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VANCOUVER

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SOUTHERN OK SISTERHOOD

From Oliver to Osoyoos, women in wine are crushing approachability. BY BARB SLIGL



It gives me goosebumps," says winemaker Val Tait when describing the subtleties of terroir in the South Okanagan. She's worked at vineyards worldwide, but thinks Gold Hill Winery's 25-acre estate vineyard on the Golden Mile Slopes—just across from the sandy, sun-baked hills of Black Sage Bench—is one of the best in Canada. And, as a woman winemaker, she wants to capture the distinct personality of its cabernet franc grapes. "It sounds like a cliché, but it's a reflection of where the grapes are grown," Tait says of the more restrained and pure varietal expression characteristic of local wines made by women.

There's a strong sisterhood in Oliver Osoyoos Wine Country, a 33-kilometre stretch from the landmark of nʔaylntn/McIntyre Bluff to the U.S. border. Women make up about 20 percent of the lead winemakers across the Okanagan (compared to 10 percent elsewhere in B.C. and 14 in California). Tait's been immersed in the nuance

WHILE
YOU'RE
THERE



DEEP ROOTED
Val Tait (top) gets a bite of the bounty at Gold Hill Winery; the vineyard at Lakeside Cellars (left) hosts soapmaking and yoga, too.

and complexity of growing grapes in the Valley for two decades—and loves that her go-to grape, cabernet franc, has an idiosyncratic and more approachable character (less of the pungent green notes and more of the dry and herbal qualities) when grown in South Okanagan soil.

"Approachable" is a term often repeated by women winemakers here. Catherine Coulombe, co-owner and winemaker at vinAmité Cellars in Oliver, uses it to describe her wines, along with words like feminine and gentle. "I like smooth wines; I want to be able to drink it tonight," she says. And, she adds, she wants her tasting room to have the vibe of "hanging out in your friend's kitchen." Coulombe also touts other women winemakers, like Gina Fernandes Harfman of Nostalgia Wines—just across the Okanagan River—

from whom she gets vinAmité's viognier grapes.

On the southeastern shores of Osoyoos Lake, you can often find Danielle Dhaliwal on a lawnmower tending the grassy site in front of Lakeside Cellars' tasting room. The co-owner and manager of the winery grew up on an Oliver farm and is now married to another farmer, who is also the viticulturist and winemaker at Lakeside. Dhaliwal wants to make the wine scene more enticing—and, yes, approachable—to women, and so cultivates a convivial spirit at Lakeside, from food trucks and to-go cans of bubbly to soapmaking workshops and live music. Noting a group of 30 yogis who are practicing on the lawn for the winery's "Rise and Wine" summer yoga series, Dhaliwal acknowledges the community vibe. "We almost look like a cult," she says with a laugh.

GRAPE GALS



Danielle Dhaliwal

Lakeside Cellars

WINE OF CHOICE — ORANGE MUSCAT

"It's the best summer wine." (Danielle's husband, Ricky, planted orange muscat at Lakeside because it's her fave.)



Val Tait

Gold Hill Winery

WINE OF CHOICE — CABERNET FRANC

"I think it's going to become the signature grape in British Columbia." (A clone of the grape variety is also Tait's social media handle: @cabfranca214.)



Catherine Coulombe

vinAmité Cellars

WINE OF CHOICE — CHARDONNAY

"This is my favourite wine. We're well known for this chardonnay because it's on the lighter, softer side." (And the yeast is sourced from Burgundy.)

TACO TIME Take a break from the wine with a spicy margarita and tacos—*¡claro está!*—on Main Street in Oliver. **TacoRiendo** started out of owner Jany Lopez's van, when the Mazatlán expat sold Mexican groceries to migrant workers who wanted authentic habanero sauce and traditional tortillas. Soak up the lively atmosphere and stock up at the attached and now brick-and-mortar grocery shop, 6038 Main St., Oliver



GRAB AND GO Throughout the summer, food trucks converge in spots like Gyro Beach in Osoyoos—and also at wineries along both benches. Get classic comfort food from **Bo Betty's**, including homemade burgers like the mushroom-laden Mamacita and deep-fried pickles. The '50s-themed fare is locally sourced and served by a crew of women, sometimes even dressed as the Pink Ladies. facebook.com/p/bo-bettys | [Instagram](https://www.instagram.com/bo-bettys)