

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 – 119
October 15, 2009

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News ... *Gewurztraminer Tickets on Sale*

Great Gewurztraminer Challenge - November 9, 12 and 18, 2009 ... Tickets for the OntarioWineReview Gewurztraminer challenge are now on sale. Visit www.ontariowinereview.com for all the details of how you can get your tickets for just one night or all nights.



OntarioWineReview: *The Gospel of VQA*

Picture, if you will, a classroom of about 30 adult students. Teacher stands up at the front and writes the words "Cellared in Canada" on the blackboard, he then asks, "Who has heard this term?" Head nods of agreement, they have heard of this. The teacher then writes these three letters "V-Q-A" on the board, "Who's heard this term?" he asks. Everyone again nods assension. "What's the difference?" Silence ensues. There are then some attempts to explain the difference, but there always seems to be a little confusion in the definition. The words, "no, but thanks for playing," escaped my lips on more than one occasion. Yes I was that teacher and this happened less than 2 weeks ago. With all the media hype surrounding Cellared in Canada the only thing anyone knows for sure is that somehow cellared wines are bad; but VQA, has somehow been lumped in there too, the term has gotten lost in all the hype. Truth is, these two terms should be as clear as night and day to Ontario wine drinkers.

Now picture this. A man driving down the road, his cell phone rings, he answers, pleasantries are exchanged, then the question is posed, "What's up?" The person on the other end of the phone is a winery owner with a very real concern, "We're getting hammered here by irate customers telling us that they are disappointed with us and angry about being duped over our use of foreign grapes and off shore wines." He pauses for dramatic effect, "We don't make cellared wines, we're strictly VQA, always have been always will be. Mike is there anything you can do?" Oh how I wish I could. My worst fears are now being realized; all Ontario wine is being painted with the sloppy broad-brush strokes of Cellared in Canada.

The two stories above are true and have come about due to the continuing controversy surrounding Cellared in Canada wine. Let's be crystal clear about these two products: Cellared in Canada and VQA. Cellared in Canada is the foreign blend with 30% Ontario content (0% in B.C.); it is a bastard child with no home, an orphan with no earthly parentage. VQA, on the other hand is a purebred, it is 100% from the province it states, Ontario or B.C., currently the only 2 provinces with VQA regulations in place. A VQA wine has the flavour of its origin, it has a home, it has that aspect of "Terroir" the French so rightly hype. Terroir means soil, but it means more than that when talking about wine, it's a combination, a culmination if you will, of everything mother nature brings to the table in any given year that goes into making that wine – the soil, the climate, the environment. VQA is Ontario wine – 100% - always has been, always will be – if it says VQA, it's A-OK.



When I wrote my very first article about [Esprit wine being the official Canadian Olympic wine](#) and that it was made from a blend of foreign and domestic grapes – Vincor went into “damage control” mode, and it would seem they’ve been in that mode ever since. I had no idea the article would end up sparking the launch of a Facebook page ([Boycott Cellared in Canada](#)), a website ([Put the ‘O’ back in LCBO](#)), which in turn would get [a former film and television producer involved in the debate](#) or that [an international journalist would weigh in](#), nor did I know it would incite and infuriate a country in the wake of my stone being thrown into the pond. When I wrote to B.C. wine writers asking for their input about this topic nobody sent the merest hint of a ‘boo’ back; but today you can’t open a wine website without the words of some offended B.C. writer or wine blogger staring back at you telling you what a sham and crock this is. Where were these guys a year ago? Why suddenly have they realized ‘Cellared in Canada’ meant “not Canadian” – the bandwagon is getting pretty full these days.

But there’s a bigger difference here between the West coast and the East coast regions ... B.C.ers care about their image. Politicians from out BC way acted quickly, they marched into BC liquor stores to see for themselves what the deal was. Then on October 5, 2009 it was announced “Wine made from foreign grapes will be moved out of the BC product section in government run liquor stores” (Agriculture Minister Steve Thomson), reports say that the job was to be completed by Thanksgiving – that would be the Canadian Thanksgiving. Here in Ontario, where the controversy first took root, [we’ve struck a committee to study the issue](#), and they’ll take 3 months to report back their findings. Huh? That’s right, instead of interrupting the holiday wine-buying season and making it crystal clear to people what they are buying by distancing the wines at the retail level, Ontario has decided to look into this with a committee formed by the Wine Council of Ontario and the wineries involved, polling wine writers and industry “elite”. Oh happy day.

Ladies and gentlemen of the wine buying public, before I go on with my case, allow me to show you an article in the [Vancouver Sun from October 8, 2009](#) – this piece of premature pandering pabulum hails the battle for the truth on the bottle as won and the large companies, who perpetrated these wines on an unsuspecting populace as the conquering heroes returning from the battlefield victorious. You should see this for what it actually is: the Vancouver Sun sucking up to potential Olympic advertisers (re: large wine companies) and offering up a pseudo apology for making things difficult on them for the past few weeks. The observant amongst you will also notice the lack of a by-line on the article, and goes as far as to praise the LCBO for already differentiating Cellared from VQA at the retail level.

What the article, and others who feel the battle for the CiC bottle has been won, fails to realize (amongst other things), is that Cellared in Canada can be compared to a bad relationship, and we’ve all been in a ‘bad relationship’ at some point in our lives. What happens? You and your partner sit on the couch one night and talk it out, one, or both of you, promise to change, you smile, you hug, tears are inevitable, but you promise to change ... Though the end results is always the same, in a year you’re still in a bad relationship because nothing has changed, you’ve both fallen back into your same old ways. We must view CiC in this same light, as long as committees are being struck (sitting on the couch) and things remain status quo (nothing changes) you’re still in a bad relationship. The committee has till December 31 to release its findings, by then most of us will have been lulled into a false sense of security because of irresponsible articles like the one in the Vancouver Sun, we’ll have long forgotten what we were fighting about until the next time we sit on the couch to discuss our relationship, and the question gets raised, “didn’t we fix that back a year ago?”

Speaking of questions, I have one for the minister in charge of the LCBO, Dwight Duncan (a man obviously in complete denial about what goes on at the liquor monopoly – “Finance Minister Dwight Duncan's office, which oversees the LCBO, says Ontario wines have good access to the market and there's no plan to change.” Windsor Star – Sept. 10, 2009): Why, instead of sitting idly by watching this brouhaha take place, don’t you take a cue from your BC counterpart and order the LCBO to change it’s arrangement in their stores? Meaning Cellared in Canada wines have no right to be directly beside, or within, the 100% Ontario wine section (VQA), they should be as far away as possible to avoid any implication that it is “Canadian”.

And as for the committee, get the word Canada off the label, that’s were this discussion should begin. Canada is part of the international community, the grapes come from other countries who are also part of this community, these wines are clearly “International Blends”, call them that, do it quickly, get transparent now ... what is there to discuss? If you get this done quickly and efficiently all will be forgiven, until the next time we have to sit down and have our talk, say about percentage content or stretch water, but those are topics for our next get together on the couch.

Here's a couple of interesting pieces that crossed my desk this week:

- 1) [A letter from MPP Kim Caite](#) pleading with the minister for consumer services, Ted McMeekin, to do something about the grape crop (and other grape and wine related issues under his control).
 - 2) [Is this letter bogus?](#) Pay careful attention to the highlighted portion. Is this how an "industry leader" should, or could act, by and issuing threats and using intimidation tactics? You be the judge.
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Grape Guy's Picks of the Bunch: How about 3 more from 2007...

Chateau des Charmes 2007 Estate Cabernet Franc - \$13.95 (W, L)

www.chateaudescharmes.com

I tried this wine as a sneak preview at the recent Chateau des Charmes new label launch. Before we get to the wine let's discuss this label for a minute. Chateau des Charmes have launched a new updated label that more than just an update, it's a leap forward – usually when one "updates" one's image they create a new label design, a new look; the Chateau not only updated their image, they took labels into the technological age: they've put a box-like item on the back that talks to your cell phone. "Talk" of course is a subjective term, what actually happens is you take a picture of the box and your phone can retrieve information about the wine and much more. Pretty sophisticated stuff for a winery whose previous label was gold block letters on a solid coloured background. As for this '07 Cabernet Franc, under the new label, it delivers outstanding value and shows how Cabernet Franc flourishes in Ontario. The nose has aromas of cherry-tobacco and blackberry, while the palate is complex: smoky, tobacco, blueberries, black raspberries, smooth with a long smoky-vanilla finish. Buy half a dozen, this should evolve well over the next decade, and is a bargain at under \$15. Price: \$13.95 – Rating: ****½

Calamus Estate Winery 2007 Meritage - \$30.00 (W)

www.calamuswines.com

The Calamus Meritage is a big step up from the Calamus Red (of the same year), price-wise; and for good reason. This wine constitutes the best barrels from the vintage; in this case 50% Cabernet Sauvignon, 35% Cabernet Franc and 15% Merlot ... and only 300 cases were produced. "Best barrels" were tough to find in 2007 because all seemed to be good, but winemaker Arthur Harder, assistant Steve Byfield and the owners of Calamus all sat down to take part in the tasting and blending, though I am sure Arthur had final say, though the tasting, by all accounts, was a lot of fun. The nose is loaded with appealing aromas: smoke, dark chocolate, blackberry, vanilla, cinnamon, crème de cassis and black cherry. The palate offers up a big load of flavour too: dark fruit, herbs, spice, cinnamon and dusty tannins on the finish, which is full of long and lingering spiced-black fruit. This is a wine that should come into its own in the next couple of years, revealing more layers of flavour, so be sure to set some aside. In my opinion, this is Harder's best red to date for Calamus. Price: \$30.00 – Rating: ****½

Cave Spring Cellars 2007 Pinot Noir Estate - \$34.95 (W)

www.cavespringcellars.com

While I am happy to review wines over \$25 I rarely buy wine over \$25, and if I do it's never a bulk purchase (more like a bottle or two) ... it's just a personal thing – but this is the first time I have totally considered buying half-a-case of a wine at this price point, and here's why: this quite possibly could be the best Pinot Noir to come out of the Niagara region from the 2007 vintage thus far – but something tells me you'll need more than that to convince you. Let's start with the vinification (how it is made): aged 12 months in a mix of French and Hungarian oak, which was primarily new; the fruit is all estate (hence the estate moniker on the label) and it was cropped to approximately 2-2½ tons per acre. The question people are bound to ask, 'is it Burgundian or Californian?' I'd say it's a nice mix of both. Aromas are enticing, big cherry take center stage, other red berries and some red licorice – the wine just lures you in by the nose, seducing you to take a sip. And here's where it explodes: red berries, sweet cherries, vanilla, nice herbal and mineral notes, all gliding seductively along the tongue with elegant soft tannins ... this wine is so delicate, yet it reminds you of its presence with a beautiful long finish ... a wine that must be tried to be believed. Price: \$34.95 – Rating: *****

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



Weekly Wine Notes and More: *Oak Heights, Stoney Ridge and lots of Road wine*

A new Ontario wine is reviewed every Tuesday ... take two minutes to listen to the [Podcast](#) or read the tasting notes on the [Blog](#).

[Weekly Wine Notes](#) (added to the Blog and Pod in the past two weeks):

October 6, 2009 – Oak Heights 2007 Cabernet Franc ([READ](#)) ([LISTEN](#))

October 13, 2009 – Stoney Ridge 2008 Chardonnay Musque ([READ](#)) ([LISTEN](#))

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

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

[Sonoma in the City](#)

[Lunch with Jane Ferrari](#)

[Savour Stratford](#)

[Vintages Platinum Tasting, Australia](#)

[One More Time with Catena](#)

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

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

[Mountain Road 2002 Reserve Cabernets](#)

[Southbrook 1999 Triomphe Merlot](#)

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

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

[Norman Hardie 2005 County Cabernet Franc](#)

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

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

[6 New Reviews Added](#)

Including: a 2002 Red Label, J & J Eger, E. Guigal 2005 Rhone and more

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

[Saturday October 24, 2009 – coming soon](#)

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www.wineriesofniagaraonthelake.com

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Uncorked and Decanted: *Nifty gadgets, accessories and other things that enhance wine enjoyment*

I'm a gadget guy and a self-admitted gizmo junkie; and if that gadget has something to do with wine I'm doubly so. I have more specialized glassware, more decanters, more doo-hickeys and thinga-ma-bobs than anybody else I know. Anything that claims to make my wine experience better I'm all for trying. So recently I have been testing this aeration devise called [Vinturi](#), and I have to say I'm rightly impressed with it.

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Now, you must understand that when I put something “to the test” I actually do. I don’t just use it once and make my decision, I try it over the course of weeks, even months, that way when I recommend it I’m confident that 1) it works and 2) it does what it says it’ll do.

Vinturi is a wine aeration system, it looks like a thick, yet slim plastic funnel ... you pour the wine through it (or into it) and it comes out the other end into your glass. You can actually hear it working away at your wine cause it makes a heck of a racket as the wine gurgles and bubbles into your glass. Basically you are pouring in still wine and it comes out bubbly (not Champagne bubbly, these are just air bubbles on top). Vinturi is a by the glass aeration system and I am convinced it works.

I should stop here and let you know that when I test a product I am not alone, I assemble friends, family, fiancée, whomever I have at hand to guinea pig products along with me on my journey of discovery. I ask them questions about their experience, I make them taste things multiple times – funny thing is, they follow right along; most people will do, and suffer through, anything for a glass of wine.

At the end of my testing (which this time lasted a few months), and countless bottles of wine, I am ready to proclaim Vinturi a success. It successfully aerates wine: made the tannic smooth ([Botalcura 2004 El Delirio](#)), brings the old to life ([Wolf Blass 2002 Red Label](#)), and can fix minor faults, stress on minor ([Mountain Road 2002 Cabernet](#)). The only think it couldn’t do anything with was a [monster Pinot Noir from Lailey](#) – but that’s a bottle that only time can help along. Otherwise Vinturi performed admirably. For more information about this cool gadget check out <http://icmcanada.ca/vinturi/>, and enjoy your wine.



Wine Event Spotlight: *Events Worth Repeating*

The OntarioWineReview Gewurztraminer Challenge – November 9, 12 and 18 at Campbell House in downtown Toronto ... you don’t want to miss our first white wine challenge. [Tickets and information are available here.](#)

The **Toronto Chapter of the Ontario Wine Society** decided that there is a need for a no-frills, serious, but, at the same time fun, tasting event in Toronto that brings together as many Ontario wineries as possible for the sole purpose of tasting their VQA wines with the intent to order. In Ontario, the wineries, by law, are not allowed to physically provide you with bottles of their wines at this event. You will be able to order the wines for delivery to your home or office. Also available to order at this event, by cheque or cash only, will be Eisch breathable glasses and Schott Zwiesel, titanium-crystal break-resistant glasses at a 15% discount from retail prices. Here’s a great opportunity to do some holiday season shopping. [The OWS Taste and Order Event](#) happens Monday November 30, 2009

The Gourmet Food & Wine Expo is coming - November 19-22, 2009 ... your chance to win tickets happens next newsletter – look for the announcement and the skill-testing question in this space. [You can check out what’s happening at this year’s expo here.](#)

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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