

to the Ministry of Natural Resources and officials descended on the vineyard and tore off the netting.

Walter Strehn not only lost \$25,000 worth of Riesling and Vidal grapes to the rapacious flock but was charged with trapping birds out of season and using the grapes as bait! Happily, the case was dropped and, with the grapes that were left, Walter managed to make 50 cases of Vidal Icewine 1983, which he labelled in the German designation as Beerenauslese Eiswein. He sold the wine to the LCBO, which set a retail price of \$12.50 a half-bottle. The public was not familiar with this wine style and bought very little, so the LCBO returned the majority of bottles and demanded a refund. Pelee Island found a more willing market in the US, where the product sold for \$100 a bottle. The LCBO then begged to have it back!

Icewine is made by allowing the grapes to hang on the vine until they freeze naturally. Since the juice is rich in sugar, the temperature has to drop well below freezing and stay there long enough for the bunches to be harvested and pressed while still in their frozen state. A thaw will cause the ice to melt and the water will dilute the sugars and acids.

A grape berry contains roughly 80 per cent water and, if the berries are frozen solid and then pressed, the water will remain in the skins as shards of ice, allowing small amounts of concentrated juice to flow out. All elements of the juice are concentrated including flavour, sugar and acidity. The juice from Icewine grapes is about one-fifth the amount you would normally get if you pressed unfrozen grapes. To put it another way, a vine will normally produce sufficient grapes to make a bottle of wine; but frozen grapes would produce only one glass of Icewine.

The harvesting of Icewine is truly an act of masochism for the pickers because it's usually done in the early-morning hours before the sun is up. Fermenting the sugar-rich juice can take months, and special hard-working yeast is required. The final alcohol level can vary from 9 percent to 13 percent, depending on how much residual sugar is left in the wine.

Canadian Icewine first gained global attention at Vinexpo in 1991. Donald Zirardo, co-founder of Inniskillin Wines, entered his Vidal Icewine 1989 in the biennial wine fair's Challenge Internationale du Vin competition in Bordeaux. His wine won the Grand Prix d'honneur, one of only 19 such awards for the 4,100 wines submitted by 40 countries. The effect was immediate. Winemakers in Ontario and BC began to set aside portions of their vineyards for netting to produce Icewine; and overseas buyers began to take an interest in the product. Canadian Icewine became an instant hit, selling for up to \$250 a half-bottle in Japan, Taiwan and Hong Kong. 🍷

Tony Aspler has written 17 books on wine. This column is an excerpt from his latest, *Canadian Wineries*.

Charity Trips: Leave Something Behind

A few ways to do good by the world while enjoying its splendours



LIKE NO OTHER time of the year, January brings on the do-good feelings. After the indulgence of the holiday break, there's no better time to remember those less fortunate. These travel options offer the courtroom escape you've earned while giving you the chance to help in places that could use a hand up.

> **Epic Road (Africa)** – If current African elephant poaching rates continue, experts estimate the majestic creatures will be extinct within 15 years. What if your vacation could do something to stop that? Becoming a sponsor through an Epic Road trip to Kenya provides the David Sheldrick Wildlife Trust, a prominent elephant and rhino orphanage, with the funds they need to help save these animals. Your trip includes private time with baby elephants being cared for until they are well enough to go back to the wild as well as game drives during the great migration. www.epicroad.com

> **Me to We (India)** – This is the social enterprise sister to the popular Canadian-based charity Free the Children. On the Family Volunteer Adventure to India, days are a mix of tourist activities and charitable acts. The benefits flow both ways. Your family is immersed in rural Indian life, visiting local markets, learning to cook and helping locals at the same time. Well-appointed private cottages with all the modern conveniences, along with visits to key sights in Delhi and Udaipur, mean you can stay healthy and helpful. www.metowe.com

> **G Adventures (Cambodia and Laos)** – This experience combines visits to the impressive Angkor temples and UNESCO World Heritage town of Luang Prabang with volunteer in Southeast Asia. Most of your nights will be in hotels and guest houses, but you'll spend one on a sleeper train and another in a family home. The 12-night trip is only one of many volunteer opportunities offered by the company. www.gadventures.com 🍷

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