

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 – 125
January 21, 2010

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OntarioWineReview: *Why Mendelson Should be Essential Reading in Ontario*

I don't usually use a book review as my main, lead-off article, but after reading *From Demon to Darling: A legal history of wine in America* by Richard Mendelson, I saw parallels between Canada and the US, as well as many differences. Where the United States progressively, though very slowly, moves forward with their wine laws, Canada stays stagnant, unwilling to move forward with our arcane and restrictive laws. The following review (and subsequent commentary) was written immediately after I had consumed the last page of Mendelson's tome. It's a book I believe all wine lovers and lawmakers should read. What started as a book report/review has morphed into something which should be nearer and dearer to all of us. Enough of the hyperbole; we've gotta start talking about this book, let's begin with the following quote:

"We must be as adamant about 'casual' users as we are about addicts. And whereas addicts may also deserve our help, 'casual' users deserve our condemnation," so said Nancy Reagan during her "just say no" campaign, which was not just against drugs, as many people believe, but also included tobacco and alcohol. This is just one little tidbit you'll find in the pages of Mendelson's book (p.164), which is a fascinating read about the legal battles over the bottle that the United States has been facing for longer than it has been a country. Mendelson is a wine law specialist as well as a winery owner in Napa, California; he does his best to keep the language in layman's terms for all to follow. He traces the history of the battle of the bottle from pre-country, to pre-Prohibition, through the Prohibition era, then the time immediately following (Repeal) and of course into today, over the course of 190 pages (there's another 100+ pages of references, notes and sources).

I would have to say that sometimes Amazon gets it right when they send you those emails that say "You have bought X in the past, we thought you might be interested in Y" ... when it came to Mendelson's book they were absolutely right. The propaganda on the back, from Philip J. Cook (author) reads, in part: "This concise yet well-documented history of how the wine industry has fared ... makes an enjoyable read for any serious oenophile." This book places the U.S. in a whole new, and somewhat parallel, predicament about wine, which we here in Canada find ourselves. The difference is in the form of the battle. The Americans are indeed battling, while we Canadians just seem to take our liquor systems at face value with no fight in us at all.

Many see Americans as this laissez-faire, free market, system, and yet, when it comes to booze, these folks lose their minds and common sense; witness the Nancy Reagan comments above from the mid-80's, not the 1880's, the 1980's. There are so many quotes in this book that I would just love to share with you, but by the time I do I will have either written my own book or cribbed half of what Mendelson has written. So much that is said and touched upon in this book can be attributed to us here in Canada.

Everything about America's wine has been battled over, not just their right to drink it, but what goes into and onto the bottle, where it can and can not go, where it is grown, can't be grown, where is can be sold, protectionist policies and even what constitutes a specific region (ie: a word like Napa on your label will fetch more money from consumers – so who can use the term?). As you get deeper into the book, you'll find out that "grandfathering" causes more headaches than the problems they are meant to fix.

To give you an idea of what the U.S. wine/booze laws entail, let me give you this example. In 1979, there was

movement led by the Coca-Cola Company (themselves winery owners at the time) to simplify, or harmonize, U.S. state and federal laws into one federal act. "When all state and federal liquor laws and regulations were compiled, they resulted in eight volumes and more than sixteen hundred pages." As you can well imagine, the harmonization never happened and that outcome was predicted by attorney Jeff Seff, "it is unrealistic to expect, or even hope, that the United States will harmonize their beverage laws, let alone adopt a model act. The politics, ... not to mention legitimate differences in regulatory approach, will keep that from happening." (p. 176)

Thankfully, for our wine loving brethren to the south, the U.S. laws are changing and progressively moving forward. In most cases, they legally challenge for a freer market for their wines, not just in-state but also from state-to-state. Today's battle is about shipping: "The patchwork of reciprocal shipment laws, local direct shipping privileges, and the cumbersome three-tier system caused wine aficionados, many of whom were attorneys, to question the constitutionality of the restrictive trade laws. In a country founded as a national economic union, the existence of fifty different state liquor laws, some discriminatory on their face, seemed un-American." (p. 181)

Never have I read a book so piecemeal and yet enjoyed it so much ... there's lots to take in and although written with the layman in mind, there is still a need for frequent breaks to digest the information given. It opened my eyes to not just what was happening south of the border but what is not happening here, in my beloved Canada: borders aren't open, the landscape for winery owners is not being made easier, and nobody seems willing to fight for what is inherently wrong with our liquor system. As of the printing of Mendelson's book (2009), "To date, over forty judges have heard more than twenty cases about interstate trade in wine. The demographics of the judges, and also of legislators and consumers around the country, favor increasing trade liberalization." (p. 186)

In his conclusion, Mendelson says, "The future will require commitment, intelligence and patience." Here in Canada/Ontario we have shown the patience, and our wineries and winemakers have shown us their commitment, it's time for our lawmakers to show intelligence. The landscape is changing and they should get on board with change and stop stalling and hindering the growth of our industry.

For those of us living in Ontario, I was talking to a lawyer not too long ago, who said that there is so much legal action we could take against the liquor monopolies, all we need are plaintiffs, but who wants to sue their biggest, and more importantly, only, customer. Does this seem right in a free market? I was reminded that we broke up Ma Bell for a variety of reasons, should it not be time to do the same with liquor monopolies coast-to-coast. I've been thinking about the LCBO this past month, and how we are always focused in on the 'C' in their name, Control; when in truth we should be focusing in on the BO, because our system stinks. Thanks to Richard Mendelson and his book *From Demon to Darling: the legal history of wine in America*, for opening my eyes to what is possible, might I suggest grabbing a copy yourself and maybe we can open more things than just books and eyes, but that would make for a good start.



Grape Guy's Picks of the Bunch: *Chardonnay Comparison, a Franc and a Riesling*

Closson Chase 2007 S Kocsis Chardonnay - \$44.95 (W)

Closson Chase 2007 Aberdeen Chardonnay - \$44.95 (W)

www.clossonchase.com

Taking these wines individually is not as much fun as tasting and reviewing them together, because they are so different, yet so the same. Both wines are sourced from Beamsville Bench vineyards (in Niagara), both go through the same oak treatment (both wines are barrel fermented – using natural yeasts - and aged 18 months, using the same barrel. 100 % French oak - 75% used 25% new, and went through full malolactic fermentation. No fining agents were used and they were bottled unfiltered). They're made by the same winemaker at the same winery and contain the exact same percentage of alcohol (13.8), and both have very long finishes that linger about long after the last swallow. Yet these wines are also oh so different on both the nose and taste. The Kocsis Chardonnay is made from 30 year old vines, the nose is big, and so is the palate. Big buttery smells of vanilla, butterscotch/toffee, hazelnut/almond and quite woody. Taste-wise it sits heavy on the palate with butterscotch/caramel, butter and lots of smoky wood notes. By contrast, the Aberdeen is made from 10 year old vines and shows more subtly and more delicacy. Soft vanilla, hint of pineapple and just a light smear of butter. Palate continues this delicacy with creamy sweet vanilla, mac apple, pineapple and a thin coating of butteriness. This comes down to a personal preference choice when it comes to the kind of Chardonnay you like. There's the heavy handed wood version (Kocsis) or the delicate fruit version (Aberdeen) – my scores are based on my liking of the one kind over the other (the delicacy over the brutish). If you like your Chardonnays rich with oak reverse the scores. Price for both: \$44.95 – Rating: Aberdeen (****½); S Kocsis (***½)

Stratus 2007 Cabernet Franc - \$38.00 (W)

www.stratuswines.com

Stratus is known for their assemblage method of winemaker. What that means is they assemble the wines from different components to make the best wines possible – the French have been doing it for years, not just in Bordeaux but also in the south of France in the Rhone Valley. Bordeaux does it for simple survival reasons. A blend is better than producing a single varietal because if one of your single varietals is weak the others can help prop it up, and the finished product makes for a more complete wine. Bordeaux limits itself to 5 varietals, the Rhone can use more than a dozen grapes in a blend, Status puts themselves somewhere in the middle. Not limiting themselves to five, Stratus uses a number of grapes and their philosophy is to blend to make the best wine possible. But JL Groux, winemaker, can also pull certain wines from the blend to make a single varietal wine when he deems the wine is deserving of its own bottling. 2007 was one of those years, and this Cabernet Franc is one of those wines. The nose is smoky, black currant and blackberry oriented with a bit of old leather and harsh spice. However, where the smells attack the senses, the palate does the exact opposite, it caresses them. Lovely, sweet red fruit coats the tongue with plump cherries and red plums all wrapped in silky tannins and just the right amount of mouthwatering acidity that delights the palate and makes you take sip after sip trying to squeeze every last drop out of the glass. Price: \$38.00 – Rating: *****

Fielding 2008 Lot 17 Riesling - \$24.95 (W)

www.fieldingwines.com

This Riesling is made from a 17 row plot of vineyard that you can see from the winery window as you're sipping on it. The vines are only 7 years old, take up less than an acre of space and they produce less than 200 cases of wine. Aromas are of pear, peach and melon and very inviting, especially for Riesling lovers. Tastes are true to the nose with extra complexity on the tongue: there's pear (lots of pear) and melon with apple and cantaloupe adding the complexity to the taste buds. The sweetness level is just under a three, the great acidity and fruit forward flavours makes it hard to tell ... what a lovely sipper. Price: \$24.95 – Rating: ****½

Winter Time Means Icewine ... this one is great for sipping in the cold weather:

[Stratus 2008 Red Icewine](#) – (W, L)

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



Weekly Wine Notes and More: *Creekside, Huff and other wines tasted and re-tasted*

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 few weeks):

January 12, 2010 – Huff Estates 2007 South Bay Chardonnay ([READ](#)) ([LISTEN](#))

January 19, 2010 – Creekside 2007 Life is Good Cabernet Merlot ([READ](#)) ([LISTEN](#))

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

Trips, tours and tastings – join me as I review the highs, and sometimes, the lows
It's been a fairly quiet week – that will change

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

Wines that got "lost" in my cellar - some are Treasures others Trash ... Find out what happened
[Cave Spring Cellars 2002 Pinot Noir Estate Bottled](#)

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

Find out what has happened to some of my favourites over the years
[Jackson-Triggs 2004 Proprietors' Reserve Shiraz](#)

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

When it's not an Ontario wine, here's what I'm pulling out of the cellar
[5 New Reviews Added](#)
Including: Australian and BC Cabs, New Zealand Merlot and a couple of dogs

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

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<http://www.wineriesofniagaraonthelake.com/dowac.html>

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Quick Sips: *Occasionally interesting things cross my desk that I would like to pass on*

Sad News to Start ... Founder and owner of Magnotta Winery, Gabe Magnotta, succumbed to Lyme Disease on December 30, 2009; Gabe, amongst other things, was the first to bring a successful lawsuit against the LCBO. Speaking of the LCBO, I'm sure Gabe would have loved [this article, which recently appeared in Ottawa Life Magazine](#), written by yours truly.

Crush Has a New Owner ... Those who know of what I speak will be interested to know that Crush Wine Bar in Toronto has new ownership which bridges the gap between the big city and the wineries that make the wine that supplies the bar. The new owners are Lais Hotel Properties Limited of Niagara-on-the-Lake fame, Lais current holdings include the Prince of Wales, Queen's Landing and Pillar and Post Vintage Inns.

Consumption is Up, Blame the Women ... Statistics Canada has released numbers that shows booze consumption is up 12 percent since 1998. While beer sales remain fairly constant, and a male dominated beverage; the up-tick in booze sales is being contributed to wine consumption primary by women, whose numbers have tripled (in some parts of the country). In a related story, ugly men are getting more action, in some parts of the country.

Mom is Hard to Forget ... Researchers at Cambridge and Stanford have found that Gouais Blanc, a once banned grape in Europe is the mother of many of our favourite grapes, including Chardonnay, Gamay and Aligote. Gouais was once widely planted in the Middle Ages, but was banned because of its poor quality. The study also showed that because it was the maternal parent it provided additional DNA and potentially provided the important characteristics of the offspring.

Big Bucks to Brock ... On December 16, 2009, the federal government announced that the Grape Growers of Ontario and Brock University's CCOVI will receive up to \$1.9 million to fund new research that will directly support Canada's grape and wine industry; 75% of the money is coming from the federal Developing Innovative Agri-Products program.

Jeers for Embassy Beers ... turns out that the message is getting through to our embassy folks in Washington: Canada makes a wide variety of wine. Unfortunately the same cannot be said for the wide and diverse array of beers that we brew on this side of the 49th parallel. As of October 31, 2009 there were only three Canadian beers available at the Canadian Embassy in Washington: Molson Canadian, Alexander Keith's and Blue Light. Beer expert Stephen Beaumont called this misrepresentation of brewing in Canada "insulting". "For them to have a huge wine list and three very similar-tasting Canadian beers out of all we have available in

this country is a disgrace.” Beaumont offered to put together a proper beer list for the Embassy for free. He’s also be happy to sit around and drink it with them.

Could we Learn this Lesson Too ... According to an analysis by Bradley J. Rickard of Cornell University in New York State (an economics and management professor), the state of New York would make an additional \$22 million a years if they allowed wine sales in grocery stores. This proposal suffered defeat earlier in 2009 but it’s back up for debate in 2010, and support for it looks pretty good. Imagine, buying beer or wine in a corner store, sigh, one can but dream.

Moskalev Cocktail ... And now, from the “why would you want to go and do that” file comes the story of a new pill invented by Russian professor Evgeny Moskalev that transforms alcohol into a powder, thus allowing you to get drunk without using the middle man, actually drinking. Moskalev claims he can pill-ify any alcoholic beverage including whiskey, cognac, beer and wine. And the world needs this why?



Wine Event Spotlight: *Wine, Chocolate and Older Wines with Dinner*

Double Decadence... Experience the sensation of decadent wine and chocolate pairings with some of the most exquisite local chocolates from Kelly Nemeth of Tote Sweet and the wines of Cave Spring. Saturday, February 13th 1:00 - 4:00. Tickets are only \$5.00. For more details please contact Cave Spring Cellars at 905-562-3581 extension 302 or email retail@cavespring.ca

Henry Ransacks the Library ... Enjoy the pleasures of older Niagara wines with Henry of Pelham and Treadwell. While much has been made of Niagara’s recent success in the wine world, very few people have had the opportunity to analyze and indulge in some of Niagara’s finest wines from yesteryear. Before the heralded 2007 vintage came along, there were years like 1998 and 1995, among others, which were considered the finest ever at the time. Paul Speck from Henry of Pelham will guide you through a multi-course tasting menu, showcasing Treadwell’s celebrated cuisine with a selection of wines from over the past two decades. Saturday January 23 starting at 7pm, tickets are \$100 per person - to reserve contact (905) 934-9797 or book online at www.treadwellcuisine.com.

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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