



A spin on the cider bandwagon

Ontario's cider industry an emerging force on the craft-booze scene

If you're not on the cider bandwagon yet you're really missing out on the next wave of "the crafts" hitting Ontario. With the beer and wine makers going strong, cider joins the ranks of what is becoming a craft-booze phenomenon.

Just like Wine Country Ontario and Ontario Craft Brewers associations representing members of those industries, the Craft Cider Association has popped up with more than 25 members and counting. As I began to ask around about cideries, people kept rattling off names of their favourites that still are not on the association's roster, so this cider thing is just getting started.

Whether you're already a part of the revolution or just discovering it, it's important to know the basics. I had email exchanges with representatives at four cideries in the province to get their take on what makes a good cider, what the best apples are and what drew them into the land of this



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particular fermented fruit.

Michael Kramer of KW Craft Cider reports that to make good cider you need "the best apples you can find ... selected for the sweetness and acidity you're looking for in your finished cider."

Lindsay Puddicombe of Puddicombe Estate Farm in Niagara speaks about "that perfect balance of acidity, sweetness and slight bitterness." She breaks apples down into four categories: bittersweets, bitter-sharps, sharps and sweets.

Antonella Presta, cider-maker at Sunnybrook (makers of Ironwood Cider), gets downright technical in her best-for-cider

assessment: "In my opinion, a good cider has bright apple aromas and flavour, nice balance of sweetness and tartness, carries some body, and can be slightly or moderately effervescent to carry those qualities to your nose and palate."

James McIntosh of Duxbury Cider Company in Meaford echoes the sentiment of all three: sugar, acids and aromatics. But he goes on to say that Ontario was short-sighted about cider apples during a certain period in our history: "In North America we have the unfortunate reality that a lot of apples required to create a good cider are long gone due to the effects of Prohibition."

Presta dives a little deeper into the storytelling of the lost apples of Ontario and what they mean to cider makers today. "Traditionally cider apples have names most people have never heard of, and are not suitable for eating, as they are aggressively high in tannins and/or acid, which makes

them unpalatable. They arguably make the best ciders.

"Unfortunately most of the cider apple trees that were commonly grown here amongst settlers were pulled out during Prohibition ... but with the recent surge of cider popularity, many growers are replanting them in orchards across North America."

So what apples are being used in Ontario for this cider revolution? Well, there's Northern Spy, MacIntosh, Ida Red and Golden Russet to name a handful of the most popular that you might have heard of, but you'll also find Jonagolds, Gala, Fuji, Cortland, Golden and Red Delicious, Pink Lady, Braeburn and plenty of others.

KW Craft Cider's Kramer claims the king of the cider apple in Ontario is the Golden Russet, while in Europe it is the Kingston Black.

As for what drew these people into the cider business, it was either the need to find a place for their unwanted crop (seconds) as in the case of Puddicombe; a visit to one of the cider capitals of the world (Normandy) for McIntosh; or a deep desire to open up minds and promote a new product to win over the hearts, minds and palates of Ontarians (Kramer of KW and Richard Liu, owner of Sunnybrook).

Most, if not all, of these experts recommend drinking cider from a glass for best enjoyment of their product. And drink it neat – no ice. "Though if it's a hot, hot day I'll turn a blind eye to ice," says McIntosh.

Ice or no ice, I suggest avoiding anything that has the word "cooler" or a list of ingredients on the label. Everyone should drink what gives them pleasure, but things called "Apple Ales" or "Apple Beverages" are not real cider.

Cider is made from apples, plain and simple, just like wine is made from grapes and nothing more.

To learn more about the growing craft cider industry, visit ontariocraftcider.com.

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