

If you haven't yet visited La Vallée Restaurant (www.lavalleerestaurant.com), our recently renovated, recreated, and renamed restaurant and lounge, you're overdue. Do check out the shaded, prettily landscaped adjoining patio, truly an urban oasis where you'll feel as though you're transported miles (or kilometers) from downtown Vancouver.

La Vallée proudly serves what we like to call "contemporary wine country cuisine" inspired by some of our amazing western wine regions—Napa, Columbia and Okanagan Valleys. Our wine country cuisine 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. We're thrilled to have Chef Short involved in La Vallée, and as at Masa's, you'll find that contemporary flavours married with classic French themes pair brilliantly with our fine West Coast wines.

Now that we have your attention, and once you've wined and dined in La Vallée, 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 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 La Vallée restaurant and lounge; 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 all of our major wine regions.

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.

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, 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 Okanagan

The Okanagan wine region may be B.C.'s biggest but it's pretty piddling in size when you compare it to say, Napa. While it's said to

have North America's most scenic vineyards—hectares of them rise from lakeshores to climb up mountain slopes—it's got plenty more going for it. Like a four-lake daisy chain running the length of the Okanagan Valley providing optimal growing conditions with long warm sunny days and cool nights with the heat from the lakes tempering the chill. The valley runs from the US border about 160 kilometres (100 miles) north, and all of this combines to provide superb growing conditions for wines that run the spectrum from auxerrois to zinfandel. Wine touring is a breeze with wineries running the length of the lakes; tasting rooms are open year-round; many of the wineries have on-site restaurants, delis, and picnic areas. Accommodation ranges from campsites to lakeside resorts. Local wines are found in abundance in restaurants everywhere

Winery: Quails Gate Estate Winery

This family winery located in the Okanagan Valley traces its roots back to 1908 and early fruit growing days. In 1956 the family bought land on the slopes of Mt. Boucherie, the current home of the winery, and planted vineyards. Now in the hands of brothers Ben and Tony Stewart, grandsons of the original founder, the winery is thriving and is one of Canada's renowned producers of pinot noir. Another not-to-be-missed wine is the Old Vines Foch. The tasting room and wine shop have just moved to a large, new vineyard-side building. The old log 'cabin', the estate's original house remains. On site is the spectacular Old Vines restaurant serving local Okanagan meat, poultry, cheeses, and produce.

Wine Wiz: Grant Stanley

This B.C. winemaker made a name for himself crafting some of New Zealand's best Pinot Noirs where he trained and worked for a decade. Back in B.C., Stanley is doing the same at Quails' Gate and turning out some of the best terroir-specific—and award-winning—pinot noirs in the country. His goal? To make one of the best pinot noirs in the world. He's well on his way if a growing raft of awards is anything to go by.

Top Drops:

White: Quail's Gate Chenin Blanc 2006

Bursting with bright fruit flavour and bold lemon and lime, teased with honey notes, make this a cool, crisp charmer that refreshes on its own or sings with oysters and pretty much any shellfish.

Rosé: Quails Gate Rosé 2006

Made from Gamay Noir, this fresh bright rosé is a tasty mouthful of strawberries, rhubarb, and lemony spice. A great quaff on its own or pair with antipasto or barbecued anything.

Red: Quails' Gate Family Reserve Pinot Noir 2005

A dense, complex, and intriguing wine, this Burgundian-styled pinot noir boasts ripe red fruit and hints of spice and earth. Rock someone's world and serve with roasted duck breast and cherry reduction.

Cool Stuff

Quick hints to food and wine pairing:

- First up, there are no rules. *Really*.
- Know the basic tastes of wine (sweet, bitter and sour) and understand the different aromas (floral, fruit, spice, and alcohol).
- Taste and texture (weight and intensity) are important in food and wine pairing.
- Note the ingredients being used in a dish and select a grape variety to suit. (If there's a butter sauce, try a buttery chardonnay.)
- Contrast flavours and textures or choose like with like to create a balance.
- Don't get hung up on the colour of the wine.
- Drink what *you* like.
- Experiment. Enjoy.

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.

Corked: A corked wine is a flawed wine with a funky aroma usually caused by a faulty cork. It's a sharp, musty, sort of wet cardboard, old socks, thoroughly unpleasant smell. Most people aren't familiar with the smell and simply think they don't like the wine. This is thought to happen in 10-20% of wines.

What's on?

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

July 17, 6:30 p.m.

Ravenswood Zin Fling!

California Wine Fair fundraiser for the Arts Club Theatre
Gramercy Grill, 2685 Arbutus Street
604-687-5315
www.artsclub.com

July 27, 5-7:30 p.m.

Tasting -- Wines of Argentina

BC Liquor Store, 39th & Cambie, Vancouver.
www.bliquorstores.com

July 27 - 29

BC Wine Country Weekend

Delta Sun Peaks Resort
Sun Peaks, B.C.
1-800-807-3257
www.sunpeaksresort.com

July 28, 12 - 8 p.m.

Citytv's Taste of the City

PNE
Vancouver's best restaurants offer Signature Samplers
www.citytv.com/vancouver

August 9 - 11

2007 Okanagan Summer Wine Festival

Silver Star Resort, Vernon
800-663-4431
www.TheWineFestivals.com

August 11

Galiano Wine Festival

Lions Park, 912 Burrill Road, Galiano
Fundraiser for the Galiano Island Health Care Centre
250-539-3506
www.galianoisland.com/winefestival

August 16, 5:30 - 8 p.m.

California Dreamin` (celebrating the wine and food of California)
VanDusen Botanical Gardens

604-257-8670

www.vandusengarden.org

August 18

Red & White Celebration with the Bard on the Beach

Fine wine, great theatre, hosted by Calona Vineyards

Vanier Park, Kits Point

604-739-0559

www.bardonthebeach.org

September 9

Vancouver Feast of Fields

UBC Farms

B.C. wine and beer and tastes from some of the city's best restaurants
in a bucolic outdoor setting

www.feastoffields.com