

A Finger Lakes Cider Primer

Cider Sipping Season is Here!

BY LAURA WINTER FALK





The Finger Lakes has been recognized as one of the most exciting regions for orchard cider in the country. Tompkins County is considered an epicenter for craft cider with 10 cideries, some producing over 20 ciders. With so many ciders from which to choose, it helps to understand some of the key elements of a quality cider.

One of the fundamental ways that craft cidemakers seek artistry is through balance of the three structural elements of acid, tannins and sugar. Just like in winemaking, true quality cider starts with structural balance. Without structural balance, any of these elements can dominate the flavor profile and mask more subtle flavors and aromatics from the other organic compounds found in the cider.

In cidemaking, structural balance is most often achieved through the alchemy of taking multiple varieties of apples that vary in their sugar, acid and tannin content and blending them. Apples are classified by these traits, making the blending process part chemistry, and part artistry.

While there are over 700 known and classified apple varieties (orangeippen.com maintains an active database), all over the Finger Lakes are wild apple trees and abandoned orchards filled with unidentified apples varieties that are the passion projects of many of the region's cider makers. The results are ciders that are as varied as the ideas that inspired them.

Make it your personal project to head out to discover the breadth of cider styles. Once you find your favorite style, then feel free to head down the rabbit hole of the number of varieties available among the excellent cider producers in the region. This primer jump-starts your cider treasure hunt. Enjoy and let us know your favorites! 🍷

Laura Winter Falk owns Experience! The Finger Lakes, a touring and events company. She holds a PhD in food and nutrition, is a Certified Sommelier and is an adjunct professor of wine at Tompkins Cortland Community College.

POPULAR ORCHARD CIDER STYLES WITH SUGGESTIONS WORTH TRYING

STILL AND DRY – These noncarbonated ciders are expressive and complex with equally balanced tannins and acids. Stylistic choices include barrel-fermentation and/or barrel-aging in the cider making process. (Bellwether Hard Cider Heritage \$16)

SPARKLING AND DRY – Carbonated dry ciders that focus on freshness with great acidity, fruit and other emergent flavors and aromatics that you can drink everyday with everything. (Redbyrd Orchard Cider Workman Dry \$14)

DRY, TRADITIONAL-METHOD SPARKLING – Using the traditional *méthode champenoise* of secondary fermentation of base ciders in the bottle, that are then aged for at least a year on lees and then disgorged, creates typically pristine, textured cider that have notes of brioche and a creamy mouthfeel. (Eve's Cidery Darling Creek \$18)

PÉTILLANT NATUREL (AKA PÉT-NAT) – A currently very trendy form of cider that is also the oldest style of cidemaking. Unfiltered and left on the lees without disgorging creates an abundance of funky aromatics and flavors (lovers of sour beers will love pet nat ciders). (Finger Lakes Cider House Greenman Series #1 - #4 \$20)

SEMI-DRY SPARKLING – Usually one of the producer's most popular ciders as they are designed to attract a wide range of palates. These are fruity, fresh, clean and appealing anytime sippers. (Black Diamond Cider Jaywalker \$16)

INDIGENOUS-FERMENT – These ciders are naturally fermented without added yeast. Gambling with native yeasts will pay off with ciders of unique character with funky and fruity expressions developed through natural fermentation's slow process. (New York Cider Company Barn Swallow #2 \$18)

PERRY – Cider made from 100% pears. It is generally lighter and rounder than cider from apples with softer tannins and acids. This subtle structure results in ciders with perceived sweetness and distinctive creamy textures. (Black Duck Cidery Perry \$23)

MULTIPLE-FRUIT CIDER – These popular ciders are made by incorporating other fruits to an apple base either during or after fermentation. They can be dry or semi-dry, but are always driven by very pleasing fruit aromatics and flavors. (Grisamore Cider Works Blue Goose \$18)

POMMEAU – A still, fortified, port-like cider that is aged in oak barrels. The result is a sweet dessert cider with a velvety texture and ripe apple, vanilla and baking spice aromas and textures. Wonderful as an aperitif or digestif. (Black Diamond Cider Porters Pommeau \$35).