

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 – 109
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OntarioWineReview: *NOTL Proves They're the Bomb*

Often imitated but never duplicated, those are words that best describe the events staged by the Wineries of Niagara-on-the-Lake. Once again this past May, the Wineries of NOTL (who now number 21) hold their annual Wine and Herb Festival ... this goes along with their Taste the Season (November) and the new Wine and Chocolate (February) events, where all the wineries in the group presented a food pairing, with wine of course, and for the most part, these pairings are of very high quality and worth the price of the passport (\$35) – taken as a whole, they are definitely worth it. Now you're thinking, "I've done the Niagara Wine Festival / the Icewine Festival and or the New Vintages Festival, how different can it be?" Let me put it this way, the Wineries of NOTL have taken their festivals to a new level and have perfected it; the Niagara Wine Festival and their ilk look like a great big SNAFU operation by comparison. When I have attended the above mentioned three Niagara-wide Festivals, I have often felt ripped off, and now, under their new format of only a set amount of "winery experiences" (6) – even more so; nobody seems to be on the same page; one winery is offering good value with a little something extra while the other is offering something you could easily get if you walked in off the street on any given Wednesday (free tasting anyone?).

For each of their festivals, the Wineries of NOTL give you the entire month to come down and enjoy their inspired food pairings. In fact, it has worked so well that other winery organizations (ie: 20 Valley Winery Association) have created their own events, (ie: [Wrapped Up in the Valley](#)). I was unfortunately out of town for the run of that one last year, but [from what my guest writer, Fred Couch, wrote](#), it sounded like it was a huge success, with only a few straggler wineries dragging it down. There is no doubt in my mind that this event was inspired by the success of what the NOTL wineries have been successfully doing for years.

The formula is simple, though it has taken shape over the years. All member wineries participate, they pair their wine with a theme inspired food, usually created in-house or by a local restaurant or caterer (Anna Olson, Stone Road Grille, Pie Plate, etc.), and it's event specific: Herb, must have their given herb in it; Taste the Season, holiday inspired goodie; Chocolate, this one's self explanatory. Visit as many (up to 21) or as few as you like per weekend throughout the month. When it first started, some wineries were just not with the program, offering below the average when it came to pairings (parsley bread anyone?), but as the years have gone by, the competitive A-game for each winery has emerged and so has the will to surpass the previous year's efforts; or at the very least, to keep up with their fellow wineries. And these events are inspiring other parts of Niagara to do better and/or create their own events with similar themes. Events like the F'in Wine Tour (Featherstone, Fielding and Flat Rock – pairing wine with F-named pasta dishes) or the new Graze the Bench (this coming June featuring 8 Beamsville wineries) – a spring event that could have only taken its inspiration from what Niagara-on-the-Lake has been doing and very successfully.

This year's Wine & Herb was truly the best ever ... as my foodie/fiancée pointed out as we traveled and tasted our way through the event destinations, "no winery was a let down, they all seemed to at least give good food pairings. There's no parsley bread." Whether you personally like the food-stuff or not, is another story, but the foods offered up this year were better than last and I fully expect that quality to value ratio to continue. Not every winery gets a gold star mind you, but there was only one winery this year that got less than three (average).

As in past years' we ranked the food, the wine and the pairing. Best wine went to Palatine Hills, for their 2008 Gewurztraminer (\$13.95 – see Picks of the Bunch below for review). Best food was to be had at Coyote's Run with a pop-in-your-mouth-delicious Cheese Tartlet. As for best pairing, that honour was shared between Strewn (Riesling/Potato Gnocchi) and new-comer Stratus (Riesling Icewine/Bergamot Crème Brulee). But there were many other inspired and worthwhile pairings. Below is the list by star ratings (5 = outstanding; 4.5 = excellent, 4 = very good, 3.5 = good, 3 = average, 2 = fair, 1 = poor) – only one winery got a 2 (which is a pretty good ratio for now having 21 wineries) while 2 wineries picked up the coveted 5-star rating ... you'll also find some selected comments about the pairing.

5-Star (Outstanding)

Stratus – Bergamot Crème Brulee w/ 2007 Riesling Icewine ... "perfect pairing, a great first time effort, can they match this next time out?"

Strewn – Potato Gnocchi with lemon and goat cheese in a sage leaf butter w/ 2006 Riesling Semi-Dry ... they used 14lbs of potatoes, flour, etc. and only 1½ lemon rinds and yet the lemon comes through, augmented beautifully by the Riesling. This is the first time Strewn has used their cooking school to their advantage.

4½-Star (Excellent)

Palatine Hills – Honey-coriander dressing served over cold rice noodle salad with dried apricots w/ 2008 Gewurztraminer ... we differed here, I liked both but not together, the foodie thought it worked well together, we compromised at the half-mark.

Peller Estates – Compote of apricot and horseradish with icewine reduction as a base for black pepper and chervil ice cream w/ Ice Cuvee ... they get their points here for uniqueness and originality of the food, they seem to use the same wine every event.

Southbrook – Arugula Pesto Pizza with roast potato, goat cheese and tomato w/ 2008 Cabernet Rosé ... for this newcomer to the party you just knew it was going to be a pizza, but they had such delicious results with their creation.

Sunnybrook – Tarragon Biscotti w/ Bosc Pear wine ... in the past their pairing have been uninspired, but this time they stepped up their performance with a simple pairing that worked great together.

4-Star (Very Good)

Cattail Creek – Shrimp and goat cheese on a crostini with tomato cilantro pesto w/ 2007 Off-Dry Riesling.

Coyote's Run – Cheese Tartlet with chive and roasted pear w/ 2008 Pinot Gris/Pinot Blanc.

Lailey Vineyard – Fennel Bulb sautéed in butter and kosher salt wrapped in phyllo pastry w/ 2008 Vidal

Niagara College – Thai Curry Shrimp w/ 2006 Rosé

Pillitteri – Cranberry-Lavender upside down cake w/ 2007 Merlot Bianco (Rosé)

3½-Star (Good)

Chateau des Charmes – Lemon basil cracker with Aligote wine jelly w/ 2007 Aligote ... the herb and wine went very well together, especially if you plucked a leaf off the plant and nibbled that on its own, then sipped some wine.

Konzelmann – Mixed bean oregano salsa infused with sambal oelek sauce w/ 2006 Cabernet Sauvignon Reserve (see Picks of the Bunch below for review).

Maleta – Douanne cheese, fresh baguette, savoury infused honey w/ 2007 VIEW Pinot Noir ... simple yet effective.

[To see the rest of the pairings and their ratings visit the On the Road with the Grape Guy blog.](#)



Grape Guy's Picks of the Bunch: *Two from the Tour, Rosés and more*
See winery's individual website for details

Palatine Hills 2008 Gewurztraminer - \$13.95 (W)
www.palatinehillsestatewinery.com

I haven't tried all of this year's output of Gewurztraminers, sometimes I think I've barely scratched the surface of the "G"-wines, but I would have to tell you, I have tasted quite a few over the years and this one brings a lot to the table without falling off the edge. To me, Gewurztraminer is a balancing act between spices and floral tones ... go over the edge and you've over-loaded with overpowering rose petals, play it too safe and you end up delivering an oily, spicy mess with the viscosity of used motor oil. This Palatine Hills offering brings great aromas to the nose and just enough to the palate for tasty refreshment. Smells of florally rose petals, with hints of orange and spice. On the palate, it deals up a lovely balanced floral and spicy character with great balancing acidity. Price: \$13.95 – Rating: ****½

Konzelmann 2006 Cabernet Sauvignon Reserve - \$13.50 (W)
www.konzelmann.ca

Sometimes I think simple flavours and aromas are more welcome to the average everyday wine drinker than complexity. I know fellow writers and tasters who pick out the smallest detail from a wine and find things that only those that spend their day in a sensory lab could pick out ... reminds me of a famous line from the movie JFK, "it's like picking gnat shit out of pepper". Konzelmann has a wine here that you won't have to do that kind of indepth analysis to enjoy, in fact you don't have to be a rocket scientist or have a degree in chemistry to identify tastes and smells. The nose is black cherry and vanilla – it's as simple as that. The taste is rich with black cherry and just a touch of tannins ... smooth enough to drink now and over the next couple of years, and it's priced exceedingly well. Price: \$13.50 – Rating: ****

Rosé Roundup ... Springtime is here. The weather is getting hotter and it's time to think about sitting on a patio with something cool and refreshing. I've tasted quite a few rosees over the past few weeks and here are some I can recommend for your patio-pleasure:

[Daniel Lenko 2008 White Cabernet](#) – [Calamus Estate 2007 Half Penny Rosé](#) –
[Huff Estates 2008 South Bay Rosé](#) – [Kacaba Vineyards 2008 Rebecca Rosé](#) –
[Angels Gate 2007 Archangel Pinot Noir Rosé](#) – [Strewn 2008 Cabernet Rosé](#) –
[Cattail Creek 2007 Serendipity Rosé](#)

In my opinion a perfect example of screwing yourself ... [Marynissen Estate 2007 Bottoms Up](#)

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



Weekly Wine Notes and More: Vineland, Calamus, Mastronardi and Tri Amici
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

May 19, 2009 – Vineland Estates 2007 Elevation Cabernet ([read](#)) ([listen](#))
May 26, 2009 – Calamus Estate 2007 Vinemount Riesling ([read](#)) ([listen](#))

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

www.ontariowinereview.com

A bi-weekly newsletter dedicated to helping you discover Ontario's best Wines and Wineries.

[Tri Amici Portfolio 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
[Mastronardi 2005 Brianje Riesling](#)

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

Find out what has happened to some of my favourites over the past few years
Nothing this week, but please 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
[4 New Reviews Added](#)
Including: Perez Cruz Cab, Monte Zovo Valpolicella and Wakefield Shiraz

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For details and ticket info visit <http://www.mastronardiwines.com/promo.php>

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On the Road with the Grape Guy: *Terroir Happens*

Both the above article and this one are one's you'd expect to find in the [On the Road with the Grape Guy blog](#) – and you will, with other content and in some cases in their longer form. But I thought both events deserved a little extra attention because of what they bring to their respective regions. Terroir is the wine event of Prince Edward County that focuses on the wines and local soils. Now some would argue that Taste! is the PEC event to showcase wine, and I would argue that Taste! is all about the food and the agricultural ties between restaurants and wineries of the region – but in the end, the focus is on food and how wine can be paired within the realm of eating local. Terroir is all about the wine.

This year, close to a dozen (or so) wineries came out, food is present but it takes a backseat to the booze, to the showing of new vintages and fine wines. Some, like Sugarbush, are new to the region, and those in attendance flocked to taste the wares of the new kid in town; while old guards, like Waupoos, bring their long-time fans out to taste what's new from the oldest kid on the block. There are cideries getting into fine wine (County Cider Company), annual favourites that just keep getting better and better ([Huff 2008 South Bay Rosé](#)) and new finds from old friends ([By Chadsey's Cairn 2008 Chenin Blanc](#)).

The other nice part about Terroir is that it allows you to explore the County outside the doors of the

Crystal Palace in Picton (where the event is held). Since it starts at 1pm and runs till 6pm, there is plenty of time to get acquainted (or re-acquainted) with what else the County has to offer.

After spending two hours at the Terroir event proper, we headed our way over to [Fifth Town Artisan Cheese](#) for a sampling of goat's milk and the cheeses made from it. Our favourite here was the Maple Bagel Chevre – there's a touch of sweetness to this creamy spreadable cheese and it's just awesome, pairs well on your morning bagel. We swung by Norman Hardie's winery, where the newest addition to his wine roster, [Cuvee L](#) – an assemblage of County and Niagara Pinot, which will only be made in the best years – was poured for me. The name is homage to his dearly departed sister Lisa who passed away at too young an age. Finally, we swung by the week old Redtail Vineyard, Canada's only "Off the Grid" winery, meaning they are completely solar powered, where we tried their only two wines: [2007 Pinot Gris](#) and [2007 Pinot Noir](#).

Since our arrival in the County was early, about 11am, it allowed us to pop in to the few places pre-Terroir. The grand opening of Lacey Estate, where I was impressed by their [2007 Baco Noir](#) (and for me to be impressed by Baco is something impressive in itself). But the real find had nothing to do with wine, it's the [Copper Kettle Chocolate Company](#) (currently located in Wellington, but moving to Picton in June). Sue Burgess' chocolate is to die for – her barks, chocolates and even the incredible new truffles (like the peanut butter and jelly) are simply, and I'll say it again, to die for. Now you have to like chocolate, but who doesn't? And for those who dig on chocolate but can't do the sugar they also have a wide variety of sugar-free goodies too.

Yes Terroir gives you ample opportunity to visit the County, whether it be for one day or the weekend – and it makes you want to come back again, sooner rather than later, see you at Taste!



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

I know it's coming on summer, and here's why ... During the winter months I search hi-and-lo for events to publish in this section, but during the spring and summer, I'm inundated with events and you have plenty of choice as to what-to-do with your time (wine-wise) – here's a sampling:

Tonight, at the Toronto Board of Trade, from 5-9pm, it's **42 New Releases from 1 Unforgettable Place** starring the Niagara-on-the-Lake wineries. This event is being staged by the iYellow Wine Group. Cost is \$48 per person – [check this link for details](#).

SWOVA (South Western Ontario Vintners Association) is doing their own version of the Herb and Wine Festival with their **2nd Annual Sip Into Summer** – tour the 11 participating wineries the weekend of June 6 & 7, collect a complimentary herb along the way while you sip and shop to stock your cellar for summer and beyond. Full details can be found at www.swova.ca.

Chateau des Charmes has announced their **Farm to Table Experience** line-up (see my previous review of this event). Events take place Sundays on the following dates: June 14 (with chefs Anna and Michael Olson), July 19 (with Erik Peacock) and August 23 (with Mark Picone). The event culminates with the Harvest Dinner on Sunday September 20. This is the perfect opportunity to taste what farm fresh is all about. All the details, plus ticket prices and a special offer for attending all 4 events, can be found at www.chateaudescharmes.com or by emailing michele@chateaudescharmes.com.

Finally, this weekend marks the 10th Anniversary of Archibald's amazing gastronomical experience – **The Fruit Wine and Food Festival**. I'll be there sipping on strawberry, raspberry, blueberry, apple and plenty of other fruit wines while enjoying nibbles to pair perfectly with each sip – a quick scan of the dessert menu tells me this alone is worth the price of admission. \$10 in advance, \$12 at the door – for details or to order your tickets visit www.archibaldswinery.com.

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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