

Fall Flavors on Tap



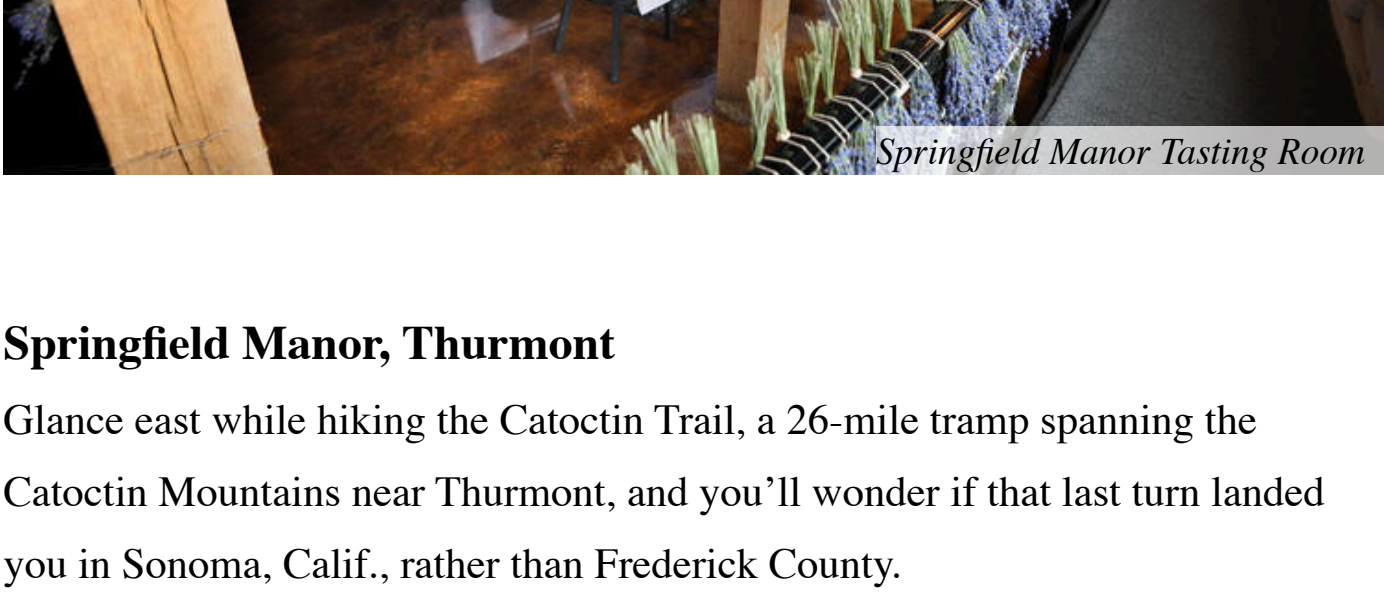
Mt. Defiance Cidery and Distillery

By Stephanie Citron, for the Baltimore Sun

Autumn often brings bright blue skies streaked with sunshine and bedroom windows cracked open to catch the crisp evening air, inviting in the aroma of crackling fireplaces, pine needles and sweet crushed fruit — apples, pears and grape mashes — fermenting into heavenly handcrafted beverages.

Fall crush once primarily referred to wine season, and the wineries around the Mid-Atlantic are producing some very respectable pours, thanks to our indigenous produce. But of late, the libation landscape has evolved, inspiring a new wave of beverage crafters who are creating hard ciders and spirits — including fresh-fruit brandies and herb-infused vodkas and gins — from locally grown ingredients.

It seems every time we look, a new craft beverage company has opened its doors — or barn gate. We’ve found more than a few worthy of an outing.



Springfield Manor Tasting Room

Springfield Manor, Thurmont

Glance east while hiking the Catoctin Trail, a 26-mile tramp spanning the Catoctin Mountains near Thurmont, and you’ll wonder if that last turn landed you in Sonoma, Calif., rather than Frederick County.

Below is the pastoral Springfield Manor, a new 125-acre winery, distillery, lavender farm and bed-and-breakfast. Its curvy driveway fronting Route 15 meanders around French and English lavender fields and vines bursting with Chambourcin and Traminette grapes to a restored Pennsylvania-style bank barn.

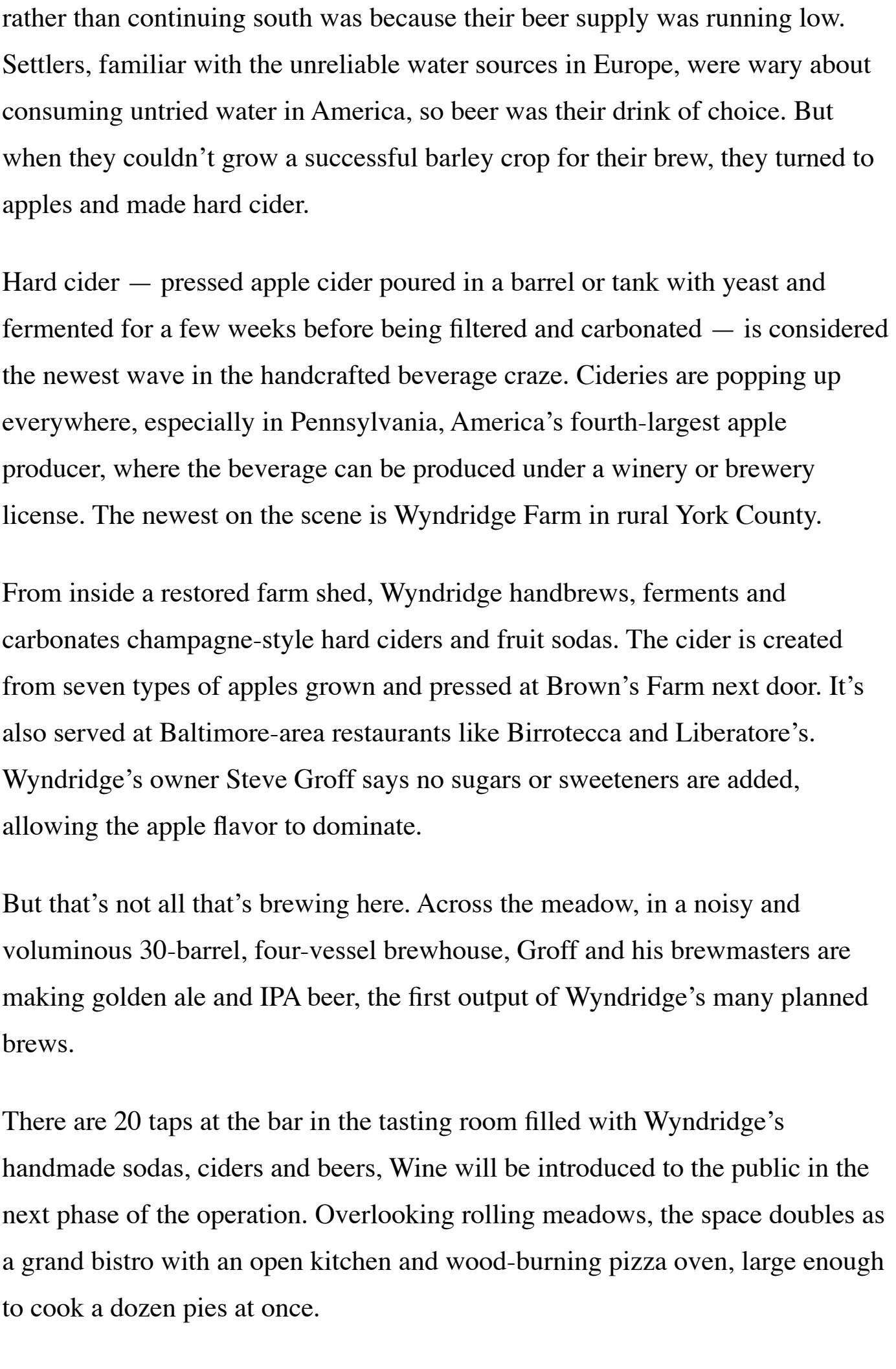
On sunny days, folks bring picnic baskets to the lawn or take a table on the patio, enjoying a 360-degree view spanning the mountains, the vineyards, gardens and bucolic valley floor.

Owners Amie and John St. Angelo and their kids scurry about, offering menus featuring small plates and delivering carafes of their new sangria, as well as wine and glasses of brandy. Inside, the couple have renovated the old dairy parlor, retaining its hand-hewn log timbers and limestone walls, and installed an antique Victorian-style bar where they pour their award-winning wines like Farm House White and Traminette.

The next room houses a 200-gallon still, where they distill lavender gin, vodka and eau de vie ode — peach, pear, apple and plum brandy from fruit skins derived from nearby farms.

Opening mid-November on the property is an eight-suite bed-and-breakfast in a restored, circa 1775 manor house, garnished with period furnishings. Springfield Manor was built by James Johnson, brother of Maryland’s first elected governor Thomas Johnson. Among many 19th-century dignitaries who lodged at the manor was Edgar Allan Poe, who spent his wedding night there — and scratched his signature into one of the windows with his diamond ring. The Johnson brothers also established the iron industry in Maryland by building the Catoctin Furnace nearby, where they produced pig iron from locally mined hematite, which was initially cast into ammunition for the Revolutionary War.

Springfield Manor, 18336 Auburn Road, Thurmont, springfieldmanor.com. Free tours are offered Wednesday to Sunday. Tastings are \$1-\$6.



Wyndridge Cidery

Wyndridge Farm, Dallastown, Pa.

Some historians claim that one reason the Pilgrims settled in Massachusetts rather than continuing south was because their beer supply was running low. Settlers, familiar with the unreliable water sources in Europe, were wary about consuming untried water in America, so beer was their drink of choice. But when they couldn’t grow a successful barley crop for their brew, they turned to apples and made hard cider.

Hard cider — pressed apple cider poured in a barrel or tank with yeast and fermented for a few weeks before being filtered and carbonated — is considered the newest wave in the handcrafted beverage craze. Cideries are popping up everywhere, especially in Pennsylvania, America’s fourth-largest apple producer, where the beverage can be produced under a winery or brewery license. The newest on the scene is Wyndridge Farm in rural York County.

From inside a restored farm shed, Wyndridge handbrews, ferments and carbonates champagne-style hard ciders and fruit sodas. The cider is created from seven types of apples grown and pressed at Brown’s Farm next door. It’s also served at Baltimore-area restaurants like Birrotecca and Liberator’s.

Wyndridge’s owner Steve Groff says no sugars or sweeteners are added, allowing the apple flavor to dominate.

But that’s not all that’s brewing here. Across the meadow, in a noisy and voluminous 30-barrel, four-vessel brewhouse, Groff and his brewmasters are making golden ale and IPA beer, the first output of Wyndridge’s many planned brews.

There are 20 taps at the bar in the tasting room filled with Wyndridge’s handmade sodas, ciders and beers, Wine will be introduced to the public in the next phase of the operation. Overlooking rolling meadows, the space doubles as a grand bistro with an open kitchen and wood-burning pizza oven, large enough to cook a dozen pies at once.

Chef Matt Siegmund, former executive chef at the Oregon Grille in Hunt Valley, designed the menu featuring tapas-style dishes for lunch and dinner. Siegmund says cooking classes and a brewing school are part of the planned programs. The building is attached to a restored barn featuring a brew pub on the first level and a hall for concerts and events upstairs.

Wyndridge Farm, 885 S. Pleasant Ave., Dallastown, Pa., wyndridge.com. The tasting room is open daily.

Mount Defiance Cidery and Distillery, Middleburg, Va.

Virginia’s cider production also dates back to Colonial days. Thomas Jefferson produced a carbonated champagne-like cider with Hewes crab apples grown on his plantation. He also used his apples to distill apple brandy. Cider’s popularity completely fizzled out in the early 19th century, largely attributed to the mass production of beer and spirits.

But within the evolution of the modern-day farm-to-table movement, enterprising growers and winemakers in apple-rich regions like Virginia are tinkering with some of the country’s earliest recipes to create new-fangled variations of this age-old beverage in the form of ciders, brandies and fruit-flavored spirits.

After 9/11, Northern Virginia native Marc Chretien felt a calling to enlist, leaving his senior counsel post in Congress. Upon returning from his seven-year duty in Iraq and Afghanistan as the State Department’s political adviser to Gen. John Allen, Chretien decided to enter the burgeoning craft beverage movement.

“This provided me a much-needed tranquil transition from dangerous active duty in combat zones to the quiet serenity of rural America,” Chretien says.

Northern Virginia was already full of established wineries and thriving craft breweries, so he turned to readily available Virginia apples and opened a cidery, naming it Mount Defiance after a local Civil War battle site.

Chretien says the simplicity of cider’s clean crisp taste appeals to him more than the heavy complexity of beer. His goal, to create an “accessible cider that is also interesting and elegant,” is realized in a new tasting room housed in a restored 1940s service station garage in the heart of Middleburg.

The ciders, all on tap, include a traditionally tart and dry Farmhouse Cider, Ginger Cider (made with real ginger), Cider Blanc, fermented with wine yeast, and General’s Reserve, named for General Allen and fermented in reclaimed whiskey barrels to add subtle kick.

Chretien also acquired a distillery license and will soon be turning out his own versions of apple brandy, rum and absinthe.

He divides his time between acting as a civilian adviser to the military in Afghanistan (where he could be redeployed at any time) and pulling the taps in Mount Defiance’s tasting room.

More to pour: Check out these new craft beverage producers

Paintedstave Distillery, 106 W. Commerce St., Smyrna, Del., paintedstave.com. This small-town distillery and tasting room, housed in a rehabbed 1940s-era movie theater, specializes in small-batch premium spirits with locally sourced produce, grain and herbs (including obscure Delaware sweet goldenrod). Tours are \$10 and include a cocktail. Tastings are \$2-\$5. Standout pours include Silver Screen Vodka, Candy Manor Gin, Time Warp Espresso Vodka.

Rocklands Farm, 14525 Montevideo Road, Poolesville, rocklandsfarmmd.com. This farm has launched a full-scale winery. Until their vines mature, wine is produced from grapes from regional vineyards. Tastings and farm tours are offered, and there is a farm market that sells their products. Tours are Thursday-Saturday. Tastings are \$1-5. Standout pours include chardonnay, White Oak and Honey Blossom.

Winery 32, 15066 Limestone School Road, Leesburg, Va. winery32.com. It sits on 32 acres and has 32 peach trees that were planted on the owners’ 32nd wedding anniversary. Along with their handcrafted vintages from seven varietals of grapes, owner/winemaker Michael Mosher serves small plates to folks lingering over their wine in the tasting room. Open Friday-Sunday with complimentary tours. Tastings are \$8. Standout pours include Gloria’s Sunshine (Vidal Blanc peach wine) and Cabernet Franc.