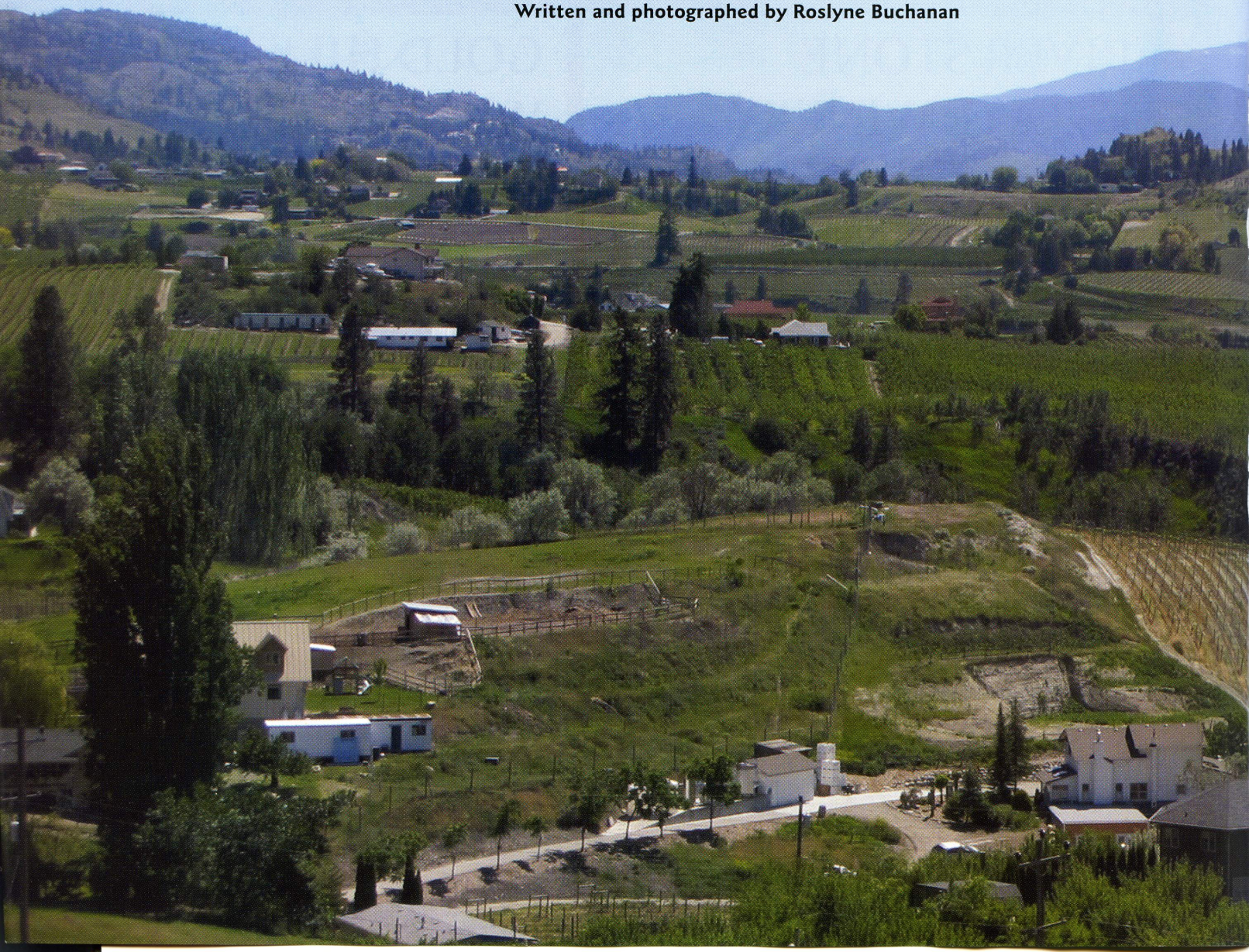
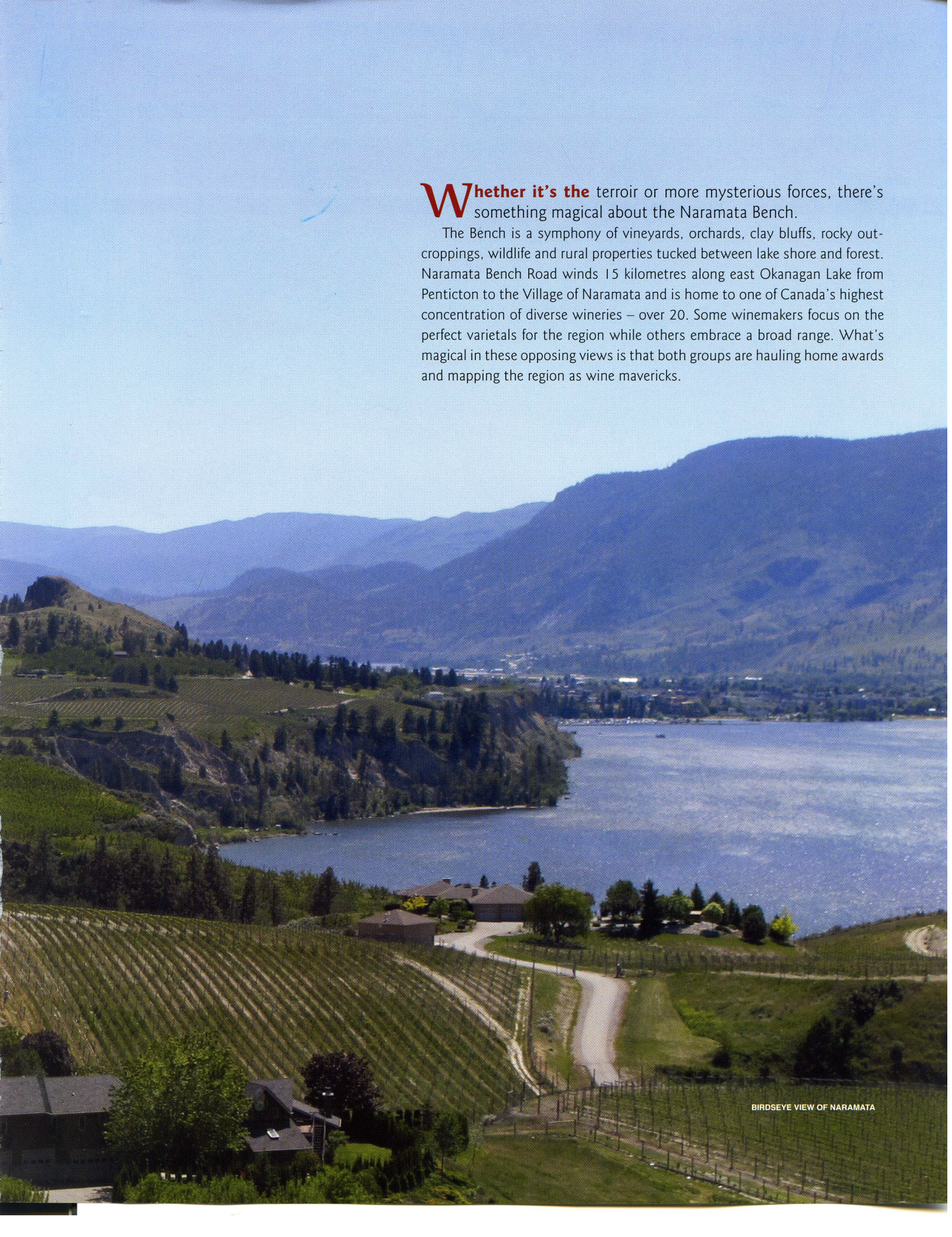


The Magic of Naramata BENCH

*One of Canada's Highest Concentrations
of Diverse Wineries*

Written and photographed by Roslyne Buchanan



A wide-angle landscape photograph showing a body of water (Okanagan Lake) in the middle ground. In the foreground, there are terraced vineyards on a hillside, with a few houses and a dirt road visible. The background features a range of mountains under a clear blue sky. The text is overlaid on the upper right portion of the image.

Whether it's the terroir or more mysterious forces, there's something magical about the Naramata Bench.

The Bench is a symphony of vineyards, orchards, clay bluffs, rocky outcroppings, wildlife and rural properties tucked between lake shore and forest. Naramata Bench Road winds 15 kilometres along east Okanagan Lake from Penticton to the Village of Naramata and is home to one of Canada's highest concentration of diverse wineries – over 20. Some winemakers focus on the perfect varietals for the region while others embrace a broad range. What's magical in these opposing views is that both groups are hauling home awards and mapping the region as wine mavericks.

BIRDSYE VIEW OF NARAMATA



An Enigmatic Provenance

Even Naramata's name has a mystical origin as an inspiration from a 1907 séance according to folklore. Early developer John Moore Robinson apparently connected with channelled Sioux Chief Big Moose whose spirit spoke fondly of his wife Nar-ra-mat-tah as the "smile of Manitou."

Not so ancient as regions such as Provence, says local historian Craig Henderson, here the glacial period was only 12,000 years ago with the distinctive clay banks dated at about 10,000 years old. As Hillside Estate Winery shareholder and geologist Bill Carpenter concurred what was left after the Devonian period, volcanic activity and Okanagan fault was an ideal mix. The lake, cliff and metamorphous rock led to "well drained soils, high nutrients and a radioactive relationship with the lake reflection."

The agricultural history is about 100 years with Robinson's company promoting the area in 1907 as ideal for fruit farming with a climate like Italy's. The Kettle Valley Railway, completed in 1915, rumbled to a halt in the 1970s yet was reborn as a cycling/hiking route thanks to the foresight of local enthusiasts.

Members of the Bench

The KVR was saluted in the naming of Kettle Valley Winery (kettlevalleywinery.com), one of the earliest wineries – third

licence granted on the Bench. For founders, winemakers and brothers-in-law Bob Ferguson and Tim Watts, it started as an apartment hobby. As the passion grew, they decided to grow their own grapes and bought the Naramata property in 1987, planting blocks of Pinot Noir and Chardonnay. Ferguson, an accountant, and Watts, a geologist, opened the winery with the 1992 inaugural harvest, barrelling the first vintage and producing 44 cases of Pinot Noir. Kettle Valley Winery proudly marks 20 years of winemaking at the family farm. It now produces 10,000 cases annually from 28 acres on the Naramata Bench and 14 acres in the Cawston/Keremeos area with two-thirds of its 24 wines red. The 20th Vintage Celebration pricing on select wine, part of the commemorative festivities, is also offered October 15.

In contrast to Kettle Valley are two wineries that debuted this summer offering four wines each. Owner/winemaker Judy Kingston of Serendipity Winery (serendipitywinery.com) is a reinvention story. Formerly a lawyer, after a serious car accident, she wasn't ready to retire and serendipitously found her way into ownership of Naramata property and Okanagan College's viticulture program. Serendipity hadn't even had its grand opening when its 2008 Serenata won gold at the 2011 Finger Lakes International Wine Competition for the red Bordeaux blend. The 3 Mile Estate Winery (3milewinery.com) was unveiled by Jake and Colleen Gunther, who previously sold grapes to Hillside,

with Colleen's sister and brother-in-law Gail and Darryl Rahn.

Marichel Winery (marichel.ca), owned by Richard and Elisabeth Roskell, concentrates on Syrah and Viognier producing 750 cases annually from grapes grown exclusively on the Bench. While available in some restaurants and fine wine stores, most sell out directly to the winery's customer list.

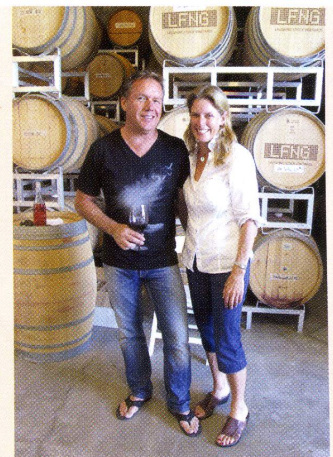


Howling Bluff Estate Wines (howlingbluff.ca) has a goal to "produce remarkable wine year after year in small lots." While this family-owned operation that was a risk for Luke Smith, formerly in the investment industry, may be small in scope, it is a giant in reputation. With his son Daniel, Luke has planted the vines and made award-winning wines since the first vintage in 2006. Many critics consider the Pinot Noir Canada's best.

Like Luke, Laughing Stock Vineyards (laughingstock.ca) owners

Howling Bluff's Summa Quies Vineyard 2009 Pinot Noir


Cynthia and David Enns followed their passion from the investment industry and built the gravity flow winery in 2005 dedicated to producing high quality small production wines. With a great sense of humour, they borrow from their old industry in everything from the winery name, label appearance to blends such as Blind Trust. David loves to quip that the winery is their "vow of poverty."



David and Cynthia Enns

Nichol Vineyard & Estate Winery (nicholvineyard.com) has been using 100 per cent Naramata fruit since 1993 and is home to the oldest Syrah vineyard in Canada. Ross Hackworth, winemaker and owner as of 2006, has carried on the tradition of Alex and Kathleen Nichol, original owners. The son of Naramata orchardists, despite his connection to the land, Ross's initial path was a business career travelling afar. Perhaps a phase pre-ordained to develop his palate for a true calling!

Speaking of individuals with a tradition of farming, Robert Van Westen was born and raised in Naramata. The family has farmed in the area for over 50 years and the orchard hosted



riesling,
unmasked


HANDCRAFTED SINGLE VINEYARD WINES

tantalus vineyards

South East Kelowna www.tantalus.ca

come and discover your...

culinary
inspirations



culinary inspirations
gourmet & specialty foods

ph: 250.832.1585

170 McLeod Street, Salmon Arm, BC
www.culinaryinspirations.ca



Local historian Craig Henderson

Australia. With a breadth of experience in the Australian and Canadian wine industry, they have been racking up awards for about 18 wine offerings including three fortified since La Frenz opened, 2002.

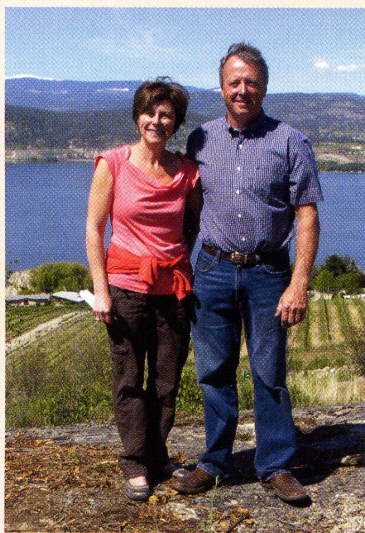
Italian-born Sal D'Angelo established D'Angelo Estate Winery (dangelowinery.com) in Amherstburg, Ontario, 1984, and opened a second location on the Naramata Bench in 2007.

Awards have been bestowed on wines from both locations and Sal was the first recipient outside of the Niagara region of Ontario's Grape King Award in 1999.

The two-site Township 7 Vineyards & Winery (township7.com) is B.C.'s only urban and rural winery – South Langley, 2001, and Naramata, 2003. Proprietor since 2006, Mike Raffan, who left a two-decade successful restaurant career, has added

the 2011 Feast of Fields. As young men often do, he left the area and pursued a different career (construction) then found himself compelled to return, and with his wife Tammi, launched a new family tradition, the Van Westen Vineyards (vanwestenvineyards.com).

The mystical call of Naramata also beckons afar. La Frenz Winery (lafrenzwinery.com) owners Niva and Jeff Martin have been involved with grape growing and winemaking since early childhood in



Niva and Jeff Martin

cultural and culinary experiences including art shows, live music/theatre, charity fundraisers, wine seminars, community

Winemaker Bradley Cooper and Sommelier D.J. Kearney

grape harvest/stomps and winemaker dinners with Lori Pike-Raffan. In the wine shop, along with the award-winning Township 7 selections by winemaker Bradley Cooper, you can find Brad's own label Black Cloud.

That's another of the attributes of the Naramata wine mavericks. While there's healthy competition, there is camaraderie that recognizes where one succeeds all benefit. As owner of Poplar Grove Winery (poplargrove.ca) with President Tony Holler and Barrie Sali, Ian Sutherland said during its flagship location opening, "Rising tide floats all the boats."

Following that metaphor, Poplar Grove's state-of-the-art facility that beams from Munson Mountain is like a lighthouse guiding travellers to Naramata Bench! Poplar Grove and its award-winning selections have travelled far from its 1993 beginning as a garage winery. Sparing no expense, the opening was celebrated in grand style with wine in abundance, sumptuous cuisine by Chef Mark Filatow, Details Catering (detailscatering.ca), and ambience of harp music with guests including competitive wineries!

On the road to Poplar Grove, you can eat or grab a picnic at The Bench Artisan Food Market (thebenchmarket.com), Vancouver Avenue, then pop into Perseus Winery (perseuswinery.com), Lower Bench Road, which opened its tasting room within walking distance of downtown Penticton last year. It is owned by Penticton businessmen Larry Lund, Ron Bell and Jim Morrison, and if the wines seem sophisticated for its age that's because Lawrence Herder, co-owner of Similkameen's Herder Vineyards, has been winemaker from the first vintage 2008.

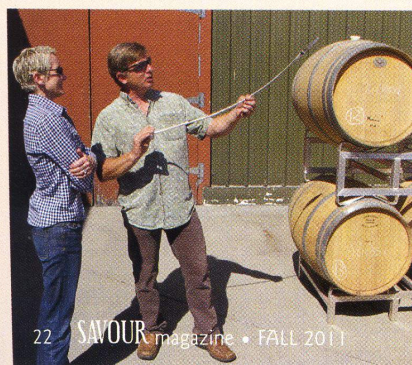
Speaking of collaborations, Naramata Bench wineries partnered with the gorgeous Serenata Guest House Retreat (serenataguesthouse.com) owned by Linda and Mike Newton in its



Dusk at Serenata Guest House

Thirst for Thursdays Culinary Wine Dinner Series debuted this summer. Each Thursday at the retreat an amazing five-course dinner created by Chef Roger Planiden's Culinary Adventures (culinaryadventures.ca) was paired with a winery to create the ultimate food and wine combination.

Fresh in the culinary scene is an association between Bogner's of Penticton and Red Rooster Winery (redroosterwinery.com).





**Lake Breeze winemaker
Garron Elmes and Del
Halladay of Elephant Island**

Founded in 1990, serious about its wines crafted by Karen Gillis and known for featuring artists in its wine gallery and grounds, Red Rooster, of Andres Wines, launched its restaurant with a menu designed by Bogner's owner and highly-regarded Chef Darin Paterson.

Across its driveway, former Red Rooster owners Prudence and Beat Mahrer established Ruby Tuesdays – now Ruby Blues Winery (rubytuesdaywinery.com). The effervescent Pru told the Vine Forum 2011 that after selling Red Rooster to grow grapes for other vintners, she missed interacting with customers so much she had to return. This time they vowed to remain small.

Hillside Estate Winery's (hillsideestate.com) 72-foot tower casts a powerful presence. While its striking facility was a 1996 expansion, it dates to 1984 when grapevines replaced apricots. Since 2000 the management team has enhanced it as a winery and bistro. Today some 12,000 cases are produced. Winemaker Kathy Malone and executive chef Robert Cordonier create food and wine pairings together second to none.

The Patio at Lake Breeze Winery (lakebreeze.ca) offers a wonderful lunch venue with Chef Mark Ashton and winemaker Garron Elmes providing the matches. Since owners Gary Reynolds, wife Tracy Ball and Drew and Barbara MacIntyre



purchased it 2001, production has grown from 3,000 to 10,000 cases annually. Lake Breeze is Canada's first winery to grow and produce Pinotage – a varietal to which Garron, who hails from South Africa, can happily relate. For the dessert course, Lake Breeze welcomes proprietors Del and Miranda Halliday of Elephant Island Orchard Wines (elephantislandwine.com) for the pairing.

Elephant Island was founded with Miranda's grandmother Catherine Wisnicki, carrying on a family tradition of crafting fine fruit wines for more than four generations. It offers a unique accommodation called the Tree House.

A number of other wineries such as D'Angelo have lodgings. At Black Widow Winery (blackwidowwinery.com), a beautiful guest house overlooks the vineyard and wine tasting room. New at Black Widow is a patio offering cheese plates and light fare to complement the wines. Black Widow uses a gravity flow system and as part of its environmental commitment, it is built into the hill to create a relatively stable temperature year-round.

Therapy Vineyards & Guesthouses (therapyvineyards.com), on the original site of Red Rooster, also offers accommodation. Rather than being a family-run operation, it is owned by a group of partners.

If you plan to swallow every mouthful rather than just sample the distinctive wines of the Naramata Bench, consider engaging guides such as Dennis Noble's Top Cat Tours (topcattours.com). With the accolades – such as the Lieutenant Governor's 2011 Excellence in BC Wine Awards to Howling Bluff's Pinot Noir, Laughing Stock's Pinot Gris and Red Rooster's Meritage, you'll want to book soon!

