

[back to story page](#)  
Journal

Printed from ABQjournal.com, a service of the Albuquerque

URL: <http://www.abqjournal.com/food/1191049FOODwinecol1106-11-08.htm>

Wednesday, June 11, 2008

## Take Wine Tour of Fair N.M.

By [Jim Hammond](#)

*Of the Journal*

The quality and diversity of New Mexico wines are definitely improving. That much is clear as I've been touring the state's wineries, working on wrapping up my first guide to New Mexico wines.

To get the most out of touring wine-tasting facilities, you need to have a plan. The first question you might ask is: Because New Mexico tasting rooms are spread out statewide, why should you travel to them?

First, it is the best way to sample the entire range of wines offered, including many that seldom make it to wine events. In most cases you can obtain detailed information from the winemaker/owner that will enhance your appreciation of the wines. The wine you enjoy the most may be available only at the winery and in limited supply. Remember, many of our wine producers are not large outfits with broad distribution channels.

### Tasting groups

There are four areas within the state with a concentration of winery/tasting rooms that I've grouped by the major cities closest to them. These are Santa Fe/Taos, Albuquerque, Alamogordo and Las Cruces/Deming. The tour we'll take now covers three wineries in the Santa Fe/Taos region selected for the quality and range of wines they offer. This is not to say others farther out are not worthy of your time, but they are less practical to consider for a wine tour.

Heading out of Española toward Taos are three must-see wineries, all within a few miles of one another. Just when Highway 68 yields breathtaking views of the Sangre de Cristo Mountains, you'll find Black Mesa on the right nestled in the town of Velarde. If you only know about this winery from its popular Black Beauty Cabernet, there are other pleasant surprises awaiting you. You'll find a wide array of dry, off-dry and sweet red and white wines, as well as dessert wines. If the owner, Jerry Burd, is there, you'll have the added benefit of a good education on New Mexico winemaking.

### Don't forget to spit

But before we head out again, let me ask: Did you make use of a spit bucket? In case you aren't familiar with spit bucket usage, allow me to elaborate. Unlike the spittoon, which requires practice and accuracy, the spit bucket is often a plastic cup held close to the mouth to dispense the wine after each taste. Wait a minute! Did you think the whole purpose of this was

to drink free wine?

First of all the wine is not free, as you'll discover once you begin loading cases of the stuff in your vehicle. When does this happen? After you've been intemperate in your wine tasting. By the time you've tried a dozen or so wines they all begin to taste the same. Worse, you'll probably pick the last ones tasted to take home. When you get home and open the first case and try — unsuccessfully is my guess — to determine why you chose some of the wines, you'll realize the value of the spit bucket. If you thought this knowledge came at the expense of my intemperate wine tasting, you were right.

What we want to do for each taste is sample the nose, swirl the wine to open it, sip enough to coat the mouth and suck in air while pursing the lips to intensify the flavors. Finally — you can do this — spit out the wine. Just make sure there is a suitable container for this purpose. We deduct points for spraying your friend's shoes.

Spitting out the wine will sharpen your palate, permitting you to sample more wines with more accuracy. A side benefit is that you'll still get a euphoric high from tasting. However, you won't have your judgment impaired, and you'll take home only the wines you really liked. Because many tasting rooms have buckets set up for spilling out wine you don't drink (not for wine you spit out after sampling), I suggest you bring your own plastic cup and make it an opaque container. The final benefit is that you will be a safer driver.

Local boys done good

Next up is the Vivac tasting room, perched at the intersection of highways 68 and 75. The 360-degree views from this tasting room are particularly awe-inspiring. Chris and Jesse Padberg are local boys with a passion for making wine their way, and they're doing a very good job of it. They use only French oak for aging the wines and focus primarily on reds. Their Heaven and Hell series is not to be missed. These are Bordeaux-styled wines that are complex and well-balanced.

On my visit, they took me to the winemaking facility close to their home in Dixon, and we did a round of barrel tasting. Boy, was I glad I'd been using a spit bucket! Back at the tasting room, they also have chocolates for sampling. Do not try these before the wines, otherwise you'll even taste chocolate in the whites, and that's plain weird.

Our last stop is a lovely adobe structure that houses La Chiripada Winery in Dixon on Highway 75. A good range of red and white wines is offered. I was particularly fond of the winery's white and dessert wines. Check out the Viognier. It has the minerally appeal of a Sancerre but at half the price.

I hate to leave you stranded in Dixon, 'cause this tour is over, but look for more tours in future articles. I just hope you planned to have enough gas to get home. Salut!

Jim Hammond has been exploring wines in North America, Europe and Australia for more than 20 years. A published author, he includes information about wine in every book. You can reach Jim at [jim@jim-hammond.com](mailto:jim@jim-hammond.com) or read more about wine at his blog, [southwesternwineguy.blogspot.com](http://southwesternwineguy.blogspot.com).

---

**All content copyright © ABQJournal.com and Albuquerque Journal and may not be republished without permission. Requests for permission to republish, or to copy and distribute must be obtained at the the Albuquerque Publishing Co. Library, 505-823-3492.**

[Back to story page](#)