

## 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 – 30**  
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#### OntarioWineReview: *Your Own Taste is Better*

I have a buddy whom I agree with on most topics – except politics (I lean Liberal, he's Draconian); women (I like the pretty ones, he doesn't); money (we both want it, but have different ideas about how to get it); eating habits (he's Atkins; I've lapsed); and wine (he doesn't seem to like anything good ... I think he must whack his tongue with a hammer on a daily basis to have such poor taste). Okay, so in truth, we don't agree that often. But, surprisingly, we like the [same dessert wine](#) and we agree that a wine tour is best done in pairs, that way you can bounce tastes, smells and ideas off one another during a tasting; and, most importantly, talk each other out of buying the not-so-good-stuff.

Why did I tell you all of this? Well, for one reason, I know he reads this and I like to razz him whenever I can. The second and, most important reason, is to illuminate the fact that wine is what you make of it; your taste counts as much as anybody else's. No wine writer, professional taster, wine bottle artiste or back label blaggard [those who write those back labels that suck us all in] ... can tell you what you like. In essence, we can lead your tongue towards a certain wine, but we cannot make you drink (to coin a phrase). In the end, you make up your own mind about what you like: your palate makes the decision whether a wine is drinkable or yucky (which by the way, is a very technical term used in the wine industry – if you need further explanation please email me). Your nose tells you if a wine stinks or is pleasant; it's *your* brain that instructs *your* hand to reach into *your* pocket for that 20 bucks to buy the wine. Here's something else I have learned over the years, and would now like to share it with you: price does not determine whether a wine is good or not. Maybe that's something you'll just have to find out for yourself.

Friends influence, writers persuade, artistes make it pretty, blaggards make it sound good – but when all is said and done, when the smells have been smelt and the wine has been tasted YOU decide. That's what makes wine so great: it sparks conversation about itself and can cause controversy between friends – but the final decision is all about personal taste, there's no right or wrong answers - it's all about you. That's why wine makes everyone feel good (besides the alcohol of course): when it comes to taste, nobody's wrong. However, it may prove which of your friends have lousy taste. I know I feel sorry for my buddy – if only he'd see it my way, he'd enjoy wine even more.

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#### Grape Guy's Picks of the Bunch: *A Kerner of Truth and a Really Good Riesling* Visit the winery or their website for more details or to purchase these great wines.

Featherstone 2004 Off-Dry Riesling - \$12.00  
[www.featherstonewinery.ca](http://www.featherstonewinery.ca)

People are going to start thinking I'm obsessed with summer, and who knows, maybe I am - here's yet another wine I can recommend for summer patio sipping. This off-dry Riesling is more dry than off, with notes of mango, apricot, lychee, pineapple and just a tinge of green apple – and some great floral notes to boot. The taste is a little more reserved including exotic fruit like kiwi and some citrusy-lime. The finish is pleasant and refreshing with just the barest hint of spritz. This 2004 is almost sold out so hurry and grab yourself a bottle, or

two. Recently, I got a sneak peak at the upcoming 2005 version and was quite impressed – tastes like Featherstone has another great Riesling on the way.

Lakeview Cellars 2005 Kerner - \$14.95  
[www.lakeviewcellars.on.ca](http://www.lakeviewcellars.on.ca)

Many years ago, I bought my first bottle of Kerner from Lakeview. It had a bit of residual sweetness with a lovely mouth feel and taste. It also proved to be amazingly popular, especially for a grape variety that people rarely, if ever, hear about. Recently, and for the first time in a long time, I was able to put my hands on a bottle. This time, it was the 2005 Vintage – and I suspect it is going to be as popular as ever. Mangoes, peaches, pears, and honey accost the nose, mixing with a very light floral bouquet. In the mouth, it's light and refreshing, with buckwheat honey on the taste, and a medium finish that has the lingering taste of sunflower seeds but seems surprisingly dry. Very tasty, and already a winner at this year's Ontario Wine Awards – taking home a gold Medal in the "other white" category.

Both wines are only available at the winery.

**Hot Tip on a Hot Wine:** The [Hillebrand 2002 Trius Cabernet Franc](#) is one of the best ageworthy Francs I have tried and is almost all sold out. The winery has switched to the lighter, drink now, 2003 version – but some bottles are still available at the LCBO. Keep your eyes open, at \$15.95 it's a great investment in your wine-drinking future.



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

### ***Willow Springs Winery***

Last month I was invited up to Willow Springs to taste test some of their new springtime releases. These included a 2004 Testa Pinot Grigio; a 2005 no oak Chardonnay; and a limited quantity 2003 Gewurtraminer. While the whites were quite delicious, and had me pinning for hotter weather, it was these two reds that really stood out: a new blend and an old favourite.

New to Willow Springs is their [Baco Cab Franc](#), a 55/45 blend with a great herbaceous taste of green pepper, along with some black cherry and raspberry aromas. Excellent for those steaks that will be popping up on BBQ's all summer long.

[And Baco is back!](#) As many already know, the wildly popular 2003 Baco Noir is sold out ... and the 2005 is now ready to take its place. Black cherry with a cedar backbone that makes for a smooth and easy sipper from this usually harsh grape. Willow Springs limits the skin contact to a few days, instead of weeks or months, which lightens the wine considerably. The problem with this approach is that it makes for a short-lived wine. I tried the 2003 a few days before this review was written, and the two bottles I opened had lost their original character. It's unfortunate because, in its youth, it was a lovely wine. This means you'll have to open your bottle of 2005 that much sooner. What a shame (wink)! The good news is that in usual Willow Springs fashion, everything is priced for multiple-bottle purchases.

Once again Willow Springs shows that quality wine can be made North of the Big Smoke, and they have no plans to move anytime soon. In fact, Willow Springs is expanding – check their website to see what is in store for your next visit.



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

### ***Wine Awakenings***

[www.wineawakenings.com](http://www.wineawakenings.com)

If you're like me, you're always looking for new and interesting ways to train your nose to smells. On the other hand, maybe you're just somebody who likes to play games and get your friends to guess at things you already know the answer to. Both are fun ways to spend an evening, and both can be had playing with, and using, Wine Awakenings.

We'll start with the packaging of these sets. They are very attractive, and a true conversation piece. Burgundy coloured boxes that look more like leather-bound collector's editions of Shakespeare or Shelley, than cases that house little bottles of various smells. They also have gold-block lettering along the spine, for easy identification, and a velcro-tassel-silk strap that keeps the lid closed and the smells inside.

When you flip open the lid, you'll see the bottles arranged neatly in the form-fitted textured interior, each in its own little slot, forming a circle around the booklet in the center which describes the smells, their origin, and why or why-not they are appealing in a specific wine variety. Look closer and you'll see each bottle has gold etched printing on the front to indicate the smell inside. There's liquid in each one; so be careful when you're opening them not to get any on yourself - you don't want to smell like "Unripe" or "Rotten Eggs" the rest of the night.

For our test purposes we had three kits: Chardonnay (white), Cabernet Sauvignon (red), and Wine Faults (there is also Shiraz, Pinot Noir and Riesling to complete the current series). We decided to play a game we called "What the Hell's that Smell". Let me explain. Each player takes a turn picking out a bottle, uncapping it, and giving it a sniff to assess the contents for themselves. Then they pass it along to fellow players, careful not to show the label. Each player in turn takes a sniff, or two, to evaluate what they smell in the bottle. As the game progresses, players either give a running commentary or silently process what we are smelling; until a conclusion is reached as to what they *think* the smell is. Here's where the guessing game really begins, and it can be done two ways: by secret ballot (a more serious way to play) or by mass discussion with all players (remember only the one who picked the bottle knows the right answer). Then when a consensus is reached, the smell is revealed. Everybody who was wrong says "schucks" or "darn" a few times, while those who got it right smile to themselves or celebrate boisterously, having won bragging rights for their olfactory lobes (until the next bottle is chosen). The box is then passed to the next person and they try to stump the other players with their selection, and so on. For further enjoyment, and to make the evening more educational, the booklet provided can be read aloud. It proved to be a wealth of information.

Wine Awakenings is a fun way to train your nose to different smells ... but a word to the wise – don't play for too long at one sitting – headaches and nasal fatigue are only a few of the side-effects of too much "What the Hell's that Smell" ... the other is 'phantom smells' (after the game you start smelling things that aren't there). Take a break, get some fresh air, pause to read the booklet. Anything to clear your head, but do pause for a break.

As for the accuracy of the smells, they were quite favourable, even if the smell was not. Most smelled the way they were suppose to ... there were a few familiar smells, like coffee and lavender honey, that (everyone agreed) fell short of the mark. As for Wine Awakenings as a whole, we found \$120 to be a bit pricey, especially because there is little else to do with them besides train your sniffer, and playing 'What The Hell's That Smell', it's not like you can use the 'Brett' or 'Corked' as a cologne, or the 'Garlic/Onion' as a seasoning. But as an educational tool for wine lovers, these make for a great night's entertainment with friends – or by yourself, and their classy look makes for an exceptionally great gift for the wine lover in all of us.



#### **Wine Event Spotlight: *Terroir in Prince Edward County***

Saturday May 20<sup>th</sup> sees Prince Edward County host the first major wine event of summer (am I jumping the gun a bit with that proclamation?). Terroir, the first annual, see PEC wineries showing off their new spring releases. There's gonna be plenty to see and do, and of course, sample. From breads and cheeses to wine jellies and specialty foods. Tickets are a mere \$20 (in advance) or \$25 at the door. And on Sunday tour the county as the celebration continues; each winery will be having special events back at their home base – so make a weekend of it. For more details visit [www.pecountywines.ca](http://www.pecountywines.ca).



#### **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](mailto:michael@ontariowinereview.com) We look forward to hearing from you!

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