

JOHN GILCHRIST

It took us a few days but we finally tracked down one of the south Okanagan's delicacies — the samosa. Large and crisp, packed with potatoes, peas and gentle spices and served with a tangy tamarind-plum sauce, it was a delight. Chuffed back at a small table set among the aisles of the Okanagan Falls Heritage Market (5109 – 9 Ave., 250-497-8155), it was a superb road snack.

But samosas in the Okanagan?

The valley has been a fruit haven forever and recently a wine mecca. But as we headed down Highway 97 to Osoyoos, we passed fruit stand after fruit stand with hand-crafted signs announcing fresh peaches, apples, plums, tomatoes and, inevitably, samosas. Since many of the fruit and vegetable farmers are of Indian origin, the samosa is a tasty cultural legacy.

But fortune was not with us. Every time we stopped at a stand, the vendors told us they were sold out for the day or they hadn't made them yet. So we kept looking.

And we sipped a little wine at the same time.

The wines of the Okanagan improve year after year. Just a few weeks ago, the 2013 Syrah from C.C. Jentsch Cellars, located on the Golden Mile between Osoyoos and Oliver, won the Judgment of BC, a wine competition that pitted Okanagan syrahs against six fine syrahs and shirazes from Australia, France and the U.S. The Jentsch syrah came out on top and, at \$30, was among the cheapest of the lot.

In addition to independent visits to wineries, we indulged our viniferous tastebuds in a wine tasting tour operated by Landsea Okanagan Tours & Charters (250-495-7565). In 41/2 hours we visited five Golden Mile wineries plus a meadery, sipping our way through a couple dozen wines. (We also stocked up on a few hard-to-find-in-Alberta labels, including the Jentsch syrah.)



Manuel Ferreira is a partner in Tinhorn Creek's Miradouro, a destination restaurant on the Okanagan's Golden Mile. CHRISTOPHER POUGET

And we ate. Chefs from B.C. and Alberta have flocked to the Okanagan to work in or open restaurants that showcase Okanagan Wine Country cuisine. A number of wineries — Burrowing Owl, Hester Creek, Nk'Mip, Liquidity, Wild Goose, See Ya Later Ranch — have built restaurants with skilled kitchens and commanding views of the vineyards.

One example is Tinhorn Creek where Manuel Ferreira, owner of Vancouver's La Gavroche for over two decades, is now partner in Miradouro, an impressive, 80-seat restaurant with a view that goes on forever. Where executive chef Jeff Van Geest, formerly chef/owner of Vancouver's Aurora, revels in the fresh products around him, pairing pickled peaches and puréed beets with local pork belly and coastal scallops. And layering slices of perfectly cooked flank steak over a medley of fresh organic vegetables. With a battery of Tinhorn's

wines and other select vintages, Miradouro is a destination restaurant on the Golden Mile.

In Osoyoos itself, Dolci Socialhouse (8710 Main St., 250-495-6807) satisfies with wholesome lunches and dinners. The quinoa Cobb salad with avocado, green beans and poached egg is delicately flavourful while locally farmed Arctic char is perfectly cooked. For a caffeine buzz and a good breakfast to precede wine touring, JoJo's Cafe (8316 Main St., 250-495-6652) does the job with egg dishes and heavy-duty sandwiches constructed from what they call "bird seed" bread. (We took a picnic lunch from JoJo's on our wine tour.) And for pure — and sublime — pastries and breads, The Lake Village Bakery at 6511 Main St., 250-495-3366 is outstanding.

The current culinary gem in Osoyoos is the Restaurant at Watermark (15 Park Place, 250-495-5508) under the direction

of chef Adair Scott. The style is Mediterranean-influenced, Okanagan-infused tapas. So you'll find albacore tuna ceviche lain over marinated local, organic zucchini with a fermented habanero purée and grilled organic bavette steak sliced over root vegetable purée with a sweet onion jus. Served with bright Okanagan wines on a heated patio overlooking Osoyoos Lake, Scott's food captures the fresh, natural flavours of the Valley. (Watermark also makes an excellent place to stay for a south Okanagan visit.)

Wanting more great produce, we headed to Covert Farms north of Oliver, where we joined a farm tour led by owner Gene Covert in partnership with Watermark. Hopping into the back of a bright red 1952 Mercury half-ton, we bounced along dusty farm trails, tasting ripe Zinfandel grapes and strawberries, learning more about the organic farming and winemaking techniques at Covert

Farms. We left with bags of onions, garlic, squash, tomatoes and strawberries along with a couple of Covert's wines.

Before leaving, we picked up one last Okanagan delicacy — a can of wild sockeye salmon fished from the Okanagan River by the Sylix First Nation. Decades of damming have prevented sockeye from reaching traditional spawning grounds in the south Okanagan, but they have been reintroduced to the area and can now sustain a yearly fishery, adding to the list of the Okanagan's culinary delights.

I bet the sockeye would work well in a samosa.

Two more fine places for samosas: East Indian Meat Shop, 10475 Highway 97, Osoyoos, 250-495-4894; Oliver Supermarket, Road #3, Highway 97, Oliver, 250-498-5566. John Gilchrist can be reached at escurial@telus.net or at 403-235-7532 or follow him on Twitter @GilchristJohn



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