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Anthony Gismondi: Goodbye California, it's been grand

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ANTHONY GISMONDI - Updated: March 8, 2019



The Vancouver International Wine Festival has come and gone for another year but not before the Californians put on an entertaining show.

The soft, round ripe wines of the Golden State certainly have wide public appeal in British Columbia. Couple that with some big names behind the booths and it was a sellout week across the board for the Americans.

The husband and wife team of Gina Gallo and Jean Charles Boisset effortlessly entertained as ambassadors for California wine all week speaking to their deep roots in wine.

Gina grew up among the Gallo empire and Jean Charles inside the Boisset family négociant world under the regimented rules of Burgundy. Together they are thriving in the New California, and like most participants, they loved the Vancouver market, its consumers, restaurants and – in a week of rare sunshine – the sheer beauty of the city.

I'm never surprised anymore by the level of wine in this city, what has disappeared from government stores appears to thrive in the private sector, albeit at crazy prices.

Highlights for me during the festival included Stina Winery from Croatia hooking up with Vij's Rangoli. The Stina 2016 Cuvée White (Brac, Croatia, \$20.99) was an Indian food slayer.

Painted Rock and Top Table's Elisa Restaurant in Yaletown were a perfect dinner match, especially when the steak met the Painted Rock 2014 Cabernet Franc(\$44.99). The only thing more beautiful than the bar at Elisa was the service.

At Cin Cin, Lorenzo Gucci from the Montalcino superstar Altesino enthralled the room with his Brunello di Montalcino(s), in particular, the Altesino 2013 Brunello di Montalcino(\$58.99). Again, the attention to detail, the food, and the service at Cin Cin was seriously off the charts.

There were so many people we enjoyed getting to know. Tom Gore of Tom Gore Vineyards was among the most genuine. From farming to winemaking to exporting, Gore has made the jump effortlessly by selling well-made, affordable California varietal wines led by his Tom Gore Chardonnay 2016(California, United States \$19.99).

It was equally thrilling to see winemaker Genevieve Janssens in the city. The longtime Robert Mondavi employee, inexplicably attending her first Vancouver International Wine Festival, seemed the right person to close the four-decade festival loop started by the Robert Mondavi family in 1979. Kudos to the Robert Mondavi Cabernet Sauvignon 2015 (Napa Valley, California, United States \$45.99).

Valentina Abbona from **Marchesi di Barolo** poured some amazing wines from her family winery located in the tiny Italian town of Barolo in the heart of Langhe for more than 200 years, including the Marchesi di Barolo **2014 Barolo** (Piemonte, Italy \$75.99). Valentina, a member of the fifth generation, continues the work that began more than two centuries ago producing high quality wines and protecting the history of Barolo's most important cellar.

It goes without saying crowds were big, and so were on-site wine sales given most wines shown inside the tasting room are not readily available in government stores. I was told the very popular Saturday afternoon tasting session is now the biggest tasting session for on-site wine sales.

As we say good bye to California, festival chairman Harry Hertscheg announced that France will return as the theme region of the 2020 Vancouver International Wine Festival.

France, like Italy, is a huge producer of wine, capable of bringing a large and diverse number of wineries to Vancouver next year. Let's hope they show more interest than they normally do in coming to the West Coast.

Should Burgundy, Bordeaux, Champagne, the Rhone Valley, Loire, Languedoc, Cognac, Cahors and, possibly, Jura show up another sellout is guaranteed.

Stay tuned.