

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.



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OntarioWineReview: *Give it Up for Gamay*

I'm not gonna say it. I refuse to say it, because if I do say it it'll taint your opinion of the grape. It seems that the moment the dreaded "B" word is uttered you might as well "shoot the dog and turn the lights out in the courtroom," as a lawyer friend of mine once said to me; people close up shop when they hear it. You become the pariah in the room, the leper, "how could you say that? Have you no social filter?" It's an absolute conversation killer, like the "C" word. Come on folks get your minds out of the gutter, I'm talking about the word "commitment" – you bring that up to a devout bachelor and he'll look in the other direction, scanning the room for a way out. Yup, when you talk about Gamay it's hard not to mention the "B" word, and yet I have to. I have to start this conversation somewhere and if the elephant has to be on the table so be it: Beaujolais, there I said it.

Are you still reading? I hope you haven't skipped on to the next article ... Good for you, I'm glad you're not fearful of the grape and not ready to run the other way. Gamay Noir is the grape of Beaujolais, there's no getting around it – and according to what I've read on the history of this grape it has had quite the bad rep from day one. It was originally one of the grapes of Burgundy before the Duke of Burgundy, Philippe the Bold, outlawed the cultivation of the grape referring to it as "disloyal" in July of 1395 – he and subsequent rulers of the realm of Burgundy decided it was inferior to the Pinot Noir grape and ousted it to the fringe country around Burgundy (to the south), Beaujolais. In theory, that's wasn't a bad thing, now the grape didn't have to fight with Pinot for land space and could flourish in its own region. But then came the brilliant idea to produce Beaujolais Nouveau – that fruity confection of a wine that drinks from Thanksgiving (the American version) to Valentine's Day – because that's about the shelf life of these quickly-pressed-into-service wines. In truth, Beaujolais Nouveau was suppose to be the bell-weather of the new vintage, but became the wine that defined a whole region – and in the process, tainted a grape variety. Most people will tell you they've never had Gamay, but will reluctantly, or, depending on the person, wistfully, admit to drinking, and at one point or another enjoying, a bottle of Beaujolais Nouveau. But Nouveau is not the sole representative of Gamay – not by a long shot.

Now, why all this talk about the Gamay grape and a French wine region? Have I bought into a vineyard (a la John Szabo in Hungary) in the region of Beaujolais? No. Quite simply I'm just giving Gamay some context for you before I throw my next thought at you: Don't shun Gamay.

Many people walk into a winery and do not immediately ask for Gamay – it's not even on their radar screen as something to try. Then when they do ask about it the inevitable "B" word shows up in the conversation and voila, the hand goes up and the mouth goes shut, they don't want to hear any more about it. Ontario Gamay is not Beaujolais Nouveau, heck most Beaujolais wine is not Beaujolais Nouveau, much in the same way as most Ontario wine isn't Icewine, and yet ask people outside of Ontario if they'd like a glass of Ontario wine and they mention something about Icewine ... a style can paint an entire region with a very broad brush.

In the immortal words of John Lennon, "All In am say-ing, is give Gam-ay a chance," alright, so maybe not a direct quote but you can still sing along (you know the tune): "All I am say-ing, is give Gam-ay a chance." As we are coming into summer the heavy reds will stay cool in the basement and the lighter fare starts coming out. Now, Gamay will never compete with your Cabs and Shirazes, but Shiraz does make a nice Gamay, two in fact

(I'm talking about Shiraz Mottiar, winemaker at Malivoire) and so do the folks of 13th Street Winery (see Pick of the Bunch below). Chateau des Charmes make a Gamay "Droit", which is a clone all their own of the Gamay grape, while Angels Gate and Henry of Pelham make a very nice sippable Gamay. Lailey blends theirs with Zweigelt, because Zweigelt is an even tougher sell than Gamay (what's Zweigelt you ask? We'll save that for another time). I could go on, because plenty of wineries in Niagara give you the opportunity to taste Gamay, it's a grape that likes our cool climate region and grows well every year, though few wineries outside Niagara give the grape a break either. So again, all I am saying is give Gamay a chance, keep an open mind and enjoy red this summer like never before.



Grape Guy's Picks of the Bunch: *Ode to Gamay and a County Rosé Sparkler*

Malivoire 2008 Courtney Gamay - \$29.95 (W)

www.malivoire.com

Ah, the lovely Gamay grape, how far you have fallen – banished from Burgundy as an inferior variety you now live on the fringe of that illustrious region in a place called Beaujolais. You make elegant and some ageworthy wine and yet the world has pigeon-holed you into a sweet candied confection wine called Beaujolais Nouveau – I hang my head in despair. Now just hold on a second folks, before you go running the other way from Gamay and head straight for your Pinots and Cabs, let me tell you that there are some serious Gamay's being made right here in Ontario, in fact you're reading the review of one of those right now. This Courtney Gamay is sourced from a one-acre plot of land and thinned to give maximum concentration to the hanging fruit. It is then aged 14 months in 50% new French oak, the other goes into 1-2 years old barrels. The result is a fun wine with a serious side. The nose is black cherry and ripe strawberry, vibrant and inviting. The palate is intense with rich red fruit, some vanilla and cinnamon tones and a titch of tannins; lush and lovely in the mouth. Only 75 cases were produced so there's a very limited quantity of this beauty available. Gamay fans, go get it – if you're not one, maybe it's time to find out what you're missing. Price: \$29.95 – Rating: *****

13th Street 2008 Gamay Noir - \$17.95 (W)

www.13thstreetwinery.com

13th Street is known for making pretty good Gamay – some would argue they are the best in Ontario at making this grape sing, which is why they usually make 2 versions ... believing that a well-matched duet is better than a soloist. But 2008 didn't give them the pairing they wanted (weather-wise), so instead of forcing an inferior reserve onto the public they combined their Gamay efforts into one bottling – incorporating their older vines (from 1983) with their younger vines – and they made quite the wonderful Gamay by doing so. The nose is black cherry, raspberry and vanilla; an aroma that comes from the 12 months of ageing in 60% French and 40% American oak (of which 25% was new). Flavours are loaded with delicious black cherry. There's plenty of this beauty to go around, 1000 cases were made (usual output in only about 500), but I can't see the wine lasting too long on the shelf because it should be in very high demand, especially for those fans of Gamay, of which, after trying this wine, there should be many in Ontario. I just hope that by the time I get to 13th Street to pick up a few bottles you guys have left some for me to get. Price: \$17.95 – Rating: *****

Also take a listen to the [Henry of Pelham 2008 Gamay Weekly Wine Note Podcast](#) from 05/11/2010

Hinterland 2007 Rosé Sparkling - \$37.20 (W)

www.hinterlandwine.com

This is the third winery, I can think of, that is making a County Sparkling, and the first making a pink bubbly. When I reviewed another fizz from the County I made mention that the winemaker was raising the bar for Ontario sparkling – I may want to extend that comment to the whole of Prince Edward County, if this kind of quality continues across the board. A blend of 90% Pinot Noir and 10% Chardonnay aged 16 months on lees in bottle and finished off with a dosage (that's the addition of wine after the lees is removed) of Cabernet Franc. This bubbly has a hint of strawberry on the nose but it's on the palate where this wine speaks in volumes. The smells let on that this might be a sweetie fruity fizz, yet the palate is dry apple with nice acidity and a prolonged finish. A real stunning sparkler. Price: \$37.20 – Rating: ****½

Favourites from the Cool Chardonnay Tasting ...visit coolchardonnay.ca for details:

Flight 4: 2008 - [Lailey Vineyard 2008 Brickyard Vineyard Chardonnay](#) (W)

[Norman Hardie 2008 Chardonnay unfiltered](#) (W)

[Flat Rock Cellars 2008 Rusty Shed Chardonnay](#) (W)

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[Ravine Vineyard 2008 Chardonnay \(W\)](#)
[Peller Estates 2008 Signature Series Chardonnay Sur Lie \(W\)](#)
[Rosehall Run 2008 Chardonnay Rosehall Vineyard \(W\)](#)

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



Weekly Wine Notes and More: *Rosé, Gamay, Trips, Treks 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):

May 4, 2010 – Cattail Creek 2009 Serendipity Rosé ([LISTEN](#))

May 11, 2010 – Henry of Pelham 2008 Gamay ([LISTEN](#))

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

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

[Bb33 Dinner with Wayne Gretzky Estate Winery](#)

[At the Table with Martin Malivoire](#)

[Why Visit a Winery with the Grape Guy](#)

[The Annual Austrian Wine Fair](#)

[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

[Two Rieslings from 2005 – Jackson-Triggs and Hillebrand](#)

[Stoney Ridge 2004 Founder's Signature Collection 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: the downing (quickly) of a 2007 Gamay

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

[May 15, 2010 Release Report](#)

[May 29, 2010 Release Report](#)

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OntarioWineReview: *May is the Time to Go*

Over the course of the spring and summer I will be at a number of events (the most recent being [Salut in Toronto](#) and the next [Fusion in Sarnia](#)) delivering interactive seminars (this means there is tasting involved). My favourite of which is entitled “Why Visit a Winery: What the LCBO isn’t selling you.” The most obvious part is that I get to say a few things about our liquor monopoly, but that is not the crux of these seminars, the wineries are, and the wines they produce. In this province we have well over 100 wineries, that includes Niagara, Prince Edward County, the Lake Erie North Shore and the fringe areas, plus there are quite a number of fruit wineries – all deliver some pretty awesome products and most of which are only available to you if you visit the winery.

The key elements of my talks are the wines that are not readily available at an LCBO near you. Now, I am not about to rail against the liquor board here and their failure to support our local wineries – we can save that for another time – what I will tell you is that the best of Ontario is not being sold there, which is a real shame. I’m not insinuating that what the LCBO has under the VQA banner is crap, far from it, but what I am telling you is that the best of the best, the crème de la crème of Ontario’s wines can be found at the winery. These wines can be small batch, single vineyard, special production wines, they can be larger production in nature or they can be somewhere in between – the point is that the LCBO just doesn’t have the capacity or the wherewithal to stock all these wines from all these producers; so if you want to taste the best of what Ontario has to offer in the wine world you best do it by taking a trek down, across or up or down to a winery near you (heck, It doesn’t have to be particularly “near you” either – make a long weekend of it and get away to one of the further reaches of the province from where you are, as the Ontario slogan says: “it’s yours to discover”).

May is the perfect month to wonder out because the new whites are starting to hit the shelves and at the winery you get the opportunity to try before you buy – I’m not talking about turning this into a day long drunk – but you can get exactly the wine(s) you’re looking for and the ones you like. At a liquor store it’s a crap-shoot, you pick up a bottle, you might even ask an employee a question (though most of us do not), but you are taking something home that you have little to no idea how it tastes. If you are at a winery you can sample before you buy, get a little taste, and if you do like it buy enough to last (though the good ones never seem to last long enough). Plus you’ll potentially get to meet the winemaker, or speak to a staff person who had a hand in making the wine, they can tell you the back story of the harvest, point out where the grapes were grown and give you information you won’t find on the back label or on a tech sheet. I mentioned whites in particular this time of year, but you’ll also come across reds, roses, icewines and a variety of other stuff you won’t find at a liquor store near you. So why not begin your planning today, summer’s coming and you’ll need plenty of beverages once that sun starts beating down on the deck; and wouldn’t it be nice to pull out something tasty and local to share with your guests, or yourselves, something that has a story behind it – one that includes you heading out to the winery and picking it up, it sure does make that wine seem a whole lot more personal and special.



Wine Event Spotlight: *Music, Tasting Festivals and Awards*

Terroir in the County ... This year a record number of Prince Edward County wineries will be pouring their new spring releases at the fifth annual Terroir Wine Festival, May 29, at the historic Crystal Palace in Picton. For a \$20 entrance fee, participants can purchase tastes of wines and local foods prepared by county chefs. Doors open at noon and the event runs until 5pm. Ticket information is available at www.thecountywines.com or by calling 1-613-921-7100/1- 888 313 9463.

Ontario Wine Awards ... This year’s Awards Ceremony is being held at Toronto’s Pantages Hotel (Thursday June 17, 2010), where the awards will be presented to the wineries and winemakers. Guests will be treated to an afternoon starting off with a sparkling wine reception, followed by the Gold Medal wines being matched with an exceptional luncheon menu created by Pantages’ Executive Chef. For tickets and additional information, please contact Sandy Kurbis at sandy@forefrontcom.com, or 416-398-3335 ext. 2.

Twilight in the Vineyard Concert Series Announced ... Jackson-Triggs Niagara Estate Winery’s popular outdoor amphitheatre concert series has announced quite an interesting line up for it’s 10th Anniversary. The Box Office opened Wednesday, May 5, 2010 and will be open daily from 12:00 - 5:00 pm. To get your tickets call (905) 468-4637 x 2 or toll free (866) 589-4637 x 2. This year’s line up includes: Tom Cochrane, Gord Downie, Chantale Kreviazuk, Jesse Cooke and others ... check the full line up and dates here: <http://track.upaknee.com/v/50/feaff5976af35de60dce257900a030181d0344aef3e7cef>

Tawse Welcomes Cuddy ... June 18th as part of the 'Summer Solstice Festival weekend, Jim Cuddy, Kathleen Edwards & Colleen Brown will be appearing at Tawse winery. More details will available soon on their website soon, but from the advance buzz I have seen this is a wine, food and music extravaganza with three performers, four restaurants and plenty of wine. Tickets are between \$40 and \$75, depending what you want to take part in. Find details here: http://tawsewinery.ca/index.cfm?fuseaction=page.display&page_id=36

Discover the Fusion festival in Sarnia ... this new wine event takes place June 18 and 19 ... the 1st annual Fusion – A Discovery of Local Food & Wine festival, with the hopes of becoming Southwestern Ontario's premier food and wine event. It takes place over 2 days at the RBC Center in Sarnia. The festival features award-winning food and wines from all over Ontario, and showcases local and national attractions that are sure to entertain. Michael Pinkus, the Grape Guy, will also be there to present. Visit <http://www.discoverfusion.ca/> for all the details on how to get tickets, who'll be there and more..

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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