

NEWCOMERS

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yards in Cutchogue that were already planted with seven acres of chardonnay, 6 1/2 of merlot and 1 1/2 of cabernet franc. The vines are predominantly European clones, he says, which fits his tastes.

"I want to make wine in an Old World, classical style. They have to be well-balanced, enjoyable wines made with limited tinkering," he says.

In Miami, where he lives with his wife, Christine, and their two children, Mr. Tobin is a constant advocate of the region, taking a bottle of Long Island wine to a blind tasting. It was the 2001 Jamesport Vineyards Cabernet Franc.

"People thought it was French," he says. "That speaks volumes. They thought it was a Chinon [a cabernet franc from the Loire Valley in France] and when I opened it up their mouths hit the floor. Think about it."

Mr. Tobin is a fan of Jamesport Vineyards. Ron Goerler Jr., an owner and the vineyard manager, is managing Mr. Tobin's vineyard, named Mattebella after his children, Matthew and Isabella. His wine is made at Jamesport Vineyards, and his first release, from the 2005 vintage, is expected soon.

Mr. Tobin believes he's in the forefront of something big. "The Long Island Wine Council [on whose board he sits] is embarking on a new marketing strategy and the reception's been awesome. There's a critical mass of excitement going on."

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MEDOLLA VINEYARDS

"Winemaking has been in our family for centuries," says John Medolla, who with his wife, Denise, has been making Medolla Vineyards wine at The Lenz Winery for five years. They just released their 2002 merlot.

His family came from Torre del Greco, in the Campagna region surrounding Naples. The tradition, he says, was passed to his mother and her sisters by his grandmother, who was famous in the neighborhoods of his youth — Red Hook and Carroll Gardens in Brooklyn — for turning nearly any kind of grape into wine.

"I can still recall the grape lugs in the street," he says. "People would use whatever they could get, seedless or anything, because of the cost."

One of this grandmother's favored varieties, he says, was piedirosso — "red foot" in Italian — which was native to the region back in the old country, but she also used moscato.

Mr. Medolla can afford to be picky now. He makes one kind of wine and one kind only: merlot. "That's what we want to get really good at before we move on to other varieties," he says.

To do so, he's been working closely with Sam McCullough, vineyard manager at Lenz, who has his own vineyard in Aquebogue. There Mr. Medolla and his family hand-harvest their grapes and bring them back to Lenz, where they work with winemaker Eric Fry.



Denise and John Medolla. The Medollas' children, John and Anita, help with the harvest.

Photos courtesy of the Medolla family

"The three of us just seem to work well together," he says.

People are noticing. The Medolla's first release, a 100 percent merlot that spent two years in oak and 2 1/2 years in bottle before it was released, received a score of 88 from the Wine Spectator. At 500 cases per year, a select few will be able to taste it.

The most important thing about wine, says Mr. Medolla, is what you do when you're drinking it.

"It's the passion for family, food and friends," he says. "Our whole day here revolves around our dinner. It's all

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