

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.



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OntarioWineReview: *The Homemades Tale*

At some point in everyone's life you either try to make, or try somebody else's, homemade wine. Most of these wines, after trying them, make you smile and nod while you choke out "it's good – you really made this yourself?" When, in actual fact, you want to take your glass, and the rest of the bottle, to the nearest job site and sell it to them as paint peeler. On the other hand, if it's *your* homemade wine, you drink it with gusto and try to convince others that it's not bad for a "home-brew".

A couple of years ago I went down the "homemade" wine route; but instead of buying all the buckets, barrels, hoses and other paraphernalia required, I went to my nearest u-brew and had them "put me on" a batch ... I was even able to convince 2 other unsuspecting souls to go in on the project with me, if for nothing else, to help spread out the financial burden. In truth, the financial aspect works out to be, on average, between 3 to 5 dollars per bottle ... and taking into account you'll make about 2-plus cases of wine, that's not a bad deal at all. I would encourage everyone to try it at least once; but, watch out for the pitfall that my compadres and I fell into.

We started out with the Reserve wines ... these are the ones the store wants you to buy because they actually taste like wine; they are more expensive per batch, but make a good, age-worthy wine. We first "put on" a batch of California Merlot – 6 weeks later, we returned to sample and bottle our creation. It was tasty and had potential for the future – we were even told to lay it down for 3 months to get rid of bottle-shock. Caught up in the euphoria of our 27 bottles of newly vinted wine, we decided to "put on" another, this time an Australia Shiraz. Six weeks later, same euphoria and a new batch, a Cabernet Merlot ... and then a Cab Franc ... all from the Reserve line and all with the same results: very passable and drinkable wines – especially for the price. So after 30 weeks we had 108 bottles of wine among 3 people ... I'll save you the mathematical equation and tell you that's 36 bottles each ... more than enough for anybody, and at a cost of only 150 dollars or so. Now that's a bargain!

This is where the wine bug bit us, and bit us hard. We got so caught up in "wine-making", we started looking at the list of wines to determine what else we could make. We shifted our selections from the costlier Reserve list (having made all 4 that they offered) to the less expensive "regular wine" list. That was our big mistake. We had made our premium reserves and now we were working backwards to make plonk. We made Italian Style Merlot, Pinot Noir, Nebiolo, Sangiovese, and whatever else struck our fancy as a good bargain in something we thought we'd like to drink ... and the best part was – it was cheaper. The same 36 bottles of wine now cost about 100 dollars; but we soon found out we were making for quantity, not quality; and we paid the price, in undrinkable, unageable boozy grape juice.

Today I still have a couple of bottles of our first 4 batches and they are drinking quite nicely – in fact, they have a shelf life of up to 5 years. As for those other wines, they all tasted the same: alcoholic sweet grape juice – none of the qualities, none of the elegance, none of the style of the grape varietal written on the label ... a sad reminder of our collective greed for more more more.

So when you decide to make your own "homemade" wine, spend the extra few dollars to get "the good stuff" – and stop when you have exhausted that list. Let's put it this way: once you've driven a Porche, you won't be happy driving a Festiva. Trust me.



Grape Guy's Pick of the Bunch : *Something sweet and something fruity*
Visit the winery or their website for more details or to purchase these great wines.

Mountain Road Wine Company 2004 Botrytis Affected Riesling – \$17.95
www.mountainroadwine.com

Here's a wine you'd usually find in the dessert wines category with sweetness levels that can top out around 14–16. It is usually found in half-bottles, and with a label that says "Select Late Harvest". Mountain Road has designed this little sweetie on the lighter side, at about half the sweetness of a normal S.L.H. (7.2), and as a bonus they have put it into a 750ml bottle, making it even a better bargain for the price. Nice for dessert, aperitif, or even to cut the spiciness of the orient down to size (as we here at OntarioWineReview found out). A Great nose of honey, candied fruit and Christmas cake; while the tastes ranged from all the melon varieties like cantaloupe, honeydew, and casaba to light honey. This is quite an enjoyable wine for all occasions – and the price for this kind of wine can't be beat – enjoy!

Available at the winery only.

Henry of Pelham 2004 Gamay – \$13.95
www.henryofpelham.com

Is a good Gamay a lost art of winemaking? On the decline, yes, but certainly not lost. Pelham offers this rather interesting and tasty Gamay, made completely in stainless steel. It has great fruit flavours and interesting smells which make it a pleasure to drink. The smells are rich and full and they tickle the nose with hints of you-are-not-quite-sure-what-that-is smells, then it finally hits you: undertones of strawberry and raspberry linger in the background while the anise (black licorice) overtones really steal the show. On the taste, it's spicy-sweet; great fruity flavour with the slightest hint of rosemary and thyme. This one is smooth and wonderful - a great offering ... enjoy warm or cold, but please do enjoy.

Available at the winery, through their website, or at the LCBO



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 OntarioWineReview Crystal Cork Awards? Chime In!

Contact us at michael@ontariowinereview.com



Uncorked and Decanted : *Nifty gadgets and accessories that enhance wine enjoyment.*

The Final Touch – \$19.95 ... www.finaltouchwine.com

According to their website, The Final Touch is a "wine and scent flavour enhancer" that allows you to "Experience up to twice as much scent and flavour"; and "oxygenate [your] wine without a decanter." Here at OntarioWineReview, we decided to put this little gadget through its paces and see if those claims were true: 4 wines (3 big wines from the great '02 vintage and a powerhouse Cab from the '01), over 4 different nights using a variety of glassware, a couple of decanters – and nobody (except for the pourer) knew which glass contained which pour.

The Final Touch looks like one of those globes you find in most classrooms – you know the kind that rotates on its axis, but in this case, one axis is rubberized to fit snugly on a bottle, the other end has a gold-tipped-lip made for ease of pouring (visit the website for a picture). It fits easily and snugly onto the bottle and yet removes just as easily, without having to fight or force it ... this was the first thing that impressed the panel.

Our reviewers also found many great uses and benefits for The Final Touch, even before the wines were poured: a space saver for those who have limited room to store decanters; it's perfect for traveling, the cottage,

camping, or even romantic getaway ... and all for the price of a standard glass decanter.

Now it was time to see if the Final Touch did what it claimed. In wine after wine the Final Touch performed very well – it really helped aerate the wine noticeably, right from the bottle. It softened and smoothed tannins, opened the nose, made the wine more approachable and brought out more of the flavours – which we found otherwise closed up when poured without aid. It would seem that The Final Touch does what it claims.

The only drawback we found was that it did not aerate as well as a proper decanter. You could not let the wine sit out for awhile and allow it to breathe – but that is nitpicking considering it's size. Interestingly enough you can control the amount of aeration by controlling your pour. The best results were achieved with the bottle at a 90 degree angle which allowed the bowl of the globe to fill up slowly before overflowing through the spout and into the glass – for less air, heighten the angle of the bottle and allow the bowl to fill up faster.

So for that Impromptu dinner party; gathering, or for that bottle you must try tonight and have no time to decant - this neat little gadget is the perfect answer for those problems. Whatever the occasion, the Final Touch is a decanter in the palm of your hand; a pretty ingenious product that works like a decanter for those who have little space and even less time, or who just like to travel. And for the price it is well worth it. Thumbs way up from OntarioWineReview.



Wine Event Spotlight : *Our Icewine Passport Winners*

Congratulations to the following winners of our Icewine Passport giveaway:

Cindy Levy (Richmond Hill); Robert DeVeer (Kingsville); Donna Sytniak (Dearborn, Michigan); Jay Moran (Toronto); Shelley Turner (Mississauga).

They will receive two tour and tasting passports to the Niagara Icewine Festival taking place January 13 - 22. Information can be found at www.niagarawinefestival.com along with a list of events and participating wineries. Enjoy yourselves, from all of us here at OntarioWineReview.



Contact Michael Pinkus Grape Guy

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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