

TICKLING THE IVORIES

And other things that are good for your children. Judith Timson explains, T6

TRAVEL & LIFESTYLE



VINEYARD ESTATE WINERY

The Parlour Room in the Woodruff House welcomes visitors to the Ravine Estate Winery.

Sipping wine and touring in Niagara-on-the-Lake

Beautiful vineyards and sublime dining complement the region's reds and whites

CAROLYN EVANS HAMMOND
SPECIAL TO THE STAR

"I'd like to taste your best three reds and three whites, please."

Andrej Lipinski, winemaker at Big Head Wines, looked at me a beat too long and replied, in a thick Polish accent, "No!" Then he motioned me to sit at a table with a quarter wheel of Grana Padano in the middle.

"You must taste all of my wines. All 14! So you will know what I am doing."

Although I could have done without his steady insistence, I tasted every wine blind and guessed the grape, alcohol level and price.

I was glad I tried the full range. They were atypically impressive across the board, yielding solid proof of change in Niagara-on-the-Lake.

Using maverick winemaking methods, such as kiln-drying grapes to make massive reds riper than Niagara's cool climate can otherwise produce, Andrej is at the forefront of a quiet revolution.

NIAGARA continued on T4



>> TRAVEL



TWO SISTERS VINEYARDS

The stately Two Sisters Vineyards is a must-stop on any wine-and-dine tour of Niagara-on-the-Lake, where the quality of the region's wines is now attracting enthusiasts of all ages.

Region attracts new breed of wine lovers

NIAGARA from T1

Yes, we all know NOTL is the birthplace of Ontario wine and a town cuter than a bug's ear, but the rise in quality of the region's wines now attracts a new breed of wine aficionados. The breed includes those in their 30s — not just 40s, 50s and 60s — who aren't content drinking on-trend wines with cult followings. They want what Andrej is offering in his tiny, tinny garage.

To experience the new NOTL for yourself, here is what to do:

Day 1

Arrive at Big Head Wines at noon for the exact tasting I experienced (\$15). It won't disappoint.

Then, visit Ravine Vineyard to taste some exciting organic wines, including the chin-drip-peach 2013 Small Batch Riesling (\$22/bottle), buttered-toast-and-lemon 2013 Chardonnay (\$25), and smoked-raspberry-and-cocoa 2013 Cabernet Franc (\$35). (\$5 for three samples.)

Lunch on Ravine's Packing Shed Porch, starting with the chicken liver pâté. It is to ordinary pâté as a Vic-

toria's Secret model is to Marge Simpson.

Sadly, it is only served on the charcuterie board (\$25), so order that with a glass of racy 2014 Reserve Riesling (\$15) and go from there.

After lunch, drive to Chateau des Charmes, which appears plucked from Bordeaux and placed in Niagara, intimidation factor intact. But ignore the castle effect, saunter in, and find the lovely Michelle Bosc, who runs the place.

Tell her I sent you and she'll let you taste the outstanding 2012 Equuleus pre-release (\$2/sample, \$40/bottle). This velvety blend of Cabernet Sauvignon, merlot and Cabernet Franc swells with dark macerated fruit, mocha, cigar box, earth and roasted nut. It's just the thing to make your boss/lover/father-in-law swoon, so grab a bottle to tuck away for Christmas.

Drive to town, check into a king room with Whirlpool in the Shaw Club Hotel & Spa (\$249-\$345/night), enjoy some downtime, and go for dinner at Kitchen 76, the new Italian restaurant in Two Sisters Vineyards. Sit outside surrounded by



Kitchen 76 is a new Italian restaurant at Two Sisters. Sit outside, surrounded by vineyards, with a glass of Lush sparkling wine.

vineyards, with a glass of Lush sparkling, while perusing the menu. Seriously consider the pillow-perfect gnocchi. (Dinner for two with wine, tax and tip: \$180).

Day 2

Arrive at Southbrook Vineyards at 11 a.m., Canada's first biodynamic win-

ery. Biodynamics takes organic farming further by not only prohibiting artificial pesticides but also feeding the land with herbal concoctions and aligning activities with lunar cycles.

Ask to try my four favourite Southbrook bottles for the reduced rate of \$10, including the stony-citric 2013

Connect Chardonnay (\$19.95/bottle), flinty-silky 2013 Triomphe Chardonnay (\$22.95); chocolaty-lush 2012 Estate Grown Small Lot Cabernet Sauvignon (\$34.95), and the 2012 Poetica Red (\$54.95), which is a drinkable operetta.

Wrap up your escape with a comparative icewine tasting at Inniskillin.

Try the 2013 Vidal Icewine (\$3/sample, \$49.95/bottle) — with its luscious French lemon tart character — against the 1990 version of the same wine (\$7/sample, \$201.95/bottle), which glows golden with dried-fruit-and-nuts from 15 years in the bottle. There's no better history lesson.

Before heading home, buy a chilled bottle of Inniskillin dry Pinot Noir Rosé 2014 (\$14.95) and drink it outdoors at the Market Grill with a plate of ice-wine-infused pulled-pork pou-tine (\$14). It's not pretty, but it is the most fun you can have clogging your arteries.

Carolyn Evans Hammond is a Toronto-based wine writer, London-trained sommelier and author. The cost of visits to wineries, restaurants and lodgings were covered by Wine Country Ontario.