

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 – 66
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News ... *We start this newsletter off with some news about OntarioWineReview and the website:*

Regular readers of my newsletter and reviews know where my tastes lie ... my favourite red grape here in Ontario is Cabernet Franc (newsletter #41). Changing gears a little, but don't worry, everything will become clear in a moment, so bear with me. After the success of the Baco Challenge last February, people kept asking me, "what grape are you going to do next?" I decided to let you folks decide, being that the Challenge is a Peoples' Challenge, I thought it best to let the people decide what they wanted to taste-test next. The website poll ran from April to June and I was thrilled to learn that the majority of readers shared my feelings about Franc (and I didn't even vote once). Therefore, as if you haven't already figured it out, our next grape is Cabernet Franc.

Together, this November, we'll be tasting over 40 Cab Francs to determine Ontario's best. Once again, this is not a professional taste-off, this is a people's challenge; you'll be doing the judging based on three criteria 1) is it good; 2) would you buy it; and 3) is it good value. We have reserved 5 nights in November at [The Fine Wine Reserve](#) in downtown Toronto, where each night a different grouping of Cab Francs will be tasted. Come out for just one night, or all five. Each evening, after the tasting, we'll throw a little wine and cheese party, pull out and sample some other wines, drink freshly brewed coffee and espresso (courtesy of Raymond Emes & Co.) along with a few other surprises. [Check out the details page here](#) to find out the where, when and how to get your tickets. I'm looking forward to seeing you there.



OntarioWineReview: *WINERY REVIEW – Stoney Ridge 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.

Drive along the main wine route trail and you can't miss Stoney Ridge. Their big white, black, gold and pale green sign stands out ... and so does the rest of the property. Stoney Ridge is billed as the "Garden Winery" and they aren't kidding. To get into the winery, taking the most direct path, you have to pass through some very lush gardens; if you wish to take the more scenic route into the building you could probably wander the grounds for a good hour before entering. But suddenly I find myself in wow-factor territory before even getting you into the winery ... so let's move quickly past the gardens (for now) and into the winery proper.

Behind that wall of plants and flowers, Stoney Ridge has the look and feel of a converted house. There are four separate rooms to visit inside, spread out between the main floor, upstairs and downstairs; there's even an outdoor patio, which looks more like the deck you'd have in your own backyard. Once you enter you are right smack dab into the tasting room, with all its nooks and crannies. There's an intimate alcove at the back corner or the room with wines displayed on racks; more wines are displayed all around the store. Wine paraphernalia, like books, glasses, magnates, wine charms, etc. are scattered throughout the store and the washrooms are across the room opposite the entrance. It's kinda like walking through your grandma's parlour; if grandma really, really, really liked wine.

Across from the bar are two short flights of stairs, one leads up and one leads down. Take the down stairs and you end up in the cheese shop, called "The Cheeseboard" ... Stoney Ridge is one of the few Niagara wineries (if not the only one) with an on-site gourmet cheese shop. Dozens of cheeses are for taste and sale along with other tasty treats. During the festivals and passport events, they use this shop to their advantage – pairing up gourmet cheese with some of their great wines. At one particular event, I remember they made a cheese fondue that included Pinot Grigio in the recipe, fantastic.

Now, let's move up a level and go deeper into the place. This is where you'll find the wine library, where older vintages and "one lefts" are sold. For the curious, it acts as a museum of sorts, where you can see 20+ years of history through Stoney Ridge's labels ... there are also books, glassware and other wine paraphernalia on display up here too. Moving through the room, you come to a small anteroom off this "museum". In truth, it looks more like a dining area. I attended an event where Stoney Ridge provided wine and hors d'oeuvres in this room. From this room, you can proceed through the sliding doors and end up on the deck, where you can enjoy a glass of wine and something to nosh purchased from the cheese store below.

Stoney Ridge is a very homey place ... it really does feel like you are walking around a converted house. With a little imagination, you can even figure out which rooms were what in its hey day as a house (see if you can figure out where the kitchen is).

After grand tasting rooms and cramped tasting rooms (and everything in between) Stoney Ridge is a nice place to "come home" to.



Grape Guy's Picks of the Bunch: *Cranberry Meritage*

For directions and more information visit www.stoneyridge.com.

Stoney Ridge 2005 Cranberry Wine - \$14.95

Cranberry juice ... God's gift to the urinary track, or so we are told. I'm sure you have friends that swear by it, I know I do; but it has to be pure cranberry juice, not that "cocktail stuff". Me, I like that cocktail stuff (you know, that mix of juices with cranberry being the most dominant) because it doesn't have that big acidic-tart bite of the purer stuff and therefore, if I had my druthers, I would go cocktail as opposed to pure. Although I too, have succumbed to the "drink pure cranberry juice for your health" edict on occasion. There are others who want to drink cranberry juice, but feel the need to cut it with something like their favourite spirits (vodka and cranberry seems to be mighty popular) making it a cocktail in the true sense of the word. Now I have found the happy medium between the pure and the cocktail in this cranberry wine from Stoney Ridge. The nose smells just like that Ocean Spray Cranberry Cocktail you've been buying for years as either juice or mixer – but this time the booze has already been added for you and seemingly a sprig of mint is in there too; very refreshing. Also present is that tart cranberry finish: sweet cranberry passes over the tongue all the way to the end, then zap! Hard to believe it's a six (sugar code) with that kind of finish. I'm told the sweetness comes from an addition of 10% apple juice to the wine and maybe that's what makes this "cocktail". This one's very nice indeed. A nice one to serve at Thanksgiving and give that meal a real kick in the giblets, turkey of course.

Stoney Ridge Estate Winery 2004 Founder's Signature Meritage - \$22.95

Again with the 2004 you say ... it may have been an off year, but some of the stuff is quite good. Word on the street is that it wasn't such a good year, but I would have to say I am more and more impressed with the wines that are coming out from this vintage, (or those still on the shelves). '04 was considered by many to be a pretty average year in Ontario, some even say below average, especially for reds; but it really goes to prove the old adage about winemakers: any winemaker can make wine during the good years, it's those tough vintages that separate the men from the boys - my apologies for my unintentional sexist comment to our winemaking ladies out there. Liubomir Popovici has been with Stoney Ridge now for about the 7 years and has proven himself year-after-year to be quite accomplished, so you'd expect something good even in bad years. This 2004 has good plum, blackberry, cinnamon and vanilla notes on the nose; while the tastes are more complex and rewarding. Initially, lots of oak, but as that blew off, in about fifteen minutes, I was left with a plethora of fruit and other flavours: black raspberry, sour cherry, pomegranate, some dark fruit like plum and cassis, then there was some chocolate and cinnamon thrown in for good measure – delicious. A good tannin backbone gave this wine some stand-up-ability, another three years and she'll still be going strong. Cheers.

These wines are available at the winery, the LCBO or thru WineryToHome.

Summer Selection:

Every newsletter throughout the summer, I will recommend great summer-sippers to make the most of your patio, cottage or boat – click on the link below to read this week's picks:

These reviews were written throughout the summer and were always meant for this section – but suddenly I have run out of summer. Some might consider this as a dumping ground, but I consider it a rectification of a wrong-doing: wines from my database that should have been brought to your attention while the weather was still hot and sunny. With fall only a few days old I ask you to enjoy this last gasp of summer while you can!

- [Calamus Estate Winery 2006 Calamus White - \\$12.00 \(W\)](#)
- [Colio Estate Wines 2006 CEV Sauvignon Blanc - \\$14.50 \(W, WTH\)](#)
- [Erie Shore Vineyard 2006 Summer Sun - \\$12.45 \(W\)](#)
- [Featherstone Estate Winery 2006 Topaz - \\$12.95 \(W, WTH\)](#)
- [Fielding Estate Winery 2006 Gewurztraminer - \\$16.00 \(W\)](#)
- [Henry of Pelham 2006 Off-Dry Reserve Riesling – \\$14.95 \(W, L, WTH\)](#)
- [Konzelmann 2006 Gewurztraminer Reserve - \\$16.95 \(W\)](#)
- [Legends Estates 2006 Grey Ghost White - \\$17.95 \(W\)](#)
- [Mastronardi Estate Winery 2005 Gewurztraminer - \\$13.00 \(W\)](#)
- [Palatine Hills Estate Winery 2006 Gewurztraminer - \\$20.00 \(W\)](#)
- [Peninsula Ridge 2006 Viognier - \\$13.95 \(W, L, WTH\)](#)
- [Thirty Bench Winemakers 2006 Riesling - \\$17.95 \(W, WTH\)](#)
- [Vineland Estates Winery 2006 Dry Riesling - \\$12.95 \(W, L\)](#)
- [Wagner Estate Winery Pug's Head Cider - \\$6.00 \(W\)](#)

Availability legend: W (Winery) – L (LCBO/Vintages) – WTH (Winery to Home)



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:

- Colio Estate Wines 2006 Late Harvest Vidal ([read](#)) ([listen](#))
- Jackson-Triggs 2006 Proprietors' Reserve Sauvignon Blanc ([read](#)) ([listen](#))

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

- [Concha Y Toro Tasting](#)
- [Chilean Wine Show Preview](#)
- [Brazilian Wine Tasting](#)

The September 29th LCBO Vintages Release report is available here:

[Ontario "Vintages" Releases: Saturday September 29, 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.

I hinted at it earlier ... it's the gardens. By calling themselves "The Garden Winery" Stoney Ridge has much to live up to - and they do it in spades. They are the only winery at Canada Blooms, a flower and garden show held in Toronto annually. It's usually during this show that they launch new gardens and/or new wines. As you walk around the property, you'll come across the Rose Garden, the Herb Garden, the Pergolas, that look like they've been there forever (because they are overgrown with vegetation, both creeping and flowering) and one of their newest additions, the Japanese Garden complete with waterfall. Each year, the plan is to add a new garden to the grounds – until they run out of space that is.

Of course, all these plants bring wildlife, if you include birds, bees and butterflies in your definition. And there are wonderful photo opportunities on benches, in huts and beside the flowers. Then winter comes, the plants hibernate, and all you're left with is the wine – which isn't a bad thing; but come the spring and summer, Stoney Ridge blooms anew.



Wine Event Spotlight: *Announcing the OntarioWineReview Cabernet Franc Challenge*

Over the course of five nights in November and into December, we'll convene at The Fine Wine Reserve in downtown Toronto where we'll taste over 40 different wines from 34 Ontario wineries. The wines will be broken down into 3 categories: Cabernet Franc, Franc Blends, and Franc Reserves. Each night, we'll taste between 7 and 9 different wines from a certain category; tasting will be done blind (you'll know the category but not the producer). Then, each taster will decide, based on a scale from 1 to 10, the following criteria: 1) do you like it; 2) would you buy it and 3) is it good value. There will also be a brief talk about Cabernet Franc, its history and future in Ontario, all hosted by the Grape Guy himself, Michael Pinkus. Your votes and feedback will determine Ontario's Best Cabernet Franc.

Afterward we'll mix and mingle for coffee and dessert ... featuring some special bottles of wine from area fruit wineries, Balderson cheese, some sweet treats and coffees from [Raymond Emes & Co.](#) Door prizes are courtesy of the [The Original Grape Shirt Company](#). Results of the tasting will be published in the January newsletter.

Wine and Cheese Reception – 7:00pm ... Tasting – 7:30pm ... After Party – 9:00 to 10pm

The Cabernet Franc Challenge will take place on the following nights – different wines will be poured each night.

[Thursday November 8](#) ... [Wednesday November 14](#) ... [Tuesday November 20](#) ... [Tuesday November 27](#)
[Thursday December 6](#)

Click on any of the dates above to buy your tickets using Visa, Mastercard or American Express through Local Wine Events ... or call the Grape Line (416-346-2223) with any questions, comments or to buy tickets directly.

For those who prefer to pay by cheque you can click the link below to get the printable order form:
http://www.ontariowinereview.com/print/Franc_Order_Form_pay_by_cheque.pdf

[For all the details about the Cabernet Franc Challenge click here.](#)

Recent Winners: Congratulations to Will Hamilton (Waterloo) who won the Discovery Passports for the Niagara Wine Festival. In an email statement of gratitude Will wrote: "This is fantastic!" And fantastic it will be. Join many of your favourite wineries as they celebrate the new harvest and the wines they've already made at Montebello Park during the Festival. For more information or to buy passports and/or tickets to other happenings during this year's festival check out www.niagarawinefestival.com.

OntarioWineReview's bi-weekly newsletter is devoted to the love, enjoyment and promotion of the wines of Ontario and the wineries that make them.



What can the Grape Guy do for you ... Michael Pinkus (Grape Guy) provides a variety of wine related services that you might be interested in taking advantage of: he gives lectures, leads seminars, conducts tastings, sets up tours; consults, selects and judges. He also gives interviews, broadcasts, podcasts and writes. [Contact the Grape Guy if you require any of these services or have any questions.](#)



Psst, Pass It On ... keep the good wine flowing. Forward this newsletter to your mom in Mimico your uncle in Uxbridge, your great aunt in Grand Bend 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, we look forward to hearing from you!

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