

## A WINEMAKER'S WONDERINGS

# DON'T COUNT YOUR CHICKENS

BY JAMES CHRISTOPHER TRACY

I try to avoid making judgments about the quality of a vintage until all the fruit is picked. Even then I would prefer to wait until the wine is actually in the bottle. But, it is hot. Hot enough to make everyone just a little bit crazy. June felt like July and July has felt like August. Everything seems at least two weeks ahead. So far this has been one hell of a growing season. People who usually struggle with their home gardens have found they have grown a green thumb.

For over a month from the ninth of June to the 10th of July we had no rain. This combination of dry and hot always gets people excited, and the questions and proclamations of a great vintage start to be bantered about. But for any wine region, especially a wine region with dramatic weather like Long Island, making any kind of statements about the vintage with at least six to eight weeks to go is a fool's game.

On Wednesday, July 21, I traveled into the city on a hot, muggy day and poured our wine at a local oyster and wine tasting with my colleagues Gary Madden of Lieb Cellars and Kareem Massoud of Paumanok at Union Square Wines. Everybody was in a great mood, slurping down bivalves and sipping sauvignon blanc and rosati. It was easy to forget about the severe weather to the north and east of the city. Reports of tornadoes in Connecticut and waterspouts in Mattituck came over the radio as I exited the Midtown Tunnel. I was in store for a stressful and beautiful ride home as I encountered heavy, sometimes blinding hail thundershowers mixed with an unbelievable lightning show illuminating the eastern Long Island sky. The next morning the reports of damage to vineyards on the North Fork started to trickle in; first Jamesport, then Comtesse Thérèse. Our vineyards on the South Fork were unscathed, and we were on our way to the North Fork

to look at the vines there. I called Kareem to see if Paumanok had escaped the hail. A solemn yet still positive voice on the other end said they had been hit. In fact, he told me they had been hit before he left for the city and he actually had a video of the damn hailstorm. "How the hell were you in such a good mood last night?" I asked. "Hey it's just one more thing in a long list of challenges and setbacks that we experience every year. It



could have been a lot better it could have been a lot worse. Whatta ya going to do?" he replied. (Ain't that the truth.)

Rich Olsen-Harbich posted on the New York Cork Report in response to the storms, "Hail has not been common on the North Fork—before this year and last many of the old farmers could not remember experiencing it. To show how weird the weather can be, Cutchogue and many points East did not even receive a drop of rain during yesterday's storm." Warmer water

temperatures can make some storms stronger, he noted, especially in the case of a hurricane. "Anything can happen that's for sure," he continued, "but with the exception of this isolated storm yesterday we've had nothing but picture perfect weather on the North Fork! The season is still trending two-plus weeks earlier than average." Again, all true, but now that we have said the word "hurricane," like uttering "Macbeth" in a theater, there is nothing I am counting on until the 2010 wines are in the bottle. 🍷

*James Christopher Tracy is the winemaker and partner at Channing Daughters Winery in Bridgehampton, as well as a student candidate for the Institute of Masters of Wine.*