

WINE ACCESS VINTAGE CHART

EASTERN CANADA

BY RICK VANSICKLE

As 2009 unfolds, we will see the first whites from a wet 2008 vintage in Ontario. It was a difficult season, with endless rain, cold and little hail in some parts. It was a miserable year in the vineyards. Despite all that, winemakers who utilized sound vineyard

practices made some delicious wines. Also making it into stores this year will be the much-anticipated 2007 red wines. Some call 2007 the best vintage ever for red wines; traditional red Bordeaux varietals were the ripest some winemakers have ever seen in all appellations.

VINTAGE	RATING (Max 7★)	NOTES	STATUS*
2008	★★★★★	(Tentative) It was a wet growing season in Ontario. Grape ripening in all appellations was a challenge. The quality of this vintage will depend entirely on vineyard management. Whites and cool-climate reds (pinot noir, gamay) fared better than other varietals. There are some gems to be found, but it was not a uniform vintage from winery to winery.	Drink Now or Cellar 5 Years or Less
2007	★★★★★★1/2	This is as good as it gets in all appellations. Many winemakers call 2007 the best vintage in Ontario's history. It was warm, dry and ideal for extended hang time on the vines. The whites from 2007 are already showing beautiful concentration of flavour with complexity and balance, and the anticipated reds promise to be the ripest wines ever from Ontario.	Whites — Drink Now or Cellar 5 Years or Less Reds — Drink Now or Cellar for 10 Years or More
2006	★★★★★★1/2	Not as wet as 2008, but still humid and slightly cooler than normal. The mood was upbeat as vines recovered from the terrible winter kill of 2005. There was plenty of sunshine in August, but a wet September meant wineries had to employ good vineyard selection. It was a decent year for chardonnay, riesling, merlot, gamay, cabernet franc, pinot noir and a great year for icewines.	Drink Now or Cellar 5 Years or Less
2005	★★★★★	This was a disastrous year. An extremely cold winter killed any hope for a healthy vintage with more than 50 per cent of the vintage wiped out. Many producers didn't have enough wine to even sell and suffered hefty financial losses. Both Lake Erie North Shore and Pelee Island fared better than Niagara. The irony of the vintage was that, even with a tiny crop, what was grown still ended up being pretty good.	Drink Now or Cellar 5 Years or Less
2004	★★★★★★1/2	The 2004 vintage was a major relief for producers following the bad winter of 2003. Conditions improved immensely and vines recovered from the previous winter kill. The hot fall resulted in mature, ripe grapes, especially in the white varietals. Some of the stars of the vintage include riesling, chardonnay, pinot noir, cabernet franc and gamay. Tender varietals didn't fare nearly as well.	Drink Now or Cellar 5 Years or Less
2003	★★★★★★1/2	This vintage had it all — a horrible winter resulting in another short crop (a reduction of 45 per cent of all vinifera vines), the reappearance of the Asian lady beetle (which causes a nasty taint in wines) and the emergence of some mighty fine whites despite all that.	Whites — Drink Now or Cellar 5 Years or Less Reds — Drink Now
2002	★★★★★★1/2	A lot of winemakers rank this vintage up there with 2007 and 1998. It was highlighted by severe drought conditions in all Ontario appellations for most of the summer. The resulting grapes ripened beautifully, with small, concentrated grapes and high sugar levels. It was a great year across the broad spectrum of varietals, including some highly concentrated icewines.	Whites — Drink Now Reds — Drink Now or Cellar 5 Years or Less
1999	★★★★★★	The vintage got off to an early start, despite the lack of spring rain. There were concerns about size of the crop, with above-normal temperatures and below-normal rainfall, but late-July rains helped increase the size of the crop without hurting quality.	Drink Now
1998	★★★★★★1/2	The best examples from this benchmark vintage are still showing beautifully today. Even the whites, the big oak-treated chardonnays in particular, are still youthful and flavour-packed. This is considered by many winemakers, grape growers and wine writers to be the most significant vintage in Ontario's history.	Whites — Drink Now Reds — Drink Now or Cellar 5 Years or Less
1995	★★★★★★1/2	Before the wonderful 1998 vintage came along, this was the benchmark for Ontario wines. A mild winter was followed by a cool spring and delayed flowering. A warm-but-wet July put vines even further behind. Then everything came together with bright sun and warm days from August to October. It wasn't a huge crop, but what was there was fantastic.	Drink Now

* Drink Now, Drink Now with Food, Cellar for 5 Years or Less, Cellar for 5 Years or More, Cellar for 10 Years or More or Not Yet Released.

This chart was developed with input from many sources: Paul Bosc of Château des Charmes, Tom Pennachetti of Cave Spring Cellars, Ann Sperling of Southbrook, Norm Beal of Peninsula Ridge Estates Winery, Ontario Wine Council, Vintners Quality Alliance and Niagara College Teaching Winery.