

## 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 – 85**  
**June 19, 2008**

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#### OntarioWineReview: *WINERY REVIEW – Alvento 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.*

I will fully admit that even before I walked into Alvento winery I was predetermined not to like it; in my mind, anyone who would have the audacity to sell an Ontario Viognier for \$49.50 could not be trusted. (Subsequently, the price of said Viognier has come down since its initial web offering, but still hovers around \$34.80). I poked my head in the door in the fall of 2007 and while this cannot be considered a full winery review (because my secret identity was discovered pretty quickly), I can give a preview of what is to come out of this little winery.

I was greeted by Elyane who was (wo)manning the counter, she called in her husband, Bruno, who is also the winemaker, and took my friend and I around for a small tour. But before all that, Elyane poured for a us a sample of the 2005 Elige and I have to admit, my heart began to soften from it's original hard stance (think Pharoah meeting Moses for the last time). Bruno was quite affable and as he walked us into his barrel room to sample he talked about the property. His approximately 5 hectares are planted with 1.6 hectares of Cabernet Sauvignon, 1.2 of Merlot, 1.2 of Nebbiolo, 1.2 of Viognier and .4 of Cabernet Franc. Elyane and Bruno come to Ontario via Italy, where they also owned a small winery – I guess they got tired of the ease of a Mediterranean climate and were dying for the hardships of snow and cool climate viticulture.

The name 'Elige' on their first red offering (both an '04 and an '05 are on the shelf) comes from an Italian Bordeaux-blend they made in Italy. Bruno's winemaking heart is still very much in the old world. He let us sample some of his other blends, named for other old world locales he wishes to emulate with his wine making here in Ontario. The '06 Emilie (named for St. Emilion) is a Franc dominated blend with a touch of Merlot (70/30) ... smoky black fruit, cherry-tobacco and sweet-vanilla oak with silky, yet dusty tannins. The '06 Sonda ("a tip of the hat to Pomerol"), 90% Merlot, 10% Cabernet Franc, "is right bank Bordeaux": has great mouthfeel and nose appeal, red and black fruit with oakiness that does not overpower, instead it remains restrained in a smooth and supple way. The '06 Elige (65% Sauv, 33% Merlot, 2% Franc) is purely black fruit dominated. All wines are set for release sometime in late 2008 (or so), but first they must go through 4-5 months of bottle age after they come out of their barrel home. Clearly, Bruno is of the philosophy "we will release no wine until it's time." And he does not seem to be in any hurry.

So what about the Nebbiolo you might ask? According to Bruno, it's not ready, it needs to sit a long time to develop character and structure ... "we're in no rush for that one," he says confidently ... and being from, and having made wine in, the home of Nebbiolo – you have to believe him. No tasting was offered.

And the Viognier, where is that and what are his plans for it? Into the tank room we headed, where the '07's were percolating (fermenting) or resting in tank. Bruno walks us over to a tank with "Viognier" written on the front. "You should try this," he says with very little inflection in his voice, "tell me what you think." This is the 2007 Viognier (and here's hoping Bruno is reading this and is up for a suggestion: leave it unoaked – which was his plan at the time, though he was still debating whether to use some wood or not). What a fantastic nose on this wine, fruity and complex, most notably, a crisp citrus (read: lemon) scent ... the palate is delicious, yet seemingly simple with citrus and vanilla which is being derived from extended lees contact (8 months worth by

the time it's ready for release in June of 2008). This wine is going to be a super summer patio sipper, if they can keep it at a reasonable price ... here's hoping.



**Grape Guy's Picks of the Bunch: *Elige – A Bordeaux Blend***

For directions and more information visit [www.alvento.ca](http://www.alvento.ca)

Alvento Winery 2005 Elige - \$29.80 (W)

With 2007 being proclaimed as the best vintage ever in Ontario many have forgotten that 2005 (although short-cropped) was also a very good year – and trust me you'll be seeing the best of '05 before you'll see what the 2007's reds have to offer. Let's take this Elige blend (named after a Bordeaux-blend the owners of this winery made at their small winery in Italy) – 16 months in mainly new French oak and made up of 60% Cabernet Sauvignon and 40% Franc. The nose has developed spicy cinnamon and blackberry notes; while in the mouth, it starts off red fruited but turns all blackberry and cassis mid-palate with medium-soft tannins and a good level of spices and herbs which reside mainly in and on the cheeks. The long finish hangs about the tongue leaving a lasting cassis-like effect – this one's quite nice, and ageable to boot.

*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:

Niagara College 2007 Riesling ([read](#)) ([listen](#))  
Vineland Estates 2006 Cabernet Franc ([read](#)) ([listen](#))

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

[Foster's Winemakers on Tour](#)  
[Chateau Musar Tasting](#)  
[Portugal Tasting](#)  
[Toast to Dionysus at Mastronardi](#)  
[Niagara Wine Weekend and Auction](#)

**[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  
[See this week's Weekly Wine Note](#)

**Vintages Release:** [Ontario "Vintages" Releases: Saturday June 21<sup>st</sup>, 2008 Vintages Release](#)

**Ontario Wines of Note at Vintages for June 21, 2008:**

[Cave Spring 2005 Brut](#)  
[Chateau Des Charmes 2006 Chardonnay Musque](#)  
[Henry of Pelham 2007 Off-Dry Reserve Riesling](#)  
[Jackson-Triggs 2006 Delaine Vineyard Riesling](#)  
[Hillebrand 2005 Collectors' Choice Cabernet/Merlot](#)  
[Malivoire 2006 Gamay](#)



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

**For June 2008**

**This Bites the Bag ...** “They pulled the plug four years early.” An LCBO employee remarked to me, as we discussed the no-more-plastic-bags-announcement (May 27, 2008). “We were told 2012, now our last shipment was really our last shipment.” In an effort to reduce waste, the LCBO announced they will no longer be packing our wine in those amazingly versatile, heavy duty plastic bags. It’s either reusable cloth, paper bag or box ... usually I tell you to stock up on a wine, today it’s time to stock up on the LCBO bags – while you’re there buy a few bottles of your favourites.

**More LCBO News ...** Here are some highlights from the LCBO’s 2007/2008 fiscal report – have a bag handy some of these numbers might make you sick (but take a generic shopping bag, an LCBO one is now a collector’s item). The LCBO reports \$4.1 billion in net sales ... putting them over \$4 billion for the first time ever; of that \$1.345 billion was paid to the Ontario government (as dividend). Sales increased 5.5%, while net income was up 6.1% to 1.37 billion, the dividend rose 5.1% or 65.3 million more than last year. This is the 14th straight year the dividend has grown. Wine sales were up 6% (1.41 billion) with red having a slight edge over white (6.6% vs. 6.4%). Top selling wines were in the \$15-\$20 range. And here’s why these guys get paid the big bucks: LCBO staff challenged over 2 million people (up 11%) and more than 134,000 were refused service (up 9%). What does all this mean – the only game in town is making money selling booze ... now that’s a real surprise.

**One More from the LCBO Road ...** And where is all this money going? As it turns out it pays to work for the LCBO – very well I might add. It has been reported to me that back in 1996 only 10 LCBO employees were making salaries over \$100,000. In 2007 that number is up more than 1500% to 157 employees who are making that kind of scratch. This could explain why your favourite wine/beer/spirit has gone up in price – especially these days with our strong Canadian dollar, we should be seeing falling prices, not increases.

**Sad News for Wine Lovers ...** If the reports of record profits from our liquor monopoly and their inflated salaries aren’t enough to make you sad, the passing of California’s legendary wine pioneer Robert Mondavi at age 94, on Friday May 16, should bring a tear or two to your eye. The man who put California wines on the world map and whose name is synonymous with California wines has gone to that big barrel cellar in the sky.

**Popularity Contest ...** I’m not sure if the Gallos were the most popular kids in school, but they are the most “popular global brand” according to an independent study that ranked The World’s Most Powerful Spirits and Wine Brands 2008. Gallo is followed by Hardy’s (Australia), Concha Y Toro (Chile), Robert Mondavi (USA) and Yellow Tail (Australia) which rounds out the top five.

**A Rolling Stone Gathers Icewine (but still no moss) ...** Announced back in April and released May 1st, the Rolling Stones entered the wine business – sort of. Ex Nihilo Vineyards of the Okanagan (B.C.) produced a limited release icewine labeled in honour of their hit “Sympathy for the Devil” and features the trademarked red tongue logo. Only 222 cases were made and each bottle is priced at \$125.

**Speaking of Labels ...** On May 21, Prime Minister Stephen Harper announced plans to tighten food-labeling laws. Under the new rules, a “Product of Canada” label will mean all, or virtually all, the contents are Canadian in origin. Labels will now reflect origin more accurately, and product with less Canadian content will be labeled accordingly with what Harper called a “qualified ‘made in Canada’ label”. What this will mean to ‘Cellared in Canada’ and ‘Product of Canada’ wine is still unclear, as these labels already say that the content comes from foreign ingredients, albeit in very small print hidden amongst lots of gibberish and gobble-dee-goop you don’t read now. For this to affect wine, that small print needs to be enlarged and come out on to the front label, or stand alone on the back label – preferably both.

**Unto You a Child is Born ...** A big congratulations goes out to Heidi and Curtis Fielding (Fielding Winery). Ty Fielding was born May 29th ... mom and baby are doing “great”, and according to a doctor friend of mine the burning in the eyes from lack of sleep should subside in about 18 years ... good luck.



### Wine Event Spotlight: *Buckhorn, Huff Cooks and Charming Jazz*

I have it through a reliable source that this year's **Fiesta Buckhorn** (July 19, 2008) is going to be a "Humdinger" – if you have never been, you are missing out on one of the premier, laid back wine festivals of the season. And your very own Grape Guy will be giving a seminar there about "Why Visit a Winery" – a fun interactive seminar with tasting and incentives. Festival details can be found at [www.fiestabuckhorn.com](http://www.fiestabuckhorn.com). If you seriously have never been to the Fiesta, then I am going to make it easy for you to go. I have two 2-day passes to the event ... all you have to do is answer my thought-provoking skill-testing question (below) and fire off an email to me with "Buckhorn here I come" in the subject line. Entries must be in my inbox by Wednesday June 25 (11:59pm) and include your name, address (with postal code) and phone number.

*Skill Testing Question: Where is Buckhorn?*

Huff Estates in Prince Edward County is at it again. The second annual **Six Barrels for Six Chefs** is taking place July 2nd at 6PM. Wines from Huff, Norman Hardie, Rosehall Run and Closson Chase will be featured, along with foods prepared by chefs Ryan Crawford, Michael Potters, Hiro Yoshida and three others. Price is \$140 per person, and I can tell you this because I was there [last year](#), this is an exquisite event not to be missed. Go to [www.huffestates.com](http://www.huffestates.com) for more details about the event and tickets.

Chateau des Charmes has announced its **3rd Annual Canadian Smooth Jazz Concert Series** line up. Performers will be Alfie Zappacosta with Cara Matthews (Sunday, July 13), Steve Oliver with Daniela Nardi (Sunday August 17), and Brian Hughes (Sunday September 14). Tickets are \$80 per person, or all three shows for \$210, and includes lunch and wine. Visit [www.chateaudescharmes.com/experience/special\\_events.html](http://www.chateaudescharmes.com/experience/special_events.html) for details on how to get your tickets.

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**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](mailto:michael@ontariowinereview.com). We look forward to hearing from you!

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