

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 – 164
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In this Edition

- **OntarioWineReview:** *Did You Get the Memo? ... Part II*
 - **Grape Guy's Picks of the Bunch:** *Wines that over deliver for their price*
 - **Weekly Wine Notes and More:** *Ottawa Life Posts, On the Road Pieces and More*
 - **Quick Sips:** *Wine does it all, Cork vs Screwcap again, and Flaunting*
 - **Wine Event Spotlight:** *The Grape Jam and Dionysus in August*
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OntarioWineReview: *Did You Get the Memo? ... Part II*

Lately, I have become alarmed with the amount of sheer drivel being flooded onto our market. Generic, innocuous blends that lack a real flavour profile and turn out to be, for lack of a better term "just wine". I got this feeling recently while tasting through some wines that were bound for the LCBO. The literature that accompanied these wines proudly stated "Coming to the LCBO (and gave a date)". At times like these I feel like Keanu Reeve tasting wine: I would take a sip and go "Whoa" as I looked at the glass, re-read the bottle, take another sip, and another, all just to confirm to my head and my palate that I wasn't tasting anything more than plain-Jane white wine (or red as the case may be).

I wrote about this issue on my Ottawa Life blog and thought the issue needed a little re-broadcasting (with a tweak here and there) about the seemingly insatiable appetite the LCBO has for general-list-generics, in a world filled with interesting and unique wines of origin why they insist on this is way beyond my scope of understanding. Maybe it's because they've gotten so used to those Cellared in Canada wines that it's become an epidemic, call it Cellared in Canada Syndrome, blah blends that do nothing but be cheap and be wine. Now, there is something to be said for cheap and cheerful, heck I have recommended quite a few myself, but I would like to think that the wines had character. Put it this way, when you sip on four wines in a row and can't distinguish one from the other this is not only eye-opening and whoa-worthy but it is also concerning, and while Canadian/Ontario wineries are not immune to making these wines, it's sad that they are being encouraged by the LCBO to create these wines to get onto their shelves. I have heard more than one winemaker say, "we made this specifically for the board and for their tastes". I guess if you want to make nice to the beast then you have to play ball with the beast. Though it is a sad state of affairs to have to admit you are the dumping ground for so much innocuous stuff, and that you are beholden to a monopoly set in there ways of giving YOU what THEY want. Because, in essence, it is not the consumer that drives what the LCBO buys, it is what the LCBO wants to buy that drives what you "like" – the KGBO is telling you what will be in your glass. Heck, I could go on for hours, but in case you missed it here is what I wrote for Ottawa Life ...

During a recent tasting in my home of a variety of new wines, soon to be appearing at an LCBO near you, I was struck by a certain sameness about these wines. I don't mean they all tasted the same, but what I did notice was they all had an inoffensive quality to them. There was nothing great or outstanding about them – but they also all had the ability not to wow, on any level. I don't know about you, but I want a wine I can describe and recommend,, I want something I can sing the praises to friends about, something with character, something that makes me say, "Man I'd like another glass of that" or "I wish I bought more", instead of, "I could take it or leave it".

These were all wines with fun sounding names, from companies you recognize, they are getting funky new labels with shoes or animals on them and are definitely marketed towards women. They are all easy drinking, passable wines but with so little character it's hard to get past the first glass. Yeah you'd take a refill during cocktail hour at a party, all the while poking your head around corners to see if maybe there was something else on offer, something that will hold your interest longer. Something you really want to drink instead of just needing something in your glass for show. And you would hope they wouldn't serve it when you sit down to dinner.

Don't get me wrong, these are easily consumable wines, very consumer friendly, and all well-priced under \$15 ... but if I were to put them in front of you side-by-side you'd be hard pressed to tell the difference one from the other. Is this the way we are heading with our wines? Are we staring down the barrel at a bunch of homogenous wines with no distinguishing character of origin or grape? Is this what the Ontario public is crying out for? I seriously hope not, because if we are I want off this ride right now. Please tell me this is not the case.

The French call origin "Terroir" and is what you taste in a glass of wine that has a specific home of origin, an American writer coined the term "Somewhereness" to give the term an English spin and something we could all understand; but what it all boils down to is a sense of place in the wine you're drinking ... It's what makes people say, "I like Australian Shiraz", or "My first love is Chilean Merlot". It's what prompted our ancestors to like Bordeaux, wines from the Medoc, Pauillac or St. Julien, Burgundy: Nuits-St.-George or from Cotes du Beaune, Pouilly-Fuisse (Chardonnay), Loire (Sauvignon Blanc), Chateauneuf-du-Pape (big red blends) and countless other region specific wines. Nowadays we put the grape name on the front label so you know your grape of choice as well as the country, but are we really getting away from the regionality behind that glass of wine? The truth of the matter is no, more and more new world wine producers are putting vineyard designations or more specific regional designation on the label: Paso Robles, Knights Valley, Short Hills Bench, Robyn's Block, Julia's Vineyard to further help you pinpoint your vinous love of choice. So with all this refinement going on when did we collectively tell the LCBO that we want wines that taste the same, that we want wines from Ontario to be indistinguishable from French wines or Italian wines? When? Because somehow I missed the memo ... and I hope you will ignore this push too.



Grape Guy's Picks of the Bunch: *Wines that over deliver for their price*

13th Street 2010 Merlot - \$17.95 (W)
www.13thstreetwinery.com

Stop the presses! 13th Street has themselves a real winner here - not like it's their first though. This all estate Merlot has a lot of firsts under its belt: first machine harvest for the winery, first second tier Merlot and first big bruiser red from 2010. I was surprised that no oak was used, but 4-5 weeks of skin contact has given this wine big flavour and power on the palate. The nose is loaded with spiced blackberry and cinnamon-raspberries while the palate has a lovely spiced quality with good tannins cassis and blueberry skin notes. Only 500 cases were made and I would think they'll go quickly based on the price; this wine will be at home with all kinds of bbq'ed fare be it pork, chicken or steak. Price: \$17.95 - Rating: **** 1/2

Lailey 2009 Cabernet-Merlot - \$15.00 (W)
www.laileyvineyard.com

I almost lost my socks when I first tasted this wine, I couldn't believe that something this good could cost so little. This is the Lailey base-model red blend set for by-the-glass restaurant sales - but you should get to the winery and buy it buy the bottle. 17 months in a mix of American and French "used" oak and a blend of 80% Cabernet Franc and 20% Merlot from fruit sourced outside the Lailey property. This is such a beautiful red fruit driven wine with hints of vanilla and a juiciness through

the palate that'll have you sipping again and again and again. As a wine it gets a 4+ stars from me, but it's 5-star value. Price: \$15.00 - Rating: ****+

Featherstone 2009 Gamay - \$19.95 (W)
www.featherstonewinery.ca

"Our inspiration is the great Gamays produced at 13th Street," Louise Engel (owner) confided in me, she is referencing one of Ontario's top Gamay houses and I would say they have done an admirable job, in fact they may have outdone the master with this '09 version. This is one kick-ass / killer Gamay, delivering all the fruit one could hope for from this grape. The nose is loaded with black cherry, while the palate follows suit with that robustness of cherry with a mere hint of spice and incredible palate cleansing acidity to balance it all out. So worth sipping on - chill it just a bit to enjoy it's full fruited potential. Price: \$19.95 - Rating: **** 1/2+

Too little ... too late - sold out wines:

[Between the Lines 2009 Lemberger](#)
[Devil's Wishbone 2009 Riesling](#)
[Hinterbrook 2010 Franc Blanc](#)

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



Weekly Wine Notes and More: *Ottawa Life Posts, On the Road Pieces and More*

Weekly Ottawa Life Blog Entries:

[Learn to Love Local](#)

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

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

Articles coming over the next two weeks

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

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

Nothing New to Report This Week

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

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

[Cave Spring Cellars 2006 Dolomite Riesling](#)
[Colchester Ridge 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

[7 New Posts Added](#)

including wines from California, British Columbia and Michigan

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

**Missed the August 20 tasting date
coming soon September 3 and 10, 2011**

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<http://www.winevirgin.com/getaway/>

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

August 2011

Extra Extra, read all about it - Wine Does it All ... According to a new study wine does it all. It helps the tired and the lazy, lowers cholesterol and will even clean the dishes for you (well maybe not that far ... yet) but everything else in-between, it seems to be the new miracle cure-all: <http://news.yahoo.com/nothing-red-wine-cant-191917996.html>

Is the debate finally over ... I doubt it but it seems that there is a growing movement to put the nail into the coffin of the cork: "Hogue Cellars ... recently made a case for screwcaps with the release of a five-year study showing that wines topped with a screwcap taste as good or better over time than wines topped with natural cork or other closures." ... <http://www.yakima-herald.com/stories/2011/07/10/study-backs-screwcaps-over-corks-but-tradition-is-difficult-to-overcome>

Think that wine is a 15% monster, think again ... it could be much more, and that means a hangover from hell: "A study of the alcohol content of 129,000 wines from vineyards across Europe and the new world over a 16-year period has suggested that many vintners have been "systematically" understating their wines' strength on labels." <http://www.guardian.co.uk/lifeandstyle/2011/jul/05/wine-alcohol-strength-understated>

They just keep rubbing it in ... as we here in Ontario struggle with our antiquated liquor laws it seems that some places just flaunt their liberalism in our face: "Sonic, which sells burgers, corn dogs and hot dogs, will be selling bottled and draft beer along with 10 varieties of wine to customers who eat on the outdoor patio at their Miami location this summer," ... <http://www.independent.co.uk/life-style/food-and-drink/fast-food-chains-in-us-begin-serving-alcohol-2307167.html>

The Italians take the lead ... it seems like it is a see-saw battle for vinous supremacy in the world, but I think the Italians have finally prevailed over their French rivals, and this time it might be for the long haul: "According to the European Commission in 2010 Italy produced 4.96 billion litres of wine compared to 4.62 billion in France, a drop of one per cent from last year." ... <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/foodanddrink/wine/8571222/Italy-overtakes-France-to-become-worlds-largest-wine-producer.html>



Wine Event Spotlight: *The Grape Jam and Dionysus in August*

Grape Jam at Pillitteri ... August 20 and 21, 2011 - it's all about Eating, Drinking and Grooving - www.ontariowinereview.com

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need I say more. Click here for details:

<http://www.pillitteri.com/calendar/index.cfm?fuseaction=ViewEventDetails&EventID=98>

Dionysus at Mastronardi ... August 20th, 2011 marks the 6th Annual Dionysus show featuring Pavlo and guests ... there's food and drink and loads of fun to be had - all to benefit Batten Disease ... call Mastronardi today to get details and get your tickets: **519-733-9463** ... and if you've never been here is my review from the event in 2008 (<http://ontheroadwithgrapeguy.blogspot.com/2008/06/report-from-toast-to-dionysus-at.html>) and I hear it gets better every year.

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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