



Cider in the Northeast: Tradition Through Innovation

By Mikhail Lipyanskiy on July 31, 2018

Orchard-based cider, both still and sparkling, can be stunningly complex, can age and develop, and can be an excellent pairing for a variety of foods. While it really is great on a warm summer day, it can also be deeply satisfying on a cold, dreary evening, paired with a rich stew. How do I know? I've done it myself.

I have also enjoyed cider with a tasting menu at one of the top NYC restaurants, [Agern](#), where they have [Eve's Cider](#) "Albee Hill" (a still, dry cider) on the menu; and it stood up to every course we enjoyed. In fact, that was the moment I realized that it was time to learn more about this beverage.

Why was this cider so good?

Now, we can talk about the apples, as well as tradition – using apples grown specifically for cider rather than for eating out of hand as they have done in England and France for centuries. These sharp, tannic apples are not really “tasty” in the traditional sense of the word, biting into them is likely to leave your mouth in a pucker. Many of these are smaller than the apples we are used to consuming, but with a more concentrated flavor, akin to grapes grown for wine versus table grapes. Not surprisingly, traditional cider in the northeast looks back to English cider, not only for the apples, but stylistically as well. On the one hand, there are the bright, crisp still ciders, austere and complex, recalling a traditional English cider and likely similar to the ones made in the colonies, as well as the use of honey to sweeten the cider, which harkens back to the Anglo-Saxon period.

However, northeast cider is not all about reviving traditions, there is innovation afoot too. Modern winemaking has made strides in the cellar, and the cider makers are following suit. Making “Champagne Method” cider is not only expensive and time-consuming, it is also



difficult. It requires a strictly hygienic environment and a lot of manual labor during disgorgement and dosage process. But the result is a beautiful, “wine-like” cider, with layers of yeasty notes mixing with the tropical and citrus fruit. The carbonation does not remind one of soda or beer; rather the bubbles are softer, adding a creamy texture to every sip.



Eve's Cidery – Van Etten, NY

Autumn Stoscheck and Ezra Sherman's cidery in Van Etten was the first one I visited. I tried their cider in New York City and was in love immediately – complex, lithe, bright... I went on their website and ordered a mixed case of the different ciders they make, from still and dry to sparkling and even to the sweet (ice cider). When the opportunity came to visit the Finger Lakes region, I emailed Autumn to set up an appointment.

Instead, I was invited to join a family lunch. I met the warmest, most humble and genuine people, both Autumn and Ezra (and, of course, their kids) were open, hospitable and in love not only with what they do but with the land itself. Autumn's working on making their own orchards fully organic and promoting bio-intensive agriculture in the region (check out her work with Forge Cellars on [Instagram](#)). Ezra is the man with the golden hands; his work on, and in, “the Barn” is honestly astonishing. That is what I taste in their cider – true appreciation for nature.



Ciders of Note:

2017 Albee Hill (still & dry) – I found this year’s version to be lightly floral, with tea and peach notes; the mid-palate more ripe with a core of white and yellow apple flesh, hints of sweet citrus and a firm, tannic finish with mineral and stone.

2017 Perry Pear (pear cider) – floral with white and yellow flowers, and sweet stone fruit on the nose, light and bright mid-palate, crisp – with mineral and acid – and finishing with a ripe pear and creamy touch.

2017 Autumn’s Gold (dry and sparkling) – broad, rich cider, with funky and yeasty notes – leaning toward brioche; tropical on the palate, with pineapple and dry mango; serious grip on the long, dry finish.

2017 Kingston Black (sparkling and dry) – this year’s version is sparkling and not still. I have a bottle of the ‘16 in my cellar and cannot wait to taste them side by side. The ‘17 showed a powerful, broad character, leaning toward dry fruits and savory, tart herbs. The palate was rich but with hints of tart melon rind and nutty, sour apples. Kingston Black produces some of the most complex ciders and this is a great example.

Essence (Ice Cider) – just a quick note, get it. It is not overly sweet, but rather rich, creamy and truly the essence of the apple. If you love sweet wines with a bite, this is a must try.

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