

HYBRID Happenings

BY LAURA WINTER FALK

Here in the Finger Lakes, hybrid grape varieties tend to be the overlooked children of the region, mostly overshadowed by their more well-known and prestigious half-sibling vinifera grapes. However, hybrids play an extremely important role in the Finger Lakes region, both in terms of their place in history and in today's market.

While winemaking in this region got its start in the late 1800s with Native American varietals, hybrids became more critical to the region as the American palate began to seek drier-styled wines after World War II. In order to meet this demand, some of the larger Finger Lakes wineries chose to rely on neutral bulk wines transported in by tank car from California that would be blended with wine from their native varieties.

However, there was a movement, embraced by Walter S. Taylor of Bully Hill Vineyards in particular, that planted European-American hybrids created in Europe, as well as new hybridized varieties coming out of the Cornell University Agricultural Experiment Station, to create well-balanced and less “grapey” quality wines that could be grown and produced right here in the Finger Lakes region.

Today, hybrids play an important role in creating great wines at affordable prices, which help offer a variety of price points to consumers of Finger Lakes wines. These grapes are easier to grow, and often yield more overall juice than the vinifera grapes. You'll find many of these hybrids used in excellent-value proprietary blends that are sold both in the tasting room and on the wholesale market at competitive prices.

There are also excellent-quality hybrid varietals in the Finger Lakes that produce distinctive and delicious single-varietal wines. The three most noteworthy are Vignoles, Vidal Blanc and Traminette. What these three white grapes have in common are lip-smacking high acidity inherited from their Native American parents, and complex fruit profiles that are mostly inherited through their vinifera lineage.

Vignoles, a hybrid created in France in the early 1930s (originally named as Ravat 51), creates beautiful wines in the Finger Lakes that

are loaded with acidity, minerality and gorgeous tropical fruit flavors that can be found in both dry and sweeter styles.

Vidal Blanc is another hybrid created in the 1930s in France. Its vinifera parent is the Ugni Blanc grape used to make Cognac. In the Finger Lakes, while there are some examples of dry Vidal in the region, one sees the grape in its finest form when used to make rich and complex dessert wines.

Traminette, while originally bred at the University of Illinois in 1965, went on to being developed as a cultivar at Cornell's breeding program. This hybrid variety expresses the beautiful floral, fruit and spice aromatics and flavors inherited from its parent, Gewürtztraminer, but with an additional layer of extended acidic structure not present in its parent.

Whether it's one of these varietals or any number of the fantastic hybrid-based blends being created in the Finger Lakes, these wines are worth paying attention to. Their quality (and their price) will undoubtedly surprise and impress you. 🍷

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WINES OF THE SEASON

This list includes wines that are currently available in tasting rooms, in stores, or online. List does not include every option available.

VIGNOLES

Dry

Keuka Lake Vineyards 2015 Gently Dry Vignoles – \$14.00

Knapp Winery 2017 Dry Vignoles – \$16.99

Six Mile Creek 2017 Vignoles – \$14.99

Semi-sweet

Anthony Road Wine Company 2016 Vignoles – \$15.00

Barnstormer Winery 2017 Sparkling Angel's Share – \$15.00

Bully Hill Vineyards Ravat 51 – \$9.99

Hunt Country Vineyards 2016 Vignoles – \$11.99

Keuka Spring Vineyards 2018 Vignoles – \$14.99

Wagner Vineyards Vignoles – \$10.99

Dessert

Swedish Hill Winery 2014 Late Harvest Vignoles – \$23.99

VIDAL BLANC

Dry and Semi-Dry

Bully Hill Vineyards 2015 Skin-Fermented Vidal Blanc – \$9.99

Penguin Bay Winery 2017 Dry Vidal Blanc – \$14.99

Thirsty Owl Vineyards 2018 Vidal Blanc – \$12.95

Traditional Ice Wine (frozen on the vine)

Casa Larga Vineyards 2017 Fiori Vidal Blanc Ice Wine – \$48.60

Fulkerson Winery 2017 Vidal Blanc Ice Wine – \$35.00

Hazlitt 1852 Vineyards 2014 Vidal Blanc Ice Wine – \$45.99

Hunt Country Vineyards 2016 Vidal Blanc Ice Wine – \$49.99

Keuka Spring Vineyards 2018 Vidal Blanc Ice Wine – \$29.99

Montezuma Winery 2014 Vidal Blanc Ice Wine – \$29.99



TRAMINETTE

Dry

Bet The Farm Winery 2017 Traminette – \$17.00

Goose Watch Winery 2017 Traminette – \$13.99

Thirsty Owl Wine Company 2017 Traminette – \$13.95

Semi-Dry

Hunt Country Vineyards 2018 Traminette – \$14.99

Fox Run Vineyards 2018 Traminette – \$15.00

Bully Hill Vineyards 2013 Traminette – \$9.99

NOTABLE HYBRID-BASED BLENDS

White Off-Dry

Damiani Wine Cellars Dolce Bianco

(Vidal, Vignoles, Cayuga) – \$12.99

White Semi-Dry

Heron Hill Winery Game Bird White (Cayuga, Seyval) – \$10.99

White Sweet

Treleaven Wines 2016 Sophistocrats Charlie (Vidal, Vignoles, Gewurztraminer) – \$11.00

Red Dry

Villa Bellangelo Forward Red (De Chaunac, Marquette, Foch, Chambercin) – \$20.00

Red Off-Dry

Lakewood Vineyards 2018 Long Stem Red (Vincent, De Chaunac, Baco Noir, Leon Millot, Foch) – \$9.99

Red Fortified Sweet

Red Newt Cellars Hellbender (Noiret, Cabernet Sauvignon, Cabernet Franc, Merlot) – \$20.00

