

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: *Confessions of an Importer*

Warning: Due to the graphic nature of the crimes committed herein, some of the names have been changed to protect the innocent.

This summer I committed the ultimate crime and I must confess it to you now. A crime so heinous that my immortal soul may never again be redeemed by any of the major deities, minor deities, or any other higher power in and of this earth or in the universe for that matter. In fact, I may have damned my very soul to Hellfire forever; and what's worse, I had an accomplice - two in-fact. What did I do that will forever keep me burning for my transgression? I shipped the three cases of wine I bought in British Columbia back to Ontario.

Yes, now it's not just a sin to drink alcohol, it's a sin to drink and/or possess alcohol that is not approved by the LCBO. Heaven's to Betsy!

By now you have heard whispers or rumors about the IILA (Importation of Intoxicating Liquors Act) – a piece of federal legislation passed in 1928 - just after the repeal of the prohibition act. To break it down to its most basic premise, this law states that you cannot travel from one province to another with booze in your car, in your luggage, or even have said booze shipped to you ... not one bottle, not a mickey, not even one of those tiny 30ml bottles - nothing.

Think of the irony. If you travel to Cuba and buy two bottles of Havana Club rum you can bring it back tax and duty free as part of your vacation declaration; but if you travel to British Columbia and stash two bottles of Mission Hill Shiraz in your bag you have committed a crime. Yup, you can bring it in from another country but you can't travel with it between the provinces in your own country. Makes a lot of sense right? Welcome to Canada, or as Beppi Crosariol called our temperance minded zealotry in his Globe & Mail column of September 17, 2008, "a country of repressed to do-gooders".

But that was not the first time I had heard about this inane law. The topic was first brought to my attention by a Niagara winery owner on September 10, 2008. He forwarded me an article written by Gordon Hamilton, of the Vancouver Sun, in which he outted the LCBO ... twice. First, they slapped the wrist of B.C.-based winery Mission Hill, for their very liberal policy of shipping wine across provincial borders, and then they ratted on Red Rooster (another B.C. winery), for shipping to Manitoba (the LCBO told Manitoba's liquor board that this was happening and was illegal).

What is the LCBO afraid of? It's quite obvious really. It's not that they're afraid we'll get addicted to British Columbia wines. Nor are they afraid for our Ontario-based wineries and trying to protect

them from a flood of "imports". No, the LCBO is afraid that these out-of-province direct-to-home shippers ... which in truth, and by their own admission, make up a minute fraction of all wine sold ... will cut into the liquor giant's profit margin. Wine you don't buy from the LCBO is wine that they don't get their "fair" share of (or is that "fare share of"). As it is "fair share" is an oxy-moronical term, because they get their mitts on the sale of any and all wines sold here, whether through the liquor board or not.

But the bigger issue here is not the LCBO, the Manitoba liquor board, B.C.'s board or any of the other provincial regulatory bodies of booze. The issue is why on God's green earth are we upholding this 80-year-old law that seems far from relevant in this day and age? You see, the boards claim that they were just "upholding the law" when they clamped down on the BC wineries; but this law is like the one about not leaving your dead horse by the side of the road ... sure it's still on the books, but does it really seem relevant anymore? I think common sense should prevail here. But it seems that we lack the common sense the good lord gave a cactus when it comes to booze (and breasts, but that's another story).

I find it amusing that wine can be shipped between states - I have a friend in the U.S. who has ordered wine for me from California and had it shipped to Michigan - that's pretty much across their country - and nobody batted an eyelash. Mission Hill has no problem shipping their wine clear across the country and into another, namely New York State, without anyone raising an eyebrow. And yet if I want to pay full retail, plus tax, plus shipping and handling, and have to buy a minimum of twelve bottles from that very same winery, I can't do it, because I am Canadian. We have free trade between North American countries (which we originally thought would be the ruin and undoing of our country), but between our own provinces we can't ship something as simple as wine, I'm thinking there is something wrong internally – not externally – the “undoing of our country” is coming from within ... this policy is now more than just amusing in my mind, it's a complete joke. If Liquor Boards had it their way there would be provincial customs just to catch these miscreants: “Welcome to Ontario, any booze to declare?”

We're coming down to the wire now - the election is less than a week away, and while I suspect this will never come up as an issue (politicians have bigger fish to fry at this moment) keep it in mind for your member of parliament for later on. Write a letter, send an e-mail, tell them it's laws like this we don't need ... its laws like this that keep us divided as a country, east from west: B.C. has no idea what kind of great beer and wine is being made out east, and the same can be said for easterners about western products. Those in the West already hate us in the East – now our liquor board just ratted them out and stopped them from making a few extra bucks – chalk up another reason.

It's laws like this that make me wonder why we fought the war of 1812. Was it so that instead of being free market enterprisers who can buy anything from the anywhere, get cross border goods, have a buyer beware policy, and have the choice to purchase from a place where the lowest price is truly the law, we fought to actually become "repressed do-gooders" where the law protects the powerful, the monopolies, and those with nothing to lose - except they're cut.



Grape Guy's Picks of the Bunch: *Pinot Noir to give thanks for*

Kacaba 2006 Wismer Vineyard Pinot Noir - \$18.95 (W)

www.kacaba.com

2006 was a good year for Pinot, provided you took it off the vines before the rains came, or you were just very careful with your vineyard management. Looking at the Kacaba notes, I would have to go with the proper vineyard management assessment, because they took the fruit off at the beginning of October and the rains started in early September. They treated the fruit and resulting wine very well, giving it a 12-month home in half new French oak (the rest was used oak, but also all French). All this culminated in a wine with such wonderful presence and mouthfeel. The nose is particularly alluring with red fruit, namely strawberry and raspberry, along with herbs and spices.

The palate is first and foremost earthy and tannic, which makes me feel that this one has good aging potential over the next 5-7 years. But underneath the tannins and earth lies cinnamon spiciness along with a nice touch of anise on a dry finish. You could enjoy this wine for this Thanksgiving, but might I suggest buying now and lying it down for Thanksgiving 2009 or 10 for even greater rewards.

Stoney Ridge 2006 Reserve Pinot Noir - \$17.15 (W, L, WTH)
www.stoneyridge.com

Fall is the perfect time for Pinot Noir. Thanksgiving is just around the corner and you'll be looking for that perfect match for your bird. But instead of having a bird looking for that perfect wine and wondering what kind of mortgage payment you'll need to keep the snobby relatives happy, let me point you in the direction of this Reserve Pinot from Stoney Ridge, which is an absolute steal for the price. What's more, it's easy to open because it's under screwcap, making it a double value (you can bring it to Aunt Ginny the teetotaler and still enjoy it). 100% single vineyard Pinot Noir aged 9 months in French, American and Hungarian oak (we'll forgive Stoney Ridge the U.S. content, which would have French winemakers rolling over in their vineyards). The wine has a very light colouration, which leans towards the red spectrum, slightly darker than rosé. A complex nose of cranberry, red currant, strawberry, anise, herbs and spice with just a touch of an earthy/dirty note. The taste is just as complex and elegant with cinnamon, cranberry, a touch of sweet vanilla thru the mid-palate along with a steady seam of sour cherry. Red berries and a slightly dusty yet smooth long lingering finish seals the deal. Perfect to pair with your turkey or ham ... Happy Thanksgiving.

Some other red wines that are bird and fall friendly ...

[Hillebrand Artist Series 2007 Meritage](#) (W, WTH) – [Reif Estate 2007 Shiraz](#) (W, WTH)
[Stoney Ridge 2006 Merlot](#) (W, WTH) – [Wagner's Log House Red](#) (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 30, 2008 – Calamus 2007 Gewurztraminer ([read](#)) ([listen](#))
October 7, 2008 – D'Angelo 2006 Iced Foch ([read](#)) ([listen](#))

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

[The Torley Dinner](#)
[The French Wine Study](#)
[Vinexx Tasting](#)
[Niagara Wine Festival Passport Program](#)
[Charton Hobbs / Authentic Wine and Spirits Tasting](#)
[The Sonoma Wine Affair](#)

[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
Nothing this week – but keep checking back

[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
Nothing this week – but keep checking back

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

When it's not an Ontario wine, here's what I'm pulling out of the cellar
[3 new wines added](#)

Vintages Release: [Ontario "Vintages" Releases: Saturday October 11, 2008 Vintages Release](#)

Ontario Wines of Note at Vintages for October 11, 2008:

[Fielding Estate 2007 Unoaked Chardonnay](#)
[Henry of Pelham 2007 Cabernet Franc Icewine](#)
[Henry of Pelham 2007 Cabernet Sauvignon Rosé](#)
[Reif Estates 2005 Vidal Icewine](#)
[Vineland Estates 2005 Elevation Cabernet-Merlot](#)



In the (pseudo)-Cellar: with Dave Johnson and Louise Engel (Featherstone)

Sometimes, if you can't get to the cellar, the next best thing is to have the cellar come to you. In a conversation this passed spring with an excited Louise Engel, co-owner (with Dave Johnson) of Featherstone Winery, she told me about their 2007 reds. I in turn said, "I hope when they are ready I get a chance to try them". Louise took what I said to heart and so in the late summer I received a package on my doorstep of soon-to-be-bottled barrel samples of their 2007 Gamay, Merlot and Cabernet Franc.

As all Ontario wine fans should know by now, or at least should be aware of, 2007 was one of those once in a lifetime vintages – everything feel right into place at the right time. At times I have heard it described as "the best Vintage ever [in Ontario]".

Now having tried these three reds from Featherstone I am once again prepared to agree with the assessment of the 2007 vintage that I made when visiting [Coyote's Run](#) and [Huff Estates](#) – 2007 is indeed a banner vintage, especially for reds.

The Gamay I tasted was unique and yet very Gamay-like. Lots of in your face raspberries and red fruit with hints of sweet byng-cherries on the nose. The taste can best be described as ripe and vibrant with black licorice, a touch of earth and something else, something familiar ... Triaminic (a kids cough syrup I grew up on – with great tastes kids loved): it had a slightly candied cherry taste that was rich and flavourful – very appealing to an under-the-weather kid. I also loved the bright red colour of this wine (which also matched Triaminic's colour). This wine is destined for good things and it's mighty tasty. Far from being something for kids though, it is recommended strictly for adults, even those who are not Gamay fans; watch out, if you drink this you just might become one.

The Merlot needed more age – a touch closed off both on the palate and schnozz, but black raspberry with a touch of spice was apparent upon further sniffs and the oaky-vanilla taste was quite becoming. I'm looking forward to the final bottled version when it is relocated to its new bottle-home and has had time to settle for a few months ... this should be a dandy.

The Cabernet Franc is a completely different beast – it has so much personality right now it'll be hard to keep it on the shelf once it is released in September or October. The nose has a pleasing yet accosting cherry tobacco aroma that really sets the stage for what's to come. Sweet cherries, vanilla, plenty of red fruits/berries and silky smooth tannins that wrap up all that sweet fruit in layers of oh-so yummy goodness ... but maybe I'm letting this description get away from me. (Deep breath and continue.) There's lots of presence in the mouth, it makes your tastebuds stand up and take notice before it slides down your throat leaving behind the most awesome long finish. This one's the real winner of the three wines tasted and priced exceptionally well (\$18.95) for what you're getting - a multiple purchase is definitely in order. Lie some down for 7+ years, but don't forget to drink a few now and again throughout your 7 year waiting period – the evolution of this wine will be fun to chart, so take a few notes along the way.



Wine Event Spotlight: *Gourmet Food and Wine Expo - Toronto*

I can't believe that another year has come and gone. When I was going to school I counted the passing years in Labour Day holidays; these days Labour Day is just another day off from work and an excuse to drink. Today I find myself counting years by wine events, as they come around again; and it's time once again for the **Toronto Gourmet Food & Wine Expo**, which takes place at the Metro Toronto Convention Centre (in downtown Toronto) November 20 – 23. This year France takes center stage, and from the scuttlebutt I'm hearing they are planning something big. So if you have been putting off coming to the Gourmet, this just might be the year to go. To learn more about what is happening at this year's Expo, and/or get tickets, visit www.foodandwineexpo.ca.

Ticket Giveaway ... Speaking of tickets I have quite a few to give away this time out – I do not have exact numbers at this time but it seems that I have more than 5 pair but less than 50. So, for your chance to win one of the pairs I have, please send me, in an email, your name, address (with postal code), phone number and the answer to the skill testing question below ... also put "I want to EXPOs Myself ... to Food and Wine" in the subject line. Good luck.

Skill Testing Question: Who is taking center stage at this year's Expo?

Send emails to: michael@ontariowinereview.com - entry deadline October 20, 2008

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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