

## 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 – 31**  
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### OntarioWineReview: WINERY REVIEW - Peninsula Ridge Estate Winery

*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.*

*Editor's Note: Talk about timely ... Peninsula Ridge's winemaker, Jean-Pierre Colas, just won winemaker of the year at the Ontario Wine Awards; but I swear we are not jumping on the bandwagon – we elected to review this winery, and set our publishing schedule, back in March. Since we have the opportunity, we would like to send our congratulations to Jean-Pierre on this prestigious honour.*

*Now on to our regularly scheduled review:*

“It's a nice view, if not for the highway over there.” My colleague says to me as we approached the front door of Peninsula Ridge – and it was true. Looking to our right, the lake stretched out in the distance behind some lush vineyards and spectacular buildings in the foreground. In the late-afternoon on this early-March day, the highway, cutting through the middle of this picturesque vista only managed to mar a little of its beauty. Being winter, I take a little creative license inserting the lush vines into the picture in my mind; but if the worst thing you can say about Peninsula Ridge is that the highway detracts from the view a little, so be it. Having said that, once you step through the double doors, the outside is long forgotten. Peninsula Ridge is a beauty to behold on the inside, and there's lots to see and do.

The first thing that greets your eyes as you walk through the doors and into the “lobby” is a hotel-style welcome desk. It seems to be book-ended between two racks of wine bottles framing a picture of their signature, (winery described) “Queen Anne revival Victorian home”. This is the most recognizable symbol of the winery, it adorns all their bottles, and is actually located on the property. I say “seems” because it's a bit of an optical illusion - the desk is actually set forward, while the racks are up against the wall. Upon closer inspection of the bottles in the rack, you'll notice they are filled with water (I assume), because the reds are as see through as the whites ... but as you walk in, it make for a wonderful introduction to the winery. This attention to detail speaks to the elegance and attention to detail that Peninsula Ridge strives for, and achieves. Looking around the “lobby”, you'll notice two doors on opposite sides ... the door to your left looks into the production area, with the stainless steel tanks clearly visible, while the door to your right leads into the wine store and tasting room.

The store is tastefully finished (excuse the pun) in a lovely deep brown wood with stylish wine racks around the walls and a few islands in the middle of the room. Wooden pillars stand erect throughout the room, while white rocks encircle their bases. To your right, an onyx-black, granite topped, tasting bar, with Peninsula Ridge engraved in gold, in various spots along its top, give the entire room more of that elegant feel.

The two ladies behind the tasting bar, Jane and Raissa, were wonderful to talk with: warm, friendly and charming. They were very descriptive about the wines they were pouring, and discussed with us what *other* area wineries were pouring on this “Cuvee en Route” weekend (mostly for their own curiosity). They had nothing but good things to say about all the wineries – and a wish list of those that they personally wanted to visit. There was even an air of excitement to our conversation, with a lot of “oh yeahs”; “realls” and “I have to go theres”.

Allow me to step up onto my soapbox for a moment and say this: it's nice to hear winery workers talking positively about other wineries, especially to customers, and especially in Niagara; which seems to be such a

rarity. In my experience, and maybe yours too, most Niagara wineries seem to see themselves as an island unto themselves when they should be instilling a sense of community about the region as a whole. All wineries could benefit from the cross-promotion that only word of mouth can bring; and I'm not just talking about sister wineries owned by the same conglomerate. This is where Niagara could take a lesson from the Lake Erie North Shore area, and more recently, but to a lesser degree, Prince Edward County. But that's a topic for another newsletter. Kudos to the ladies of Peninsula Ridge for bucking the norm and renewing my faith. I'll step off the soapbox now, and get back to our tour of Peninsula Ridge.

Browsing around the shop we noticed the layout was very visitor friendly. Bottles are angled up towards you so you can read their labels easily, while the bottles below and above lie in cubbyholes, neck out, ready for 'pull-out and purchase'. The "label" is done in beautiful gold raised lettering imprinted right on the glass itself, with the Victorian House featured prominently (a touch of red inside the gold outlines the house is the only other colour on the label). At the back of the store, a staircase leads to the gift shop upstairs (more on that in the wow factor).

A friend of mine once said "the best wineries you visit, are the ones you didn't plan on visiting"; and it's true. Some of the best visits (Featherstone, Vineland - reviews pending - and now Peninsula Ridge) were unplanned at the start of the day, but were all truly wonderful, memorable experiences. At Peninsula Ridge, their wines were of excellent quality, their staff professional and friendly, all neatly wrapped up in a great atmosphere – which makes for a great visit. Make sure to put it on your list when you're planning your next trip – or put it in the back of your mind and just stop in unannounced to yourself.



**Grape Guy's Picks of the Bunch:** *A Cabernet and A Franc ... and a note about pyrazine*  
Visit [www.peninsularidge.com](http://www.peninsularidge.com) for more details or to purchase these great wines.

Peninsula Ridge 2002 Cabernet - \$14.95

This wine has a "je ne sais quoi" quality to it, mainly because those with whom I tasted it couldn't put our collective fingers on just exactly what it was that we liked about it – except that we liked it very much. Could it be the black cherry or the sweet red and yellow pepper nose; maybe it was the raspberry, cranberry and dark fruit laden taste. Maybe it was the easy drinking nature of the wine; the smooth spiciness in the mouth, or how it didn't seem too dry, but definitely not sweet either. Finally, someone put it best by calling it "wonderfully uncomplicated" and pointing out "it's what people would love in a red wine". That about summed it up: uncomplicated and delicious, what more do you really need, this, or any, time of year.

Peninsula Ridge 2002 Cabernet Franc - \$18.95

There's lots going on in this bottle of Cabernet Franc from Ontario's big 2002 vintage, so let's get right down to it. The nose is red fruit oriented with some raspberry and cherry, but there's also some sweet spice notes like cinnamon and cardamom and hints of cedar ... a very pleasant mixture. In the mouth, it's still a little closed up. I'm expecting it to open up in the next few years, but right now, it's showing hints of the raspberry and cedar from the nose along with some blackberry and pepper. The overall effect is quite pleasurable; it could definitely use a little longer on the cellar shelf to bring out its full potential, but it's showing well now. Lots of harmless sediment coated both the top and bottom of the bottle and bottom of the glass, so decanting or pouring slowly into your glass will help alleviate this minor inconvenience.

Cabernet is available at the LCBO and the winery; Franc, winery only.

### **Picking on Pyrazine ...**

In 2001 Ontario found itself in a bit of a brine, we now know as Asian ladybug, or lady beetle, infestation – especially in the Beamsville area. It would seem that these cute little creatures found themselves in and amongst the grapes at harvest time, got scared when they found themselves part of the crush, and secreted a chemical called pyrazine ... which of course got into the wine, causing a peanut-shell smell and bitter aftertaste. Some of these wines, which were big and bold when first released, hid the imperfection; but as times mellows them, and the tannins softened, the pyrazine took over, essentially spoiling the wine. Let me set the record straight though – *not all 2001 wines were affected* – and most have now either been sold through or have been removed from shelves. But if you look you can still find some. While some find the pyrazine odor and taste quite off-putting, others don't seem to mind it. If you do find some you will notice these wines are significantly reduced in price because of the imperfection. Take for example the Peninsula Ridge 2001 Cabernet Franc

(\$14.95). It's initially strong on green pepper smell, but there are hints of peanut-shell and the aftertaste has the telltale bitter quality. Compared to its 2002 counterpart (above, \$18.95), the 2001 is lighter in colour, has less sediment and is lighter in flavour – minus the imperfection of course. That said, when served with food, like pasta in a hearty meat sauce, it proved quite drinkable and enjoyable – serve with food and you won't be disappointed. Thankfully, the ladybug problem of 2001 has been, for the most part, rectified through the use of shaking tables and sorting trays that help to remove our aphid-eating friends, before the grapes, and they, go into the crush.

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

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

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**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.*

Climb the stairs at the back of the Peninsula Ridge wine store and you're on a whole other level, literally, looking down upon the tasting room and bar. Up here, you'll find a fine array of wine paraphernalia, from Reidel glassware and decanters to coasters and books. Wine picnic backpacks, videos, and an assortment of Peninsula Ridge-wear is also available. Look out the windows and get a view of the surrounding property and countryside for as far as the eye can see. And check out the baby grand that sits by the stairs in a corner. The room is not crowded with products, so it's easy to look around. It is probably set up so they can rent out the space for events ... and if they don't, I think they should consider doing so, cause it's a quaint, cozy and out of the way space. It's one of the things that make Peninsula Ridge so special, be sure to check it out on your next visit.

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**Wine Event Spotlight:** *Niagara New Vintages Festival – June 10 to 18, 2006*

Here's a festival I wait for all year long, and the one any Ontario wine lover should be attending: the 11<sup>th</sup> Annual Niagara New Vintages Festival. Not only do you get to hop from winery to winery, you also get to sample the latest and even, the soon to be, greatest and must have wines. 30 plus wineries from Grimsby to Niagara-on-the-Lake participate, giving you the first look at what's new ... and trust me it is a weekend endeavour, no way to get all that tasting done in one day. The festival runs from Saturday June 10 to Sunday June 18 ... Touring passports are a very reasonable \$20.00 – to buy tickets or get more information go to [www.niagarawinefestival.com](http://www.niagarawinefestival.com).

**PASSPORT GIVEAWAY:** If there's one event we'll try to always get tickets for it's this one. And special thanks to Niagara Wine Festival for sending us a few pairs to giveaway. This is one you don't want to miss. Send an email to me [michael@ontariowinereview.com](mailto:michael@ontariowinereview.com) with "New Wines" in the subject line – don't forget to include your name, address (with postal code) and phone number in the body of your email. Entries must be received before 11:59pm Wednesday May 31<sup>st</sup>. We'll pick names at random and the tickets will be mailed to you before the first weekend of the event. As an added bonus, each winner will receive one of our elegant new OntarioWineReview Drop Stops ... Good luck.

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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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