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## Decanter's Steven Spurrier weighs in on B.C. wines

by [Kurtis Kolt](#) on September 9th, 2015 at 9:52 AM

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[Last week in this column](#), I covered the Judgment of B.C. The event was put on by the B.C. Wine Institute in conjunction with a visit by Steven Spurrier, *Decanter* magazine's consulting editor and chair of the Decanter World Wine Awards.

Spurrier, along with local wine professionals and media, blind-tasted and ranked B.C. Chardonnays and Syrahs against global benchmarks to see where we stand as a region. In short, the results showed our local Chardonnays trail their international brethren, while B.C. Syrahs shone, nabbing not only the top spot in the judges' collective ranking but a few more positions near it, too.

That tasting was only a part of Spurrier's first visit to the province. The Wine Institute ensured he was shown a good time, tromping around the Okanagan and Similkameen valleys, sipping all the way. Those in the wine industry were excited to see him: it was kind of like having Bob Dylan come and check out your band, Gordon Ramsay pop over for dinner, or Alice Munro read your new novel.

Not only did I have an opportunity to get Spurrier's thoughts on our industry, the Wine Institute had me organize a sit-down tasting with him, presenting him with over a dozen local sparkling wines and a small handful of icewines representative of those categories. We met at Chambar and sat in one of their awesome, round booths towards the back of the restaurant. It

Decanter's Steven Spurrier enjoyed Blue Mountain Gold Label Brut.

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was my first time meeting the guy, and while others might have been nervous, I was more excited than anything. Still, my approach to things can be quite casual, so I was curious how our tasting would go, since I wasn't familiar with his approach to tasting. For all I knew, I'd be sitting there in silence for a couple of hours as he tasted through the wines and jotted down his notes.

The tasting turned out to be much more casual than I'd anticipated, and we chatted throughout. He doubled down on something he'd said to the crowd at a dinner I'd attended the night before, when he declared, "My message to British Columbia is that I think you undervalue yourselves: your wines are sensational."

Overall, he was quite enthusiastic about B.C. sparkling wines. We agreed that the natural acidity B.C. is known for lends itself to the style, and many offer fantastic value for the price. Here are some notes on a few favourites we tasted through.

### **Blue Mountain NV Gold Label Brut**

(\$23.90, [Blue Mountain Winery](#))

This showed why it's been a local benchmark for decades. Its blend of Pinot Noir, Chardonnay, and Pinot Gris sings with tropical fruit and a zippy, lemony finish. "A very fine wine," Spurrier commented, which came across as an incredible commendation when uttered with his classic British accent, rather than my Winnipeg-in-the-1980s lilt.

### **Summerhill Pyramid Winery Cipes 2008 Blanc de Noirs**

(\$34.90, [Summer Pyramid Winery](#))

This sparkling wine, made from 100 percent Pinot Noir, certainly delighted; it's citrusy and creamy, and a short period of aging has resulted in some lovely elegance. "After some age, it becomes a wine that sparkles," Spurrier noted, "rather than a sparkling wine."

### **Bella Wines 2013 Sparkling Blanc de Blancs**

(\$23.90, [Bella Wines](#))

I was quite intrigued by this wine, which they make in two editions, each from a single vineyard. Both bone-dry, the Oliver East Side bottling from Cerqueira Vineyard is a little more steely and lean, while the Oliver West Side version from Secret Mountain Vineyards is a bit more generous on the fruity side of things, with pink grapefruit and peaches as highlights. Spurrier preferred the generosity of that West Side bottling, appreciating that it had "more depth and length".

### **Road 13 2011 Sparkling Chenin Blanc**

(\$40, [Road 13 Vineyards](#))

This local cult favourite, crafted in the traditional (or Champagne) method from 47-year-old vines, is perennially one of my favourite B.C. wines. Due to its unusual style (there isn't another wine like it in Canada), I wasn't sure how it would be received. I needn't have been concerned. "What a lovely wine," Spurrier exclaimed. "I quite enjoy the soft fruit, fresh pear, and that it's somewhat *crémant* in style."

While some may say it shouldn't be a priority to have an international icon like Spurrier come here and tell us how we're doing as a region, I disagree. When you have someone with 50 years of travel and tasting experience offer their educated and honest take on what we do—and that take is quite positive—it's a good dose of encouragement.

Between wildfires and extreme temperatures, it's been a tough summer in B.C. wine country. It was nice to have a key global player visit and tell us we should keep up the good work.

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