

# The Best of British Columbia, Part Two

by Steven Spurrier

## OUR FIRST VISIT ON MY THIRD DAY

of this action-packed trip was to Painted Rock Estate Winery, InterVin's 2014–15 Winery of the Year, on a spectacular bench that overlooks the eastern shores of Skaha Lake. Owner John Skinner, an ex-Vancouver stockbroker, leaves one in no doubt that funds have been invested in all aspects of production to arrive at a pinnacle of quality and the wines did not disappoint. A fine citrusy 2014 Chardonnay with oak and acidity in perfect balance was followed by four reds: 2013 Cabernet Franc with lovely fragrance and purity despite 14.8 abv, 2012 Syrah, black-red, rich and spicy with a silky smooth texture, 2012 Merlot even better with earthy autumnal fruits and tannins for ageing and finally his 2013 Icon, a 33% Merlot/21% Cabernet Franc/21% Petit Verdot/12% Malbec/5% Cabernet Sauvignon blend whose smoothness and vigour lived up to its name.

Next was Meyer Family Vineyards, whose owner JAK Meyer has been sending samples of his Burgundy-inspired single lot Chardonnays and Pinots to me in London for three years. Quality here is both impeccable and excitingly vineyard-influenced, winemaker Chris Carson having the same "hands off" approach of the best Burgundians. Chardonnays were ripe, crystal clear with lemony acidity; Pinots had energy, depth, no heaviness and an assured future. My notes were too long, so I will just list the wines and ranking: Chardonnays – 2013 Old Main Road Tribute Series 18/93, 2013 McLean Creek Road 17.25/90+, 2012 Meyer Family Vineyard 17.75/92; Pinot Noirs – 2013 Reimer Family 17/90, 2013 McLean Creek Road 17/90, 2012 Micro Cuvée 17.5/91, 2008 Meyer Family Vineyard 17/90.

After a light lunch with DJ Kearney at

Liquidity Wines' restaurant, sharing a carafe of lovely 2014 Blue Mountain Gamay, we set off for what turned out to be the most fun afternoon and evening of the trip, the Third Annual B.C. Pinot Noir Celebration in the beautiful Linden Gardens in Kaleden. This is the creation of JAK Meyer and it welcomed 26 wineries showing two or three vintages each to around 300 guests.

Perhaps it was the bucolic setting that saw 22 of the wineries reach or exceed the 17/90/Silver Medal score in my notes. These names may well crop up again, but here they are: 50th Parallel Estate, Averill Creek Vineyard, Blue Mountain Vineyard, CedarCreek Estate, Foxtrot Vineyards, Howling Bluff, JoieFarm, La Frenz Winery, Meyer Family Vineyards, Mission Hill Winery, Moraine Winery, Okanagan Crush Pad, Orofino Vineyards, Privato Vineyard, Quails' Gate Winery, Road 13 Vineyards, Spierhead Winery, St Hubertus Estate, Stoneboat Vineyards, Tantalus Vineyards, Tightrope Winery. The vineyards are mostly still young and the wines showed such well-defined fruit that British Columbia Pinots are now a force to be reckoned with.

Day Four began with a tasting in the middle of the vineyards of Osoyoos-Larose, the superb estate on an 80-acre bench overlooking the Osoyoos Lake, now 100% owned by the Groupe Taillan, owner of Château Gruaud-Larose in Saint-Julien. Vines were first planted here in 1998 and from the start has been Bordeaux-centric, the first taste being the "second wine" Pétales d'Osoyoos 2012 with good cedary fruit and nice balance. Five vintages of Le Grand Vin followed with the proportion of Merlot declining from 75% to 50%: a fully mature 2003, a very good, very Medoc-y and still young 2007, a richer and more structured 2009 from a warm vintage,

a very well-made 2011 in a difficult year and an excellent 2012 with florality, fragrance, really good middle palate, a great success. Barrel samples of 2014 Merlot and Cabernet Sauvignon continued the successful search for elegance under new winemaker Mathieu Mercier from Cognac. This finely presented wine maintains its price at \$C50 a bottle, which is a bargain.

After this immersion in "Bordeaux," tasting followed tasting and I can only record brief notes on each. At Culmina Family Estate, Canadian wine industry pioneer Don Triggs, whose Jackson-Triggs winery is now part of Constellation, showed five wines in his brand new winery: 2014 Unicus Grüner Veltliner, 2014 Decora Margaret's Bench Riesling, a 2014 Saignée Rosé from Bordeaux grapes, 2012 Dilemma Chardonnay in the Chablis style and a meaty yet elegant Hypothesis 2012 Bordeaux Blend. These are wines to watch.

From the modernistic Culmina winery, the contrast could not have been greater arriving at the timbered farmhouse at Le Vieux Pin, where Séverine Pinte-Kosaka from France's Languedoc is making wonderfully expressive Syrahs, her 2013 Cuvée Violette showing the grape's feminine side, the 2012 Equinox being truly masculine, while the white Rhône blend 2013 Ava was a delight. Three other producers were there: C.C. Jentsch showing a fine stone fruit 2013 Chardonnay; The Chase a lovely Bordeaux blend, an elegant 2013 Malbec and a spicy black olive 2013 Syrah; Black Hill Estate with 2014 Alibi a grape-fruity Sauvignon/Semillon blend, their very impressive 2012 Nota Bene and the now mature 2006; Burrowing Owl with a rich but dry 2014 Sauvignon, a brambly 2012 Merlot and a more impressive Napa-style 2012 Meritage.

After lunch it was off to John Weber's Orofino in the Similkameen Valley—Canada's first straw-bale, solar-heated, 100% eco-friendly winery—whose oak-fermented 2013 Old Vine Riesling had citrusy acidity and lots of energy and his neither fined nor filtered 2014 Wild Ferment Syrah was vibrantly vigorous, both superb wines. Four other wineries were present: Eau Vive, whose 2014 Cinq Blanc, a blend of Pinot Gris, Viognier, Sauvignon, Riesling and Gewürztraminer; and a lovely Chinon-style 2013 Cabernet Franc took my vote; Little Farm, where Rhys Pender MW and his winemaker wife Alishan Dreideger make beautifully expressive and pure Rieslings from vines planted in 2009 with a great future; Clos du Soleil, focusing on Bordeaux grapes and converting to bio-dynamism, whose Sauvignon/Sémillon 2013 Estate Reserve white and Cabernet Sauvignon dominated 2012 Estate Reserve red were both classy and classic; Seven Stones, whose 2011 Chardonnay still showed a fresh minerality. These Similkameen Valley wines are definitely Old World.

Overnight was at Spirit Ridge Resort, home to the Solterra Desert Spa but more importantly for us the Nk'Mip (pronounced "in-ka-meep") Cellars, North America's first aboriginal-owned and operated winery. At dinner their 2014 Pinot Blanc and 2012 Meritage red showed well, TIME Estate's 2013 Chardonnay was rich and layered, Tinhorn Creek's 2010 Cabernet Franc ripe and clear; while the stars for me were a phenolic but dry skin contact 2013 Stag's Hollow Viognier-Marsanne and especially their 2013 whole-berry fermentation 100% Grenache that showed stunning freshness.

Had I imagined that there were few surprises left, Day Five would have proved me wrong. An 8 a.m. start at Anthony von Mandl's Checkmate Artisanal Winery that makes only small batches of Burgundian-style Chardonnay that will sell in the \$C80–\$C120 range. We tasted the impressive and as yet unreleased 2013s, four single vineyards from which I preferred the Bâtard-Montrachet-style Queen Taken and the more floral very complex Attack. Then off to Moraine Estate that overlooks Okanagan Lake, where vineyardist/winemaker Jacqueline Kemp was hoping for cooler weather to delay her vintage. Her 2014 Viognier showed great precision and purity, the 2012 and 2013

## CHARDONNAY

- 1 (1) **Soumah Single Vineyard 2012 Yarra Valley**, Australia
- 2 (7) **Kumeu River Hunting Hill 2012**, Auckland, New Zealand
- 3 (10) **Hamilton Russell 2014**, Hemel-en-Aarde, South Africa
- 4 (3) **Jean-Marc Brocard 2012 Chablis 1er Cru Montmains**, France
- 5 (8) **Bouchard Père et Fils 2011 Meursault 1er Cru Genevrières**, France
- 6 (4) **Blue Mountain Reserve 2013**, Okanagan Valley, B.C.
- 7 (9) **Tantalus 2012**, Okanagan Valley, B.C.
- 8 (12) **Robert Mondavi Reserve 2013**, Carneros, California
- 9 (5) **Mission Hill Perpetua 2013**, Okanagan Valley, B.C.
- 9 (6) **Quails' Gate Rosemary's Block**, Okanagan Valley, B.C.
- 11 (2) **Meyer Family Micro Cuvée 2012**, Okanagan Valley, B.C.
- 12 (11) **Haywire Canyonview 2013**, Okanagan Valley, B.C.

## SYRAH

- 1 (4) **C. C. Jentsch 2013**, Okanagan Valley, B.C.
- 2 (3) **Langmeil Orphan Bank 2012**, Barossa, Australia
- 3 (9) **Domaine Vincent Paris Cornas Granit 60 2013**, France
- 4 (10) **Nichol 2012**, Okanagan Valley, B.C.
- 5 (5) **Le Vieux Pin Cuvée Classique 2013**, Okanagan Valley, B.C.
- 6 (1) **Ojai 2011**, Santa Barbara, California
- 7 (8) **Jackson-Triggs Sunrock 2011**, Okanagan, B.C.
- 8 (2) **Orofino Scout Vineyard 2012**, Similkameen Valley, B.C.
- 9 (11) **J. L. Chave Sélection Crozes-Hermitage Silène 2012**, France.
- 10 (12) **Tyrell's Vat 9 2011**, Hunter Valley, Australia
- 11 (7) **Laughing Stock 2013**, Okanagan Valley, B.C.
- 12 (6) **K Vintners The Beautiful 2012**, Walla Walla, Washington



*Autumn vineyards at Okanagan Falls overlooking Vaseux Lake.*

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Pinot Noirs were good, but the 2014 had superb natural warmth and energy, the 2014 Riesling with 22 g/l residual had lifted charm and barrel samples of 2014 Malbec and Syrah were full of promise.

Then off to Poplar Grove Winery to meet five producers, many of whose wines have been mentioned already. Senka Tennant's Terravista 2014 Albariño and 2014 Figaro, a Viognier/Roussanne/Marsanne blend were lovely wines; La Frenz's 2014 Viognier was good and their 2013 Viognier/Chardonnay/Roussanne more exotic; Lake Breeze Vineyards' 2014 Pinot Gris was a star; and Marcus Ansems's 2013 Daydreamer Shiraz/Viognier again showed brilliantly, while Poplar Grove's Bordeaux-style 2011 Merlot and 2011 Cabernet Franc were very elegant. Time was running out, so B.C.'s wine industry doyenne Christine Coletta met us at Okanagan Crush Pad Winery, the new brainchild of DJ Kearney's husband David Scholefield, Chile's great soil expert Pedro

Parra and Italy's flying winemaker Alberto Antonini for the last, totally uplifting, tasting of the trip. Also present was Tyler Harlton of TH Wines with a beautifully textured 2014 Merlot/Cabernet Franc Rose and a briary, earthy 2012 Pinot Noir. Under the Haywire label, the 2014 Sauvignon Blanc and especially the 2012 Pinot Gris were superb, while Canyonview's 2014 Pinot Noir showed almost ethereal elegance.

The following day, back in Vancouver, DJ Kearney had curated a comparative Judgment of B.C. tasting of 12 Chardonnays and 12 Syrahs, six of each from B.C. alongside six international benchmarks. A high level panel of 24 tasters set to work, with the following results, my own ranking in brackets.

"Not bad for kids from the sticks," to quote Chateau Montelena's Jim Barrett in May, 1976. British Columbia's wines are already inspiring and will become more so as the vineyards age. What a trip! SJ