



HYBRID WINES ARE COOLER THAN EVER

BY MARI KANE

BACK OFF, AUTOMAKERS. Hybrids are not just for cars. They also make excellent wines.

Hybrids are the viticultural equivalent of Old World meets New World, or specifically, when the species *Vitis vinifera* meets *Vitis riparia*. Hybrid vines offer the best of both worlds: European style and distinction combined with North American tolerance and hardiness.

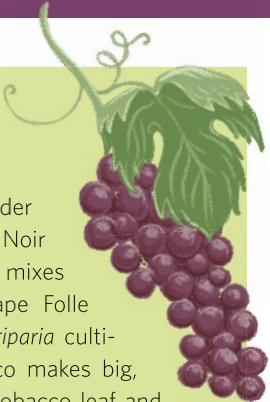
Before European *vinifera* grapes waltzed like royalty into the Okanagan Valley, robust hybrids like Marechal Foch had been mightily tolerating our cold climate and producing inky wines with aplomb. But in the late 1980s, when the government incentivized a transition to world-class *Vitis vinifera* grapevines in what was called the “Great Grape Pull Out,” most of BC’s original vineyards were replaced. Since then, the *vinifera* crowd of Cabernet, Chardonnay, Pinot Noir, Riesling, et al, have all but taken over BC’s wine country, and in the process, put the crossbred and hybrids in the minority.

Nowadays, tasting a hybrid or crossbred wine is like taking a sip of Canadian history. Hybrids are crosses between two different grape species such as the European *Vitis vinifera* Folle Blanche and the North American *Vitis riparia* Grand Glabre. Crosses such as Riesling + Silvaner = Ehrenfelser are the meeting of two *vinifera* strains. If you haven’t enjoyed these delightful Frankenwines before, this is a great time for discovery.



HYBRID WINES OF BRITISH COLUMBIA


BACO NOIR



Created by French breeder Maurice Baco, Baco Noir (BA-koh NWAHR) mixes the French cognac grape Folle Blanche with the *Vitis riparia* cultivar Grande Glabre. Baco makes big, earthy red wines with tobacco leaf and dark fruit flavours, pronounced acidity, and smokiness. Kind of wild.

Baco Noir is huge in Ontario, where it's achieved cult status. Not so much in BC. In Kelowna, **Ancient Hill Winery** makes a small batch, but **Summerhill Pyramid Winery** produces enough organic Baco Noir to distribute province-wide. "Baco makes a delicious wine," says Summerhill CEO Ezra Cipes, who notes that despite its deep, rich character, Baco is not tannic and can be enjoyed like a young Chianti. Thanks to its big acidity, Baco Noir is perfect with Italian food, charcuterie, or steak. "Its richness and freshness make a good combo," he says. "If you don't care about heritage and parentage, you'll find Baco very appealing."

MARECHAL FOCH




Pronounced Mar-esh-shall Fosh and named for the French army general Ferdinand Foch, this grape's genetics are controversial. It combines Goldriesling (itself a cross of Riesling and Courtillier Musqué) with a *Vitis riparia* crossing that may or may not contain the variety Oberlin 595. Depends on who you talk to.

The wines typically show flavours of earth, black fruit, coffee, and dark chocolate, and the styles swing from Beaujolais fresh to Zinfandel fruit bomb to Port-like dessert wines.

Quails' Gate has Foch vineyards that were planted in 1965 and 1978. The juice is so dark red, founder Tony Stewart recalls when it was made in the inky Australian Shiraz style to provide colour in blending. Nowadays, their bottling of Old Vines Foch is likened to a full-bodied Italian wine. "Personally, I have opened our ten-year aged Old Vines Foch at dinner parties with well-schooled wine tradespeople, and they rarely guess what it is. But they're always quite impressed," Stewart says. The winery suggests pairing Foch with roasted venison, grilled portobello burgers, blue cheese, or anything with sausage and mushrooms.

Other Marechal Foch producers include **Lang Vineyards**, **House of Rose**, **Edge of the Earth**, **Little Straw**, **Indigenous World Winery**, **Sperling Vineyards**, and **St. Hubertus & Oak Bay** in the Okanagan Valley; **Monte Creek**, **Recline Ridge** and **Sunnybrae Vineyards** in the Shuswap; **Skimmerhorn Winery** in Creston; **Emandare**, **Unsworth**, **Symphony Vineyard**, and **Deep Cove Winery** on Vancouver Island; and **Sea Star Vineyards** on Pender Island.

VIDAL



Vidal is an inter-specific hybrid of Ugni Blanc and Rayon d'Or that manages to produce high sugar levels in cold climates while maintaining good acidity. Vidal Blanc is fruity, with honeyed notes of grapefruit and pineapple, and makes a beautiful, nectar-like icewine. In fact, Vidal is the best deal in Canadian icewine, costing less than a Chardonnay or Riesling version.

Stag's Hollow's Vidal vineyard dates back to 1987, planted before the "Pull Out" years. After they bought the property in 1991, co-founders Linda Pruegger and Larry Gerelus soon released two different styles of Vidal—one dry and one a late-harvest—but not before making changes to their viticultural method. "In the late '80s, the vines had been cropped heavily, so the table (Vidal) wine was not very good," says Linda. "But when we cropped the vines like a Chardonnay, we got beauti-

ful fruit being expressed. That's why it became popular for us. We cropped it like everything else and it made a nice enjoyable summer white."

The Stag's Hollow dry Vidal—now blended with 15% Orange Muscat/Viognier/Marsanne and called Tragically Vidal—was a quick hit with customers. It became so popular, Linda says, that when they announced their plans to replace Vidal vines with Sauvignon Blanc, "We had quite a revolt from our customers. So we ended up keeping the Vidal, and have actually planted more."

With its forward fruit profile, a dry or icewine Vidal can handle a world of foods: Cajun/Creole, Thai, Chinese, Vietnamese, Mexican, Indian, and desserts.

Vidal late-harvest and icewine is also made by **See Ya Later Ranch**, **Prospect Winery**, **Peller Estates**, **Mission Hill**, and **Inni-skillin**, among others.

CROSSBREEDS

BC has lots of exciting *vinifera*-crossed wines that overdeliver on value. These cool climate grapes have full parentage from Old World nobility and have inherited the traits now seen as *derigueur* in the wine world.

AUXERROIS BLANC (O-ser-wa), similar to but less complex than its sibling Chardonnay, is made in dry or off-dry styles. Seek it out from **Gray Monk**, **Gehringer Brothers**, and **Little Straw** in the Okanagan Valley, and **40 Knots Vineyard and Estate Winery** on Vancouver Island.

EHRENFELSER (Eh-ren-fel-ser) is a cross between Riesling and Silvaner that has a lively mouthfeel and fresh, tropical fruit flavours. In the Okanagan Valley, **Lang Vineyards**, **CedarCreek**, **Lake Breeze**, **Gray Monk**, **Gehringer Brothers**, **The View Winery**, and **Summerhill** all produce excellent examples of Ehrenfeller.

KERNER, a cross of Trollinger and Riesling, features citrus and tropical fruits, and racy acidity. Kerner can be made into everything from dry table wine to late-harvest and icewine. Look for dry Kerner from **Gray Monk** and **Pipe Dreams Winery**, and late-harvest Kerner by **Singletree Winery**, **Oliver Twist Estate**, **Hillside Winery**, and **SummerGate** of the Okanagan Valley; dry Kerner is also made by **Recline Ridge** in the Shuswap and **Venturi Schulze** of Vancouver Island.

ORTEGA is a German cross between Müller-Thurgau and Siegerrebe. It produces a wine with floral aromas, forward fruit, and tends to be sweet. Drink like a Muscat. Find single varietal Ortega at **Skimmerhorn** in Creston; **Recline Ridge**, **Waterside Winery**, **Larch Hills**, and **Sunnybrae** in the Shuswap; **Cherry Point**, **Venturi Schulze**, **Blue Grouse**, **40 Knots**, **Symphony**, **Vigneti Zanatta**, **Enrico**, and **Deep Cove** wineries on Vancouver Island; **Kutatás**

Wines on Salt Spring Island; and **Sea Star** on Pender Island.

SCHÖNBURGER (Shawn-ber-ger) is a cross between Pinot Noir and Chasselas/Muscat Hamburg and makes a delicate wine with floral aromas, muscat flavours, and hints of sweetness. Single varietal Schönburgers are produced by **Black Widow Winery**, and **St. Hubertus & Oak Bay** in the Okanagan; and **Venturi Schulze** of Vancouver Island.

SIEGERREBE (See-geh-RAY-buh) is a cross of Madeleine Angevine and Gewürztraminer, featuring peach and apple flavours, and aromas of exotic flowers. Look for Siegerrebe by **Singletree** and **Gray Monk** in the Okanagan Valley; **Larch Hills**, **Sunnybrae**, and **Recline Ridge** in the Shuswap; **Chaberton Estate** and **Singletree** in the Fraser Valley; and **Cherry Point**, **40 Knots**, and **Blue Grouse** on Vancouver Island.

ZWEIGELT (TSVYE-gelt), a cross of St. Laurent and Blaufränkisch, is the Austrian national red grape. Zweigelt tends to be light to medium in weight and tannin level—in other words, quaffable. Dry Zweigelts come from **Arrowleaf Cellars**, **Hainle Vineyards**, **Pipe Dreams**, and **Summerhill**. **Kalala** and **Hainle** wineries also make Zweigelt icewine!

Editor's Note: We have done our best to list the vast majority of BC wineries producing these wines. We sincerely apologize for any omissions.

Mari Kane is a Vancouver-based wine writer and web designer who blogs at tastingroomconfidential.com and blogstestudio.com. Follow her on Twitter @marikane