

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 – 128
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OntarioWineReview: *What I Didn't Learn at College ...*

What could be more civilized than attending a wine show and being able to purchase some of your favourite products sampled there? That's the question on many people's lips when they attend a wine show ... well, actually, the two biggest questions Ontario producers get at these shows are: 1) where are you located and 2) can I buy some now (usually said while reaching for their wallets). Such questions make the teeth of be it winemaker, owner or employee of any of these wineries, cideries or breweries itch to the point of madness. Imagine being able to attend the Toronto Gourmet Expo, London Wine & Food Show, Ottawa's Wine extravaganza or countless other shows and being able to take home a few bottles of "local" producers' product ... it's done south of the border in New York State and it's a boon for their producers. It keeps their shows hopping and well attended by both consumers and local producers alike. It's one stop shopping, where you can get your annual fill of your "local" (read: home state) wineries.

"It infuriates me," says one winery owner, "to attend the Toronto Wine & Cheese and/or the Gourmet Expo and watch my potential customers walk out with bottle of Yellow Tail [Australia], Concha Y Toro [Chile] or FuZion [Argentina], which they can purchase from an on-site Ontario Liquor Board Store, and yet I can't get my bottle into that customer's hands unless they come and see me. It makes these shows counterproductive and not worth going to." These sentiments are shared by countless Ontario producers who find the dichotomy too much to stomach. It's one thing to get a consumer into a room with hundreds of other producers in one centralized location in Toronto, London or Ottawa. It's quite another to talk that same customer into making the trek to Niagara, Prince Edward County or the Lake Erie North Shore to buy the product they fell in love with. Even when they can order in on-line, many don't because the shipping costs can be prohibitive for just a few bottles.

So what's the answer? It's high time the LCBO stopped being such (excuse the language) dicks about things and started working with provincial producers to make this a win-win scenario.

Sadly, that is unlikely to happen especially in the wake of [Bill-132 being quashed just this past winter](#). It's time to stop with all the political backbiting and the accusations of why this bill was defeated (allegations were made that it was a case of schoolyard rules politics - you beat our bill, we'll beat yours - and look instead at what Bill-132 entailed, who opposed it and what it could have meant for this province.

Bill-132 would have allowed fruit wineries (an already hampered wine sector) to sell their wares at farmers' markets – in essence, being able to sell the wine right next to the fruit that made it, making the connection in the consumers' mind ... this is made by fermenting that. Standing in opposition to this Bill was, amongst others, the LCBO, who saw this as a loosening of their power over the beverage alcohol market, a loss of revenue and an opening of a door that would see wineries gaining other avenues for the sale of their products (look back at the first two reasons why this would never do in the LCBO's eyes). Never mind that the revenues would still flow where it should, into the public coffers in the form of taxes. The LCBO consistently uses the "social responsibility" defense as to why they must exist – this argument should fall on either deaf or at least plugged up ears (due to all the BS they are espousing). In truth, the LCBO's left side of their mouth talks about social responsibility while it's right side lavishes promotes and advertises products encouraging you to buy

more. It's as if Mother's Against Drunk Driving (MADD) held a charity wine auction to raise funds.

The passing of Bill-132 would have opened the door for wineries (all wineries) to have other venues to sell their products, which, possibly could have led to you and me being able to, one day, buy that much loved bottle of wine at the London, Ottawa or Toronto wine shows – it's a nice idea, a dream for many, and high time that dream became a reality.

For I too have a dream, that one day, little white wine and little red wines and little dessert wines and little fruit wines will be purchasable on the trade floor of my local wine show, and I say let freedom ring from the trade show floor: free at last, free at last, thank God Almighty we are free to purchase at last.

In a Related Story ... Shame on the LCBO – Sticking it to Ontario Again ...

In a letter to Ottawa Life Magazine in response to my January article ([LCBO Monopoly](#)) the LCBO claimed:

“ LCBO proudly supports Ontario wineries.”

To show that pride and initiative, they are holding the first ever “virtual” wine tasting. At first I thought they were getting on board with the Virtual wineries of Ontario (those without a winery and are sold solely thru websites) – but alas, when I opened the press release this is what I was confronted with:

“LCBO invites customers to dance the tango with Argentina's signature grape, malbec, during its first ever virtual wine tasting to be webcast on March 18 at 7:00 p.m. at www.lcbo.com/malbec. Wine enthusiasts and novices alike are encouraged to tune in as expert LCBO product consultants Janet Nastamagu and Laura Ruffolo taste and compare notes on three Argentinean malbecs – Argento Malbec 2009, Fuzion Alta Malbec 2008 and Domaine Jean Bousquet Malbec 2007.”

There's your Ontario Liquor Board hard at work supporting and promoting ... Argentina, instead of Ontario. Another fine example of your tax dollars hard at work.



Grape Guy's Picks of the Bunch: *Organizing Southbrook and Fielding*

Southbrook 2008 Triomphe Merlot - \$21.95 (W)

www.southbrook.com

This has the distinction of being Canada's first bio-dynamic red. Now some folks don't fully understand bio-dynamic winemaking; it seems like a lot of hocus-pocus with its phases of the moon planning and poop-filled horns in the vineyard. Allow me to alleviate your fears of any magical mystery about the wine, what it all boils down to is getting back to a more natural way of making wine. This Merlot has got a lot of oomph and power, from the smoky blackberry and black raspberry nose to the cassis, spice and smoky tannins in the mouth. This one needs a couple of years to come into its own then I'd say its good for another 5 years. It's going fast, so get your hands on some soon. Price: \$21.95 – Rating: ****

Organized Crime Winery 2007 Cabernet Franc - \$34.00 (W)

www.organizedcrimewine.com

I have often thought of winemaker Andrzej Lipinski as a white wine genius, but of late he is showing a pretty deft hand with reds too. This Cabernet Franc spent 17 months in new 225L Eastern European (Polish and Ukrainian) oak. Smells and flavours intermingle to produce tobacco, cherry, strawberry, and herb notes; smooth on the palate with a touch of grit from the tannins, nice fruit, oak and spice with a delicious long cherry finish. Only 150 cases produced from 6 barrels. This is a fabulous tasty Cabernet Franc well worth its price. Price: \$34.00 – Rating: *****

Fielding Estate 2007 Chardonnay Musque - \$13.95 (W)

www.fieldingwines.com

There are certain wines that are just made for summer – and sometimes you find those wines in the dead of winter – this is one of those wines. I tasted this one during a late fall afternoon during Wrapped Up in the Valley (20 Valley's pre-Christmas touring event) and as I sipped it on Fielding's back patio during abnormally warm temperatures for late-November. I thought, “I wish I had found this mid-summer instead of right now.” A nose

of pear, apple and tangerine that was thoroughly inviting. The palate was very pear oriented, with just the right amount of tangerine notes, a hint of sweetness and a lovely citrus finish. Great value on a summer sipper that should drink just as nicely next summer, so buy now, drink later, but not too much later. Price: \$13.95 – Rating: ****

Winter Time Means Sweet Wine ... this week's selection is:

[Cattail Creek 2008 Select Late Harvest Meritage](#)

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



Weekly Wine Notes and More: *Petit WildAss on the Road 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 few weeks):

February 23, 2010 – Stoney Ridge 2008 Petit Verdot ([READ](#)) ([LISTEN](#))

March 2, 2010 – Stratus 2007 WildAss Red ([READ](#)) ([LISTEN](#))

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

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

[Cuvee 2010 Gold Medal Winners](#)

[Experts Tasting at Brock](#)

[Seeing Red at Fielding](#)

[75 Wines from Foster's Estates](#)

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

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

Nothing new this week – but keep checking back

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

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

[Jackson-Triggs 2004 Proprietors' Reserve Meritage](#)

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

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

[8 New Reviews Added](#)

Including: my post Olympic wine

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

[March 6, 2010 Release Report](#)

[March 20, 2010 Release Report](#)

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Must Read: *Linda's New Book*

People like to point out to me that I like to stir the pot, I call it keeping people honest and on their toes, which is why I was looking forward to reading Linda Bramble's new book: "Niagara's Wine Visionaries: Profiles of the Pioneering Winemakers". It's the tale of the trials and tribulation of the Ontario wine industry thru the eyes of those who helped shape it. You'll read about the likes of Donald Ziraldo, Len Pennachetti, Paul Bosc Sr., Paul Speck and Don Triggs – guys who stirred the pot in their own right in their day.

I found the book to be intriguing for many reasons, one of which is because I have personally met most of the men Linda talks about in her book; I enjoyed reading how they got their start and their history. When you meet someone who is successful, you barely consider where or what they have been through to get to where they are. I also enjoyed a variety of pseudo-controversial quotes from the book. I say pseudo-controversial because Linda's aim was not to be controversial, she stops just short each and every time, from making a comment on what could be an easy assault on the LCBO and how it functions. There are many ills in the Ontario wine industry but nothing like the strangle hold the LCBO has over the industry and the way they treat their competition, the wineries of Ontario, it's like Big Brother, who's not only watching but has his foot on your throat to keep you down.

Now I know Linda is relating stories that are factual history, her position is not to stir up any controversy. Very few writers in the industry take that risk, especially when the attack would be against such a powerful liquor board. In the second chapter (page 28), Linda describes the LCBO's duties and functions. I think you should find it very interesting to know what your tax dollars are paying for: "... to import, buy and sell alcoholic beverages, to establish and manage liquor stores, to control the possession, sale, transport and delivery of liquor within the province, to maintain inspection staff, and to assist the police in enforcing the [Liquor Control] act". It's interesting that she should start that sentence off with "the duties of the LCBO were ...", since I have just written an article about the LCBO ([for Ottawa Life magazine, January 2010](#)) that "were" should read "still are". Those of you with a sense of business acumen and fair play should realize that a lot of what they do should not be held in the hands of one "company" it is incongruous, how can you sell and also be the regulator?

Linda talks about the inequality on LCBO shelves between foreign wines and domestic wines. It should be another whack-you-over-the-head moment, but it gets lost in the telling of the story, and quickly glossed over. However, it deserves repeating over and over and over again. The Ontario industry wanted to achieve, with the help of the LCBO, a 50% market share of their home market by 2020; a figure the LCBO seems to poo-poo, and yet other wine regions of the world have an even larger share: "... the home producers should have at least 50 percent of the home market. The California wine industry enjoyed 80 percent of their market, the French and Italian nearly 95 percent ... the LCBO senior leader, [Bob] Peter felt there were too many factors that were out of his control. He could control, to some degree, how many promotions he gave, but he couldn't control every winery's marketing plan or marketing spend, so he couldn't commit to a specific percentage growth." What is left unsaid here is that the LCBO is a monopoly and can commit to any number they wish – it just doesn't want to. Committing to Ontario wine means less foreign wine on their shelves and that might lead to a loss of revenue. If you think the LCBO couldn't mandate the percent of the market Ontario wines had, just take a look at the above paragraph and read what the LCBO controls, and then tell me which power they don't have that couldn't get more Ontario wine onto their shelves.

The closest thing to anything controversial said is a quote by Len Pennachetti on the very last page of the book. When talking about the Wine Council and Grape Growers impasse of 2008 and 2009. The two sides knew that the government had squared them off against one another and left them to fight it out without any help or guidance. They announced that the two sides had to find their own solution to their problems. Len, however, knew the score and let it all hang out when he said: "It's disingenuous for the government to blame our two organizations for the problems between us, because the government has created the friction that we live with every day by the way they have structured the industry. They control the supply side through the marketing board. They control the demand side through the LCBO. The government holds all the cards. For them to scold us for not getting along and say go away and figure out how you're going to be nice to each other is outrageous." That was a year ago, and still the fight for the industry continues and it all stems from the government's lack of support and the LCBO's foot on it's neck ... the LCBO and government give the industry just the right amount of crumbs to keep them hungry – mixed metaphors for sure, but what do you expect when describing a system started in the 1920's which has seen no real change since its inception.

Let me state for the record that Linda's book is an excellent read, it's interesting for what it does say but it's even more interesting for what it doesn't; it's a book you'll have to read for both what's on the line and what's between them.



Wine Event Spotlight: *Cool Chardonnay*

Ontario Chardonnay, Seriously Cool ... Cool climate VQA Chardonnays from Ontario will be showcased in England this May when British wine writers gather at Canada House in Trafalgar Square on May 17 to taste 34 of Ontario's top VQA Chardonnays selected by a group of Ontario wine critics. This Ontario Wine Society event will be a dress rehearsal for that Canada House tasting. Just the OWS on Wednesday, March 24, 2010, 6:30pm at the Toronto Lawn Tennis Club - 44 Price Street for this once in a lifetime event. Details can be found at <http://www.ontariowinesociety.com/flyers/Flyer-2010TSeriouslyCool.pdf>

To find out more about the event in London visit www.coolchardonnay.ca

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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