

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 – 83
May 22, 2008

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News ... Esprit Update

Response to my Esprit article in [Newsletter #82](#) has been overwhelmingly positive from readers, fellow writers, wineries, etc. The only people unhappy are those over at Vincor. Bruce Walker, Vice President of Industry Relations, in a rather stern phone message stated: we are in the middle of "an awful lot of damage control ... that was so unnecessary and so inappropriate." He then went on to list all the good things Jackson-Triggs and Vincor, are doing for the Olympics.

Once again, Vincor has missed the point. I said nothing against the other Vincor efforts to help our Olympic athletes, and in fact I applaud them for making a difference in this regard. Would somebody please tell Vincor (because I think they are tired of hearing from me) that, as Canadians, we have no problem with them making a buck and/or raising funds for our athletes, as Konrad Ejbich pointed out in his quote in the Welland Tribune (Tuesday May 13). What we do have a problem with is when they compromise the integrity of Canadian wine and wineries by passing off an inferior blended product as Canadian wine. Why did / does Vincor refuse to get this point?

As I casually combed through the Welland Tribune article, I found this quote:

"Both Jackson-Triggs Esprit wines and VQA products will be served in 2010 by Vincor," [Cathy Jacobs, vice-president for Jackson-Triggs Estates wines].

This quote demanded some follow-up. So I got on the horn to Bruce Walker and he assured me, with an emphatic "No", that Esprit-blended product will NOT, repeat Not be served "at any Olympic function or event" – whew. The wine will of course still be available in liquor stores.

Another positive as a result of my article is that a very good press release will soon be surfacing on the Vincor website, mainly in direct response to what was written and has come to light, in which Vincor comes clean as to the content of the Esprit product and reasons for going that route ([see the release here](#)).

I am also happy to report, and Vincor has informed me directly, and I have also confirmed it through independent spotters, that "Limited Edition VQA-Esprit" wines are now available at both Jackson-Triggs wineries (Niagara and Okanagan) ... the blends will still continue to be sold in liquor stores. My request for these VQA wines for review has been granted so stay tuned.

What I found most head scratching about this whole Esprit-fiasco is why Vincor didn't foresee this. Had they been open and honest about their plan, there would have been little need for, as Bruce Walker referred to it, "damage control". Instead, because of what I wrote two weeks ago, Vincor went into this "damage control" mode. Bruce admitted that had I not written anything (and I'm sure they wish I hadn't) nothing would have been done or said. He also said that no one (writer, public, etc.) made any kind of noise about this situation. Therefore, I am left asking that one nagging question that keeps going round and round in my mind, what took us so long?



OntarioWineReview: WINERY REVIEW – Rosewood Estates

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.

Tucked neatly next door to Angels Gate and across the road from 30 Bench is one of Beamsville's (Niagara Region) newest wineries. But what makes this place unique is not its locale, it's "stolen winemaker", or its flowery name ... it's the bees out back and the meadery inside – Niagara's first winery AND meadery, let's take a look.

During [Cuvee](#) weekend Rosewood opened their doors to the public for the first time, a sneak peak if you will. (At the time of my writing this article, the official opening is still a couple of months away, as of May 3, 2008 it is now open). Doors opening at a new winery cause a lot of buzz in Niagara, and today the staff is busy as bees during honey making time as they fly around the room catering to the throng. So what's with all the bee allusions you might be asking yourself? Well, Rosewood Estates is not just a winery; they're a meadery too – making one of the oldest known alcoholic beverages to man ... wine made from honey.

For those who were on the En-Route trail, you'll know that Cuvee weekend turned out to be a surprisingly pretty quiet event, for such a prestigious wine celebration (it is considered the Oscars of the Ontario wine world). Each winery I visited, on both the [Saturday and Sunday](#) was having a "lull" (read: not very busy), many said it was due to the nasty weather that befell the region; but Rosewood was abuzz with activity. It was hard to find a parking space, the tasting room was packed, the trays of cheese and nuts at the entranceway were well picked through – and thankfully I stayed long enough to indulge in the yummiest homemade honeycake that appeared unannounced. Tours were being given as quickly as somebody could say, "Who wants a tour of the place?" I opted to stay out front and watch the goings on while tasting through the line up of wines.

So without the hubbub, what does the place look like? Walk through the front doors and you find yourself in the main tasting room, with the tasting bar located directly in front of you. Just off to the left, are a pair of ornate wooden doors that lead to the back production area. Turn completely right and you'll see an alcove with a small sitting room and the Restrooms – for those in need a relief from a long day of tasting. A flight of stairs, to your immediately left lead to a small balcony-like event room, complete with iron railing. It's open so you overlook the tasting room below: "Romeo, Romeo pass me up a glass of something red."

Now, those who follow the Niagara wine scene may have heard stories and rumours of a "stolen winemaker" that made the rounds throughout the region. I will try and bring those not in the loop up to speed. You see current Rosewood winemaker, Natalie Spytkowski, used to work right next door at Angels Gate, as their head winemaker. One day, she up and left. As you can imagine, the rumours were all over the map, tales of a bitter departure, "stolen winemaker" was a term also bandied about, "she left them high and dry" was also used and of course the inevitable, "thrown out the door". But Natalie responds to all this with a nonchalance and a laugh, "As people often say, you can't believe everything you hear. For the record, I did not leave Angels Gate high and dry and nor was I stolen - not even close to the truth. ... My focus as it has always been and remains producing small batches of high quality wine. ... It was just time to move on."

Moving on from controversy and onto their tasting menu you'll notice something peculiar – all the wines: white, red and mead – are all the same price: \$18. When I made the inquiry as to why, Natalie said, "We wanted people to choose to buy the wines they liked, not the wines they could afford." Makes sense, I guess, but then you have to be willing to pay \$18 for a Rosé, a Riesling or even an oaked Merlot. I ran this pricing policy (and its reasoning) past a marketing friend of mine who used to work in the wine business, his response: "From a marketing standpoint, it shows a complete lack of forethought and effort to market their product – bottom line, it's pure laziness on their part ... they'll come around." In an email Natalie informed me that, "He could not be further from the truth, we gave this a lot of thought, most of the wines cost relatively the same to produce and they all get the same amount of loving attention in the winery. Having been in the industry for many years, I have seen a lot of people come in and taste all the wines, then purchase the cheapest; this way they can purchase the wine they liked best. I have also seen a lot of pricing both high and low that has nothing to do with the quality of the wine in the bottle. So far the feedback from restaurants has been favourable since they see the wines and pricing as being movable to the public."

As for the bees, they're out back of the property buzzing away like the people in the winery – I doubt they're giving tours out that way, not in the middle of winter anyway, but you can definitely sample their wares both in a bottle of mead and in what you'll find in the wow factor (see below).

**Grape Guy's Picks of the Bunch: Merlot and Mead**For directions and more information visit www.rosewoodwine.com

Rosewood Estates 2006 Merlot - \$18.00 (W)

Not to be confused with the "natural fermentation" Merlot (priced at \$40), this Merlot abound with cherries and dark chocolate on the nose. Currently, it's a wee bit tight in the mouth, but with a little aeration and/or some decanting, you can definitely see where this one is going to end up. Cassis and blackberries kick things off in the mouth, giving a very juicy mouth-filling performance; there's also a pocketful of tannins that accost the tongue before things turn all red fruit and sweet on the finish ... This is not to say that this is a sweet wine, but it sure does give that impression on the lovely finish. For enjoyment now, decant, or sit it for another couple of years – best 2010-2012.

Rosewood Estates 2006 Mon Cherie - \$18.00 (W)

Fans of the Harvest Gold, or even non-mead drinkers, might want to check out this little beauty ... same sugar code level as the Gold (2), but this one adds a beautiful layer of fruitiness to both the nose and palate. Made with honey wine (mead) and sour cherries that's exactly what you get. The nose displays the same bubblegum-like aromas as the Harvest Gold, but adds a layer of cherry. Here the bubblegum disappears from the flavour profile (and so do the tropical nuances) giving full weight to the cherry sweetness as it courses through the mouth on it's way to a very pleasing, dry with a touch of what seems like tannins, on the finish. I'm told, from a long time mead maker in Ontario, that mead needs time to develop and integrate – this one's great right now, but by laying this one down for 5+ years you might find it develops more depth and character – give it a try.

Other wines of note at Rosewood:

[2006 Harvest Gold](#) (W) and the [2006 Trois Femme Rosé](#) (W)*Availability legend: W (Winery) – L (LCBO/Vintages) – WTH (Winery to Home).***Weekly Wine Notes and More: Downey's, Vineland, and 10 On the Roads**

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:Downey's Estate winery Strawberry Rhubarb unfiltered ([read](#)) ([listen](#))The Vineland Alsatian Three ([read](#)) ([listen](#))**NEW Reports in the [On the Road with the Grape Guy](#) section:**[New Zealand Preview - Wine and Herb Festival, Niagara on the Lake](#)[Lunch with Martin Malivoire - German Wine Tasting](#)[Undurruga Tasting - Sante International Wines](#)[Weinhenstephan "the world's oldest brewery"](#)[Report from the All Canadian Wine Championships judging](#)[All Canadian Wine Championships Gold Medal Winners](#)[Terroir in Prince Edward County](#)**[What's NEW in the ... Lost and Found \(blog\)](#)**

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

New additions will be added next week**[What's NEW ... Taste it Again Grape Guy \(blog\)](#)**

Taste it Again - find out what has happened to some of my favourites over the past few years

New additions will be added next week**Vintages Release:** [Ontario "Vintages" Releases: Saturday May 24th, 2008 Vintages Release](#)**Ontario Wines of Note at Vintages for May 10, 2008:**[Cave Spring Gewurztraminer 2006](#) and [Ice House Northern Ice S.L.H. Vidal 2006](#)www.ontariowinereview.com

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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.

Bee fans will love Rosewood, because not only can you taste honey wine, but the décor is all in a bee motif – wine racks are hexagon shaped and strung together like honeycombs. Bee products line the shelves from pollen, to local honey in jars and in squeeze bottles (you can't get much more local than "made 100 feet away"), bees wax candles (in both smooth and honeycomb style), honey-dippers (not the Robert Plant kind), beeswax soap and other honey and bee paraphernalia soon to come ... need anything bee or bee related, this is the place.



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

For May 2008

What's Dune is Dune ... Twin Peaks fans unite; Agent Dale Cooper has gone from coffee-loving and cherry pie eating to winemaking with black cherry fruit flavours. Actor Kyle MacLachlan joins the ranks of celebrities making wine. His label, Persued by Bear, which takes its name from an odd stage direction in a Shakespearean play, The Winter's tale, will be available via mail order or at selected restaurants in Seattle and New York. Where and with whom did Kyle decide to make his first wine? In his home state of Washington with none other than the award winning winery Dunham Cellars. The 2005 edition (the first) is a Cabernet blend with splashes of Syrah and Merlot that underwent 25 months in barrel and another year of aging in bottle.

From the Absurd to the Ridiculous ... Trust the French to go from one extreme to the other. This once wine world powerhouse is facing problems at home with their anti-alcohol lobby. You'll remember that earlier this year, I told you that a French court ruled that wine reviews in a newspaper were considered advertising and thereby subject to a warning label. That craziness all stems from a November 2004 court ruling that says that "any mention of an alcoholic drink product is deemed publicity"... the French group Van & Society wants to have "publicity" legally defined, because as it stands, the websites of Chateau Margaux, Latour, Lafite and Yquem – as well as all other French Chateaux and Domaines – are all illegal. Believe it or not, in France any website that carries the name of an alcoholic product is deemed illegal. In compliance with this rule, Heineken closed down its French website in February of this year. Viva la France. Viva la Difference ... and what a difference a few decades have made.

Wine Across America ... While California is still king of the U.S. wine market, accounting for 90% or 449 million gallons, wine is now being made in every state of the union. It used to be a great trivia question: which state does not make wine? But now Alaska has joined the ranks along with such usual guesses as Hawaii. By using native grapes, importing juice or turning to local fruit (Alaska – salmonberry / Hawaii – pineapple / Maine – blueberries) the other 49 states are now hot on the heels of mighty California.

Peaceful repose in the Lake Erie area ... A recent sojourn to the Lake Erie North Shore uncovered a beautiful B & B, which I whole-heartedly recommend. Just on the outskirts of Windsor and seemingly miles from nowhere, where deer and rabbits frolic in the fauna, lies three acres of pristine landscape home away from home surroundings ... It is here you'll find the accommodations of Branteaney's (Bran-Tee-Nees) Bed and Breakfast. I can't vouch for their restaurant recommendations, but the accommodations, in either the 3 in-house rooms or the 3 private guesthouse rooms are what dreams are made of. A little piece of heaven in Windsor? You'd better believe it. And a winery visit in the region is an easy hop, skip and jump away



Wine Event Spotlight: *Fruit Wine Festival and Importing Wine Seminar*

It's an afternoon of food, wine and jazz at Archibald's just north of Bowmanville. The **9th Annual Fruit Wine and Food Festival** is being held at the winery Saturday May 31. Tickets are \$10 in advance and \$12 at the door. This is a fun event that I have attended a few times: here you get to try your palate on some really amazing fruit wines from all over the province, plus local restaurants are on hand to make pairings you never thought possible with fruit wines. www.archibalds-estatewinery.on.ca will get you all the details about this fun, exciting, and above all, tasty event.

If you're like me, you've often thought about whether not there is a way around the LCBO monopoly ... now you can find the ins and outs of the wine importing business by attending C. Steven Trenholme's seminar **"Importing Wine for Pleasure and Profit"**. Find out the details on how to import wine, spirits and beer into the Ontario marketplace from a 28-year veteran of the Canadian beverage alcohol industry. It takes place Saturday June 14 at The Old Mill Inn & Spa in Toronto from (9:30-4:00) – pre-registration is required so contact cstrenholme@sympatico.ca to get in on the know.

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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