

## Author toasts wine visionaries

**November 3, 2009**

For every bottle of Niagara wine Linda Bramble savoured over the past 30 years, she knew there was a human story behind it.

Tales of struggle, vision and success. People who transformed Niagara's wine industry from a joke into a world-renowned collective.

Her problem was choosing just nine people to spotlight in her new book, *Niagara's Wine Visionaries* (Lorimar, \$29.95).

"Over the years I've seen so many great people behind the scenes," says Bramble, who teaches wine appreciation at Brock University's wine institute. "I selected nine ... for the decades I felt they played an influential and innovative role."

Among the profiles in the 224- page book are Linda Franklin, who guided the Wine Council of Ontario through 13 crucial years, and Paul Speck, whose Henry of Pelham set the standard for how a small family owned winery could compete against the larger corporations.

It's no surprise to see Inniskillin co-founder Donald Ziraldo comprise a large chapter -he's one of the local industry's pivotal figures. Along with partner Karl Kaiser, Ziraldo dragged Niagara wine out of the dark ages in the mid 1970s by instilling Italian quality in the product, and convincing the stingy LCBO to grant a new winery licence after a five-decade moratorium.

Ziraldo and Kaiser were also crucial in the creation of Niagara icewine, introducing the product that put Niagara on the world stage.

"It was (Ziraldo's) vision to say, 'Hey listen, why not? Let's just go for this,'" says Bramble. "Everybody (I interviewed) agreed, he is the father of the modern industry and deserves that pioneering accolade."

One of the more profound chapters finds Bramble visiting John Ghetti, the fieldman for T. G. Bright and Company -at one time the largest winery in Canada. Bramble was critical of Bright's table wine over the years and was nervous about Ghetti's reaction. After some lighthearted ribbing, he poured her a glass of 1965 President's Port and she was stunned how good it was.

"I ate my words. I said, 'John, I do stand corrected.' The table wines were dreadful, even he had to agree with that, but there was a reason the Canadian consumer bought the ports and sherries. Because they were palatable."

Ghetti died a few months before the book was published. It hammered home why Bramble did the book -- to hear Niagara's wine visionaries tell their stories while they still can.

"They're getting older, and we've got to get those down. I felt that was imperative."

While the personal stories are impressive, the book also tackles the government red tape and squabbling between vintners and grape growers, which continues to cramp the industry. It leaves the impression Niagara's potential as a wine district has barely been tapped.

"We have 54,000 acres of arable land, and we're only using a fifth of that," says Bramble. "Not that growth is the be

all and end all, but we have lots of room for expansion. It's a matter of dealing with these systemic issues or else we're just going to stand still for a while."

A book launch for "Niagara's Wine Visionaries" will be held today at Inniskillin from 4:30 to 6:30 p. m.

[jlw@nfreview.com](mailto:jlw@nfreview.com)