



## Virginia Wines—an East-West comparison

Submitted by Peter Mika

On Saturday, March 3, 2012 a small, but enthusiastic crowd met at St. Mark's for our latest wine adventure. In October I had traveled to Virginia to do some hiking in Shenandoah National Park. The hiking was tremendous, but some rainy weather kept me off the hiking trails and put me onto the wine trails. As Virginia now has about 200 wineries with many of them located close to the Blue Ridge Mountains and the Park, there were plenty of opportunities for me to sample the local products. I can't say that all of the wineries were making high quality wines, but I did find a number that I quite enjoyed. By the end of my travels I had collected the wines shown above and thought they would make an interesting tasting for the Palouse Wine Society. The wines were tasted in three flights: 1) Viognier, 2) Cabernet Franc, and 3) Bordeaux-style blends. To provide some context for the Virginia wines, I decided to include a similar wine from California and from the Pacific Northwest. The tasting was conducted as a double-blind, so that, within each flight, no one knew what wine they were sampling.

The wines in Flight 1 were all 100% Viognier and included Keswick Vineyards 2008 Monticello AVA Virginia, DuCard 2010 Signature Virginia, The Ojai Vineyard 2009 Roll Ranch Vineyard Central Coast California, and Cougar Crest 2008 Walla Walla Washington. Flight 2 included 100% Cabernet Franc wines from Virginia--Chester Gap Cellars 2009 and Prince Michel 2005 Mountain View Vineyards--matched with a Hahn Estates 2007 Central Coast California (88% Cabernet Franc/10% Petite Sirah/2% Petite Verdot) and a Clearwater Canyon 2009 Umiker Vineyard Idaho (84% Cabernet Franc/12% Merlot/2% Syrah/2% Malbec). The final flight included Glen Manor 2008 Hodder Hill Virginia (Cab Sauvignon/27% Merlot/15% Petit Verdot/12% Cab Franc), Linden Vineyards 2009 Claret Virginia (38% Cab Sauvignon/22% Petit Verdot/10% Cab Franc/5% Merlot/5% Carmenera), Chappellet 2009 Mountain Cuvee Napa Valley California (56% Cab Sauvignon/32% Merlot/6% Cab Franc/4% Petit Verdot/2% Malbec), and Gilbert Cellars 2008 Left Bank Wahluke Slope Red Wine Washington (58% Cab Sauvignon/15% Cab Franc/12% Petite Verdot/10% Merlot/5% Malbec)

Opinions differed as to the favorite of each flight, but quality of the Virginia wines was certainly comparable to the California and PNW wines. I believe that the California wines were the least-preferred generally, mostly due to excessive levels of oak. I thought the DuCard Viognier, Chester Gap Cabernet Franc, and Linden Claret all showed particularly well. So, next time you're in that part of the country, consider spending some time visiting the local wineries. Hopefully, you too will find some wines you truly enjoy.