

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 – 75
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Ontario Wine Review: *The Cabernet Franc Challenge ... part 2*

Well by now you have read what transpired on the Regular Cabernet Franc nights of the Cabernet Franc Challenge. You've checked out the winners, looked at the comments, downloaded the PDF document ... and our ready for the next step: Blends, Reserve and Icewine, so let's get right down to it:

Night 3 – Blends / Meritage

I'm not sure why it is, but blends night is always the most poorly attended – I find that odd because some of the best and most interesting wines are poured on that night. By any means, we still had a good turnout at the [Fine Wine Reserve](#) as we readied to move away from the regular Francs and into Meritage / Bordeaux-style blends where Franc was the majority shareholder of the blend. That does not mean that Franc had to be 50 percent or higher. It meant that of the grapes used in the blend, Franc had to have the highest percentage of the content (ie: Franc 40%, Sauv 35%, Merlot 25%). We did have some 50/50 blends and, believe it or not, another disqualified wine – Pelee Island accidentally submitted a non-VQA, cellared in Ontario blend; bringing our total eligible wines down from eleven to ten.

This category was totally dominated by Niagara - as all ten wines were from that area. In the end, it was one of Ontario's wine giants that vanquished a couple of small wineries by one and two points respectively. Jackson-Triggs 2004 Cabernet Franc / Cabernet Sauvignon (a 50/50 blend and late entry into the competition) - rode to victory on the strength of their price point (\$12.25), but also took third in taste and second in likelihood to buy. Second place went to a little known winery located on the Niagara Parkway - and when their name was revealed, everybody asked "who?" and "where are they?" ... Riverview Cellars 2004 Cabernet Merlot (\$13.95) gave JT a real run for their money in this category. Following up in third place, was the second most expensive wine in this category - Mountain Road Wine Company's 2002 Cabernet Reserve (\$28.95). Then there's the case of the Pillitteri 2002 Trivalente Cabernet Merlot Family Reserve ... which took first place in both taste and likelihood to buy, but when the \$75.00 price tag was revealed, it dropped the wine to its overall sixth place finish.

[Final standings for Blend night can now be found on the website.](#)

Night 4 – Reserve Cabernet Franc ... part one

In complete opposition to Blend night, Reserve night continues to be the most popular. A chance to try what wineries deem to be their best wines, causes tasters' palates to salivate in anticipation. Reserve nights prove to be the most popular and are sellouts, or near sellouts, every time.

The first night of Reserves saw nine wines poured with each DVA represented by at least one wine (for the purpose of this article Pelee Island is included in the Lake Erie North Shore DVA). Thankfully, within the Reserve category we did not have any disqualifications. This night also featured a wine made by a winery that resides outside any of the recognized DVAs of Ontario. Of the nine wines poured each of the four "regions" (Niagara, Lake Erie North Shore, Prince Edward County and Other] were represented in the top five. Colio Estates 2002 CEV Cabernet Franc Reserve (\$19.95) carried the banner for the Lake Erie North Shore in fifth; in fourth was a Stouffville based winery, Willow Springs, giving hope to other wineries outside standard demarcation lines with their 2005 Testa Limited Reserve Cabernet Franc (\$13.95); third place went to Prince

Edward County's Black Prince Winery and their 2006 Ontario Cab Franc Reserve (\$15.95); which means first and second place were taken by Niagara. Legends Estates 2003 Cabernet Franc Reserve (\$17.95) took second - but tonight's clear winner was Eastdell, sweeping all three criteria levels: taste, likelihood and value. They also bucked the lowest-priced-bottle-wins trend that had been so prevalent on other nights. They're 2005 Cabernet Franc Reserve wowed the crowd, even at \$21.95, they also took the honour of the highest score for value of all the reserve wines – Best Value Reserve.

Night 5 – Reserve Cabernet Franc ... part two

When I was collecting the wines for this challenge, one winery owner asked me, "who else is participating?" I replied with a few wineries that sprung to mind, and at the mention of one particular winery and the wine they had entered, he said (half-jokingly), "I should just take back my wine right now if they've entered [that wine]." He turned out to be bang on with his assessment. The good news for him was that his wines never went up against "that wine", because his wines were in the non-reserve category. "That wine" ended up taking the highest score of all wines in the Cabernet Franc Challenge and the highest overall score ever from any Challenge night I have conducted so far ... and I believe it will in fact be the score to beat for a mighty long time. I calculated and re-calculated the number three times just to make sure I got it right and poured over scorecards to make sure I had copied numbers down correctly. Everything matched up.. But before we reveal "that wine" here are some other points of interest about Reserve Night Two.

Once again, all three DVAs were represented and the top four were split evenly between Niagara and the Lake Erie North Shore. Third place went to Colio's 2005 CEV Cabernet Franc Reserve (\$19.95), and second was a 2002 Cabernet Franc Reserve from Puddicombe Estates (\$15.00). But the winning wine of the night wasn't even hampered by its mighty price tag - it came first in both taste and likelihood to buy and only dropped down to third when the question of value came up - its scores were high enough with the first two criteria to weather the value storm. The best reserve Cabernet Franc, which was predicted two months earlier by a nameless winery owner with the statement "it is the best Cab Franc ever made in Ontario" went to Pillitteri Estate for their 2002 Family Reserve Cabernet Franc (\$50.00) - now only available in magnums (\$175.00).

You can see the [results of the Reserve Cabernet Franc nights](#) on the website - broken down night by night - while the [final placing of all 18 Reserve Francs can be seen via the downloadable PDF document](#).

Night 6 – Cabernet Franc Icewine / Late Harvest

After that write up, it seems a little anti-climactic in the ice wine category. Cabernet Franc icewine is notable for its great sweet red fruit character -lots of strawberry / raspberry jam flavours and smells ... Harnessing those flavors and avoiding the overly and/or sickeningly sweet tastes, is the fine line which our winemakers walk.

Using Franc as an icewine grape is a relatively new practice (as compared with say Vidal and Riesling) but something I am very excited to see and taste. In this category, seven wines were poured - one of which was a 2004 for Select Late Harvest from Pillitteri (\$30.00) and it finished in third place. Owner Charlie Pillitteri once told me that his winery was all about icewine first and Cabernet Franc second ... he realizes where his bread is buttered and how to best capitalize on what Ontario does best. Pillitteri also took first place in icewine with their 2004 Cabernet Franc Icewine (\$35.00) followed closely by the Legends Estates 2002 Cabernet Franc icewine (\$36.00) in second.

[Final standings for Icewine / Late Harvest night can now be found on the website.](#)

Cabernet Franc Challenge wrap up ...

The Cabernet Franc Challenge offered us a great opportunity to taste a variety of what I, and some forward thinking winemakers and wineries owners, consider to be Ontario's red grape. I've preached long and hard about this grape's place in Ontario, and will continue to do so until we embrace this grape and put it out there as Ontario's red calling card on the world market. There are some who believe the icewine train we have been riding for so long will soon come to an end and if that happens, we'll have nothing to fall back on if we don't act soon ... only time will tell if that is true. There are some who think that having a single grape lead the way is short-sighted, but look at countries like Australia, New Zealand, and Argentina; or states like Washington and California – each are, or have made, a name for themselves on the back of one grape. Then the rest of the wines followed, because they were already recognized as a good region for their respective grape – why should Ontario be any different? This is not to say we should shelve all other grape varieties for Franc and wait to see it take off around the globe, but we should have one grape that makes a unique wine for our province and leads the way for the other great wines being made here. Icewine is fine – but that causes people to believe that all the wine from Canada is sweet wine ... think Germany and Riesling (a stigma they are still trying to change) ... before it's too late, we have to get a dry table wine onto the world market and something recognizable and

uniquely Ontario. Cabernet Franc is our grape to do that with. I've said my piece and the people have said theirs – it's now up to our wineries and marketing boards to decide.

I'd like to thank all the participating wineries (listed on the website), and also those wineries which provided the opening wines and dessert wines for the evenings' festivities (they too are listed on the website). Thank you to our panel members who came out and had their say about the wines ...without them, there would be no scores or comments. A big thank you to my staff: my mother Gloria and dear friend Lee who helped organize glassware, pour wine, set tables, display food and most of all clean up afterward. Finally, special thank yous go to the [Original Grape Shirt Company](#), [Balderson Cheese](#), [Raymond Emes Coffee](#) and especially to Mark Russell of the [Fine Wine Reserve](#) for the use of his fabulous tasting room.

In the coming months, a new poll will be up on the website asking what grape you'd like to see us challenge next ... please have your say and I hope to see you at the next challenge.

	<p>The Fine Wine Reserve provides secure, climate-controlled cellaring space to store your fine wines. Store by the case (with pick-up & delivery), or rack up your bottles in your own private wine locker starting at \$36/mo. The only "purpose-built" professional cellar in the city, with private tasting lounge, downtown location and 24/7 access. Cellar tours are welcomed. To book your tour or for more information please call 416-593-9463 or visit www.FineWineReserve.com.</p>
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Grape Guy's Picks of the Bunch: *A couple of Regular Francs we tasted – and a bonus*
Visit the winery or their website for more details or to purchase these great wines.

FrogPond Farm 2006 Organic Cabernet Franc – \$16.00 (500ml) - (W, WTH)
www.frogpondfarm.ca

A couple of years back, I showed up at this farm-based organic winery wondering if they were open. They had a sign by the roadside but they weren't even on the map. I was curious to taste Ontario-organic wine. I walked around the property and ended up knocking on the door of the house ... the owners ushered me into this makeshift tasting room (an anteroom off of the main barn) where we sampled their two wines - I walked away unimpressed and unsatisfied. Maybe they saw my reaction, because before leaving, they took me into their backyard to show off their vines and there I witnessed something that has stayed with me to this day: a tiny 4-month-old kitten was playing with a real, live, fluffy, yellow baby duck – they wrestled, and chased one another and the kitten even licked the duckling's head. I remember it like it was yesterday; and although the wine underwhelmed me, the kitten and duck stuck with me. Fast-forward to October 2007 – FrogPond still has plenty of kittens roaming the farm ... though few ducks were apparent ... and the wine has gone from curiosity to downright fabulous. A nose that's full of earthy, leathery scents mixed in with tobacco and loganberry; while in the mouth it's a bowl of blackberries with some black cherries thrown in for variety ... in short, great juicy flavours. Round about the mid-palate, the berry bowl is calmed by an earthy-sweet vanilla sensation, but the finish comes back to berries with a little cocoa powder like dryness sprinkled on top. This time, I didn't need the baby animals' show to remember the winery; the wine was memorable all on its own.

Sandbanks Estate Winery 2006 Cabernet Franc - \$19.95 (W, WTH)
www.sandbankswinery.com

Sometimes a wine comes along at the right time, in the right place, and bang ... this is one of those wines. A few weeks after the hussle and bussle of the Cabernet Franc Challenge, I was puttering around the house putting this away, folding that, checking the water softener – and I remembered I had a bottle of Sandbanks Franc I should review. I pulled it off the shelf, popped the cork, poured it into my tasting glass, swirled it to and fro, gave it a whiff and: tobacco leaf and soft red fruit – nothing awe inspiring, but nothing close to being off-putting either. But it's when I took a sip that I said "wow". It started off rather simple: smooth with raspberries and red currants; ten minutes later I got some sweet vanillin flavours; another ten passed and more red fruit, nice and easy does it with silky-smooth tannins. 30 minutes and I have juicy blackberries that have emerged and the word "outstanding" has escaped my lips and appeared in my notes. How Catherine Langlois (owner and winemaker) does it, I'm not sure – but let's keep it a mystery and just enjoy this one.

Peller Estates NV Ice Cuvee Rosé - \$35.00 (W, WTH)
(Currently sold out – more available April 2008)
www.peller.com

Back in December, I made mention of the rise of sparkling wine making in Ontario (Newsletter #72) ... well not to be outdone, Peller has re-invented their flagship sparkler. For years, they have made the unique sparkling Ice Cuvee – a bubbly that replaces the still wine dosage with ice wine. But over the past few years, the wine has been losing its luster – someone told me it was because Peller reduced the amount of icewine they used in the dosage. Well this rosé has goosed the tired old Ice Cuvee up to a new level. I think the icewine level has been brought back to its original level because its influence is all over this wine. The nose is strawberries, cotton candy, apricot and honey. The red fruit flavours and smells come from the Cabernet Franc, which is added to the mix. Speaking of flavours, this one has a wow-mouth-factor that includes: honeyed strawberries and a lengthy lingering red fruit finish. It smells sweeter than it tastes and that's because of those persistent bubbles, which manages to tone things down. This is the old Ice Cuvee with a twist ... the addition of the Franc for fruitiness and the re-emergence of an icewine dosage you can taste ... I'd say they've cranked this one up to 11. Kudos to Peller for seeing the need to jazz-up the old and making it new again.

Taste it Again Grape Guy:

On occasion, I'll take a wine I like and put it away in a "special box" for a few years just to see how well it ages ... here are some of those wines:

[Cave Spring asks for a Mulligan – 2002 Cabernet Merlot](#)

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:

Organized Crime Winery 2006 Gewurztraminer ([read](#)) ([listen](#))

Hernder Estate Winery 2006 Riesling – Pachereva Vineyard ([read](#)) ([listen](#))

NEW Blog ... Lost and Found:

Wines that got "lost" on my wine racks - some are Treasures others are Trash ... Find out what happened

NEW BLOG ... Taste it Again Grape Guy

Taste it Again has been moved to it's own blog
find out what has happened to some of my favourites over the past few years

The February 2nd LCBO Vintages Release report is available here:
[Ontario "Vintages" Releases: Saturday February 2nd, 2007 Vintages Release](#)

Also see the reviews of notable Ontario Wines being featured in Vintages this release:

[Chateau des Charmes Methode Traditionelle Brut](#)
[Henry of Pelham 2006 Reserve Pinot Noir](#)
[Jackson-Triggs Proprietors' Reserve Vidal Icewine](#)
[Lakeview Cellars 2006 Vidal Icewine](#)
[Magnotta 2006 Vidal Icewine](#)



Wine Event Spotlight: *Return to Terroir – Saturday February 9, 2008*

Interested in alternative winemaking techniques such as biodynamic and organic styles? Well this festival is for you. For the first time in Toronto, over 50 of the world's top biodynamic / organic winemakers will gather for the premiere wine tasting "Return to Terroir" on February 9, 2008 – in the Distillery District (55 Mill Street) in downtown Toronto.

This unique, international festival brings together like-minded wineries from four continents to showcase their wines, and demonstrate their shared commitment to biodynamic / organic grape growing and winemaking.

Buy your tickets on-line: <http://www.localwineevents.com/Greater-Toronto-Wine/event-156413.html> or email the organizers for more info: return.to.terroir.toronto@gmail.com

Saving you money on the event: By mentioning that you received an email from “Le Sommelier”, you are eligible for the special “wine club member ” rate of \$39.95, rather than the “non-member” rate of \$59.95.

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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