

**Raphael****2002 First Label Merlot
(North Fork of Long Island)**

When Richard Olsen-Harbich, winemaker at Peconic's Raphael, started his winemaking career, it was in the Finger Lakes region of central New York. As you probably know, the Finger Lakes region is best suited - and best known — for its aromatic white wines, particularly Riesling. Much of the time, the classic red varieties of Bordeaux struggle to ripen in central New York. Some wineries make wines like Merlot and Cabernet Sauvignon anyway, but many of the better ones are made using fruit (or bulk wine) grown here on Long Island.

Anyway, Olsen-Harbich may have started his career dealing mostly with racy, minerally whites, but in his 27 years making wine on Long Island, he's more than adjusted to the climate and grapes here. In fact he doesn't even make Riesling or Gewurztraminer right now, though they have planted some Riesling in the back of the vineyard for the future.

Still, Raphael's focus is set squarely on red wines, particularly Merlot. They grow a lot of it, and make a lot of it too. Olsen-Harbich, who has seen more than 20 Long Island vintages, considers 2002 a tremendous vintage for Merlot and it shows in this new release, which was blended with 3 percent Malbec.

This wine is a dark, almost inky purple and extremely aromatic with blackberry and blueberry fruit aromas accented by leather and minty notes. Similar flavors carries over to the full, well-structured palate that has a lengthy, minerally-graphite finish. The tannins are ripe, but plenty apparent, bringing grip and pointing to terrific aging potential. For \$30, you'll be hard pressed to find a better Long Island Merlot.

Reviewed May 23, 2008 by [Lenn Thompson](#).

THE WINE

Winery: [Raphael](#)

Vintage: 2002

Wine: First Label Merlot

Appellation: [North Fork of Long Island](#)

Grapes: Merlot (95%), Cabernet Sauvignon (5%)

Price: \$30.00

THE REVIEWER**Lenn Thompson**

Lenn Thompson writes about New York wines for *Dan's Papers*, *Long Island Press*, *Long Island Wine Gazette*, *Edible East End* and *Hamptons.com*. Two words describe his taste in wine — *balance* and *nuance*.

Lenn prefers food-friendly, elegant wines to jammy, over-extracted fruit bombs and heavy-handed oak. When reviewing, Lenn tastes each wine three times — alone right after opening, with food, and again the next day — believing that 90-second reviews are unrealistic and not how the average person enjoys wine.