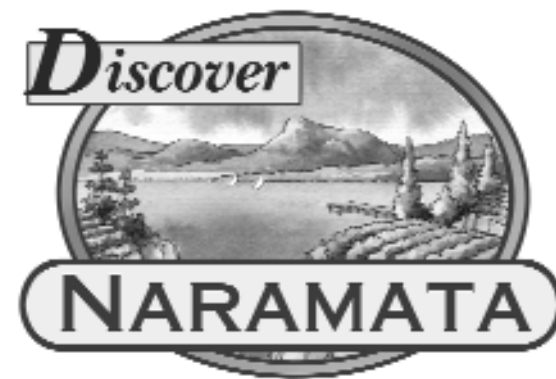




**NARAMATA  
BENCH  
WINERIES**

# Naramata Bench Wineries Get Whistler "Over A Barrel"!



*Submitted By Kathleen Nichol*

Horses and wine. Not much in common is what most would say. But most people do not live in Naramata, where unusual solutions are found to unique problems. The unique problem was how 8 wineries from Naramata Bench would get 8 full barrels of wine from here to Whistler, intact, and home again. And why would they even consider such a daunting challenge?

Well, on the second week-end of November each year, Whistler has a big wine festival called *Cornucopia*, to draw people to the area in a normally quiet time. Last spring, the Naramata Bench Wineries Association thought this would be a good event at which to make a big splash, promoting the fine wines and attractions of the area. First we thought of auctioning off a barrel of wine, but event organizers nixed that idea. Then someone suggested every winery could take a full barrel and offer "barrel samples" at the tastings. Barrel samples would be drawn directly from the barrel with a wine thief, not bottled up ahead of time. (A wine thief is not someone who steals wine, but a long cylindrical tube that looks a bit like a gigantic turkey baster that is open at both ends. It can be straight, but is often curved to fit over a barrel that is in a stack. When placed through the hole at the top of the barrel, wine streams in and is held there merely by putting one's finger on the open top of the cylinder. Some unknown law of physics holds the wine in the thief until the finger is removed, preferably over a glass!) People would love it! Rarely do folks get inside the barrel rooms of a winery to taste directly from these treasured items. As far as we knew, no one had done it before (that clearly did not mean anything to us!) So, we all agreed, and then went back to our vineyards and wineries and carried on growing grapes, selling wine, chatting to visitors, putting *Cornucopia* to the back of our minds. In the balmy days of April, the dark days of November seemed an eternity away.

But eventually October rolled around, the busy fall Okanagan Wine Festival was upon us, and lo and behold, we were crushing grapes from the 2004 vintage. November must be getting close, yet this barrel-tasting concept had not quite been fleshed out with the actual facts of how barrels would go from here to there! A couple of weeks before "the" day, Jeff Martin, of LaFrenz Winery took up the challenge. He considered various expensive shipping options and came up with a 24-foot-long by 8-foot-wide closed horse trailer rented from our local agricultural supplier, Zeller & Sons, which he would tow behind the LaFrenz truck. The horse trailer was duly parked in Hillside Winery's parking lot and each winery transported its barrel to the horse trailer the day before departure. Lake Breeze Winery had some attractive barrel stands which could hold individual barrels, so some wineries put an empty barrel on the stand and "racked" their wine into this barrel. (Racking means transferring wine from one container to another, usually via a pump or a siphon, leaving the sediment behind.) Others, such as Nichol Vineyard, already had the very special wine in its very special barrel and did not want to disturb the wine (it is a living, breathing thing!) more than necessary. Thus winemaker/owner Alex had to figure out how use the flat forks of a forklift to raise a round barrel off one rack and place it gently onto another rack - some might call this "nerve-racking". But he was successful! Then after strapping the bung down very securely he fork-lifted the cradled barrel onto a truck for the first leg of the journey, down Naramata Road to Hillside Winery. There it was "downloaded" onto the ground and moved into the horse trailer with a pallet jack.

Once all 8 barrels were cosily ensconced (taking up only about 1/2 of the trailer space), and braced, the trailer was towed to LaFrenz Winery for the night, during which a small heater kept the wine warm. We did not want to be serving cold red wine 2 days later!

Jeff and Neva Martin had the fun experience of dragging this very precious commodity (each barrel of wine worth about \$10,000 when bottled) across the Hope-Princeton Highway and up the Sea to Sky Highway. Going 40km/hour up hills was a new experience! When another Okanagan winery vehicle passed them on the way to Vancouver, its occupants wondered why LaFrenz Winery was taking horses to *Cornucopia*! Some of us know Jeff is a dog lover, but horses? Then, due to a fatal traffic accident on the Trans Canada Highway in West Vancouver, the Martins found themselves at a standstill at the Port Mann bridge. Eventually traffic started to move, but now they had to detour via downtown Vancouver and the Lion's Gate Bridge. Readers familiar with Vancouver and its bridges will recognize this as a pretty tight squeeze for a wide horse trailer! But the Martins succeeded and got to Whistler only 3 hours after the planned time, where other Naramata winemakers were waiting to move the barrels into the convention centre. Upon opening the trailer, three barrels were found off their moorings, one totally upside down, but the secure strapping over the bungs saved them from leaking. The combined brain power of the attendant winemakers then figured out how to move the offending barrels back onto their racks with only a pallet jack (and no back injuries!).

In the convention centre "Naramata Bench" was front and centre, commanding prime space in an outside row. On one side of the aisle stretched the 8 barrels attended by owners or winemakers, while on the other side all 11 wineries were at tables with the bottled wines. At the barrels, the wine thieves rarely got to take a deep breath in between retrieving samples - it was the most popular area of the room! One rather obnoxious guest kept insisting he had no glass, requesting the wine be transferred directly from barrel to mouth, but his pleas went unanswered. Generally speaking at such large wine tastings with dozens of wineries and hundreds of wines, after a few diligent attempts to take notes and remember wines, most people just get on with having a good time. This one was no different, except for the fact that out of the rosy haze of the consumer's "morning after the night before" marched the 8 barrels, from Naramata Bench. We went, we poured, and we conquered!

After the event, winemakers were seen "topping up" the barrels, that is, pouring wine from bottles or 4-gallon jugs through a funnel, to replace the "thieved" wine, thus closing in the empty space, preventing oxidation. All 8 barrels survived the trip in reverse, and are now safely back home on Naramata Bench, ready for



*All In Place! The barrels before any consumers arrived.*



*Tim Watts, Bob Ferguson - Kettle Valley Winery, Kathleen Nichol - Nichol Vineyard at their shared table with bottled wines.*

bottling, then their final trip, the one to the purchaser's wine cellar! When you make your next trip to Penticton and see a large black horse trailer parked at the north end of the Zeller property, think Wine and Ingenuity, hallmarks of Naramata!



*Ken Lauzon, of Hillside Winery, demonstrates the winemakers' Posterior Workout!*