

NEWS-REVIEW

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East End wines move up in the world

In the April issue of Robert Parker's influential publication *The Wine Advocate*, reviewer David Schildknecht definitively shattered the 90-point "glass ceiling" for Long Island wines. Historically, the *Advocate* has reserved its 90-plus point glory for high alcohol fruit bombs from hotter regions. But Schildknecht took a new, open-minded look at wines from the East End and awarded 23 wines 90 or more points, while 41 wines scored 88 or higher. (Those high 80s are satisfying, but only the 90s affect the market.) The highest scores over 90 went to wines from Channing Daughters, the Grapes of Roth, Lenz and Paumanok, with The Old Field, Roanoke, Schneider and Shinn only a point or two behind.

Schildknecht lauded Long Island wines' "delicious distinctiveness," noting their "invigorating freshness," "aromatic intensity," "blazingly bright citricity," "formidable concentration and ripeness yet exhilarating sheer refreshment and an uncanny sense of lift."

Just what I've been saying for the past 30 years.

Bedell Cellars broke through a similar 90-point barrier in *The Wine Spectator* for its "Musée" blend. This Cutchogue-based winery re-

warded its chief operating officer Trent Preszler with a promotion to chief executive officer. Preszler, a whirlwind of energy and a wonderkind of achievement, grew up in South Dakota, where his father and uncle raised cattle on 10,000 acres of prairie with no employees. Preszler learned, "If you wanted to be a cattle rancher, you had to be a cattle rancher."

This self-sufficiency motivated him to singular success in the one-room school he attended on the Sioux reservation there. With one teacher for all ages, K-12, Preszler had to educate himself. Sustained by numerous scholarships and awards, he fast-forwarded through college at Iowa State (graduating Phi Beta Kappa) and on to the University of Edinburgh (U.K.) and Cornell University, becoming an expert in biodiversity and agricultural economics. That led to an internship in the White House and work experience at the National Institutes of Health.

Preszler became interested in wine while pursuing a master's degree at Cornell. When his adviser suggested he write a thesis on the marketing of New York wines, he thought, "Maybe wine is a good way to combine my interests in agriculture, economics and the liberal arts. It is the only consumer prod-

uct that is both agricultural and a luxury good, and it takes a high level of knowledge and sophistication to sell it. I always want to know as much about something as I possibly can; I didn't want to be just the money guy or the management guy. I want to have an understanding of wine making, too. It's not enough to be involved superficially. I don't know what I would do if I had only one thing to work on."

In 2003, Preszler circulated his thesis to several wineries, including Bedell, where it caught the eye of Michael Lynne, an entertainment industry executive and contemporary

and wine collector who had bought Bedell from its founder, Kip Bedell, in 2000. Impressed, Lynne hired Preszler as national brand manager. By 2005, Preszler was COO, one of the wine industry's youngest executives. Under his direction, the homey old winery barn and farmhouse were expanded and remodeled; a new winery with gravity-fed winemaking features and ranks of French oak barrels was added; and the vineyards grew to 100 acres in Cutchogue and Peconic, earning a place on *Wine Business Monthly's* list of the world's "Top 10 Hottest Small Brands."

Preszler also orchestrated the design and launch of Bedell's new artist series of blended wines called Taste, Gallery and Musée. Each of these wines has a label designed by an East End artist.

"I want Bedell to have a point of view," Preszler says. "It may be slightly edgy for some people, but it is respectful to the North Fork's history and culture while being forward and inspirational."

These blended wines reflect a trend on Long Island to make unconventional varietal blends. Although most Long Island wineries still produce traditional varietal wines (like chardonnay, merlot and sauvignon blanc), several have stepped away from tradition to make more fruit-forward blends.

Channing Daughters' Sylvanus, for example, is a blend of muscat, pinot

grigio and pinot bianco; Martha Clara's "Five-O" white combines pinot grigio, sauvignon blanc, chardonnay, riesling, gewurtztraminer, semillion and vignonier. A variation on a theme, Clovis Point's chardonnay (while not technically a "blend" since it contains 99 percent chardonnay) accentuates the fruit component with a subtle, but distinctive, 1 percent of gewurtztraminer.

The move at Bedell from varietal to blended wines stemmed from a desire to make more complex wines; it also allows the winery's production team to be more flexible and responsive to the market. Preszler believes in "intentional" management: know-

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Trent Preszler, Bedell Cellars

ing what the consumers want, before producing it. He says, "I want total control of every bottle, knowing who all our customers are, catering to dedicated, long-term customers."

Preszler has seen "a real shift in attitudes toward Long Island

wines in the last one or two years. We've gone from being slightly disregarded to being embraced and celebrated in certain audiences."

Preszler's job now is to parlay that enthusiasm into success in the Manhattan market. He says, "The world has shifted away from high alcohol wines now. It's cool to be local. But New York [City] doesn't favor the local because it's globalized, and most people in New York aren't from New York. New York is the center of the universe for fashion, business and finance; it's constantly obsessive about what's new, hot and cool. You have to reinvent yourself every year."

This South Dakota boy knows all about reinvention. He continues to challenge himself, writing a doctorate thesis ("Effects of Grapevine Cropload on Flavor Chemistry and Economic Sustainability") at Cornell while guiding Bedell into the future.

Preszler says, "I have made a commitment for the long haul, for both Bedell and Long Island wines. It's all about quality, a special place with a unique point of view — like an astronaut on the moon."

Ms. Hargrave was a founder of the Long Island wine industry in 1973. She is currently a freelance writer and consultant.

THE OENO FILES



LOUISA HARGRAVE