

Success With Pinot Noir

By HOWARD G. GOLDBERG

Conventional wisdom, which questions whether Long Island is pinot noir country, hasn't daunted Russell McCall.

As a small wine distributor in Atlanta, Mr. McCall, a pinot lover, often visited Burgundy, the grape's home base. In 1996, when he went into farming in Cutchogue, he asked the Southold grower Stephen Mudd to visit Oregon, where pinot flourishes, to learn what pinot clones might succeed on the North Fork.

Mr. Mudd planted 11 acres with four clones and 10 acres of merlot on Mr. McCall's 108-acre Peconic Bay farm. The grapes were sold to East End vintners until 2007, when Mr. McCall started making his own wine.

"I knew the experiment could be a disaster, but I wanted to try something others stayed away from," Mr. McCall said in an e-mail.

If his regular and reserve pinots made from the splendid 2007 vintage are indicators, he's sitting pretty. The basic version (\$24) is light, graceful and redolent of cherries. The sweet-scented reserve (\$45) needs a year's evolution to more fully display its promising complexity.

Both were made at Millbrook, the Hudson Valley's leading winery. It is owned by John and Kathe Dyson, the proprietors of Williams Selyem, a great pinot noir winery in the Russian River Valley in California.

The plush 2007 merlot (\$24) is lovely. It is grapey and almost sweet, with a hint of tobacco. Ben's Blend, a Bordeaux-style red (\$45), is a harmonious assemblage of McCall merlot plus cabernet franc, petit verdot and cabernet sauvignon bought from local growers. It is named for Ben Sisson, Mr. McCall's second vineyard manager, who died last year at 49. Gilles Martin made them at the Premium Wine Group in Mattituck.

The McCall tasting room, at 22600 Main Road (Route 25), Cutchogue, (404) 274-2809, is open from 12:30 to 5:30 p.m., Thursday through Sunday, until late November.

McCall
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