

FINGER LAKES

A NEW-FOUND SOURCE OF GREAT INTRIGUE

After several decades in the wine-world wilderness, the Finger Lakes region of New York State is finally becoming the focus of some well-informed attention. Jonathan Swinchatt explores the area, examines what producers there have to offer, and looks to the future

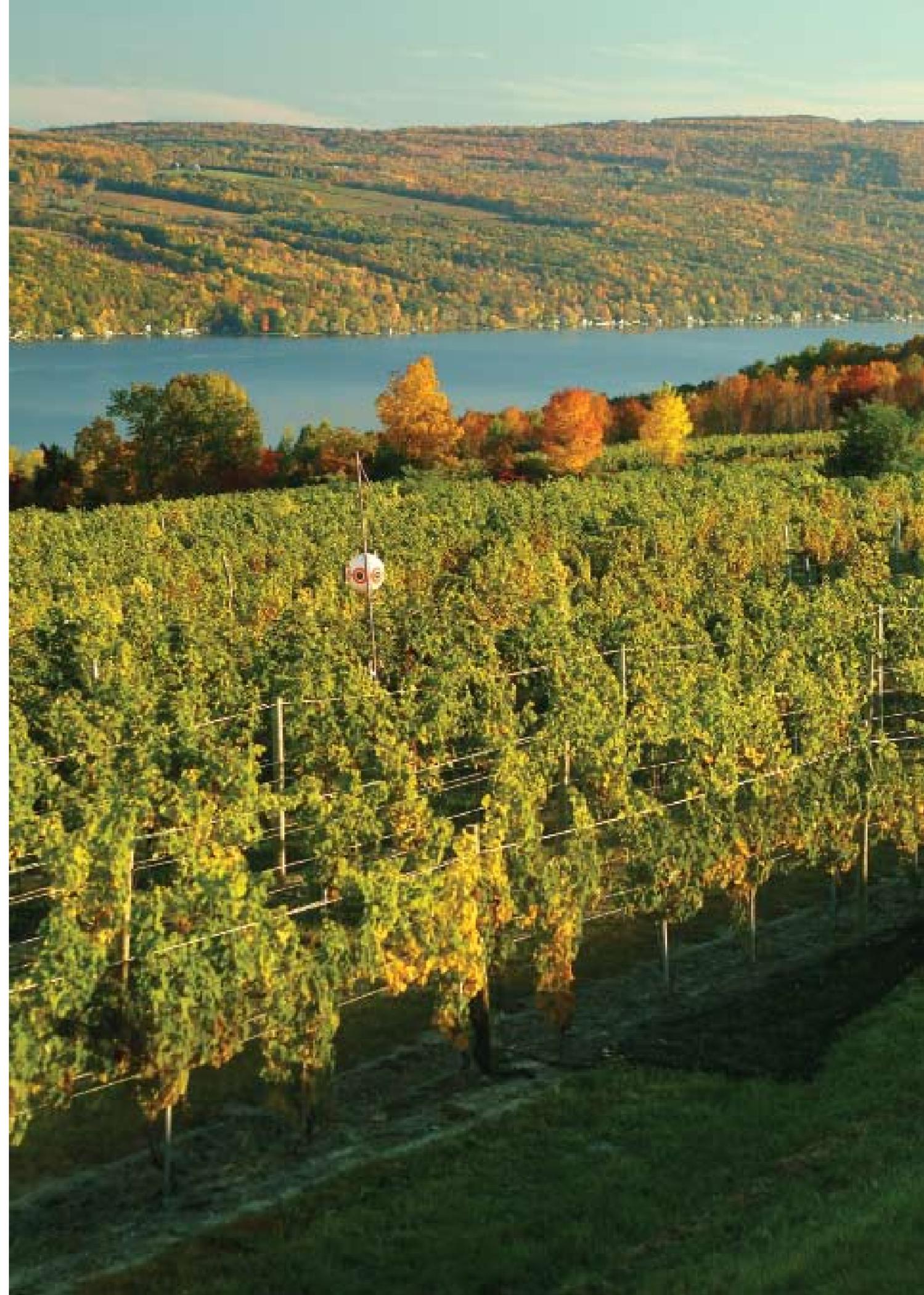


S ometime in 1962—the precise date is unrecorded—a small handwritten sign appeared on a country road above the western shore of Keuka Lake, a few miles north of Hammondsport, New York, home to the first bonded winery in America, The Pleasant Valley Wine Company. The sign read “Vinifera Wine Cellars,” and if you had followed its direction, you would have found yourself at a small vineyard—then just 9 acres (3.5ha)—being tended by a crusty old German who might well have corralled you into an extended conversation about wine grapes, the superiority of *Vitis vinifera*, and the perversity of the New York State wine industry in refusing to follow his advice. You surely would not have recognized the significance of this conversation, this vineyard, or this man; you might, in fact, have found his attitude and demeanor a bit abrasive and off-putting—a judgment that might well have been tempered had you known something of his personal history. By this time, at age 65, after a very successful early career, he had suffered through some difficult times, including starting a new life at age 54 in

a country that he loved but that had rejected his most passionate dream of a New York State wine industry based solidly on *Vitis vinifera*, the grape species from which the world’s finest wines are made. He had found enough support, however, to undertake some experiments, and after years of struggle, he had planted a vineyard that would eventually prove to be the foundation of today’s New York fine-wine industry, putting this region, some 50 years later, on the verge of international renown. The man was Dr Konstantin Frank (left), and the place is the Finger Lakes wine region of west-central New York State.

Arriving in New York City in 1951, Frank—holder of a PhD from the Polytechnic University of Odessa, one-time lecturer in viticulture and agronomy, and former manager of a several-thousand-acre vineyard in Ukraine—needing work to support his family, took a job as busboy and dishwasher in a Horn and Hardart Automat, the fast-food rage of its time. He was, though, a determined man, and cold-climate viticulture was his passion. So, within two years he had decided that the Finger Lakes region, despite its rugged winter climate, had the potential to grow *vinifera* grapes, and he wangled a job with the Cornell University Agricultural Experiment Station in Geneva, New York, at the head of Seneca Lake, in the heart of wine country. Frank’s intent was to revolutionize the New York State wine industry by shifting its focus from native *labrusca* and hybrid varieties—which had produced undistinguished but cheap and locally popular wines for decades—to *vinifera* varieties, which would produce fine wines and compete nationally and internationally. But reality has an uncanny knack of upending expectations. Arriving in Geneva, Frank found waiting for him menial labor and colleagues so steeped in the belief that the region was too cold for *vinifera* varieties that they greeted his arguments with a collective condescending shrug. After all, many others had tried it before and failed. Who was he to think he could succeed?

They might have had a point: The Finger Lakes region is surely not the first place you would choose to grow vines



Photography (left) Dr. Konstantin Frank, Vinifera Wine Cellars; (right) Kristian S. Reynolds

that are climatically sensitive and highly susceptible to frost. In the winter, bone-chilling winds sweep down from Arctic Canada, traversing the wilds of northern Ontario on their way to western New York, where they disgorge vast loads of snow on the cities of Buffalo, Rochester, and Syracuse, clogging city streets, suburban shopping malls, and rural lanes, while turning vineyards into canvases of white against which the bare, tortured vines stand out starkly. Winter temperatures reach lows (-25°F [-32°C]) that make even the native *labrusca* vines question their mortality, while summers can be dry, wet, cold, and hot all within a few weeks. This is not land that one might expect to be known for fine wines—and indeed it isn't, at least not yet. Eighty percent of the wine grown in the Finger Lakes still comes from native varieties (Concord, Catawba, Niagara) or hybrids (Aurora, Seyval Blanc, Marechal Foch, Vignole), which please local palates while convincing the broader, vinifera-oriented wine world that New York State is still a wine backwater. This perception, however, is changing rapidly, thanks to the growing attention of wine critics; to Manhattan sommeliers looking for local products and finding intriguing, food-friendly wines not too far north; and, not coincidentally, to the renaissance of Riesling—the Finger Lakes' signature grape.

The gentle beauty of aged topography

Western New York extends from the vertical eastern part of the state much like the narrow snout of a large poodle extends from the bulk of its head. The northern margin, along the south shore of Lake Ontario, rises to the east in a concave/convex curve that mimics the nose and brow, while the southern border runs straight along the boundary with Pennsylvania until it curves south toward New York City, shaping the underside of the chin as it merges with the neck. In this picture, the Finger Lakes might well be teeth, but the digit metaphor, part of Native American lore (and aesthetically more pleasing) rightly takes precedence. The tale would have it that the Great Spirit laid his hands upon the earth and formed the lake basins—a compelling vision, if not one that explains the presence of 11 lakes or their great disparity in size (from 3 to 40 miles [5–65km] in length). With all due respect to the Great Spirit, Native American cosmology, and the residents of the Finger Lakes, to one pair of eyes (mentioned with some fear of a lightning strike), the lakes more closely resemble the fingers of a pair of wrinkled and distorted gloves, or the gnarled digits of an ancient crone, than the presumably elegant appendages of a sacred being.

For all that, the Finger Lakes are graced with the gentle beauty of aged topography worn down over eons of time to rolling hills, punctuated by remnant patches of forest, amid farms planted to corn, soybeans, and wheat. Within this bucolic landscape, the lakes form a rough inverted pyramid, their nearly aligned northern termini forming its base, the apex lying some 40 miles (65km) south, outlined by the southern ends of the three central, largest, and vinously most important lakes: Keuka, Seneca, and Cayuga. The lake

basins are gouged into the northern edge of the Appalachian Plateau, a layered stack of shale and sandstone more than 350 million years old that has been slightly uplifted and tilted toward the south. Before the glaciers advanced some 2 million years ago, streams and rivers flowed south down the plateau's sloping surface. As ice spread from a locus in central Quebec across the Lake Ontario lowlands and on to the plateau, it swept away soils accumulated over millions of years and filled preexisting stream valleys. Melt water flowing along these subglacial channels under the pressure of the ice mass above scoured deeply through the soft rock, excavating the lake basins and digging the two largest—Seneca and Cayuga—to depths of almost 1,000ft (300m) below sea level. As the ice receded, it left behind moraines at the southern end of today's lake valleys—huge piles of dirt and rock scraped off the land and carried to the glacial termini by rivers that flowed beneath the ice. These moraines acted as dams, forming lakes in front of the melting ice, filling even the deepest valleys to the brim, and setting the stage for the geologic processes that would create the intricately interwoven accumulations of gravel, sand, silt, and clay in which vines are now planted.

These deposits are the remains of features formed near shore as the glaciers waxed and waned and lake level rose and fell over several hundred years at the end of the last glaciation, some 14,000 years ago. Streams began to flow east and west down the steep slopes that border the lakes, eroding shale and glacial till, carrying the debris into the lakes, where it formed beaches and small deltas now perched high above today's water level. The ancient beaches are linear strips of gravel that run roughly parallel to the lake shore, while the deltas are fan-shaped deposits that have an intricate internal arrangement of fine and coarse sediments with abrupt vertical and lateral changes throughout. The overall result is a perplexing distribution of soil texture (the local mix of gravel, sand, silt, and clay) that challenges the viticultural ingenuity of today's wine growers while providing a rich array of grape character from which to fashion wine.

Soil texture affects the availability of water, and water controls a vine's destiny and the quality and character of its fruit. The ideal mix is perhaps well-drained gravel or sand, with just enough clay and silt to hold water and feed it out to vine roots over time. Where clay and silt predominate, drainage is blocked, water is more readily available, and vines grow wild, with excessive canopy; where water drains easily, vine metabolism may be disrupted by lack of moisture. Both conditions lead to lower-quality fruit. Historically, the Finger Lakes climate is one of hot summers and cold winters, with erratic and unpredictable weather during the growing season—over the past 20 years, for example, rainfall in June, July, and August has ranged from 4 to 20 inches (10 to 50cm), and days or weeks of hot and dry weather can be followed by similar periods of cold and wet. Under such capricious conditions, viticulture in the Finger Lakes defies any urge to rely on conventional wisdom, dogma, or habit.



When temperatures fall as low as -25°F (-32°C) in winter, even Keuka Lake, one of the most important for wine, freezes over, and vines struggle to survive

Enter Charles Fournier

Although Konstantin Frank may have known little about the complex origin and architecture of Finger Lakes soils, his experience convinced him that the conventional wisdom of the time—that vinifera vines could not survive Finger Lakes winters—no matter how solidly based in historical fact, was simply wrong. After all, he had already grown vinifera grapes under the even harsher climatic regime of Ukraine, where temperatures could plunge to -40°F (-40°C). He knew the problem lay not so much with winter cold—that could be readily overcome—as with disease and pests, particularly the root louse phylloxera. Despite his experience, Frank's entreaties and harangues at the Experiment Station went nowhere until, by word of mouth, they reached the ears of Charles Fournier.

Fournier—once winemaker for famed Veuve Clicquot, then president of the large New York producer Gold Seal Champagne—realized that Frank's heresy might well prove true and, seeking to improve his product by replacing the *labrusca* and hybrid grapes they were then using with vinifera, quickly appointed him director of research. Frank recognized the keys to growing vinifera grapes in the Finger Lakes were, first, to find a cold-hardy, phylloxera-resistant rootstock on which to graft vinifera budwood; and second, to identify specific site characteristics that would allow vinifera vines to survive and thrive. The rootstocks he found in Canada, reportedly at a convent in Quebec, though this tale contains some elements that make it highly suspect. As to site: He recognized the similarity

between the Finger Lakes and the great vineyards of the Rhine and Mosel, where the rivers mitigate the effects of temperature, and steep slopes allow cold, dense air to drain, reducing the risk of damage to the vines. After working with Fournier for several years proving his theories, Frank found an affordable site for his vineyard where he would establish the foundation for those who followed.

The foundations are simple; the details, considerably more complex. The larger lakes—Seneca (38 miles [61km] long, 3 miles [5km] wide, 618ft [188m] deep), Cayuga (40 miles [65km] long, 3.5 miles [6km] wide, 435ft [133m] deep), and Keuka (19 miles [31km] long, 1.9 miles [3km] wide, 183ft [56m] deep) create narrow climatic zones along their shores, within which vinifera vines can thrive. The huge volumes of water temper the local climate, warming the vineyards in fall and winter, extending the growing season and protecting against freeze, and cooling them in the spring, delaying budbreak and reducing the risk of frost damage. This so-called lake effect extends up to a mile inland from the lakes at altitudes below 1,000ft (300m). Outside these limits of temperature and elevation, the threat of freezing and frost damage increases rapidly. During the growing season, days are warm (averaging somewhere around 85°F (29°C) (though detailed climate information is sparse), and nights are cool, preserving the signature acidity of Finger Lakes grapes. Growing season rainfall averages around 25–30in (64–76cm), arriving randomly and without yearly pattern, though some local areas are known to be wetter or drier than others.



Photography courtesy of Bloomer Creek Vineyards



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For a visitor more familiar with the vineyards of the western United States, at first glance the Finger Lakes versions look odd, even a bit distorted. It dawns, eventually, that all the vine trunks are about the same size and thin, as if they were all the same young age, and each vine has several trunks, up to five or six. One learns that, indeed, the trunks are all young and about the same age, since every few years a killing freeze grips the region, trunks are damaged, and new ones grow from basal buds, near the graft. These buds, and the graft itself (4–6in [10–15cm] above ground surface), are protected in the winter by mounds of earth hilled up each fall and uncovered the following spring after the threat of frost has passed. Multiple trunks ensure against damage—from the mechanical process of spring removal of mounded earth, and from winter freeze; if one or more trunks are injured, at least one might remain intact.

Winter in the Finger Lakes shapes spring viticulture. “Our viticultural practices coincide with what our winters are like, which is a different mind-set from what you have when you are growing in warmer regions,” says Fred Merwarth, co-owner of HJ Wiemer Vineyards. “For example, this year, because we had a mild winter, we cut out a trunk and left three canes, because we were in such early budbreak. Two got tied, and one went straight up. And then, once we knew we were in our last frost, we went through and cut that last cane out. If we have had a cool winter, I might leave four canes and a renewal coming up, so it would be two trunks and a new one [rising], and I would leave as many buds as possible, knowing that I will have to come back through and adjust depending on [the success of] budbreak. It’s always give and take in this crazy weather.”

While “crazy” is not a very informative descriptor, it is not inaccurate—2011, for example, began with floods, went on to temperatures reaching 105°F (41°C) in July, and then saw weeks of cold and wet weather in August. Wet grapes are bad news: Moisture on grape clusters promotes fungal disease and mold, while excessive water encourages the vine to grow dense canopy, which affects grape quality and delays ripening. Fungal disease and mold are mitigated by thinning shoots and dropping leaves, to encourage airflow and dry the grapes—and, in extremes, applying fungicides. Managing vine vigor is more complex, involving the interplay of water, soil, vines, and cover crops an ever-shifting dynamic that is as slippery to grasp as are the edgy ploys of Wall Street bankers.

The wine grower’s holy grail is a balanced vine, one whose canopy provides just enough energy to run the vine’s complex metabolism and produce high-quality, mature fruit year after year with little intervention. A few precious sites have the delicate mix of sun, rain, low fertility, and well-drained yet water-retaining soil required to produce balanced vines; everyone else struggles to nudge their plants toward balance by controlling moisture, modifying the canopy, and adjusting yields.

Kim Engle, proprietor of Bloomer Creek Vineyards, who, despite the vagaries of the weather, is moving ever further into the world of non-intervention

Managing moisture can be as simple as laying drain tile and guiding water out of wet spots to areas where it can naturally flow off the land. But much of the driving force behind vine vigor lies in the water-holding capacity of silt and clay, both common in the Finger Lakes soil mix. For these, the solution in the Finger Lakes is to plant cover crops or rely on native grass and weeds, to suck up moisture and dry the soil. At best, the process is imprecise and—as Kim Engle, proprietor of Bloomer Creek Vineyards, points out—always a gamble: “I control vigor through managing shoot number and crop size and through ground cover. With ground cover, I can increase or decrease vigor, but you are always just guessing. I might decide that [the vines are] growing too slowly and disk in all the ground cover, and then it might rain an inch every three days for a month and I have rank vegetative growth. There are other things I can do, but it’s all a gamble. If I see we have drought and take off fruit [to balance the canopy] and then we return to good growing conditions, I don’t have enough fruit on the vine, and then all I can do is put in a heavy ground cover in the hope of slowing growth.”

Extreme flexibility

The gamble has become more intense with the increase in climatic instability. Prior to this century, drought was rare, and irrigation seemed an unnecessary expense. The past decade, however, has brought several periods—weeks at a time—of severe drought, in 2011 so extreme that wine growers feared for the survival of vines and trucked in water, delivering it on the backs of tractors, feeding one thirsty vine at a time. Some newer wineries have installed irrigation, and some of the more established are considering the move, though the expense is daunting in this region of low capitalization and in a market that has been, until very recently, mainly local and limited.

“When you come to the Finger Lakes,” says Morten Hallgren (Ravines Wines), “there are a lot of things that you have to forget about, like your evaluation of ripeness: You can’t be too fixed on what you consider to be ripe and unripe grapes. And you have to learn to deal with the incredible vintage variation—from hot and dry, to wet and cool. You have to adapt your winemaking to the grapes you have on hand, stylistically define how far you can push extraction, work with different sugar acid balance... It demands extreme flexibility.”

Riesling might just be the ideal grape for these conditions, matching the quirky Finger Lakes weather with a distinctive adaptability to place, in part a function of its sugar-ripening curve. “In our climate,” reports Tricia Renshaw, co-winemaker at Fox Run, “flavor accumulation precedes sugar accumulation. We can have very delicious ripe-tasting Riesling that is picked at 18° Brix.” Engle agrees: “You can make good Riesling starting at 17° Brix and going up to 24.” Morten Hallgren maintains that, while cool-climate grapes in warmer regions are subject to accelerated ripening of sugar, in the Finger Lakes, the ripening curves for sugar, flavor, and tannins evolve “in sync.” “One of the

keys to the Finger Lakes,” says Merwarth, “is that we can maintain acidity and yet get full ripeness.”

This broad window of ripeness—Riesling can be picked from mid-September to early November—allows significant leeway on harvest decisions, which in the Finger Lakes are also conditioned by weather, disease pressure, stylistic considerations, and the availability of picking crews. “[Within that window] you make a decision,” says Dave Whiting of Red Newt Cellars, “based on flavor or fruit composition or skin integrity or what you expect from extraction or structure. And of course, you have to factor in the weather. There might be a week of sun and a hurricane coming up the coast that might bring a week of rain. It’s a lot of guesswork. You look at what you’ve got and what you might have after a week of rain, which might end up as three cloudy days, and you make a guess—and I say, most of the time, things turn out pretty well.”

Limited array of Rieslings

While the effects of place (terroir) on grapes and wine are still contentiously debated, winemakers in the Finger Lakes broadly agree that Rieslings from well-drained soils in the region tend to be highly structured, lean, and citrusy, with notable minerality, while those from more vigorous soils are richer, rounder, and redolent of tropical fruit. The intricate mingling of these soil types, together with the local effects of topography, rain, sun, and wind, provide an opportunity to plumb the range of expression of Riesling to an unusual degree. The path varies: Some winemakers press whole clusters; some destem and crush; some use spontaneous fermentations; some inoculate with cultured yeast. Many have resorted to chaptalization, acidification, or deacidification at one time or another, though they prefer not to intervene. “I never adjust acidity up or down,” says Merwarth, “because if you begin to adjust the interplay of acidity with sweetness and alcohol, what you really end up with is a chemistry experiment.” Engle is moving ever further into the world of non-intervention, eschewing chaptalization, filtration, and fining, and depending entirely on spontaneous fermentation. In contrast, Whiting says “Chaptalization in the wine industry has a bad rap, but it is a very useful tool, especially with red wine, where you are fermenting dry and the alcohol has such a strong impact on balance and the perception of tannin. To bring it out of the vineyard just where it needs to be is a bit hit and miss, so we chaptalize when necessary—just a tweak, perhaps by half a percent alcohol, but it makes a big difference.”

Until recently, most Finger Lakes wineries have focused on a limited array of Rieslings: a dry, a semi-dry, and perhaps a late harvest. The dry Rieslings generally run from 0.5 to 1 percent residual sugar, balanced to varying degrees by the Finger Lakes’ bright acidity. At HJ Wiemer, Merwarth makes the “flagship” dry Riesling from as many as 30 pickings of three vineyards, which provide him with an array of ripeness, acidity, aroma, and flavor from which he can create a wine of some year-to-year consistency, tempering the Finger Lakes’ legendary vintage variation.

In the process, the special character of specific place yields to a Wiemer interpretation of Finger Lakes Riesling. But Merwarth now also produces three vineyard-designated wines: HJW from the home vineyard on the southwest side of Seneca Lake, and Magdalena and Josef from satellite vineyards 10 miles (16km) north, in what is generally recognized as the warmest location in the Finger Lakes. Engle has divided his 10 acres (4ha) into two named vineyards, producing from one of them first- and second-harvest bottlings. Engle, of apparent hippy extraction, is very much an experimentalist, fermenting everything in 50- or 60-gallon barrels, changing his portfolio of wines in accord with vintage character. Morten Hallgren’s Argetsinger Vineyard Riesling comes from what he thinks is the only lyre-trellised property in the Finger Lakes. Peter Bell and Tricia Renshaw make a Riesling from grapes grown on an ancient delta and are working with a geologist to define other unique blocks within the Fox Run vineyards. These explorations of Riesling’s relationship with place signal a new level of confidence in the region’s winemakers, while providing consumers with a way of understanding and evaluating the effects of terroir.

When Johannes Reinhardt (Anthony Road Winery) arrived in the Finger Lakes from Germany some 15 years ago, he found great potential marred by too many flawed wines. At that time, Peter Bell, the first academically trained winemaker in the region, had been at Fox Run for about eight years, sharing his knowledge with all who asked, recognizing that the success of Fox Run depended in large part on raising overall wine quality and winning regional recognition. Since then, winery practices have improved substantially, and flaws have become rare, opening the region to serious critical appraisal and the recognition that it does, indeed, produce wine of international caliber.

Conditioned tastes and expectations

One might assume that Riesling is the only vinifera grape grown in the Finger Lakes. Not so. Lettie Teague, in a 2003 article in *Food & Wine* magazine, suggested that Finger Lakes winemakers shift their focus to Gewurztraminer; and in 2012, a Dr Konstantin Frank 2010 Gewurztraminer Reserve won the White Wine Sweepstakes Award at the San Francisco Chronicle Wine Competition—a result with a variety of ironic overtones. Chardonnay, Pinot Gris, Sauvignon Blanc, and the more recently planted Grüner Veltliner are also in the Finger Lakes wine portfolio, as are Pinot Noir, Cabernet Franc, Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, and Lemberger. The last of these appears to be as adaptable to place and climatic circumstance as Riesling, varying in expression but maintaining high quality despite difficult conditions of soil or weather. It might well turn out to be a hidden asset, particularly for the winery that brands it with a more alluring name.

Try as we might to meet the world with an open mind free of bias, most of us are controlled to a significant degree by conditioned tastes and expectations. Finger Lakes winemakers recognize that, while their white wines

fit well within the boundaries of the national and international palate, their red wines exist within a smaller world—the world perhaps of Loire Valley reds or that of classically styled Bordeaux. They are lean and elegant, with distinctive fruit and fine structure; good wines with food, quite the opposite of the dark, rich, and opulent cocktail-oriented wines of warmer West Coast vineyards. “With Cabernet Franc,” says Merwarth, “if it’s cropped properly, independent of vintage, you can produce ripe fruit with the color and tannin structure that is internationally recognizable, but it will never be a Cabernet Franc out of Napa.” Engle produces a vintage Cabernet Franc in two years out of three; with Pinot Noir, he puts a vintage date on the bottle every year but adjusts the price to match his evaluation of quality.

Pinot Noir is a difficult grape under the finest conditions. In the Finger Lakes, it takes particular care—a commitment beyond the boundaries of most wineries other than the Heart and Hands Wine Company, run by the passionate Tom and Susan Higgins. In 2007, after years of searching, they found a parcel of 6 acres (2.5ha) on limestone bedrock on the northeast side of Cayuga Lake, where they planted 5,000 Pinot Noir and 400 Riesling vines and built a winery. To date, they have been producing wine from purchased grapes, working closely with growers to develop fruit that reflects the place in which it was grown. All is hand-picked, meticulously sorted, and crafted in a gravity-fed winery. Tom Higgins notes a unique character of Finger Lakes Pinot Noir: “The glucose/fructose ratio is different from that in Oregon, and it leads to having lower alcohol at the same numbers. They will bring in fruit at 25° Brix and end up with 14% ABV; I’ll bring it in at 24° Brix and get 12% ABV. Our conversion rate is 50–52 percent; theirs is 60–63 percent. I can have a couple of glasses of Finger Lakes Pinot, but one glass of theirs [is enough], so I have to slow myself down.” One wonders what role this has played in the notable success of Heart and Hands Pinot Noir and what that might reflect about evolving consumer preference.

The challenges ahead

For all the attention lavished on Finger Lakes Riesling, the region has a number of obstacles to overcome if the vinifera wine industry is to grow and prosper. One detects a note of complacency, a vague tone of relaxed acceptance from some, who have for years made a decent living selling much of their product out of tasting rooms visited by more than 50,000 tourists each year. Growth means reaching beyond these limits, beyond mailing lists, beyond New York State into a more competitive market that has an outdated and inaccurate perception of New York State wine.

Overcoming that bias will be difficult enough, but the real challenge, should it come, will be rapid growth in demand. Just now, vinifera acreage totals between 1,500 and 2,000 acres (600–800ha), with about 1,000 of it planted to Riesling. Most of the arable land in the narrow lakeside climatic belts friendly to vinifera is presently either cultivated—grapes, corn, wheat, soybeans—or occupied by

small cottages that rim the water. When land comes up for sale, those who want to plant grapes are in competition with the wealthy who are attracted to lakeside and/or wine-country living. While this trend has not yet penetrated deeply into the Finger Lakes, you can bet that, as the region’s wine reputation grows, as it will, competition with residential real estate will become a major issue and expansion a function of the availability of capital, historically in low supply. And if money does begin to flow, it brings with it a new set of consequences, intended or not.

The kudos attracted by Finger Lakes Riesling over the past five years or so is well deserved. Wine growers and winemakers have worked in relative anonymity, perfecting their craft and their wines, learning from one another



Improving and maintaining wine quality will depend largely on an ever-greater focus on the vineyard, with sound soil-management practices and lower yields

and their mistakes, making a living from their regular customers and tourists attracted by the ambience of the lakes and the growing reputation of the wineries, now numbering more than 100. Yet there is still much work to do, particularly in the vineyards. Reinhardt, steeped in German respect for the soil, thinks the major road to improving grapes and wine will be through better soil management, with the focus on building healthy soil with a rich biotic community. Others think higher quality lies in lowering yields, from averages of 4–5 tons per acre down to 2.5–3. All those interviewed for this article think future improvement will come with more Riesling acreage and a larger vinifera wine community. If that leads to Hallgren’s dream of “small-scale producers making very highly sought-after wines that people are not able to find anywhere else in the country,” Finger Lakes wine will surely no longer be the bargain that it is now. Prudence suggests at least a taste of, perhaps even a trip to, this rapidly evolving region, with its laid-back, open, collegial winemaking culture. •