



The view from Chateau Grand Traverse Winery to West Grand Traverse Bay (above); Gewürztraminer grapes ripen in the Michigan sun (below).

## Celebrate the Grape

Take a tasting tour along Michigan's four designated wine trails. **By AMY S. ECKERT**

**W**hen warm weather finally reaches Michigan, everyone is ready for a party. That was the thinking behind the Lake Michigan Shore Wine Festival in Bridgman, near the Indiana border. The area vintners also wanted to boost awareness of their wine region and its appellation. Now in its second year, the festival includes food vendors, live music and a great beachside location. Best of all, the weekend provides a convenient excuse to get away and sample the Lake Michigan Shore's best wines.

The Lake Michigan Shore Wine Festival is just one example of Michigan's varied wine celebrations. Most festi-



#### WOMEN'S WINE WEEKEND

LEELANAU AND OLD MISSION PENINSULAS  
**May 4-6** The weekend features a Friday night art walk in downtown Traverse City, wine and food pairings at each winery and some Saturday evening wine dinners. Saturday afternoon men's activities include a Cigar & Fly Fishing trip to the Manistee River with wine and stream-side lunch, or a wine and golf experience. 800/TRAVERSE

#### WALLOON LAKE MORELS & MORE

LEELANAU PENINSULA  
**May 4-6, May 11-13 and May 18-20** Morel season and Leelanau's wines share top billing at this annual festival, including lots of great morel-based cooking and wine pairings. 231/535-2227

#### OLD MISSION BLOSSOM DAYS

OLD MISSION PENINSULA  
**May 19-20** Originally a religious "Blessing of the Blossoms," this festival has morphed into Blossom Days, a time of food, wine and fun amid the vineyards and orchards of the Old Mission Peninsula. 800/969-4009

#### 4TH ANNUAL INTERLOCHEN WINE, FOOD & FINE ARTS FESTIVAL

LEELANAU AND OLD MISSION PENINSULAS  
**May 27** This multimedia wine festival features jazz entertainment, Michigan wines, great food and artworks by talented area artists. 231/276-7141

#### SUTTONS BAY SUMMER ART STROLL

LEELANAU PENINSULA  
**June 8** Outdoor art exhibits are the primary focus of this festival, but visitors also have the opportunity to sample some of the peninsula's finest wines. 231/938-1811

#### LELAND WINE AND FOOD FESTIVAL

LEELANAU PENINSULA  
**June 9** Under a big tent in Leland's picturesque Fishtown district, this event features tempting food, music and local wine selections. 231/271-9895

#### LAKE MICHIGAN SHORE WINE FESTIVAL

SOUTHWEST MICHIGAN  
**June 23** This annual celebration of the Lake Michigan Shore wineries includes wine tastings, food vendors and live

music at Weko Beach in Bridgman. 800/716-WINE

#### NATIONAL CHERRY FESTIVAL

LEELANAU AND OLD MISSION PENINSULAS  
**July 7-14** The Cherry Festival offers an annual wine-paired-with-cherries component called "Cherries D-Vine." 231/947-4230



Michigan's northern wine trails offer the most opportunities to celebrate wine and food. But each of the state's four regions offer ample excuses to make a weekend wine-themed getaway, and individual wineries often offer their own special events.

#### NORTHPORT WINE AND FOOD FESTIVAL

LEELANAU PENINSULA  
**Aug. 11** Music, great food from local restaurants and Leelanau Peninsula wines are the focus of this popular festival at Northport's Haserot Park. 800/980-9895

#### WINE DAYS OF SUMMER

PIONEER WINE TRAIL  
**Aug. 25-26** Michigan's newest wine trail celebrates its appellation during this annual festival. Each winery features tastings of its standard offerings as well as special release and reserve samples. Contact each winery individually.

#### THE FESTIVAL OF THE SENSES

LEELANAU AND OLD MISSION PENINSULAS  
**Sept. 13-23** This celebration of food, wine, art, music and the great outdoors encompasses dozens of artistic, athletic, culinary and cultural events: symphony concerts, art exhibitions, gourmet meals, cooking classes, bicycle races, plays, historical reenactments and wine tastings. 800/TRAVERSE

#### TRAVERSE EPICUREAN CLASSIC

LEELANAU AND OLD MISSION PENINSULAS  
**Sept. 13-15** Top chefs, cookbook authors and wine experts from around the country gather at the Great Lakes Culinary Institute for three days of cooking classes, international wine, beer, spirits and cheese tastings, and exquisite dinners. 231/933-9688

#### HARVEST STOMPEDE

LEELANAU AND OLD MISSION PENINSULAS  
**Sept. 21-23** Part of the new Festival of the Senses, the Harvest Stompede includes a Friday night Traverse City Art Walk, a walk and run through the vineyards on Saturday and a wine and food pairing event at the wineries on Saturday and Sunday. 231/947-1120

val occur in the state's more established northern region. Some involve wine tasting alone; others include art shows, food and more hunts. But all offer a reason to check out one of the Great Lakes State's four distinct wine trails: The Old Mission Peninsula and Leelanau Peninsula routes in the northwest; the Southwest Michigan Wine Trail; and the Pioneer Wine Trail, the state's newest route, in the southeast.

#### Old Mission Wine Trail

Chateau Grand Traverse was northern Michigan's viticultural pioneer, founded in 1974. Thirty-three years later, Chateau Grand Traverse produces some of the finest and most consistent wines in the state. Its most prized wines are Johannisberg Rieslings, semi-dry and late-harvest varieties. Travelers judge for themselves the quality of 21 wines in the facility's tasting room under the tutelage of



the best winery staff around.

Chateau Chantal merits its name, its turreted inn and winery presiding over a vineyard-covered crest like a castle. The winery's tasting room offers Pinot Grigio, Chardonnay, Riesling and Pinot Noir. But the inn also features a luxury 11-room bed and breakfast. A European theme dominates, surround-



Chateau Grand Traverse winemaker Bernd Croissant inspects the bottling process (left inset). You can sample wines inside or out at Chateau Grand Traverse (below). Hand-picked Pinot Noir grapes are ready for processing (opposite).



ing guests with Impressionist masterpieces, thick down duvets and elegant tapestries. In the evening, after the tasting room has closed to the public, inn guests are encouraged to return for one last glass to enjoy in privacy or in the common room.

Brys Estate is the newest addition to Old Mission's wineries. The winery sits amid 23 acres of vineyards and produces the region's requisite whites: Riesling, Gewürztraminer, Pinot Gris, Chardonnay and Chenin Blanc. But Brys Estate also bottles a few red varieties: Pinot Noir, Cabernet Franc and Merlot,

an unusual find in northern Michigan. In late 2006, the winery added its first Riesling ice wine.

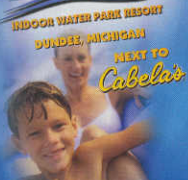
Other wineries worth visiting along the Old Mission Peninsula Wine Trail include Bowers Harbor, which produces a nice unwooded Chardonnay along with several reds, including a Pinot Noir, a Cabernet Franc and a Merlot. Peninsula Cellars' tasting room is in a 19th-century schoolhouse. In addition to its standard grape varieties, the winery produces several tasty fruit wines, including M $\acute{e}$ lange, a blend of cherry wine and grape spirits.

#### Leelanau Peninsula Vintners

While Old Mission Peninsula boasts fabulous scenery and winemakers, most of northwestern Michigan's wineries are located farther west on the Leelanau Peninsula. Traversed by the 45th parallel, the same line that runs through the great wine regions of central France and Germany, this area produces many of the same well-known wines: Chardonnay, Riesling, Gewürztraminer, Pinot Noir and Cabernet Franc.

Just south of Suttons Bay, Black Star's estate sits amid 120 acres of vine-

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yards and hardwood forest. The winery and inn are designed in the style of a Kentucky horse farm (horses included). The winery specializes in fine white wines, including local staples like Chardonnays, Pinot Gris and Rieslings. But Black Star also produces some interesting spirits as well as house-made raclette cheese.

L. Mawby Vineyards is dedicated to crafting sparkling wines (a dry Vignoles is their only still wine). The specialty is an unusual one in an area known predominantly for its still beverages. Wines range from Brut to Demi-Sec and include unconventional names such as Us, Fizz and Sex. Try a flight of two- or three.

It may require a half hour to travel the twisting rural roads that lead to Bel Lago Winery, but few travelers regret the journey. Bel Lago produces one of the few fine, big reds in northern Michigan, Tempesta, created from Cabernet Franc and other red grape varieties and aged in American oak. Also worth sampling and buying are Bel Lago's Pinot Noir and its Alsatian white, the Auxerrois, an unusual variety in this area.

Other Leelanau Peninsula Wine Trail members include Gill's Pier Vineyard & Winery, known for its Riesling, apple and cherry wines, and, just south of Leland, Good Harbor Vineyards, known for its white blends and its cherry wines. Longview Winery, in the tiny town of Cedar, produces some outstanding whites as well as an unusual cherry mead, a honey-based wine. And the fieldstone tasting room at Shady Lane offers, in addition to whites, a wonderful cherry port and a late-harvest Vignoles.

#### Southwest Michigan Wine Trail

Southwest Michigan's Wine Trail is relatively new, but not all of its member wineries are. In fact, the route features Michigan's oldest winery, founded in 1921. Still, the recent emergence of eight new wineries in a region previously unknown for viticulture has encouraged many Midwestern travelers to visit this little-known wine region.

David Braganini, grandson of Italian vintner and founder Mariano Meconi, continues the family winemaking tradition at St. Julian Winery. Michigan's oldest and largest winery, St. Julian's finished product has withstood the test of time. Rieslings and Chardonnays, Pinot Noirs and Merlots, fruit wines, brandies, and even kosher red wine are available for purchase at St. Julian's, and most are included in the winery's tasting room.

Farther south, Tabor Hill offers an equal quantity of superior wines, including some unusual vintages: Kerner, a citrus-tasting Riesling hybrid; a semi-sweet Traminette; and a Cabernet Sauvignon, an unusual treat in the Midwest. But among Tabor Hill's chief



draws is its restaurant. The dining room features floor-to-ceiling windows with sweeping views of the rolling vineyards that established the business. Entrées range from New Zealand rack of lamb to grape-leaf-wrapped British Columbian salmon filets and orange Nairagi, a tender marlin steak.

Just up the road is the Round Barn, its namesake 1911 barn sitting in the center of its property. The vintner bottles finely crafted reds and whites, including a very nice Cabernet Sauvignon and a selection of excellent cordials and brandies. New to the winemaker's list of beverages is the Midwest's first premium vodka, called DiVine, one of only four vodkas in the world produced from grapes.

Other wineries worth visiting along the Southwest Michigan trail include newcomer Contessa, known for its dry whites and a delicious black raspberry wine. Fenn Valley, the farthest north of the wine trail members, offers Sansul

Noir, a sulfite-free red wine; Capriccio, a big, red wine; and a Vidal Blanc ice wine.

#### The Pioneer Wine Trail

**M**ichigan's newest wine trail is in the southeastern corner of the state, within a circle roughly centered on Jackson. Its name — the Pioneer Wine Trail — reveals not only the origin of a new appellation; but also the fact that its half-dozen members are generally new to winemaking.

Cherry Creek Cellars is among southeastern Michigan's newcomers, although the vintner himself is no newcomer to winemaking. John Burk represents the fourth generation of family vintners. In spite of Michigan's reputation as a white-wine-producing state, Cherry Creek has managed to win awards from the Michigan Wines and Spirits Competition for its reds, including Enigma, a big Cabernet Sauvignon; a Cabernet Franc; and a Pinot Noir.

Lone Oak Vineyard Estate is rare among Michigan wineries, producing a Cabernet Sauvignon from its own, estate-grown grapes. The Jackson County vintner has recently begun selling a light, chillable red wine, a Gamay Noir, and the unfortunately named "Crapple," a blend of cranberry and apple wines that tastes far better than its name suggests.

Finally, wine lovers should check out the new Pentamere Winery. The 100-year-old tasting room, until recently a restaurant, has been transformed into a gleaming retail shop where visitors can sample the winery's wares. Pentamere produces an array of wines, including an award-winning Gewürztraminer, as well as Chardonnay, Cabernet Sauvignon, Cabernet Franc and several fruit wines. Splurge and pay \$1 to sample the winery's Vidal Blanc ice wine, a drink that is seldom poured in tasting rooms.

Obtain information about all of Michigan's wineries, including detailed wine trail maps, from the Michigan Grape and Wine Industry Council, P.O. Box 30017, Lansing MI 48909; call 517/241-4468, email [MDA-Michigan-Wines@michigan.gov](mailto:MDA-Michigan-Wines@michigan.gov) or visit [www.michiganwines.com](http://www.michiganwines.com) ■



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