

wine in the Finger Lakes?

"They (grapes) need a really long ripening time," explains Jenna LaVita, winemaker at Ventosa Vineyards on Seneca Lake, who stresses that in several recent warm vintages the wine has come out great. "If we can't get it right, we can make a Rosé, but most years we are able to make a regular table wine."

Ventosa has committed itself to experimenting with Italian grapes such as the white Tocai Friulano – not entirely unusual in New York or the Finger Lakes – but the push for Sangiovese is a unique effort in what is a cool-climate viticulture region. Most wineries in the Finger Lakes wouldn't bother with something like Sangiovese, but LaVita enjoys the challenge.

"When Sangiovese is great, it's really fruity without harsh tannins, and yet it can be enjoyed as a full-bodied red," she says, further explaining that Ventosa currently grows about one acre of Sangiovese, a crop that needs constant attention to reach ripening conditions.

"With all the time I spend on this, I hope people like it!"

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## Ice wine mystery at Casa Larga

Casa Larga Vineyards, located southeast of Rochester in Fairport, is known for its ice wines, but one of its most popular blends started out as a bit of a mystery, even to the wine-making team.

"When [Casa Larga founder] Andrew Colaruotolo planted the first vineyard in the early 1970s, he put in a few rows of experimental grapes, and over time we lost track of what was there," explains Matt Cassavaugh, winemaker at Casa Larga. "We had an area called Block 1, and we didn't know what to do with it, so we field-sorted an ice wine."

As the Fiori Block 1 ice wine came together, a worn notebook found under an old Ford tractor seat revealed for the first time what grapes made up the rows in question: Vidal (common), Golden Muscat (common) and Maréchal Foch, a red French-American hybrid grape that was developed in Alsace, France. While not unheard of, the Maréchal Foch grape is not widely grown in France or New York, and makes only a few appearances in Minnesota and Canada.

"As far as we know, this is one of the first field-blended ice wines made in the U.S.," says Cassavaugh. Although the only vintage of Fiori Block 1 is 2010, Casa Larga plans on making another version in the near future.

## A German red at Fulkerson

Often compared to wine growing regions in parts of Germany, the Finger Lakes already boasts Germany's top white grape in its massive Riesling production. What about Germany's top red?

Fulkerson winery on Seneca Lake has been growing Dornfelder since the 1990s, and while the grape is starting to be explored at other Finger Lakes wineries, Fulkerson already has years of experience in making wine from Germany's most planted red varietal.

"It's not a heavy red," says John Iszard, marketing manager for Fulkerson, "and it's early ripening compared to other reds grown in the Finger Lakes." Fulkerson's Dornfelder is grown in the warmest part of the vineyard, as well as near the parking lot of the tasting room. "It's been climbing the wall of the production building for years, and it ripens well in the open areas near the buildings."

Iszard believes that development of alternative grape varieties suited to the Finger Lakes can only benefit the region as a whole, so Fulkerson is also developing plantings of Grüner Veltliner, a popular Austrian white, and Zweigelt, an Austrian red. "We think that these cool-climate grapes can make a unique wine that is food-friendly."



Dr. Frank's Rkatsiteli wine  
Photo courtesy of Dr. Konstantin Frank

## An ongoing experiment at Dr. Frank's

Dr. Konstantin Frank was scientific in his approach to viticulture in the Finger Lakes, planting dozens of varieties in the 1950s and '60s to see what might work. As the Frank family moved away from experimentation mode over the years, they did keep a few unusual grapes in the ground that continue to show promise.

Rkatsiteli has been a mainstay within the unusual grape portfolio at Dr. Frank's. This ancient white grape, originating from the eastern European area of Georgia, is highly praised by oenologists for its flavor and acidic structure, but it is extremely rare in the United States.

"Rkatsiteli has become a cult wine for us," says Fred Frank, president of the winery. "We've expanded plantings in recent years in response to the high demand." Frank points out that sommeliers in New York really enjoy Rkatsiteli because of its food-friendly profile and its increasing demand at high-end restaurants.

Noting that Dr. Konstantin Frank winery continues to explore new plantings with a recent commitment to 10 acres of Grüner Veltliner, Frank believes that variety is key to the Finger Lakes. "We are trying to come up with new aromatic whites – the Finger Lakes Region excels in this area."