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Spotlight: Wine and Cheese in Prince Edward County

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It's a bright morning in August and I'm sitting on a bus filled with bloggers and journalists headed towards **Prince Edward County**. It's all very reminiscent of one of many high school field trips, except on this one we don't have to sneak along our own alcohol for the ride. As part of its goLOCAL campaign, the Liquor Control Board of Ontario (LCBO) is sending us to some of the area's preeminent **wineries** and artisanal **cheese producers**. It's all about promoting Ontario's terroir and cool-climate winemaking. Our first stop: Norman Hardie Winery.



(Norman Hardie vineyard; the man himself - Norman Hardie pouring one of his prized chardonnays)

Norman Hardie sits on an ideal, gently sloping hill of clay and limestone. When we first arrived, we were greeted by the winery's namesake himself, Mr. Norman Hardie. The master winemaker spent his formative years traveling throughout the old- and new-wine worlds and worked as a sommelier for the Four Seasons Hotel group, before settling in Ontario. The winery isn't a large affair - Hardie does almost all of the work himself - and as such only produces a few thousand bottles each year, many of which go to a number of key restaurants in Ontario and Quebec.



(Vineyard luncheon: Tomato, onion & garlic salad, vegetables grilled to perfection, all grown on the property, served alongside grilled beef from local Carrying Place butcher)

For our visit, Hardie uncorked an array of '08 Chardonnays, which included his Unfiltered County Chardonnay and Cuvee L Chardonnay. I can't say I'm a huge fan of these sorts of whites, but the County won me over. Reds are much more to my liking, and the Unfiltered 2008 Pinot Noir, along with a locally-sourced luncheon, made me very happy. Future patrons will be able to partake in pizzas and other traditional Neapolitan fare from a new limestone pizza oven, courtesy of Pizzeria Libretto.



Before we could all become fully inebriated, the bus whisked us away to our next stop: **Fifth Town Artisan Cheese Co.** Being a big fan of goat and sheep milk cheeses, my taste buds were excited. But before they could be sated, Founder and CEO Petra Cooper and Market Development Manager Andrew Laliberte took us on a tour of the facility. Prior to incorporating Fifth Town in Prince Edward County in 2002, Cooper worked as a publishing industry executive in Toronto. Now, Fifth Town is **Canada's greenest dairy** and the only one with LEED certification, which recognizes the site's sustainability, water efficiency, and indoor-environment quality, among other things.



After the tour, my taste buds were finally satisfied with a cheese tasting that is also offered to the public for a very affordable \$12. One of the many things I admire about Price Edward County is that activity prices are kept reasonably low so all communities can participate. The tasting including multiple soft and hard cheeses including varieties dubbed Lacy Grey, Lighthall Tomme, Fellowship, Goat Cheddar, and more.

One of my favorites was the Lighthall Tomme, which I learned goes well with Huff South Bay Chardonnay - we were supplied with a handy cheese and wine pairing guide. One of the **best tips** I've ever learned on coupling cheese and wine came from Laliberte: **Pair hard cheeses with heavier and barrel-aged wines, and pair soft cheeses with lighter, fruitier wines** such as Rieslings and sparkling wines.



(Catherine Langlois of Sandbanks Estate Winery)

The final stop of our goLOCAL tour was the warm and inviting **Sandbanks Estate Winery**. Located just east of Wellington, the winery inspires relaxation with armchairs on the patio and weekly yoga classes on the front lawn.

The winery itself was started by Catherine Langlois in 2000. Prior to Sandbanks, she honed her knowledge of wine working in sales for Pelee Island Winery and has a hand in the vineyards of Burgundy. She graciously opened the entire bar to us when we arrived, so we could all taste what we preferred. Most of us steered towards her award winners. I started with the Rose and its delicious hints of raspberry, tangerine, and pink grapefruit. It would go very well with light summer dishes of chicken and fish. Next, I sampled the Baco Noir Reserve, another award winner with intense plum and wild cherry flavours. Lastly, the Riesling proved refreshing with its lime and mineral hints and the Algonquin chair I lounged in.



As we were getting ready to head back to Toronto, Andrew Mackenzie, co-owner of one of my favorite places in Picton, **Buddha Dog**, surprised us with bagged lunches of assorted **hotdogs, ginger ale, and cookies**. Delicious wines, cheese, and Buddha dogs all from Prince Edward County and all at reasonable prices. Eating local is definitely the way to go.

For more information on **goLOCAL**, you can call the LCBO Infoline at 1-800-ONT-LCBO (668-5226) or visit LCBO online

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