

# travels with wine

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## [The Hermann, Missouri Wine Trail](#)

May 27th, 2008 -- by **Jim Hofman**

America's fascinating wine making history is rooted in the efforts of European immigrants, who brought their skills to America throughout the 1800's. Long before California and other west coast wine producing states were settled, other areas of the country were busy producing wines from native grape vines growing in the wild. In the 1830's, a group of German immigrants settled in the Missouri river valley, about an hour west of St. Louis near the present historic town of Hermann, Missouri.



Hermann's founding fathers and town leaders noted the prolific growth of wild grapes in the nearby hillsides, and encouraged new immigrants to grow grapes by providing low cost land grants. Having brought their wine making skills from Germany, settlers gladly began tending grape vines and producing wine. Within a few years, the area around Hermann became known for wine production, and American's very first wine district was born.

For the most part, wine making has continued in this area since the 1830's. Now, the Hermann Wine Trail and the historic villages in the area comprise a beckoning destination for wine travel. From the town of New Haven, MO on the east to historic Hermann on the west, this 20 mile stretch of beautiful Missouri river valley scenery boasts of seven wineries accounting for more than 30% of Missouri's wine production.

Missouri has long been known for deep, rich red wines typically produced from traditional grape varieties such as Norton and Chambourcin. Wineries in this area use these native grapes to develop award winning varieties of Pinot Noir, Cabernet Sauvignons, and Burgundy styles. But these wineries aren't all about reds, as winemakers on this wine trail also produce clean and delightfully crisp styles like Rieslings and Chardoneel.

### Saint Louis

A visit to the central Missouri wine trail usually begins with a visit to St. Louis. St. Louis, the famed "Gateway to the West", is a thriving, vibrant city that's a personal favorite of ours. Historic districts like Souldard, Laclede's Landing, and Central West End help define a city that embraces its past while forging ahead.

I love spending 2 or 3 days in St. Louis, embracing the city's passion for music and cuisine. While I cannot touch upon all the things to do in St. Louis, a must stop is St. Louis' premier wine destination, [Riddle's Penultimate Cafe and Wine Bar](#), located in a terrific St. Louis neighborhood, The Loop on Delmar Boulevard. Riddle's is a restaurant and wine bar with a style all its own, eschewing any label. The menu changes daily, offering a new pleasant surprise on each visit. Two dozen wines by the glass are offered, including Missouri selections like the Augusta Winery Norton, with flavors of cherry, huckleberry, and hints of cinnamon.

Riddle's offers over 300 wines by the bottle, and its location in the midst of Delmar Boulevard's Loop District makes it a perfect evening destination. Be sure to stroll the St. Louis Walk of Fame, with brass stars imbedded in the sidewalks honoring great citizens of St. Louis. The Loop is six blocks of fun, with well over 125 boutiques and specialty shops and ample dining options.

### On To Wine Country

Let's leave the city behind for now, and begin our short journey to the heart of Missouri Wine Country. From St. Louis, travel west on Interstate 44 to Missouri Highway 100, continuing on Highway 100 twenty miles to the town of New Haven. This charming village is the eastern edge of the wine trail and is home to historic [Röbller Vineyard and Winery](#), which offers a spectacular view of the Missouri river valley.

Röbller, a family owned operation, is about as perfect a setting for a picnic as any I've seen. This is a great place to spend a few hours, relaxing on the grounds and enjoying a bottle of Röbller's rich, full bodied Norton or the Seyval, a citrusy dry white. The owners are big supporters of all Hermann wine trail events and there's usually a different fun and inviting event at the winery every month.



Just west of New Haven and on your way toward Hermann is the [Bommarito Almond Tree Winery](#), a family owned estate winery producing a savory award winning port, among other offerings. Enjoy the patio in the summer and the warm fireplace during colder months. Bommarito produces about 1500 gallons of wine annually, all under the watchful eye of owner Nick Bommarito and family.

A few miles west, actually just off of Highway 100 north on Route B, is [Bias Vineyards and Winery](#). Situated on a 64 acre farm and featuring a microbrewery and winery, only the 2nd such operation in the United States. When you arrive, you'll be high above the Missouri River on bluffs, affording a scenic view of dozens of miles. Be sure to try Bias' River Blush Rouge, an easy drinking friendly blush.

Also at Bias, I was smitten with their dry red Chambourcin, born from grapes just 600 feet from their tasting room. This style is prevalent on the Hermann wine trail, so you'll have to sample and compare.

### Hermann, Missouri

After leaving Bias, it's only about 6-7 miles to the picture book historic city of Hermann, population 2800. In and around Hermann, four thriving wineries offer wine travelers more of the true taste of Missouri. Stone Hill, Oakglenn, Adam Puchta, and Hermannhof wineries are all situated in beautiful settings with scenic views.

Let's start at [Oakglenn Vineyards and Winery](#). Oakglenn is conveniently located just off Highway 100, about 2 miles east of Hermann, making it an easy stop either before or after exploring the town. Relax for a while and enjoy their offerings, like the fruity Chardoneel, sweet smooth blush, and the medium bodied spicy Chambourcin, another fine example of the style along this wine trail. You'll also be taken in by yet another spectacular view, enhanced by enjoyable live entertainment most Saturday evenings.



After leaving Oakglenn, we paid a visit to Missouri's oldest winery, [Stone Hill Winery](#). As you drive up, you'll notice the handsome red brick structure, listed on the American Register of Historic Places. If you're interested in a winery tour, Stone Hill's is highly recommended. You'll be shown through the old arched cellars, production facilities, spacious tasting room, and gift shop.

We enjoyed sampling several of Stone Hill's selections and particularly enjoyed their Steinberg White, a German style semi dry white we found similar to a piesporter. If you're looking for a place for dinner, make a reservation at the adjacent Vintage Restaurant, part of the Stone Hill operation. Here you'll partake in traditional German cuisine, and of course, Stone Hill wines.

The third of Hermann's four wineries is one of the area's newest, [Adam Puchta and Son Wine Company](#). Though reopened in 1990, the Puchta family has a wine making lineage going back to the area's earliest settlers. Wanting a slightly sweeter wine, we opted for their Berry Black, full of rich fruit flavor, just sweet enough. We also purchased several of their wines to enjoy later. Adam Puchta's Hunter Red was a perfect match with barbeque pork sandwiches, while the Adam's Choice German style white wine complemented a cheese appetizer platter.

Finally, I discovered the [Hermannhof Winery](#), located in Hermann. We enjoyed seeing their Inn and Gasthaus, offering comfortable and convenient overnight stays. Hermannhof's facilities are also listed on the National Register of Historic Places and are frequently used for weddings and other special events. We loved their dark ruby red Norton, another specialty of this area.

With the winery touring completed, I settled in to historic Hermann, which reminded me of a town direct from a picture book. Historic architecture abounds, along with German/Swiss specialty shops and restaurants. Hermann is the perfect place for an overnight stay, which will give you some time to mingle with the locals and immerse yourself into the German and Swiss roots.

There are only two hotels in Hermann: the [Healing Stone Retreat & Spa](#) and the inexpensive but decent [Hermann Motel](#). Alternatively, you might consider one of the many B&Bs in the area, including the highly rated [Hermann Hill Vineyard & Inn](#) or the [Secret Vine](#).

Hermann is a town to discover by strolling its historic streets. There are dozens of bed and breakfasts, local specialty shops, antique stores, and local markets. Hermann has worked very hard to preserve its heritage, and it shows. You'll enjoy spending time in this town, and we encourage you to wander and explore. After walking for a couple of hours, going in and out of various merchants, I stopped in at the Tin Mill Brewing Company, a new brewery and brewpub operation. Featuring German style lagers, Tin Mill serves a hefeweizen that is one of the best I've tried. For dinner in town there is Simon's Waterfront Restaurant, offering locally made sausages and other German fare.

This was a trip I'd like to make again and again, to not only allow us more in depth time at each winery, but to relax and enjoy the charming town of Hermann. The scenery is fantastic, the people are friendly, and the wines superb. I'm going back to Missouri Wine Country!

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