

LONG ISLAND VINES

Why the Line Is Often Long

If you drive east on Route 25 in Peconic on a weekend and hope to turn left into the parking lot at Pindar, Long Island's biggest winery, be endlessly patient. One new white and four new reds are waiting in the tasting room.

After the supertight cork is wrested from Pindar's 2002 Special Reserve chardonnay (\$19) and the pale-gold wine is poured, a buttery aroma oozes from the glass. As this simple, everyday wine is sipped, butterscotch and oak flavors come through.

The 2001 syrah (\$15) is a delight, the equal of many made from Columbia River Valley grapes that I tasted two weeks ago in Washington State. Pindar's deeply aromatic syrah, reminiscent of raspberry jam, is juicy and mouth-filling. Its long finish has a pleasing hint of smoky bacon.

Pindar's 2001 merlot (\$15) would be a no less supple alternative. Expect an opulent bouquet with traces of vanilla from the oak, a meaty but lithe body with fine tannins, and black currant and cocoa flavors.

Pindar's big number, Mythology, is made only from outstanding vintages. The 2000 edition of this Bordeaux-type blend (\$30) is a winner. I would not be surprised next December to consider it one of the top Long Island reds tasted during 2005.

It is difficult to put together 31 percent cabernet sauvignon, 24 percent merlot, 22 percent cabernet franc, 12 percent malbec and 11 percent petit verdot grapes and come up with a red with fine tannins that is so light it almost floats.

Mythology is fully drinkable now; no cellaring is necessary, though it might bring out further subtleties. This elegant, vivacious wine brings to mind a compote of summer berries. Its long finish contains the pleasing vein of pencil-like flavor common in good Bordeaux.

Nonvintage Pythagoras is in effect a second-label Mythology. Though the grapes are the same, the barrels of wine they yielded did not make the cut for what the French call the grand vin. A family similarity is obvious in this almost sweet red. Light and drinkable now, it is redolent of prunes and cherries, and at \$13 it's a bargain.

Newcomers to Long Island may be puzzled by the portfolio's classical Greek names. Pindar's owner is Dr. Herodotus Damianos. That should clear up any bafflement.

— HOWARD G. GOLDBERG

