

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 – 46
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News ... *We start this newsletter off with some news about OntarioWineReview and our website:*

We are closing the Cellar (the OntarioWineReview forum). Regrettably it was just not the right time to create that kind of venue for our readers ... and who's kidding who, I was not in there enough to give you the content it deserved. The good news is we are keeping the two most popular content threads and they will be integrated into the website over the next few weeks: The Tuesday "Weekly Wine Note" will have it's own section and a sign up option – so you don't miss out on hot wines, good wines, and cellar candidates. "On the Road with the Grape Guy" will also continue, providing you with insight on what events are must attends, where to go, what to do and the most current, upcoming and noteworthy wines available. Look for both of them in the new year.

Here are two other tidbits I'd like to share with you: With the influx of wine reviews on the site we will be making it easier for you to find the wine(s) you're looking for. Wine being the only item people still shop for by region, we will be reorganizing the wines into their Ontario regionality in the new year – we will make an announcement when that job is completed.

Also, be ready to take part in the first ever OntarioWineReview event: The Baco Challenge ... details to follow in January. We're jazzed about this one.

Now back to your regularly scheduled newsletter. Have a great Holiday Season and a Happy New Year.



OntarioWineReview: *WINERY REVIEW – Vignoble Rancourt 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.

There's an inherent thrill about finding a new, and as yet, undiscovered winery. It's like being the first on your block with the newest gadget that everyone will soon own. Think back through the ages at the excitement that was felt by the owner of the first wheel, the first book, the first motorcar, the first telephone, the first radio, the first television set, or the first computer in the neighbourhood. In today's terms, it's like being the first on the block with a Playstation 3. Then again, maybe it's on a much grander scale, like the discoveries of Magellan or Columbus, finding new worlds and new civilizations. I guess, in the end, I guess it is up to you to decide at what level you equate the discovery. Now I'll be the first to admit that I don't have monumental aspirations that everybody I know is gonna flock to my house to gaze lovingly, or wantonly, at the newest bottle of wine in my collection; nor do I feel I will be invited to court to tell my story about "the discovery" to the queen. What will most likely happen is that I'll tell my friends to go visit the place and get their own bottle – because unlike the newest gadget on the market this one isn't gonna cause you to take out a second mortgage to own it, nor will you have to book passage on the Nina, the Pinta or the Santa Maria to check it out. And just like that new toy, you'll come back again and again to find out what it does and what's happening with it. So come check out this new discovery, as we look at Vignoble Rancourt Winery (Rancourt for short).

Friends (Romans, Countrymen ...), let me introduce you to Niagara-on-the-Lake's newest winery - Rancourt.

Opened in July of 2006 they truly are just getting their feet wet on the retail side of wine ... as for making wine, Lionel Rancourt, (owner, winemaker, innovator) has been doing it for years. Rancourt Winery is a dream-come-true for Lionel, cannot claim that winemaking has been in his family going back 15 generations, "but we've been working the land for that long," Lionel told me. "Our goal is to be a shining star among the wineries." And with his attitude and vision, I don't see how he can fail.

With the days getting shorter and the sun setting on this late fall day, I pulled into the long driveway of Rancourt a little after 5pm on a Tuesday evening. The wine store itself was at the end of the drive and as I exited my car and made my way over to the door I noticed a sign that read "Monday to Friday 10-5; Saturday & Sunday 11-6" ... I figured that I had missed my opportunity and turned to get back into my car. Suddenly, a lone voice shouted "hello" and a small but spry man came skipping down a flight of stairs from the house, located halfway up the drive. This was my first meeting with Lionel Rancourt. He came bounding up to me with a smile on his face. I asked if he was still open and his jovial reply, in his heavily laden French accent "you took the time and trouble to come down my driveway, of course we're open, you're important to us." He ushered me into the winery and began asking me questions: "How did you find us?" Was of the utmost importance to him. I told him that I had seen his direction sign on Highway 55 (Niagara Stone Road – just past Pillitteri, pointing to Concession 4). It was one I had never seen before, and I am always on the lookout for new wineries. He was thrilled that his sign had brought people in and immediately pulled down tasting glasses from the shelf behind him. He offered up his Noble White as an aperitif before breaking into the reds (currently Rancourt offers 1 white and 4 reds). You can find reviews in the Pick of the Bunch section and on the site, so let's talk about the winery itself.

The Rancourts, Lionel and his wife Lorraine (pronounced Loren, as in Sophia), who runs the Bed and Breakfast and does "all the paperwork" according to Lionel, have a cute little wine shop. Lorraine admits to knowing very little about her husband's passion for the fermented grape, but she does know she likes to drink it. Lionel, on the other hand, is excited and passionate enough about the venture and product for both of them. The wine store interior is small and finished in stylish dark mahogany. The bottles are angled along the tops of shelves (which stand about four feet high) so that the labels face you at about a 30-degree angle, thus making them easy to read. The labels are attractive black with gold lettering; this effect looks better on the reds than on the whites ... the darker liquid inside gives the appearance of an elegant and stately bottle of wine. This is a bottle you'd be proud to put on your table and looks a lot more expensive than it is.

Lionel took me on a tour of his soon to be completed upstairs seminar room, where he'll hold wine classes, seminars and tastings. There's also a back room that resembles a little kitchenette, where the food pairings will be prepared (and what's more, Lionel has built it all himself). He showed me a line on the wall and said, "everything from here is all new" – The "new" includes a tank room (that currently houses 24 tanks), storage area, wine library and barrel room. When I asked him about the barrels he uses, he suddenly became very serious. "I am still experimenting. People don't like too much oak these days," he said, "so we have to be very careful." The 2004 vintage was done using mostly French oak chips and no wine saw more than 1 month at that. The 2006 vintage might see minimum contact in some of the new American oak barrels he has wrapped in plastic in the basement. "I'm still trying to figure it all out," Lionel informed me, "but we have big plans for the future ... we're going to be a shining star amongst the wineries of Niagara." He repeats. And I believe him.

Looking at the outside, you'd think my tour would have taken all of 5 minutes, but 45 minutes later I walked out with an arm full of wine and a better story to tell people than what I expected when I pulled into the drive. The queen would have been proud. A shining star? I have absolutely no doubt in my mind. Might I suggest you walk in and make up your own mind, but I think you'll be with me on this one.



Grape Guy's Picks of the Bunch: *Fantastic Franc and Marvelous Merlot*

Visit 1829 Concession 4 Niagara-on-the-Lake to purchase these great wines. No website yet.

Given the friendly atmosphere of Rancourt Winery, and the way Lionel and Lorraine make you feel like an old friend or even family when you walk in the door, I have dedicated each review of their wine to a particular friend or family member ... you'll know who you are.

Vignoble Rancourt Winery 2004 Cabernet Franc - \$20

I had a friend who would have been drawn to this wine like a Scotsman to whiskey (having met a few Scotsmen in my day I say that with some authority). She's a big fan of Cabernet Franc ... big, hearty, beefy, heck, for lack of a better term, ballsy Cabernet Franc – she even liked the green pepper aspect of the wine. Well this one has everything she'd be looking for, including the green pepper. In the past I have dubbed wines with certain

names, this one will be my Jim Croce wine, because this one requires some “Time in [the] Bottle”. But for those who just can’t wait, I would suggest decanting or getting some special glassware. First you’ll find black licorice, oak and tar on the nose (not too inviting huh?) and even the flavours are a little tight on the tongue: with licorice, oak and tart blackberries. Give it some time though and it opens up nicely with raspberries, vanilla and yes that telltale green pepper on the nose; black fruit, oak and sweet pickled red peppers on the taste. This wine goes best with food, steak, hearty pasta and sauce, or a mess of ribs – but those firm tannins will need some air to mellow them out; open a minimum of 30 minutes before serving. As for my Franc-loving friend, my dear, if you’re out there – this one’s your cup of tea, so to speak.

Rancourt Winery 2004 Merlot - \$16

My mom has always loved Merlot, Myles be damned – and she’s always on the lookout for a good Ontario Merlot. Now most young Ontario merlot is tough to drink, unless you like your tannins harsh and your body full ... mom is not a fan of either. Lionel’s light handed approach to oak has made a soft style of merlot that fits right in line with mom’s palate – smooth, easy drinking and delicious. Soft on tannins and a subtle nose that’s hard to define, maybe hints of raspberry, blackberry and some cassis waft up from the glass, with the subtlest hint of clove, but that’s about it. It’s in the mouth where this wine really shines. The raspberries are there along with some sweet vanilla and cocoa notes – as mentioned there is a little bit of tannin, but not enough to take away from the nicely persistent sweet flavours. Could there even be the slightest hint of coconut in there? You decide. For my money, this is a fine merlot to serve with dinner or on it’s own – and I’m sure mom would agree.

NB: The 2004 Cabernet Sauvignon (\$18) was tasted in store – deep rich wine with lots of dark berries, cassis and touches of oak to round it out. A good cellar candidate. A full review of the [2004 Noble White](#) and [2003 Meritage](#) can be found on the website.

Hot Tip on a Hot Wine: Mark it in your calendars folks because it doesn’t happen very often – it’s a double shot of Chardonnay. First there was Tuesday’s weekly wine note (see below) and now this one. Only 97 cases were made of this Lailey Vineyard offering which is not only unique but makes a wonderful addition to your holiday table ... and furthermore, it’s patriotic. Read about it first, then show your Canadian-Pride and go buy a bottle of the [2005 Canadian Oak Chardonnay](#) ... delicious.

These 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](#)”:
[Rosehall Run 2004 Buckthorn Red](#) and [Mike Weir Estate Winery 2005 Chardonnay](#)*



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.

At 65 plus years of age, Lionel and Lorraine are both still full of vim, vigor and vitality. Even after shattering his knee last summer, Lionel continued building up his dream until the pain became unbearable and he had to take some time off to get the kneecap replaced in February of 2006. But that’s not the wow factor – though it definitely could be. Because what he has accomplished is something amazing; while his shattered knee might have slowed him down, it did not stop him; amazing. But the real wow factor is the Bed and Breakfast that the Rancourts have been running for the past 15 years, with little to no advertising over the past 10. “It’s all repeat business and word-of-mouth now,” says Lorraine Rancourt. After she admitted to knowing very little about the wines I made the mistake of asking her (in Lionel’s presence): “Is looking after the bed and breakfast your only responsibility?” Lionel almost jumped out of his chair to tell me all the other things she does, which would have been an even longer list I am sure, had I not stopped him halfway through to apologize. As her husband rattled off his list Mrs. Rancourt just smiled and nodded, confirming my assumption. She does take care of a lot of other things that I am sure Lionel, with his over active mind, neglects.

The care and décor of both the wine store and the outside of the house have been well planned and thought

out. I have not been into the main house, seen the interior of the Bed and Breakfast, nor tried her cooking; but if what I saw inside the wine store, and the plans for the rest of the winery, are any indication it's probably immaculate ... and besides, people don't come back if they don't like the place, no matter how nice the people are. Lorraine says they're booked every year. As for the winery, trust me when I tell you that you'll come back there too. For some final words I'll leave you with something Lionel said to me: "You come back, you don't have to buy or try the wines, just come back to see what we are doing, we have big plans. I'm a dreamer, I know, but what I have in my head sooner or later comes to fruition – it might take 2 or 3 years, but you'll see." Once again I have no doubt, none at all.



Wine Event Spotlight: *Niagara Icewine Festival January 19-28*

It's icewine time again. The 12th Annual Niagara Icewine Festival kicks off January 19th and runs through to January 28th ... two weekends sandwiching 10 days of events. Highlights of which are the 7000lb blocks of ice that are turned into Ice Wine-Bars in the middle of Jordan Station (weekend one) and Niagara-on-the-Lake (weekend two). There are also tours, tastings, pairings and seminars held at the participating wineries - a \$30 touring passport can get you into those. Check out www.niagarawinefestival.com for all the details or call 905-688-0212 for information and tickets.

Touring Passport Giveaway: OntarioWineReview is prepared to help you feed, or at the very least wine, your sweet tooth ... we have, thanks to the Niagara Grape and Wine Festival, 5 pairs of touring passports to give away. Email your name, address (with postal code) and phone number to michael@ontariowinereview.com - and put "Feed my Sweet Spot" in the subject line. All entries must be received by 11:59pm Thursday December 28 ... and all winners are selected at random. Best of luck to everyone.

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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