

Valley winery strikes gold at championship back east

By Philip Round
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The Beaufort Vineyard and Estate Winery has struck gold in the All-Canadian Wine Championships.

Its 2008 Panacea, a white wine blend made with Vancouver Island grapes, picked up a gold medal at the annual Ontario event - and it also won a silver medal at the North West Wine Summit in Oregon.

The two medals are among nine just awarded to wines made at the newly-established winery on Pickering Road, just north of Courtenay.

Co-owners Susan and Jeff Vandermolén are delighted with the success, as their latest medal haul adds to three they won in 2008.

Susan, who is the winemaker in the business, said that winemaking was a passion.

"We continue to learn and push the envelope," she commented. "Our most important goal is to create high quality, small lot hand-crafted wines at a reasonable price."

Jeff, who manages the vineyard, said that 2009 should be even more exciting as they would be harvesting their first estate-grown grapes from the south-facing slopes of the vineyard.

The plan is to have the first wholly local white wines on sale in 2010, followed by the first local reds in 2011.

While waiting for the vines to mature on the site, the couple have been buying in grapes from

other areas to create their distinctive wines.

The results have proved to be an almost instant success, not only through the awards in Canada and across the Pacific North West, but also in sales.

Fourteen local restaurants in the Comox Valley now offer Beaufort wines as part of their regular wine lists, and their 2008 production is already 60 per cent sold out.

The winery's tasting room and picnic site has just reopened for the summer season, and the Vandermoléns are eager to welcome many more visitors to look around and sample their range of wines.

In addition to the 2008 Beaufort Panacea, the other medal winners at the North West Wine Summit were gold for their 2008 Cassis; silvers for their 2008 Blanc de Noir, 2007 Black Déjà Vu and 2008 G'wurtz; and bronzes for their 2008 Ortega, 2007 Premiere Merlot and 2008 Gris.

The summit, held annually at Mount Hood, is open to all types of wines and sprits produced in Oregon, Washington, Idaho, Montana, B.C., Alberta and even Alaska.

Gold medals were awarded to what the judges considered "role model examples," silver for "overall excellence" and bronze for "substantially above market quality."

At the All-Canadian Wine Championships held in Windsor, gold medals were awarded to wines scoring in the top 10 per cent of competition entries.

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Winners all: Susan and Jeff Vandermolén with the medal-winning wines from their Beaufort winery.