

Canada's Brave New Vineyards

Twenty-five years ago, Canadians chuckled at the notion of growing vinifera in Niagara and the Okanagan. Well, look who's planting now! Join us as we look at brand new vineyard sites in British Columbia and Ontario, and check out the progress of more well-established regions in Quebec and Nova Scotia.

Growers Anoint Ontario's Prince Edward County

by David Lawrason

On August 12, 1998, the winegrowers of Prince Edward County celebrated an historic moment. They met (some for the first time) and together shared a baptismal bottle of the first grape-based wine from the region's first modern-day wine producer. It was a 1997 vidal from the soon-to-be-licensed Waupoos Winery, which will be built next summer by Ed and Rita Neuser. And it was very, very good, with a delicacy and length uncommon from this often coarse and blunt hybrid.

The wine was made by Klaus Reif at Reif Estates winery in Niagara, but the grapes came from five-year-old vines planted in the most promising terroir I've yet seen in eastern Canada — gravelly limestone on a gentle south-facing slope only metres from the shore of Lake Ontario. It's on a scenic strip of prime, but economically troubled, apple orchard land near the village of Waupoos in Prince Edward County, a virtual island that juts into Lake Ontario south of Belleville.

The Neusers have 4.5 acres planted to hybrids and some riesling, with chardonnay going in next spring. Just down the way, on an even steeper and more shallow-soiled limestone hill, Grant Howes is planning to trial some pinot noir next year. Howes already makes some of the province's best apple wine and cider at his County Cider Company, and with a



The Winegrowers of Prince Edward County (left to right) Mike Peddlesen, Deborah Paskus, James Braver, Rita Neuser, Grant Howes, Ed Neuser, Geoff Heinrichs

licensed cidery and beautifully decorated tasting room already in place, he is poised to move easily into grapes.

"With all due respect," he quipped to his budding viticulturist peers, "apples are harder to grow than grapes."

Formerly one of North America's prime apple-growing sites, with over 40,000 acres of orchard and 20 canneries existing earlier this century, there is no question that the county is prime fruit land. In 1876 a wine from the region's Noxom Vineyard in Allisonville won a

medal at an exposition in Philadelphia.

Prince Edward County is one of Ontario's sunniest, driest regions. Prevailing west winds carry across Lake Ontario, from the direction of Toronto. Summer storms are often diverted north and south by the land mass reaching 40 kilometres into the lake, leaving the interior unscathed — and actually drought prone. And being surrounded on virtually all sides by circulating water, there is some protection from spring frost and winter freezing.

But it is certainly not fail safe. "The

County can get some extreme dips in temperature in the winter," says Lyle van Clief, a local farmer who also happens to be the area's MP, and Canada's Minister of Agriculture. "I think it has a lot of potential for grapes, and the local community is all for it, but it won't be for the faint of heart. It will take patient money."

As it turns out, the Waupoos Slope, despite all its apparent scenic and viticultural amenities, is one of the cooler sites in Prince Edward County in terms of degree days, so others are under consideration. Nearby in South Bay, one grower has had vines in the ground since the mid-eighties, but has never commercialized, despite a winery project first planned back in 1991.

Two other serious vinifera vineyards are already planted farther inland where it's warmer and drier.

One, owned by Goeff Heinrichs, is hacked out of dense-packed limestone soil near the village of Hillier. A journalist by day, Heinrichs has researched the county topography thoroughly and toiled since 1995 to hand plant dense-spaced and low-trellised test plots. He has a surprising array of vinifera, including several of pinot noir, Austria's St. Laurent, syrah, pinot gris, melon de bourgogne, and viognier. On August 12, one St. Laurent vine, under which Heinrichs had piled stones to reflect heat, had fully changed colour (gone through versaison), and was almost sweet to the taste.

The other site, called Clay Ridge Vineyard, is owned by partners Jamie Brauer (a builder who is designing the Waupoos Winery) and Mike Peddlesen. Also first planted in 1995, it is located at the north end of the county, not far from the Bay of Quinte. Their two acres straddle some of the area's highest, driest, and least frost-prone land, on a slope with five different soil types. They are testing hybrids like seyval blanc and foch, but also have chardonnay, pinot noir, and riesling in the ground.

"I'm going to go straight into pinot noir and chardonnay," said a notable newcomer, who is currently researching sites but has not yet acquired land. Deborah Paskus, the meticulous viticulturist for Niagara's Thirty Bench Winery, grew up in P.E. County. She gained notoriety in Ontario by teaming up to make the very expensive, limited-production Temkin-Paskus chardonnay in Niagara.

"This area is not as forgiving as Niagara, and I won't necessarily be able to use the same techniques. We'll have to be patient and flexible, but I have no doubt that everyone here will make it work," Paskus said.

All are willing to risk something to bring wine to fruition in Prince Edward County, partially because they also love living in one of Ontario's prettiest, most bucolic areas (pop. 20,000), and partially because, if they can get their wineries open, there is an important tourist base that will help them prosper.

It is three hours' or less driving time from major markets in Toronto, Montreal, and Ottawa, and it's situated just off Highway 401 in one of the most heavily travelled, touristic corridors of Canada (historic Kingston and the 1000 Islands are within one hour's drive).

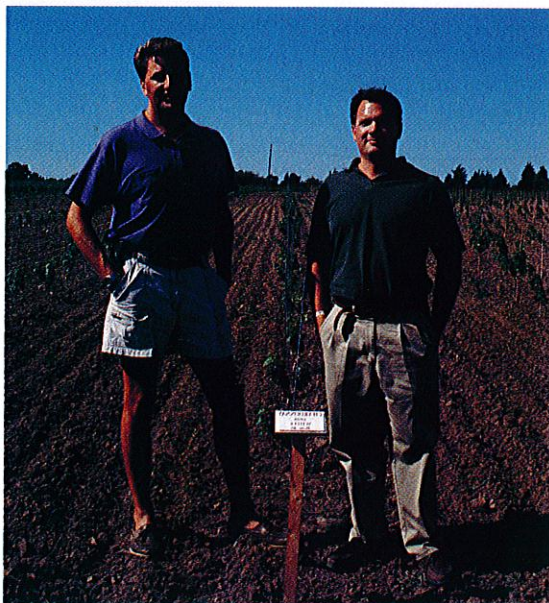
There is also a major natural attraction in Sandbanks Provincial Park, and an important family resort complex called Isaiah Tubbs. The county boasts over 100 bed and breakfast houses. There is a local cheese industry, indeed a Cheese Route in adjacent Hastings County. The towns of Picton and nearby Bloomfield are already established as artisan, antique, and craft centres. There's an ostrich farm; even a cactus farm!

Will wine fit? Bet on it.

British Columbia: Gulf Islands Coming on Stream

by *Tim Pawsey*

If you take a float plane from Vancouver to Victoria in clear weather, there's a good chance your flight path will cross right over Saturna Island, the southernmost Gulf Island, right on the USA boundary. The view is breathtaking as you leave the blue-green expanse of Georgia Strait behind and progress at eye level beside the rugged peak of Mt.



*James Braver and Mike Peddlesen
at their new Clay Ridge Vineyard.*

Warburton. Suddenly, the land drops away below the precipitous granite bluffs to a fertile, red-skinned arbutus-wrapped plateau, kissed by ocean breezes.

For years this was the Campbell farm (and the original site of the famous Saturna Dominion Day lamb barbecue). Jim Campbell, a remarkably spry man of fourscore years and not counting, still makes his home on the land here, though most of the plateau property was sold off as a block some time ago. Now, some 30 acres of vinifera plantings and evidence of more on the way proclaim Saturna Vineyards — British Columbia's first commercial winery to be located in the Gulf Islands.

For decades, prospects for vinifera plantings outside of the Okanagan Valley were considered to be "marginal"; at best prone to brief growing seasons and liable to harvest-time rains, and at worst victim of winter kill in particularly harsh years. Okanagan's neighbouring valley of Similkameen, which does not enjoy the same lake-moderated climate, is more susceptible to extremes. However, grapes have been grown in BC since European contact — not only in the geographical indicators of Fraser Valley and Cowichan, but in small microclimates dotted throughout the southwest of the province.

Saturna Vineyards represents the first winery of consequence to be established in BC outside of existing geographical indicators, and while the first harvest is