



WHAT'S NEW IN THE *Okanagan*

Photos courtesy of Wines of British Columbia

In 1978, estate winery licenses were granted to Sumac Ridge and CedarCreek, followed by Gray Monk in '82 and Gehringer Brothers in '86. BC wine was off to the races and the rest, as they say, is history. But let's take a closer look at an industry that has grown by leaps and bounds, or rather grapevine by grapevine and region by region, to become world renowned for excellence. From 17 wineries in 1990, BC is now home to more than 340 wineries. And there is no sign of this growth slowing anytime soon, as there seems to be a new winery opening monthly.

This fantastic growth was due to several milestones. The development of the land-based winery policy allowed producers to focus on quality. The federally and provincially sponsored

pull-out of the native *Labrusca* vines (good for making jam, but not wine) in 1989 was another. The establishment of the BC Wine Institute and the Vintners Quality Alliance (VQA) in 1990 cemented the base upon which serious growth could occur.

In one of the most beautiful wine regions in the world, money is pouring in as entrepreneurs establish new wineries, buy and rebrand older properties, and push the boundaries beyond the Okanagan Valley itself. There are nearly 20 wineries in the Similkameen Valley, about half a dozen in both the Kootenays and in the Thompson River Valley around Kamloops, and even one in Lillooet! That doesn't even begin to count the producers in the Fraser Valley and on the Vancouver and Gulf Islands. It seems the whole province is planting grapevines!



DAVID HOPGOOD

David Hopgood's long career in the beverage alcohol industry started in the late 1960s. He spent 36 years with the LDB, the last 20 of which were as Portfolio Manager. He managed almost all of the product categories over that period and travelled extensively to wine regions around the world.

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With this expansion came a desire to officially define certain unique growing areas, consisting of smaller and more distinct sub-regions that show a character in the wines unique to that area. In 2015, the first sub-region, Golden Mile Bench, was mapped out on the eastern-facing bench south of Oliver. Many believe this location, directly across the valley from the Black Sage area, is more favourable for grapes, as it gets the morning sun and is somewhat shaded from the late afternoon heat. This aspect contributes to brighter and more complex character in the wines grown there. There will be more sub-regions set out in the future, but for now, let us dig into a few of the Golden Mile producers.

Culmina is a relatively new winery, but the family behind it has been in the wine business for decades. Don Triggs was the CEO of Vincor, owners of the Jackson-Triggs mega brand. Vincor was purchased in 2006 by Constellation, the largest wine company in the world, so Don and his wife Elaine made an extensive search for prime vine-growing acreage and settled on the Golden Mile Bench. Much research into the site led to the planting of the five Bordeaux red varieties, plus Syrah, Riesling, Chardonnay and Grüner Veltliner. Opening in 2013 with the release of their top wine, Hypothesis 2011, they are off to a great start. Tasted recently, it shows the pure red-fruit character of the lead Cabernet Franc variety, a firm structure and the concentration to age a few more years.

Hester Creek, another Golden Mile Bench winery, has a very long history, but was completely renewed in 2006. Joe Busnardo planted European wine grapes on the property in 1968 when others were still planting hybrids. He sold the winery in 1996, but it took another 10 years of struggle to get everything in place to produce top wines. With \$25 million invested and the hiring of winemaker Robert Summers, Hester Creek is a serious player. Their reserve Cabernet Franc and Merlot are outstanding, but you can rely on all their bottlings for high quality.

Walter and Gordon Gehringer are by no means new names; they have been a mainstay on the Golden Mile Bench since opening in 1986. Always reliable and well-priced, their offerings punch well above their weight, winning more than 50 “Platinum” awards in competition with other wines of the Pacific Northwest. Their wines have always favoured pure fruit character over oak.

Tinhorn Creek, headed by the energetic Sandra Oldfield, is Canada's first carbon-neutral winery and one of the first to start using screwcap closures in the mid 2000s. The property is home to summer concerts and a fine restaurant, Miradoro, which opened in 2011. You cannot go wrong with any of Tinhorn's wines.

Mick and Pam Luckhurst bought their winery in 2003. In 2008, they decided to change the name from Golden Mile Cellars to Road 13, thereby giving back to the wine community in the Golden Mile Bench its important regional identity. The wines have gone from strength to strength. Their Chenin Blanc comes from some of the oldest vines in the valley, planted in 1968. If you see a bottle, buy it, for it will not be on the shelf long. All their wines are well made.





CULMINA R&D RED BLEND

BC VQA \$22.99 596700

Fragrant and elegant aromas of red and black fruit, black cherries and raspberries greet the nose and then the palate. This wine is very polished, fresh and full of fruit. The long finish shows the cherries and fine-grained tannins.



HESTER CREEK SELECT BARRELS CABERNET MERLOT

BC VQA \$16.49 13920

This wine is very fragrant and packed with red and black fruit, red berries and black cherry, with a herbal hint from the Cab Franc. This is a serious bargain, and so fresh and inviting, you won't want to put down the glass. It's hard to imagine anything that will not pair with this juicy Bordeaux blend.



TINHORN CREEK OLDFIELD SERIES MERLOT

BC VQA \$26.99 153213

This beautiful, aged Merlot has a complex and full-bodied character. It is lush and silky, full of ripe black cherry and plum fruit with a freshness from the 14 percent Cabernet Franc blended in. Try with barbecued meat.



GEHRINGER PRIVATE RESERVE PINOT GRIS

BC VQA \$15.49 347203

This shows wonderful concentration of ripe melon and peach from the aroma to the finish. It is lively and bright, with great balance and a touch of spice at the end. Sip on its own, or enjoy with delicate fish dishes.



ROAD 13 SEVENTY-FOUR K

BC VQA \$21.99 78915

The inky, dark appearance suggests a wine of great concentration. It's full of ripe, dark fruit and dark chocolate with a spicy, meaty note from the Syrah in the blend. This powerful pour would be perfect with a rib-eye steak.



TINHORN CREEK GEWÜRZTRAMINER

BC VQA \$15.99 530675

New winemaker Andrew Windsor continues Sandra Oldfield's practice of fashioning textbook Gew, brimming with floral hints, spice, lychee and red grapefruit from the nose to the long finish. Delicious on its own and perfect with Asian food.

GOLDEN MILE BENCH

LABELLING

Golden Mile Bench can be mentioned with Okanagan Valley on the front label only if the wine is made exclusively from grapes from the sub-region. Currently, a few wineries are noting the region when appropriate, but many blend grapes from other areas and therefore cannot denote the sub-region on the label.

SOIL

The fan-shaped bench consists of well-drained clay and gravel.

ASPECT

Eastern exposure to the morning sun, with shade from the extreme heat in the late afternoon, making for a cooler climate on the western side of the valley.