

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 – 167
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OntarioWineReview: *California Dreamin' – a lament in two parts*

I just recently returned from California, the Mecca of wine in North America, and I am still shaking my head over the amount of wine I was restricted to buy ... no wait, bring back is the proper terminology. I could buy all I wanted, as long as I consumed all but two bottles on that side of the border. While on the other side of the coin, Americans seem to have an almost unlimited carry-home amount, because their taxation on alcohol is a mere pittance based on the amount they bring back above their personal exemption, though many people I have talked with and from first hand accounts I have read say that US customs official are known to turn a blind eye on booze, their official regulations seem vague but sensible: "While federal regulations do not specify a limit on the amount of alcohol you may bring back for personal use, unusual quantities are liable to raise suspicions" In general, US customs seem less interested in how much wine you are bringing back, unless you are planning to sell it on the other side ... a mixed case would raise little to no suspicion, while 3 cases of the same wine would. Canadian customs is a different story, and stopping extra alcohol from coming in seems to be high on its mandated list.

Here's a story to illustrate my point: Last summer I was bringing in some used furniture after being away for a week. As you might be aware, after a week you have a personal exemption of \$750, I had about \$1200 worth of stuff (I was furnishing a house after all). Since I was trucking it in with a U-Haul I decided to try my luck with a mixed case of wines (12) I had acquired. At the border I declared my furniture and presented the customs official with an itemized list, I also remarked that I had 12 bottles of wine each with a retail value of under \$15. I knew I was going to pay some duty but was shocked to learn that my \$180 case of wine cost me more to bring in that my \$450 overage on furniture ... it's also sad to note that I was actually paying duty on only \$150 worth of wine, as two of the 12 bottles were exempt.

This time back we carried three bottles each and luckily had a sympathetic customs official who allowed the 6 bottles in without much questioning; I had remarked to my mother that if I were a customs official and someone was returning from California and claimed only two bottles I'd call them a liar (but that just might be my personal bias – I for one had a few more bottles I would have loved to carry home).

California, for those who have not been, is a different beast altogether when it comes to wine (than my beloved Ontario) ... they are fiercely proud of what they make. It appears prominently on wine lists, in restaurants you get discounts on wines that are "local" (one restaurant offered 25% off a bottle from their extensive wine list, 90% of which was Californian and 80% was already under \$30), and wine and its accoutrement seem to be in every store window – even if they're not selling wine.

The concept of the tasting room is entirely different too. Many wineries have their property, where you can buy wine right at the cellar door (like here in Ontario), but they also have an off-site location in a nearby village, shopping mall or even hundreds of miles away but usually within their AVA (American Viticultural Area) where they make the wine (this is very un-Ontario like). Imagine: Lailey or Coyote's Run or Cattail Creek having a store dedicated to showcasing their wines on Niagara-on-the-Lakes main drag, or in a nearby St. Catharines shopping mall. Today in Ontario only a handful of wineries are allowed to do such a thing ... the key word is "allowed". Ontario laws prohibit such stores and our lawmakers are constantly falling back on our Free Trade agreements for their lack of movement. The Californians have no such restrictions, nor do I think they would care if they did, they'd do it anyway. And of course wine is available at every grocery and corner store. One of my "oh wow" moments I experienced was walking into a place called The Cheese Shop, located in an open-air mall in Carmel-by-the-Sea, and seeing a long narrow store stocked with some 200+ cheeses from around the world at the front and double that amount of wine in the back. A one-stop wine and cheese shop ... what a concept, I almost wet myself.

Here's another brilliant adoptable concept, if only our legislatures would get off their collective arses and stop being afraid of "consequences" and look at the bigger picture ... an idea that would help our wine industry here in Ontario immensely:

I stumbled upon a place called A Taste of Monterey at a mall on Cannery Row in Monterey. The store was dedicated to showcasing Monterey wines, not just from wineries located within the Monterey AVA, but also from wineries outside the AVA that source fruit from Monterey. Imagine: Fielding (a Beamsville winery) buys fruit from Kevin Watson (a grower in Niagara-on-the-Lake) and makes a wine from those grapes; the resulting Fielding wine could be featured in a retail space devoted to Niagara-on-the-Lake wines, located in NOTL, along with the wines from other area wineries using locally sourced fruit. The same concept could be used for Beamsville in a store called "Taste of The Bench", where you could find Prince Edward County winery's wines on display who source Beamsville Riesling or Pinot Noir. The store in Monterey was owned by three winery owners from the Monterey area whose passion is to promote their area's wines ... I was told it was just not their wines on display, in fact they shy away from promoting their own wines, which is why they have some 80-90 wineries represented on the shelves and 18 different wines (changed weekly) for tasting.

These are not complicated concepts folks. A shop devoted to wine and cheese, an off-site tasting room (meaning a second place to showcase your wines), pride in your area wines on store shelves, in shop windows and on restaurant wine lists. A tasting room dedicated to regional wine promotion and tasting ... a one-stop overview shop for areas like Prince Edward County, Lake Erie North Shore, Niagara-on-the-Lake and Beamsville, which can only help to promote more tourism and more interest in our wines and wine regions.

Why have these concepts not come to Ontario? Why are we still stuck in the stone age? What are our politicians afraid of? Do we really need protection from the evils of alcohol, especially wine? And why is it easier to buy an imported wine than it is to get your hands on a good domestic bottle? I'm not going to point fingers and associate blame, but I do think we all know the answers – and if you're one of those who don't, maybe it's time you find out what's going on elsewhere in the world and why we are at a virtual stand-still when it comes to wine laws that are stuck back in the prohibition era instead of moving forward with the rest of North America (namely the US); even [Manitoba is progressing towards a freer market](#) and they don't have a thriving wine industry to speak of. Ontario could be so much more and in truth we need look no further than New York State for inspiration with their Wine and Culinary center. I have heard Ontario referred to as Napa North – but with our stagnant attitude and out-dated laws we're far from earning that moniker because nothing could be further from the truth ... our wines are there, we just have to figure out the rest of the equation ... As one winery owner replied on Facebook when I posted [my review of A Taste of Monterey](#): "Perhaps one day there will be a Taste of Niagara-on-the-Lake store. Perhaps one day we will have a provincial gov't that can see the obvious f***ing benefits of such a store." We

definitely have a passionate industry and the will is there from those who own the wineries, but their hands are tied.

Visiting California really opens ones eyes to the possibilities of where a proud-of-their-wines wine industry can go and what a little laissez-faire attitude can bring to the table (or at least some relaxing of the strongly held reign over booze) ... it's a shame that the powers that can make it a reality, namely our government, both here in Ontario and federally don't have the same vision - or any vision for that matter; a real shame.



Grape Guy's Picks of the Bunch: *Franc, Sauv B and a New Rose*

Vineland 2009 Elevation Cabernet - \$25.00 (W)

www.vineland.com

"I think you're gonna like this one," said Dave as he poured me the last of the 3 wines Vineland had on for tasting during the New Vintages Tailgate Party, "you're a Cab Franc slut." Man does he have me pegged but boy was he right. There is no way you could tell Brian Schmidt (winemaker at Vineland), that 2009 was a bad year for Franc because he nailed it. A blend of 94% Cabernet Franc and 6% Cabernet Sauvignon this is another stunning version of an Ontario Franc from one of the wineries that does it justice. Aged 18 months in all French oak with a fair amount of new this wine displays aromas of tobacco and cherry on the nose, which to most would seem simplistic, but the palate more that doubles your pleasure factor. Cherry, sour raspberry, cigar box / tobacco and some elegant spice hold down the fort with a nice acid bite on the finish to balance everything out nicely. I had to ask for a second glass just to make sure I tasted the first one correctly ... I suspect you will too as you buy that second third and fourth bottle for later enjoyment. Price: \$25.00 – Rating: **** 1/2

Hinterbrook 2010 Sauvignon Blanc - \$19.95 (W)

www.hinterbrook.com

New wineries always excite me, and they should you too, because they mean a new perspective, new wine style and of course, more choice in the wines you can try. Winemaker Natalie Spytzkowsky (Rosewood) helms the winemaking operations here and has crafted a delightful Sauvignon Blanc that steps away from the New Zealand style and reaches for more tropical and melon notes on the nose. On the palate it's a delicious summer sipper with it's slight citrus and dialed up melon sweetness – this one really refreshes. Price: \$19.95 – Rating: ****

Hillebrand 2010 Trius Rosé - \$13.95 (W)

www.hillebrand.com

With a new winemaker comes new ideas and new wines ... and with an Ontario veteran like Craig McDonald at the helm that's not too surprising. The former winemaker for Creekside brings his Aussie charm and flair to one of Ontario's largest portfolios and adds a little something, that has rarely been seen on their list, the word "Shiraz". But this version is not in a big heavy red kinda way, it's a light and easy drinking Rosé (the first ever in the Trius line). A blend of Shiraz and Merlot that has sweet cherry, raspberry and strawberry aromas and red berry flavours with a good acid backbone and a hint of Shiraz-spice on the finish. Good first effort here with this grape in a new style for this winery. I suspect there are more interesting wines to come. Price: \$13.95 – Rating: ****

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



Bi-Weekly OWR Updates: *Ottawa Life blog posts and lots from California*

Weekly Ottawa Life Blog Entries:

[More than Just Malbec](#)
[Another Promise for Change](#)

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

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

[California Winery Tour: Wente and Kunde](#)

[Tasting in Carmel, California - part 1](#)

[Tasting in Carmel, California - part 2](#)

[A Taste of Monterey](#)

[An Impromptu Tasting of Carmel Road](#)

[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

[7 New Posts Added](#)

including lots of stuff from California (big surprise)

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

In case you missed it: [September 17, 2011](#)

Coming Soon: October 1, 2011



OntarioWineReview: *Wine Dirty Talk*

With thanks to Dean Tudor for compiling this list:

For wine writers and lovers, it's NOT dirty talk to say --

1. "Spit or swallow?"
2. "Stick your nose all the way in"
3. "She's needs to open up a bit"
4. "I've had a '69 with my sister"
5. "My God! Check out the legs on that Blue Nun!"
6. "I keep Sherry on the rack in my cellar"
7. "I find the Italians flacid and the French hard"
8. "There are too many whites in this room"
9. "He needs to practice the swirl"
10. "She caught me sneaking Helen Turley into the house"
11. "We're going to be doing it vertically"
12. "You have to pull it out slowly, otherwise it'll shoot all over the place!"
13. "Have you tasted Mike Weir?"
14. "I'm smelling leather right now"
15. "Me and the guys did a 10 year old Tawny, it was sweet"

16. "Mind if I check out your screwpull?"
17. "Ladies, any of you enjoying my Beaune?"
18. "Wow that really swelled up, can you stick it back in?"
19. "Let it glide across your tongue"
20. "I'm sorry Madame but your Pouilly-Fuisse is awfully dry"



Wine Event Spotlight: *Taste the Season - and Fallstock*

Taste the Season is back ... every weekend in November there's a celebration of the season. Join the wineries of Niagara-on-the-Lake (November 5/6, 12/13, 19/20 & 26/27) from 11am-5pm for their annual The Taste the Season touring pass (\$44.25 per passport - and well worth it). This is the "must-do" event of the season for many Niagara-on-the-Lake wine country visitors. Each touring pass entitles the holder to a VQA wine and food pairing at each of the now 26 member wineries and is valid for one of the featured weekends. Touring passes can be purchased online or by phone. Guests are encouraged to purchase touring passes early as weekends sell out quickly. For details go to www.wineriesofniagaraonthelake.com or call 905-468-1950 (Niagara-on-the-Lake Chamber of Commerce).

Fallstock at Calamus ... Join the folks at Calamus on Sat. Sept. 24 for their annual party at the vineyard to celebrate the upcoming harvest. The event runs from 1:00 to 6:00 with the music starting at 2:00. Grab a few friends and experience this unique event - great music, food and of course Calamus wines. Admission is free and tickets will be sold for food and wine.

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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