

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 – 40
September 28, 2006

In this Edition

- **Ontario Wine Review:** *WINERY REVIEW – Featherstone Estate Winery*
 - **Grape Guy's Picks of the Bunch:** *Two very special wines*
 - **The Wow Factor:** *Besides the wine - check this out!*
 - **Wine Event Spotlight:** *Perfect Pear-ing and Harvest Happenings at Featherstone*
-



OntarioWineReview: *WINERY REVIEW – Featherstone 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.

“Hey, is that a dog?”

“I believe it is.”

“He’s kinda cute, in a scruffy sort of way.”

“He might be our greeter.”

Those are all snippets from our conversation as we parked and exited the car at Featherstone. In fact, Bocci, the Terrier, did greet us: silently, with his head hung low and tail wagging. We each patted him and said “hi” then he turned and walked back towards the house, occasionally looking back over his doggy-shoulder, to make sure we were following. And we did. That is how you might find *yourself* greeted at Featherstone if you are lucky ... come to think of it, and if you have found your way to Featherstone, fortune is already smiling on you.

Coming down the long driveway that cuts through the vineyards of Featherstone, with the house and barn-like buildings in front of you – you can easily forget you are in Niagara. Your mind starts wandering to somewhere else; your surroundings are so quiet and beautiful you’d think you were in another country at another time and place; there is both a welcomingly-homey and other-worldly quality to it. I would attribute this to Featherstone being off the beaten track (for now); there are no buildings surrounding it, no shopping malls, no corner stores, no gas stations, and their neighbours seem miles away ... although geographically both [Vineland](#) and [Ridgepoint](#) are literally down the road and right around the corner.

As you park in one of the dozen or so spaces out front, you’ll notice the little Terrier making his way across the parking lot towards your car. Taking a look around, you see the family house in the middle of the vineyards that surround you, and there’s a small brook with a mini-waterfall running right through ... quite picturesque ... as Featherstone re-opens for business (Featherstone closes its tasting room from January 1 to March 31). Signs point you in the direction of the tasting room and wine store, around the back of the house – and of course, there’s Bocci (which means “kisses” in Italian), who will guide you to where you need to go. As you make your way to the tasting room, take note of some of the signs dotting the landscape, they are definitely worth “pawing” to read – especially the one that says, “Dogs on leashes are welcome to visit. Thank you, The Cats.”

Enter the small tasting room, (12 people maximum – which would be a tight fit), and belly your way up to the bar. [Just a quick aside about the size of the tasting room: I am pretty sure that if I stood in the middle of the room and stretched out my arms I could touch all four walls – maybe I’m exaggerating a little, but not by much.] But it’s this room that gives Featherstone its homey feel and intimate nature, and it’s also what makes your visit all the more intimate. Smiles greet you as you walk through the door and you get the feeling that you’re among friends and fellow wine lovers. Soon the closeness of your surroundings disappears from your mind, as you begin to taste some of the more exquisite cottage-winery wines in Niagara: the double gold medal winning Gamay, the Riesling/Gewurtraminer blend they call Topaz, the straight Riesling or the wonderful Cab Franc. There’s also a limited supply of Cherry-Barrel Cabernet Franc (they make one barrel a year), though it’s pretty pricey (\$30 a bottle) for a wine you can’t sample; but it definitely rewards those who take the risk. The other

special wine is the Onyx, which is in the same boat with regards to sampling but is \$10 less, at \$20 a bottle – a special reserve Cabernet-Merlot blend, well worth the money, and both wines will reward patience in the cellar.

Sometimes, you'll catch owner Louise behind the counter serving wine or perhaps in the back preparing the food pairing for some event. Dave, the winemaker, and Louise's partner in the winery venture, might be tending to something in the barn out back, or he'll walk quickly through the tasting room ... but both are ever-present on the property and their warm friendly attitude makes you feel right at home. I have visited on a number of occasions over the past year and each time I am impressed by both the quality of their wines and the warmth and knowledge of the staff.

Featherstone is a winery that's well worth your time to visit, and sometimes for things other than the wine. All summer long they serve light lunches on the wrap-around verandah, and on certain weekends, food pairings or discussion groups are taking place. As you can probably tell, these people are serious about wine, but they know how to have fun in the process. Follow Victoria Street south, away from the lake, up the hill and you'll find Featherstone – you'll be glad you did.



Grape Guy's Picks of the Bunch: *Two very special wines*

Visit www.featherstonewinery.ca for more details or to purchase these great wines.

Featherstone Estate Winery 2005 Topaz - \$12.00

I did a little checking on the Featherstone website to see what the availability of this wine was (250 cases produced), because this wine proves to be extremely popular each and every year. On the website, I was warned not to tell the exact make up of this primarily Riesling blend, because every year it's just a little different ... and Lord knows I do not want to be chained to the cellar wall. So instead of revealing the secret blend (to which I may or may not have been privy to), let's look at what makes this wine so tasty and drinkable. We'll start with the floral, citrus, pineapple and honey nose ... you'll notice the honey aspect begins to show through once the wine has warmed up a bit. On the palate it's soft, supple and smooth with a slight hint of citrus and some peach flavours. Plus, it's got a hint of sweetness, but nothing overpowering, it's a pleasant, light and lively wine and it flies off the shelf, usually selling out by the time they close up for the winter ... (that's at least one secret I can tell you without worry of recrimination).

Featherstone Estate Winery 2004 Estate Bottled Onyx - \$20.00 – SOLD OUT!

I don't usually do this, plug a sold out wine, but this review is for all of you who were lucky enough to pick up a bottle or two (or three) of this wine.

I dubbed this a Johnny B. Goode wine – more on that in a bit; but first let's discuss this wine in a little more detail. It's a blend of Cabernet Franc (50%) and Merlot (50%), made from a light vintage year (which is also mirrored in its colour) and aged in American oak. The flavours aren't mind blowing, *yet*, but considering the year, the wine is darn good. We'll start with the nose of cassis, blackberry, strawberry and some green pepper (most likely the Franc influence). In the mouth, it's easy going down, with light tannins and raspberry flavours, along with, and here's the Johnny B. Goode influence: earth and wood (for those of you who don't remember: "Deep down in Louisiana close to New Orleans, way back up in the woods among the evergreens, there stood a log cabin made of earth and wood, where lived a country boy named Johnny B. Goode"). It's a well-made wine, with great taste and good structure that should age well over the next couple of years, when the flavours will be more on-par with "mind blowing". Only 40 cases were produced (that's 480 bottles), so the wine was in limited supply but high demand, higher than I thought – but that's because it is so Goode, and going to get better.

Be sure to check out these other two reviewed products available at Featherstone: [2005 Riesling](#) and [Verjus](#)
The above wines, and such, are available only 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](#)":
[20 Bees 2005 Cabernet-Merlot](#) and [Vineland Estates 2002 Cabernet Sauvignon](#)*



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.

Each time I have visited Featherstone, I spied something new to catch my eye: the small waterfall and river running through the vineyard, the humourous signs that adorn the lawn and rock garden, the beautiful flowers, the lush vineyard – in fact, Featherstone's vineyard won the 2003 Vineyard of the Year. One of the real sources of joy on the property is Bocci, the dog, who is as good a host as you'll ever encounter, and some of his antics are the most entertaining I've seen. But what really tells me that this winery is still about fun, even amongst the award-winning vines and serious wines, is the doghouse. Just outside the tasting room and a little to your right, as you're facing the barn, you'll see a wine barrel lying on it's side with a doorway cut out of the barrel-head, the name 'Bocci' painted above the door. That really is his doghouse – and man is it cute ... it fits in perfectly at a winery where the host-with-the-most is the pooch. You'll thank Louise and Dave for a great visit and good wine ... but you'll always remember Bocci.



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

Coincidentally, we have both a food pairing and seminar weekend coming up at Featherstone (October 21 and 22). First there's the taste of honey-roasted pear salad with thyme [verjus](#) paired with Cranberry wine (all weekend long 11am-4pm). And if you want to know what happens at harvest time, take in a seminar with winemaker David Johnson, as he takes you through a-day-in-the-life-of-the-winery at harvest time. As a special treat you'll meet Amadeus, the raptor that protects the grapes at Featherstone ... you'll also learn that co-owner Louise Engel (mentioned above) is a falconer, and she'll explain Amadeus' role at Featherstone. Two seatings for this neat and informative seminar: Saturday at 11am and Sunday at 1pm. Check out this [weblink](#) for all the details or go to [www.featherstonewinery.ca](#) and look for the Events and Seminars section under NEW.

FYI: Our [Taste!](#) ticket winners are Joe Connell (Mississauga) and Patricia and Bill Kerr (Sault Ste. Marie).

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 We look forward to hearing from you!

© OntarioWineReview.com 2006. All rights reserved.

You may use the content of this newsletter by including full credit to Michael Pinkus, Grape Guy and a link to www.ontariowinereview.com