

# Lone Star Wineries

## Texas Culture Meets Premium Wine

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### Texans love Texan products, and wine is no exception.

**T**HE WORLD-CLASS WINES produced in Texas reflect our state's diverse personality - from Cap\*Rock Winery's award-winning Blush Royale, recommended for pairing with barbeque or Tex-Mex and nicknamed "West Texas Kool-Aid," to Comfort Cellars' Jalapeño Wine.

This personality more and more is coming through to those beyond our state's borders as Texas' winemaking industry grows. According to the Texas Wine and Grape Growers Association, our 133 wineries now rank fifth in the United States in grape and wine production. Texas' 220 vineyards span eight American Viticultural Areas, and each grape-producing area features distinct agricultural and weather conditions that produce unique grapes and wines. The Lone Star State is becoming well known for these wines, and, as Texans, we can enjoy these results firsthand at wineries across the state.

### Hill Country

Located in the heart of Texas, the Hill Country is the second largest AVA in the country. Ken Maxwell, owner of *Torre di Pietra*, explains that the climate found in the region lends itself to Mediterranean-style varietals. Other nearby attractions, like Fredericksburg's historic downtown

district, make the area a perfect place to spend a leisurely weekend.

Torre di Pietra winery offers visitors the opportunity to engage all five of their senses. Flower-lined piazza gardens welcome guests and provide space for little ones to play or a relaxing and romantic setting for enjoying a glass of wine and, on Saturday afternoons, live music. Lunch boxes and cheese baskets are available in the gift shop, which Maxwell explains is the largest in any tasting room in Texas. The shop offers Italian and locally made body products and wine-related items, like handmade wooden wine racks.

Visitors can taste five premium wines for \$5. Bianca Laureles, tasting room manager, explains that 60 percent of Torre di Pietra's wines are made from their grapes, grown in vineyards located in Doss and Gillespie County. The rest come from other area vineyards and the Texas High Plains.

Torre di Pietra is known for its Red Flirt, a slightly sweet zinfandel, cabernet, and syrah blend that "flirts" with the palate, starting out sweet and ending up dry, with a spicy kick in the middle. Laureles recommends pairing the wine with barbeque or Mexican food.

Torre di Pietra is open from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. Sunday through Thursday and 10 a.m. to 7 p.m. Fri-



day and Saturday. For more information, visit [www.texashillcountrywine.com](http://www.texashillcountrywine.com) or call 830-644-2829.

Next door, shade provided by several large oak trees, a tinkling waterfall, and a gorgeous view of the Hill Country welcome guests to *Grape Creek Vineyards*. Grape Creek Vineyards offers 12 wines, Italian deli products shipped directly from New York, and locally made condiments. Be sure to try the 2006 Muscat Canelli.

“It tastes like drinking a fruit salad,” says Arlene Ehrlich, who works in the tasting room.

Grape Creek Vineyards is open from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday through Friday, from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. on Saturday, and from 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. on Sunday. Tastings are complimentary. If your timing is right, Jack Ehrlich, who works on the property, may give you a tour of the facility, including the only underground barrel room in the area. For more information, call 830-644-2710 or visit [www.grapecreek.com](http://www.grapecreek.com).

### High Plains

Jason Butler, assistant general manager at *Cap\*Rock Winery*, explains 40 percent of Texas grapes are from the High Plains area. With a dry climate, the high elevation lends itself to warm days and cool nights, resulting in

grapes with a higher sugar content than those grown elsewhere.

The flat land surrounding *Cap\*Rock Winery* allows for a great location for viewing stunning sunsets, and Butler says *Cap\*Rock Winery* is one of the most technologically advanced wineries in the state. Its custom-built equipment is capable of producing up to 100,000 cases annually.

Visitors can taste up to six of *Cap\*Rock's* 16 wines for a \$5 tasting fee. Hours are 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday through Saturday, and tours are available every half hour from noon to 4 p.m. For more information, visit [www.caprockwinery.com](http://www.caprockwinery.com) or call 806-863-2704.

### Texoma

The Texoma AVA features sandy soil and a cool climate, and visitors can taste the results at the oldest continually operating winery in North Texas' Red River Valley, *Homestead Winery*. Known for rich, full-bodied wines, the winery has locations in Denison, Grapevine, and Ivanhoe.

Chandra Moon, tasting room manager at the *Homestead Winery* at Denison, recommends pouring the solera-aged and blended Texas cream sherry over ice cream, or trying their signature wine, *Rose of Ivanhoe*, with Texas cuisine.



The Homestead Winery at Denison is open from 2 to 7 p.m. Monday through Friday and noon to 5 p.m. on Saturday and Sunday. Tastings are \$3 for four wines, and tours are available. For more information, visit [www.homesteadwinery.com](http://www.homesteadwinery.com) or call 903-464-0030.

## Mesilla Valley

*Zin Valle Vineyards*, along the scenic Juan De Oñate Trail in the Mesilla Valley AVA, offers wine made from grapes grown in intense, challenging conditions. A.J. Hawley, the farmer at Zin Valle, recommends the Rising Star red zinfandel. Or, try the 2004 Rising Star Malvasia Bianca wine, a Double Gold Champion at the Houston Livestock Show and Rodeo.

The tasting and barrel rooms at Zin Valle offer breathtaking views of the Franklin Mountains, vineyards, and pecan groves. Tastings are complimentary and available Friday through Monday from noon to 5 p.m. Visit [www.zinvalle.com](http://www.zinvalle.com), or call 915-877-4544 for more information.

## Davis Mountains

*Luz de Estrella Vineyards* offer a taste of grapes grown in the Davis Mountain AVA. The high elevation desert, with huge temperature swings from cool mornings to very hot afternoons, results in intensely flavored, dark-colored grapes.

“Good grapes make good wines, and we have really nice grapes up here,” says Patrick Johnson, Luz de Estrella’s winemaker. “It makes the wine production process so much easier.”

Johnson recommends the winery’s dark, full-bodied cabernet. Luz de Estrella offers tastings for \$3 for seven wines and is open from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. Monday through Saturday and noon to 6 p.m. on Sunday. For more information, visit [www.luzdeestrella.com](http://www.luzdeestrella.com) or call 432-729-3434.

## Visiting Texas Wineries

In addition to seeing the winemaking process firsthand, visiting Texas’ vast array of wineries and vineyards offers travelers an opportunity to enjoy wine in a unique way, Johnson explains.

“The best thing about any winery tour is that you can taste it before you purchase it. You *know* exactly what’s in the bottle when you buy it, rather than *thinking* you know at the grocery store.”

And, of course, the journey to find the “perfect Texas wine” for the dinner table can be just as fun as finding it!

For more information on Texas wineries and vineyards, visit [www.texaswines.org](http://www.texaswines.org) or [www.gotexanwine.org](http://www.gotexanwine.org). ★

