

winemaker
profile

WALTER GEHRINGER



GEHRINGER BROTHERS ESTATE WINERY

SIBLING WINERY

Forget about sibling rivalry. With the Oliver-born Gehringer Brothers, it's all about a sibling winery. Walter and Gordon Gehringer are true hybrid winemakers, embracing Old World techniques and New World technology.

Straight out of high school, older brother Walter moved to Germany to study at Geisenheim University in the Rheingau region, and was its first Canadian graduate with an engineering degree in viticulture and oenology. Gordon gained a degree from the State College and Research Institute for Viticulture and Horticulture in Weinsberg, Germany.

Four decades later, the brothers run the 30,000-case Gehringer Brothers Winery on an Oliver hillside, producing some of the Okanagan Valley's most affordable aromatic whites and reds (including both red and white Icewines). In 2015, thanks to a process initiated in 2007, the Golden Mile Bench, at an elevation of 1,670 feet, became the valley's first and only sub-appellation.

I spoke with Walter about Gehringer Brothers' journey and vision.



KASEY WILSON

Kasey Wilson is an award-winning food and travel writer, broadcaster and author. She is editor of *Best Places Vancouver* and her articles have appeared in *National Geographic Traveler*, *Bon Appetit* and *Gastronomica*. Wilson is executive producer and co-host of the “Best of Food and Wine Show” on AM650. The author of 10 non-fiction books on travel and food, Kasey is a member of the judging panel for the World’s 50 Best Restaurants.

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How difficult was it to plant your vineyards?

It was a real challenge to plant this 26-acre vineyard, because back when we started in 1981, the winter temperatures were colder. That, in turn, would damage our first year’s growth. So we had to take the vines and bury them. Then we would dig them up in the spring. The next year those vines were fine, since they were now acclimatized to the winter temperatures. Also, though we didn’t know it at the time, we bought a rock pile of land. It took three or four people working full-time during the frost-free months to prepare an acre of land.

Are there any varietals you prefer?

Honestly, we have about 21 different wines currently, so we enjoy creating a diverse wine portfolio that doesn’t concentrate on one varietal. I think this is one of the more enriching aspects of New World wineries, the strength being in a wide range of grape styles. That’s unlike Europe, where regions are known only for one variety. Here in the Okanagan, we refuse to be pigeonholed, and the region lends itself well to these diverse wine styles.

What mark are you trying to leave as a winemaker?

I try my best to create a high level of consistency from year to year. Also, we don’t put a lot of money into marketing and so we tend to be a word-of-mouth winery. The key is that we keep our pricing reasonable, and so I like to think of us as ambassadors for the BC wine industry, in that people looking to try wines from the region will gravitate toward our pricing and because our wines are well-liked and enjoyed. I think that opens the door to people wanting

to experience other wines and wineries from the area, which is satisfying, especially when we can shift their thinking from other global wine regions to our locality.

You are one of the few wineries in the Okanagan that doesn’t charge to taste wines. Why is that?

We don’t charge because our wines have such a strong appeal that most people who visit our winery are going to be buying anyway. So, it seems a pain to then charge for a tasting, and we like to think of it as an act of goodwill to let people sample the wines without charging them. It’s worked out very well for us.

After spending time studying oenology in Germany, do you have a favourite German wine?

I remember a Riesling I had in Deidesheim, a wine-growing village in the Pfalz region, although I can’t recall the exact winery. People had always told me that Riesling has a pronounced peach character, but I’d never found that to be true until I tasted this wine. It was unbelievable. To this day, I hold that wine up as a benchmark for a good Riesling.

Are you influenced by tasting wines from other wineries?

Not really. It might sound strange, but for me wine is a creative process, like painting or writing. With that in mind, I don’t like to expose myself to other people’s wines because I’m worried I might start questioning or second-guessing what I’m doing. I like to contain myself to my own world of wine. It helps me to remain confident and creative with my own winemaking process.

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 **01** 
**GEHRINGER
BROTHERS
OLD VINES
AUXERROIS**

BC VQA **\$14.49** 171496
Expect ripe apple, peach and melon with a citrus squeeze on the palate in this medium-bodied, off-dry wine. Great with seafood, salads and chicken.



 **01** 
**GEHRINGER
BROTHERS
EHRENFELSER**

BC VQA **\$14.99** 171512
With Granny Smith apple, pear, fennel and sage, this wine is complex with refreshing minerality that leads to a lime curd and *fleur de sel* finish!



 **00** 
**GEHRINGER
BROTHERS
PRIVATE RESERVE
PINOT GRIS**

BC VQA **\$14.99** 347203
Stone fruit flavours lead to delicate floral and herbaceous notes in this light-bodied and refined wine, making it a perfect companion to crisp salads and light sandwiches.

 **00** 

**GEHRINGER
BROTHERS
PRIVATE RESERVE
DRY RIESLING**

BC VQA **\$13.49** 347492
Lime, lychee, rosemary and floral notes burst through this mineral-rich dry wine. Its tangy acidity gives it balance right through its lingering finish. Fantastic with raw oysters!



 **00** 

**GEHRINGER
BROTHERS
DRY ROCK
VINEYARDS MERLOT**

BC VQA **\$12.89** 559583
Silky tannins offer structure to this fleshy, fruit-forward wine with black cherries and plum leading the way, followed by mocha and violet notes. Pair with comforting stews.



 **10** 

**GEHRINGER
BROTHERS
SIGNATURE SERIES
RIESLING ICEWINE**

BC VQA **\$46.99** 504860 375 ml
Candied orange, apricot, ginger, lime marmalade and honeysuckle wrap around this wine's firm acidity, giving it layers of structured balance. Pair with Crêpes Suzette or white chocolate.

