

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 – 51
March 1, 2007

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OntarioWineReview: *Are we Looking-Through the LENS, or is that Overlooking?*

Back in September of 2005, I wrote an article touting the Lake Erie North Shore wine region of Ontario (LENS) ([What's the Deal? – Newsletter 12](#)). After my second visit to the area, in as many years, I am still of that same opinion – now, even more so. In August '06, I traveled to some of the old places I had visited before: Sanson, Colio, Erie Shore; and some of the new: Viewpointe, Muscedere, Mastronardi, Aleksander ... and tried some wines from some up and comers: Colchester, Sprucewood, Smith and Wilson ... and from all indications, I still believe this region to be Ontario's hidden gem, and here are some of the reasons why.

For starters there's [Colio Estate](#), with master winemaker Carlo Negri at the helm; they consistently turn out great wine year after year. This year's current releases include a fruity [2005 Gewurztraminer](#) and a [2002 Reserve Cabernet Franc](#) ... with great fruit and wood integration. [Sanson Estate](#) still had their Shiraz and Merlot on the shelves, but supply was dwindling fast. These customer favourites may never be made again (part of Dennis Sanson's eccentric winemaking style), too bad; they were seductive complex wines worth buying, drinking and/or cellaring. Their newest Cabernet Merlot blend called "[Barn Cat Red](#)", named after the cats that inhabit the building across from the wine store, has a 10 % tipple of Pinot Noir added into the blend; big, bold, spicy flavours, which is just what I expect from this winery. Dennis Sanson continues to impress me with his winemaking ability and his "renegade" approach of trying anything at least once. Another LENS old guard, Erie Shore, seduced my tastebuds with their [2005 Riesling](#) and fruit forward [2005 Cabernet Franc](#) (just called "Cabernet"), it spent only a month in oak so the fruit shows through fully with little to no woody interference. My traveling companion was also a fan of their [2005 Duets](#), a blend of Zweigelt and Gamay – this time the percentage of the blend is reversed – see review.

During our visit to some of the newer wineries, like [Muscedere](#), not only were we witness to a winery starting out on the ground floor (in this case, literally in a basement), but they showed style and vision towards the future and some interesting architecture to boot. They were also pouring some great Cabernet Franc: a fruit driven [unoaked effort](#) and an [oaked reserve](#), both reasonably priced, 13.99 and 16.99 respectively, both with lush mouth feel, but very different with respect to taste and ageability; for the price it's well worth buying one of each to test them out side by side. Mastronardi Estate Winery won a silver and a gold medal for their merlot, but the wine I selected to highlight is another [Cab Franc](#), which is definitely one for all you vegetarians out there. By reducing the tannins and enhancing the fruit and vegetal characteristics they're saying "leave the meat to graze in the field, pick up what's growing there and throw it on the grill instead." And how about Aleksander's? They have come a long way since my last visit. Last year, four wines peppered the shelves (1 red, 1 white, 2 fruit); this year, many different wines crowded those same shelves, including an interesting Shiraz. The tastes that really tickled my fancy were, once again, the fruity [2005 Franc](#) and the delicious [2005 Late Autumn Riesling](#).

Speaking of fancy – John Fanscy has opened up his spectacular Viewpointe Estates, and the wines are as spectacular as the building and the view; from the affordable 2004 Cabernet Franc (16.95); 2004 Cab-Merlot (16.95); and 2005 Auxerrois (14.95) to the reserve 2002 Focal Pointe Cab Franc (\$32.95), which was the highlight of the tasting flights.

Both Colchester Ridge and Smith & Wilson have opened their doors – moving themselves from the up-and-coming category to the here-and-now. [Colchester Ridge Estate Winery](#) (CREW) with their current line-up of 3 wines: [Cabernet Sauvignon/Merlot](#) (13.95), Chardonnay and [Gewurztraminer](#) (12.95) are making wines with all

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estate grown fruit, and located, literally, a stone's throw away from Viewpointe. Smith & Wilson, located along Highway 3 near Blenheim (and I whole-heartedly recommend making the drive), is a fruit and grape winery with some pretty outstanding stuff of their own. Their [Three Belles](#) Sour Cherry wine is delicious and their double entendre [Double Barrel](#) (Smith & Wilson // Smith & Wesson) Franc-Merlot blend is well worth the \$14 price tag.

Finally, the last one to open, Sprucewood Shores, scheduled to open in November 2006, just in time for Christmas (and they opened on time), has been growing grapes for the past 16 years and finally decided to start their own winery. The building is another stunner for the region, a real showpiece, and their wines ain't bad either. "We're trying some different things," owner Gord Mitchell told me. Check out my [Report from the London Wine and Food Show](#) for details on the wines being made there – it's going to be a definite must visit this year.

What a region ... Lake Erie North Shore is truly a wine-world unto its own. The wineries work together and share knowledge, giving helpful advice and know how to the ones just opening. They know that by working together they can only strengthen their industry as a whole. I highly recommend taking the trip. And if you are looking for places to stay, you'll find some of the best accommodations down there. During my two visits over the course of two months I stayed in a couple of places that were truly worth every penny I paid for them. I should, by all rights, keep them my little secret, but that would not be fair. If you're planning a trip to the area, then check out the [Duck Pond](#) or [Our House in the Woods](#), or even www.bbcanada.com to make your own selection.



Grape Guy's Picks of the Bunch: *Late Autumn Cat* – you'll see what I mean

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

Aleksander Estates 2005 Late Autumn Riesling - \$12.45

www.aleksanderesatate.com

A relatively new winery on the South Western Ontario scene, owner and winemaker Aleksander Bemben worked for Pelee Island Winery since the early 80's before fulfilling his dream of opening his own place in May of 2005. This sweet little number is a party in the mouth, but it's all about timing and as with most parties, it begins slowly, so bare with it. Right from the pop of the cork (when the door opens) it has a strong petrol nose. 15 minutes later, apple starts to peak through the petrol curtain. After about 30 minutes, citrus shows up for the party. By this time, you have already been introduced to the flavours (the invited guests) that are going to appear at this nose party. Petrol is the host, while citrus, honey and apple play in a minor key behind the scenes (like the piano player in a dimly-lit lounge bar). There's a slightly sweet note on the tongue and the finish brings a cabbie named pineapple-banana for the ride home. Delicious, and a wonderful sipping wine. Over the course of an evening it does develop into something recognizable, a big fruity kitchen party, but, as with most get togethers, the first hour is a slow meet and greet – but the rest of the gathering is a real fun time.

Sanson Estates 2001 Barn Cat Red - \$16.95

www.sansonestatewinery.com

Dennis Sanson has once again crafted a very interesting and delicious wine. The blend is 50% Merlot, 40% Cabernet Franc and 10% Pinot Noir and on the nose all three grapes show their influence. Licorice (merlot); green pepper (franc); and earth (pinot noir) along with some burnt wood (toasted oak barrels) and white pepper spiciness. The taste is even more interesting, and inviting, with the licorice and earth following through from the nose, but with some black fruit companions along for the ride. Blueberry and a sweet cherry core show up about mid-palate and follow through to the end. Another stellar effort by this little known winery, but with wines like this, they should be better known. Your assignment this year, if you chose to accept it, is to get to know the wines of Sanson Estate.

These wines are available only at the winery.

Hot Tip on a Hot Wine: The truly big 2005 reds are starting to come out in Niagara. Despite the short crop the reds that I have tasted so far have been magnificent and more are on the way. The first of these big boys to hit the shelves and make a definite splash is one from an upstart winery next to the aptly named Ball's Falls (especially with regard to what I am going to say). I truly hope that the [Calamus Estate Winery 2005 Meritage](#) is the kind of "balls-to-the-falls" reds we will be getting from Calamus, (and the 2005 reds in general). Don't for a second take this wine for granted or it'll sneak up on you and bite you back.



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!

Added to the Wine Review Section February 20 and 27:

[Angels Gate 2003 Cabernet Sauvignon](#) and [Rosehall Run 2004 Top Barriques Chardonnay](#)



Uncorked and Decanted: *Nifty gadgets, accessories and other things that enhance wine enjoyment.*

Book Review:

Love by the Glass – Tasting Notes from a Marriage
by Dorothy J. Gaiter and John Brecher

One of my favourite wine-related books in recent memory is Love by the Glass – Tasting Notes from a Marriage by Dorothy J. Gaiter and John Brecher (journalists and wine-writers for the Wall Street Journal). It tells the sometimes romantic, sometimes funny, but always entertaining story about these two journalists who happened upon each other and a career in wine writing before the day when wine writing was chic and fashionable ... and eventually how they fall in love, get married and live each day "by the glass" – each memory they recount has a specific bottle of wine related to it.

The first few chapters are their individual stories about how they got to the point where they actually meet. Each takes their turn telling their personal story from childhood to their meeting as journalists at the same newspaper. Both talk about their early careers and educational background. Then their story merges into one voice as they became a couple – and that's where the book really takes off. Each chapter is named after a certain bottle of wine that they sampled together, and within the chapter the reason for it being so prominent is explained. Their courtship, their mutual discovery of wine, and their love for it, through to their eventual marriage; as told by two people who really love one another and share a passion for wine. Finally, they describe how they became wine writers, totally by chance, because no one on staff at the newspaper where they worked knew anything about the stuff.

Love By the Glass not only uses wine as the theme, but also as a character. It became the cornerstone these two founded their love and relationship upon and because of it, brought them closer together with each bottle and each glass. Highly entertaining and wonderfully well-written, this truly is a book that'll keep you smiling as you're turning the pages. A quote from the back of the book accredited to Andrea Immer puts it best "a needed reminder that while wine is indeed for special occasions, every day you get to spend with those you love is a special occasion worth celebrating with wine." Dorothy and John do just that – and they take us on their journey. If you know a couple in love, know a couple that loves wine – or both – this is definitely a book for them ... it's also perfect for those who dream of this combination.



Wine Event Spotlight: *The Toronto Wine and Cheese Show ... passes to give and past winners*

Another year has come and gone, and the lull of winter hibernation is coming to a close, and that means the wine festival season is beginning again. It also means Spring is just around the corner. The best part is I don't have to be checking in with any groundhog to know this; I just look at my calendar and see that the kick-starter of the season, the Toronto Wine and Cheese Show is coming up – March 23 – 25 at the International Centre on Airport Road (near the airport of course). Find out what is going on at this year's annual event by checking out www.towineandcheese.com.

Free Passes to Giveaway: Once again this year we have secured a few passes for two to the Toronto Wine and Cheese Show ... your chance to win begins now - send me an email with your name, address (with postal code) and phone number to michael@ontariowinereview.com and put "I want TO Wine and Cheese" in the subject line. Deadline for entries is 11:59pm Wednesday March 7th, 2007.

Past Winners for Cuvee: In the last newsletter we gave out passports for Cuvee-en-Route (March 2-4) www.cuvee.ca. Here are your winners: Nick Baird (London); Colleen Rivard (Beamsville); Joe Connell

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(Mississauga) and John Kijonek (Grimsby).

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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