

WINE

Philip Carter Winery: The Carter Family's Cultivated Life

Daniel Mahdavian



The picturesque landscape of the Fauquier hillside embraces the Philip Carter Winery.

I was surprised when a wine collector friend asked me what I thought about the wines from the Carter winery. The only Carter wines that immediately came to mind would have belonged to the legendary Colonel Robert “King” Carter, perhaps some imported French Bordeaux or Hungarian Tokaji that might possibly have survived buried in a secret cellar. But King Carter would have had to stash such wines before he died in 1732, so the odds for any wine surviving after almost three centuries

were not good. Certainly no American-made wine from that period would have survived.

But all the history was clarified once I met Philip Carter Strother from the newly celebrated Carter Winery in Fauquier County, Virginia. At the winery they are making quality wines in honor of Charles Carter, who started the first wine making in this area. Charles Carter was one of King Carter’s children, so my initial thinking was in the right direction if not right on target.

Charles Carter was the visionary responsible for building Cleve Plantation where much of Virginia’s early wine-making machinery and technology was developed. By the 1760s, Charles Carter had more than 1,800 vines planted and was producing wines and spirits from early Portuguese white grapes. The wines were so well received in London that in 1762 the Royal Society issued Carter a gold medal honoring him as the first person to make a “spirited attempt toward the accomplish-

ment of their views, respecting wine in America.” It should be noted that Thomas Jefferson is usually credited with initiating wine-making in Virginia, but his efforts at Monticello did not begin in earnest until he retired from public service in 1809. The Carter family was successfully producing Virginia wines 50 years earlier.

Today, Philip Carter Strother, a direct descendant of King and Charles Carter, is a wine connoisseur, lawyer and a respected crusader for the legal protection of the rights of Virginia’s wine industry, as well as a proud family man. As a member of the latest wine-making generation of the Carter family, he is determined to produce wines of the highest quality on his 500-acre estate in the Hume Valley. Strother firmly believes, and I agree with him, that Virginia can do for wine on the East Coast what Napa did for California.

Here are the highlights of what I tasted from the Philip Carter Winery:

The 2006 Falconwood is a Virginia white table wine made from a lovely blend of luscious grapes grown in Fauquier county. It showed an intoxicating floral bouquet of wild flowers, ripe tropical stone fruits and sweet yellow citrus. This stainless steel tank-aged wine is reminiscent of a beautiful Austrian wine I drank on an August afternoon in the vineyards while lounging on an Ottoman bed. The wine is mouth-watering with the acidity of bright summer yellow mangos.

The 2006 Philip Carter’s Virginia Chardonnay is a structured and well-made wine with the elegant scent of vanilla bean and the taste of a crunchy yellow apple. This is an old-world-style Chardonnay that is well balanced and shows hints of honey-suckle flowers in the nose and a beautiful long finish with the warmth of exotic spice that reminded me of my favorite grape, the Viognier.

The 2006 Philip Carter’s Cleve Plantation Red Meritage is a classic Claret wine—light in its ruby color and complex in its peppery finish.



Message in the bottles



The Strother family

This Meritage is a blend of Cabernet Franc, Merlot, and Cabernet Sauvignon from Virginia. The Cabernet Franc grape is an outstanding crowd-pleaser in this wine. It is the sort of red Claret, delicate yet expressive, with the perfume of rose pedals that Thomas Jefferson would have enjoyed while entertaining at Monticello. Indeed, a story of Virginia terroir in the bottle.

Philip Carter Winery, with Strother at the helm and his solid wine-making team in place, will become a 100 percent state-grown winery in the next two years. Their wines show and taste well today and with the cooperation of Mother

Nature and hard work, these 11-year-old vines will bear ripe delicious grapes to produce wines that would make Charles Carter and all his descendants proud.

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