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Interview with Lenn Thompson, Wine Columnist, Suffolk Times, & Founder of The Cork Report

NYWGF: When was the moment you fell in love with wine/wine industry?

LT: I first got into wine during graduate school in Pittsburgh, PA – mostly because I figured it was time to move beyond my beer-drinking, fraternity days and be at least a bit more of an adult (wow that sounds so stupid, doesn't it?). I was drinking mostly cheap, mostly Australian chardonnay and shiraz at the time. I remember Blue Marlin being a brand I liked. I wonder if that's still around.

Anyway, it wasn't until I took a job on Long Island that I fell in love with wine and the local wine industry. I had never visited a winery before moving here and my arrival was well timed from a wine perspective. I got here in 2000 and started really getting into the wineries here in 2001 and 2002 – those are all good vintages here.

NYWGF: What's your best experience/event since you've been part of the industry?

LT: It's impossible to pare it down to just one. I've had so many amazing experiences with grape growers and winemakers over the years. Spending a harvest season morning with vineyard manager Richie Pisacano at Wolffer Estate, visiting different sites and really learning about mesoclimates for the first time is a highlight. Getting to spend time with Sam Argetsinger in his eponymous vineyard on Seneca Lake was a near-spiritual experience. I've picked grapes both on Long Island and in the Finger Lakes, which is a great reminder of how much hard work goes into any bottle of wine. A lot of people don't realize that. I got to taste a 1969 Dr. Konstantin Frank Riesling once – to taste a bit of Finger Lakes history like that is something I'll never forget. So many great experiences with so many great people.

NYWGF: What's the one wine you can't live without?

LT: This changes from season to season – or even day to day depending on who I'm with, what I'm eating and where I'm spending my time – but the last case of wine I bought to make sure that I had several bottles on hand was Forge Cellars 2017 Riesling Classique. It might be my favorite New York white wine ever and it's a wine that is surprisingly versatile (even for a Riesling) with food and appeals both to Riesling lovers and those who say they don't like Riesling.

NYWGF: What do you think is going to be the next big wine trend?

LT: I'm not much of a prognosticator, but I'd love to see more New York wineries stop chasing trends in general. Don't make rosés unless you can make it delicious. Don't make orange wine just to have one. Pét-Nat isn't something that every winery needs to make. Figure out what you can do well and do that. Great wine is eternal. Trends come and go.

NYWGF: What do you think makes New York wines special and/or distinct?

LT: Diversity is what rules New York wine. A lot of people both in and out of the state might think of Riesling first because the Finger Lakes have done such a great job marketing themselves compared to other regions, but there is great wine being made from dozens of grapes with people experimenting with new stuff all the time. We're lucky to be New York wine lovers at this point in its history – there is more great wine (and less awful wine) than ever before.