

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 – 47
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News ... *Our First Ever Event: The Baco Challenge*

I am so jazzed about this I can barely breathe – it's our first ever OntarioWineReview event (I hope there are many more to come). And for our first event, we have chosen to do the First Ever "Ontario Baco Challenge". We put winery against winery, Baco against Baco, to find out who's making the Best Baco in Ontario – and the exciting part is ... you're invited. Together, we'll be taste testing Baco to determine Ontario's best. This is not a professional taste-off, this is a people's challenge – and you'll be doing the judging based on three criteria 1) is it good; 2) would you buy it; and 3) is it good value. All this tasting will be taking place over the 4 Mondays in February ... each night, 7 different Baco wines will be tasted. Come out for just one night, or all four – consider this your personal invitation. A brief discussion giving history and flavour profiles about this often maligned but tasty hybrid will also be given. After each tasting, we'll throw a little wine and cheese party, pulling out and sampling some other wines (maybe even some Crystal Cork nominees and winners). Then with glass in hand, we'll kick back our heels on a cold February night, spend some time beside the fire and discuss wine or any other subject you like. [Click this link](#) for all the details about where, when and how to get your tickets. I'd love to add your voice and opinion to this once-in-a-lifetime event. I'm look forward to seeing you there.



OntarioWineReview: *Peter Finch Said it Best*

Just like Peter Finch in the movie *Network*, "I'm mad as hell and I'm not gonna take it anymore". The LCBO seems to be forcing its will on the people and in typical Canadian-sheep-like fashion we are going to put up with it ... again. Well it's time to take a stand. What am I so hopping mad about? Tetra-Paks, and the more I learn, the more incensed I get, and I'm thinking you should be too. Sure Tetra-Paks have their place in society for juice boxes, soups and soy milk – but keep your cotton-pickin' Tetra-Paks off of my wine. You've probably noticed that the LCBO is shifting into high gear promoting this "alternative packaging" as the great saviour in wine packaging – lighter, more versatile, more consumer friendly, and recyclable. I find it funny that there was much wailing and gnashing of teeth over Stelvin screwcap closures and how it was perceived to cheapen the wine in bottle; now are we all blindly to believe that Tetra-Paks are a great invention and are the wave of the future in wine packaging? I'm not saying do away with all Tetra Paks, in fact I think they just may have their place for say boating and picnics, or perhaps as a curiosity quaffer you might pick up on your way home from work to pair with that Swanson's Hungry-Man Dinner and a ball game; but as packaging for quality wines, you have got to be kidding me. If we give in whole-heartedly to this trend, what's the next step, eliminating the middleman (namely the glass) by providing a straw on the outside? That way you can just pop it in and suck away (also great for kids lunches!).

The LCBO – the largest single buyer of beverage alcohol in the world – is throwing its weight around pressuring producers worldwide into using this type of packaging. To me, that is just downright barbaric and does not take into consideration the wine buying public's real need for quality wine in quality packaging. Are these really the same folks who are representing Ontario around the world? Telling the French, the Australians, the Americans and the Chileans that this is what Ontario wants their wine packaged in ... they must think we're daft. We fight the inception of a screwcap, calling it cheap, yet we want boxed wine - thumbs up to the LCBO on this one. But it goes much deeper than that, here's where I step off my high horse and start quoting others so you too will know the score on this issue.

I know there's an old song by a group called Foreigner, which we should re-title "Juice-Box Hero" because that is the way the pro-camp is talking about Tetra-Pak wines. In a recent article in Tidings magazine written by Stephanie Dickson (December/January 06/07 "Drink in Boxes"), she concludes the article thusly: "For convenience and ease-on-the-pocket, you can't do better than a Tetra wine. And from an environmental perspective, you are making a wise choice when choosing the box over the bottle. So if you want an affordable and convenient wine that tastes good and that can be drunk right now, the Tetra is for you."

Hrayr Berberoglu, wine writer and educator, has a much different opinion: "I have tasted practically all Tetra Prisma packaged wines the LCBO carries (there are approximately 76 and the number is increasing every week) and must state that none was great, one or two may be passable at best. They are convenient and consume less shelf space [than glass bottles], which the LCBO likes, less expensive to transport and distribute – all characteristics advantageous to producers and marketers, but not to the consumer."

To listen to the LCBO on the environmental factor, they make it sound like we best trash all thoughts about ever using bottles again. "The LCBO continues to encourage suppliers to bring forward products in alternative package formats [read: Tetra Paks] that generate less waste, as part of our plan to eliminate 10-million kilograms of waste annually." Bob Downey, Senior Vice President of Sales and Marketing for the LCBO, wrote in a letter.

A little fact manipulation Terence Corcoran tells us in his article "Monopoly Wine to Come in a Box" dated December 9th, 2006 in the National Post. "The idea that this is a waste-reduction plan is a trick concept. Glass is heavier than Tetra Pak, so replacing one with the other will reduce waste by weight. But glass, properly sorted and processed, is recyclable. Tetra Pak is not." That's because of Tetra-Pak's make up which is 75% paperboard, 20% food grade polyethylene plastic and 5% aluminum – which makes it light and unbreakable, but for recycling purposes it's a cost nightmare to separate out the materials. Even the new recycling program announced in September and touted by the Premier of the province as dragging Ontario "out of the dark ages" is actually, according to Corcoran, part of the sham to get you to buy Tetra-Paked wines: "This new 20-cent deposit system is actually the product of the LCBO's plan to make a major shift away from bottled products and towards boxes ... [the LCBO] is mounting a major international effort to get vintners to repackage wines in boxes." The LCBO is also hoping you will see the new deposit-system as another form of taxation on booze and will refuse to pay it, opting instead for the lower cost of Tetra-Wine.

Corcoran puts forth another reason for the LCBO's love of Tetra-Paks, which has nothing to do with environmental concerns. Profits are the main reason for these wine-drink-in-boxes, at the expense of consumers tastebuds. "the LCBO now has business relationships with two box plants." Thus a vested interest in you and I buying and consuming Tetra-Paked wines. This notion is seconded by [Guy Crittenden on his blog devoted to solid waste and recycling](#) in a little more eye-opening detail: "Consider that this proposed Tetra Pak facility will also package import bulk wines, and also consider that under the federal *Importation of Intoxicating Liquors Act* the LCBO must be the import agent, which means that it is the *de facto* brand-owner of the imported bulk wine."

But what about the package itself? The big problem I see with Tetra-Pak is long-term viability for the wine inside, and Hrayr agrees. "Tetra Prisma packaging breathes, and the shelf life of any wine in it is at most one year (for white wine even less). Oxygen breaks down the wine, it literally destroys it gradually and effectively," writes Berberoglu. Also take note that everything on your grocers' shelves packaged in Tetra-Pak from juice boxes to soups, soy milk to olive oil, have a "best before" date on them ... everything. Think about those same products packaged in glass or aluminum cans: that Allen's apple juice I buy at my local Loblaws, has no such time limit on it; hence I would trust a wine packaged in a can more than I would one in Tetra-Pak (NB to the LCBO: this is not an endorsement to go out and put wine in a can). It seems that all the experts agree, there is no better packaging to cellar and store wine other than bottles (the closure is still up to some debate it seems) and for the LCBO to be throwing it's weight around trying to get their way for "alternative packaging" is a downright disservice to their clientele ... you and me.

Let's look at the brass tacks of the matter. Why would the LCBO, with all its experts, inside and out, who know full well that wine in bottle is better than boxed wine, be foisting Tetra on unsuspecting and trusting Ontarians? The answer: Private Label and Higher Profits. "With private labels, the LCBO moves from monopoly distributor and retailer to manufacturer," writes Corcoran. Once again Crittenden expands: "In essence, this Tetra Pak agenda is about the LCBO getting into sponsoring the production of products that will be its house-brands in everything but name. If the LCBO manages to have complete discretion in how these bulk imported wines are marked-up for sale they will be enormously "profitable" -- bought at low bulk prices and marked-up as "premium" wines." That means the LCBO will soon be pushing their own private label brand, and for profit margin reasons (up to 65% more profit in some cases) they are going to be putting LCBO-brand wine in boxes; they just needed a litmus test (or 76); the more "quality" producers they could get on board to package wine in

Tetra Pak the better perceived quality their own branded wine will have when it hits the market. A notion seconded in a report by Deloitte Inc., the company that did an internal review of the LCBO's profitability "Re-introducing a private label program is a natural fit given the strength of LCBO's brand and retail presence."

So what does all this mean? It means you're going to be seeing a lot more wines in Tetra-Paks, and rumour has it that the LCBO is accepting all wine in Tetra-Pak with little to no scrutiny. It also means the LCBO will continue to pressure producers, both foreign and domestic, to put their wines in this "alternative packaging". It means, as the largest purchaser of alcohol in the world, they'll succeed in getting a lot of quality producers to sing to their tune. And it means "I'm mad as hell, and I'm not gonna take it anymore!" Let's all sing the bottom line to the tune of a recognizable carol which will go something like this: You'd better watch out, you'd better not cry, you'd better not pout and I'm telling you why, more Tetra-Pak wines are coming to town (whether you like it or not) ... and the only way to stop the onslaught is to buy less of them. I am going to boycott wines in Tetra-Pak, and encourage you to consider doing the same ... do not encourage the LCBO to bring more of these things into our market. 76 is quite enough "choice", too much in fact. Picnicking, boating, and camping remain very acceptable places to drink your boxed wines, (but do you really need that much choice?); and please think twice before putting them on the dinner table. Finally, and for heaven's, and the bottles sake, support the bottle return program. Call me a snob if you like, but I like my wines (and I never thought I would have to say this in my lifetime) the old-fashioned way, in bottle thank you very much.



Grape Guy's Picks of the Bunch: *Better with Age – Tawse Riesling – Jackson-Triggs Shiraz*
Visit the winery or their website for more information on how to purchase these wines.

Tawse Winery 2004 Dry Riesling - \$18.00
www.tawsewinery.ca

Much of what I am about to say probably won't win me many friends at Tawse, though I must say right from the outset I love this wine. Last year I visited Tawse Winery and walked away less than impressed ... mainly about the wine. As everybody who reads my reviews knows, I am always looking for a good value to pass along: a Riesling for \$12; a Cabernet Franc at \$14.95 – wines that perform not only in the glass but are also a good bargain for the pocketbook. Tawse left me flat with \$42 Chardonnay, \$28 Franc and overpriced Pinot (I could find comparable or better for less money) . Tawse also seems to be a winery in constant flux – there's always construction and it never seems to end. With all that said, I have reason to believe they are going to become one of the showcase wineries of Ontario ... once 3 things happen: they have a few more years under their belt, they are fully landscaped, and they decide to lower the price of their wines to a point where price meets quality (and they are no longer cashing in on winemaker Deborah Paskus' name). If you haven't been to visit Tawse it's definitely a "must see": a fully open concept gravity flow winery, stunning in both architecture and décor – wood, glass and steel – and those huge wooden cellar doors are something not to be missed when visiting Niagara. But let's get back to the wine. This 2004 Dry Riesling was the star of my tasting show, and retails for a relatively reasonable \$18. How, on God's green earth, the more expensive 2005 (\$22) outsells this baby I have no idea? The Tawse 2005 is the first 2005 Riesling that has totally underwhelmed me ... flat, no nose and disappointing taste: fat flabby slightly sweet – there's nothing there; doctor get the paddles because this one has flatlined. Ontario, and Tawse, make much better (witness the '04) ... so enough about the bad and the ugly, let's focus our attention on the good. The 2004 Dry Riesling, is truly a stellar bottle of wine, and I am told, they have plenty in stock so this is good news – but once word gets out it won't be around for long. I must have tried this wine last year during my visit but it was going through bottle shock and it's flavours were muted to me. A year later, this wine shows a nose of exotic fruit (pineapple and mango), minerality, melon and hints of apple – there is also the beginning of that classic Riesling aroma, petrol, which appears on both the nose and the taste. And speaking of taste, it is much drier than the nose projects with good acidity, apple and lemon zest flavours and a tart finish. This wine's best years are still ahead and will lay down for 2-5 plus years with even better results along the way. Leave the \$22 sweetie alone, save the four bucks and put it towards a few bottles of this bargain. Lie one down and you will be able to watch it develop complexity over time. As for Tawse, keep your eye on them – I have a feeling we will be seeing mucho changes, for the better. Cheers.

Jackson Triggs 2004 Proprietors' Reserve Shiraz - \$16.99
www.jacksontriggswinery.com

You might have heard that Jackson-Triggs Okanagan has won quite a few awards the world over for their shiraz, and now J.T. Niagara has produced something of a stellar shiraz themselves. The first time I tried this wine it had just been bottled and the nose was quite disappointing but the tastes were showing through wonderfully; I figured the nose would follow in due time ... and it did. This hot little number has opened to reveal blackberry, cassis, dark chocolate and white pepper – and I am sure there's more to come. In the mouth

is where this wine really shines with a multitude of flavours. Blackberry, cassis and white pepper follow from the nose, hints of cinnamon and vanilla from the barrel ageing and black cherry, cocoa and some sweet oak notes currently round it off – there's also just the right amount of spiciness that you'd expect from a good shiraz. I can see this wine opening up even more over the next few years ... so buy a few bottles and lay some down for a couple of years – watch the nose and taste meld harmoniously together. Delicious now, better later ... it's your choice.

Both Picks of the Bunch available at the winery only.

Check out another Jackson-Triggs wine that is sure to please:
the [2004 Proprietors' Reserve Meritage](#) is a steal at \$13.95.



The Cellar ... is now closed

The Cellar is closed – but the information lives on ... checkout the latest review from On the Road with the Grape Guy as I visit EastDell's winery restaurant "The View" [Read the Review here](#)

The Weekly Wines Notes can be found here - while we build them a more suitable home in the coming months:
[Thomas & Vaughan Old Gold](#) and [Rush Creek Wines Decadence](#)



Wine Event Spotlight: *London Wine and Food Show – January 19 to 21, 2007*

It's the 2nd Annual London Wine and Food Show taking place January 19 through 21 at the Western Fair starting on Friday at 4pm and running through to the Sunday at 5pm – with Saturday being an all day affair, noon to 10pm. I'm told by those who attended last year that it was a marvelous event, and this year organizers say it is going to be bigger and better: more exhibitors, more wine, more food, definitely a show not to be missed. There will be wine and cheese tasting seminars and celebrity chef demonstrations along with the usual food and wine samplings. Yours truly will also be in attendance hosting a seminar on the Friday night at 9pm (Prime Time, Baby) called "Choosing a Wine – Can I know what's in the bottle by looking at the label?" Tickets to the whole show are \$8 in advance or \$10 at the door and sampling tickets are a reasonable 50 cents each, with most samples ranging between 2 and 4 tickets. Visit www.westernfair.com and follow the links for Events and Shows to get all the details.

Ticket Giveaway: Heck if I were you there are two things I'd want to do on the weekend of January 19th ... one would be to go to the 2nd Annual London Wine and Food Show – and two, see the Grape Guy talk about wine. Well you can do both. I have 5 pairs of tickets to giveaway to the show. Just put an email together with your name, address (with postal code) and phone number, putting "London, Show me the Grape Guy" in the subject line and fire it off to michael@ontariowinereview.com. Entries must be received by 11:59pm Wednesday January 10th, 2007. Good Luck.

Winners of the Icewine Passports for this year's festival are: Elena Galey-Pride (Welland); Teresa MacDonald (Burlington); Barry Wylie (Oakville); Fred Couch (Beamsville); and Joe Connell (Mississauga). Thanks to everyone who entered. For details on the festival, or to purchase tickets, visit www.niagarawinefestival.com.

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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