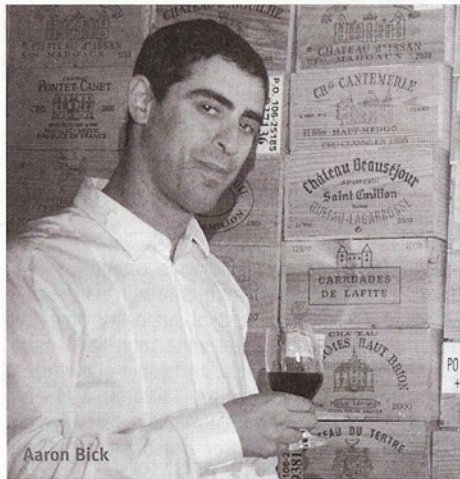


Storing Up Treasures

Where to buy and store wine in Toronto by Elizabeth Arlene



It used to be that there was only one place to go for all your wine needs—the Liquor Control Board of Ontario (LCBO). Now, thanks to Internet pioneer and WineOnline.ca Co-founder Aaron Bick's talent for finding affordable and collectible vintages, there's an alternative choice for wine buying available to the masses.

Wine Online | www.wineonline.ca goes out of its way to make customers comfortable before they click by providing a vast reservoir of helpful information—like flavour profiles and food pairings. Or you can go straight to what you know you like by choosing your own wine drinking profile. Connoisseurs can head straight to the rare, high-end, age-worthy wines and hostesses are guided toward hip, trendy, and seasonal wines. Going to a birthday party for an enviro guy? Wine Online also features organic and biodynamic wines that will make his green heart soar.

If archived profiles from in-house experts as well as reviews from *Wine Spectator*, *Wine Magazine*, and Robert Parker don't tell you everything you want to know before you buy a case, the site also includes a list of what restaurants around Toronto are serving the wine you're considering. So browse around online, find a few bottles that sound interesting, and then hit the town for a taste test.

Since the site sold its first case of wine in 2004, Wine Online has been bringing selection and value to the underserved Canadian wine enthusiasts in Ontario and Nova Scotia. This spring it's planning on expanding to Alberta and British Columbia. One of the factors that makes

the site so competitive is the pricing. The LCBO, as the only gig in the province since 1927, didn't have much reason to keep its prices low. And comparisons with similar products in the United States have suggested that their pricing was as much as 30-percent higher.

"Wine Online only offers products we believe in," says Bick, who has a knack for finding products that get people's attention—like the 2006 El Meson Rioja Blanco he's raving about right now. Wine Online focuses on boutique wines, value wines, naturally-produced wines, and wines for serious collections (most of their collection is not available at the LCBO). The government still has some control, so you'll have to order by the case.

Once you've started stocking up on those cases, you might be in the market for a place to keep it.

The Fine Wine Reserve | www.finewinreserve.com offers Torontans two kinds of storage—bulk storage for cases of wine and private wine lockers and cellars to which owners have unlimited access 24/7. That's right, even if you aren't rich and famous, the FWR will hook you up with your very own wine cellar.

The Fine Wine Reserve's purpose-built facility will keep your private collection safe in ideal conditions. The climate hovers around an ideal 13-degrees Celsius and the humidity is maintained between 60- and 65-percent with ultrasonic foggers to keep the corks on your vintage Boudreaux from drying out during Toronto's dry winters. Your bottles will also be protected from light, vibrations, and strong odors. And, in these perfect conditions, the magic of aging takes place in peace.

"The private cellars provide customers with a secure place where they can visit, admire, caress, and enjoy their wine collection," says Marc Russell, the President and Founder of The Fine Wine Reserve. There are some additional perks to professional cellaring, too, like an on-site tasting room (which can be reserved for special occasions) where collectors come to mingle, enjoy their wine, and entertain friends. The tasting room is party-ready with an entertainment system, a beautiful table made from 100+ year-old reclaimed hemlock, and a fully stocked kitchen.

"For people who collect wines, especially age worthy wines, there's so much anticipation and

expectation involved in every bottle. You look at this bottle that you remember buying in 1982 and you're uncorking so much history, there's a moment of suspense. When you pour the glass and smell, sip, and swirl the wine—it's a huge rush filled with expectation and anticipation," says Russell. "We love making that moment possible for our clients."

