

A Tour N

Up The Seneca Lake V

By Jenna Intersimmone

North

Wine Trail



Seneca Lake, the deepest of the New York Finger Lakes, holds the largest wine trail in the state

The waiter comes out uneasily, holding no menus or wine, like a messenger on a mission. "Yes sir, we do have Chianti," whispers Craig, a waiter at Stonecat Café, an acclaimed organic regional restaurant nestled in Hector, New York on Seneca Lake of the Finger Lakes. "We just don't put it on the menu, since we like to feature our local wines."

Stonecat Café has a good reason to focus on homegrown wines. They are located directly on the Seneca Lake Wine Trail, which holds 32 wineries close to the east and west sides of the deepest of the Finger Lakes.

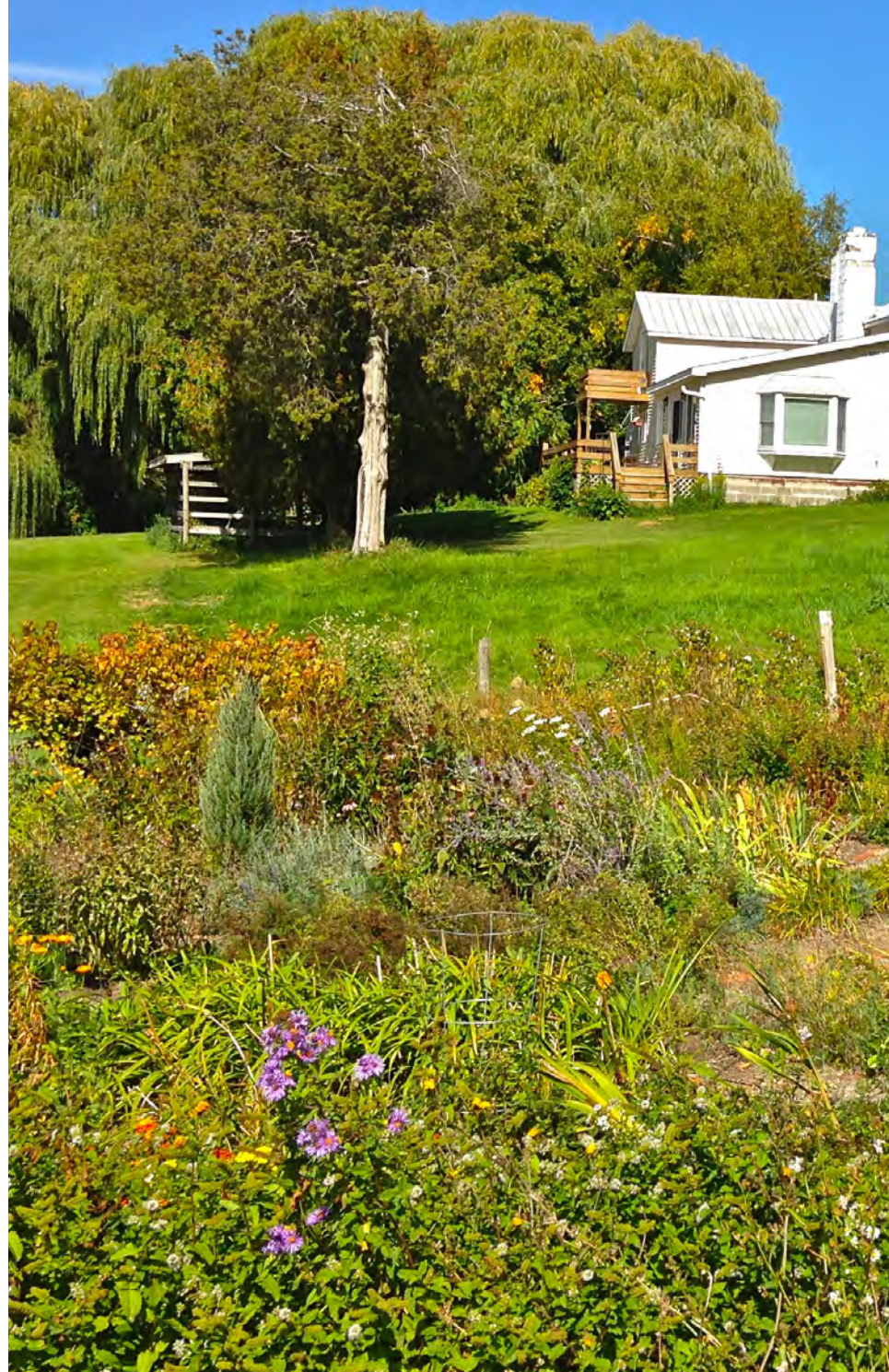
Unlike many other wine trails, the Seneca Lake Wine Trail, whose winemaking history dates back to 1866, sees itself as a community

of winemakers who come together at local eateries, such as the Stonecat Café, to bring the austere beauty of Seneca Lake to the glass. Each vineyard boasts its own personality, clientele, flavors and ideas to the lake's edge, making for a unique tourist destination that features events throughout the year.

However, I didn't think I was coming to Seneca Lake for the wine.

Following a recommendation from a friend, we ended up staying at Seneca Secrets, a community of rustic cabins located on the east side of the lake. After our road trip to the town of Burdett where the cabins are located, it quickly became obvious that the Seneca Lake Wine Trail had a steady grasp on the area. It also holds other attractions, such

The Stonecat Cafe of Seneca Lake brings together the fine wines of the region



Wagner Vineyards is one of the more expansive wineries with a full tour of its operations as well as an on-site brewery.



as the Windmill Farm & Craft Market and Watkins Glen State Park.

However, 32 wineries hold an impossible amount of tastings, even for the most ambitious of travelers. As a result, I took to the trail to get the best recommendations of wineries, asking local restaurant owners for their take on which wineries were the must-see. Although their answers were varied, they created a roadmap for me on my

journey north on the Seneca Lake Wine Trail.

Wagner Vineyards is a necessary stop for wine tourists, due to its sheer size at 250 acres and magnitude of vineyard attractions. Since it also houses a brewery, we were eager to stop there to sample some homemade beers as well. Also, unlike some nearby smaller wineries, Wagner offers a tour of its wine cellars and winemaking process. For \$4, I took

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Chateau Lafayette Reneau, the most photographed winery in the region, is another stately vineyard that has a stellar view of Seneca Lake. For \$3, one of the lighter tasting costs, we sampled six wines on its large outdoor patio. The winery is also home to an inn, built in 1911, which sits on the property's 140 acres of vineyards, ponds, woodlands and brick house. This winery is a fair choice for those looking for a more dignified winery outing.

Zugibe Vineyards, established on 2005, and working on 40 acres of land, is one of the newer members of the Seneca Lake Wine Trail. But Zugibe holds its own, due to its wines' innovation and complexity. For \$5, we sampled five dry and semi-dry wines, which are the vineyard's specialty. At this winery, we also enjoyed a view of Seneca Lake from the back porch of the estate.

Ventosa Vineyards, a friendlier and more casual winery, has one asset

that no other area wineries have - Tocai Friulano, an Italian grape found in the region, which is only grown at Ventosa. At this vineyard, we enjoyed a view of Seneca Lake, with a tasting for \$3. We also had lunch at the full restaurant on the premises, Café Toscan, which serves light Italian cuisine with vegetables from its own private garden.

The Seneca Lake Wine Trail has an expansive group of wineries which, luckily, can be visited throughout the year on organized tours, so that travelers can sample as many fine wines as possible. However, if you choose to go it alone, Wagner Vineyards, Hazlitt 1852 Vineyards, Chateau Lafayette Reneau, Zugibe Winery and Ventosa Vineyards are the best wineries along this age-old trail to enjoy a glass alongside picturesque Seneca Lake.

For more information, please visit www.senecalakewine.com



the comprehensive tour, sampled seven pre-chosen vineyard wines and enjoyed them outside on the lush grass, overlooking Seneca Lake in front of the vineyard's grape plants.

Hazlitt 1852 Vineyards, voted one of the top 25 tasting rooms in the United States by Wine Enthusiast Magazine, holds a much more quaint and casual operation than Wagner Vineyards and is more family-friendly. At Hazlitt, staff walked us through background

stories of their wines, such as that of the Red Cat and the 2012 Vidal Blanc Ice Wine, or "liquid candy." During our tasting of six wines for \$5, we also basked in the antique-barn appeal of the tasting room. Although there isn't as much grounds to enjoy as that of Wagner, since Hazlitt makes their wine in Naples, New York, there is a small party pavilion, The Oasis. This is located just outside as a casual beer and wine bar as well as light restaurant.

The Seneca Lake Wine Trail can trace its winemaking history back to 1866