

# Top marks for local teaching winery

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GORDON STIMMELL

Niagara College Teaching Winery has been graduating outstanding young local winemakers since its inception in 2000. Its students' wines, made under the hands-on tutelage of much-lauded winemaker Jim Warren, have been outstanding, though often available only in tiny quantities.

The winds of change have swept the three campuses of this teaching college. Warren has stepped back from his multi-tasking lifestyle and Terence van Rooyen has taken the winemaking reins. Van Rooyen trained in South Africa (KWV) and made a real mark in Ontario at Stonechurch and Cilento wineries.

Now Ontario consumers finally get a chance to see what I've been raving about for years. Eight NCT wines hit Vintages shelves today and they are all worth a detour.

**The NCT 2005 Riesling (\$14.95, 89 out of 100)** is just peachy, a perfect afternoon sipping white. **NCT Unoaked 2005 Chardonnay (\$14.95, 90)** has amazing aromatics of hyacinth, lilacs and roses with sweet apple flavours.

If you like smoky oaky whites, **NCT Barrel Aged 2005 Chardonnay (\$18.95, 89)** dishes up caramel, butter fudge and toasty oak flavours. The peak white is **NCT Warren Classic 2005 Chardonnay (\$27.95, 91)**, which has roasted nuts and tar aromas with refined buttery apple, minerals and lemon oil complexity.

In reds, my top picks are the **NCT 2004 Merlot (\$18.95, 90)** with its pencil shavings, black cherry and plummy chocolate layered flavours, a mellow, firmly fleshed red. And **NCT 2004 Cabernet Sauvignon/ Merlot (\$18.95, 90)** shows richly extracted black cherry, cedar, cinnamon and chocolate accented flavours. Too bad the Pinot Noir is not also part of today's offering, because it's usually a charmer.

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