

## 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 – 129**  
**March 18, 2010**

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### OntarioWineReview: *Is Chardonnay Cool Again?*

On Sunday January 31st, I was called to duty with 7 other judges to help select Ontario's best Chardonnays to represent this province at Canada House and at the London International Wine Fair in England.

Now, I can almost feel a collective head scratching: What happened to all the talk about Riesling, Pinot Noir and Cabernet Franc? Since when did Chardonnay become the grape to represent Ontario? If you ask that question to Southbrook owner Bill Redelmeier he'd tell you it started for him while driving back to Toronto, when he heard Le Clos Jordanne winemaker, Thomas Bachelder, talking on the radio regarding Le Clos' surprising win at the Judgment of Montreal. For those not familiar with this event, allow me to fill you in: Back in May of 2009, a tasting was held for 10 respected wine critics and judges, described as "a who's who of Quebec wine writers", in Montreal, Quebec. It was a pseudo-recreation of the 1976 Judgment of Paris, which saw the then upstart wine region of California beat out first growth Bordeaux and Burgundies in a tasting of Cabernets and Chardonnays respectively. The only difference this time, in Montreal, a "ringer" was thrown in, a bottle of Canadian Chardonnay from the Ontario winery Le Clos Jordanne (2005 Claystone Terrace), even more surprising, they won. This caused quite an uproar on this side of the border and began a little rippling of the waters for Canadian wine; not enough for the world to notice (as in Paris), but enough to cause a stir nonetheless.

During Thomas' interview on CBC Radio about the improbable win, he stated that Le Clos was lucky to win because they had just been included and that any number of Ontario Chardonnays could have done the same thing. This got Redelmeier thinking, "Could that in fact be true?" His conclusion was a resounding "yes".

Southbrook has been making Chardonnay since the winery's inception in 1991. Back then, Redelmeier, along with his winemaker Derek Barnett crafted Chardonnays that were meant for their cellar – both being fans of the great Burgundian whites. Chardonnay is the most widely planted white grape in Ontario and, as such, is the wine made by most of Ontario's wineries. Thomas, unbeknownst to him, had given Bill an idea. Just like the sips and slurps heard round the world in '76, Bill devised a plan to put Ontario Chardonnay front and center in the 'center of the universe' when it comes to fine wines: London, England.

The only problem Bill is a producer, so he couldn't very well just unilaterally choose his own wines to represent Ontario. For that matter, he couldn't just pick his favourites either he needed help. So with the aid of one of Ontario's most sought after wine competition planners (Sadie Darby), he put out the call for wines and researched judges. The wines entered were a secret to all but Sadie, the judges were a matter of record. Headed by Tony Aspler along with Konrad Ejbich, John Szabo, Linda Bramble, David Lawrason, Steven Elphick, Gord Stimmell, and myself (Michael Pinkus) – kind of ironic for me to be there since Chardonnay is one of my least favourite grapes – so as you could imagine, my scores were lower than my counterparts – but Bill needed lovers and haters of the grape to prove its viability and inclusion in the travel plans to Europe.

We met on a Sunday at the Summerhill LCBO in Toronto. The wines were tasted in 5 flights: 2008, 2007, 2006/2005, Unoaked and library wines (not necessarily in that order) – all wines, except for the library ones, had to be commercially available.

Now the tasting is over. The scores have been tabulated and we have 34 wines from 19 wineries going to England to represent Ontario's finest. Bill refers to these as "Cool Climate Chardonnay", because Ontario is all about Cool Climate, big natural acidity and nice fruit – different from our winemaking counterparts to the south who deliver warm weather Chardonnay with oak to spare and added acidity.

On May 17, our Chardonnays, some of our winemakers and owners and (Sir) Tony Aspler himself will travel to London to showcase Ontario's Cool Climate Chardonnays. In a tribute to this effort over the next 5 newsletters (including this one), I will be showcasing my own favourites from the 5 flights tasted. You can find out more about the tasting at [coolchardonnay.ca](http://coolchardonnay.ca) or you can make up your own mind on the winning wines by attending the [Ontario Wine Society's Cool Chardonnay Tasting on March 24](#).

As many of you know, I champion Cabernet Franc as Ontario's grape – I still do and will, but anything that gets our 100% VQA Ontario wines in front of a world audience, thus showing our industry in a positive light, I'm all for. Good luck in London gentlemen.



**Grape Guy's Picks of the Bunch:** *It's All Red, except for the Chardonnay*

**Jackson-Triggs 2007 Proprietors' Grand Reserve Cabernet Franc - \$26.95 (W)**  
[www.jacksontriggswinery.com](http://www.jacksontriggswinery.com)

During one of my favourite events, Taste the Season in Niagara-on-the-Lake, Jackson-Triggs seriously impressed me with this delicious Cabernet Franc. The nose is smoky with tobacco, black cherry and black pepper aromas. The palate and nose come together on the tongue with the sweetness of black cherry, tobacco and a nice hint of spice that carries through and intensifies on the lengthy finish. Price: \$26.95 – Rating: \*\*\*\*½

**Ravine Vineyard 2007 Meritage Red - \$24.00 (W)**  
[www.ravinevineyard.com](http://www.ravinevineyard.com)

Ravine makes another red Meritage called Red Coat, it's their entry level red on the menu. This wine is the next step up the ladder, a blend of 57% Cabernet Franc, 27% Merlot and 16% Cabernet Sauvignon that has both smells and flavours to spare. Aromas include lots of red fruit, white pepper, cranberry, cherry, and nice violet-floral notes which adds delicacy to these powerful smells. Tastes are sour cherry, pepper and other red fruits, lots of tannin bite with nice acidity, good minerality and a strong sour cherry finish. Price: \$24.00 – Rating: \*\*\*\*

**Viewpoint Winery 2005 Cabernet Franc – \$17.50 (W)**  
[www.viewpointwinery.com](http://www.viewpointwinery.com)

The Lake Erie North Shore's showpiece winery, Viewpointe, has a philosophy of not releasing wines until it is time ... well the time is right to release this 2005 Franc. Smells linger on the olfactory lobes with black cherry, vanilla and white pepper; tastes add complexity to the already inviting nose: black cherry, spice, tobacco, and pepper, there's also a bit of smokiness and a good tannin backbone that'll see further ageing improve this wine. Price: \$17.50 – Rating: \*\*\*\*

**Favourites from the Cool Chardonnay Tasting** ...visit [coolchardonnay.ca](http://coolchardonnay.ca) for details:

Library Selection - [Southbrook 1998 Poetica Chardonnay](#) (W)

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



**Weekly Wine Notes and More:** *Hernder, Flat Rock, a trip South 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):

March 9, 2010 – Hernder Estates 2006 Cabernet Sauvignon ( [READ](#) ) ( [LISTEN](#) )  
March 16, 2010 – Flat Rock Cellars 2007 Reserve Chardonnay ( [READ](#) ) ( [LISTEN](#) )

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

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

[One Stop in Kentucky](#)  
[Wine Stop in Florida](#)  
[Wine Shop in Florida, or is it a Bar](#)

**[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

[Thirty Bench Winemakers 2005 Riesling](#)  
[Flat Rock Cellars 2005 Riesling](#)

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

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

[12 New Reviews Added](#)

Including: Red Blends, Rieslings, Cheap Spanish and Big Ass Zins

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

[March 20, 2010 Release Report](#)

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**Ontario Chardonnay – Seriously Cool**

<http://www.ontariowinesociety.com/flyers/Flyer-2010TSeriouslyCool.pdf>

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

**March 2010**

**Nothing Will Change ...** According to the Toronto Sun, when the HST kicks in July 1, the tax rate on alcohol actually drops to 13%; but the Ontario government intends to "mark up" the retail price of alcohol by 2% for the restaurant/bar industry and 4% for regular customers to claw back the lost tax revenue. "Effectively, consumers aren't going to see any changes at LCBO stores," LCBO spokesperson Steve Erwin said. Personally, I'm not surprised by this in any way shape of form. Are you?

**Truth and Rumour ...** I just had it confirmed that Marlize Beyers will not be returning from her maternity leave

from Flat Rock Cellars, instead she has chosen to spend more time with her family. The winemaking duties will be taken over by Ross Wise, who has been with the winery since 2006.

**Caitor Drops a Letter ...** Niagara Falls MPP Kim Craiton sent an open letter to the Ontario wine industry criticizing Cellared in Canada producers and their most recent scare tactics. The CiC issue is far from dead folks, read the letter here. <http://www.610cktb.com/blog/1098371>

**Red Bicycleette, Red Faces ...** For those that were following the Red Bicycle Pinot Noir scandal here is the outcome. The managers from vineyards, a broker, the wine merchant Ducasse and the conglomerate Sieur d'Arques were convicted of making €7 million (£6 million) profit by passing off wine from cheaper syrah and merlot grape varieties as pinot noir. Gallo sold it in the US under its popular Red Bicycleette pinot noir brand. The court passed suspended prison sentences of between one and six months and fines ranging from €3,000 to €180,000. Claude Courset, the local director of Ducasse and the lynchpin of the fraud, was given a six-month suspended term and a fine. The Sieur d'Arques trading company was fined €180,000 for delivering fake Pinot Noir to Gallo to use in its Red Bicycleette brand of southern France wines. All but two of the executives admitted guilt.

(from the Times Online: [http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/life\\_and\\_style/food\\_and\\_drink/article7030802.ece](http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/life_and_style/food_and_drink/article7030802.ece))

**SA tops FR in Wine Sales ...** The latest report from the marketing research agency AC Nielson shows South African wine sales grew by 20% in volume to 12.27 million 9-litre-cases, while French sales fell by 12% to 12.266 million 9-litre-cases. During the twelve-month period ending January 23, 2010.

**Winery Owner Takes a Beating ...** Two Pennsylvania men beat, yes I said beat, a Seneca County winery owner (Finger Lakes, New York) after he asked them to leave a wine tour for being intoxicated. Now, I know that's not funny and so do you but there just has to be some kind of winery-takes-a-beating joke in there somewhere, like, here in Ontario our winery owners take a financial beating instead of a physical one. Still not funny is it?

#### **Top Ten Things That Sound Dirty In Winespeak, But Aren't ...**

Courtesy of fellow wine writer Dean Tudor ([www.deantudor.com](http://www.deantudor.com)):

1. "Spit or swallow?"
2. "Stick your nose all the way in"
3. "She's needs to open up a bit"
4. "I've had a '69 with my sister"
5. "My God! Check out the legs on that Blue Nun!"
6. "I keep Sherry on the rack in my cellar"
7. "I find the Italians flacid and the French hard"
8. "There are too many whites in this room"
9. "You have to pull it out slowly, otherwise it'll shoot all over the place!"
10. "Wow that really swelled up, can you stick it back in?"

#### **Here are two more, just to make it an even dozen:**

11. "Me and the guys did a 10 year old Tawny, it was sweet"
12. "I'm sorry Madame but your Pouilly-Fuisse is awfully dry"

**A Little More Humour ...** Thinking of starting a winery? Here's what you'll need to know: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qcjVfXBxvdg> - (youtube video).



#### **Wine Event Spotlight: *Cool Chardonnay Tasting***

**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](http://www.coolchardonnay.ca)

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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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