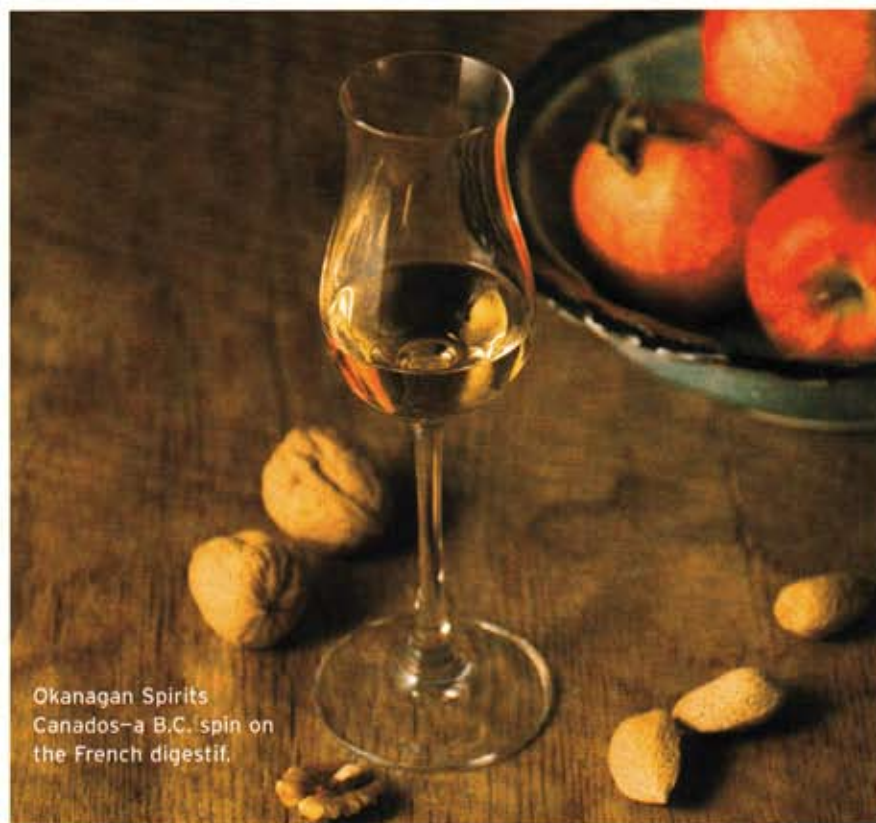


# RIPE OPPORTUNITY

Where winemakers see waste, Okanagan Spirits' Frank Deiter sees money. The story of a former forester who's turning rotten fruit into award-winning spirits. BY CHRISTINA BURRIDGE



Okanagan Spirits  
Canados—a B.C. spin on  
the French digestif.

**F**runk Deiter retired to Vernon after 30 years in the forest industry. He looked at the Okanagan orchards and was shocked by the waste. “Fifty percent of the fruit was just left on the ground to rot. Being from Germany, I figured I had to find something to do with it.” He was a longtime connoisseur of eaux de vie—fruit brandies—and was both frustrated and intrigued by the impossibility, in the midst of all this fruit, to find local high quality distilled products. Why not turn waste into taste?

He spent most of a year figuring out how to do it, mainly by spending hands-on time at top artisan distillers in Germany, Austria and Italy. In 2004 he came back home and applied for a distillery licence for Okanagan Spirits, happily unaware that B.C. had only two weeks earlier changed its regulations making his small-scale operation possible for the first time. By that fall, his copper pot still was bubbling away with apples, pears, cherries and plums, all the Okanagan's excess ripe fruit. A few months later, he took his

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**THE WINE ATLAS OF CANADA** *By Tony Aspler*  
Aspler has spent 30 years writing about wine—he's met just about everyone and been everywhere. His new *Wine Atlas* is the most comprehensive guide to Canadian wine—especially useful for all those Ontario wines that we never see in B.C. (Random House Canada, \$60)



## DISTILLED EXCELLENCE

Three top picks from Frank Deiter's Okanagan Spirits:

### OKANAGAN SPIRITS CANADOS

① \$39.99/375 mL. A Canadian Calvados that beats just about anything from Normandy on the LDB shelves. Light gold, fragrant with apples, and a lovely baked apple and spice finish. Not just a perfect digestif but delicious in chicken baked in apple cider or splashed into a pan of apples sautéed in butter.

### OKANAGAN SPIRITS OLD ITALIAN PRUNE

② \$45/375 mL. Barrel-aged to the colour of light maple syrup to give it additional, Christmas puddingy notes of figs, prunes, raisins and nuts. Exceptionally good after dinner. This was the gold medal winner at the 2006 World Spirits Championship.

### OKANAGAN SPIRITS POIRE WILLIAMS

③ \$39.99/375 mL. As with his other products, Deiter excels at bringing out the essential fruit flavours. Shut your eyes, put your nose in the glass and it's just like picking a basket of ripe pears straight off the tree. Aromatic as a misty morning in an autumn orchard.

Okanagan Spirits has cedar box gift packs of two and six bottles, complete with the right glasses to enjoy them. Direct from the distillery: 250-549-3120, Okanaganspirits.com

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first three products to the World Spirits Championship in Austria and scored three medals, one gold and two silvers. In January of this year, he repeated his success—nine products and nine medals, five of them gold.

Getting the licence, getting the fruit and making prizewinning spirits turned out to be the easy part. The distribution—getting his bottles into the hands of restaurants, wine stores and consumers—nearly killed him. Unlike an Okanagan winery, Deiter can't sell direct to restaurants. In 2005 when he started out, supplying a restaurant across the street in Vernon with one bottle of his Poire Williams meant shipping a case of 12 bottles to Vancouver to the LDB warehouse—and waiting for the LDB to ship it back, first to Kamloops, then to Vernon. A roundtrip of almost 1,000 kilometres.

Earlier this year, James Kendal, general manager of Vancouver Island's very expensive Aerie Resort, wrote an open letter to the LDB and the restaurant trade decrying the lack of listings in the LDB: “You make one of the best Poire Williams in the world so that begs the question why would I buy a product from France when I can buy yours?” The problem was that Kendal couldn't. As of August, this has changed with six Okanagan Spirits now listed by the LDB and available in restaurants throughout the province.

Besides the six, Deiter has expanded into another 16 different products with more to come—all eaux de vie, grappa or digestifs. There's apple and crab apple, pear and several different kinds of plum, cherries, choke cherries, apricots, raspberry, saskatoons, blackberries, blackcurrants, cranberries and no less than six different varietal grappas using byproducts mainly from the nearby Gray Monk estate winery. The defining characteristic of all of them is what Deiter calls “truth”—fruit flavour with no additives. When your morning strawberry yogurt with “natural flavour” has never seen a strawberry, this is something to be valued.

Deiter has a dream—to buy a second still. And a vision. In Germany's Black Forest, there are 22,000 distilleries. He thinks the Okanagan could support 20-30 artisan stills within five years—but only if the government changes the rules. ●