

NEW YORK

Finger Lakes and 14th

Sweet summer wines flow in Union Square. And the state's best terroir is here for the tasting.

By Matthew Worley



Strolling the Union Square Greenmarket.

"If you look on a map, where France sits - Germany and France -we're on the same latitude," says Tim Rosbaugh, amidst the roar of a summer thunderstorm in Union Square. On this rainy Friday, Rosbaugh is but one of a handful of New York vintners bringing the pastoral tastes of wine

country to city-dwelling palates.

It's a weekly tradition for Rosbaugh - the early-morning wake-up call, a wearying five hour drive in a pickup crammed with wine, a quick nap while his wife Valerie sets up shop. And then, around noon, Tim Rosbaugh's ready for a chat - mostly about wine. On any other subject, the Finger Lakes vintner seems taciturn. But when Rosbaugh talks wine, it all comes pouring out.

"What we have in the Finger Lakes, we have several Napa Valleys," he says resolutely. "You could take the whole of the California Napa Valley and set it in the Seneca Lake Basin alone. You've got all the micro-climates to grow these grapes."

At Tickle Hill Winery in Hector, NY, the family's 42-acre vineyard, Tim and Valerie Rosbaugh produce a mere 3,000 cases annually, with Tim Rosbaugh tending the vineyard and son Chris crafting the wines.

"It's all about the grapes first - not the wine. I remind my son of that a lot. I grow the grapes. I gotta give him a good product."

It is that very sort of product - aromatic, artisanal wines - that has built the Finger Lakes' reputation as New York's premier AVA. And with the passage of the 1976 Farm Winery Act, large scale production has faded from the region, favoring instead small producers like Rosbaugh. Today, the Finger Lakes boast nearly 11,000 acres of vineyards, with cabernet franc, riesling, and chardonnay flourishing. Yet grapes aren't the region's only wine stars - or Union Square's for that matter.

Just down the state from Rosbaugh - and just down the Square from his tent - is Autumn Stoscheck, who dismisses the Finger Lakes' fixation on grapes. "To me, grapes are tree killers," she says. "They climb up the trees and strangle them. I like trees."

A former waitress and part-time orchardist, Stoscheck turned her passion for trees to a full-time business with the formation of Eve's Cidery. And though some of her bottles are marked "apple wine," Stoscheck speaks passionately about "cider" and what she calls "the terroir of apples."



Fruit wines are also at home among the Greenmarket's grape vintners.

It is that terroir, says Stoscheck, that makes her apples superior to those grown elsewhere. "There have been a couple of years when we haven't had enough apples, and we bought a few off Cornell. They're in a different spot than we are - there's your soil and your microclimate. When we made a batch with their apples, it wasn't as good."

Also convinced of her superior terroir is Erica Crawford, who stands only feet from Stoscheck, pouring taste after taste of her Long Island vintages. "You can draw a parallel on Bordeaux and Long Island - the sandy subsoil. We're growing Bordeaux varietals," says Crawford of Aquebogue's Paumanok Vineyard. "Who's here from the Finger Lakes today?" she asks competitively. "You can definitely taste the difference."

The difference, says Crawford, is in the maritime environ. "You've got this sense of being really close to water. When you're on our vineyard, you can't see water but you can definitely sense that you're really close."

Well behind the Finger Lakes in size, Long Island ranks as the youngest and fastest growing of New York's wine regions. The area's fifty vintners produce a combined 500,000 cases annually. And despite Long Island's relatively small size, grape characteristics vary widely between three distinct AVA's: Long Island proper, the Hamptons, and the North Fork - where Paumanok sits.

Also weekend regulars at the Square, Paumanok began its wine production on the site of a former potato farm. And from that 1983 genesis, the small family winery has grown to an output of 9,000 cases per year. Paumanok prides itself as New York's only producer of Chenin Blanc - a semi-dry white that sells well in the Square. Crawford, a regular pourer in the winery's tasting room, admits

to favoring the varietal herself.

"I smell the sea in this wine - a lot of our wines," she says. "I taste the sea in our merlot, for example. You can definitely taste the difference in wine from the Finger Lakes - fresh water - and our wines."

Back at the Tickle Hill tent, it's a difference Tim Rosbaugh acknowledges - but one he'll cede no ground on. As Valerie bags a riesling for a customer's dinner, Tim chats on about Finger Lakes wine.

"Where we're at on Seneca Lake - the perfect environment to grow grapes," he says. "If you can grow good grapes, then you'll make good wine."