



WINE & DINE

Pinot Blanc

Is this the next big grape for the North Fork?



to Long Island for love, makes six Lieb wines (both red and white) from grapes on 42 acres of estate vineyards, as well as Bridge Lane, a less expensive brand that's offered as a bottle, box, and keg wine. He's also the director of Premium Wine Group, the East Coast's only custom crush facility, which makes wine for 18 of Long

Island's 56 wineries. In the last decade, he has made Lieb the poster child for sustainable viticulture according to the dictates of the Long Island Sustainable Winegrowing organization.

Hearn's sparkling Pinot Blanc—made in *méthode Champenoise*,

aged three years, and also an ideal oyster pairing—has been especially lauded by critics over the years. Champagne connoisseur and writer Ed McCarthy raved about Lieb's 2010 Pinot Blanc "Blanc de Blancs,"

calling it a winner with lots of effervescence, verve, and great citrus flavors, noting additionally that it's very dry (the wine has no dosage—i.e., no added sugar). *Wine Spectator* named it a "top American sparkling," and Eric Asimov of the *New York Times* declared it among the region's best sparkling wines, comparing it to an understated *crémant* from Alsace. It's rare to find a sparkling made from 100 percent Pinot Blanc, and Lieb's is the only one in America.

While Hearn is an indefatigable cheerleader for the North Fork's wine industry, he's careful to pay heed to Australia's "tall poppy syndrome," which discourages being the tallest poppy in the field (too much overconfidence leads to the loftiest bloom being chopped off). "We haven't achieved the next level of respect, and we still have a ways to go in promoting ourselves," he says. "But there's no dispute that the North Fork is a premium wine region, only 85 miles from the biggest wine market in the world." —*Baroness Sheri de Borchgrave*



Love It Or Lieb It
Winemaker Russell Hearn has been championing Lieb Cellars' Pinot Blancs, one of which wowed critics at a recent blind tasting in Manhattan.



Though it's ideal with oysters and lobsters, Pinot Blanc is not widely known because the grape grows only in cool climates. At a recent blind tasting, hosted by Mattituck's Lieb Cellars at Corkbuzz in Manhattan, 40 top wine critics were smitten as they sampled four Pinot Blanc contenders from Alto Adige in northern Italy, the Alsace region of France, the Willamette Valley in Oregon, and Long Island.

As they sniffed and swirled, the experts discussed the first two wines, which they deemed outstanding, with bouquets of pear, quince, and oyster shell, bright flavors of stone fruit, a nice acidity, low alcohol, and a clean, almost saline finish. The other two wines didn't show as well: They were less expressive, and it was assumed that the Lieb offering from Long Island was one of them. When the wines' identities were revealed, the two crowd-pleasers were Terlan Pinot Bianco 2012 from Alto Adige and Lieb Reserve Pinot Blanc 2012 from Long Island.

Russell Hearn, an Australian who has been making wine on Long Island for 22 years and ten years before that in Burgundy, New Zealand, and California's Alexander Valley, has made Pinot Blanc his signature grape during his 13 years as winemaker at Lieb. "What I love about Pinot Blanc is its delicate nuances," he says. "It's attractive, crisp, and subtle—a natural for shellfish." The soft-spoken Hearn, who was first lured