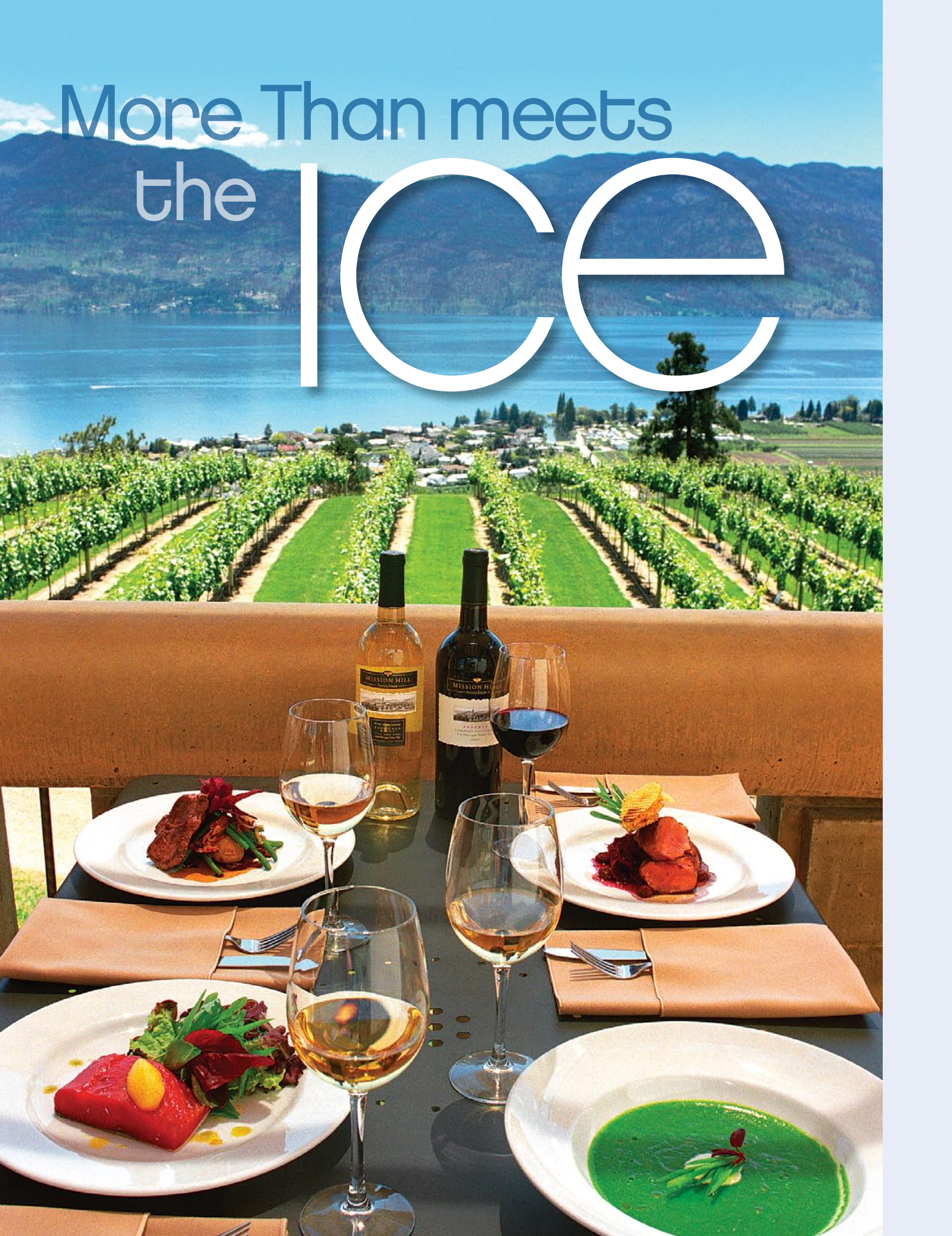


More Than meets  
the

ICE



# THE TASTING PANEL'S

## Ed Schwartz explains why British Columbia is poised for greatness

Many fine wine lovers have heard the names of two Canadian wineries, Inniskillin and Jackson-Triggs, or, better yet, have tasted icewines from these famous producers, both of whom export to the United States. Both wineries also have gained highest awards at the San Francisco International Wine Competition in recent years. In 2004 Bruce Nicholson, the Jackson-Triggs winemaker, was selected the Competition's Winemaker of the Year.

What was surprising on recent wine tour of the Okanagan Valley was to see first hand the scores of enterprising younger wineries dotting the shores of the long and picturesque Lake Okanagan, at the southern end of British Columbia. In the vast majority of cases, the wines were impressive—beautifully flavored, well-balanced, delicately nuanced and easy to like.

### Northern Lights

One would expect that wines from this northern region would be cool-weather varieties—Riesling, Pinot Noir and Chardonnay. True, the Okanagan Valley does excel in these grape varieties, but one shouldn't overlook the excellent red wines produced at the warm southern end of the valley, just above the U.S. border. This area, around the town of Osoyoos, is actually a desert microclimate. Because the entire area is northerly, the summer days are long and warm and the extra hours of sunlight help ripen Bordeaux varieties. The Merlots, especially, are on a par with the best of California.

The Okanagan Valley is a lovely place to visit, but most of the great wines produced there are consumed by wine-savvy Canadians. For outsiders wanting a taste of the area, the Thompson Okanagan Tourism office ([www.totabc.com](http://www.totabc.com)) provides a perfect opportunity—four comprehensive wine festivals throughout the year during which visitors can explore the eighty local wineries. Many of these producers not only offer a wide range of surprisingly good wines, but many of them also have small, attractive restaurants where one can enjoy the local wines within the context of a good meal.

### Wineries Large and Small

The king of the hill in the Okanagan, in more ways than one, is Mission Hill Family Estate. This impressive architectural achievement has it all, from a fine resident chef, to a collection of antique drinking vessels, to a



breathhtaking view of Lake Okanagan—and, not least, a wide range of excellent wines, including a superb Merlot and a distinguished Bordeaux blend named Oculus. A fine Mission Hill icewine comes with the territory. Mission Hill wines are becoming increasingly visible in the United States, thanks to the winery's active marketing department.

Wines from some of the excellent smaller wineries include: Hillside Estate 2004 Late Harvest Riesling—sweet, appealing tangerine flavors; Peller Estates 2004 Merlot—a lovely, fruity, balanced wine; Mt. Boucherie 2005 Riesling—lovely, with crisp acidity and finely textured, delicate flavors; the St. Hubertus 2006 Pinot Blanc—unabashedly sweet and absolutely delicious; Sumac Ridge 2003 Steller's Jay Brut—soft, lemony flavors in a refreshing sparkling wine and two Chardonnays, one with full bore flavors and the other a non-oaked example, as well as a fine icewine from Pinot Blanc. The Tin Horn 2006 Merlot is so popular that the winery sells futures in this varietal. Another architectural gem in Osoyoos, the NK'Mip winery, is owned by a noted Indian band in partnership with Constellation wine entity Vincor. (Try saying "Neekmeep.")

A lovely place to stay in the important city of Kelowna is the Manteo Resort, right on the lake, and a fine Italian restaurant in town, La Bussola, has a very extensive wine list that will knock your socks and Guccis off.

For a listing of the various wine festivals and wine and food events, check out [www.helloBC.com](http://www.helloBC.com) and [www.owfs.com](http://www.owfs.com). A visit to the Okanagan can lead to some interesting discoveries and fine wine memories. ■■