

# A Toast to the Good Life

On the Canadian shores of Lake Ontario, the wine-producing region of Prince Edward County (population 25,000) strikes the perfect balance between urbane pleasures and small-town charms. **Nikki Ekstein** takes a tour. PHOTOGRAPHS BY **JOHN CULLEN**

A view of  
Lake Ontario from  
the Drake  
Devonshire Inn.



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: A suite at the Drake Devonshire Inn; co-owner Alexandre Fida at his restaurant, the Hubb; lamb corn dogs with whole-grain mustard, one of the Hubb's signature dishes, served with a pumpkin-spiced Old-Fashioned; Kokito, one of several eclectic stores on Main Street, Bloomfield.



**IMAGINE NAPA VALLEY WITHOUT THE CROWDS**, or Provence with a little more edge. There's something of both in Prince Edward County, an idyllic spot on Lake Ontario that's home to expansive vineyards, organic farms, and pristine beaches. Thanks to the launch last year of the design-centric Drake Devonshire Inn and an influx of musicians, chefs, and filmmakers, the county is fast becoming a summer playground for Canada's cool set. And then there's the wine. What began 14 years ago with a single vineyard has grown into a network of nearly 40 estates, all on land that mimics Burgundy in both climate and *terroir*. These wineries are refreshingly hands-on, with the winemakers themselves often pouring your tasting flights. It's likely the vintages will get better with time, but to experience the charms of a destination on the brink of widespread discovery, you may want to get there soon.

**Friday**

**4:00 p.m. Hitting the Road**

It takes only two and a half hours to fly from New York to Toronto. Of the few people on my flight, I was the only one to head to the car-rental counter. Setting out along lakeside highways, I drove two hours to the pretty, diminutive town of Wellington.

**6:00 p.m. Drake Devonshire Inn**

A wind-controlled player piano in the parking lot is just one of many arty eccentricities that characterize this converted 19th-century foundry, the

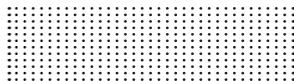
younger sibling of Toronto's stylish Drake Hotel. Upstairs, a 2011 Exultet Estates Pinot Noir awaited me in my suite, an adorably modish, rustic space. At dinner, I ordered pickerel, the local catch, paired with ultra-fresh crab-and-corn *panzanella* and a glass of the Vintner's Daughter, an un-oaked Chardonnay by nearby Rosehall Run winery. [drake devonshire.ca](http://drake-devonshire.ca); doubles from \$229.

**Saturday**

**11:00 a.m. Hubbs Creek Vineyard**

Just a few minutes' drive down the Loyalist Parkway, a landscape of

vines and pick-your-own farms led me to one of the county's smallest (and best) wineries. As I pulled up, a man appeared from a metal-sided barn, clutching an ice pack to his face: co-owner John Battista Calvieri, who had just been stung by a bee. That didn't stop him from explaining how he re-created Burgundy's fermentation process on Canadian soil—testament to his background in chemistry. Face still swollen, he poured me a glass of exceptional 2011 Unfiltered Pinot Noir, which was rich in raspberry and spice. [hubbscreekvineyard.ca](http://hubbscreekvineyard.ca).



CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: Hinterlands, a local winery; chefs at work in the outdoor kitchen at Norman Hardie; wood-fired pizza at Norman Hardie, paired with the vineyard's Calcaire blend; a glass of white with a view of the vines at Hinterlands.



**2:30 p.m. A Shopping Pit Stop**

On Main Street in Bloomfield, I stumbled on Kokito, a quirky boutique where I was tempted by cheese plates made from old Bank of Montreal marble. Instead, I picked a bold, screen-printed Falconwright clutch. From there I called in at Slickers, a shoe-box-size ice cream parlor, for a taste of their phenomenal Campfire ice cream, made from actual toasted marshmallows. [kokito.ca](http://kokito.ca); [slickersicecream.com](http://slickersicecream.com).

**8:00 p.m. Dinner at the Hubb**

There are countless old-school B&Bs in Bloomfield, and for a long time, Angéline's was one of them. That is, until Alexandre Fida and his sister, Melanie, took it over from their parents, filled it with interesting salvaged finds, and relaunched its restaurant, the Hubb, as a purveyor of sophisticated small plates. The evening I was

there, I went for the crispy lamb corn dogs served with whole-grain mustard and tuna tartare topped with microgreens and a smattering of popcorn. Delicious. [angelines.ca](http://angelines.ca); doubles from \$95; small plates \$4–\$26.

**Sunday**  
**11:30 a.m. Sandbanks Provincial Park**

When the innkeeper at the Drake described Sandbanks as a beach transported to Canada from the Caribbean, I was skeptical. But sure enough, the water was clear as glass and the sand soft as clay between my toes. [ontarioparks.com](http://ontarioparks.com).

**1:00 p.m. Hinterlands Wine Co.**  
Chefs David McMillan and Frédéric Morin, of the beloved Montreal restaurant Joe Beef, are big fans of Hinterlands' sparkling wines, so I made the winery my next stop. Their

elegant, in-demand 2011 sparkling rosé went perfectly with the *pièce de résistance*: a dozen Canadian oysters, plump, sweet, and deliciously briny. [hinterlandwine.com](http://hinterlandwine.com).

**3:00 p.m. Norman Hardie winery**

"Norm" is the patron saint of Prince Edward County. More than a dozen years ago, he left Toronto—where he worked as a wine buyer for Four Seasons—to grow grapes in PEC, and he's still at the epicenter of the local wine-making industry. At his winery, he also serves pizza (made in a brick oven by Toronto expat and veteran *pizzaiolo* David Mattachioni); I ordered one with spicy pork sausage along with a Burgundy-style Chardonnay of exceptional minerality. As a line of wine enthusiasts and scene-seekers formed at the hostess stand, I reluctantly took my cue to get back on the road. [normanhardie.com](http://normanhardie.com). ⊕