



winecountryontario.ca

# "I was amazed."

- Steven Spurrier

# A Cool Climate Wine Region

"Ontario's wines have such a particular beauty."

- Matt Kramer

Wine Country Ontario is situated between 41° and 44° North in the heart of the world's fine wine zone. This is the same latitude shared by Burgundy and many other cool climate wine regions of Europe. The fluctuations in daily temperature over the course of the growing season create conditions critical to achieving a fine balance between acidity, alcohol and fruit expression. Wines from cooler climates are more aromatic, lighter in body and higher in acidity than those from hotter areas, providing refreshment, harmony with food and good ageing potential.



## GROWING DEGREE DAYS MEASURED IN CELSIUS

DEFINED AS THE SUM OF THE MONTHLY MEAN TEMPERATURE OVER 10°C (50°F) DURING THE GROWING SEASON (APRIL 1 - OCTOBER 31).

Geisenheim, Germany	1050
Epernay, France (Champagne)	1050
Hawke's Bay, New Zealand	1200
Roseburg, Oregon	1250
Geneva, Switzerland	1250
Beaune, France (Burgundy)	1315
Niagara, Ontario	1400
Oliver, British Columbia	1423
Yakima, Washington	1426
Napa, California	1450

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Stretching across the southern part of the province, Ontario's vineyards are located near three of the Great Lakes – Lake Ontario, Lake Erie and Lake Huron. The lakes moderate cold winter temperatures and cool the vineyards during Ontario's hot summers. The soils in this Great Lakes basin vary from sand to clay to rock, with a high concentration of limestone from an ancient seabed that was exposed over a long period of glacial activity. Limestone is the same basic soil type also shared by Burgundy and other regions of northern France. Some of the vineyards lie flat on former seabed areas, others are perched on hills and benches that formed the ancient shoreline. The topography is ideal for water drainage (too much moisture can dilute flavours), and provides nutrients and minerality to the grapes.



# Wines of Origin

With the understanding of the region and growth of fine wine production, local wine has gained an important place in Ontario's cultural landscape, and wines that have an appellation of origin have become increasingly important to wine drinkers. A wine appellation defines and maps a wine growing region or terroir – a place that combines climate, topography, geology and even local heritage. The terroir determines the choice of vine varieties and how those vines are cultivated, thus how the wines are made. As wineries interpret and elaborate the terroir, they in turn shape consumer tastes and interaction with the land. So Ontario's finest wines – each with distinctive personality – are wines of origin, in Wine Country Ontario.



"We have taken Ontario's special terroir for granted for too long. Our combination of latitude, lakes and limestone is unique in the wine world."



## VQA Ontario | 100% Ontario grown

The Vintners Quality Alliance (VQA) is a regulated appellation or wine of origin system, patterned on models that have existed in Europe's great wine regions for over 60 years.



- Ontario VQA wines guarantee that 100% of the grape content for these wines comes from Ontario.
- VQA identifies four specific wine growing areas in Ontario Lake Erie North Shore, Niagara Peninsula, Pelee Island and Prince Edward County. Another 10 sub-appellations were created within the Niagara Peninsula in 2005.
- Appellations of origin provide a deep sense of place as they remind us of a wine's inherent tie to the earth, nature, our ecology, and the winemakers and growers who live in those areas and strive to give their wines that sense of where they live.





# Cool Climate Varieties Grow Best

"Ontario alone can produce a vivid array of styles of Chardonnay, some of which can hold their own with the world's finest. This variety is very well suited to Canada I'd say."

- Jancis Robinson, 2010

Ontario's unique terroir is best showcased within key varietals that excel in cool climate regions, as they produce wines with exceptional fruit and balanced acidity. Most grape varieties used include many grapes of the species *vitis vinifera* (traditional in European and international winemaking). There are another eight "hybrid" varieties developed by crossing *vitis vinifera* varieties with more winter-hardy North American grape species. Although already known as a world leader for Icewine, Ontario remains somewhat undiscovered for its high-quality table wines and sparkling wines made from familiar grape varieties such as Chardonnay, Riesling, Cabernet Franc and Pinot Noir.







## **Core White Varietals**

**Chardonnay** | The most widely produced variety in Ontario is produced in different styles. Ontario Chardonnay naturally expresses substantial weight and richness with cool climate "tree fruit" aromas of apple, pear and peach. When fermented and aged in oak barrels expect added layers of wood spice, smokiness, and a touch of vanilla or butterscotch. Ontario's natural acidity produces well-structured, firmer, more ageworthy Chardonnay than in many New World regions. Some can age well for over 10 years.

**Riesling** | One of the first *vinifera* varieties planted in Ontario, Riesling takes on classical Germanic character. It exhibits refreshing citrus, peach or floral aromas with a light "petrol" element and racy acidity. It is made in a range of dry, off-dry and sweet styles, including Icewine. Ontario Rieslings often age very well.

Other important varietals | Sauvignon Blanc, Vidal Blanc, Pinot Gris, Gewürztraminer

## **Core Red Varietals**

**Cabernet Franc** | This winter-hardy grape is one of the Bordeaux varieties, often blended with Merlot and Cabernet Sauvignon both in its homeland and here in Ontario. Alone it shows red currant, raspberry, herbal and tobacco characters, with oak ageing adding toasty, chocolaty complexity. It is made in early drinking unwooded styles, more structured cellar-worthy versions and, as Ontario has discovered, it can also make great Icewine.

**Pinot Noir** | The great red grape of Burgundy has a natural home in Ontario. Made in classic cool climate style, Pinot Noir renders wines with cherry fruit, earthy/forest floor and oak spice flavours. They are paler in colour, light to medium bodied and become silky smooth with a bit of age.

Other important varietals | Merlot, Cabernet Sauvignon, Baco Noir, Gamay Noir

# **Passion in Our People**

From the grape growing & winemaking pioneers of the 1970s to the rising stars of today, the Ontario wine industry works together to make world-class wines that can only come from the soils here in Ontario. Most vineyards are family-owned and many have generations working side by side. Committed to excellence, Ontario growers combine strong traditional agricultural values while investing in leading viticultural technology and know-how.

Ontario's winemakers are likewise focused on producing wines that typify grape character and the distinctive imprint of their region. They are increasingly immersed in all facets of production, from the cultivation, to the harvest, to the crushing, fermentation and ageing of wines in the cellar, and to helping tell the story of their wine in the marketplace. Clearly, the best wines are a unique reflection of a winemaker's passion inspired and challenged by a sense of place and these qualities of origin.



"It's about the love of watching something grow." - Ontario Grower



Natural vineyard maintenance using sheep.



Southbrook - first winery building to receive the Gold level of LEED® (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) from the Canada Green Building Council.

## Leaders in Sustainability

The breadth of knowledge and experience within the industry helps our winemakers to incorporate many techniques and practices to ensure wine quality as well as the sustainability of Ontario's vineyards and winemaking. Ontario wine grape growers and wine producers are stewards of our land – to ensure the sustainability of Ontario vineyards and wineries, the wine industry has adopted many environmental practices.

Sustainable Winemaking Ontario: An Environmental Charter for the Wine Industry is a proactive self-audit program that was created by the Wine Council of Ontario. This all-encompassing program was the first of its kind in Canada, and it focuses on all aspects of wine production – from vineyard water usage and wastewater, to energy

conservation, pesticide use and community relations. The program goal is to encourage wineries to look at day-to-day operations and the impact on all sustainability matters, including environmental, economical and social responsibility.

Many Ontario vineyards and/or wineries are also biodynamic, organic, build LEEDcertified buildings, use geothermal or solar heating, and participate in Local Food Plus and other environmental programs.



Stratus – first building in Canada and the first winery worldwide to receive LEED® (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) certification from the Canada Green Building Council.

# **Terroirs of Distinction**

The majority of Canada's wines come from Ontario's appellations, where approximately 15,000 acres of wine grape vineyards are planted. As noted earlier, these lie in the south of the province between  $41^{\circ}$  and  $44^{\circ}$  North latitude, with cold winters and hot summers moderated by the proximity of the Great Lakes.

Ontario has so far identified four primary Viticultural Areas (VAs) or appellations of origin: Niagara Peninsula, Lake Erie North Shore, Pelee Island and Prince Edward County. Furthermore, within the Niagara Peninsula appellation, decades of grape growing experience and extensive geographic research has identified 10 distinct growing areas. These sub-appellations include areas on the plains close to Lake Ontario and the benchlands of the Niagara Escarpment.



Ontario, Canada

#### Primary Appellations

Niagara Peninsula Lake Erie North Shore Pelee Island Prince Edward County





# **Ontario's Appellations**

Niagara Peninsula, Lake Erie North Shore, Pelee Island and Prince Edward County

## Niagara Peninsula - 2 Regional and 10 Sub-Appellations

Creek Shores – 1410 degree days. Flatter topography criss-crossed with creeks and streams, glacial delta, rich fertile soils. Closer to the lake.

Lincoln Lakeshore – 1400 degree days. Dominant influence of Lake Ontario, long tempered growing season, seasonal streams.

Vinemount Ridge – 1357 degree days. Atop the escarpment, farther from the lake. South- and east-facing slopes, early spring warming, hot summers. Colder winters.

Niagara Escarpment Region - Inspiring elevations, classic minerality, refreshing wines

Beamsville Bench – 1420 degree days. Fairly close to the lake, sloping benchlands, limestoneenriched soils, fresh elegant minerality.

Short Hills Bench – 1452 degree days. Warm sunny days, cool nights, complex soils, intense grape flavours. Farthest escarpment appellation from the lake.

Twenty Mile Bench – 1431 degree days. Complex topography, double benches, deep soils, reflective wines. Farther from the lake.

Niagara-on-the-Lake Region - Elegant vistas, spirited styles, inviting wines of origin

Four Mile Creek – 1425 degree days. Expansive vineyards, abundant full sunlight, warm intense growing conditions. Varying distance from the lake.

Niagara Lakeshore – 1373 degree days. Dominant influence of Lake Ontario, long consistent growing season for flavour development.

Niagara River – 1470 degree days. Easterly facing, gentle slopes, long growing season moderated by the Niagara River.

St. David's Bench – 1423 degree days. Early warming in spring, gently sloping bench, generous precipitation. Farther from the lake.

# Niagara Peninsula Appellation Overview

Diverse terroir, sheltered slopes, lakeside vineyards, a world of character in its wines

#### Niagara Peninsula

At 13,600 acres the Niagara Peninsula is the largest planted area of all *viticultural areas* in Canada.

#### Notable Features

The unique proximity of two prominent geographic features - Lake Ontario and the Niagara Escarpment - creates a microclimate that occurs nowhere else in all of eastern North America.

### QUICK FACTS

Growing Degree Days: 1400

Frost-Free Days: 208 (-2°C)

Precipitation: 529 mm

Common Varietals: Riesling, Chardonnay, Merlot, Cabernet Franc, Pinot Noir Situated on the south shore of Lake Ontario, Niagara has a diverse terroir of sheltered slopes, lakeside vineyards, mixed soils with a limestone base, and a world of character in its wines. The Niagara Escarpment – a limestone bluff that runs the length of the Peninsula – catches the on-shore moderating air from Lake Ontario and circulates it back down over the vineyards, enhancing the ripening of the grapes. Variations in the height of the escarpment and distance from the lake have resulted in the identification of 10 distinct sub-appellations with varying total heat units over the growing season, measured in degree days.

The classic cool climate varieties such as Chardonnay, Riesling, Pinot Noir, Cabernet Franc and Gamay Noir flourish here, and the region now boasts over 32 thriving varietals. The Niagara Peninsula continues to shape a rapidly expanding premium wine industry in Canada as the home to approximately 65% of Ontario's VQA wineries.





## **Climate Zones**

The macroclimate of the Niagara region is continental in nature with moderating effects from Lake Ontario, an enormous sealike lake that moderates cold winter temperatures and cools the hot growing season.

- A | Lakeshore effect zone
- B | Level plain between escarpment and lake
- C | Base of the escarpment, steep slope east of St. Catharines
- D | Steep north-facing escarpment slopes
- E | Slopes above the escarpment
- F | Flat and rolling land south of the escarpment

## **Topography and Soil**

Niagara can be divided into three broad physiographic areas: the Lake Iroquois Plain, the Niagara Escarpment and the Haldimand Clay Plain. The Niagara Escarpment carves the length of this appellation, rising to some 91 m (300 ft) above Lake Ontario and 177 m (575 ft) above sea level, providing the slopes (determining sunlight) and elevations (influencing the breeze and lake effects) that distinguish unique terroirs.

Over the ages the Niagara Peninsula experienced several glacial events that eroded and shaped the layers of sedimentary rock and ancient reef structures of the Niagara Escarpment, creating complex soil compositions in the area between the escarpment and Lake Ontario.



#### Grape climate zones in Niagara

The airflow pattern of off-shore breezes between Lake Ontario and the Niagara Escarpment profoundly moderates seasonal temperatures.



Cross-section of the Niagara Peninsula.







Miagara Peninsula

# Niagara Escarpment A Regional Appellation Up Close

Inspiring elevations, classic minerality, refreshing wines

#### **Notable Features**

The Niagara Escarpment is recognized by UNESCO as a World Biosphere Reserve and is the most prominent topographical feature of southern Ontario. This regional appellation draws together the three appellations that share the fossil-rich sedimentary soils and dramatic topography adjacent to the escarpment ridge. The Niagara Escarpment supports a vital ecosystem, with hundreds of unique species of birds, mammals, reptiles, fish and flora, including 37 types of wild orchids.

#### QUICK FACTS

Growing Degree Days: 1415 Frost-Free Days: 205 (-2°C) July Mean Temperature: 22.5°C Precipitation: 543 mm Common Varietals: Cabernet Franc, Riesling, Pinot Noir Niagara Escarpment is one of two regional appellations within the Niagara Peninsula appellation. Regional appellations are a combination of smaller appellations with similar character and winemaking experience. Representing the benchlands along the Niagara Escarpment, west of St. Catharines to Grimsby, this complex region encompasses three sub-appellations: Short Hills Bench, Twenty Mile Bench and Beamsville Bench. The air circulation and frost protection provided by the bench topography and steady water supply define unique conditions for grape berry maturation across this region and contribute to the distinctive and refreshing style of bench wines.







## **Terroir** | Niagara Escarpment

### Climate

Sheltered from the stronger prevailing southwesterly winds by the Niagara Escarpment, and enjoying lake breezes reflected by the escarpment ridge, the benchland microclimate is well moderated throughout the year. With the higher elevation, temperatures warm gradually in the spring, encouraging later bud-burst and avoiding risks of frost. In the fall, the escarpment slopes trap warm lake air and allow for an extended season for grape maturation.

#### Topography

The benchlands begin below the ridge of the Niagara Escarpment, a prominent feature cutting across the Niagara Peninsula. Below the forested ridge, a myriad of north-facing slopes characterize this appellation. The topography ranges from a distinct bench in the west Beamsville Bench, backed by steep cliff faces, through a double bench in the Twenty Mile Bench, to undulating hills in the east Short Hills Bench. Another important topographic feature is the many streams and their tributaries whose headwaters rise from the escarpment. These streams have cut through the land, creating multiple slopes, and are important both as a groundwater source and to provide water drainage during the spring melt.

### Soil

From highly variable soils consisting of water-stratified clay and silt to rich calcareous clay loam, most of this area's soils are deep and moderately drained with good water-holding capacities. Combined with groundwater flowing from the base of the escarpment during the dry summers, these soils provide steady moisture to vines throughout the growing season, while the slopes provide excellent natural drainage. The fossil-enriched sedimentary dolomites that underlie this appellation contribute to the distinct minerality found in many bench wines.

# Niagara-on-the-Lake A Regional Appellation Up Close

Flatter topography, elegant vistas, spirited styles, inviting wines of origin

#### **Notable Features**

Niagara-on-the-Lake is the heart of Ontario wine culture and a world-renowned wine country destination. The region is becoming well known for its annual celebrations of terroir-focused foods and wines.

#### **QUICK FACTS**

Growing Degree Days: 1434 Frost-Free Days: 207 (-2°C) July Mean Temperature: 22.6°C Precipitation: 544 mm Common Varietals: Chardonnay, Cabernet Franc, Riesling, Pinot Noir Niagara-on-the-Lake is one of two regional appellations within the Niagara Peninsula appellation. Regional appellations are a collection of appellations with similar character and winemaking experience. Situated below the crest of the Niagara Escarpment and stretching to the Niagara River and the shores of Lake Ontario, this region encompasses four sub-appellations: Niagara River, Niagara Lakeshore, Four Mile Creek and St. David's Bench. Although there is a great diversity in geology, soil composition, elevation and climate, the wineries of this appellation share the collective benefits of proximity to the lake, river and escarpment, which their wines reflect.



## Terroir | Niagara-on-the-Lake

### Climate

The geographical attributes of Niagara-on-the-Lake have a meaningful impact on climate. Proximity to the deep waters of Lake Ontario and the fast-flowing Niagara River moderates temperatures throughout the *viticultural region*, reducing the risk of late spring and early fall frosts. Vineyards farther from the lake receive somewhat less of the lake's moderating effects and thus experience a higher daily temperature range, with warm days and cool nights. Closer to the sheltering effects of the Niagara Escarpment spring warming occurs earlier, with sun exposure on east- and south-facing slopes promoting bud-burst and bloom.



#### Topography

Most of this region is lakeshore plains land, characterized by long, gentle slopes that become slightly more prominent in proximity to the north-facing Lake Iroquois Bluff. The gentle topography allows the entire region to enjoy generous sunlight exposure from early morning to late evening, which provides heat accumulation during the day and throughout the season, promoting an early start to the growing season. Clear, calm conditions often result in high daily temperature ranges and excellent growing conditions for grapes.

### Soil

Ranging from sandy loam soils to soils primarily consisting of red shale with a high silt and clay content, water-holding capacities vary greatly within this region. Because of the gradual sloping of the landscape toward the lake, these soils tend to be moderately to well-drained with slow surface runoff.

# Lake Erie North Shore Appellation Overview

Cool lake breezes, abundance of sunshine, ripe fruit with good balance

#### Lake Erie North Shore

Stretching along the warm, shallow waters of Lake Erie, vines in this southerly appellation enjoy the most sunshine in Ontario, providing excellent ripening conditions for more full-bodied wines.

#### Notable Features

Plantings in Lake Erie North Shore are well developed close to the Lake Erie shoreline, where topographic and climatic conditions are particularly favourable and support full and balanced ripening of grapes.

#### QUICK FACTS

Growing Degree Days: 1540 Frost-Free Days: 200 (-2°C) Precipitation: 538mm Common Varietals: Merlot, Cabernet Franc, Cabernet Sauvignon Located at a latitude of approximately 42°N and stretching along the bow-shaped shoreline of Lake Erie from Amherstburg to Learnington, the Lake Erie North Shore appellation encompasses the vineyards in the southwestern extremity of Ontario. This favourable southerly location combined with the warming effect of the shallow waters of Lake Erie allows the vines to enjoy a long growing season and promotes ripe fruit with a perfect balance between natural sweetness and acidity.







## Terroir | Lake Erie North Shore

#### Climate

Lake Erie North Shore has a long growing season. It benefits from the quick summer warming of the shallow waters of Lake Erie as well as from an abundance of sunshine during the growing season. Early harvests are the norm, with picking usually beginning at the end of August and late-harvest varieties often reaching their peak by late October.

### Topography

Bounded on the northwest side by Lake St. Clair, to the west by the fast-flowing Detroit River and to the south by Lake Erie, the Lake



Erie North Shore appellation is almost completely surrounded by water. Numerous short, shallow streams found throughout this appellation flow freely in the spring but often dry down to a trickle in the warm summer. The appellation is made up of long, gentle slopes that face in all directions, with elevations ranging from 172 metres to 196 metres above sea level. With no major topographic barrier to the prevailing southwesterly winds, this appellation enjoys the full effect of the lake breeze that moderates the entire area during the long growing season.

### Soil

The soil composition was greatly affected by the glacial lakes, which deposited large amounts of unsorted stony materials in the area. When the glacial lakes elsewhere retreated, this area remained covered in deep waters for a longer period, allowing waves to smooth out the ridges and deposit considerable amounts of sediment. The light-textured, well-drained soils around the lakeshore contain mostly sandy loam and gravel deposits punctuated by small, irregular stony ridges, which overlie shale limestone bedrock.

# Pelee Island Appellation Overview

#### Island breezes, warm summers, early harvest

#### Pelee Island

Sitting 25 km off the mainland on Lake Erie, Pelee Island lies at Canada's most southerly point, allowing for the longest growing season of all the winemaking regions in Canada.

#### Notable Features

Pelee Island is the site of Canada's first commercial winery, VinVilla, which began operations in 1866. A hundred years later, its vineyards of native grapes were replanted with premium *vitis vinifera* vines.

### QUICK FACTS

Growing Degree Days: 1592 Common Varietals: Chardonnay, Pinot Noir Pelee Island, a small island of approximately 10,000 acres, is Canada's most southerly point at a latitude of 41°45'N and Canada's smallest viticultural area. Situated in Lake Erie about 25 kilometres off the shoreline, Pelee Island enjoys the longest growing season of all appellations in Ontario. Warm breezes off of Lake Erie moderate summer and fall temperatures, and harvest usually begins two to three weeks earlier than in the other appellations – often in August.







## Terroir | Pelee Island

### Climate

Like the mainland Pelee Island's climate is characterized as humid continental – with warm summers and cool winters. Lake Erie, the shallowest and warmest of the Great Lakes, warms the island during the spring, summer and fall, and produces a longer growing season than any other wine appellation in Canada, often 30 days more than on the mainland. This makes Pelee Island Ontario's best location for late-ripening grape varieties that require a long season.

#### Topography

The topography of the Pelee Island appellation is simple but ideal for ensuring even sun exposure and ripening. The island is flat with its highest point at only 12 metres above the lake and an elevation of about 174 metres above sea level.

### Soil

Similar to the mainland in southwestern Ontario, Pelee Island has sandy loam and clay over a limestone bedrock. Soils have moderate drainage because of the underlying bedrock but dry out later in the season. The majority of vineyards are planted on the southwestern corner and centre of the island, where the soils are the deepest and allow for root systems to properly set. Careful stewardship of the soils, with the help of drainage canals and protective dykes, have created productive viticulture.





# Prince Edward County Appellation Overview

Limestone bedrock, stony soils, low yields, excellent fruit concentration

#### **Prince Edward County**

Bordering Lake Ontario and the Bay of Quinte, Ontario's newest wine appellation is surrounded by water and features a rich terroir dominated by stony soils.

#### Notable Features

The broken limestone bedrock and stony soils of this appellation create excellent drainage in the spring and absorb water throughout the growing season, forcing vines to grow deeper during the hot summer months and producing lower yields of grapes with more concentrated flavours.

#### QUICK FACTS

Growing Degree Days: 1264 Frost-Free Days: 194 (-2°C) Precipitation: 561 mm Common Varietals: Pinot Noir, Chardonnay, Riesling At a latitude of 44°N, Prince Edward County is Ontario's most northerly region, officially established in 2007 as a VQA appellation of origin. The County, as it is locally called, is a virtual island at the eastern end of Lake Ontario. Much of the appellation is separated from the mainland by the Bay of Quinte to the north, with the remainder surrounded by the waters of Lake Ontario. It relies on the lake to moderate its cooler climate. Its many bays, inlets and coves create more than 500 miles of shoreline, including the well-known Sandbanks Beach. The appellation also encompasses Amherst Island, a narrow strip off the mainland to the east. Overall, Prince Edward County is an appellation full of unique microclimate and soil conditions that provide the basis for the distinctiveness in its wines.



## Terroir | Prince Edward County

#### Climate

Most vineyards are located in areas that receive maximum benefit from lake breezes. Prevailing westerly breezes travel steadily across Lake Ontario and the Bay of Quinte to help moderate temperatures. They are especially beneficial during the warm summer months, keeping average temperatures around 22°C, with pleasant cooling during the hotter days and keeping cool nights at bay.

#### Topography

The County's topography is irregular, with hills creating various exposures for the vines, and valleys digging into the broad, flat, Trenton limestone base. A gradual rise from northeast to southwest is crossed by a number of long, gentle east-west ridges and occasionally steep, rugged escarpments. On the northern and eastern shorelines, rocky bluffs rise to an elevation of 30 metres or more above Lake Ontario, while the western shore has many inlets with sandy shores and large sandbars that define bodies of water such as West Lake and East Lake.

### Soil

Topsoils range from reddish-brown clay loam to sandy loam and overlay limestone bedrock embedded with shale fragments. The stony surface and numerous rock and shale fragments within the soils allow water to drain into the limestone, which ensures good drainage of wintermelt and substantial root penetration for mature vines. This rocky soil also allows good heat conduction and retention and encourages early warming in the spring.



# Icewine Ontario as a World Leader

#### Grape Varieties

In Ontario, Icewine must be made from *vitis vinifera* grape varieties or the hybrid variety Vidal Blanc. The most popular varieties are Vidal Blanc, Riesling and Cabernet Franc. Some small lots include Gewürztraminer, Chardonnay and Cabernet Sauvignon.

#### Wine Character and Style

- Rich aromas and flavours of ripe tropical fruits such as lychee, papaya and pineapple
- Sweet with firm backbone of acidity making them perfectly balanced
- Enjoyed as a dessert on their own or with desserts
- Perfect complement for rich, strongly flavoured foods such as foie gras and aged blue cheeses
- Also used as a "dosage" for Sparkling Wine or cocktails

#### Regulation

Icewine production is regulated in Ontario under the VQA Act and regulations. Strict standards are monitored by VQA inspectors, from vineyard to the bottle. Rules cover grape varieties, harvest procedures, winemaking, and testing before the wine is released. No wine may use the term "Icewine" on its label unless it is certified by VQA Ontario. An Ontario treasure, Icewine is a luscious, intensely flavoured wine made from grapes that have been left to freeze naturally on the vine.

With almost ideal climate conditions for the reliable annual production of Icewine – warm summers to ripen the grapes and cold but not too cold winters – Ontario has produced Icewine since 1984, and has been considered a leading Icewine producer on the global stage since 1991, when Inniskillin won the illustrious Grand Prix d'Honneur at Bordeaux's Vinexpo wine fair.

Today, Ontario is recognized as producing some of the world's finest Icewine.



## How Icewine is Made

Icewine season starts when the grape vines are netted in the autumn to protect them from being devoured by birds. Grapes are then left on the vine until a sustained temperature of -8°C or lower is reached (sometime between December and February). During the time between the end of the growing season and harvest, the grapes dehydrate and the juices are concentrated, creating the characteristic complexities of Icewine.



Grape growers and wineries carefully watch the weather, looking for an optimum stretch of temperatures between -10°C and -12°C. This range will produce very sweet juice in the range of 35 to 39 degrees Brix (a measurement of sugar). Typically, a period of at least six hours is needed to harvest and press the grapes – usually during the night. Many wineries harvest by hand but mechanized harvesting has been developed very recently.

Harvested grapes are pressed in small hydraulic presses. Because the grapes are frozen, most of the mass is water and is left behind as ice in the press. Only a small amount of concentrated juice is extracted. Juice yields for Icewine grapes are much lower than for table wines – only 15% of the expected yield for grapes harvested for table wines. Icewine juice is very sweet and can be difficult to ferment. High sugars can create a hostile environment for the yeast and fermentation stops early, leaving relatively low alcohol and high sugar levels in the finished wine.



# Ontario Wines of Origin Quick Facts

Ontario boasts a vibrant grape and wine industry that enjoys continued growth

Ontario has over 140 licensed wineries including grape and fruit wineries Number of wineries that produce VQA wines of origin: 124 Total Ontario wine grape area: 15,000 acres (6,100 hectares) Number of grape vines in Ontario: 17 million Average annual volume of Icewine produced: 900,000 litres Average annual grape tonnage used in VQA wines of origin in a typical year: 28,000 tonnes Total retail value of VQA wines: Over \$300 million CAD (Stats - for year ended March 31, 2011 - all numbers are rounded, for the 2010 harvest year) More detailed statistics are available in VQA Ontario's Annual Report - www.vqaontario.ca Grape production is sourced from the Grape Growers of Ontario

Annual Report - www.grapegrowersofontario.com

Technical information sourced from Dr. Tony Shaw

### For more information contact:

info@winecountryontario.ca or visit www.winecountryontario.ca/mediacentre

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