

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 – 61
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In this Edition

- **Ontario Wine Review:** *WINERY REVIEW – Flat Rock Cellars*
 - **Grape Guy's Picks of the Bunch:** *White Wine Fans Take Note*
 - **The Wow Factor:** *Besides the wine - check this out!*
 - **Wine Event Spotlight:** *Fiesta Buckhorn comes around again*
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OntarioWineReview: *WINERY REVIEW – Flat Rock Cellars*

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.

The first time I visited Flat Rock I did a little off-roadin'; and now here's another of my famous “miss-the-driveway” stories my web-designer used to tease me about. I was climbing 11th Avenue, saw the winery on my right and a dirt road leading up to it – knowing that the winery was still under construction I figured they hadn't finished the driveway yet (besides, many wineries still have dirt driveways); so I turned right onto the gravel and dirt road, drove a little piece until I came upon this rocky hill that ran alongside the winery. I turned left onto this loose-rocked hill then gunned the motor giving the car enough power to get up the hill. The hill led me from the back of the winery to the parking lot. As I made this journey I wondered one, if my car would make it; and two, why they called it 'Flat Rock' (“Flat Rock my ass; they should flatten this thing out a little.”) This part of my story ends with some good news and some bad news ... my efforts were for not on this day, because although the wine-touring map said the winery was open for business, they were in fact, not yet open (it would be another few months until they were) – that's the bad news. The good news: I found their proper driveway on my very first visit (but not before putting my car through its paces); and it turned out not to be that ramp I had used. Had I traveled along 11th Avenue a little further (say about 300 yards or so), up over the rise in the road I would have come to 7th Avenue. Turn right on 7th, go another 200 yards and turned right again, I would have had smooth sailing down their flat, though unpaved, driveway, which cuts thru the vineyard, and right into their parking lot ... and it's a lot easier to navigate than that rock and gravel monstrosity I used. That was two years ago, the drive remains unpaved, but now I know better.

Today Flat Rock is open and ready for business, and it's quite the sight to see, and see from. I'll forego any more references to their driveway for the rest of this review and instead get you right inside the winery. The winery itself is a hexagon-shaped building – it is said that Ed Madronich, owner, wanted a round building, but the costs were too high and instead decided hexagonal would do just fine. Had he achieved this round building he would have been the first and only round winery in Ontario ... but they gave up that notion and instead were first with many other initiatives, including: first to go all Stelvin screwcap, first to go completely geo-thermal, and first to build their winery in an eco-friendly model. In a conversation with Ed, I was informed that he has taken a lot of flak for the Stelvin closure he puts on his wines, mostly from people who just refuse to buy screwcap-closed wines. He doesn't feel sorry for himself or for the lost business; he feels sorry for those customers who won't buy based on the closure, because they are missing out on some really great wines, and not just his, “especially ones from New Zealand and Australia, because they're the ones really moving forward with screwcap.” he told me. We'll hear more from Ed a little later; but first let's move into the tasting room and have a look around.

As you enter the building, you walk through a glassed-in breezeway that has a set of stairs to your left. These stairs go up to a special events room where they host events like the icewine festival, new vintages festival and other special tastings and activities. The room is similar in shape and style to the downstairs tasting room, just without the bottles of wine, tasting bar and merchandise. So what do these rooms look like? They are mostly glass on all but two sides, so you are looking out into the vineyard and beyond to Lake Ontario; and because this room is naturally lit with sunlight streaming in, there is no need for overhead lighting (come to think of it, I have never noticed any lighting from above – but they must have some for evening and night time functions ... they just must). The tasting bar is on your left upon entering, and takes up one of the walls (remember there

are 6 – the entranceway takes up the other non-glassed wall). The shelves are low-key and low-slung so that they don't intrude on the view, and at the tasting bar, you can hear the crack and whoosh as bottles with screwcaps are opened, instead of the squeak and pop of cork.

Flat Rock specializes in two main varieties of wine: Pinot Noir and Chardonnay; but they, being on the much lauded Beamsville Bench, have also made a name for themselves with Riesling, producing two kinds: and Estate Bottled – which won Best White Wine in Canada for their 2005 vintage; and Nadja's Vineyard Riesling – a wine named after Ed's mom. They also dabble in a little Gewurztraminer on occasion (2006 being their first solo bottling of this grape) – and a white blend known simply as "Twisted" using their three white varieties. When going through the wine store, you'll also notice something else about Flat Rock: prices range from 15-30 dollars ... pricing that seems at odds with the newer wineries in Niagara these days. For an explanation I turn once more to the words of Ed Madronich, whose pricing-philosophy is based on gaining lifetime customers: "If I can get each customer to buy at least one bottle of Flat Rock wine each year for the rest of their wine drinking days, then I have a customer for life. And the way to do that is to keep my wines reasonably priced, of good quality and accessible." I guess the only ones he won't get as customers are those totally opposed to his closure ... and that is a shame, because they truly are missing out.

Flat Rock is a worthy addition to your winery tour of Niagara, especially if you enjoy white wines, Pinot Noir, a good view and have nothing against Stelvin closures.



Grape Guy's Picks of the Bunch: White Wine Fans Take Note
For directions and more information visit www.flatrockcellars.com

Flat Rock Cellars 2006 Gewurztraminer - \$18.95

This bottle marks the first time that Flat Rock has made a straight Gewurzt ... in the past most of the gewurztraminer grapes have gone into the white blend "Twisted" – along with some Chardonnay and Riesling. In 2006, the crop was big enough to warrant a straight "G-wine" from these 8-year old vines, and what a wine it is, perfect for spicy food or just straight sipping. The nose is one you could smell all day with an aroma blend of apples and peaches mixed with typical floral aromas like rose petals and lilac. Get it out from under your nose long enough to pass a sip between your lips and get lychee, peach and bosc pear along with some rose petal softness. The finish is lengthy and slightly tart, but also soft and refreshing as it flows through the mouth. Let's hope the folks at the Rock continue to make this one.

Flat Rock Cellars 2006 Nadja's Vineyard Rielsing - \$19.95

Rieslings are becoming one of Ontario's signature wines and those from the Beamsville Bench are exceptional; Beamsville fruit just seems to possess the best characteristics of really good Riesling, more so than many other places in Niagara, and the rest of Ontario. This vineyard is located at the front of the winery – you literally drive through it on your way to the front door. Peach, petrol, citrus and orange blossom greet the nose aromas of sweetness that aren't present on the palate ... this one's not a sweet sipper, it's made for the long haul. Currently, the palate is edgy, with petrol notes, good bracing acidity and a tart long Granny Smith apple finish. Give it some time, say 3-5 years, and this will be an even better wine, especially for you aged Riesling fans ... that's if you have the patience to lie it down. I see a ten-year wait being extremely rewarding.

[Also check out the latest vintage of one my favourite Chardonnays of last year.](#)

Nadja available at Vintages and the winery – Gewurztraminer available at the winery only.

Summer Selection: Every newsletter throughout the summer, I will recommend a great summer-sipper to make the most of your patio, cottage or boat – this week's pick:

[Flat Rock Cellars 2006 Riesling - \\$16.95](#)

[Flat Rock Cellars 2006 Twisted - \\$16.95](#)



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!

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

3 Mountain Road Chardonnays ([read](#)) ([listen](#))

www.ontariowinereview.com

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Lakeview Cellars 2005 Starboard ([read](#)) ([listen](#))

Also look for these reports in the NEW [On the Road with the Grape Guy](#) section:
[Angels Gate Meet the New Winemaker](#)
[Festival Epicure 2007](#)

The July 21st LCBO Vintages Release report is available here:
[Ontario "Vintages" Releases: Saturday July 21, 2007 Vintages Release](#)



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.

For only the second time in OntarioWineReview's history of winery reviews am I invoking a somebody as the "wow factor" instead of a something. Granted the building is beautiful and a tour of the premises is worth taking, especially to hear how they incorporated the land and have become enviro/eco-friendly and self-sustainable. But if you are really looking to find out about the 'why and how' of Flat Rock, the man you should be talking to is Ed Madronich himself. Upon my first meeting with Ed I would have to say I wasn't really sure how to take him: Was he being serious? Was he to be taken seriously? But after a few encounters with him, I would have to say that he is as serious as a heart attack about both his wine and his philosophies. He's easy going and pleasant to talk with, but when the topic turns to wine, he takes on a more serious edge. "We put the best wine we can possibly make into each bottle with the best closure; so that when people open that bottle it's the way we intended it to taste, and the way the customer remembers when they tasted it in the store. [He is referring to corked wine here]. That way we are always remembered in a positive light." Ed's passionate about the land that he occupies, the grapes that he grows and for making the best possible wine he can, by using the best possible methods and know how; as it turns out, it is not just his goal, it really is a passion. He has surrounded himself with people he trusts with making and promoting the wines that bear the name of his winery, but there is no better promoter for it than him. Spend 15 minutes with him and you'll feel it too. Now if only he could be convinced into doing a Sean Connery impression when he starts a tour by saying: "Gentleman, welcome to the Rock."



Wine Event Spotlight: *Outer Limits Tasting ... July 23, 2007*

Events don't come more interesting than this. The Ontario Wine Society is presenting "The Outer Limits of Ontario Wine" at the Savoy Bistro and Lounge. Over 30 out-of-the-way wineries from such places as Ottawa, Collingwood, Alvinston Haliburton, Simcoe and Stouffville will be attending; pouring wines with names like Sebrevois, Raspberry-Truffle, Cherries n' Chocolate and Back from the Dead Red. Tickets are \$30 per person and you don't have to be a member of the society to attend, just a curiosity seeker of unique and unusual Ontario wines. Jot Monday July 23rd on your calendar and be prepared to attend the Savoy Bistro (253 Victoria Street) from 6:30 – 9:00pm. Call 416-921-9798 to see if tickets are still available.

Recent Winners: Congratulations go out to our winners for the Fielding Estate Winery "FEW-esta! Tomato" event being held on Sunday August 26 (noon to 5:00pm), they are Leon Meslin (Mississauga) and John Crawley (St. Catharines). To get your tickets to this tomato extravaganza check out the Fielding Winery website at www.fieldingwines.com to get all the details.

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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