

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 – 186
August 2, 2012

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OntarioWineReview: *Wine and Herb Festival 2012*

Last time out we looked at Get Fresh in the Valley - this time we cast our eyes to the other Springtime food and wine extravaganza, the one that set the standard for others to follow for springtime events. We head a little more east, deep into the heart of the Niagara wine region, into Niagara-on-the-Lake (NOTL), where the now 28 Wineries of NOTL put on their annual Wine & Herb Festival. I have been going to this event for upwards of 5 years, and each year the stakes seem to rise a little higher: the newbies of the group want to impress right out of the gate (see [Stratus in 2009](#)), while the old guard continually rises the bar on what they did the previous year. All-in-all this, along with Taste the Season (also a NOTL presentation) are two of the premier wine and food pairing events in the Niagara region - and sit in my top 5 of annual wine events in Ontario.

This year, for the Wine & Herb, we forewent the numerical scoring - been there done that, and instead used a Good, Better, Best approach - plus gave bonus marks for unique and innovative foods and pairings, and also gave a few thumbs up and thumbs down for such things as "where was the herb" or "I'm making this at home". This year we were also a little tougher because it wasn't just about the food, the herb had to shine.

For those who are new to the event, Wine & Herb is a very simple concept: each winery is given an herb to create a unique food offering with, then they must pair it with a wine from their portfolio ... as with Get Fresh, the focus here is really on the food, we know these guys and gals can all make good wine ... the question is: can they prepare a cool bite to go with it?

Eight wineries made the Good category, seven the Better score and only five hit our Best list ... which leaves eight wineries out in the cold - and some were surprising perennial favourites, like Coyote's Run and Hillebrand didn't even get on our radar this time, where usually they offer very interesting and look-forward-to pairings. They fell into what we called the "no mention" category, but I did want to single them out because they have raised the bar so high in the past that this year we were let down by what were decent offerings ... I also want to mention one more winery before I move on: Maleta, and what I have to say comes from the heart of a cheese lover: "enough with the wine and cheese pairings, that ship has sailed my friends." Now, onto those that impressed this year.

In the 'Good' category we find eight wineries (listed in alphabetical order): Starting with Cattail Creek (good) who had dill as their herb and chose to do 'meatballs in a mustard dill sauce' ... odd but it had good dill flavour, but it made their wine seem a little bitter. The Ice House (good) has shown greatness in the past, not an easy feat because they have to pair whatever they make with icewine; arugula was their herb and they made a tasty 'chilled arugula pesto pasta'. Based solely on their

food Joseph's (good) with thyme, made 'lemon and thyme crumble squares' lots of thyme and lemony goodness - the wine almost detracted from the food. Marynissen (good) with sweet basil made a 'zesty Caesar gazpacho soup', we got more celery seed and pepper than basil but it was refreshing and tasty. Peller (good) had chervil to deal with and put out a 'slow braised beef and wild mushroom stew' - very winter hearty, too bad the weather was in the high 70's. PondView (good) had the amazing herb of garlic and almost fell out of this category because they did not showcase it near enough, but their 'braised lamb cassoulet with roasted garlic and lentils' was too good not to mention. Stonechurch (good) took the simple route with parsley and made a 'tabbouleh' salad which worked well with their 2009 Sauvignon Blanc. Last on the 'Good' list is the fruit winery Sunnybrook (good) who's 'gingered figs' was an interesting pairing with peach wine that worked - and boy did you get the ginger.

Next up, the seven wineries in the 'Better' category ... these guys stepped it up a notch with their offerings (again in alphabetical order) starting with Colanari (better) who somehow managed to get something very apropos, Italian basil, which they turned into the very filling 'panini pizazz'. New to the group, Hinterbrook (better), had another basil, small leaf basil, and put out 'flat bread with pesto, toasted pecan and finely shredded mozzarella cheese ... very homemade and loaded with basil flavour. Inniskillin (better) took an herb we are not too found of, bronzed fennel, and created an inspired 'potato and fennel soup with confit pork shoulder' - the pinot noir rosé seem to work well with it. Jackson-Triggs (better) also managed to impress with saffron and their '24 hour tomato "pizza" with saffron aioli', a sweet and savoury dish that worked with Gewurztraminer. Ravine (better) took citrus thyme and turned it into 'lemon thyme citron tart' - the tart was delicious, the pairing just so-so. It's not everyday that a winery with the reputation of Southbrook (better) is going to give you a bag a potato chips but they did, and it worked: their herb was rosemary and they offered up 'chips and dip: housemade rosemary potato chips served with garlic scape and cracked pepper dip'. Very unique and tasty. Finally, our last winery in this category is Strewn (better) with mint: 'spring salad with mint vinaigrette, asparagus and feta': nice and fresh with just a hint of mint - good for summer and something you might think of making at home. Their Sauvignon Blanc wine was part of the dressing too, so the pairing worked.

Which brings us now to the top five, once again in alphabetical order, and remember, we're looking for the herb to shine, after all this is the Wine & Herb Festival. Chateau des Charmes (best) pulled lemon verbena as their herb and they made it shine with a 'savoury lemon scone' which was light and lemony, perfect on a hot day and the Seven Generations White matched very well. Lailey Vineyard (best) used French tarragon in an inspired way 'French tarragon chicken salad slider on a sweet potato roll' - from the bun to the salad this was something we wanted seconds, thirds and even fourths of; the unoaked Chardonnay made for a cool matching. I think the most unique pairing of the weekend came from our next 'best' candidate: Palatine Hills (best) had anise hyssop and pulled a rabbit out of a hat doing the first ice cream pairing we've ever had on the taste trail: 'Cannonball Ice Cream with warmed anise caramel', pair with a Chardonnay and you've got a head-scratching winner that makes you wonder how they thought of that? Pillitteri (best) made bergamot (a key component in Earl Grey tea) work for them with a 'bergamot-infused cupcake' paired with their Straight-Up White blend - the tasty cupcake was delicious, but when paired with the mouth with the wine the herb "popped" pleasantly in the mouth. Great pairing. Rounding out the top five was Riverview Cellars (best) whose 'tortilla soup with cilantro crème fraiche' appealed to the Mexican food fans amongst us; and the Bianco Riesling/Gewurztraminer proved that sweet loves spicy when it comes to food pairings.

Another amazing time was had by all and we look forward to the next edition of the Wine & Herb to see who's cuisine will reign supreme , or at least who's bites light up our lives. But first we'll have to see what the always exciting Taste the Season (November weekends) brings.

[To see pictures taken during our touring weekend of the Wine & Herb click here.](#)



Grape Guy's Picks of the Bunch: 10 Wines - the Weird and the Wonderful

Coffin Ridge 2010 Marquette - \$25.00 (W)

www.coffinridge.ca

Coffin Ridge has a new winemaker, and according to manager Mike Todd, a new lease on life. Steve Byfield (of Nyarai Cellars fame) has taken over the reigns and brings a new vision to this Grey County winery. For those who don't know, Marquette is a hybrid grape developed at the University of Minnesota by crossing MN1064 with the French hybrid Ravat 262, and is said to have great potential in the outlying areas, especially because it is resistant up to minus-36C. As for the wine itself, there's lots of fruit in the glass: cherry and raspberry, while tobacco and smoke notes add some complexity - there's even a hint of red currant on the palate that helps keep this wine together. In the end, it's the acidity and spice on the finish that carries it through. Outskirts-Ontario may have found themselves a new quality hybrid to play with. Price: \$25.50 - Rating: ****+

BONUS: [Coffin Ridge 2011 L'Acadie Blanc - \\$23.50 \(W\)](#)

BONUS: [Coffin Ridge 2011 Bone Dry Riesling - \\$17.00 \(W\)](#)

BONUS: [Coffin Ridge 2011 Into the Light White - \\$17.00 \(W\)](#)

DiProffio Wines 2010 Cabernet Sauvignon - \$19.99 (W)

www.diproffio.com

Let me introduce you to Fred DiProffio - winemaker and owner of DiProffio Wines ... if you think you've heard that name before, he is also the winemaker at PondView in Niagara-on-the-Lake. This 2010 Cab was aged 18 months in 3 year old French barrels to keep a lot of the fruit intact. The nose is front loaded with black cherry and vanilla; the palate is dark fruited with strawberry and cherry, a little earthiness, cedar, spice and graphite notes - and it all mixes well with that fruit. Price: \$19.99 - Rating: ****+

BONUS: [DiProffio Wines 2011 Gamay - \\$16.95 \(W\)](#)

Norman Hardie 2010 County Pinot Noir - \$35.00 (W)

www.normanhardie.com

I'll come right out and say it: this just might possibly be Norm Hardie's best County Pinot to date. Hot on the heels of the very good 2009 comes this awesome 2010 ... the heat of the vintage helped give this usually feminine wine a little edge: more dyke than Southern Belle this time round. To give you an idea of how good this vintage was, the grapes were picked mid-September, some 2-3 weeks earlier than normal; then the wine was aged 10 months in 40% new oak, yet yielded an alcohol of only 12.2% - allowing for some delicacy in the glass. The nose is loaded with ripe cherry, strawberry and a touch of herbs. The palate is lovely, bright and sexy with its full-on cherry, hint of spiced cranberry, violets and white pepper - the finish carries the whole package with quite a bit of length. Price: \$35.00 - Rating: **** 1/2

BONUS: [Norman Hardie 2011 Pinot Gris - \\$25.00 \(W\)](#)

Nyarai Cellars 2011 Sauvignon Blanc - \$19.75 (OL)

www.nyarai.com

Nyarai Cellars is one of Niagara's virtual wineries - which in essence means they have no bricks and mortar winery ... they exist in the ether and on the web; and now at DiProffio Wines. Yup, Nyarai has

a new home, for not only making wine, but to have wines on the shelf as well - with all their awards on display for all to see. This wine is Nyarai's bread-and-butter, while other virtuosos make Riesling, Pinot Noir and Chardonnay, winemaker Steve Byfield has latched on to a niche - one he loves to make. This year's version is grassy, tropical and herbaceous on the nose; while the palate shows good acidity with lots of citrus, which includes a massive hit of yellow grapefruit on the tongue. Price: \$19.75 - Rating: ****+

BONUS: [Nyarai Cellars 2011 Viognier - \\$20.75](#) (OL)

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



Bi-Weekly OWR Updates: *Video Wine of the Week - Taste it Again - Vintages releases*

NEW - Video Wine of the Week:

WineFox.ca and the Grape Guy have teamed up to bring you the Ontario Wine of the Week
This week's wine: [Chateau des Charmes 2010 Barrel Fermented Chardonnay](#)

On the Road with the Grape Guy:

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

[See pictures from the Wine & Herb Festival 2012](#)

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

[Ridgepoint 2005 Cabernet-Merlot](#)
[Lakeview Cellars 2002 Cabernet Franc](#)
[Colio Estate 2002 CEV Gamay Noir - Barrel Aged](#)
[Hillebrand 2005 Trius Cabernet Franc](#)
[Ridgepoint 2004 Medium Dry Riesling](#)
[Chateau des Charmes 2006 Estate Bottled Riesling](#)
[Cave Spring 2005 Cabernet-Merlot](#)
[Henry of Pelham 2005 Meritage: Cabernet-Merlot](#)

What I'm drinking Tonight (blog)

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

[New Posts Added](#)

Because of the above, just a few wines from outside Ontario

Vintages Release (blog)

[Vintages Release for Saturday August 4, 2012](#)

[Vintages Shop on Line - July 12 release](#)

[Vintages Shop on Line - July 26 release](#)

Event



Rare Vintage - Rare Opportunity at Coyote's Run - August 11, 2012

To celebrate the outstanding 2010 Vintage Coyote's Run is having an official pre-release of four of their Rare Vintage Wines: 2010 Rare Vintage Pinot Noir, 2010 Cabernet Sauvignon, 2010 Meritage, 2010 Syrah.

Don't miss your chance to taste these wines, most of which will not be sold for a few more months. We are offering pre-release pricing, and wine and food pairings.

Tastings are at 1:00pm and 3:00pm, reservations only, \$20 per person, 25 people per session

[Sign up today by booking online](#) or call @ 905-682-8310 ext 222.

See Wine Events Spotlight section on page 6 for your chance to win a pair of tickets

Event



Quick Sips: *News from around the World of Wine and Here at Home*

August 2012

Constellation Grows Again ...

http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424052702303933404577500981700267976.html?mod=googlenews_wsj

LCBO Under Fire (you just know I'll have a comment about this in an upcoming newsletter) ...

<http://cnews.canoe.ca/CNEWS/Canada/2012/07/24/20020511.html>

We're Still Scared ... <http://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/national/wineries-still-live-in-fear-of-liquor-control-boards/article4446478/?cmpid=rss1>

Not All Bad News for Greece ... <http://www.smh.com.au/executive-style/top-drop/greek-grapes-to-celebrate-20120707-21ncf.html>



Wine Event Spotlight: *Hurrah for Pinot Noir and Coyote's Run Contest*

The Pinot Affair ... 2nd Annual ... October 13 & 14, 2012 - tickets on sale now ... find out all you need to know at www.thepinotaffair.com

Win Two Tickets to the Rare Opportunity Tasting - August 11, 2012 ... all you have to do is join the [Ontario Wine Lovers Facebook page](#) and post what you like, or love, about Ontario wine - maybe it's your favourite wine, region, winery, or grape - whatever it is we'd like to hear about it. All posting made before Monday August 6, 2012 at 11:59pm will be eligible ... good luck and have fun.

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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