

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 – 91
■ September 11, 2008

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OntarioWineReview: *The LCBO ... We're Stuck With Them*

Warning: *This article has many different names for the LCBO, one's I have heard, and one's I have used over the years.*

Nobody dislikes the LCBO more than a wine writer, it's not being boastful, it's just a fact. I feel that those who shop only at the LiCk-BO and don't go to trade events are the lucky ones. They don't know what they are missing. They don't get to try some mouth-watering wines that make you covet them immediately. They know not of the insanely cheap prices our friends south of the border get, the discounts, mail in rebates, 3-for-\$10 specials, or heaven forbid, a \$2 bottle of wine. They'll never know that some of the wines you try at these events are only sold through an agent by the case, but many people don't buy by the case, they want 3 or 4 at the most. "Get in with a friend," you'll be told, "our hands are tied." And tied they are, by, you guessed it, the protective liquor board, saving our cities and towns from the wilds of alcohol.

It's those who travel outside the country that get the biggest shock of all. They find out that Mondavi makes a true Bordeaux blend called Vinetta, or that Rosenblum makes about 800 kinds of Zinfandel ... and yet their Ontario agent can't get it, never heard of it or won't bring it in. If you try on your own, well you'll pay close to, if not more than, double what you paid for it outside the country, thus taking all the fun and value out of your little finds and giving you a headache bigger than if you drank the whole bottle yourself in half-an-hour on an empty stomach. Sure this system we have might work for a case of 2-Buck-Chuck, but "I-can't-believe-it's-only-12-bucks" a wine find gets close to \$30 once you get it home where the LCBO puts it's grubby little duties and taxes on it ... then it just doesn't seem like such a deal anymore, does it?

Folks, the LCBO is here to stay, I don't like it, but something tells me we have to work with it. Trust me, there is nothing more that I would like to do than walk into Larry's Liquor-Licious or Bob's Booze Boutique and hunt around looking for his "deal of the day", buy 2-for-1 Lafite, or save 25% on white sticker items. But the boys and girls at the BO have us by the short and curlies, like an ex-lover who has a naked picture of you and decided the world must see it 'cuz you're running for public office.

Did you know that the KGBO gets a piece of every bottle that comes into Ontario, whether they did anything to get it here or not? Their middle name isn't "control" for nothing, and they never get "board" hunting you down for those coffer-padding pennies (more like hundreds of dollars). Do they really need to be this way? After all, if privatization, in some form or another, happened, wouldn't the man still get his money? Liquor is taxed by the government, not the Liquor Board, so whether I buy it from Bob's Booze, Larry's Liquor or Lenny & Charlie the Brother Orenthal (LCBO) – the taxes get levied and the Godfather gets his vig. I don't condemn the government for its "sin taxes". We have to pay for healthcare somehow, but I just wish they'd use some of those billions to fix one or two of those "potholes" that swallow my car every spring.

Seriously, does the LCBO have to treat our only other outlets that we do have (namely wineries) like competition? They do have the monopoly on the rest of the world, could they not at least give us our Ontario wine outlets without being so competitive about it?

Did you know that each winery pays money to the LCBO just for the right to sell wine in Ontario – as one winery owner told me, “I pay them \$2 a bottle just for the right to be here.” They don’t make the wine, grow the grapes, or even touch the wine in any way shape or form – yet they make money from the sale of it ... nice racket.

I’m not even going to touch upon that full-colour glossy ad-filled juggernaut they call Food and Drink Magazine that competes for ad dollars with Tiding, Wine Access, Vines and every other privately owned magazine struggling to make a buck. It’s just nice to know your government is your biggest competitor, eh? We actually fund that tome of excess with our tax dollars. Don’t get me wrong, I, and many others, love to page through that mag, but it’s like the Yankees inviting a little league team in to play them and then charging them admission to get into the ballpark.

A source at one of Canada’s biggest wine company’s, who owns private wine boutiques across the province, told me that because they sell booze (wine) they have to submit sales figures to the government (and who gets to see those figures, the LCBO). The LCBO then looks over these numbers and can see where their most profitable stores are located; they then (being the LCBO) can put one of their stores near that location. It’s a test pilot project, and they don’t have to supply the pilot. Now imagine you’re a small retailer selling cameras – we’ll call ourselves Henry’s, and not only do you control the flow of, and get a piece of every camera sold in Ontario, but you also get to see your “competitions” sales figures and can base your growth using them as the guinea pig for high traffic areas. Nice racket you’d be running huh? Now imagine that it was not a private company, but your government ... even better huh?

Funny thing is, if you consider this fact funny anyway, the government’s own study found that we should allow some form of privatization in the province – that study was totally ignored. The hits for us wine fans just keep on coming.

I’m afraid that all this complaining is a lost cause. We can make all the noise we want, the LCBO is here to stay, like it or not. My only advice is to buy your international booze from them (where else can you go), but whenever and wherever possible, support you’re local winery. Take a trip, buy it by the bucket or case, and always look for the VQA symbol ... don’t let them suck out your soul, be proud of your Ontario wine and the wineries that make them. As for the LCBO pricing policies, magazine racket, and supposed “sales” that save us that whopping 50 cents – the only advice I can give, as we grab our collective ankles, have plenty of lube.



Grape Guy’s Picks of the Bunch: *Wines for End of Summer*

Kacaba 2006 Barrel Fermented Chardonnay - \$25.95 (W)
www.kacaba.com

Chardonnay is a chameleon, it comes in many forms and in many colours, from pale white to dark golden yellow, and it can be manipulated to the taste of the winemaker or the palate of the customer – depending on the winery’s motivation. When discussing wines for the autumn, one would be remiss if they did not include a Chardonnay in their picks – and it’s at this time of year (with the days getting shorter and the nights cooler) that you want more oomph in your Chardonnay instead of less. This Kacaba offering does the trick. Big buttery and vanilla on the nose – which might lead you to believe you’ll be chewing on a stave when this wine is in your mouth – but surprisingly no. Butter for sure enters the mouth, but then so too does vanilla, apple cinnamon/nutmeg and a touch of oaky goodness. The finish combines the best of what makes this wine so enjoyable sweet apple-buttered oak ... now that’s what I call a wine to fall for.

Hillebrand 2007 Showcase Riesling - \$25.00 (W)
www.hillebrand.com

This is a wine where the young meets the old and the marketing team gets to step in and give it even more flair. In essence, this is not just the winemaker’s wine; the entire Hillebrand marketing machine had a hand in it. First in the vineyard, where they kept yields low (.4 tons to the acre) and used a mix of 5 acres of young vines and 2 acres of 17 year old vines, then winemaker Darryl Brooker took over and made a wine with a nose ripe with peach, nice mineral content and a touch of lemony goodness, all that follows on the palate with a dose of refreshing acidity and a lengthy finish. Then the marketing team took over: with 180 cases made, reserve quality, and the sourcing of the grapes from the Four Mile Creek appellation, they needed something to really deem this wine as special. Since a dry creek bed runs through the vineyard, they played around with that idea for a bit – then it hit them ... it’s not a dry creek, it’s a Ghost Creek, and if you are walking around the vineyard late at night, you can almost hear the tinkling of the water and when the moon is half full you can almost see its phantom wetness shimmer in the moonlight. Oooooo, gives me the shivers, now take a sip – so does the wine.

Ask for it's new name: 2007 Ghost Creek Vineyard Riesling.

Peller Estates 2007 Private Reserve Rosé - \$16.95 (W)

www.peller.com

The popularity of rosés this summer was unprecedented, even in the days when white Zinfandel was a popular drink, they never saw the upswing that rosé is seeing today. Winemakers all over the world are taking Rosé very seriously. I was at a tasting where a French rosé from Provence was both ageable and priced for a whopping \$100 – now that's taking this wine seriously. Peller takes their rosé seriously too, but they still know how to have a little fun. Winemaker Lawrence Buhler made this one a bright pink (almost neon) in colour – which gives it that lively fun aspect, but from there he went all serious. A blend of Cabernet Sauvignon, Cabernet Franc and Merlot, this neon wine has a candied red fruit nose that seems to be predominantly raspberry; but that's where the sweetness stops, apple, raspberry, strawberry through the mouth with a dry strawberry and tart green apple finish. As we close out summer 2008, this is a great wine to bring back summer, if only for the time it takes to finish the bottle.

Must Pile ... More end of summer wines:

Every so often I end up with an over-abundance of good wine reviews that I feel I must pass on to you ... some might consider this a dumping ground, but I like to call it my "must pile":

[Colchester Ridge 2007 Riesling \(W\)](#) – [Colio Estate CEV 2007 Chardonnay Musque \(W\)](#)
[Erie Shore Vineyard 2007 Summer Sun \(W\)](#) – [Hillebrand 2007 Artist Series Sauvignon Blanc \(W\)](#) - [Hillebrand 2007 Limited Edition Gewurztraminer \(W\)](#) - [Hillebrand 2007 Trius White \(W\)](#)- [Hillebrand 2006 Unfiltered Chardonnay \(W\)](#) – [Pelee Island Winery 2007 Chambourcin Rosé \(W\)](#) [Peller Estates 2007 Private Reserve Pinot Gris \(W\)](#) – [Reif Estate 2007 Riesling \(W\)](#) - [Smith and Wilson 2007 Riesling \(W\)](#)

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:

September 2, 2008 – Puddicombe Estates 2003 Estate Mist ([read](#)) ([listen](#))

September 9, 2008 – Lailey Vineyard 2007 Counterpoint ([read](#)) ([listen](#))

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

The season is ramping up – next week they'll be a bunch

[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

[Lakeview Cellars 2002 Gamay Noir](#)

[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

[Vineland Estate 2002 Cabernet Sauvignon](#)

[Vineland Estates 2004 Select Late Harvest Vidal](#)

[NEW BLOG – What I'm drinking Tonight](#)

When it's not an Ontario wine, here's what I'm pulling out of the cellar

[See all 10 postings to date](#)

Vintages Release: [Ontario "Vintages" Releases: Saturday September 13, 2008 Vintages Release](#)

Ontario Wines of Note at Vintages for September 13, 2008:

[Colio Estate 2005 CEV Cabernet Sauvignon](#)

[Flat Rock Cellars 2006 Gravity Pinot Noir](#)

[Henry of Pelham 2007 Gamay](#)

[Hillebrand 2006 Trius Red](#)

[Jackson-Triggs 2006 Delaine Vineyard Chardonnay](#)

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[Magnotta 2006 Vidal Icewine](#)
[Malivoire 2006 Chardonnay](#)
[Mike Weir Estate 2006 Cabernet/Merlot](#)
[Pelee Island 2005 Cabernet Sauvignon](#)
[Peninsula Ridge 2002 Reserve Cabernet Franc](#)



In the Cellar: *with Norman Hardie*

Some have called him a maverick or renegade, others have called him a genius – while still others have said he makes some of the best Pinot Noir in Ontario. Who is this madman? Why it's none other than the nutty professor himself, Norman Hardy, former winemaker for Carmela Estates (also in Prince Edward County) who has traveled the world and decided to settle here, in Ontario's Prince Edward County, to craft his Pinot Noir. You see Norman has a dream, a dream to be the top Pinot Noir producer in Ontario, and he'll stop at nothing to achieve that goal. Today, on this hot early-July day, I visited Norman in his barrel room, to talk pinot and taste what he's got cooking ... both in his head and in his barrels.

We start with a taste sample of his 2007 Riesling. Back in 2005, Norman made, what I believed to be, one of the top five Rieslings in Ontario that year. One year later (2006), I excitedly returned to try the '06 version - Norman, always the experimenter, had tried something "a little different" with his '06 Riesling. I was not a fan and neither, as it turned out, was Norman, who never released this wine. "I just didn't like the direction it was going," he said. Now, with his 2007 Riesling, he's back on top of his game. It has beautiful floral, apple, lime and wet-stone-mineral notes that follow in the mouth and add a peachy character with an excellent medium length finish. Slow fermented (from about October to the end of April), seven months lees contact (dead yeast cells, to add character to the wine) and 1/3 wild fermented - this is another exciting wine for Norm.

Next up, was his County Chardonnay. Norman plays both sides of the winemakers' fence in Ontario when it comes to Chardonnay and Pinot Noir. He uses fruit from Niagara and the County, but keeps them separate and releases a County version and a Niagara version of the Chard and Pinot. "My fruit is still young, Niagara's is older with a more entrenched root system which really digs into the soil for more complexity in the wine." The Riesling, on the other hand, is all Niagara; "you can't beat Beamsville fruit for Riesling." Back to this County Chardonnay (2007) ... made in 40% new French wood, in some 220L and some 500L barrels to obtain a light wood extraction. All wild fermented (ended in April) and full lees contact with a minimum of four-to-five stirs per day. The result is a wine of complexity and smoothness: vanilla, apple, under ripe peach and lemon drop fill the nose; while a dry lemoncello flavour fills the mouth with a bit of tartness and some nice balancing acidity.

It's finally off to the back the cellar, where Norman keeps the best for last, his pride and joy ... his Pinot Noirs. Yes he makes both the Niagara and County versions of this wine -one he refers to as more feminine, while the other is more muscular or masculine. Today, I tasted from three barrels (2 County – 1 Niagara) ... same barrel type, same year of fruit, but the difference, in the County barrels anyway, is the crop level. The first is from a plot of land that produces two tons per acre (1.1 kilos per vine) and has a very densely planted crop (2100 plants per acre). Norm's a firm believer in green harvesting (dropping fruit through the season before ripening), "you derive better flavors in the fruit if you keep cluster levels low," he preaches. No arguing with that, as the taste of the wine has plenty of cranberry, cherry, vanilla, cinnamon and a little bit of wood character.

The next barrel contains even more radical fruit: grown at crazy crop levels, less than a kilo per vine (0.9 kilos to be exact), green harvested like crazy, keeping only the best fruit and dropping the rest, "that's better than Burgundy levels," Norm says proudly. The result is a very green smelling nose but the mouth tells a different story - big red fruit, smooth and silky. Given a little air the wine develops greater body, depth and intensity – I think Norm may be on to something here. Though he admits that any less than 0.9 kilos has little to no effect.

We move on to our final barrel, the Niagara Pinot. You can see why Norm calls this more muscular, same barrels, toasting and year of fruit, but this wine just has more to it - big dark fruit, very earthy, high in both tannins and acidity

When can you taste these wines for yourself? The Riesling was set for a July release; Chardonnay, end of July and the Pinot, mid-to-end of August ... but winemaking is not an exact science, especially when it comes to release dates. It's not like we're dealing with the latest CD from Fiddy (50) Cent or Michael Buble ... wines get held up - so check Norm's website or call for availability.



Wine Event Spotlight: *Fall means lots to do in wine Country ...*

First off there's **TASTE! a Celebration of Regional Cuisine** in Prince Edward County ... this 7th Annual event is one of the region's premier festivals encompassing both the wine and food aspect of this region, along with lively music and a friendly atmosphere. It takes place at the Crystal Palace in Picton on Saturday September 27. Admission is \$15 and the event runs from 11am to 5pm. Details at www.tastecelebration.ca.

Ticket Giveaway ... I seem to have a pair of tickets to giveaway to TASTE! because this has to get to you (whoever you are) quickly, the closing date for entries is Monday September 15 at 11:59pm. I need your name, phone number, and address (with postal code) sent to michael@ontariowinereview.com - along with the answer to this brain-burner of a question: Where is TASTE being held (be as specific as you can – bonus consideration for creativity)?

Next up is the Cave Spring vineyard walk called **Walking the Vine**, held on both Saturday September 13th and 27th running from 11:00 to 12:30pm – this includes a tasting of four estate wines. Cost is \$25.00 per person and details can be found at www.cavespringcellars.com.

Inniskillin presents the **Cool Culinary Experience**, September 20, November 22 and December 13, a “one of a kind dinner experience” with unique food and wine. Find out more by going to the [Inniskillin Events page](#).

And finally, there's a celebration going on at Harbour Estates – on September 20 from noon to 5:00pm. Harbour is celebrating their **8th Anniversary** – wine, food, music, artists and more. Drop by and enjoy the do. [Details and more](#).

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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