

# Culinaire

## A Trio of Tinhorn: Oldfield Merlot that is

An inside look at Tinhorn Creek

by TOM FIRTH posted Wed, Feb 10, 2016



I like Tinhorn Creek, one of the first wineries I ever visited - it's also one that didn't ban me after I threw a glass of wine over one of their interpretive signs (by accident) on my most recent visit. A fixture of the South Okanagan for many years, they also have been a bell-weather of many trends or goings on in the valley: one of the first with a proper wine club, one of the first with a solid message of sustainability, an enviable concert series, a great restaurant on site, and I'm pretty happy with their wines.

While digging out samples for another article, I discovered that somehow, in fact, I was sitting on three vintages of the Tinhorn Creek Oldfield Series Merlot. To be clear, I do taste through every sample I get, it might take a while, but I do, and I do get opportunities to taste wine at the vineyards with winemakers, and generally as part of my typical work week. So there I was, three vintages deep in a certain merlot and I thought, "Let's do a quick vertical."



Now, a vertical wine tasting is one where you would taste several vintages of the same wine. As opposed to a horizontal tasting, which would be multiple different wines (from the same producer), generally all from the current release. Whether to go from oldest to youngest or vice-versa is entirely up to you, but in this case I'd like to see how the elements of more mature wine become more pronounced in younger vintages. I'll go oldest first.

So without further nonsense, let's see how the last three vintages compare:

### **Tinhorn Creek 2010 Oldfield Series Merlot, Okanagan Valley**

Generally speaking, the 2010 vintage was a bit of a tough one. A cold, wet spring - cooler than average summer - makes for some challenges. Colour is still good in the glass with deep colour and a slight browning or russet tone to the rim. A little closed at first, alcohol heat leads followed by spice, prune and plum, vanilla bean and a touch of raspberry juice. Firmish tannins - exactly what I want - but with some fruit notes that are taking a back seat to earthy or bitter components. Still holding up, I wanted just a little more fruit. Pair with bigger, tougher cuts of meat that also have more flavour. Or maybe meat with barbecue sauce with a little sweetness over heat...

### **Tinhorn Creek 2011 Oldfield Series Merlot, Okanagan Valley**

The 2011 vintage was acknowledged as being a little cooler, but otherwise pretty well on par with an average year for most parts of the valley. The late start also caused a lot of wineries to drop a little extra fruit to help ripening, though the needed heat came along closer to harvest. A little lighter in colour overall than the 2010, the bright red colouring is saying this wine might be at a good time right now. Aromas are of black fruit and plums with a slightly floral character. Thicker fruit presence on the palate to match those edgy tannins, this is the right wine at the right time. Eat, drink (this), be merry.

### **Tinhorn Creek 2012 Oldfield Series Merlot, Okanagan Valley**

Despite a wet spring, the season was off to a slow start. Finally, when the nice weather came along it didn't stress the vines, according to Sandra Oldfield. Overall, the valley commented on ripe full flavours for the red wines. Compared to the other two vintages, the cabernet franc is the highest (14 per cent), which might account for the lighter colour again here, but also the increased peppercorn spice, cedar and tobacco leaf aromas overtop of those fine, plummy fruits. I like the subtlety, but miss a bit of the fruit from 2011. Flavour-wise, top shelf, full-flavoured merlot - exactly what the valley does well. I'd love another year to let the tannins mellow slightly, but this is a solid bottle already. Lamb, beef, even game - this will work.

**TINHORN CREEK VINEYARDS**  
[CULINAIREMAGAZINE.CA](http://CULINAIREMAGAZINE.CA), FEBRUARY 10, 2016

*Tinhorn Creek Oldfield Merlot sells for around \$35-38 in Alberta*

**hawksworth  
communications**