

What better time to celebrate Canadian wines



Waters & Wine

Christopher Waters

There are occasions when only Canadian wine will do. Thanksgiving and Canada Day, being holidays to celebrate the bounty and pride we have in our home and native land, come right at the top of that list.

Given a flurry of recent developments in the Niagara grape and wine industry, there's quite a lot to celebrate. New celebrity wines from the likes of Dan Aykroyd and Wayne Gretzky are adding some sizzle to the region, but the real excitement for me stems from the fact that these wines are solid, serious and flavourful. There's more to them than just celebrity endorsement.

This summer's opening of Hidden Bench Vineyards and Winery on Locust Lane in Beamsville and return of John Howard, the former owner of Vineland Estates Winery, to the winemaking fold add more diversity and innovation to the industry. Howard's cheeky Megalomaniac Wines sport amusing and stylish labels

by British Columbia's Brandever Strategy Inc., the firm behind the award-winning labels for the Okanagan Valley's Blasted Church and Dirty Laundry wineries.

The Megalomaniac wines, including the lively, off-dry Narcissist Riesling and the vivacious and delicious Pink Slip Pinot Noir Rose, are available online at www.megalomaniacwine.com.

Last weekend's successful Niagara Wine Auction has successfully elevated the industry as well. The well-attended event was a strong showcase of what's right about Niagara wine country. Great hospitality, great food and a diversity of wines that rival bottles from any wine region in the world.

Going forward, the event needs some work — more emphasis on Niagara wine components in the auction, for starters — but the infrastructure for a great event is already in place. (Note to the organizing committee: can we sample the wines included in the barrel auction next year? I'm certain you will raise more money and create more buzz if people get a chance to taste before bidding.)

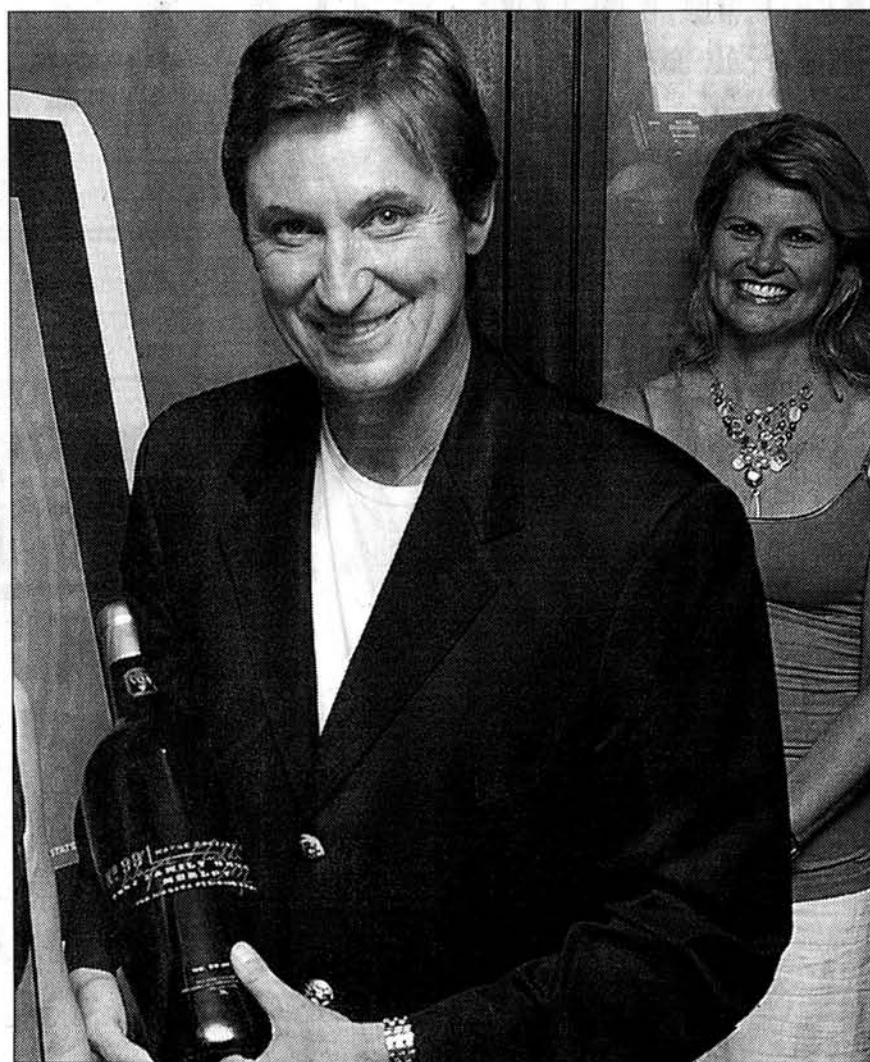
Up and down the wine route, we've got young students from Brock University and Niagara College working at wineries gaining terrific hands-on experience. There are also new restaurants springing up, like the About Thyme Bistro in Vineland, the smartly refurbished restaurant at Hillebrand Estates Winery and Tony de Luca's new and affordable Olde Winery Restaurant on Regional Road 55 (Niagara Stone Road) in Niagara-on-the-Lake.

Beyond that, there's an exciting new crop of grapes soaking up the sun in Niagara's vineyards creating optimism for the 2007 harvest. That's a lot to ponder as you sip your favourite VQA white or red during this Canada Day long weekend. Niagara wine is getting better and better with each passing vintage.

Wines of the Week:

★★★+

Coyote's Run Estate Winery 2006 Un-



Wayne Gretzky announces Tuesday in Toronto that he is lending his name to a line of Niagara wines.

STAFF PHOTO BY BOB TYMCZYSZYN

oaked Chardonnay

Niagara Peninsula \$15.15 (026740)
Coyote's Run Unoaked Chardonnay has quickly emerged as one of the most consistent and best value whites produced in Ontario. The new vintage is an extremely well made white that has lovely freshness, focus and good length. Look for melon and baked apple fruit here and impressive weight and texture. Smartly bottled under screw cap to help retain the wine's inherent freshness and purity. www.coyotesrunwinery.com (winery/LCBO Craft Winery selection)

★★★★

Hillebrand Estates Winery 2005 Trius Red
Niagara Peninsula \$19.95 (303800)
Hillebrand's Trius lineup has been a highly reliable producer of Niagara wine at fair prices since the late 1980s. This

year the brand is attracting attention with the newly minted 2006 White, an exciting, aromatic blend of Riesling, Gewurztraminer and Pinot Gris, and the release of the generous and plush 2005 Red. The new vintage red is a spicy, serious wine, with appealing coffee and chocolate notes. It has depth and structure that shows the wisdom of blending Cabernet Franc, Cabernet Sauvignon and Merlot to create a wine that's truly better than the sum of its parts. www.hillebrand.com (released July 1, 1249 Niagara Stone Rd., Niagara-on-the-Lake, 905-468-7123)

Christopher Waters is the managing editor of VINES, a national wine magazine. He was named Wine Journalist of the Year at the 2004 Ontario Wine Awards. Waters can be reached by e-mail at vin@vaxcine.com