

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.



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OntarioWineReview: *Fire Sale ... Selling Ontario Short*

Suffering succotash, as if running a winery wasn't hard enough, now you have the infighting of partners and courts forcing the sale of wineries. If the [Alvento affair](#) proves one thing, it's that owning a winery isn't all full grapes vines and lush greenery, there are also plenty of pitfalls.

Now, Alvento isn't the only winery currently up for sale in Niagara, there are plenty of wineries that are feeling the financial strain and would gladly sell to the next bidder, and there seems to always be someone willing to buy a winery, right? You hear about wineries changing hands left and right, in places like California someone is always willing to live the bucolic lifestyle that is winery ownership. But owning a winery is much more difficult north of the border - we've got laws up here that make winery ownership an uphill battle from the first grapevine in the ground to the last bottle sold off the shelf.

I am sure there are those who get into the winery game here in Ontario thinking they'll be the next Peller or Jackson-Triggs, no doubt thinking there is money in them-there vines. But wow, are those folks in for a surprise. Let's just put it this way, the chances of ending up with a golden goose like those two wineries are ... well, let's just say you have a better chance at winning the lottery AND being struck by lightning ... on the same day within hours of each other. Peller and J-T got the last of the sweetheart deals - I'm not slagging them mind you - they were looking out for themselves and they were around to make the deal at the time that deals were up for the making. But suffice it to say there are 100+ wineries out there who would love to have the advantage the big boys have.

Now, as I sit here from the comfort of the train looking out the window onto the Ontario landscape, I think to myself something has to change or given time we won't have an Ontario wine industry, or should I say, as diverse an Ontario wine industry. We'll always grow grapes and there will always be someone willing to make wine from them, but we make it so difficult to be a winery owner in this province it's almost counter-productive to buy a winery. And the reason is simply, we make it hard to sell the wine we make. It reminds me of an old winery joke I once heard: How do you make a small fortune in the wine business? Start with a big fortune. Though I don't usually see many winery owners laughing when it's told.

But really, does the Alvento affair have anything to do with the laws of the land or was it just partners that couldn't agree? Afterall, how does one make the leap from a business partners feud to wineries having it hard? Well it ain't really so big a leap. If Alvento had more avenues in which to market and sell their wines then maybe the partners would not be feuding as to which wines they should be making.

Sooner or later someone will step forward and buy the place, probably at a fire sale price and the new owner will learn what so many Ontario wineries already know - this business isn't as easy as they make it sound in the brochure.

I was once told an interesting analogy about the restaurant business and wonder if it will apply to the Ontario wine industry - especially if changes aren't made soon. It has to do with who winds up making money in the restaurant world:

A guy gets the capital together and sinks 5 million into a new restaurant along with all the accessories that go along with it, and within six months he's gone belly up. The next guy steps in and buys the restaurant lock stock and barrel for 2.5 million, opens and closes within the year. Then there's the third guy who buys the place for a cool million and still can't make a go of it. The fourth guy has no better luck even though he sunk only \$500,000 into the purchase of the place. It's the guy who swoops in and picks the place up at a song at 50 grand because "the location just can't support a restaurant" who makes a real go of the business and makes all the profit. You could see how that just might apply to a fledgling winery.

As for the Moos', owners/partners of Alvento, who moved here from Italy to make a life and their vision of uncompromising wines here in Ontario, you really have to feel for them. I used to tease Bruno in my reviews that he must be running from something in Italy (like the mob) to have picked up stakes after 17 years in Italy to work the rougher and often unpredictable terrain of Ontario ... and one day he sent me his explanation:

"We came to Ontario from Italy, believe it or not as missionaries or call it crusaders!!! Our order is the "Congregazione di Bacco" (Congregation of Bacchus). We know that you know the world [of wine] is better in Italy and they have a terrific lifestyle. Why would we give up all that? To come to Ontario? In Italy, instead of tasting wine they actually drink it, believe it or not (and do not get drunk!). When you drink a wine as, opposed of just tasting, you most likely have a second glass (with your meal). Now, with your second glass, that is when usually the residual sugar and the bitter dry alcohol with the pungent acidity hits you, your tongue gets dry and all you want at this point is a big glass of water to get re-hydrated. When the wine is made from mature and carefully picked grapes, aged in barrel and or in bottle, the wine warms up your heart [and soul], it becomes pure pleasure, especially combined with a good meal.

"Never mind new world or old world, flavours up front or in the back, [it's who yo share the experience with] conversation around the table becomes pleasant and lively and everybody present looks even more beautiful ... you enjoy. And at the end , the bottle is empty without even realizing it! It is those wines that people say: It was wonderful!!! Italians, as a habit, actually sit down at a nicely set table, calm down and eat and drink and just simply enjoy food and drink and have a good time (without the need to get drunk). In Ontario, a gala event consists of standing around all dressed up in a beautiful room, with a glass in one hand and the other has to shovel the food into your mouth. We came to help import that Italian lifestyle to Ontario!! How about, instead of just tasting, sit down, calm down, drink it and enjoy with your food and friends. Viva l'Italia and long live Ontario."

It's a lovely sentiment.

We were not in time to save the Moos' from their fate but how many more wineries have to close or be up for sale before we realize that things have got to change? Will we lose our Ontario wine identity before we reach the Nirvana described by BRuno? I sure hope not.

Slightly related ... The cost of doing business gets too high as the Gretzky winery closes and is sent packing to Peller.

<http://www.niagarafallsreview.ca/ArticleDisplay.aspx?e=3350672>



Grape Guy's Picks of the Bunch: Ga-Ga for Gewurztraminer and more

Calamus 2010 Gewurztraminer - \$16.00 (W)

www.calamuswines.com

When I first tasted this wine I was underwhelmed and ready to give it a failing grade, then I saw in the notes that it had been bottled less than a month and decided to give it another go. As the wine opened in the glass there was a subtle rosy nose and touch of spice that began to show. Flavours started to emerge too, a lovely soft rose petal with hints of lychee on the mid-palate and a nice spiciness that seems to repeat on the tongue. All-in-all nice flavour and finish. This wine still needs time to come into its own, that's why it's not being released till the Calamus open house weekend December 3-4, 2011, and when it does it should be ready for prime time. Price: \$16.00 - Rating: *** 1/2+

Check out these other Great Gewurzts ...

[Between the Lines 2009 Gewurztraminer](#)

[Chateau des Charmes 2008 Gewurztraminer](#)

[Malivoire 2010 Gewurztraminer](#)

Outstanding Reds From Fielding ...

Fielding 2007 Meritage - \$59.95 (W)

www.fiedlingwines.com

A Merlot heavy (62%) Meritage blend from the big 2007 vintage. The wine spent 18 months in a mix of new (38%) oak that was primary of French origin (70%). This wine hits all the high points of a good Meritage wine: there's fruit, smoke and other flavours that make up this a complex piece of work. The nose is smoky, raspberry, black cherry, and pencil shavings ... palate is quite young and toasty, where you'll find a smoked-licorice note and some lovely black cherry; but it's the toastiness that really comes through at the time. The finish is a long lip-smacking black cherry-vanilla. This is a really tasty wine now, but should be even better in 3 years. Drink: 2014-2022. Price: \$59.95 - Rating: **** 1/2

Also from Fielding ... [Fielding 2007 Chosen Few Red](#)

Wines From the Ravine Tasting ...

Ravine Vineyard 2010 Meritage - Estate \$24.95 (W)

www.ravinevineyard.com

Whoa Nelly! This is one really good wine for the price. 2010 from all accounts could rival 2007 for the best vintage Ontario has ever seen, which usually means the reds will be fantastic, and this blend speaks volumes as to those rumours being right on the money. The nose has plenty to get excited about, with aromas of raspberry and strawberry-licorice ... it's just so intense and pretty to sniff upon; but wait, that's not all - the palate has yet to have its' say - and it speaks volumes as well. Ripe fruit, both red and black with the right amount of elegance, weight and spice. The acidity is nice and clean with a pleasant mineral component that runs right through the middle giving it enough chalkiness without being totally drying. Let me help you out here by saying there's the right amount of juiciness in here too. This wine is ready to drink now but should easily age 5+ years. Price: \$24.95 - Rating: **** 1/2

[Ravine Vineyard 2010 Chardonnay - Estate](#)

[Ravine Vineyard 2010 Reserve Cabernet Franc - Picone Vineyard](#)

[Ravine Vineyard 2010 Sand & Gravel Chardonnay](#)

[Ravine Vineyard 2010 Sand & Gravel Redcoat](#)

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



Bi-Weekly OWR Updates: *On the Road posts and Taste it Again wines*

Weekly Ottawa Life Blog Entries:

More Coming in November

[On the Road with the Grape Guy:](#)

Trips, tours and tastings – join me as I review the highs, and sometimes, the lows

[The Pinot Affair](#)

[Lost and Found \(blog\)](#)

Wines that got "lost" in my cellar - some are Treasures others Trash ... Find out what happened

Nothing New This Week

[Taste it Again Grape Guy \(blog\)](#)

Find out what has happened to some of my favourites over the years

[Pelee Island 2005 Vinedressers Shiraz](#)

[Huff Estates 2006 Wismer Vineyard Riesling Reserve](#)

[Legends Estates 2006 Semillon](#)

[D'Angelo 2006 Iced Foch](#)

[What I'm drinking Tonight \(blog\)](#)

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

[2 New Posts Added](#)

including wines from Italy and Portugal

[Vintages Release \(blog\)](#)

All November Releases - coming soon

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November 11-12, 2011
RBC Centre Sarnia Ontario
<http://discoverfusion.ca/>

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Just this past Saturday I had occasion to visit Niagara's newest culinary and vinous destination: Ravine Vineyard. I have been here plenty of times before, the last being to buy some of their great on-site made bread, and before that for the Wine and Herb Festival (May). But this time I was invited for a twofold reason, 1) to taste the newest line of wines: Sand and Gravel and 2) To taste through the entire line-up with winery consultant Peter Gamble - now who could resist that?

Now, I have said things in the past with regards to pricing at some of the newer wineries on the scene, and while sometimes publicly, but more often than not privately, really detest a new winery slipping into the market with their astronomical pricing for their wines as if they are trying to make all their money back in a single vintage. It's impossible. The slow and steady approach seems to always be the best course of action. The reason is simple: people love to try expensive wines, but more often than not will buy the cheaper one. Before moving on to a higher priced wine a winery has to impress consumers within their comfort budget, before they are willing to step out of it. Perfect example of this is Tawse, who's winery opened with nary an under \$20 bottle, but since they have launched the successful Sketches line - why? Because the wines are under \$20, deliver great value and thus people are willing to fork over more money for the more expensive stuff when the time is right.

All this is preamble to say it would seem Ravine is taking a page out of the Tawse playbook with their new Sand & Gravel line - wines priced under \$20 and offer good value for their price points. The new line includes 5 wines, all from the 2010 vintage: Riesling (with a touch of Gewurztraminer), York Road (a white blend composed of primarily Chardonnay, Riesling and Sauvignon Blanc), [Chardonnay](#), Cabernet Franc and a red blend called [Redcoat](#) (60% Merlot, 29% Cab Franc and 11% Cab Sauv) ... all fruit for these wines are sourced from selected growers. But this was always the goal for the winery, claims Mr. Gamble, the property is only 25 acres planted (Merlot being the top planting followed by Chardonnay, Cabernet Sauvignon, Cabernet Franc, and Riesling) - that amount of grapes can produce about 2500 cases, the game plan for the winery was to top out at 8000 (in 2010 they'll be close to 7000). The Sand & Gravel series, I was told, was introduced to grab that all important restaurant market so that they are affordable to pour by the glass. As we all should know, a winery has three venues to sell their wine in Ontario: cellar door, LCBO and restaurants ... see above article on the troubles limiting sales can do.

The estate wines are a different beast all together. These are hand-harvested, barrel selection wines that are painstakingly produced. In some cases harvest of grapes takes longer because as many as five passes are made through the vineyard so that fruit is picked in its optimal condition; the average crop load is about 1 3/4 tons to the acre. Then everything is pressed using a half-ton bladder press, which yields a mere 300L per pressing. All wines are then barrel fermented and aged and then the selection process begins only after time has passed with ageing in barrel.

Which brings us to the tasting of these hand-held, hand-shepherded wines. Gamble ran me through a Burgundy-style tasting going red to white and switching liberally between vintage dates trying to stick with a lighter to fuller bodied regime. We kicked things off with a sweet smelling but ultimately dry 2010 Rosé (\$17.00), a wine loaded with strawberry notes. We also did some older wines like the 2008 Reserve Merlot and an '07 Reserve Red that proved to still be holding up well and still needed development time. More reviews of current Ravine wines will appear on the OntarioWineReview website over the next few months, but here were my top three wines of the tasting ... some are upcoming releases so keep your eyes open or phone the winery to see if they have hit the shelf yet:

The highlight of the afternoon sit down was a single vineyard [2010 Cabernet Franc from Picone Vineyard](#) - the same vineyard where Charles Baker nabs his Riesling fruit from for his eponymous wine. This is a 250 case limited edition beauty that should knock Cabernet Franc fans socks clean off with its elegance and intensity (price and release date to be determined).

The [2010 Meritage - Estate](#) (\$24.95) is excellent value; sure it crosses the \$20 threshold many put on themselves, but do yourself a solid and pick up a few for some upcoming special occasion, it'll hold for awhile. (release date is imminent).

As much as I dug the power of the 2009 Estate Reserve Chardonnay Unfiltered (\$40.00) with all its caramel, butterscotch goodness and tightly wound fruit; my Chardonnay nod went to the more fruit forward of the Chardonnays: [2010 Chardonnay - Estate](#) (\$24.00) with its mix of barrel elements, creamy malolactic mouthfeel and tropical fruit (release in 1-2 weeks).

Finally, for you bread and sweets lovers, get to the bakery early for some of the best fresh artesinal bread you'll ever wrap your mouth around and a still hot, fresh Saturday morning jelly filled donut kicks Timmy's and Krispy Kreme's ass to the curb.



Wine Event Spotlight: *See the Grape Guy - Where I'll Be*

First weekend in November ...

Taste the Season Touring Pass Event ... **All weekends in November (5/6, 12/13, 19/20 & 26/27)**

The Taste the Season touring pass event is the "must-do" event of the season for many Niagara-on-the-Lake wine country visitors. Each touring pass entitles the holder to a VQA wine and food pairing at each of the 26 member wineries and is valid for one of the featured weekends. Touring passes are available for only \$44.25 (+HST) and can be purchased online or by phone. For details and to purchase visit: www.wineriesofniagaraonthelake.com or call 905-468-1950 (Niagara-on-the-Lake Chamber of Commerce)

Second weekend in November ...

Fusion, a Discovery of Local Food and Wine ... **November 11-12, 2011 - RBC Centre, Sarnia.**
<http://www.discoverfusion.ca>

The Grape Guy will be giving seminars on Friday at 7pm (wines of the Lake Erie North Shore) and Saturday at 3pm (Wines of Niagara) - check the website for exact times.

Last weekend of November ...

Waterloo Region Food and Wine Expo ... **November 24-26, 2011 - Downtown Kitchener Market.**
<http://www.fooddrinkexpo.com>

The Grape Guy will be part of three presentations, two on Thursday and one on Saturday. Check the website for times and topics.

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.



Socially Speaking ...

Follow Michael Pinkus, the Grape Guy's (almost) daily **Tweets** at <http://twitter.com/TheGrapeGuy>. You can become a friend on **facebook**: <http://www.facebook.com/?ref=home#!/mepinkus>.

"Linked In" folks can find Michael at <http://ca.linkedin.com/pub/michael-pinkus/14/704/4b8>

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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