

A SPECIAL EDMONTON JOURNAL NEWS REPORT

# The Wines of British Columbia

*All over B.C., wineries are exploring  
the infinite possibilities and universal pleasures of wine, food and fun.*





Senka Tennant,  
Black Hills Estate Winery,  
Oliver

Croatian-born Senka Tennant is one of the four owners of Black Hills (along with her husband, Bob, and partners Susan and Peter McCarrell).

Tennant used to own a clothing store, but her degree in botany and her innate talent have equipped her to make some of the Okanagan's most coveted wines. During the 1999 and 2000 vintages, she had a mentoring arrangement with Washington State winemaker Rusty Figgins.

Until 2006, Tennant made her wines in the Okanagan's funkiest winery, a large Quonset hut that came with the property when the partners bought it in 1996. Finally in 2006, Black Hills moved into a spiffy new winery with the latest equipment and, finally, a large office and laboratory for the winemaker.

— John Schreiner

Michael Bartier,  
Golden Mile Cellars,  
Oliver

A keen outdoorsman, Michael Bartier, born in Kelowna in 1967, has a degree in recreational administration. He had intended to become a professional mountaineering guide until he got a job in the cellar at Hawthorne Mountain Vineyards in Okanagan Falls. It did not take him long to become a winemaker.

"I was at the right place at the right time," he reflected later.

"I can't see anyone now coming into the wine industry as wet behind the ears as I was, and rising so fast."

But he is a natural, his Chardonnays made at Hawthorne Mountain and later at Township 7 — where he was winemaker from 2001 to 2005 — won top national awards in the Canadian Wine Competition.

Bartier joined Golden Mile Cellars in 2005, hitching his career to a fast-growing winery where he gets to work with a wide range of varietals, including Zinfandel, Syrah, Pinot Noir, Chenin Blanc and Chardonnay.

— John Schreiner

## Okanagan South

# Food and wine — a great partnership

JUDY SCHULTZ  
Edmonton Journal Food Writer  
OSOYOOS, B.C.

At the sunniest end of the valley, a young restaurateur from Edmonton reflects on what led him to open his own wine-loving restaurant, Passatempo, at the Spirit Ridge resort in Osoyoos.

"I was out here on a wine tour, sitting on a patio, having a glass of wine," says Brad Lazarenko, who also owns Culina Restaurant in Edmonton. "I thought, 'I could live here.' So we looked around, did some tire kicking."

That was in the fall of 2005, and the Spirit Ridge Vineyard Resort & Spa, next door to Nk'Mip Cellars, just happened to be looking for somebody to handle the restaurant.

A few months later, he opened Passatempo.

Lazarenko brought a hand-picked crew of 10 people from Edmonton to help set up the restaurant. Included in the team was Jessamyn Box, who wrangled the careful selection of wines.

While the restaurant features four Nk'Mip cellar selections, it also offers 33 wines from other Okanagan cellars, including Hawthorne Mountain, Sumac Ridge, Mt. Boucherie, Blasted Church, Burrowing Owl, Dirty Laundry and CedarCreek. The list also includes such smaller wineries as Joie, Le Vieux Pin, Twisted Tree, Tantalus and Black Hills.

"It's always under reconstruction," Lazarenko says of his wine list and menu. "This is our year for developing relationships with local farmers for the restaurant."

He's even getting coffee from the tiny Rock Creek Trading Post in nearby Rock Creek. "It's organic fair trade, and they have a micro-roaster. We need more organic growers, free-range meats. Our menu has to support the wine — Nk'Mip wines, yes, but also other good Okanagan wines."

Nk'Mip Cellars also does a terrific job of welcoming guests. Its tour and tasting program is first-rate, and it has its own dedicated chef for the restaurant on its terrace, specializing in native foods. Look for smoked fish and game here.

It would be a shame to visit either the winery restaurant or Passatempo without setting aside some time for a visit to the Nk'Mip Cultural Centre, which includes self-guided and group tours, a visit to a sunken pit house, and a critter corner featuring live examples of the local reptile pop-



JUDY SCHULTZ, THE EDMONTON JOURNAL

The Okanagan has great food to go with its wine. Above, a tasting platter at Nk'Mip.

ulation. It's all housed in a magnificent building that includes a First Nations gift boutique.

Just north of Osoyoos, the 140-acre Burrowing Owl Estate Winery near Oliver has hired award-winning chef Bernard Cassavant to head its lovely Sonora dining room.

Cassavant's food philosophy is, "Keep it simple, feel the food."

To that end, he looks for local farmers to stock his kitchen.

"We'll diversify, we'll exceed every expectation we can in the guest house," says Sue Toye, the winery's director of hospitality.

"The chef will develop his menu with local producers, but in the end, it's always about the wine."

A short hop west into the Similkameen Valley you'll find Crowsnest Vineyards, with its busy Crowsnest Gasthaus, a friend-

ly, family-run restaurant with seven guest rooms.

Ann Heinecke makes the wines, and her irrepressible brother, Sascha Heinecke, runs the tasting room and enthuses about the pleasures of food with wine.

"My wood-fired bread oven is on the way from Germany right now," says Sascha. "In season, we'll have a culinary program, with guest chefs from wineries and restaurants. We're all good friends."

It's just that kind of business.

Up and down the valley, wineries are investing more resources in the infinite possibilities (and universal pleasures) of food and wine.

From picnic licences at cottage wineries to full-scale dining rooms in some of the larger wineries, the timeless partnership of food and wine is promoted and celebrated.

jschultz@thejournal.canwest.com



DHZMEDIA

The Rise development, just west of Vernon at the north end of Okanagan Lake, overlooks the lake and valley. It will have a Fred Couples signature golf course.

## Build them, and they will come

NICK LEES

Edmonton Journal Wine Writer  
KELOWNA, B.C.

There's an \$8-billion construction boom in central B.C. wine country, and Leona Snider is among those leading the charge.

The president and CEO of Okanagan Hills Development Corp. is building a \$1-billion resort community called the Rise in Vernon, about 50 kilometres north of Kelowna. It will have the only Fred Couples signature golf course in Canada.

Snider's is one of a number of huge developments planned or under construction as the financially comfortable, many of them baby boomers, seek summer or retirement homes or condo rentals in a beautiful region with an enviable climate.

Other projects include the \$477-million Vintage Landing Resort, also near Vernon, and the \$250-million Greata Ranch Vineyard Estates, halfway between Kelowna and Penticton on the western shore of Okanagan Lake.

The picturesque Okanagan Valley attracts travellers as well as homebuyers. Some come to vacation or to play golf on one of the 53 courses within a 45-minute drive of Kelowna. Other recreation opportunities include everything from boating to bird watching and hiking to horseback riding.

The majority will enjoy a glass of local wine, perhaps do a wine tour or take in one of the many wine festivals.

"We've been tagged Napa North," says Robert Fine, director of economic development for the Economic Development Commission for the central Okanagan regional district.

"There's no question there's a romantic attachment to an area with vines. Tourism has evolved to a world-class level and wine is a key to our economy."

He adds: "Of the \$8 billion that will be



BRIAN SPROUT

The Greata Ranch project will offer owners breathtaking views of Okanagan Lake.

spent in the public and private sectors in the next five years, the vast majority will be dedicated to creating facilities where people can come, live and play."

The Fitzpatrick family, owners of Cedar-Creek Estate Winery, are developing some 400 lakeshore homes near Summerland. The Greata Ranch project, being developed with the Concord Pacific Group, will offer 200 townhomes and 150 condos, with prices ranging from \$300,000 to \$2 million. There are also 50 single-family lots.

"Planned facilities include a marina, restaurant and wine reserve, a health club with swimming and sauna facilities, a fully equipped gym, and tennis courts," says winery president Gordon Fitzpatrick, who has followed his father, Senator Ross Fitzpatrick, into the wine business.

A bonus for owners is the opportunity to join an exclusive wine club and have their own private labels on wine made from

grapes on the 40 acres of vineyard outside their windows.

"Owners, if they wish, will learn about such things as pruning, cultivating and blending at some eight to 10 special events annually," says Fitzpatrick. "Some 5,000 cases of our best wine will be dedicated to them."

Wine features are big in the Okanagan. The third tower under construction in the \$100-million Lakeshore development by Okanagan Pacific Properties in Penticton has a communal cellar with temperature-controlled, 100-bottle capacity wine lockers for each owner.

Meanwhile, the town of Oliver plans to underscore its claim to being the wine capital of Canada by creating the Oliver Wine Village.

Due to open in the spring of 2009, it's a culinary tourism development on the riverfront downtown. It will cost between \$85

million and \$95 million.

"The project will focus on celebrating the culture and heritage of the south Okanagan and its relationship to food, wine and agriculture," says Jon Zwickel, whose Bellstar Hotel and Resorts is working on the village with Vancouver-based Co-Operators Development Corp. Ltd.

The village will include an inn and spa, a wine interpretive centre, a culinary arts centre, riverfront homes, boutiques and restaurants.

Bellstar is also involved in the Spirit Ridge Vineyard Resort & Spa, a \$100-million-plus development being built in partnership with the Osoyoos Indian Band.

Phase 1, overlooking Nk'Mip Cellars and Lake Osoyoos, is already complete. It includes 94 luxury villas and suites, a lodge with restaurant, spa, meeting facilities, pool and a waterfront beach club. (This is part of the Nk'Mip Destination, which includes Nk'Mip Cellars, a golf course, a cultural centre and a campground and RV resort.)

Phase 2 is due to open in the spring of 2009. The Osoyoos band has invested 25 per cent in this phase, which includes 132 homes, an adobe-style amenity building that will house a wine-bar café, theatre room, business centre and meeting places and a desert garden. There will also be a swimming pool and a second, larger fitness centre.

Near Snider's Vernon development, which includes a 40-acre vineyard with a state-of-the-art, gravity-fed winery, the G Group of Companies is working on the \$477-million Vintage Landing Resort.

The 870-acre site will have 1,000 residential units, bungalows, a five-star hotel, retail facilities, a health and wellness centre, convention space, an 18-hole golf course, a marina and a beach club.

nlees@thejournal.canwest.com