

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 – 111
June 25, 2009

In this Edition

- **News ...** *New Chair of the WCO*
 - **Ontario Wine Review:** *What Could Have Been*
 - **Grape Guy's Picks of the Bunch:** *Two Five Star wines at 25-bucks*
 - **Weekly Wine Notes and More:** *Cider, Meritage, Taste it Again and Vintages for July 4*
 - **OntarioWineReview:** *Today's Word is Hypocrisy*
 - **Wine Event Spotlight:** *Pick a Winery, Any Winery*
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News ... *New Chair of the WCO*

Congratulations to Ed Madronich, of Flat Rock Cellars, who was elected earlier this month as the new Chairman of the Wine Council of Ontario. Is Madronich the Mondavi I spoke of back in [Newsletter #105](#)? Knowing Ed, I bet he thinks so – an eloquent and passionate speaker, not just about screwcaps and Flat Rock, but of the Ontario wine industry as a whole. A guy who has played on both the big boys team (Vincor) as well as being a small, yet vocal player in the industry through his own venture. Here's wishing Ed all the best in his new position and all the endeavors he undertakes – here's hoping he can make a difference.



OntarioWineReview: *Let them eat Cake ... or at Least Buy Ontario*

I wrote this article on Monday June 22, 2009, in preparation for a strike at the LCBO. I know it sounds funny that I would say 'I was hoping for a strike' (even if it was going to be a short one), but once again our province avoided a golden opportunity to discover the wines of Ontario first hand. While the LCBO reports huge sales on the day before the strike deadline (~\$60-million), our wineries are struggling to stay afloat and our industry looks smack dab in the face of another record breaking (and I mean massive) fruit surplus. It would have been nice if the LCBO would have walked off the job and the wineries themselves would have been able to step in to fill that void. Alas, that did not happen. Our wineries will continue to struggle, the LCBO will continue to make record breaking profits while helping to break the collective backs of our wine industry. For all of you who ran out to grab cases of FuZion and Yellow Tail – you missed a special moment in time to try what's right in your own back yard, and wines that go much better with that Ontario raised BBQ'ed fare you had planned for the weekend or your Ontario grown summer salads. The article below might be a little dated now, but there are reasons why the LCBO didn't, or wasn't allowed to go on strike ... and those points are not dated. One day it would be nice if a strike actually happened and Ontario wine stepped in to be the savior; one day ... hopefully before it's too late.

Written: Monday June 22 2009 (2 days before the June 24 strike deadline) ... The wineries of Ontario are holding their collective breath at the moment ... hoping, wishing and waiting. For you see, the liquor giant in the province, you know them as the LCBO, is going on strike (deadline was yesterday, June 24), for the first time in their history. That means that the good people of Ontario will have to buy their booze in the U.S. (for those within an hour of the border); cross the border into Quebec (as Quebecers did into Ontario during their own liquor board in 2005) or at a winery (of which Ontario has plenty to choose from and most likely at least one is near you). Now I suspect this window won't be open long for two reasons: 1) Rumour has it that management will likely step in at the larger stores in major cities to keep them up and running and 2) the government will step-in in short order to send the LCBO workers back to the bargaining table and back to work (within a week if not two). Why would/could the government step in on this you ask? Because, you see, the LCBO has been deemed an "essential service" and can therefore be forced back to work, or at least forced to stay open with a skeleton crew. Yup, you read that correctly, the LCBO is right up there with the police and fire department, the LCBO is just that important to the well-being of all Ontarians.

An essential service is defined as: “those necessary to prevent danger to life, health or safety and disruption of the courts.” Employees who are designated as having essential positions must continue to provide services during a strike. While federally it’s pretty cut and dry as to who can and cannot strike due to their “essential” designation, there are provincial guidelines set out by the individual provinces. “Legislation in Ontario requires that Crown employees and ambulance workers have an essential services agreement in place before a strike can begin so that certain services can continue.” The LCBO is a crown corporation ... hence the above statement applies to them. But the strike won’t last long, or at least there will be stores that remain open (which ever management feels are the most important to staff).

Who’s kidding anyone, the LCBO essential? Hardly. Best we call them an “essential money making service” because that’s the only reason to classify them in the same category as the one’s who save our cities from the fiddling of Nero and mass corruption (though some might say this is ironic because the LCBO is a corrupt system unto itself). But the government won’t let this cash cow lie fallow for long (ya gotta love a mixed metaphor). It’s for that reason that the wineries of Ontario have to strike while the iron is hot (or should that be the other way around? ‘Iron while the striking is hot’ – you get my meaning, I hope). The wineries will have to quickly get the word out to let you know where you can buy your wine – a major push on advertising and awareness: “While the LCBO lies dormant, Ontario’s award winning wineries are open for business and ready to serve during these troubled times.” And really, there is no better time to get acquainted with what the LCBO isn’t selling you. I’m talking about those great hand crafted, small lot, small batch wines, and also what the fruit wineries are making in your area (truth is, you probably live closer to one of those than you think). Now’s the time to let your fingers do the walking over your keyboard and search out your local winery(ies), find out how long it’ll take you to get there and, maybe, even make a day trip out of it (if necessary), to stock up. There really is no better time to get acquainted with what Ontario has to offer, wine-wise, and I know you’ve heard me say it before, but really, with the LCBO walking the picket lines what better time to get to know your local winery, and what you have been missing all these years.

So to all those lovers of Ontario wine, and to all of you about to discover what many of us have known for years, here’s to you; let’s all raise a glass to toast a long labour dispute, the hopeful resuscitation of an industry in desperate need of a shot in the arm such as this, and to a boost in sales and audience of the fine wines being made in this province, it’s been a long time coming, but now it’s time you found out that Ontario makes some world class fantastic wines that can only be found, you guessed it, at the winery.



Grape Guy’s Picks of the Bunch: *Two Five Star wines at 25-bucks*

Hillebrand 2008 Ghost Creek Riesling - \$25.00 (W)
www.hillebrand.com

This wine is part of the Hillebrand ‘Showcase’ collection. These are wines that are small lot, small batch, single vineyard, single barrel, or for some other reason, a specially designated wine. This one comes from a small vineyard near a deserted creek; deserted meaning that water no longer takes a path along the creek bed, hence the water has deserted it. But that doesn’t sound all that appealing in these environmentally sensitive times ... but ‘Ghost Creek’, now that has a spooky yet almost mythical ring to it. Last year, I really liked this wine, this year I like it even more, it’s an absolute beauty. There is so much going on in the glass that I could give you a list of descriptors that’ll apply to both the smell and taste: tropical fruit, lanolin, pineapple, peach, mango, lychee, with vibrant acidity and great minerality. Add all that to the 8.8% alcohol and a 3 (that tastes like a one) on the sugar code, and you’ve got yourself one heck of a beverage. This wine is subtle in the way it introduces itself before it becomes brazen: “Hello summer heat I’m Hillebrand’s Ghost Creek Riesling – I think you’ve met your match.” Only 300 cases were made so hurry, this won’t last long. Price: \$25.00 – Rating: *****

Coyote’s Run 2007 Red Paw Vineyard Pinot Noir - \$25.00 (W)
www.coyotesrunwinery.com

Jeff Aubry, owner of Coyote’s Run, described this wine as “what the perfect girlfriend should smell and taste like”. Good thing for Patti (his wife) they have yet to make Axe Red Paw Pinot Noir Body Spray – her married life is safe. But this wine will become quite extinct the moment enough people find out about it. With only 650 cases made it might sound like a lot, but this is not a wine you buy one bottle at a time, it’s a 4-6 bottle lie-a-few-down type of purchase. First, when you pour it, you’ll notice its beautiful colour. Then with a sniff you’ll pick up ripe black cherry, raspberry, rhubarb, a touch earthy and slightly smoky. The taste is ripe and juicy black and red fruit, earthy and smoky, with firm yet smooth tannins that are velvety across the tongue. This is a

very feminine Pinot, with lot of rounded, smooth curves that feel supple in the mouth and especially on the tongue, "like licking the skin of a supermodel". Now that does sound like the perfect girlfriend, the only thing missing is the high-maintenance factor; the good news is that Coyote's Run has taken care of that part for you, tending to her every need for her 14-month stay in French barrique; now all you have to do it take her out for a good time once in awhile. This wine is still quite young but it shows so much potential that on that alone it deserves its 5-star rating. Price: \$25.00 – Rating: *****

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



Weekly Wine Notes and More: *Cider, Meritage, Taste it Again and Vintages for July 4*

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

June 16, 2009 – County Cider Company – Peach Cider ([read](#)) ([listen](#))

June 23, 2009 – Peller Estates 2007 Private Reserve Meritage ([read](#)) ([listen](#))

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

Nothing New this week – keep checking back

[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

Nothing new this week – keep checking back

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

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

[Chateau des Charmes 2005 Estate Bottled Riesling](#)

[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: 2 from California and 2 from Michigan

Vintages Release: [July 4, 2009 – Vintages Report now ready](#)

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OntarioWineReview ... Today's Word is Hypocrisy

Since we have a liquor board going (or possibly already) on strike, and one that in the past has shown that it's so worried about the rules of cross-provincial border shopping – it's only fair that we look at how the LCBO has helped out other boards when they went on strike and upheld the liquor laws of the land ...

As you may remember, last year a stink was raised by Ontario's LCBO about cross-border (and I'm talking provincial borders here) booze buying and shipping. It dated back to a 1928 law known as the Importation of Intoxicating Liquors Act - I even admitted to being a breaker of this law when I visited B.C. last summer ([Newsletter #93](#)). I found I was not alone, plenty of other readers emailed to admit that they too are felons of the vinous kind.

The LCBO decided that the less than 5% of booze that enters the province, that they do not get their greedy little mitts upon, was to be stopped. Winery principles in B.C. admit that it is a very small amount of sales that they send out-of-province; why they even bother is beyond me, especially with all those (potential) problems: unreliable shippers without heating or cooling equipment damage wines; being forced to buy a minimum of a case, as shipping costs can prove pricey for just a few bottles, and of course there's the lack of a try-before-you-buy aspect - it's hard to request a case of something that you've never tasted, no matter what the reviews say.

But our whistling-blowing moral compass, the LCBO, seems to have a skeleton in their closet which should have made them think twice before raising the red flag. In their own annual report for the fiscal year 2005-2006 they proudly printed, in black and white, a \$25-million increase in profits due directly to the cross provincial border shopping of Quebecers who were looking for holiday season booze, while their own liquor giant, the SAQ (Quebec's equivalent to the LCBO) were on strike. As you can plainly see the LCBO was all for inter-provincial booze buying then.

It is also interesting to point out that the Ottawa-Hull area is a bonanza for both Ontarians and les Quebecois. It seems that beer is cheaper in Quebec, while wine has a lower price on the Ontario side; hundreds, if not thousands, of these cross-border smuggling expeditions are made weekly and nobody has said anything about it over the years. Could it be because it's mutually beneficial to both the LCBO and SAQ's bottom line? On the other hand, who does the BC matter benefit? Not the liquor board, they don't get their tax share; so maybe it's the wine buying consumer, hmmm.

Now, I'm glad that we haven't stationed border guards on our provincial borders; can you just imagine, "Welcome to Ontario, anything to declare?" If this type of inter-provincial "looking the other way" goes on between Ontario and Quebec why can't B.C. get a piece of that action - it goes both ways you know, BCers are interested in Ontario wine too, I was there, I fielded quite a few questions.

And here's something else to think about and thank the LCBO for: Westerners already hate us here in the East, the LCBO has given them yet another reason - and all in the name of a few tax dollars. I am sure we could work something out; but if I were a B.C. winery I'm not sure I would want to now. While they were screwing the LCBO out of a few dollars, the LCBO turned around and screwed us out of BC wines. So you see, the LCBO has done it to us again, and this time I am not just talking about their over inflated prices: BC screwed a corporation, the LCBO screwed us all. Just another way the LCBO is working harder for you, think about that when you cross, or see, a picket line.



Wine Event Spotlight: Pick a Winery, Any Winery

A combination of sticking to the premise of my first article and too long a list of events to do justice to, I give you this piece of advice when it comes to events this time of year:

While both Martha Reeves and Mick Jagger sang about summer being a time for dancing in the streets, there could just as easily be a song about summer being here and wineries hosting events. Pick any winery, check their website for their events listings and you'll find a light lunch, winemaker's dinner, comparative tasting, concert, or countless other things to keep you busy and fill your days sipping, savouring and enjoying wine country. Summer's here alright and the time is ripe for visiting wineries near you – dancing in the street optional.

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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