

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 – 214
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OntarioWineReview: *Impassioned Pleas and Deaf Ears*

Last week was a big one here in Ontario. Last week the bankrupt (of ideas) and corrupt Liberal government took a page out of the Progressive Conservative's book and said they were going to look at the way Ontario sells alcohol and in particular the way Ontario wineries get their products to shelf.

Premier Kathleen Wynne was interviewed on-board a Go Train (what is this supposed to suggest? She is going places? She's progressive?) [by CTV, talking about the issue](#): "Small wineries being able to sell in farmers' markets, those are things that are being discussed right now," interspersed with an interview of Jeff Aubry (co-owner of Coyote's Run): "[Ontario is] one of the most repressive alcohol distribution regimes in the western world." Jeff's a great spokesperson for the issue: he's vocal and articulate about needing more opportunity to sell his wine, of which he and his fellow wineries currently only three avenues (cellar door, restaurants and LCBO) ... but the question was raised: is he the right spokesperson? Let's hold off debate on that one for just a moment.

Not only did I see Jeff's interview on CTV, but I also heard his next interview on CFRB-NewTalk 1010 a couple days later on the Jim Richards show (~3:45pm). There Jeff repeated his message that Ontario wineries need other venues to sell their wines – besides the LCBO and their own cellar door (restaurants are whole other ball of wax). When asked how much of his production the LCBO takes, he said "75%" (a number he also mentioned to CTV) ... Now hold the phone. If I had one customer (like the LCBO) taking 75% of my production I'd be a pretty happy business owner – granted I really should look to diversify, because if that one customer decides to cut me off (which has been known to happen), I'd be in real trouble; so one could understand the need for wanting more places and different shelves on which to sell ones product, but still, it could be argued, Jeff and Coyote's Run are in an enviable position, the LCBO likes to deal with them and 75% to a customer that pays on time is pretty sweet, right? So why complain?

I agree when Jeff says his winemaker makes great wine and that's why the LCBO is interested in carrying it, but you could also make the case that there are plenty of other great winemakers and wineries in this province making great wine that doesn't get that kind of support from the LCBO. On the other hand, there are some who claim they don't want the LCBO's help because they take too much of a bite out of the bottom line ... but then we're back to the same problem: how else do you get your wine in front of more people? No matter how you slice it Ontario wineries are limited in their selling avenues (did you miss why – see the above paragraph). Let's face it, if you want to grow your winery business you NEED to deal with the LCBO, like it or not; it's akin to being held hostage: you don't like your capture but sooner or later you have to learn to get along or they'll kill you ... yes, Ontario wineries have a case of Stockholm Syndrome.

And what about the other wineries in the province of Ontario that need to put bottles onto LCBO shelves, how do they stack up against Coyote's Run's 75%? A random sampling over the weekend found the following: Lailey (5%), Rosewood (25%), Coffin Ridge (20%), Sprucewood Shores (30%), Colchester Ridge (15%), Kacaba (30%), Muscedere (5%), Ravine (11%), Staff Wines (35%), Creekside (40%), Flat Rock (50%), Angels Gate (65%), Closson Chase (10%), Ridgepoint (5%), Quai de Vin (0%) ... Though many admit they want that number to rise and the LCBO to take more – but then again what choice do they have, the LCBO is the only one who can take more.

Truth is, all the wineries mentioned above, and plenty more like them, have nothing but their cellar door to fall back on when the LCBO says no, and sooner or later they do, because the LCBO gets flooded with so many requests to sell foreign and domestic wine, and they only have a finite amount of shelf space ... they are, after all, THE ONLY game in town.

Let's move on to the government's latest thought bubble. In a companion story to the CTV interview, [the Toronto Star did a story](#) in which they spoke with Finance Minister Charles Sousa, who was quick to point out what his government is already doing to help the industry. He pointed to the three new Ontario VQA "boutiques" as if they were something to get excited about ... but what he fails to grasp is that it is still the LCBO; avenues for selling Ontario wine have not changed, they've just been given a fancier name: "boutique".

[In that same article](#), Sousa also noted that "a "wine panel" of officials from the ministries of finance, economic development and trade, and agriculture is looking at the system." – this is nothing new for this government, in fact a report called [the BASR report](#) came out in 2005 - commissioned by, you guessed it, the Liberals, to do just that and more. So in essence the Liberals are looking at an idea they were advised was a good one 8 years ago. Your tax dollars hard at work, again.

Finally, Sousa touted the coming of "express stores" in grocery stores as another achievement ... once again failing to realize that you're still just selling to the government run agency (the LCBO) ... and once again, that is not a new avenue – it's the same old place with a different name. So currently this government's answer seems to be to keep selling through the LCBO, but give things different names to make it look like the market is being expanded.

As for our friend Jeff Aubry over at Coyote's Run, he with the 75% production going to the Board, the earlier question asked was: is he the right spokesman for the job? Consider this: if a guy in a seemingly "golden" position, like Aubry, has something to gripe about – you have to question what the other wineries, who are in a more precarious position on the LCBO pecking order, are thinking. Aubry has listings to lose while the other wineries would be more than happy to fill those voids – and don't for a second think the vindictive LCBO is above that. Aubry is walking a double edged sword: on one side he's fortunate enough to have a big customer; on the other side he makes too much noise he's liable to lose them. So whether you think he's the right man or the wrong man for the job isn't really the issue ... it's that his message is spot-on no matter where you are on the LCBO depth chart.

As for Premier Wynne, she talks about "Controlled availability", "Ontario the good", and "getting over our history". But she leaves me with more questions than answers. Haven't we had enough control? Hasn't Ontario far out-lived its moniker of being "good"? And how long does getting over our history take? Especially when it comes to the way we treat our wineries and how we go about selling their wines. Ontarians have been told time and time again by so many of our previous governments, about reforming the system from Peterson to Harris and now Wynne (and I'm sure there are more in the past I just can't remember) ... heck why should we believe it this time. This issue has because Ontario's 'Big Foot' legend: we've heard about it but we've seen little proof.

So Premier Wynne, with all due respect, whether you stole the idea from the PCs, are looking to buy winery and the wine-lover's vote, or suddenly had an epiphany in your sleep, I don't care – can we please just stop talking about it (too many governments have paid enough lip service to this issue), let's get on with it already. It's high time Ontarians had easier access to their home-grown wines,

and high time that Ontario's wineries had greater and better access for getting those wines into consumer's hands. Can we finally be like other wine making regions of the world and show pride in our homegrown wines – and just for one month at the LCBO?



Grape Guy's Picks of the Bunch: *Three Red Blends and a Cabernet Franc*

Colchester Ridge 2010 Meritage - \$20.00 (W)

www.colchesterridge.com

The first thing you'll notice about this wine from Colchester Ridge (CREW) is the label, it's not the same old sail on the label ... and it's not just the label that has a fancy look, this just might be the best Meritage to come out of CREW – let's say ever. The nose doles out oaky and smoky notes right from the get go, then the cassis swings in – palate is all about dark fruit: blackberry, black raspberry and cassis with good balancing acidity and a nice lazy tannin structure, meaning they don't over-power the wine, they hang out but aren't causing trouble – much silkier than expected with touches of cinnamon and spice. Only 295 cases produced and they should go fast. Price: \$20.00 – Rating: ****+

Fielding 2010 Cabernet Merlot - \$34.95 (W)

www.fieldingwines.com

Winemaker Richie Roberts seems to have a handle on the grapes at Fielding ... this 2010 red blend is a beauty that hits all the right notes. Nose of black cherry with mocha and the goodness of spice luring you into the glass. Palate brings it all together: black cherry, white and black pepper with mocha and tobacco all with a smooth lingering finish, the proper amount of tannin output that neither overwhelms nor disappears quickly. Price: \$34.95 – Rating: ****

Strewn 2010 Three – Terroir - \$33.00 (W)

www.strewnwinery.com

The "Three" referred to are the big three in many an Ontario red blend: Cabernet Sauvignon, Cabernet Franc and Merlot. If you have read my reviews for the single varietal wines in this Terroir series you'll find this Three seems to take all the good aspects of the grapes, mixes them together and makes for one awesome wine. Since Merlot and Cabernet Franc make up 80% they dominate with red fruit screaming into the olfactories in the form of raspberry and cherry. Cabernet Sauvignon adds some sexy elements to the palate. Sure there's the typical red and dark fruit but that Sauv adds chocolate to the mix – and that just seems to bring everything together. The robust tannins scream ageability, say 7+ years with ease. Price: \$33.00 – Rating: ****+

Tawse 2009 Cabernet Franc – Van Bers Vineyard - \$49.95 (W)

www.tawsewinery.ca

Most folks who read my reviews long enough know that I have a something-something for Cabernet Franc. Here the house that Pinot and Chardonnay built have come up with their versions of Franc, and it's lovely. Nice smoky black licorice and black cherry on the nose, while on the palate there's a juiciness about this one that has tobacco backing it up: raspberry, strawberry blend to make a yummy mid-length finish wine. Another really good single vineyard offering from Tawse Price: \$49.95 – Rating: ****+

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



Bi-Weekly OWR Updates: Wine Videos, Blog Additions and more

Weekly Wine Videos

Just as the name suggest ... every week I'll introduce you to another fabulous Ontario wine that you've just gotta try – [Check out the YouTube Channel Now](#)

Video #33 – [Hinterland 2012 Lacus](#)

Video #34 – [Colio 2010 CEV Small Lot Syrah](#)

Ottawa Life – International Wine Selection(s) of the Week:

Check out the [Ottawa Life – Thirst Impressions](#) blog for my weekly selections

This week's posts:

[Ontario Wine Month: The Whites](#)

[Ontario Wine Month: The Reds](#)

NEW – Quench By Tidings ... #Wine Wednesday ([see them all here](#))

[Walking Barefoot](#)

[The Wonderful World of Melchor](#)

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

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

[The End of Winter Stratus Lunch and Tasting](#)

[Reif Mid-Summer Lunch](#)

[La Ferme du Mont Lunch at The Wine Bar](#)

[Best of Beamsville at EPIC Restaurant](#)

[Don Melchor Dinner At Harbour Sixty Steak House](#)

[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

[Tawse 2009 Spark Rose](#)

[Inniskillin 2004 Montague Vineyard Merlot](#)

[Tawse 2004 Dry Riesling](#)

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

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

[Read the New Posts Added](#)

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

[September 28, 2013 – Vintages Release Report](#)

[In-Store Discoveries – September 28, 2013](#)

Win Tickets



Fridays, Saturdays & Sundays in November 2013 - 11 am to 5 pm

Taste the Season is Niagara-on-the-Lake's must-do event in November! Celebrate the season's bounty with locally inspired VQA wine and food pairings at each of the 27 member wineries. [Tickets are available here.](#)

**Or you can win one of 3 pairs right here right by doing the following:
Simply answer this skill testing question – Name 3 Niagara-on-the-Lake wineries.
Then email your answer to michael@ontariowinereview.com**

Winners will be chosen at random from all entries received before October 11, 2013 at 11:59am

Win Tickets



Wine Event Spotlight: *Taste Ontario + Win Tickets to Taste NOTL*

Taste Ontario ... The highly anticipated taste-and-buy event is coming to Ottawa and Toronto, with over 80 wines from over 30 of Ontario's most passionate and talented winemakers. Both the Ottawa (Oct. 7) & Toronto (Oct. 10) event are taking place in October this year. Make it a friends' night out, visit our Icewine Lounge, enter to win a Wine Country Ontario Getaway, meet the winemakers and enjoy Ontario's best. New this year is an online ticket sales system. Tickets only \$65 — these events sell out quickly. <https://kiosk.eztix.co/kiosk/15297>

Wrapped Up in The Valley ... Two days, 25 incredible sip & taste experiences brought to you by the Wineries of Twenty Valley. Your Wrapped Up passport is valid for one taste-filled weekend. November 9 & 10; 16 & 17 or 23 & 24 — here's how to get your passports: <http://www.20valley.ca/page/store>

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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