

Vintage's View

FEBRUARY 15, 2007

Now that we've got another wild and crazy Valentine's Day done with for another year, we can get on with life as it should be...enjoying a few cool wines coming our way. 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 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 guest room refreshment centre; and in case you hadn't noticed, we offer complimentary early evening/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.

WINE WIZ:

Giordano Venturi, Venturi-Schulze Vineyards

There likely isn't a more witty and focused (some would say eccentric) winemaker in B.C. than Giordano Venturi who has single-mindedly and almost single-handedly (he's aided and abetted by wife Marilyn Schulze and daughter Michelle) crafted the best, most sought after wines on Vancouver Island. And the priciest. Venturi's tightly focused winemaking vision and methods have paid off big time: The wines are as individual as he is and are nothing short of spectacular. Hard to find too—they're sold to a select few restaurants and via the winery's mailing list. Tastings and tours are virtually unheard except for a couple of open houses each year that are filled up instantly. Italian by birth, Venturi also makes very fine, authentic, aged Modena balsamic vinegar that sells for a princely \$50 for a 250 ml (8.5 oz) bottle. www.venturischulze.com

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

COOL STUFF

On a recent visit to Toronto, Britain's best wine writer, Jancis Robinson, lit into the Canadian wine industry saying, "In my experience no nation is more defensive about their wines than the Canadians, perhaps because they have so little vineyard, less than, say, Slovenia or Japan. Every time I go there to launch a book, usually a reference book about the wines of the world, I am berated for not having devoted more space to the land of maple syrup." Things perked up when she noted that 17 of the 70 wines tasted were "world class wines from any point of view." Those included mostly B.C. wines that she found "arguably a more mainstream style of wine -- much more obviously fruity, pungent and New World."

In the recently released results of the 2006 Canadian Wine Awards, B.C. scored big once again, racking up the lion's share of medals. Jackson-Triggs Okanagan was named Winery of the Year (for the third time in the four years the Awards have been held); Burrowing Owl 2003 Syrah - Best Red Wine of the Year, and Raven Ridge 2003 Braeburn Iced Cider tied for Fruit Wine of the Year. See www.wineaccess.ca for all the winners.

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.
- 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:
 - Okanagan
 - Similkameen
 - Fraser Valley
 - Vancouver Island
 - Gulf Islands

What's On?

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

February 22, 2007

Food & Wine Pairing Magic - Winter Fare

Quince Cooking Studio's Chef/sommelier Andrea Jefferson explores food and wine pairing matches from the savoury with ample sampling and cooking demos too. Delish. Cost is \$95. ~ 604-731-4645. www.quince.ca

March 6, 2007

California Wine Fair

Although we tend to drink most of the wines we make here in B.C., we like to keep abreast of what else is happening out there and keeping tabs on our California neighbours is good fun who will be out in record numbers with 75-or-so participating wineries pouring 250 wines, and we are regularly referred to as Napa North ever since the Wine Spectator hung that particular label on us. Venue: Fairmont Waterfront Centre Hotel. Tickets are \$55 at 604-687-1644 or www.artsclub.com.

March 14-15, 2007

6th Annual Victoria Festival of Wine

A side trip to Victoria to take in this popular festival that bills itself as "two days of indulgence" is highly recommended. On tap are scads of seminars, a massive tasting (100+ wineries) including many hard-to-source Vancouver Island wines, winemaker dinners, and a musical "Sideways" evening featuring plenty of pinot noir. www.victoriafestivalofwine.com

March 22-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

March 26-April 1, 2007

29th Vancouver Playhouse International Wine Festival

If you haven't already booked in for this amazing event (it's one of the top wine festivals in North America), there's no time like the present. This year—Australia is the feature country and riesling the featured varietal—will see more than 180 wineries pouring 1480 wines at 53 events over 8 days. You're waiting for what? www.playhousewinefest.com

Spotlight

Wine Region: Vancouver Island

Vancouver Island has 16 wineries so far, in a fairly concentrated area—just 200 acres are under vine. Four of the wineries are on the Saanich Peninsula, mere minutes from the BC Ferry Terminal, which is how most mainlanders, get to the Island. The others are about 40-minutes up Island in the Cowichan Valley with a hardy few scattered a little further north. On the whole, growing conditions are hardly ideal but there's a happening microclimate in the Valley that makes grape growing pretty easy, that is, if you can outfox the destructive deer, rampaging birds, and occasional bears. The scenery is beyond idyllic with views from vineyards of endless fir-covered mountains, calm lakes, and occasional expanses of ocean. Because Islanders are fiercely loyal to 'home-grown', it's difficult to find these wines for sale although some do make it onto mainland restaurant wine lists.

www.wineislands.ca

Winery: Marley Farm Winery

A little bit of Jamaica on Vancouver Island? You bet: Winery owner Michael Marley, second cousin to the late, great Bob Marley, has planted vineyards in "a little slice of Zion (heaven)." Marley and wife Beverly have neatly divided winemaking duties: he makes wines from grapes (pinot gris, Ortega, pinot noir), hers are fruit—blackberries, loganberries, raspberries, blueberries, apples, rhubarb, kiwi—and elderflowers. Kiwi wine is majorly labour intensive so Beverly enlisted friends for the great kiwi squeeze but because of the now huge demand for kiwi wine, the entire community helps out and it's morphed into a big annual party. Beverly's friends help out in deflowering the elderflowers too while the farm's sheep and geese do their bit weeding and fertilizing the vineyards. www.marleyfarm.ca

Top Drops:

White:

Marley Farms Pinot Grigio.

You can spot a Marley wine a mile away: there's a distinctive bottle shape, and exuberant Rasta-tinged label. Inside is a classic citrusy-smooth PG that begs for seafood or shellfish.

Red:

Godfrey Brownell Pinot Noir 2002.

This top-drawer Euro-styled pinot is tough to find unless you make the trek to the winery, which is utterly worthwhile. You'll tour the vineyards, taste the wines, talk to the erudite—and opinionated—winemaker/owner, and make a friend for life.

Port:

Cherry Point Blackberry Port.

This port-style wine is one of Vancouver Island's popular top sellers. What's not to like? There's hot summer sun in every drop of this intense blackberry-jammy delish port. Great on its own or with dessert.