

Wine finds from B.C. to Oz

The just-concluded Vancouver Playhouse International Wine Festival served as the launch pad for Hester Creek Estate Winery's two new blends, as well as a few other wines that made something of a splash—notably their brilliant Meritage-style red, the one they call the Judge (Merlot, Cabernet Sauvignon, and Cabernet Franc, and stunning; \$45 at the winery and a few savvy private stores). Everything's new at Hester Creek—the winery, the guest condos, the demo kitchen and dining room, the ownership, the winemaker, the labels, and the wines. If you, like quite a few others, have been staying away from Hester Creek in the past, it's time to come back and fill up the cellar.

And while these two blends will certainly keep a while, they're really meant for drinking now, so take a taste if you didn't during the festival.

HESTER CREEK CHARACTER WHITE 2010 (\$20.09) Like all Hester Creek wines, this estate blend comes from their own Golden Mile vineyards and features their unique Trebbiano and other grapes: Pinot Gris, Chardonnay, and Pinot Blanc. It's a luscious, herby, apple-y, mineral-backed white blend produced from old vines and showing abundant richness of flavour. Oysters or calamari would love it; chicken and lightly sauced fish, too. It's a most welcome newcomer for spring and summer sipping and entertaining, and proved a perfect foil for Kelowna chef Ned Bell's soup of ambrosia apple, parsnip, and celeriac with sharp cheddar toast and honey. Maybe he'll bring the recipe to Vancouver with him; he's just been appointed head chef at the new Rosewood Hotel Georgia.

HESTER CREEK CHARACTER RED 2009 (\$20.09) This is made from Merlot, Syrah, Malbec, and Petit Verdot: a big, bold, plummy blend with hearty fruit and easy tannins, with



Yellow Tail's new brand, Lucky Penny, comes in both official wine colours.

why companies that have a major hit on their hands want to go into competition with themselves, but after 30-something years observing the wine business, I can't really claim to understand any of it!

LUCKY PENNY CHARDONNAY, VIGNIER & PINOT GRIGIO 2010 (\$17.99) Those three are said by the producer to be "grapes that groove",

and it's all poppy-new and trendy stuff with a peel-off part label on the back for the mnemonically challenged. Very fruity, fresh, clean, bright, and floral.

LUCKY PENNY SHIRAZ, CABERNET & MERLOT 2009 (\$17.99) More grooving grapes, this time including the red that Australia seems to do better than just about anybody else (and has more of than anybody else!). The white certainly has more definition and ready appeal; the red is perhaps a tad too soft. I can't imagine it's going to replace the wallaby wines of the parent company, but you never know.

Off to France, Argentina, and B.C. for the rest of today's lineup.

LOUIS BERNARD COTES DU RHONE BLANC 2009 (\$14.49) A great blend of flavours derived from

a little anise, and a super-fresh finish. This is a great garlic-buster so cool it a little and serve it with your favourite approach to the stinking rose: chopped garlic on cornmeal-roasted chicken, baked garlic with olive oil and thyme, or humous. Pretty skookum with creamy blue cheese, too.

LA POSTA COCHINA BLEND 2008 (\$17.99) This is the sort of thing the new crop of Argentine wines does best: a table wine "inspired by the concept of the kitchen sink blend" according to the back label, meant for "improvised gatherings where family and friends inevitably spend the evening gathered around the *cocina*". A mix of Malbec, Bonarda, and Syrah, it's a hearty big food wine that cries out for a platter of *rouladen* or anything else meaty and rich.

ST HALLETT POACHER'S BLEND 2009 (\$12.99) Comprised of Sémillon and Sauvignon Blanc, everything's right with this Australian hit: the price, the alcohol (only 11.5 percent), the fruit, and the finish. Definitely a food wine: lovely with baked small potatoes, chicken pieces in butter with little tomatoes, fresh grapes in balsamic and flavoured olive oil, and plenty of pepper and sea salt. Crisp, clean, and fresh with a long-lasting finish and abundant fruit, it's hearty and uncomplicated.

DOMAINE DE GRACHIES COTES DE GASCOGNE 2009 (\$11.99) Definitely a best buy of the season, but where did it come from? Besides the Côtes de Gascogne, I mean. You may have some trouble getting a supply (mine was a gift from a friend); apparently it's a specialty item available only by the case in some private stores and a few restaurants. Well, a case isn't a hardship at this price. The blend (Colombard, Ugni Blanc, Gros Manseng, and Sauvignon Blanc) is very good and represents outstanding value.

NICHOL VINEYARDS 9 MILE RED 2008 (\$26.90) Despite the fact it's already sold out at the winery, I wanted to draw it to your attention as one of

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