

WINE & SPIRITS jewels in the crown

Canada's newest wineries will make you sip up and take notice. By Konrad Ejbich

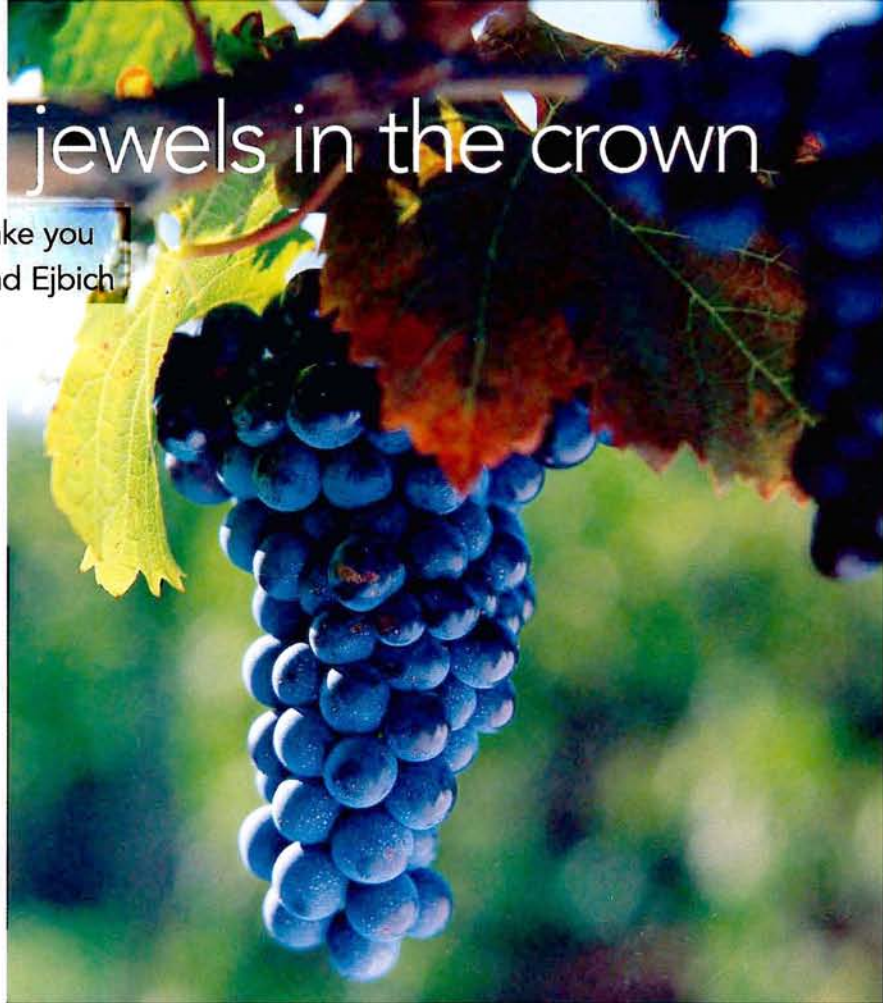
Treasure hunting is one of my favourite pastimes as I travel through wine country. There are many famous places that everyone knows, great labels that are best-sellers everywhere and winemakers known as the granddaddies of the industry. I'll gladly meet and greet them all, but I also like to find the hidden gems: new upstart wineries off the beaten path that are producing interesting and undiscovered liquid jewels. Here are a handful of Canadian newbies definitely worth discovering.

BLASTED CHURCH VINEYARDS

Eye-catching labels drawn by Toronto-based artist Monika Melnychuk tell the story of a 100-year-old wooden church that was dynamited to loosen the nails prior to being dismantled and moved to Okanagan Falls, B.C. Chris and Evelyn Campbell decided to produce their own wine and in 2002, bought a winery, rebranding it Blasted Church. **The 2002 Hatfield's Fuse, a blend of Gewürztraminer, Chasselas and Optima grapes with lively spiced fruit flavours, excites my jaded palate,** as does the 2002 Chardonnay Musqué, with its aromas of ripe peach, fennel and wine gums. Pinot Blanc, Pinot Gris and a rarely seen red Lemberger are also produced. Prices range from \$13 to \$20. To order, call 877-355-2686 or visit blastedchurch.com.

NK'MIP CELLARS

North America's first aboriginal-owned winery is a joint venture with Vincor International, Canada's largest wine company. The Osoyoos Indian band has grown grapes in its Inkameep vineyard in British Columbia's Okanagan Valley since the late '60s, providing high-quality fruit to numerous B.C. wineries. In addition to producing four varietal wines – Merlot, Chardonnay, Pinot Blanc and Pinot Noir – the band has built a



Our newest wineries add variety to the mix and expand our understanding of what can be produced in Canada

Desert Heritage Centre with ecotours and displays exploring native artifacts, history and traditions. Wines are priced from \$14 to \$18. The first vintage is sold out, but the second one is now available. **I particularly liked their 2001 Merlot for its soft texture and deep, dare I say wild, berry flavours.** To order, call 250-495-2985 or visit nkmipcellars.com for more info.

PEDDLES DEN WINES

In their first year of production, partners Mike and Cheryl Peddlesden, and Bob and Sherry Tompkins produced 35 cases of 2002 Chardonnay, 45 of 2002 Pinot Gris, 85 of 2002 Riesling and a whopping 420 of 2002 Cabernet Franc. There will be more in the years ahead from this winery, which is based in Ontario's Prince Edward County, **but what's already got me going is the sheer intensity, the texture and the pure minerality of their wines** – all clear indicators of flavour quality to come. There's a European twang to the taste: solid body,

refreshing acidity to pair with fine food, and a harmony that sings. These wines can be aged with confidence and cost from \$12 to \$30. To order, call 866-578-3445 or 613-399-3939 or visit peddlesden.ca.

FROGPOND FARM

This 10-acre farm in Niagara-on-the-Lake is Ontario's first certified organic winery. German-born Jens Gemmrich and his wife, Heike, have limited production to one red and one white wine. **Their 2001 Riesling (\$12) shows massive body, lovely balance and lingering mineral flavours** that are exciting to sip with or without food. The 2001 Cabernet-Merlot (\$16) offers jubilant, youthful fruit, and solid, serious complexity that should develop with another year or two in bottle. Speaking of bottles, the wines come in half-litre flasks – the perfect size for two to tango. To order, call 905-468-1079 or visit frogpondfarm.ca. (Local prices are listed. Other provinces may charge shipping and/or higher taxes.)