

Uncork a lively girls' night out

WINE

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While there is no substitute for reputation in the world of wine buying, marketing can play a major role in getting consumers to at least try your product for the first time. If the wine's good, they'll come back for more.

Marketing has never been a strong suit for wineries in Ontario. Small production and even smaller budgets prevent dollars being diverted from the actual product into the intangible world of glitzy labels and clever advertising campaigns.

Two companies in Ontario got my attention recently with a couple of very different strategies.

Niagara's Hillebrand Artist Series is a classy brand featuring the original contemporary art work of Ontario artists. Each wine in the series highlights a different artists' painting. And while the labels look fantastic, wine-maker Darryl Brooker is producing some of the best affordable whites in Niagara.

Not to be out done, Colio Estate Wines from Lake Erie North Shore, has unveiled its "Girls' Night Out" trio of wines targeted, obviously, at women who want wines that "speak exclusively" to them. The labels are all white with a different-coloured party dress on each varietal or blend.

Both VQA brands are bottled in screwcap, which is quickly becoming the dominant choice for wineries.

But, of course, clever marketing can only get you so far. To keep them coming back the wine has to be good. And with both these brands, the wines match the marketing. Here's what I liked.

Hillebrand Artist Series Riesling 2007 (\$11 LCBO and, like all Hillebrand wines, at Vineyards Estate Wines retail stores) — Aromas of apple and lemon-citrus in this wonderful riesling. Brooker has coaxed delicious apple flavours out of this nice, dry, refreshing and citrus-packed wine.

Hillebrand Artist Series Gamey Rose 2007 (\$12 at Vineyards Estates Wines) — Wonderful cherry and strawberry aromas in this personable rose. It's a red fruit bomb on the palate with explosive cherry, strawberry and red currants to go with a light texture. Serve cold.

— **Colio Estate Girls' Night Out Chardonnay 2007** (\$13 LCBO) — Peach, orange and citrus nose. It's a pleasing chard on the palate with creamy peach notes to go with lemon and lime flavours all leading to a clean finish.

Colio Estate Girls' Night Out Merlot-Chardonnay 2007 (\$13 LCBO) — An odd varietal mix for a rose-style wine but it works. Rhubarb and the full complement of red fruit aromas. It's light and refreshing on the palate with raspberry and cherry flavours. It's just plain delicious.

Enjoy!

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