

# Favourites Resurface From Blasted Church

Last year, right around this time, the first wines from the new Blasted Church winery at Okanagan Falls hit the shelves, instantly making bigger-than-usual waves on the B.C. wine scene.

It was mostly because of the labels. Those bold graphics, those terrific cartoony characters on the bright wraparound labels, the topsy-turvy typography—it all made the wine stand out on the shelf. Inside the bottles, there were some promising varietals, a couple of intriguing blends.

Despite the tragic death of the winemaker last fall, the winery continued working on its wines—and its labels. Now, with the second Blasted Church vintage, the quality has notched up across the board.

Here's what we've got so far: Chardonnay, Pinot Blanc, Pinot Gris, and Hatfield's Fuse, the big-fruit blend. There are also a rosé and a late-harvest Optima, plus a single red, Lemberger. All are 2002 vintage wines, with more to come, another six or seven, later in the year.

We quick-tasted the seven above not long ago and found a couple of favourites. As was the case last season, the Hatfield's Fuse tickled the taste buds the most. It may be the most unusual white wine blend in B.C.; Chasselas, Optima, and Gewürztraminer are all in the mix. Plenty of floral aromas hit the nose first, then plenty of big fruit on the tongue and a big finish, with lots of the Gewürztraminer showing through.

The winery's own tasting sheet echoes what I'm thinking: "Hatfield's Fuse represents our clear favourite to date." The total production is massive—by Blasted

Church standards, anyway—with a whopping 506 cases made. At \$12.90 a bottle at the winery (prices tend to be higher in the stores that carry the brand), it is the best value in the portfolio so far.

The Pinot Gris came a close second, as initial impressions went; there's a total of 294 cases of that, at \$18.90 a bottle. I was struck by the fact that all the wines are pretty big and somewhat on the roasty side, often showing 14 percent alcohol, or more. Let's see how they settle down in the bottle, either in the winery's cellar or yours and mine. (Details on the wines and their availability, along with a full price list, can be found at [www.blastedchurch.com/](http://www.blastedchurch.com/). They'll ship mixed case lots anywhere in the province.)

**Uncorked**  
JURGEN GOTHE

SO THE COUSINS from Prince Albert arrived, did they? Now they want to see and do everything. And eat, it being no secret that a lot of visitors know all about Vancouver's reputation as the country's paramount restaurant town. They've read all about us in *enRoute* and *NUVO* and *Chatelaine* and *Elm Street* and occasionally even the *Globe and Mail* (like, whenever it can bring itself to acknowledge the fact that, per capita, there is better restaurant eating here than in Toronto any day of the week, any month of the year).

So there are a few new places to take them (the cousins) as well as old favourites. And one of my most favourite old favourites is finally open again. It was 10 months—seems like 10 years—that Le Gavroche was closed for repairs and renos.

The little house on Alberni Street has been a flagship Vancouver restaurant for 25 years, defining fine French cuisine and intimate dining from the beginning. You



can have lunch any weekday from 11:30 on, but dinner is even better. That happens seven days a week from 5:30 p.m.

What's new is a little wine bar, just eight seats off to the side of the dining room, cozy and comfy and offering some of the city's most amazing wines by the glass.

Owner Manuel Ferreira has been quietly collecting great wines for decades—great, that is, in terms of taste, not cost. There's a fabulous cellar of 35,000 bottles, some of them true bargains, and he likes to share, which is why Le Gavroche offers many by the glass that most restaurants can't even supply by the bottle.

Half a lobster with avocado, fava beans, and sweet-pepper remoulade, for starters. Maybe a little quail stuffed with wild rice on celeriac purée and truffle sauce. Some roast-garlic-and-potato soup with parsley cream; halibut filet with sweet-pea risotto and succotash. Always leave room for dessert and cheese. No, both.

A toast to another 25 years of Le Gavroche. Call and book and bring the cousins (604-685-3924).

GET SET FOR the biggest wine circus to hit town since the Vancouver Playhouse started it all a quarter-century ago. California has been chosen as the theme "country" for the 2004 Vancouver Playhouse International Wine Festival next March.

Well, California is a country when it comes to wine, and next spring all the wine regions of the state are being showcased at Canada's premier wine event (and one of the biggest in the world). It's only fitting. The first Playhouse festival in 1979 was billed as the California Wine Festival, with one winery represented: Robert Mondavi. Buy me a bottle of Far Niente Chardonnay and I'll tell you stories... Should be good, should be entertaining, and will most likely be as over-the-top as California itself. ■