



Misty's View of Niagara Wines: Delicious Surprises

notes for me. I made some sheets with the vintner's description of the wine at the top and asked my guests if they agreed. Other sheets asked for descriptive adjectives and a rating scale of approval.

What we all noticed during this luncheon and wine tasting was how unique wines can be within the same *cepage* or grape variety and how so very different

(*elever*) their grapes and made their wines. *Elevation*, as the best vintners know, is where the true art of wine making comes into play!

Our Niagara wine makers are educated, savvy, and dedicated to their vines. It is so exciting to see how the fruits of their labours over the last 30 years have turned a geographically exceptional area into a world-class locale for tasting and purchasing wine. A number of today's Niagara vintners have turned former family vineyards into a testing ground for European old vine grapes to be grafted or reborn to create new wines to the region.

Aided by the science of wine, called oenology, **these new-age pioneers are achieving miracles** on land that has never seen this level of diversified wine production or celebrity. Unlike the arrival of big box stores that dot the roadways everywhere, the Niagara wineries nestle discretely along the wine route.

Situated well back from the road, most wineries offer a long approach to their abodes. Picturesque lanes that traverse acres of vines lead the traveller to a variety of establishments. Some are veritable chateaux, like Peller Estate Wineries, Chateaux des Charmes, Angels Gate Winery and Peninsula Ridge; others feature natural stone masonry from the region, Vineland Estate for example, while others present a farmhouse feeling like Ravine Vineyard or EastDell.

Rustic or grand, these wineries have one thing in common: pride in their wines, integrity in their production and a love and respect for the Niagara Escarpment. That is what is so nice about this variety of product presentation; one can plan for an elegant, country estate experience, complete with superb cuisine by Ontario's best chefs, or a trip down a dusty road to sit in the middle of a vineyard on a porch with vintage country kitchen chairs, and the best wood-oven baked bread in the world! You might even run into someone like celebrity chef Anna Olson, as we did recently.

Here is some advice to begin your wine tasting journey. **Start with wineries that excel in your favourite varietal.** Red wine can be the brilliant opus of one establishment, and white wine the star of another. I adore Tawse Winery and Malivoire for their old-world style chardonnay, and Thirty Bench winery for its 2007 Red.

Most wineries offer excellent door-to-door, online boutiques that will allow you to purchase cases of your new discoveries. It is exciting to try a new wine and then get it delivered to your home. Let the adventure begin! And know that **each year's harvest brings delicious wine surprises from Niagara.**

Misty Ingraham and Bill Sharpe of Ancaster own the catering business The Portable Feast at Home.

Although I'm not a sommelier or a vintner, I am a true *amateur* of wine, in the French sense of the word, an ardent enthusiast of good wine. I have become star-struck by Niagara winemakers and their passion for accessing the subtle features of the *terroir*, or the total environment of soil, topography and climate that gives wine a distinctive taste. Small parcels of land are producing outstanding *crus*, or grades of wines, with distinctive character and aging potential. These visionaries have transformed the Beamsville bench into a well-travelled wine route that winds from vineyard to vineyard along the Escarpment. Just follow the grape signs and you will encounter unique tasting rooms, staffed with knowledgeable, product experts, as well as boutiques and wine cafés.

I took a road trip to several wineries this summer. Since I was also hosting a big lunch party, I thought it would be clever to get my guests to complete tasting



within plots of land located in adjacent or nearby acres.

During a trip to the Beaujolais hills over 20 years ago, my chef husband and I purchased cases of wine from a father and son in Chinon. Their plots were literally next door to one another, but their wines were markedly different based on the differences in the land and of course, how they raised

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