

Savour the flavour of wines produced in York Region

AMANDA PERSICO
apersico@yrmg.com

Spend a nice crisp, fall day savouring the flavours of fruitful whites, full-bodied reds and award-winning ice wines produced from grapes grown close to home.

According to Wine Country Ontario, York Region is one of four emerging wine regions gaining notoriety among wine connoisseurs.

York's wineries are located within the Oak Ridges Moraine and Holland Marsh areas, where the makeup of the soil and climate mirrors that of Ontario's premier wine destination, Niagara-on-the-Lake.

"People always say, 'I never could imagine growing grapes in Stouffville,'" said Antonio Piro of Galucci Winery, who grows about three different varieties of grapes on 10 acres off Ninth Line.

"I tell them, 'Come and see the grapes growing.' You don't have to drive an hour a half to taste fine wine. It's here."

The winery is surrounded by grapevines and sits in a valley part of the Oak Ridges Moraine. The breeze from Musselman's Lake lends to vibrant flavours, Piro said.

The family owned and operated winery officially opened in 2014 showcasing the 2013 Don Paulo special red, a blend of merlot, cabernet franc and cabernet sauvignon - the wineries oldest vintage. Now the winery has about a dozen different wines for every taste.

Just a few minutes down the road is Willow Springs Winery, the first winery in York Region to receive a VQA Ontario certificate and the first to produce VQA wines in the Oak Ridges Moraine.

The cool climate and lime stone found in the soil creates light-bodied wines with a delicate aroma, said Michael Cheung of Willow Springs Winery.

"It's very similar to Niagara-on-the-Lake," he said

Willow springs, founded in the late 1950s, grows

four different varieties of grapes on 11 acres and produces about two dozen wine selections, including a number of award-winning red and white ice wines all using traditional techniques.

The third winery with roots in the Oak Ridges Moraine is home to a different type of vintage - apple and fruit wines.

"Every wine is completely different than anything you've ever had," said winery owner Matt Passafiume.

Applewood Farm Winery has been making wine from the fruits harvested on the family owned orchard since 1999.

Fruit wines are made using the same method as wine made from grapes, using the clear fruit juices for whites and whole fruits for reds, Passafiume said.

"We're not a grape farm,"



Mike Barrett/Metroland



Steve Somerville/Metroland

(Clockwise) Mac Meade is the best-selling wine at Whitchurch-Stouffville's Applewood Farm Winery. The Holland Marsh Wineries wine store manager Jill Jambor shows off their showroom. Matt Passafiume is the owner Applewood Farm Winery in Stouffville.

he said. "So, we make wine from what we have. At the start, there were believers."

There are more than a dozen different varieties of wine made from strawberries, apples, blue berries and even honey as well as a collection of hard apple and ice ciders.

Applewood released an Apple Jack this year; an iced apple cider meets bourbon whisky flavours.

Every wine has the Pas-

safiume fingerprint, from growing and harvesting the fruit to naming the wines - popular wines Elora, Eden, Evan and Ella were named after Passafiume's children.

In the north, Holland Marsh Wineries is nestled in one of the richest agricultural areas in the province and specializing in small batch reds, whites and ice wines.

Situated on the edge of the marsh brings a citrus



aroma and food-friendly and fruit-forward wines, similar to those found in Eastern Europe, said winery spokesperson Jill Jambor.

The marshlands are a combination of muck soil and sand, with plenty of organic material such as decomposed tree roots, which helps retain and release heat from the sun helping ripen the grapes.

The winery has about 22 acres and produces about a dozen different wines with a handcrafted approach.

The grapes are grown, destemmed, fermented, aged, bottled and labelled by hand, Jambor said.

Many visitors are surprised to see a vineyard this far north, she added.

The winery uses a wind machine that forces warmer air down to the vines during the winter and spring months.

While its grapes are not grown in York Region, Magnotta Winery's Vaughan location is a must see destination.

The flagship winery fea-

tures state-of-the-art wine making and bottling facilities as well as a microbrewery, distillery and underground barrel cellar.

Magnotta produces more than 180 world class wines from reds, whites, rosés, sparkling, dessert, premium VQA vintages and ice wines.

The Vaughan boutique also houses a large collection of Canadian artwork as well as pieces by the Group of Seven that serve as inspiration for the winery's labels.