



The Best in Texas

Happy Texas Wine Month, and welcome to the 2022 Texas Vintners Cup, Texas Monthly's second wine competition in collaboration with the Texas Department of Agriculture's Uncork Texas Wine program.

BY LORI MOFFATT

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Texas' \$13 billion wine industry continues to expand and diversify as grape-growers and winemakers learn what works with the state's varied topography and uncertain weather patterns ... and as consumers become confident in their selections.

That's where this year's judges come in: Meet Texas Monthly wine writer Jessica Dupuy, who recently earned a Level 4 Diploma with the Wine and Spirits Education Trust; Master Sommelier Craig Collins, Italian Sales Manager of the importer VINTUS; and Master Sommelier Jack Mason, RNDC Distributing's Texas Portfolio Manager. Together, the trio tasted 233 wines from 67 producers that

focus on Texas fruit, landing on a dozen for the top slots, plus many other Honorable Mentions.

"When we can get people to try Texas wine, they become interested in it," says Mason. "There's such a deep Texas pride; we want our wines to be Texas-grown, Texas-made. I think every restaurant ought to be pouring one."

The three agree that there's nothing like visiting a winery in person. "When you visit a winery in person, ask questions, taste with an open mind, and set yourself up for a positive experience, you're likely to become a fan," Dupuy says.

Go out this fall, have fun, and enjoy yourself at a Texas winery.

"Since 2015, we've worked to grow, expand, and attract worldwide attention to the Texas wine industry. Through programs like our Uncork Texas Wines my administration is putting a spotlight on the Texas wine industry, as well as specific Texas vineyards and brands. My goal as Commissioner is to make Texas the number one wine destination in the United States."

—Texas Agriculture Commissioner Sid Miller

Craig Collins, left, and Jack Mason flank Jessica Dupuy.



TexasMonthly

The Winners

Here, in alphabetical order of vineyard name, are the winning Texas wines with details about the top wineries that produce them. See where the grapes are grown, where the wine is made, and learn the story behind each. This fall, get out in the Texas sunshine and taste some wine! Call head to check hours and reservation requirements.

Adelphos Cellars, Lubbock

ADELPHOSCELLARS.COM



WINNING WINE

2019 Chenin Blanc

Tasting Notes

“A beautiful expression of Chenin Blanc with aromas of peach, lemon peel, and tropical fruit lead to a nice dry palate with a mineral structure and a soft, creamy finish.” — Jessica Dupuy

Winery details

In the northeast corner of Lubbock County, Adelphos Cellars winemaker Manuel Lechuga made this creamy, lemony Chenin Blanc from grapes grown at the forty-acre Cerro Santo Estate vineyard near the former Quaker settlement of Estacado. A collaboration between owners Jim and Barbara Irwin, David and Kathy Conklin, and Mike and Tammy Boring, Adelphos welcomes visitors to a tasting patio and shop at the winery while the owners locate more-spacious digs in Lubbock proper.

Jim Irwin admits that if it hadn’t been for the advice of Hye winemaker Ben Calais, he might have pulled up the Chenin vines after a few years of extremely low yields. “Chenin is usually quite vigorous, but the wine is better if you can hold the fruit back a little,” says Irwin. “So I had intentionally planted on the poorest spot in the vineyard. My plan worked a little too well, though: I was planning to plow them up when Ben visited, tasted the fruit, and told me to be patient.”



ADELPHOS CELLARS PHOTOS COURTESY OF THE WINERY

Château Wright Winery, Fort Davis

CHATEAUWRIGHT.COM



WINNING WINE

2019 Lièvre Red Blend

Tasting Notes

“This wine feels French with a dirty earthiness and notes of mushroom, ripe blackberry, dark cherry, and raspberry liqueur.” — Jack Mason

Winery details

About eight miles south of Fort Davis on the southern slope of Blue Mountain, Château Wright owner Jack Wright and viticulturist Adam White grow Rhone varieties like Mourvèdre and Grenache on vineyards that lie a mile above sea level. “We’re in an interesting little valley, with microclimates, soil, precipitation, and temperatures that differ from those just a mile away,” says winery manager James Smith. Vines were planted in 2012 and the team started making wine in 2016, then opened the tasting room in March 2020. “The first week was great,” deadpans Smith. “In 2019,” he recalls, “we had just finished pruning when hailstorms knocked out almost 90 percent of our crop,” he says. “Most of the vines thought they were dying that year, and they produced an excellent wine.”

These days, travelers to Fort Davis, Marfa, Big Bend, and beyond can enjoy Château Wright’s wines at a tasting room with mountain vistas, along with charcuterie, salads, and sandwiches.

CHATEAU WRIGHT PHOTO COURTESY OF THE WINERY; C.L. BUTAUD WINES PHOTO COURTESY OF THE WINERY



C.L. Butaud Wines, Austin

CLBUTAUD.COM



WINNING WINE

2021 Blanc de Noir

Tasting Notes

“This wine is salty and zippy with white flowers and tangerine. It tastes like an orange push-pop!” — Craig Collins

Winery details

In 2006, C.L. Butaud founder and winemaker Randy Hester left a job with a distributor in Houston and moved to Napa Valley, where he spent the next decade studying the industry from the ground up. When he moved back to Texas in 2017 with his wife, Brooke, he founded C.L. Butaud Wines in honor of his great-grandfather.

Hester sourced his grapes for this wine (a 50/50 blend of Grenache and Mourvèdre) from the High Plains, then made the wine in Fredericksburg at Slate Mill Wine Collective, a winemaking incubator that serves many other small producers. Seated tastings at the cozy C.L. Butaud Tasting Room in Austin allow guests to sample Hester’s portfolio, which runs the gamut from an elegant Sangiovese to this juicy Blanc de Noir.

“Blanc de Noir is a white wine made from a red grape,” says Hester, who notes the technique is common in making Champagne, although more unusual in still wines. “Don’t bother trying to nail down tasting notes,” Hester advises. “Experiment with the temperature you prefer and just enjoy.”

Hilmy Cellars, Fredericksburg

HILMYCELLARS.COM



WINNING WINE

2021 Rosé

Tasting Notes

“This is a delicate rosé with floral notes along with orange zest and raspberry cream. The palate has a nice stoney minerality as well.” — **Craig Collins**

Winery details

“We wanted to do a light, crisp style of rosé, like the rosés enjoyed in Provence, France,” says Hilmy Cellars winemaker Michael Barton. Though Hilmy grows Mourvèdre, Petit Syrah, and other varieties on its 7.5-acre estate vineyards, founder Erik Hilmy went to the High Plains for this wine’s bright Cinsault, a grape known for its strawberry aromas and zesty tropical-fruit flavors. “In 2021, we had to pick the fruit a little earlier to beat the rain,” Barton says. “This year is a drought year, so the fruit will be more concentrated for the 2022 version. Cinsault is a fun grape to play with, and we got fantastic results: The stars aligned and we made a nice wine.”

Tastings of Hilmy’s portfolio take place in a rustic tasting room adorned with works by local artists or on a shaded pavilion overlooking the vineyards.



Llano Estacado Winery, Lubbock

LLANOWINE.COM



WINNING WINE

2019 Sangiovese, Newsom Vineyards

Tasting Notes

“This is an excellent Sangiovese. It’s lean and dry with bright red fruit, candied rose petal, herbs, and a solid cherry core.” — **Jack Mason**

Winery details

Established by Clinton “Doc” McPherson, Robert Reed, Roy Mitchell, and a team of investors in 1976, Lubbock’s Llano Estacado Winery produces 160,000 cases of wine across three basic divisions: the popular sweet wine branch, a wholesale branch, and a direct-to-consumer branch, which includes the tasting room and wine club.

“We’ve been sourcing Sangiovese from Newsom Vineyards for almost twenty years, and we’ve come to know it as a vineyard that produces long-lived aromatic wine of finesse and grace,” says head winemaker Jason Centanni. “Each September we do a themed release for our wine club, and this was part of a trio of single-vineyard releases highlighting Sangiovese. I want to show that the place where the grapes grow matters.”

Visitors can tour the production facility and sample these special releases at Llano Estacado’s spacious tasting room, which includes a large gift shop and exhibits about the winemaking process.



Longhorn Cellars, Fredericksburg

LONGHORNCCELLARS.COM



WINNING WINE

2019 Petit Verdot

Tasting Notes

“This is a great varietal Petit Verdot. It’s big and luscious with dark plum and blackberry notes along with cinnamon spice and soft integrated tannins.” — **Jessica Dupuy**

Winery details

Longhorn Cellars owners Deanna and Mike Dickey were working as a nurse and emergency physician, respectively, when they traveled in 2012 to Napa Valley and became enamored with wine. Back in Texas, Mike earned the Viticulture and Enology Certificate at Texas Tech University while Deanna studied with the Wine and Spirit Education Trust, all the while seeking advice from wine friends about entering the industry. In 2015, they planted their vineyard near Pontotoc, and a few years later discovered a winery for sale near Fredericksburg that fit the family-friendly vibe they sought. In 2018, Longhorn Cellars sold its first wine and opened its tasting room.

“We are family-oriented, and we even allow dogs,” says Deanna, who adds that they’re about to expand the production facility for tours. “We’ve got miniature horses and Longhorns that you can feed, games and live music, and visitors can go into the vineyards and see the rows of Malbec, Merlot, and Nero d’Avola that we’re growing in our estate vineyards.”



Lost Draw Cellars, Fredericksburg

LOSTDRAWCELLARS.COM



WINNING WINE

2021 Picpoul Blanc

Tasting Notes

“A super fun wine that’s perky and vibrant with notes of juicy lemon, ripe peach, and tropical Juicy Fruit gum.” — **Jessica Dupuy**

Winery details

High Plains grape-grower Andy Timmons, who founded Lost Draw Cellars in 2012 with partners Andrew Sides and Troy Ottmers, raves about Picpoul Blanc’s ability to recover from whatever Mother Nature throws its way: “Winemakers can’t control variables like drought, heat, or late spring freezes,” says Timmons, “but Picpoul seems to thrive in tough conditions.”

Since Picpoul maintains its high acidity, winemakers treasure it for blending, too—often with other French Rhone varieties like Viognier, Roussanne, and Marsanne. Brad Buckelew, Head Winemaker for Lost Draw Cellars, notes, “The more we work with the Picpoul variety, and the more we see what our fans enjoy, the more we improve. We’re seven vintages in, and the best is yet to come with Picpoul.”

Lost Draw’s tasting room offers barrel-tastings and production tours, food and wine pairings, and live music on weekends.





McPherson Cellars, Lubbock

MCPHERSONCELLARS.COM



WINNING WINE

2019 Petite Syrah, Farmhouse Vineyards, Crookhouse East Block

Tasting Notes

“A fantastic Petite Sirah. This wine is dark and brooding with jammy black fruit, Luden’s cough drops, allspice, and a musky finish.” — **Craig Collins**

Winery details

McPherson Cellars, founded in 2000 by winemaker Kim McPherson, focuses on sustainably farmed, small-batch wines from the High Plains. “This Petite Syrah is part of our new ‘block’ series,” says assistant winemaker Spenser Igo. “Every year, we choose six of our best vineyard sites that our growers feel best represent what the varietal can do. This one has great color, lots of blueberry flavors, and, on the nose, I get lots of pepper and jammy notes.”

A tasting experience at McPherson Cellar’s true urban winery in downtown Lubbock, includes a flight of five wines and a tour of the production facility.

Pebble Rock Cellars Johnson City

PEBBLEROCKCELLARS.WINE



WINNING WINE

2019 Sagrantino

Tasting Notes

“This Sagrantino has great complexity: It’s bright and balanced with notes of cran-apple, cinnamon, allspice, and candied cherry.” — **Jack Mason**

Winery details

Winemaker Robert Nida, who founded Pebble Rock Cellars in 2018 with his wife, Lydia, says that a friendship he made while working a harvest in Italy helped him harness this inky, highly tannic grape’s voluptuous nature. “We had a contract on an acre in the High Plains, and we had to figure out what to do with it,” he says with a laugh.

The grapes were permitted to fully ripen, allowing for a wine with mature tannins and high alcohol content. “When you visit our tasting room, we encourage conversation as we discuss our story, philosophy, and process,” Robert says. “With the Sagrantino, the fruit really shines. We tell people it’s a really tannic wine, but then they’re surprised by how soft it is.”



Pedernales Cellars, Stonewall

PEDERNALESCELLARS.COM



WINNING WINE

2019 Tempranillo Reserve

Tasting Notes:

“This wine tastes like Rioja! There’s red and black fruit with both dried and stewed character and a floral note of potpourri and rose petals.” — **Craig Collins**

WINNING WINE

2018 Touriga Nacional

Tasting Notes

“Floral notes of hibiscus are followed by dark plum, cassis, dark cherry, and baking chocolate. This wine is balanced with a savory, nutty character on the finish.” — **Jack Mason**

Winery details

In 2005, Pedernales Cellars founders Julie and David Kuhlken developed a concept for a boutique winery focusing on grape varietals that thrive in the Hill Country. The siblings’ parents, Larry and Jeanine Kuhlken, had experimented with grapes here in the early 1990s and instilled in their family the importance of sustainability, history, and being good stewards of the land. These days, along with grapes from the original seventeen-acre Kuhlken Estate Vineyard north of Fredericksburg, winemakers David Kuhlken and Joanna

Wilczoch also use fruit from four High Plains vineyards, allowing customers to taste a wide variety of what Texas can offer.

“The 2018 Kuhlken Vineyards Touriga Nacional is dear to our hearts, because growing Touriga is a labor of love,” Julie says. Wilczoch, who helped farm the fruit, notes its vigor and small clusters, observing that “it’s a fun wine for me because I did a bit of everything on it.” Medium-bodied, with intense notes of dark fruit and leather with a fresh acidity, the Touriga is exclusive to wine-club members and visitors to the tasting room, (Visitors who want an in-depth experience can book a personalized tour of the production facility, which includes tank or barrel samples.)

With its fresh acidity and medium body, the 2019 Tempranillo Reserve, a blend of Hill Country and High Plains fruit, is a natural for food pairing, especially with grilled meats and hearty vegetarian dishes. “It’s one of our flagship wines,” Julie notes.



Rising Sun Vineyards, McDade

RISING-SUN-VINEYARD.COM



WINNING WINE

2021 Morning Dew White

Tasting Notes

“Approachable and versatile, this elegant white has notes of yellow apple and lemon zest, and a nice, mineral-driven finish.” — Jack Mason

Winery details

With High Plains-grown Riesling and Sémillon grapes and production assistance from Dr. Bob Young’s custom-crush facility at Bending Branch Winery in Comfort, this zippy white wine echoes the spritzzy wines found in the Basque regions of France and Spain, where Rising Sun owners Steve and Sandy Frintz have roots.

Inspired by a 2016 visit to Perissos Vineyard and Winery in Burnet, the couple’s son and daughter-in-law gifted them with 200 vines. Viticulturists at Texas A&M eventually steered them to Blanc du Bois and Lenoir grapes, but these days the family counts on Tannat and Vermentino as their go-to estate wines. “We’re at the highest point in Bastrop County, on sandy soil surrounded by pine trees,” says Steve. “Grapevines like sand.”

Visitors can try a flight of Rising Sun’s wines at the tasting room, tour the vineyard, and enjoy live music and house-made pizza at the restaurant. “All of this with our cows lowing in the distance,” says sommelier Shayna Gonzales.



RISING SUN VINEYARDS PHOTO COURTESY OF THE WINERY



A Perfect Case

Winners of the Texas Vintners Cup 2022

- ★ **Adolphos Cellars** 2019 Chenin Blanc
- ★ **Château Wright Lièvre** 2019 Red Blend
- ★ **C.L. Butaud Wines** 2021 Blanc de Noir
- ★ **Hilmy Cellars** 2021 Rosé
- ★ **Llano Estacado Winery** 2019 Sangiovese, Newsom Vineyards
- ★ **Longhorn Cellars** 2019 Petit Verdot
- ★ **Lost Draw Cellars** 2021 Picpoul Blanc
- ★ **McPherson Cellars** 2019 Petite Syrah, Farmhouse Vineyards, Crookhouse
- ★ **Pebble Rock Cellars** 2019 Sagrantino
- ★ **Pedernales Cellars** 2019 Tempranillo Reserve
- ★ **Pedernales Cellars** 2018 Touriga Nacional
- ★ **Rising Sun Vineyards** 2021 Morning Dew White

The Honorable Mentions

More Great Texas Wines to Try!

These eighteen wines were too good not to call out. With the twelve Best in Texas wines, that’s a total of thirty stand out bottles from the Lone Star State—each with its own unique strengths and qualities.

Red

Hilmy Cellars, 2020 Tempranillo Reserve, Kubacek Vineyards
McPherson Cellars, 2019 Syrah, Lahey Vineyards
Newsom Vineyards, 2019 Malbec
Pedernales Cellars, 2018 Valhalla
Peters Prairie Vineyards, 2019 Barbera
Ron Yates Winery, 2019 Tempranillo, Friesen Vineyards
Spicewood Vineyards, Tempranillo
William Chris Vineyards Mourvèdre, La Pradera Vineyards
William Chris Vineyards Syrah, High Cross Vineyard
Wine For the People, 2020 La Valentia Dolcetto

Rosé

Arché Winery, 2021 Rosé
Becker Vineyards, 2021 Provençal Rosé

White

Adega Vinho, 2020 Chardonnay, Texas Hills Vineyard
English Newsom Cellars, 2021 Moscato
Duchman Family Winery, 2020 Roussanne, Oswald Vineyard
Llano Estacado Winery, 2020 Chardonnay, Dell Valley Vineyards
Llano Estacado Winery, 2021 Sauvignon Blanc, Signature Series
Pebble Rock Cellars, 2020 Roussanne

BOTTLE PHOTOGRAPH BY BILL PEARY, PEARY PHOTOGRAPHY

MAP OF WINERIES TK

Win a Wine Getaway!

SCAN QR CODE TO LEARN MORE

From Uncork Texas Wines, in partnership with *Texas Monthly Studio*, the Texas Vintners Cup competition has determined the ultimate case of Texas wine. Twelve individual bottles of Texas wines will complete a single case, reflecting the very best our state offers. Wine enthusiasts can enter the sweepstakes with winners receiving prizes from winning Texas wineries! Prize packages include Grand Prize: Texas Wine Weekend and full case of award-winning Texas Vintners Cup wines (value: \$1550), Two Runners Up will each win a full case of award-winning Texas Vintners Cup wines (value: \$550 each).

Enter the sweepstakes and find our official rules at [TEXASMONTHLY.COM/WIN-TEXAS-WINE](https://www.texasmonthly.com/win-texas-wine). Only open to U.S. legal residents age 21 or older at time of participation. Deadline to enter at 5:00 PM CT on October 7, 2022.

