

Wine & Food

Top Restaurants For Canadian Wine Lovers

Pascale Le Draoulec 02.20.08, 6:00 PM ET

Which restaurant boasts the largest collection of Amarone wines in the world?

Here's a clue: It's not in Italy, or even New York.

It's an old-style Italian joint called [Via Allegro Ristorante](#), in a generic strip mall across from a Home Depot in western Toronto.

In Pictures: Top Restaurants For Canadian Wine-Lovers

Don't let the plebian locale fool you. Its wine list--which, at 5,000 selections, is one of largest in the world--has earned the prestigious Grand Award from *Wine Spectator* each year since 2003.

[Bistro a Champlain](#), about an hour outside of Montreal on the road to Mont Tremblant, easily boasts the world's largest collection of large-format bottles of Domaine de la Romanee-Conti. We're talking stacks of Methuselahs--six liter bottles--of what many consider to be Burgundy's pinnacle.

If you thought Canada's alcohol consumption was limited to ice wine and Molson Golden, think again.

Wine consumption is on the rise in Canada. In 2005, Canadians drained 396 million bottles, representing an increase of 23% over the 2001-2005 period. By 2010, wine consumption is expected to grow to 465 million bottles a year. Over 10 years, wine consumption will have increased by an average of 4.5% per year.

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And though "wine has not yet surpassed beer as the beverage of choice"--as it now has in the United States--"it's only a matter of time," says John Szabo, a wine consultant and master sommelier for the Toronto-based Center for Vine Affairs.

"The interest in wine has skyrocketed in the last few years," he says. "Everyone in Canada is taking a wine class and reading wine blogs."

Behind The Bar

Wine bars are cropping up everywhere, even in remote corners of Newfoundland, where at a spot called Atlantica, you can find a bottle of Fontaine-Gagnard Chassagne-Montrachet Les Vergers 2004 for \$143.

What has fueled the excitement over the grape?

In the case of Newfoundland and much of Eastern Canada, a sudden infusion of "ridiculous amounts" of oil money has created a huge demand for luxury goods such as wine, says Szabo.

What's more, Canada has seen its own burgeoning wine industry explode in the last 10 years. Its two wine-producing regions, the [Niagara Peninsula](#) in Ontario and the [Okanagan Valley](#) in British Columbia, are turning out award-winning pinot noirs and Rieslings.

"Wine appreciation is directly related to the development of a local wine industry," says Natalie MacLean, blogger for [natdecants.com](#) and author of *Red, White and Drunk All Over*.

Having hometown celebrities like [Wayne Gretzky](#) and [Dan Aykroyd](#) get in on the winemaking act has also brought more exposure to Canada's wine regions, and to wine appreciation in general.

"I'm quite proud of Canadian wines," says MacLean. "But the challenge in talking about them is that a lot of people haven't tried them."

To where would you travel for wine and food? Weigh in. Add your thoughts in the Reader Comments section below.

This is because of Canada's relatively small production and archaic laws limiting intra-provincial transport.

"So much of the great wine that's made here stays here," says MacLean.

Szabo agrees. "To get the good stuff, you really have to go to the source," he says. "It's easier--and cheaper--for me to get a wine from Chile than it is to get one from B.C."

Dishing The List

We asked MacLean, Szabo and other Canadian sommeliers to come up

with a list of top restaurants across the country to drink wine--both Canadian and international.

For a taste of the best wine British Columbia has to offer, they picked [Sooke Harbour House](#), which boasts the largest collection of wines from the province, including the largest ice wine selection in the world (300 bottles).

For wines from Ontario producers, [Treadwell Farm to Table Cuisine](#) in Port Dalhousie was the clear choice. Sommelier James Treadwell, who owns the restaurant with his father, award-winning chef Stephen Treadwell, has compiled a stellar list showcasing the pride of local producers alongside an intelligent selection of international labels.

To experience the best Nova Scotia has to offer, wine writer and sommelier Craig Pinhey recommends [Five Fishermen](#), which lists Nova Scotia wines by their sub-appellations.