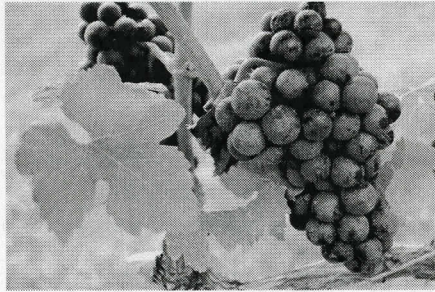


WINE IN THE SOUTH

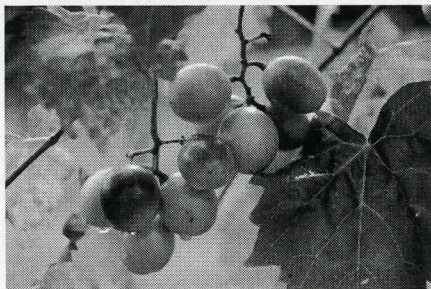
A Taste of the SFA's Newest Oral History Project



For the longest time, talk of Southern-grown grapes and Southern-vinified wines elicited dismissals from oenophiles. Some impressions were fueled by insecurity of the we-can't-compare-to-California sort. Others were fueled by bad wine.

Southern wines, made from *vinifera* grapes, are improving. Markedly. "If you haven't had a Southern wine in a few years," says Barbara Ensrud, author of *American Vineyards*, "you haven't had a Southern wine."

In the interviews that follow, you will meet *vignerons* from Virginia, North Carolina, and Georgia. In varying degrees they advocate that Southerners should not only eat local, they should drink local. As chefs and home cooks alike embrace the tenets of the farm-to-fork gospel, some Southerners are beginning to question the prevailing food and wine pairings of locally grown greens and locally raised pork alongside West Coast and Old World wines.



On the other end of the native versus *vinifera* wine divide, you will meet grape growers and wine makers who pledge their troth to wines made from muscadine, the South's native grape. The South, of course, has a long and distinguished tradition of wine making. You could make a convincing argument that our wine industry is 100 years older than California's. And you could back up such bluster with claims to quantity and quality.

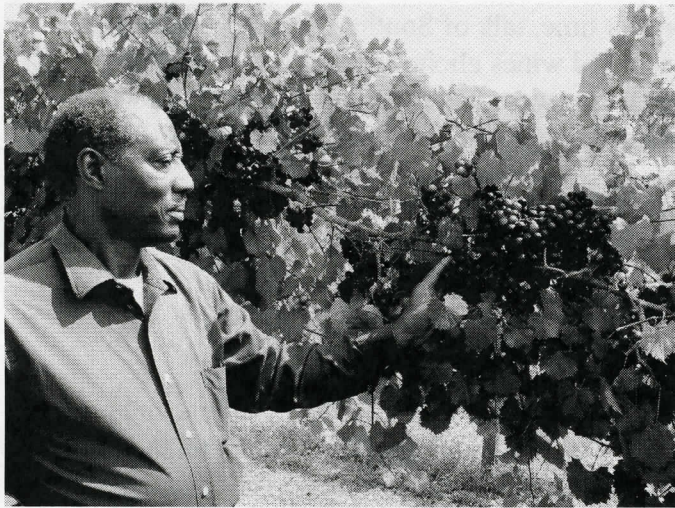
By 1840, North Carolina was the leading wine producer in the Union, a distinction that it soon lost to Georgia and, in time, states further north and west. No matter. Southern grown and vinified grapes were, for much of our nation's history, an accepted standard.

In the two decades leading up to the national adoption of Prohibition, Southern grown muscadine grapes flavored Virginia Dare, the most popular wine sold in America. At the Louisiana Purchase Exhibition of 1904, Paul Garrett's Special Champagne, a *methode champenoise* scuppernong, the pride of Medoc Vineyards in North Carolina, won the grand prize for sparkling wines, besting efforts from California and France.

That tradition of making wines from native grapes continues, unabated, today. From extreme southeastern Georgia, to the sandy plains of eastern North Carolina, and elsewhere, muscadine (and the muscadine variety known as scuppernong) remain synonymous with Southern wine making. Of late, an interest in the health-giving properties of the compound resveratrol, present in muscadines, has caused a spike in sales among a new cadre of consumers.

WINE IN THE SOUTH: Georgia, North Carolina & Virginia

GEORGIA: Tilford Winery



Tilford Winery in the central Georgia town of Kathleen, is named in honor of Tilford Taylor, the father of proprietor Robert Taylor. The winery – as well as some of the grape arbors – is set behind Robert's white clapboard home, in a suburban neighborhood. Robert, who works a full-time job at the Warner Robbins Air Force Base, believes his operation is the only one in Georgia owned and operated by an African American.

Robert's family hails from downstate Mississippi, specifically the small town of Utica. Although there is a tradition in wine making among members of the family, Robert did not consider making wine from native Muscadine grapes until, in 1999, he was diagnosed with lymphoma. He was out of work for 15 months, and during that time, he began exploring the health-giving properties of resveratrol, a compound in Muscadine grapes – and the wines made from them – that is now being employed as a nutraceutical, in response to a number of ailments.

Tilford Winery uses Magnolia and Carlos varieties of Muscadine to make white wine. Noble is their red wine grape of choice. Sales are accomplished by way of the Internet.

NORTH CAROLINA: Garden Gate Vineyards



In the hot North Carolina summers of Bo Whitaker's youth, when the blueberries were ripe and ready for picking, his grandfather would make blueberry wine. For North Carolinians of Bo's generation, this story is not unusual—except for the fact that his grandfather didn't just make wine. Charlie Howard, known to most as Uncle Charlie, was one of the best and most respected bootleggers in Davie County. Bo fell in love with his grandfather's blueberry wine as a teenager, but he didn't fall into

the craft of winemaking until much later. First, he married his high school sweetheart, Sonya, started a family, and put in thirty-four years as a line superintendent for the local power company, EnergyUnited. When Bo retired in 1999, he took some time to figure out what he would do next. Bo and Sonya started Garden Gate Vineyards in 2000. They planted blackberries,

strawberries, raspberries, and, of course, blueberries. But they also planted grapes. Bo planted his first vines right next to their house, filling an acre with hard-to-find muscadine and scuppernong varieties: Hunt, James, Triumph, and Magnolia. Today, thirteen different wines are made from the fruit that's grown at Garden Gate Vineyards. Uncle Charlie would be proud.

VIRGINIA: Oakencroft Vineyard & Winery



Felicia Warburg Rogan is widely considered the First Lady of Virginia Wine. In 1976 she relocated from New York to Virginia to marry John B. Rogan, a real estate developer and cattle rancher in Charlottesville. She befriended Lucy Morton, a noted viticulturist, and in 1983 her husband's Oakencroft Farm became Oakencroft Vineyard and Winery. She planted European varietals, invited her gardener, Deborah Welsh, to be the winemaker, and turned a farm building into a tasting room. This new all-female venture was the first of its kind and only the sixth winery to open in Virginia

(today, there are 135). In her twenty-five-year career as president of Oakencroft Vineyard and Winery, Mrs. Rogan has found time to look outside of her own estate to work in support of Virginia's burgeoning wine industry. She led the charge to establish the Monticello appellation for the area, started the Jeffersonian Grape Growers Society, and was chairwoman of the Virginia Wine Growers Advisory Board for a number of years. But now Felicia Rogan's long history in the wine industry is coming to a close. The First Lady of Virginia Wine is retiring. The estate has been sold, and Oakencroft Vineyard and Winery will shut its doors at the end of 2008. But Felicia Warburg Rogan will continue to support the industry she helped to create.

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Interviews conducted by John T. Edge and Amy C. Evans

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