

2010... What a vintage

Long growing season, ideal weather put Ontario reds on their best behaviour



By Michael Pinkus

Talk To Ontario winemakers about 2010 and their eyes light up, a dreamy tone creeps into their voice and a big smile crosses their face – if every vintage could be like 2010, Ontario would be a fantastic place to make wine because of its consistency.

You may have heard of the amazing 2012 vintage, but that is premature hype – red wines can be as much as a couple of years in the making because they have to be aged. The wines you should be excited about are the 2010. Emails from owners, winemakers and everyone on the ground floor tell the story:

“It was a season where the rains, if they came at all, were mostly at night,” remembers Daniel Speck of Henry of Pelham. “So we had more sunny days in total, and we didn’t lose any growing days to rain. This scenario is not the every-year norm.”

“All of our 2010 reds have won major awards nationally and internationally,” says Krystina Roman of Rosewood Estates Winery.

“2010 was one of those near-perfect seasons,” recalls Michele Bosc, director of



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marketing for Château des Charmes. Her recollections of the season came while she was sitting on a beach in Florida, but they flooded back as if it were yesterday. “We had rain

when we needed it and dry heat when it mattered most. The season started early, by almost three weeks, and continued throughout the summer. ... September was gorgeous with warm days and cooler nights so the grapes didn’t bake.”

She concludes in the wistful tone of a cherished memory: “2010 was a vintage for the ages.”

Jeff Aubry of Coyote’s Run Estate Winery says: “All that heat and extra hang-time was perfect for driving ripeness, particularly in the Bordeaux reds.”

And by Bordeaux reds he means Cabernet Sauvignon, Cabernet Franc and Merlot, which are the grapes that go into many of the blends here in Ontario. But all reds benefited from this type of weather – the Bordeaux varieties, especially Cabernet Sauvignon, need more time to ripen properly.

“The summer heat helped our red

varieties, some of which struggle to reach full maturity in certain years,” says Richie Roberts, winemaker at Fielding Estate.

These wines are “as good, if not better than any that I’ve experienced from Niagara in my time.”

Derek Barnett of Lailey Vineyard couldn’t agree more, and talks about the finesse of the bottled wines as well as the future potential of these wines — “balanced wines with rich texture, bold flavours and great structure. Wines that are drinking well in their youth but have the stuffing to age well over the next five to seven years.

The word balance comes up again and again when speaking both about the 2010 wines and the growing season. “During the vintage, most of Niagara had the optimal balance of rain, heat and sun,” concludes Krystina Roman.

And Steve Byfield of Nyarai Cellars calls it, “Simply brilliant.”

So let’s stop talking about them and see if we can’t get some of these amazing wines into your cellar, to enjoy now or later. Please note: most wines are available directly from the winery either by visiting or home delivery.

• **Colaneri 2010 Insieme (\$34.95):**

Insieme is one of those dried-fruit (apassimento) style wines and this time it has riper fruit, which delivers a fuller-bodied wine. Aromas of smoky plum and chocolate seem simple enough, while on the palate there’s rich red fruit and spiced plum, all with a lovely coffee finish. It’s still young and should develop quite nicely over the next 10 years, adding layers of aromas and flavours.

• **Hinterbrook 2010 Cabernet Franc Reserve (\$40):** This wine ranks in my top 5 Cabernet Francs of 2010. The nose is delightfully red fruit dominated: raspberry, strawberry and red currant with a lovely red licorice bit of whimsy thrown in. The palate sticks to the Cabernet Franc playbook with black raspberry and tobacco, then tosses in strawberry, red currant and a pleasant hit of spice. However, the coup de gras here is the strawberry rolled in cocoa finish. Simply irresistible.

• **Henry of Pelham 2010 Reserve Baco Noir (\$24.95):** When you get a Baco done right, it’s hard to find fault with it. This one is made from grapes grown in the hot 2010 vintages and has the things people love about Baco and more: smoky-bacon, raspberry, blackberry all brought together with the right amount of spice. There’s even a jammy quality to it that will make Aussie wine fans stand up and take notice.

• **Rosewood Estates 2010 Merlot Reserve - Natural Fermentation (\$36):** This version is all about more (as compared to the standard version): more tannins, more fruit, more spice, and all without being over the top and chewy. The wine has a supple palate of blackberry and blueberry skin wrapped in white pepper and cinnamon spice with a long replay of tannins on the finish. This one needs a couple of years to mellow — buy and lie for two-plus years, then drink over the next eight-plus.

• **Coyote’s Run 2010 Red Paw Merlot (\$24.95):** This is a pretty wonderful Merlot from a very good vintage. The nose lures with a musky perfume — raspberry, black cherry and some blue fruits. The taste >>

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>> follows what the nose offers in the form of blackberry, blueberry and black cherry with a dry yet firm finish. It needs a few years to mellow and soften, but then you'll be drinking it for the next seven to nine years.

- **Fielding 2010 Cabernet-Syrah (\$24.95):** This blend of Cabernet Sauvignon and Syrah shows plenty of Syrah character on the nose with smoky, mocha and spice leading the charge with a hint of cassis thrown in. Palate-wise, Syrah makes its presence felt with meaty notes and then there's blackberry, currants and coffee on the back palate – all ending with touches of smoky-vanilla.

- **Lailey 2010 Cabernet Franc (\$25):** A lovely spiced black fruit nose and a palate that doles out cedary-pepper, cigarbox and tobacco-spice. This one still needs a little time for the fruit to emerge, but it's a fine drinking wine right now.

- **Château des Charmes 2010 Gamay Noir 'Droit' (\$16.95):** This wine harkens back to the 2007 version with all the robust dark fruit and spice, but there is also a juiciness to it (it's Gamay after all). Finishes with a lovely hit of black cherry and pepper. Keep in mind, there's no oak here so drink it over two to three years.

- **Hillebrand 2010 Showcase Red Shale Cabernet Franc (\$40):** Most definitely, this is the best Cabernet Franc I've tried (so far) from the 2010 vintage – it truly is the perfect expression of Niagara Franc, and reaffirms my belief in Cabernet Franc as Ontario's red grape. Smells of cigar box and smoked raspberry greet the nose, while on the palate, you'll find cigar-tobacco with smoky blackberry and raspberry. It sounds simple, but some of the best wines don't strive to over-achieve, they just are what they are. This one has such a beautiful elegance to it. Only 332 cases were produced. This wine won the best red wine in Canada award at the All Canadian Wine Championships and might be sold out – find a friend with a bottle and offer to share it with them. 

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