



# CHANDRA ESTATE WINERY



## *A Marriage* *between culture* AND *wine*

BY SUMMER DHILLON

**THE PHRASE**, 'owning a winery', is an entire conversation piece, but the essence behind the decision to purchase a winery is the same for most—a romanticized profession. The thought of semi retirement among rolling Tuscan hills seduces most of us. So, when a piece of property went up for sale 4 years ago in Canada's wine capital, Oliver, BC, Dave and Parvinder Dhillon couldn't resist. Situated on 10 acres of land on Oliver's historic 'Golden Mile', family owned and operated, Ecovitis Vineyard and Chandra Estate Winery officially opened its doors on September 3, 2008. As with most vintners, the Dhillons' story extends far beyond 'deep pockets'.

Half of the acreage had been planted 12 years ago with Merlot, Pinot Noir, Blaufrankisch, and Chardonnay varieties, so the vineyard was in its maturity stages; however, the other 5 remained barren. Given the Okanagan's favourable terroir and climate, and upon the advice of a consultant, Dave was advised to import Malbec and Sauvignon Blanc varieties from France and plant the other 5. Only to steepen

the learning curve, Dave and Par went purely organic. Knowing that conventional agricultural practices have stripped the soil of vital minerals, and that insecticides, fumigants, and herbicides, are heavily used in production, they decided to grow organic grapes, and produce organic wines.

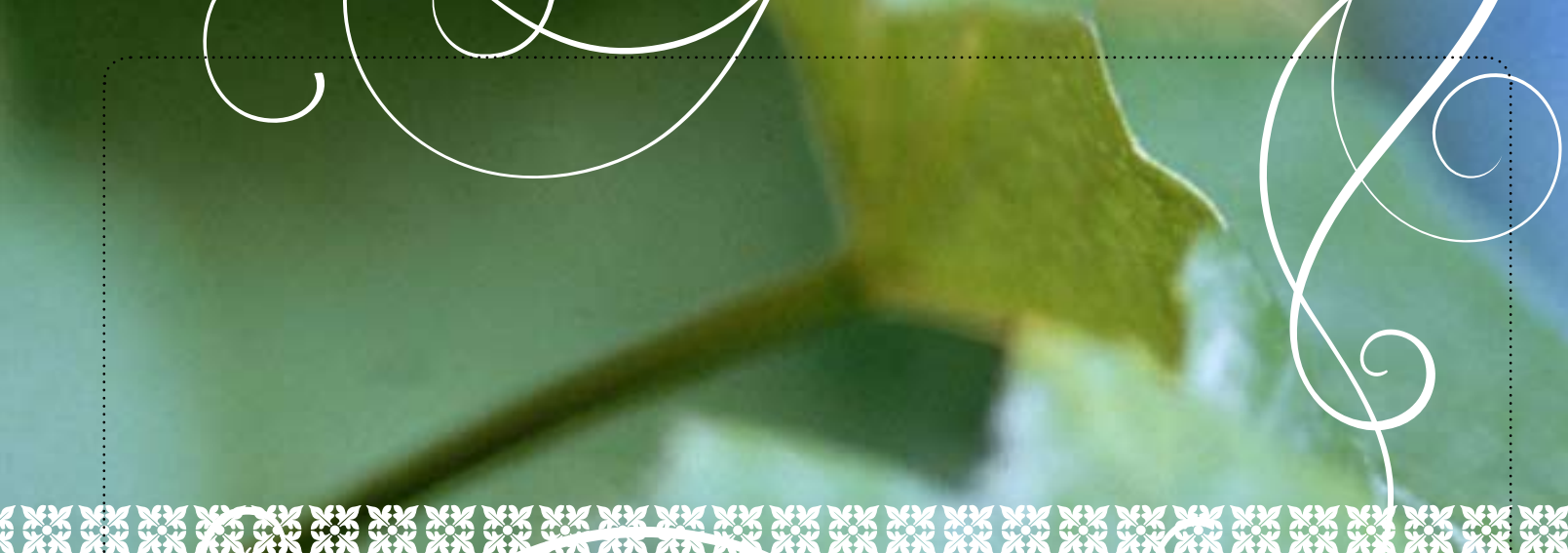
"Many consumers are not aware of the fact that grapes are one of the most heavily sprayed crops, and the pesticides used to protect the grapes, end up as residue in the wine. We could never promote such an unhealthy product. Organic farming may be tedious, since it's all about preventative measures, but it's worth it. It's not about having a niche market, it's about doing the right thing," says Dave.

The Dhillons oversaw all operations personally, exercising great quality control, and employed methods, such as low cropping yields to ensure that the vines and fruits receive the perfect amount of sunshine, water, and nutrients. The grapes were sold to established wineries, such as La Vieux Pin, Summerhill, Dirty Laundry, Township 7, and Blossom Winery.

In the fall of last year, a winery of 1200 square feet was built, and this past summer 7 products were bottled. In conjunction with Ecovitis' sister vineyard in Westbank, the current list consists of a 2007 Chardonnay, 2007 Red Fusion, 2007 Pinot Noir, 2007 Pinot Gris, 2007 Pinot Noir Rose, 2006 Merlot, 2004 Pinot Blanc, and a 2007 late harvest wine. All wines have been awarded the VQA (acronym for Vintners Quality Alliance and only awarded to wines that have been passed through a professional tasting panel) status. Once the newly planted crop comes to fruition, a 2010 Malbec and Sauvignon Blanc will be added to the list.

With the wines ready to be marketed, and having always had the intention of leaving them a legacy, they knew their children had to start being a part of the planning process. The two daughters have business and communications backgrounds while their son has his footing in Plant Sciences. Together, they came up with a marketing concept, created the name, and discussed branding, positioning, and strategy.

The winery was given the name Chandra Estate Winery because the family felt that it reflected their culture and philosophy. Its meaning is twofold. Chandra, derived from the Hindi language, (the 'a' is pronounced as a short vowel 'u') means 'moon god'. From a spiritual perspective, ancient Hindu



myth states that the moon stores Soma (an ancient drink and lunar deity), which was said to be the elixir of immortality consumed by the gods themselves. The moon is said to wane because the gods are drinking away some of its properties and, wax when the gods are not.

Traditionally, gardening practices have also been based on moon phases. The moon's passage has said to exert four distinct elemental influences on a vineyard—water, earth, air, and fire—which are shown through the leaves, roots, fruit, and flower respectively. A rising moon heightens vitality, and a lowering moon influences the sap of the vines. Although the Dhillons don't employ these traditional methods anymore, they feel that Chandra produces the 'Soma' of today.

The wines are receiving amazing reviews with their full-bodied, yet delicate and engaging tones with hints of spice and fruit, and garnering attention from media across the country. Future plans include an on-site gift shop, winery restaurant, and Bed & Breakfast. The wines will also be entered in events, such as the Okanagan spring and fall festivals, Whistler's Cornucopia, and the Vancouver Playhouse International Wine Festival.

Even though the Dhillon's story sounds quite simple, owning a winery has been

anything but easy. The desire to learn, the commitment that follows, and being blessed with the right sensibilities have underpinned the realization of their dream.

"I ended my career 15 years ago from the corrections service, retiring as Assistant Deputy Commissioner of Western Canada. I was used to being a busy man, managing thousands of employees and inmates, and raising a family. Eventually, I grew bored of having nothing to do, and a person can only travel so much. When the property went up

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for sale, I thought it couldn't be that hard in comparison. I'm only dealing with vines and fruit, and I have always been a wine enthusiast at heart. Well, I couldn't have been more wrong. Part of it is a science, but mainly it's about determination and the right mix of people. The consultants, winemakers, kids, and their spouses have been amazing," says Dave.

But Dave is humble. People tend to gravitate to him right away, due to his charismatic and savvy ways--he befriends everyone. It is evident that he is impassioned about the winery. Renowned advocate of BC wine, international judge for wine competitions, and best-selling author, John Schreiner

supports this sentiment. "The surprise at Chandra is to discover that Dave Dhillon worked for 30 years in Canada's corrections service. He has an improbably sweet personality for a jail warden. However, it is exactly the right personality when encountered in the wine shop, melding with the quiet pride (justifiably so) with which he presents Chandra's wines."

Although in its infancy stages, Chandra is open to the public by appointment only until spring of 2009 at which time tasting hours

will apply. It's located in front of Fairview Golf Course and Fairview Cellars, and within close proximity to Gehringer Brothers Winery, Silver Sage Winery, Inskillin, and Tin Horn Creek. Just look for the big signs on the Golden Mile (Road 13), which will direct you to the winery located between Road 5A and Road 7.

Chandra Estate Winery is a unique fusion of culture and wine that is committed to excellence and environmental sustainability. As the Dhillons have demonstrated, you don't need experience to operate a vineyard and winery, just the drive to succeed. How do I know? Because I am the eldest of Dave and Par's three children.