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WINES

OF NEW YORK STATE

Once a TA,
Cheryl Stanley '00
takes over the
Hotel school's
venerable Intro to
Wines class

Tasting Notes

Uncorked: Cheryl
Stanley '00 lectures
on the merits of
Bordeaux.



By Beth Saulnier

Mother Nature gives the region of Bordeaux a different year every year,” says Hotel school lecturer Cheryl Stanley '00. “We don’t talk much about vintage variation when we get into the new world, like Napa Valley, but we see this a lot in the regions of both Bordeaux and Burgundy.”

Stanley is speaking to an audience—a big audience. It’s a Wednesday afternoon in March, and she’s onstage in front of the 700 or so students packing Statler Auditorium for one of the University’s most popular courses: Introduction to Wines. As teaching assistants clad in white lab coats circulate among the rows distributing bottles—each capped with a dispenser that portions out a one-ounce pour—Stanley and her guest speaker, Bordeaux vintner Basile Tesseron, discuss his home region. Their topics range from decoding wine labels to the influence of the region’s gravelly soil to the distinctions between the Left Bank (bastion of Cabernet Sauvignon) and the Right (dominated by Merlot). “So often



PHOTOS BY LISA BANLAKI FRANK

In vino veritas: More than 700 students pack Statler Auditorum for Intro to Wines. Below right: Stanley with guest speaker Basile Tesseron, a French vintner. On the screen behind them is a chart that helps tasters assess color.

consumers associate the region of Bordeaux with expensive wines,” Stanley observes. “Let me tell you, there are amazing bargains—everyday drinking, value wines—that come from Bordeaux.” In addition to imparting veritable casks of information, their tag-team presentation often has the audience in stitches. “To make a good wine, you need to be a good drinker,” the nattily clad, suavely accented Tesseron offers at one point. “A good bottle of wine is an empty one. If you don’t like to drink, don’t make wine.”

For many Cornell seniors—at least, those lucky enough to get into the class—this is a spring semester rite of passage. Every Wednesday afternoon, students toting the regulation tasting kit of three glasses in a small black case are a familiar sight around Central Campus. “When you start learning about wine, you start seeing how unique it can be,” says current student Quinn Cox ’15. “You could taste two wines from the same grape varietal that were grown on vines fifteen feet from each other and they can taste completely different. That blows my mind.”

This is Stanley’s second year teaching the Wines class, and her first doing it solo. In 2013–14, she co-taught it with the man whose name was synonymous with the course for three decades: Professor Stephen Mutkoski ’67, PhD ’76. It was a passing of the torch similar to when Mutkoski took over from his predecessor, Vance Christian ’61, MS ’65. “Steve was Vance’s TA, and I was Steve’s TA,” Stanley says, chatting in her Statler Hall





Perfect pour: Wine distribution is overseen by about two dozen TAs.

office a couple of days after the Bordeaux class. “We keep it in the family.”

Speaking of being a Wines TA: it’s nothing like serving as a typical teaching assistant, called upon to grade homework and run section meetings. “It’s mostly just being a waitress,” current TA Alex Faulkner ’15 says with a laugh. “I’ve gotten pretty quick at opening wine bottles.” Numbering about two dozen per semester, the TAs are responsible for distributing the six wines—sometimes seven—tasted in each class. “When you’re dealing with hundreds of bottles of wine, being organized is the most important thing,” says Faulkner. “Since the students have three glasses, as soon as they finish with the first wine, we bring out the fourth, so there’s essentially always a wine in all three glasses. The timing has gotten super good, in terms of doing that effectively with the least interruption.”

At the Bordeaux class, the first wine tasted is a 2013 white from Château Bonnet, a blend of Sauvignon Blanc and Sémillon (plus some Muscadelle) that retails for about \$12 a bottle. “Sauvignon Blancs in cool climates tend to be very grassy and herbaceous,” Stanley says, “so let’s smell this wine and see what we’re getting in the glass.” She asks the students to call out the aromas they encounter: bell pepper, honey, grapefruit, turkey. Then it’s time to taste. “They’re a perfect complement to each other,” Stanley says. “The Sauvignon Blanc has that lean, crisp acidity, and then the Sémillon rounds it out.” She asks the class to ponder the wine’s body and its finish, noting, “The Sémillon is kind of hanging around in my mouth.” Stanley’s tasting style is accessible and unpretentious, as when she declares the white, “what my friend calls a ‘porch pounder’—you can sit on your porch and enjoy it.”

Stanley didn’t grow up in a household of wine aficionados. Her dad favored beer—“He had many dogs, and each dog had a different beer name”—and her mom never much cared about wine until somewhat later in life, when she had what Stanley calls a life-changing glass of Sauternes while traveling on Air France. “It was my grandmother who introduced me to wine,” Stanley says. “She always drank Louis Jadot

Stanley’s Tips

Handy advice from the wine professor

Drink what you like: “That’s the biggest thing. I might be a sommelier and recommend you have a Bordeaux with your steak, and I can talk about why you should pick it, but if you’re not going to enjoy that wine, don’t order it. If you like white zinfandel, more power to you—drink it.”

Ask for advice: “Don’t be intimidated by the amount of selection, both in retail and in wine lists. It’s okay to go with what you’re familiar with, but don’t be afraid to ask questions.”

Try something new: “If you’re feeling adventurous, try something you’ve never had before, like a Grüner Veltliner from Austria, a Greco di Tufo from Italy, or a Pinot Meunier from California. There are some really fun varietals out there.”

Make friends with your wine seller: When I worked at the Wine Cask [a restaurant and retail store in Santa Barbara], I had clients whose palates



I got to know, and I’d say, ‘You need to try this.’ It’s not necessarily going to be big names—it can be those hidden gems.”

Be an active taster: “Move the wine around your mouth, because you want to hit all of your taste buds. Chewing also can be quite helpful, because those esters, those flavor molecules, can go up your retronasal passage to your olfactory nerve.”

Gamble on a half bottle: “As consumers are drinking less but spending more, a lot of producers are bottling in half bottles. If you want to try something new, but you don’t want to commit to a whole bottle, have it in a half. It’s a perfect way to go to a restaurant and enjoy the whole procedure of opening the bottle, but only have two glasses.”

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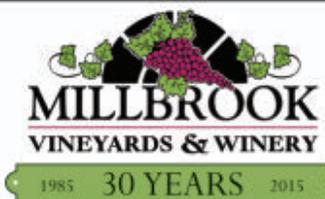
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Mouth feel: Quinn Cox '15 (left) and classmates taste one of seven Bordeaux wines. Each tray has three regulation glasses, along with a paper "spit cup."

Pouilly-Fuissé—until she turned ninety, when she switched to Crown Royal on the rocks." After graduating from the Hotel school, Stanley worked at the Four Seasons in Newport Beach, California, and soon found herself in charge of the entire beverage operation, including a wine list the length of a novella. She went on to gain sommelier certifications from three different governing bodies, earn a master's in hospitality management from Texas Tech, and teach as an adjunct at the Culinary Institute of America (CIA) before returning to the Hill in the fall of 2013.

These days, wines and spirits are a family affair: Stanley commutes to Ithaca from the Poughkeepsie area, where her husband teaches courses on beers, spirits, and mixology at the CIA. (Their honeymoon, appropriately enough, included stops in Oporto and Champagne.) In addition to the Wines class, she also teaches courses in beverage management and catering, and helps oversee acquisitions for the Hotel school's cellar. "When Steve taught the course—and this is something I want to do as well—he didn't just think about the semester or even the next five semesters. He thought long-term," Stanley says. "We have wines aging in our cellars that are from the birth years of students who are coming down the pipeline."

While the Wines course is famously

popular among graduating seniors in their final semester, Stanley aims to spread the word about a little-known fact: it's also offered in the fall, when there are empty seats. And she wants to debunk the popular misconception that non-Hotelies need to be twenty-one to take the class; the only requirements, she says, are that students be juniors or seniors and at least eighteen. "We're trying to have a marketing campaign on social media to encourage students to take the class in the fall semester," she says. "There are so many rumors around campus about the Wines class, and so much misinformation."

Back in Statler Auditorium, the Bordeaux lecture is winding up. After six tastings—the white is followed by five reds, including one from Tesseron's own Château Lafon-Rochet—Stanley ends with a seventh, a 2008 Sauternes from Château Laribotte. As the students taste, she describes the *Botrytis cinerea* fungus—also known as "noble rot"—that's key to the winemaking process. "Look at the berries in the upper right-hand corner," Stanley says, indicating the moldy fruit in a Power-Point image. "That's what you're drinking. And let me tell you, it is liquid gold."

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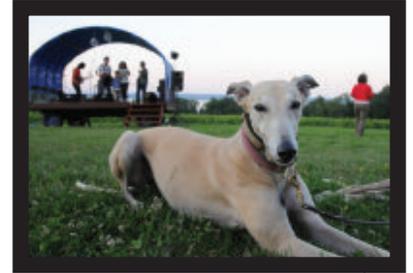


GRAPEHOUND WINE TOUR

July 30–August 2

This four-day celebration of greyhound adoption is headquartered at Pompous Ass Winery, part of the Seneca Lake Wine Trail.

Registrants can bring along their dogs, regardless of breed, as they visit the tasting rooms at more than twenty participating wineries. Proceeds benefit greyhound adoption groups throughout the Northeast. grapehounds.com



BARBECUE AT THE WINERIES

June 13

Eight wineries on Keuka Lake play host to this culinary event, with each concocting its own barbecue dish with a special sauce, marinade, or rub. corningfingerlakes.com/events/barbecue-wineries

FINGER LAKES WINE FESTIVAL

July 10–12

The three-day event at Watkins Glen International raceway features tastings from more than eighty wineries, making it the largest single showing of wines produced in New York State. The festival boasts food and craft vendors, wine seminars, and culinary classes, in addition to demonstrations in such arts as painting and ice carving. flwinefest.com



CORTLAND ARTS & WINE FESTIVAL

August 1

Held at Courthouse Park in downtown Cortland, this festival features tastings from more than twenty wineries, plus cheese pairings, food vendors, live music, a car show, art displays, and more. cortlandartsandwine.org

CENTRAL NEW YORK TOMATOFEST

September 12 & 13

The thirtieth annual event, at Emerson Park in Auburn, celebrates America's favorite red vegetable (or, rather, fruit) while raising money for local food pantries. cnytomatofest.org



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September 19 & 20

Fall-themed dishes are on the menu at Keuka Lake wineries that pair their creations with locally sourced cuisine.

keukawinetrail.com/harvest

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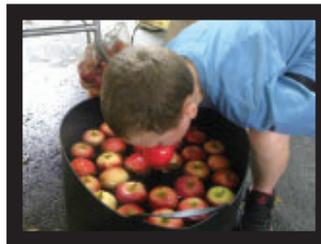
July 24–26

Touted as the only festival of its kind east of the Rockies, the event features nightly jam sessions, performances by international stars, wine tastings, and numerous food and craft vendors. It's a fixture of Syracuse Artsweek, which attracts more than 66,000 visitors to the city's downtown. cnyjazz.org/nejwf

FINGER LAKES CHEESE FESTIVAL

July 25

Held at Sunset View Creamery just outside Watkins Glen, this annual event offers the opportunity to sample the many wares of the Finger Lakes Cheese Trail. Other highlights include cooking lessons, a grilled cheese cook-off, and ricotta-making classes. flcheesetrail.com/Cheese_Festival.html



APPLE HARVEST FESTIVAL

October 2–4

The Ithaca Commons is home to this popular homage to the apple, with numerous growers, bakers, cider-makers, and more on hand to sell their wares. This fall's event is the thirty-third. downtownithaca.com

FINGER LAKES BEER FESTIVAL

October 24

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Bigger & Better

As the Finger Lakes wine industry continues to expand, the wider world is taking notice

By Dave Pohl

To the delight of many, *Wine Enthusiast* magazine has named the Finger Lakes region one of this year's ten best wine travel destinations. "Known particularly for world-class Riesling, it's also home to an increasingly diverse array of wines, from Grüner Veltliner to Teroldego," the magazine notes in its February 2015 issue. The *Enthusiast* also cites scenic beauty and an evolving food scene as two more reasons for visiting the area. The article lists a dozen wineries of particular interest, including stalwarts Hermann J. Wiemer and Dr. Konstantin Frank as well as newcomers like Kemmeter, Keuka Lake Vineyards, and Bellwether. It praises the improving quality of Finger Lakes reds and deems them increasingly distinctive in style and worthy of attention.

Back in 1976—the year of the New York Farm Winery Act—it would have been tough to imagine this degree of enthusiasm for Finger Lakes wine expressed in a national publication. At that time, Dr. Konstantin Frank's Vinifera Wine Cellars and Gold Seal Winery were virtually the region's only producers of wine made from vinifera grape varieties such as Riesling and Chardonnay. They were soon to be joined by the likes of Heron Hill Winery, Glenora Wine Cellars, and Hermann J. Wiemer Vineyard, slightly increasing the size of a tiny playing field.

Today, there are well over 100 wineries located in the Finger Lakes. Positive reviews in publications such as *Wine Enthusiast*, *Wine & Spirits*, *Wine Advocate*, and *Wine Spectator* have raised their reputation. The latter, the highest circulating wine publication in the U.S., issued its first full tasting report on the Finger Lakes in a winter 2013 issue. In recent years the *Spectator* has reviewed increasing numbers of Finger Lakes wines, and its website now contains more than 2,500 searchable reviews of the region's offerings. In March, Robert Parker's influential *Wine Advocate*—whose coverage of the region



PROVIDED

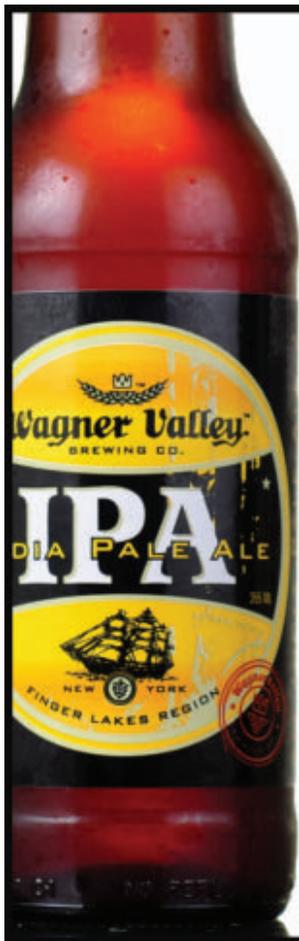
Good grapes (from top): The tasting room at Red Newt; Standing Stone bottles; and barrels at Ravines

has been spotty at best—announced that a critic would be assigned to cover the Finger Lakes. Additionally, tasting notes posted on wine-related forums such as Mark Squires' Bulletin Board and Wine Berserkers have piqued the interest of wine aficionados across the nation.

But perhaps the best way to keep up on what's happening in the Finger Lakes is by perusing the excellent New York Cork Report blog. Its main contributors are Lenn Thompson, former editor of the *Long Island Wine Gazette*, and Evan Dawson, author of *Summer in a Glass*, an excellent book about Finger Lakes wine. Founded in 2004, the blog follows all of the state's wine regions, and its coverage of the Finger Lakes is particularly timely and incisive. The reviewers are refreshingly miserly with their ratings: if a wine is well reviewed by these guys, it's definitely worth investigating.

RIESLING RULES

Much of the attention to Finger Lakes wines is showered on Riesling, generally considered the region's forte. In his 2014



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book *The Best White Wine on Earth*, British wine journalist Stuart Pigott begins a survey of Riesling around the world with a largely laudatory discussion of the Finger Lakes. The wineries that Pigott features include Dr. Konstantin Frank, Lamoreaux Landing, Red Newt, Hermann J. Wiemer, Standing Stone, Bloomer Creek, Bellwether, Silver Thread, Ravines Wine Cellars, Sheldrake Point, Anthony Road, Kemmeter Wines, and Fox Run.

A sampling of the Rieslings from any of these producers would certainly make for an exemplary introduction to the wines of the Finger Lakes. One could add to Pigott's list many other notable Riesling producers including relative newcomers such as Forge, Heart & Hands, Keuka Lake Vineyards, Red Tail Ridge, and Boundary Breaks as well as seasoned veterans like Hazlitt, Glenora, Heron Hill, and Lakewood. "There is fine potential here for the aromatic varieties of Alsace and Germany," says Dave Breeden, winemaker for Cayuga Lake's Sheldrake Point Winery, "not just Riesling, but Pinot Gris and Gewürztraminer as well."

Konstantin Frank's grandson Fred Frank, while producing excellent Gewürztraminer, is particularly excited over the prospects for the Austrian Grüner Veltliner grape. Frank, now President of Dr. Konstantin Frank's Vinifera Wine Cellars, feels strongly that the variety is capable of producing some of the finest wines in the Finger Lakes. He puts his money where his mouth is, as he now has more than ten acres of it planted on his Seneca Lake property. And in a 2014 blind tasting of Austrian and Finger Lakes Grüner Veltliners at Ithaca's Northside Wine & Spirits, the Dr. Frank Grüner acquitted itself nicely, its style indistinguishable from the Austrian

examples. Other wineries producing this variety include Ryan William, Hazlitt, Fulkerson, and Hermann J. Wiemer.

REDS ON THE RISE

While the quality of the best Finger Lakes white wines is not disputed, the region's reds are perhaps more of a work in progress. In general, it is safe to say that they are improving, though opinion is still divided on which varieties show the most promise. There are, broadly speaking, two camps: the Cabernet Franc advocates and the pro-Pinot Noir contingent. Those favoring the juicy, red-fruited Cabernet Franc would say that the area's cool climate is just the thing for producing wines in the style of those made from that variety in the cool Loire Valley of France, where it is the single grape used to produce wines such as Chinon and Saumur-Champigny.

Cabernet Franc has certainly seen some great success in warmer vintages such as 2007, 2010, and 2012. Particularly good examples have emanated from Ravines, Hermann J. Wiemer, Shalestone, Red Newt, Damiani, Bloomer Creek, and Atwater, among others. In a blind tasting of French and Finger Lakes Cabernet Franc wines at Northside, the deeply fruited Wiemer 2012 tied with a very good Chinon for top honors.

Results with Pinot Noir have been a bit spottier, which may have as much to do with soil as climate. Pinot Noir likes limestone, and it is notable that one of the most successful Pinot producers, Heart & Hands, has its estate vineyards planted on limestone-rich soil. Based on owner-winemaker Tom Higgins's successful efforts, the key to future successes with the grape will depend on finding sites that combine a warm enough microclimate

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with limestone-rich soil. Forge, Damiani, Shalestone, Billsboro, Bloomer Creek, Bellwether, and Ryan William have also produced successful Pinots.

A third variety favored by some producers is Syrah. This smoky, dark-fruited variety seems to do particularly well in Jim Hazlitt's Seneca Lake Sawmill Creek Vineyard. Other wineries that have had success using Sawmill-grown Syrah grapes include Atwater, Billsboro, Red Newt, and Hector Wine Company.

GROUP EFFORTS

These are exciting times for Finger Lakes wine, with newcomers and old-timers coaxing better and better results from their vines. It is heartening that the region's increasing success has been driven not so much by competition but by a spirit of cooperation. That spirit is nowhere more apparent than in the annual production of a wine called Tierce.

Tierce is the brainchild of three Finger Lakes winemakers: Dave Whiting of Red Newt Cellars, Peter Bell of Fox Run Vineyards, and Johannes Reinhardt of Kemmeter Wines (formerly of Anthony Road Wine Company). Each year since 2004, the three have combined forces to create a wine, usually a Riesling, that is blended from the production of their three operations. "I thought this would be a great idea, not only for the reason of making good wine, but also to serve as a metaphor for what goes on in the Finger Lakes, which is all about collaboration among winemakers," Bell told Wine Review Online in 2012, adding, "We don't consider each other competitors; we're collaborators and co-conspirators." The trio spends hours tasting and blending tank samples until they achieve a characterful, well-balanced wine worthy of the Tierce label. In 2013, their efforts were rewarded by the selection of the Tierce 2010 Riesling for service at the Inaugural Luncheon for President Barack Obama.

That success is indicative of a region where it is not uncommon for wineries to share expertise, equipment, and facilities. A significant role in this regard is played by Cornell Cooperative Extension, which shares a great deal of data and expertise as well as serving as a focal point for discussion and experimentation. In the end, one of the advantages of the Finger Lakes wine community is a feeling that success for one is a success for all. Tierce collaborator Reinhardt summed it up nicely in a 2009 interview with *Wine Spectator*: "In my career, I have yet to explore a region where people have been more humble, down to earth, and willing to work together."

—Dave Pohl, MA '79, is a wine buyer at Northside Wine & Spirits in Ithaca



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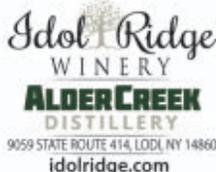


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