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Thursday, September 1, 1983

Festival celebrates fruit of the vine

Niagara blossoms as a wine-producing region

When you think of wine, do you think about the Canadian side of the Niagara River? If not, you may be surprised to know that wine is being taken very seriously here in the Niagara area.

The Niagara Grape and Wine Festival will take place Friday, Sept. 23, to Sunday, Oct. 2, in and around St. Catharines, a city on Lake Ontario within 10 minutes drive of both Niagara-on-the-Lake and Niagara Falls.

If you haven't seen the Falls lately, or if you are still planning your first visit to the Shaw Festival in Niagara-on-the-Lake, you might want to combine these well-known attractions with a winery tour and some grape-stomping festival activities.

Fruit farms have flourished on the Niagara Peninsula ever since the United Empire Loyalists crossed the Niagara River to stay with the British crown after the American Revolution. Wine has been made here for many years, but it was considered undrinkable by continental or world standards until recent years.

The native labrusca grapes make excellent table grapes and grape juice but have never suited the tastes of wine lovers accustomed to the vinifera grapes of California and Europe. This was also true of the grapes grown in the northern United States: Grapes that would survive the winter were considered to have a "foxy" taste.

ALL OF these areas have blossomed in the last 10 years because they have grafted European vines onto local roots, creating a hybrid wine grape that is closer to that popular vinifera taste. During the last few years, they have also grown "pure vinifera" grapes like Riesling and Chardonnay, defying the old wisdom that said "they'll never survive the winter."

They don't survive winter easily, so Niagara wines with familiar vinifera names are more expensive than those made in California. You might not want to spend the money necessary to drink them on a regular basis, but the



1-of-a-kind traveler
Iris Jones
contributing travel editor

vineyard and wine-tasting experience available in the Niagara area greatly enriches the travel experience there.

The Niagara Grape and Wine Festival features 200 events, including a Grande Parade, grape-stomping contests, lots of wine-garden experiences and wine-tasting tours.

Saturday, Sept. 10, launches almost two weeks of warm-up before the festival officially begins: wine history displays at St. Catharines Historical Museum, a variety of wine-and-cheese parties, dances, sports events, and open-air wine gardens.

On Friday, Sept. 23, they'll crown the Grape King, the grape grower chosen by a panel of experts as operator of the finest vineyard in Canada. The Grande Parade is at the other end of the calendar, on Saturday, Oct. 1. Winery tours are available throughout the two-week festival. Your \$3.50 ticket will take you on a driving tour through the area, on a tour of both a vineyard and a winery and includes sample tastings of local wines.

DURING THE Festival you can tour wineries such as Chateau des Charmes, Barnes, Bright's, Andres, Inniskillin, Jordan and Ste-Michelle, Montravin Cellars and Hillebrand Wineries, all in the St. Catharines-Niagara Falls area.

Inniskillin has the reputation for making the finest wines. I was served them during an elegant dinner at the Harbour Castle Hilton Hotel in Toronto last spring and was impressed. Frank Baldoock, Canadian wine writer and assistant manager editor of the Canadian TV Guide, alerted me to Chateau des



MICKY JONES

Fruit farms and vineyards such as this one have flourished on the Niagara Peninsula ever since the United Empire Loyalists crossed the Niagara River to stay with the British crown after the American Revolution. Wine has been made here for many years, but it was

Charmes, where entrepreneur Paul Bosc defied all the local wisdom by planting pure vinifera prolifically in 1978.

The most interesting tasting room is a Bright's, where you can try several popular wines in a room lined with the wood of old wine casks. Bright's started planting hybrids in the 1930s. They are one of the largest producers of pop-

ular wines in Canada. If you tend to order a wine spritzer (wine and soda water) from the bar, try their spritz wines, a combination of sparkling red or white wines and spring water. If you like dry white, try the new L'Entre-Cote.

The Niagara Peninsula was planted with 24,000 acres of grapes in 1892, producing 64,815 tons. Half the vines are still the native labrusca, which is

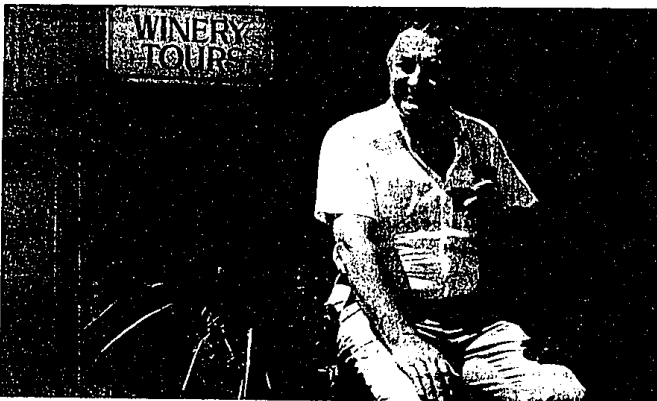
considered undrinkable by continental or world standards until recent years. The area has blossomed in the last 10 years with the grafting of European vines onto local roots, creating a hybrid wine grape that is closer to that popular vinifera taste.

used for juice, sherry, port. The Wiley Vineyards make marvelous grape juice as well as combinations like apple-pear, grape-apple, cherry-grape, cherry-apple. You can taste them in an adjacent private home and buy them on the spot or not.

YOU CAN buy wine, of course, at any of the vineyards. The vast majority of the wines are hybrids, still or sparkling, and cost from \$3 to \$6. The vinifera cost more and are in much shorter supply.

For information on the Niagara Peninsula area, contact the Canadian Government Office or Tourism in Detroit at 963-8888. For information on the Niagara Grape and Wine Festival, contact Box 1444, 164 St. Paul St., St. Catharines, Ontario L2R 7J8. Telephone (416) 688-0212 during business hours prior to Monday, Sept. 19; the festival tour booth direct at (416) 934-0156 during the festival.

The Niagara Grape and Wine Festival will start later this month in and around St. Catharines, which is 10 minutes' drive from both Niagara-on-the-Lake and Niagara Falls. If you haven't seen the Falls lately, you might want to combine that well-known attraction with a winery tour and some grape-stomping festival activities.



MICKY JONES

George Hostetter, director of research at Bright's winery in the Niagara area of Ontario, enjoys the fruits of his research. Bright's started planting hybrids in the 1930s, and today the winery is one of the largest producers of popular wines in Canada.

Bridge picked as theme for St. Lawrence cruise

Theme cruises aboard cruise ships are becoming more and more popular every year. An example is a contract bridge cruise which will start aboard the Canadian Empress lake cruiser Sunday, Sept. 25.

The three-day, two-night cruise will be launched from Kingston, Ontario (located on the northeastern tip of Lake Ontario), at the height of the fall color season. The Empress cruises the historic waters of the St. Lawrence River

and the Thousand Islands. D.H. "Doug" Clark, a life master and certified bridge director, will host the cruise, which is sanctioned by the American Contract Bridge League.

This all-inclusive cruise costs \$240 per person, double occupancy, in U.S. funds.

For more information, phone (613) 549-8091 (collect) or write R.W. "Bob" Clark, Rideau St. Lawrence Cruise Ships, Inc., 253 Ontario St., Kingston, Ontario K7L 2Z4.

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