

# Winery Boom in Niagara and Erie

BY ALAN MCGINTY

Further to openings at Stratus, Flat Rock, Tawse and Fielding in Niagara, and Closson Chase in Prince Edward County – yet more wineries opened or will soon open in Niagara and Erie North Shore.

Hidden Bench is new, but their vines are anything but. "This year the Rosomel vineyard's riesling are 30 years old and the merlot 27," says owner Harald Thiel. Several award-winning wines come from that vineyard, and about 120 buyers have pre-reserved the first Hidden Bench wines due for release in September 2006.

In Erie North Shore, George and Mary Jane Smith opened Smith & Wilson Estate Wines in July. They tend 16 varieties and produce six wines. They will sell their 5,000-case production themselves, so you'll have to visit to sample their baco noir, gamay-merlot, vidal or gewurztraminer, all VQA. Near Windsor is Viewpoint Estate

Winery. John Fancy will eventually produce 10,000 cases. The wines are selling locally and in Detroit. Three new wineries will open next year in Lake Erie North Shore: Colchester Ridge Estate Winery, Muscadere Vineyards and Sprucewood Shores Estate Winery.



Tawse winery

## New Guide Details Ontario Wine

A comprehensive new book about Ontario wine has hit the streets. *A Pocket Guide to Ontario Wine* (McLelland & Stewart, \$22.95), by Toronto wine journalist Konrad Ejbich, is an A-to-Z reference on every winery, wine and many vineyards in the province. It's a no-graphics guide in the tradition of Hugh Johnston's *Pocket Guide* and the *John Platter Guide to South African Wine*.

Ejbich's book undertakes a massive review of Ontario wines. It is up to date on wineries, including some not scheduled to open until 2006. And it provides the first detailed look at the province's best vineyards. ■

— DAVID LAWRASON



## ONTARIO'S FINEST SHIRAZ

Malvoire Winery, known for cool-climate grapes like pinot noir, chardonnay and gewurztraminer, has added Shiraz – Shiraz Mottiar, that is.

Malvoire's new winemaker took over the reins from six-year veteran Anne Sperring in time for this year's crush. Sperring stayed on as an advisor – "she has a lot of experience, and the picking date is probably the most important factor at harvest," says Mottiar.

Mottiar, from Fergus, Ont., earned his promotion after five years at Malvoire. "Honestly, I have to credit my name for getting me into the wine business," he says. "Friends would say, 'We had a bottle of you last night' when I was 20, 21. My family were not wine drinkers – Shiraz is a Persian name."

Mottiar is also among the first alumni of the CCOVI program at Brock University.

Using grapes he grew himself on a Beamsville property he owns, Mottiar released his first pinot gris at the Niagara Wine Festival at the end of September. "I am very pleased with it – it was a beautiful season last year."

New French oak fermenters were introduced for the pinot noir, but Malvoire has no plans to grow shiraz, according to Mottiar, who is not convinced of the viability of the grape in Niagara.

"There's only room for one Shiraz in this region," he says with a chuckle.

— ALAN MCGINTY

## VQA PLANS DELAYED

Ontario's sub-appellations plan was approved by the VQA board and members earlier this year, but a ministry shuffle means it was still not enacted as law by press time. Responsibility for the VQA was moved to the new Ministry of Government Services, so a new crew of bureaucrats had to look at planned changes. VQA Director Laurie Macdonald is confident it will soon be law.

As of Mar. 31, 2005, 78 members offered 843 VQA wines. But approval is no rubber stamp; 204 submissions were denied the right to use the VQA label. The agency also conducted 137 audits – random inspections to ensure compliance. Chardonnay remained the top varietal, but VQA shipments were down 21 per cent because of crop shortages, especially among the reds, thanks to the previous year's nasty winter. As a result, the annual report stated, "no production trends can be gleaned from this year's data." ■

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## ONTARIO ALTERS 2005 CONTENT REGULATIONS

With winter weather lowering Ontario's 2005 yield by more than 50 per cent, the provincial government approved a temporary plan to allow increased use of imported wine, up to 99 per cent from the current 70 per cent, to bolster supply of non-VQA wines labelled "Cellared in Canada."

The import levels increase will keep volumes

and winery revenues up while saving more Ontario grapes for VQA wines. VQA's 100 per cent Ontario content rule does not change. All Ontario wineries can now produce "Cellared in Canada" wines containing imported material. Previously only wineries that existed before 1993 could do so.

Critics say consumers will be confused by

similar-looking VQA and non-VQA brands from the same wineries, and that the policy de-bases Ontario wine's integrity.

The content change will be in effect only until February 1, 2007, at which point wineries will start bottling the 2006 vintage. A similar temporary plan was in place for the 2003 vintage.

— DAVID LAWRASON