

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 – 105
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OntarioWineReview: *Forget the Ball, The Government's Dropped the Grape*

Stop me if you've heard this one (even if you have, keep reading, 'cuz I do have a point to make) ...

A man owned a small winery in Ontario. The Provincial Wage and Hour Ministry claimed he was not paying proper wages to his help and sent out an agent to interview him.

"I need a list of your employees and how much you pay them," demanded the agent.

"Well," replied the winery owner, "there's my winery hand who's been with me for 3 years. I pay him \$400 a week plus free room and board. There's the Chef who has been here for 18 months, and I pay her \$300 a week plus benefits. Then there's the half-wit. He works about 18 hours every day and does about 90% of all the work around here. He makes about \$10 per week, pays his own room and board, and every Saturday night I buy him a bottle of Scotch so he can forget his troubles," the owner paused before continuing, "and oh yeah, to top it all off he sleeps with my wife occasionally."

"That's the guy I want to talk to ... the half-wit," says the agent.

"That would be me," replied the winemaker.

Cute story huh? Did you get a little chuckle out of it as I did the first time I read it? Here's the real funny part, it's true and getting truer all the time.

Now, why am I reminded of this story? Why did I feel the need to tell that to you? Why am I not doing a fluffy piece about cloth wine bags saving the environment, or a review about the Billionaire's Vinegar, an excellent book that I just finished reading? Because last week, the government did something that has made the wine makers and owners in this province very angry ... and you should be angry too, because everything the government does effects you in the end – and besides, they use your tax dollars to do it.

Early last week, a winemaker called me up to say that there was scuttlebutt in Niagara that the government "kickback" program, to help small wineries get their wines into the LCBO, is at risk of being axed. Known as the VQASP (VQA Support Program) it provided a 30% return to the wineries whose wines got into the LCBO and Vintages stores. This encouraged more wineries to submit wines to the LCBO (previously they were reluctant to put their wines into the provincial monopoly shops because there was no profit to be made, wineries realized more money by selling their wines out the cellar door, even if it was a slower process and to a smaller audience). This program subsidized the sale of these wines and allowed more Ontarians to see, and buy, a greater array of VQA Ontario wines from wineries they probably didn't even know existed. (In the last three years of the program, the number of Ontario wineries in the LCBO rose from 15 to 50). It is because of this program that many small wineries saw light at the end of a long harsh tunnel; some wineries even increased production in the hopes of having enough wine to offer to the LCBO and get the exposure the shelves which they so desperately needed (in order to be listed the LCBO needs a minimum supply so that all their stores can get the required product). With the cancellation of the VQASP, those wineries are now at risk of being overstocked and putting themselves into a deeper financial hole than they were before. At a time when the government is ear-marking millions of dollars to bail out the car manufacturers, who are just trying to maintain the status quo – the government has decided to cancel help to an industry that is growing, creating jobs and brings tourism to this province. I have a colleague that calls Ontario "a have not province" and something we will not have is a wine industry if this continues to be the way wineries are treated. It seems

that the current government is prepared to keep them down.

Yes ladies and gentlemen, this is your government hard at work. Do they not realize that the "O" in LCBO stands for Ontario? How quickly we forget that when we walk into the store and are faced with shelf after shelf of Chilean, Australian and South African wine. I have noticed that when I enter a US liquor store, I have to search high and low for the "foreign" wines, having to wade through row after row of California, Oregon and Washington State wine. In the LCBO it's the exact opposite – I wade through every other country before I find my country's/province's wines and who knows, maybe I'm still buying Chilean, Australian or South African after all, if you don't examine the label with a magnifying glass, you could get stuck with a Cellared in Canada wine.

What do we have to do in this province to make things better for our grape growers, winemakers, and wineries? Do 50% of them have to shut down before we realize we're in danger of losing one of our best and unique industries?

Obviously there seems to be a lack of leadership at the WCO (Wine Council of Ontario), the GGO (Grape Growers of Ontario) and any other acronym label organization that has "sway" in this province. These "lobby" groups couldn't pull the trigger to get this government to renew a plan that has proven to generate more revenue to the public treasury than it consumed. We're willing to use public money to keep foreign car manufacturers in Ontario, yet we seem not to be able to reach into our pockets to pay a fraction of what we're giving GM to save our domestic wine industry. And what about these "lobby" groups ... what do they have to say, what are they doing? Did you know, that to be part of the WCO a winery has to pay a minimum of between \$5000 and \$7000? For what ... To get their name on a map ... I see that as money well spent.

The Ontario wine industry lacks leadership. They lack a prominent voice. Which leads me right into my next story ... and sadly, it too is true.



OntarioWineReview: *What we Need Right Now*

Here's another story I would like to relate to you ... and yes, it too is a true story:

The LCBO recently had a "Meet the Makers" promotion in their stores and after [reading the brochure promoting this event](#) I had to ask myself a few questions. Should I be offended by this promotion? Should Paul Bosc, Darryl Brooker, and Daniel Speck be offended? Shouldn't we all be offended? Yes we should! Enraged in fact. For not only did the LCBO classify Cellared in Canada (CIC) wine as VQA, but then they went as far as to plug it during their "Meet the Makers" campaign; and while they were at it, they had the audacity to bring one of Ontario's distinguished elder statesman of wine along for the ride (just days after his retirement). I have to ask myself, "Have we all lost our minds, our sensibilities? Do we even care?" The media plugs VQA. We all talk about wanting to buy a local. We lament the plight of the small producer. We've bashed the big boys for their blatant disregard of the VQA in their zeal to turn a profit with CIC wines. Yet somehow we laud the LCBO for being Ontario's wondrous savior of good taste and what a great job they're doing at keeping booze out of the hands of minors. Screw that! They can't even get the Cellared in Canada/VQA thing straight ... This is the bastion of hope for this province's wine woes? Please. These boys and girls have no idea what it is like to have a real job, to sweat out a bad economy – [just take a look at what they are complaining about as they go to the bargaining table with management for a new contract](#) ... God-forbid they have to actually work to keep their jobs and woe be tied the province for even thinking of privatizing anything. I'm not totally off topic here, just bear with me.

Here's the rub my friends: [I have pictures of Alan Jackson, with bottles of CIC wine at his table - promoting the Meet the Makers campaign at the LCBO](#) (look at the CIC wine on the table). I, and you, should be asking: the maker of what? Cheap off shore plonk to line your pocket, better yet to line the pockets of an American conglomerate, while countless Ontario wineries starve, looking for a crumb of the marketplace that both the big boys (Vincor and Peller) and the LCBO have neatly carved up? Now let's be fair, the LCBO recently pulled the brochure [touting these white label J.T. wines as a VQA product](#) ... but shame on them for letting that pass in the first place. How the hell do they expect customers to get it right when the "bastion" of alcohol here in this province can't? Holy Hannah! I guess when Laurie MacDonald, of the VQA, told me that "the buyer has to read the label" - she meant both we as consumer and the LCBO as buyers ... read the fine print boys and girls that's the name of the game.

Of course, this was all swept under the rug quietly, nobody has made noise. The VQA was alerted by a

journalist who questioned the flyer. The VQA swept in and "took care of it" – no fines, no levies, no press – [if a small winery had violated the VQA act out they go](#) ... but the LCBO or Vincor ... "don't do it again ... until next time" – consider your wrist slapped boys, hope it hurt (not). But should this not be a wakeup call to the VQA, the WCO, the GGO and all the other acronyms and parties involved with the negotiations to save the wine industry from another fiasco like the one in 2008, when 4000 tons (or so) of grapes saw the ground instead of the inside of a bottle? Someone surmised to me that most of these grapes weren't viable wine grapes ... humbug ... the GGO, who oversaw the multi-million dollar payout, decided that 77% of them were. How do you like them grapes?

But let's go back to Alan Jackson for a second, sitting behind his booth promoting and pouring CIC wine. Many years ago, this man was a pioneer, a leader, an icon of the Ontario wine industry – today, in retirement, he's shilling an off-shore blend posing as Canadian wine for an American company whose bottom line is more important than the identity of the country of origin it bares on its label.

Not sure if any of you have seen these new bus ads on the TTC, they originated in the UK from an Atheist organization, they read: "There's probably no God. Now stop worrying and enjoy your life" – well with the sale of Vincor to the American conglomerate, known as Constellation, we might as well have started our own bus campaign: "There is no more Vincor, so just sit back and enjoy your CIC wine!" Because Vincor's nationalistic Canadian identity and pride died with the sale. Period!

Here's my point ladies and gentlemen ... We need a Mondavi and we need one now! If the two stories above don't prove that we are at a loss for leadership in this province, then we might as well put our heads in the sand and suck back our Chilean imports. So what do I mean by "A Mondavi"? Robert Mondavi is/was the symbol of California wine – forget what happened with family-rifts and the selling of his great winery – Mondavi's name lives on and is synonymous with California wine and its quality. But Mondavi was more than just a name, more than just a brand; Mondavi was a beacon, a ray of light for an entire industry – Robert Mondavi symbolized California wine, and was, above all a promoter for it. When he spoke he didn't just speak about Mondavi wine, he spoke about California wines ... he promoted a region. To many, he was California and the world flocked not only to his door but to the state of California to drink the wines and live the dream.

The Ontario wine industry lacks that kind of leadership, and focus ... we sold our leadership to the Americans and only the shareholders benefited. Our industry is in dire straights – winemakers and owners are losing hope: "without that agreement [the VQASP], we don't care anymore." One winery owner told me, "we have no reason to get back to the bargaining table; we're getting screwed from all sides." Another told me, "Our raw materials costs get higher and our access to the market shrinks; I'd make more money running a grow-op." He said, trying to make light of the situation, which he obviously did not find funny.

We have no Mondavi to lead the industry, and heads and hearts are beginning to sag. We have nobody to lobby and fight effectively and that is what this industry so desperately needs the most right now. Instead, we're doing that very Canadian thing called: "sit there and take it". It's time to stop thinking about the "I" and think in terms of "we", it's time to put away petty squabbles and differences between organizations and act as one unified unit – put away those selfish interests and see the big picture ... because if we don't, there soon won't be anything left to fight over. We need a leader. We need a Patton to rally the troops ... we need a Gandhi to lead the uprising, we need a Moses to lead us out of bondage, thru the desert and into the promised land. In short, the Ontario wine industry needs a Mondavi ... and we need him now.

Epilogue ... to the makers and owners ...

Robert Mondavi, as we all know, was a real person, but he took on a mythical persona when it came to the world of California wine. Say his name and suddenly everyone knew you were talking California ... he was the E.F. Hutton of wine (remember those commercials – "When EF Hutton speak everybody listens – well when Mondavi's name is mentioned, everyone pays attention). He was someone with a passion for his region, and passionate about wine, someone who didn't just want to see his winery succeed but the success of an entire region. He was someone who was willing to stand at the forefront and tout the greatness of the region. Right now our leadership is sorely lacking any strength; the tiger has no teeth, or any roar for that matter. I am reminded of the man from the Dos Equis commercial who tells us to "stay thirsty my friends". Well my friends we've been thirsty long enough, we need a leader now; and this leader has to come from inside the ranks of the wineries and winemakers – not from outside sources. Don't put your products future in the hands of lesser folk who don't understand, and make their money off your hard work. Look within, there is passion to be found for the fight, who awes you now? Who's voice shows the passion for the industry, for the region? Who would you like to see lead the industry into a bold new future? He's there, his passion is palpable, it just has to be unleashed.



Grape Guy's Picks of the Bunch: *Brand New Riesling and Another Pinot Noir*

Tawse Winery 2008 Sketches of Niagara Riesling - \$18.00 (W)

www.tawsewinery.ca

I was at Tawse late last week picking up my award for having the fourth best professional palate in Toronto. They poured the freshly bottled (about a week) follow-up to the wildly popular, successful, and now sold out Sketches Riesling 2007. Last year's was a very good effort, and garnered them many awards and accolades, this year's version is even better, proving what many will tell you: 2008 was a better year for Riesling than 2007. The nose is full of delicious fruit smells that'll make you wanna dive into the glass: pineapple, peach, mango, grapefruit cocktail and golden delicious apple – powerfully fruity. The palate delivers a crisp, tropical fruit taste with a wonderful minerality and lemon-lime finish – and with only 10% alcohol it doesn't overwhelm the palate. And talking about the finish this one goes on and on and on (kinda like I do in some reviews). If I were to have rated the 2007 Riesling it would have garnered a 4; for this 2008 version I'm gonna give it a 4½ (out of 5), because I want to give winemaker Paul Pender and the gang the drive to get 5 next year ... something tells me they hit it. Price: \$18.00 – Rating: ****½

Long Dog Winery 2007 The Otto Riserva Pinot Noir - ~ \$50.00 (W)

www.longdog.ca

In talking with owner/winemaker James Lahti, he said, "this is the best Pinot Noir I've ever made" ... he gushed further about putting it up in competition against Burgundian wines and that he's still undecided about prices – for James his pricing policy is in direct corollary with the quality of his wine vintage-to-vintage. I tried this wine after the hustle and bustle of the Pinot Noir Challenge and much time after the hype of James' words had subsided, and I'd have to say that this is an extraordinary wine. The nose is fruit-driven with strawberry, raspberry and sour cherry – I would be remiss if I did not mention what it lacks, the earthiness that is usually found in Pinot Noir, but I'll say that's a product of the hot year. The taste is nothing short of amazing – big acidity, good minerality, lots of fruit: sour cherry, raspberry, red currant and berries with a touch of cinnamon ... all in a very attractive coloured Pinot. Don't let the cute dog on the label fool you, this is a serious Pinot Noir and was it lacks in earthiness it gains in fruit, minerality and acidity, but that's a loss I can learn to live with when the wine is this good. Price: ~50.00 – Rating: ****½

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



Weekly Wine Notes and More: *Sticky, Riesling, On the Road a Lot 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:

March 24, 2009 – Pillitteri Estate 2007 Sticky Beak Icewine ([read](#)) ([listen](#))

March 31, 2009 – Twenty Twenty-Seven Cellars 2008 Riesling Featherstone Vineyard ([read](#)) ([listen](#))

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

[Drinking With Dave – Part 2](#)

[New York Wine Tasting](#)

[Essence of Port Luncheon](#)

[More Wines of California – the Wine Writers Tasting](#)

[Wines of Portugal](#)

[PMA Chairman's Gala](#)

[Bokke 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

Nothing New This Week – Keep Checking In

[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 New This Week – Keep Checking In

[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](#)

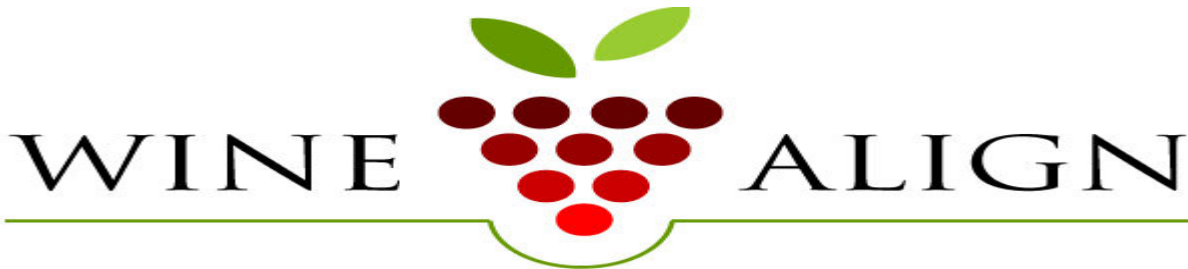
Vintages Releases: [Ontario "Vintages" Releases: Saturday April 11, 2009](#)

Ontario Wines of Note on April 11, 2009:

[Konzelmann 2006 Special Select Late Harvest Vidal](#)

[Malivoire 2008 Ladybug Rosé](#)

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Wine Event Spotlight: *A Couple of Winery Events*

Join Strewn for their [Vigneron Series: Vine Pruning & Vintage 2008 Sneak Peak](#) ... this is a hands-on Strewn signature event. Our "terroir" has inspired us to create a special event that honours the relationship of the winemaker to the land. Guided by winemaker Joe Will, the day begins with a discussion and tasting of selected white wines from the 2008 Vintage. Following the tasting you will receive a pair of pruning shears and learn the first steps of vine pruning. During this hands-on experience you will work directly with the vine that produces your wine. Time: 11:00 am – 12:30 pm ... Cost: \$20. Reservations are required - call 905-468-1229. Warm clothes and sturdy gloves are not just recommended for this event but strongly encouraged.

Join Inn on the Twenty chef Kevin Maniaci and Cave Spring wine consultant Brian Kelly in a [Celebration of Spring Food and Wine](#) when they will be pairing wines from 2005, 2007 and 2008 with some wonderful local tastes that will awaken and stimulate your senses. Saturday, April 25th 11:30 at Cave Spring Cellars - \$20.00 per person. Call 905-562-3581 to reserve your spot.

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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