



TOP: Glasses of Syrah at Red Newt Bistro.
MIDDLE: Vineyards above Keuka Lake.
BOTTOM: Greek Revival porch of Inn on Columbia.

GO FINGER

HEAD TO NEW YORK'S
FINGER LAKES
REGION TO SAMPLE
WORLD-CLASS WINES IN
THEIR NATIVE SETTING.

It's hard to convince people that winters everywhere in upstate New York aren't like photos they've seen of Buffalo and Syracuse covered by feet of snow. Until they've visited the area it's also hard to convince them that the region now produces world-class wines from European varieties, instead of the sweet plonk from native and winter-hardy hybrid grapes the region was long known for and still produces. However, one glass of Riesling from Hermann Wiemer or Dr. Konstantin Frank, or of Cabernet Franc from Lamoreaux Landing or Standing Stone, usually changes their mind about the potential of the Finger Lakes region.

Cayuga, Seneca, and Keuka—the three largest of the area's long, extremely deep lakes—have been described as enormous water "radiators" that moderate the temperature near their shores year-round, radiating warmth in the winter and coolness in the summer. The lakes effectively lengthen the growing season for crops near their shores, encouraging an early spring and discouraging an early winter. And unless they freeze over, which rarely happens to Cayuga and never to Seneca, they moderate the prevailing westerly winter winds as well, preventing some of the damage extreme cold can wreak on tender vinifera vines transplanted from the warmer climes of Europe.

Most local wines share a number of appealing food-friendly characteristics. Whites are clean and crisp, with plenty of fruit flavors. The red wines show a variety of "red fruit" aromas, fresh berrylike flavors, and they commonly retain quite a bit of bright, citric acidity. Unlike many wines from warm-climate regions such as California, local wines tend to have few of the "cooked fruit," "jammy," and "dark fruit" characteristics found in wines made from riper grapes.

BY GRADY WELLS PHOTOS BY JON REIS



THIS AND PHOTO AT LEFT BY W. BANASWESKI / JONREIS.COM



Lamoreaux Landing winemaker Staci Nugent and owner Mark Wagner



Tasting room at Lamoreaux Landing Wine Cellars



LEFT: Sign pointing the way to the Red Newt Bistro. BELOW: Tasting room at Red Next Cellars.



ABOVE: The Heights Café's profiterole sampler and entrance. BELOW: Le Petite Café and front lawn of La Tourelle Resort & Spa.



A mile south of Lamoreaux Landing is another area pioneer, Wagner Vineyards, housed in a dramatic modern winery. Wagner was among the first Finger Lakes wineries to make European-style wines from locally grown vinifera grapes. Today, winemakers John Herbert (who's worked at Wagner since its earliest days) and Ann Raffetto turn out high-quality estate-bottled wines every year. Maybe it's because the vines are so mature, or maybe it's the clone, but Wagner Chardonnays have a rich roundness to them, a kind of balance that other well-made local examples don't always equal. Wagner's Riesling Ice Wines are always excellent, often very big, honeyed, intensely fruity wines with cascades of tropical and other fruit flavors in their powerfully long finishes.

Two miles farther south, the owners of Standing Stone Vineyard, Tom and Marti Macinski—a chemist and an attorney—produce very good and sometimes spectacular wines from some of the oldest vinifera

era vineyards along Seneca Lake's Banana Belt. Be sure to try their great Reserve Chardonnay, from vineyards planted in 1974. Another frequent award-winner is their Gewürztraminer, often the region's best. Their Rieslings are delicious, too, with lots of fruit characteristics, plenty of food-friendly acidity, and even hints of banana in the late-harvest bottlings.

Taste their bright, stylish 2005 Cabernet Franc while it lasts. And be sure to try the top of Standing Stone's red wines, Pinnacle, their big, rich Bordeaux-style blend of Cabernet Sauvignon, Cabernet Franc, and Merlot. At around \$20 per bottle, it's a real value, but be prepared to put it away for a few years to soften the ripe fruit tannins. Treat their huge and complex Reserve Cabernet Sauvignon the same way, and in a few years you'll have a wine that will complement roasts of lamb, beef, and especially venison, Marti's favorite. Typically, I'm not a big booster of wines made from the region's still huge harvest of hybrid grapes, but Standing Stone's intense Vidal Ice Wine is surprisingly powerful.

The main reasons to visit the relatively young Red Newt Winery, founded in 1998, are the big red wines made by owner Dave Whiting from fruit he buys from local growers—especially the Syrah-Cabernet Franc Blend, with its chewy tannins and long finish. Viridescens, Red Newt's Bordeaux-style blend of Cabernet Sauvignon, Cabernet Franc, and Merlot, is another powerhouse in the top ranks of the region.

Dave's wife, Deb, is one of the region's best cooks. In her catering business and at



Even in years with long, cold winters and cool, damp summers, it's possible to make high-quality wines in the Finger Lakes. While the warm, largely dry 2005 vintage produced excellent Rieslings and Cabernet Francs, the cooler, wetter 2006 vintage produced good (if leaner) Rieslings and improving reds.

Most winery tasting rooms are open year-round. But given the fickleness of the region's weather, summer and fall are the best times to visit. The following nine wineries, listed from west to east, will give visitors a full picture of how far Finger Lakes wines have come.

ANY SERIOUS exploration of Finger Lakes wines must include a stop where the movement started. Vinifera Wine Cellars was founded by the late Dr. Konstantin Frank on a beautiful hillside above Keuka Lake. Chardonnay, Pinot Noir, and Riesling are the standouts here, along with the spar-

ling wines, which have been served at the White House. The lovely Rieslings are more flowery than most other Finger Lakes Rieslings, with every bit of the region's characteristic mineral and slate flavors. The sparkling wines from the Finger Lakes are often Champagne-like, and the Chateau Frank Brut Sparkling Wine and Blanc de Blancs are two of the best.

Another pioneering winery in the Finger Lakes region is Hermann J. Wiemer. Wiemer has been growing vinifera on the west shore of Seneca Lake for 30 years and making world-class wines at his lovely winery set amid his oldest vineyards for nearly as long. He is best known for his elegant, restrained Dry Johannisberg Riesling, which resembles and often equals the Rieslings from his native Mosel Valley in Germany. But his Pinot Noir, with its lively acidity, is also well worth trying.

Among the region's most favored microclimates is a one-mile-wide, ten-mile-long

strip south of Lodi on Seneca Lake's eastern shore, known as the "Banana Belt" for the peach and other fruit trees that thrive there. Some of the best wineries in the Finger Lakes are located here, producing first-rate wines year in and year out. Directly across Seneca Lake from Wiemer's is the handsome Greek Revival-style winery and vineyards of Lamoreaux Landing Wine Cellars, the northernmost winery in the Banana Belt and the tasting room with the best view. Owner Mark Wagner produces excellent dry and semi-dry Riesling, as well as luscious and fruity Merlots. One unique wine made here is the unoaked Cabernet Franc, T-23, named for its steel fermentation tank. I have tasted T-23 favorably against examples from the Loire Valley and Friuli Venezia Giulia, and it remains one of my favorite food wines. And Lamoreaux Landing's Brut Sparkling Wine enjoyed with ripe peaches is one of the local summer's greatest pleasures.

WHEN YOU GO

VISITING WINERIES

Winery addresses and websites, as well as links to maps showing locations of the wineries on each of the Finger Lakes, can be found at fingerlakeswinecountry.com.

WHERE TO STAY

CAYUGA LAKE:

INN ON COLUMBIA, 228 Columbia St., Ithaca; 607-272-0204; columbiabb.com. An upscale bed-and-breakfast in an immaculately renovated Greek Revival home, built in the 1830s.

LA TOURELLE RESORT & SPA, 1150 Danby Rd., Ithaca, 607-273-2734; latourelle.com. A deluxe country inn with a spa and two restaurants.

SENECA LAKE:

BELHURST CASTLE, 4069 Rt. 14 So., Geneva; 315-781-0201; belhurst.com. An 1880s stone castle with its own winery.

GENEVA ON THE LAKE, 1001 Lochland Rd., Geneva; 315-789-7190; genevaon-thelake.com. A luxurious lakeside resort modeled after an Italian villa when it was built in 1914 as a private home.

WHERE TO DINE

CAYUGA LAKE:

SIMPLY RED LAKESIDE BISTRO, 7448 County Rd. 153, Ovid; 607-532-9401; simplyredbistro.com. The newly renovated restaurant at Sheldrake Point Vineyard.

DIJON BISTRO, 311 Third St., Ithaca; 607-256-0503; dijonbistro.com. A recently opened French bistro.

THE HEIGHTS CAFÉ & GRILL, 903 Hanshaw Rd., Ithaca; 607-257-4144; heightscafe.com. An upscale restaurant with an excellent wine list.

SENECA LAKE:

DANO'S HEURIGER ON SENECA, 9564 Rt. 414; 607-582-7555; danosonseneca.com. A Viennese-style wine garden, operated by Dano Hutnik and his wife, Karen Gilman.



Dano Hutnik and Karen Gilman of Dano's Heuriger.
BELOW: Inn On Columbia



SUZANNE FINE REGIONAL CUISINE, 9013 Rt. 414, Lodi; 607-582-7545; suzannefrc.com.

A farmhouse restaurant that serves great duck dishes nightly.

THE STONE CAT CAFÉ, 5315 Route 414, Hector; 607-546-5000; stonecatcafe.com. The dinner place to spot winery owners and winemakers.

RED NEWT BISTRO, 3675 Tichenor Road, Hector; 607-546-4100; rednewt.com. The extensive wine list includes wines from dozens of Finger Lakes wineries, in addition to Red Newt's own wines.

the winery bistro she demonstrates her sure touch for combining local wines with local foods to produce maximum enjoyment.

The bistro is a wonderful place to stop for lunch or dinner to try some of Deb's great food accompanied by a glass of local Pinot Noir or Riesling on the deck with a wonderful view.

About halfway up Cayuga Lake's west shore is Sheldrake Point, a beautiful place in a beautiful part of New York. A popular summer resort in the nineteenth century, it now boasts one of the best wineries in the region. In good years, Sheldrake Point Vineyard makes some of the best Pinot Noir in the Finger Lakes. Even in poorer growing years their Barrel Reserve Pinot Noir is a full, soft wine in an earthy Burgundy style. Be sure to try their light and fruity Gamay, made in the Beaujolais Nouveau style with the Beaujolais grape, a local rarity. Their elegant Dry Riesling is often a perfect food wine with a long, crisp lime zest-infused finish. Their Bunch Select Riesling dessert wine is a favorite of mine, with fresh and dried apricot flavors, honeyed texture, and plenty of palate-clearing acidity to round out a great wine. Sheldrake Point's lakeside bistro overlooks Cayuga Lake, just yards away, and is another very pleasant place for lunch or dinner.

Try all the Rieslings, especially the late-harvest Spatgold, at King Ferry Winery/Treleaven's large modern tasting room on Cayuga Lake's eastern shore, 15 miles north of Ithaca. But be sure to also taste one of my favorite Chardonnays, their un-oaked Silver Lining, which undergoes minimal malolactic fermentation and boasts a variety of fruit flavors including green apples, pears, and fresh berries. All their reds—Merlot, Pinot Noir, and Cabernet Franc—are well-made examples of Finger Lakes-style wines.

Even in the best weather and long days of summer and fall, touring all these wineries in one day would be a stretch. Budget several days and you're sure to come away convinced that, yes, they do make world-class wines in upstate New York. ▀