

THE SOMM JOURNAL

THE
Pacific's
CALLING
CARD

~~~~~  
~~~~~  
~~~~~  
~~~~~  
SAN SIMEON EMBODIES
THE ELEGANCE OF THE
CENTRAL COAST



Tres Tribus[®]

Mezcal



NAMED FOR THE THREE TRIBES THAT FIRST SETTLED THE REGION, TRES TRIBUS IS A SMALL BATCH MEZCAL ARTESANAL FROM THE REMOTE MOUNTAINS OF OAXACA

BECAUSE OUR MEZCAL REQUIRES TIME, WISDOM, AND PATIENCE TO CREATE, WE SAY IT IS BORN AGED

THE SOMM JOURNAL

PUBLISHER & EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Meridith May
mmay@sommjournal.com

MANAGING EDITOR

Ruth Tobias
rtobias@sommjournal.com

SENIOR STAFF EDITOR

Kate Newton
knewton@sommjournal.com

CONTRIBUTORS

Yvonne Albinowski, Anna Beeke, Jillian Dara, Amanda M. Faison, Janet Fletcher,
Kim Haasarud, Emily Johnston Collins, Allison Levine, Kathryn Long,
Suzanna Mannion, Andrew McFetridge, Colleen McLeod Garner, Laura Ness,
Kate Nowell-Smith, Josh Reynolds

CONTRIBUTING EDITORS

Jeremy Ball; Christina Barrueta; Wes Hagen; Karen MacNeil; David Ransom;
Allyson Reedy; Erik Segelbaum; Marci Symington; Liz Thach, MW

FOLLOW US!



@SommJ • facebook.com/SommelierJournal • @SommJournal

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

The *SOMM Journal* is published bimonthly for \$52 per year by *The SOMM Journal*,
The Sommelier Journal, 17412 Ventura Blvd., Suite 363, Encino, CA 91316.
Periodicals postage at Van Nuys, CA, and additional mailing offices.

SUBSCRIPTION RATE:

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

POSTMASTER:

Send address changes to:
The SOMM Journal
17412 Ventura Blvd., Suite 363
Encino, CA 91316

SENIOR ART DIRECTOR

Michael Viggiano

COO/MARKETING & SALES

Bill Brandel, CSW
818-322-5050
bill@sommjournal.com

VP/FINANCE DIRECTOR

Anna Russell
arussell@tastingpanelmag.com

SENIOR WINE & BEER EDITOR

Jessie Birschbach

VP OF EDUCATION

Lars Leicht
lars@sommjournal.com

GLOBAL WINE EDITOR

Deborah Parker Wong

EDITORS-AT-LARGE

Jonathan Cristaldi
Randy Caparoso

EAST COAST EDITOR

Wanda Mann

NEW YORK EDITOR-AT-LARGE

Stefanie Schwalb

EVENT MANAGER

Dawn Verdone
dverdone@tastingpanelmag.com

The Lamole di Lamole estate in
Greve in Chianti, Italy.

SOMETHING TO
CROW
ABOUT

chianti

CELEBRATES A
CALENDAR DAY
ALL ITS OWN



Lamole di Lamole's vineyards range from around 1,400 to 2,100 feet in elevation.

by Lars Leicht

Chianti, that quintessential Italian red-wine region whose top Classico denomination is symbolized by a black rooster, will be observing its third annual National Chianti Day on September 1, 2023—a holiday designated by the National Day Calendar.

It celebrates all Chiantis, of course, but it was established by Santa Margherita USA to showcase its eponymous Santa Margherita Chianti Classico Riserva as well as the wines of its flagship estate, Lamole di Lamole in Greve in Chianti. Santa Margherita's founding family, the Marzottos, along with their winemakers and import team, will once again celebrate the wine region by hosting a live webinar from the estate.

It will be led by Lamole di Lamole winemaker Andrea Daldin, who will be sharing the latest vintages from the brand, some of which sport new names that help to tell their story.



MAGGIOLO is the new name for the blue-label Chianti Classico DOCG; it's based on a combination of the Italian word for "iris"—*giaggiolo*—and the month that the flower is ubiquitous in the Lamole vineyards, namely May, or *Maggio* in Italian. This fresh, young version of Chianti from the Classico zone is made predominantly from Sangiovese, aged in 50- and 70-hectoliter oak casks for about 18 months, and blended with smaller amounts of Cabernet Sauvignon and Merlot that have been aged in 225-liter French barriques. The grapes are grown in vineyards situated between 420 and 655 meters (1,400–2,100 feet) above sea level, where sandstone soils are marked by the schistous clay Galestro, rocky Macigno Toscano, and limestone Alberese.

first press



LAREALE is the moniker given to the brown-label Chianti Classico DOCG Riserva. It derives from the phrase *l'areale di Lamole*, indicating the high-altitude plateaus where the vineyard sources for this wine, Il Prato and Le Masso, are located. It is also a play on words, alluding to the *reale* or regal character of the wine according to Daldin, who describes it as restrained and refined. The wine undergoes frequent pumpovers and *délestage* during fermentation to extract optimum anthocyanins and color, followed by aging in 30- to 50-hectoliter casks for two years.



VIGNETO DI CAMPOLUNGO has long been Lamole di Lamole's designated Chianti Classico DOCG Gran Selezione, a single-vineyard wine that undergoes at least 30 months of aging in oak—in this case mostly medium-sized barrels (a small portion goes into barriques). The Campolungo Vineyard, which is made up of schist and sandstone marl at 420–576 meters (1,400–1,900 feet) above sea level, is considered to be one of the best on the Lamole di Lamole estate.



VIGNA GROSPOLI is also a Gran Selezione, coming from a single vineyard planted on ancient terraces and cultivated using the old-school *alberello lamolese* bush-training system. At 540–580 meters (1,700–1,900 feet) above sea level, the site, which sits atop a sandstone base of Galestro derived from Macigno Toscano, is exposed to constant breezes and bright sunlight. After pressing, the must is initially separated from the skins in a proprietary technique dubbed “deferred maceration”; they're later united to complete maceration in oak before the racked wine is aged for about two years

in 30-hectoliter oak casks, followed by at least a year in bottle before release.



Sangiovese on the vine.

Like the rest of the Chianti Classico area, which was built on ancient settlements, the village of Lamole was part of the 1716 codification by Cosimo III, Grand Duke of Tuscany, who officially delimited the production area for Chianti that today consists of eight towns: Greve (of which Lamole is a part), Radda, Gaiole, Castelnuovo Berardenga, Castellina, Poggibonsi, Barberino Tavarnelle, and San Casciano Val di Pesa. The Chianti zone expanded in 1923 to include surrounding areas, but the Classico designation was created to exclusively define this original territory of roughly 270,000 square miles between the Tuscan cities of Florence and Siena.

The first written reference to Chianti as a geographical area is found in 13th-century manuscripts, though the first reference to its wine didn't appear until the late 14th century. Around that time, the black rooster became a symbol of the Chianti League, a political-military institution created by the Republic of Florence earlier that century. Legend has it that, in a contest with neighboring rival Siena, the two republics agreed to send a rider out at the rooster's crow, marking

daybreak. While Siena had allegedly designated a well-fed white rooster that slept in, Florence reportedly assigned an underfed black rooster that would crow early, setting the rider off to cover a greater expanse of territory. Whether the story is true or not, Chianti Classico remains a good pairing for roast chicken.

The National Chianti Day festivities will appropriately take place at one of the highest points of the Chianti Classico growing area. The area surrounding the village of Lamole, where Lamole di Lamole is based, is so unique that the Chianti Classico Consorzio approved a special *Unità Geografica Aggiuntiva*, or Additional Geographical Unit, for Gran Selezione wines grown there; the name Lamole likely derives from the Italian word *lame* (pronounced LAH-meh), or “blade,” in allusion to the blades of land carved out by the elements over the course of millennia. The area sits at the foothills of Monte San Michele, which protects the vineyards from cold north winds. Its altitude and south-facing, amphitheater-like formation allow it to benefit from the strong sunshine that also reflects off the stone walls of the terraces that make vine cultivation practical on these steep slopes.

Sangiovese is the key component of the Chianti Classico blend. Lamole di Lamole has been experimenting with clones of the variety since as far back as 1945, when it planted one of its vineyards to 30 different clones. Lamole di Lamole still uses this vineyard to generate genetic material and currently grows about 14 clones in its five other main vineyards. The focus is on selecting a variety of clones that yield loosely packed bunches, which better resist disease, and smaller berries with a higher skin-to-pulp ratio for more persistent, rich yet elegant wines.

All of these vineyards, it’s worth noting, are certified organic. The producer has eliminated the use of chemical products in the vineyards, relying instead on aloe, algae, propolis, and orange oil to bolster the vines’ natural defenses and resistance to molds and parasites; it also creates organic compost from the byproducts of pruning and destemming. Sustainability is clearly no legend at Lamole di Lamole—and neither is its support for Chianti Classico via National Chianti Day.

Exactly when on September 1 the festivities start could depend on how well fed the local rooster is, but there’s likely to be plenty of crowing when the corks are pulled. *sj*



Casks in the Lamole di Lamole cellar.

Tasting Notes

Lamole di Lamole 2018 Vigneto di Campolungo Chianti Classico Gran Selezione, Toscana, Italy

Vineyards stretching up to 1,900 feet above sea level are home to the Sangiovese grapes that go into this precious red. Its sophistication is evident from the start, with seashell notes attaching to almost-ripe cherries and iodine as well as textured notes of dried heather and herbs. Soil notes are sweet, exuding a mineral brightness, while tension defines the finish with hints of fennel and hibiscus. Matured for 30 months in mostly medium-sized oak, with a percentage in barrique, and for an additional nine months in bottle before release. **95** —*Meridith May*

Lamole di Lamole 2018 Vigna Grosoli Chianti Classico Gran Selezione, Toscana, Italy

Breathtaking aromas of white chocolate, violets, and cedar are framed by lush purple fruit. On the palate, tobacco leaf develops along with balsamic, rhubarb, and plum. Firm notes of black tea and crushed herbs surface before evolving midpalate to release a juicy flow of soil notes and exotic incense. Though dense and creamy, this wine is above all elegant. **96** —*M.M.*

Lamole di Lamole 2020 Maggiolo, Chianti Classico DOCG, Toscana, Italy

Aromas of mulberry, underbrush, and cinnamon are connected to an undercurrent of steely minerals. Following a simply spectacular entry etched with spiced sandalwood and hibiscus, brisk acidity aligns with tangy, bright red cherry. Full, robust flavors of crushed stone, iodine, and clove appear on the finish. **93** —*M.M.*

Lamole di Lamole 2019 Lareale, Chianti Classico DOCG Riserva, Toscana, Italy

Flirtatious, mouth-coating notes of cinnamon and balsamic are topped by exotically spiced cherry and pomegranate, while a chalky midpalate includes notes of withered leaves, red tea, strawberry, and tobacco. This vintage shows texture, elegance, and extended depth. **94** —*M.M.*



CAMPAGNA FINANZIATA AI SENSI
DEL REG. UE N. 1308/2013
CAMPAIGN FINANCED ACCORDING
TO EU REG. NO. 1308/2013

THE SOMM JOURNAL

AUGUST/SEPTEMBER 2023 • Vol. 10 No. 5

COVER STORY

48 THE PACIFIC'S CALLING CARD

*San Simeon Embodies the
Elegance of the Central Coast*

FIRST PRESS

4 SOMETHING TO CROW ABOUT

*Chianti Celebrates a Calendar
Day All Its Own*

FEATURES

60 IN SERVICE TO LIFE

*What Regenerative
Organic Agriculture Means for
Bonterra Organic Estates—and
All of Us*

68 WHERE GROWING AND PRODUCING ARE ONE AND THE SAME

*Paul Hobbs on the Evolution of
Farming and the Importance of
Making Site-Specific Wines*

74 RHÔNE TO THE RESCUE

*Recapping the Rhône Valley
Vineyards Winemaker Tour*

80 CROWNING ACHIEVEMENTS

*Tracking a Decade of Progress in
the Paso Robles Cab Collective's
Namesake Region*

86 A NEW HIGH FOR HERZOG WINE CELLARS

*Camel Back Ridge Vineyard in
Lake County, CA, Represents the
Winery's Recent Evolution*

32

PHOTO: SCOTT HAMPTON



“At Quintessential, family means everything to us. On our 20th anniversary, we thank all our incredible family-owned, multi-generational wineries for their steadfast commitment to their vines and wines—because heritage matters.”

– The Kreps Family



27 DYNAMIC FAMILIES WITH 37 WINERIES



EXPLORE
OUR GLOBAL
PORTFOLIO

at quintessentialwines.com



THE SOMM JOURNAL

AUGUST/SEPTEMBER 2023 • Vol. 10 No. 5



PHOTO: CHANELLE SINCLAIR

DEPARTMENTS

- 12** Wine With Wanda
- 14** The Cocktail Collaborative
- 16** Bottom Line
- 18** Business of Wine
- 20** The Sonoran Scoop With Christina Barrueta
- 22** Elevating the Rockies
- 24** Somm to Somm
- 28** Scents and Accountability
- 30** The Inside Sip on California Wine
- 32** The Neighborhood Series
- 34** Events: The Nantucket Wine & Food Festival
- 36** Into the Future
- 38** The Leicht Side
- 40** The Somm Joury: Stone Edge Farm
- 42** Q&A: Joey Wolosz and Shelley Lindgren
- 44** Winery Spotlight: Loveblock
- 52** The Somm Joury: Ettore and Linne Calodo
- 54** Canada: Inniskillin
- 56** Italy: Ratti
- 58** The Somm Joury: De Bortoli Family Vineyards
- 64** Winery Spotlight: J. Lohr Vineyards & Wines
- 67** Notes From the Winemaker
- 78** Events: Castiglion del Bosco
- 90** Events: Sonoma County Barrel Auction
- 92** Pairings: Cave de Lugny
- 94** SommFoundation Letter
- 96** Italy: Feudi di San Gregorio
- 99** Agave: 123 Organic Tequila
- 100** Brand Spotlight: Tree Fort
- 107** Cheese Wiz
- 108** Spain: Ramón Bilbao
- 111** Varietal Spotlight: Hybrids
- 112** France: Jacques Lurton
- 114** Closing Time

14



QUATTRO THEORY

SERIOUSLY MADE TO BE EASILY ENJOYED

Learn more at [QuattroTheoryWines.com](https://www.QuattroTheoryWines.com)

Please enjoy responsibly. ©2023 Quattro Theory Wines, St. Helena, CA



For the Love of Galicia

AT **TOMIÑO TABERNA GALLEGA**, THREE BROTHERS BRING A TASTE OF COASTAL SPAIN TO MANHATTAN

FORGIVE ME: I've been selfish for keeping Tomiño Taberna Gallega to myself. But I've been smitten with this charming Galician restaurant ever since I first walked through the doors. Located at the border of New York City's Chinatown and Little Italy, the unofficial gathering place for the Big Apple's Spanish community is one where everybody knows my name and greets me with a warm *hola* and a refreshing glass of Albariño.

Tomiño comes by this gracious vibe naturally. Owned and operated by three brothers of Galician descent, Marco, Phil, and Victor González, it's a deeply personal project that had been simmering in their hearts for years before its opening in 2017. Their late father, Joaquín, was also a restaurateur in the city, but he operated an Italian restaurant because Spanish cuisine was not as appreciated back in the 1990s as it is now, and it was more challenging to source authentic ingredients. Named after the family's hometown, Tomiño is "the culmination of our feelings [about] Spain, Tomiño, Galicia, our parents, our cousins, our aunts and uncles, and [our] friends," says Phil.

Showing that Spain is not a monolith, the airy and modern interior avoids many of the markers of Spanish restaurants in the U.S., such as "a lot of dark red, bulls, and flamenco," Phil notes. "Spain's very regional, just like most countries around the world. We're certainly representing [it], but we're very much representing Galicia." That much is reflected in Tomiño's seafood-dominated menu: The coastal region in the country's northwest is home to such classic dishes as pulpo á feira. "[The octopus is] boiled to a perfect tenderness where you almost think it's grilled," he explains. "And then [there are] just three ingredients on top—extra-virgin olive oil, pimentón de la Vera [smoked paprika], and sea salt."

A certified sommelier, Phil is also Tomiño's wine buyer. "If you go to Galicia,

the pulpo you drink with red wine," he notes. He recommends pairing it with a lighter-bodied expression like Ribeira Sacra Mencía. There are several to choose from on Tomiño's list of more than 100

Tomiño Taberna Gallega's arroz caldoso con bogavante with lobster and monkfish.



PHOTOS COURTESY OF TOMIÑO TABERNA GALLEGA

Brothers Phil, Marco, and Victor González are the owners of Tomiño Taberna Gallega in New York City.

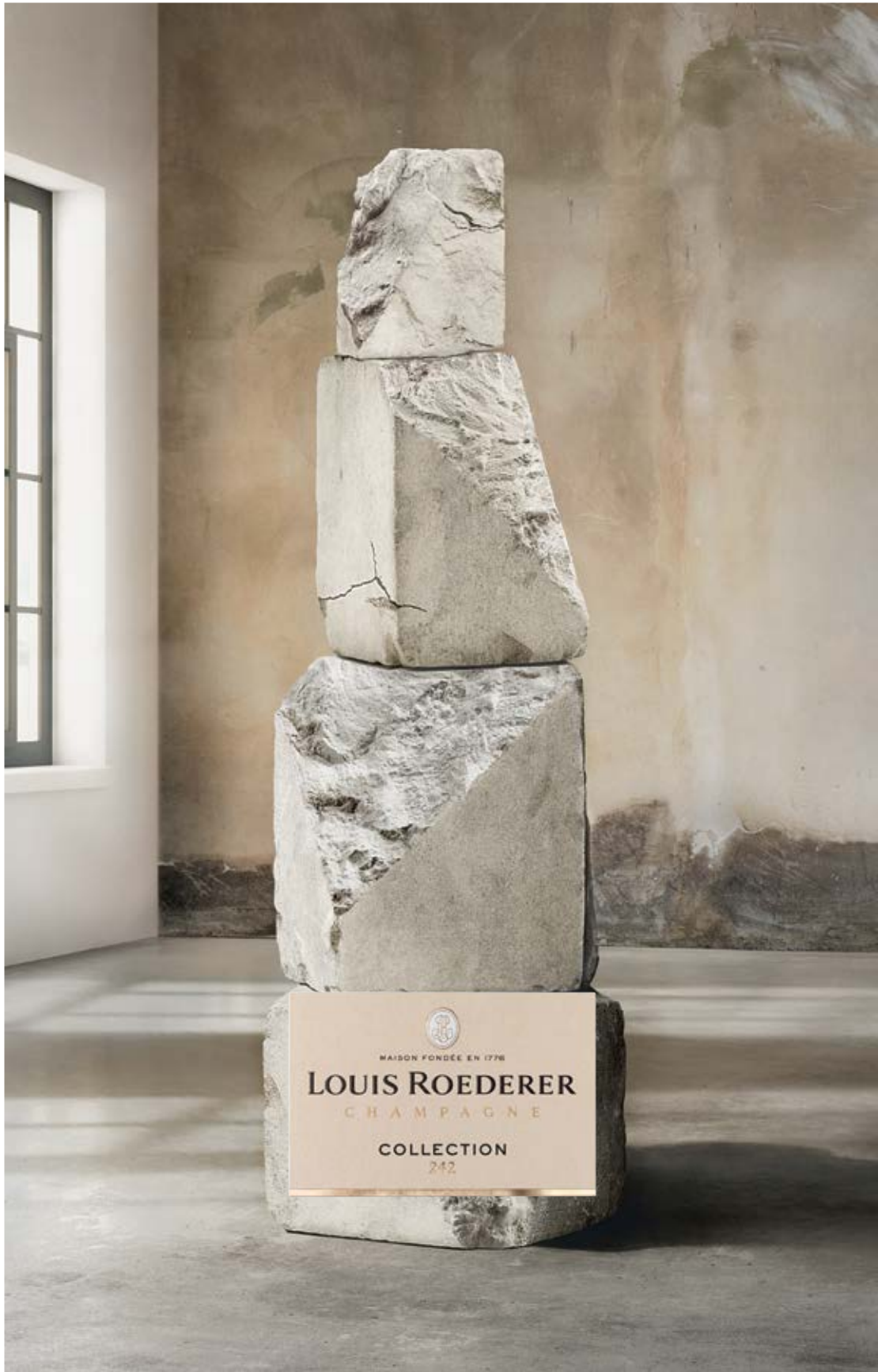
labels, which is "100% Spanish with the exception of maybe two Ports"; about 75% of the white wines are from Galicia, as are upwards of 40% of the reds.

Meanwhile, the dish that wows me every single time is the arroz caldoso con bogavante for two featuring bomba rice with lobster, monkfish, and bisque broth. "Paella's great, but the genuineness of an arroz caldoso is you have to make a broth with enough strength," Phil explains, courtesy of "a lot of shrimp [and] shrimp shells, a lot of fish bones, [and] a lot of lobster." It arrives at the table with a layer of that rich broth on top, which soaks in after a few minutes and infuses every bite. Phil recommends pairing it with "a fuller-bodied white" such as the Luis Anxo Rodríguez 2014 Escolma, a blend of Treixadura, Albariño, Torrontes, and Lado.

Speaking of Albariño, Galicia's most famous wine is strongly represented at Tomiño; with more than a dozen examples, "we may have more Albariños than any restaurant in the city," exclaims Phil. This crisp white, which often evokes the sea with its hint of salinity, makes its way into the food too: Take almejas al Albariño, which consists of Manila clams cooked in a seafood broth with a wine reduction.

Tomiño transports me to Spain with every sip, bite, and snippet of conversation *en español* that I eavesdrop on. So when I finally visit Galicia, I suspect I'll already feel at home. *sj*

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



LOUIS ROEDERER
HAND IN HAND WITH NATURE



Grilled Cocktails Are a Summertime Surprise

JUST LIKE A PERFECTLY seared steak or hot dog, cocktails featuring grilled or torched ingredients—or as I call them, grilled cocktails—capture the essence of summer. They can contain any spirit; for instance, smoky mezcals and island Scotches complement their flavors, while gin serves as a nice counterpoint, with its herbaceous, floral, and/or citrusy notes. Naturally, these drinks also pair well with grilled foods.

Sturdy-fleshed fruits and vegetables that can be cut into flat pieces are best suited for the grill. As with proteins, when they start to cook, they soften and their sugars caramelize. And the grill marks are a great visual cue, indicative as they are of char and smoke.

Pineapples, apples, peaches, cantaloupes, bell peppers, jalapeños, and citrus are all stellar ingredients for grilled cocktails. Try cutting a citrus fruit in half and putting it on the grill flesh side down for about five minutes. Remove from the heat and squeeze out the juice, which can be added to other juices for some char flecks and flavor.

Using a torch, meanwhile, is a much better option for fruits with softer skin that might fall apart on a grill, because you have more control

over where the heat is directed; you can torch just a portion of the fruit and monitor how much more heat to impart from there. Strawberries are a perfect example: They can be cut in half, topped with sugar, and brûléed, creating a crunchy surface on top of the juicy fruit to yield a fun and delicious garnish for a drink. At my Phoenix, Arizona, establishment Garden Bar PHX, I use it in the recipe provided here; other cocktails you might make include a Charred Lemon Gin & Tonic, Grilled Grapefruit Paloma, Singed Peach Whiskey Sour, Seared Blueberry Sherry Cobbler, and S'more Espresso Martini with a torched marshmallow.

Happy grilling and sipping! *SJ*

Strawberry Brûlée Smash

- 1.5 oz. Drumshanbo Gunpowder Irish Gin With Sardinian Citrus
- 0.75 oz. lapsang souchong tea
- 0.25 oz. lime leaf cordial
- 0.75 oz. rich simple syrup
- Half a lemon, cut into quarters
- 1 barspoon Reàl Strawberry Puree
- 1 strawberry, cut in half

Combine one half of the strawberry in a cocktail shaker with the lemon quarters, strawberry puree, and simple syrup. Muddle.

Add remaining ingredients. Fill with ice and shake vigorously. Double strain into a rocks glass.

Dip the other strawberry half in a bowl of sugar and place on a ceramic or wooden plank. Torch the fruit until the sugar starts to caramelize. Set on top of the drink and serve.



PHOTO: CHANELLE SINCLAIR

Author Kim Haasarud serves this Strawberry Brûlée Smash at Garden Bar PHX in Phoenix, AZ.



KETTMEIR

Elegance and Freshness from the Alto Adige



92
points

tastingpanel
MAGAZINE

2022

95
points

tastingpanel
MAGAZINE

2022

98
points

tastingpanel
MAGAZINE

2021

kettmeirwinesusa.com @kettmeirwinesusa f@kettmeirwinesusa

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



Does Terroir Matter?

REVISITING A SOMETIMES VEXING, ALWAYS INTERESTING TOPIC

TERROIR, I HATE TO SAY, has not mattered for a long time—at least not to the commercial wine industry. In my April/May column, I explored the regrettable reality that on-premise professionals rarely prioritize terroir on their lists, as the vast majority of wines are sold on the basis of brand and varietal identity. Appellations may be noted on labels, but more often than not provenance has little to do with what's in a bottle.

The issue extends to production itself: New World wines are increasingly made the same way no matter where they are from. Most Napa Valley Cabernet Sauvignons, for example, have long ceased to aspire to standards set by Bordeaux's Grand Cru classification system, which has always celebrated the distinctions among communes and individual châteaux—despite being under the pressure, over the past 30 years, of prevailing scoring systems.

This past June in the *Napa Valley Register*, even veteran journalist Dan Berger—who has always aimed to cultivate a conventional, varietal-focused taste in wine among his readers—decried how “Cab became so malformed . . . [with] far too much sameness” resulting from the use of “high-tech gadgets . . . so we can standardize all reds . . . [to be] the darkest and most concentrated.” Like the old fogey that he is, Berger recalls that “decades ago, our Cabernets from different places differed from one another. . . . What a delight!”

Producers, of course, have brought this upon themselves: Live by the 100-point sword, die by the 100-point sword. But as I mentioned in my previous column, restaurant sommeliers have it within their power to remain arbiters of taste when choosing products for their wine lists. They can select Pinot Noirs, Chardonnays, and even Cabernet Sauvignons based upon sensory distinctions related directly to appellations and vineyards.

Austin, TX, sommelier Krista Church tastes Zinfandel in an old-vine vineyard in the Lodi region's Mokelumne River AVA.



PHOTO: RANDY CAPAROSO

The commercial wine industry makes it harder and harder to do that—as do distributors perpetually driven by their sales quotas—but it is still possible to find terroir-focused wines with a modicum of due diligence.

That said, selecting wines on the basis of terroir rather than branding or technique can also be challenging for one's palate. I recall a piece in the old *Sommelier Journal* (September 2010), “Oregon's Cellar Crawl Collection,” in which we asked five experienced Portland sommeliers if they could tell the difference between winemaking and site in a blind tasting of 25 Pinot Noirs made by five of Oregon's most prestigious winemakers, each of whom produced wine from grapes picked at the same time from each other's vineyards. Individual winemaking styles made such a huge impact on sensory qualities that all but one of the sommeliers mistook the differences between styles to be the differences between vineyards.

Of course, sometimes it's the eye of the beholder, not winemaking techniques, that blurs distinctions. In another *Sommelier Journal* report on Sonoma Coast Char-

donnays and Pinot Noirs in June 2011, there was one ultra-dark, almost ferociously fruit-forward Pinot Noir that was summarily dismissed by five panelists for being “over-extracted” and “obviously manipulated.” One Master Sommelier (there were three on the panel) described this wine as “anything but natural.” That particular Pinot Noir, though, was crafted by a winemaker who is well known for his obsession with minimal intervention. It wasn't the wine that was manipulated, it was the panelists' mental *assumption* of what constitutes manipulation!

Indeed, since when are terroir-focused wines supposed to be predictable? By definition, they *should* be vexing, confounding, and occasionally shocking: The more natural the style, the more unpredictable the results. By that point, it goes without saying that while many of our so-called “best” wines are sadly no longer defined by terroir, many of our most *interesting* wines still are. We may not always recognize facets of terroir in the wines we taste, but we can at least support the concept by prioritizing it in our selection process. ■

THE OLAZABAL FAMILY CELEBRATES SIX
GENERATIONS OF FAMILY WINEMAKING FROM
QUINTA DO VALE MEÃO'S 145-YEAR-OLD PROPERTY
ON THE SPECTACULARLY DISTINCTIVE SLOPES OF
THE DOURO VALLEY.



QUINTA
DO
VALE MEÃO



DISTINCTIVE VINEYARDS. TRADITIONAL WINEMAKING. UNDISPUTED QUALITY.

©2023 IMPORTED BY DEUTSCH FAMILY WINE & SPIRITS, STAMFORD, CT. PLEASE ENJOY RESPONSIBLY.



Seeing (Michelin) Stars

LESSONS FROM THE WINE PROGRAMS OF WASHINGTON, D.C.,
SISTER RESTAURANTS **JÔNT** AND **BRESCA**

EARNING A MICHELIN STAR IS

undoubtedly one of the most coveted accomplishments in the restaurant industry. While serving impeccable cuisine is of paramount importance in obtaining this prestigious accolade, achieving a star (or two or three) is about the complete experience. At sister restaurants JÔNT (two Michelin stars since 2021) and Bresca (one Michelin star since 2019) in Washington, D.C., there is an inherent understanding that their wine programs play a critical role in maintaining guest satisfaction and retaining their respective stars. The co-owned and -operated venues might differ in concept—JÔNT offers a Japanese-influenced tasting menu, while Bresca embodies Parisian neo-bistro culture—but both provide the ideal roadmap to success for those aspiring to Michelin heights based largely on the following tenets.

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN QUALITY AND VALUE

At JÔNT, great care is taken in the selection and pricing of wines to ensure that guests are pleased with the options and their respective price points, whether they're perusing a la carte offerings or the pairing menu. "Quality over everything" is a great mantra to live by, and we like to bring that idea to our wine program. Wine doesn't necessarily need to be the most expensive to be good; [it] can meet [our] criteria at any price point," says JÔNT GM and sommelier Andrew Elder. The restaurant's staff focuses on ensuring that no matter their selection, be it a \$10 glass or \$1,000 bottle, guests will feel like they've won the jackpot vis-à-vis quality and food friendliness.

EXPERIENCE, DISCOVERY, AND REDISCOVERY

People dine at Michelin-starred establishments for the experience, and JÔNT



The Bresca team, led by chef/owner Ryan Ratino, celebrates the restaurant's Michelin star.



The chef's counter at the two-Michelin-starred JÔNT.

and Bresca provide that in spades when it comes to the depth and complexity of their respective wine programs. They pride themselves both on exposing guests to new and unknown wines and on helping people rediscover wines with which they might be perfunctorily familiar. Says Bresca's lead sommelier, Kendrick Lindsey, "Some of the most exciting wines on [the] list are hardly ever seen at other restaurants or retail shops and [have] incredible stories behind them. They elevate the experience while still being accessible to everyone." Simultaneously, JÔNT is helping guests view saké through a new lens. Elder notes, "We love to show that saké is a serious beverage with lots of nuance and complexity. We are free to show [expressions] over multiple age ranges and temperatures to create a unique guest experience."

PHOTOS: REY LOPEZ

MAINTAINING PROFITABILITY

Both restaurants cite developing positive relationships with distributors, suppliers, and importers as paramount to their ability to maintain profitability. These relationships afford them access not just to expensive allocated wines but also to exciting, off-the-beaten-path small-production expressions. Additionally, JÔNT utilizes its ability to source from private collections to create depth to its program in terms of vintages and wines that are otherwise impossible or prohibitively expensive to acquire now. Meanwhile, at Bresca, sommelier Gabriel Corbett likes to, in his words, "excite guests with unique pairings that help drive sales. Putting incredible and novel wines in front of the guests opens doors to trying other regions and expressions. The end goal is to get people to drink more wine through creative pairings [that] will bring them back," whether they're opting for such hidden gems as Cabernet Sauvignon from Slovenian producer Movia or Quinta Dos Pesos 1996 Carcavelos.

TRAINING

The greatest wine programs in the world survive thanks to their well-trained staff. Notes Lindsey, "We love to see the passion that people on the front lines (captains, servers, bartenders) have when they share with our guests. We do this by equipping our staff with the knowledge and the stories that the wines tell, which only further elevates the experience and, ultimately, sales." This approach ensures that everyone is actively involved in said storytelling as a key element of the guest experience.

Whether or not an establishment has a Michelin star on its horizon, there can be no doubt that the approach and ethos of JÔNT and Bresca's respective wine programs serve as ideal templates for others to follow. SJ

ELOUAN

OREGON PINOT NOIR



GOOD LIGHT
MAKES GREAT WINE



Course general manager/sommelier Nicholas Padua with chef/partner Cory Oppold.

Fennel with roasted eggplant puree, a squash blossom-ricotta dumpling, fava-bean falafel, confit tomatoes, and basil citronette at Course.



Where Playfulness Meets Precision

CHEF CORY OPPOLD PRESENTS AN ADVENTUROUS PRIX FIXE MENU AT **COURSE** IN SCOTTSDALE, AZ

I FIRST EXPERIENCED Cory Oppold's culinary artistry when he was earning accolades as executive chef at Atlas Bistro in Scottsdale, Arizona, several years ago, but even then, he was contemplating his own concept. "I started making notes for Course in 2016 . . . writing down ideas in a little black memo pad," he recalls.


The pandemic shutdown offered him an unexpected opportunity to take the first steps with the launch of Simmer Down, a service providing sophisticated sous-vide meal kits. The successful venture eventually transitioned into the original iteration of Course, a private-chef company. "I did that for three years, and it was a lot of fun," says Oppold, a 2019 champion on the Food Network competition show *Chopped*. "It was a great opportunity to build a client base and establish the business as a proven concept." In fact, his business partners, brothers Brett and Christian Pezzuto, were impressed guests at a dinner he prepared for Paso Robles, California, winery Clos Solène.

At his new fine-dining destination, which opened in May, Oppold offers an artfully plated ten-course menu each weekend as well as a five-course version during the week. "Chef has a whimsical creativity, but executes it in a way that is so thoughtful and so precise," says general manager and sommelier Nicholas Padua, who curates the beverage program. "We both have crazy ideas, but at the same time we like things exact and intentional."

That much is clear from Padua's pairings. "I don't think in terms of labels," he explains. "When I taste a dish, it's about the wine's fruit aspect, acid, weight, and alcohol and tannin levels and what is created when they're put together." Thus you'll find him pouring Los Milics 2021 Ita's Rosé from Cochise County as an exquisite accompaniment to fennel with roasted eggplant puree, a squash blossom-ricotta dumpling, fava-bean falafel, confit tomatoes, and basil citronette or matching an Emerson Brown 2017 Oakville Cabernet Sauvignon to rib-eye

with mustard crème, black-garlic aioli, beef fat-roasted potatoes, asparagus puree, and a shower of cured egg yolk.

On Sundays, Course transforms into its self-styled "immature sibling," Morning Would, which presents a six-course brunch. "It's a fun, laid-back atmosphere but with the same culinary precision," says Padua, who serves up giant XL Spritzes that contain an entire bottle of Prosecco and OH MAMI! Bloody Marys enhanced with his signature umami spice blend alongside dishes such as egg scramble with candied ham hocks and chicken and waffles with fried egg-maple mousse.

Making recognizable ingredients new is the defining philosophy at Course. "The flavors are approachable and familiar, but I want people to take a bite and say, 'What the hell is that? It's so damn good,'" Oppold says with a laugh. "It's a fine line to balance playfulness and execution," notes Padua. "Ultimately, our unofficial mantra is integrity, passion, and precision." Adds Oppold with a mischievous grin: "And badass." 



MISSION HILL

FAMILY ESTATE

*An Uncompromising Expression of the
Okanagan Valley*



2018 Oculus

98 POINTS

-SOMM JOURNAL

2020 Perpetua

95 POINTS

-SOMM JOURNAL

MISSION HILL FAMILY ESTATE
OKANAGAN VALLEY BC VQA
RED WINE

PERPETUA
CHARDONNAY
OKANAGAN VALLEY BC VQA

MISSIONHILLWINERY.COM



On the Front Lines of the Front Range

WHAT'S SELLING NOW, ACCORDING TO THREE DENVER/BOULDER SOMMS



Robert Hernandez, wine director, Blackbelly, Boulder, CO

Boulder is always going to sell much more Old World versus California/New World. You have restaurants [here with great Old World programs] like us and Flagstaff House and Frasca [Food and Wine], and then you have [Master Sommelier] Brett Zimmerman at Boulder Wine Merchant pushing the Boulder Burgundy Festival every year, and I think people are like, "Oh, I've probably been drinking California for a while, so I want to try something different." We're always going to sell a lot of Italian—Nebbiolo is so extremely hot, Brunello is still doing extremely well—and Bordeaux, and then we're also seeing an uptick in Spanish wines as well. I wonder if that's just because we're getting ready for Panza Negra, a new Spanish restaurant from Blackbelly chef/owner Hosea Rosenberg, or because people just love Tempranillo and [are] realizing that you can get Tempranillo besides Rioja.



Beth Grutch, partner, Crafted Concepts, Denver, CO

People are getting a little more adventurous in what they're drinking . . . and I think that that's super-fun. It's made our jobs really easy because it's not like, "Oh no, I don't drink that"; it's like, "Huh, sounds interesting." . . . I am super-excited about wines from the Baja region of Mexico right now. We are doing a Taste of Mexico wine dinner at [Mediterranean restaurant] Rioja, and I'm blown away by these wines; they have such a French flair to them. . . . It's a cool region that is up and coming. I think too [that] people are realizing that that big, buttery, oaky Chardonnay that they used to love is not really what they love anymore. . . . [Instead,] Austrian wines are so food friendly, bright, and fun, and people are looking for something that's great quality but not going to break the bank—that trend hasn't changed. Portugal continues to be hot on the list for affordability, and [so is] Spain. And we're getting more of it, which is great, so the selection there is expanding. [Finally,] I think that people are understanding that they can enjoy daily bubbles without breaking the bank with Champagne; there are lots of different sparklings out there that are great for an everyday drinker. . . . I love Spanish Cava, because it's a little bit more Brut style [compared to Prosecco] and I think it's a little bit more versatile.



Timothy Hershberger, wine and beverage director, Fruition, Denver, CO

I find that the Denver wine drinker these days is very curious. . . . I think that a lot of that has happened since the pandemic, where people were sitting at home and they were like, "Well, we're going to go to the liquor store to get some wine—let's try something we've never had before." And that has carried over quite a bit. We've had a lot of success with Albariño and Grüner Veltliner and Gamay. And it's refreshing to me because . . . my mind is curious too. I don't work at a steakhouse because I don't want to sell three cuts of meat every night; I want what's new and fresh, what the chef's making now. We've also introduced a pretty extensive brandy, or fruit-based distillate, program. We have a big selection of eaux de vie and aged brandies and grappa, and this has [also] piqued [the] curiosity . . . of people who are interested in trying things that they're not familiar with. We have a cocktail on [the menu] that's Sherry-based right now and that's not something that a lot of people are very knowledgeable about or necessarily comfortable with because they think of the cream Sherry that was on grandma's shelf. Seeing people gravitate to something because they're *not* familiar with it is really refreshing for me and I love it. It's been really fun to be on the front lines of that. SJ

Shaping the future of Argentina's
most celebrated Malbec since 1901



Luigi Bosca



FAMILIA ARIZU

 BodegaluigiBosca  bodegaluigibosca  luigiboscabodega www.luigibosca.com

PROUDLY IMPORTED BY PACIFIC HIGHWAY WINES.

THE ABUSE OF ALCOHOL IS DANGEROUS FOR YOUR HEALTH. DRINK AND APPRECIATE IT IN MODERATION.



PHOTO: TODD FRASER

Balancing Act

HOW **ELIZABETH DAVIES** APPLIES HER SOMM SKILLS TO A SIDE HUSTLE

THE SOMMELIER PROFESSION IS evolving, and wine professionals with entrepreneurial spirits are finding new ways to grow in the industry. While some are leaving hospitality entirely, others, like Elizabeth Davies, are finding balance between traditional sommelier positions and new endeavors. Davies has the stability of her 13-year career at Toronto steakhouse Harbour 60 to thank for allowing her to operate a wine-subscription and -delivery business called E.D. Wine Co., which over the course of five years has steadily grown its clientele across a 100-kilometer delivery zone in the Toronto area.

Davies launched her company when her three kids started school in order to have more free evenings to spend with

them. Still, she didn't want to leave the floor at Harbour 60—where she manages a list of 1,500 bottles with a team of fellow sommeliers—altogether: Keeping her position had financial benefits that gave her the flexibility to run her own business. Even now, she says, "I'm happy to take on risk," acknowledging that she can fall back on income from her day job.

One of Davies' favorite things about working as a sommelier is interacting with guests. Even though the wines she sells at Harbour 60 differ from those she sells through E.D. Wine Co., she says, "[The] communications I have with [restaurant] guests really help me with communicating about wine on the subscription side." A recent tableside exchange with a guest about tannic structure enlightened Davies

as to how people with a limited wine vocabulary might describe tannin. This interaction has helped her discuss wine structure with her subscription clients in a more relatable way.

In short, Davies aims to take the stress out of wine buying by making wine education approachable. With deliveries, she includes tasting notes that read as "if you and I were . . . having a glass of wine, and either you were telling me about it or I was telling you about it." By emulating the type of casual conversations two wine professionals might have, she brings a personable sense of sophistication to her retail sales. As she has learned at Harbour 60, having the skills to make wine accessible is valuable to the progressing sommelier profession. **SJ**

TEQUILA
KOMOS

“Our highest rated collection and first ever 100-point tequila.”

— TASTING PANEL MAGAZINE



WATCH OUR UPCOMING WEBINARS
AND INSTAGRAM LIVE



THE SOMM JOURNAL

EDU-TAINMENT

The *SOMM Journal's* VP of education, Lars Leicht, will connect with four renowned producers to explore their vision, approach, and attitude regarding their vineyards, region, and beyond.

For each of the three educational webinars (not the Instagram Live), dozens of qualified beverage professionals who register early will have the opportunity to receive wine samples in advance.

Be on the lookout for invitation emails from *The SOMM Journal* or *SommFoundation* about six weeks before each webinar with detailed information on how to register.

If you think you might not already be on our email list, send your information along with your email address to publisher and editor-in-chief **Meridith May** at mmay@sommjournal.com so you will receive this email.



ANDREA DALDIN

CELEBRATING NATIONAL CHIANTI DAY LIVE FROM LAMOLE DI LAMOLE

**FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 1,
10 A.M. PST**

Leicht will go live from the heart of Chianti Classico with winemaker Andrea Daldin of Lamole di Lamole to toast, taste, and crow about a range of Black Rooster wines—the symbol of Chianti Classico—in celebration of the third annual National Chianti Day.



MAURIZIO ZANELLA

BEING FRANK ABOUT FRANCIACORTA: EXPLORING ITS HISTORY AND FUTURE WITH CA' DEL BOSCO

**MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 25,
11 A.M. PST**

In this webinar, Leicht will discuss the recent release of Gabriele Archetti's book *The Origins of Franciacorta in the Italian Renaissance* with Ca' del Bosco's Maurizio Zanella, touching on the history and future of Franciacorta through the eyes of one of its leading proponents.



ERICA CRAWFORD

A CONVERSATION WITH ERICA CRAWFORD OF LOVEBLOCK

**TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 26,
12 P.M. PST**

On Instagram Live, Leicht will chat with Erica Crawford about the evolution of Sauvignon Blanc, New Zealand winemaking, organics, vegan wines, tea tannins, high-altitude farming, and how science informs her brand.



LUCA BOSIO

BRILLIANT AND BOLD IN BAROLO: LUCA BOSIO

**TUESDAY, OCTOBER 10,
11 A.M. PST**

In this webinar, Luca Bosio will join Leicht in a discussion about Barolo, exploring the wines he fell in love with while growing up in the region and the direction he wants to take his production in the future at the esteemed Bel Colle; Bosio's namesake Luca Bosio Vineyards; and his new organic endeavor, Passato.



©2023 Cline Family Cellars, Sonoma, CA 95476

Cline
Seven Ranchlands

**From our Family to Your Tables.
Food-Friendly Wines. Easy to Serve.**

CALIFORNIA CERTIFIED SUSTAINABLE • VEGAN & GLUTEN FREE
CLINEFAMILYCELLARS.COM • SONOMA, CALIFORNIA





A Sensory Treasure Trove

STEM COMPOUNDS HELP REDUCE ALCOHOL AND BOOST FRESHNESS, RESEARCH FINDS

DESTEMMING OR SEPARATING THE

fruit from the grape stalk—also known as the rachis, to which each berry is connected through smaller stalks called pedicels—prior to fermentation is standard practice in modern winemaking, but the discovery of new compounds in winegrape stems has prompted researchers in Bordeaux to reevaluate the benefits of including stems during this crucial stage of production.

Whole-cluster winemaking has long been associated with the nouveau wine style of Beaujolais, which relies on carbonic maceration for its juicy primary flavors; stems are also traditionally employed in Burgundy, Côtes du Rhône, Corsica, and Barolo, but as destemming technology has evolved, the practice has fallen out of favor in regions like Bordeaux.

The decision to include stems in a fermentation is often made with the intention of bolstering the tannin expression in wine, as phenolic compounds abound in stems. But as researchers at the Laboratoire Excell biochemistry lab in Floirac, France, have learned, there is far more to winegrape stems than previously thought: It's been discovered that they contain the salicylate family of molecules and Astilbin, which is

shedding more light on how the inclusion of stems during fermentation impacts wine beyond the contribution of tannins.

Astilbin is a well-known compound in Chinese herbal medicine typically extracted from the flower *Astilbe thunbergii* (false goat's beard). Studies have shown that it has anti-inflammatory and antioxidant benefits and shows potential in the treatment of kidney disease and obesity.

According to one of the researchers, Frédéric Massie, a technical consultant for wine-consulting firm Derenoncourt Consultants near Vienne, France, the addition of stems can decrease actual alcohol levels in wine: The stems can not only dilute the wine by releasing water but also absorb alcohol. Astilbin, meanwhile, reduces the perception of alcohol, as its presence contributes to the impression of sweetness, density, and texture. "The perception of alcohol is the balance between the level of alcohol and the density of the wine. [When compared to another wine with] the same level of alcohol, a wine with more density will appear [more] balanced," he says. Of the Merlot, Cabernet Sauvignon, and Cabernet Franc wines evaluated by the researchers, Merlot

showed the highest concentrations of Astilbin by a significant margin.

The salicylate family of compounds, meanwhile, is of particular interest to perfumer and winemaker Cédric Alfenore of Biolandes, a flavor and aroma manufacturer in Le Sen, France, who also participated in the research study. He explains that ethyl and methyl salicylates contribute nuances of freshness to wines with aromas that include juniper needles; wintergreen-dominant medicinal aromas like camphor; vegetal notes of green pepper and tomato leaf; and cut grass, herbs, and white flowers. These characteristics will be more or less perceptible depending on the concentration of salicylates: Higher levels mean more freshness.

In addition to the salicylates, Alfenore notes that there are floral terpenes (citronellol, geraniol, oxy rose); benzaldehyde (a compound that contributes notes of almond and cherry); and fatty acids such as myristic found in stems. While they are present in very small amounts and their concentrations vary depending on soil type, grape variety, and vintage, their presence results in a bouquet of aromas and incredible flavors. S|

WENTE

VINEYARDS

The Heart of

CALIFORNIA CHARDONNAY

FROM THE START, we've been obsessed with Chardonnay. For generations, we meticulously grew and grafted cuttings from renowned Old-World vineyards to create vines that express the best flavors of our California terroir. Today, 75% of all California Chardonnay stems from our prized "Wente Clone."

Experience 140 years of Chardonnay artistry for yourself and learn more at WENTEVINEYARDS.COM

Family Owned and Certified Sustainable





by **Suzanna Mannion**, communications manager,
 California Sustainable Winegrowing Alliance

TIPS FOR THE TRADE:

Communicating Sustainability

IT'S NO SURPRISE that the discourse surrounding the far-reaching implications of climate change and related issues like resource scarcity and decreasing biodiversity has increased in recent years: It's an extremely important topic that touches us all globally.

For over two decades, sustainable winegrowing practices widely embraced by California vineyards and wineries have addressed some of these issues. But how are *your* communication skills when it comes to talking about sustainability? It is increasingly important for wine professionals, whether operating on-premise or off-premise, to be able to communicate what sustainable winegrowing is and what it means for consumers and the communities around them. Thanks to a growing thirst for compelling information on this topic, sommeliers and wine sales reps have a prime opportunity to educate a captive audience on sustainable winegrowing practices that help deliver beautiful flavor profiles into customers' glasses.

Whether you're new to talking about sustainability or looking to improve, here are three actionable tips to help you bolster your communication skills.

1. Get educated: Remember that knowledge is power and enroll in the California Sustainable Winegrowing Ambassador Course (ambassador.discovercaliforniawines.com/courses), which is intended for a wide breadth of professionals—including those in hospitality, sales, communications, marketing, and education as well as employees of certified vineyards and wineries—seeking to improve and test their current understanding of sustainable practices used in California (though much of the content is relevant worldwide). Graduates of the course, which is free and

takes just an hour, receive a personalized certificate and will be able to confidently share information with others.

Another way to stay current on sustainability discussions is to subscribe to the California Sustainable Winegrowing Alliance's monthly e-newsletter, which features sustainability-focused resources, reports, tools, and upcoming webinars and events hosted by sustainability associations across the state. Subscribe at sustainablewinegrowing.org.




2. Share wineries' sustainability stories: Consumers and trade alike have an increased interest in sustainably produced wine and are hungry to learn more, so when you share compelling stories related to this topic, it enables them to better appreciate and connect to the wines they enjoy. As you inform the winery representatives that you work with that being able to tell their stories is valuable, consider asking them these questions to help elicit more information: What do you want your customers to know about your sustainability efforts? Which sustainability initiatives and practices are you most proud of? Why

is it important to commit to sustainable winegrowing?

3. Celebrate sustainability: Once you're equipped with your newly improved sustainability communication skills, don't miss opportunities to leverage monthlong campaigns such as Down to Earth Month in April or the upcoming California Wine Month in September, which is already generating media buzz, while spotlighting wine producers that

are committed to sustainable practices. Other ideas include curating a sustainable wine list, creating an end-cap display, or hosting an educational dinner or tasting featuring sustainable producers. There are a multitude of ways to make learning about sustainability engaging, memorable, and fun!

Want more tips on communicating sustainability? Check out our newly published guide, "Communicating Sustainability for Hospitality and Sales Staff," at library.sustainablewinegrowing.org. 

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 over 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.

COMPLEMENTS TO THE CHEF



HERZOG LINEAGE

ESTATE GROWN | FAMILY CRAFTED

Double Duty

CELEBRATED FOR ITS SIGNATURE GOLDRIDGE SOILS, **GREEN VALLEY** STANDS OUT AS BOTH A RUSSIAN RIVER VALLEY NEIGHBORHOOD AND A SEPARATE AVA

by Stefanie Schwalb

A VERITABLE PLAYGROUND FOR enophiles seeking to explore the nuances of style, the Russian River Valley (RRV) in Sonoma County encompasses 126,000 acres that are divided up into six neighborhoods with their own diverse characteristics. These neighborhoods aren't defined by official boundaries, except in the case of Green Valley—because it's the only one also designated as an official AVA.

Situated in the western hills of the RRV south of Forestville and north of Sebastopol, where it's nestled within the Russian River Valley AVA, Green Valley—which received its AVA status in 1983 and is celebrating its 40th anniversary this year—is one of Sonoma County's smallest and coolest appellations. Officially known as Green Valley of Russian River Valley, it's synonymous with a single soil type known as Goldridge.

The Terroir

Renowned as one of the most prized soil types in the RRV, Goldridge covers

approximately 60% of Green Valley. A combination of fine-grained sandy loam and sandstone with exceptional drainage capacity and low fertility, it's ideal for the cultivation of grapes like Chardonnay and Pinot Noir.

Cooling winds from the Pacific Ocean have a marked influence on Green Valley—which is heavily forested with fir and redwood trees—as do elevations that are higher on average than those of the other RRV neighborhoods. But whether located on slopes or in valleys that experience less wind, all of the AVA's vineyards are significantly impacted by fog creeping in via the Petaluma Gap. The resulting moderation of temperatures helps extend the growing season and ripening process.


It's estimated that 29% of harvested grapes in the RRV are Pinot Noir. The "heartbreak grape," so called for the challenges it poses to growers, has actually found a fulfilling relationship with winemakers in the region; Green Valley wines in particular are acclaimed for their high

acidity, ripe tannins, lavish mouthfeel, and splendidly complex aromatics. "We've focused on Pinot Noir because that's something really good in Green Valley," notes winemaker Fred Scherrer of Scherrer Winery. "Some of us tend to blend things to make a complete wine that speaks of the general AVA; others focus more on single sites. Some of us do both."

Recent Vintages

While all vintages face unique challenges, 2018 in Green Valley was exceptional, with a record harvest highlighted by nearly perfect growing conditions, a wide-open pick window, and ample high-quality grapes. The 2019 vintage was relatively good as well: Although some flooding occurred in the winter and mildew pressure had adverse effects throughout the growing season, spring weather and the summertime ripening phase were generally on point. The Kincade Fire took center stage in October, but the majority of the region's crops had already been harvested by that time. "If you remember

PHOTO: WILDLY SIMPLE PRODUCTIONS



Green Valley is the only Russian River Valley neighborhood that's also an AVA.



Goldridge soil sits atop clay loam in Emeritus Vineyards' dry-farmed Hallberg Ranch.

in 2018, we had massive amounts of rain and a very large crop around most of the state of California," says Keith Hammond, winemaker at Emeritus Vineyards. "In 2019 there was a bit of a hangover effect, because it was slightly larger than average as well. That's a case where we were greatly advantaged by being estate grown and having a full-time vineyard crew. We can go out into . . . the vineyard whenever we like [to] make sure the crop is thinned properly and the canopy is removed where it needs to be."

The 2020 vintage started out with favorable weather that flowed into spring and summer; but after the Walbridge Fire in August followed by the Glass Fire in September, many winemakers in the RRV feared that smoke exposure had compromised their grapes. Some decided not to harvest, but that wasn't the case for producers in Green Valley. "In general terms, 2020 was an adventure for everyone," says Tom Klassen, winemaker at Patz & Hall. "For us, the weather was pretty good, and it was shaping up to be


a very good vintage. [Vineyard source] Chenoweth Ranch is . . . a warmer island in what's generally a cooler neighborhood. It sits up on a ridgetop and ripens earlier, so we managed to harvest at our desired maturity level before the fires really got going. We didn't see any smoke impact in particular."

Our tasting notes (see above sidebar) cover wines from all three vintages.

The Future

Emerging trends in Green Valley include the use of less oak in Pinot Noir production. Winemakers like Hammond, Klassen, and The Calling's James MacPhail are coming around to the idea that while good oak is important, they may not need as much as they have in the past. "We've found ourselves over the years moving more toward lighter toast and less impactful barrels," says Hammond. "As we've found a better handle on some of our grape-growing and winemaking techniques, we've really been able to coax out the expression we feel is true from

the vineyard. So the last thing we want to do is cover that up with oak that doesn't really speak to it."

They're also keeping a close eye on the climatic changes impacting picking dates, which tend to be getting earlier and earlier. MacPhail notes (as does Hammond) that a big focus is responding each year to what they see in the vineyard. "It's looking at canopy management in the fruit zone and paying close attention to leaf removal and the exposition of sun to the grapes [and] thinking about . . . what parameters we're focusing on when it comes time to make a picking decision," he says. "My particular focus has shifted more toward looking at the level of acidity in the fruit rather than the sugar content. It's just being mindful of and responding to each vintage in terms of what we do in the vineyard and winery." As for Scherrer, keeping an open mind is always key: "I look back at what we've done, [think about] where we'd like to go from there, and [consider] what a different vintage will bring you." 

TASTING NOTES

Emeritus 2020 Hallberg Ranch Pinot Noir, Russian River Valley (\$45) Estate grown, produced, and bottled, this wine exhibits layers of fresh fruit aromas, including savory notes of black cherry, plum, and raspberry, coupled with hints of chocolate and nuts. Smooth on the palate, it features elegant acidity and a strong finish.

Patz & Hall 2020 Chenoweth Ranch Pinot Noir, Russian River Valley (\$60) Exuberant, crisp, and juicy with notes of vivid red fruits like Bing cherry. Vibrant on the palate with hints of earthiness, spice, and black tea.

The Calling 2019 Fox Den Vineyard Pinot Noir, Russian River Valley (\$60) Part of a single-vineyard series, this wine showcases great acidity balanced by complex, layered notes of florals, red fruits, and spices. Medium-bodied, with a lush texture and a lingering, robust finish.

Scherrer 2018 Hallberg Vineyard Pinot Noir, Green Valley (\$78) A wealth of layered aromas and flavors include florals, red berries, and earthy elements like chanterelle mushroom combined with hints of black pepper and other spices. Complex, structured, and balanced.

A Whale of a Time

THE NANTUCKET WINE & FOOD FESTIVAL CELEBRATES 25 YEARS by Wanda Mann

THANKS TO THE Nantucket Wine & Food Festival (NWF), the former whaling capital of the world has gained fame in gastronomic circles for hosting one of the industry's most buzzed-about gatherings. Some of the biggest names in beverage and hospitality and their enthusiastic fans flocked to this small island off the coast of Cape Cod from May 17 to 21 for the festival's 25th anniversary. From grand tastings in harborside tents to intimate dinners in historic homes, Nantucket's many

charms added undeniable chic to the festivities. And the revelry was also for a good cause: The Nantucket Wine & Food Festival Charitable Foundation supports local organizations such as the Nantucket High School Culinary Arts Program. As a first-time attendee and presenter, I was amazed at how many high-profile winemakers, sommeliers, and other industry pros I ran into in Nantucket. I asked a few of them to share their thoughts about the festival; for more information, visit nantucketwinefestival.com.



PHOTO COURTESY OF PAHLMAYER

Pahlmeyer winemaker Katie Vogt pours for a guest at the winery's Nantucket Wine & Food Festival booth.



PHOTO COURTESY OF SANTA MARGHERITA USA

Ca' del Bosco makes an appearance at the festival's Caviar and Bubbles event.

Marika Vida, sommelier and wine edu-

tor: "Nantucket is a place where we wine pros bond! There's a magical beauty about the 'The Gray Lady' [the nickname given to Nantucket because of the gray fog that shrouds the island]. . . I've been somming and presenting for NWF since 2015, and every year I can't wait to connect with my peers and all the fabulous producers that come on island. The camaraderie is intensified because you are all there together, united, to educate the consumer on all things wine!"

Vittorio Marzotto, vice president of strategic initiatives, Santa Margherita USA: "[The NWF] is one of Ca' del Bosco's favorite events in the U.S. market. A standout of the festival is the Caviar and Bubbles event. We team up with Calvisius, [a brand of] caviar sourced just a 30-minute drive from the winery grounds in Italy, to offer a tasting and education of two of the most luxurious indulgences together. During the tasting, we feature three to four species of caviar to pair with three to four types of Franciacorta and highlight the different expressions of each pairing based on classification and aging."

Jennica Ossi, senior manager of public relations, Kobrand Wine & Spirits: "[The NWF] . . . brings together some of the most prestigious wineries from around the globe—Champagne Taittinger, Montes, Cakebread Cellars, Craggy Range—in an intimate setting to learn about high-quality, collectible wines from the winemakers or winery owners. It is a very rare, special moment to be on an island with so many icons of the industry. I still have my 'fangirl' moments after all these years."

Paul Chevalier, vice president, Château d'Esclans at Moët Hennessy USA: "The early days of Whispering Angel in the U.S. actually started in places like the island of Nantucket. It was Sacha Lichine who thought it would be a great place to build a brand. Château d'Esclans was the first dedicated rosé-producing winery to ever be invited to the [NWF] in the spring of 2009. And trust me, there were no other rosés to be found anywhere when I was pouring behind my table at the Grand Tasting event back then; it was mostly reds and a handful of whites and Champagnes. So, flash-forward 15 years to 2023, [and] how times have changed . . ."

Marybeth Bentwood, senior director public relations & strategic communications, Bonterra Organic Estates: "[The NWF] is a gem of a festival nestled on a historic 100-square-mile island. . . This year's event held a special significance as our all-female team showcased Don Melchor and Heritage, our wines hailing from Puente Alto, Chile's most esteemed Cabernet-producing appellation. It was a poignant moment, celebrating our top wines' rich heritage, exceptional quality, and strong female leadership."

Katie Vogt, winemaker, Pahlmeyer: "The [NWF] is a wonderful celebration in a beautiful and elegant setting. I love how the festival highlights local chefs and establishments that help make the island such a special place to be. Connecting with so many people who share my joy of wine is one of the many reasons I look forward to attending each year." **sj**



EXPLORE

Rhône Valley Vineyards

The Rhône Valley is immensely vital to France's wine industry. Running 155 miles north to south, it is the country's second-largest AOC. Come learn about the history, terroir, and winemaking techniques that make this region's wines so unique and beloved.

ACADEMY DU RHÔNE

Attend an educational tasting of Rhône wines to become a Certified Rhône Specialist. Find us in a city near you through our Guidebook. Scan below.



rosés, whites, reds,
sweet wines and
sparkling wines



More than
30 different
AOCs



2,000 family owned
wineries, coops and
trading companies

Hospitality in a bottle

To discover our appellations of controlled origin

rhone-wines.com

 [@rhonevalleyvineyards](https://www.instagram.com/rhonevalleyvineyards)

 [@RhoneValleyVineyards](https://www.facebook.com/RhoneValleyVineyards)



Intergalactic Imbibing

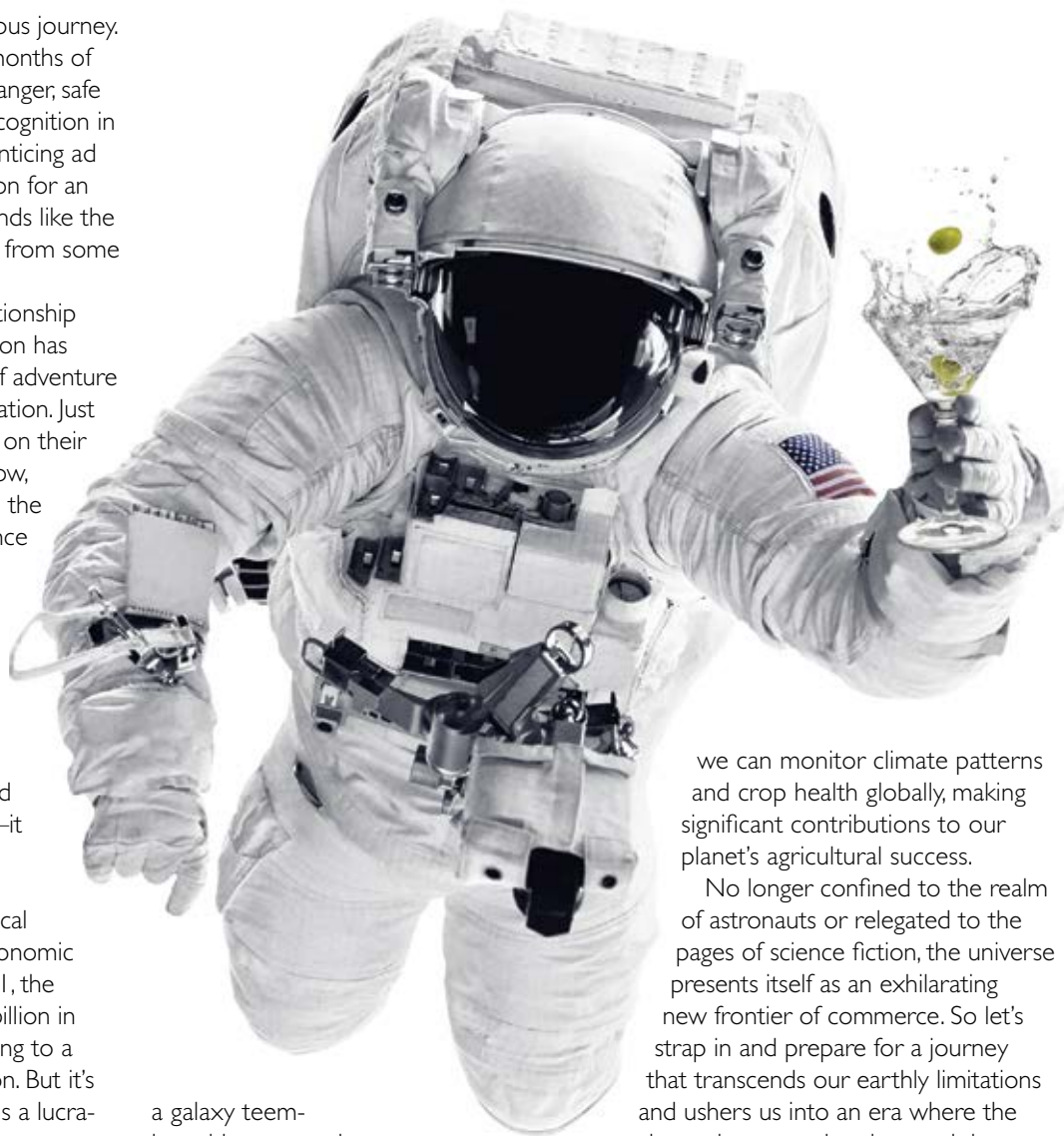
EXPLORING A NEW FRONTIER IN BUSINESS STRATEGY

“MEN WANTED FOR hazardous journey. Small wages, bitter cold, long months of complete darkness, constant danger; safe return doubtful. Honor and recognition in cases of success.” So read an enticing ad from explorer Ernest Shackleton for an expedition to Antarctica—sounds like the type of trip that would benefit from some liquid courage, right?

Throughout history, the relationship between alcohol and exploration has endured, entwining the spirit of adventure with the solace of a familiar libation. Just as the sailors of old embarked on their daring voyages with spirits in tow, today's astronauts venture into the final frontier carrying the essence of our terrestrial indulgences. Picture your future clientele, the intrepid space tourists, savoring an ultra-premium tequila while beholding the enchanting cosmic ballet from an otherworldly space bar. This transcendent experience would go beyond mere exhilaration—it would be an irreplaceable, life-altering encounter.

Let's examine the astronomical figures that underscore the economic gravity of our endeavor. In 2021, the space industry reached \$469 billion in annual global spending, according to a report by the Space Foundation. But it's not just a flash in the pan; this is a lucrative field that's only gaining momentum. With projections from global consulting firm McKinsey & Company forecasting the space industry's worth to potentially grow to \$1 trillion by 2030, it's a sector rife with abundant business opportunities for innovative trailblazers. Imagine harnessing just a fraction of this market, forging a galactic network of imbibers, and forever changing the way we experience our beloved spirits.

Yet our ambitions extend far beyond the realm of space tourism. We envision



a galaxy teeming with untapped business opportunities, from celestial hotels that defy gravity to cutting-edge agricultural systems that revolutionize farming practices. Our pursuit is not solely for the sake of venturing into the unknown; it is a commitment to harnessing the power of space for the betterment of our home planet. For alcohol production, at its core, is an agricultural act that involves the meticulous growth of crops on a grand scale. By leveraging satellite technology,

we can monitor climate patterns and crop health globally, making significant contributions to our planet's agricultural success.

No longer confined to the realm of astronauts or relegated to the pages of science fiction, the universe presents itself as an exhilarating new frontier of commerce. So let's strap in and prepare for a journey that transcends our earthly limitations and ushers us into an era where the universe is our marketplace and the stars are our audience. *sj*

Colleen McLeod Garner is director of sales—West at Casa Azul Spirits and the founder of Intergalactic Imbibing LLC. Armed with an MBA in global innovation, an amalgamation of alcohol (including WSET Level 3) and space-industry certifications (Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Arizona State University, etc.), and a treasure trove of practical experience, she will soon unveil her new book on space agriculture.

FAMIGLIA
ZONIN[®]

- DAL 1821 -



ZONE-IN[™]

ON THE MOMENT

Blending 200 years of quality with a modern twist, upgrade life's everyday moments with Zonin[®] Prosecco. Whether you're celebrating special moments or indulging in the soft citrus notes for aperitifs, cocktail mixers and food pairings, our Prosecco inspires you to Zone-In[™] on the moments that matter most. Cheers!



2023 © ZONIN USA, INC. AVENTURA, FL



CAMPAGNA FINANZIATA AI SENSI
DEL REG. UE N. 1308/2013
CAMPAIGN FINANCED ACCORDING
TO EU REG. NO. 1308/2013

www.zoninusa.com



@zoninusa

Sicily Makes a Statement

THE ISLAND PLAYS AN ESSENTIAL ROLE IN ITALY'S ENOLOGICAL GREATNESS

DESPITE ITS DISTINCTIVE CULTURE,

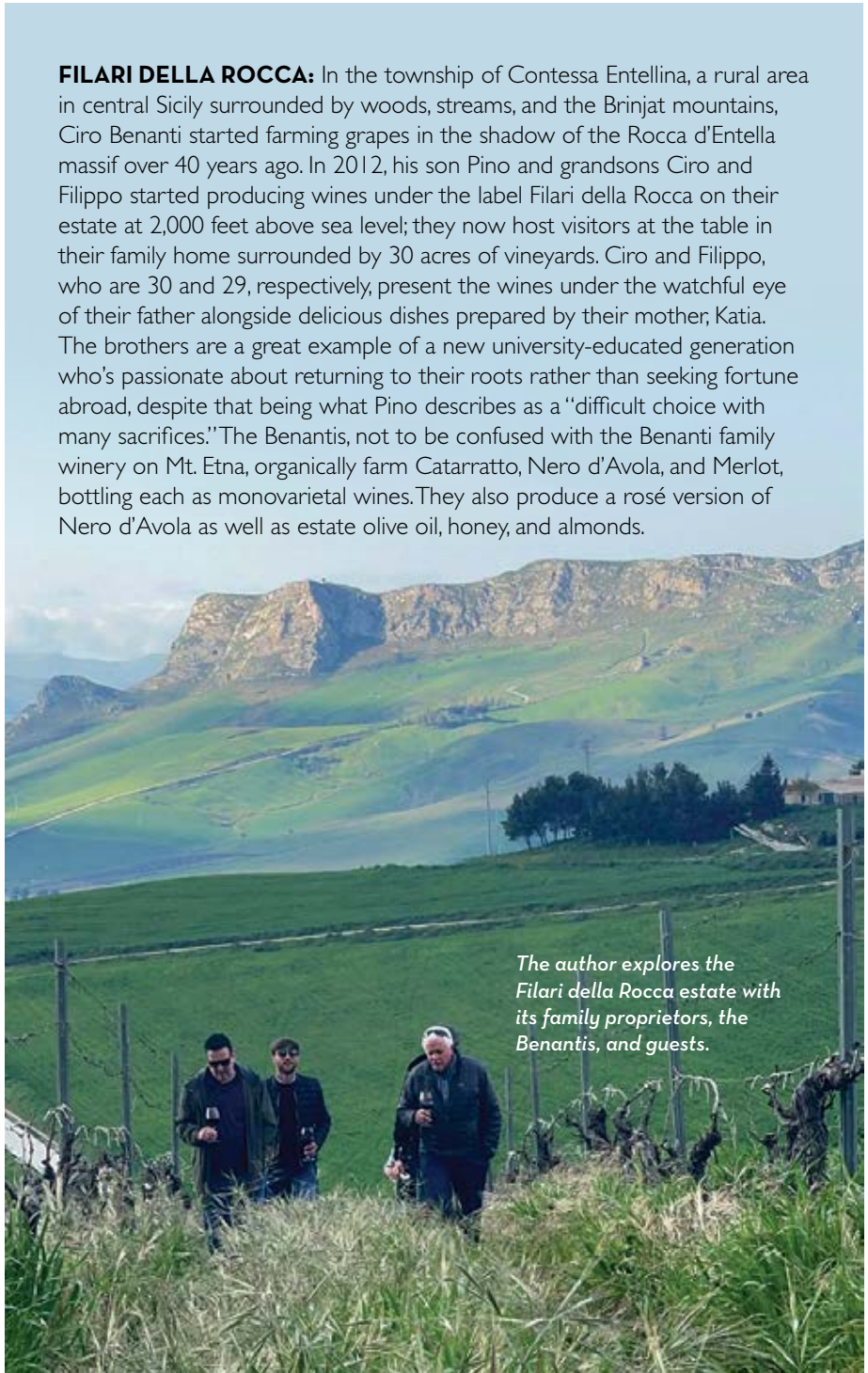
the island of Sicily is undeniably Italian—a fact that many of the country's residents still like to deny. To say that it's an ongoing dispute would be an understatement: Back in the 18th century, German literary figure Johann Wolfgang von Goethe nailed it when he said that “to have seen Italy without having seen Sicily is not to have seen Italy at all, for Sicily is the clue to everything.”

To a great extent, that statement can be applied to the world of Italian wine. Like each of Italy's “20 regions in search of a country,” as my late friend Filippo di Belardino liked to describe them, Sicily brings its own terroir and indigenous grape varieties—not to mention a wine-making history that dates back over four millennia—to the equation to help Italy's whole add up to more than the sum of its parts. It's now the country's third-largest wine-producing region—but you would be hard-pressed to realize it from looking at any given Italian wine list in the U.S. or, for that matter, mainland Italy.

That's largely because many Sicilian wines had for decades been pipelined to Northern Italy and France, where they played a role in beefing up lighter wines from cooler regions. Only relatively recently have the indigenous varieties of Sicily started to gain recognition, and not just because critics finally got around to discovering its wines: It's mostly because Sicilians themselves have taken matters into hand by raising their profiles on the world wine stage. Big names like Donnafugata, Planeta, Florio, and Tornatore are placing renewed focus on quality and craftsmanship, while small family growers who once sold off their fruit are now producing their own artisan labels.

Touring Sicily this past March, I found some great examples of the latter from three remote corners of the island.

FILARI DELLA ROCCA: In the township of Contessa Entellina, a rural area in central Sicily surrounded by woods, streams, and the Brinjat mountains, Ciro Benanti started farming grapes in the shadow of the Rocca d'Entella massif over 40 years ago. In 2012, his son Pino and grandsons Ciro and Filippo started producing wines under the label Filari della Rocca on their estate at 2,000 feet above sea level; they now host visitors at the table in their family home surrounded by 30 acres of vineyards. Ciro and Filippo, who are 30 and 29, respectively, present the wines under the watchful eye of their father alongside delicious dishes prepared by their mother, Katia. The brothers are a great example of a new university-educated generation who's passionate about returning to their roots rather than seeking fortune abroad, despite that being what Pino describes as a “difficult choice with many sacrifices.” The Benantis, not to be confused with the Benanti family winery on Mt. Etna, organically farm Catarratto, Nero d'Avola, and Merlot, bottling each as monovarietal wines. They also produce a rosé version of Nero d'Avola as well as estate olive oil, honey, and almonds.



The author explores the Filari della Rocca estate with its family proprietors, the Benantis, and guests.


PHOTOS COURTESY OF LARS LEICHT



Enjoying a spread with the wines of Riofavara: Seated from left to right are Jim Williams, Carol Williams, author Lars Leicht, Jay Bileti, and Lynn Bileti; standing is Riofavara proprietor Massimo Padova.

RIOFAVARA: In the Val di Noto area in Sicily's southeast corner, Massimo Padova represents another generational story of grape growers becoming winemakers. His wife, Margherita, and daughter Clementina smooth out his self-admitted rough edges on the hospitality side, but under his gruff façade, Padova oozes passion for what he calls the "territorial" wines that he has been producing since 1994. He too farms organically and produces eight still wines, a sparkler, and a dessert wine in his small but orderly facility. His flagship expressions, bone-dry Moscato Giallo and Nero d'Avola, are excellent, but most intriguing are his blends using obscure varieties that he cloned from 150-plus-year-old vines. Nsajàr is a white made with Recunu, Cutrera, and Rucignola, while the red San Basilio blends Nero d'Avola with Surra, Pignatieddu, Orisi, Vitarolo, and Niuru-ruossu. Situated at 130–300 meters above sea level, Padova's two vineyard sources are made up of fine soils that encourage drainage and benefit from sea breezes that endow the wines with acidity and salinity.

PALARI: An architect by trade, Salvatore Geraci has a reputation for meticulously restoring historic buildings in Sicily. That said, he's a wine producer by vocation, responsible for restoring a wine denomination that was on the brink of extinction: the Faro DOC. Its wines are made with the same principal grapes—Nerello Mascalese and Nerello Cappuccio—as the now-acclaimed red wines of Etna, but it's located about 75 miles northeast toward the Strait of Messina, also at a high altitude but with sandy soil as opposed to Etna's black lava soils. The resulting wine is arguably more elegant and allegedly predates that of Etna, but farming challenges and changing preferences led to a sharp decline a few decades ago. By the 1980s, Faro's production was about one-tenth of its peak in the 18th century, relying on just a few producers, and the wine was on the brink of oblivion. In 1994, an Italian wine-magazine publisher convinced Geraci to convert his grandparents' villa into a winery and make wine from their historic vineyard. The results were stellar, and while there are still fewer than a dozen producers, Faro maintains a firm role as an ambassador of Sicilian winemaking excellence thanks to expressions like Palari's pair of offerings: a Palari Faro DOC and a Rosso del Soprano IGT.

Sicily may not be a literal microcosm of Italy, but with its unique indigenous varieties and passionate family winemakers, it does indeed provide the clue to everything that is great about Italian wine. 



Lars Leicht with Palari owner Salvatore Geraci, who's responsible for helping to revive the Faro DOC.



THE SOMM Journey

PHOTOS COURTESY OF STONE EDGE FARM



Stone Edge Farm proprietors Leslie and Mac McQuown.

On the Edge of Glory

MAC MCQUOWN'S STONE EDGE FARM WINES ARE HEAVENLY

EARNING A MECHANICAL ENGINEERING degree from Northwestern University and an MBA at Harvard was just the beginning of Mac McQuown's accomplishments. In 1970, McQuown co-founded the Chalone Wine Group, serving on its board of directors for 25 years, and in 1980, he co-created Carmenet Vineyards. So any project of his is sure to be noteworthy—and the latest certainly is. Along with winemaker Alejandro Zimman and renowned Sonoma Valley organic grape grower Phil Coturri, McQuown is on the edge of glory with Stone Edge Farm Vineyards and Winery as well as the estate's EDGE Restaurant, slated to reopen later this year with menus inspired by the seasonality of the organic farm on Carriger Road that serves as the McQuown family residence and of the surrounding area.

In addition to the farm and the restaurant, Stone Edge Farm also encompasses two vineyards in the Moon Mountain District on the west side of the Mayacamas mountain range: Silver Cloud and Mount Pisgah. Structured for extended aging, its earth-conscious wines are constructed in the Bordeaux style. **SJ**



Stone Edge Farm 2021 Sauvignon Blanc, Moon Mountain District, Sonoma Valley (\$50)

Joined by 24% Sémillon, this wine aged on the lees for nine months in

225-liter (25% new) French oak barrels. Aromas of mandarin orange and lychee are arousing, and mouth-coating flavors of chamomile, powdered marshmallow, and crisp pear are balanced by a thread of taut acidity. A whisper of sandalwood leaves behind an incense of honeyed peach and herbes de Provence along with grapefruit bitters. **93**



Stone Edge Farm 2019 Surround, Sonoma Valley (\$95)

In this masterful blend of 82% Cabernet Sauvignon and 18% Cabernet Franc, boysenberry follows a

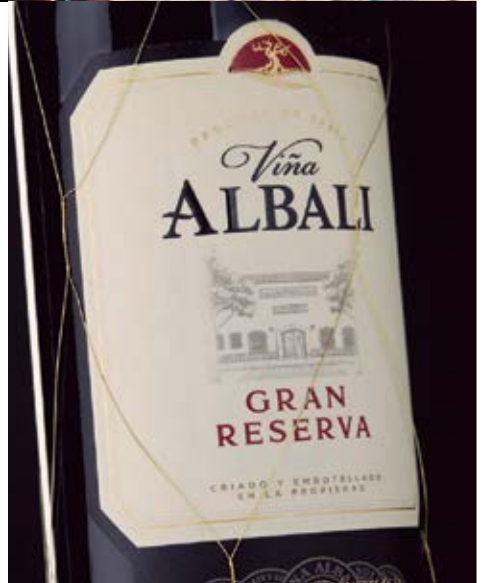
path of white-peppered cedar and tart pomegranate. Lavender and balsamic appear on the midpalate, creating a divine line between savoriness and florality. **96**



Stone Edge Farm 2019 Cabernet Sauvignon, Sonoma Valley (\$130)

This juicy blend of valley floor and mountain fruit, including 2% Cab Franc and 1% Malbec,

rested in mostly new 225-liter French oak barrels for 22 months. Chewy and fleshy, it's a liquid statement that exudes plush tannins and generous notes of blackberry, dark chocolate, espresso, cinnamon, and cedar within an elegant, silky mouthfeel: What a delicious journey. **95**





PHOTOS: KENT LEUTZEN, GLOWOW NEAD COMMUNICATIONS

San Francisco restaurateur and author Shelley Lindgren with vintner Joey Wolosz of Napa's Gentleman Farmer Wines.

Turning the Tables

IN WHICH THE WINEMAKER ASKS THE QUESTIONS

THE SOMM JOURNAL is known for our interviews with winemakers, but now we're turning the tables: This time, Joey Wolosz, the winemaker and tastemaker behind Gentleman Farmer Wines, is interviewing one of San Francisco's most lauded restaurateurs, Shelley Lindgren, who has managed to weather some of the city's most challenging storms at her restaurant and wine bar, A16.

Lindgren's third book, *Italian Wine: The History, Regions, and Grapes of an Iconic Wine Country*, was co-written with Kate Leahy and is set to publish on August 29; around that time, The Gentleman Farmer's tasting salon, formally called The Bungalow: A Studio for Gustatory Well

Being, will be close to opening in downtown Napa. There, Wolosz and his partner, vintner Jeff Durham, will host private multicourse lunch tastings they'll prepare from scratch—just as they currently do out of their own home for industry professionals, wine club members, and other guests.

Q: Joey Wolosz: To us winemakers, restaurants require the hardest work. We bow down to you guys.

Shelley Lindgren: Well, you and your husband would know! We've known each other since Jeff was my manager at Left Bank Brasserie [the Bay Area restaurant that Lindgren and Durham helped to

open in the mid-1990s]. I remember Jeff always had a brisk pace on the floor and he, you know, threw his tie over [his] shoulder and things [laughing]. I'm sure it's the same way when you guys host your famous wine lunches.

Q: Our Napa lunches are hopefully a bit more relaxed! So much has changed since our early days in restaurants. Have you observed any recent trends that might actually stick around?

In terms of wine, everyone seems to be gravitating toward lower alcohol. We also get a lot of requests for wines with some skin contact. You see it more and more often with the younger generations.

Q: Do you see that influencing the wines that come through your door?

Winemakers are picking up on this evolving consumer palate for sure. My focus is still on Italy, but there are so many more grapes being planted now in California, and there's definitely a growing pool of varieties like Vermentino now being grown in previously Chardonnay-dominant regions like Carneros. We're starting to see more blends being made as well.

Q: Yes, we love a good blend, especially with our cooking backgrounds. One ingredient can get kind of boring, but once you start to blend, that's when the flavor possibilities

start to become really interesting.

I love your Gentleman Farmer Red Wine blend.

Q: Thank you! When people talk about the iconic restaurants in San Francisco, A16 is right up there with Zuni and the best of them. What do you think defines a restaurant as iconic or classic?

I think it's about being an original, never a cover band, you know? When we first started, no one in the city was doing pizza like we were. We'd done the research in Southern Italy and tried to honor those traditions—like this macaronara pasta we're enjoying, which is always on the menu. It's a Neapolitan ragu, and we got



"I think [a restaurant's success is] about being an original, never a cover band, you know?" says Lindgren.



this recipe from a chef in the hills outside of Avellino, in a town called Nusco. He's still there, and he permitted us to use it and sends people our way. We're not trying to pretend we invented this, but we're always learning and sharing.

In the same vein, I didn't realize I was solely focusing on the wines of South[ern] Italy when we first opened. I didn't know it was such an unknown region to everyone else!

Q: Speaking of, you just wrote your third book!

Yes! It's a more general overview on Italian wine. It covers the history of Italy as well as some exciting tidbits that are still being discovered. There's always something new. Even yesterday, I heard about a new white grape being grown inside the actual walls of Pompeii which, up until a few years ago, was mistaken for a grape called Coda di Volpe. They realized it's a new variety, so they're calling it Pompeii now. I actually met the winemaker yesterday; he was here from Campania. He makes just 1,000 bottles of this wine. In the end, A16 somehow now has the only eight bottles that made it to the U.S. *sj*

Lindgren's new book, Italian Wine: The History, Regions, and Grapes of an Iconic Wine Country, is a nod to her own experiences and discoveries in Italy as well as an overview of its history and wine culture.

{ winery spotlight }

For the Love of
SCIENCE *and*
**SAUVIGNON
BLANC**

**NEW ZEALAND'S LOVEBLOCK
EXEMPLIFIES THE EVOLUTION OF
THE ORGANIC WINE CATEGORY**

*Erica Crawford is founder and CEO of
New Zealand winery Loveblock.*

by Lars Leicht

A friend who is a physician and therefore considers himself a scientist once observed that winemaking and hard science have much in common—but that the latter is significantly simpler. “In science,” he told me, “if you want more information you just kill more rats, [figuratively speaking]. In wine, you have to wait years for vineyards to develop and wines to age to find out if you got it right.”

I was reminded of that sentiment in a recent conversation with another scientist, Erica Crawford, founder and CEO of New Zealand winery Loveblock. The South Africa native’s first job was as a research scientist at the University of Cape Town’s Ischaemic Heart Research Unit, followed by a stint as a pharmaceutical sales rep. But the research she conducted in her free time was of the more vinous type: If you live near a winemaking region like Stellenbosch, you’re bound to follow the wine trail, as she did. That path led her to a wine festival atop Paarl Mountain, where she discovered some very good New Zealand wines—and the love of her life.

Winemaker Kim Crawford (yes, that one) charmed Erica into following him back to New Zealand, where they had two children over the course of 13 months while hatching a business plan for an eponymous wine brand (again, that one) that would arguably shape the reputation of the Kiwi wine industry as a whole. They were a dynamic duo: He made the wine, she did the marketing, and together they introduced much of the world to New Zealand Sauvignon Blanc. “It was hard work, a hard slog,” she recalls of the days they spent building both a brand and a category in the U.S. market. “We built it one restaurant call at a time, just the two of us on a limited budget. We were young and stupid, and we did it because it was there.”

Kim’s winemaking style—“forward and fruity and emphatically varietal,” as Erica describes it—set a benchmark for New Zealand Sauvignon Blanc that succeeded beyond even their expectations. Within seven years, the brand was bought out, and it remains a market leader under current owner Constellation Brands.

Suddenly, Kim and Erica were no longer affiliated with the wine brand that bears their name—an odd position to be in, notes Erica. And a temporary non-compete clause forced them into what she calls an “enforced brain rest” to contemplate their next step.

In due time, Kim returned to winemaking as a consultant, and Erica returned to wine marketing while becoming a grape grower for the first time with the 2004 purchase of a dormant 460-acre farm high above Marlborough and Cook Strait, which separates New Zealand’s South and North islands; she felt that while Kim had always had the winemaking part nailed down, viticulture was their “one soft spot,” and undertaking it could help them get a lock on the entire process. Now, she sees her



PHOTOS COURTESY OF LOVEBLOCK



In 2004, Crawford purchased her first property, a 460-acre farm high above Marlborough and Cook Strait.

Sauvignon Blanc is a primary focus of Loveblock.

resulting Loveblock brand as more than just a personal venture. “We always knew we were going to do Loveblock,” she says. “It is an evolution for us as well as [for] Sauvignon Blanc in Marlborough.”

The name Loveblock was inspired by the labor of love that is tending a block of vines, as a vineyard plot is called down under: “If we were into it for the money, we certainly wouldn’t be doing this,” says Erica. “The growing terrain is incredibly challenging. We planted grapes where nobody has planted grapes before. It’s windy, with difficult soil. We initially managed [the winemaking] just like we did [using fruit from] the valley floor, because we didn’t know [better].” Despite the steep learning curve, requiring time to “observe and learn,” in her words, the Crawfords are now very satisfied winegrowers.

Indeed, today Erica calls herself “more of a farmer than a winemaker or marketer.” A big part of that shift, she explains, was the move to organic viticulture, a reflection of her own life choices. Long ago, she became a vegetarian in reaction to the smell of lab animals she was working with as a research scientist; during the stressful days of brand building and child rearing, she also found that an organics-based diet, skin-care routine, and household-cleaning regimen made her feel better physically.

“So we didn’t just one day decide on organics because the market wanted it—it really didn’t,” she recalls. “It’s not as profitable, and it’s bloody hard! But it was the logical next step for us to go into organics” (as well as into vegan production, inspired by their daughter). She adds that she believes the market is more ready for organics today than it was five years ago: “It’s been a long road, but finally I can see the demand for organics; it’s about what’s in the bottle, how a company conducts itself, and how it treats its people.”



Phacelia is used as a cover crop in Loveblock’s vineyards.

For a wine to be certified organic in the U.S. and some other markets, it must not contain added sulfites. That presented a challenge for Erica the scientist. “If you don’t add sulfites, 60% to 80% of the wine is going to oxidize,” she points out. While tannins can act in their place as a preservative and antioxidant, Sauvignon Blanc does not have enough natural tannins to serve that function, and deriving tannins from the aging process wasn’t an option since Erica didn’t intend to put the wine in oak.

Instead, she found a solution in what many wine educators use to relate tannins to consumers: tea. “We found that the tannin extracted from green tea leaves also provides powerful protection against oxidation

and spoilage,” she says, noting that the secret is knowing how to best extract those tannins (with steam) and how to best apply them (in small doses every time the wine is racked and exposed to oxygen). Turns out she’s quite happy with the results.

“Non-sulfite wines are softer; their flavors more subtle,” she points out, describing Loveblock’s expressions as “more interesting, quieter in flavor and structure,” and more food-friendly than your typical Marlborough Sauvignon Blanc. “The soil has a lot to do with it—there are so many microbiomes in a single vineyard, and that gives us the texture we seek. It’s not big; it doesn’t announce itself upon entering your nose and palate; it makes you go back and look for more. It’s more on the floral side, with peach, pineapple, even a little basil on the edge.”

Erica encourages sommeliers to “not be scared of age in [New Zealand] Sauvignon Blanc,” especially if it’s organically made. “It takes a little longer to show [its] true nature. I think we tend to drink Sauvignon Blanc a bit too early—just when the flavors start to come into their own, we move to a new vintage,” she says.

In addition to Sauvignon Blanc, Loveblock has had notable success with its Pinot Gris and Pinot Noir, also both made organically—the former in a drier style than is typical, the latter in a fuller style compared to many New Zealand Pinot Noirs. Loveblock’s Pinot Noir comes from an estate vineyard further south in Central Otago, a warmer area that yields wines of “greater intensity . . . with ripe flavors [and] a nice mushroomy/umami texture on the palate.” She describes the property, planted in 2008, as “still young, but it has gotten to the stage where now it is ready.”

Still, Erica’s focus is clearly on Sauvignon Blanc, even if she sees it in a different light than she did when she was building the Kim Crawford brand. “This project,” she says of Loveblock, “has made me fall in love with Sauvignon Blanc all over again.”

Sounds like Erica Crawford the scientist has come to terms with Erica Crawford the wine lover and grape farmer. **SJ**

TASTING NOTES



Loveblock 2022 Sauvignon Blanc, Marlborough, New Zealand (\$33)

A treat for the senses, starting with a nosing of garden flowers and herbs. The salty entry lights up the palate, humming with notes of just-squeezed lime, honeyed pear, and white flower petals as well as a buzz of piercing acidity. Lemongrass surfaces midway with nuances of gooseberry and sweet basil. The effect is perky and bright atop a steely mineral foundation. **93** —*Meridith May*



Loveblock 2021 tee Sauvignon Blanc, Marlborough, New Zealand (\$35)

With the addition of green-tea tannin extracts instead of sulfur, this single-vineyard, certified-organic white is unique and noteworthy. The extracts provide protection against oxidation and spoilage, and while the color is a bit deeper than that of most Sauv Blancs, the flavor profile remains fresh and harmonious. On the nose, a perfume of chamomile, orange, clove, and papaya sets the stage for an arrestingly succulent palate, whose silky entry and creamy mouthfeel meet racy acidity amid a wash of honey, lemon meringue, thyme, and, yes, green tea that coincides with salty minerality. Bravo! **94** —*M.M.*



Loveblock 2022 Pinot Gris, Marlborough, New Zealand (\$39)

This wine’s brilliance lies in its freshness. Aromas of lime sorbet, green tea, and honeydew lead to crystalline minerality before notes of lemon drop and peach blossom join an ever-present saltiness that keeps the palate salivating. A juicy bite of crisp Asian pear graces the finish. **94** —*M.M.*



Loveblock 2021 Pinot Noir, Central Otago, New Zealand (\$41)

Long, lingering aromas and flavors of soil and sauteed mushroom are rife with plum and black cherry, while hints of tobacco are laced with roses and heather. Bold and savory, with a cinnamon-mocha finish. **93** —*M.M.*

DUKE 
Jim Wolfe
TIMELESS SPIRITS

MADE FROM CHARACTER



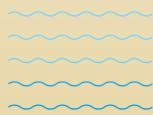
FOLLOW @DUKESPIRITS
WWW.DUKESPIRITS.COM

BUY DUKE SPIRITS



{ cover story }

THE
Pacific's
**CALLING
CARD**



**SAN SIMEON EMBODIES
THE ELEGANCE OF THE
CENTRAL COAST**

BY MARCI SYMINGTON



PHOTOS COURTESY OF RIBOLI FAMILY WINES

Riboli's Sarmento Vineyard in the Santa Lucia Highlands of Monterey.



Riboli Family Wines fourth-generation winemaker Anthony Riboli.

Riboli Family Wines, a distinguished family-run winery with a rich history spanning over 100 years in California, introduced its San Simeon label in 1992 to highlight the unique characteristics of the Central Coast. In addition to its dramatic scenery and the grandeur of Hearst Castle, the area is known as wine country that benefits from a combination of a Mediterranean climate and diverse soils. The warm days and cool nights, along with the influence of the Pacific Ocean, create ideal conditions for growing a variety of grapes, while a mix of limestone, shale, and granite adds complexity and a distinct character to the wines. Nearly three decades after its initial launch, San Simeon Wines continues to capture the essence of the region not only through an award-winning portfolio but also through updated and refined packaging, a new tasting room scheduled to open in 2024,

and other initiatives designed to enhance the consumer experience.

The Ribolis' history in the industry stretches back to 1917, when Santo Cambianica, an immigrant from Lombardy, Italy, established San Antonio Winery in Los Angeles and began producing sacramental wines for local churches during Prohibition. Eventually, his nephew, Stefano Riboli, and Stefano's wife, Maddalena, became the second-generation leaders of the company and formed Riboli Family Wines. By the 1980s, they had seized the opportunity to expand beyond Southern California and acquired vineyards in emerging wine regions further up the coast.

Fast-forward to the present, and Riboli Family Wines has continued to grow and innovate while remaining true to its humble beginnings (for instance, San Antonio Winery is still thriving in its original location and has become a popular landmark in the process). Under the leadership of third-generation president/CEO

Steve Riboli and officer of the board/fourth-generation winemaker Anthony Riboli, the family is investing in winemaking facilities and sustainable vineyard-management practices not only to ensure the production of high-quality wines but also to provide a variety of styles and price points to consumers through labels such as Maddalena (the namesake of the family matriarch), Highlands 41, Riboli Family Vineyard, Windstream, Opaque, and the organically farmed Jada Vineyard and Winery.

And then there's the aforementioned San Simeon. Having purchased grapes from Paso Robles for several decades, the family started putting down roots there in 2010, when they acquired and began planting the Stefano Vineyard, aptly named for the second-generation patriarch who led the expansion into the Central Coast. This magical area along the California coast proved to be ripe for developing a portfolio of wines of various styles.



Harvesttime at Riboli Family Winemaking and Event Center in Paso Robles.

San Simeon Wines is named for a coastal town situated on Highway 1 that lies equidistant from Los Angeles and San Francisco—approximately 240 miles in either direction. Anthony says that the name is “the embodiment of the rugged coastline,” referencing the majestic vertical cliffs that stand as testament to the sheer power of the ocean. “It is the Pacific Ocean that creates a specific terroir in Paso Robles,” he notes. “Without the wind and the fog that are generated from the Pacific, we would not have the right climate for growing grapes.”

Anthony is also quick to point out that the area around Paso Robles is characterized by calcareous soils, which have a significant impact on the landscape and its vegetation. “The receding oceans created the calcareous soils [that] are so unique to Paso Robles and [that] define the terroir,” he says. In addition to facilitating excellent drainage and providing a high concentration of nutrients, the mineral composition of the soils imparts distinct flavors and complexity to the grapes, a further testament to the influence of the sea.

The power of the Pacific is reflected in new packaging: The San Simeon label now features an elegant gold trident embossed against a white background on which the brand name appears in a rich navy blue. The former label, depicting rocky cliffs and a lighthouse that’s considered to be one of the area’s main attractions, referenced the coastline but was not representative of the wines themselves, explains Anthony, whereas “the trident, as a symbol of Neptune/Poseidon, reflects the influence of the ocean on the wine itself.”

San Simeon’s portfolio encompasses several varieties that showcase the unique qualities of the California Central Coast from Paso Robles to Monterey. Each one is 100% estate grown from certified-sustainable vineyards and crafted by Anthony and his winemaking team, including Marty Spate. Says Anthony, “We split the San Simeon wines between two climates . . .

[and are] able to offer different varieties, making sure those varieties are grown in the best possible location for their volume.” For instance, San Simeon’s Pinot Noir and Chardonnay draw from the cooler climates of the Santa Lucia Highlands and Arroyo Seco sub-AVAs in Monterey. Aged for ten months in neutral and new French barrels, the Pinot Noir offers luscious red-fruit flavors of cherry, rhubarb, and raspberry. The Chardonnay, which also benefits from ten months of aging in French and American oak, shows bright tropical fruit that leads to vanilla and oak spice. The warmer region of Paso Robles, meanwhile, is excellent for Cabernet Sauvignon—as showcased by the San Simeon Cabernet Sauvignon, San Simeon Reserve Cabernet Sauvignon, and San Simeon Stormwatch—and also yields Sauvignon Blanc, Petite Sirah, Merlot, and Rhône varieties such as Syrah, Viognier, and Grenache (the latter of which is used for rosé). While Paso’s diverse terroir lends itself to experimentation with different varieties, Riboli places high priority on growing Cabernet Sauvignon in what



is now considered the fastest-growing region in California for the variety.

Made with 10% Petit Verdot and aged 18 months in French and American barrels, the San Simeon Cabernet Sauvignon shows well-balanced acidity with flavors of blackberry and black cherry, while the Reserve Cabernet Sauvignon is more complex, with nuances of ripe dark plum and blackberry giving way to spices and dark chocolate. And the brand's premium Bordeaux blend, Stormwatch, is a rich blend of Cabernet Sauvignon, Petit Verdot, Merlot, Cabernet Franc, and Malbec that's aged 18 months in new and neutral French oak to impart notes of ripe black currant, plum, blackberry, spice, and dark chocolate.

Recognizing the need to meet consumer demand through sustainable methods, the Riboli family opened a state-of-the-art winery in Paso Robles in 2016. The 100% solar-powered facility captures rainwater and treats reclaimed wastewater with bio generators for reuse in vineyard irrigation; to date, it has recycled more than 1 million gallons. Additionally, the family recently announced their plans



to open a new tasting room in 2024: Located on Vineyard Drive in the upscale Willow Creek District, it will showcase San Simeon as a standalone brand. "It represents our evolution [as a company], as the wines from San Simeon continue to score well, and consumers are loving them," Anthony notes. "We want to take

it to the next level and offer reserve-level wines at higher price points. The tasting room itself is going to give [the brand] a real sense of place and identity. . . . It is [a way] to make people feel connected to the wines, [which is] a big part of what consumers want today."

In addition to reflecting their goal of growing brand awareness via an investment in customer experience, this development is a clear indication of the Riboli family's desire to increase their presence in the Paso Robles area, which has traditionally attracted tourism from the Central Valley, Los Angeles, and the Bay Area. And now that there are direct flights from Phoenix, Seattle, Denver, and Dallas, says Anthony, Paso "continues to grow—it has this incredible buzz . . . [as well as] a great following and will only continue to expand."

The Riboli family's century-long history in the industry, their commitment to quality and sustainability, and their proficiency in adapting to changing times have contributed to their success and recognition as one of California's prominent wine families. Anthony believes that San Simeon in particular is a great example of their ability to thrive in emerging markets while investing in the future. This is in line with the family motto: *Sempre avanti*, which translates from the Italian as "Always looking forward." "I see San Simeon continuing to grow as a brand," he asserts. "It is all about nurturing the experience and connecting [with consumers]. There is no doubt San Simeon is going to be a big priority for our family." SJ



Riboli Creston Vineyard in the Creston District of Paso Robles.



*Ettore
winemaker Sofia
Rivier.*



PHOTO: LAURANESS

Ettore Blossoms in Hopland

ON MY RECENT VISIT to Ettore, Sofia Rivier, a third-generation winemaker from Argentina, drew a tank sample of 2022 Chardonnay from the organic vineyard in Hopland, California, that captivated her boss, Ettore Biraghi, back in 2018. Flush with a carpet of clover, it lies one meager fence away from a very eager donkey. As we pondered the clarity and precision of the wine, he ventured a well-aimed chomp at my companion Bernadette, braying with delight. Thankfully, he spared her wine glass: Made without oak or sulfur and filled with the essence of brilliant sunshine, this was Chardonnay at its purest.

All of Ettore's wines are organic. The 2019 PURE Chardonnay is sassy, with lime, grapefruit, and a lemony-fresh finish. The 2019 Reserve Chardonnay is viscous,

with notes of mango pudding, brioche, and wild thyme. Biraghi's favorite, the 2019 Merlot, features black cherry and exotic spice, while the 2019 Signature Cabernet weaves sandalwood, cherry, olive, rosemary, cassia, and leather into a tapestry of pure silk.

Rivier began working for fourth-generation winegrower Jim Milone, whose family planted this bucolic vineyard decades ago, on a brand called Terra Savia in 2018. An organic olive mill as well as a winery, the site is now owned by Jurg Fischer, whose love of art in addition to wine and olive oil makes for one eclectic tasting room. Biraghi, the son of flower growers from Virese, Italy, had been making wine in Switzerland when he discovered the idyllic Mendocino spot. It was love at first

sight. He partnered with Fischer and built the new Ettore winery, recently importing a state-of-the-art Italian bottling line for both wine and olive oil.

Fittingly, their joint venture is called Olivino. "It's like a microcosm of the world," says Sofia, "[We're] all [different] ages and nationalities. They have such heart and passion. Our brands coexist, but our styles are different. There is such freedom and respect here in Mendocino. It annoys me that Mendocino isn't better known."

Maybe that outspoken donkey, whose name happens to be Washington, can assist. —*Laura Ness*

Patience Makes the Grenache Go Foudre

ON THE RELEASE OF LINNE CALODO'S THREE-YEAR **LEVEL HEADED** PROJECT

PASO ROBLES IS EXPERIENCING rapid growth and recognition—and Linne Calodo is having a moment too. Established in 1998 by Matt and Maureen Trevisan, the winery made its name as a pioneer of Rhône varieties and Zinfandel blends in the region.

Named after the calcareous soils ubiquitous to the Willow Creek District, where it's located, Linne Calodo recently introduced the inaugural vintage of Level Headed, an estate-grown Grenache that aged for 36 months in a French oak foudre. It's the first new item in the winery's lineup in more than five years.

"I finally took a breath, sat back, and decided to watch the beauty that evolves from aging a wine longer in one of these foudres," says Matt. "Cellaring a wine in wood for three years isn't an efficient business practice, but there was no other way to achieve my concept for this wine."

The Grenache was pressed into a 2,700-liter concrete tank and topped with Syrah, which brings enhanced breadth and body to the wine. In April following harvest, the blend was racked to the 3,000-liter foudre to undergo its extended maturation. —*Meridith May* **SP**



Linne Calodo 2019 Level Headed, Willow Creek District, Paso Robles (\$95) This wine hails from the steep Gabbi's Block in the Linne Calodo estate's Stonethrower Vineyard, located just 10 miles from the ocean at an elevation of 1,350 feet. Inspiring aromas of mulberry jam, tomato leaf, and cinnamon sugar precede vibrant notes of spiced sandalwood, underbrush, ginger, and wild strawberry. **94**



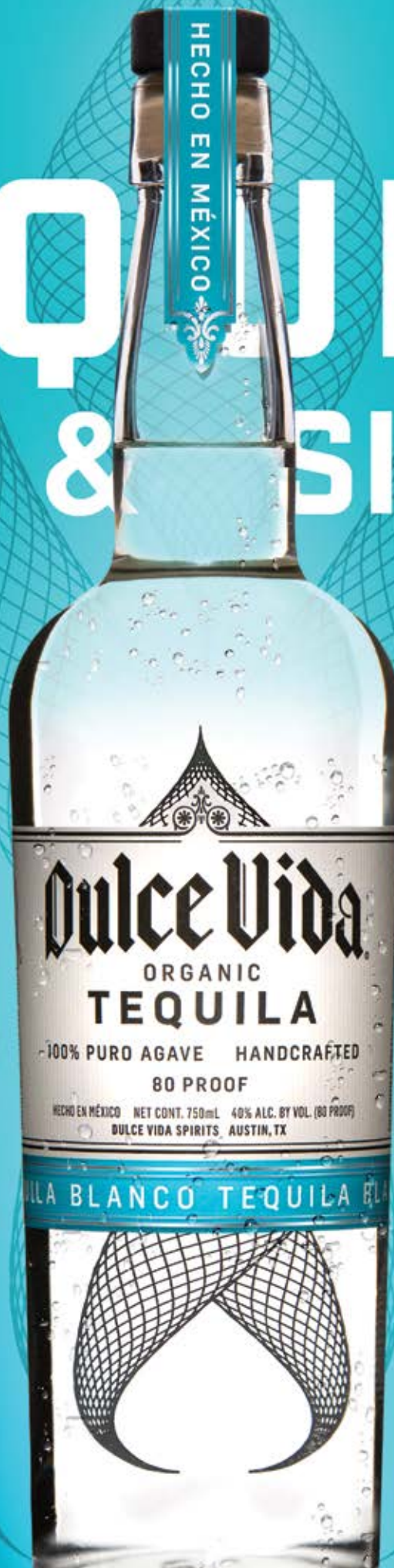
PHOTO COURTESY OF LINNE CALODO WINERY

TEQUILA

PURE & SIMPLE

100%
ORGANIC

UNDER 100
CAL
PER 1.5 OZ. SERVING



DulceVidaTequila
DulceVidaSpirits.com

DULCE VIDA TEQUILA. 40% ALC./VOL.
©2022 IMPORTED BY DULCE VIDA SPIRITS, AUSTIN, TX.
MUST BE AT LEAST 21 YEARS OLD. PLEASE VIVA RESPONSIBLY.

Ice-Cold Innovators

INNISKILLIN CRUSHES THE ICEWINE CATEGORY

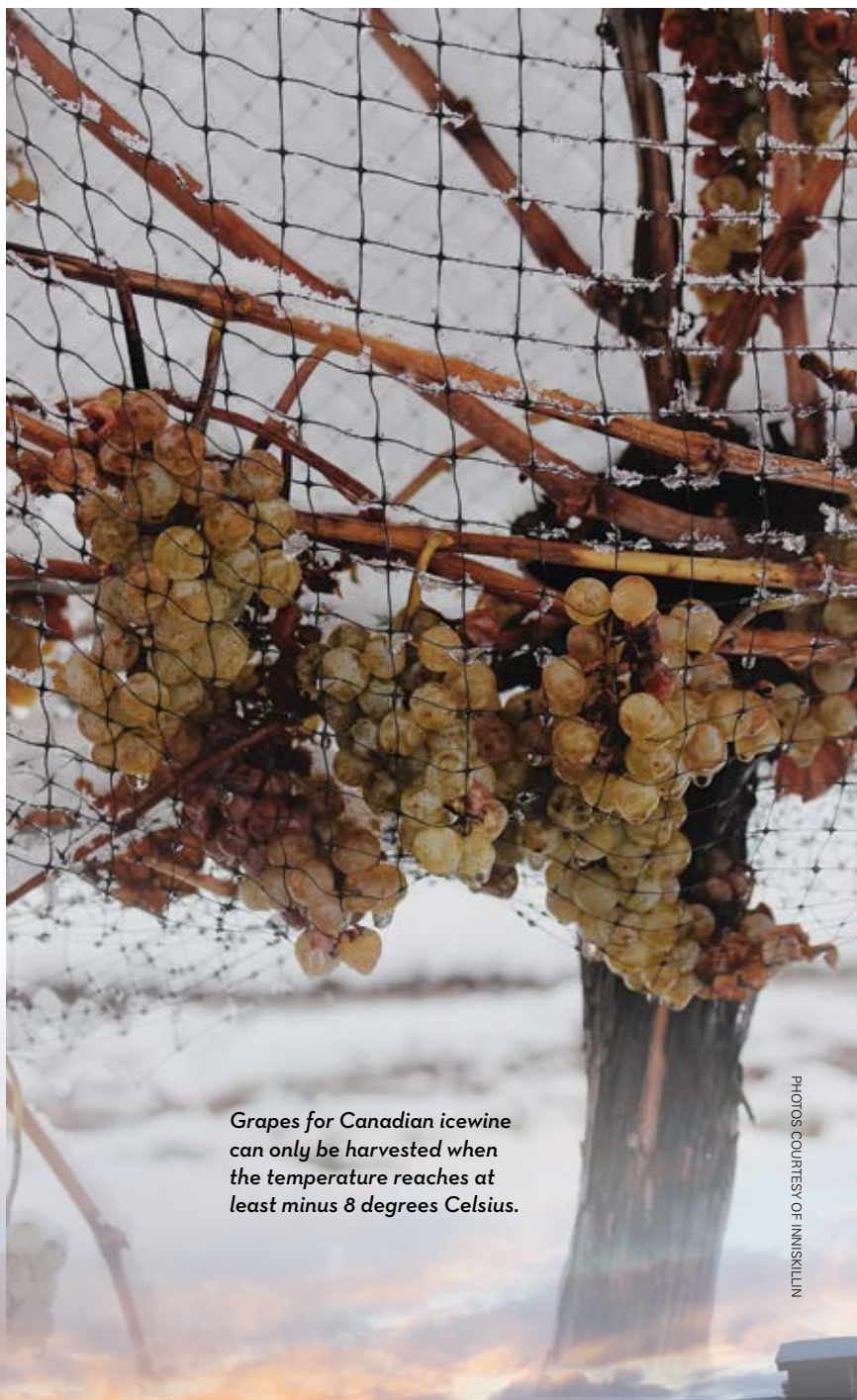
by Wanda Mann

FOR MOST WINEMAKERS, a vineyard full of rock-hard frozen grapes would cause despair. However, when the temperature dips to minus 10 degrees Celsius (14 degrees Fahrenheit), Nicholas Gizuk, winemaker for Canadian producer Inniskillin, is ready to rock and roll with harvesting. Producing icewine requires a combination of bravado, endurance, and finesse that has paid off for Inniskillin, whose acclaimed sweet wines are available in 84 countries. “We continually raise the bar,” says Gizuk. “We are the brand for icewine in Canada.”

Founded in 1975 in Niagara-on-the-Lake, Inniskillin is Canada’s first estate winery and was the recipient of the country’s first winery license post-Prohibition. Inspired by the icewines of Germany, it produced its first icewine in 1984 and rose to prominence seven years later when its Vidal icewine was awarded the Grand Prix d’Honneur at Vinexpo in Bordeaux. Its current selections include Pearl Vidal, Gold Vidal, Sparkling Vidal, Riesling, and Cabernet Franc.

On paper, the process for creating icewine seems straightforward: Ripened grapes are left on the vine into the winter months to intensify and concentrate their flavor before they’re harvested and vinified. But it’s important that they remain in pristine shape.

The sun sets over the Inniskillin vineyards in wintertime.



Grapes for Canadian icewine can only be harvested when the temperature reaches at least minus 8 degrees Celsius.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF INNISKILLIN



Vidal, Riesling, and Cabernet Franc are all used by Inniskillin to make icewine.

"When it comes to icewine, you need to have great grapes. The best vintages of icewine come from a year that was a great table-wine year as well," explains Gizuk. "What I want to stress about icewine is the purity of the varietal. There's nothing affecting the flavor profiles; we are just naturally removing water out by Mother Nature."

And how frozen should the grapes be? Although the Vintner's Quality Alliance (VQA), Canada's quality-control and appellation-of-origin system, mandates that grapes for icewine can only be harvested when the temperature reaches at least minus 8 degrees Celsius, Gizuk believes that going 2 degrees colder makes a world of difference. "My ideal, what I like to call the window of opportunity, is minus 10," he says, noting that the lower Brix range at that temperature enables him to reach his preferred percentage of alcohol: "When you're talking about Inniskillin Icewine, what sets us apart? It's balance. So I'm looking for an alcohol level of about 9.5%."

Harvesting grapes frozen solid by the harsh Canadian winter pushes the boundaries of endurance for people and equipment alike. "We have to use special hydraulic fluid in all the presses so they don't freeze. The tractors don't like working when it's cold," says Gizuk. And although

there is some nostalgia for handpicking, few people can sustain working in such adverse conditions; in addition to not needing brandy and hot chocolate for comfort, machine harvesters are more efficient and improve the quality of the wines. "The turnaround is very quick—[the] harvester goes through [and] I've got berries on my crush pad within an hour. A crew of 120 people would take four or five hours to do that," Gizuk explains, adding that picking and pressing must unfold at the same temperature, as the friction that occurs during the latter process warms up the grapes and in turn dilutes the sugar levels in the fruit, causing it to "lose that beautiful intensity": "So that window for me to operate at minus 10, get the product in, get it pressed, and get it turned over very quickly is huge to the quality."

As for which grapes make the best icewine, "there's a reason why 80% of the production in Canada of icewine is Vidal. It's thick-skinned, it's hardy, and it's consistent," says Gizuk. Inniskillin's Pearl Vidal and Gold Vidal are both produced from this hybrid of Ugni Blanc and Seibel; Pearl, which accounts for roughly 50% of Inniskillin's production, is "flamboyantly aromatic," in Gizuk's words, with "notable orange peel, apricot, fig, fresh fig. It's consistent year in, year out. No matter the growing season, it's going to make quality




Inniskillin winemaker Nicholas Gizuk.

icewine." Gold Vidal, meanwhile, is "a little bit of a different take on the Vidal, just really elevating its status and giving it a little bit more zip and pizzazz," he says, noting that its aging regimen of two to three months in two- to three-year-old French oak "gives [it] this little lifted spice note in the middle of the palate."

Vidal may dominate the production, but Gizuk believes that "when it comes to icewine, the pinnacle is Riesling." The tasting notes for Inniskillin's 2021 Riesling describe "notes of lemongrass and honeydew melon on the nose, while on the palate, citrus and lime flavors highlight fresh acidity."

That said, Gizuk is a self-described "Cab Franc guy, through and through," and the challenge of producing it in icewine form seems to be part of the allure. "It's hard to get red icewine all the way through [the process]," he says. "You're leaving it out in the rain, humidity, and windstorms. You've got raccoons out there. You've got deer eating [the grapes]. You've got mold working against you. It's very hard to get it to a finished product, but we do it." And the taste? When describing the 2019 vintage, he notes, "There's no mistaking Cab Franc. It's like strawberry-rhubarb pie filling—big, bright red fruits."

Inniskillin already had a place in the history books—the name derives from the winery's original site in Niagara-on-the-Lake, whose owner, one Colonel Cooper, christened it in honor of his regiment, the Inniskilling Fusiliers, following the War of 1812—but the fact that it's now known broadly as a viticultural innovator is pretty sweet indeed. 

A Living Testament to Progress

EVOLUTION IS A CONSTANT AT BAROLO'S RATTI WINERY

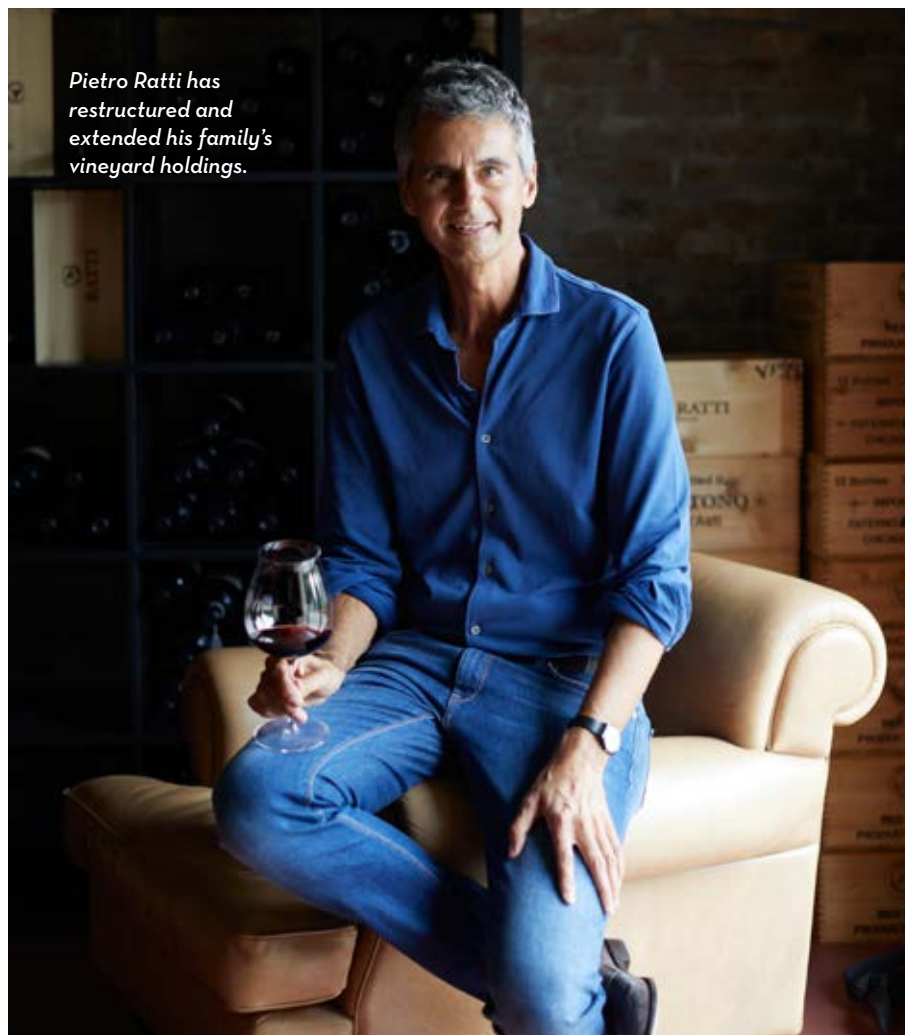
by Lars Leicht

THE LATE RENATO RATTI could easily be described as a force of nature. A scholar and innovator, Renato created a definitive vintage chart for the Barolo region as well as a map of subzones and even designed the distinctive Albeisa bottle whose trademarked shape helps distinguish Barolos from other wines. He was also a pioneer in making single-vineyard Barolos rather than following the tradition of blending fruit from different subzones; as a result, he's considered by many to be the father of *cru* Barolo.

When Renato died at the age of 54 in 1988, his son Pietro—who had just graduated from his father's alma mater, Scuola Enologica Alba (the Enological School of Alba)—suddenly had some pretty big shoes to fill as he assumed a leadership position at the company. While he has maintained the wine museum his father started, he is adamant that his winery and vineyards should not be frozen in time; Renato's legacy of experimentation and innovation lives on. Pietro has restructured and extended the family's vineyard holdings, and he continues to study each of the subzones in an effort to understand them as they evolve with time and the changing climate. In 2005, he built a new winery over the historic family cellars, and it was there that I met him last spring to discuss the past, present, and future of Ratti—and Barolo more generally.

A walking encyclopedia of the subzones of Barolo, Pietro explained the layout of what he calls the “crown” of hills and surrounding basins that make up the 11 villages of Barolo's production zone. Thanks to Pietro's initiatives, Ratti now owns 112 acres of Nebbiolo in the Langhe area, where the focus is on vineyards around the village of La Morra (Marcelinasco, Conca, Rocche dell'Annunziata, and Serradenari).

La Morra sits at the highest altitude of the villages, a distinct advantage given



Pietro Ratti has restructured and extended his family's vineyard holdings.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF RATTI

climate change. Even so, Pietro said he has changed the vinification process based on the weather patterns of recent years, using lower fermentation temperatures and seeking less extraction. “It has been very different for about the last 15 years,” he admitted. “Not just for us, but all over.”

About 14 years ago, he started using submerged cap maceration for both his Langhe Nebbiolos and his Barolos, racking the former less frequently and the latter not at all to avoid extraction and oxidation. He fines and filters the Langhe Nebbiolos but gives the Barolos only a light

filtration at bottling since oak aging for two years helps to fine them naturally.

In the vineyards, he's been using nets against more frequent hail for the past decade, and he now tills the soil between every other row. “In the past we never worked the soil; the concept was to make the water go away. Now we try to stop it and keep it,” he noted.

He added that even though budbreak has been earlier, the season is still running its course over the same basic number of days. “If you [change the length of] the season it could be a problem, but if

The goal of preserving Renato Ratti's signature style is behind any changes that Pietro Ratti makes.



everything is just shifted a little earlier—both budbreak and harvest—we still get the complexity, the finesse.” The goal of preserving Renato Ratti’s signature style is behind any changes that Pietro makes.

Despite the challenging conditions of 2022, which saw a dry and mild winter, low spring rainfall, and a very hot and dry summer, Pietro said the vines have managed well. “I don’t call it resilience, I call it adaptation,” he explained. “The vine adapts to the conditions of the place and the weather. It is a very reactive plant—it is very strong.”

Pietro has been immersed in the world of wine for over 35 years, but he continues to experiment and evolve as his father did while—like his vines—adapting to the forces of nature. *SJ*

TASTING NOTES

During my visit with Pietro Ratti, I tasted through the wines in his portfolio that are currently available in the U.S. Each wine has a distinct personality but shares a common thread of elegance. They uniformly show respect for terroir and a signature winemaking style that balances clean fruit with complexity and depth. These are well-structured, eminently drinkable wines that leave you wanting more.

Ratti 2021 Battaglione Barbera d’Asti, Italy Ratti likened Barbera to Chardonnay insofar as it can be crafted in diverse styles. As a vine, it loves heat, he said, and so has benefited from climate change. But it requires perfect timing to harvest—just a couple of days’ delay will result in a wine that is overly jammy. “It’s about the fruit, the fruit, the fruit,” he emphasized to me. Indeed, this wine shows beautiful black fruit on the nose, with hints of ripe cherry. Deeply colored with a tinge of blue, it’s round yet crisp and quenching, with bright, savory fruit. **96**

Ratti 2021 Ochetti Langhe Nebbiolo, Piedmont, Italy “Nebbiolo you drink with the nose,” Ratti told me, and he is right—this wine has ethereal aromas. Approximately 80% of it is sourced from sandy soils in Roero; more structured fruit from La Morra and Dogliani make up the rest. The grapes undergo a short maceration followed by eight months in wood—predominantly large casks—and the wine is bottled the August after harvest. The tannins are pronounced on the attack, as is to be expected with Nebbiolo, but in its brick-red color as well as its aromas it is more similar to Pinot Noir, while its gravelly, elegant flavors reminded me of some of my favorite Grignolinos. This is very much a food wine. **95**

Ratti 2019 Barolo Marcenasco, Italy This is not a single-vineyard Barolo, but all the fruit comes from three vineyards in the Comune di La Morra—one in Annunziata at 990 feet above sea level and two others in La Morra proper at 1,300 and 1,475 feet above sea level, respectively—which are picked at different times and vinified and barrel aged separately before they’re blended. The Annunziata fruit is more delicate, so Ratti ages it mainly in larger casks; the La Morra fruit is more “exuberant,” as he describes it, and benefits from time in barrique. The wine shows all the hallmarks of classic Barolo, with power and structure and a hint of black licorice on the finish. Aromatic, elegant, and complex, it’s a wine to enjoy now or savor with further aging. **97**

Ratti 2019 Barolo Rocche dell’Annunziata, Italy This wine hails from a 2.5-acre plot whose 50-plus-year-old vines produce only 5,000 bottles. Ratti said that, compared to the other Barolo subzones, La Morra generally produces more elegant wines, and the La Annunziata vineyard yields the most elegant expression of La Morra. The soil is blue marl with some sand, which according to Ratti makes the wine more floral, with aromas of violets and roses. It is warm, juicy, and persistent, with fuller fruit reminiscent of Burgundy; soft yet intense and complex, it has a great personality—and it’s delicious. **98**

Ratti 2019 Barolo Serradenari, Italy Coming from the heart of a single vineyard situated at about 1,500 feet in elevation, this wine is totally different from the others. It is not floral but shows more balsamic; it’s less delicate and more vivacious. The wood shows a little more on the nose at this young stage, but so too does blackberry; the result is warm and lush, with a pronounced note of black licorice on the long, intense finish. **98**

Ratti owns 112 acres in the Langhe area with a focus around the village of La Morra.

De Bortoli's family history dates back four generations.



The Victorian Era

AUSTRALIA'S DE BORTOLI FAMILY VINEYARDS EXUDES A REGAL ELEGANCE

LOCATED IN SOUTHEASTERN

Australia, Victoria—is named in honor of Queen Victoria—is home to 20 wine regions with a diversity of soils, elevations, and microclimates as well as to hundreds of wineries.

One of the oldest is De Bortoli, with a history that dates back four generations. De Bortoli's focus is on four of Victoria's grape-growing regions: Yarra Valley, Heathcote, King Valley, and Rutherglen.

During a recent tasting of some of De Bortoli's new releases, we acknowledged a finesse and charm that motivated us to acclaim these wines in our column.

De Bortoli 2020 Woodfired Shiraz, Heathcote, Victoria, Australia (\$20)

The Heathcote region is known for its big Shirazes and Bordeaux varieties, and this wine's boldness of character certainly comes across. Black pepper tickles the tongue, releasing notes of boysenberry and spiced cedar supported by the wine's broad shoulders. **92**

De Bortoli 2019 The Estate Chardonnay, Yarra Valley, Victoria, Australia (\$40)

Located on the De Bortoli family's estate along with both the winery and the residence of chief winemaker Steve Webber, Dixon's Vineyard was planted in 1987. Showing elegant notes of lemon bar, candied ginger, and crystal clarity, this is one of the most enticing, precise Chardonnays we've tasted. Its creamy nature is mesmerizing, but the textured mineral tones and balanced acidity left us breathless. **95**



De Bortoli 2015 Noble One Botrytis Sémillon, Riverina, New South Wales, Australia (\$40)

Darren De Bortoli, the eldest of the family behind this winery, started a project of making sweet wines in 1982, and it has earned him awards ever since. The vineyard in Riverina from which Noble One comes experiences humidity



that aids in the botrytis process. Aromas of yellow apple, orange peel, and new saddle leather form a stimulating start. Caramel-covered pear and vanilla melt across the mouth. A balance of sweetness and acidity helps define this sumptuous sipper inspired by Sauternes. **96**

De Bortoli 2019 The Estate Vineyard Pinot Noir, Yarra Valley, Victoria, Australia (\$40)

Picture a wine bubble: That's the way this feels on top of the palate. Lighter than air, the preternaturally graceful red delivers vibrant dark cherry and a hint of tobacco. Spiced sandalwood balances fine acidity and ongoing sapidity. **94**

De Bortoli Old Boys 21-Year-Old Barrel-Aged Tawny, Riverina, New South Wales, Australia (\$70)

Some of the parcels this fortified wine comes from date back to 1930. Made by winemaker Julie Mortlock, the blend of Shiraz and Grenache is luscious on both the nose and palate at 19% ABV. Notes of mocha, coffee, caramelized fig, orange zest, and a dash of white pepper demonstrate layers of complexity. It's akin to a dark chocolate truffle that begs to be bitten. **97** *sj*

PHOTOS COURTESY OF DE BORTOLI VINEYARDS

winejobs.com

The Wine Industry's
Leading Online Job Site

Where your expertise sets you apart

Discover **job opportunities** to showcase your skills and expertise, posted by the **most desired wineries** and distributors looking for people like you.

Don't waste time filtering through entry-level positions on other job sites.

Find **exactly what you're looking for** to thrive in your career.

Have a dream job in mind?

New jobs are posted every day. Create a free account and receive daily or weekly alerts containing personalized job listings that fit your criteria.

SET UP ALERTS ▶

Created & Managed by
WINE BUSINESS
|MONTHLY

Sheep graze in
the vineyards
at Bonterra
Organic Estates
in Hopland, CA.

IN
SERVICE
TO

LIFE

WHAT REGENERATIVE ORGANIC
AGRICULTURE MEANS FOR **BONTERRA**
ORGANIC ESTATES—AND ALL OF US

BY RUTH TOBIAS



The use of cover crops is key to regenerative agriculture.

IN JANUARY, Bonterra Organic Estates launched its first line—in fact one of the world's first lines—of Regenerative Organic Certified (ROC) wines. Called the Estate Collection, it consists of a Mendocino County Cabernet Sauvignon and Chardonnay, both of which boast the ROC seal. But as impressive as it may look at a glance, that seal could, at least initially, raise as many questions as it answers among consumers: Above all, what exactly is it, and why does it matter?

ROC IN A NUTSHELL

The creator of the ROC program, California-based nonprofit Regenerative Organic Alliance (ROA), was founded in 2017 by apparel company Patagonia, soap manufacturer Dr. Bronner's, and research firm the Rodale Institute out of concern that "the national [USDA] organic program wasn't doing enough" to protect not only the earth but also the creatures inhabiting it, humans included, according to ROA executive director Elizabeth Whitlow. In response, it set standards for a wide range of farming practices in three categories: soil health and land management, animal welfare, and worker fairness.

Like most organic-certification programs, ROC prohibits the use of synthetic fertilizers and pesticides and promotes composting; beyond that, however, it aims to enforce "some of the best practices that are proven to build healthy soil" by safeguarding the microbiome that aids in the sequestration of carbon, the capture of rainwater, and resilience against drought, among other things, says Whitlow. For instance, it requires the use of cover crops between vine rows as a way to "bring in more diversity to help control pest cycles"; it also obliges operators



Bonterra Organic Estates senior director of regenerative organic farming Joseph Brinkley.



Elizabeth Whitlow is executive director of the Regenerative Organic Alliance.

to greatly reduce if not entirely eliminate tillage “to minimize the disturbance of the soil.” And it encourages the introduction of animals into the vineyard, be they chickens, geese, or sheep, in order “to help cycle nutrients through the system,” in Bonterra senior director of regenerative organic farming Joseph Brinkley’s words: “You’re feeding the animals and the animals are in turn feeding the soil, which is in turn feeding the crop—it’s more of this holistic view of farming.” Naturally, that view extends to the treatment of the animals, which must be accorded what Whitlow calls “the five basic freedoms agreed upon among all the animal-welfare advocates,” including freedom from hunger, freedom from pain, and freedom to express natural behavior (such as grazing or splashing in a pond).

But it’s “the social pillar that’s probably the . . . thing that really sets the ROC program apart,” Brinkley says, mandating living wages, various benefits such as health care and vacation time, and recourse for grievances; as Bonterra’s senior director of impact, Jessica Baum, puts it, “ROC is the only agricultural standard that sits atop organic and takes the impact on humans into account.” Adds Whitlow, “What we’re really trying to do is empower the farmers . . . to know what it looks like to be a good employer, what it looks like to have a fair contract, and to do capacity building and education for their farm workers and identify areas of risk that they may not even be aware [of],” such as sexual harassment or retribution for complaints. The result, she continues, is that “I hear from our operators who are amazed at how much worker productivity

has gone up. If you talk to Joseph Brinkley at Bonterra or Jason Haas at Tablas Creek or Ivo Jeramaz at Grgich Cellars, you’re going to hear the same thing from all of them: that there has been this complete change in their cost savings by having not only retention of workers but [having them be] more engaged. It’s been really transformative.”

Indeed, says Brinkley, since Bonterra “has been farming organically since the ‘80s and biodynamically since the mid-‘90s or early 2000s, I can’t necessarily say that we [saw] a huge change in [the vineyards], because we haven’t really changed our practices so much. What I would say [has changed], though, is the capacity to retain



Bonterra senior director of vineyard operations Clint Nelson welcomes attendees at a regenerative organic workshop for farmers.

farmworkers when they know that they can show up every day on our site [and make] a wage that will help them care and provide for their families and [be] quite confident that the material we’re using on our vineyards is . . . not deleterious to one’s health [so as] to feel like you can’t even take your clothes off in your own house. . . . I think that additional layer of health and wellness is really important.”

WHY ROC MATTERS

Still, given that Bonterra has long abided by many of the practices required by the ROC, the question arises: Why was the certification process in and of itself important? For Brinkley, it’s a matter of discipline and accountability. “It entails a massive workbook—not just one spreadsheet but many columns and cells

on many tabs on multiple spreadsheets; it’s pretty extensive in [terms] of really drilling into all these practices per each tier,” he says. “So that means really being in touch with your own production system, your own fields, your own workers, your labor. . . . There’s a lot of coordinating with our departments, with the inspector, because this is a yearly on-site audit; this isn’t, ‘OK, fill out this form, tell us how you think you’re doing. OK, that sounds good, here’s the stamp.’ This is, ‘This is what you think, but here’s what we’re going to see.’”

Take soil testing, for example: “This certification [is] not just dig some soil, throw it into a bag, [and] send it to a lab, but actually look at it yourself,” he explains.

“What does the living root population look like, the macrofauna that you can physically see? How does it smell? What’s the texture? It’s really having a personal relationship with your soil.” Agrees Whitlow, “The best part of this procedure is seeing a winemaker and a vineyard manager and an inspector crawling on their hands and knees counting bugs and sniffing the soil. And I think they like it too. . . . I’ve heard it from Honduras to India to up and down California: Regenerative farmers have more fun. They’re back to exploring their farm and being a part of [it] and not just [having] the command-and-control mentality of, ‘OK, well, we’ve got a pest outbreak. What do we spray?’ Instead it’s like, ‘OK, maybe we need to look at the pest cycle; maybe we need to find some other plants that will

bring in beneficials.' . . . They're just working with nature instead of against nature, and I think that makes most people feel pretty good."

Of course, consumers also need to feel pretty good about being part of the solution when it comes to climate change and social injustice alike—both problems to which the conventional agriculture sector has, after all, been a global contributor. As Rachel Newman, VP of Bonterra parent company Concha y Toro's luxury portfolio, observes, "There is increasing demand for wine to be crafted with the highest standards for environmental and social impact [as well as quality]: The expectation is that one cannot be sacrificed for

employees—so [ROC] really aligns with our values . . . [and] it makes total sense for us to jump in on this new certification and really support those who are creating wines under its umbrella," she says. Explaining what it means to shoppers is admittedly "kind of the challenge, I think, because it's such a new certification and maybe not something that people are even necessarily aware exists yet," she adds, but the ideal conversation goes something like this: "It's not just about the land; it's about taking care of the employees, it's about having zero carbon footprint—it's such a multifaceted certification. It reaches out into other areas of the winery that the customer probably wouldn't expect."

year, and we've already almost met it."

Granted, time is of the essence. "The clock is ticking," she points out. "IPCC [Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change] scientists estimated that we have 70 or 60 harvests left [before winegrowing is no longer feasible] just a couple of years ago, and every time you read another IPCC report it's more grim than it was the last time. . . . Climate change is real; the stakes are high; [and] this is the time to take action. And wineries and consumers who support those wineries can take note and have some hand in making a change and trying to help right the ship before it rolls over into the ocean."

Which isn't to say that what's inside the bottle no longer matters. Brinkley's proud of Bonterra's Estate Collection not only for bearing the ROC logo on the label but for representing what he calls "a return to our roots" in Mendocino County. Though the brand's main tier of wines is California-appellated, the new wines are composed entirely of estate fruit, "so they really show what Mendocino can do as far as quality," as he puts it. And they won't be alone for long, what with three ROC single-vineyard expressions in the pipeline: August will see the release of Bonterra's 2022 The Roost Chardonnay, followed in early 2024 by its 2022 The McNab Cabernet Sauvignon and 2022 The Butler Red Cuvee.

But ultimately, what they all stand for is an agricultural movement with potentially profound implications for the planet. On that note, Jessica Baum refers to a recent talk by the late Paul Dolan, former president and winemaker at Fetzer Vineyards; a pioneer of biodynamic viticulture in the U.S., he created the Bonterra brand prior to its purchase by Concha y Toro and also served on the board of the ROA. "He was speaking about ROC and what he had to say about it is that it's in service to life," Baum recalls. "That's what consumers need to know: It's a certification that's so much more than a certification; it's a way of being and a way of verifying that being. It ensures that we are farming in service to the life of the organisms in the soil beneath our feet—in just a handful of soil, there can be more microorganisms than there are stars in the sky—and to the lives of the animals and the people that share our land." We can think of no better toast to the future. **SJ**

PHOTOS COURTESY OF BONTERRA ORGANIC ESTATES



Bonterra senior director of impact Jessica Baum.



Paul Dolan created the Bonterra brand during his tenure at Fetzer Vineyards.

the other. . . . ROC demonstrates a commitment to soil and society—it holds us to the most rigorous standards. We see [it] as a way to differentiate our products and assure environmentally conscious consumers of our commitment to transparency and the best practices possible."

The credibility conferred by the ROC seal is, then, another key advantage to undergoing certification—or it will be, once the public becomes familiar with it. Katie Woodcock, category manager, wine, at Sprouts Farmers Market, is one buyer who's been excited about its prospects ever since Bonterra approached her with a first-to-market proposal for its Estate Collection wines earlier this year: "[Sprouts'] mission as a company is to make sure that we're taking care of the earth, taking care of each other—our customers, our

The fact that ROC covers products other than wine may also help to make it a household name. "It's not just in the wine department that we talk about this certification—it's in produce and other areas of the store," says Woodcock. "So [we're] really just trying to get the word out, whether it's featuring regenerative organic items in our ads, which we did in April, or just talking about it in general."

And as more and more companies acquire the certification, they too will spread the word—it's just a matter of time. "We have been really busy; we've had a good bit of interest from the wine and spirits sector," Whitlow notes. "We're still a very new program. . . . But we've been getting out and doing more and more inspections; we're now up to almost a million acres in the program. That was the goal for this

The Human **TOUCH**

A METICULOUS BARREL REGIMEN HELPS
J. LOHR ROLL PAST THE COMPETITION

by Amanda M. Faison



J. Lohr founder Jerry Lohr; winemaker, white wine, Kristen Barnhisel; and VP of winemaking Steve Peck assess Chardonnay barrel samples.

After spending ten years at California's J. Lohr Vineyards & Wines, vice president of winemaking Steve Peck was well versed in the winery's legacy. But when his 9-year-old daughter was tasked with shading California's coastal areas, valleys, mountains, and deserts in different colors on a map, Peck saw it in a whole different light. "You look at that coastal strip from San Diego up to the Oregon border—that's where the good stuff comes from," Peck says. In other words, representing one of the state's most robust grape-growing regions, that strip seemed to him to underscore J. Lohr founder Jerry Lohr's influence on the wine industry: It's well established that the Central Coast as it exists today, spanning from Monterey to Paso Robles, owes much to this pioneer of viticulture.

Lohr, who planted his first vineyard in 1972, will turn 87 in January 2024, the same year J. Lohr will celebrate its 50th anniversary as a bonded winery. The latter milestone is proof of the company's success—and so is its wide-ranging portfolio. While it contains everything from the accessible supermarket wines in its Estates tier to a limited-production \$100 Signature Cabernet from Paso Robles, J. Lohr's dedication to craft and quality is the same no matter the SKU. (Uncork a bottle of Seven Oaks Cabernet Sauvignon or Riverstone Chardonnay, both of which retail at



Kristen Barnhisel checks barrel trials.



J. Lohr red winemaker Brenden Wood.

about \$15, and you'll sniff and sip a product that is worth so much more.)

The winery, which sustainably farms nearly 3,000 acres of vineyards throughout five of Paso Robles' 11 sub-AVAs, is by all accounts considered a big producer. But where some folks might think that's a knock, J. Lohr instead sees its size as an asset. "When you get to a larger scale, you have more resources and you can specialize," says Peck. "When you're a smaller business, you're worried about it all—from payroll to the artwork on the walls. We [the winemaking team] get to focus on flavor and technique and define how we manage fermentation and barrel selection to obtain the very best quality possible."

As Kristen Barnhisel, the head of white winemaking based out of J. Lohr's Monterey County winery, explains it, the human touch remains paramount

at J. Lohr no matter how far its reach extends. "There's no substitute," she says, noting that the 26,000 barrels they store in-house are stirred by hand weekly. "We forklift [the barrels] down, stir, and put [them] back. . . . There are machines [we could use] to stir, but our crew is faster, more efficient, and if something seems off, they can pull it aside."

This keen attention to detail applies to the winery's barrel program as a whole. Every drop of J. Lohr Chardonnay and Cabernet Sauvignon as well as its Bordeaux and red Rhône varieties ages in barrels; no wood chips, chemicals, or other shortcuts are used. The Chardonnays are also 100% barrel fermented. "For us, a barrel isn't just a holding tank," says Brenden Wood, head of red winemaking, who is based out of the Paso Robles winery. "This authentic, traditional commitment to high-quality



Brenden Wood and Steve Peck oversee J. Lohr's extensive cooperage program in Paso Robles.

cooperage is an important differentiator for our brand."

To underscore this point, Peck walked me through a purchase order he was writing: This year J. Lohr will acquire 14,000 new barrels that will be folded into the winery's existing inventory of 90,000 barrels. To keep them on-site, the company recently built two new storage facilities at its Paso Robles winery, each with a capacity of 15,000 barrels. "When we did that, it didn't increase production capacity," Peck says. "It's a quality-improving play. The Lohr family is committed to making the best quality of wine that you can make at every price point—all reinvestment goes back into that."

J. Lohr's upper-level Vineyard Series—encompassing on-premise-focused labels like Arroyo Vista and Hilltop, which are generally sold by the bottle—is aged entirely in French oak, while the Estates tier, including the more broadly distributed, by-the-glass-friendly Riverstone and Seven Oaks, is aged in American and Hungarian oak. This is significant because, as a rule, European oak is more expensive than American oak, in part because of the way the barrels are constructed; as Peck says, "When we choose to use French or Hungarian oak, we're paying twice as much and using twice as many barrels because the flavor impact is less. We're using

Hungarian oak to make our American [oaked wine] better."

Given J. Lohr's commitment to barrel aging, it's no surprise that the winery has a long-standing relationship with a variety of cooperages—and a hands-on approach to the barrels themselves: The complexity and variety of its barrel programs are built on decades of constant testing, tasting, records, and experience. Winemakers Peck, Barnhisel, and Wood spend a lot of time evaluating the barrels as thoroughly as they do their grapes. "Our core group [of coopers] are constantly modifying and evolving. They know our wine; we taste with them," Barnhisel says. And in order to assess the barrels' influence on the wines, the trio gathers for annual barrel trials. "We'll take a single vineyard block of juice that was fermented in ten to 20 different barrel types, and we blind taste to see which ones are preferred," Peck adds.

For example, about 20 different barrel types from six to eight coopers could be used for the J. Lohr Riverstone Chardonnay. These barrels might have been constructed using wood from Minnesota, Virginia, or Missouri; some might have a medium toast, while others might have a medium-plus toast. "Each [cooperage] has their own toasting, their own aging, their own palette of flavors to choose from," Wood says. Barnhisel refers to this array of

flavors as the spice rack. "We want something aromatic but that respects the fruit [without] overpower[ing] it, something not over-toasted but [toasted] enough so it's not raw fruit," she says of the Chardonnay program. "Same thing on the palate—we want something that integrates from [entry] to midpalate to finish."

To parse the parameters of this "spice rack," a sample is taken from each barrel type, and Peck, Barnhisel, and Wood blind taste each and give it a score. "If we have 21 barrel types, you can give seven [barrels] a plus, seven a minus, and seven neutral scores," Peck explains. "The terminology we use is Max Preference, and we've been adhering to it for quite some time." Those scores (the highest being three positives representing each of the three tasters, the lowest being three minuses) are further backed up by a scientific analysis of the headspace, or the air that sits at the top of a barrel. "We siphon wine from a barrel at the winery into a bottle and then submit that bottle to ETS Laboratories. They then analyze the aroma compounds found in the headspace in that bottle by passing inert gas as a carrier to the analyzer. It's entirely an aroma profile," Peck explains. The data, which is presented like a spider graph, indicates the concentration of flavor compounds like limonene (citrus), octalactone (clove), and diacetyl (butter). "You're looking at these and saying, 'Oh, I thought this was smoky and that's why I gave it a negative,'" Peck continues. "We let our instincts and palate speak first, and then we have this feedback loop." All of this results in input for the coopers and, ultimately, better wine. "We can say, 'This is good, but this other note is something we're looking for—how about a slightly different toasting?'" Barnhisel says.

Fifty years ago, J. Lohr started as a winery based on traditional, artisanal methods. Over time, it has scaled up, but never has it lost its focus. "When we talk about [overseeing the winemaking process from] soil to bottle, it's really to set ourselves apart from the competition," Peck says. "Our value-add starts with grapes and runs through pressing, fermentation, aging, [and] bottling." The final word—the bottle sitting on the shelf—reflects that ongoing conversation between the grapes, the winemakers, the coopers, and the barrels. **sj**



Wine by the Numbers

HOW RELYING ON DATA CAN CLOUD YOUR WINEMAKING INSTINCTS


THERE IS SOMETHING romantic about making wine without doing any number crunching. Who needs data when we have made wine for thousands of years without analyzing its specific components? Even if doing so allowed us to produce the Platonic ideal of wine, would we want a wine made entirely by robots?

There are numerous analytical technologies available to winemakers, many of them beneficial. For instance, sensors in the vineyard enable us to reduce inputs such as fertilizer, water, and fungicides to the essentials, thus lowering our carbon footprint and promoting regenerative viticulture. And even if you decide when

to pick your fruit based on looks and taste—which I would argue is the way to go—determining the fruit's starting pH with a pH meter and its Brix with a device such as a refractometer can help to guide decisions that follow, most notably by indicating how at risk for spoilage the wine might be.

Back at the winery, a single employee and a sophisticated machine can generate all the important numbers by analyzing a few milliliters of must or wine. The winemaker can then make tweaks this way and that, raising or lowering acidity and potential alcohol, adding or subtracting tannins, and so on. Machines can be employed to remove excessive volatile acidity and ethanol; one can run bench trials on an infinite number of possibilities for any given wine. The bar has been raised when it comes to making wine that lacks obvious flaws across all price points.

But there is a hollowing out of the soul of a wine when numerical data are relied upon too heavily. It comes down to that over-invoked but undeniably central concept of balance. Too little analysis and one is at risk for serious spoilage. However, if numbers run the show, then character and integrity slip away, leaving behind what I call "wine products" more akin to blended whiskey than testaments to a specific terroir and vintage. We all know these wines: They are smooth, with no obvious flaws; the acidity and tannins are "just right." But as pleasing as they may be on the first sip, they're one-dimensional, showing little evolution in the glass and certainly no complexity. As with people, a wine's quirks usually add to its appeal; when you smooth every edge and take out every incongruity, blandness ensues.

It can be a challenge for winemakers to go with their gut. Choosing not to bring a wine into alignment with the textbook numbers takes strength. But wine is not just a simple solution of water, alcohol, acid, and a few polyphenols; it is a complex matrix of molecules all constantly interacting with one another. While machines can analyze many of these molecules, they cannot analyze how we will perceive them, and it is wise for winemakers to remember that every time they smell and taste a wine, they are the generator and repository of all sorts of important data. As humans, we are exquisitely sensitive to nuances in taste, smell, sight, touch, and sound, and we can call upon our sense memories to inform our decision-making about what is in front of us. This makes us better equipped than any machine when it comes to making wines with character. 



WHERE GROWING AND PRODUCING ARE ONE AND THE SAME

PAUL HOBBS
ON THE EVOLUTION
OF FARMING AND
THE IMPORTANCE
OF MAKING SITE-
SPECIFIC WINES

BY JONATHAN CRISTALDI

*Paul Hobbs walks among the vines at
Paul Hobbs Winery in Sebastopol, CA.*



An aerial view of Paul Hobbs Winery.

Did Paul Hobbs always know that his name would one day be synonymous with some of California's greatest wines? Perhaps—after all, he was fresh out of the University of California, Davis, when he began working as an enologist for Robert Mondavi, Napa Valley's greatest champion and one of its most famous faces, in 1978. The job gave Hobbs a front-row seat to the rise of the kind of American wine celebrity that he would also become—but first, he had to build a resume.

By 1979, he had started working at Opus One, followed by SIMI Winery in 1985. Shortly thereafter, he started to gain international acclaim as a consultant in Argentina, where he

would become widely credited for introducing Argentine Malbec—a variety with little standing at the time—to the U.S. market. In 1991, his name finally bore a label with the launch of Paul Hobbs Winery's first bottlings, made with grapes purchased from Larry Hyde in Carneros and Richard Dinner in Sonoma Mountain and produced at custom-crush facilities. In 1998, he purchased and planted the property that would become Katherine Lindsay Estate in Sebastopol; that same year, he founded Viña Cobos in Argentina's Mendoza region. In 2000, Crossbarn was established, also in Sebastopol, and in 2003, the Paul Hobbs Winery winemaking facility adjacent to Katherine Lindsay was completed.

Paul Hobbs' Goldrock Estate is located in the West Sonoma Coast AVA.



With the planting of Katherine Lindsay, which was formerly shrubland, Hobbs began the real work of obtaining fruit from the best estate-owned and -farmed vineyards in the U.S.—it was what he had wanted to do since his Mondavi days. Today, he's known for producing wines imbued with not only the hallmarks of the places from which they come but also immense structure, tension, energy, and complexity. His Dr. Crane Cabernet Sauvignon, which he produces with grower-partner Beckstoffer, comes to mind, as do his Nathan Coombs Estate Cabernets, George Menini Estate Chardonnay, and Goldrock Estate Pinot Noir.

ROOTED IN RIGOROUS FARMING

I caught up with Hobbs, 69, in early June at his eponymous winery off Gravenstein Highway in Sebastopol. I'd gone into the interview with the idea that I'd illuminate two different sides to his winemaking—the single-vineyard approach he takes for the Paul Hobbs label and the broader focus on appellations that Crossbarn represents. But after two hours of conversation, I realized that there is much in common between them.

To be sure, the differences are apparent. Hobbs put it like this: "If you're making a Porsche, it's different than making an Audi. Our team at Paul Hobbs operates at the highest level—at the leading edge of what is possible. We don't worry about price point here. But at Crossbarn, we do." When he began to dedicate his Paul Hobbs label to vineyard-designate wines—before he'd purchased any land or built the winery—he realized that in order to grow, he'd have to vet more growers to find better grapes. That's when the idea of Crossbarn arose. He could begin working with the vineyard crews of the sites he selected to bring the farming up to his standards so that the grapes could eventually be used for Paul Hobbs; in the meantime, they'd fit the bill for Crossbarn.

Today, the best grapes from Hobbs' 13 estate vineyards—spread throughout Coombsville, Russian River Valley, West Sonoma Coast, and Alexander Valley—go into the Paul Hobbs portfolio, which comprises both appellation- and vineyard-designated expressions of Chardonnay, Pinot Noir, and Cabernet Sauvignon that



While he continues to serve as head winemaker, Paul Hobbs gives his winemaking team room to make decisions when he's away consulting or supervising other projects.

winemaking. Some 38 vineyard specialists are employed by Paul Hobbs Winery under the direction of director of vineyards Brycen Hill, who reports directly to Hobbs. Roughly one-third of his entire California workforce, including winery staff, farms about 300 acres of vines in Napa and Sonoma. Hobbs' checklists are famous to those employees: They detail daily regimens for vine care, soil health monitoring, and much more. In the winery, Hobbs is a shrewd business strategist who follows a strict code of promoting from within his ranks. Director of winemaking Jacob Pickett, who succeeded Jennie Murphy in 2022, previously worked at Early Mountain Vineyards in Virginia,

PHOTO: WILDLY SIMPLE PRODUCTIONS



Nathan Coombs Estate in Napa's Coombsville sub-AVA.

range in price from \$70 to \$800. The next-best grapes go to Crossbarn, priced between \$35 and \$60 per bottle. Aged in very little new oak, the latter wines maintain a fresh and youthful style, while for the Paul Hobbs wines, "we're after luxury—a higher level of farming, less yield, more attention to detail," Hobbs said unabashedly. "But we have a good level of farming for Crossbarn, appropriate for the style of wine we're making."

Indeed, the similarities between the two brands are rooted entirely in Hobbs' rigorous farming protocols and his determination to control every aspect of

where Hobbs consults; before taking over at Paul Hobbs, he worked his way up through the ranks at Crossbarn, produced in a separate facility about 2 miles away, where Aaron Barnett now leads the cellar team as winemaker under Pickett. "I like to find people who are not jaded," said Hobbs, who, for quality-control purposes, is inclined to supervise them as they develop their winemaking chops. As head winemaker, he has the final say but has given his team room to make decisions when he's away consulting or looking after his other five wineries in not only Argentina but also places like Armenia



and upstate New York, which is home to his latest project, Hillick & Hobbs.

CHANNELING “A TRUE PERSONALITY”

When I asked how farming has evolved for Hobbs since he struck out on his own in the 1990s, he first lamented that so many wineries in those days separated the domains of viticulture and winemaking. Hobbs, who was raised on a 600-acre apple and pear farm in western New York, never understood that. He sought a holistic approach that combined viticulture and winemaking, just as he'd seen happening among vigneron in Burgundy. He used the example of purchasing the 68-acre Nathan Coombs site in Coombsville to illustrate that effective winemaking is only possible with great farming: “With the Nathan Coombs site and others, we've started with vineyards farmed at the B level but planted at an A level, and we've made changes to bring the entire site up to the A level by doing things like installing new trellising, correcting pruning, and improving soil health—and it's always amazing to see how the vineyard responds. Once it is farmed at a high level, the DNA of a site comes through if the vineyard has a true personality.”

I questioned whether California vintners have focused enough on promoting single-vineyard wines, and Hobbs conceded that “years ago, there wasn't much interest. During my time at Mondavi, not even Mr. Mondavi was interested. I was lobbying for To Kalon to be a vineyard

designate, but he was focused on promoting his Reserve wine. . . . But when I traveled to Burgundy in 1984, I was more interested in their model than the Bordeaux method. That was my epiphany moment for vineyard-designate wines.”

Of course, he's keenly aware that, due to their larger size and greater di-

versity, it can be hard to compare many U.S. wine regions to Burgundy. Still, he anticipates the creation of more sub-AVAs in the future as a possible remedy: “As fine wine goes, we're a young region,” he said, “and what makes an area great is its movement to[ward] more site specificity.”

PHOTO: WILDLY SIMPLE PRODUCTIONS



PHOTO COURTESY OF PAUL HOBBS WINERY

Paul Hobbs (center) circa 1991, the year his eponymous label launched. For those bottlings, he purchased fruit from Larry Hyde (left) in Carneros, among other growers.

PAUL HOBBS ON LOCATION

We asked sommeliers from across the country to talk about their experiences with selling Paul Hobbs wines on the floor.

“We have a lot of large parties every night at Estiatorio Milos, and sometimes you can see the pressure on the host to decide something appealing for everyone. This is relieved when they see a Paul Hobbs wine on the list. There's no need to hand sell a Hobbs wine—[the] only [question is] which one to choose.”
—Dimitris Zafeiropoulos, global beverage director, Estiatorio Milos, New York, NY



PHOTO: NIAN PHOTOGRAPHY

“We carry multiple varietal wines, appellations, and vineyard designates from many vintages of Paul Hobbs. It's great for longtime followers of the brand. For those unfamiliar, it's a discovery. Sometimes, years later, a guest will enthusiastically thank us for introducing them to the wines. And tableside, guests often like to imply that they are savvy and sophisticated wine buyers by letting me know they are on the Paul Hobbs mailing list.”
—Paul Krikorian, lodge wine director, The Lodge at Torrey Pines, La Jolla, CA



PHOTO: MARRISA LEDESMA

“Our members love the diversity of the Hobbs portfolio. Our guests might dine in the Islander restaurant, enjoying the Russian River Valley Chardonnay or Pinot Noir by the glass, or have a bottle of a vineyard-designate wine in our CH Prime steakhouse. The wines all sell themselves due to the long relationship we've had with the label.”
—Sean Carroll, director of beverage and wine operations, Ocean Reef Club, Key Largo, FL



PHOTO COURTESY OF OCEAN REEF CLUB

Vinho Verde, the Rising Star of the Iberian Peninsula

by Jienna Basaldu

I didn't know
Alvarinho
could do this;
how is this
the first time
I have
experienced
this?



DEMARCATED REGION | SINCE 1908

VINHO VERDE





Prior to visiting the region of Vinho Verde in October 2021, I, like most American sommeliers, was under the impression that the white wines of the region were strictly crisp, sometimes pétillant, light-bodied, blended wines exclusively intended to be enjoyed in their youth. It wasn't until I walked into the offices of the Vinho Verde Commission in Porto and sat down for a comparative tasting of monovarietal Alvarinho going as far back as the 2009 vintage that I realized that I had terribly underestimated the aging potential and complexity that can be developed in the wines of Vinho Verde with cellaring. In my many years as a wine professional, I had never seen a bottle of Vinho Verde that wasn't a current release, nor had I seen more than a handful of monovarietal Vinho Verde expressions. And I had most definitely never heard of any sommelier purchasing Vinho Verde with the mindset of deliberately cellaring the wines to achieve development. To say that participating in this comparative tasting was an eye-opening experience would be an understatement.



As I tasted through the eight glasses of Alvarinho in front

of me, ranging from the 2009 to the 2018 vintage, I witnessed the evolving capabilities of the grape, with each wine impressing and captivating me more than the last. It was alluring and intriguing: I found myself repeatedly saying aloud, "I didn't know Alvarinho could do this; how is this the first time I have experienced this?" The wines went from just barely youthful, with slightly subdued, lighter, and fresher expressions of white peach, lime pith, and tart tangerine plus a lean texture and viva-

cious finish, to the more mature wines that exhibited intense and pronounced aromas and flavors of dried apricot, key lime pie, celery root puree, and mandarin gelée. The body of the older wines was more concentrated and powerful with a rounder mouthfeel but not overly dense, and the finish was lifted and still somewhat fresh. It was like aged Grüner Veltliner Smaragd had a baby with aged Alsatian Riesling. I immediately started to think of all the dishes that would be elevated by these aged Alvarinhos and how cool it would be to approach a table with a ten-year-old Vinho Verde and walk a guest through the pairing. I felt like I had discovered some kind of sommelier buried treasure.



After my aha moment with the aged Alvarinho flight,

I spent the remainder of my time in Vinho Verde searching for bottles boasting substantial cellaring that I could purchase and take back to share with my colleagues in San Francisco, as I thought more wine professionals needed to see what Vinho Verde is capable of. Upon a visit to Quinta da Aveleda, a family-owned winery established in 1870, I hit the aged Vinho Verde jackpot, scoring a bottle of 2002 Alvarinho. It was almost 20 years old; I hadn't seen any Vinho Verde that old on the entire trip, or ever for that matter, and I knew it had impeccable provenance. I eventually took the bottle to a dinner attended by some of the most wine-savvy professionals I know and was delighted with how well the wine showed, again impressed by the ageability of Vinho Verde.

Now that I have shared my experience with aged Vinho Verde, I would like to give insight into why it has tremendous cellaring potential. The white wines of Vinho Verde possess a natural acidity resulting from the influence of the different microclimates and topography

across the region. This natural acidity also provides structure and higher resistance to oxidation in a long-term cellaring process. Long ripening cycles and late maturations due to cold winters and warmer summers provide good balance and body. The Alvarinho and Avesso grapes particularly benefit from these conditions.



Oak aging, which I noticed was being practiced far more than I anticipated,

also aids in the development of more complexity, adding both flavor and texture to the wines of Vinho Verde.

When it comes to gastronomy, white wines from Vinho Verde have been typecast as "summer wines" or "porch pounders," and although they do fare well in the warm months, pairing nicely with dishes like chilled seafood and salads, they are so much more. With the increased trend toward the use of oak aging, the region is producing fuller-bodied wines that are highly structured, with increased complexity and development lending themselves to a whole new wheelhouse of dishes; think roasted meats and richer dishes with Asian spices.



Finally, to my wine directors and wine consumers,

I say: Pick up some Vinho Verde, cellar it, be patient, and let it age—you will be rewarded.



RHÔNE

TO THE RESCUE

AT THE **RHÔNE VALLEY VINEYARDS WINEMAKER TOUR**,
REFRESHING WINES RELIEVE A MUGGY DAY IN NEW YORK CITY

story by **Lars Leicht** / photos by **Yvonne Albinowski**



*Marin Lefebvre (right) pours his family's **Domaine Lefebvre d'Anselme** wines.*

New York City's spring weather was fickle at best this year, with lower-than-average temperatures through early June. Then one day—as if to remind us to be careful what we wish for—a rush of hot, humid air set in as a harbinger of an oppressively muggy summer in the Big Apple. Air conditioners struggled to keep up—until Inter Rhône came to the rescue with just the cure: a showcase of refreshing, fruit-driven wines from the Rhône Valley Vineyards AOCs.

As the organization that promotes the region's appellations, Inter Rhône kicked off its Rhône Valley Vineyards Winemaker Tour on June 13 on the 17th floor of the PUBLIC Hotel overlooking the Lower East



Claude Athimon of Jaillance presents his Crémant de Die wine.

Side, where I embraced the opportunity to meet and taste with representatives from 30 producers.

Soft, sparkling Clairette de Die and Crémant de Die made for welcome first sips poured by Claude Athimon, who was showcasing the wines of **Jaillance**, a 200-member cooperative that controls over 3,000 acres of vineyards across a 40-mile-long area spanning elevations from 650 to 2,300 feet above sea level. Members hold an average of 12 acres, so the base of the cooperative's production comes from small growers of mainly Muscat Blanc à Petits Grains, Aligoté, and Clairette Blanche. More than 85% of Jaillance's wines are enjoyed in France, but Athimon is looking to grow in the U.S.—which could be said of all producers

present, including Jean-Christophe Sapet of **Domaine La Fontaine de Mil Hommes**, who poured me two crisp and fruity wines: a bottle-fermented Crémant de Die and a méthode ancestrale Clairette de Die from his 67-acre hillside vineyard near the rural Lac de Miel.

Sated on sparklers, I moved on to visit with Roman Aujoulat of **Famille Gassier**, a fifth-generation family winery in Nîmes that was one of the first producers to farm organically in the region, starting in 2007. Gassier's 2022 Brise de Grenache Rosé was as clean and refreshing as I had hoped it would be. It's made predominantly of Grenache, but 5% Mourvèdre adds a juicy, mineral note. The 2020 Nostre País Blanc, whose name translates from the local Occitan dialect as "our land," is also

dominated by Grenache, which is blended with Clairette, Viognier, and Roussanne. It undergoes some barrel fermentation and aging in large oak casks to yield silky melon flavors with a flinty savoriness.

As I continued around the room, I met up with Adrien Encontre of **Domaine Niero**. This third-generation winery specializes in Côte-Rôtie and Condrieu. The 2021 Coeur de Roncharde Condrieu is sourced from 40-year-old Viognier vines; despite the fact that 40% of it ages in barriques, it was bright and unctuous. Next, it was time for the first red of the day: The Domaine Niero 2021 Bois Prieur Saint-Joseph, appropriately served slightly chilled, showed great flavors of wild blueberries and other delicate fruit. The 2021 Côte-Rôtie Eminence took things up a notch, as one would expect from a Syrah that spends a year in oak. Sourced from two parcels, it was opulent with flavors of blueberries, currants, and wild raspberries.

By the time I made my way to the **Cave de Cairanne** table, the blazing sunshine hitting the south-facing window inspired Damien Letier to temporarily leave his post to greet me and escape the heat in the process. Together we enjoyed his Côtes du Rhône Villages Sainte-Cécile-les-Vignes Abélia, which further proved how invigorating a slightly chilled red can be thanks to its great acidity and deep red-fruit flavors. The same went for the 2021 La Bête à Bon Dieu Côtes du Rhône Villages Plan de Dieu Rouge, which offered lean flavors of red fruit and white pepper lifted by citrusy notes and minerality, and the 2020 La Grande Reserve AOC Cairanne Rouge, with its quenching, crunchy fruit flavors.



Odile Couvert of Domaine de L'Odylée explains her wines to tasters.

Michael Nisen of **Cellier des Charteux**, a cooperative of 81 growers near the regional capital of Avignon, surprised me with the complexity of his 2021 Côtes du Rhône Intuition. Though it sees no oak, this GSM (50% Grenache, 40% Syrah, and 10% Mourvèdre) showed dry, dusty tannins and hints of tobacco leaf to support dark, ripe fruit. Meanwhile, the 2022 Chapel Saint-Martin Côtes du Rhône Rouge, a blend of 60% Grenache and 40% Syrah from a higher altitude, showed more forward fruit, with savory flavors and notes of ripe cherry.

Sedad Ramic tasted me through the whites and rosés of **Maison Sinnæ**, the Rhône Valley's leading white-wine producer by volume. Sinnæ's steep vineyards are on the right bank of the Rhône just opposite the Châteauneuf-du-Pape appellation. The 2022 Côtes du Rhône Blanc blend of Grenache Blanc, Clairette, Roussanne, Viognier, and Bourboulenc showed freshness and fragrance. And the 2021 Excellence Côtes du Rhône Villages Laudun Blanc contains the same grapes but spends about ten months in oak barriques to obtain creamy vanilla notes. The 2022 Côtes du Rhône Rosé, made predominantly from Grenache, had apricot and berry flavors that reminded me of the fruit of the Mediterranean strawberry tree, also known as *corbezzolo*.

I closed out my rounds of the main room by visiting Hélène Jaume of **Vigno-**

bles Alain Jaume, whose 2022 Domaine du Grand Veneur Côtes du Rhône Blanc de Viognier was vivacious and aromatic, making it a perfect match for asparagus and oysters. Her family has two vineyards in the Rhône: one with rocky soils, the other sandy. From the latter she makes the elegant, complex, and savory Domaine Grand Veneur Côtes du Rhône with 70% Grenache, 20% Syrah, and 10% Mourvèdre. Finally, the 2020 Château Mazane Vacqueyras was a showstopper, intense with dark fruit flavors and solid structure.

With the event's closing time near, I went to the adjoining room, which held producers whose wines are not yet imported to the U.S., to hear the stories of three more wineries. At the **Domaine de L'Odylée** table, Odile Couvert—full of charm and energy—recounted how, as a successful businesswoman, she bought a country home and restored its vineyard, which had been abandoned for 20 years. "My wines are different," she told everyone who approached, "because with no history in wine, I do whatever I want." A great example of that was her 2021 Côtes du Rhône La Prometteuse, a blend of Grenache, Viognier, Roussanne, and Clairette that she harvests unusually early in August to attain freshness and complex layers of fruit and herbs. Pouring her 2022 Rosé d'Automne Côtes du Rhône, she advised that "this is not [just] for the summer."



A winery representative points out her property's location in the Rhône Valley.

Made of 100% Syrah that spends six months in barrique, the crimson wine was crisp and vibrant, with rich flavors of cranberry and baking spices.

Holding court for **Domaine Lefebvre d'Anselme**, young Marin Lefebvre explained how the estate's small 37-acre vineyard has been in his family since 1904; his parents began producing their own label in 2005, farming organically and working with only indigenous yeasts. After graduating from business school and working in the field of economics in Asia as well as Europe, he became a sommelier and did stints in restaurants in Paris and Berlin. Eventually fed up with big-city life, he returned home and, under his father's guidance, took over the domaine. His Côtes du Rhône Blanc L'Art d'Être Heureux ("The Art of Being Happy") is a zesty blend of Grenache,

Syrah, Clairette, and old-vine Ugni Blanc. It has an unctuous mouthfeel, but the finish is clean and uplifting.

Château de Clapier sits in the southeastern part of the Rhône Valley above Aix, a cool-climate area near the Durance River. Thomas Montagne told me that he is one of seven brothers, all involved to some extent in the vineyard founded by his great-grandfather in 1818 and in the winery started by his father 30 years ago. His aptly named Vibrato line of

wines is bright and high-toned. (“That,” he told me, “is the expression of my microclimate.”) The 2022 Vibrato AOC Luberon Blanc is a blend of roughly equal parts Roussanne, Grenache Blanc, and Rolle (Vermentino) with a dash (5%) of Viognier. The 2022 Vibrato AOC Luberon Rosé blend of Cinsault and Grenache Noir delivered zippy acidity wrapped around tropical fruit flavors, while the 2020 Vibrato AOC Luberon Rouge blend of Grenache Noir, Syrah, and Pinot Noir

offered up complexity and elegance with classic notes of garrigue.

So many wineries, so little time: Below is a full list of participants in the tasting, which was also held this year in Chicago and San Francisco; Academy du Rhône master classes, meanwhile, are being held in other cities in August, September, and November. All producers offered up wonderful stories, delicious wines, and great values. No wonder Rhône wines are making a splash in the U.S. market. **SJ**



Thomas Montagne is one of seven brothers working for Château de Clapier, which was established by his great-grandfather in 1818.



Jean-Marie Amadieu discusses his Domaine les Hautes Cances wines.

Participating Producers

For more information on each winery, visit guidebook.com/g/rhoneusatour.

Alain Jaume
Bonpas Boisset Collection
Cave de Cairanne
Cave La Romaine
Château de Clapier
Château d'Espéran
Cellier des Chartreux
Château Montplaisir
Château Mourgues du Grès
Domaine de Cousignac
Domaine de la Valériane
Domaine de l'Odylée
Domaine de Roquevignan
Domaine des Romarins
Domaine la Fontaine de Mil
Hommes, Cave Poulet & Fils
Domaine les Hautes Cances & Pierre Amadieu
Domaine Lefebvre d'Anselme
Domaine Maby
Domaine Niero
Domaine Rozel
Domaine Saint Roch
Familles Aubert & Autrand
Famille Gassier
Jaillance
Louis Bernard Boisset Collection
Mas Edem
M. Chapoutier
Maison Sinnæ
Marrenon
Vignobles & Compagnie

“The Definition of Balance”

CASTIGLION DEL BOSCO TRANSPORTED LOS ANGELES WINE PROFESSIONALS TO MONTALCINO AT A RECENT LUNCHEON

story by Kate Newton / photos by Anna Beeke

THE LOS ANGELES wine professionals who attended a recent luncheon featuring Tuscan producer Castiglion del Bosco had only two hours to digest the estate's nearly millennium-long history, but thanks to the efforts of export manager Roberto Ruscito, they made a considerable amount of headway that was nearly as impressive as the wines themselves.

Noted Ruscito, “We have books from historians where they just talk about the Castiglion del Bosco estate,” the focal point of which is a medieval fortress dating back to 1100 A.D. Also on the 5,000-acre property, situated in the northwest corner of Montalcino within the Val d’Orcia UNESCO World Heritage Site, are forests roamed freely by deer, boar, and other wildlife, not to mention *Travel + Leisure’s* 2022 Best Hotel in the World, the Rosewood Castiglion del Bosco, and Italy’s only private members’ golf club. But Ruscito was quick to address that such accolades haven’t come at the expense of the estate’s viticultural reputation. “People can think the wine is a side [project] . . . and just something new in service of the hospitality, but it’s the other way



A group of Los Angeles wine professionals explored the wines of Castiglion del Bosco at a recent luncheon hosted by Italian restaurant Brera in downtown Los Angeles, CA. Pictured back row, from left to right: Ivo Cooper, general manager, M Grill; Naureen Lyon, district manager—Los Angeles, Maisons Marques & Domains; Roberto Ruscito, export manager, Castiglion del Bosco; Alessandro Silvestri, director of operations, Amici Restaurant Group; and Kate Newton, senior staff editor, The SOMM Journal. Front row: Jihyo Kim, sales consultant, Signature Division, Southern Glazer’s Wine & Spirits of California; Carlos Mejia, manager, M Grill; Fernando Galdamez, wine director, The Capital Grille; Joey Medeiros, owner, Nuno’s Bistro & Bar/Euro Café; and Ramon Aguirre, bar manager, Nuno’s Bistro & Bar.



The Castiglion del Bosco 2021 IGT Toscana Chardonnay accompanied scallop crudo with squid ink, citrus, and summer truffle dressing.



Brera chef Angelo Auriana collaborated with Maisons Marques & Domains district manager—Los Angeles Naureen Lyon to curate the menu for the luncheon; Castiglion del Bosco export manager Roberto Ruscito (center) presented the wines.

around,” he explained, noting that Castiglion del Bosco was among the founders of the Consorzio del Brunello di Montalcino, established in 1967.

The luncheon, hosted by Italian restaurant Brera in LA’s downtown Arts District, showcased a lineup of Castiglion del Bosco’s Rosso di Montalcino and Brunello expressions in addition to its 2021 IGT Toscana Chardonnay, which accompanied the first course of a menu conceptualized by Brera chef Angelo Auriana and Naureen Lyon, district manager—Los Angeles for the winery’s importer;

Maisons Marques & Domaines. Topped with a Vinolok glass stopper and vinified in stainless steel, the Chardonnay's scintillating minerality and acidity enlivened the creaminess of Hokkaido scallop crudo with squid ink and summer truffle dress-



The differing tannin structures of the winery's 2018 Rosso di Montalcino DOC and 2017 Brunello di Montalcino DOCG contributed dimension to hand-cut pappardelle with slow-braised wild boar sugo and pecorino toscano.



The 2010 and 2016 vintages of Castiglion del Bosco's most prestigious label, the Brunello di Montalcino Riserva Millecento, were served alongside the final course of seared Ibérico pork coppa with Castelmagno cheese fonduta and kale, fava beans, snow peas, and other garden vegetables.

ing while also melding seamlessly with the citrus in the delicate dish. But focus soon shifted from the winery's "house white," as described by Ruscito, to its 2018 Rosso di Montalcino DOC and 2017 Brunello di Montalcino DOCG expressions, which were paired with hand-cut pappardelle, slow-braised wild boar sugo, and pecorino toscano.

Ruscito noted that the former label, produced with grapes from the estate's clay- and rock-laden Gauggiole Vineyard, "is definitely the most important wine we produce [for others] to understand our style of Sangiovese," which in this case is vinified in stainless steel and concrete rather than oak. While the norm around the turn of the millennium was "a lot of concentration, a lot of contact with oxy-

Attendee Jihyo Kim, sales consultant for Southern Glazer's Wine & Spirits of California's Signature Division, noted that while the Rosso lacked the tannin structure of the Brunello, which aged in French oak for 24 months, "it had enough to balance out the flavor and richness" of the dish. Lyon opted to praise the refined brightness of the older wine, which she said was "showing spectacularly" despite hailing from a warm vintage: "So many '17 Brunellos you try are overly ripe, but because the elevation at Castiglion del Bosco is so high"—especially in the hillside Capanna Vineyard that the wine comes from, which ranges from 820–1,509 feet above sea level—the grapes were spared from heat damage.

Ibérico pork coppa with Castelmagno cheese fonduta and kale, fava beans, snow peas, and other garden vegetables, all of which came alive due to a memorable pairing with the 2010 and 2016 vintages of Castiglion del Bosco's most prestigious label, the Brunello di Montalcino Riserva Millecento (which translates to "1100," the aforementioned year the estate's castle was built); made only in the best vintages with grapes from select crus within the Capanna Vineyard, it ages three years in French oak and two in bottle. Among producers, Ruscito noted, the 2016 vintage was even more acclaimed than the 2010: "It's definitely the most elegant expression of Sangiovese and maybe the most important wine we've ever [produced]," he said. Both wines lingered on the palate, revealing their differing complexities: The 2010 was more open despite its level of maturity, with a softer nose, while the 2016 exhibited aromas of tobacco and cedar as well as strong tannic grip.

Amici Restaurant Group director of operations Alessandro Silvestri proclaimed the pairing his favorite of the afternoon, commenting that while "sometimes a lot of peas and greens [in a dish] tend to be too fresh, too rustic, and tend to not go well with this kind of wine," that certainly wasn't the case here; he also noted the wines' deft ability to cut through the fat and tenderness of the pork.

As the group departed at the conclusion of the meal, scattering across the city to prepare for their respective dinner services after a brief spiritual sojourn to Montalcino, Fernando Galdamez, wine director at The Capital Grille, offered a quip of parting praise: "If we were supposed to [provide] the definition of balance, this would be it." Maybe the next historian planning to pen a book on Castiglion del Bosco should take note. *sj*



Two more vintages of the Brunello di Montalcino DOCG—2010 and 2013—accompanied carnaroli risotto with black trumpet mushrooms, ciccioli, and Parmigiano Reggiano Vacche Rosse.

gen, a lot of super-ripe fruit," he explained, "the reality is that Sangiovese needs to be this kind of expression, with high acidity, a bouquet of a lot of flowers—violet but also balsamic notes—so it's not just about the fruit. It's for this reason that I like to say this is sort of a naked Sangiovese," with a sharp throughline of acid that's more than capable of cleansing the palate between bites of a savory pasta.

Two more Brunello vintages, the 2010 and the 2013, accompanied the next course—carnaroli risotto with black trumpet mushrooms, ciccioli, and Parmigiano Reggiano Vacche Rosse—to illustrate what Ruscito called "the evolution in style" Castiglion del Bosco was undergoing at the time; while the 2010 was aged in barriques, the 2013 represented a shift toward aging exclusively in large barrels to minimize the influence of oak. "2013 was a fresh vintage, and we find that for the style of expression of Sangiovese we want for [this] classic label, this is close to its peak—though of course it can still age—if you really look for brightness," Ruscito said. The 2010 vintage, meanwhile, was widely recognized as being among the most celebrated in Tuscany's recent history—a report hardly disputed by the attendees due to the wine's incredibly refined, silky character abundant with red fruit that amplified the herbaceous notes in the risotto and savoriness of the pork and mushrooms.

The meal culminated with seared

Crowning ACHIEVEMENTS

TRACKING A DECADE
OF PROGRESS IN
THE PASO ROBLES
CAB COLLECTIVE'S
NAMESAKE REGION

by Randy Caparoso

When the Paso Robles CAB Collective (PRCC) was founded in 2012, Rhône varieties seemed to rule the region's roost from a popularity standpoint. Yet the reality was that over 60% of the winegrapes planted in the Paso Robles AVA were, in fact, Cabernet Sauvignon and other red Bordeaux varieties—simply because they grew so well there.

The PRCC was founded by area growers and vintners who recognized the market appeal of Paso Robles-grown red Bordeaux varieties. They were also keen to initiate qualitative and stylistic changes as a group, rebuilding the region from the ground up with state-of-the-art plant material and higher-tech viticulture. As Winston Churchill once put it, "To improve is to change; to be perfect is to change often."

A little more than ten years since the PRCC's founding, many of its goals in terms of educating the media, trade, and public have been accomplished: Paso Robles is now associated with top-quality Cabernet Sauvignon and other Bordeaux varietal wines and blends. More importantly, though, the organization has given the region's producers a much stronger sense of how, why, and where these cultivars fit into their respective pockets of the appellation. The result has been better wines—better with respect to not just varietal style but ability to express a sense of place, be it Adelaida, Willow Creek, Estrella, Santa Margarita Ranch, or any of the other 11 districts of Paso Robles officially recognized as AVAs since 2014 or be it an individual estate or vineyard.

In other words, the standards of

perfection set by the finest wines of the world inevitably involve a clear sense of terroir. So in the process of turning the rest of the world onto Paso Robles-grown Cabernet Sauvignon and its attendant grapes, the PRCC gained a much stronger grasp of what exactly makes Paso Robles unique. They discovered *themselves*.

In 2023, then, the PRCC is as much about the first part of its name as the second: Its winemakers no longer endeavor to produce Cabernets that are just as good or better than Cabs from elsewhere. They are not satisfied with making wines that could come from anywhere. They want to fulfill the potential of Paso Robles and Paso Robles only.

I recently met with 11 different PRCC members to garner their perspectives on the first ten years of this evolution.

*Cass Winery in the
Paso Robles Geneseo
District AVA.*



PHOTO COURTESY OF THE PASO ROBLES CAB COLLECTIVE



The Calcareous Vineyard estate in the Adelaida District.

Calcareous Vineyard

Winemaker Jason Joyce joined Calcareous Vineyard in 2009. This Adelaida District estate was originally planted to Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, Malbec, and Petit Verdot in 2002—a time, says Joyce, when “everyone else was thinking Paso Robles should be about Rhônes.” It took the PRCC to, in his words, “turbo-charge our learning curve. . . . The organization became the place to share experiences more openly and readily. . . . We learned more from each other during the first six or seven years than we would have over 20 years doing things on our own.” Specifically, what they learned was “how to produce balanced Cab . . . [and] not to fear the high acidity we get from challenging, high-pH calcareous soils [while] adjusting to extreme 50-degree temperature shifts between the hot days that give our grapes sun-kissed flavors and the cold summer nights that shift [them] back into regenerative mode.”

There was a time, Joyce admits, when vintners held up Napa Valley as a standard, with the result that “some of our early wines may have been a little big, ripe, or oaky.” But once the PRCC got on a roll, he adds, “We made a course correction, recognizing the factors setting Paso Robles apart. Paso Robles Cabs are still known for plush, approachable fruit, but now we are also known for off-the-charts phenolic content. Our actual sweet spot, though, is the acidity we get in our grapes, which other regions do not have. It is the acidity that balances high tannin and keeps the fruit from soaring out of control.”

The **Calcareous 2020 Lloyd of Calcareous** (\$65)—named for the estate’s late founder Lloyd Messer—epitomizes this self-realization: A blend of 29% Cabernet Franc, 26% Merlot, 24% Cabernet Sauvignon, 16% Malbec, and 6% Petit Verdot, it’s more about Adelaida terroir than a sum of grapes. Showing high anthocyanin content in its near-black purple-ruby color, it also displays tannin-packed flavors of stony minerality that mingle with mountain scrub, lavender, and black and red fruit as well as lifted acidity, all pushing into a long, lip-smacking finish.



Opolo Vineyards

James Schreiner is the longtime winemaker of note at Opolo Vineyards, founded in 1999 by owner/grower Dave Nichols and co-owner Rick Quinn in what is now in the sub-AVA of Paso Robles Willow Creek District, a cooler-climate appellation whose western border is just 11 miles from the ocean.

“When we first started,” says Nichols, “our focus was primarily [on] Zinfandel, the region’s heritage grape. We still specialize in Zinfandel, which we grow on our highest hill at 1,700 feet.” That said, explains Schreiner, “In 2014 we made a stronger commitment to new plantings and clonal selections of Cabernet Sauvignon in Willow Creek—CAB Collective was a definite influence in that decision—as well as in our . . . vineyard in Paso Robles Estrella District, a warmer region that produces riper, softer wines.”

Farming on both the east and west sides of Paso Robles has “given us a strong sense of [the region,]” Nichols continues. “The common thread throughout is fruit-forward approachability. Willow Creek Cabs, though, are more pH-driven wines with bluer and blacker fruit, still approachable when young but definitely with more staying power. Our Cabernet program has grown to the point where wines now accentuate the AVA rather than just varietal character.”

Schreiner and Nichols make their case with the **Opolo 2021 Willow Creek District Reserve Collection Cabernet Sauvignon**. Considering its \$60 price point, which is low by ultra-premium standards, it is an almost shocking example of the high phenolic profile of contemporary Paso Robles wines, showing vivid pigmentation; high-flying, penetrating perfumes with minimal pyrazines; and strong, meaty, layered, mouth-coating yet elevated qualities on the palate. Instead of oak, tannin, or exaggerated extraction, it relies on acid-driven minerality to give shape to the luxuriousness of the fruit intrinsic to the vineyard.



Brecon Estate in the Adelaida District.

Brecon Estate

Brecon Estate's 13 acres of Cabernet Sauvignon in the Adelaida District are among the oldest in Paso Robles, planted in the early 1970s. The oldest Cabernet Franc vines in the region, grafted onto Chardonnay roots in the early 1980s, also belong to the producer. "When you have the oldest vines in the appellation," says owner/grower Damian Grindley, "you're not going to pull them out; you're going to work with [them] and figure out how to make [them] better every year."

Grindley's solution to enhancing the old-vine viticulture of his hillside estate—located in primarily Linne Calodo series soil just 6–18 inches deep atop calcareous bedrock—was to plant complementary grapes such as Tannat, Petit Verdot, Malbec, and Syrah. "Before the CAB Collective came along," says Grindley, "the instinct was to emulate either [the] Old World or Napa Valley. . . Cabernets typically saw a lot of oak and were picked ultra-ripe to overcome pyrazines, which made sweet, jammy styles. Over the past ten years, we've learned that this doesn't work here. Oak is not necessary to achieve balance or complexity, and monster ripeness is no longer impressive."

One initiative of the PRCC has been the introduction of new clones of Cabernet Sauvignon as well as of rootstocks favorable to calcareous soils, which are in turn conducive to grapes with lower pH and higher phenolic content. These innovations were not an option for Grindley. "Ten years ago we felt like we needed to apologize for our old-vine Cabernet, which gives lighter color and tannin," he says. "Now we emphasize those qualities by introducing different nuances [and] achieving a different level of sophistication, true to our vineyard." The **Brecon 2020 Adelaida District Reserve Cabernet Sauvignon** (\$93), for instance, is punched up with 6% Petit Verdot, which couches the wine's lithe, elegant old-vine texture in a pungent, firm, meaty profile infused with spice box, cedar, and mineral notes.

In terms of its herbaceousness and silkiness, the **Brecon 2020 Adelaida District Reserve Cabernet Franc** (\$94) might be a dead ringer for Chinon, but its almost briny minerality screams calcareous Paso Robles origins. The **Brecon 2020 Adelaida District Malbec** (\$67), blended with 20.76% Tannat, might be even more compelling, with floral and peppercorn spices lacing muscular black fruit and scrubby chapparal. "The Malbec obviously emulates Cahors," remarks Grindley, "yet [it] has all the marks of Paso Robles terroir. That's what we've learned over the past decade in concert with CAB Collective—what grows best in our own vineyards and how to coax that out in our wines."



LXV Wine owners Neeta and Kunal Mittal.

LXV Wine

Among the newer members of the PRCC (joining in 2020) is LXV Wine, whose owners/growers/winemakers, Kunal and Neeta Mittal, bring their own global perspectives to Paso Robles. They are so obsessed with Cabernet Franc, for instance, that they have recently committed to a winemaking project in Saint-Émilion. Closer to home, Neeta makes note of the fact that nearly all the members of the PRCC are family-owned. The difference between family and corporate operations, she says, is that "families are more likely to be stewards of the land and embrace sustainability as it directly impacts future generations."

While the Mittals await the first release from their home vineyard in the heart of the Willow Creek District (a 2022 Cabernet Sauvignon), their **LXV 2021 Templeton Gap Reserve Cabernet Sauvignon** (\$95), grown sustainably in the ONX Vineyard, exudes almost exotic spice and velvety, high-phenolic, acid-driven qualities that reflect soils replete with calcite (a calcium carbonate mineral common to limestone). The culinary-minded Mittals revel in this style of wine and in its affinity with the fragrant, spice market-based cuisine of their Indian heritage. Says Neeta, "LXV is a space where we bring flavors from around the world to our table . . . opening up the restrained jargon of pH and acidity . . . to a more experiential conversation of flavors and senses."

J. Lohr Vineyards & Wines

As a founder of the PRCC who served on its board during its first seven years, J. Lohr co-owner and chief brand officer Cynthia Lohr remains passionate about its mission: "Our singular focus on spotlighting the superior quality of Paso Robles Cabernet Sauvignon [and] Bordeaux varietals and blends has resonated with the trade and consumers—a goal that has been one and the same as J. Lohr's," she says.

The 1.8-million-case winery was founded in 1974 by Cynthia's father, Jerry Lohr; after nearly 50 years, what's often overlooked is the fact that J. Lohr still controls its own vineyards and remains committed to authentic, barrel-aged craftsmanship (see page 64). The results are serious wines that laudably retain many of the brand's distinct sensory signatures: If you love classic black currant/cassis aromas, the **J. Lohr 2018 Signature Paso Robles Cabernet Sauvignon** (\$100) delivers. Sourced from a windswept Creston District block at 1,700 feet in elevation, this wine is concentrated yet accessible in the Paso Robles vein, fleshed out by 1% Malbec and 7% Saint-Macaire (the latter being a near-forgotten, high-anthocyanin Bordeaux grape that Jerry Lohr still dotes on). It's a credit to the brand and the entire appellation.

J. Lohr Vineyards & Wines' Hilltop Vineyard in the Estrella District.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF THE PASO ROBLES CAB COLLECTIVE



Sixmilebridge Vineyards in the Adelaida District.

Sixmilebridge Vineyards

According to Sixmilebridge owner/grower Jim Moroney, "Sixmilebridge was conceived as a Bordeaux[-style] winery. . . Cabernet Sauvignon and Bordeaux varietals are what we enjoy, so that's what we make." Moroney planted his first hilltop blocks at this Adelaida District estate in 2013 and undertook his inaugural harvest in 2016.

Winemaker Anthony Yount explains that "Sixmilebridge is blessed with steep, high slopes, starting at 2,000 feet. Below just 10 or 12 inches of topsoil, you hit deep layers of limestone. Daily breezes off the Pacific through the Templeton Gap attenuate intense sunlight from every angle. This means thick skins and lower pH in grapes. I like to think our wines go a little back to California of the '70s and '80s, when Cabernet producers weren't afraid of wild, non-fruit qualities or acid levels that used to be considered underripe. The site itself, you can say, is 'structural'—a megaphone for tannin, ageability, [and] high-energy wines. Paso Robles may be known for big, lush Cabernet, but that doesn't describe Sixmilebridge. This site produces its own expressions of Paso Robles wine."

While fragrant with red and black berries, violets, and cigar box, the **Sixmilebridge 2019 Adelaida District Cabernet Sauvignon** (\$96) is indeed a paradigm of structure: Meaty and compact, it penetrates the palate with long, savory graphite and mineral notes. This savoriness is even more multifaceted in the **Sixmilebridge 2019 Adelaida District Shannon** (\$85), which combines 46% Cabernet Sauvignon, 24% Merlot, 20% Malbec, 5% Cabernet Franc, and 5% Petit Verdot to yield a wine that's as tight, deep, and thunderous as a conga drum with blackberry, violet, tobacco, and wild chaparral-like scrub.



Ancient Peaks Winery's Santa Margarita Ranch in the namesake AVA.

Ancient Peaks Winery

Ancient Peaks' sprawling Santa Margarita Ranch, says co-owner/operations manager Karl Wittstrom, is located in a "no man's land" between San Luis Obispo and the rest of Paso Robles. Founding winemaker Mike Sinor candidly shares, "When the winery was founded [six years after the vineyard was planted in 1999], we were advised by distributors to specialize in Zinfandel and Syrah, but we held our ground on focusing primarily on Cabernet Sauvignon because of the pure quality of that grape coming out of the ranch. . . . Working with the CAB Collective only strengthened that resolve."

The ranch sits in the coolest-climate pocket (technically a Winkler Region II) of Paso Robles, although it is the soil—much of it ancient seabed crusted with fossilized oyster shells, while some hillsides are dominated by rocky alluvium and calcite-replete Monterey shale—that exert as much sensory influence on the brand's Bordeaux portfolio as the microclimate. Both the **Ancient Peaks 2020 Cabernet Franc** (\$50) and **Ancient Peaks 2020 Merlot** (\$22) are very much site-specific, cool-climate iterations of their varieties, pungent with spice, appealing notes of methoxypyrazine, and a pervasive underlying minerality.

The entry-level **Ancient Peaks 2020 Cabernet Sauvignon** (\$25), for its part, encapsulates the restrained, sinewy climatic personality of the site while also displaying a pop of rotundone, or black pepper, on the nose that's unusual for the variety. The **Ancient Peaks 2020 Pearl Cabernet Sauvignon** (\$72) shows the same terroir-influenced restraint—a refreshing departure from your typical California fruit bomb—while packing in black olive and flinty/mineral sensations. Finally, the **Ancient Peaks 2019 Oyster Ridge** (\$60) weaves together mineral and herbaceous notes that scream "terroir," gliding in on the velvety, fine-grained phenolic texture of the Cabernet Franc (11%) and Merlot (6%) that are added to Cabernet Sauvignon (72%), Petit Verdot (9%), and Malbec (2%).

High Camp Wines

While the Estrella District is one of Paso Robles' warmer-climate appellations, chalky calcareous hilltops and extreme diurnal temperature swings bring balance to the accessible styles of wine for which this sub-AVA is known. High Camp GM/winemaker Megan Mouren points out that "the appellation is also known for daily winds—often *too much* wind—which influences the type of wine we prefer: a feminine, acid-driven style leaning on the light side."

Noting that her family has French Basque roots, Mouren explains, "We purchased this 75-acre property to produce Bordeaux-style wines. . . . We sell 90% of our grapes to other wineries and pick and choose what we want for our own wines." Those grapes include all the Bordeaux cultivars plus Sangiovese, Grenache, Lagrein, Petite Sirah, and head-trained Zinfandel as well as Cabernet Pfeffer (also known as Mourtaou, still another rare Bordeaux variety that somehow found its way to California during the late 1800s). Mouren describes her perky, medium-bodied, clove-spiced **High Camp 2021 Tres Coyotes** (\$23)—a blend of Cabernet Sauvignon (45%), Cabernet Franc (35%), and Cabernet Pfeffer (20%)—as "the opposite of the big, extracted fruit/tannin bombs typical of California." She also playfully refers to the **High Camp 2021 Estate Cabernet Sauvignon** (\$44)—which is blended with Sangiovese (15%), Petit Verdot (5%), and Cabernet Franc (5%)—as "a reverse Super Tuscan . . . [that's] super-bright and flowery, more about the raspberry/cherry fruit and acidity of Cabernet grown on this property, which the Sangiovese only enhances. . . . [It's] a perfect example of what the vineyard wants to give."

High Camp Wines in the Estrella District.



Broken Earth Winery

The PRCC's latest member (as of this year) draws from a 2,500-acre home ranch located on Estrella District slopes that top off at 1,200 feet. Because most of its 700 planted acres consist of Cabernet Sauvignon vines dating to the early 1970s, it's undergoing a significant replanting, mostly at higher-elevation points to avoid frost pockets.

Explains winemaker Ben Mayo, "We threw our hat into the CAB Collective ring because we've specialized in Cab for so long. We also want to showcase what we get in Estrella District. This AVA sees lots of sun, which reduces pyrazines and produces that soft, friendly style Paso Robles is known for. Estrella is also a colder region than what is generally assumed. For example, we're typically two months behind other AVAs when it comes to bloom, and despite our soft tannins, we get good color retention and dark, lifted fruit." Case in point: The **Broken Earth 2019 Signature Series Estate Cabernet Sauvignon** (\$30) is shy in neither color nor the bright, cedar-laced aromas of black currant that are couched in nuances derived from 17 months in new French oak, while zesty acidity perks up the even-keeled structure, moderate at 14% ABV.



Cass Winery

Founded in 2002, Cass Winery has a track record of producing Cabernet Sauvignons that are appealing when young—a Paso Robles hallmark—yet effortlessly ageable, as fresh and lively at 15 years as they are at five. The key, according to winemaker Sterling Kragten, is the sun-soaked alluvial terrace soils typifying the Paso Robles Geneseo District AVA: "Grapes mature early enough for the wines to finish with alcohols below 14%, yet there is always enough acid/tannin structure to give them longevity."


Proffering the **Cass 2014 Reserve** (\$175)—a blend of 71% Cabernet Sauvignon, 11% Syrah, 9% Malbec, 7% Petit Verdot, and 2% Mourvèdre weighing in at just 13.5% ABV—Kragten says, "Here's an example of how well the appellation shows off not just Cabernet but also other grapes . . . in this case Syrah and Mourvèdre, which make a huge impact in this blend. . . . This wine will only get better in another ten years." The **Cass 2020 M&M** (\$65) might be even more impressive: Combining Malbec (57%), Merlot (37%), and Petit Verdot (6%), it forges briary berry fruit, distinctively sage-like spice, edgy acidity, and sturdy tannin into something ultra-bright, original in its conception, and wholly unique to the vineyard.



Hearst Ranch Winery in the Estrella District.

Hearst Ranch Winery

Born and raised in Paso Robles, Hearst Ranch Winery owner/vintner Jim Saunders cites his agrarian roots—he represents the sixth generation of a family that's been farming in California since 1869—and sustainable practices across 90 planted acres as keys to the producer's recent growth. "The Paso Robles families who are in it for the long haul get it," he says. "We take a generational approach to the business. . . . This may sound corny, but we are in the grape-growing and winemaking industry for the love of it—it's certainly never easy!" He credits his colleagues in the PRCC for not just their marketing savvy but also the dogged research that led to the establishment of Cabernet Sauvignon as "the backbone of our area."

It's always said that growers are more likely to produce terroir-focused wines. This is certainly exemplified by the **Hearst Ranch 2019 Proprietors Reserve Cabernet Sauvignon** (\$120), a vivid violet-ruby expression teeming with notes of red berry liqueur and scrubby mountain flower as well as notably iron-like and faintly briny mineral qualities; it's as silky and lively with acidity as a 100% Cabernet Sauvignon can be. In short, it represents yet another crowning achievement of the PRCC in its first ten years. 

{ winery spotlight }

A New High for
HERZOG
Wine Cellars

CAMEL BACK RIDGE VINEYARD IN
LAKE COUNTY, CA, REPRESENTS
THE WINERY'S RECENT EVOLUTION

BY
RANDY
CAPAROSO

*A view of Camel Back Ridge
Vineyard in the shadow of Mount
Konocti in the Red Hills AVA.*

PHOTO: RANDY CAPAROSO

Large obsidian rocks were removed from the landscape when the Camel Back Ridge Vineyard was planted in 2020.



Standing halfway up Herzog Wine Cellars' newly planted hillside vineyard on the edge of Lake County, California's Red Hills AVA—practically in the shadow of dormant volcano Mount Konocti—David Galzignato, who serves as Herzog's director of winemaking and operations, recognized the pedigree of his surroundings when I met with him this past June. "When the sun hits the obsidian gravel just right, it gives the topsoil [the illusion of] movement, like a black wave traveling the length of the vineyard," he said.

Obsidian—a shimmeringly black, crystallized volcanic glass—does not directly contribute minerals beneficial to grapevines. But it is indicative of soil series that are highly conducive to quality winegrowing. "We're sitting at about a half-mile elevation, 2,200 to 2,600 feet," said David Weiss, the site's vineyard manager. "These are well-drained, gravelly volcanic soils. There is a northeast aspect . . . ideal for good air drainage, minimizing afternoon sun. Accordingly, we configured the row orientation [from] southwest to northeast at a 45-degree angle off true north—ideal for speckled light infiltration and afternoon sun protection."



Herzog director of winemaking and operations David Galzignato inspects Cabernet Sauvignon vines in the Camel Back Ridge Vineyard.

Weiss continued, “This was virgin ground when we put in the first 16 and a half acres of vines in 2020. We’ll add another 30 acres next year to complete the vineyard development. We’re surrounded by pine, fir, and chaparral [i.e., madrone, manzanita, and other native shrubs] unique to this area, which will add to the sensory signature of wines from this site. There is a lot of horsepower in these soils. They have potential for high vigor, which can always be controlled by deficit irrigation, and the topography allows for tight spacing. Compared to lower parts of Lake County, our days are not as hot and nights not quite as cool, but on this hill the vines will see intense UV light, which only optimizes grape-skin thickness.” In other words, the vineyard presents what Galzignato called “ideal

conditions for Cabernet Sauvignon”—to which the entire vineyard is planted.

“Our vineyards are very spread out from each other,” noted Galzignato, so he relies heavily on local specialists like Weiss (who owns his own company, Bella Vista Farming) and irrigation specialist Mark Greenspan of Advanced Viticulture to achieve Herzog’s objectives. Greenspan also joined us at the burgeoning site, which will yield its first commercial crop this year. According to Weiss, “USGS maps have identified this area along Bottle Rock Road as Camel Back Ridge”—hence the name of the vineyard.

Greenspan classified Camel Back Ridge Vineyard as “a high-potential site because of its ideal confluence of right soil, right climate, right aspect, and [right] elevation. State-of-the-art

irrigation gives us the opportunity to fine-tune water management. Moisture probes monitor water content in soil and plants literally every 15 minutes—we can water and manage canopy and cluster growth with exact precision.” The goal, Galzignato elaborated, “is to achieve maximum concentration at a lower Brix, timing phenolic and sugar ripeness to occur at the exact same time. This also minimizes methoxypyrazine and any overt green character. It’s the terroir and precision farming that will help us hit our marks with these wines, not anything we do in the cellar. Camel Back Ridge epitomizes Joseph Herzog’s commitment to taking the brand to the next level as a vineyard-focused winery. It fits in with all my own training and experience, which has always been farming-driven.”

PHOTO: RANDY CAPAROSO



PHOTO COURTESY OF HERZOG WINE CELLARS




*Herzog Wine Cellars partner/
VP Joseph Herzog.*



Irrigation specialist Mark Greenspan of Advanced Viticulture and Camel Back Ridge vineyard manager David Weiss are among the experts Herzog relies on to help oversee its farming practices.

Founded in 1985, Herzog Wine Cellars is an internationally distributed brand owned by the Herzog family, which boasts a 150-year history of winemaking that can be traced back nine generations to Czechoslovakia. While it's anchored by its California-appellated Baron Herzog line, currently retailing at \$13, the portfolio includes multiple tiers of handcrafted wines: Lineage (priced at \$22), Single Vineyard and Special Reserve (which sell for \$48–\$58), Special Edition (\$100), Limited Edition (\$150), and the Ultra luxury tier (\$225–\$350).

A change of direction toward estate farming began almost immediately after partner/VP Joseph Herzog began guiding the family's California operation in 2005. "When we started, all our grapes were purchased from growers—we established strong relationships in Sonoma County, Napa Valley, Clarksburg, and Lodi," he notes. "What changed, in 2007–2008, is we suddenly experienced a shortage of grapes, as little as 50% of what we had contracted. The issue for us is that we are 100% kosher—we can't just go out and make up the shortfall by buying wine on the bulk market because our wines need to be made in our own winery to meet kosher standards. At that point we made a new commitment to start purchasing and developing our own vineyards—or at the very least to sign long-term contracts giving us better control of farming and grape supply."

In 2007, the Herzogs began acquiring properties in Clarksburg, their longtime source for Chenin Blanc, and in 2018, they developed a property in Chiles Valley, a high-elevation eastern sub-appellation of Napa Valley. Meanwhile, in 2014, "we started working with Cabernet Sauvignon farmed by Andy Beckstoffer in Lake County," recalls Joseph. "I could immediately see that this was going to be the next appellation in terms of high-quality Cabernet. When I first saw the Camel Back Ridge property, it was breathtaking and, we knew, perfect for Cabernet." 



A TASTING OF HERZOG SPECIAL RESERVE CABERNET SAUVIGNON

To demonstrate why Herzog Wine Cellars is excited about its investment in Camel Back Ridge Vineyard, its director of winemaking and operations, David Galzignato, presented three barrel samples of 2021 Cabernet Sauvignon, all slated to be bottled under the winery's entry-level luxury tier, Special Reserve. Here are my notes.

Herzog 2021 Special Reserve Napa Valley Cabernet Sauvignon: Deep, almost black violet-ruby color. Ripe-toned cassis and black currant; broad, expansive, full body and dense, textured tannins. True to the appellation in its opulent feel.

Herzog 2021 Special Reserve Alexander Valley Cabernet Sauvignon: From a tenured vineyard that recently committed to a 25-year contract with Herzog, this wine shows a classic perfume of cedar box and cassis and rounded, densely textured tannins on the medium-full palate, followed by a long, cocoa-dusted berry finish.



Herzog 2021 Special Reserve Red Hills/Lake County Cabernet Sauvignon: Made from fruit sourced near Herzog's Camel Back Ridge property, this wine possesses the deepest, most vivid purplish-ruby color of all the Special Reserve Cabernets. The pungent, focused nose features mineral-laced cassis hinting almost at brininess; the medium-full body is compact and the tannins are dense, yet the result is svelte, zesty, and long. The Old World structure places minerality on par with the fruit.

Galzignato uses technical analysis to ensure that the phenolic content of his wines is in balance with the alcohol and acidity. The Red Hills Cabernet has a slightly higher alcohol level, but it comes across as the sleekest, most compact wine of the trio. This can probably be attributed primarily to its phenolic content, according to Galzignato: Spectrophotometer readings representing total phenolics show 56.5 for the Napa Valley, 64.6 for the Alexander Valley, and 99.5 for the Red Hills samples. Using these metrics, he can cherry-pick the most phenolic vineyard blocks as they apply to his target style. These truly are terroir-driven Cabernet Sauvignons, authentically backstopped by hands-on innovation in the field.

Sonoma County Barrel Auction auctioneer John Curley works the crowd at the 2023 event.



auctions but—given that it built its name on Chardonnay—“we wanted to dance with the one that brought us.” Ridge Vineyards’ 2022 Pagani Ranch Norma’s Block was sourced from the oldest blocks in the namesake Sonoma Valley vineyard at 120-plus years, where original plantings of Zinfandel, Petite Sirah, and teinturier grapes Alicante Bouschet, Grand Noir, and Lenoir made for what winemaker Shauna Rosenblum called “a viticultural museum” to draw from. And Ramey Wine Cellars made a Cabernet Sauvignon exclusively from the Rockpile AVA in testament to the fact that, as co-president Alan Ramey put it, the SoCoBA provides “an excuse to make that one thing that you don’t usually do for people who appreciate it.”

That would include attendees like Dave Wiegel, co-owner of Meritage Wine Market in Encinitas, who confirmed what the above examples suggest: “There’s a lot of diversity in Sonoma County, whether it’s varietals, terroir, or personalities,” he said. “It’s just a wonderful region, and this

One-Off Wonders

INSIDE THE NINTH ANNUAL SONOMA COUNTY BARREL AUCTION

by Ruth Tobias

“TELL YOUR FRIENDS—bid high and bid often.” That was Joseph Phelps winemaker Justin Ennis’ spunky response to a compliment on the wine he’d crafted with Bob Cabral Wines’ Bob Cabral for the ninth annual Sonoma County Barrel Auction (SoCoBA) on May 5, which the duo was presenting at the lot tasting preview the previous day. As Ennis explained to me, “Bob and I worked together many years at Williams Selyem. We were at a concert and we thought, ‘Hey, we haven’t worked together in a long time.’ Being able to collaborate and do something out of the box [was] just fun.” Agreed Cabral, “It turned out so good we’re going to another concert.” (They were planning on seeing Dead & Company, in case you’re wondering.)

The 2022 blend of Pinot Noir from Cabral’s vineyards in the northwest Sonoma Coast and Joseph Phelps’ in the

southwest part of the appellation was just one of 66 five-, ten-, and 20-case lots produced by members of the Sonoma County Vintners association in keeping with the motto of the auction, “Never Before, Never Again Wines.” At table after table set up along the perimeter of the piazza of Healdsburg event venue Bacchus Landing, participating wineries were showcasing such compelling one-offs as Gloria Ferrer’s first-ever Sparkling Rouge from Carneros and J Vineyards and Winery’s only single-vineyard Blanc de Noirs to date, hailing from Eastside Knoll in the Russian River Valley. Patz & Hall poured its 35th Anniversary Cuvée, the “first bottling off of the Chardonnay plot in our new estate vineyard” in the Green Valley AVA, according to cellar master Ross Outon, who explained that the winery has typically featured Pinot Noir at past

event showcases it in a snapshot in a way that’s great for the trade.” In fact, added his partner Dustin Cano, “This is our sixth time [at the SoCoBA] and we’ve walked away with lots every time. . . . The wines are always great; the relationships are better.” With that sentiment, he echoed many of the trade buyers at the tasting (who hailed from as far as Norway and South Korea). Perhaps Steven Sherman, owner of William Cross Wine Merchants in San Francisco, comes to the auction primarily to “get a good look at the vintage and what certain producers can do on small lots”; perhaps Glenn Siegel, founder of DTC luxury-wine company Wine Spectrum, has come every year since its inception because “the wines are really special—maybe they’re using different blocks of the vineyard, maybe it’s different varietals they don’t usually work



Pictured from left to right: Congressman Mike Thompson, SoCoBA Icons Award winner Lee Martinelli Sr., Innovator Award recipient Theresa Heredia, Lifetime Achievement awardee Tom Klein, and Congressman Jared Huffman.

with, but they're legitimately different and exciting and have a really good story." But each acknowledged that they also come because—in the words of Annette Cross, beverage director at Palo Alto-based catering company Catered Too—they "love the community. The people are so friendly and very down to earth."

Anyone who might doubt what Siegel referred to as Sonoma County's "gracious, collaborative lifestyle" needed only to attend the auction itself—held at MacMurray Estate Vineyards' beautiful MacMurray Ranch in the Russian River Valley's Middle Reach neighborhood—to be convinced. Generosity in the form of the dozens of bottles gracing each table courtesy of the participating producers was one hallmark of the event: "We brought more wine than we should have—it's the Ramey family flaw," said Alan Ramey, "[but] the fun is the under-the-table wines that usually don't see the light of day." Humility equal to passion was also in abundance, embodied by each of the auction honorees. Martinelli Winery's Lee Martinelli Sr., who received the SoCoBA Icons Award with his wife, Carolyn, claimed that "Carolyn deserves the majority of this distinguished award—she had the important job of raising our family. My job was so much easier—my job was to go out and prune the vines; they were happy and gave me no arguments."



Jamie Benziger of Benziger Family Winery and Imagery Estate Winery pours Blue Moon, a collaboration between the sibling producers, at the lot tasting preview. "It's the first time we've blended all of our Malbecs from our estate vineyards," she explained. "All four have different personalities, so it would make a good bang for the buck."

While Gary Farrell Vineyards & Winery director of winemaking Theresa Heredia accepted the Innovator Award in part for her work toward making the industry more diverse, equitable, and inclusive, she also declined to take credit, insisting that much remains to be done in terms of granting access to, for instance, "the countless Latinos [who] work their asses off": "I didn't grow up seeing examples of myself as a winemaker," she pointed out, describing her speech as a "call to arms" to facilitate change. And Rodney Strong Vineyards' Tom Klein, who received the Lifetime Achievement Award as a sustainability pioneer, thanked everybody from his grandfather—whose "favorite comment . . . was 'Your word is your bond'"—to peers like Ramey founder David Ramey, whom he called "the best

teacher I've ever seen." (Later, Ramey would admit that receiving the Lifetime Achievement Award in 2022 was "one of the high points of my life.")

The camaraderie continued as auctioneer John Curley got the proceedings underway, strutting across the stage to a soundtrack that included "Eye of the Tiger" and "Don't Give Up On Us" while gently teasing potential buyers with lines like "Coulda, woulda, shoulda—worst three words in the English language." Winemakers table-hopped with magnums in hand, greeting one another with a hug and a pour. At my own table, Benovia winemaker Mike Sullivan cheered for the Martinellis during the bidding on their lot, noting, "I buy grapes from [them], David buys grapes. . . . There's always this

symbiosis." Symbiosis, in fact, yielded the top-selling lot of the day: Twenty cases of a 2022 Pinot Noir made jointly by Williams Selyem, Rochioli Vineyards and Winery, and Gary Farrell Vineyards & Winery in honor of the late Joe Rochioli Jr. went for \$51,000.

By day's end, Sonoma County Vintners had raised more than \$535,000 for the organization's marketing programs and other initiatives that support the local wine community. In short, the event was a rousing success—which surely came as no surprise to Congressman Jared Huffman, who made an appearance onstage with fellow Congressman Mike Thompson. "One of the many reasons we are so proud to represent this county," he said, "is not just the incredible wine—it's the heart." ❧

Off to a Fresh Start

AT A LUNCHEON IN BOSTON, BURGUNDY COOPERATIVE **CAVE DE LUGNY'S** CHARDONNAYS MADE A FINE MATCH FOR JAPANESE FARE

story by Jillian Dara / photos by Josh Reynolds

UNOAKED AND ELEGANT, the Chardonnays of Burgundy cooperative Cave de Lugny may traditionally be paired with classic regional dishes like escargots, but during a recent lunch at Fuji at Kendall in Cambridge, Massachusetts, they proved a brilliant match for sushi and sashimi.

"The freshness and high level of acidity in the Cave de Lugny wines work well with the savory and subtle spice that shows in sushi," shared winemaker Grégoire Pissot, who was in attendance at the event along with local wine professionals including Sarah Maclsaac, beverage

director at Bar Volpe and Fox & the Knife in South Boston; Karen Marino, beverage director at Woods Hill Pier 4 in the Seaport District; and Kate Webber, owner of Webber Restaurant Group.

on limestone that lends it its minerality-forward character; it's vinified in 100% stainless steel with malolactic fermentation. As we took our seats, Pissot poured Les Charmes, which comes from the cooperative's flagship vineyard in Mâcon-Lugny. Various salads, accompanied by ponzu and ginger dressing, were placed family style around the table, featuring slices of grapefruit that danced with the fresh and fruity notes of the wine.

Next up was La Carte, served with a sushi boat containing salmon and tuna nigiri, spider rolls, and tempura shrimp rolls.



The lunch began with La Côte Blanche, a clean and crisp sipper that made for easy drinking on a humid afternoon in June. La Côte Blanche is Cave de Lugny's entry-level wine, sourced from its Mâcon-Villages vineyards, but it's produced in the same manner as all of its Chardonnays: Grown

Pissot explained that the wine's balance and aging potential derived from its terroir: While Burgundy's soils are generally prized for their limestone and clay, those in the namesake 7.7-acre vineyard are chalky. La Carte is a relatively warm site but has less exposure to the sun, so the team typically picks the grapes here on the last day of harvest; the result displays an unmissable freshness, which is what makes it one of Pissot's favorite plots. "Usually when I speak about the freshness or acidity of the



◀ Cave de Lugny winemaker Grégoire Pissot poses with his self-proclaimed favorite of the wines, *Coeur de Charmes*.

wines, I prefer to speak about the feeling of the freshness," he said, noting that it's as much about the quality of the acidity in the mouth as it is about aroma.

The last wine Pissot poured was *Coeur de Charmes*. Today the top-tier wine in Cave de Lugny's portfolio, it started as an experiment with a 5-acre plateau in the oldest part of Les Charmes (hence the name, referencing the heart of the vineyard). The vines here are over 50 years of age, with some being as old as 92; their grapes are usually the first to ripen and to be harvested. "We want to show that the area of Mâcon can produce very good wines for aging," said Pissot. "It's a good example to show customers there's no oak used even though there's vanilla, coconut, and slight toasty notes."

The consensus among the guests was that the Coeur de Charmes made for the best pairing: It was served with fried chicken strips accompanied by a spicy-sweet sauce and savory noodles. When Pissot was asked why he thought the pairing was so outstanding, he explained: "The lightly toasted aromas in the Coeur de Charmes from the long lees aging and bottle age match wonderfully with fried foods—not only with the fried chicken dish but also with the fried soft-shell crab sushi." But he added that he had a runner-up, the Les Charmes with tuna sushi: "The aromas of

Karen Marino, beverage director at Woods Hill Pier 4, noses a glass of La Carte.



Kate Webber, owner of Webber Restaurant Group, enjoys the wines and company.

and fresher the wine needs to be." On that note, we wondered, what tips did he have for combining such strongly flavored ingredients as ginger or soy sauce with wine? "Simply put, do not use a lot—especially the soy sauce, which has a sweet component," he said. "Using too much dampens the flavor of both the food and the wine."

We were sold. Move over, Pinot Grigio and sparkling wine—unoaked Chardonnay is the new sushi pairing to beat. **SJ**

Michaela Bowen, district manager at Deutsch Family Wine & Spirits, welcomes guests with the refreshing La Côte Blanche.

the wine were not overpowered by the tuna, and I think the structure of the wine worked well with the texture of the [fish]."

As the meal ended, we fired a few questions at Pissot about the ins and outs of pairing his wines with sushi. For starters, we asked, "When it comes to pairing raw fish with wine, what do you wish more people knew?" His answer: "The wines should be served well chilled, [and] the acidity is very important for the balance of flavors"; additionally, "the spicier the food, the fuller and more complex



On the Oregon Trail

DISPATCHES FROM TWO SOMMFOUNDATION ENRICHMENT TRIPS



A Voice for the Rogue Valley

story and photos by Andrew McFetridge

Irvine & Roberts Vineyards against the backdrop of the Cascade Range.

ON THE 50-MINUTE FLIGHT FROM Seattle to Medford, Oregon, en route to SommFoundation's Rogue Valley Somm Camp Enrichment Trip, my seatmate's eyes lit up when I shared that I was traveling to the region with other U.S.-based sommeliers to study its wines. As she expounded on why the Rogue Valley is so special, her beaming pride in the wines of Southern Oregon resonated with me. I was unsure yet excited.

The Rogue Valley is a slice of pristine land just north of the California/Oregon border that centers around the towns of Medford, Ashland, and Jacksonville. Garnering AVA status in 1991, it has a history of winemaking dating back to the 19th century, yet my knowledge of the region going in was slim due to the fact that it's often overshadowed on wine lists and in study programs by that famous Pinot Noir haven to its north (you know the one). Upon arriving, though, I was as enchanted by my surroundings as if they were an Albert Bierstadt painting. My

eyes drank in the blue-gray skies that lay over the rugged mountains and the electric emerald-colored hills lined with vines, vines, and more vines.

The AVA measures about 460,000 hectares in area, of which nearly 2,300 are planted to vine. While its growing season is similar to that of Rioja, Bordeaux, and Beaujolais, the Rogue Valley boasts one of the largest diurnal temperature shifts in the world; this 30- to 50-degree swing promotes hundreds of microclimates ideal for the hodgepodge of varieties grown here such as Viognier, Pinot Noir, Tempranillo, and even Tannat. The weather on our trip couldn't decide whether to overheat us, freeze us out, or keep us drenched: I could only imagine how the vines feel.

If the Valley is reminiscent of great American paintings, then the people are the painters, with ingenuity, innovation, and adaptation representing their color palette. The wines of Weisinger Family Winery, established in 1988, offered alluring ex-

amples of this resourcefulness. Its rendition of Touriga Nacional, the famous Iberian grape, reminded me of the great red wines of Australia: Seductive tobacco leaves, smoke, leather, and eucalyptus warmed my senses on our particularly cold morning visit to the estate. Owner/winemaker Eric Weisinger also treated us to a 1988 Cabernet Sauvignon Blanc, which was evocative of great Alsatian Gewürztraminer. Sadly, not much is available anymore. To spit would have been sacrilegious.

Respect for the land and the community is a recurring theme in the Rogue Valley. Quady North, a certified-sustainable winery with a portfolio of mostly Rhône varieties, was founded in 2006 by Herb Quady. While producing wines with great respect for the land and the people working it, Quady also provides mentorship to up-and-coming winemakers in the region and even lends his facilities to others for bottling and canning.

Neighboring Troon Vineyard, a 100-acre Demeter-certified farm off the Applegate



Sheep graze the vineyards at Troon Vineyard (joined here by a sheepdog that could masquerade as a sheep if it pleased).

River, is a pioneer of biodynamic farming practices in the Valley, including using field horsetail spray to combat fungus, composting spent grape must to promote soil health, and maintaining a chatty yet helpful flock of sheep for grazing. The passion of the Troon crew can be felt in their spell-binding wines: I could have drunk their PétanNat all the livelong day.

Feeding ten hungry sommeliers is no easy task. Nevertheless, the region's talented chefs skillfully and thoughtfully painted the story of the Valley on our plates. Irvine & Roberts Vineyards spoiled us with its elegant Chardonnays and seductive Pinot Noirs, expertly paired with a six-course meal that included wagyu tortellini and sunchoke vichyssoise. The wine and food understood each other like lifelong friends. I was beginning to fall in love while trying to forget the inevitable flight home.

As sommeliers, we are a voice for the wines, regions, and people that we believe in. To that end, we must experience them firsthand so that we can inspire others. We travel to listen and learn, because an open mind is the most important instrument a somm can possess—with a durable wine key coming in a close second.

Andrew McFetridge is sommelier at Verōnika at the Fotografiska Museum in New York, NY.

The Hidden Gem of the Willamette Valley

story and photos by Kathryn Long

WHILE MOST REGIONS that are known for Pinot Noir also focus on Chardonnay, Pinot Gris has historically been the preferred white grape in Oregon's Willamette Valley. But a new intention behind the cultivation and vinification of Chardonnay in the region has put the grape in a spotlight it hasn't previously enjoyed. In April, SommFoundation sent several sommeliers, including me, to the Willamette Valley to take a deep dive into the burgeoning category of Oregon Chardonnay.

On our visit, Adelsheim Vineyard founder David Adelsheim noted, "We didn't create this place—we're just interpreting it." Terroir is at the heart of the choices made by producers in both the vineyard and the winery; honoring its diversity while acknowledging the role humans play via farming, fermentation, and aging is key to how Willamette Chardonnay is crafted.

U.S. winemakers have a lot of freedom in terms of how they approach their craft, but the producers of the Willamette Valley focus on the expression of both the fruit and the soil to determine which interventions to make. Shane Moore, winemaker at Gran Moraine, quipped that "if the seeds are brown, bring it down." While following this motto would mean picking early in other regions, it's often optimal advice in the Valley. The same sentiment was offered by winemaker Josh Bergström of Bergström Wine, who pointed out that the region's producers have put their own stamp on Chardonnay by "pick[ing] for the skeleton and creat[ing] the musculature" around physiologically ripe grapes. They're crafting wines with plenty of texture from lees aging and malolactic conversion without adding the heavy influence of new oak. As Ben Casteel, co-owner/director and winemaker at Bethel Heights, put it, "Barrels and butter have nothing to do with each other."

The Willamette Valley Chardonnay category is ever evolving and one to watch. Area winemakers are dedicated to sharing their methods and knowledge with one another as they define and refine their style and their identity beyond Pinot Noir. If there is one thing for certain, it is that their efforts deserve attention as their story continues to unfold. Their Chardonnays are hidden gems that we all fell in love with—and we'll undoubtedly be sharing them with our guests and friends. *sj*

Kathryn Long is wine buyer at Olamaie in Austin, TX.

SommFoundation scholars, including author Kathryn Long (third from right), with Jason Lett of The Eyrie Vineyards (second from left).



Some of the old vines with which Feudi di San Gregorio works reach higher than 6 feet.

Old Vines, GREAT WINES

A FIELD TRIP TO
CAMPANIA'S FEUDI DI
SAN GREGORIO REVEALS
HISTORY AND HERITAGE

by Lars Leicht

IF WE'VE HEARD IT ONCE, we've heard it a million times: Old vines make great wines. Antonio Capaldo, CEO of Feudi di San Gregorio in the Irpinia sub-region of Campania, has not only heard it, he lives it on a daily basis: His portfolio could be the poster child for wines made from old vines. So convinced is Capaldo of the truth of the adage, in fact, that in April he hosted a field trip for the U.K.-based Old Vine Conference, where he strutted the stuff of his most prized vineyards; having been fortunate enough to be in Italy at the time, I took the opportunity to join the in-depth educational outing.

Feudi's focus on old-vine production may seem at first to be a bit of an anomaly, given its aura of modernity. Its wines bear an elegant profile and sleek packaging; its winemaking facility is state of the art, and its restaurant, Marennà, is a showcase of Michelin-worthy fine dining. Yet Feudi has made an agricultural policy of working only with the indigenous varieties of Campania. To that end, it buys old vineyards when they become available, rents them from families who don't want to sell, and buys fruit from those still farming them.

The Capaldo family founded Feudi di San Gregorio in 1986, a period of development for Italy's reputation on the world wine stage marked by the introduction of Super Tuscan, which blended international varieties, including Cabernet Sauvignon and Merlot, with the indigenous Sangiovese. But in Campania, the



Antonio Capaldo is CEO of Feudi di San Gregorio.



In April, Feudi di San Gregorio hosted a field trip for the U.K.-based Old Vine Conference.

Capaldos saw no reason—then as now—to add to the local mix.

When phylloxera hit France and Northern Italy in the early 1860s, affected producers turned to fruit from Southern Italy, where the louse had not yet arrived. Indigenous grapes and local wine from Irpinia were loaded at the train station of Taurasi, a village now synonymous with the Aglianico grape, and went by rail to Tuscany, Piedmont, or more frequently, the Bay of Naples to be shipped to Bordeaux. Unfortunately, in the 1920s and 1930s, phylloxera found its way to parts of Campania, and the destruction wreaked by World War II took its toll on the region as well. In 1980—as Italy’s aforementioned wine renaissance was underway—a great earthquake in Campania literally and figuratively rocked the south of Italy. “It stopped the clock in Irpinia,” noted Pierpaolo Sirch, Feudi’s agronomist and cellar director.

But out of the rubble the Capaldo family made a firm bet on the region’s patrimony. Locals had maintained their time-tested methods of subsistence farming, growing wheat, vegetables, and other crops between well-spaced rows of grapevines. What’s more, in areas containing the sandy and volcanic soils common

to Irpinia, phylloxera could not thrive, so the vines were still own-rooted.

Sirch, together with renowned University of Milan professor of viticulture Attilio Scienza, took tour guests to visit some centenary vineyards trained using techniques dating back to the area’s ancient settlers, including Greeks, Etruscans, Oscans, Lombards, and Goths. He explained that local farming families typically stick with one grape variety, adding that the different soil types ideal for each of the native vines—Aglianico, Falanghina, Fiano di Avellino, and Greco—tend to occur in distinct pockets of Irpinia. “There was no crossover of varieties from plot to plot,” he said. “Specific geographic areas are dedicated to each variety in a sort of spontaneous zonation. The farmers know where each variety grows best. And this area was not polluted by international varieties.” As a result, Irpinia is home to some of the smallest DOCGs in Italy.

Even the classic Raggiera Avellinese training on high pergolas varies slightly from village to village, Sirch said. He called the Guyot and Espalier training in newly planted vineyards a “contamination”—though perhaps useful when modified to include old-school pruning techniques.

We visited one 150-year-old vineyard of Aglianico where thick vines were

trained to reach about 6 feet in the air before branching out into long spurs with multiple buds. Scienza pointed out more evidence of the farmers’ sagacity: “They trained the vines like this to complement the acidity of Aglianico,” he explained. “By extending the cordon, [they ensured] the vine’s energy was dispersed to more fruit.” We also visited a 180-year-old vineyard that at first sight appeared untrained, but close inspection revealed that the long branches were extended on wires and left unpruned, also to disperse the vine’s energies.

Capaldo and Sirch’s efforts to preserve local traditions are far from a marketing veneer, especially given the company’s rating as a B Corp, a private certification of for-profit companies that meet social-sustainability and environmental-accountability standards. Embracing the best elements of Irpinia’s culture and history, Feudi seeks to preserve as many of its old vines as possible. “The tendency here is for the older farmers to abandon the vineyards” as younger generations leave the countryside, explained Capaldo. “We’re trying to keep those vineyards and support this culture.” He admitted that despite his efforts, agriculture in the region is still decreasing: Land under vine in Irpinia has gone from about



Feudi agronomist and cellar director Pierpaolo Sirch.

78,000 hectares in 1930 to roughly 6,500 today—yet ironically, that is what has preserved the old vines he counts on. “Here, farmers [have] remained farmers” on a small scale, said Sirch, noting that the average vineyard plot is around one-third of an acre in Irpinia.

The older vineyards are also important as both a source for genetic material—i.e., clones—for new vineyards and a hedge against climate change, situated as they are in an area where it was once common to harvest under snowfall, according to Sirch. Ungrafted Aglianico, which can grow in vineyards planted as high as 700 meters above sea level, is often the last grape to be harvested in Italy, historically in early November, though over the past decade the norm has been closer to late October. Irpinia’s light soils provide excellent drainage, reflecting yet another anomaly: This is one of Italy’s rainiest winemaking zones despite its location in the country’s otherwise warm and sunny south.

It should be noted that less than a quarter of Italy’s vines are over 30 years of age. The majority of its old vines are concentrated in certain southern regions—especially Campania and its neighbors Puglia, Calabria, and Sicilia. There are also some noteworthy old vineyards in the north, including Trentino–Alto Adige; the hills of Soave in the Veneto; and the Prosecco zone, which includes parts of Veneto and Friuli. In 2016 and 2022, the Italian parliament passed laws to encour-

age the preservation of old vines, whose biggest threat comes from fungi that impact the heartwood of the vine and shorten its productive lifespan.

The definition of “old vine” varies by geographic region, but it is generally accepted that after about 25–30 years, grapevines become less productive and therefore less commercially efficient. The fruit is generally lower in anthocyanins, which results in lighter color; another potentially negative commercial factor. But it also yields more concentrated fruit flavors. While newer clones boast disease resistance, Scienza points out, old vines have undergone an evolution to increase their chance of survival despite the fact that, unlike animals, they are constrained to remain in place. “Through millennia of hot waves and cold waves, they have learned to deal with the environment around them, and that remains in their epigenetic code,” said Scienza.

Many regions around the world count on monasteries and garden pergolas as a source for previously underestimated old-vine genetic material, and groups like the Old Vine Conference seek to encourage that. Capaldo is one of the movement’s biggest champions in Campania, which has a wealth of ancient vines supported by its unique microclimate and a heritage passed down by Etruscan farmers and Greek merchants. The former gave us old vines, the latter an appreciation for great wines. *sj*

Feudi di San Gregorio 2022 Visione, Campania Rosato IGT, Italy (\$32)

Crafted from Aglianico, this dynamic expression with a salty temperament offers notes of tangerine zest and rosemary that leave a trace on the palate, followed by an ethereal finish of white cherry. **92** —*Meridith May*

Feudi di San Gregorio 2021 Greco di Tufo DOCG, Campania, Italy (\$34)

Starbright aromas of lemon biscuit lead to flavors that speak of a sea breeze along with pine nut, toffee, and minty pear. Stainless-steel fermentation and lees contact help result in zingy acidity that prickles the palate before a finish of vanilla and white flowers threaded with lean minerality. **93** —*M.M.*

Feudi di San Gregorio 2022 Cutizzi, Greco di Tufo DOCG, Campania, Italy (\$35)

Aged for up to five months in stainless steel with constant lees contact, this energetic, racy white is taut and edgy as cut glass, with a vivacious attitude. On a palate defined by its clean lines, acacia and crisp pear are accented by just-squeezed lime and a dot of marjoram. **95** —*M.M.*

Feudi di San Gregorio 2015 Serpico Irpinia Aglianico DOC, Campania, Italy (\$106)

Old-vine Aglianico from the historic Dal Re Vineyard is aged at least 18 months in both French barriques and smaller 13-gallon barrels, followed by another 12 months in bottle. The result lies between heaven and earth, with soil and herbal notes as light as air in the mouth. We tasted black cherry on crushed stone, plum skin, leather, and tobacco, all set within a dark, taut chamber. **97** —*M.M.*

A Real-World Impact

AT **123 ORGANIC TEQUILA**, QUALITY DOESN'T COME AT THE EXPENSE OF SUSTAINABILITY

by Deborah Parker Wong

LEADING THE WAY comes naturally to tequilero David Ravandi, founder of 123 Organic Tequila, whose push for the organic certification of his tequila brands began long before sustainable practices became an industry driver.

As early as 2000, Ravandi began working with agave growers in Jalisco to certify their production and his products as organic through both the USDA and the European Union. That foresight laid the foundation for the launch of 123 Organic Tequila in 2010, which put the brand portfolio at the very heart of the convergence between premiumization and sustainability that has been guiding the sector for the past decade-plus. According to IWSR Drinks Market Analysis, almost half of U.S. consumers of beverage alcohol say that producers' sustainability practices positively influence their purchasing decisions. With so many willing to pay extra for environmentally friendly products, commitment to such initiatives further justifies the cost of premium releases.

But there's more to sustainability than organic farming, and Ravandi's early adoption of sustainable packaging—which is now a key consideration for consumers—meaningfully differentiated his products. Known for his acumen in developing brand identities, Ravandi chose an immediately recognizable bottle that's hand-blown from recycled glass and designed labels using 100% recycled paper as well as environmentally gentle soy inks. "These packaging choices are more costly," he says. "But they reduce the impact on the environment where our products are being produced and they subtract from our carbon footprint in a significant way."

At the same time, his fair-trade practices have set a high bar for a category that has grown explosively over the past decade. "One of the biggest challenges the tequila industry faces is how to preserve



PHOTO COURTESY OF 123 ORGANIC TEQUILA

and protect the heritage of this product while meeting consumer demand," he points out. "It's a delicate balancing act, and respecting that balance isn't something that we can take for granted." To that end, "almost all our production takes place at the point of origin, which means that local artisans are involved in every aspect of production, from cultivation to packaging. This represents an investment in the local economy and in the communities where we do business," Ravandi adds.

Currently accounting for 18% of all spirits sales in the U.S., tequila is on track to grow by almost 6% by 2029 per Fortune Business Insights, with celebrity endorsements fueling much of that demand. "The tequila category is a magnet for celebrities," says Ravandi. "But the influx of new brands, many of which fail to deliver in quality despite their marketing allure, is making the category far harder for consumers to navigate."

What they need to know is that 123 Organic Tequila relies on Blue Weber agave, a long-growth crop that should be allowed to mature for a decade before

it's harvested for distillation. According to Ravandi, that's not a universal practice, however. In an effort to meet current demand, producers are using chemicals to rush maturation and harvesting immature plants before they've accumulated enough sugars, resulting in poor-quality spirits.

The character of ultra-premium tequila relies first and foremost on the quality of the agave, but the choice of production methods is also crucial. For Ravandi, the release of 123's limited-production Diablito Rojo (\$700), a blanco that ages in French Limousin barrels of white oak for seven years and finishes for six months in barrels that previously held one of Napa Valley's top Cabernet Sauvignons, is the height of premiumization as well as sustainability.

"123 Organic Tequila has made a commitment to releases that have a real-world impact on the environment, and Diablito Rojo is no exception," he says. "We can see that consumers are seeking out ultra-premium expressions [whose producers] also have an eco-conscious way of doing business." ❧

Thinking Outside the Bottle

3 BADGE BEVERAGE CORPORATION EXPLORES YET ANOTHER CREATIVE OUTLET WITH ITS TREE FORT ADVENTURE PACKS

by Kate Newton

IT'S HAPPENED MORE than a few times as fourth-generation vintner August Sebastiani travels the country on behalf of his company, 3 Badge Beverage Corporation: From Detroit to Oklahoma City to Syracuse, the proprietors of mom-and-pop bottle shops, packaging companies, and other businesses have approached him to recount that they were inspired to pursue a career in wine in part due to their visits to his family's Sonoma tasting room, where some of them, he says, "met a lovely lady who was pruning the flowers" outside—his grandmother Sylvia. Casual conversation would turn to an invitation to visit her at home, where she'd prepare lunch for them as they got to know each other.

While her hospitality was the furthest thing from calculated—"She was just a good person," Sebastiani says fondly—her proclivity for creating such connections played a pivotal role in building the Sebastianis' reputation as producers who refused to cut corners and take their supporters for granted, even as their business expanded to make them one of the most prominent families in the California wine industry. "In doing so, she . . . frankly [left] sizable shoes for me and my siblings and my cousins and my children, ultimately, to fill," says Sebastiani, but it's an occasion he's gladly risen to at 3 Badge, which was founded in 2015 in the former fire station where his grandfather August served as a volunteer firefighter and



PHOTOS COURTESY OF 3 BADGE BEVERAGE CORPORATION

Fourth-generation vintner August Sebastiani founded 3 Badge Beverage Corporation in the former Sonoma fire station where his grandfather served as a volunteer firefighter.

Tree Fort, one of four brands in 3 Badge's wine portfolio, launched in 2020; its Red Wine Blend and White Wine Blend are now available in recyclable and resealable Tetra Pak cartons.





Tasting Notes

◀ Tree Fort White Wine Blend, Central Coast (\$15)

White flowers, peach nectar, and salted pine nut reveal a semi-sweet, enjoyable white with balanced acidity and a fresh finish. —Meridith May

Tree Fort Red Wine Blend, Central Coast (\$15)

Bold notes of blackberry, tobacco, and cedar emerge within a plush mouthfeel, leaving a savory tone on the palate. —M.M.



3 BADGE ENOLOGY

Both Tree Fort Adventure Packs are made with grapes from California's Central Coast.

earned three service badges (hence the company's name).

"I hate to say we spare no expense, because we do what we can to manage costs, but we're looking for the highest quality that we can possibly find—that's the dividend that we're paying the next generation," he says, adding, "That's part of the magic of 3 Badge. We've got this world where brands are consolidating left and right, [but at our] tasting room in Sonoma where we sell our Gehricke [wine] brand, really and truly a more compelling story than the grape and where it was sourced and how it was produced is talking about the family—[people] want that family connection and story and that personal touch."

Said personal touch is certainly reflected in the mantra of sorts that Sebastiani and the 3 Badge team apply to all of the brands across the company's wine and spirits portfolio, among them Guinigi, Tree Fort, Cedar + Salmon, Uncle Val's Botanical Gin, and Bozal: Craftsmanship is king. And while he's been involved in the family business since his early twenties, he's still inspired to the point that he sees it as an outlet for the "creative spirit" that he's nurtured since he was a teenager acting in his high school's theater productions. "What gets me out of bed in the morning is brand creation—designing new packaging, the marketing end of figuring out where the market void is and how

we can capitalize on it. You can sit and talk all day long about whether or not [something] fits a price point and if it meets the needs of a consumer, but if what's in the bottle doesn't step up to their expectation or overdeliver . . . then what are you doing?" he says.

Tree Fort in particular has enabled Sebastiani to think outside the box—or in this case, the glass, which the wine was exclusively packaged in when it debuted in 2020. But while on a trip to Lake Tahoe with his family, he and his wife found themselves wishing for a more portable option while lugging a bottle of wine on a hike and picnic with their kids. With the tagline "Reclaim your hideout," Tree Fort was tailored at the outset to outdoor enthusiasts, and what Sebastiani calls that "recreational brand proposition" meant it was primed for alternative packaging formats that would allow for such "grab-and-go" opportunities. So when one of 3 Badge's bottling partners approached him with a proposal to try packaging Tree Fort in Tetra Pak's lightweight, recyclable, and resealable cartons—which are made with plastic derived from sugarcane and paper sourced from sustainably managed forests—it seemed like a no-brainer, as "the whole Tree Fort message is [about] that comfort and ease of application," he says, noting that the brand is offering "a unique selling proposition that we think has been overlooked to date."

Two Tree Fort expressions debuted last year in the Tetra Paks, which 3 Badge dubbed Adventure Packs: a Red Wine Blend (100% Merlot) and a White Wine Blend (67% Pinot Blanc and 33% Malvasia), both of which are made with grapes from California's Central Coast and come in a pack of four 250-milliliter cartons. Each carton amounts to just under two glasses of wine, making them a more portable option than the 500-milliliter and 1-liter products that are more commonly found in this packaging, according to Sebastiani. That Central Coast label is another point of differentiation for the brand, as few competitors in the category carry a specific appellation. "The perception is that [Tetra Paks are] for more of a value offering, and being able to pivot more to the premium Central Coast appellation is I think the steeper grind of the learning curve [for consumers]," Sebastiani says. "We've found that, as is so often the case, once you . . . pour somebody a glass, the door opens."

A similar level of education, Sebastiani notes, has been required in the off-premise space, where retailers haven't always known how and where they should display these types of products. But as alternative formats proliferate in the marketplace and consumer interest increases, more "doors are opening left and right"—and a similar level of opportunity has been emerging in the on-premise. Sebastiani says that 3 Badge is primarily pursuing placements in hotels, where Tree Fort would appeal to vacationers seeking portability and convenience while perusing their minibars, and sports venues, as they typically prohibit glass. "Some of our mentality is that we feel like we're competing with that RTD category, because it's the same . . . ease of activation," he adds. "And those on-premise opportunities where RTDs are popular and do well is where we see this brand performing well."

But in the meantime, Sebastiani is more than happy seeing fans of Tree Fort enjoy the Adventure Packs however they see fit, even if said adventure is simply tossing one in their beach tote or golf bag, as he prefers to do. "The floral notes of the white and the fruity notes of the red [make them] easy to drink and easy to approach," he says. "It's a fun brand, and we enjoy the playful nature of it." ❧

Updated Schedule: SommCon 2023. Check the website for for the latest updates!

Educational Tracks & Sessions

Track 1: The Business of Beverage

Building an Award Winning Beverage Program in a Private Club

- Jesse Rodriguez, SWS, FWS, CWE, DipWSET, Advanced Sommelier - FUTO
- Shaun Adams, CSW, CSS - Scottsdale National Golf Club
- Rachel VanTil, Advanced Sommelier - The Clubs at Houston Oaks
- Ben Foster, CMS - Yellowstone Club

Entrepreneurship Part 1: Life After Restaurants And Best Practices To Become A Consultant

- Erik Segelbaum, Advanced Sommelier, CSW - SOMLYAY LLC / SWIG Partners

Entrepreneurship Part 2: Workshop, Practical Applications & Success Stories From Experts

- Erik Segelbaum, Advanced Sommelier, CSW - SOMLYAY LLC / SWIG Partners
- Elise Cordell - Perrier-Jouët & GH. Mumm
- Haley Moore, CMS, WSET Diploma Candidate - Acquire
- Amy Waller CMS - Americas - Wines of Germany USA

Exploration of Career Paths in the Beverage Industry

- Jayme Kosar, M.B.A., CSW, FWS, Advanced WSET and Certified Sommelier, Court of Master Sommeliers - Society Wine Bar Franchise Group
- Natalie Dulaney, Ehlers Estate

Recession Proof - How The Wine Industry Adapts To Economic Volatility

- Allison Hupp, DipWSET, CWE - Southern Glazer's Wine & Spirits
- Lora Tagliarina, Certified Sommelier, CSS, CSW, CWAS, FWS, WSET III - Southern Glazers - CPWS division

Your Health & Alcohol

- Maurice DiMarino, CMS, Certified Cicerone® and CRT certified in Tequila - Cohn Restaurant Group
- Dr. Christine Eros - Metro Family Physicians

Women Shaping the Industry through Mentorship

- Annette Alvarez-Peters, Annette A.P. Wine & Spirits, Inc
- Katie Canfield, O'Donnell Lane

Study Tips for Theory & Tasting Exams

- Lindsay Pomeroy, Wine Smarties

Track 2: Spirits & Mixology

Additives In Tequila: What Are They And Why Are They Used?

- Maurice DiMarino, CMS, Certified Cicerone® and CRT certified in Tequila - Cohn Restaurant Group

Discovering Japanese Craft Spirits - Shochu & Awamori

- Toshio Ueno, DipWSET, MSS - Mutual Trading Co., Inc.

Island Time: A Journey Through The World Of Rum

- Christian Esser, WSET Educator - Wineschool3

Techniques Behind the Bar: Hands-on Introduction to Balanced Cocktails

- Maurice DiMarino, Cohn Restaurant Group
- Willem Van Leuven, Heaven Hill
- Christian Sigilin, Fernside Bar

Track 3: Industry Trends & Insights

Business Case For Alcohol In Space (Yes, The Final Frontier)

- Colleen Mcleod Garner, MBA, WSET 3, CSS, CSW - Casa Azul Spirits

Cannabis Beverages 101

- Rachel Burkons - Sands Lane
- Evan Eneman - Sands Lane
- Jamie Evans CSW, FWS - The Herb Somm

Classical Music For The Win(e)! Unlock The Power Of Classical Music For Wine

- Susan Lin, MW, MFA - Belmont Wine Exchange

The Future Of The Wine List: Exploring The Role Of Ai And Machine Learning

- Craig Saper, WSET 2 - VINU / Sponsiv Digital

The Truer Vision: Pathways To Profitability Through Diversity

- Jackie Summers - JackFromBrooklyn Inc.
- Hoby Wedler, Ph.D. Chemist, Educator, Sensory Expert

New in 2023: The SommCon Expo: Taste with up to 150 producers, importers and distributors. Visit the website for more information on the Expo and how to attend or exhibit!

Certifications

WSET Award in Wine
Lindsay Pomeroy - Wine Smarties

WSET Award in Sake
Toshio Ueno, DipWSET, MSS - Mutual Trading Co., Inc.

▶ **View Full Schedule & Register:**
sommconusa.com/conference



Track 4: Advanced Tasting & Sensory Evaluations

Baja California: Cool Wines From "Hot" Terroirs

- Diego Meraviglia, CSW - North American Sommelier Association
- Taylor Grant, CMS - TRESOMM

California Cabernet: Origins Outside of Napa

- Justin Seidenfeld - Rodney Strong Wine Estate

Cava's Quest For Quality: What's New Within The D.O.

- Rick Fisher, DipWSET, SWS, MBA - Wine Scholar Guild

Discover The Beauty And Versatility Of Madeira Wine

- Bruno Almeida, CMS

Exclusively Languedoc: An Appreciation Of Southern France's Rich Resources

- Erik Segelbaum, Advanced Sommelier, CSW - SOMLYAY LLC / SWIG Partners

Exploring Ancient Varieties From The Origins Of Wine

- Lisa Granik, MW - Storica

Old Vine Master Class

- Randy Caparoso - The SOMM Journal

Orvieto: The Magic of the People, Place and Wines

- Tanya Morning Star, DWS, CWE, IWS, IWA - Cellar Muse

Premium Argentina: A New Movement Of Luxury Wines

- Lars Leicht - The SOMM Journal
- Pablo Cúneo - Bodegas Luigi Bosca
- Carlos de Carlos, MBA, WSET - Paul Hobbs Wines
- Andrew Wolfe - Antigal Winery & Estates

Rocky Mountain High: Uniquely Compelling Wines From The Valley Of Aosta

- Alan Tardi, CSW, IWS, WSET Advanced Level 3 Award, Champagne Master certificate

The Oldest World: Exploring Israeli Wine And Modern Consumer Trends

- Erik Segelbaum, Advanced Sommelier, CSW - SOMLYAY LLC / SWIG Partners

Australia's Great Cabernet Sauvignon Terroirs

- Mark Davidson - Wines Australia

Round up of the Usual Suspectsor Not

- Ira Norof - Society of Wine Educators
- Serafin Alvarado MS - Southern Glazer's of Illinois

Savoring Washington Wine: A Tale Of Two Ava's

- NaKenge Adisa - Parousia Cellar
- Tanya Morning Star - DWS, CWE, IWS, IWA - Cellar Muse

Altitude Matters

- Craig Ellick - Jackson Family Wines
- Michael Jordan, MS - Jackson Family Wines

European Garnacha/Grenache Quality Wines Seminar And Pairing Dinner

- Eric Aracil - European Garnacha/ Grenache Quality Wines

Rioja Advanced Tasting Skills

- Monika Bielka-Vescovi - Napa Valley Wine Academy

Napa Valley Grene Scene

- Sara Vandenriessche - Elizabeth Spencer
- Jaime Araujo - Trois Noix
- Laura Diaz - Ehlers
- Chris Carpenter - Lokoya/Cardinale/La Jota/Mt. Brave

Go On, Bloom Big: Loire Valley Wines

Speaker Spotlight

...and so many more!



Martin Reyes



Toshio Ueno



NaKenge Adisa



Will Costello



Lisa Granik



Annette Alvarez-Peters



Erik Segelbaum



Jackie Summers



Hoby Wedler



Tanya Moring Star



Jesse Rodriguez



David Glancy



Tahira Habibi

Track 5: Production & Techniques

Climate Change And The Future Of Sustainability

- Deborah Parker Wong, DipWSET, MS Viticulture Enology - Somm Journal
- Joseph Brinkley - Bonterra Organic Vineyards
- Andy Lynch, MBA - Wente Family Estates

Dreaming Of Sheep And Wine: Climate And Emerging Regenerative Farming Practices

- Larry Stone, MS - Lingua Franca
- Hilary Graves - Booker Wines
- Greg Jones, Ph.D - Abacela Vineyard & Winery

From Influence To Action: Somm Sustainability Talk & Workshop

- Dan Valerino, CMS - Bottle Boon Consulting
- Chiara Shannon, MBA Global Wine; WSET Diploma Candidate - Mindful Wine

Icons And Discoveries From The 2023 Slow Wine Guide USA

- Deborah Parker Wong, DipWSET, MS Viticulture Enology - Somm Journal

Innovation Or Tradition?

- Annette Alvarez-Peters, DipWSET, CWE

Napa Valley's Green Scene

- Martin Reyes MW - Reyes Wine Group/Wine Wise

What Do Natural, Organic, Sustainable And Biodynamic Really Mean Anyway??

- Will Costello MS - Bien Nacido & Solomon Hills Estate
- Beth Vukmanic, BS Agricultural Business - Vineyard Team

Sunday Welcome Happy Hour

Hosted by Paso Robles Cab Collective and Somm Journal featuring a meet up with Bâttonage

Somm Chill After Party Monday Night

View **Full Schedule** & Register: sommconusa.com/conference

Register Today!

Get noticed and be part of the expo at sommconusa.com/brand-partnerships

THE **SOMM** JOURNAL

THE **tastingpanel** MAGAZINE

VINS DU **Languedoc**

LOIRE VALLEY WINES

D.O. CAVA



J. LOHR VINEYARDS & WINES

LANGETWINS FAMILY WINERY AND VINEYARDS

RODNEY STRONG VINEYARDS

NAPA VALLEY WINE ACADEMY America's Premier Wine School

RIOJA INSTITUTO DE DENOMINACIÓN DE ORIGEN CALIFICADA

Jacobson FAMILY WINES



GARNACHA & GRENACHE EUROPEAN QUALITY WINES FROM FRANCE AND SPAIN

AUSTRALIAN WINE



SommCon Beverage Expo

The only beverage tradeshow on the West Coast bringing together the entire adult beverage market. Co-located with SommCon, the premier wine and spirits conference in North America, the SommCon Beverage Expo connects importers, distributors and on & off-premise buyers with domestic and international beverage brands in wine, beer, spirits and the brands in the emerging low and no alcohol category.



Watch for
The SOMM Journal's
 Seminars at the
SOMM|CON
 San Diego Conference
 & Expo



SEPTEMBER 10-12

2023

**TOWN & COUNTRY
 RESORT**

**Register today at
sommconusa.com**

11:15 a.m. September 12

Topic: Innovation or Tradition?

Moderator: Annette Alvarez-Peters

New and established brands sometimes have to reinvent themselves or simply create something unique to stand out. In this seminar, we'll discuss how they bring products to market while tasting six wines with the audience to determine their status.

2 p.m. September 12

Topic: Climate Change and the Future of Sustainability

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

While tasting and talking with our group of producers, we'll explore topics from regenerative organics and biodynamics to ideas for addressing the challenges of the future.



11:15 a.m. September 11

Topic: Premium Argentina: A New Movement of Luxury Wines

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

Argentina is taking its place at center stage in the world-class wine category. We'll prove as much by tasting and talking with producers who continue to up their game.



11:15 a.m. September 12

Topic: Languedoc Wines: A Fresh Approach to Wine Lists and Strong Bottom Lines

Moderator: Erik Segelbaum, contributing editor, *The SOMM Journal*

Producers from Languedoc will present wines to taste with our audience and provide an understanding of the region's AOC and its grapes, from Mourvèdre and Mauzac to Carignan and Clairette.



2 p.m. September 11

Topic: Napa Valley's Green Scene: A Community Dedicated to Sustainability

Moderator: Martin Reyes, MW

At this seminar hosted by Napa Valley Vintners, talk and taste along with some Napa Valley sustainability leaders (Sara Vandenriessche from Elizabeth Spencer, Jaime Araujo from Trois Noix, Laura Diaz from Ehlers, and Chris Carpenter from Lokoya/Cardinale/La Jota/Mt. Brave) as we discuss how sustainability is more than a set of practices: It's an ethos of looking toward the future to ensure the long-term viability of the land, the community, and the wines of the Valley.

LANGUEDOC COMES TO SOMMCON

SEPTEMBER 10-12, 2023 • TOWN & COUNTRY RESORT, SAN DIEGO

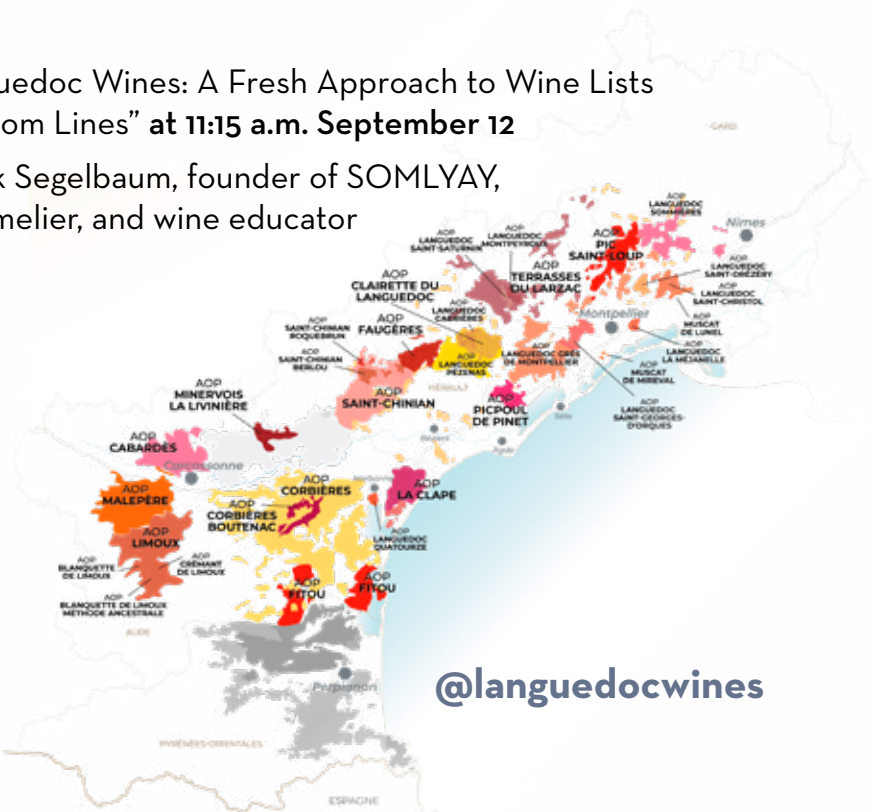
PHOTO: MICHAEL BUTCHER



Seminar: “Languedoc Wines: A Fresh Approach to Wine Lists and Strong Bottom Lines” at 11:15 a.m. September 12

← **Moderator:** Erik Segelbaum, founder of SOMLYAY, Advanced Sommelier, and wine educator

Very few wine regions have it all—quality, range, and organic leadership, all driven by a dynamic, young generation of winemakers. Today’s Languedoc region is unstoppable and realizing its full potential with red, white, rosé, and sparkling wines from 20 unique appellations. Erik Segelbaum, the trailblazer behind SOMLYAY, has spent the last year immersed with the top growers from Languedoc and will share his insights on how to reinvent your wine list and increase your bottom line. The U.S. is the leading export market for Languedoc wines with sales growth up 17% overall—find out how to capitalize on this consumer powerhouse!



@languedocwines

PHOTO: MAUD CHALARD



THE **SOMM** JOURNAL



Culture Heroes

EXPLORING THE BOOM IN BLOOMY-RIND CHEESES

FOR YEARS I AVOIDED buying brie and Camembert because they were so often underwhelming. To comply with U.S. regulations, the export versions of these two French classics had to be made with pasteurized milk and never had the room-filling aroma I remembered from France.

Today, I'm happy to say, a few producers have figured out workarounds. Using a complex "cocktail" of cultures, they have managed to create cheeses with the characteristics typical of a raw-milk wheel: robust mushroom and garlic aromas and a texture that softens gradually from the outside in. I'm buying imported brie and Camembert again, selectively, and have been thrilled to discover some American bloomy-rind cheeses that are easily their equals.

Any of the following four bloomies will elevate your cheese board. Pair with cider, saison-style beer, Pinot Noir, or a full-bodied white wine.

Moses Sleeper from **Jasper Hill Farm** is named for a Revolutionary War hero with roots in Vermont's Northeast Kingdom, where the creamery is located. At 20 ounces, it's larger than a Camem-

bert yet smaller than a brie; a half wheel would serve six generously. A ripe wheel will have some give, like a ripe peach, a sign that it's softening inside. Some tan mottling and rippling on the white surface is another clue that the wheel is reaching maturity; an ammonia scent would indicate a wheel in decline. At its best, Moses Sleeper has a thin, tender rind and a supple bone-colored interior with an inviting mushroom aroma.

Mt. Alice from **von Trapp Farmstead** (pictured) is another Vermont gem, a farmstead cheese produced with the organic milk of Sebastian von Trapp's predominantly Jersey herd. Jersey cows produce high-butterfat milk, a desirable trait for this style. Weighing about 1 pound—twice the size of a Camembert—Mt. Alice is produced with traditional Camembert cultures, so you will note more similarities than differences. When fully ripe, the interior will be silky and spreadable, with a fragrance that reminds me of butter-braised porcini. Younger wheels will be less beefy, with more of a lemon and sour cream scent. The thin rind is edible and the cheesemaker would be disappointed if you cut it away.

Camembert from **Hervé Mons** is exclusive to Whole Foods, although you may see the same cheese elsewhere under the Le Pommier brand. Mons is a superstar French affineur (cheese ager) who was convinced that Americans would welcome a Camembert that was bolder than most export versions. He worked with a Normandy producer for more than a year to develop this cheese, which has a huge mushroom aroma and hints of garlic, barnyard, and ripe laundry. It's not shy on salt, but the luscious texture and robust flavor make any saltiness easy to overlook.

Brie Fermier comes from **La Ferme de la Tremblaye**, an eco-friendly farm in the Rambouillet forest near Paris. You don't see the word *fermier* often on brie anymore: It indicates a cheese made on the farm with the farm's own milk, a rarity in brie production today. La Tremblaye's cheese is properly supple and highly perfumed, with notes of mushroom, garlic, and truffle. The same producer makes an exceptional Camembert Fermier and one of my favorite blue cheeses, the goat's milk Persillé de Rambouillet. **SJ**

FROM WILLINGNESS *Comes Wisdom*

RAMÓN BILBAO EVOLVES AND EXPANDS IN RIOJA AND RUEDA

by Jessie Birschbach

You'd think that a master's degree in enology and viticulture from the Universidad de la Rioja, combined with decades of experience, would allow Ramón Bilbao technical director and general manager Rodolfo Bastida to feel at least a little entitled to convey that he knows a thing or two about wine-growing. But based on an early morning Zoom conference I had with him this June, I'd say that his great wisdom comes from his willingness to learn.

Thanks to Bastida's leadership over the past few decades, Ramón Bilbao is now setting itself apart from other winemakers in Rioja, Spain, a region where roughly 85% of the fruit used by wineries is sourced from growers. Uncommonly, the producer owns 653 acres of vineyards, 505 of them in Rioja (primarily the Rioja Alta subregion) and 148 in Rueda in the

form of a large single vineyard, Finca Las Amedias, which is situated at over 2,500 feet in elevation. It also holds long-term contracts with farmers, essentially renting an additional 2,224 acres of vineyards across the two regions. But either way, sustainability and a deep understanding of the land are paramount to Bastida, and it's this approach that has enabled Ramón Bilbao to not only expand its range of offerings (including single-vineyard expressions) but produce higher-quality wine in the process.

The history of Ramón Bilbao runs in near parallel to the region it champions: In 1924, aspiring winemaker Ramón Bilbao opened a bodega in Haro, two years before Rioja became an official appellation. He died not long after, but his legacy lived on through his children. However, it wasn't until 1999, when the Zamora fam-

ily—whose namesake company produces Licor 43—purchased it, that Ramón Bilbao started to look like the producer it is today.

The first thing the business-savvy Zamoras did was hire Bastida, and over the past few decades they have worked together to create a portfolio of wines first from Rioja and then, starting in 2016, from Rueda, where fresh fruit character is respected above all. But according to Bastida, "All of these wines will represent their region, and you will find additional fruitiness in even the most classic examples of Rioja." This is thanks in part to Bastida's relentless focus on research and development, especially in the realm of sustainability.

Case in point: Ramón Bilbao strives to minimize the use of herbicides and pesticides in all of its vineyards, not only the 74 acres that are farmed organically,



Ramón Bilbao's 32-acre estate vineyard in Villalba, Rioja, harbors old-vine Tempranillo grown in sandy soils at 2,132 feet in elevation.



For example, as a means of pest control, it uses a pheromone that interferes with the reproduction of a grape-eating moth specific to Rioja, while a *Trichoderma* fungus is used to prevent the attack of harmful fungi like the hairy curtain crust, which causes wood disease in the vine. Additionally, it relies on weather stations and prediction models developed as the result of an ongoing study it began in 2018 to inform the team of which actions to take

in the vineyard; since then, this model has resulted in a 30% reduction of sprays.

In the winery, Ramón Bilbao operates on 100% renewable energy sourced from solar panels and wind turbines and is working toward relying entirely on on-site power sources by 2025. It also built a wastewater-treatment center in 2016 that purifies the water before it goes back into local waterways; this facility is currently undergoing expansion.

There are several other sustainable practices both in the vineyard and the winery that Bastida proudly mentioned—all of which, he repeatedly noted, are the result of ever-evolving information that's helping the producer to set itself up for optimal grape growing and winemaking in the future. "Is all this research and development going to sell more wine? I'm not sure. But I am sure it will produce better wine," he said with a laugh. SJ

Located on the shores of the Ebro River in Rioja, Ramón Bilbao's Aguilones vineyard sits at 1,400 feet in elevation.



A Q&A With Rodolfo Bastida



You've been with Ramón Bilbao since 1999. How have you seen the company grow over the past two decades? Given that Rioja is the land of a thousand wines, the first thing we did for the first five years (1999–2004) was to understand what [types of] wines we could produce [as well as] what vineyards we wanted to cultivate and what they could produce

[in addition to getting fruit from] our suppliers. We also wanted to understand how we could contribute something different, what we call the Ramón Bilbao twist: [using] traditional grapes [for] producing wines where the fruit is key. And that is what we did, in addition to incorporating wines with a certain trendy character to the range. For example, [we've made] wines from [single] vineyards since 2014 and [from] high-altitude vineyards since 2012, and more recently, [we made] a 100% Garnacha wine. In terms of volume and growth, we have gone from just 500,000 bottles to the current 4.5 million, with [a] corresponding investment in vineyards, barrels, buildings, and so on. Not to mention that we now produce wine from Rueda.

How have you helped to shape this growth and how has your portfolio of wines changed as a result? Understanding the uniqueness of the area is key. Our portfolio is very varied, with [regional] wines . . . such as Ramón Bilbao Crianza; subregion[al] wines such as Ramón Bilbao Reserva or Gran Reserva; and wines from [single] vineyards such as the Lalomba collection.

How is it that Ramón Bilbao describes itself as both traditional and modern? We're traditional in the sense that we use only native varieties and American oak for much of our production, [and we give wines] a very long aging time. We're modern because of the fruit character in our wines: preserving it, giving it complexity, and extending it over time.

Which viticultural and winemaking practices do you think most define Ramón Bilbao? In the vineyard, integrated predictive wine-growing that combines research with a deep knowledge of our land. [In the winery, the] practice of virtually no intervention: no fining, no filtration, and a naturally high acidity level, allowing us to use very little SO₂.

What is your most impactful sustainability practice? Integrated viticulture: 80% of our vineyards are dry farmed. This requires us to choose our vineyards very carefully. [Furthermore,] we are reducing our glass consumption for all our bottles, and our cardboard and plastics management is magnificent; [it] will soon enable us to recycle 100% of what we receive from suppliers. We are also working to reduce the amount of plastic and cardboard that enters the warehouse.

TASTING NOTES

Ramón Bilbao 2022 Verdejo, Rueda, Spain (\$17)

With a delicate demeanor; this light-on-its-toes Verdejo romances the nose and palate with white flowers, tapiooca, lychee, and fennel. Lime chiffon has a cooling effect alongside a trace of powdered vanilla. Bright acidity keeps the wine fresh. **91** —*Meridith May*

Ramón Bilbao 2016 Reserva, Rioja, Spain (\$27)

Some Graciano and Mazuelo is added to the Tempranillo in this wine, which is sourced from 40-year-old vines and aged in American oak for 20 months in barrel, followed by 20 months in bottle. Woodsy notes precede flavors of espresso, black cherry, violets, and eucalyptus on a palate that's creamy and dense, with grainy tannins washing over it for a vigorous textural experience. **92** —*M.M.*



Ramón Bilbao 2015 Gran Reserva, Rioja, Spain (\$37)

The grapes for this wine come from vineyards that are up to 65 years old, located at altitudes reaching over 2,200 feet. Aged for 30 months in American oak and another 36 months in bottle, the blend of 90% Tempranillo and 10% each Graciano and Mazuelo delivers a contained performance that displays its inner strength. Rose petals arise alongside white pepper, oregano, balsamic, and wild strawberry before notes of cherry and mocha appear midway. The palate has a weighty, wonderful presence. **93** —*M.M.*

Ramón Bilbao 2016 Mirto, Rioja, Spain (\$80)

Bracing acidity and ripe cherries are hallmarks of this profound, terroir-driven 100% Tempranillo, aged 19 months in new French oak. Majestic in its demeanor; it's a savory, floral red with notes of wildflowers, herbes de Provence, white pepper, and soy sauce. Crushed violets, cigar leaf, and slate also leave a calling card on the palate. **96** —*M.M.*



Ramón Bilbao 2017 Lalomba, Finca Ladero Vineyard, Rioja, Spain (\$125)

From the 14-acre Finca Ladero estate in the Yerga mountains overlooking the Ebro Valley, this blend of 80% Tempranillo and 20% Garnacha represents Rioja at its most expressive and energetic. First matured in once-used 225-liter French oak casks and new Hungarian oak for 16 months, it was then placed in concrete vats for another 22 months. Plush and juicy notes of coffee bean, dark chocolate, blackberry, and fennel are buoyed by a superb acid structure as chewy tannins adhere to the teeth. Both nose and palate possess extraordinary charisma. **97** —*M.M.*

High on Hybrids

NEW YORK'S **SENECA LAKE AVA** IS MAKING A CASE FOR HERITAGE GRAPES *by Allison Levine*

MOST OF THE WINES we enjoy, from Chardonnay and Sauvignon Blanc to Pinot Noir, Cabernet Sauvignon, and everything in between, are varieties of *Vitis vinifera*, the European grapevine. But there are also hybrid grapes, which are the result of crossing *Vitis vinifera* with its American relative *Vitis labrusca*. Hybrid grapes were first cultivated in response to phylloxera, and while they're resilient when it comes to insects and diseases as well as impervious to rot, mildew, and low temperatures, they have not been embraced by many winemakers—except, that is, in cold regions such as Seneca Lake, the largest and deepest of New York's 11 Finger Lakes.

Located within the Finger Lakes AVA, which was established in 1982, the Seneca Lake AVA was created in 2003. Its producers are leading an effort to shift the narrative as they push for greater recognition of and respect for hybrid grapes—which they're collectively referring to as "heritage" or "heirloom" varieties—and the wines they yield.

The following five hybrid varieties offer high levels of natural acidity, making them ideal for use in sparkling and dessert wines as well as in still wines.

CAYUGA WHITE

One of the most popular hybrid grapes grown in the Finger Lakes, Cayuga White was developed by Cornell University in the 1970s and produces crisp, fruity white wines such as the Lakewood 2021 Bubbly Candeo, a sparkling wine with 2.2 grams per liter (g/L) of residual sugar and 7 grams of total acidity that cleanse the palate.

TRAMINETTE

Created in Seneca Lake and introduced in 1996, Traminette is a cross of Gewürztraminer and a French-American hybrid, Joannes Seyve 23.416. Fox Run winemaker Craig Hosbach describes it as a vast

improvement over Gewürztraminer, offering a more complete wine with a vibrant finish and no oiliness. The Fox Run 2021 Traminette, with 2 g/L of residual sugar, has floral, herbal, and lime-skin aromas as well as tart acidity and a touch of sweetness on the finish.

VIGNOLES

Yielding a medium-bodied, crisp, and flavorful wine, Vignoles is a French-American hybrid of another hybrid grape, Seibel 6905 (also known as Le Subereux), and a clone of Pinot Noir, Pinot de Corton, that was developed in France and brought to the U.S. in 1949 before arriving in Seneca Lake in the 1970s.

Atwater, a family-owned winery on the eastern side of Seneca Lake, ages its Vignoles for seven months in stainless steel. Featuring notes of pineapple, peach, and nectarine, the 2020 vintage has 6.5 g/L of residual sugar, but the sweetness is not cloying due to the intense acidity.

Anthony Road Wine Company makes four styles of Vignoles, including a Late Harvest Vignoles comprising at least 50% botrytis-affected grapes. The 2020 vintage, made in a Beerenauslese style with 12.65 g/L of residual sugar, has aromas of crushed apricot and a lovely, juicy finish.

DECHAUNAC

DeChaunac is a dark-skinned French-American hybrid of the Seibel 5163

PHOTO: STU GALLAGHER PHOTOGRAPHY



Harvest in New York's Seneca Lake AVA, which was established in 2003.

PHOTO: ALLISON LEVINE



and Seibel 793 varieties that ripens early. Winemaker J.R. Dill

often uses DeChaunac in blends at his namesake winery, but the J.R. Dill 2018 DeChaunac is a single-varietal expression that aged for two years in French oak and offers notes of tart cherry and fresh earth with good acidity.

VIDAL BLANC

Vidal Blanc is a white hybrid variety produced from *Vitis vinifera* Ugni Blanc and another hybrid variety, Rayon d'Or (Seibel 4986). Vidal is known principally for its use in icewine, including the Wagner Vidal Blanc Ice Wine, whose sweet notes of honey, pear, orange blossom, and citrus are balanced by acidity.

These hybrid grapes have allowed growers to produce quality wines in regions that were previously considered too cold and challenging for traditional varieties. And given their reliability in the face of changing climatic conditions—including frosts, heat waves, and hailstorms—perhaps even regions exclusively employing *Vitis vinifera* should take a deeper look at hybrid varieties. **SP**

First Time's a Charm

JACQUES LURTON BRINGS BORDEAUX TO NEW YORK DURING AN INTIMATE GUIDED TASTING

by Stefanie Schwalb

JACQUES LURTON REALLY DOESN'T need an introduction, but given that the globally renowned winemaker recently visited New York City for the first time since he became group president of Les Vignobles André Lurton, we'll make an exception—especially considering the fact that he brought several new releases and a pleasant surprise to an intimate tasting held at wine bar Corkbuzz in Chelsea Market on June 7.

Known for his technical prowess and creative approach to winemaking, Lurton seamlessly unites innovation with tradition as part of his internationally influenced and fresh perspective on Bordeaux—a specialty showcased via the breadth of wines he guided attendees through during the event. Among those bottles were a 2018 red and a 2020 white from Château La Louvière (Pessac-Léognan); a 2018 red, 2022 white, and 2022 rosé from Château Bonnet (Entre-Deux-Mers); and the 2020 Coeur Perdu Cabernet Franc, a micro-cuvée from Château de Barbe Blanche (Lussac-Saint-Émilion).

The 2018 red from Château La Louvière—a blend of 60% Cabernet Sauvignon and 40% Merlot—was matured for 12 months in oak barrels (up to 50% new) with racking. While already lush in the glass, it has the potential to evolve beautifully for 15–30 years. The 2020 white, a 100% Sauvignon Blanc, aged for ten months in oak barrels (30% new) on full lees with bâtonnage. It could age up to 20 years, but it proved more than drinkable after just three.



From Château Bonnet, the 2018 red—a blend of 60% Merlot and 40% Cabernet Sauvignon—matured in both tanks and barrels; while it could be aged up to seven years, its lush yet

fresh red fruit with hints of spice makes it easy to consume now. With two to three years of aging potential, the 2022 white (85% Sauvignon Blanc and 15% Sémillon), aged for four months in tanks on the lees, showed a freshness combined with citrus and exotic fruit that would be ideal for lighter summer fare and seafood. Equally suited to warm-weather consumption was the 2022 Château Bonnet rosé, a blend of 51% Cabernet Sauvignon, 45% Merlot, and 4% Sémillon that hit a sweet spot with light acidity and notes of raspberry and strawberry; matured for four months in tanks, it could potentially age up to three years.

At Château Bonnet, sustainability is a strong focus. Lurton spoke at length about the wines' new packaging, which features lightweight bottles that reduce the producer's carbon footprint by more than 400 tons per year as well as labels made with up to 50% reused hay or recycled paper and ink reused from previous printings to avert waste. Another comprehensive program aims to rebalance the winery's vineyard ecosystem through the creation of an eco-garden and an eco-farm that boost biodiversity. Notably, since 2017 the property has been certified High Environmental Value Level 3 by the Ministère de L'Agriculture ed de La Souveraineté Alimentaire for its environmentally friendly practices.

Speaking on the topic of climate



PHOTO: HÉLÈNE BRUN-PUGNIER/VIGNOBLES ANDRÉ LURTON

Renowned winemaker Jacques Lurton, group president of Les Vignobles André Lurton, recently visited New York City to share a variety of expressions from several of his estates.

change, Lurton admitted that it has benefited France and Bordeaux in particular in at least one aspect: "The American market seems to like our wines because now they are in a style that matches the consumer palate. That's why our wines have gained so much recognition and we have received so many good ratings," he said. "But on the other side, our yields are lower every year, so we're losing a lot of wine in yields. Economically, it's very hard to sustain because we tend to lose too many grapes [to] drought, dry conditions, and downy mildew. We need to change our viticulture practices to adapt to these new climate conditions without losing the quality that we have been able to produce now."

We finally arrived at the surprise wine of the evening, the 2020 Coeur Perdu Cabernet Franc (a grape rarely used for monovarietal wines in Bordeaux), which had a little bit of everything worth cherishing: complex aromas, balanced tannins, and memorable character, defined in this case by notes of black fruit and hints of chocolate and spice. While it could age further, everyone in the room seemed to savor it as the perfect end to the evening. **SJ**



BOTTLE SHOTS: STUDIO PRIGENT/VIGNOBLES ANDRÉ LURTON



2023 COMPETITION: AUGUST 22-24



The NYWSC is accepting entries for the 2023 Competition. Wine & Spirits producers wishing to gain the attention of distributors and consumers have learned that the NYWSC medallions awarded to their superior products help open doors and build recognition like few other marketing tools can.

**ENTER ONLINE AT
THE TASTING ALLIANCE.COM**

**@THE TASTING ALLIANCE
#NYWSC #THE TASTING ALLIANCE**





A Natural Advocate

IN CONVERSATION WITH BOSTON-BASED
SOMMELIER/PROPRIETOR **LAUREN FRIEL**

by Jillian Dara

WHEN SOMMELIER LAUREN FRIEL opened Rebel Rebel in Somerville, Massachusetts, in 2018, she focused on two things: natural wine and social activism. While the former has gone mainstream, the latter can sometimes feel performative in a business setting, the hospitality industry included. For Friel, though, activism is a daily practice, and now all three of her venues—Wild Child in Somerville opened in 2020, followed by Dear Annie in Cambridge in 2021—are beacons of advocacy for the community. “It’s not a decision I sat down and made,” explains Friel, noting that when Rebel Rebel opened, she’d just exited an abusive relationship. “It was hard for me to unsee the inequities that keep women and other nondominant populations out of power and often out of control of their own existence, especially in our industry,” explains Friel.

Reversing this power dynamic became Friel’s mission, informing everything she does at the restaurant, from closing relatively early so that team members can walk home at a reasonable time to fundraising for organizations that prioritize the health and safety of nondominant populations. “I don’t see it as a choice at this point; it’s part of our business model,” she affirms.

We talked to Friel about how she’s advocating for equality both in and out of the bar and how she’s seen perceptions of natural wine change since entering the industry in 2011.

Q: How has your mission to make wine more inclusive ultimately affected the spaces you’ve opened?

We’ve cultivated a guest base that trusts us to bring them the best of what we can

find, to help them understand why they should care, and to never make them feel ashamed for not knowing something. We tried to take the ego out of wine, which makes it a more pleasant experience for everyone involved; we do still get a few puffed chests walking in the door who are used to the more competitive wine scene that values spitting facts over connection, but we can usually get them to chill out and relax and realize we’re here to share an experience, not one-up each other.

Q: How do you balance running multiple restaurants with your various pursuits in activism?

I see the two as working in unison, not individually vying for my time; my businesses are my life, and I’ll always give part of my life to people and organizations who need my efforts. I think there’s this idea that activism is only powerful if it involves huge effort—big galas and massive amounts of money. But those big moments can be fleeting. In reality, lasting change happens when many people make small efforts every single day.

Q: If you could offer one piece of advice about making spaces more inclusive, what would it be?

Talk to your teams: Ask them what they need, ask them what they think. Listen to them when they tell you and then act on it. Because if they aren’t on board with what you’re trying to do, it won’t happen.

Q: You run multiple bars that are focused on natural wines. How have you seen the natural-wine movement change since you started working in the industry?

In 2011, natural wine was still mostly



PHOTO: BRIDGET BADORE

relegated to Paris, London, New York, and the Bay Area, and it was a sort of *High Fidelity* situation—a little clubhouse community for nerds only. Now, natural wine is way more part of the popular culture than it was; RAW is a huge party open to the public, natural-wine pros are in *Vogue*, and celebrities are capitalizing on natural wine’s popularity to start their own wine brands. It’s been really wild to watch this thing [that] some of us fought so hard for rise in popularity.

Q: How have consumer perceptions evolved?

People are way more willing to try natural wines now and way more accepting of them than they used to be. Cloudy wine, pét nat, orange wines—there was a time when I had to have at-length conversations with guests to convince them that there was nothing wrong with these wines, that they weren’t spoiled, and that this was what wine looked like when it wasn’t über-processed. Now it’s like, the weirder the better.

Q: Have you noticed any recent trends in what people want to try?

Orange wine, orange wine, orange wine! It’s our number-one-selling category at every place I own, and we can’t keep enough in stock. It’s outpaced rosé this season, and it isn’t showing any signs of slowing down.



PURE AGAVE



CERTIFIED
Organic



TEQUILA
100% de AGAVE

123tequila.com





SAVOR THE COLORS OF TIME

ÉTOILE, UNION OF THE BEST OF OUR THREE DOMAINES IN PROVENCE

DOMAINES

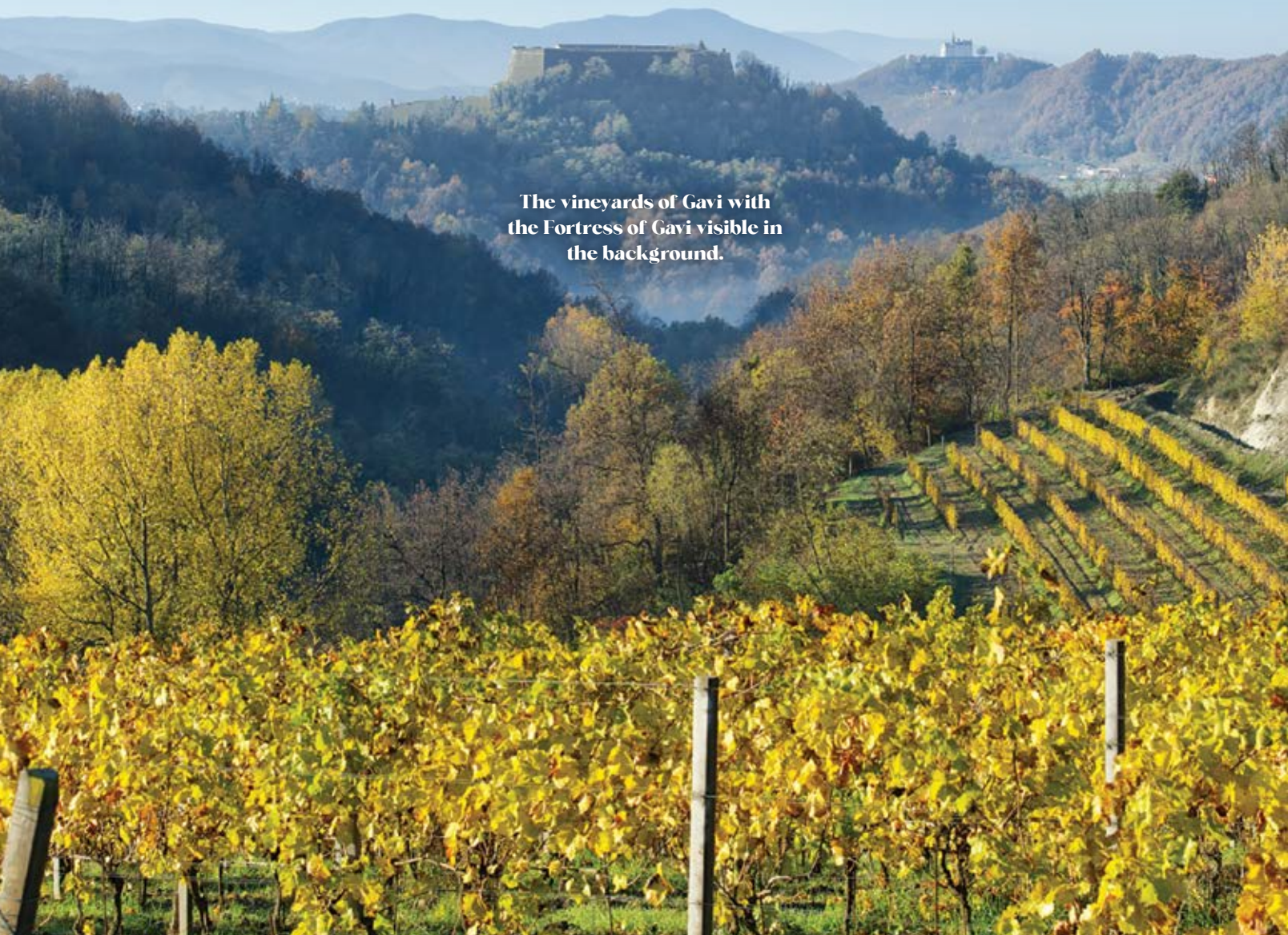
*Olt**

BETWEEN
COAST AND
Hinterland

AN OVERVIEW OF GAVI

BY LARS LEICHT

The vineyards of Gavi with
the Fortress of Gavi visible in
the background.



Located in the province of Alessandria in the southeastern corner of Piedmont along its boundary with Liguria, the Gavi territory has always served as an important communication route between coast and hinterland as well as a geological frontier where plains and mountains meet. Its rolling hills teem with biodiversity; vineyards alternate with woods, cultivated fields, and pastures to reach the headwaters of the Lemme River as it cuts through unspoiled nature.

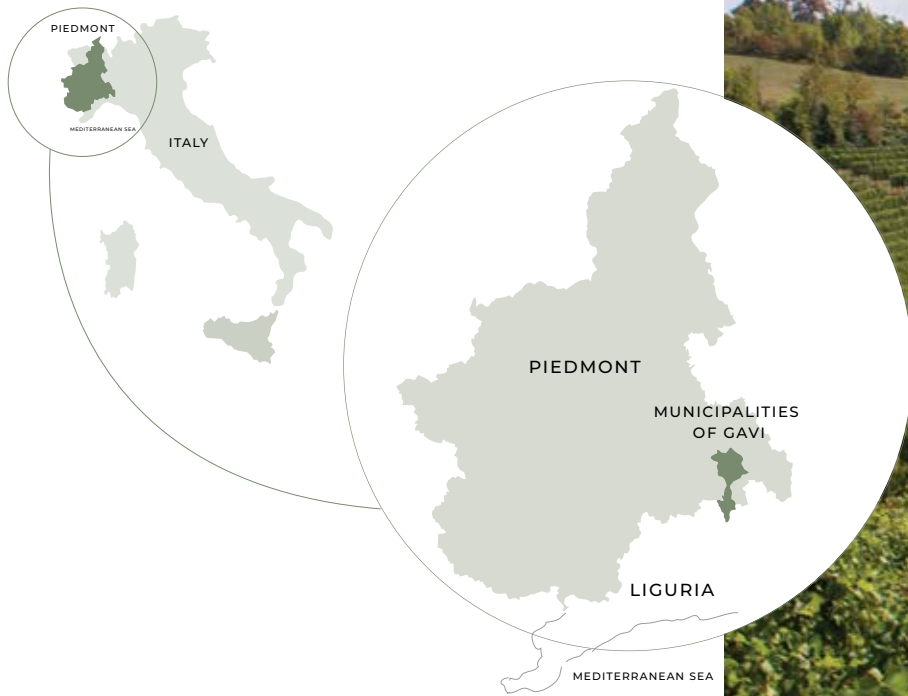
Crossed by the Via Postumia, which connected Aquileia and Genoa, the thriving Roman city of Libarna once stood in this area. Built in the second century BC, it was an important center for trade with a thriving agricultural and winegrowing economy. The majestic Fortress of Gavi, overlooking the town of the same name, was constructed by the Republic of Genoa, which ruled these lands from the early Middle Ages until the unification of Italy. Historic references to the edifice date back to 973, when it served as a defensive stronghold against threats from the north.

THE DENOMINATION AND ITS TERROIR

The Gavi DOCG includes the 11 municipalities of Bosio, Carrosio, Capriata d'Orba, Francavilla Bisio, Gavi, Novi Ligure, Parodi Ligure, Pasturana, San Cristoforo, Serravalle Scrivia, and Tassarolo. Strung across 4,000 acres from the foot of the Po Valley toward the Piedmontese Apennines 20 miles from the sea, its vineyards are greatly influenced by their unique position in a transitional continental climate marked by long, harsh winters and hot, sunny summers during which the grapes can reach optimal ripeness. The coastal wind known as the marin blows through the hills and helps bring out the freshness and delicate flavor typical of coastal wines.



IMAGES COURTESY OF THE CONSORZIO TUTELA DEL GAVI



The soils of Gavi are the continuation of Serravallian marls that, originating from the Langhe, reach the Apennines. Marked by three different types—red alluvial gravels, white calcareous marl, and a central strip with alternating layers of marl and sandstone—these soils are particularly suitable for Cortese, which yields wines of elegance, structure, freshness, and longevity.

VITICULTURE

A traditional type of viticulture is practiced in Gavi by small and medium-sized growers employing about 250 local families. The Consorzio Tutela del Gavi counts a total of 190 growers, winemakers, and bottlers in its membership. Strong emphasis is placed on three key tenets:

- **Low yields:** 3.8 tons per acre for vintage Gavi and 2.6 tons per acre for Riserva; grape yield must never exceed 70%
- **Sustainability:** The Consorzio works alongside producers to monitor seasonal trends and promote timely operations and practices that reduce the use of chemical treatments. It encourages grass cover between rows, organic conversion, and the prevention of soil erosion.
- **Mapping:** The Consorzio provides maps of sunshine hours, altitude, and solar exposure to help growers in their farming choices.

PIEDMONT'S GREAT WHITE

The first written references to the cultivation of Cortese, a variety indigenous to Piedmont, date back to the tenth century, when the area belonged to the Republic of Genoa. Not only did the wine grace the courts of the local nobility, it traveled abroad on Genoa's legendary merchant ships. Today, Cortese is the most widely cultivated variety in the Gavi denomination; acreage has grown from 2,500 in 2003 to 4,000 today, accounting for 60% of the grape's plantings in Italy. Since 1997, the Consorzio has worked with the National Research Council of Italy in Turin to select the Cortese clones and biotypes best suited for the area with the goal of enhancing quality while maintaining low yields. In 2004, it used satellite geolocation to undertake ampelographic- and cadastral-identification studies that verified Cortese was exclusively being used in the production of Gavi wines.



NORTHERN BELT



This is the area with the warmest climate, yielding Gavi wines with excellent body and structure.

CENTRAL STRIP



This is where Gavi wines with great balance between structure and flavor come from.

SOUTHERN BELT



A sparsely planted area due to the altitude and the steep slopes.



Gavi accounts for 60% of all the Cortese grown in Italy.

Made from 100% Cortese, Gavi DOCG is a fresh and elegant wine that can develop rich and sumptuous notes with moderate aging. Though the Consorzio allows for the production of semi-sparkling and fully sparkling wines, still vintage wine accounts for 99% of Gavi production. It must have a minimum alcohol content of 10.5% and is usually consumed young, though many producers are increasingly emphasizing its ability to withstand time in the bottle.

Generally revealing a pale straw-yellow color with greenish reflections, Gavi DOCG offers distinct and delicate aromas of fresh white fruit and flowers as well as notes of citrus and almonds. Its aromatic profile becomes more mineral and elegantly complex with aging. Even eight to ten years after harvest, Gavi can demonstrate a rich and complex organoleptic profile. Riserva wines, meanwhile, are specifically meant for aging. Spending at least six months in bottle before they're released to the market no less than a year after harvest, they benefit from lower vineyard yields and winemaking techniques that enhance their longevity. Golden in color, they present a rich nose and mouthfeel yet maintain unmistakable freshness as they deliver noble tertiary aromas and flavors along with a refined mineral note and hints of acacia honey, citrus, and candied fruit.

Gavi's great versatility makes it an ideal pairing with a broad range of foods from around the world. Young Gavi can enrich delicate fish and vegetable dishes and is also ideal with white meats, raw seafood, fried foods, young cheeses, and all sorts of appetizers. Long-lived Riserva Gavis are suitable for more daring pairings, including red and cured meats, stuffed pastas, and even blue and well-aged cheeses.

CORTESE AT A GLANCE

VINES: lush, vigorous canopy; attentive pruning and training to endure spring winds

GRAPES: golden-yellow with greenish or amber reflections when exposed to the sun

BUNCHES: medium-large clusters

HARVEST: around the second half of September

PRODUCTION: selective thinning to keep yields low on the otherwise generous vines



CAMPAIGN FINANCED ACCORDING TO (EU) REGULATION NO. 1308/2013

