

# Wineries making a comeback

## Fertile soil, accomodating climate are great for local vineyards

The Ohio River Valley is a historic viticultural area made famous by Nicholas Longworth, the "father of American wine." At one time, he had 1,200 acres of vineyards, and is credited with making America's first sparkling wine.

In the 1800s, many forces joined to close down the industry: tobacco farming became profitable, horses could farm the terraces, but tractors couldn't, wire for trellising was expensive, and Prohibition struck. After Prohibition most activity moved north to the lake area in northern Ohio.

In 1999, Ron Barrett and Nancy Bentley sold an Oregon Pinot Noir vineyard and planted a ridge near Ripley with European grapes, sparking a renaissance in wineries in Southern Ohio. Named after William Kinkead, who settled Kinkead Road in the 1790s, Kinkead Ridge wines have been internationally recognized in the Wine Report Paperback, edited each year by Tom Stevenson, British wine writer. Two of their wines have been rated as Top 100 Exciting Wine Finds in the World.

In the beginning years, Ron and Nancy encouraged and mentored other growers. The area is now home to several wineries in Brown and Clermont counties within driving distance of each other, including Harmony Hill in Bethel, famous for their underground barrel cave and summer entertainment, the upcoming Renascent Vineyards in Georgetown, La Vigna Vineyards in Higginsport, Lakeside in Felicity and Meranda-Nixon near Ripley.

In 2008, Harmony Hill and Kinkead Ridge were featured in the *Wall Street Journal* for their Annual Ohio River Valley Barrel Tasting. They have also been featured in a national PBS television show, America's Heartland, and on the Ohio PBS television show "Our Ohio."

### Meranda-Nixon Winery

Seth Meranda grew up on a tobacco farm and, after graduating from Ohio State University in 1994 he planned to continue to grow the crop. He didn't foresee the demise of the tobacco industry in southern Ohio.

"Around 1998 I saw the writing

on the wall," Meranda said. "Free trade and cheap imports led to the demise of the industry here."

Seth and his wife, Tina, looked for an alternative crop to replace the tobacco.

"We knew the history of the land, and figured we'd try, too, to bring back the wine industry for the third time," he said.

In 2003 the Meranda Family Vineyards was born on five and a half acres of land, with the first bottles of wine to be produced in 2007.

Meranda-Nixon Winery concentrates on the unique diversity of the Ohio River Valley terroir to produce wines unique for all to enjoy and remember.

Traminette is an enjoyable off-dry crisp clean white wine with wonderful aromas of tropical flavors, with hints of spice, pear, and honey dew melon.

The winery is located off US 68 on 6517 Laycock Road, Ripley.

Every Saturday 4 p.m. to 9:30 p.m. steak and salmon dinners accompanied with a bottle of wine are offered. For reservations call (937) 392-4654.

Meranda-Nixon Winery hours are Thursday 12:30 p.m. to 7 p.m.; Friday 12:30 p.m. to 8:30 p.m. and Saturday, 11 a.m. to 9:30 p.m.

Watch for postings on the web [www.meranda-nixonwinery.com](http://www.meranda-nixonwinery.com) for special holiday hours.

### Kinkead Ridge Estates

With many years of experience in the Oregon vineyard and winery industry, and owner of Chehalem Valley Vineyard, a 40-acre parcel near McMinnville, Oregon, where he grew Pinot Noir, Ron Barrett was ready for a new challenge. He and managing partner Nancy Bentley researched eastern Washington, southern Oregon, and southern Ohio, and determined that the unglaciated limestone ridges near the Ohio River had the potential to produce world-class vinifera.

The Oregon vineyard was sold and the initial Kinkead vineyard was planted in 1999 with a second section planted 2001. The vineyard includes an experimental section to test rootstock and scion wood and alternate varieties, and Syrah, Cabernet Franc, Cabernet



The Ohio River Valley Barrel Tasting event is a great time to visit local wineries and taste some of the delicious southern Ohio wine.

Sauvignon, Riesling, Sauvignon Blanc, Viognier, Petit Verdot and Roussanne.

The winery is located at 904 Hamburg Street, in Ripley. For more information call (937) 392-6077 or go to the website at [www.KinkeadRidge.com](http://www.KinkeadRidge.com).

Winery hours vary. Kinkead Ridge Estate wines are available in fine wine stores and restaurants throughout Ohio. Private group tastings are available by advance appointment (10 or more). Kinkead does not have a permit to open on Sunday.

### Renascent Vineyards

Renascent Vineyards resides in and around what is believed to be the oldest continually operated winery building in the United States. The winery was built in the early 1830s, and operated from then until the coming of fungal blights such as black rot in the mid 1850s. The winery changed hands several times between 1854 and 1863, with all production ceasing at that time.

Tom and Kyoko Crush bought the property that now includes Renascent Vineyards in 2001. Intrigued by the unusual history, they decided to rework the property back into its original form. This process has been ongoing for several years, and will continue for years to come.

Originally, the winery had more than 50 acres of winegrape vines. Today, they have 1.5 acres of winegrapes.

The ancient wine cellar was

quarried into the hillside almost 180 years ago, and its walls are of hand cut fossil rock.

For more information go to [www.renascentvineyards.com](http://www.renascentvineyards.com) or call (513) 313-2314. The winery is located at 7385 state Route 221 Georgetown, Ohio 45121-9405.

### La Vigna River Heights Farm

Situated high above the Ohio River, LaVigna lays claim to the moderating influence of a large body of water. Winds blow across the cool waters of the Ohio River and travel directly up a natural chute to the vineyard. This breezeway makes the vineyard unique and enhances the quality of fruit as the winds cool the grapes on hot summer days.

The winery and vineyard are located on River Heights Farm overlooking the Ohio River. The trellis system of choice is the Carbonneau Lyre. This horizontally divided canopy system considered by some to be the "Cadillac of Trellis Systems" will be spur pruned.

Wine is sold through wine club located on web site. [www.lavignawines.com](http://www.lavignawines.com).

### Lakeside Winery

On Sept. 15, 2002, Lakeside Winery was born. The basic building is 6,200 square feet with 12 foot ceilings. There is an enclosed drive through crush area, production space, barrel and case storage rooms, a research lab, kitchen space and a tasting room to seat 50 guests. In

February 2009 Lakeside planned to open a new tasting room. The tasting room is open every Saturday from noon until 9 p.m.

The winery is located at 3324 state Route 756, in Felicity. For more information call (513) 876-1810, e-mail - [info@lakesidevineyard.com](mailto:info@lakesidevineyard.com) or visit on the web [www.lsvy.com](http://www.lsvy.com).

### Harmony Hill Winery

Harmony Hill Vineyards and Winery is a small boutique winery nestled in the village of Bethel, just miles from the historic Ohio River Valley.

Harmony Hill features a picturesque country setting surrounded by a 70-acre Nationally Certified Wildlife Refuge farm.

Harmony's underground wine cave is one of only four similar structures in the country, and the only one within a 40-state area. Sample the premium award-winning wines among the fermentation bins in the working winery or view the vineyards from the covered outdoor cafe.

Picnicking in the vineyards or under the shade of the hundreds of trees that surround the winery is encouraged. Harmony Hill is a family-friendly destination featuring juice tastes and miniature donkeys for the children.

For more information go to Harmony's website at [www.hhwines.com](http://www.hhwines.com) or call (513) 734-3548. The winery is located at 2534 Swings Corner / Point Isabel Road, Bethel.

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