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Roman Roth is One of "Wine's Most Inspiring People 2019"

"Are you serious?! This is amazing!" Roman exclaimed through crackled soundbites over the phone yesterday when we told him the news that he had been chosen as one of wine's most inspiring people by **The Wine Industry Advisor**, the de facto online network reporting on all things wine.

The news came while Roman is still over in Tokyo, tirelessly promoting and educating on Long Island wines. The moment felt serendipitous - Roman exemplifying the attributes that led to his award: his drive, his never-ending passion for the product he makes, and his commitment to constantly elevating our region despite all adversity.

We are so honored to work for and alongside such an incredible force and would like to extend our congratulations to Roman. We hope you have been able to enjoy his wines, ciders, spirits, and infectious personality just as much as we have the last 30 years

By [Editor](#) January 22, 2019

[Wine's Most Inspiring People 2019: Striving for Quality and Uniqueness](#)

By Paul Vigna

Wine's Most Inspiring People 2019



Roman Roth

It was early January and Roman Roth was on the phone talking about a probable break in his routine later that afternoon at Wolffer Estate Vineyard, his voice rising with enthusiasm. "Liverpool against Manchester," he said of the Premier League showdown. "I may have to take an hour off later today."

An hour off for soccer isn't always a spectator sport for Roth, who grew up in Rottweil, in southwest Germany. Participating in a sport he played as a child has been part therapy and part weight reducer during his 26 years building a brand at one of Long Island's iconic producers.

He said those on his winemaking team started playing a decade ago at lunch, setting up portable goals on one of the estate's numerous fields. They play a half hour, or maybe longer. "Depends if I'm on the losing side," he says, laughing. "Then we might play 10 minutes longer. But it's fun, gets me in good shape. The morale is fantastic. It's a nice break in the middle of the day."

Adds Richie Pisacano, a viticulturist extraordinaire who has worked alongside Roth for 22 years: "Roman is quite the soccer player, especially for his age. His team can be losing by a few goals with minutes remaining, and he will still run down a player half his age from across the field to block another potential goal."



Richie Pisacano and Roman Roth

That competitive fire was mentioned by many of his associates. It has driven Wolffer Estate to star status in a wine region that now occupies an international stage with Roth playing a leading role during that ascent. It has earned him, besides numerous accolades and critical acclaim, recognition as one of Wine's Most Inspiring People.

Says David Schildknecht, of *Vinous* and formerly *The Wine Advocate*, "The thing that impressed me about Roman from the beginning was his combination of earnestness, generosity, and modesty with a superb sense of self-criticism."

Roth's introduction to making beverages came early: His father, Remigius, was a winemaker, distiller, and wine merchant along with his mother, Rosa. So did his involvement in music: the Roth Family Singers featured his dad, brothers, brother-in-law, and

himself, and later he joined a boys' choir that criss-crossed Europe, at times competing with the Vienna Boys Choir.

"I love singing. It brought me friends wherever I went," he says.

There were many stops, beginning with apprenticeships at wineries in Germany, the United States (California), and Australia. Armed with his master degrees in winemaking, he took a temporary job at Wolffer Estate, one of maybe 12 wineries operating on the island. Or so he and wife, Duchy, thought.

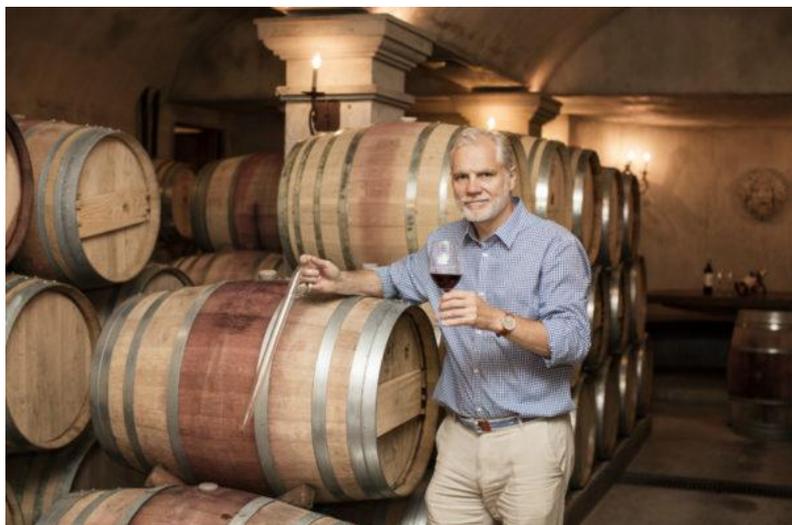
"We had met Christian [Wolffer] in Germany, and he told me, buy whatever you want to buy. I want to make the best wine possible. So it sounded promising," he recalls. "My wife was from Sydney, Australia, so we had plans to go there actually to live. We thought, well, most Australian wine got sold in America, so it's maybe useful to know what America likes. Make contacts. Meet the press. It will only help to find a better position in Australia one day, and, well, here we are, 27 harvests later."

Today, Wolffer Estate is celebrating 30 years of growth, best recognized for its rose, its verjus (made from the pressed juice of unripened grapes), its Merlot and other dry reds and whites, Roth's premium line of wines called *The Grapes of Roth*, and its brandy. The goal, Roth says, is to keep coming up with something else that nobody has. "These things make you sustainable-and bring something new to the winery that wasn't there."

Roman Roth with Gin still making Wolffer 'Pink' Gin of rosé.

And as one winery evolves, so does the region's industry, says Kareem Massoud, whose family runs Paumanok Vineyards on the island's North Fork. "Roman Roth has worked tirelessly and meticulously to produce fine wines and develop the Wolffer brand into what it is today. In doing so, he has helped put not just Wolffer but Long Island on the map."





Adds Lieb Cellars' Russell Hearn, himself immersed in Long Island's wine and food industry, "Roman's personality, commitment and energy helped to push forward the growing quality of wines from Long Island and market them in the world's toughest market."

Those in his circle admire many things.

General manager Max Rohn talks about Roth as supercharged, out preparing and cleaning before anybody else, and someone who's not afraid to take risks while showing a strong attention to detail.

Pisacano says what he noticed from the start of their long relationship was Roth's ability see the big picture and focus on the quality of the product. "He has not shown any signs in all our years together of settling for anything short of strengthening, growing, and perfecting the brand and his art of winemaking."

As for longtime friend David Loewenberg, one of the most celebrated restaurateurs in the Hamptons, he

acknowledges the respect and admiration that he has for all that Roth has accomplished, but on a more personal note says simply that he's fun to hang out with.

Perhaps summing up both sides the best is former assistant Vinny Aliperti, working now in the Fingers Lakes overseeing the winemaking at Atwater Estate and of his own label, Billsboro Winery. While Roth was strict and demanded Aliperti's full effort and attention, he says there was time for work and play. "While most of the time it was all business in the cellar, there were plenty of lighter moments when Roman cracked a joke, poked fun, or just broke out into song."

As for Roth, the years have been marked by a variety of milestones, beginning with the expansion of then Sagpond Vineyard into Wolffer Estate, sprawled over 50 acres on Long Island's South Fork. Then came the development of his own wines, The Grapes of Roth, released for the first time in 2006 and using grapes that are hand-picked and hand-sorted. His 2002 Merlot earned 92 points from the aforementioned Schildknecht, at that time reportedly the highest rating given to a New York wine.

"The wines struck me as epitomizing the combination of fruit ripeness with modest weight, firm frame, and a wealth of savory [i.e. herbal, animal and medicinal] nuances that can render Long Island reds distinctive," Schildknecht says. "They also illustrate Merlot's predilection in Long Island for delivering greater richness but at the same time more structure than does Cabernet Sauvignon in that corner of the wine world."

Wolffer Estate Owners

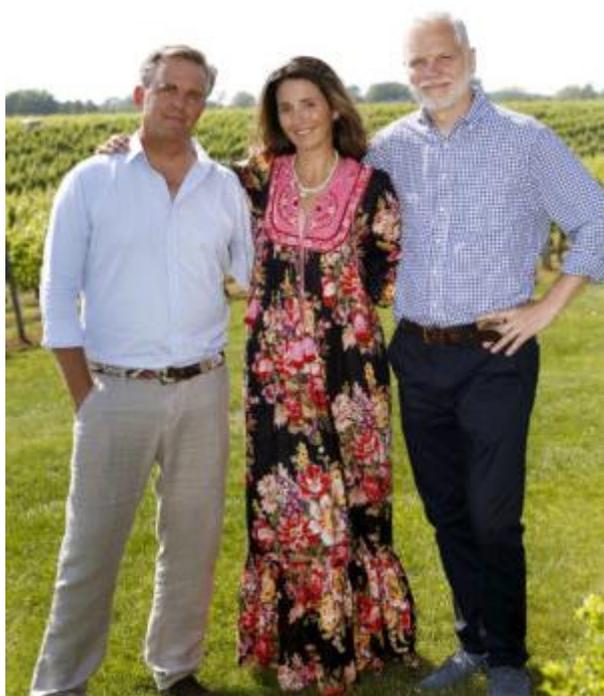
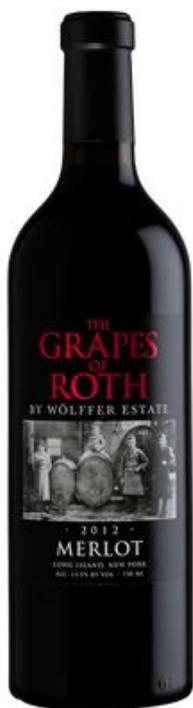
By 2007, the winery was producing Riesling, and in January 2013 Roth became a partner in the winery with Marc and Joey Wolffer. Roth, who lauded their late father, Christian, for both the freedom and the financial support he provided during those first two decades, says he's delighted with the new partnership. "We all love creating something unique, and it's not just the dollar amount that counts," he says. "It's that uniqueness that counts—that will always help us survive trends and waves."

Roth several times mentioned his willingness to keep pushing for higher quality and, as he called it, pushing "beyond what you would normally do and rally people for it."

Maybe nothing epitomizes that more than the work he put into developing the Long Island Merlot Alliance, which hatched the idea of Harvest East End, a fund-raising event that began in 2010 with 1,100 guests attending and Wine Spectator as a sponsor. Local foods, local wines, a grand tasting, plus a sit-down dinner, offsite limited-ticket 10-Mile Dinners at private homes, and several auctions.

Donnell Brown, who heads up the National Grape Research Alliance, was the founding event director of Harvest East End while also serving as executive director of the Merlot Alliance. She recalls those early days fondly. "It was a ton of work, but it amply demonstrated the incredible beauty and bounty of the region." It also showed Roth's belief in what Long Island can be. "Roman also has always been an advocate and ambassador for the Long Island wine region, and for the quality and caliber of wine he knows the region can produce and should be known for," she says. "He cares deeply about the AVA and its success."

All photos courtesy of Wolffer Estate





Art.	Jahr	Wein	Einh.	EUR/FI. netto	EUR/FI. brutto
		Pink GIN	0,375	29,41	35,00



Mark Squires (on Parker Wine Advocate): „...*One of Long Island's best wineries, with one of its best wine-makers (Roman Roth), this estate is located on the South Fork, with the Hamptons' vibe. That means you have to be really motivated to get here if you are on a wine tasting tour. The South Fork is pretty, glitzy and exciting, but also heavily congested. Meanwhile, virtually all the top wineries are on the more down-to-earth, calmer North Fork. Between the Forks is a drive of roughly an hour or a couple of ferry rides. Make this winery (and add Channing Daughters) a destination and it will be worth the effort. At Wölffer (and its sibling, the separately listed Grapes of Roth by Wölffer Estate, which is their highest scoring red this issue), there are some claims to fame. They have some old vines now. The big reds age beautifully. The sparklers and top whites age, too. The winery is also one of the few on Long Island that really takes Rosé very seriously. For my money, they are Long Island's best Rosé producer. And the prices overall are pretty fair, notwithstanding the majestic appearance of the winery's impressive estate in the glitzy playground of the rich and famous. It's hard to go wrong here. The new renovations to the tasting room make it even more attractive. You could easily spend the day tasting and enjoying the vibe.*

4779	2016	Wölffer Sauvignon Blanc	0,75	16,72	19,90
10987	2017	Wölffer Chardonnay	0,75	14,20	16,90
4847	2016	Wölffer Chardonnay Perle	0,75	22,61	26,90
2217	2016	Summer in a Bottle - White	0,75	19,92	23,70
7779	2015	Classic Red	0,75	15,88	18,90
10564	2014	Cabernet Franc	0,75	16,72	19,90
5884	2013	Merlot	0,75	15,88	18,90
2847	2014	Pinot Noir Landius	0,75	32,77	39,00
1856	2014	Fatalis Fatum	0,75	29,41	35,00



Parker (91): „... The 2014 Fatalis Fatum is a mostly equal blend of Cabernet Franc and Merlot, with dollops of Cabernet Sauvignon and Petit Verdot, aged for 20 months in 20% new French barriques. It comes in at 13.5% alcohol. Sterner and drier than the 2013 (and perhaps more typical), without its vivid flavors, this is still lovely. It is refined, sophisticated, precise and elegant. Not quite ready, it is still approachable, but you'd be better served giving this two or three years in the cellar. It should age well, perhaps 20 years or more, but let's take that in stages. There were 463 cases produced”

Art.	Jahr	Wein	Einh.	EUR/FI. netto	EUR/FI. brutto
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7960	2014	CAYA Cabernet Franc	0,75	27,73	33,00
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Parker (90): „... The 2014 Cabernet Franc Caya (from 1991 plantings) also has 17% Merlot. It was aged for 20 months in 30% new barriques and comes in at 13.5% alcohol. Full in the mouth, this retains its finesse and adds smooth texture and black fruit more than herbs. Sophisticated and refined, this will be approachable young and age pretty well. It is pretty tasty, too, and a perfect, understated food wine. There were 487 cases produced.“

8666	2013	Merlot Christian's Cuvée – 94+ Parker	0,75	66,39	79,00
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Parker (94+): „... The 2013 Christian's Cuvée Merlot was aged for 22 months in French oak (20% new). Sourced mostly from the winery's 1990 Merlot plantings (over 92%), this takes the beautiful performance of the Lambardo and doubles down. It adds a layer or two of depth and more intensity, but it remains beautifully balanced. Consistent with this issue's theme, it is rather seductive and leans more to expressive fruit than tannins, but it is still the most unevolved of the wines here this

