



by Michael Botner

# Kelowna wine history

**Kelowna is the birthplace of Okanagan Valley winemaking, home of BC's first commercial winery and a must-visit for modern wine tourists**

■ Kelowna features an array of intriguing wineries in three distinct areas—the west-facing lakeshore and slopes of Okanagan Lake; East Kelowna Bench, which straddles Mission Creek in the agricultural heartland of Kelowna; and downtown Kelowna where the focus is on making fine wine from grapes grown elsewhere in the Valley.

As the birthplace of Okanagan winemaking, Kelowna boasts a rich historical perspective to complement the great wines and winery visits. Father Charles Pandosy, an Oblate priest from France who ventured west to Washington State then north along the Okanagan Fur Brigade Trail in 1859, is credited with planting the region's first grapes. Attracted by the broad stretch of tillable land about mid-point along Okanagan Lake, Pandosy established a mission near Mission

Creek, the first non-native, non-fur trading settlement in the BC Interior, and sent for vine cuttings from Oregon.

Fast forward to 1925 when Charles Casorso, a son of Giovanni Casorso who arrived from Italy in 1883 and worked as an agricultural specialist for the missionaries, planted a vineyard of the labrusca persuasion on a 35-acre property in Rutland. In 1930, his two brothers, Pete and Louis, first planted the 45-acre vineyard on Casorso Road that now supplies the family-owned Sperling Vineyards winery with Marechal Foch, Riesling and several other vinifera varieties. As the single largest investor in the original group that included Guiseppe Ghezzi, Pasquale (Cap) Capozzi and W.A.C. Bennett, the Casorso clan, led by Giovanni's wife, Rosa, played a pivotal

role in launching Calona Vineyards (BC's oldest continually operating winery) in 1931. Now owned by Andrew Peller Ltd., Calona Vineyards occupies a sprawling, 1950s-era complex, with newer Peller Estate Winery and Sandhill Wines, on Richter Street in downtown Kelowna.

As far back as 1929, the Rittich brothers imported vinifera vines, which they planted on land that now overlooks Kelowna International Airport, near Ancient Hill Winery. Reporting the results in BC's first wine book, *European grape growing in cooler districts where winter protection is necessary* (1934), they found that the Okanagan Valley is perfectly suitable for growing vinifera vines as long as growers selected suitable, early-ripening varieties and developed training practices for high quality wine. **OL**

PHOTO CONTRIBUTED

Showcasing a selection of intriguing wines from a host of producers based in Kelowna, the five star rating system stresses value for price.



**CALONA VINEYARDS 2011 ARTIST SERIES SOVEREIGN OPAL**

*Kelowna, Okanagan Valley*

★★★★ \$14.99

The world's only producer of Sovereign Opal, Calona buys grapes from Casorso-owned vineyards. Intensely floral and spicy, it displays exotic flavours of mandarin orange, juicy ripe peach, grapefruit, white pepper and mineral. It pairs with spicy Asian cuisine.



**ST. HUBERTUS 2010 OAK BAY GEWÜRZTRAMINER**

*Kelowna, Okanagan Valley*

★★★★ \$16.75

Dry-style Gewürztraminer shows an extravagantly perfumed nose and succulent palate. Spicy flavours suggest lychee, pineapple, apricot, melon, rose petal, jasmine, black pepper and ginger. Calls for curries, sweet and sour pork, Muenster or blue cheese.



**SPERLING VINEYARDS 2008 SPARKLING BRUT**

*Kelowna, Okanagan Valley*

★★★★ \$39.95

Pinot Blanc left on the lees for three months is the foundation for this elegant, bottle-fermented bubbly. Clean, zesty palate delivers notes of flower petal, green apple, pear, lemon, almond, toast, vanilla and mineral. Perfect with oysters, smoked fish and caviar.



**CAMELOT 2010 CHARDONNAY**

*Kelowna, Okanagan Valley*

★★★★ \$24.90

Barrel-fermented Chardonnay exhibits nuanced aromas and a poised palate. The buttery flavours suggest green apple, peach and grapefruit with notes of hazelnut, smoke, toasty oak and creamy vanilla. Accompanies chicken or seafood pasta with a creamy sauce.



**PELLER ESTATES 2010 PRIVATE RESERVE DRY RIESLING**

*Kelowna, Okanagan Valley*

★★★★ \$15.99

A steal at the price, this classy, dry Riesling shows style and finesse. Notes of lime zest and diesel combine with Granny Smith apple, honey and mandarin orange on the razor sharp palate. It prefers smoked salmon, grilled sausages or spicy Asian cuisine.



**TANTALUS 2010 PINOT NOIR**

*Kelowna, Okanagan Valley*

★★★★1/2 \$29.90

Made from five- to six-year-old vines, this seductive Pinot Noir delivers a delicately floral nose and graceful flavours suggesting sweet, succulent cherry and plum, notes of earth, tomato leaf and vanilla and velvety tannins. Calls for veal or poultry with a mushroom sauce.



**HOUSE OF ROSE 2009 MARECHAL FOCH**

*Kelowna, Okanagan Valley*

★★★★ \$18.90

Spicy, richly-flavoured Marechal Foch unearthes layers of juicy, ripe berry, currant and plum fruit, and notes of tobacco, toast, smoky oak and coconut, refreshed by lively acidity. Best bet with game, smoked meats and barbecued ribs.



**SANDHILL 2010 GAMAY NOIR SANDHILL ESTATE VINEYARD**

*Kelowna, Okanagan Valley*

★★★★1/2 \$19.99

Delicious Gamay shows complexity and finesse. It features lovely dark chocolate, earth, plum and black cherry nose, followed by a spicy palate suggesting dark fruit, cinnamon, black pepper and sweet oak. It accompanies pasta with mushrooms and sausages.



**THE VIEW 2009 PINOTAGE**

*Kelowna, Okanagan Valley*

★★★★ \$20.90

Beguiling Pinotage nose introduces a rich, tasty palate featuring supple, ripe, concentrated plum and black cherry, black licorice, mocha coffee, smoky oak, and chewy tannins, lifted by lively balance. Enjoy with game, meat stews and barbecued ribs.

PHOTOS BY MICHAEL BOTNER