

## BEHIND THE BOTTLE

# VERJOOZ

*Juice that packs a punch*

BY AMELIA SAUTER

Living in Finger Lakes wine country has a few significant side effects, and we're not talking about the hangovers. Grape pies and grape seed oil are two treats you'll find around these here parts. You can also buy verjuice, or unripe grape juice, thanks to Tina and Eric Hazlitt of Sawmill Creek Vineyards and Finger Lakes Food Company, who have been bottling Verjooz since 2009. Amelia Sauter quizzed Tina Hazlitt on the culinary implications of a local Verjooz.

**Amelia Sauter:** What was your introduction to verjuice?

**Tina Hazlitt:** I read an article in Practical Winery and Vineyard magazine and thought, "Ooooo, this is exciting, and it's not being done in the Finger Lakes!" I ordered verjuices from all over the world, and Eric and I sat and tasted them with Deb and Dave Whiting from Red Newt Cellars, and they got as excited as I was.

**AS:** Tell me about the phrase on your bottles, "Lime of the Vine."

**TH:** Our tagline used to be "It's zippy, it's zappy, its zesty... it's Verjooz," but it doesn't tell you what Verjooz is or what to do with it. Lying awake in the middle of the night, the phrase "Lime of the Vine" came to me. We can't grow citrus here in the Finger Lakes, so it's a great way to think about it: A citrus-like ingredient that's local, sustainable and not shipped halfway around the world.

**AS:** So even though it's made with grapes, you use it like lime juice?

**TH:** Yes, in anything from a Gin and Tonic to a key lime pie. I make a shrimp and scallop ceviche with it and it's delicious. Since Verjooz is made from Cabernet Franc grapes, it'll give you that same nice depth of flavor when you simmer or deglaze with it. It finishes really smoothly, and doesn't detract from wine served



with a meal. And if you want to cook with wine but don't want alcohol, Verjooz is a great substitute.

**AS:** When do you pick the grapes for the Verjooz?

**TH:** In grape growing, with some varieties, you go through and thin while the grapes are still unripe. In the past, we would just drop that fruit on the ground. Now we use them to make Verjooz.

**AS:** How have people responded to trying a Finger Lakes verjuice?

**TH:** This summer I got a phone call from a woman in Texas. Her boss had been visiting the Watkins Glen Harbor Hotel where he had a mussel dish that included Verjooz. He got home and that's all he could think about. He put his secretary in charge of finding Verjooz and getting it shipped to him. Turns out he's the owner of the largest ranch in Texas.

**AS:** Where can I buy Verjooz?

**TH:** We sell more to restaurants than to individuals. Chefs understand what verjuice is, and they love it. Right now you can also find it for sale in a number of winery tasting rooms—Anthony Road, Fox Run, Lakewood, Frontenac Point, and Hazlitt 1852, among others—and it will be available for purchase on our website soon. Or you can ask your favorite tasting room to carry it.

**AS:** I hear you have some other plans that are centered around Verjooz.

**TH:** We're currently working with Brud Holland, who was the chef at Red Newt after we lost Deb Whiting. He's got some great ideas for products. We are considering bottling a ready-made lime-of-the-vine beverage.

**AS:** You are really passionate about Verjooz!

**TH:** No one has researched the health benefits of verjuice. Maybe, like wine, it's good for your system if you have a little every day. Maybe it's a miracle elixir, a keep-you-young juice. You never know!

607.546.6444, [verjooz.com](http://verjooz.com)

*Amelia Sauter is the co-owner of Felicia's Atomic Lounge in Ithaca. She writes for several regional publications and blogs at [drinkmywords.com](http://drinkmywords.com).*