

THE SOMM JOURNAL

A photograph of three women walking through a vineyard. The woman on the left is wearing a blue button-down shirt and grey pants. The woman in the middle is wearing a white t-shirt and dark jeans. The woman on the right is wearing a floral patterned shirt and dark jeans. They are all smiling and walking towards the camera. The vineyard is lush with green leaves and some clusters of grapes are visible.

**LAND,
LEGACY,
AND**

LUXURY

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THE SOMM JOURNAL

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

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

SUBSCRIPTION RATE:

\$52 one year; \$100 two years
Single copy: \$10
For all subscriptions, email:
subscriptions@sommjournal.com

POSTMASTER:

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THE GRAIN

THE NEVER-ENDING STORY OF
CASTELLO DI MONSANTO IS ONE
OF PASSION AND PERSEVERANCE

by Lars Leicht

Il Poggio is Castello di Monsanto's most famous vineyard in the Chianti Classico zone.



Daughter-and-father team Laura and Fabrizio Bianchi of Castello di Monsanto.

Laura Bianchi of Castello di Monsanto likes to say that her family's story has no beginning or end. Well, I never like to contradict a friend—I've known Laura for a few decades now—but one could argue that, technically speaking, the anniversary of the 60th harvest of the winery's single-vineyard Il Poggio label does indeed mark a beginning, specifically 1962. That said, Laura is correct, as she so often is. That date simply marks a milestone along a much longer and deeper path.

There are other key milestones in the Bianchi story—like the decision by Laura's paternal grandmother, Anna Lovazzano, to purchase and restore a small farmhouse in rural Tuscany in early 1961. Lovazzano's husband, Aldo Bianchi, made it clear that as much as he too loved the farmhouse in his native region, his industrial work in Milan kept him too busy to look after her project. So their 21-year-old son Fabrizio volunteered to organize things. Six months later, the landlord of the surrounding estate suggested that if they liked the little red stone house so much, they should buy the entire property, including the castle that crowned it and several vineyards.

Times were tough in rural Tuscany, and with work to be found in the cities, nobody wanted to farm anymore. But Fabrizio—now Laura's father—remembered visiting his maternal grandmother and cousins in Piedmont and helping them make wine there as a young boy. He was smitten by the Tuscan countryside and its vines—and besides, he had a tendency to go against the tide.

Fabrizio and Anna tasted the wines they found in the castle cellar and were intrigued. Then, as his Piedmontese grandmother taught him, he began tasting the grapes on the vine and was even more impressed, especially with those from the vineyard called Il Poggio, or "The Hill." Drawing from the lesson provided by the cru designations of Piedmont, he reasoned that if the fruit from the different vineyards combined to make a very good wine, a bottling exclusively from Il Poggio could be extraordinary. He was correct, and it changed the course of his family's future. "The property had been originally purchased because we liked the area, not [because we had] the goal of producing great quantities of wine," says Fabrizio. "But the wine, that first year's production, convinced us to create a winery based on modern systems."



The cellar at Castello di Monsanto holds bottles of every vintage the winery has produced since 1962.

So Fabrizio continued to go against the grain in rural Tuscany at a time when winegrapes were just another subsistence crop, and the more you could put on the table the better; his move to green harvesting was especially foreign to local farmers. Meanwhile, when he carved out cellars to store his bottled wine, many neighbors thought it pure folly—why hold on to it when you can sell it or drink it? And they weren't the only ones. Much of the world, and certainly the U.S. market, viewed Chianti Classico as a simple table wine: cheerful, reasonably priced, and hardly ageworthy. But he literally dug in, hiring elder craftsmen using artisan methods to complete a monumental project that took six years and today stretches over 300 meters (almost 1,000 feet) underground, where it holds bottles of every vintage of Castello di Monsanto from 1962 onward. "It was a fight against the mentality of the time," explains Laura.

Fabrizio, now 84, calls that sprawling

cellar his greatest satisfaction: "The selection in this wine cellar is one of a kind not only in Italy but in the entire world." Laura says that her father adamantly corrects people who tell him that he is lucky to have all those vintages for reference. "Luck has nothing to do with it," she asserts. "It was his plan, his vision, his determination. It was his risk."

In 1968, the rebellious Fabrizio achieved two more milestones. First, he quietly stopped including the white varieties that were required to go into the Chianti Classico blend as of the year prior—a rule that wasn't lifted until 2006. Second, he planted a new Sangiovese vineyard that would come to demonstrate his dedication to the variety. While other producers were creating what would later be dubbed "Super Tuscans" by adding Cabernet and Merlot to their wines, Bianchi broke the old rules as well as the new convention by making a 100% Sangiovese: His 1974 Sangiovese Grosso Fabrizio Bianchi again violated the

local production laws of the day, which required that Chianti Classico must include white varieties Trebbiano and Malvasia as well as other regional red varieties, including Canaiolo and Colorino. The wine was relegated to the lowest classification, *Vino da Tavola*, but Fabrizio put the European VQPRD designation (a French acronym for Quality Wines of Determined Regions) on the label along with the name of the variety, which was also not permitted.

"It was completely illegal," admits Laura. "It was something really revolutionary at the time but [necessary] to make people understand that the importance is in the wine and in the variety." The Sangiovese Grosso is still produced today from the same vineyard as a cornerstone of the Fabrizio Bianchi line (which also includes a Chardonnay and a Rosato of Sangiovese); to show how much the rules have evolved, it could now technically be labeled as a Chianti Classico, but the Bianchis prefer to keep it as an IGT

(Indicazione Geografica Tipica). “We like to protect the story of the winery, the story of the man who made this winery,” says Laura. “If I transform that wine into a Chianti Classico, I destroy a story, which is our patrimony. It has a story to transmit, even if it would be easier [to sell as a Chianti Classico].”

At the same time, the Bianchis are staunch defenders of the Chianti Classico denomination. “Our first wine has always been Monsanto Il Poggio,” says Laura of the aforementioned expression, which was originally designated as a Chianti Classico Riserva; it’s now a Gran Selezione in recognition of its single-vineyard status. “My father and I have always believed that as part of a denomination, your most important wine must be of that denomination. We always believe in giving value to the entire denomination, value to the entire territory.”

That conviction carries on into the next generation, with Laura’s daughter Giulia Cecchi working in the U.S. as a brand ambassador. Like her mother, she was surrounded by the business as a child and decided to be the one among her siblings who would bring continuity to the family story. “I grew up at the winery, and that helped me establish . . . passion for the entire home and to understand the value of all of it,” she says. But first—just as young Laura drove a tractor and worked harvests to better understand production—young Giulia learned other aspects of the business by taking a job with an importer to better understand the U.S. market. “It is very important for any generation to go away to expand your experience, then come back,” says Laura. “Step by step, you fall in love with it.”

And where there is love, passion, and generational succession, there’s a never-ending story. **SJ**

“THE SELECTION IN THIS WINE CELLAR IS ONE OF A KIND NOT ONLY IN ITALY BUT IN THE ENTIRE WORLD.”

—**Fabrizio Bianchi**

Tasting Notes



Castello di Monsanto 2020 Fabrizio Bianchi Chardonnay, Toscana IGT, Italy (\$30) Aromas of creamed corn and lemon wafer are opulent in this rich and generous wine, whose stark acidity expands with flavors of vanilla pudding on the mid-palate. Hints of jasmine and ginger energize the stunning finish. **92** —*Meridith May*



Castello di Monsanto 2020 Fabrizio Bianchi Sangiovese Rosato, Toscana IGT, Italy (\$20) Story and cool, the mineral base of this rosé upholds a bed of roses and raspberries. Crisp and clean, with a hint of oregano and wild strawberry on the finish. **91** —*M.M.*



Castello di Monsanto 2018 Chianti Classico Riserva DOCG, Toscana, Italy (\$33) Seasoned with white pepper and a hint of chili powder, this spicy red is vibrant thanks to high-toned acidity and tart fruit. Cherry, red beet, and defined tannins make for a super-charged Sangiovese. **92** —*M.M.*



Castello di Monsanto 2017 Fabrizio Bianchi Sangiovese Grosso, Toscana IGT, Italy (\$50) Rich, broad strokes of cherry, cedar, black pepper, tobacco leaf, and cranberry gleam on the palate. Upright and bright tannins dry the tongue, leaving a lasting impression until the next sip. **93** —*M.M.*



Castello di Monsanto 2017 Chianti Classico Gran Selezione Vigna Il Poggio DOCG, Toscana, Italy (\$74) Satisfyingly rich, round, and succulent. Black cherry and coffee bean unite with a side of espresso and tobacco. Distinctive and regal, chalky tannins are weighty and add to the wine’s intensity and muscular structure. **96** —*M.M.*

Arizona Is the Center of My World

WHAT'S YOUR HAPPY PLACE?

PHOTO: DEBBY WOLVOS



Publisher/editor-in-chief Meredith May at Garden Bar PHX in Phoenix, AZ.

Meredith May

THOUGH BORN AND RAISED in New York, I had only a few adventures in the Big Apple in my late teens. Central Park was a focal point, and concerts at the Fillmore East were spectacular in those days. But I never did get to experience the fine-dining spots that would someday play a major part in our publications: When my brother left for Stanford University and my sister traveled west to attend Berkeley, I elected to go to college in Southern California. And there I stayed—for decades.

I found homes in Hollywood, the San Fernando Valley, West Los Angeles, the Santa Ynez Valley, and, finally, Thousand Oaks up in Ventura County. So what made me move to Arizona?

When things got tough or I just needed a retreat, I would often choose between Scottsdale and Sedona. The two destinations kept me tranquil. When the desert shows itself in all its glory, the flora and fauna flourish. The rich corals, turquoise greens, and salmon pinks are stunning and lull me into a sense of well-being.

Scottsdale and some of its neighboring communities, such as Chandler, Gilbert, and, of course, Phoenix, boast some of the country's best restaurants. I am beginning to make acquaintances with the area's hospitality industry professionals while also welcoming winemakers, spirits producers, and other visitors who come to work in the ever-evolving market.

The SOMM Journal and *The Tasting Panel* continue to operate out of our headquarters in Los Angeles, and our editors reside all over the country, so our national fingerprint is healthy. But now, my calling Arizona home means that, from time to time, a few of our pages will be imbued with a sunbaked, terra-cotta palette.


Here's to finding your happy place in 2023! 

*Meredith May
Publisher/Editor-in-Chief*

On the Cover

Launching into 2023, we're thrilled to have Courtney Foley and her winemaking team on our cover. With its growing portfolio, Foley Family Wines leads the way in what they call "the three Ls"—land, legacy, and luxury—while sustainable farming practices remain a consistent theme throughout their U.S. properties.



A black and white photograph of a wine bottle lying on its side on a bed of sand. The bottle is dark and has a light-colored, textured label. The label features the text 'IRON + sand' at the top, followed by several horizontal lines. At the bottom of the label, it says '19 PASO CAB'. To the left of the bottle, there are several thick, rusty iron rods or rebar pieces. The background is a mix of sand and a piece of rough, layered rock on the right side.

**A WINE BORN FROM
THE GRIT OF PASO ROBLES**

© 2021 Iron and Sand Wines, St. Helena, CA

The natural draw of the historic hot springs, Iron Spring and Sand Spring, propelled Paso Robles into a bustling destination in the late 1860's. Today, wine, especially Cabernet, is what draws us to Paso Robles.

IRON + sand

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**FROM MOURVÈDRE
AND MAUZAC TO
CARIGNAN
AND CLAIRETTE**

A Languedoc Primer



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CON UN SENSACIÓN EN LA
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- ANA MARIA ROMERO
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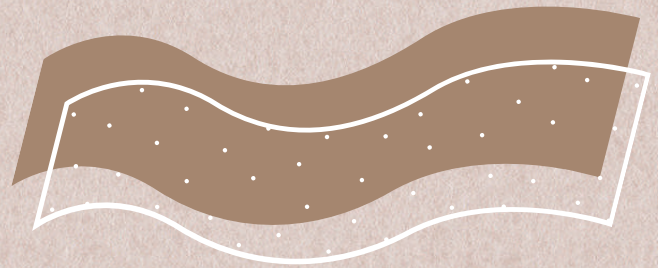
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For centuries wine and tattoos have been a part of our culture. As grapes evolve into beautiful and complex wine, tattoos transform a canvas into a visual display of a personal narrative. Our wine celebrates the individual and delivers an elevated experience.

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Benefit of the Doubt

WINE CONSUMERS ARE A LOT SMARTER THAN YOU THINK

FOR AS LONG as I've been in this business, the American wine industry has treated consumers as though they were idiots. I don't get it, because that couldn't be further from the truth. Consider, for example, how they're able to adapt to rapidly changing technology or the latest trends in music, film, food, and fashion; even if they don't understand something, they're savvy enough to figure it out quickly, ensuring that they're never truly left behind.

Yet when it comes to wine, producers, distributors, media, and hospitality pros alike treat consumers as if they are slow learners who can barely understand more than four or five varieties at a time. When Jancis Robinson first published her pocket-sized *Guide to Wine Grapes*, she listed over 700 grape varieties grown commercially around the world, while later editions included as many as 1,368. Why? It's called consumer demand.

Yet the way we stack our restaurant wine lists is a reflection of the industry's overall attitude toward consumers. A typical "award-winning" wine list will have 100 Cabernet Sauvignons, 50 Chardonnays, and maybe a couple of Zinfandels and one Chenin Blanc, but nothing "weird" like Graciano or Biancolella. Almost no cool new producers will be represented, while the big commercial brands sold everywhere will dominate. There will be nothing from out-of-the-way appellations because—well, we assume our guests can't possibly understand or appreciate alternative grapes, unknown brands, or unfamiliar appellations, no matter how amazing the wines may taste with our cuisines.

So we spoon-feed them like babies and chuckle about their penchant for "thinking dry and drinking sweet." But it's not that consumers are dumb; rather, it's



IMAGE: NATURAL WINES/REG CLARKE © 2022

that we, the so-called professionals, are lazy—too lazy to make an effort to give them what they deserve, which is as much variety on the wine list as they find on the menus prepared by many of our über-talented chefs. Guests, as we all know, always come in for the food. They understand brand-new dishes, and even if they've never heard of every ingredient that goes into them, they are more than eager to experience them.

In short, if you assume your guests are capable of appreciating only a few wines at a time, then that's what you get—guests with narrow tastes; those who are utterly bored by your meager selection will simply go elsewhere. But if you treat them like people with the capacity to learn about and appreciate just about anything you throw at them, then you get the predictable results: You sell a lot more wine! SJ

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Peak Performance

A WORD WITH ANDREW SHAFFNER, WINE DIRECTOR/
SOMMELIER AT THE TELLURIDE SKI & GOLF RESORT

TALK ABOUT A big job—mountain-sized, in fact. As wine director/sommelier of the Telluride Ski & Golf Resort, Andrew Shaffner oversees the wine programs for a whopping 13 restaurants, two hotels, and what he calls a “massive” wedding and events department, all while running “a sort of sommelier prep course” for staff. I asked the Maryland native, who’s worked in the industry from Connecticut to Las Vegas since he was 14 years old, to elaborate on his duties.

French onion soup. So that’s a really fun list to play around with; it’s quite small, with more village-level stuff and a lot of Rhône wines.

Alpino Vino is my baby; that’s the highest-elevation restaurant in North America, sitting at 12,000 feet up at the top of the mountain. It’s old-school, upscale Italian, and the wine list, about 500 bottles, is primarily Italian; we have the largest collection of Brunello—which has got a particular place in my heart—that

ally at Bon Vivant, [but] at Allred’s I have a team of sommeliers. There’s also Tomboy Tavern, which is an upscale gastropub with a heavily New World–focused wine program: Silver Oak, Caymus, Rombauer. It’s a fun, fun place at the very bottom of our mountain; it’s constantly packed.

What’s a typical day for you?

My day sorta goes like this: I jump on a snowmobile, usually at about 8:30 in the morning, and go up to Bon Vivant. We may do a little tasting if there’s a new product; we do some staff training—what’s the difference between this Champagne or that Champagne? What’s the difference between a Sancerre and a white Bordeaux? We try to make sure that our staff are experts in their field, and a lot of that falls on me and the general managers of each restaurant. So I’ll go up to each restaurant, check in with them on inventory, on staff training, how busy do you expect to be today, and then I’ll move on to the next one. I usually spend the bulk of my time at Alpino Vino, where I’m also the GM; it is in the wintertime our busiest restaurant, so I’m up there opening bottles, meeting guests, shaking hands—we have a lot of regular clientele who are both locals and tourists; it’s very much a destination. And then I’ll scoot on back down the mountain, check in on Allred’s and Tomboy Tavern—and then it’s probably dinner service and my day is basically done.

Allred’s features a 1,200- to 1,400-bottle wine list and modern American cuisine. ▼



▲
Andrew Shaffner is wine director/sommelier at the Telluride Ski & Golf Resort in Telluride, CO.

Tell us about some of the restaurants whose programs you oversee.

We have everything from a little mom-and-pop pizza place, where we serve everything from boxed wines to obscure Nero d’Avola from Sicily, to a Thai concept whose program is heavily focused on high-acid, low-oak white wines. We have Bon Vivant, a ski-in, ski-out establishment that sits at about 11,000 feet and is modeled off what you would find if you were skiing in the French Alps, with a French-only wine list and French country cuisine: There’s foie gras torchons and duck-leg confit and a really smoking-good

I’ve ever seen except for one place in Las Vegas. The cool thing about it is we have a sizeable aging program: We’ve got about 100, 150 cases of wine just waiting—Brunello, Barolo, some top-tier California stuff—until they’re ready.

And then there’s Allred’s, which is by a lot of people’s standards the crown jewel of Telluride. It’s modern American cuisine with French influence and a 1,200- to 1,400-bottle wine list, and that’s where we have your DRC and Screaming Eagle and all the first growths and all that good stuff. I don’t necessarily work the floor in all these places; I do at Alpino Vino and occasion-

How do you characterize Telluride as, in your words, “a very high-end, borderline-private ski resort”?

We say that you go to Aspen to be seen; you go to Telluride to *not* be seen. Aspen, Vail, Jackson Hole, Deer Valley—we’re not trying to be any of those places. We’re so incredibly unique. [Given Telluride’s remote location,] you’ve got to be committed to coming here: You’re coming for a week, not a weekend. You’re committed to spending some money and having a good time. I think we’ve done a very good job of accommodating that kind of customer base. From a food and beverage standpoint, we stand out above just about everybody. ❧

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Don't Call It a Comeback

AL CORO REPRESENTS A BOLD NEW START FOR A NEW YORK CITY ICON

SIGHS OF SHOCK and sadness could be heard across New York City when acclaimed Italian restaurant Del Posto permanently closed its doors in 2021. Well, when one door closes, another opens—or three, at least in the case of Del Posto's former space at 85 Tenth Avenue: It's now home to Italian fine-dining concept Al Coro as well as the more casual pizzeria Mel's and cocktail lounge Discolo. And chef Melissa Rodriguez is at the center of it all.

The former executive chef of Del Posto, Rodriguez was the first woman at the helm of a restaurant awarded four stars by *The New York Times*. She and her business partner, Jeff Katz, have made quite a splash since opening the doors to Al Coro last June: In October, they were awarded two stars by the *Michelin Guide*.

On a recent visit, I felt a sense of familiarity upon entering the grand 150-seat dining room. But the new team has introduced some tasteful changes that make it their own. The restaurant's website states, "Al Coro is a restaurant built for celebrating," and they aren't joking. A live band performs each night during dinner service in the mezzanine above the bar. Seating for groups of up to ten is available in the main dining room, where the addition of arches between the large structural columns has created intimate nooks. Private dining options are also available, including an underground space that can accommodate up to 180 people.

Changing every six weeks to focus on one of Italy's 20 regions, Al Coro's menu has the wow factor to match the extravagant setting. (Five- and seven-course tasting menus are also offered.) Each meal starts with a lavish spread of antipasti such as fried artichokes with fish-sauce caramel, candied lemon, pickled red onion, and mint. Pastas like culurgiones, a Sardinian pasta stuffed with potato, fontina, and

PHOTOS: NATALIE BLACK



▲ *Melissa Rodriguez is executive chef and partner at Al Coro in New York City.*

mascarpone and served in caviar butter sauce with razor clams, are plated per person; main courses, including whole roasted sea bass Marsala, are served family-style. Desserts by executive pastry chef Georgia Wodder—who served in the same position at Del Posto—include a strawberry-vanilla mascarpone tartufo with an oozing strawberry-Cardamaro caramel center.

And the wine program? Calling it "approachable and fun," wine director Catherine Fanelli says that it's "an ode to Italy. The list spans the entire country and focuses heavily on the classic wines as well as more esoteric, off-the-beaten-path


producers, [plus] a wide selection of Champagne and a good representation of other great regions in France."

As for Mel's, it opened a few months before Al Coro and is accessible via a separate entrance. It serves wood-fired pizzas, pizza-friendly wines, and heartier dishes like New York strip steak and whole branzino. For a glam drinking and dancing experience, meanwhile,

Al Coro's potato, fontina, and mascarpone-filled culurgiones with razor clams in caviar butter sauce. ▼



guests can descend the stairs from the dining room to take in the twinkling lights, lively beats, and creative cocktails of Discolo.

Ready for a big night out in the Big Apple? Al Coro has you covered. 

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

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Isabel Mitarakis

ISABEL MITARAKIS
WINEMAKER

A Distinctive Dynamic

THE LIFE OF A SOMMELIER IN A PRIVATE CLUB

by Elizabeth Dames

“HAPPY BIRTHDAY! That was a super-fun night! Thanks for all you do.” Though one might expect to receive a text like this after a night out with friends, it actually came from a member of the private club where I work as wine director. I had been working the floor on my birthday, and this particular member not only recognized the milestone and thanked me for being there but even had his son play me “Happy Birthday” on the grand piano while we all shared a glass of Champagne together.

Such interactions are not uncommon in private clubs. There is a distinctive dynamic between those serving and those being served that verges on familial in a way that is reminiscent of what is portrayed in *Downton Abbey*. Our guests know us and we know them, and the potential is there to develop lasting relationships.

As wine director, I therefore have the unique opportunity to learn their preferences intimately, which can then be translated into wine lists and events that engage them. However, I also consider it my role to expose them to more than the wines they already know and possibly expand their tastes. The most rewarding moments are when I successfully encourage members to venture outside their comfort zone to try something new and they end up loving it. It’s beautiful to see someone realize that wine can be such an adventure! In private clubs, it’s about the long game. I don’t have to wonder in these moments if I’ll see my guests again: I know with certainty I’ll soon have another opportunity to guide them to more new discoveries.

Yet another advantage to working in a private club is that I have the flexibility to create broader wine experiences. One of the most memorable examples is a wine tour of Champagne that I coordinated. We visited the historical *crayères* (aging

PHOTO: DIANA ALFORD PHOTOGRAPHY



The most rewarding moments are when I successfully encourage members to venture outside their comfort zone to try something new and they end up loving it. It’s beautiful to see someone realize that wine can be such an adventure!

cellars) and learned about the impact of the World Wars on the French region. Such trips allow you to form a significant bond of respect and loyalty with members. The trust that they then place in you in the dining rooms is unbreakable, and the camaraderie that they continue to experience long after the trip is unparalleled.

Working in private clubs has allowed me to build a multifaceted wine career—from serving as a floor sommelier to teaching educational courses to acting as a travel guide. Each of these roles has helped

mold me into the wine professional that I am today. **§**

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

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A Pinot for Every Palate

A GROUNDBREAKING STUDY PROVES THE DIVERSITY OF RUSSIAN RIVER VALLEY TERROIR by Michelle Ball

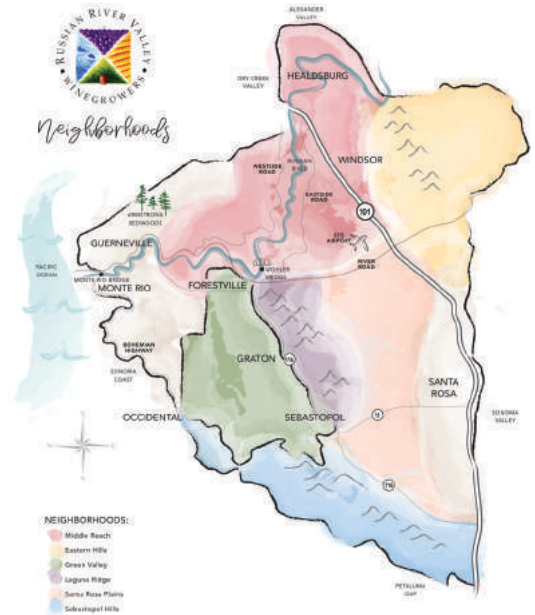
EVERY IMPORTANT WINEGROWING

region has an identity. For instance, the phrase “Burgundian” is often employed to describe wines with a certain profile, despite the tremendous diversity that exists throughout the French appellation. By the same token, winemakers and growers in the Russian River Valley AVA (RRV) in California’s Sonoma County have collaborated since the 1980s to define the characteristics of their signature grape: Pinot Noir.

Early winemaking pioneers such as Greg La Follette, Rod Berglund, Merry Edwards, and others met often to taste wines from the region compared to other growing areas. “Over time, it evolved into the realization that there wasn’t just one Russian River Valley Pinot Noir model. . . . There is lots of differentiation and a lot of commonalities at the same time,” says Berglund. For instance, tannin development is a prominent marker of distinction among the RRV neighborhoods. “In colder

regions, the grapes develop thicker skins, and those thicker skins add to heavier tannins. [When] you go north, those tannins tend to be a little bit finer, a little lushier, and less dark,” observes Ryan Prichard, winemaker for Three Sticks Wines. Winemaker Ed Morris, meanwhile—who crafts a Pinot Noir from multiple sites in the RRV for Ron Rubin Winery—finds that warmer areas of the region such as the Eastern Hills serve as a beautiful foil to cooler ones like Green Valley: “Green Valley has really bright red fruit; it tends to be cranberry and rhubarb. I get more dark cherry from the Eastern Hills—it’s a little bit lushier. Acid is a little bit lower. And I think those two sides really complement each other.”

Although such producers knew RRV Pinot Noirs were nuanced and varied, their observations were recently confirmed by scientific evidence. In 2015, Dr. Roger Boulton, professor of enology and



The Russian River Valley AVA consists of six neighborhoods, each with its own unique terroir.

chemical engineering at the University of California, Davis, began to study them using a method known as elemental fingerprinting. His test was conducted on the 2015 vintage and repeated in 2017:

A view from the Eastern Hills neighborhood overlooking the Russian River Valley.

Single-vineyard wines from throughout the neighborhoods—all of them unfiltered, unfiltered, and aged for four to five months in neutral oak barrels to eliminate bias—were collected, numbered, and analyzed for chemical structure, including potassium, nitrogen, and so on.

Boulton's findings, published in the May 2020 edition of the scientific journal *Molecules*, concluded: "Overall, distinct elemental fingerprints were found across both vintages, separating all neighborhoods from each other." The study identified six neighborhoods within the RRV: Eastern Hills, Middle Reach, Santa Rosa Plains, Laguna Ridge, Green Valley, and Sebastopol Hills. Yet apart from Green Valley, which has been designated as a sub-AVA, these names are unlikely to appear on a label. "There's some concern that if you dive too deep and create all these AVAs, you start to diminish the commonalities. We want to keep Russian River at the forefront," says Prichard, who adds that there isn't a push to create new sub-appellations.

While we can't yet confirm how the results translate into neighborhood-specific sensory profiles, knowing there are commonalities within areas can guide buying decisions. To prove as much, the Russian River Valley Winegrowers association hosts the annual Pinot Forum, a three-day experience that gives industry professionals an opportunity to explore the region (see page 74 for our recap of the 2022 event). In anticipation of next year's

Forum and the celebration of the AVA's 40th anniversary, *The SOMM Journal* will take a closer look at each of the RRV's neighborhoods and their influence on the Pinot Noir grown there in a special six-part series, starting with this installment.


Part One: A Look at Eastern Hills

Rolling in from the cold Pacific Ocean and dissipating as it moves inland, fog is the dominant factor of influence on the RRV's climate. Eastern Hills sees the least amount of fog as the easternmost neighborhood. This, along with its predominantly west-facing exposure, translates to warmer growing conditions and an earlier harvest date.

What's more, explains Alex Holman, winemaker for Balverne and Notre Vue, "Eastern Hills terroir includes more volcanic soils than the other neighborhoods, which adds a level of unique minerality to our fruit-forward Pinots. I tend to pick early, which goes with my style. We also tend to get more sun with less canopy than other neighborhoods, so good vigor is key for us."

According to La Follette, Eastern Hills is in fact the most diverse neighborhood in terms of soils, which range from the aforementioned rocky, volcanic earth on the hillsides to clay and alluvial soils toward their base. As winemaker for Ancient Oak Cellars, a small family estate located at the southern end of the neighborhood, La Follette finds Eastern

Hills Pinot Noir to exhibit "a riper tannin structure ... [as well as] warmer, darker fruit tones and darker berries."

For that reason, he considers it to be more approachable for the average wine consumer than Pinot Noirs from other neighborhoods. Yet he's quick to emphasize that this is a generalization and encourages tasters to explore all parts of the RRV, adding, "I think the beauty of these different regions is there is interest for everyone." 

TASTING NOTES

Ron Rubin 2019 Pinot Noir, Russian River Valley (\$25)

Sourcing from multiple neighborhoods throughout the Russian River Valley allows winemaker Ed Morris to blend flavors for a complex yet approachable Pinot Noir. Tart red cherry, flint, and herbal aromas join silky red-fruit flavors framed by raspberry-tea tannins and bright acidity.

Three Sticks 2020 Pinot Noir, William James Vineyard, Russian River Valley (\$75)

The alluring bouquet includes snappy blood orange and pomegranate. In the mouth, savory Earl Grey tea and earth mingle with dried red cherry, focused red-plum tannins, and a juicy burst of cranberry on the finish.

Ancient Oak Cellars 2017 Siebert Ranch Pinot Noir, Russian River Valley (\$55)

This Eastern Hills wine is the last vintage made from the Pommard clone planted by Ken Moholt-Siebert's grandfather in 1994 (the vineyard has since been replanted and, in 2022, celebrated its first commercial harvest); it was safely in barrel when the 2017 Tubbs Fire overtook the property. Warm wild strawberries and savory red-clay aromatics surge from the glass before the broad, juicy palate unfolds with notes of hibiscus tea, blackberries, and soft black cherry-skin tannins.

Balverne 2019 Forever Wild Estate Grown Pinot Noir, Russian River Valley (\$45)

Beguiling aromas of fresh chanterelle mushrooms and ripe dark cherries are echoed on the palate of this wine from the Eastern Hills, which offers plush red fruit and fine-grained tannins.





*Japanese tai crudo
with yuzu and shoyu at
Anheho in Phoenix, AZ.*

New Kid on the Block

ANHEHO REDEFINES THE FINE-DINING SCENE IN DOWNTOWN PHOENIX

“THAT’S THE PÉTRUS,” says Ivan Jacobo with a smile upon the arrival of a delivery. He gets up from the table where we’ve been chatting to sign for the package and quickly returns, setting a bottle of 2010 Château Pétrus before me and noting, “We sold the last one on Wednesday, but the same customer is coming in tonight and requested another.” In the year since its reopening in a new location, fine-dining destination Anheho has quietly garnered a passionate following, a testament to this young chef’s ambitious vision and unbridled talent.

for the three-course meal, and you’ll be spoiled with delights such as silky Japanese tai (sea bream) with yuzu or juicy, lavender-crust and honey-glazed duck. Splurge on seven paired courses, and you may swoon, as I did, over duos such as California golden king crab and caviar with Krug Grande Cuvée or Jacobo’s signature beef Wellington with Dominus Estate’s 2006 Bordeaux blend from Napa Valley.

The extraordinary wine program is curated by wine director Ryan Ansell, who joined Anheho in 2021. An avid col-

are coming in to do a full vertical, and for another dinner, it will be Château Ducru-Beaucaillou and 40 years of their wines dating back to 1986. Even if someone flew to Bordeaux, they wouldn’t be able to have someone from the château and their wines in such a setting. It’s something special we can share with our loyal patrons.”

Jacobo’s first pop-up dinner, which served as the inception of Hidden Kitchen, was a wine-paired, multicourse affair priced at \$20 per person. He sold two tickets. “I can’t believe that we went from having to give away seats to selling out \$800-per-person truffle dinners,” he says with an incredulous grin. “In the



PHOTOS: CHRISTINA BARRUETA



Anheho chef-owner Ivan Jacobo.

Jacobo began his career as a teen. After working in various kitchens, he went on to launch his own food truck as well as a supper club called Hidden Kitchen before founding the original iteration of Anheho (Spanish for “desire”) in 2019; in 2021, he moved it to a larger space in a historic Art Deco building in the heart of downtown Phoenix.

There, he offers two different prix-fixe menus with optional wine pairings. Opt

lector; he builds his list through the relationships he’s cultivated during his wine travels. “For example, I was in Bordeaux for En Primeur in April, in Burgundy in May, in Piedmont in June, and in Tuscany in July,” he tells me. These connections are at the heart of Anheho’s consistently sold-out wine dinners, for which “I’m able to bring in heads of châteaux, owners, and winemakers,” says Ansell. “The owners of Vine Hill Ranch in Napa Valley



Anheho’s prime beef Wellington with chanterelle duxelles and black garlic demi-glace.

beginning, people weren’t sure it was good timing to open a fine-dining place downtown; [they said] that we should have tried Scottsdale.” And now? “We made the right move,” Jacobo asserts. **SJ**

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2019 CABERNET SAUVIGNON,
NAPA VALLEY

*The Tasting Panel
November/December 2022*



97

2018 TRANSCENDENT
CABERNET SAUVIGNON,
NAPA VALLEY

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*The Tasting Panel
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Returning to Radici del Sud

SOUTHERN ITALY'S NATIVE VARIETIES WERE ON PARADE AT THE ANNUAL WINE COMPETITION

AFTER A SEVEN-YEAR ABSENCE,

I returned to Sannicandro, Italy, last June to serve as a member of the international jury of Radici del Sud—otherwise known as the world's only competition for wines made with native grapes from

included several fellow Americans: Li Valentine, Lisa Denning, Matthew Horkey, Michelle Williams, my *SOMM Journal* colleague Lars Leicht, and Robert Camuto. Scores determined the first- and second-place wines for both juries, and

the results revealed a marked difference in palates: Not one wine received awards from both.

If, like me, you're passionate about native grape varieties and their regions of origin—or even if you're just curious—I'm providing a list of the wines awarded first place by the international jury for handy reference. Consider it a shopping list for the next time you're looking for something off the beaten path. All of these wines have the potential for enjoyment and represent good value. *sj*

The 2022 Radici del Sud jury included panel chair Robert Camuto (left), author Deborah Parker Wong, Matthew Horkey, Maurizio Gily, Lisa Denning, and Michelle Williams.

PHOTO COURTESY OF RADICI DEL SUD



the Southern Italian regions of Abruzzo, Calabria, Campania, Molise, Puglia, Sardinia, and Sicilia.

Before 2015, when I first juried the competition, my exposure to many of Southern Italy's native varieties—and the DOCs/DOCGs they come from—had been limited to my WSET studies and the occasional trade tasting. Radici del Sud provided my first immersion into the region's wealth of grapes and wine styles. It was a defining experience, one that initiated years of study and tasting.

The winning wines at this year's competition are memorable for several reasons: The whites were fresher; the rosés crisper; and the red wines seemingly more elegant than I recall them being in 2015. Granted, my impressions are surely influenced by the fact that I am now far more familiar with these varieties and their terroirs.

Radici del Sud, which marked its 17th anniversary this year, is unique in that it has a dual group of juries: one composed of Italian trade and press and another of international trade and press, which

ABRUZZO

- Masciarelli Castello Semivicoli 2019 Trebbiano d'Abruzzo Superiore
- Casa Vinicola Roxan Corale 2020 Pecorino Colline Pescaresi
- Azienda Agricola Guardiani Farchione 2011 DITE & DI ME Riserva Montepulciano d'Abruzzo

CALABRIA

- Casa Comerci Abatia 2019

CAMPANIA

- Pietreionne 2020 Maiorano Falanghina
- Nativ 2021 Vico Storto Greco di Tufo
- San Salvatore 1988 2021 Pian di Stio Fiano
- Agnum 2016 Piediroso Campi Flegrei
- Agriter Aglianico 2020
- Claudio Quarta Vignaiolo SRL 2015 Taurasi Riserva

PUGLIA

- Masseria Borgo dei Trulli 2021 Vermentino
- Menhir Salento 2019 Filo Terra d'Otranto Riserva Negroamaro
- Le Vigne di Sammarco SRL 2016 Archè Primitivo di Manduria
- Cantina di Ruvo di Puglia 2016 Augustale Castel del Monte Nero di Troia Riserva
- Le Vigne di Sammarco SRL 2017 Marasia Salento
- Santa Lucia 2021 Gazza Ladra Fiano

SARDINIA

- Contini 2020 Sartiglia Cannonau di Sardegna
- Contini 1979 Antico Gregori

SICILIA

- Coppola 1971 '71 Settantuno Spumante Brut

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The Duke Abides

WITH A NEW LOOK, A HISTORIC ITALIAN WINE—**RUFFINO RISERVA DUCALE**—NODS TO MODERN LUXURY by Ruth Tobias

STANDING THE TEST of time and changing with the times would seem to be mutually exclusive endeavors. But over the course of its illustrious history, Ruffino has proven otherwise with respect to its flagship wine, Riserva Ducale—an icon, in one form or another, for more than 140 years.

Founded in the Tuscan town of Pontassieve in 1877, Ruffino quickly developed a reputation for what was then called Chianti Stravecchio. Word of its quality spread to the royal court, and in 1890, the Duke of Aosta visited the winery; duly impressed, he declared Ruffino the court's official supplier. For the next 37 years, it reserved the best wine in its cellars just for him.

To commemorate its 50th anniversary in 1927, Ruffino returned the honor by renaming Chianti Stravecchio Riserva Ducale—meaning, sure enough, the Duke's Reserve—and creating a label depicting him receiving the wine as a 16th-century Florentine prince.

Ruffino saw its share of change in the years to follow. A World War II bombing destroyed innumerable treasures in the cellars of the winery, which had to be rebuilt from scratch; the 1966 flood of the Arno River inflicted further damage. That same year, Riserva Ducale was designated as Chianti Classico, and in 1984,

PHOTO COURTESY OF RUFFINO



it became a Chianti Classico Riserva DOCG. But through it all, it remained one of the world's most recognizable Italian wines, appearing everywhere from banquets held by Charles de Gaulle and Queen Elizabeth II to a scene in the film *The Devil Wears Prada*.

And so it remains today. Aged for one year in French oak followed by one

year in concrete and an additional three months in bottle, the stainless steel-fermented blend of 80% Sangiovese with 20% Merlot and Cabernet Sauvignon retains its classic profile of cherry, violet, and plum with touches of tobacco, clove, and eucalyptus, derived in part from the mix of clay, limestone, and Tuscany's famous galestro soils in which the grapes grow. But on the outside of that bottle, for the first time in nearly a century, is a new label with a more contemporary look to represent Ruffino's answer to the call of the moment.

Though the famous illustration of the Duke accepting a glass of Chianti from a proffered tray has been preserved, the backdrop has been stripped out, making for a cleaner, more minimalist design enhanced by block font on a field of gold that's softer than that of the original. In the upper-right corner, the brand logo now incorporates the crest of Chianti—as is only fitting for a wine that has contributed so much to the fame of the region worldwide. No doubt, then, that the new label will become as ingrained in the minds of consumers as its legendary predecessor. **SJ**

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Somm in 60 Seconds

HOW TO SIMPLIFY BURGUNDY FOR GUESTS

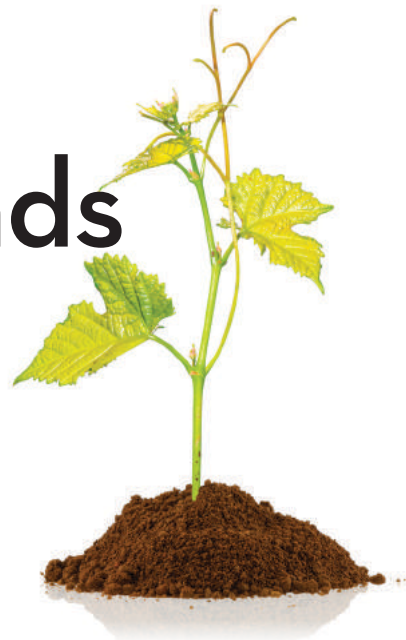
WINE IS HARD. If it were easy, we sommeliers wouldn't have careers. Yet we tend to forget not only that wine is an immensely complex subject but also that our staff and guests don't always share our knowledge or passion for it. For many, wine causes more anxiety than joy. As sommeliers, we must distill down all of its intricacies, committed to memory over years of zealous study, into easy-to-digest sound bites. While it's a monumental task, it's doable, provided the correct approach is applied. Burgundy provides a perfect example.

There's a reason that, for every wine list I've ever written, I've organized Burgundies, both white and red, geographically from north to south—and it's not just that the somm in me wants to justify the hours I spent studying the region's appellations and their orientation on a map. In truth,

so much can be communicated in a short amount of time by a list that's organized this way. It doesn't matter if the selection comprises six wines or 600. Nor does it matter if the subappellations are placed under separate headings or not. Bear in mind that what follows is an oversimplification of a complex region and won't always ring 100% true. However, it will quickly and efficiently guide servers and guests alike to a comfortable selection.

White Burgundy: Think Christmas Ornaments

Envision Christmas ornaments with round bodies and tapered ends, which can serve as a visual representation of the flavor profile of white Burgundy from north to south. We begin with Chablis: angular, lean, sharp. As we move down through the Côte de Beaune into Puligny-Montrachet, Chassagne-Montrachet, and Meursault, the wines become richer, rounder, and more textural. Heading further south to the Côte Chalonnaise, Mâconnais, and Beaujolais, the wines again become leaner, sharper, and more pointed. Et voilà—your servers and guests can now understand the flavor profile of the entire region's white wines without having deeper knowledge of the producers or appellations.

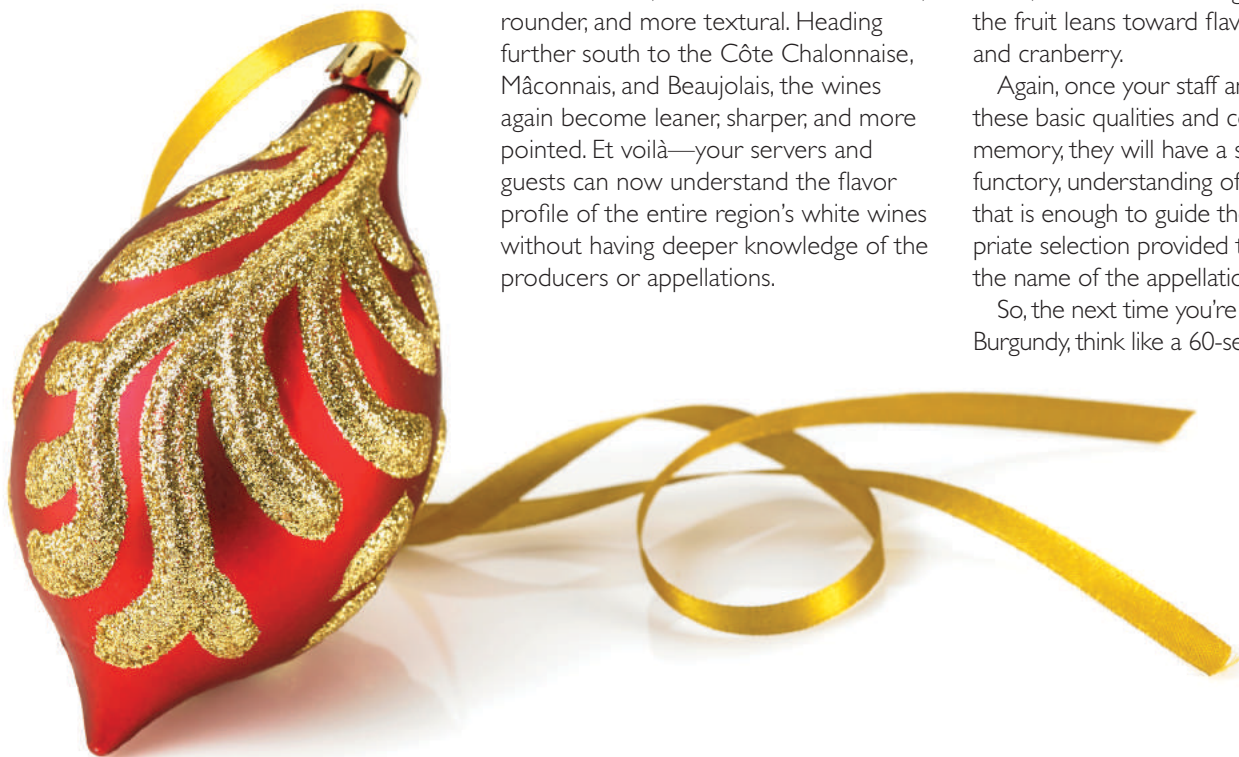


Red Burgundy: From Dirt to Fruit

Red Burgundy is even easier to grasp. It will always be marked by intense earth and fruit. Further north in the Côte de Nuits, the earth components tend to be much more organic: Flavors reflect anything involving microorganisms or creepy crawlies—dirt, leaves, loam, moss, forest, mushroom, et cetera. Meanwhile, the fruit typically expresses as darker and blackberry-like. In the Côte de Beaune and further south, the earth profile shifts to inorganic matter, with stone, rock, metal, and mineral leading the charge, and the fruit leans toward flavors of raspberry and cranberry.

Again, once your staff and guests learn these basic qualities and commit them to memory, they will have a strong, albeit perfunctory, understanding of red Burgundy that is enough to guide them to an appropriate selection provided they recognize the name of the appellation on a list.

So, the next time you're overwhelmed by Burgundy, think like a 60-second somm! **SJ**



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Building for the Future

A CONVERSATION WITH KELLY SCHMIDT, ASSISTANT DIRECTOR OF BEVERAGE AT FAMED TENNESSEE RESORT **BLACKBERRY FARM**

by Emily Johnston Collins

HOW DO YOU KNOW whether a wine will still be worth drinking in 50 years? That's a question that Kelly Schmidt and the wine team at Blackberry Farm in Walland, Tennessee, think about constantly. As the resort's assistant director of beverage, Schmidt oversees its two restaurant beverage programs, selects wines for private events, and helps manage the 140,000-bottle inventory. Though this inventory feeds the lauded wine list at James Beard Award-winning restaurant The Barn, which features about 10,000 selections, it is also part of an ongoing project to cellar-age wines for years to come.

Blackberry Farm was founded in the Great Smoky Mountains of Tennessee in the 1930s, though alcohol couldn't be sold in Blount County until the early 2000s. The resort has been collecting wine for 20 years, and Schmidt has been on the team for eight of those years. While its initial purchases continue to mature, she is finding new wines to age.

In the face of decreased availability and increased prices for many top wines, sommeliers are finding alternatives. Schmidt has recently begun favoring selections from lesser-known appellations for her program. "Perhaps Pouilly-Fumé will become as commonly requested as Sancerre," she muses, adding that the new generation of wine drinkers is more willing to spend money on sommelier-led experiences than on expensive bottle

PHOTO: SARAH RAU



As assistant director of beverage at Blackberry Farm in Walland, TN, Kelly Schmidt oversees two restaurant beverage programs and a 140,000-bottle inventory in addition to selecting wines for private events.

selections. This gives the sommeliers a chance to pour what they like—and they like Grenache, according to Schmidt, who quips that Blackberry Farm may sell more

of it than any other restaurant in the U.S. From Southern France, Spain, and Australia alike, Grenache-based wines complement the locally sourced, wood-fired meats; housemade cheeses; and preserved items that define Blackberry Farm's "foothills cuisine." A warm-climate hero and an exemplar of versatility, Grenache will no doubt continue to interest future wine drinkers.

When asked if the list at Blackberry Farm features local wines, Schmidt points out that Tennessee is a better producer of whiskey than wine. But that hasn't stopped her from reviving a generations-old family vineyard in Sevierville. With her kids, she began pruning the old Cabernet Sauvignon vines so that they would produce fruit, and they yielded enough clusters in 2021 to produce eight bottles. The second vintage, however, succumbed to the heat. Winemaking is fickle, but even when

unsuccessful, it provides valuable lessons. Perhaps this is the foundation of a wine that will be poured at Blackberry Farm in 50 years' time. SJ



A CHARMING EUROPE TO DISCOVER

Delicious wines from two well-known wine Regions worth exploration

Abruzzo wines and sweet wines from Bordeaux are the **ambassadors of European charm**, a heritage of history and tradition that was able to innovate and look to the future. Both are on the move, with a new concept of **sustainability, the indigenous varieties and export as a guideline for development**. Abruzzo is one of the oldest wine-growing regions in the world, known for its dominant varieties, the red Montepulciano grape which is used to produce the doc **Montepulciano d'Abruzzo** and the rosè version **Cerasuolo d'Abruzzo** and the white **Trebbiano d'Abruzzo** grape. It is also known for nurturing autochthonous varieties like **Passerina, Pecorino** and **Cococciola** as well as Sangiovese, Chardonnay, Cabernet Sauvignon and Merlot. Today the Consorzio Vini d'Abruzzo (Consortium of Abruzzo Wines), which includes more than 200 wineries and 6 thousand producers, representing about 85% of the regional production, **promotes a new model of sustainability in the wine sector, with reference to territory, biodiversity, and agriculture**. Exports of Abruzzo Wines in 2021 alone recorded +10% over the previous year for a total turnover of more than 205 million euros. Only the American market scored +12%.

Bordeaux is rightly famous for the late harvest using botrytised grapes. There are **8 different appellations of delicious, late harvest wines of Bordeaux**, each focuses on a slightly different interpretation of fruitiness made from a blend of sauvignon blanc, semillon and muscadelle grapes: **Premières Côtes De Bordeaux, Cadillac, Loupiac, Sainte-Croix-Du-Mont, Cérons, Côtes De Bordeaux-Saint-Macaire, Bordeaux Moelleux and Bordeaux Supérieur**. These wines range from pale yellow to a bronze in color, and taste of white blossoms, with hints of citrus and candied aromas. The eight appellations are located to the south and west of the city of Bordeaux. There are 350 wineries in the region, and together, they produce around 9 million bottles of late harvest wine each year – **of which 35% is currently exported**.

An ancestral skill that is carried out still today by family owned chateau.

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{ cover story }

LAND, LEGACY,

&

LUXURY

TWENTY-FIVE YEARS AFTER ITS FIRST HARVEST,
FOLEY FAMILY WINES TAKES THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN
WINE, LIFESTYLE, AND HOSPITALITY TO A NEW LEVEL

BY NELL JEROME

PHOTO: ROCCO CESELIN

*Foley Family Wines purchased Chalk Hill Estate
Vineyards in Healdsburg, CA, in 2010.*

The ten largest wine companies in the U.S. annually produce more than 10 million cases each. Producing just under 2 million cases per year as the 20th largest, Foley Family Wines is taking a different approach to growth, playing the long game with a focus on what you might call “the three Ls”—land, legacy, and luxury—as it builds a portfolio of some of the most iconic estates and distinguished vineyards in California as well as winery and hotel properties in Oregon, Washington, and New Zealand.

A West Point graduate, U.S. Air Force officer, and lawyer, Bill Foley embodies fortitude and determination. Those traits helped him turn Fidelity National Financial—where he was formerly CEO and now serves as non-executive chairman of the board—into the largest title insurance company in the U.S.; at business dinners along the way, he developed a passion for wine. With a thirst to continue expanding his knowledge of Burgundian varieties, Foley traveled and tasted his way through the wine regions of both France and California. In 1995, Bill and his wife, Carol, moved their family to Santa Barbara to search for vineyards where Chardonnay and Pinot Noir would thrive, and a wine career was launched.

Their first purchase was a winery just outside Solvang in Santa Barbara County that the couple named Lincourt Vineyards after their two daughters, Lindsay and Courtney. Next, they bought a site in the Sta. Rita Hills region in 1996 and named it Foley Estates; that same year, they established Foley Family Wines as the home of both brands. Lincourt celebrated its first harvest in 1997, while Foley Estates did the same in 2002.

PHOTO: ALEXANDER RUBIN



Foley Family Wines founder Bill Foley and his wife, Carol.

PHOTO: ROCCO CESELIN



Merus Wines in St. Helena is part of the Foley Family Wines portfolio.

PHOTO: ROCCO CESELIN



Ferrari-Carano Estate Winery in Dry Creek Valley.



Second-generation vintner Courtney Foley with her Corgi, Tubbs, at Chalk Hill Estate Vineyards.

Second-Generation Vintner Courtney Foley on *FAMILY, FARMING, AND SUSTAINABILITY*

Farming runs deep in the family. My mom, Carol Foley, grew up on a berry farm in Washington State, where she was taught by her parents, Knute and Eunice Johnson, that if you take care of the land, it will take care of you. This message was carried down [through] the next generation, with my siblings and me participating in harvest at my grandparents' farm, spending all hours of the day exploring the outdoors.

[And] this interest in land was mirrored by my dad's family, who were deeply involved in cattle ranching in the Texas Panhandle. They spent long days on ranches and cattle drives, growing more aware and observant of the changes in the land that assisted with or hindered their seasonal work. When my parents came together, [their] enduring interest in better land practices persisted and has become a cornerstone of how we approach farming and winemaking operations.

At Foley Family Wines, we are committed to increasing our sustainable practices year after year: All of our U.S. wineries and vineyards participate in third-party auditing processes that push each of our sites to adopt more progressive and environmentally friendly practices on an annual basis. This mindset extends to the business partnerships that we forge. With our farming company, Foley Family Farms, partnering with Vitidore and Ceres Imaging, we are actively working with cutting-edge technology that not only improves our farming operations but also provides robust resources to build institutional carbon sequestration and water-saving practices.

All these improvements are put in place to ensure the land that we are lucky to farm is healthy for generations to come. The term "sustainability" does not just extend to our vineyards and winery sites but also to the people who work with us and the communities we are fortunate to work in. Our executive leadership team is constantly striving to make conditions safer, more comfortable, and richer in resources for all our teammates. Additionally, my family is actively involved in non-profits and community organizations that support those most in need where Foley Family Wines employees and customers work and live.

Although there is still much to do, the challenge of determining what sustainability looks like across the board fuels my family and the leadership team at Foley Family Wines and Foley Family Farms. We view this commitment as a privilege and look forward to building out more meaningful support for the work that is so closely tied to our environment and the people we work alongside.



Reaping the bounty of produce at Chalk Hill.

Five years later, with the awareness that continued growth was essential to good relations with distributors, the acquisitions accelerated. The Foley Family Wines collection grew to include the historic Firestone Vineyard in the Santa Ynez Valley; cult Napa Cabernet producer Merus; Three Rivers Winery in Washington's Walla Walla Valley; Sonoma's Sebastiani Vineyards; Kuleto Estate in St. Helena; and New Zealand brands Vavasour, Goldwater, Clifford Bay, and Dashwood.

The more Foley acquired, the more he learned, and his strategy shifted to finding iconic wineries and improving them through meticulous viticulture. "I began spending time with the vineyard managers to understand what they were doing, what they were worried about, and what they were excited about," he notes. "Elevating the quality of the wines starts in the vineyards, and that takes patience—but it pays off."

In 2010, Foley made a pivotal acquisition of Healdsburg's picturesque and expansive Chalk Hill Estate Vineyards, where he now resides part time. Over the next few years, Lancaster Estate and Roth Estate in Sonoma County, Chalone Vineyard in Monterey County, Acrobat in Oregon, and Sonoma boutique producer Banshee all joined the family, followed in 2020 by the well-respected Ferrari-Carano Vineyards and Winery in Dry Creek Valley—a purchase that included what was then known as PreVail Mountain Winery (Ferrari-Carano now offers a line of wines called PreVail) and more than 3,000 acres of land across Sonoma Valley.



Silverado Vineyards in the Stags Leap District of Napa Valley.



Winemakers Alison Rodriguez and Sarah Quider at Silverado Vineyards.

In 2021, Foley continued to bet on luxury properties, acquiring Chateau St. Jean in Kenwood. Known as a pioneer of single-vineyard Sonoma County Chardonnay as well as for the lauded Bordeaux blend Cinq Cépages, Chateau St. Jean will celebrate its 50th anniversary in 2023.

Most recently, Foley purchased the Black Walnut Inn & Vineyard in Dundee, Oregon, and Silverado Vineyards, the luxury estate founded by the Disney-Miller family in the Stags Leap District of Napa Valley. "Because we are known as an acquirer within the industry, we are fortunate to see some of the best wineries and brands that go on the market," says Foley Family Wines president Shawn Schiffer. "We are always on the lookout for wineries with a legacy and wines with luxury-level quality potential; when deals come up, we consider the operational infrastructure of the winery and its capacity to enhance our production efficiency. Perhaps most importantly, we consider the potential of each site to offer an incredible hospitality experience to our guests and produce the highest-quality . . . wines possible." Silverado is a case in point, he adds: "With its history and location, Silverado Vineyards is a special place with enormous potential in channels where luxury wines are sold across the country as well as [in the] consumer-direct [space]."

Following its acquisition, the team brought Alison Rodriguez on board as its winemaker "to help further elevate the wines and fully reflect the fruit of our exceptional estate vineyards; we're very excited to see what she'll create in her first vintage with Foley Family Wines," says Schiffer, noting that Rodriguez reports to Sarah Quider, Foley Family Wines' VP of winemaking. "Sarah came to us in the Ferrari-Carano acquisition, and all our winemakers and wines have benefited from her talent and experience. Under her supervision, our winemaking team supports each other and pushes each other toward better and better performance."

Meanwhile, as the owner of luxury organizations such as Montana's Whitefish Ski Resort and Rock Creek Cattle Company, a private ranch and golf club, as well



Foley Family Wines president Shawn Schiffer.

as Hotel LeMars in Healdsburg, Foley aims to bring additional equity to Foley Family Wines customers. The Foley Food & Wine Society is a loyalty program that gives members discounts on wines and access to exclusive experiences at not only Foley's wineries but also his boutique hotels, private golf clubs, ranches, and other lifestyle properties. The common denominator is luxury. Santa Barbara's Hotel Californian, which Foley purchased in 2021, is the site of The Society: State & Mason, an upscale wine bar that exclusively features Foley Family Wines labels. As the majority owner of the National Hockey League team the Vegas Golden Knights, Foley also opened a Foley Food & Wine Society Wine Bar in Las Vegas' T-Mobile Arena in 2019. "While the sports industry continues to embrace wine, few cities have the capacity and appetite for entertainment that Vegas does. We elevate the hockey experience to the level of luxury that Vegas visitors have come to expect, including the wines they drink and where they drink them," Foley explains. "Having our wines available at the ... arena is a benefit to the consumer [as well as] lucrative for the venue and the distributor."

Ultimately, he adds, "When our season ticket holders have access to experience a weekend of wine events at a private ranch, or guests at one of our boutique hotels can attend a dinner hosted by the winemaker of one of our estate wineries, it takes the luxury lifestyle to a new level. There is an intersection between sports, wine, travel, and hospitality—and we are building it." ❧

TASTING NOTES



Ferrari-Carano 2021 Chardonnay, Sonoma County (\$27) A perfume of yellow apple and buttercream envelops the glass. Orange-vanilla notes coat the full-bodied palate, balanced by acidity and a dot of salinity. A hint of candied ginger and cinnamon appears on the glossy finish. **92** —*Meridith May*



Chalk Hill 2020 Estate Chardonnay, Chalk Hill, Russian River Valley, Sonoma County (\$48) A glistening jewel with mesmerizing aromas of lemon blossom and honeyed melon. Flavors of lemon cake, vanilla, pine nut, and sugared jasmine paint the palate. Elegance defines the mouthfeel, underscored by a sleek, floral finish. **95** —*M.M.*



Banshee 2021 Pinot Noir, Sonoma County (\$25) Earth and spiced cedar speak to this wine's savory character, while exotic floral tones of prickly pear and hibiscus work well with Chinese five-spice and black raspberry. High-toned acidity maintains freshness throughout. **91** —*M.M.*



The Four Graces 2021 Pinot Noir, Willamette Valley, Oregon (\$40) Poised on its tippy toes with acidity, this is a lean and expressive wine with delicate bones. Notes of cherry, cinnamon, and rose petal are precise on the finish. **93** —*M.M.*



Foley Johnson 2020 Estate Cabernet Sauvignon, Rutherford, Napa Valley (\$60) This energetic red offers base notes of roasted coffee and mocha along with the density of blackberry preserves and dried fig in tilled soil. Chewy, broad-shouldered tannins lend texture to the deeply shadowed, fleshy finish. **95** —*M.M.*



Chateau St. Jean 2017 Cinq Cepages, Sonoma County (\$110) The five Bordeaux varieties unite in this iconic red. Blackberry pie is sumptuous with a side of espresso and tobacco. Distinctive and regal, with chalky tannins that add weight to the wine's intensity and structure. **97** —*M.M.*



Sebastiani 2019 Cherryblock Cabernet Sauvignon, Sonoma Valley, Sonoma County (\$165) A wave of succulent black cherry and mocha creates a stunning bouquet that translates to Luxardo cherry-soaked oak flavors. Chewy tannins are sumptuous, rewarding the palate with elegance matched by a buoyancy inherited from the maturity of some of the vines, planted in 1961. Aged 16 months in French and Hungarian oak (50% new). **98** —*M.M.*



Silverado 2018 SOLO, Stags Leap District, Napa Valley (\$180) This single-vineyard Cabernet Sauvignon composed of the Silverado clone, designated as the Heritage clone, is a masterpiece aged in 85% French oak and 15% Hungarian oak for 15 months. Toasty vanilla creaminess combines with black raspberry, violets, and distinct minerality. Dusty mocha tannins integrate well with the bold berry lushness. **98** —*M.M.*

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“An Amazing Adventure”

CELEBRATING 20 YEARS AS WINEMAKER, TODD GRAFF USHERS IN A NEW ERA AT **FRANK FAMILY VINEYARDS** by Liz Thach, MW

PHOTOS COURTESY OF FRANK FAMILY VINEYARDS



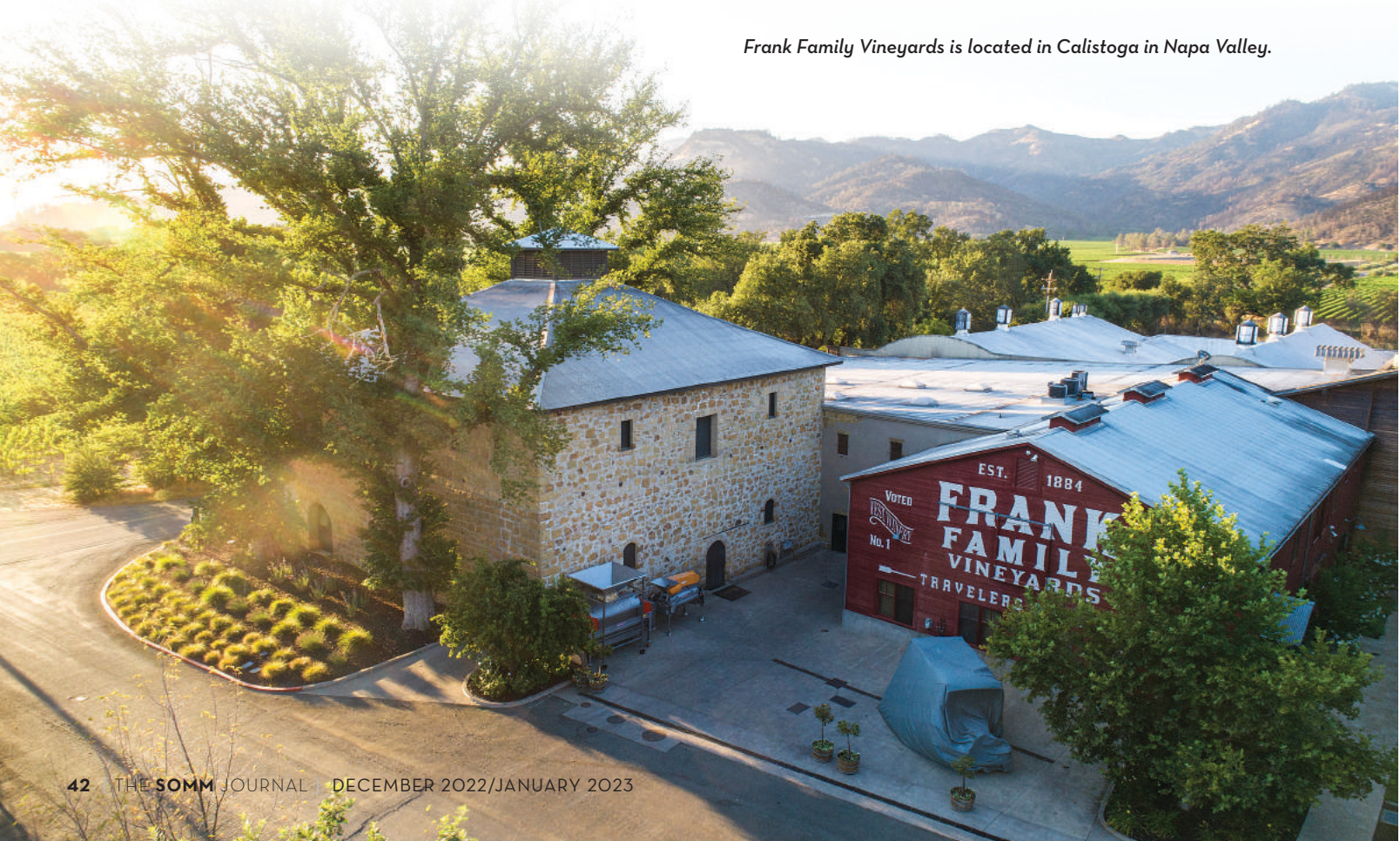
Frank Family Vineyards winemaker Todd Graff.

GROWING UP IN Sonoma County, Todd Graff knew from a young age that he wanted to work in the wine industry. After obtaining a viticulture degree from the University of California, Davis, he traveled the world, working harvests in Germany, France, and Australia. But California wine country called him back, and in 2002, he took a job as winemaker at Frank Family Vineyards in Calistoga.

Frank Family Vineyards was established in 1992 in the historic Larkmead Winery, where Hanns Kornell once made sparkling wine; built in 1884, it's the third-oldest facility of its kind in Napa Valley, and its founders, Rich Frank and his wife, Leslie, lovingly restored it to focus on Napa Valley Cabernet Sauvignon and Chardonnay as well as their own sparkling expressions. "It's hard to believe I am celebrating my 20th anniversary with Frank Family this year," Graff says. "But working for Rich and Leslie Frank has been an amazing adventure."

Graff is credited with helping to build the Franks' estate vineyard assets over the years to more than 350 acres and with producing one of the country's most popular Chardonnays, among other exceptional wines. "I am proudest of our Chardonnay program," he says. "I see the variety like the chiseled dancer with very broad shoulders. It can express the subtleness of beautiful French oak while remaining bright and balanced."

Frank Family Vineyards is located in Calistoga in Napa Valley.





Rich and Leslie Frank are the founders of Frank Family Vineyards.

The November 2021 announcement that Frank Family was being sold to Treasury Wine Estates came as a surprise to many in the industry. “Rich and Leslie had many successful careers,” says Graff, referring to Rich’s tenure as president of Disney Studios and Leslie’s as an Emmy Award–winning news reporter for ABC. Both continue to be intimately involved in the winery’s operations, but they decided it was time to look ahead to their next chapter after retirement. “Treasury offered the best transition in keeping both the cellar and tasting-room teams together as well as offering ways that Frank Family could improve its wines, vineyard sources, winery facilities, and sustainability initiatives even more,” Graff explains. “The transition has been impressively great.”

Graff reported that there have been few changes with the sale, and those that have occurred have been quite positive—including the fact that the winery now has access to a vast array of famous Napa Valley vineyards owned by Treasury Wine Estates in addition to its Winston Hill and Lewis vineyards and long-term contracts with Beckstoffer and Sangiacomo. “I still have complete control over the winemaking process,” Graff says. “We are currently looking to add more estate vineyards to our portfolio, so our wines will only get better as we’ll have even more control from grape to bottle.”

Though Frank Family has one of the most popular and devoted wine clubs in Napa Valley, the winery built a national brand over the years and relies deeply upon its partners in distribution and sales. “Having come from Hollywood, Rich firmly understood that the success of a great movie depended on distribution, so he grew a smart business in wine. We sell

a large portion of our wine in restaurants and retail, and we’re proud that our wines are recognized nationally,” reports Graff. “We could not have done this without the support of our distributors, retailers, and sommeliers.” With harvest completed, he’s going on the road to thank them in person: “It is a great feeling when you know that you’ve produced a great-tasting wine,

put a cork in the bottle, and sent it off into the real world. But truly nothing is better than being at a restaurant and seeing that bottle being enjoyed by others,” he says.

The wines in Frank Family’s Napa Valley collection are all available nationwide; beautifully crafted, they offer the stunning flavors and elegance for which the region is known. See below for my notes. *SJ*

Tasting Notes

Frank Family 2016 Blanc de Blancs, Carneros, Napa Valley (\$55) Aged five years on the lees, this is a beautiful vintage bubbly with a nose of creamy almond, lemon, and minerals. Soft, elegant mousse with persistent bubbles; fresh green apple appears on the palate before the long finish. Enticing! **94**

Frank Family 2021 Chardonnay, Carneros, Napa Valley (\$40) Seamless, with a brilliant golden hue and an inviting nose of yellow apple and lemon custard. Creamy vanilla and pear meld with toasty, well-integrated oak on the palate. Barrel-fermented and aged ten months in (33% new) French oak. **93**

Frank Family 2021 Pinot Noir, Carneros, Napa Valley (\$40) Glowing ruby color, with scents of dried strawberry, Bing cherry, and Tahitian vanilla. Good concentration and complex, savory notes—allspice, pomegranate, and umami—on the palate. Aged ten months in (33% new) French oak. **92**

Frank Family 2019 Zinfandel, Napa Valley (\$45) Aromas of mixed berries, including boysenberry, plus black cherry and a touch of pepper. Well-structured, velvety tannins with an appealing earthy character. Aged 18 months in (33% new) French oak. **91**

Frank Family 2019 Cabernet Sauvignon, Napa Valley (\$60) A big, meaty, and comforting Cab, with classic cassis, herbs, and a hint of boysenberry on the nose and palate joining appealing, toasty notes of spice. Excellent concentration, fresh acidity, structured tannins, and a long finish. Aged in (30% new) French oak for 20 months. **93**





by Wes Hagen

LXV Wine's Armaa.N Vineyard in Paso Robles' Willow Creek District.

PHOTOS: THE BRAND FOTO BY MELANIE NEGRI



Recapping the 2022 Harvest on California's Central Coast

WITH THE EXCEPTION of a few pockets of Syrah, Nebbiolo, and Cabernet, most vineyards between San Francisco and Santa Barbara were clean by the end of October, and many winemakers were even barreled down. I thought it wise to check in on three iconic Central Coast districts to see what the experts are saying about the 2022 vintage.

Santa Cruz Mountains AVA: Viticulturists and winemakers in the Santa Cruz Mountains all agree that the 2022 harvest came early. Madson Wines founder/winemaker Cole Thomas reported: "It's not early because it's been hot this summer; it's early because it was hot in February, which pushed plants to flower earlier and produce fruit earlier." That said, the AVA—like the rest of California—did suffer through the (all-too-normal) Labor Day heat wave, which persisted in many places for longer than a week and challenged winemakers with tough picking decisions; Jeff Emery, owner/winemaker of Santa Cruz Mountain Vineyard, added drought-impacted soil to the reasons that grapes came in early. Nevertheless, there is great hope that 2022 will yield balanced, high-quality wines. "So far, I'm really happy with numbers," said Margins Wine

winemaker Megan Bell. "Sugars might be ripening a little ahead of acids, [and] yields are a little low, [but] I've hit all the targets, which never happens; pHs are nice and low, which makes me happy."



LXV Wine winemaker Jeff Streckas.

Paso Robles AVA: According to the blog of Tablas Creek Vineyard—always a great repository of information on Paso Robles—the traditional Labor Day heat wave hit Paso hard before a rare autumn rain dropped nearly an inch over a few days. Tablas Creek partner/general manager Jason Haas wrote: "We got exactly the weather we were hoping for—escaped any negative impacts from the rain. . . . Conditions look outstanding for the next ten days or so. We plan on

harvesting steadily each day." Jeff Streckas, winemaker for LXV Wine in the Willow Creek District AVA, described the 2022 vintage as "a tale of two harvests: before the heat spike and after. Winemaking on early picks seeks to preserve the power and structure of these wines but to moderate tannins. Later picks needed sorting, and the wines are more phenolically ripe with softer tannins. Expect the blends and the single-pick lots to show a lot of diversity."

Santa Barbara County: This region has an incredibly diverse climate. In the Santa Maria Valley and Sta. Rita Hills AVAs, the Labor Day heat wave was mitigated by the Pacific Ocean—they generally avoided triple-digit temperatures—whereas inland vineyards baked. Like Streckas, ninth-generation rancher and winegrower James Ontiveros of Native9 Wines also saw two vintages in coastal Santa Barbara County divided by the September heat. "Those who seek to make bright, fresh, and vibrant styles of wine are going to be thrilled by the pre-heat picks," he said. "Those who waited until after the heat will have to sort out the raisins and desiccation, or there might be some issues making the riper styles of these wines." SJ

— THE — SEEKER

AWARD-WINNING WINES FROM AROUND THE WORLD

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—AND—
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92 POINTS
2021v

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91 POINTS
2020v

Blue Lifestyle

91 POINTS
2020v

Blue Lifestyle

90 POINTS
2021v

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by Natalie Wymer, VP of communications
and member relations, Wine Institute



Need a Holiday Gift? Look No Further Than California Wine

IT'S THE HOLIDAY SEASON, and there's no better time to enjoy California wines with family and friends. In fact, October through December is the busiest season for wine sales and shipping, and consumers tend to spend a bit more per bottle while dining during the holidays as well.

There are many ways for people to factor California wines into their plans; as they do, they'll be supporting an industry that continues to give back—providing quality jobs, bolstering the economy through tourism and taxes, implementing innovative environmental-stewardship practices, and giving to charities. According to a recent study by economic research firm John Dunham & Associates, the California wine community employs more than 1.1 million people across the U.S., with annual economic activity totaling more than \$170.5 billion. Consumers can continue to drive this economic engine while boosting their gift-giving reputation by sharing and enjoying California wines this holiday season.

For state residents, wineries are only a short distance away. In addition to traditional tastings, many wineries offer intimate, customized experiences that may include pairings showcasing local produce and cuisine. A wine tasting or experience makes for a great gift, as does a bottle of wine from one of California's 4,200 bonded wineries; local retailers, of course, offer countless options as well.

Many celebrate the holidays by dining

out. With knowledgeable sommeliers happy to make recommendations, this provides an excellent opportunity for people to share a meal and learn more about the types of California wines their friends and family prefer. As a result, they'll gain insight into options for gifting—whether for this year or next.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF WINE INSTITUTE



The holiday season is the perfect time to gift California wines.

Consumers looking to prepare a special meal at home, meanwhile, can consult the Wine Institute's 31-day countdown of festive recipes and wine pairings through the social channels of its California Wines program. Follow [@california.wines](#) on Instagram and [@californiawines](#) on Facebook to get tasty appetizer and dessert recipes throughout the month, starting December 1. For more recipes, visit [discovercaliforniawines.com](#), which also provides a listing of holiday winery events and offerings along with information on different winegrowing regions.

Those who have aspiring enophiles on their gift list can take a more educational

approach by giving them bottles of the same variety from a few different California regions—and perhaps from different vintages to add further nuance—with a card detailing fun pairing ideas. A more unconventional gift for the eager to learn, meanwhile, would be enrollment in a California Capstone wine course; the definitive educational resource on Golden State wines, it offers a professional certification through four levels of classes from introductory to expert.

Finally, people seeking environmentally friendly gift options should be more than satisfied, as the Golden State is home to one of the world's most widely adopted sustainable winegrowing programs: 80% of California wine is made in 178 certified sustainable wineries.

Giving the gift of California wine—whether by visiting wine country, shopping at a local retailer, enjoying it as part of a meal, or learning more through various educational opportunities—can be special and memorable. Cheers to a great holiday season! S

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 more than 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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Wines IN HIGH PLACES

WHAT WENT DOWN AT OUR BLIND SPEED
TASTING ABOVE DALLAS, TX

story by Jessie Birschbach / photos by Jason Kindig



From left to right: Daniel Bowman, corporate beverage director, Travis Street Hospitality; Tiffany Tobey, sommelier, Tower Club; Chris Keel, owner/sommelier, Put a Cork In It; Charles Riley, corporate director of food and beverage-task force, Aimbridge Hospitality; Leslie Hartman, general manager, Clay Pigeon; Kent Bearden, club manager, Tower Club; Judd Fruia, VP of operations, Haywire; and Greg Minella, sommelier.



Clay Pigeon general manager Leslie Hartman noses a glass during a reveal.

The floor-to-ceiling windows of the Tower Club in Dallas, Texas, offer panoramic 48th-story views. Arriving to prepare a blind tasting for a few of the most respected palates in the city, the *SOMM Journal* team was first compelled to absorb the sweeping scenery. Miniature cars crossed under the wide, white arch of the Margaret Hunt Hill Bridge, and as we looked down through the colorful stained-glass spiral top of the Chapel of Thanksgiving, I was reminded of a vital step of assessing a wine: perceiving its color by how the light filters through it. It was a lovely and strange thought to realize that whether we were taking in the light shining through stained glass or through stemware, we were assigning meaning to our experience.

The loftiness of the venue might have almost been intimidating, but Tower Club manager Kent Bearden welcomed us warmly, saying hello to each of the wine professionals as they trickled in, ready to enjoy some lunch along with a blind lineup of wines we asked them to assess before representatives from each of the featured producers revealed the contents of their glasses.



ANTIGAL 2018 ADUENTUS CABERNET FRANC, MENDOZA, ARGENTINA

Presenters: Tom Campese, Southwest sales manager, Antigal Winery & Estates, and Stefano Cartoni, CEO, Cork Alliance

Although Antigal Winery & Estates' history in Mendoza, Argentina, dates back to 1897 when the winery was built, its Southwest sales manager, Tom Campese, informed the room that "there isn't much to talk about until the year 2000." That's when the current owners, the Cartoni family, renovated the property, leaving the historic structure intact while transforming the interior into a state-of-the-art, gravity-fed facility. Here, Argentine winemaker Miriam Gómez is able to employ gentler production methods, forgoing the use of pumps or crushers. "Our winemaker did her internship at Opus, so we make wine the way Opus does—only it's a whole lot cheaper to do it in Argentina," said Campese with a smile. That's undoubtedly helped to propel Antigal's Uno Malbec, available in all 50 states at a retail price of \$15, to become one of the bestselling Malbecs in the U.S., according to Nielsen.

Campese went on to distill the brand's winemaking process down to its essence: "We hand-harvest, double sort, pre-chill [the grapes], [and] then do a whole-berry-cluster fermentation," he explained, noting that pre-chilling the fruit, as they do at 43 degrees Fahrenheit, is a rare practice that "stops any premature fermentation [from] happening and keeps [it] fresh." The wine he presented, the Antigal 2018 Aduentus Cabernet Franc, was so true to type that almost every attendee guessed the variety correctly.

Tasting Notes

"Cigar box, cedar, bell pepper, black cherry, blackberry, Red Vine, cinnamon, and nutmeg. This wine's nose blasts you to the Old World[, followed by] a savory and expansive palate. The energy is very persistent and the wine shows exceptional balance. Fruit is riper." —Leslie Hartman, general manager, Clay Pigeon

"Blueberry, blackberry, green bell pepper; soft midpalate with acidity and tannin in balance." —Daniel Bowman, corporate beverage director, Travis Street Hospitality



CORK ALLIANCE

BELLE GLOS 2011 TAYLOR LANE VINEYARD PINOT NOIR, SONOMA COAST, SONOMA COUNTY

Presenter: Lisa DeLano, national account manager, Copper Cane Wines & Provisions



Burgundian in style and more restrained than the rest of the typically powerful offerings in the Copper Cane Wines & Provisions portfolio, the Belle Glos Taylor Lane Pinot Noir has a special place in proprietor/winemaker Joe Wagner's heart. "This is from the first vineyard that Joe farmed [when he was] 15 years old," said Lisa DeLano, national account manager for Copper Cane. "Taylor Lane was his first experience working with his father, [Caymus Vineyards owner Chuck Wagner]. They converted an old apple orchard. Back then, Caymus didn't make Pinot Noir, although they had plans to. But then they ended up sell-

ing the property, and [years later], after Joe sold Meimi, his first order of business was to buy back this property that made him fall in love with winemaking."

Taylor Lane sits at around 1,000 feet in elevation in Occidental, California, in what was once called the "extreme Sonoma Coast" but is now officially the West Sonoma Coast AVA, established just this year. Carved into its mountainous terrain, the Taylor Lane vineyard is just 5.5 miles from the Pacific Ocean. "It's super-difficult to harvest wine from this area—lots of wind, lots of fog," said DeLano. "It's a lower-production area; the vines get super-stressed up there."

The Taylor Lane Pinot Noir is made, in typical Wagnerian fashion, via practices like determining harvest-time by cane lignification (rather than Brix measurement); cryoextraction of the harvested grapes by placing them on dry ice; and filling new French oak barrels with water to help neutralize the presence of harsh wood tannin. Yet thanks to the West Sonoma Coast terroir, the wine maintains an Old World style. "Joe thinks Belle Glos [is like] a great record: Each vineyard shows its own sense of place, and they all make sense together. But this one is sort of like a deep track; it surprises you a little bit," said DeLano.

Tasting Notes

"Old World nose, nice tannin structure, well balanced, and easy-drinking. A great comfort-food wine." —Kent Bearden, club manager, Tower Club

"Tangy, dark red fruit. Soft and fruit-forward. Peppery strawberries." —Charles Riley, corporate director of food and beverage—task force, Aimbridge Hospitality

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PROVISIONS



CANTINA MESA 2021 GIUNCO VERMENTINO DI SARDEGNA, ITALY

Presenter: Lars Leicht, VP of education, *The SOMM Journal*



“Vermentino shines the brightest in three areas of Italy,” said Lars Leicht. “In Liguria’s Genoa, where it’s called Pigato; in Tuscany; and in Sardinia, where [it’s] a bit more opulent in style, generally speaking. But the one thing it always has in common is the ocean. It likes to see the water.” Leicht, *The SOMM Journal’s* VP of education, is also our resident Italian wine expert and covered Cantina Mesa in sister publication *The Tasting Panel’s* September/October issue; no doubt this is why Santa Margherita USA asked him to present the winery’s Giunco Vermentino di Sardegna. “Well, that and everyone is busy in the vineyards at the moment,” he joked.

The Vermentino grown in the Sulcis area of southwestern Sardinia indeed tends to make bigger wines than it does elsewhere; thanks to the winds it sees, mainly the sirocco coming from

the Sahara, Sulcis “can be a bit rough and tumble,” said Leicht. But most of Cantina Mesa’s vineyards are sheltered from these winds in what he called “a little cove that tends to be more alluvial, so it’s a little more of a nurturing area.” The result is a Vermentino that balances the structure typical of Sardinian wines with a bit more refinement, as evidenced by its citrusy minerality.

Mesa sources Giunco from a total of 65 acres; grown on alluvial deposits with aeolian sandstone and clay loam, the grapes are handpicked. The wine is left on the lees for a minimum of four months before it’s matured in stainless-steel tanks, followed by an additional month of aging in bottle—whose label depicts the old Sardinian tapestries lining the winery’s doorway. “It’s symbolic of the fact that they want to represent tradition,” said

Leicht. Constructing these complex tapestries takes a lot of time and finesse—not unlike the work that unfolds in the vineyards of Cantina Mesa.



Tasting Notes

“Tropical notes, mainly pineapple, with green apple and medium-plus acidity.” —Chris Keel, owner/sommelier, *Put a Cork In It*

“Moderate[ly] intense nose: citrus and tropical fruit. A light, dry palate with low tannin, medium acid, and floral notes.” —Judd Fruia, VP of operations, *Haywire*

SANTA MARGHERITA USA



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RENATO RATTI 2018 BAROLO MARCENASCO, ITALY

Presenter: Corbin Grantham, portfolio consultant, Lux Wines, E. & J. Gallo



It's beyond the scope of this article to recount the historic importance of Renato Ratti within the context of Barolo. But we'll try. After making vermouth in Brazil, its namesake founder traveled to Burgundy, where he fell in love with the concept of terroir. Upon his return to Italy in the mid-1960s, he purchased a vineyard in La Morra and began producing a wine that would come to exemplify the elegance of Barolo from the commune. "To this day, the terroir of La Morra is what Marcenasco is based on," said Corbin Grantham, portfolio consultant for E. & J. Gallo's Lux Wines, while revealing the Renato Ratti 2018 Marcenasco Barolo.

In developing his own style of Barolo, Ratti not only shortened the traditionally weeks-long maceration period to six to eight days but also reduced the oak-aging regimen to two years—"all just to highlight how bright and ethereal La Morra can present itself when compared to the rest of the Barolo," said Grantham. Ratti also contributed to the development of what would eventually become Barolo's cru system by drawing the region's first winegrowing map. Comparing it to a current-day map, Grantham pointed out, "You can see [that] a lot of what he identified is still intact. It was wildly significant." Ratti further helped to shape the area by taking leadership positions in both Barolo's and Alba's consortiums.

To further illustrate the delicate nature of La Morra Barolo, Grantham presented the 2018 vintage. Rainy and cool, 2018 was according to Grantham "one of the most elegant and ethereal vintages [Barolo has] had in quite some time." Made by Ratti's son, Pietro, Marcenasco is a 100% Nebbiolo sourced from three estate vineyards in La Morra to create "a consistent, classic house tapestry."

Tasting Notes

"A bright orange color on a shy wine. There is great structure, firm tannins, and mouthwatering acidity [plus] tightly packed tart cherry and Italian herbs in a worn leather suitcase." —*Leslie Hartman, general manager, Clay Pigeon*

"Light, with tomato leaf and oregano. Smooth on the palate, with raised acidity." —*Daniel Bowman, corporate beverage director, Travis Street Hospitality*



E. & J. GALLO

SCREEN DOOR CELLARS 2021 CHARDONNAY, GREEN VALLEY, RUSSIAN RIVER VALLEY

Presenter: Jim Jiabia, Midwest sales director/partner, Daylight Wine and Spirits



"The cool thing about this wine, besides the fact that it's got a Texas star on the label, is that [it's aged in] one-third steamed [neutral] oak, one-third new French oak, and one-third concrete egg," said Jim Jiabia, Midwest sales director/partner for Daylight Wine and Spirits. Like that lone star, the name of the 2021 Chardonnay in question, Screen Door Cellars, reflects winemaker Bobby Donnell's roots in Plano, Texas. Roughly a decade ago, he and his wife, Shannon, created the label as a labor of love; to Donnell, the squeak of a screen door signifies the sound of coming home to Texas.

The majority of the wine was grown within the producer's ASERN

Vineyard, which is owned by Donnell's in-laws and perched on a hill overlooking the lush Green Valley in Sonoma's Russian River Valley; past vintages have contained 100% ASERN fruit, but in an effort to expand its production, Screen Door is now sourcing from other growers.

As for the aging regimen, said Jiabia, "Although the steamed oak is new, it doesn't impart any oakiness. It's considered neutral, and yet it still imparts a richness. The wine does see a little bit of malo, but Bobby uses the neutral oak and concrete because he wants to make sure to maintain the acidity and bracing character and flavors of Green Valley."

Tasting Notes

"Floral nose with notes of lychee, slight melon, and sweet citrus."

—Greg Minella, sommelier

"Soft and tropical, with medium acidity. Minerality and almond on the finish." —Chris Keel, owner/sommelier, *Put a Cork In It*

DAYLIGHT WINE AND SPIRITS



FEUDI DI SAN GREGORIO 2021 GRECO DI TUFO, GRECO DI TUFO DOCG, ITALY

Presenter: Corey Smith, Texas district sales manager, Terlato Wines



The most striking example of minerality at the tasting came in the form of Feudi di San Gregorio's Greco di Tufo. That isn't a total surprise given that the name of the commune from which the Greco is sourced, Tufo, comes from the Italian word for chalk. The degree

to which Tufo's finely textured, alkaline, calcareous soils influence Feudi di San Gregorio's stunning white is up for debate—but the chalky character of the wine, combined with orchard fruits and a high degree of citrus, was undeniable.

Based in Sorbo Serpico, a small town in the Irpinia region of Campania, Feudi di San Gregorio was established in 1986. "So it's a pretty new winery," said Corey Smith, Texas district sales manager for Terlato Wines. At 40 years old, it may be young by Italy's standards, but it's nevertheless the largest producer of Greco in the country. It farms 740 acres of vineyards about 40 miles from the Amalfi Coast, where its Greco grows at an altitude of 1,450–2,300 feet above sea level on vines averaging 15–20 years of age. The presented wine's acidity, noticed by nearly everyone in the room, may be attributed to this elevation, to Irpinia's higher rainfall (compared to the rest of Campania), and/or to Greco's late-ripening tendencies.

Although many consider its origin to be Greek, Greco di Tufo has a long, rich history in the Irpinia region. Feudi di San Gregorio aims to cultivate and champion native varieties such as Fiano di Avellino, Falanghina, and Aglianico as well as Greco. In addition, its proprietors, the Capaldo family, are strongly committed to "leav[ing] the world a better place," said Smith; just this year, in fact, Feudi di San Gregorio became a B Corp, meeting the certifying organization's high standards of social and environmental performance, transparency, and accountability.

Tasting Notes

"Very bright citrus, some melon, and minerality. Would be wonderful with arugula and endive salad." —Kent Bearden, club manager, *Tower Club*

"Dry white with sweet flowers, granite, and minerals." —Charles Riley, corporate director of food and beverage—task force, *Aimbridge Hospitality*



TERLATO WINES

THOMAS GEORGE ESTATES 2017 CRESTA RIDGE VINEYARD PINOT NOIR, RUSSIAN RIVER VALLEY

Presenter: David Green, owner; David Green & Co.

Thomas George Estates proprietor Tom Baker “believes strongly in the Old World philosophy that wine needs time,” said David Green, owner of wine-consulting firm David Green & Co. As evidence, Green presented the producer’s most current release, the 2017 Cresta Ridge Vineyard Pinot Noir, while noting that neighboring producers in the cooler Green Valley area of the Russian River Valley are releasing two and sometimes even three years earlier.

According to Green, all three of Thomas George’s estate vineyards, encompassing roughly 62 acres, are undergoing organic certification; Cresta Ridge Vineyard is already 100% certified through California Certified Organic Farmers (CCOF). Its Goldridge soil series is composed of sandy loam with excellent drainage, which helps the vines to grow deeper in search for water while mitigating virus and pest challenges.

According to Green, the Pinot Noir it yields is “made very classically”: Seeing 30% skin contact, the grapes are fermented for seven days and aged for, well, as long as it takes in 30% new and 70% neutral French oak. It was perhaps the most balanced wine of the lot and was well received by all.

Tasting Notes

“Red apple skin, fall spices, mo-
rel mushroom. Makes me want
to go to the Willamette Valley
in the fall. Somebody get me a
scarf and boots! Silky texture
with soft oak spice. Briary on
the finish.” —Leslie Hartman,
general manager, Clay Pigeon

“Raspberry, strawberry, juicy
berries, baking spice, nutmeg,
cinnamon, and rose petals.
Medium tannin.” —Chris Keel,
owner/sommelier, Put a Cork In It



THOMAS GEORGE ESTATES

RIDE & RIDDEN WINE CO. 2020 CABERNET SAUVIGNON, NAPA VALLEY

Presenter: David Green, founder/partner, Royal Wine & Spirits, and owner, David Green & Co.

“That’s on our wall!” exclaimed Kent Bearden. The aforementioned view of Dallas from the Tower Club is so breathtaking that it upstages most of the colorful art in the restaurant—but there is one piece that gives the skyline a run for its money: a photograph of a bull rider by Dallas-based photographer Steve Wrubel. So when David Green revealed the Ride & Ridden Wine Co. 2021 Cabernet Sauvignon equipped with a label sporting a similar image by

Wrubel—who’s a collaborator on the brand—Bearden was naturally excited.

In terms of inspiration, then, it’s clear there’s “a lot of Texas in the wine,” in Green’s words; the hedonistic Cabernet Sauvignon grapes themselves, however, were sourced from Napa Valley, where the wine was made by Remington Jorgensen under the guidance of Royal Wine & Spirits partner Maayan Koschitzky. Also director of winemaking at the highly regarded Atelier Melka, Koschitzky “has made more 100-point wines than he can count,” said Green.

As a négociant brand, Ride & Ridden makes use of both Koschitzky’s and Green’s deep connections in the region. Case in point: 100% of the barrel selection for the wine we tasted, blended by Jorgensen and Koschitzky, comes from the region’s prestigious Howell Mountain AVA. “[It’s] a pretty compelling wine considering the \$40 retail,” said Green. The group agreed faster than a rookie pickup rider gets knocked off his horse.

Tasting Notes

“Great nose, with balanced
aromas of fresh fruit and barrel
nuance. A mouthful of tan-
nin that begs for a tomahawk
rib-eye. Pleasantly surprising!”
—Kent Bearden, club manager,
Tower Club

“A traditional, classic Cabernet
Sauvignon with everything in
balance. Love the richness of
the wine.” —Judd Fruia, VP of
operations, Haywire



ROYAL WINE & SPIRITS



CIGAR BOX 2020 CABERNET SAUVIGNON, MAIPO VALLEY, CHILE

Presenter: Max Arriagada, national sales director, Santa Rita USA

The Maipo Valley is known throughout the world for its Cabernet Sauvignon: In fact, over half of the region's 10,000 planted acres are dedicated to the grape. Many of Chile's most entrenched producers are based here, including Viña Santa Rita. Established in 2011, "Cigar Box is Santa Rita's lifestyle brand," said Max Arriagada, national sales director at Santa Rita USA. Its Cabernet, sourced from the Maipo Valley, thrives at 1,300–2,500 feet in elevation on the lower slopes of the Andes Mountains. "The altitude helps with acidity, [while] the heat during the day properly ripens the grapes," said Arriagada. He noted that the Cigar Box 2020 Cabernet Sauvignon contains 15% Syrah, which enhances the spicy character that he believes is common in Cabernet Sauvignon from the region.

Given that the brand's name is inspired by the cigar-making traditions of South America, it's no surprise that the wine also features obvious tobacco notes.

Tasting Notes

"Black fruit, herbal spice, slight hint of vanilla. Mountain fruit. Spicy and fruit-forward, with tobacco." —Judd Fruia, VP of operations, Haywire

"Baked berry pie: blue-berry/blackberry. Savory, fruit-forward finish." —Daniel Bowman, corporate beverage director, Travis Street Hospitality



SANTA RITA USA

CASTELLO BANFI 2016 VIGNA MARRUCHETO BRUNELLO DI MONTALCINO, ITALY

Presenter: Heather Queen, district manager, Banfi Vintners



After it purchased the Poggio alle Mura estate in the late 1970s, American import company Banfi Vintners established a winery there, Castello Banfi, which eventually became one of the most influential wineries in Montalcino. Its pioneering research on Sangiovese and its many clones, its patented hybrid wood-and-steel fermentation tanks, and its many sustainability efforts, among other innovations, have helped to elevate the profile of not

only Castello Banfi but Montalcino as a whole on the world wine stage.

That research yielded the inaugural 2016 Vigna Marrucheto Brunello di Montalcino, Banfi's first annually released single-vineyard Brunello. "Everybody knows our classic Brunello, but this Brunello is really near and dear to all of our hearts," said Banfi Vintners district manager Heather Queen. Banfi's 7,100 acres in the southwestern corner of Montalcino are often described by the producer as a "constellation of single vineyards"; nestled in the center of this constellation is the Marrucheto Vineyard, planted in 2009 in the area's marine-based soils. "We've taken these three clones that we've isolated, and we've been building these three small plots [in the vineyard]. So each clone is grown in a separate plot down to the southeast of the castle. Then we blend them together," Queen noted.

Fermented in Banfi's aforementioned temperature-controlled tanks and then aged in French oak casks for 30 months, "this version of Brunello for us is a softer version, with soft, supple tannins, especially when you compare it to our bolder Poggio alle Mura expression," said Queen. Only 12,000 bottles of the 2016 Vigna Marrucheto were made, making it one of Banfi's most limited bottlings.

Tasting Notes

"Brilliant, expressive nose on the onset. Fruit is chewy and authentic." —Charles Riley, corporate director of food and beverage—task force, Aimbridge Hospitality

"Sour cherry and dried oregano in a full-bodied wine. Tannic and complex." —Judd Fruia, VP of operations, Haywire



“What Grows Together Goes Together”

THE WINE TEAM AT **RPM RESTAURANTS**
DISHES ON THE ART OF PAIRING

by Michelle Ball

Richard Hanauer serves as wine director for all of RPM's restaurants in Las Vegas, NV; Chicago, IL; Washington, D.C.; and West Palm Beach, FL.

WHAT DOES IT take to build a world-class wine program, especially one that allows you to stand out in food meccas like Chicago and Las Vegas? For Richard Hanauer, wine director of multistate hospitality group RPM Restaurants, it's about more than assembling a list of stellar bottles: It's also about the people behind the program. “We have this incredible team of individuals and leaders who are so dedicated,” explains Hanauer, who has been with the company for 14 years. “We don't believe in turnover; everyone comes and they grow. They keep getting better at their job and keep getting wiser for their guests. They just never lose their honed edge of hospitality, which we take so much pride in.”

As that team knows, an exceptional program is also about timing. At each of the restaurant group's concepts—RPM Steak, RPM Italian, and RPM Seafood—Hanauer has established a deep list of wines destined for the moment. This means that often a wine doesn't appear in print on the list until it's ready to drink; instead, it stays put in the cellar. This practice isn't limited to Grand Cru Burgundies or cult Napa Cabernets but applies to every bottle at every price point; as Hanauer notes, “Montepulciano d'Abruzzo can age just as gracefully as Margaux does.”

Recently, Hanauer introduced the Sommelier Experience—an intimate tasting offered at all locations in which service is conducted entirely by the chef and the sommelier and the food menu is designed specifically to accentuate the wines. During our interview, I asked him to propose a pairing one might not expect: He suggested wagyu beef with an older Prädikatswein Riesling. For this to work, the wine “has to have some age on it,” Hanauer pointed out, adding that its fruit must be tempered by the earthier components that come with age. The dish was served sashimi-style with aged soy sauce for a harmonious pairing.

I asked a few other sommeliers on Hanauer's wine team to weigh in with their favorite pairings; read on for their responses.

PHOTO: ZOE PAIN



RPM Chicago's team of wine directors and sommeliers: Allison Curatolo, Richard Hanauer, Kristin Francesco, John C. Slatter, Kathleen Hawkins, Lindsey Becker-Schwartz, Joseph Lapi, Brennan Sopko, and Isabella Tenorio.

Q: Sell me on a wine for steak that I wouldn't expect.

Kathleen Hawkins, wine director, RPM Steak, Chicago: Sweet white wines are the best pairing with steak, especially when it comes to rich and decadent styles of Japanese A5 wagyu. There is always a hidden acidity to sweet wines that helps to cut the richness of the marbling in these luxurious cuts of beef. . . Tokaji, Sauternes, [and] Spätlese Riesling [all] work . . . opposite a salty beef pairing.

John C. Slatter, wine director, RPM Italian, Chicago: Perhaps not unexpected, but Sagrantino from Umbria in Italy is often overlooked in favor of Sangiovese as a steak wine. [It's] fuller in body, with the firmest tannins imaginable and flavors of grilled meat as well as black fruit and dried herbs. Give me a porterhouse and a glass of this dark red, and I'm happy!

Q: What are your favorite underrated wines from both a varietal perspective and a pairing perspective?

Nick Schulman, wine director, RPM Italian, Washington, D.C.: I love the Ruché grape from Piedmont. It has [among] the most intriguing and distinct aromatics of any variety I have tasted. Ruché is rare but still easily attainable today, offering notes of lychee (a

flavor never found in red), white pepper, violets, and jasmine. Eugenio Gatti of La Miraja winery produces my favorite Ruché in his 11th-century castle-turned-winery, and it works extremely well with vitello tonnato.

Slatter: White wines from Mount Etna in Sicily made from Carricante [show] ample body, striking acidity, and complex minerality. They're intriguing on their own, but when paired with something like branzino with herbs and olive oil, they evolve to cleanse the palate while matching the flavors of the Mediterranean.

Joseph Lapi, wine director for RPM Seafood, RPM Events, and Pizzeria Portofino, Chicago: Most of the Loire Valley, sans Sancerre and Pouilly-Fumé. When you head down the river to the lesser-known regions of Saumur/Savennières (Chenin Blanc) and Muscadet (Melon de Bourgogne), you encounter these incredible, mineral-tinged, palate-cleansing, crisp white wines that are so versatile with food. Everyone always wants to go to Chablis with shellfish, but give me Muscadet or give me death.

Q: If you could choose only one variety or wine style to pair with any meal, what would it be?

Hawkins: Champagne is the perfect

wine. It ranges in style, sweetness level, age, quality, price, grapes in the blend, and color. It gives a sommelier the largest tool belt to work with in terms of flavor profile and sensation to pair across a wide range of cuisines.

Schulman: Easily Nebbiolo for me. What I call a "chameleon grape," Nebbiolo changes its characteristics drastically depending on soils, altitudes, microclimates, and viticulture. When I want tannins and powerful structure, I reach for Barolo in Serralunga. When I want a delicate, lighter expression, I might seek Picotendro, a cooler-climate Nebbiolo from the northerly Val d'Aosta region. [As for rosé—]you say "rosé," I say "yes way" [to] Pasquale Pelissero's Nebbiolo version from Nieve, Barbaresco.

Q: What's your best advice when it comes to pairing?

Lapi: Michael Broadbent, an old British wine critic, once said, "Drinking good wine with good food in good company is one of life's most civilized pleasures." Drink what you want with whom you want, and that will make the pairing the most memorable.

Schulman: Don't overthink it. Simple is best. Classic pairings are classic for a reason: What grows together goes together. ❧

{ france }

A BOLD

Move

**WITH ÉTOILE,
DOMAINES
OTT AIMS TO
TRANSCEND THE
CATEGORY OF
PROVENÇAL ROSÉ**

**story by Ruth Tobias
photos by Lucy Beaugard**



T

o meet Jean-François Ott, the fourth-generation director of Domaines Ott, is to be struck by his

resemblance to the rosés for which he is famed: Though he couldn't be more delightful or charming, he also couldn't be more serious when it comes to representing the warm, dry, quintessentially Mediterranean region of Provence, where gently sloping vineyards fringed with olive groves and patches of garrigue meet the sea. That's only fitting, as Provençal rosé has become a serious business; according to a recent article in *Market Watch*, exports to the U.S. soared from well under 100,000 9-liter case shipments in 2006 to more than 1.8 million in 2021. So it may come as a surprise that, in 2019, Ott dared to launch a label under the Vin de France appellation. As Cyprien Roy, communications manager for importer Maisons Marques & Domaines USA, points out, "When you've established yourself not just as a Côtes de Provence but as a Cru Classé Côtes de Provence, it's a bold move."

The kicker is that said label, *Étoile*, is anything but an ordinary table wine. On the contrary, it is in many ways the culmination of the producer's considerable winemaking history and expertise in the region, founded as it was in 1896 by Jean-François' great-grandfather Marcel Ott. The idea to blend cuvées from each of its three organically farmed properties—Cru Classés Château de Selle and Clos Mireille in Côtes de Provence and Château Romassan in Bandol—began to take shape around 2015, when Jean-François and his team made about 100 bottles simply because "we thought it was fun," he says. But it was also "strange because we [would be] losing the distinct AOC. . . . [Then] finally, in 2019, I was looking at the market in the U.S. and seeing there was really a lot of



Jean-François Ott is the fourth-generation director of Domaines Ott.

rosé—so many different rosés from not only Provence but other places. We've been working on rosé forever: My great-grandfather wanted to make [it] at a time when nobody was drinking [it], nobody was making [it, but] he found a place in the market between high-end red and high-end white . . . so we've been working on that for four generations. And I thought at this time, maybe we should do something different as a way to talk about different terroirs [and prove] that rosé can be something [more] than a summer drink or a beach drink."

Of course, Domaines Ott—which has been part of the Roederer Collection since 2004—had already done as much with its three single-estate cuvées; retailing for around \$60, they're all celebrated for their ageworthy structure and complexity. But with the \$170 *Étoile* in particular, Jean-François stresses, "We really want to carry the rosé category at the same level as the best white and red wines in the world."

The SOMM Journal got a tour of all three estates to understand how the producer goes about doing just that.

Château de Selle

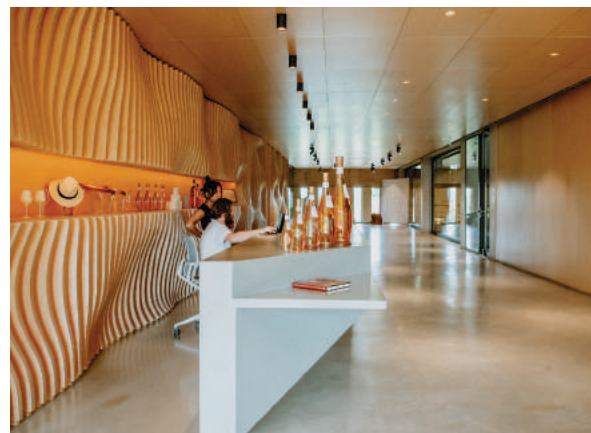
Marcel purchased the domaine's flagship estate in the Côtes de Provence town of Taradeau in 1912; the original winery remains on the property, though a gorgeously sleek new gravity-flow facility, designed by Swedish architect Carl Fredrik Svenstedt, was completed in 2016 to accommodate an increase in plantings from 32 acres in 1982 to more than 100. "Before, [due to space,] I needed to blend [lots]. Maybe I was putting three or four fields of Grenache in, but I didn't know which were good or bad," says Jean-François. Now that he can vinify them separately, "we can adapt the grape growing from one vintage to another" based on their findings, he adds.

It's mainly Grenache and Cinsault that Ott grows here, along with some Mourvèdre, Syrah, Cabernet Sauvignon, and, as a trial, Rolle, on limestone and clay soils that contain up to 50% stones—which is "a lot," Jean-François acknowledges. "We need to keep the stones inside the clay or it becomes too compact. But they can be too big. . . . I used to break them [up], but the active limestone goes into the soil [too much], so I remove them [instead]." Even so, he occasionally needs to add iron to prevent vine yellowing. The point—here as at the other two properties—is to "make sure we have a really good balance in the soil . . . [so] that we have the same energy from vine to vine." Eschewing chemical products entirely, he continues, "We make every three years on each plot an analysis of the soil, the leaves, the grapes. . . . If there's not enough [nutrients], we can add compost. I buy goat compost from Roquefort in Aveyron because I

know that the place where the goats eat is 100% free of everything. . . . If we get a good balance, we don't need to do much in the winery. We don't do any acidification or clarification; we don't add sugar; we don't take sugar out." Ultimately, he notes, "I just want to make it simple, to make it respectful for the grapes and the job we've done outside"—on which they spend 600 hours per hectare each year.

All of Domaines Ott's properties are dry farmed; irrigation is allowed in Côtes de Provence, "but I don't want to—I want the vines to work for themselves," Jean-François says. Since the 1980s, all of the vines destined for rosé, here and elsewhere, have been trained into a V shape inspired by apple trees so the bunches aren't stacked on top of each other—"kind of like gobelet training, which is traditional in Provence, but narrower." Come harvest—which typically begins here in de Selle's valley plots in mid- to late August and finishes in Bandol in late October—the production process for the three estate rosés is also much the same. The grapes are handpicked, sorted in the vineyard but not destemmed, and cooled to about 15 degrees Celsius overnight before being pressed for no more than two hours in part to preserve Domaines Ott's luminously pale color—"like if you make tea with cold water," says Jean-François—and in part because "we need to be as fast and as gentle as we can to keep the fruit."

The juice then undergoes débourage in stainless steel, a process that allows the pulp to settle so that "only the cleanest part of the juice [is used] for fermentation," ensuring greater purity of expression. Fermentation starts at 22 degrees



The tasting room at Château de Selle.

Celsius with an eye toward the imperative that "it must be really consistent," he says, to achieve the precise flavors of white fruit and flowers that are the hallmark of the wines, which then undergo bâtonnage; at Château de Selle, it's done in custom thermoregulated tanks initially once or twice a week, then every two weeks until fining—sometimes in wood—before the wine is piped down to the floor below for bottling in March.

Speaking of bottles, Domaines Ott's is famously unique; Jean-François explains that in the 1930s, "The brother of my grandfather designed it like a Greek amphora, thinking that in Bordeaux they have one shape, in Alsace they have one shape, [and so on]. He went to the other [local growers]: 'We have a special shape for Provence, do you want to use it?' 'No, it's too expensive.' So since then it's our shape."

And as for the wine within, Jean-François believes that, though "the soil is really tough to work on—the acidity is a little bit low"—the combination of the clay and the calcareous rock at Château de Selle



Vineyards at Château de Selle in Taradeau.

“gives a little more austere but also a soft taste. The texture is the key to Château de Selle.” Of the 2021 vintage in particular; he notes that “the finesse of the mouth [is] almost fragile”—and indeed the blend of 55% Grenache, 30% Cinsault, 10% Mourvèdre, and 5% Syrah comes across as slightly more delicate than its counterparts though no less vibrant, with aromas of apricot, star fruit, and citrus (mandarin, lime, grapefruit) leading to a palate that’s at once lithe, supple, and mineral-inflected, fairly shimmering with nectarine, strawberry, and hints of almond, rose petal, and salt-dusted, grassy herbs toward the finish.

payoff is that “the schist by the sea gives the [wines their] salinity and sharp taste.”

Sure enough, sheer salinity is the trademark of the Clos Mireille Côtes de Provence Rosé, which is vinified by the same method used at Château de Selle, except that bâtonnage is done using a traditional cane. Powered by that continuous breath of sea salt, the 2021 vintage—a blend of 70% Grenache, 25% Cinsault, and 5% Syrah—is a more linear and mineral wine with notes of lemon-lime, crunchy white peach, and young mango on the nose that move on the glossy, lively palate toward melon, grapefruit zest, and flower-herbs, including an anise finish.

They’ll be primarily Mourvèdre, in keeping with Domaines Ott’s style as much as regional dictates: After all, he says, “I think [Bandol] is the best place to grow Mourvèdre in the world. The rules are 50% minimum Mourvèdre for reds and 20% for rosé, but I put [about] 80% and 60% [respectively]. It depends on the vintage, but that’s mainly the recipe.” Accordingly, the vineyards overall are planted to 60% Mourvèdre, 30% Cinsault, 8% Grenache, and 2% Syrah; those (including the l’Hermitage parcels) that are higher in elevation at about 400 meters, sitting on clay soils, are reserved for red wine, being slightly cooler than those in the rosé-yielding valley, where limestone, sandstone, and marl dominate. But not much cooler—this is hot, dry Bandol, after all. Asked if he expects rain in the near future, Jean-François says flatly, “No. I’m a little worried because the water is really low [this year].”

In any case, he continues, “Our viticulture is very different if you talk about red versus rosé. For red we work on the skins. We need small berries [for concentration], so the yield is a little bit lower. For rosé we need to keep the acidity; we work on the pulp, so we need bigger berries with a little more juice.” Obviously, the winemaking is different too. See the sidebar on page 63 for an explanation of the Bandol Rouge; for the rosé, vinification follows the same formula as at the other estates, except for the fact that fermentation occurs not only in stainless but also concrete and—in the case of a small portion of the Mourvèdre that dominates the blend—neutral oak “because it helps to round it, to make it soft and silky, which is nice when you launch your rosé seven months after [harvest],” Jean-François adds.

That said, the intense character of the Mourvèdre grape is such that Jean-François describes the Château Romassan Bandol Rosé as “the strong one [of the three]. . . I always feel that the taste of the grapes is a little more profound.” Certainly there’s a rounder structure, a solidity, to the 2021 blend of 55% Mourvèdre, 30% Cinsault, and 15% Grenache, where ringing notes of grapefruit and nectarine, grounded by hints of garrigue, are joined in the mouth by cantaloupe, white cherry, and orange zest plus an earthy touch of fennel on the finish.



The Clos Mireille estate in La-Londe-les-Maures.

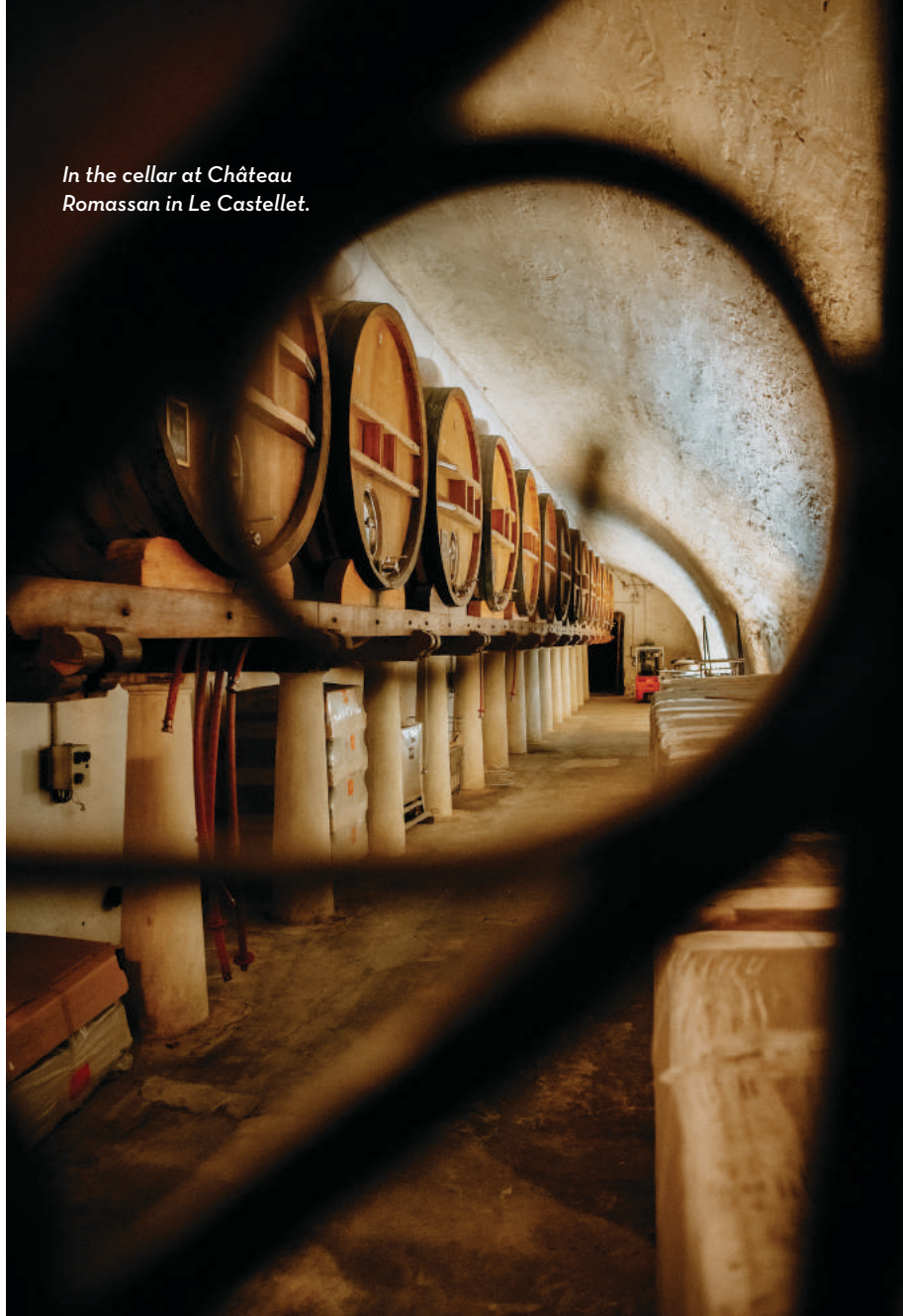
Clos Mireille

Now this is postcard-perfect Provence: La-Londe-les-Maures, where buckets of bouillabaisse bubble over an open flame at beachside restaurants, clumps of lavender line even the entrance to the local grocery store, and an old monastery overlooking the sea—dotted with palms and pines and bursts of bougainvillea—turns out to be a winery where the grapevines stop just 20 meters from the water’s edge. Domaines Ott purchased this property in 1936; today, 60 hectares are planted on schist to Grenache, Cinsault, and a little Syrah as well as Sémillon and Rolle, the latter of which go into the producer’s sole—and stunning—white wine, Clos Mireille Blanc. Maritime humidity in this balmy microclimate means that “we can have diseases easy, so we need to be careful,” says Jean-François, but the

Château Romassan

Of the 1,600 planted hectares in the small appellation of Bandol—renowned as much if not more for its bold reds as its rosés—Domaines Ott owns 90 in eight different villages, including Le Castellet, where this château is located. Though it’s the newest Domaines Ott property, acquired in 1956, it’s the oldest facility, dating to 1776; renovations to the structure are currently underway because, according to Jean-François, “it’s getting small” for the amount of fruit they’ll soon be bringing in following the purchase of land from nearby Domaine de l’Hermitage in 2014. “We bought 36 hectares and we pulled 20; we let the soil fallow for four years and then we waited four years for having grapes, so by the time we start harvesting, it will be almost ten years. So we are going to have a lot of grapes,” he adds.

In the cellar at Château Romassan in Le Castellet.



The Making of Étoile

Calling it “a rosé’s rosé,” Cyprien Roy acknowledges that Étoile is simply “about adding a tête de cuvée that shows the prowess of Jean-François and his team—it’s not a financial game changer;” above all because “the volumes aren’t there.” From a total annual production of 7,000–8,000 bottles, approximately 100 6-packs of 750-milliliter bottles and 20 of magnums are exported to the U.S. and “pretty much sold out” to the on-premise market, with white-cloth fine-dining establishments in places like Miami and the Hamptons being their typical forever home. (Granted, 2020—the year of Étoile’s launch—was an exception due to the pandemic, but as Roy points

out, “If there was a way to treat yourself during confinement,” a bottle of luxury rosé was it.)

To make the blend, Jean-François collaborates with his teams at all three wineries because “they know the taste of the grapes; they always think about which cuvée is right for Étoile” (not that he always agrees). “We always start with Château de Selle, then Clos Mireille, and the last one is always Château Romassan. It’s kind of a long day because we have at least 30 cuvées of each,” he adds. Thus far, the winners have mostly come from the same plots: “It’s funny because I didn’t . . . want to make always the same from each plot, working a special way for [it] because it’s going to be the Étoile plot—no. I just

wanted to take the most characteristic, the best cuvée of each estate, every vintage. But in the end, from Romassan, [for] three years it’s [been] the same plot.”

At de Selle, the grapes have come from either of two neighboring plots planted in 2009: “It’s really young Grenache that we are looking for. . . You get the acidity, the good balance, the freshness that we want for rosé. And for Clos Mireille, it’s the Grenache that we have on the right side when we go to the beach—it’s always the same,” Jean-François says.

Granted, he continues, the decision partly depends on yield: “If we are less than . . . 6,000 kilos per hectare it gets too strong, too concentrated, almost with tannins at the end. I don’t like it. And as soon as we go further than 7,500 kilos per hectare, it gets too watery. So it’s a matter of balance,” an indicator in his view of ageability as well: “When it’s good at the beginning, you can age them for a long time.” Should he fail to strike that balance in any given vintage, “We are [simply] not going to make Étoile.” So far, so good.

The selected cuvées are blended at Château de Selle in stainless vats before aging in a mix of stainless steel and ceramic eggs, which “don’t give any flavor but [offer] a really slow micro-oxygenation,” explains Jean-François. “When I first started [using them], I thought, it won’t work—I was tasting every week and I couldn’t find the difference between [ceramic] and stainless. But in the end, the taste of the fruit was really more precise.” The final results of 80% Grenache and 20% Mourvèdre combine what he calls “the finesse and the texture of Château de Selle; the fruit, the crispness, and the salty taste of Clos Mireille; and the body of Château Romassan”; in addition, he says, “I want [the acidity] to be linear, honest.”

What it is is beautiful, deliberate but never delirious, across all three vintages to date. The 2019, for its part, offers a glimpse at the evolution of Étoile over time: A bit softer and creamier in the mouth, it meshes contoured shades of peach both white and yellow, flesh and skin, with reverberations of ruby grapefruit and the crispness of lemon zest. They’re met by nuances of red fruit, including rhubarb, on the silky palate, where the delicate wash of salinity speaks to Jean-François’ overarching goal: “If you have the first sip, you need a second one.”



The 2020, by contrast, approaches with a more chiseled character, driven by stony minerality, an array of citrus, and zesty acidity; while their energy directs the palate through to the finish, it's fleshed out by hints of apricot, red berry, and guava.

As for the 2021 vintage, it brings to mind "Nude Descending a Staircase," the X.J. Kennedy poem about the eponymous painting by Marcel Duchamp. As the subject, "a snowing flesh . . . sifts in sunlight down the stairs," so this wine

steps assuredly forth from vibrant aromas of grapefruit pulp and zest, nectarine, and white flowers to move with a gliding texture across the palate, leaving a fresh trail of salinity in its wake; as she "collects her motions into shape," so it brings notes of white cherry and cherry bark, raspberry, Marcona almond, and tangerine into laser focus along with steady, crystal-cut acidity before a finish that's full yet clean and pure as, well, snow.

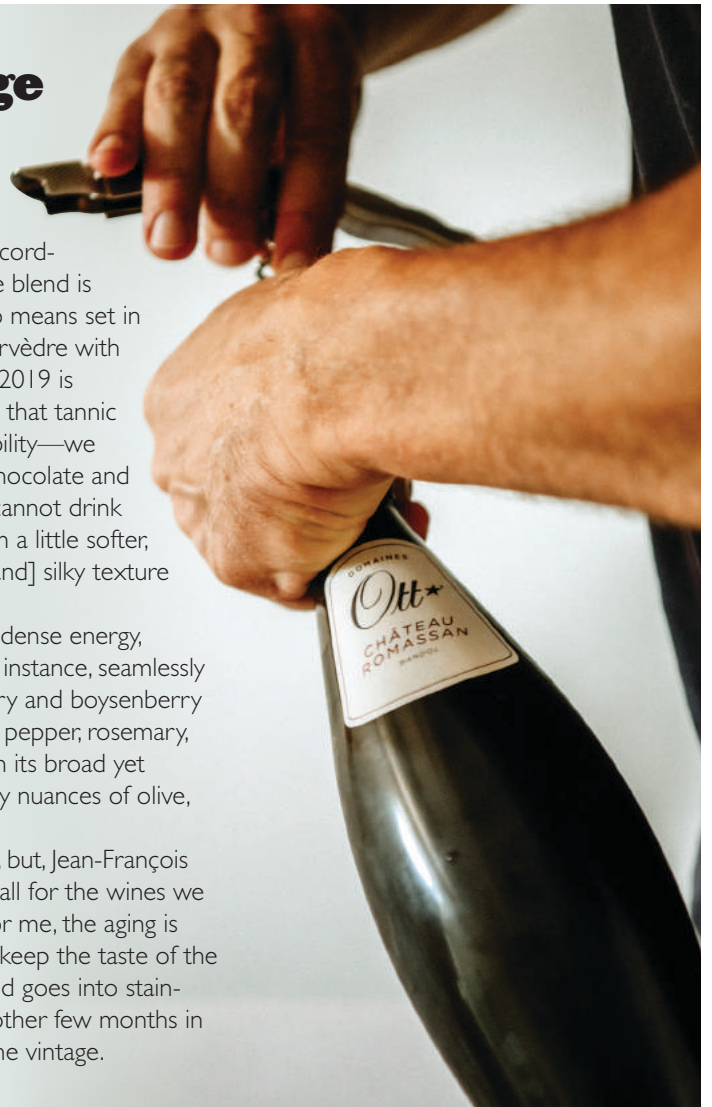
Interestingly, the Duchamp work provoked massive controversy upon its unveiling in 1912—that's right, the same year Château de Selle was established—for breaking the rules of the Cubist movement with which he was associated; today its status as a masterpiece is undisputed. No doubt the work of art that is *Étoile* will reap similar rewards vis-à-vis its intrepid embrace of the Vin de France designation. *STJ*

A Word on Bandol Rouge

Cyprien Roy, communications manager for importer Maisons Marques & Domaines USA, calls this red from Château Romassan Domaines Ott's "sleeper cuvée." Just 60 cases make it to the U.S., where it retails for around \$85. According to winery director Jean-François Ott, the baseline for the blend is 80–95% Mourvèdre and 5–20% Grenache, though it's by no means set in stone; the 2016 vintage, for its part, contains a full 95% Mourvèdre with 3% Grenache and 2% Syrah, while the soon-to-be-released 2019 is composed of 85% Mourvèdre and 15% Grenache. Granting that tannic Mourvèdre is the main contributor to Bandol Rouge's ageability—we tasted a 1976 that still possessed fruit along with notes of chocolate and umami—he says, "They used to be done in a way that you cannot drink them before ten years; [now] we are all trying to make them a little softer, more approachable. . . . They need fruit, depth, [and] spice, [and] silky texture is so important."

Mission accomplished: The wines we tried, while radiating dense energy, showed more velvety polish than pure brawn. The 2016, for instance, seamlessly incorporated into its sturdy frame the freshness of blackberry and boysenberry with a continuous wellspring of more savory notes of earth, pepper, rosemary, mint, graphite, bacon, and licorice; similarly, the 2019 lifted on its broad yet smooth shoulders of black cherry, black plum, and blackberry nuances of olive, meat, and coffee plus floral and fennel hints.

They're aged for at least 18 months in a variety of barrels, but, Jean-François admits, "I don't really like barriques—I think they are too small for the wines we like to do," which are free from a preponderance of oak. "For me, the aging is like the salt or pepper you put in your dish—if you want to keep the taste of the cuvée, adding too much wood [is bad]." In fact, the final blend goes into stainless steel or concrete for three months before spending another few months in bottle—anywhere between three and nine, depending on the vintage.





A partial lineup of the Paso Robles Cabernet and Bordeaux varietal blends poured at TEXSOM, held in Dallas, TX, in late August.

Claiming the Spotlight Down South

THE PASO ROBLES CAB COLLECTIVE MAKES A STRONG SHOWING AT TEXSOM

story by Lars Leicht / photos by Marcus Junius Laws

DALLAS IS NOT EXACTLY around the corner from San Luis Obispo, where the closest airport to Paso Robles wine country is located: The two cities are about 1,600 miles apart, making for a 3.5-hour flight. But for Doug Filipponi, co-owner of Ancient Peaks Winery, the trip was well worth the time he took to show the region's wines at TEXSOM last August; as president of the Paso Robles CAB Collective (PRCC), he led a contingent that opened almost 100 bottles of wine from 24 PRCC members over the course of the conference's three-day Expo. "We've enjoyed a big focus in this state," he told *The SOMM Journal*. "Texans love Paso Robles Cabernet Sauvignon, and TEXSOM was a great opportunity to share the wines and stories of our member wineries."

CAB is an acronym for Cabernet and Bordeaux varietal blends. The nonprofit organization was formed in 2012, and it's open to all Paso Robles producers of those red varieties; its goal is to build a network of industry locals who can assist each other in areas including viticulture, production, marketing, and sales while promoting the Paso Robles AVA.



Justin Watts, sommelier at Aplós in Jackson, MS, shares a laugh with Paso Robles CAB Collective (PRCC) president Doug Filipponi.

Austin-based sommelier Lindsey Ford agreed with Filipponi about Texans' affinity for Paso Robles wine. "It used to be harder to find a spot on the wine list for Paso wine, but now you're seeing them more and more, and people are asking for them," she said. "For the Texas market in particular, what our customers love is the profile, with riper fruit. They are the kind of wines we like to drink, and they are at a great value."

Their character is due in great part to Paso Robles' unique microclimate, marked by a 50-degree diurnal temperature shift caused by the cool marine air that flows east from Monterey Bay through the Templeton Gap and south along the Salinas Valley. The region, divided into 11 distinct sub-AVAs, encompasses approximately 40,000 acres of vineyards, whose soils are primarily bedrock composed of weathered granite, volcanic, and marine sedimentary rocks overlaid with sandstone, mudstone, or calcareous shale.

LeaAnne Ingendorf, sommelier at Eddie V's Prime Seafood in Fort Worth, declared, "I love Paso and I always have," adding that she's happy to have a few examples on her wine list. "When you speak with customers looking for a fruit-forward wine, you can gauge where they want to go based on what this region offers."

Besides admiration from Lone Star State somms, what further justified Filipponi's trip, he explained, was getting to meet conference attendees from other states. Among them was Alden McInnis, a sommelier at fine-dining restaurant City Grocery in Oxford, Mississippi. She pointed out that because Mississippi owns a monopoly on wine distribution, the supply of Paso wines is not as regular as it might be in states where private wholesale distributors operate. "I take what I can get," she said. "When [Paso Robles wine] comes in, I literally clear the shelves to buy [it]."

While the list at Mediterranean restaurant Aplós in Jackson, Mississippi, features predominantly Old World wines, sommelier Justin Watts likes to feature a Paso Robles Cabernet whenever he can. "It is truly distinctive of what Cabernet can be," he said. "It shows that we can make wines in the U.S. just as good as, if not better, than the Old World."

For attendees less familiar with the region, a visit to the PRCC table led to a



Sommeliers Alden McInnis of Oxford, MS; Lindsey Ford of Austin, TX; LeaAnne Ingendorf of Fort Worth, TX; and Eric Henderson of Jackson, MS, visit the PRCC booth at TEXSOM.




PRCC president Doug Filipponi tastes with Alden McInnis, sommelier at City Grocery in Oxford, MS.

positive discovery. Carlos Cisneros, sommelier at Bocca Ristorante in Birmingham, Alabama, called it a revelation. "This was an 'aha' moment for me," he said. "Five years ago I felt the wines from the region were all tasting the same. Over the years, my opinions have changed, and so have [they]. The wines I tried today were more layered and terroir-focused. I always thought that Paso wines were trying to get there, and now they have arrived."

Cisneros agreed with Ingendorf that Paso wines can fill important spots on a

well-rounded wine list. "As a buyer, I always felt that Paso had a distinctive style, and that style has improved over time," he said. "[It's] fruit-driven with varietal expression [yet] distinct for each area of the region."

So Filipponi endured a long flight and invested three busy days in the work of showcasing the PRCC, but he garnered quality time with the national somms community—which goes to show that events like TEXSOM are worth a special journey. 



Much More Than Port

WHEN IT COMES to Portuguese wine, you probably know Port as well as the spritzy Vinho Verde. But as it turns out, the country makes an incredible amount of wine, ranking 11th in the world in total production by volume. And when I visited Portugal in September 2021 for our “Travel Portugal” episode, I found the wines (like the country itself) to be underrated and underpriced for the quality.

Let’s start in Minho in Northern Portugal: Known for the Alvarinho grape (Albariño in Spain), this region is one of the largest in the country. The most famous DOC here is the aforementioned Vinho Verde, which you may know as a slightly



PHOTOS COURTESY OF VIS FOR VINO



Quinta de Azevedo is located in the Minho region.

effervescent and cheap summer sipper. But don’t miss out on the new styles made with high-quality, ripe grapes and without bubbles. These wines, including what I tried from Quinta de Azevedo, are a delicious blend of stone fruit, minerality, and tropical notes; are usually aged on the lees; and are comparable to some slightly bitter Italian varieties like Vermentino or Soave. They’re complex, affordable, and great for pairing with citrus-based dishes and shellfish.

The Douro DOC, where the grapes for Port come from, also makes an increasingly higher percentage of full-bodied, fruit-forward table wines. Like most

Portuguese bottlings, they are blends of indigenous grapes, of which there are several hundred spread across the country, among them Touriga Nacional, Touriga Franca, and Tinta Roriz. As such, these wines have not only the authenticity that consumers crave but the complexity that wine buyers love—and their price points range from affordable substitutes for Cabernet Sauvignon on by-the-glass lists to ageworthy selections that will make adventurous guests feel like they’re in on a secret.

Further south, the Alentejo DOC region is similar to Paso Robles in that it produces wines that retain their fresh-

Herdade do Peso winemaker Luís Cabral de Almeida with author Vince Anter.

ness in the dry, hot climate due to the cool nights. I tasted through a lineup from Herdade do Peso that included blends of Syrah, Alicante Bouschet, and Touriga Nacional with various oak treatments. I picked out violets, plums, meatiness, and ripe fruit that was still crisp: a great match with hearty, rustic cuisine.

We’re just scratching the surface, as there are a total of 13 wine regions in Portugal. In the Dão, you can explore both ageworthy blends as well as lighter wines from the Jaen grape (known as Mencía in Spain), or take a day trip to Lisbon and try the value-driven bottlings from Lisboa and Setúbal. What astonished me most about the Portuguese people when we visited was their kindness as well as their pride in their culture and their eagerness to share it, so please do yourself a favor and indulge them: Don’t be afraid of obscure grape varieties and dive into Portuguese wines with reckless abandon.

*Until next wine,
Vince*

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



Achieving Excellence Through Blending

THERE WAS A TIME when the merits of single-vineyard versus blended wines were hotly debated. That argy-bargy seems to have thankfully cooled down, as there is plenty of room in the world for these two different approaches to happily coexist, even on the highest tiers of quality.

Blending is typically done once all lots have completed fermentation so that the winemaker can see what they have to work with. They can have many reasons for producing blends, but throwing one together with the leftovers of other bottlings just for the sake of making a product is the least justifiable. I recently tasted a disjointed mess made with Nebbiolo, Nerello Mascalese, Barbera, and Primitivo that suffered from an excess of acid and tannins, not to mention alcohol. This doesn't mean that lower-tier "everything but the kitchen sink" wines don't have their place, but wineries should market and price them accordingly. And they still need to be enjoyable: They can't be considered a good value if they're unpleasant.

Blending out faults is possible in some cases: Elevated volatile acidity, for example, can be brought below the sensory threshold. But smoke taint does not blend away nearly as well. Humans are highly sensitive to it, so even a tiny amount can ruin an otherwise clean wine. Brettanomyces is also tricky; as with smoke taint, the spoilage can reveal itself more over time, making it hard to mitigate entirely during the winemaking process.

Blending done right is often about creating a harmonious balance. Sometimes the judicious addition of another component is all that is needed to lower a wine's alcohol level; smooth out its tannins; or reach a juicy, delicious degree of acidity. This is often preferable to adding tartaric acid, hiring a company to spin out excess alcohol, or bottling a wine with noticeable sweetness when dryness was the goal.

Knowing that certain vineyards and varieties will ripen ahead of others can be used to great advantage when crafting an intentionally blended wine. Sémillon, for

its part, is a classic adjunct to Sauvignon Blanc: In the vineyards I work with, it typically ripens at a lower Brix than Sauv Blanc and can thus be counted on to temper the alcohol of the final blend—a subtle tweak that makes all the difference.

Another approach is to pick a vineyard at varying stages of ripeness and blend the resulting lots to taste, producing superb complexity while maintaining a wine's single-vineyard status. This is especially successful for Chardonnay, which offers a wide range of characteristics as it ripens: bright acid and lower alcohol to start; green apple and pear in the middle; and ripe mango, pineapple, and a richer mouthfeel in the final stages. These components can be brought together to create something unique.

This is not to say that every expression benefits from blending, as some have a gorgeous linearity that would be a shame to lose. That said, it is arguably the most cohesive way to create a wine that wants for nothing. *sj*



{ winery spotlight }

glory DAYS

MAJOR CHANGES ARE UNDERWAY
AT **GLORIA FERRER** AS IT MARKS FOUR
DECADES OF WINEMAKING

story by Jonathan Cristaldi / photos by Alexander Rubin

Gloria Ferrer, senior vice president of winegrowing and winemaking Harry Hansen and vineyard director Brad Kurtz.



Gloria Ferrer's winery and hospitality center are located at its Home Ranch vineyard.

With the 2022 vintage, Gloria Ferrer is marking four decades of sparkling-wine production from estate grapes grown on the Sonoma County side of the Carneros AVA. And with the celebration comes a wave of new hires and guest experiences as well as a turn toward organic farming principles.

For starters, senior vice president of winegrowing and winemaking Harry Hansen is back. With a genial cordiality that belies his strict standards for excellence in the cellars, Hansen began his career at Gloria Ferrer in 1986 as enologist, left in 2001 for Edna Valley Vineyard, spent a decade at Sterling Vineyards, and returned in 2021.

Also joining the team last year was vineyard director Brad Kurtz, whose sprightly vigor outmatches even the energy and endurance of the vines he tends. Kurtz has worked with the best—first at Abreu Vineyard Management and later at Wente Vineyards in the Livermore Valley, where he helped secure the first trial program for electric Monarch tractors in California; he's since purchased one for Gloria Ferrer as well.

In 2016, Gloria Ferrer received certification from the California Sustainable Winegrowing Alliance; now, under Kurtz's supervision, the winery is close to obtaining organic certification from California Certified Organic Farmers. "We just finished a 12-month cycle of fully organic farming practices," he says, "and two years without herbicide use."

Hansen's Homecoming

When I asked Hansen what it's like to be back, he said with a wide grin, "It's been a real opportunity," adding, "I had built a great team, and when I came back, five people I had hired in the 1980s and 1990s [were] still working here! So there's a real sense of being home again."



Food-paired tastings are part of the Gloria Ferrer guest experience.

He specifically feels at home in a house where there's "a lot of interest in the diversity of clones and clonal selections," he says, including 14 Pinot clones and half a dozen Chardonnay clones. "Our early selections came from a variety of places like Corvallis in Willamette Valley and Amador County as well as from Champagne—clones that went through quarantine at the University of British Columbia and were released virus-free to [the University of California,] Davis, and then to us." As he and Kurtz continue to oversee replanting, which began in 2014, "We are selecting many of the clones that came from those early selections," says Hansen.

dazzling Carneros Cuvée and Carneros Cuvée Rosé.

Kurtz, who drove Hansen and me to the top of the Home Ranch vineyard in his pickup truck, explained that "we have low yields here because of the intense wind" that was whipping about us. "Acid levels stay high, and malic acid stays really high, because it stays very cool here." His farming methods yield 3–3.5 tons per acre of fruit for the sparkling wines and about 2.5–3 tons per acre for the still wines. "I prune for fewer buds to have stronger vigor—you don't want stressed vines for sparkling wine, which will increase tannin and color. So we want aromatics, which happen in a low-stress environment. And

vine health will allow him to listen to the vineyard more closely and experiment with dosage levels accordingly. Coupling that with his and Kurtz's focus on regenerative practices, he feels confident that, even given the realities of climate change, "what we are doing now will be for the next generation." In the meantime, he plans to pop many corks during his renewed crusade to show the world what Carneros sparkling wine is all about—the Gloria Ferrer way.

Top-to-Bottom Transformation

Hansen's transition from Sterling was complicated by the fact that the iconic Napa winery was deeply impacted by the 2020 Glass Fire and is still in recovery, but perhaps it was also eased by the presence of a familiar face. Melanie Schafer, a close Sterling colleague, joined Gloria Ferrer in 2020 and is now vice president of direct-to-consumer and marketing, essentially making her the gatekeeper of the winery's big secrets: a small, DTC-only portfolio of remarkable sparkling wines (the aforementioned Carneros Cuvées, Royal Cuvées, and vintage Blanc de Blancs) as well as still Pinot Noir, Chardonnay, and Pinot Blanc wines.

Schafer is also focused on hospitality, which estate founders José and Gloria Ferrer knew would play a significant role in their success. In the early 1980s, when they broke ground on their new winery, they installed an expansive, east-facing covered terrace, oriented so that it's sheltered from the aforementioned intense winds that funnel through the Petaluma Gap on their way to the San Pablo Bay every afternoon and evening. This ensures that guests can casually enjoy scenic views without fear of a glass tipping over or so much as a paper menu taking flight. But until Schafer arrived, the terrace was a nondescript sea of wicker tables and chairs. Once she cleared those out, she brought in beautiful Dekton stone-topped tables that are produced via a carbon-neutral method along with more chic, imminently comfortable chairs and arranged them in intimate nooks partitioned by manicured hedges in planters; she also brought in olive trees to create shade paths. In short, she ushered in a total transformation



▶ **Gloria Ferrer executive chef Raymond Schafer.**

▶ **Gloria Ferrer vice president of direct-to-consumer and marketing Melanie Schafer.**



Between two estate vineyards—the 180-acre Home Ranch, which houses the winery and hospitality center; and Circle Bar, a 120-acre ranch a mile and a half south of the winery—Gloria Ferrer produces a number of sparkling wines typically led by Pinot Noir. The majority is its Sonoma Brut, followed by its Extra Brut and Demi-Sec cuvées, Vista Brut, Brut Rosé, Blanc de Noirs Rosé, and Alquimia—Hansen's experimental cuvée, which changes annually depending on what he wants to try—as well as a vintage Blanc de Blancs, the top-shelf Royal Cuvée and Royal Cuvée Rosé, and the

those heavy clay soils," he said, motioning toward vines planted back near the entrance to the property, "retain water, so it makes it easy to grow. Further up the hill is where we grow for our still-wine program." The middle of the property also has clay soils, but they drain well; Kurtz calls this source for the higher-end sparkling wines "the Goldilocks zone."

Gloria Ferrer's sparkling wines, which have always been made in the traditional method, are dominated by a brut style. But Hansen says he is feeling more adventurous these days, suggesting that the practice of monitoring water use and individual

of the space by way of simple cosmetic upgrades, not seismic structural shifts.

Also driving the spate of new hospitality experiences at Gloria Ferrer is another recent addition to the team: Schafer's husband, executive chef Raymond Schafer, who was hired in October 2021 and brings his French training and penchant for experimentation to bear on the intricate and creative dishes offered through Gloria Ferrer's culinary program. "We save the best tables and best views for our five-course tasting," explains Melanie, "which is offered Thursday through Sunday by reservation only. The wine selections change depending on the food pairing, which is seasonally driven."

Chef Raymond says he "thinks in colors first" when conceiving a dish, motioning toward the produce gardens on the estate as if to point out that he has a huge color palette to draw upon. "I never do the same thing twice," he explains. "The things we do are indicative of the wines we produce, but I look for the things we can make our own. Since we work with so much sparkling wine, I can, [for instance,] do scallops and blend different flavors with different cultures." As a mouthwatering example, he explains a new dish he's been highlighting: "As part of our five-course food and wine pairing, I do a five-spice braised beef cheek with udon noodles and beef ramen broth [as well

as] lobster rolls with pickled jalapeños." And that's just the beginning: The team has also launched an eight-course Chef's Table Experience, which is not to be missed.

Finally, if Gloria Ferrer's guests notice that the bottles they're tasting through appear slightly more curvaceous than they used to, with an elegant, wide-bottomed base, they can rest assured they're not seeing things: The winery has commissioned an exclusive new bottle mold as the veritable icing on the cake of all of its upgrades. "Gloria Ferrer's new, modern packaging demonstrates our commitment to producing quality wines," explains Schafer, "and pays tribute to [our] interest in glassware." We'll drink to that. **SJ**

tasting notes



Gloria Ferrer Sonoma Brut, Carneros (\$28) Here's a crowd-pleaser with panache to match its lasting bead. The blend of 88% Pinot Noir and 12% Chardonnay opens with confidently genial, yeast-touched aromas of ripe apple and pear, lemon-lime curd, and flashes of honeysuckle. Pillow-soft and pretty in the mouth, it balances its zing of green apple and peachy, lilting acidity with honeyed tones of tangerine and a hint of black cherry before a finish dashed with baking spice. **92** —*Ruth Tobias*



Gloria Ferrer 2014 Royal Cuvée, Carneros (\$65) Aromas of brioche and green pear mingle delicately with hints of white pepper and fresh button mushroom in this blend of 67% Pinot Noir and 33% Chardonnay, aged five years on the lees. Ripe yet nimble thanks in part to persistent bubbles, it expresses lemon curd and Asian pear as well as yellow apple, followed by stony minerality on the sleek midpalate and a flourish of white cherry and nectarine on the finish. **93** —*R.T.*



Gloria Ferrer 2019 Brut Rosé, Carneros (\$62) Scents of sun-warmed raspberry, French bread, and ginger announce this stylish and self-assured blend of 92% Pinot Noir and 8% Chardonnay, which combines a peach-skin texture with acrobatic acidity that gracefully leaps across flavors of juicy strawberry, ripe melon, lime and lime leaf, and green apple before it's brought down to earth by a touch of rooibos tea on the back end. **93** —*R.T.*



Gloria Ferrer Blanc de Blancs, Carneros (\$28) Pure class in the glass, this Chardonnay overdelivers for the price, nonstop pinprick perlage and all. The nose suggests baked apple and white flowers with hints of baguette and honeyed almond; similar flavors appear on a palate whose voluptuous acidity gives entrée to juicy green apple along with hints of kiwi and vanilla, sprinkled with savory herb on the finish. **94** —*R.T.*



Gloria Ferrer 2012 Carneros Cuvée, Carneros (\$88) Intense clarity is the hallmark of this blend of 54% Pinot Noir and 46% Chardonnay, which spent more than seven years on the lees. Pear tart and lemon meringue drive the nose, seconded by beeswax, salted Marcona almond, and the slightest whiff of banana; scintillating acidity meets a delectable roundness on the palate, where crisp tarte Tatin is punctuated by pine nut and a hint of dried white fig. There's staying power on the elegantly creamy finish. **94** —*R.T.*

In Pursuit of Perfection in Paso

CELEBRATING 25 VINTAGES OF J. LOHR ESTATES LOS OSOS MERLOT by Wes Hagen

PHOTOS COURTESY OF J. LOHR VINEYARDS & WINES

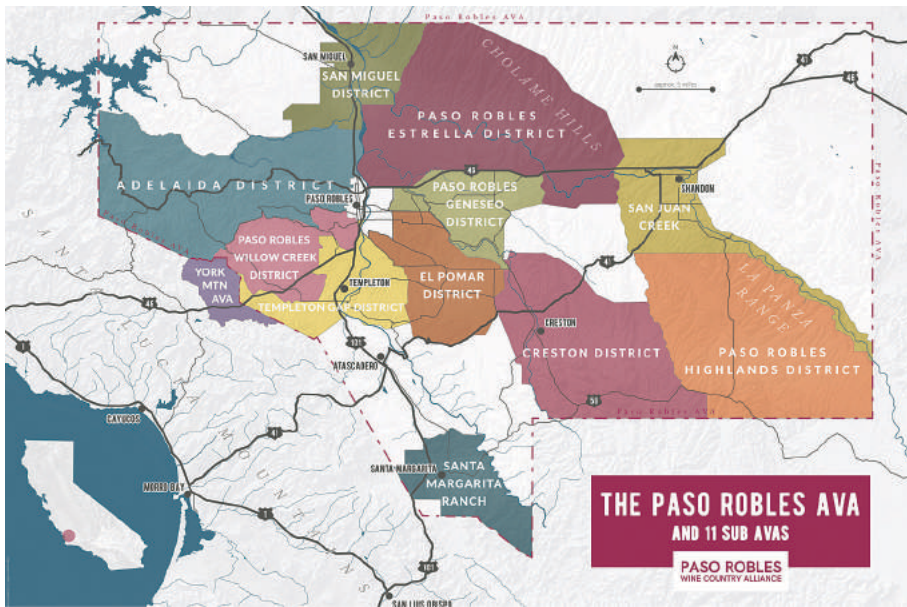


Brenden Wood is J. Lohr's red-wine winemaker.

HAVING ESTABLISHED his first vineyards in what would later become Monterey's cool-climate Arroyo Seco AVA 50 years ago, J. Lohr Vineyards & Wines founder Jerry Lohr next began to look south to the warmer climes of Paso Robles with a strong desire to produce top-tier Cabernet Sauvignon and Merlot.

Planting and farming 150 acres of Merlot, mostly in what is now the El Pomar District sub-AVA, he proved that the grape was perfectly suited to being grown in Paso Robles with the creation of a blend called the J. Lohr Estates Los Osos Merlot, the first vintage of which appeared in 1997. Given that a total of only 2,500 acres of Merlot are planted in Paso Robles (by comparison, Cabernet Sauvignon accounts for over 20,000 acres), J. Lohr's commitment to the variety both on its own and in blends has had historic significance.

Merlot is a key variety in J. Lohr Vineyards & Wines' Creston Vineyard in the El Pomar District of Paso Robles.



Neither the warmest nor the coolest of the region's 11 sub-AVAs, El Pomar is located in south-central Paso Robles, tucked between the Templeton Gap District to its west, the Geneseo District to its north, and the Creston District to its east. Here in J. Lohr's Creston Vineyard, according to red-wine winemaker Brenden Wood, "Our Merlot vines grow on some pretty unique soils. It's mostly clay and loam but is intermixed with calcareous, chalky limestone pebbles and cobbles. What's so special about that? Well, all these cobbles make for excellent drainage during the winter months when we're receiving rainfall [while] giving off moisture in summer and also [raising] the soil pH. The higher the pH of the soil, the lower the pH of the eventual wine—creating a balanced structure and backbone to the Merlot." What's more, Wood adds, "If you look around the world, you'll find this type of compound soil is fairly rare—but some of the great Merlot-growing regions . . . have it and take advantage."

The viticulture and winemaking teams at J. Lohr work harmoniously to grow, harvest, ferment, and bottle their Merlot wines using an approach that has been fine-tuned for decades to produce the style they define as "dense but soft." An array of clones, both French and Italian, give them a large spice box from which to build each vintage of Los Osos. As Wood explains, "Merlot clones 9, 10, 11, and 12 are Italian clones from the Vivai Cooperativi Rauscedo in Northern Italy via the University of California, Davis. The



Lawrence Lohr is a co-owner and the COO, vineyards, of J. Lohr.

leaves and canopy on [them] stay greener longer into harvest season; [they] tend to provide more fruity character, with notes of raspberry, plum, and black cherry. Clone 181 is a French clone; it brings more minty, herbal, and chaparral notes to the finished wine."

Harvests on the estate usually take a few weeks to a month. When picked earlier, Merlot provides varietal character in the form of notes of bay leaf, cherry, currant, and violet as well as a solid backbone; mid-harvest picks deliver ripe plum and cocoa along with more sweet cherry and violet. Both help keep the wine balanced and bright even as later-picked grapes give it some boysenberry-compote notes.

The fruit for Los Osos is destemmed but not crushed, undergoing whole-berry fermentation in stainless steel to achieve fruit-forward aromatics and purity of character in the final blend. The wine

completes malolactic fermentation and spends a full year in (20% new) 225-liter American oak barrels from Missouri. The blend changes a bit with each vintage but traditionally incorporates small percentages of Malbec and Cabernet Franc to accent the color and complexity.

In a portfolio that emphasizes Cabernet, what role does Merlot have to play? According to co-owner and COO, vineyards, Lawrence Lohr, "We are well-known for our Cabernet Sauvignon, but Merlot has been an important part of our Paso Robles winegrowing since the late 1990s. Whether as a standalone release [like] our J. Lohr Estates Los Osos Merlot or as an essential component in our finest, luxury-class red blends such as our J. Lohr Cuvée POM, Merlot is a critical part of our red-wine programs. The soil types and dramatic diurnal temperature swings found throughout our Paso Robles vineyards provide optimal conditions for growing the red Bordeaux varieties, including Merlot. All of this adds up to a delicious, approachable, and affordable Merlot that exemplifies our house style of 'dense but soft' red wines."

Every wine deserves an hour at a table laden with delicious things. Lawrence Lohr loves Los Osos with rosemary-garlic lamb chops; a meal of smoked tri-tip, beans, and garlic bread is an equally successful match. *sj*



J. Lohr Estates 2020 Los Osos Merlot, Paso Robles (\$15) Ripe red plum, sugared beet, and cinnamon-rubbed rose form an alliance on the nose and palate. Black cherry, cedar, and jasmine complement one another on the wine's satin patina. A layer of mocha and a hint of minty brush make an impact on the exotically spiced finish. **92** —*Meridith May*

Welcome to the NEIGHBORHOOD(S)

THE **RUSSIAN RIVER VALLEY PINOT FORUM** EXPLORED THE SONOMA COUNTY APPELLATION'S DISTINCT SUBREGIONS

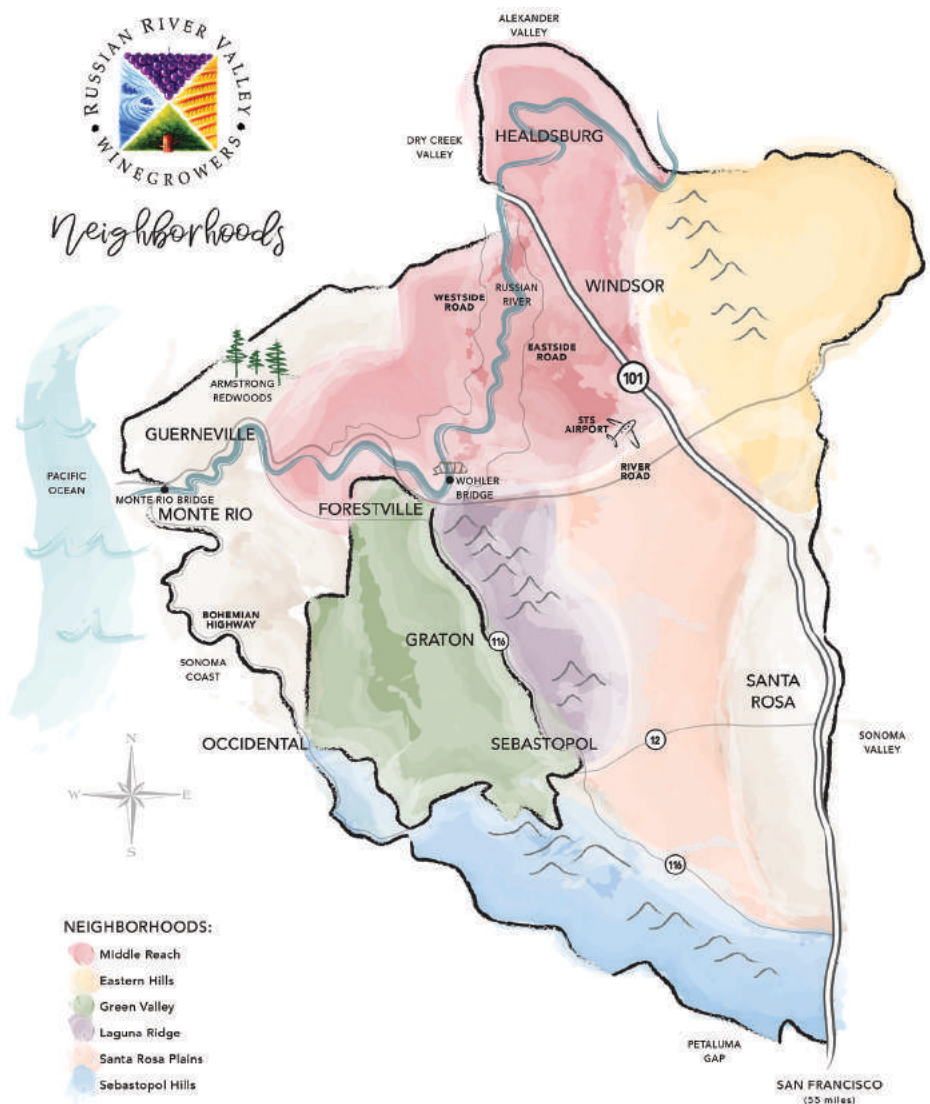
by *Christina Barrueta*

Log lingered as we walked the rows of Landmark Vineyards' Hop Kiln Estate. "It's quite chilly," noted my companion as I nodded in agreement. But by the completion of our tour, led by winemaker Greg Stach, the maritime mist had given way to warm, sunny skies. Having spent the previous day discussing the diurnal shift found in California's Russian River Valley (RRV), I considered the opportunity to experience it firsthand to be one of many memorable experiences that marked the 18th annual Pinot Forum, held last July, when some 60 wine buyers and sommeliers joined sponsor Russian River Valley Winegrowers for a deep dive into the region's Pinot Noir.

Centered on the Russian River, this subappellation of the greater Sonoma County AVA produces some of the world's most sought-after wines. Within the RRV lie six neighborhoods: Sebastopol Hills, Green Valley, Middle Reach, Laguna Ridge, Santa Rosa Plains, and Eastern Hills. Each boasts a distinctive microclimate that contributes to the area's outstanding diversity of expressions.



Emeritus Vineyards president and Pinot Forum chairperson Mari Jones welcomes guests to a seminar.





Marimar Estate Vineyards production manager and cellar master Taylor Bianco digs a soil pit to reveal the Russian River Valley's famed Goldridge soil.



DAY 1

Our journey began with a welcome dinner at Spoonbar in Healdsburg. Each attendee was assigned a host, and we were delighted to meet Mari Jones, president of Emeritus Vineyards. As we grazed on bites such as al pastor pork belly and tuna sashimi, Jones shared the story of Emeritus, founded by her father, Brice Cutrer Jones. She focused on its Pinot Hill Vineyard, "since you'll be having a lot of wine from our [other vineyard,] Hallberg Ranch, in the next couple of days," she explained. Laughter and wine flowed freely as we savored courses of smoked duck breast and lobster risotto while tasting through five elegant Pinot Hill bottlings, dialing in on the defining characteristics of site orientation and individual clones.



DAY 2

The next morning found us at Emeritus Vineyards' tasting room overlooking Hallberg Ranch. As forum chair, Jones commenced the "Welcome to the Neighborhoods" seminar by introducing moderator Evan Goldstein, MS. "This is a wonderful kickoff for immersing yourself in the wines, culture, and holistic reality of our world," he began, explaining that 24 winemakers would be covering the RRV's neighborhoods in order from coolest to warmest. "Let's start first with Rod

Berglund, aka the Rodfather, to give us the background on the Neighborhoods Initiative and an amuse bouche to our tasting."

Berglund of Joseph Swan Winery was inspired to create the Neighborhoods Initiative as a way to promote the diversity of the region. "Back then, there was no [winegrowers' association], and most thought of the Russian River Valley as an amorphous lump with a bunch of Pinot producers," he noted. Making parallels to the communes of Burgundy, he mapped out the neighborhoods "as areas of commonality." Further research ensued, resulting in a pioneering study by Dr. Roger Boulton of the University of California, Davis, that identified the elemental "fingerprints" exhibited by the wines from each neighborhood. As Berglund explained, "[Boulton] said that in his 40 years of teaching and research, he had never seen such conclusive results. It was repeated two years later with the same finding; every neighborhood's wines were a cluster separated from the others. It was a validation of the [Neighborhoods Initiative]."



Sebastopol Hills'

major attributes are the RRV's famed Goldridge soil, a well-draining sandy clay loam, and its proximity to the Pacific Ocean through

the Petaluma Gap, which makes it colder and windier than other neighborhoods. To showcase the vibrant Pinots created here, Tom Klassen of Patz & Hall Winery filled our first glass with his 2017 Boot Hill Pinot Noir "as an expression of the coolness of Sebastopol Hills," he explained. "We make 12 different Pinot Noirs, and this always has the highest acidity and the brightest fruit." These characteristics were also present in the wines introduced by Zidanelia Arcidiacono of Sonoma-Cutrer, Alan Baker of Cartograph Wines, and Julien Howsepian of Kosta Browne.



A discussion on **Green Valley**, the only RRV neighborhood recognized as an AVA, followed. Fog influence and Goldridge soil produce

lively Pinots with ripe tannins, as seen in those poured by Chris Strieter of Senses Wines, Marimar Torres of Marimar Estate Vineyards & Winery, David Lattin of Emeritus Vineyards, David Hejl of Domaine Della, and Jeff Stewart of Hartford Family Winery.



Laguna Ridge, which sits mainly on Goldridge and Altamont soils, experiences milder weather than the other neighborhoods, with earlier budbreak and

longer hang times. The resulting wines, presented by Berglund as well as Anthony Beckman of Balletto Vineyards, Craig McAllister of La Crema Winery, Courtney Wagoner of Martinelli Winery, and Jennie Murphy of Paul Hobbs Winery, were characterized by midpalate richness and soft tannins.



Santa Rosa Plains is composed of upland foothills and low valleys in which the Huichica soil series prevails. Fog tends to burn off sooner here than elsewhere, resulting in higher daytime

temperatures and creating the balanced and well-structured Pinots introduced by Alexia Pellegrini of Pellegrini-Olivet Lane, Fred Scherrer of Scherrer Winery, Sam Lando of Lando Wines, and Olivia Wright of Davis Bynum Winery.



Middle Reach, historically known for Pinot Noir, lies closest to the Russian River. As the northernmost region, it sees warmer temperatures that, combined

with a wide range of soils, contribute to richly textured Pinots with firm tannins, such as those crafted by Greg Stach of Landmark Vineyards, Theresa Heredia of Gary Farrell Winery, Adrian Manspeaker of Joseph Jewell Wines, and Jenna Davis of DuMOL.



The most northeastern section of the RRV, **Eastern Hills** (see also page 22) sees the least amount of fog influence. Due to a complex mix of soils ranging from Hu-

ichica clay loam to volcanic, its Pinots tend to be bolder with more muscular tannins; the wines presented by Ancient Oak Cellars co-owner Melissa Moholt-Siebert (filling in for winemaker Greg LaFollette) and Guy Davis of Davis Family Vineyards served as cases in point.

After a lively Q&A, we refueled with lunch before heading to Marimar Estate Vineyards & Winery. Passing the tasting room, we wound our way uphill to Marimar Torres' beautiful home and stepped from our shuttle to find cellar master Taylor Bianco, who had been hard at work digging a soil pit. "The Goldridge soil is well regarded for Pinot Noir because of its low vigor and great



Marcell Keys, beverage manager of Chops Lobster Bar in Boca Raton, FL, examines soil samples during "Terroir Class" at Marimar Estate Vineyards.



Nancy Bailey, general manager of Gary Farrell Winery, welcomes guests to the Grand Dinner.

drainage," said Bianco as he gestured toward the layers of sandy loam over sandstone. "This area was all underwater at one point—I found a seashell this morning—and this is what's left." Later, we were given chilled glasses of Marimar Godello, a Spanish variety from Galicia, and guided to seats on the picturesque terrace to continue our "Terroir Class." Among other presenters, Fred Scherrer and Guy Davis dug into the diverse geology of the RRV, passing around test-tube racks of soil samples that included the

rocky Franciscan Complex and the fine-grained Wilson Grove Formation, while Olivia Wright tackled climate, contrasting the RRV's weather conditions with those of Oregon; Dijon, France; and Central Otago, New Zealand (the region tends to be warmer, though it experiences similar diurnal shifts).

Having started from the ground up, we were ready for a winemaking education via a production tour at Hartford Family Winery. Sipping on icy spritzes and local brews, we were guided by Jeff Stewart from the receiving and sorting area to the barrel room, where Rod Berglund shared anecdotes from the inaugural Forum dinner, when winemakers wore tuxedos and poured wines. "The somms told us at the end to never again do their job; we failed," he said with a laugh.

Our day concluded with a winemakers' dinner at Gary Farrell Winery. "Our appellation is still young," noted general manager Nancy Bailey. "We're still writing the book, so you are sitting amongst the pioneers of the Russian River Valley who are part of our founding story. Think about that!" It was an inspiring thought to ponder as we dined on a multicourse meal crafted by Pascaline Fine Catering. Our Pinot palates were further honed by 18 pairings, including Gary Farrell's 2018 Lancel Creek—the spiced, earthy notes of which paired beautifully with a first course of calamari topped with smoky bean and chorizo salad. Each winemaker spent time at guests' tables throughout the night, which ended with decadent desserts and parting gifts in the form of leftover bottles.

Landmark Vineyards winemaker Greg Stach discusses viticulture on a tour of the Hop Kiln Estate in the Russian River Valley's Middle Reach neighborhood.





Pinot Forum guests donned togas for the Bacchanalia at Rodney Strong.

DAY 3

While some headed to Ancient Oak Cellars in Eastern Hills, others (including me) visited Landmark Vineyards in Middle Reach. Greg Stach began with the history of Walters Ranch Hop Kiln, a registered California Historical Landmark, before leading our vineyard tour: “The ranch is 250 acres, with 93 planted,” he shared. “There are roughly four levels to this vineyard, so a lot of different elevations and orientations.” Throughout the morning, we touched on topics such as leafing, fruit drop, his favorite clone (943), and crop yield. “This year we have shorter clusters and smaller berries,” he noted, adding that he was anticipating the production of a more concentrated Pinot Noir:



A panel of 18 winemakers led the “Vintner Conversations” seminar at Balletto Vineyards.


Next was the “Grand Tasting Marketplace” at Davis Family Vineyard, founded by Guy and Judy Davis. Here we were introduced to more Pinot producers: Ramey Wine Cellars, Notre Vue Estate, Dot Wine, Merry Edwards Winery, Three

Sticks Wines, Kanzler Family Vineyards, Siduri Wines, Lynmar Estate, Ron Rubin Winery, Trione Vineyards and Winery, and Domaine de la Rivière.

After an al fresco picnic lunch, it was time to attend our closing session at Balletto Vineyards in Santa Rosa. “This is 160 acres and our largest single vineyard,” began Anthony Beckman. “Balletto farms 850 acres in the Russian River Valley with 22 vineyard sites, but less than 10% comes to me. I get first pick—I’m like a kid in a candy store—and the rest of it sells.” We then launched into the “Vintners Conversations” seminar. Moderated by sommelier Amanda McCrossin, the fascinating five-part symposium covered a wide range of topics. For “Ageability,” we compared wines from the 2008, 2009, and 2010 vintages to those from 2019. We then discussed the wildfires of 2020 and the impact of smoke taint, noting such important variables as wind drift, smoke intensity, and degree of leaf and grape exposure. The winemakers leading the “Whole Cluster” session offered their thoughts on varietal stem differences, the placement of clusters before crushing, and the effects of different percentages of inclusion, while the “Oak” session covered not only the influence of barrel aging on wine but also toast levels, cooperages, and forest provenance. The enthralling afternoon concluded with a comparative tasting of Pinot Noir clones, including 667, 828, 943, and Pommard.

How to cap off such a spectacular itinerary? With a Bacchanalia at Rodney Strong and the company of the winemakers who had now become friends, of course.

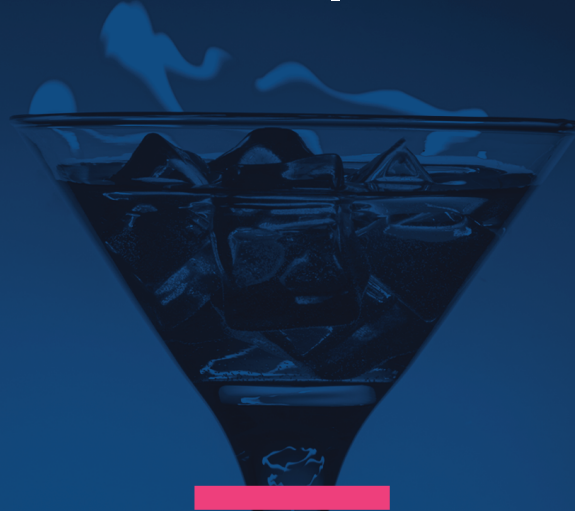
Fantastic wines stem from a fantastic community, and exploring Russian River Valley Pinot Noir’s expression of terroir through the Neighborhoods Initiative was an incredible experience. “It’s a wonderful way to display the diversity of this tiny area,” said attendee Tiffany Tobey, wine director at the Tower Club in Dallas, Texas. “I would recommend this educational program to anyone in the industry, as it will open your eyes to how complex this region is.” Daniel Webber, head sommelier at Maple & Ash in Scottsdale, Arizona, agreed. “There’s no learning experience as valuable as immersing yourself in a region,” he commented. “There is a lot of diversity, and highlighting the different styles based on the neighborhoods they’re grown in is a natural evolution. We do it in Burgundy; why wouldn’t we do it in Sonoma?” Advanced Sommelier Cara Patricia, co-founder of DECANTsf in San Francisco, concurred: “The Pinot Forum helped me see—and taste—that the Russian River Valley is not a monolith making rich Pinot Noirs but a complex region with unique terroirs that create world-class wines.”

The Pinot Forum organizers were equally pleased. “I think of Pinot Forum as summer camp for Pinot nerds,” Jones said at our welcome seminar, “but I think the counselors might have more fun than the campers.” 



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Social Climbing

WITH HELP FROM THE ELECTRIC TALENT AT **UMBRELLA HOSPITALITY GROUP**, THE SIXTY BEVERLY HILLS GIVES THE NEIGHBORHOOD A NEW EDGE

by Stacie Hunt

ZACHARY PATTERSON BREEZES INTO the stylish lobby of the SIXTY Beverly Hills hotel with a welcoming smile. We're here to chat about the hotel's partnership with Umbrella Hospitality Group, which Patterson co-founded with Austin Melrose. Explaining how he got his start in the hospitality industry, he admits, "It's a little-known fact—I got hired at Ketchup [then a hot new bar in LA, which has since closed] without ever actually bartending. Everyone assumed I had. [But] I'll never forget, [the GM] offers me the job, and he goes, 'I know you know what you're doing,' which I love that he said that."

turned my brain off and did not worry... I just had fun," says Patterson. "The perception of me behind the bar [changed] too. It's like, 'Actually, he does this because he's good at it and enjoys it.' It then opened up a lot of opportunities."

Eventually Patterson connected with Melrose, a childhood friend from Oregon, who was also working his way through Los Angeles' vibrant bar scene. Merging their talents, the two established the Melrose Umbrella Company in 2013. They've personally designed and overseen every aspect of the establishments they've opened since, often building the spaces themselves. Their current venues include



Jason Pomeranc is co-founder of SIXTY Hotels.



SIXTY Beverly Hills' rooftop is home to Umbrella Swim Club and Umbrella Social Club.

He may not have known how to pour a drink, but his demeanor instantly put guests at ease, and his enthusiasm for having a good time was palpable—which made him worth taking a risk on in this line of work. "Bartending at night was the only time I felt free; it was the time I

Melrose Umbrella Company, LONO Hollywood, The Corner Door, and Umbrella taCO as well as their newest ventures at SIXTY Beverly Hills: Ella, Umbrella Swim Club, and Umbrella Social Club.

They're still exactly the kind of people you'd be willing to take a risk on, which



Zachary Patterson is co-founder of Umbrella Hospitality Group.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF UMBRELLA HOSPITALITY GROUP



A spread at Ella, SIXTY Beverly Hills' signature restaurant.

is just what Jason Pomeranc, co-founder of SIXTY Hotels, decided to do when redeveloping his Beverly Hills outpost—even though Melrose and Patterson had never created concepts for a hotel before. “I loved what they were doing at their venues,” says Pomeranc. “Most importantly . . . [I loved] how passionate they were about the concept [of creating community] and content, particularly as it related to wine and cocktails.”

Their fresh approach was vital given that “Beverly Hills was really not about that very current offering in cocktail culture, organic wines, and locally sourced food. . . . It was much more traditional,” says Pomeranc, who was looking to disrupt the status quo and develop spaces that would appeal to an increasingly younger local audience. “I reach out to nonconventional hotel food and beverage partnerships, simply because I’ve always felt that the hotel should reflect its immediate surroundings . . . and give guests a hyperlocal experience. Often, larger hotel companies try a formulaic approach. [Sometimes] it’s a famous television chef or some sort of concept that they feel is . . . as general as it can be and as appealing toward as wide an audience as they can make it. I try to make things very specific.”

Ella, SIXTY’s cheerful and cozy full-service restaurant and bar, was designed to offer an inspired dining experience for neighbors and hotel guests alike. In lieu of a gift shop, the Bottle Shop is nestled into an alcove in the dining room, just

off the lobby. It’s a quick stop for guests to procure a bottle of wine from the carefully chosen selection—a perk with a personal touch.

A large portion of the hotel’s wine program is devoted to natural, organic, and biodynamic producers. It features a growing selection of pét-nats and orange wines as well as a chilled reds category, which is still a bold move in a town accustomed to a more traditional wine selection. “That exploration is fun and exciting,” says Patterson. “I was always chilling my reds, even before I knew that was a thing to do. . . . I just prefer the way it [enlivens] when it’s 10 degrees cooler.”

Meanwhile, Patterson is at the helm of Ella’s innovative cocktail program. “Our go-to greeting shot at Ella is a shot of chilled orange wine topped with a splash of mezcal. I can see this evolving into a cocktail at some point, but for now, it’s the perfect shot—bright, dry, earthy, and satiating,” says Patterson.

On the stunning rooftop, Umbrella Swim Club and Umbrella Social Club bring people together by offering locals the same perks hotel guests receive, such as private pool and gym access, discounted dining options, and lower valet prices. “Our goal is to grow our community and connect in a way that feels right for everybody,” says Patterson. “It’s one of our favorite things in hospitality, having people whom we’ve . . . met only once show up years later and say, ‘I had one of the most amazing nights ever [at your restaurant].’” *SJ*



A Taste of the Umbrella Club

Umbrella Hospitality Group co-founder Zachary Patterson’s current favorite cocktail is the Sage B4 Beauty: “I can’t seem to get enough of [it],” he says. “It is a perfect fit during the daytime as well as in the evenings.” An ode to the Pisco Sour, it’s elegant yet creamy and luscious.

SAGE B4 BEAUTY

- 1 oz. Italicus Rosolio di Bergamotto liqueur
- 1 oz. unaged brandy (such as Macchu Pisco, Frisco American Immature Brandy, or Calisco Spirit of California)
- 1 egg white
- ¾ oz. fresh lemon juice
- ¾ oz. almond-sage honey*
Shake and strain into a coupe. Garnish with a sage leaf.

*Heat 32 ounces of water to 175–180 degrees Fahrenheit. Add 32 sage leaves and let steep for 6–8 minutes. Strain and combine with equal parts wildflower honey. Add 4 drops of pure almond extract.



Mother Tongue beverage director Ryan Hess; Marqués de Murrieta export director Arthur de Lencquesaing; and Naureen Lyon, Los Angeles district manager for Maisons Marques & Domaines, host an evening with Marqués de Murrieta at Mother Tongue in Los Angeles, CA.

A Living **LEGACY**

DISCOVERING SPANISH WINE THROUGH THE LENS OF
MARQUÉS DE MURRIETA

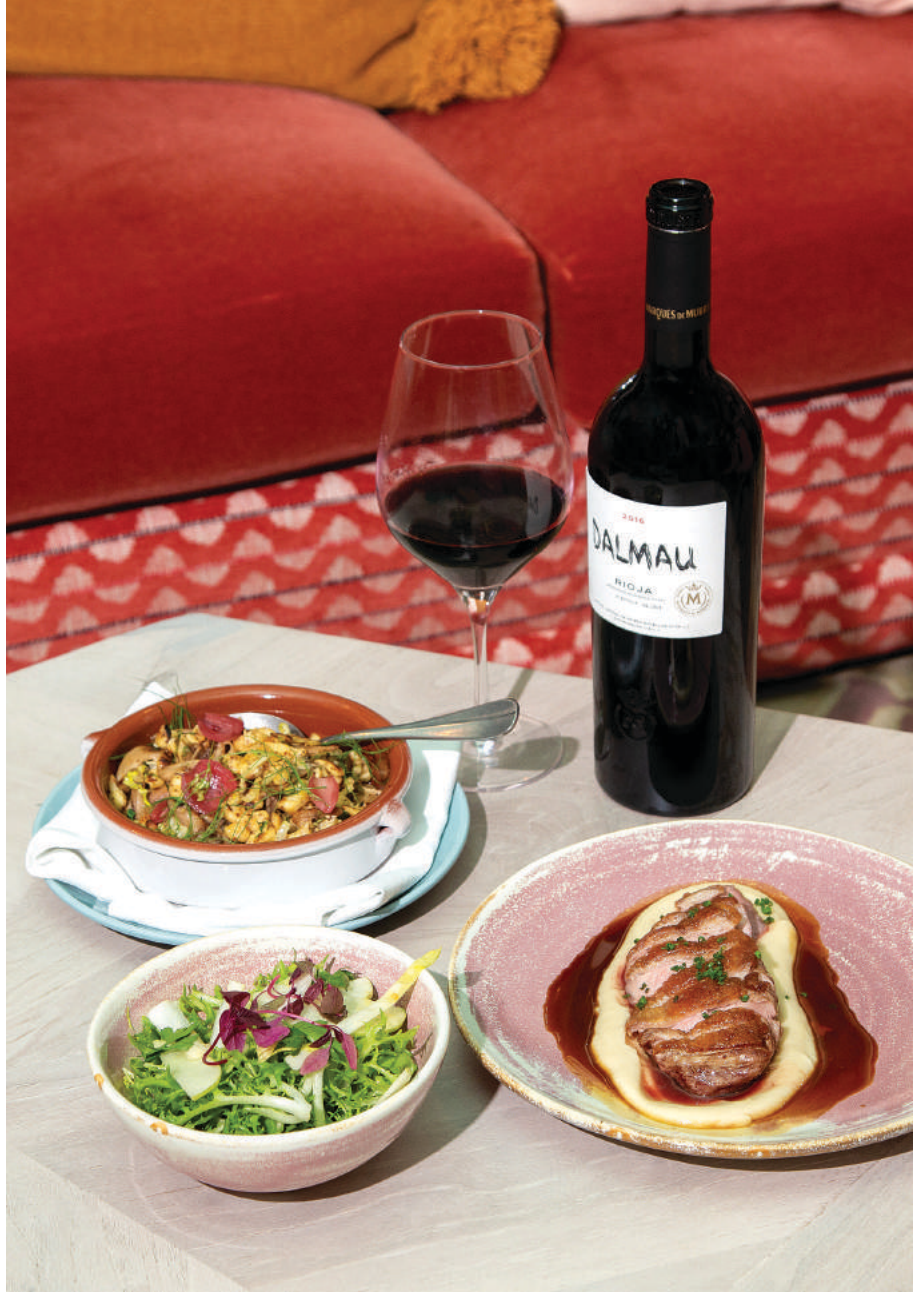
story by Emily Johnston Collins / photos by Anna Beeke

“T

he World's Best Wine Is Spanish," exclaimed the headline of a newsletter published by

Marqués de Murrieta that was displayed in the private dining room of Los Angeles restaurant Mother Tongue on September 26. This reference to *Wine Spectator's* selection of the Marqués de Murrieta 2010 Castillo Ygay Gran Reserva Especial as the world's top wine in 2020 set high expectations for the dinner the producer was hosting for some of Southern California's top Spanish wine buyers.

Marqués de Murrieta's export director, Arthur de Lencquesaing, welcomed his guests with a broad smile and an easy charm matched by his deep knowledge of the winery's history. For starters, he narrated the story of Marqués de Murrieta's founder, Don Luciano de Murrieta: Born in Peru, then a Spanish colony (his father was a Spanish entrepreneur), Murrieta arrived in Rioja in the mid-19th century via Bordeaux, where he had studied winemaking. Wanting nothing more than to have a wine-producing château of his own, he purchased the Finca Ygay vineyard, renamed it Castillo Ygay (*castillo* is the Spanish word for "château"), and went on to make Spanish wine history.



The Marqués de Murrieta 2016 Dalmau was accompanied by chef Fernando Darin's duck breast with chanterelle mushrooms, Bing cherries, and hazelnut dukkah.



In 2020, Marqués de Murrieta 2010 Castillo Ygay Gran Reserva Especial was named the world's top wine.

The 1852 vintage from the estate was the first Rioja designate as well as the first Rioja wine to be exported.

Murrieta had learned in Bordeaux that winemakers there were using barrels not just for transportation but to age their wines, and he adopted their practices. This proved instrumental in creating expressions of finesse and longevity in a region that, at the time, customarily released wines within six months. After his death in 1911, Marqués de Murrieta continued following his methods to develop wines with so much aging potential that the historic 1925 vintage of Castillo Ygay Gran Reserva Especial wasn't released until 1964!

Mother Tongue's beverage director and sommelier, Ryan Hess, first poured us a 2019 Albariño from Pazo de Barrantes in the Spanish region of Galicia. Located in the heart of the Rías Baixas DO, the estate was added to Marqués de Murrieta's portfolio when the Cebrián-Sagarriga family bought the latter in 1983; the wine served as an example of the fact that "the well-thought-out use of barrels is part of the ethos of Marqués de Murrieta," said de Lencquesaing as we took our first sips alongside a dish of aguachile de camarón. Fifteen percent of the wine was aged in acacia barrels, which is unusual: Only some producers in Rías Baixas age their



Dinner guests, top row: Hotel Per La wine director Rick Arline; Woodland Hills Wine Company sales manager Daniel Herrera; Gigi's wine director Kristin Olszewski; Marqués de Murrieta export director Arthur de Lencquesaing; Maisons Marques & Domaines Los Angeles district manager Naureen Lyon; and Waldorf Astoria Beverly Hills sommelier Sean Liu. Bottom row: Packing House Wines owner Sal Medina; author Emily Johnston Collins, wine director at The Dutchess; Vaca general manager Donnie Perez; and Ahmed Labbate, owner of Vaca and Broadway by Amar Santana.

Albariño in barrels at all, and most that do use oak. De Lencquesaing explained that “the decision [to use acacia wood] was made after trying many different barrel woods, wood origins, and toast levels.” The result offered a bittersweet caramel note to balance its aromatics and minerality. Sal Medina, owner of Packing House Wines in Claremont, California, saw the wine as a cut above most Rías Baixas Albariño and noted that there is “room for higher-[end] Albariño” on retail shelves.

We were then introduced to the 2016 and 2017 vintages of Capellanía, a white wine from the Castillo Ygay estate. It's made from Viura—a grape that, according to winery legend, was planted by fortunate accident, since Rioja is dominated by red varieties. Sommelier Sean Liu of the Waldorf Astoria Beverly Hills and wine director Kristin Olszewski of Los Angeles restaurant Gigi's agreed with de Lencquesaing that

Capellanía's balance of minerality and oak mirrored the finesse of white Burgundy.

Everyone in attendance was familiar with the next featured labels, Marqués de Murrieta Reserva and Gran Reserva. The winery ages these flagship wines in American oak, the classic choice for Rioja. The warm vanilla tones of the oak evened out the mature fruit character derived from the 2017 Reserva's extended élevage, while the 2014 Gran Reserva showed the complexity that comes with even further aging.

Also poured were the 2016 and 2017 vintages of Dalmau; of all Marqués de Murrieta's wines, these most clearly depict its affinity for Bordeaux as blends of Cabernet Sauvignon with Tempranillo and Graciano that are aged, suitably, in French oak. Hess divulged that, when working with Mother Tongue chef Fernando Darin on the event's tasting menu, “I knew [the



Dalmau] was the wine for duck."When he later emerged to greet us, Darin received all of our praises for creating what was one of the most excellent duck-and-wine pairings many of us, including me, have experienced.

But the Castillo Ygay Gran Reserva Especial 2009 and 2011 vintages were the highlights of the night. Even before we tasted them, there was buzz around the table. In fact, Ahmed Labbate and Donnie Perez, owner and general manager, respectively, at Costa Mesa restaurant Vaca, stated their case for augmenting their allocations, but the wines are already sold out. We had heard about Marqués de Murrieta winemaker María Vargas' passion for the wine—produced only in select vintages—so by the time we took our first sips, our palates were well primed for the luxury. Aged in both French and American oak, the Castillo Ygay Gran Reserva Especial reflects the blend of Bordeaux and Rioja traditions that inspired Don Luciano de Murrieta and that he inspired in turn. SJ



Marqués de Murrieta's wines developed so much aging potential that the historic 1925 vintage of Castillo Ygay Gran Reserva Especial wasn't released by the winery until 1964.



A line-up of some of the wines featured at the dinner.



Egging on *the* Chardonnay

**JORDAN VINEYARD & WINERY WINEMAKER
MAGGIE KRUSE LAUNCHES A NEW “SUPER BLEND”**

In

**story by Jonathan Cristaldi
photos by Alexander Rubin**

2005, as second-generation vintner John Jordan walked toward his family's winery, his steps brisk along the cobblestone path lined with manicured hedges, he might have stopped for the briefest of moments to inhale the richly scented Alexander Valley air—an ether of pine, live oak, lush green grass, and earth—and take in the grandeur of the estate's mustard-colored stucco walls covered in a blanket of thick ivy. After all, it was a crowning moment: He had just taken over day-to-day operations at the winery from his parents, Tom

and Sally, who founded it in 1972. Walking through the glass-paneled doors that lead to the winery's reception area, he knew he already had a plan for years to come.

Those closest to John describe him as a visionary. One of the first things he did as the estate's new owner was to ask longtime winemaker Rob Davis what could be done to produce an even better Jordan Cabernet. Davis' answer had been simple: focus on improving fruit concentration by working with more growers and move away from American oak in



Maggie Kruse is winemaker at Jordan Vineyard & Winery.



favor of the judicious use of only the best French oak available.

With grapes from the harvest of 2005, Davis went on to produce a new Jordan Cabernet—a trial “super blend,” in the team’s unofficial parlance, sourced from the best blocks both on the estate and in grower vineyards and aged in Colbert barrels from La Tonnellerie Nadalié. It was never released to the public: “We kept some large-format bottles and blended the rest back into the 2006 vintage,” says Maggie Kruse, who, after 13 years at Jor-

dan, inherited the role of winemaker from Davis upon his retirement in 2019. “[But] it set the course for how we put together our red blend today.” By the 2015 vintage, the Cabernet was aged entirely in (40–50% new) French barrels from Saury and Nadalié.

If Kruse was at all anxious on the day that she arrived at the winery bearing her new title, she never showed it. In the past three years, she has demonstrated that she has the tenacity to maintain Jordan’s legacy as a pillar of the Alexander

Valley and to build upon its reputation. So when John Jordan asked her if there was anything they could do to improve their Chardonnay—just as he had asked Davis about their Cabernet—Kruse, like her mentor, knew the answer and got right to work.

Historically, the grapes for Jordan Chardonnay have come from growers in warmer areas of the Russian River Valley, but “I started to look at cooler areas, around the Sebastopol Hills and Vine Hill Road,” says Kruse, “[for] vineyards that



The Jordan cellar houses eight concrete eggs.

would give us grapes full of pretty, bright acids and delicate fruit flavors." Seeing that she would gradually be changing the profile of Jordan Chardonnay for the better, John asked her what else she could do to highlight the quality of their future Chardonnay program.

One word: concrete, which Kruse knew could usher in an era of Chardonnay that was seamless, bright, and mineral-driven, with marvelous tension. In an egg-shaped vessel, the fermentation process sets into motion a kind of churning activity. As the wine circulates, microscopic holes in the concrete permit a tiny amount of oxygenation, which lends a slightly weightier texture to the wine. At the same time, concrete as compared to oak enhances mineral character along with vibrant acidity and pure fruit flavors.

In 2021, Kruse tested out her first egg. Sure enough, she says, "It emphasized the acidity and minerality and didn't take anything away from the fruit." I can report that the result was distinctly

"We are constantly tweaking and trying to improve our wines, and I'm excited about the eggs."

**—Maggie Kruse, winemaker,
Jordan Vineyard & Winery**

Jordan-esque, featuring the winery's signature stone-fruit complexities and ample fruit weight, but it also possessed a creamy texture derived from its activity in the egg as well as electric, zippy acidity and great mineral tension.

It was also a hit with John Jordan, who approved the purchase of eight eggs—all produced by Sonoma Cast Stone, which built a glycol cooling system into

the concrete so that the coils do not come in contact with the fermenting and aging wine. Each egg holds 476 gallons (the equivalent of about eight 60-gallon barrels).

The additional eggs arrived in time for the 2022 crush. As of this vintage, then, Jordan will produce some Chardonnay in concrete eggs, some in stainless-steel tanks, and some in French oak barrels. After aging for six months, the wine will be blended, bottled in June or July 2023, and held until its release in May 2024.

"We are constantly tweaking and trying to improve our wines, and I'm excited about the eggs," says Kruse. That said, she is committed above all else to producing the best wine possible—so she's monitoring the egg-aged wine closely to determine whether she may continue to need the same number of oak barrels.

Meanwhile, Jordan's Chardonnay is still produced entirely from grower-purchased fruit. I asked Kruse if Jordan was on the hunt for a Chardonnay vineyard of its own. She said not to rule it out. **\$**

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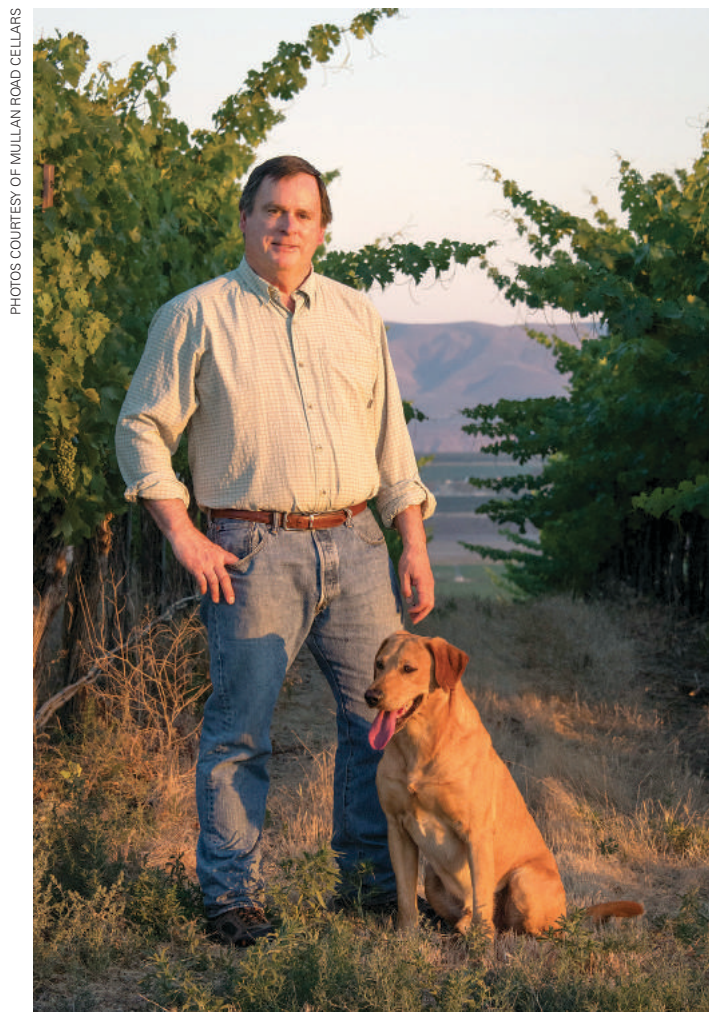
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That Pioneer Spirit

DENNIS CAKEBREAD'S **MULLAN ROAD CELLARS** STAYS THE COURSE IN WASHINGTON STATE by Lars Leicht



PHOTOS COURTESY OF MULLAN ROAD CELLARS

Mullan Road Cellars founder Dennis Cakebread.

DENNIS CAKEBREAD IS a wine-industry veteran with serious credibility and pedigree stemming from his family's eponymous California winery, Cakebread Cellars. When he started kicking the tires up in Washington State a little over a decade ago, no doubt some of the locals might have wondered if this successful outsider wanted to come in and "show them how it's done." But those in the know soon realized that he was an easy fit for the Washington wine community. Before even starting to make wine there, he took a low-key approach, assessing the lay of the land and taking the time to get to know respected locals like Marty Clubb at L'École 41, Jean-François Pellet at Pepper Bridge, and many others.

"It's like when you want to buy a house in a new town," Cakebread says. "You first explore and understand the area." He quickly learned that exploring meant driving the vast spaces between vineyards and villages. "The most important piece of agricultural equipment out here is a truck, because you're going to have to drive and drive to get places," he adds.

In early 2010, Cakebread scheduled a long weekend to explore the area around Walla Walla, but a heavy snowfall scuttled his plans for driving the countryside. He visited the local museums instead and came to know a lot about the history of the area. He learned, for instance, that the area was quite isolated until the mid-18th century, when the U.S. Army built Mullan Road. This allowed wagons to cross the Rocky Mountains to and from the Pacific Northwest, making Walla Walla a gateway to mining opportunities in neighboring Idaho and paving the way for the gold rush.

What Cakebread took away from that history lesson was the sheer accomplishment of building the 25-foot-wide, 600-mile-long trail, which was carved with shovels by about 200 men over the course of just three years despite winter delays. "It's just impressive for the magnitude of the project and the speed in which it was done," he says. So when he founded his winery in 2012, he named it Mullan Road Cellars to commemorate that pioneering spirit.

Like U.S. Army Corp of Engineers Lieutenant John Mullan, who supervised the roadwork, Cakebread saw potential in Walla Walla, which reminded him of Napa in its pre-boom years. "We felt we needed geographic diversity, but it turns out the whole West Coast is pretty similar when it comes to certain things—when you have drought and fires in California, you have drought and fires in Washington. It's not as different as I thought," he says.



Stillwater Creek Vineyard director of vineyard operations Ed Kelly walks the rows with Dennis Cakebread.



Loess soil in Solaksen Vineyard, one of Mullan Road's key sources.

What he did find different is the pace of the growing season in Royal Slope, the AVA where the fruit for the Mullan Road Cabernet blend is grown. Here, the season starts about two weeks later than in Napa due to harsh winter weather but then kicks in with a vengeance, experiencing two extra hours of sunlight per day because of the latitude. "It changes your approach to viticulture," he says. "You have to be two steps ahead because [the vines] grow so fast—[they] just come zooming out of the ground. You can't get behind in working the vineyards."

Home to over 1,900 acres of vineyards planted to more than 20 varieties, the Royal Slope AVA was established in 2020 within the Columbia Valley AVA, about a two-hour drive northwest of Mullan Road's headquarters in Walla Walla. Its average elevation is 1,300 feet, and 90% of its vineyards are on south-facing slopes, which see ideal diurnal temperature shifts. Cakebread says he chose it because of the quality of its Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, and Cabernet Franc, the latter of which he considers to be the spice that makes his predominantly Cabernet Sauvignon blend so appealing. "We like the elevation, we like the exposure, and we like the growers we work with," he explains. "We can grow just about any-thing red there."

Those growers include Josh Lawrence's Solaksen Vineyard and the Alberg family's Stillwater Creek Vineyard. The former is

a 100-acre site planted predominantly to classic Bordeaux varieties at elevations of 1,430–1,490 feet; it features fine sandy loam and Taunton silt loam soils atop fractured basalt, which provides ideal drainage. Stillwater Creek is a 235-acre site planted on a steep, south-facing slope that also features fractured rock. It boasts one of the state's most diverse clonal selections of Cabernet Sauvignon and Merlot.

After making the final blend for Mullan Road Cellars, Dennis Cakebread and winemaker Aryn Morell will often bottle some lots as single-vineyard wines and are also experimenting with the bag-in-box format. He relishes the fact that his Washington project involves fewer constraints than does the more established Cakebread Cellars: "Part of the fun at Mullan Road Cellars is that we are smaller, so we can do a lot of different things."

Because Washington's wine country is so spread out, Cakebread decided to open a tasting room in Woodinville, part of the Seattle metropolitan area, about two hours northwest of Royal Slope and four hours northwest of Walla Walla. "There are about 1.5 million residents within an hour's drive of Woodinville," notes Dave Griffiths, general manager of Mullan Road Cellars. "It can be hard to get to the remote corners of Washington to do tastings. For us, this is the logical next step in highlighting the wines [of Royal Slope]. It's a great community of

tasting rooms, with 130 wineries being represented in Woodinville. You don't have the soils underfoot, so it really puts more focus on what's in the glass."

The new tasting room, scheduled to open this spring, will show off not only Mullan Road Cellars' offerings but also the full range of Cakebread Cellars. "It is about showing people the Cakebread family's vision for winemaking and style and what they believe makes a great glass of wine," explains Griffiths. "The [Mullan Road Cellars and Cakebread Cellars] wines are different [from each other]. . . . It is not about which one is better but understanding what is unique about each of these regions."

With ten years in Washington under his belt, Cakebread is characteristically nonchalant yet conservative with respect to his vision for the next ten years. "Of course, we hope to keep growing, and we keep talking about different things to add to the portfolio," he says. "There are still lots of choices to be made." Asked what consumers need to know about Washington wines, he avoids any chest-beating about his own accomplishments, pointing instead to the established neighbors who welcomed him into the local winemaking community: "Look at the history in Washington—there are a number of beautiful wineries that have been at it for a long time."

Spoken like a man who intends to keep at it for a long time himself. **SJ**



A layer of fog covers the Annadel Gap Vineyard.

Exploring Westwood Estate

A TEAM OF EXPERTS CRAFTS THESE MAGNETIC WINES

WITH SUSTAINABILITY IN its soul, Westwood Estate Wines uses select fruit from the most pristine vineyards—including its own Annadel Gap Vineyard in Sonoma, which achieved Demeter Biodynamic certification in 2017, followed by organic certification from California Certified Organic Farmers in 2018.

The pedigreed winemaking team is led by Atelier Melka founder Philippe Melka and director of winemaking Maayan Koschitzky. Together since 2017, they have upped the game of this dynamic portfolio with guidance from general manager David Green. Here are our notes on the latest releases.

PHOTOS: ALEXANDER RUBIN



Westwood Estate director of winemaking Maayan Koschitzky.

Westwood 2020 Chardonnay, Sangiacomo Vineyard, Roberts Road, Sonoma Coast, Sonoma County (\$55)

Barrel-fermented in French oak in small lots and aged sur lie with partial malolactic. Ripe guava, banana, and sweet oregano perfume the glass. The wine within is sultry and round-bodied, with notes of jasmine, fig, lemon meringue, and almond butter. Fine acidity and layers of minerality raise the elegance level yet another notch. **93**



Westwood 2019 Founder's Reserve Pinot Noir, Annadel Gap Vineyard, Sonoma Valley (\$125)

The taste of strawberries just pulled from the earth leaves a memorable mark on the palate of this creamy Pinot Noir, aged in (50% new) oak for 18 months. Red roses and mocha form a fine pair steeped in cherrywood. Silky and savory, this is elegance defined. **95**

Westwood 2019 21 Proprietary Rhône Blend, Annadel Gap Vineyard, Sonoma Valley (\$135)

This small-production blend of 72% Syrah, 14% Mourvèdre, and 14% Grenache is seductively rich with coffee, chocolate, white pepper, and iron-kissed earth. Violets form a creamy base while sweet plums add depth. Silky tannins are accompanied by a dusty finish. **96**

Westwood Legend 2019 Proprietary Red, Sonoma Valley, Sonoma County (\$55)

This blend of Cabernet Sauvignon, Syrah, and Mourvèdre, aged 20 months in French oak, has a deep, opaque purple hue. Notes of spiced blackberry, licorice, and new leather meet heather and soy sauce. Creamy, penetrating, and concentrated, it's generous in its juicy, floral nature. Dark chocolate lingers on the finish. **95**



THE MOST EXTRA EXTRA AÑEJO:

123 Organic Diablito Rojo

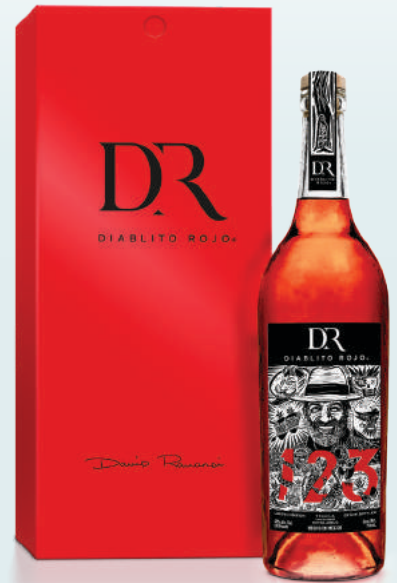
FOR ALMOST A quarter of a century, David Ravandi has been a significant player in the tequila category. After developing and distributing an über-successful premium tequila brand, Casa Noble, in 1998, Ravandi founded 123 Organic Tequila in 2010, followed by El Luchador Tequila and Cráneo Organic Mezcal. Today, almost everyone in the wine and spirits industry knows Ravandi. So when he chose California wine country as his U.S. base of operations, in 2020, he says with a laugh, “All my winemaker friends thought I was going to get into the wine business.” Little did his new neighbors know that their craft would instead serve as motivation for him to develop his most ambitious tequila yet, born from his own private collection: 123 Organic Tequila Extra Añejo Diablito Rojo.

“I’m inspired by winemakers who have long recognized the importance of terroir, quality aging, natural fermentation, and naturally derived complexity,” says Ravandi. Granted, he’s always taken a similarly artistic approach to making tequila, but the Diablito Rojo “is a totally different animal for me.” Though the 100% organic blue agave tequila is, like the brand’s other products, sourced from a single sustainably farmed estate at 6,000 feet elevation in Jalisco, this one is aged for seven years in white Limousin oak and then finished for six months in barrels that recently held ultra-premium Napa Valley Cabernet Sauvignon.

Although Ravandi is not at liberty to reveal his source, he’s at least able to tell us that it was one of the prestigious region’s top wineries that provided the barrels, which—while still wet with the rich red wine—were quickly shrink-wrapped and shipped to Mexico, where they were filled with the aged tequila to allow it to continue to evolve. Ravandi had been tasting the spirit at least three times a year as it matured, but after sampling the finished version, “The aroma blew my mind,” he says. “It smells very much like a Napa Cab, but on the palate, there’s so much roasted agave and brown spices from the aging and other complexities.”

Retailing at \$695, just 2,000 bottles of the highly limited expression were released in November—just in time for lucky tequila connoisseurs to receive as a once-in-a-lifetime gift. *SJ*

David Ravandi at his sustainably and organically farmed agave plantation in Jalisco.



123 Organic Tequila Extra Añejo Diablito Rojo, Mexico (\$695) Aromas of cherrywood, persimmon, and brown spices are reminiscent of a fine wine. On the palate, the liquid is multidimensional. Stone fruit and red berries create a luscious flavor profile alongside patchouli, watermelon, and cinnamon-spun rose petals. Cocoa and Luxardo cherry burst through clean, subdued agave notes through to the deluxe finish. **99** —Meridith May

PHOTO COURTESY OF 123 SPIRITS





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On His Own Terms

WALLY'S WINE & SPIRITS PRESIDENT/PRINCIPAL CHRISTIAN NAVARRO
USHERS THE ICONIC BUSINESS INTO ITS NEXT PHASE by Caitlin White

PHOTOS COURTESY OF WALLY'S WINE & SPIRITS



After taking over Wally's Wine & Spirits in Los Angeles, CA, with partners Paul and Maurice Marciano in 2013, Christian Navarro has helped usher the business into a new phase of growth despite the challenges of the pandemic.

WHEN CHRISTIAN NAVARRO STARTED

working at Wally's Wine & Spirits in Los Angeles, California, in the early 1990s, it wasn't because he loved wine—it was because he needed a job. Born in Mexico City and raised in Palm Springs by a single mother, Navarro spent his early days at the store sweeping floors, but soon enough, under owner Steve Wallace's guidance, he discovered the power of his palate. "I always had this thing for smell and taste, and it's still the most important thing to me, but when I was a little kid I didn't realize that it would ever be anything . . . [until] Steve Wallace said, 'This is something that's important,'" Navarro says.

At Wally's, Navarro was able to smell and taste wines he'd never been exposed to during his rough upbringing, which included dropping out of high school and experiencing homelessness. But as his role at the business evolved, he began to realize that its original model as a retail shop also needed to change and grow. "I said, 'Steve, we're going to end up like Tower Records or Blockbuster Video or any of these bookstores,'" Navarro recalls. Having opened the original Wally's way back in 1968, Wallace was ready to retire at that point, so he encouraged Navarro to enlist the help of some new partners in buying him out.

Navarro found those partners in Guess founders Paul and Maurice Marciano and took over the business in 2013. They hit the ground running, opening Wally's Beverly Hills on Canon Drive the following year with not only a retail shop but a lavish wine bar and restaurant. Their hybrid model was such a hit that it paved the way for another location in Santa Monica in 2018. "It really was out of necessity and me having a fear that this old-time retail



Wally's Wine & Spirits' Santa Monica location opened in 2018.

model would go away," Navarro says. "I love what I do, and I loved all my team around me, so I couldn't let them leave. That's where it all started."

When the Santa Monica location opened, Navarro and his partners opted to close down the original Wally's Wine & Spirits on Westwood Boulevard, but more changes would soon be on the horizon. After weathering the challenges of the pandemic, which Navarro describes as "a really horrible thing for the entire world," the team launched a third Wally's location in fall 2021—this time in Las Vegas at Resorts World, the first new hotel to open on the Strip in over a decade.

Part of what set the brand up for expansion in the midst of the pandemic was the leadership team's decision to retain their full staff throughout the closures of 2020, despite the cost. "My partners and I gave up lots of money to preserve our entire staff," Navarro says. "What it showed me was resilience: Really great people will do really great things in times of crisis, and our company has been more successful because of the way we handled it and helped our community. In a lot of ways, the pandemic really showed people's colors, and



it really showed the muster of my team. I grew up on the streets, so you know what you do when you have a hard time? Work harder."

Operating across state lines and in one of the biggest hospitality cities in the world has only helped Navarro to confirm what he already knew: that finding joy in serving people is what makes Wally's special. "I love to see people with smiles," he says. "It's a natural progression for us to then be able to take that from Los Angeles and bring it to Las Vegas—which is . . . an incredible city for hospitality. We have a speakeasy underneath, and it's the next level of expansion of service."

Like any foray into a new market,

Wally's Beverly Hills was the first of the company's locations to house not only a retail shop but a wine bar and restaurant.

the move to Las Vegas has come with ups and downs, but Navarro has been able to take them in stride. "You never know what you don't know," he says with a laugh.

"Every day is a discovery, and we're very lucky to be where we are and love what we're doing." With the return of the Maui Food & Wine Classic—a festival he helps curate at the Four Seasons Resort Maui—following a pandemic hiatus and a new Wally's hotel opening in Miami on the horizon for late 2023, Navarro is continuing to expand his empire while defining his success on his own terms.

"I don't really have expectations except to be the best," he said. "What is success anyway? The question is, what makes you happy? That's success. When I wake up in the morning, I can't wait to get to work, and I guess that makes me a success. I don't know if money or prestige or anything like that even matters." SJ

Two and a Half Centuries of Transitions

MASI MARKS ANOTHER MILESTONE IN ITS LONG HISTORY

HISTORY BUFFS LIKE MYSELF always appreciate a good transition, and on my recent visit to the Vaio dei Masi vineyard in Valpolicella to celebrate its 250th harvest—yes, you read that correctly, it's been producing for four years longer than the United States has been a country—there was no shortage of references to them unfolding over the centuries.

The first serves as a literal transition from place to place: Called the *cupola*, a small, round passageway connects the winery's historic 19th-century cellars to the new wing, inaugurated in 2002. The cupola's design features symbolic nods to the Veneto. Evoking the vines and soil of the vineyard are wood walls decorated with ceramic grape leaves and red marble quarried from the surrounding hills that displays ancient marine fossils—just like the slabs lining the sidewalks of Verona. The gold convex ceiling representing the sun, meanwhile, was fashioned after the dome of St. Mark's Basilica in nearby Venice.

In the new wing, a plaque commemorates the 1972 celebration of the winery's 200th harvest; a large cask engraved "1772–1888" marks the 116th. Nearby, 40 more casks bear inscriptions of the Masi Prize, a tradition started by Masi CEO Sandro Boscaini in 1981 to recognize excellence in Venetian culture from the artistic, literary, musical, and agricultural sectors; each year, honorees sign an Amarone cask in chalk, harking back to the days when purveyors were escorted to the cellars to taste and mark the casks they wished to purchase.

Sandro's son Raffaele, seventh-generation proprietor of Masi as well as the winery's director of marketing and the coordinator of its Technical Group committee, fondly recounted when, during his childhood, his mother, Giuliana, and grandmother Elda would



PHOTO COURTESY OF MASI

Sandro Boscaini, right, and his son Raffaele are the sixth- and seventh-generation proprietors of Masi.

PHOTO: LARS LEICHT

Masi CEO Sandro Boscaini leads a tour of the vineyards.

prepare meals for the customers hosted by his father and his grandfather Sergio. "It was typical wine-country hospitality, something still carried on today in different ways," Raffaele says.

The Boscainis recently hosted a more formal meal for a much larger crowd as part of the 41st awarding of the Masi Prize: 350 guests from 32 countries, including dignitaries from Italy, international clients, press, and, of course, family members. The gathering was held in their impressive new winery extension, a five-year project named Monteleone21 that's set for completion in 2023. During the ceremony, sepia-toned portraits of the first-generation Boscainis transitioned to the vibrant onstage presence of members of generations eight and nine, several of whom are already involved in the family enterprise.

Earlier that day, Sandro and Raffaele led a retrospective tasting of Masi's Costasera Amarone that went back over seven decades, starting with the 1958, which was followed by the 1962, 1974, 1980, 1988, 1990, 1997, 2003, 2009, 2012, and 2016 before culminating with the Riserva Costasera Amarone from 2003 and 2015.

While some participants wanted to pick favorites, Sandro put the tasting into perspective by noting that the wines were not necessarily from the best vintages but rather were those he considered most representative of their respective decades. For example, "The 1958 was made for the pleasure of the producer," he said. "There was no market at the time, not even a local one." Valpolicella producers only started marketing Amarone in the 1950s as a dry version of the Recioto made since Roman times from grapes withered in special aerated attics. Recalling the Beatles song "When I'm 64," the wine was still loveable, its fruit slightly maderized but balanced by plenty of acidity. Sandro said that he too was surprised by the brightness of the 1958 and 1962.

Though he didn't exactly apologize for the 1980—which I found less vibrant in color compared to the preceding vintages, with bracing tannins atop dried citrus and herbal notes—Sandro called the late 1970s and early 1980s "the lowest point for Italian wine in general. The system was depressed; there were no economical results for family producers." It was a period of mass over class and quantity over quality, making it a discouraging time for artisan

winemakers. Things hit rock bottom with the 1986 methanol scandal that fatally poisoned at least 20 people—a crime that was committed by a few producers to cheaply boost the alcohol content of their wines but that tainted the reputations of many. "Finally," said Sandro, "the industrial system was discredited, and we returned to favor the producer who can grow their own grapes with integrity and traceability."



PHOTO: JANS LEICHT

A passageway known as the cupola connects the winery's historic 19th-century cellars to its new wing.


A clear transition was marked with the powerful 1988 and the elegant 1990, which Sandro credited to winemakers adapting to challenging climatic conditions: a wet spring followed by a hot, dry summer with intense sunshine in the former and persistent dryness in the latter that was thankfully mitigated by sufficient winter rainfall. "It was the start of another life for Amarone and Italian wines," he said. "It was almost a Californian wine made in Northern Italy." And with the 1997, the tasting progressed into what he called the "modern style," reflecting worldwide demand for Amarone with deeper, darker fruit and distinct wood aging. Tannins were brawny in the turn-of-the-century wines, while the 2018 vintage brought back balance as an ideal food wine—a key strength for Masi.

The next flight was like working a Rubik's cube made up of three single-vineyard Amarones—Vaio Armaron from the Serego Alighieri estate, Campolongo di Torbe, and Mazzano—from five differ-

ent vintages: 1979, 1986, 1997, 2007, and 2012. Tasters could approach it vertically or horizontally: vintage to vintage across the range or by vineyard across the years. I chose the latter to confirm the theory that while Amarone is typically considered to be more defined by technique (namely the appassimento process), it can also show terroir.

Despite being made essentially the same way, each of the three wines showed distinct character thanks to their different terroirs. Vaio Armaron comes from a site 250 meters above sea level with southwest exposure in a dry area, resulting in low yields; its eroded, well-drained volcanic soil is rich in fossils with sand and red marl. Showing rich fruit character, this Amarone is aged in casks of local cherrywood—a unique choice that interestingly results in the most traditional wine of the line. Campolongo di Torbe's volcanic soils are younger, with a black rock base under a layer of humus, clay, and friable rock that holds moisture and therefore exposes the grapes to botrytis. As a result, the wine is soft and velvety, with pleasant notes of almond and cherry pit on the finish. Finally, Mazzano's vineyard has more limestone and is exposed to gentle breezes, yielding an austere wine with gentle tannins and a long finish.

The next day, on a tour of the three vineyards, Sandro himself seemed to undergo a transformation. The charismatic executive and patriarch let his inner vigneron show, his eyes lighting up as he walked the rows and shared his intimate knowledge of each plot. "I always feel at home here," he said in the Campolongo vineyard, located near his home, before adding, "I am one of the few people who can say they lived the production cycle of Amarone from its inception. I have been lucky to see this wine grow internationally and transition to something modern but with a very authentic history. It is not just a reliquary of the past but a proponent of the territory: something new but with an ancient heart."

With those words, Sandro summed up not only Amarone but his winery and family's legacy. If generations eight, nine, and beyond show half the passion of Sandro and Raffaele, then over the next 50, 100, and even 250 more years, there will surely be even more grand festivities at Vaio dei Masi. 

Truffle orchards improve biodiversity in the vineyard and can help with reforestation.



Staci O'Toole with her Lagottos, Mila Flora Romagnolo and Tone.

Diamonds in the Ruff

TRUFFLES ARE A DOG'S BEST FIND by Laura Ness

VINEYARD OWNERS ON the West Coast have been installing truffle orchards for about 15 years, hoping to cash in on the coveted delicacy. Black Périgord truffles currently fetch well over \$1,000 per pound, while prized white Alba truffles net roughly five times that amount. Growing them is part sorcery, part roulette, and the practice is shrouded in secrecy. It can take up to five years after the planting of specially inoculated trees—usually oaks, but hazelnuts are also common—for a single truffle to be produced. And then it must be found.

"Any breed of dog can be trained to hunt truffles—I've trained everything from a blind German Shepherd to a purse dog!—but the Lagotto Romagnolo is specially bred for this: It's in their DNA," says trainer Staci O'Toole, the self-described "truffle huntress" who lives in Placerville, California, on a *truffière*, to use the French word for "truffle orchard." "The dog must have focus and want to please. We start with a super-high-reward treat, like prime rib or steak, when they find a truffle."

Her dog, Mila Flora Romagnolo, is the reason O'Toole went down the rabbit hole of truffle hunting in the first place. A few years ago, she and her friends were musing about what to do when their kids went off to college. "I imagined the perfect life would involve wine, food, and dogs," she recalls, but thought, "Nah, that'll never happen!" Then she lost her beloved Labrador. Wanting a medium-sized dog that didn't shed, she settled on one of two breeds: the Lagotto Romagnolo and the Tibetan terrier. "The latter's job was to sit on the king's lap and take responsibility for the king passing gas!" she notes. "The Lagotto is a rare dog that dates back to Roman times whose job it was to hunt truffles."

At just 12 weeks old, Mila scored her first truffle during a training class at the Oregon Truffle Festival. Then she discovered a Périgord on the Placerville truffière. O'Toole was so overjoyed she ended up buying the farm, which she calls Tesoro Mio. Soon, she and Mila were hunting in Napa vineyards (including those of Jackson Family Wines and Robert Sinskey Vineyards). Today, she trains truffle dogs while conducting truffle-hunting and food-and-wine-pairing events.

Maria Finn of Sausalito-based company Flora & Fungi Wild Food Adventures credits the pandemic for prompting her to adopt Flora Jayne Tartuffo, a Lagotto that helps her find not



Brian Farrell Sr., Brian James Farrell Jr., Denise Peters, and Lolo, Alana McGee's prized Lagotto Romagnolo, at Caelesta Vineyard in Paso Robles, CA.



Maria Finn and Flora Jayne Tartuffo, her Lagotto Romagnolo, on the hunt for truffles.

just truffles but mushrooms such as porcini and chanterelles during the foraging classes she leads. Flora knows that when Finn puts her jacket on, it's time to get to work. Finn says that truffle orchards are great for biodiversity in the vineyard and can help with reforestation insofar as trees are the fungus' chosen host: "To me, the truffle is this hidden gem."

Alana McGee, who now lives in Seattle, Washington, fell in love with truffle hunting on a college outing in Italy. "About 15 years ago, I noticed all these truffle orchards going in, but nobody had dogs or a service,"

she says. Bingo: Truffle Dog Company was born. She and her Lagotto, Lolo, have been helping Brian Farrell Jr. at Caelesta Vineyard in Paso Robles successfully sniff out truffles among the 2,200 inoculated holly oaks on his farm every fall. She and Farrell are encouraged by the growing crop. "The yield curve looks logarithmic," McGee explains. "We went from 0.1 pounds to 5 pounds, and this year we are hoping for 20–50 pounds. The yield plateaus when the orchard matures, which should be [at] about 100–500 pounds per year."

That's going to take a lot of dog hours. ❧

RESULTS FROM THE

Concours d'Spirits



PRESENTED BY SOMMCON AND *THE SOMM JOURNAL*

These exceptional wines and spirits were tasted and judged by professionals—from Master Sommeliers to wine directors, educators, mixologists, and winemakers. Stay tuned for Concours' 2023 dates!



DOUBLE GOLD MEDAL - SPIRITS

Branson Cognac VS Phantom,
France (\$50) SIRE SPIRITS

Branson Cognac VSOP Royal,
France (\$60) SIRE SPIRITS

Don Fulano Tequila Imperial Extra
Añejo, Mexico (\$191) E. & J. GALLO
WINERY

Don Fulano Tequila Reposado,
Mexico (\$60) E. & J. GALLO WINERY

LIQS Mojito Wine Cocktail, USA
(\$14) E. & J. GALLO WINERY

Royal Mash Vintage Vodka 2020,
U.K. ROYAL MASH

Teryan Armenian Brandy Aged 8
Years, Armenia CRILLON IMPORTERS

Uncle Nearest Uncut/Unfiltered
Straight Rye Whiskey, USA (\$149)
THE BRAND GUILD



GOLD MEDAL - SPIRITS

Argonaut The Claim 2nd Edition
Brandy, USA (\$200) E. & J. GALLO
WINERY

Batch 22 New American Classic
Gold Aquavit, USA (\$39) DOWNTIME
COCKTAILS, INC.

Familia Camarena Silver/Plata
Tequila, Mexico (\$17) E. & J. GALLO
WINERY

Faux Pas Spicy Mango Tequila &
Soda RTD, USA (\$13) E. & J. GALLO
WINERY

High Noon Grapefruit Vodka & Soda
RTD, USA (\$2.50) E. & J. GALLO WINERY

LIQS Hard Lemonade Wine Cocktail,
USA (\$14) E. & J. GALLO WINERY

RumChata Limón, USA (\$22) E. & J.
GALLO WINERY

RumHaven Coconut Rum, Canada
(\$16) E. & J. GALLO WINERY

Salt Tequila Salted Chocolate, Mexico
(\$27) SPLASH BEVERAGE GROUP, INC.

Uncle Nearest 1856 Premium
Whiskey, USA (\$59) THE BRAND GUILD



DOUBLE GOLD MEDAL - WINES

Amabuki Bananakobo **Junmai Daiginjo Saké**, Japan (\$25) MUTUAL TRADING

Andis Wines 2021 **Estate Grown Schioppettino**, Sierra Foothills (\$35)

Banfi Rosa Regale 2021 **Brachetto d'Acqui**, Piedmont, Italy (\$20)

Black Stallion Estate Winery 2019 **Limited Release Cabernet Sauvignon**, Napa Valley (\$60) DELICATO FAMILY WINES

Diora 2019 La Grande Majesté **Pinot Noir**, San Bernabe Vineyard, Monterey (\$40) DELICATO FAMILY WINES

GIFFT 2019 **Pinot Grigio**, California (\$25) VINTAGE WINE ESTATES

Kevin O'Leary 2018 Reserve Series **Cabernet Sauvignon**, California (\$25) VINTAGE WINE ESTATES

Knotty Vines 2019 **Pinot Noir**, California (\$15)

Kunizakari Nigori Saké, Japan (\$28) MUTUAL TRADING

La Marca NV **Prosecco DOC**, Veneto, Italy (\$19) E. & J. GALLO WINERY

Le Vigne Winery 2018 **Merlot**, Paso Robles (\$24)

Le Vigne Winery 2018 **Sangiovese**, Paso Robles (\$26)

Maison Simonnet-Febvre 2019 **Sauvignon Blanc Saint Bris**, Burgundy, France (\$20) MAISON LOUIS LATOUR

Merriam Vineyards 2021 **Sauvignon Blanc**, Russian River Valley (\$30)

Nanbubijin Awa Junmai Ginjo Sparkling Saké, Japan (\$95) MUTUAL TRADING

Oak Farm Vineyards 2019 Estate Grown **Barbera**, Mokelumne River, Lodi (\$36)

Owen Roe Winery 2021 **Moscato**, California (\$25) VINTAGE WINE ESTATES

Ragtag Wine Co. 2018 **Cabernet Sauvignon**, Paso Robles (\$46)

Ragtag Wine Co. 2018 **Malbec**, Paso Robles (\$42)

Ragtag Wine Co. 2017 **Meritage**, Paso Robles (\$48)

Ragtag Wine Co. 2018 **Meritage**, Paso Robles (\$48)

Ragtag Wine Co. 2018 **Petite Sirah**, El Pomar District, Paso Robles (\$44)

The.Grenachista 2021 **Grenache Blanc**, Sonoma Valley (\$34)

The Landing 2020 Bay of Islands **Chardonnay**, New Zealand (\$38)

Whitehaven 2021 **Sauvignon Blanc**, Marlborough, New Zealand (\$20) E. & J. GALLO WINERY

Wiens Family Cellars 2019 **Petite Sirah**, Riverside County (\$95)

Wild Thing 2019 Old Vine **Zinfandel**, Mendocino County (\$20) CAROL SHELTON WINES



GOLD MEDAL - WINES

Barton & Guestier 2021 **Tourmaline**, Côtes de Provence, France (\$18) BGPL USA

Bertinelli Estates 2019 **Moscato**, California (\$25) VINTAGE WINE ESTATES

Black Box 2021 Tart & Tangy **Sauvignon Blanc**, California (\$20) E. & J. GALLO WINERY

Carol Shelton Wines 2019 Rockpile Reserve **Zinfandel**, Rockpile, Sonoma (\$42)

Cellar Beast Winehouse 2019 **Cabernet Sauvignon Reserve**, Red Mountain, Washington (\$40)

Chateau La Mer 2019 **Cabernet Sauvignon**, California (\$25) VINTAGE WINE ESTATES

Derby Wine Estates 2020 Vineyard Select Series **Cabernet Sauvignon**, Templeton Gap, Paso Robles (\$46)

Emerald Peak 2019 **Pinot Grigio**, California (\$25) VINTAGE WINE ESTATES

Firesteed 2021 **Pinot Noir**, California (\$25) VINTAGE WINE ESTATES

Gran Moraine 2018 **Chardonnay**, Yamhill-Carlton, Oregon (\$45) JACKSON FAMILY WINES

Kikuizumi Hitoshii Rose **Sparkling Saké**, Nihonsu, Japan (\$90) MUTUAL TRADING

Kikuizumi Hitosuji Junmai **Sparkling Saké**, Nihonsu, Japan (\$180) MUTUAL TRADING

Knotty Vines 2019 **Chardonnay**, California (\$15)

Knotty Vines 2019 **Red Blend**, California (\$15)

Kunizakari Handago Kobo1801 **Junmai Ginjo Saké**, Japan (\$28) MUTUAL TRADING

Le Chemin du Roi NV **Brut Rosé Champagne**, France (\$325) SIRE SPIRITS

Le Vigne Winery 2019 Nikiara **Bordeaux Blend**, Paso Robles (\$54)

Lyra Peak 2020 **Moscato**, California (\$25) VINTAGE WINE ESTATES

Maison Louis Latour 2019 Domaine de Valmoissine **Pinot Noir**, Vin de Pays du Var, France (\$19)

Maison Louis Latour 2020 **Macon-Villages Chameroy**, France (\$26)

Oak Farm Vineyards 2021 **Sauvignon Blanc**, Lodi (\$17)

Painted Fields 2020 Curse of Knowledge **Bordeaux Blend**, Sierra Foothills (\$30) ANDIS WINES

Pomar Junction Vineyard & Winery 2016 Train Wreck **Red Blend**, El Pomar District, Paso Robles (\$45)

Rodney Strong 2020 **Chardonnay**, California (\$18)

Rodney Strong 2019 **Pinot Noir**, Russian River Valley, Sonoma County (\$25)

Rodney Strong 2019 **Cabernet Sauvignon**, Sonoma County (\$23)

Rodney Strong 2018 **Merlot**, Sonoma County (\$23)

Rodney Strong 2017 **Red Wine**, Sonoma County (\$60)

The Landing 2019 Bay of Islands **Syrah**, New Zealand (\$40)

The Landing 2021 Bay of Islands **Rosé**, New Zealand (\$40)

The.Grenachista 2021 **Grenache Noir**, Sonoma Valley (\$26)

Tolosa 2019 **1772 Pinot Noir**, Edna Ranch, Edna Valley (\$74)

UPSHOT Wines 2019 **Red Blend**, Sonoma County (\$19)

Wiens Family Cellars 2021 **Fiano**, Temecula Valley (\$28)

Two Perspectives on “The Original Bordeaux”

Following our search for the best takeaways from *The SOMM Journal's* webinar on Graves-Sauternes, SommFoundation awarded scholarships to two beverage professionals, Eric Phipps and Evan White, for their outstanding essays.

Graves-Sauternes: Wine Aging Techniques That Place Terroir First

Two wine producers from the region of Graves-Sauternes spoke on cellar solutions in the era of unpredictable climate changes

by Eric Phipps

AS CLIMATE CHANGE brings unpredictable weather patterns to traditionally cooler wine regions, winemakers have been tasked with creating new solutions in the cellar to continue producing age-worthy and precise wines.

In “The Original Bordeaux: Graves-Sauternes” webinar, hosted by *The SOMM Journal* in partnership with SommFoundation on July 20, Olivier Bernard from Domaine de Chevalier (Pessac-Léognan, Cru Classé de Graves) and Miguel Aguirre from Château La Tour Blanche (Sauternes, Grand Cru Classé en 1855) highlighted significant differences between oak and stainless-steel aging as well as the respective impact that these vessels have on a finished wine in warmer versus cooler years.

Stainless-Steel Versus Oak-Barrel Aging

Monitoring maturity and acidity is of crucial concern, and it is exactly here that the struggle for balance is centered, according to Bernard and Aguirre.

Stainless steel is wonderful for retaining



freshness, fruitiness, and, most importantly, acidity. This is due to a lack of oxygen ingress, but a winemaker may also use micro-oxygenation to enable a gentle oxidative process to occur. In warmer vintages, where grapes may lack some acidity, stainless-steel vessels retain this valuable structural component during *élevage*.

Another vessel common in classic wine aging is the venerable oak barrel, which offers a gentle ingress of oxygen to a wine during *élevage*. Oak softens the texture of an astringent wine while delivering vanillin, spice notes, and varying levels of oak tannin—depending on the age, toast, size, and type of barrel used. Fresher, fruitier, and more floral wines can develop mature savory or nutty flavors due to the subtle oxidation that takes place during *élevage* in oak. The porous nature of oak allows for more microbially derived flavors and complexity to develop, while once-harsh tannins can become plush and ripe through the polymerization of phenolic compounds. If *sur lie* aging is utilized, the oxidative impact may diminish as the lees consume oxygen and protect the wine from aging too quickly.

A Blended Approach

In warmer years, it's important for winemakers to exercise caution when

using oak, since losing precious acidity is a concern in several key areas. Firstly, the age-worthiness of a wine is determined largely by acid structure, which helps preserve the wine. Using stainless steel may be crucial in this regard. Secondly, a higher pH is more susceptible to enhanced microbial activity, especially in oak. Controlling *Brettanomyces* requires careful sanitation, temperature control, and a balanced acidity—all of which stainless steel makes easier.

Winemakers are constantly faced with a multiplicity of factors in determining maturity during harvest and *élevage*. Blending riper fruit aged in stainless steel with more elegant fruit aged in oak would benefit winemakers seeking creative approaches to aging in warmer years, whereas cooler vintages may lend to more aging in oak.

As Bernard proclaims, the mentality is changing in places like Pessac-Léognan: It's not the foot on the gas pedal but the one on the brake that is necessary. This struggle to produce wines of precision and grace is where the art of winemaking and the expression of terroir converge. In producing fine, elegant, and defined wines, one must let the wine speak from the soil. “Oak must not lead but rather follow the wine,” as Bernard put it so perfectly.

Eric Phipps is a sommelier at Girl & the Goat in Los Angeles as well as an amateur winemaker. He is currently completing a BA in philosophy while pursuing certification through the Court of Master Sommeliers. When not pouring wine or studying, he does volunteer work with the nonprofit No Us Without You, which distributes food to immigrant restaurant workers who are ineligible for pandemic relief.

Graves-Sauternes: All About Balance

Two winemakers weigh in on a measured approach to oak in great Bordeaux wine

by Evan White

IF YOU'RE LIKE

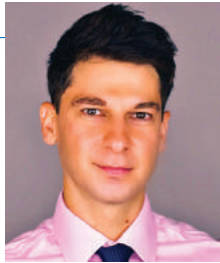
me, you've spent countless hours memorizing the typical descriptors of classic wine styles and doing rigorous blind tastings. As a result, it becomes second nature to link the notes indicative of new French oak—barrel aging—baking spice, vanilla, toast—with the red and white (dry and sweet) wines of Bordeaux.

In the recent webinar “The Original Bordeaux: Graves-Sauternes” featuring Miguel Aguirre, winery head manager of Château La Tour Blanche in Sauternes, and Olivier Bernard, director of Domaine de Chevalier in Pessac-Léognan, both vigneron concurred that maturation in French oak is integral to producing great Bordeaux.

But how much is too much, and are winemakers' opinions changing?

Modernizing Traditional Wine Aging Techniques

As Aguirre pointed out, oak-aging regimens have come a long way from what they were 20–25 years ago, when heavy usage of toasty new 225-liter barriques



was more the norm. Since that time, the modern market has sought wines that display more freshness, purity of fruit, and, above all, balance.

Bernard noted that “good fruit makes great wine” and that the overuse of new oak can overwhelm even the hardest Bordeaux, especially when it comes to conveying terroir: He pointed out that the scent of pine trees from the nearby Landes forest can often be perceived in the region's great wines.

I couldn't help thinking of the iconic Martha's Vineyard Cabernet Sauvignon produced by Heitz Cellar in Napa Valley and its telltale notes of menthol. A quality-driven winemaker wouldn't dream of covering up such inimitable flavors. To simply let the fruit express itself, winemakers in the Graves region are now experimenting with vessels larger than the classic 225-liter barrique, including 400-, 600- and even 1,500-liter casks.

Additionally, vintners are reducing the amount of new oak used in favor of second- and third-passage barrels, which impart less overt oakiness. Some winemakers are even choosing to age their *grands vins* in stainless-steel tanks during the second year of maturation, which helps to retain that all-important freshness and reduce oxidation.

Reassessing the Role of Oak

The impact of climate change has also caused Bordelaise winemakers to re-examine their usage of new oak. Both Aguirre and Bernard somewhat cautiously admitted that warmer conditions have actually helped produce a string of excellent vintages. However, warmer vintages produce wines with less acidity, which tend to integrate the rich flavors of new oak less seamlessly, diminishing their typical elegance and making them feel unpleasantly heavy.

Aptly, Bernard advised that oak should support the wine, not take center stage. Cooler vintages, producing wines with higher acidity and more firmly structured tannins, are perhaps better suited to a higher percentage of new oak maturation.

At the end of the day, it's all about balance. Whether it's residual sugar levels in Sauternes and Barsac, the fruity notes found in the Sauvignon Blanc/Sémillon blends of the Graves, or the presence of new oak in red wines from Pessac-Léognan, every winemaker's goal is to use these elements as tools to create delicious, harmonious wines that express both terroir and the château's individual style. *EW*

Evan White currently serves as a sommelier at chef Daniel Boulud's Le Pavillon in New York City. Previously, he was head sommelier at Babbo Ristorante in the West Village and wine manager at CoolVines Hoboken, part of a group of boutique wine stores in New Jersey. He is a Certified Sommelier through the Court of Master Sommeliers and received his WSET Diploma in October.

SommFoundation

Morning mists over vineyards in Sauternes.





From Sweden to the Sub-Saharan

A CONVERSATION WITH **HAV & MAR** BEVERAGE DIRECTOR RAFA GARCÍA FEBLES

by Ruth Tobias

ONE OF THE MOST hotly anticipated restaurants in New York—and therefore the nation—this year was without a doubt Marcus Samuelsson's Hav & Mar. But if the hoopla surrounding it put a lot of pressure on its beverage director and assistant GM, Rafa García Febles, prior to its opening in November, you wouldn't have known it from a conversation with him. Raised in Puerto Rico, the onetime student of comparative literature—which, he says, "seemed like a complete waste of everyone's money at the time and ended up being super-useful for talking to winemakers"—was cucumber-cool and ready to roll when I spoke to him about his wine program in late October.

Q: What's the concept behind Hav & Mar?

Hav & Mar is a midsized restaurant—120 seats plus about 18 at the bar—focusing on small plates. It's seafood-forward, and the flavors are based in Ethiopia but definitely themed after the African continent and the African diaspora. A lot of our team, myself included, is from the Caribbean; our executive chef is Haitian, one of our sous chefs is Ethiopian, another is Jamaican, and our GM is Dominican, so a lot of the flavors of our part of that diaspora have definitely ended up at the table. Because the restaurant is so tied up with Marcus' vision and his story, there's a lot of Nordic influence as well. So it's a really fun, exciting set of flavors—it's not like anything I've ever worked with or eaten.

Q: How do you put together a wine list for such an unusual menu?

In my first conversations with Marcus, it was really important to him to give representation to producers of color and women producers [as well as] smaller

PHOTO: ANGELA BANKHEAD



producers doing cool things environmentally, [like] regenerative agriculture of all kinds, and socially and ethically, whether [they're] participating in "land back" programs ... or they're indigenous-owned or doing revenue share with their farmhands. That's part of the reason I took the job, because a lot of the time when I would specifically seek out producers who I thought represented a move forward, I'd get pushback from owners. So it started from there.

We're going to have a lot of the classic regions represented—we've got great Burgundy, great Champagne, Northern Italy, Napa—but we've also got a lot of the Global South represented. That's for a few reasons. One, we have a big spotlight, and it's nice to give some of that shine to producers and regions that might not otherwise get it. And two, that's where a

lot of our ingredients and the stories around our food originate, so it seemed appropriate. We've got a lot of fun newer producers from South Africa ... and a lot of South American wines, primarily Chilean, but also [from] Uruguay, Brazil, Argentina. And a lot of the domestic stuff I've got—yeah, I've got wines from Napa and Sonoma and the Finger Lakes, but I've also got stuff from Michigan and Wisconsin; we've got blueberry wine from Maine.

At the same time, we want it all to be very fun and approachable. ... The menu is going to have a lot of unfamiliar words on it, and some of our grapes are going to be unfamiliar; I want to make sure that if somebody comes in and just wants

a Sancerre, I'm going to have a banging Sancerre for them. If they just want a full-bodied red, we're going to make sure that we've got that at every price point. That's the overall approach, and we've ended up with a list that I'm very proud of.

Q: What else should we know about Hav & Mar?

Something that's really important to me and to Marcus is we want this to be a place where staff can learn and grow—[where] people who don't normally get a leg up in hospitality can come and, if they're willing to put in the work, if they want to be a somm, they will leave here a somm. If they want to be a bartender, they will leave here a bartender. There are so many barriers to entry in this industry and ... I'm really excited about the opportunity to remove those for people. **SJ**



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FROM MOURVÈDRE AND MAUZAC TO CARIGNAN AND CLAIRETTE

A LANGUEDOC PRIMER

Amid historic towns and nature preserves, the southwestern French region of Languedoc is home to more than 90,000 acres of vines as well as 22,000 winemakers and négociants. Here, white, red, rosé, and sparkling wines are produced from vineyards that experience more than 300 days of sunshine a year along with the influence of both the Mediterranean Sea and the Atlantic Ocean.

Winemaking in the Languedoc has endured for 2,500 years, and its wine community is focused on maintaining its vineyards for years to come: Today, it boasts the most organic vineyard acreage in all of France. The resourcefulness of its producers derives from their rich history and generations of experience working within this diverse terrain.

by Emily Johnston Collins

The southwestern French region of Languedoc is home to more than 90,000 acres of vines.

History

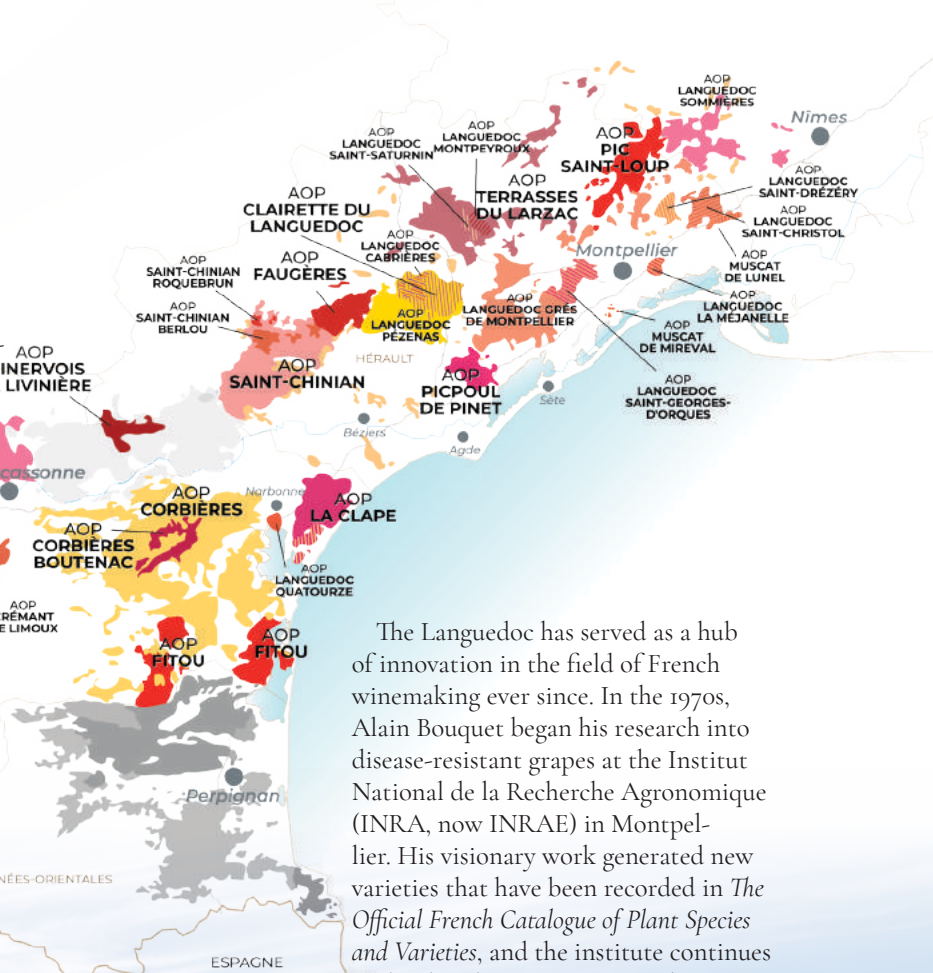
As far back as the first century BC, the Languedoc was known to the Romans for its vineyards and olive groves. The port of Narbo, modern-day Narbonne, was the capital of the Roman territory of Gallia Narbonensis, which stretched from the Rhône River to the Atlantic; the Languedoc encompasses a smaller stretch of the Mediterranean coast, including the city of Narbonne.

Nestled in the western portion of the Languedoc is the region of Limoux. Its flagship wine, Blanquette de Limoux, was the first sparkling wine on record, according to documents dating to 1544—over a century before the first mention of sparkling wine in Champagne.

In the winter of 1709, extreme storms and frosts decimated vineyards across France—but the Languedoc was spared. Accordingly, local winemakers began expanding their plantings to hillsides to meet the increased demand for wine.

In the late 1800s, Languedoc native Jules Émile Planchon was instrumental in resolving the phylloxera crisis. As head of the Department of Botanical Sciences at the University of Montpellier, he was commissioned to investigate the cause of vine death across France. He and his fellow researchers quickly identified phylloxera as the culprit. Planchon's further studies of phylloxera yielded a solution to the worldwide scourge when he determined in 1873 that *Vitis vinifera* vines could be grafted onto phylloxera-resistant American rootstocks.

The first sparkling wine on record was made in Limoux.



The Languedoc has served as a hub of innovation in the field of French winemaking ever since. In the 1970s, Alain Bouquet began his research into disease-resistant grapes at the Institut National de la Recherche Agronomique (INRA, now INRAE) in Montpellier. His visionary work generated new varieties that have been recorded in *The Official French Catalogue of Plant Species and Varieties*, and the institute continues to develop disease-resistant cultivars. In 1993, Montpellier hosted the world's first expo for organic wines, Millésime BIO; it will celebrate its 30th anniversary in January 2023.



Organic Viticulture

The combined regions of Languedoc and Roussillon contain 33% of France's organic vineyards and account for 10% of organic vineyard acreage worldwide; meanwhile, many more vineyards are in conversion to become organic. HVE (High Environmental Value) certification by the French Ministry of Agriculture, which promotes vineyard biodiversity and water conservation, is also popular in the Languedoc. The region's broad adherence to this and other environmental certification programs ensures it remains at the forefront of sustainability.



The Picpoul de Pinet AOP was established in 2013.



Once an island, La Clape has since been connected to the mainland by alluvial deposits.

Appellations

The Languedoc has 20 AOPs that variously cover still table wines, sweet wines, and sparkling wines. Formerly known as Coteaux du Languedoc, the Languedoc AOP was created in 2007 and is the base appellation for still-wine production. This large appellation, bordered by Nîmes to the east and Spain to the southwest, allows for several distinct villages to be appended to the designation. Within it are smaller subregional AOPs such as Saint-Chinian and Corbières as well as some village-level AOPs such as La Clape and Faugères. Sweet-wine AOPs include Muscat de Lunel and Muscat de Mireval, while Limoux encompasses three sparkling-wine AOPs: Blanquette de Limoux, Crémant de Limoux, and Limoux Méthode Ancestrale.

Climatic Zones

ZONE I—Mediterranean: This zone, which is home to the cities of Montpellier and Narbonne, covers the AOPs along the coastal plains of the Mediterranean Sea. The Mediterranean influences the climate greatly, contributing to warm, sunny summers and mild, wet winters, while the dramatic limestone cliffs dotting the landscape are suggestive of the region's dominant soil type (sandstone, clay, and sedimentary soils are also prominent).

Much of the vineyard area here falls under the Languedoc AOP, which produces mainly red wine from Grenache, Syrah, Mourvèdre, and Carignan; other appellations include the charming, 100% white Picpoul de Pinet AOP as well as the aforementioned sweet-wine AOPs and the rocky village appellation of La Clape (which was once an island off the coast of Narbonne; alluvial deposits filled in the gap between it and the mainland in the Middle Ages). Indigenous white grapes—Muscat, Bourboulenc, and Clairette as well as Piquepoul—are featured in many of the subregional AOPs.

The wines of Malepère are Merlot-based.



ZONE 2—Atlantic: The western zone of the Languedoc encompasses the historic town of Carcassonne. Though geographically closer to the Mediterranean than the Atlantic Ocean, the vineyards here experience influence from the latter. Distinctly rocky soils are composed of sandstone and limestone.

In addition to local varieties, the grapes grown here are also typical of Southwest France. Wines in the Carbardès AOP blend Merlot, Cabernet Sauvignon, and Cabernet Franc with Grenache and Syrah, but Malepère uses Merlot as its principal grape. Limoux's flagship variety is Mauzac; Limoux Méthode Ancestrale is 100% Mauzac, while Blanquette de Limoux allows for a small quantity of Chardonnay and Chenin Blanc to be blended with a majority of Mauzac. Crémant de Limoux is primarily composed of Chardonnay and Chenin Blanc.

ZONE 3—Hills and Mountains: This diverse zone includes the appellations that are shielded from direct Mediterranean influence by hilly terrain. The climate is marked by more seasonal extremes, and many higher-elevation subregions experience a cooling effect. This zone produces the rich red wines of Grenache, Syrah, Mourvèdre, and Carignan for which the Languedoc is best known.

The AOPs of Corbières and Fitou (which is split into Fitou Maritime and Fitou Montaneux) are the leading appellations for Carignan. Minervois la Livinière is a village-level AOP that produces only red wines made primarily from Grenache, Syrah, and Mourvèdre. Saint Chinian produces red, rosé, and white wines—the latter made from Grenache Blanc, Marsanne, Roussanne, and Vermentino—but its subregions of Berlou and Roquebrun produce only red wines. Neighboring Faugères grows the same varieties as Saint Chinian. Clairette de Languedoc is a subregional appellation for white wines and vin de liqueur made from Clairette, while Terrasses du Larzac produces robust and mineral-driven red wines grown on volcanic soils at high elevations. The Pic Saint Loup AOP is named after the mountain located at the center of the appellation; it makes rosé and red wine at varying elevations.

Saint-Chinian produces white, rosé, and red wines.



Languedoc's Corbières-Boutenac AOP produces red wines from Carignan, Grenache, Syrah, and Mourvèdre.

Grapes and Styles

As noted, the Languedoc makes predominantly red wines from the key varieties of Grenache, Syrah, Mourvèdre, and Carignan. Together, Grenache, Syrah, and Mourvèdre yield wines that tend to be full-bodied, spiced, and rich in color. By itself, Grenache, like Carignan and Cinsault, produces wines of a lighter ruby color.

Rosé represents 20% of the Languedoc's total production. The grapes used to make terroir-driven rosés in AOPs such as Saint Chinian, Corbières, Faugères, and Languedoc Cabrières are the same as those used for red-wine production.

Chardonnay, Marsanne, Roussanne, and Viognier are among the region's most planted white varieties, along with such aforementioned heritage grapes as Piquepoul, Bourboulenc, and Clairette.

As for the region's sparkling wines, Blanquette de Limoux AOP and Crémant de Limoux AOP are made in the traditional method; they must be aged a minimum of one year on the lees. Blanquette de Limoux Méthode Ancestrale undergoes a single fermentation and is not disgorged; the result is a less fizzy, unfiltered sparkling wine.

Muscat de Lunel and Muscat de Mireval AOPs are key appellations for *vins doux naturels* made from the Muscat grape. *Vins doux naturels* are fortified before their sugars are fully fermented to reach 15–18% ABV.

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