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Going Out Guide

Branching out: A guide to local craft cider



By [Fritz Hahn](#) and [Stephanie Merry](#) October 8 at 5:06 PM [Follow @fritzhahn](#) [Follow @stephmerry](#)



Lori Corcoran discusses her ciders while pouring samples in the Corcoran Cidery tasting room in Waterford, Va. (Photo by Kate Patterson for The Washington Post)

First came the wineries, then the craft breweries; the distilleries followed. And now the next taste sensation has arrived: Hard cider makers are sprouting up in Virginia and Maryland, the number of bars pouring local ciders is growing and — seasonally, anyway — the timing couldn't be better.

National trends mirror local ones. Cider sales rose 75.4 percent from November 2013 to November 2014, according to market research firm IRI, and the Beer Institute reports that cider production volume tripled between 2011 and 2013. Why? No one seems to agree, exactly. Maybe it's the growing number of beer lovers cutting back on gluten, or the farm-to-table foodies who like a tasty beverage from hand-picked fruits with local provenance.

All that really matters is that cider is here and it's delicious.

To get a handle on the region's growing cider scene, we set out to visit as many Virginia and Maryland cidermakers as we could; we made it to 14. (We ruled out Potter's, which is on a working horse farm outside Charlottesville and doesn't have a public tasting room, and Foggy Ridge, which we've enjoyed at bars in the District but sits approximately 600 miles round trip from downtown.)

We sampled dry, fruity ciders crafted the way Thomas Jefferson might have enjoyed them, and sipped fizzy, sweet ciders designed to appeal to drinkers who have tried only Woodchuck.

In the end, what impressed us was the breadth of ciders available: Blue Bee's sour or dry-hopped offerings may not appeal to the same drinkers as the more traditional ciders at Albemarle or Old Hill. Winchester Cider Works serves distinct styles from counties in the eastern and western ends of England, while Millstone takes inspiration from Basque styles. Distillery Lane Ciderworks sticks closer to home, growing the same kinds of apples George Washington would have used in his cider

at Mount Vernon.

This time of year, a trip to an orchard is the perfect way to spend a Saturday. Virginia cidemakers are clustered in the Shenandoah Valley, around Charlottesville and throughout hunt country, making it easy to wrap a few into a day trip.

[Six favorites](#) | [More cider tasting rooms](#) | [Cider bars and shops in D.C.](#)

Our six favorite cideries



Seven ciders are offered during a tasting at Blue Bee, an "urban cidery" in Richmond, Va. (Photo by Fritz Hahn/The Washington Post)

Blue Bee

212 W. Sixth St., Richmond, Va. 804-231-0280. www.bluebeecider.com. \$15 per tasting flight.

Most of the cideries cited in this story use fresh air and countryside settings to sell their ciders: You walk past the orchards on your way to the tasting room, or settle in with a glass of sparkling cider and a view of the trees on which the apples grew.

Blue Bee has none of those things. From its early-20th-century coffee warehouse on the south side of the James River in Richmond, the only way the two-year-old Blue Bee can conjure images of ripe fruit and the sweet smell of fresh apples is through its ciders.

Actually, says cider maker Manuel Garcia, the un-leafy urban setting may work in its favor. Since Blue Bee isn't on a farm, first-time visitors don't expect the cider offerings to mirror the traditional styles elsewhere.

This gives Blue Bee far more room to play around: the Charred Ordinary, a dry, sour cider with very little residual sugar from heirloom apples; Fanfare, whose mild berry sweetness and light pink color come from the addition of mulberries foraged from around Richmond by members of Blue Bee's Cider Club; the funky, earthy mushroom notes of Gold Dominion, made with Belgian ale yeast instead of the more common champagne yeast; and Harvest Ration, a thick, warming blend of cider and an apple brandy made in conjunction with Purcellville's Catoctin Creek Distillery. (The barrels used for aging the brandy make their way back to Blue Bee, where they're filled with Hopsap Shandy, Blue Bee's gently bitter hop-infused cider, and left to age for several months. The Barrel-Aged Hopsap will be released later this month.)

Next year, Blue Bee is moving a few miles northwest to the buzzing neighborhood of Scott's Addition, home to the Ardent and Hardywood breweries, Reservoir Distilling and the forthcoming Buskey (see Page 20). The new digs, formerly city-owned stables, will allow for new equipment and a cool outdoor courtyard, but expect the spirit of experimentation to continue unchecked.



The tasting Room at Castle Hill, a cidery outside of Charlottesville, is located inside of a renovated barn. (Photo by Stephanie Merry/The Washington Post)

Castle Hill Cider

6065 Turkey Sag Rd., Keswick, Va. 434-296-0047. www.castlehillcider.com. \$8 per tasting flight.

The uneven dirt road that leads to Castle Hill Cider, nestled in Virginia horse country, offers few hints about the destination ahead. The land eventually levels out to reveal a massive, pristinely renovated white barn set above a lake with a spectacular view of the Blue Ridge Mountains. The vista is best appreciated from the newly built outdoor tasting room. You can see why the spot has become popular with brides and grooms.

Castle Hill has plenty of history, beginning in the 1700s as a home and plantation. The cidery is a relative newcomer, opening in 2011, though the dozens of varieties of apple trees dotting hundreds of acres have been around longer, bearing everything from Albemarle Pippins — a favorite of Thomas Jefferson's — to Black Twig and Goldrush.

Castle Hill has eight ciders available. Try the dry, sparkling Levity, which is made using a technique that's thousands of years old: Juice from Albemarle Pippin apples is aged and fermented underground in large clay jugs called kvevri that are imported from Georgia (the country, not the state).

Black Twig, meanwhile, is aged in Jack Daniels whiskey barrels, giving a hint of a kick, while the sparkling Big Pippin adds small-batch bourbon to the mix. It's delicious, but beware of its 11 percent ABV.

While Castle Hill is cropping up in restaurants and markets around the D.C. area, the cidery will be partnering with Bloomingdale restaurant the Red Hen on a special rosé cider, which is now aging in kvevri and will be available in November.







A flight of four varieties of cider is offered every weekend in Corcoran's Waterford, Va., tasting room. (Photo by Kate Patterson for The Washington Post)

Corcoran Vineyards & Cidery

14635 Corky's Farm Lane, Waterford, Va. 540-882-9073. www.corcorancider.com. \$7 tasting flights.

Jim and Lori Corcoran, already known for their Loudoun County winery and brewery, decided to expand their empire in 2014. The timing was right given that the big red barn on their property was empty after beer production, which was previously housed there, moved to Purcellville. And so, drawing on her winemaking knowledge, Lori Corcoran turned the barn into a space for liquid experimentation.

Just a year on, Corcoran has four ciders, including the original, Corcoran Hard Cider. She uses a “secret” blend of seven varieties of apple, which yields a refreshing cider that’s off-dry, carbonated and perfect for a warm fall day. But the unique offering is new this year: the Hop n Pop, a dry-hopped cider that balances the sweetness of the fruit with an ever-so-subtle bitterness.

Corcoran turns into a community gathering space when the tasting room opens on weekends. The family dishes up its

Cork Belly BBQ, selling pork sandwiches and baked beans, and visitors bring their kids and dogs, entertaining themselves with games of cornhole between beverages.



The apple orchard at Distillery Lane Ciderworks, located just outside of Burkittsville, Md. There is no witch on the farm. (Photo by Stephanie Merry/The Washington Post)

Distillery Lane Ciderworks

5533 Gapland Rd., Jefferson, Md. 240-344-8856. www.distillerylaneciderworks.com. \$6 per tasting flight.

At Distillery Lane Ciderworks, 40 varieties of apples grow on thousands of trees in a nine-acre orchard. Each has its own purpose: There are French pastry apples for restaurants, Japanese apples for fresh juice, British apples for expats who need just the right flavors for pies that taste of home. And then there are the heritage apple varieties, the types George Washington grew at Mount Vernon, which are turned into hard cider for sale at the first president's farm.

With all the varieties of apples growing on its farm outside Frederick, Distillery Lane has one of the largest portfolios of any local cidemaker. You'll probably find more than a dozen varieties for sale in the tasting room, mixing traditional funky, tannic, semi-dry English ciders such as the Kingston Black with the more approachable, effervescent Rio, which picks up vanilla and honey notes after aging in rye whiskey barrels. Owner Rob Miller and his family planted the first trees at Distillery Lane in 2001 and have been experimenting with new varieties ever since, while cider maker Tim Rose works on blending, barrel-aging and fermentation techniques.

"Our advantage, if you will, is that we planted these trees 15 years ago," Miller says. "We've learned the very hard way what trees grow well here and what don't."

Of course, Distillery Lane offers more than just sampling: A self-guided walking tour around the orchard gives plenty of apple facts and special signs for kids to follow, and Miller and Rose lead a monthly cidemaking class for beginners in the offseason, which runs from January to July. This Saturday and Sunday is the Explorers Festival, with tastings, tours, apple picking and cooking classes from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m.

[\[Fermentation first-hand: Learn to make hard cider at Distillery Lane\]](#)



Millstone Cellars co-founder Kyle Sherrer works in the cidery's warehouse, where different types of cider ages in hundreds of oak barrels.

Millstone Cellars

2029 Monkton Rd., Monkton, Md. 443-470-9818. www.millstonecellars.com. Free tours and tastings.

Millstone is all about getting back to basics, shunning industrial methods and additives in favor of letting nature do its thing. That doesn't make Curt and Kyle Sherrer's jobs any easier. The father-and-son team uses only apples that are at peak ripeness and sources all of its fruit from within 150 miles of the Baltimore County facility. Each batch is its own experiment, fermented in a single oak barrel. That means that, since opening in 2011, Millstone has created more than 1,500 batches of cider, each with a distinct flavor, depending on the balance of yeast and bacteria during the fermentation process.

This simplified yet time-intensive approach means that Millstone specializes in rustic-style ciders, which are unlike most other options you're likely to try in the area. The Farmgate, for example, has more in common with a funky craft beer than with the hard cider at your neighborhood grocery store. It's sparkling, sour and dry.

And then there's the Sidra Americana, an homage to Basque-style cider, which entails its own unique process. Fresh juice is fermented with apple skins, which lend natural tannins, then go into barrels to be aged just like the others. The still cider has a singular, tart flavor that would go with just about any meal. Everything at Millstone seems to be lovingly handcrafted; even the bottles are beautiful in their simplicity, with swing tops sealed with wax.

The tasting room, located inside a converted grist mill, is open weekends with free tours and tastings. Be sure to also check out the cidery's selection of meads and cysers (fruit-based meads), which are even more experimental — the Bonfire is made with apples, honey and smoked fish peppers, balancing fruitiness with a spicy kick. No food is sold, so visitors are

encouraged to bring their own.





At the rustic "tasting deck" at Winchester Cider Works, old apple boxes serve as both seats and table legs. (Photo by Fritz Hahn/The Washington Post)

Winchester Cider Works

2502 N. Frederick Pike, Winchester, Va. 540-550-3800. www.winchesterciderworks.com. \$6 per tasting flight.

If Virginia's cider scene had been this active a decade ago, Winchester Cider Works might not exist. Stephen Schuurman left his native Suffolk, England, in 2004 to help his manufacturing company open a plant in Winchester. Right away, he began missing the dry, crisp ciders from the east of England. "It's our national drink," he says. "I've been drinking it from an early age. It's in our heritage. It's in our blood."

To fill the gap, Schuurman began making cider in his garage. And then he found a calling in his own back yard; he lives next door to an orchard owned by Diane Kearns, whose family runs more than 3,000 acres of apple trees in the region.

Their first hard cider, Malice, debuted in 2013 and is akin to Aspall and the fizzing, refreshing ciders Schuurman grew up with. The second line, called Wicked Wiles, consists of still, funky ciders in the style of Somerset in England's West Country, all aged in used bourbon, rum, brandy or rye whiskey barrels for at least nine months; the cider remains in the rye barrels for almost two years. "I'm going for a more mellow flavor," Schuurman says. "You can't rush it." He's also planning to make a pear cider and an elderflower cider, "which is very popular in England," for his next seasonal batches.

Winchester Cider Works is housed in an old farm building on the side of Route 522, about five miles north of historic Winchester — a city that calls itself the "Apple Capital" of Virginia. The "tasting deck" is the porch of the building, with a simple bar at one end. There's really no better way to describe it than rustic: Tables are made from wooden boards laid on stacked apple boxes, and other upturned boxes are used for seats. Schuurman says an indoor tasting room will debut next year; in the meantime, he'll be crafting warm mulled ciders for visitors to help ward off autumn's chill.

More cider makers and tasting rooms





The tasting room at Albemarle Ciderworks in North Garden, Va., turns into a concert venue every weekend. (Photo by Stephanie Merry/The Washington Post)

Albemarle Ciderworks

2545 Rural Ridge Lane, North Garden, Va. 434-297-2326. www.albemarleciderworks.com. \$6 per tasting flight.

Don't let the idyllic setting near Wintergreen and the Giverny- caliber pond fool you. Weekends are happening at Albemarle, where the orchard and cidery hosts musicians and improv troupes. There's a four-bedroom rental house on the premises that would be perfect for a group getaway.

Bold Rock

1020 Rockfish Valley Hwy., Nellysford, Va. 434-361-1030. www.boldrock.com. Tastings of two types of cider are free. Flights with four types are \$5.

Given Bold Rock's sudden availability just about everywhere in the D.C. area, you'd be forgiven for thinking that it is owned by one of the big brewing companies. Nope; the independently owned cidery is just outside Charlottesville, and its most readily available beverages, the Virginia Apple and the Virginia Draft, are as close as local ciders come to the crowd-pleasing sweetness of Angry Orchard.





On nice days, a tasting flight at Bold Rock, in Nellysford, Va., is best enjoyed on the deck overlooking the Blue Ridge Mountains. (Photo by Stephanie Merry/The Washington Post)

Buskey Cider

2910 W. Leigh St., Richmond, Va. www.buskeycider.com.

Richmond's second urban cidemaker plans to open in December, crafting cider from apples grown in the Shenandoah Valley. Owner Will Correll says Buskey will set itself apart by offering a pair of flagship ciders in cans rather than bottles, since cans are "designed for floating down the James River." Expect additional seasonal draft offerings at a tasting room in the city's buzzing Scott's Addition neighborhood.

Cobbler Mountain Cellars

5909 Long Fall Lane, Delaplane, Va. 540-364-2802. www.cobblerscellars.com. \$5 per tasting flight.

This Fauquier County winery has a cider pub for tastings. It offers traditional and hopped hard ciders but also makes sweeter, spicier ciders, including Kickin' Cinnamon, Wild Blackberry and (sigh) Pumpkin Spice.





This year is the 50th anniversary of the apple orchards at Old Hill in Timberville, Va. The mountains of the Shenandoah Valley provide a scenic backdrop with a glass of cider in hand. (Photo by Fritz Hahn/The Washington Post)

Great Shoals Winery

14526 New Hampshire Ave., Silver Spring, Md. 410-849-9616. www.greatshoals.com. \$7 per tasting flight.

Great Shoals wins points for convenience. Just off New Hampshire Avenue, the small tasting room shares space with the Heyser Farm market and offers ciders, wines and fruit wines. The standout is the dry, sparkling Spencerville cider, made from a type of apple that can be found only at Heyser.

Mt. Defiance Cidery

207 W. Washington St., Middleburg, Va. 540-687-8100. www.mtdefiance.com. \$5 per tasting flight.

The biggest draw at Mt. Defiance is its prime location in downtown Middleburg, among the boutiques, antique shops and restaurants. The traditional ciders are fine, if not particularly memorable. We were more curious about the house-distilled absinthe.





Jay Clement, the founder of Wild Hare Cider, in his Bluemont, Va., tasting room. One of the area's newest cidery producers, Wild Hare's soft opening was in early August 2015. (Photo by Fritz Hahn/The Washington Post)

Old Hill Hard Cider

17768 Honeyville Rd., Timberville, Va. 540-896-7582. www.oldhillcider.com. \$8 per tasting flight.

Old Hill's orchard celebrates its 50th anniversary this year, making fall the perfect time to visit the cidery, located in the Shenandoah Valley between New Market and Harrisonburg. Take a seat on the patio, which has a view of the Blue Ridge Mountains, and sip a glass of the dry, English-style cider. You can also pick your own apples or buy local produce from the farm store.

Wild Hare Hard Cider

33735 Snickersville Tpk., Bluemont, Va. 703-216-8630. www.wildharecider.com. \$3 per tasting of two types.

The newest cidery in the area occupies just 500 square feet off the tiny main drag of Bluemont in western Loudoun County. Wild Hare has a DIY vibe and just two ciders so far, with a hoppy variation to come. Hatch and the pleasant Windrush are dry with just a touch of fizz, but you may leave the shop with more than cider. T-shirts with the charming Wild Hare logo are pretty enticing, too.

Cider bars and shops in D.C.

Most of the area's cidermakers and orchards are inaccessible without a car. Here are a few places in the District where cider shines.



Cider by the glass

[6oz. pours]

BRIGHT

- high acid, dry, low tannin
- Potter's Craft Farmhouse Dry VIRGINIA - 7% - \$4
- Les Vergers de la Colline CID Base QUEBEC - 6.5% - \$5
- Millstone / ANXO Collaboration MI - 7% - \$7
- Millstone Cellars Farmgate MARYLAND - 8.5% - \$10
- Albemarle Cider Works Jupiter's Legacy VIRGINIA - 9.3% - \$10
- Blue Bee Charred Ordinary VIRGINIA - 8.3% - \$10

PERRY

- cider made from heirloom perry pears
- Oliver's Classic Perry HERFORDSHIRE - Still - 6% - \$6
- Snowdrift Perry Reserve WASHINGTON - 8% - \$11
- Eric Bordelet Poiré Authentique NORMANDY - 4% - \$11

ICE CIDER

- made from pressing naturally frozen apples
- 20 Manzanitas Still - 10% - 3oz Pour - \$15

BALANCED

- medium tannin, off dry, medium acidity
- Domaine de la Mission Cider Ferme des Apples HERFORDSHIRE - 8% - \$7
- Guzman Rientes Sidra Brut Nalaga ASTURIAS - 8% - \$7
- Snowdrift Orchard Reserve WASHINGTON - 8.3% - \$9

RUSTIC & BOLD

- high tannin, off dry, medium acidity
- Oliver's Traditional Cider HERFORDSHIRE - Still - 8% - \$5
- Le Brun Brut Cidre de Bretagne BRETAGNE - 5.5% - \$5
- Domaine Bordatto Reservere 2011 PAYS BASQUE - 6% - \$10
- Domaine Bordatto Tzala Paris 2011 PAYS BASQUE - 7% - \$11
- medium tannin, dry, medium acidity
- Heck's 2013 Vintage Dry Cider SOMERSET - 6% - \$6
- Snowdrift Dry Cider WASHINGTON - 7.6% - \$5
- Eden Sparkling Dry VERMONT - 8.5% - \$11

SHOT OF CALVADOS -- \$6

Basque and Asturian ciders are available by the bottle on the patio.





The must-order cider on the menu at Anxo's pop-up cider bar in Sept. 2015 was the Millstone/Anxo Collaboration #1, a dry cider produced at the Millstone Cidery (left). The Snowdrift Orchard Select from Washington State was also delicious. (Photo by Fritz Hahn/The Washington Post)

Cidery

Anxo

300 Florida Ave. NW. www.anxodc.com.

Set to open in 2016. Early next year, Anxo is set to become Washington's first "urban cidery," producing and serving its own Basque-style cider at a pub near Truxton Circle, in addition to 20 other ciders and 20 beers and cocktails on tap. (Fun fact: Due to oddities of the city's licensing restrictions, Anxo will legally operate as a winery.)

The driving forces behind Anxo are former Meridian Pint beer director Sam Fitz; his sister, Rachel Fitz; and Boundary Road beverage director Tim Prendergast, who worked with the Fitzes at Meridian Pint. They're joined in the endeavor by Boundary Road chef Brad Walker and bar manager Cooper Sheehan.

While waiting for Anxo to open, the team has launched a series of pop-up dinners and happy hours around Washington. Last month's takeover of Colony Club on Georgia Avenue NW marked the debut of Anxo's first cider, a dry, slightly tannic beverage fermented by Kyle Sherrer of Millstone and aged for four months in a 660-gallon Barolo barrel. The rest of the evening's cider list, mixing funky, rustic English and French ciders and a well-curated selection from the East Coast, bodes well for the full-time bar. More information about upcoming events will be posted at www.anxodc.com.

Bars

ChurchKey

1337 14th St. NW. 202-567-2576. www.churchkeydc.com.

Sure, ChurchKey is known for the 50 beers on tap, five on cask and hundreds more in bottles. But there are more than 30 apple and pear ciders, too, organized into such categories as “Earthy and Sparkling” and “Bright and Fruity.” Don’t miss the ciders from Massachusetts’s West County Cider, funky Spanish options and “methode traditionnelle” English sparkling ciders.

Pizzeria Paradiso

Three locations: 3282 M St. NW; 2003 P St. NW; 124 King St., Alexandria. www.eatyourpizza.com. Local ciders, particularly Millstone and Blue Bee, are regularly featured on tap and in bottles at all three Pizzeria Paradiso locations. Through Monday night, it will be even easier to locate ciders, as they’re offered alongside harvest ales and Oktoberfest lagers as part of Paradiso’s Autumn Fest tap takeover.

Estadio

1520 14th St. NW. 202-319-1404. www.estadio-dc.com.

You’d expect Estadio to have several varieties of Spanish cider, and it’s no surprise they also stock Distillery Lane’s Spanish-inspired Sidra Montaña Sur. But there are more options waiting at the Logan Circle tapas joint, including Millstone and Eve’s Cidery from Upstate New York.

Shops

Glen’s Garden Market

2001 S St. NW. 202-588-5698. www.glensgardenmarket.com.

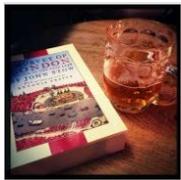
Glen’s prides itself on sourcing local, artisanal products, including craft beer and cider, and this Dupont Circle market has one of the strongest cider selections in the city. Almost all of our favorite local ciders were represented on a recent visit: Blue Bee, Distillery Lane, Millstone, Castle Hill, Potter’s, Albemarle, Bold Rock and Foggy Ridge. We appreciated the

options from New York cideries Bellweather and Standard Cider, as well as the expected Jack's and Doc's.

Pipetown Traders

1412 Pennsylvania Ave. SE. 202-544-1740. www.pipetowntraders.com.

Pipetown Traders, which celebrates its first birthday at the end of the month, has quickly become one of Washington's more interesting craft beer stores. But among the Mikkeller IPAs and West Coast saisons is an intriguing list of ciders, with more than three dozen choices available earlier this week. In addition to the expected products from Virginia and Maryland, such as Blue Bee and Albemarle, there are ciders from around the world, including traditional English bottles, fruit ciders from New Zealand and dry and sparkling ciders from Brittany and Normandy.



Fritz Hahn has covered bars, drinks and nightlife for the Washington Post Weekend Section since 2003, but he also writes about everything from Civil War battlefields to sailing classes. You can find him on [Twitter](#) and [Instagram](#).



Washington-area native Stephanie Merry covers movies and pop culture for the Post.

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