

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 – 49
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OntarioWineReview: *Seasons of Change*

Growing grapes in Ontario is a challenge, to realize this you needn't look much further than the Prince Edward County region. On a visit over the summer to "The County" it all became even more apparent as I witnessed, first-hand, a wine region in its' infancy. They are now getting over the romance aspect of owning a winery, and understanding the hardships that were faced by their predecessors in Niagara and other grape growing regions of the world. On the bright side, they are also beginning to find their "forte grapes" - those grapes that match up with the soil and climate in which they find themselves. Pinot Noir seems to be the focus, with some excellent results from wineries like Long Dog, Carmela and Norman Hardie, some say it's because the soils in "The County" mirror those in Burgundy. But let's set specifics aside for the moment and concentrate on the Ontario situation as a whole.

You may have noticed that the wines you buy from places like Chile, California and Australia are pretty much uniform from year to year, with some minor variations, depending on the winemakers tastes and choices: oak ageing, vineyard locale, fruit used in the blend, percentage of grape variety used etc. That's because those countries have a longer and more uniform growing season. They can pretty much count on the right amount of hours of sunlight, a limited amount of rainfall during the grape-growing season and frost-free nights that are instrumental for proper grape development. Here in Ontario our grapes are subjected to an unpredictable climate (so as not to deter people we call it a 'cool climate'). We don't know whether we'll have a wet summer or a dry summer: if too much, water gets into the grapes and we get plump and watery grapes which is reflected in the wines made from them. We can't predict our heat units: grapes thrive on sunlight and heat (they need approximately 1500 hours in a growing season) - a cool summer does not allow the grapes to ripen and mature optimally, which gives us under-ripe wine, or wine that is considered "green". Our winters can also play havoc with our vines and hence the wines. A cold winter will kill off many of the vines that are not as winter-hardy – as what happened most recently in the winter of '04-'05 ... causing a major shortage in the '05 harvest ... and although it was a good growing season, there were much less grapes to be picked ([see newsletter #15](#)). Early spring thaws combined with late spring frosts can also cause problems: when we have above average temps in April, like we had in 2006, the vines start to blossom, pushing out their new shoots to start growing; but if the weather goes back to seasonal temps, or dips slightly below, there is a risk that frost will kill off those early bloomers. And don't even get me started about the fall ... an Indian Summer in September and October prolongs the growing season, and is always welcome, giving us the necessary extra heat units required to fully ripen the grapes. But take, for example, the Fall of 2006, talk about the unpredictability of our weather. The summer growing season was beautiful, some say "perfect" even: good heat, low amounts of rain, mild winter ... but then September hit, and it was like "call your friend Noah and see what he's up to". Harvesting is hard enough, but in the rain it is next to impossible – and those extra few weeks of heat our growers were hoping for just never happened.

As you can see there are many factors at play, which makes growing grapes, and subsequently, making wine, a little trickier here in the Great White North – but many people, myself included, think it's worth the end result. Winemakers come from all over the world to work here in Ontario ... some lured by the money ... but many come for the challenge and the experience of working in this environment. And the challenge to have a great end result; and when all the factors magically fall into place – that makes for a great vintage. Take for example 2002 ... not only did everything fall in line: the growing season, the winter, the abundance of the crop – but the wines from that year were, and still are, amazing ... big, bold, ripe fruit making for age-worthy reds and good fruity whites. Compare that with 2003, which was a lighter year, with lots of rain that watered down the grapes -

making for some decent wines, but much fewer cellar candidates. 2004 was an average year making wines that were of good quality. 2005 saw a great growing season, but the previous winter killed off too many plants, and there are some wonderful wines being produced, just less of them. For the most part the '05 Rieslings were excellent, and the reds are proving to be massive and age-worthy. (I'll have some examples in upcoming newsletters of some of these wines that are already starting to show up on winery shelves).

As for the 2006 crop, it has been harvested, squeezed, fermented and barreled – soon we'll be seeing how that crop fared – and we'll find out how our winemakers overcame yet another round of unpredictability and adversity. Time will tell about those '05 reds and the '06's in general ('06 whites should be on shelves in the next few months). But that's why Ontario wines vary from year to year and what makes drinking wine from Ontario (and other cool climate wine regions) such an adventure. In 2002 it was hard to make a bad wine, while in 2003 it was harder to make a really good one, that's where skill and experience pays off (and some times ingenuity). But those are the challenges we face here in Ontario, and why it's so worth it when all factors hit the jackpot and we get a great vintage.

So why am I telling you all this? Because I felt you needed to know why vintage dates are so important and why a wine from Ontario in 2002 tastes different then the same kind of wine made in, say, 2003. What I do want to get across to you is to keep supporting your local winery each and every year ... the adventure in the glass is always worth the trip.



Grape Guy's Picks of the Bunch: Cabernets – one blend, one Franc

Visit the winery or their website for more details or to purchase these great wines.

Chateau des Charmes 2002 Cabernet-Merlot Estate Bottled - \$19.95
www.chateaudescharmes.com

Many of you might be aware that one of my favourite wines of all time is made by Chateau des Charmes ... their 1999 Estate Bottled Cabernet-Merlot still holds a special place on my wine rack and with each bottle I open and consume I relish the drinking of it, while lamenting the loss of yet another friend. While the two subsequent vintages were good I thought they did not measure up to the power and majesty of the '99. Then along came '02 – with its dark fruit, smoke and tobacco nose, woody tannic taste, and cassis with blackberry flavours. Pay close attention and you'll pick out hints of cinnamon, vanilla and black cherry too ... but those tastes should become more prominent over time. Lie this one down for 5-10 years, but don't forget to enjoy a bottle every so often along the way, like a child you'll want to monitor it's growth.

Reif Estate 2004 Cabernet Franc - \$18.95
www.reifwinery.com

Upon first pour and sniff this Reif Estate Cabernet Franc exhibits tight black licorice, burnt coffee and oak scents, best you give it a few minutes to open up, because when it does you'll find rhubarb, raspberry, cassis and cedar. On the other hand, the flavours on the tongue open up a little quicker then the nose offering more fruit forward tastes like strawberry, blueberry and sweet cherry. Over the course of an hour the wine mellows giving you an excellent nose and flavours that compliment cheeses, pastas or light meat dishes such as chicken or pork. Medium bodied, short to medium finish and smooth tannins make for a pleasant easy drinking wine for sipping, sharing and enjoying.

These wines are available only at the winery.




Weekly Wine Notes and More

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 to the Wine Review Section every Tuesday!

In honour of the [Baco Noir Challenge](#) coming up I have added two wines that reflect the event: [Southbrook Winery 2003 Cabernet](#) (our host) and [Sandbanks Estate Winery 2005 Baco Noir](#)

There are also two new articles in the [On the Road with the Grape Guy](#) section:
Reports from [The London Wine and Food Show](#)
and [The Bordeaux vs. Canada Tasting held January 23, 2007 in Toronto](#).

**The Baco Noir
Challenge** 

Join us next Monday at the historic Southbrook Winery
Let's Discover Ontario's Best Baco together!
Visit www.ontariowinereview.com for other dates and wines



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.

Why is Icewine so expensive? - Tony Gabler, B.C.

Now that the cold weather has come in fast and furious the ice wine questions are doing the same thing; this one made the most sense to answer because of the late harvest we experienced here in Ontario.

Many people are perplexed by the price of icewine, but if they understood what a labour intensive and strictly control product it is to make they'd probably wonder why it doesn't cost more.

Icewine grapes are left on the vine long after other grapes have been harvested; they are netted to keep the juice-laden, over-ripe fruit on the vine, instead of sagging to the ground. Normal harvest time is between September and October – while icewine grapes can hang as long as March before they are picked (though that kind of delay scares the pants off of winemakers and growers – and the last thing we need around here are skivvy-less winemakers and growers); because by then the crop has been very much thinned by animals, the elements, natural spoilage or all three. What we're waiting for are temperatures to drop to –8 degrees C or colder. This usually comes about in the Frank Sinatra hours (The Wee Small Hours of the Morning), at which point, no matter what the time, the grapes are harvested by hand and pressed outside while they are still naturally frozen. The grapes that are picked in September or October yield approximately 700 liters of juices per tones; icewine grapes yield approximately 75 to 100 liters per tonne.

Finally, icewine is fermented very slowly, mostly in stainless steel tanks but sometimes, on those special occasions as the winemaker deems, in oak barrels, allowing it to develop those intense exotic flavours we all love, like honey, peach, apricot, mango, pineapple, toffee, lychee and countless others. But don't burden yourself with all that knowledge, simply pop the cork and enjoy ... but for the price savour slowly.

Send your questions or statements to michael@ontariowinereview.com



Wine Event Spotlight: *The OntarioWIneReview Baco Noir Challenge*

We would like to cordially invite you to attend an extraordinary wine tasting event hosted by OntarioWineReview. Wine enthusiasts and Baco Noir lovers especially, will jump at the opportunity to taste 37 Baco Noirs representing the three major Ontario wine regions. Join me, Michael Pinkus Grape Guy, and our faithful readers, in the barrel cellar and then by a crackling fire for an intimate wine tasting party atmosphere, taking place every Monday night in February (5, 12, 19, 26), at the historic Southbrook Winery in Richmond Hill. **If you enjoy wines with lush dark fruit on the nose and a playful palate of dark cherries, blackberries, cedar and spices with hints of tannin and sweet oak flavorings, this event was created for you. Intrigued? Call me on the Grape Line to find out more 416-346-2223.**

Our reservations/payments process is easy, secure and personalized! Simply Call Michael Pinkus at 416-346-2223 to make arrangements. Payment can be made by Visa, MasterCard, American Express or cheque. Tickets are \$30 per person; discounts are available for groups and/or multiple night bookings.

Let's discover Ontario's Best Baco Noir together!

Free Passes : We are pleased to announce that 2 Lucky readers will receive a pair of free passes to this wonderful event - for either February 12 or 19. (Click here for the list of wines being poured). Email michael@ontariowinereview.com with your name, address (with postal code) and phone number and put "Take me to Your Baco (and your choice of the two nights)" in the subject line. Deadline for entries is 11:59pm Tuesday January 6th, 2007.

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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