

# The New York Times

PUBLISHED SEPTEMBER 18, 2005

The New York Times  
**Long Island**

Section **14**

## LONG ISLAND VINES At 25, Pindar Continues to Grow

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SIZE is not everything at Pindar, Long Island's biggest winery, but on its 25th anniversary, being celebrated this Sunday, it seems that way. Dr. Herodotus (Dan) Damianos, the producer, owns 616 acres, 430 of them under vines. He grows 15 types of grapes. This year, he planted 10 more acres, all riesling, and he says he intends to plant another 10 acres a year for the next four years. He also buys grapes and juice from other East End producers and from the Finger Lakes, and he sells some of his grapes to other producers. Pindar's production capacity exceeds 100,000 cases a year; in 2004, it bottled 80,000. The winery receives at least 200,000 visitors a year, Dr. Damianos said. His prices range from light to heavy wallets, so his spacious tasting room can provide one-stop shopping for many. Pindar has built a new winery that, by next year, will fully replace the sprawling current structure, facing Main Road (Route 25) in Peconic. Pindar also has a satellite retail store in Port Jefferson. Supporters praise many Pindar wines and maintain that

the flow of visitors benefits the North Fork's boutique wineries. Detractors say that production on Pindar's scale inevitably diminishes quality. The winery regularly acquires medals in the rigorously judged annual New York wine contest. Last month, its 2001 cabernet port (\$26.99) won a gold medal, and its 2004 Johannisberg riesling (\$14.99), 2001 merlot reserve (\$18.99), nonvintage Bordeaux-style blend called Pythagoras (\$12.99) and 2001 syrah (\$14.99) all won silver medals. A tasting of seven Pindar wines found them favorable across the board. All were flawless and inviting. The 2004 viognier (\$14.99) offered a floral, honeyed scent. It is dry, fairly simple, and fruity in a subdued way, with peach notes - a welcome aperitif white. The 2004 Johannisberg riesling, a small off-dry white, is charming and light as a breeze. The requisite aromas and flavors of peaches and apricots are present. Fresh, bouncy and first rate for everyday use, the 2004 chardonnay (\$9.99) is dry, soft, buttery and inflected with melon and pineapple flavors. It is better than many competitors in its genre,

whether from the East End or elsewhere. Pindar's reds come on especially strong. The regular 2001 merlot (\$14.99), densely fruity and a little smoky, is notably savory. Consumers who occasionally tire of Long Island merlots - the growers' strongest suit - will perk up with this one. The 2001 cabernet sauvignon (\$14.99), ripe and supple, is particularly grapey; its aroma and flavor of black currant (cassis) stand out. Pythagoras is delicious. It is nearly a sweet dessert red, especially with a vein of chocolate-like flavor. Expect a classy, complex, seductive and gutsy wine. Flooded with a crushed-berry bouquet and flavor, the voluptuous 2001 cabernet franc (a terrific bargain at \$14.99) is a knockout: one of the juiciest East End reds I've drunk this year. The sweet wood in the background almost makes it a confection.

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September 18, 2005*