excursion, which allows you to visit Hidden Meadow and Morgan Creek Wineries, Vizzini Farms, and Bryant and Ozan Vineyards."

And just think: while you're busy on your quest to find a great bottle of Alabama or Tennessee wine to serve at your next dinner party, you'll be boosting the local economy at the same time. Then all you need to do is stop off at farmer's market on the way home for a pint of blackberries or a basket of peaches so that you can pair that sweet wine with a tasty cobbler. Acting locally has never been this delicious. ✨

**"Grapes are the fastest growing cash crop in Tennessee."**

**- Elizabeth Owen,  
Marketing Consultant**



Amber Falls  
Winery & Cellars,  
Maury County, Tenn.



## WINERY EVENTS

Many, if not all, of the wineries on the Alabama and Tennessee Wine Trails offer tastings, festivals, live music and other special events that make the perfect excuse for an overnight or weekend getaway. Whether you want to enjoy a concert by the Gadsden Youth Orchestra at Wills Creek Winery, pick your own fruit at Whippoorwill Vineyards, attend a murder mystery dinner at Paris Winery, stomp grapes at Morgan Creek Vineyards, or take a tour of Sugarland Cellars, there's always something exciting going on between the vines.

Here is just a small selection of upcoming events being held in Alabama and Tennessee wine country in the coming months:

**17 | MARCH**

**ST. PATRICK'S DAY CELEBRATION**  
Ozan Vineyard & Winery (Calera, Ala.)  
[www.ozanwine.com](http://www.ozanwine.com)

**17 | MARCH**

**ST. PATRICK'S DAY DINNER**  
Vizzini Farms Winery (Calera, Ala.)  
[www.vizzinifarmswinery.com](http://www.vizzinifarmswinery.com)

**APRIL - OCTOBER**

**"VOICES IN THE VINEYARD"  
CONCERT SERIES**  
Century Farm Winery (Jackson, Tenn.)  
[www.centuryfarmwinery.com](http://www.centuryfarmwinery.com)

**12 | MAY**

**A TOAST TO TENNESSEE WINE FESTIVAL**  
Nashville Shores (Hermitage, Tenn.)  
[www.atoasttotennessee.com](http://www.atoasttotennessee.com)

**26 | MAY**

**CAJUNFEST**  
Amber Falls Winery & Cellars (Hampshire, Tenn.)  
[www.amberfallswinery.com](http://www.amberfallswinery.com)

**26 | MAY**

**CONCERT BY THE GADSDEN  
YOUTH ORCHESTRA**  
Wills Creek Vineyards (Duck Springs, Ala.)  
[www.willscreekvineyards.com](http://www.willscreekvineyards.com)

**23 | JUNE**

**WINE ON THE WESTSIDE**  
Downtown Cookeville (Cookeville, Tenn.)  
[www.wineonthewestside.com](http://www.wineonthewestside.com)



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