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WINE: Calamus Estate Winery has an often missing ingredient

Country charm is hard to find

On a wine tour through Niagara these days it feels as though I'm in Napa Valley, bulked up with audacious wineries on manicured lawns. These American-looking joints seem to be popping up everywhere. Little of Niagara's once rustic charm is visible.



The Sophisticated Wino
SHARI DARLING

Except when you visit Calamus Estate Winery, a 20-acre vineyard in Jordan. This is a true Niagara gem nestled in the back area of Jordan. This winery may be off the beaten path, but it's definitely worth visiting.

Calamus is housed in an 1800s-era heritage barn, possessing that rustic charm of the young wineries I used to visit in Niagara in the early '90s. A scenic, 20-acre ravine behind the winery makes this an ideal location for outdoor functions. The winery also incorporates a Chronos Observatory. Inside the observatory is a deep space telescope capable of viewing interstellar bodies in significant detail.

Calamus is Latin and means "arrow." When owners Derek Saunders and Pat Latin prepared the land for vines, they discovered fragments of rock used by

First Nation inhabitants. The aborigines used these fragments of indigenous rock, called "chert", to make stone tools and arrowheads. This was the inspiration of their winery name.

Calamus produces a line of interesting and well-priced wines. They are available through Firehouse Gourmet, located at 73 Hunter St. E. in East City. You can sample the products at Firehouse before placing an order. Your order is sent to the winery for processing and the wine is delivered to Firehouse Gourmet for pick up. (Firehouse does not actually sell the wine.)

The Calamus 2008 House White, \$12.20, is vinified from the grape varieties of Riesling, Vidal and Chardonnay. It's an interesting wine, showing Riesling on the front end and Chardonnay aromas on the back. The medium-bodied palate is well balanced with good acidity, a hint of sweetness and citrus notes. Due to its lovely balance, this wine is ideal for serving to seniors who tend to refrain from acidic wines. That makes it great for summer family functions. Salads with a rice-based vinaigrette would shine when served alongside this white.

I am a huge fan of semi-sweet Rieslings because I love hot and spicy food. Wines with sweetness clean the palate. There is an art to vinifying wines with sweetness. The winemaker must be able to integrate the acidity

and sweetness so that these taste sensations dance seamlessly on the palate. They do the tango, so to speak. Poorly made off-dry wines occur as cloying.

Calamus 2008 semi-sweet Riesling is worth its \$16.20 price tag. The nose sings of tangerine and honey. The full-bodied palate is lush with excellent acidity to balance the sweetness. This one is definitely doin' the tango! Red grapefruit flavours come through in the taste, followed by a very long, strong finish. This is the perfect wine to pair with a carried chicken and apple sandwich on toasted focaccia. It is also an ideal wine for summer weddings and wedding and baby showers.

Calamus 2008 unoaked Chardonnay, \$14.20, has a nose of ripe Bartlett pears. On the mouth you'll also find pear character with creamy texture and a medium finish. I'm personally not a big drinker of unoaked Chardonnays. I like my Chards to taste like the wood on trees. This wine is, however, stylistically strong.

I enjoyed their 2008 Calvin's Cabernet, \$14.20. This is a meritage blend, made from 85% Cabernet Franc, 10% Merlot and 5% Cabernet Sauvignon. There's lots of spiciness on the nose, followed by a medium-bodied palate with good structure, velvety texture and balance. Pair this wine with barbecued ribs coated in Kawartha Critter BBQ Sauce, also available at Firehouse Gourmet. This is

my favourite barbecue sauce as it is thick and dense, not runny.

The 2007 Cabernet Franc, \$18.20, will be a big seller as the wine has an intense nose of blackberries and tobacco. On the mouth you'll find full body with intense ripe blackberry fruit, velvety texture and earthiness on the finish. Pair this wine with barbecued chicken or burgers. Firehouse Gourmet sells a rosemary rush spice rub, \$7.25, that would be perfect for lamb done in the oven or on the barbecue.

For gourmet dining and special occasions there is the Calamus 2007 Meritage, \$30. This blend is made up of 50% Cabernet Sauvignon, 35% Cabernet Franc and 15% Merlot. This is a Bordeaux-style wine with finesse and grace, offering a nose of sweet blackberries. On the palate you'll find cedar and blackberry notes with great structure, complexity and a long lasting finish. This wine deserves a top quality steak accompanied by a blue cheese pate. Firehouse Gourmet sells a dried blend called Garlic Blue Cheese Seasoning, \$9.95. Mix this seasoning with mayonnaise and serve with the steak.

Cottagers can order the Calamus Wines through Fresh Country at Fowlers Corners.

Shari Darling owns The Moan Factory (www.themoanfactory.com), producing artisan foods for the wine lover.