




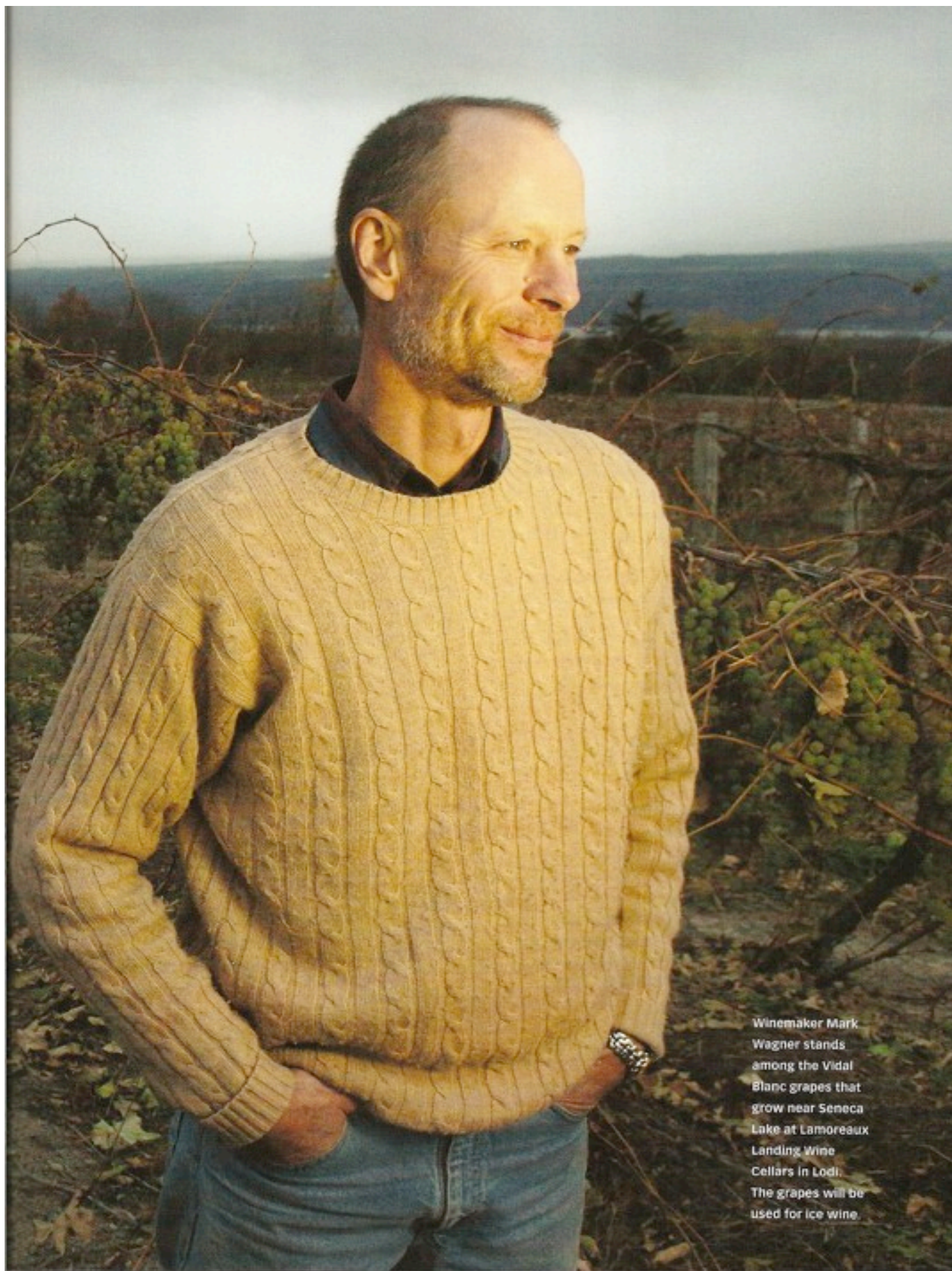
# THE ICE WINE COMETH

FINGER LAKES OFFER  
PERFECT SETTING  
FOR PRODUCTION OF  
THIS SWEET DRINK

  
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PHOTOGRAPH BY STEPHEN D. CANNARELLI





Winemaker Mark Wagner stands among the Vidal Blanc grapes that grow near Seneca Lake at Lamoreaux Landing Wine Cellars in Lodi. The grapes will be used for ice wine.



On a blustery late November day, winemaker Mark Wagner heads south through the hillsides overlooking Seneca Lake. He passes bare vineyards picked clean in the harvest a month before.

A mile or so south of his winery, Lamoreaux Landing Wine Cellars in Lodi, he turns off into a dirt lane. Here are two long rows of vines still full of pale green Vidal Blanc grapes, some speckled with brown spots.

Wagner pulls a few grapes, tastes them for sweetness and tartness, and tosses a few to his dog, Max.

These grapes — hanging on the vine in the face of wind, birds and the approaching frost — are special. They will remain on the vine until real winter weather arrives, freezing and squeezing out most of their moisture.

Then they'll be turned into ice wine, a sweet nectarlike dessert drink that takes advantage of the concentrated flavors left when the water is frozen out.

The Finger Lakes are a natural for ice wine production: The area is one of the coldest wine regions in the world, with deep snows and bone-chilling temperatures.

But even here, ice wine can be a dicey proposition. All wines depend heavily on the weather. (That's why different vintage years produce different wines.) But it's exaggerated with ice wine.

Without a timely freeze, there is no ice wine.

"It's not something you can count on doing every year," says Wagner, who has made ice wine at Lamoreaux Landing in all but a few years since his first try in 1991. "The conditions have to be right."

Yet more and more Finger Lakes wineries are making the effort. Dozens of wineries now offer one or more ice wines to complement their lineups of dry Rieslings, chardonnays and cabernet francs.

And Finger Lakes ice wines have won bushels of competition medals, from Australia to California to the New York State Fair.

"Ice wine is a great product from the Finger Lakes region with a great future," says Jim Trezise, executive director of the New York Wine & Grape Foundation in Canandaigua. Trezise is sure production of ice wine in the region is growing, although there aren't statistics to prove the point.

Though ice wine originated in Germany (as Eiswein), the chief competition for Finger Lakes ice wines comes from Canada, particularly Ontario's Niagara Peninsula, where ice wine is one of the leading products.

On one point, Trezise is clear: "The ice wine made by our friends in Canada is fine, but it's generally double the price of our Finger Lakes ice wines."



Vidal Blanc grapes at Hunt Country Vineyards on Keuka Lake were picked the weekend after Thanksgiving 2007.

#### MAKING ICE WINE

Ice wine, says Wagner, is "beautiful but expensive."

Consider: You can find good Finger Lakes wines for \$10, \$15, or maybe \$25 per 750-milliliter bottle.

It's not unusual to see ice wines for \$40 per 375-milliliter bottle.

Why? Think about it:

The grapes are frozen at temperatures in the midteens or lower. The water inside is frozen solid.

When the grapes are pressed into juice, the frozen water is



Netting on the Vidal Blanc grapes at Hunt Country Vineyards thwarts birds until harvest.

discarded, so the yield per grape is much less than with other wines. Instead of gushing from the press, the juice that will turn into ice wine is more of a trickle.

"You have to love doing it," Wagner says. "It's risky, time-consuming and believe me, it's hard, working with frozen grapes."

It all starts with the grapes.

In the Finger Lakes, ice wine can be made with Riesling or Vignoles grapes, but by far the most common are Vidal Blanc grapes.

These are hardy, thick-skinned grapes that cling tenaciously to the vine as the wind blows. They also resist rot because they're high in acid.

Here, patience is a virtue for the winemaker, says Art Hunt, >



who helped pioneer ice wine production at his Hunt Country Vineyards on Keuka Lake back in the 1980s.

The longer the grapes stay on the vine, the more sugar they build up.

"Of course you're adding a lot of risk, between normal harvest and ice wine harvest," Hunt adds. "Wind, birds and rot."

If the grapes freeze and thaw and re-freeze, that can actually help.

"It all adds to the concentration of flavor," Hunt says.

Eventually, when it's about 15 degrees, it's time to harvest.

After the 2007 Finger Lakes growing season, that happened around Thanksgiving. In milder years, it's later.

In the 2006 vintage year, for example, Wagner's Vidal ice wine grapes didn't freeze on the vine until mid-January 2007. Hunt thought he was going to have to make a "late harvest" or unfrozen dessert wine, until the temperatures suddenly dropped.

There is an alternative to natural freezing on the vine: Wine-makers can harvest unfrozen grapes and freeze them manually before pressing for juice.

Wines made by such a method can be high-quality but under federal law can't have the words "ice wine" on the label, Trezise says.

Wagner used that method for his 2006 Riesling Ice, and it won a gold medal at the Long Beach Grand Cru Wine Competition in California.

"Part of the fun of winemaking is that it's going to be different every year," Wagner says. "Ice wine is fun to make, fun to have and fun to drink."

#### A SPECIALTY PRODUCT

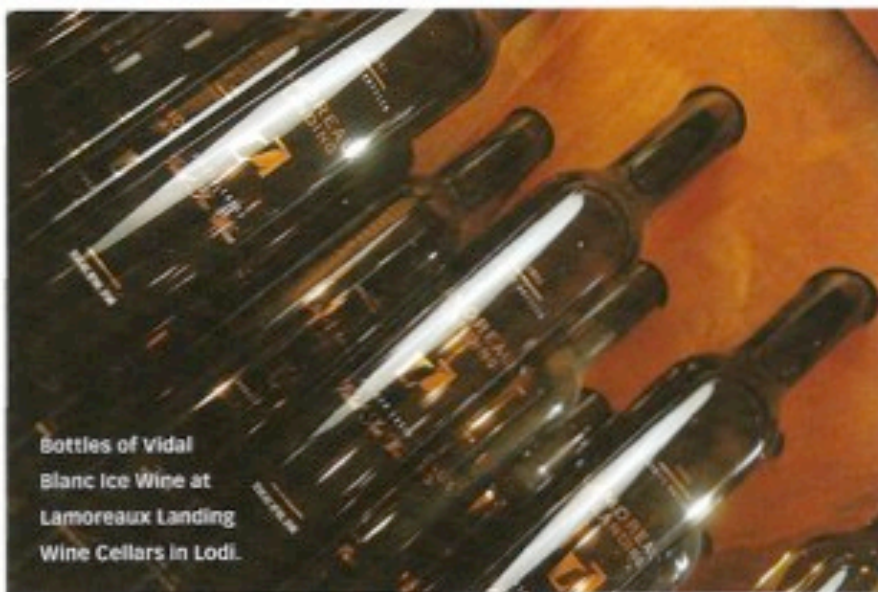
Awards or not, many believe in the Finger Lakes wineries' ability to make good ice wine.

"The Finger Lakes have an advantage for making ice wine," Hunt says. "In September, we have sunny days and cool nights, and that helps concentrate the fruit flavors more than in another region of the country."

Hunt made his first ice wine in 1987, before the recent trend took off. It won a gold medal in a wine competition the first year.

"We were astounded at the quality," Hunt says. "We realized we had a neat little niche."

Take a tasting tour at one of the Finger Lakes' many wineries, and you'll see the pourers take the ice wines out of the



Bottles of Vidal Blanc Ice Wine at Lamoreaux Landing Wine Cellars in Lodi.



Awaiting the harvest at Hunt Country Vineyards on Keuka Lake are Suzanne Hunt, left, and her friend, Drury MacKenzie, with Gus, an 8-year-old Bernese mountain dog.

freezer as the final offering in a flight. (You should always taste sweet wines last.)

"Ice wine is truly a specialty product," Trezise says. "It's like dessert. What people like about chocolate, they like about ice wine." ♦

## WINE TASTING

Ice wines are rising stars in New York's Finger Lakes. In Canada, they're the reigning champs.

Ice wines should be both tart (acidic) and sweet, and the label will usually indicate both the alcohol content and the amount of residual sugar in the wine at bottling.

The best have aromas of peach, apricot and honey, along with a thick, luscious mouthfeel.

Our panel tasted six Finger Lakes ice wines — including an unusual red — but top honors went to the seventh bottle, the lone Canadian in the mix.



Canada is considered the premier maker of these flavorful dessert wines.

The 2005 Vidal Icewine from Mike Weir Estate Winery in the Niagara Peninsula was considered the most elegant of the seven ice wines tasted at Gary Decker's Vinomania store on Pearl Street in Syracuse.

A 2006 Castel Grisch Vidal Blanc took honors as the best value for the money.

Singled out for special notice:

The 2006 Lamoreaux Landing Riesling Ice, which panelist and sommelier Shanna Eck described as "more of an intense Riesling" than a dessert wine, with its perfumy aromas.

And the Sheldrake Point Vineyard Cabernet Franc Ice Wine, which scored points for being a highly unusual example of a red ice wine. Panelist Rick Gerharz, of Pascale's Wine & Spirits, found it to have a nose reminiscent of port. ♦

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Multimedia of wine tasting at: [www.syracuse.com/slideshows/071210\\_WINEPANEL.ssf](http://www.syracuse.com/slideshows/071210_WINEPANEL.ssf)

### THE PANEL



**Tim Buckles**  
The Wine House,  
Manlius



**Gary Decker**  
Vinomania,  
Syracuse



**Shanna Eck**  
sommelier,  
consultant



**Rick Gerharz**  
Pascale's Wine &  
Spirits

### ICE WINE

Producer	Name	Region	Vintage	Price*	Rating (1-5)**	Comments
Castel Grisch	Vidal Blanc Ice Wine	Finger Lakes	2006	\$19.99	4	"thick body," "simple and pretty," "apricots, with a lift in the end," "acid holds to the end," "excellent for the money — good value."
Lamoreaux Landing Wine Cellars	Vidal Ice Wine	Finger Lakes	2005	\$22.99	2.5	"rich, golden color," "a little nectarlike honey," "not so much apricot," "not as balanced."
Hunt Country Vineyards	Vidal Blanc Ice Wine	Finger Lakes	2006	\$39.99	2.5	"concord grape," "grape in the nose," "cheesy," "some botrytis funk," "nuances of dry white grape juice."
Lamoreaux Landing Wine Cellars	Riesling Ice	Finger Lakes	2006	\$35	4	"perfumy, big time," "cleaner and sleeker," "pie spice, apple spice," "good balance and follow-through," "more of an intense Riesling than a dessert wine."
Sheldrake Point Vineyard	Riesling Ice Wine	Finger Lakes	2007	\$74.99	3	"light color," "grape quality in the nose," "mineral in the nose," "nectar sweetness with a crisp finish," "gets more complex."
Mike Weir Estate Winery	Vidal Icewine	Niagara Peninsula, Ontario, Canada	2005	\$50	4.5-5	"deep color," "dill in the nose," "honey richness," "covers your tongue in flavor," "mango, tropical fruit," "light acidity, not cloying."
Sheldrake Point Vineyard	Cabernet Franc Ice Wine	Finger Lakes	2004	\$39.99	3	"port wine nose," "nutty chocolate," "bitter orange hints," "light tannins," "very unusual."

\*Indicates price at winery, except for Mike Weir icewine, which is listed at the Vinomania wine store's price

\*\*5 is best