

# FROM THE CELLAR... VINELAND

## YOU HAVE TO VISIT OUR WINERY BECAUSE...

“For the experience. We’re laid back, customer-focused, and everyone here likes having fun.”

Jeff Weir, Vineland Estates Winery

## FIRST IMPRESSIONS

August 6, 2019

We have long been fans of Vineland Estates Winery, one of the many excellent wineries on the Niagara Escarpment Bench. Driving onto the property, three things caught our eye: the manicured grounds, the pristine buildings, and the stunning views. Not a bad prequel to our tasting.



## THE LAY OF THE LAND

Vineland Estates Winery produced its first vintage in 1983, and it remains one of the original wineries in the Niagara region. The estate itself, including the unmistakable stone tower (see picture above), stands on a previous Mennonite homestead. Some of the buildings date to the 1840s, and through meticulous renovation and conservation, they may very well stand for at least another 170 years.

Vineland produces several series of wines, each offering something unique. The Classic Series wines are produced from machine harvested fruits and could be considered entry level. Don’t let that fool you, however, as some of the offerings are outstanding in terms of both quality and value. In the Elevation Series, grapes are hand-picked and hand-sorted, with increased complexity and flavour profiles. The Reserve Series, as the name suggests, are produced in limited quantities using only the very best fruit. Production only occurs in the best years (vintages), so get them when you see them.

In addition, you will find sparkling wines, late harvest wines, and icewines on the Vineland Estates Winery list. If you’re lucky, you might even get your hands on a “Game Changer” wine, which is produced using an optical sorter, a specialized machine built to select the very best grapes using cutting-edge technology (see below for more details about this latest innovation in the wine industry). Finally, the estate produces a vodka-wine martini under the label, “Vice.” From what we learned, this blend of Canadian Vodka and Vidal icewine has its own unique following.



*The Vineland plots (top), the pristine Vineland grounds (middle), and a vintage amphora, still going strong (bottom)*

Vineland Estates Winery produces about 50,000 cases of wine annually from 120 planted acres. Some of the vines date to the late 1970s, when Herman Weiss brought over some plantings from Mosel, Germany.

With its award-winning restaurant and pristine grounds, it comes as no surprise that the estate remains a premier destination for weddings, musical performances, and social events. The restaurant offers indoor dining inside a 1845 farmhouse, as well as outdoor dining on a terrace overlooking Lake Ontario and the Niagara Escarpment. The food at the restaurant alone is worth a visit.

## **WINEMAKING PHILOSOPHY**

At Vineland Estates Winery, the winemaking team likes to experiment in a multitude of ways. As an example, the estate produces the only still red Pinot Meunier in the region (which was fantastic, by the way). Premium wines are produced using hand-picking and hand-sorting. In terms of innovation, as mentioned, the winery owns an optical sorter, a device that uses high-speed cameras and digital-processing software to select the very best grapes, which translate into the very best wines.

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*“Our wines sell themselves.” – Jeff Weir, Vineland Estates Winery*

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## **ONE-ON-ONE WITH JEFF WEIR, VINELAND ESTATES WINERY**

### **Q: What do you like most about wine?**

A: I’m constantly learning. It reminds me of the places my wife and I have visited in the world, and I get to meet some fascinating people.

### **Q: Of all the wines you produce, which one is your favourite and why?**

A: That’s a tough one, but if I had to pick, I’d say our Riesling, Pinot Meunier, and Cabernet Franc Reserve.



*Jeff Weir*

*Vineland Estates Winery*

### **Q: What’s your ultimate favourite wine and why?**

A: Our Cabernet Sauvignon Reserve. Unfortunately, it’s now sold out.

### **Q: What’s the best part of your job?**

A: Meeting new people, socializing, and learning (about wine).

### **Q: What’s the worst part of your job?**

A: When people get out of hand because they’re intoxicated.

### **Q: What’s your most embarrassing wine moment?**

A: The other day, a young man asked me for a “latte harvest” (as opposed to a late harvest), which was more embarrassing for them than for me.

## THE TASTING...

We had the opportunity to spend a good part of the morning with Jeff Weir, learning about what makes Vineland Estates Winery tick and tasting the fruits of its labour. We began with the 2017 Sekt Riesling Sparkling (price: \$25 CAD) and ended with the 2018 Vidal Icewine (price: \$48 CAD).



*Some of the Vineland Estates Winery selections*

In between, we tasted the:

- 2017 Elevation St. Urban Riesling (price: \$19.95 CAD)
- 2007 Elevation St. Urban Riesling (price: \$50 CAD)
- 2018 Game Changer Rosé – The Memory (price: \$20 CAD; 75% Cabernet Sauvignon and 25% Cabernet Franc)
- 2017 Pinot Meunier (price: \$50 CAD)
- 2016 Elevation Cabernet (price: \$28 CAD; 80% Cabernet Franc and 20% Cabernet Sauvignon)
- 2015 Cabernet Franc Reserve (price: \$50 CAD)

The 2007 Elevation St. Urban Riesling and the 2016 Elevation Cabernet both placed in our top three. But the top honours fell to the 2015 Cabernet Franc Reserve. We appreciated the distinctive silver label, as well as the medium-deep ruby hue. In the nose, this single varietal dry red offered up a delectable combination of coffee, dark chocolate, burned bourbon/molasses, seared lamb, tomato sauce, and ferrous notes. Interestingly, we didn't get a lot in the way of fruit, but that's not a problem, at least not in our book. On the palate, we'd consider this light-to-medium-bodied, with medium-high acidity, and soft tannins. Prominent flavours included bright, vibrant red cherry, candied red pepper, green pepper, Montreal steak spice, black pepper, and graphite. The finished endured, leaving us with more graphite and spices. Well balanced and highly complex, we would enjoy this Cabernet Franc on its own, just as we would enjoy it with grilled beef or lamb, aged cheddar cheese, and hearty pasta dishes smothered in rich tomato sauce (a five-layer lasagna with a layer of pecorino cheese comes to mind).

## FINAL NOTES

Our visit confirmed why we have always held Vineland Estates Winery in high esteem. With spectacular views of Lake Ontario and the Niagara Escarpment, pristinely restored buildings dating to 1840, immaculate grounds, an award-winning restaurant, and a friendly, good-natured staff, not to mention several spectacular wines, the estate offers a complete experience, and it showcases the very best in Ontario wines.

### Contact Vineland Estates Winery

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