

# Indulge

MAY/JUNE 2007

**full bloom** spring  
fashions arrive

living space turns **inside  
out**

**grill skill** the BBQ  
comes of age



Burrowing Owl Estate Winery photos

From Spirit Ridge Vineyard Resort and Spa (above) to Walnut Beach Resort (below) and Watermark Beach Resort, the South Okanagan's wine country is developing a flurry of high-end boutique hotels.

# Four-star resorts shine in South Okanagan

by JOHN MASTERS

**Think of Burrowing Owl's** new Guest House as a safety feature, says Susan Toye. "People who've been sipping wine shouldn't be driving," she points out.

So Burrowing Owl Estate Winery, just north of Osoyoos in B.C.'s southern Okanagan Valley, has kindly constructed an inn you can repair to after you've spent some time in the winery's tasting room...and had dinner at its posh restaurant...and maybe gone for a swim in its 25-m saltwater pool...oh, and watched the sun set over 60 hectares of vineyard from the hot tub.

It's a pretty good safety feature.

The Guest House had its "soft" opening in November. The official debut is the start of May.

That's when work on the 165-square-metre penthouse will be completed.

During the winter Toye, Burrowing Owl's director of hospitality, has been sorting out the inevitable start-up kinks of a winery that's suddenly also a hotel.

Not a big hotel, you understand. Just as Burrowing Owl has kept its yearly wine production to a modest 13,000 cases, its Guest House has a mere 10 rooms, plus the penthouse. Each is done, like the rest of the property, in American Southwest style with lots of warm desert colours, as befits its location in the northernmost tip of the Sonora Desert. Creamy walls, light wood, rust-tones floor slate... And with four-star touches like local artwork and the 37-inch high-def LCD TV on the walls.

This is something new for the south end of the Okanagan. Osoyoos has always had a fair bit of accommodation, but until very recently it was almost all classic 1960s-style motels: the Richter Pass, the Spanish Fiesta, the Sun Beach. In summer, families would come with their kids for the warm waters of Lake Osoyoos; in winter, snowbirds from

Indulge in  
Travel



Construction is well on schedule for Walnut Beach Resort, the south Okanagan's newest condominium development cropping up in the burgeoning wine country.



*'A few years ago, when people talked about the emergence of a Napa North in B.C., the smart money was on Kelowna. Suddenly all the action seems to be 128 km down the road.'*

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Manitoba and Saskatchewan would use the town as a cheap alternative to Arizona.

But with the development of the Okanagan's wine industry in the past decade, and especially with the number of premium vintners setting up shop at this end of the valley, Osoyoos is enjoying a sudden lurch up-market, amenities-wise. Wine travellers looking for

ownership. The suites in Phase One were all sold by December 2006, six months before most were ready for occupancy. Sales of Phase Two, which includes the first three-bedroom suites at Spirit Ridge, has begun, with prices starting from \$62,000 (quarter-ownership) and \$240,000 (full).

As at Burrowing Owl, wine is the motivating force here. Spirit Ridge is a popped cork's flight from Nk'Mip Cellars, North America's first Native-owned winery and one of B.C.'s best producers. Each room comes furnished with Nk'Mip samples, available for drinking at just a \$5 mark-up from what you'll pay if you walk the 10 metres to the wine shop.

(Burrowing Owl doesn't put wine in your room, but its wine shop is even more conveniently located, right in the Guest House. And it's all Burrowing Owl wines in the restaurant, just taken over by Chef Bernard Casavant, whose quarter-century tenure in Whistler began with opening the Chateau Whistler in 1989.)

Soon to join Burrowing Owl and Spirit Ridge in the four-star neighbourhood is Watermark Beach Resort, with 153 units, a pool, restaurant, spa and wine bar. It too has ownership options, as does a fourth property, Walnut Beach Resort, also under construction.

And 22 km north of Osoyoos on Highway 97 in Oliver, a town trying to position itself as "the wine capital of Canada," Bellstar Hotels & Resorts, the ambitious Calgary-based firm that manages Spirit Ridge, has announced plans for its Wine Village Inn & Spa, a 100-suite hotel in the middle of the proposed Oliver Wine Village, which will include shops and a culinary centre.

A few years ago, when

people talked about the emergence of a Napa North in B.C., the smart money was on the area around Kelowna. It certainly can't be discounted, especially with Mission Hills' \$40-million destination winery, not to mention Quail's Gate, with one of the first winery-bistros in the valley.

But suddenly all the action seems to be 128 kilometres down the road.

#### If you go...

For information on Spirit Ridge, [www.spiritridge.ca](http://www.spiritridge.ca).

For info on Watermark Beach Resort, [www.ownwatermark.com](http://www.ownwatermark.com).

For info on Walnut Beach Resort, [www.walnut-beachresort.com](http://www.walnut-beachresort.com).

For information on Burrowing Owl Estate Winery and its Guest House, visit [www.bovwine.ca](http://www.bovwine.ca).

For Osoyoos information, [www.destinationosoyoos.com](http://www.destinationosoyoos.com).

John Masters is contributing travel editor for *Indulge Magazine*.



something beyond a vibrating bed at the end of the day are starting to have choices.

The pioneer – and still the flagship – is Spirit Ridge. The final part of Phase One has just opened: 30 villas and 64 suites, plus the Passa Tempo restaurant and the Sonora Spa. Phase Two, six more villas and another 126 suites, along with a business centre and shops, has just broken ground, for completion in 2009 – God and the overly busy construction trades in B.C.'s booming Interior willing.

Spirit Ridge offers the added lure that if you like your accommodation you can buy it, either quarter or full

