

Calgary Wine Report 2024

Calgary provided an auspicious arrival for Ailm Estate, a spanking new BC house specializing in sparkling wine! Ailm 2021 Blanc de Blancs waltzed off with the Best of Show at the Calgary edition of Canada's Great Kitchen Party, moving it on to the Canadian Culinary Championship Wine of the Year competition in Ottawa in January. The first runner up was the complex, classic Tinhorn Creek 2020 Merlot Reserve; the second runner up was the bang-on, hearty and delicious JoiRyde 2020 Syrah from an ambitious start-up at the District Wine Village in the South Okanagan.

Ailm Estate is an important project based on a large vineyard in south Kelowna owned by the Stewart Family, of Quails' Gate. In the works for years, its first releases are the 2021 Blanc de Blanc, 2020 Blanc de Noir Reserve, and 2018 Connemara, a profound red blend. The Irish leanings of the brand and the release roll out are explained at ailmestate.com

Twenty Canadian wineries supported Kitchen Party in Calgary, including Grange of Prince Edward, Stratus, Featherstone and Vineland Estate from Ontario, the largest eastern showing to date.

The evening opened with the VIP Elite Wines Station pouring wines essentially new to Calgary. The Ailm Estate sparkler and JoiRyde Syrah were hits with the VIPS as well as the judges.. The Grange of Prince Edward poured its Estate 2023 Chardonnay and Pinot Noir. Terravista Vineyards of Naramata poured their unusual white blend called Figaro. Stratus offered the very well received, maturing 2019 Red, a blend of seven varieties. O'Rourke Cellars poured a rich, yet elegant 2021 Chardonnay, and Culmina presented its delicious 2023 Rose

Each chef was responsible for sourcing their wine pairing. The winning chef – Matthias Fong of Primary Colours – paired his vegetarian fois gras with the zesty Upper Case 2022 Riesling from Naramata. Other wines on the competition floor included Dirty Laundry 2023 Woo Woo Gewurztraminer, Vineland 2017 Riesling Icewine, Poplar Grove 2020 Merlot, Gold Hill 2022 Cabernet Franc Rose, 50th Parallel 2020 Riesling, Featherstone 2022 Cabernet Franc and Lightning Rock 2021 Blanc de Noirs.

When guests moved into the Celebration they were greeted with a selection of new and/or gold medal winning wines from the National Wine Awards of Canada. VIP tables enjoyed Terravista Sparkling Albarino, a Spanish variety increasing popular elsewhere. The judges were shocked to see it was from the 2024 vintage, and that it was sourced from a vineyard in California. This will be the new normal in the next years as BC wineries deal with the 2024 crop loss due to a deep freeze last January.

Other Celebration Wines included a lovely, fresh Unsworth 2023 Pinot Gris from Vancouver Island. The classic Gray Monk 2022 Odyssey Chardonnay and Black Hills 2021 Addendum and the Runner-up Tinhorn Creek 2020 Merlot Reserve were donated by Andrew Peller. The Nk'Mip Qwm Qwnt 2020 Pinot Noir, which took Best of Show in Edmonton in October, was provided by Arterra Wines.

The judges for the Calgary event included Calgary Herald wine columnist Darren Oleksyn, freelance wine and food writer Shelley Boettcher, and NWAC senior judge Brad Royale.

Calgary was the last of ten regional qualifiers for the CCC in Ottawa Jan 30-Feb1, which is turning into the culinary event of the year in Canada, increasingly attracting winemakers and wine fans to experience nation's newest and best wines. Make it a mid-winter getaway, and bring your skates.

And thank you to the many wineries who supported us in Calgary and across the country.