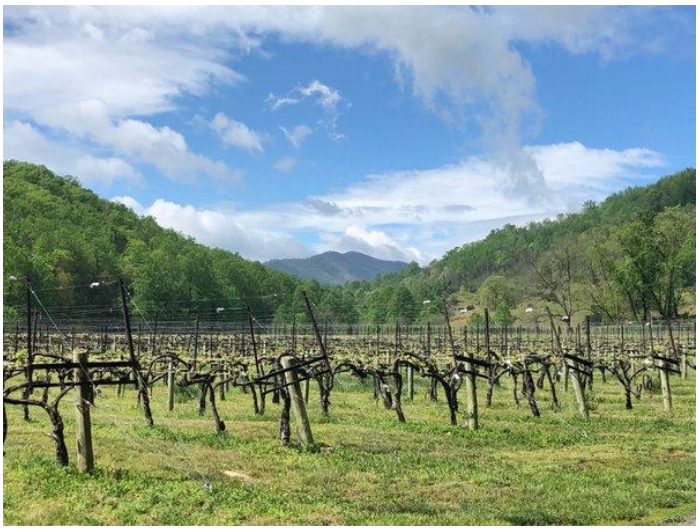
Explore the World of Wine at DuCard Vineyards in Virginia

Armchair Expedition classes give participants a global view as they sip and learn.

BY JANE FULLERTON LEMONS

MAR. 03, 2026



DuCard Vineyards

For wine lovers who enjoy learning about what's in their glass, DuCard Vineyards offers an educational journey around the world of wine with no plane ticket required.

The Armchair Expedition series allows participants to taste the same type of wine from various locations around the world, helping to understand how the same grape variety can taste different depending on where it's grown.

A Cabernet Franc from Virginia tastes distinctly different from a Cab Franc grown in the grape's native France, for instance.

“We started offering Armchair Expedition programs over a year ago as a low-key, fun and efficient way to help consumers broaden their familiarity with the whole global world of wine,” explained Scott Elliff, founder of DuCard Vineyards in Etlan, about 90 miles southeast of Alexandria.

Owner Scott Elliff collaborates with Ann Czaja, a certified wine educator and master chocolatier, who teaches the A rmchair Expedition classes.

The mountainside winery is nestled at the eastern edge of the Shenandoah National Park in Madison County.

Different Regions Result in Different Wines

At a recent Armchair Expedition tasting, participants had the chance to try five versions of wine made from the Petit Verdot grape variety, illustrating the concept.

Traditionally used in Bordeaux-style red wine blends, Petit Verdot has grown in popularity in Virginia, where it is used to create both red blends and single-varietal wines.

Its status in the Commonwealth was underscored in 2025 when the prestigious Virginia Governor's Cup competition added Best in Show winners for select categories, including Petit Verdot.

The wines for the class came from Texas, Italy, Spain and Uruguay — including several that would be difficult to find locally. For comparison, the wine tasting began with DuCard's 2021 Petit Verdot, grown and produced in Virginia.

A recent class focused on wines made from the Petit Verdot grape variety, which is growing in popularity in Virginia.

The session was led by Ann Czaja, who is both a certified wine educator and a Lindt Master Chocolatier.

She explained where the variety grows and how the location affects the resulting wine, with factors including the soil, the climate, the winemaking process and even the local regulations impacting the taste.

"The response from consumers has been great," Elliff said. "They're very engaged and asking a lot of questions. The sessions are helping both broaden their awareness and solidify their own preferences."

Learning About Wine — and Chocolate

Elliff and his staff have several Armchair Expedition classes planned for 2026. They include sessions on Rosé, Chardonnay, Viognier and Petit Verdot.

For example, the Rosé class will allow participants to taste wines from five different countries, with different climates and soil types using different production methods and winemaking styles.

“It’s a super fun experience that fits right in with our ongoing efforts to provide unique and superior customer experiences,” he said.

The Armchair Expedition series allows participants to taste the same type of wine from various locations around the world.

DuCard also offers another class taught by Czaja, focused on how to pair wine with chocolate — a natural fit with her role as a master chocolatier.

This class matches chocolate with different DuCard wines, with Czaja and Elliff explaining why certain combinations work.

Attendance at all the classes is limited to keep the experience personal and educational. You can find them listed here on DuCard’s events calendar.

DuCard’s history dates to 2004, when Elliff began growing grapes and selling them to a nearby winery.

But when those folks started winning awards with the resulting wine — including the coveted Governor's Cup — he decided it was time to bottle his own wine under his own label.

With expanded production and facilities, DuCard opened its tasting room in 2010. Julien Durantie is the winemaker, bringing experience from his family's vineyard in Bordeaux to Virginia.

Elliff's decision to follow the path of his "hobby gone wild" has paid off with numerous awards over the years, including three gold medals in the 2026 Governor's Cup competition.

Jane Fullerton Lemons

Jane Fullerton Lemons is a Virginia-based writer and recovering Washington journalist focused on wine and travel. A 2026 fellow at the Wine Writers Symposium in Napa Valley, she shares stories of the people and places behind the bottles, while also helping American consumers understand agriculture and how it impacts their lives.