

DRINK

Winemaker Richard Olsen-Harbich's new book explores the captivating world of North Fork viticulture

by [LILLY PARNELL](#) on NOVEMBER 6th, 2023

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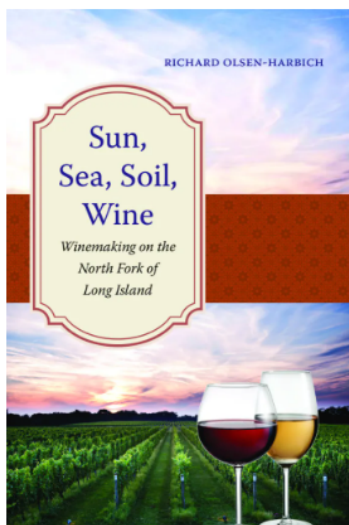
RICHARD OLSEN-HARBICH AT BEDELL CELLARS IN CUTCHOGUE, WHERE HE SERVES AS WINEMAKER. (COURTESY PHOTO)

Why is the North Fork the perfect place for winemaking?

In his debut book, "**Sun, Sea, Soil, Wine**," winemaker Richard Olsen-Harbich, of Bedell Cellars, sets out to answer this question, exploring the vast geological and ecological qualities and deep-rooted agricultural history that has led the North Fork to produce high-quality, award-winning wines.

"I found myself running into people who wondered why we were doing what we do here," explained Olsen-Harbich. "They'd ask, 'Why are we making wine here?' I thought we deserve an introspection and analysis for this region."

Unlike other books about the region, which usually discuss specific vineyards and winemakers, "**Sun, Sea, Soil, Wine**" takes a deep dive into the intricacies of the North Fork's unique climate, geography, and soils and how in turn produces high-quality unique wines unlike anything else in the country. Drawing on his expertise and passion for winemaking, Olsen-Harbich takes readers on a journey through the intricate world of crafting wines along with stories delving into the history of how the region grew to garner recognition as a premier wine destination.



Fifty years after the first Cabernet Sauvignon and Pinot Noir vines were planted, the region grew to become home to over 40 vineyards and wineries along Main Rd. and Sound Ave. and the North Fork is now one of the most concentrated viticultural hubs on the East Coast.

"[The book] is a love letter to the North Fork from me – that's how I think about it," said Olsen-Harbich. "There [are] so many beautiful things that are happening and that we have here and I wanted to get that information out. I didn't see it discussed or written about enough."

Olsen-Harbich grew up outside of New York City in a multi-generational home. From a young age, Olsen-Harbich knew he wanted to work in agriculture. While not a winemaker, his mother immigrated to the United States from the wine region of Germany and grew up working in vineyards alongside her parents giving Olsen-Harbich a glimpse into wine culture early on in life. His

paternal grandfather owned a speakeasy in New York City during prohibition.

Olsen-Harbich was one of the pioneers of winemaking on the East End of Long Island. After graduating from Cornell with a degree in viticulture, he found himself in Bridgehampton, managing the second vineyard to emerge out East. Eventually, he was drawn to the craft of making the wines.

"I guess you can say there's some alcohol that runs through my veins," he said. "I started out the way a lot of young winemakers do [with an] approach [that] replicat[ed] some techniques from regions and styles that they admire. No one's made more mistakes making wine in this region than I have. The key is not to repeat them."

The first 10 years of his career were spent on the South Fork before Olsen-Harbich made his way north. While he admits that in terms of agriculture, little has changed on the North Fork since his move in the late 1980s, he notes witnessing the culture of fine wine tie itself to the many farm-to-table restaurants popping up in these seaside bucolic towns.

"I've seen a slow evolution toward more and more winery tasting rooms in a place that was not a tourist region," added Olsen-Harbich. "Before the vineyards people didn't come out to the North Fork in the large numbers we see today. We've somewhat become discovered and I think for good reason. It's the whole experience now that people can celebrate."

Throughout his book, Olsen-Harbich explores why the North Fork is one of the most important wine-producing regions in the New World, praising the success of the industry as he intertwines his scientific reporting on the soil, geology, and botany with personal anecdotes about winemaking on the North Fork.

"This is the Goldilocks area as I mention in my book," said Olsen-Harbich. "All these factors are a real confluence of events that allowed us to grow European wine grapes outside of their original area – which in the mid-seventies was something no one thought we would successfully do."

"**Sun, Sea, Soil, Wine**" is available for pre-order [here](#). A sold-out book launch party will be hosted at Bedell Cellars on Thursday, Nov. 9, from 7 to 9 p.m. where Olsen-Harbich will offer personalized book signings and a Q&A regarding the book. Find more information about Bedell Cellars on their [website](#).



Lilly Parnell is a multi-media reporter who started at Times-Review Media Group in 2022. A graduate of Stony Brook University's School of Communications and Journalism, she specializes in telling authentic stories about food, drink and lifestyle.

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