

## 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 – 58**  
**June 7, 2007**

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

Week after week new changes to the OntarioWineReview world happen and I am happy to report them to you. You have already been introduced to the new [Weekly Wine Note](#) and [Podcast](#) sections – now there is a poll on the website asking whether you would like them to focus on the same wine or a different wine. This poll will run for the whole month of June.

Speaking of the poll – the most recent one just closed and an overwhelming number of you chose Cabernet Franc as our next challengeable grape (37.1%). I'll keep you posted as to when and where the challenge will be taking place.

On a personal note, yours truly, Michael Pinkus – the Grape Guy, was recently accepted as a member into the Wine Writer's Circle of Canada.

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**OntarioWineReview:** *I Reserve the Right to Slap your Wrist*

The Oxford English dictionary classifies “reserve” as a verb: “put aside or keep back for later occasion or special use”; or as a noun: “thing reserved for future use; limitation or exception attached to something”. The Oxford Companion to Wine says this about that same word: “It should be quite reserved itself, for superior wines, but, unlike Reserva and Riserva, the English term Reserve has few controls on its use.” The World Atlas of Wine puts it even more succinctly “much used term which generally has very little meaning.” So how did we go from “special and exceptional” to bupkis? But more importantly, why? Why are some wineries trying to fool you into believing the wine you hold in your hand, with “reserve” written on the label, is special; even though it is being used solely as a marketing tool. And why if wineries know the word “Reserve” means nothing, do some continue using it, while others, knowing it's meaningless, refuse to use it? Because the wine buying public still buys into the word and holds it sacred, believing that the wineries do too. We the public, have given wineries a sacred trust, and yet some abuse it to no end. I hate getting on this horse again ([see newsletter #36](#)), but I am not one to sit idly by as a term that at one time meant so much, gets blatantly defiled. It is a slap in our collective faces when the term gets misused as a marketing ploy to raise the price on a typically ordinary bottle of wine; which is why I have decided to slap back.

As you can plainly see, I am feeling a little feisty of late; but there comes a time in every man's life when he has to take a stand against something. Now, before I get going I want everyone to understand that I am not attacking the wineries I mention, just their labeling practices. Some of the wineries use the term “too liberally” and that is where I have my problems. Some seem to use it on everything, while others just misuse it.

I know there are “Reserve Offenders” in all regions of Ontario, in Canada and all over the world – mostly new world. To avoid this word-fraud, the Spanish and Portuguese actually have the term defined in their wine laws with minimum lengths of time that wines have to be held back before they can use the word “reserve” on the label; and although it can get complicated, I have no doubt when I pick up a wine from Spain or Portugal, I have a genuine “Reserve” wine.

In this article, I have to site one of the most blatant misuses I have ever come across. The "Shame-On-You" award goes to Black Prince Winery in Prince Edward County for the following Reserve Offense:

On a trip to "the County" last fall (October 2006), I walked into Black Prince to purchase a bottle of Leon Millet-Zweigelt made by Bella Vignes (an up-and-coming winery in the area which to date does not have their own facilities for wine distribution). I give kudos to Black Prince Winery for helping smaller, aspiring wineries to promote their wines and giving them an outlet in which to sell and sample their wines ... all done in a spirit of co-operation. While I was in their store, I spied a bottle of 2005 Cabernet Franc "Reserve" for \$24.95 ... made from all county fruit. Remember, it's October 2006 and here in front of me was this bottle of 2005 Cabernet Franc "Reserve", how could that be? So I inquired how long the wine spent in barrel ... the answer: 4 months. Four months I thought to myself, bewildered and confused I asked the natural follow-up question: "Why is it called a reserve then?" "Because we can" was the answer I got. I tried one more time, "Really?" I asked ... the answer I received: "Basically."

Not less than 2 months prior to this encounter (August 2006), I wrote an article about the laws, or lack thereof, governing the word "Reserve" on Canadian VQA labeled wines. The simple answer is "there are none". Now here at Black Prince, a well-respected winery in the Prince Edward County area, I find the most blatant disregard I have ever heard for the use of the term. Black Prince winery was started by members of the Opimian society: they hold a 27% share in the winery. For those not aware of Opimian, it is a wine club that brings wine in from around the world for their members, who, in turn get a chance to purchase and taste wines which they would not normally find at the LCBO. Of course, they do other things too ([www.opim.ca](http://www.opim.ca)). What I am getting at is that they should know better ... this isn't a mom-and-pop-type start up operation. Opimians have a love and an appreciation for wine. But it is just these kinds of shenanigans that should cause the public to be skeptical about the "reserve" moniker on a label; it cheapens the word to the point where it becomes, as The World Atlas proclaimed it has, "very little meaning". Here are a few examples of why this should outrage you: Erie Shore Vineyard in the Lake Erie North Shore area has a wine called [2005 Cabernet](#) (made from 100% estate grown Cabernet Franc). It's oaked for "a couple of months maximum", and they charge \$12.95 for it; Aleksander's (also LENS) [2005 Cabernet Franc](#) \$14.00, no more than four months in oak; Coyote's Run (Niagara) 50/50 blend of Cabernet Franc and Sauv called simply [Cabernet 2005](#) sees a heck of a lot more oak and sells for \$16.95; Sandbanks Estate Winery's (PEC) [2005 Cabernet Franc](#), which spent 6 months in oak, \$19.95. None of these wines have the word Reserve on the label and yet most have had more done to them than the Black Prince version ... and all are less pricey. So why did they put "reserve" on the label? The only reasonable conclusion, to charge more.

It's time for the VQA to look into the word "Reserve" and apply some guidelines for its use. It's shameful that a winery can just throw the word on a label willy-nilly in order to make a few extra bucks. The wine was okay, I'd say worth 15 or 16 dollars. The short crop in Prince Edward County, and throughout Ontario, and it being 100% county fruit may raise the price a few bucks, but no more than \$20. There should be some kind of explanation other than "because we can". I have found wine drinkers to be an understanding lot and I am sure if they liked the wine and the explanation made sense that they would pay that price. But putting the word "Reserve" on the label just "because you can" shows little respect for your customers. Four months does not constitute a reserve branding; but then again, the guy was right, they do it because they can.

"Reserve" conjures up images of wine sitting in barrels for a long time ... held back, specially selected barrels, the best fruit, more flavours, better wine ... all equal higher price. All Black Prince did was take the former (the name) and left the rest to the imagination.

I am disappointed that Black Prince would pull such a ruse ... they do such good work in the area, they help so many other producers get their wares to market and give them exposure. They are spoken of highly in the area, and yet they pull this stunt, for that the Black Prince should get a black eye.

Follow up ... In an effort to give Black Prince a chance to explain, I spoke with John Sambrook, the founder and former President and Director of the winery. In a phone interview, he said he remembered the wine and said it was called Reserve because only one new oak barrel was used to make this wine, and only one barrel was made, therefore it is considered a "reserve" because it was in limited supply. He also informed me that they would love to sit on wine longer but because Black Prince is a "cash strapped" winery, they have to get their wines to market within a year. John did agree with me that the "man behind the counter" should have been a little more helpful with my questions, instead of being so flippant ... which leads me to another pet peeve - behind the counter staff who show little regard for the product and even less knowledge - but luckily they are few and far between, and a topic for another newsletter.



### **Grape Guy's Picks of the Bunch: *Two Real Reserves***

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

Huff Estates 2004 Merlot Reserve - \$24.95

[www.huffestates.com](http://www.huffestates.com)

Ontario merlot is an interesting creature, it seems to need time in bottle to really develop to its full potential. I find most young Ontario merlots have too much mouth drying tannin to truly make it worth sipping without a big hunk of meat in front of you. Winemaker Frederic Picard worked under award winning winemaker Jean-Pierre Colas at Peninsula Ridge. Jean-Pierre has won a few awards for his merlot over the years and Frederic seems to have taken a few pointers away with him. This wine sat in barrel for 18-20 months, a blend of 50% new oak and 50% 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> use barrels; the nose is loaded with black and red fruit, predominantly strawberry with some licorice and cedar. The mouth shows off good oak integration with fruit that follows the nose. This wine could be cellared for another couple of years, but there's no crime in drinking it now.

Sandbanks Estate Winery 2005 Baco Reserve - \$24.95

[www.sandbankswinery.com](http://www.sandbankswinery.com)

There is no wonder what-so-ever in my mind why this wine placed so well during the [OntarioWineReview Baco Challenge](#) ... For those who missed it, this Sandbanks Reserve finished 2<sup>nd</sup> amongst some very stiff competition in the reserve category. And while winemaker/owner Catherine Langlois sweated over the fact that she sent in a barrel sample, she had no reason to. I am happy to report that the finished product is even better than I remember, and here's why. First there's the presentation, the bottle sports a new gold foil label, which is quite impressive and gives the bottle an elegant look; but it's what's inside that's even more impressive. The nose lacks the usual leather-tarry aromas most associated with young Baco, instead it gives way to black cherries, cinnamon, white pepper and truffles. The taste is also very appealing: sour cherry, a good mixture of spices and wonderful toasted oak notes (from the 12 months spent in American oak). This wine is surprisingly lush and would make for a great BBQ companion. I know this is Catherine's first go round with a Reserve Baco, and many would consider this beginner's luck, but if she keeps this up, she'll definitely give the Henry of Pelham boys a run for their money in the Baco department.

**Hot Tip on a Summertime Wine:** Every newsletter throughout the summer (hot months), I will recommend a great summer-sipper to make the most of your patio, cottage or boat – this week's pick:

[Tawse Winery 2006 Chardonnay Musque - \\$18.00](#) – might be sold out publication time  
so as an alternative check out the [Jackson-Triggs 2006 Proprietors' Reserve Gewurztraminer - \\$11.95](#)

These wines are available at the winery only.

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### **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 or listen to the Podcast at [www.ontariowinereview.libsyn.com/](http://www.ontariowinereview.libsyn.com/)

Here are the [Weekly Wine Notes](#) that were added to the Blog over the past two weeks:

Hillebrand 2000 Showcase Cabernet Franc ([read](#)) ([listen](#))

Ridgepoint Wines 2005 Unoaked Chardonnay ([read](#)) ([listen](#))

Also look for these reports in the NEW [On the Road with the Grape Guy](#) section:

[Malivoire Open House](#) - [13<sup>th</sup> Street Open House](#) - [Tawse Open House](#) – [Lailey Open House](#)  
[Wine and Herb Festival Niagara-on-the-Lake](#)

The June 9<sup>th</sup> LCBO Vintages Release report is available here:

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

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

*Having Reservations (tips on spotting the real reserves) ...*

When you are at a winery and you come across “Reserve” on the label, don’t be afraid to ask questions like: how long was this in barrel? How is this different from your non-reserve? Or what makes this a reserve wine? If you’re not happy with the answer, don’t buy it.

Remember there has to be something special about a wine to make it “reserve”. Number one it is usually aged longer in barrel, but with wines like Rieslings, where there is no barrel age listen for detailed answers about special selection, crop thinning, lower yields, older vines, declassification, or only in the best vintages (skipping vintages, not made every year); and combinations thereof. Don’t let someone throw off an off-handed line like “It’s our own fruit” and get away with it; that’s not a legitimate reserve answer, push them for more details. If no more are forthcoming, then the “reserve” moniker is just a money-grab. The word reserve should not be used as a license to print money (so to speak).

Some wineries won’t open reserve wines, preferring instead to describe the difference. Remember, if you can’t try, it’s hard to buy.

And finally, if you get the opportunity to try the reserve and non-reserve side-by-side and you can’t taste the difference, don’t spend the extra cash, it’s just that simple. Afterall, in the end, it’s all about your personal taste.

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**Wine Event Spotlight:** *Finger Lakes Wine Festival in New York ... win weekend passes*

For the first time ever, I am featuring an event outside of Ontario. It’s close enough to drive to and it is held in some beautiful countryside ... I am talking about the Finger Lakes Wine Festival July 20-22 – check it out here at [www.flwinefest.com](http://www.flwinefest.com). I have been there twice in the past 4 years and recommend it highly; it really is a party atmosphere worth checking out, and the region is also worth the miles you’ll put on the car.

**Ticket Giveaway:** I have a pair of weekend passes for the Finger Lakes Wine Festival to Give away ... to enter send me your name, address (with postal code) and phone number before June 13 (11:59pm) and you’ll be in the running for the lone pair. Emails should be titled: “Seneca, Cayuga, Keuka”, so they don’t get misfiled, and sent to [michael@ontariowinereview.com](mailto:michael@ontariowinereview.com). Good Luck.

**Past Winners:** Congratulations to Robert DeVeer of Kingsville, who won the Saturday wristbands to Festival Epicure being held in Windsor the weekend of July 6-8 ... more information about Festival Epicure can be found at [www.festivalepicure.com](http://www.festivalepicure.com).

We are into prime winery visiting season and if you’re looking to experience the region in style, and learning a little something along the way check out Niagara Vintage Wine Tours at [www.nvwt.biz](http://www.nvwt.biz).

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**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, 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](mailto:michael@ontariowinereview.com). We look forward to hearing from you!

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