

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 – 69
November 8, 2007

In this Edition

- **News From Our Vine ...** *Let's be Franc, The Cab Franc Challenge starts tonight*
- **Ontario Wine Review:** *Does Location Matter ... a candid look at Southbrook Winery's move*
- **Grape Guy's Picks of the Bunch:** *Blends Galore and a Cab Franc Preview Wine*
- **Cyber Winery Review:** *John Howard - A New Maniac in Town*
- **Wine Event Spotlight:** *Wassailing through the County*



News ... *Let's be Franc, The Cab Franc Challenge starts tonight:*

As Rod Stewart sang, "Tonight's the night ..." the first Cabernet Franc Challenge evening (Regular Cab Franc ... night 1) – there are 4 more to come, but this is the inaugural night. If you have not reserved your tickets yet there are still a few spaces left for tonight, but you'll have to act fast, sale of tickets stop at 2pm the day of the event. You can call me directly at 416-346-2223 to reserve a place. Out next night is November 14 (Regular Cab Franc ... night 2) same Bat-Time same Bat-Place (The Fine Wine Reserve) ... different set of wines – there are still tickets available.

Our other nights are November 20 (Cab Franc Blends), 27 (Cab Franc Reserve ... night 1) and December 6 (Cab Franc Reserve ... night 2) – different wines are poured each night ... call or check out the website for tickets: <http://owrcabfrancchallenge.blogspot.com/>.



OntarioWineReview: *Does Location Matter ... a candid look at Southbrook Winery's move*

Have you ever heard of Southbrook Winery? If you haven't you're not alone. Southbrook has long been the king of under-advertising, hoping instead to develop a cult-like following through word of mouth, yet even without the use of conventional advertising they have managed to survive because of two key factors: by producing quality products and by the deep pockets of its owner.

This underachieving winery, located north of Toronto has had "break out star" written all over it since its inception in 1991; but due to the loss of their star, and founding, winemaker in 2001 and a slew of both bad management and business decisions, it turned a once rising star into a shadow of its former self. And that's too bad, because the makings and markings of a great winery were all there: an owner with passion and pockets; a self-taught winemaker who advanced to the pinnacle of the industry (2000 winemaker of the year) and many award winning wines. While their flagship fruit wine, Framboise, still wins awards, the erosion of Southbrook's potential happened from within. Passionate, award-winning winemaker gives way to lackluster winemaker ... proud family farm gives way to developers ... and now they have pinned their hopes for better days on moving into the lion's den, instead of building upon the better marketing the place which they once called home. Southbrook is asking the question: does a winery become more relevant if it moves closer to the action; does proximity matter?

As a long time follower of Southbrook Winery (since the late 90's) I have watched this winery grow, flourish and win awards from its North Toronto location; and all without the benefit of a stitch of advertising. Here's but one example: Southbrook makes an award winning icewine year after year. They are situated amongst an ever growing Oriental population who crave icewine like my pregnant mother craved pickles and ice cream, yet there is not a mention of icewine on a billboard, sign or newspaper – a simple ad in the areas Chinese language newspaper around the time of their New Year would go a long way ... but the owner refused.

Why is any of this important you might be asking yourself, glad you asked. In the Fall of 2007, Southbrook Winery picked up, lock stock and barrels (literally) and moved the entire operation to Niagara-on-the-Lake,

leaving their winery-home of over 15 years. This is a big risk for owner Bill Redelmeier – one he is not undertaking alone. He takes with him renowned Canadian architect Jack Diamond; vineyard manager extraordinaire Scott Jones; and all-star winemaker Ann Sperling. Southbrook is going to try and make a go of it where everybody else is, down in Niagara.

As some of you may know, I spent approximately 2½ years at Southbrook, during their waning days. At first it was to garner first-hand wine knowledge: in the process of winemaking and from the perspective of a wine-jockey behind the counter, dealing with the public and answering their questions – and, of course, the opportunity to ask some of my own. It was an invaluable experience. Ethically, I could not report on the happenings at Southbrook because I was an “insider” (for instance, I could not “break” the moving story). Now that I am no longer part of “the Southbrook team” (a term I use loosely) I have some unique insight as to the happenings and goings-on, and some criticisms and questions that were never answered, even when I was on the inside. At the outset, I offer up my sincere good luck wishes to the Redelmeiers; but I question their timing and their promise slash commitment to the people of Richmond Hill, where they have made their home and have been supported by the community for many years.

If you talk to any winery, they will tell you that they would have loved to be in Southbrook’s position, the only game in town, or just north of it. The enviable position that Southbrook found themselves in for years is something most wineries would give their left barrel for: a potential customer base of over 3 million people living within a half-hour drive and one of only a handful of wineries to visit in the area. I can remember some wonderful Sunday drives to attend their events; a trip to the country. Now, in 2007, as urban sprawl makes its way to Major Mac and Bathurst (in the form of new development and housing), just as a customer base is finally moving in, Southbrook decides to pick up shop and move out. As a couple of residents told me, “It’s too bad they’re moving, we were looking forward to walking to a winery on a Saturday afternoon and picking up a bottle. The coolness factor of being here is gone.” Their sentiments are echoed throughout the area – Southbrook was a big draw to many of the residents; with both a winery and farmer’s market within walking distance of home.

In the Spring of 2006, Southbrook held their 10th Anniversary celebration of Triomphe (their reserve line of wines) and announced their plans to move across the road. A beautiful new winery was promised, along with a restaurant and event center. It was going to be a destination place north of Toronto. But then all that changed, as did the face of Southbrook, as the move “across the road” turned into a move a little further away ... to Niagara-on-the-Lake.

Is it a case of lost focus? Loss of direction? Or a brilliant business move? Looking at Southbrook’s history it’s hard to believe it’s the latter. But I guess time will tell. It therefore comes as no surprise that other wineries in the area are now stepping up and taking not only the quality reigns, but also the lucrative wedding market; this was a niche that Southbrook had a lock on in North Toronto, especially if you were looking for old world charm in a winery atmosphere. In fact, many were, the summer of 2005 saw a wedding on the property almost every weekend – “I make the money around this place,” Events Co-ordinator Cathy Chiappetta would say, “It’s the weddings and events that bring in the money.” One such winery that will pick up this mantle is Willow Springs in Stouffville, a little further north to be sure, but well worth the drive. They have improved the look of the winery, added a banquet hall to host weddings in their country/winery atmosphere ... and I am sure they are thanking Southbrook for clearing the way; they would be wise to look to Chiappetta for help.

Southbrook’s decision to move is puzzling at best. They are shucking their “neighbourhood winery” status and doing so at a time when the neighbourhood is coming to them. Only Redelmeier knows why for sure. Is it the lure of owning a vineyard of his own? More control over his output? New winemaker’s pressure? I’m speculating, but it would seem that Southbrook is making a big mistake in moving; they are going from being a big fish (in the small pond of North Toronto) to becoming a very small fish in the big pond of Niagara. History shows that this is never a good move ... Southbrook is going to find out the hard way that they should have stayed in Maple and built the dream there.

So, is moving to the heart of where the action is a good thing? Time will tell, though we may never know the real story ... but to the folks of Richmond Hill, it’s a treasonous act of epic proportion – and for that, Southbrook will not soon be forgiven.



Grape Guy’s Picks of the Bunch: *Blends Galore and a Cab Franc Preview Wine*
Visit the winery or their website for more details or to purchase these great wines.

Cabernet Franc Preview:

With the [Cabernet Franc Challenge](#) upon us, I thought it only fitting to give you a preview of one of the wines we'll be tasting at the event:

[Willow Springs Winery Testa Limited Reserve 2005 Cabernet Franc - \\$13.95](#)

To book your tickets for the Challenge [click here](#) – [the details](#) can be found here

Mike Weir Estate Winery 2006 Cabernet-Merlot - \$18.95 (L, WTH)

www.weirwines.com

So you know that every Canadian star and his dog has their own winery, right? Well almost everyone: Dan Aykroyd, Wayne Gretzky, Bob Izumi, you name them they probably have one (or at least a wine named for, after, or in the works for, them). But the originator of this trend is the Great White North's golfing hero Mike Weir; following in the footsteps of other great golfers before him. As is usually the case the originator brings the best stuff to the party and everyone else tries to copy 'em ... this is the case for Mike Weir. I've enjoyed many of his previous vintages and now we have this 2006 Bordeaux blend of Cabernets Franc and Sauv along with Merlot. A nose of blackberries, cassis, black cherry and tobacco leaf is followed up on the palate by vanilla, blackberry and black cherry in the mouth and a smooth cedary-oaky finish. Another hole-in-one that's well on par with his previous efforts. Cheers.

[Also check out the new Mike Weir 2006 Chardonnay](#)

Creekside Estate Winery 2005 Laura's Blend Red – \$19.95 (W, WTH)

www.creeksidewine.com

I did a little bit of comparative tasting with this wine, between the 2001 and the 2005 versions. 6 years on the 2001 is loaded with cassis and cedar notes, though heavy on the wood both nose and taste ... I still have a few bottles of the '01 so more experimentation is needed over the next few years to see how this one's arch progresses. But now let's focus on this newly released "monster-wine" they call the 2005. The blend, as usual, is Cabs Franc and Sauv with Merlot, and the Laura of the name refers to owner, Laura McCain. I put this wine through its paces to see how it would end up in a few years. Initially, I used a regular glass, then a big Spiegelau young red glass, then I decanted the rest of the wine and used the two aforementioned glasses to re-taste. In the regular glass, restrained floral, black fruit and those cedar tones were the dominant aromas ... opening it up revealed red fruits, plum, cassis, cocoa and black licorice. Flavours started out as fairly closed off, with black fruit, cedar and tons of tannins (no floral) ... opening helped showcase cinnamon notes on the tongue, with red and black fruits intermingling with spices and herbs. The tannin bite mellowed with aeration and became more of a dull roar than the lion's share it started out as. This one should age better than its 2001 counterpart though my experimentation will continue with both wines and I'll keep you posted. Right now, my prediction is that the '05 has the potential to be a real beauty 6 years down the road – it has good pedigree and that makes all the difference.

Checking in with the newest sweet stuff:

As we get closer to the holidays our thoughts turn to sweet wines and luscious desserts – here are a few I have tried recently which just might make your holidays that much sweeter:

[Huff Estates 2006 First Frost - \\$18.95 ... \(W, WTH, L\)](#)

[Sandbanks Estate Winery 2005 Winter Harvest Vidal - \\$14.95 ... \(W, WTH\)](#)

[Tawse Winery 2006 Late Harvest Cabernet \\$19.90 \(200ml\) ... \(Sold Out\)](#)

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 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:

Cattail Creek Family of Rieslings ([read](#)) ([listen](#))

Hillebrand Winery 2006 Cabernet Franc Icewine ([read](#)) ([listen](#))

NEW Reports in the [On the Road with the Grape Guy](#) section:

[Port and Dour Tasting ... Stem Wine Group Tasting](#)

www.ontariowinereview.com

A bi-weekly newsletter dedicated to helping you discover Ontario's best Wines and Wineries.

[Hungarian Renaissance Tasting ... Gourmet Food and Wine Media Launch](#)
[Select Wines Web Launch ... Wines of Spain](#)
[Vinexx Fall Tasting](#)

The November 10th LCBO Vintages Release report is available here:
[Ontario "Vintages" Releases: Saturday November 10, 2007 Vintages Release](#)
Plus
LCBO 2007 Holiday Gift Guides – [Part 1](#) and [Part 2](#)



Cyber Winery Review: John Howard - A New Maniac in Town

A few months back, I received an email from a reader that read, “if you don’t like strangely named wines ([Calamus Sagitta](#)), you’re going to hate what John Howard has done.” And below was a link to John Howard’s new project: [“Megalomaniac Wines”](#).

First, let me get a misconception out of the way: I do not have anything against cutesy or strangely named wines – in fact I have a book in my wine book collection, written by Peter F. May who collects interesting wine labels – and I gave the book a positive review ([newsletter #45 – Marilyn Merlot and the Naked Grape](#)). My problem with Calamus’ Sagitta, and wines that may follow in its footsteps, is that it was a poor name for a straight varietal wine (one grape). I don’t mean to be picking on Derek Saunders and the rest of the team at Calamus who make these wines, but the name Sagitta should have been saved for the [Calamus White](#), a delicious blend that deserved a better name; where as using “Sagitta” to cover up Gewurztraminer because, “people have trouble pronouncing it,” seems a bit ridiculous; in a recent talk with Calamus’ owner Derek Saunder he said, “I’m re-thinking the whole thing.” That’s where we left it ... and that’s the last I’m hoping to say about it.

John Howard, one of the founding fathers of Vineland Estates, has started a new project called John Howard Cellars of Distinction, which, according to Mr. Howard, is based on “not taking wine too seriously”. Hence his funky labels, the bowler hat emblem and the names of his wines: [Vainglorious Merlot-Cabernet](#), [Contrarian Sauvignon Blanc](#), [Bravado Cabernet Sauvignon](#), [Narcissistic Riesling](#), Cold Hearted Cabernet Franc Icewine and the granddaddy of all interesting names [SonofaBitch Pinot Noir](#). Each wine has a short story to tell on the back label – as well as John’s story about how he came up with the name ... and a postage stamp sized sticker acknowledging his winemaker: Andrzej Lipinski.

I recently tasted through the line and have to say I am rightfully impressed with what John Howard is doing. His wines have a price ceiling of \$24.95 – and that’s where he has set his price-bar, believing that, at this time, Ontario wines should not be crossing that line ... “a good Ontario wine can be made for under \$25, no question,” he told me. “Too many people are taking wine too seriously here in Niagara, I’m trying to put the fun back into the bottle.”

By making the outside fun, the inside becomes more interesting and worth a look see (or is that a taste-see). The wines inside speak for themselves and they speak up loud and clear. When I asked John about his plans to open his own winery, he hesitates before answering. “There are no plans for a winery at this time, everything’s done on-line. I wasn’t looking to open another winery; this is kinda like my retirement project. I’m doing this for fun.” And fun seems to be the key word for John’s new project. If the label doesn’t get you talking, the wine inside certainly will. As for that physical winery – I wouldn’t bet the farm against it ... no matter what John’s saying now.



Wine Event Spotlight: Wassailing through the County – November 24/25 and December 1/2

The fine art of Wassailing is an olde English term which had to do with praising the trees for their harvest, wishing them well for their winter slumber and bring hope for next year’s bounty. 10 wineries, 1 brewery and 1 cidery will be taking part in this festive occasion in the County ... getting you ready for the season ahead. Gifts, goodies and wine ... along with joyous songs of the season to the greenery ... will be invoked. Check it out the weekends of Nov. 24/25 and Dec. 1/2. It’s all walk-in, so you don’t even need a ticket, just a wide smile and a willingness to participate. What’s more, 2 new wineries, Bergeron and Sugarbush, will be opening their doors for this occasion. Details of who, what, where and when can be found at www.thecountywines.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!

© OntarioWineReview.com 2007. All rights reserved.

You may use the content of this newsletter by including full credit to Michael Pinkus, Grape Guy and a link to www.ontariowinereview.com