

Meet Pascaline Lepeltier, the Local Wine Guru who will Host a NY Sub-Terroir Tasting Next Week

September 12, 2011 | By Cheryl Chan



Editor's Note: Besides our own events (the next being [Edible Escape](#) on October 19) there's a few we look forward to each year, mainly because of the fine organizations they support. One of those is Just Food's [Let Us Eat Local](#) on September 21. Not only one of the better walk-around tastings in town, featuring local produce and proteins from all the places that know exactly what best to do with it, it supports an organization that is at the forefront in getting better, fresher, more nutritious food to more of the city.

In honor of the organization, we're profiling a few of the folks who work for or with Just Food on so many of their very cool projects. The [first](#) was on Jane Hodge, the Director of their new Farm School NYC program. The second is on a very different subject-matter expert: a sommelier. This year Let Us Eat Local will feature its first [VIP Experience wine tasting](#) session that aims to introduce attendees to the different sub-regions of wines in New York State. The guide is [Pascaline Lepeltier](#), a French-born sommelier working at [Rouge Tomate](#), a seasonally focused restaurant.

With a Star Chefs Rising Star NYC Award under her belt, Lepeltier will curate a unique tasting and food pairing session with vintage wines from

Long Island and upstate vineyards. Year round, the Rouge Tomato wine list showcases 14 varieties of local wines, from sparklings from New York State, to whites, reds and desert wines. And the selection, says Lepeltier, who is also an expert in organic wines, “keeps growing.”

Q. Why hold a wine tasting at Let Us Eat Local?

The idea is to work with wineries and show the huge possibility of New York wines. I wanted to show four major areas; Long Island, the Finger Lakes, Hudson Valley and Brooklyn ... because I think great wines are produced in all these sub-regions. All of them deserve recognition for their dynamism.

As a sommelier and a wine buyer in New York, I want to show that New York wines come not only from one place. I work in a restaurant that does local food, and I have certain inspirations from all these areas. I think variety is what’s great about New York wines, and I don’t think everybody knows that many styles of wines exist.

There will also be a library of wines, to show that New York wines can age. Thus, that New York state is a serious wine region with a huge potential. The idea is to work with wineries that have been around for years, and to ask them to show some wines with a bit of developments, for consumers to realize that there is also potential for aging, and not just wine to sip on the beach or something like that. You can have local wines that are 6 years old to 10 years old that are very beautiful.

This will showcase wineries with a different history. For example, the pioneer of the rebirth of Finger Lakes wines like Lenz and Bedell in Long Island; and younger wineries with people who came to the wines with passion and enthusiasm like Shinn, Channing Daughters (Long Island) or Ravines (Lakes) or Red Hook winery and Abe Schoener (Brooklyn), people that brought a new vision to the wines.

A lot of people believe that it’s not possible here, but it is possible. The best and oldest wineries like Lenz and Bedell in Long Island have been making wine since 40 years ago. When you visit the vineyards, everything is covered crops and dry farmed. There is a real work to create this type of

environment, for growing in this manner. Shinn Estate Winery, the first organic winery, is also going to be at this tasting.

I think it's wonderful to see all these people so committed to making such high quality wine. The most green conscious people are what I want to showcase too.

Why work with Just Food?

Many [of the wines I work with] tend to be produced from organic farming and natural vinification, with respect of the soil, work of the soil, and a lower use of any type of outside additives.

I want to showcase some wineries that try to work their vineyard and make their wines with the utmost respect for their soil, their terroir and their vintage—thus wines with minimal intervention.

Do you think organic wines taste different?

For me, there is the idea behind that by being organic, or moving towards organic, you work your soil. In the end you have the ability to choose not to use any chemical fertilizers or pesticide because your vineyard is going to be much more balanced. The grapes will be much more earthy. You don't need to add additives. Doing a wine with just grapes in the end, you are going to be able to have a wine with a lot of minerality, and a true expression of the place and the wine maker. In the end what I see is a wine.

On the other hand, you have more conventional wines that tend to be more of a type of product, where you try to get the same taste every year and to produce a good quality every year. I think that is great too, but as soon as you want to stop, and think about a region, a climate, and a style, you'll realize that you can't go on like this. That you are trying to do the same thing all the time, and that it not represent where the wine is from. This is what I believe makes organic wines extremely interesting, because you have another approach of what you are going to do.

What do you think defines the taste of wines produced in New York?

What's amazing with New York is that it's very tough to grow grapes organically here, because of the climate and the pressure of the rain. It's much more difficult to grown organic here than in California, for example. But there is a consciousness in New York about the quality of the farm even though it will maybe take a longer time to grow, or that it's nonsense for wine makers not to spray a product to save their crops. Of course you are going to need to do it to make a living.

However, I think that there is a movement in food and wine that is starting in New York. When you see where New York is coming from in terms of wine making, from what was made 80 years ago with indigenous grapes and was a huge massive industry with no quality focus and a mass product, to where New York is now, the improvement is insane. It's like wow, a new generation, in such a short amount of time.

Look for Pascaline Lepeltier's VIP New York wine experience at Just Food's [Let Us Eat Local](#) on Sept. 21.