

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: *Changes to a System in Crisis ... a love letter*

A colleague of mine recently sent me an article [about the amalgamation of Ontario's wine industry](#). How the little guys are being swallowed up by national and multi-national companies and how they keep getting screwed over by both the cost of doing business and by the LCBO. His article hit home and was made even more prophetic in light of the recent purchase of Canada's own wine-giant, by the ever expanding, Constellation.

Another colleague of mine forwarded me another article, this one dealt specifically with the LCBO and how it [views Ontario's wineries as direct competition](#) to the liquor giant, instead of as partners in the promotion of locally grown and made product.

Finally, a third article which was brought to my attention appeared in the National Post. It reported on how the LCBO is trying to squeeze Ontario wineries into doing they want; namely, [changing their packaging towards Tetra-Paks instead of bottles](#) – in what they are calling a 'measure to save the environment' by "reducing the sheer tonnage going into Ontario's blue boxes". To accomplish these goals, the LCBO is threatening Ontario wineries with limiting their already dwindling shelf space if they do not comply.

What do these seemingly unrelated topics have to do with one another? It points towards a province in desperate need of some direction for it's wine industry. This is a cry for help, if you will, from a growing industry that has some policies dating back to the 70's and beyond: a time when Ontario was making cheap plonk which was the laughing stock of the international industry, *as well as* within our own province. So let's look at some of these problems and investigate better solutions that you and I can do to help.

First, instead of the LCBO pressuring our wineries into using wasteful "alternative" packaging that would make us the joke of the industry, again, we, as consumers, should be pressuring them to take back our empty wine bottles. Lord knows at 25 cents a bottle (\$3 per case) that credit will be going towards my purchase that very day. That 25 cents could be easily absorbed by the LCBO without raising the price of wine and spirits. Profits are high enough at our liquor monopoly, and it's the least they could do for the environment. In B.C. 86% of wine and spirit bottles are returned under this type of plan ... while 87% of Tetra-Paks find their way into landfills ... you do the math on this one. Less space but more waste. Maybe a recycling campaign where we return our bottles, even without compensation, might give them the hint. If I could stomach drinking the Tetra-Pak wines, I would bring a garbage bag full of that back too... just to prove a point.

Second, "buy Ontario at the source" - start shopping at the wineries. For the purposes of this article, I wanted to be as specific as possible regarding how much the LCBO dings wineries to get their product onto the LCBO shelves. However, according to one winery owner, there is no "exact amount" but it is costly. It's a varying percentage scale, which adds costs somewhere in the range of 5 to 20 thousand dollars to the winery for "promotion and advertising". The important thing for the public to remember is that in the end it's a two-thirds one-third split, on each bottle. "If we sell it we keep two-thirds; if the LCBO sells it, we get one-third." In addition to the taxes and mark-up go into the LCBO coffers. "But it's the commitment for the promotion and advertising that kills us, because that's on top of everything else." That's something most wineries don't factor in when making the wine, because you never know what the LCBO is going to take. That's why some wineries

refuse to list their products. Others have gone as far as to remove their products altogether, relying on more aggressive marketing campaigns, the internet, mail order and other sources for the sale of their wines. You can hop in the car on any given Saturday and mosey on down to one of our 3 major wine regions. The best part of winery shopping is that you get to try before you buy (it's one of the major benefits of visiting wine country). You'll know which wines to stock up on – plus most of the really good stuff (and I don't mean expensive either) is found at the winery itself.

Think of the little guy. Don't just stop into the big wineries; the little guys are making some of the best stuff. I love the wines of Jackson Triggs; Inniskillin; Colio and Pelee Island Wineries – but they also have deep pockets and have plenty of room on the LCBO shelves. Places like Marynissen, Lailey, Featherstone, Harbour Estates, Sanson Estate, Long Dog and countless others will thank you for your business, and you'll be rewarded with excellent wines you won't find anywhere else.

Finally, make other stops along the way. There are some great restaurants and shops along the wine routes. Niagara, Prince Edward County, and Lake Erie North Shore are all realizing they are quickly becoming destination hot spots. Some great little places are starting to pop up along the routes; like restaurants, cheese shops, etc., take a few moments to enjoy them and help contribute to the local economy.

Now before you think I'm telling you to boycott the LCBO, I'm not – nothing could be further from the truth. The LCBO is a great place ... I'm there every second Saturday for my Vintages-fix. But that's for Australian, Chilean, American, Italian, Spanish, French and other countries' wines. When it comes to Ontario, I like to investigate my own backyard to see what finds are lurking in the vines ... and may I suggest you do the same. You'll find the rewards to be amazing and delicious.



Grape Guy's Picks of the Bunch: *All the red Weir that matters ... and a delicious white*
Visit the winery or their website for more details or to purchase these great wines.

Mike Weir Estate Winery 2002 Cabernet Merlot - \$17.95
www.weirwines.com

Mike Weir is already starting to make a name for himself ... in the wine world that is. Canada's best loved and most famous golfer (sorry Stephen Ames) has thrown his hat into the wine ring, and, as on the golf course, he's already showing that he's going to be a force to be reckoned with. Pairing up with the already multi-award winning Creekside Estate Winery, Mike Weir has found a "grape"-skins partner that is already paying dividends. Here's proof: this 2002 Cab-Merlot won best Meritage blend at this year's Cuvee competition. This wine has great blackberry, black cherry, black currant and oak aromas, along with some mild raspberry and green pepper notes, throw in the herbaceousness of asparagus and you've got quite a blend for the nostrils alone. In the mouth, there's some black pepper spiciness along with what seems to be, more red fruit, then the black-fruited nose suggested. There's also plenty of oak and tannin ... this inspired us to decant half the bottle to see how it would re-act ... it smoothed out lusciously. So if you are considering serving it now, might I suggest decanting. Better yet, lie this one down for a few years and watch it develop. Kudos to Mike Weir and Creekside for bringing us another Canadian Champion.

To read about more Mike Weir wines, including the delicious [2004 Pinot Noir](#) and spectacular [2003 Cabernet Shiraz](#), reviews of both can be found in the wine review section of the website.

Ridgepoint Wines 2004 Vidal - \$12.95
www.ridgepointwines.com

Here's a wonderful spring/summer sipper that I know you'll enjoy, from a winery we've already visited. Ridgepoint's 2004 Vidal has sweet macintosh apples on the nose, intermingled with peaches and honey. On the palate, it's light and refreshing – and not too sweet, but there's no real tartness to speak of either: fruity with apples and limeade on the tongue. Quite tasty and easy drinking, perfect for the hot weather ahead.

Availability:

Mike Weir wines are available primarily through their website.
The LCBO carries the 2004 Pinot exclusively and the 2004 Cabernet Merlot .
Ridgepoint Wine is available at the winery or through their website.



Oops, They Did It Again: *Looking at past reviewed wineries and their new vintages.*

Fielding Estate Winery

At a recent new release tasting held at Fielding Estate Winery, 375 of my closest friends and I, got a sneak peak at Fielding's new line of wines from the 2005 vintage. While the reds were outstanding (from the blockbuster 2004 Syrah to the 2004 Merlot Reserve), it's the whites that really stole the show. Andrzej Lipinski has really outdone himself, with these 3 stellar whites. The [2005 Pinot Gris](#), with it's light tangerine hue from 6 hours of skin contact is tart on the opening, but ends with sweet smooth notes of apple and buckwheat honey. The [2005 Chardonnay Musque](#) is citrusy on the nose and tropical fruit in the mouth, with a surprise. Finally the star of the show was the [2005 Reserve Riesling](#). Last year, we touted the Semi-Dry Riesling as the second coming (and you agreed as it sold out very quickly). This year, there's a new kid on the block which blew our minds. The Reserve Riesling opens with apricots and subtle citrus and ends with cinnamon-baked apple flavours that linger long after your last swallow.

Sadly, the 2005 Semi-Dry Riesling was a let down after last year's blockbuster. Still a wonderful wine, but not in the same league as the '04. Happily, where the semi-dry fails this year, the Reserve picks up the grape and carries it over the goal.

Don't let these wines pass you by – with the summer months approaching, you'll need to stock up on these great patio, or anytime sippers, and with a touch of sweetness on each they're perfect for the summer. If last year is any indication – these wines will go fast ... the waiting lists on all of them have already started. Be warned, prices are up a little from last year, as many predicted, because of the short crop, but they're well worth the money.



Ask the Grape Guy ...

On occasion I get asked questions when I attend events, visit wineries, or through email. Other times I overhear things in liquor stores, at dinner tables, or at the odd festival that just don't ring true. It's at these times I like to step in, so that wrong information and rumours don't get started and spread. Herewithin we lay rest to some of those half-truths and answer those nagging questions.

Why Ontario?

I have been asked this question in many different forms, by many different people, and I think it's time to publicly answer it. Usually the question is phrased in a derogatory manner like: "what makes Ontario so special?" Or "why focus only on Ontario?" Or even, "is there enough good Ontario wine to sustain you?" Don't get me wrong, I love wine from all over the world and I review it all. In my collection, I have wines from France and Italy, whites from Australia and reds from New Zealand, Cabs from Washington, Pinots from Oregon, and a plethora from California; I think I might even have something from Lebanon, hiding in the back somewhere. But no Canadian's wine collection is complete without wines from British Columbia and Ontario. I have friends that don't like Ontario wine. They find the reds too herbaceous, our vines too young, the whites too acidic or lacking in character. Of course they don't phrase it in those terms, they, like some of our merlots, are a little more harsh about it.

When I started to visit and learn about Ontario wine I started with sweet whites and fruit wine – to somebody like myself who, in my youth, was addicted to chocolate and Popeye cigarettes these sweet wines tasted just fine to me; the harsher tannins in red were just too bitter. As I aged, so did my tastes ... I gravitated towards whites because it seemed a natural progression: fruity Chardonnay, semi-dry Riesling or off-dry Gerwurztraminer, was wine as I saw it. Reds still tasted bitter and flawed – my palate just wasn't ready.

Then, one day, a friend said let's try this Chilean merlot, and the world of wine changed for me forever. It was smooth as silk and tasty as anything I had ever tried ... hmmm, maybe reds aren't as bad as I thought ... maybe, I had been sipping on the wrong reds. It was then that I became a voracious reader about all things wine related. I visited our wineries with a renewed gusto three, four, five times a year. I went to all the shows and events, even joined a wine club. Through it all I learned that Ontario makes some pretty great, world-class wines – both red and white (fruit too). As my tastes grew so did the Ontario wine industry and it's quality. Now, there is more than enough great Ontario wine to sustain my appetite for wine.

Today, I find myself lucky to live in a province where you can experience wine and winemaking first hand. I can

take a day trip to sample wine, or spend a weekend taking part in a festival devoted to wine, *right where the wine is made*. Think of how lucky we are as wine drinkers – not just us Ontarians – but those in California, France, Italy and other wine making regions of the world, where they too can drive a short distance to sample quality wines in their infancy, as well as in their maturity. Thank your lucky stars that Ontario wines are just a short drive away – and they're yours to discover ... all you have to do is get out there.

Have your own comments about this topic ... [Join me in the cellar to discuss](#) – I'd love to hear from you.

To quell or confirm rumours, half-truths or misnomers – or to ask your question, email me at grapeguy@ontariowinereview.com



Wine Event Spotlight: Wine and Herb Festival

Simon and Garfunkel had the right idea when they sang about Parsley, Sage, Rosemary and Thyme ... if you're a fan of any of these herbs, or countless others, then the Niagara Wine and Herb Festival is for you. Throughout the month of May – each weekend – the wineries of Niagara-on-the-Lake are paring their wines with a variety of herb inspired treats (unfortunately, at this time, there is no listing on-line as to the wine and food pairings). Passports are \$30 and there are 17 wineries participating in this fun and tasty weekend activity ... so get out there and enjoy some parsley, sage, rosemary, thyme and a variety of other wonderful herbs. Tickets can be purchased on-line at www.niagaraonthelake.com and more information can be garnered by going to www.wineriesofniagaraonthelake.com.

As for our Sante winners who have each won a pair of passports to the Sip Savour and Shop event taking place Saturday May 6th; an event where Bloor-Yorkville retailers, paired with Festival wineries, invite you to browse their exceptional stores and galleries while winemakers personally introduce their wines to you. Congratulations to Teresa MacDonald (Burlington); Kimberly Heys (Toronto); Joe Connell (Toronto) – your tickets will be in the mail to you shortly. For more information about this event go to www.santewinefestival.net.



The Cellar ... [the OntarioWineReview Forum](#)

Grab a glass, come downstairs, pull up a chair, sit around the barrels and let's talk wine.

OntarioWineReview's bi-weekly newsletter is devoted to the love, enjoyment and promotion of the wines of Ontario and the wineries that make them.



Psst, Pass It On ... keep the good wine flowing. Send this newsletter to a friend, family member, loved one, the woman in the next cubicle, your buddy from Bobcaygeon ... you get the picture.

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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