

The Great Grape Revolution



The grapes for ninety per cent of Canadian wines grow in the Niagara peninsula, where temperatures are moderated by Lakes Erie and Ontario and the escarpment provides protection from the wind.

In recent years there's been a revolution in the vineyards.

The native grape of the region, the *Labrusca*, and its many descendants produce sweet, emphatic wines; they make a good sherry, but table wines made from them have a strong, sweet, foxy taste. They are now being rapidly and systematically replaced by *vinifera* hybrids crossbred from European and North American varieties specifically for wine making.

The T.G. Bright & Co., Ltd. in Niagara Falls, Ontario, which has a 1,000 acre nursery, was a pioneer in developing the de Chaunac, the principal new grape of the region, which produces a dry, fruity red wine. The provincial and federal governments have also been much involved. Last year more than half of the grapes grown in the area were of the new select types, and table wines now dominate production. Canadian per capita wine consumption has almost doubled in the last ten years, and the great gains have been in table wines. The changeover has been profitable for both the growers and the vintners: old-style Concord grapes brought the growers \$252 a ton in 1980, the new grapes as much as \$672.

It takes almost five years for a new vine to produce substantially. In 1956 the area's 28,000 acres of vineyards were covered with *Labrusca* vines—Elvira, Delaware, Chelois, Niagara,

Agawam, Catawba and Concord, with Concord by far the most widely planted.

Between 1966 and 1978 a great many new varieties had been introduced and were producing, including de Chaunac, Pinot Chardonnay, Seyval Blanc, S.V. 23-512 and Vidal 256.

As the new grapes came in, a good many of the old went out. Concord remains the dominant grape in the region, but in 1980, while 48,158 new vines were planted, 84,916 old ones were removed. By contrast, while 4,100 Seyval Blanc vines were removed, 112,445 were planted. About ninety per cent of the total plantings were of the new varieties, while about fifty per cent of the removals were of the old.

Wine

Wine is the fermented juice of grapes.

Grapes come equipped with their own essentials—the skin is covered with a powder-like "bloom" which contains the yeast needed for fermentation.

When the grape is crushed the yeast would, if left alone, change the grape's natural sugar into alcohol and carbon dioxide. Unfortunately, the bloom also contains acetic organisms which would change the sugar into vinegar.

To prevent the latter process, the juice may be pasteurized, heated to 168°F for a period of eight minutes, or treated with chemicals. The natural yeasts are usually replaced by cultured ones since it is hard to predict how the natural ones are going to behave.

During the first stage of fermentation, from forty-eight to seventy-two hours, the yeast is at work on the juice, skin and seeds. In the second, which lasts from two weeks to two months, the skin and seeds are removed.

The flavour and bouquet of the resulting wines depend on the type of grapes used and their subsequent aging and blending.

Wines can be divided by colour into red, white and rosé, by carbonation into sparkling and still, by sugar content into dry and sweet and by alcoholic content into fortified and unfortified.

In producing white table wines the crushed grapes are immediately separated from their skins, and the juice is fermented at relatively low temperatures, 50° to 60°F. For red wines the skins and juice are placed in open fermenting tanks. Pinks or rosés are produced by fermenting varieties with a small amount of colour in their skins or by separating the juice from the skins some twelve to thirty-six hours after fermentation begins.

All wines contain carbon dioxide; sparkling wines contain an extra amount. The basis of a