

Report from the Okanagan



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As usual, spring arrived quickly in the Okanagan. One day the mercury was struggling to reach a positive reading, the next it was the temperature for t-shirts and shorts and you were outside digging in the garden under a 20°C sun. And now here comes summer, hot on the heels of spring.

In fact, looking back on it, spring was ahead of schedule this year, with bud break occurring a week earlier than usual in the vineyards. After the cold winter (-25°C in some areas), the early bud burst and shoot growth that resulted from the sudden warm weather had viticulturists fearing Mother Nature would then throw up a late frost to wreck havoc on the tender young vine shoots. But with the passing of the May long weekend, stress levels dropped and now it's on with the business of growing grapes -- not to mention preparations for the silly season, when wine, sun and fun lovers descent on the Okanagan. Even for us writer types it's time to spring clean the files and take stock of what's new.

Most conspicuous is the new winery **Red Rooster** built at the gateway to the Naramata bench (see article on page 39). Also expanding to larger facilities are **Little Straw Vineyards** (the new name for Slamka Cellars) and **Jeff and Niva Martin's La Frenz**. New names to ponder include **Orofino** in Cawston, **Desert Hills** on Black Sage Road in Oliver, **Pentâge** wines in Penticton/Okanagan Falls and the playfully named **Laughing Stock Vineyards** in Naramata. Should we blame the success of **Blasted Church** for this new crop of mischievous winery names?

New owners have taken the reins at **Golden Mile Cellars** in Oliver and **Pinot Reach** in Kelowna. Fans of the Old Vines Riesling from Pinot Reach can look forward to more of the same as the new proprietors plan to increase plantings of this noble grape. And another winery building on its success is **Carriage House** on Black Sage Road, where another acre or so of Kerner will ensure that this popular wine doesn't sell out quite so quickly.

Further happenings in Naramata include the development of the **Naramata Bench Vintners Association**. Events for this new marketing

TASTING NOTES:

Quail's Gate Family Reserve Pinot Noir 2001

One of BC's best Pinot's. Complex cigar, spiced orange, nougat and chocolate covered cherry. It's silky smooth. You could pop it in the cellar for 3 to 5 more years.

Inniskillin Bear Cub Vineyard Zinfandel 2002

Intensely fruity with mixed berries and the sweet yet zingy flavour of pomegranate. Drink this bold beauty now.

Carriage House Kerner (off-dry) 2002

Great aromatics of rose petal and apricot and the all-important balance of crisp acidity against the sweet fruit. You might want to try this one with spicy Thai or Indian food.

association have already commenced with Naramata wineries and restaurants returning triumphant after a successful journey to Vancouver for a sold-out event on April 20th at the Roundhouse in Yaletown. Food participants included the **Naramata Heritage Inn, Joie Gastronomic Guesthouse and Farm Cooking School** and the **Barrel Room Bistro** from **Hillside Estate**.

A stylish logo for the association depicts the picturesque Naramata vineyards perched on cliff tops above the lake. Naramata is turning into a real little wine and food gem, and now with effective marketing through the new association, the word will be spread far and wide.

Rumours abounded that 2004 would see the bricks and mortar laid for a new wine shop and hospitality facilities for both **Jackson Triggs** and **Inniskillin** in Oliver. However, it looks as if we may have to wait a little longer. There is still no wine shop to visit at Jackson Triggs, but be sure to squeeze your way into the original little Inniskillin shop. In particular to taste some of their impressive reds. If you are lucky enough, you may get a chance to try and buy the 2002 Inniskillin Bear Cub Vineyard Zinfandel (approximately \$30). Apparently you can't grow Zinfandel in BC, so I must be a monkey's uncle because this wine does exist and it's very big, aromatic and intense, tasting of mixed berries and pomegranate. Only 250 cases were made and released during the **2003 Spring Wine Festival**. The other significant news from Vincor was the release of the first vintage of their 2000 **Osoyoos Larose** a joint venture with **Group Tailon** of Bordeaux.

2001, 2002 and now 2003 make up a string of great vintages for the Okanagan, and that's in spite of last year's fires and the associated smoke damage. The first of the 2003 whites hit the shelves in March and many wineries released their barrel aged 2002 red wines over the Spring Festival. So if you are a fan of the ones typically in short supply, be sure to get your order in before summer officially arrives.



A New Winery For Red Rooster



Just as the new season's shoots were bursting from the vines, Red Rooster's new winery arrived on the scene in Naramata-- and just in time for the 2004 season. This impressive new building is a result of the combined drive and energy of two owners who are now enjoying the good fortune of being considerably busier than they ever expected to be.

When Beat and Prudence Mahrer built the first Red Rooster winery in 1996 they would have laughed at the thought of having to begin construction again only seven years later. They're not laughing now. The original 10,000 case capacity winery would not have even come close to adequately housing the 14,000 cases worth of grapes that were ripening under the hot 2003 sun, so construction on the new production facility was hurriedly pushed to completion -- and not a minute too soon to receive the first bins of grapes from what turned out to be an exceptionally early harvest.

Winemaker Craig Larson and his team were all smiles over the new facility. In fact, there is nothing like building a winery once to know how you would build it a second time. Having the chance to build again so quickly, Beat and Prudence had the chance to turn all the 'should haves' into 'haves'. The new building can easily handle 20,000 cases, ensuring it will be at least another seven years before they have to build their next one. They are hoping it won't be so soon.

The buildings are designed by local architect Robert Mackenzie and incorporate his now almost trademark open wooden beams. For the Mahrers, the typical cathedral like shape, similar to a Swiss mountain house, reminds them of their Swiss roots. In Mackenzie, The Mahrers were fortunate to work with a designer familiar with winery operations and one who has a proven ability to blend practical function with striking form. Having already designed **Nk'Mip Cellars**, **Burrowing Owl**, **Hillside Cellars**, **Hester Creek** and the expansion of **Cedar Creek**, he understands the needs of a winemaking operation and what design elements can be incorporated to ensure smooth cellar operations.

One interesting touch - in a nod to the ancient history and culture of wine, the buildings are finished with **ArcusStone**, a limestone coating that was invented for the purpose of restoring historical stone structures. It is now available for commercial use and Red Rooster is believed to be the first company in Canada to use it. The yellow and brown earth tones of the limestone blend seamlessly into the backdrop of the Naramata rocky hillside, making this brand new winery look already old and established.

Credit the success of Red Rooster and its rapid growth to the colourful personalities of Beat and Prudence. Certainly none of their sense of humour went missing in the new winery design. One strictly enforced (and patrolled) feature is a parking area reserved for dogs owners only, who may take advantage of the coolest, most shaded parking spots. This to ensure Fido won't melt in the car while you are sipping wines in the air-conditioned wine shop.

Under Penticton fire laws, a shortage of water means that businesses have to contribute a water source to assist fire fighting. An ugly dam at the back of the property would have sufficed, but Beat and Prudence decided to build an attractive pond and fountain in front of the winery for the purpose instead. They are still deciding whether to fill it with live lobsters to pair with their wines or to start a 'toss the coin over your shoulder and make a wish' tradition. The later of course being limited to \$2 (toonies) only.

Spilling outside on to a massive covered patio, the wineshop is complete with both indoor and outdoor fireplaces as well as tables and chairs to sit at while enjoying a glass of wine and a panoramic view of the lake. One hundred or more people will be able to enjoy events on the lawn, but if the weather should not cooperate, they will be able to run back to the security of the wineshop and the covered patios that surround the building. The inside space can comfortably seat 30 people, and a private meeting room upstairs will accommodate a dinner or wine tasting for up to ten people.

One thing that hasn't changed is the wines, which are still great value, but now easier to find thanks to the new location on Naramata Road. The new winery is one of the first wineries encountered when making the pretty drive along the Naramata bench from Penticton.

The revitalized Red Rooster is open seven days a week (10am to 6pm). Bring your dog, your lucky two-dollar coin, and don't be surprised to see one or two roosters in attendance as well - *R Pender*.



EATING AT THE BAR

Made to mesh. The all B.C. wine list at fledgling **Aurora Bistro** with its specially selected labels complements a menu that wine guy **Kurtis Kolt** says "showcases modern local ingredients. Our list features local wines that are the most appropriate match." A couple of Kolt's proven winners are:

The wine: *Kettle Valley Gamay 2002*

The dish: Chef **Jeff VanGeest's** local roasted halibut served with a grapefruit brûlé, Beluga lentils, local wild mushrooms and asparagus.

The match: "The gamay works with the earthy quality of the mushrooms, and the texture and weight of the lentils and the fish while the ripe fruit in the wine suits the fruitiness of the grapefruit and the juiciness and weight of the fish."

The wine: *Lotusland Stone's Throw Gewürztraminer 2002*

The dish: Savoy cabbage rolls stuffed with wild rice, pear and pistachios with a grainy Dijon dressing.

The match: "The clean style and minerality of the Lotusland Gewürtz goes well with the cabbage and its citrus elements stands up to and cuts through the Dijon."

Spicing it up. Over at 11th and Granville, **Mike Bernardo** has put together minimalist adventurous wine lists for **Vij's** and **Rangoli**. "Our list is educational in style. We have interesting, unique wines that enhance the flavour of the spices and that work with richer style foods." Bernardo's wines change every few months with the menu. "We have five whites and five reds, at \$8.75 a glass or \$35 a bottle. At Rangoli, it's one of each, \$6 a glass and \$30 a bottle. Beer sells better." Bernardo's "reserve list"? He'll suss out your wine style and present assorted fistfuls from his stash.

The wine: *Schloss Gobelsburg Gruner Veltliner 2001*

The dish: Dungeness crab, shrimp and scallop coconut saffron curry.

The match: "The sweetness of the coconut and the aromas of the saffron go with the crispness of the Gruner Veltliner which has enough fruit and acidity to work with the curry."

The wine: *José de Sousa Tinto Velho 1999 from Portugal*

The dish: ghee-braised beef short ribs with cinnamon, red wine in a tomato-based curry.

The match: "Mostly tempranillo, the José de Sousa is nice and light which works with the earthiness of the curry, and it's lightness and easy tannins cut through the richness of the braised ribs."

