

**RayLen Vineyards****2004 Viognier
(North Carolina)**

It wasn't that long ago when the Viognier variety was regarded as one of the rarest quality vinifera grapes in the world, its propagation all but restricted to the tiny Condrieu and even tinier Château-Grillet appellations of the Northern Rhone (and an allowed but infrequent appearance as a minor blending component in Côte Rôtie Syrahs).

Wow, can things change quickly. With new clones and better viticulture worldwide, Viognier is perhaps the most remarkable comeback kid of the varietal catalogue. So popular has it become that even its original ACs in France have been

revitalized, finding new interest from wine enthusiasts. Today, Viognier can be found growing in just about every New World region, in both hemispheres – so much for finicky and difficult to grow. With its new found popularity, the question is, where is this variety performing best? Rapid increases in plantings in California have perhaps been less about matching terroir than meeting new demand, and more than a few that I have tried from CA appellations were overblown and sometimes obscene caricatures of what the varietal is supposed to be. At the other end of the spectrum, some examples from Canadian appellations have had such character anemia they were more akin to Trebbiano.

It may well be that the eastern seaboard of the US is Viognier's New World nirvana. Virginia is forging ahead and some might claim that Viognier is a signature varietal there. But fine Viogniers are also popping up from vineyards in southern neighbor North Carolina, such as this superb example from [RayLen Vineyards](#). With deep green gold hues, you know it's a big wine just from the color. Sure enough, the nose is brimming with classic Viognier aromas including floral blossoms and loads of peach and apricot fruit with roasted pineapple. A viscous mouthfeel offers juicy peach flavors, anise and fennel seed, with just enough of that typical Viognier bitter pithiness to lend structure to the lushness. The finish is bone dry but gives a sweet impression due to the lingering intensity of fruit. A final zing of acid reminds one that this is a wine from an eastern appellation.

Reviewed July 25, 2007 by [Adam Dial](#).

THE WINE

Winery: [RayLen Vineyards](#)
Vintage: 2004
Wine: Viognier
Appellation: [North Carolina](#)
Grape: [Viognier](#)
Price: \$13.00

THE REVIEWER**Adam Dial**

Adam Dial is co-founder and Managing Editor of Appellation America. Brought up in a family with winery ventures in both California and Canada, he seeks and appreciates diversity and individuality in wines. He is a Sommelier with more than two decades of experience in the hospitality and service industry, and is a respected wine educator, judge and industry advisor.