

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 – 107
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In this Edition

- **Ontario Wine Review: *Putting the Esprit Issue to Bed – I Hope***
 - **Grape Guy's Picks of the Bunch: *Some 2005 Wines and a Bonus***
 - **Weekly Wine Notes and More: *Southbrook BioD, No. 99, Losses and Re-Tastes***
 - **Uncorked and Decanted: *Book Review – The Billionaire's Vinegar***
 - **Wine Event Spotlight: *So much going on I have no idea where to begin***
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OntarioWineReview: *Putting the Esprit Issue to Bed – I Hope*

Well, it seems like we did some good for Canada and the Olympics and I'm proud of us; although we should not let our guard down quite yet – they tried to pull the wool over our collective eyes once before. What, you may be asking yourself, is the Grape Guy talking about? [Why it's Vincor's recent announcement](#) that we should be cheering about: by summer those Esprit Olympic wines will all be 100% VQA. But before we all break out the Sumac Ridge commemorative bubbly, let's hark back a little and see how we got here. You are more than welcome to read my rants on the issue (Newsletters [82](#), [83](#), [101](#) and little tidbits here and there), but more important is the feedback from people and the flack and feedback I'm sure Jackson-Triggs and Vincor got for their bed judgment and for their handling of this mess, which was completely mismanaged from the beginning ... some readers saw it coming right from the get go:

"I have over the last little while noted with sadness the lack of Canadian product in the Vincor outlets set up in two of our local grocery stores," a reader wrote to me. "When Vincor was first the subject of a takeover bid, I feared this would be the result. When the management fought the bid, I thought there might be the possibility that it could remain the success (in every sense of the word) story it had become ... A short time later [they] quit fighting the takeover and it became clear the "fight" had not been about staying independent but about getting a few more dollars on the table."

Other readers read about Esprit for the very first time right here – and they too were appalled:

"I was just in the process of writing a stinging note to JT, VANOC merchandising about these disgusting Olympic concoctions when I came across your [piece] which expressed my sentiments perfectly!"

"Regarding the Esprit issue, it is disturbing & indeed a poor reflection on the Canadian wine industry. To offer second-best-pseudo-wines while our top athletes are competing for us would be embarrassing ... it's a time for Canada to pull out our "Sunday Best" & showcase what is truly Canadian!"

"I believe Vincor is only interested in profits and could care less about the true Canadian wine industry (i.e. VQA wines) ... I believe [the Esprit issue] will set back our wine industry significantly. At a time when we have an incredible opportunity to show the WORLD what great wines we can make with our own grapes, it seems that Vincor is planning to shoot us in the foot."

As alluded to in the above quote, what really irked us proud Canadians, was the passing off of Cellared in Canada (CIC) wine as our own, both to an unsuspecting public and to those visiting this country during a premier event where we should be showcasing not only our best, but our local product:

"The dishonesty is appalling ... A public outcry is required for those who are making the decisions to

perpetrate this scam, think twice about what [you] are doing.”

“The dishonesty, deception and lack of regard for [our] wine industry is what bugs me. If you want to sell low-end crap, fine. But when you parade it around as representative of what comes out of [Canada’s] wine regions, then you offend me to the core.”

“We need to make it easy for consumers to identify & purchase 100% Canadian with a sense of confidence - a sense of pride. Debunking/decoding "Cellared in Canada", "Product of Canada" is an important step. However, an even more positive and pro-active step would be to clearly brand 100% Canadian Wines.”

All these comments and opinions culminated in this scathing indictment of VQA and labeling practices here in Ontario. Here’s a letter I acquired which was addressed to the VQA (the pictures to which the author is referring are the [VQA and non-VQA Esprit labels comparison, found in Newsletter #101](#)).

“I just read Michael Pinkus’s latest newsletter about the Esprit wines and the labeling issues and looked at the pictures!! I realize that business is business and sometimes decisions are made. BUT it is my opinion this a bait and switch situation. This is bad for VQA and people that support buying a 100% local wine and 100% VQA wine producing wineries. Seriously, if you were at the LCBO picking up a bottle of “Canadian Olympic Wine” you would need a PHD in label reading to figure out the difference between these wines ... VQA wines need to be clearly different from the Cellared In – No Grey Areas.”

During the past year, I have also learned that cynicism runs deep in this country. Here’s a letter from a reader who clearly understands what Vincor could have, and should have, done:

“At many of these types of events there is the normal "official" product of the event, and another higher end "limited edition" product, for those with more expensive tastes. Vincor should be ideally positioned to provide both from Canadian grapes, and the size of the company makes a [variety of] truly Canadian product very doable ... In my view that would have been a better marketing strategy that might have actually made them more money and given Canada a lot of exposure in the international wine scene. However I’m not surprised they didn’t.”

Or this reader, who encountered non-VQA Esprit at his local LCBO and drew some conclusions of his own once he got home and checked the Esprit website:

“I went home to check the Jackson-Triggs website and found this as part of their marketing of this wine: “Jackson-Triggs Esprit really embraces the Vancouver 2010 brand, ... [Vincor and Vancouver 2010] have aligned values and are very like-minded on sustainability and creativity.” And that got me thinking about the words they chose: “Sustainability” - sustaining the bottom line at the expense of hard working growers dropping their quality fruit to rot. “Creativity” - duping the Canadian public into thinking the plonk they are flogging represents a truly nationalistic Canadian wine. What a sham!!”

Some readers resorted to making pictures like these two, a take-off of a controversial bus campaign in the U.K.: [Bus Ad 1](#) ... [Bus Ad 2](#).

Combine these comments and pictures with the [poll on my website](#), showing that over 86% of people do not trust Vincor to do the right thing when it comes to the Olympic wine program, and you’ve got yourself a barrel load of trouble brewing for Canada’s largest winery and self proclaimed “industry leader”. And trouble it was, Jackson-Triggs went into damage control overnight.

At the beginning of this month, I had plenty of folks forward me the “[good news](#)”; and as I read it over I found myself stewing once again. I really take exception with one statement in particular made by Executive Vice President Bruce Walker: “It was always our intention to offer a 100% VQA Olympic line-up when we first signed a six-year sponsorship agreement with the Vancouver Olympic organizing committee several years ago...” I hope and trust that we can all smell the B.S. coming off that pile of dung. If the intention of Vincor was to go all VQA, why didn’t Bruce just tell me that at our breakfast meeting two months before I launched [Newsletter #82](#). In fact, his answer to my question about having an all VQA Esprit was “We’ll have to see how it goes” and “We’re looking into it.” Had

he told me it was their intention this would have been a non-issue, a dead story, a foot note in an article about the coming of VQA Esprit. And if it was in the plan all along why, to the following inquiry: "Will every bottle of Esprit wine sold anywhere in the province of British Columbia at the time of the Olympics be VQA?" did I get this response: "Regarding the availability of non-VQA Esprit wines, they will be in retail distribution in all provinces (in addition to VQA), in order to meet our financial obligations to VANOC (and our Olympic athletes) as per our contractual agreement. Also, as discussed earlier, the fact is there is simply not enough VQA wine available to meet our Olympic wine volume requirements/commitments."

And finally, if I was so totally off-base or "didn't get the program right" (as was suggested to me), and Vincor was so wanting to make pure VQA wine from the get go, as Vincor now wants people to believe, why did I get a message on my answering machine from Mr. Walker telling me to find something else to write about and mind my own business: "I just as soon you didn't do anymore comments about our wines in your column," he said, "let it lie, let it go." But here's my all-time favourite quote from his message: "it's none of anybody's business what Vincor does in terms of it's Olympic program ..." Oooo, I still shudder when I think about the arrogance of a line like that.

So, when I read about how it was in their plan all along, I think to myself, "this is super premium, high grade malarkey they're dishing out" and I hope, dear reader, you can see it too.

Larry Paterson, an industry "outsider", whom many consider to be a radical-watchdog of sorts, wrote this to me after my second article on the subject of Esprit wine: "If you were on one side of a barn full of hay, and I were on the other, which side would the Gods of Vincor shoot their only burning arrow into?" When the Vincor announcement was released a few weeks ago, Mr. Paterson mentioned that I should get an "industry bulldog of the year award" and another reader wrote in saying: "If this is true you should get an Order of Canada!" ... a nice thought (from both of them) but I must pass these kinds of accolades on to you; those who wrote to Vincor/Jackson-Triggs and to me.

Thanks to you, Vincor was forced to make the decision they announced on April 2, 2009: "We are ecstatic about the 100% VQA lineup of dedicated Olympic wines we will be offering leading up to the Vancouver 2010 Winter Games," said Vincor Canada's Vice President of Marketing, Estate Wines, Cathy Jacobs. "As a result of the exceptional growing season in 2007, as of July 1, 2009, all bottlings of Jackson-Triggs Esprit will be 100% VQA, hitting retail shelves over the latter part of the summer."

With luck and vigilance they will indeed follow through and the potential embarrassment we Canadians would have faced, at the hands of an American conglomerate without a care for our national pride, will have been thwarted. Keep your eyes open ... look for this promised wine and of course the VQA symbol on it.

In closing, somebody said to me, "why write this article, we won and you shouldn't rub it in." [Another sent me this amusing picture.](#) The fact of the matter is there are no winners in this battle, we're all losers, because this battle should never have been fought in the first place. It should never ever have been an issue as to whether or not Canada's Olympic wine should be an all-Canadian VQA product – it should have been a no-brainer from the start.



Grape Guy's Picks of the Bunch: *Some 2005 Wines and a Bonus*
See winery's individual website for details

Chateau des Charmes 2005 Estate Cabernet-Merlot - \$19.95 (W, L)

www.chateaudescharmes.com

With all the talk about 2007, everyone seems to have forgotten 2005, which, aside from being a short crop year, was a very good red wine vintage. Today, you'll be fairly hard pressed to find any

05 – but Chateau des Charmes seems to have a good one still sitting quietly on their shelves. “We generally don’t make noise about a vintage roll over,” Michele Bosc told me in an email – and I’m thinking, “Why not? This is the kind of vintage we should be fanfaring.” The estate Cabernet Merlot has been a fav of mine since it [wowed me in 1999](#) – I still have 2 bottles – and the [2002 was pretty stellar also](#). The 05 is big – even 4 years from harvest. 9 months in French oak has given it power and longevity. 50% Cabernet Sauvignon and equal parts Merlot and Franc (I’ll leave you to do the math on that) this wine is big on black fruit: blackberry and cassis with big spice and a touch of cinnamon. Give it some room to breathe and you’ll also find black raspberry on the nose. The palate shows more bigness to this wine – big biting acidity, cedar, cinnamon, spice, and heat – which I originally attributed to alcohol, but at 13% it couldn’t be possible – and there’s also loads of black fruit ... after aeration. This is a big tannic wine that needs one of three things: a big glass, a decanter or time ... you’ll have to make whatever decision is right for you – all three would be perfect. Price: \$19.95 – Rating: ****

Alvento 2005 “Elige” - \$30.00 (W)
www.alvento.ca

Why anybody would move from Tuscany to Ontario is a mystery to me. Why anyone would move from Tuscany to Ontario to make wine is either a maverick, running from the law, crazy or up for a challenge. I have not done a background check on Elyane and Bruno of Alvento, but they don’t seem like they are crazy or running from the law – so maverick or up for a challenge must be the answer. This is a blend of 60% Cabernet Sauvignon, and equal parts Cabernet Franc and Merlot. The wine’s nose is woody with black fruit, spice and licorice notes. The palate shows more complexity and staying power, black fruit, spice, cinnamon, and wood tones, along with hints of mocha and licorice in the mid-palate. The finish is smoky with a touch of bittersweet chocolate and fine tannins ... a nice wine that makes a welcome edition to the Ontario pantheon – Tuscany’s loss seems to be our gain. Welcome to Ontario Bruno and Elyane, we thank you for coming and as the years progress you’ll, find out that your maverick nature was also tinged with a bit of the crazy. Price: \$30 – Rating: **** ½

Bonus Wine Review: I thought I had told you about this one – but I see from my notes it fell through the cracks ... so here it is: [Konzelmann 2007 Barrel Aged Shiraz](#)

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



Weekly Wine Notes and More: *Southbrook Bio-D, No. 99, Losts and Re-Tastes*
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:
Great News – Now you can listen to the [Podcasts](#) of your choice - individually

April 21, 2009 – Southbrook 2008 Cabernet Rosé ([read](#)) ([listen](#))
April 28, 2009 – Wayne Gretzky No. 99 2007 Unoaked Chardonnay ([read](#)) ([listen](#))

NEW Reports in the [On the Road with the Grape Guy](#) section:
There is stuff coming – please be patient

[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
[Flat Rock 2004 Riesling](#)
[Southbrook 1999 Triomphe Cabernet Franc](#)

[What’s NEW ... Taste it Again Grape Guy \(blog\)](#)

Find out what has happened to some of my favourites over the past few years
[Featherstone 2005 Riesling](#)
[Flat Rock 2004 Gravity Pinot Noir](#)

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

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

[2 New Reviews Added](#)

Including: Yalumba 2003 Shiraz and Delicato 2004 Merlot

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Tastes wines from Across Canada at the All Canadian Wine Championships “Passport to Canada”

For details visit <http://www.canadianwinetrail.com/en/>

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Uncorked and Decanted: Nifty gadgets, accessories and other things that enhance wine enjoyment.

Book Review ... [The Billionaire’s Vinegar](#) by Benjamin Wallace

I just finished reading [The Billionaire’s Vinegar](#) by Benjamin Wallace, a book that has been recommended to me on many occasions by quite a few good friends in the wine trade (mainly writers), and one which my sweetie bought me as a “your special” gift ... not sure what kind of special, but I’ll take it as a compliment. Anyway, it’s now my turn to recommend it to you. As far as wine books go (and that seems to be the only kind of books I’m reading these days - and books by Robert B. Parker – the Spenser guy, not the wine guy), it’s a real page-turner. I classify myself in the slow-reader group of folks: I read every word, I don’t skim or speed-read, and it takes me a good month (sometimes two or three) to plow through a book ... I find I don’t have a lot of time for reading - books I mean, I voraciously consume trade mags, articles and such; but books for pleasure take a backseat ... this book was a pure pleasure to read. After all that preamble, I am happy to report that I finished this one in an astonishing two weeks. I was drawn back time-and-time again by the tale Wallace was weaving, although, he seemed to veer down a few roads that seemed more like side stories than the main one, he still kept me interested. It might all seem like a laundry list of fake wines but he kept me guessing to the end as to whether or not there would be a payoff of justice or retribution.

For those who haven’t heard about this tale, it originally appeared in New Yorker magazine – I first heard about it last summer. It’s the story (true story might I add) about a bottle of 1787 Lafite that was, allegedly, owned by Thomas Jefferson, America’s first connoisseur of fine (French) wine. The story takes you through the history of Jefferson’s love for wine, rare wines, fakery of old bottles, the Forbes fortune, the William Koch collection, the first man of wine Michael Broadbent and (if you can stomach it), there’s even a recipe for creating your own fake bottle of rare vintage wine.

The writing style is engrossing; it’s a tale of excess of the super rich and barely famous, the story of their tasting parties will astonish - especially as we sit in the midst of these recessionary times ... but above all, you should find it fascinating. Now, if you’ll excuse me, I have a ‘05 Yellow Tail I’m trying to pass off as a ‘61 Latour ... we’ll see how it goes - if my next newsletter comes to you from Kingston Pen Publishing you’ll know how it all went down.



Wine Event Spotlight: *So much going on I have no idea where to begin*

The Ontario Wine Awards Gala is taking place Friday May 8, 2009 at the Queen's Landing in Niagara-on-the-Lake. This is your opportunity to see first hand, and before anyone else, who the big winners are. Tickets are \$140.00. All the facts and figures about the Ontario Wine Awards and details on how to get tickets can be [found here](#).

A Toast to Mothers at Sprucewood Shores Winery in the Lake Erie North Shore: May 10, 2009 - 12:00pm, Tickets \$30/person, \$17/child (11 and under). A lovely afternoon with your Mother and Sprucewood Shores Estate Winery! To reserve your spot call (519) 738-9253 or at info@sprucewoodshores.com. Advanced RSVP required, [check the website for full details](#).

Wineries of Niagara-on-the-Lake are hosting the very popular and always exciting **Wine & Herb Festival** (all 5 weekends in May) Spend the weekend touring the 21 Wineries of Niagara-on-the-Lake, where, at each stop, a different herb-themed food pairing is featured, matched with a premium VQA wine selected to highlight the flavour and aroma of the herb. Passports are \$35 each. [Visit the event page for all the details](#).

Toronto's Spring Wine Festival has a new name, **Salute**, it takes place May 5-9 ... "Attendees of the festival will enjoy an impressive line-up of tasting events, wine and shopping experiences, educational seminars led by leading wine experts and exclusive menus at Toronto's top restaurants." – that's taken straight from the media release. Check it out on the web www.salutewinefestival.com.

Ticket Giveaway and Event Announcement ... It's that F'in time of year again. Fall has passed, Freezing temps have Faded and the Folks at Fielding, Featherstone and Flat Rock want you to Follow your Feet to their doors on a Fabulous Field trip. This year the Focus is pasta. What does that have to do with "F"? Well if it's Fettucini, Fusilli and Farfelle, a lot. Join these F'in wineries for an F'in good time as you take part in the "**The F'in Winery Tour**" – tickets to this Frantically Fun Feature are a Fraction the cost they should be, just a pair of Fins (that's 10-bucks). And it takes place the weekends of May 2-3 and 9-10. I have some tickets for the second weekend to giveaway – so this has to be Frickin' Fast ... First email to michael@ontariowinereview.com with a non-cursing F-Word (no phonetics please) in the title gets the tickets; don't forget your address with postal code and phone number.

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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