

red wine is produced from one of the new American hybrids, called St. Croix, grown in his vineyard.

“What I love is that St. Croix is fantastic in the vineyard. We were under the impression that this variety was very resistant to winter injury. But it is more vulnerable than we expected. It can handle minus 25 but not minus 30-degree temperatures. But it is a dependable crop and makes a beautiful wine by itself. I produce 100 per cent St. Croix. I put it into French oak to provide some more tannin. Due to our cool climate the grapes don't produce enough natural tannin.”

Le Royer says that St. Croix is particular about its conditions – more so than people first thought. For example, he believes this American hybrid produces better wines in a sandy soil. So, he says, the experimentation continues.

By mid afternoon we were back on the road, heading for Chapelle Ste. Agnès. We continued on winding roads, heading down steep hillsides, along valley floors and up again into the Sutton Mountains. We finally arrived at a property in the Missisquoi Valley near Glen Sutton, just north of the Quebec-Vermont border. Vignoble Chapelle Ste. Agnès, with its stonewall surroundings, looked impressive.

Co-owner John, son of Henrietta Antony, greeted us. Looking lean and clean and possessing the stature of European royalty, John shook our hands, graciously welcoming us to his home.

**I now understood** why Larry had insisted on my participation in this road trip. Vignoble Chapelle Ste. Agnès was... well, magical. The amphitheatre style vineyard of vinifera and French hybrids stepped down into a valley. On the valley floor lay a small, man-made lake reflecting the magnificent forests of the Sutton Mountain range.

“The work on the vineyard started in 1997 and the first plantings (Riesling) started in 1998,” Antony said, guiding us through the vineyard. “The vineyard experiences some advantages. We have the altitude. We are able to avoid frosts in May and October. This allows us to extend our growing season by a precious couple of weeks.”

Single stakes support the vines rather than trellises, and so I asked Antony about this system.

“We disbanded the trellises on the advice of our pickers who prefer to work with the stakes,” he explained. “We also removed the laterals, and 60 per cent of the grape clusters, to improve the quality of the remaining grapes.”

Thousands of tons of boulders, rocks and stones are other tools in the vineyard's arsenal. The rocks are strategically placed throughout the property, emitting heat. It helps in creating a microclimate around the vines during the severely cold winters.

Chapelle Ste. Agnès focuses on the production of Late Harvest and Icewine, which are highly aromatic. Antony says that it is not difficult to produce quality Late Harvest or Icewine. It is just expensive, due to the cost of the winter protection methods.

“Our vineyard consultant/winemaker, Christian Barthomeuf, mentioned the idea of wrapping geocloth around the vines and stake, and then tightening it with a type of ‘tough tie’ – one near the top and the other near the bottom. Part of the strip of geocloth is folded to give extra protection to the bottom of the vine.”

John's fairy-tale home sits atop the hill, overlooking the sloping vineyard. There is also a masterful 12th century stone chapel recreated on the property. The walls were erected by Brittany's Master Mason, Michel Dodier; the framework by Master Carpenter Thierry Pautard. Marc Guillemjoun, Master Slate Worker, built the magnificent slate roof. Inside, the chapel is filled with religious antique paraphernalia collected by mother Henrietta Antony, an antique dealer who started the winery with her son.

The Chapelle Ste. Agnès' first bottling took place not too long ago, in July 2003. It included the 2001 Vidal Icewine, the 2001 Late Harvest Geisenheim and 2002 Gewürztraminer and 2002 Vidal.

Unfortunately for the time being, John Antony plans to sell most of their wines on the premises, through private tours. The winery, a jewel in the Eastern Townships, is not open to the public. I'm glad I got to see it. **T**

## Tasting Notes

### >> Vignoble Le Royer St-Pierre Reserve Givre Noir 2002

Red brick in colour with a forward nose offering ripe berries with hints of leather in the background. Medium-bodied, the palate has cranberry flavours with good acidity and soft tannins. An excellent red for spicy, tomato sauce pasta.

### >> Vignoble Le Royer St-Pierre Le Lambertois 1998

Deep ruby red, with forward, lush blackberries on the nose. Full-bodied with good structure, sour cherries and longevity. Another red with enough acidity and soft tannins to pair with spicy dishes.

### >> Chapelle Ste. Agnès Geisenheim Vendage Tardive 2001

A forward nose of fresh tangerines. The palate is big and lush with pink grapefruit and peach flavours. Ideal with something as simple as slices of fresh melon.

### >> Chapelle Ste. Agnès Vidal Icewine 2001

A light nose of peaches. Rich, dried fruit in the mouth make it an excellent partner for fruit-based desserts.

### >> Chapelle Ste. Agnès Gewürztraminer Icewine 2002

Deep golden in colour, this wine swirls with wonderful, rich, sweet caramel and apples in the bouquet. The palate has an excellent balance of richness, sweetness and good acidity that work well together. Fresh ripe, juicy peaches is the primary flavour.

### >> Chapelle Ste. Agnès Vidal Icewine 2002

Deep gold in colour, this Icewine is more concentrated than the 2001 vintage. It has a forward nose of toffee. The palate is rich and lush with ripe pineapple. An excellent balance of richness and acidity.