

## 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 – 121**  
**November 12, 2009**

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**News ... Gewurztraminer Challenge - Two Nights Left**

**Great Gewurztraminer Challenge ...** Great Gewurztraminer Challenge ... Tickets for the OntarioWineReview Gewurztraminer Challenge Nights 2 & 3 (November 12 & 18, 2009) are still available. Visit [www.ontariowinereview.com](http://www.ontariowinereview.com) for all the details of how you can get your tickets or call 416-346-2223 to order now.

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**OntarioWineReview: What are you doing for the Holidays?**

Well, I hate to tell you this, but I was consulting with my calendar the other day and I noticed that the holidays are quickly approaching, so quickly in fact that I fear they will be upon us before we know it. Are you ready for them? Next newsletter will be my annual gift giving and getting guide – things to put on your list for yourself and for others. This week, I want to tell you how you could best spend the upcoming months and fill them with vinous joy ... visit one of Ontario's wine regions, there is plenty going on.

### Niagara

**Niagara-on-the-Lake ...** (sing with me now) The wine at night is chilled just right, deep in the heart of Niagara (clap-clap-clap-clap) ... but seriously, deep in the heart of Niagara lies the once voted "prettiest town in Canada", surrounded by a number of the best wineries in Canada. Here, you'll find an aptly named organization called "the Wineries of Niagara-on-the-Lake", which now number 21. When it comes to their events, there is always plenty to see, do and taste at the wineries. The month of November kicks off the festivities of the season with one of my favourite holiday-themed events: Taste the Season. A passport program held every weekend throughout the month of November where each winery offers a wine and food pairing ... collect enough stamps in your passport and you can wander into old town Niagara-on-the-Lake proper to pick up your commemorative ornament (there really is no minimum, you could just go and get the ornament if you like, but I think you'll want to get all 21 stamps). For me, this is one of the premier events of the season, which I never fail to miss. In fact, this weekend, I'll be roaming the highways and bi-ways of NOTL getting my fill of snacks, stamps and holiday wines.

Hot on the heels of Taste the Season is "21 Stocking Days of Christmas", a relatively new endeavour where the wineries of NOTL throw open their cellar doors and offer special wines for you to give as gifts or adorn your holiday table. I've never been on this tour, but it's definitely something to do in December and it's wine related; what more could you ask for? Details of both events can be found at [www.wineriesofniagaraonthelake.com](http://www.wineriesofniagaraonthelake.com).

**The 20 Valley ...** Staying in the Niagara region, but moving up the QEW a bit, you'll find yourself in the 20 Valley region where they are staging "[Wrapped Up in the Valley](#)" on the last 2 weekends of November. This is a similar event to Taste the Season in NOTL. The wineries are pairing up wine and food, but it's not an ornament you'll be taking home with you, instead, it's a box of specially crafted Lindt chocolates, each made with the wineries' own wine. You'll even get a gift box to put them all in. [Details of pairings can be found here](#).

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

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I just learned that alas this year's event is not completely sold out, seems you couldn't beg, borrow or steal a pair of tickets ... best to put this on your calendar for next year and get your tickets early, or hope they expand it to more weekends.

### Lake Erie North Shore

It would make a certain amount of sense for the wineries in the Lake Erie North Shore to call themselves "the Wineries of the Lake Erie North Shore", but they went for something a little catchier, SWOVA, South Western Ontario Vintners Association. I've checked out their website and see nothing official has been announced yet, but I am told that most wineries in the area have an open house with gift ideas and food. I am taking part in one such event November 28 and 29 at [Mastronardi Estate Winery](#) where I will be doing a glassware demonstration/seminar with Schott Zwiesel stemware and showing how the proper glass can make the world of difference to your wine enjoyment. Best of all, when we're done, you get to take the glasses home. I'll also be touring the area and checking out the other wineries offerings. Keep your eye on the [SWOVA website](#) for upcoming events.

### Prince Edward County

Finally, we have Ontario's newest wine region with a very old idea: [Wassailing](#). Wassailing, according to the folks at Wikipedia, is "the act of toasting the gods for a bountiful harvest [usually done] with a hot, spiced punch; often associated with Christmas." [The wineries of PEC](#) invite you down (November 20-22) to the County to help them celebrate the harvest and offer you the chance to celebrate with them. Sounds like there will be plenty of mulled wine, cider and snackies for everyone.

If that wasn't enough, through the month of November, the restaurants of the County are also celebrating the season with [Countylicious](#). 12 of the County's best restaurants are offering prix fixe menus of thirty to thirty-five dollars ... now that's an offer you can sink your teeth into (hey, I couldn't resist that one).

### All Regions and Wineries (from fruit to grape)

Not sure if any of these ideas appeal to you, then I have one more suggestion: check out the website of your favourite winery, there are plenty of holiday open houses to wander into and lots of things going on. This is the year you should put the best of Ontario on your holiday table, and the best Ontario has to offer can be found, you guessed it, at the wineries.



**Grape Guy's Picks of the Bunch:** *More of Ontario's best*

#### **Stratus Winery 2007 Gamay - \$29.00 (W)**

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

Regular readers know that I have a special place in my heart for Gamay, especially because I know Ontario can do this grape justice year after year. Unfortunately, it's just not as sexy a grape as Cabernet Sauvignon or Shiraz, so not everybody tries their hand at it, but those who do reap great rewards. Now Stratus isn't known for putting out many single varietal wines, but a recent discussion with winemaker J.L. Groux revealed that in good years, he'll make the call as to whether or not a single grape will be bottled. 2007 was one of those calls of greatness, thus we see this straight Gamay from the blending house of Stratus. The nose of this wine is riddled with big smoked cherry smells (that's because of the 639 days in oak – 43% of it new) and then there's the smell of alcohol (not surprising since it's a whopping 14%, pretty big for Gamay). The palate is loaded with cherry and alcohol heat, but if you decide to chill it the heat dissipates, leaving behind smoky, cherry and raspberry notes with a hint of licorice. Because I enjoy my Gamay slightly chilled, I've based my review on the hour in the fridge version, not the pre-opening, sitting on the counter version. With lower alcohol and a lower price we'd be looking at a 5-star wine here. Price: \$29.00 – Rating: \*\*\*\*½

#### **Ravine Vineyard 2007 Gewurztraminer - \$22.00 (W)**

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

This wine is the tale of the Gewurztraminer that nobody wanted. Now I am not sure of the full story here, but I overheard the following story: the folks at Ravine got the fruit for this wine from an unwanted vineyard on the Beamsville Bench. They hand harvested, and double sorted the fruit, basically, they cherry picked only the best. About two months after bottling the wine was a disaster, they didn't like the smell and the taste was very ordinary. This wine is a write off, or so they thought. A few weeks later in walked chef Michael Stadlander, and he wanted to try a white for his restaurant, surprisingly he picked the Gewurztraminer. Michael must have tasted something nobody else did, and he was right - soon after this ugly duckling blossomed and turned into the

beautiful swan, I mean version of the G-wine that it is today, not typical but very tasty. The nose is golden delicious apple based with a very subtle rosy-floral note; the palate has an easy sweetness (1) of pear and peach with a delicate yet long floral finish. What a treat. Michael liked the wine so much he designed the label for it – check it out. Price: \$22.00 – Rating: \*\*\*\*½

**Hillebrand 2007 Showcase Cabernet Sauvignon - \$35.00 (W)**

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

At a recent Taste and Buy event a few weekends ago at Hillebrand, I got a sneak peak at some of the upcoming releases. This particular wine won't be seeing store shelves till the Spring of 2010, but it was the highlight of the tasting (October 2009) and is only going to get better with time. This wine represents the top barrel selection from the 2007 vintage, the grapes come from the Clark Vineyard – a vineyard mostly dedicated to the growth of quality red grapes. The wine then rested for 22 months in new French oak barrels, taking on the complexity you can smell and taste, it was then bottled without filtration, which means in years to come, this wine will throw a sediment, but will also age quite gracefully. Beautiful deep colour is the first thing I noticed about this wine, then it's the smells of sweet fruit that permeate up into the olfactorys. The palate is dominated by black cherry, raspberry, white pepper and plums – there are some seemingly dusty tannins, but they become smooth and approachable with each passing sip. This wine is supple and lovely. A fantastic wine from a fantastic vintage – it may seem expensive now but in 10 years it'll be so worth it to pull the cork on this one. Price: \$35.00 – Rating: \*\*\*\*\*

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



**Weekly Wine Notes and More:** *Fielding and 30 Bench Blends + On the Roads and more*

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):

**November 3, 2009** – Fielding Estate Winery 2007 Cabernet-Syrah ([READ](#)) ([LISTEN](#))

**November 10, 2009** – Thirty Bench Winemakers 2008 Riesling ([READ](#)) ([LISTEN](#))

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

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

[Profile Wine Group Tasting](#)  
[Masi. Tasting Under the Stars](#)  
[Taste Napa Valley](#)  
[G7: Wines of Portugal](#)  
[Bb33 Errazuriz Winemaker's Dinner](#)

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

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

[Jackson-Triggs 2002 Proprietors' Grand Reserve Merlot](#)

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

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

[13<sup>th</sup> Street 'Reds' – Again, Last Bottle](#)

**[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 story about a disastrous night of tasting

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

See what's coming [November 21, 2009](#)

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## **OntarioWineReview Commentary:** *It's About Time for the WCO ...*

There's a proposal on the table at the Wine Council of Ontario – ditch Cellared in Canada. This is not like the Facebook page telling you to Boycott Cellared in Canada wines, this is something bigger, it's a marketing and lobbying decision, and it's been a long time coming.

There's a new chair over at the Wine Council, and while I don't want to pat him on the back quite yet, or give him all the credit, he is making some sense. Why should the Wine Council of ONTARIO be lobbying for wines that aren't 100% Ontario product? The answer is as plain and simple as you believe it is: they shouldn't; and that's why it's nice to see the Wine Council finally putting 2 and 2 together and coming up with the right number (for those on the wine council reading this, and still not getting it, the right number is 4; as in the Wine Council should stand 4 Ontario wines only). Now this is only a "proposal" and one that will be voted on November 17 (which, if approved, does not take effect until April 1, 2010). I strongly urge the Wine Council of Ontario to adopt this proposal, and let the makers of Cellared product fight their own battles, instead of lumping their interests in with the other 70+ wineries you represent who can't make ANY Cellared product. For the record, the only 7 wineries (by my count) making CiC wines are Jackson-Triggs, Peller, Pillitteri, Colio, Pelee Island, Kittling Ridge and Magnotta, and if they were smart they'd take a page out of the Gabe Magnotta book of labeling. You might have noticed that Magnotta has fared pretty well through this whole Cellared in Canada issue, in fact they've come out unscathed in this whole mess. That's because they have their labeling done right. Need a refresher on their labels? Visit a Magnotta retail outlet near you. Those big bold letters that spell out other countries tells the consumer exactly where the grapes/wines comes from – so simple it's ingenious, and honest.

Might I also offer the Wine Council another little piece of advice: the idea floated recently about including fruit wineries and those that make 100% Ontario wine, but not necessarily VQA wines, is also a good one. You are the Wine Council of ONTARIO, you should speak for all the wineries of Ontario. Speaking as one voice is much better and more productive than the cacophony of many and maybe, just maybe, more can be accomplished and achieved as an all encompassing unit. The right track for Ontario's wineries starts on November 17 ... will the Wine Council finally take on the role of an Ontario wine group – we'll have to wait and see, I for one remain hopeful.



## **Wine Event Spotlight:** *Two upcoming events and Where I'll Be*

As if the above wasn't enough for you, here are a few more events you might want to check out:

[The Gourmet Food and Wine Expo](#) – November 19-22 Metro Toronto Convention Centre – South Building – Congratulations to all our ticket winners to this event.

[The Ontario Wine Society Taste and Buy event](#) – November 30, 2009

**Where I'll Be ...** You can catch me at [Mastronardi Winery](#) in the Lake Erie North Shore region talking about glassware (November 28) and cool climate wines (November 29) ... for details visit the [Mastronardi website](#) and I hope to see you there.

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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.

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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