

You Make Me Feel Like a Natural... WINE

BY MARI KANE

NATURAL WINE MAY SOUND like the hottest trend since the screwcap, but it's actually the world's oldest winemaking technique, rediscovered. Let organic or biodynamically grown grapes ferment in their own wild yeast, soak long in their skins, age in neutral oak, then bottle it with particulates included, and you've got yourself a natural wine just like the ancients drank.

Natural wine is sort of like Las Vegas: what comes from the grapes stays in the wine.

The goal of natural winemaking is to produce an honest interpretation of the vineyard's terroir expressed through fresh, living juice.





Mike Nierychlo of Emandare Vineyards

"I'm not dogmatic about natural wine, but for me it's our way of showcasing our terroir."

To Ann Sperling of **Sperling Vineyards**, making natural wine is "Not only an ethical choice, but a quality-driven and terroir-driven choice." Her family's thirty-year-old biodynamic vineyards near Kelowna are so attuned to the lunar cycles and seasonal changes, she never feels the need to augment what nature intends for them. "I selected the sites and know them well and have confidence the fruit is balanced and that the ferment and juice are healthy. The healthier the overall content of the juice, the easier it is to do fermentation."

Yeast is central to winemaking, not only because it turns sugar into alcohol; it also influences flavour. While conventional wineries can choose yeast—manufactured to produce just about any characteristic one could desire—from an online catalogue, the tactic for natural winemakers is to use the ambient yeast that naturally grows on the grapes.

Winemaker Matt Dumayne at **Okanagan Crush Pad** says their Switchback Organic Vineyard in Summerland is so healthy it has built up its own natural immunities, as well as its own strain of yeast! "Our labs found there is a native yeast exclusive to our winery that they can't track, which is a testament to the health of the vineyard and cleanliness of our cellar," Dumayne said. "Having our own yeast strain allows the uniqueness of our vineyard to show through." CONT. P.52>



Photos: Mari Kane



BC'S FINEST NATURAL WINES

Bella Chardonnay 2017, Keremeos opens with a giant pop of the bottle cap where it releases a big nose of super ripe and oxidized apple, pear, and apricot. Complexity builds as the abundant foam settles and it takes on the character of a well-aged champagne. Impressive.

Bella Gamay Noir 2017, Naramata unfurls leesy notes of strawberry cream on a frothy nose, and a soft mouthfeel of sweet berry fruit greets the palate, finishing with beautifully lifted fruit. bellawines.ca

Lock and Worth Semillon 2016, Kelowna appears slightly cloudy yellow in bottle but clear in the glass with tartrates settling in the bottom. Diesel aromas evaporate into delicate lemon custard on the nose and mouth with great balance and acidity, finishing clean, pretty, and sexy. lockandworth.com

Haywire 2015 Free Form Sauvignon Blanc, Summerland is seriously hazy with wisps of cloud floating at the bottle's base. Once opened, a nose of roast zucchini and gooseberry is followed by powerful lemon drop flavours on the soft mouth, and it finishes savoury. okanagancrushpad.com

Emandare 2017 Sauvignon Blanc, Cowichan Valley is filtered for aesthetic reasons, but that doesn't tone down its vivacious tropical aromas and flavours. The mouthfeel sizzles with acidity and the juicy finish is long but clean. Whitefish, you've met your match. emandarevineyard.com

A Sunday in August 2017 Pinot Gris, Similkameen Valley is not only cloudy, but so darkly pink it should be considered rosé. Aromas of raw fruit and vegetation include a hint of funk, and a plush mouth of cherry,

strawberry, and rhubarb, finishing long and fruity. asundayinaugust.com

Rathjen 2016 Rose of Gamay/Pinot Noir, Cowichan Valley appears dark pink and clear, and features a strawberry nose, a zesty palate of cooked red fruit, and an insanely fruity finish. rathjencellars.com

Emandare 2015 Pinot Noir, Cowichan Valley has aromas of wood, spice, red fruit, and Crayola. Mouth-filling tannins, a lean body, bright acidity, and a briary red fruit finish make it perfect with food.

Rathjen 2016 Bunker Red (Gamay Noir, Pinot Noir from Cowichan Valley, Foch and Regent from Saanich Peninsula) is a hazy red Beaujolais-like pizza wine with zesty, sweet red fruit flavours with a breath of orange, and ripe, smooth tannins.

Haywire 2015 Free Form Pinot Noir, Summerland appears clear and red in colour with earthy notes of cherry on the nose and funky red fruit on the palette and finish. Good tannic structure and a touch of minerality add to its intrigue.

Synchromesh 2016 Cab Franc, Oliver is dark and cloudy, showing earthy red fruit and violets up front, with lovely minerality and flavours of rhubarb pie in the mouth. Great balance and focus. synchromeshwines.ca

Sperling 2016 and 2017 Amber Pinot Gris, Kelowna. This, the foggiest of the natural wine lineup, is the shade of a tequila sunrise and is now classified as "orange wine." Both vintages are like a walk through an apricot orchard after harvest, with a compost heap stewing in the distance. Dense in body, with soft acidity, it's excellent with breakfast. sperlingvineyards.com

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Mike Nierychlo of **Emandare Vineyards** feels the same about yeast being key to terroir. He started making garage wine eleven years ago with his brother-in-law Mike Rathjen of **Rathjen Cellars**, using every method possible. Now that he and his wife, Robin, own an organic farm in the Cowichan Valley, he's gone *au naturel* to convey the cachet of Vancouver Island terroir. "I think the only way [natural] works precisely well is to have an estate winery where you're farming the fruit yourself, and you allow the wine to ferment naturally in a facility that's in the centre of that vineyard," he says. So they built their small winery from scratch to create an environment where his indigenous yeast can ferment as purely as possible.

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Making natural wine when you don't own the vineyards can be more challenging, but Naramata winemaker Jay Drysdale of **Bella Wines** is doing well with the six to ten sites he leases or sources from. After making a couple of vintages conventionally, he realized the satisfaction of "making wine when you can't just throw in chemicals to fix it."

Drysdale's Ancestrale sparkling does get disgorged—where the sediment produced during fermentation is removed—but it's topped with its same juice instead of the artificial sugars of traditional methods. Ideology is not his goal though. "I don't make wine for the sake of being natural; I make it natural because I think it will end up as the best wine possible."

To find the best natural BC wines, my wine-judge friend Sam Hauck and I tasted about twenty bottles from eight wineries. I probably consumed over a bottle's worth and the next day I felt just fine. Seriously, I was not hungover in the least. So, there's that.

Mari Kane is a writer and web designer living in Vancouver, BC. She blogs at tastingroomconfidential.com and recently completed a novel set in the Okanagan wine country. @marikane

Photo: Mari Kane

EDIBLE EVENTS

LANGLEY EATS LOCAL

August 8, 12–4:30pm at Langley Community Farmers' Market. This annual event, celebrating the bounty of Langley's farmers and producers, is very family-friendly and free to attend (with extra things available for purchase). facebook.com/LangleyEatsLocal

FEAST OF FIELDS

FarmFolk CityFolk's annual local food celebration and fundraiser, held each year on a different farm in the Okanagan Valley (August 12), on Vancouver Island (August 26), and in Metro Vancouver (September 9). Experience the harvest, gourmet style. For tickets: feastoffields.com

10TH ANNUAL GARLIC FESTIVAL

August 19, 10am–3pm at The Sharing Farm, Terra Nova Rural Park, Richmond. The festival features family-friendly fare from local restaurants, live entertainment, a farmer's market, cooking demos, a kid's zone and more. Proceeds support The Sharing Farm. richmondgarlicfest.com

A DAY AT THE FARM

September 8, 10am–4pm at Westham Island Herb Farm. This annual event is a fun way for the family to learn about farming and agriculture. Enjoy hay wagon farm tours, live music, food trucks, fresh produce for sale, a food contest, and more. Entry is free, or by donation. deltafarmland.ca/a-day-at-the-farm

ORGANIC WEEK

September 8–16. To find an event near you that celebrates organic food, farming, and products, visit: organicweek.ca

1ST ANNUAL BRITISH COLUMBIA LIEUTENANT GOVERNOR'S WINE AWARDS

September 27, 7–9:30pm at Laurel Heritage Packinghouse in Kelowna. This new event is a merger of the province's two premier judging competitions and is presided over by the Lieutenant Governor of British Columbia. For details and tickets: thewinefestivals.com

Photo by LoboStudio Hamburg on Unsplash