

Clockwise from below: Lenz winemaker **Eric Fry**, a **wind turbine** at Shinn, Lenz's **tasting room**, outside **The Winemaker Studio**, Bedell's **tasting room**, and **David Page** and **Barbara Shinn** inside their winery



DRINKS

Tasting the Best of the North Fork

BY ELIN McCOY

In late April, I spent a couple days exploring the increasingly sophisticated wine scene on Long Island's North Fork, two hours east of Manhattan. Several dozen boutique wineries—marked by green Wine Trail signs sporting a bunch of grapes—now line the two main roads between Aquebogue and Southold. I tasted the best wines the region has to offer and was surprised by their quality—as well as by the new restaurants where young chefs are creating an exciting local cuisine to match.



SHINN ESTATE VINEYARDS

shinnestatevineyards.com

MUST TRY:

2011 Coalescence, 2009 Wild Boar Doe, 2007 Clarity

My base for this regional tour is the luxury bed-and-breakfast at Shinn Estate Vineyards and Farmhouse in Matituck. The B&B is located in a shingled

1880 farmhouse in front of the weathered-barn winery, where I can feel like an insider, wandering around after hours.

Vintners Barbara Shinn and David Page take me on their new vineyard tour. They lead me down a tractor path to cabernet franc vines and chicken coops made from wine barrels. Shinn explains that the grass beneath the grapes and the pest-gobbling chickens are part of their sustainable, biodynamic approach to viticulture.

I'm impressed by the delicious reds and whites Page pours in their cozy tasting room. From the unusual, smoky 2009 pinot blanc to the sumptuous, plummy \$100 red blend named Clarity, they have savor, balance and elegance.





BEDELL CELLARS

bedellcellars.com

MUST TRY:

2011 Taste Rose, 2010 Cabernet Franc, 2007 Blanc de Blancs sparkling wine

Bedell Cellars in nearby Cutchogue is my next stop. Founded in 1979, it's one of the region's pioneers. Since 2000, Bedell has been owned by movie producer Michael Lynne. The black-and-white tasting room, hung with contemporary artworks from Lynne's collection, has the glamorous sheen of a Tribeca gallery.

"Quality is better now because we're thinking about what works in New York," winemaker Rich Olsen-Harbich says. "We used to copy California. Our lighter wines need less oak." To preserve aromas, he now picks grapes earlier than the winery used to. And he's creating more wines using blends of grapes.

With the luscious cheeses served in the open-air pavilion, my pick would be Bedell's spicy cabernet franc. On a hot day, I'd have a picnic on nearby Ballie Beach with the zippy, dry rose.



LENZ WINERY

lenzwine.com

MUST TRY:

2007 Gewurztraminer, 2005 Cuvee sparkling wine, 2002 Old Vines Merlot

At rustic Lenz Winery up the road from Bedell in Peconic, the cool, humid air reminds me of how similar the North Fork's maritime climate is to Bordeaux's.

Lenz's Eric Fry, like most winemakers here, touts merlot as the region's star grape, though he also

makes a killer gewurztraminer. He organizes periodic blind tastings for wine critics and consumers, pitting his Old Vines merlots and cabernet sauvignons against top Bordeaux to prove that the North Fork's reds can compete with the world's best. In 2008, the 2002 merlot came in second to the 2002 from famous Chateau Petrus.

Vintages matter on Long Island. In rainy years, grapes struggle to ripen, often producing lean, green reds. I taste some mellow 2007s. Those from sunny 2010, Fry says, are the best yet.



THE WINEMAKER STUDIO

winemaker-studio.com

MUST TRY:

2011 Anthony Nappa Anomaly, 2011 Anthony Nappa Bliss rose, 2009 Suhru Shiraz

The next day, I get a glimpse of the region's restless experimentation at the new Winemaker Studio in Peconic. The cute storefront with a dog snoring by the window is a tasting space where several vintners, including owner Anthony Nappa, sell wines they bottle under their own personal labels. After 5 p.m. on weekends, it's a local winemakers' hangout.

A big chalkboard lists almost a dozen choices. Just about everything I sample is interesting. Nappa's 2011 Anomaly is a rich white made from pinot noir. "The North Fork has greatness potential," says Nappa, who has worked in California,



Italy and New Zealand. "Our food, viticulture, wine are getting better and better."

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