



Exploring the Texas Wine Industry

Often times when I talk to people about Texas wine I get a confused look and something along the lines of 'there's wine in Texas?', to all the skeptics out there, I say don't turn up your nose so quickly because Texas isn't just for BBQ anymore (not that their BBQ isn't amazing, The Salt Lick brisket will change your life). To describe the state of the Texas wine industry, I liken it to a college student; they got through that awkward High School phase, where you're trying anything and everything to see what fits, and now have a better idea of who you are, where you want to be, and are well on your way to getting there.

I first got acquainted with Texas wine at the Texas Wine and Grape Growers (TWGG) Conference this February. Not to go into details but Texans definitely know how to have a good time. Their passion and excitement is infectious, you can't help but want to be part of it all. After the conference I wanted to go back and learn more about this new and expanding wine industry. On April 20th this Napa Valley native landed in Dallas ready for a 9 day trip with barrel price sheets and wine samples in hand having no idea how it was going to go. Side note, is it considered profiling when the Texas car rental company gives the Californian a Toyota Prius?



Texans do not keep their state pride a secret and the wine industry is a very close knit group, they're a self-described big family. I wasn't sure how they would respond to this California girl showing up and taking up their time.

My concerns were completely unjustified and I can assure you southern hospitality is alive and well in Texas. Most people were more than happy to talk, taste wine samples, listen to my spiel and share some of their knowledge and wine with me. I was lucky enough to spend 2 nights at the beautiful Los Pinos Ranch Vineyard. If you're ever in Pittsburg Texas make a point to stop by, you won't be sorry. I write this while enjoying a



glass of their Blanc du Bois (or blanky doo boys as it is affectionately called). While you're there don't forget to say hi to Pinot the cat, their official greeter.

I quickly realized that you can't really compare Napa Valley wines to Texas wines. It is like comparing apples and oranges; they're both fruit but two entirely different entities. Talking to Texas winemakers you can tell they're proud of what they do and aren't trying, and don't want, to be California. It seems like they're still figuring out exactly what it means to be a Texas wine but with every passing vintage they are getting closer to confirming their identity as a whole.

Not to negate my previous point but a big difference I did notice was that pretty much every winery had a fair selection of sweet wines. The running joke among winemakers is that it's because Texans are raised on sweet tea. Full disclosure, I'm biased because I'm not a sweet wine fan. Many of the Texas wine drinkers are still new to the game and palates are developing and figuring out what they like. This sweet wine preference seems to be slowly changing as Texans become more attuned to dry wine. Many of the people I talked to in the tasting rooms seemed to follow that same sentiment where they started out with the easy drinking sweet wines and have now gone to the dry side. I think that 5 years from now we'll see a different type of Texas wine enthusiast.

One of my favorite aspects of the Texas wine industry is the diversity. Kim McPherson, owner and winemaker of McPherson Cellars, in a recent article on CBS said it best;

"They (millennials) are not drinking what their parents drink. The mom and dad might be drinking Chardonnay, Cabernet and Merlot. And they really don't want to drink that. You give them a weird wine like Carignan or Mourvèdre or Cinsault or Viognier, they're going, 'Oh, we like that. We love this,'".

Don't get me wrong, there're few things as enjoyable as drinking a glass of Conn Creek's Atlas Cab or Smith-Madrone's Chard but this millennial definitely enjoys switching up the everyday varietals. I had fun reading through the wine lists with my friends when I got back; Semillons, Mourvedres, Grenaches, Tannats, Roussannes, I was entertained by the look of confusion on their faces since most of them hadn't tried or even heard of some of the wines I rattled off. While I was there I made a point to try as many different wines as possible. Not to say that I loved everything new I tried but I had fun doing it.



A little bit more about me; I'm a serious note taker, I write everything down especially while I'm tasting wines. I do this for several reasons, one is that it helps me figure out



common themes of a particular winery's style, second it's nice when I'm trying to remember what I thought of a wine when I'm contacting the winemaker, and third people always think I'm cooler than I actually am when I'm vigorously taking notes while tasting wine. At Grape Creek Vineyards in Fredericksburg I was doing what I always do, smell the wine then take notes, taste the wine and take some more

notes, and repeat this several times. I was so into what I was doing that I didn't notice that everyone at the bar was looking at me like 'who is this person and what is she doing?'. Once I noticed the multitude of eyes staring at me with curiosity and skepticism I quickly explained that I was from the Napa Valley on a business trip and this was simply for my notes. As soon as they knew I wasn't some pretentious wine critic they were more than happy to talk to me and share their thoughts. People were excited when they discovered that I was from the Napa Valley and here to learn about Texas wine. Texas pride definitely carries over to the wine industry as well.

After 9 straight days of traveling, visiting dozens of wineries, trying more wines than I can count I arrived home exhausted, with a case of Texas wine, and more than a little excited to go back. Part of what makes the Texas wine industry so fun is that it hasn't been saturated by elitism or exclusivity. It's made up of a great group of people who love what they do and just want to make good Texas wine.

Shout outs!

Thank you to Gerald and the whole Los Pinos team for being such incredible hosts. Also, everyone very much enjoyed your Blanc du Bois I brought home.

<http://lospinosranchvineyards.com/>

Patrick at Tara Vineyard & Winery, thank you for your hospitality! Getting to watch the storm blow through while sitting on the porch drinking wine was one of the highlights of my trip.

<http://www.tarawinery.com/>

You'll be hard pressed to find a more passionate and knowledgeable person about Texas wine than Carl from 4.0 Cellars. Thank you for a fun experience tasting wines and getting an education at the same time.

<http://www.fourpointwine.com/>

Here's a link to the article I referenced earlier:

<http://www.cbsnews.com/news/texas-wine-industry-booming-in-longhorn-state/>