

THE SOMMELIER JOURNAL

JUNE/JULY • 2021
\$10.00 US/\$12.00 CANADA

THE **SOMM** JOURNAL

to the **USA**



**INTRODUCING PENFOLDS'
CALIFORNIA COLLECTION
AND "WINE OF THE WORLD"**

From **AUS**



**PENFOLDS MAKES A
QUANTUM LEAP**



*Penfolds chief winemaker Peter Gago,
senior winemaker Stephanie Dutton, and
red winemaker Andrew Baldwin.*

PHOTO: BEN MCPHERSON



GOÛTER LES COULEURS DU TEMPS

CLOS MIREILLE, CÔTES DE PROVENCE

DOMAINES
Ott★®



GOÛTER LES COULEURS DU TEMPS

CHÂTEAU ROMASSAN, BANDOL, PROVENCE

DOMAINES
Ott★®



GOÛTER LES COULEURS DU TEMPS

CHÂTEAU DE SELLE, CÔTES DE PROVENCE

DOMAINES

Ott★®

THE SOMM JOURNAL

PUBLISHER/EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Meridith May

mmay@sommjournal.com

MANAGING EDITOR

Ruth Tobias

rtobias@sommjournal.com

SENIOR STAFF EDITOR

Kate Newton

knewton@sommjournal.com

CONTRIBUTORS

Amy Antonation, Devin Berko, Kyle Billings, Tony Correia, Ini Gabriel Uko, Susan Keevil, Michelle M. Metter, Lori Moffatt, Kate Nowell-Smith, Rafael Peterson, Patricia Schneider, Eric "ET" Tecosky, Ariana Tsuchiya

CONTRIBUTING EDITORS

Jeremy Ball; Wes Hagen; Karen MacNeil; David Ransom; Allyson Reedy; Stefanie Schwalb; Erik Segelbaum; Liz Thach, MW

FOLLOW US!



@Sommj • facebook.com/SommelierJournal • @SommJournal

Published six times per year
ISSN 1944-074X USPS 024881

The *SOMM Journal* is published bimonthly for \$52 per year by The *SOMM Journal*, The *Sommelier Journal*, 6345 Balboa Blvd., Ste. 111, Encino, CA 91316. Periodicals postage at Van Nuys, CA, and additional mailing offices.

SUBSCRIPTION RATE:

\$52 one year; \$100 two years

Single copy: \$10

For all subscriptions, email:

subscriptions@sommjournal.com

POSTMASTER:

Send address changes to:

The *SOMM Journal*
6345 Balboa Blvd., Ste. 111
Encino, CA 91316
818-201-3950

VP/SALES & MARKETING

Bill Brandel, CSW

818-322-5050

bill@sommjournal.com

VP OF EDUCATION

Lars Leicht

lars@sommjournal.com

VP/FINANCE DIRECTOR

Anna Russell

arussell@tastingpanelmag.com

SENIOR ART DIRECTOR

Michael Viggiano

SENIOR CONSULTING EDITOR

Anthony Dias Blue

DEPUTY EDITOR

Eric Marsh

SENIOR WINE & BEER EDITOR

Jessie Birschnach

GLOBAL WINE EDITOR

Deborah Parker Wong

FEATURES EDITOR

Michelle Ball

EDITORS-AT-LARGE

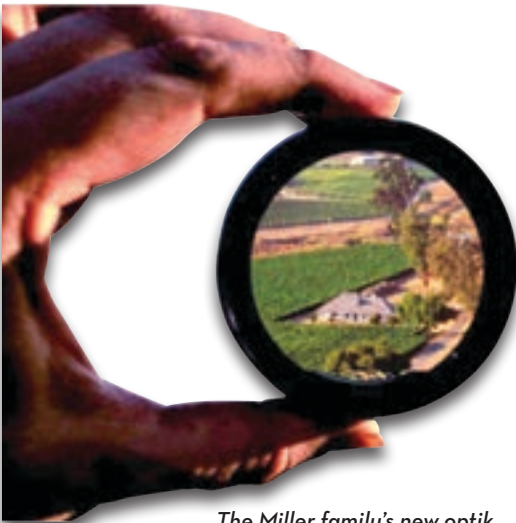
Randy Caparoso

Jonathan Cristaldi

EAST COAST EDITOR

Wanda Mann

©2021 The *SOMM Journal*, The *Sommelier Journal*. All rights reserved. Reproduction in whole or part without written permission is prohibited. *Sommelier Journal* USPS 024881, ISSN 1944-074X



The Miller family's new optik label was built around the idea of perceiving Bien Nacido Vineyard through a new lens.

OPTIKAL

Profuzion

WITH ITS NEWEST
LABEL, **MILLER FAMILY
WINE COMPANY**
ILLUMINATES THE
INEXHAUSTIBLE RICHES
OF BIEN NACIDO
VINEYARD

by Liz Thach, MW

A cool afternoon breeze ruffles the leaves of Bien Nacido Vineyard, creating the illusion of a vast green lake of undulating waves. "The Native Americans had many different names for the wind in this region," says Nicholas Miller, whose family owns this famed property in the Santa Barbara County AVA of California's Santa Maria Valley. "They called the special cool wind that blows in from the Pacific Ocean every afternoon *esolu*."

It is this wind as well as the dry Mediterranean climate, soils, and diversity of aspects found here that make up the terroir of Bien Nacido, whose name translates as "well born." The vast 800-acre vineyard was the vision of Nicholas' father, Steve, and uncle, Bob, who purchased the property in 1973 and had the foresight to plant Chardonnay, Pinot Noir, and Syrah when they were not yet popular varieties in the U.S. Fast-forward to today, and the vineyard designate graces the front label of many famous wine brands, including Au Bon Climat, Byron, and Twomey.



PHOTO: WILL COSTELLO

"This is a good example of how the age of the vine and the slope location can impact the taste," explains Tensley. "We actually picked the Block I-1 three weeks later than the Block 11D3, because it wasn't ripe enough. Block I-1 has older vines, planted in 1973, and they are lower on the bench, where it is cooler; they ripen later and maintain high acidity. Block 11D3 was planted more recently and is higher up on the slope, where it is warmer."

Noting that such focus on the unique characteristics of different blocks is reminiscent of Burgundian tradition, Nicholas clarifies that "we are not trying to make Burgundy wines here. This is California. However, in looking at our vineyard map, it is rather similar, because we see more complex wines coming from the bench and upper slope, rather than the valley floor. In some areas of the vineyard, the elevation reaches 1,000 feet. And like Burgundy, we are a cool-climate location—listed as [Winkler] Region I."

The Vision Behind the Launch

To bring the optik brand to life, Miller Family Wine Company director of marketing Tommy Gaeta decided that a label depicting the concept of new perspectives was key. He searched for a cutting-edge, wine-focused design firm to execute his vision and found it in Rioja, Spain-based agency TSMGO, whose resulting design features the *hamsa*—an open right hand with an all-seeing eye at its center—set against an illustration of the Bien Nacido Vineyard. "The hamsa is a universal symbol that represents protection, good fortune, power, and strength," says Gaeta. "Here, it symbolizes the empowerment of the winemaker's hand to convey what his eye sees."

The first vintage of optik includes two Chardonnays, two Pinot Noirs, and two Syrahs; limited to only 1,000 cases, it will be distributed in high-end retail channels and select on-premise accounts in major metro areas. Nicholas reports that the Millers plan to steadily expand the line as they identify other special sites in the vineyard that they want to highlight. *sj*



Santa Barbara winemaker Joey Tensley, who oversees the production of optik, with Miller Family Wine Company VP of sales and marketing Nicholas Miller.



Tasting Notes

optik 2019 Bien Nacido Vineyard Block I-1 Chardonnay, Santa Maria Valley (\$35) Fresh and focused, this wine entices with a nose of green apple and lemon zest, then evolves with lime and mineral notes. Well balanced, with a relatively light body and crisp, refreshing acidity, it came from vines planted in 1973 on a cooler block of the property, which sees both wind and ocean influence. Aged ten months in 40% new French oak; 13.2% ABV. **92**

optik 2019 Bien Nacido Vineyard Block 11D3 Chardonnay, Santa Maria Valley (\$35) Expressing ripe golden apple along with notes of toasty oak, nuts, and apple crumble, this voluptuous white is full bodied and full throttle. From a hillside block higher in the canyon with a warmer mesoclimate, it's a creamy, hedonistic delight for all who enjoy big-textured California Chardonnay. Aged 11 months in 40% new French oak; 15.2% ABV. **90**

optik 2019 Bien Nacido Vineyard Block 42A Pinot Noir, Santa Maria Valley (\$45) Clone 115 comprises 100% of this elegant, multi-layered wine, which expresses raspberry, black cherry, vanilla, tobacco, and a hint of herbs. Well balanced with crisp acidity, medium body, and integrated oak, it comes from a block on the lower bench. Aged ten months in 40% new French oak; 14.9% ABV. **93**

optik 2019 Bien Nacido Vineyard Block 42B Pinot Noir, Santa Maria Valley (\$45) Made entirely from the Mt. Eden clone, this wine leads with red-plum pudding and marionberry plus generous, spicy toasted oak. Plump and flamboyant, ripe and full bodied, it will even delight Cab lovers at 14.9% ABV. Sourced from a block on the upper bench, it aged ten months in 40% new French oak. **92**

optik 2019 Bien Nacido Vineyard Block 49A Syrah, Santa Maria Valley (\$45) Heady blackberry and black plum dotted with white pepper and earth join chewy tannins and crisp acidity before the long, luscious finish. Made with a hint of Roussanne to add a floral component, this absolutely delicious Syrah from a very steep hillside block aged ten months in 40% new French oak. 15% ABV. **94**

optik 2019 Bien Nacido Vineyard Block 11D1 Syrah, Santa Maria Valley (\$45) Showing inky black in the glass, with seductive blueberry and tar notes, this wine opens up to highly concentrated berry flavors with hints of mint chocolate. Huge, textured tannins join refreshing acidity before an incredibly long finish—wow! From a terraced hillside block in the steepest part of the vineyard, reaching 1,000 feet in elevation. Aged ten months in 40% new French oak; 15% ABV. **95**

THE **SOMM** JOURNAL

JUNE/JULY 2021

Vol. 8 No. 4

66

Harvested piñas at Bozal Mezcal.

COVER STORY

50 FROM AUS TO THE USA

With Its New California Collection, Penfolds Makes a Quantum Leap



FIRST PRESS

5 OPTIKAL PROFUSION

With Its Newest Label, Miller Family Wine Company Illuminates the Inexhaustible Riches of Bien Nacido Vineyard

FEATURES

66 AGAVE VERDE

How Sustainability Is Baked into Tequila and Mezcal Production

71 A CLEAR FAVORITE

Concours d'Spirits Returns to Focus on the Ever-Popular Vodka Category

Geographical



DIGEST

56 GOD BLESS ITALIA

Recapping the "Italy, North to South" Webinar in Association with SommCon and National Geographic

88 SHARING THE WEALTH

The Next Installment in Our Webinar Series Explores "Luxury From Remarkable Sites"

PHOTO COURTESY OF 3 BADGE BEVERAGE CORPORATION



The Amarone della Valpolicella estate of Serego Alighieri.

DEPARTMENTS

- | | | |
|---|--|---|
| 10 Reader's Page | 34 Sustainability: Redwood Empire Whiskey | 87 Fresh Voices |
| 12 Bottom Line | 36 Restaurants | 94 New Releases: Duke Spirits Tequila |
| 14 Wine With Wanda | 40 Rioja: Marqués de Cáceres | 96 The SOMM Joury: Testarossa and Kosta Browne |
| 16 Elevating the Rockies | 44 Industry Profile | 98 Passion Projects |
| 18 Wes' Side | 46 Retail | 99 Pairing Up |
| 20 One Woman's View | 48 Education | 100 Somm Sessions: Beringer Vineyards |
| 22 Five Minutes With . . . Maia Parish | 64 Scents and Accountability | 102 Whiskey: Jack Daniel's |
| 24 Business of Wine | 78 South America: Antigal | 104 SommFoundation Letter |
| 28 Notes From the Winemaker | 82 Japan: TYKU and iichiko | 106 Last Page |
| 30 Sparkle Motion | 86 Anniversaries: Sonoma-Cutrer | |
| 32 New Releases: Borreo | | |

Piece Offering



Water & Wines is a Swedish company that has made wine education fun by designing jigsaw puzzles illustrating the wine regions of France, Spain, Italy, and South Africa.

WATER & WINES' WINE-MAP JIGSAW PUZZLES ARE A GREAT FIT FOR EDUCATIONAL PLAYTIME

AS A PUZZLE FAN, I have spent hours of my leisure time piecing together jigsaws depicting dogs, old Betty Crocker cookbooks, *New Yorker* magazine covers, and more. But recently, I received a jigsaw puzzle depicting the wine regions of Spain. The colorful, carefully designed, 1,000-piece map also illustrates the iconic and/or indigenous varieties represented by these growing regions.

That means my playtime is turning into an educational endeavor, providing fulfillment that, for those of us in the industry, ultimately pays off. Guilt-free breaks in the day are hours well spent. Finding the big picture as I assemble the various parts—from the western shores of Galicia, where the highlighted names of Albariño and Loureiro remind me of the grapes grown there, to the far southwest corner of Murcia, bringing Macabeo and Airén into view—is quite satisfying.

Founder Yamit Viitaoja is a Sweden-based sommelier who came up with an ingenious concept to share with wine lovers around the globe. Her first name translates as “small sea”; thus the name of her company was conceived—and as we in the U.S. are oceans apart from the Old World, it's a wonderful fit.

A portion of this woman-led company's sales are donated to charitywater.org, an organization that helps developing countries obtain clean water. For more information, visit waterandwines.com. —Meridith May

One for the Shelf

THE OXFORD COMPANION TO SPIRITS & COCKTAILS IS SURE TO BE REQUIRED FALL READING

THOUGH ITS RELEASE DATE, October 14, is a ways off yet, *The Oxford Companion to Spirits & Cocktails* (OUP, \$65) is now available for preorder “at your favorite online bookseller,” as renowned bar historian David Wondrich slyly put it on Twitter. Given the buzz surrounding it as the first of its kind, securing that purchase early might not be a bad idea.

Wondrich and his co-editor, Noah Rothbaum, recruited some 150 experts in the field—not only writers but also “distillers, blenders, spirits-merchants, bartenders, brand-owners, collectors, spirits geeks, cocktail fiends, poets, critics, bar-owners, raconteurs, and a couple of people we really can't pigeonhole at all,” per the introduction—to pen the 960-page tome, which delves deep into everything from the origins of the Rickey to the production of ogogoro, a palm-derived spirit from Nigeria. It also incorporates charming archival photos and illustrations, numerous recipes, and a foreword by chef Marcus Samuelsson. And perhaps best of all, true to Oxford style, are the cross-references embedded into each of the whopping 1,150 entries—making for a *Choose Your Own Adventure*-style approach to enlightenment on any and every distillation-related topic under the sun. For further details, visit global.oup.com. —Ruth Tobias





Setting the new standard for
world-class Bordeaux varietals



PATRIMONY

Paso Robles • Adelaida District

PATRIMONYESTATE.COM • @PATRIMONYESTATE



THE PANDEMIC HAS
HIGHLIGHTED THE
ENDURING
IMPORTANCE OF
GOOD SERVICE

How Hospitality Has (Not) Changed

IN THE LATE 1970s and 1980s, during the early years of my career in hospitality, it was easy to tell when a restaurant was going out of business. It wasn't just the empty tables that made it so painfully obvious—it was the staff. When you walked by, they didn't say hello, smile, or even pretend to be happy to see you. As you left, they never bothered to look up and say goodbye or thank you. You didn't need to be a genius to understand why they were failing—and in fact why *most* restaurants fail well within their first ten years: When the employees couldn't care less, neither will their customers.

At the time, waiting tables was considered something of a noble profession. In the finest restaurants, every night was a special occasion, and we dressed formally, typically in tuxedos. I started as an 18-year-old busboy assigned to stations commanded by 40- to 50-year-old men with rakish gray manes. In another place, I served as a 20-something sommelier alongside teams of kimono-clad women, some of whom had been waiting tables since before I was


born. Incredible.

Somewhere along the line, though, front-of-house staffing became more the domain of college kids and would-be actors or artists waiting for something better to come along—and the reputation of restaurant service as a career suffered accordingly.

But once again, times are changing. The coronavirus has seriously affected the hospitality industry in general, not to mention our overall outlook on life, and the buzz right now is that there is renewed public respect for front-of-house work: Absence, as it often does, makes hearts grow fonder. “Customer entitlement,” according to a recent *Food & Wine* article, may have been at an all-time high just before the pandemic, but today, to quote North Carolina chef Steven Devereaux Greene in the same publication, “The entire country is realizing, perhaps for the first time, just how important hospitality is. . . . I hope to see a shift in how we regard all hospitality professionals—that we see them for the true lifeblood and contributors that they

are, not just to the economy but to the human spirit.”

Which is not to say that post-pandemic guests are less likely to be demanding or even nasty—that would be wishful thinking. All you can hope for these days is that they don't come with guns. In fact, this is why this industry has never been for the faint of heart. Adequate service is hard, and legendary service is a cruel and grueling marathon. But the more a restaurant staff chooses to win over even the most challenging guests, the higher the likelihood of that restaurant's critical and financial success.

Hospitality, after all, always involves choices on the part of employee and customer alike. Given the choice, people will always gravitate to restaurants where staff go out of their way to be, well, hospitable, treating every visit like a special occasion. There is absolutely no reason to believe that the corollary between good service and busy dining rooms—or, conversely, poor service and empty ones—will be any less direct than it was 40 years ago. 

TRIVENTO

Golden Reserve

PLATINUM



THE BEST KEPT TREASURE

"In our wine we find the unmistakable influence of the Andes, tradition and the Lujan de Cuyo terroir."

M. Viani

MAGDALENA VIANI
GOLDEN WINEMAKER



Finger Lakes Riesling Knows How to Sparkle

WINES FROM FAR-FLUNG places are intriguing by nature, but there's something special about sipping a bottle from my home state of New York. The global pandemic derailed my plans to visit wineries abroad, but thanks to webinars and virtual tasting opportunities organized by the New York Wine & Grape Foundation and the Finger Lakes Wine Alliance, I've developed a deeper knowledge and appreciation for local producers.

There's much to appreciate, especially if the New York wines on the table are from the Finger Lakes. The quality and diversity of expressions made here are astounding, but the region's prowess with Riesling has been its global calling card. Home to more than 115 wineries and 848 acres of Riesling that produce 220,000 cases of wine, the Finger Lakes benefit from a combination of cool-climate terroir and talented winemakers that produces impressive results.

As a fan of sparkling wine, I'm increasingly intrigued by its different styles of sparkling Riesling. Dr. Konstantin Frank Winery, a pioneer in the region, has recently introduced its elegant **2018 Riesling Nature (\$25)**. Crisp and nuanced with lively fruit flavors, this no-dosage traditional-method bubbly is aged on the lees for 12–24 months in the winery's underground cellar. "Our family has been making traditional-method sparkling wines for over 35 years, building on the success of my great-grandfather's work to pioneer the European grape varieties in 1962," said Meaghan Frank, vice president of Dr. Konstantin Frank Winery, when I reached out to her recently after an online tasting. The Nature in particular, she noted, "marries what we do best in the Finger Lakes—Riesling and traditional-method sparkling wines. There is no dosage added, which leaves a racy and vibrant acidity, making this



▲ *Meaghan Frank is vice president of Dr. Konstantin Frank Winery in Hammondsport, NY.*

wine a perfect accompaniment on the table. A quiche Lorraine served with fresh salad greens alongside the 2018 Riesling Nature [is] a match made in brunch heaven!"

The team at Buttonwood Grove Winery took a different approach with its unfinned and unfiltered **2020 Riesling Pét-Nat (\$20)**, which is equal parts fresh, fruit forward, and fizzy. "We like to focus on the grapes that grow best in our region and experiment with different styles," winemaker Sue Passmore told me. "The Riesling Pét-Nat project has been really exciting. This year's Pét-Nat really allows the Riesling fruit to shine." Inspired by pairings prepared by chefs in the Finger Lakes, Passmore recommends matching the wine with dishes focused on seasonal ingredients like wild ramps. Added Buttonwood Grove's director of wholesale sales, Car-

PHOTO: DAVE SIT

▼ *Sue Passmore is winemaker at Buttonwood Grove Winery in Romulus, NY.*



PHOTO: MARCIA KLUE

mela Barbagallo, "The Riesling Pét-Nat is a nod to our region's long-standing sparkling wine production and shows how Finger Lakes winemakers are constantly putting creative touches on their wines."

The history of sparkling wine in the Finger Lakes spans almost a century. By embracing that rich tradition to craft diverse styles of sparkling Riesling, the region's winemakers honor the past while showing their knack for innovation. As a native New Yorker, I'll concede that the bubbliness of our personalities is debatable, but the quality of our wines, still and sparkling, can't be disputed. *WJ*

Wanda Mann is a Certified Specialist of Wine and the founder of winewithwanda.com. Follow her on Instagram @winedinewanda.



CàMaiol

Italian Wines from Lake Garda.



IMPORTED BY SANTA MARGHERITA USA. 1900 SUNSET HARBOR DR., MIAMI BEACH, FL 33139.
MADE RESPONSIBLY TO BE ENJOYED RESPONSIBLY



CAMPAIGN FINANCED ACCORDING
TO EU REG. NO. 1308/2013



The Right Place at the Right Time

LIFE LESSONS AT DENVER'S
LATEST GREATEST WINE SHOP

THOUGH I'M SLIGHTLY embarrassed to admit it, I think I can be forgiven for never having heard of top-notch retail shop Denver Wine Merchant (DWM) until I received an email from co-owner Sally Stewart last month inviting me to come check it out. For one thing, it opened just last August, at the height of the pandemic; for another, it's located in a veritable commercial no man's land between Globeville and Sunnyside in the shadow of I-25—at neither the time nor the place for foot traffic, in short.

A minute's worth of browsing on my first visit, however, was enough to confirm that DWM deserves all the enthusiastic word of mouth it's beginning to get from the community: fabulous grower Champagnes here, skin-contact Sylvaner from Alsace and clay-pot Aladasturi from Georgia there, local cult favorites like Ratio Beerworks' King of Carrot Flowers saison and Haykin Family Cider's Niedzwetzkyana Reserve over there—not to mention a cuddly cat named for one of Stewart and her partner Steven Washuta's favorite Barolo producers, Aldo Conterno, roaming around. (They carry its wines too, of course.)

And the shop's virtues aren't limited to inventory (vinous or feline). With a small bar in back for twice-weekly tastings of their favorite Austrian wines, say, or Muscadet and Grolleau, the couple puts a premium on service; as Washuta explained, "Our major focus was to have a comfortable atmosphere and to hire hospitality professionals. It's not often you can go to a retail store and talk to someone who could be or has been a somm at a restaurant."

To call that an understatement would itself be an understatement in their cases. Stewart holds an Advanced certification and Washuta is a Master Sommelier, and though they've worked in the industry everywhere from San Francisco and



Denver Wine Merchant owners Sally Stewart and Steven Washuta.

Portland, Oregon, to Telluride, Colorado, and Casablanca, Chile, their time in New York City alone speaks volumes: Over the course of four years, Stewart was a sommelier at Babbo, Atera, and CUT by Wolfgang Puck, while Washuta served as wine director at Felidia and Portale. So why, you may be wondering, would they leave such prestigious posts to work retail in a town where, per Stewart, "let's just say there's a lot of room for growth" as far as fine-wine consumption goes?

Part of the answer to that question will be all too painfully familiar to their on-premise colleagues: The unrelenting pace and stress of the big-city dining scene had already led them to begin considering alternatives by the time Washuta was furloughed early on in the pandemic. But the other part is downright heartrending, as well as related to the reason Stewart reached out to me when she did. To put it in her own words, "Another incredibly important aspect of our story is that May is ALS Awareness Month. [In 2019,] I was diagnosed with the terminal nerve

disease ... [and] essentially given a death sentence at 31 years old, [told] that I had a maximum of a few years left to live. Rather than rolling over and succumbing to depression that my time was up, I chose to push even harder toward achieving my dream of owning the best wine shop in the country."

It no doubt helps that her drive is matched by a naturally sunny, funny personality. "We're happy to be practicing our craft in a cool place with cool people—we actually love what we do again," she told me. After Washuta pointed proudly to the Sonos Five speakers he'd installed to further the good vibes in the space, she added, "We may have Grand Cru Burgundy on the shelf, but we also listen to gangster rap—we have the highbrow-lowbrow mentality, which I think keeps us leveled. I'm not from a well-to-do family, but today I drink amazing wine, and I want to help others get to that point." Profound challenges notwithstanding, it seems she's now in exactly the right place at the right time to do just that. **SJ**

DUKE SPIRITS



DUKE KENTUCKY
STRAIGHT BOURBON



DUKE GRAND CRU
RESERVE BOURBON



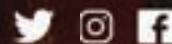
DUKE RESERVE
RYE WHISKEY

MADE FROM CHARACTER



*Grand Cru Reserve Bourbon awarded the Award of
Excellence at Sommeliers of America's Concours d'Spirits!*

KENTUCKY STRAIGHT BOURBON WHISKEY



dukespirits.com



Spilling Secrets

LOOKING BACK ON THE CREATION OF THE STA. RITA HILLS AVA

THE STA. RITA HILLS AVA turns 20 this year. Since its inception in 2001, this western subregion of the Santa Ynez Valley AVA has become well known for crisp, nervy, mineral-laden Chardonnays and luscious, dark, structured Pinot Noirs that continue to thrill the wine world. But it still has some secrets.

I should know: I was part of the 12-person crew—along with Bryan Babcock, Richard Sanford, Rick Longoria, Dan Gaaney, and others—who drew up the boundaries of the proposed AVA in 1997. Richard was our gentle, soulful leader; Bryan was the scientific brains of the group; and I was the rookie scribe who learned how to write an AVA petition. Here's what I've got to share.

Secret #1: Laws were broken. We aimed to explore every hilltop and valley in the area to assess viticultural potential, fog patterns, Pacific wind influence, soil types, and so on. In the process, we trespassed on at least 20 different properties. If somewhat reckless, it was also a noble act: We believe to this day that the borders we designated are perfect, and the owners of most of that land—none of whom ever noticed us—are now benefiting from massive real-estate appreciation.

Secret #2: One might have been two. In 2001, Sanford called a meeting in the Sanford Map Room adjacent to his tasting room in El Jabali Vineyard, which he planted in 1983 near Lompoc; it had served as the axis mundi of the AVA's creation, making it a fitting place to share with the petition committee the letter—which I still possess—that awarded us our AVA designation. But while the whole room cheered, Bruno D'Alfonso, then Sanford's winemaker, held up his contrarian hand and got the room's attention. "This is all well and good," he said, "but you all know damned well that

this should have been two AVAs" based on their differing soils and mesoclimates: one between the south-facing slopes of the Santa Ritas and the north-facing slopes of the Santa Rosa Hills in what was referred to as the Santa Rosa Road Corridor; and the other, called the Highway 246 corridor;

for a barbecue, where they'd meet local winemakers and engage in open discussion about our brands. After some tri-tip and mucho vino, we agreed to use the abbreviated Sta. Rita Hills both on our wine labels and in all manners of communication about the appellation.



PHOTO: WES HAGEN

As winemakers Mark Cargasacchi, Bryan Babcock, Rick Longoria, Dan Gaaney, Peter Cargasacchi, and Wes Hagen (behind the camera) quickly discovered, perfecting the boundaries of the Sta. Rita Hills AVA would require some harmless trespassing.

between the south-facing Purisima Hills and the Santa Ritas' north-facing slopes. Even though many of us saw this idea as feasible in the future, I remember a chorus of "Shut up, Bruno!" as we poured glasses of celebratory wine. We remain quite happy with the AVA as delineated.

Secret #3: The Santa vs. Sta. saga.

When Sanford learned we might be sued by Chilean wine company Viña Santa Rita, which claimed that it held the international rights to the name, he unilaterally traveled to Chile to charm the leadership. Believing in the power of hospitality over lawsuits, he invited them to his winery

I invite you to visit us in the Sta. Rita Hills AVA as we mark our 20th anniversary; for more information, go to staritahills.com. And to view a recent webinar I moderated on the appellation's creation, visit the Sta. Rita Hills Wine Alliance's YouTube page.

Wes Hagen is consulting winemaker and brand ambassador for Miller Family Wine Company. Follow him on Instagram @wes_hagen or, to submit ideas or samples for future installments of this column, contact him at whagen@millerfamilywinecompany.com.



Vermentino di Sardegna
GIUNCO
2017



Carignano del Sulcis
BUIO BUIO RISERVA
2016



Carignano del Sulcis
BUIO
2017



Champagne's New Frontier Goes Beyond Bubbles

THE HOUSE OF ROEDERER RELEASES ITS NEW STILL WINES

AS SOMEONE WHO drinks a glass of Champagne almost every night, I never thought I would see this: Champagne made commercially as a still wine.

Of course, we all know that great Champagne begins as a great still wine. With that in mind (and with climate change already profoundly affecting so many wine regions in the world, including Champagne), the House of Roederer has just introduced its first single-vineyard still wines: Camille Chardonnay and Camille Pinot Noir, both from the 2018 vintage. After a handful of bottles were sent to the U.S. in April, I sat down with Xavier Barlier, senior vice president of market-

ing and communications at Roederer's importer, Maisons Marques & Domaines, to taste them.

First, some background: According to Barlier, 19 years ago, Roederer CEO Frédéric Rouzaud and cellar master Jean-Baptiste Lécaillon began devising a strategy for what would become these new releases. After buying concrete eggs and oak casks, they started identifying vineyard parcels that might be suited to making complex still wines.

"Camille is not about trying to be Burgundian," said Barlier. The Chardonnay is from a lieu-dit called Volibarts in the Champagne village of Le Mesnil-sur-Oger, while the Pinot Noir hails from the lieu-dit Charmont in the village of Mareuil-sur-Aÿ. Both vineyards are farmed biodynamically, and both wines carry the appellation Coteaux Champenois. Just 2,880 bottles of the Chardonnay and 1,631 of the Pinot Noir were made.

History was an added impetus behind the wines' creation. Rouzaud's great-grandmother Camille Olry-Roederer, who inspired their name, ran the house from 1932 to 1975, steering it through the devastation wrought on the region during World War II. She entertained her best customers by pouring still wines from her finest vineyards.

The House of Roederer owns 650 acres of vineyards in Champagne. Does this portend more still wines from other villages joining the Camille line in the future? Barlier says there are no such plans for now. But who knows what a warmer future will hold?

THE WINES



Camille 2018 Chardonnay, Le Mesnil-sur-Oger, Coteaux Champenois (\$158) If chalk could be creamy as well as mineral, that would describe the flavor and texture of this beautifully refined and restrained Chardonnay. The wine is very long on the palate. Despite Barlier's injunction, I couldn't help but

try to think of it in Burgundian terms. It's not as briny and acidic as Chablis but also not as rich and weighty as Meursault, Puligny, or Chassagne. And, needless to say, it's nothing like anything in California. It's hard to score, but I'd put it in the neighborhood of 95 points.



Camille 2018 Pinot Noir, Mareuil-sur-Aÿ, Coteaux Champenois (\$188) Beautifully precise and refined, the Camille Pinot Noir is a bit spicy and fresh, with pomegranate and tea notes as well as some earthy leafiness; it's also slightly tannic on the end. It was even easier to think of this in Burgundian

terms: I found it comparable to a good village-level Burgundy and would score it around 93 points. *SM*

Karen MacNeil is the author of The Wine Bible and editor of the free digital newsletter WineSpeed.

IMAGES COURTESY OF MAISONS MARQUES & DOMAINES



Aviation is the best gin on the planet.

— Ryan Reynolds,
Owner & Planetary Expert

AVIATION 97 PTS

**BOMBAY
SAPPHIRE 92 PTS**

HENDRICK'S 92 PTS



WINE ENTHUSIAST
MAGAZINE



CRAFTED WITH A BLEND OF BOTANICALS.
SMOOTHER, MORE SUBTLE & BALANCED.

AVIATIONGIN.COM

PLEASE FLY RESPONSIBLY. AVIATION AMERICAN GIN, 42% ALC/VOL. 84 PROOF. DISTILLED & BOTTLED BY AVIATION GIN, PORTLAND, OR

Maia Parish

SOMMELIER AND OWNER, THE WINE SUITE AND PARISH MEDIA LLC

by Michelle M. Metter

PHOTO: JAMES BEVERLY, OFF PHOTOGRAPHY



DENVER RESIDENT MAIA PARISH

has been in the wine industry for over ten years and in food service from the age of 16. A WSET Level 2 Intermediate and current Certified Specialist of Wine candidate, Parish embarked on her career path due to a love of travel and making meaningful connections with people. We chatted with her about her passion for the industry and her thoughts on how social media will continue to shape the way we learn about and purchase wine in the future.

Q: Why did a career in wine speak to you?

My love for food and wine is written within my soul. When you want to learn about a culture or region, you can always start with food or wine. What a great way to break barriers—opening the conversation about a topic that is nonthreatening but creates intimacy. We are living in a time where people have lost the ability to have conversations and learn about other spaces. Although food and wine are not a neutral space and the stories are being adjusted to incorporate a more global [perspective], they are great tools to get to know anyone. My love language is acts of service, so hospitality and entertaining spaces are natural modes for me. There is no greater moment than to witness a person making a wine discovery. I can think of no greater honor! According to the Bible, wine is a miracle—I will agree.

Q: How do you think new audiences will be educated through social media into the future?

I have been an advocate of social media platforms since the inception of Periscope. I began my live-streaming career on this platform, and due to the immense education [in software it provided], I honed my skills with my brand. Also, I hold a B.A. in communications and journalism, so I am familiar with these spaces. I have met mentors, collaborators, colleagues, friends, and future board members via social media. The platforms connected me with Black mentors and colleagues, who helped me create forms of passive income and business-sustaining education. My brand has been able to be monetized on platforms like Instagram, StreamYard, and Facebook business pages. It is exciting to see the ability of newer platforms like Clubhouse or TikTok to reach new and diverse audiences ... in much-needed ways, and if you want to be around in the next five years, you'd better pay attention. If you are not using at least three forms of social media to enhance your brand, service, or product, then you are in danger of losing out on major growth opportunities.

Q: You have ten minutes and one glass of wine. What are you drinking and who are you with?

This may be controversial, but hear me out: I'd look forward to having a glass of Bollinger La Grande Année from my daughter's birth year, 2012, on her 21st birthday. She's growing up in the world of wine by default—she already has a pretty good nose! 🍷

San Diego-based wine journalist Michelle Metter is the co-founder and director of SommCon USA. The SOMM Journal and The Tasting Panel are proud supporters of SommCon and its mission of continuing education and training for the global wine industry. Follow Metter on Instagram @michellemetttersd.

*Perfect pairings,
twist left*



SEVEN RANCHLANDS

Five Food Friendly Wines. Easy to Serve. Supporting Restaurant Relief.

CLINE
FAMILY CELLARS

www.clinecellars.com





Rosé All Day Year!

I MUST HAVE BEEN sick that day in sommelier school when we learned the “rules” of rosé. Apparently, rosé is only good when consumed between May and August in its current vintage. I recently overheard a sales rep apologizing to a wine bar owner that she was showing a 2019, suggesting that she would understand if he didn’t want it because it wasn’t 2020. It’s amazing to me that sommeliers influence virtually every wine-drinking trend yet seem powerless when it comes to espousing the virtues of quality rosé.

Pink wine may be the only category that people drink for the color alone. Think about it: Nobody ever orders “a glass of white,” yet I rarely hear guests ask for anything *but* “a glass of rosé”—they don’t inquire about its region of origin, the grapes it’s made from, or the winemaking methods used. Conversely, the only wines I have ever seen guests regularly reject have been darker rosés such as Tavel—because they incorrectly equate the hue with sweetness.

Speaking of myths, the misconception that rosés are at their best on release is

widespread—despite the fact that most of the world’s best rosés are better with age. Rioja producer R. López de Heredia doesn’t release its rosé for nearly a decade, and the results are mind-blowingly delicious. In my experience, most rosés don’t start to show nuance and integration until they are at least three or four years old.

Perhaps most maddening of all is the notion of “rosé season.” Please, never use that expression. In reality, most rosés have more year-round utility at the dinner table than many popular white wines.

Rosé continues to show exponential category growth, so you should definitely be capitalizing on its popularity. It doesn’t matter if your restaurant has a tiny wine program or a huge one: To improve your bottom line, you should pour at least two different styles of rosé by the glass at price points separated by at least a few dollars. If you only have one, the question is simply “Rosé or not rosé?”; if you have multiple expressions, then it shifts to “Which rosé is right for my guest?” You can train your staff to discuss their distinc-

tions in easy-to-understand terms—explaining that one is more berry forward and savory while the other has more citrus and mineral notes is a way to ensure that the conversation is all about the guest’s preferences, not their wallet. And if you run a larger program, don’t be afraid to offer a third rosé at a premium price. Sancerre rosé can easily fetch \$18–\$20 a glass in the right market, as can some well-established Provençal brands.

By the bottle, you should also have a variety of rosés at multiple price points, including a few premium options, rather than a collection of similar wines at similar prices. Producers are often surprised when I tell them that, though I love their rosé, it’s too inexpensive. The last thing I need is yet another bottle for less than \$12 wholesale; on the contrary, I’m always searching for quality rosés in the \$20–\$50 wholesale range so that I can maximize category revenue.

Sommeliers, it’s up to you to have a well-balanced, year-round rosé program—and to help guests understand that they should put some think into drinking pink. §

A DIVINE STORY





The iconic
'Vaio Armaron'



SEREGO ALIGHIERI
DAL 1353

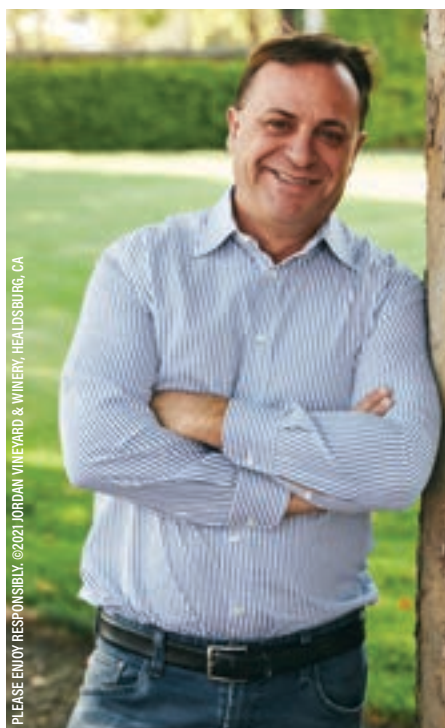
The Serego Alighieri estate has the longest historical, cultural and winemaking tradition in Valpolicella. For 21 generations the family has lived there continuously, producing wines of unique personality and authentic expressions of viticulture in the Valpolicella region, since Pietro Alighieri, son of the divine poet Dante, bought the estate in the 14th century.

Follow our story on: seregoalighieri.it   @seregoalighieri



Leaning In

The pandemic creates an opportunity to reimagine and renovate guest experiences at Jordan Winery.



PLEASE ENJOY RESPONSIBLY. ©2021 JORDAN VINEYARD & WINERY, HEALDSBURG, CA

THE GREAT EUROPEAN designer Eileen Gray once said this: “To create, one must first question everything.” At dawn of the new decade, the pandemic forced many unexpected changes to our daily lives—and left us with more questions than answers. It challenged business, especially those in the hospitality sector, in transformative ways that have not been seen since the Great Depression. A general rule of business is to cut spending when sales are down.

John Jordan, the owner of Jordan Winery, dismissed that principle and chose to create rather than contract. He doubled-down on investments in hospitality spaces in 2020, using the decrease in visitors as an opportunity to renovate gardens, tasting salons and guest suites at Jordan Estate. The spaces, originally built to host restaurateurs, chefs and sommeliers at the French-inspired chateau, reopened this spring. Here’s a look at each transformation.

WINERY LODGING

The Jordan guest suites received their first renovation since the chateau's construction in the 1970s, bringing design and amenities.



CELLAR ROOM

Its recent 10-month makeover transformed the space into an old-world wine cellar, with the backdrop of 800-plus bottles of cellared Jordan Cabernet.



LIBRARY

The wood-paneled salon where Library Tasting begins was transformed into a curated library filled with vintage books.

Do You See What I See?

USE YOUR INNER VISION TO TASTE WINE

by Kate Nowell-Smith

DO YOU EVER close your eyes when tasting wine? I ask for three reasons. The first is straightforward: It's simply a great concentration tool. Just as silence can help one focus, so too can shutting out all visual "noise" heighten one's senses of taste and smell. If you've never tried this, I highly recommend it.

Reason number two stems from the fact that as a winemaker, yes, I evaluate a wine for balance, but I'm also trying to analyze each part of the whole. With my eyes closed, I can better pull the wine apart, intentionally zeroing in on one specific aspect at a time with each successive sip. For those of you who meditate, think of this as akin to doing a body scan, only instead of checking in on your head, neck, shoulders, and so on, you are consciously directing your senses to focus on one attribute at a time, then closing your eyes and letting that sense impression come to you.

It's best to home in on aromas and flavors first, when your nose and palate are fresh. Acid is usually the first physical


sensation to hit, so I taste for it next, then oak, then alcohol, then tannins. If any of those seem disjointed, I'll circle back and taste for residual sugar, volatile acidity, or anything else that might be putting the wine off balance.

I could end this article here: Close your eyes to better taste and evaluate wine. But there's more to it than that. If I lost you at meditation, we might be in trouble with what comes next—so please bear with me, dear reader; for reason number three. Like me, you should always take one last sip for overall pleasure, pulling out of the analytical nitty-gritty and letting the wine wash over you. This is when things can get pretty exciting: As I taste with my eyes closed, I "see" the wine unfolding over time on the palate, as if I am scanning a mural from left to right.

I don't "hear" wine, but because it changes and unfolds in the glass, there is a temporal aspect to its enjoyment that mirrors music. And there is something musical about the images I see. There are

dashes and dots, curves, and sometimes big bursts like fireworks; they're similar to the sorts of markings you might get if you asked someone who did not know how to transcribe music to put what they hear on paper.

Just like a classical orchestral work, a great wine that's delicious and complex will have plenty going on: here, there, over in the left-hand corner; now rumbling in the bottom right, now a few sparks going off up top. By contrast, an uncomplicated wine, like its pop-song cousin, will come across as something simple: a skinny stripe or a low wave.

Synesthesia is a well-described, if hotly debated, medical phenomenon. The literature speaks of people who "taste" color and "hear" aromas, for instance. I may or may not have synesthesia as defined by the scientific community, but no matter—I'm just glad to be cognizant of this extra dimension, which adds to my enjoyment. Wine, music, and the visual arts: Close your eyes and let yourself experience them all as one. 

VENERATED
TERROIR SEEN
THROUGH
A NEW LENS.

A COLLABORATION BETWEEN THE MILLER
FAMILY'S BIEN NACIDO VINEYARD AND
WINEMAKER JOEY TENSLEY

Joey Tensley

*Opening Eyes
Summer 2021.*



Sparkle Motion

"Sometimes I doubt your commitment to Sparkle Motion," moans one frenzied pageant mom to another in a scene from cult classic *Donnie Darko*. Well, don't doubt ours. In this column, we at *The SOMM Journal* rate the most notable sparkling wines that cross our desks and lips each issue. Given the wide range of production methods, styles, and price points the category covers, we've devised the following system to score each on its own merits.

1 BUBBLE ●

Simple but satisfying.

2 BUBBLES ●●

Satisfying and a little more complex.

3 BUBBLES ●●●

A strong example of its kind.

4 BUBBLES ●●●●

A superb example of its kind.

5 BUBBLES ●●●●●

Stellar by any standard.

For details on submitting wines for review, contact managing editor Ruth Tobias at rtobias@tastingpanelmag.com.



Stoller Family Estate 2017 LaRue's Brut Rosé, Dundee Hills, Oregon (\$65) Showing pale copper in the glass, this estate-grown blend of 84% Pinot Noir and 16% Chardonnay possesses effortless style: steady perlage, stunning balance, lithe mouthfeel, length, and all, not to mention a touch of savoriness to accentuate the subtleties of Rainier cherry, young strawberry, and nectarine. **94**



Domaine Bousquet NV Rosé Brut, Tupungato, Uco Valley, Mendoza, Argentina (\$13) The graceful character of this salmon-hued, Charmat-method blend of 75% Pinot Noir and 25% Chardonnay is a surprise given the price, but not given the high-elevation source—it hails from Tupungato vineyards reaching 4,000 feet. Sparks of lime and lemon drop on the nose presage the liveliness of the palate, with its layered peach and strawberry fruit, yet the seams between the acidity and the soft-bubbled, silken texture simply don't show. **92**



Gustave Lorentz NV Crémant d'Alsace, France (\$26) Just because a wine has bubbles doesn't mean it has a bubbly personality. This one, however, most certainly does. Like the perfect party host, it brings together just the right mix of elements at just the right moments, thanks to its own composition of equal parts Chardonnay, Pinot Blanc, and Pinot Noir: Touches of toast, mineral, and honey all mingle with golden apple and lemon just as creaminess and zing strike up a rapport. **92**



Castello di Poggio Prosecco DOC, Italy (\$15) From its pretty lilac-colored label to its medium-dry palate, this is the easy-drinking stuff a brunch lover's dreams are made of. So lavish with ripe peach it evokes a Bellini in and of itself, it also offers up honeyed apple, orange cream, and a touch of florality that a brunch hater might instead consider playing off savory, semi-spicy Asian flavors. **90**



QUINTESSENTIAL WINES



Chandon NV Brut, California (\$19) The luxe packaging may be brand-new, but when it comes to what's inside, Domaine Chandon knows full well not to fix what ain't broke: The multiregional, traditional-method blend of 73% Chardonnay, 26% Pinot Noir, and 1% Pinot Meunier is a sure bet for everyday bubbly. Scents of ripe Anjou pear, apple butter, and sweet florals attend a palate that starts out crisp as lace, then quickly spreads out on the mid-palate, juicy to the finish with apricot nectar and grapefruit rind. **92**



MOËT HENNESSY USA



Avaline Sparkling, Spain (\$26) Whatever the buzz surrounding this brand due to its high-profile founders (actress Cameron Diaz and entrepreneur Katherine Power), the bubbles do manage to speak for themselves, made as they are in the traditional method from the classic Cava grapes by historic Spanish producer Raventós i Blanc. A lovely pale lemon in color, it's nearly as low in residual sugar as a brut nature, with ample fresh acidity; enhancing the overall profile of green and yellow citrus and yellow apple are hints of flowers and nutshell on the finish. **90**





AGRICOLA PUNICA

Sardinia, Island of Wines



Taste why Sardinia is called Italy's "Isle of Wine." In 2002, an extraordinary team of winemakers discovered the remarkable connection between the land and climate of Sardinia and founded Agricola Punica. Here, the sun provides optimal heat and light to mature grapes perfectly, while the sea breeze cools and regulates the climate. Carignano, Chardonnay, and Vermentino have found their ideal terroir at Agricola Punica in Sardinia.

The Launch of a *Legacy Label*

PHOTOS COURTESY OF SILVERADO VINEYARDS



Silverado Vineyards has named this historic Napa Valley property—and its newest line of wines—after onetime owner Felix Borreo.

SILVERADO VINEYARDS' NEW BORREO LINE IS A NOD TO A HISTORIC SITE

by Jonathan Cristaldi

THE VICTORIAN-ERA stone building that stands at 920 Third Street in downtown Napa, California, was erected in 1877 by an Italian grocer from Genoa named Felix Borreo. The 12-inch-thick stone walls came from boulders quarried in the Soda Canyon area, where Borreo had a ranch. He grew grapes to make wine, cultivated a large fruit crop, planted an olive grove, and raised cattle. After 31 years as a grocer, he sold the building



Tasting Notes



Borreo 2020 Kerner, Napa Valley (\$38)

Planted on the coldest of the Borreo Ranch sites in the flattest part of the vineyard, this white mimics some of our favorite aspects of its Italian varietal's native Alto Adige. Bright and racy, the fine tingle of sparkling

acidity mingles with a hint of salinity. Fresh, crisp pear meets orange blossom, white flowers, and a hint of basil to make for an adventurous sipper: **92**

—Meridith May



Borreo 2020 Sangiovese Rosa, Napa Valley (\$28/750-mL; \$65/1.5-L)

Scents of summer-sweet watermelon and red rose petals offer this delicate, 100% tank-fermented rosé an ethereal quality. A slight spritz bursts with white cherry and soft vanilla. The wet-stone middle

is ramped up by bright acidity, adding dimension to its expressive red fruits. **92** —M.M.



Borreo 2018 Sangiovese, Napa Valley (\$38)

Ripe, vivid red-berry fruit gets an elegant lift from fragrant red currants, a hint of citrus oil, and underpinnings of warm earth and brown spices. Gushing with juicy boysenberry and tart cranberry notes, this wine—

which aged 16 months in (16% new) French oak—is framed by elongated, grippy tannins; cedar spices; and zippy acidity that dissolves into a long, berry-driven finish hinting at cocoa powder and pink peppercorns.

92 —Jonathan Cristaldi



Borreo 2018 Zinfandel, Napa Valley (\$45)

Though jammy, the ripe black fruit exists on a lighter, molasses-meets-cola plane thanks to a heightened acid structure that brings in notes of pomegranate and bright cranberry. Spiced with white pepper,

cinnamon, clove, and vanilla bean, this complex, traditionally styled Zin goes from fruity to savory and back again. Aged 13 months in Hungarian, French, and American oak. **93** —M.M.

prior to his death in 1906; it's known as the Borreo Building to this day (though it's now home to a craft brewery).

In the 1990s, during one of his annual stays in the U.S., Jacopo Biondi-Santi—steward of his family's iconic namesake winery in Tuscany—visited Borreo's ranch with his good friend Diane Miller, founder of Silverado Vineyards, who had recently purchased it with her husband, Ron. Like Miller, Biondi-Santi was awestruck by the place, from its magnificent olive grove to the vines growing there: It transported him straight back to his home in Italy. He recommended to Miller that she plant Sangiovese to join Borreo's original, and still thriving, Zinfandel plantings.

In fact, the brilliance of the site—which sits halfway up Soda Canyon Road on the way to Atlas Peak—and of Borreo's painstaking efforts to cultivate it has never been lost on the Miller family. So when the Atlas fire raged straight through it in 2017, burning everything but the beautiful stone masonry of Borreo's historic winery, they felt that something significant needed to



In 2017, the Atlas fire burned down Borreo's historic winery on Soda Canyon Road, leaving only its stone foundations.

be done to honor the legacy of the place.

"As we began thinking about rebuilding after the fires," explains Silverado Vineyards president Russell Weis, "we realized we needed to pay homage to Felix." Rounding the bend on 40 years in the wine business, the Silverado team decided to mark the anniversary by renaming Soda Creek Ranch in honor of Borreo and starting production on a new imprint bearing his name. In spring of this year, the

wines began rolling off the bottling line.

Weis describes their truly attention-grabbing label illustrations—done by Annabel Miller, the daughter of Chris Miller and the oldest great-grandchild of Walt Disney—as "charcoal drawings rendered into a cornucopia in the style of old fruit boxes," a direct reference to Borreo's days as a grocer, when he filled such containers with olives, pomegranates, and lemons from his orchards. He would also pack in bottles of the brandy that he distilled and the wine he crafted before hauling it all down to his now-landmark store on Third Street.

The full lineup of wines—all single-vineyard designates from the newly christened Borreo Ranch—includes a Sangiovese; a Zinfandel; Rosa, a rosé available in both 750-milliliter and 1.5-liter formats; and a Kerner sold only at the Silverado estate and to limited on-premise accounts. The winery also produces an Estate Olive Oil (\$50) from Borreo Ranch's 130-year-old trees, which miraculously survived the fires pretty much unscathed. **SJ**



Inset: A rack card from Redwood Empire's Earth Month campaign, touting its partnership with agroforestry nonprofit Trees for the Future.



PHOTOS COURTESY OF PURPLE BRANDS

Redwood Goes Green

REDWOOD EMPIRE WHISKEY'S EARTH MONTH CAMPAIGN PAID DIVIDENDS FOR THE BRAND AND FOR THE PLANET by Amy Antonation

RUNNING A DISTILLERY in California's wine country comes with pros and cons. Pros: It's gorgeous (the rolling hills, the towering trees, the coastal cliffs!). It's halcyon (the sunshine, the Pacific breeze!). It's delicious (the seafood, the produce!). Cons: Well, it's wine country, where it's all wine, all the time. So how does a distillery nestled among the trees in Graton, Sonoma County, make itself stand out from the tangle of vines, wine-makers, and somms that the Northern California coast is famed for?

For Redwood Empire Whiskey, which is named after the stretch of Pacific coastline that runs from San Francisco to the Oregon state border, the answer is: by focusing on what's really important—fulfilling its commitment to making great spirits and honoring the inspiration behind the brand while also striving to get the greatest return on its marketing dollars.

Success in the marketplace entails the ability "to pick and choose strategies," says Aaron Webb, CEO of Purple Brands, which owns Redwood, among other wine and spirits brands. So in 2020, just as the pandemic was putting the kibosh on in-person sales, the distillery chose to pour its undiluted efforts into an intense 30-day Instagram campaign on its account [@redwoodempirewhiskey](#)—one that would showcase its commitment to sustainability as much as quality. Focusing sales and marketing resources on Earth Month, Webb explains, "maximizes our share of voice and impact with content that is highly rel-



Redwood Empire's head distiller, Lauren Patz, and master distiller, Jeff Duckhorn.

evant to our brand and meaningful to our consumer." Content was released throughout April, a month marked by naturalist and conservationist John Muir's birthday (April 21), Earth Day (April 22), and Arbor Day (April 30).

Of course, anyone who's ever posted a particularly barbed *bon mot* on Twitter or an especially flattering photo on the 'Gram and then waited . . . and waited . . . for the likes to roll in knows that engaging customers effectively can be harder than it looks. But the strategy worked so well last year that Redwood's Instagram following grew by 40% over the course of the campaign; more importantly, says Webb, "We must [have been] doing something right because our volumes more than tripled [over the] year." So it was a no-brainer for the brand to repeat the effort in 2021.

A key goal for the Earth Month campaign has been to show consumers that Redwood's environmental advocacy is a year-round endeavor. In 2019, the distillery began partnering with Trees for the Future, a global agroforestry nonprofit that has planted over 200 million trees in its 30-year history. Trees for the Future currently trains farmers in eight African nations in permaculture and regenerative agriculture through the cultivation of what it calls Forest Gardens: plots of trees, vegetables, grains, and fruits designed to benefit soil health and prevent monocropping. Meanwhile, the farmers involved enjoy increased economic and food stability.

For each bottle of Redwood Empire Whiskey sold, the distillery plants one tree in a Forest Garden; to date, it has planted over 225,000 trees. So both this April and last, Redwood's Instagram featured plenty of posts about Trees for the Future's mission; how to plant a tree if you don't want to get your hands dirty (buy whiskey, of course!); and how followers could reduce their carbon footprint.

In between conservation tips, consumers were treated to images of Redwood Empire's packaging, which seems custom-made for the app—especially when all three of its whiskeys are presented together. The labels on Pipe Dream, a blend of four- to 12-year-old bourbons; Emerald Giant, a spicy, cinnamon-driven rye; and Lost Monarch, a blend of 60% straight rye and 40% straight bourbon, boast woodblock-style depictions of a fantastical John Muir alongside his musings

about nature to make for a striking lineup. (Illustrator Steven Noble, whose work you may also recognize from the Kraken Rum, Samuel Adams, Anheuser Busch, and Cakebread Cellars labels, created the art.) But no matter how stunning the bottles are—and they are beautiful—you need more than that to roll out 30 consecutive days of content. Last year, Redwood took the natural next step of posting cocktail recipes. In 2021, it added educational insights into whiskey production from master distiller Jeff Duckhorn and head distiller Lauren Patz; it also promoted a luxe glamping giveaway.

Recipes are a perennial social-media favorite, and Redwood heavily featured both Duckhorn's and Patz's favorite concoctions.



The Redwood Empire distillery in Graton, CA.

They ran the gamut from no-nonsense classics (a Lost Monarch Manhattan) to the surprisingly light Seelbach (made with Pipe Dream, Triple Sec, bitters, and bubbly) and subtly floral Emerald Canopy (with Emerald Giant, Earl Grey tea, lemon juice, and simple syrup).

Redwood Empire suggested that the latter drink would be the perfect fire-side cocktail for the lucky winner of its aforementioned giveaway; in addition to spending three nights in an exceptionally photographic tent kitted out with a queen bed and lighting, the winner could taste the distillery's products just minutes from where they are aged, blended, and bottled. More adventurous glampers (though why court additional adventure when you're holding a mind-altering glass of amber perfection in your hand?) could also go on

a quest to find the whiskeys' redwood-tree namesakes: Pipe Dream, at 367 feet tall, is the 14th-tallest tree in the world; Emerald Giant, the world's fastest-growing tree, adds 1,500 pounds of mass every year; and Lost Monarch is one of the widest trees alive at 26 feet in diameter.

The final—and definitely the most delicious—ingredient that found its way into the mix? A teaser of Redwood's first bottled-in-bond releases, both straight whiskeys aged for five years: a rye named Rocket Top and a bourbon, Grizzly Beast, that will debut in September. Duckhorn is thrilled to usher them to market. "It's been our goal from day one to have a 100% in-house distilled product," he says. "Bottled-in-bond is in-house and more."

Duckhorn put the whiskey into barrels in 2016, the same year the distillery began production; he notes that he was grateful Redwood Empire Whiskey hired Patz in January 2021, as she was able to bring a new perspective in the midst of the blending process. ("You're always hardest on yourself," Duckhorn acknowledges, "and you do get a little house blind.") Says Patz, "[Bottled-in-bond] is a true reflection of the distillery itself in terms of craft and palate. I totally understand the desire to have it be the best."

Just 500 9-liter cases each of Rocket Top and Grizzly Beast will be released, and both will retail at a suggested price of \$80. Redwood Empire plans a vintage bottled-in-bond release every year—perfect for helping a little distillery stand out in wine country. **\$J**

Know Your Customer, Know Your Brand

RYAN HILL OF SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA RESTAURANT GROUP
PORTA VIA ON SUCCEEDING IN “THE WORST OF TIMES”

story by Meredith May / photos by Devin Berko

DURING THE DARKEST DAYS of the pandemic, Peter Garland, founder of the Porta Via restaurant group in Southern California, decided to open an outpost in Calabasas in north Los Angeles County. His popular Beverly Hills and Pacific Palisades locations had flourished for almost three decades in the before times—and thanks to outdoor seating on tony Cañon Drive or near the ocean, they have remained thriving destinations for Cal-Mediterranean cuisine.

“I saw the upwards growth of the business since I began as a server in Beverly Hills in 2003,” comments partner and regional GM Ryan Hill. Knowing he wanted to grow with the company, Hill would prove himself, expanding his duties and honing his abilities to play a more managerial role. He soon advanced up the ladder, and after almost 20 years with Porta Via, Hill was tasked with opening its third location in Calabasas in September 2020—at the height of the pandemic, in other words, when outdoor dining was subject to the open-close-open-close accordion effect of government mandates on business operations.



Ryan Hill's new summer cocktail is the Seaside G&T, combining cucumber, lemon, orange, grapefruit juice, tonic water, and housemade simple syrup with Millinery Gin (a brand founded by Phillip Dunn, beverage director at Spago Beverly Hills).



Ryan Hill is a partner in and regional general manager of Porta Via, which operates three restaurants in Southern California.

Spanish archways, Moroccan-style terra cotta-colored pillows, and big doors that open to the patio. The shade from the Sunbrella striped awnings along the rails gives the restaurant the feel of some place in Naples, Italy—it is the most luxurious setting in this rural-meets-suburban community by far.

Hill keeps the staff happy—turnover is basically nil—by offering three- to five-day work weeks, setting hours that work with everyone's schedule, and guaranteeing full tables, which means better

tips. After all, Hill observes, “Customers like seeing familiar faces; that's another key to being a local's favorite.” But the venture has been a success so far: “Sensing the neighborhood gives us the ideas of how to best cater to the customers at each venue,” Hill notes, adding that “offering the consistency of inspired, healthy cuisine and an open, welcoming atmosphere [also] makes a difference.” Compared to the beachy feel of the Palisades or, as Hill puts it, the “hustle and bustle” of Beverly Hills, where business deals are made and people want to be seen, the vibe in Calabasas is more upscale-casual; that sense of place has created a haven for the local clientele.

Designed by Sophie Goineau, the new space has a relaxed ambience, with

tips. After all, Hill observes, “Customers like seeing familiar faces; that's another key to being a local's favorite.”

While wine director Jeffrey Morgenthal's list features well-chosen wines by the glass and on tap, Hill—a former bartender himself—has his hand in the bar program, creating fresh, unique, and lighthearted drinks. “I cook all the time at home and educate myself on the best ingredients, so it comes naturally at the bar,” he says, adding that his cocktail menu is also about appealing to the clientele. “This is not the aged Scotch crowd,” he points out. “We are here to please the customer; we are new and always able and ready to evolve.”



FIOL
PROSECCO DOC



Enjoy Responsibly

 @fiolprosecco

www.fiol.it

A year in the life of the vineyards and wines of the USA



AN OFFER FOR READERS FROM

slow wine

Slow Wine, the publisher of Italy's most popular wine guide, is set to release its first standalone U.S. publication. The *Slow Wine Guide USA* has now expanded to cover not only California and Oregon but also New York and Washington states.

As the only U.S. wine guide that has eco-friendly criteria for inclusion, the 2021 edition profiles 285 producers and more than 850 wines, all of which celebrate and demonstrate the Slow Food ethos of "good, clean, and fair." Our immensely talented team of 20 field coordinators from across the four states responded to the pandemic by conducting virtual winery visits in place of in-person visits, which is just one of the many features that make the *Slow Wine Guide* so unique. The purchase of even one guide goes a long way toward supporting their efforts—and we're offering the readers of *The SOMM Journal* and *The Tasting Panel* a trade discount.

To order your guide directly from Slow Wine, send your name, shipping address, and payment to PayPal slowwineguideusa@gmail.com or Venmo [@slowwineguideusa](https://www.venmo.com/slowwineguideusa). Pricing is as follows:

- 1 copy:\$25.98** (\$22.99 + shipping \$2.99)
- 6 copies:\$125.93** (19.99 each + shipping \$5.99)
- 12 copies:\$224.87** (\$17.99 each + shipping \$8.99)
- >12 copies:\$16.99 each** (shipping included)
(please indicate the number required)

Exciting initiatives lie ahead for the launch of the 2021 *Slow Wine Guide USA*. We will be working closely with producers in all four states to speed the adoption of the newly introduced Slow Food Manifesto for good, clean, and fair wine—a ten-point pledge that establishes a code of practice beyond the vineyard and winery to the community at large.

Deborah Parker Wong
National editor, *Slow Wine Guide USA*

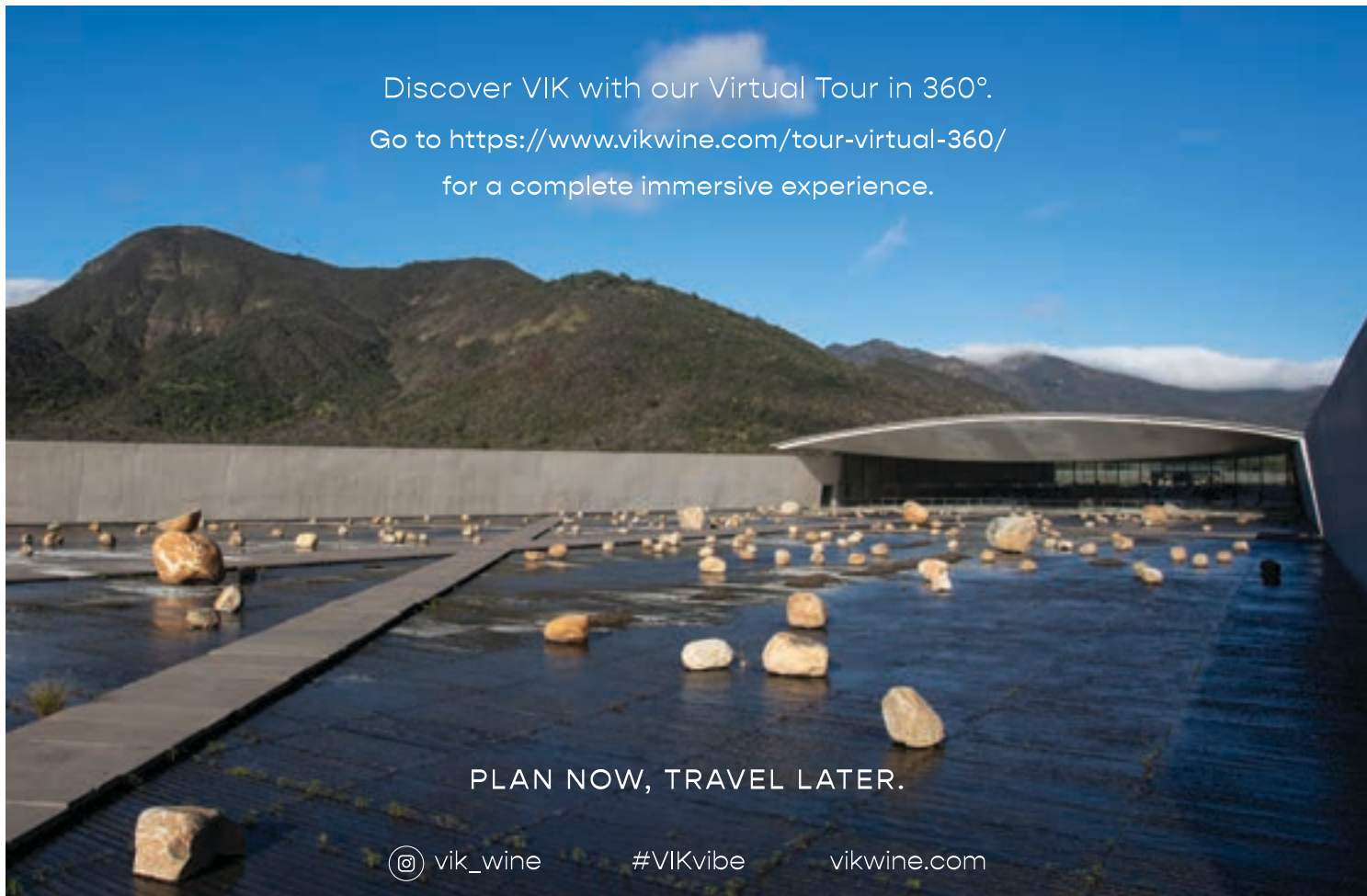


WORLD'S BEST
VINEYARDS 2020

20th ANNIVERSARY
WINE ENTHUSIAST
WINE STAR
AWARDS
2019 WINNER
BEST WINERY EXPERIENCE
OF THE WORLD



Discover VIK with our Virtual Tour in 360°.
Go to <https://www.vikwine.com/tour-virtual-360/>
for a complete immersive experience.



PLAN NOW, TRAVEL LATER.

@ vik_wine

#VIKvibe

vikwine.com

SETTING THE *SPANISH* STANDARD



Marqués de Cáceres president & CEO Cristina Forner.

MARQUÉS DE CÁCERES
PRESIDENT CRISTINA FORNER
PROPELS HER FAMILY'S
LEGACY IN THE IBERIAN
PENINSULA TO NEW HEIGHTS

by Kyle Billings

SINCE TAKING OVER as president of Marqués de Cáceres, Cristina Forner has bolstered the famed bodega's holdings in her ambition to represent the great potential of Spanish winemaking. But her roots, like her vision, extend beyond Rioja.

The turbulent history of 20th-century Spain did not leave Forner's family unaffected. The onset of civil war in 1936 prompted her grandfather, Valencian négociant Enrique Forner, to emigrate north with his children—including her father, also named Enrique. After stints in the Rhône and Loire valleys, they settled in Bordeaux to restore Château de Camensac and Château Larose-Trintaudon to their pre-phylloxera glory.

In 1970, Enrique Forner the younger returned to Spain. Inspired by his Bordelais training, he purchased 2,500 acres of land in the Rioja Alta village of Cenicero with great expectations. Sourcing local fruit, aging in French barriques, and vintage-dating his bottlings before it was common practice in the area, he aimed to lead Rioja's transition toward higher-quality production.

"He started a new school of vinification, making full-bodied red wines that are well balanced between fruit and oak along with whites and rosés full of freshness and crispness," says his daughter. "It was like a revolution in Rioja at that time, because consumers weren't used to tasting this style of wine."

Her own entry into the family business was roundabout: Beginning her career far from the vineyards, she founded a successful real-estate venture in Paris. In 1985, however, fate called, and she answered, returning to Spain to join her father at Marqués de Cáceres as a fifth-generation producer. Leaving the City of Lights for a boots-on-the-ground lifestyle was no easy task: "As a woman with a French accent," she struggled upon "land[ing] in a rural atmosphere and culture," Forner says. "I wanted to train by myself and be independent before coming back. But ultimately, I needed to assure the continuity of the family business."

In the 1980s, the world had yet to receive an introduction to Rioja. Forner willingly assumed the role of liaison, spending her first few years on the job traveling the globe to proselytize about the region's hidden treasures. She had much to praise—starting, of course, with the wines of Marqués de Cáceres.

Protected on the south by the Sierra de la Demanda and on the north by the Sierra Cantabria, the estate established by her father also benefits from the mountains' diversity of soils and aspects. "The vineyards are located at different altitudes, which can vary from 300 meters up to 700 meters above sea level, so we get a wide range of expositions and also plots of lands [that] permit us to interpret the different character of the grapes," Forner says. "We get the ideal character to make high-quality wines."

Marqués de Cáceres' Crianza and Reserva Riojas showcase the texture and elegance that are their hallmarks. From the Crianza—which rests 12 months in 60% French and 40% American oak before aging



The Finca La Capilla Ribera del Duero Crianza and Vendimia Seleccionada.





in bottle for another year—"we get these tannins which are rounder, smoother," explains Forner. "The Crianza shows nice fruit . . . and we get a freshness in the finish." The Reserva spends 20 months in 50% new and 50% recently used oak to acquire structure and refinement. Culinary possibilities are legion for both: Forner suggests pairing the Crianza with pasta, Asian dishes containing soy sauce and ginger, Mexican food, and, of course, paella, while the Reserva complements roast lamb, seared steak, and mature cheeses.

The bodega's adherence to the meticulous production of fruit from privileged sites is a direct challenge to what Forner believes is an unfair perception of Spanish wines as pleasant yet unremarkable among consumers. "We use an artisan process to make great wine," she says. "We need to defend the image of these top-quality wines to get this prestigious recognition."

Upon her father's retirement in 2007, Forner assumed leadership of a company that had grown since its inception to export to 130 global markets. But it wasn't just the family business she received—she also inherited a legacy of pioneering spirit. So in 2014, she began expanding beyond Rioja with the purchase of 300 acres in Rueda, a region of Castilla y León known for its expressive whites. The new vineyards in the villages of Serrada and La Seca reflect the influences both of the Atlantic and of the gravelly soils they're planted on to yield wines like the Marqués de Cáceres Verdejo, which ages on the lees until bot-




Cristina Forner with her father, Enrique, the founder of Marqués de Cáceres.

tling for depth and complexity that don't preclude the grape's signature freshness.

"Our ambition is to be the reference [point for] the best DOs and the best Spanish wines," Forner says. "We are always looking to make wines with good structure while keeping their elegance and finesse. I think that you can stick to the local character but maintain this philosophy . . . which is the identity of Marqués de Cáceres."

Her trek across the Iberian Peninsula resumed in 2019 with the acquisition of Ribera del Duero estate Finca La Capilla; Forner can hardly conceal her excitement when discussing the newest Marqués de Cáceres enterprise, calling it "a dream

come true" to be able to hand-harvest the grapes in the 148-acre vineyard, then slow-ferment them with native yeasts before aging in French barrels. It's no wonder she affectionately refers to it as "our baby."

Forner takes pride in both the reputation and growth of Marqués de Cáceres, but she maintains that her job is never finished: Continuing down the path of success requires constant evolution and an ethos of resolve. "Talking about the future, we want to remain a dynamic company, focusing on digitalization and innovation and sustainability," she says. "My hope is that our family will continue this project another 100 years." 

THE LEGEND OF JAMES OWNBY



A LEGACY OF
RENEGADES

James **OWNBY** Reserve

GATLINBURG, TENNESSEE

Drink Responsibly

James Ownby Reserve. 47% Alc./Vol. ©2021 Ole Smoky Distillery, LLC, Gatlinburg, TN All Rights Reserved. OLE SMOKY is a registered trademark of Ole Smoky Distillery, LLC.

JAMESOWNBYRESERVE.COM



All in the Family

JUAN CARLOS RUIZ TRANSITIONS FROM WINE SERVICE TO SPIRITS WITH VOLCÁN DE MI TIERRA TEQUILA *story by Michelle M. Metter / photo by Rafael Peterson*

BORN IN SANTA MARIA, California, Juan Carlos Ruiz grew up in the Central Coast region as many first-generation Americans here do—in an agricultural family. His parents and their brothers and sisters, originally from Jalisco, Mexico, worked in the fields picking strawberries, broccoli, bell peppers, and cauliflower, and they ensured that his early life was spent surrounded by lots of family and good food to boot. “I felt like every weekend we would be at the park in Nipomo or Arroyo Grande celebrating someone’s birthday,” Ruiz says. “It’s a beautiful place to grow up, and I consider myself lucky.”

Although the Central Coast is well known for wine, with vineyards spanning from Santa Barbara to Monterey, Ruiz never gave it too much attention until he followed his older brother Emanuel south to San Diego and began working at Salvatore’s Cucina Italiana as a busser. “This is where the world of food, wine, and hospitality opened up to me, and I realized I had found my passion,” he says.

“With that experience, I knew I could bus tables anywhere in San Diego.” He worked as a busser and food runner for years until he ended up at Addison, the only Michelin-starred restaurant in the city, as part of the opening team.

After working there for several years and advancing his way up to captain, Ruiz moved to Las Vegas to work at Twist by Pierre Gagnaire, a *Forbes Travel Guide* 5-Star award winner, in the Waldorf Astoria Las Vegas (formerly the Mandarin Oriental). While there, he eventually became a certified sommelier under the mentorship and guidance of Master Sommelier Will Costello. “Seeing mentors of mine like Will move away from working in restaurant service pushed me to look at a change,” says Ruiz. “I had given 18 years of my life to restaurants, and it took a pandemic for me to let it go.”

Seeking to broaden his career outside of the service industry, he began looking for new opportunities—and that’s when he encountered luxury tequila brand

Volcán de Mi Tierra, a co-partnership between the Gallardos, a prominent Mexican business family, and Moët Hennessy. The brand—whose name pays homage to a volcano in the lowlands of the Tequila region that erupted 200,000 years ago, creating the ideal terroir for Blue Weber agave—launched in 2017 with a Blanco and a Cristalino, followed by a Reposado in December 2020.

After taking on the role of Volcán de Mi Tierra’s development manager for Southern California, Ruiz has settled back in San Diego. Among his responsibilities are developing brand awareness by educating distributor partners and putting tequila to lips at tasting events. But when he reflects on why he feels so connected to his new path in the spirits industry, it all comes back to family: “I’m really an extension of the 56 distillery employees that work so hard to create a special tequila from harvest to bottling,” he says. “Volcán de Mi Tierra is showcasing what tequila is truly capable of.” *SM*

Monção e Melgaço:

Getting to Know Portugal's

Marquee Subregion



Of all the classic European wine regions admired by consumers and trade, Vinho Verde is a bit of a paradox: While unanimously appreciated for its accessible, fresh whites, the full range of the region's wines and their expressions—and especially its marquee subregion of Monção e Melgaço—have been little-known in the United States until recently. With import, distribution, and adoption by retailers and restaurants rising rapidly, wine lovers are discovering a more elevated side of a wine they've always enjoyed, evolving out of the limiting mindset that Vinho Verde is simply “cheap and cheerful,” and finding northern Portugal's true story to be as distinguished as that of any other iconic Old World winemaking area.



Vinho Verde's viticultural history is both long and fascinating, with the winemaking of the Minho River area noted by ancient Stoic philosopher Seneca as early as the first century—and with the wines of Monção e Melgaço becoming sought-after exports to the rest of Europe during the 1300s as an alternative to Burgundy, a region to which Vinho Verde's contemporary premium wine styles are increasingly again compared.

intense, layered, and aromatic whites from exciting new regions grows by the year—not to mention that these Alvarinhos are wholly distinct from those of neighboring Spain, offering a style that speaks of local tradition with confidence and complexity.

So where do these wines fit in for members of the trade looking to grow their retail or restaurant programs? Still decidedly undervalued on the basis of their quality and pedigree, premium Monção e Melgaço wines frequently still retail for half the price of wines of commensurate excellence from Sancerre, Burgundy, or Germany, providing extraordinary QPR to both novice consumers trading up and experienced wine aficionados thirsty for exploration.

On the restaurant side of the equation, the possibilities are endless. These wines can pair beautifully with everything from ceviche to South Indian cuisine and technique-driven tasting menus to Thai takeout. Moreover, the density and structure of the richer expressions make a welcome complement to roast chicken, whole grilled branzino, or even well-spiced carnitas. These are whites tailored perfectly to the spectrum of style between delicate, aromatic, and crisp as well as wines that are rich, layered, and ageworthy—a major discovery for wine lovers of all levels.



Situated in a warmer, drier, and higher-elevation corner of the famously rainy maritime terroir of the broader Vinho Verde region, Monção e Melgaço's microclimate is perfectly tuned to the production of famed white grape Alvarinho, which is native to the Minho area. Under these unique natural conditions, Alvarinho shines as a varietal wine—showing ripe tropical and orchard fruit characteristics, deep minerality, complex aromatic qualities, and a versatility that pairs beautifully across a diverse range of cuisines.

Many Monção e Melgaço producers are also experimenting with oak usage and lees aging, two techniques that result in richer, deeply textured wines that challenge public misperception of the area's production as merely fresh, fun, and “drink-now.” These higher-end expressions in particular are very much on trend with the trade, as consumers' taste for


Monção e Melgaço



wines of
portugal
a world of difference



Transportation, Texas-Style

CADILLAC WINES IN FORT WORTH TAKES CUSTOMERS TO THEIR HAPPY PLACE

by Lori Moffatt

IN 2012, when Corrie Watson and her brother, Will Churchill, opened their Fort Worth wine shop to serve customers at the auto dealership founded by their great-grandfather in 1935, they soon realized how both cars and wine have the ability to transport us. “The idea of the wine shop came from Will,” explains Watson. “A lot of Cadillac buyers are interested in food and wine, and we were thinking of how we could add an amenity you wouldn’t find in other dealerships. Neither of us has a formal background in wine, but we have a passion for travel, especially exploring other countries and their wines; we love learning about terroir, farming methods, and how wines are made.”

Thankfully, you don’t have to be in the market for a new luxury vehicle to shop at Cadillac Wines, which today occupies a cozy, 300-square-foot nook between Service and Sales—though it’s impossible to resist ogling the cars on display and entertaining the idea of an upgrade. You’ll also

find the pricing structure accommodating to, ahem, a Honda budget, with plenty of marvelous wines in the \$20–\$50 range (in addition to bigger-ticket bottles). “We have built amazing relationships with our distributors, who know what our clients like, whether it’s a special-occasion Champagne or a gem that drinks like a big red but without the price tag,” says Watson.

She and Churchill recently added wine director Naomi Garcia to the team, who “brings a wonderful knowledge of wine, a passion for service, and a go-get-’em attitude,” according to Watson. She’ll therefore add extra incentive for customers to linger—especially in the summertime, when the air-conditioned space serves as a respite from the summer heat. “We often have to explain that we are not a bar,” Watson admits, “but we can sample them up to 5 ounces.”

As an essential business, Cadillac Wines never fully closed during the pandemic—but like most package-store owners, the

siblings had to retool their business model accordingly. “We quickly improved our website, signed on with delivery partners, started hosting Zoom wine tastings, and perfected our six-pack and four-pack specials,” Watson says. (For example, a recent six-pack of rosé featured curated bottles from across the globe—a \$95 value for \$60.) She notes that customers love the bundles because it’s a low-risk way to push their comfort levels: “The best part is when they tell us they’ve found a new wine they love [that] they would not have tried without the pack special.”

Another surprise hit, according to Watson, is the Moët vending machine, which dispenses 187-milliliter bottles of three different Moët Champagnes, transporting people to their special place with the clink of a token. “It dispenses happiness daily and often!” Watson says. “We thought it might enjoy a social-media moment, but who knew little Champagne bottles could make people so happy?” *—SJ*



PHOTO: MARK GODFREY

Siblings Corrie Watson (left) and Will Churchill own Cadillac Wines, a wine shop located inside a Fort Worth, TX, car dealership. They recently hired wine director Naomi Garcia (right) and plan to open a second shop in Arlington, TX.



Weed

—BE GREAT TOGETHER—

Proud Sponsor of



Assisting those suffering from financial medical toxicity.

Contact: Jim Moeller / jim@weedcellars.com / (949) 813-8003

Moving Forward

by Ini Gabriel Uko




It is an honor to be a recipient of the generous SommFoundation Scholarship for Black American Wine Professionals sponsored by Cooper's Hawk, which has given me the confidence to keep pursuing my education, aware that SommFoundation aims to support sommeliers like me on my journey.

I FELL IN LOVE with hospitality at age 19 while working as a college student. I was excited by the high-energy atmosphere, the diligence and creativity of my colleagues, and the vast array of personalities who would walk through our doors in search of a sensational dining experience. It would be five years, however, before my curiosity drew me to the beverage side of the industry. I especially appreciated the collaboration between the chef and the beverage management team, as I quickly discovered that the synergy between a restaurant's menu and its beverage list is what brings the sensory experience to life for guests.

To further my knowledge, I went behind the bar to learn the foundations of cocktail development while beginning my wine studies. Meanwhile, my one-on-one interaction with customers helped me home in on their desire to feel connected to their drinking experience. Nothing beats the satisfaction I get when I make wine and spirits come alive for them. My fervor to continue my education in food and drink so that I could provide even better hospitality led me to cross paths with a few sommeliers, who revealed to me how incredibly immersive the wine and spirits world can be during the tasting sessions I shared with them. They motivated me to achieve my career ambitions.

The more I delved into my studies and researched sommelier organizations, the more I realized there is always so much more to learn; it took some years and substantial expenses for me to become a Certified Sommelier through the Court of Master Sommeliers, Americas. But I succeeded, and I could not be prouder to represent my beverage community, bridging the gap between producers and consumers with integrity.

I seek to be qualified to the best of my ability, and that calls for continued studies and advanced certifications. The path to accreditation at each level is an arduous one that requires consistent practice, the procurement of study materials, sacrificed time, examination and travel fees, and more. The financial burden of these requirements has at times been a deterrent in pursuing further certifications.

So it is an honor to be a recipient of the generous SommFoundation Scholarship for Black American Wine Professionals sponsored by Cooper's Hawk, which has given me the confidence to keep pursuing my education, aware that SommFoundation aims to support sommeliers like me on my journey. The grant reminds me that I am not alone in my passion for training and hospitality; its timing is especially encouraging as the food and beverage industry tries to ride out the devastation the pandemic has wrought. Every bit of assistance helps, so I am truly grateful to SommFoundation and Cooper's Hawk for their sponsorship. I can't help but feel hopeful that I can continue to prepare for my future while we as a community bounce back and reform. 

SELECT SPRITZ

SELECT APERITIVO, THE CLASSIC VENETIAN APERITIF, WAS CREATED IN 1920 IN THE HEART OF VENICE.

A PRECISE SELECTION OF 30 BOTANICALS COMBINE TO ACHIEVE THE WELL-BALANCED, BITTERSWEET TASTE OF SELECT APERITIVO- THE ESSENTIAL INGREDIENT FOR MAKING THE ORIGINAL VENETIAN SPRITZ.



{ cover story }



From **AUS** *to the* **USA**

**WITH ITS NEW CALIFORNIA
COLLECTION, **PENFOLDS** MAKES
A QUANTUM LEAP**

by Jonathan Cristaldi

THE AUSTRALIANS
ARE COMING, AND
THEY'RE DOING
WHAT THEY DO
BEST: **BLENDING IN.**



Iconic Australian winery Penfolds—producer of the legendary Grange—has so perfected the art of the blend that critics often compare it to the great Champagne houses. The difference, of course, is that it sources many of its blends from multiple regions—and now, it's going global. You may already have heard that Penfolds has ventured to California to produce a new line of wines. In March of this year, it announced the inaugural release of The California Collection: a project more than 20 years in the making that's resulted in four singularly magnificent wines.

They hail from distinct sites in Napa, Sonoma, and Penfolds' own Camatta Hills Estate in Paso Robles, which is planted to heritage cuttings from its Magill and Kalimna estates in South Australia; two of the new releases also contain wine from the homeland, leading to the coinage of the term "Wine of the World." The layered, savory, and robust **Penfolds 2018 Bin 704 Cabernet Sauvignon** from Napa Valley is a mirror reflection of Penfolds' Bin 407 as a top-shelf blend of Cabernet from across South Australia's subregions. The **Penfolds 2018 Bin 600 Cabernet-Shiraz** is a satiny, cherry- and black pepper-infused Cabernet blended with Shiraz grown in Camatta Hills' Block 30. Then there's the **Penfolds 2018 Bin 149 Wine of the World Cabernet Sauvignon**: Spanning continents, it balances the power of Napa Valley's tannins and ripe fruit with the savory and sinewy flavor



PHOTOS COURTESY OF PENFOLDS

Some of the fruit for Penfolds' new California Collection comes from Diamond Mountain Vineyard in Napa Valley.





Penfolds chief winemaker
Peter Gago.

profile of South Australia. And finally, the extraordinary, Grange-inspired flagship label, **Penfolds 2018 Quantum Bin 98 Wine of the World Cabernet Sauvignon**, was awarded a perfect 100-point score by *SOMM Journal* publisher Meridith May (see page 55).

In late April—the thick of Australia's 2021 harvest—Penfolds chief winemaker Peter Gago took a few hours to speak with me on Zoom about The California Collection. I asked him if he was pleased with his newest creations. “I am very happy with the outcome,” he said humbly. But as can be expected, the 23-year lead-up to such a momentous launch presented numerous challenges along the way.

Revelations and Evolutions

In the 1980s, when Penfolds was owned by Tooth & Co.—a subsidiary of the Adelaide Steamship Company—it bought a 50% stake in Geyser Peak Winery in Sonoma, sending Daryl Groom to make the wines on its behalf. Later, Mick Schroeter (the older brother of Kym Schroeter, who produces Penfolds' white wines) leapt the pond and joined Groom. “We learned something very valuable when we sent those winemakers to the U.S.,” said Gago—namely that “they didn't come back.”

Was it the unparalleled California sunshine? The chance to make a mark

some 8,000 miles from home? Whatever the reasons, it's essential to understand that the idea for The California Collection took shape once Penfolds' entire team—its then-owners, winemakers, and sales force alike—began to grasp the region's potential. And though that seed was planted decades ago, it would take years to bear fruit.

What makes The California Collection so remarkable, then, isn't so much what it is but what it is not: It is not some marketing ploy. (Incredibly, it's pure coincidence that its debut coincides with Penfolds' 175th anniversary.) Joining Gago on the winemaking team behind The California Collection are senior winemaker Stephanie Dutton and red winemaker Andrew



at the thought. Given, then, that Penfolds has been blending across regions for a long time, Gago felt it was not a major leap to combine wine from two different countries. He pointed to its Yattarna Bin 144 Chardonnay, the sources for which have expanded over time to include “the snowy island of New South Wales and later Southern Victoria and eventually Tasmania,” as he put it, adding, “So you see how these things progress? What we are doing today has been an evolution over 175 years.”

To further prove the point, he held up a bottle of the Quantum and gave it a 180-degree spin to show me that “there is no signature on the back,” as there has been on the winery’s older bottlings. “This is not the result of just one winemaker,” he noted. “This is entirely Penfolds.”

Establishing Camatta Hills

In 1998, Penfolds purchased the 610-acre Creston 600 Ranch in Paso Robles and renamed it Camatta Hills. Sending vineyard manager Aiden Broc to establish the vineyards, the company planted 200 acres a year later and another 210 acres a year after that, 10 of them to the aforementioned cuttings from South Australia. “It’s California skies above and soils below, but everything in between is Penfolds,” said Gago.

By 2006, Penfolds had produced a Camatta Hills Syrah and went so far as to

bottle and label it. But the CEO at the time pulled the rug out. “It was thought that it was not part of what Penfolds should be doing,” Gago recalled. “We were devastated. But it was the best thing that could have happened. You only ever get one chance at a first impression.” To ensure that the world’s first impression of Penfolds’ American wines would be a memorable one, then, Gago sent his top two winemakers—Dutton and Baldwin—to California to prepare for the first harvest.

Upon their arrival in 2017, the duo’s first visit to Camatta Hills came with an unusual reminder of home. “As you drive into the vineyard in Paso, it looks like an Australian vineyard,” Baldwin told me. “It’s sprawl and spacing, which is what we do in Australia, where we’re governed by water flow and have to space the vines out so they don’t compete with each other.” The visual honeymoon was short-lived, however, because Dutton and Baldwin soon realized that much more work needed to be done to perfect the trial work that began two decades prior. “We looked at fruit positioning and fruit zone and canopy management and realized that the way we were approaching farming in Paso Robles was very Barossa-centric,” recalled Dutton. They immediately set about adjusting the canopy, and by the end of that year’s harvest, they felt that they’d positioned themselves for a great harvest in 2018. Whether prophetic

Baldwin; when I asked each of them to describe the inception of the project, none could point to any particular “aha” moment—no meeting with executives sitting around a conference-room table to divine the Great Idea.

Rather, Gago explained, The California Collection demonstrates the natural evolution of Penfolds, which was founded in 1844 when Dr. Christopher Rawson Penfold and his wife, Mary, established the Magill Estate in the Adelaide Hills. As the winery expanded, sourcing fruit and operating facilities around the country, its house style took root in solid ground. “Grange celebrates its 70th birthday this year,” said Gago, seeming almost in shock



Camatta Hills is Penfolds’ 610-acre estate in the Creston District of Paso Robles.



Penfolds red winemaker Andrew Baldwin and senior winemaker Stephanie Dutton, who help chief winemaker Peter Gago craft The California Collection, walk the vineyards in Napa.

or just lucky, they dodged two big bullets: Correcting the canopy led to improved ripening, and as we all know, 2017 was the year of devastating fires.

Claim to Fame

Gago, who has led Penfolds' winemaking team for 20 years, considers himself "a custodian of style." When he arrived in Napa Valley after the 2018 harvest, it was for the winery's highly anticipated and time-honored "classification tasting"—the final step in maintaining that style. The first takes place during fermentation, when header boards atop the winery's stainless-steel tanks submerge grape caps, sending runoff juice to a separate tank that's then pumped back over the cap. Once that phase is complete, fermentation is finished off the skins in barrels. The free-run juice is drained off and aged in both French and American oak.

The classification tasting is conducted blind to identify the top lots for crafting the final blend of each wine. "We don't know vineyard or variety," explained Gago, "[which] takes out [any] financial and

emotional bias." For the Quantum, for instance, the tasting included selections from Oakville, Diamond Mountain, and Howell Mountain.

Earlier in the morning, Dutton and Baldwin had gathered with some American winemakers who, between them, had over 50 vintages' worth of experience in Napa and who had graciously agreed to help them determine benchmarks according to the Penfolds grading system; the goal was to put multiple palates from two different hemispheres in the service of identifying world-class fruit. "We grade grapes from A to C," explained Baldwin, "so we took Aussie Shiraz and Shiraz from the U.S. and tasted and debated to agree on what constituted A-I-grade quality." They did the same for Cabernet.

This exercise would prove to be an accidental breakthrough. When Gago arrived for the tasting, he'd noticed the wines sampled earlier "still hanging around," as he put it. Inspired, he decided to add a bit of the remaining Australian Cab to some of the afternoon blends—"and it was like magic," recalled Gago. "The wine became cohe-

sive and complete, and we had our Bin 149." Then "we tried the same thing with Quantum, adding a bit of Shiraz to the young California wine—and it worked," he said excitedly. An American-style "Baby Grange" was born, and Penfolds coined the phrase "Wine of the World," which now graces the front labels of both Bin 149 and Quantum Bin 98 as an indication of their international contents. The remaining lots became the two other wines in the collection. And with that, the first chapter in the story of Penfolds' California Collection was complete.

Suffice it to say that Penfolds is not unique in blending domestic and imported wine. It has, however, created the first luxury-tier multicountry blends. Incredibly, these wines sold out within hours at the cellar door of Penfolds' Magill Estate in Adelaide. Imagine that: On its 175-year journey from humble beginnings in South Australia, this winery has explored different vineyards, expanded to other regions, and finally bridged whole continents—offering a completely new experience for wine drinkers from here to Oz. **SJ**

Tasting Notes

Penfolds 2018 Bin 600

Cabernet-Shiraz, California (\$50)

This multiregional California blend contains fruit from Napa, Sonoma, and the winery's own Camatta Hills property, planted to cuttings from its Kalimna and Magill estates in South Australia; located in Paso Robles' Creston District, it was originally called Creston 600 Ranch, and the wine was named Bin 600 in its honor. With its rolling hills, large diurnal temperature swings, and clay-loam and calcareous soils, the terroir is reminiscent of the Barossa Valley, and it shows in the wine's herb-kissed depth of blackberry and plum, which morphs into a rare-roast beef meatiness. Sparked by salinity, caperberry and olive tapenade come into play. A streak of chocolate-almond croissant provides voluminous softness while sweetening the savory elements. **94**

—Meridith May

Penfolds 2018 Bin 704

Cabernet Sauvignon, Napa Valley (\$70)

Streamlined and showing dusty tannins, this 100% Cabernet Sauvignon is 100% Napa Valley, with a winemaking signature that's 100% Penfolds. Aged 16 months in 100% French oak, it shows a sleek mouthfeel in which lavender and peony converge with plum skin and jasmine. A few extra days of skin contact allow beefy, concentrated notes of cherry liqueur and dark chocolate to surface. Marked by spiced cedar, the finish is a satisfying immersion of power and elegance. **96** —M.M.

Penfolds 2018 Bin 149 Wine

of the World Cabernet Sauvignon (\$149)

The combination of Cabernet Sauvignon from vineyards in Napa Valley and South Australia is an extension of Penfolds' house style and has been christened with the unique term "Wine of the World." Maturation for 16 months in new French (80%) and new American (20%) oak further adds to its globe-spanning distinction. A phantom of a wine, with a feminine sort of reined-in power and tension, it delivers both sweetness and a sassy, savory, keen sensation of sage on cocoa along with woody tones. The palpable dark fruit acts like drapes parting on the dynamic stage, revealing statuesque glamour. **98** —M.M.

Penfolds 2018 Quantum Bin 98 Wine of the World Cabernet Sauvignon (\$700)

Muscle and grace delineate a wine that is making history in the footsteps of its forebear, Grange. Napa Valley Cabernet Sauvignon (87%) and South Australian Shiraz (13%) are the building blocks of this multidimensional creation ten years in the making. Balanced and expressive, with recognizable accents of both the Southern and Northern hemispheres, it offers aromas of fresh dark berries, apple tart, and a touch of piquant spice, which lead to headier notes on the palate. Licorice, slate, and molasses pave a path with staying power. Plum preserves and a twist of basil, cigar leaf, and hazelnut determine the lengthy, exhilarating finish. **100** —M.M.

TREASURY WINE ESTATES



"What we are doing today has been an evolution over 175 years."

—Penfolds chief winemaker **Peter Gago**

A small portion of Penfolds' Paso Robles acreage is planted to heritage cuttings from its Magill and Kalimna estates in South Australia.

Overlooking
the Serego
Alghieri estate in
Valpolicella.

God Bless ITALIA

RECAPPING THE
“ITALY, NORTH
TO SOUTH”
WEBINAR SERIES IN
ASSOCIATION WITH
NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC



by Jessie Birschbach

PHOTO COURTESY OF SEREGO ALGHIERI



San Polo is the Montalcino property of the Veneto-based Allegrini family.

ITALY

is notoriously complicated when it comes to wine. Its north-to-south axis makes for an incredibly wide range of macroclimates in which roughly 2,000 native grape varieties alone are cultivated.

(And don't even get me started on appellation and labeling laws.)

As a longtime friend of Lars Leicht, VP of education for *The SOMM Journal* and moderator for our Geographical Digest webinar series, I expected him to describe attempting to understand the country's wine industry the same way I've heard him do so in the past: "like trying to untangle a bowl of spaghetti." But this time the Italian wine expert did no such thing. "Our theme today is very poignant," Leicht told our audience, "as Italy is just coming out of a political crisis." He was referring to the governmental upheaval that had ended in February, just a few weeks prior to the webinar, and resulted in the resignation of Prime Minister Giuseppe Conte. Leicht also solemnly mentioned that the country had imposed yet another lockdown due to the pandemic.

Yet, he noted, Italy's wine industry is still thriving amid the tumult. I might have been missing my friend's reliable pasta metaphor, but I was grateful to hear him frankly address what Italians are currently facing. I suspect that, like me, the truth made the audience all the more willing to not only learn about their wines but support the industry as a whole. "We're representing six different wine regions today," said Leicht—and perhaps in keeping with the Italian spirit of spontaneity, "we'll actually be moving south to north, so let's get on with it! And God bless Italia."

THE SAVVY OF THE SALENTINI

APPELLATION: SALENTO IGT, PUGLIA

WINERY: MASSERIA ALTEMURA

PRESENTER: ANTONIO CAVALLO, WINEMAKER DIRECTOR

PHOTO COURTESY OF MASSERIA ALTEMURA



Antonio Cavallo, winemaker director of Masseria Altemura.

The Zonin family has been producing wine in Italy for seven generations. Today they own ten estate vineyards in a handful of the country's major regions—plus one in the U.S. and another in Chile.

One of their most unique properties is located in Puglia, the heel of the boot-shaped country. In the southernmost part of this region, flanked by the Adriatic and Ionian seas, is the subregion of Salento, home to the Masseria Altemura winery. The area conjures images of turquoise-colored water giving way to arched white cliffs, but it's also known for its Primitivo, particularly its Primitivo di Maduria.

Salento is one of the hottest places in Italy, but its climate is tempered by sea breezes. These, combined with the intense sun and the rocky white soils that reflect it, help to shape the character of the wines grown here. "Every day we have wind,"

said Antonio Cavallo, winemaker director for Masseria Altemura. "But most important is our collection of rocks in the soil. This helps the color of red grapes to intensify and adds to the minerality and salinity of our white wines."

A mix of red clay and white calcareous rocks serves as the base of Masseria Altemura's 270-hectare estate, in which 130 hectares of vines—in addition to two winemaking facilities, one 400 years old and the other ten—are surrounded by olive groves.

Cavallo, a Puglia native who considers himself a champion of indigenous varieties, noted that the majority of the estate is planted to Primitivo and Fiano. While admitting that they are not the easiest grapes to cultivate, he insisted that Fiano maintains its freshness thanks to the calcareous soil and to viticultural methods like machine harvesting at night. As for Primitivo, he acknowledged, "We fight with [it] every year because it's very delicate [and] it ripens very early—we harvest the first week of September even."

Cavallo presented both the Masseria Altemura 2018 Sasseo Primitivo and 2018 Fiano, noting that the Primitivo is aged in large Slovenian tonneaux. Both wines are not only fresh in character but authentic expressions of Salentini culture.



Masseria Altemura 2018 Fiano, Salento IGT, Puglia (\$17)

This crisp, linear, and dry white is blessed with delicate white floral notes and a sensation akin to a sea breeze that softens its angular character. Just-ripe pineapple, flint, lemon, and a rich texture make for an exceptional wine. **92**

Masseria Altemura 2018 Sasseo Primitivo, Salento IGT, Puglia (\$17) Rich and rustic, with identifying notes of cigar leaf, tart cherry, and Italian herbs. Tannins are round and smattered with mocha and cedar. **91**

1821 FINE WINE & SPIRITS

An aerial view of San Polo and its estate vineyards.

SEVENTH-GENERATION STEWARDS

APPELLATION/REGION: BRUNELLO DI MONTALCINO DOCG, TOSCANA

WINERY: SAN POLO

PRESENTER: ROBIN SHAY, EXPORT MANAGER, AMERICAS

Any somm worth their salt is well acquainted with Allegrini, but they might not know of the Veneto-based family's Tuscan estate, the San Polo winery in Montalcino. "Sixth-generation winegrower Marilisa Allegrini invested in Montalcino in 2007 with the hope of providing a platform for the next generation of talented Allegrini women to express themselves enologically," said

Robin Shay, export manager of the Americas for San Polo. And they surely did: Today, Carlotta Allegrini, also an MD, is a member of the board for San Polo, and her sister Caterina is the winery's current CEO.

What's been most important to the current generation of leaders is environmental stewardship. After Marilisa purchased the winery in 2007, it became certified by the energy certification system CasaClima, earning the Quality Seal for Sustainability; by 2017, San Polo had also earned its organic certification from the European Union.

After a topline review of Brunello di Montalcino's DOCG requirements, Shay noted the importance of subzones within the appellation, dividing it into three levels of elevation: the high ground, which offers the most structured and ageworthy wines; the mid-mountain level, which produces a



Robin Shay, export manager, Americas, for San Polo.

richer style of wine with a more approachable structure; and the lowlands, which typically offer a softer, riper style of Brunello di Montalcino. For somms currently studying for a certification, it's worth noting that Shay strongly recommended the book *Brunello di Montalcino: Understanding and Appreciating One of Italy's Greatest Wines*, whose author, Kerin O'Keefe, conceptualized these elevation-based delineations.

Within Brunello di Montalcino's highest subzone, which ranges from 1,148 feet to 1,640 feet, is San Polo's 54-acre estate, comprising mostly Galestro soils. Forty acres are planted to vine, half of them classified as Brunello di Montalcino. Shay presented both the estate-grown San Polo 2018 Rubio and 2015 Brunello di Montalcino as a demonstration of the producer's range. The former is an early-release wine that he said "communicates [the winery's] values" through its "bright, fresh quality" and, in the quoted words of San Polo winemaker Riccardo Fratton, "unspoiled nature." The latter expression, meanwhile, exemplifies what Fratton calls "power and elegance," according to Shay. He used that descriptor to draw a fitting parallel to the leadership of Carlotta and Caterina as well as Marilisa, "who's broken a number of glass ceilings in our industry."



San Polo 2018 Rubio, Montalcino, Toscana IGT (\$25)

Composed primarily of hillside-grown Sangiovese, this stainless steel-aged red presents as dense and juicy, with high acidity and notes of concentrated dark plum. Soy sauce and olive tapenade add dimension to its freshness. The mouthfeel is silky,

leaving a touch of salinity on the tongue. **91**



San Polo 2015 Brunello di Montalcino DOCG, Tuscany (\$70)

At 1,476 feet above sea level, soils rich in calcium and clay underlie

the two vineyards on the San Polo estate that impart character to this masterpiece, aged in barrel for 30 months and in bottle for six. Aromas of dried blue and red fruits signal the wine's high-powered energy. Fine acidity, tart cherry, and cinnamon lead the way, followed by sweet rose petals and tomato leaf. Sandalwood, balsamic, and earthy tones join in midway to reach the full finish. **95**

TRINCHERO FAMILY ESTATES
HERITAGE COLLECTION



San Polo winemaker Riccardo Fratton.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF SAN POLO

A PIEMONTESE FASCINATION WITH BURGUNDY

APPELLATION/REGION: BAROLO DOCG, PIEMONTE

WINERY: RENATO RATTI

PRESENTER: PIETRO RATTI, WINEMAKER

PHOTOS COURTESY OF RENATO RATTI



Renato Ratti winemaker Pietro Ratti.

Renato Ratti's winery and cellar are located on the precipice of a hilltop overlooking not only a few of its estate blocks but the other vineyards of the La Morra subregion of Barolo in Piemonte. Nestled within the dark green hills is the Annunziata Abbey, a 14th-century church that the winery's founder, Renato Ratti, saw as a good omen for purchasing the property. It was also precisely the view that Renato's son, winemaker and proprietor Pietro Ratti, was seeing during his presentation—and though he was just a small square in the corner of the PowerPoint image he was sharing, you could still see his twinkling eyes peering out of the winery's panoramic windows.

In 1965, after making vermouth in Brazil for a decade, Renato returned to his hometown of Barolo to fulfill his dream of making the Nebbiolo-based wine in La Morra, which, at an elevation of roughly 1,500 feet, is the highest village in the region. Renato felt

strongly that the bottlings produced there were among Barolo's best, yielding a more elegant and floral expression of the powerful wine. "What my father did was not just to make a Barolo but introduce and lead all Barolo and Barbaresco regions to the single-vineyard concept," said Pietro. "It existed in the region [before], but at the time [most producers] tended to blend. My father was fascinated by Burgundy, so in 1965 he made his first single vineyard, [Marcenasco,] and in 1970 he made [another] small single-vineyard wine called Conca."

Renato went on to release additional single-vineyard estate wines and also became president of the Consorzio di Tutela Barolo Barbaresco Alba Langhe e Dogliani, leading him to help draft the regulations for the Barolo DOCG in the 1980s. Thanks to the role he played in elevating the wines to international acclaim, he's now posthumously recognized as one of the foremost authorities on Barolo and Barbaresco.

Pietro presented the Renato Ratti 2017 Conca Barolo made from the two plots directly below the winery—which total 1.3 acres—as a "quintessential single-vineyard" wine, made all the more special by its limited production: a mere 3,000 bottles.



Renato Ratti 2016 Conca Barolo DOCG, Piedmont (\$120) From the winery's La Morra property, this single-vineyard Barolo offers ecstatic notes of brown-sugared cherries—tart, vibrant, and washed in earthy notes of balsamic. Dried roses and chalky minerality run with fine acidity uplifted by jasmine. **97**

The Renato Ratti winery sits above the Conca plots in the La Morra subregion of Barolo.





The winery and vineyards of Serego Alighieri.

DECANTING AMARONE INTO POETRY

APPELLATION/REGION: AMARONE DELLA VALPOLICELLA DOCG, VENETO

WINERY: SEREGO ALIGHIERI

PRESENTER: RAFFAELE BOSCAINI, MARKETING DIRECTOR



Serego Alighieri 2013 Vaio Armaron, Amarone della Valpolicella Classico DOCG, Veneto (\$119) Aged in cherrywood casks, Corvina, Rondinella, and the Serego Alighieri clone of Molinara are classic Amarone varieties. Earthy and spiced with both fresh and dark chocolate-covered cherry, this upright and regal wine offers additional notes of dates and plum liqueur; armed with elegance and strength of character, it shows a white-peppered depth. **97**

VINEYARD BRANDS

PHOTOS COURTESY OF SEREGO ALIGHIERI



Raffaele Boscaini, marketing director for Serego Alighieri.

There are wineries with history and there are wineries with *celebrated* history—and Serego Alighieri undeniably ranks among the latter. The estate boasts one of the longest winemaking traditions in Valpolicella, dating back more than 660 years to

its purchase in 1353 by Pietro Alighieri, the son of writer and philosopher Dante Alighieri. Dante himself, according to Serego Alighieri marketing director Raffaele Boscaini, “would not only decant wine into a decanter but into poetry.”

It’s a terribly endearing—and distinctly Italian—way to speak of wine, and it’s incredible to think that Dante’s descendants still live in this area known as Gargagnago, considered to be the heart of Valpolicella. “Serego Alighieri is in the Classica [area of] Valpolicella,” said Boscaini, “and it’s protected from the cold winds by the Dolomites.”

Located between that mountain range and the Adriatic Sea, the 12-hectare estate is one of the largest in the Valpolicella Classica zone. In the 1970s, the family partnered with Masi Agricola, a well-known Amarone brand, to assist in “technical support with production and worldwide distribution of wine and food specialties from the estate,” said Boscaini.

The family continues the unconventional tradition of aging its wines in cherrywood casks, according to Boscaini, who noted that cherries rank second only to grapes among agricultural products in Valpolicella. The producer’s Amarones, of course, are made in the traditional appassimento method, in which the usual trio of indigenous grapes (Corvina, Rondinella, and Molinara) dry on bamboo racks for three to four months. Boscaini presented the 2013 Vaio Armaron Amarone della Valpolicella as Serego Alighieri’s flagship wine; aged for three to four years in Slavonian oak barrels and four months in cherrywood casks, the blend is made with grapes sourced from the hillside Vaio Armaron vineyard, consisting of clay and limestone soils terraced by stone walls called *marogne*. The name Amarone is said to derive from this very vineyard, according to Boscaini, who proudly added that “this is Amarone with a capital ‘A.’”

LONGSTANDING TRADITION SPROUTS ANEW

One of Weed Cellars' vineyard sources in Prosecco.

APPELLATION/REGION: PROSECCO DOC, FRIULI-VENEZIA GIULIA

WINERY: WEED CELLARS

PRESENTER: MURPHY PERNG, WINE EXPERIENCE MANAGER



Weed Cellars Sparkling Rosé, Italy

(\$13) Bubbles are light and airy on a lovely and delicate mouthfeel. Raspberries and brioche combine on the dry palate of this blend of 80% Glera and 20% Pinot Noir, with notes of orange zest and minerality coming in for an energetic finish. **92**

PHOTOS COURTESY OF WEED CELLARS



Murphy Perng, wine experience manager for Weed Cellars.

"Does Weed Cellars have any cannabis in the wine?" an audience member asked in the Q&A forum of the webinar. Used to the question, Murphy Perng, wine experience manager for Weed Cellars, promptly answered: "None whatsoever. It's simply our fun way of branding"—and perhaps there is no better style of wine to match Weed Cellars' boisterous approach than Prosecco.

But that doesn't mean that its brut and rosé versions of the sparkling Italian wine aren't meant to be taken seriously. "Our winery, located in Friuli, has a long-standing tradition of winemaking, being founded [as a cooperative] in 1931," said Perng, adding that it's distinguished by its "high standards. We evaluate each batch of grapes coming in according to temperature, appearance, sugar content, and weight. And because we have such a clear evaluation process, it really motivates each one of our members to make the best grapes they possibly can."

Perng noted that the cooperative had to be rebuilt after it was destroyed in World War II, at which point a new era of accelerated growth and focus began. In 1981, it expanded its facilities and opted to center its production around sparkling wine, and it now consists of 500 members who farm 115 hectares of land in the Prosecco production area.

These vineyards lie between the cities of Pordenone and Udine in northeast Italy, according to Perng, which positions them "in the perfect area between the Alps and the Adriatic Sea. So our vineyards are influenced by cool air from the mountains and breezes from the sea, which makes for

excellent growing conditions. We have nice long summers, giving the grapes extra time to hang so they reach complete ripeness and realize their full flavor potential."

She also attributed favorable growing conditions to the area's diurnal swing "from 80 to 40 degrees Fahrenheit," enabling the grapes to retain acid, while its soils, consisting of "mostly sand and limestone as well as dolomitic material," provide excellent drainage. Weed Cellars' sustainability efforts only serve to augment these prime conditions: "We have technicians that walk each of our cooperative members through pruning to harvest, making sure that they're using the best sustainable processes. The technician also teaches each of our members how to reduce winery waste and water usage."

After opening both the Weed Cellars Prosecco (100% Glera) and Italian Sparkling Rosé (80% Glera and 20% Pinot Noir), Perng noted that the upcoming release of the latter will actually be a Prosecco Rosé, featuring 13% Pinot Noir in accordance with the new appellation's regulations. Regardless of percentage, Perng's tasting notes indicated typical fresh, fruity Prosecco character—it's only the name of the brand that's deviant.

THE RELIGION OF ENOGASTRONOMY

APPELLATION/REGION: LAMBRUSCO REGGIANO DOC, EMILIA-ROMAGNA

WINERY: MEDICI ERMETE

PRESENTER: ALESSANDRO MEDICI, OWNER

PHOTOS COURTESY OF MEDICI ERMETE



Alessandro Medici (right) and his father, Alberto, are owners of Medici Ermete.

In Emilia-Romagna, “enogastronomy is like our religion,” said Medici Ermete owner Alessandro Medici, whose expression told the webinar audience that he was quite serious. To be fair, anyone who knows anything about the region’s culinary culture knows this statement to be true: Otherwise known as “the food valley,” Emilia-Romagna is acknowledged worldwide for food products like Parmigiano Reggiano, cured meats (especially mort-

adella), lasagna and tagliatelle Bolognese, and balsamic vinegar. It’s also famed for its Lambrusco, the frizzante red wine that first gained popularity in the late 1970s, especially here in the U.S., thanks to the slogan for Banfi’s Riunite brand: “Riunite on ice . . . that’s nice.” The sweet, fizzy wine was a huge hit despite the headaches it spawned, but it also marred the general perception of Lambrusco’s quality in a way that persists today.

Medici’s family, for their part, have been working to change this ever since. “The sweet Lambrusco was a commercial invention of the ’80s that was very successful in the American market,” he said, “but the real Lambrusco that we produce and drink in our area is dry, with a low level of sugar.”

Medici Ermete organically farms 80 hectares of vineyards in the town of Reggio Emilia. An image Medici shared with the audience showed the winery centered within a flat valley vineyard that remained seemingly level until it reached the foot of the mountains in the background. “The Apennine Mountains divide perfectly the Emilia-Romagna region from Tuscany,” he explained. “They also help to create a perfect [climate] for the

agriculture and viticulture of the region. Thanks to these mountains, we don’t receive the strong winds from the sea and the southwest of Italy.”

In these ideal, relatively warm conditions, the Lambrusco grape and its 60 subvarieties thrive. According to Medici, most of the growers and producers in the area stick to six of these cultivars: Lambrusco Grasparossa, Lambrusco Salamino, Lambrusco Maestri, Lambrusco di Sorbara, Lambrusco Marani, and Lambrusco Mantovano.

Medici Ermete’s Concerto Lambrusco Reggiano is made with 100% Lambrusco Salamino, the subvariety that Medici believes is the most balanced, offering what he called an “intense red color and beautiful fruity aroma, with significant acid and a little bit of tannin.” Sourced from the Concerto vineyard and initially released in 1993 as the region’s first single-vineyard Lambrusco, the wine was officially certified organic with the 2020 vintage.

“I will never say that Lambrusco is the most important variety in the world,” said Medici thoughtfully, “but I can easily say it is one of the most gastronomic and versatile wines in the world. And what my family has done in the last 20 years is to try to show the potential in this serious and unique wine.” *SJ*

Medici Ermete’s estate vineyard in Reggio Emilia.

Medici Ermete Concerto Lambrusco, Reggiano DOC (\$20)

Not only is this the world’s first vintage Lambrusco, but Concerto is also the first single-vineyard expression of the dry sparkling red. Fresh from the start, the almost chalky entry is packed with dark fruit as well as bright pomegranate and strawberry. A hint of white pepper shows itself, and the harmonious balance of acid and tannins makes the wine’s name well deserved. Concerto has been honored with the Gambero Rosso Tre Bicchieri award for over a decade. **91**

KOBRAND WINE & SPIRITS





Unraveling Geologic Metaphors

MORE NATURALLY OCCURRING COMPOUNDS
HAVE BEEN FOUND IN SOIL AND IN WINE

IN ADDITION TO WATER and alcohol, wine is composed of fewer than 4% of minor components, many of which are only present in minuscule amounts. The dozen or so minerals that are present as nutrient elements—typically metallic cations (positively charged ions)—such as potassium, phosphorus, and calcium are only distantly related to geological minerals found in vineyards, which are complex crystalline compounds. However, research is showing that some of the same volatile compounds found in rocks can also be found in wines described as “mineral.” (I covered the best known of them, petrichor, in my October/November 2019 column.)


Although there is no single term for the source of mineral expression in wine, one thing wine professionals and consumers do agree upon is the use of certain words to describe such characteristics. Careful study of the lexeme for the word “mineral” has produced a list of relevant descriptors, including: flint, matchstick, smoke, kerosene, petrol, rubber eraser, slate, granite, limestone, earthy, tar, char-

coal, graphite, rock dust, wet stones, salty, metallic, steely, and ferrous.

One of the most romantic yet misguided geologic metaphors employed by winemakers attributes mineral expression to the soil vines grow in. For example, flint and pebbles contain polysulfides and, more specifically, hydrogen disulfane, compounds that give them odors of flint, gunpowder, and matchstick. Despite the widespread use of the term “flinty” to describe them, the odors of these sulfanes had previously never been studied in the context of food products—largely because the sulfanes are highly volatile and unstable, making them challenging to work with—until researchers who were studying toilet malodors realized they were on to something.

Flint is formed from sediments rich in hydrogen compounds as a result of the bacterial reduction of sulfates in an anaerobic environment. When it’s scraped or struck against another rock, the presence of iron from clay minerals releases those compounds as iron sulfides and

other sulfur forms. This is the source of the easily detectable gunflint odor that the winegrowers of Sancerre metaphorically assign to the aromas found in the wine that comes from the area’s silex soils. Flinty aromas in Sauvignon Blanc are attributed to benzene methanethiol (or reduction), but hydrogen disulfane can also play a role.

The abovementioned researchers confirmed the presence of hydrogen disulfane in two dry white Chasselas wines that were described by wine professionals as the most mineral from among 80 samples. When tested, in addition to containing this polysulfide, these wines were found to have higher concentrations of malic and lactic acid. While hydrogen sulfide is present to some degree in all wines, the compound hydrogen disulfane is more abundant in wines defined as mineral. Given its presence in both them and the soils they hailed from, the intrepid winegrowers of Sancerre can now revise their metaphor and take credit for winemaking choices that reflect their terroir. 



Uncork

with Felix Solis Avantis
& get your temp on



Felix Solis avantis
EXTENDING WINE CULTURE

www.felixsolisavantis.com
www.getyourtempon.com



agave VERDE

HOW SUSTAINABILITY IS BAKED INTO TEQUILA AND MEZCAL PRODUCTION

BY ALLYSON REEDY

*Fermenting agave
at Bozal Mezcal.*

Not all heroes wear capes: Some wear glass bottles with cool labels to protect the earth while giving you a buzz. For our second Concours d'Spirits webinar in partnership with SommCon, the conversation surrounding tequila and mezcal—both super-spirits in our book—kept coming back to the same topic: sustainability. Moderated by Fernando Sousa and Travis Gyarmaty of San Diego consultancy Hatchet Proof Craft Cocktail Services, the session explored the eco-oriented lore and process behind five tequila and mezcal producers.

"I love hearing everyone's stories," Sousa said during closing questions. "I feel like [they all] had an undertone of sustainability. You don't really hear that from other categories, so kudos to all of you." Here's how these standout brands are crafting champion juice while respecting and protecting their terroir.

PHOTO COURTESY OF 3 BADGE BEVERAGE CORPORATION



123 ORGANIC TEQUILA

123 Organic Tequila founder David Ravandi wasn't live on the webinar, but his recorded presentation was a good substitute, taking us through his process and a portfolio tasting. "This particular brand is close to my heart," he said. "After 30 years in the business of making tequila, I was finally able to achieve my dream"—namely to create a brand that focused as much on caring for the land as the palate. He succeeded: 123 is certified organic by both the U.S. and the European Union, and its sustainable practices extend from farming to using agave pulp as compost and making labels with recycled paper and soy ink.

Kicking off the tasting with the Blanco—labeled as the number 1—Ravandi explained that "I'm a huge fan of blanco tequila. . . . It's a really important step in the art of tequila making," serving as the foundation for numbers 2 and 3. He described the former, a Reposado aged for six months in American white oak barrels, as the most complex yet versatile spirit in his portfolio; as for the latter, the Añejo achieves its intensity and heavy weight on the palate through aging for 18 months. "My favorite part of Añejo is the back end: It's clean, fresh, [and] leaves a nice hint of agave," he added.

Finally Ravandi introduced us to a tequila he originally made for private consumption, 123 Diablito ("Little Devil"). Aged in French wine barrels for 40 months, it was, he decided, too good to keep to himself. "After consuming this, a little devil will come out of you," he said. "The only complaint we get about this is that it goes down really fast."



123 Organic Tequila founder David Ravandi.

PHOTO COURTESY OF 123 ORGANIC TEQUILA



Harvested agave at the Sombra distillery.

SOMBRA

The sustainability theme continued in the presentation by Sombra's international agave ambassador, Andrés Portela, who shared some of the considerable efforts the mezcal brand makes to contribute to the community of Oaxaca and ensure that agave thrives there for generations to come. One especially innovative program is Sombra's upcycled—adobe brick project. For every liter of spirit a *palenque* (distillery) distills, 10–15 liters of *vinasa*—an acidic distillation residue—is produced. When it's dumped into local rivers, the toxic liquid can contaminate the water and kill aquatic life. To solve this problem, the Sombra team reserves their *vinasa* and uses it, along with spent agave fibers, to make bricks, which are used in turn



to construct homes for locals in need. So far, they've built 24, with more in the works.

In addition, they've sown 20,000 Tobaá agave seeds in a nursery

at their *palenque* in honor of those used in their limited-edition *Ensamble* expression, transplanting the viable plants into the wild. For their main expression, Sombra Mezcal Joven, they source sustainably grown, fair-trade Espadín agave. Once it's harvested, they bury the piñas in traditional volcanic rock-lined pits, roast them over black oak for four days, and crush them with a solar-powered mechanical *tahona* (wheel). "I think we're the pioneers of not having donkeys [pull] our *tahona*," Portela said. The agave is then fermented with wild yeasts before it's distilled twice in copper pot stills. The bottled result is mezcal for you and a flourishing community for Oaxacans.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF SOMBRA



Billy Erickson (right) with his father, Guillermo, at their distillery in Jalisco.

FORTALEZA TEQUILA

It's possible that, in addition to blood, tequila also runs through Billy Erickson's veins. His great-great-grandfather started the Sauza Tequila company, and now he and his father, Guillermo Erickson Sauza, have followed in his footsteps via Fortaleza Tequila. "My family's been making tequila since the 1870s," Erickson said. "My great-grandfather left a tiny little distillery to my grandmother, and with her permission, my dad sort of refurbished it and got tequila flowing out of it again. My dad thought it would be a side hobby for him to restart the family business, but he didn't realize the quality of tequila we were going to produce."

To make the old Destileria La Fortaleza in Jalisco functional again, they had to refurbish and repair everything—fermentation tanks, stills, oven, boiler—and in 2002 they made their first tequila, nearly the same way their ancestors made it more than 100 years earlier: They use goats and horses to keep weeds at bay around the agave, and their team of local jimadores harvests the plants with coas before tossing them in a small brick oven to cook for three days. Next, the donkey-pulled stone tahona squeezes out the juices that are then fermented in wooden tanks and distilled in the facility's original copper pots. "One of the best compliments I've ever received was from someone from Kentucky," Erickson said. "They told me they'd seen bigger stills in someone's bathtub."

Erickson said it's important for Fortaleza to make a positive long-term impact on its region via good practices because he has a young daughter himself, and who knows? Though it's a little early to tell for sure, she may have some tequila flowing through her veins too.

Fortaleza Blanco Stone Ground Tequila

(\$50) This bottling offers up scents of vanilla, clay, and agave. White flowers bloom on the palate while white pepper tingles the tongue and vanilla has a soothing effect. Delicious, fragrant, and elegant. **95**

Fortaleza Blanco Still Strength Tequila (\$65)

The floral aromas and flavors of this 92-proofer are enhanced by a wash of blue fruit and cocoa. Unusual notes of lemon blossom and pear custard allow the agave to shine through a hedonistically unctuous curtain. **96**

Fortaleza Reposado Tequila (\$65)

A rush of caramel, pear nectar, and honeysuckle inspires. The agave here is unmasked, yet without heat or astringency. Sandalwood and jasmine are soft and graceful on the finish. **96**

Fortaleza Añejo Tequila (\$90)

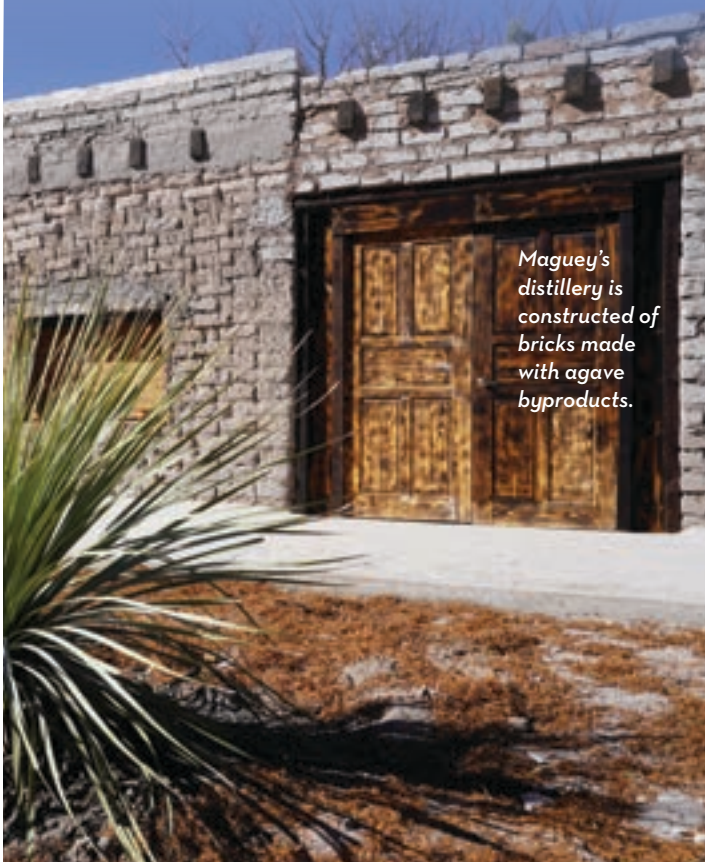
Following a clean entry that shows restrained oak, peach and brown sugar bathe in agave with a hint of earth. Jasmine and ginger play into the seamless, succulent profile. **95**

CHOPIN IMPORTS

PHOTOS COURTESY OF CHOPIN IMPORTS



At El Pandillo Distillery, where Terralta is made, the floor is marbled with machete cuts from the process of removing the quiotes (stems) from the piñas.



Maguey's distillery is constructed of bricks made with agave byproducts.

Though Chopin is best known for its namesake vodka brand, the company also has an imports division, so it was agave spirits that Chopin Imports chief operating officer Chuck Kane' stopped in to discuss. Noting their focus on working strictly with family-owned and -operated distilleries, he explained that "when we put together a spirits portfolio, one of the things we look for is someone with that same passion to be the distiller and farmer and producer; [someone who will] be hands on throughout the whole process. We partner with extraordinarily talented people who make incredible liquid"—in this case the producers of Terralta Tequila, Koch El Mezcal, and Maguey Spirits.

Take Felipe Camarena of Terralta. A third-generation master distiller who also holds a civil engineering degree, Camarena combines traditional tequila-making techniques with modern efficiencies to shrink his carbon footprint. The plants for his Blanco, 110-proof Blanco, Reposado, Añejo, Extra-Añejo, and 110-proof Extra-Añejo are estate grown, handpicked, and destemmed before they're transferred to a stone oven heated from the top and bottom to ensure a higher yield in a shorter amount of time; the even cooking process means less overdone agave, which translates into less waste. Camarena's own waste-minimizing devices include a rooftop rainwater-collection system and a custom-designed shredder and spreader—made from recycled parts and nicknamed Igor and Frankenstein, respectively—to best keep the plants' sugars intact.

Kane' also spoke about Carlos Moreno of Koch El Mezcal—the largest producer of artisanal mezcal in Oaxaca—and of how Moreno uses his power for good. To help the environment, he's planted more than 1 million agave seedlings in a nursery to be transplanted into the wild. And to help his community, Moreno hires locally with an eye toward diversity—including LGBTQ+ employees and women in positions rarely attained in the historically male-dominated local spirits industry—while building schools and libraries in the region. "He was raised by a single mother, and he's all about giving back; he really believes he can bring a better way of life to Oaxaca," said Kane', adding, "Not to mention the liquid's fantastic."

Finally, Kane' turned the audience's attention to the most unusual product in Chopin Imports' agave portfolio: Maguey Spirits' Mezcal Gin. During the distillation process, its mezcal is infused with 13 different locally grown botanicals, from the classic juniper and cardamom to twists of ancho chile and hibiscus flower.

As with the other featured brands, sustainability isn't an afterthought for Maguey Spirits: Besides relying on solar power in the distillery and making bricks and fabrics from agave byproducts, it puts two agave plants into the earth for every one it takes out.



Koch El Mezcal's Carlos Moreno.

BOZAL MEZCAL AND PASOTE TEQUILA

PHOTOS COURTESY OF 3 BADGE BEVERAGE CORPORATION



Pasote undergoes copper-pot distillation.

"It's important to think of the relationship between palenques and family," said Eric Timmerman, national sales manager for 3 Badge Beverage Corporation, which includes both Bozal Mezcal and Pasote Tequila in its portfolio. In the case of the former brand, he explained, "The process of making mezcal is so unique, with everything being made by hand, [so working closely] with mezcaleros and their families is essential." Of the nine Mexican states that produce mezcal, Bozal currently operates out of three—Oaxaca, Guerrero, and Durango—with a long-term goal of developing such relationships in all of them.

Of course, before you can produce the juice, you have to grow the agave. While Bozal uses 13 wild varietals for its diverse selection of mezcals (the brand name translates as "wild" or "untamed," after all), it also uses cultivated Espadín plants. To ensure that all of these species thrive for decades to come, a seed bank has been created to nurture them in a controlled environment before they're transferred into the natural one.

When the agave is ready to achieve its noble transformation, the mezcaleros cook the agave hearts in earthen pit ovens, mash them under the traditional tahona, and ferment them in open air with natural yeast. After distillation in copper or clay pot stills, the spirit is then bottled in super-sleek ceramic vessels that beckon from any backbar. "I think it's one of the sexiest bottles on the market," Gyarmaty chimed in. "I've got a bottle of Bozal in my hands every day."

Production of Pasote Tequila is similarly traditional: The 100% Blue Weber agave piñas are cooked in an oven that heats from the top and bottom before being crushed, fermented with natural yeast, distilled in copper pot stills with a combination of pure rainwater and natural spring water, and aged in neutral barrels because, said Zimmerman, "This is tequila—this is not meant to be bourbon or whiskey. The agave needs to be forward." The clean, refreshing, additive-free result is available in Blanco, Reposado, Añejo, and Extra-Añejo expressions. **SJ**

Bozal uses a total of 13 wild agave species in its mezcals.





A Clear Favorite

CONCOURS D'SPIRITS RETURNS TO FOCUS ON THE EVER- POPULAR VODKA CATEGORY

by Allyson Reedy

Held in April, our third Concours d'Spirits webinar in partnership with SommCon was devoted to vodka for the most obvious of reasons. "There's a running joke that vodka pays the bills," industry specialist and moderator Jennifer Wren said of the spirit's popularity among American drinkers.

Representatives from three vodka brands—one you're almost certainly familiar with, one import you're about to hear a whole lot more about, and one homegrown newcomer—talked about what makes the category so special, joined by a spokesperson from a leading ice-machine manufacturer. Like any spirit, vodka is all about the raw materials, the process, and the brand story—but as one panelist, NV Group USA's Mike Ginley, put it, "The sourcing of ingredients and meticulous care are more important in vodka than any other category because by definition there's no flavor, taste, or color. You can't hide behind agave or wood." The implications of that statement made for a lively discussion.



Smoke Lab Vodka

Ginley has marketed some of the best-known vodka brands in the world, including Absolut, Tito's, Finlandia, and Stolichnaya, but his current passion is supporting worthy up-and-comers around the globe. "What excites me these days is helping [them] come to the U.S. from elsewhere in the world to tell their story," he told the panel. The spirit he wants you to know about right now? Smoke Lab Vodka, produced by the NV Group, one of the largest spirits companies in India. As the president of its U.S. division, Ginley gave us a brief history on how America fell in love with vodka—from James Bond's Martinis in the 1960s to Carrie Bradshaw's Cosmos in turn-of-the-millennium phenomenon *Sex and the City*—before telling us why our next crush should be on Smoke Lab, which launched stateside in October 2020.

One reason is its uncommon base ingredient: When was the last time you sipped a vodka made from basmati rice? "Using basmati is a conscious choice because it originates from India—70% of the world's basmati is grown there," said Ginley. "In Sanskrit [the word] means 'fragrant,' and it gives us a fragrant product." Another reason is its meticulous production process. The basmati is steeped in local Himalayan spring water before it's distilled five times in stainless-steel column stills. The spirit then goes through a two-step filtration process, the first using traditional carbon charcoal filters and the second using a sparkle filter, which adds silver to the carbon to remove the finest of impurities. Oh, and it's all done in India's first zero-carbon footprint distillery.

And a third reason is that, in addition to its flagship product, Smoke Lab produces singular flavored vodka that makes the most of India's amazing herbs and spices. Its Aniseed expression is already available, and Saffron will follow this summer. Eventually, Ginley noted, NV Group USA will launch other products such as gin, rum, and whisky—but first things first. "For [us], the vision is simple: to establish Smoke Lab as India's first premium vodka [and] to build NV Group to the world's first global spirits company from India, creating awareness and putting it on the map," he said. "It's a great brand, and we look forward to bringing it to consumers throughout the U.S."



"Using basmati is a conscious choice because it originates from India—70% of the world's basmati is grown there. In Sanskrit [the word] means 'fragrant,' and it gives us a fragrant product."

—NV Group USA president Mike Ginley





According to CEO Mark Anderson, Drake's lives by the motto "Better for the environment, better for you."

Drake's Organic Vodka

"I kind of stumbled into the alcohol industry," said Drake's Organic Vodka founder and CEO Mark Anderson. One of the serial entrepreneur's previous companies produced the world's first Non-GMO Project-verified cane sugar and citric acid; as he watched the demand for organic, non-GMO products grow across all sectors, he figured, why not take that non-GMO sugar and use it to distill alcohol? "[With] enough capacity for 12 million cases annually, we're not just a product—we're building out a new category," Anderson said.

That category is health and wellness, and it's only expected to continue to gain traction on the market. Drake's is the first and only spirit company in the world to be certified not only USDA organic

and Non-GMO Project-verified but also vegan, gluten-free, and kosher. (It gets its vegan designation thanks to its coconut-fiber filtration system; many distillers use charcoal derived from animal bones in their filtration systems.) The sustainable production practices associated with organic and non-GMO products, mean-

while, ensure that a lower carbon footprint is another bonus of the brand. "The quick catchphrase is it's better for you, and it's better for the environment," Anderson said.

Because the vodka is made from sugar, its flavor differs from that of grain alcohol; according to Anderson, "There's no initial burn; it's very smooth, with a light, sweet aftertaste to it." In fact, all of Drake's ultra-premium products start

with that organic cane sugar: In addition to two rums, a tequila, and a full line of organic mixers, the company also features its spirits in a line of freeze-and-eat popsicles called Spiked Ice and super-fun, ready-to-drink boxed cocktails called Boxtails. Launched last October, the latter comes in five organic flavors at 12% ABV, two of them vodka-based: Watermelon Tini and Blackcherry Limeade. (The other three are Mint Mojito and Mango Punch, both made with rum, and a tequila-based Margarita.)

The demand for RTD beverages was already growing before COVID-19 ever entered our lexicon, but it exploded in 2020; with Boxtails, Drake's proved how quickly it was able to capitalize on the trend. "That's one of the benefits to not being a top-heavy company: We're nimble," Anderson said. "Last year was a really interesting time for on-premise, but we're excited to see those [accounts] coming back." And people seem to be excited for Drake's in turn; with its products available in 36 states and four countries, it has tripled its revenue year over year. Not bad for a company that just launched in 2017.



Grey Goose Vodka

The regional brand ambassador on hand for Grey Goose talked to us about a mythical-sounding time before super-premium vodkas were a thing. That faraway era? Around 1997, when liquor importer and marketing mastermind Sidney Frank began talking with bartenders in New York City about what they perceived as missing on the backbar. Learning that they were desperate for super-premium expressions to elevate their vodka-based cocktails at long last, Frank convinced celebrated French Cognac cellar master François Thibault to create one as a way of capitalizing on France's reputation for luxury.

Thibault lived up to that image as he got to work: He was exacting in his demands, choosing to work with only a handful of farmers—namely 11th-generation wheat growers—whose land lay within 50 kilometers of the Picardy distillery where Grey Goose would be made. He insisted on milling that wheat at the facility, right down to his specified granularity. And Thibault also developed Grey Goose's distillation technology, which involves only a single pass through five column stills. The resulting spirit is then blended with Gensac spring water, considered by Thibault to be the best water in France, and bottled at the brand's Cognac facility.

Although Grey Goose was purchased by Bacardi in 2004, Thibault still carefully commands every step of the process; from the moment the wheat arrives at the distillery to the moment the liquid leaves the blending facility, the vodka must undergo a staggering 550 quality checkpoints. "The team is involved in every single step," the representative said. "We do cost more, [so] it's important to show people where every dollar is being spent. It's worth paying a little bit more for."

The next frontier for the brand is the burgeoning market for lower-ABV products that encourage mindful drinking, for which it's conceptualized a line called Grey Goose Essences, consisting of carb- and sugar-free flavored vodkas infused with fruits and botanicals. Launched earlier this year, its expressions include Strawberry & Lemongrass, Watermelon & Basil, and White Peach & Rosemary. "We are trying to enter the mindful-drinking realm and offer people a new solution at 30% ABV," the ambassador said. "We'll defend vodka until the day we die; we celebrate the vodka category, however you choose to drink it."



*Grey Goose cellar master
François Thibault.*



Hoshizaki Ice

"You can't make a good cocktail without having the best ice on Planet Earth," Wren said before introducing Sally Ray, marketing director for Hoshizaki Ice. For vodka drinks especially, proper chilling is key to maintaining integrity, so as Ray assured the audience, "I'm here to say we know ice."

While Hoshizaki's ice makers have been available in the U.S. for going on 35 years, the Japan-based company was actually established way back in 1947. So yes, there are decades of experience behind its products, though they've also evolved to keep up with—and even ahead of—the times. Ray said that she's particularly excited about Hoshizaki's spherical-ice machines: "You can charge a premium for cocktails with amazing presentation," she

said of the dramatic spheres they produce. "Ice can be a garnish; we're no longer restricted to herbs and citrus peels."

Besides looking pretty, ice does, of course, serve that all-important purpose of making and keeping drinks cold. Ray reminded us that, when shaking a cocktail, we want hard, clear ice to chill the ingredients as it's mixing them, diluting the resulting libation to its proper strength. If the ice has ragged edges or if it didn't freeze right, chips can break off into a drink, a less-than-desirable possibility for any self-respecting bar program.

Noting the company's reputation for cleanliness and efficiency (not to mention value compared to third-party vendors), Ray highlighted a few Hoshizaki models in

particular as being ideal for high-end restaurants and bars looking to perfect those craft cocktails and set themselves apart from the competition. The first produces the versatile 1-inch cube, great for shaking and stirring. The second, which came out last year just as the pandemic hit, makes the aforementioned 1.8-inch sphere; Ray said she's excited to get that machine into more bars and restaurants as people return to their favorite spots for drinks they haven't been able to make at home. And Hoshizaki will continue to think big for the future: In June, it will introduce a model that makes 2-by-2 cubes for extra drama, and Ray said they're hoping to create a 3-inch cube manufacturer in the next year or two. SJ

"You can't make
a good cocktail
without having
the best ice on
Planet Earth."

—moderator Jennifer
Wren

PHOTO COURTESY OF HOSHIZAKI ICE



SOMMCON® INTRODUCES:

SOMM | GO™

NOW AVAILABLE FOR ONLY \$14/MONTH

SommCon is coming straight to you with year-round education and learning opportunities you can access anywhere, anytime. SommGo by SommCon now offers monthly and annual subscriptions giving users access to new classes each month. Wine, beer, and spirit sessions led by an educational team of professionals from throughout the industry.

VISIT WWW.SOMMGO.COM TO GET STARTED!



SPONSORED BY:

THE **tastingpanel**
MAGAZINE

THE **SOMM** JOURNAL

THE SOMMGO PERKS!

- ▶ NEW CLASSES UPLOADED MONTHLY
- ▶ LEARN FROM THE INDUSTRY'S BEST PALATES
- ▶ WATCH ANYWHERE, ANYTIME ON ALL DEVICES
- ▶ INVEST IN YOUR FUTURE WITHOUT BREAKING THE BANK
- ▶ THE BEST OF SOMMCON LIVE CONFERENCE EDUCATION NOW STREAMING YEAR-ROUND
- ▶ CLASSES RUN FROM 20-90 MINUTES



PRODUCED BY:

SOMM CON



{ south america }

Antigal winemaker
Miriam Gomez.

“CHOOSE ONE, *Tell Many*”

WITH UNO, MENDOZA
WINERY **ANTIGAL**
INVITES CONSUMERS
TO CONNECT OVER
MALBEC

by Patricia Schneider

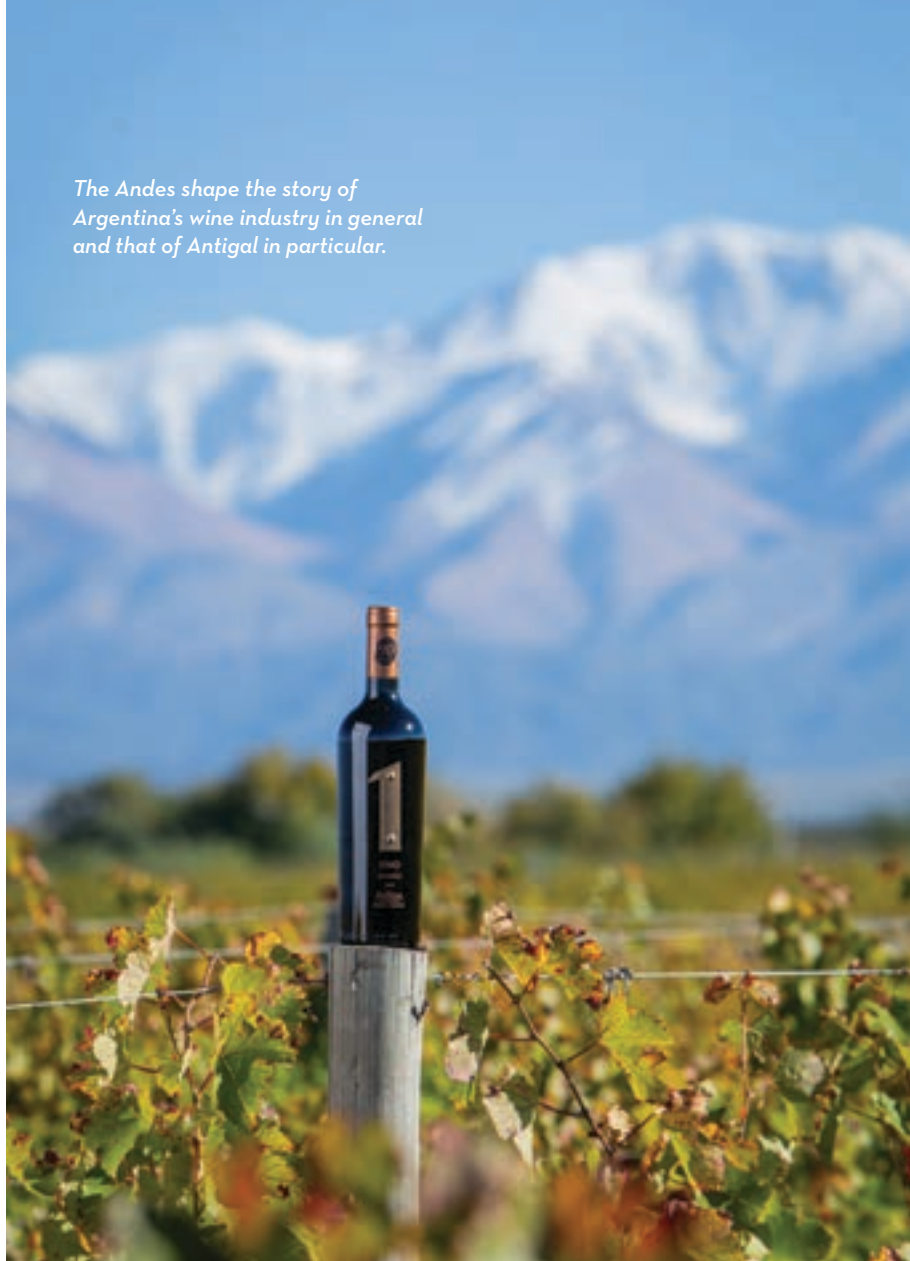
W

hat makes a wine memorable: its flavor or the story behind it? If you're lucky, it's both.

I first discovered Antigal UNO on a lovely spring day at Alegria, a onetime bank turned popular upscale Italian restaurant in Napa, California. Joining me at a table inside the old vault were Napa industry veteran Gary Ramona—now the vice president of marketing and sales, USA, for Antigal Winery in Mendoza, Argentina—and the late, great Harvey Posert, public-relations mastermind at Robert Mondavi, with whom Ramona had worked for many years. While we drank Antigal's full line of rich, elegant Malbecs and reminisced about the delicious food, rich culture, and fascinating people of its home country, I heard stories about how UNO, its flagship collection, came to be.

While Antigal sits on the site of a historic winery in the Mendoza subregion of Maipú dating back to 1897, everything else about it is new. Its state-of-the-art facilities were constructed in the early 2000s to bring together the best of both worlds: high-quality, high-tech equipment within 120-plus-year-old architecture. Its gravity-flow platform system eliminates the need for forceful pumps and crushers to allow for a largely hands-off approach to winemaking on the part of winemaker Miriam Gomez—who, with her team, has many awards under her belt to show for Antigal's Malbec-focused portfolio, which includes several single-vineyard bottlings from four estate vineyards.

In 2005, Antigal released its first signature wine, a single-vineyard Malbec called La Dolores One, from its namesake mountain vineyard in the Uco Valley, where the management team drops as much as two-thirds of the fruit at harvest to yield one bottle per vine. To celebrate its



The Andes shape the story of Argentina's wine industry in general and that of Antigal in particular.

inaugural vintage, the winery held a special event with a ceremony involving cutting shapes of the number one out of metal barrel hoops and placing them on the first bottles off the line. The design was so well received that Antigal continues to use metal "1"s on its packaging, complete with rivets placed by hand, while the back label is silk-screened directly onto the bottle. The Cartoni family, who took ownership of Antigal in 2015, admits that their packaging process is very expensive; however, they're proud of the uniquely memorable results (which even earned them a gold medal for design at the 2020 San Francisco International Wine Competition).

Three years later, inspired by the success of La Dolores One, Gomez created UNO with the idea of reaching a larger audience of wine lovers around the globe,

according to Antigal general manager Alessandra Cartoni Castilla, who says, "UNO represents those everyday heroes [and] invites you to be the one: to be yourself, to connect with others and the community, to celebrate every moment and to tell many stories with our wines. [As] we say, 'Choose ONE, tell many.'"

An Ambassador for Argentina's Wine Industry

While the Southern Hemisphere as a whole has become one of the world's go-to sources for delicious yet affordable wines, Argentina in particular has emerged as an important player by closely identifying itself with specific varieties and working to refine the expressions they yield. The Cartoni family recognized that by focusing on Malbec, they could zoom in

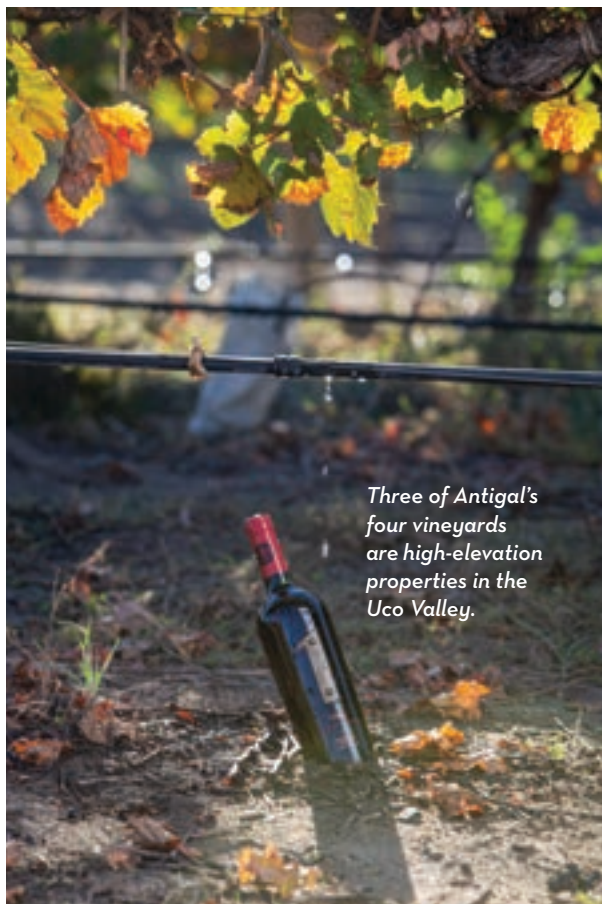
on the best sources to supplement estate fruit and hone their production processes to offer the distinctive flavors of Argentina while showcasing a style all their own—and delivering excellent quality for the price to boot.

It all starts with the philosophy that great wine is made in the vineyard. In addition to La Dolores, Antigal is blessed with two other high-elevation sites in the Uco Valley, Doña Ángeles and La Lomas; the average annual rainfall here is just 7 inches, so the vines are irrigated through wells and reservoirs fed by snowmelt from the Andes. Its fourth property, La Nonna, is located near the winery in Maipú.

At La Nonna, Antigal practices LETIS-certified organic farming, eschewing the use of chemical pesticides and fertilizers, as well as precision viticulture to optimize vineyard performance, maximizing grape yield and quality while minimizing environmental impact and risk. Its minimal-intervention philosophy is meant to ensure that the wines wholly express the land and its fruits as part of an integral network that involves soils, ecosystems, and communities. As Gomez says, “Developing an [organic] agronomy and enology ... contains a long-term message; respect for the land—the estate and the planet; care for what we consume; and a tireless search for the genuine expression of the terroir.”

To that end, Cartoni Castilla and her brother, Antigal CEO Stefano Cartoni, are operating as a dynamic duo to spearhead several winegrowing initiatives that further the family's commitment to sustainability and best practices. For example, making its debut later this year is the La Nonna-sourced UNO 2019 Malbec (\$19), which is not only organic but also bottled in ultra-lightweight glass, labeled using environmentally friendly inks, and packaged in biodegradable cartons. The Cartonis have also introduced screwcap closures on UNO wines, making them a convenient choice for table service and by-the-glass lists.

As for Gomez, the Mendoza native is now heading into her 23rd year with Antigal, but she also teaches enological microbiology at her two alma maters, Universidad Nacional de Cuyo and Universidad J.A. Maza. Receiving undergraduate degrees in food science and enology and graduate degrees in viticulture and enology there, she went on to work in both the Côtes du Rhône and in Napa Valley as well as at



Three of Antigal's four vineyards are high-elevation properties in the Uco Valley.

Argentine winery Nieto Senetiner. “At Antigal, I have the freedom to create single-varietal and blended wines in a variety of styles,” she says. “Most importantly, I work with the best possible fruit in the finest of facilities. Those advantages alone inspire exceptional results.” With a passion for great food and wine that's contagious, she shares a favorite toast that captures the spirit of her wines: *Salud y amor y tiempo para disfrutarlo*, or “To health and love with time to enjoy both.”

Marketplace Moves


Since my first experience with Antigal UNO, I've enjoyed many others, with two pairing events in Napa in particular coming to mind. The first was a dinner at Cole's Chop House in November 2016, the second at high-end Japanese restaurant Morimoto in July 2017. On both occasions, my companions were Gary Ramona and Sasha Paulsen, features editor at the *Napa Valley Register*, who later commented that the rich Malbec tasted just as fine with *ishi yaki buri bop* as it had with Cole's fabled steaks.

It was there that Ramona shared more stories with us about what inspired him

to join Antigal in 2009. The winery had already begun exporting to the United States as of 2007, when it quickly earned attention for its small-production fine wines as well as its value labels, finding placement on restaurant wine lists and on retail shelves. When the owner at the time told him, “We're small but we want to grow, and we want to compete with the best wines in the world,” Ramona was sold. He says that Mendoza's growing wine industry reminds him of Napa Valley in the 1970s, when he went to work for Mondavi. Back then, the community was characterized by a shared goal: “We [too] wanted to rub shoulders with the best in the world,” he recalls. It helped that labor and land prices were then

more affordable for aspiring winemakers: “I remember back when people would come to Mondavi and [think] \$5.50 for a bottle of wine was expensive.” With Mendoza on a similar trajectory today, Ramona calls it “one of the great wine regions of the world—and we're able to sell great wines at a great price.” (SRPs range from \$13 at the entry level up to \$54 for the single-vineyard bottlings.)

No wonder, then, that “Americans have embraced us,” Ramona says. “The winery is growing quickly to meet demand, and recovery from COVID-19 has made our digital and online presence even stronger. We are proud of our partners' efforts to build back stronger and look forward to working together.” The Cartoni family has a similar message for U.S. buyers: “Cheers to our friends in the on-premise world. Your resilience, creativity, and stamina inspire us to be our best and make you an UNO hero. Thanks for all that you do!”

Antigal is sold in all 50 states and more than 60 countries around the globe. For more information, visit antigal.com. 

Patricia Schneider is a freelance writer and consultant in marketing and public relations.



CHALONG BAY PURE S
WON DOUBLE GOLD AT
2019 NEW YORK WORLD
AND SPIRITS COMPETITION



2021 COMPETITION: AUGUST



The NYWSC is now accepting entries for the 2021 Competition. The medallions it bestows are universally recognized by consumers and the trade alike as the most reliable indication of spirits and wine excellence.

ENTER ONLINE AT
NYWSCOMP.COM

@NYWSCOMP #NYWSC
@THETASTINGALLIANCE #THETASTINGALLIANCE



AGAVE DE LOS ANDES

A Portal for the Palate

Fifth-generation proprietor Kayo Yoshida runs the famed Umenoyado Brewery, making her the first female brewery owner in Japan's Nara Prefecture.

TYKU AND ICHIKO
HELP TRANSPORT U.S. DRINKERS
TO JAPAN IN ADVANCE OF THE
OLYMPIC GAMES

by Deborah Parker Wong

PHOTO COURTESY OF TYKU



When Japan hosted its first Summer Olympic Games in 1964, saké was served freely on opening day as part of a festive ceremony known as *kagami biraki*. This ancient tradition, which dates to the 17th century, is an integral part of Japanese culture, taking place at celebrations throughout the year.

Japan has since played host to two Winter Olympics—1972 in Sapporo and 1998 in Nagano, where saké and shochu were the drinks of choice—but it will make history this year as the only Asian nation to host a second Summer Games. Because Americans won't be able to attend in person, they'll be seeking ways to experience the tournament from afar—and, surely, raising their own toasts to the occasion.

In fact, they already are. According to a market research report from Kalsec, a leading producer of natural spice and herb flavor extracts, pandemic travel restrictions are fueling dining and drinking trends that emphasize cultural authenticity. Interest in Japanese cuisine in particular is growing; take, for example, the newfound popularity of “sandos,” or katsu sandwiches, and *sudachi*, a Japanese citrus fruit from Tokushima Prefecture that's being touted as the new yuzu. As these foods grow in recognition, saké and shochu are also gaining traction in the U.S. market—and for consumers who are increasingly drawn to the stories behind the products they purchase, TYKU saké and iichiko, Japan's most popular shochu brand, have what they're looking for in spades.

Do You TYKU?

The provenance behind TYKU could not be more authentic: It's brewed at the famed Umenoyado Brewery in Nara Prefecture, the area considered to be the birthplace of saké. Fifth-generation proprietor Kayo Yoshida currently runs the brewery, making her Nara's first female brewery owner.

Although the brand touts its use of Akebono and Yamada Nishiki rice, the latter of which is noted for its fragrance and integrated flavors, water has historically been the most important ingredient, as it comprises about 80% of saké. Umenoyado Brewery's location was selected specifically for its proximity to the underground springs of Mt. Katsuragi, which yield high-quality, iron-free water known for the softness, or *nansui*, that it contributes to the saké.

The TYKU portfolio includes three traditional Junmai, or pure rice-style, sakés and two naturally flavored sakés: a cucumber-flavored Junmai and a coconut-flavored Junmai Nigori (*nigori* means “cloudy,” as some remnants of rice sediment remain after filtration). One of the best ways to determine the style of a saké is to measure the total perception of sweetness and acidity in its flavors (see graphic on page 84).



TYKU's saké lineup includes three traditional Junmai expressions as well as a cucumber-flavored Junmai and a coconut-flavored Junmai Nigori.

TYKU Junmai is made from the Akebono rice variety—a saké rice with a mill rate of 70%—making for a sweet, full-bodied style with fresh, subtle pear flavors. The dry, rich Junmai Ginjo uses both Yamada Nishiki and Akebono polished to 55%, resulting in flavors of peach and vanilla. Junmai Daiginjo hails from the brand's partner brewery, Matsuyama Shuzo, in Yamagata Prefecture, which is known for the Yamada Nishiki rice variety; it's polished here to 40% for a dry, refined style with floral aromas and flavors of banana and vanilla. Finally, the Coconut Nigori has a silky texture with creamy coconut and vanilla flavors and is similar to the Junmai in terms of style and balance, while the slightly sweet Cucumber Junmai is the lightest saké in the portfolio, with fresh cucumber flavors.

Since its U.S. launch in 2007, TYKU has dispelled much of the mystery that once surrounded the saké category to become the nation's top-selling premium saké and rice spirit brand. “While we intentionally Americanized the

brand with a name that was easy to pronounce, we retained every drop of the Japanese tradition and cultural significance of saké," says founding partner Andrew Chrisomalis.

Being well established in the U.S., TYKU is primed to serve as a go-to for consumers as they watch "their favorite athletes and events at the Olympic Games," according to Danny Mandelbaum, vice president of marketing for TYKU's parent company, Davos Brands. He concurs with Chrisomalis that "TYKU helped open the premium saké category to a much wider U.S. audience with its contemporary packaging and award-winning quality."

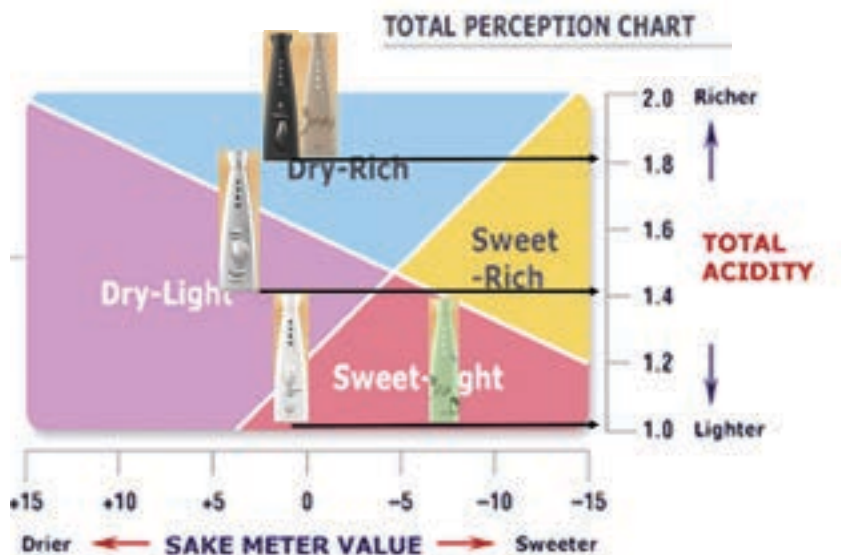


PHOTO: CLARA RICE



iichiko's Silhouette and Saiten shochus are produced at its distillery on the island of Kyushu in Ōita Prefecture.

The Spirit of Umami

While saké is a fixture at all of life's important moments in Japan, the similarly lengthy history and traditions of shochu have made it the nation's distilled spirit of choice—and iichiko its most notable producer.

With a name that translates as "it's good," iichiko conveys a level of complexity that few white spirits can rival thanks to its barley base and koji backbone. It's distilled on the island of Kyushu in Ōita Prefecture, but because the area lacks the cold winters that were once so essential to fermentation, shochu became the key alcoholic beverage, as warmer weather wasn't a factor in the distillation process.


That said, the two-row barley used to produce iichiko is treated very similarly to saké rice in that it's polished, steeped, and steamed in soft, iron-free water, preparing it for the addition of barley koji. The koji initiates the fermentation process, releasing the rich flavor of the grain and creating citric acid, which protects the shochu from bacteria that causes spoilage.



Masahiko Shimoda, president of iichiko's parent company, Sanwa Shurui, at the iichiko distillery.



To produce its two expressions, iichiko uses a mix of low- and high-pressure distillation techniques at different temperatures, resulting in raw shochus with different characteristics. These are then blended to create Silhouette—which, at 25% ABV, offers notes of melon, grapefruit, and herbs with a smooth, elegant flavor profile and nutty finish—and Saiten, a 43% ABV shochu that shows aromas of honeydew melon, white grape, pickled watermelon rind, Kabosu citrus, and umami notes of soy and barley as well as flavors of jasmine tea, white peach, minerals, and earth. Saiten was developed specifically for mixology, while Silhouette is frequently mixed with oolong or matcha tea, showcased in a classic Highball with soda or fruit juice, or served on the rocks.

Together, they reinforce shochu's undeniable versatility. But as ambassadors of Japanese culture, TYKU and iichiko have their own unique stories to tell. From their heritage grains and traditional production methods to their affinity for pairing with umami-rich foods, they're a metaphor for Japan itself: a place where the enduring past sets the stage for the future. 

To produce its shochu, iichiko uses two-row barley that's polished, steeped, and steamed in soft, iron-free water.

SONOMA-CUTRER'S LIMITED EDITION
WINEMAKER'S RELEASE 40TH
ANNIVERSARY CHARDONNAY DOUBLES
AS A HEARTFELT TRIBUTE

*The Cutrer
Vineyard, one
of Sonoma-
Cutrer's estate
vineyards in
the Russian
River Valley.*

Extra-Extraordinary

by Jessie Birschbach

DURING THE PAST 40 YEARS, as the world and likewise the wine industry have evolved through all kinds of trials and tribulations, few things have remained as steadfast as Sonoma-Cutrer Chardonnay.

Described by its winemaker, Cara Morrison, as “crisp acidity balanced by ripe fruit and oak complexity,” the style has made Sonoma-Cutrer an enduring domestic favorite among Chardonnay lovers; the Russian River–based producer has hovered for years near the top of *Wine & Spirits*’ Restaurant Top 50 list of bestselling wine brands. Interestingly enough, this unwavering consistency is precisely what compelled the team to try something new by developing their Winemaker’s Release lineup in 2014: In the words of director of winemaking Mick Schroeter, “As we [were] doing what we’ve always done and maintain[ing] Sonoma-Cutrer’s style and quality, we introduced the Winemaker’s series to give us something different.”

The Winemaker’s Release expression for 2021, the 40th Anniversary Chardonnay (\$70), is particularly special. Just as in previous years, it was created by all Sonoma-Cutrer winemakers both past and present, with Schroeter and Morrison joining Bill Bonetti (1981–1990) and Terry

Adams (1991–2010) last June for a virtual blind-tasting and blending session. But only this vintage has been dedicated to Bonetti, who died peacefully in his sleep just a few months later.

The Chardonnay was sourced from three blocks within a trio of Sonoma-Cutrer’s estate vineyards in the Russian River Valley—Les Pierres, The Cutrer, and Vine Hill—selected for their Burgundian character. “They were originally planted under a Burgundian vineyard model in terms of high-density spacing, so there’s some competition between vines, [with only] a meter between [them] and a meter between rows,” explained Schroeter.

This distinguished estate fruit also underwent a very French approach to élevage: minimal settling, bâtonnage “every couple of weeks,” and sur lie aging over the course of ten months, according to Morrison. But perhaps the most fascinating aspect of this wine’s upbringing is its oak regimen, as only oak sourced from the Forest of Orléans in Central France was used. “We go through the barrels and taste them blind, and the Orléans barrels are always [among] our favorites,” said Morrison. “[The oak] just integrates so well with the fruit.”



Sonoma-Cutrer director of winemaking Mick Schroeter and winemaker Cara Morrison.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF SONOMA-CUTRER

Given the late Bonetti’s involvement, the wine is distinguished just as much by its sentimental value as its technical specifications. “Bill said, ‘At my age, my palate’s shot,’ but when he sat down with us [in recent years], my god, he was right on the ball,” Schroeter recalled of the blending process. “Same with [the] tasting that we did in June last year—even at 92, he was on it.”

Harkening back to the winery’s debut in 1981, I asked the winemakers to name one of their favorite songs from that decade. Morrison very thoughtfully chose The Cure’s “Just Like Heaven,” and one can’t help but note the profound connection between the song title, the wine’s ambrosial profile, and Bonetti’s legacy. **SJ**

A limited quantity of Sonoma-Cutrer’s Winemaker’s Release 40th Anniversary Chardonnay is available for purchase at sonomacutrer.com.



Island Hopping

THERE'S NO BETTER TIME TO TURN YOUR CUSTOMERS ON TO THESE MEDITERRANEAN WINES

IMAGINE A POSTCARD: cerulean waters stretching up to a sandy shoreline beneath bright, sunny skies and, of course, “Wish you were here” endearingly scripted in the corner. Never have most of us felt that sentiment more strongly than we did in 2020, as the pandemic brought the world to a halt and we found ourselves locked down with nowhere to go.

At least armchair travel has been just a bottle away: Wine allows us to adventure to all kinds of faraway places. Growing up in Hawaii, I have been fortunate enough to call its sunny beaches home, but I am forever imagining the myriad other islands out there with terroirs worth discovering.

First stop on my daydream trip: Corsica. Set in the Mediterranean Sea, this mountainous island draws climatic and cultural influence from both mainland France and its closest neighbor, Italy. Much like its rugged countryside dotted with winding roads, the wines can be both alluring and rustic. Local producers love to work with indigenous red grapes such as Niellucciu and Sciaccarellu in bottlings that channel both the sunbaked earth and the wild herbs that grow there. The granitic soils of

the coastal region of Ajaccio offer intriguing terroir for winemakers to showcase with a proud sense of Corsican tradition.

Traveling south over the Tyrrhenian Sea, we come to the Italian island of Sardinia. Here, Cannonau is king. Genetically proven to be the twin of French Grenache, Cannonau di Sardinia presents as a vibrant, energetic wine with buoyancy at its core. Its earthy minerality, dried lavender florals, and crunchy red-pomegranate notes make it a gem of a pairing with classic Italian dishes featuring tomatoes and dried herbs.

Separated by the narrow Strait of Messina, the hot island of Sicily boasts not just the tallest active volcano in Europe but also some of Italy's most fascinating cuisine. The exciting terroir created by Mount Etna's elevation and rocky soils is home to Nerello Mascalese and Nerello Cappuccio (among other grapes), which combine to create the popular Etna Rosso—a wine built to accompany rustic dishes like roasted fowl.

Jetting off to the other edge of the Mediterranean, we arrive on the Greek island of Crete, which possesses both a rich history and a plethora of native

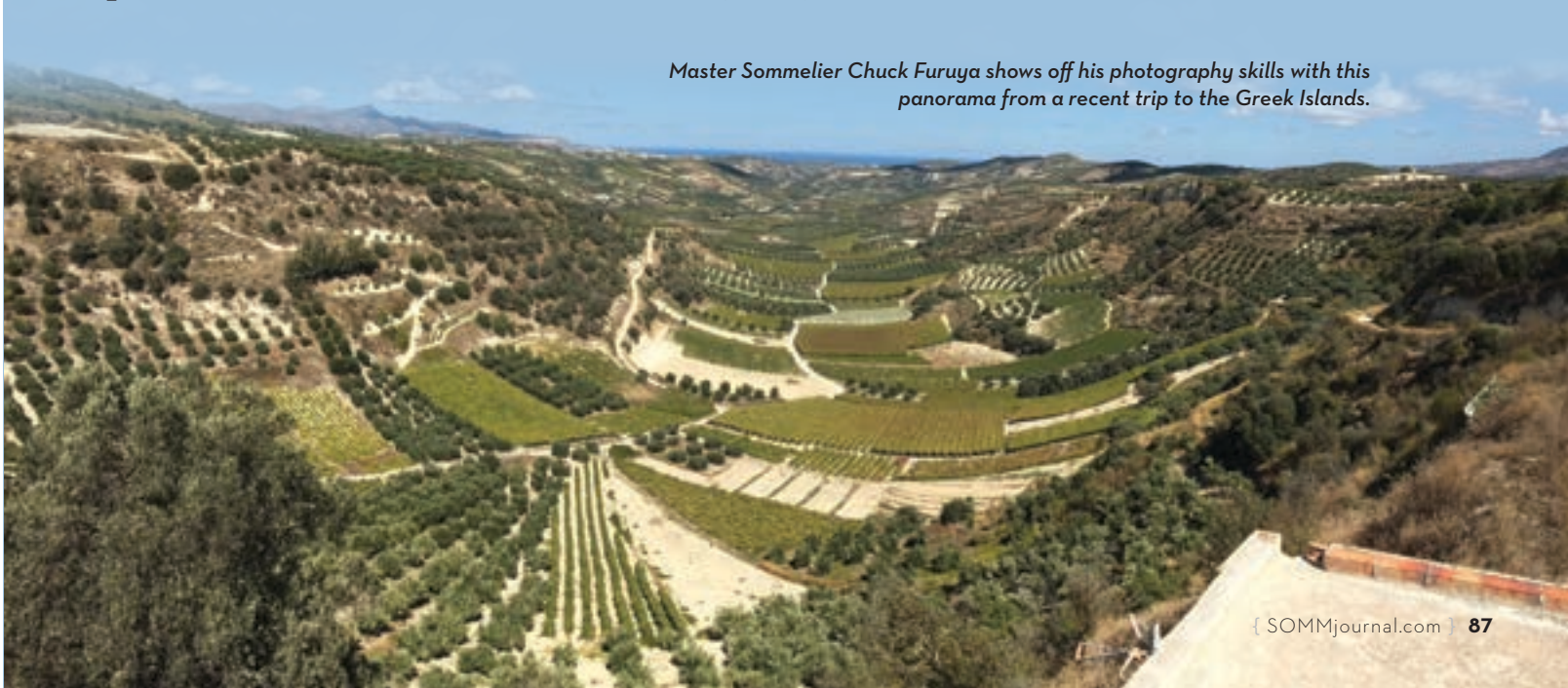
grapes. Master Sommelier Chuck Furuya is especially captivated with the indigenous white Vidiano. At the heart of the island, Douloufakis Winery produces one of the finest expressions of the variety, which Furuya describes as “a lighter, more zesty, vivacious ‘country’ wine [that] works well with fresh seafood dishes because of its lemon-like edge.”

Beyond their postcard perfection, these and still other Mediterranean islands, with their distinct, wild terrain and rich history, produce special wines that provide a different type of adventure—one for the senses. So pop some corks, pour these enchanting wines for your customers, and start their holiday in the sun today. **ST**

Fresh Voices is a collaborative effort between The SOMM Journal, The Tasting Panel, and 501(c)(3) organization Dream Big Darling. The concept centers around providing opportunities to and amplifying the voices of the next generation of women in the wine and spirits industry. To learn more about Dream Big Darling, visit dreambigdarling.org or follow [@dreambigdarling_org](https://www.instagram.com/dreambigdarling_org).

Master Sommelier Chuck Furuya shows off his photography skills with this panorama from a recent trip to the Greek Islands.

PHOTO: CHUCK FURUYA



Sharing the WEALTH

IN PARTNERSHIP WITH *NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC* AND *SOMMCON*,
THE NEXT INSTALLMENT IN OUR WEBINAR SERIES EXPLORES
“LUXURY FROM REMARKABLE SITES”

by *Jessie Birschbach*

LET'S BE CLEAR: Luxury wine doesn't have to be expensive. A fine German Kabinett Riesling is a great example, as it typically isn't costly but can still be considered an indulgence. However, as Lars Leicht—*The SOMM Journal's* VP of education as well as the moderator for our Geographical Digest series—pointed out, “Luxury can be defined in many different ways. When we say ‘luxury wines,’ we're probably talking about wines that make our experiences a little bit more special, or perhaps wines that are a little more rarified, but what makes them a true luxury is the rare place on Earth they come from.”

For the latest webinar in the series, we visited a handful of vineyards so exceptional that the wine they produce is nothing short of an extravagance. Here's to “Luxury From Remarkable Sites.”



A vine's view of Castello Banfi
in Montalcino, Tuscany.

PHOTO COURTESY OF CASTELLO BANFI

THE WHITE BURGUNDY WITHIN BLACK CHARDONNAY

Winery: OO Wines

Presenter: Kathryn Hermann, co-founder

PHOTOS COURTESY OF OO WINES



"Double zero in numerology is the number of potential," said Kathryn Hermann, co-founder of OO Wines, a Willamette Valley-based winery that seeks to fulfill its own prospects for greatness through the two varietal wines it produces, Chardonnay and Pinot Noir. "Our winemaking techniques really draw out the

potential of these special places," added Hermann.

To make its Burgundian-inspired wines, Hermann and her husband, Chris, a longtime Burgundy lover and well-connected wine-law professional, called upon friends who farm or own some of the best vineyards in the valley: Eola Springs, Seven Springs, and Chehalem Mountain, to name just a few. In an image Hermann shared, her husband was barely visible as he crouched behind a large, gnarled, own-rooted Pinot Noir vine planted in 1968 in the Chehalem Mountains AVA by none other than Oregon wine pioneer Dick Erath. In 2019, OO Wines produced its first Pinot Noir from the Chehalem Mountain Vineyard.

Hermann next zeroed in on another of the winery's extraordinary sources: Wentle clone clusters from the Chehalem Mountains AVA sporting green-tinged golden berries of variable size ("hens and chicks"). Most of these clones, which are native to California and were planted throughout the valley in the 1970s, have since been replanted to Pinot Gris, as Chardonnay was deemed too difficult to ripen properly. However, OO Wines is able to source from the pockets that remain to produce what Hermann called "very fruit-forward, mineral [Chardonnay] that really shines through as a result of our special processing" known as Black Chardonnay.

As part of a domestic riff on a traditional yet rarely used Burgundian technique, OO Wines makes Black Chardonnay by taking whole-cluster Chardonnay exposed to oxygen—it sits overnight after being crushed by foot—and sending it through a "very, very long, hard press cycle," Hermann explained. Sulfites are withheld, and the juice that has turned brown from oxygen exposure then goes immediately into barrels to ferment before eventually finishing in a steel tank. Led by Wynne Peterson-Nedry, the winemaking team employs other minimal-intervention techniques like native yeast fermentation and minimal filtering and fining on its incredibly special Willamette fruit, prompting some critics to claim that OO Chardonnay gets as close to white Burgundy as any producer in the U.S.

THE BRIDGE TO QUALITY

Winery: Tenuta Sette Ponti

Presenter: Alberto Moretti, owner



If any of the wine professionals on our panel understands luxury, it's Alberto Moretti, owner of Tenuta Sette Ponti. His father, Antonio Moretti, who was a luxury goods entrepreneur prior to founding the estate, used his discerning taste to assemble what was considered at the time to be one of the best winemaking teams in Italy. "Everything has to be top quality. For example, it took my father a whole month to make a decision on the best cork," said an amused Alberto. But no matter how time-consuming, the careful consideration with which Tenuta Sette Ponti operates has shaped it into the world-renowned Super Tuscan producer it is today.

Named after the seven bridges crossing the Arno River from Florence to Arezzo, the 300-hectare property is located in the Chianti region's Valdarno di Sopra DOC off of the Via del Monte, sometimes referred to locally as the Via Dei Sette Ponti. Sixty hectares are planted to Sangiovese, Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot,

and Petit Verdot, as well as small portions of the native Trebbiano and Malvasia varieties, in high-density configurations of 6,666 vines per hectare. This careful approach to viticultural management results in "extremely high-quality fruit," said Moretti. Soil types

PHOTOS COURTESY OF TENUTA SETTE PONTI



The vineyards of Tenuta Sette Ponti are located in the Valdarno di Sopra DOC in Tuscany.

range from clay and sand to the famed Galestro soil found in Chianti's most cherished vineyards.

The 85-year-old Sangiovese and Trebbiano plantings in Tenuta Sette Ponti's terraced, 3-hectare Vigna dell'Impero Vineyard, meanwhile, are less dense yet still produce quality fruit. Moretti praised the Crognolo Toscana Rosso IGT—a wine composed of Sangiovese and a touch of Merlot that's named after the wild bush that grows on the property—as a "modern style." However, he seemed to take the most pride in presenting the 2017 vintage of the winery's flagship expression, the Oreno Toscana Rosso IGT. Named after the river that crosses the estate, it contains 50% Merlot, 40% Cabernet Sauvignon, and 10% Petit Verdot.

Moretti described Tenuta Sette Ponti's approach to winemaking as labor-intensive, starting with a "double-handmade selection": The grapes are handpicked and hand-sorted to guarantee consistent quality and, ultimately, great pleasure.

Tenuta Sette Ponti 2017 Oreno, Tuscany IGT (\$115) Upright and austere, this blend of Merlot, Cabernet Sauvignon, and Petit Verdot matured in new French oak for 18 months. Chocolate adds seamless dimension, while slate and balsamic place aromatics and a rich mouthfeel against a velvety tannin backdrop. **95**

KOBRAND WINE & SPIRITS

THERE'S NO PLACE LIKE PEUMO

Winery: Terrunyo

Presenter: Marcio Ramírez, winemaker

PHOTOS COURTESY OF CONCHA Y TORO



Terrunyo's Peumo Vineyard is located in the Cachapoal Valley subzone of the Valle del Rapel DO, which is situated within the larger Valle Central DO of Chile. Historically, the Cachapoal Valley is known for a thriving agricultural industry, thanks to its location in the fertile foothills of the Andes Mountains. "It's a beautiful place; it's very warm, and it can produce luscious fruit," said Marcio Ramírez, longtime winemaker for Terrunyo's parent company, Concha y Toro, who emphasized

that the area—and particularly Peumo Vineyard—is perfectly suited to Carménère.

Peumo Vineyard and Cachapoal Cellar—Concha y Toro's second-oldest winery—are located in the coolest part of the valley. According to Ramírez: "[Peumo] offers the ideal temperature [for Carménère]. The weather is much more temperate than in other zones [of the valley]. Its early spring also means early budbreak, approximately 20 days earlier than other grapes, and this in turn makes for a longer growing period." He added that Carménère is known for its picturesque harvests: "The vines tell me when the Carménère is ready by changing the color of their leaves to a red-orange [hue]."

The native Chilean also attributed the grape's exceptional quality to Peumo's soils, which he described as "a mixture of clay and silt with sand in some sectors," adding that they're "rich and fertile but without excess . . . contribut[ing] to the red-fruit [character] and elegance of the Carménère."

Ramírez reminded the audience of Carménère's history in Chile: After what was purported to be Chilean Merlot garnered global attention in the 1980s, French ampelographer Jean-Michel Boursiquot discovered in 1994 that the grape was, in fact, Carménère. It was a happy accident for Chileans, as it bolstered the grape's reputation and eventually led to Concha y Toro's inaugural release of the Terrunyo Carménère in 1998. And although the variety originally came from France, Ramírez believes that its true home is in Peumo: "It's not possible to make Carménère if it's not made in Peumo," he mused.

IMPORTED BY FETZER VINEYARDS



Concha y Toro 2019 Terrunyo Carménère, DO Peumo, Cachapoal Valley, Chile

(\$40) This seamless blend of 95.4% Carménère, 4.3% Cabernet Franc, and 0.3% Cabernet Sauvignon fermented in stainless steel and aged nine months in French oak. Its aromas of brush, oregano, and dill with blackberry accents are breathtaking; on the palate, it's juicy and balanced, with clean herbal notes and vivid flavors of ripe summer plum. Floral notes persist through the finish. **94**

CONCHA Y TORO

Viña Concha y Toro's Peumo Vineyard in the Cachapoal Valley of Chile.



Torbreck's estate vineyard in the Barossa Valley.

CUSTODIANS OF THE BAROSSA

Winery: Torbreck Vintners

Presenter: Ian Hongell, chief winemaker

Established in 1994, Torbreck is known the world over for ageworthy wines made from Rhône varieties that still manage to reflect the terroir of the Barossa Valley. In fact, representing the region seems to be a great point of pride for Torbreck's chief winemaker, Ian Hongell.

"It's a pretty special area," said Hongell, presenting at 2 a.m. his time in South Australia. While Torbreck farms roughly 50% of its own fruit, Hongell noted that he's particularly proud to source the remainder from around 35 grower families throughout the valley, some of whom have farmed the same land for seven generations—and who still use traditional farming practices such as hand-pruning, handpicking, and dry farming.

Their work reflects the great winegrowing heritage of the Barossa Valley. "Today we're working with vineyards that go back to the 1850s and with the oldest living Shiraz in the world, planted in 1843," said

Hongell. He noted that, over the course of decades, many of these vines have gone through a form of natural selection, making the Northern and Southern Rhône varieties they yield—namely Grenache, Shiraz, Mataro (Mourvèdre), Marsanne, Roussanne, Viognier, Grenache Blanc, Carignan, and Counoise—especially well suited to the area's minimally fertile soils. "The red-brown [soils], the clays, the limestones, the patches of sand: What we've seen over the years is that actually each [type] has an affinity with a different variety," Hongell explained. "Grenache in sand is formidable, [and] Shiraz in soils high in iron or stone content tends to produce reds that have great structure and longevity."

Hongell presented Torbreck's Laird Shiraz, which hails from Laird Vineyard in the Marananga subregion and is one of Australia's most internationally acclaimed wines. Torbreck's 2018 Steading, meanwhile, is a blend of Grenache, Shiraz, and

Mataro, "the three varieties that we believe best represent our region," he said. "We get lovely red fruit [like] raspberry from Grenache, incredible texture and power from Shiraz, [and] then lots of earth and spice from Mataro."

RunRig is another wine that "symbolizes the pinnacle of what we're about," said Hongell as he presented the 2015 vintage, a blend of Shiraz grapes sourced from six different heritage vineyards planted from 1850 to 1901 and finished with a dosage of Viognier. Most of the clonal material in these vineyards originally came from Hermitage, Hongell noted, distinguishing it from the modern Shiraz clones used by other producers. Torbreck has even gone so far as to propagate cuttings from these heritage clones on other optimal sites in hopes of continuing to prove that careful custodianship makes for incredible wine.

DELICATO

Castello Banfi's estate property is said to be the largest contiguous wine estate in Europe.

THE SUPERPOWER OF POGGIO ALLE MURA

Winery: Castello Banfi

Presenter: Jgor Marini, area manager Europe

For the next presentation, "we're moving on to somewhere entirely different," noted Leicht. Castello Banfi is located in the same region as Tenuta Sette Ponti, but visiting the 2,800-hectare Banfi estate in Montalcino feels very much like visiting a small, self-sustaining town. One-third of the vast property—said to be the largest contiguous wine estate in Europe—is under vine while the rest remains forested, demonstrating just one of the many ways in which environmental sustainability permeates Castello Banfi's culture.

Established by the Mariani family in 1978, Banfi is today the largest producer of Brunello di Montalcino, but according to its area manager of Europe, Jgor Marini, its size only bolsters its intent to make the best Brunello possible by focusing its plentiful resources on research and innovation. Banfi has poured exhaustive amounts of time and money into studies of Sangiovese, discovering 650 different clones in the process. It then used meticulous vineyard-zonation mapping to plant the three optimal performers among them to the ideal terroir and now vinifies and ages these tiny lots separately. Add to that the development of proprietary hybrid steel-and-wood fermentation tanks, and Banfi is now theoretically able to produce 20 different Brunellos. "Of course we don't, because it's not economically feasible," said Marini, "but that just goes to show [how closely we] study every corner of our estate." He also highlighted sustainability measures like recycling water for various uses and using "low-input chemicals for agriculture to help preserve the flora and fauna."

A more recent innovation includes a new trellising system developed by Banfi within its crown jewel, the Poggio alle Mura Vineyard. Webcasting from the site, Marini stood before a few rows of Y-shaped Brunello vines; behind them, Banfi's medieval-castle headquarters could be seen up the hill, blocking the setting sun. "We call this system 'Banfi Alberello,' and as you can see it has only four canes, which can reduce the nutrients the plants need," Marini explained. "It's very good for poor soil and for Sangiovese especially. At the same time, you are also reducing the labor and risk of disease." Today, 85% of the vineyard utilizes this system.

Sipping on the 2016 vintage of Poggio alle Mura Brunello di Montalcino, Marini commented on the wine's voluptuousness, pointing out that such smooth, approachable character is uncommon in young Brunellos. "The superpower of this magical site is to help all the [intense] characteristics of Sangiovese reach a balance with natural finesse," he concluded.



A LUXURIOUS EXPERIMENT

Winery: Bodega Garzón

Presenter: Christian Wiley, managing director

"Welcome to Uruguay: You probably haven't even heard of this country, but it is a country, [albeit] smaller than the island of England," joked Christian Wiley, managing director of Bodega Garzón. The veteran Chilean winemaker pointed out that while Uruguay shares the same latitude as the Barossa Valley, "it's the only winegrowing region in the premium wine belt of the Southern Hemisphere that enjoys 100% exposure to the Atlantic Ocean."

It's so windy there, in fact, that Bodega Garzón's proprietor, Alejandro Bulgheroni, originally intended for the property to harbor a wind farm. But as the story goes, his wife didn't want him to spoil the view. "So this is basically an experiment," said Wiley, referring to a map of the winery's plantings.

The refreshing breezes of the Atlantic aren't the only distinguishing factor of Bodega Garzón's terroir. Wiley noted that the 500-acre estate, which sits on some of the oldest granite deposits in the world, also experiences more than 1,000 millimeters of rain annually—more than the amount Bordeaux receives. This can make growing grapes a bit of a challenge but results in wine that's "more European in style, with very nice, high natural acidity," in his words.

Wiley shared an image of Bodega Garzón's barrel room, carved out of the ancient meteorized granite called *balasto*, which has lent its name to the highly rated Balasto, a blend comprising 50%





PHOTOS COURTESY OF BODEGA GARZÓN

The high-tech, tulip-shaped concrete fermentation tanks used at Bodega Garzón.

Tannat, 40% Cabernet Franc, 5% Merlot, and 5% Marselan.

The grandiosity of the estate—which encompasses a golf course and a restaurant offering a regional selection of traditional dishes, with famed Argentine chef Francis Mallmann at the helm as culinary director—augments the high-end winemaking program directed by Alberto Antonini. It utilizes, for example, tulip-shaped concrete fermentation tanks that are a high-tech version of those used in Cheval Blanc in Bordeaux. Antonini's program has spared no expense to ensure that Bulgheroni's "experiment" would succeed with flying colors.

Bodega Garzón 2018 Balasto, Maldonado, Uruguay (\$120)

Grown in the Uruguayan region of Maldonado on the Atlantic coast, this blend of Tannat, Cabernet Franc, Petit Verdot, and Marselan is remarkably aromatic, with a perfume of chocolate, gingerbread, and plum. Roasted coffee and spiced blackberry are enhanced by a dry tannin structure. The boldness of the wine is tempered by an earthiness on the blackberry-washed mid-palate. Slate and salinity appear on the finish. **95**

PACIFIC HIGHWAY WINES & SPIRITS



DIFFERENT HEMISPHERES, SAME STYLE

Winery: Penfolds

Presenter: Timothy Irwin, GM Americas



PHOTOS COURTESY OF PENFOLDS

Penfolds is known throughout the world for its blending-is-king philosophy, shaping a house style that can't be contained by appellation borders. This past March, it ventured far beyond its country of origin by releasing a series of California-appellated wines; for the webinar, Timothy Irwin, Penfolds' GM Americas, presented the Penfolds 2018 Bin

704 Napa Valley Cabernet Sauvignon from the new lineup as well as the Penfolds 2018 Bin 407 Cabernet Sauvignon

from South Australia, as the expressions are meant to form a hemispherical mirror image of one another.

"Heads might be spinning in terms of [combining] Napa and Penfolds, but Penfolds is 177 years old, dating back to 1844. So we've got a pretty rich history, and when we think about the house philosophy, we've got single vineyards, single-region wines, and multiregion wines: Bin 704 fits into this regional representation," said Irwin, adding, "The Penfolds California Collection has been [more than two decades] in the making. In 1998, Shiraz cuttings from Penfolds' esteemed Magill Estate and Kalimna Vineyard were planted in Paso Robles. Curious to learn more about California wines, the Penfolds winemakers at the time ventured to Napa, and the experimentation and fascination with California began. This release is the culmination of this journey, and Bin 704 seeks to redefine Napa Valley through a Penfolds lens." (For more information on The California Collection, see page 50.)

Meanwhile, the Bin 407, first released in 2000, is a multiregional Cabernet from the cooler climates of Australia, including Coonawarra, "[whose] terra rosa soil is very unique," Irwin explained. "These cooler climates and beautiful soil structures contribute to the blueberry, cassis, and menthol character found in Bin 407." Tasting the 704 and 407 side by side, Leicht was struck by the wines' ability to display varietal typicity without obscuring their native terroir: "Contrasting styles, two hemispheres, but still iconic Penfolds in their own right," Irwin concurred.

Penfolds Bin 704 Cabernet Sauvignon, Napa Valley

(\$70) Streamlined and showing dusty tannins, this 100% Cabernet Sauvignon is 100% Napa Valley, with a wine-making signature that's 100% Penfolds. Aged 16 months in 100% French oak, it shows a sleek mouthfeel in which lavender and peony converge with plum skin and jasmine. A few extra days of skin contact allow beefy, concentrated notes of cherry liqueur and dark chocolate to surface. Marked by spiced cedar, the finish is a satisfying immersion of power and elegance. **96**

TREASURY WINE ESTATES



A Dream Fulfilled

BUILDING ON THE SUCCESS OF ITS WHISKEY PROGRAM, **DUKE SPIRITS** LAUNCHES A LINE OF FRENCH OAK-AGED TEQUILAS

by Stefanie Schwalb

BY NOW THE INDUSTRY knows Duke Spirits for the Kentucky Straight Bourbon, Duke Grand Cru Kentucky Reserve Bourbon, and Duke Grand Cru Double Barrel Rye it launched to high acclaim beginning in 2013. But what you may not know is that even though the late actor John Wayne—who inspired the brand—is synonymous with bourbon, he was quite taken with tequila too. In fact, when his son Ethan founded Duke Spirits with wine industry vet Chris Radomski, they took note of the many boutique tequilas in the elder Wayne's extensive liquor collection. His interest made sense: Because many of his movies were filmed in Durango, Mexico, the Duke spent a lot of time there and developed a profound affection for the nation and its people.

He also dreamed of producing his own spirits, as evidenced by the recipes Ethan found in a treasure trove of his father's belongings. Making them as the Duke would

have wanted, Radomski knew, would take a significant amount of time and effort—and that was particularly the case with tequila. "I just wanted to work to find the right recipe and make something that was consistent with the existing line of Duke Spirits," says Radomski. "We chose not to make a Blanco or have a well tequila because we wanted to produce something ultra-premium that was [also] unique. I'm not about additives and I'm not about altering formulas—I wasn't when I was in the wine industry, and we certainly aren't in the spirits industry."

After searching for several years for the right partner in Mexico to develop the product, Radomski met an "incredible" man in Miami who owns a boutique distillery as well as exceptional high-altitude agave plantations. "We worked together to do a piña-by-piña harvest," Radomski says, "and when I had access to that sourcing, I started conceiving what would make sense

[for a Duke Spirits tequila]." He decided it would have to meld seamlessly with the whiskey line, opting to focus specifically on the aging regimen.

Duke's Grand Cru bourbon and rye, he explains, "are finished in . . . some of the best wine barrels available in the world: All are French oak that have had 100-point cult Cabernets resting in them for two to three years, so the finishes [they provide] are exquisite." Given the success of both products, Radomski wondered what would happen if he took some aged tequilas and let them rest in the exact same vessels. After sending some of his barrels down to Mexico, Radomski and his team started experimenting with three-, four-, and five-year-old tequilas. They studied the results before arriving at a recipe and an aging regimen they loved, all but sealing the deal that they would move forward with, according to Radomski: a limited and commemorative line of Duke tequilas that



PHOTOS COURTESY OF DUKE SPIRITS



Duke Spirits founder Chris Radomski.

would not only “pay homage to Wayne’s love of Mexico and the Mexican people [but] also raise money for the John Wayne Cancer Foundation, two very important pillars in his life.”

Radomski has always been about authenticity and not cutting corners, but that philosophy has proven even more worthwhile now that consumers have become increasingly exacting. “They’re very educated,” he says, “and the distillery where we make everything is truly an estate operation, from the farming to the production. There are very few tequilas in Mexico that can say that ... [so] that was really the driving factor.”

Introduced in late May, Duke Spirits’ trio of tequilas can be enjoyed in a range of ways. The commemorative seven-year-old Grand Cru Tequila (\$250)—is ideal for sipping, while the Grand Cru Extra Añejo (\$150), a blend largely comprising four-year-old tequila, is built for serving neat

or in cocktails like tequila-based Espresso Martinis. Finally, the Grand Cru Reposado (\$65) makes for a great base in spicy Margaritas as well as Palomas.

The flavor profiles of the expressions vary greatly, integrating the characteristics imparted by the American oak whiskey barrels they originally aged in with those from the French wine barrels. “Every barrel we finish is different. One may be six months in the finishing process, another might be years. There are different extraction rates through each barrel,” Radomski explains. For example, before the finishing process, the Grand Cru Tequila featured incredible nuances of “deep vanilla and charcoal,” according to Radomski, “but when you finish it in a repurposed wine barrel, it just gives it a beautiful little hint of deep, dark black cherry.”

While all three tequilas can be purchased directly by consumers in states that permit shipping through Duke Spirits’ web-



Duke Spirits’ tequilas wear their inspiration on their back label.

site, just 1,000 bottles of the commemorative tequila are available. The company will donate approximately \$50,000 from its proceeds to the John Wayne Cancer Foundation, while the Extra Añejo and the Reposado—both of which also have retail placement in five states—will donate additional dollars from every bottle sold. “Obviously I’d love to see people embrace it and love it,” says Radomski. “There’s always a bit of trepidation, because I don’t know of a whiskey brand that’s also released tequila. But I think there’s a meaningful connection and a great reason to do it: John Wayne’s love [of and] appreciation [for] ... northern Mexico and his passion to cure cancer.”

Pinot Noir grapes
from Doctor's
Vineyard in the
Santa Lucia
Highlands.

A Testament to Testarossa

CAPTURING THE JOYS OF THE CENTRAL COAST

ACCORDING TO TESTAROSSA'S director of winemaking, Bill Brosseau, the 2018 vintage was a "fairy tale," especially following the extremes of 2017: "Well-spaced rain and modest spring weather started out for a great vintage in the making," he said. "As we approached harvest, the weather was steady and predictable, thus allowing for a perfect balance of acidity, tannin, and sugar development. Early on in the harvest, we could tell it was going to be an epic vintage. And sure enough, now we are enjoying it!"

We also had the opportunity to enjoy it. Here are our notes.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF TESTAROSSA



Bill Brosseau is director of winemaking for Testarossa.

Cuvée Los Gatos by Testarossa 2019

Chardonnay, Monterey (\$27) The taste of buttered popcorn is mouth-coating, with a touch of lemon drop and basil. We love the delicately balanced finish of toasty oak: like melon-washed cedar. **92**

Testarossa 2018 Chardonnay, Sta. Rita Hills, Santa Barbara County (\$44)

If any California Chardonnay stands out as Burgundian, this one does. Elegantly framed by gingerbread and jasmine, its textural sophistication is undeniably stunning. Orange peel and salted white peach adorn the finish. **95**

Testarossa 2018 Chardonnay, Santa Lucia Highlands, Monterey County (\$43)

Also Burgundian in style, this white is stark, clean, and edgy after 11 months of aging in French oak. Its high-impact acidity ties into notes of lemon wedge and vanilla cream-topped Asian pear. **96**

Testarossa 2018 Pinot Noir, Garys' Vineyard, Santa Lucia Highlands, Monterey County (\$70)

Distinctly brighter in its leaner frame than some other Garys' Vineyard wines we've tasted, this wine nevertheless expresses its own kind of intensity, without a doubt. Tart cranberry, spiced pomegranate, and chaparral play a part, but streamlined texture is key to its stage presence. Aged 18 months in 100% French oak. **97**



Testarossa 2018 Pinot Noir, Doctor's Vineyard, Santa Lucia Highlands, Monterey County (\$70)

Focused and linear compared to the Garys'-grown wine. Fruit and acid rise to the top of the mouth while mocha-kissed pomegranate-rhubarb jam spreads across the palate. **96**



Kosta Browne winemaker Julien Howsepian sets the standard for labor-intensive winemaking while finding the best way to express each great vineyard site he works with.

Earthly Expressions

EXPLORING KOSTA BROWNE'S SINGLE-VINEYARD SERIES

THE ABILITY TO PARTNER WITH some of California's best cool-climate vineyards gives Kosta Browne an advantage in crafting superior Pinot Noir. Winemaker Julien Howsepian philosophizes that "while there is no Grand Cru classification in California, over the past two decades, winemakers and wine lovers have come to understand that there is a magic to the way certain vineyards express themselves, especially [with] Pinot Noir."

The vineyards featured in the following reviews all have stories to tell, and Howsepian has a knack for understanding and communicating them in turn. He works in small batches, completing ten to 15 small fermentations to make each single-vineyard wine.

Kosta Browne 2018 Chardonnay, El Diablo Vineyard, Russian River Valley, Sonoma County (\$160) A striking cut-glass quality defines this angular and star-bright white. Both the Montrachet and Robert Young clones influence the demeanor of the wine, 52% of which aged for 11 months in foudres before going into 60-gallon French oak barrels. Its richness, marked by plush notes of Dutch apple pie, is contrasted by its pointed minerality and a thread of pineapple and salted lime. **96**

Kosta Browne 2018 Pinot Noir, Garys' Vineyard, Santa Lucia Highlands, Monterey County (\$165) Garys' Vineyard was planted in 1997 and named for Gary Francioni and Gary Pisoni, two of the most celebrated winegrowers in the Santa Lucia Highlands. Fermented in 49% stainless steel, 39% concrete, and 12% wood and then aged in French and Austrian oak for 16 months, this nuanced red shows the pedigree of its coveted source on the palate. Mocha, wild strawberry, sweet meats, and chaparral engage with a "big boy" mouthfeel. A stony, forest-floor keenness on the finish completes the experience. **98**

Kosta Browne 2018 Pinot Noir, Giusti Ranch, Russian River Valley, Sonoma County (\$165) This vineyard contains some of the deepest roots in the Russian River Valley thanks to the Giusti family, who have been farming here since the late 1800s. Its namesake wine was fermented (a small portion whole-cluster) in a combination of concrete and stainless steel. Aged in French oak for 16 months and finished in wood tanks for another four, it's a bright and peppery yet complex red with exotic accents of cumin, lemon peel, and paprika. The red fruit is ripe and perfumed. **96**



Kosta Browne 2018 Pinot Noir, Gap's Crown Vineyard, Sonoma Coast, Sonoma County (\$165)

From the maritime climate of the Petaluma Gap AVA, this celebrated vineyard in the southern part of the Sonoma Coast offers the advantages of high elevation, afternoon winds, and a lingering fog that allows for slow sugar development. Angular and spicy, with cocoa-dusted tannins, this juicy and delicious wine has a zippy mouthfeel that's ready for a steady flow of blueberry, sage, and coffee. **98**

Kosta Browne 2018 Pinot Noir, Thorn Ridge Ranch, Sonoma Coast, Sonoma County (\$165) Four clones, planted in Goldridge soil on dry-farmed hillsides unshielded from cold sea air and fog, go into what winemaker Julien Howsepian calls "an old-soul wine." The mouthfeel fulfills all your wants: rich and lush, with notes of dark chocolate, kirsch, earth, and sweet tobacco. **97**

Kosta Browne 2018 Pinot Noir, Kanzler Vineyard, Sonoma Coast, Sonoma County (\$165) Whole-cluster fermented in 100% concrete and aged in French oak barrels for 14 months with an additional three months in wood tanks before bottling, this is a dynamic and woody red. Blue fruit reigns, graced by touches of cumin and sage. As the wine opens, its acidity gives rise to a minty cherry component, while the lasting finish leaves an earthy impression. **95**

Graped Crusader

A NEW DOCUMENTARY
SERIES KICKS OFF
WITH A PROFILE OF
WINEMAKING LEGEND
RANDALL GRAHM

by Tony Correia

AN AMBITIOUS AND ENERGETIC

young somm, Thomas Brenner, has just launched a new project that profiles wine personalities in easily digestible yet fascinating documentaries. We went behind the scenes of the first episode, for which Brenner visited Popelouchum, the latest venture of Randall Graham—the legendary Rhône Ranger, provocateur, and philosopher of the California wine world who founded (and then sold) Bonny Doon Vineyard.

Having survived the long, dark, cold, and oh-so-lonely winter of 2020, Graham emerged from his cocoon and spread his wings into the cautiously optimistic



Documentarian Thomas Brenner during a tasting with Graham.

sunshine of an early April afternoon to welcome Brenner to his 400-acre ranch of virgin soils in the limestone hills of the Gabilan Mountains. On a grand tour of the property, Brenner wandered through circular plantings of Petit Manseng and nurseries filled with grapes—a proprietary Rayas clone of Grenache, Grenache Gris, Sérine, Susumaniello, Ruché, Rossese—representing Graham's uniquely ambitious



Randall Graham inspects a vine in this still from Thomas Brenner's debut documentary.


(quixotic?) crusade to develop thousands of unique varieties and determine which would be best suited to the creation of a New World Grand Cru.

While tasting the film crew through some of his wines—Popelouchum's Champagne-method sparkling Furmint, a Grenache made from the aforementioned Rayas clone, and a blend of co-fermented Grenache Blanc and Grenache Gris, not to mention the last bottle on earth of Bonny Doon Vineyard's 2012 Vin Gris de Cigare Réserve—Graham discussed his legacy project, founded on a magical site overlooking the tiny mission village of San Juan Bautista. Popelouchum is built on his quest to produce truly distinctive wines of place—discovering special terroir and then “pushing all the appropriate viticultural buttons,” in his words, to reveal its characteristics. In his view, grapes are merely vessels, carriers of the essence of a site, best showcased through a minimalist, low-intervention approach to vinification.

To that end, Graham is meticulously head training and dry farming varieties that are uncommon to New World viticulture but that are drought- and wind-tolerant, key for success in San Juan Bautista. Next, he's

experimenting with what he calls “varietal auto-tuning”: crossing grapes that have proven to perform well here, harvesting the results and sowing their seeds to create a “*sélection massale* on steroids.” While many of these offspring will be genetically weaker than their parent, Graham is looking for the small percentage that may show distinctive qualities or better potential for adaptation to the site. He is intrigued by the idea of identifying a number of seedling biotypes with unique qualities—a floral fragrance in one case, a tannic structure in another; resistance to oxidation in yet another—and then creating an assemblage from these genetically diverse elements. “It takes a viticultural village,” he quipped.

Finally, he plans to breed some 10,000 new varieties from genetically distinctive lineages with the intention of thoroughly effacing varietal characteristics in favor of heightened ability to express the soil. It all comes down to his belief that “a distinctive terroir is capable of producing great, complex wine from a vast array of different varieties and blends thereof,” as he put it.

For more information on Brenner's soon-to-air documentary series, visit wineifera.com. 

PHOTOS: MJ VALLERO



Acquerello's famed faux
foie gras pasta.

A Decadent Dupe

AT **ACQUERELLO** IN SAN FRANCISCO, CHEF SUZETTE GRESHAM'S FAUX FOIE GRAS PASTA LEAVES A LASTING IMPRESSION by Michelle M. Metter

PHOTO: DANIEL MORRIS

I MET CHEF SUZETTE GRESHAM

around 13 years ago, and while the exact details of our encounter are now fuzzy, the experience of tasting her decadent faux foie gras pasta—one of the most epic bites of food I've ever had—has been imprinted in my memory ever since. An Antonin Carême Medal recipient and one of only four female chefs in the United States to achieve two Michelin stars, Gresham's San Francisco restaurant Acquerello is an icon to locals and culinary travelers alike—and the pasta, which has been on the menu for more than 20 years, is likely its best-known and most beloved dish.

When she created it years ago, Gresham turned to a cookbook by the late Italian chef Gualtiero Marchesi, of whom she was an avid admirer, for guidance and inspiration. "Chef Marchesi was the father of minimalist cooking, preparing uncomplicated but modernized versions of classic dishes that always managed to capture [their] essence . . . without losing [their] soul," she says. Although his recipe featured

fattened goose liver, the California ban on the product called for ingenuity: "I modified it to use fresh [unfatted] duck liver instead, making it reminiscent of foie gras."

To make the dish, Gresham begins with high-quality dried rigatoni and creates a compound butter with the duck liver. She then prepares an uber-rich and unctuous sauce, adding cream, Marsala, and black truffle to the butter before tossing it with the pasta and finishing with a drizzle of truffle oil.

Wine director Gianpaolo Paterlini's pairing for this dish, a wine named Torcolato from Italian winery Maculan, is a mainstay at Acquerello. Located in the Breganze DOC in the Veneto region, Maculan has specialized in sweet wine for over five decades; Torcolato features Vespaiola grapes that are left to dehydrate in the winery, hanging or in flat baskets, allowing them to develop up to 20% botrytis. The result is concentrated but not cloying, with a sweetness that serves as a welcome contrast to the intensely savory liver and black truffles as well as refreshing acidity that helps to cut through the dish's richness.

To conceive yet another pairing, I enlisted the help of Geralyn Brostrom, managing director of Italian Wine Central, an online resource and database that oversees several education initiatives focused on Italian wines. Here's what she said: "When I taught at [the Culinary Institute of America], the chef-instructors urged us to consider more than just wine color or sweetness when pairing. [You



Acquerello chef-owner Suzette Gresham.

should] understand the wine's and the dish's components, including weight. While the portion size may be restrained, the dish is not—it is loaded with savory flavors, rich texture, and distinctive truffle aromas. Gianpaolo knows his pairings, but if you are compelled to stray, you needn't go far from the Veneto. Next door in Friuli, the richer Friulano-based wines from Marco Felluga or Prinčič are always meticulously crafted, just like Suzette's dish. Tramin's Alto Adige Stoa is an exotic but balanced blend that will face off against the dish nicely, bringing the acid you need to stay refreshed. An aged, complex sparkling wine from Trento such as Ferrari's Trento Brut Riserva del Fondatore will [also] bring that acidity to the table along with a host of complementary flavors for a special treat." ■

PHOTO: CHANDLER SOWDEN

PHOTO: DANIEL MORRIS



Acquerello wine director Gianpaolo Paterlini.

Where Sonoma Meets Napa

EXPLORING FIVE DECADES OF
INNOVATION IN KNIGHTS VALLEY
WITH **BERINGER VINEYARDS**

by Stefanie Schwalb

WHEN YOU THINK OF KNIGHTS VALLEY,

the word “bucolic” comes to mind: Set in the northeastern corner of Sonoma County, right on the border of Napa County, this narrow and rural AVA is one of California’s most pristine growing regions. It lies between the Mayacamas mountain range and the base of Mount St. Helena, where its approximately 2,000 vineyard sites are shielded from the Pacific influence most Sonoma AVAs are known for—yet its high elevation results in broad diurnal shifts between hot days and cool evenings, making for an extended growing season that results in world-class wines, particularly those made from Bordeaux varietals like Cabernet Sauvignon and Sauvignon Blanc.

As renowned as it is, its location fairly off the beaten path means that Knights Valley sees a relative lack of tourism. So attendees of our mid-April Somm Sessions webinar, “Crossing

Knights Valley is located in the northeastern corner of Sonoma County, CA.



Beringer Vineyards senior winemaker Ryan Rech.

the County Line: Knights Valley, 50 Years of Innovation," were lucky to discover a destination rich in history. Held in partnership with SommFoundation and hosted by Treasury Wine Estates' Gillian Ballance, MS, and *SOMM Journal* VP of education Lars Leicht, the virtual event took us on a deep dive into the AVA, complete with a tasting of the Beringer Vineyards 2018 Knights Valley Cabernet Sauvignon and a surprise visit from Beringer's senior winemaker, Ryan Rech.

The backstory of Knights Valley's wine industry begins in the 1800s, when the Mexican government was giving land grants to people who had provided years of dedicated service to its nation. One of the lucky recipients, José de los Santos Berryessa, was awarded more than 17,700 acres collectively known as Rancho Mallacomes in 1843, but once California became its own republic five years later, Berryessa decided to return to Mexico. That's when Thomas Knight, a member of the historic Bear Flag Revolt, bought 9,000 acres of the land and started planting vineyards. By 1875, the valley was a highly popular grape-growing region now named for Knight.

As word spread, Kellogg—the small town located there—had high hopes for competing with Calistoga, but Prohibition followed by the Great Depression put an

end to those aspirations. Making matters worse, a massive fire wiped Kellogg out completely in the 1960s. Knights Valley didn't begin to fully recover until the mid-1970s. However, when the first AVAs were selected for Sonoma County in 1983, Knights Valley was included. Among the handful of growers still operating there was Beringer Vineyards, which actually played an instrumental part in garnering the recognition.

Already longtime producers in Napa Valley, the Beringer family staked their claim in Knights Valley in the mid-1960s after recognizing the potential for growing high-quality grapes in its volcanic,

well-drained soils. They purchased a 600-acre ranch and released the first vintage of Knights Valley Cabernet Sauvignon in 1974; that land is still primarily planted to Bordeaux varietals today, but their acreage within the AVA has increased to cover roughly a third of its total plantings. "While our vineyards sit on the valley floor, [they're] primarily farmed like a mountaintop vineyard, and that's because of how rocky our soils are. If you look at some of the maps and read some of the history, you can actually see where the Russian River used to flow down all the way through Alexander Valley, cut down into Knights, and flow into the Napa River," explained Rech, noting that when a geological event diverted the river away from

Knights Valley millions of years ago, "it left Knights as this old riverbed with rocks—just really restrictive soils. We get really small berries, preserving a lot of acidity, too, which makes it a really cool spot."

To ensure those vineyards speak for themselves, Rech and his team try to keep their use of oak in balance. "When you start talking about the type of tannin that we extract out at Knights Valley and the quantity, it's really just a small touch of new oak—just enough to kind of lift the fruit but not so much to overpower some of that elegance that we get off the vineyard itself," he said. "With the reds, we're tasting the fermenters as we go. We are looking at the quality and the quantity of the tannins coming out, and that's when I'm deciding how much oak to use and what kind of toast. The tweaks are going to be based off of what we're tasting while things are fermenting."

While Beringer has long been celebrated for its quality, it's also lauded for its deep-seated commitment to sustainability. Each of Beringer's owned and leased vineyards are certified sustainable through its participation in about six different programs, including Fish Friendly Farming. It also uses solar panels and is constantly reviewing metrics like water consumption and energy use to preserve the land's precious resources. "[Beringer has] been making wines for over 140 years. I want [it] to be making wines for another 140 years, so sustainability is a huge part of that," said Rech. "When you start thinking about a piece of land in those terms, you can't think about what you're doing this season—you have to think long term." **ST**



Beringer 2018 Knights Valley Cabernet Sauvignon, Sonoma County (\$36)

Notes of mountain brush and crushed violet integrate with this wine's firm structure. It's heady and plush, with chewy tannins and broad shoulders, and there's an elegance to the uplifted and ripe notes of deep, dark boysenberry. Melted dark chocolate is so satisfying on the long finish. **94** —Meridith May

TREASURY WINE ESTATES

{ whiskey }

“The True Way of Making Whiskey”

FOR ASSISTANT DISTILLER
LEXIE PHILLIPS, WORKING
AT JACK DANIEL’S IS A
FAMILIAL RITE OF PASSAGE

by Eric “ET” Tecosky, Jack Daniel’s U.S.
Brand Ambassador

Lexie Phillips may have just been promoted to the position of Jack Daniel’s assistant distiller this year, but her road to the distillery in Lynchburg, Tennessee, started generations ago. “I have had at least 24 close family members, past and present, work at Jack Daniel’s,” she says. “If I start looking at third cousins and beyond, that tree grows quick. My great-grandfather worked for Jack Daniel’s nephews, the Motlows, in the 1940s.”

*Jack Daniel’s assistant
distiller Lexie Phillips.*

PHOTO COURTESY OF JACK DANIEL’S

Phillips' family also used to run a beloved restaurant on the Lynchburg Town Square called Iron Kettle, where she worked for years and met some Jack Daniel's employees while on shift. (Like any hospitality pro, she "can still remember their orders and who drank what with their meal," she says.) After her stint serving its delicious pork chops and slaw burgers, she went off to college to study agriculture and business, but she jumped at the opportunity to return to Lynchburg when her aunt told her about an opening for a part-time job at Jack Daniel's. There, she found herself gaining diverse experience in various departments before landing in quality control—and as she got a peek behind the curtain, she "started realizing how much care it took to put a perfect bottle of Jack Daniel's out in the world," she says.

Her stint in QC has enriched not only her professional life but her personal life as well: That's when she met her now-husband, Josh, who worked in processing—specifically, getting the whiskey into the bottle. They remained friends while transitioning into different roles—her in the stillhouse and him on the Single Barrel Select line—and in June 2020, they got married.

But the road to the stillhouse was also marked by a different kind of milestone: her first interview with the top brass, which was daunting considering how much she wanted the job. "I told the interview panel, 'I may be dressed up . . . but I am a jeans-and-T-shirt kind of girl who doesn't mind breaking a few nails,'" she recalls. "I let them know I could change my own oil, brake pads, and rotors. I think I cemented the position when I mentioned that I recently fixed the mowing deck on our old John Deere without the aid of a YouTube video. They realized I was a pretty roll-up-your-sleeves, hands-on kind of person who really got in there and figured it out."


Like everyone I've spoken with who's connected to Jack Daniel's, Phillips is quick to vocalize her love of the brand: "It's all about family, community, and tradition. When I was a little kid, I remember a huge outing we went to as a family each year, the Jack Daniel's [World Championship] Invitational Barbecue—such great memories. Also, I have had so many family members who had worked at Jack that I



Lexie Phillips and her husband, Josh, on their wedding day last year.

felt like the job was passed down to me like a family heirloom. I feel like we are protecting the traditions of making great whiskey, generation after generation. This whiskey boom we are in right now is great, but in an effort to get liquid in a bottle, sometimes the art of making whiskey can be lost along the way. Not here. I love the fact that at Jack Daniel's, we hold on to the craft of making whiskey and the history behind it. From the yeast we make to the same source of water that Mr. Jack used to our own barrels and on and on—it is the

true way of making whiskey."

After making it, of course, Phillips likes to savor the fruits of her labor: Her personal preference? "I mostly drink Jack neat. If I do mix it, it may be a simple Sour with a bit of lemon juice, water, and a touch of sugar," she says. "Every once in a while I will enjoy an Old Fashioned, but 90% of the time, it's Jack neat." Well, as the distillery's U.S. brand ambassador, I can tell you with authority that 100% of the time, it's a treat to spend time with Phillips—preferably over a glass of our favorite whiskey. Cheers! 

SommFoundation Expands Its Board of Directors

NEW AND LONGTIME MEMBERS DISCUSS THE ORGANIZATION'S FUTURE

WE ARE EXCITED to announce new leadership roles and the expansion of our board of directors as we adapt, grow, and expand on ways to fulfill our mission. With our new team assembled and our new roles established, we feel that we are now ready to get to work on fulfilling SommFoundation's mission: to assist all wine and spirits professionals in achieving the highest level of proficiency and accreditation in the food and beverage industry. We recognize the incredible honor and responsibility we have in selecting the recipients of our awards thoughtfully and transparently. Our vision for the immediate future is to prioritize building a more fair, inclusive, and just industry through access to educational experiences, scholarship funds, and personal networks.

Like all in our industry, we have strived to find innovative ways to carry out our mission during these incredibly challenging times. We have introduced new scholarship competitions; virtual webinars with tasting components; and SommGeo, a unique and powerful mapping tool that is revolutionizing the study of wine for curious drinkers and pursuers of expert-level knowledge alike. We've also collaborated with many sponsors on our programs to ensure that our processes are in line with our values and our goal of inclusivity for all professionals wishing to achieve their highest potential in the food and beverage industry.

Each year, we award over \$150,000 in annual scholarship funds, and we provide hundreds of professionals with enrichment opportunities. These programs would not be possible without the vital support of our sponsors and donors. To learn more, visit sommfoundation.com, where you can join our email list, and follow us on social media @sommfoundation. If you are interested in sponsoring a program, contact us at info@sommfoundation.com.

And to all you aspiring professionals out there, we have many opportunities for participation now and more coming soon, including new scholarship programs, virtual educational trips, and yes, even physical enrichment trips! As Thomas Price, MS, says: "We are grateful to contribute to our community by helping others achieve their goals, and we look forward to seeing our industry flourish again in the near future." Allow us to introduce you to him and four other members of our team, currently serving on the board along with Tony Busalacchi; James Lechner; director of enrichment trips Steven Poe, MS; co-chairman Jay James, MS; and cellar master Jay Fletcher, MS.



Thomas Price, MS.

Our longtime director of scholarships, Thomas Price, MS, has taken on the leadership role of co-chairman with Jay James, MS. Price states: "I thank Jay James for his guidance, example, and innumerable contributions to SommFoundation. I am thrilled to continue the legacy of philanthropy that this organization has always stood for and that I am deeply passionate about."



Our vision for the immediate future is to prioritize building a more fair, inclusive, and just industry through access to educational experiences, scholarship funds, and personal networks.



PHOTO: KRIS ALEX

The Lotus & The Vines founder Larissa Dubose.

Larissa Dubose joined our board in February. Founder of online wine-education company The Lotus & The Vines, Dubose saw a need to empower wine novices to foster their curiosity and help them build confidence. She has extensive experience managing wine brands in the wholesale arena and comes with invaluable social media savvy. She is also the director of education for Black Wine Professionals, an organization dedicated to diversifying the industry. "I'm beyond excited to join this dynamic board of directors and continue the impactful legacy of SommFoundation," says Dubose. "The opportunity to serve the professionals in our community while amplifying their voices is my distinct honor."



Jackson Family Wines SVP of marketing Shilah Salmon.

Shilah Salmon joined our board in March, bringing with her nearly 20 years of experience in wine marketing and brand strategy. She is SVP of marketing at Jackson Family Wines, managing its Santa Barbara labels and its luxury portfolio, Spire Collection. Her global experience, executive skills, and extensive professional network will be an incredible asset to SommFoundation. "The sommelier and trade community are our storytellers, our educators, and the ambassadors that keep our dynamic global industry moving forward," she says. "I'm on this board to support the further education of a wide range of wine professionals and to help push our industry toward greater inclusion by bringing more diverse voices to the table—literally and figuratively."



Ashley Hausman, MW.

In April, Ashley Hausman, MW, joined our board; her perspective as a Master of Wine will greatly assist us in creating opportunities to build a larger wine community. Hausman has more than 15 years' worth of experience in the industry, spanning nearly every link in the supply chain from production and sales to academia and consulting. The education she received working in the cellar and out in the vineyards, tasting from barrels and participating in harvests, has brought context and meaning to her journey toward the goal of certification through the Institute of Masters of Wine: "These real-life experiences have been invaluable to my growth as a professional and a lifelong learner," she says. "To join an organization whose essence is rooted in giving those opportunities to others is inspiring and a privilege." An excellent public speaker and educator, Hausman will focus on scholarships.



PHOTO: COURTNEY KILLIAN

SommFoundation COO Lynn Fletcher.

Lynn Fletcher, who has been with SommFoundation since 2016, now holds the title of chief operating officer. She has been instrumental in sponsor relations, program development, project execution, compliance, communications, website development, and administration. Fletcher says, "I find it incredibly rewarding to work for SommFoundation in all aspects of our operations. After working 25 years on the floor and in management in the hospitality industry, it is an honor and a joy to work for a nonprofit that gives back to this amazing community." 



by Susan Keevil

Deep Dive

SUSAN KEEVIL SHARES THE BACKSTORY OF HER WINE EDUCATION

I WENT OFF the deep end with wine early on. My geography degree course at university made for a segue into the historical geography of viticulture, which involved a round trip to the hallowed chalk cellars of Épernay; the Grand Cru vineyards of Bâtard-Montrachet (where there was a surreptitious clos-side picnic); and a tasting of deliciously almondy young Burgundies with a grower in Nuits-St-Georges. I was charmed, delighted, and smitten, in that order.

Actually, the deep end went even further than that—10,431 miles to Australia's Hunter Valley. Those fortuitous studies of wine culture somehow qualified me for a job at the iconic Rosemount estate, working alongside the likes of then-interns Anne Gros and Christophe Bichot, Burgundians who really *did* know about wine. I remember being handed a magnum-sized spanner on my first day and told to "pump the Chardonnay in vat 13 through the Alfa Laval (the 'ultracooler')"; to call for help when it was time to "push it through"; and to never let winemaker Philip Shaw catch me running. It was a big ask, and though I learned quickly, the panic of being tasked with such urgent duties never left me: My nickname in the winery was "The Greyhound."

My point in relating all this is that, here in the U.K., we have an august body called the Wine & Spirit Education Trust (WSET). When I got back home from my travels and reflected on my steep learning curve with Aussie Chardonnay, I knew that it was time to knuckle down and learn about wine—properly this time. I also knew where to turn.

I've heard about the rigorous training that U.S. somms go through, and I'm aware that you now have the WSET too. But I doubt any of your education centers are as creaky and Edwardian as ours were back then. Once I'd completed the book learning for the Certificate and

Higher Certificate courses and passed examinations involving finicky questions on permitted grape varieties and average yields, I graduated (with my own rattling box of six ISO glasses) and proceeded to tasting classes at the mahogany-paneled Five Kings House in London. I was now a Diploma student—and then an MW student (I passed the theory papers but failed the MW tasting exam, so I didn't quite get the T-shirt).


often found myself drawing on my WSET reserves—knowledge learned acre by acre, vintage by vintage, emerging from the shadows of my mind (along with Shakespeare quotes from school) to answer the question: "What next?"

Thus I salute the WSET, that first-rate cornerstone of wine-trade knowledge—it's rather less starchy these days!—as I plan my reacquaintance with Sablet, Saussignac, and Saint-Pourçain-sur-Sioule.



A trip to Champagne was a formative experience for the author.

There's no escaping the nitty-gritty; it has to be faced. Those years of rote learning were intense, but they introduced me to facts, figures, and flavours beyond my imagination, as well as to experts and luminaries whose words I'm deeply glad of now as we come out of lockdown. The past year has left me counting on my favourites (Riesling, Grüner Veltliner; I adore you!), and winemaker-led webinars have kept me fascinated. But without the inspiration of restaurant meals, winery visits, and convivial trade tastings, I've

I'm ready to welcome you back, you wines of yesteryear. You are no longer tedious. But where can I find you? I'm certain my old friend Steven Spurrier would have known. 

*Susan Keevil is editor-in-chief at the Académie du Vin Library, the London-based publisher of Steven Spurrier's memoir *A Life in Wine* (2020), among other titles. She is currently collating its new anthology, *On California*, for publication in autumn 2021. For more information, visit academieduvinlibrary.com.*



The Man Behind the Brands



CERTIFIED
Organic





*Elegance and Freshness
from the Alto Adige*

www.kettmeir.com



KETTMEIR

Imported by SANTA MARGHERITA USA. Made responsibly to be enjoyed responsibly.

