



This article originally appeared in Issue 16 of *The World of Fine Wine* magazine. The article may not be sold, altered in any way, or circulated without this statement.

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Sun-dappled beach grass overlooking Gardiners Bay, Long Island

WIND, WATER, AND LONG ISLAND'S WEALTH OF WINES

Although going for only 30 years, Long Island's increasingly self-confident and self-critical producers now offer distinctive wines from 30 varieties. David Schildknecht offers a guide to the region's top producers and wines

Visitors to Manhattan from afar touch ground first on Long Island, at La Guardia or Kennedy airports. Few realize that 90 minutes' drive would take them to one of North America's most promising wine-growing regions, in what seems another world from New York City. Pass relentless rows of tenements; pass Flushing Meadows, site of New York's 1964 World's Fair; pass Levittown, where in 1947 Abraham Levitt and sons raised America's first mass-produced houses and planned community on former potato fields; pass Long Beach, Jones Beach, and the huge yet narrow barrier strip of Fire Island, playgrounds and lungs of the city, and eventually suburbs give way to open spaces, scrub, vestiges of farmland, and remaining cores of 18th-century villages with their New England-style town greens, clapboard houses, and tall, white church steeples. One has arrived at the so-called East End. In colonial times, this was indeed part of New England, specifically Connecticut, the state lying north across Long Island Sound. To the south lies the open Atlantic. Where vineyards begin, Long Island splits, The Hamptons and the North Fork each jutting jawlike into the ocean and enclosing the Peconic Bay. Those factors that define this young wine region are manifest

from a traveler's first moments. Viticulturally, they are water, wind, and loamy, barely undulating farmland. Commercially, a grower's fate is tethered to the metropolitan giant next door. As veteran viticulturalist Steve Mudd neatly summarized this region's fortunate circumstances for a local journalist: "We're just a pencil sitting out in the ocean. And we're 80 miles [130km] from the biggest wine market in the world."

Louisa Hargrave and her husband Alex began with 10,000 cuttings in 1973, after having convinced themselves—without compelling reasons, as she admits today—that Long Island offered distinctive viticultural opportunities. Only a year later Chris Baiz planted Hargrave vines to establish The Old Field after buying and hoping somehow to sustain what had been his maternal great-grandmother's estate on Peconic Bay. That same year, David Mudd—a commercial pilot from Missouri in love with Long Island—followed the Hargraves' lead, planting Chardonnay, Sauvignon Blanc, Gewürztraminer, Cabernet Sauvignon, and Merlot, whose cuttings have supplied the region ever since. (By some accounts, Mudd Vineyards—nowadays under the direction of David's son Steve—has planted half the grapes on Long Island.)

Photography © James Leysne/CORBIS

On the heels of these pioneers came Hamburg-born Christian Wölffer in 1978, who admits, "I had no bloody idea what I was doing when I started," and a few years thereafter Chip Bedell and the Lebanese- and Pfalz-born team of Charles and Ursula Massoud. They tasted Hargrave's first wines, explains Massoud, before starting Paumanok Vineyards. "However, it wasn't any wine we tasted that influenced our decision. Rather, it was the conviction that we developed as we understood the quality of the soil and weather. At the time, there were very few wines being made here, the vines were young, and winemaking skills were limited. So we gambled on Mother Nature—an act of faith or folly." Around this time, Cornell University's Long Island Viticultural Research station hired Californian Larry Perrine, who says he arrived in New York solely on the inspiration of a *Times* article that proclaimed a vinous revival in the Finger Lakes. Perrine, too, went on to have a profound influence on the local learning curve.

Farm acreage converted to vines did not always easily yield its secrets. The early-1990s experience of the Petrocelli family, at what became their Raphael Vineyards, was not uncommon or mysterious. Several years of plowing cover crops back into the soil were needed to re-establish an acceptable level of organic material on land that had been worn out by years of unremitting cabbage and potato farming. Less obvious in origin, and initially resistant to explanation or treatment, were elevated levels of potassium and consequent pH imbalances in early Long Island wines. English-born Peter Carroll—an engineer—and his winemaker, André Tchelistcheff disciple Eric Fry at Lenz Winery, eventually stumbled upon and corrected the source of this widespread problem. It seems that North Fork loam is abnormally high in aluminum, a metal generally harmlessly locked into the soil, becoming active only where pH is extremely low. In such cases, the vine scavenges potassium in a desperate attempt to buffer aluminum ions. A machine was designed to penetrate the soil with granular lime, after which root penetration, foliage retention, and thus the entire process of ripening improved dramatically, to say nothing of the vinous imbalance having been corrected.

University of Bordeaux soil specialist Professor Bernard Seguin—whose visits to Long Island over the past decade encouraged and enlightened growers—is said to have compared the island's fast-draining, clay-poor soils with those of Graves, though given their mixture of loam with sand and gravel, comparison with Margaux or the southern Médoc does not seem far fetched. Who would not be flattered by—indeed, who could fail to notice—an at least superficial resemblance of Long Island to Bordeaux? There is, however, considerably more direct oceanic influence on this island than between the Atlantic and the Gironde, as even a glance at its exposed position on the map suggests. A frost-free growing period of more than seven months, as well as virtually continual ocean breezes to ward off humidity and pestilence, combine with generally cool summer evenings for the opportunity to achieve late, slowly accumulated ripeness at relatively low sugar (and consequently low alcohol) levels. But it would be somewhat misleading to call the effects of nearly omnipresent ventilation "tempering," since temperatures and rainfall can vary enormously from year to year. Heat and drought that frequently afflict vines late in the summer in these quick-draining soils, driving growers to irrigate routinely, can sometimes be exacerbated by wind. Yet cool rainy years in which fruit struggles to ripen are also a risk. Speaking of which, Long Island's exposure to ocean winds encompasses vulnerability to hurricanes,

of which she has endured two in the past quarter-century. (Gloria, in 1985, flattened a considerable number of fledgling vineyards.)

It was not a hurricane, however, that delivered the most dramatic and exceptional weather experienced here since the advent of viticulture. That dubious honor accrues to torrential storms that struck midway through harvest in October of 2005, dropping more than 19 inches of rain—around two-thirds of average annual precipitation—in a single week. "Having worked for years in mining and petroleum," says veteran Chris Baize, who extensively researched the record books, "I have always been concerned with geology and very long time frames. And this was probably a 500–1,000 year event that we experienced. It's just that nobody realizes this yet."

But what growers do realize now is just how resilient their vines are here. Despite the significant—and in some cases economically devastating—loss of grapes, those bunches that emerged from this harsh baptism intact did not succumb to rampant rot. Drying breezes and fast-draining soils went to work with startling effectiveness, and the 2005-vintage red wines residing in Long Island cellars include, without question, many of the most concentrated, complex, and promising in this region's three decades of viticultural history. Furthermore, early indications suggest that those who waited longer after the rain to pick their fruit will have achieved the finest results.

Breezes blowing north from the open Atlantic and across the Peconic Bay significantly influence local temperatures—not only the relatively cooler conditions that prevail in the Hamptons, but also a warming as one travels west along Long Island's North Fork, culminating in Riverhead, where Bruce Schneider and others are demonstrating the ability of Syrah to ripen to impressive complexity. The reason for this warmth is that as the Peconic Bay tapers off and the Island widens, these winds travel across an increased land mass—not to mention increasing residential concentration—to reach the vines. Still, Larry Perrine and other seasoned viticulturalists insist that overall differences among Long Island's subregions pale by comparison with the striking microclimatic differences experienced over very short distances. What counts as a hill here is the subject of many jokes, yet seemingly small swales and undulations can be critical to wind exposure and drainage. "It was amazing, when I first came down here with Cornell researchers," relates Perrine, "to walk a row and find three dramatically different vineyards. The soil here is not a very deep phenomenon. Over time, as the glaciers receded, such thin layers of glacial moraine were often washed away." This explains how, as Perrine's colleague Christopher Tracy relates, "3ft [1 meter] in elevation can make for five days' difference in picking and three different tranches. We're that susceptible to temperature and water retention. The top of a 'hill' can be drought-stressed, the bottom lag behind, and the rest be perfect." Such circumstances guarantee that growers here will take a long time to sort out the best strategies for their vineyards, without even introducing the complications of grape variety.

A vinous roll call

Some 30 sorts of vines are cultivated by what are now nearly three dozen Long Island wineries, and a dozen or more grapes at a single address is not uncommon. It is tempting to compare this situation with that of Napa Valley in the early years of its vinifera explosion, before growers concluded that a small number of varieties—notably the red grapes of Bordeaux, and overwhelmingly Cabernet

Chardonnay is still ubiquitous, but one senses a mounting concern among growers that this variety's days of pre-eminence are numbered. Many vintners are reducing or removing the barrels from their Chardonnay programs

Sauvignon—represented that region's destiny. But such a comparison might be hasty when one considers the range of varieties with which Long Island vintners are making deliciously distinctive statements. Asked whether he would not consider paring down his eight-variety list, Charles Massoud of Paumanok echoed the sentiments of many growers by replying: "I am torn in two directions. Reduce the number of varieties to gain greater depth and focus on those that are left, or grow more varieties to satisfy my curiosity as to what else may be possible. Ours is a young region, and we have not yet fully explored what will shine here. I would not know today which variety to discontinue."

Chardonnay is still ubiquitous, but one senses a mounting concern among growers that this variety's days of pre-eminence in American consumers' minds are numbered. Increasingly, many vintners are reducing or removing the barrels from their Chardonnay programs, with two aesthetic payoffs. First, few Long Island Chardonnays display the requisite concentration of material or inherent richness to benefit from barrel *élevage*. If not overoaked, then a great many Long Island Chardonnays were at least underwined. Second, in a region known for a range of seafood—from Peconic Bay scallops to Greenport oysters, with a dozen delicious stops in between—exhibiting great delicacy and generally responding best to a minimum of culinary elaboration, it is hard to find a place for buttery or oaky Chardonnay. Lees contact is a different matter, and more sophisticated use of stainless steel, together with the veritable renaissance of concrete in winemaking today, should prove a boon for those growers intent on enhancing the quality of their Chardonnay. Striking a blow on two fronts, Jamesport promotes a crisp, subtle, and lip-smacking \$13 East End cuvée, donating a portion of the revenues to benefit a Cornell University-backed project for restoring Long Island's threatened shellfish banks.

Sparkling wine presents a highly promising avenue, though whether it will prove a useful outlet for excess local Chardonnay has yet to be seen. Lenz Winery's Eric Fry has been fine-tuning a program of strikingly vinous, leesy, late-disgorged traditional-method bottlings for 15 years, drawing what tasted to him like the proper conclusion from having "made red Pinot Noir in good years and it was mediocre, [whereas] in bad years I'd make bubbly and it was wonderful." Now he is phasing out the Chardonnay in his cuvée because "the Pinot"—which in its raw state tastes remarkably white-wine-like in its citric, floral, and pit-fruited personality—"is wonderful, [whereas] the Chardonnay is [only] pretty good." Fry consults nearby at The Old Field, whose 2000-based Blanc de Noirs—as disgorged in 2005—was strikingly meaty, briny, floral, and black-fruited, with a caressing silkiness and superb depth. Lieb Cellars, meanwhile, operating out of a state-of-the-art custom crush facility in which they are part owners, renders a uniquely refreshing, fruity, and ingeniously food-friendly Blanc de Blancs composed entirely of Pinot Blanc.

Beyond Chardonnay, the most widely represented and initially successful white grape has been Sauvignon Blanc. There can be no question after canvassing the results at Jamesport, Palmer,

Paumanok, and Shinn that it can consistently ripen in these climes and is capable of a wide range of phenolic and stylistic expression. Furthermore, the local seafood guarantees that there will always be a use for it. Success with Gewürztraminer (which Americans almost invariably, if oddly, spell with its Germanic umlaut) has arguably been more of an accident. Certainly it represents a more willful approach on the part of vintners. "Until I can go down the row and get 19 out of 20 grapes tasting like Gewürztraminer, it's not ripe yet," insists Eric Fry. "And by the time Gewürztraminer is ready [here], the acid is gone, the pH is 4, it's falling apart, but it's gotten ripe." Yet his wines, despite acid adjustment, exhibit no disjointedness. On the contrary, Lenz Gewürztraminers are seamless and creamy, in addition to avoiding those ever-present dangers of bitterness and alcoholic heat. They are even shockingly good with local oysters on the half-shell. That these are Lenz's oldest vines—planted in 1979—may contribute to consistent success, but Tom Drozd at Palmer Vineyards rendered a remarkably bright, virtually Scheurebe-like exemplar from young vines, loaded with citrus, pit fruits, litchi, and honey. Drozd fearlessly cold-soaks the fruit to enhance Gewürztraminer's trademark phenolics, yet avoids picking up bitterness.

Where there's Gewürztraminer—at least in North America—there is almost invariably Riesling as well. And even though there is no reason to believe that this great grape could enjoy remotely the success on Long Island that it does in New York's faraway Finger Lakes, late-harvested renditions at Jamesport and Paumanok displayed an amazing combination of richness and refinement, and could hold their own even in the company of Old World benchmarks.

Nowhere can a fuller range of white-wine possibilities be more deliciously or memorably brought home to Long Island visitors than at Channing Daughters in the Hamptons. Inspired by the wines of Friuli, partner Larry Perrine and husband-wife winemaking team Christopher Tracy and Allison Dubin bottle a Tocai Friulano (perhaps the only one so-labeled, now that European Community regulations have banned Tocai). Ironically, it resembles Furmint: rich yet bright, and redolent of flowers, smoke, quinine, and fresh lime. There are only 150 cases a year, but soon new plantings will come into production. The pungently smoky, salty, peachy, subtly oily rendition of Pinot Grigio at this address—vinified in stainless steel save for the enhancement of a single new Slovenian hogshead—offers classy complexity behind that prosaic grape name. And then there are the Channing Daughters blends, their *Meditazione* uniting no fewer than seven grape varieties into a beverage sufficiently thought-provoking and synergistic to justify its name. "To have people plant more Sauvignon, more Pinot Grigio, more Tocai, more Muscat would thrill us," says Tracy, "because we think that, year-in, year-out, we can make world-class whites on Long Island." With reds, he insists, "it's more difficult," and less consistent. Channing Daughters makes a convincing case in the glass for the untapped potential of myriad white varieties, but that Tracy's is a minority opinion on reds is proven by the acreage Long Island growers devote to them.

Merlot may (thankfully!) no longer enjoy the ubiquity and knee-jerk commercial appeal that for the better part of a decade made it almost synonymous with "red wine" among US consumers. And its employment as a stand-alone or the star in bottlings from Napa and other of the best western-US growing regions is declining. But Merlot makes up nearly one third of Long Island's acreage, and even though more than one grower opines that it has "peaked, even here," acreage grew more than 25 percent in the past decade. Furthermore, there is no doubt that this grape—the subject of Hargrave Vineyards' most interesting wines from the earliest days of Long Island winemaking—is still the source of many of the region's proudest bottles and moments. The purity and refinement, smoothness of texture, as well as generosity of herbs, black fruits, flowers, and spices of which Long Island Merlot is capable, all offer immense immediate appeal. Yet the best of these wines lack nothing in structure. And for now, at least, most Long Island wineries are giving their top cuvées at least a year in bottle before release. The Grapes of Roth, Jamesport, Lenz, Paumanok, Shinn, and Wölffer are standouts, but Peconic Bay, Raphael (where Château Margaux's Paul Pontallier regularly consults), and Bedell (purchased in 2000 and substantially upgraded by movie producer Michael Lynne) also show promise with this variety.

Getting Cabernet Sauvignon entirely ripe here, on the other hand, is a dubious proposition, requiring crossed fingers into November. So several of this grape's most successful practitioners have relegated it to a softer, fruitier role—indeed, a role reversal compared with one's expectations. "If I had more heat summation in the summer and another three weeks of growing season, I might make a big, extracted Cabernet Sauvignon," says Eric Fry. "But the fruit is generally ripe while the tannins aren't quite ripe, so I back off on the extraction, back off on the temperature, cold ferment, then add Merlot to give it structure." Meantime, in the reserve bottlings of Merlot that arguably represent Lenz's finest achievements, "Cabernet plays the role that Merlot does in California, [rendering] a softer, rounder wine." Despite the warmth that accumulates as one moves west from Lenz's exposed location (narrowly poised between Long Island Sound and Peconic Bay), Charles Massoud—nearly 15 miles (24km) west at Aquebogue—endorses Fry's observation, insisting that "Merlot [here] generally has more structure than Cabernet Sauvignon, which it's better to vinify for fruit." But veteran Richie Pisacano—who also partners as vineyard manager with Roman Roth and Christian Wölffer—seems on his way to proving that Cabernet Sauvignon can be a standout from his Roanoke Vineyards in relatively warm Riverhead. And one ought never to discount the extent to which a variety's flavor profile can be rooted in terroir. For some years after founding Dominus, for example, Christian Moueix harbored serious doubts about the authenticity of his Cabernet Franc, so Merlot-like did it seem to him from a Right Bank Bordeaux perspective. Gradually he convinced himself that the critical difference was location.

Ultimately, Cabernet Franc could be a showstopper on Long Island. There is in fact growing interest in this variety throughout the northeastern and midwestern United States due to its frost resistance. But whether its ripening demands can be met to produce distinctive perfume and texture is, for most regions, still an open question. On Long Island, however, floral, black-fruited, nutty, and often silkily refined examples from Jamesport, Paumanok, Pellegrini, Schneider, and Shinn approach the sensual

allure that one finds in the best Franc from either the Loire or California. Not surprisingly, synergistic "Bordeaux blends" also number among Long Island's better bottlings, with Jamesport's *Melange de Trois*, Paumanok's *Assemblage*, Pellegrini's *Encore*, and Shinn's *Wild Boar Doe* being distinguished examples. Bruce Schneider has found Petit Verdot the ideal blending grape for his striking Cabernet Francs, and early experiments with this variety at Paumanok and Shinn are also promising. The same can be said of the latter's peppery, floral Malbec. Even Roman Roth, who insists (and in the face of his successes with that variety, whom should this surprise?), that "Merlot will always form the main body of Long Island reds" and concedes that "Cabernet Franc will certainly play more and more of a role, and Malbec and Petit Verdot will certainly have a place in the toolbox." David Page and Barbara Shinn aptly illustrate the pains that must be taken here with any of Bordeaux's varieties: High-density plantings, severe pruning, rigorous green-harvesting, cutting the shoulders from each individual bunch of grapes, and (in her words) "praying for no berry-touch"—that is, for air circulation around each berry in a loose cluster—are all among the strategies pursued at Shinn Vineyards to achieve satisfying ripeness.

Amazingly, there exist several years of bottled evidence suggesting that Syrah could also become a Long Island star, at least in the warmest vineyards around Riverhead. Schneider had been specializing in Cabernet Franc for well over a decade from what was then the westernmost vineyard on Long Island when he came to bottle his first Syrah, from purchased fruit of the 2000 vintage. Convinced by the results, he planted three "Hermitage clones" in 2002. The meaty, briny, herbal, peppery, and red-fruited results of early bottlings from these vines are highly distinctive and satisfying—not surprisingly bearing a stronger resemblance to Northern Rhône's (particularly certain St-Josephs) than they do to any of the world's other Syrahs. Clearly, today's vinous visitors are discovering a Long Island wine community still in the process of discovering itself. As Christopher Tracy puts it: "The reason I'm here"—as opposed to, say, his native California—"is that we're helping to define a region. It's not just with young vines; a lot of our vines are now 20–25 years old. But we're still finding out what works where, and that's very exciting."

Asked about important recent changes among Long Island's growers, regional pioneer Louisa Hargrave pointed to the emergence of a sense of community rather than the pursuit of separate interests. Regions as well established and revered as Burgundy's Côte d'Or have demonstrated in recent decades that where a sense of curiosity, collaboration, and criticism infect wine growers, elevated standards are sure to follow. Despite a tendency of too many Long Island vintners and wine activists to define themselves, by contrast, with a conception of syrupy, high-alcohol, overoaked, and overmanipulated California wines that is at best a caricature, these New Yorkers are nevertheless right to call attention to and defend a distinctively Long Island style of wine—one that, at its best, allies pure, sweetly ripe fruit character with relatively low alcohol, moderate weight, and refined structure.

The greatest challenges to continued improvement and economic sustainability are posed by deer, starlings, and land developers. The overpopulation of Eastern American white-tailed deer in rural and suburban settings has become a national dilemma over the past two decades, and the cost of fencing is almost prohibitive. Hitchcockian black clouds of starlings have in recent years begun descending on the North Fork from the New England

mainland, with effects so devastating that growers have been forced to invest in netting, which is only partially effective. And the steep rise of what were already some of the highest residential property values in the United States would have nipped Long Island's wine industry in the bud had not Suffolk County pioneered a plan that placed 12,000 acres under permanent agricultural preservation. The resultant Peconic Land Trust is financed by a 2 percent tax on home sales. "That puts a floor under the growers," Tracy points out, "but you still have to make tough decisions and run a tight ship. And wine at \$10 retail a bottle [examples of which are still legion today] is simply not sustainable."

Small Long Island growers will have to continue relying on retail sales to support their bottom line. Constraints imposed on interstate trade and cellar-door sales (dating back to the repeal of the Prohibition) are finally being eroded. This means that a lack of national distribution should no longer prevent far-flung wine lovers from discovering the unique excellence that the best Long Island growers can offer. With retail prices rarely more than \$30 a bottle and topping out at around \$50, many of these wines can conservatively be called good value, particularly from a US perspective. But a few growers are even thinking ahead to a time when there could be a small European market for their wines. New York consumers, like the growers and the occasional busy-bee journalist anxious to promote cross-pollination of tastes and ideas, have discovered that Old World palates are charmed and fascinated by Long Island's vinous bill of fare.

Red and white alike, Long Island's wines can prove infectiously juicy and primary in their youthful fruitiness, yet they are capable of aging to fascinating complexity characterized by balance and restraint. Tasted at ten years of age, 1995 vintage wines ranging from Paumanok's Grand Vintage Selection Chardonnay to their Tuthill's Hill Cabernet Sauvignon, and from Wölffer Estate's Sagapond Vineyards Pinot Noir to Lenz Vineyard's Merlot, all showed delectable depth. Other mature standouts—several of these still available in limited quantities as winery reserve selections—include Jamesport Vineyards' 1998 Cabernet Franc and Merlot reserve, Lenz's 1997 Old Vines Merlot, and Pellegrini's 1997 Cabernet Franc and Encore Bordelaise blend. Taking into consideration the accumulated experience and increased quality-consciousness at all of these wineries—not to mention the emergence of such exceptionally promising but youthful ventures as Schneider Vineyards, Shinn Estate, and The Grapes of Roth—one can predict with confidence that by far the best wines from Long Island's increasingly self-assured, but also increasingly self-critical, wine-growing community are yet to come.

If you go...

Traveling among Long Island's wineries demands an automobile, but an alternative to renting one at La Guardia or Kennedy is to do so at Long Island's Islip Airport, accessible from downtown Manhattan via the Long Island Railroad or by air from Baltimore Washington International and other airports. Islip is just over an hour's drive from the wineries of the Hamptons and nearby Sag Harbor, from where a pair of northbound ferries and a scenic drive will take you, in under an hour, to Greenport at the eastern tip of the North Fork. Bear in mind that hotel rates are high and roadways crowded with tourists during the summer months and again at harvest (when no serious enophile would want to disturb growers anyway).

Bedell Cellars, Cutchogue (North Fork)

+1 631 734 7537; www.bedellcellars.com

New Zealand film producer Michael Lynne recently purchased Bedell and its affiliated Corey Creek vineyards, and substantial improvements to what was already among the North Fork's most expansive facilities guarantee that both grapes and human visitors will receive generous and gentle hospitality. The impeccable attention to detail of which Dave Thompson's viticultural team is capable was proven by the way in which Bedell's 2005 crop flourished despite autumn rains of biblical proportions. Recently arrived from California, young winemaker John Irving Levenberg has instituted some clever and foresighted approaches in the cellar. He sees Long Island as attempting to position itself between California and Bordeaux in the style of its red blends. Their Gewürztraminer is also fascinating.

Channing Daughters, Bridgehampton (The Hamptons)

+1 631 537 7224; www.channingdaughters.com

Long Island viticultural veteran Larry Perrine and partners Christopher Tracy and Allison Dubin vinify a number of interesting wines from the North Fork, but their pride and joy are whites from Italianate varieties grown on their estate. Their Tocai, Pinot Grigio, and white blends chart new territory for Long Island and set new standards of excellence for local white wines.

Jamesport Vineyards, Laurel (North Fork)

+1 631 722 5256; www.jamesport-vineyards.com

Winemaker Les Howard bottles some of Long Island's outstanding values. In addition to stylish Merlot, Cabernet Franc, and blends including impressive reserve wines with 5–7 years' bottle age, the team here also rendered a strikingly pure and penetrating botrytis Riesling. Their East End Chardonnay is a model of simple refreshment, and proceeds benefit a Cornell University-backed fund for restoring the island's shellfish banks.

Lenz Winery, Peconic (North Fork)

+1 646 364 8403; www.lenzwine.com

Sussex-born Peter Carroll and microbiologist-turned-winemaker Eric Fry focus intensely on Gewürztraminer in a distinct key, ageworthy traditional method (a labor of love) and Merlot. Fry—in much demand as an adviser—is one of the region's veterans, having originally come to New York's Finger Lakes from California on the recommendation of André Tchelistcheff.

Old Field Vineyards, Southold (North Fork)

+1 631 765 2465; www.theoldfield.com

Nearly at the eastern tip of the North Fork, on the shore of the bay, Ros Phelps and Chris Baiz's windswept vineyards are the source for (among other things) a highly promising Blanc de Noirs. The couple represent that rarity on Long Island: an estate held as a family farm over several generations.

Palmer Vineyards, Riverhead (North Fork)

+1 631 722 9463; www.palmervineyards.com

Tom Drozd is another of the small band of Long Island vintners who are demonstrating the region's potential for distinctive whites. His Pinot Blanc and Sauvignon are notably successful, but the Cabernet Franc is also promising.

ACCOMMODATION

There is no dearth of accommodation on the East End of Long Island, but it fills up well in advance during the summer and autumn months, and even in off-season only a few very modest hotels offer prices lower than \$150 a night. Better, then, to bite the bullet as well as book far ahead.

The North Fork Table & Inn, Southold

+1 631 765 0177; info@northforktableandinn.com

The region's newest restaurant also offers rooms. Visitors won't want to leave the table, so better not to have far to go!

The American Hotel, Sag Harbor

+631 725 3535; www.theamericanhotel.com

Ted Conklin's hotel is one of Sag Harbor's landmark old buildings, and its hospitality is famous. The restaurant and wine list are also among the region's best.

Jedediah Hawkins Inn, Jamesport

+1 631 722 2900; www.jedediahhawkinsinn.com

This recently restored 19th-century mansion includes six bedrooms, as well as one of the region's finest restaurants.

Shinn Estate Vineyards, Mattituck (North Fork)

+1 631 804 0367; www.shinnestatevineyards.com

The Long Island wine region's first bed and breakfast opens here in June, and given the hospitality background and quality fanaticism of owners Barbara Page and (chef) David Shinn, as well as the look of the construction site, their winery customers alone will probably guarantee a long waiting list.

The Bartlett House Inn, Greenport

+631 477 0371; www.bartletthouseinn.com

This lovely 19th-century home offers impeccably restored rooms at reasonable rates. The grounds are also gorgeous.

Paumanok Vineyards, Aquebogue (North Fork)

+1 631 722 8800; www.paumanok.com

Lebanese-born Charles Massoud and his southern Pfalz-born wife Ursula have farmed this property since 1983. Eldest son Kareem is taking on more and more of the cellar work. The Massouds' enormous range of bottlings and varieties includes some of Long Island's most complex and ageworthy reds. Their best cuvées—nature permitting—are bottled as Grand Vintage.

Schneider Vineyards, Riverhead (North Fork)

+1 631 727 3334; www.schneidervineyards.com

Bruce Schneider is a Manhattan-based marketing specialist working for the government wine-information bureaus of both Chile and Germany. In his "free time," he can be found tending his Cabernet Franc and Syrah vines and working out of the North Fork's crowded and impressive Premium Wine Group custom crush facility. This part-time vintner's ambition is awesome, and his wines—despite largely young vines—display a nuance and textural allure that few if any Long Island reds surpass.

RESTAURANTS

The North Fork Table & Inn, Southold

+1 631 765 0177; info@northforktableandinn.com

Open for less than a year, The North Fork Table is run by two couples with impeccable city credentials, Gerard Hayden and pastry chef Claudia Fleming, and Mike and Mary Mraz. The cuisine is stunning in its inventiveness and ability to showcase local ingredients. The desserts are the most stimulating I have enjoyed anywhere in years, and the wine list—while brief and including a strategically chosen quorum of local bottles—is unusual for its international breadth. Wines by the glass can be paired with each course.

Jedediah Hawkins Inn, Jamesport

+1 631 722 2900; www.jedediahhawkinsinn.com

Another recent arrival from the metropolitan restaurant scene, Tom Schaudel has assembled a formidable team here. Features include the High Cheese, highlighting some of the area's distinctive local cheeses.

The American Hotel, Sag Harbor

+1 631 725 3535; www.theamericanhotel.com

Rich variations on local culinary themes and an extensive cellar of Long Island wine make this an excellent choice.

Fifth Season, Greenport

+1 631-477-8500; www.thefifthseason.com

Chef-owner Erik Orłowski has a deserved reputation for a menu that showcases local produce and changes weekly.

Scrimshaw, Greenport

+1 631 765 3010; www.scrimshawrestaurant.com

An innovative restaurant offering Asian-European fusion.

Shinn Estate Vineyards, Mattituck (North Fork)

+1 631 804 0367; www.shinnestatevineyards.com

Unusually near to Long Island Sound, Barbara Page and David Shinn's property has shown success with the major Bordeaux varieties. New plantings, a new facility, and the help of winemaker Juan Micieli-Martinez all promise a new level of excellence. Page and (chef) Shinn are the owners of Manhattan's Home restaurant and a superb source of culinary and agricultural lore.

Wölffer Estate, Sagaponak (The Hamptons)

+1 631 537 5106; www.wolffer.com

Long Island viticultural pioneer and Hamburg-born Christian Wölffer, with vineyard manager Richard Pisacano and winemaker Roman Roth, are responsible for many successes with Chardonnay and Pinot Noir, as well as Bordeaux varieties. The facility here is impressive, and prices are the highest in the region. Pisacano's own Roanoke Vineyards on the North Fork are a superb source of fruit, a little of which he bottles himself, and the first vintages of Baden-born Roth's Grapes of Roth Merlot have been exciting. ■