

OntarioWineReview

A bi-weekly newsletter dedicated to helping you discover Ontario's best Wines and Wineries. Enjoyment comes from understanding - Passion comes from understanding more.



OntarioWineReview Newsletter – 18
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OntarioWineReview: *WINERY REVIEW - Willow Springs*

Our winery reviews are done blindly – the wineries have no prior knowledge of our visit and are not made aware until just before we leave their premises that they have been “spot-checked” – this ensures that we get the same level of service that anybody walking off the street would get.

Imagine driving along the road ... a nice leisurely Sunday drive ... no particular destination in mind, when suddenly you pass by a cute little country house that has one of those black portable signs with neon pink and yellow letters proclaiming “VQA Baco Noir \$9.95” ... thank God for anti-lock brakes, cause that's pretty close to what happened to us when we visited Willow Springs in Stouffville. Now, to be honest with you, we were searching out this winery again because we had heard some very good things had happened to it since last we visited.

Willow Springs looks like any well-groomed country home – porch around the outside, well-kept lawn, beautiful flowers out front, plenty of room for parking (well maybe that's not so typical); they even have a neighbour who has a duck pond in his front yard.

A few years back, a friend and I made a brief stop at Willow Springs on our way to Newmarket, visiting some of the Toronto Area wineries along the way. It seemed like an interesting little winery that was well-situated in a beautiful country setting but their wines were nothing to write home about. Fast forward to the Summer of 2005, and wow, have things changed for this little winery! Not only are the wines very impressive and well-priced, they grow grapes right there on the property (check out the “wow factor”).

Exiting the car and walking along the cobblestone path from the parking lot, you could almost imagine that you were stopping by your grandma's house for milk and cookies – complete with white-pickets around the porch and a rocking chair by the front door. There is nothing about this house in the country that screams winery - until you walk through the door.

Straight ahead and to your left you'll see wine racks and other wine related products that are scattered throughout the store amongst the copious amounts of bottled wine. The high vaulted ceiling adds to the spaciousness and home-like atmosphere of the place, while the tasting bar stands waiting for you to your right.

“You won't buy, if you can't try,” Grant, the fellow standing behind the bar told us, “so everything is open.” ‘Everything’ included the limited edition Testa Meritage (named after the owners of the winery Julie and Mario Testa). As “Testa”-ment to this fabulous wine, this year's vintage is already sold out.

Most of Willow Springs' grapes still come from Niagara, but they are doing their best to become self-sufficient with Baco Noir, Chardonnay, Frontenac, Lucy Kuhlman and a few other grape varieties growing out back. Speaking of the back, near the back door you'll also find some great wine accompaniments like cheeses, crackers, dips and spices, along side coasters, napkins, glasses, corkscrews and other wine paraphernalia. If you like, you can go ahead and pick Grant's brain. He's very knowledgeable about the wines and the property, and he's a pleasure to speak to.

Other changes happening at Willow Springs revolve around their label which has undergone a complete overhaul for the better ... some bottles around the store still have the faux water colour print on them, which to

my mind, made them look rustic and unappealing. Now they are making the change over to an elegant black label with gold print and trim that attracts the eye with both its elegance and simplicity. Even more striking is the Testa label: gold with black print, reminiscent of a vintage street sign. There are also expansion plans in the works, so keep your eyes open for those changes too – they are sure to make Willow Springs an even more impressive destination to visit.

This is one winery that's close to home (if you live in Toronto) and worth the drive (if you're coming from further away). This winery is surrounded by the beauty and charm of country atmosphere and, what's more, their wines are getting better all the time (the Baco, the Cab, the Riesling and the Testa Meritage all received high marks). In the last two years their philosophy of quality wines at a fair price (most wines are well under \$18.00) has really paid off in the glass. Willow Springs is definitely a winery to take note of, watch closely, and for goodness-sake visit ... and prepared to be impressed.



Grape Guy's Pick of the Bunch : *To Baco or not to Baco, and a wonderful Cabernet*
Visit www.willowspringswinery.com for more details or to purchase these great wines.

Willow Springs 2002 Cabernet – \$11.95

I think I am going to dub Willow Springs with the title “wines that surprise”. About two years ago I visited with unappealing results – unfriendly wines, with oddly named grapes on the shelf (Geisenheim; Lucy Kulman) and, although it was not out of the way, I felt I had made the trip for nothing. What a difference time can make! This wine is a prime example of Willow Springs' turn around. A Cabernet blend that is so appealing you'll want to take a case home and make it your every day sipper - though, if you choose, this cab will also improve given some time in the bottle ... and the price is what makes it a true bargain. Green pepper influences both the taste and smell, along with peppery spiciness and black cherry. Medium tannins and light sediment at the bottom indicated aging potential for the next 3 to 4 years ... don't delay – get yourself to Willow Springs to sample, and purchase, this wine.

Willow Springs 2002 Baco Noir - \$9.95

Most of the people I know don't like Baco – it always seems to be too something to people and as one person once said to me “It's foxy but not in a good way.” But when David Churchill of the LCBO told me to go back to Willow Springs and try this homegrown Baco I couldn't resist ... and neither should you. This one seems to lack the things people don't like in their wine, that is prominently found in most Bacos ... instead, this one is smooth, approachable, and easy-drinking. It's also light in colour – comparable to a Beaujolais or light-style Pinot in the glass ... and, if you like your wines on the cooler side, this wine is also very chillable. A delicious little Baco that's only \$9.95 – so taking some home won't break the bank. And here's the kicker ... when I said homegrown I mean right there at the winery – in Stouffville, Ontario (25 minutes north of Toronto) – now that shows guts and determination. Kudos to Willow Springs.

Cabernet available at the winery only, while the Baco can be purchased at the winery and at selected LCBO locations that are taking part in the Craft Winery Program.



The Grape Vine : *Submit your opinion and become a part of the OWR tasters circle.*
Should either of these wines be a candidate for our Ontario Wine Review Crystal Cork Awards? Chime In!

Contact us at michael@ontariowinereview.com



The Wow Factor :

Every winery has a uniqueness to it ... be it the tasting bar, the barrel cellar, the gift shop ... something besides just the wine – it is here where we highlight another reason you should visit.

Poke your head out the back door (located across from the tasting bar on the right hand side behind the cheese and dip cooler) and see the vineyard behind the house. Lush plantings of grapes, rows of them; open space where weddings are held, and, if you are lucky enough, bunches of grapes can also be held in the palm of your hand. There's also a pond and some wonderful green space back there. Usually the vineyard aspect wouldn't be such a big deal, after-all it's a winery ... but when you remember you're in Stouffville, 25 minutes north of Toronto and a good two and a half hours away from Niagara or any other standard grape growing area. Impressed now?



Wine Event Spotlight : Open Houses Galore

As the cold weather begins to move into Ontario wineries move their events indoors. The end of November and beginning of December see a plethora of open houses where wineries are releasing new vintages; un-librarily old vintages, and just plain whooping it up for the season. Here's a select list of open houses and dates – for details check individual winery's website: Angels Gate (Nov. 26); Mountain Road Wine Company (Nov. 27); Creekside (Nov. 25 – 27); Willow Heights (Nov. 25 – 27); Featherstone (Nov. 26 & 27); Coyote's Run (Dec. 3-4); 13th Street Winery (Dec. 3); Erie Shore (Dec. 4).



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OntarioWineReview's Newsletter is designed to enhance the appreciation of wine, in particular Ontario's wines and wineries and to develop a better understanding about how best to enjoy both.

Please feel free to pass this newsletter on to other wine lovers!

To contact us with feedback, article ideas, comments, concerns or questions – email michael@ontariowinereview.com We look forward to hearing from you!

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