

Short Cellar: Chardonnay triumphant

Written by Matthew Sullivan

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Chardonnay is now Ontario's top grape. It is the **varietal** that is coming to define our incipient fine wine industry. Its rise to dominance did not begin with any centralized decision or organized effort; it was just a slow evolution powered by growers, vintners and consumers doing what seems most natural: making and buying the best sort of wine that our northern landscape can produce. The volume of "**VQA**" (i.e. 100% local) Chardonnay in Ontario is almost twice that of its next competitor (Riesling). There is nearly as much VQA Chardonnay as all types of red wine combined.



A group of Canada's top wine critics recently selected 34 VQA Chardonnays to travel to London, England for a trade show that's intended to solidify Ontario's international standing. The show is called **Seriously Cool Chardonnay** and will be held on May 17, 2010. If these bottles can make a splash in London, Ontario Chardonnay could start to rival ice wine (which I usually detest) as our signature offering. "The opportunity to showcase Ontario wines in London can provide a real boost for our product," says Southbrook Vineyards owner Bill Redelmeier, who initiated the tasting. "A generation ago, the New Zealand wine industry launched Sauvignon Blanc in Britain, and it put New Zealand wines on the map."

When I last checked out the **website for this event**, I was pleased (and surprised) to see that the home page featured a quote from an article that I recently wrote for *Tidings Magazine*. **The article** is about the joy of heavily oaked Chardonnays, or — as I like to call them — "dirty Chardonnays." What makes Ontario so interesting, however, is that in addition to producing such rich, viscous Chards, it also creates many unoaked varieties with great spirit and elegance. Unlike California or Australia, which produces an over-abundance of sloppy monsters, Canada's winemakers show excellent versatility.

I recently attended a preview of the London tasting here in Toronto, at the Toronto Lawn Tennis Club. Stay tuned next week for complete tasting notes, but I'll leave you with a review of one of my favourites:

Ravine Vineyard 2008 Chardonnay (\$24.00, *Vintages* #173377)

Ravine is a **new winery** built around an old vineyard located on Niagara's **St. David's Bench** sub-appellation. Being on St. David's Bench is significant because this is a tiny microclimate that tends to be warmer than the rest of the region. It also has a longer growing season, leading to more ripeness in the wine. Ravine's 2008 Chardonnay has a lovely, understated

character — it's light without being flighty. Although it was fermented and aged in oak, the freshness of the fruit is preserved, along with an aromatic nose of peppermint. Two to three years of aging will only improve it. **88/100**