Buyer's GUIDE

THE tastingpanel MAGAZINE

East meets West

The Red Hook Winery in Brooklyn, NY.

Crown Point Vineyards in the Happy Canyon of Santa Barbara AVA in Santa Barbara County, CA.

HIGHLIGHTING RECENT RELEASES FROM **NEW YORK STATE** AND **SANTA BARBARA COUNTY**

PHOTO COURTESY OF THE RED HOOK WINERY

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by Jonathan Cristaldi
***with additional research by* Joe Roberts**

Let me say this loud and clear: Both New York and Santa Barbara County deserve greater attention from American wine buyers. Having covered them extensively for *cristaldiandco.com*, I am delighted to introduce *The Tasting Panel*'s first comprehensive buyer's guide on these two regions, whose varietal and stylistic diversity I regard as a strength, not a weakness. The New York Wine & Grape Foundation's 2025 vineyard report records more than 155 varieties grown statewide, and so many of them are producing intriguing wines; Santa Barbara Vintners, meanwhile, lists more than 75 grapes across seven appellations. Such breadth gives buyers considerable scope to build selections that reward exploration.

In June, I tasted wines from New York producers at The Red Hook Winery in Brooklyn. In July, I visited Santa Barbara County and conducted a large centralized tasting. In both cases, the quality of the 2024 and 2025 vintages was impressive, with numerous releases deserving immediate consideration for wine programs extending into 2027. The strongest combine exceptional quality, distinctive sense of place, and incredible value: Many are priced to suit ambitious by-the-glass programs as well as bottle lists and retail shelves, and though hand-selling may be necessary, it will be worthwhile. I hope this report encourages you to seek out the producers covered within and request samples.

An extended version will appear on my website and on *tastingpanelmag.com*.



PHOTO COURTESY OF HERMANN J. WEIMER VINEYARD & WINERY

Hermann J. Weimer Vineyard & Winery in the Finger Lakes region.

NEW YORK

New York's growers and producers have leaned into Cabernet Franc as their signature red grape; the quality of the examples that I've tasted in the past few years makes their case compelling. The grape ripens earlier than Cabernet Sauvignon, giving them a chance to harvest ahead of potentially harsh late-season weather. In the Finger Lakes region in particular, deep lakes mitigate frosts by moderating temperatures, delaying spring growth and extending autumn ripening, while sloping vineyards direct cold air toward the water instead of settling around the vines.

The best Cabernet Franc wines reflect improved farming methods. Canopy management and crop thinning are critical: Excessive vigor can compromise ripening and increase the green-pepper character associated with methoxypyrazines, whereas timely leaf removal can reduce those compounds, helping producers obtain ripeness while preserving the freshness and elegant, savory complexity that distinguish New York's Cabernet Francs from, say, the fruit-forward, full-throttle examples from California.

The state's bubblies and whites warrant equally serious consideration. Long Island's sparkling wines were particular highlights during my tastings, earning scores as high as those of the strongest Cabernet Francs.

The Vineyard Landscape

Hybrids and native varieties remain integral to New York's regional diversity; the Finger Lakes Wine Alliance has embraced the term "heirloom grapes" to highlight those that are at least 100 years old. Hybrids indeed represent a significant part of the state's plantings, with 1,363 of 17,414 total acres reported across the Finger Lakes, Long Island, and Hudson River regions (1,277 of them in the former), giving buyers another substantial category to explore alongside the *Vitis vinifera* wines, which are achieving great results across the board thanks to better canopy management.

Of these, Riesling is the most-planted white winegrape, with 805 acres in production, followed by Chardonnay at 630 acres; Cabernet Franc leads the reds with 488 acres, narrowly exceeding Merlot's 481 acres.

As of 2025, the Finger Lakes region reported 4,908 acres in grape production, compared with Long Island's 1,784 acres (where *Vitis vinifera* accounted for 98% of reported plantings). The Hudson River Region reported 205 acres, including 119 acres of *vinifera*—but despite its considerably smaller vineyard footprint, it delivered several outstanding wines during my tastings.



PHOTO COURTESY OF PAUMANOK VINEYARDS

Harvesttime at Paumanok Vineyards on Long Island.

The 2024 and 2025 Growing Seasons

Because producers follow different release schedules, I tasted wines from the 2021 through 2025 vintages. This report, however, focuses on 2024 and 2025, as buyers are most likely to be looking at those.

In 2024, much of New York experienced an unusually warm growing season, and favorable ripening conditions prevailed overall. In the Finger Lakes, Geneva recorded 3.6 inches of rain on August 9, followed by relatively dry conditions in late August and September that supported ripening and limited bunch rot. In the Hudson Valley, Poughkeepsie's September highs averaged 76.9 degrees Fahrenheit and its lows 52.6 degrees, with just 0.57 inches of rain. Whitecliff began harvesting in late August and reported good quality, ensuring expressive base wines for sparkling production. On Long Island, an April 26 frost caused substantial crop losses at some estates, including Paumanok Vineyards, before excellent ripening conditions followed. Islip's September highs averaged 75 degrees and lows 58 degrees, with a record-low rainfall total of 0.24 inches.

The 2025 growing season was warm but close to the decade average. In the Finger Lakes, a wet spring gave way to a warm summer and dry September. Temperatures in July hovered around 84 degrees with lows around 65, followed by September average highs of 75 degrees and lows of 53 degrees. Monthly rainfall declined from 5.3 inches in May to 0.5 inches in September. In the Hudson Valley, September highs averaged 78 degrees and lows around 52 degrees; on Long Island, highs hovered near 78 degrees and lows around 61 degrees—warmer than 2024, with below-normal rainfall.

Quality Across Styles

As noted above, New York's Cabernet Franc wines are coming in hot, delivering the state's strongest combination of quality and value. Lakewood Vineyards' concentrated, finely textured 2024 and Lamoreaux Landing Wine Cellars' fresh, satiny 2024 MJW Vineyard Unoaked bottling both earned 95 points, at $20 and $26, respectively (talk about value!). Millbrook Vineyards & Winery's 95-point Block Three East demonstrated the Hudson River Region's capacity for savory complexity and refined tannins.

On the white wine front, Dr. Konstantin Frank Winery's 2025 Eugenia Dry Riesling combined depth with bracing acidity, earning 95 points, while Acquilano Wine Cellars' 94-point 2024 Chardonnay balanced richness and polished texture with freshness. Montezuma Winery's 2024 Voleur Dry Riesling offered a particularly revealing example of cellar experimentation: a wild pied-de-cuvée fermentation, followed by contrasting treatment in acacia and concrete, yielded honeyed complexity, creamy texture, and good energy.

Long Island's sparkling wines continue to impress. Memorable sips range from Macari Vineyards' lively 2025 HORSES pét-nat to Sparkling Pointe's 96-point 2020 Blanc de Blancs, whose aging regimen of four years on the lees contributed pastry notes and a creamy mousse without sacrificing tension.

NEW YORK STATE BUYER'S GUIDE

Over 175 wines were reviewed for this report. The entire list of wines and my full reviews are available at tastingpanelmag.com.

Best Buys for By-the-Glass Placements

**SRP is provided by the winery or is an average based on wine-searcher.com results. Please confirm exact SRP with the winery.*

SCORE	WINE NAME	PRICE*
93	**Airy Acres Vineyard 2022 Dry Riesling,** Cayuga Lake, Finger Lakes, New York	$18
93	**Mazza Chautauqua Cellars 2021 Pinot Grigio,** Finger Lakes, New York	$20
93	**Heart & Hands Wine Company 2023 Esoterra,** Finger Lakes, New York	$20
93	**Montezuma Winery 2024 Voleur Dry Riesling,** Finger Lakes, New York	$24
93	**Ryan William Vineyard 2024 Cabernet Franc,** Finger Lakes, New York	$24
93	**Mazza Chautauqua Cellars 2019 Merlot,** Long Island, New York	$26
93	**Idol Ridge Winery 2024 Local Culture Chosen Home Red,** Finger Lakes, New York	$28
92	**Idol Ridge Winery 2024 Local Culture Delaware,** Finger Lakes, New York	$24
92	**Atwater Vineyards 2023 Chardonnay Reserve,** Seneca Lake, Finger Lakes, New York	$28
91	**Billsboro Winery 2025 Uva White,** Finger Lakes, New York	$18
91	**Element Winery 2023 In Our Element Riesling,** Finger Lakes, New York	$28
90	**Acquilano Wine Cellars 2024 Blaufränkisch,** Finger Lakes, New York	$25

Best Buys for Bottle Lists

SCORE	WINE NAME	PRICE
97	**Paumanok Vineyards 2022 Assemblage Red Blend,** North Fork of Long Island, New York	$75
95	**Dr. Konstantin Frank Winery 2025 Eugenia Dry Riesling,** Finger Lakes, New York	$39
95	**Red Hook Winery 2010 Legacy Series Red Wine Lot #311,** New York	$60
94	**Milea Estate Vineyard 2023 Farmhouse BDX Red Blend,** New York	$35
94	**Macari Vineyards 2022 Merlot,** North Fork of Long Island, New York	$40
94	**Damiani Wine Cellars 2024 Pinot Noir Reserve,** Finger Lakes, New York	$65
94	**Atwater Vineyards 2024 Blaufränkisch,** Finger Lakes, New York	$34
93	**Heart & Hands Wine Company 2024 Aligoté,** Finger Lakes, New York	$36
92	**Lakewood Vineyards 2024 Sixty/40,** Finger Lakes, New York	$40
91	**Element Winery 2021 In Our Element Chardonnay,** Finger Lakes, New York	$55





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Best Value Picks*

**94-plus-point wines for $30 or less*

SCORE	WINE NAME	PRICE
96	**Dr. Konstantin Frank Winery 2023 Cabernet Franc,** Finger Lakes, New York	$28
95	**Glenora Wine Cellars 2023 Cabernet Franc,** Finger Lakes, New York	$19
95	**Lakewood Vineyards 2024 Cabernet Franc,** Finger Lakes, New York	$20
95	**Lamoreaux Landing Wine Cellars 2024 MJW Vineyard Unoaked Cabernet Franc,** Finger Lakes, New York	$26
95	**Apollo's Praise 2024 Pentecostal Block Dry Riesling,** Lahoma Vineyard, Seneca Lake, Finger Lakes, New York	$27
94	**Boundary Breaks Vineyard 2024 Cabernet Franc,** Finger Lakes, New York	$25
94	**Airy Acres Vineyard 2025 Rkatsiteli,** Cayuga Lake, Finger Lakes, New York	$25
94	**Anthony Road Wine Company 2023 Cabernet Franc,** Seneca Lake, New York	$28
94	**Acquilano Wine Cellars 2024 Chardonnay,** Finger Lakes, New York	$30



Cabernet Franc: *New York's Signature Red*

SCORE	WINE NAME	PRICE
96	**Millbrook Vineyards and Winery 2024 Cabernet Franc Clone 623,** Hudson River, New York	$55
95	**Anthony Road Wine Company 2023 Martini-Becraft Selection Cabernet Franc,** Seneca Lake, New York	$47
95	**Milea Estate Vineyard 2023 Reserve Cabernet Franc,** New York	$50
95	**Millbrook Vineyards and Winery 2024 Cabernet Franc Block Three East,** Hudson River, New York	$50
94	**Macari Vineyards 2024 Cabernet Franc,** North Fork of Long Island, New York	$38
94	**Damiani Wine Cellars 2024 Cabernet Franc Reserve,** Finger Lakes, New York	$60
94	**Apollo's Praise 2024 Lahoma Vineyard Cabernet Franc,** Finger Lakes (Seneca Lake), New York	$26

Top Sparkling Wines

SCORE	WINE NAME	PRICE
96	**Sparkling Pointe 2020 Blanc de Blancs,** North Fork of Long Island, New York	$48
96	**Sparkling Pointe 2019 Boisseau Blanc de Blancs,** North Fork of Long Island, New York	$58
94	**Glenora Wine Cellars 2017 Blanc de Blanc,** Finger Lakes, New York	$29
94	**Hermann J. Wiemer Vineyard 2021 Brut Rosé,** Seneca Lake, Finger Lakes, New York	$50
94	**Paumanok Vineyards 2021 Blanc de Chenin,** North Fork of Long Island, New York	$55
92	**Standing Stone by Hermann J. Wiemer Vineyard 2024 Saperavi Brut Rosé,** Seneca Lake, Finger Lakes, New York	$36