

We've got big news to share: Ta-da... Introducing **La Vallee Restaurant** (www.lavalleerestaurant.com). We've completely renovated, recreated, and renamed our restaurant and lounge. Step off the elevator on the second floor and you'll spot three elegantly draped tables—just so you'll know that you've arrived—and a fully-stocked wine cabinet a few steps away. The entry to La Vallee is a perfect introduction to the relaxed elegance of the dining room, lounge, and stellar patio that awaits. The décor truly evokes the best of wine country. A table on our serene landscaped patio complete with towering trees will transport you miles (or kilometers) from downtown Vancouver.

We're truly one of Vancouver's hidden gems. Why? We proudly serve what we like to call "contemporary wine country cuisine" that's been inspired by our amazing western wine regions—the 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, the Executive Hotel Vintage Court. We're honoured to have Chef Short involved in La Vallee. As like Masa's, you'll find contemporary flavours married with classic French themes that pair that brilliantly with our fine West Coast wines. We're thrilled with the new 'us' and we think you will be too.

Now that we have your attention, and once you've wined and dined in La Vallee, you've probably noticed that all of us at the Executive Hotel Vintage Park have a thing for West Coast wines, B.C.'s in particular. 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 early evening/happy hour wine tastings in La Vallee'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 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.

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 Gulf Islands

Just north of Washington State's San Juan Islands are B.C.'s Gulf Islands that happen to be more hospitable to growing grapevines than the slightly more southerly isles. This is important to know because in the 1850s, a dispute over the Canadian-US boundary which involved who'd get San Juan Island, came to be known as "The Pig War" when a Canadian pig—the war's only casualty—was killed by an American. As it turned out, America got San Juan Island and a few others and we Canadians got the Gulf Islands. Today there are eight wineries on six of them. The oldest is relatively young. Saturna Island Vineyards on Saturna Island with vineyards that run right down to the ocean's edge, dates back only to 1998. With the vagaries of island ferries, is not possible to visit them all in a single day. Three days or so would offer leisurely touring of these picturesque islands and tasting of characterful wines

Winery: Peller Estates

Peller Estates got its start in B.C. in 1961 as Andrés Wines in Port Moody, a Vancouver suburb though B.C. was sort of lost in the dust for decades as Andrés focused its wine making in Ontario. The name Peller (the founder was a Hungarian called Andrew Peller) has overtaken Andrés, which is a good thing because some of the Andrés wines were less than remarkable. Winemaker Robert Summers' wines improved dramatically in 2002 and the wines have gone better by leaps and bounds ever since. Even more so a couple of years ago when wine guru Howard Soon stepped in to oversee all winemaking operations. In 2006 Peller Estates was named Winery of the Year at the Canadian Wine Awards. Definitely a winery to watch.

Wine Wiz: Howard Soon

Master winemaker Howard Soon is one of the most respected and enduring winemakers in the Okanagan. Vancouver-born and bred, Soon began making wine at Calona in 1980, in charge of both the mass-volume wines and small-production single-vineyard Sandhill Wines, plus the superb Sandhill Small Lots Collection wines (production is a few hundred cases, about 75 to 500). Peller Estates purchased Calona and Sandhill a couple of years ago, and now guru Soon oversees these plus the Peller Estates winemaking team.

Top Drops:

White: Red Rooster Pinot Gris

This tasty quaff is flavoured with everything that grows where it does on the sun-soaked Naramata Bench in the Okanagan: apples, pears, melons, and grapefruit (okay maybe the grapefruit doesn't grow there but everything else does). This zingy white has plenty of crisp acidity and aces seared ahi tuna, seafood risotto, and maybe even tomatoey-garlicy bruschetta.

Rosé: Township 7 Rosé

Pop the cork on this baby and you'll find summer in a bottle. Appealing flavours of strawberries, rhubarb, and raspberries jump out of the glass. Serve this lovely rosy-salmon pink number well chilled and drink on its own or with picnic fare like cold roast chicken, a niçoise salad, cold cuts, and fresh fruit.

Red: Peller Estates Private Reserve Cabernet Sauvignon 2005

This is a deep, dark, luscious red with a wicked edge and we mean that in the best way possible. There's a bit of a butch nose to this baby—like leather, oak, spice, and hits oh barnyard aromas and dark berries and black pepper on the palate. Bring on a big ol' grilled steak, rare please, with a side of mushrooms.

Cool Stuff**Nat's Wine Pairing Magic**

If the thought of trying to come up with a wine for tonight's bison steak or even potato chips makes you dizzy, imagine a website that offers 360,000 matches. Ottawa wine wiz Natalie McLean has come up with many inventive pairings on her easy-to-use www.nataliemaclean.com/matcher/ site. Right now she's trying to figure out what'll go with those cheesy stadium hotdogs she'll be scoffing at ball games this summer.

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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.

Brawny: Use this to describe a hefty, muscular, full-bodied wine with plenty of weight and flavour. It may not always be the most elegant or refined sort of wine, but it's got plenty of appeal.

What's on?

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

June 17, 3 to 5 p.m.

Fathers` Day "Big Red" Tasting/Summer Party Wines Tastings

Taylorwood Wines

1185 Mainland Street, Yaletown

604-408-9463

www.taylorwoodwines.com

June 20

Winery Night: Tinhorn Creek

BC Wine Appreciation Society

Vancouver Listel Hotel, 1300 Robson Street

www.bcwas.com

June 21st, 7 to 9 p.m.

Summer Solstice Festival

South World Wine Society

Vancouver Lawn Tennis & Badminton Club

www.southworldwine.com

June 24

Tasting - French Garden Pleasures - Loire White & Gold

Liberty Wine Merchants, 291 East 2nd Avenue

604-925-3663

www.libertywinemerchants.com

July 12, 7:30 p.m. to 9:30

12th Annual Summer Champagne & Caviar Extravaganza

Hosted by Liberty Wine Merchants, at Vancouver Rowing Club

Proceeds benefit Amateur Sports at VRC

604-224-8050

www.libertywinemerchants.com

July 14, 9:30 to 5:30 p.m.

Wine & Spirit Education - Foundation Course (1 day intensive)

UBC Robson Square, Vancouver

604-375-0533

www.finevintageltd.com