

## The Year-End Wine Report and the Canadian Culinary Championship 2026

By David Lawrason, retired National Wine Advisor

The 2025/2026 Kitchen Party campaign felt very different for me, as it is was my last after 17 years as National Wine Advisor. My emotions were very mixed. I really missed attending all the fall events, which have been a constant joy, largely in seeing so many friends across the country. But I did not miss the travel. After a hectic travel schedule in 2024 and early 2025, I realized it was time, in my retirement years, to slow down. And a more sedentary project had been taking shape in my mind to continue my mission to promote quality Canadian wines. It is a new website simply called Lawrason's Guide to Canada's Best Wines. <https://canadasbestwines.ca/>

The most important task was to find my replacement, which was an easy choice once his name crossed my mind. Light bulbs! I have tasted and worked with **Michael Godel** for over ten years, as a friend and colleague at WineAlign. He is gifted in so many ways. He is creative and intelligent with an amazing memory. He owns a strong sense of responsibility and has a solid work ethic. But most importantly, he is very sociable, with a legion of people in the wine world, in Canada and beyond, who call him a friend. So, he is an easy fit for Kitchen Party, which is a social enterprise above all. And oh yes, he is also a chef by training, although now fully one of Canada's great wine experts.

### The Season Wrap and The Numbers!

The gala Canadian Culinary Championship 2026 in Ottawa capped another hugely successful national wine showcase this season (more on the CCC below). The regional Great Kitchen Party events in 2025 plus the CCC equalled the donations by Canadian wineries set the previous year. In all 79 wineries, breweries, cideries and distillers donated over 260 cases of 124 different products, which are alphabetically listed below.

It is not just the quantities that are important, it's the quality. Since COVID we decided to request some of Canada's best wines for our guests' enjoyment, and to elevate perceptions of our home grown. Using Gold Medal results of the National Wine Awards of Canada as a base line, we directly indicated which wines we would like to pour, and rarely were we turned down. I have estimated an average price of \$35 per bottle, bringing the total value of the donations to be just over \$105,000.

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.

## The Canadian Culinary Championship 2026

With late January temperatures in downtown Ottawa stuck at a bone numbing  $-25^{\circ}\text{C}$ , the grand interior of the Rogers Convention Centre glittered and glowed as more than 500 people turned out to taste some of the best cuisine in the country, and enjoy some of Canada's finest wines. It was a soiree of the first order, a celebration of excellence, and simply a great kitchen party.

The wine selection this year was the best ever assembled, with more than 50 wines poured, from 23 different wineries. All were from Ontario, which of course is odd given this is a national program, and that wines from B.C., Quebec, New Brunswick and Nova Scotia were used in the regional events. The problem is current inter-provincial trade restrictions in Ontario that require wines used in public events go through the LCBO listing and lab-testing process. There is not enough time between the fall events and the CCC to make this happen. So only Ontario wine is used in the final. We are hoping that changes in inter-provincial regulations will remedy this issue.

The first competition was the **Mystery Wine Pairing**, where the chefs were given one wine in an unmarked bottle for which they had to create a matching dish. Guests were also served the wine blind as they went from station to station to judge for themselves how well the chefs performed. This year I chose **Malivoire 2024 Gamay** from Niagara, a \$22 LCBO offering with very bright fruit and acidity that drank effortlessly through the evening. It was a hit. Malivoire generously donated 15 cases to the event, with winemaker Shiraz Mottiar taking the podium to thank the guests for their support of Canadian wine, and extoling the fact that its time has come.

Before the Mystery Wine was poured guests were able to sample six wines all sourced from the growing-in-fame **Grimsby Hillside Vineyard** in the Lincoln Lakeshore sub-appellation of Niagara. First planted in the late 19th century for commercial production, it was purchased by the Franciosa family in 2002 and gradually rehabilitated to produce high-quality grapes that are now sold to several wineries. It is the latest big deal in Niagara, and never before as a vineyard been featured this way at a public tasting in Canada. Six were poured this night: Bachelder, Leaning Post, Divergence, Fogolar and Trail Estate, thanks to the largesse and co-ordination of Paul Franciosa.

On Saturday night at the **Grand Finale and Celebration**, other winemakers pouring their best included Keith Tyers of Closson Chase, J.J. Syer of Rosehall Run, Jonas Newman of Hinteland and The Grange of Prince Edward, and Chris Thomson of Volta Estate — all from Prince Edward County. The Niagara contingent included Marty Werner of York Vineyard and MW Cellars, Kelly Mason of

Mason Vineyard and Domaine Queylus, Melissa Beausoleil of Perenelle, and Adam Pearce, who poured Two Sisters and Stone Eagle. It was a busy, glittering, very tasteful evening. I think we ran out of wine!

### **The Wine of the Year Competition**

As the chefs compete, so do the wines.

In the fall, there is a Best of Show competition in each city — judged by a panel of local National Wine Awards judges, wine writers, sommeliers and retailers — with the winner going on to Ottawa. Those winners go up against two other winners from the much larger pool of wines poured over three events at the CCC, with one wine emerging as gold medal Wine of the Year, followed by a silver and bronze medalist.

The wine judges in Ottawa included National Wine Awards veteran judges Janet Dorozynski and Michael Godel, Ottawa's eminent wine author and historian Rod Philips, director of the National Capital Sommelier Guild Bill Ellis, and Edmonton-based publisher of The Tomato Food & Drink, Mary Bailey.

The Wine of the Year 2026 was Closson Chase Churchside Vineyard Pinot Noir 2023, a wonderfully precise and elegant Prince Edward County definition of this grape. Silver went to energized and sophisticated Mason Vineyard The Landing Cabernet Franc 2022 from Niagara's Beamsville Bench. The Bronze went to the very refined and textural The Long Way Home Chardonnay 2023 from the Beamsville Bench. All three wines are fully reviewed below complete with tasting notes and backgrounders.

## The Complete List of Donated Wines in 2025/2026

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. Many thanks to all for your generous support.

Ailm Estate 2021 Blanc de Blancs Brut, South Kelowna Slopes VAN  
Ailm NV Brut Reserve, South Kelowna Slopes VAN  
Ailm NV Brut, South Kelowna Slopes VAN  
Ailm Brut Rose 2022, South Kelowna Slopes VAN  
Apara Gamay Noir 2023, Okanagan Valley VAN  
Bachelder 2023 Wismer-Wingfield Chardonnay, Twenty Mile Bench CCC  
Bachelder Wismer-Parke Pinot Noir 2023 Twenty Mile Bench TOR  
Bachelder Grimsby Hillside Frontier Block Chardonnay 2023, Lincoln Lakeshore CCC  
Bachelder Chardonnay Spencer Morgan Chardonnay 2023, Beamsville Bench CCC  
Bachelder Wismer Foxcroft Chardonnay 2023, Twenty Mile Bench CCC  
Benjamin Bridge 2022 Brut NV, Nova Scotia, Moncton  
Bent Stick Salinity Now!, Alberta EDM  
Big Head Raw Chenin Blanc 2023 Niagara-on-the-Lake TOR  
Birds and Bees Honey Mead Wine, Alberta EDM  
Black Hills 2021 Bona Fide, Okanagan Valley, EDM  
Black Hills 2022 Nota Bene, Okanagan Valley, CGY  
Blind Enthusiasm 2023 Still Velvet Spontaneous Fermentation Blend, EDM  
Burrowing Owl 2022 Merlot, Okanagan Valley, EDM  
Cave Spring Adam's Step Riesling 2023 Beamsville Bench, TOR  
Cave Spring CSV Cabernet Franc 2022, Beamsville Bench TOR  
Checkmate Chardonnay 2023, Okanagan Valley VAN  
Closson Chase Vineyard Chardonnay 2023, Prince Edward County TOR STJ SKS  
Closson Chase 2023 Vineyard Pinot Noir, Prince Edward County STJ SKS  
Closson Chase 2023 South Clos Chardonnay, Prince Edward County CCC  
Closson Chase 2023 Churchside Pinot Noir, Prince Edward County CCC\*\*\* WINE OF THE YEAR  
Cloudsley 2022 Pinot Noir, Twenty Mile Bench, CGY  
Culmina 2023 Saignée, Golden Mile Bench, CGY EDM  
Dirty Laundry 2021 "Bordello", Okanagan Valley CGY

**Dirty Laundry 2022 Kay's Syrah, Okanagan Valley EDM**  
**Divergence 2020 Hughes Vineyard Blanc de Blanc, Lincoln Lakeshore, TOR**  
**Divergence Grimsby Hillside Frontier Block Chardonnay 2023, Lincoln Lakehore CCC**  
**Domaine Le Clos Jordanne 2023 Villages Pinot Noir, Niagara Peninsula, STJ**  
**Domaine Le Clos Jordanne Villages Chardonnay 2022, Niagara Peninsula TOR STJ**  
**Domaine Le Clos Jordanne Grand Clos Chardonnay 2021, Twenty Mile Bench, TOR**  
**Domaine Le Clos Jordanne Grand Clos Pinot Noir 2021, Twenty Mile Bench TOR**  
**Domaine Queylus 2023 Tradition Chardonnay, Niagara Peninsula CCC**  
**Domaine Queylus 2021 Tradition Cabernet Franc, Niagara Peninsula CCC**  
**Fielding 2023 Cabernet Franc, Beamsville Bench, TOR**  
**Fielding Gamay 2024, Niagara Peninsula, EDM\*\*\***  
**Flat Rock 2023 Pinot Noir, Niagara Peninsula, EDM**  
**Fogolar Grimsby Hillside Cabernet Franc 2023, Lincoln Lakeshore, CCC**  
**Fort Berens Blanc de Blancs 2022, Lilloet VAN**  
**Grange of Prince Edward 2024 Estate Chardonnay, Prince Edward County, EDM CGY CCC\*\*\***  
**Grange of Prince Edward 2024 Estate Pinot Noir, Prince Edward County, CCC**  
**Grange of Prince Edward Fontaine du Loup Brut, Prince Edward County OTT**  
**Grange of Prince Edward 2024 Estate Cabernet Franc, Prince Edward County CGY CCC**  
**Gray Monk Odyssey 2022 Chardonnay, Okanagan Valley, CGY EDM**  
**Hidden Bench Pinot Noir 2023 Beamsville Bench, TOR**  
**Hinterland 2020 Blanc de Blancs Brut, Prince Edward County, CCC**  
**Hinterland 2023 Pinot Gris Riesling Brut, Prince Edward County, CCC**  
**Huff Estate Chardonnay 2022, Prince Edward County, CCC**  
**Huff Estate Pinot Noir 2023, Prince Edward County CCC**  
**JoieFarm en Famille Chardonnay 2023 Naramata Bench, CGY VAN**  
**La Cerveceria Astilleros Calamansi Pale Pilsner, North Vancouver VAN**  
**Laughing Stock 2023 Viognier, Okanagan Valley EDM**  
**Landwash OnGuard Canadian Pale Ale, Newfoundland, STJ**  
**Lakeboat Merlot 2022, Kaleden, Okanagan Falls, VAN**  
**Leaning Post 2023 The Fifty Chardonnay, Niagara Peninsula STJ**  
**Leaning Post Syrah Keczan Vnyd 2020, Lincoln Lakeshore, TOR**  
**Leaning Post Grimsby Hillside Vineyard Frontier Block Chardonnay 2021, Lincoln Lakeshore CCC**  
**Loch Mor Cider House Harrison Danforth Road, Prince Edward County CCC**  
**Maened Grimsby Hillside Cabernet Franc 2023, Lincoln Lakeshore, CCC**  
**Magnetic Hill Winery, New Brunswick, Moncton**  
**Malivoire Gamay 2024, Niagara Peninsula, CCC MYSTERY WINE**

**Malivoire Small Lot Gamay 2023 Niagara Peninsula TOR, CGY**  
**Martin's Lane 2020 'Simes Vineyard' Pinot Noir, South Kelowna CGY**  
**Mason Vnyd The Landing Cabernet Franc 2022, Beamsville Bench, CCC\*\*\* (2nd Wine of the Year)**  
**Mission Hill 2020 Compendium Okanagan Valley, EDM**  
**Mission Hill 2022 Reserve Cabernet Sauvignon, Okanagan Valley STJ**  
**Moraine Sophia Pinot Noir 2022, Naramata Bench, CGY**  
**MW Cellars Sauvignon Blanc 2023, Niagara Peninsula, CCC**  
**MW Cellars Syrah 2023, Niagara Peninsula, CCC**  
**Niagara Custom Crush Studio 2027 Cellars Wismer-Foxcroft Riesling 2024, 20 Mile Bench, TOR**  
**Niagara Custom Crush Studio Rennie Estate "G" Red 2017 Beamsville Bench, TOR**  
**Niagara Custom Crush Studio Therianthropy Cabernet Franc 2021 Lincoln Lakeshore TOR**  
**Niagara Custom Crush Studio KiMu First Crush Pinot Noir 2023 Twenty Mile Bench, TOR**  
**Niagara Custom Crush Studio Ella Gamay 2020 Four Mile Creek, TOR**  
**Niagara Custom Crush Studio Scheule Vineyards Chardonnay 2023 Lincoln Lakeshore TOR**  
**Niagara Custom Crush Studio The Juice Co Chardonnay 2024 Niagara Peninsula TOR**  
**Niagara Custom Crush Studio Unscripted Sauvignon Blanc 2023 Niagara Peninsula TOR**  
**Niagara Custom Crush Studio Unscripted Montage 2023 Niagara Peninsula, TOR**  
**Niagara Custom Crush Studio Long Way Home 2023 Chardonnay, Beamsville Bench TOR CCC\*\***  
**Noble Ridge Meritage 2022 Okanagan Valley, CGY**  
**Noble Ridge 2020 "The Pink One" Sparkling Rose, Okanagan Falls, STJ**  
**Perenelle Rose 2024, Niagara Peninsula CCC**  
**Perenelle Nightingale 2023, Niagara Peninsula CCC**  
**Plume Cabernet Sauvignon 2022, Similkameen Valley, VAN**  
**Quails' Gate 2022 Chardonnay, Okanagan Valley EDM**  
**Quails' Gate Pinot Noir 2023, Okanagan Valley VAN**  
**Quails' Gate Merlot 2022, Okanagan Valley VAN**  
**Redstone 2022 Gamay Noir, Niagara Peninsula, STJ**  
**Rosehall Run Sauvignon Blanc, Prince Edward County, CCC**  
**Rosehall Run 2014 Stardust Traditional Method, Prince Edward County CCC**  
**Rosehall Run 2023 Chardonnay Musque, Prince Edward County CCC**  
**Rosehall Run 2022 JCR Pinot Noir, Prince Edward County CCC**  
**Rosehall Run 2023 Tempranillo, Prince Edward County CCC**  
**Stratus 2021 Cabernet Franc, Niagara-on-the-Lake CGY STJ \*\*\***  
**Stonebridge Brut Rose 2021, Niagara-on-the-Lake TOR**  
**Stone Eagle 'Eagle Eye' 2022, Niagara Peninsula CCC**  
**Tantalus 2023 Riesling, Canada CGY**

Tantalus 2023 Chardonnay 2023, Okanagan Valley, VAN \*\*\*  
Tawse 2022 Quarry Road Riesling, Vinemount Ridge CGY  
Two Sisters Eleventh Post 2020, Niagara River, CCC  
Two Sisters Merlot 2020, Niagara River CCC  
Terravista Albarino 2023 Naramata Bench, EDM  
Terravista Vineyards Figaro 2024, Naramata Bench VAN  
Thirty Bench Winemakers Blend Cabernet Franc 2022, Niagara Peninsula TOR  
Time Winery Chronos Malbec 2022, CGY EDM VAN  
Tinhorn Creek Pinot Gris 2023 Okanagan Valley TOR  
Tinhorn Creek Cabernet Franc 2022, Okanagan Valley CGY  
Trail Estate Grimsby Hillside Cabernet Franc 2022, Lincoln Lakeshore, CCC  
Truck 59 Ciderhouse x The Hatch Baptism by Firetruck Cider, Okanagan Valley VAN  
Ungava Gin, Quebec, STJ  
Unsworth 2022 Pinot Gris, Cowichan Valley, Vancouver Island CGY EDM  
Unsworth Vineyards Charme de L'Île NV, Vancouver Island, VAN  
Upper Bench 2022 Chardonnay, Naramata Bench CGY  
Volta Estate Chardonnay Amphora 2023, Prince Edward County, CCC  
Volta Estate Pinot Noir 2023, Prince Edward County CCC  
Wayne Gretzky 2022 Cabernet-Merlot, Niagara Peninsula STJ  
Wayne Gretzky 2021 No. 99 Riesling, Niagara Peninsula STJ  
Wending Home Gamay 2021, Niagara Peninsula CCC  
York Vineyard Brut Rose, Niagara-on-the-Lake CCC  
York Vineyard Brut Nature, Niagara-on-the-Lake CCC

My sincere thanks to all the wineries, brewers and distillers who stepped, helped out and provided our guests with their finest.

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