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Top picks from Top Drop

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From left to right, the Alta Alella, Blanquette, Masseria, Truchard and Yangarra. — Contributed photo

Somehow, I've built a career that involves attending various wine events around the world.

Last week, though, I didn't even have to get on a plane! The draw to stay home was Vancouver's very own [Top Drop](#) on May 22-24. Co-directors Kurtis Kolt and Jeff Curry founded the trade and consumer festival just four years ago. "We're still making this up as we go along," jokes Kolt. Adding a couple of last-minute events leading up to the two-day festival meant it spilled over into a third day.

New this year was a keynote address. California-based wine writer [Elaine Chukan Brown](#) set the tone, highlighting the cornerstone of Top Drop, which is authenticity. "Wines that have clear links to their origins," she explains. Participating wineries are family owned – some bigger, some smaller.

The festival encompasses trade seminars, wine dinners and even a Wine Séance Rave. Then there is the main event: a walk-about, freestyle tasting for all. In the casual setting of the Roundhouse in Yaletown, it has an intimate, unpretentious feel. This year, Top Drop managed to attract iconic wineries like Vietti from Barolo and Chappellet from Napa Valley, hip new BC ventures such as Synchronesh and Roche Wines, as well as lesser-known curiosities like Luxembourg sparkling wine producer Caves Bernard Massard. And every table was manned by engaging personalities – often the winemaker, winery owner or family member.

“This is not a money-making venture, but a passion venture,” Chukan reminded us. Proceeds from Top Drop support the [BC Hospitality Foundation](#) and Kolt estimates the event raised more than \$5,000.

I didn't make it to all 30-plus tables simply because the conversations at each were far too interesting, and I ran out of time. Nevertheless, here are a just a few standouts.

Carmel & Joseph, Brut, Blanquette de Limoux AOC, France, \$28.99 at BC Liquor Stores

Limoux is a southern French region producing sparkling wine based on the obscure Mauzac grape. Scents of apple blossoms and pastry dough lead to lots of fresh orchard fruit and zippy acidity.

2016 Alta Alella, Pansa Blanca, Alella DO, Spain, \$22-25 at private wine stores

Pansa Blanca is the local name for Xarel-lo, one of the white grapes traditionally blended to make Cava. Here, you get to taste it on its own, in a still wine. White pear, anise and almond notes with a driving minerality and salty edge.

2014 Truchard, Roussanne, Carneros, California, \$43-45 at private wine stores

Looking for something different from California? Truchard is one of the few producers that has embraced Roussanne, a beautiful but lesser-known Rhône Valley variety. Apricot, cantaloupe and hyacinth meet citrus zest and vanilla in this judiciously oaked, rich but juicy white.

2014 Yangarra Estate, Old Vine Grenache, McLaren Vale, Australia, \$32.99 at BC Liquor Stores

While raspberry and boysenberry notes jump from the glass, this ain't just a simple fruity Grenache. Nuances of cocoa, thyme and laurel add complexity and intrigue. I love the dry, savoury, lingering finish.

2013 Masseria Li Veli 'Askos' Malvasia Nera IGT Salento, Italy \$35-37 at private wine stores

Puglia's Malvasia Nera di Brindisi grape usually plays a small supporting in blends but Askos is a rare example where it shines on its own. Fragrant lilac, cherry, tobacco and licorice flavours ride the wave of soft layered tannin.

Prices exclusive of taxes.

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