

## 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 – 188

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### OntarioWineReview: *The Success of the OWS?*

For those of you who are not members of the [Ontario Wine Society](#) (and trust me there are plenty of you out there), this is a "reprint" of the article I wrote for their [July/August, 2012 newsletter](#) ... but before you say to yourself, "I've read that one already," here's the unedited version ...

"Clearly the formation and success of the OWS for the past 20 years added another component of credibility to our industry. It showed there was major interest in learning and promoting our wines while revealing a great pride in our wines." I'm not sure I would use the word "clearly" in that here, because clearly the Ontario Wine Society (OWS) has seen its share of ups and downs - unfortunately, in the province they call home it's been mostly downs, through no fault of their own. Started in 1993, the mandate of the OWS was to promote Ontario wines to Ontarians - to prove that the province wine industry had moved past Baby Duck and Bright's President, French Cross and 'Fine Canadian Burgundy' and moved into a new era for Ontario winemaking, one of quality (using vitis vinifera grapes - those found in Bordeaux, Burgundy and other parts of Europe) ... or as Debi Pratt (whose quote is also above) put it, "Belief [was] in the need for [a] club and how it could assist our industry efforts to sustainability as a premium wine growing region". Lofty goals indeed, but the best goals usually come from a greater need ... and Ontario was in need of fans for its new style of wines - especially due to its dark aforementioned past "accomplishments" in winemaking.

In speaking with Society members, there seems to be a lot of chest-thumping amongst the ranks about what a great job they're doing informing the public about the goodness of Ontario wines, but the truth of the matter is that they are a small group that has never raised membership above 400 people, across four chapters ranging from Windsor to Prince Edward County, but as the old saying goes, "where there's smoke, there is some fire", and if fire equals passions then this is one fired up group.

"Every great wine region has wine clubs or societies, so the Ontario Wine industry came of age in this department when the OWS began." - Debi Pratt, Winery Public Relations, Great Estates of Niagara.

There does seem to be a few origin stories behind the formation of the OWS and whose brain-child it originally was, Steve McAdam takes up the tale from here, "Heino Klassens and I met to discuss ideas on the viability of [the] creation of an Ontario Wine Society. In the meetings I was wearing two hats that of Industry Liaison as well as the key contact for Inniskillin, (Director of Sales and Marketing for Inniskillin Wines). In 1991 Inniskillin had just won the Grand Prix D' Honneur for the 1989 Braeburn Estate Icewine which elevated Ontario and Canadian Wines to classification amongst the Top Wines of the World. Their was a great curiosity of what the Ontario (and BC) wines were doing." According to Debi Pratt, an original member, the OWS found a friend in one particular

industry heavyweight: "with support from Inniskillin cofounder Donald Ziraldo." And by all accounts also got immediate support from Tom Pennachetti (Cave Spring Cellars owner), as he became one of the founding board members.

Bob Moore, member of the board since the inception, and past president (2006-2007), points to Ziraldo as a major influence, "I was approached by Donald Ziraldo to join the Board that was to be created with funding by the Wine Council. He said "You know as much as anyone on how to run a wine club and we need your help."

Yes it's great to have industry support and pat yourself on the back as being industry players; but what exactly has the OWS accomplished in its 20 year history. For that we turn to past and present members for their recollections on how the industry has changed, what the OWS has meant to them and their impressions of the impact the OWS has had on the Ontario wine industry as a whole.

The first thing, according to Steve McAdam, was to change the mindset of folks, especially those in the industry - and this from the eyes of a man, who, at the time, was working for Inniskillin, "Inniskillin always believed in industry promotion. The feeling at the time was very much [that] the competition was not Niagara or Canada but rather all the poorly made wines that were out there from around the world that people seemed to be drinking by rote." Interesting to note that Ontario was not far removed from its own "poorly made wines"-days, but now wished to put that winemaking past in the rear-view mirror.

Since those days, changes within the industry have been huge, from the ever expanding number of wineries, to the quality and diversity of the wines: "20 years ago it was based primarily on hybrid grapes. While some of these are still important, the impact of the varietals has been remarkable", say Ken Burford, current OWS President.

"The industry has focused on VQA standards and cool climate wines to reinforce its sense of place and authenticity, which is vital to the credibility within a wine region." (Debi Pratt)

"In the early days, we all tried to copy other wine regions: we tried to make Riesling like the Germans or Pinot Noir and Chardonnay like California or France. We have finally come into our own and realized that our terroir is unique to Ontario with all its challenges and advantages. What we are trying to do now is make a truly Canadian wine." (Anne Weis-Pennachetti, Sales & Marketing Cave Spring Cellars)

But as for the actual impact the Ontario Wine Society has made ... it's sad to say not one member could give me one plausible impact the society has made on the industry (that could not be refuted by statistics) besides the usual platitudes of how great they are, what a wonderful thing the OWS is and what it has done for members' perceptions of the Ontario industry:

"The OWS has given me a chance to learn more about the Ontario wine industry, meet the owners and winemakers and make friends through attending tastings and Board meetings. The OWS is a way for the wineries to showcase their wines to a group of enthusiastic people who appreciate that Ontario can produce award-winning wines. The OWS introduces some of the newer wineries to its members and guests who in turn can pass information on to their friends and colleagues." (Fred Couch, former treasurer and founding member, Niagara Chapter)

The best impact reaction, and the most honest, I could garner was from former Niagara Chapter president, Yvonne Trout, "To a certain degree [we have been helpful in promoting the Ontario wine industry]. We have no advertising budget so ours is a subtle role. We validate, thereby giving the image of the Ontario Wine Industry a boost, and provide a small stage to a limited but verbose sector of the market segment." It is sad to note that this enthusiastic bunch has had little to no impact on the wine buying public at large ... in a province of more than 13 million people, 400 members is barely a drop in the bucket. As a percentage of the population it's less than 1% (0.0000307% to be exact)

Current Niagara Chapter President, Clarke Baker, takes this approach, "I think that the OWS is trying to make the concept of local Ontario wine more real." Which is quite a healthy attitude to take: they are not trying to change the world, just the perceptions of, as Yvonne put it, "a limited" segment of the population.

In the end it's the words of Heino Claessens, founding president, that ring truest, "I would not be so bold to say that the industry's success is a result of the OWS, nor would I even go so far as to say that the OWS has had a significant impact on the industry. The role of the OWS was to provide a forum for those interested in Ontario wine to come together to further their knowledge and appreciation of Ontario wines. For myself, the OWS surpassed this goal in that I was able to meet many kindred lovers of Ontario wine, while sharing with them the knowledge and experiences of Ontario wine makers often comparing Ontario wine against other quality international wines."

There's also the realistic approach of current President Ken Burford, "... [we're] just one of many organizations that are trying to raise the awareness of the super industry that we have here."

Or maybe, just maybe - after I poured over the numbers and replies I received and told Ken that this article was going to take on a much more downbeat look after what I had seen, Ken wrote back: "Look at the bright side, perhaps it would have been worse without us. I scratch my head and wonder why we don't have millions of OWS members in this province. Why is there such a disconnect?"

It was then that I realized what I was dealing with. After you cut through all the BS you'll realize that what the OWS and its members really are, the Eliot Nesses of the Ontario Wine Industry - their trying to do some good, or as Fred Couch puts it, more diplomatically, "[we] are the unpaid ambassadors for the Ontario wine industry" ... while the rest of Ontario just sits back, watches and waits to see what is going to happen - usually in a haze of not even knowing/realizing they have a wine industry in their own backyard. The folks of the OWS know the difference, they love local and they are willing to shout about it if they must - and they must. They are not happy to be complacent observers. They want to see the waking-up of the province to their home-grown and produced wines, and they want it to happen sooner rather than later - the rest of the province just has to meet them halfway.



#### **Grape Guy's Picks of the Bunch: 5 Highlights and a Dozen More**

##### **Coyote's Run 2010 Red Paw / Black Paw Cabernet Franc - \$21.95 (W)**

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

It's been a staple at Coyote's Run to do it with Pinot Noir and a few times with Cabernet Franc ... and in 2010 it was once again time for Cab Franc to shine in the Red and Black soil spotlight. The difference is delicate versus heft. Red Paw has a very pretty nose loaded with cherry, spice, graphite and smoke ... Black Paw is earth laden with cigar box notes. Palate wise Red Paw is soft and supple but with loads of acidity: sour cherry, hints of smokiness and fresh acidity. Black Paw does out Franc's robust nature: dark berries, black raspberry and cherry with a smoky, earthy quality that leads to a graphite and dark fruit finish. It really depends on how you like your Franc, but my take is this: Price \$21.95 - Red Paw: \*\*\* 1/2+; Black Paw: \*\*\*\*+

**BONUS:** [Coyote's Run 2010 Red Paw Merlot - \\$24.95](#) (\*\*\*\* 1/2)

**BONUS:** [Coyote's Run 2010 Black Paw Pinot Noir - \\$35.95](#) (\*\*\*\*)

**BONUS:** [Coyote's Run 2010 Red Paw Pinot Noir - \\$24.95](#) (\*\*\*\*+)

**BONUS:** [Coyote's Run 2009 Meritage - \\$21.95](#) (\*\*\* 1/2)

**BONUS:** [Coyote's Run 2010 Pinot Noir - \\$19.95](#) (\*\*\*\*+)

**Huff Estates 2011 Reserve Riesling - \$21.95 (W)**

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

A very interesting Riesling and one that seems to be following a new trend to ferment Riesling dry (instead of leaving a touch of sweetness behind). The fruit for this wine comes from the Fox Vineyard in Niagara. The nose is grapefruit and pear - that may not seem all that appealing, but it finds a way to lure you in. Palate has a real tart presence, mostly on the finish, peach goes front to middle then lemon zest takes over and carries through to the finish. Price: \$21.95 - Rating: \*\*\*\*+

**BONUS:** [Huff Estates 2010 Medium Dry Riesling - \\$17.95](#) (\*\* 1/2+)

**BONUS:** [Huff Estates 2011 Pinot Gris - \\$19.95](#) (\*\*\*\*)

**Malivoire 2009 Pinot Noir - \$29.95 (W)**

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

2009 was a great Pinot Noir vintage - ask anyone who makes Pinot and they'll trip over their tongue trying to describe the greatness of the vintage for that particular variety. One of those Pinot specialists is Malivoire, who turned their base-model Pinot into a gentle, easy-spiced-black-cherry-with-a-hint-of-cranberry number. There's also some nice vanilla and spicy tannins on the finish ... while the acidity cleans the whole thing up nicely. Price: \$29.95 - Rating: \*\*\*\*

**BONUS:** [Malivoire 2010 M2 Small Lot Chardonnay - \\$19.95](#) (\*\* 1/2)

**Peller Estates 2010 Private Reserve Cabernet Franc - \$21.95 (W)**

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

Peller is no stranger to making nice with this grape. In 2007, a similar vintage to '10, their Franc was one of the best in class. So it should come as no surprise that the 2010 Franc measures up well. The nose has an array of interesting smells: raspberry, dried-strawberry, cherry-tobacco and crème brûlée. The palate shows mucho complexity as well: cherry-raspberry, tobacco, cranberries, milk chocolate ... and it seems to keep on giving. Great for drinking now or give it another 5+ years. Price: \$21.95 - Rating: \*\*\*\*+

**BONUS:** [Peller Estates 2010 Private Reserve Cabernet Sauvignon - \\$21.95](#) (\*\*\*\*)

**BONUS:** [Peller Estates 2010 Private Reserve Meritage - \\$22.95](#) (\*\* 1/2+)

**Rosehall Run 2009 Rosehall Vineyard Pinot Noir - \$34.00 (W)**

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

It's surprising sometimes what you can derive from a young vine. Now in vine years 8 is pretty young, but winemaker Dan Sullivan seems to be able to coax lovely flavours out of his own fruit from his home vineyard. This wine was aged 12-14 months in new French oak, but it seems to have integrated its oak flavours very well. The nose has plenty of sweet red fruit with a predominance of cherry-vanilla. On the palate that red fruit continues with a lovely juiciness of cherry and raspberry keeping just a touch of vanilla on the tongue. Smooth and lush with a suppleness of fruit and easy going tannins. Wanna know why 2009 was such a great year for Pinot - look no further than this. Price: \$34.00 - Rating: \*\*\*\*+

**BONUS:** [Rosehall Run 2011 'Defiant' - Pinot Noir - \\$18.95](#) (\*\* 1/2)

**BONUS:** [Rosehall Run 2011 'Liberated' - Chardonnay - \\$15.95](#) (\*\* 1/2+)

**BONUS:** [Rosehall Run 2009 Rosehall Vineyard Chardonnay - \\$39.00](#) (\*\*\*\*)



**Bi-Weekly OWR Updates:** *On the Road* articles - *What I'm Drinking* Reviews

**NEW - Video Wine of the Week:**

WineFox.ca and the Grape Guy have teamed up to bring you the Ontario Wine of the Week

**This week's videos:**

[Lailey 2010 Cabernet Merlot](#)

**On the Road with the Grape Guy:**

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

***All Stars in the Vineyard at Rosewood***

**Lost and Found (blog)**

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

[Lailey Vineyard 2005 Canadian Oak Cabernet Franc](#)

[Cattail Creek 2008 Chardonnay - No Oak](#)

[EastDell Estates 2005 Cabernet Franc Reserve](#)

**Taste it Again Grape Guy (blog)**

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

[Thirty Bench 2005 Cabernet Franc - Small Lot](#)

**What I'm drinking Tonight (blog)**

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

[New Posts Added](#)

***Chilean Syrah and German Riesling***

**Vintages Release (blog)**

*Vintages Release for September 15, 2012*

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**Wine Event Spotlight:** *Two Upcoming Events to Look out for*

**TASTE community grown** ... will be held on Saturday, September 29, 2012 from 11am - 4pm at the historic Crystal Palace, Picton, Ontario. A tight-knit community of chefs, winemakers, cider and beer masters, artisanal food producers and farmers united for one day to create the picnic of a lifetime. Tickets in advance are \$25 and include: wine glass, \$5 worth of sampling tickets, attendance at seminars and cooking demos, great music, parking and lots of fun. \$30 at the door. You can purchase tickets online at [www.tastecelebration.ca](http://www.tastecelebration.ca) or call 1.866.845.6644.

**Savour Stratford Perth County Culinary Festival, September 21-23, 2012** ... Ontario's foremost celebration of authentic local cuisine with 12 award winning chefs, 30 illuminating tutored tastings, cooking shows and skills workshops led by renowned culinary authors, artisans and innovators and exclusive sampling events. Click here for all the details: <http://www.visitstratford.ca/culinaryfestival>

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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.



**Socially Speaking** ...

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