

Testing state wines

The wine-lover turned summer traveler, headed into northern Michigan as so many traditionally do, need not necessarily carry his wine cellar with him. All he needs is a sense of adventure and an open mind.

Better yet, when summer travel plans call him to the Traverse City area, there are wineries to visit and wines to sample. And they are set in some of our state's loveliest tourist areas — a truly benevolent companionship.

And it isn't too early for each of us to begin to plan summer travel. Here's a chance to combine pleasurable events somewhat unexpectedly.

All three Traverse City area wineries can be easily visited in a single day, none being more than 30 minutes from the city limits.

South from the city on Highway 31-37, about 5 miles on the east side, is Leelanau Ltd. Winery. The grapes are not grown here. There is only a tasting room, but it is a most pleasant one. The grapes are grown up on Leelanau County in Omena, clearly in view of Grand Traverse Bay. But no visitors there.

Here the wines are from fruit (cherries, apples, etc.), French hybrid grapes (Chelois, De Oeunac, Baco Noir, Seyval and Vigoules) and there is a Chardonnay. The steward is friendly and helpful. How many times a week must he answer the question about grapes for wine being grown this far north?

THE LEAST KNOWN and smallest of the three is Boskydel up in Leelanau. Take M-22 north to 204, then west to the village of Lake Leelanau. From there the signs direct you south about three miles on a paved county road. In a setting (well marked) strongly reminiscent of the Finger Lakes region of New York there is a tasting room set among the vineyards.

Here there are only hybrids: Vignoles, De Chaunac and Seyval. Take

home a few of these bottles and amaze your friends. This is a small winery (in California they would call it a boutique), 5,000 gallons a year, whose wines are meant to be drunk young and with gusto. They are chiefly available only at the winery.

The biggest operation of the area is Chateau Grand Traverse Winery (CGT). CGT is also a distributor for a number of European and California wines but they are now coming into greater public view via their own wines. The tasting room, again beautifully set, reflects a wide variety of wines but only those from CGT can be tasted there. The whole range in sight may be purchased, however.

Here you will find locally grown fruit wines, blends of grape wine "in the German tradition" and several vinifera wines made from California grapes. However, soon they will be releasing locally grown Chardonnay and Riesling.

TO GET THERE from Traverse City, take M-37 north out Old Mission peninsula. Atop a knoll about nine miles from the city the tasting room is clearly marked. Tasting is available in the afternoon only (this is also true at Boskydel). Morning tastings are available only at Leelanau.

These are not spectacular wineries but they are honest and offer information and a chance to learn more about wines one sometimes too easily dismisses. And the settings, when compared to those wineries in the southern part of the state, are delightful and mix well with a vacation time.

Compared to the number of Michigan wineries in the southwest, those of the Traverse City area are small in number but the intention toward quality (i.e., away from native lambrusco grapes) is encouraging. If they are the wave of the future, Michigan may yet be proud of its wines.

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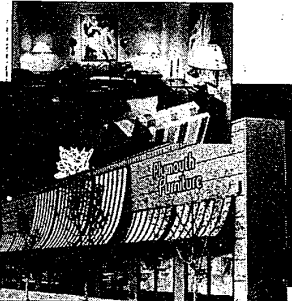
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