

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 – 123
December 10, 2009

In this Edition

- **News ...** *Holiday Publishing Schedule*
 - **OntarioWineReview:** *End of the Year Mini-Rant 2009 Edition*
 - **Grape Guy's Picks of the Bunch:** *Five Wines, including 3 Chardonnays*
 - **Weekly Wine Notes and More:** *Strewn Red, Lailey White and I've been On the Road*
 - **Wine Event Spotlight:** *The Icewine Festival Invades The Chateau*
-



News ... *Holiday Publishing Schedule*

What's coming in 2010 ... January 7, 2010 - results of the Gewurztraminer Challenge will be published. Also look for the announcement and crowning of 2009's sexiest winemaker later in the month. This is the last Newsletter of the year see you in 2010.



OntarioWineReview: *End of the Year Mini-Rant 2009 Edition*

Issues that, throughout the year, have bewitched, bothered and bewildered me. I take one more pass at them – for 2009 anyway ... and more often than not, I have more questions than answers, and you should too.

In Pseudo Defense of Chardonnay ... speaking as someone who, in the grand scheme of things, would rather drink his own urine than a glass of many of the mass marketed, totally blasé Chardonnays of the world, I have to admit (not too grudgingly I might add) I have found a few good ones this year (three of which appear in the Picks of the Bunch section this week; some from [Chateau des Charmes](#) and [Closson Chase](#), were reviewed earlier this year). It's not just here in Ontario where well-made, highly drinkable Chardonnay is being made, some world wineries are doing wonders with Chardonnay too: Scott Family (California), Nova (Chile), and La Crema (California), just to name a few. Chardonnay has become king for a number of reasons: it's fairly easy to recognize in the glass, it doesn't require you to do tongue athletics to pronounce it like Gewurztraminer and Viognier do, and it's a fairly easy white wine ... but that's the biggest problem I have with Chardonnays, it's so easy to make that many either take it too seriously or not seriously enough. Many wineries treat it so poorly that it is not the wine the ABC crowd (Anything But Chardonnay) craves when it's the time to have a glass of white. The real challenge for us red or anti-Chard-drinkers, is in developing the skill to recognize a good one. My fellow ABCers, don't give up on the grape completely, just maintain standards which you will not compromise for the sake of having a glass of "white wine" when the occasion calls for it.

Diamond Rated Concern ... Is it just me who is a little fearful about the Diamond Group of wineries consolidating under one roof? Diamond, who purchased Birchwood, DeSousa, Lakeview, EastDell and 20 Bees over the last few years, and maintain the Dan Aykroyd brand, is consolidating their operation at the huge facility known as 20 Bees on Highway 55 in Niagara-on-the-Lake. So far, they have sold off the Lakeview and Birchwood properties, and I have also heard they are shopping both DeSousa and EastDell around. Now, they are just selling the land, not the license nor the brands that go with them. That means they'll have all 6 brands under one roof ... does that strike anyone else as odd? Do we all believe that each wine brand will be distinctively different, especially when you realize they don't own any vineyards and get all their grapes from growers? Will the Pinot in one bottle be the same Pinot in another, yet under a different brand name? The possibility is most certainly there. Diamond, please alleviate my fears that you're not just making McWine for the McMasses using the same McGrapes and putting it all under some pretty well-known and well-established labels.

LCBO Mag Lacks an Ontario Column ... Answer me this: Why is the LCBO so scared of showing support for

Ontario wineries? Sure they have these months through the year where they promote “go local”, but when approached (by yours truly) about having a section devoted to Ontario wine in every issue of their precious Food & Drink magazine they balked. Now, I’m not saying I have to write it, but it would be nice to see local being promoted every month (or issue, as the case may be) instead of specific months when they feel like being touchy feelie with Ontario consumers. Just another way the LCBO treats our wineries like their competition instead of partners in the field of beverage alcohol.

South Africa has tar; Chile has mint; Australia, eucalyptus; Ontario: baby-poo ... It’s quite possible that next time you wander into an Ontario winery you may be confronted by a ‘child-friendly-winery’ thanks to a website called JustTheFactsBaby.com. Now who really thinks having toddlers (or infants) along in a winery is a good idea? Honestly? There are so many reasons why not that I’m surprised that somebody has actually deemed this to be a good idea. For God’s sake, where’s MADD when you need them? I don’t have time to argue this one out [again](#), especially in this short-rant forum, so I’ll begin here with my top three reasons and then you can input your views to me in an [email](#). #1 – With all the talk about, and new laws against, drinking and driving and the safety of people and children on the road (heck you can’t smoke in a car with your child), I’m shocked somebody would offer up this idea that mom should get out there and sample wine with junior in tow (Is this the newest version of the Rolling Stones “Mother’s Little Helper”?) #2 – Who amongst us really wants to see toddlers running around playing tag in and amongst the bottles of wine and stemware displays; can you say ‘disaster waiting to happen’. #3 – With the whole world turning politically correct and wanting to include more people in more places, wineries should still be a sanctuary for adults. There are so many kid-centric and family oriented things to do in this world, shouldn’t a winery be a bastion where adults can congregate and still talk about adult things without hearing, “I’m sorry, did junior bump into you, I’m sure that won’t stain, at home we use ...”

Tetra Quandry ... I have been watching with interest the Tetra-Pak wines in my local LCBO dwindle and I think that is the best news I have been witness to all year. For me, it was always a case of freshness. I agree that the cardboard amalgam was good for boaters and pinickers, but I always asked myself why is everything in Tetra-Pak, from water and oil to juice boxes and soup, all best before dated with the exception of one product, wine? Don’t believe me? Check out any Tetra-Pak product you have in the house (I’m sure you have quite a few, I count a dozen in my own pantry on one shelf alone), check the shaded box on top and you’ll find the words “best before” – now pick up a box of French Rabbit ... see what I mean.

Prize Takes a Holiday ... Now that the most recent Taster’s Challenge is over and officially in the books (held November 23 in Toronto), I should tell you about my own experience with the competition. Last year, I placed 4th in the professional category; it was pointed out to me that 4 out of 400 is not bad placing at all, very Canadian. It meant that I had the fourth best palate in the Toronto area (not too shabby indeed). I attended a luncheon at Tawse winery in Niagara where I received my prizes: 24 pieces of Spiegelau stemware (4 boxes of 6 different glass styles), \$500 cash, a Jackson-Triggs dinner, over-night stay and tour of their facilities, and finally, a trip to Chile. As you can rightly imagine, the notion of a trip was more than I thought I would come away with. But wait, now ask me what I have used of these fabulous prizes: the glassware and the dough. The J-T offering was nice, but I’m sure I’m the last person J-T want to entertain on their property these days. And that trip to Chile I was so thrilled about? It was a pay-your-own-airfare affair ... not much of a prize when you have to pay your own way to get to some place; it’s like winning “a new car” on the Price is Right and then being told you have to pay for the engine. Now, organizers have assured me this kind of oversight will not happen again – little consolation to the guy who won the trip in 2009 (yours truly); but at least I have the fourth best palate in Toronto (out of 400 people) – that’s something they can’t be taken away from me ... until the winners are announced in February 2010. As for my memories of my Chilean trip fiasco, that has left a bad taste in my mouth, so to speak. I still competed in this year’s Challenge, I’m hoping to almost go to France.

One More Blast at CiC, for This Year ... There is still so much to say on this topic, and yet it is very quiet out there. It’s as if we are either waiting to see what happens, or everybody has lost interest in this whole scandal and washed their hand of it. Now scandal may be too harsh a word, SNAFU would be a better descriptor if I could spell out what the acronym means. To listen to the wineries tell you their side, they never meant to deceive or mislead the public, but at a [press conference held in BC in October 2009](#), they really didn’t come up with any concrete answers for us either. Their feelings were hurt by all the negative publicity, they made this quite clear, more than once. Aww, but the misleading and deceiving, they never meant to do that. Well we the press never meant to hurt your feelings, we just wanted the truth. This has been an issue coming down the pike for a long time and I am surprised it took this long to bite them in the ass. However I guess when you start messing with national pride (a la Esprit wine), Canadians can get a little jingoistic. Unfortunately, this issue has all but disappeared from the national conscience. The press seems mollified and so does the wine buying public; but the game is still going on, the labeling practices continue and the LCBO continues to be complacent and compliant in shelving the CiC wines right beside the VQA wines.

A few weeks ago the Wine Council splintered over the issue, the 7 wineries that produce CiC wines have picked up their carboys and moved to another playing field to fight the battle for their right to make Cellared product. Not surprising. A former insider at one of these big companies once said to me "If we could get out of the VQA game we would." But here's something that's really telling. I received an email from a former Wine Rack manager (owned by Vincor), in it he wrote: "Things changed significantly in the years that I worked there and came to a head after the Constellation takeover. I noticed that the promotion program moved almost entirely away from VQA wines and began to focus on Cellared in Canada wines almost without exception. In addition, all new products that were released were CiC: Naked Grape, JT Esprit, Inniskillin Int'l Series, Night Raiders, Sawmill Creek, Weekend Reserve, Simply ... Our mandatory listings of product were drastically scaled back and many VQA items were eliminated from our stores. The emphasis was put on volume, and virtually no effort was made to increase VQA sales."

This SNAFU is far from over, nor should you let it stray too far from your conscience. You'll be hearing about it again and again and again until we finally do get it resolved and there is no better time than before we invite the world to our door in Vancouver. Otherwise, we'll have to wait till they're about to come again (in 2015) for the Pan Am games in Toronto – but that's a long time to wait for a resolution, and right now there is no sign that we are close to resolving it.



Grape Guy's Picks of the Bunch: *Five Wines, including 3 Chardonnays*

Coyote's Run 2008 Black Paw Chardonnay - \$22.00 (W)

www.coyotesrunwinery.com

"I love Chardonnay. I could bathe in Chardonnay. I could drink it by the bucket full." These are quotes from Jeff Aubry (owner of Coyote's Run) when he talks about Chardonnay. Obviously this is a favourite wine of his to drink, but also one of his favourites to make. Now, to be fair, Jeff doesn't make the Chardonnay, his winemaker David Sheppard does, but Aubry signs the cheques so Dave makes the best Chardonnay he can ... because lord knows, if you can't sell it the boss has to drink it. Well I don't think Coyote's Run is going to have any trouble selling this Chardonnay, because it's a beauty. The wine is aged 18 months in a mix of new and old Hungarian oak barrels, and if you have never tried a wine done in Hungarian oak this is a good place to start. The nose sucks you in with vanilla notes, tropical fruits and lemon curd. The palate has a soft and buttery vanilla sensation, there's also lemon, pineapple core, peach pit along with some great minerality and acidity to round out the whole package. As many readers know, I am not a Chardonnay fan, in fact, I am firmly entrenched in the ABC camp – but this one helped pull me, if just ever so slightly, a little closer to the Chardonnayers' way of seeing things. Price: \$22.00 – Rating: ****½

Reif Estate Winery 2006 Cabernet Sauvignon Reserve - \$24.95 (W)

www.reifwinery.com

You have probably heard a lot about the 2007 reds and the 2008 whites, so much so, that 2006 seems to be long forgotten – especially, because it was sandwiched between two good quality harvests, 2005 and 2007. While on the Taste the Season trail, I tasted this Cab Sauv Reserve from Reif and was rightly impressed – and you'll have to trust me when I say it wasn't the food that made the difference, it was definitely the wine. The nose was the first thing to lure me into the glass (as it should be with most wines), sweet cherry, herbs and a hint of cassis. The palate showed some really good complexity for the tongue to work on, herbs, vanilla, cranberry and sour cherry all with a smooth, dry finish that kept you sipping and re-sipping trying to squeeze out as much flavour as you could. Delicious. Price: \$24.95 – Rating: ****½

Willow Springs 2007 '5 Barrel Select' BF Chardonnay - \$16.00 (W)

www.willowspringswinery.ca

For a guy who claims not to like Chardonnay, it is odd for me to put two in one newsletter, especially when it entails me bumping one of my favourite grapes out of the selection spot, Cabernet Franc (next time). But the bump seems necessary because there is a very limited supply of this wine, so if you want to get your hands on it you have to hurry. This wine is made at a little winery north of Toronto in Stouffville by a gentleman name Mario Testa. Mario actually has his own little vineyard up there where he grew Chardonnay. Yes, I did say grew because recently Mario pulled out his Chardonnay (I'll let him tell you why when you go up there or call to order your wine). It seems that there are only a few years left to try Mario is homegrown Chardonnay, and this is one of those years (there is still the '08 and '09 vintages to come and then it's over). This is such an alluring wine, which was aged 12 months in re-coopered barrels. The nose is toasty, oaky, slightly buttery and a bit nutty, think buttered almonds here as you put the glass to your nose and breathe deep. Those smells translate

to the tongue and add a lovely bit of apple fruit to the mix. It's not often that you get to drink a Chardonnay grown in Stouffville, Ontario, and as of 2009 you won't be able to anymore – so I suggest you give this one a try. As for the price, I think this wine is a real value selection, and we'll give them an extra half star to prove it; though something tells me they would have received that half star if the wine was twenty bucks. Only 125 cases were made, only 60 remain. Price: \$16.00 – Rating: ****½

Holiday Time Means Icewine ... this one is great for sipping and/or giving:

[Palatine Hills 2006 Cabernet Sauvignon Icewine](#)

Something Special you might want to get your hands on, ASAP:

[Black Prince 2008 Chardonnay Terroir](#)

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



Weekly Wine Notes and More: Strewn Red, Lailey White and I've been On the Road

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):

December 1, 2009 – Strewn 2008 Rogue's Lot Cabernets Franc / Sauvignon ([READ](#)) ([LISTEN](#))

December 8, 2009 – Lailey Vineyard 2008 Counterpoint ([READ](#)) ([LISTEN](#))

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

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

[Lunch at Biff's for La Chablisienne](#)

[Hanna & Sons and the wines of Daniel Wollenweider](#)

[Gourmet Food & Wine Expo](#)

[Wrapped Up in the Valley](#)

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

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

Nothing new this week – keep checking back

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

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

Nothing new this week – keep checking back

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

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

[10 New Reviews Added](#)

Including: Italian, Portuguese, Chilean and plenty more

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

Look for the January releases coming soon

Advertisement



CHÂTEAU DES CHARMES

The Icewine Festival invades the Chateau

http://www.chateaudescharmes.com/experience/special_events.html

Advertisement



Wine Event Spotlight: *The Icewine Festival Invades The Chateau*

Check out this link to see all that is happening at Chateau des Charmes this January:

http://www.chateaudescharmes.com/experience/special_events.html

Have a safe and happy holiday, drink plenty of Ontario wine and we'll meet up again in 2010.

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!

© OntarioWineReview.com 2009. All rights reserved.

You may use the content of this newsletter by including full credit to Michael Pinkus, Grape Guy and a link to www.ontariowinereview.com