

TIME

Made in
Canada

Eco-Wine Designer

David Feldberg
[Stratus Vineyards]

By blending Planet-Friendly processes with furniture manufacturing, David Feldberg turned his Toronto design firm, Teknion, into a C\$500 million powerhouse. Now the Toronto-born businessman is distilling his firm's successful combination into his personal passion: wine. Feldberg has created a boutique winery along Niagara-on-the-Lake that earns comparisons to gems along Napa Valley. "I really didn't expect this much attention," says Feldberg, 47. The attention started in 2000 after Feldberg purchased 25 hectares and lured celebrated winemaker Jean-Laurent Groux from mammoth Hillebrand Estates, located nearby. Grapevine gossips speculated something audacious must have been in the works to have attracted Groux. Yes and no. Stratus winery, which Feldberg opened last spring, has

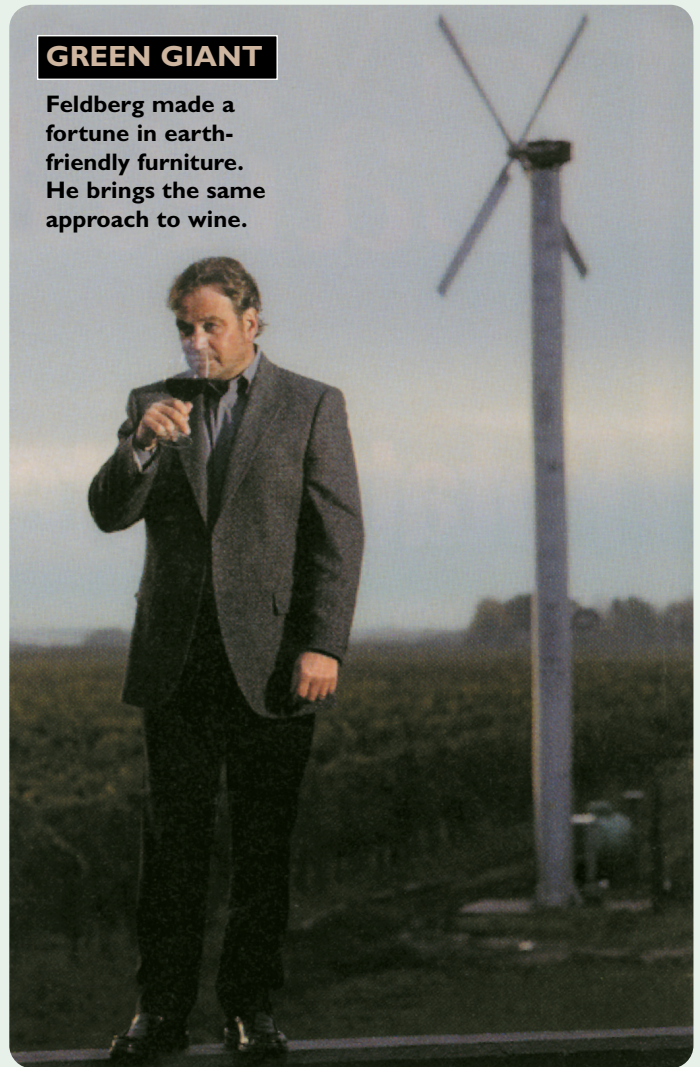
precious little devoted to tourist grabs such as cafés, gift shops and tasting rooms. But oenophiles will appreciate Stratus' singular focus: making the purest wine possible.

The winery is a model of environmentally friendly design. The fruit, picked by hand, travels up four stories via freight elevator, where it flows down a specially designed sorting system using gravity's natural pull, eliminating the need for pumps, which can damage fragile fruit. The temperature is controlled by 24 geothermal wells lifting air from 68 m below the ground. By removing mechanical pumps, which experts believe compromise flavor, Feldberg hopes to cultivate a wine to rival that of well-known labels.

Stratus' winemaking method uses an old-school approach. Rather than focus on a single grape variety, as do most Canadian wineries, Feldberg employs a technique called assemblage to make his flagship red and white wines (about C\$38 a bottle). Stratus Red uses as many as seven grape varieties, including merlot, cabernet sauvignon and petit verdot. The Stratus White uses up to six.

GREEN GIANT

Feldberg made a fortune in earth-friendly furniture. He brings the same approach to wine.



Both wines have wowed critics, who call them "intense" and "mesmerizing."

Stratus grows 13 grape varieties, meaning the wine is representative of the vineyard; if one variety fails in bad weather, then another with a later harvest may compensate with high-quality fruit. The best juice isn't the blend of grapes one might expect, says Groux; "It's like assembling the right team of people. You might have some people weaker than others, but they bring something valuable to the table." — by **Chris Daniels**.