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**BEST OF VANCOUVER**

**Cellars to brews, our critic uncorks his bests**

**B**y way of definition, *bests* in this case means personal bests. That is, my picks and preferences, with the database limited to firsthand experiences. You're quite allowed—nay, encouraged—to agree or disagree. And "Vancouver", in this case, extends beyond the city limits.

**BEST WINERY DINNER OF THE YEAR** The Thomas George Estates (based in California's Russian River Valley region) portfolio-tasting event, with seafood from C restaurant, held on that temporary pop-bottle float boat in False Creek. Lovely Sauvignon Blanc in particular. Not cheap, those fantastic Californians, but worth treating yourself to.

**BEST WINE AGENCY PORTFOLIO TASTING** Select Wine Merchants' annual portfolio tasting at the Shaughnessy Golf and Country Club. With wine from every known region, spir-its aplenty, and a groaning range of not-always-finger foods, this stands out as one of the true international culinary amazements.

**BEST CONCISE RESTAURANT WINE LIST** Lupo Restaurant + Vinoteca in Yaletown, which used to be Villa del Lupo. Keen wine mind Michael Mameli has assembled a lovely short-form list that's big on treats. The chef is, as in the Villa days, Julio Gonzalez Perini. Pastry chef Jeff Salzauler makes a mean chocolate and tangerine *semifreddo*, which cries out for one of Mameli's Moscatos or Vin Santos. Be happy, let him choose.

**BEST RESTAURANT CELLAR** Tough call anytime, but I'm calling a three-way tie between the Observatory on Grouse Mountain (with the oxymoron of having the highest cellar), CinCin as trendiest and in possession of the best selection of half-bottles (always handy when you're dining alone), and Raincity Grill for its plethora of Pacific Northwest wines by the glass.

**BEST INVASION OF THE BUBBLE MONSTERS** Prosecco: zero to 60 in about six months. Where'd they all come from, those endless new labels of sparklers? Italy, of course, where Prosecco is almost as much a national drink as espresso. A year ago, we had maybe three listed here; now there are dozens, especially when you factor in the many small labels stocked by the indie stores. Nobody's complaining.

**BEST B.C. WINERY PORTFOLIOS Big, and getting bigger:** Mission Hill Family Estate. **Medium, and massive on quality:** Sandhill. **Small (but what a lineup!):** Stoneboat Vineyards. **Really small:** got a tie here between Sperling Vineyards and Working Horse Winery—I mean, maybe 250 cases between both! But worth seeking out. Best way is from the wineries direct.

**BEST B.C. FRUIT WINE TREATS** I'm slow-sipping Rustic Roots Winery's Mulberry-Pear Port, Forbidden Fruit Winery's Pearsuasion, the Fort Wine Company's Mighty Fraser Red Cranberry (there's also a white cranberry version), and, as always, Elephant Island's Stellaport. And I'm glad more and more fruit wines are coming down the pike. Grape snobbery be damned.

**BEST B.C. ICED TREAT** Canada continues to (a) define what icewine is all about, and (b) produce more of the stuff than any other country. And despite what our friends in Ontario like to tell the world, B.C. did it first with Tilman Hainle's original back in the '70s. So he's in this lineup, of course, with his tiny, über-eco Working Horse Winery and finally gets one named after himself, Tilman Ice Riesling. Then there's Stoneboat's Oraniensteiner-model Verglas and Tinhorn Creek's just-released Kerner Icewine.



Mission Hill Family Estate had the best big winery portfolio this year.

**MOST ENTERTAINING B.C. WINE LABELS** Gotta be Blasted Church, again. Recently revamped with Claymation-type figures, they just keep on getting funnier and more clever. Meanwhile, the Oscar for the most interesting recipe suggestions on back labels goes to St. Hubertus. They'd better be getting ready to do a cookbook. I wanna be in it, because I've tried most of them.

**BEST SUBURBAN WINERY** Neck of the Woods, Langley. They've taken over the space that used to be Genlugie and have come up with some nifty blends and varietals, and periodically some case-lot sales.

**BEER BESTS** Best new brew: Stanley Park 1897 Amber. Best limited-edition brew: Granville Island Ginger Beer. Best import beer portfolio: AFIC EXIM. Best beer (and specialty booze) retailer: Viti Wine & Lager (like 350 craft brews, 550 global wines, 160 whiskies, plus, plus, plus).

**BEST NEW \$3,200 COGNAC** L'Essence de Courvoisier. What else is there to say?

**PIZZA BESTS** For dinner: prosciutto, arugula, and roasted garlic with Moretti or another Italian beer, iced from the fridge, at Nook. For breakfast: Dino Renaert's bacon, scrambled eggs, herbs, and white Cheddar with a succession of chilled Proseccos, at Beachside Forno. For dessert: marshmallows, chocolate, banana, and Graham cracker crumble, with Baileys on ice, same place.

**MOST SOON-TO-BE MISSED** The William Tell, closing for good on December 31 after 46 years of high-end dining with down-to-earth treats like the Swiss farmers brunch; Chasselas to drink with the meal and several shots of iced eau de vie after.

**BEST NEW RESTAURANT** How should I know? Just pick one from the dozens that have opened this year in Gastown alone. But I like this trend: many are listing lots of small B.C. wineries' offerings. *Quelle renaissance.* Best new restaurant name—NOT! L'Abattoir; what were they thinking. Best new dinner concept: the Long Table Series at the Irish Heather, with a cool, not chilled Guinness and a shot of Red Breast 12-Year-Old.

**BEST CHINESE RESTAURANT** DISH Have to have two here: enoki mushrooms with deep-fried bean curd skin at Fortune Garden. And the curried beef with potatoes at Hon's. **Best accompaniment:** Yan-jing beer or Mateus on the rocks.

**BEST ALL-AROUND B.C. SIPPING WINE WITH ASIAN FOODS OF ALL KINDS** Quails' Gate Chasselas/Pinot Gris/Pinot Blanc.

**BEST WISHES TO A TRUE VANCOUVER FOOD AND WINE PIONEER** Happy 70th birthday to La Belle Auberge's Bruno Marti.

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