

THE SOMM JOURNAL

Delas Frères winemaker
Jacques Grange in front of
Hermitage Hill vineyard
Les Bessards.

A Torchbearer in

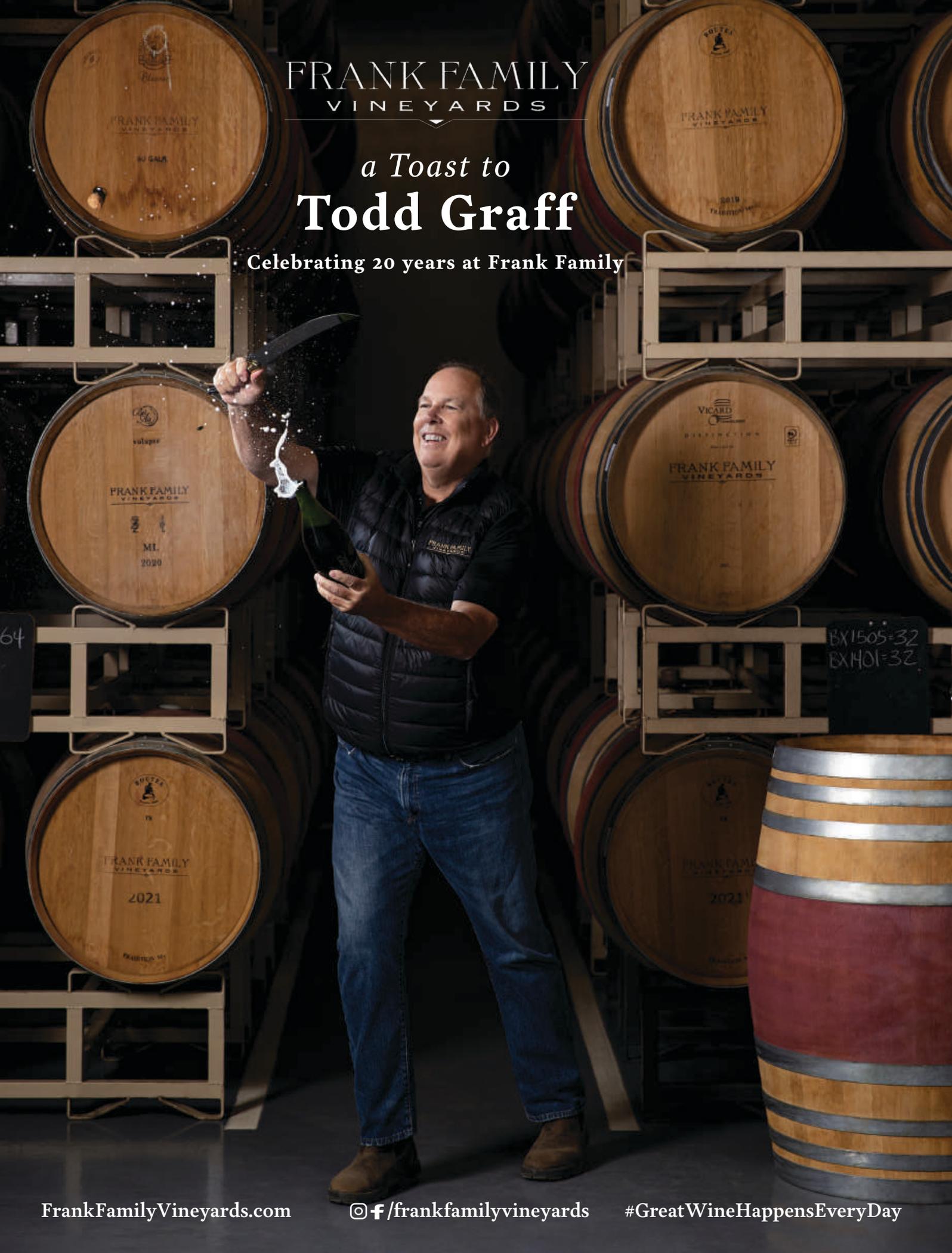
TAIN L'HERMITAGE

AT NEARLY 200, THE RHÔNE
VALLEY'S DELAS FRÈRES IS AT
THE TOP OF ITS GAME

FRANK FAMILY
VINEYARDS

a Toast to
Todd Graff

Celebrating 20 years at Frank Family



THE SOMM JOURNAL

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first  press

A Tale of TWO VINEYARDS

DALLAS, TEXAS-BORN

winemaker Bobby Donnell and his wife, award-winning viticulturist Shannon Donnell, established Screen Door Cellars in 2012 as a passion project. The wine label was particularly near and dear to Bobby's heart, but juggling it with their full-time jobs and raising children became too much for the couple, and they ended up producing just a few vintages.

The brand's name was inspired by a West Texas homecoming: "I wanted to convey that feeling you get when you come home and you can smell your



mom cooking something through the screen door, so you open it up in a hurry and that little-bitty spring goes 'eeeeeek,'"

Donnell says with a happy look of nostalgia.

Although Andy Wahl, the president of Daylight Wine & Spirits, is from Santa Rosa, California, he relates to that squeaking sound of the screen door: "When you have a really nice bottle, it becomes less about the food pairing and more about the people you drink that bottle with. You really

only let so many people through that screen door. That's what the name means to me," he says. In 2016, Wahl brought Donnell on as Daylight's head winemaker, and two years ago they decided to resurrect the Screen Door Cellars brand.

On a warm summer day in June, just as production was really starting to ramp up—the Chardonnay alone jumped from 800 cases in 2021 to 3,000 cases in 2022, and Wahl estimates the brand's overall wine sales will quadruple this year—*The SOMM Journal* joined the Screen Door duo for a walk around both the Leras and Asern vineyards in Sonoma County.

EXPLORING THE SPECIAL SONOMA-BASED SOURCES OF SCREEN DOOR CELLARS

STORY BY JESSIE BIRSCHBACH / PHOTOS BY CLARA RICE

Leras Vineyard

As you turn off the dusty Woolsey Road in Windsor onto a smaller dirt road, the first thing you'll notice about Leras Vineyard is an old, rustic sign that reads, "Leras: God's Little Acres." It's a sweet, folksy greeting, and after just a brief chat with Nick Leras, you get the feeling he truly believes that he's the steward of his Creator's very own vineyard. The third-generation farmer sustainably dry farms 30 acres of Pinot Noir here in the Russian River Valley; he's done so all his life, inheriting the land from his father, who purchased the ranch in 1918. The region is known for experiencing fog that not only helps to retain the acid so crucial to Pinot Noir's profile but also allows for a longer hang time, enabling the grapes to mature as fully as possible.

Leras' smile widened under his gray mustache as he stared at a bunch of grapes just beginning to darken from green to purple. "This year will be my 62nd harvest. We had an early flowering and it looks like now early veraison too; we're about 20 days ahead of time this year," he said. "We normally harvest around mid-September, but I'm thinking it'll be around August 28." Nevertheless, he felt the vintage would show well.

Bobby Donnell wasn't too worried either. We stood in a row of Pinot Noir close to an old barn that Leras and his father had meticulously restored piece by piece. "This row right behind the barn here and this row next to it . . . were the first rows we got for our 2012 vintage. This is Pommard clone primarily and the other side is a 777 clone," said Donnell. Screen Door Cellars Pinot Noir is currently composed of Pommard, 115, 777, and 667, "and I'm trying to get some of that 828 from Nick for a little more depth and structure," he added. However, the 2014 vintage we sampled later wasn't lacking in depth whatsoever, layered as it was with dainty, briary aromatics. "My winemaking philosophy is, if you don't like it on the nose, you're not gonna stick it in your mouth. So I love aromatics in wine. My wife's good friend calls all my wines user-friendly. They're all approachable and easy to drink," said Donnell.

Leras Vineyard in Windsor, CA. Inset: A rustic sign welcomes visitors to the property.



Daylight Wine & Spirits president Andy Wahl, Leras Family Vineyards owner Nick Leras, and Daylight Wine & Spirits head winemaker Bobby Donnell.

Asern Vineyard

After a quick ten-minute drive from Leras Vineyard to Green Valley, we pulled into a circular driveway leading to the home of Donnell's mother- and father-in-law. Behind the large, recently renovated home was a 7.5-acre Chardonnay vineyard named after his in-laws' five grandchildren. "ASERN is the first initial of all the grandkids' names in birth order," said Donnell. "So there's Alex, Savannah, Emma, Robert, and Norah." The winemaker is grateful to live across the street from his in-laws, who can help keep an eye on his kids while he keeps an eye on the vineyard. "Once or twice I've come over and all I see is a cloud of dust just ripping around the vineyard and all the grandkids just screamin' and having a good time and you think, 'Please, just don't take any vines out,'" he quipped.

Perched high on a hill overlooking a lush section of Green Valley, the site was established by Warren Dutton (of Dutton Ranch) in 1997. Donnell explained that much of the Chardonnay planted on the vineyard's eastern and western slopes are clone 4, but the Chardonnay toward the top is a Spring Mountain clone with "really bright floral aromatics . . . and when you put that together with the clone 4, it makes a really nice Chardonnay."

Donnell poured the Screen Door Cellars 2020 Asern Vineyard Chardonnay into our glasses—but not before the



Winemaker Bobby Donnell entertains in the outdoor kitchen at Asern Vineyard in Green Valley, CA.

blustery wind could steal a few drops. "It's always this windy up here," he noted, "because you get all of that coastal influence. As the crow flies, the coast is probably only about 10 miles from here. There are times when the wind just howls. The Chardonnay holds its acid really well up here."

In fact, the acidity in the wine came across as bright and lemony, yet a rounded richness remained. "I ferment a third of it in concrete egg, a third in

stainless steel, and a third in brand-new French oak," said Donnell.

The thoughtful winemaker next took us to Dutton Estate's custom-crush facility, where he makes both Screen Door Cellars wines. "[It] works out really [well,] because I consult with Dutton Estate and I'm making other wine for Daylight here as well," said Donnell, adding, "I'm pretty lucky. Everything is right here." Although it's far from Dallas, Donnell seems to have found another squeaky door here in California. SJ

20 years with you



**PAGOS
 DEL REY**

20 ANIVERSARIO

Pagos del Rey – Ribera del Duero celebrates its 20th Anniversary. This winery represents the first step towards the expansion of Felix Solis Avantis into northern wine regions. This arrival in Ribera del Duero was followed by new openings in the most recognizable Spanish D.O. (Denominación de Origen) such as Rioja, Rueda and Toro. After these 20 years, “Pagos del Rey - Ribera del Duero” achieved an outstanding performance, bringing the main two brands: “Condado de Oriza” and “Altos de Tamarón” to the top of national and international distribution. Additionally, the wines have been internationally recognized with prestigious awards, worthy to mention Best Spanish wine 2021 by the ‘Frankfurt International Trophy’.

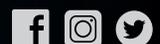
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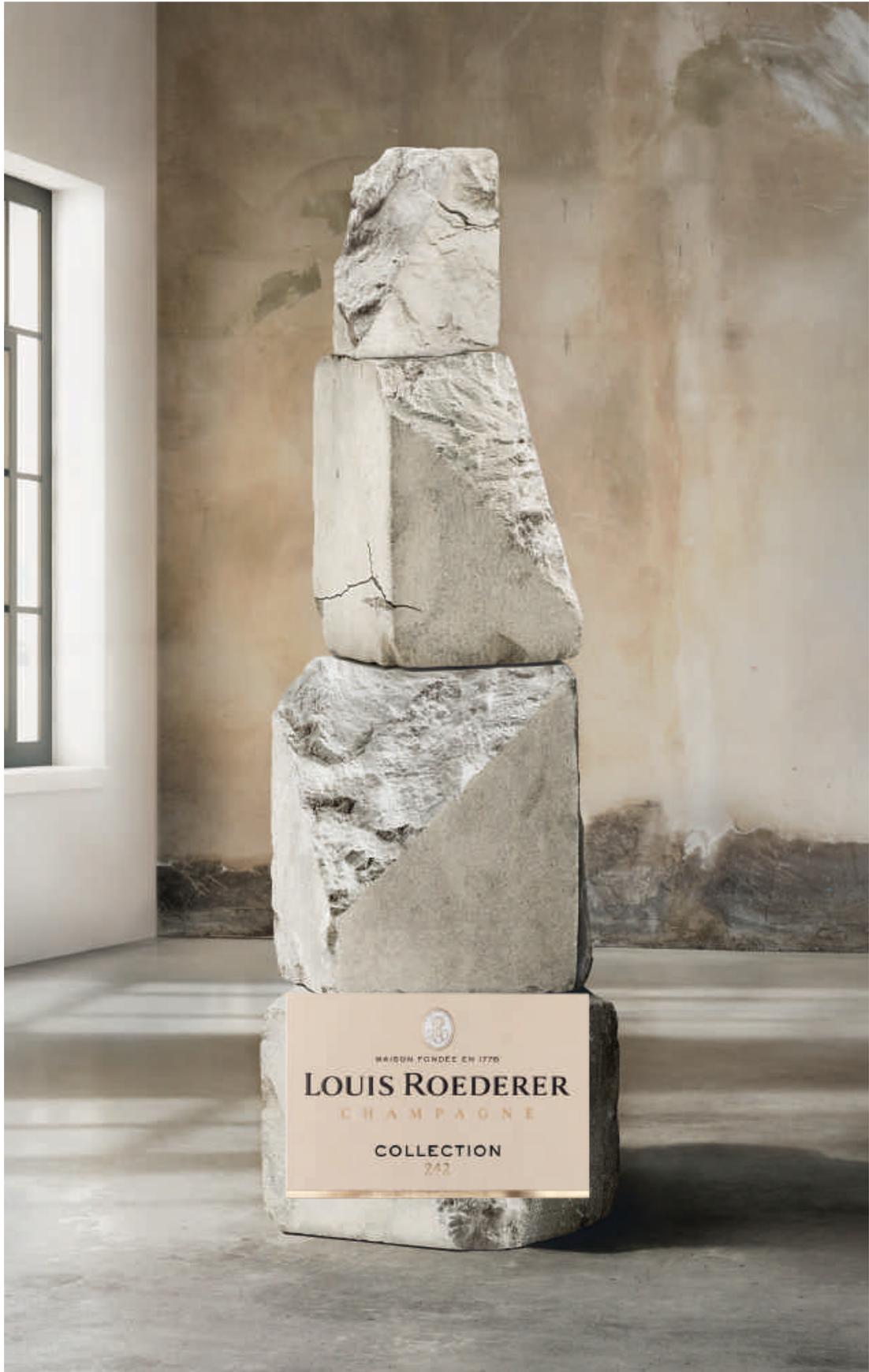
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THE SOMM JOURNAL

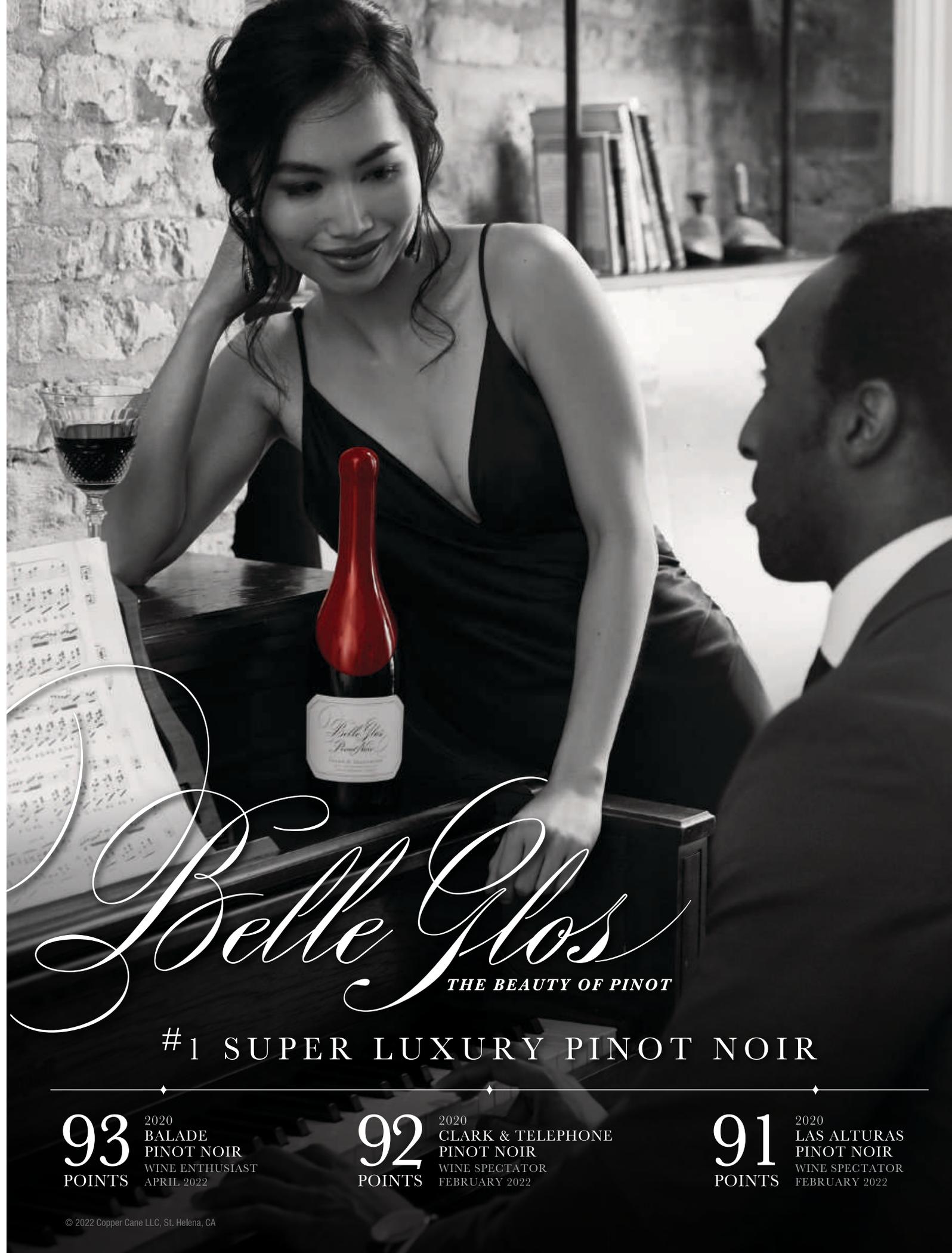
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Belle Glos

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Emphasis on Engagement

HOW TO SUCCEED IN AN EMPLOYEE-DRIVEN LABOR MARKET

by Megan Bravo, CSW, business development manager, Folded Hills Winery

AS A MANAGER in the hospitality industry, you're taught to look at your business through both a telescope and a microscope. You must create big-picture visions and goals while keeping your finger on the pulse of employees and overseeing daily operations. So how can you be expected to work effectively when you're short staffed—playing tasting-room steward, acting as a line cook, or working in the countless other roles that are going unfilled?

I keep hearing the same stories about wineries and restaurants struggling to find help for their entry-level positions. Earlier this year, I and my fellow direct-to-consumer managers in Santa Barbara wine country decided to meet once a month to learn from one another and try to tackle some common issues we all face; it's no surprise that our first meeting focused on how to recruit and retain staff. In a live poll during that meeting, most managers answered that their main problem in hiring is finding qualified employees. At Folded Hills Winery in Santa Ynez, where I work, we have had many applicants who are only looking for a fun, low-risk job. Well, wine is fun, but front-of-house employees are required to be on their feet all day, work holidays and weekends, and have the knowledge to sell wine. When the fantasy of working in a winery wears off, new hires soon realize it's actually a bit of a grind.

This raises the question: Once we've found them, how can we support qualified employees and keep them happy? I am passionate about employee engagement, and I truly believe it's the best way to help retain staff. To me, that means giving my team the chance to cross-train and making sure they have all the tools and knowledge to be successful. At Folded Hills, we have started a free wine class for employees every Wednesday

When the fantasy of working in a winery wears off, new hires soon realize it's actually a bit of a grind. This raises the question: Once we've found them, how can we support qualified employees and keep them happy?

that is taught by our GM, who happens to be a Certified Wine Educator with a WSET Diploma; we also sponsor ongoing wine education for any interested staffers. In addition, we offer a small signing bonus and give the equivalent bonus to any current employee who helps recruit a new hire. To me, the most important thing we offer is a company culture of support and friendship. We like each other!

It will be exciting to see how job candidates across hospitality industries take advantage of these new opportunities. Will a whole new generation of workers be better educated and trained in their

respective fields? Employers would be wise to find creative ways to incentivize their staff in this new employee-driven job market. **sj**

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_](https://www.instagram.com/dreambigdarling_) on Instagram.

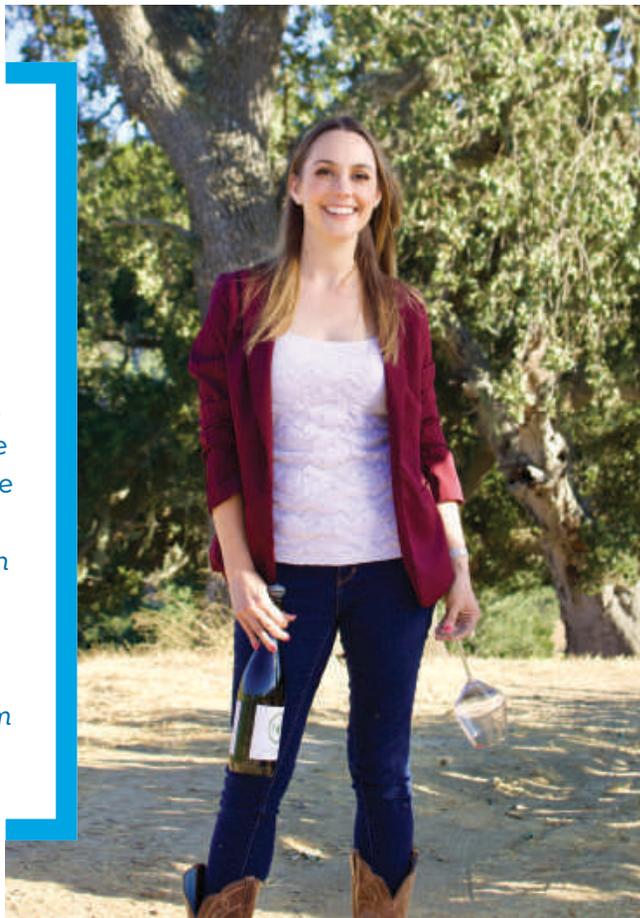


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Training Day

HOW TO SUCCEED ON THE FLOOR IN TODAY'S CHALLENGING BUSINESS CLIMATE

BACK IN THE DARK AGES—namely the 1970s and 1980s, when even white-tablecloth restaurants sold ten times more Blue Nun and Lancer's Vin Rosé than California Chardonnay and red Bordeaux—I relied on a variety of selling techniques to light a fire under guests. Just to feed my family, after all, I had to work full time in retail stores to supplement my sommelier career at night, so I had a range of skills at my disposal in an era when many servers had as little clue as diners.

While times have changed to some extent, the current business climate is a difficult one for the hospitality industry at large. Amanda Wittstrom Higgins—the former vice president of Ancient Peaks Winery and the founder of consulting firm Full Cup Solutions—recently sent me these observations: “It’s no secret that staffing in winery tasting rooms is extremely difficult. Either there isn’t enough staff or management does not have time to train new people. The most basic processes, made worse by COVID, can fall through the cracks when wineries are spread too thin.” The situation is the same for restaurants: Staff training, now as then, is like pulling teeth.

So it would behoove restaurant operators to borrow some of Wittstrom Higgins’ advice on how to sell just to live another day. Here’s my adaptation of her basic tenets of staff training:

■ **Smile.** When getting dressed in the morning, the most important thing anyone can possibly put on is a friendly face.

■ **Set the table.** Surround guests with nonverbal selling tools that “assume” the sale and that let them know how important wine is to their experience. This includes not only providing glassware on the table but also decorating the room with wine displays, decanters, and so on.

■ **Do your research.** Take advantage of reservation-booking tools that provide information on guests, not only because they are flattered by the recognition but also because the more you know, the easier it is to tailor your service to their needs.

■ **Prepare ten-second pitches.** Do drills, and do them again, until you’ve memorized brief yet compelling descriptions of every wine on your list, every dish on your menu, and every detail about your restaurant—the owners, the chefs, everything.

■ **Compile tasting notes** for every training session and consider offering short, sweet descriptions of the wines on the list itself as a useful tool for staff as much as guests.

■ **Extending simple invitations** to guests to join your email list or “frequent flyer” club (a timeless idea) or to attend upcoming events will always be Marketing 101.

■ **Ask for the sale.** Restaurant sales are exactly the same as retail or any other sales in that you never get anything unless you ask for it in the form of a question such as “May I suggest a wine with that course?” This is not “check-building,” it is enhancing guest experiences.

■ **Hire effective managers.** Poor service, which is the fastest way to go out of business, is a direct reflection on management, not staff. If managers can’t effectively train, they’re useless—and of course, if you’re not willing to pay them for their ability to do just that, you have only yourself to blame. *sj*



PHOTO: BARRY GOVETTE

Amanda Wittstrom Higgins is the founder of consulting firm Full Cup Solutions.

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by Ruth Tobias



Magret de canard with radish, lavender oil, and foie jus.

Icing on the Cake

BAKERY AND FRENCH RESTAURANT **NOISETTE** BRINGS A TASTE OF CUISINE BOURGEOISE TO DENVER

AS MUCH AS Denver's dining scene has evolved in the past decade-plus (pandemic notwithstanding), French restaurants remain few and far between. Perhaps they're perceived as too formal, too fancy, too fussy in this fiercely casual city. If that's the case, there's a newcomer to LoHi that should disabuse the locals of that notion: Noisette.

While it's certainly upscale—check out that gorgeously serene dining room in hues of seashell, sage, and burnt sienna—the bakery-by-day, full-service eatery—by-night couldn't be warmer or more welcoming. And though the husband-and-wife team behind it, chef-partners Tim and Lillian Lu, boast impressive resumes that include such New York temples of haute gastronomy as Le Coucou and Daniel, they place Noisette firmly in the camp of cuisine bourgeoise.



Lillian and Tim Lu are the wife-and-husband duo behind Noisette.

On a recent visit, my companion and I started—as one must—with an order of pastry chef Lillian's *comme il faut* baguette, accompanied by a quenelle of cultured brown butter. From there, we dug into escargot-stuffed potato fritters served with herb aioli; skate wing in anchovy béarnaise with chanterelles, baby fennel, cherry tomatoes, and confit potatoes; and beautiful, mahogany-skinned duck breast in a pool of foie-enriched jus, laced with radishes and lavender oil. Followed by tarte tropézienne

and peach melba parfait for dessert, the meal struck the perfect balance between elegance and earthiness, class and comfort—and though we stuck with bubbles for its entirety (because why not), I could see from a glance that the mostly French wine list followed suit, managing on a single

(Take, for instance, the “mineral-driven, unoaked” Lioco Sonoma County Chardonnay that Davenport says “we’ve really been loving” with salmon in *beurre blanc*.) The small cocktail list, for its part, channels what Lobato calls “that post-World War I era of elegance and debauchery in Paris”



Noisette's dining room is adjoined by a daytime bakery.

page to cover both familiar and lesser-known regions and grapes, relative bargains and splurges: Corsican Sciacarellu and Jacquère from Savoie on the one hand, Grand Cru Burgundy on the other.

That list is the result of “a collective effort,” according to general manager Damon Lobato, one of two sommeliers on staff along with service director Amanda Davenport—not to mention a juggling act involving multiple factors. In addition to varietal diversity and a range of price points, the team took everything from food-friendliness to sustainable production into account; ultimately, says Davenport, “We wanted to [showcase] wines produced in the right way and also in an Old World style, so we can represent those French traditions regardless of where the wine is actually coming from.”

with drinks like the Fiopé, combining Cognac, Bénédictine, Byrrh, and lemon juice.

Speaking of Cognac, “We put a lot of effort and energy into having something to finish up with,” says Lobato, on the grounds that “we had all talked about [how] people go out to eat but they don't go out to dine—there's a big difference there. So we were thinking, ‘What's the ultimate dining experience?’ And digestifs and after-dinner drinks are icing on the cake.” Be it Muscat de Beaumes de Venise or Armagnac, the fact that they're served in vintage glassware is the cherry on top (not to mix dessert metaphors), in keeping with the mismatched china that Lillian personally sourced from area antique shops. You might call the effect “homespun haute”—and it's bound to feel just right to locals. **SJ**

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All Flavor, No Apologies

NEW YORK CITY'S **SEMMA** CELEBRATES THE FOODS OF SOUTHERN INDIA

TOO SPICY? Too “authentic”? Too, well, Indian? Too bad! Unapologetic Foods will not be begging your pardon for serving the true flavors of India at its growing empire of New York City restaurants, which includes Dhamaka, Adda, and Semma. For restaurateur Roni Mazumdar and chef-partner Chintan Pandya, the cheeky company name is meant to challenge the notion that Indian cuisine must be watered down to have broad appeal. Bustling dining rooms and impressive accolades, including Pandya's 2022 James Beard Award for best chef in New York State at Dhamaka, prove Unapologetic Foods' bold stance is paying off.



PHOTO: PAUL MCDONOUGH

Peconic snails stir-fried with caramelized onions and tomatoes in a ginger-tamarind paste.

that match [his] thoughtfulness, intention, and story. For reds, you'll find wines that are fruit-forward with lighter oak treatment, such as Gamay, Barbera, low-alcohol Zinfandel, Grenache, and Syrah. Sparkling [wines], rosés, and aromatic whites have this lively natural acidity that acts as a great refresher between the spice-filled bites.”

I'm no stranger to snails, but

I've never tasted any that even faintly resembled Semma's aforementioned nathai pirattal. Peters' suggested wine pairings for this unconventional and delectable dish provide a snapshot of the myriad options offered by Semma's menu. “Gewürztraminer is perfect for nathai pirattal; the gingery notes in both will sing in harmony,” she explains. “I would opt for an off-dry style from Alsace, and you end up with a lovely, sweet-and-savory balance. Champagne is also a great option; it will contrast the creaminess of the snails without overwhelming the delicate flavor.”

Semma means “fantastic” in Tamil, and it certainly is. Just as a well-made wine has a sense of place, Semma's wealth of vibrant southern Indian flavors takes your palate on a journey. Put the two together, and it's a mighty tasty adventure you won't regret taking. **SJ**

(snails from Peconic Escargot stir-fried with caramelized onions and tomatoes and mixed with a ginger-tamarind paste); and Goanese oxtail with green cardamom, cumin, and cilantro.

Pairing Semma's complex, layered, sometimes spicy dishes with wine presents endless possibilities. “While wine is not part of the

dining experience traditionally in southern India, I strongly believe that wine enhances [it],” says Kumar, who lived in California for a decade. Sommelier Ashley Peters is a new addition to the Semma team, and she is raring to go: “Exploring flavors and dishes that are new to me and pairing them with wines I have known and loved is a fun challenge that I am fully embracing,” she says. “The dishes that Chef Vijay creates are not only abundant with depth and flavor but they also tell the story of his childhood in Tamil Nadu. I am aspiring to create a program full of producers . . .



PHOTO COURTESY OF SEMMA

Ashley Peters is the sommelier at Semma in New York City's Greenwich Village.



PHOTO: MOLLY TAVOLETTI

Semma chef-partner Vijay Kumar.

Last summer, I had a memorable meal of regional Indian cuisine at Dhamaka, which remains one of the toughest reservations to snag in the Big Apple. And this year, on a steamy July night in Greenwich Village, I found myself mesmerized by the soulful flavors of South India at Semma. Chef-partner Vijay Kumar hails from Tamil Nadu, the southernmost part of the Indian peninsula, and his menu showcases the foods he grew up eating on his family's rice farm. My meal included the gunpowder dosa (a rice-and-lentil crêpe with potato masala and sambar); nathai pirattal

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

SILVERADO

96

POINTS

THE
tastingpanel
MAGAZINE

2017 VINTAGE



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Wedded to Tradition

THE EXQUISITE GRAN RESERVAS OF LA RIOJA ALTA

AMONG ALL THE world's great wines, one has remained stubbornly unique and impervious to fashion: Gran Reserva Rioja. Aged at least five years for reds and four years for whites, Gran Reservas cling to a time when subtlety, lightness, and a soulful earthiness were more appreciated than syrupy saturation and fireworks of fruit. Like Grand Cru Burgundy (for which, in a blind tasting, they can be mistaken), Gran Reserva Riojas are the ultimate rite-of-passage wines—it takes years of drinking experience to be drawn in by their nuance.

barrel to barrel by hand rather than by pumping the wine through hoses—a time-consuming, laborious process but one that is indispensable to the elegance of the final wines.

The winery imports oak timber from Kentucky, staves the wood outdoors for years, and then coopers its own barrels. The barrels are generally fourth-use (effectively neutral in terms of oak flavor extractives), so the Gran Reservas are never exposed to the smack of new oak.

While the time spent in those barrels



La Rioja Alta owner Guillermo de Aranzabal.

Recently I attended a tasting of La Rioja Alta's Gran Reservas going back to 1995. Founded in 1890, La Rioja Alta is one of the stars of Rioja. And like its neighbor R. López de Heredia, it's fiercely wedded to tradition.

The two signature techniques used in the Spanish region to make the top Gran Reservas are multiple rackings to mellow the wine and long aging in American oak. At La Rioja Alta, racking is done from

is critical, long aging alone does not make a Gran Reserva. For example, if a Rioja Crianza, which is generally aged two years, were left to age for a few more years, it would not turn into a Gran Reserva. Rather, Gran Reservas are special lots of wine chosen from the very beginning to become, with age, Gran Reservas. Only three or four vintages in a decade are of high enough quality to make a La Rioja Alta Gran Reserva.



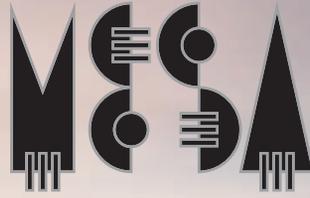
PHOTOS COURTESY OF LA RIOJA ALTA

The winery makes two collections of Gran Reservas—one referred to as 904 and the other as 890. Owner Guillermo de Aranzabal describes the 904 wines as "silk" compared to the 890s, which he says are "velvet." These are wines that lead with their languorous textures. Indeed, the sensual texture of a great Gran Reserva delivers an out-of-body experience.

The 904 Gran Reservas we tasted were wines of exquisite delicacy; the 890 Gran Reservas had a bit more body and gravitas. Both collections had sweeping arcs of flavor reminiscent of old books and fine leather as well as aromas that reminded me of walking into an antique store. The 2010 890 has just been released; the 2015 904 will be released in March 2023.

De Aranzabal's final words rang true: "It's never been easier to make a good wine," he said, "and never harder to make a great one." 

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



SARDINIA'S HEARTBEAT



91
points

WINE ENTHUSIAST

Carignano del Sulcis
BUJO BUJO RISERVA
2019



94
points

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Vermentino di Sardegna
GIUNCO
2021



92
points

WINE ENTHUSIAST

Carignano del Sulcis
BUJO
2020

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November 7

11:15 AM *The SOMM Journal's* "Reflection of Terroir: Blends vs. Single Vineyards" featuring wines from Louis Roederer and Domaine Anderson



Moderator
Lars Leicht, VP of education, *The SOMM Journal*

Speakers
Xavier Barlier, Maisons Marques & Domaines

Darrin Low, winemaker, Domaine Anderson Estate

2:00 PM *The SOMM Journal's* "World-Class Bordeaux Varieties From Paso Robles"



Moderator
Meridith May, publisher/editor-in-chief, *The SOMM Journal*

November 8

11:15 AM *The SOMM Journal's* "Assessing Crucial Body Profiles in Wines"



Moderator
Deborah Parker Wong, global wine editor, *The SOMM Journal*

Speakers
Ralf Holdenried, winemaker, Black Stallion Cabernet Sauvignon, Napa Valley

James Ewart, winemaker, Diona Pinot Noir, San Bernabe, Monterey County

Dino Altomare, director of education, Banfi Vineyards, Thick Skinned Red Mountain Bordeaux Blend, Washington

Matthew Heil, director of fruit supply, Belle Glos Pinot Noir (Copper Cane Wine & Provisions)

Jacob Gragg, Cantina Mesa (Santa Margherita USA)

Will Costello, MS, Barrel Burner Chardonnay, Miller Family Wine Company

November 6-8, 2022
Kona Kai Resort, San Diego

Here are our seminars and panelists. Taste along with us at these super sessions!

For the full event schedule, see the following pages >>>

2:00 PM *The SOMM Journal's* "Spectrum of Spirits"



Moderator
Jessie Birschbach, senior wine and beer editor, *The SOMM Journal*

Taste through spirits from producers at the top of their game!

Mezcal and Vermouth, presented by **Joel Caruso**, director of education, Chopin Spirits

Empress Gin, presented by **Peter Hunt**, president/founder, Milestone Brands

Duke Bourbon, presented by **Miguel Rodriguez**, Legends Spirits

Banfi Poggio alle Mura Grappa, presented by **Dino Altomare**, Banfi Vintners

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FULL SCHEDULE
SOMMCON SAN DIEGO
KONA KAI RESORT

November 6

- 3:00 PM.....** Pre-registration
- 6:30 PM** Welcome Reception

November 7

- 7:30 AM** Registration Open
- 8:00 AM** Networking, Pastries & Coffee
- 9:00 AM** Buyer's Market Registration
Mindfulness Through the Power of Gratitude
 Kathleen Thomas, CORE Mind|Body
- 9:00 AM** Nature vs. Nurture: An Exploration of Topicity in Wines
 Tanya Morning Star - Cellar Muse Wine School
 NaKenge Adisa - Parousia Cellar
- 9:00 AM** Study Tips for the Serious Wine Student
 Lindsay Pomeroy - Wine Smarties
- 9:00 AM** Vins de Provence Masterclass: The Art of Making Rosé
 Joshua Orr - Broadbent Selections
- 10:30 AM** Buyer's Market OPEN, Networking
- 11:15 AM.....** Introduction to European Garnacha Grenache Quality Wines
 Eric Aracil - European Garnacha/Grenache Quality Wines
- 11:15 AM.....** *The SOMM Journal's* "Reflection of Terroir: Blends vs. Single Vineyards"
 Xavier Barlier - Maisons Marques & Domaines USA
 Lars Leicht - *The SOMM Journal*
 Darrin Low - Domaine Anderson
- 11:15 AM.....** The Rise of Oregon Chardonnay
 Nick Hetzel - Jackson Family Wines
 Larry Stone - Lingua Franca
 David Adelsheim - Adelsheim Vineyard
 Eugenia Keegan - Jackson Family Wines
- 11:15 AM.....** Valle de Guadalupe, The New Pacific Frontier: A Deep Dive into the Incredible Growth of Baja Wines. Analysis, Exploration & Assessment
 Diego Meraviglia - North American Sommelier Association

- 12:30 PM.....** Winemaker Lunch: Grown with Grit, Crafted with Grace: Explore Single Vineyard Pinot Noir and Chardonnay with Patz & Hall
 James Hall - Patz & Hall

- 12:30 PM.....** Buyer's Market, Networking

- 12:30 PM.....** Conference Lunch

- 2:00 PM.....** Argentina's Finest; Discovering 90+ Point Wines from North to South
 Joaquín Hidalgo - VINOUS/VINOMANOS

- 2:00 PM.....** Back to the Future: The Ancient Origins and Evolution of Carbonic Maceration
 Alan Tardi, Wine Educator

- 2:00 PM.....** Champagne: Presenting the Styles and Developing Tasting Skills
 Monika Bielka-Vescovi - Napa Valley Wine Academy

- 2:00 PM.....** Distinctions of Whiskey

- 2:00 PM.....** Paso Robles & Its World Class Bordeaux Varieties



Matthew Glunz
 Glunz Family
 Winery and Cellars



Jim Madsen
 The Farm
 Winery



Marc Laderriere
 Hearst Ranch
 Winery

Moderated by Meridith May - Editor-in-Chief, *The SOMM Journal*

- 3:30 PM** Buyer's Market, Networking

- 4:15 PM** Blind Tasting Three Ways



Doug Frost
 Echolands
 Winery



Mark Guillaudeu
 Quince & Co.

- 4:15 PM** Discover Sannio: The Birthplace of Falanghina
 Laura Donadoni - La Com Wine Agency

- 4:15 PM** Keynote Presentation with Michael Dorf of City Winery
 Michael Dorf, City Winery

- 4:15 PM** Madeira. A Wine with the Name of an Island, and an Island with the Name of a Wine
 Paul Carayas - Chez TJ
 Erik Segelbaum - SOMLYAY LLC / SWIG Partners

- 4:15 PM Non-Alcoholic Trends - Making Space Behind the Bar and on the Wine List**
Matthew Kaner - Will Travel for Wine
Will Costello, MS - Miller Family Wine Company
- 4:15 PM Prohibit Not!**
Joseph Spellman - JUSTIN Vineyards/Landmark Vineyards
- 4:15 PM Reserva de la Familia**
- 5:30 PM Adjourn and Break** (Dinner on your own)
- 7:30 PM SommCon & Chill Beach Party - Presented by Paso Robles Cab Collective & The SOMM Journal**

November 8

- 8:00 AM Breakfast & Registration**
- 9:00 AM Around New Zealand Wine Regions - Featuring Pinot Noir**
Cameron Douglas - New Zealand Wine Ambassador
- 9:00 AM Fresh Faces, Old Vines with Wines of Germany**
Amy Waller - Wines of Germany USA
- 9:00 AM Perfecting Balance: Winemaking Decisions that Go into Creating a Balanced Wine**
James MacPhail - The Calling
Glenn Hugo - Girard Winery
Andrea Robinson, MS
- 9:00 AM That's So Shady!**
Allison Hupp - Southern Glazer's Wine & Spirits of California
Lora Tagliarina - Southern Glazer's Wine & Spirits - CPWS Division
- 9:00 AM What Noah Found After the Flood: Discovering the Armenian Wine Industry**
Lisa Granik, MW - Storica Wines
- 10:30 AM Buyer's Market, Networking**
- 11:15 AM..... Blind Tasting to the Next Level - Evil Wine Twins**
David Glancy - San Francisco Wine School
- 11:15 AM..... The SOMM Journal's "Assessing Crucial Body Profiles in Wine"**
Moderated by Deborah Parker Wong - Global Wine Editor, The SOMM Journal
Will Costello, MS - Miller Family Wine Company
Dino Altomare - Banfi Vintners
James Ewart - Diora Wines
Matthew Heil - Belle Glos; Copper Cane Wine & Provisions
Ralf Holdenried - Black Stallion Winery
← Jacob Gragg - Santa Margherita USA



- 11:15 AM..... Sparkling Sake All the Way!**
Toshio Ueno - Sake School of America
- 11:15 AM..... The Evolving Role of the Sommelier**
Barbara (Bobbie) Burgess - WCBI News, Scotty's Wine and Spirits, Eat Local Starkville, Brian Michaels Catering Co.
Chuck Nix II - Bravo! Italian Restaurant
Matthew Kaner - Will Travel for Wine
Molly Brooks - Meritage Wine Market
- 11:15 AM..... The Power of Publicity: Advance Your Career Through PR and Social Media**
J.W. Arnold - PRDC Public Relations
- 12:30 PM..... Winemaker Lunch - Tuesday**
- 12:30 PM..... Buyer's Market, Networking**
- 12:30 PM..... Conference Lunch**
- 12:30 PM..... Vins de Provence Lunch: The Aging Capacity of Provence Rosé**
Joshua Orr - Broadbent Selections
- 2:00 PM..... A Global Exploration of Volcanic Wines**
Rupert Billins - Dalla Terra
Geoff Labitzke - Hamel Family Wines
Brooke Barnett - Kistler Vineyards
- 2:00 PM..... Inside Perspectives: Employment, Advancement & Opportunity for BIPOC Beverage Professionals within the Three-Tier System**
Larissa Dubose - Paradies Lagardère (moderator)
Panelists TBA
- 2:00 PM..... PinotTalks®**
SPEAKER
- 2:00 PM..... The SOMM Journal's Spectrum of Spirits**
Moderated by Jessie Birschbach - The SOMM Journal
Joel Caruso - Chopin Spirits (Mezcal & Vermouth)
Peter Hunt - Empress Gin
Miguel Rodriguez - Duke Spirits
Dino Altomare - Banfi Vintners (Grappa)
- 2:00 PM..... Temecula Valley - The New World's Mediterranean**
Roger Bohmrich, MW
- 2:00 PM..... Winning at Beverage: Maximizing Profitability in a Constantly Evolving Restaurant Environment**
Erik Segelbaum - SOMLYAY LLC / SWIG Partners
- 3:15 PM Buyer's Market, Networking**

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A TOAST TO YOU

The dream of Jordan would never have become a reality without the friendship of so many sommeliers, restaurateurs and distributors who believed in Tom and Sally Jordan's vision of French-inspired wines from Sonoma County. Thank you for your unwavering support throughout the years. We raise a glass to you as we toast to 50 years at Jordan.



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The pollo guisado is one of several dishes inspired by Tía Carmen's namesake, Angelo Sosa's aunt Carmen.



“A Love Letter to the Region”

AT NEW PHOENIX RESTAURANT **TÍA CARMEN**, ANGELO SOSA SHARES HIS FAMILY STORY THROUGH AN ARIZONA LENS

“MAGICAL” IS A WORD that *Top Chef* All-Star and restaurateur Angelo Sosa sprinkled freely throughout our recent conversation as we touched on topics ranging from his discovery of Arizona’s agricultural bounty to treasured memories of his restaurant’s namesake, his *tía* (aunt) Carmen.

In May, Sosa and operating partner Mark Stone opened Tía Carmen at the JW Marriott Desert Ridge Resort & Spa in Phoenix, honoring his beloved relative while celebrating the flavors of the Southwest. He recounted the memory of being a 9-year-old propped up on a stool in her kitchen: “Everyone would head to the living room, but I would be tugged into the kitchen by the aromas of her cooking,” he shared, adding that, through her, he realized the power of food. “Her cooking transformed you. Have you ever had a bite of something and it moves you? That’s why food is an experience.”

One homage to her at Tía Carmen is pollo guisado, a homey chicken stew that Sosa has lovingly recreated through memories of his aunt’s Dominican rendition. “I layer in Chimayo chile and Southwestern spices, but her guisado is the canvas,” he said.



Menu highlights at Tía Carmen include tomato salad with serrano chile, sweet corn puree, and corn ash; avocado aguachile; and lamb ragu tossed with mesquite noodles.

PHOTOS: CHRISTINA BARRUETA



Top Chef All-Star and restaurateur Angelo Sosa opened Tía Carmen with his operating partner, Mark Stone, in May at the JW Marriott Desert Ridge Resort & Spa in Phoenix, AZ.

“Mark and I took a farm tour with Bob McClendon [of organic farm McClendon’s Select],” Sosa said. “Little did I know that dates grow in Arizona! Adding them to the aguachile tames the spiciness and adds natural sweetness.” At a farmers market, meanwhile, he discovered that “Brian [Hedger] of Hypha Foods had beautiful cordyceps and cauliflower mushrooms. I had never seen anything like that, but it reminded me of tripe.” The result is a deliciously clever vegetarian menudo laden with chile de árbol, Chimayo chile, and epazote. From there, more Southwestern-inspired

twists abound: Lamb ragu is seasoned with chiles and cumin and tossed with mesquite noodles; serrano chile-spiked tomato salad is accompanied by sweet corn puree and corn ash; and Sosa’s ten-month-aged mole includes tepary beans from Ramona Farms.

He describes his role at the restaurant as that of a “storyteller,” emphasizing the importance of engaging directly with the community. He’s traveled to Benson, Arizona, to meet Michael Muthart of Top Knot Farms, whose chicken Sosa smokes over mesquite wood before glazing it with ancho chile-laced honey; worked with artist Christiane Barbuto of Blue Door Ceramics to design the restaurant’s handmade tableware; and visited local farms and weekly markets to cultivate relationships. “It’s important for me to tell their story and share their vision,” he explained.

Take, for example, the date crumble that gilds his colorful avocado aguachile.

“This restaurant is a love letter to the region. From Bob’s dates to the produce that farmer Nate [Diemer] grows for us here [at the resort], they all enrich this story,” he said. “Telling theirs as much as mine is so powerful and magical and truly an expression of us all. Honoring my *tía* is a gift that I share with everyone who walks through the door as a thank you.”

PREMIUM WINES FROM ARGENTINA

- HIGH ALTITUDE VINEYARDS -

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SALES INFO



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The Hows and Whys of Skin Contact in Red Winemaking

GRAPE SKINS CONTAIN virtually all of the pigment-rich anthocyanins that color wine as well as the vast majority of precursor molecules that, when fermented, give it its distinct flavors and aromas. As soon as the grape is crushed, the clear liquid begins to extract these from the skins. In general, the longer juice is kept on the skins, the greater the extraction. Managing juice-to-skin interactions is a practice as varied and nuanced as red wine itself.

Consider Blanc de Noirs, which is made by gently pressing Pinot Noir, keeping skin contact to a minimum. The resulting liquid is light-bodied, delicately flavored, and almost colorless; it can create a sparkling wine of amazing finesse. Still white wines made from red grapes also exist: For example, Dot Wines in Sonoma County picks a small portion of its Russian River Valley Pinot Noir slightly early and ferments it off the skins to guarantee that all will not be lost in the event that a wildfire reaches the remaining crop before it is ripe enough to be harvested for red Pinot.

Rosé is made by crushing red grapes and leaving them on their skins for anywhere from a few minutes to several hours. The margin of error for making a fresh, appealingly tinted rosé is slim; the line between expressive and oppressive can be a fine one. Winemakers can aim for lighter, brighter, more refreshing rosés by carefully selecting their variety and controlling ripeness and fermentation temperature as well as degree of skin contact.

For many red wines, tannin management becomes the deciding factor in how much skin contact to allow. Tannins are present in the skins and seeds and are extracted by alcohol; the goal is to maxi-



mize their extraction before the alcohol becomes high enough to overextract whatever harshness may be lurking within them. With a warm, actively fermenting must, that can happen fast. A winemaker may choose to stop punching down the wine, switch to gentler pumpovers, or even press the wine off the skins in an effort to limit tannin extraction.

Cold soaking, or chilling the must on the skins for about a week prior to fermentation, is often used to coax as much from the skins as possible prior to any alcohol developing. A happy byproduct of using ambient yeast to initiate a spontaneous fermentation is the cold soak that happens naturally over the course of five to six days.

Sometimes an extended maceration is warranted, typically for a mighty Cabernet Sauvignon or Barolo. Here, the wine is kept warm on the skins for many weeks

after fermentation; tannins will continue to rise, but at a certain point they will form stable polymers that ultimately have a softening effect.

Of course, grape variety plays a huge role in a wine's final character; even the best winemaking techniques cannot extract from the skins what is not there to begin with. Lightly pigmented grapes such as Pinot Noir will never produce a wine with the inky darkness of a Malbec; Nerello Mascalese simply does not have the tannins of a Nebbiolo. And this article would not be complete without a nod to co-fermentation, whereby different varieties are fermented together. Long before science could explain why fermenting red Syrah with a small amount of white Viognier produces a wine of greater depth and color, winemakers were doing it. But that is a story for another day. »

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Taking Root

ARIDUS WINE COMPANY CRAFTS FINE WINES IN ARIZONA'S HIGH DESERT COUNTRY by Christina Barrueta

NESTLED IN THE foothills of the Chiricahua Mountains in Pearce, Arizona, is the vineyard of Aridus Wine Company. Founders Scott and Joan Dahmer purchased their 40-acre site in 2009, planting the first vines in 2015. In the interim, they transformed a 28,000-square-foot apple warehouse in nearby Willcox into a stylish custom-crush winery to attract clients. As one of the largest such facilities in the state, it has served as a springboard for many local winemakers to launch their own labels.

The picturesque Aridus vineyard is bisected by Turkey Creek, which divides it into what the Dahmers call the “north side” and the “south side.” On the former, white grapes are planted in rich, gray loamy soil, while red varieties flourish in the red loam of the latter. In both cases, an elevation of 5,200 feet contributes to an all-important diurnal temperature shift—up to 30 degrees—that provides complexity and balance to the wines crafted by Lisa Strid, a former winemaker for E. & J. Gallo.

With 28 acres under vine, Aridus is currently home to 12 varieties: Malvasia Bianca, Sauvignon Blanc, Viognier, Tempranillo, Petit Verdot, Merlot, Syrah, Cabernet Sauvignon, Cabernet Franc, Petite Sirah, Graciano, and Malbec. While their plantings were maturing, the Dahmers



Aridus Wine Company founders Joan and Scott Dahmer.



Aridus winemaker Lisa Strid.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF ARIDUS WINE COMPANY

supplemented their grapes with fruit from neighboring Arizona vineyards and from New Mexico's Mimbres Valley AVA; as of the 2021 harvest, however, it has become an all-estate operation.

Among Strid's favorite grapes is Malvasia Bianca for its highly perfumed character and versatility. “The Malvasia we have planted is incredibly aromatic,” she notes. “It's so floral, and we can do so much with that particular variety, whether it's sweet, dry, or sparkling.” This is exemplified by the recent release of a limited-edition (100 cases) sparkling Malvasia with notes of white flowers, star fruit, and peach as well as a lingering floral finish.

Meanwhile, “Graciano is another one I love working with,” Strid says. “It comes

into the winery retaining so much of its own natural acidity, which means that I don't have to do much work on it as it goes through the fermentation process. It does really well in this region, and I love the blackberry and graphite notes we get.”

Though it should be noted that Aridus takes its name from the Latin word for “arid,” Strid thinks it's important to address the misconceptions that consumers may have about the state's thriving wine industry. “When people hear ‘Arizona,’ they usually think hot and dry, when in reality we have such a wide range of climates and growing regions,” she points out. “There are so many varieties that do well here, and it's an exciting time to be making wine in Arizona.” SJ

Aridus' 40-acre vineyard in the foothills of the Chiricahua Mountains.





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Goodbye, Burgundy— Bonjour, Bourgogne!

by Stacie Hunt

BOURGOGNE IS THE NAME of a French region soaked in a rich and distinctive winemaking history. So is the English translation “Burgundy” a suitable alternative? According to the winemakers of Bourgogne—no.

For a decade, this region has been working to reintroduce itself by its true name to international audiences. Re-branding requires substantial effort, which the Bureau Interprofessionnel des Vins de Bourgogne (BIVB) is vigilantly making—and what better way to accomplish it than with a tasting?

chain delays and meeting the challenges (and rare, perhaps fleeting, opportunities) posed by climate change.

Still, optimism was palpable—especially when it came to celebrating the outstanding 2020 vintage.

Anne Moreau, president of the BIVB’s communications commission and business manager at Louis Moreau in Chablis, was brimming with enthusiasm to meet and taste with U.S. wine buyers and professionals. “Fortunately for us, we have a most beautiful vintage in both value and price to present,” she said while introduc-



exquisite aromas, and mouthwatering texture. “We stopped using oak barrels simply because the grapes don’t need it anymore,” Moreau noted. “The richness of the juices doesn’t need to be rounded and structured via oak aging. We are going straight to steel.”

As the room hummed with the sound of wine being poured, tasted, and discussed, Moreau addressed the future: “In laboratories, new clones and varieties are being studied—not to replace Pinot Noir and Chardonnay but [for the purposes of] new wine stock that will ripen less quickly to keep the freshness as we warm.” Meanwhile, she added, “We have new winegrowers who focus on organic and sustainable growing [and] gaining HEV certification [High Environment Value]. They are moving, respectfully, a bit from tradition with an attitude of ‘Let’s try and see.’ [It’s] a real revolution.” (HEV certification operates in a similar manner to Sustainability in Practice, or SIP, certification in the U.S.) Moreau also suggested that attendees go beyond the region’s iconic appellations to give attention to lesser-known areas of Bourgogne. These hidden gems include Brouilly, Saint-Véran, Vézelay, Sauvigny, and the Côte Chalonnaise.

Finally, our host offered a toast and a last word: “Bourgogne wines are for every moment. There is one for every moment and meal—and from now on, we only say *Bourgogne!*”



Anne Moreau, president of the communications commission for the Bureau Interprofessionnel des Vins de Bourgogne, addresses attendees of the Bourgogne Homecoming U.S. Conference and Wine Tasting.

In June, the board hosted the Bourgogne Homecoming U.S. Conference and Wine Tasting in New York and Los Angeles. The event enlightened guests as to how the region has been focusing its energy upon rebounding from the catastrophic events of 2021, when a black frost in April followed by sub-zero temperatures resulted in a 30–50% loss of yield, while working around supply-

ing the wines. For the first time in history, the U.S. is Bourgogne’s number-one export market, tipping the U.K. out of that prestigious chair.

“The 2020 vintage was the perfect balance between sugar, acidity, and fruit, requiring less manipulation as nature gave us her gifts,” Moreau continued. Indeed, for now, Mother Nature is smiling upon the region, serving up ripeness, freshness,

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FOR QUALITY AND VALUE, **MAISON ALAIN DE LA TREILLE** IS A LEADER IN THE LOIRE VALLEY *by David Ransom*

ONE OF FRANCE'S most cherished winemaking regions, the Loire Valley has a wine for everyone. Whether it's a crisp, Melon de Bourgogne-based Muscadet from Sèvre et Maine east of Nantes; a Chenin Blanc, Cabernet Franc, or rosé from the central production regions surrounding Angers; or a wonderfully complex Sauvignon Blanc from easternmost Sancerre, this unique region—with its east-west orientation, world-renowned châteaux, and relaxed atmosphere—is an aficionado's heaven. Among its notable producers is Maison Alain de la Treille in Touraine, which has been leading the way in terms of quality and value for well over a century.

Originally grape growers, the de la Treille family founded their first vineyards in 1885 in Saint-Georges-sur-Cher. It was Alain de la Treille, born in 1925, who first delved into winemaking as a négociant and, along with partner Jean-Claude Bougrier, set the foundation for the estate's enduring success. Now run by sixth-generation proprietor Noël Bougrier, Maison Alain de la Treille farms some 250 acres of vines and produces wines at three cellars in Nantes, Anjou, and Sancerre, respectively. This geographical spread ensures quick vineyard-to-winery transfer times, which in turn allows the winemaking team to craft bottlings of great freshness and finesse.

"Alain de la Treille produces fruit-driven wines that keep the alcohol in check while showing true-to-type varietal character," says Master Sommelier Fran Kysela, owner of Winchester, Virginia-based importer Kysela Pere et Fils, who has worked with the family for the better part of a decade. What's more, he adds, "They are constantly responding to global market fluctuation to keep pricing competitive—a win-win for both the cost-conscious consumer and those that sell to them."

Kysela Pere et Fils imports about a dozen wines from Maison Alain de la Treille, including the core labels below. Learn more at kysela.com. **SJ**

PHOTO: DAVID RANSOM

A vineyard near Saumur in the Loire Valley.



Alain de la Treille Sauvignon Blanc Touraine AOP, Loire Valley, France (\$18) From one of the top production areas for Sauvignon Blanc, this wine undergoes partial skin contact prior to fermentation in stainless steel and sees six months of aging on lees, which give it a subtly rich mouthfeel in balance with that classic varietal acidity.



Alain de la Treille Cabernet Franc, Chinon AOC, Loire Valley, France (\$23) Fermented and aged in stainless steel, this fruit-driven Cabernet Franc sourced from 25-year-old vines offers intense color along with bright cherry and spice on the palate. Gravel-covered limestone soils give it roundness and depth, mineral notes, and aging potential.



Alain de la Treille Pinot Noir, Vin de France (\$13) Varietally labeled, this Pinot Noir from the eastern Loire Valley is the brand's number-one-selling SKU for Kysela. With a bright ruby color, velvety mouthfeel, and notes of black cherry and earth, it's perfect for pouring by the glass: It would be tough to find a comparable Pinot Noir at this price point.



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Honing Perception

HOW EVALUATING CHOCOLATE AND FRAGRANCE CAN EXPAND YOUR TASTING SKILLS

BEYOND OUR FIVE senses—smell, taste, touch, hearing, and sight—our brains regularly perceive other sensations from temperature (or thermoception), which is part of flavor; pain (nociception); the passage of time (chronoception); and our body's movement and orientation in space (proprioception).

In an effort to expand my perception beyond my daily work with beverage alcohol, I tackle the evaluation of chocolate and fragrance a few times each year by judging hundreds of products as part of an unpaid panel.

We can make the case that judging wine and chocolate using a common language tips the scale in favor of the idea that tasting is based in objectivity: The rubric for evaluating the sensory characteristics, quality, and style of chocolate is similar to that of wine, and we can achieve consensus on that quality and style according to our analysis. The exercise is demanding but doesn't require me to stretch too far beyond my comfort zone into uncharted territory while offering sheer gustatory pleasure.

However, evaluating fragrance, even using industry standard guidelines, is considered by many to be almost entirely subjective. Natural perfumer Mandy Aftel, who judges an industry award that bears her name, prioritizes the quality of ingredients and factors other than analytical evaluation. "My priority is what's going into the bottle and whether a perfume is well made and evolves well," she says. In her view, longevity or "dry down," which refers to how long a scent lasts, doesn't speak to anything other than the presence of chemicals.

Have you entered an empty elevator only to find it filled with fragrance worn by the previous passenger? In the perfume world, the trail a scent leaves in the wearer's wake is known as *sillage*. Aftel says it's the most immediate way to identify a synthetic fragrance: "Natural perfume doesn't billow off the wearer leaving a trail; you must be very close to the person to smell it."

When judging fragrance, I like to collaborate with fellow wine professional and perfume lover Mary Orlin, who has judged the TasteTV Artisan Fragrances of the Year Awards since its inception in 2012. While we can easily achieve a consensus for a description of the scents in question, we have very different emotional responses to them. Researchers have found that people inherently choose perfumes that interact well with their own chemistry, which provides at least one explanation for the highly individual nature of perfume choice.

"Perfume helped me decipher scent notes in wine," says Orlin, "and my wine sensory training has helped me be a better evaluator of fragrance. I find them similar in the way that perfumes have a top, middle, and base note, [while] wine

"Perfume helped me decipher scent notes in wine, and my wine sensory training has helped me be a better evaluator of fragrance."

—Mary Orlin

has [an] aroma, a mid-palate, and [a] finish."

Guidelines for evaluating scent include two different aspects of quality: preference and emotional response being one and the quality of the ingredients and the accord or "soul" of the fragrance (which are key for Aftel) being the second. Other criteria are originality, power (also referred to as "projection"), radiance, longevity, and versatility. The language of perfume evaluation may be different, but I agree with Orlin that there are structural parallels to the analysis of wine. "An individual's connection to perfume is profound," says Aftel. "One of the most important factors we consider is beauty." SJ



94
POINTS

2019 NAPA VALLEY
CABERNET SAUVIGNON
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French Connection

AN INTERVIEW WITH SUMMER STAEB AND JAKE ZYLSTRA OF MIDTOWN WINES

by Emily Johnston Collins

WHEN I ASK Summer Staeb and Jake Zylstra how their newly minted retail shop, Midtown Wines—which opened in Ventura, California, in September—attracts their ideal clientele, they smile a little as if letting me in on a secret: The Orange County natives established a foothold with wine lovers in this well-known haven for surfing, beer, and burritos long before they sought to draw a hip audience to their business.

Staeb is the owner of the bright and welcoming space, which is located on Main Street downtown. In addition to serving as a consultant for Midtown Wines, Zylstra owns an import company, Cul Sec, focused on French wine. He originally found a wine niche in Ventura by chance: While working for Lo-Fi Wines in Los Alamos, he would stop here to surf on his trips up the coast and began selling bottles to fellow surfers out of his car. In 2021, after settling in a home just down the street from their future shop, the couple began hosting well-attended pop-up dinners—aptly named “All Summer Long”—that helped them gain traction with local wine enthusiasts.

During my recent visit to Midtown Wines, Staeb offered me a glass of Âmevive Graciano Rosé from the Los Olivos District AVA—a testament to her hospitality. As we sipped, she touted the accomplishments of her winemaker friends in the Santa Ynez Valley. It seems fitting that the couple has landed halfway between their native Orange County and the Central Coast, but their journey involved a notable detour: Zylstra was lured to southwest France for its surf, then traveled to Paris to study coffee while working as a barista before switching his focus to wine. Meanwhile, Staeb was living in Provence—where she was also working in the coffee biz at a cafe called Mana Espresso—when a friend connected her with Paul Wasserman, the son of prominent importer Becky Wasserman. She toured the villages of Burgundy with his expert guidance and found herself similarly captivated by wine. (Ironically, Zylstra and Staeb didn’t actually meet until they were both back on California soil.)

Having lived in France myself, I detected a familiar influence in the couple’s vision for their shop, where they plan to place a particular emphasis on bottlings from Burgundy, Beaujolais, and Jura as well as on natural wines. Their vision is also apparent in the decor: One element that particularly speaks to their travels is a communal table, which will not only serve as a gathering space for future pop-up events but beckons as a symbol of a European mentality whereby wine and community go hand in hand. For more information, follow @midtownwines on Instagram. SJ

Jake Zylstra and Summer Staeb opened Midtown Wines in Ventura, CA, in September.



PHOTO COURTESY OF SUMMER STAEB

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Rising to the Top

THE **WINE PINNACLE AWARDS** RETURNS TO SINGAPORE TO CELEBRATE THE INDUSTRY AT LARGE

PHOTOS COURTESY OF RESORTS WORLD SENTOSA



RESORTS WORLD SENTOSA (RWS) will present the second edition of the Wine Pinnacle Awards (WPA) from October 28 to November 1, 2022, in Singapore. Following its 2019 debut, the prestigious five-day celebration is returning to an in-person format after a pandemic-related hiatus.

This year's program has been meticulously curated to distinguish the WPA as Southeast Asia's most prominent wine festival; Scott Peterson, vice president, lifestyle, for RWS, describes it as "an avenue to celebrate diversity, excellence, and innovation in the world of wines. Throughout these five days, guests at RWS will not only discover and appreciate the art of winemaking, they can even enjoy intimate and exclusive wine pairing dinners . . . from world-famous celebrity chefs; a Masterclass Experience for enthusiasts and investors to discover new gems; and a two-day Wine Industry Symposium for wine and hospitality professionals."

As the world's first wine-awards ceremony based solely on nominations, the WPA will recognize the finest wines and wine professionals the world has to offer, representing the opinions of 61 jury members from around the globe—including Masters of Wine, Master Sommeliers, and other wine-industry luminaries as well as the WPA's illustrious Technical Committee.



The Wine Pinnacle Awards will be held at Resorts World Sentosa in Singapore.



Jeannie Cho Lee, MW, is chair of the Wine Pinnacle Awards' Technical Committee.



WPA jury member Christy Canterbury, MW.



WPA jury member Liz Thach, MW.



The Judges

The Technical Committee comprises five internationally renowned wine experts. The first Asian Master of Wine, committee chairwoman Jeannie Cho Lee of Hong Kong is joined by Andreas Larsson of Sweden, named Best Sommelier in the World in 2007; Doug Frost, MS, MW, of the U.S.; Kenichi Ohashi, MW, of Japan; and famed expert Oz Clarke of the U.K. They are responsible for establishing the award categories; forming a credible panel of jury members; and overseeing the nomination process to ensure the focus is on diversity, quality, and merit.

Says Lee, "Participating in the creation of the inaugural awards and its groundbreaking platform [was] truly an extraordinary experience. I am honored to continue the search for the most deserving wine producers and wines in the second edition of the awards. . . . This year, I am most looking forward to the comfort wine category, [which] was added because of the pandemic . . . when most people were enjoying wine at home. It will be fun to find out what red, white, and rosé wines below \$40 USD provided the most comfort to the jury members."

Regarding those jury members, Frost notes that "I have judged in dozens of competitions over my four-plus decades in the wine business[, and] this is inarguably the most credentialed and, more importantly, the most likely to be best

informed of any corps of judges I have ever seen."

That includes Liz Thach, MW, who in turn calls the WPA "one of the most exciting and unique wine competitions in which I have ever judged. Not only is it based on the collective knowledge of some of the top wine professionals in the world, but it incorporates very distinctive categories."



The Nomination Process

The WPA considers wines from every region without restrictions on origin and without requiring entry fees. As judge Christy Canterbury, MW, points out, "The Wine Pinnacle Awards allows a different range of wines to rise to the top than [do] traditional wine competitions, [where] only the wines submitted can be awarded. The [WPA] nominees tend to be from producers that do not or rarely submit to traditional wine competitions."

What's more, says Clarke, "We've spread the net wider this year and are on the lookout for budget-priced wines as well as . . . wineries that are making the greatest effort with [respect to] sustainability. We have also highlighted individuals who we believe have made a particular effort to cope with the COVID-19 pandemic."



The Award Categories

The WPA's 18 award categories fall under the headers "Best Recent

Releases," "Best Friend of the Earth," "Mature Wines," "Comfort Wines," and "Pandemic Hero." For instance, the nominees for "Best Recent Release: Riesling" are F.E. Trimbach 2018 Clos Sainte Hune Riesling, Alsace, France; Egon Müller 2018 Scharzhofberger Riesling Auslese, Mosel, Germany; and Joh. Jos. Prum 2019 Wehlener Sonnenuhr Riesling Auslese, Mosel, Germany. The nominees for "Comfort Rosé: < 40 Euros," meanwhile, are Domaine Tempier 2020 Bandol Rosé, Bandol, France; Château Miraval 2020 Côtes de Provence Rosé, Provence, France; and Château d'Esclans 2020 Whispering Angel Rosé, Provence, France.

As for "Mature Wines," says Canterbury, "the [WPA] can showcase . . . wines that are showing well now. This is particularly useful for collectors keen to know whether bottles in their cellars may be ready to enjoy."



The Wine Pinnacle Awards Gala Dinner and Ceremony

Concluding the five-day celebration is the Wine Pinnacle Awards Gala Dinner and Awards Ceremony. Held on November 1 in the RWS ballroom, the black-tie soirée will gather key industry experts, influencers, sponsors, peers, and wine luminaries from across the globe.

A limited number of tickets are now available. For the latest news about the event, visit winepinnacle.com. SJ

A Story of Discovery and Disruption

PASO ROBLES IS A REBEL IN THE WORLD OF CABERNET SAUVIGNON

by Maeve Pesquera

AS THE WORLD'S most iconic grape variety, Cabernet Sauvignon would have seemed far past the point of disrupting the industry—let alone being labeled as a “discovery”—by the mid-2000s. After all, its legend had already been cemented for centuries in Bordeaux and for decades in Napa and Sonoma. If there was another region that could rival these stalwarts for producing world-class Cabernet, surely it would have been identified by then, right?

Then along came Paso Robles. Though it was established in 1983, a paradigm shift has occurred there in 15 short years; as a recent comparative tasting conducted by Master Sommelier Evan Goldstein and the Paso Robles CAB Collective affirmed, Paso Robles Cabernet Sauvignon now stands toe to toe with the best in the world.

This disruption to the Cabernet universe is perhaps best embodied by the experience of brothers Georges and Daniel Daou. When they started DAOU Family Estates in 2007 and announced their intention to create Paso Robles Cabernets that would rival the greatest, they were met with almost blanket skepticism. Yet today, wines like DAOU's Soul of a Lion are helping set the pace for a new generation of Paso Robles Cabernet Sauvignons.

How is the region's rendition of the grape perceived in the trade today versus 15 years ago? What is its future? To answer these questions, I reached out to two of my trusted wine-trade contacts—Dan Williams, buyer at Hi-Time Wine Cellars in Costa Mesa, California, and Grant Hewitt, vice president beverage at Loews Hotels & Co.



PHOTOS COURTESY OF DAOU FAMILY ESTATES

Wines like DAOU's Soul of a Lion are helping set the pace for a new generation of Paso Robles Cabernet Sauvignons.

How has your perception of Paso Robles Cabernet Sauvignon changed over the past 15 years—and what role has DAOU's Soul of a Lion played in that?

Dan Williams: In a winegrowing region where Cabernet Sauvignon often took a back seat to other varietals, this grape is now strongly taking the wheel and helping to lead Paso Robles into a new era. Wineries and their vineyard managers are honing in on the more ideal spots to plant Bordeaux varietals, and DAOU Family Estates is situated on one of the most prized pieces of property in the region. During one of my trips to Paso Robles, I

tasted the 2016 Soul of a Lion next to a high-scoring, hard-to-get, boutique Napa Valley producer . . . and the Soul of a Lion was every bit as good as the Napa offering. It was at this moment that I knew that Paso Robles Cabernet was finally reaching its true potential.

Grant Hewitt: There has been a dramatic shift [from] Paso Robles Cabernet . . . being thought of as a younger, greener, and higher-alcohol varietal. Many winemakers have tried extensively through marketing programming to bring attention to the potential of the varietal. DAOU came along and showed what . . . Paso Robles Cabernet can achieve. The Daou brothers



"In a winegrowing region where Cabernet Sauvignon often took a back seat to other varietals, this grape is now strongly taking the wheel and helping to lead Paso Robles into a new era," says Dan Williams, wine buyer at Hi-Time Wine Cellars in Costa Mesa, CA.



Grant Hewitt, vice president beverage at Loews Hotels & Co., says that "Paso Robles producers have come on strong with an unshackled manner of creation [for Cabernet Sauvignon]."

have been able to grow grapes that are beautifully complex and highly concentrated, allowing them to extract a true brilliance in the Cabernet varietal.

Are you surprised that a region like Paso Robles could come on so strong so quickly with such a stalwart grape variety?

DW: To be honest, nope, not at all. Practically everything was already there—the climate, soils, topography, vineyards, et cetera. All the region needed was a few winemakers who didn't just talk the talk about doing what it takes to make wines that rival the best from Napa, Bordeaux, or Australia but who would actually walk the walk. Daniel Daou is one of those walkers [who] is not cutting any corners.

GH: I'm not surprised at all by the dramatic rise in popularity of the region. It simply lacked a different, more creative . . . way of thinking. That has changed in recent years as DAOU and other Paso Robles producers have come on strong with an unshackled manner of creation. It allows them to be both innovative and traditional at the same time, and it seems to have paved the way for unlocking the region's potential.

It has been said that "Cabernet is king." What makes it so alluring to winemakers, the trade, and consumers alike?

GH: In my opinion, Cabernet has been king due to many factors like marketing . . . and the versatility of the varietal [at] all meal periods.

DW: What's not to like about Cabernet? Sure, there are a variety of styles out there (just like any other wine), but Cabernet Sauvignon is often brimming with ripe fruits that many people can easily relate to, such as black cherry, plum, and blackberry. Plus, it tends to have a lot of body and pairs well with beef, so it's a crowd-pleaser. Lastly, the way it plays so well with high-quality new oak can give the finished wine nicely placed notes of vanilla and/or coffee, and I feel that adds to its enchantment.

What does the future hold for Paso Robles and California Cabernet Sauvignon as a whole—what trends do you foresee in the growing, making, and/or selling of Cabernet wines?

GH: The future of wine as a whole in California has nothing but upside. Further innovation into organic, biodynamic, and sustainable farming will continue to be a factor in Cabernet development. What both new and existing brands have shown is that by implementing creative techniques, there is unlimited potential to understand and develop more of California's regions.

DW: California Cabernet Sauvignon has garnered the limelight for quite some time. I don't see that changing anytime soon, but the spotlight will shine a little brighter on Paso Robles than it has in the past. As more wineries see the successes that DAOU and others are having with Cabernet on the west side of Paso Robles, I think there's the potential that we will see a slew of new plantings or replantings in the area. . . . This may increase competition with the other notable Cabernet Sauvignon regions of California, push[ing] those producers to keep moving forward and not rest on their laurels. We are also starting to see the pendulum slightly swing back toward wines with a touch more freshness and vibrancy [while] still retain[ing] their full-bodied and generous profiles. SJ



Maeve Pesquera is senior VP of strategy and business development for DAOU Family Estates.

Jordan Wentz grew up climbing trees and exploring the vines on her family's Murrieta's Well estate; she now serves as brand manager after joining the company in 2015.

The **Livermore** **Valley** *weary*

**MURRIETA'S WELL BRAND
MANAGER JORDAN WENTZ
AND WINEMAKER ROBBIE
MEYER MAKE "WINES OF
INTENTION" ON A HISTORIC
FAMILY ESTATE**

**story by Jonathan Cristaldi
photos by Clara Rice**



Robbie Meyer has served as winemaker for Murrieta's Well since 2015.



Two wines in the Murrieta's Well portfolio are nationally distributed: Sauvignon Blanc and The Spur Red Wine Blend.

In 1883, Carl H. Wente, a German immigrant, purchased 48 acres of land in California's Livermore Valley. His son, Ernest Wente, added to that acreage in 1940 by buying the famed Louis Mel Vineyards, today home to the family's Murrieta's Well label. And 82 years after Ernest's purchase, fifth-generation winegrower Jordan Wente is stepping into her role as brand manager for Murrieta's Well, helping cement the legacy of the historic property.

Jordan, the eldest daughter of fourth-generation winegrower Phil Wente, who introduced the brand in 1990, knows intimately the vines surrounding the winery. She raced through them as a child, snacked on their juicy grapes, and climbed the ancient olive trees planted among the vines. She first joined the family business, Wente Family Estates, in 2015 and confidently dove headfirst into her new role in project management at Murrieta's Well.

The first job Jordan ever had was polishing wine glasses in the kitchen of her family's former restaurant at Wente Vineyards. There and throughout her youth, she witnessed the passion her dad poured into Murrieta's Well, but she set out to carve her own path in the world, earning her bachelor's degree in political science at the University of Colorado, Boulder, before going on to obtain a master's in business administration from California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo.

From 2011 to 2015, she served as the COO for the Californians Dedicated to Education Foundation, an organization focused on improving the outcomes for students in California's public school system. Eventually, though, she began to feel the same pull that fueled her father's passions, and when the family decided that Murrieta's Well needed a total remodel and label redesign, Jordan saw an opportunity and grabbed it. "It felt like the right homecoming," she says. "The family needed me, and I love design and project management. But [I] wanted to keep the integrity of the history of the building and make it a place that would be incredibly inviting."

She proved not only willing but capable beyond her family's expectations, leading an eight-month renovation of the estate and historic gravity-flow winery—originally built by Livermore Valley pioneer Louis Mel in the 1880s—that transformed it into an open-air, upscale wine-country retreat with a rustic yet luxurious aesthetic and pervasive sense of charm. From the parking lot, a wide and inviting pathway leads to an expansive lawn area with a thick carpet of grass, ample seating, and views of an old artesian well that

was famously frequented by the brand's namesake: Joaquin Murrieta, a gold rush-era bandito. Beyond the lawn is the two-story barn, whose first floor is outfitted with long tables ideally suited for large parties or weddings. Beautiful exposed beams and walls that date back to the 1800s are illuminated by elegant chandeliers, and the space is decorated in lovely brown tones; the walls, if you look closely, are composed of the same rocks that make up the gravelly, well-draining terroir that comprises sections of the vineyards. Upstairs, a modern tasting room and expansive patio offer cozy spaces to taste wine with optional pairing experiences.

Overseeing the estate's roughly 12,000-case annual production is winemaker Robbie Meyer, who is an alum of Peter Michael Winery, Lewis Cellars, and Jericho Canyon Vineyard. Though Meyer's first official vintage was 2015, Jordan's cousin Karl Wentz, who serves as COO and chief winemaker for Wentz Family Vineyards, began inviting Meyer to taste at Murrieta's Well in the early 2000s. "I'm the benefactor of hundreds of years of history and, of course, [the efforts of] Jordan's father, Phil Wentz, who does the viticulture here," Meyer says of the

estate's top-notch plant material, including Sauvignon Blanc and Sémillon from Château d'Yquem and Cabernet Sauvignon and Merlot from Château Margaux that Louis Mel obtained in partnership with Charles Wetmore.

Today, some 500 acres of vines—all farmed in accordance with their certification by the California Sustainable Winegrowing Alliance—surround the winery, from which Meyer produces estate wines of tremendous depth and complexity. The reds are especially impressive, showcasing intensely savory characteristics with real elegance and fine structure. They are benchmark bottlings for the Livermore Valley in that they exhibit the balance that is possible in the region's distinct climate, which many outsiders perceive as hotter than it actually is. In fact, the winds that funnel through the Altamont Pass of the Diablo Range draw cool air in from the coast to ensure that "we have fewer degree days than Napa," explains Meyer. "And that gives us some restraint."

Jordan says that Meyer brings a "fresh perspective" to the wines—of which there are 12 in the portfolio, two of them nationally distributed: Murrieta's Well Sauvignon Blanc and The Spur Red



Murrieta's Well produces a lineup of estate wines from a vineyard predominantly comprising gravelly, well-draining soils.



Jordan Wente and Robbie Meyer share a glass of the Murrieta's Well Sauvignon Blanc.

Wine Blend. For his part, Meyer revels in the collaborative environment and open communication the family facilitates regarding not only their preferences but how the wine is expressing the terroir. "We're making wines of intention," he asserts. "Take the Sauvignon Blanc, for instance—let's focus in and pick the best expression of Sauvignon Blanc in the Mel Vineyard from vines planted in the gravelly arroyo, the same soils that are embedded in the walls of the winery building."

That sense of focus is ushering in an era of precision winemaking and targeted picking decisions. In recent years, Meyer has been turning his attention to the dirt—literally focusing on the soil types and other aspects of individual microblocks that he then can vinify separately to explore their potential. His canopy management is focused on the kind of leaf-to-bunch balance that ensures there is no development of pyrazine flavors and that crop yields are in line with the concentration levels he desires. Meanwhile, he's almost giddy to be working with the various distinct white varieties planted throughout the estate: Orange Muscat, Muscat Canelli,

Viognier, Sémillon, and Malvasia Bianca in addition to the aforementioned Sauvignon Blanc and Chardonnay. In that light, it's no surprise that "we're producing more single-varietal wines these days," Jordan points out, "more so than we had in the past."

As for the reds, Meyer says that blending and fermenting dry are important for consistency. "The blends may change from year to year, but the style through-line is always intentional. I ask myself, 'How are these wines going to [show] in five years?'"

As with everything else at Murrieta's Well, food is no afterthought. If Meyer is making wines of intention, chef Tony Glanville, who joined the estate in 2016 and conceptualizes its tasting menu and winemaker dinners, is equally passionate about his seasonally inspired cooking, which accompanies the hospitality team's education-driven experiences, including guided wine pairings preceded by property tours. "We want to tell the story of our estate and wines and show how they pair extremely well with food," Jordan says.

"Murrieta's Well was a very on-premise-focused brand pre-pandemic, but we

saw a lot of off-premise pickup [during the pandemic]," she adds, noting that as in-person tastings have resumed, Meyer has been a critical asset. "When Robbie gets out in the field, it really seems to make a difference. He is incredibly passionate and honest about his winemaking, so that's no surprise."

Jordan feels a particular sense of pride when, during her own visits to accounts, people are surprised by how balanced, structured, and beautifully savory the wines show in the glass. Their reaction highlights her and Meyer's constant struggle to instruct the wine-buying public at large that the Livermore Valley is a relatively cool growing region: From atop the highest bluff on the Murrieta's Well property, panoramic views of San Francisco and the bay confirm how close it is to the Pacific Ocean inlet. But as the duo continues to take every opportunity to paint that picture for the public, there's no doubt consumers will grasp what's so special about the region in general and about Murrieta's Well in particular. After all, should there really be any surprise that a fifth-generation winegrower would craft an exceptional wine? *sj*

The property of Tenuta Ca' Bolani in Italy's Friuli Aquileia DOC is lined with 999 cypress trees.

CLEAN, GREEN, AND PRISTINE

AN INTRODUCTION TO FRIULIAN ESTATE CA' BOLANI

by Ruth Tobias

COUNTLESS WINERIES BOAST OF

honoring the past while looking to the future. But Tenuta Ca' Bolani, located in the heart of Italy's Friuli Aquileia DOC, truly embodies that ethos. Established in 1500, it remains an unspoiled oasis in the northeastern countryside; famously lined with 999 cypress trees, the biodiverse property is sustainably farmed. To name just a few of numerous measures that it takes to ensure its legacy for generations to come, it irrigates with the spring water naturally found there, employs green manure to increase soil fertility, has greatly reduced carbon emissions through the installment of photovoltaic panels and the conservation of 20 hectares of woodland, and has dedicated still more acreage to projects such as the placement of artificial nests and the reseeded of nectariferous flowers for the benefit of pollinating insects.

Within this pristine setting, Ca' Bolani grows ten different varietals both indigenous and international, from Friulano to Refosco dal Peduncolo Rosso, on primarily clay

and sand soils with well-draining layers of gravel. These grapes thrive in the local climate, where abundant sunshine promotes ripening that's kept in check by breezes from the Adriatic Sea and marked diurnal temperature shifts, while the nearby Alps protect the vineyards from inclement weather. But three of the winery's expressions in particular point to its designs on the U.S. market: Ca' Bolani Brut Prosecco, Pinot Grigio, and Sauvignon Blanc have all undergone a recent packaging refresh that speaks to consumers' interest in what's clean and green, in every sense of the words. A delicate illustration of a vine graces the otherwise simple labels, each a different shade of green in an allusion to the diverse vegetation on the estate.

The wines within are likewise built to appeal to today's drinkers, oriented as they are toward lighter, fresher profiles. The Prosecco, for instance, is classically fruity and floral with notes of Rennet apple and wisteria as well as hints of almond; here are our reviews of the still whites. **\$J**



Ca' Bolani 2021 Pinot Grigio, Friuli, Italy

(\$18) The palest of copper hues, this light-as-air white wafts scents of honeysuckle, green melon, and chamomile that are dashed ever so slightly with spice—as is the apple that appears in the mouth drizzled with lemon oil before more savory, saline notes saunter in. **90**



Ca' Bolani 2021 Sauvignon Blanc, Friuli, Italy

(\$18) True-blue aromas of grapefruit and grass get a kick from mint and a hint of lychee, which are joined on the palate by lime zest, tarragon, and nectarine, plus a touch of white pepper on the finish. For all the freshness it exudes, this one's smooth to the point of silkiness. **91**

PHOTO COURTESY OF TENUTA CA' BOLANI

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{ cover story }

A Torchbearer in

TAIN L'HERMITAGE

STORY BY RUTH TOBIAS / PHOTOS BY LUCY BEUGARD

A photograph of three men standing in a vineyard. The man on the left is wearing a white long-sleeved shirt and dark trousers. The man in the middle is wearing a light blue short-sleeved shirt and dark trousers. The man on the right is wearing a dark green polo shirt and dark trousers. They are standing in front of a vineyard with terraced hills in the background. A small white building is visible on the left side of the hill.

Delas Frères winemaker Jacques Grange with his team, Marco Beckmann (left) and Clément Panigai (right), in front of Hermitage Hill vineyard Les Bessards.



AT NEARLY 200, THE RHÔNE VALLEY'S DELAS FRÈRES IS AT THE TOP OF ITS GAME



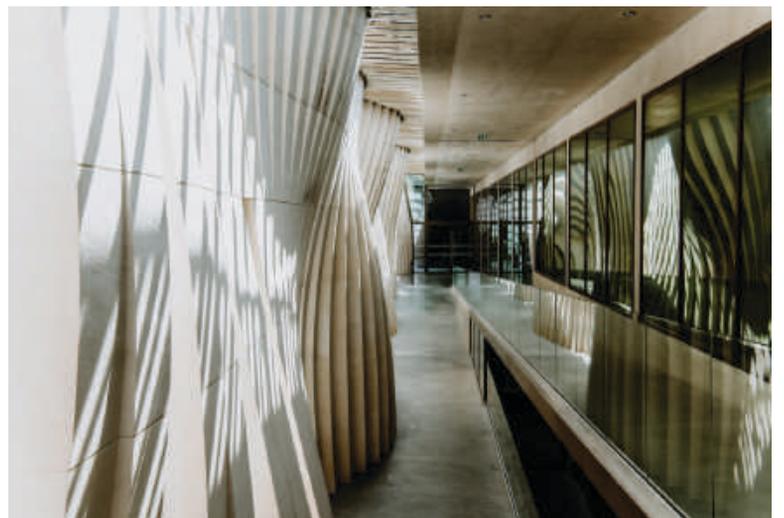
When Champagne Louis Roederer acquired Delas Frères in 1993, it was simply part of a package deal whose prize was the Rhône Valley

winery's owner, Champagne Deutz. After all, says Deutz/Delas CEO Fabrice Rosset, "The gurus were not holding Delas in high esteem at the time. But we quickly discovered [a] sleeping beauty."

Today, that beauty—founded in 1835—is wide awake. While it produces a broad range of wines from across the region, it's "positioning itself as a key player in the high-end Northern Rhône," in the words of Cyprien Roy, communications manager for importer Maisons Marques & Domaines USA.

Two recent developments in particular epitomize that endeavor: The first was the construction of a new, state-of-the-art winery in the heart of Tain-l'Hermitage on a site purchased from the Jaboulet family in 2015. Whereas the old facility in nearby Saint-Jean-de-Muzols continues to produce entry-, mid-level, and Southern Rhône reds as well as whites, this one—inaugurated at the end of 2019—is dedicated solely to the upper-tier reds of the Northern Rhône;

Delas Frères' new production facility in Tain-l'Hermitage was inaugurated in 2019.





Delas' two cellars hold approximately 800 barrels.



Just a portion of the Delas portfolio.

also on the property is a new retail boutique and a completely refurbished guest house that encapsulates the evolution of luxury wine tourism in France. The second—launched in 2015 though not released in the U.S. until 2020—was the addition of a new top cuvée, Ligne de Crête, to the already remarkable portfolio; translating as “Ridge Line,” the name pays tribute to the wine’s prized source at the crest of the hill of Hermitage, lieu-dit Les Grandes Vignes. It all speaks to Delas’ ambition to maintain world-class status in a world-class region.

A TOUR OF THE WINERY

Burgundy-born Delas winemaker Jacques Grange calls the exterior of the new production facility, whose design by Swedish architect Carl Fredrik Svenstedt received a 2019 Architecture MasterPrize, “the most photographed wall in Tain-l’Hermitage”—an undulating masterpiece composed of nearly 280 stones from Luberon. Behind that wall, Grange and his team, Clément Panigai and Marco Beckmann, work in a completely gravity-fed environment. The handpicked grapes are destemmed and carried by conveyor belt to funnels that, while preventing oxidation, drop them softly into stainless-steel tronconic vats, each containing a separate parcel of less than 1 hectare; there, says Grange, “I really want to keep the grapes between three to five days at very low temperatures before the alcoholic fermentation [begins] to extract slowly different components like color, tannins, and aromas to make

something very expressive in fruits.” To this end, the grapes are mostly kept whole; crushing is done in small percentages only in extremely hot, dry years, when there’s not enough juice to begin fermentation. (As of June, 2022 was shaping up to be just such a year: “Since the first of January here in Tain-l’Hermitage, we’ve had only 120 millimeters of rain,” says Grange. “The average for one year is 700 to 750 milliliters. It’s completely crazy.”)

The gently conical shape of the tanks—which are cooled by groundwater pumped through coils—is critical to the fermentation process: Because “a lot of components are contained in the skins, we have to mix every day the juice and the skins of the grapes,” Grange explains. “We [do] pumpovers twice a day and one or two *pigeages* [punchdowns] a day; sometimes it’s not enough,” but any more could lead to rough tannins. This shape naturally keeps some of the solids in suspension to allow for “a slower extraction, very soft.”

During vinification, the team tastes the wines daily, and “when we devat the wines, we imagine the mix of oak that they need.” At that point, off they go into the barrel cellar, of which Delas has two: one for each vintage currently in production, reason being that malolactic fermentation requires the wines be kept at 18–20 degrees Celsius, whereas those that have already undergone the process need to be kept at 14–16 degrees.

A total of nearly 800 barrels from different coopers—Seguin Moreau, François Frères, Saury, Chassin—also represent

different ages. “We don’t have any cuvées with only new oak,” says Grange. “We mix new and one- and two-year-old barrels.” Throughout the approximately 18-month aging process, they continue to taste every barrique and adapt their recipe for the final blend accordingly; the result may turn out to represent “another mix of coopers and age of barrels” than the one they originally envisioned, but either way it will be “a photograph of the parcel [along] with everything that made [the] vintage,” in his words. “If you [use] too much oak . . . you make something average. Every vintage is the same.”

A DEEP DIVE INTO THE PORTFOLIO

In short, Grange’s mission is to “show the potential of each parcel” in every wine he makes, regardless of appellation or Delas’ holdings therein—which is to say that the producer is a *négociant* as well as a *domaine*: In addition to farming estate-owned and -leased vineyards, it also purchases grapes and, in the case of its Cotes-du-Rhône Saint-Esprit, juice for blending from other growers.

That wine is worth a mention even in this context because, with an annual production of 1.5 million bottles, “This is the entry into the universe of Delas for people in so many countries,” as Roy puts it. “It has to be good.” With that in mind, Grange blind tastes dozens of samples a day for two months; in his view, “Every component is important to be considered—even a small parcel in a small



Winemaker Jacques Grange in the Delas tasting room.

winery that represents 20–40 hectoliters in a total of more than 8,000, I want to taste, so it's passionate work. For the 2021 vintage, I think I chose less than 5% of what I tasted." The current vintage on the U.S. market, 2020, retails for \$14–\$16; a blend of roughly 60% Syrah and 40% Grenache that sees no oak, it's a distinctly Northern take on a Southern classic, full but fresh from the forthright entry of black pepper, blackberry, and plum liqueur to the emerging touches of leather and espresso.

And though we are focusing on reds here, Delas' white wines also warrant discussion in light of Grange's state-

ment that, while "everybody knows the Northern Rhône and the Rhône in general as a region of red wines, I imagine in the future we [will] discover more and more the whites . . . with a real complexity and depth, with a real potential [for] aging." Case in point: The 2020 Condrieu Clos Boucher (\$102), which Grange calls "a mix of all the different soils and exposures" to be found in the 2-hectare lieu-dit it comes from, leased to Delas by members of the Delas family themselves. On its terraced slopes—steep enough to require double-echalas training, whereby two stakes form an upside-down V, for the vines, some 50 to 60 years old—the Viognier is handpicked in five passes within a very short window "because the maturity process for this variety is very quick," he says. "Monday it's not matured; Wednesday it's finished." Vinified partly in stainless and partly in wood, then aged in new and one-year-old barrels for eight months (it also undergoes both malolactic fermentation and lees stirring), it's lush-textured yet graceful, with apricot and rose leading to swirls of mango, vanilla, and a hint of hazelnut—and according to Grange, "It's able to go six to ten years without being heavy or tired."

But it's Delas' Northern Rhône reds that arguably represent the ultimate expression of terroir insofar as "they are made with the same variety in the same winery with the same philosophy, and [yet] the differences are quite evident," as he puts it, going on to compare the Syrah parcels in the region's various appellations to the Pinot Noir grown in Burgundy's climats: "Regarding the soils, the expositions, the age of the vineyards, there are a lot of tiny differences that make [an impact on] the wines." Accordingly, Delas works in most of the sub-regions, from Saint-Joseph to Crozes-Hermitage; in every case, he adds, "There are tannins, there is barrel aging, but everything [is] just under the wine. First you smell and you taste vineyards."

Illustration of that claim comes from a side-by-side comparison of the 2020 Cornas Chante-Perdrix (\$68) with the 2020 Côte-Rôtie Seigneur de Maugi-

ron (\$112)—both from a vintage that, compared to the "very ripe, solar," and powerful 2018 and 2019, was according to Grange "more quiet, more elegant [and] approachable; the balance is very beautiful." Interestingly enough, he notes, "We always begin the harvest with the reds of Cornas—and we always finish the harvest with the reds of Cornas," made as the wine is from fruit grown both on the early-ripening slopes of the natural amphitheater that the appellation forms and at its late-ripening top; 80% of the 2020 vintage came from the higher-elevation plots, which may partly account for its unusual finesse—undeniably masculine in structure but also "very flowery," as Grange puts it, while layering aromas and flavors of smoky plum, earth, and licorice softened by a mid-palate touch of vanilla. As for the Seigneur de Maugiron, he asks, "Can you imagine? There are only 50 kilometers between Cornas and Côte-Rôtie," but the latter wine—coming primarily from the mica-schist soils of the Côte Brune—is a whole different animal; powerful to its black-cherry core, it's streaked with iron and grilled meat yet silken in texture, its tannins finely woven amid hints of white pepper, violet, and cedar to a finish marked by a subtle note of dark chocolate.

Delas' top Côte-Rôtie, meanwhile—of which no more than 2,500 bottles are made in only the best vintages—hails from a 0.7-hectare, south-east-facing parcel of the famed La Landonne vineyard in the Côte Brune, also owned by the Delas family and estate-farmed. Here, in Grange's view, the iron deposits from the mica-schist blocks in the easily fractured granite give the double-echalas-trained Syrah "freshness and minerality," while the 200-to-240-meter elevation contributes to even more flowery, namely violet,



aromas. That much is evident in the full-bodied yet indeed fresh and fine-grained 2019 Côte-Rôtie La Landonne (\$340), which at this stage also shows cherry and red plum laced with licorice, tobacco, and a little tar—but time will ultimately tell the full story, given that "we try to make something with great aging potential. With

Delas vineyard Les Grandes Vignes at the top of Hermitage Hill.



Côte-Rôtie it is necessary to wait eight to ten years to appreciate it," he adds.

Patience is, in other words, a virtue at Delas—as exemplified by the tremendous work it has put into its vineyards on the legendary, 134-hectare hill of Hermitage, particularly the aforementioned Les Grandes Vignes, over the past decade-plus. In 2011, it began a four-year undertaking to rebuild the walls of the terraces that define so much of the Northern Rhône landscape, without which—to quote a book it published in 2019, *Delas Frères: The Art of Being a Maison Since 1835*—“the soil would have hurtled down these vertiginous slopes to the river a long time ago.” But these walls, or *chais*, are not merely critical to viticulture per se; they also provide shelter for lizards, snakes, and other pest-eating creatures. Delas is currently conducting a study on the biodiversity of the hill as part of a broader push toward sustainability that includes organic farming for the past five years; certification will be achieved in 2023.

The winery's larger Hermitage lieu-dit, sitting at 400–450 meters, is the 7-hectare, west- and southwest-facing Les Bessards. Though it's planted mostly to Syrah on granite, toward the bottom of the slope, where the soils are deeper and contain alluvial deposits brought in by the river, about 0.6 hectares is also devoted to white grapes; historically all Marsanne,

it today contains about 10% Roussanne. Some of these vines are being bridge-trained in a return to an old technique whereby the vines are tied together in an arch formation to slow down their growth. But the Syrah vines are, per tradition, all echalas-trained, which keeps them upright along a stake, not only to help them withstand wind and give them 360-degree exposure to sunshine but also to make more room for the vineyard workers—entirely manual labor is, after all, essential on this steep terrain.

Said wind is most keenly felt at 500 meters up at the top of the hill, where the south-, southwest-, and southeast-facing Les Grandes Vignes commands 2.5 hectares (just 0.3 of them dedicated to white grapes). Here, the high-draining soils of disintegrating granite de Tournon are especially poor—“and with poor soils we obtain very concentrated grapes; that's what we smell and taste with Les Grandes Vignes,” says Grange. They're also flecked with silica, which “is really what makes this granite particular to this hill,” according to Clément Panigai, who credits it with providing “silkier tannins [and] more austere but more delicate aromas.” Many of the Syrah vines here are between 80 and 100 years of age, though new ones are also planted each year to replace any that are dead or dying.

Together, these two remarkable sites yield three of Delas' finest reds (as well



Maison Delas Frères is now a top destination for luxury hospitality in the Rhône Valley.

as a stunningly buoyant Hermitage Blanc). The Hermitage Domaine des Tourettes is a blend of Les Bessards and Les Grandes Vignes fruit; Roy calls it “the perfect first acquaintance to a Delas Hermitage [at] \$100 on the shelf.” Grange, for his part, compares tasting the wine to “the way you feel the parcels when you walk across them,” with Les Bessards contributing “the depth of the soils” and Les Grandes Vignes “something more precise, more direct.” The resulting “expression of Tourettes is strength . . . [but] there is a lot of minerality; it's not heavy.” To be sure, while there's a meatiness to the mouthfeel of the 2019 vintage (\$100), it's supple, and there's also a ringing purity to the top notes of cherry liqueur and blueberry that's made all the clearer by the dashes of pepper, candied olive, and fresh earth that season the way to a streaming finish.

Then there's the single-vineyard Les Bessards, produced only in the best vintages, including 2018 (which was made in the old facility in Saint-Jean-de-Muzols, where fermentation took place in small-lot concrete tanks installed by Grange upon his arrival at Delas in 1997—one of many improvements he made in both the vineyard and the winery early in his tenure). At once “fresh and powerful,” in Grange's words, the wine (\$249) is seductive in its intensity, brimming with black currant and black cherry as well as spice both savory and sweet, including cracked pepper and licorice root, which are both lightened by a breath of violet and framed by earthy tannins before a subtly mineral finish.



Pops of color fill the interior of the guest house at Maison Delas Frères.

Which brings us, finally, to the Ligne de Crête. It's a wine that "we tried since 2010 [to make] and every vintage, we saw that the quality is something special," recalls Grange; especially as "we rebuilt a lot of walls and terraces in Les Grandes Vignes and we planted a lot of new plants, [we saw that] the place is so beautiful that we want to make [it]. And it costs a lot of money"—he estimates that hillside farming requires "1,500 man hours" per year; three or four times more than at lower elevations—"but suddenly the quality is there, so we [felt we] can make a special cuvée at that place that would be the equivalent of Les Bessards. So it's easy to understand."

Launching with 2,000 bottles in the 2015 vintage, they've now increased the volume to 4,000–5,000 bottles; though just 50–60 cases are currently exported to the U.S., that number is expected to rise too, so confident are they in that quality. "People think of Hermitage as massive, but it can be very elegant, and Les Grandes Vignes is the epitome of that," says Fabrice Rosset. "On south-, southwest-facing slopes on granitic soils, Syrah is just majestic. . . . Here we have the quintessence of Syrah." Indeed, the expansive nose on the 2019 Hermitage Ligne de Crête (\$340) turns like a kaleidoscope on aromas of leather, deep black cherry, peppered brisket, chocolate-covered espresso bean, and cured olive plus a hint of violet; on a palate of velvet, the fruit continues to evolve—plum, black currant, blackberry—amid hints of game in balance with chocolate-edged tannins before licorice graces the finish. Its complexity is matched by its self-possession,

and the same is true of the 2015 (\$340), even more mineral and savory with tobacco and pepper but also perfumed with violet and red fruit (cherry, raspberry, plum) as well as emerging hints of fig and date; as it elongates on the palate, showing elegant acidity, licorice and dark chocolate meet a touch of smoked meat.

A SHOWCASE FOR L'ART DE VIVRE

Because extraordinary wines deserve an extraordinary place in which to drink them, the Rouzaud family didn't stop at constructing a new winery. They also turned the old home of the Jaboulet family into a guest house with the goal of making Maison Delas Frères not just a jewel in the crown of the Roederer Collection but also a top destination for luxury hospitality in the Rhône Valley, if not all of France: After all, says Delas director of wine tourism and public relations Valérie Antomarchi, "You find facilities like this mostly in Bordeaux or Burgundy or Champagne, but for Tain-l'Hermitage, [it's] something absolutely new."

While initially that hospitality was to be reserved for what Antomarchi calls "friends of the company," including members of the trade and press, the house is now, a few years after its completion in December 2019, beginning to open to the public. To be clear, "We will never have a bus of tourists every five minutes," says Antomarchi; with just 11 rooms available for an average of 500 euros per night, it's very much for guests who understand and appreciate *l'art de vivre*.

Designed by Julia Rouzaud—the sister of Champagne Louis Roederer presi-

dent Frédéric Rouzaud and the founder/creative director of studio GOOD-MOODS—the interior is indeed luxe but hardly ostentatious: "When you enter, right away you feel comfortable because it's peaceful," Antomarchi observes. "It's made of materials that are related to nature." Against light woods and off-white walls, the color scheme is rich in greens, golds, and terra cottas accented with pops of yellow and turquoise, evoking the vineyards under sunny skies. Modern, sculptural furnishings and geometric prints are juxtaposed by organic details—ceramic, linen, wicker, cane—throughout the ground floor, which includes a private tasting room, meeting rooms, a dining room graced by pink-marble tables, and a kitchen where local chefs like Rika Bau prepare meals that are "a reflection of the region" and the seasons.

A Guggenheim-inspired spiral staircase leads to the guest rooms and the rooftop of the winery, where small gatherings can be held overlooking the park at the property's center. There, according to Antomarchi, landscapers ensure that the vegetation, blossoming variously throughout the year, appears "different from one day to another"; against that backdrop, in addition to hosting private events, "we can easily do festivals of poetry, of cinema, concerts of classical music. This is something we will have in the next few years." Of course, tastings themselves can be multidimensional experiences; for instance, Antomarchi is working with a perfume specialist who can come in and "interpret the philosophy of the scents in wine . . . to help [guests] understand what the wine is provoking in [them] as an emotion. I want [opportunities like] this to be a trademark of this place."

While the hospitality program is still developing (thanks in part, or rather no thanks, to the pandemic), its potential is bound to be realized sooner rather than later. France will be hosting the Rugby World Cup in September 2023 and the Summer Olympics in 2024; in both cases, Saint-Étienne and Lyon, an hour's drive from Tain-l'Hermitage, are home to competition venues. "So there is a lot to do in the next two years that is going to help us to be visible," Antomarchi notes.

Ultimately, Fabrice Rosset says, "Within the [Hermitage] AOC we want to take the lead." All things considered, Delas appears poised to do just that. **\$**



Reverence for the Aztecs

TASTING QUECHOL SOTOL

THE MEXICAN SPIRIT called sotol is named for a desert plant in the *Dasyliirion* genus harvested in the wild; unlike the agave that produces tequila and mezcal, it is related to the asparagus family. We were impressed by Quechol, a small-batch brand of sotol that's sourced from plants that mature for about 15 years in the Chihuahuan Desert in Durango. After fermentation, the liquid is distilled twice in 350-liter copper pot stills.

Quechol Texanum Sotol, Mexico (\$60) *Quechol* translates from the Aztec Nahuatl tongue as "precious feather"; the Aztecs had special reverence for birds and their colorful plumage. Made from *Dasyliirion texanum*, this expression has a nose of orange peel, cigar leaf, and spearmint. It's a bucking bronco of a spirit at 92.6 proof: earthy and sparked by spicy herbs, sassy black pepper, and tobacco. **93** —*Meridith May*

Quechol Wheeleri Sotol, Mexico (\$60) *Dasyliirion wheeleri*, also known as Desert Spoon, sports hundreds of long, narrow, blue-green leaves tipped with white-spined fibers, which can reach 5 feet in length. The scents here are bright, with sweet cactus, hibiscus, jicama, jalapeño, and a touch of smoke. Brown-sugared wheat bread, campfire smoke, and a pinch of white pepper come in midway. The 91-proof liquid is glossy, with licorice and mocha adding to the woody finish. **94** —*M.M.*

3 BADGE BEVERAGE



In the Heights

REDWOOD EMPIRE PAYS HOMAGE TO NORCAL'S LIVING STATUES

THE GIANT REDWOODS that find their home along California's northern coast—from San Francisco to Humboldt Bay to the Oregon border—were the inspiration for this lineup of tremendous bottled-in-bond whiskeys (meaning they were crafted at a single distillery in a single season) from the folks at Purple Brands, which they call "the purest expression of our craft."

Redwood Empire Rocket Top Straight Rye Whiskey, USA (\$80) This bottled-in-bond 100-proof whiskey is named for a 365-foot-tall tree that resembles a bottle rocket. Aromas of cream soda, mocha, sage, and peach are gloriously expressive. Fragrance joins flavor with each sip, as jasmine, ginger, and bergamot unite for one fantastic journey. A pinch of caraway lends dimension, but this rye takes off with a cedar twist, covered in fig jam and cinnamon. **95** —*M.M.*

Redwood Empire Grizzly Beast Straight Bourbon Whiskey, USA (\$80) A mash bill of 66% corn, 23% rye, 7% wheat, and 4% barley creates a bottled-in-bond whiskey with a growl at 100 proof. It's named for two trees: the Grizzly Giant, a sequoia from Yosemite that sports over 2 billion leaves, and the Mattole Beast, a 375-foot Humboldt Redwoods State Park resident, which is 12 feet taller than the Saturn V rocket. Scents of sarsaparilla, apricot, mocha, and red plum soften the blow of the prickly first pass. The liquid soon settles down to more of a purr as layers of peach nectar, melted caramel, and walnut are surrounded by lemon peel and sweet oak. **95** —*M.M.*

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Belén Tudela
Winemaker



93
POINTS

- 2019 -



93
POINTS

- 2020 -



91
POINTS

- 2020 -

Hiding in Plain Sight

THE **ITATA VALLEY** IS EXPERIENCING A RENAISSANCE IN THE FORM OF HERITAGE VARIETIES AND ANCESTRAL WINE STYLES

by Deborah Parker Wong



An old vine in Güarilhue.

THE PREVAILING IMPRESSION of Chile's wine industry as one based on international varieties and conventional winemaking practices leaves little to the imagination. Yet all along, its ancestral wine culture has been hiding in plain sight.

Following a chain of valleys that runs from north to south, the Itata Valley denominación de origen (DO) is located south of the Maule Valley DO. It spans 60 miles of rolling hills and native forests, extending east from the Pacific Ocean to the foothills of the Andes Mountains, where the Cerro Blanco, peaking at 10,500 feet, dominates the landscape. Wine culture here in the northernmost of Chile's three southern wine regions exemplifies what is known as "evolution in isolation." Experiencing no phylloxera and only a modest incursion of international grape varieties, this isolated region has held on to its heritage grapes and ancestral winemaking practices seldom found beyond its borders.

The Itata Valley DO is centered on Ñuble, which became Chile's 16th political region in 2018. Like the Ñuble River, which flows west from the Andes to join the Itata River as it winds its way north to the Pacific Ocean, the region takes its name from an indigenous Mapudungún word meaning "narrow river" or "stony river."

While 97% of Ñuble's vineyards lie within the province of Itata, the 13 communes comprising the Itata Valley DO extend beyond its borders and dip into the neighboring provinces of Diguillín and Punilla as well as the sunny coastal region of Bío Bío to the south. Here, the Mediterranean climate is like that of Maule and is cooled by the Humboldt Current that runs the length of Chile's coastline, although any similarities to the northern valleys end there.

In contrast to the larger estates to the north, wineries in the Itata Valley are typically small and family-owned, with a production capacity averaging 60,000 liters per year. The average vineyard size here is just over 5 acres; plots are traditionally measured by the number of vines. Usually planted to old vines, organically farmed, plowed by horses, and handpicked, this rare patchwork of small estates has been instrumental in preserving the region's culture and its distinctive wines.

Plowing by horse in Güarilhue in the heart of the Itata Valley.

PHOTOS: PROCHILE

*Winemaking in Pachagua in the
Itata Valley's Quirihue sector.*

Ancestral Varieties

The Itata Valley encompasses an extensive mix of head-trained, dry-farmed vineyards that are home to some of the oldest vines in Chile. The majority are ancient País (Listán Prieto), Muscat of Alexandria, and Torontel—varieties that arrived during the country's colonial era. In the 1940s they were joined by Cinsault, Carignan, and Chasselas, which were introduced to improve the market price of the region's wines, as well as by lesser plantings of the international varieties ubiquitous in many other areas of Chile.

Muscat of Alexandria and Cinsault form the backbone of Ñuble vineyards, especially in the Itata Valley, where they represent two-thirds of the grapes grown. Plantings of País, which came to Chile from Peru during the colonial era, are second only to those of Maule; Torontel, a natural cross of Muscat of Alexandria and País that originated in Mendoza, is considered indigenous. The heritage of these and other varieties is cataloged in Chile's old-vine register; of the 22 producers from Itata listed there, ten care for vines 100 years or older, including Le Leona, which harbors a País vine dating back to 1798.



Barrels in the cellar of Viña Lomas de Llahuén in Portezuelo.

What's Old Is New Again

One of the first major wine regions of Chile, the Itata Valley was initially planted by the Spanish in the mid-16th century. Wine culture flourished under the Jesuits during the colonial period, and viticulture became an integral part of the



local economy. Winemakers used the high-quality clay found in the region to make *tinajas*, or clay amphorae, and made barrels and vats from a native beech tree called *raulí* in which to ferment and age their wine. While these centuries-old practices were never fully abandoned, they are enjoying a renaissance today.

Producers to Know

Under his own name as well as the Rawüll and Kilaco brands, Gustavo Martínez is championing the use of ancestral varieties and production methods at his small winery in the Itata Province, where he ages País, Carignan, Cinsault, and Muscat of Alexandria in 20-year-old barrels.

Since 1992, the Pandolfi Price family has been making wines in Chillan Viejo, the easternmost commune in the Diguilín planted to vine. There, they produce Sauvignon Blanc, Chardonnay, Pinot Noir, Syrah, and Riesling under their Larkün and Los Patricios brands.

Juan José Ledesma, who works with Malbec from Bío Bío and Cabernet Sauvignon from Itata, explores the connection between music and wine at Terroir Sonoro, developing musical compositions for each expression as part of his creative winemaking process.

Enologist Leonardo Erazo employs a combination of experimental and ancestral techniques at A Los Viñateros Bravos in the Itata Province to produce both modern and traditional wine styles. He works with aromatic white varieties planted on slate in the commune of Cobquecura as well as with fruit from

Guarilhue, a cold coastal site in the Coelemu commune, where he recently completed a soil map.

Since 1983, Joel Neira and his family have tended Cinsault, Cabernet Sauvignon, Carménère, and Muscat of Alexandria vines at Viña Piedras del Encanto in the commune of Ránquil. They produce both still and sparkling wines under the Kürüf, Quartz Rouges, and Piedras del Encanto labels.

Built-in Sustainability

In a region that is home to a chain of 12 volcanoes, many of which are active, it's a given that the parent soil is primarily granite. Its decomposed forms, including *maicillo*, or gravel rich in quartz, and rusty-colored, iron-rich clay, are found in the Cordillera de la Costa, the coastal mountain range. Further inland, there are pockets of sedimentary deposits along the rivers and caches of slate on the eastern slopes of the Andes. The key to the Itata Valley's natural sustainability lies in the location of the vineyards, which determines how much rainfall they receive, and the water-retention capacity of these soils. With approximately 33–43 inches of rain each year, the Itata Valley is one of the few regions in Chile that can be completely dry farmed. (Despite the presence of snowmelt from the Andes and many rivers, Chile does experience droughts, and water resources are increasingly scarce.)

With approximately 300 wineries, of which 26 export to 23 different markets and 38 are potential exporters, the future looks auspicious for the Itata Valley. *sj*



Jacob Gragg, Ca' del Bosco and portfolio fine wine specialist for Santa Margherita USA (SMUSA); Luis La Torre, Texas Italian wine specialist at Republic National Distributing Company (RNDC) in Dallas, TX; Carlos Cisneros, sommelier at Bocca Ristorante in Birmingham, AL; and Jordan Abraham, wine director at Gozu in San Francisco, CA, toast to the opening of TEXSOM 2022 over dinner at Uchi in Dallas.

SommFoundation scholarship recipients Grace Bradley (left), wine director at Vie and Vistro Prime restaurants in Chicago, IL, and Jordan Abraham (far right) look on as Cantina Mesa Giunco Vermentino is poured at SMUSA's TEXSOM welcome dinner.

The Return of the Thing

TOASTING TO TEXSOM WITH **CA' DEL BOSCO** AND **CANTINA MESA**

story by Lars Leicht / photos by Marcus Junius Laws

THE HISTORIC GATHERING of Vikings and Teutonic tribes for educational, legislative, and/or trade purposes was called a Thing; that's what the word originally referred to until its definition morphed to denote any object. At a Thing, old friends and rivals, colleagues and strangers would come together in camaraderie—itsself a term derived from the Latin word for a chamber where people congregated.

In the wine world, we have our Things as well: key annual events we mark on the calendar in anticipation of coming together to achieve mutual goals. But of all our conferences, festivals, and the like, perhaps the most truly Thing-like is TEXSOM, the sommelier symposium held each August in Dallas.

Like so much of "normal" life, TEXSOM was disrupted by the pandemic in 2020 and 2021. (Yes, there was a hastily organized version in November 2021 as restrictions on public gatherings began

to lift, but it just wasn't the same.) In 2022, however, the Thing was back in all its glory, boasting a new venue, better-organized expo tastings during breaks, a return to more in-depth seminars, and many other improvements.

Among the many wine companies eager to support the community and get back to business was Santa Margherita USA (SMUSA). The importer put its best foot forward, mobilizing a larger team than usual while offering attendance scholarships through SommFoundation, sponsoring a polishing party for volunteers who prepped stemware pre-conference, pouring its award-winning wines at the Grand Tasting, and organizing not one but two paired tastings for attendees.

For starters, SMUSA hosted a provocative opening-night dinner at Uchi, an acclaimed Japanese restaurant in Dallas' Arts District. Set in a former private home, the cozy establishment serves

the makimono, yakimono, tempura, sushi, sashimi, and seasonal small plates on which chef Tyson Cole made his name at the original Uchi in Austin. Did the cuisine present a bold challenge for Italian wines? On the contrary, the selections of Franciacorta from Ca' del Bosco and Sardinian wines from Cantina Mesa fared quite well alongside the parade of over 20 dishes that came out to the table.

Of course, it was no surprise that the sparkling wines—Ca' del Bosco's Cuvée Prestige Edizione 44 and Dosage Zéro—worked with the food, but just how well they paired was a revelation to dinner guest and scholarship recipient Jordan Abraham, wine director at Gozu in San Francisco. "I wanted them with everything, and they worked in really interesting and delicious ways that I didn't expect," he said. "The [Dosage Zéro] was fantastic and really speaks to the technical ability and farming that went into that bottle.

It was even texturally good with the A5 wagyu . . . with a ton of creaminess to go with the fat of the beef. And the Prestige surprised me by how well it showed with some of the more delicate dishes.”

For her part, fellow scholarship recipient Grace Bradley, wine director at Vie and Vistro Prime restaurants in Chicago, was enthusiastic about Mesa’s Giunco Vermentino and Ca’ del Bosco’s Maurizio Zanella Chardonnay, which were served side by side. “That was my favorite flavor experience of the evening,” she said. “I took two bites of every morsel of food, followed by each wine in turn. The Vermentino and raw fatty fish [made for] a great contrasting pairing of salt, citrus, and richness.” Meanwhile, when the Chardonnay was paired “with something a touch leaner, the flavor of the fish was enhanced and the Chardonnay seemed to shine a little brighter as well.”

Bradley was also impressed by the pairing of the Chardonnay with charred Japanese eggplant nigiri. “The eggplant was cooked to perfection, chewy on one side and soft on the other,” she noted. “Then you add in the Chardonnay, with its toasty notes from carefully chosen small barrels bringing out the caramelized-sugar sweetness of the eggplant. The wine’s flavors of almost-bruised yellow apples and pears made the more tertiary flavor of the

vegetable seem luscious yet rustic. I could go on forever about this pairing and the way that eggplant was cooked.”

As for Abraham, he observed that the Vermentino had great freshness even as it clearly showed the classic Sardinian texture of viscosity along with yellow apple and stone fruit. “I loved this with the shishito peppers,” he said. “It had a light volcanic smokiness and minerality which was also awesome with the smoked yellowtail.”

Finally, two red wines from Cantina Mesa—Buio and Buio Buio, both made from Carignano—made for an appropriate pairing with the thin slices of wagyu beef cooked by the guests on hot rocks brought to the table. “The Buio was lighter, friendlier, and full of red fruit laced with a touch of pepper,” offered Bradley. “The Buio Buio was more brooding; [with] the fruit less pronounced, [it was] far more peppery, earthy, and mushroomy. Both were [also] delicious with the tartare, the Buio bringing out the meatiness of the beef and the Buio Buio accenting the generous amount of black pepper over the top.”

For both Abraham and Bradley, the dinner represented everything that is great about a Thing—especially educational enrichment and conviviality. “Being in a room full of like-minded and passionate

wine professionals was the perfect kickoff to TEXSOM,” said Bradley. “Only on rare occasions do I get to enjoy the company of multiple sommeliers—and never in the joyous type of gathering that only an amazing meal and great wine can ensure.”

Luckily, there was one more Thing to come: On the final day of the conference, Cantina Mesa sponsored a Mediterranean-inspired buffet lunch for nearly 50 guests, where it showed off its entire range—not only the aforementioned Giunco, Buio, and Buio Buio but also the Primo Bianco Vermentino and Primo Scuro Cannonau. SMUSA wine educator Kristina Sazama spoke to the fresh and quaffable nature of the latter wines as well as to the unique terroir of the area of southern Sardinia known as Sulcis. Pointing out that this part of the island lies closer to the northern coast of Africa than it does to Rome, she described the influence of the near-constant winds on Sulcis: The north-to-south mistral, south-to-north scirocco, and east-to-west levante each play a role in keeping the vineyards dry and fresh. The attendees expressed keen enthusiasm about the fruit-forward brightness of the resulting wines.

Yes, our Things are back. We’re looking forward to the next one at SommCon San Diego in November! *sj*



Martha Bednarek, associate brand manager for SMUSA, presents Cantina Mesa’s Buio Carignano to Morgan Burton, district manager for SMUSA, and Devin Proch and Dee Duff, vanguard sales associates, on-premise, for RNDC.



Ca’ del Bosco’s Dosage Zéro was one of the wines served at the dinner; pictured in the background is SMUSA wine educator Kristina Sazama.



“B”

Stands for “BETTER”

It seems like just yesterday—OK, maybe it was the late 1990s; I've been in this business a long time—that organic wines were largely viewed as suspect: More often than not, the experience they provided was more about feeling good with one's superior choices than about drinking well. Then, in a relatively short time, the wine world went from saying “This wine is organic, and it's actually good!” to declaring “This wine is great, and it's actually organic!”

The problem that consumers increasingly struggled with was how to distinguish organic products from those advertised using unregulated terms like “natural.” Meanwhile, the concepts of sustainability and corporate responsibility began following a similar trajectory—and creating similar confusion. Wannabe do-gooders risked accusations of “greenwashing,” a term used for companies that talk a big game when it comes to sustainability and positive social impact but in reality might just be doing the bare minimum by putting organic dressing on the same old conventionally grown salad.

THROUGH ITS B
CORP CERTIFICATION,
**BONTERRA ORGANIC
ESTATES** STRIVES
FOR CONTINUOUS
IMPROVEMENT

by Lars Leicht

Bonterra Organic Estates' winery headquarters in Hopland, CA.



Studying the soil at Bonterra Organic Estates' historic McNab Ranch in Mendocino County, CA.



Enter the B Corp Certification awarded by B Lab, a nonprofit organization founded in 2006 in Berwyn, Pennsylvania, by three friends who shared a vision to make business a force for good in the world. The “B” stands for “benefit,” indicating that certified organizations meet certain standards for transparency, accountability, sustainability, and performance, with an aim to create value not just for shareholders but for society as a whole, now thoughtfully referred to as “stakeholders.” Certification is based on a 200-point scale (a minimum of 80 is required to qualify for B Corp status), with scores updated every three years.

The goal is for companies to constantly improve upon practices in five critical areas: treatment of workers (including the company’s contributions to its employees’ financial security, health, safety, career development, and satisfaction); community (in relation to topics such as diversity, equity, inclusion, economic impact, civic engagement, charitable giving, and supply-chain management); environment (focused on a business’ impact on air, climate, water, land, and biodiversity); customers (including quality of products and services, ethical marketing, and data privacy and

security); and self-governance (including the company’s overall mission, decision-making processes, and communication with stakeholders).

Today there are more than 5,500 certified B Corps representing 158 industries in 85 countries, but fewer than 50 of them are wineries—a number that Andy Fyfe, director of equitable growth at B Lab, says he hopes will only increase: “B Corps come in all different sizes and in



As part of its climate-smart operations, Bonterra Organic Estates has lightweighted much of its glass to reduce emissions.

different industries,” he notes. “The more B Corps across industries, the more changes that are enacted towards better business practices.”

According to Fyfe, becoming a B Corp actually requires a change in legal status assuring that companies are accountable

to all stakeholders. “The certification journey is just the beginning of a journey to a commitment to improvement,” he explains. “Certification is not just a badge of responsibility or an acknowledgement of environmental accomplishments: It’s a holistic framework that looks to help businesses understand and improve their impact on people, communities, and the planet.”

In 2015, one of the first wineries to be certified as a B Corp was Fetzer Vineyards, now known as Bonterra Organic Estates (BOE). Based in Hopland, California, the company has long been recognized as a pioneer in making quality wines from organic and biodynamic grapes since its founding by Barney Fetzer in 1968. He and his family were pioneers in organic viticulture, which prioritizes the health of the vineyard ecosystem while combating climate change. Today, through its Bonterra brand, BOE continues to embrace those practices in all of its estate vineyards in Mendocino County.

Giancarlo Bianchetti, CEO of BOE, relishes the opportunity to join forces with this global community of like-minded companies that seek to redefine what it means to succeed as a business. “B Corp gives us a framework to measure our successes and a roadmap to continually increase our social and environmental impact,” he says.



Bonterra Organic Estates' Sundial Vineyard in Hopland, CA.



An aerial view of Bonterra Organic Estates' McNab Ranch.

Improvement Across the Board

BOE earned its first B Corp rating in 2015 with a score of 80.2; in its next assessment in 2017, it bumped that up to 95.1, and now, with its latest certification in 2021, it has scored an impressive 130.

Its greatest growth has occurred in the environmental arena, which Bianchetti attributed to the company's strides in organic and regenerative farming practices (e.g. sheep grazing in vineyards, reduced tillage, planting for biodiversity, and leaving the majority of its acreage undeveloped); climate-smart operations (e.g. identifying and disclosing emissions, carbon offsetting, and the use of lightweight glass for bottles); and resource conservation (e.g. smart water metering and zero-waste operations at its headquarters). All of this has helped BOE to achieve that 37% increase in its score and put it in the top 5% among B Corps of comparable size in terms of environmental performance.

Between now and the next scheduled certification review in 2024, the BOE team is aiming for broader growth across the B Corp categories, according to Jess Baum, director of regenerative development and sustainability. "We are looking at improvement across all impact business areas," she says. "We have a clear roadmap for what we need to do to sustain and surpass our current score," including identifying opportunities in community engagement and supplier relations.

In addition to its B Corp certification, Baum is proud of BOE's 2021 certifications by Regenerative Organic Certified (ROC), which applies to all vineyards under its cultivation, and Climate Neutral, which applies to the Bonterra brand. BOE is currently the largest winery to be ROC certified. "ROC is a pioneering certification that brings regulation to the buzzword 'regenerative,' requiring best-in-class

practices in the three pillars of soil health, animal welfare, and social fairness," she says. "With Climate Neutral, we chose to disclose our greenhouse gas emissions, commit to near-term [emissions] reduction targets, and communicate openly and transparently with consumers about our climate impact."

In Baum's view, the three certifications are complementary: "We prioritize all of [them] because they are relevant to different areas of our business," she explains. "To simplify things, ROC verifies [that] we use agriculture as a solution for climate and social injustice, and Climate Neutral brings credibility and focus to our decarbonization efforts. B Corp verifies our overall purpose and helps us codify and increase our positive impact."

The Bigger Picture

BOE's parent company, Viña Concha y Toro, achieved its own B Corp rating in 2021. Like many first-time B Corps, its initial assessment of 81 put it just over the hurdle, with high scores for its treatment of workers, customers, and its community. According to sustainability director Valentina Lira, it's serving as inspiration for further growth: "Since its beginning, Viña Concha y Toro has incorporated the principles of sustainability in our actions," she says. "However, ten years ago we developed a sustainability strategy for the holding company, which has served to outline a long-term plan for us to achieve these goals with a sense of integration and clear purpose."

The rating for the publicly traded Chilean company is especially significant given its location (the majority of B Corps are located in the U.S. and the EU), its size, and the number of countries in which it does business. "The global scope of our certification was one of

the biggest challenges," says Lira. "[It] has been a great learning experience for us and also for B Lab due to the global coverage of our company."

Noting that Viña Concha y Toro is "developing initiatives aimed at building a regenerative future," Lira says the company has a precise strategy for growth in each of the B Corp certification pillars, with an eye toward recertification in 2025. Those initiatives include developing a responsible-consumption campaign for consumers; engaging in circular innovation (including complete management of industrial waste and the exploration of policies related to upcycling and food waste disposal); and contributing to the preservation of Chile's biological heritage (e.g. planting 80,000 native trees in its own nurseries in the coming years). In terms of climate change, Viña Concha y Toro's goal is to reduce total CO₂ emissions by 35% by 2025 compared to 2017 and achieve a 55% reduction by 2030, reaching zero emissions by 2050.

"We wanted to take an important and transformative step in sustainability and to demonstrate our commitment to the different stakeholders in a transparent, independent, and global manner," Lira adds. "We base our strategy on four corporate pillars: excellence, innovation, sustainability, and people. These four pillars necessarily involve a constant effort to do things better every day, in all our work. To us, being a B Corp is precisely a way of guaranteeing this constant effort to be a better company."

It's a fitting outlook, as the B in B Corp could also very well stand for "better" based on the steps taken by companies like BOE and Concha y Toro to meet B Lab's lofty standards and redefine the 21st-century standard for organic and sustainable winemaking. 

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94
POINTS
TASTING PANEL



by Allison Jordan, executive director, California Sustainable Winegrowing Alliance, and VP of environmental affairs, Wine Institute

Joining Hands

HONORING THE MANY WORKERS WHO CONTRIBUTE TO CALIFORNIA'S WINE INDUSTRY

Vineyard workers conduct a night harvest in Lompoc, CA.



PHOTO COURTESY OF WINE INSTITUTE

CALIFORNIA IS THE TOP agricultural producer in the nation, with more than 400 crops ranging from nuts to vegetables and fruits, including more than 100 wine-grape varieties. Each October since 2020, California Farmer and Farmworker Month has been shining a light on those who nurture and harvest this bounty. During the annual celebration, the Golden State's wine community—encompassing viticulturalists, vintners, winery employees, distributors, retailers, restaurateurs, and sommeliers alike—recognizes the people who work hard to bring world-class wine to consumers across the state, the nation, and the world.

California's winegrowers have a long history of embracing sustainable practices; a vast majority of producers participate in the California Sustainable Winegrowing Program, Certified California Sustainable Winegrowing, and other regional educational and certification programs. (Visit californiasustainablewinegrowing.org for information on the statewide commit-

ment to sustainability over the past three decades.) Enriching the lives of employees is a critical aspect of sustainability, as a productive and satisfied workforce helps the wine industry strengthen the communities in which it operates.

Using the state's rigorous laws and regulations as a starting point, California's vintners and growers do much to protect the welfare and the environment of their employees while striving to provide positive workplaces that develop, motivate, and retain high-quality personnel. Common practices include team-building activities, career-development coaching, and educational opportunities as well as providing the right training, tools, and equipment. In addition, producers are actively involved in spearheading charitable initiatives and backing a wide array of community services.

California's diverse wine regions offer unforgettable scenery, small-town charm, renowned dining experiences, and, of course, some of the world's finest wines.

As leaders in sustainable farming and winemaking practices who are committed to preserving open space and promoting cultural activities alike, vintners here contribute significantly to the quality of life in the communities in which they operate while ensuring that the industry will continue to be a signature force in the state's agriculture for the foreseeable future.

As the 2022 harvest wraps up, October is an ideal time to open a bottle of California wine and appreciate the many hands that brought it all the way from the vineyard to you. Learn more at discovercaliforniawines.com. 

Authored by Wine Institute contributors, The Inside Sip on California Wine provides an insider's look at the latest developments in California's wine community. Wine Institute is an advocacy group of 1,000 California wineries and affiliated businesses that initiates and advocates for state, federal, and international public policy to encourage the responsible production, consumption, and enjoyment of wine.

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writing their own story

A LOOK AT THE BOUTIQUE WINERIES OF PASO ROBLES

The view from the Opolo Vineyards estate.

STORY BY MICHELLE M. METTER
PHOTOS BY RAFAEL PETERSON

Paso Robles wine country defies easy generalizations. Here along California's Central Coast, 40,000 vineyard acres are tended by 200 producers whose similarity starts and stops with the inherent belief that the rules do not apply to them—in the best way possible.

The rugged landscape yields a wealth of ageworthy, world-class wines made from Cabernet Sauvignon and other red Bordeaux varieties that, together, make up nearly 60% of all grapes grown throughout the region, which is home to 11 sub-AVAs that represent vast differences in soil, topography, average temperature, and annual rainfall while experiencing the largest diurnal temperature swings in California. The Paso Robles CAB Collective—a group of 25 wineries specializing in the red Bordeaux varieties, namely Cabernet Franc, Merlot, Petit Verdot, Malbec, and Carménère as well as Cabernet Sauvignon—is making some of the best wines in the state, as consistently good as they are unique in style. Here are a few producers to know.





The Mooney family of Chateau Margene: Margene, Michael, and Jon.

chateau MARGENE

Chateau Margene was one of the first producers to establish roots in the Creston District: Its 9-acre estate vineyard was planted in 1998. The winery is also home to husband-and-wife duo Michael and Margene Mooney; their intimate proximity to the vineyards can't help but be represented in their luxury Cabernet, Cabernet Franc, and Bordeaux blends, which range in price from \$82 to \$210.

The vineyard consists of two blocks: Stella is named for Margene's mother and granddaughter, while Michael's Vineyard pays homage to the couple's older son and grandson. Michael and the couple's younger son Jon oversee all winemaking with the exception of the Cab Franc made by CFO Margene; first bottled in 2002, it's her favorite variety for its bolder characteristics. In short, the Mooneys quite literally touch every aspect of daily operations and production. chateaumargene.com

Chateau Margene 2019 Cask 4, Creston District, Paso Robles (\$210) Aged in 100% new French oak for 30 months, this plush and confident blend made with 100% estate fruit (68% Cabernet Sauvignon, 24% Cabernet Franc, and 8% Merlot) is strikingly elegant, with notes of espresso and loose tobacco. Slate intertwines with black plum and a bevy of violets in bloom as chewy tannins go juicy. **98** —*Meridith May*

Chateau Margene 2019 Estate Grown Cabernet Franc, Creston District, Paso Robles (\$90) Margene Mooney has been making this 100% Cab Franc—her favorite variety—for the past decade. Spiced heather, wild boysenberry, and slate make for a heady combo of textures and flavors. The palate shows high-toned acidity and a juicy disposition, and like a Chinon, it offers a hint of jalapeño and dried oregano. Aged 23 months in French oak. **94** —*M.M.*

Chateau Margene 2019 Cask 7, Creston District, Paso Robles (\$210) Exotic and lush, this Right Bank-inspired blend of 52% Merlot and 48% Malbec from Michael's Vineyard fills the mouth with velvet-lined tannins that extend the sensations left behind by dried violets; vanilla-infused espresso; and ripe, juicy plum. Broad-shouldered, with spiced cedar and an earthy finish. Aged 30 months in 100% French oak. **96** —*M.M.*



Sixmilebridge Vineyards' DTC manager, Rosie Behrens, is pictured in the tasting room.

Sixmilebridge VINEYARDS

Jim and Barbara Moroney met as students at Stanford in the mid-1970s, when, as Jim explains it, they fell in love with each other and with wine simultaneously. Trips to Napa led to declarations that, some decades down the road, they would spend their retirement making wine.

Some 40 years later, they made their dream a reality as proprietors of Sixmilebridge Vineyards, located in the Adelaida District. They chose their property for its abundant, peach-colored limestone soil, which would allow them to make small-batch, Right Bank–style Bordeaux wines as well as premium Cabernet Sauvignons. Today, husband-and-wife team Anthony and Hillary Yount collaborate as winemaker and vineyard manager, respectively. In addition to trying the outstanding wines, which regularly sell out, experiencing the modern and welcoming tasting room is reason enough to visit Sixmilebridge. sixmilebridge.com

Sixmilebridge 2019 Limerick, Adelaida District, Paso Robles (\$85) Meaty aromas meld with fennel, lavender, plum, and espresso in this statuesque Bordeaux-style blend composed of 65% Merlot, 17% Petit Verdot, 15% Cabernet Sauvignon, and 3% Cab Franc. Chalky tannins aid the great acid structure in bringing out the elegance of the superb mouthfeel. Bittersweet dark chocolate layers atop the palate with oak, sending wildflowers and licorice to a lengthy finish. **95** —*M.M.*

Sixmilebridge 2019 Cabernet Sauvignon, Adelaida District, Paso Robles (\$96) On this winery's 11-acre estate, grapes grow on limestone soil in vineyards as high as 1,885 feet above sea level. A nose of cured prosciutto and salami with a rub of pomegranate leads to chalky tannins and gleaming notes of red tea. Cinnamon, cedar, and plum skin surround glossy black cherry as the wine's earthy character unfolds with grace. **95** —*M.M.*

Cass WINERY

When you step into the Cass Winery Café, glance up. There you will see a red sail, taken from the ship that Steve Cass and his family almost spent a good part of his retirement on. "Almost" is key here, as after only a few short weeks of sailing, Cass' wife thought better of the idea, leaving him to hatch a plan for an adventure involving wine instead.

Fortunately, this resulted in the establishment of Cass Winery, located in the Geneseo District just southeast of the town of Paso Robles. With his partner Ted Plemons, Cass planted the 145-acre vineyard to some 12 varieties, among them Cabernet Sauvignon and other red Bordeaux grapes. Winemaker Sterling Kragten, who took the reins from his predecessor Lood Kotze in 2014, has received numerous awards and accolades while expanding the Cass portfolio to include new blends and single-varietal wines.

For their part, chatting with Cass and Plemons makes you feel as



though you've been invited to a secret cool kids' club, while the winery itself feels like a playground built exclusively for their biggest fans. Stay at the Geneseo Inn on the property or attend one of their "adult summer camps" for a fully immersive experience. casswines.com

Cass 2019 Estate Grown Cabernet Sauvignon, Paso Robles (\$55) With a foundation of 81% Cabernet Sauvignon, this red also houses small amounts of Merlot, Petit Verdot, and Malbec. Espresso and blackberry preserves inspire on the first sip before pomegranate paves the way to a vanilla middle. Juicy, creamy, and well balanced. **93** —M.M.

Cass 2019 Reserve Cabernet Sauvignon, Paso Robles (\$150) The addition of Petit Verdot, Syrah, and Malbec adds texture, color, and depth to this elegant red. Offering chewy tannins within a plush frame, it takes a deep dive into plum preserves, melted chocolate, and pomegranate. Clove-spiced sweet oak sparks the palate alongside meaty notes that are in tune with slate and creamy fennel. Aged 22 months in French oak. **96** —M.M.

Steve Cass is co-owner of Cass Winery.



Eberle WINERY

In 1979, Gary Eberle bottled his first Eberle Winery Cabernet Sauvignon. Since then, this Paso Robles pioneer has received an abundance of accolades both for his role in establishing the region and for the exceptional quality and ageworthiness of his single-varietal Cabernets and red Bordeaux blends. Today, winemaker Chris Eberle (no relation—they've done the genealogical testing) brings an international point of view to winemaking at the estate, having worked in Australia, Germany, South Africa, New Zealand, and France.

Chris explains that, while the cool 2019 vintage presented its share of challenges, it resulted in a highly balanced estate Cab. "Sometimes fruit hangs on too long and you can lose a lot of varietal character," he says. "We pick early, middle, and then late and blend to create what is a more restrained and European-styled wine—a little more elegant and balanced." eberlewinery.com



The "Eberles": winemaker Chris and proprietor Gary, a Paso Robles pioneer.

Eberle Winery 2019 Vineyard Selection Cabernet Sauvignon, Paso Robles (\$26) Showing notes of spiced violet and espresso on the nose, this medium-bodied Cab matured in a mix of new, second-fill, and neutral oak. Dark cherry and chocolate empower its flowery tone as peppered cedar engages the mid-palate. Juicy, with supple tannins and an athletic frame. **92** —M.M.

Eberle Winery 2019 Estate Cabernet Sauvignon, Paso Robles (\$52) Gary Eberle's clone 6 is the foundation of this flowery, concentrated estate red aged 22 months in French oak. Lilac and lavender surround dark plum on the nose. Concentrated flavors of blackberry engage with a string of earthy, savory notes as black olive, coffee, and slate slathered in dark chocolate make a remarkable impression on the palate. Floral notes continue to deliver a rush of flavor on the finish. Wow—this is a classic. **96** —M.M.

Brecon ESTATE

Located among the rolling hills of the Adelaida District on Paso Robles' west side is the 40-acre, sustainably farmed (and often dry-farmed) Brecon Estate. Here, Welsh-born winemaker Damian Grindley—a former spelunker—produces award-winning estate-grown red Bordeaux wines, including old-vine Cabernet Sauvignon from some of the first plantings in the district. These small-batch ferments have a limited case production and an avid fan base, which makes them hard to get.

Grindley describes the wines as food-friendly and finessed, thanks in part to “bright acidity from the calcareous soil—which means they age really well.” He points out that “with all the microclimates in Paso Robles and winemakers with varied backgrounds . . . you get to write your own story, and there is a sense of voyage and discovery. I was once a cave explorer; now I'm a wine explorer.” breconestate.com



*Brecon Estate winemaker
Damian Grindley.*

Brecon Estate 2019 Meritage, Adelaida District, Paso Robles (\$68) This meritorious blend of 56% Cabernet Sauvignon, 30% Petit Verdot, and 14% Cabernet Franc was made with 100% estate fruit. It's sumptuous to the point of glamorous, with silky tannins and waves of plum, creamy blueberry, mocha, violets, and tilled soil. The underlying calcareous nature of this tamed beast offers textural bliss. **93** —M.M.

Brecon Estate 2019 Reserve Cabernet Franc, Adelaida District, Paso Robles (\$90) From outcropped limestone hillsides, this red aged 20 months in French oak is supremely aromatic and intensely fruit-forward. Violets dipped in chocolate define the entry, followed by blueberry preserves, black tea, and spiced licorice. Offering a combo of structure and acidity with a hint of tension, this elegant wine lines up beautifully across the palate. **96** —M.M.

Brecon Estate 2019 Petit Verdot, Adelaida District, Paso Robles (\$69) Dynamic notes of violets and black olive define a heart of darkness. Oregano and balsamic season the liquid, whose chalky, tongue-coating mouthfeel is enhanced by espresso, spiced oak, and a garden of dried lavender. **94** —M.M.

Opolo VINEYARDS

With estate vineyards on both the east and west sides of Paso Robles, Opolo may enjoy the most varied terroir of all the members of the Paso Robles CAB Collective, giving proprietors Rick Quinn and Dave Nichols and winemakers Chris Rougeot and James Schreiner a diversity of topographies to draw from. Fruit from the westside Willow Creek and Templeton Gap districts combines with warmer-climate sites to create Opolo's Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, Rhapsody Reserve blend, and other Reserve Bordeaux-style wines.

The estate vineyards were established in 1995, followed by the winery starting with the 1999 vintage. A tasting room soon followed; set up in a tractor barn with two barrels and a wood plank bar, it had such humble beginnings that Quinn and Nichols joked that they wondered if people would show up. Today, Opolo is a signature destination in the rugged coastal mountains of Paso Robles, with an expansive tasting room, open-air patio bistro, and boutique inn set amid the terraced estate vineyards. opolowine.com

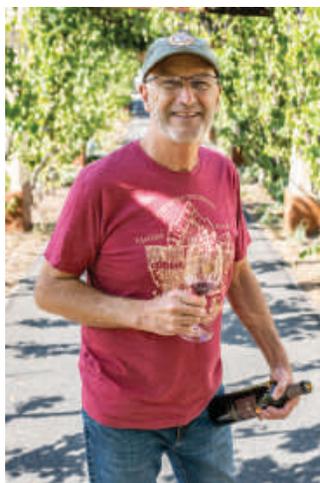
Opolo 2019 Rhapsody Reserve, Paso Robles (\$50)

The Cabernet Sauvignon base of this juicy Left Bank-style cuvée is blended with the four other Bordeaux varieties. Aged 18 months in (35% new) French oak, it begins with scents of black raspberry and coffee bean. Steeped in roasted coffee, dried cranberry and dark chocolate-covered cherry emerge. With richly developed tannins and a round body, it's far from decadent but close to sublime. **94** —M.M.



Opolo Vineyards proprietors Rick Quinn and Dave Nichols.

Castoro CELLARS



Proprietor Niels Udsen at the entrance to the Castoro Cellars tasting room.

In 1983, Neils “Beaver” Udsen and his wife, Bimmer, founded Castoro Cellars in the Templeton Gap District, which now encompasses 1,400 acres of estate vineyards that are entirely certified sustainable by SIP (Sustainability in Practice) and organic by the California Certified Organic Farmers (CCOF); the tasting room of Castoro (whose name translates as “beaver” in Italian) can be found in Templeton off Highway 46 West. According to Neils, it all represents a vast change from

their early days, when they started with what he calls a backwards approach to winemaking—landing first on the concept for the brand and then producing it in a small corner of a rented space in someone else’s facility before eventually purchasing their own equipment and acreage.

From those modest beginnings to the arrival of winemaker Tom Myers in 1990 to an annual production of 40,000 cases, Neils and Bimmer have remained passionate about the organic and sustainable practices that earned them the title of Paso Robles Wine Country Alliance Environmental Winery of the Year in 2020. “If you have been looking to add a quality Cabernet to your wine list that meets the need of organic consumer demand, this is your bottle,” says Niels, referring to the Castoro Cellars 2018 Reserve Cabernet Sauvignon from Whale Rock Vineyard—so named for its soil riddled with whale-bone fossils. castorocellars.com

Castoro Cellars 2018 Reserve Cabernet Sauvignon, Whale Rock Vineyard, Paso Robles (\$45) Piquant aromas of mocha, jalapeño, and currant give way to chalky, well-developed tannins that ride a wave of spiced cedar, ginger, and bright plum. Mineral notes seep through this juicy red, keeping the fruit vibrant and fresh. **92** —M.M.

Castoro Cellars 2019 Due Mila Sedici MM16, Paso Robles (\$60) A beautiful nose of violets and fresh summer plum brings this red blend to life. Soon after Old World acidity refreshes the palate, an intense surge of slate dries the mouth. Chewy tannins embrace a trace of wildflowers, blackberry, and garden herbs on the finish. **93** —M.M.



LXV founders Kunal Mittal, pictured left with the winery’s Reserve Cab Franc, and Neeta Mittal.

LXV WINE

Twelve years ago, Neeta and Kunal Mittal began making wine in Paso Robles for their LXV label, inspired by their travels through Bordeaux, Burgundy, and other Old World wine regions as well as by the openness of the local winemaking community, which reminded them of their native India.

As a Bordeaux house, LXV pays homage to the Left Bank, specifically Margaux. Kunal’s goal is to capture the beauty of Bordeaux blends while exploring varieties like Cabernet Franc: As he puts it, “I want to see how much I can do with it—how much expression can I get out of this grape?” LXV’s Cabernet Franc Rosé and Reserve Cabernet Franc from Portico Hills Vineyard are two of the stylistically different results. Pairing LXV wines with international cuisine is also an aspiration, says Neeta: “We want to see if we can we bring something to the plate and the palate that will help us deconstruct the wine.” To that end, the Mittals package their wine-club shipments with signature spices.

Watch for their first estate release from their vineyards in the Willow Creek AVA, made under the guidance of consulting winemaker Frederick Ammons and winemaker Jeff Streckas. lxvwine.com

LXV Wine 2020 The Secret Cabernet Sauvignon/Cabernet Franc/Petit Verdot, Paso Robles (\$68) While floral aromatics greet the nose, this blend of 68% Cabernet Sauvignon, 18% Cabernet Franc, and 14% Petit Verdot makes an earthier impression on first sip. Garden herbs parade alongside streaks of iron, briar, and cassis. A juicy character unlocks the wine’s secrets, stretching out generously midway with brushstrokes of lavender and spiced boysenberry. **95** —M.M.

LXV Wine 2020 X Reserve Cabernet Franc, Portico Hills Vineyard, Santa Barbara County (\$90) A brilliant array of plum, jasmine, and lilac joins lushly textured notes of white-peppered blueberry as a thread of slate brightens sensations of red fruit. We found a dash of oregano on the delightful, earthy-woody finish. **95** —M.M. 

The TRANSFORMER

HERZOG'S NEW DIRECTOR OF WINEMAKING, DAVID GALZIGNATO, ADDS TECHNOLOGY TO TRADITION AT THIS ESTABLISHED, FAMILY-OWNED CALIFORNIA BUSINESS

STORY BY MERIDITH MAY / PHOTOS BY JEREMY BALL

“This will be my 25th harvest in the industry,” David Galzignato pointed out as we toured the upgraded barrel room at Herzog Winery. The University of California, Davis, graduate, who received his bachelor of science in viticulture and enology and a bachelor of arts in Italian, also scored a wine business MBA from Sonoma State in 2019. His career spans decades and ranges from big-name wineries to more boutique labels. “I wanted to fast-track my palate and work with as many talented winemakers as I could,” he explained.

With 15 years of experience in Napa and some time spent in Paso Robles and France, he’s been mentored by the late Denis Malbec and Ray Einberger (Opus One, Ste. Michelle), among others. “I was French-trained in Napa, and that has influenced my style, my decisions, and ultimately, the wines,” Galzignato said.

Herzog director of winemaking David Galzignato is applying a fresh approach to barrels, tanks, and vineyard sites as the winery looks toward the future.

His first vintage at Herzog—the 2021, which we tasted through barrel samples—is already stunning. And this is only the beginning: Galzignato’s plans to upgrade the winery’s equipment, facilities, and world-class Northern California sites are just now being implemented. Taking the baton from longtime Herzog director of winemaking Joe Hurliman—who first conceived of Herzog’s single-vineyard reserve program in Napa and Sonoma and now holds the title of winemaker emeritus—Galzignato is drawing from his years of experience to develop an even stronger footprint in luxury branding.

“My strength and passion is farming—I have a lot of respect for [it],” he confessed, at first reticent about his breadth and depth of knowledge and the prestige of the wineries and professionals with which he’s worked. But as we talked and toured the winery—which, located in the coastal city of Oxnard, is certainly California’s largest kosher facility—he opened up, although still fairly modestly, about the changes to come.

Galzignato takes a hands-on approach in the vineyard, walking up and down rows whether it’s a family-owned estate property or a grower-partner’s site. “Some say I’m an a—hole in the vineyard,” he blurted out, jokingly defending himself by proclaiming that he is a perfectionist. I pointed out that chefs are meticulous in the kitchen and that’s often accepted by the team; after all, the winemaker is responsible for the end product. “It’s just that I get to the point quickly,” he agreed. “You may have only two days to hit each independent viticultural window. You know, *lingchi*, death by 1,000 cuts—so many things can go wrong. After all, we’re investing in the tools, an irrigation consultant—and, of course, I can’t drive to the vineyard before work in the morning like I did when I worked locally in Napa.”

But thanks to the installation of moisture probes and weather stations in estate vineyards and grower locations, Galzignato can measure temperature, wind direction, and humidity every 15 minutes. They also measure soil moisture every 8 inches and assist with irrigation strategy, an important metric for water conservation. “We’re spending money, but during a challenging or variable vintage it will pay for itself,” he noted.



All tanks aren’t created equal: With features like dimpled jackets, dual screens, TankNET controllers, and dedicated pumps, these custom-built 7-ton fermenters are well equipped to handle Herzog’s luxury tiers.

Other investments include an updated barrel program. On a recent trip to Bordeaux, where he has longtime relationships with coopers, Galzignato was able to purchase what he needed to produce new high-tier wines; the barrels have since been rabbi-approved. And because Galzignato is so meticulous, he has introduced new silicon barrel bungs, which form a tighter seal to keep contaminants out.

Smaller tanks with equal height-to-width ratios are also being installed, better for luxury wines when keeping vineyard blocks separate. The 2,000-gallon-capacity tanks—as opposed to 15,000-gallon

commercial tanks—“improve fermentation kinetics,” Galzignato explained. “That equates to better color, mouthfeel, and yeast health.”

So, What Else Is New?

- An optical sorter is on the way to ensure uniform berries and consistency from vintage to vintage.
- A dedicated crush/barrel pad custom built to carefully handle Herzog’s reserve barrel program.
- A “winery within a winery,” aka the Chateau Reserve Winery, as well as a barrel room for luxury tiers.

SOURCING IS KEY

The ability to accent terroir, express vineyards, and be competitive within specific AVAs is in Galzignato's wheelhouse. "Rutherford needs to taste like Rutherford," he noted as an example. "The vineyard sites and farming philosophy have evolved since 1985. We'll soon be working with fruit from Howell Mountain, Mt. Veeder, and other AVAs for our newest high-tier line. I am also excited about building on our existing expressions with Lake County and Alexander Valley."

We sat down to taste Galzignato's first vintage; read on for our notes.



SOMM Journal publisher/editor-in-chief Meridith May tastes with David Galzignato.



Herzog Lineage 2021 Sauvignon Blanc, Lake County (\$20)

This newly released (almost sold out!) wine hails from the Kelsey Bench's deep, well-drained red soils. Made with

the Musqué clone, it has a big, fleshy body: Herzog director of winemaking David Galzignato notes that this is a "red-wine lover's white." Tropical fruit exudes from the glass and translates to the palate. A thread of minerality, white flowers, and honeyed tangerine make for a unique, ripe style.

Herzog Special Reserve 2021 Cabernet Sauvignon, Lake County (\$45)

The grapes for this wine were picked the first week of October 2021, and Galzignato is extremely enthusiastic about the phenolics from the Red Hills AVA. The barrel sample featured a perfume of terroir and crushed boysenberry that led to finely grained tannins. The dusty texture reminded me of dry plum skin anchored by chocolate and slate. The style—seamless with finesse, not rustic—is elevated for the region: Galzig-

nato is on to something big and may be a pioneer in changing attitudes here.

Herzog Special Reserve 2021 Cabernet Sauvignon, Napa Valley (\$50)

Blending Oak Knoll fruit with grapes from Yountville, Oakville, and Howell Mountain, this round and balanced red is elegant in its youth. The black-fruit perfume is heady and floral. Supple yet chewy tannins reveal spiced sandalwood and a plum-liqueur largesse. *sj*



These Lego-like blocks represent Galzignato's priorities, top to bottom.

THE IMPORTANCE OF FAMILY

After hearing about his experiences at admired wineries and the many improvements he plans to bring to the table, we asked Herzog director of winemaking David Galzignato how he came to work for the Herzog family.

"When COVID hit, I was laid off from Treasury Wine Estates and moved to Nice, France. Through video conferencing, I met with Joseph Herzog," Galzignato recalled. "He said that 'fit' was an important factor for them, and family was in that definition. Coming from an Italian family [from Piedmont], I understood that. I also relate to smart business-people: The Herzogs go back eight generations in the wine industry. Their continuing success speaks volumes. We speak a common language."

Galzignato is thrilled to be working for the Herzogs and is thankful for the autonomy he has been given in making upgrades and overseeing not only the vineyards and new plantings but also the warehouse and bottling. "I think my MBA [in wine business] was also a dealmaker," he surmised. "There's a structure to running a winery, and after all, it is a business. I specialize in risk management and know what things cost."

Referring to himself as a bull in a china shop, he may be tough on the inside and come off a bit gruff, but he is a Renaissance man with many talents and the impetus to lead Herzog Winery's revival period.

A photograph of three people sitting on a wooden cart in a vineyard. The cart is loaded with several large, pinkish-purple wine buckets. The people are dressed in casual, outdoor attire. The background shows rows of grapevines and trees under a bright sky.

Inside Graves- Sauternes

Graves-Sauternes is home to an abundance of small, family-owned wineries.

A SOMMFOUNDATION WEBINAR ON THE “ORIGINAL BORDEAUX” REVEALS INSIGHTS INTO THE REGION AND ITS FOUR APPELLATIONS: GRAVES, PESSAC-LÉOGNAN, SAUTERNES, AND BARSAC

by Stefanie Schwalb

WHAT MAKES A particular region enticing to wine lovers? When it comes to Graves-Sauternes, whose history is as exciting as the world-renowned wines it produces, the list is a lengthy one: Its appellations, wineries, and winemakers continue to evolve as they surprise and delight enophiles across the globe.

Attendees of the webinar “The Original Bordeaux: Graves-Sauternes,” hosted on July 20 by *The SOMM Journal* in partnership with SommFoundation, dove into the details of the region and its four major appellations during a discussion led by Master Sommelier and CIVB (Conseil Interprofessionnel du Vin de Bordeaux) Accredited Bordeaux Tutor Jesse Becker and *SOMM Journal* VP of education Lars Leicht. Also featured were insights from two exceptional regional producers: Domaine de Chevalier owner/managing director Olivier Bernard, who covered Graves and Pessac-Léognan, and Château La Tour Blanche winery head manager Miguel Aguirre, who focused on Sauternes and Barsac.

A Diversity of Terroirs and Styles

Kicking off the webinar with a bit of background, Becker guided attendees on a visual tour of the region while highlighting some key facts.

"Bordeaux itself is the largest appellation in all of France with over 110,000 hectares—it's an enormous AOC," he said. "[Graves-Sauternes] represents 6% of [Bordeaux's] vineyards, around 17,600 acres." The region, which lies south of the city of Bordeaux, is home to roughly 450 winegrowers and has an annual production of approximately 240,000 hectoliters (more than 32 million bottles). Its four major appellations—Graves, Pessac-Léognan, Sauternes, and Barsac, which include a stunning 42 classified growths—produce dry reds, dry whites, and sweet wines. "It's the only region in Bordeaux that has the distinction of producing all three of these styles at a very high level of quality," Becker added.

Expanding on its history, Becker noted that Graves-Sauternes is often referred to as "the original Bordeaux"—hence the webinar title. "This is the birthplace of claret—these blended wines that first made their way to England in the Middle Ages," he said. "It's where Bordeaux originated." Additional milestones beyond those humble beginnings include the 1855 classification of wines from Sauternes and Barsac as well as the classification of Graves wines between 1953 and 1959. "[The latter] was entirely focused on the region that's now Pessac-Léognan," Becker added, "and it's where we find the great classified estates for both dry white and red wine."

Becker then moved on to some geographical highlights: the Landes forest of Landes de Gascogne, a hilly region that protects the Graves vineyards from storms off the nearby Atlantic Ocean, and the Ciron, a small river that originates in the Landes forest and divides Sauternes and Barsac. "The Ciron is a cool stream that comes into contact with the much warmer Garonne River" to the north of Graves, Becker explained. "This is part of why you have this humidity that lingers here—especially in the autumn months—and it's what brings Botrytis to make these world-class sweet wines."

Wrapping up his overview before handing things over to Bernard, Becker also briefly addressed regional soils, which play a significant role in Graves-Sauternes' success. "Graves' comes from gravel . . . but it's not just gravelly soils—it's much more geologically diverse than that," he said. "In fact, in the southern part of the Graves, the closer we are to Sauternes and Barsac, the more we find limestone soils—sometimes clay or sandy too—and limestone is key as part of the character of these great wines from southern Graves."



PHOTO COURTESY OF FAVORANT DESIGN ©

The renowned gravel soils from which Graves derives its name.

Graves and Pessac-Léognan

Established as an AOC in 1937, the 31-mile-long Graves appellation encompasses 42 villages/communes and 200 winegrowers that together produce 20 million bottles annually, accounting for 3% of all Bordeaux production. It has 2,224 acres planted to white varietals (Sauvignon Blanc, Sauvignon Gris, Sémillon, and Muscadelle) and 6,177 acres planted to reds (Cabernet Franc, Cabernet Sauvignon, Carménère, Malbec, Merlot, and Petit Verdot). "I wrote [a] book on the 45th parallel [*The Magic of the 45th Parallel: The Ideal Latitude for the World's Great Wines*] saying that we need freshness for white and maturity for red," said Bernard. "The Graves region is wonderful because you have soils ideal to mature Cabernet Sauvignon and other sites to make Sauvignon Blanc with wonderful acidity."

In the north of Graves lies Pessac-Léognan, "where some châteaux have endured for 700 to 900 years," Bernard added. The appellation, which is situated at the gateway of Bordeaux in close proximity to the port, produces 10 million bottles annually (80% red and 20% white). Comprising ten villages and 72 estates, it's home to 16 Crus Classés de Graves—including the acclaimed Château Haut-Brion—and its soils consist of a combination of gravel and pebbles.

Bernard noted that these appellations overall present a bit of a paradox. "The classification of Graves is only from 1953 and Pessac-Léognan from 1987, so this is a very old story, but at the same time, what's happening here is a very new renaissance," he said, adding that Graves-Sauternes is known for fine, elegant, ageworthy wines that also drink well after just a few years. "You don't need to wait eight, ten, or 15 years. We often say the wines of Graves are charming, and you can drink [the reds] quite quickly," he continued, "but we also produce dry white wine. Few people know that the best dry white wine can age for a long time—15, 20, 25 years." It's all about giving the soil the time it needs to express the complexity of the roots.



PHOTO COURTESY OF DOMAINE CLARENCE DILLON ©

The world-famous Château Haut-Brion.

Sauternes and Barsac

With 4,700 acres (2% of the total Bordeaux vineyard acreage), five communes, and 140 winegrowers, Sauternes and Barsac produce 5 million bottles of wine annually from three grape varieties: Sémillon, Sauvignon Blanc, and Muscadelle. The AOCs, both founded in 1936, were among the first French appellations. Their location between the Ciron Valley and the Left Bank of the Garonne—where they're surrounded by the Landes forest—makes them ideal for the development of noble rot. Comparing Barsac and Sauternes to Pessac-Léognan and Graves, Aguirre said that the big difference between them is the terroir: "There's more humidity than Pessac-Léognan and Graves, and this condition permits the development of Botrytis," said Aguirre. "When the fungus attacks the grapes and dehydrates them, the concentration of grapes and sugar makes amazing wine."

Of course, soil composition plays an important part as well. "The big difference [between Barsac and Sauternes] is that Barsac is very near the Garonne, the soils are predominantly clay, and there's a lot of rain," Aguirre noted. "In Sauternes we have more hills, more limestone, and very fine gravel." It's often said, he added, that Barsac's terroir imparts more minerality to its wines because the clay is closer to the roots of the vines, while Sauternes delivers body with plenty of elegance.

Discussing how wine styles are evolving with regard to residual sugar, Aguirre revealed that "the problem is not quantity of sugar; it's a question of good balance. We have often the same concentration, but we all try to have more freshness. Global warming helps us a little because we need to wait less to have good concentration, and besides, you don't want to lose a lot of sugar because then you lose the style of Sauternes and Barsac." Acknowledging that winemaking requires constant evolution as well as a healthy respect for tradition, he pointed out that while many people relegate them to the dessert course, these are actually among the most versatile wines of Bordeaux in a modern setting. "Why do I say this?" he asked. "Because if you want to try Sauternes in a cocktail, you can. If you want to try it as an apéritif, it's a great moment. With chicken, it's incredible." Becker, for his part, recalled being served oysters with Sauternes on a visit to the region. "I thought it was crazy," he said. "But of course it's incredible and works so well." In short, thanks to their aromatic and stylistic complexity, both Sauternes and Barsac pair with a wide range of foods, from cheeses to appetizers and entrees.

The original Bordeaux, Graves-Sauternes is a region whose four timeless appellations are defined by their unique terroir. Winemakers like Bernard and Aguirre remind us that its many small vineyards deliver big personality via wines that consistently thrill us and challenge us to discover more with every vintage. SJ



PHOTO COURTESY OF ODG SAUTERNES BARSAC

Morning mists support the development of noble rot in Sauternes.



PHOTO COURTESY OF FAVOREAT DESIGN ©

The magic of Sauternes wines lies in their body and elegance.



Morning fog over the walls of Barsac.



A view of the setting sun from Silverado Vineyards in the Stags Leap District.

SLAYING THE **Swanky** BEAST

OUR NAPA
VALLEY SOMM
CAMP BROUGHT
THE RENOWNED
REGION DOWN
TO EARTH

story by Jessie Birschbach
photos by Alexander Rubin

Held at the end of June, *The SOMM Journal's* 2022 Napa Valley SOMM Camp wasn't our first official camp since the pandemic began, but perhaps it should have been: Where better to get back to "normal" than on a visit to the region that is responsible for putting American wine on the map? On the day Robert Mondavi opened his winery doors in 1966, this small, then little-known agricultural valley in Northern California, growing mostly walnuts and prunes, began its evolution into the esteemed, monocultured behemoth it is today (though, interestingly enough, it produces only 4% of California's wines).

As the United States' first and most famous designated wine region, established in 1981, Napa Valley evokes images of glamorous estates and opulent Cabernet Sauvignons grown in some of the world's most expensive vineyards. But looking back on our trip—and I bet our SOMM Campers from all over the country would attest to this—I can say that it never once felt pretentious or unwelcoming, right down to the warm and friendly Mediterranean climate (save for one inhospitable 100-degree day), which varies by about ten degrees from the hotter north to the south. Napa's soils also vary greatly thanks to the Napa River and both the Vaca and Mayacama mountains, ranging from volcanic to marine deposits.

We'll dive into more detail on that illustrious Napa dirt in a minute. First, though, let's finish this introduction with the most charmingly relevant quote I heard at camp, delivered as a toast by one of our panel moderators, Master Sommelier Andrea Robinson: "Here's to the fact that we are at work."

A SOFT-ROCK START

Silverado's hilltop terrace in the Stags Leap District formed the perfect sunset backdrop for our first official dinner of SOMM Camp. Set to a selection of the good kind of yacht rock (who am I kidding, all yacht rock is amazing), it was co-hosted by Chappellet Winery and Domaine Carneros, so naturally each course of our locally sourced dinner was paired with a library selection from these Napa Valley staples. "This is what Northern California tastes like these days," said Blossom Catering CEO and chef Itmar Abramovitch, who informed us that the big green bushes growing everywhere in the Valley are very likely to be wild fennel. Our flatware clinked to the beat of Steely Dan's "Do It Again" as we most certainly did do it again, and again, cutting into our yellowtail tuna with said ubiquitous fennel and citrus between sips of Chappellet's 2014 Signature Chenin Blanc.

"When Donn and Molly Chappellet first bought their property on Pritchard Hill in 1967, they found that the people that owned it before [had] planted about 25 acres of Chenin Blanc on the steepest terraces of the site," said Phillip Titus, Chappellet's winemaker since 1990. They'd later have to pull those vines thanks to a virus, but they were enough to start Molly Chappellet's love affair with the variety—in fact, Chenin Blanc was the first wine Chappellet released in 1967—and she'd later insist on replanting it in 2006, despite the fact that the grape isn't commonly grown in the Valley. Today, a small parcel of Chenin Blanc grows on Chappellet's organically farmed 110-acre estate overlooking Lake Hennessey. Although it was rich and concentrated, the 2014 still showed a striking, memorable freshness.

Russ Weis, former president of Silverado Vineyards, swirled his Silverado 1990 Limited Cabernet Sauvignon, served alongside an herb-crusted rack of lamb, while explaining that the term "limited"—chosen thanks to former proprietor Diane Disney Miller's dissatisfaction with the ambiguous term "reserve"—is used only in those years that the team declares the Cabernet Sauvignon exceptional. "In our 40 years, we've only done 15," he said. The 1990 was proof of Napa's great aging potential.

The evening ended with a creamy, rich, bubbly pop thanks to vanilla-bean panna cotta topped with the Domaine Carneros 2017 Verméil Demi-Sec. Zak Miller, Carneros' sparkly-eyed sparkling winemaker, pointed



Chappellet and Acumen winemaker Phillip Titus, Chappellet managing director David Francke, and Silverado Vineyards VP of marketing Nora Feeley.



SOMM Camper Joe Grasso awaits his pour of Chappellet's Pritchard Hill Cabernet.



A toast at Silverado Vineyards.



SOMM Campers Emily Engelman and Fernando Jewett meet on the hilltop terrace at Silverado Vineyards while fellow campers take in the view.

out that the three *Domaine Carneros* expressions served at the dinner—the 2017 Ultra Brut, the 2017 Vintage Brut, and the aforementioned—ranged from 0.5% to 2.5% dosage. “So it’s really an exercise in what the dosage does for the wine,” said Miller. My favorite course of the meal therefore ended up revealing the best cork-dorky tidbit of the night for us somms.

CONSERVING CREATIVELY

The next day after breakfast, Cakebread Cellars director of winemaking Stephanie Jacobs and vice president of operations Aaron Fishleder led the group on a walk around the winery’s property in Rutherford. Cakebread, which will celebrate its 50th anniversary next year, is best known for its Sauvignon Blanc; it has roughly 60 acres, or about two-thirds of its total vineyard holdings, planted to the grape.

En route to its main barrel room for Chardonnay, we walked through Cakebread’s “green” parking lot, outfitted with permeable pavers that act as a drainage system, funneling the rainwater they capture into two basins designed to maximize the winery’s water-conservation efforts. “It’s one of our biggest accomplishments in sustainability,” said Fishleder. Cakebread is also committed to reducing its carbon footprint and is in the process of becoming a member of the International Wineries for Climate Action collaborative.



Cakebread Cellars will celebrate its 50th anniversary next year.



The “Cabernet Appellations” seminar was held at Cakebread Cellars.

A SUB-APPELLATION STAMP COLLECTION

At the end of our tour of Cakebread, concrete eggs standing like portly sentinels lined the hallway to a room filled with tables offering a lineup of Napa Valley Cabernet Sauvignons. Master Sommelier Andrea Robinson served as the moderator for a panel of female winemakers and winery representatives that, for once, wasn’t about “women in wine.” Rather, the topic of the seminar was “Cabernet Appellations,” during which each of the Cabs presented served as a shining example of a different Napa subregion.

Robinson kicked things off by reminding us that 65% of Napa’s vineyards are planted to Cabernet Sauvignon. “I was excited when [*SOMM Journal* publisher and head camp counselor] Meridith [May] asked me to moderate this panel because I’ve seen that there’s this lack of appreciation of the detail and nuance that Napa Valley Cab is capable of,” she said. “And I think when we don’t give ourselves the chance to explore that, we really cheat ourselves and our customers. Especially now, after many decades [since Prohibition], these winemakers are really starting to play through all the potential of the different parts of Napa and how we express that potential through Cabernet Sauvignon. This lineup is a spectacular way to see each appellation’s stamp.”



Representing the Stags Leap District (SLD) was Chimney Rock Winery’s general manager and winemaker, Elizabeth Vianna. Located at the base of the Vaca Mountains, the Stags Leap

Palisades tower over Chimney Rock’s 119-acre estate, which is parceled into 28 different blocks. One of our country’s few Latina winemakers and among the more brilliant minds in Napa Valley (she was a pre-med student at Vassar College before falling in love with wine and getting her master’s degree in enology at the University of California, Davis), Vianna chose to present the herb-laden Chimney Rock 2018 Tomahawk Vineyard, considered the producer’s best single-vineyard wine. She felt—and the lot of us agreed—that it exemplified both the savoriness and the silky texture for which SLD wines are so beloved.



Speaking not only for the Mount Veeder subregion but for one of the families who helped establish it in the early 20th century, the Brandlins, was



The “Cabernet Appellations” panelists from left to right: *Diana Schweiger, sales and marketing director, Acumen Wines; Elizabeth Vianna, general manager and winemaker, Chimney Rock Winery; Becky George, associate winemaker, Brandlin Estate; moderator Andrea Robinson, MS; Laura Díaz Muñoz, general manager and winemaker, Ehlers Estate; and Stephanie Jacobs, winemaker, Cakebread Cellars.*

Becky George, associate winemaker for their eponymous winery, Brandlin Estate. “The appellation is 60,000 acres in total, but only 1,000 acres are planted to vine, so only about 1.5% of the wines in Napa come from Mount Veeder. It’s a challenging place to make wine, but that’s also what makes it special,” said George. The Brandlin Estate 2019 Cabernet Sauvignon is sourced from the property’s 95-year-old vineyard nestled amid the steep, rugged, heavily forested slopes of the mountain. The relatively high elevation and cool temperatures of the area result in thick skins and therefore a concentrated, well-structured Cabernet Sauvignon.

Diana Schweiger, the sales and marketing director for Acumen Wines, grew up in a beloved winemaking family on Napa Valley’s Spring Mountain. She explained that the Atlas Peak appellation, where Acumen is located, was a different sort of mountain region than the one to which she was accustomed. It’s one of Napa’s coolest AVAs, with the highest rainfall, but “when I first drove up there,” said Schweiger—who later said taking the steep and winding journey was like “visiting the Grinch’s house”—“I thought, this is definitely the Wild West: a lot of Manzanita bushes and lots of sun exposure.” Founded by Eric Yuan, Acumen organically farms 116 acres, from which Phillip Titus (also of the

forementioned Chappellet) makes two tiers of wine. Schweiger presented one of her favorites, the 2019 Peak Cabernet Sauvignon, a deep, dark-chocolaty blend of Acumen’s Edcora and Attelas vineyards.



Originally from Spain, Laura Díaz Muñoz, general manager and winemaker for Ehlers Estate, has been making wine in Napa Valley for over 15 years. She told the group that much of her experience prior to arriving at Ehlers four years ago involved working with mountain fruit. But she’s welcomed the challenge of moving to lower-elevation St. Helena, believing that it’s important for winemakers to work with different fruit. Owned by Jean and Sylviane Leducq, Ehlers organically farms 42 acres in this iconic central valley-floor region. “St. Helena is small, but it’s got a lot of diversity in terms of soil profile,” said Díaz Muñoz. “It’s one of the warmest [appellations], but I think that’s given us a slight advantage because our vineyards have already been adjusting to the heat.” The talented winemaker presented the peppery, meaty Ehlers Estate 2018 Jean Leducq Napa Valley Cabernet Sauvignon, sourced from a single block

in the gravelly clay soil of the estate vineyard (the property ranges from 35% to 65% gravel).



Although the aforementioned Cakebread has been making wine for half a century, Stephanie Jacobs is only its fourth winemaker. She started there as its enologist in 2004 and has been in charge of its wine-making program since 2017. Representing Rutherford, she walked us through the Cakebread 2014 Benchland Select Cabernet Sauvignon, offering black cherry, boysenberry, and a touch of that earthy dust for which the AVA is famed.

[T] Acumen 2019 PEAK Cabernet Sauvignon, Edcora Vineyard, Atlas Peak, Napa Valley (\$165)

The 84-acre Edcora Vineyard sits on shallow volcanic soils high atop Atlas Peak, where it yields small berries with thick skins. Bold aromas of crushed blackberry and a cashmere mouthfeel offer a fine interpretation of the site. The wine’s muscle and athleticism are conveyed by generous notes of coffee-soaked plum and dark chocolate as well as chewy tannins. **97** —*Meridith May*



[T] Acumen 2019 PEAK Cabernet Sauvignon, Attelas Vineyard, Atlas Peak, Napa Valley (\$145)

Attelas, which was first planted in 1992, sits at 1,300 feet in elevation. Combining three clones from three prized blocks with 9% estate Malbec, this wine is dusky, with big bones. A surge of blackberry licorice coats the mouth, layered with tobacco, deep slate minerality, and spiced cedar. **94** —*M.M.*





Hailey Trefethen stands proudly in a garden planted by her grandmother on the Trefethen estate in the Oak Knoll District.

LUNCH FROM LA HUERTA

“Sorry,” said Hailey Trefethen of Trefethen Family Vineyards, shouting over a chainsaw. “We’re trying to save an oak tree, but in order to save it, we have to chop down some large branches today.” It was a symbol of the hard work the family puts in to remain dedicated stewards of the Oak Knoll District estate, which sprawls across about 420 acres. Following Hailey, as sentimental as she was knowledgeable, around the property before lunch felt like a tour through Napa Valley’s history. We walked from the winery—originally built in 1886 and outfitted with a horse-drawn grape elevator—under some towering redwood trees planted by her nana to a garden also originally planted by her nana that teemed with an absurd diversity of fruits and vegetables (even kiwis). Today a section of it has been dubbed La Huerta (“the garden”), and the good majority of its yield goes to Trefethen’s 60-odd employees.

On this day, however, our group of somms was lucky enough to enjoy a meal prepared from the bounty of La Huerta, which included one of the most memorable pairings we experienced at camp: a simple dish of ripe peaches, shaved parmesan, salted almonds, and estate olive oil with the Trefethen 2020

Chardonnay. Drifting down from stone-fruit heaven, I think I heard the biggest takeaway that Hailey offered: “We’re in a world-renowned region. It’s important that we take care of it. It’s a responsibility to be at the forefront of sustainability but also to communicate it. We have an incredible opportunity to talk to people [who] come and visit us about farming.

That is [so] important to us as a family . . . because we are all estate [farmed]. . . My grandmother had a quote in her garden shed that we keep in our office: ‘Good gardening is to do everything that needs to be done when it needs to be done whether you like it or not.’” But what was blatantly obvious was just how much Hailey loved it.



Peaches, parmesan, salted almonds, and estate-grown olive oil paired with Trefethen Chardonnay.



The “Technique or Terroir” seminar panelists from left to right: moderator Deborah Parker Wong, global wine editor, The SOMM Journal; Kale Anderson, winemaker, Trinity Cellars; Russ Weis, former president, Silverado Vineyards (now president, Walsh Vineyard Management); Michael Eddy, director of winemaking, Louis M. Martini; and Maayan Koschitzky, winemaker/proprietor, La Pelle and Royal Prince.



Michael Eddy shares a laugh with his fellow panelists.

The SOMM Campers enjoy the comfort of the luxurious stadium classroom at Louis M. Martini.



TERROIR AND GHOSTS ARE REAL

Our bellies full of summer garden delights, we settled into the stunning stadium classroom at Louis M. Martini in St. Helena. Who better to moderate the ever-confounding “Technique or Terroir” debate than *The SOMM Journal’s* very own global wine editor, Deborah Parker Wong? As in her Scents and Accountability column, where she bravely tackles the most technical and scientifically driven subjects in the world of wine, Parker Wong showed the utmost grace and consideration while wrangling our panel of winemakers and winery representatives; as opinionated as they were astute, they made for the camp’s liveliest discussion.

“The research of the last International Terroir Congress has deduced that ‘climate change has the most impact on terroir expression,’” said Parker Wong. “We know that winemaking technique is one way for winemakers to address climate change. But what does that mean

in practice, exactly? Today our panelists are going to shed some light on their individual relationships with the concept of terroir, the winemaking techniques they’re currently using, and [whether] terroir is impacting what they’re doing.”



“I’m not sure I’m a terroirist,” said Michael Eddy, director of winemaking for Louis M. Martini, “but I do believe in terroir—not like I believe in ghosts, but I actually experience it. I live it. I see it. But

I [also] think there’s a lot of confusion on what terroir is and what elements of a wine [reveal] terroir. . . . There are a lot of things that impact the way a wine

tastes. So when I’m asked, ‘technique or terroir?’ my immediate response is ‘yes.’” Eddy presented two Louis M. Martini Cabernet Sauvignons, the 2018 Stagecoach Vineyard and the 2018 Lot No. 1. The latter is composed of fruit from different sites throughout Napa Valley, while the former represents “what I and my team believe is typical of Stagecoach,” said Eddy, which brought the winemaker

to his biggest point: “I think sometimes it [terroir] has to do more with intent.”

Russ Weis, who presented both the 2018 Silverado SOLO from the Stags Leap District and the Silverado GEO Cabernet Sau-



FOR TRINITAS, TERROIR IS SANDY

If most of the “Technique or Terroir” panel focused on questioning terroir’s true meaning, Kale Anderson, winemaker for Trinity Cellars, was its most confident advocate. “When I was a student at [UC] Davis, my ‘aha moment’ was during a student-run tasting called ‘Rhônes Around the World,’” he recalled. “It was a brown-bag tasting of Garnacha from Spain, Shiraz from Australia, Syrah from Paso, and so many more Rhône varieties from everywhere. That was when I realized terroir wasn’t a bunch of BS. It’s real and it’s probably why I’m sitting here. In fact, it inspired me to work with Rhône varieties from my own brand.”

There may have been no better example of terroir than the concentrated Trinitas 2020 Sandy Lane Vineyard Old Vine Red Blend from Contra Costa County. Maybe this was because it was the seminar’s only field blend (44% Carignan, 22% Mataro, 18% Zinfandel, and 16% Petite Sirah). Maybe it’s because the vines ranged in age from 50 to 100 years old. Maybe it’s because they’ve been dry farmed their whole lives by the same loving family: While Trinitas Cellars has been owned and operated by the Busch family since 2002, the Gonsalves family has owned and farmed the incredible Sandy Lane Vineyard for three generations. Whatever the reason, the complex wine was showing particularly well.

vignon from Coombsville, brought up a study of Napa's climate across 50 years that he helped to fund as president of the Napa Valley Vintners association in 2013–2014. "The real fact of the matter is [that] we are about a degree warmer in the winter than we used to be five or six decades ago—and we're about a degree cooler in the growing season," said Weis, noting that the real threat to Silverado's vineyards



were the heat spikes to which they've had to react through architectural methods like trellising.

Maayan Koschitzky, winemaker/proprietor of the La Pelle and Royal

Prince brands, is from Israel, but he's been in the Valley for 11 years. He believes that Napa is still young as an appellation and that its producers are still figuring out things like optimal clone selection and rootstock; for him, whether winemaking has more to do with terroir or technique is "really about the style of the winemaker and what [they] want to achieve with the wine with less or more intervention." Like Eddy, he thinks that terroir is too broadly defined, especially in the face of climate change; consider that the recent practice of installing misters in the vineyard to combat heat spikes has "changed the profile of fermentation and the profile of the maturity of grapes."

Koschitzky shared the La Pelle 2018 Cabernet Sauvignon from Red Hen Vineyard in the Oak Knoll District and the Royal Prince 2019 Napa Valley Cabernet Sauvignon. Parker Wong noted the dense tannic structure of both wines, particularly the latter. Launching the Royal Prince brand in 2021 with David Green, Koschitzky—best known for a portfolio of high-end wines—set out to "create a wine that was showcasing a vintage in a more affordable price without being too commercial."



Campers participate in a barrel tasting at Appellation Trading Company.

REVERSE ENGINEERS

Looks of confusion washed over the faces of our SOMM Campers as we pulled into the parking lot of an industrial complex. And although our brows softened as we tasted through a handful of wines, including bottlings from Beau Vigne, Cult, and Typhon Estates, the confusion remained until Appellation Trading Company's head of marketing David Zurowski explained in his introductory welcome that "we have 32 brands, and we custom-bottle wines for people all over the world. ATC is unique in the sense that we're not a traditional winery, even though we treat our brands individually as if they [were our] own wineries. Our business is generally reverse engineering, meaning you tell us where your missing links are within your needs, and then we'll produce those products for you."

If you're still confused, here's a bit of background that might help: Growing up in Napa, ATC's founder and CEO, Charles Bartlett, had always wanted to work in wine. His experience in printing and sales proved to be incredibly valuable upon the establishment of ATC in 2008, when the commodity market became flooded with finished wine due to the economic crash. Bartlett and his team, including general manager John Galvin, would buy inventory at a good price, relabel the wines, and sell them to other business, like exporters. It became such a successful model that, a few years later, they built their own facility, which included a bottling line, cellar room, and more.

They work with several winemakers, including Julien Fayard, who squired us from the front room of the facility to the



barrel room for a tasting. Fayard, who was an integral part of Philippe Melka's consulting business for roughly a decade, told us how ATC managed to acquire Beau Vigne and help return it to its former glory. The samples—some from well-known single vineyards like Beckstoffer Georges III, others from prestigious appellations such as Pritchard Hill—all displayed a signature concentration that will make its way into ATC's Cult Cabernet Sauvignon.

Meridith May chimed in as we left the facility: "I brought you all here because the first time I tasted through these wines, about 12 of the brands, they *all* blew me away—every single one. So I really wanted to share this company with you because I think what they do is not only really different but very special."



SOMM Journal publisher Meridith May (center) with Appellation Trading Company winemaker Julien Fayard (left) and founder and CEO Charles Bartlett (right).



Vultour 2019 Reserve Cabernet Sauvignon, Oakville, Napa Valley (\$140)

Small amounts of Merlot, Petit Verdot, and Cab Franc are blended into this exuberant Cab from a single estate vineyard. Sumptuous yet elegant, it's full-bodied luxury, with satin-lined, mouth-filling notes of earth, dark chocolate, and black plum. **95** —M.M.



The Beau Vigne Collection 2020 CULT, Napa Valley (\$125)

We find dense notes of plum jam, fennel, and unearthed blackberry. With voluptuous tannins and a satiny, fleshy mouthfeel, the wine presents shaved cocoa and nutmeg plus a nuance of black tea and sandalwood. **94** —M.M.



Beau Vigne 2020 Juliet Cabernet Sauvignon, Napa Valley (\$125)

A dynamic profile shows reined-in power. Dense, silky fruit emerges with pencil lead, coffee bean, and crushed violets in a graceful flow of juiciness. **96** —M.M.



Beau Vigne 2020 Romeo Cabernet Sauvignon, Napa Valley (\$125)

Expressive summer plum and grainy, melting dark chocolate define the entry. Vibrant and juicy, with firm tannins. Striking notes of new leather, black cherry, and cedar offer freshness on the finish. **94** —M.M.

St. Supéry CEO Emma Swain with a tribute honoring the heroes of the Glass Fire.



Gus, St. Supéry winemaker Michael Scholz's boxer.



GUS THE GREEN WARRIOR AND OTHER HEROES

On day three, St. Supéry Estate Vineyards and Winery winemaker Michael Scholz helped us to waddle off our decadent breakfast of baked avocado eggs, crispy bacon, and freshly baked donuts by leading us on a tour of the producer's lush Rutherford property. After inspecting the floor for any remnants of our morning meal, Scholz's boxer, Gus, caught up to the group, wagging his bobtail as the Aussie winemaker pointed out the rows of Merlot, Cabernet Sauvignon, Cabernet Franc, and Petit Verdot grown on 35 of the estate's 50 acres. He noted, however, that it was the purchase of the 1,531-acre Dollarhide Ranch in the northeastern mountains of Napa by Robert Skalli, the third-generation French vintner who founded St. Supéry, that defined the producer as we know it today. "We are an estate brand," said Scholz. "Any wine you buy from St. Supéry will come from one of these two properties. We don't buy



St. Supéry CEO Emma Swain with local Napa sommelier (and SOMM Camper) Louise Olivares and St. Supéry winemaker Michael Scholz.

grapes. We farm everything ourselves with a plan to make a great bottle of wine."

Right on cue, as if to send a not-so-subtle reminder to Scholz, Gus lifted his leg next to the winery's Napa Green sign. After several jokes about dry farming, Scholz got serious about St. Supéry's efforts in sustainability. To achieve Napa Green certification, it has installed solar panels and owl boxes, composts pomace, and reclaims rainfall at Dollarhide, to name just a few practices; in addition, two-thirds of its total acreage is left unplanted to promote biodiversity.

Perhaps the most emotional experience of SOMM Camp appeared in the form of a photographic tribute. Before seating us at tables set with the next lineup of Napa wines to taste through, St. Supéry CEO Emma Swain directed our attention to a wall filled with large black-and-white photographs of firefighters, social workers, and volunteers. Swain chose one image in particular: a group of men of varying ages and one boy perched on a bulldozer. "These guys are our neighbors," she said. During the Glass Fire in 2020, "They brought their bulldozers, [their] water trucks, and [their] will and cut about 5 miles of fire breaks around the property, effectively halting the fire. Four days later, CalFire was able to use those firebreaks for a back burn." Although St. Supéry was only able to make 18 cases of Sauvignon Blanc that year, they donated all of the proceeds—about \$110,000—to the Napa Valley Community Foundation Disaster Relief Fund in honor of those "who really exemplify our everyday heroes," said Swain.

IT'S NOT A COMPETITION

"Let's be clear," said Chris Sawyer, our moderator for the "Mountain Versus Valley Floor" seminar, "[we don't mean] 'mountain versus valley floor' in a competitive way—it's all good wine." The NorCal native made an excellent point: Regardless of where a Napa wine is made, it has the potential to become one of the best in the world. Which isn't to say that our winemakers didn't have preferences regarding where their fruit is grown. Take Smith-Madrone founder Stuart Smith.



"It's a long, circuitous story of how I got there, but in 1971 I was able to purchase 200 acres at the top of Spring Mountain. The reason I went there was because I felt how I feel now: Napa makes

the best wine. . . . You can only make great wine from great grapes. And the best grapes come from the mountain. . . . I was also nuts," said Smith, noting how difficult making wine on a mountain is, especially at that time; getting equipment and other materials up or down was a feat on its own. However, sips of the Smith-Madrone 2017 Riesling and 2018 Cabernet Sauvignon made us all grateful for Smith's pioneering determination. "What makes Spring Mountain different?" he asked. "It's the

structure. Some years, [the wine is] red fruit-dominated; other years it's black fruit, but there's always the structure."



Conversely, Michael Scholz presented the St. Supéry 2017 Rutherford Cabernet Sauvignon and 2021 Dollarhide Sauvignon Blanc, calling the supple Rutherford-dust texture a result of the appellation's "deeper, gravelly valley-floor soils."

Guarachi Family Wines founder Alex Guarachi is a former Chilean soccer player who, as the result of an injury, pivoted to become an über-successful South American wine importer: "After I started selling all these high-altitude Argentinian wines, I



realized, "Hey, there's something great going on here—these wines are different than wines grown on the valley floor," he recalls. This was part of the impetus for Guarachi to purchase and develop the

rocky 30-acre Meadowrock Vineyard in Atlas Peak, ranging in elevation from 1,400 to 1,760 feet; having become a vintner after working with winemaker Paul Hobbs, he eventually hired Hobbs' assistant, Julian Gonzalez, to become his chief winemaker and caretaker of Meadowrock. We sampled the Guarachi 2019 Meadowrock Vineyard Cabernet Sauvignon to explore its aging potential.

Michael Baldacci, director of winemak-



ing for Baldacci Family Vineyards, was there to represent not just the valley floor but the "the valley within the valley," a term often used to describe the Stags Leap District. He told the somms

that when his parents first came to Napa 25 years ago, they thought it to be a special place, "but the SLD is even more special." The Baldacci 2018 Black Label is a chewy, rich yet well-balanced example of his family's 20-acre property: "To me, this wine is that iron fist in a velvet glove," said the second-generation winemaker, adding, "These velvety tannins are thanks to the air flow and lack of intense heat in the Stags Leap District."



The "Mountain Versus Valley Floor" seminar panel from left to right: moderator Chris Sawyer; Stuart Smith, winemaker, Smith-Madrone; Michael Scholz, winemaker, St. Supéry; Alex Guarachi, founder, Guarachi Family Wines; and Michael Baldacci, director of winemaking, Baldacci Family Vineyards.

A FAIRY-TALE ENDING

Visiting Peju's tower-shaped winery and gardens makes you feel as though you've suddenly been transported into a wine-soaked fairy tale; even the sycamore trees that surround the vineyards on the organically farmed, 30-acre Rutherford property are shaped like Dr. Seussian shrubs. As we absorbed the view, feeling the spray of the tower's surrounding fountains, we found ourselves suddenly shaking the hand of Herta Peju, the estate's sophisticated, soft-spoken proprietor, whose tiny white dog stayed by her side thanks to a red leash that matched her red scarf. Her husband, founder Tony Peju, is known in the industry as the "father of custom crush" thanks to his legal battle with Napa County in the mid-1980s. Peju helped to redefine what makes a winery a winery, paving the way for other producers who employ custom-crush practices today.

During our seminar luncheon in the vineyard, Oren Lewin, president of Peju, told us about a few other clever moves made by Tony, one of which we were



actually able to taste: "Province was created by Tony Peju in 1987 as a 'bridge wine' to introduce new consumers into the wine category—or convert white-wine drinkers into red-wine drinkers,"

said Lewin. The blend of red and white grapes—stainless steel-fermented French Colombard and Chardonnay plus barrel-fermented Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, and Zinfandel "with just a little bit of residual sugar to weave it all together—is still the number-one-selling wine out of our tasting room."

Lewin shared this crowd-pleaser, along with Peju's 2018 Cabernet Franc, as examples of wines that fall in line with recent trends in keeping with our camp's final seminar, "2022 Napa Valley Wine Trends," moderated in an interactive and engaging way by Master of Wine Liz Thach. "And speaking to the popularity of sparkling," added Lewin, "we'll be releasing a sparkling



Province in October of this year!"

Perhaps it was thanks to the celebratory mood of our last stop on a great trip. Perhaps it's because delicate bubbles are so refreshing on a warm

afternoon. But whatever the reason, no other wine at SOMM Camp hit the spot quite like Domaine Carneros' Cuvée de la Pompadour Brut Rosé. In fact, they ran out of the stone-fruity (yet perfectly dry) stuff as CEO Remi Cohen presented a compelling case for the growing sparkling-wine category as a whole. "Nielsen shows that sparkling wine has been the fastest subcategory of wine among consumers, growing 13% in 2021 *alone*," she said, following her statement up with a dizzying amount of supporting stats and facts. What sets Domaine Carneros in particular apart, however, "is that we're estate- and appellation-driven." The producer, which farms 400 acres in Carneros, is

The "2022 Napa Valley Wine Trends" panel from left to right: Oren Lewin, president, Peju; Remi Cohen, CEO, Domaine Carneros; Russ Weis, former president, Silverado Vineyards; moderator and Master of Wine Liz Thach; Steven Rogstad, winemaker, Cuvaison; and Diana Schweiger, sales and marketing director, Acumen.



known for its elegant style thanks to the influence of its proprietor; Champagne Taittinger; and its legendary winemaker of over 30 years, Eileen Crane; one of the most respected sparkling winemakers in the U.S., Crane nearly single-handedly set the high bar for domestic traditional-method bubbly. In 2020, she retired, but if there's anyone who can fill her polished shoes, it's the no-nonsense, wise-beyond-her-years Cohen.

Since 1969, Cuvaision has been a family-owned winery that likewise produces wine from the cooler Carneros region of Napa Valley. Although it's known for Chardonnay and Pinot Noir; its winemaker of two decades, the seasoned Steven Rogstad, presented the estate-grown Cuvaision 2021 Sauvignon Blanc, as "there's been an emergence [for the grape] and one that's more terroir-driven." A specialist in cool-climate varieties, Rogstad noted that he makes three different Sauvignon Blancs from a single vineyard in Carneros planted in 1979, this one "entirely done in stainless steel to try and capture the direct primary-fruit character." Thach added that the varietal wine is the "only still-wine category that's grown in the last few months."

Gracing us with her presence yet again in support of the Sauvignon Blanc trend was Acumen sales and marketing director Diana Schweiger, presenting the 2019 Acumen Peak Sauvignon Blanc. "I think growing Sauvignon Blanc at the top of Atlas Peak is a testament to the grape's popularity," she said. "There's been an emergence since about 2016 to create Sauvignon Blancs that are more meticulously farmed and are given more attention in winemaking. There's also been a growth in the \$50-and-above range for Sauvignon Blanc. Acumen's Sauvignon Blanc gets that."

And fittingly enough, the seminar ended by circling back to the person who first kindly opened the doors to the Valley for us, allowing us to bask once more in his experience and always amusing insight: Russ Weis, who was there to present Silverado's 2018 Mt. George Vineyard Cabernet Franc from Coombsville. "The reason I brought it is because we've been making Cab Franc forever and nobody cared, but now I can't make enough of it! It's crazy what

you guys are doing as somms with Cab Franc," said Weis.

It's our pleasure, Russ. Thanks to you and everyone else in the Valley for show-

ing us that the monocultured behemoth that is Napa is actually, like its array of Cabernet Sauvignons, way more multifaceted and lovable than it gets credit for. 



Back row, left to right: Jennifer Aspery, Emily Engelman, Riley Huddleston, Alex Fetter, Tim Desmond, Ray Perrin, and Jeff Degner. Middle row: Mariangela Pagán, Jessie Birschbach, Meridith May, Sarah Jobbins, Fernando Jewett, and Angelo Perez. Front row, seated: Joe Grasso, Reuben Atkinson, and Tiffany Tobey.

THANKS TO OUR PARTICIPATING SOMMS

Jennifer Aspery, restaurant operations manager/sommelier, Casino Del Sol, Tucson, AZ

Reuben Atkinson, cellar wine manager, Reynolds Lake Oconee, Greensboro, GA

Jerry Cox, wine buyer, SAGA, New York, NY

Jeff Degner, business development manager, H-E-B, Texas

Tim Desmond, "the wine guy," Westlake Village Inn and The Stonehaus, Los Angeles, CA

Emily Engelman, senior F&B manager, Epicurean Hotel, Tampa, FL

Alex Fetter, lead sommelier, COTE Miami, Miami, FL

Joe Grasso, wine director, Del Frisco's Seaport, Boston, MA

Riley Huddleston, vice president/F&B director, RDO Development, Southern California

Fernando Jewett, category wine manager, Crown/Mega Wine & Spirits, Miami, FL

Sarah Jobbins, managing partner, Coastal Restaurants and Bars, Hilton Head Island, SC

Louise Olivares, sommelier, Solage, Calistoga, CA

Mariangela Pagán, supervisor of hospitality operations, Dutton Estate Winery, Sebastopol, CA

Angelo Perez, sommelier, Gravitas, Washington, D.C.

Ray Perrin, corporate bar manager, Nobu, Newport Beach

Tiffany Tobey, sommelier, Dallas, TX



Serving Up a Spectrum of Styles

GRENACHE/GARNACHA OFFERS A CORNUCOPIA OF HOLIDAY PAIRING OPTIONS

by Jessie Birschbach

THE FACT THAT Grenache/Garnacha warrants a standalone pairing piece should speak to the grape's incredible versatility. Its styles and variants cover every section of the wine list, ranging from red, white, and rosé to sparkling and sweet.

Perhaps this is why so many European producers and wine organizations have shown a renewed interest in the variety over the past decade. With a

little help from the European Union, Spain's Garnacha Origen Association and France's Conseil Interprofessionnel des Vins du Roussillon have been working together since 2019 to promote the "Garnacha & Grenache" campaign across the world, especially in their respective regions that aren't always top of mind for consumers of the grape despite the fact that they celebrate a long history with it—particularly in

Spain, as Aragon is Garnacha's birthplace. Those areas include Collioure, Côtes du Roussillon, and Banyuls in France and Calatayud, Campo de Borja, and Cariñena in Spain.

With the holidays drawing near, we've put together a lighthearted list of Grenache/Garnacha pairings worthy of special occasions. They might even serve as inspiration for holiday menus or suggested retail purchases.



A Bevy of Bubbles

Garnacha/Grenache in bubbly form can be found in the aforementioned areas of Roussillon and northeastern Spain as well as in Côtes Catalanes and, of course, the Cava DO (though it's worth noting that Macabeo dominates most Cava blends). With its typically fruity and flowery profile, sparkling Grenache tends to pair well with shellfish and other types of seafood, fresh fruit, roast poultry, and fried foods.

The rich, weighted texture and red-berry flavors of Bodega San Valero's Cava Particular Garnacha Rosé, a 100% Garnacha sparkler from Cariñena, would go swimmingly with the umami sweetness of a Southern-style holiday main course like deep-fried ham, and the bubbles would also cut right through the crispy batter of fried veggies like green beans and asparagus.



Serious Pinks

Refreshing and fruity yet substantial, Grenache/Garnacha rosé can be found in places like Calatayud, Campo de Borja, Cariñena, Somontano, Terra Alta, and Roussillon. Typically dripping with strawberry along with notes of watermelon, rhubarb, and rose, the wine generally pairs well with chicken, grilled fish, squid, tofu, and sautéed vegetables.

Farming roughly 9,200 acres of vineyards across Aragon, Bodegas Aragonesas is a co-op that specializes in Garnacha. Its Coto de Haya Rosé—made with Garnacha grown on old vines (at least 30 years of age) in Campo de Borja—retails for under \$10, making it perfect for large family gatherings. Just-ripe strawberry and a weighted body would meld well with salmon glazed in honey and garlic butter and topped with a holiday-style tapenade of dried cranberries, almonds, and parsley. Just make sure there's enough fish to go with all that rosado!



Muscular Reds

Full-bodied red Grenache/Garnacha often exhibits blackberry and currant in spades alongside notes of allspice, anise, and tobacco. Sommeliers are quite familiar with versions from Priorat, Châteauneuf-du-Pape, and even Australia, but look to places like Calatayud, Campo de Borja, Cariñena, Somontano, Terra Alta, and Roussillon to offer better value to your guests and customers. Of course, the more substantial the body, the more the wine lends itself to richer meats like Kobe and roast beef or tangy, umami-heavy dishes like Korean barbecue, spicy Sichuan meats, and sweet-and-sour pork. The 2015 vintage of the Cariñena Grandes Vinos Anayón Garnacha—a 100% Garnacha from vines at least 75 years of age—took home a silver medal at the 2020 Sommeliers Choice Awards thanks to a jammy fruit character that still offers formidable acidic tension. Serve it with a showstopping dish like beef Wellington, as its vanilla-and-toffee character will play well with the buttery pastry while the fruit and acid complement the tender filet.



Luscious Vins Doux Naturels

Roussillon's Rivesaltes region is well known for its fruit-forward fortified sweet wines; in fact, over 90% of the fortified wines made in France come from Rivesaltes, which has become an AOP thanks to its wide range of vins doux naturels (VDNs). Somms are familiar with Maury, Banyuls, and the Banyuls Grand Cru appellations as well, but the multiplicity of VDN styles allows for a similarly broad spectrum of pairing options. For instance, Rivesaltes Ambré, often made with 100% Grenache Blanc, and Rivesaltes Grenat, made with 100% Grenache Noir, are quite different—but in either case, one can't go wrong with a spicy Asian dish or, of course, dessert. An aged expression like Château de Puig-Parahy's 1978 Rivesaltes, a rich blend of Grenache and Carignan defined by leather and licorice, could accompany a classic Christmas pudding, as both offer abundant dried fruits and baking spices.





You Don't Know Bordeaux

OK, I KNOW you know Bordeaux. We all do. It's likely the first region you studied once you began your journey into the professional wine space. You memorized (or tried to, anyway) the 1855 Classification, maps of the subregions, and the major producers. But do you *know* Bordeaux? Past the Grands Crus Classés, over the hills from the grandiose estates, and tucked between the famous communes are hundreds of small family wineries making every style of affordable, high-quality wine imaginable, and they're worth a second look.

Let's start with its size. The poster of Bordeaux on your wall doesn't do the region justice; at 150,000 acres, it's massive. In fact, it's one of the largest wine regions in France geographically, with the fairly populous and historic city of Bordeaux at its center. It's also one of the largest by volume: Some 6,000 producers (more than in the entire state of California) yield around 600–900 million bottles per year (over five times the amount made in Napa Valley). All this to say, there is so

know the classic white Bordeaux, a blend of Sauvignon Blanc and Sémillon that's often barrel-fermented. But there are plenty of winemakers doing crisp, light styles of this wine and/or adding Muscadelle or Sauvignon Gris to the blend. Then you've got the winemakers who use both the red and white grapes of Bordeaux to make Crémant de Bordeaux (Champagne-method sparklers). Rosés made by the

The size and diversity of the region ensure a tremendous amount of affordability as soon as you leave the big names out of the equation. When building your wine list, don't be afraid to swap Graves for Entre-Deux-Mers-Haut-Bénauge, Sauternes for the smaller region of Monbazillac, and Saint-Émilion for Côtes de Bourg; these esoteric styles and lesser-known regions can only survive if we



PHOTOS COURTESY OF VINCE ANTER



▲ **Author and *Vis for Vino* host Vince Anter, right, with Youmna Asseily, owner of Château Biac in the Cadillac Côtes de Bordeaux AOC.**

◀ **In addition to the red blends and dessert wines for which the region is best known, Bordeaux producers also make whites, rosés, and Crémants.**

much wine coming out of Bordeaux, and more than 90% comes from non-classified estates.

Bordeaux is also more diverse than we give it credit for. It's home to over 60 appellations, and its famous Cabernet Sauvignon— and Merlot-based blends vary considerably from AOC to AOC—but red wine isn't all they produce. You probably

saignée method are common as well. And of course, there's Sauternes, the botrytized dessert wines made from Sémillon. When all is said and done, you can pair an entire meal with Bordeaux: Start with Crémant, then move to a crisp white or rosé for the salad course; a heavier, more serious white for pasta or fish; a red for meat; and a Sauternes for dessert.

help them sell. When I visited Bordeaux for an episode of *Vis for Vino*, I spoke to so many people at family-run wineries who want us to understand that they don't all come from old money and grand châteaux. Most producers in Bordeaux are struggling to cut through the noise and attention bestowed upon a few lucky estates. They are making wines for the next generation of Bordeaux drinkers: new expressions from a classic region that are fresh, fun, affordable, and diverse.

Until next wine,
Vince

*The Bordeaux episode of *Vis for Vino* can be watched free on visforvino.com, YouTube, and Roku.*



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Aerating the Sun

LLOYD CELLARS' PRESCRIPTION VINEYARDS CHARDONNAY IS BUILT FOR BY-THE-GLASS PROGRAMS

story by Jessie Birschbach / photos by Hardy Wilson

THERE'S SOMETHING A little different about cracking open a bottle of Prescription Vineyards Chardonnay. Once you've released a finger or two of the golden, rich, and viscous liquid into a glass, you'll notice a phenomenon not often seen in other bottles of the still version: bubbles. There are just a few, and they'll dissipate as quickly as the green flash of a sunset, but the CO₂ is undeniably there. Whether or not you see it, you can taste it.

"The neat thing is that if you're at a restaurant and [they're] pouring [Prescription] by the glass, that CO₂ that's naturally in there is going to preserve the wine so that if you don't finish the bottle and you pour it next day, it's still going to taste really fresh," says Prescription's winemaker, Rob Lloyd. "I don't usually have that problem myself, as I tend to finish the bottle in one sitting. But if you're pouring Prescription by the glass, that's where it comes in handy."

Lloyd's sense of humor is as prolific as his winemaking resume, which reads like a who's who of Chardonnay producers, from La Crema to Cakebread. He says that one of the first things he learned in his vast experience with the grape is to keep the temperature low enough for long enough to temper the volatilization of the wine's aromatics while preserving what would be otherwise be lost at a higher temperature. "My plan of attack for all white-wine ferments, whether barrel or tank, is to keep [fermentation] really slow and keep the [fruity esters] dissolved," Lloyd explains. "And after primary [fermentation] is done, I put all our Chardonnays through [malolactic fermentation] because I want that big, rich style of Chardonnay. That's the style I like to drink."

Prescription Vineyards winemaker Rob Lloyd.

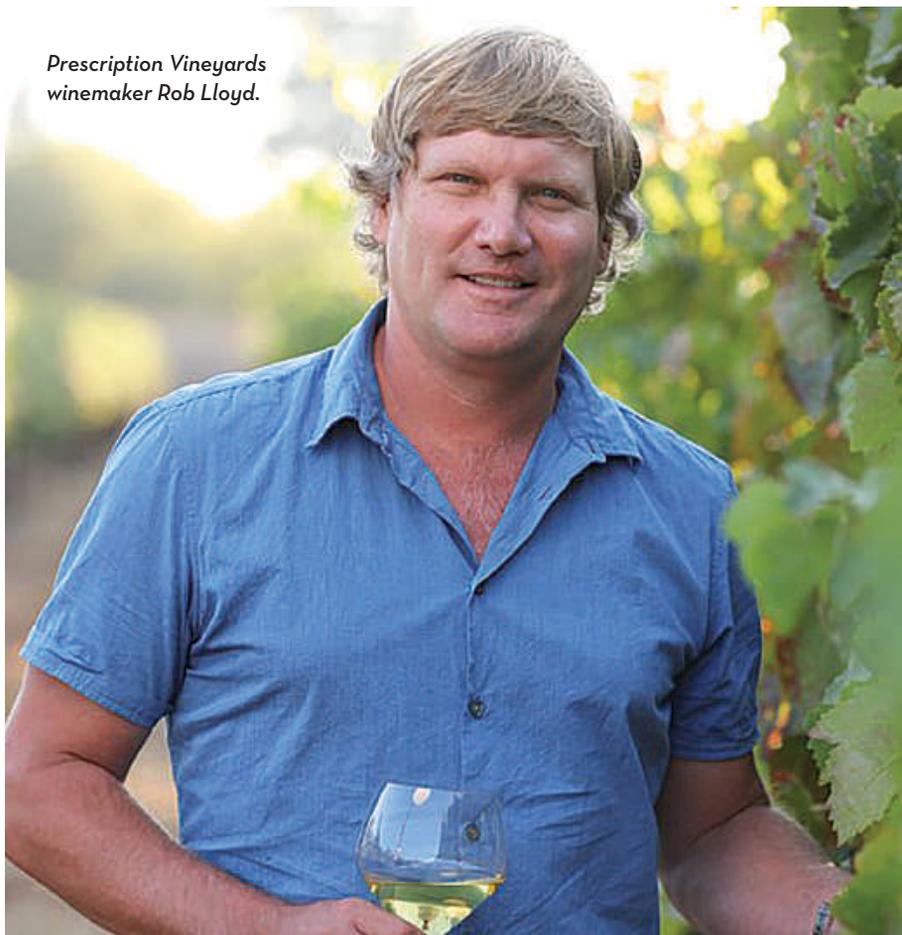


PHOTO COURTESY OF LLOYD CELLARS

Maximizing and preserving natural CO₂ levels is vital when it comes to imparting a fresh, bright character in the luscious, creamy Chardonnay he produces for both Prescription and his Lloyd Cellars label. "When you're going through ML, you're giving off a little bit of CO₂," says Lloyd, "so as soon as the secondary [fermentation] gets to where I want it, I just chill it down to 50 [degrees] and keep all that natural CO₂ dissolved. In fact, I don't add sulfur until right at bottling, which keeps

the total sulfur levels dramatically low. I need some protection, but not that much thanks to the preservative CO₂. Most bad bugs in wine are aerobic, but if I'm providing [a] house that has no oxygen, they can't survive and breed. . . . With Prescription I'm able to bottle at a higher CO₂ [relative to other wines], at about the highest CO₂ that most wine bottles can handle."

Lloyd will also tell you that Prescription's 100% Chardonnay, which is sourced

solely from Reamer Farms in Clarksburg, is first and foremost a "grower's wine." In fact, if you look closely, the name of farmer and proprietor James Reamer, who's a longtime friend of Lloyd's, is included in the old-timey inscription on the label. "Prescription is and always will be single-grower," says Lloyd. "James gets what we're trying to do—I never have to tell him what's wrong. Plus, he drinks a lot of Prescription Chardonnay. He likes that style as much as I do. We're a good fit."

Issei Chiba is manager and wine director at Vintage Wine Merchants in San Jose, CA.



Issei Chiba pairs “the nice fresh fruit, Meyer lemon zest, and vanilla creaminess” of Prescription Chardonnay with Vintage Wine Merchants’ mortadella-burrata pizza.

A Surprising Steal

Issei Chiba, manager and wine director at Vintage Wine Merchants in San Jose, California, is a certified sommelier with the Court of Master Sommeliers, holds a WSET Level 3 certification, and has almost a decade of experience in wine. He explains that both the retail shop and the wine bar focus on the best wines from California,

France, Italy, and Germany, “but that doesn’t always mean expensive or the most popular,” says Chiba. “It can also be best in [value], quality, and style.”

Vintage’s wine program features around 2,000 SKUs, a myriad of flights, and an average of 40 different by-the-glass options at any given time, including Prescription Chardonnay. “Chardonnay has always been a staple for us, of course. But I think it can also serve as kind of an intro wine, which

can be great for a younger demographic. When someone tells me, ‘I don’t want something too dry,’ Chardonnay can serve that purpose for me [instead of] a sweet wine,” says Chiba.

As for Prescription Chardonnay specifically, “It’s such a great value for what it delivers,” he adds. “Being part of a retail hybrid, that’s always something that we like to consider—that if a guest likes something, they’ll want to take a bottle home with them. So I like to surprise our guests with value, and Prescription does that. It’s an overdelivering Chardonnay in my opinion, and those are the wines we like to pour here by the glass.”





Many Sommeliers, One Community: The United Sommeliers Foundation

IN MARCH 2020, when the wheels were starting to fall off the restaurant industry, a group of sommeliers connected with a singular purpose: to help provide support to our suffering community. What started as a GoFundMe quickly blossomed into a full-scale charitable organization. The United Sommeliers Foundation (USF) is now an officially recognized 501(c)(3) charity, with almost all monies raised going directly to support the industry. This includes coverage of medical bills, housing needs, and child and family care. To date, it has raised over \$1 million, which has been used to provide thousands of emergency financial-assistance grants to sommeliers in critical need.

The USF's early activities were centered around the fallout from so many restaurant professionals losing their jobs due to the COVID-19 pandemic. However, its mission extends far beyond pandemic relief. It has also supported those who have experienced a pause in or loss of employment due to medical issues as well as fires, floods, and other disasters.

The USF is now embarking on a new chapter in supporting sommeliers across the country: It aims to develop and improve the future of their vocation and community. A sommelier is primarily known as an employee of a restaurant. However, that definition is ever-evolving, and it is a core objective of the USF to support not only individuals but the growth and health of the profession overall through the creation of programs that provide resources for financial literacy, mental health, and employment, among others. The USF will soon launch

a series of scholarships tied directly to four core values: hospitality, integrity, transparency, and innovation.

A primary fundraising activity for the organization is its charity auction, which is being hosted in late October by Zachys Wine Auctions (auction.zachys.com). "The mission and vision of the United Sommeliers Foundation is to not only support our current community but help improve the viability of the future of the profession. This would not be possible without the support of generous donors

"The mission and vision of the United Sommeliers Foundation is to not only support our current community but help improve the viability of the future of the profession."

*—USF interim executive director
Jon McDaniel*



United Sommeliers Foundation

and partners like the incredible team at Zachys. With their partnership, we will be able to showcase potentially hundreds of auction items to fundraise for our long-term goals to support our community," remarks USF interim executive director Jon McDaniel.

Charles Antin, head of sales for Zachys Wine Auctions, comments, "I'm so delighted to be working with the USF. Zachys has a history of helping to raise money for all sorts of worthy causes, of which the USF is certainly one. Of

course, it is especially meaningful to be helping our colleagues in the wine industry. We're excited to [contribute to] this important work."

If you are a wine professional in critical financial need or know of one, visit unitedsommeliersfoundation.org to apply for emergency assistance and other resources the USF may provide. There, you can also donate, volunteer services and/or join a committee, learn more about the 2022 fundraising auction, and review a list of contributing brands to consider supporting through your operation. **SJ**



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The United Sommeliers Foundation's mission is to provide immediate financial assistance to Sommeliers who are experiencing a pause or termination of their employment due to circumstances beyond their control. The USF is a 501(c)3 Charitable Organization, all proceeds from this auction go directly to our community and those in need. All donations and purchases from our auction are tax deductible.

Dwelling in the Details

MIJENTA IS LEADING A REVOLUTION IN THE PREMIUM TEQUILA CATEGORY

by Amanda M. Faison

Mijenta Tequila's maestra tequilera, Ana María Romero Mena, with co-founder Juan Coronado.



PHOTO: NICO SCHINCO

MIJENTA TEQUILA'S TAGLINE, "Doing well by doing right," was aptly chosen. For starters, the portfolio hinges on the deep-seated knowledge of maestra tequilera Ana María Romero Mena—yes, that Ana María Romero Mena, the one who mapped the aroma wheel of tequila in her book *The Aromas of Tequila: The Art of Tasting*, published in 2007. Known as a champion of Mexican tradition and culture, she came aboard the company in 2019, which was co-founded by Mike Dolan (formerly the CEO of Bacardi), award-winning mixologist Juan Coronado, and sustainability expert Elise Som, to oversee the process of creating premium tequila from ground to glass.

The name Mijenta is a derivative of *mi gente*; translating literally from the Spanish as "my people," the phrase refers to a community that comes together in celebration. Accordingly, Mijenta's tequila is meant to resonate deeply with those who drink and share it.

All three of the brand's expressions—Blanco, Reposado, and Añejo—are unfiltered and have a slightly cloudy appearance. The decision not to filter is somewhat unusual in the tequila industry, but the payoff, Romero Mena believes, is the presence of flavor, aroma, and complexity that would otherwise be lost. Put simply, it's the right thing to do.

PHOTO COURTESY OF MIJENTA TEQUILA

As is everything else she does, Romero Mena specifically chose the Highlands region of Jalisco as her agave source for its telltale red-clay soil rich in iron content, high elevation, and ample sun exposure. The Blue Weber agave that grows here “has a very distinct profile—there’s floral [character], there’s fruit, there’s mineral-ity,” explains Coronado. In fact, the flavors it imparts are so acute and revealing that Romero Mena eschews additives. Legally, tequila is allowed to contain up to 1% of additives, but what that term used to mean decades ago (think along the lines of caramel coloring) has dramatically changed as flavor technology has exploded. Now, small measures of ingredients like the artificial sweetener aspartame can dramatically change a tequila’s flavor profile. “At Mijenta, there are no shortcuts,” says Coronado. Because this is critical to Romero Mena’s process and her product, she sought (and received) additive-free certification from Tequila Matchmaker, a popular app that functions as a consumer database, which recently launched an intensive, on-site verification program. “Just that this exists shows that there’s consumer appetite for transparency [in] how tequila is being introduced,” Coronado adds.

In many ways, Mijenta is at the forefront of a tequila revolution. Loving attention to every element of production—from soil, sun, and plant maturity to Romero Mena’s slow fermentation process and the yeast



According to Coronado, consumers are increasingly aware that tequila is “something you can sip like bourbon, Cognac, and Scotch.”

used therein—is antithetical to how the spirit has historically been received, fairly or not. “For far too long in the U.S. there’s been a perception that tequila is what college kids do shots of,” says Coronado. Low-brow brands will always have their place, of course, but Mijenta is positioning itself to contribute to a “growing understanding that tequila is something more—something you can sip like bourbon, Cognac, and Scotch,” he adds. Consumers increasingly appreciate the fact that agave spirits show nuance and terroir, much like wine.

This shift in awareness began a handful of years ago thanks in part, Coronado concedes, to celebrity brands such as Casamigos, which was co-founded by George Clooney. Now it seems that every celebrity—from Kendall Jenner to Dwayne “The Rock” Johnson—is launching their own tequila. They may vary in quality, but the spotlight they’re putting on the spirit means that “more people are coming to tequila, and more are coming to the high end—and that’s right where Mijenta sits,” as Coronado puts it. (Its Blanco goes for \$50, the Reposado for \$70, and the Añejo for \$200.)

The brand has another thing going for it too: a strong digital presence, which is an unexpected boon of launching in September 2020 in the midst of a pandemic. Traditionally, a new product is rolled out state by state and slowly builds momentum. Mijenta, on the other hand, launched exclusively via

online sales, so its narrative and aesthetic had to make an immediate impression on consumers. And they did, especially with an audience who cares about a brand’s backstory and transparency as much as they do an exquisite product.

To that end, Mijenta has put sustainability front and center; to date, it is the only tequila brand to have received a B Corporation certification. “While other companies try to tack on sustainability, we’re based this way,” Coronado explains. Case in point: “We’ve offset residual greenhouse gas emissions related to the process of making our tequila . . . through ClimatePartner, and our contributions in turn go to support local green initiatives and communities. We’re also in the process of becoming carbon neutral,” he adds. Meanwhile, the box the tequila is packaged in—essentially a folded piece of origami that uses just one strip of nontoxic glue—is made up of 100% post-consumer recycled cardboard. The bottles, likewise, are made from recycled glass. And then there’s the sealant ring made from biodegradable material in each bottle cap and the labels crafted from a combination of agave waste and the burlap of spent coffee-bean bags.

At every turn, Mijenta Tequila demonstrates that the details matter—and that doing right is the path to not only an excellent spirit but also a consumer’s heart and liquor cabinet. **sj**

PHOTO: MIKE GARLAND





BY SARAH GRAYBILL

Adalina's core team includes partner Miles Muslin, pastry chef Nicole Giuni, partner Phil Siudak, executive chef Soo Ahn, and partner Matt Deichl.



Adalina's branzino is served with eggplant mostarda, frisée, and radish.



PHOTO: MATTHEW REEVES PHOTOGRAPHY

Upstairs, Downstairs

CHICAGO'S ADALINA PROVIDES AN ALL-IN-ONE FOOD AND WINE EXPERIENCE

FROM COZY VELVET seating to drinks chilled with rose-shaped cocktail ice, there's nothing lukewarm about Adalina in Chicago's Gold Coast neighborhood. The experience here is twofold: First, there's the restaurant, featuring modern Italian cuisine prepared by chef Soo Ahn, formerly of the Michelin-starred Band of Bohemia, who focuses on housemade extruded and stuffed pastas, imported meats and cheeses, and hand-selected beef and seafood; they're rounded out by Jean Banchet Award winner Nicole Guini's fun and whimsical desserts. Second is the speakeasy-style Rose Lounge below it.

Upstairs, the menu is a perfect match for a wine list curated by Adalina wine director Alexandra Thomas, who started working in the industry at age 16. After wading deep into the Italian wine pool at 23 and consulting with a Master Sommelier in Iowa, Thomas made her way back to Chicago as a sommelier, where, in her words, several "positive transitions eventually brought her to Adalina." Here, she adds, "I was given a great opportunity to showcase a grand wine list that really

spoke from my great love affair with Italian wine, culture, attitude, and food. This list really is the culmination of my wine career so far, and I couldn't be more grateful to share it with our guests."

Among her favorite pairings are the lamb chops, "which are made with a mint-maple glaze and a pistachio-sesame seed crust, with Poggio di Sotto's Rosso di Montalcino," Thomas says. "This wine has such great Morello cherry and tobacco expressions that really bring out the sanguine quality of the meat. The tannin is present just enough to help melt those last bites toward the bone, and the umami of the sesame seeds really brings out the terroir in the wine. [Meanwhile,] if you're in the mood for something sweet, I recommend that our patrons try our newest strawberry cloud dessert with a glass of Ruinart Rosé."

Downstairs, according to owner/partner Matt Deichl, the idea behind the Rose Lounge is to serve crafted libations on ice that has been delicately embossed with the namesake flower along with elegant wines from big-name producers that invoke luxury and prestige. "The Rose

Lounge has this voluptuous and provocative feeling when you sit in velvet chairs with black crystal chandeliers hanging [overhead], so you really want to tap into that feeling with the wines," Thomas says.

Tending to the wine program by continuing to "taste what's out there," she adds, "I find something new every time and pick the ones that surprise and fascinate me because I know they will surprise my guests too. I also look for the classics—names that our guests are going to recognize and know they love. I did not want to make a list of just hidden gems but [rather] a list with a healthy balance between respecting the traditional and ushering in the modern."

Deichl says that Adalina sets itself apart by putting the guest experience first; wine dinners and other events are one way to accomplish this. Thomas agrees: "Through these dinners I get to engage with the community Adalina is located within and give the chefs a creative outlet for the prix fixe menus," she says. "But a real event I'm throwing around is a 'revival of rosé' event called the Adalina Wine Mixer. So stay tuned!" **sj**

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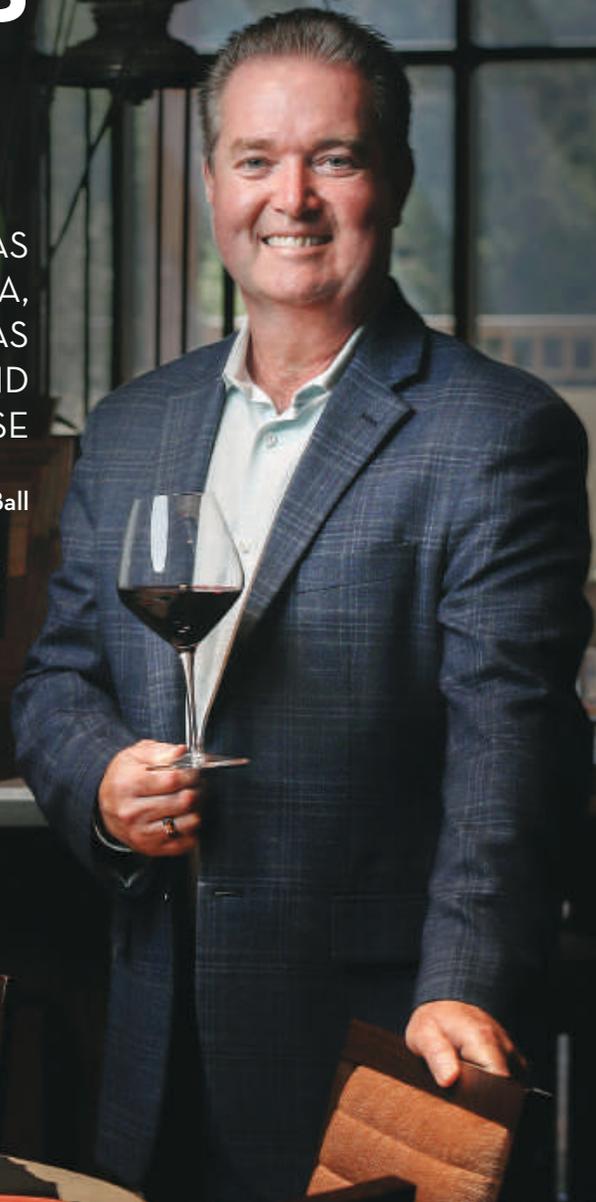


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Sherlock's Homes

FROM NEW YORK TO LAS VEGAS TO CALIFORNIA, **PETER SHERLOCK** HAS MASTERED THE BACK AND FRONT OF THE HOUSE

story by Meredith May / photo by Jeremy Ball



Peter Sherlock is the executive food and beverage director for two properties in the Santa Ynez Valley on California's Central Coast. He's pictured at Willows, an American steakhouse in the tremendously successful Chumash Casino.

GROWING UP IN Cold Spring Harbor on Long Island, New York, Peter Sherlock started learning the business of catering at 14 years old. “My parents would hire a caterer for so many occasions and celebrations in our backyard,” he recalls. “There were as many as 200 people who would attend our famous parties.”

Taking the cue from his mother, who loved to cook and entertain, Sherlock got his first job as a teenager with that catering company. “One of my earliest and great lessons was the art of making a sandwich,” he says. “I was taught that the fine details mattered—you don’t just pile on the ingredients.” From then on, he built on his experience, progressing from setting up and breaking down chairs, tables, and equipment to organizing events.

“A Natural Progression”

Inspired to further pursue a career in the hospitality industry, he attended Johnson & Wales University in Providence, Rhode Island, where he earned a degree in culinary arts. But “you can only learn so much in school,” he points out. “I needed to get out there and take those next steps.” At age 21, Sherlock was hired as head chef for a kosher caterer in Great Neck, New York. “I was interested in learning the culture and cuisine,” he comments. Just a year later, he went “big time” in Manhattan when he was brought into the Waldorf Astoria as an assistant chef by then-executive chef John Doherty; “the food program was centered around catering, so it was a natural progression for me,” he explains. Feeding heads of state, celebrities, and other VIPs was an everyday occurrence, and he was eventually promoted to sous chef de cuisine, overseeing the hotel’s restaurants and room service and gaining a foundation in culinary and management skills over the course of six years.

Not surprisingly, Sherlock was ready for more challenges. At The Plaza Hotel, famed French chef Bruno Tison hired him to not only work in the kitchen but also cover every back-of-the-house operation from labor and food costs to profitability. When Tison was out for three months due to a skiing accident, Sherlock took over as The Plaza’s F&B manager, upping both profitability and guest-service satis-

faction in the process. “I think Bruno was a bit peeved when he returned . . . maybe even jealous,” quips Sherlock.

When Fairmont purchased The Plaza from Donald Trump in the late 1990s, Sherlock was transferred to the company’s property in San Francisco and, at the ripe old age of 29, was promoted to executive chef of the hotel as it was being renovated. “Imagine working a full-scale hotel operation with all that construction going on,” he notes. “We were working on generators in the kitchen and running extension cords to power refrigerators. We boiled water for tea and coffee on Sternos.” Left to serve cold cuts and salads to customers, Fairmont comped all breakfasts and lunches during the remodel. Sherlock and his team made it through with aplomb.

ties for Sherlock. He taught at Le Cordon Bleu College of Culinary Arts, where he also met his wife, Madeline, and from 2013 to 2017, he served as corporate chef for Station Casinos’ 110 restaurants, feeding 47,000 people a day with the help of 15,000 team members.

When he received a phone call to be the executive chef and run the food program at Chumash Casino in Santa Ynez, he asked, “Where is that?” But Madeline knew the area well from her frequent visits to Solvang. She urged him to take the position, and they moved to this most lovely, bucolic part of Santa Barbara County on California’s Central Coast.

With two properties under his supervision—Chumash Casino and Hadsten House Inn—Sherlock is at home, relying on the years of experience under his belt

“One of my earliest and great lessons was the art of making a sandwich. I was taught that the fine details mattered—you don’t just pile on the ingredients.”

—Peter Sherlock



A Competition Opens New Doors

To test his culinary creativity, Sherlock entered a competition sponsored by former trade publication *Food Arts*. The challenge was to showcase a unique part of a pig’s anatomy on a plate. Taking the shoulder and forearm from muscle to bone, he made an osso buco that came in third place, bringing him new notoriety among his peers.

After taking a break to work in the technology field for a couple of years, Sherlock opened Tumberry Place in Las Vegas as executive chef; he then headed up a team of five area head chefs to compete in the Culinary Olympics in Erfurt, Germany, in 2004. They took home a silver and a bronze medal.

Vegas brought other new opportuni-

ties to handle the 11,000 people a day that come through the casino alone. Wine programs are a priority for him: Showcasing local wines is a must, but he maintains space on his lists for other regions in California as well as for a wide global selection.

Bringing It Home

As long as they were residing in wine country, Sherlock and his wife were determined to create a boutique backyard winery of their own. He planted 80 vines, with nine rows of Chardonnay and one row of Viognier and Muscat. He is in the process of deciding what to name his label as he anticipates his first harvest three years from now.

For him, learning winemaking in that short time frame will, we are sure, be elementary. **SJ**



GARNACHA  GRENACHE

A Toast to European Garnacha/Grenache, One of the World's Most Eco-Friendly Grapes

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Image courtesy of European Garnacha/Grenache Quality Wines © DO Terra Alta

The European grape variety known as Garnacha in Spanish and as Grenache in French has achieved global renown. From the celebrated single-varietal Garnacha wines to the famed Grenache, Syrah, Mourvèdre (GSM) blends, this grape has captured hearts and minds over centuries, becoming the seventh most-planted variety (5th in reds) in the world. Loved by winemakers for its versatility and embraced by growers for its ability to thrive in harsh conditions, it's no wonder why Garnacha/Grenache is so prevalent - and why there is an international day dedicated to the grape every September.

Despite its global popularity, nearly **93 percent of the world's plantings**

are still found in Europe. For perspective, while Cabernet Sauvignon is the most-planted variety in the world, only 39 percent of its plantings can be found in Europe. "Garnacha/Grenache is the only major European grape for which the top three producers are European countries," explains Sofía González, Manager of the AGRIP EU funded *European Garnacha/Grenache Quality Wines Program*. France has the largest plantings of the variety, followed by Spain and Italy.

Old-Vine Quality and Sustainability Go Hand-in-Hand

After phylloxera decimated European viticulture in the late 19th century, Garnacha/Grenache was widely

replanted. Favored for its fertility and tolerance of hot, arid conditions, vigneron understood its potential to thrive once again. Consequently, continued commitment to this ancient grape has led to an abundance of old-vine plantings between 45 and 120 years old - some of the oldest vines in Europe today. **"Contemporary European producers are demonstrating that older vines, limited yields, and the right terroir can produce premium-quality single-variety wines,"** remarks González.

The same attributes that have led to the prosperity of old-vine Garnacha-Grenache also make it one of the world's

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most sustainable grape varieties. As a proven survivor of harsh conditions, the variety can be grown without invasive chemical treatments or aggressive irrigation, allowing producers in Europe to meet sustainable winemaking goals in the Mediterranean's climate.

Garnacha/Grenache has become one of the primary grapes used in the production of organic wines due to its versatility and its ability to adapt to the extreme climate conditions and terroirs of its European birthplace. "Our wines are grown, not made," says González.

As wine producers grapple **with climate change, the grape's time-tested ability to produce quality fruit in a variety of harsh conditions makes it a promising candidate for the future of sustainable viticulture.**

Garnacha/Grenache thrives in a variety of poor soils, particularly in slate, clay, limestone, pebbles, and sand, allowing the grape to authentically express terroir driven diversity. Known as a **'water-stress' variety, it's highly drought-resistant**, so vines can produce fruit in dry areas where water is limited, requiring little or no irrigation. Due to the vine's sturdy wood, Garnacha/Grenache can withstand the elements such as strong winds in the Mediterranean valleys of Europe, and its roots dig deep to find resources in the subsoil.

Understanding the future potential of the variety, in 2011, the **World Climate Change and Wine Conference** with Kofi Annan held in Marbella, Spain **recognized European Garnacha/Grenache as one of the world's most eco-friendly grapes.**

An Evolution in European Wine-making

Previously under-used to add body and fruitiness to wine without adding tannin

or acidity, Garnacha/Grenache has been experiencing a modern renaissance in Europe. "Growers and vintners in Europe are respecting the varietal's naturally **low yields, taking advantage of well-adapted old vines** and combining traditional and modern techniques to produce quality wines with character and concentration," González explains.

With increased dedication to recovering old vineyards and native varieties, European winemakers have focused on pedigreed Garnacha and Grenache, with a new approach. "The common denominator for many winemakers is **less intervention, respecting the variety's powerful fruit aromas and terroir-led authenticity**," adds González. "That's just what the modern consumer is looking for."

In spite of the grape's ability to transform and transcend, its quality and provenance - in any style - is preserved, protected, and guaranteed by the

European Union's Protected Designations of Origin (PDOs) and Protected Geographical Indications (PGIs) quality schemes

which include regionally-specific checks, controls, traceability, labeling, and winemaking guidelines that differentiate products while promoting their place of origin. Each wine appellation is distinct in terroir and production techniques, which provides a plethora of quality wines from Europe. If you see PDO or PGI labels on any food or drink, you can rest assured that you will be rewarded with excellent quality and European standards (safety, authenticity, respect for the environment and sustainability, and the characteristics of European agricultural products, particularly in terms of their quality, taste, diversity or traditions; among others).



Image courtesy of European Garnacha/Grenache Quality Wines

INTERNATIONAL GARNACHA/GRENACHE DAY **Raise a Glass of European Garnacha/Grenache on September 16th 2022**

Observed on the third Friday of September, International Garnacha/Grenache Day celebrates the many forms of this eco-friendly European heritage grape variety. Consider entertaining your palate with a diverse tasting of quality Garnacha/Grenache from Europe, from robust single-variety wines to traditional blends. Raise a glass to endless possibilities.

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Chateau Montelena winemaker Matt Crafton presents the producer's 1990 Chardonnay during a retrospective tasting in St. Helena, CA.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF JORDAN VINEYARD & WINERY

Cheers to the Class of

INSIGHTS FROM FIVE
DECADES OF FINE
WINEMAKING IN
CALIFORNIA

by Deborah Parker Wong

OF THE CALIFORNIA wineries celebrating their 50th birth year in 2022, six gathered to mark the occasion with a retrospective tasting at The Culinary Institute of America at Greystone in St. Helena. Each dazzled us with three wines while reflecting on five decades of harvests and providing a snapshot of their current vintages.

In his 2002 *Decanter* story on the 30th anniversary of the Class of '72—as the Napa Valley and Sonoma wineries that either were founded in or presented their inaugural releases that year have come to be known—Paul Franson noted that it was a glowing report about the future of the wine business by Bank of America that emboldened many to make the leap of faith required to live their dream. And yet 1972 wasn't an easy vintage; on its 25th anniversary in 1997, *Wine Spectator's* James Laube wrote that "if you turned back the clock to 1972, you'd find one of the—if not the—worst [Napa Valley] vintages in modern history." His observation is a testament to the passion and determination that kept these post-Prohibition winegrowers, who were known for their camaraderie, going strong.

In fact, the vintage was a dry one, with intense summer heat spikes and rain during harvest, yet quality for Stag's Leap Wine Cellars remained excellent. Stag's Leap assistant winemaker Luis Contreras and vineyard manager Kirk Grace presented the 1972 Stag's Leap Wine Cellars S.L.V. Cabernet Sauvignon. Representing the second harvest from vines planted by Warren Winiarski, the wine was showing well, having moved to fully tertiary flavors of umami, loam, clove, and black pepper; while its aromas pointed to evidence of bright red fruit and even citrus in its youth.

Made by founding winemaker Bill Sorenson, the Burgess Cellars 1989 Cabernet Sauvignon was presented by current winemaker Meghan Zobeck. With a deep ruby-garnet core and a fully garnet rim, the wine was very much alive, offering complex leathery notes courtesy of Brettanomyces, deep brown spice, earth, black tea, and, eventually, coffee. Like the mythical phoenix, Burgess has risen from the ashes after being destroyed in the Glass Fire in 2020 thanks to its new owners, Lawrence Wine Estates, and the arrival of Zobeck, now in her second vintage.

Chateau Montelena's fame will forever be entwined with that of Stag's Leap Wine Cellars, as together they conquered the Judgment of Paris tasting in 1976, which succeeded in shining a spotlight on Napa Valley. Presented by winemaker Matt Crafton, Montelena's 1990 Chardonnay was made by Bo Barrett with destemmed fruit from the Oak Knoll AVA; vinified without malolactic conversion, the wine was both fresh and lush, with delicate notes of petrol and ripe pineapple (a classic marker of the Old Wente clone) and a dusting of nutmeg.

Diamond Creek's 1993 Red Rock Terrace, made by Al and Boots Brounstein, was the product of a cool, wet vintage. Made from dry-farmed vines planted in 1968, the deeply extracted expression showed layers of dark, spicy fruit, including blackberry and cassis, and earth with resolved, dusty tannins. The winery was acquired by Maison Louis Roederer in 2020 and is under the guidance of president Nicole Carter, who presented the wine.

Dry Creek Vineyard's Dave Stare was one of the only winemakers in the Class of '72 to study at the University of California, Davis, prior to founding a winery—in fact the first winery in Dry Creek Valley since



Pouring the 1972 Stag's Leap Wine Cellars S.L.V. Cabernet Sauvignon.



A partial lineup of the 18 wines poured at the tasting.

Prohibition. Winemaker Tim Bell presented the 1994 Fumé Blanc, renowned for its provenance as one of the first Fumé Blancs besides Robert Mondavi's. Bright, beautifully golden, and vibrant, the wine was redolent of toasted hazelnut, golden apple, and aromatic dried herbs.

The retrospective tasting was organized by Lisa Mattson, creative director for Jordan Vineyard & Winery, who was not about to let the 50th anniversary of the Class of '72 go unacknowledged. Founders Tom and Sally Jordan were already Francophiles when Tom read a *Wall Street Journal* article citing Bank of America's aforementioned report on the bright future of the California wine industry. He planted vines in 1972, and Jordan's first harvest was in 1976. In 1980, when newly elected President Ronald Reagan chose the wines that would

be served at state dinners, Jordan was among them, helping to make a name for Sonoma's Alexander Valley.

The 1999 Jordan Cabernet Sauvignon was presented by grower relations manager Dana Grande, who pointed out that 1999 was a "rebound" vintage after the notoriously cool 1998 and that it was the first vintage made from Jordan's hillside estate vineyards. With a deep garnet core moving to a narrow garnet rim, the wine opened with lighter red-fruit and black-olive aromas that deepened to a rich, nuanced palate of black cherry, tobacco, and vanilla.

For tasters with an appreciation for older vintages, it will be a dream to revisit these and the spectacular 12 wines that followed them in 2044, on the 72nd anniversary of the Class of '72. *sj*



Keeping It Real

AT MILLER UNION IN ATLANTA, GA, NEAL MCCARTHY IS A SELF-TAUGHT SUCCESS

by Ruth Tobias

NEAL MCCARTHY IS awfully humble for a man who, to date, has garnered five James Beard Award nominations for Outstanding Wine Program at Miller Union in Atlanta. Granted, it may be his humility that makes him such a successful co-owner, GM, and sommelier in a town whose wine scene is, in his words, “still growing”; putting guests at ease while introducing them to, say, a Chasselas from Valais, Switzerland, or a Washington State Nebbiolo is clearly his jam.

Hailing from Essex, England, McCarthy arrived in Philadelphia in 1990 at age 17, where he faced “kind of a rocky road,” he admits. “I didn’t really know where I was headed, but I wound my way up into Charleston, South Carolina.” There, he found work as a bartender while briefly going to college—and for the next several years, “I cooked, I bartended, I worked my way through the restaurant world,” landing in Atlanta in the process. In 1999, having returned to school at Georgia State University, he took a job at then-new Italian restaurant Sotto Sotto. “I started there as a busboy and didn’t really know anything about wine,” he recalls, “but it was an all-Italian wine list, so I quickly started going all in on Italian wines because that’s what they were serving, and I wanted to *not* be a busboy—I wanted to [be] a waiter, which was obviously more lucrative.” Upon graduation, he took the position of GM and wine buyer: “I really didn’t know what else to do with my life, and food and beverage had just become ingrained into who I was as a person, to be honest,” he says.

Opening Miller Union in 2009 presented another opportunity for self-teaching. “My baseline for other regions of the

PHOTO: ANDREW THOMAS LEE



world [besides Italy] was pretty limited,” he insists. “So I spent the couple of next years reading, educating [myself], and tasting. . . . I kept really detailed journals of the tastings I did; I still have [them]. They mean a lot to me—to go back and just read them now and see these wines that I tasted.”

That training has yielded an Old World–centric list grounded in “small producers trying to farm organically, biodynamically, [or] at least to a sustainable level,” McCarthy explains. “That’s always been a philosophy for us; chef[-partner] Steven [Satterfield] has always sourced

the best ingredients possible, and people know that, they can see it—it’s a tangible thing when you . . . can see that tomato that just came in from our farmer. So with the wine, [we’re] making sure that those people that we’re buying from are farming properly and are stewards of the land.”

Some of his favorite producers right now are coming from Spain, including Sierra de Gredos and the Canary Islands, while his sommelier, long-time employee Princeton Saunders, “is a Champagne nutter—he sells more Champagne in Atlanta than anybody.” That said, he adds, “[We] don’t have to sell certain things to meet certain goals. My ideal guest is somebody who tells me that they

want to spend X amount of dollars—I want to spend \$100 on a bottle of wine, Neal. What’s cool, what’s interesting, what are you liking to drink?”—and then having that faith in me that I’m going to be able to pull out something that they haven’t had and turn them on to something new.”

No doubt living up to their expectations is itself humbling. “I just try and find great bottles of wine for not a lot of money, because that’s what I drink,” he says. “I can’t afford Grand Cru Burgundies! Trying to find those really good-value wines—those are those magic moments that we try to find every day.” ■



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- ANA MARIA ROMERO
MIJENTA MAESTRA TEQUILERA



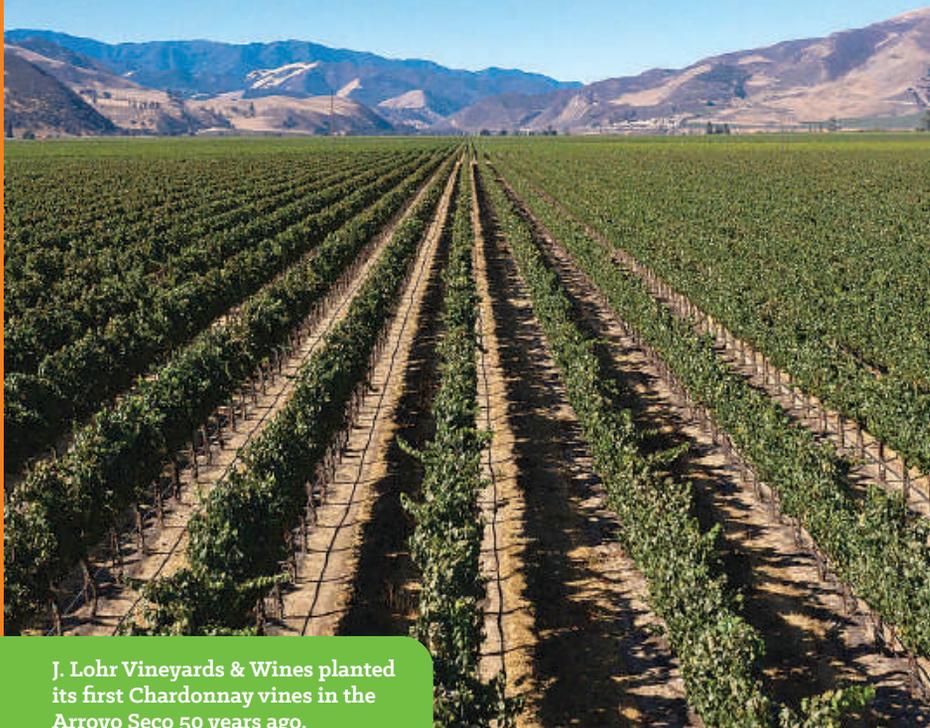
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marvelous MONTEREY

A SOMM JOURNAL PRIMER ON CHARDONNAY FROM THE MAJESTIC CENTRAL COAST AVA

by Kelly Magyarics



J. Lohr Vineyards & Wines planted its first Chardonnay vines in the Arroyo Seco 50 years ago.

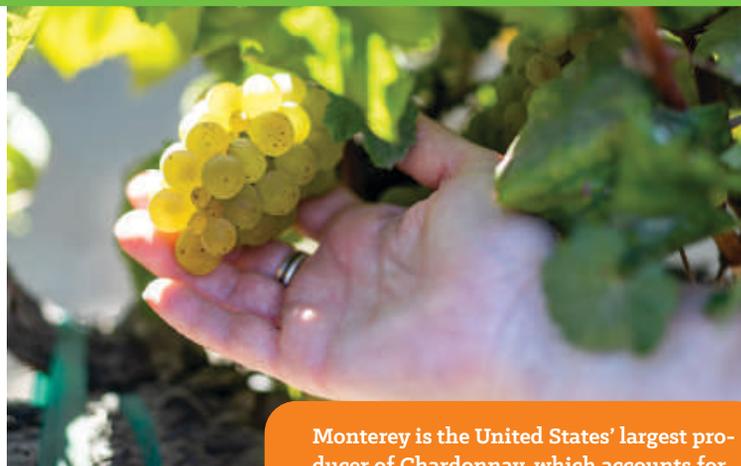
➤ **The terroir of Monterey's nine sub-AVAs dictates the best location for each varietal planted here.** The region as a whole is the United States' largest producer of Chardonnay, which accounts for 40% of total plantings; they're concentrated mainly in the northern part of the AVA in the sub-appellations of Arroyo Seco and Santa Lucia Highlands, though the grape is found throughout Monterey. Benchmark aromas and flavors for the variety range from citrus to stone fruit and tropical fruit, accompanied by decidedly cool-climate acidity and minerality.

➤ **Monterey's climate is comparable to that of the Russian River Valley, Carneros, and parts of the Sonoma Coast;** it's slightly warmer than Burgundy and Geisenheim, Germany, and cooler than Australia. Since it is located in a rain shadow from the Santa Lucia Mountains, the area receives only 10 inches of rain per year, concentrated mainly from December to April. Yet the region's proximity to Monterey Bay and its marine air brings a cooling, moderating effect that is capable of dramatically lowering the temperature in the vineyards. Each afternoon during the growing season, the wind off the Bay shuts down the vines' photosynthesis, a process that ultimately extends the season by about three weeks. The result is a long hang time that lends texture to Chardonnay while preserving acidity levels, resulting in a unique balance of ripe fruit, mouthfeel, and freshness.

➤ **The Arroyo Seco River runs right through its namesake appellation,** where it joins with the Salinas River to head north to Monterey Bay. Over thousands of years, the river has carved out mesas of varying elevations. The amount of sunshine that the vines see depends on their aspect, exposure, and slope, the latter of which also affects the impact of the winds coming down from the Bay.

The Region at a Glance

➤ **Monterey County is located in the Central Coast American Viticultural Area (AVA),** which measures 25 miles wide while stretching 250 miles along the coastline from San Francisco County to Santa Barbara County. Monterey is home to 349 vineyards representing approximately 46,000 acres under vine.



Monterey is the United States' largest producer of Chardonnay, which accounts for 40% of the region's total plantings.

Large river stones nicknamed “Greenfield potatoes” are contained in the silty clay loam soils of the Arroyo Seco.



➤ **The predominant soil type in the Arroyo Seco is well-draining silty clay loam mixed with gravel and a little sand.** Large river stones nicknamed “Greenfield potatoes” located 6–7 feet underground force the vines to go deeper and also allow for good drainage, keeping the plant balanced between leaf and fruit production. Stones located closer to the surface, meanwhile, absorb heat during the day and radiate it after sundown, contributing to the wines’ richness and florality. It’s here in the Arroyo Seco, with its ideal combination of climate and soil, that Jerry Lohr first planted Chardonnay vines 50 years ago.

➤ **Chardonnay harvest begins in late September or early October and continues until the beginning of November.** Though there is relatively no danger of damaging autumn rain, the latter part of the season carries the potential for cold weather and frost; winemakers need to weigh the benefit of waiting for optimally balanced fruit with the risk of late-season weather issues.

➤ **Vineyards are generally trained using a double-cordon trellising system.** On the north-facing side of the vines, leaves are pruned to take better advantage of that cooling, drying wind from Monterey Bay, which helps prevent mildew and Botrytis. On the vines’ south-facing side, some leaves are retained to provide sun protection, keeping the grapes from becoming sunburned.

➤ **Because the grapes pick up an optimal amount of acidity as well as an appealing texture and vibrant flavors of ripe fruit,** Chardonnay from Monterey can handle complementary oak fermentation and maturation as well as malolactic fermentation without becoming unbalanced or flabby.



Marine air from Monterey Bay has a cooling effect on the region, shutting down photosynthesis in the vines each afternoon during the growing season—a process that ultimately extends the season by about three weeks.



A map of J. Lohr's vineyards and partnerships in Monterey's Arroyo Seco and Santa Lucia Highlands sub-AVAs.

J. LOHR MONTEREY CHARDONNAY *tasting notes*

Sourced from the Arroyo Seco AVA of Monterey County, all three of J. Lohr's Chardonnays are 100% barrel-fermented. Yet thanks to a thoughtful selection of clones and vinification techniques, each is able to showcase the hallmarks of the region's fruit while retaining its own unique personality and essence.

J. Lohr Estates 2020

Riverstone Chardonnay (\$14)

Ten Chardonnay clones go into this expression, including Mount Eden, a heritage clone that originated in the late 19th century in the Santa Cruz Mountains and is known for its tight clusters and flavor concentration. The juice is fermented in mostly American (along with a small portion of Hungarian and French) oak barrels sourced from 12 to 14 different coopers. It undergoes 50% malolactic fermentation in barrel and then is stirred by hand weekly for seven to nine months. The result is fresh and youthful yet richly textured and balanced thanks to its maturation on the lees; light straw in the glass, it offers aromas of ripe orange, cocoa, beech, and baking spices along with flavors of apricot, ripe pear, hazelnut, and citrus cream followed by a lengthy, oak-tinged finish.



J. Lohr 2020 Arroyo Vista

Chardonnay (\$25) The basis for this expression is clone 76, which lends notes of apple and pear as well as a bright floral character. Additionally, the Mount Eden clone provides Meyer lemon, tangerine, and daffodil; clone 17 offers hints of florals, strawberries and cream, and white peach; clone 95 adds touches of yellow peach and contributes to the texture; and clone 96 ramps up acidity while showing apple and apricot. The grapes are whole cluster-pressed before primary and malolactic fermentation take place over 15 days in mostly French oak; 14 months of maturation sur lie with weekly stirrings also give the wine its rich texture. Pale yellow in the glass with intense aromas of Meyer lemon, paperwhites, ripe apple, white peach, brioche, and crème brûlée, it presents pear, lemon cream, tangerine, apricot, and baking spices on the palate, followed by sweet oak on the long finish.



J. Lohr 2020 October Night

Chardonnay (\$25) The vineyards for this wine are located in Block 9 near the mouth of the Arroyo Seco River, which provides wind protection. It's composed mainly of Dijon clone 809, a Musqué clone that accounts for 60% of the blend and lends notes of orange oil, orange blossom, and gardenia; clone 548 and clone 4, known for their vibrant acidity, make up the remainder. After being hand-harvested in the early morning, the grapes are whole cluster-pressed and cold-settled; they then undergo malolactic fermentation before aging nine months in barrel. In the glass, a pale straw hue is joined by a heady nose of gardenia, honeysuckle, daffodil, ripe apple, and baking spices. The rich and complex yet balanced palate shows ripe orange, white nectarine, and lemon cream, followed by a long finish of toasted oak and vanilla.



A Q&A With J. Lohr Winemaker

KRISTEN BARNHISEL



How do you describe Monterey Chardonnay to those who are unfamiliar with it?

The benchmark aromas for Chardonnay from Monterey are stone fruits, including apricot and white peach. The extended growing season that results from close proximity to Monterey Bay and the winds that it brings gives the region's Chardonnay both texture and a bump in acidity, which is quite a unique combination.

What makes for a perfect bottle of Chardonnay from the Arroyo Seco, in your opinion?

For me, it's about the complexity of flavors. It's going to start with signature aromatics, including white and yellow florals, ripe orange, apricot, and peach. There will definitely be a hint of oak—I really like that complementary bit of baking spice and creaminess it adds to the palate, almost like a cobbler—and cocoa or dark chocolate on the finish. I love that whole package.

What role do clones play in your Chardonnay program?

One of the great things about working here is the diversity of available clones. Just like different types of oak and yeast, it's one more layer, one more tool we can use to build complexity in

the blend. We start with clones 4 and 5, like most California Chardonnay does, and then pepper in the Dijon clones. Recently we started working with the Mount Eden clone, which dates back to the 1800s and brings attractive apple and pear flavors. Its first production was last year, and we're very excited to see what it can do.

How does your fermentation regimen influence your Chardonnay expressions?

We harvest at night, press the grapes, bring in the juice, and use about six different yeasts total. We do inoculate about 70% of malolactic across the whole program, and then finish between 50% and 70% malolactic. We use at least a dozen different coopers to source our barrels, and wines are barrel-fermented and aged for seven to 14 months, depending on the desired style. We have a great barrel crew that stirs the barrels by hand weekly and tops them every three weeks—we're talking over 20,000 barrels.

Are you employing any experimental techniques in your Chardonnay production?

We have been increasing our acreage of the Corton Charlemagne clone 548 and fermenting it in a concrete egg, which

we use in our Arroyo Vista release. I love the expression of apple and the really bright white-floral notes that 548 imparts; the concrete egg really brings out minerality, Meyer lemon, and freshness, adding this nice linear texture. We are also experimenting with adding oxygen to the juice, which browns the phenolics and allows us to rack off clean wine with brilliant color.

How long can your Chardonnays be cellared and how do they evolve during that time?

After five or seven years they are still very drinkable, though the freshness from the bright floral notes evolves more into a dried-floral character. There is better integration of the malolactic and stone-fruit components; the oak influence becomes more prominent; and noticeable notes of caramel, vanilla, butterscotch, and honey emerge.

What are your favorite food pairings with J. Lohr's Chardonnays?

Here in Monterey, of course, we think of seafood with Chardonnay. I recently made an orange-reduction sauce with some really nice halibut that was a perfect pairing; crabcakes and shellfish also go beautifully, as does chicken with a creamy Dijon sauce. The Riverstone Chardonnay has enough texture that you can go a little bit spicy, like Indian or Mexican cuisine.

What's the biggest change you've seen at J. Lohr's Monterey facility since you became its winemaker seven years ago?

I've definitely seen a shift. When I started, we were producing just 25% in the new facility and 75% at our original winery in San Jose. Today we are producing 100% at the new winery, which is surrounded by over 1,000 acres of estate vineyards. Since pressing is done on-site, there is much less potential for oxidation, resulting in a fresher style for our Chardonnays. Beyond that, I've just been working on little tweaks: better barrels, better color, better yeasts to accentuate aromas. It's a small shift, little by little, as we're constantly exploring ever-better quality in a Chardonnay program that's already been a leader since the 1970s.

