

New York

8 Aug 2008 by Jancis Robinson

In a nutshell: Especially fine dry Rieslings.

Main grapes: Concord and hybrids giving way to the usual suspects.

New York state is an important wine producer with five quite different wine regions. Most important in terms of quantity of wine produced (as opposed to grape juice or table grapes) is the bucolic [Finger Lakes](#) region in the west of the state. The slopes of these deep lakes are sufficiently steep to keep cold air moving in winter while vines bud too late in spring for frost to be a serious threat. The Cayuga Lake is warm enough to ripen European vinifera vines, but considerable quantities of wine have been produced from earlier-ripening hybrid or American vines, of which red Concord is the most powerfully flavoured example. Some seriously fine Riesling is produced here, however, and in warmer years some appetizing dry red wines emerge too.

Superior producers include Anthony Road, Heron Hill, Chateau Lafayette, Lamoureaux Landing, Macari and Hermann J Wiemer. The vineyards on Lake Erie on the Canadian border produce mainly grape juice, Concord jelly and table grapes, while those of the Hudson River due north of Manhattan are notable for their continuous existence over 300 years. Most of the wine, made from European, American and hybrid vines, is sold locally although Millbrook, under the same ownership as California's famous Williams Selyem and specializing in the relatively obscure white grape (Tocai) Friulano, has a national presence and even manages to penetrate the odd restaurant in Europhile Manhattan.

Arguably the most exciting wine region is only just in New York state, the easternmost tip of Long Island where the climate, thanks to the ocean which surrounds it, is mild enough to allow vinifera vines to flourish in all vineyards. Cabernet Franc, Chardonnay and Merlot do particularly well here and have a finesse, natural acidity and delicacy that distinguishes them from many other American wines. The North Fork of the island, potato country, is the predominant wine region and high achievers include Bedell, Channing Daughters, Gristina, Jamesport, Lenz, Macari, Palmer, Peconic Bay, Pellegrini and Pindar.

For more information on this region see [Uncork New York](#).

Other american states

Although wineries have sprouted all over the United States (even in Hawaii), one of the states which has taken a predictably large-scale stake in the burgeoning American wine industry is Texas, where wine styles are still emerging but were sufficiently encouraging for Bordeaux wine merchants of substance, Cordier, to have invested heavily in the high plains of Trans Pecos in the west of the state.

But Pennsylvania, Ohio, Virginia and Missouri all have more wineries than Texas. Missouri was the centre of the American wine industry in the nineteenth century, growing vast quantities of hybrids, particularly the distinctly superior Norton red grape, as well as vast quantities of Concord grapes for jelly. Its only rival historically was Ohio, first famous for sparkling Catawba developed by a Frenchman. Michigan and Wisconsin can produce some fine Icewine and Riesling, although as in other states wineries often ship in grapes from elsewhere.

In terms of wine quality Virginia has one of the most interesting modern wine industries, producing a host of well-made, rather French-tasting Cabernets and Chardonnays. The wine business of Pennsylvania is perhaps more motivated by tourism opportunities and summer humidity can be a problem for thin-skinned grapes such as Pinot Noir, though an increasing proportion of well-made Cabernets and Chardonnays are emerging here too.