



Pressed for Time

BY LAURIE LAMOUNTAIN

I don't fully trust MapQuest or Google Maps, which may have something to do with why they don't work for me, but that's grist for another article. Notorious for losing my way, however, I made sure to get directions from MapQuest for my visit to Norumbega Cidery in New Gloucester before I left the house one fall morning. When I ended up on a couple of remote and badly beaten up dirt roads, I pulled over to recheck them on my iPhone. Big mistake. Norumbega Cidery was not yet on Google Maps (rest assured, it is now) so it took me to the closest thing, Cider Mill Road, which wasn't all that close. I began to feel pressed for time.

When I alternatively asked for Woodman Road, off which Norumbega Cidery is located, it brought me there and I searched the road for a sign. And there it was, tacked high up on a tree at the entryway. A pair of horses and two pigs foraged in rolling pastures on either side of a long dirt driveway, along which three dogs eagerly escorted me. I had reached my destination. Hearing that I've "arrived" is perhaps the one thing I like about GPS.

Noah Fralich emerged from the side door of a shingled barn to welcome me. He invited me to sit at a blue picnic table in the sun to talk about his pretty-much-one-man venture in making cider with heirloom apples on a piece of land that is off the grid and that Google Maps had yet to map. Noah has an engagingly matter-of-fact way of talking about the cidery that began as a family affair in 2013. Now that it's found

its groove, he is able to handle just about all aspects of the business on his own.

With a graduate degree in sustainable agriculture that he earned in Oldenburg, Germany, and a desire to make use of it on the land where he grew up, Noah set out to learn everything he could about making cider. Through reading, research and a lot of experimentation, he learned the technique and craft of making ciders that are "dry, medium bodied, uncomplicated yet easy to drink."

Using heirloom varieties such as Esopus Spitzenburg, Ashmead's Kernel, Calville Blanc d'Hiver, Dabinett and several others, Noah prepares fall apples for Norumbega Cider in a grinder manufactured in Ger-

many and then loads them into stainless steel presses made in Slovenia. A bladder at the top of each press forces the fruit against the slotted drum and the juices drain into a collector. The juice is then transferred to fermentation casks for conditioning and racking throughout the winter. Racking is a process of transferring the contents of one cask to another to aid the clarification process and reduce fermentation for a more favorable flavor. The rest is up to time. Come spring, the cider is bottled or kegged. It's a pretty low tech process considering and, even off the grid, it's likely a lot easier for Noah than it was for his ancestors.

Cider has a long history. As the Norumbega Cidery Web site states, it is "America's original beverage, borne of the necessity to preserve the apple harvest. It was therefore first and foremost a utilitarian beverage." Before refrigeration it was one of the only options available. Of course, it probably didn't hurt that it made it a little easier to get through long Maine winters.

Following in their footsteps, Noah's focus is on traditional, New England-style cider that, compared to other American ciders, is not sweet. He points out that incorporating bittersweet varieties, such as Dabinett, Foxwhelp and Yarlington Mill, with crossover varieties, such as Esopus Spitzenburg and Golden Russet, imparts a drier, more full-bodied quality due to higher tannin levels in the former. In that way, it's not unlike wine.

The orchard at Norumbega Cidery is planted with more than 250 dwarf apple trees of various varieties, but most of the



trees are a few years away from maturity. In the meantime, an orchard in Vermont provides the heirloom apples and a local orchard supplies the crossover varieties. Noah's five-year plan is for most of the apples they use to come from their own orchard. With fourteen varieties to work with, he feels it will distinguish them as a high-quality, traditional New England cidery.

"I like to experiment, so every year I will play around with some flavor addition. So far I've played around with orange, ginger, hops. I'd also like to try something with pine needles. Or maybe do some wild fermentations or just all bittersweet apples for a really tannic, earthy cider? Having more of these cider varieties available will give me the opportunity for single varietals and smaller batch releases," says Noah. "It's a good way to build loyalty and interest and differentiate from larger cideries."

For now, Classic, Spice, Berry Medley and Honey (also known as Cyser) Ciders are bottled in 22-ounce servings with crown caps and retail for between \$8 and \$10 a bottle. All but the Honey, which is still, are bottle conditioned to carbonate. They can be found at around forty retail locations throughout Maine, as well as on permanent tap at Liquid Riot in Portland and Primo in Rockland. If you're lucky, you can also find them at select farmers markets.

I was lucky enough to leave Norumbega Cidery with a bottle of Classic and one of Honey. The Honey was the highlight of a picnic lunch enjoyed with friends on Pleasant Mountain one Sunday afternoon in November. The Classic was contentedly consumed at home that very evening, not long after hearing I'd "arrived" for the second time that day. ✨

Norumbega Cidery
380 Woodman Road
New Gloucester, Maine
norumbegacidery.com

THE NORTHWOOD

This will definitely be a sipper, but who says things are moving all that fast this time of year?!

- 3 Tbsp gold rum
- 2 Tbsp brandy
- 1½ Tbsp of Norumbega Classic Hard Cider
- 1 tsp Maine maple syrup
- ¾ tsp lemon juice
- ice cubes
- 2 thin apple slices

Combine everything but the apple slices in a tumbler and shake until well mixed. Strain into two coupe glasses garnished with apple slices on the rim. *Adapted from a recipe by David Moo for bonappetit.com.*

SNAKEBITE

This classic combination is simple and delicious. It works great with bitter ales and dark stouts so mix and match your favorite brews until you find something you like.

- 1 part Norumbega Classic or Spice Hard Cider
- 1 part Ale of your choosing

Pour. Drink. Enjoy! It's that simple.

FIREBALL CIDER COCKTAIL

This little concoction is a fiery jolt on a cold day. It has become all the rage in some of those bigger cities, but tastes just as good up here!

- 1 ½ oz Fireball Whiskey
- 12 oz Norumbega Classic or Spice Hard Cider

Toss in some apple slices for effect if you like! *Adapted from a recipe at fireballwhiskey.com.*

APPLE CIDER SANGRIA

This makes a great pitcher to put out on the table and will hopefully bring some of that Iberian swelter into these cold, dark days!

- 1 750 ml bottle pinot grigio (or white wine of your choosing)
- 1 22 oz bottle Norumbega Classic Hard Cider
- ½ c brandy
- 4 firm apples of your choosing
- 2 Tbsp grated fresh ginger

Cut apples into bite-sized cubes. Combine all ingredients and chill. For lower potency, cut cider with one cup club soda. *Adapted from a recipe at howsweeteats.com.*

BOURBON CIDER

This is one of those pairings that is hard to overlook, and for this time of year hard to pass up! Serve on ice or use a chilled bottle of cider.

- 4 oz Norumbega Spice Hard Cider
- 2 oz Bourbon of your choosing
- 1 Tbsp sugar
- Orange wedge
- Rosemary sprig

Run the orange peel around the rim of the glass. Add sugar and Bourbon to tumbler and shake. Pour mixture into glass and fill glass with cider. Serve with orange wedge and rosemary garnish. *Adapted from seththetableblog.com.*

