

QUENCH

BEAMSVILLE WINE COUNTRY

CANADA



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MARCEL GROSS



Niagara

WHERE ON EARTH

On the Bench **BEAMSVILLE WINE COUNTRY**

by TALIA WOOLDRIDGE

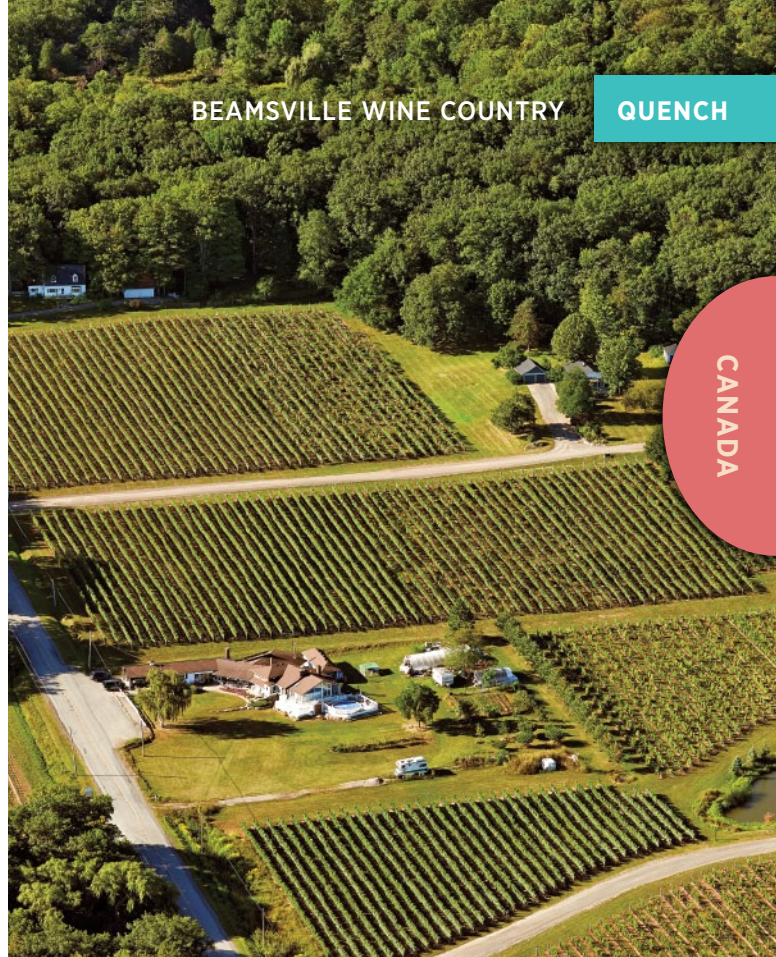
With everyone travelling closer to home these days, Beamsville Bench offers the perfect autumn escape. Located only 30 minutes away from Niagara Falls, this picturesque section of Niagara's wine country sits along the beautiful escarpment. The views of Lake Ontario are breathtaking. We took in the bright fall colours one October afternoon, loaded up on a dazzling selection of award-winning vintages, and learned some fascinating facts about the viticulture in this unique wine terroir.

Beamsville is home to approximately fifteen wineries, as well as the popular local distillery, Dillon's, known for its tasty small batch spirits. While the area shares the same microclimate of Niagara-On-The-Lake, its unique geographical positioning also provides natural conditions that lend to producing exquisite wine.

Our first stop was Organized Crime, a family-run, craftsman-styled small lot winery specializing in award-winning cool climate and wild ferment wines. The vineyard's curious name stems from an infamous pipe organ theft between two warring Mennonite communities who originally inhabited the property. Present day owners, Ania de Duleba and husband Edward Zaski, work alongside Greg Yemen, their consultant winemaker, to produce the handcrafted vintages. Yemen is always tasting and monitoring the grapes year-round which may explain the ongoing quality of their stock.

Organized Crime also uses an estate-grown natural flora, low-interaction growing style. Due to the ambient eastern breeze from the lake, mildew and mold are prevented from growing on the grape varieties, resulting in a cleaner, almost organic wine. The wind also lends to a natural fermentation process known as a wild ferment. The sloped hillside of the area allows for longer southern exposure aspect sun that also prevents powdery mildew and fruit rot. The heat of the sun also ripens the grapes more quickly. The result: seven award-winning vintages in 2019 from the National Wine Awards of Canada, along with recognition as being #2 Ontario Winery, #4 Canadian Small Winery and #6 Canadian Winery! They also had a successful 2016 scoop of awards for their chardonnays and pinot noirs.

The 2017 Wild Ferment Riesling at Organized Crime won silver at the 2019 Canadian National Wine Awards for its aromatic mix of spice, lime zest, floral notes and citrus, bergamot tea and mineral note palate. Here Yemen used an older puncheon and foudre method to ferment the juice of the Riesling with the wild yeasts from the vineyard at warmer than usual temperatures. It was left to age on its lees (the dead yeast cells) for nine months before being bottled. Puncheons and foudres are larger oak barrels that allow for less oak-to-wine contact. This lees aging in neutral »



PHOTOS THIS SPREAD CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT Enjoying a glass at sundown; Angel's Gate aerial view; Organized Crime vineyard.



THIS PHOTO Villa Bacchus garden.

«barrels contributes texture and body to the wine, without adding any barrel taste or aromatics.

We also sampled the 2019 Gold Medal winner, a 2016 Cabernet Franc featuring the vineyard's delicious Bordeaux red varieties harvested in the hot and dry 2016 growing season. The hot climate that year allowed the grapes to fully ripen while the dry season provided a very small concentrate of berries. They used the traditional appassimento method, which consists of drying a portion of the grapes, to preserve the fresh-fruit character. The result is a blend of black cherry, raspberry jam, tobacco and vanilla aromatics. Despite an overt ripe character, this wine is very balanced and elegant on the palate with smooth tannins that provide a very long persistent finish.

Next up was Villa Bacchus, another vineyard with a fabulous view, and an indoor tennis court out back! Beautifully landscaped gardens and a spacious gazebo recall Europe and offer the perfect setting for wine tasting. The winery's current vintages are mostly from 2017 with a smaller selection from 2016 and 2018. The impressive selection of 2017 Rossos stole the show with their notes of blackberry, blueberry, smoked meat and pipe tobacco.

Villa Bacchus also offers up some award-winning chardonnays — both oaked and unoaked. I was more partial to their delicious 2017 pink pinot gris that features ripe stone fruit, peach, pear and quince tones with a sweet cream finish. The fresh, dry palate offered a noticeable weight with soft acidity that is recommended with slightly sweet mozzarella cheese and wood-oven pizzas. It can visibly pass for a rosé

but is not. Like most vineyards in the area, Villa Bacchus delivers cases of wine if you fall in love with their stock.

Thirty Bench, located just up the road, is one of Niagara's first boutique wineries, producing exclusive premium red and white small lot wines from grapes grown for over three decades in their one-of-a-kind vineyards. Winemaker Emma Garner frequently wins national and international medals including titles such as Canada's Small Winery of the Year and Winemaker of the Year in 2015. I took home a bottle of their silver-medal Experience Rosé USA salmon pink 2019 rosé. It has a fresh aroma of wild strawberry, raspberry, watermelon, Rainier cherry and crab apple and is light to medium-bodied and dry with a refreshing mouthfeel. The red berry tea flavour lingers through on the finish and pairs well with lighter Mediterranean dishes.


The vineyard prides itself in producing exclusive low yield grapes with exceptional quality and flavour. For these reasons, their vintages are a bit pricier due to being in such high demand. Thirty Bench offers a selection of tastings, as well as Niagara Wine Tasting itineraries. This winter they are also offering Snow-shoeing in the Bench, a great way to work off all of the tastings. Like most vineyards in the area, they feature riesling, cabernet sauvignon, cabernet franc, merlot, vidal, chardonnay, pinot gris, gewurztraminer and pinot noir grapes.

We finished our tour at the stunning Angel's Gate vineyard, one of the largest growers of vinifera grapes in the region with more than 180 estate acres of fruit grown across seven sprawling vineyards. It obtained its name from the property's history as a Cistercian Order of Nuns, a religious order of the

Roman Catholic Church. It operated as a fruit orchard initially since the 1930s and then as a milk farm, until 1970, when it was abandoned. In 1995, the land was converted into a vineyard with the first grapes planted in 1996. The winery opened in 2002 after the first vintage in 2000.

Angel's Gate has been crafting excellent award-winning wines for 20 years by combining traditional winemaking techniques with new-world technologies to produce vintages with delicate balance, finesse and structure. Their in-house winemaker, Philip Dowell, joined Angel's Gate in 2007. With 35 years of international experience, Dowell strives to preserve each varietal's aroma, acidity and structure. It is no surprise that he was just crowned Ontario Winemaker of the Year!

All of Angel's Gate's sparkling wines are vinified in the traditional champagne method meaning the second fermentation occurs inside the final bottle that you purchase, not inside a large tank. The main difference is that the mousse and mouthfeel of the wine is much finer, while a tank method produces more of a soda pop look and feel. The winery's crisp and dry 2017 sparkling Muscat, Shine, a brut made from varietal muscat grapes harvested from their St John Appellation Vineyard, is a perfect example of this delicate mousse texture. It offers hints of floral, tropical fruit and citrus and is a perfect wine for casual and fine dining. The name of this sparkling vintage comes from Dowell's description of the wine as "sunshine in a glass." We also sampled their refreshing and smooth 2016 Sauvignon Blanc. It pairs well with pork, chicken, shrimp, delicately-spiced Thai or Indian food, spicy Muenster and Pepper Jack cheeses, and also pairs beautifully with desserts, such as vanilla ice cream, Christmas pudding and mince pies, according to the tasting notes.

If you are feeling restless or are a wine lover, Beamsville Bench is a great getaway. Accommodations are plenty in the area if you want to make a weekend of wine tasting. Or, you can book a hotel room overlooking Niagara Falls, and continue on to visit the vineyards in Niagara-On-The-Lake. If you are coming from far away, four tipsy days will likely get you a decent overview of both areas. Excellent restaurants are scattered throughout. 



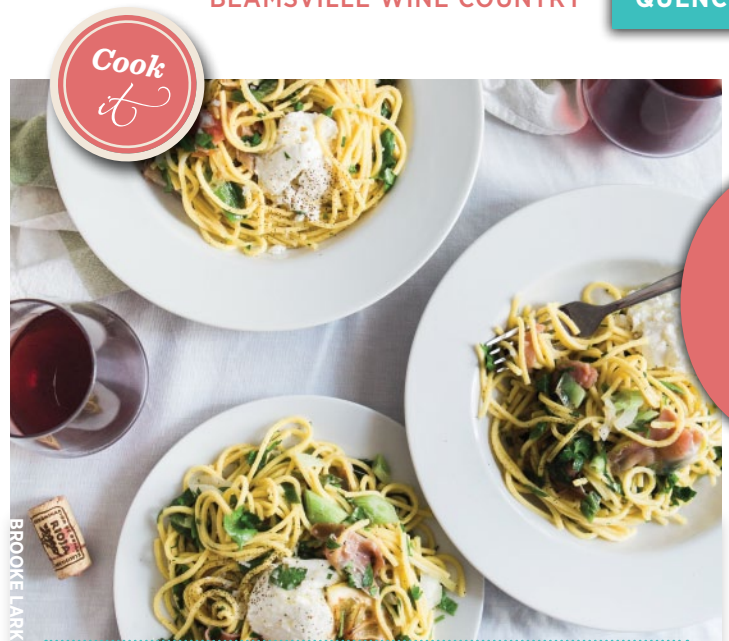
Organized Crime Winery
www.organizedcrimewinery.com

Villa Bacchus
www.villabacchus.square.site

Thirty Bench
www.thirtybench.com

Angels Gate Winery
www.angelsgatewinery.com

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SERVES 4

Spaghetti with Prosciutto, Ricotta & Lemon

THIS RECIPE IS RICH but light-tasting, and best paired with a chilled glass of sauvignon blanc or a red with some acidity, such as a valpolicella.

Lemons 2

Dry White Wine
1 ½ cups

Heavy Cream 1 cup

Spaghetti
1 lb

Butter 3 Tbs,
in pieces

Ricotta 8 oz

Prosciutto
8 oz, torn
into pieces

Extra Virgin Olive Oil
2 Tbs

Scallions
2, green part
only, sliced

Flat Leaf Parsley
a handful

Sea Salt and Freshly Ground Black Pepper

- 1 ZEST** and juice one lemon. Slice the other into half moons.
- 2 IN** a non-reactive pot, bring the lemon zest and wine to a boil. Reduce the heat to medium, add the lemon slices and simmer until the liquid is reduced to about a syrupy ¼ cup, about 10 minutes.
- 3 REMOVE** from the heat and pour in ¼ cup of cream. Stir, then add the rest. Return to the stove and bring to a boil. Reduce the heat and simmer until reduced slightly, about 5 minutes. Remove from the heat.
- 4 MEANWHILE**, bring a large pot of water to boil, salt it generously and add the pasta. Cook to al dente, reserving ¼ cup pasta water, and then draining.
- 5 POUR** the sauce over the hot pasta, adding the butter, lemon juice and olive oil as rapidly as possible and mixing well. Add cooking water if the sauce is too thick. Stir through the prosciutto, parsley and scallion greens.
- 6 LADLE** on to plates, top with a generous dollop of ricotta and drizzle with a little more olive oil, adding salt and pepper to taste at the table.