

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 – 165
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OntarioWineReview: *Speculating About Danny*

Two weeks ago, just as I was preparing my newsletter, some interesting news was forwarded to me. Now, interesting may not be the appropriate word, we could try for sad, disappointing, irritating ... those might suit better, especially if you're a fan of Daniel Lenko Wines.

The story goes something like this:

An "order to comply" certificate was slapped on Lenko's winery door. The order, from the Region of Niagara dated July 18, 2011, listed two areas of concern an official found after inspecting Lenko's property on June 29, 2011. First, "Lenko must cease and desist from discharging winery production waste" (Lenko says this waste is 99% water and 1% wine) into an unapproved septic tank and then discharging that onto the ground surface. Second, Lenko is ordered to apply to the Region for a permit to construct a sewage system and, upon application, submit a detailed design plan from a qualified engineer or sewage systems designer and, upon approval, proceed to install the new system by Sept. 14, 2011. Costs for this work could get into the \$50,000+ mark. [[Get full details from Rick Van Sickle's article here](#)]

Since this news broke I have received plenty of emails asking me, "have you heard about Danny?", the answer to that question is a definite "Yes" ... then there's the speculation as to why now. You see Lenko has been making wine at this same location for the past 12 years and people are wondering why Niagara is coming down so hard on him now. Some say it was Danny's new sign that has gotten him into such trouble, but in truth Danny's had a sign up for years, and it's been a fairly cheesy one at best, I don't think his new, stylish, and professional sign he has just recently acquired, has anything to do with it.

Let's be honest folks, I've had a week or two to think about this and the first thing that leapt into my head was not the new sign, it was that Danny had pissed off the wrong people. From there my conspiratory mind went to work as I tried to recall where I had seen Danny last. Now that I am a Niagara-area resident my chances of bumping into Daniel locally are much greater. Was it at the Blu Turtle for brunch? Nope I've never stepped foot into the Blu Turtle, but I hear it's a good place on a Sunday morning. Maybe August Restaurant, where I understand Danny frequents quite often? Not there either, in truth I haven't been there in over a year, though it too is a good place to eat.

Then it hit me. I saw Danny's face peering back at me from between two barrels in a May 6, 2011 article in the Toronto Star entitled "[Grape Expectations frustrated by LCBO](#)". In the article Danny, who has never been shy about his dislike for our monopoly system and those who run it, said: "In the real world, there'd be an alternative, some place else to sell our wines, but the LCBO's the only game in town ... They say they're the best at what they do, but how can you say that when they have

no competition? What's wrong with having a VQA store?" Another prominent quote in the article is not attributed to anyone, but with Danny's face front and centre at the top it is easy for any reader to make an inference (rightly or wrongly): "Would I like to get more of my product on the shelves? Sure. But why would I provoke an 800-pound gorilla? There's just no way to win that battle."

What my conspiratorial mind thinks is that Daniel Lenko has provoked the 800-pound gorilla once too often and the Board, or as we like to refer to them in certain circles, the KGBO, has put its foot down - or to keep with the gorilla metaphor: has decided to swat at the plane piloted by Lenko from atop its perch.

The aforementioned picture at the top of the article had a caption that read: "Daniel Lenko started his winery in 1999 using the grapes from the vines that his father planted in Beamsville in the Niagara Wine Region, in 1959. Lenko sells his wines from the kitchen of a small house on the vineyard which he also uses as a wine testing lab and an office." Now what do you think it take for the LCBO to get on the horn with the AGCO (Alcohol Gaming Commission Ontario - who "oversee" the wineries) or even a local official and say to them: "maybe you'll want to look into this Lenko guy a little harder" he is after all selling wine from his kitchen and a kitchen might not be considered a suitable place to be selling alcohol from. I think someone is making an example of Danny.

In these uncertain times, when the LCBO is under a constant barrage of attacks about the Importation of Intoxicating Liquors Act of 1928, local wineries screaming for greater access to market and Tim Hudak touting the idea of VQA-only stores in his election platform, the Board is under pressure and in the spotlight for negative reasons, and no matter how they spin it they continuously fine themselves in negative lights. Sure they try to make themselves look better by implementing new programs and policies, like a [new out-of-province importation personal amendment](#) (now you can bring back 9L of wine from another province - see "Ontario Consumers Love Canadian Wines") or [press releases about how Ontario wine sales are up](#). The fact is the Board likes to flex its muscles every so often, but they like to do it in subtle ways.

My thoughts on the Daniel Lenko issue: Danny didn't piss people off with a stupid sign, Danny pissed off a power far greater and with more clout than some neighbours with a grudge; and this powerful entity isn't getting off Danny's neck till he says "uncle" and is ready to play ball like a nice boy. Now let that be a lesson to all of you who dare to criticize the great and powerful LCBOz, (and pay no attention to the man behind the curtain), just go about your business and do your thing the status quo is just fine thank you very much ... or you could be next.

Which brings me to what I thought about these past two weeks: Danny, the LCBO called, I think they want their winery back; after all, each winery is making their wine at the pleasure of the LCBO - but that's a story for another time. Meanwhile take part in our new poll question (bottom of page):

[Some have likened the LCBO to the mob, what do you think?](#)



Grape Guy's Picks of the Bunch: *Two Years, Three Wines and more*

Vineland 2009 Semi-Dry Riesling - \$13.95 (W, L)

www.vineland.com

I've tried some great Rieslings from 2009, it was a great Riesling year, plenty of plumped up acidity, and lots of lovely fruit, everything a Riesling lover enjoys. Brian Schmidt, winemaker for Vineland, seems to be able to coax Riesling grapes to submit to his will year-after-year, so in a year such as 2009 you really look forward to what he'll accomplish with really great fruit - and with this semi-dry (3) he doesn't disappoint. I dropped that three there as a teaser, because a three on the sugar code would indicate some really noticeable sweetness, but with all that amazing zingy and zippy acidity it's hard to tell. The nose is lemon-lime mixed with peach, nectarine and green apple ... the palate has Jolly Rancher green apple candy from start to finish, mixing the sweet with the tart to perfection; there's also nice lemon and mineral notes that balance everything nicely. Then there's a long lovely

finish that'll have you swallowing with a smile on your face ... perfect wine for hot summer days or sipping on before dinner. Price: \$13.95 - Rating: **** 1/2

Also check out the newly released: [2010 Pinot Meunier](#)

Calamus 2008 Merlot - \$25.00 (W)

www.calamuswines.com

By all accounts 2008 was not a great year for red here in Ontario, but some varieties did fare better than others. Calamus has produced something that's very special from a tough vintage, their inaugural single varietal Merlot, (hard to believe they've never done one before). A 75 case production, limited edition wine that was aged a full 30 months in French oak, of which one third was new (only three of the four barrels made the cut). The nose is big on cherry with a ready to drink smoothness on the palate that's loaded with cherry flavour - this is the kind of Merlot you think of when you hear the word `Merlot` - which means Miles (of Sideways fame) would hate it, but it is one you can easily fall in love with. Good acidity, food friendly with a nice linger of red and black cherry on the finish. For kicks I aerated some and found that it got smoother and silkier, the fruit sweeter and a pleasing hint of vanilla came through. Not for long term ageing but when a wine is drinking this well you'll want to consume it by the bottle. Drink 1-3 years. Price: \$25.00 - Rating: **** 1/2

Also check out the newly released: [2009 Cosmic White](#) and [2008 Cosmic Red](#)

Good Earth 2009 Cabernet Franc - \$18.00 (W)

www.goodearthfoodandwine.com

What came first the chicken or the egg is an age old question. In the case of the Good Earth Cooking School and Winery the question should be, what came first, the wine or the food? In this case it's the food - 14 years of cooking schoolery came before the wines and the goal is to make food friendly wines that go with as much of their foods as possible. This is a Franc that spent 10 months in new French oak, has a nice smoky, tobacco and black cherry note on the nose and follows with smoky-cranberry and cassis on the palate. Good acidity allows it to be very food friendly. Price: \$18.00 - Rating: *** 1/2

Also check out new reviews for: [2010 Dry Riesling](#) and [2009 Medium-Dry Riesling](#)

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



Bi-Weekly OWR Updates: *Many things from Vintages and What I'm Drinking Posts*

Weekly Ottawa Life Blog Entries:

More coming in September

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

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

New Entries Coming Next Week

[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
[8 New Posts Added](#)

including a test of Wine Shield and an EOS Zinfandel

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

Now Available: [September 3, 2011](#)

Also Available: Shop online for [July](#) and [August](#)

Plus: [September 10 All Ontario Release Picks](#)



OntarioWineReview: *Culinary Journeys - part 1*

Lately, the wife and I have decided to do a monthly exploration of the Niagara area. Last month we checked out a few wineries, including Cave Spring and Featherstone. But for those who read my [On the Road with the Grape Guy blog](#), and some of the wine and food events I attend, know that my wife does not live by the fermented grape alone, she's the foodie amongst us and has inspired me to cook and try to be adventurous with different edible products. So this month's outing started with the need for more ingredients to cook with and ended with a delightful dessert.

Earlier in the week I had been on a Wine Writers wine tour of Niagara and at the Good Earth Cooking School and Winery I was reminded of something I had learned about during a [food truck dinner at Flat Rock Cellars](#) the previous year: there's an heirloom vegetable farm in Wainfleet. The wife and I have been trying to remember this piece of info for a year now, but it took Nicolette Novak to remind me. The [Twig and Tree](#) is run by Linda Crago and she is an absolute encyclopedia of heirloom-veggie-knowledge. Erica (my wife) commented on how it was amazing she remembered all the specific names of the varieties of tomatoes she showed us, let alone the other things we tried and collected to take home. We came for the mouse melons (mini watermelon-look-alikes about the size of a grape, but are actually part of the cucumber family) and left with more than a dozen different kinds of tomatoes, some oriental melon (another kind of cucumber), a squash and various other edible goodies (including blue basil and lime basil) - can't wait to start cooking this week. The most curious thing we tried was called a "Schezwan Button" - which looked like a thistle with a red top and, when eaten, numbed the mouth for up to 5 minutes, "a New York delicacy," Linda told us with a shrug, "I can grow them so I do." If you stop by be sure to feed Joey, the pig, a few tomatoes.

On the way for lunch we made an impromptu stop at [Niagara Presents](#). I've often seen the sign and many times wondered if it was "presents" as in presentation or "presents" as in gifts - turns out it's a bit of both. A big building with a small store that houses all their jams, jellies, marmalades, relishes, chutneys and a variety of other giftable delicacies made from local products. We gravitated towards the garlic products, including a grilling sauce, garlic mango dressing and garlic cooking oil made with the scapes (the shoots that proceed the actual bulb production).

Lunch was to be at the [Good Earth Food and Wine Company](#), it only seemed fair to eat at the place that set us on our culinary course of the day. Nicolette welcomed me back with open arms and greeted Erica warmly - but then she seems to do that with many who walk through the door, it's a place where you're an instant friend or part of the family. We sat for a delicious lunch of shaved flank steak with grainy mustard, goat cheddar (from Fifth Town in Prince Edward County) on artisanal multigrain bread (from Ravine Bakery in Niagara-on-the-Lake) topped with back door grown chives. The wines we tried included [Dry Riesling](#), [Medium-Dry Riesling](#) and [Cabernet Franc](#) and we started our lunch with a Canadian cheese tray that included homemade preserve (tri-

berry) that was so delicious we almost licked the cup it came in. "The key to good jam is real fruit and real sugar," Nicolette told us, she's not a fan of pectin; jam should not be hard to spread, "it should ooze and fill all the nooks and crannies of what you put it on". We left after a quick visit to the Pantry Hut (across the parking lot) to pick up a package of their much touted Double Smoked Bacon and a jar of that delectable jam (luckily they both made it home before we gobbled 'em up in the car).

After such a delicious lunch the only thought in our heads was for ice cream, and in Erica's little culinary guide she read about a hut in Jordan called [Toute Sweet](#), a delightful 6 year old venture that reminded us a Cold Stone creamery, but with local flair. Pick your desired flavour of ice cream for the base, then pick your filling and they mix it right in front of your eyes on a cold slab ... who knew frozen Twix bars could taste so good.

The next day we hopped in the car for a quick outing to Vineland for a tasting of some new releases, including a [2009 Semi-Dry Riesling](#) and the [2010 Pinot Meunier](#) ... their website promised the 2010 Cabernet Franc was ready for tasting, but alas nary a bottle was seen nor tasted ... I have to say that I can't wait to give that one a go, knowing Brian Schmidt's love for the grape, nor can I wait to try the 2009 Dry Riesling.

On the way home we stopped at [Lake Land Meats](#) to pick up some sausages for Monday night's dinner ... thus our culinary journey will continue at home.



Wine Event Spotlight: *Fallstock returns*

Join Calamus for Fallstock ... Saturday September 24, 2011 from 1-5pm for food, drink and music from the Prince Brothers (sad to hear that Larry Horne and the Horn Dogs won't be making an appearance, but maybe we can lure them out for a set). <http://www.calamuswines.com/Events/>

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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