

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 – 98
December 18, 2008

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News ... *Ratings, Advertising, Pinot Noir and Publishing Change*

New Rating System ... you have overwhelmingly voted and I have listened. As of Sunday December 14th, the vote was 80% in favour of a ratings system. Currently, there is a voting system on the website, but as for my reviews having stars or points, I've attempted to shy away from one or the other ([see Newsletter #86](#)). In the next newsletter, January 8, 2009, the new rating system will take effect. I will be using a five-star rating system, which allows for a range instead of a hard and fast number system. Wine after all, is based on mood, company and place, giving something a 96 or 88 seems to me to be too finite. More about this in the January newsletter.

Advertising ... also starting in 2009, there will be space available for advertising. Another website poll showed me that a majority of you favour advertising as long as it doesn't affect editorial content - that means if the LCBO wants to advertise with me, I'll still get to take shots at them.

Pinot Noir Challenge Details ... last week the details of the Pinot Noir Challenge were finalized (more details are still to be released in the coming weeks). The wines are beginning to arrive at my office and we continue to make plans for the best Challenge ever. Tickets are available [on the web](#), by phone (416-385-9400 or 416-597-0222, ext. 3) or [by cheque](#).

Publishing Note ... OntarioWineReview's next scheduled publishing date is January 1, 2009, but due to the holiday it will be pushed back one week to January 8, 2009. Have a safe and happy holiday ... Cheers.



OntarioWineReview: *End of the Year Mini-Rants*

Throughout the year, I get thousands of e-mails sent or forwarded to me regarding some issue or another. Some make their way into an article, see Confessions of an Importer ([newsletter #93](#)) or any of my Quick Sips columns. But there are others that, while they spark my interest, they never seem to make it as a full-fledged article, or into a column. That's why in this end of the year issue, I would like to do a little ranting on a variety of seemingly disjointed topics – you might find me repeating myself because these little bits were written on different occasions. Of course, these are not all the issues that stuck in my craw this year, however, I have limited room and you have limited time, and truthfully, in the end, I ask more questions than give answers.

The 1% Killer ...

I still get e-mails about the one-percent rule, which continues to be one of the biggest sticking points for the Canadian wine buying public. I'm not sure how many times I'll have to go through this but here goes again: the 99-1 rule was a one shot deal for the 2005 vintage and affected only "Cellared in Canada" wine. The issue of confusion really hit home when a fellow wine writer asked me if it was still practiced ... for God's sake, if my esteemed colleague, who should be informed on this matter, is confused how do we expect the wine buying public to get it straight? This crazy policy was never clearly explained, it was announced and then died as a

news topic – sure it was a farcical policy, but then nobody did any follow up for the public. I say again: it was never fully explained that the 99-1 rule only applied to “Cellared in Canada” wines (those that have always used a blend of foreign and domestic grapes) for that single vintage (2005) and this ruling had no effect on VQA wines -which are always 100% Ontario product, period the end. The easiest way to solve this problem would be to get rid of the Cellared wines altogether; however, as it was explained to me during a breakfast meeting with one of our larger wineries (when I got into big trouble during the Olympic wine scandal - [see newsletter #82](#)) - this will never happen: too much money is involved and deep pockets create the law – but then again am I telling you something you don't already know?

Dropping Fruit ...

I am of two minds on this issue and that won't make me any friends in either camp. I believe our grape problem this year was due to a combination of over-cropping and blending rules. My first thought turns to the over-cropping issue. With the great summer and autumn of 2007 behind us (which gave us smaller berries with very concentrated flavours), many growers thought they could beat the lower tonnage issue of the previous year by keeping extra bunches of grapes on their vines – this decision is made early (as in the winter before the growing season) when you are thinning and training shoots. Then, throughout the season, you green harvest (ie: drop fruit to the ground) to thin out the bunches and concentrate the vines' fruit-making energy on the remaining hanging fruit. Those growers that kept "a little more" (or in some cases a lot more) on the vine got caught with excess fruit, which in the end, ended up on the ground anyway. Though my issue here is not with the growers, but instead with our big wineries, who are allowed to blend wine and make “Cellared in Canada” crap. I've heard whispers in the wind, and was once promised a copy of a now infamous piece of legislation that stated all cellared / blended wine would cease by the year 2000 when Ontario should, and by all projections would, become self-sufficient in grape production. Well, it seems that with us dumping so much fruit on the ground this year we have reached that point – so should we now (or once again) look at curtailing or banning this practice that cheapens our wine on the world stage? When it seems derigeur to say “Not in my backyard” when the topic of garbage is brought up, should we also not use the same catch phrase for these wines? Am I drawing a parallel between the two issues? I guess that is for you to decide. I find this confusion between what is Ontario and what is “not-really Ontario” in a large part can be blamed on the LCBO, where the VQA symbol is often completely ignored.

Don't Get Me Started ...

Yes the LCBO, whose middle name is “control”; and where VQA means nothing. I say this because they can't seem to organize their shelves between “Cellared in” and genuine “VQA” wines. The last time I brought this up, it prompted one of my readers to ask: “when did the “O” in LCBO change from “Ontario” to “only”?” I've been into many stores within the liquor monopoly where the VQA wines (those made from 100% Ontario grapes) are intermingling and fraternizing with the Cellared garbage. Sure we outlawed segregation, but here's an instance where that policy might actually be effective. I say separate these wines out entirely ... real Ontario wines on one side of the store, cellared stuff goes all the way to the back corner ... make it a walk of shame to be buying this stuff. Don't make it so accessible at the front of the store, with large displays and bright signage: there's no pride in this wine, it's all about making cheap plonk. If you will allow me to come right out and say it: these are the bastard children of the Ontario wine industry, and they should be cast out of the system, not be allowed to carry the word Canada anywhere on the label – and there should be truth on the label stating the grapes' country of origin and percentage. Our grape growers struggle while our big wineries flourish by putting money into foreign countries, money that would best be spent here at home making quality VQA products.

365 Days a Year, Not 27 ...

In September of this year, the LCBO put out a press release about their push for Ontario product called “Go Local” - a push that saw the Board highlight Ontario VQA wines. It ran from September 14 to October 11 – and the release read: “almost 150 products from 38 Ontario wineries will be highlighted with prominent displays and supporting print, radio and TV advertising.” That's great, but why isn't the LCBO promoting Ontario wine all the time, after all the big “O” at the end stands for Ontario, not “Only”.

Speaking of Ontario ...

From the “Are You Sh*tting Me” department comes this beauty ... a visitor to Ontario Place this summer discovered that Ontario Place did not sell a single bottle, glass, or tetra-pak of Ontario wine in their restaurant (there is only one that serves alcohol). A subsequent letter to Ontario Place's manager elicited the promise that “the restaurant will be selling an Ontario wine starting tomorrow.” With a name like Ontario Place should they not have thought of this on their own?

Up Up and Away ...

And speaking of names that should be self explanatory, why in the world does Air Canada not have Canadian wine onboard their flights? They have two coasts to choose from and they still serve foreign wine. I think that Air France would be horrified if Gallo was being poured on their flights, and when I traveled to Italy in

September ([see Piedmont article](#)); Air Italia, even though it was rumoured to be going broke, still served authentic Italian wine – though I am sure some promotional consideration money from Constellation Brands to serve something from Australia would have been welcome. Is Air Canada so global and so polite that they don't want to offend anybody and yet are ready to offend their own country? Or are the big wigs upstairs too stupid to realize that they have a world class wine industry in the country they serve?

Registered Trademark ...

And talk about being so tightly wound and inflexible, did you know the word "Ontario" is registered by the VQA? Did you know that if you are not part of the VQA you cannot put the word 'Ontario' on the label of your bottle of wine? That applies to all fruit wineries and wineries not part of a Designated Viticultural Area. You would think that with the movement towards being a Locavore or the 100-mile-diet that you would want to put the word Ontario on your label? (and trust me wineries do – but the VQA refuses to loosen its grip). Shop local, shop proud and all that, and yet some local wineries are forbidden to put their place of origin on the label. I guess the keyword in all of this is "think" – of which we are sorely in short supply in the upper-echelon of government and governing in this province, particularly when it comes to the wine industry. It would seem that what we really scars us here in North America are nipples and booze, all that terrorists would really have to do to get our government's ire up is to drop flyers of a naked Pamela Anderson on our cities and we'd storm Damacus the same day. I make light of this but in true it seems nobody wants to do anything to fix our wacky wine industry and maybe to curb and control it.

July 2005 Goes Ignored ...

Speaking of wanting to fix things ... I stumbled across a website this year called 'EndtheLCBO.com'. They posted excerpts from a 2005 study done for the Ontario government by an independent third party. The report was called "Strategy for Transforming Ontario's Beverage Alcohol System". In it, they called for the privatization of the LCBO (you can visit either www.endthelcbo.com or Google the above report by name to read it for yourself); but one line did strike me as very valid and really sums up the entire report: "After 78 years, action is long overdue. It is time to transform Ontario's beverage alcohol system." The LCBO is you and me, they represent Ontario all over the alcohol making world - and they are feared by many, and abhorred by many more.

I close with this story. A friend of mine, and his wife, went to New Zealand. They walked into a winery and tasted wines alongside dozens of fellow patrons. As it turned out, the patrons were from all over the world and were asking about delivery to their respective countries. Yes we deliver there was the man's pat answer until my friends piped up with, "what about Ontario?" "No way," he answered flatly and without pause, "too much hassle, too much red tape, not worth it." Their middle name is control ladies and gentlemen and they rule with an iron fist. We're seeing it in the U.S., now maybe it's time for Ontario, in 2009, to promote the idea that change is gonna come ... it sure would be nice.



Grape Guy's Picks of the Bunch: *Riesling from PEC and Franc from the Cave*
See winery's individual website for details

Norman Hardie 2007 Riesling - \$21.00 (W)
www.normanhardie.com

Back in 2005, Norm made one of the most spectacular Rieslings. It turned out that Norm had made some great contacts with growers on the Beamsville Bench and when he started his own winery, he made a point of using Beamsville fruit, which he described as the best for making Riesling. In 2006, magic didn't strike twice, as Norm's Riesling never saw the light of day, too many factors ended up spoiling the broth, so to speak. I would say with his 2007 edition, Norm is back with a vengeance and what he describes as "my house style of Riesling, very Germanic". This Riesling is fermented near dry and rests 9-months on its lees so that it develops depth of character; and what character it does have. For a young Riesling, it is loaded with petrol or diesel notes on the nose, with peach and apple as the backing fruit, and tons and tons of mineral. In the mouth, there's lime and peach along a big minerality and those petrol notes. To put it into a simple sentence, this one is crisp, clean with good acidity and a long, long, long apple finish. Welcome back Norman.

Cave Spring Cellars 2006 Estate Cabernet Franc - \$24.95 (W)
www.cavespringcellars.com

On paper, the 2006 growing season seems like a bust, there was nothing spectacular or remarkable about it, considering that it sits right smack dab in-between two very good vintages. But '06 is one of those vintages that separated the men from the boys (if you'll forgive my sexist analogy) – good winemakers rose to the top while those of mediocre talent treaded water in hopes of a better vintage next year (which they got). Winemaker

Angelo Pavan has been the head winemaker at Cave Spring for ... well since the beginning actually in 1986 (you do the math); so he has seen everything Ontario can throw at him. He knows how to make good wine from what Mother Nature offers. With this 2006 Cabernet Franc, he solidifies his reputation with a very coifable red that will still benefit from a few years in the cellar. The nose is cherry, tobacco, cinnamon and vanilla – something I would say has sniff-all-day-edness to it. The palate manages to deliver on the promise of the nose, with good fruit like black cherry and blackberries along with vanilla and the merest hint of wood. Tannins are silky through the mouth, yet dusty on the finish. My notes say, "better than expected" – I was judging the vintage there, not the winemaker.

Availability legend: W (Winery) – L (LCBO/Vintages) – WTH (Winery to Home).



Weekly Wine Notes and More: *Stonechurch comes back, 13th Street does the usual 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:

December 9, 2008 – [Stonechurch 2007 Merlot](#) ([read](#)) ([listen](#))

December 16, 2008 - [13th Street 2006 Sandstone Gamay](#) ([read](#)) ([listen](#))

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

[Wrapped up in the Valley](#)

[Gourmet Food and Wine Expo](#)

[Lailey Vineyard Pre-Launch / Futures Tasting](#)

[Cynthia's Selections / Ex-Cellars Tasting](#)

[Annual Italian Tasting at Roy Thomson Hall](#)

[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

[Southbrook 1992 Riesling Dry](#)

[Inniskillin 1999 Riesling Icewine](#)

[Southbrook 1998 Lailey Vineyard Merlot](#)

[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

[EastDell 2004 Pinot Noir Reserve](#)

[Peninsula Ridge 2002 Merlot](#)

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

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

[There is always something new here](#)

Vintages Release: [Next Vintage Release is January 10, 2009 – coming soon to the website.](#)



Rasie Your Spirits: *A Holiday and New Year's Selection of Bubbliies and Sweeties*

Bubbliies and Sweeties for the Holiday Season

Sure I've been saying it for weeks now, and I'm sure if you ventured out of your house over the past two months, you've noticed it yourself - the holidays are coming. It's the time to sit back and celebrate with friends. It's also at this time of year, thoughts turn from still wines to bubbles, and from the usual dessert fair to Ports ... which also help to take the chill out of those freezing cold nights. A few weeks back, I joined a number of my fellow wine writers in a tasting of sparkling wines, including Champagnes, and a number of sweeties, from late harvests and Icewines to Sherrys and Ports. Below you'll find my holiday list of bubbliies and sweeties that'll make this holiday season an awful lot happier, even if you are having your in-laws over.

Bubbliies ... in no particular order:

Sparkling wine comes in all shapes and sizes, I remember a few years back when Coppola put it in a can

(complete with straw) - but this year, I am happy to report I have not seen anything that gimmicky. If you're looking for bubbles this season here are some of my suggestions:

Bottega Petalo Moscato "Il Vino dell'Amore" (\$13.95 - #588780) - sweet and sexy.
[Colio Lily Pinot Noir 2007](#) (\$16.25 - winery) – strawberry-raspberry and citrus on the finish .
Giovello Prosecco (\$14.95 - #85316) - fruity, lively and slightly sweet.
[Henry of Pelham Cuvee Catharine Brut](#) (\$29.95 - #616441) – always a good choice.
[Chateau des Charmes Brut](#) (\$22.95 - #207944) - another fine Ontario bubbly.
[Chateau des Charmes Sparkling Rosé](#) (\$28.95 - winery only – Vintages Feb. 2009) -something very special.
Henkell Trocken Fine Sekt (\$13.65 - #122689) - toasty, appley, gentle on the palate.
Jacquart Brut Mosaigue (\$45.95 - #664672) - tart finish, quite tasty.
[Konzelmann Old Cellar Door](#) (\$30.00 - winery only) - mac apple, smooth yet toasty.
G.H. Mumm Cordon Rouge (\$59.95 - #308056) – apple, citrus, buttered toast mmm mmm good.
[Peller Ice Cuvee](#) (\$29.95 - #53199) - kissed with Icewine as the dosage.
[Peller Ice Cuvee Rosé](#) (Vintages April 2009 - #113035) - kissed by both Icewine and Cabernet Franc, truly unique.
Yellow Tail Bubbles (\$13.85 - #50625) - surprisingly good with citrus and peach notes.

Bridging the gap between fizzy and sweet comes the following ideas:

Fresita (\$14.50 - #56697) mix of strawberry and sparkling - awesome.
Bosca Peach Sparkletini (\$7.95 - #88849) - loaded with peachy goodness.
[Inniskillin 2006 Sparkling Vidal](#) (\$69.95 - #86884) – Icewine that tickles the tongue.
[Pillitteri 2004 Sparkling Vidal](#) (\$60.00 - winery) - honeyed, dried peach and fizzy.

Sweeties ... magically delicious treats from Ontario and Portugal:

Warre's Otima 10 (\$22.95/500ml - #566174) - almonds and cherries dominate.
Ferreira Dona Antonia Reserve (\$18.80 - #157586) - red berries, chocolate and cinnamons.
Fonseca Late Bottled Vintage 2003 (\$22.95 - #87551) - cherries and spice with good acidity.
[Stoney Ridge Forte](#) (\$15.05 - winery only) - Cabernet Franc/Baco blend with surprising results.
Graham's 20-Year-Old Tawny (\$36.95 - #62641) - so lovely, you gotta like 'em old.
Graham's 10-Year-Old Tawny (\$27.95 - #206508) - cherry liqueur, big acidity.
Taylor Fladgate LBV 2003 (\$17.95 - #46946) - rich chocolate and plums.
Taylor Fladgate 10-Year-Old Tawny (\$34.95 - #121749) - sweet red cherries.
Taylor Fladgate 20-Year-Old Tawny (\$68.95 - #149047) - stunning finish.

Finally, for those chomping at the bit for things that will be available come the new year at Vintages, there are two outstanding values in LBV Port coming:
January 10 – Croft LBV 2003 (\$18.95) and January 17 – Cockburn LBV 2003 (\$16.95).

As for me, I'll be ushering in the new year in Michigan with a bottle of Ontario bubbly tucked firmly under my arm: A bottle of [Chateau des Charmes Sparkling Rosé](#) (coming to Vintages in February 2009) will be my Happy New Year wine of choice. This wine has been released in very limited supply at the winery and is well worth the \$28.95 price tag. Happy holidays to all – and if I may slip a revolutionary idea your way ... "Drink more Ontario wine in '09".



Wine Event Spotlight: *London Brings Back the Show (and the Grape Guy)*

It's time once again for the London (Ontario) Wine and Food Show. I have attended, and spoken at this event for the past 3 years and it quite possibly could be the most civilized show in Ontario – bar none; a place where the crossroads of Niagara and the Lake Erie North Shore meet. You'll see and taste wines and foods from international vintners, agents and Ontario based grape and fruit wineries along with great local foods and unique vendors. Every year I am surprised by who I see and the foods and wines I taste. And once again I'll be giving an interactive seminar on Saturday afternoon (January 17) at 3:30 entitled "Affordable and Available". Mark your calendar for January 16-18 and plan to make a weekend of it. To see all the details, [click here](#).

Ticket Giveaway ... I have a chance for you to win a couple of tickets to the London show. Just send me an email with your name, address (with postal code) and phone number to michael@ontariowinereview.com ... I will also want you to answer this skill testing question: What grape is OntarioWineReview Challenging in

February? Contest entries must be received by January 4, 2009. 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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