

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 – 48
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News ... *We start this newsletter off with some news about OntarioWineReview and our website:*

Voting for the first ever Crystal Cork Awards ended at 11:59pm December 31, 2006; now the votes have been tabulated and we're ready to announce the winners. Some wineries got right into the spirit of the awards, while others rested on their laurels and hoped for the best. This really is one of the few awards where "stuffing-the-ballot-box" is legal (the other has something to do with politics in Florida). Mind you, we only accepted one email ballot per person (minimized our worry of hanging chads); but if wineries had the wherewithal to send word out to their minions, the masses could help them load-up for victory. And that's exactly what happened. This year's awards were dominated by the Lake Erie North Shore region and a little upstart in Haliburton ... all well-deserving and exceptional wines; some, now sadly, sold out, while others (namely the sweet and fruit winners) still in plentiful supply. Check the website to see if you picked the winners and also find out who I would have voted for in a little article I call "If I Ran the Circus". Thanks to all who voted, we had an exceptionally good turn out and I look forward to an even greater number of votes, and closer races, next year. [Crystal Cork Awards Winners Available Here.](#)



OntarioWineReview: *WINERY REVIEW – Muscedere Vineyards*

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.

I continue my on-going quest of visiting wineries that start out in basements ... basement-istes, as I like to call them (out of respect to the French winemakers who make and sell their wines out of their garages in rural France, they call themselves "garagistes"). Driving down the long driveway of Muscedere, you'll notice the vineyards on the left and right. At the end of the driveway (in the parking area), you'll notice a garage to your left, which is no doubt the production facility, deemed to be such by the steel tanks seen through the open door. The house where the family lives is on your right. This is also where, you guessed it ... the wine store is housed, in the basement. After you park and you exit the car (or whatever mode of transportation you've arrived in) you'll notice a small sign pointing you around to the back of the house, toward the tasting room. A patio with a few welcoming tables and chairs, along with a BBQ are the first things to catch your eye. Sliding glass patio-style doors lead into the tasting room itself, identified as such by the small sign to the left of the door. Upon entering be prepared, the décor is not what you'd expect. Many basement tasting rooms I have visited, look like basement rooms that have been converted into tasting rooms: a thrown together bar area, a few shelves scattered throughout, a tiny bar fridge. Here, at Muscedere, the basement was designed with obvious prior knowledge and forethought, as a tasting room. Upon sliding open the door and entering the room, the polished walnut wood L-shaped bar and shelves are the first thing to greet your eyes – quite elegant and stylish. There's a matching walnut door to your right that's about 6 feet high, rounded at the top and 2-and-a-half inches thick, which is mainly glass, except for the foot wide frame – "Muscedere Vineyards" etched into the thick glass. Further investigation through the tasting room will uncover the stairs leading up to the rest of the house, and at the back more of these elegant thick brown and glass doors, behind which, will one day, be the home of the barrel room and library.

The winery is owned by two brothers, Fabio and Rob Muscedere, whose original dream was to go to Italy and start a new vine venture; after all, they already have family working in the wine business there. Then it struck them like a thunderbolt, they already live in a unique wine region, Lake Erie North Shore. So on their 168 acre property (of which 80 is plantable) they planted, or have plans to plant, Pinot Noir, Cabernet Franc, Merlot, Syrah, Cabernet Sauvignon, Vidal, Pinot Gris, Sauvignon Blanc, Chardonnay and Riesling.

At the time of my visit they had 4 wines on the shelf, and a very helpful and pleasant mama behind the bar, who showed grace, poise and charm as she poured – though she admittedly knew very little about the wines. The brothers started this venture alone, but received helpful tips and pointers from already established area winemakers whose help was, and is, invaluable to them. “We could not have done it without them.” Fabio says. His brother finishes the thought, “It’s amazing how the whole wine community around here is like that – very helpful, especially to us new guys.” Both brothers nod in agreement.

They also receive a little advice and help from Grandpa back in the old country (Italy) – “who sometimes doesn’t understand why we don’t always take his advice.” Roberto says with a laugh. Fabio explains, “He’s warm climate, we’re cool climate, we take his advice and modify it to suit our situation.” These hard working boys are nothing less than hands on, learning the ropes from those who came before them. During my visit in early fall they were out “netting” the Pinot Noir. “We’ve already thinned the crop,” one said, “but now the birds are trying to thin it even more.” They laugh nervously while shaking their heads. It is my belief that Rob and Fabio will do quite well. They have good hearts and upbeat attitudes, are affable and have lots of help (if only of the advice variety). A beautiful location, big plans for the future and, of course, mama rounds out the team. The wine also speaks for itself. Salud boys!



Grape Guy’s Picks of the Bunch: *Two Different Franc – one wooded one un*
For directions and more information visit www.muscederevineyards.com.

Muscedere Vineyards 2004 Cabernet Franc (unfiltered) - \$13.99

I’m noticing these days that wineries are taking a chance and experimenting with Cabernet Franc, like they’ve been experimenting with Gamay (regular readers of my newsletter know Gamay is usually light and fruity, but I have been applauding the wineries that are making a more full bodied ageworthy version out of this grape). Cabernet Franc is typically a medium to full bodied wine, with good firm tannins in its youth, allowing it to age for a number of years. This is usually achieved through oak aging and skin contact during fermentation; but I’m now starting to notice a high number of delightful unoaked, or lightly oaked, fruity, playful Francs hitting the market. This Muscedere version is no exception. What we have here is one of the first wines from one of Lake Erie North Shores’ newest wineries – and it is a decent first effort to say the least. Muscedere makes two styles of Cabernet Franc: oaked and unoaked. This is the unoaked and unfiltered version. A muted nose, which contains hints of cloves and oregano along with some raspberry, blackberry and cassis. In the mouth, it’s a smooth, light, and quaffable affair – a full fruit bowl of yummy temptations including cherries, raspberries, currants, blackberries with some white pepper seasoning; all without the harsh tannins, and no vegetal green pepper notes to speak of. It really is a delightful fruity number that’s easy drinking and smooth as silk. I would say this is the “drink-now” of the two Cab Francs.

Muscedere Vineyards 2004 Cabernet Franc Reserve - \$16.99

Here’s where the effects of ageing in oak can really be seen (and tasted of course). Where the unoaked version was more fruit, this version is woody, tannic and with more spices mixed in with the fruit. There’s the typical green pepper found in many Ontario Cabernet Francs, along with white pepper and cherries on the nose. It’s when you take your first sip that you start to get some spices, mainly vanilla and cinnamon, along with a great raspberry flavour that flows continuously through your mouth. The finish is where this wine really sparkles: medium long and with good wood and fruit integration, oak with cherries; if you lick the coating the wine leaves in your mouth you’ll get it, and it’s lovely. Pick up a few bottles of this pleasant and delicious sipper, lay down a couple for good measure. And what’s more, it’s an excellent value wine to boot.

These wines are available at the winery only.



The Cellar ... is now closed

The Cellar is closed – but the information lives on ... check in with the new [On the Road with the Grape Guy](#) section of the website to see where to go, what to see, and the new, hot and upcoming wines from around the world of wine, as Mic;hael travels the highways, byways and show circuit.

The Weekly Wines Notes can be found here - while we build them a more suitable home in the coming months: [Rosehall Run 2005 Sullyzwicker](#) and [Sanson Estate Winery 2002 Shiraz](#)



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.

The Muscedere family owns 168 acres, 80 of which are plantable, the rest is forest, so I was told and so I observed. And that is truly the wow factor. Muscedere Vineyards has created an inviting area at the back of the house, just outside the wine store on the patio, where small get-togethers can be held, but will also accommodate larger events. You can even just sit and relax with a bottle or glass of wine in the noon-day sun. The forest lines the back of the property bringing the country atmosphere to your doorstep – it's like having cottage country right outside your back door ... now all you'd need is a lake, a dock, a small boat, and maybe some Muskoka chairs.

Don't have time to relax in the back – then check out those walnut wood and glass doors. They are 2-and-a-half inches thick ... so thick in fact they can't use conventional handles because they don't make the mechanisms long enough. Finely crafted, beautiful to look at, and hopefully, one day, fully functional.

Talking Baco ... Noir That Is - Getting You Ready for the Challenge

As you probably have heard OntarioWineReview is holding the first ever comprehensive all Ontario Baco Noir Challenge. Never before have so many wineries come together to compete for crown of one hybrid grape variety. All the major grape growing regions of the province are represented: Niagara, Lake Erie North Shore and Prince Edward County. But what exactly is Baco? Someone asked me if were holding a lawn bowling tournament ... that my friend is Bocce, Italian lawn bowling played by people in their 60's (although wine does play a major role) ... and you'll just have to trust me it's quite different from the challenge we have in store. Baco Noir is a French hybrid grape that was designed between 1894 and 1902 by Francois Baco (hence the name). The aim was to create a winter hardy grape that still had what the Europeans considered "good wine characteristics". This Monsieur Baco crossed a Cognac grape, Folle Blanche, with a native North American vitis raparia, though nobody seems to know which one exactly. (Maybe we should ask Mr. Baco ... oh, wait, he's dead ... I guess the mystery goes unsolved ... and for one of those we'll have to call on Robert Stack; wait, he's dead too. I guess we'll never know – seems like anybody who knows anything is dead. Guess we'll just have to find out about this grape for ourselves.)

Brought over in 1951, Baco Noir proved to flourish in North America and was first planted in Canada as early as 1955, in the hopes of better quality wine than our native Concord and Lubrusca. In the 1980's a large push toward the more globally recognized European varieties (like Cabernet Sauvignon and Merlot) caused many Baco Noir vines to be uprooted. But still many growers and winemakers continued growing and making wine with Baco. Today some 900-plus acres are planted with Baco Noir, and at least 24 wineries are making a minimum of 37 wines between them. And in February OntarioWineReview is gonna need your help to choose the best. [So check out the website to see how you can get involved.](#)



Wine Event Spotlight: *Baco Noir Challenge – February 5, 12, 19, 26 - 2007*

Every Monday night in February, 7 different Baco Noirs will be poured, an impromptu wine and cheese party will break out, award winning wines will be enjoyed, opinions will be expressed and shared, issues will be raised, all in the historic and beautiful setting of Southbrook Winery's century old tasting room; all part of the OntarioWineReview Baco Noir Challenge.

This is one event any and all wine lovers should not miss - designed for friends and foes of Baco alike – a chance to have your say in finding Ontario's Best Baco Noir. All three major regions of Ontario are represented. Imagine three categories of Baco Noir: Baco Noir (young), Baco Blends, and Baco Reserve, held over four nights, and no two wines are the same on any given night. So to find out who truly makes Ontario's best, attendance to all four nights is strongly recommended. But even one night will get you your fill of Baco and will allow you to add your voice to the final decisions. Most important to remember is: 24 wineries, 37 wines ... 4 nights, 3 categories – one great event ... don't miss it. Join in the fun and have your say in Ontario's first comprehensive Baco Noir Challenge.

Tickets are on sale now – payments accepted by Cheque, Visa, Mastercard, and American Express. To see all the details visit [The Baco Noir Challenge](#) page of the website.

Winners of the London Wine and Food Show Passes: Congratulations to the following winners of double passes to the 2nd Annual London Wine and Food Show – and don't forget, when you're at the show, stop by and say hi to the Grape Guy who will be speaking at 9pm on the Friday night. Show and ticket information can be found at: www.westernfair.com. Adam Arbus (Arva); Judy Ackley (Essex); Nick Baird (London); and Carla Runka (Toronto).

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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