

## 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 – 57**  
**May 24, 2007**

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

The OntarioWineReview universe is expanding just a little bit more ... by now you have heard about the [Weekly Wine Note](#) and the [On the Road with the Grape Guy](#) blogs and the [Weekly Wine Note Podcast](#) ... now it's time to introduce you to the newest blog: [Vintages Releases \(http://grapeguyvintages.blogspot.com\)](http://grapeguyvintages.blogspot.com) – it will appear every two weeks and will highlight some of the most notable wines from the upcoming Vintages release. It will be posted on the Monday of the coming release date (ie: Saturday May 26 release was posted on Monday May 21).

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**OntarioWineReview: WINERY REVIEW – Henry of Pelham Family Estate Winery**

*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.*

You've seen their name in the LCBO: the blue label with the gold lettering; you may even have thought to yourself “what a funny name for a winery”, but at Henry of Pelham wine is anything but funny, it's serious business, and over the years, they have made quite a name for themselves with everything from Riesling and Meritage to icewine and Reserve Chardonnay. And, of course, many wine drinkers know them for the most unlikely of grapes; the much maligned, Baco Noir, of which they have the reputation of making the very best in Ontario. While their name may be prominent at the LCBO, with quite a few bottles on both the general list and in Vintages (last search showed 37 listings), what do you know about Henry of Pelham? Have you ever visited? And what in the world is a “Henry of Pelham” anyway? We're about to find out, as we visit Ontario's version of IHOP, without the pancakes (and without the “I”).

Henry of Pelham Family Estate Winery (a.k.a.: HOP or Pelham) is located at the corner of Fifth Street and Pelham Road in St. Catharines (one of the few wineries to have a St. Catharines address); the name and land is steeped in the area's historical tradition. When you get there you will find that there is no long driveway cutting through the vineyards, no gated property, no massive parking lot, no modern structures, no mansions on a hill – in fact Henry of Pelham winery looks pretty unobtrusive from the road, and even when you're on the property, it keeps it's quaint, understated charm. In fact, it looks like a small village unto itself. The property is home to a few buildings, and as you pull into the driveway and park, you see signage on lamp posts pointing your way: Wine Store / Office / Coach House Café are all to your left (or in front of you, depending where you parked); the production area is to your right (or behind).

Your mindset changes when you are out here. It's all very quiet and seemingly isolated, there are few neighbours, and rolling hills and “mountains” are all around you ... it's like being in olden day Upper Canada, or even on a street in Victorian-era England; it would be more appropriate to call it The Village of Henry of Pelham. Once you make your way down the slope to the entrance of the tasting room these feelings truly and totally envelope you.

The tasting room is in the basement of the old inn, which was built in 1842 and is comprised of two rooms. 1)

the main room and tasting bar, with it's bottles of wine stored behind the L-shaped bar, where the staff congregate, and the cash register, which seems to be the only modern feature in the room; and 2) the auxiliary tasting bar/wine store, where another, smaller, bar is located and the wines are shelved around the outside walls on low shelves. Bottles of wine are displayed in carefully designed shelving units, the top bottle is slanted towards you for easy reading of the label, tasting notes are placed above and the rest of the bottles are stocked and lovingly cradled in individual bunks below. The feeling one gets from both rooms is of an old English Inn and Pub; it would not surprise me at all if a bartender, complete with a handle bar mustache and apron, appeared, requesting, "what'll it be gov'ner?" as he flips a stein in his one hand and fingers the beer taps with the other.

Not at all what you'd expect from one of Ontario's largest wine producers; and when I say one of the largest producers I mean 50,000-75,000 cases per year (depending on vintage year), which ranks them in the top 5 of all the wineries in Ontario. If you think of Vincor (Jackson-Triggs, Inniskillin) or Andrew Peller Wines (Peller, Hillebrand) you think bright, modern, state of the art ... but Pelham doesn't want you to think that way about them – they give you an old world feel for a reason. At Pelham it's not about the show on the outside, it's about the go in the bottle. And when you show up at Pelham, and taste what's in the bottle, you will be going home with a few bottles, if not more. As for what's a Henry of Pelham? That will remain a mystery in this article, but I encourage you to visit their website ([www.henryofpelham.com](http://www.henryofpelham.com)) and look under the "about us" section ... where it will all be made clear.



**Grape Guy's Picks of the Bunch:** *Whites that are just this side of heaven*  
For directions and more information visit [www.henryofpelham.com](http://www.henryofpelham.com).

Henry of Pelham 2005 Cabernet Franc - \$13.95

It's not every year that Henry of Pelham makes a straight Cabernet Franc, they usually put the grape into their Meritage blend, but lucky for us in 2005 they decided to grace us with a well-priced, well-made straight Cab Franc. Daniel Speck, vice president Sales and Marketing, told me via email, "Cabernet Franc ripens unevenly on the vine, greenish clusters will set right next to a red one ... we don't want green flavours in the wine so we prune vigorously [before budding], then early in the season." And with only a hint of green veg, which blows off 15 minutes after the initial opening and pouring, they've succeeded admirably. This medium bodied Franc is a tasty, yet lighter expression than many I have tasted lately – blackberry, cassis, black cherry, cedar and soft spice on the nose. Black fruit, cedar and black cherry come through on the palate, with a touch of red fruit sweetness and black raspberry tartness; there's even a touch of oregano – where that came from I'm not sure, but it sure did add to the mix nicely. It all culminates in a coffee/cocoa finish. There's much come-back-ability to this wine sip after sip so enjoy.

Henry of Pelham 2005 Reserve Chardonnay - \$14.75

Looking for bang for your buck in a Chardonnay? This one delivers. Winner of the 2007 Cuvee award for best General List White (which means it's readily available at the LCBO); this 6 month oak-aged Chardonnay is a winner on all fronts. First, let's get the oaking part out of the way – I am not a fan of over-oaked Chard; Pelham deals with that barrel fermenting only 28% of this wine; the other 72% is done in stainless steel, which give the wine a chance to show off some fruit not just oak. The nose is loaded with buttery-oaky goodness along with some vanilla and pleasant herbaceous aromas. The palate is the opposite, it's fruit driven, easy drinking with slight butter and oak notes, a hint of citrus and a touch of vanilla. Quite lovely ... made with a delicate hand and beautifully positioned to take advantage of patio sipping this summer. Salud!

**Meritage Comparison:** Check out the differences and similarities in the [2003](#), [2004](#) and [2005](#) versions of this Pelham staple.

These wines are available at the winery and the LCBO.



**Weekly Wine Notes and More**

*The Grape Guy presents the "Weekly Wine Note"! A savoury selection of Ontario wines to impress, enjoy, or just plain drink! A NEW Wine Selection is added to <http://ontariowinereviews.blogspot.com> every Tuesday!*

*Here are the Weekly Wine Notes that were added to the Blog over the past two weeks:*  
Calamus Estate 2006 Segitta ([read](#)) ([listen](#)) and Coyote's Run 2005 Cabernet Franc ([read](#)) ([listen](#))

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

["Terroir" in Prince Edward County](#)  
[New Zealand Wine Fair](#)  
[Sante, International Tasting](#)  
[Lifford Grand Tasting](#)

The May 26<sup>th</sup> LCBO Vintages Release report is available here:

<http://grapeguyvintages.blogspot.com/>



### **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 WOW Factor of HOP is the quaint, old-world feel of the tasting room, attached wine store, and other buildings on the property. A place where you feel you have stepped back in time. A place of top hats, horse and buggies, smoking lounges and gentlemen's clubs. When I emerged from the wine store, I was almost shocked back to reality by the bright sunshine and the cars driving by on the road – they just seemed so out of place for these surroundings. But the age of the wine store is not all there is to this winery. Henry of Pelham has spent years making a name for themselves with the most unlikely of grapes, Baco Noir, a French hybrid that Ontario seems to have lovingly adopted as it's own. Dozens of wineries make a version of this grape wine, of which, Henry of Pelham is the gold standard to which all other winery's aspire. During Ontario Wine Review's recent [Baco Challenge](#), Pelham's dominance showed, landing in the top two in two of the three categories they entered. But that is not the full Baco-story. Baco Noir is an age-worthy wine and takes many years to come into its own. On one of my visits, Daniel Speck, V.P. Sales & Marketing, and one of the 3 brothers who own the winery, cracked a bottle of 1998 Baco Noir and put it beside the currently available 2005 Vintage. While the 2005 showed a strong nose and taste of leather, deeply sour cherries and strawberry (heaviest emphasis on the leather - cowhide) ... the 1998 was soft on leather (lambskin), with stewed strawberries, compote-like, on the nose, with peppered stewed fruit on the taste. The tastes are best described by the leathers they recall: the 2005 was a tough cowhide, while the 1998 a smooth lambskin. Daniel remarked, "this one still needs time, but I think you can see where it's going." The acids were still quite high on '98 while the tannins had begun to soften. Daniel is convinced Baco is Ontario's grape ... and while I may not fully agree with that assessment, I would say it most definitely belongs in the hands of the Speck brothers at Henry of Pelham to help steward it along.



### **Wine Event Spotlight:** *Festival Archie Epicure*

Call these events the sooner and later events – one happens this weekend the other the first weekend in July:

May 26, 2007 at Archibald Orchards & Estate Winery it's the 8<sup>th</sup> annual Fruit Wine and Food Festival ... this is a fun little event that happens every year around this time. Archibald's invites fruit wineries from all over Ontario along with area restaurants, who present food and wine pairings. Check out my report from last year's event and you'll get an idea about what I am talking about ([Newsletter #33](#)). Call 905-263-2396 to book your tickets.

July 6-8, 2007 in Windsor it's the 13<sup>th</sup> Annual Festival Epicure ... I am told this is a blast ... where wineries, breweries, spirits as well as an array of food from various area restaurants. Admission is \$5 per day. I could try to explain it all here but the best thing to do is visit [www.festivalepicure.com](http://www.festivalepicure.com) and then book some accommodations because this is gonna be a lot of fun.

**Ticket Giveaway:** In this case it's a wristband, but for all intents and purposes it's the same thing. Festival Epicure ([www.festivalepicure.com](http://www.festivalepicure.com)) is offering up 3 pairs (a total of 6) – one pair for each day. Send your name, address (with postal code) and phone number along with your day of preference (Friday, Saturday or Sunday) to [michael@ontariowinereview.com](mailto:michael@ontariowinereview.com). Entry deadline is 11:59pm Wednesday May 30. Good Luck.

**Recent Winners:** Congratulations to the following readers who won tickets to this year's Niagara New Vintages Festival (June 9-17) – for more information or to get your tickets visit [www.niagarawinefestival.com](http://www.niagarawinefestival.com). Joe Connell (Mississauga), Brenda Clark (Markham), Judy Ackley (Essex), Evelyn Truty (Hamilton), 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](mailto:michael@ontariowinereview.com) We look forward to hearing from you!

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