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EVOLUTION

UNDER NEW
LEADERSHIP,
CHAMPAGNE
TAITTINGER
SEES A

*Sparkling
Future*

by Wanda Mann



Vitalie Taittinger is president and
CEO of Champagne Taittinger.

Pierre Taittinger purchased Château de la Marquetterie and its surrounding vineyards—which date back to the 14th century—in 1932.



Vitalie Taittinger not only bears the instantly recognizable surname of one of the world's most storied Champagne houses but is also boldly leading her family's business toward effervescent new heights. Having succeeded her father, Pierre Emmanuel Taittinger, as president and CEO of Champagne Taittinger in January 2020, Vitalie respects the rich traditions of the past yet is unafraid to embrace the styles and preferences of contemporary times. "If we consider that Champagne is only tradition, we will create the old Champagne, and I never want to, because Champagne is a lively brand, a lively product," she says. "This is bubbly; this is sparkling; this is crispy. So, it has to breathe, and it has to continue to evolve."

Founded nearly a century ago, Champagne Taittinger is one of the few remaining family-owned and -operated Champagne houses. "When you are a family, you are working with different expectations," Vitalie says, noting that their commitment to the company goes beyond profit margins and personal advancement to honor "the treasure you have in your hands" in the form of each bottle they craft. "Of course, [the] business [aspect] is super-important and is part of the future, because if it is not working, you have no future," she adds. "We have to be very dynamic."

From day one, Champagne Taittinger was forward-thinking in its approach to creating and conveying a singular style. Founder Pierre Taittinger, Vitalie's great-grandfather, was a gastronome and visionary who recognized that society was moving away from complex and heavy haute cuisine in favor of lighter fare that wasn't overwhelmed by elaborate techniques or rich sauces. He seized the opportunity to similarly transition the tastes of traditional Champagne clientele, who had been accustomed to the old Belle Époque style of sweet Champagne with significant dosage, toward a more elegant Brut style that expressed both the fruit itself and the terroir it came from. "Taittinger is a taste—a taste captured by Chardonnay," Vitalie explains.



Champagne Taittinger's chalk cellars.

Indeed, Taittinger distinguished itself from its competitors by using a higher proportion of Chardonnay in its blends. Thirty-seven percent of its vineyards are planted to the variety, compared to an average of 27% in the broader region. Why has the winery cast Chardonnay as the leading lady in its wines? “[It] has a beautiful acidity that allows Champagnes and cuvées to age super-well,” Vitalie notes, which is fitting, as ageability is a priority for Taittinger: its Champagnes are aged extensively

before release and often exceed the legal requirements.

But without quality grapes, it's impossible to create great Champagne capable of extended aging. The third-largest vineyard owner in the region, the family oversees 752 acres of plantings that include prestigious, sustainably managed Grand Cru vineyards in the Côte des Blancs and Montagne de Reims. Although they acquire some grapes from other sources, Vitalie explains, long-term relationships with the

growers give them the privilege of being selective with the fruit they purchase in order to yield wines of “freshness, energy, and precision.”

Within the portfolio, the **Taittinger Brut La Française (\$65)** serves as an elegant introduction to the house style. A blend of 40% Chardonnay, 35% Pinot Noir, and 25% Pinot Meunier, the delicate wine ages three to four years on the lees—more than twice as long as required by AOC law—and offers aromas of peach, white flowers, vanilla-bean pod, and brioche along with flavors of fresh fruit and honey. “You’ll know the soul of a house from the quality of its nonvintage Champagne,” says Vitalie, describing the Brut La Française as a “wine to sip after a hard day” that pairs well with a simple spread of cheese and crackers as well as seafood and white meat.

Conceptualizing such pairings is another priority for the winery, exemplified through its prestigious international culinary competition, Taittinger Prix Culinaire, which has celebrated the art of French cuisine while showcasing the talent of young chefs for more than 50 years. These efforts have helped emphasize Champagne's gastronomic importance, reinforcing the idea that it can be enjoyed as a pairing with everything from simple homecooked meals to haute cuisine across many cultures.

That, of course, includes dessert: The ideal match for the lively, fruity, and fresh **Champagne Taittinger Prestige Rosé (\$85)**, according to Vitalie, is a dark-chocolate tart, though it also pairs well with seafood such as salmon and shrimp. Crisp and full-bodied, the blend of 50% Pinot Noir, 30% Chardonnay, and 20% Pinot Meunier ages three years on the lees and has enticing aromas of crushed raspberries, cherries, and black currants.



The **Les Folies de la Marquetterie (\$97)**, meanwhile, is a 100% estate-grown Champagne created as a tribute to Château de la Marquetterie, whose surrounding vineyards date back to the 14th century. In 1932, the property was purchased by Vitalie's great-grandfather, marking the beginning of the family's production in Champagne. A blend of 45% Chardonnay and 55% Pinot Noir, Les Folies de la Marquetterie ages five years on the lees and boasts intense aromas of peaches, apricot jam, and vanilla as well as subtle hints of toasted brioche. Rich and complex, it is full-bodied and fruity on the palate, with flavors of golden



peaches leading to a finish of light woody notes. Vitalie recommends serving the wine alongside chicken in a cream-and-white wine sauce with mushrooms such as morels.

Finally, the blend of 50% Chardonnay and 50% Pinot Noir known as **Prélude Grands Crus (\$98)** is produced exclusively with fruit from Grand Cru vineyards, balancing the lean minerality of the Chardonnay with the aromatic strength of the Pinot Noir. It ages five years on the lees, four times longer than required by AOC law, which develops the wine's body and complexity, conveyed by mineral aromas that segue into scents of



elderflowers and spicy cinnamon. “[It’s] the ultimate expression of minerality and purity, which characterizes the terroir of the Champagne region,” Vitalie says, recommending a pairing of scallop or tuna tartare and fresh oysters.

In keeping with the perfect balance of the Champagne that fills Taittinger's bottles, Vitalie knows that a balance between established practice and innovation is essential to the winery's continued success—a notion reinforced recently by the new generation of wine lovers introduced to Champagne Taittinger through prominent placements in the Emmy-nominated show *Emily in Paris*. “Tradition is really created by the method: the way we cultivate the grapes, the attention to terroir; the respect of the human gestures,” she says. “This tradition is in everything we are doing. The way we love Champagne, the way we share it, [and] the way we communicate it is totally free to carry this tradition, but we also turn to the future.” And what a sparkling future it is! SJ

Taittinger oversees 752 acres of plantings in the Côte des Blancs and Montagne de Reims.



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Advanced Sommelier Erik Segelbaum greets attendees of the Beaujolais Nouvelle Génération tasting at Le Mercerie Café in New York City.

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Inspecting the soil at Casa Brancaia in the Radda district of Chianti, Italy.

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The Turn Toward Terroir

WHY AMERICAN WINE DRINKERS SHOULD EMBRACE A SENSE OF PLACE

ONE OF THE GREAT mysteries of our industry concerns the fact that so few of us appreciate American wines as much as their classic European counterparts. We understand, for instance, that Lafite is Lafite, which is different from Margaux, Haut-Brion, or Cheval Blanc. Why? Because they are different vineyards, reflecting completely different terroirs.

The same goes for Burgundy. We do not expect a Corton to taste like a Chambertin or a Chambertin to be like a Musigny; meanwhile, in Germany, a top *einzellage* in the Saar won't resemble another in the Mittelmosel, the Pfalz, or Rheingau. This is as simple as A, B, C.

So why, when we taste Old World varieties grown in different regions throughout, say, California, do we throw them together and rate them as if they should all meet the same sensory profile? Heck, you can take two Pinot Noir vineyards on either side of a road in the Russian River Valley's Middle Reach neighborhood and find more differences in soil, aspect (i.e., slope and sun exposure), and microclimate than you would in Corton as compared to Chambertin. So

why would you expect a Pinot Noir from the Russian River Valley to resemble one from the Anderson Valley 60 miles away, the Santa Lucia Highlands 175 miles away, or the Santa Maria Valley 350 miles away?

The answer, of course, is that we shouldn't but do anyhow because of the way we evaluate American wines in general: primarily in terms of varietal character and intensity rather than sensory nuance. Appellation, terroir, sense of place—whatever you want to call it—are low on the list of factors consumers consider when purchasing domestic wines.

Yet more and more American wines are being crafted like European wines in the sense that their creators are focused on staying true to the vineyards and appellations they're sourced from. In some cases, varietal character and house style are thrown completely out the window. Many of you in the sommelier trade or hospitality industry agree with me that, yes, this is the way wines *should* be.

But here is my caveat: No matter how significant, these changes won't stick if consumers keep looking at American

wines in the same old way. We need to help our guests and customers throw out preconceptions of varietal character and teach them to demand more than mere consistency from commercial brands while encouraging even our most talented winemakers to resist the compulsion to mess with wines that should be left alone. We need to promote and celebrate the diversity of terroir, whether the vines in question are 60 or 350 miles apart or just across the road from each other.

I've had only two real mentors during my entire career, which started in 1978: André Tchelistcheff and Kermit Lynch. While he is now retired, Lynch's single-minded obsession with imports that taste like where they come from remains a profound influence on our industry. What I remember most about Tchelistcheff is his insistence that, when it comes to vineyards, Mother Nature has the final say on what should be grown and how. Therefore, it is the environment, not the producer, that should be the arbiter of the form our best wines take. Since these values were good enough for Tchelistcheff, they're still good enough for me. **SJ**

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98 Points
2018 Pinot Noir

95 Points
2018 Syrah

95 Points
2019 Syrah

93 Points
2018 Chardonnay

92 Points
2019 Pinot Noir





Access Is Everything

NEW YORK CITY'S NEW **CONTENTO RESTAURANT** RESPECTS THE RIGHTS OF DINERS AND EMPLOYEES WITH DISABILITIES

OPENING A RESTAURANT is daunting in the best of times; during a pandemic, it's downright audacious. So every time I receive word of a new eatery or wine bar, I am inspired by the resilient spirit of our industry: Now, more than ever, we all need safe places to gather that satisfy our palates and nourish our souls. Why, then, have so many operators neglected to accommodate people living with disabilities? At Contento Restaurant (contentonyc.com) in New York City's East Harlem neighborhood, accessibility is not an afterthought; it is built into the establishment's ethos and architecture.

According to the U.S. Census Bureau's 2018 American Community Survey, 12.6% of the "civilian noninstitutionalized population"—or 40.6 million people—have a disability. Although the Americans with Disabilities Act became the law of the land in 1990 to prohibit discrimination in employment as well as in both public and commercial facilities, too many restaurants treat it as a suggestion and not a mandate.

The all-star team behind Contento includes co-owner/sommelier Yannick Benjamin, who is also the co-founder of Wheeling Forward, an organization that advocates for and provides support services to people with disabilities. Benjamin navigates life from a wheelchair due to a spinal cord injury he sustained at the age of 25, but it hasn't stopped him from achieving success as a sommelier. Wheel-



PHOTOS: MIKHAIL LIPANSKIY

Contento Restaurant co-owner/sommelier Yannick Benjamin, seated center, with his team.

ing confidently around Contento with his custom-made wine tray, he knows firsthand the importance of spaces that allow for safe and independent movement. For example, Contento's entryway enables guests in wheelchairs to enter unassisted with ease, and a section of the bar is lowered to a height that seats them comfortably.

When I interviewed Benjamin on *The SOMM Journal's* Instagram Live channel a few months before Contento's June opening, he said, "It's been a long time coming, but it's not going to just be a restaurant. It's also going to be a community gathering place." Now that Contento is the talk of the town, he knows that its commitment to accessibility could have an impact far beyond its walls: "The truth is that we have no interest in being known as one of the only barrier-free restaurants," he asserts. "Our objective is that other restaurants and other hospitality establishments will incorporate universal design along with sensitivity training [for] the staff."

The same level of attention that the Contento team paid to restaurant design is evident in the menu. Chef Oscar Lorenzi's vibrant and flavorful Peruvian-

inspired cuisine is the perfect companion to Benjamin's thoughtfully eclectic wine list, which spans the globe. I'm still working through the menu, but so far I've greatly enjoyed the Kurobuta pork katsu with spicy daikon slaw and yuzu aioli and the verde pizzetta with pork belly, tomatillo, and Oaxacan cheese; other dishes include ceviche, shrimp escabeche, crispy yuca, and a quinoa dish prepared risotto-style (see our August/September issue for details). Wines by the bottle, meanwhile, are grouped into intriguing categories such as Wines of Impact, highlighting producers with a socially conscious mission; Wines of the Ancient World; and East Coast Terroir.

As convivial as it is accessible, Contento is more than just a great place to wine and dine; it has the potential to be a catalyst for change in the restaurant industry. The time is long overdue to make real room at the table for our friends, family members, colleagues, and guests with disabilities. **WJ**

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



The bar at Contento Restaurant in New York's East Harlem neighborhood.

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by Ruth Tobias

Good Wines Make Good Neighbors

BRASSERIE BRIXTON AND TRELIS WINE BAR PROVE PÉT NAT CAN PLAY IN PEORIA

THERE ARE SOME CURIOUS

parallels between two of my new favorite places to drink in Denver; Brasserie Brixton and Trellis Wine Bar. Both are owned by hospitality-industry rookies. Both are located in largely residential neighborhoods without much of a dining scene to speak of. And yet both are marking their territory with the kinds of exciting, if not challenging, wine programs even the city's most dynamic and progressive commercial districts have only begun to see in the past few years.

Opening in Cole last summer, Brasserie Brixton represents a labor of love (and perhaps a love of labor) for Amy Keil and her boyfriend/partner, Justin Morse, who explains that “my background is in engineering, and [Keil’s] an architect, so we took a bit of a backwards approach” to restaurant design—building out the cozy space themselves from the ground up as they continued to fine-tune the concept. The result is “inspired by a lot of restaurants in Montreal and Paris” encountered on his travels abroad, he adds, noting that “what deeply bound all of them was that they were kind of hard to define” when it came to wine; rather than following a one-size-fits-all template, their eclectic selections simply reflected what the proprietors liked to drink. By the same token, says Morse, “There’s nothing on [our list] that’s like, ‘Well, we need a Sauvignon Blanc here.’ We wanted to have a variety from the ultra-natty stuff on one end of the spectrum to more classic wines on the other”—provided, that is, that they were crafted by the small, organic and/or



Trellis Wine Bar in Denver's Park Hill neighborhood.

Biodynamic producers “who spoke to us.”

A recent visit with friends revealed the wisdom of his ways. Given the diversity of influences on the freewheeling menu—take the blooming onion with eggplant pakora and peach chutney or the chili crisp-drizzled steak tartare with Chinese doughnuts and turnips—it only makes sense that the list of about 40 labels by the bottle and ten by the glass would likewise range from piquettes and pét nats to uncommon blends (skin-contact Grüner Veltliner, Ribolla, and Kerner from the Willamette Valley, say, or Lemberger and Trollinger from Württemberg) to Barolo and Ribera del Duero. The Captain’s List, meanwhile, comprises about 20 listings,



The dining room at Brasserie Brixton.

mostly French, that Morse says “would probably sell at a traditional steakhouse for double the price”; even so, he felt strongly that it should be available by request only, so that first-timers “don’t see \$400 wines and get intimidated.”

A couple of miles away in Park Hill, the four-month-old Trellis Wine Bar is an instant charmer: Filled with plants and plush lounge furnishings in cool jewel tones, the airy, split-level space resembles something out of the pages of *Architectural Digest*. Yet for all its polish, Ilona Botton and Alisha Stoltz run it like the longtime close friends they are and want their guests to feel like. “In business class, they say, ‘Don’t build a business around what you want, build it around what will make money,’” Botton points out. “But we just kind of ignored that. We wanted to be able to watch a Broncos game while drinking a good glass of wine, [not go] to some stinky pub.”

Indeed, the nearly 40 wines listed on the chalkboard are all offered by the glass as well as the bottle—and they’re all half-price come happy hour; to further encourage exploration, the duo provides full technical and tasting notes via QR code, conducts regular blind tastings, and, of course, “give[s] out tasters all the time,” says Botton. “We understand that most people don’t know a lot about wine”—especially the likes of País from Chile’s Bío Bío Valley, White Pinot Noir from the San Luis Obispo Coast, or a Hungarian pét nat blend of Hárslevelű and Juhfark. For that matter, she admits, they too are still learning about best list-building practices. But they aren’t sweating it. “Wine should be fun and approachable—it’s just a drink,” Stoltz says with a grin. “[Besides,] there’s no waste here, because I drink whatever’s left.”

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The Power of the Pacific

DIVING INTO THE GREATEST INFLUENCE ON THE CENTRAL COAST'S TERROIR

THE SINGLE GREATEST influence on the terroir of California's Central Coast is not soil, nor is it the abundant and reliable sunshine that breaks through the fogbanks (though the latter could be the topic of an entirely different piece). Instead, let me try to make a counterintuitive point that will become clear by this column's conclusion: Though I'm well aware that you cannot grow wine in seawater, the Pacific Ocean and its effect on temperature, fog, and winds has the most profound impact on farming decisions across the region's 40-plus AVAs and, in turn, the wine styles they yield.

Nowhere is that impact felt more than in my home appellations of Santa Barbara County, whose story of sea, soil, and sun serves as a microcosm of the entire Central Coast. Here, east-west mountain ranges have helped to create the most diverse winegrowing area in the world contained within a 30-mile corridor, encompassing seven AVAs that grow more than 70 varieties. At one end, temperatures near Lompoc in the Sta. Rita Hills on a summer day may average in the low 70s, but the temperature can climb roughly 1 degree per mile as one drives east to the other end, topping out in the 100s on the east side of Santa Ynez.

But how is it possible that Lompoc—

which shares the same latitude as Iraq and Tunisia—can have cooler summer highs than Anchorage, Alaska, more than 2,000 miles to the north? The Pacific Coast along central California has experienced violent tectonic shifts throughout its history, creating deep troughs and uplifts that cause the water to roil and shift; as a result, it stays cold at the surface, maintaining average temperatures of roughly 55 degrees in the winter, 57 in the summer, and 59 in the fall. This massive body of cold water serves as a "heat sink," preventing the coast from getting too hot while producing fog and cooling winds that reach far inland, where on an August day you can see that fog fighting it out in the sky with the sun.

Why does that matter when it comes to wine? Michael Jordan (the basketball player) would surely agree with Michael Jordan (the Master Sommelier) that it's all about hang time: The warmer the climate, the faster grapes ripen, while a slow pace of ripening improves depth of flavor, color, and overall quality. The colder the nights relative to daytime temperatures, the less acid the grapes respire, which means the wine will retain its structure even at higher ripeness levels. Strong winds, meanwhile, will shut a vine down, extending the growing season even further—which is optimal for winegrowers, who seek to plant in

The Pacific Ocean and its effect on temperature, fog, and winds has the most profound impact on farming decisions across the region's 40-plus AVAs and, in turn, the wine styles they yield.

vineyards where grapes will barely ripen by September/October.

This is hardly exclusive to Santa Barbara County: The AVAs of the Central Coast are all heavily influenced by the cooling propinquity of the ocean, with Pinot Noir and Chardonnay ruling the coastal vineyards; Rhône varieties thriving in both cooler and warmer climes; and Bordeaux, Italian, Spanish, and California heritage varieties like Zinfandel and Petite Sirah claiming dominance over the sunbaked sites further inland. The Pacific is in constant battle with abundant California sunshine, and we should be stoked to discover that this fight is all about making more delicious and consistent wine, year after year. **SJ**



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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@sommjournal.com.



Altaneve NV Prosecco Superiore D.O.C.G., Italy (\$29) Alluding to its vineyards' location in Valdobbiadene at the foot of the Dolomiti, this Prosecco producer's name translates from Italian as "High Snow." Fitting. For all its lush aromas and flavors of honeysuckle, apricot, ripe yellow apple, and gingered pear, this pale-straw sparkler maintains a distinctly, disarmingly alpine freshness and clarity from start to finish. **92**

VICO NEVE, LLC



Champagne Gervais Gobillard NV Brut Authentique, France (\$37) The tech sheet for this wine describes it as "straight-forward"; a better word might be "classic." Containing 35% reserve wine, the blend of equal parts Chardonnay, Pinot Noir, and Pinot Meunier offers no shortage of orchard fruit and toast, along with whiffs of almond, vanilla, and mineral; 7–8 grams per liter of residual sugar appear as flashes of orange cream and key lime on the medium body. **91**



Dopff & Irion NV Crémant d'Alsace Rosé Brut, France (\$20) This 100% Pinot Noir reflects the sure footing of its estate, established in 1945 by two families with centuries-old roots in Riquewihr. While its salmon hue, steady perlage, and vibrant notes of strawberry dotted with herbs are *comme il faut*, touches of nectarine and citrus also emerge on the slightly creamy palate. **91**

DREYFUS, ASHBY & CO.



Corvezzo NV Prosecco DOC Rosé, Italy (\$13)

What a charmer for the price. From an organic estate in the Treviso comune of Cessalto, this farmer's fizz appears as a very pale flesh-pink in the glass, but it shows its true colors on the nose and palate: Strawberry and Meyer lemon lead the way, strewn with white blossoms, drizzled with honey, and followed by ripe peach and mandarin orange. The abundantly juicy acidity lingers. **91**

ORIGINS ORGANIC IMPORTS



Venturini Baldini NV Montelocco Lambrusco Emilia IGP, Italy (\$17)

With 16% g/l residual sugar, this 100% Lambrusco Salamino has the tingly acid and lightly tannic structure to wear its sweetness blithely. Raspberry and wild-cherry lozenge candy meet tart cranberry and a hint of funk to make for an ideal match with salumi galore. **91.5** 

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Photo: Massimo Vitali



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Reims



A wine-paired spread of corn “ribs,” tepary-bean hummus, and eggplant-studded polenta fries.



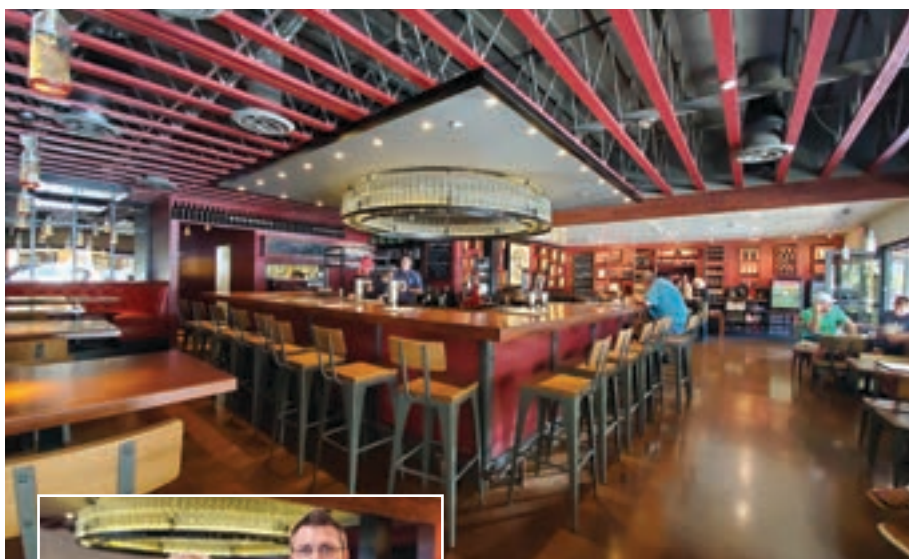
In Praise of Provenance

MERKIN VINEYARDS OLD TOWN SCOTTSDALE TAKES GUESTS ON A PAIRING ADVENTURE

“OUR FARM TO YOUR TABLE. Our Vines to Your Glass”: Merkin Vineyards Old Town Scottsdale’s slogan is an ode to provenance that reflects the philosophy of Maynard James Keenan, owner and head winemaker of both Merkin Vineyards and Caduceus Cellars in Arizona. In addition to tending his vineyards in the high elevations of Verde Valley and the Willcox AVA, he has been delivering the bounty of his farms and orchards to Scottsdale since 2019; for guests at his wine bar and restaurant in the heart of Old Town, the resulting food and wine pairings are a true expression of the local landscape.

In 2021, this singular exploration of terroir was enhanced by the arrival of executive chef Steve Zimmerman and an imported, wood-fired Morello Forni oven for the tiny kitchen. What isn’t sourced from Keenan’s land is supplemented by local purveyors to deliver as close to a 100% Arizona experience as possible.

“Our wines are made for this kind of interaction,” says general manager Jim Cunningham, a longtime industry pro who holds a degree from the enology and viticulture program at Yavapai College. “It’s enjoyment on a broader spectrum.” In addition to the Merkin and Caduceus wines, the tasting room carries Caduceus’ Puscifer Queen B label, a canned line of sparkling white, red, and rosé; mead fermented with Arizona honey; and hard cider made from Keenan’s apples. To pair with veggie-centric dishes, Cunningham suggests Merkin Chupacabra Bubbles, a blend of Malvasia Bianca and Sauvignon Blanc; Caduceus Pét-Nat, part of the limited-edition Outlier Series; or the Merkin 2020 Jane Pink, a 100% Monastrell rosé. “When it comes to pairings, our job is fairly easy because our wines work so well with so many dishes,” he notes.



PHOTOS: CHRISTINA BARRUETA



Merkin Vineyards’ wine bar in Old Town Scottsdale (above) carries Caduceus Cellars and Merkin Vineyards wines and a variety of other Arizona-made products; the kitchen, meanwhile, is overseen by executive chef Steve Zimmerman, pictured at left with GM Jim Cunningham.

Zimmerman, for his part, relishes the opportunity to incorporate as many unique regional ingredients into his dishes as possible. “Since it’s such a small kitchen without a walk-in [refrigerator], it’s a fun challenge to use everything we get,” he says. Guests can dive into hummus made with Ramona Farms tepary beans decorated with sauce vierge and partnered with farm-fresh crudités; nibble on corn-on-the-cob “ribs” drizzled with Alabama white barbecue sauce and finished with harissa-spiced honey and Crow’s Dairy Goatija cheese; or dip their eggplant-studded polenta fries into a fondue of marinara, ricotta, and mozzarella made with milk from Rovey Dairy.

Recent chalkboard specials, meanwhile,

have included dishes like Two Wash Ranch chicken confit and carrots nestled in a pool of crème fraîche, embellished with cilantro-mint chutney and salsa macha, or wood-fired pizzas—one week layered with pistachio pesto and arugula, the next with foraged porcini mushrooms and Ibérico chorizo (especially nice paired with Caduceus Airavata Garnacha). And for dessert, patrons can choose from house-made treats such as warm squash blondies with cajeta and vanilla gelato or Merkin Orchards apple cobbler topped with buttery madeleine streusel.

“Dining here is not just a meal,” says Cunningham, “it’s a communal way to really enjoy an Arizona food and wine experience.” SJ



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Money Well Spent

HOW TO PLAN A SUCCESSFUL WINE TRIP

WHEN YOU'RE PLANNING a wine tour for buyers, it's understandable that you would want to maximize every moment of interaction—especially when you've spent a great deal of time and money arranging the transportation, meals, and other logistics that a successful trip entails.

Does that mean your guests should indulge your every whim when it comes to following the itinerary? That depends on whether it adheres to the “Three E’s”: experiential, educational, and, most important, enjoyable. Falling short of those goals is the greatest way to waste all of that expense while alienating participants.

I've not only attended trips both large and small but have even planned a few for my clients. As an attendee, I'm always grateful for the effort and resources expended to fly me to a foreign region—but in some cases, overbooking and hectic pacing have resulted in me being turned off by rather than endeared to the wines. To avoid a similar result, follow these golden rules of effective wine trips; if done properly, they'll convert loyal buyers who will bring your brands on at every account they oversee, present and future.

Start by Hitting the Reset Button

Most sommeliers have to utilize precious vacation days or take unpaid time off to join a trip, so it's your job to ensure that it's worthwhile. Resist the urge to hit the ground running and use day one as a jet-lag reset by planning nothing except an early hotel check-in and a casual early dinner. By contrast, a recent trip had us on a red-eye to Europe, with some attendees traveling for over 24 hours. Instead of giving us an opportunity to freshen up, they piled us on a bus for a two-hour drive straight to a 10 a.m. tasting at a winery—the first of three we visited that day before getting to our hotel. Suffice it to say, I don't even remember their names.

Plan Plenty of Downtime

Don't try to cram too much in: If you have to say “it's not a death march,” then it probably feels like one. I recall trips where we visited as many as five wineries a day when it should be a maximum of three. Include plentiful time to rest in between activities and use meals as an excuse to showcase even more producers. Also, we all know what tanks and barrels look like, so we don't need to see them at every winery: Save that time for something more meaningful, like vertical

tastings or more downtime to reflect on the experience.


Showcase the Region as a Whole

Be sure to incorporate local culture and must-see destinations into the trip to expose the group to everything the area has to offer beyond wine. If your attendees fall in love with their surroundings, it will make the wines that much more memorable.

Less Tell, More Show

Of course the purpose of these excursions is to sell more wine, but blatantly acknowledging this fact is the most heavy-handed mistake one can make. On one trip, my fellow guests and I were required to name our favorite wine from the day before and discuss why we were going to add it to our lists; the terrible taste this demand left in our mouths all but ruined everything we'd tried. Rather than forcing a discussion on selling, let your attendees come to love the wines through the nature of their experience with the producers.

There's so much more we could discuss, but remember that the best trips are ultimately driven by common sense and a hospitality-minded approach. Oh, and don't forget to include lots of fresh vegetables. I don't know why it's all cheese and meat—on most trips I'd kill for a salad! SJ



Wine trips should adhere to the “Three E’s”: experiential, educational, and, most important, enjoyable.

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by Kate Norwell-Smith

The Razor's Edge

WHY PICK DATE IS THE MOST IMPORTANT WINEMAKING DECISION

LIKE MANY ENDEAVORS in life, the winemaking process can be diagrammed in the form of a decision tree: There are many “if this, then this” steps along the way that can take a given wine in different directions. But I would argue that the most critical input for a winemaker is when to call the pick.

Pick day puts a time stamp on the fruit by halting change on the vine and initiating the beginning of grapes' transformation into wine. It is the single largest determiner of wine style and frequently dictates the approach taken in the winery.

Chardonnay intended for sparkling wine offers an extreme example of picking for style. Winemakers are looking for that first hint of lemon or green apple as well as great acidity and low sugar. They must walk a razor's edge between an underripe, sharp, boring juice and a cloying one with overripe tropical notes and zero finesse. Bubbles help to volatize aromas, making them more pronounced, which makes striking that balance all the more critical. Chardonnay picked for sparkling wine is radically different from that destined for still wines, and that is mostly attributable to when the fruit is harvested.

While table wines have a wider ripening window, pick date is still the dominant stylistic input. It's often the difference between a lean, bright, red fruit-

driven Pinot Noir and a rich, plummy one, or a Sauvignon Blanc with notes of grass and gooseberry versus one that sings of peach and papaya.

Beyond stylistic matters, the riper the fruit, the more the winemaker will arguably need to intervene. For those who want to shepherd the grapes to the bottle with minimal input, the state of the fruit at harvest is all-important. After all, if left on the vine too long, the winemaking will literally begin in the vineyard: Sweet grapes will attract creatures like birds and raccoons, and ambient yeasts will start to ferment the damaged fruit. *Acetobacter* bacteria will also quickly move in, turning grape juice into vinegar; the wine may need to undergo treatment to remove excess volatile acidity as a result. By contrast, I like to talk about “balance in the berry”: If the chemistry inside the grape is already where it needs to be, then no additional tweaking is needed, and the resulting wine will truly be a representation of variety and place.

There are those who don't stress as much about berry chemistry and push ripeness to an extreme, often to create a specific style of rich, jammy wine. Here's my issue with this approach: Overripe

grapes not only lose their typicity but often trigger a cascade of necessary interventions due to their compromised quality. The must will likely be low in nitrogen and other nutrients and will therefore need supplementation to properly ferment the yeast. High sugars and the resulting high alcohol increase the chance of reduction and stuck fermentations, both of which require serious manipulation, while accelerating the extraction of tannins that may have moved past suppleness to become harsh. To soften them, fining will be needed, and substances such as gum arabic might be added.

The effects of a late pick date are even seen at the final stages of winemaking. A higher Brix often leads to residual sugar that triggers a need for filtering and/or the addition of *Velcorin* at bottling to eliminate spoilage yeasts. Add up all these interventions, and the wine's future suddenly seems pretty grim.

That said, I am not suggesting that there is such a thing as a Platonically ideal pick date. Any reasonable winemaker with more than a few harvests under their belt will tell you that other factors cannot be ignored; tank space, availability of workers, and weather conditions must all be put into the equation. A flexible mindset is key. But ultimately, the lesson is timeless and universal: The more you strive to hit your mark from the start, the fewer troubles you will encounter along the way—and your product will be all the better for it. *sj*



*Perfect pairings,
twist left*



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Andy Paxson and Dave Gibbs

PROPRIETORS, MELANIE WINE BAR, LOS ANGELES, CA

by Michelle M. Metter

PHOTO COURTESY OF MELANIE WINE BAR



IN AUGUST, Andy Paxson and Dave Gibbs opened the doors to Melanie Wine Bar in Los Angeles. At 450 square feet, it's everything a neighborhood wine bar should be—the kind of intimate place where even visitors feel welcomed as locals.

Q: Tell us about the inspiration behind Melanie Wine Bar.

Andy Paxson: I've been at 8310 West 3rd Street since 2010 with my [previous] restaurant Simple Things. I have loved the neighborhood and the community there. In recent years, I kept getting this feeling that our little space could be a wonderful little wine bar. The true inspiration was the neighborhood itself: Those blocks of West 3rd, Beverly, and Melrose east of La Cienega and west of Fairfax have always reminded me of a splash of New York. I named the wine bar after my wife, so there is also a tip of the cap to the love of family and to that unique place in our restaurant world that is solely held by the spouse of a restaurateur.

Q: How did the two of you come to collaborate on this project?


Dave Gibbs: Andy and I are co-owners and business partners at Sushi Note and a few other projects, so when he asked me about the potential for a wine bar at his Simple Things location, it seemed like a really fun collaboration. It was already an operating restaurant with a wine and beer license, so half the battle was already won. I love the design and decor[ation] phase, and it came together really quickly and organically. It's a tiny space [but it has] a full kitchen, so it seemed fitting to refocus the menu to more wine-centric offerings, and our chef at Augustine Wine Bar, Dro Dergevorkian, was the perfect person to oversee that. Same with the wine list: Shane Lopez, the Augustine wine director, is the consultant for Melanie, and while the lists are different to reflect the different demographics of the area, they share a similar approach to quality and value.

Q: What has been the biggest challenge in opening during a pandemic?

AP: Hiring team members. There isn't even a close runner-up. I feel so lucky that my wife was able to recruit some amazingly good professionals that have given us a wonderful start, but it's no secret that the labor shortage in L.A. has created some very real problems for the industry. I'm so proud of friends who are restaurant owners—they've continued to take it on the chin for a year and a half and are still fighting the good fight. Since we did open up during the pandemic, I hold Melanie Wine Bar very close to my heart. Perhaps it's one little win for the community. I like to think of it like that.

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

AP: I would be with my wife in her new little wine bar, but I wouldn't be drinking. I would have just given my glass to her—what better feeling than that moment after you just finished your second glass of wine?

DG: It would be a 1931 Viúva Gomes Colares Ramisco with my father. My dad was born in 1931, so it's not too easy to find a birth-year bottle, but the Ramisco is still a pleasure to spend time with. And like my dad, it's honest, subtle, and incredibly complex. 

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 @michellemettersd.

~ PROMOTION ~

Small Details, GREAT WINES

Aveleda Reflects the
Guedes Family's Devotion
to Vinho Verde

PHOTO: KENTON THATCHER

Fifth-generation producers Martim Guedes and António Guedes are the co-CEOs of Aveleda.

Aveleda is a family-owned brand that has been creating high-quality wines from the Vinho Verde region since its establishment in 1870. One of the oldest producers in the area, it has been at the forefront of Vinho Verde's evolution, leaving nothing to chance by nurturing everything from the very root. From steep, high-altitude sites to the biggest continuous vineyard in the region, from rare schist to granite soils, from Loureiro to Arinto to Alvarinho, Aveleda uses all the tools at its disposal to make wines reflecting both the wisdom of old traditions and the bold vision of younger generations.

Limitless Potential

Demarcated in 1908, Vinho Verde is the largest wine-producing area in Portugal and one of the largest in all of Europe, with a wide variety of soils, climates, and terroirs within its borders. We at Aveleda believe that it's among the greatest viticultural regions in the world, particularly when it comes to white wines. Our purpose is to explore its full potential and promote it around the world.

Mastery in Viticulture and Winemaking

At Aveleda, innovation is a Guedes family tradition. Here, we mix the empirical winegrowing knowledge five generations have acquired with the latest technology and techniques available, including the use

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PHOTO COURTESY OF AVELEDA

Aveleda's current portfolio is a pure reflection of Vinho Verde.



PHOTO COURTESY OF AVELEDA

The vineyards of Quinta de Aveleda.

of drones to assess the timing of vineyard treatments and harvesting. Each harvest is the successful product of the careful dedication we put into uncovering the secrets of our generous terroir, which yields an equally bountiful array of wines with differing profiles and characters.

Aveleda has a team of highly skilled specialists and professionals working on its projects, which rely on its own high-density viticultural model: fewer clusters per plant but more plants per hectare, ensuring higher root penetration and higher competition in very fertile soils. The results? One, sustainable vineyards that will be healthy for years to come, and two, more concentrated grapes—and thus more concentrated and dense wines.

A Pure Reflection of Terroir

Aveleda's current portfolio pays tribute to its region of origin. The Fonte label is its most authentic expression of Vinho Verde, perfect for easy drinking on any occasion for its delightful freshness and flavors of lime and green apple. In the Castas range, meanwhile, the indigenous grape varieties Alvarinho and Loureiro shine both in varietal bottlings and a blend. The lineup's evolution continues with the Solos (Soils) range, where the geological richness of the region speaks for itself. Finally, the Parcelas (Single Parcels) range focuses on specific areas of exceptional terroir. As a whole, the portfolio truly reflects the rich heritage of Vinho Verde.





Duality and Dissonance

EXPLORING THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN OUR NASAL PATHWAYS, LANGUAGE CENTERS, AND ABILITY TO IDENTIFY AROMAS

OUR SENSE OF SMELL is based on two delivery pathways, orthonasal and retronasal; that makes it the only “dual sense modality” we possess, one that provides information about things both external and internal to the body. When it comes to evaluating as well as marketing wines, the duality of smell has important consequences for perception.

Not surprisingly, there are differences in the odors resulting from orthonasal and retronasal olfaction, even though they are processed in the same way. While both pathways deliver volatile aroma compounds to the same receptors, the quality of those odors and our thresholds for detecting them differ due largely to the airflow patterns that the molecules follow, the temperature differences of the air traveling through each pathway, and the different enzymes found in our saliva and the membranes of our mouth and throat.

Researchers at Ohio State University have determined that food odors elicit similar responses through orthonasal and


retronasal olfaction—but that’s not the case with non-food odors such as floral aromas. Participants in the study were asked to match an identified scent, such as rose, with one of four unknown scents using two methods: by drinking a solution to activate the retronasal sense of smell through the internal nares, or nostrils, at the back of the throat and by sniffing from a vial to activate the orthonasal sense of smell through the nose. Participants were presented with the reference aromas of honeysuckle, lavender, rose, and jasmine labeled in three different ways: with their common names, with their Latin or species name, and with a letter.

When the routes of delivery differed, for example by smelling one sample and tasting another, participants made more mistakes, which were attributed to the differences in those delivery systems affecting their ability to match the scents. Regardless of how the samples were labeled, the best results were achieved when aromas were introduced in the same way, either through sniffing them in a vial or drinking them in a solution.

However, researchers were surprised to find that the less participants knew about the reference aromas—that is, when they were labeled with their species name or a letter—the better their chances of correctly identifying a match when using different routes of delivery. The unexpected finding suggests that aroma detection (and thus perception) involves learning, memory, and cognitive strategy.

Researchers point to cues provided by familiar labels as the cause of cognitive interference from the brain’s language centers, which has a negative impact on our ability to identify aromas: Even when the same aromas are activating the same receptors, albeit through different path-

ways, we still can’t make a match. That discovery and its relation to the duality-of-smell phenomenon is further illustrated by a small study conducted by Cornell University researchers in tasting rooms in New York’s Finger Lakes region, which showed that both the volume and value of wine sales were higher when tasting sheets omitted sensory descriptors like “dry and full-bodied, with decadent flavors of pink grapefruit, honeysuckle and lemon meringue” in favor of details on the climate in which the grapes were grown and the foods the wines in question paired with. Their conclusion: Sensory descriptors are likely intimidating to inexperienced consumers, who get frustrated when they can’t identify the aromas and flavors used to describe the wine. The consumers studied had a better tasting experience and purchased more wine when they had less information about the sensory attributes of the wines they were tasting.

In short, the challenges created by the duality-of-smell phenomenon in combination with cognitive dissonance are at least partly responsible for the confusion consumers experience when they have difficulty identifying non-food aromas ascribed to wines. 



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**Reviews by Publisher Meridith May*



LLOYD
BY: *Robert Lloyd*





Double Duty

SARAH ERTMANN DEFTLY JUGGLES HER ROLES AS GM AND WINE DIRECTOR OF MARKET RESTAURANT + BAR IN DEL MAR, CA

story by Michelle M. Metter
photo by Rafael Peterson

WSET Level 2 sommelier Sarah Ertmann joined Market Restaurant + Bar in Del Mar, CA, as general manager and wine director in June.

MARKET RESTAURANT + BAR in Del Mar, California, is an institution known among San Diego County residents for its award-winning chef, Carl Schroeder, and his menu, which changes daily to spotlight only the freshest of locally sourced ingredients. Now Market has bolstered its reputation on the beverage side by appointing sommelier Sarah Ertmann to the position of general manager and wine director in June after largely working with a consultant to manage its wine program during the pandemic.

Ertmann, who holds a WSET Level 2 diploma, has stepped into a role that splits her duties between daily operations and wine-program management. “At Market, you will see me running the floor during service—table touches, opening wine, jumping behind the bar, seating guests, et cetera—as well as [fulfilling] all the other aspects of being a GM, including . . . supporting the chef, updating menus, [performing] administrative work, and so on. My other

role as wine director has me constantly updating and ordering, fine-tuning the wine list to satisfy both the needs and wants of the guests as well as supporting and uplifting the food. Constant training of the staff is needed as well to ensure we deliver top-notch, world-class service.”

Market’s well-established list attracts a savvy clientele with discerning palates, but that hasn’t deterred Ertmann from bringing a fresh perspective. “The clientele definitely enjoys Burgundy—both white and red, but concentrating in red—as well as Napa Cabernets,” she notes. “I’ve had fun bringing on some new Italian reds from Sicily as well as . . . building a good half-bottle program, something I think people like to have [as an] option and can be fun to play with. We are also working on bringing back a wine-pairing program, something I’m looking forward to.”

Ertmann began her hospitality career in 2004 as a server at upscale Italian restau-

rant Aldos Ristorante in Virginia Beach, Virginia, where the general manager noticed her ability to describe wines and suggested she take a more vested interest in wine training. This put her on a path that led to her most recent position as a captain and sommelier at Addison at the Fairmont Grand Del Mar—but she traces her most fruitful period of education to her childhood, when, on trips to Champagne, her father helped her develop an appreciation of wine that would eventually make the possibility of joining an esteemed team like Market’s a reality.

Currently enrolled in a Master of Champagne program with the Wine Scholar Guild, Ertmann spends much of her downtime studying but can also be found out and about with her dog Schnitzel, exploring local wineries, hitting the beach, hiking, and daydreaming about future pursuits like opening a wine bar with an instructional component. **SJ**



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CASTELLO BANFI REAFFIRMS ITS ROOTS WITH A NEW SINGLE-VINEYARD WINE, VIGNA MARRUCHETO

by John M. Fodera

LEADING MONTALCINO PRODUCER

Castello Banfi has taken its pioneering vineyard practices to a new level with the release of its first single-site Brunello after Poggio all'Oro (a Riserva produced only in special years): the 2016 Vigna Marrucheto, representing the culmination of decades of initiatives directed at exalting a singular expression of Sangiovese.

Vigna Marrucheto owes its complex character, subtle elegance, and masculine power to a distinctive combination of soils across the vineyard's three blocks. Close to the surface, a mixture of sand, silt, and rocks absorbs water and promotes drainage; as the vineyard deepens, the presence of clay and sand becomes more pronounced, while maritime silt and small pebbles are more intermittent.

Since it was planted in 2009, the vineyard has employed a trellising system called Banfi Alberello; created by Banfi agrono-

mists, this sustainable training method resembles a candelabra in shape and excels in poor soils because it has fewer clusters, only about four to five bunches per plant. As a result, the vine doesn't require much nutrition to thrive and the bunches are well exposed to sunlight and wind. Additionally, because this system is easy to manage, it reduces the manual labor required to maintain vine health.

Vigna Marrucheto is Banfi's highest-elevation vineyard and was planted as part of the estate's long-term clonal research on Sangiovese. The clone that grows here was specifically chosen for its ability to withstand warmer temperatures. During a recent visit to the estate, I barrel-tasted several outstanding 2016 single-vineyard Brunellos as managing director Enrico Viglierchio elaborated on the virtues of Vigna Marrucheto. "Of course we thought it was an ideal location, with the potential

for excellent wine," he said. "But it wasn't only about that. A lot of consideration was also given to climate change. Certain vineyards react differently to the changing climate, and a vineyard that illustrates a positive reaction often leads to selection for separate bottling."

Renewing Its Commitment to the Region

One of Banfi's earliest innovations was its focus on single-vineyard winemaking. Soon after the estate was acquired, the Poggio all'Oro vineyard was recognized as possessing special terroir, with optimal southwest exposure and rolling hillside topography that allows for excellent drainage. Its elevation at approximately 1,000 feet above sea level promotes the diurnal temperature swings Sangiovese needs to ripen slowly and evenly, and the combination of clay, maritime silt, and stones in the soil contribute both structure and a unique mix of textures to the wines it yields—namely the Poggio all'Oro Riserva.

This year marks two distinct milestones for Poggio all'Oro; the first makes the second all the more impressive. One, it has been almost 30 years since the Riserva was originally bottled, commencing with

Banfi's highest-elevation vineyard, Vigna Marrucheto, is planted to a Sangiovese clone capable of withstanding warming temperatures due to climate change.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF CASTELLO BANFI

the 1985 vintage. And two, as a result of Banfi's commitment to excellence, it has been produced only 15 times since then, culminating with a special anniversary release of the 2015 this autumn. Now, with Vigna Marrucheto, Banfi has emphatically reinforced its commitment to Brunello.

Clonal Research, Site Selection, and Climate Control

Not prone to rest on their laurels, the Banfi team is currently considering whether to replant Poggio all'Oro, Viglierchio informed me. Climate change is creating challenges that need to be addressed, and analysis with an eye toward replacing the rootstock is critical. "The proper rootstock can be as important as the final clonal selection, because the 'brain' of any vineyard is what lies underground," Viglierchio said. "It is about quality and never about volume or vineyard longevity."

Meanwhile, years of site and clonal research culminated in the planting of another prime site—a cru called Poggio alle Mura. "In many ways, Poggio all'Oro was the father of the single-vineyard project," Viglierchio noted. "But after our extensive study in the mid-1990s, we identified an ideal place for specific Sangiovese clones. Poggio alle Mura resulted from that research. So it's the mother of the single-vineyard project."

Their findings were dramatic. Across the estate, 29 different soil types have been identified, and meticulous analysis revealed the ideal marriages between vineyard sites and specific clones of Sangiovese. Understanding this symbiotic relationship has been critical for Banfi in harnessing the best character of each vineyard.

But site selection isn't everything. Banfi is utilizing various methods to counter climate change that, a few decades ago, would have seemed counterintuitive. For instance, Viglierchio pointed out, "Canopy management is an effective tool for combating the increased heat. We used to strip leaves off the vines so the sun could be in direct contact with the grapes; now we keep more leaves on to shade the grapes and prevent sunburn. Sometimes we remove leaves from one side of the vine, typically the one facing the weaker morning



sun. This way we allow ventilation between the leaves, which prevents fungal disease from excessive humidity." Furthermore, the winery is increasingly utilizing large barrels to age its Brunello, he added: "The higher the alcohol in a wine, the faster it will extract tannins from the wood. Larger barrels slow this process, so to achieve elegant, silky wines, we need to manage this."

With Brunello Vigna Marrucheto, they have succeeded. Both elegant and powerful, the 2016 possesses a rich core of dark fruit that remains fresh and lively while already displaying several tertiary complexities. Its balance makes it approachable now, but it will easily cellar for decades.

Sustainability and Educational Efforts

Castello Banfi's innovation doesn't end with soil analysis and clonal research. Though not formally certified, the estate employs various organic practices that support environmental sustainability.

One of these initiatives centers around water conservation. Summers in Montalcino often involve drought-like conditions that coincide with the beginning of veraison. Proper watering is fundamental during this phase, so in 1986, Banfi created ten artificial catch basins to retain rainwater, preventing the need to draw water from the nearby Orcia and Ombrone rivers. Most of the basins are located at the highest parts of the estate and connect to the vineyards with gravity-flow underground piping, supplying water to over 50% of

Banfi's vineyards and eliminating the usage of electricity for pumping.

Additionally, the estate has drastically curtailed its glass usage by reducing the weight of its bottles from 20 to 14 ounces. The domino effect of this change is significant, as it reduces the consumption of raw materials as well as the water required for production by almost 80%; the decreased weight also eliminates the equivalent carbon-dioxide emissions of approximately 600 people annually.

Sustainability also includes continuing education, further extending Banfi's commitment to Sangiovese beyond the vineyard. In 2017, it created the Fondazione Banfi, a nonprofit that aims to promote and enhance the philosophy of viticulture and enology from ancient times to the present day. As part of this initiative, the Sanguis Jovis Alta Scuola del Sangiovese—the first permanent research center focused on Sangiovese—was founded in collaboration with respected educators from the University of Milan. Funded by the Fondazione Banfi, classes are conducted annually to advance the culture of Sangiovese in Italy and worldwide, while a publishing wing produces educational materials; a magazine devoted to Sangiovese is forthcoming.

Despite Banfi's advancements in winemaking, clonal research, and education over the past four decades, many challenges remain. That's why, as third-generation family proprietor and CEO Cristina Mariani-May told me, "we are relentless . . . when it comes to our pursuit of excellence. Our philosophy is built on four central pillars: a pioneering approach, sustainable practices, a focus on research, and respect for the land above all else. It's a constant effort that we embrace."

Even as consumers' attention spans migrate from Chardonnay to Cabernet and back again, the demand for Brunello continues to increase, and the team at Banfi is well positioned to extend its dedication to and focus on Brunello. Beyond climate change. Beyond the vineyard and the classroom. Beyond decades.

As another Brunello producer recently told me, "None of us would be here talking about Brunello if it weren't for Castello Banfi." SJ



BY SARAH GRAYBILL

Paired With Care

DYNAMIC DINNERS DRAW RESTAURANT PATRONS TO THE HYATT LODGE

CREAMY POLENTA, smoked pork belly, and sweet-and-sour fig agrodolce thrown at the plate Jackson Pollock-style: To some, the end result simply looks like dinner, but to chef Joshua Karther, it's art.

This dish was part of a recent multi-course wine-pairing dinner at the Hyatt Lodge in Oak Brook, Illinois, to which Karther's culinary team fittingly took an artistic approach, creating a "gallery" of foods paired with selections from Napa Valley winery Orin Swift. The dinner was hosted at the Water's Edge restaurant on the Lodge's private lakefront property, the scene of a variety of pairing events held during the summer months as patrons enjoyed a return to fine dining and in-person gatherings.

General manager Robert Brand says the influx of diners has prompted his team to add new wines to the menu almost weekly as they work to expand their selection to pre-pandemic levels. "When we finalize upcoming menus, we will most likely revisit them quarterly while staying exciting and nimble for guests: offering specials, [conducting] tastings, and, of course, hosting our popular winemaker dinners and other events," says Brand. "We enjoy introducing [people] to wines they may never have tasted before, which often ends in guests having new favorites."

Those discoveries are naturally enhanced by the food: Karther sees the plate as his

canvas, one that paints up-and-coming wines in a light that makes an impression on patrons within a culinary framework. "So much knowledge and feeling comes from this time spent tasting, smelling, and watching the wine legs run down the glass," he says. "It is in these moments that I am absorbing the complex flavors and appreciating the work and time invested by the winemakers into each bottle."

Karther strives to match that passion with his pairings, involving his entire



At Hyatt Lodge in the Chicago suburb of Oak Brook, IL, creamy polenta and smoked pork belly are topped with fig agrodolce thrown at the plate Jackson Pollock-style to complement the theme of the dish's wine pairing, Orin Swift Abstract.



PHOTO: ERICA VANWIJEN

Hyatt Lodge executive chef Joshua Karther leads the culinary team at the property's Water's Edge restaurant.



PHOTO: REGGIE ABESAMIS

Hyatt Lodge executive chef Joshua Karther, executive sous chef Nebojsa Miljkovic, cook Erica VanWieren, and sous chef Sergio Mancilla.

team in the planning. "I share tasting notes ... and ask for input on what they would take pride in as additions to the [dish] or plate design," he says. "I have been amazed [by] and continue to learn from some [ideas] our team has come up with that I might never have thought of."

Looking ahead to 2022, Brand says the property's staff aims to further expand its programming if restrictions allow, hopefully creating even more opportunities for the culinary team to apply its artistry in ways that showcase the selected wines. "Simplicity is elegance," Karther adds. "In the end, I feel that when our guests sit down and enjoy each course, they can taste and feel the care that all of us put into each plate and glass." 

Seduction in SONOMA

PHOTO: CLARA RICE



Westwood Estate managing director David Green.

THE LURE OF **WESTWOOD ESTATE** AND THE
ANNADEL GAP VINEYARD, 21 YEARS IN

by *Liz Thach, MW*

PHOTO: ALEXANDER RUBIN

The Annadel Gap Vineyard in the northern Sonoma Valley.



Author Liz Thach, MW, with David Green in Westwood Estate's barrel room.

At first, Philippe Melka did not want to accept the invitation he received in 2017 to make wine from a little-known vineyard in Sonoma Valley. After years of crafting luxury Cabernet Sauvignon for such famed Napa Valley and Bordeaux producers as Dominus, Dana, Haut-Brion, and Pétrus, the founder of consulting firm Atelier Melka had more job offers than he could accept. But a single sip of Syrah from Westwood Estate's Annadel Gap Vineyard completely changed his mind.

"I knew that if I could get Philippe to taste the wine, he would love it," explains Westwood managing director David Green, who had worked with Melka at Dana. "Annadel Gap is such a unique cool-climate location in the northern part of Sonoma Valley that produces amazing Pinot Noir and Rhône varietals." Indeed, the Syrah, GSM, and Pinot Noir that the winery makes from the 33-acre vineyard all exhibit complex minerality, high natural acidity, and an earthiness reminiscent of the Old World. "Philippe describes the Syrah as having a touch of *animale*," Green says with a grin.

Melka agreed to visit the vineyard,

bringing along his director of winemaking, Maayan Koschitzky, who has an impressive resume of his own, including stints at Screaming Eagle and Dalla Valle. "It was a classic cold, foggy morning in March when we all arrived at the vineyard," recalls Green. "Our founder, Carl Stanton, was with us, and we were all wondering how Philippe would respond to the site."

The four men walked slowly through the vineyard, each in his own row. The fog swirled around them, misting their clothes and the bare grapevines. The only sound was the soft fall of their boots on the loamy clay soil and the birds calling in the distant hills. Melka and Koschitzky stopped to touch the vines, dig into the soil, and bring it to their noses to smell the earthy richness.

Suddenly Melka turned around and, with excitement in his voice, said, "We want to unlock the soul of this vineyard with you."

A Bit of History

Annadel Gap Vineyard was established in 2000, when Stanton and John Kelly discovered the site near Trione-Annadel State Park. Surrounded by the Mayacamas to the east, it was open to a gap in Sonoma

Mountain to its west, so it was covered in dense fog most mornings while receiving a cooling breeze in the afternoons.

The duo initially planted many different grape varieties to see which would flourish best in the combination silt loam, clay, and volcanic soils. In so doing, they discovered a large black oak tree at the far western end of the vineyard and decided to call their brand Westwood in homage.

Eventually, they started making wine at a custom-crush facility and opened the



Westwood Estate's winemaking facility is now located at Brasswood in Napa Valley, joined by its second tasting room.



PHOTOS: CLARA RICE

Westwood Estate tasting room on the Sonoma Plaza in 2003. Stanton assumed sole custody of the vineyard in 2014 and began to focus on what it produced best: the aforementioned Pinot Noir and Rhône varietals. By 2017, he had achieved organic certification through the California Certified Organic Farmers (CCOF) and Biodynamic certification through Demeter. Along the way, he hired Green, a 20-plus-year Napa veteran, as managing director.

The Vineyard Is the Soul

Moving the winemaking facility to Brasswood in St. Helena and establishing a second tasting room there, Melka and Koschitzky have produced four vintages of Westwood Estate to date. Tasting through the portfolio, you immediately recognize that they're not only expressions of terroir but of texture. "Philippe's special talent is to bring texture to his wines," explains Green. "[They] have a lovely viscosity and massively overdeliver for their price point."

Despite a slight setback due to the 2020 wildfires, which left it with only a small amount of rosé and Syrah, Westwood is surging ahead with plans for the future. "Our current production averages 4,000 cases annually, but we have plans to grow the brand for national distribution in fine wine shops and restaurants," Green notes. "Our wine club customers are also extremely important to us, [having] helped us during the COVID shutdown."

But amid the turmoil, it is the vineyard that remains the essence of Westwood. "The soul of the brand lies in our Annadel Gap Vineyard. The wine is a true expression of site, and Philippe has allowed us to unlock that," says Green, adding that they're considering "setting up an Airstream tasting room in the vineyard so that customers can hike and taste among the vines." SJ

TASTING NOTES

Westwood Estate 2018 Legend Proprietary Red Wine, Sonoma County (\$65) In its third vintage, this superbly expressive blend of Cabernet Sauvignon, Syrah, and Mourvèdre was fermented by winemakers Philippe Melka and Maayan Koschitzky in closed-top stainless-steel tanks as well as a French oak upright tank and was aged in (30% new) French oak for 20 months. Scents of jasmine, plum blossom, and mocha are mirrored on the palate, which adds a graceful array of floral notes while ascending to heavenly levels with robust flavors of black raspberry, coffee, and dots of white pepper that cause the mouth to salivate. **97** —*Meridith May*

Westwood Estate 2018 Legend Cabernet Sauvignon, Napa Valley (\$125) Combining 97% Cabernet Sauvignon with 3% Petit Verdot from the sustainably farmed Ashe Vineyard in the Oakville AVA, this sophisticate has a classic nose of cassis, black plum, forest floor, and graphite. Elegant and well balanced, with deeply textured tannins and a long finish, it is the quintessential Napa Cab. Aged in 100% French oak for 19 months. **96** —*Liz Thach*

Westwood Estate 2018 Twenty-One, Annadel Gap Vineyard, Sonoma Valley (\$105) A red blend made with 68% Syrah, 20% Mourvèdre, and 12% Grenache, all Biodynamically certified, Westwood's flagship should be called an SMG rather than a GSM—one that transports you to the Old World with its earthy nose, savory black fruit, and hint of garrigue and blood. Extremely complex, with volcanic and graphite notes as well as massive tannins that coat the tongue with dense and exotic spices, it's named for Westwood's 21st anniversary. **95** —*L.T.*

Westwood Estate 2019 Sangiacomo Roberts Road Vineyard Chardonnay, Sonoma Coast (\$55) Vibrant lemon blossom and wet stone on the nose, with allspice, almond, and crème brûlée on the palate. Exquisite, mouthwatering acidity is wrapped in a creamy texture before a long, mineral-driven finish in this wine made from certified-sustainable Petaluma Gap grapes. **96** —*L.T.*

Westwood Estate 2018 Pinot Noir Founder's Reserve, Sonoma County (\$115) Made from the best barrels of the vintage, this Biodynamic Annadel Gap Pinot Noir is incredibly seductive, with a nose of heirloom rose and fresh raspberry. On the palate, it evolves into wild blueberry and black-cherry truffle, joined by hints of potting soil. Decadent and inviting, with silky tannins; excellent balance; and a long, delicious finish. **98** —*L.T.*



The Great Cluster Debate

SIX WINEMAKERS WEIGH IN ON SYRAH FERMENTATION PRACTICES

by Brooke Herron, WSET Level 3

DECISIONS REGARDING THE USE of whole-cluster fermentation (including the stems) in a winery are based on a variety of factors, from personal preference and house style to appellation, vineyard sites, and vintage conditions. When there's debate on the topic, it usually revolves around Pinot Noir. However, it's an equally important concern for Syrah producers.

Winemakers who are passionate about Syrah aim to elevate the grape's status and reveal its potential for yielding nuanced, balanced, and ageworthy wines as well as to express the terroir from which it comes. As with Pinot Noir, whole-cluster and/or stem inclusion in Syrah fermentation affects aroma, body, tannic structure, and chemistry; the results, however, will differ depending on whether the Syrah is grown in Oregon's Willamette Valley, Washington's Walla Walla Valley, the Sierra Foothills of California, or the Sonoma Coast. For example, Syrah grown in a cool microclimate might require harvesting at a lower-than-desirable pH and therefore benefit from more stem inclusion, as stems are rich in potassium, which contributes to higher pH levels. Syrah from a warmer site, meanwhile, might have perfect pH and acidity levels but still gain character from a higher percentage of whole-cluster fermentation, developing more savory and earthy aromas and flavors as well as a body boost due to increased tannins (which in turn impact ageability).

Some winemakers always choose to include the highest percentage of whole clusters possible, while others make the call on a lot-by-lot or vineyard-by-vineyard basis. Here, six Syrah producers explain the rationale behind their fermentation regimens.



ANDY SMITH, winemaker, viticulturist, and partner at DuMOL Winery, Sonoma County

Average percentage of whole-cluster inclusion: 33

Let's remember that the material we are working with is fruit. The wine should smell and taste like fruit, because that's what it is. Too much whole-cluster inclusion can overwhelm the sense of the vineyard; it becomes more about the fermentation process than the vineyard.

In my opinion and experience, hot, dry vintages tend to lend themselves better to whole-cluster inclusion, with the rachis [the branched part of the stem that leads to the grapes] having a minimal amount of green, underripe flavors. We opt to include some whole cluster . . . when we feel it will elevate the wine style. We find it adds elegance, texture, and lifted aromatics to our cool-climate [Syrah].

JASON DREW, owner/winemaker at Drew Family Wines, Anderson Valley

Percentage of whole-cluster inclusion: 100

I firmly believe it is totally up to the winemaker's preference. There are 100 ways to make wine, and I don't believe that one method is superior to another. To me, it is a question of how the winemaker interprets the expression from a particular site [to] suit his or her style best.

I've gone from no cluster to 100% whole cluster and everything in between . . . over the past 20 years making Drew wines, but I've gravitated toward 100% whole cluster for several reasons. First, I'm more confident in the outcome. Second, I believe it adds another dimension to the wine's texture, flavor, and aroma profile. Third, I believe it elevates the wine's structure and increases the potential for aging.



ERIC SUSSMAN, owner/winemaker at Radio-Coteau, Sonoma Coast

Percentage of whole-cluster inclusion: 30–70, with 100 for some vineyards

There are so many vineyard and vintage conditions that dictate how much [whole-cluster inclusion] makes sense for a specific vineyard. For instance, in drier years we get better stem lignification [a process that turns stems brown, dry, and crunchy], so we do more whole-cluster inclusion with fruit from the vineyards that have the best stem lignification.

Stylistically, with our wines I want to strike a balance between fruitiness and earth/spiciness. Stem inclusion adds earthy and spicy notes.



ADAM SMITH, director of winemaking at Skinner Vineyards & Winery, El Dorado County

Percentage of whole-cluster inclusion: 30–50

My stem inclusion varies by lot, but I do work with a certain percentage of whole clusters in every lot. I decide how much stem inclusion I'm going to employ on a case-by-case basis. Throwing 100% whole clusters in would certainly be easier; however, in my opinion, it takes more work and time to be intentional and to select . . . based on the style you want to achieve. I like the weight, the ripeness on the palate, and the aromatics I get when I add stems.



ROBERT BRITTAN, owner/winemaker at Brittan Vineyards, Willamette Valley

Average percentage of whole-cluster inclusion: 15

After 49 harvests, I still don't know all there is to know about Syrah. Until I've been working with a specific site for at least ten years, I am just learning and evolving and figuring things out. My decisions change from vintage to vintage.


When you're working with a grape like Syrah, which has so much potential . . . you want to be absolutely expressive of the site through the wine that you make. You can't make any hard and fast rules about what you're going to do until you're there. . . . [But] to a certain extent in my winemaking, I use whole-cluster inclusion to increase potassium in fermentation [which can help to raise pH levels].



DOUG FROST, MS, MW, co-founder of Echolands Winery, Walla Walla Valley

Percentage of whole-cluster inclusion: 100

There is a simple metric to define how small or large a percentage of whole-cluster inclusion makes sense: The stems need to be lignified, or they create vegetal notes and excessive bitterness. How lignified is very much a matter of opinion. As subjective is whether or not the wines will be improved by the inclusion of stems.

We set up winemaking protocols for each wine at the beginning of harvest. While we might make adjustments based upon the season, most practices remain constant. We employ 100% stems, or 100% whole clusters, [for] our Les Collines Vineyard Syrah because we find that the wine can handle it. We like the aromatic character, phenolic structure, and complexity offered by the inclusion of stems. But I think the real metric that matters is how the wines age. 

{ central coast }

Keeping Up With

JERRY LOHR

THE HUNT FOR CABERNET
COUNTRY IN PASO ROBLES

story by Michelle Ball / photos by Jeremy Ball



J. Lohr Vineyards & Wines founder Jerry Lohr in the Hilltop Vineyard, where he planted his first Cabernet Sauvignon vines in Paso Robles.

Jerry Lohr is not the kind of hands-off winery owner you'll find behind a desk or relaxing at home. More than likely, he's conducting business on his car phone while commuting between vineyards or en route to his latest project. In early August, my photographer-husband Jeremy and I scheduled a photo shoot and interview with Lohr, founder of J. Lohr Vineyards & Wines, at the winery's estate in Paso Robles. He squeezed us in for a 45-minute window between water board and construction meetings and made us promise we'd have him back at the winery by 10 a.m. Earlier that week, I'd connected with Lohr via his car phone. Now, I rapidly fired follow-up questions for clarity while fumbling to help with camera equipment. As I clumsily wielded a diffuser to shade Lohr (who is 6' 5" to my 5' 2"), my smartphone captured the conversation.

Here's my point: Despite the fact that he's 84 years young, it's nearly impossible to keep up with Lohr. The onetime South Dakota farmer couldn't help but give us a directorial play-by-play of the vineyard throughout the shoot. "Look here," he said, motioning us over. "When you see clusters like that, you know this is going to be a good year." He pointed to one bunch, noting, "You see how small these berries are? We are in veraison. This is always a *really* interesting time. Oh, you should get that, *that's* the shot right there."



A handful of Cabernet Sauvignon clusters in veraison in early August.

The Roundabout Road to Paso Robles

It's been 50 years since Lohr first arrived in Monterey's Arroyo Seco AVA to scout for suitable vineyard sites in the fall of 1971. Back then, most of California was still unproven when it came to high-quality viticulture; Napa was an exception, as the "Cabernet was good," he pointed out. "But if you went to Napa at that time, you could maybe find 12 or 21 acres"—most of the valley was already cultivated, and he was looking for undeveloped land. Besides, he was living in Saratoga, a long distance from Napa. Yet the Stanford graduate recognized that there was ample room for pioneers like him to make their mark elsewhere. His

first business plan was for a vertically integrated winery with a 125,000-case production: "We would grow 80% of that [case count], which would take about 300 acres," Lohr said of his initial idea, "and we would buy [20%] from outside people. So we would learn and help them too. That concept hasn't changed."

Lohr was also looking for an opportunity to forge his own path—to plant vines in a new area where he could make wines that matched those of Napa Valley in quality but offered better value to the consumer. "I wanted to grow Cabernet, but I also wanted it to be affordable," he said. Monterey piqued his interest as producers like Paul Masson had started sourcing fruit from the region. Just a few months before

PHOTO COURTESY OF J. LOHR VINEYARDS & WINES



Jerry Lohr among the vines in the Arroyo Seco area of Greenfield in the mid-1970s.

Lohr proudly highlights the tiny berries and small clusters of the Cabernet Sauvignon at Hilltop.



Lohr's scouting trip there, Stan Wolf, then the vice president of Paul Masson, called on Lohr, a frequent customer, for consumer market research. The winery was located near Lohr's home in Saratoga, and over multiple visits, the pair tasted Cabernets from many different sources, including Lodi, Saratoga, Napa, Sonoma, Soledad in the Santa Lucia Highlands, and Greenfield in Arroyo Seco. Although Lohr preferred the Napa wines, he was intrigued by those from Greenfield and by the Bordeaux-like gravelly soils there as described by Wolf—who pointed out that he would have to charge three times more for the Napa wines. "That whole discussion was so good because it got me down a few months later to the Arroyo Seco area, seeing the gravelly soils and talking to the neighbors," Lohr recalled.


Fortunately, he found multiple good-sized parcels and, with help from his inves-

tors, acquired 280 acres of land in Arroyo Seco to which he planted 11 different grapes, predominantly Cabernet Sauvignon, to see what worked best. Within just a few years, his team whittled them down to only four, none of them Bordeaux varietals; though Arroyo Seco is slightly warmer than the Santa Lucia Highlands to the north, it endures the same windy conditions that make ripening difficult for heat-loving grapes like Cabernet Sauvignon, especially in cooler years.

Yet the Chardonnays from his estate proved standouts—and they ultimately, if indirectly, led to his finding a home for his red wines. Lohr was pouring at a Monterey County Vintners and Growers Association tasting in Chicago, demonstrating the verve of his white wines due to the natural acidity that their cool-climate site provided, when a buyer for Hyatt Hotels took notice; soon after the event, he

received a call for a prospective contract with the hotel chain based on the buyer's trust in Lohr's palate and confidence that he knew what Hyatt was looking for. The task was to produce 84,000 cases of Cabernet Sauvignon and Chardonnay from purchased wine. That year, Lohr and his winemaker, Barry Gnekow, tasted over 500 samples from all over California. "That was really, really instructional," Lohr recalled, adding that the wines from Paso Robles especially stood out in the mix: "There was a similarity to [them], and it was the kind of flavor that we were looking for."

The Hyatt team agreed and nearly doubled its initial contract, purchasing 150,000 cases in 1984. The experience provided Lohr the opportunity to empirically assess the most promising regions for growing the style of Cabernet Sauvignon he wanted to make, on par with one of his favorites from the tasting, made by



Paso Robles legend John Muench—whose estate was next door to what would become J. Lohr’s Hilltop Vineyard. “The Hyatt situation was very much an affirmation of the choice of Paso Robles for Cabernet and Arroyo Seco for Chardonnay,” explained Lohr. “The success was much greater than they expected.”

Diversification in a Changing Climate

In 1986, Lohr planted his first vines at the Home Ranch in Paso Robles’ Estrella District. Today, he farms over 2,800 acres throughout five of Paso Robles’ 11 sub-appellations. Cabernet Sauvignon is the dominant focus here, planted in 17 of the 24 vineyard blocks. As a farmer, Lohr understands the importance of site diversification to ensure an excellent crop every year regardless of weather, and he’s constantly assessing each of his properties with climate change in mind. Since a new vineyard should be viable for 25–35 years before it requires replanting, he considers how it may evolve. For example, he might start off with Merlot and graft to Cabernet Sauvignon if temperatures increase consistently year to year. (This was the case with many of the vines at the Home Ranch.) Lohr stresses the importance of having

a backup plan while bearing in mind that climate change is about more than heat.

In California, water availability and water quality are of crucial concern, and Lohr gauges what a prudently pumped well can handle prior to establishing any vineyard in its vicinity; by way of example, he points to one 1,280-acre parcel of which only 400 acres are planted to avoid overtaxing the well. Lohr has prioritized water conservation through numerous initiatives for the past two decades. These include working with a water-use specialist from Bordeaux to institute a “dry down,” thus avoiding irrigation in the summer, as well as monitoring the vine’s stress level. In addition to dramatically reducing water use in the winery as well as in the vineyards, such measures have also improved vine health, as the roots are forced to grow deeper in search of moisture and are therefore less susceptible to environmental stressors such as extreme heat.

Economic sustainability, meanwhile, is just as important today as it was when Lohr developed his initial business plan for 125,000 cases annually. The company now produces quite a bit more than that, balancing its popular value brands—J. Lohr Estates Seven Oaks Cabernet Sauvignon and J. Lohr Estates Riverstone Chardonnay—with several higher-end, more



Jerry Lohr has had this same license plate for decades.

limited-production releases such as J. Lohr Hilltop Cabernet Sauvignon and J. Lohr Pure Paso Proprietary Red Wine. Yet even at this larger scale, the winery remains family-owned, family-operated, sustainably certified, and almost entirely estate-grown while supporting over 200 employees—many of whom have been there for decades. “Our people are just invaluable,” said Lohr. “Team members need to be knowledgeable, concerned, caring, and do the right thing. We’re just so fortunate to have so many people like that.” SJ



The J. Lohr team strives for continuous improvement. Pictured at the winery’s Home Ranch in Paso Robles are the foundations for two new cooperage buildings that will hold 32,000 barrels, eight new bottle-ready storage tanks, a nearly completed water-treatment system, solar panels that provide 75% of the winery’s power, and composting fields.

{ cover story }

*Daniel Daou of
DAOU Vineyards
and Patrimony at the
family estate in the
Adelaida District sub-
AVA of Paso Robles.*

THE

Patriarch

OF PASO
ROBLES

Patrimony's blocks are densely spaced, with the vines planted 2-3 feet apart in 6-foot-wide rows.

PHOTO: DANIEL DAOU



DANIEL DAOU'S PATRIMONY LABEL FURTHER ENHANCES HIS WORLD-CLASS REPUTATION

by Liz Thack, MW

Striding through the steep blocks of the Patrimony vineyard in the Adelaida District sub-AVA of Paso Robles, Daniel Daou stops to scoop up a handful of soil. All around him, 200 acres of vines form a sea of green on the undulating hillsides, flowing toward the Pacific Ocean only 13 miles away. He sifts through the soil in his palm to showcase the rich clay with small pieces of white limestone.

Adelaida, Daou explains, "has the most clay and limestone in [California]. This, coupled with our 2,200-foot elevation and the cooling sea fog that comes in most evenings, creates a unique cooler climate in Paso Robles. While the lower elevations of the region are warmer and more suitable for Rhône varietals, up here on DAOU Mountain it is the ideal growing climate for high-quality Bordeaux varietals."

With that in mind, Daou set out to do what no one had yet achieved in Paso Robles: Since 2013, he and his brother, Georges, have crafted Patrimony as a \$275 cult wine meant to compete with first-growth Bordeaux. Even more impressive, they have managed to sell out all of their releases, including placements in many high-end wine shops across Europe, such as Harrod's in London.

"Everyone told me I was crazy when I said I wanted to create a world-class luxury wine in Paso Robles," Daou admits. "They told me it was too hot; they told me no one would take me seriously and that it wouldn't sell." But as he prepares to launch the 2018 vintage, he knows he has proven the naysayers wrong.



A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE ADELAIDA DISTRICT AND THE PATRIMONY LABEL

Viticulture arrived in the Paso Robles region in 1790, when Franciscan friars planted vines for the local missions. In 1870, Ascension Winery was established, and it's still in operation today as Epoch Winery. Nearly a century later in 1961, Dr. Stanley Hoffman established vineyard and winery Hoffman Mountain Ranch in what would become the Adelaida District and invited the famous winemaker André Tchelistcheff to assist in planting some of the first Cabernet Sauvignon vines in the region. Tchelistcheff proclaimed the property "a jewel of ecological elements."

It is this jewel that Daniel and Georges Daou purchased in 2007. After replanting most of the vineyards and lovingly restoring the original redwood winery, they christened their estate DAOU Vineyards and began to produce award-winning (and delicious) wines with a focus on Bordeaux varietals. Along the way, they began to zero in on the blocks that produced wine of special quality, with extremely high phenolics. It was then that the brothers decided to launch Patrimony, defined as an estate inherited from one's father.

The heritage of the Daou family, who immigrated to California from Lebanon via France in the early 1980s, is reflected in the name, says Daou, "because it is our vision to honor our parents, and we want to leave a legacy for our children and future generations. That's why we have engraved the bottle with the words 'Legatum Nostrium,' which means 'Our Legacy.'"

THE IMPORTANCE OF PHENOLICS

"With Bordeaux varietals, the best way to measure quality is to look at phenolics," Daou says, "which are the color and tannins in the wine that contribute to smell, taste, texture, and structure." Considering them critical to Patrimony's success, he and his brother conducted an experiment to analyze 700 of the top Cabernet-based wines in the world to assess their phenolics in parts per million (ppm). "We analyzed the first growths of Bordeaux, the top wines of Napa Valley, and many others," he reports, "and we found their phenolics measure between 150–250 ppm in color. Our goal for Patrimony is 300 ppm and above." In his view, "color equals

Daou presents Caves des Lions, a blend of Cabernet Sauvignon and Cabernet Franc.



PHOTO: JEREMY BALL

texture," so fruit below that measurement is rejected. Tannins, meanwhile, "must be between 1,200–1,500 ppm."

With this data, they started to explore why the Patrimony blocks within their vineyard were producing such high phenolics and discovered that certain clones, rootstock, soil composition, and vineyard management techniques were responsible. Now they are using these findings to plant an additional 70 hillside acres for exclusive use in Patrimony. On top of that hill, they are building a magnificent château and dedicated winemaking facility for the label, with plans to open it to visitors in 2024.

QUALITY STARTS IN THE VINEYARD

"My management philosophy is summarized in two words," says Daou: "vineyard balance." He asserts that the clusters in

many vineyards in California do not ripen at the same time due to lack of balance. Patrimony's blocks are densely spaced, with the vines planted 2–3 feet apart in 6-foot-wide rows. "We plant up to 3,630 vines per acre in order to reduce the number of clusters per vine," he explains. "It is a very different approach than [in] regular California vineyards—more like a first-growth vineyard in Bordeaux."

The property is SIP Certified and 95% organic. "We only use 5% commercial products to help control mildew," Daou notes. After all, in addition to being one of the coolest areas of Paso Robles, Adelaida is also the wettest, receiving around 30–45 inches of rain each year compared to 20 inches in other parts of the region, along with moisturizing fog. The limestone in the soil provides good drainage while retaining enough water to allow the

Daous to use deficit irrigation, resulting in water conservation.

The soil also contributes to the complexity of the wine. "The clay [adds] color, aroma, and fleshiness," says Daou, "while the limestone provides freshness, acidity, and minerality, [giving] a much deeper experience than just fruit and alcohol."

The vineyard is meticulously maintained, with over 100 employees tending the vines. "Everything is done by hand, and each vine is touched at least five times per season," he explains. "If we were to sell the grapes used in Patrimony, they would cost \$15,000 per ton."

NO EXPENSE SPARED

Once the Patrimony blocks have been harvested, the grapes are transported the short distance to the winery, where the clusters are hand-sorted. Next, they are gently destemmed and passed through a Pellenc optical sorter, so that only the highest-quality fruit with the correct phenolic measurements goes into tank. Here, they undergo a five-day cold soak before beginning fermentation in stainless steel. "We isolated and captured our own proprietary yeast from the vineyard, which we have named Daou 20," Daou notes. "It allows us to ferment our wines perfectly without using commercial yeast."

During fermentation, Daou checks on the wines daily, tasting and measuring the phenolics. "We perform three pumpovers per day using open circuit, which gently drains the juice into a tub," he reports. "Each time, I personally taste to ensure it is good enough to go into Patrimony. If not, it gets declassified. We have five levels of classification. The top level is Patrimony."

When fermentation is complete, only the free-run juice from the best lots is transferred into 100% new French oak. No expense is spared for the Patrimony barrel program: The Daous work closely with the cooperages to obtain proprietary barrels created from a rare, super-fine-grained pink oak as well as Taransaud T5 barrels from the centuries-old Tronçais forest. In addition, they have negotiated to receive six to ten Tonnellerie Sylvain barrels annually from a 362-year-old forest planted during King Louis XIV's reign.

The wine undergoes malolactic in barrel and does not see any sulfur until afterward. Just as in Bordeaux, the blend is assembled in early spring and then returned to barrel, where it rests for a total of 30 months. "Our goal is to achieve a point where wood never comes between a wine and flavor," Daou says. "The style of Patrimony is always about elegance, which we've found we can achieve after about 30 months in oak, when you get

the longest-chain tannins."

The final result is a line of three exquisite Patrimony wines: a Cabernet Sauvignon, a Cabernet Franc, and a blend of the two called Caves des Lions. All three are deep inky-black in color with complex aromas and flavors. According to Daou, "Our calculations show that Patrimony wines can easily age from 40 to 60 years."

A FOCUS ON COMMUNITY

With Patrimony, Daniel and Georges Daou have proven to the world that the Paso Robles region has the potential for a luxury-wine legacy. And they're trying to help other wineries in the region achieve this as well.

"We believe that all ships can rise on the tide of improved quality," says Daou, "and because we want Paso to succeed, we have helped to establish the Paso Robles Cab Collective," which aims to promote the region's Bordeaux varietals and share best practices in viticulture and production methods.

In addition to farming organically and sustainably, the Daous also take diversity in their workforce seriously, with 54% represented by women. As Daniel explains, "We believe that diversity is an important part of innovation and [of] creating world-class luxury wines." ❧

The road to DAOU Mountain.

PHOTO: RANDY CAPAROSO



Spreading Its Wings

THE DUCKHORN PORTFOLIO OPENS A NEW TASTING ROOM IN CARNEROS FOR ITS MIGRATION LABEL

by Jonathan Cristaldi

IN MAY 2021, exactly 20 years after Duckhorn introduced Migration to the market, it unveiled a tasting room dedicated to the label in the old Starmont Winery space in Carneros, California. “We take a while to get our estate wineries an [actual] estate,” quipped Carol C. Reber, The Duckhorn Portfolio’s executive vice president and chief marketing and DTC officer, upon my recent visit. “Migration was due, and this is the perfect home [for] the next generation of Migration fans.”

Was it worth the wait? Absolutely. The stunningly renovated space at 1451 Stanly Lane—just south of the town of Napa and under an hour’s drive from San Francisco and Oakland—boasts a gorgeous patio with plenty of comfy seating and heaters. Inside, the atmosphere is casually elegant: Surrounding a small, classy bar are more cushy chairs, tables, and booths—all enhanced by a cool, nautical color scheme that evokes some breezy seaside retreat. Just off the main tasting room, the Running Creek Room offers private tasting experiences in a warmer, more intimate space with burlap-textured walls and a large-scale photo of the eponymous estate vineyard.

But given that Running Creek is located on River Road in the Russian River Valley, I

wondered, why set up shop in Carneros?


“South Napa has gained a lot of traction in recent years,” Reber pointed out, with a slew of tasting rooms, boutique hotels, and exceptional restaurants entering the area near Oxbow Market and the riverfront; the Migration tasting room itself will soon have a new neighbor in the form of the sprawling Stanly Ranch, an Auberge Collection Resort slated to open in 2022. What’s more, she added, “We love the cool-climate varieties; clearly the coolest region in Napa [is Carneros, so] we’ve got some Chardonnay planted here and Pinot as well.”

Migration’s wines were first made by Bruce Regalia, followed by Zach Rasmuson; Neil Bernardi—the current vice president and general manager for Kosta Browne, Canvasback, and Goldeneye—took the reins in 2009 when the company decided to evolve away from Anderson Valley toward Sonoma. “We started making wines from the Russian River Valley, and [then we] began to explore different single vineyards from across the state,” Bernardi explained. “And that’s the beautiful thing about these wines today—you’re sitting here in Carneros, but you’re going on a terroir tour of California.”

Migration’s new tasting facility in Carneros.



PHOTOS: BOB MCCLIMAHAN PHOTOGRAPHY

Members of the trade are encouraged to visit the new space to sample flights of Pinot Noir and Chardonnay expertly crafted by Migration’s current winemaker, Dana Epperson. In addition to a sparkling rosé, the portfolio today includes a range of both varieties, including single-vineyard designates from Bien Nacido in Santa Maria Valley, Charles Heintz and Dutton Ranch on the Sonoma Coast, and Drum Canyon Vineyard in Sta. Rita Hills. Visit migrationwines.com for more information. 

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The Hearty Boys' chilled miso-maple noodles with Persian cucumber, radish, Napa cabbage, and herbs.

MISO

MEETS ITS MATCH

**THE HEARTY BOYS
MAKE A NOODLE DISH
TO COMPLEMENT
TWO COCKTAILS**

by Michelle M. Metter



Restaurateurs Dan Smith and Steve McDonagh are known as *The Hearty Boys*.

JUST BEFORE THE pandemic began, Dan Smith and Steve McDonagh—the Chicago restaurateurs, caterers, Food Network personalities, and authors known as *The Hearty Boys*—were looking forward to a solidly booked season that included “Dinner With a View,” an outdoor event series taking place in a large glass dome. Each night over the six-week schedule, the duo would treat guests seated under the stars to a menu that paired McDonagh’s cocktails with multiple courses prepared by Smith, including a starter of chilled miso-maple noodles.

“It’s a lovely, light starter but still has a satisfying heft due to the rice noodles,” says Smith. “The dressing of white miso, fresh lime, and maple syrup is the perfect balance of sweet and acidic. The addition of Persian cucumber, radish, Napa cabbage, and fresh herbs lends a great crunch to the soft, slightly chewy noodles. [And the] preparation is simple, with a quick whisk of the dressing and a toss [of the] cooked noodles, vegetables, and herbs.”

Though the series had to be postponed due to the pandemic, the dish has found its way onto *The Hearty Boys*’ catering menu for micro-weddings. McDonagh’s recommended pairing, a cocktail called the Allotment, reflects the expertise with spirits that’s also showcased in the duo’s 2007 cookbook, *Talk With Your Mouth Full*. “I wanted something fresh and green that would punch up the dish’s lighter flavors of white miso and cucumber,”

he says. Batavia arrack, a spirit made from sugarcane and fermented red rice, “adds a little raw heat to the cocktail that we need to play against the radish. Noodles in general can be dense, so choosing something effervescent,” such as club soda, “brightens up the palate and [helps the drink go] down really easily. . . . I think this might be a two-cocktail meal.”

His recipe follows, along with an alternative pairing suggestion from Dallas Juanes, general manager and beverage director at Verbena Kitchen in San Diego, California.



PHOTO: SHAY STUDIOS

Dallas Juanes is general manager and beverage director at Verbena Kitchen in San Diego, CA.

Allotment

- 1½ oz. white rum
- ½ oz. Batavia arrack
- ½ oz. simple syrup
- 3–4 slices English cucumber
- 3–4 leaves cilantro
- 3–5 oz. club soda

In a cocktail shaker, muddle the English cucumber, cilantro, and simple syrup. Add the rum, Batavia arrack, and ice. Shake well. Strain into a Collins glass filled with ice and top with club soda. Garnish with a fresh lime wedge.


Continental Divide

Dallas Juanes’ drink recipe puts the spotlight on cashew-apple feni from India. Noting the dish’s Asian influence, he says, “I wanted to build from that. [The feni in] this delicate cocktail . . . [has] a profile of shoe leather [and] tropical, nutty astringency that is softened by the other ingredients. I incorporated a Thai chili—and—cilantro tincture to add depth, a plum-wine orgeat to match sweetness, and umami gin to bring salinity and earthiness to the table. These ingredients encapsulate the dish to its fullest by providing a balanced flavor profile—[the drink is] the yin to its yang!”

- 1½ oz. Pacific House Umami Gin
- 1 oz. Spirit of India Feni
- 1 oz. fresh lime juice
- 1 oz. plum wine—peanut orgeat*
- ¼ oz. Thai chili—cilantro tincture**

Add all ingredients to a shaker tin. Shake with a little ice to incorporate all the flavor components with minimal dilution. Double-strain into a Collins glass and pack with crushed ice. Garnish with a sprig of cilantro, a slice of dehydrated lime, and a pinch of ground black pepper.

*In a saucepan, simmer 24 oz. plum wine; 8 oz. almond milk; two macerated plums; and 2 cups of crushed, unsalted peanuts until reduced by two-thirds to roughly 2 l oz. Strain the mixture and return it to the saucepan over low heat; incorporate 1 cup of fine white sugar and 1 cup of demerara sugar. Once the sugar is dissolved, remove the orgeat from the heat, let cool, and refrigerate. Will keep for two weeks.

**Macerate 1 cup Thai chilies and 2 oz. Sichuan peppercorns in 1 cup of high-proof vodka for two days. Add ¼ cup minced cilantro leaves and 1 oz. black peppercorns and let soak for an additional day. Fine-strain all ingredients and bottle. Will keep for four weeks. 

{ south america }

A
DIAMOND
IN THE PLACE OF

Gold

FROM ITS STRONGHOLD IN CHILE'S
MILLAHUE VALLEY, **VIK** USHERS IN A NEW
ERA OF WORLD-CLASS HOSPITALITY AND
TERROIR-DRIVEN WINEMAKING

by Jonathan Cristaldi

VIK Winery in Chile's Millahue Valley.

When Norwegian-born billionaire Alex Vik and his wife, Carrie, set out to launch a winery in Chile, they went all in: No expenses were spared or corners cut in their effort to create both one of the country's most prized destinations for upscale R&R and a portfolio of red wines that could compete with the world's greatest.

The Viks' quest for top terroir began in 2004, but it took them two years to find their ideal location: a slice of Chilean countryside in the Millahue Valley, whose name translates to "place of gold." Nestled in the remote foothills of the Andes Mountains within the Cachapoal Valley about a two-hour drive from the bustling capital city of Santiago, this 3-mile corridor of lush, undulating land is where the Viks planted their first vines in 2006 after digging hundreds of soil pits and cataloging more than 6,000 different soil types, which we've listed below (kidding).

Just one year later, the Viks launched their ambitious plan to build a state-of-the-art, sustainable, and visually arresting monument to the art of winemaking: the



PHOTOS COURTESY OF VIK

VIK Chile resort and spa, which fittingly showcases the couple's vast collection of rare artworks in its 22 guest suites and throughout the premises (see sidebar on page 57). Opened to the public in 2014, VIK Chile was designed by architect Marcelo Daglio and sits atop a hilltop smack in the middle of the valley, offering a

360-degree view of the vineyards, the surrounding landscape, and the distant Andes. A cascading roof cast in bronze titanium mirrors the hills of the valley below.

Daglio also designed **Puro VIK**, the resort's seven VIP glass bungalows embedded directly into the hillside, where they're covered with wild grass and solar panels





VIK winemaker Cristian Vallejo.

to minimize energy use. They offer guests similarly uninhibited views, including of the **VIK Winery**. The spa, meanwhile, offers patrons the chance to bathe in wine, whose antioxidants purportedly offer benefits for skin health.

VIK also operates two restaurants: **Pavilion** at the winery and **Milla Milla** at the resort. Both are helmed by executive chef Pablo Cáceres, who focuses on organic, experiential haute cuisine; some of the ingredients are harvested just minutes before Cáceres adds them to his exquisite-looking dishes, creating a true terroir-to-table experience. The glass-walled Milla Milla harbors a stunning wine cellar and more views of the valley beyond an infinity pool on the decks just outside.

The VIK Winery portfolio currently includes three reds and one rosé: The flagship bottling, **VIK**, and **Milla Cala** are both Cabernet Sauvignon-dominant red blends, while the **La Piu Belle** red blend is primarily composed of Cabernet and Carménère and also comes in a rosé version comprising Cabernet Sauvignon, Cabernet Franc, and Syrah. From certain suites in the VIK Chile resort, guests can swirl any one of those wines while gazing out at the primary architectural element of the winery itself—a transparent roof made of

stretched fabric. The award-winning chief architect is Chilean-born Smiljan Radić, who worked closely with the Viks to bring their radical ideas to life, including their keen desire to build a structure that fit as naturally into its surroundings as possible.

That desire is exemplified by the massive plaza leading toward the winery, devised by Radić and his wife, Marcela Correa; dotted with granite boulders, the remarkable art installation encompasses a calming slope of running water that flows toward the winery entrance, giving guests the impression that they're walking on a paper-thin river.

Radić's inspired vision for this palatial estate is only slightly overshadowed by the craft of the wines' own chief architect—fellow Chilean native Cristian Vallejo, who learned the art of winemaking from some of Europe's best. He not only studied under Paul Pontallier and Philippe Bascaules at Château Margaux but also worked with the Cuvelier family of Château Léoville Poyferré and Château Le Crock as well as renowned enologist Lorenzo Tomazzoli at Cantina Toblino in Alto Adige, Italy. And he counts Josep Vadrí, winemaker at the 300-year-old Clos Montblanc in Catalonia's Conca de Barberà DO, as a key mentor. "From them, I have learned that winemak-

ing is about having passion, a dedication to hard work, and a deep connection to nature," says Vallejo, which are "all important and critical factors . . . in helping express the terroir of VIK."

VIK's estate vineyards encompass some 857 acres across 12 different sites around the Millahue Valley. Once harvested, grapes are gently conveyed to the winery, which is largely underground. The "fermentation hall," as Vallejo describes it, is spotless, boasting a colonnade that is a visual tapestry of concrete columns and beautiful stainless-steel tanks; it continues to the barrel cellar and ends at a massive stone altar to the wines themselves. Classes are offered here for wine zealots but also for families traveling with children who just might be keen to, in Vallejo's words, "dip their toes into enology" (without breaking any laws, of course; underage guests cannot taste the wines—but they can certainly ingest a bit of earth science).

But Vallejo's approach to winemaking is hardly confined to the production facility. "In the vineyard, we focus on low yields, we night harvest by hand, and all grapes are gravity fed, followed by a soft extraction," he explains. From there, it's all about a proprietary process the VIK team refers to as *barroir*—a mashup of "barrel" and "terroir."

The pristine landscape surrounding the vineyards on the VIK estate.



The VIK Chile resort and spa.



What is *barroir* exactly? According to Vallejo, it primarily involves “toast[ing] our barrels with our own oak.” To accomplish this, the team gathers fallen wood from the floor of a 140-acre oak grove on the property, which is then taken to their cellar cooperage and used to toast the new French oak barrels they import; thus the local oak is “reborn in the soul” of their wines (as explained in a rather stunning video about the process). Some of the trees in this grove, namely the *Quercus robur*, are European in origin, according to Vallejo, and some are over 100 years of age; to add to its French-made inventory, VIK is actually making barrels from some of these trees.

Beyond the barrel, the rest of the process should come as no surprise given Vallejo’s perfectionism: Everything is native yeast-fermented, he says, with “no filtering, no fining, [and] no additions”—all in pursuit of capturing unadulterated terroir in the bottle. That work culminates in the production of roughly 235,000 bottles annually, about 41,000 of which are imported to the U.S.; in addition to selling them through its website (vikwine.com), VIK is working with distributor Guarachi Wine Partners to get these stunning representations of Chilean wine directly into American consumers’ hands. Leaving no room for error, the Viks have ushered in a new era for their adopted country’s winemaking industry. 

A Passion for Art

Alex and Carrie Vik are serious art collectors, and their passion is woven into the very fabric of every experience at VIK. Immersive, site-specific, and one-of-a-kind pieces are scattered throughout the property, from paintings by Chilean artist Roberto Matta to furniture by Vladimir Kagen as well as works by Antonio Segui, James Turrell, Pablo Montealegre, Axel Revold, and Kjell Nupen, among others. The Puro VIK glass houses, meanwhile, feature rare art and design works by Roy Lichtenstein, Tom Wesselmann, Dale Chihuly, and others.



From the large-scale painting in Milla Milla’s dining room to the playful graphics displayed in the master suites, VIK Chile reveals its owners’ passion for art.





“Like Making Wine on Mars”

A RECENT VIRTUAL TRIP HOSTED BY SOMMFOUNDATION EXPLORED THE DIVERSE TERROIR OF CHILE WITH **VENTISQUERO**



IN JUNE, I was fortunate to travel the length of Chile with Ventisquero Wine Estates after SommFoundation selected me for one of its virtual wine trips. Head winemaker Felipe Tosso, head viticulturist Sergio Hormazabal, and communications director Catalina Bräuchle teamed up with Greg Van Wagner, creator of digital wine-map platform SommGeo, to take us on a tour of six of the country's wine regions, accompanied by Ventisquero wines.

SommGeo's ability to zero in on specific vineyards within a larger region really brought these winegrowing areas to life and will be immensely helpful for my WSET Diploma studies. Among the world's longest countries, Chile is a land of extremes, from the cold, dry Atacama Desert in the north—one of the driest places on Earth, it receives less than 40 millimeters of rain per year on average—to the glaciers of Patagonia in the south (Ventisquero is Spanish for “hanging glacier”). To the east, the Andes separate Chile from Argentina, while the Chilean Coast Range and the Pacific lie to the west; the importance of the Humboldt Current's cooling effects on the vineyards and ecosystem of Chile, I learned, cannot be overstated. In addition, the country has remained phylloxera free, which is a rarity in the wine world. No wonder Tosso called it “almost an island to itself.”

The first Ventisquero wine we tried was Tara, an unfiltered Chardonnay that hails from a vineyard source in the Huasco river valley and is named for the salt flats in the Atacama. Hormazabal pointed out that the limestone and clay soils, which are unusual

The Atacama vineyard in the Huasco river valley is the source of Ventisquero's Tara Chardonnay.



Las Terrazas de Leyda is the Leyda Valley vineyard from which Ventisquero's Grey Line Pinot Noir comes.



for Chile, are perfect for the grape, but working with the arid conditions “is like making wine on Mars,” in Tosso’s words; the mist from the *Camanchaca*, the name of the fog that arrives every morning, provides the only moisture for plant life. Tara stays on its lees for 30 months and is kept in a variety of containers, including concrete eggs made from locally sourced stone. The result is a salty, lemony, textured, and intriguing Chardonnay that made me envision that I was drinking the essence of the Atacama.

Up next were Pinot Noirs from the neighboring regions of Casablanca and the Leyda Valley: Heru, named for the elf that guards the area’s abandoned gold mines in local folklore, and Grey Line, a nod to the iconic Grey Glacier in the Southern Patagonian Ice Field. Casablanca, with its Mediterranean climate and granitic soils, sits in the middle of the Chilean Coast Range about an hour from the coast; its terroir results in a wine defined by red berries, cherry, pomegranate, and baking spices. The Grey Line reflected its much cooler home of Las Terrazas de Leyda, just 7 kilometers from the ocean. Hormazabal noted that they harvest the grapes three weeks later in Leyda than in Casablanca, yielding a crunchier wine with more raspberry.

We moved inland and southward to the Andes foothills in the Maipo Valley

The Tapihue vineyard in Casablanca is the source for Ventisquero’s Heru Pinot Noir.



near Santiago—specifically the Pirque winegrowing area, which is known to produce some of Chile’s top Cabernet Sauvignons. Situated within a canyon on colluvial soils, Pirque has ideal conditions for grape growing, protected as it is from extreme weather by the coastal range and the Andes foothills, while the winds it does get keep frost away. The sheltered location of the vineyard inspired the label name: Enclave. We tasted the 2013 vintage, a fresh, elegant, and outstanding Bordeaux blend that undergoes a long maceration and spends two years in barrel, followed by three to four years of bottle aging.

The next wine, *Obliqua*, was from La Roblería, the highest vineyard in the Apalta area of the Colchagua Valley, about two hours south of Santiago; its name references the scientific term for the Patagonian oak, *Nothofagus obliqua*, which is fitting given that a large oak tree is planted in the middle of the vineyard. The area gets 600 millimeters of rain per year and its soils have a high iron content. This wine was quite different than other Carménères I

have tasted: It was elegant and sculptured, with a great balance of fruit and tannins. And thanks to SommGeo, we had a gorgeous view of the vineyard, with steep hillsides towering over a lush valley.

The last wine we tasted, *Queulat* (also named for a glacier), hailed from Itata, Chile’s southernmost growing region as well as one of its oldest. Hormazabal called it a “community wine,” as the old-vine Cinsault grapes are sourced from the small growers in the area who themselves determine the ideal time to harvest. It was described by Tosso as a light and playful summer wine built for poolside drinking.

It is one thing to study a region and another to be immersed in it. Ventisquero and SommGeo really brought the Chilean landscape to life, and I now look at Chile’s wine regions as distinctive entities rather than names on a page, which is invaluable to me. From “drinking” the Atacama to taking in the gorgeous views of Apalta, it was quite a trip, and I am thankful to SommFoundation, SommGeo, and most of all Ventisquero for the experience! ❧

Pure Bliss

YIELDING WINES OF EVER-GROWING COMPLEXITY AND VALUE, **VINHO VERDE** HAS EVOLVED INTO A SOMMELIER'S HAVEN

by Randy Caparoso

AMORIM GIRÃO, one of Portugal's most esteemed geographers, once described Vinho Verde as "a vast amphitheater which, starting at the coast, gradually climbs in elevation towards the interior." Today, at long last, this region nestled in the country's northwestern corner is being recognized not only for its distinct geography but for wines that exhibit a true sense of place.

Vinho Verde translates literally as "green wine," but it's understood as "young wine," as it's meant to be consumed immediately after bottling, when it's bright and prickly. All the same, this is not a "young" region: There are Roman records of viticulture here dating back to 96–51 BC. After it received its first official demarcation in 1908, regulations controlling production and sales were set in 1926 when the DO was established.

Geographically speaking, it's useful to think of Vinho Verde by another of its traditional names, *Entre-Douro-e-Minho*, i.e., the region "between Douro and Minho"; the Minho River to the north borders Spain's Galicia and its famous DO, *Rías Baixas*, while the Douro River to the south is lined with vineyards just downriver from the Douro DOC, the home of Port. They're joined by other rivers that "shoot out like fingers" from the region and provide the names for some of its nine official subregions, according to Master Sommelier Alexander LaPratt, owner of Brooklyn restaurant Atrium and brand ambassador for Vinho Verde Wines; because of its proximity to *Rías Baixas*, he explained, the north is where "you find more Alvarinho," known as *Albariño* in Spain, while "naturally you find more red wine grape plantings" in the south near the Douro.

Vinho Verde is dominated by an Atlantic maritime climate marked by wet winters (average yearly rainfall is 47 inches) and warm, dry summers with slight humid-



Alvarinho in the vineyard.

FIVE DISTINCTIVE VINHO VERDE WINES



Soalheiro 2019 Granit Mineral Selection Alvarinho, Monção e Melgaço, Vinho Verde (\$22)

This fascinating wine, organically grown by the Cerdeira family, is all about terroir rather than varietal. While second-generation winemaker Luis Cerdeira plays with multiple iterations of Alvarinho each year—experimenting with French barriques, chestnut barrels, concrete eggs, 900-liter tonneaux, native yeast, and unsulfured bottlings—the Granit is fermented in stainless steel at slightly higher temperatures than other Soalheiro wines and ages on the lees with *bâtonnage* to accentuate the sensory profile of particularly dense granitic sites on the family estate. It's a true distillation of the *Monção e Melgaço* subregion, which is located south of the Minho River in the northeast corner of Vinho Verde, farther away from the influence of the Atlantic Ocean and at higher elevations than most of the DOC. The nose is overtly and compellingly stony, all but concealing an inner core of the peach and citrus fruit associated with the grape, and the body is firm and fleshy, its medium weight (13% ABV) kept lithe and vibrant by citrusy acidity. Minerality dominates from beginning to end.



Valados de Melgaço 2017 Alvarinho Reserva, Monção e Melgaço, Vinho Verde (\$20)

This brand was founded in 2013 by a systems engineer named Artur Meleiro, who also comes from a multigenerational winegrowing family. His goal is to raise the profile of traditional grapes like Alvarinho through low-intervention winemaking and the use of ancestral techniques such as aging in Portuguese wood or walnut vats. The 2017 Reserva captures a grippier, fuller style of the grape yet still retains lightness thanks to a moderate ABV of 13.5%. Its fresh character of citrus and white peach is rounded out by creaminess and subtle minerality enhanced by a yeasty fluidity achieved through *bâtonnage*.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF VINHO VERDE WINES





Quinta das Arcas 2020 Arca Nova Loureiro, Vinho Verde (\$10) António Esteves Monteiro established this winery in 1985, consolidating some 494 acres of vineyards farmed by his family for generations primarily in Vinho Verde's inland Sousa subregion, located just north of the Douro River. Grown on modern-style VSP (i.e., vertical shoot position)

trellises, this pure Loureiro honors the light, slightly effervescent, and tart-edged style of traditional Vinho Verde, albeit with elevated intensity and body at 11.5% ABV. Flowery, citrusy, and minerally, with a touch of leesiness (the wine sees some *bâtonnage* in steel tanks), it's buoyed by a trace of residual sugar (8 grams per liter) that a crafty sommelier could have a lot of fun with by pairing foods with sweet-and-sour or semi-spicy elements.



Quinta da Lixa 2020 Aromas das Castas Grande Escolha Alvarinho-Loureira, Vinho Verde (\$12) This estate, operated by the Meireles family since 1986, has come to personify a drier, more contemporary style of Vinho Verde. It also illustrates the beauty of traditional blending, with two classic grapes combining at equal proportions to produce

effusive notes of citrus, tropical flowers, and stony minerality underlined by a light-medium body at 12.5% ABV. Showing slight leesiness and touch of effervescence, it finishes with fresh notes of citrus and orange peel.



Quinta da Raza 2020 Dom Diogo Padeiro Vinho Rosé, Vinho Verde (\$15) Made entirely from the black-skinned native Padeiro grape grown in the hot, dry Basto subregion located on Vinho Verde's easternmost, highest-elevation slopes, this wine is grown by the Teixeira Coelho family, who have farmed these hillsides since 1769. Yet it's thoroughly modern and nuanced, featuring an exuberantly fresh nose of strawberry and watermelon and a silken, fine, and zesty yet rounded light-medium body (12% ABV). Its slight aperitivo-like phenolics and natural acidity balance out the faint residual sugar (8.4 g/L), and the wild-berry qualities ring true.



Harvesting Vinho Verde's signature grape, Alvarinho.

ity. Soils consist primarily of decomposed blue granite and quartz from the base rock of the mountain range that dominates the northeastern corner of Portugal and extends into northeast Vinho Verde. "As the granite weathers, the quartz stones remain intact, and some of the decomposing granite can form clay, which holds water well," LaPratt says. "The result is soils that are fertile yet very well drained on top, with clay subsoils with some water retention."

Currently totaling about 39,536 acres, the Vinho Verde DO now allows 45 of the 68 varieties grown there to appear on labels. The three most widely planted grapes—Loureiro (representing about 9,874 acres); Alvarinho (5,787 acres); and Arinto (5,540 acres)—are all white, representing the region's association with the aforementioned "green" wines that, once upon a time, were always picked early to be light in alcohol (8.5–11% ABV) while exhibiting both effervescence and smidgens of residual sugar to balance the high acidity. The fourth most widely planted grape is the black-skinned Vinhão (4,578 acres), a red cultivar that is genetically close to, but still distinct from, Sezão (aka Souzao).

The good news for sommeliers is that Vinho Verde is no longer a predictably light, fluffy, tutti-frutti white: It can now be a *serious* wine. Improved viticultural practices, combined with the introduction of high-tech production methods used by new generations of vintners, have recently borne drier, fuller-bodied expressions that are more likely to showcase the character of not only the subregions from which they come but of individual estates or vineyards—not to mention, of course, the artistic sensibilities of their winemaker.

"Today's top producers run the gamut," LaPratt remarks. "Although most of the wines are still crisp and light, some are experimenting with oak and some with more natural winemaking. Consequently, for example, you'll find some Alvarinho with more power and structure, distinct minerality, and fewer fruit-forward qualities, even compared to most Rías Baixas Albariño."

The "mainstay" Loureiro, meanwhile, was long featured primarily in blends but is now frequently being bottled as a monovarietal. "It produces aromatic, floral wines, often with notes of jasmine and honey, [that are] occasionally tropical and almost always minerally," LaPratt explains. "These should be no-brainers for sommeliers. . . . As far as I'm concerned, nothing else in the world can touch Vinho Verde insofar as uniqueness, value, and quality." ❧



Vinho Verde's soils are primarily decomposed blue granite with large amounts of quartz.

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The Mess We Missed

RECENT REPORTS SHOW SIGNS OF HOPE FOR THE U.S. HOSPITALITY INDUSTRY

by Nell Jerome

AFTER ALL THE stay-at-home orders, the thwarted travel plans, and the waves of closures—the National Restaurant Association estimates that 100,000 businesses shut down in the first six months of the pandemic alone—many of us have now experienced the euphoria of returning to our favorite restaurants and bars. (As conveyed by the hilarious recent Pepsi commercial “The Mess We Miss,” even gathering around a cocktail buffet of shrimp can feel like a win.) Yet on-premise operators continue to be impacted. In California, for instance, an estimated third of all restaurants have closed permanently and two-thirds of employees furloughed or laid off, per a legislative report issued in May. So while business is bouncing back—according to a Nielsen study of the U.S. market released in September, rate of sales for the average on-premise outlet is up 35% over 2020 and 25% over 2019—the sector may take years to fully recover.

The question arises: Why are some people continuing to stay home? Consumers surveyed by the Nielsen division of Curren Goodden Associates in the top markets of California, Texas, Florida, Illinois, and New York cited various reasons—and, surprisingly, COVID-19 was not the top concern. While older respondents blamed the delta variant, for younger (and larger) generations, expense was the leading determinant. Less surprisingly, answers fluctuated by state, with health concerns ranking high for Californians and low for Floridians.

Fortunately for the trade, two-thirds of consumers said they were “completely comfortable” with going out to bars and restaurants. But their motives also vary. With many offices still closed in favor of employees working from home, only 9% of consumers cited business meetings as the reason to visit an on-premise location and only 14% were opting for drinks after work. Following more than a year of social

distancing, survey respondents said their reasons for dining and drinking out were catching up with friends (38%), treating/rewarding themselves (35%), and celebrating (28%). According to a July article in *Nation’s Restaurant News*, ambiance was a key factor in choosing a restaurant among diners right now, largely because of its connection to cleanliness and safety. Service was another factor that set top-performing venues apart.

In August, the *Wall Street Journal* reported, bars and restaurants lost 41,500 more jobs, and new challenges such as severe weather and emerging COVID variants are also affecting consumer behavior. Yet these resilient businesses have established their value. While most of us can still appreciate a home-cooked meal or takeout in front of the TV, there are occasions for celebrating, commemorating, or simply communicating that are made even more memorable when they’re shared somewhere special. **SJ**



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OCTOBER 15_{TO} 24



{ up close with the winemaker }

Rare EARTH

Pete Stolpman with his
Great Dane, Earl.

STOLPMAN VINEYARDS
FARMS QUALITY
FRUIT IN THE HIDDEN
BALLARD CANYON
AVA—AND THE TIME
HAS COME FOR WIDER
DISTRIBUTION OF ITS
WINE GEMS

by Meredith May

TWISTING ROADS AMONG horse ranches and vineyards finally reach the summit where we find Stolpman Vineyards. Tom Stolpman founded this property—an outcropping of limestone-based soils nestled in the hills of the Santa Ynez Valley—over 30 years ago, before Ballard Canyon became an AVA. It's now known as the only American appellation dedicated to Syrah, and Stolpman indeed pays close attention to the variety, with 90 acres planted among the winery's 174 acres under vine.

Experiencing daily chilly winds that blow from the Pacific through exposed hillsides as well as high diurnal swings, this property stands apart from others on the Central Coast. In 2009, Tom's son Pete took over the operation and began working on some revelatory projects. While his father was mostly a grower, the younger Stolpman, 39, is a producer working toward wider distribution, and his new brands, The Great Places and So Fresh, are just beginning a national rollout.

The grapes used for So Fresh are natively fermented whole cluster and uncrushed. High acidity and that namesake freshness are a hallmark of these wines, with label names such as Love You Bunches and Crunchie Roastie Rainbow that speak volumes to the off-premise buyer.

The Great Places features a diverse array of old massal-selection Syrah strains grown on own-rooted stock in high-density, head-pruned plantings in plots with the best exposures. These wines are worthy of Ballard Canyon's—and Stolpman Vineyards'—world-class status.

We recently made the drive up to Ballard Canyon to spend the afternoon with Pete, his two dogs, and his crew of 30 vineyard workers, tasting these new expressions under shady trees in the heart of the property.

LA CUADRILLA

Thanks to a diligent team led by vineyard manager Ruben Solorzano—known in the Santa Ynez Valley as “the Grape Whisperer”—Pete can rest assured that his property is well cared for. All work is performed by hand, as “no tractor can fit into these narrow, steep rows,” he insisted. The crew micro-picks estate block by estate block (aka a *cuadra*) to ensure the quality of this special wine; the Rousanne alone takes 14 passes. Ten percent of the vineyard's total production goes into the blend, and profits for the brand are returned to the full-time vineyard crew in the form of year-end bonuses, which are supplemented by weekly bonuses to assist in their day-to-day quality of life.

La Cuadrilla 2019, Ballard Canyon (\$22) A blend of 70% Syrah, 15% Grenache, and 15% Sangiovese, this mouth-filling, juicy red shows a meaty side as well as notes of wild strawberry, heather, chocolate malt, and sweet earth. Balanced and plush, it's a tad salty on the finish. **92**



SO FRESH

Carbonic maceration adds high-acid, bright-fruit freshness to these expressive wines.

Stolpman Vineyards So Fresh 2020 Love You Bunches, Santa Barbara County (\$24) Sangiovese is a beloved grape at Stolpman, taking up 21 estate acres. It joins Sangiovese sourced from other vineyards in the region in this rosé, which has a low ABV of 12.5% and aromas of cherry blossom. Dried rose petals bring out the best in this rustic, youthful sipper. **91**

Stolpman Vineyards So Fresh 2020 GDG Gamay, Santa Barbara County (\$36) The own-rooted Gamay featured in this wine was planted in 2016 and struggles to survive in the extreme diurnal temperature swings of Ballard Canyon. (Stolpman sources some of the fruit elsewhere in Santa Barbara County.) Carbonic maceration for this variety is natural à la Beaujolais, and no sulfur is added. Solorzano's unique penmanship is featured on the handwritten labels—and what does GDG stand for? It's Tom Stolpman's reaction to Pete growing this grape: “You planted goddamn *Gamay*!!” Earthy, with rhubarb, salted plum, oregano, and dried rose petals, this bright, charming wine has a true savory side and a crunchy texture. **93**



THE GREAT PLACES

This is the crown jewel of Stolpman Vineyards, made with pre-clonal Syrah strains packed into 9 acres on the steep limestone slopes that surround the high hillside-planted mother vine.

The Great Places 2019 August James Stolpman Syrah, Ballard Canyon (\$98) This latest vintage is named after Pete's son, who in turn was named after Auguste Clape, famed vigneron from the Northern Rhône; Clape's Syrahs from the cru of Cornas, specifically Reynards Vineyard, inspired the wine. Its impeccable balance, dark fruit, espresso-like dusty tannins, and bittersweet center of dark chocolate coat the tongue with flair. Juicy and chewy, this is truly an example of magnificent terroir. **98** SJ

Stolpman Vineyards is located in the Ballard Canyon AVA.

{ up close with the winemaker }

CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE

BARBIERI AND KEMPE WINES
ARE BASED UPON A GREAT
UNDERSTANDING OF SANTA
BARBARA COUNTY

by Meridith May

IN 1998, Paolo Barbieri was serving as the GM/wine director at Prima in Walnut Creek, California, when he got an offer to interview for the wine director position at the soon-to-open Le Cirque and Circo in the Bellagio in Las Vegas, where Master Sommelier Jay James was the hotel wine director. He agreed on one condition: that James mentor him through the Master Somm program. "Jay inspired me to study for the Master exam; I passed after a couple of attempts at service, which was [ironically] my biggest strength," he notes.

Barbieri exited the Bellagio in 2005 for the Wynn, where he ran the wine program for chef Alessandro Stratta's two-Michelin-starred restaurant Alex. After the ultra-luxe dining spot closed, he was off to oversee



*Paolo Barbieri and wife/
partner Erin Kempe at their
Los Olivos tasting room.*



Barbieri sources some of his grapes from Rodney's Vineyard at Fess Parker Estate off Foxen Canyon in the Santa Ynez Valley.

The Cosmopolitan's Italian hot spots, Scarpetta and DOCG, also as wine director.

In the meantime, although he didn't leave Las Vegas until 2014, Barbieri began making wines in Santa Barbara County with his wife, Erin Kempe. A visionary for the region, "I had about 45 Santa Barbara County wines on my lists in Vegas," he points out. The couple has two labels, Barbieri and Kempe, which are focused on Rhône and Bordeaux varietals, respectively.

Getting into the soil is not new to Barbieri; he studied farming management in his native Italy. "I may have made a lot more money in Las Vegas," he admits, "but this is something I am doing for myself. I have reached the time of my life when passion comes first. And I don't mind working every single day." (His 26-year-old son, Massimo, serves as assistant winemaker.)

I met with Paolo and Erin at their tasting room in Los Olivos, California, in late August to taste through the broad array of wines in their portfolio. They all deserve attention, but here are some standouts.

Barbieri 2020 Vermentino, Santa Barbara County (\$32) Fermented partly in stainless steel and partly in 400-liter puncheons, this white offers bright notes of hazelnut, candied pineapple, and lemon blossom as well as a lovely, crisp texture with zingy green-apple acidity and a hint of caramel on the finish. Barbieri recommends that you "drink it ice cold." **92**

Kempe 2020 Bianco, Santa Barbara County (\$32) This blend of 60% Viognier and 40% Clairette Blanche is left in tank for five to six months and sees partial malolactic fermentation. The yellow-floral aromas are mesmerizing, as is the perfume of passion fruit. Honeyed ginger, key lime, and salty pine nut combine with high-wire acidity that's unique for a Viognier. Floral notes shine through. **92**



Barbieri 2017 Dromeus Grenache, Central Coast (\$58) Dry herbs meld with ripe red fruit while earth, rhubarb, and floral notes glow with Old World acidity. Dark cherry and a taste of soil are highlights. Aged in large, used oak puncheons, the wine finishes with white-peppered cranberry. **93**

Kempe 2018 Iron Wheel Red Blend, Central Coast (\$58) Featuring Cabernet Sauvignon with a bit of Syrah and Petite Sirah, this red is voluptuous, with the texture of boysenberry liqueur. Its velvet entry and supple, dry tannins contribute to its beautiful balance of fruit and savory character. **94**

Barbieri 2017 Romanus Syrah-Viognier, Santa Barbara County (\$58)

The Syrah comes from Colson Canyon, a high-end vineyard in the rugged hills of Santa Maria Valley owned by famed Central Coast winemaker Joey Tensley. "Joey doesn't sell his fruit for this vineyard, but we are lucky enough to have a relationship with him that allowed us to purchase Syrah for our wines," says Barbieri, who also produces an even smaller-production single-vineyard Colson Canyon Syrah. This Côte-Rôtie-style sipper offers scents of deep, dark chocolate with a meaty boysenberry aroma in the background. An immediate dive into flavors of salty charcuterie, ripe plum, espresso, and anise makes for a haunting red; the note of white pepper is so well integrated that it barely seasons the toasty finish. **96**



Kempe 2018 Illumina Red Wine Blend, Paso Robles (\$58) One-third each of Cabernet Sauvignon, Cabernet Franc, and Merlot is sourced from Plummer Vineyard—a sustainably farmed site on Paso's warmer eastern side known for its late-ripening fruit—and aged 20 months in 40% new French oak. The result is an elegant, wrap-around-your-tongue wine with pillow-soft tannins. The blue, red, and black fruit lights up in the glass (yes, the name is perfect) along with spiced plum and coffee bean. **96**

Kempe 2018 100% Cabernet Sauvignon, Paso Robles (\$58) This wine also contains Plummer Vineyard fruit and offers stunning aromas; again, the blue fruit is exquisite, and the liquid generously stretches out on the palate. **96** SJ

THE
Weight OF
WINE'S
**BUILDING
BLOCKS**

OUR “PHENOLICS:
COLOR, TANNINS,
AND TASTE” WEBINAR
MEASURED THE
SIGNIFICANCE OF
POLYPHENOLS

by Jessie Birschbach

Polyphenols are important to wine—so crucial, in fact, that it's widely accepted that a red wine's phenolic profile determines its quality and ageability. Attempting to understand them, however, can be incredibly complicated even to wine scientists and

chemists. Simply put, polyphenols, which are found throughout the plant kingdom, are a group of compounds that all have one thing in common: a phenol ring in their chemical structure. The most well-known subcategories of these hexagonal heroes are anthocyanins, flavan-3-ols, and their byproducts, which include mostly tannins, pigments, and, of course, the coveted resveratrol, dubbed the "fountain of youth" by some for its purported anti-aging properties.

All of these subcategories can be categorized into two groups: flavonoids, which have a three-ring structure found in the seeds, skins, and stems of grapes, and non-flavonoids, which lack three rings and are found mostly in grape pulp. It's worth mentioning that the latter serve as the main phenolic compound in white grapes; however, the subject of phenolics more often revolves around red grapes, as only a fraction of the polyphenols found in red varieties can be found in white grapes.

On a hot afternoon in mid-July, our panel of wine experts bravely navigated the elaborate maze made up of phenolic rings. "Often phenolic compounds determine a wine's taste, color, and mouthfeel," said Lars Leicht, VP of education for *The SOMM Journal* and the moderator for our Geographical Digest webinar series in partnership with *National Geographic*. "Techniques such as canopy management, green harvest, [adjusting] fermentation temperatures, maceration, and even aging will significantly transform and sometimes add phenolic compounds. In other words, when winemakers play with their phenols, they release a plethora of pleasure-inducing, palate-pleasing perceptions. Let's ask our panel to tell us how they do it."



PHOTO COURTESY OF JORDAN

This Cabernet Sauvignon vine illustrates Dana Grande's knack for fruit distribution.

JORDAN VINEYARD & WINERY

Location: Alexander Valley, Sonoma County, California

Presenter: Dana Grande, grower relations manager

It's no surprise that Dana Grande, grower relations manager at Jordan Vineyard & Winery, views vineyard management as having the biggest impact on phenolics. "Today I'm going to focus on the practices that keep our wines in balance," Grande said with subdued confidence. Before a hiatus from which she returned in 2020, the Sonoma native helped to oversee the winery's vineyards for 13 years, so she's undoubtedly responsible at least in part for its reputation for creating elegant, food-friendly wines with unwavering consistency.

Founded by Tom and Sally Jordan in 1972, Jordan is now owned and operated by their son, John, who sustainably farms roughly 1,200 acres in the Alexander Valley, around three-quarters of which are left untouched for the sake of conservation. Thanks to the hot Mediterranean climate tempered by forgiving breezes that funnel through the Petaluma Gap, Bordeaux varieties—particularly Cabernet Sauvignon—thrive in the Sonoma County subregion. Roughly 80% of the Cab grows on the benchland of the valley floor, taking advantage of well-draining soils ideal for the variety.

As an example of Alexander Valley's highly regarded Cabernet, Grande presented Jordan's 2016 vintage. Although she acknowledged several vineyard practices that affect phenolics, she focused mainly on fruit thinning, through which Grande aims for Jordan's signature balance via two main phases: the crop adjustment pass and the green drop. In the former, she and the team look for factors like fruit distribution on the vine and overall vine growth to determine how much fruit to drop; then, at about 75–90% veraison, the latter involves another pass that encourages uniformity throughout the vineyard.

The viticulturalist readily acknowledged that winemaking practices like blending also impact the wine's phenolic levels, but true to form, she ended her presentation by attributing the bulk of the 2016 vintage's character to the vineyard. She noted that the crop adjustment pass was particularly important, as yields were a bit higher that year. "This wine has that beautiful structure; I really love the tannins," said Grande. "It's got a great fruitiness and the flavors we're looking for, but really what I love about [it] is the mouthfeel, structure, and the richness, and it's because these vines were balanced."



PHOTO: MARC OLIVIER LEBLANC

BODEGA ALTOCEDRO

Location: La Consulta, Uco Valley, Argentina

Presenter: Karim Mussi Saffie, winemaker/proprietor

Argentina might be known for its varietal Malbecs, but Bodega Altocedro winemaker/proprietor Karim Mussi Saffie believes that the La Consulta area within the Uco Valley subregion of Mendoza is capable of producing much more than this structured, blue fruit-driven wine.

The Uco Valley is regarded for its high-elevation vineyards, the majority of which are at 3,000 feet or higher. Within it, the area of La Consulta is coveted for its desert conditions, offering ideal factors like low rainfall, a cool continental climate, and high levels of sun exposure. Mussi told the audience that, generally, Bordeaux varieties and Malbec grow on alluvial soils in the north of La Consulta, while Tempranillo grows on the chalky, sandy colluvial soils in the south. Bodega Altocedro sustainably farms 17 different estate vineyards across the area, some of which still harbor their original rootstock.

Established in 1999, the family-owned winery is one of La Consulta's pioneering producers. Mussi, who's been with Altocedro since the beginning, prides himself on expressing the terroir to the fullest

while practicing sustainability in the vineyard. "What makes this area unique is that we are at the perfect level of efficiency in terms of phenolic concentrations. Tannins to anthocyanins are usually seen in a one-to-five ratio" in other regions worldwide, he said. "Here in La Consulta, we have a higher concentration of anthocyanins, so we ask for additional time with the oak." The oak supplies additional tannins, helping to polymerize longer chains that make the color more stable and polish the fruit-derived tannins.

One such example is the Altocedro 2018 La Consulta Select red blend, which consists of Malbec, Cabernet Sauvignon, Cabernet Franc, Tempranillo, Merlot, and Syrah co-fermented in small concrete vats and aged 12 months in French oak. Mussi conducts native-yeast fermentation in Altocedro's gravity-flow winery, built in the 18th century, and eschews fining and filtration. These practices create wines with balance, elegance, and ageability, in his view. "[In Argentina as elsewhere], vineyard management, the oak regimen, the [timing of the] harvest, the macera-

tions, the temperature of fermentation, and [the length of] barrel aging are the key factors to building that beautiful [structure] of polyphenols that permit us to create elegant wines with a lot of balance and very bright acid."

Altocedro 2018 La Consulta Select, Uco Valley, Mendoza (\$20)

We were wowed by this blend of 40% Malbec, 19% Syrah, 15% Cabernet Sauvignon, 12% Tempranillo, 9% Cabernet Franc, and 5% Merlot grown on vineyards at 3,330 feet above sea level and aged eight months in (70% new) French oak barrels. Graphite and espresso notes are drying at first, but the palate then opens up like a wide double door, leading to velvety notes of big, bold, and tarry fruit. Blackberry preserves peek through black walnut and plum tannins. **92**
—Meridith May



VINO DEL SOL

PHOTOS COURTESY OF BODEGA ALTOCEDRO



The entrance to La Consulta, a winegrowing area within the Uco Valley.





Grapes air-dry on bamboo racks in accordance with the *appassimento* process.

MASI AGRICOLA

Location: Veneto, Italy

Presenter: Andrea Dal Cin, enology director; Masi Technical Group

PHOTOS COURTESY OF MASI AGRICOLA



Amarone juggernaut Masi Agricola was established in 1772, when the Boscaini family purchased a vineyard in a small valley then known as Vaio dei Masi. After more than two centuries as proven experts in the *appassimento* method, the publicly traded company remains under family control, and although it's rooted in its great history and the traditional winemaking methods of the Valpolicella Classico zone, research and innovation remain vital. For this reason, a team of experts in viticulture, enology, and marketing formed the Gruppo Tecnico Masi (Masi Technical Group); among them is Andrea Dal Cin, the group's enology director, who appeared on the webinar panel to talk

phenolics and present Masi's 2015 Costasera Amarone della Valpolicella Classico.

Masi farms 673 hectares across several classico zones in the Veneto. "Our soils [in Valpolicella Classico], from which we source the grapes grown for Costasera, are composed of marl and limestone," said Dal Cin. "Our [rock-filled] vineyards . . . also have the sediments of an ancient volcanic eruption and [remnants of] seabed from 6 million years ago, so we have a really rich[, red] calcareous soil known as *marl rosso de Verona*." Part of Masi's mission involves focusing on native Venetian grapes, which naturally thrive in these soils. The term *costasera* refers specifically to slopes that face the sunset; in Valpolicella Classico, the vines benefit from lengthy days as well as the light reflected off of the surface of Lake Garda, not to mention its tempering influence.

Featured in Costasera's blend are the native Corvina, Rondinella, Molinara, and Oseleta varieties. Dal Cin noted that 90% of Masi's

vines are trained on a pergola system; the remaining 10% use the guyot training method. A thermal image of both systems showed a dramatic difference in temperature, with the pergola reading much cooler. "With a certain degree increase in temperature, we start to see a decrease in quality, specifically within the phenols in the grapes," said the enologist.

Another factor that may impact phenolics and overall grape expression in Amarone is the aforementioned *appassimento* process, in which the hand-sorted grapes air-dry for 50–120 days during the winter on bamboo racks, thereby concentrating their sugars, aromas, and flavors. But, interestingly enough, "the grapes are still alive," said Dal Cin, meaning their phenolic profiles are continuing to evolve. According to a 100-day experiment conducted with the University of Verona's biotechnologies department, in which they compared Corvina, Cabernet Sauvignon, and Syrah that had been dried via *appassimento*, the genetic makeup of Corvina is best suited for optimizing flavors and aromas. "The level of expression is very high in *appassimento* grapes, so when we dry [them], we don't just decrease water [content], we're increasing the quality of the grapes," said Dal Cin.



CANVASBACK

Location: Red Mountain, Yakima Valley, Washington

Presenter: Brian Rudin, winemaker

PHOTOS COURTESY OF CANVASBACK



Before diving into Canvasback's take on phenolics, winemaker Brian Rudin had no choice but to address the hot, sweaty elephant in the virtual room: rising concern for the impact of heat on Washington's grapes. The webinar happened to take place just as the Pacific Northwest was experiencing a historic heatwave. "It's 117 degrees right now here in Red Mountain, but the trick to surviving heat like this is to get a suntan before the sunburn," said Rudin. For grapevines, that means strategically exposing grape clusters via careful canopy management, among other things. But Rudin was also quick to point out that Washington's warmer sites, Red Mountain included, might actually be less vulnerable to climate change than its cooler ones, where adapting to rising temperatures will be more difficult.

As the Cascade Mountains block the Pacific Ocean's influence, they create a rain shadow that results in extremely dry conditions in eastern Washington. That's where the 4,000-acre Red Mountain sub-AVA—one of the state's smallest and warmest winegrowing areas—is nestled within the Yakima Valley. With 40-degree-plus temperature swings; a northerly latitude, which makes for a long growing season; southwest-facing slopes, which maximize sun exposure; and uber-dry conditions that mitigate vine disease, it's renowned for producing Cabernet Sauvignon.

Rudin, a Washingtonian who grew up in the farming community of Wenatchee, became Canvasback's first winemaker in 2014; a year prior, he had helped to strategize the planting of the winery's 20-acre Longwinds Estate Vineyard. The wine he



Canvasback 2018 Cabernet Sauvignon, Klipsun Vineyard, Red Mountain, Washington (\$72)

The vines that yielded the fruit for this concentrated wine were planted in 1984 and 1989; seeing the addition of some Malbec and Merlot, it aged in 94% new oak for 20 months and delivers incredible depth of character. Dark cherry perfumes the glass before wildflowers and red tea generously grace the palate. Blue and red fruit are spiced with tobacco and iron. Silky to the finish. **95** —M.M.

THE DUCKHORN PORTFOLIO

The Hope Family Wines tasting room in Paso Robles.



HOPE FAMILY WINES

Location: Paso Robles, California

Presenter: Jason "JC" Diefenderfer, director of winemaking

Having grown grapes in Paso Robles since 1978, the Hope family has borne witness as the region gained worldwide recognition in recent years. Today they not only farm a handful of estate sites within the region but own and operate five different Central Coast-based labels. Director of winemaking Jason "JC" Diefenderfer presented one of the brightest gems in the lot, the 2019 Austin Hope Cabernet Sauvignon, which features fruit from the Huerhuero Vineyard.

The property, positioned on a hill within

the Geneseo District subregion, receives the Pacific's maritime influence through the Templeton Gap as well as the winds that travel north and south through the entire valley. Due to these conditions, this location, which Diefenderfer referred to as the "Y intersection," experiences incredibly large diurnal swings—one of the largest in all of Paso Robles, a region already known for the largest diurnal swings in California. "It's a big 50- to 60-degree swing," said Diefenderfer.

The Central Coast native also noted that Huerhuero's soils consist of well-drained loamy material, which he believes impacts the balanced phenolic character in Hope Family's wines in general and the Austin Hope Cabernet Sauvignon in particular. "This [vineyard] is what I consider to be the glue in a lot of [our] wines," said Diefenderfer.

Interestingly enough, he also credited much of the phenolic level to the winemaking process: "I look at tannins and extraction a bit differently [than the other winemakers on the panel]. I'm looking at flavors but also data,

focus[ing] on color extraction by testing early fermented lots and lab micro-ferments with a spectrometer," said Diefenderfer; who added that he and the team will test batches of micro-ferments leading up to harvest. "From that, we'll break those down and ferment our wines differently and then blend together at the end."

Diefenderfer noted that they also run ferments at high temperatures of around 85–95 degrees Fahrenheit "to get higher extractions early on." He believes it's necessary in Paso, as the aforementioned diurnal swings tend to produce grape skins whose thickness makes their higher levels of tannins and color harder to extract than in other regions of California.

The Paso-centric presentation ended appropriately enough with a quote that Diefenderfer shared from his former schoolmate and longtime friend Austin Hope, now proprietor of Hope Family Wines: "[Hope Family Wines means] striving to make wines that reflect all that Paso has to offer and to inspire people to be just as excited about the region as we are."



ST. SUPÉRY ESTATE VINEYARDS & WINERY

Location: Rutherford, Napa Valley, California

Presenter: Michael Scholz, VP of winemaking and vineyards



Michael Scholz began his presentation by describing St. Supéry, for which he serves as VP of winemaking and vineyards, as an “estate brand,” meaning it grows and sustainably farms 100% of its fruit from estate sites in Napa Valley. Of the 50 acres that surround the Rutherford winery, around 35 are planted to vine, but the hillside Dollarhide Ranch estate vineyard truly distinguishes the producer due to its tremendously diverse terrain. St. Supéry is known worldwide for the Bordeaux varieties it produces at both locations, particularly Sauvignon Blanc and Cabernet Sauvignon.

The Australian winemaker described the 1,587-acre Dollarhide Ranch as “kind of a valley within itself.” Originally a cattle ranch

in operation since the 1800s, the property has been in the care of St. Supéry since 1982, when the winery was founded by third-generation French vintner Robert Skalli. Dollarhide ranges from 600 to 1,100 feet in elevation, and its varied topography—flatlands, seven lakes, both steep and rolling hills—is home to an abundance of wildlife that St. Supéry aimed to protect by planting only 500 acres to grapes. It also encompasses seven different soil series and 13 soil variations (or subseries, which are classified according to parent materials, color, texture, and other characteristics). “As we climb through these elevations, we see our soils become more shallow, with a tremendous amount of variation on the property as a result,” noted Scholz, who helped replant some of the vineyard in the late 1990s. “That in turn brings an enormous amount of variability to what we can do . . . [as] this variability creates differing opportunities within the wines and their phenolic profiling, structuring, and density.”

He also highlighted the site’s abundance of old vines, with one-third of its Cabernet plantings around 35 years of age, as he presented the St. Supéry 2016 Dollarhide Estate Vineyard Cabernet Sauvignon: “There is beauty to them, and they produce wines that have tremendous density, texture, integrity, and ageability. These old vines tend to be consistent and reliable. Younger plantings bring with them improvements in viticultural design due to our ever-improving knowledge and therefore exciting future,



PHOTOS COURTESY OF ST. SUPÉRY

but they take time to mature.”

It’s not just the age of the vines, however, that contributes to phenolics. Like his fellow presenters, Scholz attributed viticultural practices such as cluster load, cluster spacing, and leaf removal to a wine’s eventual phenolic profile while stressing that winemaking techniques can play an equally influential role. In relation to vintage variation, the timing of these practices in both the vineyard and the winery are layered factors. “We’re a little conservative [with leaf removal]. We remove leaves on one side of the vine, as we believe it improves both the color of the berry and the progression of that phenolic structuring, while looking for an even display of fruit to ensure correct exposure, as the phenolic opportunity is created in the vineyard,” said Scholz.

In the winery, methods such as the use of hand and optical sorting, small-lot fermentations, varying fermenting vessels, measuring phenolics during maceration, and monitoring barrel temperature prior to malolactic fermentation all contribute to producing wines with phenolic structure like the bold mountainous character for which the St. Supéry Dollarhide Cabernet Sauvignon is known. “We like to extract as much as we can early in the [maceration] phase. At the end of the day, we’ll achieve greater concentration yet more gentle, plush wines,” Scholz explained.



GOLDSCHMIDT VINEYARD

Location: Alexander Valley and Oakville, California

Presenter: Nick Goldschmidt

PHOTOS COURTESY OF GOLDSCHMIDT



In addition to making wine and consulting in countries like Chile, Canada, New Zealand, and Argentina, Nick Goldschmidt owns and oversees a portfolio of nine California brands with his wife, Yolyn. Their flagship brand is Goldschmidt Vineyards, which was established in 2008 and focuses on the production of single-vineyard Cabernet Sauvignon from Alexander Valley and the Napa Valley sub-AVA of Oakville.

The New Zealand native presented the Goldschmidt Vineyards 2016 Cabernet Sauvignon and the Goldschmidt Vineyards 2015 PLUS Cabernet Sauvignon, both of which hail from the Yoeman Vineyard in Alexander Valley. Goldschmidt noted that the latter is sourced from the lush end rows of the vineyard, which yield polyphenols that are “a little bit different” from the rest of the site, situated on east-facing terraces that wrap around the hills just outside Geyserville. But what makes the vineyard special to Goldschmidt is that much of it is planted to cane-pruned, heritage-selection, old-vine Cabernet Sauvignon that’s dry farmed, unlike that in much of the region. (In fact, Goldschmidt insisted that unless a vineyard is dry farmed, it can’t express “true terroir”—a viewpoint that could perhaps serve

as the topic of another webinar.)

During his presentation, Goldschmidt shared a slew of slides that helped to define the basics of phenolics while detailing his approach to showcasing them through his wines. “The bottom line for me is color; so how do we keep these wines in the primary color for the longest period of time [as they age]?” he asked. “And the tannins are the preservatives. So how do we maintain this fruitiness by using the tannin . . . and keeping the tension, brightness, and the nerve of the Cab?”

In attempting to answer these questions, he touched on things like phenolic volume and maturity, which can be attributed to berry size; smaller berries mean higher skin-to-pulp ratio, which can be more easily achieved during a drier season and through cane pruning (versus spur pruning). Speed of ripening also affects phenolics: The earlier the grapes experience heat, the less time the tannins will have to mature. Anthocyanins, a major contributor to a wine’s stability, are influenced by factors like heat, light, air, and time, but Goldschmidt noted that older vines seem less affected by these elements.

In the winery, “time is the key,” he added, referring to the amount of time the wine spends on the skins during extraction—a decision usually based on whether the grapes are sourced from what he calls an “elegant vineyard” or a “dense vineyard,” where “I have to extract a lot less,” Goldschmidt noted. Yoeman PLUS represents the dense terroir; Yoeman the elegant.

After relaying a dizzying amount of information, the frank winemaker ended his presentation on a humorous note by insisting that his dogs are the real viticultural experts: “Our final decision is always up to the Ridgeback, because she’s the princess.”



Goldschmidt Vineyards 2016 PLUS Cabernet Sauvignon, Yoeman Vineyard, Alexander Valley

(\$120) This small mountain vineyard sits just south of Geyserville on glacial loam soils. Aged for four years in French barrels, this big, bold, and juicy red is a fruit-forward and beefy beauty. Violets and espresso coat the luxurious mouthfeel and round tannins are washed with black licorice and dark plum before velvety notes of blackberry appear on the finish. **96** —M.M.



Goldschmidt Vineyards 2016 Ultimum Cabernet Sauvignon, Double Rock Vineyard, Oakville (\$500)

The first vintage of this stellar red makes a spectacular entry on a silk road. The name translates in Latin as “final,” which is fitting, as Goldschmidt sees each vintage as the final result of exceptional winemaking and viticultural practices. The name Double Rock, meanwhile, “comes from the idea that the hillside is rocky,

and as we farm by hand, we take the rocks in the middle of the avenue and add them under the vines, doubling the number of rocks there,” he explained. “The vineyard, being so steep and closely planted, is farmed all by hand, and [it’s] so easy to farm organically.” Ripe red berries hit the palate’s pleasure center, joining a sweet, velveteen thread of peony, rose, and mountain brush. Notes of thyme and spiced mulberry are flavorful and fragrant. **98** —M.M.

Chelsea Goldschmidt 2019 Guidestone Rise Merlot, Alexander Valley

(\$22) Planted along Route 128 just east of Geyserville, the estate vineyard that yields this 100% Merlot—named for Goldschmidt’s oldest daughter, Chelsea—is on the cooler side. With flowers perfuming the glass, the wine is chewy, dense, and delicious. A rapturous array of chalky tannins is bathed in black cherry and coats the teeth with beet, plum, and rhubarb. Mocha and sweet tobacco round out the juicy finish. **93** —M.M. **\$**

Into Il Blu

AS **CASA BRANCAIA** CELEBRATES 30 YEARS OF ITS ICONIC TUSCAN WINE, OWNER AND WINEMAKER BARBARA WIDMER LOOKS BACK ON THE EVOLUTION OF HER FAMILY'S ESTATE

by Stefanie Schwalb

IT HAS BEEN three decades since Tuscan winery Casa Brancaia debuted its flagship wine Il Blu, and the timing of its 30th anniversary couldn't be better: Given the exceptional potential of the 2018 vintage, the wine's latest release makes the celebration extra-special.

Il Blu came to fruition after Bruno and Brigitte Widmer purchased a Tuscan estate, which included a small winery, as their holiday home. The Swiss couple decided to cultivate the vineyards on the property and secretly hoped this endeavor would become a family business if their daughter, Barbara Widmer, took an interest in winemaking. Although she was originally drawn to architecture, Widmer soon switched gears, acquiring a wine merchant diploma in 1994; she then interned at one of Switzerland's first organic estates, Domaine des Balisiers, before going on to study enology at the University of Wädenswil while working for her parents' trading and import business, Vinothek Brancaia. In 1998, she returned to Brancaia to take over operations, and in 2007, she made Italy her permanent home. Widmer's pride and passion for winemaking at the estate—and for Il Blu in particular—is apparent in her commitment to its legacy of uncompromised quality and respect for the region's terroir.



PHOTOS COURTESY OF CASA BRANCAIA

Barbara Widmer took over winemaking duties on her parents' estate in 1998.

Brancaia's estate vineyard in Radda.



Barbara Widmer's father, Bruno, designed the label for Il Blu.

Brancaia 2018 Il Blu, Rosso

Toscana IGT (\$100) Chewy, teeth-gripping tannins are captured in this full-bodied blend of 80% Merlot and 10% each Sangiovese and Cabernet Sauvignon. Named for the blue fruit that streams generously from start to finish, Il Blu features a silky mouthfeel and hallmark elegance. Violets, blueberry liqueur, and brown-sugared beets lend additional depth and complexity to the experience. **96** —*Meridith May*

Forging Their Own Path

There are two sides to the story of Il Blu: the wine and the label. “The dream of my parents was to produce a Super Tuscan and make a more modern wine at that time than a Chianti Classico. It started with their love for wine in France—especially Bordeaux,” says Widmer. “That’s one of the reasons why they wanted to plant Merlot and Cabernet Sauvignon” in addition to Sangiovese in Brancaia’s two Chianti vineyards in Castellina and Radda. At the outset, the blend was Sangiovese-dominant with just a touch of Merlot. It later evolved to contain roughly equal amounts of Merlot and Sangiovese along with a bit of Cabernet Sauvignon. And as the complexity of the Merlot continued to increase—especially that of the fruit from Radda’s 30-plus-year vines—so too did the proportion used. The 2018 vintage features 80% Merlot and 10% each Sangio-

vese and Cabernet Sauvignon.

For Widmer, winemaking is a personal experience more akin to philosophy than science. “Whatever we are doing, you can’t repeat it [back-to-back]. Science is very precise—you do something, you figure it out, and you can redo it,” she notes. “In winemaking, we can’t do that. It doesn’t mean we can’t learn and improve, but every year nature is giving us new challenges and qualities.” While the winery uses technology to obtain precise measurements of things like soil temperature and humidity, at the end of the day, key decisions on harvest timing, length of skin contact, and barrel usage are all about intuition.

Although Brancaia lacks the traditional background shared by many Tuscan wineries given its relative youth, its team has always been open to honoring the region’s history while simultaneously never being afraid to try something new—which brings us back to the packaging. A study in minimalism, Il Blu’s unique blue label and contrasting orange capsule haven’t changed since the wine’s inception 30 years ago. “My dad created [the label],” explains Widmer. “His background is advertising, so he thought, ‘We have a beautiful house—definitely not a castle—and there’s no family history, so let’s do something different.’” At the time, the bottle design was shocking to those in the region. “People said, ‘This is not a wine label,’” she says. “Today, it looks modern. Probably the only thing that’s shocking is that it’s old but doesn’t really look it.” It’s a perfect match, she adds, be-

cause it’s “timeless, elegant, and unique—just what we think our wine should be.”

A Standout Vintage

Major milestones in Il Blu’s evolution include the introduction of organic farming in 1998, when Widmer took over, and the adoption of natural fermentation in 2012. Hand-harvested from the Castellina and Radda sites, the 2018 vintage is expected by Widmer’s team to be one of their best, with the quality of the Merlot exceeding expectations. They also implemented some new techniques they plan to keep in place moving forward: One, while each vineyard and variety continued to be aged separately in barriques (two-thirds new), they reduced the duration from 20 months to 18. And two, the final blend was refined in unlined concrete tanks for three months before bottling.

For Widmer, what makes 2018 a standout is its balance and elegance. “I would say that the drinkability of the wine when it’s young has increased. In the early years, you needed at least five years to have the first drinking pleasure,” she says. “Today, if you want to drink it right now, you can. You will have a beautiful structure, concentration, and elegance. But there is, of course, no need to drink it immediately; if you’re keen to get more mature flavors, you just need to give it some time. We are always trying to find out how we can improve the first drinking experience for our customer without losing the aging potential.” **SJ**



The town of Poppi in the Radda district of Chianti is home to the Casa Brancaia estate and tasting room.

A New Point of View

ANDIS WINES' LORENZO MUSLIA MUSES ON ITS NEWEST RELEASE, **CURSE OF KNOWLEDGE**, AND WHY WINES FROM THE SIERRA FOOTHILLS CAN BE A CHALLENGING SELL *by Lorenzo Muslia*

PHOTOS COURTESY OF ANDIS WINES



Lorenzo Muslia (right), partner at Andis Wines, consulting in the vineyard.

IT WAS 2014 when I left Italy and ventured into a “New World.”

To say I was culture-shocked at the start is an understatement. I went from walking out of my apartment in Florence and simply asking for an espresso to driving for 2 miles to engage in a three-minute interrogation with a barista: “What size, 16-ounce or 8-ounce? How many shots do you want? Do you need room for cream?”

Dinnertime used to be at 9 p.m., but now that’s bedtime. I used to make five stops at local grocery stores on the way home, and now everything is delivered to my doorstep.

But if I had to pick the thing that shocked me most, it was unquestionably the wines. I grew up drinking Old World wines that were the perfect complement

to food; they weren’t better or worse than those from California, just a different style.

In 2015, I joined Andis Wines in the Sierra Foothills. My ultimate goal was to use those memories to build a bridge between what I used to drink and what we’re able to make here. It’s not easy, and it never will be, but we’ve gotten closer and closer year after year as we continue to pursue perfection.

I have visited locales in over 35 states over the past several years, from northern Michigan and Houston to Honolulu and Richmond, Virginia. I’ve ventured into hundreds of restaurants and wine bars with the purpose of selling Andis Wines, and it has been a journey! Almost every time I sat down with a potential buyer or exchanged a phone call or email, it seemed



Andis Winery 2019 Painted Fields Curse of Knowledge, Sierra Foothills (\$25) A

powerhouse that effortlessly releases red and blue fruit into a stream of violets and mountain brush. Fine acidity leans into an inner meatiness to keep the palate as fresh as it is bold and complex. Floral and fruit aromatics persist through the finish. **93** —*Meridith May*

as though there was a preconceived perception of our wine, and it made me feel like I had something to prove. I wondered, “Why are people so skeptical and scared to try our wines from this region?”

It took me years to understand that the answer was in the history of what we used to be. We were “cursed by the knowledge” they had about our region, and the only way to break that spell was to make extraordinary wines. Opinions are hard to change in a short time, but it can be done.

So here it is: the result of our dedication to five years of vineyard research to thwart the curse and equip people with new knowledge of the beautifully balanced, high-quality wines emerging from the Sierra Foothills. **Painted Fields Curse of Knowledge** is not just another red blend from another winery—it contains the authentic fruit of our labor.

Made in partnership with Philippe Melka and Maayan Koschitzky, two industry heavyweights, the wine is our first Bordeaux-style red blend; it comprises 45% Cabernet Sauvignon, 30% Cabernet Franc, 18% Malbec, and 7% Merlot and aged 18 months in 20% new French oak barrels to create the perfect harmony between fruit and oak.

Dedicating Decades

A COMMITMENT TO SUSTAINABLE ORGANIC FARMING IS THE LEGACY AT **VOLKER EISELE FAMILY ESTATE**

PHOTOS COURTESY OF VOLKER EISELE ESTATE



Second-generation proprietor Alexander Eisele runs the family estate with his wife, Catherine Eisele, and winemaker Molly Lippitt; his sister, Christiane Eisele, also assists in the operation.

LOCATED IN NAPA VALLEY'S Chiles Valley District AVA, Volker Eisele Family Estate has been owned, operated, and farmed organically by the Eisele family since 1974. The Bordeaux varieties they grow are influenced by cooling Pacific Ocean breezes at high elevations in the eastern Vaca Mountains.

Founder Volker Eisele became a prominent name in the industry thanks to his efforts to upgrade quality winegrowing practices in Napa Valley over several decades in association with the University of California, Davis; he has also been recognized with numerous awards, including the Earl Thollander Environmental Award in 2007; the Napa County Farm Bureau's 2008 Agriculturist of the Year award; and the Leader of the Year award from the California Association of Winegrape Growers, which he received posthumously in 2015. His son Alexander, fluent in Spanish and German and equipped with a degree in international business, has committed himself to carrying on his father's legacy and now manages the vineyard and winery.

Volker Eisele Family Estate 2016 Terzetto, Chiles Valley District, Napa Valley (\$80) Equal proportions of Cabernet Sauvignon, Cabernet Franc, and Merlot organically grown on the estate are co-fermented to produce this wine. With considerable structure and a regal charm, ripe notes of black cherry and rhubarb meld with mocha and just-tilled soil. Aged 22 months in 60% new French oak. **95** —M.M.

Volker Eisele Family Estate 2015 Cabernet Sauvignon, Chiles Valley District, Napa Valley (\$60) This broad-shouldered, silky red blended with 25% Merlot shows cedar and plum within a graceful frame. Aged 22 months in 50% new French oak, it projects greatness with notes of espresso and cocoa. The terroir shines through and the texture is meaty yet distinctly refined. **94** —M.M.



Fog hangs over the Volker Eisele Family Estate in Napa's Chiles Valley District AVA.



The vineyards of Catalina View Wines in the new Palos Verdes Peninsula AVA.

PHOTO COURTESY OF JIM YORK

One Man, One Vineyard, One AVA


AN INTRODUCTION TO THE PALOS VERDES PENINSULA

by Kristen Shubert

THE EMAIL READ, "We harvest Pinot tomorrow," which was August 11—an early harvest date for any grape. I had my doubts, but excitedly made plans; I would witness the first harvest in Palos Verdes Peninsula since it became California's newest AVA on July 19.

Jim York is the owner of Catalina View Wines, the only commercial winery in the 15,900-acre appellation southwest of Los Angeles. As he explained to me, "The coastal climate, geology, soils, and elevation are perfect for the thin-skinned Pinot Noir and Chardonnay grapes." Winemaker Ken Brown, dubbed the Prince of Pinot, consults on the project. Because Catalina View's 5-acre vineyard "is only several hundred meters from the Pacific Ocean," he said, "it has a short dormancy period and a very narrow diurnal change during the growing season."

The ripening process here begins in January or February when the soil begins to warm, signaling the vines toward bud break. But due to that narrow shift—the difference between the warmest and coolest temperatures on any given day is 8–15 degrees—"the end result is that the time from bud break to harvest is about the same number of days as [in] the warmer east end of the Sta. Rita Hills," where diurnal temperatures can shift by 30 or 40 degrees, explained Brown. The Pinot Noir came in at a Brix of 23.8 degrees, as ripe as York and Brown had anticipated.

Given the continually increasing quality of the fruit his vineyard has yielded since its planting in 2012, York said, "We didn't want to print California on our labels; we wanted something more specific." It took three years for his petition for the Palos Verdes Peninsula AVA to be approved; now that it's official, he added, "I hope to plant an additional 15 acres." 

Rutherford Sisterhood

PEJU WINERY'S **SARA FOWLER** VIEWS WINEMAKING AS AN EXTENSION OF FAMILY VALUES

story by Randy Caparoso / photos by Clara Rice

THIS FALL, PEJU Winery winemaker and vice president of operations Sara Fowler celebrated her 16th harvest at the Rutherford estate, which is very much a family-run operation: That is to say, people named Peju are everywhere, leaving their fingerprints on all facets of their business in the historic heart of Napa Valley. When you drive onto the 30-acre estate, founded in 1983 by Tony and Herta "H.B." Peju, the sign on the stone wall at the front entrance proudly proclaims that you're entering "Peju Province"—an indication that the property is cut from a slightly different cloth than the rest of this storied appellation.

The couple's daughters, Lisa and Ariana, were just 6 and 3 years old, respectively,



PEJU Winery winemaker and vice president of operations Sara Fowler joined the family-run winery in 2006.



PEJU owns six vineyards across Napa Valley, all of which are overseen by Sara Fowler, including the one at its Rutherford estate.

when their family moved to Napa Valley from Los Angeles, where Tony ran several plant nurseries. Wine-country life became so thoroughly infused into the sisters' veins that they chose to remain there as adults to serve as co-owners and hands-on managers. The family's operations have since expanded to comprise six estate vineyards totaling 232 planted acres across five properties in Oak Knoll, Carneros, Calistoga, and Pope Valley. The original PEJU estate vineyard in Rutherford is certified organic by the California Certified Organic Farmers (CCOF), while the other five are sustainably farmed as they undergo the transition to certified-organic status.

The Pejus initially sold the Cabernet

Sauvignon grapes grown on the Rutherford estate to other wineries, but after they debuted the first vintage of PEJU Cabernet Sauvignon in 1985, it quickly became apparent that future success hinged upon production of their own wines. In the mid-1990s, the family completed construction on a winery and tasting room; by that point, the PEJU H.B. Vineyard Cabernet Sauvignon had garnered accolades such as an appearance on *Wine Spectator's* Top 100 list.

Fowler's first order of business upon coming aboard in 2006 was to convert the estate to organic farming; from that point onward, she says, "I have never felt like I was employed by a company—

I felt like I became part of a family. A lot of it was because H.B. had as strong a role in the winery's direction as Tony, and Lisa and Ariana were always there and deeply involved."

Their leadership has solidified PEJU as a "strong women-run company" today, she adds, and while "it wasn't that way in the beginning, it is now predominantly women who run production, marketing, human resources, [and] the finance teams. This supportive, empathetic, female-led environment is reflected in the property grounds and the way we run our hospitality, and it also extends into our wines."

Fowler endeavors to ensure that the wines of PEJU reflect the character of the family's various estate vineyards. "You can't overemphasize the importance of growing your own fruit because that makes you conscious, as a winemaker, of retaining a sense of place—not messing with what you get out of the vineyards," she says. "PEJU wines are also made with a European mindset in that they are meant to go with food. I don't want anything to be overdone, over-extracted, or heavy—




A lineup of PEJU wines in the winery's Rutherford tasting room.

we go for brightness and freshness with balanced acidity."

In that vein, Fowler explains, "Oak is an example of something that is added only as needed. It's like using salt in the kitchen—why overdo it? Like a good chef who understands spices and ingredients, you can achieve a lot once you get to know your vineyards, even in wines aged in 100% new barrels."

One PEJU label, The Experiment, enables

Fowler and her team to work with a wide variety of barrels from various cooperages and compare the results to achieve the winery's trademark character. "Each year we order anywhere from 30 to 60 different types of barrels [from 25 to 60 different cooperages], and we'll age Cabernet Sauvignon from our Persephone Vineyard in two each of those new barrels," she says. "The barrels reflect ... different forests, [different] thicknesses of staves, [and] different toast levels reflecting different temperatures and lengths of toasting—some with barrel heads that are toasted and some with heads that are not [as well as] steamed barrels versus fire-bent barrels, American versus French, and so forth. Learning what we have in terms of barrels is like learning what we have in the way of fruit from all the different blocks in our vineyards."

In short, she adds, The Experiment "gives us the opportunity to match our oak with fruit in order to produce the types of wines that, say, a sommelier might prefer, which are well-integrated wines that do not scream 'oaky' and, of course, pair well with food." 

TASTING NOTES

PEJU 2020 Legacy Collection Sauvignon Blanc, Napa Valley (\$28)

This expression is crafted with fruit from the estate's Persephone and Tess vineyards in Pope Valley—which could more accurately be described as being on the back side of Howell Mountain, since they sit on slopes over 1,000 feet in elevation. It's fermented in stainless steel, with some lees stirring in the tank to enhance the texture of its keenly crisp, tense, lemony medium body, but it lacks any leasiness on the nose; instead, floral, citrus, and honeydew scents carry through a fresh, snappy finish.

PEJU 2020 Reserve Cabernet Franc, Napa Valley (\$150)

Although Cabernet Sauvignon makes up 20% of the blend, it lends none of the tannin or weightiness one might expect; instead, this is a svelte, velvety, long, and even-keeled wine that studiously avoids the green characteristics associated with the primary varietal. Aging in French oak (85% new) highlights the pungency of cedar, mint, and raspberry on the nose and adds to a layered, round, and savory feel. A good example of Fowler's ability to employ oak without falling into its sensory trappings.

PEJU 2018 Cabernet Sauvignon, Napa Valley (\$65)

Crafted from PEJU's Pope Valley, Oak Knoll, Calistoga, and Rutherford estate sites, this wine aged 19 months in French and American barrels (40% new). The addition of 4% Merlot and a half-percent each of Petit Verdot and Cabernet Franc adds up to an appealingly plump and sumptuously layered and textured wine, generous in its focus on black currant and black cherry and tinged with herbaceous/cigar-box qualities. Staying true to both its varietal and its place of origin, this Cabernet Sauvignon is exactly what it's supposed to be.

PEJU 2019 Legacy Collection Cabernet Sauvignon, Napa Valley (\$65)

With the same barrel regimen and SRP as the PEJU 2018 Cabernet Sauvignon, the 2019 Legacy Collection is a more classic Bordeaux blend (75% Cabernet Sauvignon, 17% Merlot, 6% Petit Verdot, and 2% Malbec) that shows signature finesse. The deep and pungent nose expresses cassis without a sense of excess extraction or oakiness, and the mastery of the blending is manifested in the moderately weighted, polished, round, and seamless core of concentrated fruit, which is tinged with subtle, smoky spice.

PEJU 2018 Barrel Exp 100% Cabernet Sauvignon, Napa Valley (\$110)

This iteration of The Experiment is every bit as exquisite as the label's previously acclaimed vintages; in 2018, it involved 40 different barrels crafted by 25 coopers. Mint leaf and espresso bean bring the varietal character of the wine into sharp focus unburdened by clumsy sensations of oak. The medium-full body, while restrained, is filled to the brim with rich, zesty smoke- and spice-toned qualities beefed up by sturdy yet finely polished tannins. Simply put, this wine wows.

THE PARAMETERS OF

Excellence

by Jessie Birschbach

IN MID-AUGUST, the steadfast moderator for our Geographical Digest webinar series, Lars Leicht, smiled into his computer camera while sipping on a glass of bubbly and offered his experienced take on the subject at hand: estate vineyards and the special fruit they yield. *The SOMM Journal's* VP of education described the discovery of exceptional grape sources as the "holy grail of winemaking and the starting point on a winemaker's mission toward excellence."

This concept is widely agreed upon in any medium; chefs naturally like to work with the best, freshest ingredients, for example, and artists choose their raw materials with intention. But when it comes to viticulture's role in production, there's something more at stake, and that something is almost always viewed in the geographical terms of terroir. Thankfully, we had Greg Van Wagner and his three-dimensional wine map platform, SommGeo, on hand to help navigate the terrain. Read on to travel with us to a handful of exceptional estate-owned vineyards.

**OUR "ESTATE OF MIND:
FRUIT FROM AN
EXCEPTIONAL SOURCE"
WEBINAR EXPLORED
DISTINGUISHED VINEYARDS**

Chalk-like volcanic tufa is found in abundance in the Mt. George Vineyard.

SILVERADO VINEYARDS

Location: Napa Valley, California

Focus: Mt. George Vineyard, Coombsville AVA

Presenter: Russ Weis, president



PHOTOS COURTESY OF SILVERADO VINEYARD



FOUNDED IN 1981 by Ron and Diane Miller (Walt Disney's daughter), Silverado Vineyards remains family-owned today, sustainably farming 360 acres of plantings. Its portfolio consists solely of estate-grown and -bottled expressions.

Silverado Vineyards president Russ Weis directed the audience's attention to an illustrated slide of the estate's six vineyards scattered about Napa Valley, "but we'll be focusing on that one in the top left corner in Coombsville, Mt. George Vineyard," said Weis. Positioned near the Napa River where it flows into the San Francisco Bay, the historic vineyard was planted in 1868, making it one of the oldest plantings of *Vitis vinifera* in Napa Valley and certainly the oldest in the Coombsville AVA, which was established in 2012. In fact, Silverado team members were part of the committee that petitioned for

the creation of the subregion, which according to Weis came to fruition thanks mostly to its unusual (for Napa, anyway) tufa-based soil profile.

"Like Carneros, Coombsville sits down on the San Francisco Bay, which keeps our winters a bit more moderate and our summers quite a bit cooler because of the fog," said Weis. Despite the area's enviable weather, the California native admitted that he was a bit jealous of growers in another region featured in the webinar, the Anderson Valley, which is blessed with sufficient rainfall: Coombsville averages just 24.6 inches annually, "and we're also in our third year of a drought." This, however, is where the ubiquitous tufa soil that makes Coombsville unique in Napa also becomes its saving grace.

Weis shared an image of the Mt. George Vineyard, which starts below the foot of the mountain

and climbs about a third of the way up its slope, as he explained how the tufa formed in the area through an igneous leak: "The pressure of the volcano pushed the soils down and out, away from the crest of the hill," he said, noting that tufa "looks like a rock, but you can crumble it in your hands. . . . So 15–25 feet below the topsoil, you have these huge chunks of [it], and even in a very dry season like 2021, the rain will drain through the gravel and collect in these chalky chunks of soil. The vines tap into that and find a consistent source of water throughout the growing season, which is why [Coombsville] is one of the oldest places to grow grapes: You could dry farm there in the 19th century."

Weis presented the 2017 GEO Cabernet Sauvignon, named after Mt. George to honor the mountain and its soils. Silverado's veteran winemaker of over 30 years, Jon Emmerich, and 25-year associate winemaker Elena Franceschi produce the single-vineyard wine in a classic Coombsville style, with broad, chewy, brambly black fruit.



Mt. George Vineyard in Coombsville.

J. LOHR

VINEYARDS & WINES

Location: Paso Robles, California

Focus: Shotwell Vineyard, El Pomar District AVA

Presenter: Steve Carter, regional vineyard manager

RAISED ON A FARM in South Dakota, Jerry Lohr was led by agricultural intuition to the Central Coast of California in the late 1960s; by 1972, he had planted his first 280 acres in Monterey County. “We’re coming up on our 50-year anniversary,” noted regional vineyard manager Steve Carter, who himself has been with the company since 1989. He explained that Lohr originally planted a range of different grapes but eventually realized that the Monterey area was a little too cool for Bordeaux varieties—so in the mid-1980s, Lohr found a new home for them in a

then little-known area called Paso Robles, “and that’s when he began his ‘right grapes, right place’ mantra.” (See also page 42.)

Today, J. Lohr sustainably farms more than 2,800 acres across five Paso Robles sub-AVAs. In the more southern El Pomar District, for instance, is the 266-acre Shotwell Vineyard. The veteran viticulturalist noted that the J. Lohr Hilltop Cabernet Sauvignon he was sharing was sourced primarily from this site, particularly the ridges of its hills. “Our Hilltop Cab that you’re tasting today came from an observation that we made [after purchasing the site



PHOTO COURTESY OF ACAGIA PRODUCTIONS

eight years ago]: The vines that are growing on the knolls of the vineyard produced less fruit, but [it was] more deeply colored [and] possessed more dense fruit character,” said Carter. Growing on thinner, less fertile soil, these vines don’t have the vigor of their neighbors downslope, “and that’s

Shotwell Vineyard in the El Pomar District of Paso Robles.



just what we're looking for to produce a special wine," he added.

Regarding the commonalities between the Hilltop Cab and J. Lohr's lower-priced Seven Oaks Cabernet Sauvignon, Carter told the webinar audience that "if you compare today's Seven Oaks to the Hilltop of 15 years ago, you'll see that Seven Oaks has now reached a similar phenolic profile. And our current Hilltop has achieved an even higher level." Although the two expressions undergo a different regimen, with the Hilltop seeing all French oak (70% new/40% neutral) and the Seven Oaks all American oak (20% new/80% neutral), he attributed the advanced quality of the latter to factors like new vineyard sites and new clones and rootstocks as well as decades of experience.

The El Pomar District may be warmer than the Monterey sites J. Lohr started with, but it's still only a Region II on the Winkler Scale, thanks mainly to what many call the "air conditioner" of Paso Robles:



the Templeton Gap. In fact, even though El Pomar was known only for growing Merlot at the time Shotwell was developed, Lohr recognized that by planting Cabernet Sauvignon there, he "could extend that harvest but also get that denser, more phenolic wine to form the base of our

Hilltop release," Carter explained. Planted with 8-by-4-foot spacing on crumbly, chalky, white calcareous Linne-Calado soil, the vines bear fruit that, as expressed in the Hilltop (with 5% Petit Verdot and 2% Malbec), prove Shotwell is certainly the right place for the right grape.





ROEDERER ESTATE

Location: Anderson Valley, Mendocino, California

Focus: Anderson Valley AVA

Presenter: Arnaud Weyrich, winemaker and senior vice president of production

“WE THINK OF OURSELVES as being the benchmark of Californian sparkling wine,” said Roederer Estate SVP of production Arnaud Weyrich. It’s a bold statement that’s also hard to argue with. Founded in 1982 by the Rouzard family of Champagne Louis Roederer, the winery works with 100% estate-grown fruit, a rarity among sparkling wine producers here in the United States.

The Rouzard family carefully chose the Anderson Valley to grow the traditional Champagne varieties for a number of reasons, the first and primary being its close proximity to the Pacific Ocean, whose cold waters cool the area down enough to rank as a Region I on the Winkler Scale, the same as Champagne. Due to its location “at the 39th parallel north latitude, the same as somewhere like Valencia in Southern Spain, [it] doesn’t seem like the place to grow grapes for acid-driven wines,” Weyrich admitted, noting that it still experiences 40- to 50-degree diurnal shifts. But they’re balanced by the maritime influence, represented by the image the winemaker shared of a sea of



PHOTOS COURTESY OF ROEDERER ESTATE



fog over the Anderson Valley, with the occasional small island of evergreen trees breaching the white mist.

Additional reasons the native Frenchman gave for growing Champagne grapes in the Anderson Valley included a range of altitudes up to 2,500 feet and the presence of low-pH soil types like sandstone and mudstone. The former allows for a variety of ripening phases and harvest passes, which serve as a buffer during more difficult weather patterns, giving Weyrich more options as a winemaker than he would have with a single harvest. As for the latter, he noted a particular type of weathered sandstone called Bearwallow, which has good water-holding capacity but still drains well: "It's well suited to Pinot Noir, as the grape doesn't like to get its feet wet for too long."

Weyrich treats the Pinot Noir and Chardonnay grown on the estate's 620 planted acres much as they do in Champagne, blending them with reserve wines from previous vintages, averaging four years of age (a practice that's rare in the States). He shared the multivintage Roederer Estate Brut and Rosé along with the 2013 L'Ermitage and the 2012 L'Ermitage Rosé, noting that they'll release the 2015 L'Ermitage before the end of this year: "Chardonnay and Pinot Noir have the beauty of being ageworthy," he pointed out. "The right level of malic acid enables you to make long-lasting, quality sparkling wine."



Roederer Estate 2013 L'Ermitage Brut, Anderson Valley (\$55) Following aromas of toasty vanilla and lemon scone, the palate opens with a squeeze of bright lemon, bubbles bouncing off the tongue. A touch of salinity, yellow-floral tones, and a hint of chiffon creaminess emerge along with guava and red cherry enhanced by honeyed tangerine. With a perfect beginning, middle, and end, the blend consists of 52% Chardonnay (including 4% reserve wine from the 2011 vintage) with 48% Pinot Noir. **95** —*Meridith May*

MAISONS MARQUES & DOMAINES

PATRIMONY ESTATES

Location: Paso Robles, California

Focus: DAOU Mountain, Adelaida District AVA

Presenter: Erik Johnson, estate manager

“THE LEGACY of the Daou brothers and Daniel Daou’s vision is why Patrimony exists today,” said Erik Johnson. The former head sommelier of The French Laundry, now serving as the Bordeaux-inspired Paso Robles winery’s estate manager, was tuning into the webinar from an airplane, but he made his point loud and clear as he elaborated: “It’s Daniel’s engineering background that’s gotten us to where we are today. He asked the question, ‘What *could* be the best wine in the world?’, not ‘What *should* be?’ He researched the greatest wines in Europe and California and the like and [determined] that [what] separates [those wines] from the others is terroir, . . . meaning both climate and soil. And looking at this vineyard [DAOU Mountain,] you

have [the best of] these.”

The Adelaida District AVA is situated on the cooler, rainier, higher-altitude side of Paso Robles; one only needs to glance at the greenness of DAOU Mountain to see that. Johnson shared a slide comparing the number of days that saw temperatures over 100 degrees on DAOU Mountain to that in the rest of Paso, as well as in St. Helena in Napa Valley and Pauillac in Bordeaux. While most of Paso saw 27 such days in 2019 and 32 in 2020, DAOU experienced zero in 2019 and only six in 2020; Pauillac’s numbers were similar. Johnson attributed the microcli-



mate to the elevation (the Adelaida District rises up to 2,200 feet), adding, “Once you get over a certain number of days over 100 degrees, you really start to lose quality.”

For Johnson, however, it’s not just the weather that makes DAOU Mountain special; it’s also the calcareous clay that makes up the first 18 inches of the site’s topsoil and the limestone beneath it. “The limestone is what sets us apart from the rest of California; truly unique is this small stretch of clay and limestone that’s only found in Paso Robles and a little bit down in Santa Maria,” he said. “Limestone is what gives you that minerality, acid,

DAOU Mountain in the Adelaida District of Paso Robles.



backbone, [and] balance from that really bright climate that we have here in Paso.”

True to form for Daniel Daou, the winemaking is equally remarkable, with methods like optical sorting, use of wild yeasts cultured from DAOU Mountain, and free-run juice only. Daou ages the Patrimony Cabernets, including the Patrimony Estate 2017 Cabernet Sauvignon presented by Johnson, for 30 months in French oak and an additional year in bottle. Johnson also shared an image of a 270-acre south-facing ranch adjacent to DAOU Mountain that will serve as the site of future plantings. “This will be the next chapter for us, to continue to elevate the overall quality in Paso and shine a light on Adelaida,” said Johnson. (For more on Patrimony, see page 46.)



Patrimony winemaker/owner Daniel Daou at the top of DAOU Mountain.



BANFI

Location: Gavi DOCG, Piedmont, Italy

Focus: Novi Ligure

Presenter: Elizabeth Booth, trade development manager

PHOTOS COURTESY OF BANFI



JUST A FEW YEARS after the Mariani brothers acquired their first property in Montalcino, they purchased a mid-19th-century winery in Piedmont in 1979. Today, the facility—known as Banfi Piemonte—produces a portfolio that includes Barbera, Dolcetto, a handful of sparkling expressions, and, of course, the region's famous white wine, Gavi.

Gavi is made with the native Piedmontese grape Cortese, and although it can technically be still or sparkling, the for-

mer is more common. Banfi is considered a pioneer of the refreshing, mineral-driven wine, as it helped propel Gavi into the international spotlight when it released its first vintage in 1995. Three years later, the Gavi appellation was elevated from DOC to DOCG status and today exports 85% of the wine it produces, according to the Consorzio Tutela del Gavi.

To really understand Gavi, she told the audience, it's important to know how different it is from its neighbors to the northwest, including Asti, Alba, Barolo, and Barbaresco. "Here we have a lot of climactic coastal influence; in fact, the region was part of Genova years ago [and] still maintains [Genovese] cultural influences," said Booth.

Gavi encompasses roughly 1,570 hectares of vines in the province of Alessandria, spanning from the "beautiful rolling hills," as described by Booth, from the north of Novi Ligure to the border of Liguria at elevations ranging from 500 to 1,400 feet. Though these areas are defined by a variety of microcli-

mates, "the meeting of the Ligurian Sea and the Apennines" creates an overarching semi-Mediterranean climate with cold winters and warm summers tempered by breezes from the ocean roughly 25 miles away. The naturally acidic Cortese grape thrives in these conditions, as "it needs those warmer temperatures to ripen," said Booth. "That's why you don't see it planted in other Piemonte subregions like Asti and Alba."

Banfi's vineyards are located in the Novi Ligure area of production, which features ancient alluvial deposits mixed with gravel: "It's this really beautiful kind of red clay soil," Booth said, noting that in addition to being naturally high in acid, Cortese can be quite vigorous. "We always work a tremendous amount in the vineyards, doing things like controlling our yields, making sure the quality of grapes is fantastic." She presented Banfi

Piemonte's 2019 Principessa Gavia Gavi as evidence: After the grapes go through what she described as "rigorous selection," they're fermented in stainless steel at a cool 64 degrees Fahrenheit, preserving the freshness and subtle fruit flavors. "Banfi has been making world-class Gavi for many years," she added proudly. "We've always believed in making approachable wines, but just as important is to highlight the incredible terroir."



Banfi Piemonte's vineyards in the Gavi region.





ZOLO WINERY

Location: Luján de Cuyo, Mendoza, Argentina

Focus: Finca Las Llamas in Alto Agrelo and Finca El Jarillal in Agrelo

Presenter: Martina Galeano, winemaker

PHOTOS COURTESY OF ZOLO



LUJÁN DE CUYO IS A SUBREGION

of Argentina's most prolific (and famous) wine-producing area, Mendoza. Also known as the Primera Zone, it's highly regarded due to its elevation at more than 3,000 feet above sea level. Zolo Winery's two estate vineyards in Agrelo, a province in the heart of Luján de Cuyo, take advantage of their coveted altitudes in different ways.

The 64-hectare Finca Las Llamas is located in the lower part of Agrelo at 3,125 feet above sea level. It was first planted in 1998 to 10 hectares of Cabernet Sauvignon, and the Bordeaux variety continues

to thrive today thanks to the site's arid climate as well as its well-draining alluvial soils, which formed over the years "from all the rocks and such that have come down from the Andes," said winemaker Martina Galeano, who received her master's degree in viticulture at the University of California, Davis. Galeano noted that the winery is adjacent to the vineyard, which provided the fruit for the Zolo 2018 Reserve Cabernet Sauvignon; the wine aged about 14 months in new and second-use barrels and, like most wines from this area, is "really aromatic, with good structure and velvety tannins," she said.

To the west of Finca Las Llamas is Zolo's Finca El Jarilla estate, situated in the upper part of Agrelo, or Alto Agrelo, at 3,450 feet above sea level. Unlike Las Llamas, the 45-hectare property, which was planted in 2008, grows both white and red grapes, and the Bordeaux varieties are own-rooted. Here the vines take advantage of the pebbly alluvial soils and 3% slope, which help mitigate fungal diseases and frost dam-

age, according to Galeano. The vineyard team harvests all the fruit grown here by hand, including Sauvignon Blanc—making three passes, each six days apart, to maximize the grape's aromas and flavors while preserving its naturally low alcohol levels. "The first and earliest harvest [captures its] green character[istics], like peas and grass; the second harvest brings on the citrus aromas; and the third harvest [yields] more tropical pineapple and passion-fruit flavors," Galeano explained.

The newest release from this vineyard, the 2021 OSMOSIS Sauvignon Blanc, is a true reflection of its potential. Clocking in at only 9% ABV, it's full of bright acidity and the tropical-fruit notes typical of Las Llamas; it's also certified vegan and gluten-free, according to Galeano, who added, "We are really excited about this one."

Fincas Patagónicas 2021 OSMOSIS Sauvignon Blanc, Mendoza, Argentina (\$15) Made with sustainably farmed estate fruit grown in the foothills of the Andes at 3,440 feet above sea level, this "better-for-you" wine is lighthearted and clean, with only 9% ABV, zero sugar, and aromas of grapefruit and papaya. White pear, wet rock, and honeysuckle add character. **90** —M.M. SJ

Beaujolais

IN THE BIG APPLE

The Beaujolais Nouvelle Génération tasting was held at La Mercerie Café in New York City's SoHo neighborhood.

A RECENT LUNCHEON FOR WINE PROFESSIONALS REINFORCED THE REGION'S BROAD APPEAL

story by Wanda Mann
photos by Doug Young



The tasting featured a lineup of six wines from various Beaujolais producers.

If you're ever faced with

the challenge of luring a group of wine professionals to lunch in New York City during an August heatwave, the wines of Beaujolais are certainly an effective enticement. Add in an elegant location like La Mercerie Café in SoHo and the expertise of Advanced Sommelier and wine educator Erik Segelbaum, and success is all but guaranteed. "If you're here, it's because you like Beaujolais and you know Beaujolais," Segelbaum said to the attendees of the Beaujolais Nouvelle Génération tasting, whose smiles and requests for refills illustrated the enthusiasm they had for the region.

Segelbaum, who is the founder of hospitality agency SOMLYAY as well as a contributing editor at *The SOMM Journal*, understood that this savvy group of professionals from some of the city's most respected restaurants and retailers already possessed a solid foundation in Beaujolais. So instead of reviewing the basics, he opted to augment their existing knowledge by sharing some key attributes that have secured its status as a premier wine region. Running along the Saône River between Burgundy to the north and the Rhône to the south, it's best known among consumers for producing Beaujolais Nouveau, but Segelbaum reminded his audience that the hills and plains of its vineyards are capable of yielding the kind of elegance and quality that serves as an effective selling point. "If you're passionate about something, you can sell it," Segelbaum reminded the group. "Your job is to create a profitable wine program with a well-trained staff."



Serving as the host of the tasting, Advanced Sommelier and wine educator Erik Segelbaum (right, pictured with author Wanda Mann) reviewed the qualities that make Beaujolais such a coveted wine region.



Leeks in curry vinaigrette, black sea bass with tomato concassé and fresh herbs, and fresh red berries were among the pairings featured during the luncheon.

To be sure, perhaps the only thing more competitive than acquiring New York City real estate is securing placement on a local wine list. But according to luncheon guest Jeff Harding, beverage director for the Waverly Inn in Greenwich Village, Beaujolais earns it by being “a great value with name recognition that’s easy to sell. . . . People always get a second bottle. And finally, for the wine nerds, there are endless styles and terroirs to explore, so it’s fun to have a juicy, easygoing value wine and then a coveted producer’s gem that is still affordable.”

Although all Beaujolais reds and rosés are produced from Gamay and the whites from Chardonnay, the region’s 12 distinct appellations indeed offer a diverse range of styles. To better communicate the nuances of Beaujolais; Beaujolais Villages; and the region’s ten crus (Brouilly, Côte de Brouilly, Régnié, Morgon, Chiroubles, Fleurie, Moulin-à-Vent, Chénas, Juliénas,

and Saint-Amour), Segelbaum paired each with a one-word alliterative descriptor: For example, wines from Fleurie have floral qualities, Juliénas was deemed juicy, Régnié is regal, and Morgon’s wines are massive.

Gamay, whose full name is Gamay Noir à Jus Blanc, is a natural cross between Pinot Noir and Gouais Blanc and accounts for 98% of production in Beaujolais. Planted in the region since the early 17th century, the red wines it yields show fruit notes of strawberry, raspberry, and cherry; floral notes of violet, rose, and lily of the valley; and spice notes of cinnamon, vanilla, and white pepper as well as flavors of minerals, leather, and eucalyptus. Consumers are increasingly drawn to the fruit-forward style of Beaujolais rosé, meanwhile, driving its growth. Chardonnay accounts for the remaining 2% of production, yielding white wines that are generally refreshing, round, and full of finesse.

Gamay’s impressive range can be attributed in part to the astounding diversity of Beaujolais’ soils; although the entire growing area is relatively small, measuring 61 square miles and 14,500 hectares, over 300 soil variants have been identified within its boundaries. The region also benefits from France’s three main climatic influences—continental currents, oceanic air movements, and Mediterranean winds—as well as the Haut-Beaujolais mountain range, which reaches 1,000 meters in altitude and serves to moderate the winds, including the *foehn* in the summertime. When this warm air from the west crosses the Beaujolais mountain ridges on its way down to the plain, it has a warming and drying effect that aids in grape ripening. The Saône, meanwhile, helps to regulate temperature.

Beaujolais’ heterogeneous nature has not gone unnoticed by event attendee



and water quality.

Praising Gamay's brightness, low acidity, and supple tannins, Segelbaum noted that Beaujolais' status as a food wine has made it "the top-selling wine in the brasseries of Paris." Best served chilled, it's "great with spice-forward foods, barbecue, and South Asian cuisine"—but while it's highly approachable, it can also be "hyper-complex and hyper-sophisticated," he added.

During the lunch, guests were able to mix and match dishes like leeks in curry vinaigrette, black sea bass with tomato concassé and fresh herbs, and fresh red berries with six wines: the Jean-Marc Burgaud 2018 Beaujolais Blanc, Domaine de la Prébende 2019 Beaujolais Rosé, Château de Châtelard 2018 Les Vieilles Vignes Beaujolais Villages, Henry-Fessy Château des Reysiers 2018 Régnié, Château de la Chaize 2018 Fleurie, and Château du

cian's hat," she said. "Almost everyone [has] heard of it, but few [have] dived deep and tasted wines beyond Beaujolais Nouveau. So many village or cru wines are delicious [and] still affordable, and [they] pair well with a plethora of cuisines yet do not need food to shine. Both whites and reds are refreshing, satisfying, and approachable without sacrificing complexity and charm."

"Beaujolais equals connectivity and conviviality," Segelbaum enthused as he introduced attendees to the idea of *Beaujonomie*, which the Beaujolais Wine Council describes as "a philosophy, a mindset, that advocates the spirit of sharing, exchanging, discovering, and rediscovering the vineyard. . . . The values of Beaujonomie are universal and now especially resonate with contemporaries who are seeking real, concrete sociability beyond the virtual world."

Reminding attendees of the tremendous

Daneen Steele-Lewis, who is happy to showcase it at the bustling shop she co-owns, Harlem Wine Gallery: "At the moment we carry [wines from] six appellations—mainly reds [and] one white and one rosé. There's something for everyone, from price point to versatility in food pairings," she said. "We love the fact that [the region] was a pioneer in sustainable environmental practices, in keeping with our buying habits, and introduces customers to historical family farmers along with a new generation of winegrowers."


It's true that Beaujolais embraced sustainability long before it became a trend. In 1989, its winemakers joined together to study their vines and determine an effective strategy to protect them; they now work collectively to further the impact of agroecology, an agricultural practice whose tenets include maintaining and reintroducing biodiversity while preserving soil vitality



Harlem Wine Gallery co-owner Daneen Steele-Lewis and Certified Sommelier/wine educator Bruno Almeida were among the New York City-based wine professionals in attendance.

Moulin-à-Vent 2018 Couvent des Thorins Moulin-à-Vent. The menu elegantly dispelled the old-fashioned notion that red wine doesn't go with fish, as the Beaujolais reds paired brilliantly.

Ganna "Ania" Fedorova, national beverage director for City Winery, also ranks among the region's proponents. "There is this incredible potential to pleasantly surprise a guest with wine from Beaujolais, a perfect bottle pulled out of the wine magi-

influence of the millennial wine drinkers who readily respond to such a concept, Segelbaum emphasized how Beaujolais can satisfy experimental young consumers seeking to try new wines, especially those with an authentic and compelling backstory. But perhaps its true beauty lies in its broad appeal: For everyone from the novice drinker to the discerning connoisseur, there's a delicious and elegant Beaujolais wine to match every mood and meal. 

Expanding Perspective

FOR ASIAN WINE PROFESSIONALS, THE PATH TO SUCCESS BEGINS WITH FOCUS AND DETERMINATION

story and photos by Wilfred Wong



HOW DO ASIAN wine professionals navigate an industry that is sometimes uncomfortably Western-centric? It isn't easy. Since the early 1970s, I have stayed steadfast in my goal to become an expert taster and a thorough student of the industry; early in my career, I was often the only Asian at any given wine tasting or conference. I did not let that deter me, however, as I kept my focus on doing what I had to do and wanted to do. In the meantime, the ethnic makeup of the wine industry has diversified over the years, but it still has a long way to go. After interviewing more than 20 Asian wine professionals, I found one commonality between them: focus and determination.



Upon arriving in Canada from Guyana as a child, **Robert Chin**, CEO of the Aquilini Beverage Group, became active in athletics and passionate about table tennis, winning national titles as he represented Canada internationally; that energy and competitive spirit served as his launchpad to the wine industry and continue to define him today. After spending most of his career at E. & J. Gallo Winery, the 30-plus-year industry executive is now on a mission to make Washington State, particularly the Red Mountain AVA, part of the fine wine conversation with his growing team at Aquilini, a leading North American beverage producer offering a portfolio of wine brands, ready-to-drink products, and spirits.

Taipei-born and -raised **Angie An** is the founder of online retailer Angie Somm. Recalling her father asking her as a young adult, "So when are you going to get a real job and stop bartending?", she admits, "I had a difficult time explaining what I do and what I wanted to achieve." This experience mirrors my own at age 23, when, after tasting an incredible aged German Riesling, I realized that wine was more than just liquid in a bottle. But I had to figure out how to build a career in a nontraditional way, as I was sometimes overlooked because of my

Asian heritage; while I seldom faced blatant racism, I often felt like people were questioning if "this Chinese guy [could] be a real taster." I simply ignored the skepticism and continued undeterred down my chosen path, and when I first met An, I recognized that same sense of determination and seriousness about her work. She is one of the few Advanced Sommeliers who is a bilingual speaker of Chinese and English.



Husband-and-wife team **Dave and Lois Cho** launched artisan winery CHO Wines in Oregon's Willamette Valley in April 2020. While continuing to work as a nurse family practitioner, Lois serves as the director of operations; Dave, for his part, is the first Korean American winemaker in the state, having been bit by the wine bug when he and his band, Dave and The Cousins, performed at wineries in Southern California. I recently tasted their first releases: the 2020 Pique Me Piquette, 2019 Willamette Valley Pinot Noir, 2020 Laurel Vineyard Pinot Noir Rosé, 2020 Pétillant Natural Sparkling Pinot Noir Rosé, 2020 Laurel District Pinot Noir Blanc, and 2015 Laurel Vineyard Blanc de Noirs. Their focus on making wines of purity, with a sense of place, is admirable.



Cecil Park.

Winefornia CEO/CFO **Jeannie Kim** and winemaker/owner **Cecil Park** are realizing their longtime dream of creating a sustainable wine company based in Napa Valley that assists its clients in winery/vineyard development and provides custom wine-making services in addition to making their own wines. They call themselves a “grape pair”: Kim is the CEO of Bridge Hospitality Management Group as well as the restaurateur behind San Francisco restaurant SAMS American Eatery and gastropub Fermentation Lab, while Park, the first female Korean American winemaker and viticulturist, manages over 80 vineyards throughout Napa Valley and Sonoma County. I recently tasted several wines from their expanding portfolio, including the excellent 2020 Innovatus Carneros Viognier; the savory 2014 Innovatus Napa Valley Cuvée Red, and the 2015 Winefornia Sonoma Valley Syrah.



Philana Bouvier is a dynamo. She is the co-founder of Be the Change, whose mission, in her words, “is to create a diverse alcohol beverage industry [built

on] companies committed to creating real change through diversity and equality training, measurable results, and long-term policy”; she is also president of a recently formed sales and marketing company, Demeine Estates, which supports a dynamic and growing portfolio of domestic and international luxury wine producers. First-generation Vietnamese, she was born

in Bangor, Maine, and began her career in Hawaii as a beer merchandiser.

Since then, she’s held several leadership roles in the industry, including EVP/general manager and senior vice president of new business development for Young’s Market Company and vice president of fine wine/supplier business development for Republic National Distributing Company. In 2019, she was recognized with Seventy-Fifty Daily’s “Drink Innovator of the Year” award for spearheading efforts to advance women into wholesale C-Suite positions by increasing their access to high-level decision-makers and persistently challenging male executives to get in on the effort. She’s also been featured in *Forbes* and was named one of *San Francisco* magazine’s “Most Dynamic Women” in recognition of her fierce commitment to diversity and inclusion in the wine and spirits industry.

David Akiyoshi, a 35-year industry veteran, is currently the director of winemaking at LangeTwins Winery in Lodi; he long held the same position at Woodbridge by Robert Mondavi, where he was instrumental in improving the quality of the label’s wines. He’s no stranger to major projects: When I was at BevMo! from 1995 to 2014, he was helping to launch Gen5, which was initially a private label and later became a national partnership between LangeTwins and Vino del Sol. Gen5 has now sold over 250,000 cases in the United States and has previously been ranked among the top 50 Zinfandels in the country, according to Nielsen data.



Wine and spirits expert **Quinton Jay** was already a seasoned wholesale professional when he opened Bacchus Wine & Spirits in Millbrae, California, in 2014. His retail

shop is more than your local liquor store: Located inside of Pape Meat Co., it hosts butcher demos and consultations as well as wine dinners that aim to take the mystery out of food and beverage pairing.



Jin Zhang.

Fah Sathirapongsasuti is co-owner and assistant winemaker at Sunset Cellars in Fairfield, California; **Jin Zhang** is wine club director/head sommelier at K&L Wine Merchants in San Francisco. Together they represent a new breed of Asian wine professionals, entering the marketplace at a time when the field is competitive and expanding.

With a background in science, Sathirapongsasuti is determined to make an impact on the industry as he takes on more winemaking and managerial responsibilities. “I am not shy to wear my Asian-ness with pride,” he says, noting that he is helping to build a coalition among BIPOC wine professionals both locally and online through groups like Asian Wine Professionals.

Zhang’s extensive resume in hospitality includes back-of-the-house stints at Chez Panisse in Berkeley, California, and Jardinière, Liholiho Yacht Club, and Nari in San Francisco; she joined K&L Wine Merchants at the beginning of the pandemic. Both Sathirapongsasuti and Zhang stand out as rising industry stars to watch.

The journey for the Asian wine professionals of yesteryear was different than the one we’re taking today. While there is still work to be done to improve diversity, standing out has become less of a stigma as our differences become more accepted. As comedian Steve Martin once said in an interview, “Be so good they can’t ignore you!” This is the mantra of the people showcased here. SJ



PHOTO: AMY ELLSWORTH



◀ FLXcursion 2021 co-chairs Oskar Bynke and Kelby James Russell. ▲ FLXcursion attendees gather for a luncheon during the four-day event in New York's Finger Lakes region.

Heeding the Call of Riesling

FLXCURSION 2021 LURED THE WINE WORLD TO THE FINGER LAKES

by Wanda Mann

MORE THAN 200 wine professionals and enthusiasts with a passion for Riesling ventured to the Finger Lakes for the four-day FLXcursion International Riesling Expo in July. Located in upstate New York, the region has attracted legions of fans with its high-quality wines, and Riesling, in all its glorious iterations, has become its calling card. FLXcursion showcased takes on the grape from six different countries, six U.S. states, and approximately 75 wineries.

After more than a year of social distancing, the event served as a much-needed source of reconnection within the wine community. "FLXcursion started in 2019 as a way to welcome the wine world to the Finger Lakes—to show off the land, wines, and people we treasure and feel should be better known," said Kelby James Russell, FLXcursion 2021 co-chair and winemaker at Red Newt Cellars. "But in 2021, it was a true joy for FLXcursion to welcome the wine world back together. As we reenter a new world, we wanted to make it clear from the start that the Finger Lakes will be central and supportive in this next era of wine."

According to Russell's co-chair, Oskar Bynke, who co-owns Hermann J. Wiemer Vineyard, education was a core component of FLXcursion. "We addressed a

number of topics, including: If our industry is a canary in the coal mine of climate change, how are we adapting? How can the hospitality world be more inclusive [and bring] more diverse talent [to] the table? How does social media affect our consumption?" he said.

Andreas Hütwohl, winemaker and deputy general manager at German winery Weingut von Winning, didn't hesitate to make the transatlantic trip to the Finger Lakes. "I think FLXcursion is an important event for the Riesling community and wine world because it brings together a lot of enthusiasts and broadens the spectrum and perspective of Riesling," he said. Another FLXcursion enthusiast, winemaker Kerry Shiels, who co-owns DuBrul Vineyard and Côte Bonnevillie in Washington State's Yakima Valley, was returning to the event for the second time: "I love that it is a fairly small event but has great people and great wines from around the world. The combination of tasting, education, and connection is well worth it."

That winning combination is essential to FLXcursion's appeal. "While Riesling is well known, there is still some mystery surrounding it," said Cheryl Stanley, senior lecturer in food and beverage at the Cornell University School of Hotel Admin-

istration, who moderated the "Let's Talk Riesling" panel featuring winemaker Nova Cadamatre, MW, and wine educator Erika Frey. "Professionals at different levels of knowledge and the general consumer are familiar with German Rieslings and maybe Austrian or Alsatian or Washington Rieslings, but other countries or regions like the Finger Lakes are less known and understood. Also, having the opportunity to taste Riesling side by side from different areas . . . can showcase its unique ability to represent its various growing regions and styles."

I had the pleasure of speaking on the panel "Riesling: Food's Best Friend," moderated by restaurateur and sommelier Dominick Purnomo. My fellow panelists included Cornell University associate professor Kathy LaTour and sommeliers Kenneth Crum and Jamie Schwartz. Our discussion paired a selection of Rieslings with cheese, charcuterie, and ceviche as well as with music meant to reflect the style of each wine, including tunes by Madonna and Stevie Wonder. Yes, you can get your groove on with Riesling!

The International Riesling Expo heads to Germany in 2022 and will return to the Finger Lakes in 2024. For more information, visit flxcursion.com. **SJ**



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*The author at wine bar
APT 115 in Austin, TX.*

Next Stop, Wine NIRVANA

EXPLORING THE USA, ONE GLASS AT A TIME

story and photos by Jamie Knee



*Delachaise Wine Bar & Bistro in
New Orleans, LA, is charmingly
illuminated at night.*



*Crab claws in white-wine butter at
Wine Bar on Palafox in Pensacola, FL.*

WHEN I RECENTLY journeyed across the United States from Florida to California, I was reminded that travel is as much about the people you meet as the places you visit. With our Chihuahua in tow, my husband and I packed our car and headed west, tasting wines and encountering wonderful characters along the way.

Starting in the Florida Panhandle, we stopped at Wine Bar on Palafox in Pensacola's historic downtown. The eclectic, family-friendly bar and restaurant, which just celebrated its 11th year in business, is owned by Ian Kaple, who has created something truly special in the form of a wine list that changes every three weeks to highlight some of the places he's visited on his own extensive travels around the world. And thanks to chef Jason Perry, pairings like the mouthwatering pesto-roasted salmon salad with Sierra del Mar Central Coast Pinot Noir and crab claws in white-wine butter with Errazuriz Max Reserva Sauvignon Blanc from Chile's Aconcagua Valley also impress. Wine Bar offers half-price pours during daily happy hour and also hosts monthly wine dinners and educational events; a wider selection of wines can be found in The Bottle Shop around the corner, which Kaple also owns—it's another must stop in Pensacola.

Our next stop was New Orleans, aka the Big Easy—a city famed for its booze fests and carnival atmosphere. We were guided by Evan Hayes, who, having worked in the wine industry for 18 years, recognized the need for a high-quality gastrobar in the beautiful St. Charles area. So he launched Delachaise Wine Bar & Bistro across from the St. Charles Streetcar Line, working with family-owned producers to showcase over 350 bottlings he calls “real ‘place’ wines, wines with an origin.” He aims to take the mystery out of unconventional varieties by letting guests try anything on the menu before they buy it, and Delachaise has become a neighborhood favorite as a result. During our visit, Hayes served us Fritz Riesling from Rheinhessen, Petite Sirah from Israel’s Barkan Winery, and Ameztoi Txakolina from Spain, to name a few. (And let’s not forget his award-winning duck fat fries, voted by Eater readers as some of the best fries in New Orleans.) Hayes’ newer bistro, Chais Delachaise, is a family-friendly establishment up the street where moms with strollers meet for light, boozy brunches. Both are great places to try hard-to-find wines.

Our first stop in the Lone Star State was Austin, where we met Joseph Pannenbacker, owner of a tiny little wine bar called APT 115 that’s designed to give guests the cozy feeling of sharing a bottle in a friend’s apartment. With vintage décor, a turntable spinning vinyl, and wallpaper designed by musician Brian Eno, you know you’ve stumbled upon something unique.



Copa Wine Bar in San Antonio, TX, is known for its generous pours.



Sommelier and wine director Andre Boada with Jamie Knee at the Signor Vineyards tasting room in Fredericksburg, TX.

The extensive menu changes daily, reflecting Pannenbacker’s love of low-intervention wines from underrepresented regions, such as unfiltered and unfinned Petit Manseng from California’s Sierra Foothills; small plates like raclette and Hornbacher cheese with cured charcuterie are also available for pairing. Pannenbacker has developed a loyal cult following among guests looking to have a memorable experience, as he certainly delivers.

Smack in the center of Texas, which spans 773 miles at its widest point, is the Texas Hill Country wine region. Signor Vineyards in Fredericksburg proved a great place to stop for a glass of wine and some Lone Star hospitality, and with its gardens, mature oak trees surrounding the 200-acre vineyard, and several seating areas where you can relax and enjoy nature, it’s undoubtedly one of the most scenic wineries in the state. Sommelier and wine director Andre Boada walked us through a world-class tasting of Tempranillo, Tannat, Montepulciano, Grenache, Petite Sirah, Mourvèdre, and Sangiovese. Visit for personalized tastings, wines by the glass, wine club selections, and freshly made treats at the winery’s country store, Joanna’s Market.

We then headed to San Antonio and stopped at Copa Wine Bar, founded in 2005 by sommelier Jeff Bridges and his wife, Angie. Their goal is to bring a bit of Spain to Texas in the gorgeous space, which Angie designed to resemble a Mediterranean winery through its warm color palette, dark wood, and wrought-iron stair railing and light fixtures. With over 300 wines on the list and several tasting flights to choose from, the most popular being the sangria,

Copa is known for its large pours—one glass equals one-third of a 750-milliliter bottle—and Wednesday Wine Tastings, with five pours for \$20. Add in its delicious tapas and you see why it’s such a hit; in fact, it was voted as having the Best Wine List in the city by the *San Antonio Current* last year.

Finally, visiting the Wrigley Mansion in Phoenix, Arizona, was like stepping back in time. Built in 1932, this historic property surrounded by manicured landscaping was commissioned by the family behind Wrigley’s gum and was later purchased by the late Geordie Hormel and his wife, Jamie, who turned it into a club that houses Geordie’s—named one of America’s 100 Best Wine Restaurants of 2019 by *Wine Enthusiast*—and Christopher’s restaurants as well as Jamie’s Wine Bar. The stellar wine cellar, meanwhile, houses over 1,300 wines curated by Wrigley’s Mansion CEO/sommelier Paola Embry. Our delicious Sunday brunch, perfectly paired with Château Gravielle-Lacoste and Nikolaihof Wachau Grüner Veltliner, concluded with a tasty fruit popsicle served in a wine glass that helped us cool down in the city’s infamous summer heat. It all made for a very special cap to a remarkable trip. **sj**

A Region Reawakens

SHINING A SPOTLIGHT ON **NAVARRA**, ONE OF SPAIN'S MOST OVERLOOKED WINEGROWING AREAS

by Lorea Amatria

AMONG WINE'S MANY powers is its ability to transport you to other places. This especially came in handy during 2020 and most of this year, when most of us were deprived of the ability to travel. A bright Chianti can whisk you away to a Tuscan villa, an aromatic Riesling can take you to the foothills of the Rhine River, and a bold Carménère can make you feel as if you've landed in the rugged Cachapoal Valley. For me, a Spaniard living in New York, a great glass of wine from Navarra has been the perfect way to connect with my beloved land.

A region in northern Spain that extends from the country's inner plains to the Pyrenees mountain range, Navarra is perhaps best known for the annual Festival of San Fermín, which was popularized by Ernest Hemingway and now attracts visitors from all over the world. However, there is much more to Navarra than the running of the bulls: superb gastronomy, diverse landscapes that range from expansive deserts to jagged mountains, and, of course, a long and rich winemaking history.

There is evidence that viticulture has existed in Navarra since the Roman era, with archeological finds like ancient amphorae and the remains of old wineries confirming the social and economic importance of wine at that time. It was during the late Middle Ages, however, that the region's wines began to develop a more widespread reputation thanks to pilgrims on the Camino de Santiago, a route that cuts through Navarra on its way toward the Galician coast and whose popularity continues to grow to this day.

The industry boomed in Navarra during the mid-19th century as phylloxera hit neighboring France, but it did not last long, as the blight arrived in the region a few years later, devastating 97% of the 50,000



Author Lorea Amatria in a vineyard in Spain's Navarra region.

hectares then planted. Thanks to significant efforts from the local government, including grafting on American rootstock, some of these vineyards were eventually reconstructed and saved.

But during the mid-20th century, many small family-owned vineyards fell into disuse due to conglomeration of the industry and changing demographics in rural areas. Currently, there are 10,000 cultivated hectares within DO Navarra, 94% of which are planted to red grapes; 70% are native varieties like Garnacha, which has long been linked to bright-pink rosé wines but is making a comeback as a new generation of winemakers focused on quality and authenticity produce fresh, delicate, and drinkable expressions that serve as a true reflection of the land. As my brother, up-



PHOTOS COURTESY OF LOREA AMATRIA

A grape bunch on the vine in Navarra.

and-coming winemaker Josu Amatria, told me while he was restoring old Garnacha plantings, "I am not inventing anything new. These vines are almost 100 years old, and I am just trying to restore and love what was here."

And there is a lot to love. Even though Navarra's path as a wine region hasn't been smooth and has sometimes

been overshadowed by neighboring Rioja, its reawakening is being driven by the determination of a new generation of wine professionals who are fighting to further its legacy. *Salud* to all of them! **SJ**

Lorea Amatria is an agricultural engineer and WSET Level 3 candidate from Pamplona, Spain, who now resides in New York City.

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 on Instagram.



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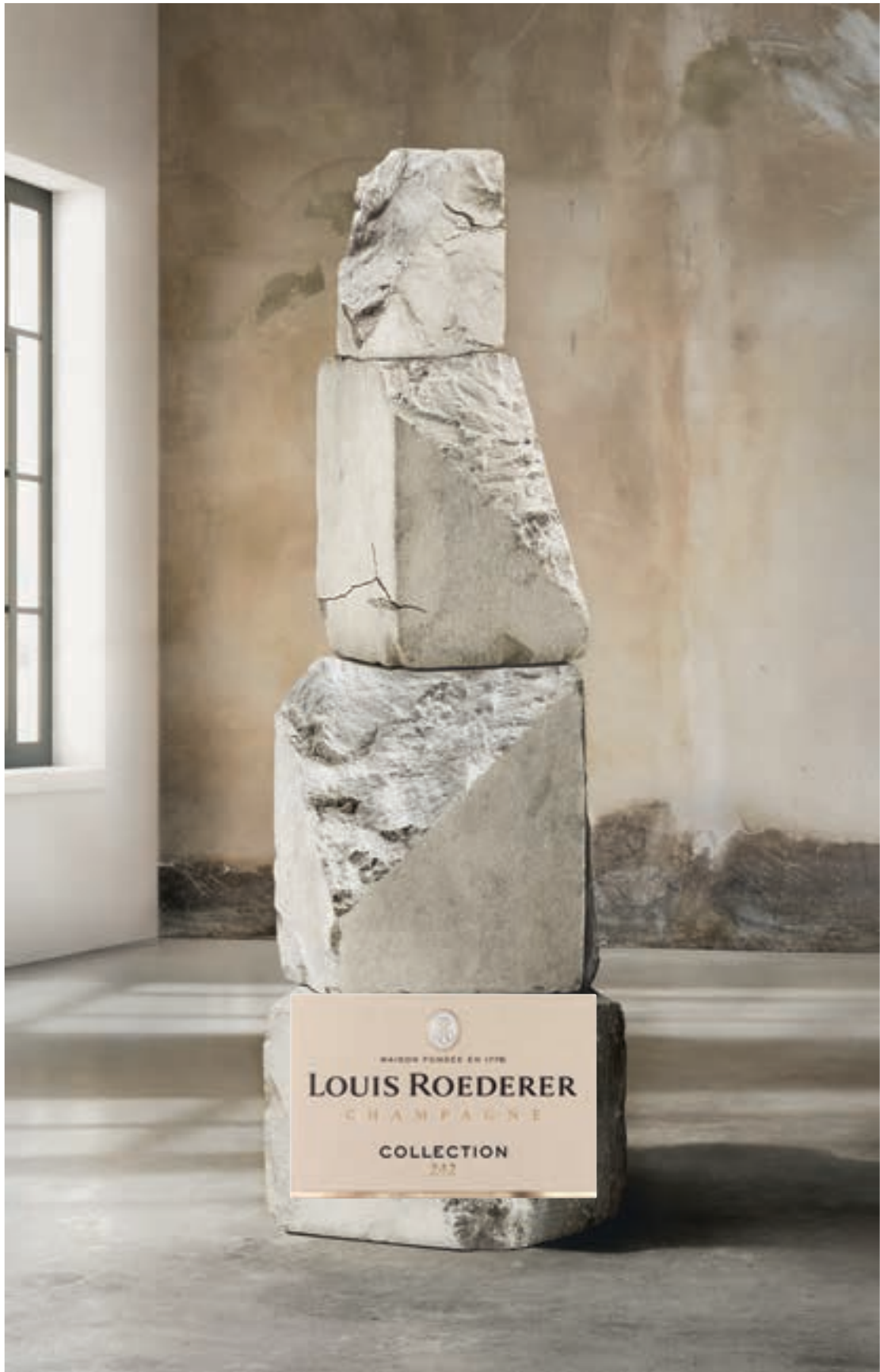
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