

Not just Icewine

10 Mar 2010 by Jancis Robinson

Canadian wine producers are getting very bold, planning a major tasting of what they reckon are the best Ontario Chardonnays at Canada House in London the day before the start of this year's London wine trade fair at Excel. Bill Redelmeier, owner of Southbrook Vineyards in Niagara-on-the-Lake, Ontario, who initiated the tasting has high hopes: 'The opportunity to showcase Ontario wines in London can provide a real boost for our product. A generation ago, the New Zealand wine industry launched Sauvignon Blanc in Britain, and it put New Zealand wines on the map.'

The plan is to show the 34 Chardonnays listed below, selected on the basis of a blind tasting conducted by Ontario wine critics Tony Aspler, author of *The Wine Atlas of Canada* (and judge at next month's Decanter World Wine Awards), Linda Bramble, Konrad Ejbich, Steven Elphick, David Lawrason, Michael Pinkus, Gordon Stimmell and John Szabo MS.

'Most people think Icewine is Ontario's signature wine, but actually it's Chardonnay, asserted Aspler, who will be in England for the tasting in May along with Bill Redelmeier and other Ontario producers. 'The London tasting will give the British press the opportunity to discover wines that are food-friendly and reminiscent of fine white Burgundies.' Fighting talk!

Chardonnay is the most commonly produced VQA wine in Ontario, according to VQA Ontario (Ontario's Wine Authority). The province's expanding wine industry now boasts 113 VQA wineries, 21 of which will be sending wines for the London tasting. It is estimated that more than 90 of these wineries produce Chardonnay. Bill Redelmeier is as confident as Aspler about the likely effect of these Ontario VQA Chardonnays on British palates. 'We see a lot of people who say they don't like Chardonnay, but when you pour a cool-climate Chardonnay, they change their minds.' (Though it has to be said that the British tasters will already be familiar with many cool-climate Chardonnays, from Chablis to Marlborough.)

A Toronto dress rehearsal for the London event, entitled Ontario Chardonnay – Seriously Cool, is being organised by the Ontario Wine Society on 24 Mar at 6.30 pm at Toronto Lawn Tennis Club. The public will have the opportunity to taste many of the Chardonnays to be shown in London. Tickets are \$39 for members and \$49 for non-members. More details at ontariowinesociety.com or on +1 416.921.9798.

Redelmeier dreamt up the British media tasting after Niagara's Le Clos Jordanne beat off French and American competition in a high-profile tasting last year in Montreal. Le Clos Jordanne's Chardonnay served as the ringer in the contest and emerged victorious. Hearing Le Clos winemaker Thomas Bachelder say in a radio interview that any number of wineries in Ontario could have won the contest, Redelmeier conceived the idea of promoting Ontario Chardonnays en masse.

'A rising tide lifts all boats', he says, describing his personal philosophy. 'It's wrong to be very competitive with each other. The guy down the road is not the competition. The guy in Chile is the competition. We're all in this together', says Redelmeier. 'The event is as much about producing fellowship as promoting our wines. What we're trying to do is build the Canadian brand.'

Canadian judges decided that only two wines per winery would be sent to England. They also allowed a winery to submit one library wine older than five years. 'That means no matter how big the winery', Redelmeier says, 'only the best will be showcased.'

I am confident that the wines will be very much more impressive than the Ontario selection shown at Canada House at the very first wine tasting I ever attended, in December 1975.

Ontario Chardonnays to be shown in London on 17 May include:

Cave Spring Cellars, CSV 2003
Cave Spring Cellars, CSV 2005
Chateau des Charmes, Barrel-Fermented 2007
Chateau des Charmes, Musqué 2008
Closson Chase, Kocsis Vineyard 2007
Colio Estates, CEV 2006
Colio Estates, Musqué 2007
Coyote's Run, Black Paw Vineyard 2008
Creeside Estate, Queenston Road Vineyard 2008
Flat Rock Cellars, Reserve 2007

Flat Rock Cellars, The Rusty Shed 2008
Henry of Pelham, Barrel-Fermented 2007
Henry of Pelham, Speck Family Reserve 2007
Hidden Bench, Tête de Cuvée 2006
Hidden Bench 2007
Hillebrand, Showcase Wild Ferment 2008
Huff Estate,s South Bay Vineyard 2007
Lailey Brickyard Vineyard 2008
Le Clos Jordanne, LCJ Vineyard 2006
Le Clos Jordanne, Talon Ridge 2007
Malivoire, Moira Vineyard 2004
Malivoire, Moira Vineyard 2005
Norman Hardie, Unfiltered 2008
Peller Estates, Signature Series Sur Lie 2007
Peller Signature, Series Sue Lie 2008
Peninsula Ridge, Reserve 2007
Ravine Rowan, Vineyard 2008
Ravine Rowan, Vineyard Reserve 2008
Rosehall Run, Rosehall Vineyard 2008
Rosehall Run, Cuvée County 2008
Southbrook, Poetica 1998
Southbrook, Poetica 2005
Southbrook, Triomphe Certified Organic 2008
Tawse, Quarry Rd Vineyard 2007