

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 – 176
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OntarioWineReview: *Cuvee, The Best Wines, Really? (Says Who?)*

Here I sit in my post-pre-tasting funk, scratching my head and wondering why some even bother . I have just returned from sitting high atop Toronto in the BMO building on the 68th floor tasting what are considered to be the best of the best that Ontario's wineries have to offer. Of course, that's according to a bunch of winemakers. And for the second year in a row I am left scratching my head and saying, "Really?" Last year it was all about the atrocious VA (volatile acidity) problem in the reserve '07 reds ... this year it's about the lackluster wines that are suppose to represent a winery's "best" at the event. Let me explain how this process works ...

The media pre-tasting is suppose to represent the top scoring wine from each winery that entered the competition. On January 19th, 2012 a group of some 51 winemakers sat in judgment over their peers works, some 264 wines in total. A winery could submit up to 4 wines to the competition; one can only assume that the wines a winery would submit would be their best ... what a winery would consider their top wines giving them the best possible chance to take home some hardware. From these 264 wines the top rated / scored from each individual winery sees the media room on the 68th floor on February 22, 2012, just over one month from the actual judging (therefore no one can claim that too much time has passed and the wines have changed from when they were judged). In this room the media passes its own judgment over these wines - and for the most part a collective shudder goes through the room over certain wines. The good wines are universally proclaimed as good, great, whatever, while another segment of wines (those shudder-inducing wines) makes the vast majority of us wonder what a winery was thinking submitting that wine as one of their "best". One member of the media off-handedly remarked: "these are suppose to be the best wines from their respective wineries so if they score less than 87 does the winery have to close up till they get it right?" A little tongue in cheek, but in some cases it wouldn't be a bad idea, because if this truly represents their "best" wine, then they have some serious problems..

Another, more serious theory was offered up: "winemaker's really aren't meant for this kind of tasting - they taste a lot of young wines in various stages of their evolution - and don't know when a wine is suited for public appeal." An interesting theory to say the least. One, I suspect, every winemaker who sat in judgment would take exception to. But is this why the wines of Cuvee don't cut it, because winemakers can't judge finished wines? Is that the fatal flaw of the Cuvee process? Hardly.

No matter how we look at it there will always be a fundamental difference between writers and winemakers, each wondering WTF* the other is thinking when it comes to judging wines. Writers can get fooled by the tricks and possible chemistry of getting a wine ready for competition; winemakers believe they could do better than what their peers are doing.

There are some in and around the industry that equate Cuvee to the Oscars - but an interesting email I received recently likened them to the Screen Actor's Guild (SAG) awards - peers judging peers work (consider the winemakers as actors and the wine as their craft). But it's really hard to equate Cuvee to anything on the awards circuit as they don't seem to represent what they are meant to: "excellence in Ontario winemaking" - and that's the fundamental problem with Cuvee.

Think about it, this is an open competition to all the wineries of Ontario, who are asked to submit their wines for judging by a jury of their peers (one winemaker from each submitting winery is invited to judge) and yet close to two-thirds of all wineries in Ontario don't bother to submit even a single bottle to the Cuvee competition. I have heard many reasons as to why, and over the years the complaints seem to multiply. One such complaint is that the awards are too Niagara-centric and in fact the numbers bare that out, only 2 Lake Erie wineries (Colio and Pelee) and 1 Prince Edward winery (Keint-he) bothered to enter this year. That's 3 out of 57 wineries (barely a drop in the bucket) - but by now it's a self-fulfilling prophesy, few enter so none outside of Niagara win.

After the tasting I posted my disappointment about the wines on Facebook (maybe you saw it), I received some feedback, but none more telling then from Jeff Aubry, the outspoken owner of Coyote's Run: "We hate Cuvee, and haven't been in it for many years. It's a poor competition." He's not alone in his dislike of Cuvee, but one of the few willing to voice his thoughts in such a public forum.

Another winemaker confided in me: "I don't enter my wines into Cuvee anymore - I never win, even though I know my wines are better than most of the stuff I end up tasting." This too is a very popular sentiment. So maybe it's winemaker ego that gets in the way?

But the truth lies somewhere between resentment and apathy. How can a competition claim to be the best - "excellence" in Ontario winemaking - when more than 65% of the industry doesn't even bother to showing up ... and while it's true that you can't be all things to all people, but what happens if you're nothing to nobody? That seems to be the question that faces the Cuvee competition ... something has got to change to bring more wineries on-board with what they are doing or they risk losing it all. And it shows in the caliber of wines being submitted, making it easy for the top wineries that do still enter to win year after year.

At the moment Cuvee is an interesting blend of really great wines that stand heads and tails above their competition and also rans vying for recognition. There are wineries that push the envelope and others that shouldn't even be pushing out wine. Cuvee continues to be the event that separates the proverbial men from the boys - but it seems fewer and fewer "men" are showing up to be counted because they don't like the competition; are they just being sore losers, taking their bat and ball and going home, or do they have a point? It's time for the Cuvee organizers to take a hard look at who they are losing, why they don't have a greater appeal, and why they aren't gaining substantial momentum across the province. In short, what are they doing wrong and how can they fix it?

These days Ontario is considered a have not province, Cuvee wants to shine a light on those that have, but instead, unfortunately, show off those that have not and those that couldn't be bothered. To paraphrase Jim Lovell on the Apollo 18 mission, "Cuvee, we have a problem."

* if you don't know what this acronym stands for ask your kids



Grape Guy's Picks of the Bunch: *The Best Wines from the Cuvee tasting*

The Best from the Cuvee tasting ...
Of the wines I have not previously reviewed or tasted

Creekside 2010 Reserve Viognier - \$29.95 (W)

www.creeksidewine.com

There are but a few wineries making Viognier in Ontario, and even fewer doing it justice. Creekside seems to have a handle on this grape variety and year-in and year-out they produce one of, if not, the finest example in the province ... this 2010 is no exception. This fruit driven white, on both the nose and palate, is a revelation for those looking for an alternative to Chardonnay. Peach and vanilla cream with lovely acidity for balance - but it's the fruit that keeps replaying over the palate. Delicious, with a finish that keeps you coming back for more. Some may think this expensive, but it's well worth it until the rest of Ontario catches up with this grape variety - right now it's not only delicious it's unique. Price: \$29.95 - Rating: **** 1/2

Vineland 2009 St. Urban Riesling - \$20.00 (W)

www.vineland.com

There are some producers in Niagara that really know how to push the right Riesling buttons - who know how to walk that fine line between the racy and the sweet and bring it all together ... Vineland continues to show that it is a leader in this category. This St. Urban Riesling from the hopped up acidity of the 2009 vintage is just such a fabulous wine for Riesling lovers that you might just forget about the rest of the world for awhile while you sip on it ... and isn't that what a really good wine is suppose to do, transport us away - even if just for a little while. The nose is very lemony with loads of mineral notes, there's pear and apple fruit in here too but it takes a backseat to the lemony-mineral stars of the show. The palate has a whack of acidity, a touch of sweetness to balance it off along with lemon-lime in the middle leading to a great green apple pucker on the finish. This is Riesling done right. Price: \$20.00 - Rating: **** 1/2+

Twenty Twenty-Seven 2010 "19th Street" Chardonnay - \$30.00 (W)

www.2027cellars.ca

Chardonnays are a dime a dozen all over the world, except in Kentucky - I bumped into a winemaker there who swore to me that it doesn't grow well amongst all that bluegrass ... but everywhere else it's like a weed. This is the first time I've seen the new packaging from 20-27 Cellars and it's more eye-catching than the previous incarnation ... and that's good because now that the bottle catches your eye what's inside has to do pretty much the same with the palate ... this one does. The 2010 seems to meld wood and fruit together seamlessly, in fact it allows the fruit to shine: sweet fruit hits the palate in the form of apple and pear with just a touch of vanilla-butterscotch for flavouring, all without being overpowering - I'll say it again, the fruit absolutely shines through here. This is the best version of Chardonnay I've had from 20-27. Winemaker Kevin Panagapka seems to be really hitting the right notes on this one, balancing the fruit, the wood and even hints of spice - for a complete wine without too much of anything, and just enough of everything. Price: \$30.00 - Rating: **** 1/2

Bubbling Under - other Cuvee wines to be aware of ...

[Cave Spring 2009 Riesling CSV - \\$29.95](#)

[Hillebrand 2010 Artist Series Limited Edition Cabernet-Merlot - \\$18.75](#)

[Strewn 2008 Vidal Icewine - \\$45.00 / 375ml](#)

More from the Must Pile ...

Wines tasted last year that did not make it into last year's publications ...

[Closson Chase 2009 CCV Chardonnay - \\$24.95](#)

[Sanson Estate 2008 Reserve Baco Noir - \\$24.95](#)

[Smith and Wilson 2008 Pink Cadillac - \\$18.00](#)

[Rosehall Run 2008 Gamay Cuvee County - \\$17.95](#)

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



Bi-Weekly OWR Updates: *Ottawa Blog posts, On the Road reviews*

Weekly Ottawa Life Blog Entries:

[Thirst Impressions: Big Wines ... Little Prices](#)

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

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

[Day 5 in Portugal: Essencia Day - February 16, 2012](#)

[Day 4 in Portugal: a little more Douro - February 15, 2012](#)

[Day 3 in Portugal: The Douro - February 14, 2012](#)

[Day 2 in Portugal: Oporto and Dao - February 13, 2012](#)

[Oporto, Portugal - Day 1, Arrival and Walk Around - February 12, 2012](#)

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

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

Nothing New This Week

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

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

[Lakeview 2005 Cabernet Sauvignon](#)

[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](#)

including Spanish bubbly, old Cali-Cab and new Aussie Shiraz

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

[March 17, 2012 - Vintages Release Report](#)

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the star.com

WINE & CHEESE
SHOW

March 16 to 18
International Centre, Mississauga

Giveaway ... This week I have 3 pairs of tickets up for grabs from the [Toronto Wine & Cheese Show](#) happening March 16-18 at the International Centre. The skill testing questions is as difficult as ever: name 4 kinds of cheese - bonus points for naming their country of origin.

Email yours answers to me at <mailto:michael@ontariowinereview.com> - we will draw three winners from the correct answers received before 11:59pm March 7, 2012. Please be sure to include your name, address (with postal code) and phone number to be eligible.

Advertisement



Quick Sips: *News from around the World of Wine*

The Power of Wine Awards ... I thought this seemed apropos considering the theme of this week's newsletter: <http://www.thedrinksbusiness.com/2011/10/power-of-wine-awards/>

A Different Side to Awards Season ... Seems the wine pourers in New York have themselves an award ceremony that rivals any on the wine awards circuit - other areas take note: <http://suffolktimes.timesreview.com/2011/11/24892/winery-pour-people-host-their-first-awards-night/>

Time for a Change ... Look's like Ontario's so-called "South Coast" has themselves some new winery owners a pair of East-Coasters move west to experience wine making in a different region of the country: <http://www.brantfordexpositor.ca/ArticleDisplay.aspx?e=3376951>

String Loosen in Manitoba ... the prairie province has been making some changes to their wine laws of late, here's the one that helps restaurant goers enjoy their beverage of choice: <http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/manitoba/story/2011/11/01/mb-wine-restaurants-manitoba.html>

Did you Buy Fake Pinot Noir ... If you bought Red Bicyclette Pinot Noir back in the scandal days you could make a tidy profit with a minimum \$3.50 claim, good luck: <http://www.decanter.com/news/wine-news/529679/gallo-and-constellation-to-pay-out-in-fake-pinot-case>

Will the Starbucks Evening Wine Bar be Coming Here Soon? ... <http://houston.culturemap.com/newsdetail/01-24-12-18-37-no-wine-for-you-starbucks-gets-into-selling-alcohol-but-turns-its-nose-up-at-texas/>

New Winemaker at Ridgepoint ... here in Ontario Ridgepoint Wines has made a change to their winemaking operations: "We would like to share some great news. We recently hired Barclay Robinson to run the winemaking operations. Barclay, a former assistant winemaker at Tawse Winery, he will now be the Head Winemaker at Ridgepoint." (taken from the press release)

Video Corner ...

Penis Wine (I swear it's true) ... Talk about the worm in the bottle - this video is not for the faint of heart: <http://natgeotv.com/hk/the-witch-doctor-will-see-you-now/videos/penis-wine>

Downfall of a California Cult Winery ... if you offend easily stay away: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9IlvGuCPZOc>



Wine Event Spotlight: *Every Newsletter I'll pick something Unique or Interesting*

Shores of Erie Lobster Fest ... April 14, 2012 at United Communities Credit Union Complex. Seating is limited. Tickets are \$55. Call 519-730-1001 for more information.

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 ...

Follow Michael Pinkus, the Grape Guy's (almost) daily **Tweets** at <http://twitter.com/TheGrapeGuy>. You can become a friend on **facebook**: <http://www.facebook.com/?ref=home#!/mepinkus>.

"Linked In" folks can find Michael at <http://ca.linkedin.com/pub/michael-pinkus/14/704/4b8>

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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