

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 – 64
August 30, 2007

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OntarioWineReview: *WINERY REVIEW – Pillitteri 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.

Over the past 10 years Pillitteri has become one of my favourite wineries to visit for a number of reasons: 1) during the festivals (New Vintage / Ice Wine / Taste the Season / etc.) they always seem to have a food and wine pairing that's a must try; 2) the private room upstairs, in which these delicacies are served, has an elegant look and feel; plus there's the beautiful view (out the window facing the vineyard); 3) their price points are excellent (ranging from easily affordable to those special occasion bottles) and their wines are delicious; 4) the staff is always knowledgeable and friendly. But that was then and this is now. As a reviewer, I must cast a more critical eye on things, and even with that critical eye Pillitteri did not disappoint my preconceptions.

My visit was during a recent festival; it's always better to witness how a busy winery copes with the influx of traffic. Passport holders were whisked into the back and up a flight of stairs to the private tasting and events room ... black table clothes covered the tables and 3 staff were dedicated to the upstairs room taking turns as greeter, pourer/server, and explainer of the pairing. Very professional and enjoyable ... and no wait time.

Then it was down to the main tasting room – a long well lit bar with tasting “menus” which lie in-front of you, giving you a list of wines, prices and what's open for tasting. There are other particulars about the wine on this list namely sugar code and alcohol content. The shelves of wine behind you (on the shop floor) can get pretty confusing when you are looking for something specific; that's why, thankfully, the staff has a supply of wine behind them. They can pull out a bottle or two of that wine you're smacking your lips over on your say so - saving you from going on that search and destroy mission to find it (or is that a game of hide and go seek?).

You'll notice this winery review was written backwards, because now we'll quickly step outside for a view of the exterior. To get into the building there are three doors: the one on the far left leads to the tasting room and wine store; the one on the far right takes you into the market and gift store – a long windowed hallway separates the two rooms. The building itself looks like an old-style market building that has been revamped, but still retains that country-market look and feel – a little roadside market that grew. Which leaves us with a third door to look behind – the middle door. And that brings us to the wow factor ... (read on McDuff)



Grape Guy's Picks of the Bunch: *Something Icy and Something Mellow* For directions and more information visit www.pillitteri.com

Pillitteri Estates Winery 2002 Merlot Reserve - \$29.95

I was in a tasting room when I sampled this one, and one of my fellow tasters said, “I hate that typical Ontario green pepper smell and taste in this wine.” I looked over at him a bit confused – having already tasted this wine and having found no hint of green pepper what-so-ever – had I missed something? I had to be sure ... so back I went to re-taste. Smell: blackberry, cherry, plum, spice, oregano, chocolate – no green pepper. Taste:

follows nose and changes those straight cherry aromas to black cherry flavours. Smooth and lush in the mouth; a long finish with nice oak, cinnamon and vanilla nuances as it lingers on the tongue. But definitely no green pepper – at least none that stood out to me. My fellow taster must have had a case of 'tasting with a preconceived notion'. Just in case you're an Ontario Green-Pepper-Ite (or –aphobe) be prepared take those blinders off and give this one a go. I fully believe that Ontario Merlot needs time to shuck it's greenness and this one has had 5 years to develop and it has matured very nicely, thank you very much – green pepper not included.

Pillitteri Estates Winery 2004 Riesling Icewine - \$50.00 (375ml)

Pillitteri devotes 55% of their production to icewine ... that's a lot of frozen grapes and a lot riding on the hope of minus-10 degree weather, but when it works it pays off – and Pillitteri has many icewines that pay off handsomely; like this one right here. This Riesling is smooth and luscious in the mouth and a wine you could just sit and sniff all night long, if the taste weren't so darn tasty. Dominated by apples and pears on the nose, with hints of sweet apricot and peaches lingering in the background. The palate offers up those apricots and peaches with a honeyied/caramelized coating and a touch of cinnamon and nutmeg. Tempted yet? You should be – it's delicious!

Two newly released wines also reviewed: [2006 Sur Lie Chardonnay](#) and [2006 Bianco Merlot](#)

Both spotlight wines are available at the winery and the LCBO – new wines are winery only.

Summer Selection: Every newsletter throughout the summer, I recommend great summer-sippers to make the most of your patio, cottage or boat – this week's picks are:

[Vineland Estates Winery 2006 Gamay Noir - \\$14.95](#)

[Malivoire Wine Company 2005 Gamay - \\$15.95](#)

[Peller Estates 2005 Gamay – Private Reserve - \\$19.15](#)

All currently available from the winery



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:

Inniskillin 2004 Brae Burn Vineyard Shiraz ([read](#)) ([listen](#))

Chateau des Charmes 2005 St. David's Bench Cabernet Franc ([read](#)) ([listen](#))

There are some new report in the [On the Road with the Grape Guy](#) section:

[Spanish Wines on the General List](#)

[Lake Erie North Shore Vintage Tasting](#)

[Reif's Sensory Garden \(Pictures\)](#) and [Featherstone's Sheep \(Pictures\)](#)

[FEW-esta Tomato at Fielding](#)

The September 1st LCBO Vintages Release report is available here:

[Ontario "Vintages" Releases: Saturday September 1, 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.

To refresh your memory, Pillitteri has 3 doors to enter the building: left, wine store; right, market store; but the best door to walk through is the middle one – there you will be immediately confronted by Pillitteri's wall of excellence – spot lit cubby holes that house a variety of prestigious awards won by Pillitteri over the years. They are all set in elegant black shelving: cups, plaques, trophies and medals fill the cubbies floor to ceiling, as high as the eye can see ... very impressive. Between the rows (there are 5 on each side), in a black alcove, there is the "Pillitteri Cart", the cart in question is the one that appears on the top of every Pillitteri label. After you're finished being wowed here, you can turn right for the market store or left for the wine store and walk down the glassed in hallway to get to where you were originally headed.



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

For August 2007

Word is out that Wayne Gretzky has himself a winery, not a full-time one yet, but one upon which to hang his helmet for the time being. According to all sources, Wayne's temporary winery is Willow Heights – which will soon bare his name on the sign out-front (“He has become the majority shareholder in the winery,” a Willow Heights employee told me.). The wines are being made by Rob Power and Craig MacDonald of Creekside fame; and there are currently two wines available: [2006 Unoaked Chardonnay](#) and [2005 Meritage](#). Wayne is looking to capitalize on the under \$20 market with the wines baring price tags of \$13.99 and \$16.99 respectively (somehow the .99 in the price seems justified) ... along with his own famous 99 on the label. Willow Heights will be Gretzky's home for the next 3 years until he relocates to his (as of now) super-secret winery and vineyard location, which is a place to be named later. The Willow Heights brand of wines will still be available and will be marketed as “higher end” wines.

The rumours of livestock at Featherstone were, and are, true ... by the time you read this, they will have gone the way of the abattoir, but the small sheep at Featherstone made great grape farmers. Dave Johnson took a few weeks away in New Zealand this past winter and came back with a few Kiwi-tricks in his back pocket; one of which was the use of sheep to pluck the leaves and keep down the weeds in the vineyard. It was quite a sight to see. “The key,” Louise Engel (co-owner of Featherstone) said, “is to use little sheep so they can only reach the low hanging leaves and not the grapes. They did that plot over there last month,” she says pointing to some rows of grapes to the left of the driveway, “We're naming that wine Black Sheep Riesling.” In honour of the one black sheep they had in their small flock of 5. For those who missed it this year, you'll get a chance to catch the wooly-grazers next year. [Or check out the On the Road section of the website for a few pictures.](#)

Reif's Sensory Garden is now open. For their 25th anniversary, Reif has thrown open the bank account doors and is spending money on up-grades and new features at the winery. One of those features is their new Sensory Garden. Explained in a press release, the garden was designed to “[interpret] different grape varieties typically used to produce wines in the region.” I visited just this past weekend and was impressed with the smells available; I really did smell chocolate mint, vanilla, strawberry and ginger in seemingly innocuous green plants ([check out the pictures here](#)). Clay pots line the paths of the garden and smells are clearly labeled. Obviously, not a winter activity, unless they decide to enclose the garden in some kind of green house, but definitely something interesting to do the other 3 seasons of the year. Don't expect help though – this is a self-guided tour.

“It's about time you come down here and try the About Thyme Bistro,” people in the wine industry kept telling me. And so on Friday August 24, I walked through the door for the very first time to meet up with some friends and enjoy lunch. And enjoy I did. With a menu that's short, but ever changing, in order to take advantage of fresh ingredients (based on the time of year); a wine list that stresses Lincoln area wineries (the area of Niagara in which the restaurant is located) – going as far as having a BYOW corkage fee less for local wines (\$10) then all others (\$15). I can now recommend the restaurant highly if you're in the area – just don't get too attached to one particular menu item, it may not be there the next time you go ... but something tells me something just as good or better will take its place. About Thyme Bistro – 3457 King Street – 905-562-3457; reservations not required, but bring an appetite, portions are a good size.



Wine Event Spotlight: *Taste! the County – October 6, 2007 ... and a pair of tickets to be won*

It's the 6th Annual Taste! celebration in Prince Edward County, and this year they really do have a lot to celebrate. New DVA-status (Designated Viticultural Area), hot wineries, cool wines and don't forget the food. It's a one-day wine and culinary extravaganza. I was there last year and had a blast ([read review](#)) and this year it's gonna be even better. The festivities kick off at 11:00am and run till 5:00pm at the Crystal Palace on the Picton Fairgrounds. The next day (Sunday), you can drive around to all those wineries who's wines you sampled and see where they're made; maybe grab some dinner at one of the many local area restaurants ... heck make a weekend of it, start the whole thing off on Friday – you'll be glad you did. To learn more about Taste! visit www.taste.thecounty.ca; buy tickets and start making your weekend plans now.

Ticket Giveaway: It all comes down to this: one pair of tickets to Taste! in Picton on October 6, 2007 (event hours: 11:00-5:00) – that's what I have to giveaway. One pair of tickets to taste what all the fuss about Prince

Edward County is about. One pair of tickets to taste the food, the wines, see the entertainment and just relax and enjoy yourself in the peaceful surroundings of The County. How? Easy. Send your name, address (with postal code), and phone number to michael@ontariowinereview.com and put "I Want to Taste The County" in the subject line. Entries must be received by Wednesday September 5 at 11:59pm. Good luck.

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 drunk uncle in Dryden, your co-worker in Cobourg or anyone else you know, animal, vegetable or mineral, who 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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