

A celebration of B.C. wine

Where the future looks as peachy as the past



Given the Okanagan Valley's picturesque setting, with its spectacular beaches and lakes, the region easily makes any list of the most beautiful wine regions in the world.

19 Jun 2010

The Vancouver Sun

BY ANTHONY GISMONDI

Anyone familiar with the Okanagan Valley for more than a couple of decades will recall its well-learned “beaches and peaches” moniker, when one or the other was the *raison d'être* for a '70s or '80s summer holiday in the valley. Even if both are still on the to-do list of today's vacationer, it's wine and food that shape the modern-day touring calendar.

Today, the scenic 200-km-long valley — a sort of Napa Valley/ Sonoma County/ Central Otago hybrid — has something for just about every level of gastronome. And should you get tired of wine, the beaches are still there, as are the peaches, which, while as good as ever, are likely organically grown.

With the exception of the occasionally nasty looking strip mall, the likes of which seem to dot most of the major population centres, the Okanagan Valley easily makes any list of the top 10 or 15 most beautiful wine regions — think Stellenbosch, South Africa, the Uco Valley, Mendoza, Argentina, the Mosel Valley, Germany, Leyda Valley, Chile and more. From the moment you enter the valley you can't help but notice the spectacular benches that sit high above the lake, clearly defining the look of B. C. wine country and literally handing growers the perfect platform from which to make wine.

Ironically the region's look, with its sexy elevated benches, is more uniform than the wines that have come off those vineyards since the early 1980s. The good news is, the level of professionalism among current winery owners has risen considerably in the 2000s. One can only surmise that in 10 years from now, the Okanagan will fully engage its potential as forecast by the likes of some of its earliest visionaries: Harry McWatters (Sumac Ridge), George and Trudy Heiss (Gray Monk), Anthony von Mandl and John Simes (Mission Hill), the Stewart Family at Quails Gate, the Mavety family at Blue Mountain and the Nk'Mip first nation.

As you read this, a number of producers and growers are contemplating subdividing the huge “ Okanagan Valley” appellation into more manageable sub-regions that better express the origin or home of its wines. From a handful of pioneers in the late 1970s and most of the 1980s, the valley has exploded exponentially, adding 40 winery facilities in just the last three years alone to close in on the 200 mark.

Yet for some reason, the lengthy valley remains a single, undifferentiated region on its bottles even if the wines say something different in the glass.

The usual argument begins with you, the consumer, not needing to be confused by such esoteric information as the origin of a wine. Perhaps. But the future of the Okanagan lies in the differences that can be discovered from Vernon to Osoyoos.

Just east and north of Penticton lies the geographically well-defined Naramata Bench, home to scores of vineyards and at least a couple of dozen wineries. The word “bench” is money in the bank in the wine business, so bet on this sub-region being one of the first to appear on British Columbia wine labels, perhaps as early as this year.

Similarly, south of Penticton, the Skaha Bench rises along the east side of Skaha Lake, offering yet another well-defined piece of dirt that has sub-appellation written all over it, should the handful of producers and growers there get their act in gear.

Much further along the accreditation process are the growers and wineries of Golden Mile Bench, a spectacular-looking hanging plateau that is made up of a series of well-defined alluvial fans just south and west of the town of Oliver.

You can almost imagine a Burgundian-style patchwork of vineyards, some dotted with wineries that could easily qualify as a sub-region based on site and soil.

The sheer size of the Okanagan almost forces you to pick a base from which to tour, and for most that means Kelowna or West Bank in north, Penticton and Summerland mid-valley, and Oliver and Osoyoos in the south.

Each has its charms and stories and each offers a glimpse into the new Okanagan where, bit by bit, you can discover the ultimate wine country experience.

7 great spots to imbibe

Enjoy the best of B. C.'s vineyards at these great Metro Vancouver eateries



RESTAURANTS

7 great spots to imbibe

Enjoy the best of B.C.'s vineyards at these great Metro Vancouver eateries

The Observatory

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BY JOANNE SASVARI

Each spring when B. C.'s wineries release their new vintages, the best bottles get snapped up right away, sometimes within minutes. Who's buying them? Metro Vancouver restaurants, of course. If you want to taste the fruit of the province's vines and can't get to the wineries, sample a glass or two at these great establishments.

1. Bluewater Café + Raw Bar

1095 Hamilton St., 604-688-8078 www.bluewatercafe.net Sommelier Andrea Vescovi has compiled one of the city's top wine lists here, with an emphasis on great B. C. and Pacific Northwest wines. Their fresh, delicate flavours pair beautifully with the mainly seafood menu. You may not find pearls in the raw bar's oysters, but you are likely to find gems like the Foxtrot Pinot Noir.

2. C Restaurant

2-1600 Howe St., 604-681-1164 www.crestaurant.com C is a celebration of all things finny, so it's little surprise that the menu features so many of B. C.'s light, fragrant, seafood-friendly wines. Look for interesting choices like the Burrowing Owl Pinot Gris or Gehringer "Dry Rock" Sauvignon Blanc, or unusual varietals like the Venturi-Schulze "Le Cicale" blend of Madeleine Angevin and Sylvaner.

3. Observatory

6400 Nancy Greene Raine Way North Vancouver, 604-980-9311 www.grousemountain.com The wine list at this luxe dining room atop Grouse Mountain travels the world, but with plenty of stops among the best in B. C. Look for choices like the Meyer Family Tribute Series Chardonnay, Church and State's "Coyote Bowl" Syrah and Blue Mountain Stripe Label Pinot Noir.

4. Hart House Restaurant

6664 Deer Lake Ave., Burnaby, 604-298-4278 www.harthouserestaurant.com Nestled amid the gardens near Burnaby Lake, this brunch favourite is a great place to enjoy a glass of B. C. bubble. But there are plenty of other interesting choices on the list, like Quail's Gate Chenin Blanc or Pentage Gamay Noir, which pair beautifully with the inventive menu any time of day.

5. Tap Restaurant

101-15350 34 Ave., Surrey (Rosemary Heights) 604-536-1954, www.taprestaurant.ca This friendly restaurant in one of Surrey's most upscale neighbourhoods is as much about the wine as it is its globe-trotting menu. Along with the accessible international bottles, there are some truly great B. C. selections like the Ex Nihilo Night, Thornhaven Gewurztraminer and cult fave Black Hills Nota Bene. We raise our glasses to seeing more places like this in the suburbs.

6. Tapenade

3711 Bayview St., Richmond, 604-275-5188 www.tapenade.ca The menu may be Mediterranean at this Steveston favourite, but the wine list offers plenty of choices from right here at home. We especially love the tantalizing descriptions: " smoky, pepper, spicy" for the Kettle Valley " Brakeman's Select" Red, or " tropical fruit, lime and honey" for the Poplar Grove Pinot Gris. We'll have the " bright fruit, citrus and strawberry" Joie Rose on the patio, thanks.

7. Salmon House on the Hill

2229 Folkestone Way, West Vancouver 604-926-3212, www.salmonhouse.com If you think this view restaurant is just for tourists and Mother's Day, well, you clearly haven't been in a while. The menu is a joyful celebration of everything local, and that includes wine. In addition to an extensive selection of bottles, all the wines by the glass are all from B. C. and include gems like Black Hills Alibi or Kettle Valley Pinot Noir.

10 winemakers who are becoming better with age

From the original trailblazers to the next generation of innovators, these experts have put British Columbia on the world's wine map



THE CONSULTANT: Tom DiBello

For a decade, DiBello was the winemaker at Cedar Creek Estate Winery, where he produced lush, award-winning Merlots and Chardonnays and developed a knack for dealing with finicky Pinot Noir. Then in March, he left to go out on his own, leaving the Okanagan abuzz with speculation. It's been an interesting journey for the former California surfer dude who debated studying business or medicine back in the late 1970s before deciding to make wine instead. He worked at Stag's Leap Wine Cellars in Napa as well as at wineries in Arizona and Australia before coming to the Okanagan in 2000.

Now, as a free agent, he's working with former Sumac Ridge owner Harry McWatters' new Vintage Consulting Group as well as with several other wineries. That should mean exciting times ahead for the industry.



THE CONSTANT INNOVATOR: Sandra Oldfield, Tinhorn Creek

Originally from California, where she studied oenology at the University of California at Davis and worked at Rodney Strong Vineyards in Sonoma, Oldfield arrived at Tinhorn near Oliver just in time for the 1995 crush.

Since then she — along with her husband, Tinhorn Creek chairman Kenn Oldfield — has taken the winery from one that produced 1,000 cases of wine a year to one that produces 35,000.

But perhaps her most important project has been making Tinhorn Creek Canada's first carbon neutral winery. She's saved energy, money and a tiny corner of the planet — and now other wineries are lining up to see how she did it.



THE VISIONARY: Andy Johnston, Averill Creek

On Vancouver Island, most wineries are small, cosy, family-run operations. But Johnston believes they can be so much more.

The Welsh-born doctor turned to winemaking after years of running a series of successful medical clinics in Alberta, and finally settled on the little-known Cowichan Valley to build his own winery. Unlike the mostly rustic wineries that dot the Cowichan, Averill Creek Vineyard is sleek and modern.

He believes the Cowichan is one of the world's best regions for producing wine, and wonders why more vintners aren't taking advantage of the largely undeveloped region to start planting vines. Guess it takes a visionary to see the potential.



THE FIX-IT GUY: Rob Summers, Hester Creek Estate Winery

Not so long ago, Hester Creek was a little-known winery near Oliver producing so-so wines. Then Summers showed up in 2006.

Born and raised in the Niagara region, Summers had worked for some Ontario's biggest and best wineries, and before joining Hester Creek, he was national winemaker for Peller Estates. Hester Creek has had a turbulent past, but also has some terrific vines and state-of-the-art equipment. It's the perfect place for an experienced winemaker to relax a little and really enjoy his craft — and that's just what Summers is doing. His first vintages of exceptional wines, including an aromatic white Trebbiano and lush, chocolatey Merlot, are just a taste of what's to come.



THE ONE WHO DARED: John Simes, Mission Hill Family Estate

From the moment Simes landed in the Okanagan Valley from his native New Zealand, he has been revolutionizing B.C.'s wine industry.

Since then, Simes has gone on to set new standards in B.C. for everything from high-tech irrigation systems to temperature controlled underground cellars and has produced some terrific vintages along the way.

But perhaps the most daring thing he's done so far is to break the price barrier. With his exceptional Legacy Series of wines, he's proved that consumers will spend as much as \$70 for a bottle of B.C. wine — and who knows, maybe even more.



THE INSPIRATION: Brooke Blair, Jackson-Triggs Okanagan Estate Winery

Somehow, it just makes sense that the young woman charged with making the biggest, boldest, juiciest Shirazes in the Okanagan would hail originally from Australia. Blair grew up in Mount Gambier in South Australia, where her father was a vineyard manager. She earned a degree in oenology from the University of Adelaide while working as a cellar hand, then became an assistant winemaker before joining Jackson-Triggs, where she was mentored by the renowned winemaker Bruce Nicholson. Now she's in charge of all the winery's red wines. She's all about the big reds, especially Shiraz. It's no mistake that in the past couple of years of competition, Jackson-Triggs reserve Shirazes have been beating out the Australians who put them on the map in the first place.



THE VISITOR: Alain Sutre, Painted Rock Estate Winery

Plenty of B.C. wineries have taken advantage of international wine consultants. One winery where that practice is bound to pay off is Painted Rock, on the eastern shore of Skaha Lake. Never heard of it? You will.

That's because renowned Bordeaux viticulturist and wine guru Alain Sutre has been lending a hand to Painted Rock winemaker Gavin Miller, teaching him the secrets of France's legendary wine region. Previously, Sutre oversaw the development of the vineyards at Osoyoos Larose, which produced Canada's first — and priciest — true Bordeaux-style blend, Le Grand Vin.

Painted Rock is releasing its second vintage, and early reports are raving about it. With this kind of talent behind it, we can expect great things to come.



THE MENTOR: Howard Soon, Sandhill Wines

Howard Soon has been making wine in the Okanagan for 30 years, starting with Calona Wines in 1980. Today the former Vancouverite and UBC grad is the wine master at Sandhill Wines, which was named the Winery of the Year at the 2009 Canadian Wine Awards.

Sure, he's made some great wines, such as Sandhill's Small Lots series, and blazed some important trails in the industry over the years.

But perhaps his greatest legacy is as a teacher, especially for the team of talented winemakers he's mentoring these days: Katie Dickieson at Calona, Stephanie Leinemann at Peller and Karen Gillis at Red Rooster.



THE INDEPENDENT: Matt Mavety of Blue Mountain Vineyard and Cellars

From the beginning, the Mavety family has been doing things their own way. In the 1970s, when everyone else was buying land around Kelowna, Ian and Jane Mavety bought a vineyard overlooking Vaseux Lake near Okanagan Falls. When everyone decided to make fruit-forward New World-style wine, they stuck with their lean, Burgundian style. Mind you, the family's independent streak has led to some consistently terrific wine.

Now son Matt is the winemaker, and he continues to use traditional methods to produce gorgeous Brut, elegant Pinot Noir and stunning Chardonnay.



THE BRIGHT HOPE: John and Virginia Weber, Orofino

Saskatchewan isn't exactly wine country, but that's where John and Virginia Weber are from. In 2001, looking for something new, this young couple fell in love with the Similkameen Valley and purchased this small vineyard.

But don't think they're just winging it. Both have been studying wine at Okanagan University College, where John was the first recipient of the Frank Supernak Bursary, given to the student who shows the greatest potential in B.C.'s wine industry. So far it seems to be paying off: Already, Orofino wines show great promise and are among B.C. wine-lovers' favourite "cult" wines.

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British Columbia's winemakers are scientists and artists and, sometimes, magicians as well. However romantic it seems in the movies, winemaking is a tough job. The training is hard and never-ending. The skills involve technical know-how, as well as the ability to plan, analyze, problem-solve and communicate.

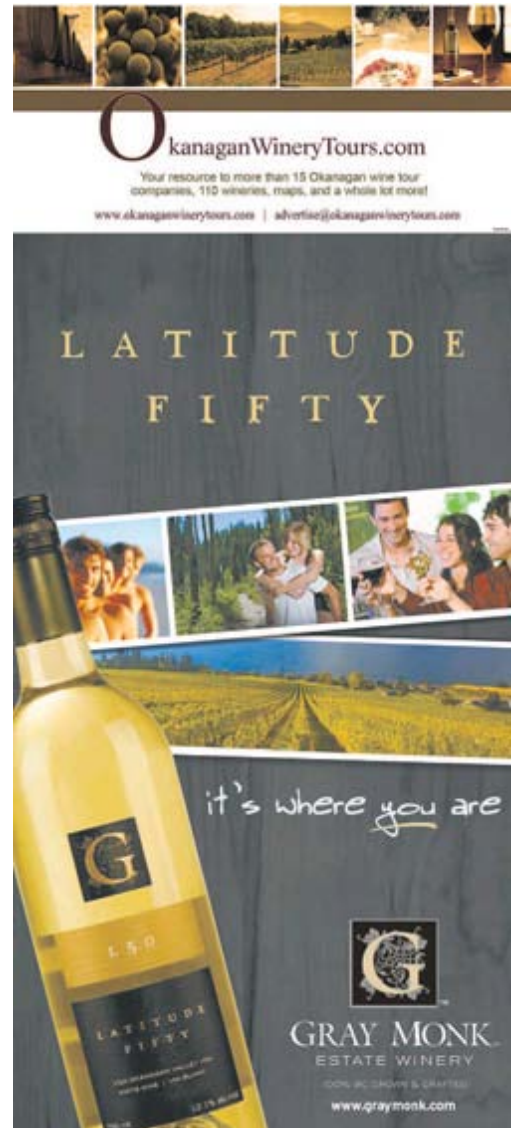
Winemakers have to work as well with the people who grow the grapes as they do with the people who develop the marketing plans. And on top of all that, they need to develop an exceptional sense of smell and taste.

We raise a glass to 10 B. C. winemakers who do all of the above exceptionally well.

THE CONSULTANT: Tom DiBello For a decade, DiBello was the winemaker at Cedar Creek Estate Winery, where he produced lush, award-winning Merlots and Chardonnays and developed a knack for dealing with finicky Pinot Noir. Then in March, he left to go out on his own, leaving the Okanagan abuzz with speculation. It's been an interesting journey for the former California surfer dude who debated studying business or medicine back in the late 1970s before deciding to make wine instead. He worked at Stag's Leap Wine Cellars in Napa as well as at wineries in Arizona and Australia before coming to the Okanagan in 2000. Now, as a free agent, he's working with former Sumac Ridge owner Harry McWatters' new Vintage Consulting Group as well as with several other wineries. That should mean exciting times ahead for the industry.

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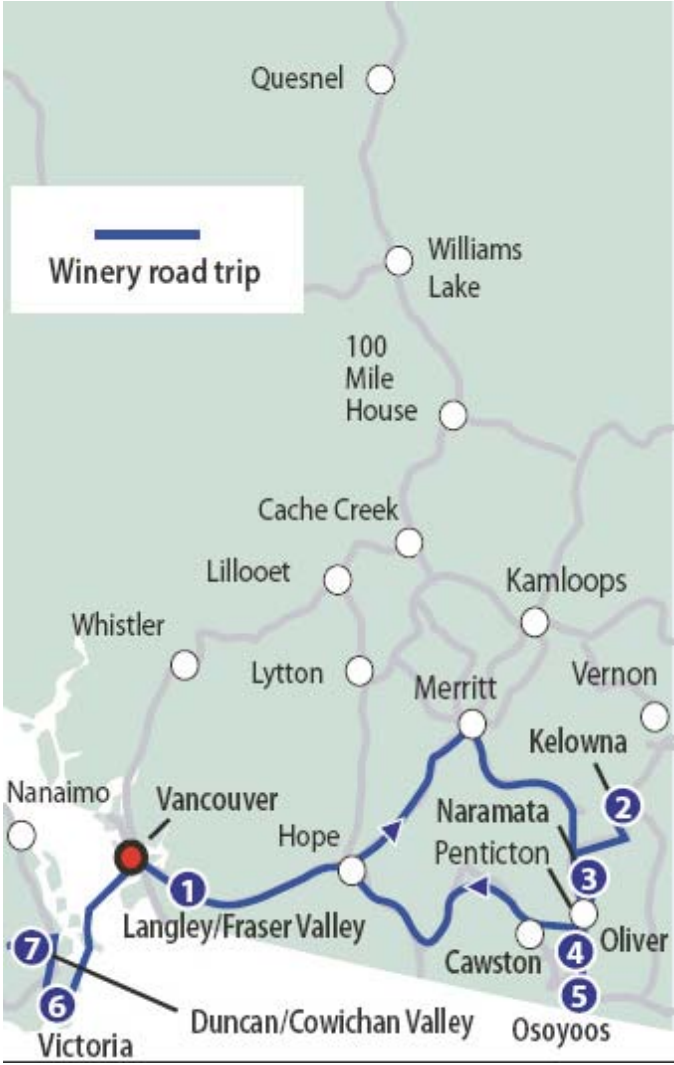
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A week of wine

Explore B. C.'s wineries, one sip at a time



Check out the vineyards at Nk'Mip Cellars in Osoyoos on Day 5 of your road Trip. Planning your woen wineries trip? Go to www.vancouver.sun.com to see a Google map of all of the wineries mentioned on these pages and in this section.





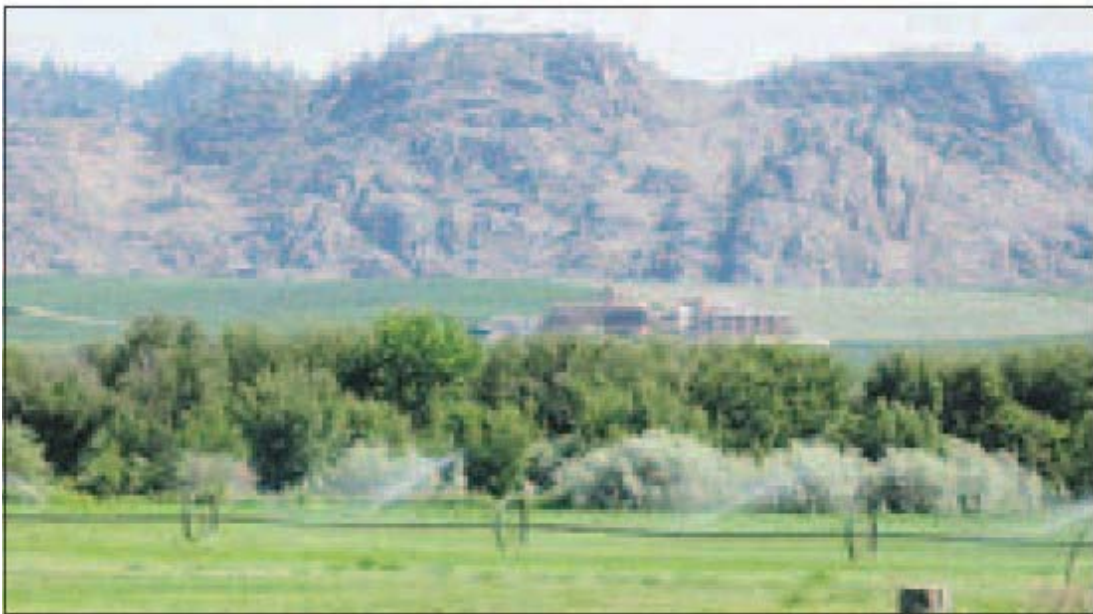
A View of fabulous Skaha Lake and the vineyard at Blasted Church Vineyards in Okanagan Falls



Wine barrels in the cellar at Mission Hill Family Estate winery in Westbank. Try a tasting and lunch here.



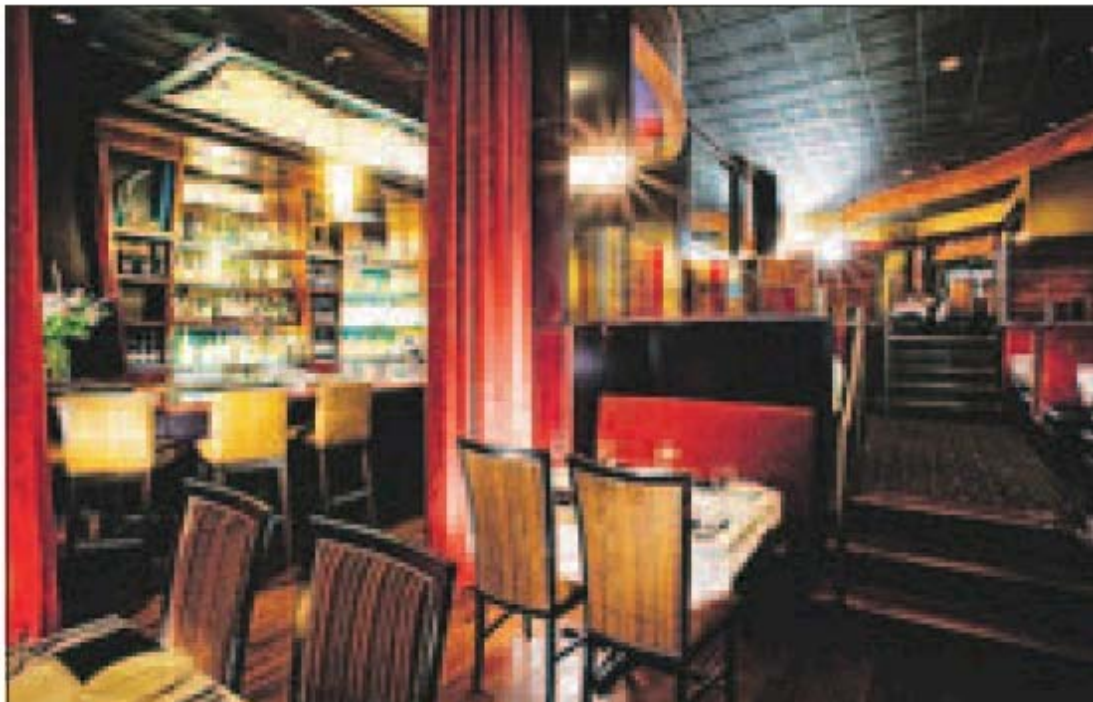
Grapes are ready for the crusher at Domaine de Chaberton Estate Winery in Langley.



One of the Okanagan's most impressive estates, Burrowing Owl Estate Winery makes a breathtaking picture.



Follow the wine route signs to discover boutique wineries like Vigneti Zanatta, Rocky Creek and Blue Grouse, above



The Magnolia Hotel & Spa is located in the middle of all the action, and also home to a terrific steak house called Prime.

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BY JOANNE SASVARI

Say you've got a week to explore the best of British Columbia's wineries. With nearly 200 of them dotted around the province, it would be, if not impossible, then at least challenging to visit them all. But you can certainly get a taste of the best by following this actionpacked itinerary.

DAY 1: FRASER VALLEY

Start your wine adventure in suburbia. There are about a dozen wineries dotted through the Fraser Valley, from the Lulu Island fruit winery in Richmond to the award-winning garagiste Pacific Breeze in New Westminster and on to Langley and Abbotsford.

The biggest cluster of wineries is located around Langley. It's here that you will find Domaine de Chaberton Estate Winery (www.domainedechaberton.com), the valley's biggest and oldest winery. Drop into the tasting room and sample award-winning blends and single-varietal wines like the Canoe Cove Shiraz or Chardonnay. The winery's romantic Bacchus Bistro is also a great spot for a lunch or dinner of farm-country French cuisine.

Not far from here is Vista d'Oro Farms (www.vistadoro.com), which is not just a winery, but a whole agri-tourism experience. Explore the orchards, shop for exotic preserves in the farmgate shop, take a cooking course and taste the intriguing wines like the Pinot Noix, a blend of Pinot Noir and Fraser Valley green walnuts macerated in brandy. This is also a great place to pick up everything you need for a picnic lunch at the nearby Fort Langley National Historic Site.

Looking for a place to spend the night? Want to add some pampering and exceptional cuisine to the experience? Then head up Hwy 1 past Chilliwack and take the Agassiz-Rosedale exit to Harrison Hot Springs Resort (www.harrisonresort.com).

DAY 2: KELOWNA

Hit the highway bright and early so you can get to the Okanagan Valley and Kelowna in plenty of time to get some serious tasting in. Head up Highway 1 to the Coquihalla turnoff at Hope, then travel along Hwy 5 to the Okanagan Connector (Hwy 97C) at Merritt. Turn east and follow the signs into Kelowna. It's about a 4 ½ - hour trip from Vancouver, 3 ½ if you're starting the trip from Harrison Hot Springs.

Kelowna is the thriving heart of B. C. wine country. Many of B. C.'s most famous wineries can be found here, along with terrific restaurants, golf courses, beaches and all the attractions of a summertime getaway destination.

If you plan your trip right, you should arrive just in time for a tasting and lunch at Mission Hill Family Estate (www.missionhillwinery.com). You can't miss it — Mission Hill's the one with the big bell tower on top of the big hill in West Kelowna. Owner Anthony von Mandl has created an elegant winery experience like no other in B. C. While you're visiting the gorgeous tasting room, be sure to try the Legacy Series of exceptional blended wines such as the pricey Oculus. If it's sunny out, head across to the Terrace, the winery's outdoor restaurant, and enjoy chef Matthew Batey's fresh wine-country cuisine and stunning views down the Okanagan Valley.

Afterward, head across the bridge into Kelowna, where you can plan afternoon's tastings around your palate.

Do you love sparkling wines? Then go to Summerhill Pyramid Winery (www.summerhill.bc.ca) for a taste of the Cipes Ice or Blanc de Noir bubble (named for charismatic owner Stephen Cipes) and a visit to the pyramid where the wines are aged. Prefer big, rich reds? Then visit the Fitzpatrick family's Cedar Creek Estate Winery (www.cedarcreek.bc.ca) with its luscious Merlot and Meritage.

Or, if delicate Riesling and food-friendly rose are more your thing, go directly to Tantalus Vineyards (www.tantalus.ca) and its new eco-friendly winery. While you're here, check out the display of beautiful First Nations masks by Dempsey Bob, which are reproduced on the Tantalus labels.

Check into your hotel, and be glad that after too many years of so-so accommodation, Kelowna has a number of great new properties like Manteo Resort (www.manteo.com) on the waterfront or Playa del Sol nearby (www.playadelsolresort.com).

These resorts are also home to two of our favourite wine country restaurants, each helmed by one of the region's best chefs — Bernard Cassavant's Wild Apple at Manteo and Ned Bell's Cabana Grille at Playa del Sol.

Or head into downtown Kelowna for the gourmet diner food at RauDZ (www.raudz.com), where chef-owner Rod Butters is having

more fun than ever with local ingredients.

DAY 3: NARAMATA BENCH

Drive south down Hwy 97 for about an hour until you reach Penticton, then follow the “ Corkscrew Highway” along the eastern bench of Okanagan Lake toward the village of Naramata, another 20 minutes or so.

Naramata is a haven for small wineries, artisanal producers and unexpected discoveries. You'll find quirky wineries like Blasted Church and Therapy, as well as some of the province's most historic wineries and some of its most exciting new ones. Plan to take your time and explore.

Two wineries you won't want to miss are Kettle Valley (www.kettlevalleywinery.com), a small, farm-based operation that produces powerhouse wines like Old Main Red, and Red Rooster (www.redroosterwinery.com), which is also an art gallery that features both a remarkable permanent exhibit and an ever-changing selection of new artworks.

Spend the night at the beautifully renovated Naramata Heritage Inn & Spa (www.naramatainn.com), where you can enjoy local ingredients and huge selection of Okanagan wines in its posh dining room or casual wine bar.

DAY 4: OLIVER

Continue south along Hwy 97 to Oliver, about a 45-minute drive from Penticton, more if you stop in at Tickleberry's in Okanagan Falls for ice cream.

Oliver is serious wine country. Ten per cent of Canada 's wineries and vineyards are located here, ranging from tiny cult producers such as Nota Bene or Le Vieux Pin, to exclusive high-end wineries like Osoyoos Larose, to giant operations with well-known labels like Jackson-Triggs or Inniskillin.

The western side of the valley is known as the Golden Mile. It's here that you will find Tinhorn Creek (www.tinhorn.com), where winemaker Sandra Oldfield is constantly breaking new ground. She's the first winemaker in BC to use the modern screw cap and lead her winery to carbon and she's doing it all with wines like the lush aromat blend. Drop by on a summ you might be able to catch ries in the outdoor amphit

Just up the road you'll find a Creek (www.hestercreek.com) winemaker Rob Summer joined the winery after a stint in Ontario's best labels, is producing wines like the aromatic deep, rich Merlot. Hester home to a lovely Tuscan-st a perfect spot to rest for th

Across the valley, the BC are home to even more wineries. Owl (www.bovwine.com) the buttery Chardonnay and but for the fine food in the Restaurant and the elegant guest house.

DAY 5: OSOYOOS AND SIMILKAMEEN VALLEY

Continue south on Hwy 97 for 20 minutes until Osoyoos, located in the desert a scant few minutes from the US border.

Stop in at Nk'Mip Cellar (www.nkmip.com), where winemaker Randy Picton is producing exceptional wines with the top tier “ Qwam Qwm” winery is owned and operated by the Osoyoos First Nations and is part of Nk'Mip Resort, which includes a desert cultural centre, an RV park, golf course and Ridge Vineyard Resort & Spa.

Spirit Ridge is also home to a Mediterranean-inspired Restaurant.

Or, if you're feeling adventurous, try Sol Grill & Brewing Company for great vino-licious Watermark the just-opened Watermark

She was among the first to introduce and is the first to attain neutral status. She's making great 2 Bench white mer evening and has the concert theatre. Also find Hester (www.hester.com), where she recently started a career at some of the best producing stels Trebbiano and her Creek is also a lovely guest house, he night. Black Sage Hills wineries. Visit Bure. ca), not just for the smoky Syrah, but the Sonora Room for the comfort of its

ALLEY

Hwy 97 for about an hour until you reach Osoyoos desert country the United States (www.nkmip.com). Randy Picton is producing wines, especially the “ mt” series. This is rated by the Osoyoos part of the big also comprises a conference centre, and the luxe Spirit Spa. Come to the terrific Passa Tempo kitchen, try the fuom, the Ridge eat pub grub or Ark Wine Bar at Ark Beach Resort (www.watermarkbeachresort.com).

If you check out Osoyoos in the morning, you should have time to swing up to the Similkameen Valley in the afternoon. To get

there, head west from Osoyoos on Hwy 3 for about 30 minutes until you reach the town of Cawston.

Although this is still primarily orchard country, many experts think it will be the next big thing in B. C. wine. Here you'll find small, young wineries making intriguing wines, like the cult faves Seven Stones Winery (www.sevenstones.ca) and Orofino Vineyards (www.orofinovineyards.com), both near Cawston.

DAY 6: TRAVEL TO VANCOUVER ISLAND

From Osoyoos, travel west along Hwy 3, the Crowsnest Highway, to Hope, where it merges with Hwy 1. Take the New Westminster exit. Follow Hwy 91, the Richmond Freeway, until it merges with Hwy 99, then exit on to Hwy 17 and continue to the Tsawwassen Ferry Terminal. Take the ferry to Swartz Bay and drive into Victoria. Unless you have to wait for a sailing, the whole trip should take about seven hours.

If you get to Swartz Bay early enough, you'll have time to check out a couple of Saanich Peninsula wineries on the way into Victoria. Visit Church and State (www.churchandstatewines.com), which is earning international recognition for master winemaker Bill Dyer's bold reds, and Sea Cider (www.seacider.ca), where owners Kristen and Bruce Jordan are making traditional ciders from heritage apples.

Plan to stay in Victoria — it's a good base for your wine country explorations and also has an exceptional array of restaurants, many of them serving local wines. The Fairmont Empress is the classic local hostelry, but we love the European-boutique-style Magnolia Hotel & Spa (www.magnoliahotel.com). It's perfectly located right in the middle of all the action downtown, and is also home to a terrific steak house called Prime.

Other dining options include Spinnakers for fresh-from-the-farm gastropub fare, Stage for irresistible small plates, Café Brio for hearty roasts and braises or the plethora of oyster bars that have popped up overnight.

DAY 7: COWICHAN VALLEY

Travel about 55 minutes north on Hwy 1 to Duncan. From there, work your way back through the Cowichan Valley and the villages of Cowichan Bay and Cobble Hill.

This is an area of rural country roads and small, family-owned wineries, most of them specializing in cool-climate varietals like Pinot Gris and Ortega.

Start at Averill Creek Vineyard (www.averillcreek.ca) just outside Duncan. This gorgeously designed modern winery sits atop a hill with a great view all the way down the valley, and owner-winemaker Andy Johnston produces terrific wines, such as his award-winning barrel-aged Pinot Gris.

Then follow the wine route signs to discover boutique wineries like Vigneti Zanatta, Rocky Creek, Blue Grouse and Glenterra.

Two you won't want to miss are Venturi-Schulze Vineyards (www.venturischulze.com), where winemaker Giordano Venturi makes remarkable blends, and Merridale Ciderworks (www.merridalecider.com), where owner Rick Pipes produces crisp, traditional apple ciders.

Merridale is also a great place to stop for lunch at its casual Bistro Pommeraiie — in fact, several of the wineries have great little bistros, including the First Nations-owned Cherry Point Vineyards and Vigneti Zanatta. Then it's back to Victoria and home. But before you hit the highway one last time, make sure you've picked up a case or two of B. C. wine so you can relive your journey in the weeks and days to come.

B. C. winemakers green the scene

With little fanfare, many wineries have quietly gone organic



Guests sample the wines at Tantalus Vineyards. The Kelowna winery is the first in B. C. and only the third in Canada built to Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) building standards.

19 Jun 2010

The Vancouver Sun<

BY JOANNE SASVARI

Going green as a winery isn't as simple as one day deciding to start recycling bottles or throwing some organic compost on the vineyard.

It involves multiple systems, ranging from the chemicals the growers use on the vines to the way they irrigate the fields, from how the winery is heated to what kind of glass is used in the bottles and how the wine is shipped to market.

It's complex, it's time-consuming and it can be expensive.

And yet more and more British Columbia wineries are becoming models of sustainable farming and production. The bonus is that for those wineries willing to go green it often pays off where it counts most: in the bottle.

" B. C. wineries — while not global leaders with respect to eco-friendly practices — are getting on board quickly," says Christine Coletta, a marketing and communications consultant with more than 25 years' experience in the B. C. wine industry.

Regions such as Oregon and New Zealand were the first to introduce wine-industry-specific environmental programs, while B. C. focused on smaller initiatives such as environmental farm planning and waste water management. But now the province is quickly catching up.

" Our practices were very good to begin with, based on public awareness in B. C. for the need to protect our environment," says Coletta, the senior partner at Coletta and Associates and vicepresident of the British Columbia Grapegrowers Association.

" Now wineries are establishing programs through all aspects of their operations and the importance of doing so is keenly felt."

Wine production has an impact on the environment, especially when it comes to energy and water use. Last fall, Tinhorn Creek became the first carbonneutral winery in Canada , and the process was a real eye-opener for winemaker Sandra Oldfield.

The project began when Tinhorn's owner, Bob Shaughnessy, encouraged the winery to get its carbon footprint evaluated by Climate Smart, which targets the carbon dioxide emissions that contribute to global warming.

At first, Oldfield was reluctant — after all, the recession had just begun, and she was more concerned about saving money than the environment. " But it dovetails with exactly what you need to do when you go into a recession, and that's look at how efficient you are," she says. " You need to look at your business and sharpen your pencil.

And so Tinhorn switched to biodiesel fuel for the tractors, reduced the energy used in the winery, started using lightweight bottles that take less energy to ship, and stepped up efforts to compost and recycle.

After a year of living sustainably, she discovered that although they'd reduced carbon use in some areas, some areas had remained flat and others had actually increased, largely because of a hot summer that saw water pumps going non-stop to keep the vines hydrated.

Still, once they'd purchased carbon offsets that would go toward building alternative fuel projects in B. C., they came out carbon neutral. Now other B. C. wineries are looking to them for advice on how they can do the same.

It might just be easier to get this whole sustainability thing right from the start, and that's what they're hoping they've accomplished at Tantalus Vineyards.

The Kelowna winery is the first in B. C. and only the third in Canada built to Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) green building certification standard.

The new building is built on the site of the original winery, which was pulled down in March 2009. "It's very state-of-the-art. Very clean and contemporary," says a delighted general manager Jane Hatch.

Although Tantalus is still waiting to hear what level of certification it has reached — Hatch thinks they might have enough points for a silver — she notes that a LEED-certified building doesn't just happen, it has to be carefully planned.

At Tantalus, that meant using eco-friendly building materials, making the building energy efficient, establishing a charging station for electric cars, installing efficient spray heads in the winery hoses and using paints and other finishes with low gas emissions.

"The off-gassing of paint is absolutely horrendous," Hatch says. "I didn't know it until I started this project."

One of the most ambitious features at Tantalus, though, is its waste water treatment facility.

Water is a big deal in wineries because they use a lot of it, not just to irrigate the vines, but to wash the tanks, scrub the bottles and hose down the winery operations.

"Our waste water treatment system is the first of its kind in a winery in British Columbia," Hatch says. "It processes it up to tertiary status, which means it's clean enough and safe enough that we can use it to irrigate our vineyards. It's very cool."

One of the reasons they chose to go with the expensive, high-tech treatment system is that Tantalus is not on the Kelowna sewer system, so their other option would be to partially treat the waste water then truck it elsewhere. But fuel surcharges are huge and so is the carbon footprint of trucking waste.

"The return on investment is probably going to take many years," Hatch says. "But the writing was on the wall for us."

Irrigation is also a sustainability issue for many wineries since those traditional overhead spray systems waste thousands of gallons of water a year.

Some wineries, like Venturi-Schulze Vineyards on Vancouver Island, eschew irrigation altogether, insisting it drives the roots of the vines deeper, producing better grapes. Others, especially in arid regions like the South Okanagan, are moving to a drip system that directs the water just where it's needed.

Another issue — although it's one you hear less about these days — is the use of chemicals such as pesticides in the vineyard. In fact, many B. C. wineries have quietly gone organic, though they're often not certified as such.

At her Switchback Vineyard near Summerland, for instance, Coletta has decided to leave ground cover between some of the vines to provide "living quarters for beneficial bugs."

There's plenty more that wineries are doing, from composting the "cake" of grape skins left over from the crush at Nichol Vineyard to insulating the buildings with straw bales at Orofino to reducing printed materials.

The payoff can be huge, and not just in terms of a greener environment and cost savings.

"When you open yourself up to thinking of your business in a different way, you come into contact with a whole different community

of people,” Oldfield says. “ It’s opened a huge opportunity to converse with other wineries that do things differently. It’s opened a whole lot of doors.”

25 fabulous summer sippers to savour

19 Jun 2010

The Vancouver Sun

BY ANTHONY GISMONDI

Summer’s imminent arrival has spurred us to select a list of 25 amazing B. C. white wines made for warm days and long nights on the patio.

There are many reasons to buy B. C. wines, not the least of which is they are produced locally. They also have an amazing ability to pair with West Coast cuisine.

Food aside, our local whites are easily capable of bearing the ultimate summer sipper moniker. From picnics to pre-dinner appetizers, these bottles of fresh, bright, high-acid wines will not only turn heads but tantalize your taste buds, too.

Today we take an early look at our favourite homegrown white wines. It’s the perfect list for the cabin or the patio and it should be relevant all summer, so make sure you clip it out and stick it on the refrigerator for future reference.

Best of all, white wine is almost always more affordable so you can revel in your savings as you sip away the warm, lazy days of summer. 8th Generation Vineyard Riesling 2009, \$ 20 Bright and fresh with zesty acidity, it’s just the right mix of sweet limy mango fruit. Impressive styling and fun to drink. Bravo. Try it with chicken salad sandwiches or spicy Asian dishes. Arrowleaf Solstice Gewurztraminer 2008, \$ 20 Arrowleaf makes very clean, varietally correct wine, as evidenced by this honey, lychee fruit, citrus and mineral flavoured white with just a dusting of rose petal. Elegant styling. Try with turkey or pork wraps.

Blue Mountain Chardonnay Reserve (Stripe Label) 2007, \$ 26 Much in the style of a premier Cru Chablis with a bit more oak. Attractive style for dishes like halibut, turkey, chicken, lobster polenta and assortment of soft cheeses.

Burrowing Owl Chardonnay 2008, \$ 25 BOV’s rich, smoky, nutty nose and baked apple and grapefruit flavours make it a crowd favourite. Try it with nut-encrusted fish dishes or fresh local grilled halibut.

CedarCreek Estate Ehrenfelser 2009, \$ 19 This is the quintessential summer sipper, polished to perfection by former winemaker Tom DiBello. Fresh, crisp, juicy tangerine and melon fruit with a bit of Granny Smith — this wine has star power.

CedarCreek Pinot Gris 2009, \$ 18 Look for bright fruit notes of spiced peach and honey with some underlying mineral and citrus notes. Perfect with barbecued vegetable and pork kebabs.

Black Hills Alibi 2009, \$ 30 Alibi is fashioned after the sauvignon blanc Semillon blends of the Loire Valley, as evidenced by its grapefruit, gooseberry, lemon thyme, ginger, chalky flavours. Serve it with seafood salads.

Gray Monk Ehrenfelser 2009, \$ 17 Fresh, juicy, somewhat sweet palate with orange, grapefruit rind, peach, lime skin and slate flavours. Similar in style to last year. A fun sipper to try with a spicy Asian dish.

Herder Pinot Gris 2009, \$ 17 Winemaker Lawrence Herder makes a 100-per-cent tank fermented Gris and sees no wood. The result is crisp minerality and cool citrus fruits, all with fresh creamy peachy undertones. Bring on the calamari.

Hillside Estate Pinot Gris Reserve 2008, \$ 20 Winemaker Kathy Malone is turning the ship around and this Gris with its floral, ginger, baked pear notes and buttery, spicy, pear flavours is a prime example. An easy match with West Coast cuisine.

Joie A Noble Blend 2009, \$ 24 Edelzwicker, the Alsace quaffer, is the model and this spicy aromatic ginger and mineral-scented



GRANT BLACK / CNS FILES

white with strong grapefruit rind and grassy, peach pit, green apple flavours has summer written all over it.

Laughing Stock Vineyards Blind Trust White + 23/ 9 2009, \$ 25 You can taste this fruity blend “ blind” unless you remove the capsule where the mix, 59/ 15/ 13/ 13 of Pinot Gris, viognier, Pinot Blanc and Sauvignon Blanc is revealed on the neck. Magic with sushi.

Mission Hill Viognier Reserve 2008, \$ 19 The first viognier from Mission Hill and it's on the money. Elegant with sweetish, ginger, mineral, lemon peel, tangerine, honey and nectarine skin flavours. A natural with Pan Asian cuisine.

Mt. Boucherie Estate Collection Chardonnay 2009, \$ 15 An unoaked version that offers solid fruit and balance for the money. A perfect wine to accompany simple roasted chicken stuffed with onions and lemons.

Nichol Vineyard Pinot Gris September Ranch 2009, \$ 20 This “ eye of the partridge” tinted Gris delivers with a fruity but restrained nose spiked with a dash of earth and honey. A classic Gris that screams salmon.

Nk'Mip Cellars Pinot Blanc 2008, \$ 17 Fresh pear, grapefruit, peach pit, light butter aromas and a delicious creamy, soft palate with light pear, red apple, chalk and peach skin flavours. Start planning the picnic.

Pentâge Winery Riesling 2009, \$ 20 Always intense with aggressive acidity, but this iconic Riesling has its staunch followers who delight in its ability to match a variety of local foods both West Coast and Pan Asian.

Quails Gate Chardonnay Family Reserve 2008, \$ 30 One of the top five Chardonnays made in the province, the QG Reserve has a rich smoky, nutty, spicy character with a creamy, nutty passion fruit, mineral, melon palate. Perfect with Dungeness crab.

Road 13 Home Vineyard Old Vines Chenin Blanc 2009, \$ 20 Ripe, round, crisp and somewhat sweet entry with plenty of candied pink grapefruit, red apple and honey gooseberry guava flavours, this would work well with spicy Asian dishes.

Sandhill Pinot Gris King Family Vineyard 2009, \$ 18 Over the years this wine has settled into its fresh, juicy persona, offering up bits of pear and tropical fruit with a touch of Okanagan peach. Try it with spicy wraps or crab cakes. See Ya Later Ranch SYL Brut N/ V, \$ 20 The entry is clean and crisp, with baked pear and yeasty notes over a dried peach and pear finish. This bubble has jumped another notch up the sparkling scale. Very fine quality.

Stag's Hollow Viognier 2008, \$ 25 Ripe, soft fruit flavours with a taste of honey, grapefruit rind and apricot to subdue the fat in your ham and cheese sandwich.

Road 13 Stemwinder 2009, \$ 21 Winemaker Michael Bartier wants you to remember the Stemwinder name and its delicious spicy, peachy, guava, grapefruit and passion fruit flavours long after its grape mix: Chardonnay, Sauvignon Blanc and Chardonnay Musqué.

Stoneboat Vineyards Chorus 2009, \$ 17 An attractive, aromatic white flecked with bright tropical fruit, lime-rind flavours and bits of peach and red apple in the finish. A super summer sipper for those warm day patio parties.

Summerhill Organic Pinot Gris Bateman GTK Series 2008, \$ 23 The palate is a mix of citrus fruit, minerality and nectarine skin with a clean fresh finish. A touch light in concentration, but otherwise a tasty little Gris now certified organic. Try with lightly spiced seafood salads.

Pinot Grigio in your glass and in your risotto

White table wine has a place in your pantry as a subtle flavour enhancer

19 Jun 2010
The Vancouver Sun
BY RANDY SHORE



Chef Don Letendre with his Pineapple and Sauvignon Blanc Granita with Orange and Marcona Almond Salad.

Pineapple and Sauvignon Blanc Granita with Orange and Marcona Almond Salad

- 1/3 cup sugar
- 1 cup water
- 2 cups pineapple juice
- 1 1/2 cups Sauvignon Blanc
- 8 small navel oranges, peeled, divided, seeded and chilled
- 1 cup unsalted marcona almonds
- 1 tbsp. almond oil
- 1 cup micro herbs

Method: For the pineapple granita: Heat the sugar and 1 cup of pineapple juice in a small saucepan until

the sugar dissolves, stirring occasionally. Remove from heat. Stir in the rest of the juice, and 2 cups of Sauvignon Blanc. Let cool over an ice bath. Pour mixture into a stainless steel flat pan, cover and freeze. Once it becomes solid, break it with a fork so it comes out flaky. Re-cover and place back in the freezer.

For the salad, in a large bowl, toss together the oranges and almonds, almond oil and microherbs.

Prosciutto Risotto with B.C. Pinot Grigio

- 4 cups chicken stock
- 1 pinch sea salt
- 1 pinch saffron
- 3 slices of prosciutto
- 4 tbsp. butter
- 2 shallots, finely diced
- 2 cups arborio rice
- 3/4 cup unoaked Pinot Grigio
- 1/2 cup Parmesan cheese, finely grated

Method: In a small saucepan heat chicken stock to a simmer and season with salt to your taste. Sprinkle in the saffron. In a separate large saucepan melt the butter on medium heat and fry the prosciutto until crisp. Add shallots and sauté until soft. Stir in

the rice until it is thoroughly coated with the butter mixture. Add the wine and stir continuously until the rice is thick and creamy, then begin to add the stock one ladle at a time, stirring continuously. Add more stock as the mixture thickens. The goal is to cook the rice until it is soft, but firm inside with a creamy rich saucy texture. When you are out of stock, the rice mixture should be thick enough to stand up on a plate but loose enough to run off if you tilt the plate. Use a little water to loosen it if it is too thick. Stir in the cheese and serve immediately.

Helpful hint: Pour yourself a glass of wine before you start and keep it close. You are going to be at the stove for about 20 minutes.

B.C. Pinot Grigio Osso Buco



4 thick cut pieces of veal shank
1 tbsp. sea salt
1 tsp. ground black pepper
2 tbsp. olive oil
1 large onion, diced
2 carrots, diced
2 celery stalks, diced
2 tbsp. all-purpose flour
1/2 cup unoaked Pinot Grigio
3 tbsp. tomato paste
2 cups veal, beef or chicken stock
2 fresh bay leaves
1 bunch fresh thyme

Method: Heat your oven to 250 F. Preheat a large, heavy-bottom oven-proof pan. Rub the shanks liberally with sea salt and pepper. Pour olive oil into the pan. It should smoke a little. Place the shanks in the pan until thoroughly browned on both sides. Set aside. Place onion, carrot and

celery in the pan and sauté until softened. Stir in flour. Add the wine and the tomato paste and stir until combined with the flour. Place the shanks in the pan and wiggle them to the bottom. Pour stock over the contents of the pan until almost completely covered. Roll the bay leaves around the bunch of thyme and tie with cooking twine. Place in the cooking liquid. Cover and place in the oven for three hours. After the veal is thoroughly cooked, remove the herbs and set the meat aside and purée about half the vegetables and cooking liquid with a blender, food processor or immersion blender. Stir the purée back into the pan, then pour the entire mixture over the meat on a high-sided serving dish.

Helpful hint: Go to an Italian butcher such as Bosa or Cioffi's in Burnaby and ask for osso buco shanks.

What grows together goes together.”

Wine educator Ingo Grady says the case for using B. C. wine in the pot as well as to fill your glass is as simple as that. When the grapes, the herbs, the vegetables and the meat all come from the same soil, something special happens. Foodies call it terroir, which means the flavour of a place.

When he isn't training sommeliers for Mission Hill Family Estate winery, Grady is splashing some of B. C.'s best varietals into all kinds of things, including himself.

“ I always use wine when I cook and sometimes I even put it in the food,” he laughed, trotting out another favourite old saw. Fortified wines such as Madeira have a long history in cooking, all the way to the Greeks and the Romans. They add richness and body and provide a valuable function as a deglazing agent, picking up all the brown flavourful bits in the bottom of the pan. (Chefs call that brown stuff fond, probably because they like it so much.)

But table wine also has a place in your pantry. One of B. C.'s best grapes is the Pinot Grigio with flavours of citrus, green apple skins and peach. Its assertiveness is enough to perk up a heavier dish and it carries enough tartness to take the place of citrus in your recipes. Need a splash of lime? Try a splash of wine.

“ If you are drinking a Pinot Grigio, you should definitely use it in your risotto. Wine adds brightness and acidity,” said Grady. “ And white meats, such as veal, work with Pinot Grigio.”

Grady likes to add some of the cooking liquid from his meat dish into his risotto to strengthen the common thread of flavours that run through the meal.

Chef Don Letendre and I have taken that advice to heart, creating a menu that employs Mission Hill's Pinot Grigio in each of three courses, including dessert.

“ Using good wine makes a difference,” said Letendre, formerly of Elixir at the Opus Hotel and now working with Gourmet Syndicate to create mobile gourmet kitchens for the street food trade. “ And using white wine to marinate or braise meat is very different from using red wine.”

“ It lightens a dish immediately. I love the acidity it gives as opposed to red wine,” he said. Red wine can be so overpowering in its effect on the flavour of a dish that the cook doesn't have much of a flavour palate to work with.

“ The nuances in a Bordelaise [made with red wine and a veal reduction] are pretty limited once the red wine goes in,” he said.

“ But white wine is more subtle and there's more room for finesse,” Letendre said. “ You can do 10 times more.”

The following recipes for osso buco and risotto are Shore family new classics developed over the past couple of years. Chef Letendre's granita is his icy twist on a Spanish dish.

“ It's really surprising and a great palate cleanser,” he promised.

The risotto and osso buco pair well with a B. C. Pinot Grigio. You should have plenty left after cooking for the first round. The granita is your chance to try a B. C. ice wine or an Italian sparkling Prosecco.



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