

## 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 – 37**  
**August 17, 2006**

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### OntarioWineReview: *A trip through The County (part 1)*

A beautiful long weekend in July and off I went to check out the wines of Prince Edward County (PEC or The County). Two years ago I made the very same trip ... at that time there were 5 or 6 wineries open (with 2 or 3 more on the way), and it seemed that everybody in the Canadian-wine-world was talking "the county"; "the county"; "the county". What a complete disappointment that trip was. Maybe my expectations were too high; maybe the industry wasn't geared up for the glut of visitors; maybe the wines weren't quite ready yet - but back in 2004 I recommended waiting a few years before making your own trek. (The tell-tale sign on that trip: I bought 3 bottles of wine). Since then the hype has died down a little, PEC has had a few bad vintages under their collective belts; and the talk of The County is more a quiet murmur than full-scale buzz ... honestly, I think, they prefer life out of the spotlight. Now, with 11 or 12 wineries open (depending on whether you count the cider company), and another couple on the way; two years later the county is starting to make the transition from green-horn-rookie to seasoned-veteran. (tell-tale sign this time: 2 cases of wine bought).

I started my visit at [Carmela Estates Winery](#). There I sampled some Riesling, Chardonnay, Gamay, and Pinot Noir. The [2002 Riesling](#) was quite tasty, unfortunately the Chardonnay and Gamay, were barely passable. The star of the show was the [2004 Pinot Noir](#) (made by the newest king of Pinot, Norm Hardie). This is a wonderful bottle of wine that shows what winemakers down here can do, given good fruit. The main criticism throughout The County, is the lack of County fruit in the bottle (many wineries use grapes sourced entirely from Niagara because of the lean '03 and '04 vintages). Although the word about the recent '05 is low yield but very promising quality-wise, and everybody seems jazzed about the upcoming '06 harvest as a real banner year for PEC. The Carmela staff was friendly and accommodating, they even pointed me in the direction of Norman Hardie's own winery across the road and to Rosehall Run just a stone's throw away. Though both wineries proved to be closed on the Friday, I was told that they were expected to open for the weekend (they did and reviews appear in Newsletter 39). Therefore, my next stops were By Chadsey's Cairn and Sandbanks Estate Winery.

[By Chadsey's Cairns](#), once again, failed to impress me. The property has a spooky charm, which includes a graveyard, old barn buildings, and a great view of the vineyards from the back porch of the tasting room; but their wines continue to underwhelm me, as they seem far too rustic for my taste. An opinion fueled, this time, by the Gewurzt and Gamay. The Gewurzt lacked the fruit forward zesty aspect one expects of the grape, while the Gamay had far too much earth tones on the palate; leaning more towards a Pinot without the finesse (though I was soon to learn that many of the County's Gamay suffer from the same fate ... proving that there is something to be said about terroir). But all is not lost, on a positive note, Chadsey's Rieslings are quite delicious and their rose makes for a fine summer sipper.

Just up the road, you'll find [Sandbanks Estates Winery](#) run by Catherine Langlois. With only 4 wines to choose from, your choices are limited – but all four are quite impressive. A bone -dry Riesling, a friendly easy-going Baco Noir, a fruit-driven, semi-dry, estate-grown Vidal and her wonderful 2005 Cabernet Franc. (My next newsletter focuses on this winery, so let's move on).

I started to take note that Prince Edward County, like many wine regions, has many if its wineries grouped together (Chadsey's and Sandbanks; Carmela, Rosehall and Hardie) ... as I made my way along Closson Road I noticed this again. The Grange of Prince Edward County was next on my list, and down the road a short

piece you'll find Closson Chase. [The Grange of Prince Edward County](#) is a stunning showpiece property, centered around a beautiful old barn, surrounded by lush vineyards and a variety of out-buildings. Inside there's lots of charm and lots of wood. Out on the veranda you can order a light lunch while you sip wine and drink in the scenery. As for the wines, they are ripe, ready and very enjoyable. Included on my list of favourites are an ['05 Riesling](#) and ['05 Pinot Gris](#) both with hints of sweetness. Their reds also held some interest, especially the [2004 Cabernet-Merlot](#), (a fruit and spice driven number) and their reserve Cabernet blend and straight Cabernet Franc, two wines that I would recommend lying down for an extended period of time. The Grange provides value for your wine-buying dollar ... they have a good range of wines, in both reds and whites, priced affordably. Combine that with their attractive surroundings, and a nice lunching patio, and The Grange has all the markings of a must stop on your tour of The County. On the flip side, (at the corner of Closson and Chase Roads – owned by actress Sonja Smits, amongst others, and celebrated winemaker Deborah Paskus at the helm) [Closson Chase](#) has a beautiful piece of property and awe-inspiring interior, but with wines priced well above the norm for the area (read: out in the stratosphere) I am not sure they will survive. I have always been of the opinion that you need a value priced wine to entice consumers; when the only 2 wines you have are a \$40 Pinot and similarly priced Chardonnay, you are not courting the average wine drinker, and in this budding region that's who's coming. Take for example some of Niagara's newest wineries: Tawse (same winemaker as Closson Chase) and Stratus who are struggling to make high end wines acceptable in an already established region (Niagara) ... how Closson Chase expects to command that price in The County, I am not sure – but I do wish them luck (of course, sell-out vintages will obviously prove me wrong, and I'll be glad to drink my words one day).

Next on the list is [Huff Estates](#) (driving along Highway 1 you can't miss it) – a sprawling winery and inn, looks like an oasis on a barren strip of road. It's beautiful, expansive and high-tech in both scope and vision, and is the second of the showpiece wineries in the area. As for the wine, their ['05 off-dry Riesling](#) is delicious and their "big red" blend [Cabernet Sauvignon/Cabernet Franc 2003](#) is just that: big bold and spicy. Again, made from Niagara fruit. Finally, on this leg of the journey, I stumbled onto (or is that into) [Black Prince Winery](#), on the outskirts of Picton. A big supporter of other local wineries, they house both their own brand, Hillier (which is made by Domaine Calcaire) and Bella Vigne. While there, an interesting Pinot Noir was poured from Hillier and a rather fruity-easy-drinking [Cab Franc](#) from Black Prince.

Tomorrow, it's off to the east side of the island to check out three more wineries, a cheese factory and a brewery ... but so far this trip to the county has proven much better than my previous foray. My resting point in Picton, [Caruso's on King](#), a top-notch bed & breakfast and spa, reasonably priced and beautiful accommodations. I'm looking forward to the gourmet breakfast and maybe a spa treatment downstairs – talk about relaxing after a long day.



**Grape Guy's Picks of the Bunch: A Pinot Noir and a Blend from the County**

Visit the winery or their website for more details or to purchase these great wines.

Carmela Estates 2004 Pinot Noir – \$19.95

[www.carmelaestates.ca](http://www.carmelaestates.ca)

I trust you all read my review about another Norman Hardie wine a few weeks back (2005 Riesling) – but wait, you're saying, this is a Carmela Estates wine, not a Norman Hardie; well it just so happens that Norman Hardie is also the winemaker for Carmela. The 2004 Pinot Noir is as simple as it is delicious – made from Niagara Pinot, there's plenty of dark fruit on the nose and some sour cherry, mixing it up with earth and vanilla notes. On the tongue, it's even simpler, strawberry, black cherry and well integrated oak with light drying tannins. Easy drinking and tasty, this is one fine Pinot ... and proved well-matched with some strong cheese – say a 5 year old cheddar ... yum!

Huff Estates Winery 2003 Cabernet Sauvignon/Cabernet Franc - \$15.95

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

This blend of 80% Cabernet Sauvignon and 20% Cab Franc is still pretty young – so it'll need a little time to settle down and develop in the bottle to smooth out some of those fierce tannins and rough edges; but if you insist on trying it now, a good hour in a decanter will work wonders. Made from Niagara fruit, this wine showcases the winemaking skills of Huff's winemaker Frederic Picard. A white pepper nose with plenty of spiciness, some red pepper and other herbaceous notes are also present. On the other hand, the taste is pure green pepper with cedar and spice ... a short finish does not allow the drying tannins to linger long. This is a hearty wine that should age well for the next three or four years.

Both wines are only available at the winery.

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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.*

The Grape Guy presents "Weekly Wine Notes"! A savoury selection of Ontario wines to impress, enjoy, or just plain drink! A NEW Wine Selection is added into the [OWR Cellar](#) every Tuesday!

*Be sure to check out the wines added in the past two weeks "[Weekly Wine Notes](#)".*

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### **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.*

I get a fair number of questions about ageing wine, like how long to lie something down? How do you know what to age and what not? Where can I set up a cellar? etc. But there are some comments or questions I have heard lately that disturb me a little. So before we get to the ones above, let's look at the two below. These two questions/statements just seem to go hand in hand ...

#### **Said to me when I worked at an LCBO (not kidding here):**

***"Wine doesn't get any better in the bottle, except maybe that Yellow Tail stuff."***

That was said to me in direct response to a comment I made about the bottle the gentleman was considering: "I would lay that one down for a year or two to let it mature." At first I thought the person was pulling my leg. Sometimes when things like this are said to me, I look for that playful hint of a smile or that knowing twinkle in the eye, when somebody is putting you on – but this person was dead serious! Obviously, a case of someone who had read half an article somewhere. Allow me to quote from one of my favourite recent movies because I don't think I could put it any better myself (you might recognize this):

*"I like how wine continues to evolve, like if I opened a bottle of wine today it would taste different than if I'd opened it on any other day, because a bottle of wine is actually alive. And it's constantly evolving and gaining complexity. That is, until it peaks, like your '61. And then it begins its steady, inevitable decline ... And it tastes so f\*\*king good."*

Of course that was said by Maya (Virginia Madsen) in Sideways – no words could be truer. Now some wines aren't meant to age, while others will taste better in 2 or 3 years, and others still need a decade or more to show well. My suggestion is to do your own investigating on the subject (don't just listen to me, or Maya for that matter). Buy three bottles of your favourite, open one tonight, lay one down for 6 months, another for a year – make some notes to see what happens to it and how it changes – colour, taste, smell. For those of you who are even more intrepid, try lying them down for a year and then 2 – or buy a case and try a bottle annually. Sometimes for better, sometimes for worse – but wine does evolve.

#### **Typical statement I hear:**

***Sure, some wines are meant to age, but Ontario wines lack the depth of character / the climate / the knowledge of winemaker to make a quality wine worth ageing ...***

Where have these people been? Whoever makes this statement to you, or something close to it, you have my permission to slap them upside the head. Obviously it's somebody whose last bottle of Canadian wine was Baby Duck or Hochtaler. Lately, I have tried a '98 East Dell Cab Franc that was wonderful; a '98 East Dell Cab Merlot that was stunning; a '92 Southbrook Medium Dry Riesling that tasted absolutely fantastic, followed by a '94 that was even better; a Kacaba 2000 Cab Sauv that was just starting to mellow and will continue to get better for another 5+ years; and a '99 Southbrook Chardonnay that is just starting to show its true potential. At a fairly recent dinner I was poured a 9 year old Stoney Ridge Chardonnay that still had lots of life left in it and a '99 Chateau des Charmes Cabernet-Merlot that continues to knock my socks off year after year ... the list goes on and on. I have also tried some great recently released wines from Coolio, Featherstone, Peller, Chateau des Charmes, Fielding, and Mountain Road that will be stellar drinkers well into the next decade and beyond.

Statistics show that consumers drink wine much too young these days: approximately 90% of all wine bought at the LCBO is consumed within 24 to 48 hours; and many wines are released onto store shelves much too early, to keep up with the demand of consumers. Producers (especially from Australia) are giving people what they want ... early drinking wines with a touch of sweetness that simulates the smoothness that would develop naturally over time. The key to making the decision of whether to drink now vs. hold is to read and learn more about wine – sometimes a back label will give you directions for cellaring, or ask the winemaker or staff member at the winery. You live in a winemaking province, and have access to the proper resources to help you make the proper decision: the winery itself ... so visit, talk, learn. And be sure to use my experimentation method from the previous question - buy a few bottles of one wine and taste them annually. Ontario wines have come a long way baby, and with some proper care, patience and time – you'll be able to taste the quality of an aged Ontario red.

*To quell or confirm rumours, half-truths or misnomers – or to ask your question, email me at [grapeguy@ontariowinereview.com](mailto:grapeguy@ontariowinereview.com)*



### **Wine Event Spotlight: 2<sup>nd</sup> Annual Shores of Erie International Wine Festival**

You've all heard, or read, about my take on the Lake Erie North Shore region of the province ... as far as I am concerned, it is the hidden gem of Ontario (and you'll be reading more very soon). Now's your chance to visit. Last year more than 7,000 people learned why this a great wine region by attending the festival for the wine and the entertainment, this year, they are expanding to include celebrity chefs and guest speakers, of which yours truly – the Grape Guy – is one of them. So if it's not for the wine, the entertainment, the food or the fun – then come out and meet me – that alone should be worth the price of admission, but I am sure you'll force yourself to enjoy the rest too (wink). The Festival runs September 8-10 at the Fort Malden National Historical site in Amherstburg, Ontario. For more information or directions visit [www.soewinefestival.com](http://www.soewinefestival.com). As for me, I'll be appearing on September 9<sup>th</sup> at 2:40 PM – See you there.

**FREE PASS GIVEAWAY** – Your chance to see the Grape Guy in person, and go to the Shores of Erie International Wine Festival, begins here. I have five (5) 3-day passes for 2 to give away. Send an email with "Sure I want to See the Shores" in the subject line to [michael@ontariowinereview.com](mailto:michael@ontariowinereview.com) include your name, address (with postal code) and phone number. I'll pick the 5 winners out of a hat – and the first 10 emails I get will receive a special limited edition OWR Drop Stop. Have your email to me no later than 11:59pm Thursday August 24. Good Luck.

**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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