

# Saturna winery does much better with all-estate-grown grapes

*Gewurztraminer  
most sought-after vintage  
by visitors to B.C. island*

Nick Lees



It was chasing the dream of having a little inn overlooking a cove that sent me on a 10-minute boat plane ride to Saturna Island from Salt Spring.

The pilot pointed out a school of whales. But it was easier to spot numerous kayakers paddling between islands and divers swimming to a boat.

Sheep, livestock and some 340 residents had the Gulf Island of Saturna to themselves until enterprising Vancouver securities lawyer Larry Page realized its potential in 1990.

With a group of investors, he bought a significant chunk of land on the southwest of the island and by 2002, the last of 31 waterfront lots had been sold.

The island, which takes its name from Saturna, a Spanish ship which explored the area in 1791, is the southernmost of the Gulf Islands.

A French restaurateur in Vancouver suggested vines should fare well on elevated land away from the shore. Impressive, west-facing sandstone cliffs would capture the sun's heat and keep the land warm at night.

The inn, one kilometre from the dock, is five minutes away by car from the Saturna Island Family Estate Winery.

I loved the inn's view, the decks, the fireplace and bar. But as I made my way back to Victoria by ferry, I found myself more often thinking about the winery than the inn. (It needed some work.)

I've decided to hold out until I win the

lottery and then buy a waterfront vineyard.

Meanwhile, I'll talk sailor friends into landing at the winery's dock and enjoying some tasty bites at the bistro, a short stroll from the dock.

I won't be alone. About 40 per cent of the summer traffic is visitors who arrive by boat to dine at the bistro.

The Saturna winery takes advantage of a micro-climate unique to the region, with long summers and mild winters.

It is by far the largest winery on the islands and is bounded by the picturesque Campbell farm and newly designated parkland to the east, and Thompson Park and Saturna Beach to the west.

Between 1995 and 1999, four vineyards totalling 24.3 hectares were planted to Chardonnay, Pinot Gris, Pinot Noir, Gewurztraminer, Merlot and Muscat.

But using Okanagan fruit, wine sales began in 1998.

"The winery opened in 2001 and we make between 9,000 and 10,000 cases annually now," says Saturna vineyard operations manager Michael Vautour.

"The first all-estate-grown wines were produced in 2002."

He adds: "We couldn't have made it through without purchasing grapes from the Okanagan for the first four years. We also thought it a good idea to get our name out there. But we were called on the origin of our fruit and it harmed us. We've now turned things around again."

The most sought-after wine by visitors is the Gewurztraminer, full of lychee, pear and rose petal hints on the nose.

I also enjoyed the clean, fresh 2005 oaked Chardonnay. There are pineapple, citrus and white flower notes on the nose, with a touch of spice. It was creamy in the mouth, with flavours of green

apple, pear, vanilla and hazelnut.

All the wines, screw-capped, sell in the \$20 range.

Stores in Edmonton where they are usually available: Crestwood Fine Wines, Fine Wines by Liquor Select, The Vines at Riverbend and Baseline Wine and Spirits.

## Diary dates

► **Sept. 17:** Wine merchant, educator, journalist and broadcaster Gurvinder Bhatia leads a course for three Monday nights in the NAIT dining room for those who want to learn more about wine.

Discussions, with tastings, include winemaking techniques, grape varieties, the world's major wine regions; food and wine pairing and navigating a restaurant's wine list. The course is Hospitality 132 Wine Basics. Cost: about \$160. Call 471-6248.

► **Sept. 20:** The Gateway Rotary Club hosts Robust Reds for Rotary, a festival-style tasting featuring more than 75 full-bodied red wines from around the world.

The event, with food and a silent and live auction, will be held at the Delta's Top of the Inn on Gateway Boulevard. Funds raised will help the Rotary Club's projects, including the building of a school in Mozambique, the Youth Emergency Shelter and a summer camp for the Spina Bifida Association. Tickets: \$50. Call: 465-6780 or Keg N Cork Liquor Company, 3845 99th St.





PHOTOS SUPPLIED  
 Dropping by float plane into the Gulf Island of Saturna, one can often spot whales, kayakers, yachts and divers.



The patio at Saturna winery is often full in the summer.



Wines from Saturna winery can now be found in Edmonton.