

BC WINE CLUB NEWS

Judged to be the Very Best

Feature Winery



NICHOL VINEYARD

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For our members, receiving award winning wines from BC's best wineries is 'de rigueur' This is not happenstance as we strive to offer some of the best and unique wines from the region. But, when we say a vintage is an 'All Canadian Wine Championship' or 'Lieutenant Governor's Award of Excellence' award winner, what does that imply? What makes these designations so special, and what exactly does it take to obtain these coveted prizes?

To get answers, the BC Wine Club spoke with two extremely informed individuals; Herb LeRoy, Private Secretary to the Lieutenant Governor, and Bev Carnahan, Director of the All Canadian Wine Championships (ACWC). Both were quick to assure us gaining their honour is no small feat. In fact, as Mr. LeRoy puts it, wines selected as worthy of Lieutenant Government Award distinction are definitely "the best of the best."

Although these two competitions share a common quest for excellence, the way they go about deciphering this, and even their reason for doing so, are quite different.

Established in 1981, the All Canadian Wine Championships is the oldest and largest competition in Canada. It is also one of North America's most respected. Ms. Carnahan says it was conceived and convened so that the emerging Canadian wine industry, which was showing such promise in it's infancy, could have a vehicle to determine outstanding craftsmanship similar to those available to US and European vintners.

To enter, Carnahan says she "only asked for two things of the wineries. First, the wines must

be derived from totally Canadian grown grapes. Secondly, these wines must be available for the full tourist season." This is important, she says, as many travelers consult the awards prior to embarking on their wine tours and, should vintage after vintage be unavailable, the awards significance and purpose would be lost.

That purpose, to extol the virtue and diversity in the Canadian wine industry, highlighting the best this country has to offer, is a lofty one. It has also become more difficult to ascertain as the competition now boasts having more than 850 wines entered from 140 wineries.



Nichol's Ross Hackworth & Hon. Iona Campagnolo

In contrast to the ACWC, LeRoy tells us the Lieutenant Governor's Award of Excellence was created with the sole purpose of encouraging the development of World class wine production in BC. "The competition is available only to those wines vinted in BC, using only grapes grown in BC soil." He also points out that as one of BC's premier sustainable industries,

the BC wine industry is of considerable importance to Government House. BC wines have certainly started to gain international acclaim and the Lieutenant's Governors office, as well as the citizens of British Columbia, have a vested interest in seeing that trend continue.

In 2007, the Awards of Excellence competition judged 188 wines produced by BC wineries, all vying to be selected as one of a possible 10 wines to be deemed the best in BC - not just the best in it's varietal class. Which brings us to another difference between these two competitions; (Cont. Pg. 4)

Lee McNish - 'Caterer to the Stars' -

joins The BC Wine Club in our new Food & Wine column

'On the Side'

NICHOL VINEYARD

Refreshing

On a recent tour of the Naramata, one winery that rated high on our 'must visit' list was Nichol Vineyard. Having sampled their excellent Cabernet-Syrah at the 'Best of the Bench' spring release event in April, and in talking with owner/winemaker Ross Hackworth, we knew this winery was worth a closer look! On arriving, we were pleasantly taken aback; We had just come from another, much larger winery, with a crush of people at the tasting bar, so stepping into Nichol's newly constructed tasting room, in a decidedly more intimate setting, was refreshing. Although we did not let Ross know we were coming, he, the actual winemaker, was there to pour for us and to explain the subtle nuances to look for in the wine. Personal attention to detail is something Ross believes in strongly. This was also the mantra of the winery's founders, Alex & Kathleen Nichol, under whom Ross studied and honed his winemaking skills. Hackworth also knows that in order to continue Nichol's tradition of crafting the finest wines, and if he is to manage a premier vineyard properly, he must keep things to the small side. Whether he is in the vineyard, tasting room, or crafting wine his hands-on approach is always evidenced - like we said, refreshing!



Holding Back the Years

Nichol is home to BC's oldest Syrah vines and, as every good winemaker knows, a healthy mature planting can be worth its weight in gold. Back in 1990, the Nichols had the very good sense to be the first to plant Syrah vines on their 5.5 acre land. Today, this Rhône varietal is all the craze and Nichol's versions are, as their many awards attest, amongst the best to be found.



The vineyard also has plantings of Cabernet Franc, Pinot Noir, and a Pinot Gris that shows a wonderful shade of salmon once vinted. At another elevated site, Gewürztraminer and the Italian version of Gris - Pinot Grigio - have been added allowing this vineyard to offer a variety of expressive, and impressive wines.

But, perhaps one of the most interesting facts about this winery is that, contrary to many others in the industry, you won't see Nichol serve up a wine before its time. Therefore, if a wine deserves greater barrel time to be at its best, it gets it - something our members are certain to appreciate with this months 2004 vintage of Nichols Cabernet/Syrah!

Almost Fated

Ross Hackworth's life as a winemaker/winery owner was almost fated - it just took him a few years to realize it! As a child, holidays consisted of frequent trips to the Napa and later, the Okanagan. It was in the latter, on the Naramata, that his parents settled and had an orchard. Here, Ross had his first turn working with the land. Next, Ross moved on to the field of International Business - an industry that allowed him to visit and appreciate some of the finest wine regions in the world and, at the same time gain the financial know-how needed to run a winery. In 2001, Ross returned to the Naramata to pursue his passion for wine and the making of it. It was then that he had a fateful meeting with Alex & Kathleen Nichol who were looking to sell their estate. They agreed to sell the business to Ross *and* to become mentors to him. An excellent student, Ross quickly learned the intricacies of winemaking from Alex, and the importance of careful viticulture from Kathleen. Today, in full control of all aspects of the winery, Ross has realized his fate; An award-winning winemaker of the first order!



Introducing...

The BC Wine Club is thrilled to have Lee McNish join us as a columnist! McNish has created culinary magic and exceptional pairings for over 20 years. His bio reads like a fine diners dream tour and includes the kitchens of the Hotel Vancouver, Four Seasons (Australia), Chateau Lake Louise and Ontario's Minaki Lodge. Now, as an owner with *Twice a Night Motion Picture Catering*, McNish is serving up his fantastic cuisine for the who's who of the film and television industry. Recently, Lee took a break from the set of the major motion picture 'The Watchmen' to bring us his musings on the wonderful interconnection between food and wine.

On The Side



With Chef Lee McNish

For many of us, when we're asked to select a wine to compliment food, we try to resort to a set of pre-determined rules to guide our decision. We lose focus about the purpose of the decision, which is that certain wine selections can make an ordinary, or good meal, truly magnificent. Instead we try to make the "right" decision and for most of us we simply don't possess the breadth of knowledge (or the extensive wine cellar) to make exactly *the* "right" decision.

A great example of this was demonstrated by a wine-loving friend who shared a recent culinary experience in Mazatlan. When asking for a wine list to make a perfect selection for a Mexican-infusion steak dinner, the waiter replied with a smile "...we have red and we have white, which would you prefer?" Although that response may seem to be an over-simplification, the waiter was actually right; we tend to over-analyze wine and food pairing. The dinner and red wine - I have been assured - were both delectable!

When making wine selections we are traditionally not offered an endless inventory of our favorite vintages, or a directory for those vintages we are familiar with. More realistically, we encounter a limited selection of wines that we may not have tasted, have little information about, and have not experienced with certain foods. Given these limitations, how do we achieve our own style of perfection in the pairing of wines and food?

You will encounter a variety of different formulas that claim to hold the key to the perfect pairing. Unfortunately (or fortunately for the adventuresome) we learn through trial and error that pairing of wine and food is much more about personal palate than it is a science. This means the answer to pairing food lies not necessarily within the literature, but rather within our own preferences and successful experimentation. Now, I am not advocating a complete abandonment of "the rules", but use of the published suggestions from the pro's as guidelines to achieve and define food pairings that you enjoy. Use your instincts and challenge yourself to imagine how a beloved wine would complement your favorite recipes or foods. Remember - it was originally our passion for food and wine that has led to the evolution of wine pairings and our attempts to magnify the tastes of each through the marriage of the two. With the odd attempts to create a marriage between wine and food, we may learn that, like some real life marriages, it just wasn't meant to be - but we learn from the experience and hopefully are inspired to try and find love again!

In closing, I want to emphasize that if Cheezies and a Borolo are a food and wine pairing that you enjoy then it is a marriage made in heaven. The problem you may encounter is that your friends and loved ones may be more difficult to convince - Therefore I, for one, will be to savouring my Cheezies and Borolo alone!



Photo by Kimberly French

'Pining for the Vine' - Your Wine & Dine Event Planner

Okanagan Wine Festival - September 28th to October 7th - www.thewinefestivals.com

Cowichan Wine & Culinary Festival - September 28th to 30th - www.wines.cowichan.net

Autumn Bounty at the Delta Sun Peaks Resort - A Festival highlighting the food and wine of the Thompson Okanagan region - October 12th to 14th - Toll Free: 1-866-552-5516

see our website for more details



A Tale of Two Competitions



(Cont. from Page 1)... The way in which these two competitions categorize their awards and derive their winners.

The ACWC sets out three forms of recognition, with all judges utilizing the 100 point system for their determinations. The totals from all judges are combined, with the highest score determining a wine's outcome. 'Trophies' are reserved for the best wines in show - the very best red, white, sparkling, dessert, fruit and value wines. Next, are the 'Best of Category' winners - those ranked highest in terms of varietal. Finally, we have the 'Medals of Merit' (Gold, Silver, & Bronze) for the wines that have ranked in the top 10, 20th and 30th percentile. Carnahan assures us recent changes have been made to strengthen the means by which wines are judged thereby ensuring only the most deserving of wines medal.

As for the Lieutenant Governor's awards, Herb LeRoy, who has partaken in the event as both an observer and judge since its inception, explains the ways in which the Award of Excellence winners are determined are vastly different from the ACWC. First, all wines submitted are placed in blind tasting flights, which are carefully arranged by the BC Wine Institute's noted wine authority, Marjorie King, and daughter Kimberly Dever. The flights are arranged in descending density from whites to medium bodied reds, then on to heavy reds and finishing with the likes of ports or dessert wine. Wines submitted are critiqued by whatever method the judge wishes to employ. By the end of the first day, the judges convene and determine which of each flight they wish to reserve for the next days tasting. The second day of judging is, as LeRoy states, extraordinarily hard. From here, the panel must determine which of the remaining entrants best exhibit the characteristics of a World class wine. The awards like to keep the winners to a maximum of 10, but in certain years there have been more, and, conversely, sometimes less.

Regardless of how they decide, each competition gives BC wineries a fair and competitive forum by which to gauge their success - and the winners will tell you, if you can succeed in this, one of the most highly acclaimed wine regions of the world, you are truly the best of the best.

This Month's Featured Wines From Nichol

Feature Red - 2004 Cabernet/Syrah

Feature White - 2006 Gewürztraminer

Companion Red - 2006 Capriccio

Please Note: Our Fabulous Food Pairings will now be found on a separate page for easy access - Bon Appetite!