

## 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 – 181**  
**May 10, 2012**

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#### News ... Award Winning Journalist - Michael Pinkus

Many who know me know I am far from a blatant self-promoter, but I would like to take this opportunity to say that I am humbled and feel privileged to have won the Ontario Wine Awards Journalism Award for 2012 (handed out May 4, 2012). Thank you to Tony Aspler and his selection committee for this honour.

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#### OntarioWineReview: Re-Branding VQA

There has been a lot of talk by media-types lately about VQA ... about how the VQA symbol is finding its way onto inferior wines; inferior, bland, uneventful, non-descript wine blends - the latest culprit in this category are whites ... a growing segment of the LCBO market. These white blends seem to encompass the kitchen and the sink ... everything is fair game in them, from Chardonnay Musque to Viognier to Riesling, Sauvignon Blanc (just name a white grape and it's in there) and of course there's always some Gewurztraminer thrown into the mix. I find myself on this topic After reading Rod Phillips' musings, where between two article ([Q stands for Quality](#) and [Lessons from](#)), went so far as to accuse the Ontario wine industry and the VQA of dumbing down wine - actually regressing us back to a time when Ontario wine was the laughing stock of the wine world. Are we?

Let's face it, as much as we like to believe in global markets, the vast majority of the world is shocked beyond belief that Ontario, Canada actually makes wine, beyond icewine - if they even know about that. Whose kidding who, we seem to be the only ones who know Ontario has a "fine wine" division. Ontario, the laughing stock of the world? Nah. But we're doing a good job at being a laughing stock in our own backyard; but I'm also gonna let you in on another secret ... every fine wine making region of the world that you can think of has a crap division too: from France to Italy, Australia to New Zealand, Chile to Argentina, Oregon, Washington, you name it ... but that does not mean we have to aspire to replicate that model.

Let's get back to VQA ... I'm gonna let you in on another highly guarded secret: VQA is NOT, repeat NOT a sign of quality ... it's a symbol of origin. That's right, according to executive director, Laurie MacDonald, whom the Wine Writers' Circle of Canada members had a meeting with back in 2011. She was adamant the VQA was all about origin - not quality ... so why is the word "Quality" in the acronym? Good question ... to which I would hazard a guess there is no really good answer besides it sounded good at the time; but I also offer you this: it sure sounds better than Questionable?

I'm sure, in the past, that you have tasted a wine with a big VQA symbol on it and thought "this is some nasty-ass sh\*t ... how did that pass VQA?" Yes there's a tasting component to the process, but I have been assured by many a winery that they just think it's cash grab by the VQA. It costs a winery \$265.50 a shot to run tests through the VQA lab and get authorization to use the symbol on their bottles and a wine can be submitted up to 3 times. I have heard countless stories about wineries failing VQA on the first or second pass only to get the thumbs up on the third time around, wines being guaranteed a failure score if submitted before holiday time ... and, wines that received failing grades getting their highest mark on pass two or three although nothing has been done to the wine upon re-submission. Can you say Cash-Grab? I knew you could. The VQA is about origin and typicity (typical characteristics from Ontario), but how can a panel determine the "typical" characteristics of a blended rosé or from a grape that has never been grown in Ontario before - plus it stymies our winemaker's creativity. Origin can be determined thru lab tests and paperwork trails ... so what is the taste test for, what does that accomplish if all we are looking for is origin? We're back to typicity again? Because that's what I'm looking for in my wines something that tastes typical. What would an Ontario Marsanne taste like, or a Tempranillo - how typical is that? And ask Norm Hardie and Martin Malivoire about their struggles to find Ontario typicity in Melon de Bourgogne (a variety grown primarily in the Loire Valley).

Here's the real problem .. many years ago, and to this day in fact, the VQA has stressed the quality behind the VQA symbol - so much so that the public that was / is paying attention has taken it to be a symbol of Ontario-quality; but to back-pedal and say "no, we're all about origin of the fruit" seems a disservice to the public. But it does stand to reason. The VQA was patterned after the AOC / DOC origin guarantee of France and Italy ... just because a wine has either of those symbols from their respective countries does not mean quality resides in the bottle ... it just means the grapes came from where they are supposed to. For those who need a refresher, AOC stands for Appellation d'Origine Contrôlée, translated to "controlled designation of origin"; and DOC: Denominazione di origine controllata, which translates to, you guessed it "controlled designation of origin" - nowhere does it mention quality. Yet the VQA has perpetuated the misnomer that VQA is about quality ... but they are sending a mixed message ... and that is what is causing our industry to stumble down the path of getting yet another bad reputation.

So where do we go from here? We have confused the hell out of the public about VQA and its meaning - and now are getting the symbol back-lash because of lackluster wines ... Do we re-brand VQA as origin only or start upping the quality of our wines. The latter would be better for the industry - but the former seems more plausible, even if it takes another 25 years to instill the meaning into the minds of consumers; because one man's plonk is another man's nectar ... and regulating good taste is impossible, trust me, I know, my wife watches *Real Housewives* and *Hoarders*, much to my chagrin. An even easier solution is that VQA should remove the word quality from its acronym and focus strictly on origin ... thus untying our winemakers' hands to do what they do best ... make quality wine instead of generic wines that conform to the norm. The word quality should not appear on the label if it's not always being put in the bottle, and that means it's time to re-brand or re-name VQA before it comes to stand for Very Questionable Alcohol ... which is where it is heading now ... at least here in Ontario.



**Grape Guy's Picks of the Bunch:** *Funky White and Two Reds*

**Flat Rock 2010 The Rogue Concoction - \$30.00 (W)**

[www.flatrockcellars.com](http://www.flatrockcellars.com)

This white is part of the always interesting Rogue line from Flat Rock - but this time the folks on the Rock aren't letting you in on the secret of what's in the bottle. Aromas of beeswax, earthiness and a touch of pear skin. The palate holds plenty of interest for the curious: earthy, a delicate dose of butter and vanilla, hint of caramel and a decent amount of acidity - this is reminiscent of those white

Pinot Noirs I have tried in the past, with something extra. The finish also holds some interest - it retains the earthy, pear and some peach pit notes ... plus there's also a lasting linger of vanilla-caramel and baked apple. NB: I spoke with winemaker Ross Wise the day before this newsletter came out for the make up of this wine: 50% Gewurztraminer (with some ageing and some late harvested), white Pinot Noir, Chardonnay and Riesling; 6 barrels in total made up this wine. Price: \$30.00 - Rating: \*\*\*\*

**Lailey 2010 Pinot Noir, Niagara Peninsula - \$25.00 (W)**

[www.laileyvineyard.com](http://www.laileyvineyard.com)

This is a tale of two tastings. When I first poured the wine I noticed that it was very light in colour - almost rosé-esque - and with a very funky nose. Things changed within a few minutes. Sour cherry and dried cranberry seem to come out of nowhere and the smells come off as almost juicy. The palate shows off the nose in every way - quite simply put it's lovely. Sour cherry comes roaring through with a nicely spiced character and good acidity on the finish, which seems to linger with delicate fruit and spice. It's really a diamond in the rough - just give it a little time for it to shine. Price: \$25.00 - Rating: \*\*\*\*+

**Karlo Estates 2010 Petit Verdot - "The 5th Element" - \$39.00 (W)**

[www.karloestates.com](http://www.karloestates.com)

The sub-title of this wine refers to the 5 grapes that go into a Bordeaux blend: Cabernet Sauvignon, Cabernet Franc, Merlot, Malbec and ... Petit Verdot ... which is the element least put in, and then usually as seasoning in minute amounts. It's rare you see it on its own and even more so from here in Ontario, which goes to show what a good season we had in 2010. Raspberry, strawberry and pepper on the nose leads to the same on the palate, which balances off with an interesting earthy quality - the best word to describe this wine would be interesting, because it is. Price: \$39.00  
Rating: \*\*\*\*

**Must Pile ...**

*Wines tasted last year that did not make it into last year's publication ...*

[Colaneri 2009 Pinot Grigio - "Profondo Cavallone" \(NIAG\)](#)

[Henry of Pelham 2009 Cabernet-Merlot - Meritage \(NIAG\)](#)

[Jackson-Triggs 2009 Silver Series Chardonnay \(NIAG\)](#)

[Ravine Vineyard 2009 Redcoat \(NIAG\)](#)

*Availability legend: W (Winery) – L (LCBO/Vintages) – WTH (Winery to Home - OL (On-Line)).*



**Bi-Weekly OWR Updates:** *On the Road reviews, Vintages and more*

**NEWS ...** The look of the blogs have changed - the content remains the same but there is now a uniformity to them. If you get a chance take a peek, hope you like the new look.

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

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

[Ontario Wine Awards - and the winners are ...](#)

**[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

**Nothing New This Week**

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

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

**[Many New Posts Added](#)**

**including three 2001 vintage wines and a Bauer Kitchen visit**

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

**[Vintages Shop On-Line May 3, 2012](#)**

**[Vintages release: May 12, 2012](#)**

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**The Event ... Food Truck Eats at Peller Estates Winery - May 20 & 21**

Peller Estates Winery is debuting a new event that highlights the Food Truck craze that has over taken North American streets. [Food Truck Eats at Peller Estates Winery](#) takes place on the May long weekend - Sunday, May 20 and Monday, May 21 commonly known as the unofficial kick-off to summer. The event will feature 16 food trucks from Canada and the United States, the first time ever for a bi-national event. 16 wines from Peller Estates award winning portfolio will be served alongside some of the most daring, tasty and innovative street food available.

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**CookBook Corner ... reviews by Erica Pleiness**

Lately I have been getting emails to review all sorts of things: beer, vodka, whisk(e)y, rum, wines, of course - but the one thing I had never thought to review were cookbooks, and it seems that those are coming out of the woodwork. The one person I know that simply adores cookbooks is Erica Pleiness, who has never come across a cookbook she hasn't pick up and leafed through ... with all this pawing of pages going on I could think of nobody better or more qualified to kick off the inaugural cookbook column than she ... take it away Erica.

**Short Simple and Snappy**

by Maria McRae ...

as reviewed by Erica Pleiness (foodie and cookbook aficionado)

I received the cookbook Short, Simple and Snappy a few months ago and because of its very simple

cover and lack of pictures, it didn't really entice me like most cookbooks do. Hey, let's be honest anyone who knows me knows that I love my cookbooks ... so much so that my husband refers to it as my gastro-porn and in truth he isn't far off. If I was at a bookstore thumbing through cookbooks to buy (as I do frequently on my lunch hour) I'd have to say I probably wouldn't even have picked this one up; first the cover really does nothing to grab you and if you do thumb thru it there aren't any pictures. I like to think of myself as a pretty good cook, and someone that is "above" needing pictures in her cookbooks, but let's face facts, pictures are the eye candy, the money shot, the draw that makes you think, "yeah, I could make food that looks like that." Looking at how some of the recipes turn out and how good they look inspires one to want to cook whatever the cookbook is selling.

Luckily, I decided that no matter what I was going to plow through this cookbook. It's best that I warn you that from the get-go you'll feel underwhelmed by this book ... push through it, don't focus on the lack of pictures (like I did) - this book has some really useful stuff - I had to pick it up a number of times before I could get into it. You will find recipes for stocks, sauces, proteins, veggies, fruits, everything, right down to the basics. There are recipes from all over the place (I'd like to say world cuisine, but it isn't that highfalutin) and because the recipes are easy to follow you will be cooking flavourful goodies from all different areas of the world in no time. This cookbook also allows you to experiment with your own creativity. In several recipes there are "according to taste" instructions which maybe overwhelming for those that think they can't cook, my advice here would be to taste as you go and add things slowly until you find them to your liking. There is even a section with weights and measurements and one where we discover ethnic and basic ingredients.

Though I have barely scratched the surface of this cookbook in its entirety and all it has to offer, what I have seen and tasted is very much to my liking ... this sure proves what mother always taught me "don't judge a book by its cover". If I had I would have missed out on a lot of tasty goodness.



### **Wine Event Spotlight:** *The NOTL Wine and Herb Festival*

Wineries of Niagara-on-the-Lake's annual Wine and Herb Festival every weekend in May - this is one of the best festivals of the season - details can be found: <http://wineriesofniagaraonthelake.com/wine-and-herb>

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**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](mailto:michael@ontariowinereview.com). We look forward to hearing from you!

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