

FROM THE CELLAR... PALATINE HILLS ESTATE WINERY



YOU HAVE TO VISIT OUR WINERY BECAUSE...

“You have to visit the winery for the wines and for the people. It’s a hidden gem.” – Jeff Innes, Winemaker

FIRST IMPRESSIONS

August 2nd, 2016

At first glance, Palatine Hills Estate Winery appears somewhat modest and understated, in other words, a working winery. What you see is what you get. Its unpretentiousness forms part of its charm and appeal. The welcoming, inviting staff hint at the winery’s potential.

THE LAY OF THE LAND

Winemaking at Palatine Hills traces back over 40 years, though grape growing extends even further in history. The owner, John Neufeld, Sr., prides himself on combining a respect for history, including links to the Battle of 1812, and innovation, such as being among the first in the region to produce icewine.

Palatine Hills produces the equivalent of over 100,000 cases of wine per year, though only 35,000-40,000 cases remain under the Palatine Hills label. Most of the wine is sold in bulk to wineries across the province, demonstrating the respect other wineries have for Palatine Hills’ grape-growing and wine-producing abilities.

WINEMAKING PHILOSOPHY

Winemaker Jeff Innes has over 20 years of experience in the business. He endeavours to produce crisp, clean, and enjoyable wines for everyone, from the novice wine drinker to the more sophisticated wine connoisseur.



*The top of Palatine Hills’ rosé (above) and
a look down its vineyard (bottom).*



*Palatine Hill's winemaker, Jeff Innes,
with his barrels.*

ONE-ON-ONE WITH JEFF INNES, WINEMAKER AT PALATINE HILLS ESTATE WINERY

At the understated tasting bar, Jeff opened up about his wines, the winery, and the wine industry in his characteristically candid, humorous, and engaging way. His authentic, personable demeanour constitutes a definitive asset for Palatine Hills, something we witnessed when he spoke to a couple who happened to enjoy a tasting during our visit.

Q: What do you like most about wine?

A: It's fun (he says with a smile). It's so versatile. Wine can be sophisticated, but it can also be easy and light-hearted.

Q: Of all the wines you produce, which one is your favourite and why?

A: That's like picking your favourite child (laughs). It depends on the day. Today, it's the Meritage 2012, which we called 2.0 because I nailed it (more laughs). It surpasses what I envisioned for it. It's just one of those wines you pinch yourself knowing you made it.

Q: What is your ultimate favourite wine and why?

A: There's no year, but it's Robert Mondavi's Fumé Blanc. One reason is I've never had a bad bottle, going back to the early '90s. A close second would be Silver Oak Cabernet Sauvignon [because] we went to Lancaster, PA, and we went to this amazing dinner, and that was one of the bottles, and it was incredible.

Q: What's the best part of your job?

A: This! Tasting with people, when they taste a wine and like it.

Q: What's the worst part of your job?

A: Icewine (chuckles). No. When it's just not going right, like it's raining or the filter plugs up... But, the good *far* outweighs the bad.

Q: What is your most embarrassing wine moment?

A: I was doing a video with Angela Aiello at the Toronto Gourmet Food & Wine Show, and I bumped myself and the wine I was circling, a 1812 Merlot Cab, went all over my shirt. My stepson found it on YouTube...

Q: Tell us one thing about you or your winery that nobody else knows.

A: Honestly, I don't know... The winery. A lot of people don't know about us.

"In the end, do you like it? And, you have to be adventurous." – Jeff Innes

THE TASTING...

We tasted many great wines over the course of three enjoyable, informative hours. It started with the 2012 Neufeld Chardonnay, which is only produced in “good” years, and ended with the 2012 Riesling Icewine, a peachy-nutty icewine, with a high level of acidity to help balance the rich, sweet, chewy nectar.

In between, we tasted the:



Palatine Hill's barrels being renewed.

- 2015 Pinot Gris
- 2013 Lakeshore White, a blend of 50% Gewürztraminer, 30% Riesling, and 20% Sauvignon Blanc
- 2014 Sauvignon Blanc
- 2015 Sauvignon Blanc
- 2013 1812 Unoaked Chardonnay
- 2014 Pinot Gris
- 2014 Gewürztraminer
- 2015 Riesling (off-dry)
- 2013 Rosé, made from Gamay Noir grapes
- 2013 Lakeshore Red, a blend of 87% 2013 Merlot, 9% 2014 Maréchal Foch, and 4% 2014 Gamay Noir
- 2013 1812 Merlot Cabernet
- 2012 Cabernet-Merlot Estate
- 2012 Merlot Estate Neufeld Vineyard
- 2011 Cabernet Franc Neufeld
- 2012 Cabernet Sauvignon Neufeld
- 2012 Cabernet Franc Neufeld
- 2012 Meritage
- Meritage 2.0

Though difficult to choose a favourite, given the impressive range of wines we tasted, our top pick came as a surprise. Knowing we are not typically fans of Sauvignon Blanc (given the wine's characteristically sharp finish), kudos to Jeff for producing a Sauvignon Blanc we truly enjoyed.

The 2014 Sauvignon Blanc appeared pale gold in colour and smelled of citrus and grass. It tasted of citrus fruit and asparagus, and had a long, smooth (non-aggressive) finish.

We should note, however, that the peach-coloured 2015 Pinot Gris came a close second. Its orange and mandarin notes, combined with its enduring orange peel finish both intrigued and pleased us. It fit Jeff's winemaking philosophy perfectly.

FINAL NOTES

The winery has significant potential thanks to the many quality wines it produces. Its unpretentious and understated tasting room came alive with the warm, heartfelt welcome we received. We highly recommend you visit this hidden gem where you will surely find something to tease and please your palate.

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