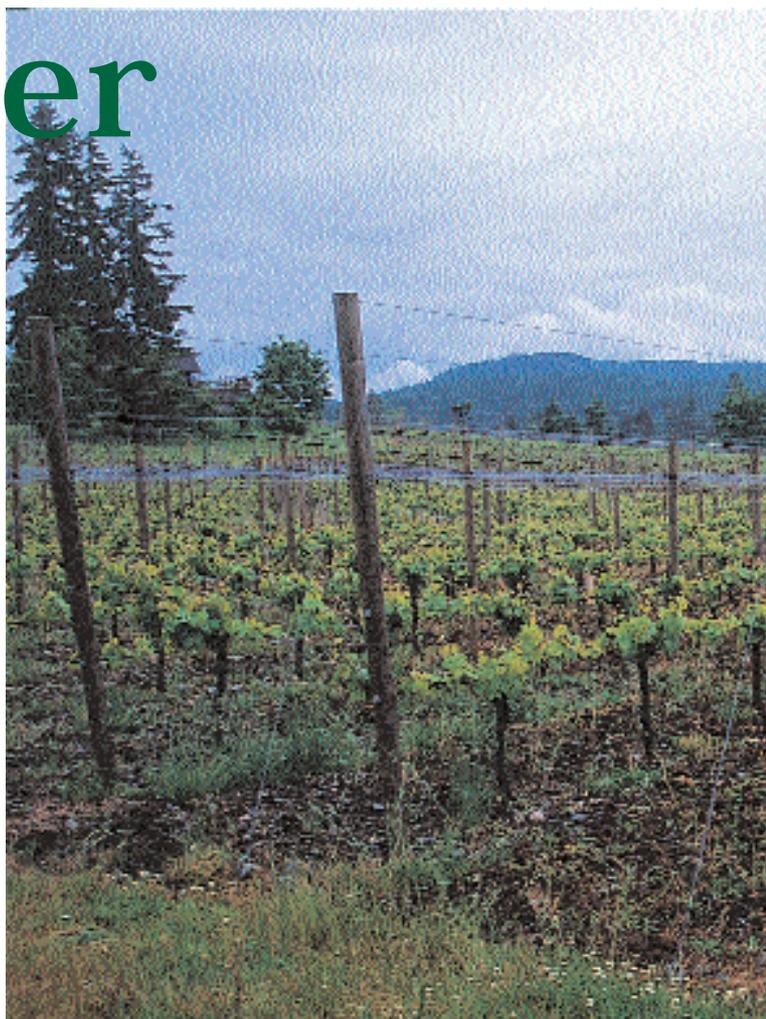


Vancouver Island

WITH ITS DENSE rainforests, mountains and glaciers, Vancouver Island, off the west coast of Canada, might seem an unlikely place to grow grapes. Nevertheless, it is the second-most important wine region in British Columbia after Okanagan¹. The wine industry came relatively late to Vancouver Island: all of the current vineyards have been planted since the early 1980s. The total area is approximately 70 ha and there are 12 wineries. The majority of vineyards are just a few hectares in size.

The island is 450 km long, and 100 km at its widest point. It is separated from the mainland by the Strait of Georgia. A range of mountains runs down the spine of the island, the highest of which is 2,200 m. Captain James Cook is said to have been the first European to set foot on the island in 1778. The Hudson's Bay Company established a fort for trading purposes at the southern tip of the island in 1842: this has become the city of Victoria, the capital of British Columbia. Vancouver, the largest city in BC, is located on the mainland, just across the strait.

At such a high latitude (close to 50°N), site selection is paramount. What are some of the factors that make viticul-



Cherry Point Vineyard

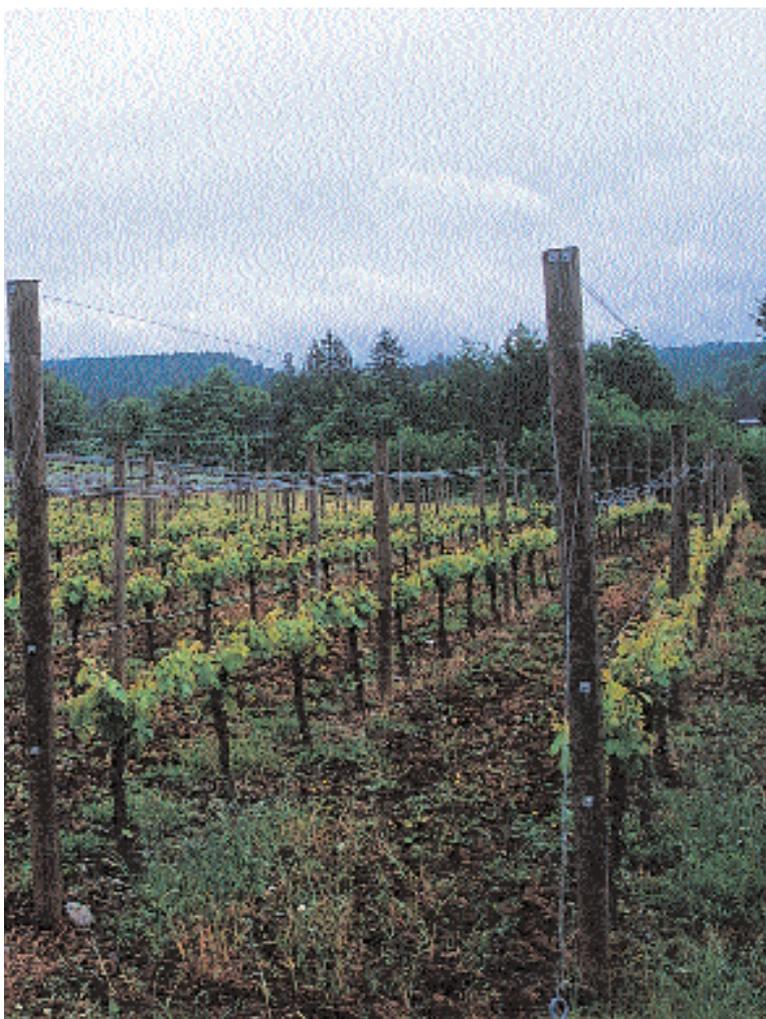


Peter Dry
Vineyards of the World

ture possible in this seemingly hostile location? Firstly, the central mountain ridge intercepts the moisture-laden air from the west, creating a rain shadow on the eastern side of the island. Interestingly, this rain shadow does not extend across the strait to the mainland: the annual rainfall of Vancouver is 50% higher than that of Victoria. Secondly, the maritime influence significantly moderates the winter temperatures and reduces the risk of frost. Thirdly, it is warmer and sunnier than the adjacent mainland: for example, there are 20% more sunshine hours annually at Victoria than Vancouver. The vineyards are confined to the south-east of the island between Victoria and Nanaimo, a distance of 90 km. Most are found in the Cowichan Valley around the town of Duncan; this is an important fruitgrowing area.

¹ See the Volume 15(4) issue of this publication for a description of the Okanagan region

² Consult www.islandwineries.ca/map.htm for a map of the region



Others are located on the Saanich Peninsular, 50 km to the south near Victoria, on Saturna and Salt Spring Islands in the Strait of Georgia and near Nanaimo to the north². Vineyard land is relatively flat to undulating, with southerly and easterly aspects and close to the sea.

The climate of the region is very cool (MJT = 16.6°C) with relatively low growing season sunshine hours (1,439). The growing season temperature, sunshine hours and rainfall (304 mm) are similar to Hobart, Tasmania. However, the mean temperature of the ripening month is lower, e.g. for

Pinot Gris, 12.2°C for Cowichan compared to 14.7°C for Hobart. Also winters are much colder, e.g. the mean mid-winter temperature is 2.7°C compared to 8.1°C for Hobart. The risk of frost in late spring is relatively high. The soils in the Cowichan Valley are of glacial origin: acidic, often gravelly and usually well drained.

The climate is much more suited to white winegrape production than red. The main white varieties are Pinot Gris, Auxerrois, Ortega, Bacchus, Traminer, Mueller-Thurgau and Siegerrebe. Auxerrois is an important variety in Alsace (France) and Luxembourg. It is valued for its low acidity and is typically blended with other varieties such as Pinot Blanc. Ortega is a cross of Mueller-Thurgau and Siegerrebe, and Bacchus is a cross of Silvaner and Riesling; they are early ripening and capable of producing fruit with high sugar and low acid in very cool climates. Chardonnay, a relative newcomer, has been planted in a new 25 ha development on Saturna Island. For red wine, the varieties include Pinot Noir and Marechal Foch. The latter is an early ripening, cold resistant French hybrid; it is mainly grown in eastern USA and Canada. Sparkling wine, from a range of varieties, is an important product.

Phylloxera is not present on the island and thus rootstocks are rare. VSP trellis with cane pruning appears to be universally used, with either moveable or fixed foliage wires. Typically, there are two canes per vine. The main disease problems are powdery mildew, Botrytis bunch rot and crown gall. The latter is a common problem in regions with cold winters and may be associated with trunk damage caused by freezing. In order to maximise the chance of fruit ripening, intensive manipulation is necessary, e.g. shoot thinning, bunch thinning and leaf removal in the bunch zone.

At the Cherry Point vineyard in Cowichan, budburst takes place in April. Harvest is generally in mid October for the Pinot varieties, coinciding with an average rainfall for the month of 87 mm.

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