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by David Lawrason. National Wine Advisor

A pristine Naramata pinot noir, a demure Vancouver Island chardonnay and a juicy Oliver malbec rose to the top in the field of BC wines at the Kitchen Party at the Pipe House in North Vancouver on October 16. Sixteen BC wineries donated to this event, and it was one of the most eclectic selections ever assembled. Vancouver loves to be on the edge and conscious of its seaside. Sparkling and racy whites dominated the competition this year.

But 1 Mill Road 2022 Home Block Pinot Noir from the Okanagan's Naramata Bench waltzed off with top honours. Aussie born and trained Ben Bryant now calls BC home and is ensconced in the NaramataWine Vault – a former fruit storage facility. His pinot took two first place rankings, ensuring the trip to Ottawa to compete for Wine of the Year at the Canadian Culinary Championship. And it was also the unofficial people's choice, being the fastest disappearing wine at the VIP Elite Wine Station. Unsworth 2022 Chardonnay from Cowichan Valley on Vancouver Island was the 1st runner up with top four rankings by all three judges, a mild, unassuming but impeccably balanced, unoaked chardonnay. Third place saw three wines tied – Tinhorn Creek 2020 Merlot Reserve, Ailm 2021 Blanc de Blancs, and Riverstone 2022 Malbec. A second ranking of the three put Riverstone Malbec ahead. For a second year this Oliver winery has finished in the upper echelons.

For the judging I was joined by two WineAlign National Wine Awards of Canada judges. Tim Pawsey, aka The Hired Belly, is among the most experienced wine and food writers in Vancouver. And Michaela Morris may be currently the most in demand and hardest working.

There were many interesting and eclectic wines, and sparkling wines loomed large. Most notable was the sneak debut of Ailm 2021 Blanc de Blancs Brut, the new sparkling house in the Stewart family/Quails' Gate realm, officially released in early November. Township 7 2018 Polaris Blanc de Blancs scored neck in neck. Tinhorn Creek 2019 B de B was astutely paired by winning chef Alex Kim, culinary director of Five Sails.

Several small, newer wineries added intrigue: JoiRyde 2022 Syrah, Gneiss 2023 Sauvignon Blanc, Peak Cellars 2021 Gruner Veltliner, Terravista 2022 EnTerre Riesling, Rust 2022 Gamay, and Ursa Major Chapter 6 Gewurztraminer. Faves at the finale concert were the big reds: Tinhorn Creek 2020 Merlot Reserve and Black Hills 2021 Ipso Facto.

It was a compelling wine evening. Thank you to all the BC wineries who donated so generously to the cause.