

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 – 196
January 10, 2013

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OntarioWineReview: *Unseen Article - Election Reaction*

It would seem we're on the verge of having another provincial election – with that in mind here's an article I wrote for Ottawa Life after the last time we went to the polls:

Give an Ontario winery the chance to vent its spleen, especially about the recent provincial election and the future of the wine industry in the province, and you can sit back, pour a glass and listen to what has been described as “years of frustration”. Ontario remains one of the most backward places to make and sell wine and the rules and regulations are just so 1920s (the decade our monopoly was formed). One of the most telling problems about our system is how many winery principals are afraid to go on the record with their comments. "I will ask to remain anonymous as quite frankly I am afraid of LCBO backlash. We are spending more and more time getting to know the LCBO system [as one of the only ways to grow our business] ... and I am sure with one phone call the buyers will drop us ... without the LCBO we are screwed." Now, you would think we were discussing selling forbidden information in communist Russia or talking against the state in Stasi-controlled Cold War Germany, instead of discussing election results in a "free" country like Canada. The conversation started with the October election results and covered topics as broad as the wineries' optimism before, their feelings now and where they think the wine industry is heading or needs to head and whether or not they feel it actually will with this "new" government. But then again, calling this government new is like talking about the innovation of the pet rock in the age of the iPad.

Here's is what one winery principal had to say about the system."... The government is competing with its own citizens through the LCBO ..." Anonymous winery principal (AWP)

Ontario's wine industry is like a game of Family Feud except it's the most dysfunctional family around, and they really are feuding - or is that fuming?

"The Ontario wine industry can be an economic driver for the province but we need to be able to sell our wines." AWP

A quick poll of the wineries who were brave enough to answer, but afraid to go on the record, found that a solid 90+% saw light at the end of the tunnel going into the last election - or at least had reason to be optimistic. "Going into the election we felt confident, that with a new government, the Ontario wine industry would be a priority and not taken for granted. Market access would be improved ... either through new opportunities or expansion of existing outlets." (AWP) The Progressive Conservative party, led by Tim Hudak, himself a Niagara-based politician (and who, at one time, had a comfortable lead in the polls), made noise about better access to market for Ontario wines, something the wineries have been clamouring over for years. Hudak was promising to go outside the current LCBO system to achieve his goals. In an exclusive interview with Wines in

Niagara (web site) he said that it was clearly time for change in Ontario to allow greater access to local wines. Had he been chosen to lead Ontario in October, he had vowed "to open up more VQA avenues" and to create a "parallel" system to the LCBO. " There was even a promise in his party's platform on the issue. "We will also increase market access for Ontario's VQA wines."

One winery principal expressed his optimism, "it was obvious that the Conservatives were listening to the industry and were ready to make some changes and allow the industry the opportunity to offer suggestions for improvement."

On the other hand, Andrea Horwath, leader of the NDP (riding a wave of popularity for Jack Layton after his passing) was also talking about bringing Ontario wines to the forefront but still within the LCBO's current system."There are still too many barriers stopping small wineries from getting to the shelves of LCBO outlets," she was quoted as saying. Access to market was on the NDP leader's mind. "We will examine a range of measures to give small wineries more access to more Ontarians, including allowing wine to be sold at designated farmers' markets."

Meanwhile the governing Liberals stayed quiet on the topic - not a peep as to what their plan for the surging and growing Ontario wine industry would be.

But for the AWP's, that optimism died on October 6, 2011. Sure the Liberals had been trimmed to a minority, but they still ruled the roost and without a pre-election promise they showed they have no intention of changing the system.

So where does that leave the wineries of Ontario? Quite frankly, many will be frustrated for another 5 years. "That same optimism does not exist. The current government has done very little to expand retail or profitability for Ontario wineries." (AWP)

Says one winery principal, set to open a winery in the Ottawa area, "I know a couple of cabinet ministers who like wine, but have no interest in changing something that is so entrenched in Ontario."

"We are definitely one of the worst regulated wine industries in the world. No other jurisdiction has supply-managed grapes and government-owned monopoly distribution (a system designed to fast-track imported wine into Ontario). In fact, I am hard pressed to think of any other industry in Canada that has this type of anachronistic regulatory burden. Off the top of my mind, a list of products more dangerous than 100% grown Ontario wine that are less regulated: hunting rifles, cigarettes, pseudoephedrine, ATVs, fast food, pointy sticks, etc." (AWP)

So what can you as a consumer do about this situation? First of all, you can of course become more informed, look into why you can't order wines from other provinces, question, and why you can't buy local wines at wine shows or farmers' markets. Find out why wineries are limited to where they can sell their wines and why only a handful of wineries are making money hand-over-fist because of the ability to blend foreign wine with domestic wine (yet over 98% of wineries cannot use that practice) and why those same wineries can sell wine in off-site stores, while smaller un-grandfathered post-1993 wineries struggle to sell wines in one of three places: their cellar door, restaurants and the restrictive LCBO. Many wineries won't go on the record against the biggest wine buyer in Ontario (so much for free speech).

What about regulatory bodies and lobby groups? Says one insider: "Currently VQA Ontario, Wine Council, and Grape Growers of Ontario are so involved in maintaining "club status" they are incapable of offering any type of innovation. They ignore the fact that we do not yet own our own backyard and have no idea how to get there. Numerous consultations with consumers and industry have concluded that access to market is imperative ... They extort fees and add layers of cost to industry without having to demonstrate any added value." (AWP)

Here are just two of the problems plaguing Ontario wineries because of our monopoly-led system:

Problem One are direct sales to restaurants and other licensee holders (banquet halls, etc). One AWP says OMAFRA (Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs) puts ridiculous regulations in place. "If I sell a bottle of wine at the winery for \$10.00 (including all taxes etc), I get to keep \$7.55 of that. If I deliver that wine to a restaurant, I get to keep \$4.03, rather than \$7.55. Although LCBO has not touched that bottle, I have to pay the equivalent of LCBO warehousing charges. This overhead is not warranted as cost recovery by LCBO, as its only responsibility is the audit of winery reports."

Remember the LCBO had nothing to do with the sale, yet it makes money on it.

Problem Two is that market share is actually declining. According to numbers obtained by the Winery and Grower Alliance of Ontario (WCAO), Ontario's market share of wine, in its own market place, is actually declining - although an agreement made years ago stated that the LCBO would work towards a 50% target for Ontario market share compared with imported wine. The numbers show a different story. In 2010/2011, imports had 61% of the market, while Ontario had only 39%, of which 29% were International-Canadian blends (the old Cellar in Canada) ... leaving Ontario VQA wine (100% Ontario product) with a measly 10% (WGAO newsletter - August 2011) ... Ontario is losing ground in its own market - and that's not because of low quality wines, that's because access to market is curbed. Says one winery principal on the subject: "The present situation is choking the wine industry in Ontario" while another says , "it is very apparent that the LCBO is unable or not interested in growing the VQA wine industry."

So how do we fix this mess? The wineries have some simple answers, if the government is willing to listen.

"Wine distribution must be liberalized with equal opportunities for every producer or retailer. Like the rest of the food industry, we do not need a state monopoly." (AWP)

"Create an opportunity or incentive for restaurants and banquet facilities that use VQA wines. Force the LCBO to increase the shelf space allotted to domestic wine. Offer incentives to Canadian Companies ie: Air Canada, WestJet, SunWing to serve Canadian wines on their flights, instead of foreign wines." (AWP)

"Let wineries sell at wine shows and through clubs [and special] events," says Gaye Doolittle, interested consumer.

But one thing that keeps coming up time and time again you would think would be a no-brainer for the province. "There needs to be greater market access for the Ontario wine industry." Furthermore, "a second stream for selling VQA wines needs to be created other than the LCBO" ... "allow some private retailers (not corner stores). Look at the BC or Alberta models. Heck, even Nova Scotia has private stores!"

This government has a chance to change the course of the Ontario wine industry, two of the three parties in Queen's Park said they wanted things to change. Sadly, nobody in the industry believes it will happen. "Talk within the industry is be prepared for increased regulations and costs of doing business in 'Nofuntario ... yours to Endure!'" (AWP)

With a new government on the way it's be nice to see things change ... cross your fingers and hold onto your hats, it just might be an interesting year.



Grape Guy's Picks of the Bunch: *Re-Birth of Ridgepoint and 14 more reviews*

Closson Chase 2010 CCV South Clos Chardonnay - \$39.95 (W)

www.clossonchase.com

I believe this to be the 3rd year in a row I have liked the South Clos Chardonnay over all the other Chardonnays that Closson Chase makes (and there are quite a few) – I'm starting to see a pattern here. Aged 18 months in 20% new French oak, using wild yeast for fermentation and producing only 220 cases ... this one is limited. Vanilla and apple screams from the glass accosting the olfactories, but pleasantly so. Palate shows the same but its got a creamy vanilla texture with caramel apple notes. Smooth, sexy and creamy this one glides over the tongue adding nuances of hazelnut and gentle spice along the way. Price: \$39.95 – Rating: **** ½

BONUS: [Closson Chase 2009 Churchside Pinot Noir](#) - \$49.95 (****)

BONUS: [Closson Chase 2009 KJ Watson Vineyard Chardonnay](#) - \$34.95 (****+)

BONUS: [Closson Chase 2009 Kocsis Chardonnay](#) - \$34.95 (****+)

BONUS: [Closson Chase 2010 CCV Chardonnay](#) - \$29.95 (*** ½+)

BONUS: [Closson Chase 2010 CCV Chardonnay "The Loyalist"](#) - \$23.95 (****)

Colio Estate 2008 CEV Small Lot Shiraz - \$19.95 (W)

www.coliowinery.com

With new winemaker Lawrence Buehler taking over the reins at Colio I have a feeling the winery is in good hands; I'm also interested to see what he does with this grape variety. This is his predecessors wine and Tim (Reilly) did a nice job getting a good balance between Shiraz fruit and Syrah smoke into the glass. The nose is smoky, meaty and perfect for carnivores who like to congregate around the BBQ. The palate doles out the Syrah-style white pepper, well-spiced with smoked meat character, all with Shiraz-style fruit: cassis, black raspberry and blackberry with a dry toasty finish. Price: \$19.95 – Rating: ****+

BONUS: [Colio Estate 2010 CEV Small Lot Syrah](#) - \$19.95 (****)

Colchester Ridge 2008 Cabernet Sauvignon - \$17.80 (W)

www.colchesterridge.com

How would you like to be able to put on your wine resume that George Clooney bought a case? That's the rumour going around the Lake Erie North Shore, that the one-time world's sexiest man himself stopped in to acquire a case of this Cab for his crew to enjoy while he was filming in Michigan. I would have to say that George has good taste, as this is a nicely complex Cab: black cherry, raspberry jam, vanilla and plum play across the tongue with a touch of cedar, black pepper and strawberry rounding out the finish, where some dark chocolate and toast also make an appearance. Was George lured by what he tasted or was it the 20% new American oak? (Rumour is he didn't stay for a tasting). We'll never know. But now's your chance to buy a wine George drank. Price: \$17.80 – Rating: ****+

BONUS: [Colchester Ridge 2008 Merlot](#) - \$14.80 (****)

Stoney Ridge 2010 Excellence Pinot Gris - \$29.95 (W)

www.stoneyridgewinery.com

This is one of those peculiar wines that you can't figure out from the nose ... in fact, given just that I would have poured it down the sink cause all I got was something funky mixed with white pepper. But the palate more than made up for it with mac apple and fresh peach (pit and all). There's also a creaminess in the mouth with white pepper, vanilla cream and lemon curd. But before everything gets too far out of hand the acidity comes sweeping in and cleans everything up ... nice balance in this very interesting Pinot Gris. Price: \$29.95 – Rating: ****+

BONUS: [Stoney Ridge 2009 Excellence Meritage](#) - \$39.95 (** ½+)

BONUS: [Stoney Ridge 2010 Excellence Sauvignon Blanc – Kasper Vineyard](#) - \$29.95 (** ½)

Ridgepoint 2010 Merlot Cabernet Aglianico - \$30.00 (W)

www.ridgepointwines.com

Ridgepoint has been off the radar for the last few years – they've been making wine but they have not made any really exciting wine ... but all that is about to change with Barclay Robinson taking the helm of winemaking and bringing with him a new energy and spirit to Ridgepoint, starting right here with this interesting and tasty blend of two standard grape varieties with an Italian twist. This wine is made from 20% Aglianico of which all of it was dried (in a greenhouse) a new trend here in Ontario – then each individual component was aged in a mix of French and American barrels. But it's not the nose that'll impress you, it's the palate. It's the hit of spice, the robust red fruit and the spice. Yes I said spice twice cause that's the part that you'll remember. There's nice complexity here and it'll age extremely well over the next 5+ years – you just have to have the patience to lie it down and not drink it up right away. Price: \$30.00 – Rating: ****+

BONUS: [Ridgepoint 2010 Sangiovese](#) - \$22.95 (****)

BONUS: [Ridgepoint 2008 Nebbiolo](#) - \$45.00 (** ½+)

Availability legend: W (Winery) – L (LCBO/Vintages) - OL (On-Line).



Bi-Weekly OWR Updates: *Ending the Year with a Bang ... and a Flurry*

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:

[Calamus Estate 2010 Cosmic Red](#)
[Malivoire 2011 M2 Small Lot Gamay](#)

On the Road with the Grape Guy:

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

[Meeting Angelo Gaja](#)
[Discover. Wines of Chile](#)
[Wines of Chile Holiday Press Tasting](#)

Lost and Found (blog)

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

[13th Street 2004 Riesling](#)

Taste it Again Grape Guy (blog)

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

[Fielding 2005 Reserve Riesling](#)
[Angels Gate 2005 Old Vines Chardonnay](#)

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](#)

Vintages Release (blog)

[Vintages Report for January 5, 2013](#)

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Where I'll Be



Join me at the London Wine and Food Show this January 11 & 12 for an amazing glassware tasting brought to you by Schott Zwiesel. Each participant will receive a set of glasses to take home.

[Get your tickets to Glassware Tasting here \(bottom of page\)](#)

Where I'll Be



OntarioWineReview: *Desperately Seeking Acceptance for Misdeeds*

There have been many of you who have written to me asking if I'll be writing something on the Natalie MacLean situation considering I am so closely linked to what happened (ie: blew the whistle).

My short answer to that question is "no", though I can tell you that I am not in agreement with [Steve Heimoff](#) who believes the whole issue should be dropped – in fact I have much stronger opinions as to what should happen to Ms. MacLean. I am of the opinion that she should not be counted amongst some of Canada's great wine writers such as TA, DL, JS, AG and KE just to give the initials of a few. She does not belong in their league – let alone in the same sentence or paragraph.

There has already been a lot of ink spilled over NatGate and many have weighed in quite eloquently. If you missed it because you had better things to do this holiday season, here is a list of articles that have been written and, without colouring your view, I'll let you decide what you think should be done.

<http://palatepress.com/2012/12/wine/content-theft/>

<http://palatepress.com/2012/12/wine/pay-for-play-wine-writing/>

<http://www.decanter.com/news/wine-news/530726/natalie-maclean-what-i-am-doing-is-legal-and-right>

<http://thejosephreport.blogspot.ca/2012/12/pay-to-play.html>

<http://blog.wblakegray.com/2012/12/natalie-maclean-should-pay.html>

<http://winediarist.com/worlds-best-wine-writer-busted/>

http://www.vinography.com/archives/2012/12/the_soap_opera_of_wine.html

<http://vinquebec.com/node/10489>

<http://www.thedrinksbusiness.com/2012/12/palate-press-accuses-maclean-of-copyright-infringement/>

<http://winehiker.posterous.com/the-hyprocrisy-of-natalie-maclean>

<http://www.ambitonline.com/nextrelease/2012/12/wine-writers-behaving-badly-the-natalie-maclean-story/>

<http://intoxreport.com/2012/12/23/maclean-is-macdirty-i-have-your-hack-back-natalie/>

<http://blog.wblakegray.com/2012/12/natalie-maclean-tells-lie.html>

<http://hosemasterofwine.blogspot.ca/2012/12/nat-defrauds.html>

<http://blogs.timeslive.co.za/pendock/2012/12/27/the-passion-of-natalie-maclean/>

<http://life.nationalpost.com/2012/12/28/john-szabos-vintages-preview-for-jan-5-2013/>

<http://www.thestar.com/living/article/1309056--online-wine-writer-feels-wrath-of-grape-lover>

<http://www.ottawacitizen.com/Controversy+swirls+over+popular+Ottawa+wine+writer+alleged+misuse+others+work/7761638/story.html>

<http://www.ottawacitizen.com/Lack+proper+attribution/7782349/story.html>

Twitter hashtag #natnabbed



Wine Event Spotlight: *Three Upcoming Events*

Sweet. Sparkling. Sensational! Experience ... Twenty Valley's Newest event on January 19 2013 which takes place at various Various Twenty Valley Winerie. Check out the details here: http://www.20valley.ca/events/339/sweet_sparkling_sensational_experience

Days of Wine & Chocolate ... Explore the decadently sweet and savoury art of wine and chocolate pairing. Visit the wineries of Niagara-on-the-Lake to taste up to 28 VQA wines matched with chocolate-infused dishes – from classically sweet flavour combinations to unexpected surprises. Notice the “chocolate infused dishes” - that finally sounds like something worth attending – kudos to the wineries of NOTL. Weekends in February. [Visit here for details and to get tickets.](#)

The New Cuvee ... March 1, 2013 - <http://cuvee.ca/>

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.

www.ontariowinereview.com

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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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