

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:** *A Call is Answered*
 - **Grape Guy's Picks of the Bunch:** *A Clone is a Clone is a Clone ... or is it?*
 - **Beautiful Bottles:** *The Grape Guy asks: Are you Getting Screwed?*
 - **Wine Event Spotlight:** *Taste of the Season ... one pair of tickets ... and winners*
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OntarioWineReview: *A Call is Answered*

A few months ago ([Newsletter #29](#)), I wrote an article calling for a) a bottle return policy at the LCBO and b) the end of those stupid Tetra Pak wines (or at least not forcing them on our wineries as "alternative packaging"; let's leave that to the French!). While, I am not so full of hubris to believe that my little article instituted a full-scale change, for one brief moment it's fun to think maybe that I did. What I talked about has now come to fruition, or will in February of 2007, and it was all announced over a 5-day period in September, 131 days after it appeared in these very pages.

On Wednesday September 6, 2006, the Liberal government, lead by Dalton McGuinty, floated the balloon about instituting a bottle deposit-return system for LCBO products (similar to the one already in place at the Beer Store). The numbers presented to the government on the previous Tuesday stated that a full third of the bottles, half the plastic and 75% of those Tetra-Pak cartons sold at the LCBO are finding their way into landfill sites (instead of blue boxes as planned). The main reason cited for the glass being in landfills is that when the bottles break they can't be separated properly from the other recyclables; the rest is just plain consumer apathy. On the other hand, the report went on, The Beer Store has a 99% recovery rate for beer bottles and 90% for aluminum cans. [*Ed. Note: At first I thought these Beer Store numbers sounded a little high to me, but then I thought about it, 'I save beer bottles up for months just to get that measly 10 cents a bottle'. So if I'm doing it, I'm sure others are too, and with a heck of a lot more beer bottles than yours truly.*]. The numbers created a stir in the Premier's office and got him to "[light] a fire to get discussions going and options looked at," a source was reported to say. That same day, the NDP environment critic said, "They're not working on it. They're not thinking about it. It is not a priority." Four days later he was proved wrong.

Fact is, the government was not only looking into it, they acted upon it. McGuinty announced that "... Ontarians need to know is that we have come kicking and screaming out of the dark ages when it comes to LCBO containers." Starting February 1st, 2007, Ontarians will join all the other provinces, except Manitoba, when they institute a bottle deposit-return program, with one little twist, instead of taking your bottles back to the LCBO, you'll drop them off at the The Beer Store; reason given: because The Beer Store is already equipped to handle the empties – makes sense to me. It is reported that the new system will save 30 tons of glass, an amount equal to 80 million bottles, from reaching landfill sites.

Critics of the program are many, including some wine writers, citing amongst others things, consumer apathy, the LCBO raising prices to cover costs they will never incur, and blasting the two trip system (liquor store to buy, Beer Store to return). I, on the other hand, think it's a fabulous idea that we should all embrace, if for no other reason than to prove these critics wrong. I'm sure there will be some bugs in the beginning, but predictable at the onset of a new government program starts – at least this is a step in the right direction.

Neither the cost of the program has been fully determined, nor has the deposit amount to be levied been set, but estimates range from 10 to 40 cents, depending on the product. Many reports I've read proclaimed ominously "Alcohol is going to cost more in the new year" but what we have to remember is that this is a deposit system and that you will be getting the money back when you return the empties (same as beer) – so wine and spirits aren't going to cost more, per se. On a positive note, if you are like me, the money returned to you will probably be put towards your next purchase anyway. It will cost more for are those of us who cellar our

wines; we won't see the money back for some time: those who drink their wines within 24-48 hours of purchase (and according to LCBO's numbers this includes 90+% of you) will get your money back the next morning or after the weekend.

This announcement is great news and with any luck will also spell the culling fell for those stupid Tetra-Paks the LCBO has been trying to tout as the saviour of our "over-full waste system". The numbers so far have shown that, what the LCBO estimated would be saved, has yet to materialize. So without malice, or an I-told-you-so-attitude, I call for the LCBO to do away with those Tetra-Pak wines, or at the very least, stop calling for our wineries (here in Ontario) to cheapen their products by putting them in "alternative packaging". Long live the bottle I say ... now cork, that's a different story for another time. (sooner than you think even ... see below)



Grape Guy's Picks of the Bunch: A Clone is a Clone is a Clone ... or is it?

Visit www.flatrockcellars.com for more details or to purchase these great wines.

Flat Rock Cellars Pinot Noir Clone Research - \$110 (4 bottle pack)

www.flatrockcellars.com

In speaking with a few business associates the other day, there was a brief debate about how long a business is considered "new". We figured that you could no longer be a "new" location, or place, after about a year. Let's take Flat Rock Cellars for example, they have been open for over a year now (since May 2005), but are still considered one of Niagara's newest wineries. On the other hand, they do remain on the cutting edge of innovation in Niagara. You can debate whether they are still considered 'a new kid on the block' for as long as you like; but you certainly can't take away that innovative - aspect from them, so new might still hold water, or is that wine. It is some of these innovations that most of the more established wineries have been reluctant to adopt; like full Stelvin screwcap bottling, a five level gravity flow winery, and specializing their production to only certain grape varieties such as Riesling, Chardonnay and Pinot Noir. And it's the latter that they are doing something completely new with: Clone Research.

Pinot Noir is one of the most interesting grapes in the world because, it is constantly mutating, hence the Pinot Noir vines we see today will be different in 10 years, changing and adapting to their environment, and in another 10 years different again. Here's the explanation as taken from the Flat Rock literature: "[a clone] is essentially a spontaneous mutation of a "parent" vine that has been propagated over time. Due to the fact that Pinot Noir is genetically unstable, there are possibly thousands of different clones of Pinot Noir in the world." What Flat Rock Cellars has done is take the current batch of "Dijon clones" they have (115, 667, 777) and made clone specific wines from them. Usually, wineries will have a variety of different clones of a particular grape and they will blend them into the final wine to get the taste they are looking for.

Now Flat Rock is giving you the chance to try 3 different clones of Pinot Noir and determine your favourite. Three of us sat down in the OntarioWineReview Lab to try all three side-by-side to give our thoughts and opinions:

115 ... A nose of smoke, oak, clove, cedar, earth and dried fruit. On the palate we found raspberry, clove, sage, spice and some earthy notes. Final analysis and comments: nice, pleasant, low tannin, short to medium finish. A nice light tasting wine. Average score: 6.83 (out of 10).

667 ... Fresher smells than the 115, raspberry, strawberry, sour black cherry and lots of ripe red fruit on the nose. The palate showed signs of vanilla, sweet red cherries, and mild earthiness. Final analysis and comments: great nose, pleasant aftertaste. Softer and more fruity than the 115. Medium long with an elegant finish. Average score: 7.66 (out of 10).

777 ... Pleasant smell of mint and earth, along with some great red berry fruit. The mint followed through in the taste, along with milk chocolate, oak and raspberry. Final analysis and comments: no one knew where the hint-of-mint or the chocolate came from, but it was present on everyone's score card. The tannins weren't too overpowering and it was an easy drinking and pleasant tasting Pinot with some perceived sweetness (though still a zero). Average score: 7.66 (out of 10).

What did we learn? Well, first of all, and this came as quite a revelation; everybody has different tastes (shocking huh?). Turned out that each bottle had its' fan (3 bottles – 3 people, and each person picked a different one as their favourite). Secondly, as you can see, there were definite, unmistakable differences between the clones.

The Flat Rock Clone Research Pack is a great introduction to Pinot Noir that you can try with friends, and well worth promoting for your next wine tasting party. As for the fourth bottle, [the Gravity Pinot](#), (previously reviewed), it's a blend of all three clones – and remains my personal favourite of the lot.

The above wines are available at the winery only.



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](#)":
[Angels Gate 2005 Rose](#) and [Harbour Estates 2004 Petit Verdot](#)*

This week also sees the Grape Guy reviewing the 21st Annual Ottawa Wine and Food Show. Check out the [On the Road with the Grape Guy](#) section of the forum to see what interesting and wonderful wines were being showcased in Ottawa.



Beautiful Bottles: *The Grape Guy asks: Are you Getting Screwed?*

I guess that "another time" I promised has come sooner than expected.

Hopefully, you have been noticing the proliferation of screwcaps on liquor store shelves, mostly from countries like Australia, New Zealand and California (even some small Ontario wineries are getting on board, more on that in a moment). Screwcaps used to mean inferior quality jug wine, but that is not the case today. Screwcaps are starting to become more common on mid-quality wines, and even some high-quality wines, because of the countless studies that have shown that 1 in 10 bottles, that's 10 percent of all bottles closed by cork, end up with some kind of flaw, be it cork taint, oxidation, or leakage ... ten percent! Some industry analysts put this number as high as 20% of bottles that contain even minor taint of some kind. No other industry in the world would settle for even a 10% failure rate, let alone a possible 20, but wine has continued undaunted. By contrast, screwcaps have proven to have less than a 1% failure rate, and allow the wine to age just as well as cork – in some studies even slower. These tests also found the wines under screwcap to be fresher and more in line with what the winemaker had intended. The tests I am referring to are ones that were done starting in the 1930's, when UC Davis, in California, bottled a 1937 Colombard with a screwcap, and when opened 50 years later the wine was found to be "in fine fettle". The French ran trials in the 1960's and 70's; while the Australians started looking into screwcaps in the late 70's. It is because of the results of these studies, that the infamous screwcap has become more commonplace, on more than just low-end jug wines, and Australia and New Zealand are leading the charge.

Case-and-point: At the most recent New Zealand wine fair in May 2006, a full 95% of all New Zealand wine at the show was under screwcap, and nearly 100% of the current vintage required you to crack the cap. Flat Rock Cellars, right here in Ontario, is the first Canadian winery to commit all their products to the screwcap – even icewine; while Malivoire is putting the twist on their whites and lower end reds. You'll soon see other Canadian wineries following suit. Coyote's Run is making the switch over for all of their 2005's and beyond; Norman Hardie Wines has made the commitment to full Stelvin bottling; and 20 Bees is betting you'll like to do the unscrew with all their wines. Of course, the cork industry is none to pleased, but change is inevitable. As James Halladay asked in the July 2006 issue of Decanter magazine, "what other 350-year old technology has remained unchanged for all but 40 years of it's life?" Answer: none. But the cork industry does not want you to believe there is anything better than cork as a wine closure ... and their ads are stressing just that, as well as the obvious loss of the romance factor provided by cork.

Now I fully agree, you'll lose the romantic charm of pulling cork: the pomp and circumstance of the pop, the ceremony of getting the bottle ready, and showing off your pulling and popping prowess; but you'll also lose the embarrassment of serving a bad bottle of wine, which, to me, far outweighs the other three. So it's time to lose those old held stereotypes and prejudices about the lowly screwcap and learn to embrace it ... because like

CDs that took over from LPs, they're better and they are here to stay. Keep in mind, CDs got rid of the hiss, pop and crackle from those Long Players; but, in the case of the cork vs. the screwcap, the "pop" gives way to the "crackle". If you're looking for hiss, open a beer.

Here's a little trivia for you ...

Name the first Ontario winery to put a VQA wine under "Stelvin Screwcap", with VQA approval?

Send an email to michael@ontariowinereview.com with your guess and also provide me with your name and address with postal code – the first 4 correct answers will receive a limited edition OntarioWineReview DropStop.



Wine Event Spotlight: *Taste of the Season ... one pair of tickets ... and winners*

Niagara-on-the-Lake wineries and Second Harvest team up once again to bring you Taste of the Season, a culinary and wine-pairing extravaganza during weekends in November (11/12; 18/19 and 25/26). Where else will you be able to sample things like: Wild Mushroom Tart paired with Merlot (Inniskillin); Brie Baked Cheesecake with Cranberries paired with Cabernet Franc (Joseph's); or Maple Cured Pork Tenderloin with Apple Salsa paired with Barrel Aged Chardonnay (Niagara College). Sound good? Trust me it is. Having been on this excursion the past 4 years I can tell you it is well worth the money. For more information you can check out the [Wineries of Niagara on the Lake](http://www.wineriesofniagara.com) website. For information about the organizer of this event you can check out their website at www.secondharvest.ca - tickets are \$40 and can be purchased [online](#) or by calling 905-468-1950 or 416-408-2594 ... don't forget you have to pick a specific weekend. I know that tickets are going quickly – so get your hands on some while you still can. The last weekend is probably your best bet.

FREE PASSES: Speaking of the last weekend, we have put our hands on ONE pair of tickets for the last weekend of Taste of the Season (November 25/26) – in my opinion this is the perfect weekend to go. With the holiday season fast approaching the wineries always have some great gift ideas; be it wine or wine-paraphernalia for all the wine lovers on your list. To take your chances for these passes send an email to michael@ontariowinereview.com, along with your name, address (with postal code) and phone number; put "I wanna Taste the Season's Second Harvest" in the subject line. Good luck. Entries must be received no later than 11:59pm Wednesday November 15.

Winners: Speaking of winners we had 5 pairs of tickets to giveaway to the Gourmet Food and Wine Expo – and the winners are: Robert Deveer (Kingsville); Geoff Harper (Brampton); Larry Horne (St. Catharines); Jack Lucas (Toronto) and Kim Heys (Toronto). Each will receive a pair of tickets to go to the show. Congratulations. For more information on the show please visit <http://www.foodandwineshow.ca/>.

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!

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