

Travel: Welcome to wine country in Charlottesville, Virginia

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I am in the tasting room of [Barboursville Vineyards](#) and the winemaker, Italian-born Luca Paschina, is pouring a glass of Viognier. The setting couldn't be more idyllic: acres of vineyards stretch out for miles and beyond, the tree-covered hills still blaze with autumnal color.

On the grounds sit the remains of the mansion of [James Barbour](#), the original owner of the property, which was destroyed by fire in 1884 (though the brick wall ruins are still quite impressive).



Thomas Jefferson Foundation/Robert C. Lautman,
Liesel Nowak

West Front of Thomas Jefferson's home
Monticello

I take a sip of the crisp white wine and though I could be in [Europe](#), I am, in fact, in the foothills of the [Blue Ridge Mountains](#) in central [Virginia](#).

It might surprise people to learn that Virginia is a thriving wine-producing state. But grape growing in the [Old Dominion](#) actually dates to 1774, when [Thomas Jefferson](#), third U.S. President and the area's most famous son, planted a vineyard.

Today, in addition to [Barboursville](#), there are 23 wineries clustered around the main town of [Charlottesville](#), including [Kluge Estate Winery and Vineyard](#) (owned by philanthropist Patricia Kluge), and [Blenheim Vineyards](#), owned by musician [Dave Matthews](#) (actress [Sissy Spacek](#) and author [John Grisham](#) also live here).

Aside from wineries, [Albemarle County](#) is known for its spectacular scenery. Take meandering drives along country roads like Route 231, where you'll pass rolling hills and perfectly manicured horse farms. More jaw-dropping vistas can be found along the Skyline Drive in [Shenandoah National Park](#).

It's probably the associations with our nation's Founding Fathers that Charlottesville is most known for. [James Madison's Montpelier](#) mansion is here, yet the most famous is Monticello, Jefferson's sprawling, hilltop Palladian-style estate.

Jefferson's shadow stretches pretty long around here, even at dinner. Fossett's, a fine-dining restaurant in the [Keswick Hall](#) hotel, takes its name from [Edith Fossett](#), a slave who served as Jefferson's chief cook during his retirement years. The seasonal menu might include dishes such as hickory-smoked breast of maple-cured duck with organic greens, pan-seared Virginia striped bass and [Brunswick](#) stew with Jameson Farms rabbit.

The hotel frequently offers wine tasting dinners - accompanied by a Jefferson impersonator if you so choose. You can also dine in downtown Charlottesville, where an eight-block pedestrian mall and offshoot streets are lined with elegant restaurants and hip wine bars like Fleurie and Enoteca.

I was up early for my tour of Monticello, which includes a visit to Jefferson's library, dining room and bedroom. The historic items on display include elk antlers presented to him by Lewis and Clark, a 1789 French-made bust (used as the model for Jefferson's image on the nickel), his book collection (he apparently could read, but not speak, seven languages) and his "wall of worthys" lined with portraits of Gen. [Lafayette](#), [George Washington](#) and [Isaac Newton](#).

You can also walk the kitchen, cellars, brewery and vegetable gardens, and learn more about the 150 slaves who lived and worked on the 5,000-acre wheat and tobacco plantation (including alleged mistress [Sally Hemings](#)).

Down a path is the graveyard where Jefferson is buried. His epitaph reads, "Author of the Declaration of [American Independence](#), of the Statute of Virginia for Religious Freedom and the Father of the [University of Virginia](#)." Back at the brand-new, \$43 million education and visitors center, make sure to stop at the gift shop, where you can learn as well as buy. There's a fabulous book collection, garden accessories, Virginia wines and collective coins including, of course, nickels. u

If you go:

Where to Stay: Keswick Hall (1-888-778-2565; www.keswick.com)

This former mansion turned Orient Express property has 48 individually decorated rooms, an [Arnold Palmer](#) golf course and an infinity swimming pool.

Where to Eat: Fossett's (1-888-778-2565; www.keswick.com)

Keswick's signature restaurant has a wood-burning fireplace and floor-to-ceiling windows with views of a neighboring horse farm.

Fleurie (434-971-7800; www.fleurierestaurant.com)

The French-inspired dishes at this downtown hot spot include pan-roasted halibut with truffle butter crust and rack of lamb with fennel puree.

Enoteca (434-974-9463; www.enoteca-wine.com)

A casual Italian wine bar (with more than 40 wines by the glass) and panini bar - try the prosciutto, mozzarella and basil.
