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# Sweet Southern Shenandoah

ALONG THE TRAIL AMERICA TOOK,  
NEW FRONTIERS ARE STILL FOUND

By Patrick Evans-Hylton

**I**t's a warm sunny day, and I am driving along Interstate 81 southbound, nestled down in the Shenandoah Valley and in the embrace of the Blue Ridge Mountains to my left and the Allegheny Mountains to my right. This is a route that my family took – not on a vacation to Florida – but in finding a new life, a better life. It wasn't even recent; this journey took place 300 years ago.

Following well-worn trails first established by migrating animals and later Native Americans, this stretch through here roughly follows the Great Wagon Road (mostly the parallel Route 11) which was the superhighway during America's childhood years.

In the early 18th century, this was the Wild West. The Frontier. America was clamoring for more land and English, Irish, German and Scots-Irish were among the groups of people that traversed this backcountry, beginning at the port of Philadelphia and through Virginia into what is now Tennessee, and then beyond.

Save a few billboards and the dotting of farmhouses and barns, it's easy to imagine that a lot of this area still looks the same; the endless blue sky reaching down and touching the smoothed, rounded tops of tree-laden mountains rolling like great waves on a green ocean.

But a passing big-rig truck reminds me that this is the 21st century, which is fine with me, because it means my journey won't be fraught with fears of starvation, illness or attack – common fears of early settlers.

Rather it will be laden with the hospitality this special part of the Old Dominion is known for, as well as two other calling cards: delicious food and drink.



## Pairs well with the weekend

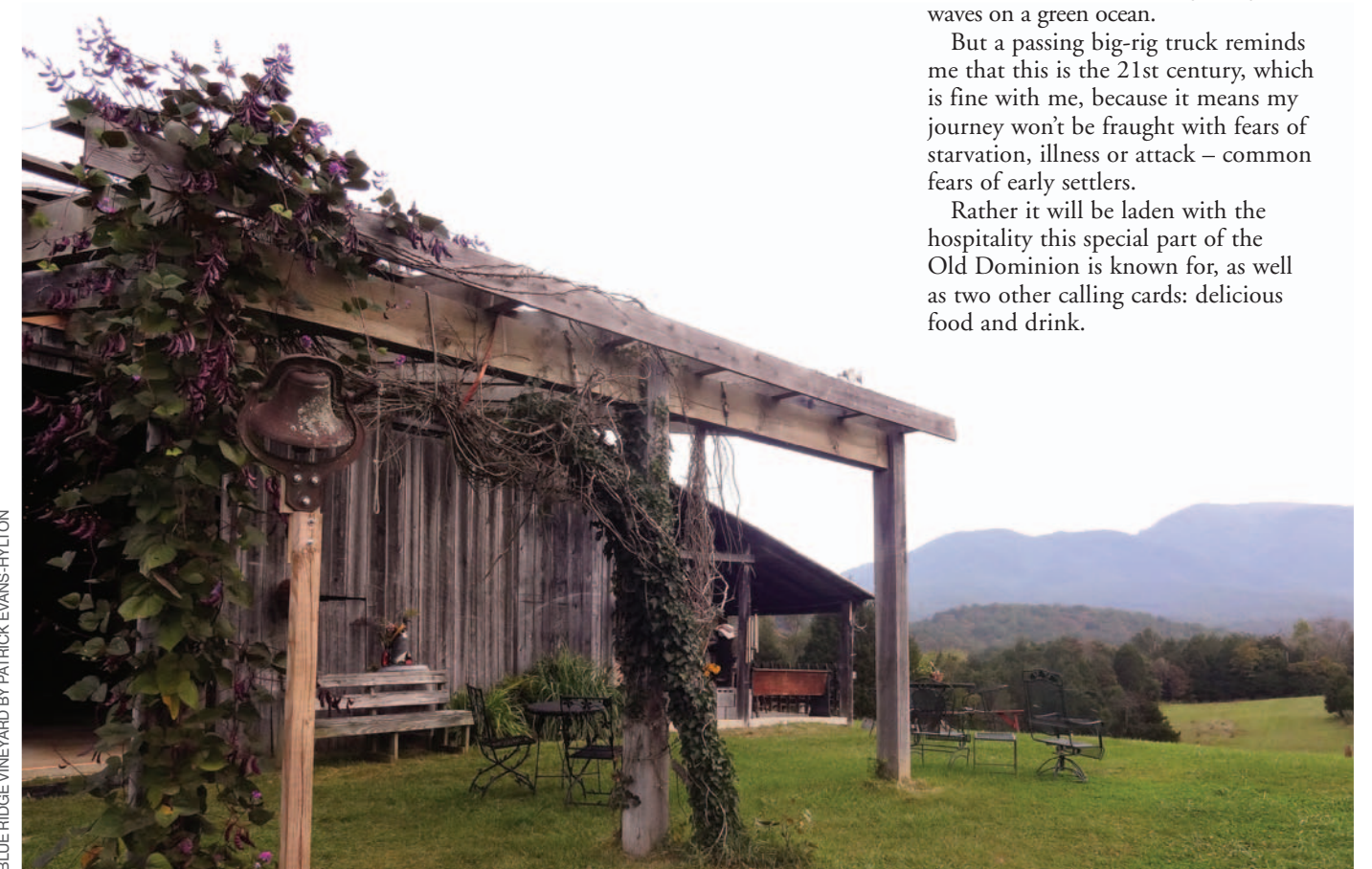
Anytime of year is the perfect time to plan a trip to Virginia wine country. With more than 250 vineyards spread throughout the Commonwealth, you're never far from a glass or bottle of world-class wine. Take the weekend to explore wineries high in the mountains or tucked along the coast. No matter where you roam, you'll discover uncommon flavors of rare varietals, and more than 400 years of living history.

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BLUE RIDGE VINEYARD BY PATRICK EVANS-HYLTON





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### THE WINE/IMBIBES

In an area curiously called The Wharf, an easy walk a couple of blocks from downtown Staunton, a number of shops and restaurants are found in this warehouse-chic district. Here, too, is the cute-as-a-button tasting room for **Ox-Eye Vineyards**. Located in a turn-of-the-last-century building, the space also is a showcase for local art.

We enjoyed several wines; for warm weather the White Ox 2012, a delicious, light blend of Gewurztraminer, Chardonnay and Traminette, got our attention. The full-bodied Lemberger 2012, a dry red blend with hints of cherries and chocolate, would be good with grilled meats.

Nearby is **Redbeard Brewing Company**, a taphouse offering a pint to enjoy onsite, or growlers to go; generally six to eight beers are available, including barleywines, IPAs and stouts.

A short bit down the road in Raphine is winemaker Shep Rouse's Rockbridge Vineyard. A large silo greets you as you approach the tasting room, and rows of vines lay across the hills like ribbons.

Standout wines include the full-bodied, dry 2012 DeChiel Chardonnay; a crisp, tropical-fruit laden Vignoles that is welcomed in the summer; the beautiful inky DeChiel Cabernet Franc 2008 great for grilled foods with its full body and dark cherry notes; and the lovely sweet, syrupy dessert wine, V D'Or, made in a late harvest style.

In a state where many wineries have beautiful vistas, **Blue Ridge Vineyard** is in among the top. The shabby-chic tasting room opens up to a rolling meadow that stretches to the nearby mountain ridge.

We were guided through a tour and tasting by winemaker Barbara Kolb, who has a purely delightful personality and is a wealth of knowledge. Wine standouts included a spicy, off-dry Gewurztraminer that we'd love with Mexican or Thai food, Big Bear Red, a lighter red blend (primarily of Cabernet Franc) that would be perfect for summer sipping, and Sweet Shiloh, another summer quaff that is a semi-sweet blend of reds and whites.

A lovely country ride brought us to **Virginia Mountain Vineyards** where we enjoyed several quaffs, including Trinity, a fuller-bodied, smooth blend of Cabernet Franc, Petit Verdot and Merlot with lots of red fruit on the nose and palate, and Acacia Gold, a slightly sweet, refreshing fruity wine perfect for summer.

What's Your Bot-e-Type?

Whether you enjoy an occasional taste or are a wine connoisseur, find your "Bot-e-Type" along The Wine Trail of Botetourt County.  
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**FESTIVALS**

**Wine and Trotter Festival**  
Saturday, May 10  
11am til 5pm  
Shenandoah County  
Fairgrounds  
Woodstock, VA

**Wine and Jazz Festival**  
Saturday, June 28  
1pm til 7pm  
Frontier Culture Museum  
Staunton, VA

Shenandoah Valley Wine Trail

[www.ShenandoahValleyWineTrail.com](http://www.ShenandoahValleyWineTrail.com)

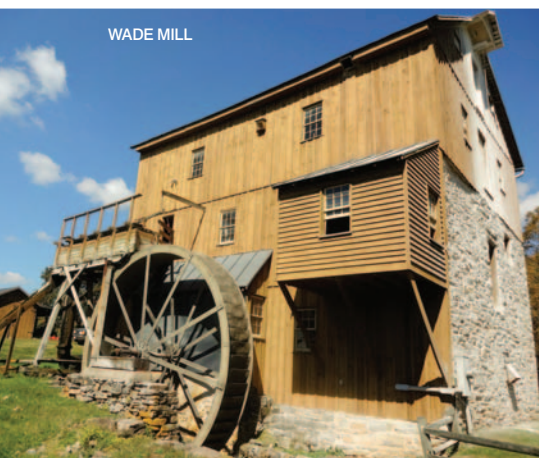


DEVIL'S BACKBONE OUTPOST

A FORK AND THE ROAD  
Shenandoah



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WADE MILL

In Lexington, we enjoyed a visit to **Devil's Backbone Outpost Brewery**, a 15,000-square-foot custom-built brewery that puts out some award-winning labels. (It was named in 2012 as Small Brewpub and Small Brewpub Brewer of the Year at the Great American Beer Festival, among other accolades.)

Brewery tours are offered, and the tasting room is a great place to relax with, say, a Vienna Lager, one of our favorites.

The drive from Roanoke to **AmRhein Wine Cellars** was beautiful, showcasing the splendor of the Shenandoah Valley. At the winery, we took note of the expansive patio shaded with growing vines, and enjoyed a number of wines, in particular the summery Sauvignon Blanc with a bright citrus nose and palate.

Portions of this region are in Shenandoah Valley AVA (American Viticultural Area). Nearby are the North Fork of Roanoke AVA and the Rocky Knob AVA.

There are many other notable wineries in the region, as well as a number of wine trails that traverse the landscape; check with the Virginia Wine Marketing Office, (link below), for more information.

## THE FOOD

In The Wharf district, we popped in **Byers Street Bistro** for a bite of lunch to start an afternoon of wine tasting and other diversions and I was very pleased with the comfortable surroundings and my tasty American Burger.

Later we visited **Staunton's Barking Dog**, a very urban, hip place to grab a glass – or a bottle – of wine, complete with a nice selection of Virginia vintages. We loved the vibe and the selection of cheeses to nibble. We decided, at the wise urging of our server, to share a grilled pimento cheese sandwich, too, and it was nirvana.

Dinner one night in Staunton was at the venerable **Emilo's Italian Restaurant**, which showcases classic Old World dishes against an elegant Old School décor. Professional servers guided us through the menu, and I settled on a beautiful Orrecchietti Con Pesto – delicate ear-shaped pasta tossed in homemade pesto, sun-dried tomatoes and pine nuts.

I've heard far-and-wide about **Zynodoa**, a Staunton restaurant many of my foodie friends revel to me in a hush-like whisper, least the secret be let out. It should be let out: this is an incredible restaurant, from the casual-but-upscale atmosphere and impeccable service, to the perfectly executed dishes that shout from the highest hilltop the virtues of local food sourcing. We enjoyed a chef's tasting menu, and it is a meal forever seared on my tastebuds.

A drive down the Valley took us to Lexington, and to **Sweet Things Ice Cream Shoppe** downtown; it's a tasty, old fashioned respite for lovers of quality chilled confections regardless of the season.

We stayed in downtown Lexington for dinner at **The Red Hen**, an absolutely adorable jewel box of a restaurant that features fine dining dishes utilizing the bounty of the Shenandoah Valley.

The space, in a century-old building, features charming architectural features. But the charm goes beyond that with a gorgeous, seasonally-changing menu, too. We enjoyed multiple courses with ingredients featuring house-rolled pasta, local meats and vegetables, and other treats from within the foodshed. At meal's conclusion, the cheese board – selection, accouterments – was as close to perfect as it comes.

Moving south again, we stopped at **Town Center Tap House** in Daleville, a fun and vibrant bistro that offers a dizzying array of beers, including many local ones. While I enjoyed a lunch of soup and salad, I sipped a delightful Parkway Brewing Company Get Bent Mountain IPA.



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**More:**

**AmRhein Wine Cellars**  
[www.AmRheinWine.com](http://www.AmRheinWine.com)

**Blue Ridge Vineyard**  
[www.BlueRidgeVineyard.com](http://www.BlueRidgeVineyard.com)

**Devil's Backbone Brewing Company**  
[www.DBBrewingCompany.com](http://www.DBBrewingCompany.com)

**Fincastle Winery**  
[www.FincastleWine.com](http://www.FincastleWine.com)

**Lexington Valley Vineyard**  
[www.LexingtonValleyVineyard.com](http://www.LexingtonValleyVineyard.com)

**Redbeard Brewing Company**  
[www.RedBeardBrews.com](http://www.RedBeardBrews.com)

**Rockbridge Vineyard**  
[www.RockbridgeVineyard.com](http://www.RockbridgeVineyard.com)

**Ox-Eye Vineyards**  
[www.OxEyeVineyards.com](http://www.OxEyeVineyards.com)

**Virginia Mountain Vineyards**  
[www.VMVines.com](http://www.VMVines.com)

**Virginia Wine Marketing Office**  
[www.VirginiaWine.org](http://www.VirginiaWine.org)



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Like Zynodoa, I had also been told of Roanoke's **The River and Rail Restaurant**, and I knew of Executive Chef Aaron Deal's excellent reputation from many accolades, including a nomination in the Rising Star category of the James Beard Awards a few years back. I was not disappointed.

Located in the former Lipes Pharmacy, the space is open and chic, with exposed brick and many architectural details. The menu is, well, awesome. Shared appetizers were Deviled Farm Eggs, Jar of Pickles, Spicy Pork Rinds and Chicken Liver Mousse – all incredible – and dinner was a beautiful pork loin. Dessert was, well, are you sitting? Banana Pudding with Cornbread Crispies and Jalapeno Coconut Sorbet. Sigh.

On my last day in the Shenandoah Valley, I was sent off in style with a remarkable classic Southern at **The Roanoker Restaurant**, an institution in these parts since 1941.

The fried country ham was sublime,

and the biscuits – oh, the biscuits! Fluffy and light; it's estimated more than 10 million have been devoured here.

### More:

**Barking Dog Wine**  
[www.StauntonsBarkingDog.com](http://www.StauntonsBarkingDog.com)

**Byers Street Bistro**  
[www.ByersStreetBistro.com](http://www.ByersStreetBistro.com)

**Emilio's Italian Restaurant**  
[www.EmiliosItalianRestaurant.com](http://www.EmiliosItalianRestaurant.com)

**The Red Hen**  
[www.RedHenLex.com](http://www.RedHenLex.com)

**The River and Rail Restaurant**  
[www.RiverAndRailRestaurant.com](http://www.RiverAndRailRestaurant.com)

**The Roanoker Restaurant**  
[www.TheRoanokerRestaurant.com](http://www.TheRoanokerRestaurant.com)

**Sweet Things Ice Cream Shoppe**  
[www.SweetThingsIceCream.com](http://www.SweetThingsIceCream.com)

**Town Center Tap House**  
[www.TownCenterTapHouse.com](http://www.TownCenterTapHouse.com)

**Zynodoa**  
[www.Zynodoa.com](http://www.Zynodoa.com)

### THE SIGHTS

In between all the wonderful food and drink, there are still tons to see and do in the southern Shenandoah Valley.

In Staunton's Wharf district, we visited **Sunspots Studios & Glassblowing**, a fascinating retail shop that allows folks to see how the many beautiful glass pieces for sell are handcrafted.

The **Frontier Culture Museum** just outside Staunton is an amazing living museum showcasing the many cultures that came together in colonial America to form Virginia. Entire villages are set up with costumed interpreters and craftspeople, among them 1700s West Africa, 1600s England, 1700s Ireland, 1700s Germany, 1700s Native America, 1740s Virginia settlement, and homes from 1820s and 1850s America.

Near downtown Staunton is the **Blackfriar's Playhouse**, a stunning recreation of the first indoor theater in the English-speaking world, offering a number of performances ala William Shakespeare throughout the year.

The **Woodrow Wilson Presidential Library** is also near downtown Staunton



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**CrossKeys Vineyard**  
[crosskeysvineyards.com](http://crosskeysvineyards.com)

**Fairfield Inn & Suites**  
[marriottharrisonburg.com](http://marriottharrisonburg.com)

**Wine Down in the Burg** [www.VisitHarrisonburgVA.com](http://www.VisitHarrisonburgVA.com)

and is an amazing collection of information and artifact related to the 28th president, who was born here.

Several buildings make up the library, with a number of living museum features and several fascinating exhibits—among them exhibition of Wilson's presidential car, a Pierce Arrow limousine, a recreation of a World War I frontline and political memorabilia.

Close to Rockbridge Winery in Raphine is **Wade Mill**, a circa 1750 working flour mill. This amazing structure is open to visitors, and includes a shop with products crafted here, including stone-ground flours, grits and mixes. Items are also available for sell online.

Wade Mill is owned and operated by a charming husband-and-wife team, Jim and Georgie Young, and if you plan your visit right, you'll be able to take one of Georgie's cooking classes.

In Roanoke, a don't miss is the **Historic Roanoke City Market**, the oldest continually operating open-air market in

**More:**

**Blackfriar's Playhouse**  
www.AmericanShakespeareCenter.com

**Frontier Culture Museum**  
www.FrontierMuseum.org

**The Historic Roanoke City Market**  
www.DowntownRoanoke.org/city-market

**Mountain View Farm**  
www.MountainViewFarmProducts.com

**Sunspots Studios & Glassblowing**  
www.Sunspots.com

**Shenandoah Valley Wine Trail**  
www.shenandoahvalleywinetrail.com

**Taubman Museum of Art**  
www.taubmanmuseum.org

**Wade's Mill**  
www.WadesMill.com

**The Wine Cellar**  
www.stauntonwine.com

**Woodrow Wilson Presidential Library**  
www.WoodrowWilson.org

Virginia, dating to 1882. In addition to the more than three dozen permanent vendors, there are many seasonal and temporary vendors, offering fresh fruits and vegetables, dairy products, fresh meat, handcrafted items and artwork. Around the market a thriving retail area compliments the offerings.

Of note – my trip included a visit to **Mountain View Farm** in Fairfield, which is typically not open to the public. The visit also included a sampling of cheeses, which I can report are smack-your-mama-good, and highly recommend seeking them out.

On future trips, the **Virginia Safari Park** near Staunton, Lexington's **Clark's Ole Time Music Center**, and the famous **Roanoke Star** at Mill Mountain are on my to-see list.

For a complete list of attractions and events, see the section at the end of this article to contact area visitor's bureaus.

**THE ACCOMMODATIONS**

A grand old hotel in the classic turn-of-the-last-century Southern Style, the **Stonewall Jackson Hotel & Conference Center** provided lots of charm. An impressive lobby, professional and courteous service, and a very comfortable room provided a good homebase while in Staunton. Without exception, most of my destinations were within easy walking distance.

In Lexington, the 1827 architecturally rich, Classic Revival-style Col Alto Mansion was a beautiful and relaxing stay. The main house, part of the **Hampton Inn Lexington – Historic District**, was the place to check in; an adjacent add-on housed well-appointed rooms. It too was easily within walking distance of many of Lexington's downtown attractions.

The **Holiday Inn Roanoke – Valley View** was comfortable and affordable lodging, right off Interstate 581 which runs north-to-south through Star City. It allowed us to get anywhere in the region quickly, and to get back to Interstate 81 when it was time to head home.


Also in Roanoke, the **Hotel Roanoke** is legendary and a close walk to the restored train depot, which serves as a visitor's center and depository of rail memorabilia, and to the Historic Roanoke City Market and other downtown features. 



PHOTO BY BRADLEY HART, HART PHOTOGRAPHIC, INC.

**More:**

**Hampton Inn Lexington – Historic District**  
www.HamptonInn.com

**Holiday Inn Roanoke – Valley View**  
www.HolidayInn.com

**Hampton Inn-Col Alto, Lexington**  
www.hamptoninn.com/hi/lexington-historic

**Hampton Inn-Staunton**  
hamptoninn.com/hi/staunton

**Stonewall Jackson Hotel & Conference Center**  
www.StonewallJacksonHotel.com

**BUT WAIT, THERE'S MORE**


For more travel information, visit these folks:


**Botetourt County Tourism**  
www.botetourtwinetrail.com

**Lexington and the Rockbridge Area Tourism**  
www.LexingtonVirginia.com

**The Roanoke Valley Convention & Visitors Bureau**  
www.VisitRoanokeVa.com


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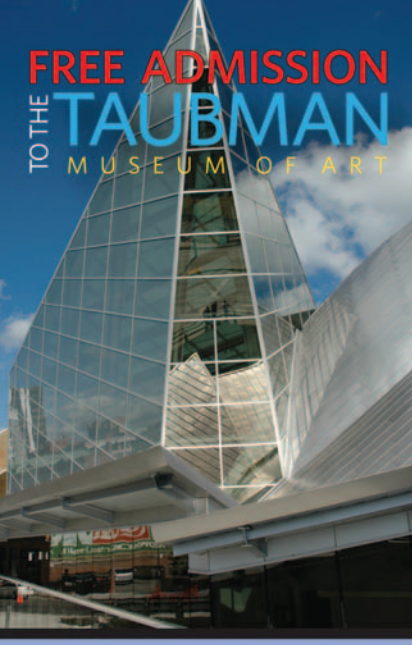
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