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wine & spirits

Long Island Expressions

A cool maritime climate translates to wines of great character at Lieb Cellars. BY EUNICE FRIED

It was only 40 years ago that Long Island's first winery was established, and land that once grew potatoes began to sprout grape vines. Today, this region, 85 miles east of New York City, boasts 56 wineries, most at the far end of the island where it splits in two. Forty-seven wineries lie on the North Fork, four on the South Fork, and there are 3,000 acres of vineyards. The lure? With a cool maritime climate, well-drained soils and the longest growing season of East Coast wine regions, Long Island has proven it can grow many of Europe's finest vinifera grapes.

Among the pioneers willing to take a chance in a new wine region is Lieb Cellars, on the North Fork. Established in 1992 and releasing its first vintage in 1999, Lieb is an iconoclast. While most Long Island wineries began with Bordeaux varieties, Lieb was the first to plant Pinot Blanc and make it its signature grape. Pinot Blanc, sometimes called Chardonnay's understudy, is widely used in Europe, especially in Alsace, and Lieb's Pinot Blanc resembles the style of those of Alsace.

While most Long Island wineries began with Bordeaux varieties, Lieb was the first to plant Pinot Blanc and make it its signature grape.

Under its top-of-the-line label, Lieb Reserve, Pinot Blanc 2012 (\$22) provides a fine expression of the grape — a graceful, elegant wine, medium-full in body, crisp

with a touch of apple in the aroma and a memorable aftertaste.

With its natural acidity, Pinot Blanc is the perfect grape to make Lieb's Reserve Blanc de Blanc 2010 (\$35). A refreshing, light-golden sparkling wine made in the Champagne method, it is well-balanced, remarkably dry, with mineral tones.

Lieb also produces two fine reds under its Reserve label. One, the satiny-textured Merlot 2008 (\$22), blended with 6 percent Cabernet Sauvignon, offers hints of black fruit in both its aroma and taste, followed by a long aftertaste.

Its Reserve Cabernet Franc 2010 (\$40) is blended with 7 percent Cabernet Sauvignon, 3 percent Merlot and 2 percent Malbec. A big, supple, ruby-shaded wine, it features excellent balance and good fruit flavors and leaves a fine, lasting impression.

Lieb also produces wine under its less expensive label, Bridge Lane, where prices for the Rosé, Chardonnay, White Blend and Red Blend range from \$15 to \$20. Bridge Lane wines are available in bottles and in three-liter boxes.

