



The Very Best in Texas

Happy Texas Wine Month!
Welcome to the
2023 Texas Vintners Cup,
Texas Monthly's third wine
competition in collaboration
with the Texas Department
of Agriculture's Uncork
Texas Wines program.

BY TINA DANZE



Texas's \$20 billion wine industry is booming, with 443 producers and 9,300 acres of vineyards growing 70-plus grape varieties. Using grapes that grow well in Texas, more producers are crafting wines that reflect their terroir—a sense of place that you can taste. New labeling laws help consumers confidently choose wines made with grapes grown in Texas, and in specific locales—a single vineyard, county, or one of the state's eight AVAs (American Viticultural Areas). Our judges picked their favorites, after tasting 236 wines produced by 70 wineries focused on Texas grapes. Judging again this year were Texas

wine writer Jessica Dupuy, a Certified Sommelier who holds a Diploma through the Wine and Spirit Educational Trust; Master Sommelier Jack Mason, Texas portfolio manager at Republic National Distributing Company; and Master Sommelier Craig Collins, Sales Manager at VINTUS, a wine importer. The trio named 12 wines to the top tier and awarded many Honorable Mentions.

The best way to experience Texas wines is to visit wineries, where you can taste, ask questions, take tours, or just relax and enjoy the scenery. Small bites are usually on offer, and cooler fall temperatures make patio sipping a pleasure. Hit the road, and head to a Texas winery!



"My goal as Texas Agriculture Commissioner is to make Texas the number one wine destination in the United States. TDA programs like Uncork Texas Wines put a spotlight on the Texas wine industry as well as specific Texas vineyards and brands. For decades, we've been supporting these great Texas winemakers who develop some of the best wines in the world. I encourage Texas Monthly readers to taste and experience for themselves that Texas wine is the real deal."

—Texas Agriculture Commissioner Sid Miller

JACK MASON, LEFT, AND CRAIG COLLINS JOIN JESSICA DUPUY
AMONG THE TEXAS GRAPES.

Make sure to visit the **GO TEXAN Pavilion**
at the **State Fair of Texas** to sample these
award-winning wines on October 13 & 14, 2023!

SCAN QR CODE TO LEARN MORE



TexasMonthly

The Winning Wines

Here, listed in alphabetical order of winery name, are the 12 winning Texas wines and the wineries that produced them. Read on to learn where the wines are made, where the grapes are grown, and details about the wineries. This fall, get out and discover the diversity of Texas wines! Call ahead to check hours and reservation requirements.

Can't wait to taste these wines?

Scan the QR code to purchase your limited availability mixed case of the 2023 Texas Vintners Cup Top 12 Texas wines here:



Augusta Vin Winery, Fredericksburg

AUGSTAVIN.COM



WINNING WINE

2020 Augusta Vin Montepulciano Reserve

Tasting Notes

“Aromas of toasted marshmallow and ripe blackberry and plum lead to an earthy palate with hints of baking spice, tea leaf, and leather.” — **Jack Mason**

Winery Details

Owner Scott Felder developed Augusta Vin bent on offering visitors an elevated tasting experience with excellent hospitality. On a 130-acre property, eight miles from downtown Fredericksburg, the winery planted a 60-acre vineyard in 2017 and opened its two-story, timber-framed tasting room in 2019. It offers sweeping vineyard views and restaurant-style table service for the 1.5-hour tastings. “We have highly educated servers—most with sommelier training,” says Brian Menconi, Augusta Vin’s general manager. On rotation are about 30 wines, including nine estate-grown varietals.

This Montepulciano, made with fruit from a nearby vineyard, shows layers of complexity. “It’s a medium-to-heavy structured wine, with a texture that puts it in line with a softer Bordeaux red, like Malbec,” Menconi says. The tasting room menu balances heavier reds—like Tannat and Petite Sirah—with lighter wines, including an estate Counoise sparkling rosé. “Counoise makes great sparkling wine because it’s got that pleasant texture that Blanc de Noir would have,” Menconi explains. Visitors can also taste at outdoor tables on the green, surrounded by vineyards.



PHOTOS COURTESY OF THE WINERIES



Becker Vineyards, Stonewall

BECKERVINEYARDS.COM



WINNING WINE

2019 Barbera, Tallent Vineyards

Tasting Notes

“From the Hickory Sand soils of Mason County, this Barbera offers notes of red plum, cherry, and raspberry framed by layered herbal notes that add to the wine’s balance and lift.” — **Jessica Dupuy**

Winery Details

Founded by Richard and Bunny Becker in 1992, Becker Vineyards occupies a 308-acre estate that includes 66 acres of vineyards, a 10,0000-square-foot production facility, and a homestead cabin built in 1890. Although the estate grows 11 grape varieties—including Sauvignon Blanc, Petite Sirah, Viognier, and Cabernet Sauvignon—Becker tapped Tallent Vineyards for its Barbera. The Beckers knew firsthand that this Italian grape variety handles Hill Country heat well, having once grown it themselves in Mason County, says Nichole Bendele, Director of Marketing for Becker.

To make this elegant Barbera, the winery added small amounts of its estate Petite Sirah (10%) and Cinsault (5%). “The Petite Sirah adds tannic structure and the Cinsault lends a fragrant bouquet, as well as boysenberry, anise, and red fruit notes,” Bendele says.

Visitors to Becker can choose from 30 wines to enjoy in several tasting areas: a spacious, open-air pavilion, overlooking lavender and flower fields; the veranda; or the main tasting room. The winery offers six different tasting experiences and complimentary production facility tours.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF THE WINERIES

Bolen Vineyards, Smyer

BOLENVINEYARDS.COM



WINNING WINE

2022 Marsanne

Tasting Notes

“A bright, refreshing white wine with notes of pear and underripe peach and a savory, herbaceous palate.” — **Craig Collins**

Winery Details

Located 20 miles west of Lubbock, Bolen Vineyards is a tiny boutique winery founded and run by Rowdy Bolen and his wife Tameisha. The couple started out in 2010, growing grapes for Hill Country wineries. After Tameisha attended Texas Tech’s Viticulture Certificate Program, the Bolens helped co-found a nearby winery, then established their own winery at Bolen Vineyards in 2019.

Using estate-grown Merlot, Malbec, Mourvèdre, and Tannat, plus varietals from other High Plains growers, Bolen makes mostly bold red wines. “But we needed a white to serve in the tasting room,” Rowdy says. Impressed with the Marsanne grapes from Canted County Vineyards in Lamesa, they made this single varietal wine, although the grape is traditionally blended. “It’s got a pleasant pop of acidity, green apple, pear, and delicate white flowers,” Rowdy says. The tasting room also sells a Mourvèdre rosé—Teenage Wasteland—that their daughter, Reese, made for her high school FFA project. Once a month, the winery opens to visitors, with live music, food trucks, and games on the lawn overlooking the vineyard.



C.L. Butaud Wines, Austin

CLBUTAUD.COM



WINNING WINE

2021 Farmhouse Vineyards Grenache

Tasting Notes

“This Grenache is bright, tart, juicy, and fun! Bright red cherry and black raspberry notes lead to a light, earthy finish.” — **Jack Mason**

Winery Details

Houston native Randy Hester spent ten years working and studying in Napa Valley with one goal: returning to Texas to make great wines with 100% Texas grapes. In 2017, Randy and his wife Brooke moved to Austin and opened C.L. Butaud Wines, named for Hester’s Cajun great-grandfather. Sourcing grapes from the High Plains and Hill Country, Hester makes wines at a co-working space in Hye. Although Tempranillo is his flagship wine, he works mostly with Rhone varietals, like Grenache, Mourvèdre, and Counoise. “Grenache is where my heart is. I make it every way I can,” he says, adding that C.L. Butaud has sparkling and rosé versions.

For its standout 2021 Grenache, Hester bought grapes from Farmhouse Vineyards in Brownfield, paying a premium for the grower to reduce grape yields. “Everything works better naturally when there’s less fruit on the vine,” he says, citing enhanced flavor, acidity, tannic structure, and color. You can taste flights of C.L. Butaud wines—and Hester’s two other wine brands—in the winery’s tasting room and on the shaded patio.



Château Wright, Fort Davis

CHATEAUWRIGHT.COM



WINNING WINE

2020 Malbec “Point of Rocks”

Tasting Notes

“With grapes grown in the Davis Mountains of West Texas, this wine is bold and concentrated with notes of ripe blackberry, smoked Chinese tea, Lucchese leather boots, mocha, and fresh-baked cinnamon bun.” — **Jack Mason**

Winery Details

On vineyards perched a mile above sea level in the Davis Mountains AVA, owners Jack Wright and Adam White grow Rhone varietals for their wines. When a neighboring vineyard offered them leftover Malbec grapes, the winemakers stepped out of their Rhone zone. “We had not really planned on making a Malbec, but when we got the fruit, we knew it was something great,” says James R. Smith, Château Wright’s sales and marketing director. Thanks to low grape yields and White’s skillful winemaking, the winery’s first 100% Malbec impresses. “There’s so much flavor in there. It’s dark; it’s inky; it’s complex; it’s got a lot of tannins—but it’s not like rip-your-face-off tannins,” Smith says. The Malbec shares a link with the winery’s Rhone-style wines: an expression of terroir, imparted by the volcanic soil, cooler temperatures, and longer growing season of Texas’s highest elevation AVA. Visitors to Château Wright—located 20 miles north of Marfa—can also enjoy red and white Rhone-style blends and fare from Smith’s food truck, on a patio with views of Blue Mountain.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF THE WINERIES

English Newsom Cellars, Lubbock

ENGLISHNEWSOM.COM



WINNING WINE

2021 Dry Riesling

Tasting Notes

“This fruity Riesling is a light, refreshing, easy wine with notes of ambrosia salad, ripe peach, and tropical citrus.” — **Craig Collins**

Winery Details

In 2018, Tommy and Jana English teamed with High Plains grape growers Steve and Cindy Newsom to found English Newsom Cellars at the former Caprock Winery in Lubbock. The winery sources grapes from 100 acres just west of Lubbock, where Steve and his family grow 21 varietals at an elevation of 3,600 feet.

Steve says his vineyard’s focus on grape quality, versus quantity, accounts for the winery’s success with this Riesling. “If you aren’t looking for super high yield, I do think the Texas High Plains is particularly well-suited for Riesling,” he says. The tasting room offers a wide range of varietals and blends, including some lesser-known wines such as Picardan—a rare French white varietal with apricot, peach, and nectarine flavors. English Newsom hosts many public events, including themed parties, food and wine pairings, live music, and a weekly market.



PHOTOS COURTESY OF THE WINERIES



Invention Vineyards, Fredericksburg

INVENTIONVINEYARDS.COM



WINNING WINE

2022 Vintage Riesling

Tasting Notes

“With beautiful floral lime zest and summer fruit punch notes, this wine is slightly off-dry with a nice balanced finish.” — **Jessica Dupuy**

Winery Details

Invention Vineyards (IV) was founded last October, when Heath Family Brands bought Slate Mill Collective. Heath—which owns Grape Creek Winery, Heath Sparkling Wines, and Jenblossom Cellars—had longed for more production capacity, a new brand, and a presence on Hwy. 16, says owner Brian Heath. Given Slate Mill’s location, 35-acre vineyard, and spacious production facility, “the puzzle pieces fell together,” he says.

This fruity, off-dry style Riesling has been popular with visitors to IV. “It’s a pretty traditional Riesling, for Texas. The (grapes) mature really fast in the High Plains, so it expresses more of those floral and citrus characteristics,” says Jason Englert, winemaker for Heath Family Brands. The 2022 harvest yielded concentrated fruit, but a smaller crop—so Englert supplemented the Riesling with 7% Viognier. “It doesn’t overpower the character of the Riesling, and it adds a little elegance,” he says.

Last year, IV produced ten old-world style wines, including two Bordeaux blends and a Mourvèdre rosé. Visitors can sample them in the industrial-chic tasting room, or on a 120-seat patio with stunning vineyard views.



PHOTO BY LACIE FREELAN

McPherson Cellars, Lubbock

MCPHERSONCELLARS.COM



WINNING WINE

2022 McPherson Cellars Counoise

Tasting Notes

“Light and delicious, this wine is soft, fresh, and supple with a sturdy backbone and notes of ripe strawberry and blueberry, and mushroom.” — **Craig Collins**

Winery Details

Winemaker Kim McPherson, who founded McPherson Cellars in 2000, had previously used Counoise in red blends—a traditional use of the Rhone grape. But in 2022, after sourcing exceptional grapes from Farmhouse Vineyards in the High Plains, he saved them for this single varietal Counoise. “It’s very fruity, and the closest thing you’ll get to Pinot Noir in this state. It’s soft and elegant,” McPherson says. Unlike Pinot Noir, Counoise “loves the heat,” he says, quipping, “you won’t see Counoise in Oregon.”

Making single varietal red wines from the High Plains’s best vineyard sites guides the winery’s Block Series, which includes Carignan, Cinsault, Grenache, Mourvèdre, Petit Sirah, Syrah, Dolcetto, and Alicante Bouschet. They’re fruit forward wines, made in an old-world style, with subtle French oak, and less than 14% alcohol. “We like to call it a Claret style,” McPherson says. Although these are special, small production wines—the kind most wineries reserve for club members—the tasting room sells them by the glass. “My daughter said, ‘you have to let people taste these wines,’” he says.

Messina Hof Winery, Bryan

MESSINAHOF.COM



WINNING WINE

2019 Paulo Sagrantino

Tasting Notes

“A beautiful, age-worthy wine with notes of ripe black plum and blueberry, dark chocolate, and dried herbs backed by a firm, complex structure with velvety tannins.” — **Jessica Dupuy**

Winery Details

Founded by Paul and Merrill Bonarrigo in 1977, Messina Hof has a history of pioneering grape varietals that flourish in Texas. Now helmed by the couple’s son, Paul M., and his wife, Karen, the winery continues to blaze trails with grape varieties, such as Sagrantino. In 2012, Messina Hof was the first in Texas to plant this robust, tannic grape, which was scarcely available in the U.S. The first two vintages were so impressive that the winery made Sagrantino a big part of its red wine program. “Now we have long term contracts on it. There was so little planted in the U.S. that we’re actually the largest producer of Sagrantino in the country,” says owner and winemaker Paul M. Bonarrigo.

The 2019 vintage is complex, with jammy fruit flavors and firm tannins. “For a Texas steak, you want something with a lot of tannins. Sagrantino is a great wine for that,” he says. The tasting room offers 50 wines, including 15 Italian varietals and blends, and Messina Hof’s acclaimed port-style wines—such as Papa Paolo Port.



PHOTOS COURTESY OF THE WINERIES



Pedernales Cellars, Stonewall

PEDERNALESCELLARS.COM



WINNING WINE

2020 Texas High Plains Grenache

Tasting Notes:

“A bright and elegant Grenache with notes of cherry, baking spice, and cocoa powder.” — **Jack Mason**

Winery Details

Since founding Pedernales Cellars on their family’s vineyard estate in 2006, siblings Julie and David Kuhlken have prioritized sustainability, replanted the 1995 Kuhlken Vineyard, and diversified their High Plains grape sources. Along the way, they’ve experimented with new grape varieties in both varietal wines and blends.

Julie Kuhlken credits the success of Pedernales first red Grenache to the addition of 25% Graciano, a black-skinned Spanish grape. “Graciano is long on tannins, so it gives it more structure. Color is the Achilles heel of Grenache, and the Graciano helps with that too,” she says.

Visitors to Pedernales’s tasting room will find up to 20-plus wines, which they can also enjoy on the wood-decked patio overlooking the Pedernales River Valley. Choices include Tempranillo, Viognier, and a variety of red blends—mostly Italian, Rhone, and Bordeaux styles. Special Blends featuring Touriga Nacional, a Portuguese red grape variety, are available to wine club members. For the coming solar eclipses in October and April, the winery will host viewing events, for which reservations are required.

Skies Over Texas Winery, Early

SKIESOVERTEXASWINERY.COM



WINNING WINE

2021 Mourvèdre

Tasting Notes

“A lovely, clean, and cheerful wine with aromas of boysenberry, ripe blackberry, and cherry, and a nervy and peppery structure.” — **Jack Mason**

Winery Details

Located in central Texas, just off Highway 183, Skies over Texas Winery was founded in 2016 by Brian McCue and his wife, Moira. The McCues based the winery on an 11-acre property where they converted an old barn into a tasting room, and have plans to build a production facility. Meanwhile, Skies Over Texas’s wines are produced at a friend’s winery, two hours away.

Made with grapes from the High Plains, this 100% Mourvèdre is one of 16 wines in Skies Over Texas’s portfolio. “It would appeal to Cab and Syrah drinkers,” McCue says. “Often, people come in asking for a Cab or a Chardonnay. We’ve really enjoyed having some of the more unusual single varietals and we use this opportunity to try to educate them about Texas wines.”

Marked by a gigantic “WINERY” sign visible from the highway, Skies Over Texas’s tasting room exudes Texas charm—decorative finishes were salvaged from the property’s original structures. Inside, or on the large covered patio, you can taste Roussanne, Montepulciano, Dolcetto, Sangiovese, and several blends, along with pizzas and paninis.



PHOTOS COURTESY OF THE WINERIES

William Chris Vineyards, Hye

WILLIAMCHRISWINES.COM



WINNING WINE

2022 Chenin Blanc, Dell Valley Vineyard

Tasting Notes

“Vibrant and zippy, this wine is like a salt-rimmed margarita with notes of melon, lime zest, and white flowers.” — **Craig Collins**

Winery Details

In 2008, William “Bill” Blackmon and Chris Brundrett founded William Chris Vineyards with a shared conviction: great wines aren’t made—they’re grown in the vineyard. The winery, located 58 miles west of Austin, farms almost 90 acres in several Hill Country locations. To make a broader range of wines that showcase other Texas terroirs, it also sources grapes from 36 growers across the state.

For this Chenin Blanc, the winery partnered with Dell Valley Vineyards, in Hudspeth County, northeast of El Paso, and worked closely with the vineyard manager—a 40-year veteran. “I love that it’s an acid-driven white wine that reflects where its grown. It pairs well with so many foods—squash salad, oysters, tuna tartar,” Brundrett says.

The winery’s vineyard focus shows in the tasting room. “Some of the most fantastic wines on our menu are Mourvèdre—we have six different single-vineyard Mourvèdre that we produce,” he says. For an overview of some of the state’s best vineyards, he recommends the Winemaker’s Tasting flight. The winery also offers food and wine tasting experiences.



PHOTO COURTESY OF THE WINERY



A Perfect Case

Winners of the Texas Vintners Cup 2023

- ★ **Augusta Vin Winery**
2020 Augusta Vin Montepulciano Reserve
- ★ **Becker Vineyards**
2019 Barbera, Tallent Vineyards
- ★ **Bolen Vineyards**
2022 Marsanne
- ★ **C.L. Butaud Wines**
2021 Farmhouse Vineyards Grenache
- ★ **Château Wright**
2020 Malbec “Point of Rocks”
- ★ **English Newsom Cellars**
2021 Dry Riesling
- ★ **Invention Vineyards**
2022 Vintage Riesling
- ★ **McPherson Cellars**
2022 McPherson Cellars Counoise
- ★ **Messina Hof Winery**
2019 Paulo Sagrantino
- ★ **Pedernales Cellars**
2020 Texas High Plains Grenache
- ★ **Skies Over Texas Winery**
2021 Mourvèdre
- ★ **William Chris Vineyards**
2022 Chenin Blanc, Dell Valley Vineyard

The Honorable Mentions

More Great Texas Wines to Try!

To round out the Top 30 stand-out wines in Texas, here are the 18 Reserve Champions. These wines are too good not to mention!

Red

Christoval Winery 2019 Cabernet Sauvignon
Invention Vineyards 2021 Left Bank Bordeaux
Llano Estacado Winery 2021 Artist Blend
Wedding Oak Winery 2020 Cabernet Sauvignon
Fly Gap Winery 2021 Tempranillo
Grape Creek Vineyards 2019 The Individualist
Bending Branch 2019 Tannat
Duchman Family Winery 2018 Montepulciano
Valley Mills Vineyards 2021 Grenache
Ab Astris 2019 Zinfandel
Pebble Rock Cellars 2020 Tempranillo
Portree Cellars 2021 Aglianico
Ron Yates 2019 Friesen
Bell Springs Winery 2020 Tempranillo
Lost Draw Cellars 2020 GSM
Sandstone Cellars 2019 XX111

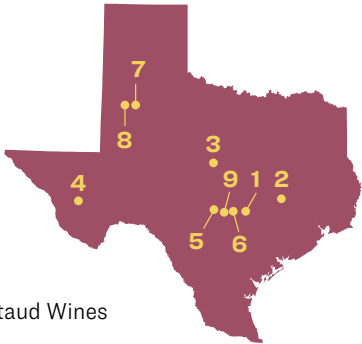
White

Lewis Wines 2021 Chenin Blanc
Lost Draw Cellars 2022 Picpoul Blanc

Sorry, no rosés made our list this year!

BOTTLE PHOTOGRAPH BY **BILL PEARY, PEARY PHOTOGRAPHY**

Visit the Wineries



1. **Austin** C.L. Butaud Wines
2. **Bryan** Messina Hof Winery
3. **Early** Skies Over Texas Winery
4. **Fort Davis** Château Wright Winery
5. **Fredericksburg**
Augusta Vin Winery, Invention Vineyards
6. **Hye** William Chris Vineyards
7. **Lubbock**
English Newsom Cellars, McPherson Cellars
8. **Smyer** Bolen Vineyards
9. **Stonewall** Becker Vineyards, Pedernales Cellars

Win a Wine Getaway!

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From Uncork Texas Wines, in partnership with *Texas Monthly Studio*, the 2023 Texas Vintners Cup competition has determined the ultimate case of Texas wine! Twelve individual bottles of Texas wines will complete a single special 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 2023 TX Vintners Cup wines (value: \$1,550), Two Runners Up will each win a full case of award-winning 2023 TX 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 6, 2023.

