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MEDIA RELEASE

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Canada’s winemakers get in on ‘secret’ Fizz Club

As Canadians decide on beverages to serve during the holidays, a growing number will buy sparkling wines, much of it Canadian made.

Consumers are choosing bubbly like never before – sparkling wine sales in Ontario jumped nearly 12 per cent this year alone.

Against that backdrop, 40 of Canada’s top sparkling winemakers journeyed to Brock University this week for a clandestine meeting that has come to be known as Fizz Club. No media or sales agents here: This off-the-record gathering is where industry professionals compare notes, discuss production and talk candidly in a closed-door setting with a members-only feel.

Organized by Brock’s Cool Climate Oenology and Viticulture Institute and led by Brock scientist Belinda Kemp, the meeting also gives winemakers the opportunity to hear about research developments and openly discuss issues relating to sparkling wine production.

This year’s fourth annual Fizz Club focused on rosé sparkling wine, drawing attendees from across Ontario and Quebec, while one British Columbia winemaker sent in wines for feedback.

Wednesday’s gathering also had a bonus attraction. Bernard Richet, an expert from France’s Institut Oenologique de Champagne, spoke for more than an hour about techniques that European winemakers use to deal with the delicate challenges of holding the colour and fruity flavours in rosé sparkling wines.

“What he said was incredibly helpful and important, giving people knowledge they can use,” said Kemp, an oenologist whose research specializes in sparkling

wines. “People told us it was valuable to have an international speaker of this background. One grower said it provided new approaches to consider using in their operation.”

Fizz Club has come into its own at a time when both consumption and production of sparkling wine is rising in Ontario.

“Sparkling wine is not just for celebrations anymore,” said member Emma Garner, winemaker at Thirty Bench in Beamsville, Ont.

The numbers bear it out. In terms of sparkling wines last year, sales of imports rose 11.9 per cent, while Ontario VQA shot up 10.5 per cent, representing total sales of \$4 million.

“Ontario wineries clearly have everything it takes to make great rosé and sparkling wines and to craft great brands,” said Astrid Brummer, category manager for Ontario wines at the LCBO. “However, the fact that VQA sales represent just 3.5 per cent of overall sparkling sales tells me that there is enormous opportunity for Ontario brands to steal share from the luxury Champagne or super-cool Prosecco segments.”

Grabbing a larger share of the market is typically what Fizz Club conversations focus on. For Marc Théberge, a sparkling winemaker from Quebec, attending Fizz Club gave him an opportunity to hear insight into Ontario trends.

“It’s always fun to hear different perspectives,” Théberge said. “It was nice to be able to see production trends in Ontario Rosé and the differences between our provinces.”

Scientists like Kemp also realize a gathering like Fizz Club is something special.

“I’ve never heard of this type of winemakers-only forum – where they spend a day focusing on one wine style, sharing ideas and real-time research findings – happening anywhere else,” she said.

Fizz Club also showcases the research of Brock students to a roomful of Canada’s top winemakers. Both undergrad and graduate students play direct roles in research that benefits Ontario’s wine industry, a hands-on culture that Kemp says helps Brock oenology and viticulture graduates maintain an employment record of more than 90 per cent.

“It is a unique opportunity for undergrads to get training in sparkling wine production and be part of research projects that directly assist the industry and have economic impact.”

For more information or for assistance arranging interviews:

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