

## 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 – 35**  
**July 20, 2006**

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#### OntarioWineReview: *WINERY REVIEW - Vineland Estates 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.*

“Holy moly, *what’s that* monstrosity on the horizon!” Someone said as we stood in [Ridgepoint's](#) parking lot. “It looks pretty from here,” said another, “maybe we should take a few minutes and check it out. It’s not very far.” And that’s how we ‘stumbled’ onto Vineland. With the sun setting behind us, we noticed a tall tower to our right and decided we must see what it was. It turned out to be Vineland Estates (I guess I’ve never seen it from that angle) – and as luck would have it, on this Saturday evening at 5:15pm – they were still open. So let’s slip inside.

Vineland Estates has a big piece of property and there are three buildings to choose from once you arrive – thankfully, there’s a good-sized parking lot too, big enough to accommodate all the visitors. The first building you come across, as you drive through the gates and down the drive, is the shortest ... it’s a mid sized building which houses the restaurant and has a seasonal patio for good weather dining. The restaurant is beautiful inside with a bar/private room to your right, glassed-in main dining area to your left and patio-area beyond the sliding glass doors at the rear. The ambiance is quite posh and it has the prices to match, but there’s an elegance to the place that would make dining an ideal experience for a special occasion.

The next building is the smallest, the Carriage House ... Vineland has both a red and white named for this little building and a quick peek inside tells me it is available to rent for small private functions. Finally, there’s the large main building with the aforementioned tower pointing straight up to the sky, like a beacon calling out to wine lovers ... this houses the wine store, gift shop and event “loft”. It’s this building that we entered first and the one most often entered by visitors to the winery.

When we arrived, some bus tours were on the verge of leaving, so for the first few minutes the place was a buzz with people. Most of them were standing 2 to 3 deep at the tasting bar, while others hovered around the check-out desk. Up a couple of steps from the gift and wine shop, and to your right, as you walk in, is the tasting bar. The busyness of the place gave us ample opportunity to scout out the gift/wine shop part of the store. Stylish and elegant, with a wide variety of wine related products, objects and gifts, from coasters to books; napkins to stoppers; cheeses to chocolates, as well as a wide range of varietal specific crystal glassware and decanters. I also noticed that the colours and décor matched that of the restaurant.

When the crowd thinned out from around the tasting bar, we found a quiet corner and waited. Allow me to interrupt and quote an old adage you might have heard: “looks can be deceiving.” Let me explain further, in a way seasoned winery visitors might find familiar. An older gentleman wandered over to where we had stationed ourselves, and to a person we thought the same thing “this is not good”. We’ve all been there, you know the type: the tasting bar jockey that allows you only 4 tastings maximum (even when you’re in a group and sharing), makes you pay for each and every sample, barely knows his stuff, and just overall spoils the experience. We all thought “he’s a presence at the counter to help serve customers during the busy times.” Joe turned out to be the furthest thing from what our expectations were, in fact he was awesome ... knowledgeable, pleasant, not only interesting to talk to, but to talk with. Our tasting lasted close to an hour with samplings of whites, reds, vintage reds, late harvests and icewines – finishing off with icewine chocolates

served by Bill (he just appeared with the tray). All the while Joe proved himself adept at his job – knowing the wines, and other wineries in the area to compare Vineland's wines to. He took our wine suggestions to heart and even wrote some down so that he'd remember to check them out next time he toured the wineries. To equate this tasting experience with something we can all relate to, it was like having a glass of wine with an old friend.

A little bit of an aside here - I don't usually mention a trip to the washroom when I write these reviews – but a trip to the washroom might be in order at Vineland ... and may take you longer than usual, so warn people so they don't think "you've fallen in" (as my mother used to say). In the hallway leading to the restrooms, are a number of laminated articles that tell the history of Vineland, its property and its buildings. In case of emergency, wait till after you go to read them, as you will find them very engrossing and informative.

Vineland has some incredible wines, at all price ranges, a fantastic property, a wonderful place to shop and countless wine related products that could have kept us browsing for another hour, and upped the amount of our already substantial purchases. Vineland is a beautiful stop on your wine tour... so stop, check out the property, sample some great wines, and just enjoy the ambiance of the place.



**Grape Guy's Picks of the Bunch: A Lovely Late Harvest and a Couple of Racy Rieslings**  
Visit [www.vineland.com](http://www.vineland.com) for more details or to purchase these great wines.

Vineland Estate Winery 2004 Select Late Harvest Vidal (375ml) - \$18.95

If you're a fan of late harvest wines, then have I got a recommendation for you. Vineland's low alcohol (8.8%) sweetie is the perfect after dinner sipper and truly lives up to the moniker of "poor-man's-icewine". The nose has plenty of tropical fruits like pineapple, tangerine, lychee and some honeyed pear ... in the mouth it's the 3 S's - soft, supple and smooth – what's on the nose is found on the tongue, along with a touch of wildflower honey. What's more, it's not overpoweringly sweet – perfectly in balance with sweetness and acidity, delicious from start to finish. A bargain at twice the price – but don't tell them I said that. This just might be the best Select Late Harvest Vidal I have ever tried.

Vineland Estate Winery 2005 Dry Riesling - \$12.95  
Vineland Estate Winery 2005 Semi-Dry Riesling - \$12.95

For some reason, I am in a Riesling mood this year and the 2005's are turning out to be really very good, so why wouldn't you be a fan as well? Rieslings from the noted Vineland Estates have always been high on the list of Ontario's best, and these current editions are no exception. The 2005 version of their Dry-Riesling is pure and simple. Simple: a citrus nose with slight hints of sweet peach – but pure tart and tanginess from first to last sip. In the mouth, the peach from the nose, disappears, giving way to grapefruit on the palate. The acids are still quite high which makes this wine mouth puckeringly tart (give it a few months or even years in bottle to soften), but it goes great with all kinds of light summer fare like salads and white fish. The Semi-Dry version tones down the tartness and adds a touch of sweetness to the mix. Still maintaining the citrus nose, but this time it adds in some floral tones. In the mouth, it reminds me of "Dad's Olde-Fashioned Lemonade sweetened with a touch of honey" with a lingering muted-lime finish. Because of its sweetness, this one can be enjoyed as a patio sipper on its own, but will also find favour with a light summer dishes. Drink up and enjoy them both. And you can pick them up at your local LCBO.

These wines are only available at the winery and, where indicated, at the LCBO.

There are two other Vineland Wines added to the website this week:

[2004 Cabernet Franc](#) and [2003 Cabernet Sauvignon \(non-VQA\)](#)

**Hot Tip on a Hot Wine:** During my most recent visit to Prince Edward County (article to follow in August), I visited one of the hottest winemakers in the area, Norm Hardie of [Norman Hardie Winery](#). His '04 Pinot Noir won silver in the Pinot category during this year's Ontario Wine Awards and his new '05 looks, and tastes, to be a monster. Now PEC purests will say "we're glad for the exposure, but he's not using County fruit." While this is true, and there is more to be said on that issue, I would be remiss if I did not direct your attention to his unique and stellar ['05 Riesling](#) – which is available now and will sell out quickly, so get your hands on a bottle or two before it's all gone.



### **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.*

Usually I write about an aspect of the visit that I found intriguing, like the scenery (which is marvelous – lush vineyards all around), the shop (lots to see well-stocked and well-worth looking around in), or the selection of wines (which were varied and plentiful – something for every palate and price range). But this is the first time I've done a "Wow Factor" about a person; but let's face it, sometimes it's the person(s) you meet and who take(s) you on your tasting tour that makes all the difference to your visit. Joe was that guy. Not animated, flamboyant, over the top or jokey, instead, Joe was laid back, unassuming, courteous, friendly, knowledgeable and above all, a great host. Not only did he pour the wines we were interested in, but he made suggestions – "if you liked this, then you must try that." He allowed us to talk and answered questions professionally in a simple and easy way to understand, and in turn, made us want to listen to him when he talked, because we didn't get lost in terminology and jargon. Joe might have had 10 or 20 years on all the guys behind the bar, but he acted with class and professionalism that really stood out and also made you feel like an old friend. Joe, on a day where we visited close to a dozen wineries – you were the best of the bunch ... so the next time you find yourself at Vineland (or even the first time), if it happens to be on a Saturday (it's the only day he's in), ask for Joe.

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### **Wine Event Spotlight: *Ontario Wine Society – Niagara Chapter: Wine Tasting and Boat Cruise***

Okay, okay maybe it's the romantic in me, but this sounds like a fabulous event that the Ontario Wine Society has planned. Spend a beautiful Tuesday night (August 8<sup>th</sup>) cruising around Lake Ontario and the Niagara River sipping on Chardonnay, Pinot Noir and sparkling wines. There will also be entertainment, hors d'oeuvres and of course plenty of socializing. Where do I get my ticket you ask? Call 905-685-7623 or visit the website for more details about the evening at [www.ontariowinesociety.com](http://www.ontariowinesociety.com). Now, if only I could get an invite ...

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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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