
EAST END OENOPHILE

BY LENN THOMPSON



2005 REDS TRICKLE ONTO SHELVES

Until recently, the only wines we've had to assess of the much-ballyhooed 2005 vintage have been whites. Disappointingly, many of those wines proffer inconsistent acidity and balance. Perhaps some local winemakers just weren't sure what to do with all that ripeness.

Most local wineries won't release their 2005 reds until 2009 or later, but a few are trickling out into the marketplace—offering a taste of what's to come.

Corey Creek's 2005 Cabernet Franc (\$30) offers delicious cherry-red berry flavors accented by subtle herbal notes, earth and a wisp of smoke. Raphael's 2005 Cabernet Franc—a steal at \$18—is made without oak barrels, which puts the focus on that ripe fruit. It's dominated by concentrated cherry, floral and spice notes.

Two merlots from Bedell Cellars—a regular (\$25) and a reserve (\$40)—are still very young and will profit greatly from more bottle aging, but the intensity of the 2005 vintage is on display in the form of rich, mouth-filling flavors and structures. This reserve in particular may prove in time to be one of the best merlots in the brief history of Long Island wine.

Vineyard 48 has also pushed three 2005 reds to store shelves quickly, and they are easily the young producer's best to date. Still youthful, time in the bottle will improve these wines, too.

ITALIAN ROOTS IN WINE COUNTRY

The Scarola and Medolla families have joined the roster of Italian-Americans that own local vineyards, joining the Macari, Pugliese, Pellegrini, Petrocelli, Diliberto, Borghese, Pisacano and Pipia families.

Frank Scarola, owner of Scarola Vineyards, makes his wines at Wölffer Estate under the watchful eye of Wölffer's winemaker, Roman Roth. "Roman serves as my winemaker and I as apprentice. I'm involved in all aspects of wine production but Roman is the expert," said Scarola.

Scarola currently makes cabernet franc, merlot and chardonnay with grapes purchased from North Fork vineyards. He is in the process of planting a small vineyard of his own in Southold and plans to explore Italian grape varieties.

His 2002 Merlot (\$17), which has rich blackberry, blueberry and vanilla aromas and flavors, is charmingly rustic, and has a little sweet oak note with noticeable tannins that will mellow with time.

The best of Scarola's current release is the \$13 2003 Chardonnay.

The fresh nose is loaded with citrus aromas with honey, toasty vanilla, roasted nuts and spice. The palate is impeccably balanced with nutty, citrusy flavors, a slightly creamy palate and lively acidity.

Medolla Vineyards, owned by John and Denise Medolla, focuses solely on merlot and makes its wines at Lenz Winery. Their first release—a 2002 merlot (\$23)—is a fine example of Long Island merlot. The nose is very Old World with tobacco and earth raspberry and cherry. Medium bodied, the flavors are similar to the nose with some minty-eucalyptus notes and ripe, smooth tannins. □

Lenn Thompson writes about New York food and wine at lenndevours.com.



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