

Okanagan's Ex Nihilo Vineyards Partners with the Rolling Stones *Lip-smacking ice wine devilishly designed to give satisfaction*

By Wendy Wright

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Quidvis est possible. In English, anything is possible. Especially when you create something out of nothing. Spend some time with Jeff and Decoa Harder of Ex Nihilo Vineyards and Celebrity Cellars Canada and you will understand this tenfold and maybe learn some Latin as well.

The Harders are dedicated and passionate innovators and are part of British Columbia's Okanagan Valley wine scene. This May saw the culmination of not one, but two of their dreams.

First, they have captivated Canadian palates with the inaugural release of their premium 2005 Ex Nihilo Vineyards Merlot and 2006 Ex Nihilo Vineyards Riesling. At the same time, they captured international acclaim with the release of their 2004 Rolling Stones Sympathy for the Devil VQA Pinot Noir Ice wine. That's right, rock royalty partnered with a Kelowna winery to produce a spectacular Ice wine, iconic red lips and all.

For a couple who awoke one morning five years ago with only a dream of owning a vineyard and winery in the valley they love, this presented a demanding timeline. Find, purchase and develop the land, negotiate licenses, call in the partners, add in the births of their three sons, and they could have filmed a winery start-up meets extreme life extravaganza rock n' roll reality show.

And why Ex Nihilo? *Ex nihilo* in Latin means "out of nothing," as in *creatio ex nihilo*, or "creation out of nothing." It is also the title of the renowned Ex Nihilo sculpture Frederick Hart created for the Washington National Cathedral's west façade. The Harders viewed a

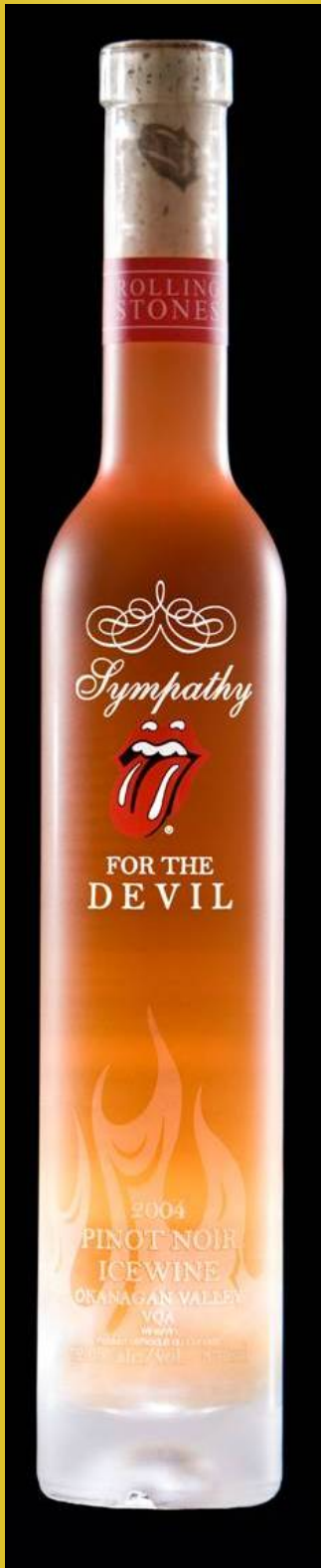
replica of this piece in San Francisco and were immediately enthralled by the simplicity of life and beauty from nothing.

Exactly how did all this lead to the Rolling Stones? Jeff (the ultimate fan) was served Rolling Stones Cabernet Sauvignon at a VIP dinner hosted by the band in San Francisco. He then realized there might be a niche to develop a Canadian ice wine with the greatest band in the world. Eventually the Harders formed Celebrity Cellars Canada, which is the northern extension of Martin Erlichman's Celebrity Cellars of Los Angeles, producers of Celine Dion, Madonna and KISS vintages. The ice wine project took three years to develop. "It's hard to tie the boys down for a business meeting," noted Harder. The Stones approved the concept while touring in Belgium in June 2007, and production was in full-swing from that point on.

Of course, this occurred exactly as the estate vineyards at Ex Nihilo were being planted – 8 acres of Pinot Gris, Pinot Noir and Riesling under the watchful eye of Okanagan Valley grape growing guru, Karnail Sidhu. The vineyard site is gorgeous, with the soil and climate perfectly suited to the chosen varieties and the southwest facing slopes all fully overlooking Okanagan Lake.

Decoa reflects on the first time they walked the steep, un-touched hillside. "We realized at that moment we had found our Ex Nihilo," she says, "the land where we could commit to creating wines that would reveal its beauty and essence." This estate planting com-

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plemented the Harders' two leased vineyard sites in Westbank and Okanagan Falls, bringing their total acres under vine to 18. Ex Nihilo Vineyards are in the idyllic Okanagan Centre neighbourhood – the same locale as Arrowleaf and Gray Monk Wineries (across the road and down the hill respectively), which is famed Pinot Gris and Pinot Noir growing land.

A tasting of the inaugural Ex Nihilo vintages shows the prowess of the winemakers - Dr. Allan Marks, Graham Pierce and Rob Thieleck. Separately and together, this team of skilled vintners has worked wine mastery at many famed Okanagan wineries such as Summerhill, Mount Boucherie and Black Hills.

2006 Ex Nihilo Riesling - 100% Riesling, with 10 g/L residual sugar, there is enough sweetness delivering an intensely layered mouth feel. Then the crisp acidity lifts the mouthwatering passion fruit and citrus palate to lofty heights. And what a nose! Peaches, fresh apples and pink grapefruit enchant the senses. **\$22 a bottle. 500 cases produced.**

2005 Ex Nihilo Merlot - 100% Merlot, the wine received some thoughtful cellaring in 50% new and 50% used French and American for 18 months, plus another 12 months in bottle prior to release. This is a stunningly rich Merlot, with soft berry and spicy Christmas cake aromas

leading into a full, silky attack, rich berries on the mid-palate and an incredible finish. **\$42 a bottle. 100 cases produced.**

2004 Rolling Stones Sympathy for the Devil Pinot Noir VQA Ice Wine - From one of the best vineyard sites in the world to nurture perfect ice wine grapes. Very classy and unique – this is simply the nectar of the gods. *Wine Spectator* noted "This rare wine is enchanting and a little sinful." Each bottle is individually hand numbered. **222 cases produced**

Now that the Harders have demonstrated what committing to a dream or two really means, what's next? Ex Nihilo plans to have a tasting room open in May 2010 and will be releasing their Pinot Noir and Pinot Gris in the next two years. Currently the wines are available at select British Columbia retailers and restaurants or directly from the winery.

Currently, the Harders are launching Ex Nihilo Napa Valley, a partnership with Jeff's brother James Harder of the prestigious Nine North Wine Company, located in the valley's Stag's Leap District. With this venture, Celebrity Cellars Canada will be releasing a VQA Riesling ice wine plus an imported Napa Valley Meritage that might help get some... *satisfaction!*

For more information, go to sales@exnihilovineyards.com and www.rollingstonesicewine.com. •

Wendy Wright graduated from the Toronto ISG diploma program in 2007 and has been living, writing about and thoroughly enjoying the Okanagan Valley wine industry since 2003.