

We're all decked out for the holidays and looking glamorously festive. La Vallée's "contemporary wine country cuisine", inspired by some of our amazing western wine regions—the Napa, Columbia and Okanagan Valleys to be exact—is a hit with seasonal celebrants. Our wine country menu was designed by Chef Gregory Short of San Francisco's internationally acclaimed 'wow' restaurant, Masa's, located in our sister property, Executive Hotel Vintage Court has been tweaked to accommodate special group menus featuring contemporary flavours married with classic French themes that pair brilliantly with our fine West Coast wines.

New Year's is in our sights too and we hope you'll be here to mark it in La Vallée style or be staying with us, the host hotel for First Dance 2008, the gay community's glam entrée to the New Year. And in mid-January, Dine Out Vancouver slams into Vancouver for 19 days with dining deals at over 150 restaurants including La Vallée. We think our \$25 three-courser is a fine intro to our menu. Do reserve and mention that you're staying with us so we can make sure you're happily fed.

As our guests, you've probably noticed that all of us at the Executive Hotel Vintage Park have a thing for West Coast wines. We've partnered with many of these western 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 La Vallée restaurant and lounge; and B.C. wines are stocked in mini-bars. And in case you hadn't noticed, we offer complimentary happy hour wine tastings in La Vallée's lounge. Got a little time to spare? We can arrange wine tours to B.C.'s wine regions and beyond.

Just so you know, we strive to have as much fun with our great West Coast 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 these wineries, their winemakers and their best bottles in our wine letters.

PS. If you're in town for the Vancouver Playhouse International Wine Festival: Ciao Italia!, February 25 to March 4, stay tuned. As a Festival host hotel, we aim to make your Festival stay-and-play dates truly memorable.

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

And since we're also partial to other West Coast wine regions, namely the Columbia Valley in Washington, and Napa Valley in California, you'll find some of their top wines on La Vallée's expanded wine list too. If you haven't visited the regions, do. The landscape is unlike anything else on earth...and you'll understand why it's "the perfect climate for wine."

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, and hot picks from the West Coast. Ask for resident wine guru David Lancelot.

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 Fraser Valley

When Vancouverites want to visit a few wineries, they've merely got to hop in their cars and in about 40 minutes they're in bucolic farm country and set for an easy loop round five ace wineries within minutes of each other. So as not to get looped in the process, most people spit (very important). Or better yet, bribe a DD (designated driver) with a really good lunch at Domaine de Chaberton Estate Winery's French bistro. Others worthy of a look in and tasting? Award-winning Township 7, the Fort Wine Company (superb fruit wines), Glenugie Winery (this one's organic), and Lotusland Vineyards (The name? Eastern Canada thinks we laid-back West Coasters live in Lotus Land).

Winery: See Ya Later Ranch

This colorful B.C. Okanagan winery has a highly entertaining history and label. The name came from a sort-of-sad tale when the mail-order bride of original owner Major Hugh Fraser (1885-1970) was so fed up with the ranch's far-away-from-everything, secluded location that one day she upped and left leaving a note that said "See ya later...." On the label, the halo-ed dog floating skyward (or heavenward) is a tribute to the Major's many dogs that are buried at the winery. The winery itself has undergone a metamorphosis from Hawthorne Mountain Winery to See Ya Later Ranch, improved its winemaking practices so that it now wins loads of medals, and switched everything to screwcap.

Wine Wiz: Dave Carson

German-born Dave Carson arrived in the Okanagan as a young child and by the time he was 11 he was working in the vineyards. In 1980 he helped build sister winery Sumac Ridge, eventually moving in 2003 to Hawthorne Vineyards, now See Ya Later Ranch where he's responsible for managing the cellar and making all nine wines. If you see Carson and the label side by side, you'll swear there's a

resemblance between man and pup.

Top Drops:

White: See Ya Later Chardonnay Okanagan Valley 2005

This tasty chard is reputed to be one of the best wines made at SYL. With just a hint of new oak, it's lively, fresh, and oh-so-expressive. You'll find flecks of appetizing honey, baked apple, and buttery vanilla. Gotta love the creamy mouth feel and impressive length.

Red: Osoyoos Larose Petales, Okanagan Valley 2004

This baby sister to *grand dame* Osoyoos Larose is a beaut and a fine addition to the family. It's dry, round, supple and redolent of dill, coffee, black olives, and sports a touch of leather and smokiness. Integrated and soft, it's drinking nicely now.

Cool Stuff: After one *Have A Glass*, and two of *Had a Glass*, Vancouver wine guys, Kenji Hodgson and James Nevison have just released a third 'Had' vintage, *Had a Glass, Top 100 Wines for 2008 under \$20*. As with previous editions, it prances through the points of how to taste, tosses in a few recipes, but the heart—and most of the book—are the wines. What to drink, when, and with what. Example? Mission Hill Five Vineyards Pinot Grigio 2006, \$16.99 that the guys recommend as an aperitif, for romance, and to down with chicken strips with plum sauce, or grilled pork chops and applesauce.

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.

Decadent: We all have our own ideas what this means, and since it's the hols, decadence plays a big role about now. A decadent wine is one that's loaded with opulent, unctuous layers of fruit, with a big dramatic bouquet, and one that's enticingly plump, luxurious textured.

What's on?

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

Early Bird Tickets on sale for the
Vancouver Playhouse International Wine Festival 2008
(Ciao, Italia! February 25 to March 4)
604-872-6622
www.playhousewinefest.com

December 20
Fine Wines: critics' choices and limited release wines
Taylorwood Wines, 4:30-6:30 p.m. (free)
1185 Mainland Street
www.taylorwoodwines.com

December 22
Tasting - Township 7
Marquis Wine Cellars, 3-7 p.m. (free)
1034 Davie Street
www.marquis-wines.com

December 23
B.C.'s Best Bubbles
Taylorwood Wines, 3:00-5:00 p.m. (free)
1185 Mainland Street
www.taylorwoodwines.com

December 31
First Dance 2008 (Vancouver's glam gay gala New Year's fete)
The Roundhouse, 9 p.m. – 3 a.m., \$50
Roundhouse Mews
www.clubzone.com or 1-866-824-8212

January 10
War of the Wines: The Grapes of Laugh
Vancouver TheatreSports' comedic wine & appies fundraiser
Performance Works, Granville Island, 7 p.m. (\$50)
www.vtssl.com/warofthewines/index.php

January 16 – February 8
Dine Out Vancouver 2008
150+ Vancouver restaurants will be serving three-course menus priced at \$15, \$25, or \$35
See www.tourismvancouver.com/visitors/dining/dine_out_vancouver

for participating restos and menus.

January 22

Taste B.C. 2008 – a celebration of local food and drink!

Hyatt Regency Hotel, 4:30 PM - 7:30 PM (\$49.99)

655 Burrard Street

www.libertywinemERCHANTS.com or 604-739-7801