

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.



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In this Edition

- **Ontario Wine Review:** *WINERY REVIEW – Mountain Road Wine Company*
 - **Grape Guy's Picks of the Bunch:** *Hold on to these reds ... or drink now*
 - **The Wow Factor:** *Besides the wine - check this out!*
 - **Ask the Grape Guy:** *We lay rest to some of those half-truths and answer those nagging questions*
 - **Wine Event Spotlight:** *The Gourmet Food and Wine Show is Back ... and you could win tickets*
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OntarioWineReview: *WINERY REVIEW – Mountain Road Wine Company*

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.

As you climb Mountain Road, which starts in the middle of Beamsville, you begin to wonder if you're actually on the right path. But soon, as you crest the hill, you see a sign that says “Mountain Road Wine Company” and you breathe a sigh of relief; but as you turn right into their driveway, the doubt in your mind is renewed. An old steel barn-like building to your right, a large rusty tractor straight ahead, to your left a house – all looking innocuous enough but unlike any other winery you've ever seen. As you make the turn into the parking area, you'll notice a short brick wall that acts as a barrier between the lot and the tree-shaded pond beyond it. From the vantage of your newly acquired parking spot, you are probably under the impression that you are in the midst of some junkyard oasis. Is this really the right place? As you step out of your car and turn to face the building, you notice a small path to the left, leading into an alcove, this is the main entrance to the tasting room of the Mountain Road Wine Company. This is a cottage winery. This is how the big guys got their start, selling wine out of their basement, one bottle at a time. This winery boasts no fancy building; no monstrosity of a production facility; no gravity-flow, high tech machinery; just good, small batch, artisan winemaking. But let's go in and check it out.

As you enter the tasting room, you'll notice that it has the general appearance of any basement in Canada (except of course the cash register, the tasting bar and the multitude of wine bottles on racks around the walls). It's a relatively small tasting room, 3 or 4 times as long as it is narrow. The tasting bar itself runs the length of the room and can handle a good number of tasters at one time. Our host, Brenda, took us through a number of tastings, especially the new 2002's reds, both reserve and non-reserve, as well as a few back catalogue wines, including the incredibly under-valued [Botrytis Affected Riesling](#) (which by the time you read this will be completely sold out – a review can be found in Newsletter #21). The effervescently friendly Brenda told us, on this beautiful mid-week June afternoon: “I love working the mid-week shifts, Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday – it's not as busy and you get to actually talk to the people that come in, not just pour samples and go.” And throughout our visit she was plenty informative; not just about the wine, but about the area, her family, her life, etc. She small-talked and made us feel genuinely welcome; we felt like long lost friends. Maybe to some, the conversation would seem like too much information to share with a stranger, but it's part of what makes mid-week winery-hopping so much fun – the fact that you get to talk *with* people, making a new friend, if only for 15 minutes – and everybody gets to share one story which leads to another, and another. Time is taken, information is shared and by the end, you know at least 6 different shops to visit – and 3 reasonably priced restaurants that serve good food. And, in turn, you end up passing on your knowledge: other wines you've tried in the area, or somewhere to visit near where you live. Afterall, people who work in wine country travel too, and not just to other wine spots, the information shared is valuable to both parties. It's what makes us all human and gives us all that invaluable connection, and it's all done over a glass of wine ... the great social equalizer. “What's so funny about peace, love and understanding,” to coin a phrase.

During our tasting, Brenda convinced us to try a 2001 Marechal Foch. “What about the '02?” I asked. “The '01 is very popular, even people who don't like Foch (Grape Guy's Note: of which I am one) like our '01 – I haven't tried the '02 yet.” Well give us a comparative and pour yourself a sniff too, I prodded. She hesitated, and then with this simple explanation “I attempt to try 2 a day to familiarize myself ... I guess this'll be number one for

today,” she poured herself a tiny taste too.

Mountain Road Wine Company was lots of fun – once you get inside and start tasting their great wine you forget about the Sanford and Son-style exterior. So don't be fooled when you come up that driveway, park your car and come inside ... good wines await your arrival.



Grape Guy's Picks of the Bunch: *Hold on to these reds ... or drink now*
Visit www.mountainroadwine.com for more details or to purchase these great wines.

Mountain Road Wine Company 2002 Cabernet Franc - \$17.95

What a wonderful wine ... released earlier this year, during the New Vintages festival, when Mountain Road releases a plethora of wine from the great 2002 vintage – and most of them will age very well right into the next decade. This Franc is stunning, especially for the price. Currently the nose is loaded with green pepper, black pepper, tons of black fruit and oak. The taste is a little bit closed, showing signs of spicy black pepper, oak and a tannin grip that should loosen with more bottle aging. One of my co-tasters came out with the following “damn good wine now, but it's gonna be even better later”. I would probably have used a more flowery or descriptive vocabulary but I couldn't agree more. Buy a few bottles of this beauty now and lay them down, then start trying them in 3-4 years. Then again, you might want to give yourself a starting point for comparison, open one now, make some notes, then open another in a year from now ... and then the following year ... and then the next, and so on. Or, if you like it just the way it is now – drink up. By the way – for you romantics out there, the intense reddish-purple colour of this wine is also a great selling point and looks great in candlelight.

Mountain Road Wine Company 2002 Reserve Gamay Noir - \$17.95

You might be sick of hearing me talk about Gamay, but because I love the grape and what we are doing with it here in Ontario, you'll have to listen to me just a little bit longer. In France they make Beaujolais, which is a light fruity flavourful wine. Here in Ontario we also make a light fruity wine out of the Gamay grape, but there are some who are trying something different; and I am liking both versions. This reserve Gamay has lots of oak infused into the blend, you can smell and taste it. Once you get past that, you'll find the nose has plenty of raspberry, cherry and vanilla while the taste is black cherry, toasted oak and some lingering tannins. Hence, this is another wine from the highly acclaimed 2002 vintage which saw great growing conditions for reds. Because it has spent some time in oak, and because of the year, you know this wine is gonna age nicely. Right now the elements of a lighter style of Gamay are present (red fruit sweetness), but there's also some backbone that gives this wine that extra umph it deserves ... and what's more, it's highly drinkable now or you can lie it down for a couple of years - it's your choice.

These wines are available only at the winery.
Also check out the [2002 Cabernet Sauvignon](#) review on the website.



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](#)":
[Southbrook Winery 2002 Triomphe Cabernet Franc](#) and [Reif Estates 2002 VQA Shiraz](#)*

Also there are two new articles in the [On the Road with the Grape Guy](#) section:
A report from [Taste! in Prince Edward County](#) and about some time spend on [Pelee Island](#) in earlier this fall.



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 the Wow Factor is something positive outside the winery, inside the winery or around the winery; this one is going to sound like a criticism, but hear me out. When you pull up that steep-sloped gravel driveway, there is no way you're going to believe you are at the right place. It looks like an old rundown farm: rusty farm equipment and dilapidated buildings – but in actual fact, it adds to the mystic and rustic charm of the place. Once inside the well-lit, immaculately clean tasting room, the line between the outside world and the inside world blurs and you are left with a warm wine feeling (unless you're drinking chilled whites, of course). After your tastings and you step outside with your purchased bottles, or cases, reality hits again and you are left saying "I can't believe such great wines come from a place that looks like this." Well ya gotta start somewhere – better the wines be good and the grounds be shabby, than the other way around – right? Right!

You saw me make mention of the Sanford and Son look of the place – and if you have the chance, and privilege, to meet owner and winemaker, Steve Kocsis, you'll believe you've met the white version of Redd Foxx – no kidding. Smile Steve, I love what you've done with the place.



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 don't like red wine – it's too dry."

Not so much a question as a statement I hear way too often and it's not that I don't believe it, some people actually don't like red wine (I know, I am as shocked as you). I have determined, over time and study, in the course of my days of being a wine enthusiast and educator, that most novice wine drinkers are served the wrong kind of red wine their very first time; a wine far beyond their palates' acceptance or capabilities. This is not wine snobbery, it's true. Nobody cared enough about you to serve you the right wine from the get go. Let me explain using this example: You go over to your friends' house for dinner, they serve red wine, and, in all likelihood, they have probably been drinking red for years. Over the course of those years they have developed a taste for more robust, fuller reds. The wine they will most likely serve at dinner is something they like, not taking into account your tastes, or even your novice palate. They'll say something like, "This is currently our favourite red, you're gonna love it." But you don't, you're not ready for that big, bold and brawny Sauv they serve, in fact it tastes bitter and "too dry" to you.

Now, some folks take to wine like a fish to water; others have to find their way slowly and ease into it – like hot bath water. I'm a hot bath water kinda guy, my learning/taste curve started with sweet fruit wines, moved to sweet grape wines, then medium-dry to semi-sweet wines, dry whites and finally reds (beginning with a very fruity, low tannin, Chilean Merlot). It's those heavy, chalky tannins that kill the novice every time.

If you really want to start your foray into the world of reds, or want to get your friends to take the leap, try starting off with a light and lively Gamay or Beaujolais, a soft fruity merlot (Chile seems to make very good ones), Italian Valpolicella is also a good candidate. Once you get accustomed to those, you can make the leap to Cabs, Shirazes and other reds, but slowly – use the bath water analogy.

On the other hand, maybe you just don't like red wine, that's a shame, but I bet I can get you started ... I know many others who have said the very same thing to me and now enjoy a glass daily; we just have to find *your* red wine. Never fear, help is here.

Send your questions or statements to michael@ontariowinereview.com
or post them in [the cellar](#).



Wine Event Spotlight: *The Gourmet Food and Wine Show is Back ... and you could win tickets*

Another year has passed and thankfully the Gourmet Food and Wine Expo is back in town – bigger and better than ever. Annually it is held at the Metro Toronto Convention Centre – South Building – this year it runs from Friday November 24 to Sunday the 26. Live Entertainment, Connoisseurs Corner, The Cheese Corner Stage, The Food Network Stage and much more highlight this year's festivities. And of course there is always a featured region, this year it the Best of Niagara, very fitting. For more information about time, place and the event itself, visit www.foodandwineshow.ca.

Win Tickets: You'd better believe we've got 'em, so come and get 'em – by email of course. Send me an email with your name, address (with postal code) and phone number to michael@ontariowinereview.com and put "I wanna be a Gourmet" in the subject line. Deadline for entries is Thursday November 2nd, 2006 – 11:59pm.

Speaking of winner we have but one winner for the passes to the Ottawa Wine and Food Show November 3-5 held at the Ottawa Congress Centre. Congratulations to Brian Preston (Nepean) ... and here's a quick little update about the show ... seems that we got some wrong information about the theme of the show – this year it's "The Wines and Cuisine of Canada". [Check here for more information.](#)

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 We look forward to hearing from you!

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