

The Great Wine Season Finale at the Canadian Culinary Championship

By David Lawrason, National Wine Advisor

The Wrap and The Numbers!

The gala Canadian Culinary Championship 2025 in Ottawa capped another hugely successful national wine showcase this season. The regional Great Kitchen Party events in 2024, plus the CCC equalled the record donations by Canadian wineries set the previous year. In all, 65 wineries donated almost 300 cases involving 110 different wines.

The number of different wines poured this year is thanks to a strategy to ask each winery for less, spreading the donations among a larger number, and including new wineries who get the promotional potential of this program. The alphabetical list of wines poured at the end of this article is quite incredible.

It is not just the quantities that are important, it's the quality too. Coming out of COVID we decided to request some of Canada's best wines for our guests' enjoyment, and to elevate perceptions of our home grown. Often, I directly indicated which wines we would like to pour, and rarely was I turned down. I have estimated an average price of \$30 per bottle, bringing the total value of the donations to be \$108,000.

The magnitude of this donation, and the fact that the events were attended by about 4,000 people across the country make this the Canada's largest showcase for Canadian wine, and one of the largest collective charitable undertakings by Canada's wineries. KP beneficiaries include MusiCounts, SpiritNorth and local youth food security initiatives in participating cities.

In most cities I assembled local judges to taste through the donated wines and come up with a Best of Show selection, the gold medalist going forward to the CCC in Ottawa in 2024. The competition is run primarily to bring publicity to the wineries, with an enhanced KP social media program kicking into gear this year, new efforts by Ottawa-based ___ and plenty of social media generated by guests.

The CCC Mystery Wine Competition

This was the first of three competitions to crown the Canadian Culinary Champion this weekend.

Three hundred guests went two hours blind tasting a mysterious white wine, as they sampled chef creations built to match the wine. The chefs were also in the dark about the mystery wine's identity, even though they had spent 24 hours designing and preparing a dish to match.

I have great fun selecting the Mystery Wine. Over the years I have often selected a lighter red like pinot noir or gamay to accommodate a variety of culinary interpretations by the competing chefs. This year I went to a boldly different white, that could conceivably pair with both lighter seafood as well as richer dishes for those who dared.

I chose MW Cellars 2023 Semillon from a brand new Niagara-on-the-Lake winery. Semillon is French grape variety important in Bordeaux for both sweet Sauternes and some the great dry whites of Pessac-Leognan. The vines that produced this wine were planted in the nineties by John Neufeld in Niagara Lakeshore. MW owner and winemaker Marty Werner donated over 150 bottles of the \$25 wine.

The winning wine pairing dish was never fully revealed by the Culinary judges, but the guests in attendance voted for the “People’s Choice Award”. Taking home the prize was Ottawa’s Lizardo Becerra of Raphael Peruvian Cuisine with his dish, beet cured HoKaido scallop crudo with citrus Grana Padano foam, spiced cucumber / charred basil nuts/ lemongrass plantain. Most of the chefs did pick up on the citrus and herbal notes in the wine. My favourite match was a very simple, impeccably balanced raw salmon and herb dish from ultimate Silver Medalist Chef Jordan Holden from Atelier Tony in Moncton, New Brunswick.

The Grand Finale and Celebration

Over 500 people assembled at the Rogers Centre on the Saturday night to taste the ten signature dishes of the competing chefs, and to sample new and leading edge Ontario wines poured at two stations. Sixteen different wineries were represented, with thirteen winemakers making the trip from Niagara and Prince Edward County. I was delighted to welcome Peter Gamble and Ann Sperling who were pouring Dobbin Riesling and Cabernet, just one project in their impressive consultancy portfolio. And we were joined for the first time by Jonas Newman of Hinterland in PEC, Marty Werner of York Vineyard and MW Cellars, Kelly Mason of Mason Vineyard, Jeff Moote of Divergence and the Oppenlaender sisters Jess and Alison of Liebling. We also welcomed back owner Taylor Emerson and winemaker Jonathan Mclean of Black Bank Hill, Charles Baker of Charles Baker wines (sensational rieslings), JJ Syers of Rosehall Run and Keith Tyers of Closson Chase – all being stalwart supporters. And all poured diligently through the evening, unfortunately not getting much chance to try the chefs’ dishes.

Once the dust settled and the lights dimmed to signal the move to the sit-down Celebration portion of the evening, virtually all the wine at the two stations had been poured. Guests filed in to the magnificently adorned room to find three bottles on their tables – a dry white, a lighter red and a heavier red. The selection was varied, but I must mention the following wines which were donated in multiple cases.

The sparkling wine for VIP Guests was the Hinterland 2020 Les Etoiles, one of Ontario’s best traditional method sparklers. The whites served included the delicious Divergence 2023 Semillon-Sauvignon Blanc, and the Bachelder 2022 Les Ardoise Chardonnay, both from Niagara. The light red selections included a pair of pinot noirs from Prince Edward County wineries – Grange of Prince Edward 2023 Estate, and Rosehall Run 2023 Defiant. The heavier red selection was amply covered off by Domaine Queylus 2022 Tradition Cabernet Franc, and Liebling 2022 Cabernet Franc.

The Wine of the Year

Mason Vineyard 2022 L'Avenir Chardonnay, by Kelly Mason, took this honour during a judging on Feb 1. It rose to the top after seven regional competitions that had worked through almost 110 different Canadian wines. The Best of Show winners in each city were grouped in Ottawa to compete for the top prize. The judges included Canadian wine expert and veteran National Wine Awards judge Janet Dorozynski, wine book author Rod Phillips, National Capital Sommelier Guild president Bill Ellis, Edmonton sommelier Mary Bailey and yours truly.

Kelly has risen to the top of the class in Niagara after years of making wine at Domaine Queylus and Honsberger. She purchased her own 13-acre vineyard in Twenty Mile Bench and launched the winery in 2021. Her Mason L'Avenir 2022 Chardonnay dazzled with its purity, precision, nuance and elegance. Not too lean, not too rich. Sensitive yet straight arrow with excellent depth indicating great viticulture.

The runner-up was Closson Chase 2022 Churchside Pinot Noir from Prince Edward County (not yet released but coming soon in 2025), again so precise and PEC definitive with extra intensity. Second runner-up also went to the iconic sparkling Hinterland 2016 Les Etoiles Brut.

Other wines that made this competition so tough were Bachelder 2022 Wismer-Wingfield Chardonnay from Niagara, Benjamin Bridge 2023 Wild Rock White from Nova Scotia, 1 Mill Road 2022 Home Block Pinot Noir from BC Naramata Bench, Nk'Mip Qwam Qwmt 2022 Pinot from South Okanagan and the debut of Ailm Estates 2021 Blanc de Blancs from East Kelowna.

The Complete List of Donated Wines

Here is an alphabetical list of every wine donated to events this year. *** indicates a finalist in the Wine of the Year competition. The city abbreviation where the wines were served follows each wine name. This year Grange of Prince Edward donated the largest quantity to the most events in Canada. Mant thanks to all for your generous support

1 Mill Road 2022 Home Block Pinot Noir, Naramata Bench VAN***

50th Parallel 2020 Riesling, Okanagan Valley, CGY

Ailm Estate 2021 Blanc de Blancs Brut, Okanagan Valley CGY, VAN***

Bachelder 2022 Wismer-Wingfield Chardonnay, Twenty Mile Bench TOR***

Bachelder 2022 Kirby Vineyard Gamay, Niagara Lakeshore TOR

Bachelder 2022 L'Ardoise Chardonnay, Niagara Peninsula CCC

Benjamin Bridge 2022 Wild Rock White, Nova Scotia***

Bella Estate 2022 Estate Chardonnay Traditional Method, Naramata Bench VAN

Black Hills 2021 Ipso Facto, Okanagan Valley CGY, VAN

Black Hills 2021 Addendum, Okanagan Valley, EDM

Black Bank Hill 2021, Runway White, Lincoln Lakeshore CCC
Black Bank Hill 2021 Runway Red, Lincoln Lakeshore CCC
Black Bank Hill 2021 Egalite, Lincoln Lakeshore CCC
Casa Molina Pamplemousse Juice Sparkling 2022 Chardonnay, Okanagan Valley, VAN
CedarCreek 2021 Pinot Noir, Okanagan Valley, EDM
Charles Baker 2022 B-Side Riesling, Niagara Peninsula OTT
Charles Baker 2023 B-Side Riesling, Niagara Peninsula, CCC
Charles Baker 2020 Picone Vineyard Riesling, Vinemount Ridge TOR
Closson Chase 2022 South Clos Chardonnay, Prince Edward County CCC
Closson Chase 2022 South Clos Pinot Noir, Prince Edward County CCC
Closson Chase 2022 Churchside Pinot Noir, Prince Edward County CCC*** (1st RunnerUP)
Cloudsley Cellars 2022 Chardonnay, Twenty Mile Bench, TOR
Culmina 2023 Saignée, Golden Mile Bench, CGY EDM
Dirty Laundry 2023 Gewurztraminer, Okanagan Valley CGY
Divergence Hughes Vineyard Blanc de Blanc, Lincoln Lakeshore, CCC
Divergence MN Brut One, Lincoln Lakeshore. CCC
Divergence 2022 Wismer Wingfield Gamay, Twenty Mile Bench, CCC
Divergence 2022 Semillon Sauvignon Blanc, Lincoln Lakeshore, CCC
Divergence 2022 Red, Niagara Peninsula, CCC
Dobbin Estate 2019 Riesling, Twenty Mile Bench, CCC
Dobbin Estate 2019 Cabernet, Niagara Peninsula, CCC
Domaine Queylus 2020 Reserve du Domaine Pinot Noir, Niagara Peninsula CCC
Domaine Queylus 2020 Tradition Cabernet Franc, Niagara Peninsula CCC
Fairview 2021 The Bear, Okanagan Valley, VAN
Featherstone 2021 Cabernet Franc, Niagara Peninsula, CGY
Fielding 2022 Cabernet Franc, Beamsville Bench, EDM
Frind 2022 Premier Merlot, West Kelowna, EDM
Gneiss 2022 Sauvignon Blanc, Okanagan Valley VAN
Gold Hill 2022 Cabernet Franc Rosé, Okanagan Valley, CGY
Grange of Prince Edward 2023 Estate Chardonnay, Prince Edward County, EDM, CGY
Grange of Prince Edward 2023 Estate Pinot Noir, Prince Edward County, CGY, EDM, TOR, CCC
Grange of Prince Edward 2023 Estate Pinot Gris, Prince Edward County OTT
Grange of Prince Edward 2023 Estate Rose, Prince Edward County OTT
Grange of Prince Edward 2023 Estate Cabernet Franc, Prince Edward County CCC
Gray Monk Odyssey 2022 Chardonnay, Okanagan Valley, CGY

Henry of Pelham 2022 Old Vines Baco Noir, Ontario EDM
Henry of Pelham Cuvee Catharine Rose, Niagara Peninsula TOR
Henry of Pelham 2017 Blanc de Blancs Niagara Peninsula, TOR
Hidden Bench 2021 Felseck Vineyard Pinot Noir, OTT
Hinterland 2020 Les Etoiles Brut, Prince Edward County, CCC
Hinterland 2016 Les Etoiles Brut, Prince Edward County, CCC *** Wine of Year 2nd RunnerUP
JoiFarm 2023 A Noble Blend, Naramata, EDM
JoiRyde 2020 Syrah, Okanagan Valley CGY, VAN
Kern 2018 Cabernet Franc Reserve, Niagara Peninsula, TOR
KIN Vineyards 2020 Chardonnay, Carp Ridge, Ottawa Valley CCC
KIN Vineyards 2020 Pinot Noir, Carp Ridge, Ottawa Valley CCC
Kew Vineyards 2019 Soldiers Grant, Niagara Peninsula, OTT, TOR
Lailey 2019 Stonebridge Reserve Chardonnay, Niagara-on-the-Lake EDM
Lailey Stonebridge 2019 Cabernet Franc, Niagara-on-the-Lake TOR
Lailey 2021 Zweigelt, Niagara Peninsula, OTT, TOR
Laughing Stock 2023 Viognier, Okanagan Valley CGY
Last House 2023 Hillier Blanc Christians Block, Prince Edward County OTT, TOR
Last House 2022 Hillier Rouge Daniels Block, Prince Edward County, OTT
Liebling Wines 2022 Cabernet Franc Oppenlaender Vineyard, Four Mile Creek, CCC
Liebling Wines 2022 Sauvignon Blanc Andrews Vineyard, Four Mile Creek, CCC
Liebling Wines 2022 Riesling Lingard Vineyard, Four Mile Creek. CCC
Liebling Wines 2022 Gamay Creek Road Vineyard, Four Mile Creek, CCC
Lightning Rock 2021 Elysia Vineyard Blanc de Noirs, Okanagan Valley CGY
Mason 2022 L'Avenir Chardonnay, Twenty Mile Bench, OTT, CCC***(Wine of the Year)
Mission Hill 2021 Cabernet Merlot, Okanagan Valley, EDM
MW Cellars 2023 Semillon, Niagara Lakeshore CCC **Mystery Wine**
MW Cellars 2023 Sauvignon Blanc, Niagara-on-the-Lake, TOR
MW Cellars 2022 Chardonnay, Niagara Lakeshore CCC
MW Cellars 2022 Gamay, Niagara Lakeshore CCC
Niagara Custom Crush Studio, Long Way Home 2022 Chardonnay, Beamsville Bench CCC
Niagara Custom Crush Studio, 2027 Cellars 2020 Wismer Foxcroft, Twenty Mile Bench CCC
Nk'Mip 2022 Qwam Qwmt Pinot Noir, Okanagan Valley CGY, EDM ***
Nk'Mip 2020 Mer'r'iym White Meritage, Okanagan Valley, EDM
O'Rourke 2022 Chardonnay, Lake Country, CGY
O'Rourke 2020 Pinot Noir, Lake Country, EDM
Peak Cellars 2023 Gruner Veltliner, Lake Country VAN

Poplar Grove 2020 Merlot, Naramata Bench, CGY
Rennie Vineyard 2016 "G", Niagara Peninsula, TOR
Riverstone 2022 Malbec, Okanagan Valley, VAN
Rosehall Run 2023 Pinot Gris, Prince Edward County, OTT
Rosehall Run 2014 Stardust Traditional Method, Prince Edward County CCC
Rosehall Run 2022 JCR Chardonnay, Prince Edward County CCC
Rosehall Run 2021& 2022 JCR Pinot Noir, Prince Edward County CCC
Rosehall Run 2022 Defiant Pinot Noir, Prince Edward County CCC
Rosewood 2021 Gewccci, Niagara Peninsula, TOR
Rust 2022 Gamay, Golden Mile Bench, VAN
Quails' Gate 2022 Chardonnay, Okanagan Valley, EDM
Stratus Red 2021, Niagara-on-the-Lake, CGY
Stratus 2021 Cabernet Franc, Niagara-on-the-Lake CCC
Stratus 2023 Ancestral Field Blend, Niagara-on-the-Lake CCC
Summerhill Cipes Brut NV, Okanagan Valley, EDM
Tawse 2021 Estate Chardonnay, Twenty Mile Bench, OTT
Terravista 2024 Sparkling Albarino, CGY
Terravista 2022 En Terre Riesling, Naramata Bench VAN
Township 7 Polaris 2018 Blanc de Blancs, Okanagan Valley VAN
Thirty Bench 2020 Small Lots Cabernet Franc, Beamsville Bench, OTT
Thirty Bench 2020 Wild Cask Cab Franc Beamsville Bench, TOR
Tinhorn Creek 2019 Blanc de Blancs, Okanagan Valley, VAN
Tinhorn Creek 2020 Merlot Reserve, Okanagan Valley CGY, VAN
Tinhorn Creek Pinot Gris 2023, Golden Mile Bench, EDM
Unsworth 2023 Pinot Gris, Cowichan Valley, Vancouver Island CGY
Unsworth 2022 Chardonnay, Cowichan Valley, Vancouver Island VAN
Upper Bench 2022 Riesling, Naramata Bench CGY
Ursa Major Chapter VI A Congregation of Jackals Gewurztraminer, Kaleden VAN
Vineland 2017 Vidal Icewine, Niagara Peninsula CGY
York Vineyard Brut Reserve, Niagara-on-the-Lake TOR
York Vineyard Brut, Niagara-on-the-Lake CCC