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Long Island

LONG ISLAND VINES

Young Blends of Long Island

By HOWARD G. GOLDBERG

DRY blends, red and white, are a significant part of the East End's portfolio of wines.

The latest editions of two white blends from Channing Daughters, in Bridgehampton, the 2005 Sylvanus and 2005 Vino Bianco, are especially complex. Both are inspired by blends of Friuli, in northeastern Italy, whose regional cuisine requires quicksilver whites.

Both wines need time to unfurl. In their current youthful state, which is dominated by a fresh, appetite-quickenning acidity, they are as versatile as whites can be for fish and shellfish.

James Christopher Tracy, Channing Daughters' winemaker, aims for excellence with his exceptionally ambitious Vino Bianco (\$29). It consists of 22 percent sauvignon blanc, 26 percent early ripening Dijon-clone chardonnay, 18 percent musqué-clone chardonnay, 16 percent pinot grigio (pinot gris) and 18 percent tocai Friulano.

As every cook knows, the more ingredients, the riskier the recipe. As usual, Mr. Tracy, a chef and a perfectionist, succeeds; the blend is seamless. Vino Bianco's swirl of flavors comes across best when

the wine is well chilled. Its aroma is heightened by use of the spicy musqué clone of chardonnay. The grapefruity finish on this light-bodied sipping wine invites a second glass.

While Vino Bianco contains grapes from a number of vineyards, fermented separately and then blended, Sylvanus is a so-called field blend: the grapes were grown, harvested, pressed and vinified together. Sylvanus (\$24) consists of 43 percent muscat Ottonel, 44 percent pinot grigio and 13 percent pinot bianco (pinot blanc). Tangy, virtually a citric fruit salad in a glass, it cries out for shellfish.

As for reds, the Long Island Merlot Alliance has released its first collective wine, the 2004 Merliance. A blend of merlots by Pellegrini, Raphael, Sherwood House, Shinn and Wölffer, it costs \$35 at each winery.

The alliance seeks to promote the Island's merlot, which many consider the area's signature red, and to define a model for the wine. The 2004 is in a quiet, closed phase; it needs six more months' bottle aging to bloom.