

dining with the Gods

God's Table set for a heavenly feast

photos Stephanie Seaton

Alfresco dining at God's Mountain Estate

by Joyce D Wegner

It is a glimpse into heaven, especially for non-believers who resist the gilded glory of the traditional hereafter. The automatic gate at the end of the long driveway silently swings open and the winding road between the vineyards leads you to rustic parking area tucked under the trees not far from the main building where a well-worn timber door stands open awaiting your arrival.

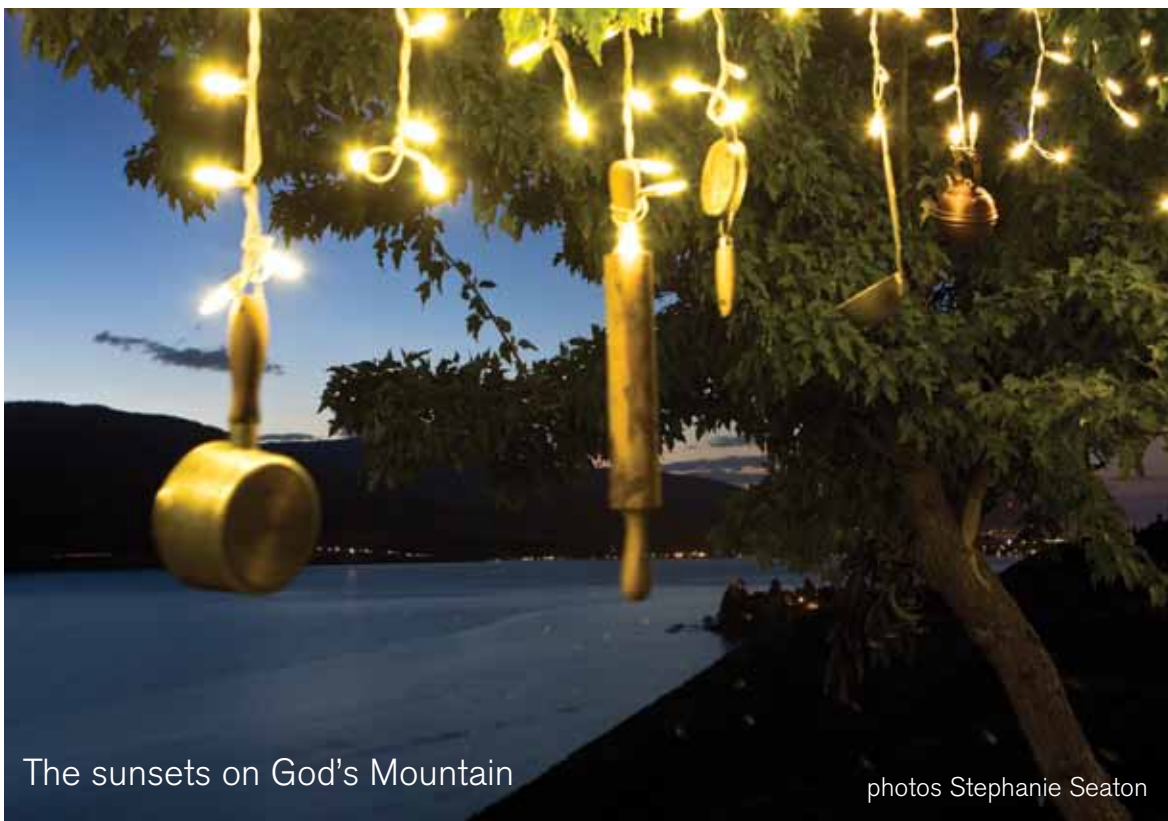
A large furry white mutt casually saunters over to take a sniff as you exit your vehicle. He's the four-legged version of St. Peter - the official greeter to God's Mountain. His name is Luna and he wears the regal bearing and face of a Pyrenees Mountain dog and the friendly demeanor of a collie. Luna gently herds you towards the open door of the office that is like everything in this magical place - unadorned by signage. Richard, one of the three permanent residents at the estate is calmly deciphering from thick Swedish accents as a newly arrived young couple patiently spell out their names in halting English. Triumphant, Richard scribbles a quick check mark in pencil upon the ledger and welcomes the couple to the estate. I'm invited to join them as he takes us on a tour of the buildings and surrounding grounds.

Our respective rooms are clean, simple and very cozy. I'm thrilled with the view of Skaha Lake outside the large picture windows of my sitting room. A large futon couch covered with embroidered pillows beckons me to sprawl upon it and memorize every detail of the scene before me. The scarlet geraniums stuffed and blossoming in planters outside my window, the worn wooden bench with its decorative wrought iron frame set inside the cozy courtyard outside my door, the earthen tiles where Zola, the dingo dog, lies in a dreamless slumber under the outstretched canopy of a nearby Mountain Ash. I recall the Spanish proverb in their brochure, "How beautiful it is to do nothing and then rest afterward." It is tempting, but I must change for dinner.

It is a quick stroll from my room along a gravel pathway to the front of the estate where a long table is elegantly set upon the front lawn. The white linen tablecloth stirs gently in the breeze as the crystal sparkles capturing the fading rays of the long day's summer sun. There are a dozen chairs placed on either side in a farm style manner. A server in a crisp white uniform greets me with a glass of Pinot Gris from Laughing Stock Wines. Guests spill out randomly beyond the grand-style staircase that extends from the large portico embracing the ornate façade of the main house.

“How beautiful it is to
do nothing and then rest
afterward.” *Spanish proverb*

I wander up the staircase to take a peek into the main drawing rooms. Large cozy couches and overstuffed chairs are tucked between an eclectic display of antiques that capture your attention and imagination. My eyes linger on the over-size vintage portraits and landscapes that decorate the walls. Hand-woven rugs bravely resisting the ravages of time and traffic stretch from end to end in a subtle blend of floral patterns. A hand-carved chess set stands on guard on a mahogany table while upon another 'The Ultimate Cigar Encyclopedia' rests beside a hardcover edition of the 'Best of James Herriott'. Like my room, I'm tempted to fold myself into the contours of a couch to study every detail of my surroundings. But, I hear the dinner bell ring from outside the open window proclaiming the beginning of my Alfresco dining experience.



The sunsets on God's Mountain

photos Stephanie Seaton



Servers weave amid the group offering trays full of appetizers that pair excellently with Laughing Stock Winery's Pinot Gris. Locally produced Prosciutto wrapped around freshly picked melon is the first savory sample from the creative genius of Dana Ewart and Cameron Smith from Joy Road Catering Company. I meet four men from New Zealand who are thrilled to participate in this event. "We have wine in New Zealand," one admits with a grin. "But we like the wines here very much too."

The next teaser is a crispy God's Mountain apple slaw over a puff of slightly toasted fresh goat cheese. The tangy slaw curls itself seductively around the melting cheese in a naughty but nice blend of texture and taste that is hard to resist. So, I don't and indulge in a few more before I head to my seat at the table.

The first course is paired with a stunning Chardonnay. Cynthia and Dave, the owners of Laughing Stock Wines, are seated next to me. Dana, our diner host invites Dave, also the winemaker, to introduce us to his Chardonnay. He has a friendly and receptive audience of foodies and wine enthusiasts who attentively listen to his every word.

"This Chardonnay was aged in puncheons using 200 year-old french oak that influences caramelized flavours in the wine," Dave explains. Puncheons are over-sized barrels that hold 500 liters of juice (more than double the standard). At first sip, the Chardonnay arrives with a bolder presence than the Pinot Gris we'd been drinking earlier. The fruit is softer, the tannins smoother and with a hint of oak it promises to be a contender with our next course of Black Cod, sweet garlic sauce, homemade pancetta, cippolini onions with freshly shucked corn and oregano.

Yet before we begin, Dana has something important to share with all of us. First, Amos, the adorable husky/golden retriever that has made himself visible during the reception is unveiled as the reincarnate of the Artful Dodger from Dickens. "No, he doesn't steal food," Dana explains. "He steals wallets, from your back pockets, while you're dining. So, please anyone with a wallet in their back pocket, make sure to hide it from Amos."

So, wallets safely tucked away, Dana asks us to bow our heads in prayer for the "God's Mountain Grace." In this heavenly place, all heads bow as Dana inspires us with a local ode of appreciation to the bounty of our region. A chorus of "Amens" arrives in time to enjoy the next course.

The fun begins with the arrival of Blind Trust, Laughing Stock's tribute to their former lives in the financial sector where the contents of a blind trust are typically kept under seal. Dave explains, "When you purchase this bottle, you are trusting the winemaker. And to test your knowledge of wine, I invite you to guess what blends this wine is made from."

The sipping and the chatting grow excitedly while Dave and Cynthia encourage the enthusiasm. Finally, Dave reveals that the label on the bottleneck actually peels back to reveal the composition. It's a great conversation starter. Deep, dark, and inky, this complex blend of Merlot, Cabernet Sauvignon, Cabernet Franc, Malbec and Petit Verdot is a stalwart companion to Joel's Venison sausage with roasted eggplant, tapenade and cherry tomatoes set in a roasted red pepper sauce.

As the sun sinks behind the distant hills and the glow from the candles illuminate our culinary convivial, our servers quietly steal away our empty plates and replenish our drink.



Diners feast in farm style fashion

Saving the best for last is Laughing Stock's Portfolio – Gold medal winner at the Canadian Wine Awards. This is a wine that will snuggle into your wine cellars and become your absolute best friend in a few years. Richly layered it effortlessly enhances the flavours of our next two courses from the succulent roasted lamb, heirloom tomatoes and wild chantrelle mushrooms to the dark chocolate mousse and honeycomb.

Locally roasted coffee signals the demise of our dream dinner. Reluctantly guests hug each other in the European tradition of newfound friendships and retire for the evening. I follow the lit pathway to my room where a soft lamp glows in the window. I

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realize I don't even have a key to my door. A warm breeze softly dances with the drapes and I sink into my bed. The sandman arrives unannounced and I awaken refreshed the next morning.

I hear “clop, clop” outside my window. As I wipe the sleep from my eyes, I see a white horse standing in the courtyard nibbling on the flowers. At first I think I'm still dreaming as he appears translucent in the morning sun but after a few chews, Sara, my host arrives and shoos him away.

I lean out my window. “Who is that?” I ask.

“Oh, that's Sir Grey,” Sara laughs. “He's my daughter's horse. He's 23 now and diagnosed with cancer. I don't have the heart to pen him in, so he wanders through the grounds.”

Sara hustles away to prepare for breakfast and I quickly change to join her. The cozy dining room offers a feast of morning's repast. Freshly baked croissants, whole grain bread, and peach/almond coffee cakes are tempting for the sweet tooth. While steaming hot plates hold scrambled eggs, homemade potato latkes, and a selection of bacon and small sausages. Cheery tableware and bunny coffee mugs coax smiles from the most reluctant risers.

I'd like to stay forever. The absence of the influences of the outside world – no televisions or telephones in your room, no radios blaring, no rules posted, no signs to follow, no room service, no room keys to lose is a blissful state of surrender. This is a simple place with outstanding views, food, service, and ambiance. Sara reminds me as I say goodbye. “Please don't call us a resort,” she implores. “We're rustic in our own way. Like Yellow Point Lodge on the Island.”

I wave goodbye to Sara and descend God's Mountain slowly returning to my mortal existence. Sir Grey, the beautiful white horse whinnies to me as I pass him in the vineyards. I swear I can see wings...

www.godsmountain.com
www.joyroadcatering.com