

## 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 – 38**  
**August 31, 2006**

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**News ...** *We start this newsletter off with some news about OntarioWineReview and our website:*

Due to the large number of spam posts that are starting to appear in the forum (yes somehow they get in there too – not just your email), we have decided to limit posting access in the forum to registered users. Of course, coming by and looking is always free to everybody. Thanks to everyone who has registered so far and I invite more of you to come and join us ... it's always free to register and most of all, it's fun – just [click here](#) to get started.

Don't forget my [Weekly Wine Notes](#) appear in the cellar every Tuesday, a different wine every week for your tasting and drinking pleasure. Cheers.

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**OntarioWineReview:** *WINERY REVIEW – Sandbanks 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.*

My editor once said to me “Mike, why is it that 4 of your last 12 reviews express that a place ‘isn’t much to look at’, and another 3 were ‘hard to find?’” Incredulously I asked, “What are you talking about?” She proceeded to quote chapter and verse those reviews back to me, finishing with “you seem to miss a lot of these places – are you a bad driver or something?” I’ll leave the answer to that question up to the passengers that ride with me; suffice it to say, I like the hunt. I like the out of the way, and I like little and unassuming – especially when it comes to wineries; because those are the ones to search out, and the search usually rewards you with good quality wines. Driving the wine-trail of Prince Edward County in early summer, this year, there were a few hard to find and unassuming wineries, but none more so than Sandbanks Estate Winery – and, as usual, well-worth the hunt.

Two years ago when I visited Prince Edward County, Sandbanks was on the map as a ‘coming soon’ winery. This time while looking for it, I drove right by it, thus having to turn around. It popped up quickly as I rounded a bend on Highway 33 (Loyalist Parkway) and I missed the sign and the small, and yes unassuming, driveway. My first clue was seeing the vineyards on my left. Luckily, I only missed it by a few car lengths and made a ewey. Turning into the long driveway, with vineyards now on my right, I marveled at the beauty and openness of both the property and surrounding area. Across the highway (now behind me), the lake shimmered in the background. I pulled into one of the few parking spaces, just off the gravel driveway on the grass, beside the Porta-Jon (which might seem out of place at a winery, but this time it just fit with the rural setting). The walk to the wine store from the parking lot is about 40 yards, and in fact, it looks like somebody’s house; somebody’s house with a tasting room/wine store in the basement (my kinda house). The front yard has a few picnic-type tables and lawn-style chairs placed invitingly about ... allowing visitors to relax and look out over the vineyard.

The inside of the Sandbanks Winery tasting room is small – it’s actually a converted room in the basement of the only house on the property. You open the door, walk down a small flight of three stairs and you’re on ground level. The tasting bar is to your left and the shelving for the bottles is to your right. The house itself is

lovely from the outside and stands as a testament to a family-run small winery. This is how many wineries get their start these days. The French call them “garagistes”: vintners who make and sell wine out of their garage ... in PEC and across North America we could use the term “basementistes”, because of the number of wineries that get their start selling wine out of a basement room in their house, just like this one. Currently, Sandbanks has only four wines on the shelf: a bone-dry Riesling, a fruity “Dunes” Vidal, an interesting and tasty, Baco Noir (even for those non-Baco drinkers) and a delicious Cabernet Franc.

In all likelihood you’ll meet Catherine Langlois in the tasting room – “owner, operator, winemaker, custodian, you name it,” as she told me. She’s charming, friendly and passionate about her wines and her vineyards, and serious about her winemaking. There’s a story behind every bottle and her enthusiasm bubbles over, as she almost wills you to enjoy everything you taste. While I was there, a gentleman walked in, grabbed two bottles of Baco off the shelf, walked immediately to the counter and proudly stated (as he dug into his pocket for money) “We tried and bought your wine not too long ago, and we just ran out – my wife sent me over to get more of this stuff, we really enjoyed it.” Catherine stood there with an “awe-schucks” look on her face, she smiled, thanked him appreciatively for liking the wine, and completed the sale. Seeing this exchange first hand, I can tell you that Catherine Langlois is proud yet humble. She’s proud of her wines and accomplishments, but humble enough to accept compliments with a degree of modesty and grace. I have often said about wineries that it’s not just the place, but the people you meet there that make the visits special ... meeting Catherine Langlois was one of those visits.

Sandbanks may not have the selection of some of the bigger wineries in the area, nor the monstrously big buildings and impressive architecture ... but it’s because of it that it lacks the corporate feel or the “huge-money-looking-for-something-to-do-with-it” aspect that seems prevalent these days in many wine regions around the world. That’s what I liked about Sandbanks: passion not pretension - the following a dream aspect of it all ... one acre, one barrel, one bottle at a time. Search out Sandbanks and enjoy calm in the county ... and, of course, a sip of something delicious.



**Grape Guy’s Picks of the Bunch:** *The Best of a Small Batch*

Visit [www.sandbankswinery.com](http://www.sandbankswinery.com) for more details or to purchase these great wines.

Sandbanks Estate Winery 2005 Cabernet Franc - \$19.95

When you only have 4 wines (currently) – it makes it easier to pick a favourite than when you have a wall full ... that’s why this Cabernet Franc is the Pick of the Bunch this week. Had I not been to the winery, tried the wine there; then bought a few bottles and tried them again at home, I would have totally believed this fruit-bomb was from California or Australia. It shows that here in Ontario we can make a fully fruit driven wine from this grape. Aged 6 months in oak, this Cab Franc is allowed to show off its fruit forward flavours – and coming from the wonderful, yet meager, 2005 Vintage, really shows what many more of these wines are going to be like. A nose of pure sweet cherry and a taste that has that same sweet cherry at it’s core wrapped in a coat of vanilla and leather is what makes this wine delicious to savour anytime. The minimal oaking was the perfect port-manteau for this wine. This is a great wine from one of PEC’s newest wineries’, giving you yet another reason to watch this region in the future.

These wines are only available at the winery.



**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”](#).



**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.*

Although tourism is up significantly within “the County”, visiting “The County” is neither stressful nor busy, even

on the Canada Day weekend when I visited. My trip was stress-free and relaxing. Traffic was at a minimum; that's what usually raises the blood pressure for most of us city folk; who wants to waste their vacation stuck in gridlock? At Sandbanks, there is a placidity that comes from being surrounded by grapevines and greenery. Once down the driveway, parked, and walking toward the house / tasting room ... a calm washes over you. Maybe it's the acres of vineyards that lie between you and the road, but everything just seems tranquil and quiet – you actually hear more birds chirping, than cars passing; and with the chairs and tables placed about the lawn between the house and the vineyard, the owners of Sandbanks know that there is peace behind those walls of vines ... they are inviting you to sit down and enjoy it. Take a small stroll through the vineyard, enjoy the calm, take a load off and just enjoy the peace and tranquility of the moment.

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**Wine Event Spotlight:** *Mark this date on your calendar: Rock n' Ribs*

It's that time of year again – the Niagara Wine Festival ... where wineries open their doors with new wines, tastings, food pairings, tours, flights, you name it. There's also the big party in Montebello Park, where all the wineries congregate in an open air setting, along with area restaurants, to celebrate, what else, wine. There's also entertainment on the main stage; this year's artists include Jack de Keyzer; Michelle Wright and Rik Emmett. So check out [www.grapeandwine.com](http://www.grapeandwine.com) for all the information you'll need to plan your trip to the festival.

**FREE PASS GIVEAWAY:** Once again this year OntarioWineReview is honoured to be giving out winery-touring passports for the festival, each winner will get 2 ... because nobody likes going alone. Send your name, address (with postal code), and phone number to [michael@ontariowinereview.com](mailto:michael@ontariowinereview.com) - be sure to put "Festing Niagara Style" in the subject line.

Speaking of passes, congratulations to: Jeff Wareham (London), Steward R. Fulford (Windsor), Gerald Arbus (Toronto), Art and Dianne Miller (St. Clair Shores, Michigan), and Donna Sytniak (Dearborn, Michigan) who have all won passes for 2 to the Shores of Erie International Wine Festival in Amherstburg September 8-10 ... Don't forget to stop by and say hi to me Saturday 2:40-3:00pm when I'll be speaking on the main stage about "Building a Cellar to store your wine – tips and tricks to growing with your wine."

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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. Forward this newsletter to your mom in Milton, your son in Smith Falls, any other family member or loved one that you know needs good wine advice.

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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