Canada

White

90 Fielding Estate Bottled Riesling 2012, Beamsville Bench ($18.95)

This Riesling is always one of the stars from Niagara's bench lands. Even though there is 30 g/l of sugar, the extremely high acid brings the wine down to the point of off-dryness on the palate. It is rich and mouth coating with all of its lime juice, blood orange, smokey minerals, white flowers and apricot. It will also age well over the next 3 to 4 years.

90 Hidden Bench Nuit Blanche White Meritage 2011, Beamsville Bench ($40)

Close to 90% Sauvignon Blanc and the rest Sémillon, mixed with some new oak, is the recipe for this wine. Apricot, honey, spice, lanolin, nectarine, toast, honey and vague tropical fruit nuances are all in play. The acidity makes for food friendliness, especially halibut, chicken in a cream sauce and even some mild curries.⬜ Drink from 2014 to 2019. (ES)

90 Hidden Bench Roman's Block Riesling 2011, Beamsville Bench ($32)

One word: minerals! This wine is the essence of crushed rock, with added nuances of lime zest, apple juice and stone fruit. No sweetish Riesling here. It is dry, slightly austere, and it is a perfect foil for some pork schnitzel or choucroute garni. From 2014 to 2019. (ES)

89 Rosewood Estates Select Series Sémillon 2012, Beamsville Bench 2012 ($18)

Sémillon excels with heat, and there was an abundance to be had in 2012. Clocking at 14.6% alcohol, this full bodied version is inundated with anise, lanolin, mango, quince, lychee, cream, white flowers and peach. There is a rich texture and elongated finish. From 2014 to 2018. (ES)

88 Rosewood Estates Select Series Süssreserve Riesling 2012, Beamsville Bench ($15)

This straightforward bench Riesling dishes out lime, crushed rock, bergamot, mineral, grapefruit and a slight hint of CO_2, at this early stage. The palate is tangy with just the right amount of residual sugar, taking the edge off. Crack it open tonight with sushi or a spiced ceviche. (ES)

88 Cattail Creek Barrel Fermented Chardonnay Small Lot Series 2010, Four Mile Creek ($24.95)

The aromas of pineapple, vanilla, spice, honey, fig and coconut explode out of the glass and onto the palate, where additional nuances of golden apple, cream and nutmeg join the party. The finish is lengthy with a nice underpinning of acidity providing lift. Drink now. (ES)

Red

92 Rosewood Estates Merlot Reserve Natural Fermentation 2010, Twenty Mile Bench ($36)

In a blind tasting, I would call this wine a top St-Émilion, what with all its chocolate covered coffee bean, plum, cinnamon, violets, anise, black cherry and smoke. Encapsulating the tannins is the fabulous richness. This beauty will reach its peak around 2016 and drink well until 2022. It is a steal for the price. (ES)

92 Hidden Bench La Brunate 2010, Beamsville Bench ($75)

This is only the 3rd time that La Brunate, Hidden Bench's flagship red wine, has been made as it is only produced in top vintages. That being said, this vintage is the best rendition to date as it was harvested at an insanely low yield of 1.5 tonnes/acre. This blend of 33% Merlot, 31% Cabernet Franc, 19% Cabernet Sauvignon and 17% Malbec saw a high percentile of new oak, creating a bouquet of plum, mint, graphite, smoke, blueberry, black cherry, dark cocoa, earth and anise. That being said, it is still remarkably youthful, and will require at least another 2 years of bottle aging and then should be consumed by 2022. If you are looking to give a top end red this holiday season, this wine should be at the top of your list. (ES)

90 Hidden Bench Terroir Caché Meritage 2010, Beamsville Bench ($38)

This little brother to La Brunate is no slouch in the quality department. Dark cherries, raspberries, figs, plums, smoke, vanilla, toast, violets, dark cocoa and a savoury blend of oregano and mint are all present in this medium bodied offering. The finale is long, and the tannins will allow 8 to 10 years of cellaring. (ES)

88 Rosewood Estates Pinot Noir 2011, Twenty Mile Bench ($20)

Even though 2011 was not any easy year for red wine production, Rosewood has done an excellent job capturing the elegance of the vintage. A combination of black cherry, plum, earth, cola, cinnamon and smoke flatters the senses. Tannins are suave, and there is terrific length. Drink over the next 3 years. (ES)

88 Rosewood Estates Merlot 2011, Twenty Mile Bench ($22)

This is a worthy successor to the superb 2010 and a minor success considering the vintage. Plum, anise, red flowers, root beer, spice and cocoa are built on a medium

bodied frame. The finish carries, and there is just a minute green/bitter edge which necessitates some form of roast/braised meat to take the edge off. It will age well over the next 4 to 5 years. (ES)

87 Cattail Creek Pinot Noir Estate Series 2010, Four Mile Creek ($18.95)

An explosion of black cherries, black raspberries, spice and vanilla inundates the senses. Texturally, it is polished with crisp acidity and a lingering, earthy/spicy finish. (ES)

86 Cattail Creek Cabernet Merlot Creek Series, Four Mile Creek ($14.95)

This solid value combination of 60% Cabernet Franc and 40% Merlot reveals a bouquet of cassis, raspberry, tobacco smoke and vanilla on a light to medium bodied frame. Tannins are soft, and there is admirable richness and persistency. Drink over the next 2 years. (ES)

USA

90 Treana Marsanne/Viognier 2010, Central Coast ($29.95)

This Rhone inspired blend of equal parts Marsanne and Viognier has been treated to some new oak. Peaches macerated in honey, pineapple, marmalade, fig, cream, spice, vanilla. It is full bodied with excellent length and more acidity than previous vintages due to the cooler growing conditions in 2010. Drink over the next 5 to 6 years. (ES)

87 Liberty School Chardonnay 2011, Central Coast ($18.95)

This is a relatively oaky Chard, but not overdone. The cream, vanilla and spice of the wood meet up with pineapple, banana, golden delicious apple and citrus of the grape. The palate is creamy, with lowish acidity and just a dash of residual sugar. This is a tailor made for parties, get-togethers or simply for sipping. (ES)