

Crystal City

Route 86 to Corning, N.Y.

> BY KATHERINE O'DAY

To get to the Finger Lakes, it is but a hop and a skip into the car and then no more than a puddle-jump onto Route 63, off Interstate 90, at Batavia. Before you really feel like you've left the Buffalo area, Geneseo appears along with the first signs for Letchworth State Park, and here a choice presents itself: Continue on Route 63, with the winding country roads and crumbling old farmhouses lending a gothic touch to the pastoral landscape, or grab the I-390 to the 86 East/17 South.

If you are in a hurry, as we were, taking the main route seems reasonably faster than to risk being caught behind a slow-moving tractor all the way down the 63. So we followed the common wisdom and arrived at our destination of Corning, New York, in a little over two and a half hours. Corning,

otherwise known as "The Crystal City," is home to the Corning Museum of Glass, a gorgeous example of 1950s progressive architecture that was designed by Wallace Harrison in 1951. At the time, this merging of art and industry was a landmark in American architecture, and it is just as stunning today. Corning also has the Rockwell Museum of Western Art, which boasts a nationally respected collection of American Western and Native American art. The Rockwell Museum was gearing up for an exhibit of work by Ansel Adams during our visit, which, unfortunately, we missed by a week. A joint day pass for both museums is for sale at either, and since they are within a 10-minute walk of each other—a walk which will also take you through Corning's quaint Historic District—that's a nice option.

Corning was the cradle of the glass mak-

ing industry in the US after the Civil War ended, and the museum was erected as a monument to the city's industrial history. It is now an international draw for tourists, and there were just as many foreign faces and languages on the day we visited as there are on your average warm-weather day at Niagara Falls. The museum complex itself looks thoroughly modern, with the factory and studio areas and high-rise corporate headquarters sheathed in dark, visually impenetrable glass, while the museum entrance, courtyard café, activity areas and glass bridge walkways are all light and color. After visiting a few of the exhibition rooms, which contain glass sculpture, artifacts, stained glass, etc., I surmised that the ominous dark glass exterior isn't mysterious at all; it serves the purpose of protecting the

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glasswork from the sun's damaging rays, which can make glass warp and color fade.

On the day of our visit these rays were as bright as they get around those parts, and this made it rather a chore to stay inside the museum, which recommends you allow at least four hours for your visit. So after a tour of the exhibits, which run approximately every hour, and a visit to the Steuben Glass Studio where you can make your own ornament, glass flower or sandblasted piece (there is an age limit on these activities, however—a restriction that greatly disappointed my daughter), we started to plan a way to spend the rest of the day outdoors. Nevertheless, we didn't leave the museum



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above: Keuka Lake, just outside Corning, is in the neighborhood of eight wineries.



left: The Heron Hill Winery looks like a fairy tale, a gingerbread house perched high over a gorgeous vista of Keuka Lake.

in a close bout with the surprisingly crisp and practically oakless Chardonnay. We bought a bottle of each.

After the informative session, things at Dr. Frank's started to break down a bit, but only for the greater good. I now recommend hitting a wine-tasting within an hour of business close, and for this reason: By the end of the

day, most of the employees and representatives at a given winery are bound to have sampled a bit of the product, as simple professionalism would dictate. In addition to the intimate and generous "wine flight," we were treated to good-natured antics from a quip-trading staff, who were combining their cleanup efforts to glue each and every empty bottle to the bottom of the cases they were replaced into—the better to frustrate the inventory taker, I presume. In any case, it was cause for much hilarity at the time...but maybe you had to be there.

We visited one more, the Heron Hill Winery, before returning to Corning. Located downhill from the famed Bully Hill Vineyards—too daunting for this trip, I decided—Heron Hill looks like a fairy tale, a gingerbread house perched high over a gorgeous vista of Keuka Lake, with the grape vines laid out all along the hillsides. We opted for a \$5 "premium tasting," which was quite nice—though, for what it's worth, Dr. Frank's was more formally run, despite the antics. More informative, more delicious and cheaper, too.

The greatest expense of the trip was the hotel accommodation, which would have been easily avoidable if we hadn't decided to stay so we could watch last Sunday's hockey game—a thankless endeavor, to say the least. However, we made up the lost time, if not the money, on the way back, when I fortuitously missed the exit to the 63 at Mt. Morris. We ended up taking Route 20A all the way back, and we made the return trip—door-to-door from Corning to the offices of Artvoice—in two hours, four minutes, all told. And honestly, I never went above 80.

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before a tempting and potentially costly visit to the Museum Gift Shop where, to my astonishment, the deep, bowl-shaped goblets so popular in wine bars were on sale at six for \$15. Of course, add some painted flowers or color swirls to these same glasses and the price increases exponentially. For real high rollers, there are dazzling glass works for sale by internationally renowned artists such as Nourot, Strini, Milon Townsend, and Bertil Vallien, among others. For my part, I escaped without buying anything, and the rest of the day's activities ranged from extremely cheap to completely free.

We decided to see the Keuka Lake wine trails, starting with Dr. Konstantine Frank's Vinifera Wine Cellars, which ranked Number One in the *Wine Report 2005* list of the "Top Ten Greatest Wine Producers" in the Atlantic Northeast. I suppose the idea behind free wine tastings is that the taster feels compelled, either through appreciation or obligation, to make hefty purchases from said winery after all the hospitality and free samples, a tactic that certainly worked at Dr. Frank's.

The woman conducting our tasting, Colleen, hailed originally from Northern Ireland but came to New York via Yorkshire. Her charming accent underscored her obvious wine knowledge, and she could've told me their wines contained a youth serum that made you live forever and I'd have believed her. In fact, she actually said something like this about their Fleur de Pinot Noir, which happens to be the richest in something called *resveratrol*, a natural, heart-helping compound found in the skins of red grapes that is especially concentrated in Finger Lakes grapes. Whatever the magical properties of the pinot, Dr. Frank's Sparkling Blanc de Blanc won out

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