

## The Other Bordeaux Lies Closer to Home

Once lauded for its whites and rosés, Long Island's North Fork delivers some very good reds

By JAY MCINERNEY [CONNECT](#)



**FORTY YEARS AGO**, Louisa and Alex Hargrave, a young couple fresh out of Harvard, planted the first vinifera grapes on the North Fork of Long Island, undeterred by their own lack of agricultural experience. As told in Ms. Hargrave's memoir, "The Vineyard," the story of how they survived the harassment of various state and federal agencies as well as natural disaster seems almost miraculous. In the end, the trailblazing Long Island winery was a casualty of divorce, but the Hargraves' example brought

others to this bucolic, sea-scented peninsula, where potatoes and fishing were mainstays of the economy and where there are close to 60 wineries today.

### Oenophile: North Fork Game-Changers

**OENOFILE**  
North Fork Game-Changers  
*(Select the dots to see details)*

**2010 Bedell Cellars Thirtieth Anniversary Merlot, \$30**  
Anybody who thinks they don't like Merlot should try this one. Fleshy but not flabby, this complex, aromatic, medium-bodied red reminds me of a good, ripe Saint-Émilion. Drink now.

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As a longtime summer resident of the South Fork (also known as the Hamptons), I've been watching the North Fork come of age as a wine region, often wishing the wines were better and more consistent. But this past summer I was deeply impressed by what I tasted, especially the reds from the 2010 vintage. I no longer felt the whites and rosés were the most successful wines.

One of the first to follow the Hargraves' examples was Kip Bedell, who started making wine in his basement in Garden City, Long Island, with a home winemaking kit while he ran the family fuel-oil business. In 1979 he bought a 50-acre potato farm in Cutchogue. Mr. Bedell planted vines in 1980, as did neighbors at Pindar, Lenz and Peconic Bay—all but the last still making wine today. Mr. Bedell planted seven varieties, including Chardonnay, Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, Riesling, Gerwürtstraminer, Zinfandel and Petite Syrah. The latter two were unable to handle the rainy climate. "The berries split," Mr. Bedell said. "We always get rain in the fall. But we noticed early on that Merlot did well and so we planted more over time. We could get it ripe most years, whereas with Cabernet Sauvignon you sometimes had to wait 'til November."



In 1999, Mr. Bedell was approached about selling the vineyard by Michael Lynne, who owned a house in East Hampton. A wine buff who was then co-CEO of New Line Cinema, Mr. Lynne had first visited Mr. Bedell in 1984 and believed that additional capital investment could take the winery to the next level. Mr. Bedell sold to Mr. Lynne in 2000 but stayed on as a winemaker until 2005. The arrival of Richard Olsen-Harbich in 2010 seems to have marked a turning point.

Mr. Olsen-Harbich's career making wine in Long Island stretches back 32 years and includes a stint at the Hargraves' vineyard. He was the author of the federal application that in 1985 created the North Fork of Long Island AVA (American Viticultural Area). "I don't think I could make wine in Napa," said Mr. Olsen-Harbich, who has taken Bedell Cellars to new heights since he arrived at the winery.

A promising regional development is the trend toward blends of different varietals. Some of Mr. Bedell's finest wines are blends, including my favorite Long Island white, Gallery, a blend of Chardonnay, Sauvignon Blanc and Viognier.

Given the climate, Long Island wines will never be the most powerful on the shelf, but cool-climate wines—which are often lower in alcohol—are the hot topic among oenophiles, as more consumers and sommeliers balk at rising alcohol levels. North Fork wines have less alcohol than California wines, and flavor profiles that seem to split the difference between Old World and New World.

Until recently, the attitude of New York's wine community toward Long Island wines seemed to hover somewhere between oblivious and contemptuous. But that attitude is changing, and it's no longer surprising to see Long Island bottles on wine lists at restaurants like Le Bernardin, Daniel and Gramercy Tavern.

The locavore movement in fine dining, which prizes locally sourced ingredients, hasn't hurt this trend, although it couldn't have happened if the wines hadn't been getting better and better. Brooklyn has become the center of locavorism, and the borough seems particularly receptive to its North Fork neighbors. New York sommeliers are tough tasters, and their customers are—how to put this delicately—finicky? Trendy? Snobby? All of the above? Skepticism is still fairly widespread, but I would urge the doubters to try a bottle of Bedell's stellar 2010 Musée. Expensive at around \$100 though it certainly bears comparison with Napa reds costing two or three times as much.