

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 – 54
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OntarioWineReview: *Are you getting your daily dose of cork? Chances are good you are.*

A few weeks ago something happened that made me weep huge tears of despair ... and then I got angry. While scrolling through my wine cellar database I noticed I had a Concha Y Toro Casillero del Diablo 2000 Merlot ... "Oops," I thought to myself, "now there's one that's probably on its way out, if not fully ruined." I located it on the rack, pulled it out and held it up to the light: not a great or effective way to judge a perspective wine, but it gave me an indication of how it was ageing (as red wines age, they become lighter in colour, whites are the opposite, they get darker. For example, a 2001 De Chaunac (deep red) I had sat on for far too long, looked like a rose when I finally got to it). As I held the bottle up I saw that no light passed through the bottle, "a good sign," I thought to myself. Next, I sunk the corkscrew into the cork, I braced the handle and pulled – the cork came out with a resounding "pop" – loud and clear ... another good sign, the seal had held. I smiled, so far so good. I poured the wine into a glass ... still darkly coloured, deep ruby with a bare hint of garnet on the rim. My smile widened, maybe I got lucky – had I benefited from my cellar mismanagement? Had this bottle, purchased several years ago for \$9, aged well? I swirled the liquid in my glass commenting on the good legs and nice sheen of the wine as it reflected the light. Then I put my nose in and inhaled deeply ... ooooo-weeeee, what is that horrid smell? Wet newspaper, damp basement, old gym socks, moldy – whatever your term of choice, it boiled down to one thing, this wine was corked. All other indicators pointed to a good bottle of wine, but the dang cork ruined the show!! In a nutshell, this bottle was bad the day I bought it – age just enhanced the fault. Now I am sure you have all heard the term, but you may be asking yourself: what does being a "corked wine" actually mean?

Corked is a slang term that has been kicking around for awhile and has come to mean and describe different things: someone who is drunk (Bob drank too much, he's absolutely corked!); to punch someone (Bob was being a total jerk, so I corked him one.); or a person who's having trouble going to the toilet (Bob ate so much cheese last night he'll be corked up for days.). But in the wine world "corked" means something completely different and when you smell a wine that is corked it's a smell you won't soon forget; especially when you smell it in a bottle you can't wait to taste; did I mention my bottle of 2000 Merlot?

Simply put, "corked wine" is wine that has been tainted or contaminated by TCA, more specifically 2,4,6-Trichloroanisole. How it gets into your wine is an interesting story. You see, for aesthetic purposes, cork, once it has been taken off the tree, is given a bath in a bleaching mixture. Within said mixture is the real culprit, chlorine, which when it comes in contact with some molds, that occur naturally and harmlessly in cork, causes a chemical reaction. If natural corks aren't properly and thoroughly rinsed and dried after their bath, the mold lives on and they are considered contaminated, and when said cork comes in contact with the wine, you get the dreaded TCA ... and that equals yucky wine. I have over-simplified the science and chemistry, but I'm sure you get the point. TCA manifests itself as smells that have been described as wet, musty and moldy, as in wet cardboard, wet newspaper, musty basement, old dirty socks – need I go on? The taste isn't much better than the smell - musty, muted and hollow flavours – subdued is one of the best ways to describe TCA tainted wine. Your wine does not have to be swimming in it either, as little as 5 parts per trillion can be detected. It's not just old wines that can be affected; young wines can get it too. Once the wine comes into contact with tainted/contaminated cork you have yourself some TCA-wine. However, have no fear, it can't hurt you to drink it ... it's just not very pleasant and you won't want to, as I found out from my bottle of 2000 Casillero del Diablo (which smelled like the devil's gym socks).

Wine industry insiders put the number of tainted bottles somewhere between 5-10% ... just a quick reminder:

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we're talking natural cork sealed bottles here ... 5-10 percent. What other industry in the world would accept that high a failure rate? So what can you do about it you ask? Nothing ... it's up to the individual producers to figure out the best closure for their wines. I was just lucky enough to get one of those one-in-ten bottles, how lucky do you feel?

These days, it seems, Stelvin screwcaps are all the rage, and are finally making inroads. New Zealand has gone almost completely Stelvin; Australia is heading down that same path with more and more of their bottles being sealed that way. Many fore-thinking California wineries are going Stelvin; while the same kind of fore-thinkers here in Ontario do the same, either at start-up (Flat Rock) or make the switchover (Coyote's Run). On the other hand, the cork industry, as you might guess, is not very happy about this; they are fighting tooth-and-nail to keep their tenuous grip on bottle sealing by promising better and higher standards along with new ways and measures to make less contaminated corks. Could this be a case of too little too late? The movement is already afoot; it seems almost inevitable that cork will become a thing of the past. In 20 years, I'll be sitting around the dinner table and as I twist the cap off my favourite wine, I'll tell my niece how I used to use a corkscrew to open a bottle of wine and she'll say, "Not cool ... what's a cork?" To which I will reply, "a cork is that stopper-thingy I pulled out of my ruined bottle of 2000 Chilean Merlot."

But I digress – let's get back to corked wine. The best thing you can do for both yourself and your favourite winery, is learn to distinguish a cork-tainted wine from other faults or even a wine you just don't like. If it smells musty-funky-wet-rotting-socky it's most likely corked don't be afraid to take it back to the retailer (LCBO) or the winery. The LCBO will give you little to no hassle, while most wineries will be more than happy to exchange a corked bottle, and even happier that you were able to recognize it as such, instead of just discounting the wine as "bad" and never darkening their doorstep again. If you are unclear what cork-taint is, ask someone at a winery the next time you visit; sadly, many, if not all, who work at a winery, have had experience with a corked bottle at one time or another. An educated consumer is a winery's best friend because when you learn to recognize the telltale stink and muted flavours that TCA imparts, then you'll know it's not the winery's fault. Many customers that claim they'll never buy a particular wine again because it was "bad" – have no idea it was cork related and could have easily been fixed by exchanging the bottle at it's point of purchase. Unfortunately, while it is possible to get another bottle, you will not be able to re-create that fantastic ambiance around the dinner you had planned; nor the excitement of opening a 2000 Merlot that had such great potential.

There is no doubt that TCA/corked wine is a problem with which the industry is dealing, but consider this: cork has been sealing bottles now for well over 350 years, without any significant challenge from any other closure. It'll be a slow change for many old world producers who think they are getting screwed, while the new world seems ready to screw you ... so to speak. I am not an advocate for either one, though I do believe in the benefit of the screwcap; I also believe in the right of the producer to choose the seal for his product. I just don't believe I should have to suffer a ruined seven-year-old wine because of it.



Grape Guy's Picks of the Bunch: Riesling, Riesling and more Riesling

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

Jackson-Triggs 2005 Delaine Vineyard Riesling - \$18.95

www.jacksontriggswinery.com

From the very first sip to the ultimate and inevitable last tip of the glass, the best word to describe this Riesling is "wow". The Delaine Vineyard line of wines from Jackson-Triggs, Ontario, is the fruit from one of their premier vineyards, which was planted by Don and Elaine Triggs in an effort to showcase the terroir of the Niagara Peninsula. A great nose of apple, citrus, peach and some petrol aromas does not even begin to prepare you for what's in store once the wine passes your lips. The apple, lime, peach and mild petrol follow through on the palate, but there are also hints of sweetness that find their way into the mix. It's here that the peach turns juicy and white, while mid-palate, the tart apple and lime subside to become exotic lychee and mango, then reappear on the long finish with lots of mouthwatering acidity. Food friendly sure, but it can also be enjoyed in a sipping environment all on it's own. This'll be a wonderful addition to your summer patio eats and drinks. Did I mention "wow" when I started this review – I must have ... because while drinking this wine I must have said it out loud about a dozen times. Lovely.

Hillebrand Winery 2005 Trius Dry Riesling - \$14.95

www.hillebrand.com

When I do my tasting notes, I write them on small scraps of paper that I have lying about, then, a day later, I review my notes and write the review. There are times when I smile fondly over the notes, remembering the

wine, and other times where I can literally still taste and smell the wine as I read over my scribbles. This is one of those wines ... it might seem simple on the page, but it was far from that. Immediately the smell was of peach and melon, with hints of Bartlett pear thrown into the mix for good measure. The taste was white peach and honeydew with some really good minerality and an apple finish, which kinda pops up right at the end as you're savouring the medium long finish. There's just a touch of sweetness making this an absolutely delicious sipper. Buy a bunch, some to drink now and some to lie down for later – I can't wait to see how this one ages, it'll gain more apple and petrol notes, that's my prediction anyway – it'll be fun to find out if I'm right, stay tuned.

These wines are available at the winery and at the LCBO.

Hot Tip on a Hot Wine: Seems that there is one more Riesling that I have to draw your attention to ... this one is not only good, but now in limited supply. Check out the review of the [Henry of Pelham 2005 Reserve Riesling](#) – then check out how to get some.



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 April 3 and 10:

[Strewn Winery 2004 Cabernets](#) and [Coyote's Run 2005 Pinot Noir](#)

Also look for these reports in the On the Road with the Grape Guy section:

[The Hamilton Food and Drink Fest](#)
[Germany ... Wine with Jazz](#)
[Churchill Cellars Portfolio Tasting](#)



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

Book Review:

Judgment of Paris:

California vs. France and the Historic 1976 Paris tasting that revolutionized wine

By George M. Taber

The title says it all, or does it? It certainly is a long one and if you think you already know the story of the 1976 Paris Tasting, in which California wines bested France's, then think again, because you probably don't know the half of it. This book was written by George M. Taber – the ONLY reporter who attended the tasting and the only outside witness to put pen to paper (or is that typewriter keystroke to paper) to report on the event's actual happenings. Consider this: when "the event" was first announced by Steven Spurrier, it was considered a non-event, even to those hosting it, because France was wine in the eyes of the world. But Taber thought it would be an interesting afternoon, with some good wine, interesting discussion, and, when the French wine inevitably won, it would be a fluff piece, one that might or might not (most likely not) be picked up by Time Magazine (where Taber worked). As it turned out, Taber witnessed one of the most historical events in the history of wine, and here he finally tells the real story.

He starts the book with some history of France's winemaking practices. Then he tells the story of the soon-to-be key figures (Steven Spurrier, Mike Grgich, Warren Winiarski) of the Paris Tasting ... followed by descriptions of the wineries that participated (both French and Californian). That takes up about half the book. The second half goes into the fall-out from the event, and how it affected everyone, and I do mean everyone, involved and the worldwide ripple effect. The book is broken into two major sections: 1) before the event and 2) after the event. And as dry as this might seem it truly is a page-turner. Taber's style of writing keeps you guessing as he slowly reveals his little surprises along the way, which usually happen at the end of chapters ... spurring you on to read "just one more". Taber covers all the bases and tells a great story. If you are even the slightest bit interested in this chapter of wine history – Taber makes it palatable and worth the read.

What makes this book even more apropos, is the recent events that took place at [Sette Mezzo in Toronto](#)

[January 23, 2007](#). Due to these events, the book resonates even more strongly for me today than it did a few months ago. Having taken part in a similar taste-off myself between Ontario and France and witnessing a little winery's 2002 Cabernet-Merlot best the best of France, really hit home as to not only how far Ontario wine has come, but how revered and reviled the French are in the wine world. To be considered world class, you have to beat the best and I am sure Bill Redelmeier (owner) and his 2002 winemaking team (Colin Campbell and Steve Byfield) feel the same way Mike Grgich and Warren Winiarski felt back in 1976 ... a mixture of shock and awe at what they have accomplished, and of course an element of pride, not just for themselves but for the industry as a whole. We all say bring on the French when it comes to wine competitions, and no matter who they apparently lose to, be it California, Chile, or even us "lowly" Ontarians – they are still considered the ones to beat. In Taber's book, he takes you inside to see why, not just how and who.



Wine Event Spotlight: *Sante – the Bloor-Yorkville Wine Festival – May 8-12, 2007*

Spring is slowly sneaking around the corner and so is Sante ... from May 8 to 12 the Yorkville area of Toronto is turned into a wine lovers paradise. Seminars, international tastings, shopping and sipping and plenty more - with new features added this year like Sante in the Park and Cool Wines & Hot Sounds. For all the details about this year's event, what's happening, how to get tickets, who's involved, etc. check out www.santewinefestival.net

Free Passes to Giveaway: Here's your chance to raise a glass during the Sante Wine Festival. OntarioWineReview has acquired some passes to Saturday's (May 12) Sip, Savour and Shop event – a chance to get out for a walk amongst the shops of Yorkville, take in the beautiful sunshine, find a bargain and try some really excellent wines from around the world. For a list of participating wineries and shops visit www.santewinefestival.net and look under "Festival Events". To win these tickets send an email with your name address (with postal code) and phone number to michael@ontariowinereview.com. Put "Festing it up in Yorkville" in the subject line. Entry deadline: Wednesday April 18, 2007 (11:59pm).

Break out the Herbs: Winners of the Wine and Herb passports are Mike Gilechuk (Ajax) and Ramute Misevicius (Toronto) – you're off for a Niagara weekend of great tastes, in both food and wine. I was reminded, by organizers, that it's a great way to experience the region, and a great time of year to do it; so book a Bed & Breakfast and plan to stay for the whole weekend. More info about this month long festival can be found at www.wineriesofniagaraonthelake.com. Passports will be mailed out to the winners shortly.

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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