

CHÂTEAU DES CHARMES 2006 HARVEST REPORT

TUESDAY, JANUARY 16, 2007

Grape Variety:

Vineyard Block:

Sub-appellation: Weather Conditions: Mainly cloudy, still, -7°C

Brix:

ph:

Total Acidity:

Field Notes:

Happy New Year! Yes, winter has arrived in Niagara Wine Country. That's one thing we can generally take for granted --- winter will arrive. It's just a question of when and for how long. This is why Niagara is the world leader in Icewine production.

Today at 1:30 pm the temperature at the St. David's Bench Vineyard is hovering at -7°C and at the Creek Road Vineyard it is -6°C. The forecast is for the ambient air temperature to drop to about -12°C, perfect Icewine weather! The regulations stipulate that the grapes must be frozen on the vine and picked at temperatures of -8°C or colder. We prefer to wait until -10°C to be absolutely positive that the water inside each grape is completely frozen. We are regularly checking the temperatures throughout the day using an automated telephone system. We have three weather stations, on Paul Bosc Estate Vineyard, another on Creek Road Vineyard and the last on 7 and 7 Vineyard. They all transmit recorded ambient air temperature to a central station. We simply call our assigned phone number and hear up-to-the-minute readings. Wind chill factors cannot be used in determining the temperature requirement.

While we are awaiting Mother Nature, we have an opportunity to prepare for the long night ahead. Our crew of about 40 people have been put on stand-by anticipating we will need them some time later today. They are trying to get some sleep now because most Icewine picking is done at night. Our production team has assembled the picking boxes, checked the presses and tractors and other machinery to make sure all is in good working order. We have a spare bladder for our presses in case one ruptures during the pressing (image #1 below). The bladders are specially made in France so if we need one ASAP, we would have to wait a week or more. When you are in the middle of Icewine harvest an hour makes a big difference let alone a week. Another aspect of the regulations regarding Icewine production is not only must the grapes be picked at -8°C or colder but also they must be pressed at these temperatures. The window of opportunity is quite narrow so the entire team must be ready to roll when Paul Sr. gives the OK. Image #2 below shows bunches from our first crop of Cabernet Franc Icewine. There are five rows west of the Chateau. I took this image #3 from the west side of the vineyard row. I was amazed when I looked behind me at the east side of the adjacent row --- it's completely covered in a thick sheet of ice (image #4). This clearly shows the direction of the freezing rainfall from yesterday.



#1: Spare bladder hanging between tanks, just in case!



#2: Cabernet Franc on St. David's Bench Vineyard awaiting harvest.



#3: Row of Cabernet Franc, west side story.



#4: Row of Cabernet Franc, east side story.

This quick freeze has also provided us the opportunity to continue the rehab work on Creek Road Vineyard. So far this fall and winter, the ground has been too wet and mucky to dig the trenches and lay the under drainage. The cold weather has firmed up the ground enough to get this work done. Interestingly, the ground is still not completely frozen, as you would expect at this time of year. You can see in image # 5 below, there is still some water about a foot below the surface. In case you were wondering, the rows are running north south and spaced 2.4 metres apart with the under drainage buried three feet below the surface, 30 cm east of each vineyard row.



Working in the trenches.

As I was driving around the vineyards today I couldn't help but notice the beauty in the layers of ice on all the trees, vines and other branches. While the ice is a definite hazard on roadways, tree branches and hydro lines, there is a moment when the sun peeks from behind a cloud and the branches look like filaments of crystal. My pictures don't do Mother Nature justice.



Vines on St. David's Bench Vineyard.





Winter wonderland!



Ice winery.

Please email me directly if you have any suggestions or questions. Watch for many more postings as the harvest continues.

Michèle Bosc

michele@chateaudescharmes.com