



Pelee Island

DRAWING BOUNDARIES

Ontario producers push for sub-appellations in Niagara, Pelee Island and Erie North Shore

BY ALAN MCGINTY

VQA Ontario recently held a series of meetings with wineries and grape growers on the creation of “sub-appellations” within the existing viticultural areas of Niagara, Pelee Island and Erie North Shore. A two-year study of microclimates and soils, led by Tony Shaw of the Cool Climate Oenology and Viticulture Institute at Brock University, was presented and 11 potential sub-appellations were identified.

Can we expect a rigid French-style system? “No,” says Laurie Macdonald, executive director of VQA Ontario, “we just want to define the geographic areas right now.” And she acknowledges

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The fact is, it’s not defined.”*

that no consensus has emerged that any particular areas of Ontario are the “best” places to grow certain varieties. Macdonald says that although the

push for sub-appellations came mainly from producers, “more wineries are using geographical descriptions other than Niagara Peninsula or Lake Erie North Shore. People phone us and ask what it means; what are the boundaries of the Beamsville Bench? The fact is, it’s not defined.”

Macdonald is hopeful that the ongoing consultation process will go smoothly and the official designations will be signed into law as early as next spring. ☼

DOWELL'S DONE

After nearly a decade at Inniskillin, Philip Dowell heads back to Australia, and the search is on for his replacement

BY ALAN MCGINTY

Inniskillin's winemaker of six years, Philip Dowell, has gone back to Australia. Billion-dollar powerhouse Southcorp, whose wines include Penfolds, Rosemount and Lindemans, has offered Dowell the post of head winemaker at a new venture. Inniskillin's Donald Ziraldo says, "It was a tough decision, and we had a tearful evening before he and his family left."

Ziraldo is confident Inniskillin will continue to produce noteworthy wines: "Karl Kaiser is still doing the icewine, but we're going to find someone else for the table wine. For the 2004 vintage, Dowell surveyed the vineyards, decided on the fruit to use before leaving, and everything was

allocated. The Inniskillin team will take care of [the 2004] vintage."

The search is underway. "The competition is open to anyone and I want the best person I can get. If I have to go outside Canada, then absolutely I will. We hired Philip because his focus was on pinot noir and chardonnay, and that's still the area we'd like to focus on, so Burgundy might be an area we'll look at. We're focused on cool climate wine style."

Ziraldo's in no rush, and he anticipates the new winemaker will not come on board until next year. Hopefully Dowell's replacement will be able to match his sublime 2002 Reserve Pinot, which, at \$18 or so, is an incredible bargain. ☼

PELEE ISLAND TRIALS TEMPRANILLO

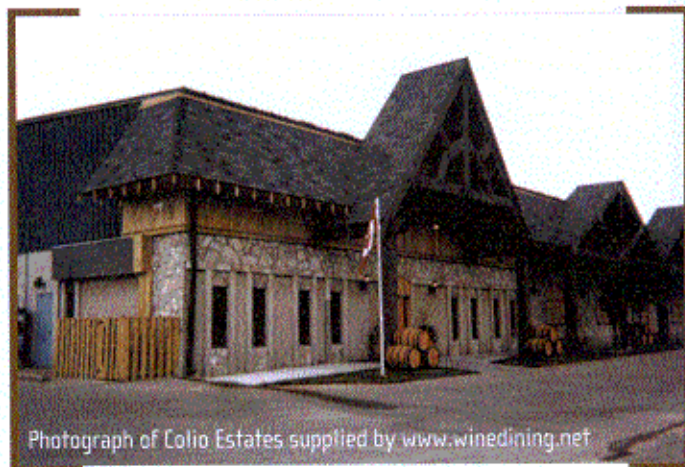
Described as "finicky," Spain's tempranillo grape gets a workout in Canada's most southern region

BY ALAN MCGINTY

It's the grape that makes Rioja and so it's appropriate that the southernmost winery in Canada is trying its luck with tempranillo. Spain's top varietal was rarely cultivated elsewhere until recently. Now, in addition to plantings in California, Oregon, Mexico and Argentina, there is a patch of tempranillo on Pelee Island. Vineyard manager Bruno Friesen says, "We planted in 2001, but we haven't had a crop yet. They're still a bit finicky."

With 500 acres and the warmest climate in Ontario, Pelee Island Winery can afford to try new varieties. Grapes currently being tested include shiraz, malbec, lemlinger and bianca, among others. "They may be used for blending, but if something looks promising, we'll try it as a single varietal," says Friesen.

Kevin Donohue, vineyard manager at Colio Estates in Lake Erie North Shore, agrees that many reds do better in that part of Ontario. "Our big reds are superior to Niagara's. We're generally warmer all year round, but it's really our longer, warmer fall that benefits those later-ripening red varieties." Last year, Colio Estates' 2000 CEV Merlot Reserve won top honours at Les Citadelles du Vin at VINEXPO in Bordeaux – a first for an Ontario merlot. ☼



RETAIL WRANGLE

ONTARIO VQA STORES REMAIN STALLED, WHILE LIBERALS SIT ON BILL

BY ALAN MCGINTY

Tim Hudak, a Conservative MPP from Niagara, introduced a private members' bill at Queen's Park in November 2003 to permit privately run retail outlets to sell VQA wines, but the bill has languished.

"Initially I had some encouraging comments from [Liberal] ministers," says Hudak, "but almost a year has passed and I've yet to see any action." Hudak pointed to the successful program in British Columbia, which now has around 20 stores licensed to sell only VQA wines, as a model.

There are over 250 privately-run outlets selling their own brands of Ontario wines, but the number of licences was capped in 1988 in General Agreement on Trade and Tariffs negotiations. Hudak's bill would create "new VQA-only Ontario wine stores." It would allow cross-selling of brands, so multiple wineries would be represented in each store.

Hudak says he is optimistic about the bill and that there is strong support from the wine industry. However, Liberal Minister of Consumer and Business Services Jim Watson says that although he likes the idea, the trade agreements are crystal clear: "We can't favour domestic products."

Watson says that the existing licences were "grandfathered" and that B.C. had re-defined pre-existing licences, something the Ontario industry is reluctant to do.