

# THE SOMM JOURNAL

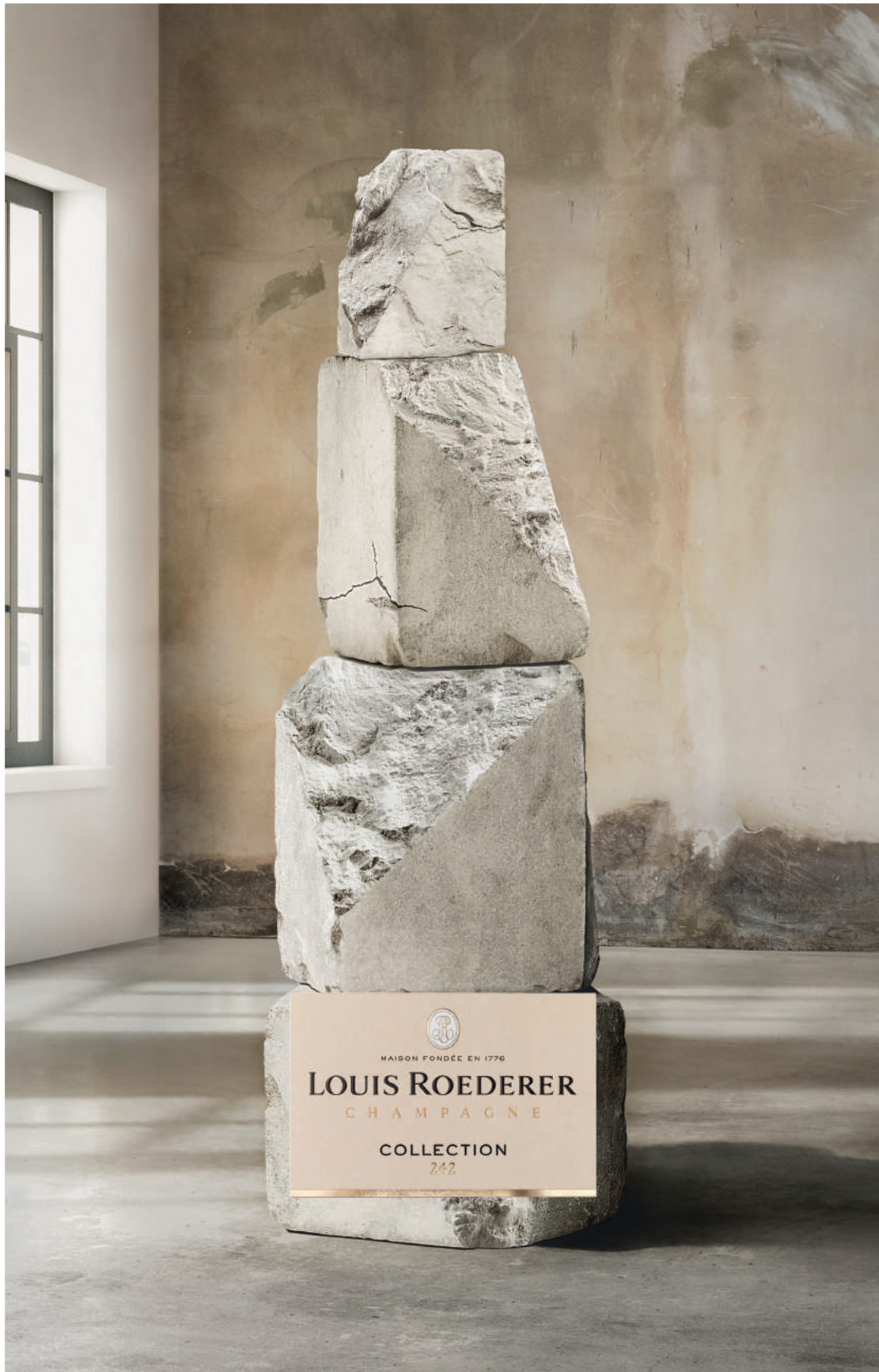
As One Cru founder  
Chris Radomski, left,  
with partner Matt  
Zubrod in Aspen, CO.

# A cru

## FOR ALL CREWS

**HOW CHRIS  
RADOMSKI  
CONCEIVED A  
WINE BRAND  
WITH A LITTLE  
HELP FROM HIS  
FRIENDS**





**LOUIS ROEDERER**  
HAND IN HAND WITH NATURE



# THE SOMM JOURNAL

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first  press

# *northern* EXPOSURE

IN ANTICIPATION OF OUR UPCOMING SOMM CAMP, HERE'S  
AN EDUCATIONAL PRIMER ON THE **OKANAGAN VALLEY**

*by Jessie Birschbach*





The Okanagan Valley's stunning Naramata Ranch Vineyard.



The Jagged Rock Vineyard is located in south Okanagan.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF VON MANDEL FAMILY ESTATES

## This summer, I will mark my eighth anniversary

as an editor at *The SOMM Journal*, and after all this time, my absolute favorite part of the job is covering our SOMM Camps. Getting to know America's wine regions while making new sommelier friends from all over the country has been a true joy that I don't take for granted. So when our publisher Meredith May, aka "the Chief," asked me to clear a week in June to visit the Okanagan Valley in British Columbia, I just about spit out my tea. This will be the first time I have ever visited the region—an opportunity that may speak to its rising popularity, which may in turn be attributed to the impacts of climate change (though we'll get into that a bit later).

Preceding these camps, we typically publish a bit of background on the region while featuring a few winemakers, but a camp this special deserves a more extensive introduction—especially given the fact that there isn't a ton of educational information out there on the Okanagan Valley among the go-to resources for sommeliers. The most thorough, to my knowledge, remains the Wines of British Columbia website ([winebc.com](http://winebc.com)): I encourage you to visit it yourself, as I strongly suspect you're going to see more and more of the region's fresh, dry red and white wines entering the U.S. market.

To gain more perspective, I recently spent time with Graham Nordin, general manager of Iconic Wineries of British Columbia, a collection of quality-minded producers, and a member of the board of directors for the Canadian Association of Professional Sommeliers. Armed with a Level 3 WSET Advanced Certificate in Wine and Spirits, the Vancouver native is also a Certified Canadian Wine Scholar and has worked in the Canadian wine industry for a decade and a half—so I don't think we could have found a more knowledgeable (or friendlier) expert on the wines of the Okanagan Valley, where he's resided for over five years. Perhaps it's thanks in part to Nordin's gratitude for being able to raise his young family in the region's beautiful countryside, especially during pandemic times, but whatever the reason, his love for one of Canada's most renowned Geographical Indications is contagious.

### Harvesttime in the Okanagan.



## A Hallmark of Vibrancy

"I think of [the Okanagan] as Napa Valley meets Lake Tahoe. It's this combination of a pristine, rugged landscape with lush green trees and mountains and a stunning lake, much like what you'd think of when you think of the Pacific Northwest, but then it's also got these incredible sloped vineyards," said Nordin. "It's one of the most beautiful places in the world, let alone one of the most beautiful places in the world to be able to grow and make wine."

That landscape ensures that the Okanagan promotes more of an outdoorsy lifestyle than does Napa, offering an abundance of activities such as skiing, hiking, water sports, and biking. The culinary scene, however, is as serious as that of Napa, with many restaurants maintaining an intense commitment to hyperlocal seasonality. As a prime example of this, Nordin referenced Neil Taylor, executive chef at CedarCreek Estate Winery restaurant Home Block, who was inspired to move to the Okanagan when he realized that all the best ingredients he was sourcing for his former restaurant in Vancouver were coming from the region.

That observation points to the long agricultural history of the Okanagan, known in particular for orchard fruits like cherries, peaches, apricots, and apples that offer a bright purity not found in many other parts of the world. "The natural acidity in our fruit is such a hallmark of the Okanagan . . . and [likewise] the types of wines we can make here offer an incredibly pure, vibrant, fresh natural acidity and have this true sense of place. And when you look around the world of wine, as the climate is changing and areas are warming, we've got this really unique ability to be able to make wines of freshness . . . that is a hallmark for the Okanagan," said Nordin.



# OKANAGAN VALLEY MILESTONES

## Mid-1800s

French missionaries plant the first grapes in the area, though it should be noted that much of what they planted were hybrid or *Vitis labrusca* rather than *Vitis vinifera* vines.

## 1932

Calona Vineyards becomes the first commercial winery in the Okanagan.

## 1988

Following the enactment of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), trade between Canada and the United States fuels significant growth in the Canadian wine industry. As a result, the Canadian government institutes programs to replant hybrid and *Vitis labrusca* vines with *Vitis vinifera*.

## 1990

The BCVQA (Vintners Quality Alliance) is established to serve as the appellation of origin and the quality standard for British Columbian wine.

## 1994

Mission Hill Family Estate Winery wins "Best Chardonnay in the World" at the International Wine & Spirit Competition (IWSC) in London, putting not only the Okanagan but Canadian wine in general on the map.

## Forged by Ice

Thanks to ancient volcanic activity, multiple glacial ages, and its roughly 125-mile length, the Okanagan Valley offers a notable range of growing conditions. "Ten thousand years ago the entire Okanagan Valley would have been under a sheet of ice. Then about 8,000 years ago, glaciers formed as those sheets of ice started to melt. So the Okanagan is really just an ancient glacial trench created by these rescinding glaciers that carved out this valley, leaving a series of lakes, with the most significant being Lake Okanagan," said Nordin.

Surrounded by vineyards on both sides, the long and narrow Lake Okanagan plunges as deep as roughly 750 feet and is a major influence in the region. "We're right at that northern cusp of where you can grow wine grapes around the world, and of this 200-kilometer stretch of valley, about 140 kilometers of that is lake," Nordin added. "Lake Okanagan is critical because it not only reflects light and heat in the summertime, which helps with ripening in a relatively short growing season, but really helps to stave off frost in the wintertime. So a lot of vineyards are planted in close proximity to the lake because it really helps moderate the temperature."

Perhaps equally influential on the Okanagan's climate are its mountains. Looming on one side of the valley are the Coast Mountains and on the other the Monashee Mountains, together creating a rain shadow effect. "We get significantly less precipitation than, say, Vancouver, which is three and a half hours west," noted Nor-




A view of Mission Hill Family Estate.

din. The region as a whole averages 11 inches of rainfall, but the amount varies from the cooler and wetter north to the drier and warmer south.

The Okanagan's soils were formed first by volcanic activity, then by melting glaciers and a glacial dam that burst and flooded into what is now the northern United States. They range from the common sandy glacial till (material left behind by glacial movement) and benchland soil series (alluvial fans at the base of a mountain deposited by streams) to silt loam (left behind by glacial lakes), the Olhausen series (wind-blown Aeolian layered over glacial lake silt), and everything in between, including volcanic, granite, clay, and limestone.

Needless to say, the region's diverse soil types and dynamic climate have an impact on the growing conditions within each of its 11 subregions—among them the cool Lake Country sub-GI in the north, which grows mainly Pinot Noir, Pinot Gris, Riesling, and Chardonnay, and the Osoyoos region in the south, where much of the Okanagan's Syrah and Bordeaux varieties are grown. The latter is Canada's warmest growing area and its only desert.

For more detailed information on each of the Okanagan's subregions, I once again urge you to not only visit the Wines of British Columbia's website but tune in for the recap of our SOMM Camp in the early fall—or, better yet, visit the Okanagan yourself! 



## THE OKANAGAN AT A GLANCE

- British Columbia rivals only Ontario in terms of Canadian wine production and fame, and the Okanagan Valley is its largest wine region, with roughly 8,700 acres under vine—about 86% of the province's acreage. Of British Columbia's roughly 300 wineries, about 200 are in the Okanagan Valley. That said, the Okanagan is small compared to many other regions; it's less than a quarter of the size of Napa, for instance.
- Despite its diminutive size, the Okanagan farms the largest percentage of organic vineyards in the world: 17%.
- Starting at a latitude of 49.6 degrees north, the Okanagan is just over 124 miles long and extends down to the U.S. border.
- There are nine official Geographical Indications (GI) in British Columbia, of which the Okanagan Valley is one. Currently there are 12 sub-GIs in British Columbia, 11 of which are in the Okanagan: Golden Mile Bench, Golden Mile Slopes, Naramata Bench, Okanagan Falls, Skaha Bench, East Kelowna Slopes, Lake Country, South Kelowna Slopes, Summerland Bench, Summerland Lakefront, and Summerland Valleys.
- The most commonly planted white grapes in the Okanagan are Chardonnay, Pinot Gris, Gewürztraminer, Riesling, and Sauvignon Blanc.
- The most commonly planted red grapes are Merlot, Pinot Noir, Cabernet Sauvignon, Syrah, Gamay, and Cabernet Franc.

*The Border Vista Vineyard at night.*

## tasting notes

**Martin's Lane 2018 Riesling, Fritz's Vineyard, West Kelowna, Okanagan Valley, British Columbia, Canada (\$65)** Aged sur lie on natural yeast, this sumptuous white sends out a perfume of beeswax and apricot preserves. Exotic flowers bloom in the glass, including jasmine and peony, along with ginger and turmeric. Both peach tones and acidity are fresh, clean, and lean. A dollop of salinity appears on the finish. **94** —*Meridith May*



**Mission Hill Family Estate 2020 Perpetua Chardonnay, Okanagan Valley, British Columbia, Canada (\$65)** Bright, salty, and lean—this is a modern, edgy ballerina en pointe. Lemongrass and garden herbs maintain a high profile with just-ripened pineapple and a spray of gardenia. The mouthfeel is pitch-perfect. Fermented and aged sur lie for 16 months in French oak barriques, puncheons, and concrete eggs. **95** —*M.M.*

**Checkmate Artisanal Winery 2018 Black Rock Merlot, Okanagan Valley, British Columbia, Canada (\$95)** This is a blockbuster Merlot wrapped in a blanket of black licorice and balsamic. Ripe aromas of cherry, sandalwood, and red beet beguile, joining expressive notes of cranberry and espresso as well as a thread of slate and plum-skin tannins running through a concentrated core. **94** —*M.M.*



**Checkmate Artisanal Winery 2019 Little Pawn Chardonnay, Jagged Rock Vineyard, Okanagan Valley, British Columbia, Canada (\$95)** Grown at elevations exceeding 1,200 feet and spending 16 months in (50% new) French oak, this single-vineyard Chardonnay emits a bright light. Peach, rose, and honeysuckle charm on the nose and palate. Salty lemon curd, baked apple, and ripe pineapple are vibrant, lining the mouth with a luscious texture. **98** —*M.M.*

**Martin's Lane 2018 Pinot Noir, Simes Vineyard, Okanagan Valley, British Columbia, Canada (\$100)** Bramble and black cherry lick the palate of this texturally exciting red with savory flavors of earth and new leather. Strapping notes of pomegranate, brown sugar, and white-peppered rose are well integrated on the toasty finish. **95** —*M.M.*

**Mission Hill Family Estate 2018 Oculus, Okanagan Valley, British Columbia, Canada (\$185)** Hand-sorted grapes are gravity-filled into French oak and concrete before resting in individual barrels, where the juice is aged for 19 months. The result, a standout blend of 49% Merlot, 30% Cabernet Franc, and 21% Cabernet Sauvignon, settles luxuriously on the palate, where notes of black cherry, molasses, soy sauce, and black olive unite for a performance of athletic prowess. It's balanced and regal, with a finish of dried violets, chocolate, and cranberry. **98** —*M.M.*



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PHOTO: REBECCA PEPLINSKI



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# A Piece of Cake

HOW ONE GUEST TAUGHT A RESTAURANT TEAM TO GET OVER THEMSELVES

**IN EARLY 1989**, the newly opened Roy's Restaurant in Honolulu—of which I was a founding partner—landed its first review in the local daily newspaper. Out of four possible “dots,” we garnered one and a half. Almost everything, according to the critic, was wrong. You would think being owned by a celebrated chef was an advantage. She seemed to despise the very idea.

About a week later, a lanky, bespectacled, white-haired man in his mid-70s walked in. We had just opened, so the dining room was empty. The first thing he did was refuse the table he was offered, which was one of our best, located next to a picture window overlooking the Pacific Ocean. Instead, he pointed to a tiny deuce just 10 feet from our exhibition kitchen, where he'd be looking directly at our food runners' butts. Our hostess played it smart—she let him sit where he liked.

He ordered a Martini, which was instantly sent back. A second Martini was also rejected. As I was the manager on duty, it was my job to nip this problem in the bud. I found out his name from the hostesses—Ray Underwood—and introduced myself before asking him what would make him happy. His response: “First, that first Martini was ridiculous, less than half a proper-sized pour; and second, your house gin is terrible!” I asked him what he'd prefer, and he said, “Nothing less than Bombay Sapphire, but I don't expect to be charged extra!”

That kind of demand would typically be a no-go: Every restaurant on earth succeeds, or fails, on how well it controls costs. But I went to the bartender and told him to give Mr. Underwood a triple

pour of Bombay Sapphire. I then instructed the waiter not to charge him an extra dime, even if he ordered ten of them. If he wanted it that bad, he could have it.

Mr. Underwood had three courses during that first visit—at least one of which, as I recall, he sent back. After all, it was easy



PHOTO COURTESY OF RANDY CAPAROSO

**From 1988 to 2002, Randy Caparoso (pictured here in 1998) served as founding partner/vice president/corporate wine director of Roy's Restaurants.**


to do since he was sitting close enough to the chefs to have direct conversations.

But here's the surprising thing: Every single night for the next ten years, Mr. Underwood would come walking through that door at 5:30 p.m. to sit at the same table and order two Martinis, followed by a glass of wine with three courses. His value as a paying guest grew incalculable. It wasn't that he turned into a kindly old man—he was always cantankerous and demanding, inciting fear among the

*We were never perfect, but we learned how to get better. Because whenever you can meet the toughest challenges, everything else is a piece of cake.*

waiters and anxiety among the chefs. We managers, however, could reliably use him as the quintessential example of a guest for staff: If you could satisfy him, you could satisfy anyone. Ray Underwood became our rallying cry. Next to him, all other guests were pussycats.

After 12 years, we became successful enough to open more than two dozen restaurants from Tokyo to New York. We garnered cover stories in national magazines and every accolade there is, from a James Beard Award to placement in the *Nation's Restaurant News* “Fine Dining Hall of Fame.” All the while, we served Ray Underwood—even when his health began to fail and he couldn't walk through the doors. Our chefs still prepared his dinners, which were delivered either to his apartment or to his hospital bed, wherever he happened to be.

A permanent place in our restaurant family's history, my history, belongs to Ray Underwood because of what he taught us: how to get over ourselves and how to maintain grace, humility, a thick skin, and common sense. We were never perfect, but we learned how to get better. Because whenever you can meet the toughest challenges, everything else is a piece of cake—just as Ray Underwood taught us. 





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# Shelf Life

## HOW SOME NEW YORK SOMMELIERS ARE ACHIEVING SUCCESS OFF-PREMISE

**DON'T PUT SOMMS** in a box! As the restaurant industry continues to evolve in response to the pandemic, many professionals are spreading their wings and pursuing opportunities as wine educators, content creators, and retailers. On the latter front, New York is now home to two new wine shops owned by sommeliers: The Communion Wine + Spirits in Syracuse and Beaupierre Wine & Spirits in Manhattan.

by shelving the wines in the same way that she designs a by-the-glass wine list—by “weight and intensity of flavor rather than by varietal and region,” in her words.

In addition to owning and operating The Communion,

PHOTO: MIKHAIL LIPVANSKY



**Heidi Turzyn and Yannick Benjamin, owners of Beaupierre Wines & Spirits in New York City, with the store mascot, Amélie.**

PHOTO: ALICE G. PATTERSON PHOTOGRAPHY/LOVING MY COMPANY



**Cha McCoy is owner of The Communion Wine + Spirits in Syracuse, NY.**

Native New Yorker Cha McCoy, who opened The Communion Wine + Spirits ([thecomunion.life](http://thecomunion.life)) in October 2022, views the shop as a natural expansion of The Communion wine-dinner series that she started as a pop-up in her Harlem apartment in 2017. “My mission has always been centered around terroir and accessibility,” she notes. “I always wanted my first brick-and-mortar to be in close proximity to a wine region; I chose Syracuse, which is near one of the greatest underrepresented wine regions, the Finger Lakes. This has allowed me to continue to bridge the gap between winemakers and wine lovers and [to] understand terroir from a first-person perspective, even for the wines we sell from beyond New York.” McCoy brings her sommelier expertise to the sales floor

Yorkers, didn’t have to look far to find the ideal location for their shop, Beaupierre Wine & Spirits ([beaupierrewine.com](http://beaupierrewine.com)): It’s located on the block in Hell’s Kitchen where Benjamin grew up. Opening its doors in November 2022, it features selections from around the world, including producers in regions the couple has explored during their travels. “For Heidi, the idea of a small shop was very exciting. She was overjoyed at the thought of being able to create a place that she could call her own and to build a business from the ground up,” says Benjamin.

The duo brings a combined 40-plus years of wine and hospitality experience to their retail endeavor. Turzyn’s resume includes a five-year tenure as the wine and beverage director at Gotham Bar

McCoy teaches wine appreciation and history at Syracuse University and is the beverage director for the Charleston Wine + Food festival.

Wine power couple Heidi Turzyn and Yannick Benjamin, also native New

and Grill, while Benjamin was born into a family of French restaurateurs and has worked at several top-tier establishments, including Le Cirque and Felidia. In 2003, a car accident left him paralyzed below the waist, but that didn’t derail his career; he outfitted his wheelchair with a table that allows him to work the floor. In 2021, he opened the barrier-free restaurant Contento in Harlem, and his nonprofit, Wine on Wheels, aims to enhance quality of life for people with disabilities.

Beaupierre is a deeply personal project for the couple. “Beaupierre has a couple of meanings; one is it means ‘handsome Pierre,’ which is an homage to Yannick’s father, Pierre,” says Turzyn. “[It] also means ‘beautiful stone’ in French. So much of what goes into a great bottle is place and terroir. Terroir includes soil, topography, and climate. Soil is such an important factor in wines, and these soils often include rocks and beautiful stones. [It] seemed like a perfect name!”

In addition to finding the ideal bottle, Beaupierre’s patrons will find it hard to resist the owners’ adorable pooch, Amélie, who “works” at the shop every day. **SJ**

*Wanda Mann is a Certified Specialist of Wine, the founder of [winewithwanda.com](http://winewithwanda.com), and a Manhattan native. Follow her on Instagram @winedinewanda.*



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# Playing in Peoria

CRETANS AND CHEZ ROC PUT SOME PIZZAZZ  
BACK IN CHERRY CREEK

PHOTO COURTESY OF CHEZ ROC



*Chez Roc was inspired by the El Morocco Club, a midcentury Manhattan nightspot.*

UNTIL RECENTLY, a night out in Denver's upmarket Cherry Creek neighborhood meant a nice steak dinner with the folks, not barhopping with friends in search of adventure. But the past couple of years have brought signs of change, the newest of which exude cosmopolitan style and sizzle to spare: Mediterranean wine bar Cretans and Moroccan-inspired cocktail lounge Chez Roc.

Operated by New York-based restaurant group Quality Branded in the Clayton hotel, the sister establishments surprised me during a media preview last November with the bold progressiveness of their beverage programs. As I surveyed the wine list at Cretans—rife with Greek varieties, pét-nats, skin-contact whites, and amphora-aged bottlings—I couldn't help but wonder: Will it play in Peoria (or Cherry Creek, as the case may be)? But in a follow-up interview, Quality Branded director of wine and beverage Meng Chiang assured me that it already was, singling out two orange wines, Robert Sinskey 2021 Orgia and Ruth Lewandowski 2021 Tatto, as by-the-glass bestsellers while noting that, among by-the-glass rosés, "the Chateau

Musar Jeune [from Lebanon] and the Ameztoi Rubentis Txakolina are outselling the Provençal rosé significantly."

Even cooler are two sections of the wine list that reflect how "our company prides itself on fun engagement with guests," in Chiang's words: At Cost and Mystery Grab. The former involves an ever-rotating selection of highly allocated bottles offered at zero markup, such as Antinori 2014 Solaia for \$48 and Opus One 2006 for \$65; as Chiang put it, "It's a cool talking point and a great way to taste something you may not have tasted before without committing so many dollars to it." The latter, meanwhile, centers on a grab-and-go fridge the team inherited from the coffee shop that preceded it; inside are some 12–14 different natural wines in brown bags, all priced at \$80. Order one, and "the server will literally walk you over, [help you] select your own glasses, then pick you out a bottle. And no matter what you get, you're going to get a really good value," explained Chiang. "To be honest, the mystery bottles have outsold every other bottle by a lot. The cost is at a point people are comfortable



PHOTO COURTESY OF QUALITY BRANDED

*In addition to a splashy wine list, Cretans serves cocktails like "Pour-Over Martinis," which nod to the coffee shop that preceded it in the Clayton hotel.*

with; if, say, four people share it, it's \$20 a glass—it's no different than having a regular glass at the bar. But it pushes boundaries for us as well as the guest. And I think it just goes with the whole vibe; it's meant to be fun. If you like it, great, [but] we have kind of an unspoken policy where if you take the bottle out of your bag and don't love what you find, absolutely go grab another one."

Next door at Chez Roc, meanwhile, a whole other experience awaits. A wonderland of zebra-striped wallpaper; plush banquettes and ottomans, and live piano music, it was inspired by the El Morocco Club, "a New York hot spot from the times of Prohibition up until the mid- to late 1950s," according to Joey Smith, who serves as bar director for Quality Branded properties Chez Zou and Zou Zou's in New York and who designed the cocktail menu here. Using ingredients like olive oil, grape-leaf brine, mint tea, harissa, and date syrup, "we wanted to create a transportation into a different realm as soon as you walk across the threshold, and we wanted the drinks to express that," Smith told me, offering his Morocco Mai Tai made with tahini-sesame oil orgeat as an example. "There's such a strong identity for this little bar, and I hope that people in Denver are able to take a little adventure, a little vacation at Chez Roc." ■



# *Raised in the Sonoma Heartland*



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# Making the Most Out of Molé

**CHEF ROBERTO MADRID BRINGS PAN-LATIN FLAIR TO SEDONA, AZ**

**I WAS FIRST INTRODUCED** to the talents of Roberto Madrid, an acclaimed industry veteran of over three decades, at Deseo at The Westin Kierland Resort & Spa in Scottsdale, Arizona. There, he earned recognition for his Nuevo Latino cuisine, a refined celebration of Latin American cooking that integrates influences from Mexico, Peru, and everywhere in between.

Following his departure from Deseo in 2016, Madrid spent time in executive chef roles in Texas as well as Arizona before joining the Wild Thyme Restaurant Group as executive corporate chef in 2021. At Molé in Sedona's Arabella Hotel, Madrid, who hails from Chihuahua, Mexico, continues to reimagine his native cuisine with techniques and ingredients found throughout regions such as South America and Spain. "We wanted to elevate our Mexican menu by incorporating those ingredients," he explains. "There are a lot of similarities in those cuisines. For instance, Peruvian leche de tigre is like Mexico's aguachile, while [Peru's] aji amarillo is similar to Oaxaca's costeño amarillo."

His richly nuanced approach is demonstrated in dishes



PHOTOS: CHRISTINA BARRUETA

*Roberto Madrid is executive corporate chef for the Wild Thyme Restaurant Group.*

such as ceviche featuring a colorful mélange of cubed striped bass, avocado, and peppers in a jalapeño-spiked leche de tigre marinade whose golden hue derives from the presence of aji amarillo, a yellow chile. Creamy guacamole is adorned with lump crab poached in lemon- and ponzu-accented butter, topped with mango salsa, and decorated with fried plantains. Grilled skirt steak Tampiqueño is served on a bed of patatas bravas, the traditional tapa of potatoes swathed in a rustic smoked chile-tomato sauce, though here Spanish pimentón is replaced by chipotle. Complemented by a Padrón pepper chimichurri, an avocado-and-chile relish Madrid calls "guacachile salsa," and a garnish

of crispy gaufrette potatoes, it's a cross-cultural knockout.

"When you layer flavors and textures, you get the real Mexican experience," says Madrid. "It isn't just simple food and tacos. For instance, we have very technical dishes that take a lot of time, such as mole," which he makes with more than 30 ingredients. "My goal is to show that there's so much more to Mexican cuisine."

But that's not all he does. Working with Wild Thyme's culinary director, Jay Bogsinske (whose resume boasts stints at Zinc Bistro and the now-closed Michael's at the Citadel, both in Scottsdale), Madrid also oversees the restaurant group's recently opened California restaurant properties, including a location of Molé in Palm Desert. Are there plans for still more eateries? "Let's just say we have some things in the pipeline," Madrid says with a smile. SJ

*Guacamole adorned with butter-poached lump crab, mango salsa, and fried plantains.*





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*Victor King and Kristen Hall operate Bar La Fête in Birmingham, AL.*

PHOTO: CALEB CHANCEY

# Are Guest Somms the Future of Wine Programs?

**ONE OF MY** favorite quotes from Master Sommelier Andy Myers is: "A great sommelier can parachute into any restaurant, pick up a wine list they've never seen before, and go to town as if they'd been running the joint their whole life." At Bar La Fête in Birmingham, Alabama, owners Kristen Hall and Victor King are putting this idea to the ultimate test. In what feels to me like a groundbreaking response to the shifting demands, labor shortages, rising costs, and social trends impacting the restaurant industry today, they have instituted a guest sommelier program at their newly opened wine bar. This creative approach not only solves many operational challenges but may also set the tone for the future of engaging and creative wine service.

Their inspiration came from a trip to France, where they observed a clear delineation between servers and sommeliers: Even at casual wine bars, servers focused on the overall dining experience while devoted sommeliers spent their

shifts bouncing from table to table discussing and serving wine selections. Realizing that in a market as small as Birmingham, few people could commit to becoming full-time somms, they devised a scheme to create a veritable revolving door of wine professionals to assist with service. With at least three guest sommeliers on the floor each weekend, Bar La Fête is creating a stronger community through wine: The strategy helps them combat labor shortages while also providing "the injection of a different personality every time, [which] is a ton of fun for the staff" as well as regular guests who appreciate the opportunity to interact with different wine experts on each visit, says Hall. "They get to ask all the questions they want and learn from some great minds."

The guest somms are plucked from Birmingham's young but earnest wine community. "No formal criteria or certifications [are] required," explains King. "Knowledgeable and passionate wine professionals, from seasoned veterans

to distributors, or those returning to the floor after a long hiatus all make great fits." Working with Bar La Fête's existing wine list, they generally have no trouble finding a few favorite and exciting bottles to promote to guests. For compensation, they are tipped out from the servers and also receive a percentage of wine sales. While jumping into service in a foreign environment is a potentially daunting prospect, Hall notes that Bar La Fête is "not a very large operation, and the table and seat numbers are fairly straightforward. The system for locating wines is all in the POS, so usually after one service, they have it all down."

Though the program is still in its infancy, the results have already proven to be a boon to the local wine community. Hall and King are excited for its future and intend to expand it commensurate with increased business volume. If variety is the spice of life, Bar La Fête's guest somm system might just be the chili powder the restaurant industry needed! **SJ**



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# North Star

## EXPLORING THE RUSSIAN RIVER VALLEY'S MIDDLE REACH NEIGHBORHOOD

by Brooke Herron

### THE RUSSIAN RIVER VALLEY'S (RRV)

northernmost neighborhood, Middle Reach was the first area in the region to garner extensive recognition for its wines. It's also home to the RRV's oldest Pinot Noir plantings, thanks to iconic growers and producers such as the Bacigalupis, the Rochiolis, and Davis Bynum.

Out of the six RRV neighborhoods, Middle Reach almost always sees the earliest pick dates, especially for Pinot Noir, as its well-protected vineyard sites experience warmer temperatures and lower fog impact.

### TERROIR

Extending from east Guerneville to the south of Healdsburg and encompassing most of the west side of Windsor, the Middle Reach neighborhood flanks the Russian River on both sides, where it's defined by the benches that in turn flank the river to the east and west.

The soils in Middle Reach are more diverse than those found in neighbor-

hoods like Green Valley, where a single soil type prevails. To the west, they're dominated by sandstone, shale, and other rocks that were transported on a tectonic plate from trenches in the ocean floor and deposited on the edge of the continent around 100 million years ago. Soils along the river contain flood deposits with well-drained gravel terraces, while those further from the river tend to be dominated by iron-rich Josephine loam soils.


### WINE CONDITIONS AND CHARACTERISTICS

While Middle Reach is one of the warmest neighborhoods in the RRV, it still experiences cooler nighttime temperatures thanks to wind that pushes the fog in from the coast. These allow for slower ripening, which contributes to the full flavor maturation and balanced acidity of the wines while preventing the baked or overripe fruit characteristics of warmer-climate Pinot Noirs.

Middle Reach wines display more tart and/or dried red fruit than black or blue fruit; more rose than violet on the floral spectrum; and more spiced notes, including tea, tobacco, thyme, sage, and cedar, than do the more overtly fruit-forward wines from other areas of the RRV.

### 2019 VINTAGE NOTES

The 2019 growing season in the Middle Reach neighborhood started out wet and cool. Frost in March delayed budbreak slightly, and rain in May impacted clusters, resulting in shatter that reduced yields by a significant percentage. But warmer temperatures set in in the second half of the season, and vineyards saw less morning fog than they had in previous years, resulting in more hours of sun exposure per day. Conditions from June onward were perfect, allowing vines to make up for lost time and develop fully before harvest in late August and early September. The aforementioned lower yields and smaller clusters resulted in more concentrated fruit.



*The Middle Reach neighborhood is the Russian River Valley's northernmost and one of its warmest subregions.*



A vineyard in Middle Reach.



PHOTOS COURTESY OF THE RUSSIAN RIVER VALLEY WINEGROWERS


## 2020 VINTAGE NOTES

Following two wetter- and cooler-than-average vintages, 2020 was a dry year. The low amount of water stressed vines early in the season, serving to limit crop size and produce lower yields that resulted in more concentrated wines.

However, the 2020 vintage was also plagued with wildfires, the largest of which ignited in Sonoma County in mid-August, spurring producers to harvest everything they could before smoke pollution ensued. This was easy to do with white grapes, which were harvested



Diverse soils in Middle Reach range from sandstone and shale to flood deposits with well-drained gravel terraces to iron-rich Josephine loam.

without issue, but a lot of Pinot Noir was left on the vines as wineries focused on harvesting early-ripening parcels before the smoke could have damaging effects on the fruit. This resulted in a much smaller crop, but the wines that Middle Reach producers were able to make display great concentration, tannic structure, and quality. 

## Tasting Notes

**DuMOL 2020 Flax Estate Pinot Noir, Russian River Valley (\$90)** Located on the western end of the RRV on the west side of Westside Road, Rochioli's Flax Estate Vineyard is one of the earliest-ripening vineyards that DuMOL works with (the majority of its sources are in the cooler Green Valley and Sonoma Coast AVAs). Though sitting at just 200 feet in elevation, it's on a steep hillside with an eastern exposure, so it gets plenty of sun while receiving protection from the hottest part of the afternoon. A mix of Pommard, Mount Eden, and Swan clones is planted in its red and rocky soils.

The wines from Flax Estate tend to show a lot of power, ripeness, and body, especially as compared to those from the other AVAs that DuMOL sources from. On the nose, this Pinot Noir displays aromas of strawberry fruit leather, star anise, and cranberry. On the palate, it's lean and light yet concentrated with notes of blood orange, tart dried cranberry, thyme, and underlying hints of darker ripe fruit like black cherry.

### **Gary Farrell 2019 Rochioli Vineyard Pinot Noir, Russian River Valley (\$85)**

This wine comes from Rochioli's so-called "old river block," which encompasses a few standout blocks on the property, including three planted in 1974, 1995, and 2000. They're set right next to the river on the east side of Westside Road, just 5 miles from Gary Farrell's winery. Planted to the Pommard clone,

the relatively shallow soils here are from the Yellow series, with gravelly loam and riverbed deposits that make dry farming a challenge.

On the nose, this wine displays darker fruit notes with hints of anise or fennel lingering in the background. On the palate, it's bright but plummy, with nice acidity and notes of ripe red fruit and blood orange as well as hints of tobacco, cedar, and black tea. It displays the classic Rochioli Pinot Noir characteristics: richness and lushness with structure and well-balanced tannins.

### **Domaine de la Rivière 2019 Heritage Block Pinot Noir, Russian River Valley (\$90)**

Domaine de la Rivière has been growing grapes in the RRV since 2011 and started making its own wines in 2017. With an annual production of just 1,000 cases as of 2022, it's one of the smallest wineries in the RRV.

The estate-grown Pommard clone grapes for its Pinot Noir come from Heritage Block Vineyard II, situated east of Eastside Road in Middle Reach. This site is warmer than both the Flax Estate and Rochioli vineyards mentioned above. The grapes here ripen earlier than most of the fruit in Middle Reach and are typically harvested in late August.

This wine is more savory and earthy than floral and fruity. The nose shows forest floor and cedar; on the palate, there's dried red fruit such as raspberry and strawberry along with spiced notes. The acidity is balanced, the body is medium-light, and the finish is long and smooth.





# Deconstructing Aged Amarone

A VERTICAL TASTING OF **BERTANI** REVEALS HOW THE EXPRESSION OF TERROIR EVOLVES WITH AGING

**IN PREPARATION FOR** a vertical tasting of older vintages of Bertani Amarone della Valpolicella Classico presented by Bertani COO Andrea Lonardi last November, I revisited my notes for several of the wines, which I'd also tasted in a vertical flight in 2018. Upon sampling them again, I was struck by their subtle evolution after an additional five years of bottle age; many of them seemed to have barely budged in terms of development, with the exception of a few very particular compounds.

Bertani Amarone, which ages for seven years prior to release, was characterized by Lonardi as having three stages. At seven to ten years old, it shows primarily cherry, plum, and orange; at ten to 20 years, it reveals sour cherry, chocolate, and fig; after 15 years of bottle age, it's dominated by tertiary flavors of tobacco, truffle, and earth. The vintages I tasted in 2018 ('67, '75, '81, '98, '05, and '08) and the ones I tried recently ('67, '75, '87, '98, '00, '05, '11, and '12) showed those characteristics and much more.

For Lonardi, the drying process known as appassimento that's used to make Amarone produces wines that are expressive of terroir. Researchers studying the compounds found in Corvina—the indigenous grape that is the foundation of the wine's blend—agree. Typical markers for Corvina include balsamic and tobacco notes that increase during appassimento, and the presence of these markers in aged wines points to specific vintage conditions.

Tabanones, compounds that contribute tobacco notes, are directly derived from the grape and are generally increased by oak aging. There's a direct connection between levels of tabanones and vintage conditions; vines that have been subject to severe water stress in warm weather produce wines with higher levels of taba-

nones after several years of bottle aging. These compounds can also be used as markers to identify vineyards that have a greater capacity to produce wines with tobacco aromas. I found tobacco notes to be

PHOTO COURTESY OF BERTANI



◀ Bertani COO Andrea Lonardi brought an eight-wine vertical to San Francisco's One Market Restaurant last November.




PHOTO: DEBORAH PARKER WONG

more apparent in Bertani Amarones from warmer vintages.

Cineol, a eucalyptus note; p-cymene, which is minty; and the elusive vitispirane, with its camphoraceous aromas and earthy-woody undertones, all help to form the balsamic character of aged Corvina wines. They are generated from precursors that unlock over time, and they accumulate progressively as the wine ages. In the 1975 Bertani—a wine that shows orange zest, star anise, and bittersweet chocolate—they present as beautiful herbal notes reminiscent of Ricola lozenges.

Lonardi's first vintage at Bertani was 2012, which was warm, with low rainfall. From that vintage onward, he re-

vealed, he has eschewed malolactic conversion. Given his penchant for freshness in Amarone, which he describes as a "nervous profile," this shouldn't come as a surprise, but it's a rare exception in red winemaking—one that is clearly working in his favor. The 2012 Bertani is characterized by its purity of red fruit, savory resinous herbs, complex bitterness, and characteristic freshness.

Bertani is not resting on its laurels. In 2023, Lonardi will introduce a new line of Valpolicella wines that he referred to as "an evolution of style," one that captures the region's earlier, warmer harvests, made from grapes that are crushed after just 60 days of drying. 



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More info: [www.pagosdelrey.com](http://www.pagosdelrey.com)





*Christian Moueix is the president of Bordeaux wine merchant and producer Établissements Jean-Pierre Moueix as well as the owner of Napa Valley's Dominus Estate and Ulysses Vineyard.*

# A MAN OF THE *earth*

**CHRISTIAN MOUEIX** ON  
BORDEAUX, NAPA, AND 50-PLUS  
YEARS IN THE WINE BUSINESS

story by Ruth Tobias / photos by Rebecca Peplinski





## Few figures in the wine

industry may be more deserving of the label “icon” than Christian Moueix. Few would also be as likely to reject it. Nothing if not graciously humble as the president of venerable Bordeaux wine merchant and producer Établissements Jean-Pierre Moueix as well as the owner of Napa Valley’s prized Dominus Estate and Ulysses Vineyard, Moueix prefers to refer to himself as “a man of the earth”—and he proved as much during “A Master Class Featuring the Wines of Dominus Estate and Ets. JP Moueix,” held on October 25 of last year at the Southern Glazer’s Wine & Spirits Hospitality Center in Chicago, Illinois. Walking the audience through a tasting of nine wines, he spoke passionately to his belief that—as he put it to me in a follow-up interview—“terroir cannot fool people, you see. The only certitude is terroir.”

It’s a view he comes by honestly, given that Établissements Jean-Pierre Moueix was built literally from the ground up. As he explained, “I am from a farming family in Libourne; my father was from a very poor family of farmers. . . . The *ix* [in Moueix] comes from the old French, ‘coming from’; *moueix* means ‘coming from the moue,’ and in the central part of France, the moue is kind of a slum, so very poor.” What Jean-Pierre did have,

however, was gumption and foresight; establishing himself as a merchant in 1937, he began to sell the wines of Saint-Émilion and Pomerol and eventually to purchase properties in the postwar era, when their owners “were losing money year after year after year,” Moueix pointed out. “Sometimes I had a difficult time to understand why, without any fortune but a lot of talent, how could he get such châteaux in the ‘50s, and my father always told me, ‘But *mon petit*, [they were] worth nothing at the time!’ An acre today in Pomerol is worth something like \$5 million. . . . It’s crazy.”

Moueix joined the company after studying viticulture first in Paris and then at the University of California, Davis, where “I had a great time . . . such a good time that my father brought me back in 1970; he said, ‘Enough. Please come back to manage the family vineyards.’” Fifty years on, Moueix remains a student of the land, which he endeavors to know “square foot by square foot.”

## SAINT-ÉMILION

The tasting began with two wines from Saint-Émilion, which at 12,000 acres is big enough to contain “soils that vary a lot,” said Moueix, breaking down their influence on the wines’ character: “I would say from gravel, it’s ripeness; from lime, it’s viv-

idness; from clay, it’s heaviness; and from sand, it’s lightness.” In the case of Château Puy-Blanquet, which he called “a gentle chateau of 50 acres on the east side of Saint-Émilion, the wines are known to be a bit more rustic—vivid, with a lot of character. Maybe not always with as much refinement as we’d like, but they are not as expensive of course, and usually they are good values.”

Evaluating the color of the 2018 we sampled, he noted amusingly that “for me the first quality of a red wine is to be red, [as compared to years ago] where the first quality of a wine was to be black. And that was very troubling. . . . I’ve never been in favor of inky wines because I don’t drink ink.” Inky the Puy-Blanquet wasn’t, showing instead “pure red fruits,” including red currant, along with “that vividness. Some people would say it’s slightly acid, which is true, but it’s very typical of this part of Saint-Émilion,” Moueix added.

Perhaps more important, it represented what he called “one of the greatest vintages ever for Bordeaux” based on the “total amount of sun,” an advantage shared by the 2019 and 2020 vintages; for Moueix, it’s an indication that, “surprisingly, global warming is very favorable for Bordeaux,” at least in some respects.

The Clos St. Martin we tasted, by contrast, came from 2017, when “there was



a slight lack of sun. . . . Some of the wines did not reach full ripeness." If that wasn't the case at this 4-acre estate (which, due to its small size, is classified as "a Grand Cru when it deserves by its quality to be a Premier Grand Cru"), it was perhaps thanks to Clos St. Martin consulting winemaker Michel Moueix, a "good friend" whose approach, Moueix admitted, "has always been a slight overripeness, which was not my approach." That's because, in his view, "The problem of overripeness is that you lack precision. . . . Precision is the word of Bordeaux. [Based on] the evolution I have seen in the vineyards over more than 50 years, it's true that we are much more precise."

It's partly a matter of picking at the right time: "If I really think about it, probably I think maybe one-third of the time [I've picked] on the [right] day, one-third of the time a little too early, one-third of the time a little too late—that's life," he said. It's also a matter of proper crop thinning, a practice that Moueix himself pioneered at Pétrus in 1973 to much crit-

icism by everyone from his family to "the priest in Saint-Émilion, who condemned me" in public, but that today is standard and "very precise—we crop thin two or three times for the same vines. We can almost decide the perfect yield depending on the weather conditions over the summer," he explained. Granted, as those conditions heat up due to global warming, he added, "We [also] have to really consider our way of trimming the vines so that our clusters get as little direct light from the sun. . . . We are adapting slowly but surely our vineyards to global warming."

## POMEROL

Whether that will entail the planting of nontraditional varieties remains to be seen, but Moueix is a firm believer that Merlot—as the main variety on the Right Bank—is, in his words, "smart enough to adapt. . . . The problem with Merlot is it's a very generous varietal which sometimes gives big yields [that are] difficult to control, and the wines can be on the lighter side in terms of tannins. [But] if Merlot

is perfectly ripe, it's a beautiful varietal." Walking us through the region's other key grapes, he described Cabernet Franc as "a very delicate varietal. Why? Because it needs perfect ripeness, perfect equilibrium. . . . If you don't reach full ripeness, then it's very herbal; you get the taste of cold tea." As for Cabernet Sauvignon, it's "perfectly adapted to global warming. The problem with Cabernet Sauvignon in Bordeaux is it needs a lot of time to mature, and if nowadays people are drinking wines younger and younger, Merlot has a big advantage."

Then there's Malbec, for which Moueix confessed a personal distaste—"I cannot even swallow a Malbec," he said to laughter from the audience—and finally Petit Verdot, which "brings an exotic character and a spiciness [that] a perfect wine does not need, but very rarely we are perfect." He compared it to a "good amount of pepper" on a steak: "It enhances the taste. The danger with Petit Verdot [is that] if you go above 5%, you lose all finesse." Still, he predicts that it has a future in



Area sales representatives and buyers attended "A Master Class Featuring the Wines of Dominus Estate and Ets. JP Moueix" last October at the Southern Glazer's Wine & Spirits Hospitality Center in Chicago, IL.





*A packed house at the Southern Glazer's Wine & Spirits Hospitality Center.*

Pomerol as well as in Napa Valley; in fact, he recalled, "About ten years ago, there was a meeting of growers of Pomerol [to discuss] how we could adapt to global warming. [One gentleman] stood up and said, 'I have an idea: We should popularize Syrah in Pomerol.' Usually I'm very discreet . . . but I stood up and I said, 'As long as I am in Pomerol, there will be no Syrah in Pomerol. . . . Are you crazy? We have the best terroir in the world probably for Merlot and you want to plant Syrah.'" Instead, he suggested planting more Petit Verdot. "We changed the rules of the appellation; we added Petit Verdot instead of Syrah, which I think was a good move," Moueix said.

Speaking of changes in Pomerol, it's hard to imagine today, but there was a time when the tiny, 2,000-acre appellation "was not very popular because the wines . . . are naturally charming in their youth; they are very approachable," noted Moueix. "And when the market was driven by English writers—that was in my youth—they loved

the wines of Bordeaux to be old, [and] they thought that the wines with higher acidity had better potential for aging. It's not true." He credited Robert Parker for its reevaluation beginning with the "obviously great" 1982 vintage: "For the Americans, discovering Pomerol was easy. It's a soft approach, so you don't need to be a wine aficionado to understand Pomerol—it's so naturally pleasant."

That was certainly true of the 2014 vintage we tasted from Château de Sales, Pomerol's largest estate and one of its oldest, having been established in the 17th century; that said, Moueix again singled out the 2018 as his recent favorite from the property, noting that a light spring frost like the one it received that year "can be positive in the sense that the weaker terroir of the château will be the most damaged . . . and the final blend will be only for the best blocks. It's unfair to say that, but frost can be selective." We also tasted the 2015 Château Bourgneuf, which he called "a beautiful [place of] clay soil with some gravel—a lot of clay, which

means that especially in dry vintages Bourgneuf makes a beautiful wine that I would set above its rank" insofar as clay retains moisture: "It's a serious wine—very fruity, very round. It's very typical of Pomerol [and] will improve with age. The tannins at the end are still rough."

Then there was the 2011 Château Certan de May, a property that today, with a recent change in management, "has the potential to be in the top ten châteaux, maybe in the top five, of Pomerol," Moueix asserted. He had even higher praise for Château Hosanna, which he purchased in 1999 with the goal "to produce a feminine version of Pétrus"; his first order of business was to dig wells to aid drainage on the plateau, though, he admitted, "Of course now I am criticized because that drainage which was very useful in the days when we got rainy summers is negative now that we have droughts." We tasted the 2008, in his view "a very sensual wine" with hints of chocolate derived from Cabernet Franc: "It goes between violet, which we find in





*Cyprien Roy, communications manager for importer Maisons Marques & Domaines USA, pours for guests.*



*Guests tasted through nine wines from Saint-Émilion, Pomerol, and Napa Valley.*

top Pomerols; slight truffle if it is overripe; and then that chocolate character.”

This led to a discussion on evolution in technique. “‘Gentleness’ is a word we use in winemaking in recent years—I love the word,” he said, whereas “the word ‘extraction’ was, in the ‘90s, the word for winemaking. I find extraction very painful myself—it reminds me of teeth.” Where once his team did one-hour pumpovers twice daily, he continued, “We have moved this year, the 2022 vintage, [to where] ... every other day we pump one minute in the morning, one minute

in the evening. So that’s what I call a very gentle technical approach. Our wines are so much softer; so much more approachable in their youth. ... I do drink young [Bordeaux] today because they are softer than they used to be.”

### **Napa Valley**

After years spent in the 1970s looking for a vineyard to purchase on the West Coast of the U.S.—“from San Diego to Yakima”—and coming up empty-handed, Moueix received a call from Margaret Mondavi in 1981 about a property in

Yountville. “I got on a plane the next day, and that’s how I visited Napanook on a rainy day of ‘81,” he recalled. “And as soon as I arrived ... I had such a deep feeling for that terroir that I met the owners and made a joint venture which created Dominus. ... It has been a love story with the vineyard.” Nevertheless, he had three stipulations for his then-partners (whom he bought out in the mid-1990s): “I said I need 20 years to produce a good wine. ... I will produce a wine without irrigation and I will produce a wine without acidification,” he said.

Aside from being “nicely surprised that it [only] took me ten years” to make a wine up to his standards, he has abided by those terms for both the Cabernet Sauvignon–dominant Dominus and Napanook labels, aided in his nonirrigation efforts by natural springs flowing from the Mayacamas. As he explained, “Dry farming is essential to my philosophy—I will not produce a wine which has not been dry farmed. Why? Because if you want to taste the terroir, you need your roots to go deep” in search of water. That said, he did have to install sprinklers in summer 2022 to create a mist on the top blocks of Dominus, so that “instead of reaching 118 [degrees], we were 107, 108. And that makes a huge difference, so I hope that those blocks ... will still produce a good wine in ‘22, when sadly, the blocks which were not protected, I don’t think will produce a good quality.”

While he considers the 2013 to be the best vintage of Dominus to date, he tasted the 2019—a rainy year whose results he described as “not that far from the Bordeaux in terms of style,” with “more red fruit than black fruit, which is very rare in Napa Valley”—and the 2006, which “for me was very difficult. ... I thought [the wine] was a little on the lighter side, and I was concerned by that, and at the very last minute before bottling ... I decided to add two barrels of pressed wine to structure the wine. Did I make a mistake or not? I don’t have the answer yet. ... It would have been probably a little more friendly [without it].” Ultimately, he said—humble to the end—“I still have room for improvement.”

Master class attendees may have begged to differ. For Ron Dufek, sales representative for the Signature Division of Southern Glazer’s Wine & Spirits of



Illinois, the Château de Sales stood out as “a perfect expression of his passion—it’s sublime”; his colleague Danny Mekstan, meanwhile, favored the Certan de May—“I got that signature Pomerol minty, herbal note to it that I just love”—while enthusing that “it was wonderful to see [Moueix’s] decades and decades of experience not only in Bordeaux but in Napa as well.” Alicia Barrett, wine educator at Binny’s Beverage Depot, concurred: “His perspective on the evolution in viticulture, his candid evaluation of his wines, and his overall patience and methodical approach to crafting precise and balanced wines were refreshing and insightful. Spending two hours with Christian Moueix was a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity.”

On that no doubt everyone could agree—including the guests of the wine dinner held in Moueix’s honor that night at The Alinea Group’s Next restaurant, where five courses were paired with six vintages of Dominus Estate as well as the 2018 Napanook we’d also enjoyed at the master class. Well accompanied by smoked-ricotta gnudi with roast leg of lamb in a caramelized onion broth, the latter, Moueix explained, is “slightly lighter than Dominus [and] most approachable in its youth. [It’s a wine] which most people can afford; it does not have the complexity of Dominus, but it gives pleasure.”

As he talked us through each of the wines—among them the 2008 (“quite charming, very French in the approach”) and the 2012 (“more typical of Napa: more tannic, higher acidity”)—he returned to the subject of climate change, calling it “a very risky situation” for Napa Valley. “In 2022, there were five days over 110 [degrees]... What can we do? Maybe pray[ing] would be a good solution.” On the bright side, he reiterated his earlier claim that it was a spectacular year for Bordeaux thanks to “an unbelievable amount of sun... Honestly, the only problem [is] it will be too expensive” due to low yields. Through it all, facing challenges with equanimity seems to be his lifelong MO: As he put it, “We are always looking for perfection and it does not exist on earth, at least.” That may be, but Moueix—who Alinea Group director of development Gary Obligacion later called “one of the nicest people in the industry [whose] sheer depth of knowledge... is just amazing”—comes close. ■

## Christian Moueix on Dominus Estate

It was really love at first sight—unbelievable. I remember the day in ’81 [I first visited Napanook]; I was with one of our trainees in France, Dan Baron, who became manager of Silver Oak later on when he left me in ’94... It was a very rainy day, and we entered that vineyard on a Sunday because I wanted to see the vineyard before meeting the owner. If I did not like the vineyard, I would not even have pursued the negotiation. And I told Daniel, “Daniel, do you have a feeling?” He said, “Well, we are soaked.” We were soaked; it was raining so much. I said “No, no, I don’t mean being soaked—I mean, you don’t get the feeling?” I said, “Daniel, you and me, one day, we are going to produce one of the best wines of California.” I had that feeling. It’s a vineyard which has a soul. First, I always like things which are centered. Aristotle said *In medio stat virtus*—the virtue stays always in the center. And of course it’s in the center of Napa Valley, which means it’s not too cold... and not too hot. Many, many times I have seen the fog coming up from the bay, stopping just at what is called Yountville Hill, so that... the temperature is usually reasonable, let’s put it that way. That’s one feeling. Then I love the slope. Some people say Dominus is valley floor. No, it’s not valley floor; the slope is 3–10%, 10% on the upper part, which is not nothing. I bike a lot, and I can tell you 10% is serious. So really the definition is foothill. I would never have purchased a vineyard on the valley floor; I’m not interested... [What’s more,] at that time, I didn’t know there would be beautiful springs coming down from the Mayacamas...

So I bought that vineyard, love at first sight—first I loved the name, Napanook, “the little corner of Napa,” even if there are meanings of “nook” which I didn’t know at the time—and the fact of [its] being part of Inglenook for me was fantastic, because when I was a student at UC Davis and a trainee at BV [Beaulieu Vineyards] in ’68, there were only two well-known vineyards in the Valley: It was clear it was BV and Inglenook, you see. So it was really historical. And for a young man like me in ’81 having access to an historical vineyard, it was unbelievable. In France it would have been understandable; in California it was a miracle.

It sounds so pretentious [that I thought I’d make a great wine,] but I had that feeling and that hope. And besides, even if it sounds pretentious, you need a little bit of hope, otherwise why would I [bother]... That’s why I did it as a personal venture. Because of my family’s reputation and especially my father’s reputation at the time... I didn’t want to have a big failure for our company.

[At first,] it was very slow moving; we had no winery, it was very difficult, [and] I could’ve given up. I almost gave up on a few occasions... Don’t forget, in the meantime, my father was getting quite old [and] I had to run the French company. But I have to pay credit to my father, who was a very, very smart man; he was always supportive, [though] I will not even say that he loved the wine—I showed him [only] once the wine, because you never serve Napa in Bordeaux. Many of my friends were [also] reluctant: “Christian, why do you sell your secrets to California?” I said, “There are no secrets; the terroir is not the same”—people were not as open-minded 40 years ago as they are today. So those early years were not as easy at all. But I kept moving slowly but surely, and today I have no regrets.



Christian Moueix holds forth.





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

# Become a Sustainability Ambassador

TAKE A FREE CERTIFICATE COURSE ON SUSTAINABLE WINEGROWING

## CALIFORNIA IS AN INDUSTRY LEADER

not only in sustainable vineyard and winery practices and certification but also in sustainable winegrowing education. In December 2022, Wine Institute and the California Sustainable Winegrowing Alliance (CSWA) enhanced and relaunched the California Sustainable Winegrowing Ambassador Course, a popular online educational program that, since 2015, has certified more than 4,000 wine professionals from over 120 countries.



IMAGES COURTESY OF WINE INSTITUTE

A wine shopper looks for the Certified California Sustainable Winegrowing program logo.

## About the Course

The free one-hour course explores all areas of sustainable winegrowing and wine-making and helps wine professionals—be they sommeliers, retailers, restaurateurs, distributors, journalists, salespeople, marketers, or public-relations specialists—develop and test their understanding of California growers' and producers' sustainability efforts.

The course, accessible at *ambassador.discovercaliforniawines.com*, now covers five chapters: California Wine and Sustainability, Sustainable Winegrowing, Sustainable Viticulture, Sustainable Winemaking, and Employees and Communities; additional updated content includes videos and a section focused on the intersection between sustainability and climate action. What's more, the program has been redeveloped on a sophisticated educational platform that makes for a more user-friendly experience.


## Addressing Market Interest

This course is especially timely given the strong trade and consumer interest in sustainably produced wine in the global marketplace. In a 2021 trade survey conducted by Full Glass Research, 79% of U.S. respondents (including retailers, restaurateurs, and distributors) said they considered sustainability when making purchasing decisions; 61% of respondents indicated that, all things being equal, they would purchase a sustainably produced wine over one that is not. While 78% believed that the demand for sustainably produced products had increased over the past five to ten years, 67% thought it would increase in the next five to ten years.

On the consumer side, a 2020 survey conducted by Wine Intelligence found that 71% of U.S. wine drinkers would consider buying sustainably produced wine in the future and that younger consumers, namely millennials and Gen Z

drinkers of age, are particularly invested in sustainability, holding a strong affinity for sustainable wine certifications. (A 2019 survey by Wine Intelligence found similar results in key international markets.)

## The Takeaways

California Sustainable Winegrowing Ambassador Course participants will deepen their understanding of sustainable practices used in California vineyards and wineries. They will also be able to confidently communicate with consumers, media, and other key members of the wine trade on the topic of sustainability. While knowledge is the ultimate prize, those who successfully complete the final exam receive a personalized certificate of completion, deeming them a California Sustainable Winegrowing Ambassador. Perhaps more importantly, they join forces with the thousands of growers and producers that are part of an important movement toward a sustainable future that includes a healthier environment, stronger communities, vibrant businesses, and, of course, quality wine for generations to come. 

*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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# A Quick Study

SOMMELIER LENKA DAVIS CHANNELS HER MASTER OF WINE TRAINING IN HER APPROACH TO SERVICE

by Emily Johnston Collins

**WHEN LENKA DAVIS** moved to the United States from her native Slovakia as a young professional, working in the wine industry wasn't her plan: She was pursuing a career in journalism and writing for a Slovakian weekly news publication. Wine piqued her interest following a move to California, where she went in search of nature that reminded her of her home country. Now, as the wine director for both Santa Barbara restaurant Barbareño and Good Lion Hospitality on the Central Coast as well as a sommelier at the three-Michelin-starred SingleThread Farm-Restaurant-Inn in Healdsburg, she shoulders the responsibility of selecting wines with care for the environment and the guest.

Davis and I bond over a common thirst for wine knowledge. While many sommeliers are likely to pursue the service-oriented Master Sommelier

title (myself included), she is a candidate in the more academic Master of Wine (MW) program. Her study group includes wine writers, retail shop owners, and bottle-closure sales representatives. The collective knowledge and varied perspectives among MWs are such, she asserts, that dissertations on every wine question we ponder have already been written. But at its core, wine is a tangible thing, not a theory, and Davis felt she had something to learn from making it. In 2022, she landed a harvest position with one of the University of California, Davis-trained winemakers she most wanted to shadow: natural-wine hero Martha Stoumen.

Davis exudes excitement over her winemaking experience, so I asked her if she is considering a career in it. She assured me otherwise: She enjoys interacting with guests and telling the stories of

the many producers she features. Her MW studies help her uphold her service standards given that providing accurate information when talking to guests is of chief importance to her. She reminded me that sommeliers are "often [guests'] first contact with the wine world"; what we say shapes their comprehension of wine. Her purchasing standards also reflect the curriculum of her MW program. She called wine buyers the "last gatekeepers for wines that could cause harm," whether they result from vineyard practices that lead to the erosion of precious topsoil or contain additives that aren't disclosed on the label.

Lenka's scholarly approach enhances her charm on the restaurant floor. While she selects the perfect wine for any given occasion, her aim to cause no undue harm to her guests' health or pocket-books makes for authentic service. **SJ**





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# TIKTOK

## on the Clock

FOR **BELLE GLOS WINEMAKER JOE WAGNER**, THE POPULAR SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORM IS A NEW FRONTIER PRIMED FOR INDUSTRY-WIDE EXPLORATION

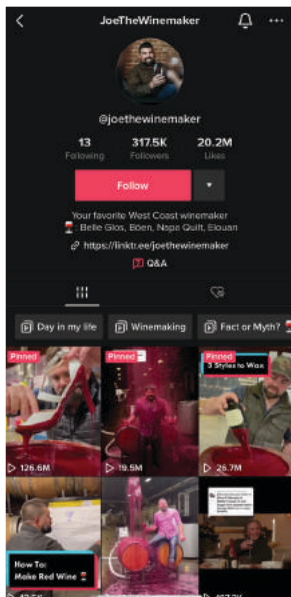
by Kate Newton

**WHILE JOE WAGNER** can no longer count on the relative anonymity he enjoyed as the Napa Valley–based creator of such popular brands as Belle Glos and Quilt thanks to an unexpected development in his 20-year career, it's a small price to pay for the benefits his company, Copper Cane Wines & Provisions, has undeniably reaped.

That unexpected development is his adoption of TikTok, where his account *@joethewinemaker* has accrued nearly 318,000 followers and more than 275 million views since his first post in September 2021. The benefits, meanwhile, have included not only the free exposure to a global audience of a billion active users but the perspective the platform has lent in terms of its potential to serve as both an educational resource and an engine of growth for wine, especially as the industry weathers the challenges of stagnation and increased competition from burgeoning segments like ready-to-drink cocktails and no-/low-alcohol beverages. “Being able to teach people how to drink responsibly and appreciate wine as part of culture, that’s something we need to be doing with the next generation,” Wagner says. “Wine is so much more than just a buzz.”

From Wagner’s view, the popularity of his videos demonstrates just how few winemakers on TikTok are “making an impact with current and future consumers” while walking the fine line between informative content and mere entertainment. “Once we realized we had an opportunity with TikTok, we started leaning in more and really had more fun

PHOTO COURTESY OF TIKTOK



*A glimpse of Joe Wagner’s TikTok profile, which as of press time had nearly 318,000 followers and more than 275 million views.*



PHOTO COURTESY OF COPPER CANE WINES & PROVISIONS

*Copper Cane Wines & Provisions owner/winemaker Joe Wagner’s various experiments with Belle Glos’ wax packaging are among his most popular videos on TikTok.*





*Joe Wagner makes sure to balance his profile's educational content with clips meant purely to entertain; this one of him being drenched head to toe in wine has garnered nearly 20 million views.*

to my dad [Caymus Vineyards founder Chuck Wagner] about it [and told him], 'If you ever see anything that really embarrasses you, just let me know.' He's reached out to me a few times on that," Wagner jokes.

His ability to embody that winemaker-next-door persona in front of the camera hardly came naturally at first, but Wagner credits the shift to the livestreams, webinars, and other online operations he led during the pandemic for helping him quickly find his footing—not to mention his

voice. "Sabina [Morgenlaender, Copper Cane's social media director,] was already on board and was bringing up new ideas, and I felt like, OK, I'll go ahead and give it a shot and put myself out there. . . . It used to be that I would go into the market and [have] more one-on-one interaction or do seminars, and I'm still doing that stuff, but the audience we can reach with these platforms is huge; it's almost limitless," Wagner says, adding, "I think that having that personalized connection or knowing that there's somebody behind a brand is so valuable to this next generation that I hope people start to really expose themselves as being the people behind the brands. Because we all want to hear from them—we want to hear their stories."

Equally essential to him finding success on the platform were the efforts of Morgenlaender and social media associate Chris Rubio, who work closely with him to brainstorm ideas and plan everything that will be needed for each post so that the shooting process is as seamless as possible. "It really does come down to having a good team, someone who's paying attention to what the trends are and the algorithms and being responsive [to commenters] as well," Wagner says. Morgen-

laender likewise stresses the importance of continuously engaging with viewers on the platform, noting that by "let[ting] our audience tell us what they want to see," they're strengthening a relationship that directly translates to increased sales and word-of-mouth awareness: "Our comments have shifted to users sharing that they just picked up their first bottle, [and] our sales team will share stories of accounts asking for Belle Glos after seeing it on TikTok. For me, nothing beats these moments."

In 2023, the team hopes not only to collaborate more with other brands and TikTok personalities but to shine more of a spotlight on Copper Cane's new collection of spirits as well as its wine portfolio beyond Belle Glos; more longform videos highlighting the harvest process from beginning to end and podcasts are also in the works. "From my point of view, I feel like we haven't even reached the surface on education and what we can share about winemaking behind the scenes," Morgenlaender says. "Yes, we have [over] 300,000 followers, but that's really nothing compared to the amount of users that are on the platform. There's so much more we can share."

And if they inspire more wine professionals and producers to try their hand at harnessing the power of TikTok, all the better: "It's such a huge marketing tool that I think a lot of brands are overlooking. We've had millions and millions of views, and we've spent zero dollars—it's basically a no-risk platform," Morgenlaender adds. "People are there, and you have to go where people are." ❧

## TASTING NOTE

**Belle Glos 2021 Clark & Telephone Pinot Noir, Santa Maria Valley, Santa Barbara County (\$55)**

Succulent notes of deep-dish cherry pie lead to a silky mouthfeel. A graceful dollop of mocha atop cinnamon and boysenberry lends weight to the palate. Elegant, with mineral-tinged earth and an exotically spiced finish. **95**

—Meridith May

COPPER CANE WINES & PROVISIONS







Hosting the Maze Row Wine Merchant tasting at Fotografiska in New York, NY, were portfolio producers and winemakers alongside representatives from the company. Pictured from left to right are Pietro Ratti, Carlotta Allegrini, Andrea Pieropan, Felix Jermann, Barbara Widmer, Joseph C. Gallo, Giovanni Nencini, and Giuseppe Tornatore.

# A Shared Adventure

## MAZE ROW WINE MERCHANT HOSTS A FESTIVE AND IMPACTFUL TASTING AT FOTOGRAFISKA IN NEW YORK CITY

by Stefanie Schwalb

**ACCORDING TO MAZE ROW WINE** Merchant's website, "In wine, we find life." Nowhere was that more apparent than at the tasting the U.S. importer/exporter hosted late last October at The Loft at Fotografiska in New York City's Flatiron District. The company, which is led by Joseph C. Gallo, held the event to showcase a portfolio that includes producers from Piedmont, Tuscany, the Veneto, Friuli-Venezia Giulia, Sicily, and California's Central Coast.

With magnums stationed at tables across the room and bottles lining the bar, there were plenty of enticing options to discover. Among the magnums, attendees enjoyed sips of Allegrini 2012 La Grola; Argiano 2015 Brunello; Brancaia 2018 Il Blu; Jermann 2017 Vintage Tunina, 2017 Dreams, and 2019 Dreams;

Pieropan 2020 Soave La Rocca; Renato Ratti 2018 Marcanasco; The Language of Yes 2020 Grenache; and Tornatore 2017 Etna Rosso Trimarchisa. At the bar, they were treated to samples of Allegrini 2018 Amarone; Argiano 2018 Solengo; Brancaia 2017 Iltraia; Pieropan 2020 Soave Calvarino; Poggio al Tesoro 2018 Sondaia; Renato Ratti 2018 Barolo Rocche; The Language of Yes 2021 Syrah; and Tornatore 2021 Etna Bianco. The vibe was upbeat thanks to a playlist curated for the night by Audio Culture's Charlie Reyes, who is well known in the hospitality world for selecting the music at such New York hot spots as Charlie Bird and Pasquale Jones. Representatives from each winery were on hand to handle the pours, provide insights on the wines, and answer any questions guests might have.



Andrea Pieropan pours a sample of the Pieropan 2020 Soave La Rocca for one of many attendees eager to try his wine.

We caught up with a few of them to get their reactions to the big night.

Although Casa Brancaia owner/winemaker Barbara Widmer has traveled recently to Washington, D.C.; Chicago; Detroit; and Napa, the Maze Row event marked her first trip to New York since the pandemic began. For her, it was an im-

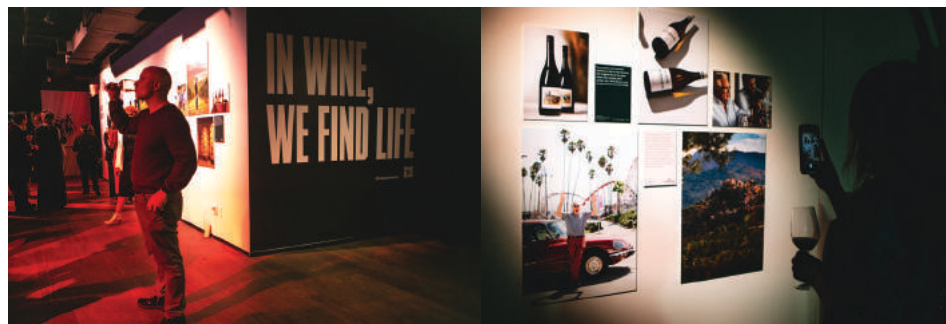


portant gathering to attend. "I believe that people generally need social contact, and this has been lacking in the last two years. On a personal level, it's simply great to travel again and meet people in real life," Widmer said. "As a winemaker, it's very important for me to be able to transmit the vision and character of Brancaia and to connect with the wine lover. To transmit emotions—as well as to create emotion—is enormously important for us, and this is certainly much easier and nicer when you meet physically."

As the proprietor of Allegrini, one of the first wineries to join the Maze Row portfolio, Carlotta Mastella Allegrini said she wouldn't have missed the event for anything. "To see this company grow with an array of like-minded, quality-focused producers has been a joy, and we were



**Felix Jermann of the Jermann estate toasts with Audio Culture's Charlie Reyes and his wingman DJ 1-DEUCE, who provided a curated playlist for the evening's festivities.**



**The Loft at Fotografiska was transformed into a sumptuous tasting space complete with mood lighting and the Maze Row Wine Merchant motto, "In Wine, We Find Life," displayed on the entryway wall.**

honored to celebrate this occasion together with our friends in [such a] wonderful space," she shared. "The food, atmosphere, and people who put this together all made for a lively evening, where wine was at the center of a wonderful community of passionate and fun-loving people." She added that as a seventh-generation winemaker, she feels a kinship with the Gallo family. "Although we may operate in different contexts and cultures, I know that they face some of the same challenges we do as a multi-generational, family-operated winery," she explains. "I am confident that we are aligned in leaving our wineries and the land we farm in an improved condition for the next generations. This is part of


**An attendee captures an image of excerpts from Maze Row Wine Merchant's new magazine, *Voices*, which seeks to explore the world of wine through different lenses. A complimentary copy was provided to all attendees.**

our heritage and our shared adventure moving forward."

Renato Ratti owner/winemaker Pietro Ratti concurred that it's always important for wine producers to attend importer events. "We are partners in a mutual project—we share ideas, plans, and intentions," he said. "When Maze Row proposed this new type of [tasting] presentation, I was thrilled to attend, because I knew it was going to be special. As it was!" According to Ratti, one of the benefits of working with Maze Row is that Joseph Gallo and his team always look ahead. "I was happy to share his vision from the first day I decided to join him," Ratti noted. "Maze Row is [something] that I'm sure will be successful because

of a great mix of skills and, most of all, a great mix of unique and talented people."

"I like the idea behind Maze Row," agreed Giuseppe Tornatore, head of family operations for Tornatore. "It's not just selling a bottle of wine, it's being part of an experience—a way of life. New customers want to embrace a lifestyle, and Maze Row is trying to share and communicate these new messages about the producers and our different terroir. They are the perfect courier." Tornatore also appreciated the unusual, trendy event venue. "The event reflected, in my opinion, the new world of wine customers," he said. "We appreciated it a lot, and everything was set up incredibly well."

Having worked in the U.S. market since 1971, agronomist Andrea Pieropan noted that it remains one of his family winery's priorities. In fact, the Pieropan team felt that it was so important for them to participate in this event that they traveled during harvesttime to be there—and the evening did not disappoint. "We experienced the feeling that we are in a strong team composed of high-profile wineries," Pieropan said. "This means a lot for us. In a period like the one we are living, creating strong connections is the base of long-established relationships. We joined this portfolio in 2015, and we think we've made a quantum leap. The U.S. market is always changing and gives lots of opportunities, so we are happy to seize them alongside such a well-organized company." 



# Burgundy Boom

CAVE DE LUGNY SEIZES A GOLDEN OPPORTUNITY  
TO OFFER REGIONAL VALUE TO THE U.S. MARKET

by Lars Leicht

*The Cave de Lugny cooperative of grower families is made up of more than 200 estates encompassing over 3,100 acres.*

**THESE DAYS**, finding true value in Burgundy might sound like mission impossible, but a historic Burgundian cooperative is offering up just that. While wines from Northern Burgundy, including the Côte d'Or, are reaching unprecedented price levels, many somms and buyers have turned their focus to Southern Burgundy and the wines of Mâcon.

Enter Cave de Lugny, which controls a third of production in the Mâconnais with unparalleled access to top-quality vineyards. It's been supplying wine to other prominent producers in Burgundy since its founding in 1926, and all that time, it has been growing and bottling village-level and single-vineyard Chardonnays under its own label on its estate. Now, it's catching the U.S. market's attention in a big way, especially considering that "a lot of Burgundy producers have abandoned the by-the-glass price point," notes Theo

Rutherford, senior manager of wine and spirits education at Cave de Lugny's importer, Deutsch Family Wine & Spirits. "There is nothing out there more accessible [than Cave de Lugny,] especially if you want to educate consumers on what terroir in Burgundy can actually mean. For under \$15 a glass you can taste two wines made the same way by the same producer from two vineyards 2 miles apart, with completely different soils. With little intervention or oak aging, these wines show ter-

roir in a way that few others do. [They're] a microcosm of Burgundy in general."

To be fair, climate change has proved beneficial in Southern Burgundy, where the quality of fruit has arguably never been better. But the particular advantages presented by Cave de Lugny, said Rutherford, have as much to do with sheer control over the land—the cooperative of grower families is made up of more than 200 estates encom-

passing over 3,100 acres—as they do with the steadfast maintenance of high production standards



PHOTOS COURTESY OF  
CAVE DE LUGNY

*Cave de Lugny is located in the Mâconnais in Southern Burgundy.*





PHOTO COURTESY OF DEUTSCH FAMILY WINE & SPIRITS



*Theo Rutherford is senior manager of wine and spirits education at Cave de Lugny importer Deutsch Family Wine & Spirits.*

and an ethical approach to craft.

Cave de Lugny was one of Burgundy's early adopters of sustainable winegrowing, implementing such practices as minimizing the use of pesticides and carefully managing its energy use and waste. While it's made up of many grower families who have been members for multiple generations, their membership can be revoked if they no longer meet its standards. At the same time, Cave de Lugny regularly welcomes new growers who are eager to embrace its environmentally friendly practices. The cooperative's winemaker and cellar master, Grégoire Pissot, consults directly for many members who make their own wine. He is also on the board of Vignerons Engagés, a group of growers dedicated to environmental and social responsibility in winegrowing.

Starting with the 2019 vintage, all of Cave de Lugny's still wines are vegan, as

the producer is fining them with a pea derivative rather than egg whites, isinglass, or bentonite. "With these wines you can really jump into the tradition, all those things that make French wines what they are," Rutherford says, "but at the same time they are not afraid to go out on a limb and experiment."

Rutherford partially credits the return to fashion of the bona fide wine bar in the U.S. for the resonance Cave de Lugny's unoaked Chardonnays are having in the stateside market: "We're seeing American consumers becoming more wine-curious," he said, and these wines satisfy those who can't decide whether they want a muscular Chardonnay or a zesty alternative to Sauvignon Blanc. "It has minerality and fruit for those who say they don't like oak-aged Chardonnay but body and character for those who seek fuller-bodied wines."

Though Cave de Lugny produces a broad range of wines in France, its current stateside offerings include just four still Chardonnays (see the sidebar for tasting notes). Rutherford is proud of the portfolio for what he calls its "equation of value with quality" and is eager to grow it in the United States for the same reason the brand is popular in its home country and beyond: "There is a sense of pride in being able to sell to the top names even after they take what they want for their own label," he says, "because it is all top quality." **SJ**

## Tasting Notes

### **Cave de Lugny 2020 Les Charmes Chardonnay, Mâcon-Lugny, Burgundy, France**

**(\$19)** Atop a mineral base, this old-vine Chardonnay explodes with juicy notes of vanilla custard, mango, lime sorbet, and white flowers. A honeyed, seductive texture and a yeasty finish add complexity. 19,547 cases imported. **93** —*Meridith May*

### **Cave de Lugny 2021 La Côte Blanche Unoaked Chardonnay, Mâcon-Villages, Burgundy, France**

**(\$15)** Aromas of lemon meringue lead to a succulent, juicy mouthfeel, while the steely midpalate lifts up melon, yellow apple, and gardenia. 6,215 cases imported. **93** —*M.M.*

### **Cave de Lugny 2018 Coeur de Charmes, Mâcon-Lugny, Burgundy, France**

**(\$28)** In this 100% Chardonnay from vines that average 40 years in age, aromas of passion fruit and creamed corn precede waves of seabed minerality, tropical flowers, and exotic fruit. Jasmine and pineapple nectar create an exceptional mouthfeel. Wet stone and dynamic acidity form a bridge to a poetic, lengthy finish. 114 cases imported. **94** —*M.M.*



{ regional spotlight }

# A Vinous

by Wanda Mann

## EL DORADO

EXPLORING THE WINES AND MAVERICK  
CULTURE OF **LANGUEDOC**

*A dramatic view of the Chapel of  
Corconne in Languedoc.*





*Author Wanda Mann discusses cultivation methods with Rémi Vandôme of Domaine de Trépaloup.*

Consider this a warning: A visit to Languedoc may cause you to rethink your choices in life. As I sat sipping a perfectly chilled al fresco glass of Picpoul de Pinet just steps from the Mediterranean Sea, I wondered why I didn't live in this sultry region, where I could bask in 320 days of sunshine a year. Popping corks on bottles of sparkling Blanquette de Limoux, I contemplated whether I could be as fearless as the expats and career changers I'd been meeting who had started new chapters in Languedoc as winemakers. While swirling red blends of Grenache, Syrah, and Mourvèdre from the Corbières AOP, I wished I spoke French.

I clearly have some soul-searching to do, but in the meantime, my journey to Languedoc has certainly bolstered my knowledge of this alluring and fast-growing area. Along with a lively group of wine professionals, I spent a glorious week in October 2022 exploring it during the invitation-only Languedoc Camp, hosted by Vins du Languedoc. We were indeed happy campers as we traipsed around

vineyards and cellars, tasting an impressive selection of wines that encapsulated the character of this creative, maverick, and somewhat underappreciated region.

Covering a vast swath of the south of France, the Languedoc AOP has more than 90,000 acres of vines spread across the coastal plains of the Mediterranean to the east; along the cool, windy Atlantic Corridor to the west; and in the hills and mountains to the north. While it has long been known for its prolific production of bulk wine, it is now garnering attention for terroir-driven wines that express its geological and climatic diversity.

Indeed, producing some 140 million bottles per year in various styles from 26 grape varieties, the region is hardly a monolith. The Languedoc AOP is divided into 23 sub-appellations that produce red, white, rosé, sparkling, and sweet wines. (Red wines account for 59% of its production, rosés for 20%, and whites for 21%.) In the Mediterranean coastal plains, indigenous grapes like Piquepoul, Bourboulenc, Clairette, and Muscat thrive in sedimentary, limestone, and mineral-

rich clay and sandstone soils. In the west, an array of grape varieties grows in rocky sandstone and limestone, including Cabernet Franc, Cabernet Sauvignon, Côt (Malbec), Chenin Blanc, and Chardonnay; this area is also home to Mauzac, the foundation of the sparkling Blanquette de Limoux. In the higher elevations of the north, rich reds with tannic intensity such as Carignan, Grenache, Mourvèdre, and Syrah are cultivated in volcanic subsoils—*ruffe* (red sandstone), limestone, basalt terraces, and schist.

Languedoc's viticultural history spans 2,500 years; the Greeks first planted vines here in the fifth century. French wine educator Claire Henry, who led our guided tasting sessions, described the region as a land of "perpetual conquests" that's "constantly reinventing itself." It is also a land of firsts: For instance, France's first wine cooperative was formed here. Cooperatives remain a vital part of Languedoc's wine culture; today, 150 of them account for 70% of the region's production. And many people are surprised to learn that the world's first sparkling wine, created





in 1544, was Blanquette de Limoux, not Champagne. Languedoc is also a leader in organic viticulture, boasting 33% of France's and 10% of the world's organic vineyards. (An additional 27% of Languedoc's vineyard acreage is currently being converted to organic farming.)

It takes visionaries to undertake developments like these, and Languedoc is full of them: Henry described the region as "El Dorado for winegrowers" and a "hotbed for innovation." While the exorbitant price of land in regions like Burgundy makes it virtually impossible for aspiring winemakers to fund their dreams, Languedoc—nine of whose AOPs are under 20 years old—is still accessible to those willing to get their hands dirty. That includes former French Air Force pilot Alexandre Thouroude, who recently released the first vintage from his Clos des Ors winery, and Amsterdam native Lidewij van Wilgen, who owns Terre des Dames. As the latter explained, "People told me Languedoc was the new world of wine in France, and indeed, it's exactly here that I found ambitious winemakers from different horizons like myself. In the hills, nature is wild and preserved. My winery dates from the 18th century and still has its original structure of old plots

on different levels. After 20 years, I feel so connected that I know I will never leave this place."

Of course, Languedoc is also home to winemakers with deep roots in the region. Jean-Claude Mas of Les Domaines Paul Mas is a fourth-generation grape grower whose vineyards span more than 800 hectares. A visit to his Côte Mas estate is an immersion into what he calls *luxe rural*, or "everyday luxury": "Luxe rural sums up our culture and philosophy. With the greatest respect for our rural roots, we aim for perfection. Our wines are the result of our mission to inspire real emotions," he said.

In our tasting sessions, Henry encouraged us to approach Languedoc wines instinctively and focus on impressions and sensations instead of formal evaluations of tannins, acids, and pH. Close your eyes, take a sip, and perhaps that crisp, refreshing Picpoul de Pinet will conjure up images of a day at the beach or songs like Katrina and the Waves' "Walking on Sunshine" or the timeless Gershwin classic "Summertime." A complex and rich Languedoc red blend may convey the energy and complexity of a Jackson Pollock painting. Meanwhile, *garrigue* is a



Tasting through some AOP Languedoc wines.



*A sample of limestone and schist soils reveals the terroir of Languedoc.*




common descriptor for Languedoc wines. Referring to the low-lying scrub and herbal vegetation that grows in limestone and surrounds the coastal vineyards, it's composed of aromatic plants like thyme, rosemary, lavender, and juniper. Similarly, *maquis* describes the aromatic vegetation that grows in the region's schist soils, including sage, bay, lavender, and heather.

Are you wondering if Languedoc wines merit space on your wine list or shelf? Camp participant Abraham Zarate, a sommelier at New York City restaurant Contento, thinks so: "Our wine list focuses on highlighting people and regions that are making a positive impact socially and environmentally, and the Languedoc has no shortage of options," he said. "This is a region that has not enjoyed as much of the spotlight it deserves, so we do our part in sharing those stories. Languedoc wines are often referred to as lacking identity because of their experimental ways, but I think it can be constraining to base an entire region's identity on its relationship with a particular grape or one homogenous style. There is so much his-

tory and so many stories to dive into. For a long time, the region has been showing us its identity: rebellious. And for anyone who appreciates an element of surprise, look no further."

In addition to being a fan of Picpoul de Pinet, Zarate was pleasantly surprised by "the freshness of the rosés of Cabrières. These have a beautiful concentration of red fruits without sacrificing delicateness." California-based wine educator Jamie Knee was also impressed by the

wines she tasted during Languedoc Camp: "I'd definitely encourage people to try Languedoc wines for the sheer quality, value, and varieties the region offers," she said. "Although red wines reign supreme throughout the region, they make fabulous rosé and a crisp, fresh, and mineral-driven Picpoul de Pinet."

If you want to enhance your inventory with well-crafted, unconventional, and expressive wines, let your instincts lead you to Languedoc. 

## Twelve Languedoc Producers to Seek Out

### Abbaye de Valmagne

Founded in 1139, this Cistercian abbey is a historic monument with one of the oldest vineyards in Languedoc. [valmagne.com](http://valmagne.com)

### Château Saint Martin de la Garrigue

This 16th-century castle is surrounded by 170 acres of vineyards planted to 18 grape varieties. [stmartingarrigue.com](http://stmartingarrigue.com)

### Clos des Ors

Rising star Alexandre Thouroude is a former French Air Force pilot who released his first vintage in 2022. [clos-des-ors.fr](http://clos-des-ors.fr)

### Domaine de la Baume

Wine has been produced at this winery in the small village of Servian for more than a century. [domaine-labaume.com](http://domaine-labaume.com)

### Domaine Monplezy

The Sutra de Germa-Gil family has been cultivating the vines at Monplezy for four generations. [domainemonplezy.fr](http://domainemonplezy.fr)

### Domaine de Saumarez

This family-owned boutique winery was built from the ground up by Liz and Robin Williamson, who met at the coffee machine at work in London; they had their first harvest in 2004. [domainedesaumarez.com](http://domainedesaumarez.com)

### Domaine de Trépaloup

This estate makes organic wines from Sommières, Languedoc's newest and easternmost appellation. [domainetrepaloup.com](http://domainetrepaloup.com)

### Gerard Bertrand

A local icon, former rugby player Gerard Bertrand is strongly committed to biodynamic farming across 16 different estates, where he produces a wide range of wines. [gerard-bertrand.com](http://gerard-bertrand.com)

### Les Domaines Paul Mas

The portfolio of this producer, considered a pioneer of the "New Languedoc," includes wines from diverse subregions and soil types. [paulmas.com](http://paulmas.com)

### Mas Combarèla

Founded in 2016 by Olivier Faucon, this organic winery produces wines from native grapes in the Terrasses du Larzac AOP. [mas-combarela.com](http://mas-combarela.com)

### Mas du Novi

Wine has been produced at this hillside estate, surrounded by woods and scrubland, since the 11th century. [masdunovi.com](http://masdunovi.com)

### Terre des Dames

Vines as old as 100 years are surrounded by garrigue and ancient stone walls at this winery owned by Dutch expat Lidewij van Wilgen. [terredesdames.com](http://terredesdames.com)



{ cover story }

# a CRU

for all

*Crews*

HOW CHRIS  
RADOMSKI  
CONCEIVED  
A WINE  
BRAND WITH  
A LITTLE  
HELP FROM  
HIS FRIENDS

BY MICHELLE BALL



PHOTO: HAL WILLIAMS PHOTOGRAPHY INC.





*The crew behind As One Cru, from left to right: Eli Lippman, Russ Courtnall, Matt Zubrod, Michael Roche, Tom Ferry, and brand founder Chris Radomski.*

**IT ALL STARTED** in 2018 with the creation of a group text among friends that was labeled “The Crew.” Once the pandemic began and everyone was stuck at home, the all-too-familiar message thread about their domestic activities became “almost like a book club but [for] a bunch of buddies,” as Crew member Chris Radomski recalls it.

Meanwhile, the wines for Radomski’s next, as-yet-unnamed project had been soundly barreled away for years in Napa Valley. The industry veteran, whose resume includes the co-founding of one of the region’s most highly acclaimed wine labels as well as Duke Bourbon and La Adelita Tequila, explains that “my dream was always to build a multi-branded, synergistic wine and spirits company”; having learned early on in his career that quality and attention to detail were nonnegotiable keys to success, he had begun with the 2016 vintage to harvest and vinify fruit from two of his favorite vineyard sources in Napa Valley. Between the bottles’ long aging process and the stay-at-home orders, he had plenty of time to reflect on the circumstances that were affecting us all and on how supportive the Crew was through it.

As a key topic of theirs was food and wine, Radomski invited them to join him on the project. Yet the capital he hoped to raise wasn’t financial: He sought to combine the wealth of knowledge and talent possessed by his friends,



*Chris Radomski, left, with brand partner Matt Zubrod, culinary director of The Little Nell in Aspen, CO.*





Chris Radomski, left, and Matt Zubrod with Tommy Tolleson, manager of Aspen's Cloud Nine Alpine Bistro.

among them a culinary director, a digital-marketing expert, an artist, a sommelier, and a legendary hockey player (and fellow Canadian). As they bounced around ideas for launching their wine, it dawned on them that their own story could be the brand story. "We're all together as one, and we're stronger as one. So that's how we came up with the name As One Cru," says Radomski, who has fully embraced the ethos behind the label (as well as the spelling of "Crew" as "Cru").

### A Collective Vision

The brand is clearly personal to the founder, who intends to limit production to no more than 6,000 cases across a handful of offerings while focusing on the direct-to-consumer and on-premise channels. "There isn't a drive for an economic varietal—it's more [about] what we, the Cru, enjoy," he explains. "The goal is to build the brand slowly." Production will be limited to some extent by vineyard sources; for instance, only about 400

cases of the As One Cru 2017 Napa Valley Cabernet Sauvignon were produced. Still, Radomski is keeping his options open as he expands the portfolio with the release of a Sonoma-grown sparkling wine this year and the prospect of European offerings in the future.

Also personal is the packaging, which aims to send a clear message: The crisp white label, with its bold wordmark logo, wraps around the bottle, unveiling the Cru's bond and vision for the wine. Radomski sums it up by saying, "It's all about togetherness and having fun. This isn't a pretentious brand. It's a wine by people who love, enjoy, and respect great wine."

Ultimately, though, packaging and storytelling can only get a brand so far. "It's got to be good," insists chef Matt Zubrod, a member of the Cru and the culinary director at five-diamond resort The Little Nell in Aspen, Colorado, remarking on what makes a wine brand successful. "At the end of the day, it's the fruit and who makes it." The Napa Valley Cabernet Sauvignon hails from two of Radomski's





favorite sites in Napa's St. Helena and Howell Mountain AVAs; the combination of delicate valley-floor Cabernet and powerful mountain fruit "gave beautiful reflections of the expressions of those areas and really married well together as an all-Cabernet, two-vineyard blend," explains Radomski. The 2018 vintage, which will be released in March, spent roughly three years in barrel followed by additional time in the bottle, allowing the flavors to meld.

As One Cru's portfolio also includes a Pinot Noir, which Radomski describes as "a Cab lover's Pinot." Sourced from Stanly Ranch in Los Carneros and aged in second-use Cabernet barrels, the grapes for the 2018 vintage were picked on the riper side, resulting in a full-bodied, slightly higher-alcohol wine with a deep-cherry profile.

## Meet the Crew Behind the Cru

The members of the Cru are located across the U.S., making it difficult for them to get together in one place. During the pandemic, Radomski, who's based primarily in California and Florida, sent shipments of wine to everyone on the text thread—prompting Zubrod to follow up with care packages of wagyu beef from The Little Nell's farm in Durango. The two met at a dinner years ago and hit it off, according to the accomplished chef, who is also disarmingly approachable and down-to-earth. He got his start in the kitchen at a young age thanks to his parents' chore chart, which included meal prep. "I just took that to another level," recalls Zubrod, who nevertheless prefers "cooking simply and more classic[ally]."

Although Zubrod considers himself more of an ambassador for the brand, Radomski notes that he has relied on the chef for feedback on the wines, especially the sparkler: "I've found the best palates to be [those of] the chefs," admits Radomski, who also worked with Zubrod several years ago to create a proprietary brand of caviar that pairs with his La Adelita Tequila.

Meanwhile, the man who started the text thread, Eli Lippman, is an executive in the digital media and publishing space in Los Angeles, California. As such, he understands the world of marketing—but



## TASTING NOTES

**As One Cru 2018 Cabernet Sauvignon, Napa Valley (\$175)** Fruit from Howell Mountain and St. Helena proves ultra-worthy of this new release. Representing the third vintage of As One Cru Cabernet, the 2018 is a show-stopper—but with a production of only 900 cases, it will have to be allocated. Aged in (100% new) French oak for three years before spending a year in bottle, it yields dense aromas of coffee and blackberry that are indicative of what's to come. Grainy tannins quickly evolve and smooth out, but their grip remains intact. Pennyroyal tinged with minerality is promptly followed by blackberry preserves, balsamic, and dried violets. Sweet earth spreads out across the palate, bolstered by dried fruits. As if it couldn't get better, the finish of chocolate fudge, toasted coconut, and cedar seals the deal. **99** —*Meridith May*

**As One Cru 2017 Cabernet Sauvignon, Oakville, Napa Valley (\$150)** A velvet robe envelops the entry of this wine—a fitting sensation given the liquid's deep purple-black hue. The aromas of brown-sugared boysenberry and roasted coffee bean are swarmed by a mouth-filling body of dark chocolate and finely grained tannins. **99** —*M.M.*

**As One Cru 2018 Pinot Noir, Los Carneros (\$50)** Fresh black-cherry aromas are perfumed with rose petals. Intense and focused floral notes gloss the palate, and graceful, sweet earthiness shows itself through a sensuous texture. Aged in second-use Cabernet Franc barrels. **96** —*M.M.*

he also brings a fresh perspective as a millennial who's just beginning to learn more about wine. "Wine is inclusive—it's supposed to be the gathering point for people," insists Lippman, who wants it to be more approachable.

With that in mind, he hopes to engage a younger audience of consumers by focusing on the experiential nature of wine. "I think it's the storytelling around wine and the environment you can create [that will engage them]," says Lippman, who admits to saving empty bottles from

memorable evenings with friends and writing on the labels as though they were pages in a journal. Since their text thread evolved during a time of social distancing, the Cru became a point of connection—and so, they hope, will As One Cru. As Lippman observes, "We realized that everyone kind of has their crew—everybody has their people that they share their experiences with. We wanted to provide a juice that people can gather around . . . and celebrate [special] occasions with." **SJ**



## { winery spotlight }

# Reveling in the Red Hills

THE 2019 VINTAGE FROM LAKE COUNTY'S **HAWK & HORSE VINEYARDS** IS SHOWING STAMINA

**THERE'S SOMETHING SPECIAL** about the 2019 vintage of Hawk & Horse, a family-owned, Demeter-certified Biodynamic estate in the Red Hills AVA of Lake County, California. It makes the majority of its vineyard preparations on-site: Compost and manure are vital ingredients. The vineyard is home to a large number of red-tailed hawks that help keep rodent populations in check as well as to the American Saddlebred and American Quarter horses that graze in its pastures and to Scottish Highland cattle, which provide the necessary elements for biodynamic farming.

Co-founder/winemaker Tracey Hawkins comments, "The 2019 growing season started with some nice, late rains. This seemed to push bud-break back. After the cool, wet spring, the Red Hills AVA saw moderate temperatures, with slow, even development and ripening in the vineyard [that] allowed for long hangtime. This gave the wine complexity, depth of color and flavors, and balance of fruit and acid. Harvest was October 1. Yield: 3 tons per acre. Average Brix was 25.5 at harvest—just where we like it."

We explored the label's three varietal wines, which truly revel in the Red Hills.



Hawk & Horse co-owner  
Mitch Hawkins.

PHOTO COURTESY OF HAWK & HORSE VINEYARDS

### **Hawk & Horse Vineyards 2019 Petit Verdot, Red Hills, Lake County (\$65)**

A charge of violets and crushed stone coats the teeth. The structure and beauty of this red is apparent: It's as silky as a horse's mane, with subtle sweet tobacco surrounding salty plum and pistachio on the finish. **96**



### **Hawk & Horse Vineyards 2019 Cabernet Franc, Red Hills, Lake County (\$65)**

From the producer's 18-acre estate, this wine shows creamy, tarry notes of licorice-covered boysenberry that glide easily across the palate. Peppery violets and tobacco demonstrate density and texture as a wave of melting dark chocolate leads to the finish. **94**



### **Hawk & Horse Vineyards 2019 Petite Sirah, Red Hills, Lake County (\$65)**

A cascade of cinnamon-spiced cherries rushes across the mouth. Whereas many expressions of this variety are dense and teeth-gripping, this one exemplifies a more demure, floral style. Mocha and red licorice are aligned and the tannins are just slightly chalky, but this wine's power lies in its balance and regal grace. **96**

## { book review }


# An Evolving Evaluation

MESSAGE IN THE BOTTLE EXPLORES THE ART OF WINE TASTING STEP BY STEP



**DEFINING AND DESCRIBING** structure, acidity, and flavor profiles in wine may come naturally to some, but for an in-depth approach to analysis for novices and pros alike, we highly recommend Master Sommelier Tim Gaiser's book, *Message in the Bottle: A Guide for Tasting Wine*.

Applying his three decades of experience in tasting, teaching, and writing, Gaiser divides and conquers concepts both objective and subjective, among them varietal types and wine quality; pinpoints the basic markers in dozens of classic grapes; and investigates the importance of where and with whom one tastes. To quote him, "Context reminds us that tasting even the greatest vintages while in the throes of frustration, boredom, or anxiety can render the pedigree of the wine moot and the experience less than memorable—or tragically memorable in some cases."

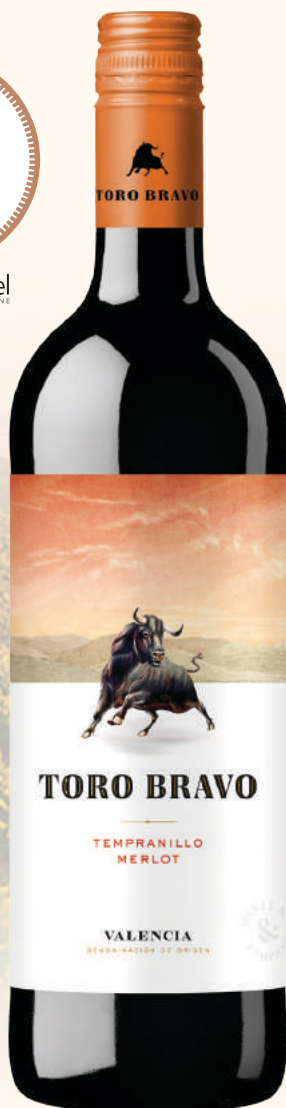
For those prepping for exams, *Message in the Bottle*, which is available on Amazon via Networlding Publishing, may be one of the most valuable tomes in your arsenal. 





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# A Rêve Come True

**CHAMPAGNE ESTERLIN'S BLANC DE BLANCS IS BUILT FOR BY-THE-GLASS PROGRAMS** by Jessie Birschbach

**SHORTLY AFTER** I was ushered into the elevator by a kind young man with a thick French accent, the doors opened to the rooftop of the Petit Ermitage hotel in West Hollywood, California. I strolled past the pool to a secluded area where a reception was being held in honor of Champagne Esterlin. A boisterous lot sipped on their bubbling coupes, many speaking *en français*; I joined them and watched my own coupe light up with Esterlin's 2010 Cléo Blanc de Blancs. At first sip, the sudden zing of the 100% Chardonnay sent me to another place. Were it not for the Pacific Design Center in the background, I would have sworn I was in Paris.

If you've not yet heard of Champagne Esterlin, there's a good reason for it: Although it was established in 1948, it's been available in the United States for less than a year. Nearly three-quarters of a century ago, three families purchased 23 hectares of vineyards in Champagne and began to work with roughly 30 growers. Since

then they've grown to farm 116 hectares in addition to sourcing from around 200 growers via a cooperative that represents 52 different villages in the region. Using fruit mainly from Côteaux Sud d'Épernay, Mancy, Côte de Sézanne, Condé-en-Brie, and Vallée de la Marne, the house produces 250,000 bottles a year.

Charmed by its quality, Bruno Laclotte of Hillside Wines & Spirits in California and Regency Wines Nevada added three Champagne Esterlin expressions to his portfolio in 2021: NV Brut Éclat (a blend of 60% Pinot Meunier, 30% Chardonnay, and 10% Pinot Noir); NV Blanc de Blancs Éclat; and Esterlin's top cuvée, the aforementioned Cléo 2010 Blanc de Blancs. Esterlin's director of exports, Alexis Vaernewyck, offered the hook:

"None of our white-wine base goes through malolactic fermentation. We're also working with a solera, which is really unique. It's the oldest solera in Champagne, as it was started in 1972. And our NV products are left on the lees for five years. Without the malo we

have that freshness, but the time on lees and using the solera rounds out the wine." All three in fact spend much more time on the lees than the Champagne standard of 15 months, including the Brut Éclat, for which 30% of the current release comes from the reserve solera, while 70% comes from 2015; the Cléo 2010 Blanc de Blancs, for its part, spent more than nine years sur lie.

It's an interesting variation on Champagne-making methodology: countering the higher acid due to eschewing malolactic fermentation with longer aging and/or the addition of reserve wine. But for Laclotte, it's this practice, compounded by the price, that makes Champagne Esterlin's success inevitable. "For me, the number-one priority was to have one of the most affordable blanc de blancs NV by the glass on the market, because it's so difficult to find a good blanc de blancs by the glass anywhere," said the clever businessman. For a by-the-glass program, the NV Blanc de Blancs is available at a lower cost than most blanc de blancs. "I wanted to bring the best of the best from this region so that consumers don't have to drink Champagne only on special occasions. After all, our slogan is 'Esterlin: Singularity in Champagne,'" said Laclotte. "It's a Champagne for sommeliers," added Vaernewyck. I'd agree: Between the dry, higher-acid style and the price, Esterlin is a wine buyer's by-the-glass *rêve*. *SB*





# Grange Rover

A TALK WITH PETER GAGO, CHIEF WINEMAKER OF PENFOLDS

by Richard Carleton Hacker

**THE LAST TIME** I saw Peter Gago, chief winemaker of Penfolds—who, unlike his wines, never seems to age—was at a tasting in 2017. This year, our get-together was prompted by the return of the Penfolds Recorking Clinic, a free service the winery provides for customers to have any of their Penfolds wines aged 15 years or older professionally uncorked, analyzed (for which purpose only 1.5 milliliters of wine is removed), tasted, and then recorked and certified.

For the occasion, I brought a 1999 St. Henri, a Shiraz-dominant wine matured up to 18 months in neutral oak hogsheads, which allows the grapes rather than the wood to determine its character. Carefully uncorked, the wine released a perfumed aroma; a sip was laced with mocha, licorice, and chocolate. By comparison, the just-released 2018 St. Henri (\$150) was bolder, though it showed similarly soft, earthy, mocha-like characteristics.

Read on for my reviews of two current Penfolds releases as well as an excerpt of my interview with Gago.

**Q:** What conditions led to the 2018 Grange wines since the 1955 vintage to garner 100 points from five critics?

In years like 2018, basically nothing goes wrong. Optimal flowering, set, ripening, and picking [were] all indulged by Mother Nature.

**Q:** I have found Penfolds wines to be uniquely ageworthy across the spectrum—and not just the reds; I have even successfully aged some of the whites, including Penfolds' flagship Yattarna Chardonnay, for over a decade. What is your "secret"?

The magic enological word—*balance*—naturally coupled with physiologically ripe fruit and tannins and harmonious acidity.




Author Richard Carleton Hacker, left, scrutinizes a sample of Penfolds' 1999 St. Henri with chief winemaker Peter Gago, according to whom "a great vintage of St. Henri will age as long as a bottle of Grange."

**Q:** Is climate change one of the factors that led you to start creating wines from regions other than Australia, such as Bin 600 from Napa, Sonoma, and Paso Robles; Bin 704 from Napa; and your Bordeaux venture, which is available in Australia and Europe?

Yes—spreading the risk! But the main reason is [to achieve] diversity and [fulfill] our excitement to avail something different [in terms of] soils, climates, [and] topographies, readying Penfolds for the next 178 years.

**Q:** Are there any truly standout wines for you among the recent releases?

Naturally the 2018 Grange. And never forget the alluring 2019 St. Henri Shiraz, a wine that harks back to 1889, the very first vintage. Bin 389? Across its 62 years, there's never been an "ordinary" one. 



**Penfolds 2018 Grange, South Australia (\$850)**

This vintage blends 97% Shiraz with 3% Cabernet Sauvignon, producing a thick bouquet of amaretto-soaked cherries that seep into flavors of mixed nuts, citrus, and black cherries on the finish.



**Penfolds 2018 Bin 707, South Australia (\$450)**

In this full-bodied Cabernet Sauvignon, buttery oysters in black-bean sauce, salmon tartare, and Earl Grey tea flow into nuances of French vanilla, silky tannins, and a dry finish.



# The Wine of Tomorrow

CHAMPAGNE ROEDERER'S COLLABORATION WITH FRENCH DESIGNER PHILIPPE STARCK SIGNIFIES PROGRESS AND POSSIBILITY

story by Kate Newton / photos by Anna Beeke

**THEY MAY BE** making their debut seven years after they were harvested, but Champagne Louis Roederer's 2015 Brut Nature and Brut Nature Rosé—part of an ongoing collaboration with French architect and designer Philippe Starck—are very much a symbol of what the future may hold for the winery. They're "wine[s] of timing," in the words of the producer's executive vice president and chef de cave, Jean-Baptiste Lécaillon. "Think about the world of tomorrow—that was a key idea of this project and collaboration," he said during the labels' release party, held last November at the five-star Pendry hotel in West Hollywood, California. "First you ask, 'What is the future?' The future is low-footprint, low-energy . . . and at the same time, [it comes] back to the essence of the ingredient: the fruit."

The 2015 vintage of the Brut Nature is the fourth iteration of the collaboration between Starck—an "outsider" who ably lends both perspective and "vision," in Lécaillon's words—and Louis Roederer, following the 2006, 2009, and 2012; the Brut Nature Rosé is returning for just its second vintage after its inaugural release in 2012. Using broad descriptors like "honest," "minimal," and "modern" as their guide, Lécaillon, Starck, and CEO Frédéric Rouzaud have aimed to add new dimension to the historic producer's portfolio, though perhaps "new" should be interpreted loosely: Interestingly enough, they're revisiting techniques used by their predecessors that are far less common today, namely sourcing the Chardonnay, Pinot Noir, and Pinot Meunier used for both zero-dosage wines from a single, biodynamically farmed 10-hectare parcel in Cumières and harvesting the fruit in a single day before it's pressed together, all at once. Minimal intervention in the winery



*Champagne Louis Roederer executive vice president/chef de cave Jean-Baptiste Lécaillon and Naureen Lyon, district manager, Los Angeles, for Maisons Marques & Domaines at the release party for the producer's 2015 Brut Nature and Brut Nature Rosé at the Pendry hotel in West Hollywood, CA.*



means that what the vines give you, "you have to follow. . . . You really have nothing to hide the fruit," Lécaillon said.

The conditions of the 2015 vintage—the same year Champagne was declared a UNESCO World Heritage Site—were perhaps a harbinger of what the region will regularly experience as climate change continues to impact it in the coming decades: The mild, wet winter was followed by a hot, dry summer of record-breaking temperatures (though late summer brought much-needed precipitation). As a result, the vines yielded grapes rich in concentration, and capturing this character in the bottle proved the primary goal for Lécaillon and his team. From his perspective, maintaining a low footprint in both the vineyard and the winery "is a way to embrace climate change, not to fight against [it]—because we cannot," he said. "Never play against, but challenge—see in every difficulty an opportunity. If you want to be ahead of your time, you

need to prepare for the future. . . . That's maybe the true definition of sustainability."

The Brut Nature, an energetic and mouthwatering blend of 46% Chardonnay, 37% Pinot Noir, and 17% Pinot Meunier, shows notes of lemon and orange peel, nougat, and baked apple while still being "full of salt [and] umami . . . because of its high acid and low sugar," according to Lécaillon, "so you need to match this with food that is creamy and oily." Meanwhile, the rosé—a blend of 50% Pinot Noir, 37% Chardonnay, and 13% Pinot Meunier—"is softer and more textured," with a touch of spice arising through notes of camphor and gingerbread to join sweet and smoky flavors of honey, blackberry, and bacon. "It works very well, of course, with oysters and seafood," he added.

Summing up the project and its impact on the winery's long-term vision, Lécaillon quipped, "It was not meant to be Roederer . . . but in the end, it's very Roederer. [So] you get optimistic for the future." ■



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# Man Cannot Live by Sauvignon Blanc Alone

**Craggy Range Winemaker Julian Grounds** Shows New Zealand's Potential for Varietal Diversity *by Lars Leicht*



*Craggy Range winemaker Julian Grounds.*

**JULIAN GROUNDS WENT OUT** of the gate and into winemaking fast. From an early age, the native Australian had dreamed of making premium wine and began working in vineyards and wineries at age 17, leapfrogging many colleagues in promotions while graduating from Curtin University at the head of his class in viticulture and enology and earning a scholarship to make wine in Burgundy. He subsequently moved his way up through the ranks while working for producers in Margaret River, Australia; Central Otago, New Zealand; and Oregon before eventually becoming senior winemaker at two different wineries in Australia.

No wonder the Peabody family, proprietors of New Zealand's Craggy Range Vineyards, tapped him to make their regional, site-specific wines in 2019. Like that of Grounds, their commitment to their project is steadfast: With business interests in North America, Asia, and Oceania, they spent several years researching locations for a winery before choosing New Zealand for its combination of history and potential. They then put Craggy Range into a 1,000-year trust to preserve their long-term vision. "It is humbling to be approached for something like this," Grounds admits. "This has been amazing for me, to get involved in ultra-fine, premium wines at an earlier stage than I expected."

The world-class level of winemaking that both the Peabodys and Grounds envisioned is often associated with reds. Which, of course, begs the question: Why New Zealand, better known for whites? "It's not just the Sauvignon Blanc story," says Grounds. "The first land we purchased was chosen with a focus on growing Bordeaux varieties."

*The Gimblett Gravels Vineyard in Hawke's Bay.*





The Gimblett Gravels Vineyard in Hawke's Bay is ground zero for Craggy Range's Bordeaux blends. Te Kahu and Sophia are two Merlot-driven blends with varying proportions of Cabernet Sauvignon, Malbec, Cabernet Franc, and Petit Verdot, depending on the vintage. Sophia is a selection from the vineyard's highest block, where soils of mostly gravel and stones give low yield but intense flavor; made in a fermentation cellar in a dedicated winery, Sophia sees more oak aging than the Te Kahu, which is "plush, [with] more red fruit [and] freshness. Sophia is intense, [featuring] more blue fruit with hints of herbs and a dusty savoriness," says Grounds, noting that Merlot adds suppleness, Cabernet Sauvignon provides structure and aromatics, and Cabernet Franc brings "the aromatic lift we need." He added that although Hawke's Bay is a cool-climate region, stony soils "make the difference" for the fruit to achieve physiological ripeness.

Le Sol is a 100% Syrah made from heritage clones brought to New Zealand in the mid-19th century and planted in the most sun-drenched stony soils of the Gim-



***Craggy Range's Giants Winery is home to three fermentation cellars, including one dedicated to its Sophia label.***



***The Te Muna Road Vineyard in Martinborough.***



***Terry and Mary Peabody are the founders of Craggy Range.***

blett Gravels Vineyard. They are naturally low in vigor, yielding sweet tannins, rich aromas, and balanced acidity. Grounds ages the wine in (30% new) large oak barrels to keep the wood from dominating the fruit.

After selecting lots for Le Sol, he uses the remaining Syrah in other wines—but there isn't much to go around. Syrah represents only about 1% of New Zealand's varietal mix, compared to 70% for Sauvignon Blanc. "With the benefit of hindsight, we would have planted more Syrah," he admits.

Craggy Range Pinot Noir comes from the Te Muna Road Vineyard in Martinborough, which is also where the producer grows its Sauvignon Blanc, but the former grape is planted on a higher terrace with clay and limestone, while the latter sits on a lower block with more gravelly loam. The area is buffeted by high winds, causing lower yields of smaller fruit with thick skins and naturally high tannins. Grounds explains that he uses whole-cluster fermentation to achieve spiciness; the resulting wine is deep in color with earthy flavors of forest floor and mushroom. "I like Pinot Noirs to be aromatically driven," he asserts. "That beautiful bouquet is what is intoxicating about Pinot Noir." But he avoids comparing it to that of other regions. "I draw inspiration from the classic Pinot Noir regions of the world and relate it to our terroir," he says. "More and more, we want great New Zealand Pinot Noir to be recognized as great New Zealand Pinot Noir."

As for Sauvignon Blanc—of course that would be the anchor of the portfolio—Grounds is adamant about taking a unique tack. While New Zealand Sauvignon Blanc is often associated with the tropical-fruit flavors of the warmer Marlborough growing area, Martinborough is decidedly cooler. "The stony soils with some limestone there give us citrus components and textural acidity," says Grounds. "It becomes linear; you want to have a second glass rather than getting Sauvignon Blanc fatigue. I see our Sauvignon Blanc as being more profoundly restrained. It's more about the secondary flavors."

Grounds takes a similar approach to Chardonnay from the coastal Kidnapers Vineyard in Hawke's Bay, where the limestone soils have a bit more clay than in Martinborough. He ferments in large-format oak as well as stainless steel. "I'm going for a fresh, vibrant style of Chardonnay, more comparable to Chablis than Cote d'Or," he says. "It attracts people who have been scared off by those big-yellow-monster Chardonnays."

That said, while Grounds seeks to maintain consistent quality in his flagship Sauvignon Blanc through selection, he's happy to show vintage variation in the Chardonnay as in the reds. His greatest satisfaction is being able to proudly present these wines anywhere he travels. "Our focus is on wine that will be enjoyed in the great restaurants of the

world,” he explains. “It has to have sophistication, and it has to have elegance.”

Grounds is gratified by both the growth of Craggy Range and the recognition it has received but insists that “we need to not rest on our laurels and double down on making our wines better year after year.” He points out that the Peabody family “saw the opportunity to be an original leader” with their red wines: “We have the right varieties and wines that reflect the global shift [toward] wanting more freshness and vibrancy. They are unique. There is a soul to these wines. They don’t remind you of anywhere else.”

Winemaking prodigy or not, one thing is for sure: Julian Grounds doesn’t remind you of anyone else, either. **ST**



## tasting notes



**Craggy Range 2022 Sauvignon Blanc, Martinborough, New Zealand (\$20)**

Following dramatic aromas of dill, tarragon, and kiwi, yellow apple and just-ripened peach flow across the palate, with key lime pie backing up lovely acidity. A dollop of vanilla cream and wet stone make the finish worth savoring. **93** —*Meridith May*



**Craggy Range 2020 Chardonnay, Kidnapers Vineyard, Hawke's Bay, New Zealand (\$23)**

Joined by a subtle wash of creamy lime chiffon, edgy minerality adds finesse, freshness, and thrill. Lemon-tinged white pepper and chamomile receive a kiss of butterscotch. **92** —*M.M.*



**Craggy Range 2019 Te Kahu Red Blend, Gimblett Gravels Vineyard, Hawke's Bay, New Zealand (\$24)**

Opulent notes of boysenberry and crushed stone reside with violets and black pepper in this Merlot-dominant Bordeaux blend. It's brambly on nose and palate, with a coating of dark chocolate. **92** —*M.M.*



**Craggy Range 2018 Pinot Noir, Te Muna Road Vineyard, Martinborough, New Zealand (\$47)**

A dynamic Pinot Noir with dramatic acidity accompanied by vibrant aromas and flavors of cranberry and cherry. Tobacco and ferrous undertones meld with kola nut and an animale quality. The finish is clean and fresh. **93** —*M.M.*



**Craggy Range 2019 Sophia, Gimblett Gravels Vineyard, Hawke's Bay, New Zealand (\$76)**

This outstanding blend of Merlot, Cabernet Franc, and Cabernet Sauvignon offers a lean line of crushed stone and coffee. With sweet soil, cinnamon, and clove, it's vibrant and statuesque; brown-sugared pecan arrives on the finish, surrounded by saffrafr and sandalwood. **95** —*M.M.*



**Craggy Range 2019 Le Sol, Gimblett Gravels, Hawke's Bay, New Zealand (\$107)**

The success of this wine has motivated the producer to plant more Syrah. From its purple-toned floral and fruit notes to its gushing, creamy texture, its many layers kick it into high gear. Violets, dark chocolate, black olive, and soy sauce combine within the tarry, voluptuous mouthfeel. **97** —*M.M.*



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# When a Great Product Isn't Enough

## ON THE IMPORTANCE OF COMPANY VALUES

by Molly Thompson

**WE'VE ALL WORKED** at companies that hang posters displaying their values on the wall—and let's be honest, it always seems a little cheesy. But attitudes toward brand values are changing quickly. According to the Sprout Social Index for 2022, "Company alignment with personal values is 74% more important to consumers than it was in 2021." Now more than ever may be the time to dust off that poster and really reflect on it. How does your wine brand align with and communicate those values? And what exactly are consumers looking for?

Thanks to a social media landscape that fosters higher consumer expectations as well as to increased competition (the U.S. alone saw its number of wineries grow by 50% between 2009 and 2021, according to consumer data company Statista), wine brands face more of a challenge when it comes to standing out in the marketplace than they used to. At the end of the day, what works best for both them and for consumers in search of great wine? Authenticity and connection.

Story sells, and people want to be part of it. Has your vineyard been in the family for generations? Is your winery minority-owned and -operated? Do you collaborate with local producers? Do you practice sustainability? People want to support these kinds of things and want you to succeed because they see themselves in your brand. Make these details easy to find! Make room for them in a separate tab on your website, share them often on social media, and get them on the back of your bottles. Tell your story in a genuine, relatable way by featuring real customer sentiments, collaborating with influencers who align with your brand and target audience, and spotlighting your employees and partners.

Connection is critical, and social media provides a direct channel to your custom-

PHOTO: SHUN LIANG



ers. It is now used increasingly by younger generations as a way of discovering new brands, learning more about the ones they already know, and reaching out for customer support. Showing up actively on social media and being responsive to questions, comments, and mentions builds trust among your followers and helps ensure they have a positive experience with your brand. Even a simple "thank you" or reshare makes someone feel seen and heard and can transform a customer into an advocate.

People today are shopping with more intentionality, asking themselves more often, "What am I supporting with this purchase?" For brands, this is a great opportunity. Get in front of your audi-

*Has your vineyard been in the family for generations? Is your winery minority-owned and -operated? Do you collaborate with local producers? Do you practice sustainability? People want to support these kinds of things and want you to succeed because they see themselves in your brand.*

ence and share your story and what you stand for. Be honest. Be vulnerable. Be attentive and present. People are actively looking for it! It's great to have an awesome wine with dinner, but it tastes even better when we know it is in support of a larger mission that brings us

all a little closer together. ■

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*Molly Thompson is a certified sommelier and marketing account manager. You can follow her on Instagram @starsinourglasses and view her website at starsinourglasses.com.*

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*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](http://dreambigdarling.org) or follow @dreambigdarling\_org on Instagram.*



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# Virginia Is for (Wine) Lovers

## EXPLORING AN EMERGING EAST COAST REGION

**AS I DECIDED** which wine regions to feature in the fifth season of my streaming show, *V is for Vino*, one name kept coming up: Virginia. Fans emailed me constantly, telling me I was missing out by not visiting “The Napa of the East Coast.” So in August 2022, we booked an episode there—and were more than pleasantly surprised.

We should start with some history: Virginians have been making (or attempting to make) wine since 1609—over 400 years! The English thought the “new world” was their ticket to a wine-producing colony they could control, giving them a way out of having to buy wine from France and Spain. But the conditions were a bit too challenging for the settlers



to overcome: wet, humid, rainy, and hot in the summer. In the late 1700s, our third president, known enophile Thomas Jefferson, also strove to produce high-quality European-style wines in Virginia on his estate in Monticello. And though he too failed, his belief in the region encouraged others to keep the torch lit. Finally, after the Civil War, Prohibition, and the Great Depression, a group of wineries spearheaded by Gianni Zonin (of Zonin Prosecco) cracked the code in the 1970s. They learned which grapes to plant where and determined the viticultural techniques needed to help the region thrive. Fast-forward to today, and there are 300 wineries in the state.

Virginia has yet to land on a signature grape across its eight AVAs, though several are vying for the title: Chardonnay and




PHOTOS COURTESY OF VINCE ANTER

Author Vince Anter with Barboursville Vineyards winemaker/general manager Luca Paschina.

Cabernet Franc are the most produced, but Petit Verdot, Viognier, and Petit Manseng also have significant plantings. One notable characteristic of Virginia wine I discovered is this: It really is a balance of New World and Old World, straddling the gap stylistically and geographically between California and Europe.

I had a focused, linear Chardonnay from Linden Vineyards that was my first shock of the trip. This wasn't a \$20 wine that was merely passable; this was a \$50 Chardonnay from a producer I'd never heard of in a region I hardly knew, worth every cent of its price tag! The most famous winery in the state, Barboursville Vineyards, makes a Bordeaux blend called Octagon that I swear is a dead ringer for great Bordeaux, especially as it ages (I got to try a 2004 and 2007). Another of the most exciting wines that I sampled on the trip was the Petit Manseng from Walsh Family Wine: It was reminiscent of all that we love from classic Loire Valley Chenin Blanc. I also tasted a 2015 traditional-method sparkler from Veritas that rivaled Champagne in quality; at 11.5% ABV, it was still rich thanks to years of lees aging. Also from Veritas,

a nearly 15-year-old Petit Verdot held up remarkably—elegant, structured, and powerful, it still had plenty of life to go. And Lightwell Survey's Cabernet Franc from the Shenandoah Valley combined pencil shavings and the right mix of fruit, à la California Cab Franc, with freshness on par with Loire Valley expressions.

As I spoke to winemakers in the region, they mentioned that while we would have found some gems ten years ago, they wouldn't have recommended the state as a whole to wine tourists. Today? I wouldn't hesitate to send you to Virginia instead of somewhere on the West Coast. There is no reason that it shouldn't be the East Coast winemaking powerhouse; the only thing stopping it from growing is consumer buy-in. So take the trip, support this region so we can have more of its fantastic wines, and tune in to our Virginia episode when it comes out mid-2023. 

Until next wine,  
Vince

Episodes of *V is for Vino* can be watched free on visforvino.com, YouTube, and Roku.





# “Napa Is Entering a New Era”

## A WORD WITH WINEMAKER TONY BIAGI

by Meredith May

A FIFTH-GENERATION BAY AREA native who's been making wine in Napa since 1994, Tony Biagi is considered to be among the most prominent producers and thought leaders in not only Napa Valley but the industry at large. He currently serves as winemaker for the region's Hourglass Winery and Amici Cellars as well as Olema in Sonoma and is also the founder of Patria Wines, his signature private label.

Biagi had firsthand experience with the damage wrought by wine-country wildfires in 2020, when the Glass Fire destroyed the cellar at Hourglass, including several vintages of his personal wine that he'd made there. Despite this setback, he remains optimistic about Napa Valley's long-term prospects. While climate change is of critical concern, his mantra is, “Don't throw the baby out with the bathwater on Cabernet yet.” Believing that “Napa is entering a new era,” Biagi explained to *The SOMM Journal* that acidity is playing a larger role in the development of the region's wine styles. “The wines are becoming better, not bigger, with more elegance to the mouthfeel,” he commented. “Wine professionals are appreciative of that. We're pulling ripeness back, with lower sugar levels.”

Biagi is also bullish on the different drought-resistant rootstocks available to vintners such as 110R and St. George, citing the 2.8–3.2 tons per acre he's consistently able to harvest on the former. According to him, it's not about replanting to drought-resistant varieties; it's about using this hardy rootstock.

In addition to his aforementioned head winemaker roles, Biagi serves as consulting winemaker for Clos du Val (Napa), Lasseter (Sonoma), and Jada Vineyard & Winery (Paso Robles). Prior to his consulting work, he held the position of winemaker at PlumpJack (2003–2011) and founding winemaker at CADE, Sinegal Estate, and Neal Family Vineyards. SJ



## Tasting Notes

**Olema 2021 Cabernet Sauvignon, Sonoma County (\$25)** Fruit sourced from the Alexander and Dry Creek valleys spent 12–14 months in French oak. Aromas of vanilla, nutmeg, and ripe plum lead to delicate, cocoa-dusted tannins. Black cherry reinforces the juicy midpalate while sandalwood adds to the creamy finish. “We set our goals high for these wines,” says winemaker Tony Biagi. “We walk the vineyards day to day, ensuring ripeness levels.” **91**

**Amici Cellars 2019 Cabernet Sauvignon, Napa Valley (\$50)** With a dollop of Merlot and Cab Franc, this luminous Cabernet Sauvignon offers black cherry and deep red-rose-petal dust on the palate. Plum blossoms are slightly salty, while sweet red beet and mocha address a luscious, red licorice-inspired finish. **93**

**Patria 2019 Cabernet Sauvignon, Oakville Ranch, Napa Valley (\$100)** Meeting amplified notes of ripe berries, coffee bean, mocha, and oak up front are new earth and dark chocolate. Well-developed tannins are round and buoyant on the palate. Fine acidity on the back end pays tribute to this wine's elegant nature. **96**

**Patria 2019 Avoyelles, Oakville Ranch, Napa Valley (\$165)** This distinctive blend of 48% Cabernet Franc, 46% Cabernet Sauvignon, and 6% Petit Verdot inspires love at first sip. A floral beauty, it blushes with heather and violets before lassoing in slick notes of dark chocolate and new leather. Its creamy mouthfeel is bolstered by elegance and balanced richness. **97**

PHOTO: LEIGHANN BEVERLEY

*Tony Biagi is the winemaker for Hourglass Winery, Amici Cellars, and Olema as well as the founder of Patria Wines, his signature private label. He is pictured at Oakville Ranch, one of his fruit sources, with his dog, Drake.*







*Breakthru Beverage luxury wine specialist Travis Brown, CS/WSET III, sits on one of Zinc Bistro's patios with the restaurant's general manager, Glenn Belfield.*

# Scottsdale Is Having a Moment

**STORY BY MERIDITH MAY**  
**PHOTOS BY GRACE STUFKOSKY**

*Daniel Webber is wine director at  
Maple & Ash in Scottsdale, AZ.*







*Foie gras at Zinc Bistro.*

Belfield describes Zinc Bistro as “Paris in Scottsdale.” The restaurant’s bar, a focal point in the dining room, is made of zinc, a metal used in post–World War II brasseries in Paris and New York. “Terry designed the bar,” Belfield adds. Meanwhile, the outdoor tables, which form an L-shape around the corner eatery and are as happily dog-friendly as their Parisian counterparts, add to the Left Bank look and feel. Now in its 23rd year of operation, Zinc Bistro was among the first establishments in Scottsdale to offer a communal dining table.

The team visits with representatives from many distributors and wine brokers; we happened to arrive on a day when Breakthru Beverage luxury wine specialist Travis Brown was pouring several selections for Belfield and bar manager Tony Hornstein.

“What keeps me motivated is our chalkboard selections,” Belfield explained. “It’s part of our strategy to teach our staff weekly about appellations, describing wines and really educating them so they can easily talk about the list with our customers. We offer them the opportunity for a 12-week training for Level 1 certification, along with a two-day class.”

## ZINC BISTRO

Tired of scrubbing hot stoves after kickstarting his career at 14 in the back of the house of his family’s business in south Texas, Glenn Belfield decided his calling was up front. “I attended culinary school in Seattle [and] managed kitchens on the West Coast and here in Arizona, but once I started tasting wine and learning about its fascinating nuances, I knew my path was about to change,” he says. Now, at 45, Belfield is marking his ninth year at Zinc Bistro, where he serves as general manager for owner Matt Carter. He gives credit to his mentor, late former owner Terry Ellis, for helping shape his career: “He taught me many things, especially how magical food and wine pairings can be.”



*Tony Hornstein is bar manager at Zinc Bistro in Scottsdale.*





Daniel Webber and Travis Brown in the Wine Room at Maple & Ash.

Though especially fond of Old World varieties, Belfield keeps an international list that pairs well with *specialties de la maison* such as oysters, charcuterie, and fromage. “We love being a French restaurant, representing the Rhône, Bordeaux, Burgundy, and the Loire, but we also find treasures from California, Oregon, and Washington—and Arizona,” added Hornstein, who, with 24 years of bartending experience, collaborates with Belfield on the beverage program, handpicking wines and spirits for the restaurant under the GM’s guidance.

Brown poured a **DeLille Cellars Chaleur Blanc** from Washington’s Columbia Valley, which offered notes of hazelnut and flint with nuances of chamomile and red apple. The Sauvignon Blanc–dominant wine added a lovely lilt to the oysters. A **Kistler 2019 McCrea Vineyard Chardonnay** from Sonoma County was creamy, with fresh-squeezed lemon and a line of minerality; there are only eight cases available for Arizona. With its satin texture and vibrant character of mocha and violets, the

**Château Armandière Cahors Malbec** was a highlight of our tasting.

Summing up his finest hours in the business, Belfield said, “Finding wines to pair with foie gras and steak frites is one of my life’s true privileges.”

## MAPLE & ASH

We followed Brown to Maple & Ash, a modern steakhouse in downtown Scottsdale that, according to wine director Daniel Webber, offers “twists on the classics.” Opulent yet not too formal, its vivacious dining room boasts eclectic, turn-of-the-1900s-inspired decor, with five-prong candelabras on every table.

Webber is proud of the restaurant, a sister to Chicago’s Maple & Ash. “Maricopa is the fastest-growing county in the country right now,” he pointed out. “This is a new land of opportunity for chefs who are coming in from other cities and setting up shop. While chains used to dominate the restaurant scene, the barrier to entry is low here, and more independent places are

thriving. The buzz here is real. Scottsdale is having a moment.” Webber and his three somms maintain a growing team while housing half a million dollars in wine inventory. “That makes Maple & Ash one of the top on-premise accounts for wine sales in Scottsdale,” he noted.

His rapport with Brown was obvious as they discussed the wines together. “We’re friends,” claimed Webber. “Travis gives us the information we need and shows us wines that really fit our goals. Time with him is very focused.”

Speaking of providing information, the ability to express himself is key to Webber’s success. “What I find appealing about Maple & Ash is there is no script,” he said. “Ownership encourages us to be authentic with guests. And what I truly love about this job is the capacity to support brands and family-owned wineries. I have empathy for smaller labels that struggle to get their product to market. And furthermore, there is a romance to talking about wines, and we aim to be champions of the wines we are proud of selling.” 





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- ANA MARIA ROMERO  
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# The Versatile Vibe of Valpolicella

IN PRAISE OF SIMPLE PLEASURE

**VALPOLICELLA WAS FOR ME** a seminal wine. By that I don't mean it was the kind of earth-moving, "aha-moment" wine that brings many somms to the calling, mind you; I just mean it brought subtle pleasure to the table and planted a seed that would grow into my appreciation for simply delicious wine.

Classic Valpolicella is no fuss, no pretension—what I like to call a JDI (just-drink-it) wine. In the 1970s and 1980s, many Americans were weaned off soft drinks by just such easygoing wines. I, on the other hand, was brought up in the European tradition in which wine was integral to a meal, like a food group. Frequently at dinner we drank our family's humble homemade bottlings, but for special occasions or when we had guests over, it was versatile Valpolicella on the table. To this day, I love its crunchy, cherry-like fruit and bright acidity.

The denomination has come a long way, as we all do over time. Like Chianti, Valpolicella had its "straw-flask moment" about a half-century ago, when demand challenged supply and many producers chased quantity over quality. Also as in Chianti, when boom turned to bust and Valpolicella's cooperatives and industrial producers cut back, its farmers found themselves without an outlet for their grapes. But over the past decade or so, consumer passion has grown for Valpolicella from family growers who take pride in the fruit of their land, and even larger

producers now offer single-vineyard and cru Valpolicellas. This has shined light on the subzones and unique parcels within the region—as it has, come to think of it, in many renowned areas in both the Old and New Worlds. Think of the subappellations now hot in Napa, Sonoma, Monterey, Paso Robles, Chile, Brunello, Barolo, Languedoc, Bordeaux, and Burgundy.

I've even heard recent comparisons being made between Valpolicella's subzones and the villages of Burgundy. Francophiles might scoff at that slight stretch, but incredibly diverse microclimates run from the shores of Lake Garda on the western side of Valpolicella to the volcanic hills bordering Soave to the east. Divided across 11 valleys, each with variations in eastern and western exposures, Valpolicella's vineyards sit below a glacial

mountain range and slope from 2,300 feet above sea level down to 200 feet. Throw in three indigenous principal varieties (Corvina, Corvinone, and Rondinella); commonly used secondary regional grapes (Molinara, Oseleta); and another half-dozen varieties from elsewhere in Italy, not to mention some wiggle room for international grapes, and tell me the diversity isn't mind-blowing.

Of course, Valpolicella achieves great structure and complexity when made in the ripasso, Amarone, and recioto styles. But what I crave most often is that classic Valpolicella: fresh, zesty, and delicious no matter what you're eating, or even if you're simply sipping. Sometimes you just want a wine that enlivens the conversation without stealing the show—while perhaps quietly planting a seed. SJ

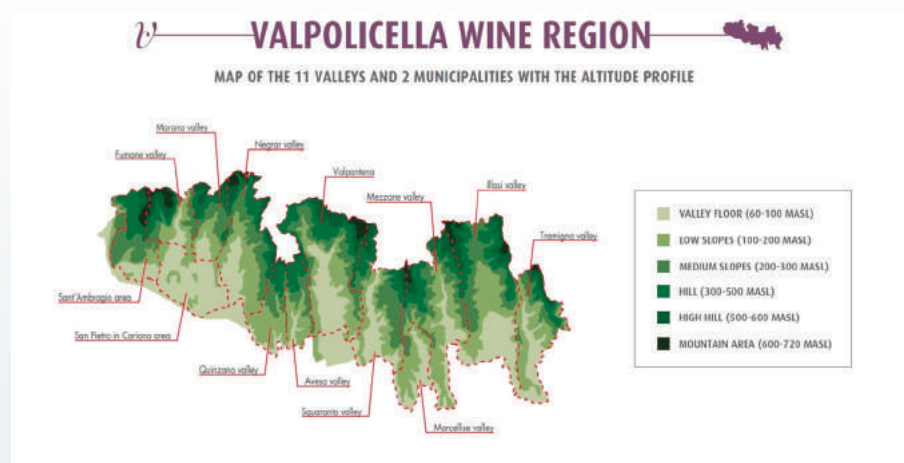


IMAGE COURTESY OF CONSORZIO TUTELA VINI VALPOLICELLA

PHOTO: LARS LEICHT

Vineyards in Italy's Valpolicella region.



# Irish Whiskey this unforgettable... deserves an event you'll remember

Ireland's whiskey is recognised internationally for its remarkable fusion of heritage and innovation. Over the last two decades, a range of exciting new distilleries – in addition to some of the world's longest established – have made Ireland's fertile landscapes a place of discovery for those who enjoy the lighter, smoother taste and subtle flavors of triple distilled whiskies. A growing number of Canadian and America consumers count among these enthusiasts.

Irish whiskey's position as a premium offering is key to its appeal as growing numbers of consumers – among them your clients and customers – actively trade upwards in their spirit preferences.

## A story brought to life

To illuminate what makes this true original so irresistible, Bord Bia, the Irish Food Board, has created **The Spirit of Ireland**, an exciting interactive event aimed at industry professionals in the US and Canada – from employees of State Alcohol Boards to bar tenders, mixologists and liquor store personnel. Hosted at a number of venues across North America, the Spirit of Ireland is a two-hour immersive experience that brings to life the story of Irish spirits from its extraordinary past through its vibrant present to bright future.

Hosted by an industry expert, you will take virtual reality tours through some of Ireland's most renowned distilleries; learn about the four different styles of Irish whiskey – Single Grain, Single Malt, Single Pot Still, and Blends of these; and enjoy sensory experiences that bring their distinctive flavors and aromas to life.

You'll see how centuries of history have given way to a modern renaissance in Irish distilling, and understand how the different styles of Irish whiskey are key to its appeal and versatility. Along the way, you'll meet some of the personalities passionate about unlocking Irish whiskey's potential and discover the stories behind Ireland's other spirit successes, including our famous cream liqueurs and flavorsome gins.



## Bord Bia - Helping you capture your customers' imagination

The Spirit of Ireland is also an excellent opportunity to connect with Bord Bia, the Irish Food Board, and learn how we can help you identify and work with suppliers that meet your exacting needs, allowing you to translate one of the strongest trends in the spirits sector into revenue growth for your business.

Bord Bia is the Irish Government agency tasked with supporting the sustainable development of the Irish food and drink industry. Through events like the Spirit of Ireland, we facilitate awareness, interaction and relationship building between Irish producers and their American customers. Our on-the-ground presence in the US, combined with our world-leading expertise in market and consumer insight, means all our actions are based on a deep understanding of your needs. We are confident we can link you with suppliers whose objectives truly match your own.

Irish spirits have long been recognised as some of world's most iconic drinks. We cordially invite you to engage with Bord Bia and turn the unforgettable taste of Irish whiskies, cream liqueurs and gins into experiences your customers will remember.

To find out more, contact:

**Teresa Phelan**  
**North America Market Specialist**  
Bord Bia New York  
[teresa.phelan@bordbia.ie](mailto:teresa.phelan@bordbia.ie)



**BORD BIA**  
IRISH FOOD BOARD





# A CLOSE CONNECTION

OUR “REFLECTION OF TERROIR: BLENDS VS. SINGLE VINEYARDS” SEMINAR HIGHLIGHTED  
**LOUIS ROEDERER AND DOMAINE ANDERSON**

story by Jessie Birschbach / photos by Rafael Peterson

*Darrin Low, winemaker for  
Domaine Anderson, and Maisons  
Marques & Domaines senior VP  
of marketing and communication  
Xavier Barlier at SommCon 2022  
in San Diego, CA.*







There was a full house for the “Reflections of Terroir: Blends vs. Single Vineyards” seminar.

**“WE’RE AT SOMMCON.** If you need my help to tell you about terroir, please leave,” joked *SOMM Journal* VP of education Lars Leicht while serving as moderator for our “Reflections of Terroir: Blends vs. Single Vineyards” seminar at SommCon, held last November in San Diego. The bubbles of the Louis Roederer 2014 Blanc de Blancs tickled our noses while Leicht tickled our funny bones, but he would get serious when necessary, of course: “This is what I would consider more of a master class,” he said. “We’re not talking about terroir in general; we’re talking about some very specific terroir and how it relates to its wines and varieties. Yes, we [talk about] blends versus single vineyards, but it’s not a competition. It should be ‘blends *and* single vineyards,’ because there’s no right or wrong—they’re both wonderful in different ways.”

Champagne production at Louis Roederer is obviously very different than still winemaking at Domaine Anderson in California’s Anderson Valley, but according to Maisons Marques & Domaines’ senior VP of marketing and communication, Xavier Barlier, and Domaine Anderson winemaker Darrin Low, there’s commonality to be found in their belief that the key to winemaking is a close connection to the land.

### Sparkling Secrets

Although Louis Roederer was founded in 1776, Barlier told the audience that it wasn’t until 1833—when its namesake inherited the maison from his uncle and began to acquire Grand Cru and Premier

Cru vineyards—that it truly came into being. One of the few independent, family-run houses remaining in Champagne, it’s known for not only its prestige cuvée, Cristal, but its precise, plot-by-plot vinification of fruit from what now amount to 600 certified-organic acres of Grand and Premier Cru vineyards across the Montagne de Reims, Vallée de la Marne, and Côte des Blancs districts. Louis Roederer’s seventh-generation president and CEO, Frédéric Rouzaud, is today in charge along with chef de cave Jean-Baptiste Lécaillon, who matches each of its 410 estate plots to an appropriately sized stainless-steel or French oak vessel for use as a separate ingredient.

The seminar’s tasting component began with the previously mentioned Louis Roederer 2014 Blancs de Blancs. “I’m going to tell you a little secret,” said Barlier: “This is the same source of Chardonnay we use for Cristal, and I always suggest to wine enthusiasts that they calibrate their palate with this wine, because it is one of the purest expressions of Chardonnay.” Sourced mainly from hillside plots in the Grand Cru village of Avize, the wine showed intense freshness that Barlier attributed to the region’s incredibly chalky limestone soils before confiding that “the secret to our Blanc de Blancs is that the pressure is a little bit lower. . . . We use less indigenous yeast at bottling so that we have lower pressure at 45 psi. Why? Because Chardonnay is so delicate. If we had the traditional pressure of around 60, the bubbles would be

too strong for the finesse and elegance of Chardonnay.”

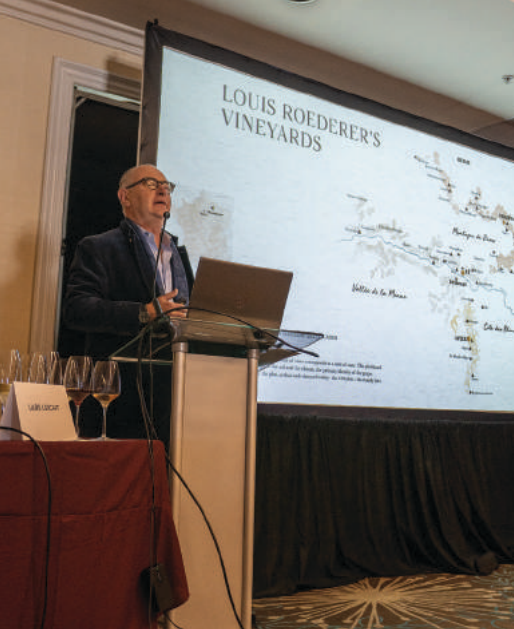
Attendees also tasted the Louis Roederer Collection 243, released just a few days prior to SommCon. “When I started in this business in the last century,” joked Barlier, “we saw three good vintages out of ten. Today we have seven good vintages out of ten because of climate change. So the idea was, let’s change the way we look at the nonvintage category.” Not to be confused with a nonvintage Champagne that represents a consistent house style, Collection 243 is a multivintage blend of wines from select vineyard plots in the heart of Champagne. While 59% comes from the 2018 vintage and 10% is an oaked reserve wine made from young Cristal vines, 31% consists of a solera-like reserve blend started in 2012. “In 100 years, our successors will taste the 343, and there will be over 100 years in this reserve. So technically, Collection will only get better over time thanks namely to the solera,” said Barlier.

Finally, the Louis Roederer 2015 Rosé, sourced from 35 small plots in Vallée de la Marne, served as an excellent transition into Domaine Anderson’s still wines.

### A Lot of Tradition in a Little Valley

“Where Louis Roederer Champagne comes from a lot of different areas in the region’s 85,000 acres, the Anderson Valley is only 2,500 acres. We’re not Sonoma. We’re not Napa. We’re this small appellation that’s close the ocean, two hours north of San Francisco. It’s pretty remote. And that lends itself to the character of





**Xavier Barlier gives his presentation on Champagne Louis Roederer.**

these wines," Low said to set the stage for a discussion of Domaine Anderson.

The winery was established by Louis Roederer president Frédéric Rouzaud in 2012, when he and his family acquired the 17-acre Dach Vineyard. Today Domaine Anderson owns 50 acres of vineyards throughout the appellation. "The 240 years of making wine from Louis Roederer—the traditions, techniques, and the house style—have been passed on to our little valley," said Low, focusing on both Dach Vineyard—which was certified organic in 2014 and has been Demeter-certified Biodynamic since 2016—and the Pinoli Vineyard, also certified organic; in fact, all of Domaine Anderson's vineyards are farmed organically, while "two out of our three main vineyards are farmed biodynamically, and this technique and philosophy makes it a lot easier to express these sites," Low added. To illustrate his point, seminar attendees tasted Domaine Anderson's 2019 Dach Vineyard Pinot Noir, 2019 Pinoli Vineyard Pinot Noir, and 2020 Dach Vineyard Chardonnay.

Defined by the wind and fog patterns that develop 25 miles from the Pacific Ocean, the Anderson Valley experiences 40- to 50-degree diurnal swings. Closest to the water is Pinoli Vineyard, "our coldest site," said Low, adding, "It's about 400 to 600 feet above sea level, so it's not super-high, but [it] gets us the longest hang time, so what ends up happening is that these grapes become naturally pretty powerful in terms of sugar content. That typically makes a higher-alcohol wine, so I

have to put the brakes on the extraction. ... That's how the '19 vintage became 15% ABV. I don't necessarily want that much alcohol, but I'm allowing this single vineyard to guide me to where it needs to be naturally." Yet somehow the Pinoli Pinot possessed more elegance than do many expressions of the grape from Northern California regions a bit further south.

Dach Vineyard, for its part, sits "in this little warm bowl; it really produces very structured, tannic wines, and so I have to be careful," Low said, noting once again that he is mindful not to overextract. But structure is actually crucial to the profile of the Chardonnay: "The fruit is very acid-driven with some phenolics, which brings a very focused Chardonnay." **SL**

## SHEDDING LEIGHT ON THE SUBJECT

With his decades of experience in the wine industry and his background in journalism, Lars Leicht is a master at getting the most out of an interview. Fortunately, after Barlier's and Low's presentations, there was enough time left in the seminar for him to fire a few questions at the two experienced panelists. Read on for an abridged excerpt.

**We didn't hear much about soil in your presentation, Darrin. Is there a difference in soil type in your single vineyards in the Anderson Valley?**

**Darrin Low:** I don't think there is a lot of difference. It's a very small region. The soil types in each vineyard are essentially the same: light, sandy loam clays. So when you talk about terroir for [Domaine Anderson], there's the aspect of climate, site, and exposure. The differences in these two Pinot Noirs [from the Dach and Pinoli vineyards involve] exposure, elevation, and proximity to the ocean. [Those] are the three factors that guide how the grapes ripen and then how they're dealt with in the winery.

**Is making Champagne more about terroir or technique?**

**Xavier Barlier:** Well, I think it's both, because Champagne is the most technical wine to make. It's the most difficult, because you have to make two wines: You make a still wine and then you make a sparkling wine. A couple of years ago, Louis Roederer launched a very limited still ... Pinot and [a] still Chardonnay, and the question is, why is Roederer making still wine when we hardly have enough grapes to make Champagne? The reason was that ... Champagne is first and foremost a grand vin. Some say that terroir does not matter in Champagne, and so we're going to make still wines in limited quantities [to prove otherwise].

**What is your philosophy as a winemaker?**

**Low:** I think you have to have good ingredients, so most of the year is dedicated to growing our grapes, tending the vineyard and even the animals on the vineyard, and really nurturing the site. We don't want to rule over Mother Nature; we want to work with Mother Nature. Biodynamic farming is a philosophy that bodes well [for] crafting small-lot wines that are really unique and are a powerful statement of that terroir, so I really have to work with nature, and then my job as a winemaker is to try to extract the most from what I've been given. I love the purity of the fruit from these vineyards, and the wines seem to become more refined the longer we are farming biodynamically.

**Michel Rolland famously said that he believes that climate change may be helping Bordeaux and that [the region has] never made better wines. Has this been true for you both in Champagne and the Anderson Valley?**

**Low:** I personally think you have to monitor your grapes a little closer because grapes are ripening quicker. And that's how it is everywhere. ... Climate change is a slow boil, so right now we're looking at different varieties, trying to expand, and blending when we can. It's something that we're aware of as we're getting riper and riper vintages and getting such a richness in our wines. And being from a French house, where we really prize elegance in our wines, you know, we're not trying to make that quintessential California fruit bomb. We're trying to make our delicate house style in a changing climate.

**Barlier:** We have seen in Champagne the benefits. So if you are courageous enough to revisit your winemaking philosophy, as we have been, you can benefit from climate change.



THE **SOMM** JOURNAL'S**Assessing Crucial Body Profiles in Wines**

Moderated by DEBORAH PARKER

Global Wine Editor, *The Somm Journal*

# TECHNICAL Magic

## RECAPPING OUR “ASSESSING CRUCIAL BODY PROFILES IN WINES” SEMINAR AT SOMMCON SAN DIEGO

by Jessie Birschbach

### COMMENCING THE “ASSESSING CRUCIAL BODY PROFILES IN WINES”

seminar at SommCon 2022 in San Diego, California, moderator and *SOMM Journal* global wine editor Deborah Parker Wong said a mouthful: “Despite what we have been taught anecdotally or are inclined to believe about the components of wine, research shows us that, below certain thresholds, ethanol (below 14% ABV), glycerol (below 25 grams per liter), and sugar (below 15 grams per liter) don’t significantly contribute to the perception of body in dry white table wine. In dry red table wine, tannins have the most impact on mouthfeel, contributing bitterness, astringency, and dryness—all of which influence body.”

Her opening statement, unlike the wines featured on our panel, was a bit tough to swallow for the audience of wine professionals, who are usually taught that a wine’s body can be attributed to factors like alcohol and residual sugar. But if there’s one thing we know about Parker Wong, it’s that she does her homework, as evidenced by her *SOMM Journal* column “Scents and Accountability,” in which she tackles dense wine topics. She took the same approach in her introduction, exploring technical specifications such as “dry extract,” a common metric in Europe that measures the dissolved solids (including tannins) in a wine. And although none of our panelists could offer this metric, they certainly revealed in their own terms how choices made in both the vineyard and the winery helped shape the body of their presented wines. ~~~~➔



PHOTOS: RAFAEL PETERSON

*The “Assessing Crucial Body Profiles in Wines” seminar was moderated by SOMM Journal global wine editor Deborah Parker Wong.*



# WINE: CANTINA MESA 2021 GIUNCO VERMENTINO DI SARDEGNA, ITALY

PHOTO: RAFAEL PETERSON



**PRESENTER: JACOB GRAGG, CA' DEL BOSCO AND PORTFOLIO FINE WINE SPECIALIST, SANTA MARGHERITA USA**

**THE WORLD'S BEST-KNOWN** and perhaps most respected versions of Vermentino come from Sardinia, particularly the northern region of Gallura. But Cantina Mesa, located in the island's southwestern corner, has created its own style with Giunco. "What you have here is a very different situation in grape growing," said Jacob Gragg, Ca' del Bosco and portfolio fine wine specialist for Santa Margherita USA. "Down here we don't have much granite, the primary soil type for most of the Vermentino grown in Sardinia. Our soil is almost entirely sand with some clay. In fact, the soil is so sandy that some of the vines sourced for the Giunco are growing on their own rootstock."

The weather is also a bit different in this part of Sardinia. "Every vineyard that went into your glass can see the ocean," said Gragg. It's not so much the marine influence that affects the area's growing season, though, as it is the winds, particularly the sirocco that originates in the Sahara. "[Cantina Mesa's] grapes achieve more total phenolic ripeness because there's this huge diurnal shift. And [the wind] is this big moderating factor because, as the winemaking team will tell you, they can count on one finger the number of days that don't have wind as a major influence—kind of like this morning here," Gragg said of the rare stormy weather unfolding in San Diego.

While the fact that Sardinia is closer to Africa than it is to Tuscany is yet another signal that the island's Vermentino is different than the rest of Italy's, Cantina Mesa's version is made even more unconventional by the winemaking team's approach, which of course impacts Giunco's body and aromatics. "This is a Vermentino that sees a decent amount of skin contact," Gragg explained, about six to eight hours in the 2021 vintage. "I think that's a little bit more than you would traditionally see with Vermentino. . . . I also think that mutes aromatics in a certain way. This wine is not popping out of the glass as some [do], but it really does show a rounder style of fruit [on the palate] that I think represents the place; [though] relatively lighter-bodied . . . in the scheme of Vermentino, it's on the heavier side." The wine is fermented and matured in temperature-controlled stainless steel for at least six months before it's laid to rest in bottle for a minimum of two months.

The label is a nod to the area's textile industry, which owes its existence to the local abundance of sheep. According to the savvy and mischievous Gragg, "This isn't the part of Sardinia that you go to relax [at] a beach resort—this is the part where you make really nice wine, or perhaps you really like sheep."





## **WINE: MILLER FAMILY WINE COMPANY 2021 BARREL BURNER DOUBLE-OAKED CHARDONNAY, PASO ROBLES**



PHOTO: RAFAEL PETERSON



**PRESENTER: WILL COSTELLO,  
MS, EXPORT MANAGER**

### **“DOES IT TASTE LIKE BURNT BARRELS?”**

Miller Family Wine Company's export manager, Will Costello, MS, asked the seminar participants of the 2021 Barrel Burner Double-Oaked Chardonnay: "I hope you say yes, because that's the character we're leaning into here." The Miller Family Wine Company, which has been farming since the 1850s and making wine since the early 2000s, set out to create a wine "with a name that would jump off the shelf or a wine list," added Costello, while appealing to those who enjoy a rich, oaky, buttery Chardonnay.

Costello noted, however, that the wine's bold character doesn't come just from the barrel or decisions made by director of winemaking Jonathan Nagy. "The story to tell about wine and how body interacts here, I would say, starts from the beginning of planting the vineyard. Clonal selection is a big factor in a wine's body. If you pick clones like we have here—75, 96, 97—they tend to have super-small clusters as well as fairly thick skins," he explained. The sandy soils they grow in, meanwhile, cause hydric stress, "and during hydric stress the vines hold on to more green matter and [therefore] produce a wine with higher phenolics."

After a lengthy discussion about the deliberate choices made in the vineyard, Costello moved on to the aging regimen and other winemaking techniques. "We use open-grained wood, like that from the Vosges forests, that helps make the body of the wine super-soigné and soft," said Costello, who added that pressing at a low pressure of 2.9 bars and extended lees contact also contribute to the body of Barrel Burner. An audience member noted that the Chardonnay's smoked-bacon character was a true testament to its name.



# WINE: DIORA 2020 LA GRANDE LUMIÈRE CHARDONNAY, SAN BERNABE, MONTEREY COUNTY

PHOTO: RAFAEL PETERSON



**PRESENTER: JAMES EWART,  
WINEMAKER**

**ALTHOUGH DIORA WINEMAKER JAMES EWART** has been haunting the San Bernabe Vineyard in the eponymous San Bernabe sub-AVA of Monterey County for over two decades, getting to know every aspect and row, his love for viticulture began well before that in Australia: “I was lucky enough to grow up in the Adelaide Hills on a small 20-acre farm. My brother, sister, and I were the workforce of that vineyard, and that’s where I developed the love for that connection between growing grapes and making wine,” said Ewart. After obtaining a graduate degree in viticulture in addition to an undergraduate degree in geology and chemistry, the Aussie landed an internship to work in Delicato Family Wines’ San Bernabe Vineyard in 2000 and loved it so much he never left.


Having purchased a whopping 12,640 acres of grapevines in San Bernabe in 1988, the Indelicato family soon realized the site’s great potential for Chardonnay and Pinot Noir and pared it down to the 5,800 acres best suited to those grapes, of which 1,800 are planted to vine; since 2004, San Bernabe Vineyard has spanned nearly the entire San Bernabe AVA, made official thanks to its distinctive, wind-derived Aeolian soils. Then, roughly ten years ago, the Indelicatos did two things: established Diona Wines with Ewart as winemaker and engaged him and his team in optimizing their Burgundian-varietal wines. “They came to me and said, ‘Look, you guys are already making some really fabulous, bright, tropical Chardonnays and some really great Pinot Noirs, but what do you need to drive up the quality and concentration even more? If you had a magic wand, James, what would you wish for?’” he recalled. Since he and the Indelicato family had already spent years planting and replanting with new clones and rootstocks, Ewart sought the construction of a small-lot “winery within a winery,” as he put it, overseeing the addition of a new destemmer as well as a press and small open-top fermenters in 2013.

Propelling Diona Wines to where it is today, this strategy has also impacted the body of its wines—as has the terroir of the San Bernabe AVA, of course. Funneled down through the valley, the wind from Monterey Bay not only helps to maintain the grapes’ acid but thickens their skins, which “leads to more pineapple character and concentration and body in the wine,” said Ewart. Meanwhile, the region’s aforementioned Aeolian soils, which he said are not found anywhere else in California, “probably end up giving the wine more viscosity.” (Roughly two-thirds of San Bernabe’s soil is of sandy Aeolian character; the other third tends to be calcareous.) “I remember tasting these grapes many times before harvest and realizing that [they and their resulting wine] had more concentration, higher acid, and minerality,” Ewart added.

Much of Diona’s La Grande Lumière Chardonnay is sourced from a limestone-laden section of the vineyard dubbed Limestone Ridge. To make the 2020 vintage, Ewart harvested the grapes in different phases, carefully pressed them, and fermented the lots separately with clean commercial yeast in French oak before blending; he then aged the wine sur lie for 15 months, also in French oak. The result, Parker Wong believed, offered a “beautiful, limpid, and ethereal quality.”







## **WINE: BELLE GLOS 2014 TAYLOR LANE VINEYARD PINOT NOIR, SONOMA COAST**

PHOTO: RAFAEL PETERSON



**PRESENTER: MATTHEW HEIL,  
DIRECTOR OF FRUIT SUPPLY, COPPER CANE  
WINES & PROVISIONS**

**WHILE TOURING NAPA VALLEY**, visitors might come across a road called Glos Lane, and on that road is a little house where winemaker Joe Wagner's paternal grandmother, Lorna Belle Glos Wagner, was born. She would later become the namesake for a brand best known for its wildly successful and opulent Belle Glos Pinot Noir, but at SommCon, Matthew Heil, director of fruit supply for parent company Copper Cane Wines & Provisions, presented a different expression of the grape.

Wagner's Taylor Lane Vineyard is located in one of California's newest appellations, the West Sonoma Coast AVA, established in spring 2022. Set in the furthest western reaches of Sonoma County and carved into mountains that overlook the Pacific Ocean, the region was approved mostly due to its cold maritime climate; it currently harbors about 50 vineyards ranging in elevation from 400 to 1,800 feet. "The West Sonoma Coast is very cold. And this AVA is all about fog, fog, and more fog," said Heil. "We have a marine layer that comes in [and sits] between 600 and 900 feet in elevation. Above that there's an inversion layer, or layer of warm air, that keeps the vines in sunlight during the daytime and allows the [fruit] to ripen well."

Sitting at around 1,000 feet, the nearly 11-acre Taylor Lane Vineyard is located about 2.5 miles southwest of the town of Occidental and less than 6 miles from the ocean. Wagner and his father, Chuck, founder of Caymus Vineyards, began planting the former apple orchard to vines in 1994. Originally intended as a source for Caymus, the vineyard was later sold, but it served as a formative experience for the young Wagner, who would, years later, purchase the site back after the sale of his Meiomi brand. Its Goldridge soils of fine, sandy loam allow for excellent drainage for the Pinot Noir; grown along a Trentino pergola trellis system that helps to provide shade for the grapes, under which sheep graze to keep the weeds at bay.

Released this year as the oldest vintage currently available from the West Sonoma Coast AVA, the Belle Glos 2014 Taylor Lane Vineyard was made with Pinot Noir that was handpicked and placed in macro-bins filled with dry ice, "which causes cryoextraction," said Heil. "The dry ice is so cold [at] negative 185 degrees that the skins of the grapes fracture and release their anthocyanins and flavonoids into the solution." The cold ferment can take as long as three weeks, during which both pumpovers and punchdowns optimize the wine's phenolics. Bottled in magnum only, the Taylor Lane Pinot Noir is said to be Wagner's most Burgundian-style wine, thanks in part to the terroir of this beloved vineyard in the West Sonoma Coast.





## **WINE: THICK SKINNED 2017 BORDEAUX BLEND, RED MOUNTAIN, WASHINGTON**

**PRESENTER:** LARS LEICHT, UP OF EDUCATION, *THE SOMM JOURNAL*

PHOTO: RAFAEL PETERSON



**AFTER BANFI UINTNERS** purchased Pacific Rim & Co, a portfolio of wines from the Pacific Northwest, the company naturally began to explore the area in more depth. “Banfi wanted to make a statement in their new home in Washington,” said *SOMM Journal* VP of education Lars Leicht—brought in to present at the last minute to cover for Banfi’s intended representative, who came down with the flu—“and they wanted to make a wine that was predominantly Cabernet Sauvignon.” It’s no accident that the company ended up sourcing the fruit from Washington’s warmest growing region, Red Mountain, which is highly lauded for its tannic Cabernet Sauvignon. The grapes that grow on the AVA’s southwest-facing slope spend long hours each day baking in the hot sun, resulting in the development of thicker skins that guarantee the concentration for which the region is known. Given this, the brand’s name hardly needs an explanation.

Leicht explained that, following several trials with blending grapes that could temper the gritty tannins of the Cabernet Sauvignon, the winemaking team landed on the fruit-forward, plush Malbec and a touch of the floral, higher-acid Petit Verdot. After providing a number of technical specifications—picking at 24 Brix; ten to 12 days of maceration; 10–12% saignée; frequent, early pumpovers; and 18–24 months in medium- to medium-plus-toast French oak—Leicht concluded, “And with all these technical numbers, I always ask, ‘Where does a wine fit on the DYLI scale: Do You Like It?’ It’s high on mine: This is a fruit-forward wine that you can sip and enjoy by itself, but it also works well as a great food wine.”



# WINE: BLACK STALLION ESTATE WINERY 2019 LIMITED RELEASE CABERNET SAUVIGNON, NAPA VALLEY

PHOTO: RAFAEL PETERSON



**PRESENTER: RALF HOLDENRIED,  
WINEMAKER**

## AS THE LAST PRESENTER IN THE SEMINAR,

winemaker Ralf Holdenried took a different tack than his colleagues had in highlighting the concentrated body of the Black Stallion Estate Winery 2019 Limited Release Cabernet Sauvignon. Whereas most of the other panelists considered the influence of the vineyard on a wine's body, he focused on his work in the winery: "I really want to turn the page and talk more about how I as a winemaker can influence this wine—how I can push the body of this wine in different directions," he said. "Obviously, all winemaking starts in the vineyard: the location, the terroir, the weather, the farming practices, the picking decisions. All of that is important, as it really sets the table for what the winemaker has to work with, but we haven't talked about the influence of a winemaker enough."

As soon as the fruit enters the winery, Holdenried told the audience, he is already making decisions about what exactly to ferment. Whole clusters? Just the berries? Holdenried prefers the latter after the fruit is hand sorted, as this will later help to prevent the development of any green character in the finished wine. The winemaker continued to take the SommCon attendees through many of his decisions, from how hard to crush the grapes and the choice of yeast to the frequency of pumpovers and punchdowns and the size of the fermentation vessel. "We found that the sweet spot for our fermentation tanks is usually around the 3- to 5-ton range because they naturally create the heat that brings the fermentation up to the mid-90s [Fahrenheit]," he explained. "The temperature really drives a lot of the extraction while not being too extensively warm or [requiring us] to cool the tank artificially too much from the outside."

Though the Black Stallion Estate Winery—named in honor of the 32-acre property's former tenant, the Silverado Western Center—is located on the Silverado Trail in the Oak Knoll District subregion, the presented wine is a blend of both mountain and valley-floor fruit from vineyards throughout Napa; in that sense, it captures the essence of our country's most famous appellation. But the thoughtful winemaker left the audience with Black Stallion's ultimate goal: "It's not about maximizing extraction—it's really about building a harmonious wine that has concentration in front and in the midpalate but also length. It's really hard to put numbers behind [winemaking] for me, as it's [all about] touching and tasting the wine." SJ







# Sardinia Meets SoCal

**CANTINA MESA AND CA' DEL BOSCO TAKE THE STAGE AT HUMPHREY'S IN SAN DIEGO, CA**

story by Lars Leicht / photos by Rafael Peterson

**HUMPHREY'S RESTAURANT** on San Diego's Shelter Island is well known as a waterfront music venue, but thanks in great part to executive chef Tom Connolly, it was the wines of Cantina Mesa and Ca' del Bosco that were singing at a *SOMM Journal* dinner held on the first night of SommCon 2022.

The evening started with a welcome glass of Ca' del Bosco Cuvée Prestige Edizione 44, a multivintage Franciacorta from the Italian region's leading producer. Jacob Gragg, Ca' del Bosco and portfolio fine wine specialist for importer Santa Margherita USA, compared the Cuvée Prestige to the flagship wines of many Champagne houses. Like them, it blends base wine from one vintage with wine from other vintages to achieve a consis-

tent style and flavor profile from year to year. Gragg pointed out that, with just 1 gram of sugar, the Cuvée Prestige qualifies as an Extra Brut.

At the pre-dinner reception, it accompanied a poblano bisque shooter topped with Osetra caviar and crème fraîche. "I would say my single favorite bite from dinner was the poblano shooter," noted Nick Gergen, beverage director at Juniper & Ivy in San Diego. "The addition of the bubbles was a really great pairing." At the table, the sparkler was also paired with Connolly's leche de tigre, a ceviche-like composition of scallops and prawns with pineapple, habanero, and citrus.

For the next course of grilled local swordfish with root vegetable hash, pancetta, and sorrel cream, Cantina Mesa's



*Cantina Mesa wines awaiting service.*

Giunco Vermentino di Sardegna was festively poured from a 3-liter bottle (packaging that's only for special occasions such as this dinner, according to Gragg). Gergen praised the "synergy" of the pairing.

In the meantime, Gragg described the three vineyards from which Cantina Mesa sources its Vermentino in Sulcis, the southwest part of Sardinia—a "very different area" with sandy soils instead of the rocky and calcareous soils found on the rest of the island. Located close to the shore, the vineyards are buffeted by





*Randy Smerik and Tommy Smerik, proprietors of Solare Lounge San Diego; Carlos Cisneros, sommelier at Bocca Ristorante; Nick Sinutko, wine buyer at Campfire; and Lars Leicht, VP of wine education for The SOMM Journal, gather outside of Humphrey's pre-dinner with a glass of Ca' del Bosco Cuvee Prestige Edizione 44.*



*Jacob Gragg, Ca' del Bosco and portfolio fine wine specialist at Santa Margherita USA; Jeff Josenhans, director of food and beverage at the Intercontinental Hotel San Diego; and Martha Bednarek, associate brand manager at Santa Margherita USA.*

constant winds, but because of the sand, the vines remain ungrafted. To maintain its young, crisp style, Giunco does not undergo malolactic fermentation, nor is it aged in oak. "This is the wine that we think really showcases Sulcis at its best," said Gragg.

Two more courses followed, paired with three different reds from Cantina Mesa. The 2020 Primo Scuro Cannonau di Sardegna was served with a vanilla- and star anise-glazed duck breast alongside fennel, cauliflower puree, granola, and juniper snow. Gragg pointed out that Cannonau is the local name for Grenache, adding, "This is one of my favorite wines in the portfolio. It is tremendously delicious; there is a friendliness here." Jamison Law, sommelier at San Diego wine shop and bar Vino Carta, concurred, calling it "friendly indeed."

An herb-roasted rack of lamb with coconut sweet potatoes, baby squash, candied pepitas, and mole negro was served with two takes on another Sardinian grape, Carignano: The 2020 Buio and 2019 Buio Buio Riserva. Buio Carignano del Sulcis is unoaked to highlight its fruit character, said Gragg: "It is clean, it is bright, and it has this clear typicity of Carignano." Buio Buio, a Carignano del Sulcis riserva, sees 12 months of aging in a mix of used tonneaux, barriques, and stainless-steel tanks before final blending and bottle aging.

Buio, which means "dark" in Italian, is a reference to Carignano's deep, dark color; because the riserva wine is even darker than the Buio, Mesa decided to

double the name. Meridith May, publisher and editor-in-chief of *The SOMM Journal*, described the Buio as having flavors of "lavender; jasmine, and roses—it is bright"; by comparison, she noted, the Buio Buio had more "balsamic notes and slate flavor; it is a bigger wine that tastes graceful and elegant."

Though quantities vary from vintage to vintage, Cantina Mesa makes fewer than 2,500 cases of Buio Buio annually, and even Buio is produced at a relatively boutique level. "These are small-production wines that are getting a lot of attention," said Gragg, adding that Sulcis is Italy's only DOC for Carignano. That was part of the draw for many guests. "It was so fun to taste such unique wines," said Paul Krikorian, wine director for The Lodge at Torrey Pines in La Jolla. "The Vermentino was

excellent, but I loved the two Carignanos."

Because Cantina Mesa does not make sweet wines, Gragg decided to pair the dessert—a black-and-white bread pudding with praline, hazelnut butter crunch, and vanilla gelato—with a fernet-style amaro. Afterward, Chef Connolly came out for a bow and thanked the diners. "This is always fun for us to do," he declared—and clearly fun for the diners as well. Jeff Josenhans, director of food and beverage at the Intercontinental San Diego, said, "I thought it was a wonderful dinner! Loved the wines. The food was beyond my expectations, as I really only associated Humphrey's [with] a concert venue. Hats off to the chef there for sure." Gergen, for his part, summed up the evening as "an all-around dynamite meal with great company." *—SJ*

### ***The SOMM Journal would like to thank our guests for the evening:***

**Randy and Tommy Smerik**, proprietors, Solare, San Diego, CA

**Nick Gergen**, beverage director, Juniper & Ivy, San Diego, CA

**John Logan**, sommelier, Rancho Valencia Resort, Rancho Santa Fe, CA

**Jeff Josenhans**, director of food and beverage, Intercontinental Hotel, San Diego, CA

**Paul Krikorian**, wine director, The Lodge at Torrey Pines, La Jolla, CA

**Alan Marquez**, food and beverage manager, Alila Marea Beach Resort, Encinitas, CA

**Nick Sinutko**, wine buyer, Campfire, Carlsbad, CA

**Jamison Law**, sommelier, Vino Carta, San Diego, CA

**Dan Cools**, beverage director, Stake Chophouse & Bar, Coronado, CA

**Alexandra Reynolds**, wine director, Cowboy Star Restaurant & Butcher Shop, San Diego, CA

**Carlos Cisneros**, sommelier, Bocca Ristorante, Birmingham, AL



# An Eclectic Cornucopia

## SAN DIEGO SOMMS SIP AND SAVOR SELECTIONS FROM FREIXENET MIONETTO USA'S ARTISANAL COLLECTION

story by Lars Leicht / photos by Rafael Peterson

**FOR THOSE VISITING** San Diego's ever-festive Gaslamp Quarter, bypassing the massive bar in the high-energy, sprawling Water Grill on a busy weeknight to duck into a private side room can feel like a move straight out of the Prohibition era. For a dozen somms accustomed to being on the working end of such scenes, the opportunity to sit down at a long table for a sumptuous feast with friends and colleagues was a rare and cherished treat. Freixenet Mionetto USA toasted its trade

donnay, which are sustainably farmed on its two Carneros ranches, divided into 13 blocks with five different soils. The Pinot Noir is grown in rocky volcanic soils that boost its minerality, while the Chardonnay is grown in mostly clay soils, which give it texture and elegance. The warm days and cool nights of the area provide the ideal diurnal temperature shift to slowly ripen the fruit, preserving its vibrant acidity.

The next pour was Champagne Alfred Gratien's NV Classic Brut Rosé, a blend



*Josh Neimeyer, owner of Vinicola Varga Wine Bar; Rick Perrault, beverage manager at The Marine Room; and Chris Russo, wine director at NINE-TEN Restaurant and Bar, gather pre-dinner.*



*SOMM Journal publisher/editor-in-chief Meridith May with Mary Davies, wine director at Piper at The Seabird Resort, and SOMM Journal global wine editor Deborah Parker Wong.*

guests on the closing night of SommCon with selections from its Artisanal Collection, an eclectic family of brands sought after by list-building wine directors.

They were promptly welcomed with Gloria Ferrer NV Sonoma Brut, a bottle-fermented Pinot Noir-dominant blend from Carneros that spent 18 months on the lees. It is the flagship wine of the estate's founders, Gloria and Jose Ferrer, who branched out from their native Barcelona in the 1980s to arrive in what they envisioned as ideal sparkling-wine country in California. Gloria Ferrer specializes in clonal selections of Pinot Noir and Char-

of 56% Chardonnay, 23% Pinot Noir, and 21% Pinot Meunier aged for five years in the bottle before release—far more than the 12 months required by the appellation. Founded in 1864 and overseen by fourth-generation cellar master Nicolas Jaeger—who worked alongside his father for 17 years before taking the reins in 2007—Maison Alfred Gratien is one of the few remaining Champagne houses to conduct the first fermentation of its wines exclusively in oak, using 228-liter Chablis casks. It also eschews malolactic fermentation, allowing the wine to preserve its natural aromas and freshness. Sarah Worley,

wine club director at The WineSellar & Brasserie in San Diego, declared that, "by far, my favorite selection of the evening was the Alfred Gratien Champagne—such a beautiful entry to start off one of the best events I've been to!"

When appetizers—including a selection of raw oysters on the half-shell with horseradish and mignonette as well as wild-caught Pacific bigeye tuna poke with soy sauce, avocado, wasabi tobiko, and sesame seeds—hit the table, so did magnums of Silberlack 2020 Grosse Gewächs Dry Riesling from Schloss Johannisberg, the world's first Riesling estate. Though





**Karla Poeschel, sommelier at Harlo Steakhouse, and Devaney Rezendes, wine steward at Del Frisco's Double Eagle Steak House in San Diego, enjoy Gloria Ferrer Sonoma Brut before dinner.**

it invented the late-harvest (spätlese) style in 1775, its dry counterpart was a huge hit at the dinner. As soon as it was presented, Chris Russo, wine director and sommelier of NINE-TEN Restaurant & Bar in La Jolla, leaped from his seat to bring the bottle to the table for a closer look at the label, saying later that “the highlight [of the night] for me was the Riesling. I’m a huge Riesling fan in general, and this one was exceptional.”

Josh Neimeyer, proprietor of San Diego’s Vinicola Varga Wine Bar, also called the Riesling “a standout,” and Carlos Cisneros, sommelier at Bocca Ristorante in Birmingham, Alabama, described the pairing as “incredible,” adding that “German Riesling pairs very well with oysters that contain a little more salinity. The oysters were the perfect medium size, creamy in texture with a slightly sweet melon flavor. The Riesling was just dry enough, and the acid from the wine was like a squeeze of lemon on the oyster—absolutely perfect.”

When the Caesar salad with romaine hearts, 18-month-aged Parmigiano Reggiano, and white anchovies was served, Russo continued to wave the flag for the Riesling, calling it a fantastic pairing. Most of the guests agreed—quite an achievement considering that one of a somm’s great challenges is to pair wine with salads.

Though entrée choices included charcoal-grilled organic chicken and farmed New Zealand king salmon, most of the guests went for the surf and turf—an 8-ounce filet mignon with a wild South

African lobster tail. That was a logical choice given the next two wines: Ferrer Miranda’s 2017 Valdubón Reserva from Ribera del Duero and Pertinace 2016 Barbaresco Cru Nervo.

The estate-grown Tempranillo selected for Valdubón Reserva comes from vines that are more than 30 years old; they’re noted for their high concentration of flavor and aromatics. Ferrer Miranda’s Bodegas Valdubón property, established in Ribera del Duero in 1997, sits on high plains whose elevation ensures the wines have good acidity for long aging. The fermenting wine is pumped over multiple times daily to extract polyphenols, and it is aged for over two years in 50% each American and French oak. The result is powerful yet elegant, with notes of ripe berries and plums, tobacco, and a pleasant spicy character from the oak aging. Its great acidity and warm, firm tannins made for a delightful pairing with the steak.

As for the Barbaresco, served in 3-liter bottles, it too commanded the table. “The Pertinace Nervo Barbaresco was absolutely fantastic with the filet mignon,” reported Cisneros. “The steak was lean and tender and cooked perfectly. The medium-rare temperature paired well with the sanguine notes from the Nebbiolo. The wine had this dual identity of elegance and power, with moderate tannins that interacted well with the proteins in the steak. The nose . . . had multiple

layers of dried rose petals, exotic herbs, and fresh pomegranate that gave me an appetite before I even took my first bite of the steak.”

A small cooperative of just 20 sustainable growers, Pertinace is located in the heart of Piedmont’s Barbaresco zone, where it focuses on varietal purity, aging exclusively in large oak casks. Founded in 1973, it was named for the locally born Roman emperor Publio Elvio Pertinace, who ruled for a total of 87 days in 200 A.D. before being assassinated for his fervent campaign to end corruption in the national government. From him we also get the word *pertinacious*, meaning “to hold firmly to an opinion or course of action.”

Our pertinacious group of sommeliers certainly held to their course of action that evening, lingering through a dessert of key lime pie over lively conversation. “The food, wine, and company were top-notch,” said Neimeyer; Russo agreed that it had been “a memorable evening full of great wine and fellowship. That’s what hospitality is all about, right?” Commenting on the attentive and swift service by the Water Grill team, Worley perhaps summed up the event most eloquently: “The dinner was incredible and the wines were impeccable to match,” she said. “Not to mention [that] everyone at the table was a delight to chat with.” *—SJ*

## ***The SOMM Journal would like to thank our guests for the evening:***

**Justus Benjamin**, owner, Boutique Vino, San Diego, CA

**Alberto Moreno**, beverage manager, Catania, La Jolla, CA

**Rick Perrault**, beverage manager, The Marine Room, La Jolla, CA

**Devany Rezendes**, wine steward, Del Frisco’s Double Eagle Steak House, San Diego, CA

**Sarah Worley**, wine club director, The WineSellar & Brasserie, San Diego, CA

**Mary Davies**, wine director, Piper at The Seabird Resort, Oceanside, CA

**Michael Pickering**, beverage director, Polo Steakhouse, Carlsbad, CA

**Prentiss Hyatt**, wine director, Paon Restaurant & Wine Bar, Carlsbad, CA

**Bertrand Daluzeau**, director of food and beverage, Sheraton San Diego Hotel, San Diego, CA

**Chris Russo**, wine director, NINE-TEN Restaurant and Bar, La Jolla, CA

**Karla Poeschel**, sommelier, Harlo Steakhouse, Las Vegas, NV

**Josh Neimeyer**, owner, Vinicola Varga Wine Bar, San Diego, CA

**Carlos Cisneros**, sommelier, Bocca Ristorante, Birmingham, AL



*The Spectrum of Spirits panel: Legends Wine and Spirits Western region manager Miguel Rodriguez, SOMM Journal senior wine and beer editor and moderator Jessie Birschbach, Chopin Imports director of education Joel Caruso, and Victoria Distillers president Peter Hunt.*



# Something Extra

STANDOUT PRODUCTS SHOW OFF THEIR MOVES AT OUR “**SPECTRUM OF SPIRITS**” SEMINAR *story by Deborah Parker Wong / photos by Rafael Peterson*

**ON DAY TWO** of SommCon's San Diego conference last November, *The SOMM Journal* hosted its seminar “Spectrum of Spirits.” Serving as moderator, our senior wine and beer editor, Jessie Birschbach, set a lively tone for the session with an upbeat playlist that not only added some “spirit” to our tasting lineup, which included vermouth, mezcal, rye whiskey, and grappa, but also had attendees dancing in their seats and the panelists showing off their moves as they took the floor.

As one of our most prolific and engaging writers, Birschbach takes her readers on lively excursions that weave together

essential knowledge and storytelling in what amounts to best-of-class edutainment. She brought a similar energy to her role on the panel while pointing out that the spirits had, in her words, “something extra happening” that makes them of particular interest to buyers.

As director of education for Chopin Imports—whose portfolio is anchored by the well-known Chopin Potato Vodka—Joel Caruso presented Dos Déus Origins, a sweet red vermouth that wowed the room while representing a category that bridges the gap between spirits and wine. Produced in Priorat, Spain, the fortified

wine is made from the region's indigenous Macabeo, Parellada, and Xarel-lo grape varieties, which are also used in the production of Cava. It's blended with 30 natural herbs and spices, including wormwood, according to a highly guarded recipe and finished in Sherry barrels. Caruso described the aromatized result as “near-bulletproof” in that it's shelf stable for weeks on end after opening.

Dos Déus Origins opened with complex, savory brown-spice aromas and flavors that reminded this taster of cola and root beer; earthier on the palate, the flavors moved toward sandalwood





**Chopin Imports director of education Joel Caruso.**



**Master distiller Peter Hunt is president of Victoria Distillers.**



**Legends Wine and Spirits Western region manager Miguel Rodriguez.**

and even white pepper before a finish with plenty of length and intensity. According to beverage analysis company IWSR, various factors are contributing to growth in the vermouth category, including increased consumer interest in bitter flavors, botanical ingredients, and lower-alcohol options.

Mezcal, tequila's smoky sibling, continues to trend as consumers under 40 seek out authentic, handcrafted products. Caruso had a story to tell with Burrito Fiestero Mezcal, a brand named for the donkeys or *burritos* that carry harvested maguey from the fields to the distillery and are thus representative of authentic mezcal culture. Based in Durango, a Mexican region that lies north of Oaxaca, and distilled by Don Juan Conde, Burrito Fiestero Ensamble blends two wild agave species—*Agave durangensis* and *Agave crassispina*—for a mezcal that's spicy, sweet, and smoky, with a round, smooth intensity. Burrito Fiestero also produces a line of small-batch mezcals made from agave species grown only in Durango for its Ancestral Collection. Rodriguez noted that when the brand's spirits are poured over ice, they will *louche*, or turn cloudy, as a sign of quality.

Master distiller Peter Hunt, who serves as president of Victoria Distillers in Sidney, British Columbia, has been perfecting Empress 1908 Gin since 2008. The brand was

created in honor of the historic Fairmont Empress Hotel, which was built in 1908 and is famous for its afternoon tea, served on china gifted by Queen Elizabeth II. Distilled with the signature blend of black tea served at the hotel, Empress 1908 has a soft, buttery texture while exhibiting an indigo-blue color naturally derived from the butterfly-pea blossom that turns a lovely shade of pink when mixed with acidic ingredients. Hunt, a molecular biologist by training, explained that butterfly pea balances the traditional citrus notes of the gin with a floral, mildly sweet flavor that can be compared to angelica. Today, the Fairmont Empress follows the Edwardian tradition of afternoon tea with a cocktail hour featuring Empress 1908 Gin.

Created by Legends Wine and Spirits founder Chris Radomski as an homage to the late actor John Wayne, fondly known as "The Duke," Duke Double Barrel Founder's Reserve Rye has one of the most complex aging regimens in its category, as Legends Western region manager Miguel Rodriguez explained. After aging in American oak barrels, the nine-year-old Kentucky rye whiskey is finished first in second-use French oak barrels that previously held ultra-premium Napa

Valley Cabernet Sauvignon and then in barrels that held Duke's 5-Year Kentucky Straight Bourbon Whiskey (thus the name "Double Barrel"). The result delivers a complex wave of caramel, dried stone fruit, dark chocolate, and exotic wood notes, while the rich, pronounced mouthfeel has a spicy attack reminiscent of a classic high-rye expression.

Finally, *The SOMM Journal's* own director of education, Lars Leicht, was on hand to present Castello Banfi's Poggio Alle Mura Grappa Riserva di Brunello di Montalcino, which is distilled from the pomace of Sangiovese grown in the walled-in *cru* vineyards surrounding the historic Poggio alle Mura castle in Montalcino, Italy, and aged in Slavonian oak for 12 months. Leicht, a grappa lover who once lived on the Banfi estate, described the bottling as the very "soul of the Sangiovese grape." Due to the inherent sustainability of grappa's zero-waste production process, appreciation for the spirit is growing in the U.S.

While the product lineup made for a memorable end to the conference, Birschbach's playlist became the de facto anthem for SommCon 2022. We can't wait to hear what's cued up for 2023. *sj*





# The Profundity of Paso Robles

## SOMMCON PUT A SPOTLIGHT ON THE REGION'S WORLD-CLASS BORDEAUX VARIETIES

story by Deborah Parker Wong / photos by Rafael Peterson

**THE RATIO** OF speakers to attendees at SommCon 2022, held last November in San Diego, California, was one to ten—making it one of the beverage industry's most dynamic and intimately immersive educational events of the year. *SOMM Journal* publisher and editor-in-chief Meridith May was joined by the magazine's VP of education, Lars Leicht; its senior wine and beer editor, Jessie Birschbach; and me, its global wine editor, to present and moderate several standing-room-only sessions.

the most exciting Bordeaux-style wines in the country.

While her familiarity with the region is impressive, the camaraderie May has built with its producers set the tone for a session that was both informative and candid. Six wines were presented and are discussed here in the order they were tasted.

The Farm Winery's 2018 Cardinal is impressive for several reasons, one being that it's sourced from Paso's oldest surviving Cabernet Sauvignon vineyard: the Old Bailey Vineyard, planted in 1964.

vanilla and dark chocolate, not to mention the freshness that is so characteristic of the chalky Adelaida District AVA. I had the opportunity to taste Achaval's Malbecs from his winery in his home country of Argentina, Achaval-Ferrer; long before I tasted the Cardinal, but he and Madsen clearly have a winning partnership.

Hearst Ranch Winery's 2020 Lone Tree Cabernet Franc was presented by the producer's director of sales, Marc Laderriere, whose experience in the region spans two decades. The blend of 83% Cabernet



Marc Laderriere  
is director of  
sales for Hearst  
Ranch Winery.

Jim Madsen  
is co-founder  
of The Farm  
Winery.



May teamed up with a panel of vintners and winemakers from Paso Robles, a region that happens to be one of her favorites, to explore its world-class range of expressions featuring the Bordeaux varieties that are excelling there. As California's fastest-growing wine region—which houses 11 American Viticultural Areas (AVAs) within its borders—Paso Robles is becoming a go-to for some of

The nearly 60-year-old vines produce miniscule yields of less than a half ton of grapes per acre. Winegrower Jim Madsen and winemaker Santiago Achaval—who together with their wives are partners in the winery—don't produce this flagship every year; the 2018, which is the eighth vintage since the first release in 2009, is in its infancy but radiates floral aromas, a precise varietal character, and notes of

Franc, 10% Cabernet Sauvignon, and 7% Merlot was sourced from the estate's Estrella Vineyard on Paso Robles' west side. Upon first impression, the wine showed pretty, dried-floral aromas indicative of the high percentage of Cabernet Franc, which were underscored by earthy notes of dark chocolate and tobacco; the palate, meanwhile, showed deeply extracted yet fresh and balanced flavors. Laderriere not-





*Douglas Ayres  
is the owner  
of Allegretto  
Vineyard Resort.*

*Fourth-  
generation  
winemaker  
Matthew  
Glunz.*



ed that the vintage was harvested later than usual, allowing the team to achieve their desired style. Fans of Cabernet Franc will find that this bottle exceeds expectations at an SRP of \$49.

Next, fourth-generation winemaker Matthew Glunz poured the Glunz Family Winery 2019 Reserve Cabernet Sauvignon. Long based in Grayslake, Illinois, the producer today oversees 20 acres just east of the city of Paso Robles. Glunz, whose winemaking background includes stints in Oregon and Sonoma, described this wine as a blend of Cabernet Sauvignon clones 337 and 4 (the latter of which is an Argentine clone) from the estate's 3-acre Bernard's Block Vineyard. With a hefty 17% of estate Petit Verdot in the blend, it reminded me in some ways of another Bordeaux-style blend, Beaulieu Vineyards' celebrated Georges de Latour. Aromas of black tea, dried leaves, and orange zest expanded with notes of cedar and dark fruit as well as abundant tannins.

We returned to The Farm Winery with the 2018 Old Union, a wine sourced from the Paso Robles Willow Creek District AVA (the official name, as there are many Willow Creeks in the U.S.). Serving as a contrast to the Cardinal, Old Union is dominated by red fruit, with concentrated flavors of ripe cranberry and raspberry that are carried from the midpalate through the finish by a sense of freshness. In time, Old Union will unwind and become every bit as seductive as

the more forward Cardinal. During his presentation, Madsen touted the differences between the two sites and credited Achaval's winemaking for allowing them to shine.

The penultimate expression, the Allegretto Wines Reserve Willow Creek Vineyards 2019 Cabernet Sauvignon, was produced by vintner Douglas Ayres, owner of Allegretto Vineyard Resort just west of the city of Paso Robles. Made with biodynamically farmed grapes, it showed varietal markers of dried herbs, cassis, dark cherry, and vanilla framed by generous tannins and an abundant use of new oak. (Seminar attendee David Glancy, MS, noted that this was his top pick from the flight.)

We then arrived at the final wine of the session, Pomar Junction Vineyard & Winery's 2018 Cab Forward; named in homage to the history the winery's owners, the Merrill family, have in the railroad business, this blend of the winery's best barrels of Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, and Petit Verdot was presented by winegrower and winemaker Matt Merrill, who made his first vintage at Pomar Junction in 2002 and now manages the winery and works closely with fellow winemaker Jim Shumate. Thirty-three percent of Cab Forward is estate fruit, while the remainder was sourced from across the region, namely from the El Pomar District and the Templeton Gap as well as from the San Benito AVA. The blend, which comprises



*Winegrower and winemaker Matt Merrill of  
Pomar Junction Vineyard & Winery.*

50% Cabernet Sauvignon, 25% Merlot, and 25% Petit Verdot, aged in (66% new) French and Hungarian oak barrels.

While it was possible to differentiate between all the wines—primarily through their aging regimens—the character of Paso Robles' Cabernet Sauvignon served as the thread that clearly connected them. In closing, May acknowledged the collaborative and community-driven energy as a thread that similarly connects the region's winegrowers and winemakers. *SM*



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## THE SOMM JOURNAL

The SommJournal and BUSA are partnering to offer guidance for sommeliers seeking to compete against the world's best. BUSA will begin offering sommelier bootcamps in the US in 2023, the first of which is in Puerto Rico April 21-23, 2023.

**Join BUSA today and learn more about these great opportunities!**

Keep reading The SommJournal and scan to learn more about becoming a member of Best USA Sommelier Association  
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{ on-premise }



by Kate Nowell-Smith

# Sonoma SIPPING

**PULLING UP A CHAIR AT MAISON HEALDSBURG,  
A CALIFORNIA WINE BAR WHOSE TIME HAS COME**

*Maison Healdsburg owners  
Jade Hufford, Evan Hufford,  
and Ryan Knowles.*



## COMMUNITY, HOSPITALITY, AND

sharing are the dominant themes that arise when speaking with the trio of sommeliers behind Maison Healdsburg, a wine bar and shop that's set to open in the northern Sonoma County town of Healdsburg in February. With decades of collective hospitality experience at such celebrated restaurants as San Francisco's Michael Mina and Atelier Crenn, Evan and Jade Hufford and Ryan Knowles could have chosen to remain at the starry apex of fine dining for the rest of their careers—or they could have settled comfortably into less demanding roles in quieter locales. They chose to do neither. Instead, the three have banded together to create their ideal spot, described by Evan as “a Parisian-inspired wine bar in a comfortable space with a Michelin-caliber wine list.”

Evan and Jade began their careers in Phoenix, Arizona, at much-awarded Native American restaurant Kai. Evan credits it with giving them a thorough grounding in what he calls “peak hospitality.” It was there, while hosting the local chapter of the Confrérie des Chevaliers du Tastevin, that he had that “aha” moment known to so many wine lovers—when we encounter a knockout that defies generic descriptors and presents us with a beguiling mystery. In his case, it was a Joseph Drouhin 2005 Charmes-Chambertin Grand Cru. “I couldn't keep my nose out of the glass,” he enthuses. “I had to know more!”

Knowing more entailed entering a more established wine scene, a requirement that prompted Evan and Jade, by then a couple, to move to Las Vegas, where Evan accepted a sommelier position at Joël Robuchon's L'Atelier. In their new home, they were exposed to the sort of broad and deep wine lists that most sommeliers can only dream about. Evan speaks fondly of one regular who insisted on selecting wines that the young sommelier had not yet tried, thus helping him to fuel his passion and education. A subsequent move to San Francisco took Jade to Michael Mina and Evan to Saison, which maintained a focus on Burgundy that deepened the couple's love for the region. Eventually, the two were brought up to Healdsburg to be part of the opening team at SingleThread Farm-Restaurant-Inn.

While Evan and Jade were coming up in the industry, so too was Ryan, a Healdsburg native who began his career

at age 14. By 16 he was working at The Madrona, a local showcase for Sonoma County food and wine. After a stint in Oaxaca learning everything there is to know about mezcal, he returned home and joined the opening team at SingleThread, where he met his future business partners. Jade gently teases Ryan about this time; it was then that he passed the first two levels of the Court of Master Sommeliers exam—less than a month after turning 21.



SingleThread earned three Michelin stars within its first two years, a testament not only to its exquisite food and wine but also to its superb hospitality. Nevertheless, the trio began to dream about a place of their own. They craved opportunities to interact with locals, see familiar faces, and develop lasting friendships over wine. “Wine is so inclusive,” Ryan says. “Everyone has a spot at the table. We are about knocking down the barriers to entry.” Their vision began to crystallize into something rarely seen in this part of the world: They would offer a top-tier by-the-glass wine list in a warm, casual setting for industry locals and tourists alike.

While that list incorporates what Evan calls “cool, amazing finds” from all over the world, the primary focus is on their shared loves: West Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir and Chardonnay, Burgundy, and grower Champagne. Jade speaks excitedly of a space where she can pour the wines and tell the stories of small producers they have come to know as friends, thereby replacing an outmoded, recher-


ché approach to wine education with one of enthusiasm and inclusion.

The decision to open Maison Healdsburg from 2 p.m. to 2 a.m. is a radical one in what is still a sleepy grape-farming town at heart, but it reflects the owners' desire to serve the local hospitality community as much as the many travelers they receive. Whether you've just finished a meal or a shift at one of Healdsburg's fine restaurants, there will be a place for you here.

In addition to serving an ever-evolving

selection of wines and bites, Maison will hold educational tastings in its cellar room. These will range in price and scope from single-variety flights designed to put local wines into a global context to knock-your-socks-off explorations of the world's most vaunted and hard-to-find wines. And if you taste something you love, you can buy a bottle to take home.

For those just starting down the sommelier path, the Maison team has plenty of wisdom to share. “Find the passion for hospitality alongside wine,” enthuses Evan as Jade nods in agreement, “and learn to understand the back end of running a wine program.” Ryan's advice: “Take the job seriously, but don't lose sight of the fun of it—how playful wine is.”

As if on cue, Arzelle, Jade and Evan's magnificent Husky Shepherd mix, pads over, and I can tell my time is up. But I'll be back, and I know that Maison Healdsburg will be here to welcome you too. 

For more information, visit [maisonwinebar.com](http://maisonwinebar.com).

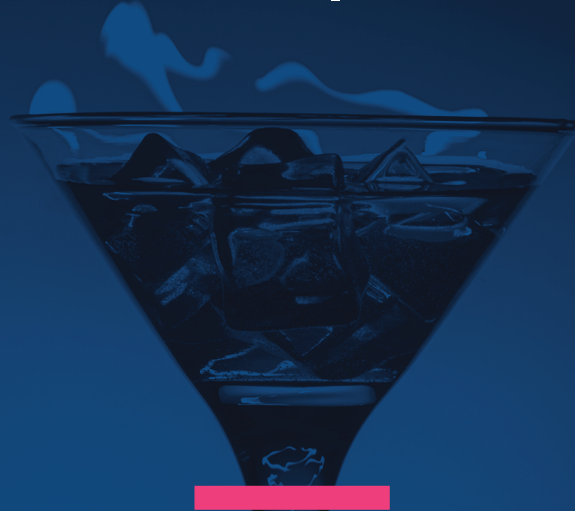
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# A Dream Come True

MEET **MARCUS SLOSEK**, LEAD SOMMELIER AT THE RITZ-CARLTON,  
HALF MOON BAY, CA by Laura Ness

**WINE IS FOOD, RIGHT?** So technically, Marcus Slosek, lead sommelier at The Ritz-Carlton, Half Moon Bay, in California, is still on the career path he initially chose at San José State University: nutritional science. No doubt his love of food helped prime his palate for the never-ending pleasures and treasures of the grapevine.

Born in West San Jose, Slosek was first exposed to the wine world while working at a wine bar to pay his way through school. Access to 30 wines by the glass juiced his curiosity, and rigorous blind tasting with Jon Walker, a somm at Manresa, during the pandemic helped cement his new life path.

Now that he has ended up where Master Sommelier Ian Cauble (star of the 2013 documentary *SOMM* and its 2015 sequel, *SOMM: Into the Bottle*) once worked, we asked him how he's putting his own spin on the wine selection.

PHOTO COURTESY OF THE RITZ-CARLTON, HALF MOON BAY



**Q: Landing a job at the Ritz must be a dream come true. How did that come about?**

I heard through the grapevine that they were looking for a sommelier. I never thought I could ever have the chance to work for such an esteemed luxury brand that sets the standard for hospitality.

**Q: The Ritz-Carlton, Half Moon Bay, has an amazingly deep cellar of 4,000 bottles. What are you bringing to the selection?**

We currently have 15 wines by the glass, more than when I started. I like to keep a lot of local wines from the Santa Cruz Mountains in every category, including Ridge, Rhys, and Thomas Fogarty, to display not only the superior uniqueness... but how they come together and have a perfect reason to have a place at the table.

Personally, I think Ridge is the doyenne of Cabernet Sauvignon in California with [its] Monte Bello offering. It captures a beautiful expression of Cabernet Sauvignon in the depths of its rich but refined, restrained character, which draws from the unique climate of the mountains, [the] Pacific Ocean, and geology (there's fractured limestone in the soils here, unique in California). So it's truly like nothing else coming out of California.

**Q: What do you look for in candidates for your by-the-glass program?**

Something that complements the innovation that chef Francisco Simón brings to his dishes. He is truly dynamic and distinctive, and so I have to highlight unique wines that pair with his courses—something that enhances the plate.

**Q: How many guests request wine-pairing recommendations for each course versus those who order a bottle for the entire meal?**

It seems we lean toward more pairing than bottle sales, as we have two sensational wine-pairing options. I hear much feedback from our guests that they enjoy having wines they wouldn't normally ever think to pair with.

**Q: Have you noticed any recent trends in the varieties people want to try?**

In terms of bottle sales there's not much exploration, honestly, but I strive to provide options by the glass that not only have unique character but, again, go

with our dishes. So that includes wines like Carricante grown on Mt. Etna in Sicily, Aligoté from Meursault in the Côte-d'Or, or even sparkling wine from the Santa Cruz Mountains, like Rhys—[wines] from producers committed to displaying a sense of place.

**Q: Do you have any “aha-moment” wines?**

Thinking about wines that really make you sit up and take notice, I would say Domaine Roulot [Meursault] Perrières could be the greatest wine I've ever had. It always makes me smile when people state they dislike Chardonnay—which I understand, as there are oceans of commercial, mindlessly made white juice out there—but this wine is truly stunning, [with] so much vibrancy on the palate, like tamed electricity.





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