

As you've probably noticed, all of us at the Executive Hotel Vintage Park have a thing for B.C. wine: we've partnered with many of the province's wineries and named rooms and suites after them; we've hung wine-themed art hither and yon; there's a sweet wine list happening in our lounge and restaurant; B.C. wines are stocked in mini-bars; and in case you hadn't noticed, we offer complimentary happy hour wine tastings in the lounge. Got a little time to spare? We can arrange wine tours to all of our major wine regions.

Just so you know, we strive to have as much fun with B.C.'s great wines as we can, and that means tasting widely, increasing our partnerships with the wineries, and sharing our finds with our guests. You'll see what we mean and why as we profile some of our partner wineries, their winemakers and best bottles in our wine letters.

It rains in Vancouver. Sometimes a lot. But it's what keeps everything clean and green, and it's a proper intro to spring. Cherry and Japanese plum trees are in bloom and milder weather is kick starting new growth on the grapevines, technically called bud break. Spring means that wineries are releasing their new wines. Check out our What's On section—there just might be an opportunity or two to try the latest vintages.

Just the Facts

Here's the dirt on B.C. wines and wine country:

- Jesuit missionary Father Charles Pandosy first made wine in B.C. in 1859 in the Okanagan; the first commercial wines were made in the 1920s; and B.C. wines stepped up in 1990 when old varieties of grapes were pulled out and replanted with premium varieties.
- Currently, B.C. has 140 licensed wineries (in 1981 there were just 14 struggling to make a buck) and another 26-or-so in the pipeline. This includes a dozen fruit wineries, cider makers, and sake (rice wine) producers.
- There are 411 grape growers growing 60 grape varieties (48% are white, 52% are red).
- The top whites are chardonnay, pinot gris, and gewürztraminer; top reds include merlot, pinot noir and cabernet sauvignon.
- In 2006, 6,632 acres of land were under vine.
- We have five wine regions: the Okanagan

Similkameen
Fraser Valley
Vancouver Island
Gulf Islands

Wine Buys:

Want to take a bottle or two home? Here are a couple of our favourite wine shops, handily within strolling distance.

Marquis Wine Cellars, Vancouver's first wine shop, has a stellar selection of B.C.'s best bottles. Ask for resident B.C. wine guru David...
1034 Davie Street, 604-684-2471,
www.marquis-wines.com

Taylorwood Wines sells only B.C. wines at winery-direct prices. Ask for a taste—there's usually something open.
1185 Mainland Street
604-408-9463
www.taylorwoodwines.com

Spotlight

Wine Region: The Similkameen Valley

The Similkameen Valley's Wild West history is as colourful as it comes—gold, cowboys, and railway speculation. Today, the gold's all been prospected, the railway built. Ranching, farming and fruit growing and more recently, vineyards rule. The vineyards are planted near the Similkameen River (the Similkameens are a B.C. Indian band) that runs through the valley and enjoys the same bone-dry climate as the Okanagan, which lies to the west. The Similkameen currently has about 200 acres of vineyards and 13 wineries. The valley's poor soils are gravel, stone and silty glacial remnants and hugely grape friendly. Merlot is the most planted grape, followed by chardonnay; others that do well are gamay noir, pinot noir, pinot blanc, cabernet sauvignon, and cabernet franc.

Winery: Church & State

Located near Vancouver Island's celebrated Butchart Gardens, Church

& State Winery came into being when businessman Kim Pullen took over troubled and underperforming Victoria Estate Winery in 2004. He quickly encountered a dilemma of “church and state” proportions—that of the quality of wine being completely out of sync with the impressive facility and the huge enthusiasm of wine tourists. Pullen figured that Church & State would be the perfect name for the winery, illustrating the separation of all the crazy hard work that goes into winemaking and the pleasure and fun that goes on at the winery’s tasting bar. The new order of wines has just officially debuted—both Church & State and second tier Church Mouse—to plenty of outstanding reviews. These wines are worthy of their maker, celebrated Californian wine wiz, Bill Dyer, and worth seeking out.

Wine Wiz: Bill Dyer

Church & State’s winemaker, Californian Bill Dyer, had his work cut out for him when he agreed to come on board as consulting winemaker in 2004. Not the first of which was convincing the winery’s new owner to dump every bottle of wine in the place before he’d sign on the dotted line. A harsh decision but the wine was harsher: About 16,000 bottles went down the drain. In his short time at Church & State, Dyer’s about face change in the quality of wines has been nothing short of miraculous. And so it should be. This winemaker spent 20 years at Sterling Vineyards in Napa, has consulted for Frog’s leap and Spring Mountain Wineries in Napa and Burrowing Owl in the Okanagan. In addition to Church & State, he currently works with Marimar Torres Estate in Sonoma’s Russian River Valley and Sodaro Winery in Napa. Dyer also makes his own wine (now in its eighth release) in Napa, Dyer Vineyard Cabernet Sauvignon.

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Top Drops:

White: Church & State Church Mouse Chardonnay 2005

This tasty charmer positively glows with creamy vanilla and ripe fruit. Hallelujah nuances of citrus and spice. Enjoy with smoked salmon, crab cakes or lobster with butter.

Red: Church & State Saddle Ridge Syrah 2005

Almost black in colour, this powerhouse syrah offers drifts of black pepper on the nose, and gorgeous ripe cherries and plums and more pepper. Fab with grilled meats, cheese, and on its own.

Icewine: Nk'Mip Qwam Qwmt Riesling Icewine, Okanagan B.C.

2005

This silky little number is guaranteed to blow you out of the water. It's a perfect and elegant mouthful of apricots, baked apples, and citrus accented by worldly glints of riesling's classic petrol aromas. Don't just take our word on good it is...its got oodles gold of medals including some from the Canadian Wine Awards, and the San Francisco International Wine Challenge.

Cool Stuff: Edible British Columbia

How does the idea of a three-day gourmet kayaking adventure—complete with a chef/sommelier/guide, and exquisite fireside meals washed down with plenty of B.C. wines—strike you? Or perhaps a B.C. cooking class that morphs into dinner with wine? Maybe chef-guided edible tours of a few of Vancouver's foodie neighbourhoods including Granville Island and its famous market, Commercial Drive—Vancouver's original Italian 'hood (The Drive as the locals call it), and Chinatown? These are a few goodies from Edible British Columbia (www.edible-britishcolumbia.com), which offers these adventures and more and has a smart shop (fab food gifts) and cooking studio in the Granville Island Public Market.

Wine Speak

Don't know a fat wine from a thin one? Woody from wooly? Here's where we let you in on some of the lingo that goes along with wine. Drop a few of these babies and you'll sound like a pro.

Woody: When a wine is overly oaky, it's often said to be woody. Oakiness in a wine is good up to a point. Past that point, the woodiness masks the fruit and you might as well stick your nose into a bag of woodchips

What's on?

If you're around or you'll be back soon, put some of these on your calendar:

To April 7, 2007

Up Your Glass!

UYG! is an evening all about the vast subject of wine with award-winning broadcaster and writer Jurgen Gothe. Get ready for" lore and

legend, fact and fable, spoofs and silliness, rants and raves, all surrounded by lots of music."
beyond restaurant + lounge; tickets are \$35 at 604-684-3474

April 14 – 15, 2007

10th Annual Taste Washington 2007

If Seattle is in your plans, this two day celebration of Washington State's fine wineries and restaurants is a must do. Seminars and tastings galore.

Bell Harbor Conference Centre + Qwest Centre, Seattle
206-667-9463 www.tastewashington.org/

April 17, 2007

Best of the Bench Spring Release Party

If you're in town, don't miss this great tasting of wines from Naramata Bench Wineries, one of B.C.'s coolest niche wine areas that produces excellent wines across the board. Bonus: wines are paired with food from Vancouver and Naramata's top restaurants.

The Roundhouse
604-280-4444 or www.naramatabench.com

April 20, 2007

Chocolate & Wine Pairing Evening

A fundraiser for Les Dames d`Escoffier Scholarship Fund

Miele showroom
69 Smithe Street
Reserve at www.lesdames.ca/chocolate.htm

April 28, 2007

Like Wine for Chocolate

Fine wine, fine chocolate...and all that jazz!

Telus World of Science
Tickets at chocaffair@scienceworld.cachocolate.scienceworld.ca

April 30, 2007

BC Hospitality Golf Classic

Golf with chefs, wine guys and more at this delicious fundraiser for the B.C. Hospitality Foundation.

University Golf Club
www.bchospitalityfoundation.com

May 1, 2007

New Zealand Wine Fair 2007

New Zealand's sauvignon blancs and pinot noirs rock. Come out and taste these and others among the 120+ wines being poured by 25 of New Zealand's finest wineries.

Fairmont Waterfront Hotel

www.nzwine-events.ca