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OKANAGAN CRUSH PAD

What to Ask Canada's Most Innovative Winery?

Okanagan Crush Pad shares most frequently asked questions at the Vancouver International Wine Festival

[Summerland, B.C.] As the leader in forging a new style of wine for Canada's Okanagan Valley, Okanagan Crush Pad (OCP), the maker of Haywire and Narrative wines, relishes opportunities to inform wine lovers about the points of difference in their wines.

After a highly successful Vancouver International Wine Festival, where over the course of eight special events and seminars, and meeting thousands of visitors at the winery booth, the winemaking team saw several threads emerge from the most commonly asked questions.

Okanagan Crush Pad co-owner Christine Coletta is keen to keep the dialogue alive. Here she answers questions on why the winery uses concrete tanks; crown caps for their sparkling wines; and, why it is more and more devoted to making natural wine.

Okanagan Crush Pad's top three questions:

1. Why Are You Using Concrete Tanks?

By harvest 2017, OCP will have 18,000-case capacity of concrete fermenting and aging tanks, (together valued at more than \$500,000 CAN). The vast majority are from Nico Velo, the renowned Italian company that has been making concrete wine tanks for the past 60 years. Known for its innovative ideas and highly sophisticated manufacturing, key features of Nico Velo tanks are thermal regulation inside the walls, high quality concrete finish, and state-of-the-art fittings.



In the early 1960s French producers noticed the successful use of stainless steel tanks in the dairy industry and began adopting stainless steel tank use for wine. Decades ago the quality of concrete was poor, and there was less ability to control cellar bacteria, which led vintners away from concrete to stainless steel.

"I first came across numerous concrete tanks in Chile, and was interested to learn that many winemakers still considered them their favourite vessels," notes Coletta.

“Concrete manufacturing has come a long way in the past few decades; evident when you compare an old concrete wall or sidewalk with a newly-installed one,” she continues. “We have done many studies since our first concrete tanks arrived in 2011, and yes, the vessel does make a difference in winemaking, in some grape varieties more than others. We find that the wines fermented in these tanks have a livelier lees impression, fuller, rounder mouth-feel, and greater mid-palate depth.”

Concrete tanks allow flavour development, and conserve native microbiological organisms, which is critically important when using native fermentation to replace commercial products. With established and emerging wine stars such as Chateau Cheval-Blanc (St.-Emilion, France), Bodega Garzon (Uruguay) and Poggiontondo (Tuscany, Italy) all committed to the use of concrete tanks, it is exciting to see more BC wineries adding concrete to their cellars, experimenting, and learning the impact the vessel has on wine.

“Concrete tanks are here to stay in our cellar,” adds Coletta. “This is not a fad, or a passing trend; and those tanks will be in the OCP cellar long after I have left this world.”

2. Why Did You Choose To Make Natural Wines?

For OCP, natural winemaking is the means to an end; the end being to create wines that are a pure expression of the vineyard where they were grown. Natural winemaking is making wine without chemicals, and using minimum technological intervention in both growing the grapes, and making them into wine.

At Okanagan Crush Pad, the move to natural winemaking started in 2011 when the team began converting its vineyards to organic farming. When the organic conversion is complete in 2018, 75 additional acres (30 ha) will be certified. While the winery’s use of winemaking additives has always been minimal, the winery has eliminated what was previously used (such as commercial yeast, sugar and stabilizing agents) relying solely on healthy, balanced, ripe fruit as the base of their production. Native fermentation is employed. Oak is used sparingly, if at all, and when used is neutral, and does not impart flavours. Sulphur dioxide is used cautiously in tiny amounts (as a preservative); and on any wine in the portfolio labeled as “natural”, it is not used at all.



“The goal is to make wines that tell the story of a particular vineyard, and reflect vintage conditions,” shares OCP chief winemaker Matt Dumayne. “In our experience, natural winemaking is the best way to achieve this. We were very excited to see the response to our Haywire Free Form wines at the Vancouver International Wine Festival. Overall, in the past three years we’ve noticed that consumers are increasingly understanding and embracing these wines.”

3. Why Does Okanagan Crush Pad Use Crown Caps on Sparkling Wines?

Okanagan Crush Pad uses Stelvin cap closures (screw caps) on all its still table wines to avoid cork taint. Therefore it seemed disingenuous to use cork and cage closures on its sparkling wines; so the winemaking team employs crown cap closures. The benefit is that the wine arrives to consumers in the exact state intended by the winemaker.



Many sparkling wine producers use cork and cage closures for their own reasons, but there is also a romantic notion of the consumer's experience of opening a bottle and the associated ritual of the cork-popping process.

Many people think a cork and cage closure system is more sustainable, but this is actually not the case. A cork, foil, and cage closure have a total weight of almost 10 grams, in addition to the cork. This is twice the metal content of two crown caps.



OCP also holds to its efforts for sustainability by the use of crown cap closures. OCP uses two crown caps, which have a total metal weight of 4.4 grams to produce each bottle of traditional method sparkling wine (wine fermented and aged in bottle).

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The winery team never shies away from questions, and enjoys conversation with its industry peers and other interested parties.

“OCP always welcomes dialogue about what we are doing and enjoys having these debates with our customers and fellow vintners,” says Coletta. “When you are leading something new, there is a responsibility to tell your story over and over again, in a way that engages people to learn more. We were happy to see that our story is starting to resonate with wine enthusiasts,” she continues, “and to see that other wineries across Canada are also as passionate about some of these new concepts as we are.”

About Okanagan Crush Pad

Christine Coletta and Steve Lornie built Okanagan Crush Pad in scenic Summerland, BC, on Switchback Organic Vineyard in 2011. The facility, producer of Haywire and Narrative, has quickly built a reputation as a premium winery, receiving many awards and accolades with chief winemaker Matt Dumayne at the helm.

Dumayne creates natural wines using organically farmed grapes in state-of-the-art concrete tanks, using only native yeast and minimal, if any, additives. The wines reflect the region's unique high mountain/northern desert setting noted for its intensely hot, short growing season with hallmark cool nights.

In their constant pursuit of innovation, the team added a line of wine-based spirits under the Narrative label in 2015. Visitors discover a guest center, built into the heart of the winery, offering a rare glance into the art of natural winemaking and a place where they can sample and purchase.

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