

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.



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OntarioWineReview: *Festivus for the Rest of Us ... or Maybe Not*

The Icewine festival is all about ice and wine, but not necessarily in that order. At some of the wineries you'll see ice sculptures; in both "downtown" Jordan and Niagara-on-the-Lake you'll see bars made completely of ice and, of course, all wineries in attendance are pouring icewine. Now, there's also a certain amount of politics involved, especially when it comes to the new Icewine Festival Discovery Passport - which follows along the same lines as both the New Vintage and Wine Festival passport that were launched in 2007 ... (those can be found in previous articles I have written: [New Vintages](#) and [Wine Festival](#)). Of course, I have a review of the current crop of icewine festival participants and their pairing in my On the Road with the Grape Guy blog: [Icewine Festival 2008](#) – but there is a bigger issue at stake this year and it seems to revolve around this new Discovery Passport ... it's a clash between what the wineries want, what the patrons want and what the Niagara Grape and Wine Festival is giving them; if these problems don't improve we may be looking at the end of these Festivals as we know them.

First, a quick recap about the passport program: The discovery passport allows you to visit five wineries taking part in the program, a passport costs \$30.00; individually, without a passport, the wineries charge a minimum of \$10.00 for their "pairing" ... thus with passport the value of what you get at each winery has to be at least six bucks worth (\$30.00 divided by 5 the equals \$6), without the passport you pay \$10.00. It is with this limited program that many of the wineries (and attendees) have their problems. At more than a few wineries I heard the familiar refrain of "the hard part is to give \$10.00 worth of value" - and each winery is judged based on what the other wineries are doing; patrons are disappointed by only being able to visit five wineries (ten if you're a couple sharing). This new passport policy has caused quite a winery or two to drop out of the program (the number of wineries participating were down from last year with one noticeable absentee, Stoney Ridge) and others are contemplating doing the same for the next Grape and Wine Festival events. "We just don't make any money from doing it this way," one winery told me, "it would be better if [passport holders] got to visit more wineries with their passports, say ten." One very upset patron sent me the response to an email he sent to the Grape and Wine Festival head office complaining about the new program and the value one gets from the wineries ... the wine festival's response was to put the onus onto the individual wineries:

"Thank you for your feedback. The programs that the wineries offer are organized by the wineries themselves, so if they would like to charge extra it is at their discretion, and complaints regarding that issue should be directed to the wineries. That way they will get the feedback directly and will be able to make changes to their programs. We have asked the wineries to vamp up their programs this year and offer a value of \$10, if the winery has not done that, I would recommend not visiting that winery if you feel it is not an exceptional program."

Then to show what the Grape and Wine Festival is doing for attendees of the festival they told the e-mail writer: "This year we have also added extra value to the Discovery pass with discounts at 7 hotels and about 15 restaurants."

To this statement the upset patron said to me, "they keep stressing the discounts at the hotels and restaurants and that this is worth \$200. How many hotels can a person stay in and how many restaurants can we afford to go to in order to get a "free" dessert? Just ridiculous. And ... what about the locals? They don't need to stay at hotels or go to expensive restaurants. How much value are they getting from the Discovery Pass?"

This mess is causing a rift in the fabric of these festivals between the wineries and the festival organizers: "they're making money off of our work," I was told, "they make more money from the event than we do - and we're pouring the wines." When confronted with the detail that the onus of value is placed on the individual wineries my contact's response was, "that figures".

"Nobody is listening to either the patrons or the wineries," one source said to me, "and that's gonna change or we're out."

"You'll notice quite a few regular participants pulled out this year – some went off and did their own thing," one non-participating winery said, "You'll notice numbers are down, they had 35 last year, I think their down to 28 this time round."

Ladies and gentlemen of the jury, there it is a lot of bad blood building here and the demise of the three main festivals are at stake: New Vintages, Wine Festival and Icewine Festival - if something is not done soon to fix it we may see these festivals fall by the wayside. The main purpose of these festivals is to bring you out to the wineries for a special event /tasting/pairing and while there you get to "experience" something new/different/unique ... and of course, to buy wine. The old passport program was a mad dash across Niagara to see how many wineries you could hit before the end of the weekend. But the new format takes us to the other extreme - there has to be a happy medium. If you have any idea about how you would like to see the passport program run forward them to me, and I'll publish them in an upcoming newsletter; or you can send your ideas directly to the Grape and Wine festival Customer Service department (vidal@niagarawinefestival.com). According to the wineries, they (Grape and Wine Festival organizers) are not listening to them (the wineries), so maybe they'll listen to those buying the tickets (you). But, then again, my upset patron quoted earlier is convinced that they are just passing the buck along. If that's the case the bucks will stop flowing altogether if the wineries decide to pullout. I think for festival ideas we should look no further than our wine making friends to the south [New York State] who have a promotion running this March; it's a Wine & Cheese pairing event where you can visit 35 wineries for \$25 USD. For this you get a wine and a sampling of food prepared with cheese, a gift and recipes – don't take my word for it, check it out: <http://www.senecalakewine.com/jc/content/view/17/30/>. This works out at 70 cents per winery. Compare this with what you get for \$6 at a winery using the Discovery Pass ... now that's value. And when you get value like that wine sales are bound to go up. Makes you wonder what the heck is wrong with us up here?

[To see my value reviews of the ten wineries I attended click here](#)



Grape Guy's Picks of the Bunch: *Lailey and Trigger get the blends*
Visit the winery or their website for more details or to purchase these great wines.

Lailey Vineyard 2005 Cabernet - \$19.95 (W, WTH)
www.laileyvineyard.com

What's the recipe for a truly good Cabernet blend, let's poke through the Lailey cookbook and see: 49% Cabernet Franc, 49% Cabernet Sauvignon and 2% Merlot (just a dash), let it rest for 1 year in 1 year-old oak and voila. Follow this recipe and you too might have yourself a tasty Cabernet with spicy black fruit nuances, black pepper attributes and hints of cinnamon - and that's just the nose. In the mouth, you'll be wowed by the sweet red fruit in the mid-palate, good tannin structure throughout and the raspberry-oaky finish; there's even a smooth lush mouthfeel. This ones got the stuffing to lie down for a few years to come, but why wait, open it up now and enjoy.

Jackson-Triggs 2005 Grand Reserve Meritage - \$24.95 (W)
(due February 2008)
www.jacksontriggswinery.com

Just recently I added the J-T 2002 Meritage onto my [Lost and Found blog](#) – I have to admit, I was not surprised that the 02 had aged very well and would continue to do so. Well, I am happy to report that I'll be doing a Taste it Again Grape Guy in a few years on the '05, because this one is stuffed with the signs of ageability. We start off on the nose with the dark underbelly of this wine showing through: black cherry, blackberries, cassis, dark

chocolate and some cedar-like wood influence. The mouth is tight, very tight (there's just gotta be a joke I can make about the prom queen here, but I'll refrain) – suffice it to say it's currently dark and woody with lots of tannins and that cedar from the nose materializes in the finish. I would recommend ageing it 3 years before drinking, and I'll go out on a short limb here when I tell you that it will hold for 10 years easily. Daring to drink it now would mean opening 3 hours in advance, decanting or both. Curious fact, according to those I talked with, the 51% Merlot that went into this wine is the highest percentage of Merlot ever in the Grand Reserve blend – the rest is 35% Cab Sauv and 14% Cab Franc.

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 every Tuesday or you can listen to the Podcast.

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

Lailey Vineyard 2006 Impromptu ([read](#)) ([listen](#))

Huff Estates 2006 Lighthall Vineyard Chardonnay ([read](#)) ([listen](#))

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

[Return to Terroir](#)

[2005 Bordeaux Tasting](#)

[Niagara Icewine Festival – passport tour](#)

[London Wine and Food Show](#)

[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

Vintages Release: The February 16th LCBO Vintages Release report is now available.

[Ontario "Vintages" Releases: Saturday February 16th, 2007 Vintages Release](#)

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

[Henry of Pelham 2004 Merlot Reserve](#)

[Wayne Gretzky Estates 2005 Vidal Icewine](#)



Uncorked and Decanted: *Nifty gadgets, accessories and other things that enhance wine enjoyment.*

VersoVino

Skepticism, as both a wine writer and wine enthusiast runs pretty deep, especially when a new gadget comes along that is made to "enhance your wine experience". I have seen so many of these things and scoff at three-quarters of them; the big magnet that removes tannins is my favourite of all time – what a crock – so I am always on the look out for these things (mostly for a good laugh). As I was wondering around this year's [Gourmet Food and Wine Show](#) in November, I happened across a booth for a gadget called VersoVino – imported directly from Italy (What intrigued me? Italians know wine, don't they?). In a nutshell VersoVino, it's a by the glass decanter.

The backstory: A restaurateur in Italy needed a way to serve his wines by the glass, but he also needed a way for his wines to be decanted first without having to decant a full bottle – and of course he would need to measure out the proper amount of wine to get the most glasses from the bottle. So he invented the strangely shaped object that appeared before me this November evening: a bulb at one end, a pouring tube and a connector piece that fit onto the bottle.

How it works: You fit the connector onto the bottle top, you tilt the bottle so that the wine fills up the bulb

(~100ml), then you pour the wine from the bulb into your glass – and voila, perfectly measured and decanted wine.

Does it work: Now I'm not going into the science of the wine swirling around in the bulb and aeration, but I will tell you that it works – not on all wines, but it does work. First, let me say that it does nothing for wines that are soft, fruity and made in a drink-now-style. On the other hand, it was designed for wines with some power and punch that you want to drink now; it smoothes out their edges. I tried using the device on a number of bottles from different countries and I would say it did improve each wine; some dramatically, like my Ontario Syrah (where it rid the wine of an unpleasant herbaceousness), and some to a lesser extent – a powerful Aussie Shiraz seemed less affected when put through the device (there did not seem to be a marked improvement between the control glass and the “decanted” glass). I found the best wines were Old World, namely Spain, Portugal, France, Italy, and even Ontario. New World wines seemed not to have any great improvement. This is a broad generalization, but my research is ongoing.

Bottom line: The VersoVino worked and I was impressed by this oddly shaped device. The nice part is I could pour glass after glass and not worry about overfilling or spillage; and it's a conversation piece – people will undoubtedly ask you what it is and you'll have fun showing it off. Does it take the place of a proper decanter? No, but it's small (so it travels well), you don't have to decant a whole bottle if you happen to be dining alone and best of all, it works.

To see the VersoVino, checkout this website: <http://www.versovino.com/>



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

For February 2008

Since You've Been Gone ... It's been awhile since I quick sipped, and in that time Beppi Crosariol, from the Globe & Mail, broke a story about the LCBO's desire to raise profits by bringing in more premium wines, thus leaving us bargain hunters in the cold by foregoing “bargain-wines” (Globe and Mail 12/22/07). Since that story broke, the LCBO has back-pedaled and lowered the floor on the minimum price for wines they will accept into their stores. So good on Beppi for shining some light in the proper place – and hurrah to the LCBO, who finally decided to listen to the consumers, though I am sure their bottom line won't feel any kind of pinch.

Confused about Bordeaux ... If you find the French wine section as confusing as I do here's some good news. The Bordeaux wine union, Federation de Syndicats des Grands Vins de Bordeaux (FGVB), has decreed that estates can now use only two Chateau names on their bottles of wine. In the past, estates used a multitude of Chateau names depending on the channel of distribution they were sending the wine through. Now, to avoid the consumer confusion that is running rampant, these estates had until January 31 to discard their unwanted names and keep but two. Here are the numbers: there are 7,000 winemakers in the region, but 12,000 Chateau names, the FGVB hopes to cut that number down to around 10,000 – still a lot of names, but at least some will be gone and things will get a little clearer.

Speaking of France ... Did you know that a recent French court ruling deemed wine reviews to be advertising ... I have a poll on the website if you'd like to chime in with your opinion.

A 3-Way - Trade? ... I usually expect news like this to come to me via the sporting world, but here in Ontario we have a three-way deal, or at least a winemaker swap. Liubomir Popovici did indeed leave Stoney Ridge for the head winemaker's job at Vincor. Ray Cornell, formerly of Hernder, left his year-and-a-half old gig at Fielding to take over the now vacant job at Stoney Ridge (a place he had worked at before under Jim Warren). And finally, in what could be the most exciting part of this three-way, Richie Roberts, J.L. Groux's assistant at Stratus for the past 4 years, takes over the reigns at Fielding. Have I lost anybody? Good luck to all in their new positions.



Wine Event Spotlight: *Cuvee ... The Oscars of Ontario Wine Making - and a Cuvee Giveaway*

Cuvee ... Ontario winemakers know all about it, Ontario wine lovers know all about ... or do they. Cuvee is the awards event where Ontario salutes its own. It is equated to the Oscars by those in the know – winemakers giving awards to winemakers for the best wines Ontario has to offer; those who downplay Cuvee just call it peer

awards. Of course awards need an audience, and that's where you come in. First there's the Gala event on the evening of Friday February 29, where the awards are handed out. Next, is Cuvee-en-Route, a passport program with no limits ... many wineries open their doors and sample wines from past vintages, were past winners or just something special they want to share with wine lovers. Get all the details by visiting www.cuvee.ca.

Passport Giveaway ...

I have 4 pairs of "en-route" passports to give away so that you to enjoy this most awesome of wine weekends. Send an email with "Cuvee Giveaway" in the subject line to michael@ontariowinereview.com - include your name, phone number, full address (with postal code), and the name of ONE Ontario winery in the email ... also note that winner's emails will be shared with Cuvee organizers, so please, no virtual panties this year. Deadline is 11:59pm Tuesday February 19, 2008. Winners will be announced in the next newsletter. 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.



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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