

Roots

in the

Vine

Kentucky's wineries have a flavorful history

by **Julie Wilson**

Photos by **Dwayne Lloyd Photography**

California Chardonnay, Oregon Pinot Noir, New York Riesling, Kentucky Cabernet.

Come again?

In addition to Kentucky's world-renowned status for fine bourbons, Kentucky is successfully making a name for itself in the wine-making industry. And because of its heritage, this shouldn't surprise anyone.

A Taste of the Past

Believe it or not, Kentucky was the birthplace of America's commercial wine industry in 1798. Jean-Jacques Dufour, the Marquis de Lafayette's winemaker, came to America to find new land to grow grapes. After becoming friends with Henry Clay, Dufour created the Kentucky Vineyard Society and bought 600 acres along the Kentucky River, in modern day Jessamine County.

By the late 1800s, Kentucky had become the nation's third largest grape and wine producer.

Then prohibition hit.

The future of Kentucky's farmland changed from growing grapes to tobacco, and so the future took a different path.

But many Kentucky land owners are returning to its roots and finding wineries a prosperous business. There are more than 50 wineries in Kentucky, including Acres of Land in Richmond. This award-winning vineyard, owned by Lowell and Katherine Land, sits atop a picturesque hillside in Madison County, which has been in the family for more than 50 years.

Like so many other Bluegrass farms, the Land's was originally used for tobacco. But in 2000, they branched out and sewed their first vines. "In 2000, Lowell said 'I'm not going to die behind this desk,'" said Katherine, noting that both she and her husband had desk jobs all their lives. "We knew we had to get out of there."



Acres of Land



Wine Facts

- Acres of Land produces more than 12,000 gallons of wine/year.
- Equus Run Vineyards was voted by CNN Travel as a "Must-see Hidden Treasure of the U.S."
- Elk Creek also offers cooking classes, so you can learn how to prepare foods that complement their wines.
- Looking for a unique winery tour? Acres of Land offers a wagon tour so you can see the land up close and personal.
- Events hosting groups as small as 20 and as large as 1,200 can be comfortably accommodated at Equus Run Vineyards.
- Besides wines, Elk Creek has created two of its own home-grown Kentucky Proud marinara sauces. One is flavored with Elk Creek's Sangiovese wine, the other with its Cabernet.

They learned the ropes the old-fashioned way – learn by doing. Their first planting resulted in the production of their first wine in 2004, followed shortly by a restaurant in 2005, where guests could experience the wines alongside gourmet fare.

Acres of Land also boasts a community building where guests can host wedding receptions or other events in this unique setting. And what better way to share your home state with your wedding guests than by holding your event in such a scenic location with a memorable wine.

Acres of Land produces 11 different wines, all coming from their own grapes or a mixture of theirs and grapes from other Kentucky growers. Being "Kentucky proud" is a guiding light for their business. "Wineries and grape growers didn't communicate much at first," said Katherine. But now, thanks in part to the The Kentucky Grape and Wine Council and the Kentucky Vineyard Society (of which Lowell is the 2011 president), collaboration has become a key to the success of Kentucky's new booming industry.

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Elk Creek



Photos courtesy of Elk Creek

Medals of Honor

And its success is proven. Just two months ago, 21 Kentucky wineries earned 112 medals, including 31 gold medals, at the 2011 Kentucky State Fair Commercial Wine Competition.

In addition to Acres of Land, Elk Creek Vineyards earned a gold medal for its Elk Creek Vidal Blanc. Established in 2003, Elk Creek has made a name for itself, not only because of its award-winning wines, but for the actual destination itself. Set amid the countryside of Owenton, Elk Creek offers an amazing getaway for guests new to the state as well as those born and bred here.

A celebrated art gallery, relaxing spa and a bevy of entertaining events in the spring and summer have put Elk Creek on the radar for those interested in a “staycation” or a unique venue to show another side of the Bluegrass State. Just an hour’s drive from Lexington, Louisville and Cincinnati, it is a convenient destination for a large part of the state.

Not only are Kentucky wineries earning statewide accolades, they are also making their mark all over the United States. Equus Run Vineyards was awarded a silver medal at the 2011 Fingerlakes International Wine Competition for its Cabernet Franc.

Nestled on seven and a half acres of a scenic part of Woodford County, Equus Run is a stunning winery just minutes from Lexington. However, Equus Run has made an impact on other regions of the state now that it has become the commemorative wine of the Kentucky Derby.

The Dirt on Kentucky

With an amazing array of Kentucky wineries earning a strong following, there has to be more to it than good grapes. As any vintner will tell you, it’s as much the soil as it is the grapes that really make the wine.

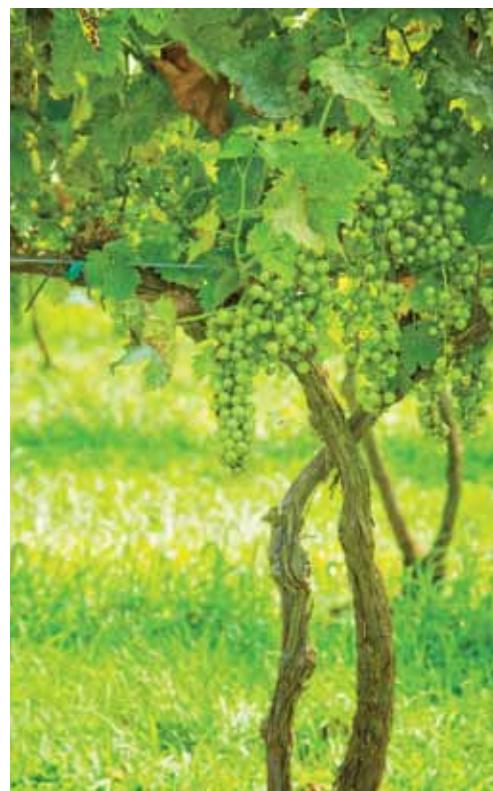
Kentucky’s rich limestone and sandstone soil has proven to be a hardy breeding ground for some of the best grapes. But it’s also the soil’s previous life that has given it an edge. “The tobacco has made the soil rich,” said Katherine Land.

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Equus Run



Winery Details

Located in Midway, **Equus Run Vineyards** is open seven days a week; Monday-Saturday 11 a.m. – 7 p.m. and 1-5 p.m. on Sundays. Visit EquusRunVineyards.com for complete details.

Elk Creek Vineyards is open Monday-Thursday 10 a.m. – 6 p.m. and Friday-Saturday 10 a.m. – 9 p.m. in the fall. For more information, visit ElkCreekVineyards.com.

Acres of Land in Richmond is open Monday and Tuesday 10 a.m. to 5 p.m., Wednesday-Saturday 10 a.m. to 9 p.m. and Sunday Noon to 5 p.m. Visit AcresOfLandWinery.com for more information.

Don't want to be in the driver's seat and miss the beautiful scenery? Let **Mint Julep Tours** do the driving for you! Visit MintJulepTours.com for complete details on how to plan your Kentucky winery tour.

“Our Chambourcin Reserve, I feel like you can taste a little tobacco in it.”

Kentucky's weather is quite different from its other wine-making neighbors. With four distinct seasons, there are some wines that do not adapt well to our climate. “Zinfandel does not grow well here,” shared Katherine, explaining that the grapes that produce Zinfandel need more sunny days than Kentucky can offer. “There is a longer warm season in California.”

Kentucky's late frosts can also hinder growth. Acres of Land lost nearly 80% of its grapes from the big freeze in 2007, so they brought in grapes from other areas to hold them over.

It's this unique recipe of wine-making – from which grapes acclimate well to Kentucky's soil to wineries working together to create unique blends – that is heralding Kentucky as a promising source for wines for years to come. ^{KB}

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