

# Northeastern Flavor Uncorked

THE NEW WAVE OF CRAFT HARD CIDERS

BY ERICA DUECY



**D**escend from any ski area in the East—Jay Peak, Stowe, Hunter—and you’ll find yourself in apple territory. That’s where a hard cider renaissance is underway, led by dozens of small producers who farm their orchards to make artisanal ciders. The hills are virtually awash in cider these days, giving visitors a fresh way to taste the region’s bounty.

This new crop of craft ciders coincides with America’s renewed taste for the drink. A Congressional Report indicates that since 2007, sales of American-made ciders have more than tripled, making hard cider one of the fastest growing categories of alcoholic beverages.

But don’t mistake artisanal ciders like Farnum Hills, Eden Ice Cider, and Harvest Moon for the hard ciders you find in the cooler at the convenience store. Instead of a soda pop-like drink, the new breed of ciders is actually more like wine with its wide range of expressions, from Champagne-like sparkling ciders to semi-dry, still styles to rich, sweet-tart apple wines.

## CORE OF THE CRAFT

Cider making has been a part of European drinking culture for hundreds, if not thousands, of years. English ciders tend to be drier, with alcohol content of five to eight percent, where French ciders have lower alcohols (two to five percent) with some residual sweetness. Imbibers today may

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not realize it, but America also has a long-standing thirst for hard ciders that goes back to its first colonial settlements. The cider-making techniques used today in America’s craft cideries find their roots in the European traditions.

Andy Brennan, of Aaron Burr Cidery in Wurstboro, New York, thinks of his job as an “apple ambassador” rather than a cider maker, helping the fruit find its greatest expression. “Of course I want the cider to taste good, but I don’t want to tell it how to turn out,” Brennan says. “There’s a fine line between helping nature express itself and trusting nature to do that on its own. I lean heavily toward letting it go.”

These craft ciders are made using winemaking techniques. First, apples are harvested and pressed. To make a still, light-bodied cider, only one fermentation is required, then the cider can be aged in barrels or bottled. To make a sparkling cider using the Champagne method, the cider requires a second fermentation in the bottle to give it bubbles. Sparkling ciders like these, including Aaron Burr and Farnum Hill, are bottled in heavy, 750 ml Champagne bottles sealed with corks and wire cages.

For ice cider, the process is similar to making still wine, but it starts with frozen apples, which are pressed as they thaw, yielding a concentrated juice that undergoes a singular fermentation. These ciders are often bottled in smaller, 375 ml bottles.

### NEW REGIONAL FLAVORS

“Ciders are the truest reflection of Vermont terroir in a bottle,” says Eleanor Leger, who with her husband owns and makes cider at Eden Ice Cider, not far from Jay Peak, one of the East Coast’s best ski resorts. The

duo makes dessert wine-like ice ciders that celebrate heritage apple varieties (such as Roxbury Russet, Esopus Spitzenburg, and Northern Spy apples) by using winemaking techniques to allow the natural flavors of the apples to shine through.

In New York—the second largest producer of apples in the country—Harvest Moon’s Matthew Critz farms orchards that have been in operation since 1793. At 1,400 feet elevation, the orchards are not far from Gore Mountain in the Adirondacks. Critz describes his ciders as “a Northeast take on an English pub cider, with a long finish and good minerality.”

### ON THE MOUNTAIN TABLE

Like French and English ciders before them, artisanal American ciders pair exceedingly well with food. Sparkling ciders add a refreshing new dimension to après-ski drinks and snacks, and are equally at home starring on the dinner table alongside earthy main courses such as roasted chicken, or pork chops with roasted vegetables.

At Farnum Hill in New Hampshire’s White Mountains, proprietor Stephen Wood has developed his ciders with an eye toward food pairing. His ciders—both still and sparkling—tend to be drier and more acidic than the French style. “I’m fond of acids as a palate cleanser and for a brightness of flavor,” he says. These higher acid ciders make a brilliant foil for richer dishes such as seared pork belly, or butternut squash risotto.

With their bright flavors and delicious drinkability, these new American ciders add a fresh dimension of regional flavor to your slopeside gatherings, whether a casual family dinner or a celebratory feast with friends. **S**



Aaron Burr

Eden Ice Cider

Farnum Hill

## TASTING NOTES

### AARON BURR CIDERY HOMESTEAD APPLE, NEW YORK \$15, 750 ML BOTTLE

Complex aromas, with tart, earthy flavors—made from wild apples and native yeast—and a long, lingering finish. Delicious with aged gouda and cheddar, and cured meats.

### EDEN ICE CIDER HEIRLOOM BLEND, VERMONT \$28, 375 ML BOTTLE

Deep golden color; concentrated rich apple aromas; full bodied and viscous with a long finish. Magical paired with blue cheese or foie gras paté.

### FARNUM HILL EXTRA DRY SPARKLING CIDER, NEW HAMPSHIRE \$16, 750 ML BOTTLE

Quite tart, with fresh apple aromas and earthy notes. With fine bubbles, this is an excellent, sparkling substitute for Champagne. The cider’s light flavors would nicely complement butternut squash ravioli.

### FARNUM HILL FARMHOUSE CIDER, NEW HAMPSHIRE \$12, 750 ML BOTTLE

Gently sparkling, fresh apple flavor; palate-cleansing tartness, long finish. Great paired with a cheese plate for après-ski noshing.