



PHOTOS BY PATRICIA HARRIS FOR THE BOSTON GLOBE

Route 97 in southcentral British Columbia follows the contours of Okanagan Lake in the middle of a growing wine and tourism landscape next to old-fashioned agriculture.

Tradition and experiment grow here

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chamber inside a giant pyramid purported to “amplify the spirit of the wine.” It’s too much mumbo-jumbo for us, but the sparkling wines we drank with dinner at the winery’s Sunset Organic Bistro gave an extra pop to the late-evening sunset.

Cipes was hardly the first seeker of riches lured to the valley. Gold prospectors arrived on the heels of the 1858 Fraser gold rush, and Tinhorn Creek Vineyards outside the town of Oliver is named for the gold-mining creek that transects its property. The couples who founded the vineyard and winery in 1993 use the creek to irrigate their hillside plantings of gewurztraminer and muscat. But the old gold rush mentality dies hard. The immediate vicinity of Tinhorn Creek is known as the Golden Mile, so-called for the concentration of fruit farms and vineyards along that short stretch of Route 97.

We were greeted at the door of Tinhorn Creek with a small pour of wine to sip as we followed the self-guided tour. We’ve seen enough fermentation tanks to last a lifetime, but we were transfixed by the bottling line. Tinhorn Creek claims to be the province’s first premium wine maker to bottle all its wines with Stelvin screw caps. In the small demonstration vineyard, it’s possible to taste a grape from the vine and compare it with a sip of the same varietal.



One of the big draws at Tinhorn Creek is Miradoro, a glass-walled restaurant that seems to hang in mid-air above the South Okanagan Valley. The chef works with local growers and brings a Mediterranean flair to Okanagan products. That might mean using asparagus and morels in the spring while making exuberant salads



The sculpture at Summerhill Pyramid Winery in Kelowna.

with fresh melons and tomatoes in the height of summer.

Getting up any speed along the roads of the Okanagan Valley is nearly impossible, since an old-fashioned fruit stand or a newfangled winery tasting room seems to lurk every mile or so. We were lucky to visit during the peak of the August fruit and vegetable harvest — an edible bounty that some in the valley fear will become only a memory as vineyards replace orchards and row crops.

Covert Farms in Oliver tries to strike a balance between old-fashioned agriculture and the new viticulture. Gene Covert’s grandparents homesteaded the land in 1959, and Gene and his

wife, Shelly, now run the 600-acre certified organic operation, shipping tomatoes, muskmelons, onions, and table grapes all over western Canada. They also welcome a steady stream of U-Pick customers, who brave the rattlesnakes to harvest everything from strawberries to pumpkins. Pick 500 pounds of tomatoes and the Coverts throw in a free watermelon.

The rolling land in the shadow of McIntyre Bluff used to be planted in apples. Facing falling apple prices and red-hot demand for wine grapes, Covert Farms replanted 25 acres in grapes. The flagship MDC Red wine is a robust blend of caber-

If you go . . .

Where to stay
Sandman Hotel Kelowna
2130 Harvey Ave., Kelowna
British Columbia
250-860-6409
www.sandmanhotels.ca
Two buildings — one low-rise, the other a tower — feature Mod decor on a strip highway outside of town, offering quick driving access to downtown and wineries. Doubles from \$119.

Apple d’or Guesthouse
2587 Naramata Road, Naramata
250-496-4045
www.appledor.ca
Guests are welcomed with a glass of Apple d’Or sparkling wine. Three spacious suites, each with private garden and kitchen, epitomize wine-country luxury. From \$300, two-night minimum.

Watermark Beach Resort
15 Park Place, Osoyoos
888-755-3480
www.watermarkbeachresort.com
All-suites resort on 1,000-foot sandy lake beach at the south end of the Okanagan Valley makes a good break from wine touring. Studio suites from \$159.

What to do and where to eat
Mission Hill Family Estate
1730 Mission Hill Road
West Kelowna
250-768-6448
www.missionhillwinery.com
Open year-round. Guided tours by reservation \$12-\$50. Terrace Restaurant open for lunch and dinner through mid-October. Entrees \$25-\$31.

Summerhill Pyramid Winery
4870 Chute Lake Road, Kelowna
800-667-3538
www.summerhill.bc.ca
Open year-round. Guided tours \$10. **Sunset Organic Bistro** open for lunch, dinner, and Sunday brunch through December. Entrees \$20-\$38.

Tinhorn Creek Vineyards
537 Tinhorn Creek Road, Oliver
250-498-3743
www.tinhorn.com
Open year-round. **Miradoro Restaurant** open for lunch and dinner through December. Entrees \$24-\$44.

Covert Farms
200 Covert Place,
off Secrest Road, Oliver
250-498-2824
www.covertfarms.ca
Open June through October.

Harker’s Organics and Rustic Roots Winery
2238 Highway 3, Cawston
250-499-2754
www.harkersorganics.com
Open through Dec. 23.

Upper Bench Winery & Creamery
170 Upper Bench Road South,
Pentiction
250-770-1733
www.upperbench.ca
Open year-round.

Vinegar Works
10216 Gould Ave., Summerland
250-494-7300
www.thevinegarworks.com
Open July through mid-October.

net sauvignon, zinfandel, and syrah, a grape that develops a lively expression of blackberry-blueberry fruit when grown in the valley.

Other growers shun the traditional fruits. Sara Harker of Harker’s Organics and Rustic Roots Winery in Cawston brings a winemaker’s taste and skills to the task. “We didn’t want to pull out 30 acres of food,” Harker says, “because sustainable family farming is the goal.” She laments the trend toward vineyards. “Everyone’s going to be drunk and hungry before they realize what they’ve done.”

In the 1880s, five generations back, her husband, Troy’s, family homesteaded the farm. The modern farmstand brims over with organic fruits and vegetables so beautiful that even the seconds could pose for cover pictures on seed packets. Fresh fruit milkshakes are a specialty, and Harker is dedicated to making wines as good as the produce.

Her sparkling apple wines are the most popular, but the dry cherry wine is a versatile table red, and the mulberry-pear dessert wine finished in French oak has the left and toasted flavors of a good Amaronne. “There’s more acceptance of fruit wines,” Harker says, “but they are still a niche market.”

There are other niches to fill. In 2011, Shana and Gavin Miller bought Upper Bench Winery

on the east side of the lake near Pentiction. Originally from the United Kingdom, Gavin concentrates on the winemaking. Shana, who moved cross-country from Nova Scotia, converted a wine crush pad to cheesemaking. Gavin’s powerful and multi-layered merlot finds a perfect complement in Shana’s King Cole semi-soft blue cheese. Her brine-washed buttery Okanagan Sun goes equally well with his silky pinot noir or fruit-forward chardonnay.

A number of winemakers “pooh-poohed” Kim Stansfield and John Gordon when they decided to turn their wine grapes into vinegar. The Vancouver couple caught the viticultural bug on a trip to Napa, planted a vineyard in Summerland in 2001, and introduced gourmet vinegars at farmers markets a couple of years later. Now they sell their herb- and fruit-infused bottles at the Vinegar Works, just steps from the vines.

Stansfield and Gordon also bottle some pasteurized unripe grape juice as verjus, which many chefs use to add acidity to dishes without the overpowering qualities of vinegar.

“I use it in risotto,” says Stansfield. “That way I can drink the wine that the recipe calls for.”

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