



Adam Pearce, Julie Rennie, Paul Gardner

PHOTO BY J. KEVIN DUNN

PENTÂGE WINERY / Penticton, B.C.

british
columbia
winery of
the year

Followers of British Columbia wine would have to be living in a cave to miss the continuous mining of medals by Paul Gardner and Julie Rennie at Pentâge Winery.

Last year, they earned gold at the Northwest Wine Summit for the 2008 Pinot Gris, the 2009 Rosé and 2009

Slow Vineyards Icewine.

The All-Canadian Wine Championships also recognized the 2008 Pinot Gris and the Pentâge 2009 Gewürztraminer as a gold, and the wine went on to earn a 2010 Platinum in Wine Press Northwest's annual best-of-the-best competition.

It continued a trend for Pentâge, which garnered a Platinum the year prior for its 2008 Sauvignon Blanc Semillon.

Such consistent excellence makes Pentâge our 2011 B.C. Winery of the Year.

"We've been at this since 1996, so with another three years of hard work, maybe we can rest a little," Gardner said with a smile. "Our focus is making small lots of excellent wine."

The 60-case production of 2009 ice wine went on to finish third overall in Wine Press Northwest's regional judging of ice wine in 2010. That wine continued to flash Pentâge's knack for blending as it gathered up five white varieties — Semillon, Muscat, Chardonnay, Sauvignon Blanc and Viognier — for a remarkable dessert drink.

Ironically, Gardner and Rennie named their winery after the Greek word "penta," which translates to "five" —



Pentâge Winery

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a reference to the number of red varieties they first planted on their estate and used for their original red blend of Cabernet Sauvignon, Cabernet Franc, Merlot, Syrah and Gamay.

The Gamay now is featured by Gardner and young winemaker Adam Pearce for Pentâge's highly sought-after pink.

"It's not a sexy grape, but I was advised to grow it in 1996 by Richard Cleave, one of the pioneers," Gardner said. "He thought it would be a great varietal for the Okanagan Valley, and I love the grape."

Around the same time, Gardner, a former marine engineer, also began receiving winemaking expertise from up above.

"I was lucky that first year," he said. "When I was contouring the slopes, my neighbor was looking down on this show that was going on. It happened to be Mark Wendenburg from Sumac Ridge, and if there is someone who knows winemaking in the valley, it would be Mark. Well, he mentored us in the first year. We've met other winemakers along the way, and they've been a great source of knowledge and help."

Pearce arrived in 2008 from Ontario's Niagara region, and he's helped Pentâge achieve success with full-bodied reds, too. Wine Press Northwest recently deemed its 2006 Merlot and 2007 Syrah as "Excellent."

However, one may get a sense that Gardner's true passion is trellised to the vineyard.

Between his original Vista Ridge Vineyard and the new Dirty Dozen parcel, Gardner works with 13 varieties. His Rhône varieties also include Grenache, Marsanne, Mourvèdre and Roussanne. Gardner's "spice reds" in production are Malbec, Petite Sirah, Petit Verdot, Tempranillo and Zinfandel.

But wines and vines aren't the only driving forces on the 23 acres overlooking Skaha Lake, with the Penticton skyline to the north. There's also a remarkable cave project, "which seems to go on forever," Gardner said with a smirk.

"In 2000, we found that a natural feature of granite from the Skaha Bluffs goes right through the property and that it was possible to do a cave," Gardner said. "It works thermally. The barrels love it because the humidity is about 75 percent, so it's a no-brainer. On this property, you don't just get the big flat space where you can put a building. It optimizes the land, and I like to think that it's 'green.'"

Now, it plays host to special events and safeguards much of the 4,000-case production. So much for those days Gardner spent "dabbling as a home winemaker" in 1995.

"I was happily living in Vancouver, but I always wanted to have a piece of land — property to walk around on — and I had the interest in grapes," Gardner said. "Julie was encouraging me to leave the house, and we came up to the Okanagan for the weekend. By fluke, we stumbled upon this property. It was little bit more than we wanted, but two months later we owned it."

And B.C. wine lovers are digging it. — ERIC DEGERMAN