

recreation

& investment properties

NECESSITY VS. LUXURY

Owning a rec property has become a priority for many Albertans

OKANAGAN – much more than beaches and peaches

WEST COAST ADVANTAGE
property at the right price

REAL ESTATE'S HOT
south of the border

Vineyard living hits high note with oenophiles

It seems the perfect location for growing grapes is also ideal for a recreational property

By Suzanne Beaubien

Wine tourism in the west has given way to whole new lifestyle for investors with a palate for prized real estate in the heart of B.C.'s grape-growing country.

Buying property with proximity to some of the province's most promising wineries and vineyards ensures benefits only grapes have known up until now, say realtors and developers who specialize in the Okanagan.

That means hot weather in the summer, short winters, and enough sunshine year-round — over 2,000 hours a year — to make the perfect pinot noir.

Folk Cramer, managing broker for Re/Max Penticton, says the Okanagan Valley's climate is especially attractive for retirees and baby boomers planning for their future.

And the wine-country connection is becoming more common among developers, says Cramer, noting the area's large population growth in recent years.

Complete with wine clubs, gourmet restaurants and wine lodges, these new developments are offering wine lovers all the amenities of Napa, at northern B.C. prices.

According to the B.C. Wine Institute, an organization that represents 95 per cent of total wine production in the province, there are 136 wineries in B.C., and over 12 million litres of wine were produced in the province last year. The Okanagan Valley has more than 70 wineries and supplies 93 per cent of the province's wine.

At Greata Ranch, a 400-

home property development on a working vineyard 25 minutes south of Kelowna, B.C., vineyard living means watching over the vines from your front window, and even getting your hands dirty by helping out.

"To most people, living on a vineyard is a dream," says David Negrin, senior vice-president for Concord Pacific Group, the developer behind Greata Ranch.

"You'll really experience the seasons," he says of life on the 40-acre vineyard — a partnership with Cedar Creek Winery.

"In the springtime, the grapes are coming out — then you come to summer and it's really green."

Featuring a bar and grill that overlooks Okanagan Lake, a members lounge, marina, wine shop, 20-room boutique hotel, health club and spa, the project also includes an exclusive 225-member wine club, with private cellars dedicated to members' collections.

An on-site boutique winery with a 10,000-case output is also in the works.

Construction on the development, which will include Mediterranean-style estate-size homes, townhouses and condos, starts next spring. Sales start this fall.

Negrin says the developer expected to see a great deal of interest from baby boomers looking to secure a second home, but were surprised to discover a diverse cohort of registrants both young and old — many of them from the area, as well as Albertans.

Further south, the four-star Spirit Ridge Vineyard Resort and Spa in Osoyoos, B.C., is expanding to include full-ownership properties on the 1,200-acre lakeside resort

overlooking the NKMip Cellars Vineyard, North America's first aboriginal-owned and operated winery.

"I like to say that wine-tasting is one of the premier sports in the Okanagan Valley," says Curt Jansen, sales manager for the project being developed by Bellstar Hotels & Resorts.

While there are dozens of wineries within a short drive of Spirit Ridge, residents of the pueblo-style development will need only to walk five minutes down the path to NKMip Cellars, which was named one of the 2010 Olympics official wineries.

Oenophiles will delight in a dinner at Passa Tempo, the on-site bistro that pairs the best South Okanagan wines with "wine country comfort food," while golfers can work up their thirst at Sonora Dunes Golf Course.

Phase 2 is now sold out, but Bellstar plans to launch Phase 3 of the development next spring.

Bellstar is also working on a "wine village" in Oliver, B.C. Though early in the development, it aims to showcase numerous local vintners through tastings, tours and other events.

Meanwhile on the sun-warmed slopes overlooking Okanagan Lake near Vernon, five acres of pinot noir and riesling grapes are maturing in preparation for next year's harvest, the first at The Rise's vineyard.

The \$1-billion, 735-acre, multi-phase resort community will eventually feature a winery complex that will serve as a natural meeting place for tastings, events and fine dining, says Lexna Snider, president and chief executive officer of The Rise.

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Greata Ranch is a 400-home development on a working vineyard near Kelowna, B.C.

