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# 10 Surprising Texas wines

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If the only time Texas wine passes your lips is at Grapevine's annual GrapeFest bash -- coming up next week -- you aren't alone.

Texas wines aren't the first choice for most of us who drink wine in Texas. We probably know about Ste. Genevieve, the state's largest producer, a company whose bottles are everywhere from convenience stores to high-end wine shops. We may even be aware of the most popular wines from some of the most popular wineries, like Messina Hof and Fall Creek.

But not enough of us know enough about the rest of the wine that's available in the state. Why? Because we stick to cabernet, merlot and chardonnay. For whatever reasons -- timidity, ignorance, and, yes, even snobbery -- we won't venture far from that cabernet-merlot-chardonnay path. And those three varietals are not especially representative of the best wine in Texas.

Which is a shame, because there's a lot of interesting, intriguing and fascinating Texas wine to drink that has nothing to do with those three grapes. Now that the Texas wine industry is becoming less fixated on duplicating California wines, quality in Texas has never been better. The reason: More and more winemakers have learned that they can make terrific wine with Italian, Spanish and Mediterranean varietals; with hybrids; and even with fruit like muscadine grapes.

Does this wine taste like it came from California? Nope. And there is nothing wrong with that, because wine made here should not taste like California wine. If it does, what's the point of drinking it?

## LONE STAR SIPPING

Here are 10 wines that our "Wine Curmudgeon" Jeff Siegel believes could open your eyes to the delicious possibilities of Texas wines:

### Becker Vineyards Chenin Blanc Martin Vineyards 2006

**Cost:** \$12

**Where it's made:** The grapes come from the Texas High Plains appellation; the Becker Vineyards winery is near Fredericksburg in the Hill Country.

**Available:** From the winery, 830-644-2681, [www.beckervineyards.com](http://www.beckervineyards.com)

**Why it surprises:** Texas should produce tremendous chenin blanc, a French grape that thrives in this climate and soil. But, for whatever reasons, most chenin blanc made in the state is quite ordinary; it's usually sweetish, and not in a pleasant way. The Becker, however, is dry -- and not only exceptionally well-made, with an impressive mineral finish, but also an exceptional value.

### Guerra Vineyards Signature Red Muscadine 2006

**Cost:** \$8

**Where it's made:** In East Texas' Piney Woods, near Pittsburg

**Available:** From Guerra Vineyard and Winery, 972-791-3004.

**Why it surprises:** It's difficult to make decent-quality wine from muscadine grapes, which are considered poor relations to wine grapes. Usually, wine makers have to add lots of sugar to cover up some very disagreeable muscadine qualities. This wine is sweet, yes, but it tastes like wine and not alcoholic grape juice. How good is it? I was on the panel that gave it a gold at this year's Lone Star International competition, and I'm famous for not giving out gold medals.

### Kiepersol Estates Texas Cabernet Sauvignon 2005

**Cost:** \$22

**Where it's made:** The Kiepersol Estates vineyard, about 12 miles south of Tyler

**Availability:** From the winery, 903-894-8995, [www.kiepersol.com](http://www.kiepersol.com), and at the KE Cellars shop in Tyler, 903-939-9805

**Why it surprises:** Here's one Texas cab that's an exception to the rule, but then the winery itself is an exception to most of the rules: Kiepersol makes award-winning wines with grapes grown in humid East Texas, about as unlikely a place for growing high-quality wine grapes as there is in the state.

### Homestead Winery La Bodega de Mitchell Crema del Sol NV

**Cost:** \$45

**Where it's made:** Homestead Vineyard & Winery at Ivanhoe, just north of Bonham, in the state's newest wine region, Texoma

**Availability:** At the winery's Grapevine location, Homestead Winery at Grapevine, 817-251-9463, and at the winery, 903-583-4281, [www.homesteadwinery.com](http://www.homesteadwinery.com)

**Why it surprises:** This is cream sherry, but it's certainly not your grandmother's cream sherry. It's deep and dark and luscious, with nutty flavors that last and last. Yes, it's sweet, but so well-balanced that the sugar doesn't overwhelm the wine.

**Pleasant Hill Winery Collina Bianca NV**

**Cost:** \$11

**Where it's made:** Near Brenham, about 50 miles northwest of Houston

**Available:** By special order from Off the Vine, 324 S. Main St., Grapevine, 817-421-1091, and at the winery, 979-830-8463, [www.pleasanthillwinery.com](http://www.pleasanthillwinery.com)

**Why it surprises:** This wine is made from a hybrid grape called blanc du bois. Most of the time, blanc du bois is used for white zinfandel knockoffs. This is too bad, because in the hands of someone who knows what to do, blanc du bois makes an appealing dry wine that is not unlike sauvignon blanc. This may be the best example of that style in the state.

**Flat Creek Estate Travis Peak Muscato D'Arancia 2006**

**Cost:** \$15.95 (500 milliliters)

**Where it's made:** Flat Creek Estate, east of Marble Falls in the Hill Country

**Available:** Central Market, World Market and the winery, 512-267-6310, [www.flatcreekestate.com](http://www.flatcreekestate.com)

**Why it surprises:** This dessert wine, with its orange aroma and orange flavors and its predisposition for chocolate desserts, always seems to get overlooked unless it's Valentine's Day. It deserves better than that. This wine is just one example of Flat Creek's commitment to quality and its growing reputation.

**Sandstone Cellars II 2005**

**Cost:** \$30

**Where it's made:** Sandstone Cellars Winery in Mason County, where the Hill Country meets West Texas

**Available:** Lone Star Wines in the Stockyards and the winery, 325-347-8463, [www.sandstonecellarswinery.com](http://www.sandstonecellarswinery.com)

**Why it surprises:** This red wine is a blend of eight Mediterranean grapes, some of which are almost unheard of in Texas. In this, it is part of the trend toward non-French varietals in Texas, as well as the trend toward higher-quality wine. This resembles Italian wine, but with a more fruity Texas feel.

**Llano Estacado Viviano Super Tuscan Style Red 2003**

**Cost:** \$40

**Where it's made:** Llano Estacado Winery, near Lubbock in the Texas High Plains appellation

**Available:** Lone Star Wines in the Stockyards; Central Market Southlake; and the winery, 800-634-3854, [www.llanowine.com](http://www.llanowine.com)

**Why it surprises:** This red blend was one of the big winners at the Lone Star competition, earning a gold medal and a best-of-class award. That really shouldn't surprise us, though, because Texas produces some of the best sangiovese in the United States (yes, even better than California's), and this wine is more than a quarter sangiovese.

**Inwood Estates Vineyards Tempranillo-Cabernet 2003**

**Cost:** \$39.50

**Where it's made:** The grapes come from West Texas; the winery, Inwood Estates Vineyards, is in Dallas.

**Available:** Central Market Fort Worth and the winery, 214-902-9452, [www.inwoodwines.com](http://www.inwoodwines.com)

**Why it surprises:** This is the mystery wine of Texas, a label that wine types have been buzzing about since the beginning of the year. It's an impressive achievement -- fruitier than a Spanish tempranillo but with subtle Old World structure. This will age at least three or four more years.

**La Diosa Cellars Sangria NV**

**Cost:** \$8.99

**Where it's made:** Lubbock, with grapes from around Texas

**Available:** Central Market Fort Worth, Kings, and the winery, 806-744-3600, [www.ladiosacellars.com](http://www.ladiosacellars.com)

**Why it surprises:** Most bottled sangria tastes like bottled sangria -- sugary and nasty. This tastes like sangria: Pop in some lemons, limes and ice, and you're ready for a paella party. It's made by Kim McPherson of McPherson Cellars for his wife Sylvana's winery/wine bar in Lubbock.