

## 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 – 191**  
**October 18, 2012**

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### OntarioWineReview: *Changes to Cuvee Go Too Far*

Earlier this year I laid some pretty harsh criticism on Cuvee both in [Newsletter #176](#) (before) and in [Newsletter #177](#) (after) ... sure it might seem like I was picking on what many saw as the Oscar's of Ontario wine awards, but I was not alone in my criticism, just, it seems, the most vocal. Now, as Cuvee enters its 25th year it seems that someone was actually listening (and yes I did get lots of feedback both through email and by phone), agreeing with what I said. So it came as no surprise that earlier this month Cuvee announced they were making some changes to the prestigious Cuvee weekend. Some are up in arms about the proposed changes to the awards, but I think it's a step in the right direction to getting these awards back on track and back to the spirit in which they were intended, though maybe the committee has taken a step too far back. For those of you who missed the announcement here are some highlights from that press release:

"Next year's annual Cuvée Weekend (March 1 to 3, 2013) is not only the occasion of its 25th Anniversary – it will also mark the rebirth and renewal of one of the wine industry's most celebrated events ... On Friday, March 1, 2013, in the spirit of a grand tasting, guests will sample some of Ontario's best wines while celebrated chefs and food purveyors wow food lovers with live cooking stations. This year, however, the wines that will be poured at the Gala will not be chosen by a panel of winemakers via an awards judging process as in the past. The Cuvée awards have been replaced with an invitation to participating winemakers to pour a singular, very special VQA wine – one that they have chosen themselves as their personal favourite. In this way, wines offered for tasting will be hand selected and "curated" by the winemakers themselves, ensuring that guests can taste the true highlights of what the Ontario wine industry has to offer ... The invitation for all wineries to participate will broaden the wine tasting experience for attendees as it now includes wineries who previously may not have attend due to competition philosophies."

My first reaction was one of peaked interest. While I do applaud a new direction for Cuvee, I question the idea of "one singular wine" – it opens the door for too much of one wine, be it Chardonnay, Pinot Noir, Riesling, Cabernet Franc – wines that Ontario does exceptionally well, while leaving out the more interesting varietals that consumers might be pleasantly surprised about (Viognier, Vidal, Semillon, Petit Verdot, etc.). Also, to pour only one wine "the winemaker's favourite" could cause a problem, it means that a winery needs to bring lots of what they consider "their best". In many cases these are limited production wines, thus depleting a winery's inventory that they could potentially sell, and with no way to sell it directly to the consumer that evening, once past the lips of their guests most consumers will move on. My first question is how much, or how little, is a winery required to bring to the Gala evening? More importantly, would it not make sense to spread the love and allow a winery to bring a couple more wines, say upwards of three? And, thinking out loud, to make it more worthwhile to a winery, figure out a way that a winery could sell their wine at the event.

It was only after these questions swirled around in my head that I was able to put my hands on the Winery Guidelines for Submission:

1. Wineries will be asked to submit 2 (two) wines on paper, including both a red and a white table wine. They will be asked to rank their two submissions as their 1st and 2nd choices.
  2. A wine selection committee will select the wine to be served, with an emphasis on honouring the wineries' first choice, while maintaining a balance of varietals for the consumer.
  3. Winemakers will be asked to submit a 100 word description explaining why the wines chosen are defined as their "favourite".
- (4, 5 & 6). Submitted wines must be designated VQA; must be available for purchase by the consumer; and can include red wines, white wines and blends.

While my initial worry was that we'd be inundated by too much Chardonnay or Cabernet Franc, now my worry is that if a winery gets saddled with their second choice – it no longer can be labeled as "winemaker's favourite", will it still be designated as such if it is a second choice? Will a winemaker's description and write-up really sway the panel? If you have 30 Chardonnays and there's only one Viognier entered (as a second choice wine), you'd better believe that winery will be pouring their Viognier instead of its Chardonnay. Maybe this is a minor issue. Maybe I'm over-thinking it. Or maybe I'm not the only one thinking these things ... Am I missing the bigger picture? Is Cuvee?

There are other requirements for participation, one is that two representatives (staff) will have to pour at the event – remember they are only going to be pouring one wine. The winemaker has to be there – I guess to talk about and explain why this is their favourite wine. Again, I stress they will be pouring one (1) wine ... Cuvee is asking wineries to pay three people to stand at a table to pour one wine. While financially burdensome, owners could attend to off-set cost. But that's not the biggest issue.

According to some winery principals, who have already made the decision not to participate, the part that irks them is the fee. "In addition to pouring their submitted wine, wineries will be subject to a \$200 participation fee per winery." Sources tell me that the fee last year was \$60 per wine with a maximum of 4 wines submitted to the judging. During the judging, if your wines were designated as Cuvee-pourable you could have 4 wines to pour at your table, as well as the potential bump from an award to showcase. Right or wrong, this year there is no award to display and only one wine to showcase, yet you're paying more money to be part of the event. It's a real head scratcher here as to why the Cuvee committee has scaled back in such a draconian way ... I still think that a maximum of three wines designated as "best", "favourites" or "winemaker's choices" would have been a better option ... and here's why:

My understanding from a phone call with an industry and Cuvee insider last spring was that Cuvee had gone way far afield from what it was originally intended to be and too many mistakes were being made. Instead of being all encompassing Cuvee was being hi-jacked and turned into a fiefdom with more and more industry folks getting more and more disenfranchised and disheartened by what was happening to an event that had real possibilities and cache. That's why I do applaud Cuvee's new direction – while not perfect it does return Cuvee to its roots of being all encompassing and an industry celebration instead of an industry sticking point. All are invited as they were back in 1989 when 16 wineries and 350 guests showed their support to sip and savour their way through the wines of a nascent industry's endeavours. To catch you up, the original idea behind Cuvee was for an industry to get together to taste what each other was up to; Cuvee was about wineries reacquainting themselves after a long season in which many might not have seen each other. "We don't always get out to see what our neighbor was doing," said my not-wanting-to-be-named-source. "It was about camaraderie and feeling part of a whole community – it had nothing to do with awards." And now, some 25 years later, the invitation for all to attend, for all to get together and revel in how

much the industry has grown has once again been extended. But I do believe they are stepping too far back, to a time when the original 16 participating wineries only had one really good wine to pour, today most of our wineries here in Ontario have half a dozen they could put on a “best of” list.

That all said, I really do look forward to this year’s Cuvee event to see how it all turns out. I give kudos to the committee for having the guts to turn the event on its ear instead of sticking with the some-old some-old event format that was broken, criticized and no longer working. But before they shoot themselves in the foot, kill the golden goose, or whatever other metaphor you like, (and while there is still time) might I suggest they raise the limit of wines being poured, I think they’ll see a better response from both the wineries and the public – call them “winemaker’s choices” or “our best” or something of that nature, dump the panel and leave it to the wineries to choose their top three (they should know what they are) – because to limit a winery to just one wine is limiting their creativity, their originality and their spirit ... and we already have an organization in this province that does that, we call it the VQA.



**Grape Guy’s Picks of the Bunch:** *Creekside/Sideroad and 9 more*

In honour of the Sideroad Twenty's purchase of Creekside we'll start with some wines from both companies:

**Creekside 2010 Viognier Reserve - \$29.95 (W)**  
[www.creeksidewine.com](http://www.creeksidewine.com)

At the moment there is no better or consistent producer making Viognier in Ontario. This wine wins awards year after year and it's no wonder, Creekside just has a way with Viognier. Aromas of pineapple, pear and lemon greet the nose – the only sense one gets that this wine has seen oak might be that waft of vanilla, but there really is 10 months of “gently used French oak” which has given the wine exotic flavours of coconut and other tropical fruit and even though it has not gone through malolactic fermentation there is a delicate creaminess across the tongue. Price: \$29.95 – Rating: \*\*\*\*+

**BONUS:** [Creekside 2010 Cabernet-Shiraz - \\$16.95](#) (W, L)

**Sideroad Twenty 2008 Red Tractor Merlot – \$14.99 (O)**  
[www.sr20.ca](http://www.sr20.ca)

Who is Sideroad Twenty? They are Ontario’s newest virtual winery located somewhere in Niagara. They have their wines made at a few locations, but it seems the primary place is Creekside (whom they are reported to have purchased) by award winning winemaker Rob Power. Of the four wines I tried from this new venture this was my favourite. The nose was full of ripe cherry, while the palate was sweet cherry with hints of smoky-vanilla, which lead to a nice juiciness through the mid to the finish. Drink now or over the next 2-3 years. Price: \$18.99 – Rating: \*\*\*\*

**BONUS:** [Sideroad Twenty 2008 Reserve Chardonnay - \\$19.99](#) (O)

**Inniskillin 2010 Montague Vineyard Pinot Noir - \$24.95 (W)**  
[www.inniskillin.com](http://www.inniskillin.com)

Inniskillin’s single vineyard offerings have always raised my eyebrows and made me stand up and take notice: This 2010 Pinot is no exception. Aged 16 months in French oak with fruit coming exclusively from their longtime Montague vineyard site. And this really is something special: nose

has the pre-requisite earthy notes but also raspberry, strawberry and appealing cinnamon. Palate has all that and more. Strawberry, spiced cranberry with a black pepper linger and delightful cinnamon after-taste. Another winner from the Montague vineyard. Price: \$24.95 – Rating: \*\*\*\*+

**BONUS:** [Inniskillin 2011 Montague Vineyard Chardonnay - \\$18.95](#) (W)

**BONUS:** [Inniskillin 2010 P3 - \\$17.95](#) (W)

**Vineland Estates 2010 Cabernet Franc - \$12.95** (W, L)

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

Another beauty of a vintage for reds and another steal of a bargain from Vineland. Because this wine is available through the general list at the LCBO the price is set and in great vintages like 2010, you get a fantastic value for a wine that should be at least \$20 (if it was priced according to the vintage). Tobacco, raspberry, black cherry with good mouth-feel and balancing acidity – really tasty and varietally correct in every way. Six-plus years in the cellar or drink now, either way works. Price: \$12.95 – Rating: \*\*\*\*+

**BONUS:** [Vineland Estates 2011 Pinot Grigio - \\$16.95](#) (W)

**BONUS:** [Vineland Estates 2011 Pinot Meunier - \\$17.95](#) (W)

**BONUS:** [Vineland Estates 2011 Unoaked Chardonnay - \\$12.95](#) (W, L)

**BONUS:** [Vineland Estates 2011 Cabernet-Merlot - \\$15.00](#) (W)

**BONUS:** [Vineland Estates 2010 Cabernet-Merlot - \\$15.00](#) (Sold Out)

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



**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:**

[Jackson-Triggs 2007 Brut, Methode Classique](#)

[Karlo Estates 2008 Van Alstine Port](#)

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

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

***New reports coming soon***

**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

**Nothing New This Week**

**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 Argentinean and an older Zinfandel***

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

[Vintages Release for October 27, 2012](#)

[Vintages Shop-on-line for October 4 and October 18](#)

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**November 9 and 10 – Sarnia, Ontario**

**Find out all the details: [www.discoverfusion.ca](http://www.discoverfusion.ca)**

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**Wine Event Spotlight:** *Three Upcoming Events and Where I'll Be*

**Where I'll Be ...**

**Fusion - A discovery of Local Food and Wine: Friday November 9 at 7pm**

*"Join Ontario Wine Review's Grape Guy, Michael Pinkus, as he takes you on a journey through the Lake Erie region of Ontario wine country, letting you taste some of the wines only available at the wineries of this great, yet often overlooked, wine making region. Along your tasting journey you'll learn why the best wines of Ontario are sold only thru the cellar door and why you won't be seeing them at a liquor store near you any time soon." [www.discoverfusion.ca](http://www.discoverfusion.ca)*

**Other Events of Note - Coming in November**

**Taste the Season** – Food and wine pairings all month long in November put on by the Wineries of Niagara on the Lake: <http://wineriesofniagaraonthelake.com/taste-the-season>

**Wrapped Up in the Valley** – Food and wine pairings put on by the wineries of Twenty Valley, and walk away with a collection of savoury cheese shortbreads, find out all the details: [http://www.20valley.ca/events/48/wrapped\\_up\\_in\\_the\\_valley](http://www.20valley.ca/events/48/wrapped_up_in_the_valley)

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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 ...**

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](mailto:michael@ontariowinereview.com). We look forward to hearing from you!

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