

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 – 152
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OntarioWineReview: *And it Hurts Me, More Than It Hurts You*

I've often wondered if an article like this one would alienate me from or (hopefully) galvanize an industry into action (I guess we shall see) ... I have been putting it off for awhile, but after sitting in a room with a number of writers tasting Ontario wines at this year's Cuvee preview in Toronto I can say it's time. Some writers approached me to ask what is wrong with (some of) these wines, as if I was to blame; (please note: I write about them, I don't make them). But because this newsletter and my website is 90% about Ontario they feel they have no one else to turn to, so now, I turn to you: the consumer, the industry and all the others who read this newsletter. It's time to dole out some tough love and hard truth. Are you ready? Then read on. Otherwise the sand is over there and you can kindly put your head back into it at anytime.

This is what I wrote while sitting at my table just minutes after my Cuvee pre-tasting:

"Here I sit tasting the wines from the fruit of the labour of Ontario winemakers for the 2011 Cuvee media pre-tasting ... It is here we taste what the competition organizers and judges have deemed the best. Actually let's get more specific, before us is one wine from each winery that entered the competition and we are told "These wines represent each participating winery's top scoring wine from the Cuvee judging held in January". In other words these are the top scoring wines from each individual winery's submission ... 62 wines in total. In and amongst these wines are wines I have previously tasted and/or reviewed, while there are also some new wines and many are very good. The wines I was most looking forward to were some of the Cabs and blended reserves from the 2007 vintage, sadly at least 5 were loaded with volatile acidity (a nail polish-like smell). The ones that were clean were beautiful, including a [Vineland 2007 Reserve Cabernet Franc](#), a Thirty Bench 2007 Small Lot Cabernet Franc, a [Peller Signature Series 2007 Cabernet Sauvignon](#), a [Jackson Triggs 2007 Delaine Syrah](#) and a [Henry of Pelham 2007 Reserve Cabernet-Merlot](#) ... these were fantastic, well made wines worthy of their price (especially the Pelham which was an absolute steal at \$24.95). But then there were others, whom I will not mention here by name but instead by price: a \$45 Reserve Cabernet Franc, a \$45 Cab-Merlot, a \$55 Red Blend, a \$40 Reserve Franc and a \$35 Red Blend, that should all be ashamed of themselves for unleashing sub-par quality at astronomical prices. I'm talking about sub-par wines at above par prices for what the consumer is getting. This is not just about hurting the individual winery's reputation but also, as one colleague pointed out to me, Ontario's reputation as a whole. It's time to stop trying to get all your money back at one shot - this is a long term investment people, and a tough one at that.

Some wineries have told me that Cuvee does nothing for them. Sure they still enter (while some others don't), but they really see no benefit to their business, no up-tick in sales, no busting down the door or ringing off the hook of the phone to get the wine(s) that win. As I sat at my table sipping the best wines of each winery - I began to see why not. And while it is true what the French say: "chacun a son gout", some of this stuff really was just that, "goo". Another winemaker, told me

confidentially, "These winemakers are judging my wines, while some of the wines they submit are dreadful and loaded with faults. How can I take this seriously?"

As for some of my highlight whites: [Five Rows 2009 Sauvignon Blanc](#), [Pondview 2009 Bella Terra Chardonnay](#) and [20-27 Cellars 2009 Foxcroft Riesling](#)."

I was prepared to post that on the blog and just walk away (in effect, putting my own head in the sand) letting the chips fall where they may, but then it started to eat at me more and more. I want to keep writing about his industry, but what can I say? The final straw happened two days later at the bi-weekly media LCBO Vintages tasting and I have to admit to you I was appalled by a few of the Ontario wines being offered. I hopped on the train back home and found myself thinking about both tastings and penned the following:

I have been gentle on some of you over the years but seriously if these wines represent the best Ontario has to offer, give me a break. If the wines I tried at the Cuvee preview are some of the best wines wineries have to offer, then some wineries are in BIG trouble: (what was with that nasty-ass Merlot Icewine?). Don't care what they submit: (a flat, flabby, bland Sauvignon Blanc, is that really what your winery does best?). Have given up: (a Gewurtz that has no Gewurtz characteristic to it what-so-ever). Are not paying attention: (a fume blanc so heavy handed on the fume that there was no fruit at all). And are just wasting grapes: (a poor excuse for an '07 made with Franc and Sauv, an '07!!!).

Two days later, at the LCBO Vintages tasting (for the March 19, 2011 release) I had to pull out my best conspiracy-theory to explain some of the Ontario wines we sampled. I know full well that the LCBO isn't trying to be helpful to the Ontario wine industry, but never did I think they would stoop to this level: the tasting included a lackluster Sauvignon Blanc and a horrible Red Blend (you know who you are) ... I suggest to you that the LCBO takes some of these atrocious wines to make Ontario look bad ... advertise a red, from a good vintage like 2005, for under \$15, and people will buy it, sip on it and just as quickly spit it out, vowing never to buy Ontario wines again. Thanks for nothing LCBO.

I'm not saying they do that with every Ontario wine (case in point: [Cave Spring Cellars 2009 Estate Gewurztraminer](#)), but I think they throw in a ringer every-so-often just to screw with their major competition, the wineries. Am I just paranoid? Well find out for yourself, buy each and every Ontario wine that comes thru Vintages and you tell me they are in the caliber claimed by the Board's Vintages website: "the fine wine and premium spirits business unit of the LCBO. Our experts shop the world for fine wine and premium spirits of exceptional value." Now, not every wine is to everybody's taste you'll say - true - but some of those wines the board tries to pawn off as "fine" are only fine for salad purposes and that's all. I don't buy this argument. As they say on ESPN NFL Football broadcasts, "C'mon Man", this just ain't happening.

Every region has their duds, but do we really have so many? I don't believe it, I don't want to believe it. Did some winemakers/wineries get lazy in 2007? You bet. Did they feel the words 2007 and/or Reserve thrown on a label would sell? I think so. Should they be chastised for their arrogance? You better believe it. But not by me and not here, not by name anyway, the customers will take care of that ... but let's hope they don't take a whole industry down with them. One winemaker told me that, "some folks get stupid in a hot vintage" ... try some of the poorly made '07s and you can taste the truth in that statement.

Time to face facts, we can only blame the LCBO and the government for so much and for so long, at some point we have to look in the mirror and say, "Am I making the best wine I can? Am I growing the best grapes possible? Am I proud of all the wines we have on the shelf?" If the answer isn't "yes" to all those questions, where do you think the blame starts?

I hear through the grapevine (pun intended I guess) that 2010 was a phenomenal year, but let's downplay some of that hubris we seem to have developed with the '07's (when every Tom, Dick and

Harry with a pen or a computer said it was the 'best vintage ever' and everything labeled '2007' would sell); let's get down to making really good wines, world class wines. The kinds I know we can make. Ontario wineries have several monkeys on their collective backs, let's not kid ourselves about that, but let's try to remove at least one of them with the 2010 vintage ... the one that has people saying that Ontario makes sub-par wines; that's why the older generation doesn't drink them, they remember Baby Duck and the 70's. Let's show them we're more than that, that we've come a long way since then. To the wineries: While you're concocting your 2010 wines keep ma-and-pa-I-don't-buy-that-crap-from-Ontario in mind, show them where we're going doesn't regress us back to where we have been.

With Cuvee two weekend away let's make a new pact, to make the best wines we can, I know money's tight and some of you wanna get it all back with the sale of one bottle, but seriously, make good wine and the people will come, the profits will come ... Some of you believe in the Field of Dreams: "If you make it they will come" (not to play baseball, but to your winery). But it has to be done right and across the board; in this case one rotten apple really can spoil the basket. Now before y'all think I'm just ranting and raving about the high prices of Ontario wines, or the new wineries that have prices in the stratosphere I'm not ... what I am saying is if you are going to charge the big bucks you'd better make sure the wine is worth it, and that it's not just a wine from a "great" vintage that you feel you can throw any old crap in a bottle and it'll sell. Here's a thought that a winery principal emailed to me: "Shouldn't whatever tier you produce at be worth the money every year [despite the vintage]?"

I asked it over a year ago now, and so far there has been nobody who has heeded the call. I asked for a Mondavi-type of individual to rise up, take this industry upon his or her back and talk it up like no one else, so we could hold our collective heads high. So far all's quiet on the Eastern front, we seem to still be set adrift, rudderless. Honestly people, if the best marketing ploy we can come up with is to fill a glass full of icewine for Guinness (and I am still confused over the record we set) than, as one colleague said to me while we watched the spectacle: "This industry is in some real trouble". And that particular line seems to be on many people's lips for many different reasons.

I don't have the answers, and if I did I doubt the government, the LCBO or any of the other regulators and organizations controlling the industry would ever get out of the way and let us do them. That's why we're still looking for a figurehead, an insider, who has a big set and the brains to match. Maybe it's a young buck just starting out, but in truth it should be an old-timer who made it 'big' and has nothing left to prove. I have heard the names of some nominees, but Mondavi wasn't nominated, he wasn't elected, he just did it. Was he self-serving? Sure he was, but he also served his industry, his country and his region. But the big question remains, would we all recognize the Messiah if we saw him?

All I know is they'd better come around soon, because the hurdle of 2014 is just around the corner (too many grapes, not enough takers) ... but that's a rant for another time ... if we don't have this quality wine making issue figured out by then, by everybody, they'll be a lot of pain and suffering ... like there isn't enough of it going around now.



Grape Guy's Picks of the Bunch: *The Top Five From My Cuvee Pre-tasting*

Henry of Pelham 2007 Reserve Cabernet-Merlot - \$24.95 (W, L)

www.henryofpelham.com

I tried this at the media preview tasting for Cuvee 2011, the awards where the winemakers judge their peers, and I'll be completely honest with you (as I always am): of all the wines I hadn't previously tried, this was my favourite ... and the even bigger and better surprise, the price. For a 2007 Reserve you'd expect a pretty good gouging, considering it was "the vintage of the century" in Ontario; but this one delivers plenty of everything for less than you think. This wine really reflects

the vintage with a hefty dose of Cabernet Sauvignon making up the blend, 41.5%, along with 49.5 % Merlot and only 9% Cabernet Franc. Dark fruit, hints of spice, raspberry and mocha grace the nose and also the tongue, leading to good tannins on the silky supple finish. This one's a real value selection as well as being a really great wine. Price: \$24.95 - Rating: **** 1/2+

Five Rows Craft Winery 2009 Sauvignon Blanc - \$25.00 (W)

www.fiverows.com

Sauvignon Blanc fever is sweeping Ontario, it seems everywhere you turn someone is now working with the grape that New Zealand made famous (again). This Sauvignon Blanc is a really good example of the grape and how well it can be made here in Ontario. The nose has much of what many fans of the grape are looking for: grapefruit, grass and a touch of lemon rind. There are pleasant Sauvignon Blanc flavours too, including gooseberry, grassiness and a nice finishing acidity to keep it all clean. Price: \$25.00 - Rating: ****

Pondview Estate 2009 "Bella Terra" Chardonnay - \$24.00 (W)

www.pondviewwinery.com

Everybody knows that Chardonnay and I have not been the best of friends over the years. But lately I have tried quite a few interesting ones (having been one of the judges at the Cool Chardonnay tasting - coolchardonnay.ca). This was one of those Cool Chards that impressed me on the day of judging and did it again during the Cuvee media preview. A nose that's buttery with caramel apple and vanilla - this appealed to my sweet tooth. In the mouth it's creamy with vanilla, apple puree, and a lingering finish that kicks in some spiced vanilla cream for good measure. Price: \$24.00 - Rating: ****+

Twenty Twenty-Seven 2009 Foxcroft Riesling - \$24.95 (W)

www.2027cellars.ca

This is the pet project of one Kevin Panagapka - 20-27 Cellars - and his baby is Riesling, a grape he has been making wine from since the very beginning of his virtual winery experience. This particular version comes from the Foxcroft Vineyard (part of the Wismer Vineyard) and it really does show what Riesling in the right hands can be like. The smells are of peach and mineral with a hint of pear that lures you into the glass for that first sip ... and I'll tell you, from first to last this wine does not disappoint. Stony mineral, peach pit and green apple lead the charge with loads of biting acidity leading up to a dry finish that replays over and over in the mouth. Price: \$24.95 - Rating: **** 1/2

Vineland Estates 2007 Cabernet Franc Reserve - \$40.00 (W)

www.vineland.com

The Chardonnay-ophiles and the Riesling-geeks can say what they like, but for my money Cabernet Franc is Ontario's grape to win or lose with, and after tasting this one, and what winemaker Brian Schmidt (and others) can do year-after-year with this grape I become more and more convinced. Flavours of cherry, chocolate, licorice and smoke really touch a nerve, especially when accompanied by a pleasant medium length finish. For those focused on smell try cherry and mocha notes on for size. This is easily accessible now or for the next 5+ years. Price: \$40.00 - Rating: **** 1/2

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



Weekly Wine Notes and More: Rief and Lakeview wines plus 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 14, 2011 – Reif Estates 2009 Pinot Shiraz ([LISTEN](#))
February 21, 2011 – Lakeview Cellars 2009 Reserve Kerner ([LISTEN](#))

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

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

[Wine Writers' Circle Annual Dinner](#)

[My Lunch with Andrzej](#)

[Cuvee Media Preview Tasting](#)

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

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

No New Reviews this Week

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

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

[Tawse 2005 Echos Bistro Red](#)

[Henry of Pelham 2006 Off-Dry Reserve Riesling](#)

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

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

[5 New Posts - Many new wines](#)

Including: wines from 1995, 1994, 1999 and a New Chilean Sparkler

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

[March 5, 2011 release](#)

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Wine Event Spotlight: *Cuvee Weekend and Jazz on the Ridge*

Cuvee 2011 ... Need I mention the biggest night in Ontario wine. Check it out at www.cuvee.ca to see what's happening the weekend of March 4. *Winners of the Cuvee En Route Passports were Rick Schofield (Port Ewen, New York) and Cindy Sands (Blue Mountains, Ontario)*

Jazz on the Ridge is back ... Friday, May 27, 2011 at 7 p.m. Peninsula Ridge Estates Winery's benefit for the New Niagara West YMCA, the McNally House Hospice and other important local community causes. An evening filled with great wine, spectacular food & celebrity jazz performers which includes The Jack de Keyzer Rhythm & Blues Revue, The Tianna H Quintet, Archie Alleyne & Kollage and Robert Scott Trio. Tickets are \$195 per person - To purchase call the Winery Retail Shop 905.563.0900, ext. 25

www.ontariowinereview.com

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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. We look forward to hearing from you!

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