

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 – 103
March 5, 2009

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News ... Two Burning Questions

What's going on at Stoney Ridge? According to an inside source, Stoney Ridge is not going broke or being sold, "Not as far as I know," my source tells me. "We're in the process of turning things around, our reputation has taken a hit over the past few years, and this was a long time coming." It started a few weeks ago at the very top with the ousting of Mark Bonham (President / CEO) who was replaced by former owner and winemaker Jim Warren. A week or so later, more bad news came to Stoney Ridge's door, when the LCBO unceremoniously delisted all their products. The rumour mill began to work overtime: was this the beginning of the end – not according to my source: "Our quality has suffered in the past few years. And those flower labels were not the best thing for the winery ... I understand we're the "garden winery" but really, you try to sell those to a restaurant." But Stoney Ridge's current hardship is a boon for customers. Warren's first action upon taking the reigns was to put all the back catalogue and library wines on sale (I guess there's no use for a library of wines if there's no winery to house them in). Old Chardonnays were selling for as little as \$10.00, Sparkling wine (originally \$30) for \$18.95, and more recent vintages are also available for quick sale (a 2005 Wismer Vineyard Reserve Cabernet Franc, \$14.95 – originally \$34.95). All these wines and more are reduced to fire-sale prices (visit the website or winery store to see all the deals). "We're gonna come back better and stronger, but it's gonna take some time. This is not a quick fix, it's gonna be six months or more." Here's wishing all the best to Stoney Ridge. A couple of the wines on sale (and recently tasted): [2005 Wismer Vineyard Cabernet Franc Reserve](#) & [2005 Proprietor's Reserve Brut](#)

What's happening at Thomas & Vaughn? My source at Stoney Ridge called the winery "the whipping boy of the industry ... unless you count Thomas & Vaughn." Now the recent story of Thomas and Vaughn is a long complicated one full of missteps, misjudging and missed opportunity.. Suffice to say that the new owner had no idea about being in the wine business here in Ontario. He screwed over many growers and coopers, delayed payments, ordered too much Icewine, and (gasp) pulled out the almost twenty year old Cabernet Franc vines from the estate vineyard claiming that nobody knows or buys that stuff. I met the now former owner once, at the Ontario Wine Awards, and it was my impression that he seemed as arrogant as he was clueless about the wine industry. My brief discussion about his pricing policy fell on deaf ears. There are rumours flying around about wine being secreted out of the cellars just days before the bank came and shuttered the doors - but sources close to this reporter suggest that the '07s are safe and will appear under a different label come the late spring (legitimately – part of a partner buyout). The '08s will be a different story. Some believe this is the end of the road for the illustrious Thomas & Vaughan; others wonder if financing can be secured so that the winery can resume regular operations. In either case, things look grim at T&V. In case this is the end, I took a moment to remember the past of this once great winery: [2001 Cabernet Sauvignon](#) & [2002 Cabernet Franc](#)



OntarioWineReview: I Hope She was Kidding

Last year somebody sent me a copy of the St. Catharines Standard. In it was an article by Monique Beech

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about "kid friendly wineries" - you heard me right, kid friendly wineries.
(A wine tasting without the whining - Sept. 5, 2008)

I tried to keep my mind open as my eyes scanned the article - it promoted the idea of bringing your kids with you on a winery tour ... promoting those wineries that feature 'kids stuff' like crayons, changing tables, fruit juices, etc. but really, is a winery the wisest place to bring kids? Seriously?

Now before I get off on some kind of rant here, let me first say that I have nothing against kids. They're fun at Marineland, Canada's Wonderland, and Ontario Place; at petting zoos, cavorting with puppies, kittens and other pets and at the grocery store, especially the grocery store. Yup, I love seeing them whining, throwing tantrums, and generally behaving like kids, my favourite is when they're putting unwanted stuff into their parents' cart, then we all must here the levels of discipline doled out from the asked to behave to the full-on stern reprimand. Heck, sometimes I find it fun to encourage a misbehaving child to put more things into a shopping cart. But a winery. Really. Folks, there has to be a better place. Honestly. A winery might sound like a perfect place to bond with your child and teach them new things but I just don't see it. This is not like some specialty grocery store, it truly is one of the last bastions of adulthood, and should we not keep it that way?

You think I'm being too harsh, I sense it through the computer screen and it radiates through the paper, I'm painting all kids with too broad a brush. Okay, maybe I am, but I want you to think about it for a second: Is a winery a place to bring your children? Would your parents have brought you to one?

It turns out some enterprising moms set out to find those wineries that were "kid friendly" - and what'dya know, they created the Baby-Friendly Wine Route ... Oh happy day, that's just what we need, now, not only will you find the occasional drunken winemaker or wine imbibers on the streets of Niagara, but there's now the potential that the "Baby On Board" sign in the Dodge Caravan in front of you just might contain a drunken mom and/or pop negotiating the roads with junior strapped into the car seat.

This article sited a source at Thirty Bench who commented that families in Europe include wine as part of their daily meal. That's great when meals are served in the privacy of your own home. There, you can teach your 3-year old about what's in the glass or let your six-year-old try the shinny yellow liquid, but what exactly are you teaching little Johnny or Beth-Ann when you take him or her to a winery?

I am not the only one who has these opinions, a few readers sent me their thoughts via email on this topic, allow me to share some favourite comments:

"There have to be a few places left where we adults, who don't have kids, can go without kids running around all over the place."

"There are lots of other activities [parents] can do together as a family unit."

And my favourite one of all: "If parents want to do the wine route there's a great invention that's been around for hundreds of years - it's called a babysitter."

One irate reader told me about a visit to Malivoire they had endured the Saturday after the Beech article was published: "there were kids running around all over the place, climbing on rocks and generally being a nuisance, not just to the parents but to other patrons as well."

Again, let me state, I have nothing against children, and I believe in teaching the next generations of wine drinkers/buyers about this fantastic invention. I'm all for getting them early, before the beer bandits do anyway; but strollers, carriages and walkers have not place in a winery. On a personal note allow me to talk about my niece, Erin. At present she is three years old and I have very little in common with her so I am really looking forward to relating to her on a vinuous level (until then I'll keep giving little Erin those little penguins and clip on koalas I get at Australian trade shows). I have often teased my sister-in-law, during gift giving holidays and birthdays, about what bottle of wine I should buy for Erin; or when it comes time for her to date I'll help pick out the good boys from the bad boys by the kind of wine they bring over for dinner. I'm also glad that she was born in 2005 because it has allowed me to come up with a nickname for her (Short Crop) so I can never forget her age; and with any luck some of the wines made that year will still be drinking well come her 18th birthday. These are but a few examples to show you that there are plenty of reasons to love children and wine and bring them together - but would I even for a second think about taking her on a road trip to Niagara, The County or Lake Erie - not a chance; not for another 12-years, at least.

Might I offer up a suggestion without sounding elitist or pompous and just say leave the kids at home, teach them about wine there. I'm not wishing us back to the puritanical days (Lord knows we haven't really left them

here in Ontario, or Canada for that matter), nor am I advocating the snobbery of wine. What I am saying is that there's a time and place for everything - including wine - and a winery is neither the place for little Johnny to be, nor the time for Beth-Ann to be running around. Maybe if wineries had signs stating, "you break it you bought it" people would think twice about bringing their offspring. Think of others. At home, wine can be enjoyed by all; but the wineries themselves are to be enjoyed by adults, the key word here is "adults". And really grandma and grandpa would love to spend the afternoon or weekend with the kids – I know because my mother relishes those times.



Grape Guy's Picks of the Bunch: *Something New and Something in Pre-release*

Hillebrand 2007 Trius Red - \$21.95 (W, L)
www.hillebrand.com

For many people the Hillebrand Trius Red has been the pinnacle of red wines in Ontario. The first of this blend was made by J.L. Groux, a master of the blend, who moved his assemblage skills just down the road from his former employer. After J.L. left, Hillebrand offered the winemaker's gig to a guy whose previous work experience included wineries in New Zealand, Australia, and a couple here in Ontario. He was just about to pack up the family and head back home when Hillebrand knocked on his door ... he decided to stay and good thing for all of us he did. Darryl Brooker's time at Hillebrand has brought a renaissance to that winery. Instead of boring you with the history, let's get right down to Darryl's newest creation of this J.L. favourite. The 2007 vintage has been termed by Darryl as "the best vintage I've ever seen". From it he has created a Trius Red that truly should stand the test of time. A blend of Cabernet Franc (44%), Cabernet Sauvignon (32%) and Merlot (24%), this one really shows the brilliance of the 2007 fruit enhanced by good wine making practices. A nose loaded with black cherry, cinnamon, spice, vanilla, raspberry and plenty more. Some might call this wine too tight or too young - and while there is some truth to that, it still exhibits plenty of aromas; it's on the palate that this wine is not quite ready to express itself. There's blackberries, red berries, spice, licorice and a touch of mocha/coffee that resides on the tongue at this time, with more to come. You'll also notice the stunning color, which is what first drew my attention to this wine back in the fall. Fruit forward, fresh and lively - all terms you could use right now and it's only going to get better. For the past ten years this wine has been a bargain in \$19.95 ... this year we'll see it's first increase, a measly two bucks, which might seem a tough swallow in these times, but the wine certainly isn't; even at \$21.95, this wine is a bargain and you'll feel you stole this one from them when you're drinking it in 2019. Price: \$21.95 – Rating: *****

Darryl Brooker won the Tony Aspler Cuvee Award of Excellence at the 2009 Cuvee awards ... his decision to stay has been a boon for the industry, as Tony said during his presentation of the award, "Darryl raised the bar of quality for Ontario wines by bringing his extensive experience of winemaking in Australia and New Zealand to Canada and sharing it magnanimously with his peers." Congratulations to Darryl.

Rosewood Estates 2007 Chardonnay Reserve - \$25.00 (till June) -\$30.00 afterward (W)
www.rosewoodwine.com

Some people will take one look at the word 'Chardonnay' above and say "bah, Chardonnay!" and move on ... but hopefully you haven't done that yet, because I'm about to shine a light on this wonderful Chard from Rosewood. The smell is so subtle that it does not even scratch the surface as to what is about to materialize in the mouth. It starts with a simple sniff to reveal just a light dusting of butter and vanilla scents, pleasant and not over-powering. But it's with each sip that this wine truly expresses itself. In a small glass you get the usual, butter, vanilla, butterscotch, along with some Mac apple fruit – but if you let it open up in a big glass, the fruit truly becomes larger than life filling the mouth with pineapple and delicious apple; it's in this kind of glass where the butter, vanilla and butterscotch play a backup role. I was very impressed with the layers of this wine and the finesse it exhibited. Currently in pre-release, which means it's bottled but not labeled, you can buy it now for \$25.00, but you can't take it with you. Come June it goes to its regular price of \$30.00 a bottle – obviously the bargain is to buy it now and make delivery arrangements. Although perfect for summer and fall, might I suggest picking up a few bottles, because with a little patience you'll be enjoying this one well in to the next decade and reaping plenty of delicious rewards. (2015+). Price: \$30.00 – Rating: ****½

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

Weekly Wine Notes and More: *Stewn, Cattail, Reif and plenty more to keep you busy*



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:

February 24, 2009 – Lailey Vineyard 2007 Syrah ([read](#)) ([listen](#))
March 3, 2009 – Magnotta 2007 Vidal Classic Sparkling ([read](#)) ([listen](#))

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

[Cuvee Preview Tasting](#)
[Bokke Inc. Tasting](#)
[Lifford's Blogger Tasting](#)
[Castagna Tasting](#)

[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

[Fielding 2004 Cabernet Franc](#)
[Southbrook 1998 Lailey Vineyard Cabernet Franc](#)
[Thomas & Vaughan 2001 Cabernet Sauvignon](#)

[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

[Stoney Ridge 2005 Cabernet Franc Reserve Wismer Vineyard](#)

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

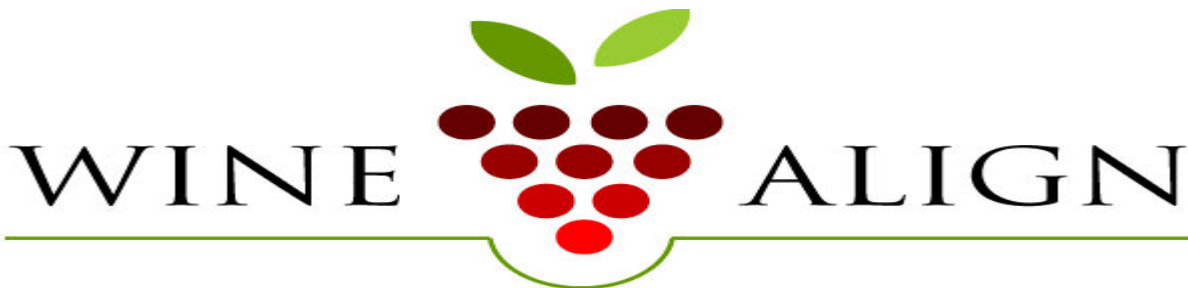
When it's not an Ontario wine, here's what I'm pulling out of the cellar

[6 New reviews Added](#)

Vintages Releases:

[Ontario "Vintages" Releases: Saturday March 17, 2009 – coming soon](#)

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In the Cellar ... with Derek of Lailey Vineyard

On a warm February day I ventured over to Lailey Vineyard in Niagara-on-the-Lake to check on some of the percolating '08s and got to taste a few surprises along the way.

Winemaker, Derek Barnett, (joined by marketing director Ed), took the walk to the side of the winery building and down the concrete cellar steps, which, just a few days earlier, were covered with snow. Today, with 5° on the thermometer (and rising), the snow melting and nothing more than a few white islands dotting the

landscape, we spent some time in the Lailey cellar tasting and marveling at what is here and what is to come.

"2008 isn't as bad as people believe," Derek informs me, "I for one am not singing the blues. I have great color, concentration and the wines are coming along as I want them to." Granted we are a mere three months passed the last picking day, but still a winemaker knows. He puts his thief (a long tube that "steals" wine from the barrel) into a two-year-old French oak barrel and withdraws something opaque and yellowish in color. I smell bananas and citrus, the taste continues citrus on the mid palate before pineapple takes over right thru to the finish ... lovely. This is the 2008 Sauvignon Blanc (set for release summer/fall 2009). Another thieving takes place and this time it's the 2008 Niagara River Chardonnay made from a combination of 22-year old and 7-year old vines. The taste is buttery with hints of melon and slightly under-ripe tree fruits. The 2008 Canadian Oak Chardonnay tells a different story; this one is loaded with tropical sweetness on the nose, vanillas, coconut and a buttery sensation on the palate ... both Chardonnays have wonderful acidity and announce their presence in the mouth without being overbearing.

It's not surprising that '08 was good to Chardonnay, what vintage isn't? But what about the reds? All that rain must of affected them adversely? Right? That does not seem to be the case. Good growers took advantage of our last few weeks of sunshine. The grapes took in rainwater early, which helped to thicken and concentrate flavors in their skins, that concentration comes out in both the color and flavor of the wines. We move on to Pinot Noir to prove the point. The Wismer Vineyard Pinot is the best example of what clean fruit can yield ... there is a bit of the funky stink here but Derek assures me that Wismer fruit goes through this every year around this time, he's not worried in the slightest ... there's good concentration of color here and there are cranberry, strawberry and raspberry notes. The finish is the best part combining the vanilla and cinnamon from the barrel with the raspberry nuances from the fruit all ending with a magnificent taste both pre- and post-swallow.

We move on to two pretty big wines, the old vines Pinot and Chardonnay, both these wines won't see the light of day until February 2010. The Pinot is made from 20-30 year old vines, while the Chardonnay is at least 30-years-old. Both these wines are weighty in the right places and have wonderful mouth presence. The Pinot has fine tannins, while the Chardonnay is spicy with lots of fruit – both wines sit firmly in the mouth without any hollow spots. We end the barrel portion of our tasting with the still in barrel 2007 Niagara Peninsula Pinot Noir. The wine is due to come out of oak and into bottle unfiltered, sometime in late March, going on sale (most likely) September 2009. I tried this one almost a year ago and was blown away by the deep rich colour; it's lost a bit of that but has gained significantly in the aroma and flavor profiles. If the smell of a wine can be described as "pretty" this one has it in spades ... it's delicate without being frail, delicious without being overly anything. The palate has good tannins, herbs, spices, red and black fruit along with the subtlety of violets. Both Derek and Ed swoon over this one. "How much?" I ask. "I'd like to sell it for \$50.00," says Derek; Ed smiles and takes another sip, "but we're selling it for \$25.00," he says. A steal for sure – I've already put my order in for four bottles.

Back topside, we taste both the 2008 Syrah and Cabernet Sauvignon. For comparison, Derek puts a glass of both the 2007 (finished) and 2008 (still in barrel) side by side to show off the color difference - which is marginal at best - and repeats, "I am not at all unhappy with 2008. With color like this," he sniffs the liquid in the glass, "and concentration like that, how could I be?" In fact the 2008 Syrah has a great purple colour, it's spicier and pepperier than its 2007 counterpart ... the Cab has similar attributes with a healthy concentration of black fruit and firm tannins. The tour ends with Derek popping the cork on the recently bottled and soon to be available (April 2009) [2007 Gamay-Zweigelt](#), an ideal wine for summer ... "this is going to be my BBQ wine," Ed confided, and at \$14.00 you should be eyeing some too. It's going to be a very affordable \$14.00 and will go great with both food and company.



Wine Event Spotlight: *Toronto and Hamilton Show Who Wines Better*

This week's events are two very differently aged yet similar shows. Celebrating its silver anniversary (25 years), the **Toronto Wine and Cheese Show** ([March 20 - 22](#)) brings a plethora of wineries, breweries, food, and of course cheese to the International Center on Airport Road in Mississauga. On the other hand, in only its fourth year the **Hamilton Food and Drink Fest** ([March 27 - 29](#)), which dubs itself "The Festival With Taste" – is a smaller more intimate show than it's Toronto counterpart. It is a growing event that has its fair share of local wineries, agents, breweries, restaurant goodies (from the Hamilton area), though I don't remember any cheese. Having attended both events in the past, I can recommend both and would encourage you to do likewise. March is a pretty slow month and I always find it best to get the most out of your wine experiences. These two shows prove that both cities put on a pretty good party, and they aren't that far apart.

Ticket Giveaway ... To that end, I am offering up tickets to both shows ... in my biggest ticket giveaway ever. Follow the instructions below to enter (deadline for entries March 11, 2009) all entries are to be submitted to michael@ontariowinereview.com:

Hamilton Fest - send your name, address (with postal code) and phone number to the above email address, along with "Ham has Good Taste" in the subject line.

Toronto Wine and Cheese - send your name, address (with postal code) and phone number to the above email address, along with "Cheesy in Toronto" in the subject line. 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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