

# ARIZONA WINE COUNTRY

Quench your thirst with Arizona's Fastest Growing and Tastiest Industries

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Anyone who has recently taken a trip to Sedona or the Verde Valley has likely noticed a growing number of tasting rooms featuring locally produced wines. Often thought of as being the provenance of Provence or the fertile and foggy valleys of California, upstart Arizona has become the maverick in yet another well-established industry steeped in tradition.

Setting aside the general (and often incorrect) assumption that wines improve with age, industry experts are appreciating the youthful beauty and flavor of our state's products. Respected wine reviewers with *The Wall Street Journal*, *The Wine Advocate*, *Bon Appetit* and *Food & Wine* have all toasted praises to Arizona's wines. The discriminating palates at *Wine Spectator* have also enjoyed a hearty taste, ranking more than 20 wines from eight Arizona wineries at an '88' or better.

These ratings are a coveted point of pride amongst winemakers, but a good wine is all in the tongue of the taster. Perhaps the most enjoyable way to find a favorite Arizona wine is to make a leisurely weekend getaway to one of Arizona's wine regions.

Though individual tasting rooms tend to be located in tourist areas with higher amounts of traffic, much of the wine is produced in vineyards found down State Routes less traveled. Arizona's prime grape growing occurs in the Verde River Valley and in Southeastern Arizona, where the elevations of the Chiricahua Mountains create an ideal growing environment a mile above the hot sands at sea level.



About 60 miles from Elgin, outside Wilcox, Fountain Hills residents and longtime wine collectors Peggy Fiandaca and Curt Dunham own and operate Lawrence Dunham Vineyards. After falling in love with the area and its wines during numerous tasting trips, they began looking for a small plot of land to try their hand at making their own wine and further explore their passion for collecting. Before long, five acres became 40 and with eight acres currently under production, Peggy says their Rhone varietals are doing extremely well.

Familiar favorites include Syrah and Petite Sirah, Grenache and Viognier grapes, which are ideal for the Chiricahua climate and soil, Peggy says. “They’re selling well and getting great reviews,” she adds.

Located in Southeastern Arizona, Kief-Joshua Vineyards was established just outside Elgin in 2003. Already with 16 acres “under vine”, 28-year-old winemaker and Australian trained viticulturalist Kief Manning says their 5,000-foot elevation places them among the highest vineyards in the United States.

“The altitude itself probably doesn’t affect the grapes, but the elevation’s effect on the climate allows for a longer hang-time and added complexity. The grapes don’t ripen at night,” says Mr. Manning. “Plenty of sun and cool nights helps us retain acidity and achieve a good balance.”

Kief-Joshua Vineyards produces around 2,000 cases per year, and is one of the rare Arizona winemakers producing wines from single varietals such as Mourvèdre and Tempranillo, Mediterranean grapes which adapt well to the hot and dry summer climate.





EVERY YEAR, THE ARIZONA WINE GROWERS ASSOCIATION HOSTS THE FESTIVAL AT THE FARM GIVING WINEMAKERS A CHANCE TO SHARE THEIR WINES WITH THE PUBLIC AND EACH OTHER. THIS YEAR, THE EVENT IS ON NOVEMBER 18TH AND 19TH AT THE FARMS AT SOUTH MOUNTAIN.

Although Southern Arizona's climate at 5,000 feet is strikingly similar to Napa Valley - both get about 25" of rainfall annually and blend warm, dry summers with cool, wet winters - producing Estate wines has proven to be more of a challenge. The "Estate" designation, essentially meaning a wine produced completely by a single winery, is rare amongst Arizona wines. This is partly due to the occasionally tricky climate and partly due to the relatively young age of the vineyards and wineries. However, considering the industry's phenomenal growth, odds are good this seemingly elusive recognition will become a part of Arizona wine culture in the near future.

Every year, the Arizona Wine Growers Association hosts The Festival At The Farm giving winemakers a chance to share their wines with the public and each other. This year, the event is on November 18th and 19th at The Farms at South Mountain. James Beard House recognized Executive Chef Greg LaPrad is preparing gastronomical delights to complement this year's wines. Other events include meeting the men and women behind Arizona wines, live seminars and, of course, wine tastings. [www.azwinefestivalatthefarm.com](http://www.azwinefestivalatthefarm.com)