



# Cheers: Michigan's newest wine trail

DIANNA STAMPFLER | THURSDAY, JUNE 15, 2023



Pentamere Winery is located in downtown Tecumseh in southeastern Michigan.



Early French explorers were the first to discover grapes growing wild along what the  
ultimately called Riviere aux Raisin – the River Raisin, which flows for about 139 m



through Jackson, Hillsdale, Washtenaw, Lenawee and Monroe counties, before emptying into Lake Erie.

Today, more than 240 years later, this region maintains its agricultural roots and is home to the newly established River Raisin Wine Trail.

“The River Raisin Wine Trail now consists of four wineries that were previously part of the Pioneer Wine Trail,” notes Justin Gifford, executive director of Visit Lenawee, the local convention and visitor’s bureau. “This development was the result of a collaboration between Visit Lenawee, Cherry Creek Cellars, Flying Otter Winery, Pentamere Winery, Chateau Aeronatique Winery and our partners at Lenawee Now.”

The River Raisin Wine Trail is the fifth such agri-tourism winery alliance in Michigan and the only one in the southeast region of the state (the others being the Lake Michigan Shore Wine Trail, Leelanau Peninsula Wine Trail, Wineries of Old Mission Peninsula and Petoskey Wine Region).

According to the Michigan Craft Beverage Council, there are more than 3,375 acres of wine and grape vineyards in the state primarily located in five federally recognized American Viticultural Areas (AVAs) in western and northern Michigan. The state is home to more than 170 wineries.

“As a rural destination, Lenawee County has seen significant growth in agri-tourism, particularly in vineyards and wineries, breweries, and farm-to-table experiences,” Gifford says. “This collaboration has created a product that will attract more visitors to our area by showcasing the diverse offerings available through this partnership. As visitor and resident attendance increases, so does demand, which in turn will lead to increased production. We are already seeing expansion at one winery as new vineyards are being planted.

It is with the addition of this new trail, and the continuous promotion and demand of the wineries that we hope to not only continue the economic development for our current winery partners but also work towards new and future developments.”

The members of the River Raisin Wine Trail include:

Chateau Aeronatique Winery  
12000 Pentecost Highway – Onsted

Founded in 2008 by international airline pilot Lorenzo Lizarralde, who vinified his first wines in his hangar and began serving them the following year from a tiny Gazebo Tasting Room overlooking the grass runway the following year. Many of the wines are influenced by the chateaus of Bordeaux, France, including Pinot Gris, Syrah, Sur Lie Chardonnay and Cabernet Franc.

Throughout the year, visitors can experience live music, paint and sip events, trivia and other activities, including private event space. In addition to its primary Onsted tasting room, Chateau Aeronatique also operates locations in Jackson and Auburn Hills.

### Cherry Creek Cellars

11500 Silver Lake Highway, Brooklyn

John and Denise Burtka opened their boutique winery in a former one-room schoolhouse in 2003, using old-world tradition to craft award-winning wines (and becoming the fourth generation of Burtkas to become vintners in America). Today, the operation is under the direction of owner, winemaker and vineyard manager Patrick Spensley. Cherry Creek Cellars grows many of its own hybrid grapes on its five-acre estate, but also sources from the nearby Lake Michigan Shore AVA for its Pure Michigan wines.

One of the winery's prime events is the Summer Concert Series (Thursday, Friday and Saturday from May through September) with food trucks on Friday and Saturday nights as well. Other special events include book clubs, pop-up shops, yoga and art classes.

### Flying Otter Winery

3402 Chase Road, Adrian

One of the more interesting winery names comes from Bob Utter's love of flying (he is even building his own airplane) and the Swedish translation of his last name – Otter. This family planted their first grape vines on May 5, 2005, and two years later recorded their first harvest. In 2010, they opened their tasting room with offerings like Rachis Ruckus, made with Marquette grapes; Northern Lights (a blend of Traminette and Chardonnell); and Wild Thing (85% Frontenac Blanc and 17% Frontenac Gris).

A variety of events are held throughout the year including a book club, table games night, trivia, rock star bingo, live music and winemaker dinners in June and August.

Pentamere Winery  
131 E. Chicago Blvd., Tecumseh

Crafting “wines from the vines of the Great Lakes,” the family-owned and operated Pentamere Winery has been producing wines since May 2002. From spiced, dessert and fruit wines to dry varietals, this award-winning establishment is located in a historic building in downtown Tecumseh. With a nod to the maritime history of the state, visitors will find wines like Lady of the Lakes, Channel Marker Three, and Wings of the Wind, among many others.

“One of the unique aspects of this trail is that visitors are able to explore many areas throughout our county while traveling to and visiting each self-guided location,” Gifford says. “From beautiful, historic downtown Tecumseh to the charming countryside just outside of Adrian, and of course the breathtaking views through the rolling Irish Hills, there is something for everyone to enjoy, and along the way, they will find many of our other partner businesses whether it be an attraction, restaurant, or shop.”

*Dianna Stampfler has been writing professionally since high school. She is the president of Promote Michigan and the author of Michigan's Haunted Lighthouses and Death & Lighthouses on the Great Lakes, both from The History Press.*

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