

MONEY

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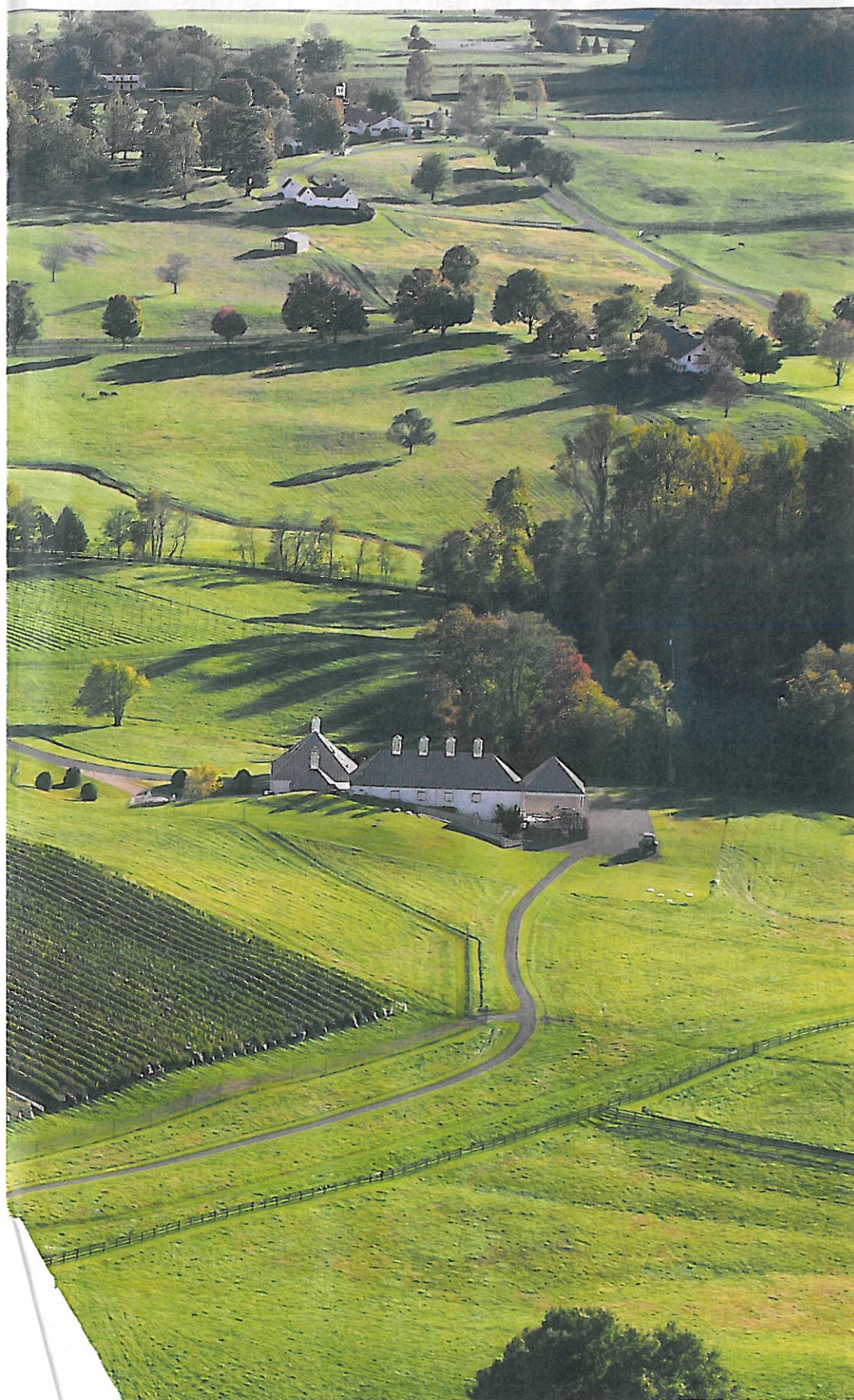


WINE COUNTRY *Confidential*

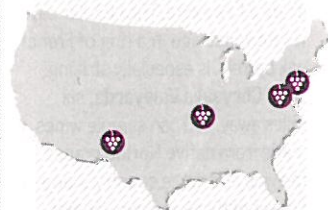
YOU MIGHT NOT KNOW ABOUT THESE FOUR LOW-PROFILE
GRAPE HAVENS. HERE'S WHY YOU SHOULD.

by Stirling Kelso

BOXWOOD ESTATE,
LOCATED IN MIDDLEBURG, VA.,
COVERS 21 ACRES.



No one's saying Napa and Sonoma aren't wonderful. They are. But they can also be crowded and pricey. So next time you're considering a weekend of wine tasting (or even just a day trip), remember these destinations. Each offers award-winning sips, affordable lodging—and a location that's less than an hour from a big city.

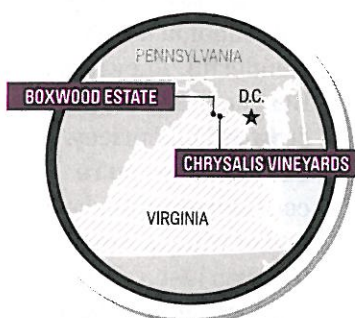


Middleburg, VIRGINIA

Thomas Jefferson tried—and failed—to grow grapes at Monticello. Fortunately, Virginia has had plenty of winemaking success since then. The state has nine major wine regions, but Middleburg, located about an hour outside Washington, D.C., is a great place to start. The area is home to six wineries, not to mention a charming horse-and-hunt culture.



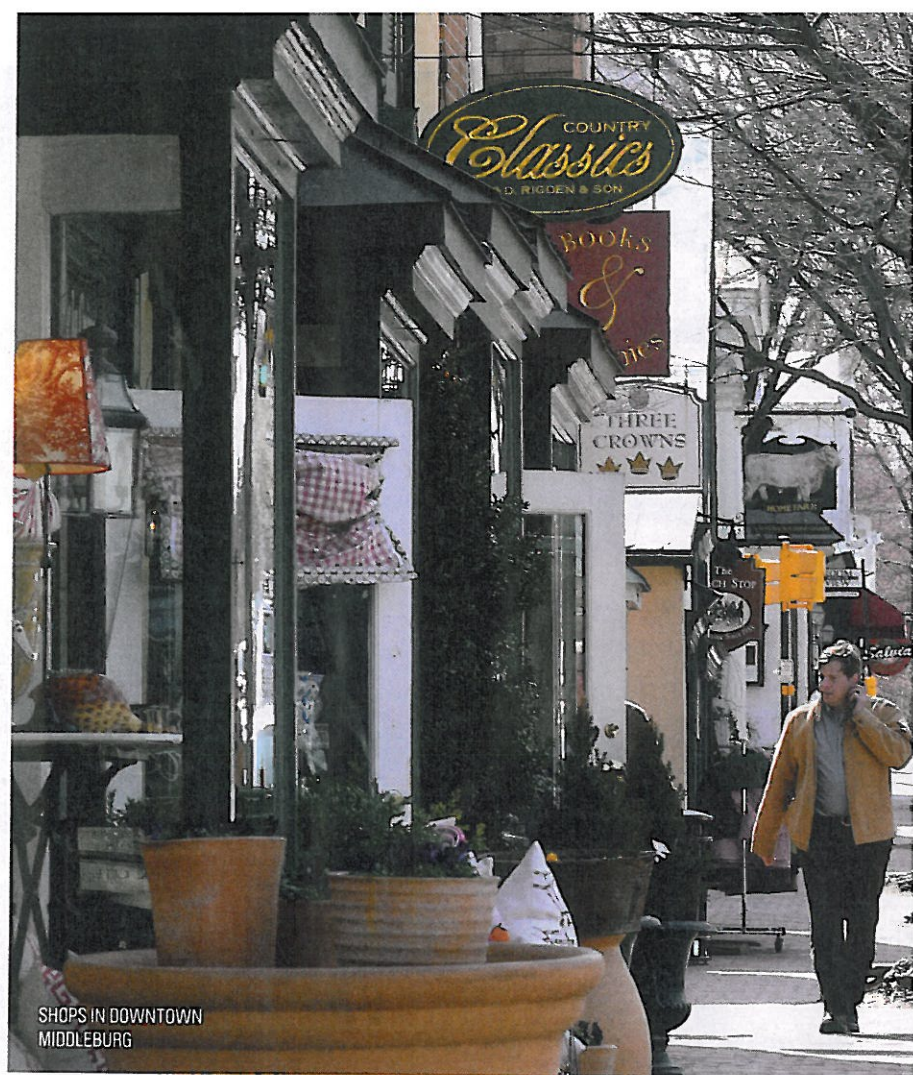
WHERE TO SIP: Begin at the 21-acre **Boxwood Estate**, the grand dame of Middleburg vineyards, open Friday to Sunday. For \$10 you can taste Boxwood's four wines, including Topiary, a *Decanter* World Wine Award-winning Cab Franc and Merlot blend (\$25 a



bottle). An extra perk: Keep your glass as a souvenir. This winery was designed by Jacobsen Architecture, a D.C.-based firm also known for Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis's home in Martha's Vineyard. Boxwood is one of the most elegant vineyards in the region, so don't miss the chance to explore. The circular cave, where wines age in a ring of French oak barrels, is especially striking.

At **Chrysalis Vineyards**, six miles away, you can sample wines made from native Norton grapes; the vineyard is the country's largest grower of this American varietal. The owners of the sprawling 412-acre property invite visitors to stick around after their tasting to drink in views of the Bull Run Mountains and use the Chrysalis outdoor grills. If you like, wash down your BYO burgers or shish kebabs with one of the winery's best value bottles, like the 2011 Mariposa rosé, \$15.

WHERE TO STAY: While you could drive back to D.C., you'll save by staying local. According to research firm STR, the average hotel in Middleburg's Loudoun County is 66% cheaper than lodging in the capital. **The Middleburg**



SHOPS IN DOWNTOWN
MIDDLEBURG

Country Inn (from \$105 weekdays and \$120 weekends) has rooms decorated with period Southern charm and one of the best complimentary breakfasts in town, says Jackie Brown-Saunders with Visit Loudoun. For a bit more, you could also opt for one of the eight Easter-egg-colored rooms (or the freestanding cottage) at the **Briar Patch B&B**, where fall rates start at \$150.

TAKE A VINEYARD BREAK: Stroll down Middleburg's main drag, Washington Street. In shop David Ladd & Co., you'll find handsome highball and gimlet glasses decorated with the town's unofficial mascot, a very posh fox. Drive to Upperville, a few miles away, to the **Hunter's Head Tavern**, suggests *Loudoun Times-Mirror* reporter Trevor Baratto. If it's warm enough, snag a table in the stone courtyard (lunch, \$20).



WINE STORAGE TANKS
AT BOXWOOD ESTATE





MOUNT PLEASANT ESTATES,
AUGUSTA'S OLDEST WINERY

Augusta, MISSOURI

MISSOURI
MOUNT PLEASANT ESTATES

St. Louis

AUGUSTA WINERY

ARKANSAS

Any guesses as to America's first federally certified wine region? Nope, it's not in California. In fact, the honor goes to this Midwestern spot, located 45 miles west of downtown St. Louis. (Augusta beat Napa to the punch by eight months.) The area can credit its vino bona fides to its German immigrants, who started producing wine more than 150 years ago. These days Augusta's 11 wineries range from small mom-and-pop shops to sprawling vineyards, all spread across a compact 15 or so miles of lush, rolling hills.



WHERE TO SIP: Start your tour at **Mount Pleasant Estates**, a 10-acre winery that overlooks the Missouri River Valley. On April through October weekends, take the complimentary tour of the original 1881 limestone cellars, suggests Barbara Gibbs Ostmann, contributor to *Missouri Life* magazine. You'll learn that Mount Pleasant was established in 1859, making it the oldest winery in Augusta. Head to the tasting room for samples (\$6 for five) of \$20–\$40 wines, many of which have won medals at the World Wine Championships Awards.

Along with traditional Cabernets and Chardonnays, try the Tawny Port. The rich dessert wine, \$28 for a half bottle, takes 15 years to produce and has attracted a cult following.

Sommelier Glenn Bardgett of St. Louis area restaurant Annie Gunn's recommends the Chambourcin, a \$12 dry red, at **Augusta Winery**. "A sip takes you to the South of France," he says. The winery, located in town, also has good \$12 or less wines made with French varietals such as Seyval Blanc. With a flight of 2012 vintages in hand—these wines benefited from a particularly great growing year, notes manager Jessica Cahill—make your way to the property's wine and beer garden. There, settle in to snack on



JOHANN'S
GENERAL STORE

homemade pizza and sip in the shade of the vines.



WHERE TO STAY: Among the local lodging options, the **H.S. Clay House** (from \$150) stands out: The B&B has a pool, a hot tub, and breakfasts that go beyond the usual eggs and muffins—think custard French toast. Or go rustic by opting for one of the six basic cabins, starting at \$65, in Augusta's **Klondike Park**. Need more creature comforts? **Old Dutch Hotel & Tavern**, located 20 minutes east of town in Washington, offers freshly renovated contemporary rooms for \$85 a night.



TAKE A VINEYARD BREAK: Start with a stop at Johann's General Store, a former feed mill, to stock up on picnic provisions. Then drive about 15 minutes east to Katy Bike Rental, where wheels are priced at \$5 an hour. Once you've picked your ride, Steve Henry, author of *60 Hikes Within 60 Miles: St. Louis*, suggests an afternoon pedaling some of the 240-mile **Katy Trail State Park**, the country's longest rail-to-trail conversion.

Vineyard-Hop Like an Oenophile

WINERIES CAN BE INTIMIDATING. USE THESE TIPS TO NAVIGATE THE TASTING ROOM.

PRACTICE THE FIVE S'S:

See, swirl, smell, sip, and savor. Don't throw your wine back in one gulp.

ASK QUESTIONS. Chat up the staff with basics like, "What wine are you known for?" and "What types of grapes do you grow?"

GO EASY. To control your alcohol intake, take small sips and pour any excess into the communal spittoon. If you must spit, ask for a personal vessel, recommends Jessica Cahill, the tasting room manager at Augusta Winery.

YOU'RE NOT OBLIGATED TO BUY. Leaving empty-handed but still want to contribute? Ask if the tasting room has a tip jar.

DON'T GOSSIP ABOUT OTHER VINEYARDS. The wine industry is a small one, so most winery staff try to keep mum on their competitors, says Cahill.

DRINK WHAT YOU LIKE. Trust your taste buds. "If you're not a fan of the winery's best bottle, that's A-OK," says Richard Heritage of Heritage Vineyard.

TIME YOUR TRIP RIGHT. On weekdays, open wineries are usually less crowded. Weekends, on the other hand, are typically more festive, thanks to live music or special events.



PYRAMID PEAK PROVIDES
A UNIQUE VIEW FROM
THE ST. CLAIR VINEYARD.



ARTIFACTS AT WESTERN NEW
MEXICO UNIVERSITY MUSEUM

Southern NEW MEXICO

Too hot for grapes? That's where New Mexico can fool you. In fact, some areas have altitudes of up to 6,000 feet, which produce cool nighttime temps that refresh heat-sensitive vines. Gruet, in Albuquerque, is New Mexico's best-known winery. For a unique, off-the-beaten-trail trip, though, try the Deming area, located about an hour west of Las Cruces, the state's second-largest city.



WHERE TO SIP: Choose from 38 samples—more

than half of which retail under \$12—at **St. Clair Winery** and tasting room, located on the edge of town. You can also play winemaker by blending the four wines on tap; fill a half-gallon growler for under \$10. St. Clair's tasting room is set on 15 grassy acres, with two shaded patios. (The 260-acre vineyard itself is located 50 minutes away.)

Across town, visit the 300-acre **Luna Rossa**, owned by

Italian-born Paolo D'Andrea and his wife, Sylvia. The vineyard is known in part for its 2009 Shiraz, which took home a big award at the Finger Lakes International Wine Competition. Tasting room sips are complimentary; try the Italian Nini table wine and sangria.

WHERE TO STAY: Drive about an hour north to Silver City, an arts town on the edge of the 3.3-million-acre Gila National Forest. The town's 47-room **Murray Hotel** is an Art Deco stunner, located in the historic district, from \$109. On a tight budget? **The 1882 Palace Hotel**, housed in a former bank building, is homey and quirky, with rooms that start at a tough-to-beat \$51. Those willing to go another 21 miles east can check out the six **Georgetown Cabins** (from \$125 on weekdays or \$150 weekends, two-night minimum). The

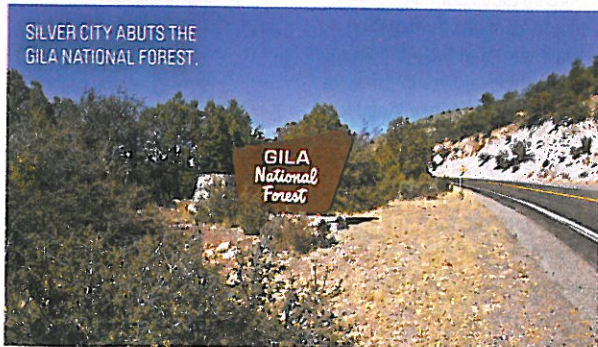
cabins are well appointed, and most are set up for grilling and alfresco dining.

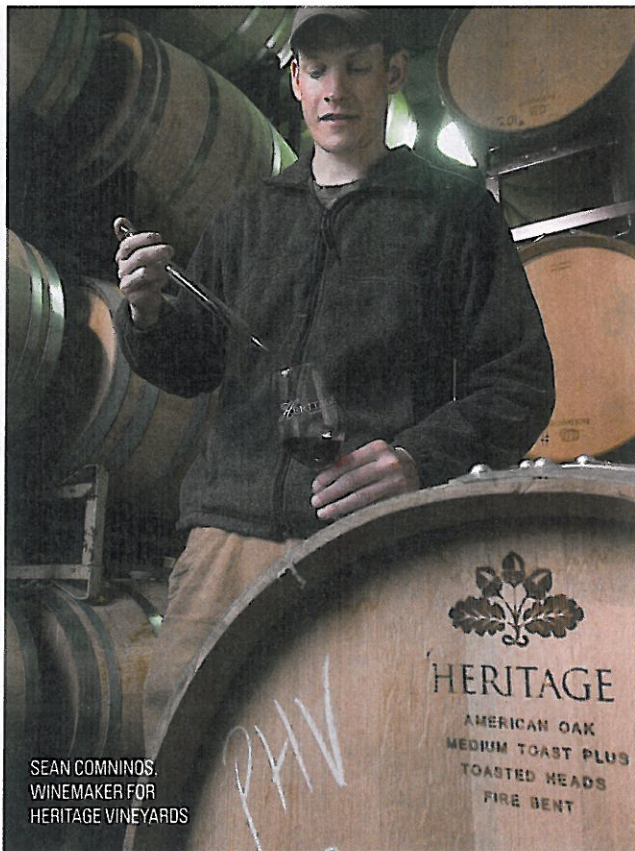


TAKE A VINEYARD BREAK:

Kelduyn Garland of the Silver City Visitors Center suggests visiting the free **Western New Mexico University Museum**, home to the world's largest collection of artifacts from the Native American Mimbres culture. Downtown Silver City is peppered with galleries. Don't miss the Southwest Women's Fiber Arts Collective—operated Common Thread for woven works by more than 60 regional artists.

SILVER CITY ABUTS THE
GILA NATIONAL FOREST.

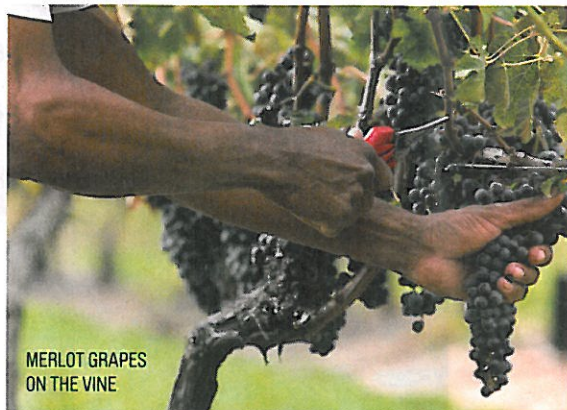




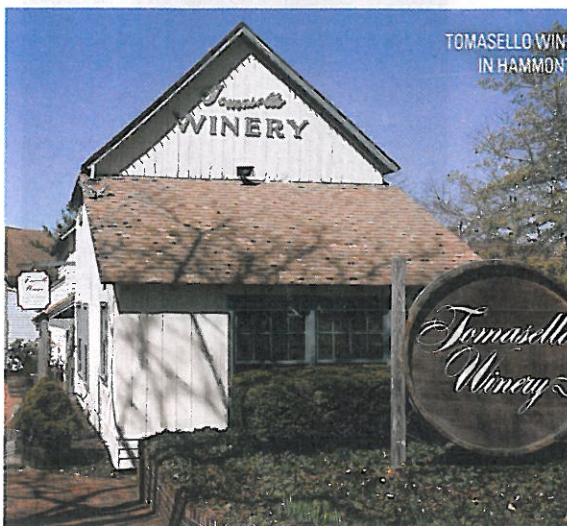
SEAN COMMINOS, WINEMAKER FOR HERITAGE VINEYARDS



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MERLOT GRAPES ON THE VINE



TOMASELLO WINE IN HAMMONT

Southern NEW JERSEY

Bordeaux-style wine might not be the first thing that springs to mind when you think of New Jersey. But hold the jokes: Many award-winning bottles have come out of the Garden State's 45 wineries. Last year New Jersey hosted the Judgment of Princeton, a blind-tasting event where local wines squared off against, and in many cases bested, French wines. Head to the vineyards in the southern part of the state to taste some of those winners.

WHERE TO SIP: John Foy, a wine columnist for the Newark-based *Star-Ledger*, recommends **Heritage Vineyards** in Mullica Hill, about 30 minutes south of Philly. Among the Old World-style wines available in the tasting room (tastings, \$5 for five), try the BDX, a blend that's 66% Cabernet Sauvignon (\$70). Buy a snack or bring your own, and mosey down through the peach and apple orchards to the pond for a picnic.

Drive 25 miles east to Hammon-
ton's **Tomasello Winery**, named Winery of the Year at the New Jersey Wine Competition in 2010. The Palmaris Cabernet Sauvignon Reserve, \$48, should make your sipping selection (tastings, \$5 for five). Enjoy it in the tasting room's courtyard. Buying a bottle? The Chambourcin and Pinot Grigio are solid picks at \$15 each.

Round out your day at **Amalthea Cellars**, nine miles northwest in Atco, says *New Jersey Monthly* writer Jill Capuzzo. Here, owner Louis Caracciolo has been on a

37-year mission to cultivate soil and vines that imitate the Bordeaux region of France. The tasting room is open Friday through Sunday, and samples are free. "The 2010 Legends Europa I should not be missed," says Princeton economist Orley Ashenfelter, president of the American Association of Wine Economists. This Bordeaux blend sells for \$33.

WHERE TO STAY: You won't find many chain hotels near the wineries, but there are several B&Bs, many of which have lower rates during the week. At the **Candle House Inn** in Mullica Hill, located on 33 acres and complete with horses and chickens, you'll save \$25 Monday

through Thursday (from \$11 weekends, \$135). In nearby Pitman, **The Inn on Holly** has charming, old-fashioned rooms: two with clawfoot tubs—start at \$119 a night. A note: Most these properties have only a handful of rooms, so book early to avoid getting shut out.

TAKE A VINEYARD BREAK: Cut your dinner bill with a BYO eatery. One good one is **Tre Famiglia Restaurant** (dinner, \$35) in Haddonfield, a quaint café- and boutique-packed town not far from the wineries. Or if you're in the region for seafood, try the pistachio-and-basil-crusted salmon at The Little Tuna. Cheers! **M**

