

College students get right to work

Lynn Ogryzlo, Just a Sip

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It's the start of a new school year and for the students of Niagara College's Winery and Viticulture program back to school starts off with one of the students' biggest tests ever -- harvest!

The Niagara College Winery and Viticulture program is a two-year diploma program where students learn winemaking, viticulture and sales and marketing, with a strong concentration on wine sensory evaluation.

While students in other programs look forward to easing into the school year, the 35 first-year wine students find themselves knee-deep in the preparatory stages of their first harvest or 'crush' as it is called in the industry.

Under the guidance of winemaking professor Terrance Van Rooyen, the students begin immediately by walking the vineyards evaluating its condition, readiness, ripeness and Brix (sugar) levels. They'll be involved in picking the grapes, processing them and learning first hand the intricacies of fermentation on the dozen or so different varieties that grow in the 40-acre Niagara College vineyard.

From Chardonnay to Cabernet Franc, Riesling to Merlot and Ontario's signature Baco Noir, each variety requires individual attention, different yeast strains and a different fermentation process. Quite the challenge for students with no prior classroom studies to prepare them.

It's a crash course in winemaking from the ground up. On top of their winemaking responsibilities, they're thrust into the role of promoting the program and its wines at the Niagara Wine Festival happening Sept. 19 to 28.

At the same time, the 28 second-year students are all working at the region's wineries. They have a year of study under their belts and are working in real-life harvest conditions, contributing their expertise wherever they can to the Niagara wine industry before they return to their second year of classroom studies.

Graduate students have gone off to fill roles in sales and distribution, sommeliers, viticulturalists, assistant winemakers and winemakers. They're finding jobs as close as in Niagara and as far as Australia.

The wines made in the program are of international calibre and the wall of awards in the on-site retail store confirms the quality. The retail store is strategically located at the entrance to the Niagara Culinary Institute restaurant demonstrating the delicious pairing of the region's food and wines. Who can resist this tasty return to school?

- Niagara College (Teaching Winery) 2007 Dean's List Chardonnay, VQA, \$27.95

Extraordinarily rich yet a bit restrained on the nose. This ripe and round Chardonnay turns more complex and sophisticated on the palate with a core of pear, nectarine, vanilla and toasted oak galore. Very creamy in texture with a rich, buttery aftertaste that's long and focused.

- Niagara College (Teaching Winery) 2007 Cabernet Sauvignon, VQA, \$18.95



Rich ripe and focused, this Niagara Cabernet Sauvignon shows layers of currant, plum and vanilla flavours with hints of pepper and bay leaf sneaking in on the long, supple finish. Fine-grained tannins.

- Niagara College (Teaching Winery) 2007 College Red, VQA, \$10.95

Lots of fun in this bottle of red. Shows a black colour and intense aromas of crushed berries and wet earth with a slight spiciness. Full-bodied and mouthwatering this young bodybuilder of a red wine has loads of fruit and gutsy tannins. It's a fantastic value.

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Lynn Ogryzlo is food and wine writer for Niagara this Week, Niagara Life Magazine, and author of Niagara Cooks, a farm to table cookbook.

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