

VQA British Columbia  
 WINE  
Information Centre

2017 Media Kit

#101 – 553 Veas Drive  
Penticton, British Columbia  
[Pentictonwineinfo.com](http://Pentictonwineinfo.com)

## What is BC VQA?

VQA stands for “Vintner’s Quality Alliance”. In British Columbia, it was created in 1990 as a standard to guarantee consumers were drinking wines made from 100% British Columbia grown grapes. Winery participation in the VQA program is voluntary.

The BC VQA program is based on the appellation of origin system (or geographical indication), similar to the AOC and DOC systems used in France and Italy. This guarantees origin and ensure qualifying wines meet a certain minimum of quality requirements. VQA uses a certified tasting panel of trained people who are independent of the wine and grape growing industries. The panel performs a sensory evaluation of each wine submitted for VQA approval to determine the wines are free of faults as specified in VQA regulations. The panel reviews (on average) more than 1,600 wines per year.

BC VQA wines:

- are made of 100% British Columbia grapes
- come from one of the five official regional geographical indications (appellation of origin)
  - or the one official sub-geographical indication
- have 95% of the grapes specified on the label come from the geographical indication
- with 85% of the grapes from the vintage indicated
- must have 85% of the grape varietal as stated

## Who is the BC Wine Information Centre?

We are hold license to sell only VQA wines, presently on a consignment basis operating on behalf of wineries participating in the VQA program. Opened in 1996, we are owned and operated locally by the non-profit BC Wine Information Society and governed by a Board of Directors.

All store profit (above operating costs) is returned to the community through wine industry related charitable donations and scholarships to viticulture programs at Okanagan College. In 2014, the Society donated \$300,000 to the Centre of Excellence for construction of a new Wine Sensory Lab that has become an educational hub for the college’s Food, Wine, and Tourism Program.

Our mandate is to sell and promote BC VQA wines, and offer educational value to consumers on behalf of the BC wine community. Through employing knowledgeable staff who are enthusiastic about the BC wine industry, providing educational tastings and seminars, and representing a wide selection of BC VQA wines, we have positioned the BC Wine Information Centre as an information gateway to British Columbia wines.



## Key Information

### BC Wine Information Centre

Location	#101 – 553 Veas Drive, Penticton, British Columbia
Manager	Laura Kowalchuk <i>since 2007</i>
Established	1996
Owned and Operated by	BC Wine Information Society, <i>a registered not-for-profit society</i>
Board of Directors	Rod King, Chair with Ellen Matthews, Donna Faigaux, and Jeff Omland
Donations to Date	more than \$500,000 <i>at January 2017</i>

### British Columbia Wine

Wineries	275 (at January 2017)
Latitude	49° (similar to the Champagne region in France, and Germany)
Altitudes	300m (near Osoyoos), 600m (Oliver area), 400-480m (Similkameen)
Total Acreage	More than 10,200 acres (4,130 hectares), with 90% planted in the Okanagan and Similkameen valleys
Soils	Varied: glacial till, volcanic ash, clay loam, alluvial fans, silt, sand.
Designated Viticultural Areas (DVAs)	Okanagan Valley, Similkameen Valley, Fraser Valley, Vancouver Island, Gulf Islands and beyond
Sub-Appellation(s)	Golden Mile Bench
Climate	Continental and Maritime Climates (depending on the area) with diurnal range (hot days, cool nights, warm summers, cooler winters)
Most Planted Red Grapes	Merlot, Pinot Noir, Cabernet Sauvignon, Cabernet Franc, Syrah/Shiraz, Gamay Noir
Most Planted White Grapes	Pinot Gris, Chardonnay, Gewürztraminer, Riesling, Sauvignon Blanc, Pinot Blanc, Viognier
Wine Styles	Still, sparkling (traditional method champagne-style, charmat, prosecco-style, injection method), fortified wines, late harvest, icewine.
Economic Impact	The BC wine industry contributes \$2.8 billion annually to the BC economy

## About the BC Wine Information Centre

Founded in 1996, the BC Wine Information Centre was one of the original VQA-specific licenses issued by the British Columbia Wine Institute (BCWI) with a mandate to focus on selling only VQA wines. Established under a consignment model, the BCWI facilitated the opening of these stores throughout the province with each under individual ownership and operated separately. The BC Wine Information Centre was and remains the only VQA retail store of its kind operating as a non-profit under the ownership and direction of the registered not-for-profit BC Wine Information Society.

For more than 20 years, the BC Wine Information Centre has supported the BC wine industry through charitable contributions and by providing scholarships to viticulture students at Okanagan College. As of 2017, these donations and contributions exceed \$500,000.

Over the last two decades, the Centre has evolved and grown. Originally located off Highway 97 behind a hotel, it was slightly off the beaten visitor path in a less visible location. Despite its 'hidden gem' feel, the Centre did well in attracting wine tourists and consumers in the early days of BC wine. By 2005, the Centre found a new home in a more prominent location co-located with Penticton tourism and truly began embracing the 'information centre' part of its name.

When the Society's board of directors recruited store manager Laura Kowalchuk in 2007, the BC Wine Information Centre entered the next phase of growth. The combination of a highly visible location and Laura's attention to customer service invigorated the Centre, introducing a new vibrancy to the retail experience. Suddenly, this small VQA retail store became a must-visit hub for all things wine. Locals and visitors appreciated the increased diversity of wine-related items available, and the Centre earned a strong reputation for excelling in its variety of quality giftware and unique merchandise. Laura and her team received the Penticton Chamber of Commerce Retailer Excellence Award in 2011.

In 2016, the BC Wine Information Centre temporarily relocated (within the parking complex) while awaiting the completion of a new building. Business continued as usual. Under Laura's watch, the team set up shop in a modular unit where guests could feel at home away from home and enjoy the trademark hospitality for which this VQA store is recognized. The staff's efforts proved worthwhile when their new custom retail space opened in April of 2017.

Now situated in a modern 4,500 square foot retail location adjacent to Cascades Casino, the new BC Wine Information Centre is embarking on its next growth phase. As we enter our third decade as champions of BC VQA wines, we find ourselves at a place where we can truly celebrate all that is special about this industry. By sharing our story and making the link between customer support and contribution to the growth of the BC wine industry, the BC Wine Information Centre and Society have reached a place few others in this industry can speak to.

Our focus continues to be solely BC VQA wines. We share our knowledge with consumers through daily wine tastings, special guided wine educational experiences, in-store events, and by inviting partner wineries to sample their wines at our store throughout the year.

After twenty years, we're thrilled to enter the next chapter of our story and that of BC wine.

## Contacts

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