

Embracing Icewine

By Gloria Hildebrandt Photos by Mike Davis



Kelly Nemeth, in the yellow vest, was pleased by the popularity of the 2009 festival.

In the short chilly days of January, a celebration of Niagara's icewine is a heartwarming event. Niagara Region has hosted several icewine festivals in various places over the last 14 years. Cities, towns, villages, individual restaurants, wineries and hotels are again planning to take part, while tour operators can be booked to take you safely around.

This January 16 and 17, Jordan Village will hold their sixth festival, the Twenty Valley Winter Warm Up, to showcase icewine as well as sparkling, late harvest and premium table wines.

Last year, the Twenty Valley Icewine Bar was set up on Main Street of the village. Closed to traffic, it became a pedestrian mall that was free for everyone to enter. People paid for tastings of Vintners Quality Alliance wines, and there were other experiences to enjoy. Estimates are that more than 1,000 people attended, from southwestern Ontario and the GTA, and even some from Texas and California.

The hub of the festival was a magnificent structure entirely built of ice blocks, forming a long wall with a wine shelf and a serving bar. Crowds of people gathered under its tent to sample a wide selection of Niagara wines.

Glass in hand, they wandered down the street enjoying the beautiful decorations, ice sculptures and live entertainment, including the invigorating music of the Jumpin' Jive Band. People rested their glasses on amazing bar tables made of carved ice. Sharing the table gave good opportunities to chat with other festival visitors.

At the side of the street, Catherine Coulter of the business called



Carved ice blocks and pillars formed cool bar tables.



Icewine bottles on ice.

Community MARKET



When below-freezing temperatures are great: Catherine Couter of iceculture chips away at another ice sculpture.



Happy to share the throne: Ice Queen Kim Cayer lets visitors reign.



Jack Frost, aka Scott Kaija, entertains by cycling and juggling.



Visitors crowd the ice bar for icewine.



Indoors, people enjoyed Niagara cheeses and cheese fudge.



Cheers! Friends enjoying the festival.

Tips for Enjoying Icewine

1. Serve icewine chilled but not cold, in a generous wineglass with perhaps a tapered top to let the aroma and flavours intensify.
2. Icewine goes well at dessert or after dinner, with biscotti, very ripe blue cheeses, and fruit-based desserts.
3. Try icewine before dinner, with salty snacks or hors d'oeuvres. The sweetness softens the salt, and the salt enriches the fruity flavours of the icewine.
4. Try icewine made from red grapes.
5. An opened bottle of icewine should keep for three to five days after opening if the cork is put back in and the bottle is stored in the fridge.
6. Other uses for icewine: use as an ingredient in such cocktails as a martini, cosmopolitan or royale, blend with brandy, use when making jellies, use in some meat recipes, and in a sabayon or custard with fruit.

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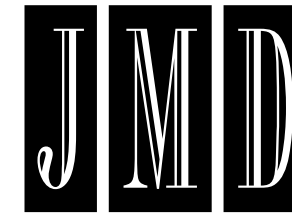
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iciculture, was hard at work carving another elaborate ice sculpture.

A particularly impressive carving was the throne of the Ice Queen, which tempted several people to try it out and have their photos taken. The Ice Queen herself, portrayed by entertainer Kim Cayer in full costume and make up, generously yielded her throne to young and old, mingling with all the visitors.

Scott Kaija kept warm by portraying an active and talented Jack Frost who rode a unicycle while juggling large pins.

"The icewine festival is a wonderful way to celebrate and embrace our winter season," says Jacqueline Del Col, owner and designer of the clothing boutique Tintern on Main in Jordan. "It gives us all a reason to bundle up and enjoy the snowy outdoors while savouring Niagara's bounty."

The shops along Main St. were open and many people browsed and delighted in the unique of-

ferings. One storefront was used as an information centre and informal warming area, where the Dairy Farmers of Ontario held wine and cheese pairing seminars, various organizations displayed information and Niagara cheeses were given out for free sampling. Cheese fudge was included which, despite seeming unusual, combines the best of both flavours.

"The 2009 Icwine Festival was the best to date," says Kelly Nemeth, owner of Tote Sweet Ice Cream and Chocolate Shop, and past president of Jordan Village Merchants Association. "The addition of decorator Jayme Nesbit's street design combined with the dedication and enthusiasm of Twenty Valley members was a recipe for success. Everyone attending enjoyed fabulous Niagara icewines and culinary treats while being entertained by live music and street performers. I'm looking forward to 2010's Icwine Festival in Jordan Village."

The Reason for the Season

Cave Spring Cellars of Jordan was one of the wineries offering icewine at the festival. Theirs is made from Riesling grapes grown along the slopes of the Escarpment and the shore of Lake Ontario.

The Pennachetti family that owns the winery describes the harvesting process like this: "These clusters were left to partially raisin on the vine during the late autumn, with a further concentration of sugars and acids occurring when the berries were frozen solid by the onset of winter." They note that the grapes were hand picked on the nights of Jan. 16 and 17, 2006.

Anne Pennachetti explains that they harvest by hand because the frozen grapes are fragile and can be picked more cleanly. There can be too much loss with machine harvesting.

"The best time to start picking is in the middle of the night," she goes on to explain. "You want to keep the grapes frozen while pressing them. As soon as it warms up, the juice becomes less concentrated. Pressing should be finished by sunrise."

A wine reviewer gave this appraisal of the resulting 2006 Riesling icewine: "Granny Smith apple, spice and zesty tangerine notes are bolstered by crackling acidity in this lively white." This icewine costs \$59.95 and is available only at the winery. Anne warns that they are almost sold out of the '06 and are moving quickly into the '07.

She agrees that icewine should be served in a decent-sized glass. "It's still a wine," she says. "You still want to throw it. The legs on icewine are thick because of all the glycerine. You want to get the whole picture of it."