

UNVEILING QUEBEC WINES

ROCHELLE LASH

Heat and love are two of the elements needed to grow wine anywhere, and particularly in Quebec. “The weather during the growing season of 2017 has been unpredictable and inconsistent,” said Yvan Quirion, the owner of Domaine St-Jacques, a vineyard south of Montreal. “So it is surprising, but it still could be a very good year for wine.” Quirion also is the president of the Association des Vignerons du Québec (Quebec Vintners Association), which represents about 80 wine growers who produce about 90 per cent of the yield — whites, reds, rosés, sparkling and ice wines, as well as aperitifs and liqueurs. “It’s true; passion drives us,” Quirion said. “But you also need a choice piece of land, a financial investment and favourable terroir — that elusive combination of soil, climate and environment.” Every minute of heat and sunshine matter, and the somewhat temperate microclimate of southern Quebec is agreeable — often compared to the weather in wine-rich areas of Burgundy, France, and New Zealand.



VINEYARD VARIETY — Montérégie embraces approximately 35 operations around the Richelieu River communities such as St-Hilaire, Rougement, St-Paul d’Abbotsford, Vaudreuil and St-Jacques-de-la-Mineur, where Quirion is situated. The Eastern Townships area is home to about 30 vineyards, part of the rich farmland around Magog, Dunham, Farnham and Sutton. And the countryside around Quebec City embraces several more. Former Albertans Carolyn and Brock Dagenais operate the newest vineyard in Quebec. They left their Edmonton law office and moved their four children to their dream home in Quebec to start a new life in viticulture and wine-making. “It’s a romantic story and an indescribably beautiful place,”

Carolyn said. “By planting something that will grow and mature, we are able to focus on the future for our family.” The Dagenais’ Vignoble La Belle Alliance in Shefford, adjacent to Lac Brome, opened to the public last month. The first wine for sale is a dry, low-acidity white blend of Frontenac Gris and Vidal, with a minerality that comes from Shefford’s rocky soil. Quebec’s wine industry is flourishing, but the current crop of vineyards is only the beginning. Quirion expects the scene to blossom over the next few years. “The demand for Quebec craft wine is booming,” he said, “and due to an increasingly warm climate, the geographical area suitable for wine cultivation is expanding.” Vineyards have popped up in Lanaudière, the Lower Laurentians and along the St. Lawrence River shore from Gatineau in the west to Kamouraska, heading east.

TEMPTING TASTINGS — Deeply rooted in Quebec’s terroir and history, vineyards offer remarkably different experiences. Vignoble La Bauge in Brigham has tastings, nibbles and, for children, an animal farm of yaks, llamas and deer roaming around large fenced fields. Domaine Côtes d’Ardoise in Dunham, the oldest vineyard in Quebec, made its debut in 1980, and now also is prized for its sculpture garden.

Vignoble Isle de Bacchus, a landmark of the pastoral island of Île d’Orléans outside of Quebec City, embodies the historic cachet of New France. Tastings are held in a 305-year-old farmhouse and, with seductive views of the St. Lawrence River, Bacchus is arguably the most picturesque vineyard in Quebec. Bacchus’s owners, Steve Boyer and Carole Primeau, took the plunge in 2017, buying the established Bacchus vineyard and fulfilling their dreams to be vintners. Bacchus takes terroir to a new level, flavouring some of its wines with other agri-products of Île d’Orléans, such as black currants and maple syrup. Véronique Hupin and Michael

Marler, owners of Vignoble Les Pervenches in Farnham, also have a noble goal. “Our signature is that our products are all organic and biodynamic,” Hupin said. “We want to have ‘terroir in a bottle,’ using only natural ingredients.” “We don’t simply wait for the harvest. Because we don’t use chemicals, we do intense work in the fields, removing weeds by hand and monitoring carefully for disease.” Visitors will find wines that are lighter and fruitier, from grapes such as Zweigelt and Pinot Noir for reds and, for whites, Seyval and Chardonnay, a wine that is rarely grown in Quebec.



Wine tastings are held in this 1712 farmhouse at Vignoble Isle de Bacchus, a landmark of the pastoral Île d’Orléans outside Quebec City. COURTESY OF VIGNOBLE ISLE DE BACCHUS

A couple of routes to wine wisdom

Still at the stage of red versus white, but want to learn more about wines? Here are a couple of roads you can take, either on your own or with a friend:

WINE 101 — The SAQ (Société des alcools du Québec), in conjunction with l’Institut de tourisme et d’hôtellerie du Québec (ITHQ), the inspirational tourism school on St-Denis St., runs several Wine and Food Pairing Workshops and Wine and Spirit Courses, including Wine 101/Vins 101. You’ll sharpen your wine vocabulary with terms like bouquet, tannins, decanting, barnyard and the classic three “C’s” of French oenology — cépage, cuvée and cru (grape varietal, blend/batch and classification). Wine 101 covers the art of interpreting wine labels, so you’ll be savvy at the wine store. You’ll taste and learn the subtleties of different grapes. And you’ll have a basic lesson in wine pairings, going above the basics of red with meat and white with fish. Wine 101 will be held in November in Montreal and Laval. Vins 101 (in French) runs on several dates, September to December, at many other venues. Three classes cost \$180; visit atelierssaq.com for more information.

HARVEST FESTIVAL — If learning about wine and cider is your goal, the annual Fête des Vendanges (Harvest Festival) Magog-Orford is a terrific place to sip and sample Quebec products. It’s an extravaganza of gastronomy and family fun, held in a giant tent on Pointe



This year’s Harvest Festival Magog-Orford takes place Sept. 2-4 and Sept. 9-10. PHOTO COURTESY OF FÊTE DES VENDANGES

Merry in Magog, on the shore of Lake Memphremagog. This year’s event will take place Sept. 2-4 and Sept. 9-10 and includes artisan displays, children’s activities, musical performances and demos by top chefs. Food producers will be out in force, with tastings and sales of gourmet treats such as duck, honey, maple products and herbs. Among new attractions: a virtual reality pavilion where people can experience a vineyard visit through sound and video. Among the exhibitors will be Domaine des Côtes d’Ardoise, Quebec’s oldest winery, founded in 1980; Vignoble Gagliano, owned by former politician Alfonso Gagliano and his family; and Vignoble de l’Orpailleur, marking its 35th anniversary. Among the cider producers at the festival will be Cidrerie La Pommerai du Suroît, Cidrerie du Minot and Domaine Cartier-Potelle.

For more info, visit fetedesvendages.com

Founded more than 25 years ago, Isle de Bacchus was the first vineyard in Île d’Orléans. A winner of many local, national and international distinctions, Isle de Bacchus produces more than 40,000 bottles each year.

Try our red, white, rosé, sweet, aperitif, or award-winning ice wine in our authentic French tasting cellar or on our lovely terrace.

Open all year round, our summer hours are from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. daily.

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