

WINE BUSINESS MONTHLY



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Honoring American Heritage

Chrysalis Vineyards 2020 Locksley Reserve Norton

AS THE CLIMATE CONTINUES TO CHANGE, and weather fluctuations become wilder, many in the wine world have begun to consider new varieties. In Bordeaux, a slew of new clones and grapes have been approved. In vineyards across the United States, viticulturists are trialing more Spanish, Italian and other warm-climate varieties.

And it's amidst this altered landscape that some have even looked to French-American hybrids—or even the more traditional all-American varieties.

However, there are wineries and vineyards east of the Rockies who never gave up on these grapes, and one of the most prominent is Chrysalis Vineyards in Middleburg, Va. Proprietor Jennifer McCloud is proud to grow Norton, and might be one of the largest Norton growers in the U.S.

For many in the wine industry, Norton is simply viewed as “lesser than”. First cultivated by Daniel Norton in the early 19th century, Norton is of the *vitis aestivalis* species and doesn't have the typical characteristics we would expect from *vitis vinifera*—but it also doesn't have the “foxy” characters of other hybrids. What it does have is a lot of anthocyanins and produces deeply colored, rich red wines.

Norton is widely considered “America's grape” and is a staple in states like Virginia and Missouri, where it has been commonly grown for more than a century.

It is this indigenous variety that Chrysalis Vineyards is dedicated to growing and growing well. McCloud is steadfast in her belief that Norton can produce premium, dry wines. Yes, more international varieties, including Albariño, Nebbiolo, Petit Verdot, Tannat and Viognier, are part of the portfolio, but they certainly are not the focus.

Norton has proven to be one of the more resilient grapes—a necessity in harsh Virginia climate. In 2020, a hailstorm ripped through the vineyards in



late summer, just before the harvest on the white varieties began. While some of the Albariño, Petit Manseng and Viognier shattered, Norton, a late-ripening variety, was still tough enough to withstand the pelting ice.

The Locksley Reserve is Chrysalis Vineyards' flagship wine. At \$45 it is also one of the most expensive Nortons on the market. Blended with a little bit of Tannat to add chocolate, raspberry and slightly earthy tones, and “a splash” of Petit Verdot, this wine is meant to showcase just how special this grape can be. With just 12 months barrel aging, it is not an overtly tannic wine, but is it certainly suitable for long-term aging.

As the Virginia wine industry continues to mature, the wines coming out of Chrysalis Vineyards have demonstrated that Norton can be part of its future.

