

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.



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OntarioWineReview: *Baco Tasting Nights ... Who Do You Love?*

"Let's Drink Baco" ... Reworked from the opening of Prince's "Let's Go Crazy"

Dearly beloved ... We are gathered here today 2 drink this thing called Baco.
An interesting wine that Baco, it means different flavours to different people,
But I'm here 2 tell u – we're here to find Ontario's best one.
We'll drink till we find it, we know where the grapes are from, making wine that's big, bold and heavy.
So when u call up that winery in Niagara, the County or Lake Erie -
U know the one – It's Been Your Favourite For Years.
Instead of asking them how much of that wine is left, ask him how much time it needs.
'Cuz in this challenge things aren't cut n dry in the Baco-world
In this challenge, you're on your own.
But if the other tasters try to shout u down - Go crazy.
Let's Drink Baco ... Let's get nuts ...

And that's exactly how I felt when I put together this little challenge; many thought I was simply off my rocker to go through with a taste-off for a wine that "nobody likes". Ah, but that simply is not true! Plenty of wineries grow it and make it – plenty of wineries sell it and sell out of it; which means, somebody is buying it. And that is where the Baco Noir Challenge comes into play – instead of inviting wine writers and experts out to try the wine – I decided to invite the people who are drinking it and buying it and get their opinion ... and I got lots of opinions. But before we look at the nights and the winners let's look at a brief history of the grape.

Baco Noir was created in the late 1800's by Francois Baco of France by crossing a Folle Blanche (a Cognac grape) and a native North American grape which, to this day, remains unknown. For awhile, in France, Baco Noir did quite well, but the French winemaking authorities that be, banished the grape from their vineyards by declaring that no hybrids were allowed. Baco then found a new home in the Americas in the early 50's, namely the Northeastern United States, later that decade the grape crossed the 49th parallel, around 1955, where it has done pretty well for itself. In the 1980's Baco once again fell prey to vine-pull as the Ontario government requested that grape growers turn their vineyards to more international grape varieties such as Merlot and Chardonnay; but not all growers listened, feeling that Baco Noir did have a rightful place here in Ontario. At last count Ontario had 902.69 acres of Baco Noir planted (as compared to only 3.5 acres in B.C.). Many wineries make a Baco Noir or use it in a blend of some sort. 24 wineries joined our challenge, submitting a total of 37 wines, which were tasted over four nights in three categories. On each night we had one winner.

Night 1 – Feb. 5, 2007

The night was cold, the fire was hot and the barrel cellar was cozy, as 15 of us filed in for the first night of this four-night event. Tonight was all about young, or regular, Baco Noir, 9 wines were selected from the 18 entrants into this part of the competition ... picked and poured completely at random. Mostly 2005 and 2004 vintage wines, with a 2002 thrown in for good measure. In fact, 2 of the wines entered in this category predated the 2004 vintage – a 2002 and a 2001. These wines were split up between the two nights that hosted regular Baco. The stipulation for all wines and wineries was that the wine had to be available for purchase as of March 2007, which meant that some entrants were barrel samples, while others had just been bottled and were released to us prior to going on store shelves. All three major regions of Ontario were represented. On

this night, the line-up was: Peller, Harbour, Hernder, Rockway, Vineland, and Caroline from Niagara; Black Prince and Sandbanks from Prince Edward County; and Aleksander from the Lake Erie North Shore region.

All wines were uncorked at 6:45pm, poured at 7:00pm and the tasting began at 7:30pm. By 8:30 all the tasting was done and the votes and comments were put to paper (wines were rated for taste/nose and likelihood to buy, not knowing the price). It was time for the price-reveal, where I told the tasters the price of the wine and asked them to judge the value with regards to the taste (the third criteria). After all the scores were marked down, then, and only then, were the identities of the wine revealed.

Night 1 saw Vineland's 2005 Baco Noir take home the highest rating for taste/nose, Sandbanks' second bottling of their 2005 Baco Noir took the likelihood to purchase site unseen crown, while Hernder's 2002 Baco Noir, on the strength of their best value status took Overall Best Baco of the evening. Their bottle of '02 is available at both the winery and the LCBO for a mere tuppence (\$7.95). Their value status may have vaulted them into first place but they also ranked high in the other two categories, placing 2nd for taste and 3rd in likelihood to buy. Those in attendance could not believe it was so readily available, and so "cheap". Second place of the night went to Vineland's 2005 while third was quietly taken by Peller's Heritage Series Baco Noir '05.

Night 2 – Feb. 12, 2007

A larger crowd assembled for this evening, no doubt word had spread and interest had been peaked. This was night two of the young (regular) Baco category, with another 9 wines grouped at random. Those in attendance the previous night commented that the tastes were more earthy in this grouping, while those from grouping one were more dark fruit oriented. I assured them that the grouping was purely random and the tasting similarities were freak chance. Night two's scores were lower than on night one. I attribute that to the larger crowd, hence more diverse opinions. The procedure for wine opening, pouring and tasting was the same as described on night one. As for the wines being poured, representing Niagara were Mountain Road, 20 Bees, Rockway, Konzelmann, Birchwood, and Henry of Pelham; Prince Edward County had Waupoos and Black Prince in their corner; while the lone Lake Erie wine was from Erie Shore Vineyard.

Once again, the scores were spread out over the three categories with no conclusive winner, number crunching was definitely in order. Top rated for nose/taste was again one of the oldest entries, the Mountain Road Wine Company 2001 Baco Noir; likelihood to purchase site-unseen went to Henry of Pelham's 2005, and the value win was notched by Niagara's only co-op, 20 Bees – which was surprisingly the same price as Pelham (\$12.95), yet took 6th for taste. That being said, the top 6 rated for taste were only separated by .74, so it was a very close battle for the tastebuds of the samplers. Night two's overall winner was Henry of Pelham's 2005 Baco Noir, squeaking by Mountain Road's 2001 by .04. Henry also took 2nd for taste, 1st for likelihood to buy and third for value. Rounding out the top three was the 20 Bees 2005 offering.

Night 3 – Feb. 19, 2007

This night saw a smaller yet intrepid crowd taste the most interesting of our Baco selections. In this grouping there were 6 blends from the likes of Featherstone (Niagara), Smith & Wilson (LENS), Reif, times two (Niagara), EastDell (Niagara), and Henry of Pelham (Niagara) – there was also a sweet straight Baco (2) from Konzelmann (Niagara) and a rose from Black Prince Winery (Prince Edward County). The last two wines really had no other place to go, so I placed them in this category as a catchall. Overall they placed very well, taking 3rd and 5th respectively. As for the blends, let's just say that most of the tasters believe Baco should be left alone and not blended with other grapes. In the end the competition was really between 2 wineries, the others lagged behind by as much as 5 and as little as 2 full points. Henry of Pelham took first in the value category with their 2004 Cabernet-Baco (\$11.45) – but the night belonged to EastDell who took a decisive 1st in both taste/nose and likelihood to purchase for their 2005 Black Cab, a blend of Cabernet Sauvignon, Franc and Baco. Had the medium dry Baco not been around to take third, Smith & Wilson's 2005 Buckhorn Noir would have captured the Blended Bronze. Now all that was left is the granddaddy of them all – Reserve night.

Night 4 – Feb. 26, 2007

A packed house joined me for this event, 30 people, all wanting to taste the best of the best in Baco. Prices ranged from \$14.85 to \$34.95, and wines from 2005, 2004, 2003 and 2002 competed for the "best of" moniker ... ten wines in total (the most of any night) and all three major regions of Ontario were represented. The wines being poured were Sanson Estate (x2) and Muscedere from Lake Erie North Shore; Sandbanks held the flag for Prince Edward County and the rest from Niagara included: Hernder; Henry, Harbour, Lakeview, Stoney Ridge and Peller.

When the dust had settled, the heavily favoured wine of the night had been vanquished by another large

winery, though one not known for its Baco Noir. Many tasters thought the wines were good but overpriced, and of course, there were quite a few surprises. The top ranking Reserve Baco Noir: Peller Estates Wines 2004 Private Reserve Baco Noir - which took first in taste and value and second in the likelihood to buy category. Taking second was the upstart winery from Prince Edward County, Sandbanks Estate Winery, whose 2005 Baco Noir Reserve took second place in all categories except likelihood to buy, where it took first. The third place finisher should have been Sanson Estates 2002 Reserve (3rd in both nose/taste and likelihood for purchase), but when it was revealed it was \$34.95 it took a major hit in the value category leaving the door open for the Cuvee 2007 winner for Red Hybrid – Lakeview Cellars Estate Winery 2004 Reserve Baco Noir.

In closing, there are many things to be said for Baco Noir and I read many comments on the tasters' sheets. Most prominent among was the requirement of a good piece of meat or cheese to accompany these wines. After the tasting, I did pass out some Balderson's Red Wine cheese and many thought the wines showed better with it. Another comment that I saw over and over again was with regard to the youth of the wines and how many thought they could lie down for a few years. That sentiment is echoed in the winners and placers for both the first and second night, where a 2002 took first and a 2001 took second respectively. It also follows with what Dean Tudor said to me to spark this competition: "the best Baco Noirs I have had have been a minimum of 5 years old, 10 to 20 seems almost optimal." So in the spirit of that comment, I have laid a few bottles down, putting them aside for 5 years (case to be opened in March of 2012) – where upon I will re-try these wines to see if they in fact do make a difference with age. Who knows, maybe we'll invite some of our panelists back and gauge their reaction too ... it will make for an intriguing experiment. A big thank you goes out to all our participants and tasters. We'll do it all again soon with another Ontario grape. If you have any ideas for which grape you would like to see us compare next, don't hesitate to drop me an email (michael@ontariowinereview.com). To view the full list of placings for all our participating wines by night and read more insight and analysis, [please visit the website](#).



Grape Guy's Picks of the Bunch: *A couple of sweeties*

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

Cave Spring Cellars 2005 Select Late Harvest Cabernet - \$21.95

www.cavespring.ca

You're going to see quite a few of these little darlings from the 2005 vintage. That's because in early-December '05 Ontario had itself some cold temperatures but they were erratic; we dipped to minus-8 (perfect temperature for icewine picking and production) in the early morning of November 24 but jumped quickly back to more seasonal temps within a few hours. Some wineries tried to take advantage of the first good freeze by running out to get a jump on their icewine picking and production. Alas, the below minus-eight freeze didn't last long enough for the grapes to freeze properly for the making of icewine – therefore we should be seeing some very nice late harvest wines picked around that time. This 50/50 blend of the Cabernets: Franc and Sauv, were harvested on Dec. 2 to be exact – rhubarb and strawberry fill the nose, while the mouth picks out sweet strawberry and raspberry with a long finish reminiscent of peach-apple cocktail. The colour is also extremely light due to limited skin contact. Good acidity keeps you coming back for more ... and more ... and more; and at only 9 on the sugar code this one isn't teeth-rottingly sweet. Can you say yum! I knew you could.

Harvest Estates 2001 Late Harvest Blue Bottle Chardonnay - \$14.95

www.harvestwines.com

I have heard many terms used to describe a sweet wine; my favourite is "a sticky" (used mainly for Port). I always thought it was because if you spilled a drop on the counter or table top it would become quite sticky, like honey or jam. Well with this wine you can take that description a step further and call it "a-sticky-lip-licker". Turns out after each sip I found myself licking my lips repeatedly – being able to get another taste because the taste was always there. Then again, there really was no need to go back all that often because the long lasting finish hung out for an extended period of time – guess with all my lip licking I was just a glutton for more. The nose is soft, you'll mainly find honeyed-pear; it's in the mouth where this one gets interesting, because there's a lot going on. Not too sweet (13 by the code), not too hot with alcohol (only 9%) you find yourself second guessing each sip: honey ... no maple syrup ... apple ... candied apple ... toffee apple ... baked apple with a touch of cinnamon ... do I taste some pear ... no honeyed pear ...? Whatever it is, it's darn tasty, mouth and lip coatingly tasty, yet not too thick, a rich mouth feel that keeps you guessing till the last drop. Not sure what it tasted like when first released, but 6 years on, it's a fine, and fun, dessert wine. This unique sweetie makes for a wonderful dessert all on it's own.

These wines are available only at the winery.

Hot Tip on a Hot Wine: There's a new sparkler in town and it just might set the bar for sparkling wine in Ontario – and it has set it pretty high. Check out my review of the newly released [Stoney Ridge Estate Winery 2005 Proprietor's Reserve Brut Sparkling Wine](#).



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 March 6 and 13:

[The Grange 2005 Cabernet Merlot](#) and [Le Clos Jordanne 2004 Village Reserve Pinot Noir](#)



Quick Sips: *Occasionally interesting things cross my desk that I would like to pass on*

For March 2007

The LCBO has launched NISS (New Item Submission System). According to the LCBO press release, "suppliers and agents can now much more easily submit new products for review ... conveniently track the progress of their submission and approval stages on-line ... [allowing] staff to quickly log, track and approve or decline new submissions ... almost eliminating paperwork and dramatically speeds up the application process by eliminating errors." Sounds great, but what have been the industry reactions around this new initiative. Andrew Hanna of Hanna and Sons Ltd. says "all in all it's a good system; instead of someone data entering off a piece of paper, we enter the data ourselves through a website – less chance for error." Andrew Green of Diamond Estates Wines and Spirits Ltd. also agrees with Hanna's sentiments, "we have found NISS to be a good system, it is an improvement." In the past, the feelings towards the LCBO have been, as this un-named source said, "It's a monstrosity that needs revamping in so many areas ... this is a good start." I guess time will tell if this initiative is a step in the right direction to revamping our liquor monopoly.

In December noted British wine writer and author Jancis Robinson visited Toronto on a book tour and tasting of some of the crème de la crème of Canadian wine. While she did find 17 of the 70 wines she tasted were "world class wines from any point of view", the most notable of her comments were directed towards the stature of the LCBO. She commented that we Canadians are "fed stories which rather overstate Canadian wine's place in the world of wine", especially when it comes to the LCBO, who is always proud to claim their important player status as the world's largest single buyer of wine. Jancis says, and I quote: "I don't see how it can be. For example, while the LCBO retails wine to fewer than 13 million people, of all ages, whose average annual wine consumption is 11 litres, the leading British supermarket Tesco has a 25 per cent share of the retail wine market in a country of 60 million people, so in effect supplies 15 million people whose average annual wine consumption is 22 litres." Something to keep in mind the next time you hear how mighty the LCBO is worldwide; I'm not saying the LCBO isn't an important player – but they certainly aren't the biggest.

Speaking of our place on the world stage, another Canada vs. Bordeaux tasting was held by the Niagara chapter of the Ontario Wine Society on January 27, 2007 – specifically, Niagara vs. Bordeaux. Eight wines (4 Niagara, 3 French, 1 ringer from Long Island, New York) were rated by 45 tasters, prices ranged from \$16-\$35, and the wines ranged from the 1999 to the 2003 vintages. Niagara took the top 3 places with Creekside, Jackson-Triggs and Lakeview in the 1-2-3 position.

Finally, the Girl Guides of Canada are pleased to announce an expansion of their Bag-a-Cork recycling program. This program is celebrating its' 2 year anniversary and in that time 5 tonnes of natural cork has been recovered, mainly in the Greater Toronto area from approximately 150 drop off points. Now with expansion across Ontario, more cork can be recovered and re-used, saving precious landfill space. To find the cork drop off bin nearest you (to drop off your natural cork) visit www.bag-a-cork.org.



Wine Event Spotlight: *2nd Annual Hamilton Food and Drink Fest ... March 30 to April 1, 2007*

Have you heard of the Hamilton Food and Drink Fest? Well if you live in Hamilton you probably have, but outside of Hamilton, probably not, and I think it is time you do. It is billed as the Festival with Taste! and now in its second year it sure sounds like it's got plenty of it to spare. Featuring over 50 exhibitors including local wineries from Niagara and the Lake Erie region, breweries from across Ontario and wines, beers, spirits and food from around the world – as well as right here at home. Visit www.foodanddrinkfest.com for all the details, including time, place (Hamilton Convention Centre), dates (March 30-April 1), exhibitors list and best of all a \$2 off coupon for admission (\$12) at the door.

Ticket Giveaway: Experience the 2nd Annual Hamilton Food & Drink Fest on us ... we have acquired 2 pairs of passes to the event, so send your name, address (with postal code) and phone number to michael@ontariowinereview.com ... please put "Drinking it Down in Hamilton Town" in the subject line. Deadline for entries is 11:59pm Tuesday March 20, 2007.

Past Winners for Cuvee: Speaking of winning, 5 lucky readers are going to the Toronto Wine & Cheese Show (www.towineandcheese.com) – they are: Jason Alger (Erin); John McVicker (Toronto); Hayden Shadow (Scarborough); Leon Meslin (Mississauga); and Brenda Clark (Markham). Congratulations and have a good time.

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 Mimico your uncle in Uxbridge, your great aunt in Grand Bend or 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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