

OKANAGAN

The fine art of swilling wine

I am not a wine expert. I do not regularly swirl, swoosh and swallow (or spit) the stuff while pretending to know what kind of soil the grapes were grown in or what kind of shoes the winemaker prefers to wear while he, well, makes wine.

I do not – in a natural setting – utter things like “Bold!” “Fantastic bouquet!” or, for that matter, “Subtle complexities with just a hint of American oak!”

I have never referred to anything in a glass as having “great legs.”

When it comes to wine, my palate’s geography is limited to two distinct regions – one tells me what I like and the other tells me what I don’t.

These regions have served me well over the years, but as my bus pulled up to the See Ya Later Ranch (formerly Hawthorne Mountain Vineyards) in the Okanagan, I felt a tad anxious.

What if I belted out a rogue “Bold!” at an inappropriate time?

What if someone asked me what subtle fruit complexities I was getting and I said mostly grape?

I needn’t have worried. Wine tasting in the Okanagan is hardly so formal. But like dirty jokes, some wines are better than others. And a crowd’s reaction to a wine can be just as varied. It’s a subjec-

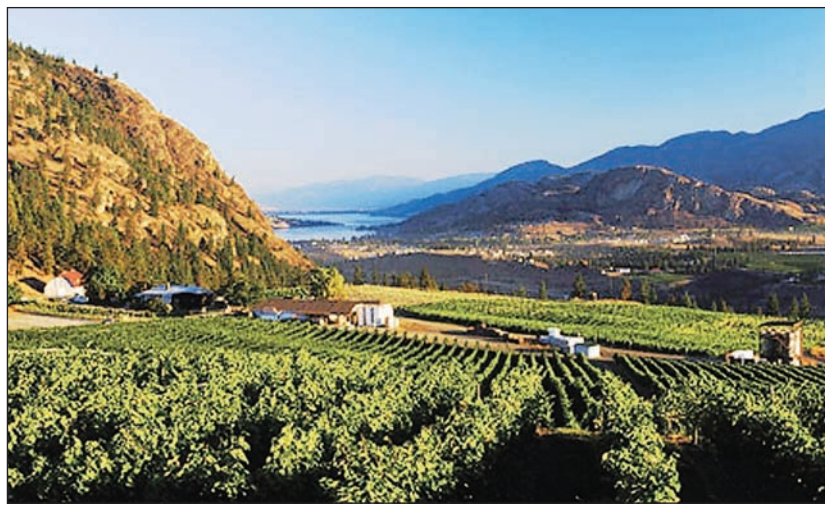
tive experience, but that’s what makes it fun. (Although it is always nice when a world-renowned wine authority gives your country a nod, as British wine writer Jancis Robinson did earlier this year following a tasting of Canadian wines when she called some of them “world class wines from any point of view.”)

But keep in mind that’s only *ber*view.

My view is that wine is for swallowing, which can pose a bit of a problem when touring a few wineries in the space of a day. One has to be careful in these situations, as it’s easy to become tired or drunk or both, which is why I chose to do it on a new tour being offered by Vancouver’s C & C Destination Tours. It’s called the Great Estates of the Okanagan, a package for two that includes a tour of five vineyards and includes two nights accommodation and

a winemaker’s dinner for two at the Sumac Ridge Estate Winery (with transportation to and from the dinner in a classic convertible car).

Some history: The first time wine passed over my lips was during my brief stint as an altar boy when we would sneak some of the priest’s sacramental stash, so it’s fitting (at least for me) that the person credited with setting up the first vineyards in B.C. wine country is Father Charles



- Photos submitted
Above, the sun shines on the See Ya Later Ranch. Right, NK'Mip (pronounced 'Ink-a-meep') Cellars is North America's first aboriginal owned and operated winery dedicated to crafting premium VQA wines.



Pandoso, who planted them at the Obelate Mission near Kelowna almost a 150 years ago so he could make sacramental wines for his parish. It’s not clear whether *his* altar boys sampled the fruits of his labour.

It wasn’t until 1926 that the first commercial vineyards were planted, producing not-so-illustrious classics such as Fuddle Duck and Hot Goose.

Thank (the Lord, perhaps?) things got better.

There’s plenty of good stuff to swallow or spit on the tour, including a colourful story about the

See Ya Later Ranch, where Major Hugh Fraser, a Montrealer, lived for more than 45 years. The Major, a dog lover (there’s a pet cemetery in the yard), is said to have fired a maid over the treatment of a pet. And the ranch is said to have

gotten its name because the Major, who spent time as a prisoner in the First World War, brought a war bride back from England in order to gain his inheritance (he had to be married). She promptly left after only a few days because she couldn’t stand the desolation. She left a

Dear John letter, signed simply, “See Ya Later...”

The story seems to have been corroborated over the years, and the vineyard has incorporated the lore into its See Ya Later Ranch (SYL) wine series, the labels of which feature a white dog with angel wings in what they term “a celebration of man’s best friend.”

I wondered aloud if it was then fair to say the wine had “bark and bite.” The crowd, in this case, chose not to laugh.

As they say, when the wine is in, the wit is out.

- Graeme McRanor, 24 hours

little BITS

Great Estates Okanagan Wine Tour (for two) includes:

- two nights accommodation at the beautiful Summerland Waterfront Resort

- Private tour and tasting at See Ya Later Ranch (formerly Hawthorne Mountain Vineyards)

- Tour, founder’s tasting & winemaker’s dinner for 2 at Sumac Ridge Estate Winery. Includes transfers to/from the hotel for the dinner in a classic convertible

- Private tour and tasting at NK'Mip Cellars

- Icewine discovery tour and tasting at Inniskillin Okanagan

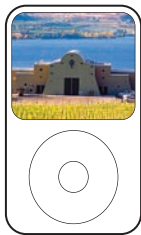
- Private library wine tasting at Jackson-Triggs

- Information session at the Wine Country Visitor Centre in Penticton

- Great Estates Passport: includes a 20 per cent discount coupon for each winery

Available at Costco for \$599.99 (+ GST). Call C & C Destination Tours at 604-532-1088 for more information or visit www.destination-snow.com.

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