

WORLD BUILDERS VANCOUVER DEVELOPERS' GLOBAL REACH **p.37**

NEED GOOD ADVICE? HOW AND WHERE TO GET IT **p.110**

FUELLING DIVISION Kinder Morgan's First Nations Problem **p.52**

RAISE A
GLASS TO HARRY
McWATTERS!
**10 OKANAGAN
WINERIES** **p.120**

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Local Character

Unlike Time Winery, these nine South Okanagan wineries are distinctly rural, yet each has its own personality



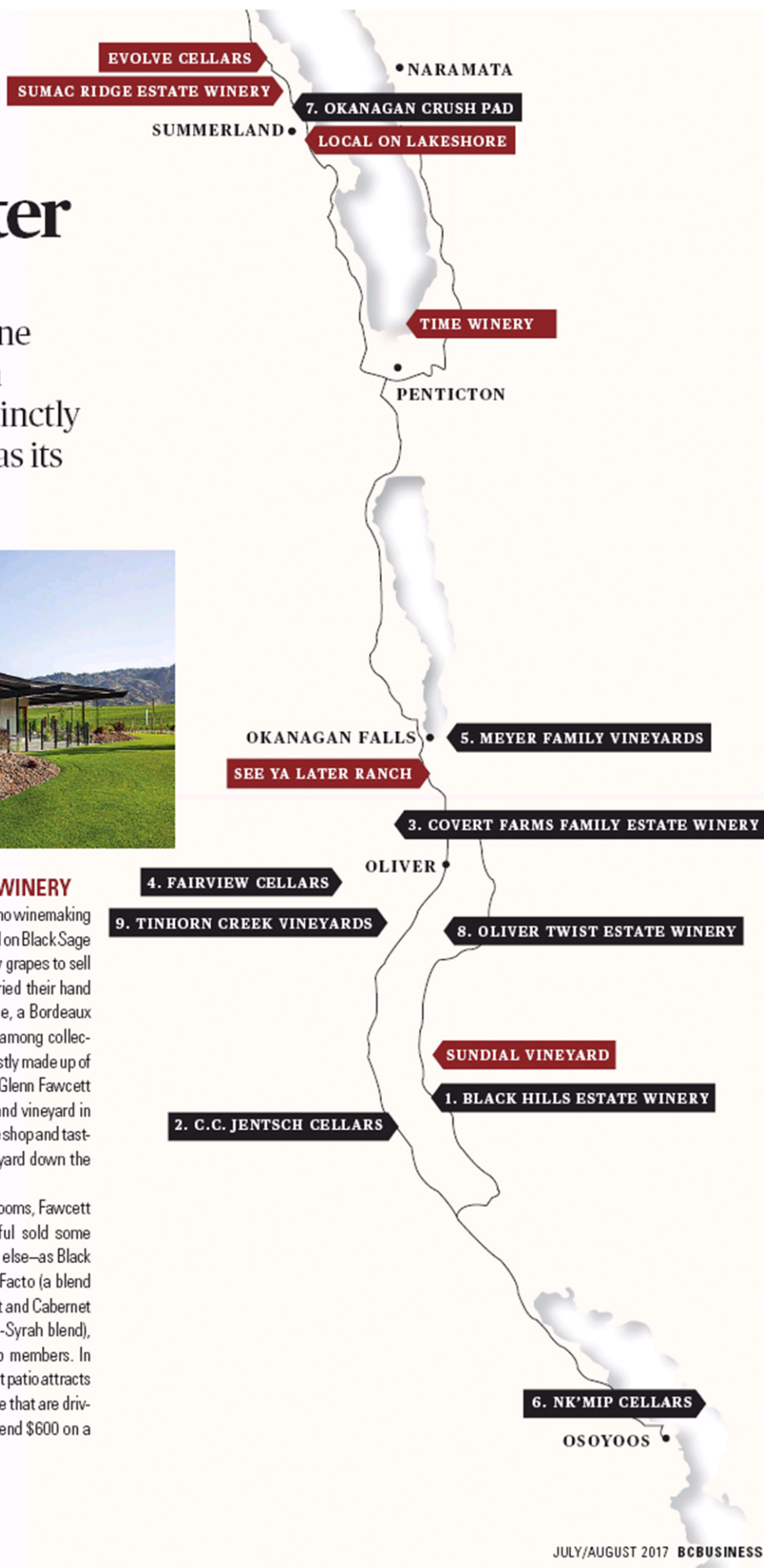
1 BLACK HILLS ESTATE WINERY

In 1996, two Vancouver couples with no winemaking experience bought a 34-acre vineyard on Black Sage Road near Osoyoos, planning to grow grapes to sell to wineries. Three years later they tried their hand at winemaking, producing Nota Bene, a Bordeaux blend that has become a cult wine among collectors. Vinequest Wine Partners LP, mostly made up of long-term customers and headed by Glenn Fawcett as president, purchased the winery and vineyard in 2007. Black Hills has since built a winery and tasting room overlooking a 15-acre vineyard down the road, purchased in 2011.

After researching Napa tasting rooms, Fawcett discovered that the most successful sold some wines that are unavailable anywhere else—as Black Hills does with its Carmenere, Ipso Facto (a blend of Syrah, Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot and Cabernet Franc) and Per Se (a Cabernet Franc-Syrah blend), which are exclusive to its wine club members. In summertime, the expansive restaurant patio attracts a different consumer, he says: “people that are driving the nice cars and not afraid to spend \$600 on a case of wine.”

VINEYARDS: 49 acres, 40.5 planted

PRODUCTION: 16,000 cases in 2016



2 C.C. JENTSCH CELLARS

The Jentsch family has been farming since 1929 on a 63-acre property on Road 13 in Oliver on the Golden Mile Bench, the first sub-DVA (designated viticultural area) in B.C. The Jentsches originally grew apples, then switched to cherries when that fruit became more lucrative. In the early 2000s, owners Chris and Betty Jentsch began converting their orchards to vineyards, growing a range of grape varieties to sell to wineries. They later planted four acres on their home property in Summerland and took over Betty Jentsch's parents' Eugenio vineyard on the Black Sage Bench. After having some of their fruit made into wine at Okanagan Crush Pad (see p.130) in 2012, they converted their packing house into a winery, hired winemaker Amber Pratt and started making their own: Viognier, Syrah, Cabernet Sauvignon, Cabernet Franc, Malbec, Chardonnay and blends, sold in the wine shop with its long wooden tasting bar next to the tall racks of barrels.

VINEYARDS: 82 acres, 63 planted
PRODUCTION: 14,000 cases in 2016

3 COVERT FARMS FAMILY ESTATE WINERY

Established as a vegetable farm in 1959 by George Covert, Covert Farms began growing grapes in the early 1960s. In 2014, Gene Covert, George's grandson, changed his focus to winemaking and organic food growing. The 25-acre vineyard (300 acres of the 650-acre farm is leased to another winery, Peller Estates) is certified organic, and the farm collaborates with Watermark Beach Resort in Osoyoos as one of Destination Canada's 197 Signature Experiences. Participants tour the farm in the back of a 1952 Mercury pickup truck to learn about its agriculture and viticulture practices. Its location 400 feet above the highway and right below McIntyre Bluff, a South Okanagan landmark, means the farm receives more heat and wind than other local farms, reducing mildew problems. The Coverts try to work with nature, planting cover crops that suppress weeds and attract beneficial pollinators and insects; they make their wines with minimal intervention, using natural fermentation when possible. At the end of the tour, participants pick seasonal vegetables for a wine tasting with charcuterie and a cheese board on the patio back at the wine lounge, or head to Watermark for a dinner prepared with produce from the farm.

VINEYARD: 650 acres (65 Covert Farms vines, remainder leased or farmed)
PRODUCTION: 4,500-5,000 cases a year

4 FAIRVIEW CELLARS

Bill Eggert, owner of boutique Fairview Cellars outside Oliver, loves growing grapes but has no plans to grow his business. "I'm making a good living; people like my wine," he says. "Once you expand, once you get a little farther away from it, you're not hands-on anymore."



GRAPE EXPERIENCES
Covert Farms Family Estate Winery (above) and NK'Mip Cellars (right) offer vineyard tours



Eggert grew up on a fruit farm in the Niagara Peninsula before moving to the Okanagan in 1983 and becoming manager of Covert Farms three years later. In 1989 he used an inheritance from an uncle for a down payment on 10 acres next to the first green of the Fairview Mountain Golf Club. The property was inexpensive because there was no water system, but it took Eggert until 1993 to develop one and start planting vines: Cabernet Sauvignon, Cabernet Franc and Merlot, from which he produces full-bodied wines ideal for cellaring. He harvested his first commercial vintage in 1997 and began selling wine in 2000 from a log cabin where a tabby cat now dozes in the cosy tasting room.

VINEYARDS: 12 acres planted (estate, Eagle Bluff partnership and Quail's Wayside lease)
PRODUCTION: 3,500-5,000 cases a year

5 MEYER FAMILY VINEYARDS

After a career in finance, in 2006, JAK (John Arthur Kenneth) Meyer bought a three-acre vineyard with some Chardonnay vines in Naramata and decided to start a winery as a hobby. In 2008, looking to expand, he purchased an Okanagan Falls winery with a sloping 14-acre vineyard and a view of Peach Cliff Bluff in a court-ordered sale. "They went under before they ever sold a bottle of wine, so I was able to take over this property with a licence and have a turnkey

winery but without any previous reputation to deal with," Meyer recalls. The winery specializes in two varietals, Chardonnay and Pinot Noir, at a range of prices. "People that like Chardonnay and Pinot Noir, there's something for everybody," Meyer explains. "People like oak, don't like oak, we've got different styles. We've sort of established ourselves as one of the best Chardonnay and Pinot producers in Canada."

Unlike many B.C. wineries, Meyer exports, both to raise the profile of the province's wines and to diversify his market. He has clients in seven countries outside Canada, including Marks and Spencer PLC, which has sold a Meyer Family Vineyards Pinot Noir in its 169 U.K. stores since 2015. "It's great exposure for B.C. wineries; it's great exposure for us," Meyer says. "I'm really proud of that. It's the only Canadian wine that's on the shelves at Marks and Spencer."

VINEYARDS: 16 acres planted + 10 under contract
PRODUCTION: 8,000 cases in 2016

6 NK'MIP CELLARS

The Osoyoos Indian Band (OIB) began growing grapes for wineries in 1968 on a 340-acre vineyard near Oliver but didn't make its own wine until 2002. When Chief Clarence Louie saw wineries winning awards for wines made with grapes from the NK'Mip vineyard, he realized the band could do the same. He was right.



NATURALLY INCLINED
Tinhorn Creek Vineyards (top)
and Okanagan Crush Pad
(below) take a hands-off
approach to winemaking



yards but no production facility. "Maybe they're just getting started in the industry, so we shepherd them along," explains hospitality manager Kristina Neilsen. "We act as an incubator for them while they get their feet on the ground, and then they graduate from our facility and usually go on to open their own wineries."

Since 2011, Okanagan Crush Pad has graduated more than

14 custom crush clients. The nine-acre Switchback vineyard on a hill overlooking Okanagan Lake was originally an apple orchard, purchased in 2005 and converted to grapes the following year. In 2012, Coletta and Lornie bought the nearby 312-acre Garnet Valley Ranch, where they have begun planting what will eventually be a 70-acre vineyard with Pinot Noir, Chardonnay and Riesling.

Both vineyards were certified organic in 2014, and Okanagan Crush Pad makes its own Haywire wines using natural methods and breathable concrete tanks, with native yeast and minimal additives. It sources grapes from other Okanagan growers for its Narrative collection of wines and wine-based spirits, including Bolly Water gin produced for Vancouver restaurateur Vikram Vij.

VINEYARDS: 28 acres planted
PRODUCTION: 45,000 cases, including 27,000 for custom clients, in 2016

8 OLIVER TWIST ESTATE WINERY
Denise and Bruce Hagerman launched their winery on the Black Sage Bench near Oliver in 2006, selling to Gina Harfman six years later. The winery was one of the first in the province to use exclusively twist tops. Out of 12 bottles of wine with corks, chances are one will be bad, says Hagerman, who now works for Harfman. Most consumers don't take it back, but they never buy that wine again, she explains.

7 OKANAGAN CRUSH PAD
In addition to its own Haywire and Narrative brands, Christine Coletta and Steve Lornie's Summerland winery makes wine for clients who have vine-

yards but no production facility. "Maybe they're just getting started in the industry, so we shepherd them along," explains hospitality manager Kristina Neilsen. "We act as an incubator for them while they get their feet on the ground, and then they graduate from our facility and usually go on to open their own wineries."

Unlike many winemakers, the pair do their own bottling, capping and labelling on-site. The more self-sufficient a winery is and the more of its own grapes it uses, the better for winemaking and controlling costs, Hagerman notes. "The nice thing is we can go out there when it's ready, we can pick, we can get it in," she says. "When the wine is ready to bottle, Gina and I bottle it. We don't have to wait to be put on a list."

While sipping samples at the wraparound bar in the tasting room, visitors can watch the production process through windows into the crush pad. Oliver Twist's signature grape is aromatic Kerner, a hybrid cross of a white Riesling and red Trollinger, but Harfman and Hagerman produce three tiers of wine from multiple varieties: Oliver Twist, eight wines based on Hagerman's original recipes; the more modern, higher-end Reserve series; and the lively new Nostalgia series, with Boogie Woogie White, Rockabilly Red, Pink Cadillac rosé and Cherry Baby port.

VINEYARD: 17 acres, 14.5 planted
PRODUCTION: 3,000-6,000 cases a year

9 TINHORN CREEK VINEYARDS
Tinhorn Creek's most distinctive feature is its two vineyard sites, says winemaker Andrew Windsor. One is on the Golden Mile Bench, B.C.'s first sub-appellation; the other is the Diamondback Vineyard, on the Black Sage Bench across the valley. The two terroirs allow Tinhorn Creek to grow a range of grapes—Gewürztraminer thrives in the east-facing Tinhorn Creek Vineyard; Merlot, Cabernet Franc and Pinot Gris in Diamondback, which soaks up afternoon sun—and make a portfolio of different wines. The Tinhorn Creek varietal series focuses on the grape, while owner Sandra Oldfield's signature Oldfield Series wines, recently rebranded Oldfield Reserve, emphasize the site—or sites, in the case of 2Bench Red and 2Bench White.

Once the grapes get into the winery, next door to its Miradoro Restaurant, which offers a panoramic view of the valley and vineyards, Windsor takes a hands-off approach that reflects the sites and the vineyards and not necessarily the winemaker's style. "We tend to use more natural processes than most, certainly for a winery of our size," he says. "The 2016 vintage was done almost exclusively using natural fermentation processes and natural malolactic fermentation."

Winemakers he has worked with in Australia and California are trained to manipulate the grapes so they control the process from start to finish and reduce risk, Windsor notes. The result is wines that become a little less genuine thanks to the addition of acids. "Then that wine, regardless of what the vintage is, is going to have a certain acid flavour profile which will never change," Windsor explains. "The most beautiful thing about wine is the variability."

VINEYARDS: 150 acres; about 130 planted
PRODUCTION: Average 35,000 cases a year ■