2024 VINTAGE REPORT

WINES OF
BRITISH COLUMBIA

SUMMARY

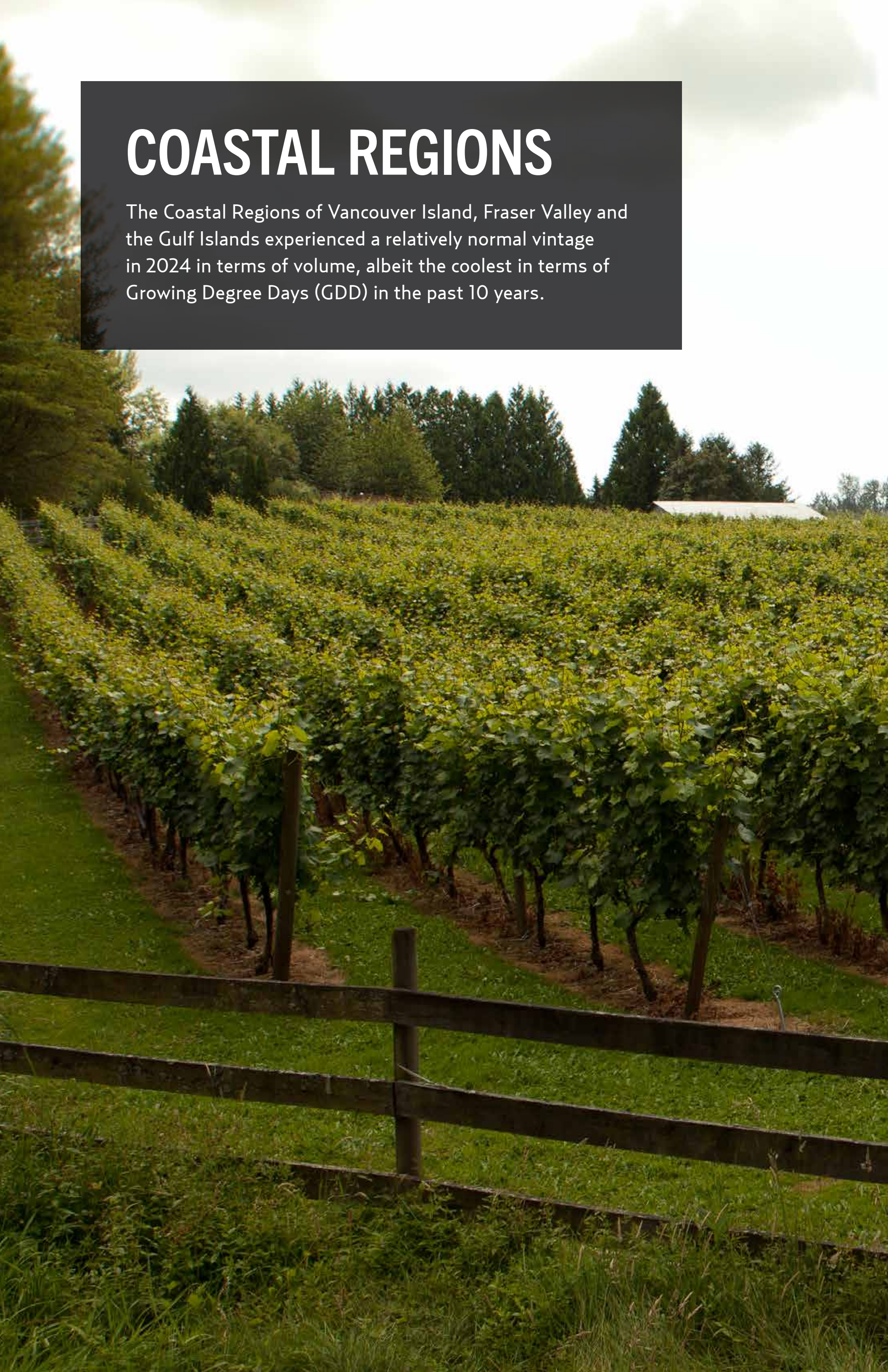
The 2024 vintage was one that illustrated the extreme difference in growing conditions between British Columbia's coastal and interior wine growing regions. Thanks to the immense moderating effect of the Pacific Ocean, coastal regions were able to dodge the extreme cold that vastly reduced yields in the interior of the province for a second year in a row. Coastal regions were able to produce a normal sized crop of vibrant, crisp wines from an overall cool vintage, while the interior produced a tiny crop, what some have dubbed a "micro harvest".

In the interior, the 2024 vintage is one that has tested the resilience of BC wine growers. After a significantly reduced crop in 2023, 2024 was even more devastating, with a January cold event wiping out what is estimated to be over 90% of the crop and necessitating the retraining and in some cases replanting of vineyards. The outcome is a tiny harvest, and many growers having to look to alternative vineyard sources to produce any wine for the 2024 vintage. This has resulted in a unique one-year exemption for wineries to bring in out of province grapes to help keep their businesses economically sustainable.

The upside is that many of the vineyards that initially looked to need replanting actually grew healthy shoots or replacement trunks and while not producing much or any crop, will be able to be retrained ready for a harvest in 2025. Others need to be replanted.

COASTAL REGIONS

The Coastal Regions of Vancouver Island, Fraser Valley and the Gulf Islands experienced a relatively normal vintage in 2024 in terms of volume, albeit the coolest in terms of Growing Degree Days (GDD) in the past 10 years.




WHALES, WILDERNESS AND WINE
VANCOUVER ISLAND
BC VQA
A FERRY-TALE ADVENTURE
GULF ISLANDS
SIGNED
BC VQA
HERE'S TO THE RURAL LIFE
FRASER VALLEY
BC VQA

VANCOUVER ISLAND & GULF ISLANDS

VANCOUVER ISLAND

Vancouver Island and the Gulf Islands typically share similar growing conditions. For the 2024 vintage, budbreak timing was reported as normal for most producers, as was flowering and veraison. A fairly warm start to the summer looked like it was setting up for another excellent vintage before temperatures cooled off and slowed down ripening in the fall. These lower temperatures combined with higher fall precipitation increased disease pressure and growers had to be diligent in their canopy management to avoid botrytis and mildew issues. The resulting crop was of good quality but varied in quantity. Most growers reported wines that are light, juicy, with lower alcohol and vibrant, fresh acidity.

GDD was 1000 at North Cowichan, the coolest since 2012.

GDD was 887 at Saturna Island, the coolest in 10 years.

FRASER VALLEY

The vintage got off to a cooler start in the Fraser Valley with some producers reporting late budbreak and flowering and some rare, isolated spring frost damage. There was some rain at flowering which caused issues with yields and maintaining spray schedules. Veraison was delayed and things cooled off after that, pointing towards a potentially late harvest. Wet conditions followed causing significant disease pressure and harvest was a couple of weeks behind recent vintages, with some growers deciding to pick early at lower brix with crisp acidity to avoid further damage to the grapes. The wines are reported to be lean, crisp and fresh, much of which is ideal for the sparkling wine production of the region.

GDD was 902 at Langley Central, the coolest since 2012.

INTERIOR REGIONS

The well-documented deep freeze in January 2024 caused enormous turmoil for wine growers in the interior regions. All interior regions were impacted as the cold arctic air dipped temperatures to between -22°C to -30°C and below in some areas. The sustained period of low temperatures caused significant bud death and, in many cases, full top loss of buds, with growth in the spring limited to new shoots emerging from close to the ground. Some vines were killed and those vineyards will be replanted in 2025.

The sporadic and late emergence of some secondary and mostly tertiary buds over a period of six to eight weeks from vines that didn't experience top loss made for a very late start to the growing season. This caused uneven growth as leaves, shoots and any clusters were all at varying stages of growth. This made for difficult vineyard management. The good news was that many vines originally thought to be killed can be retrained from the secondary and tertiary shoots, or from the healthy-looking new shoots from the base that can be retrained as new trunks and ready to produce a crop in 2025.

There were some pockets of small grape production in the interior regions in 2024 with a seemingly random pattern of different varieties in different locations surviving and producing a crop, albeit of significantly lower yields in most situations. The small crop of grapes experienced significant pressure from birds and bears, all hungry due to the lack of food sources in the region (all tree fruits in the region were impacted by the cold). Regions such as the Thompson Valley, accustomed to dealing with cold temperatures and using techniques like burying vines, achieved up to 80% of a normal yield with their vinifera grapes.

Overall, the interior growing season is hard to summarize, due to the delayed growth and resultant vines at different stages, but even with GDD close to average or slightly warmer in most regions, all key growth stages were late. Ironically, the growing season was ideal with no issues of smoke from forest fires and fairly consistent temperatures without any excessive heat spikes. There just weren't enough grapes to enjoy it.

The delayed growth (and in some cases early picking due to animal pressure) resulted in grapes with higher acid and lower brix and wines that are fresh, crisp, fruity and bright with lower alcohol levels.


WHERE THE NORTH AND SOUTH MEET
THOMPSON VALLEY
BC VQA
A RIVER OF DISCOVERY
KOOTENAYS
BC VQA
WHERE THE SUN COMES TO PLAY
OKANAGAN VALLEY
BC VQA
LILLOOET
RICH IN HISTORY AND WINE
BC VQA
BC VQA
SIMILKAMEEN VALLEY
A RIVER RUNS THROUGH IT
LAKE, COUNTRY, CULTURE
SHUSWAP
BC VQA

OKANAGAN VALLEY & SIMILKAMEEN VALLEY

OKANAGAN VALLEY & SIMILKAMEEN VALLEY

The two largest production regions of the Okanagan Valley and Similkameen Valley were significantly hit by the cold events with production down well over 90% of a normal vintage. The damage was mixed. Some vines produced shoots without any crop, some vines experienced full top loss but can be retrained with new trunks from the base while others were killed altogether. Some vineyards were able to produce small crops, mostly in areas close to nearby moderating lakes such as Naramata Bench and parts of Osoyoos. Certain varieties seem to have been hit harder than others, though no variety was completely spared. Syrah, known for producing some of the best wines in the interior was hit particularly hard but many growers have expressed that they will replant the variety.

THOMPSON VALLEY

The Thompson Valley with its northern latitude is more used to dealing with potentially damaging cold and many growers already have practices in place to protect the vinifera vines, or they grow winter hardy hybrids that can withstand the cold. Because of this, yields were not as affected as significantly as most other interior regions.

“This year all our Thompson Valley vinifera vines have been buried again. This is where we’ve ended up as geotextiles were giving us about a 4–5° C improvement in air temperature, but with Thompson Valley temperatures reaching -31° C two years in a row that still wasn’t enough. Overall, our hybrid varieties had a normal yield and with burying, our Pinot Noir, Chardonnay and Riesling all produced around 3 tons per acre.” Galen Barnhardt, winemaker at Monte Creek Winery.

LILLOOET

The Lillooet GI also experienced very low temperatures in mid-January and while growers were initially expecting no crop, they were rewarded by some resilient vines producing quality grapes, albeit a small amount.

"Initially anticipating 100% loss of crop, we were pleasantly surprised when our Riesling and Cabernet Franc did better than expected. Overall, we ended up producing 32% of our normal crop." Heleen Pannekoek, Co-owner & founder of Fort Berens Estate Winery.

SHUSWAP & KOOTENAYS

SHUSWAP & KOOTENAYS

Like the other interior areas, both the Shuswap and Kootenays experienced damaging winter temperatures that caused significant bud damage in vinifera varieties. Pockets of hardy hybrid plantings were able to survive the cold and produce a crop while the vinifera was largely lost.

GROWING DEGREE DAYS INTERIOR REGIONS

REGION	GDD 2024	AVERAGE (LAST 5 YRS)
Lillooet	1623	1628
Shuswap (Salmon Arm)	1153	1182
Thompson (Kamloops)	1553	1510
Kootenays (Creston)	1357	1386
Similkameen (Cawston)	1527	1567
Okanagan (Osoyoos)	1674	1712
Okanagan (Oliver)	1550	1512
Okanagan (Penticton)	1373	1415
Okanagan (Summerland)	1464	1482
Okanagan (Kelowna)	1318	1392

NON-BC REPLACEMENT WINES

The loss of most of the 2024 wine crop in British Columbia puts growers and producers under significant financial pressure. In order to alleviate some of the stress and to help winegrowers be economically sustainable, wineries have been allowed to bring in grapes or juice from outside of British Columbia for the 2024 vintage. Normally this would require a change to the winery license type, but a one-year exemption has been granted to those wineries who need to bring in outside grapes to remain financially resilient. As of March 31, 2025, 73 BC wineries have 'Crafted in BC' wines registered with the BCLDB, while others have different business models or high enough stock levels to ride out a missed vintage. At time of writing, British Columbia is home to 306 licensed grape wineries.

With the retraining of new trunks and many vines producing tertiary shoots albeit with no fruit, vineyards should be ready to produce a reduced but significant crop in 2025 and be back to 100% British Columbia wine production. New plantings from 2024 and 2025 will likely come into production in 2026 to 2027.

FUTURE-READY AND RESILIENT

A significant and devastating crop loss provokes contemplation and stimulates thoughts of how to be more resilient and better prepared for similar events in the future. Decades of moderate winters meant that tried and trusted techniques, such as hilling up vines, were no longer being widely practiced. The reflection on what took place has meant that growers have developed robust plans to help deal with future cold events. Techniques such as hilling up, using straw or geotextiles to insulate, burying backup canes, second trunks and more creative ideas are all being explored and utilized.

Growers who lost their vines have the opportunity to replant with varieties better suited to the site, the market and the climate, all contributing to a more resilient infrastructure for the future.

*For a French version of this report, please contact info@winebc.com

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