

Now's the time to tour wineries



Ethan Hawke (right) tells alien that he and friend Jason Presson have come in peace, in "Explorers."

Summer is a great time to visit wineries (so are winter, spring and fall), a time when tourists are expected and driving is safer.

If you cannot take advantage of the inexpensive air fares to Europe or get to California, what better place than stay at home and visit our own local industries. Michigan ranks fourth in the nation in production, has two distinct regions and, in general, produces some very acceptable wines.

To see the equipment, tour vineyards and meet winemakers is the same the world over. It's a great way to learn at first hand the joys and rigors of viticulture.

This is the first of two articles on touring Michigan wineries. This will report on the older, southwestern part of the state and in the next column, the northwest.

Now that the most effective winery in the region, Tabor Hill, has opened a tasting room in beautiful downtown Paw Paw, this community can well be thought of as the center of the wine industry in this part of the state. It provides access to the three wineries worth visiting locally, St. Julian, Warner and Tabor Hill. They line up nicely on the west side of the main street.

THE FIRST boasts the most modern tasting facility, loaded with sommeliers and tiny plastic tasting cups. It seems to always have one or two busloads of

tourists in the room asking for "something sweet." This St. Julian can provide from its assortment of labrusca and hybrid wine grapes. But it also has wines for the more serious taster and is generous in pouring anything it makes, except chambourin, which never ever gets to the tasting room.

Making a serious effort to be more than purveyors of sweet, native wines, it is today doing decent things with seval, Vidal and chancelor. Except for its Vidal-based sparkling wine, these are to be avoided as a group, however.

Make no mistake, St. Julian is the big producer of the area. It caters to a variety of tastes and shows evidence of moving with the changing tastes of the public. It is marketing hard as well, now having off-premise tasting rooms down the road on I-94, another near Jackson, one in Frankmunth, Sault Ste. Marie and, most recently, on I-75 at the Grange Hall Road exit near Holly.

A block or two north is troubled Warner, a winery that has been around a long time, focusing chiefly on native American grape varieties (and several blends with peculiar, idiosyncratic names). There it is, a few years ago, who predicted Warner would be the first of the southwest wineries to go under financially (Broote beat Warner to it), but Warner continues to hang in.

Warner has an attractive, rustic tasting room, with a modest restaurant at-



wine
Richard Watson

tached set by the river but seems to be a winery wholly out of focus these days. There appears to be no real sense of direction, offering attractions from the past while occasionally showing some quality hybrids.

IT HAS consistently made fairly good sparkling wines and, when I was there recently, had excellent sales on its 1982 Vidal brut and its non-vintaged Vidal naturel, both most palatable. (But the sales promotion does not look good. Why special prices?)

Tabor Hill, whose origins are in Berrien County down the road, goes back to the very early 1870s and has had a checkered history of ownership. It has never made wine from native grapes, using instead hybrids and some vinifera. It has been most successful with whites (true for all wineries in the state) and is currently marketing a sparkling wine from chardonnay grapes that is most appealing. In general, Vidal has been its most consistent grape.

The tasting room is part of a building just north of Warner's that shares

space with a shoe store. The hint of leather mixed with wine is unusual.

Two other area wineries, Peterson and Vendramino, are best ignored by anyone serious about wines.

Wary from intense sampling throughout Paw Paw, the tourist would do well to consider the Little River Inn across from St. Julian, a most attractive restaurant. Open for lunch and dinner, a sampling of good local, California and imported wines is offered to complement a most imaginative, moderately priced menu.

The still-eager wine sampler should continue on northwest, using Highway 40, to the Fenville area. There, the Fenville Vineyard is focusing on estate-grown vinifera and hybrids to produce some excellent white wines. Farther south, on the Red Arrow Highway, Len Olson has opened the Olson Family Winery in the old Lakeside property. He is the man who made Tabor Hill wines at their best before the turnover, and his early releases of Vidal and seval show a great deal of promise.

the movies
Dan Greenberg

Film 'Explorers' needs more than flashy space story

The only limitation to the motion picture is the imagination of the filmmaker.

"Explorers" features three adolescents on screen and who know how many more off screen, all of whom have failed to explore their imaginations and the possibilities of the motion picture.

The result is 105 minutes of expensive-looking footage with lots of glibly special effects by George Lucas' Industrial Light and Magic, but that is not enough to save this scattered story about three junior high kids wandering around space for no good reason.

Ben Grandall (Ethan Hawke) is a typical daydreaming, science-fiction-oriented adolescent, with a twin. Ben's dreams enable his precocious friend, Wolfgang Muller (River Phoenix), to wire up an old TV screen and a computer (only 128K) which creates a force field that literally flies you to the moon and beyond.

THE CREW NEEDS a little mechanical know-how to help the visionary and the electronic genius. Along comes Darren Woods (Jason Presson) who builds spaceships out of stolen car parts and old garbage cans. Darren is also tough enough to save Ben from Steve Jackson (Bobby Pitt) and his gang: Bradley Gregg, George Olden and Chance Schwab.

Jackson and the gang terrorize our heroes several times, just one of a series of essentially disconnected elements that serves no real purpose. A sheriff's department helicopter pilot, Charlie Drake (Dick Miller), is alternately driven to distraction and glee that the boys are flying and the Muller family is the biggest bunch of loonies seen in recent years.

At first view, it appears that Wolfgang lives in an institution for the retarded and that his father amuses him by imitating elephants. Everything, however, has a reasonable explanation. Father wears a mask to avoid injuring himself with bug poison and Mother Muller is permissive enough to allow her children to eat cereal while wearing Halloween masks.

Honest, folks, I am not making this up, just reporting. One of the film's problems is the Muller family's German accents, which are not clear. But you can't blame all of it on non-native speakers. "Naturalistic" sound is used, with characters distant from the screen having soft voices. This may be a nifty, artistic technique, but it is impossible to hear what the actors are saying, particularly after laugh lines — and there are some, not many, but some.

THE MAIN difficulty with "Explorers" is that there is no antagonist against whom our intrepid young friends can pit their dreams, their genius and their practical survival skills. The film is just a long series of vaguely related gags.

Limited stimulus to action in the film turns out to be two young space creatures who wanted to meet Earthlings. Wak/Starkiller (Richard Picardo) and his girlfriend (Karen Mayo-Chandler) stole Daddy Starkiller's (Robert F. Boyle) spaceship. They dipped over to Earth's outer environs to make Ben dream enough circuitry so that Wolfgang could construct a force field that makes space travel possible.

After a long post-landing inspection, our three heroes meet the Starkiller kids but Daddy comes home and breaks up the party.

So the guys go home and that's all there is to it. In "Explorers" the problem is solved by a trivial reason, which just does not support a long movie. Director Joe Dante ("Gremlins") and co-producers Feldman and Bombyk ("Witness," among many other credits) should have known better. Perhaps their biggest mistake was choosing Eric Lake to write his first motion picture scenario, an original conceived while he was clerking in a Santa Monica science-fiction bookstore.

Experience like that leads to films like "Explorers."



Ethan Hawke gives a Martian rock ring to Amanda Peterson for her birthday.

Androcles meets Ilon

Thomas O'Connor (left) and Robert Helnowski portray the title roles in the children's theater production of "Androcles and the Lion," through Saturday, July 27, at the Hillberry Theatre at Wayne State University in Detroit. For ticket information, call 877-2972.



True Grist dinner theater offers hit musical 'Annie'

The Broadway musical hit "Annie" continues on the mainstage through Sunday, Aug. 25, at the True Grist dinner theater in Homer.

"Annie," based on the adventures of comic-strip character Little Orphan Annie, is set in the 1930s Depression era. The show combines villains, good guys, a 1930s-style radio show, a visit with F.D.R., a Christmas celebration, little girls and a dog.

Besides evening performances, there is a special Saturday matinee. Prices for the matinee are \$9 for show, \$6 for buffet for general admission, and children's rate (age 13 and under), \$4 for show, \$3.95 for buffet.

For more information, call 517-568-4151 or Michigan tollfree 800-828-6161.

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