

NAPA NORTH:

THE TERROIR! THE TERROIR!

aesthetics and politics
of land use



BY HENRY TSANG

Terroir l? suyiapx 4aks n"qʷəlqʷaltn-nməcin l?təmχʷulaχʷ isʒac'əs tali ʒast
l?4uqʷlaχʷ ʒiya4nχʷ lak'in ac plal l_kyir'r's. Itli ki 4ʷuləl l? qʷamqʷamt siu4kʷ.



IMAGES COURTESY OF HENRY TSANG

Terroir is a French term that denotes the special characteristics of geography that bestow individuality on the wine, the result of combining soil, climate, sun, air, environment and grapes; it's an expression of the place from which the wine comes.

lʔ sʰalʰʰalt tali qʷicʰt t_ʰskʷul, naʰamʰ tʰac ʰwʰsʰwʰusəlʰ swit ilʰlʰ ʰkʷkʷʰʰast
 cʰalʰ ilʰlʰ sən cʰalʰxtn məʰ kʷakʷʰulst kʰal sən kʷakʷʰulstn. lckənəlʰ lʰpʰuʰkʷla
 (golf) kəm ʰwʰaʰwʰist kʰal sqʷanʰtq lʰ kyirʰrʰs. Kʷʰuləm tə stʰəkʰal lʰ kʰal staʰəm
 məʰ ʰastmisləʰ lʰ skʰəʰwʰtn lʰ ʰayitʰxʷ məʰ cʰalʰ lʰ ntaqʷitʰkʷ siust t_ʰsiuʰkʷ.

WINE REPRESENTS SO MUCH TO SO MANY: class, culture, education, fancy food, expensive restaurants, disposable income, old world money, European history, colonization. Since the 1980s, the nouveau riche in rapidly emerging markets—particularly in East Asia and the Middle East—have contributed to the rising prices and popular awareness of formerly obscure labels such as Chateau Margaux, Romanée-Conti and Grange. More recently, television's Food Network in North America and the proliferation of wine festivals have helped introduce wine to the palate of a younger and relatively hip generation. Stemwear sales have skyrocketed (Crate and Barrel carries 40 types of wine glasses) and Riedel has become a household name—in some households. Agritourism revolving around wine and gourmet food production has been growing in sophistication and efficacy especially in and around the Napa Valley in California. All of this thanks to visionary marketing strategists like Robert Mondavi and influential chefs like The French Laundry's Thomas Keller.

relationship to local, national and global forces. For this reason, I was intrigued by how this part of the world had transformed itself over the past two decades: from a rural region where families from Vancouver and Calgary vacationed and brought apples, cherries and peaches back home, to an urban space encompassing three cities—Vernon, Kelowna, Penticton—with some of the highest real estate values in Canada. These conditions are becoming increasingly common. An earlier video installation of mine, *Orange County*, (2003) had looked at a development in China where architects and interior designers from Orange County, California, were hired by a Chinese developer to create an "authentic" American-style gated community near the 2008 Summer Olympic site in Beijing. That project evoked questions about the confluence of urban design, politics and global capital. What did it mean for the Chinese to earnestly replicate suburban, southern California architecture,



In 2007, I had the opportunity to explore this recent wine phenomenon when I was invited by the Alter-nator Gallery in Kelowna, British Columbia, to create a project working with the local community. Kelowna is in the centre of the Okanagan Valley which in turn is the centre of the province's wine production. Much of my work to date as a visual and media artist has focused on the construction of identity in

especially when the housing design styles are defined as "Spanish," "Italian" and "French?" What happens when the American Dream is translated into Chinese? What kind of spatial politics were at play here? And what kind of actor/citizen has the privilege and access to engage in practices that seem so similar in such different geographic and historical places? *Napa North* follows the wine industry's fascination with the concept of terroir—how flavours and characteristics are expressed through the soil or territory, and how the land is expressed as real es-

The days here are full but unhurried. A **perfect** morning starts with a dip in the pool or quick workout in the fitness room, followed by a round of golf or stroll among the many acres of ripening grapes. Continue with a picnic lunch on your boat and watch the sunset as you enjoy a glass of wine in the hot tub.

tate. *Napa North* explores the importation of upscale design and values into the Okanagan Valley. This transformation is indicative of how flows of capital move out from larger urban centres into other regions in an expanding network and mobile class of temporary residents. New economies are generated through the aggressive marketing of the local, natural beauty of idyllic landscape, augmented by recreational amenities such as skiing, golf, water-sports and wine tasting.

The project began with the participation of Susan Brandoli and Susan Bizecki, two local emerging artists I mentored through the Alternator Gallery's residency program. They were involved in the initial research phase that included many conversations and interviews with residents, farmers, winery owners, winemakers, land use consultants and real estate developers. Of particular interest was the Osoyoos Indian Band (OIB), whose economic and cultural strategies have brought recognition and investment into their territory in the Oliver area, just north of

complete with golf course, spa and fine dining, in a joint venture with Bellstar Hotels and Resorts. The Nk'Mip Desert Cultural Centre is an architecturally stunning, state-of-the-art, interpretive centre with indoor/outdoor components and a spectacular rammed-earth front exterior wall.

We made a formal presentation and request to Chief Clarence Louie and Council, facilitated by Charlotte Sanders, Band Councilor and Manager of the Desert Cultural Centre. They then granted us permission to work with Modesta Betterton, an elder with deep knowledge of the social, cultural and economic history of the OIB. Most importantly, her expertise as a teacher of the Okanagan (N'syilxcen) language pro-



the U.S. border. The OIB is a major player in wine, agriculture, tourism, construction and development. As wine grape growers since 1968, they have since become the province's largest producer, accounting for 25 per cent of all the acreage in the valley, much of which is under lease to other wineries. Their Nk'Mip Cellars is North America's first Aboriginal owned and operated winery, in partnership with Vincor of Constellation Brands, the world's largest wine company. They also own Spirit Ridge Resort,

vided a nuanced, complex context that both complemented and contrasted the "official" (and corporate) language that defined the rapid growth and development of the region. It was her ability to translate this language of marketing and promotion, of the promises of luxury-lifestyle living in wine country that would form the foundation of this project. I was surprised by how easily she found the Okanagan language's equivalent of "condominium" and "hot tub" but struggled with "luxury" and "sustainability," concepts that are foreign to the First Peoples of that area.

The resulting exhibition—presented in the summer of 2008—comprised of a three-channel video installation, a series of colour photographs and free wine

tastings at a custom designed wine bar presented at the Kelowna Art Gallery and Alternator Gallery in Kelowna. The exhibit subsequently traveled to the Penticton Art Gallery in the fall of 2008, in conjunction with the Okanagan Wine Festival. Complementary events such as a film screening of Craig Noble's *Tableland*, a dinner of local foods cooked by Joy Road

Valley in a time of rapid and, as some locals see it, unfettered growth. Seen in context, and when compared to cities like Shanghai or Dubai, the expansion of the past decade is much less dramatic in scale. However, the forces at play and the specific attempts to capture flows of capital are similarly played out in many locations around the world, creating a new



Catering, and speeches by local farmers, producers, a baker, brewer and abattoir operator rounded out the whole event. In addition, Modesta Betterton offered Okanagan language instruction, and cultural workshops were given by the Desert Cultural Centre.

The tasting bar, designed and fabricated by David McGuire, was an inclusive gesture to encourage conviviality and participation. Free tastings of local wine provided a platform for the sharing of the fruit (fermented juice) profiled in the artwork. The bar had a pedagogical as well as dialogical function—encouraging articulation of the experience of taste—ideally leading to opportunities for self-referentiality. Ensuing conversations would inevitably invoke issues around local land use, with wine as a growing symbol of the region. The intent was to stimulate discussion and question notions of identity, with the bar acting as an ideologically framed, communal space. The video and photo components of *Napa North* were a documentary portrait of the Okanagan

typology: the “resort residential.” All of these forces signal a shift in industry and land use. Geographers such as Edward Soja argue that land that was once agrarian—relatively recent, since European settlement—has become urban or suburban extensions of the city. This is a place where slopes with views and microclimates amenable to viticulture are being converted for luxury housing; where the resort swimming pool commands a majestic view of the vineyard and winery; where the large-scale industrial winemaking facilities with their well-worn heavy machinery are hidden towards smaller, charming boutique wineries with finely designed tasting rooms.

In the video component of *Napa North*, the real estate developers speak matter-of-factly about the market forces they are dealing with. Gordon Fitzpatrick of Cedar Creek Estate Winery describes how they approached Concord Pacific Group, whose projects include the post-Expo’86 lands along the north

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cxʷuy tʔiyam naqs skʔə kəm tʔəsxʷuys.

shore of Vancouver's False Creek, and CityPlace on Toronto's downtown lakefront. Their Grea Ranch development—with its working vineyard and winery overlooking Lake Okanagan—is defined as "contemporary Mediterranean," designed to live and photograph well for architectural magazine reproduction. The aestheticization of the landscape and the romance evoked by wine culture is part of the marketing package. Also included are services such as maintenance of the homes for the majority of the owners who plan to visit for a week or three every year or so. In contrast are accounts by farmers such as the Casorso brothers in Kelowna and Mount Boucherie Winery co-owner Nirmal Gidda who speak of the challenges of fluctuating market prices for grapes and other crops. This is further exacerbated by the local labour shortage that has spurred the importation of foreign guest workers, many from Mexico, simultaneously alleviating manpower pressure while raising production costs for agriculture.

What becomes manifest in the photographs and video interviews are values exemplified by an urban design representing a leisure class experience. Successful models attract external investment that drive up land values and therefore, living costs. Economic and employment growth which are defined as good and desirable also result in the increase of the local class divide; jobs are plenty, but few pay well enough for locals, let alone outsiders, to cover the higher housing costs and other living expenses. The contradictions imbedded within the promise of economic prosperity become particularly apparent when, in the video, Calona/Sandhill winemaker Howard Soon recalls the recent sale of a vineyard, then roughly calculates how much the new owners would need to sell a bottle of wine to break even: \$35 their cost, before markup. That would mean the retail price would be \$70 a bottle, defying economic logic given market demand. But apparently there are other factors at play that justify the inflated price, such as the prestige among some circles of being a winery owner. Napa North uses the growth of the wine and real estate industry as a means to reveal the expectations and rhetoric of economic growth, how identity and alliances are formed, and are at odds with, such desires. Given the recent economic downturn with the subsequent suspension of many construction projects, it will be especially interesting to see how the language promoting these upscale lifestyles might adapt or change with the times.

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