



Rediscover Ontario wines

Hop in the car and head to the wine regions of Prince Edward County, Niagara or Lake Erie North Shore

I have the opportunity to taste wines from all around the world, but it is important not to neglect the ones produced in our own backyard.

This year I did myself a favour and booked appointments with Ontario winemakers to sample their current lineups. It's good to see and taste how quality is progressing, outside of what the LCBO has available. By going out to little-known producers, you can see how the province is doing as a whole and which grape varieties are performing better than others.

Ontario makes great Riesling – we always



Michael Pinkus

have – but the list of well-made varieties is expanding and now includes ones that might surprise you. Pinot Noir and Chardonnay are doing very well, and why not? They are Burgundian grape varieties and Burgundy has a similar climate to Ontario.

The neighbour of Burgundy is Beaujolais, home to Gamay Noir, and Ontario is

producing outstanding Gamay. In fact, some of our Gamays are outperforming those coming out of the homeland (France). Sauvignon Blanc, Pinot Gris – Pinot Grigio, if you are Italian – and the lesser known Viognier are filling out the white portfolios of wineries quite nicely.

As for the reds, Cabernet Franc has always been an Ontario staple and performs well year after year. How Syrah became part of the conversation I can't tell you, but we sure are glad it did. Syrah goes by another name you've definitely heard, "Shiraz," and who would have thought Ontario would



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ever be making that heat-loving grape. But Syrah in Ontario is much different than Shiraz in Australia; here, it's more on the spicy red-fruit spectrum, less jammy and more elegant, with balancing acidity. Syrah has definitely found a home in Ontario and our winemakers are showing it much love.

Now that we've covered grape varieties, let's look at some of the wine styles beginning to take firm root. Yes, Icewine has the world's attention, but that's not all Ontario is doing well.

First and foremost, our sparkling wine can rival those from anywhere in the world, and I am including Champagne on that list of "anywhere." And if you are into pink, Ontario has you covered from bubbles to still. You can put those White Zinfandel sweet-style pinks in your pocket as dry rosé rules the day when it comes to summer wines of the off-white or less-than-red persuasion.

Finally, this has been described to me as the "Golden Age" of Ontario wine making, and that seems about right. We are seeing wine from two great vintages back-to-back starting to hit the market: 2015 is going to be the sleeper of the two because everyone can't stop talking about how great 2016 was, and thus the '15s are likely to slip under the radar. Don't let them – you're sure to be thrilled with both.

So that's why it's a great time to discover – or rediscover – Ontario wine. At the moment the LCBO has a decent selection, but I recommend hopping in the car for a trip to Niagara, Prince Edward County or Lake Erie North Shore. Once there you can hire any number of tour companies to guide you around for the day.

For those opting to stay home for their tasting adventure, here's a half dozen at the LCBO to get you started.

Niagara

Flat Rock Rusty Shed 2016 Chardonnay (\$26.95 - #1552)

There's nothing subtle here. It's big Char-

donnay from a hot vintage, and the acidity keeps it from being blousy on the palate: vanilla, apple, peach, apricot and hints of butterscotch – great creamy texture in the mouth with delicate spice. I'm proclaiming it the best Rusty Shed ever.

Cave Spring 2015 Cabernet Franc, Niagara Escarpment (\$17.95 - #523001)

Twelve months in a mix of American and French oak has resulted in smoky-tobacco and raspberry with a pretty cassis note and a long finish – great value at under \$18.

Megalomaniac Sonofabitch 2016 Pinot Noir, (\$27.95 - #85134)

A ballsy Pinot from a hot vintage that has plenty of fruit up-front but also secondary flavours to balance it out: smoky-raspberry, leathery-cherry along with earth and spice rounding it off.

Pondview 2017 Cabernet Franc Rosé (\$16.95 - #241802)

A light, bright version of Rosé with lots of cherry and raspberry notes along with some rhubarb to keep that sweet-ish fruit at bay. Definitely dry and very "crushable" (as the kids are saying these days).

Prince Edward County

Closson Chase 2016 Chardonnay, Vineyard (\$29.95- #148866)

Rich, buttery and creamy on the palate with great weight yet balancing acidity to keep it fresh. The apple, peach and praline notes are a great aspect of the mid-palate which is just voluptuous and addictively sippable all the way to the finish.

Rosehall Run NV Ceremony Blanc de Blanc (\$34.95 - #575696)

It's so fresh (even though it has 30 months in bottle). Apple, lime and fresh biscuits that at times seem croissant or brioche-like in its richness – plus there's that acid backing. Don't wait for a special occasion to open this; it requires nothing more than a Friday. 🍷

Michael Pinkus is an award-winning wine writer and past president of the Wine Writers' Circle of Canada.

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