

Business: Urban Winery in the Heart of The Triangle

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Photos and story by Lindsey Chester. Above, Chatham Hill Winery owner Jill Winkler.

Cary, NC – Tucked off Aviation Parkway in an office park sits a hidden gem, [Chatham Hill Winery](#). They've been creating awarding-winning wines here in Cary since 1999.

Cary's Winery

That's right – a winery in Cary. But you won't see rolling hills of grapevines, this wine maker brings in grapes, many from the Winston-Salem area and makes the wine here in oak barrels to be sold all over the state. Jill Winkler, owner, explained that the Triangle area has a tough climate for grape growing, humidity encourages mold and pests become issues. She went on to explain that for centuries wine makers all over the world have purchased grapes from other regions and created the wines in a central location, thus Chatham Hill's operation is no different.

Chatham Hill was one of the earliest wineries to locate in North Carolina, in fact they were the 14th, of what has become a list of over 115. They call themselves “an urban winery in the Heart of North Carolina” because of their office park location, right near I 40, the RDU airport and within Cary's town limits.



The Wines

The winery lists an impressive array of wines from dry red cabernets, to fruitier Rieslings. Some grapes are sourced outside of North Carolina, but a good majority are being grown within the state.

For tasting and sale currently available:

- 2009 Viognier
- 2010 Chardonnay
- Trinity (a blend of Bordeaux, Cabernet Sauvignon, Cabernet Franc and Merlot)
- 2009 Cabernet Franc
- 2009 Cabernet Sauvignon, and a Reserve
- 2010 Syrah
- Rose
- There are also a wide variety of fruit infused wines that are sweeter on the palette, including Blackberry, Mango and Strawberry.

Unlike scuppernong or muscadine, these wines are made from smaller, more tightly bunched grapes with thinner skins. Many grape growers in the state have converted from formerly growing tobacco and are looking to do new sustainable farming and the grape industry is growing because of it. The demographics of the state are also pushing for wine consumption.

Wine is truly a growth industry here in NC.

Awards

Chatham Hill has won many awards including Wines of the South, The San Francisco International Wine Competition, NC State Fair competitions and The Grand Harvest Award handed out in Sonoma, CA. Their Chardonnay Viognier is a notably big award winner. Syrah and a dry Riesling have also won plaudits.

History of Chatham Hill

The winery got its start with three partners, 2 PhD's working in the Research Park and an MD. These doctors got together first experimenting with French grapes that were doing well here in North Carolina. One of the founders, Marek Wojciechowski (and current owner along with Jill) was already making his own wine, and was experimenting in the lab.

They located in a small business office in the back of a commercial building within the Gateway Office Park. At the time, they had a winemaking area and a small tasting room. Their intention was always to move, maybe even to a vineyard, but as the business grew and more space became available here, they eventually tripled in size and remained within the office park.



What Makes Chatham Hill Unique

Most of the grapes come from the Yadkin Valley which is the best area in North Carolina for growing European style grapes and has an [AVA](#) designation.

The winery actively works to partner with their growers to help educate them through state supported research and development. The collaboration creates a win-win for the growers and the winery as they help each other trouble shoot. Mark with his PhD in chemistry can analyze the grapes and is very involved in the growing process. He helps farmers decide when to pick and can fix problems.

Plan a Visit

Besides making the wine, Chatham Hill also conducts tours and tastings on Fridays, Saturdays and Sundays. They can hold corporate events holding up to 156 people for team-building events, catered dinners and more. One of the fun activities they conduct are wine blending parties where teams of attendees actually create their own special blend of various grapes, and are later sent home with corked bottles of that blend as a souvenir.

Upcoming Events

Food Truck Rodeo

Friday, September 28 – 6-9pm

Enjoy live music and local food trucks out in the spacious parking area in front of the winery.

Wines available for purchase by the glass or bottle.

It's Harvest Season

Saturday and Sunday, September 29-30

Sample grape juice in its initial phase of transformation into wine. Please check the [website](#) for the most current information about harvest. Complimentary with paid tasting.

Right here in Cary, a winery, like a little piece of heaven dropped into our own backyard.