

Oliver excels at culinary coupling

Sun-kissed region in South Okanagan is known as the Wine Capital of Canada

BIANCA BUJAN

OLIVER — It's 10 a.m. on a Sunday morning and I'm at Platinum Bench Estate Winery & Artisan Bread Co. — in Oliver, the time of day doesn't matter when it comes to tasting the town's best wines.

I'm sitting on the back patio and below me and stretching toward the hill on the horizon, are rows of grape vines, and in the distance, three cows grazing the long grass of the neighbouring grounds.

And while this sweet spot that sits nestled on the slopes of the Black Sage Bench — where sandy soil and late-day sunlight produces bold reds and fruity whites — offers an intriguing mix of wines, I'll be honest: they had me at "bread."

I bite into a warm slice of sourdough bread with baked-in brie and pear preserves and a sip of Pinot Gris as I read through the wine pairing list on the tasting table before me.

I'm in this celebrated wine region in search of the perfect glass of Merlot, Cab Sav, Syrah or Chardonnay, and more — a culinary coupling of the best food and wine found in this sun-kissed region of the South Okanagan, known as the "Wine Capital of Canada."

PICK THE PERFECT PAIRING

When Murray Jones and Fiona Duncan left the cold winters of Winnipeg behind them to take on a new challenge in Osoyoos back in 2012, they enlisted the help of Dick Cleave, a pioneering viticulturist (referred to by "Mur" as "the god of grapes"), to pick the right plot of land.

Cleave mentored the pair, and they quickly began creat-



Wine and food share the spotlight at the annual Pig Out Festival held the first Saturday in May. LEILA KWOK

ing their own handcrafted wine creations.

Duncan, having taken culinary classes in San Francisco, decided to add an on-site artisan bread bakery to the mix, creating an offering not found in any other winery in the region: breads baked fresh daily on site, and paired with wine for tastings. A terroir and tasting tour at Platinum Bench, which includes four wine and bread pairings, is available for \$10 per person.

CHOOSE YOUR OWN

With 43 wineries in the region, you may want to pick up a few bottles of your favourite finds, grab a curated

charcuterie board, and find a picturesque park for a picnic.

Oliver Eats, a newly-opened, fast casual-counter deli and cafe, offers the perfect selection of meats, cheeses, snacks and sandwiches to satisfy your cravings. Here, you can find products produced by local food entrepreneurs, as well as those food products that you would normally travel far and wide to find.

OPT FOR UPSCALE

Food and wine are equally in focus at Hester Creek Estate Winery, where guests can

choose to enjoy their wine tasting while partaking in on-site cooking classes led by some of B.C.'s top chefs, or they can opt for an Italian dinner on the Tuscan-style patio of Terrafina Restaurant, where they can enjoy the stunning views of the vineyard.

Tinhorn Creek Vineyards features the on-site Miradolo Restaurant, with sweeping views of the valley, and a mouth-watering menu inspired by Mediterranean flavours.

For a more intimate culinary experience, you can book a seating at one of their

special dining events, regularly-hosted communal dinners, or premium guided sit-down wine and food seminars.

HEAD TO THE PIG FESTIVAL

Each year, on the first Saturday in May, wine and food share the spotlight at the annual Pig Out Festival, hosted by Covert Farms Family Estate. The outdoor, tented event focuses on pairing pork and poultry-themed dishes created by local chefs, with the varieties of wines found in the region.

This year's event fell May 4, inspiring a well-suited festival theme of "May the pork be with you."



Bison Carpaccio can be experienced at Miradolo Restaurant. TREVOR COOPER

In its eighth year, the event crowd reached more than 1,000 guests, many of whom were dressed in their favourite Star Wars swag.

Fit for guests of all ages, kids enjoyed jumping on the giant, inflated bouncy pillow, taking a swing at Star Wars-themed pinatas, and taking their turn at the plastic duck races, while their parents noshed on pork-themed nibbles (including a sandwich cleverly titled "Ham Solo", created by Oliver Eats), and taster glasses of a wide variety of wines (the Sparkling Pinot Noir by Covert Farms was a refreshing pick for the warm sunny day).

WHERE TO STAY

Family-friendly and in a central location, the Coast Oliver Hotel offers the comforts of a trusted brand, with comfy beds, an indoor pool and hot tub and complimentary buffet-style breakfast.

For a romantic getaway, opt for a stay at Hester Creek — a Mediterranean-style villa with vineyard views. A homemade breakfast is included.



Mediterranean-style villas at Hester Creek. HESTER CREEK



Wine and bread tasting at Platinum Bench. BIANCA BUJAN



Oliver Eats is a casual counter deli and cafe. BIANCA BUJAN

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