



Château Élan Winery, Braselton

SERIOUS SIPS

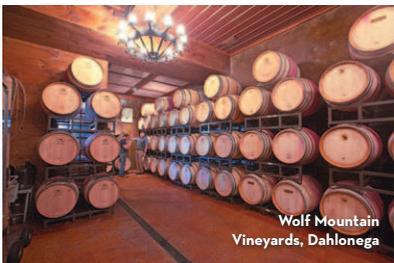
A Georgia wine expert spills on his favorite pours around the state

By Kate Parham Kordsmeier

Oenophiles, take note: Georgia is home to more than forty wineries, many of which have won major wine competitions, beating out winemakers from California, Washington, and Oregon.



Frogtown Cellars, Dahlonega



Wolf Mountain Vineyards, Dahlonega

That’s no surprise to Eric Crane, a certified wine educator from the Society of Wine Educators, advanced sommelier from the Court of Master Sommeliers, and director of training and business development for Empire Distributors. “Georgia is producing interesting European varietals in growing conditions that aren’t much different from the world’s best wine regions,” he says.

This hasn’t always been the case, Crane concedes, recounting his first experience with Georgia wine as “extra grapey.” “There’s a fruitiness that happens in young wine regions, but the wines coming out of Georgia today are made at a really high level,” he says. “It used to be more of a novelty, but now there’s some really serious people putting a lot of time, passion, and commitment into making wines people will love and enjoy.”

So, which wineries are worth a visit? Start with a pioneer, **Château Élan Winery & Resort** in Braselton. One of the first vineyards to open in Georgia since Prohibition, this resort helped champion the concept of Georgia-made wines in 1984. It’s still going strong, producing noteworthy wines like Duncan Creek Red, a sweet muscadine varietal. “Château Élan has gotten more serious about winemaking as time goes on and are doing some great wines,” Crane says.

More taste-worthy wines abound in Dahlonega, which lays claim to five applauded wineries with great Mediterranean varietals and postcard-perfect views. From the Petit

CHATEAU ELAN WINERY; FROGTOWN CELLARS; WOLF MOUNTAIN VINEYARDS & WINERY



Horse Creek Winery

Manseng at **Cavender Creek Vineyards and Winery**, to the Fat Boy Red at **Three Sisters Vineyards**, you'll find plenty to please your palate. "It's easy to navigate between most of the Dahlonega wineries, and there are beautiful tasting rooms, so you get the feel of being in a wine country," Crane says. "Lumpkin County isn't an American Viticultural Area yet, but it will probably be the next one. Just like Australia's Barossa Valley and California's Napa Valley, land that's rich in gold produces wines of great levels, and we have that in Dahlonega."

Crane likes all of Dahlonega's wineries, but he's especially partial to **Wolf Mountain Vineyards**. "I'll gladly share their incredible wines, which are a gem in the Georgia wine scene, with anyone," Crane says. "Wolf also has one of the most beautiful views in Georgia from their gorgeous tasting room."

Montaluce Winery is another lovely place in Dahlonega to taste wine. "When they built the property out, they preserved a lot of the land, and there's some really cool old Indian trails there you don't see

every day," Crane says. And he's a fan of **Frogtown Cellars**, which produces more than thirty wines from its Dahlonega headquarters. (It also has tasting rooms in Hahira and Helen.) "Their Chardonnay is fantastic," Crane says.

For a true Georgia treat, Crane likes sipping a glass of muscadine wine from South Georgia. "Muscadine doesn't have to be cloyingly sweet—in fact, these wines tend to be made in an off-dry style," he says. He likes the muscadine wine at **Horse Creek Winery** in Nashville, which has a new, state-of-the-art tasting room just twenty minutes off I-75. "The winery is right at the Georgia-Florida border, so it's as hot and humid as it gets anywhere in the state. It's also classically Southern with flat, hard earth, which is great for grapes that are native to these conditions, like muscadine."

You'll find more wineries serving quality muscadine wines and other native varietals between Macon and Savannah. At **Meinhardt Vineyards & Winery** in Statesboro, try Southern Eagle, an off-dry Southern red muscadine wine. "It goes great with spicier barbecue dishes and is great as an afternoon sipper," Crane says. Muscadine is also celebrated at **Warm Springs Winery** in Warm Springs. "They focus on making quenchy wines near the second home of Franklin Roosevelt," Crane says. After you've purchased a bottle of jalapeño-infused Hotlanta Red, enjoy it with a picnic lunch on the lovely grounds. Cheers! 🍷



Montaluce Winery, Dahlonega



Creature Comforts Brewing Co., Athens

SUDS AROUND THE STATE

As Georgia's wine industry grows, so too does its beer scene. You'll find more than two dozen breweries around the state, including **Creature Comforts Brewing Co.** (creaturecomfortsbeer.com), the newest suds purveyor to crop up in Athens. Their fruit-forward IPA, Tropicalia, has already garnered national attention and rave reviews. Beverage expert Eric Crane highlights some of Georgia's other top breweries:

SweetWater Brewing Company "Atlanta's hero, SweetWater, has made quite an impact in the Southeast with their delicious beer and creative labels. Their tours are legendary, they're extremely active with local charities, and they host a music festival every April in Atlanta." sweetwaterbrew.com

Terrapin Beer Company "Terrapin has made award-winning beers from the start; it's one of the best breweries in Georgia. It's open for tours and located in Athens, which is a fun-loving college town. Be sure to try the Pale Ales." terrapinbeer.com

Jailhouse Brewery "Located in an old jailhouse in Hampton, Jailhouse Brewery is a rising star in Georgia's beer scene. One of their more popular recurring events is 'Lockdown Thursdays,' when folks can arrive and ask any questions they have about brewing." jailhousebrewing.com

Cherry Street Brewing Co-op "This is a true cooperative located in Cumming that makes a wide range of experimental beers. You never know what might be available, so be prepared to taste adventurously when you're there." cherrystreetbrewing.com

// RESOURCES //

Château Élan Winery & Resort chateaelan.com, **Cavender Creek Vineyards and Winery** cavendercreekvineyards.com, **Three Sisters Vineyards** threesistersvineyards.com, **Wolf Mountain Vineyards** wolfmountainvineyards.com, **Montaluce Winery** montaluce.com, **Frogtown Cellars** frogtown.us, **Horse Creek Winery** horsecreekwinery.com, **Meinhardt Vineyards & Winery** meinhardtvineyards.com, **Warm Springs Winery** 706-655-2233