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Marble Room Steaks & Raw Bar

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USPS Publication Number: 024-881

Filing Date: September 1, 2023

Published: Six times a year

Annual Subscription Rate: \$52.00

Mailing Address: 17412 Ventura Blvd., Ste. 363, Encino, CA 91316

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Total copies run: 40,150. **Outside county paid/requested:** 8,740. **In-county paid/requested:** 5,000. **Sales through dealers and carriers:** 5,600. **Distributed throughout other mail carriers and through USPS:** 3,800. **Total paid and/or requested:** 23,140. **Outside county non-requested:** 7,850. **In-county non-requested:** 4,270. **Non-requested copies distributed through USPS by other classes of mail:** 890. **Non-requested copies distributed outside the mail:** 3,500. **Total non-requested distribution:** 16,510. **Copies not distributed:** 500. **Total distribution:** 40,150.

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

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World-Class Paso Robles Hotel Allegretto Vineyard Resort Is Honored by National Press

WHEN *USA TODAY* recently announced the results of its 10Best Readers' Choice Awards 2023, Paso Robles' own Allegretto Vineyard Resort was recognized as the #3 Best Wine Country Hotel in the United States for a second consecutive year. Nominations were garnered from a panel of wine-industry experts, with voting for the awards open to 10Best's 5 million monthly readers nationwide over a four-week period.

Recognized by AAA with a four-diamond rating, the Allegretto Vineyard Resort was established in 2015 by Douglas Ayres, who drew inspiration from the beauty of wine country as well as from his own extensive travels in order to design the resort in the style of an Italian vineyard estate. Nestled among acres of vineyards in the heart of Paso Robles wine country—which the awards deemed the Best Wine Region in the United States—the property cultivates an immersive, Tuscan-inspired luxury experience for the guests who stay in any of its 171 guest rooms and suites through amenities like locally farmed and foraged cuisine; a wine-tasting lounge featuring the resort's private label, among many others; a full-service boutique spa; a pool and cabanas; and manicured gardens with walking paths.

"Our commitment to our guests is unwavering, and we are deeply honored to receive this award once again," said general manager Rich Ver-runi. "It's our privilege to ensure our guests receive exemplary treatment as they experience the beauty of Paso wine country for themselves at the Allegretto." SJ



PHOTOS COURTESY OF ALLEGRETTO VINEYARD RESORT

Located on 20 acres of vineyards and fruit orchards, the Allegretto Vineyard Resort was designed to evoke an Italian wine estate.



Set against a backdrop of vines, a pool and cabanas are among the Allegretto Vineyard Resort's many amenities.

A VISION

fulfilled

DAOU FAMILY ESTATES MARKS
TEN YEARS OF ITS FLAGSHIP
WINE, **SOUL OF A LION**

story by **LARS LEIGHT** / *photos by* **MIKHAIL LIPYANSKIY**

Before Maeve Pesquera leaves DAOU Mountain in Paso Robles, California, on a road trip, she repeats what has become a daily ritual over the course of her seven years at DAOU Family Estates: taking in the infinite view across the 20 miles of hillsides that lead to the Pacific Ocean. This July, we met Pesquera, who serves as the winery's senior vice president, strategy and business development, across the country in New York to take in an equally inspiring view of the Atlantic Ocean from Montauk.

There, Pesquera shared her experience at DAOU with a dozen trade members who had gathered at Gurney's Montauk Resort for a surfside dinner celebrating another vision—that of Daniel and Georges Daou. The two brothers went from being refugees and immigrants to inventors and tech-industry pioneers before founding their namesake winery in 2007. Three years later, they made the first vintage of their crown jewel: Soul of a Lion. Our dinner marked that anniversary with a vertical tasting of five vintages, including the recently released 2020.





DAOU team members Jennifer Sollinger, East regional sales director, Soul of a Lion; Stephen Klein, division manager Northeast; Alyssa Ducker, regional sales manager New York; and Maeve Pesquera, senior vice president, strategy and business development.

Soul of a Lion was named in homage to Daniel and Georges' father, Joseph Daou, a self-made businessman whom they credit for instilling in them passion, courage, and persistence. Their idyllic childhood in Beirut, Lebanon, was shattered at the outbreak of civil war in 1973, when an errant rocket struck their house, gravely wounding them and their sister. After recovering, the family moved to Paris, and the brothers spent their formative years immersed in France's food and wine culture.

Having faced death together, the brothers embraced life and forged a bond that defined their future. Georges went to college in the U.S. and convinced Daniel to follow. After graduating from the University of California, San Diego, they persuaded their parents to emigrate to the U.S. and invest \$50,000 of the family's precious capital in a technology start-up called Daou Systems. The eventual sale of that company allowed them to pursue their lifelong dream of making fine wine.

Their winemaking model was Bordeaux. Growing up in France, Daniel had found his "aha" wine (as many in the industry describe the bottle that made them enophiles): Château Cheval Blanc. "It now seems normal" to make Cabernet Sauvignon in Paso Robles, Pesquera said, but that certainly wasn't the case 16 years ago, when the region was best known for Zinfandels and Rhône blends.



Pesquera tells the story behind Soul of a Lion to a group of VIP trade members gathered at Gurney's Montauk Resort and Seawater Spa in Montauk, NY, on July 10.

What the Daou brothers accomplished, in her estimation, changed the course of Paso Robles.

“Daniel and Georges started with a big vision and a whole lot of courage,” Pesquera said. “Soul of a Lion is the wine they came to Paso to make. It took an eight-year quest to find the perfect terroir; they looked in France, Argentina, Napa, and Sonoma but chose Paso Robles for its calcareous clay soils and climate.”

The 212-acre mountaintop that the brothers decided to plant grapes on sits at an elevation of 2,200 feet, where an 18-inch layer of red clay tops sheer-white calcareous clay and limestone. They were not the first to appreciate its propensity; famed winemaking consultant André Tchelistcheff once described it as “a jewel of ecological elements,” and the Hoffman Mountain Ranch winery was built across the road from it in the mid-1970s to make mainly Pinot Noir and Burgundian blends. But Daniel saw its yet-unfulfilled potential for Cabernet Sauvignon.

Today, Daniel is the winemaker, and Georges is the creative force. “Daniel is everything inside the bottle,” said Pesquera, while “Georges is everything on the outside of that bottle.” In his role, Daniel meticulously curates the vineyard blocks used for Soul of a Lion, deploys an optical sorter for berry selection, and uses only free-run juice. The wine is aged for two years in proprietary barrels made of French oak selected by Daniel and his cooper for its tight grain and rare pink color, which inspired the name he has bestowed upon the wood: *bois rosé*. While staves are normally seasoned for 18–24 months to contribute structure and tannins—of which his DAOU Mountain fruit already has plenty—he has determined that his *bois rosé* staves should be aged for five years to highlight the wine’s flavor and inherent phenolic character.

Daniel is hands-on when it comes to blending as well, adjusting proportions based on vintage conditions to achieve the style he seeks: one of power, density, and elegance. Pesquera recalled that when she asked Daniel why he chose to use more Cabernet Sauvignon in the 2020 vintage than in the 2019, he replied, “Because that’s what spoke to me.”



Here are my notes on the Soul of a Lion vertical tasting:

2012: This is the only vintage with no Cabernet Franc and very little (3%) Petit Verdot on a Cabernet Sauvignon base. A warm year, 2012 yielded high sugars and corresponding alcohol content, but today the wine shows great fruit, vibrant acidity, velvety texture, and hints of tobacco leaf on the finish.

2014: Made with 83% Cabernet Sauvignon, 14% Cabernet Franc, and 3% Petit Verdot, this wine exhibited dramatically more tannic structure than the 2012 when first poured but gradually softened in the glass. It has deep color; hints of cola, and predominant notes of graphite that Pesquera described as a signature of DAOU Mountain wines.

2016: According to Pesquera, this blend of 84% Cabernet Sauvignon, 12% Cabernet Franc, and 4% Petit Verdot represents one of Daniel’s favorite growing seasons, benefiting as it did from what he calls the “August effect,” wherein moderate temperatures ensured that the grapes, which had achieved phenolic maturity by midsummer, did not overripen. The wine shows roundness, elegance, and balance.

2019: This vintage was marked by ideal conditions: abundant winter rainfall and an ideal temperature range mostly in the 80s and 90s, without a single day reaching 100 degrees. Composed of 78% Cabernet Sauvignon, 12% Cabernet Franc, and 10% Petit Verdot, the wine is plush and shows dark fruit and spice on the palate.

2020: Pesquera said 2020 was a difficult vintage because of the challenges that the pandemic presented for working conditions, but the weather and the resulting fruit were again ideal: “The mountain didn’t know [about COVID-19]; it just kept on giving.” This blend of 80% Cabernet Sauvignon, 13% Cabernet Franc, and 7% Petit Verdot was a favorite of the evening, revealing rich dark fruit and complexity with notes of cigar box and sage while bearing a velvety texture but distinct brightness.

Across the board, these wines lived up to their reputation. “Today, Soul of a Lion is among the highest-rated Cabernets around the world,” said Pesquera, “and that is the direct impact of Daniel and Georges Daou’s vision.” S

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THE SOMM JOURNAL

OCTOBER/NOVEMBER 2023 • Vol. 10 No. 6



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The Little Region That Could

LONG ISLAND WINE COUNTRY TURNS 50

FOR LONG ISLAND WINE COUNTRY, turning 50 years old is not a catalyst for a midlife crisis—it's a milestone that merits celebrating. In 1973, the Hargrave family planted Long Island's first vineyard in Cutchogue. Today, the New York region is home to 57 wineries and three distinct AVAs—Long Island; The Hamptons, Long Island; and North Fork of Long Island—that are recognized for the quality and diversity of their wines.

Kareem Massoud, winemaker at Paumanok Vineyards and president of the Long Island Wine Country Organization (liwines.com), has observed and participated in the region's evolution and success: "Since my parents founded Paumanok Vineyards in 1983, we have seen the region grow both in terms of vineyard acreage as well as winegrowing aptitude," he says. "Over the decades, we have learned to tune in to our terroir and a changing climate. The result is a range of wine styles that marry well with the bounty of the land and the sea that surrounds us."

Unlike many wine regions defined by a single variety or style, diversity is one of Long Island's strongest selling points; over 25 grape varieties are planted here. The region's climate is similar to that of Bordeaux, so Merlot, Cabernet Franc, Cabernet Sauvignon, Carménère, Petit Verdot, and Sauvignon Blanc have a strong presence. But Chardonnay, Albariño, Pinot Noir, Gewürztraminer, and other varieties are becoming increasingly popular.

No wonder the region continues to attract new vintners, including the Rivero

González family, who first planted vines in Mexico in 1998. What led them to launch RGNV in the North Fork AVA in 2019? "First, we wanted an underdog region that would allow us to keep being innovative," says RGNV CEO Maria Rivero



PHOTO COURTESY OF MARA RUDZINSKI

Mara Rudzinski is managing partner/sommelier at Contento in New York City.

González. "I had lived in New York City twice and had no idea the North Fork existed! But then we visited and were impressed by the grapes. Ultimately, we are farmers, and this cool-climate region has a lot to offer in terms of beautiful grapes."

Meanwhile, many of New York City's sommeliers and restaurateurs are committed to showcasing wines produced just a couple of hours away. Says Mara Rudzinski, managing partner/sommelier at East Harlem restaurant Contento, "Drawing attention to local producers is just as important to us as working with local ingredients on our menu whenever possible. There is a lot of great wine being made in Long Island . . . and I personally get excited about turning visitors on to some producers right in our backyard."

Tourists may come to New York craving a slice of pizza or a bagel, but Adrienne Cooper, general manager at Corkbuzz Chelsea Market, believes that local wines are also a vital part of the visitor experience: "Aside from the fact that there are just some amazing producers in Long Island that fit the style and ethos of Corkbuzz, our Chelsea Market location is ripe with tourists who are eager to try wines from our home state. I think it's an added bonus to be able to provide a true taste of New York to our guests," she says.

And for Charlie Marshall, chef/owner of The Marshal in Hell's Kitchen, Long Island wines correspond to his farm-to-table philosophy: "When we opened ten years ago, I was disappointed that other farm-to-table restaurants sourced their food ingredients locally but . . . did not extend that commitment to . . . their beverage programs. The Marshal has been offering local wines exclusively since day one," he says, adding that their quality validates that decision: "The amount of winegrowing and winemaking talent on Long Island is incredible, and seeing how much the wines have changed over the past ten years has been really impressive." SJ

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

Paumanok Vineyards in Aquebogue, NY.

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The Riches of Rotundone

USING THE MYSTERIOUS SESQUITERPENE TO GENERATE MEMORABLE RESTAURANT EXPERIENCES

ROTUNDONE, LIKE UMAMI, is one of the more curious phenomena of sensory perception. While it may not be fully understood, it can still prove useful when assessing wines.

First, let's define it: Rotundone is a sesquiterpene, a class of aromatic terpenes commonly found in plants and most strongly in peppercorns but also in wines. In the latter, rotundone is most often associated with so-called "spicy" varieties such as Syrah, Petite Sirah, Zinfandel, and Grenache, though other wines that are sometimes described as "peppery" include Gewürztraminer, Viognier, Grüner Veltliner, Graciano, Mourvèdre, Pinot and Gamay Noir, Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, and Touriga Nacional.

Since its formal identification in Australia in 2008, there have been a number of studies of rotundone, particularly in the context of grapes, for the simple reason that peppery qualities in wines are considered positive. The drawback, however, is that researchers also found that as little as 20% of people are capable of readily identifying these aromas in wines—which is to say that peppery components are neither here nor there for the majority of consumers.

That said, many of the aromatic attributes of wine as well as of food fall below detectable thresholds. This does not make a wine or dish any less appealing. The beauty of our senses is that sensory qualities can be appreciated whether they are recognized or not. A chef, for instance, may use 15, 25, or 40-plus ingredients in a single dish, but it is not necessary for the average guest to perceive more than four or five of them in order to enjoy the result. The same applies to sensory components in wines.

My professional experience with rotundone goes back to 2000 and



The beauty of our senses is that sensory qualities can be appreciated whether they are recognized or not.

2001—the two vintages of Cabernet Sauvignon-based red wine I bottled under my eponymous brand. My objective was to produce Cabernet Sauvignon that was sleek, crisp, and light enough to complement Asian or fusion foods. Yet it wasn't enough, I quickly discovered, for a wine to be sleek, crisp, and light.

Since human perception is syncretic—that is, the brain gathers sensory information via receptors channeled through the nose as well as the palate—my wines needed an aromatic synergy to meet the culinary goals I had for them. Luckily, around that time, I discovered newly planted Syrah in the lower foothills of Lodi, California, that possessed strong peppery attributes: When blended into the Cabernet, voilà, it produced red wine that was light yet peppery enough to strike a stunning chord with Asian-influenced dishes such as Thai shrimp with Sichuan peppers, furikake salmon, and wok steak with shishito peppers.

I have since discovered that rotundone can make a surprising partner for dishes rich in umami. Not too long ago, I gathered six sommeliers around a table and served them a classic California Chardonnay and Petite Sirah with a creamy dish consisting of macaroni, aged cheeses, lobster, and cayenne pepper. Counterintuitively, every one of these restaurant professionals preferred the Petite Sirah, not only because the lobster and cheeses offered an umami-driven flavor bridge to the red wine but also because the latter's intrinsic peppery note interacted so well with the hot spice.

Most guests do not walk into restaurant doors expecting exotic sensory experiences, but they know good things when they taste them. Just as a chef combines distinct ingredients into coherent dishes, a clever sommelier utilizes sensory components in wines to bring together the various elements of a menu to create a cohesive experience. In this endeavor, rotundone can be their friend. S|



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TIPS TO MAXIMIZE THE PROFITABILITY OF YOUR BY-THE-GLASS PROGRAM

THERE CAN BE no question that a restaurant's by-the-glass (BTG) program is the workhorse of profitability. However, this critical revenue source is often given little more than perfunctory attention. Sommeliers tend to place wines at a price point they deem appropriate without thought toward a balanced selection. The result is that most BTG lists exist at the intersection of consumer demand and appealing discounts rather than serving as a thoughtfully designed profitability tool. What follows is a simple guide to maximizing BTG profitability, with tactics as useful at a Michelin-starred fine-dining spot as they are at a casual restaurant.

Know Your Comp Set

The competitive set (or comp set) consists of every establishment and program that is in direct or indirect competition with your property. Many operators erroneously assume that their comp set is entirely composed of restaurants within the same genre when in fact it is much broader. For example, while a steakhouse is competing with every other steakhouse in the

same city or area (concept comp set), it is also competing with every other restaurant in the surrounding neighborhood (geographical comp set) and with those that offer a similar level of ambiance and service (economic comp set). Therefore, in this example, an upscale steakhouse is competing with every other steakhouse in the city, every other fine-dining establishment in the city, and every restaurant of any type in the immediate vicinity.


With this in mind, savvy operators will investigate what their comps are pouring BTG and avoid those wines in their programs. Consider that any price variance for the same wine will immediately cause your guests to make a comparison. While their reaction could be favorable if your wine is less expensive, they will feel gouged if that wine is even a dollar more per glass. This is especially challenging for an independent restaurant in competition with a chain or high-volume restaurant. There is simply no way to compete with the latter's purchasing power: Its ability to negotiate better pricing allows it to pour the same wines at a lower price to the consumer, often without sacrificing margin. The independent or

lower-volume operator who takes a standard markup will be seen as overcharging even though the reality is they are making a lower margin and fewer dollars with each transaction.

Serving wines their competition doesn't can be a game changer for these smaller establishments and their ability to maximize revenue and margins. Everyone knows what that one big-brand Champagne costs in stores and in restaurants BTG, but how many consumers will recognize that Crémant de Limoux from Languedoc or sparkling Albariño from Rías Baixas? The demand for sparkling wine won't change, but the ability of the operator to take an appropriate margin is enhanced by the presentation of lesser-known brands and/or producers within a given category.

Don't Cannibalize Your Sales

All too often a BTG program offers multiple similar wines at roughly the same price point. Why have three Sauvignon Blancs all within \$1 of each other? There's no financial benefit to that. Rather, it would make sense to have three Sauvignon Blancs (or Pinot Noirs or Chardonnays) at three different price points. Low-, mid-, and high-priced expressions not only spread the revenue but, if thoughtfully curated to be stylistically different, can steer sales to the latter. Imagine a restaurant with a \$12 Chilean Sauvignon Blanc, a \$15 New Zealand Sauvignon Blanc, and a \$19 Sancerre. Given their differences, savvy servers and sommeliers can guide the conversation toward flavor rather than price point—a scenario that often leads guests to the higher-priced selection.

A successful BTG list is complicated to say the least. However, the right balance of comp-set awareness and savvy pricing can lead your program to new heights of profitability. 



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CRUjiente Tacos beverage director/
owner Jason Morris and executive
chef/owner Richard Hinojosa.



PHOTOS: CHRISTINA BARRUETA

Tortillas and Terroir

CRUJIENTE TACOS IN PHOENIX, AZ, BOASTS GLOBAL FLAVORS AND A SOPHISTICATED BEVERAGE PROGRAM

WHAT HAPPENS WHEN LONGTIME

friends and sommeliers with a shared passion for tacos and wine join forces? They create CRUjiente Tacos, a modern taqueria that opened in Phoenix, Arizona, in 2016 and quickly garnered accolades from Food Network to Forbes.

The masterminds behind the venture are executive chef Richard Hinojosa and beverage director Jason Morris. Hinojosa comes to it with extensive fine-dining experience at acclaimed resorts like The Westin Maui Resort & Spa in Hawaii; Hotel Jerome in Aspen, Colorado; and The Wigwam in Phoenix, while Morris' background includes Quench Fine Wines, a boutique distributorship he sold in 2010.

The latter's expertise is displayed through an all-Spanish wine list that means you might find him pairing a special of butter-poached king crab and white truffle with Raventos i Blanc de Nit Brut Rosé, pouring Descendientes de J. Palacios Petalos alongside a taco with garlic-roasted mushrooms and jalapeño-lime aioli, or partnering Dominio de Pingus PSI with lomo Ibérico and mole verde.

Under Morris' guidance, CRUjiente also boasts an exceptional collection of craft beers and spirits. "I went from tasting 2,500 wines a year for two decades to now tasting over 1,500 spirits a year," says Morris, who has racked up Best Margarita wins from outlets like *PHOENIX magazine*, *Phoenix New Times*, and *Arizona Foothills Magazine* to accompany Hinojosa's Best Taco awards from the same publications, among other organizations. "Today I got in Elmer T. Lee, Rock Hill Farms, E.H. Taylor Single Barrel and Small Batch bourbons, and four new ArteNOM tequilas. I can't let Chef outshine me," he jokes, "so I have to have the best."



Strip steak taco with pickled shimeji mushrooms, cilantro mojo, karashi (Japanese mustard), and roasted garlic-shoyu horseradish sauce.

By a similar token, says Hinojosa, "I want to integrate as much flavor as I can in creating refined versions of traditional dishes." A prime example is his rendition of elote, Mexico's humble street snack of grilled corn. Ears of corn first take a dip in a master stock of corn cobs, silks, and husks plus charred onions and peppers before being rubbed with spices and charred on the grill. To build more flavor, Hinojosa cuts the kernels off, sautés them in butter, and adds tomatillo to the classic accompaniments of chile, lime, crema, and cotija.

"We put a lot of thought into every aspect of every dish to carefully balance

flavors and textures," continues Hinojosa. Take, for instance, the familiar steak taco redefined as a blue corn tortilla topped with strip steak cooked sous vide in duck fat, cilantro mojo, pickled shimeji mushrooms, and dollops of karashi (Japanese mustard) as well as fresh horseradish that's been emulsified with roasted garlic and shoyu.

"I want our guests to walk away with a new experience," says Morris, and Hinojosa concurs: "We want to be memorable. If tacos come up in someone's conversation, whether it's years later or miles away, I'd love them to say, 'Remember that place where I had those really cool and delicious tacos? Those were the best.'" SJ

A WINE BORN FROM THE GRIT OF PASO ROBLES



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The Kids Are All Right

SẮP SỮA HAS AN INCLUSIVE VISION FOR VIETNAMESE CUISINE IN DENVER

HONOR THOUGH IT WAS to see Sắp Sữa listed among *Bon Appetit's* "8 Most Anticipated Restaurant Openings of Summer 2023," chef/owner Ni Nguyen says that the "nontraditional Vietnamese restaurant" he and his wife/partner, Anna, opened in Denver, Colorado, in July "is not about accolades or being written up in articles. It's just about being able to help that one kid in that one classroom feel like they belong and they're accepted."

As he explains, the impetus behind the venture "had to do with my upbringing and the experiences I've had as a first-generation Vietnamese American—the teasing in school from 'smelly' lunch boxes and being ashamed of the food that I ate at home—and with feeling like I don't want the next generation to feel that way. So if there's anything I can do to help people explore the cuisine and expose them to different cultures and flavors, if that's going to help our kids going through school . . . then I feel like we've done our jobs."

That admirable, not to mention poignant, mission finds its corollary in the couple's aim to "have every single person working for us have a dish on the menu so that it feels like it's [all of] ours and not just Anna's and mine," says Ni. Take the *bún riêu ướp lạnh*, a cold vermicelli soup with crab and tomato created by "this young Vietnamese cook with us who I don't think [has] ever put a dish on a menu before. . . . When we ate it, we were like, 'Wow, this is really good,' and you could see that sparkle in his eye, like, 'Oh, maybe it isn't just a far-fetched dream, maybe I can be a chef one day cooking Vietnamese food' . . . and every time it gets ordered you just see him looking down, working, but smiling."

He's not the only one smiling. The light, bright space designed by Regular Architecture's Kevin Nguyen (no relation) has been thronged since day one with Denverites thrilled to the gills by such



Sắp Sữa owners Ni and Anna Nguyen.

dishes as *bắp cải luộc*—charred cabbage with anchovy breadcrumbs and egg yolk—and *cá kho*, a deceptively simple, deeply flavorful dish of hamachi collar in coconut caramel over steamed rice, as well as the layered dessert of grass jelly, coconut crême, and guava granita called *chè sương sáo*. Pairings only enhance the pleasure.

For the cocktail program, the Nguyens brought in George Wright, lead bartender at local Italian favorite Tavernetta, as a consultant because "he has really lovely taste—he really dug deep and did a lot of research into ingredients that are specifically Vietnamese and not just quote-unquote Asian," says Anna, citing as an example the Pandan-monium, a creamy blend of Cognac, coffee, and pandan with a whole egg inspired by Vietnamese egg coffee, or *cà phê trứng*.



PHOTOS: CASEY WILSON

▲ *The Island Hopper* features sotel with mango, coconut, and horchata.

The wine list, for its part, is built on labels that "go well with the food," she adds. Be it Ovum Big Salt Orange Rosé out of Oregon or No Es Pituko Cabernet Franc by

Chile's Echeverria, "there's nothing very tannic—everything's fairly acidic, a little salty, a little funky." But one of her own favorite beverage offerings is, true story, Heineken on the rocks. "If you were traveling in Vietnam," she explains, "you would drink a beer over ice—and a few people have actually ordered it, which has been really cool."

While they've clearly nailed their opening goals, "the thing that I like to stress to everyone is how much of a group effort this is," says Anna, crediting everyone from GM Heeji Kim to "the contractors and all the restaurants that hosted us for takeovers." Agrees Ni, "The people that we've surrounded ourselves with understand our story and have really taken the time to tell it the right way." With that kind of community support, the couple hopes, the kids will be all right. **sj**



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Fueled by Flavor

A WORD WITH **JORDAN LYNN TRAYLOR** OF MARIETTA PROPER IN ATLANTA, GA

by Emily Johnston Collins

PHOTO COURTESY OF JORDAN LYNN TRAYLOR




Her favorite wines to pour are those with interesting stories, especially if they come from female winemakers, Black-owned producers, and/or boutique wineries.

JORDAN LYNN TRAYLOR is both a chef and a sommelier: Flavor is her forte. But her expertise in food and wine aren't all that helped her achieve her dream of owning a wine bar; rather, it is her gusto that led to the opportunity. When fellow Atlanta, Georgia-based chef Will Adamek offered to introduce her to Hillery and Kacey Cecil, who were planning to open a wine bar in the northern suburb of Marietta, she came ready with the business plan that she had been working on since determining her career goal. They were so impressed that all four parties decided to go into business together on a swanky cafe and wine bar called Marietta Proper, opening this fall.

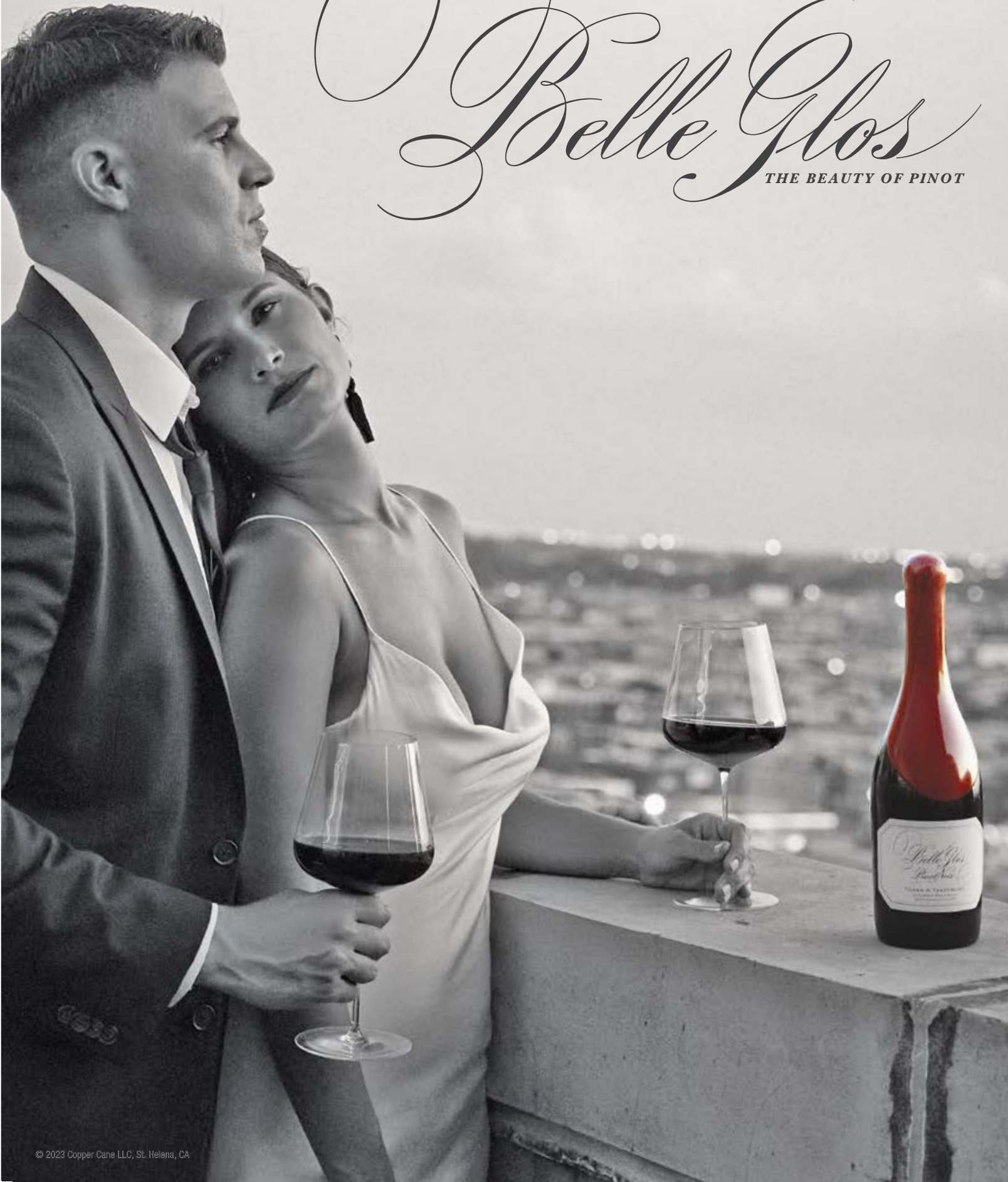
Marietta Proper's menu of small plates is being created by both Traylor and Adamek. Adamek will run the kitchen while Traylor focuses on the wine, but "the menu will have my hand and my flavors in it," she says, incorporating influences from around the world, including the Southern U.S. and Europe. Meanwhile, her wine selections will be as eclectic as her culinary style: Her favorite wines to pour are those with interesting stories, especially if they come from female winemakers, Black-owned producers, and/or boutique wineries. "And Israeli wine will have a heavy presence," she notes, because it is the kind of wine "people would love if they only knew."

Traylor is currently pursuing certifications through the Wine & Spirit Education Trust and the Court of Master Sommeliers, and she wants to use her knowledge to make wine less intimidating. After putting a poll out to her followers on social media, she decided to add a pronunciation key and glossary of wine terms to the back page of her wine list. This, along with her friendly personality, will help foster meaningful interactions over wine.

My own interaction with Traylor yielded the revelation that we both pivoted to a career in wine after picking up the same bottle of Nero d'Avola from Sicily. Both of us had been living in Italy at the time; I was working at the Università di Parma, and she was completing a culinary internship in Sorrento. The spiced and juicy flavor of the wine came to symbolize the gastronomic culture we had both loved in Italy. Traylor assures me that when she finds a Nero d'Avola that evokes her memories of that time, "it's going on my wine list!" If you see it, be sure to ask her about it, because her story is worth hearing. 

Belle Glos

THE BEAUTY OF PINOT





The Nose Knows

DECODING THE ORIGINS OF WINE AROMAS

IF YOU DETECT the familiar aroma of coconut in a young Merlot wine, you might surmise that it was derived from barrel aging and characterize it as a secondary aroma. Likewise, if you perceive dried-fruit aromas of figs or prunes, you might conclude that those tertiary aromas indicate that the wine had considerable bottle age. Yet the aromas of coconut and dried fruit that we typically associate with secondary and tertiary development can also be found in must and young wine.

In a July 2023 study by Alexandre Pons, a research scientist at the University of Bordeaux and Seguin Moreau France, the compounds responsible for those aromas in must and young red wines were identified as furaneol and homofuraneol. The concentration of these compounds as well as that of γ -nonalactone, which is reminiscent of coconut and cooked peach, depends on vintage conditions and the amount of sunlight grapes receive during ripening, with the highest levels of γ -nonalactone being found in Merlot and Cabernet Sauvignon.

When grapevines are stressed by heat or by *Uncinula necator*, a fungus that causes powdery mildew, the metabolism of the berry is affected such that during

fermentation yeasts can produce large amounts of γ -nonalactone. A demonstration of that connection can be seen in Merlot and Cabernet Sauvignon wines from the 2007 and 2010 vintages in Napa Valley, which yielded higher levels of γ -nonalactone in the wines due to heat spikes close to the harvests.

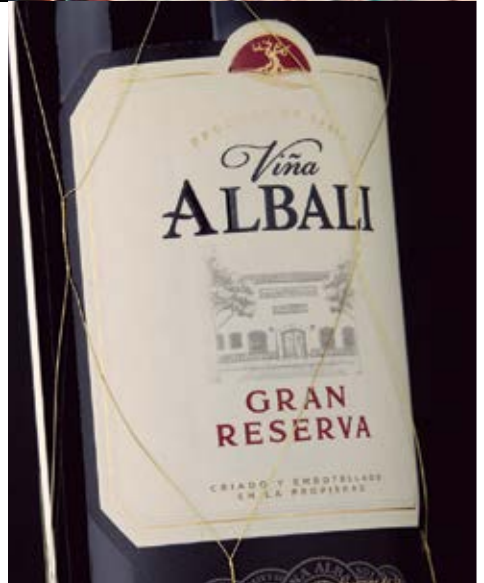
Winemakers have a particular interest in understanding the origin of coconut and dried-fruit aromas in must, as they can point to premature oxidation. Researchers at the University of Bordeaux have identified both another lactone, massoia lactone, which smells like coconut and dried figs, and a fig-like aldehyde, (Z)-1,5-octadien-3-one, that contribute cooked- and dried-fruit aromas in red grape must.

In a previous column for the August/September 2017 issue of *The SOMM Journal*, I discussed the paradox of a grape-derived compound like 1, 1, 6, -trimethyl-1,2-dihydronaphthalene (TDN) being categorized as a tertiary aroma when TDN is also found in must and detectable in young wine. According to research by Vicente Ferreira, head of the Laboratory of Aroma Analysis and Enology at the University of Zaragoza in Spain, tasting rubrics like the Wine & Spirit

Education Trust's Systematic Approach to Tasting and the tasting grid preferred by the Court of Master Sommeliers for codifying wine aromas were state of the art when developed, but recent advances have allowed researchers to expand the wine-aroma universe by linking the seven aroma-precursor systems in grapes to potential aromas.

Ferreira's research pushes beyond the boundaries that have been the standards by which the wine industry has trained professionals for the past 50 years. Even though the grape genome was decoded more than ten years ago, we still don't have an understanding of all the grape metabolites that ultimately contribute to the aromas of wine. **SJ**







Being the Change

HOW VARIOUS COMPANIES ARE STIRRING UP HOPE FOR THE HOSPITALITY INDUSTRY

IN THE CURRENT LANDSCAPE, our industry faces a multitude of challenges ranging from persistent labor shortages and supply-chain breakages to rising prices and declining customer bases. However, there is a silver lining as various companies and nonprofits are stepping up to tackle these issues head on. Here, we shine a spotlight on a few that have risen to the occasion since the onset of the pandemic, addressing critical problems.

BRAND SOLUTIONS

In response to on-premise labor shortages and the need for streamlining the cocktail-making process, **Greenbar Distillery** has introduced a trio of organic liqueurs called 1 to 1—Ginger, Orange, and Hibiscus—that can serve as a cocktail base. They are designed to be mixed at a 1-to-1 ratio with any other spirit (not to mention club soda or Prosecco). This shelf-stable innovation not only reduces cocktail preparation to two steps but also boasts eco-friendly credentials (for instance, one tree is planted for every bottle sold). greenbardistillery.com

Emily Darchuk, a food scientist in the dairy industry, recognized the environmental challenges associated with the disposal of whey. She ingeniously devised a method to convert excess whey into a delightful alcoholic spirit, helping to reduce waste and its impact on the environment. **Wheyward Spirit** makes two products, one reminiscent of a light baijiu and the other of whiskey. wheywardspirit.com

Under the banner Love, Tito's, **Tito's Handmade Vodka** is empowering its sales representatives to engage with charitable causes in their communities, giving away millions of dollars annually. Its website prominently showcases donations made to various charities and offers an

online application process for nonprofits seeking grants. Furthermore, 100% of the net profits from all sales of Tito's merchandise is directed toward charitable endeavors. titosvodka.com/love



NONPROFIT ALLIES

Another Round Another Rally caters to restaurant workers in both the front of house and back of house. Born just before the pandemic, this educational resource raises funds for grants, offers programs on the topics of personal growth and financial assistance, and is actively developing mentorship opportunities for bartenders. anotherroundanotherally.org

Operating since 2004, **CORE**, or Children of Restaurant Employees, provides grants to restaurant employees with children who are facing financial hardships due to disasters, deaths, injuries, or life-altering health crises. coregives.org

With a national mission to unite and elevate the bar community through education, community-building, and advocacy, the **United States Bartenders' Guild** (USBG) operates approximately 35 chapters across the United States. During the pandemic, its foundation raised over \$10 million to provide microgrants to over 40,000 industry workers. It has also intro-

duced the Guildhouse program, simplifying membership sign-ups for restaurants and bars whose employees can then access its educational resources as well as network with peers. usbg.org

ONLINE RESOURCES

Beam Suntory's **The Blend**, helmed by director of advocacy and trade engagement Robin Nance, is a valuable website for anyone in the hospitality industry, offering a wealth of articles, podcasts, and other content addressing the sector's pressing

challenges. Created by established bartenders and industry experts, the content is a thoughtful collection of insights and best practices; of special note are the Refire video series and Served Up podcast. theblend.world

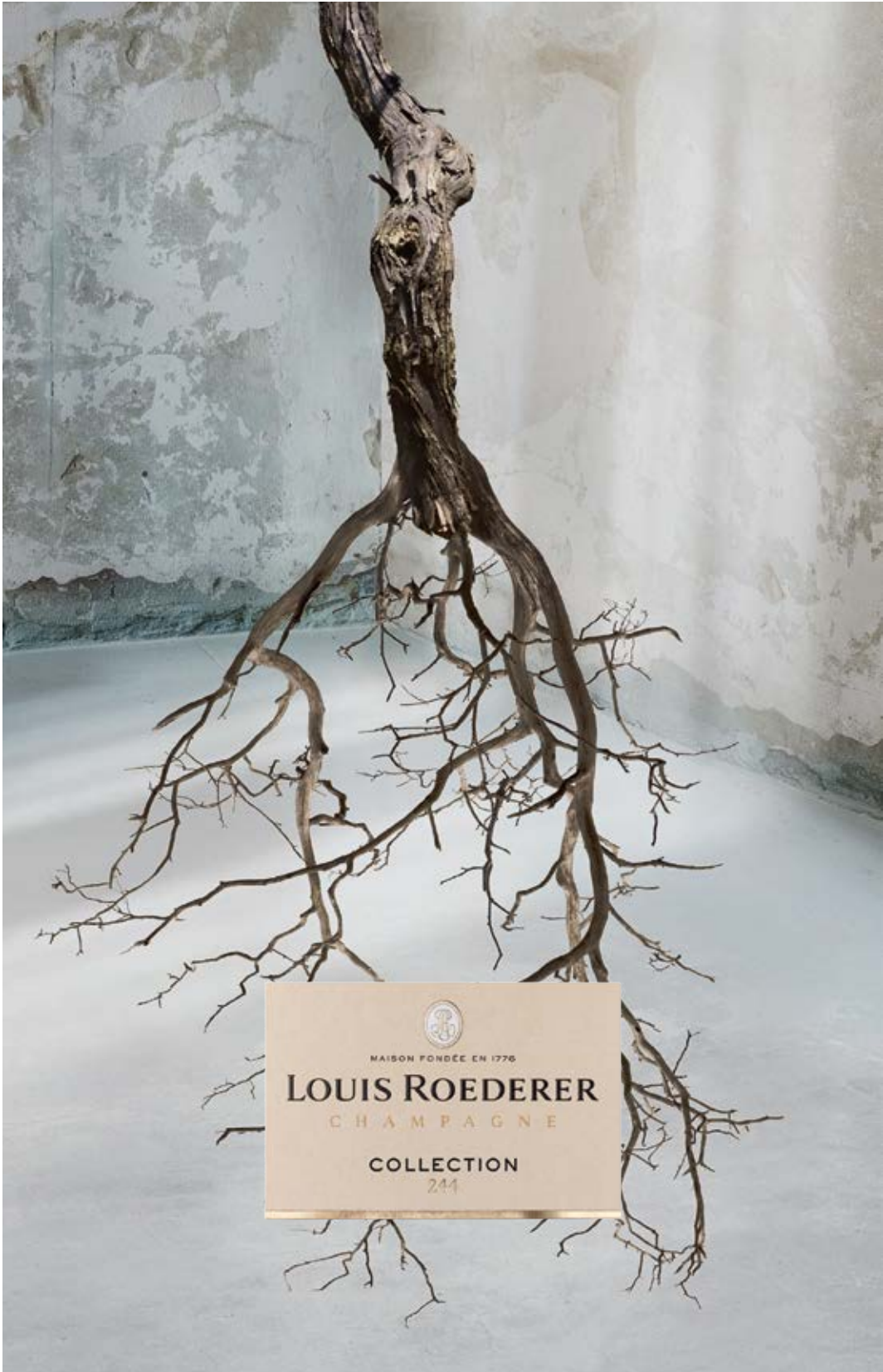
Catering to bartenders and bar-management professionals, **Diageo Bar**

Academy likewise offers a wide array of articles on topics ranging from trending ingredients to tools and techniques, along with cocktail calculators and more. It's a constantly updated source of inspiration and tools to enhance bar operations. diageobaracademy.com

Trying to launch a brand from scratch is a monumental task made even harder for women and other underrepresented groups. Earlier this year, **Southern Glazer's Wine & Spirits** launched its Incubator Academy, a virtual platform that gives these entrepreneurs free access to business tools and e-learning modules to help set them up for success. For more information, visit southernglazers.com.

In these trying times, such products and resources are beacons of hope, addressing the industry's challenges and fostering growth, support, and innovation. **sj**

Kim Haasarud is the founder of Liquid Architecture, a national beverage consultancy based in Phoenix, Arizona.




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LOUIS ROEDERER
HAND IN HAND WITH NATURE



by Honore Comfort, vice president of international marketing, Wine Institute

The Tectonic Shift That Changed California Wine

IN A STATE famous for its fault lines, no tectonic shift in California's recent history had a greater impact on its wine industry than when the lights went dark in restaurants and retail shops around the world at the onset of the pandemic. The lockdown created huge shifts in the global economy and consumer behavior, which presented some unique opportunities as well as challenges.

Suddenly, wine professionals and consumers were connecting in online communities to learn and talk about wines that many had never tasted before. This exchange of information created a new demand for bottlings that previously couldn't be found outside of the Golden State, and as importers and retailers responded by moving inventory and sales online, the California wine community directly benefited from the global discovery and appreciation of wines from its diverse regions and eclectic producers.

From Nebbiolo and Nero d'Avola to Vernaccia and Valdigué, California's winemakers are leaning into the state's complex terroir to explore the potential of a wide range of lesser-known grapes. "Wine drinkers are looking for something new," says Joe Lange, international sales director for LangeTwins Family Winery and Vineyards in Lodi, "so we're fortunate to farm in a region growing over 125 varieties of *Vitis vinifera*. Some of our bestselling wines are varieties that just a few years ago were relatively unfamiliar to people."

Only a small percentage of California's 4,800 wineries export their wines to global markets. Traditionally, buyers lean heavily on international wine exhibitions and big trade tastings abroad to engage with producers. Wine Institute wanted to replicate the scale and efficiencies of this



Elaine Chukan Brown and Kelli White lead a session at California Wines' 2022 Global Buyers Marketplace in Napa, CA.

established paradigm while leveraging the innovation and enthusiasm created by bringing buyers face-to-face with wineries—many of them new to the export market. So last year, it launched the Global Buyers Marketplace, bringing more than 80 buyers from markets across Europe, Asia, Mexico, and Canada to California to meet with producers. The buyers represented more than \$10 billion in annual wine sales and were eager to add California wines to their portfolios. Over the course of five days, they tasted over 800 expressions, attended seminars led by educators Elaine Chukan Brown and Kelli White, met with over 200 vintners, and explored wine regions ranging from Santa Barbara to the Sierra Foothills.

As global professionals experience California wines on a deeper and more intimate level, their perceptions are being transformed, and as a result, export sales

continue to grow, fueled in part by interest in regions like Lodi, Paso Robles, and Anderson Valley as well as in emerging and eclectic varieties.

At a recent dinner, legendary Alexander Valley Cabernet Sauvignon producer Chris Hanna, president of Hanna Winery, shared with me her newly released Nero d'Avola: It was plush, juicy, and delicious. "This is the future" she said—and a bright one too, I might add. *sj*

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.

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Phoenix From the Flame

NOT EVEN FIRE-STRICKEN VINTAGES LIKE 2020 WILL DETER NAPA VALLEY'S FINE-WINE PRODUCERS

IN ITS FORMER ITERATION, which ran for several years beginning in 2014, *The Punchdown* featured interviews with beverage-industry titans, but as I reintroduce the column, I'm reinventing it: Based as I am in Northern California, I'll use this space to address topics relevant to my home state's wine scene.

To reignite things, I'd like to bend your ear about wildfires, particularly in the con-

I don't have extensive experience tasting wines from 2020 that were mass-produced and/or manipulated to tease out smoke impacts. I did, however, sample as many as 175 Napa Valley Cabernets from top-end producers—most over \$100 SRP. And in my opinion, it is utterly irresponsible for anyone to write off the vintage and declare Napa's fine wines unsuitable altogether.

Wine buyers, sommeliers, beverage

tial wildfire-smoke impacts. That's why organizations like the West Coast Smoke Exposure Task Force, created in 2019, are obtaining millions of dollars in grant money to research the impacts of wildfire smoke and looking at new technologies like barrier sprays while exploring impacts on leaf canopies, the different metabolic stages of grapes throughout the growing season, and the development of portable

PHOTO: RACHID DAHNOUJ



A 2020 drone shot depicting the destruction of Newton Vineyard's production facility in St. Helena, CA, due to the Glass Fire; on the right are untouched portions of the property.

text of the 2020 growing season in Napa Valley, as it was impacted both by the LNU Lightning Complex Fire—which started in August around Lake Hennessey and Lake Berryessa—and by the Glass Fire, which ignited on September 27 on Glass Mountain north of St. Helena, scorching the towns of Angwin and Deer Park on Howell Mountain before cutting a wide path of destruction in several directions. Grapes harvested after the Glass Fire were unusable for fine-wine producers, but all was not lost, as a good deal of excellent wine from Napa and Sonoma was still produced that year—and I'm not just talking about the whites, which were largely unimpacted save for locations where heat spikes caused ripening to overtake natural acidity.

directors, and consumers alike have an obligation to give every single winery the benefit of the doubt in a fire-impacted vintage such as 2020. If you find yourself asking why, answer the following questions: Who knows precisely what happened to each grapevine in 2020? Who can explain exactly where fires ignited and which way their smoke blew? Did you obtain the exact pick dates from every winery and a list of every report filed at ETS Laboratories in St. Helena? Did you ask for reports on samples sent overseas to laboratories in Australia?

Granted, it should be noted that lab results aren't conclusive of smoke taint in wine, as testing is currently not sophisticated enough to test for all the poten-

nanoparticle-based sensors that can detect volatile phenols in real time. In short, we're right around the corner from a day when a fire vintage may mean nothing more than business as usual.

In the meantime, we need to put more faith in the fine-wine producers that bottled during a challenging year and taste as many of their wines as possible. I, for one, would be proud to pour (and drink) the majority of expressions I have sampled from 2020. *sj*

Jonathan Cristaldi is an editor-at-large for The SOMM Journal and The Tasting Panel and is also the Napa Valley correspondent for Decanter. Follow him on Instagram @jcrystalidi.

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What Is Sustainable Hospitality?

by Caroline Clark

IN THE BEVERAGE INDUSTRY, we all know how important hospitality spaces are when it comes to not only connecting and tasting with guests but the craft of food pairing and of beverage production itself. Beverage professionals who work in bars, tasting rooms, and restaurants are directly tied to their communities and get to enjoy the immediate gratification of guests enjoying their curated selections and creations.

It can be a tough corner of the industry to work in, however, and it's been begging for change for some time now. Many independent businesses are plagued by a lack of organizational infrastructure and accountability as well as wage disparity, social inequity, and, often, unhealthy work environments. Many passionate professionals looking to pursue a legitimate and fulfilling career in hospitality have been chewed up and spit out by the long hours, impossibly thin margins, labor shortages, and normalization of substance abuse.

I hold the role of beverage director for *Id Est* in Colorado. Our concepts—*The Wolf's Tailor*, *Basta*, *Dry Storage*, *Hey Kiddo/Ok Yeah*, and *BRUTØ*—run the gamut between fine-dining establishments, bars, and casual dinner spots. I began as a host at our first spot, *Basta*, and stayed committed to the organization because I was moved by its ethos. Working in these spaces has always been so much more than serving food and wine.

The leadership keeps environmental consciousness and impact at the core of decision-making in the kitchen and behind the bar through practices like zero-waste initiatives and extremely thoughtful sourcing that supports regenerative agriculture and viticulture. We are not alone in these sustainability practices; over the years they have become more common and are even expected in respected contemporary restaurants and bars.

There is a new frontier when it comes to true sustainability, though, as the term

PHOTO: JEFF FIERBERG



On a large scale, I am seeing folks creating channels to address the toxic aspects of workplace culture, incongruities in work-life balance, and the need for employee protections while holding leaders accountable on equity and inclusion efforts.

can no longer be limited to an exclusively environmental definition. A recent push by activists, leaders, and educators to focus on *social* sustainability is giving me a sense of optimism about where the industry is headed. On a large scale, I am seeing folks creating channels to address the toxic aspects of workplace culture, incongruities in work-life balance, and the need for employee protections while holding leaders accountable on equity and inclusion efforts. More energy and resources are being allocated to mental health, HR, and zero-proof programming. There is momentum for these changes from the local level all the way to high-profile trade conferences and national award stages.

Admittedly, there is a lot more work to be done in this arena. It can be painful and requires intense self-reflection. But it's heartening to be part of a generation of change that could have a last-

ing impact for hospitality work and the people who make it special. I am seeing more opportunity for beverage leaders who embrace conscious values, believe in establishing healthy spaces, and speak up when sustainability efforts veer off course. My hope is that other leaders from around the beverage trade perceive the same promising horizon as I do and are inspired to contribute to this important moment of reconstruction in the hospitality industry. ❧

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



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Okanagan Valley, B.C., Canada

MARTIN'S LANE WINERY
Simes Vineyard
2018 Pinot Noir
Okanagan Valley, B.C., Canada

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Anthony Road Wine Company founders Ann and John Martini.



PHOTOS COURTESY OF QUINTESSENTIAL

The Road to Riesling

A TASTING WITH NEW YORK'S ANTHONY ROAD WINE COMPANY

by Deborah Parker Wong

ANTHONY ROAD WINE COMPANY founder John Martini recently brought a taste of New York's Finger Lakes region to Napa, California, when he hosted an al fresco lunch showcasing his world-class Rieslings, grown on the west bank of Seneca Lake, at Bear, the restaurant at Auberge resort Stanly Ranch.

Martini's journey from grower to vintner follows a well-beaten path, one that is familiar to many winegrowers from coast to coast. In the late 1980s, when he and his wife, Ann, decided to make wine, they were faced with a marketplace that rejected the non-vinifera varieties their 100-acre estate was planted to. With resolve, they began replanting to well-known vinifera varieties—Riesling, Chardonnay, Pinot Noir, Pinot Gris, and Lemberger—conserving just 5 acres of Vignoles from their original 1973 plantings. They founded their winery in 1990, and today, 25 acres of the now 125-acre

estate are cultivated and new plantings are on the drawing board.

Production at Anthony Road is under the direction of head winemaker Peter Becraft, who took the reins in 2014. A trained sculptor, Becraft apprenticed with his predecessor, Johannes Reinhardt, beginning in 2002. Winegrowing, meanwhile, is a family affair, as the second generation has joined the company. John and Ann's son, viticulturist Peter Martini, manages both the estate and a neighboring 100-acre site, Nutt Road. The couple's grandchildren, for their part, work on the bottling line, help in the tasting room, and care for the estate gardens.

During the lunch, Martini showcased a vertical of four dry Rieslings—2014, 2016, 2018, and 2020—with the 2014 vintage being a standout for its intensity and complexity. None of the wines were considered greatly influenced by botrytis, he pointed out, adding that "2008 was



the last big year for botrytis." But the bright honeysuckle aromas of the 2018 were telltale signs of a warmer vintage.

Martini, now 81, has been a tireless advocate for the Finger

Lakes wine industry. With his background as a researcher at Cornell AgriTech (formerly known as the New York State Agricultural Experiment Station), he has helped improve both the quality of the region's wines and its reputation. Today he serves as an executive committee member of the National Grape Research Alliance, but you'll still find him behind the wheel of a tractor or brandishing a dish towel on a busy day in the tasting room. *sj*



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Onward and Upward

ASSESSING HIGH-ELEVATION PINOT NOIR IN CALIFORNIA by Jillian Dara

WHEN MOST OF US think about high-elevation wines, we picture the steepest slopes of Argentina, Italy, and Austria. Yet a few key players on the West Coast of the U.S. are defining what high-elevation Pinot Noir looks like stateside.

In California, Pinot Noir wines produced from grapes grown at altitudes ranging from 1,250 to 2,300 feet above sea level are distinctively tannic yet possess bright acidity. This is a result of not only beneficial weather patterns—cool days and warmer nights create thermal inversion, which occurs when air near the surface of the earth cools faster than the air above it, resulting in a hovering warm layer—but also coastal proximity and soil composition.

“There’s a common misconception that the [sole] reason to go up in elevation is the weather,” explains Jeff Brinkman, director of winemaking at Rhys Vineyards, who grows Pinot Noir some 2,300 feet up in the Santa Cruz Mountains. According to him, the real reason to be at altitude in California is shallow soils. “The Santa Cruz Mountains have baseline geologies that are primarily old seafloor bed, so marine sedimentary formations,” he says. There’s enough soil there to establish the vine but not enough to sustain it. The stressed vine’s roots must penetrate the rock for water and nutrients. As a result, Brinkman adds, “We find that the shallow soils provide more pronounced minerality and increased tannic structure.” These characteristics lend themselves to ageworthy wine.

“Growing Pinot Noir in bedrock leads to wines with character and power, which is complemented by what I can only describe as a crystalline latticework of charged energy nodes that frame the textural foundation of the wine,” asserts Chantal Forthun, winemaker at Flowers Winery, which has been producing high-elevation Pinot Noir from Cielo Vineyard, situated at 1,850 feet above sea level in the Fort Ross–Seaview AVA, since 1989.

Forthun appreciates the site for the “convergence of energy” that uniquely



PHOTO: MARK RYAN

Rhys Vineyards grows Pinot Noir at 2,300 feet in the Santa Cruz Mountains.

occurs at the confluence of extreme elevation, powerful coastal influence, wild topography, and rare geologic diversity due to the nearby San Andreas Fault. It’s one of 27 vineyards in the appellation, which collectively express a “striking heterogeneity,” she says. “Every vineyard in the area is in the middle of [its] own unique ecosystem . . . and not one tastes like another.”

Forthun especially stresses the importance of the coastal influence in California. She recalls her first encounter with the aforementioned phenomenon of thermal inversion while working at Rhys Vineyards in 2011: She was driving back from the town of Santa Cruz with her windows down and “there was this insane switchback turn coming out of Boulder Creek—when you entered it, the air was cool and coastal, and when you came out, you wished you had air conditioning,” she says. Thermal inversion assists in the development of smaller berries with thicker skins, which in turn yield more concentrated Pinot Noir with those distinct tannins. Accordingly, Brinkman says that extraction is something the winery has to watch carefully: “It’s easy to overextract . . . so we foot-tread all our Pinots instead of [doing] standard punchdowns or pumpovers.”

Indeed, high elevation can provide more hurdles than usual for the finicky Pinot Noir grape. For instance, another challenge is solar radiation and intensity, says Forthun, who strives to maintain plentiful leaf coverage on the vines to shade the clusters. But for the most part, altitude makes for a longer growing season than many lower-elevation sites experience, according to Mike Waller, winemaker at Central Coast producer Calera. The almost desert-like conditions of the estate vineyards he works with at 2,200 feet serve to limit yields to well under 2 tons per acre. “[This] is a key factor in the depth and character of our wines,” he says.

With climate change already impacting growing regions around the globe, Waller predicts that “higher-elevation coastal sites may be the answer to ensuring the long-term future of Pinot Noir in California.” In addition to Rhys, Flowers, and Calera, other wineries creating striking expressions of high-elevation Pinot Noir include Mount Eden Vineyards (Santa Cruz Mountains, 2,000 feet); Thomas Fogarty Winery (Santa Cruz Mountains, 2,000 feet); Hirsch Vineyards (Sonoma Coast, 1,574 feet); Muns Vineyard (Santa Cruz Mountains, 2,600 feet); and Chalone Vineyard (Monterey County, 1,800 feet). ■



"At Antigal, I have the freedom to create single-varietal and blended wines in a variety of styles," Miriam says. "Most importantly, I work with the best possible fruit in the finest of facilities. Those advantages alone inspire exceptional results."

Miriam Fdez

Winemaker

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How Do We Solve the Need for More Diversity?

by Thomas Price, MS, SommFoundation chairman

MUCH OF THE FEEDBACK we are getting from the wine industry is that diversity, equity, inclusion, and representation are no longer at the top of the list of important causes that need funding. That's far from the truth, yet there are so many organizations fighting for positive change: What is the best way to support what matters to us? How do we know where to make charitable commitments that will have the biggest impact?

We now have the answer, and it's the Diversity in Wine Leadership Forum (DIWLF). Founded in 2020 by Maryam Ahmed and Elaine Chukan Brown and now led by Ahmed and Dr. Akilah Cadet, the DIWLF is the first collaborative fundraising group in the North American wine industry. With 14 member organizations across the United States and Canada, it not only provides a virtual space to convene and share information and resources but alleviates the massively time-consuming and uncertain

*From left to right:
Dr. Akilah Cadet (Change Cadet),
Maryam Ahmed (Maryam +
Company), Julia Coney (Black
Wine Professionals), Rachel
Adams (Assemblage Symposium),
Cara Bertone (Lift Collective),
Gabriela Fernandez (Hispanics in
Wine), Katie Canfield (Bâtonnage
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(Continued on page 40)

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PHOTO: SARAH ANNE RISK

Maryam Ahmed co-founded the Diversity in Wine Leadership Forum with Elaine Chukan Brown in 2020.



PHOTO: SOMMFOUNDATION/CHANDLER SCHWARTZ

Author Thomas Price, MS, is chairman of SommFoundation.

realm of fundraising. This is a big deal: Just do a Google search for “nonprofit burnout” and you will get thousands of hits to indicate that leaders in this sector do not have the bandwidth for the many tasks they must complete to ensure that their organizations can continue doing the amazing things they do for our communities.

“The racial reckoning of 2020 changed that way people view diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging—but now, in 2023, that excitement and change has worn off,” says Cadet, partner of DIWLF and CEO of Change Cadet. “The Diversity in Wine Leadership Forum represents organizations that are still doing the work in a climate that has lost momentum for diversity. We are giving them the tools and access to funding by working as a collective committed to changing diversity in wine.”

Luckily, Cadet and Ahmed are relentless in their vision, energy, and dedication. What they have fostered is a geographically discrete group of people who are spearheading the next phase of this movement. The DIWLF offers support and camaraderie, which we all know contribute to sustainability in our jobs and lives and the work we care about, but it is also a unique space for the sharing of

resources, information, techniques for the management of nonprofits and boards of directors, 501(c)(3) compliance rules, antiracism training, and methodologies for the advancement of career pathways.

We at SommFoundation believe in this mission and in the work being done by the DIWLF and all of its member organizations. We are thrilled to announce our new role as the fiscal agent for this collaborative fundraising effort, which means that all donations to support this unified cause can be given and tracked in one place. This structure gives more time to each of these organizations to accomplish their missions while supporting the important work of the DIWLF in our community.

“One of the biggest challenges our member organizations face is access to funding. Non-profit and social impact organizations are vying [for] the same pool of

funders, but each organization is uniquely important, especially within its respective market,” says Ahmed, owner of Maryam + Company. “This collaborative fundraising effort with SommFoundation will provide equitable distribution of funds to 14 organizations with a focus on inclusivity within the wine industry.”

We hope that you will join us in this effort, that you will continue to emphasize the need for more

dedication to this movement in your daily lives, and that you will support collaborations like this one because of the synergy and positivity created by humans coming together toward a shared goal. There may be a lot more work to do, but it’s a heartening process to be a part of. **SJ**



PHOTO: EMILY SCOTT @EMTHEGEM

Dr. Akilah Cadet leads the Diversity in Wine Leadership Forum with founder Maryam Ahmed.

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An Exhilarating Position

THE DIRT ON NAPA VALLEY'S SEQUOIA GROVE

photos by Hardy Wilson

WHEN A WINERY is firing on all cylinders, you can feel it the way you would with a high-powered race car. Sequoia Grove Winery in Napa Valley is in just such an exhilarating position after assembling a powerhouse winemaking and winegrowing team and continuing to make significant investments in its future with the acquisition of new vineyards in top Napa AVAs.

Sequoia Grove, based in Rutherford, is best known for making Napa Valley Cabernets of impeccable balance and finesse. The winery was founded in 1978 by brothers Jim and Steve Allen on land originally planted by George Yount in the 1800s, and since it was acquired by the Kopf family in 2002, its story has been one of continual evolution. This includes the recent purchase of two new properties: State Lane in Yountville and a recently announced site on Mount Veeder. Both sites stand to benefit from the aforementioned new talent as they lead the winery toward a bright future.

Winemaker Jesse Fox came on board in 2022, bringing with him two decades of high-level experience gained during stints at Harlan Estates, Amici Cellars, and Ram's Gate. He is also an accomplished chef, graduating from Le Cordon Bleu in Paris and working at The French Laundry in Yountville. "Achieving balance



Sequoia Grove director of vineyards Jake Terrell and winemaker Jesse Fox with Terrell's dog, Koda.



Tonella Vineyard on Skellenger Lane in Rutherford, CA.



is the guiding principle in my winemaking," says Fox. "It is a privilege to be a part of this historic producer's future and to join a team that believes in creating wines that welcome guests into the Napa Valley experience, introducing them to the diverse expressions of Cabernet Sauvignon."

Of course, the heart of Sequoia Grove is its estate vineyard program, which encompasses 115 acres, 60% of them in Rutherford. Wine quality comes first, and for any Napa Valley winery, estate vineyards are the key to achieving that goal. To that end, Jake Terrell, who joined Sequoia Grove in 2014 as director of vineyards, is a recognized leader in green viticulture who has helped to set standards for sustainable winemaking in California. Together, Fox and Terrell are fulfilling the vision for the next chapter in Sequoia Grove's history.

The winery is deeply committed to sustainability in its winegrowing and winemaking practices, as its team believes that caring for the land and community is critical for everyone's future. Sequoia Grove has been 100% powered by renewable energy since 2018 and supports Save the Redwoods League to protect threatened redwood and sequoia tree habitats. The winery is also certified sustainable by Napa Green—the preeminent climate and community association in the Valley—both in its vineyards and in the winery, demonstrating a significant dedication to the future of the region.

"Our philosophy in general is about evolving and improving quality for the long term," says Fox. "We're making investments for the future to guarantee diversity beyond Rutherford, guarantee the cost of fruit, and bring the farming in house to be more sustainable, with a dedicated vineyard team to farm our own sites." Terrell adds that his goals in the vineyard are the same as Fox's in the winery: "We're not incentivized by yields or budgets," he asserts.

The winery has been replanting its estate vineyards with curated rootstocks and clones by micro-block in order to maximize the quality of fruit coming from

a minimum with the help of evapotranspiration sensors that track irrigation levels by block.

At harvest, the fruit from these vineyards is brought to Fox in the estate's winery, a state-of-the-art facility situated directly adjacent to the property's 100-year-old barn, which serves as a hospitality space. There, he has the resources to achieve the ideal fermentation and extraction of each lot. Tank temperatures can be monitored several times a day, allowing for precision in the process, and automated pumpovers result in refined and site-expressive wines with silky, balanced tannins.

Sequoia Grove Estate Vineyard, Rutherford Bench

- 5 acres planted, 85% to Cabernet Sauvignon—specifically clone 412, an aromatic clone known for its nuanced black fruit layered with red fruit
- Remaining 15% planted to Cabernet Franc, Merlot, Petit Verdot, and Malbec

Tonella Vineyard, Skellenger Lane, Rutherford

- 50 acres planted
- Has been replanted to select Cabernet Sauvignon clones to match its variety of soil compositions and microclimates, including the Weimer clone, a rare and exotic clone with intense wild-berry aromatics and floral notes, as well as clones 685 and 412

State Lane Estate Vineyard, Yountville


- Acquired in 2022, it sits along the Napa River and has 18 acres planted to Cabernet Sauvignon, Cabernet Franc, and Sauvignon Blanc.
- Terrell plans to replant all of it over the coming years to further elevate the quality of the fruit from its exceptional volcanic soil, which is rich in rhyolite.

Mount Veeder Estate Vineyard

- Acquired in September 2023, this mountaintop estate vineyard is so new to the winery that it has yet to be named.
- It consists of 104 acres, 31 of which will be planted at elevations that reach up to 1,700 feet; the remaining 73 acres will remain forested.
- Terrell and Fox plan to work in concert to replant the entire property to maximize its unique altitude, soil types, and multiple exposures.

each site. In addition to replanting, the Sequoia Grove team continues to elevate their farming and viticultural practices. Their work includes opening the canopy to get more dappled light on grape clusters to enhance flavor development at lower sugar levels and employing a variety of cover crops depending on each block's needs to naturally increase organic matter in the soil. These permanent no-till, nitrogen-fixing cover crops help reduce reliance on outside inputs and have better water-holding capacity. Irrigation is kept to

Sequoia Grove's portfolio encompasses such smaller-production wines as the Rutherford Bench Reserve Cabernet Sauvignon and single-vineyard Cabernets from the Christian, Stagecoach, Lamoreaux, Morisoli, Frediani, Tonella, and Healy vineyards. It also includes a nationally distributed Napa Valley Chardonnay and Napa Valley Cabernet Sauvignon.

As Sequoia Grove continues on its journey of innovation and evolution, it remains committed to sustainably making the best wines from the best dirt in Napa Valley. 



A Salute to Sangiovese and Red Sauce

ON THE TRANSFORMATIVE POWER OF PAIRING

MOST OF US know that when customers order wine in restaurants or pick up a bottle at a shop, they usually “drink what they like.” They don’t worry about pairing it with food, which leads them to commit such atrocities as drinking Cabernet Sauvignon with seafood towers. And we in the hospitality industry tend to oblige them, for better or worse; we keep our mouths shut as they pair their grilled pork chops with Sauvignon Blanc and their salmon with Super Tuscans. But I’d like to make a case for a polite pushback (the keyword being “polite”)—



PHOTOS COURTESY OF VINCE ANTER



Grilled peach and burrata salad with Reciprocity Sauvignon Blanc.

or better yet, for suggestive selling at the top of the transaction.

As we all know, it’s not just the integrity of the wine that’s at stake—the food is impacted too. Chefs don’t put their blood, sweat, and tears into their work only to see their delicate crudo overpowered by a 15% ABV butter bomb or their arrabbiata demolished by a high-tannin Châteauneuf-du-Pape. Meanwhile, their customers may not know why their food doesn’t taste right, but they’ll know something’s off—and they’ll blame the chef.

By contrast, I firmly believe in the transformative power of appropriate pairings; they can make believers out of skeptics. Riesling haters will sing the Mosel’s praises as the region’s wine balances their spicy Thai curry. Napa fanboys will bask in the glory that is truffle risotto with Burgundy. (OK, Burgundy may be tough, but you can at least get them to Russian River Pinot Noir. Baby steps!) The point is that the right pairing can start changing hearts and minds. Be it fried food and Champagne-method bubbles or Sangiovese and red

The author at work on his new YouTube cooking show, VINO First.

sauce, it can transport us to where the dish or the wine (or both!) came from, if only for an hour or so.

I recently created a spin-off of my travel show *V is for Vino* called *VINO First*. It’s a cooking show in which we choose the wine first and then pick a food to pair with it, contrary to most people’s instincts. We highlight which elements in wine affect food, and then we tailor-make a complementary dish. It’s a fun approach to teaching people a new way to think about pairings—my way of moving the needle toward a more pairing-conscious society.

I, in turn, challenge you to start your next customer transaction with a question like “May I ask what you plan on eating? I’d love to find you a perfect match?” rather than “What do you typically like to drink?” Because a polite nudge today may lead to a more trusting, happier customer tomorrow.

Until next wine,
Vince

Episodes of V is for Vino and VINO First can be watched for free on YouTube at @visforvino.

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Heart and Soul

A CONVERSATION WITH VINE FARMER'S **JACE CHAFFEE** by Jillian Dara

WHEN BROTHERS JACE AND KADEN

Chaffee established their Franklin, Massachusetts-based importing company, Vine Farmer, in 2019, it was a reaction to the shift they'd witnessed in the industry toward younger producers who were bringing wine back to the basics and expressing "the soul of the grower" while experimenting with new techniques, says Jace. "I saw an opportunity to build something that would contribute to what the next generation was doing."

A self-proclaimed wine geek, Jace had been collecting wine personally for 15 years before getting into the business, unknowingly planting the seeds for Vine Farmer as he traveled to Italy and France and made connections with small producers. Now, those producers represent the heart of the Chaffees' portfolio; many are biodynamic or organic, and all are making wines that are "familiar but redefining [classic styles] ... with more clarity than some of the traditionalists," in Jace's words.

Q: What were some of your goals when you started Vine Farmer?

I knew we wanted to work with really authentic wine, wine that's farmed in a sustainable, natural way, because that's what gives balanced fruit. ... We're not the first people to import authentic wine, but it's still a relatively small percentage. Part of it is about wine being inherently of place—it's something you drink but more than a beverage. That's worth championing and preserving.

I also wanted to be importing from people with something to prove—the next generation: young people who were going back to the time-tested method of refining in a way that put the land in even more focus than their grandparents [did], people [who were] shaking up the scene.

Q: Who was the first producer you worked with?

Cascina Val Del Prete in Roero, run by



PHOTO: PAH PHOTOGRAPHY

Vine Farmer co-founders and brothers Kaden and Jace Chaffee.

a young guy named Giovanni "Nino" Roagna. He's part of this group of young people in Roero who are trying to revive the historic pedigree of this region. Roero's lived in the shadow of Barolo and Barbaresco, so a lot of producers try to emulate these other regions, but Nino is like, "We celebrate what we are—our wines are different than [those of] Barolo and they're beautiful in their own way."

Q: Do you remember your first wine from him?

Yes. It was a 2016 Riserva Nebbiolo that he makes from these really old vines at the top of a slope where there's a lot of sand. I can remember that I'd never had a Nebbiolo so intoxicating and exotic—the red fruit, the florals; it is a showstopping wine that's imprinted in my memory. It was one of the initial ten wines that we imported, and we sold through it pretty fast.

Q: What were you doing prior to Vine Farmer?

It sounds weird to say, but I was buying

wine personally for 15 years in a pretty intense way. I didn't have kids at the time; I was working in life sciences for a software start-up in biotech and pharma. But all my free time was [devoted to] wine, and I was cellaring both \$500 bottles and \$20 bottles. I got this range of understanding of what you get at each price point and what you don't get.

Q: Do you feel as though part of your job is storytelling?

It definitely is. And it's cool because the deeper we go with this, the more fascinated we are with the people behind the wines, their personalities, and their decision-making—they are a part of the wine. The stories give this context to the wine.

Q: Can you highlight a few of the producers you're really excited about right now?

Chiara Condello, Bricco Ernesto, Valfaccenda, Francesco Annesanti, Cascina Val Del Prete, Lulu. 

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THE **OKANAGAN VALLEY**
HELPS WRITE THE
HISTORY OF THE REGION

by
JESSIE BIRSCHBACH



Okanagan Valley SOMM Campers at the Border Vista Vineyard in Osoyoos. Back row, from left to right: Jessie Birschbach, senior wine, beer, and spirits editor, The SOMM Journal; Marianna Caldwell, wine director, Cassia, Santa Monica, CA; Ryan DeCuffa, beverage manager, Nobu, Malibu, CA; and Shaun Adams, director of food and beverage, Scottsdale National Golf Club, Scottsdale, AZ. Middle row: Daniel Webber, wine director, Maple & Ash, Scottsdale, AZ; Chris Dooley, head sommelier, Daniel, New York, NY; Graham Nordin, general manager, Iconic Wineries of British Columbia; Cheron Cowan, beverage director, Craft, New York, NY; and CW Kelley, sommelier, Dolce Riviera, Dallas, TX. Front row: Rob Achurch, viticulturalist, Iconic Wineries of British Columbia.

PHOTO: JENNIFER HODDER

A SOUTH KELOWNA SLANT

After three hours of travel to British Columbia and an encounter with some hissing Canada geese, wine director Marianna Caldwell of Santa Monica restaurant Cassia and I needed a pick-me-up. Seated just a few stools down from us at the bar of the hotel, a local asked what had brought us to Kelowna; we explained we were attending *The SOMM Journal's* Okanagan Valley SOMM Camp. "Oh! Then you *must* visit CedarCreek and Mission Hill," he replied. "Trust me, those are the two not to be missed, and my wife is a sommelier—I should know." Despite the well-intended mansplanation, we thanked him politely, and to his credit, or rather his wife's, he was right.

It's no coincidence that those wineries represented half of our itinerary, as both fall under the Iconic Wineries of British Columbia umbrella. In fact, all four wineries that we visited—Martin's Lane Winery and CheckMate Artisanal Winery as well as CedarCreek Estate Winery and Mission Hill Family Estate—are part of that wine group. They even share some estate vineyards, which stretch from the Okanagan's northernmost sub-GI, Lake Country, to the furthest south in Osoyoos; that range ensured we received a thorough account of the roughly 120-mile-long region's topography and the geographical events that shaped it.

But this story isn't about the history of the Okanagan Valley as much as it is about its future. (I'd advise you to read the SOMM Camp preview in the February/March 2023 issue of *The SOMM Journal* for more of an educational overview.) Yes, we should acknowledge that the region is 50 million years in the making, beginning with volcano eruptions followed by a series of glacial events that helped to carve out the steep hillside, the Valley, and, most notably, the deep, long Okanagan Lake. But the most significant plot point here is how the region has evolved over the past few decades—and how this particular group of wineries is leading the charge.

Our official introduction to **CedarCreek Estate Winery** in South Kelowna was in the form of dinner at its wildly popular restaurant, Home Block. The view of Lake Okanagan and the mountains through floor-to-ceiling windows served as a refreshing contrast to the wood-fired open kitchen, outputting locally sourced seasonal fare. There, executive chef Neil Taylor and his team prepared such homegrown delights as fiddleheads accompanied by fresh burrata, jamón serrano, and charred crusty bread to pair with a slew of wines, including the **CedarCreek 2020 Block 5 Aspect Collection Chardonnay** and **2020 Block 2 Aspect Collection Pinot Noir**. The spicy Pinot worked perfectly with the thinly sliced, smoky-sweet ham.



PHOTO COURTESY OF CEDARCREEK ESTATE WINERY

A herd of Scottish Highland cows lives at CedarCreek Estate Winery.

We appreciated the South Kelowna Slopes wine even more the next morning while standing not far from the single block it came from, along with more Pinot Noir, Chardonnay, and even some young Sauvignon Blanc that had just survived a challenging winter. We shuddered to think what would have happened were it not for the moderating influence of Lake Okanagan on cold temperatures.

Joining us en route to the site on the estate was our "camp counselor," Graham Nordin, general manager at Iconic Wineries of British Columbia. "For me, this is one of the most beautiful vineyards in the Valley, so I think it's a good place to start," he told us. Although the sky this particular morning was gray and cloudy, we were able to look downslope over the blocks of vines dotted with evergreen trees. The rapier-like Lake Okanagan, which drew a

line between the banks of South Kelowna and West Kelowna, was indeed a stunning place to start.

On the rocky hillside vineyard, we met up with organic viticulturist Kurt Simcic. The tall, earnest New Zealander explained that he arrived in the Okanagan in 2017 with 15 years of organic farming under his belt. Since then, he and his team have converted all of Iconic Wineries' estate vineyards to organic farming; they're certified accordingly today.

Simcic noted that the alfalfa scattered between the vine rows is an effective cover crop, harboring beneficial insects and helping to hold the loose glacial till together. But it isn't alone in working to ensure the estate's organic vineyards thrive: Compost teas, worm casts that help aerate the soil, seaweed sprays, and yellow tape that's wrapped around the bottom of the vines as an alternative to insecticides all do their part. Especially endearing was a small herd of shaggy, disinterested Scottish Highland cows, which provide manure for the soil; a modified, buzzing shipping container full of bees, which pollinate the

flowers and trees scattered throughout the vineyard, adding to its biodiversity; and a large chicken coop overlooking the lake. Deo, the Kangal Mountain dog, might have rivaled the cows for charm, but he was nowhere to be found. The pup was skirting his duty to protect the vineyard from coyotes and bears, the latter of which like to eat grapes.

Although Nordin expressed that they're only just beginning to see the fruits of this harmonious labor, he seemed to have no doubt that this site and South Kelowna in general are particularly well suited to Pinot Noir and Chardonnay. Simcic concurred, as confident about the wines as he was disappointed in Deo: "Our Pinots our pretty awesome in the Valley here. Our soils aren't very generous—very lean and bony grounds—so the vines are low vigor to balanced."

THE COOLEST BUILDING AND COOL-CLIMATE GRAPES

A stone's throw away from CedarCreek, **Martin's Lane Winery** offered further proof of the potential of Pinot Noir

from the South Kelowna Slopes sub-GI, specifically the Simes Vineyard. It also spoke to the quality of the Pinot grown down south on the estate's Naramata Ranch Vineyard in the Naramata Bench appellation and Fritz's Vineyard in the West Kelowna region just across the lake as well as of the Riesling from all three vineyards.

Designed by architect Tom Kundig, the striking terraced winery and tasting room of Martin's Lane is built into the hillside and made of steel, concrete, and glass. We entered the structure and assembled in a hospitality space overlooking a sleek, darkened barrel room while Matt Lebedoff, the winery's charming, fast-talking guest-experience manager, continually filled our glasses with the **Martin's Lane 2022 Simes Vineyard Riesling**, **2017 Naramata Ranch Vineyard Riesling**, and **2019 Fritz's Vineyard Riesling**. After a few sips, it occurred to me that the Riesling in our glasses resembled the building we stood in—somehow simultaneously raw and refined.

After a tour through the pristine gravity-flow winery, we ascended a spiral staircase to a tasting room that overlooked Okanagan Lake. There awaited four wines on a long white-marble table: the **Martin's Lane 2019** and **2020 Naramata Ranch Vineyard Pinot Noir** and the **Martin's Lane 2019** and **2020 Simes**

Vineyard Pinot Noir. All were made in nearly the same way, with hand harvesting, whole-cluster inclusion, spontaneous fermentation, roughly a month of maceration in a combination of concrete and stainless steel, an aging regimen of 17

months in French oak barriques, and bottling unfiltered and unfiltered by gravity. But the two vineyards yielded strikingly different results. While they sit at roughly the same elevation (1,500 feet) and feature the same silty topsoil over granite bedrock, the silt is much finer in Naramata Ranch. Naramata is also one of the estate's warmest vineyards, while Simes is one of its coolest.

Regardless of whether they preferred the muscular Simes or the generous Naramata, the campers agreed that the

2020 vintage outshined the 2019. So did our hosts: "2020 was a cracking season for us in the Valley," said Simcic, concurring with Nordin that it's one of the best vintages the region has seen in decades.

A MISSION STATEMENT IN WEST KELOWNA

As we crossed under a limestone-arched entryway while taking in the monastic style of architecture featured throughout the grounds at **Mission Hill Family Estate**, it was only fitting that we heard tolling from the 12-story bell tower. Nordin stood in the middle of the courtyard, pointing out the al fresco restaurant Terrace, the amphitheater, and the appointment-only tasting room, all set against the scenic backdrop of Lake Okanagan.

"This is where it all started for us, but

it didn't always look like this," said Nordin, who explained that proprietor Anthony von Mandl established Canada's first wine-importing company in 1972 with the goal of building his own winery in the Okanagan, where he spent his summers as a boy. He opened Mission Hill as only the fifth winery in British Columbia in 1981, before the enactment of the U.S.-Canada Free Trade Agreement in 1989. (Prior to that agreement, which was superseded by the enactment of NAFTA in 1994, Canada grew mostly hybrid and *Vitis labrusca* grapes. Once the FTA was in place, the Canadian government offered grants encouraging *Vitis vinifera* plantings, and these formed the launchpad for the country's foray into table wines.) While no one in the early 1980s believed in his "vision of seeing wineries and hotels up and down the Okanagan Valley," said Nordin, "our entire business for the last 50 years has been putting this region on the world stage, and here we are 40 years later seeing a million visitors from all over the world and 400-plus wineries and hotels."

Lit solely by an oculus, Mission Hill's arched underground cellar butts up against a wall of raw volcanic rock, serving as a reminder that Mount Boucherie—the mountain in West Kelowna where the winery is located—was once an active volcano. Comically, Nordin had to pause our tour due to the frequent tolling of the bells, but eventually we descended far enough underground to a private tasting room to avoid the triumphal interruptions. There, we tasted the **Mission Hill Family Estate 2021 Jagged Rock Vineyard Sauvignon Blanc-Sémillon**, **2021 Perpetua Chardonnay**, **2020 Vista's Edge Cabernet Franc**, **2018 Quatrain Syrah Blend**, **2018 Compendium**, and **2019 Oculus Red**. Having just come from a blending session, head winemaker Corrie Krehbiel entered



Iconic Wineries of British Columbia's organic viticulturist, Kurt Simcic, at Martin's Lane Winery.

The gang at Mission Hill Family Estate. Joining them to the left is Iconic Wineries of British Columbia's affable senior manager, communications, Andrea Harrison.



Head winemaker Corrie Krehbiel strives to maintain the freshness of the fruit character in all of Mission Hill's wines.



The somms and Graham Nordin survey the CheckMate estate in Osoyoos.



PHOTOS: JENNIFER HODDER

CheckMate winemaker Spencer Kelly.

the room swirling her first iteration of the 2022 Oculus in a large beaker, eager to hear our thoughts.

The Okanagan Valley native came to Mission Hill in 2015 as a fourth-generation fruit farmer with over a decade of winemaking experience. Now she takes the same approach to producing each of the aforementioned wines with the goal of maintaining the signature profile of the Okanagan. “To me what makes the Okanagan so special is that freshness and that concentration of fresh-fruit characters, so the last thing I want to do with any of our wines is to overshadow that with oak,” said Krehbiel, who beamed as bright as her Sauvignon Blanc–Sémillon blend—especially after Cheron Cowan, beverage director at Craft in New York City, assessed the wines as a whole: “There’s this incredibly long finish in all of them,” she said. “Each of them just goes on, which is quite amazing. . . . Usually there’s one in the lineup where you’re like, ‘Oh, this is special,’ but it’s pervasive even midpalate in all of these. . . . All of them have a throughline!”

.....

ALMOST HOME

Orchards, fruit stands, and Okanagan sub-GIs like the stunning Naramata Bench and its undulating cliffside vineyards whizzed by during our two-hour drive south from Kelowna. McIntyre Bluff, a massive, glacier-scarred rock ridge between Okanagan Falls and Oliver, unofficially marks the division between the northern and southern halves of the 120-mile-long Okanagan region. Roughly 10,000 years ago, the landmark was a natural dam until water broke free and flooded into the rest of what is now British Columbia and beyond into Washington State. Thanks to this event, the soils in the north are derived

mostly from glacial meltwater, while the soils in the south form sandier alluvial fans. Climate also divides the region in two, with the south being warmer: In fact, Osoyoos, the southernmost-growing region in the Okanagan, is the only desert in Canada, and it is here that Bordeaux varieties can achieve optimal ripeness.

Located in Osoyoos on the eastern side of the Valley, the Border Vista Vineyard is carved into a west-facing slope. “Those apples on the other side of the fence are in Washington,” said viticulturist Rob Achurch, “and on this side of the fence [is] arguably the best vineyard in Canada. It’s one of our oldest plantings, planted in 1996.” Although it had been rainy the past few days, the clouds graciously parted as if to give us an idea of the heat in the area on our last day of camp. “It’s always 35 and sunny here,” said Achurch. “He means about 100 degrees Fahrenheit,” added Nordin as he filled our glasses with the **Mission Hill Family Estate 2022 Border Vista Vineyard Rosé**. In the background, mourning doves cooed softly from the branches of wild sagebrush; I looked down at the talcum powder-textured soil and followed the line of a fence peppered with prickly pear cactus. The arid landscape made the bright, silky rosé all the more refreshing.

On the western side of the Valley at **CheckMate Artisanal Winery**, we sampled a bevy of Chardonnays and a few Merlots with winemaker Spencer Kelly, an Okanagan Valley native who recently joined CheckMate after a long stint in Napa Valley, on the property’s balcony. The **CheckMate 2020 Capture Chardonnay**, sourced from the Border Vista Vineyard, seemed to be the crowd favorite, but Nordin also pointed us toward the neighboring Deklava and Combret vineyards, thought to contain

the oldest plantings of Chardonnay in Canada. Deklava, for its part, was the source of the 1992 Mission Hill Chardonnay that won Best Chardonnay at the 1994 International Wine & Spirit Competition in London. “So it was a bit like our Judgment of Paris moment, as it was the first time a Canadian table wine had ever gotten any recognition, and [it was also] the first validation for proprietor Anthony [von Mandl],” said Nordin. When the Deklava and Combret families decided to sell their vineyards at roughly the same time, von Mandl was entrusted with the historical sites; he established the Chardonnay-focused CheckMate Artisanal Winery in 2013.

Later that night, back in Kelowna, a handful of SOMM Campers sat around a bar table at our hotel, digesting a hearty meal from the restaurant Waterfront Wines. Daniel Webber, wine director at Maple & Ash in Scottsdale, Arizona, joined the group with a bottling of Martin’s Lane Riesling. “I’ve never actually continued drinking the wines of a somm camp after the camp is over,” he told us. Neither had I. It also struck me that I’d been seeing somms buy bottles from each of the wineries we visited—a rare occurrence. The wines were truly that revelatory for the group, which made me think of what Nordin had said the day prior at Martin’s Lane: “You’re not just a part of the history—you’re now helping to write it. You’ve seen and tasted the work we’ve done in the vineyards and wineries over the past 40 or 50 years, and we feel that the work that we continue to do today will be looked back upon 50 years from now as another pivotal point in our history. . . . We are all writing the [story] of what that future of the Valley looks like today, and there’s something powerful and exciting about that.” SJ

Colin Hofer and Owen Huzar are general manager and head sommelier/wine buyer, respectively, at Adorn Bar & Restaurant in the Four Seasons Chicago.



Revealing a Region on the Rise

AT ADORN IN THE FOUR SEASONS CHICAGO, **RAVEL & STITCH** IS THE “KEY THAT UNLOCKS THE DOOR” TO THE CENTRAL COAST

story by Kate Newton / photos by Hannah Schweiss

ON THE DAY Colin Hofer and Owen Huzar—general manager and head sommelier/wine buyer, respectively, at Adorn Bar & Restaurant in the Four Seasons Chicago—connected with *The SOMM Journal*, the five-star hotel was hosting not only two weddings but another event featuring a tasting menu and wine pairings for 100 people. Nevertheless, they took time to discuss their combined efforts to enhance the restaurant’s wine list and overall guest experience since they both joined the

Adorn team earlier this year, and their calm demeanors suggested that steadfastly navigating such a confluence of activity was business as usual for the Four Seasons.

The pair have only been working together for several months, but their vast experience in the wine and hospitality industries ensured they were able to hit the ground running. Huzar, a Boston native, brings a wide-reaching skill set to his role given his degree in hospitality administration and Wine & Spirit Education Trust



Ravel & Stitch Cabernet Sauvignon, a by-the-glass selection on Adorn’s wine list, “definitely [has] some Central Coast fruit-forwardness to it, but it [also] has a rustic flair,” says Hofer.

Level 3 certification as well as his history in multiple levels of the business: In recent years, he distributed wine to local restaurants and retail stores through his company, Owen’s Open Bottles, LLC, in addition to conducting private client sales



According to winemaker Elizabeth Kester, Ravel & Stitch aims to “celebrate the bounty of California’s Central Coast,” a region Hofer and Huzar say guests are increasingly intrigued by as they seek to explore beyond Napa Valley and Sonoma.

for Château de Pommard in Burgundy; working at Verve, a retail bottle shop owned by Master Sommelier Dustin Wilson; and serving as a broker for a New York-based distributor, Massanois. “I feel like each tier of the system I’ve worked in gives me a certain type of angle or experience I bring to [this role],” he said. “I think of it like tools in my tool belt. You put it all together [with] that service-management background . . . and you have this position at the Four Seasons.”

Named Chicago Sommelier of the Year in 2022 by the *Michelin Guide*, Hofer, who was born and raised in California’s San Joaquin Valley, has served in management positions at such local establishments as Beacon Tavern, Soho House, and Porto, the latter of which received its first Michelin star during his tenure; most recently, he was director of wine and education for Bonhomme Hospitality Group. “This is a people business first and foremost, and I think the interactions I’ve had with guests [since joining Adorn] have only strengthened the reason I wanted to come to Four Seasons, where you have this opportunity of community at the highest level [and] people are really trying to reach for the exceptional, amazing experience that Four Seasons

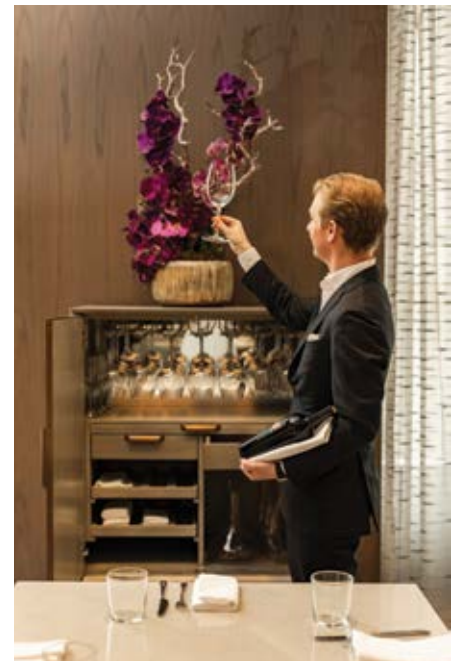
can [provide],” Hofer explained. “We have amazing amenities in this space, and wine is one of those that I hope becomes even more of a highlight.”

It’s fitting that a wine hailing, like him, from Central California has emerged as a highlight in its own right on their evolving list: by-the-glass selection Ravel & Stitch Cabernet Sauvignon from Wente Family Estates. The label aims, in winemaker Elizabeth Kester’s words, to “celebrate the bounty of California’s Central Coast”—which stretches from Santa Barbara to the Bay Area—by bringing together a variety of vineyards, soils, rootstocks, clones, and microclimates in a way befitting of its name. “To see [parts of the Central Coast] in the last 25 years get bigger and bigger in their wine focus and the wines that are coming from them score higher points and leave more of a lasting impression . . . I’m super happy about it, because I have a relationship with those [areas],” said Hofer. “I think Ravel & Stitch is just a continuation of that. Their focus is community, and [when you come] from an agrarian background . . . you realize farming is very much a community-based activity. They all lean on each other . . . much like [staff at] a restaurant. So I try to bring that all together and tell the guests that it’s not my program or Owen’s program, it’s really a collaborative effort with everyone here at the Four Seasons. And it’s the same with the wines: It’s a collaborative effort with . . . the farmers and the actual people who are producing the wine.”

Huzar has seen firsthand how pouring Ravel & Stitch for guests and sharing its backstory can serve as a “key that unlocks the door into these greater conversations” about the Central Coast and beyond, as it’s an accessible entry point for more traditional fans of Sonoma and Napa Valley Cabernets but distinctive enough to “push people outside of their boundaries.” “It isn’t this overextracted, austere, big style of wine; the tannins are a little more integrated and it has a little more fruit to it,” he added. “I think it’s exciting for guests to have that ‘aha’ moment, and for me . . . that’s the most exciting part of the job: You can meet with distributors and develop a great wine list, but sharing those exciting new wines with guests and seeing the light bulb go off is really what I strive for every day.”

Clocking in at 14.5% ABV, Ravel & Stitch “definitely [has] some Central Coast fruit-forwardness to it,” exhibiting notes of black currant, red cherry, and plum, “but it [also] has a rustic flair” and smoky character, Hofer said. “It packs a punch for the cost and overdelivers, and I think that’s pretty common for the Central Coast. . . . [The wines] are such a great value, and Ravel & Stitch is so indicative of that.” He noted that “if you can gently nudge guests into exploring wines” beyond their comfort zone, it’s all “the better for their experience, the better for their knowledge. . . . The more they know about the Central Coast and a little bit more about the process of making the wine, [that] will enhance and heighten their experience.”

As he and Hofer continue to refine the list in the coming months, Huzar said that he believes “there is a really great opportunity here in Chicago with a city that’s so excited about food and beverage [to] be a part of that scene. Wine is inherently an oversaturated market . . . so it’s really our job . . . to wade through all of this product and find the best wines for this list, which is where Ravel & Stitch falls in. It’s really a diamond in the rough.” Given the many other esteemed jewels in the Four Seasons’ crown, that’s high praise indeed. *sj*



Huzar, who joined the Adorn team earlier this year, is collaborating with Hofer to enhance the restaurant’s wine list and overall guest experience.

Lofty Heights

PROFESSIONALS AND ENTHUSIASTS CONNECT AT THE **FOOD & WINE CLASSIC** IN ASPEN, CO

by Wanda Mann

THE SOMM JOURNAL shows up at all the best wine events, and the 40th Annual Food & Wine Classic, held this past June in Aspen, Colorado, was no exception. While there, we were delighted to see that wine brand As One Cru, the cover subject of our February/March 2023 issue, was proudly displaying the magazine on its station in the festival's Grand Tasting tent.

The eye-catching cover features the winery's founder, Chris Radomski, and partner Matt Zubrod—who is also the culinary director at famed Aspen resort The Little Nell—decked out in ski gear and triumphantly raising bottles on an Aspen mountaintop. As One Cru's table at the Classic was a popular stop among attendees clamoring for sips of its 2017 Napa Valley Cabernet Sauvignon from Oakville and 2018 Napa Valley Pinot Noir from Los Carneros. Radomski, also the co-founder of Legends Spirits (see page 118), said, "Aspen Food & Wine has evolved to include many great spirits now. It's great to see some familiar faces!"

E. & J. Gallo made a similarly big splash at the festival. Reflecting on the event, the company's senior director of public relations and partnerships, Caroline Shaw, said, "The Aspen Food & Wine Classic is always a great time, and this year was no different. At Gallo, we participate for the opportunities it provides us to engage directly with consumers, media, and industry decision-makers. At the Grand Tasting Pavilion, La Marca was able to increase brand affinity by offering an immersive experience with tastings and storytelling. . . . Additionally, several of our estates were represented in seminars [from] Pahlmeyer in Amanda McCrossin's 'California Ageability' seminar to Allegrini Amarone in the 'Wine Versus Saké Taste-Off' seminar."

Sonoma County Winegrowers rose to the occasion with their epic soiree, for

which guests ascended to an elevation of 11,200 feet in gondolas to wine and dine at the top of Aspen Mountain. "The Top of the Summit party is the annual must-attend event at the Aspen Classic, and this year did not disappoint. It was an incredible opportunity for us to showcase

PHOTO: WANDA MANN



As One Cru's tasting station at the Food & Wine Classic in Aspen, CO.

Sonoma County's diverse set of world-class wines, chefs, sustainability commitment, and region in a way that can only be done at a global and renowned event such as the Classic," said Karissa Kruse, president and CEO of Sonoma County Winegrowers. "We were thrilled to be present in such a big way for the 40th anniversary of both organizations. Like this year's theme for the Classic, Sonoma County Winegrowers and Sonoma



PHOTO COURTESY OF SONOMA COUNTY WINEGROWERS

Sonoma County Winegrowers hosted the Top of the Summit party on Aspen Mountain.

County have long been 'Innovators and Icons' in the industry, so our partnership this year was the perfect fit." Shaw, who attended the fête, noted that she enjoyed seeing wines from her home region poured at the event. "For the first time in Aspen's history, wine was offered to be enjoyed during the gondola ride to the top of the mountain," she added. "It was none other than Cuvée 20 from J Vineyards & Winery, the official sparkling wine of the night."

This year marked my second time participating in the Classic: In addition to leading the "Drink Pink: Around the World With Rosé" seminar, I was also a guest on a taping of public radio program *The Splendid Table* in front of a live audience at the Wheeler Opera House. At these events and others that unfolded over the course of the festival, Aspen's breathtaking high-altitude landscape provide a storybook setting for a world-class gathering of wine and food professionals and enthusiasts—and the energy from the crowd is exhilarating. Save the date for the 41st annual Food & Wine Classic in Aspen June 14–16, 2024. **sj**

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Metz Road winemaker
Casey Di Cesare at the
brand's winery.

Under the Confluence

WIND, MARINE AIR, AND A LONG HANG TIME IMPACT THE CHARACTER OF THESE MONTEREY COUNTY WINES

by Meridith May

SINCE 1972, the Scheid family has been growing grapes in the northernmost region of the Central Coast, Monterey County, which shows a wide range of variation when it comes to wine styles. For the first 15 years, they sold all of their fruit to other wineries; today, the evolution of their 12 estate vineyards along a 70-mile stretch of the Salinas Valley and the array of wines they produce under the Scheid Family Wines umbrella prove how entrenched they are in Monterey's many microclimates.

At the bottom of the Monterey Bay lies a deep gorge called the Monterey Canyon, which rivals the Grand Canyon in size. It causes frigid water to rise from its depths to the surface, cooling the marine air along the coastline. This enables a longer growing season for the 39 varieties cultivated by the Scheid family.

Both the following release and the Metz Road label (see sidebar) are a testament to the Scheids' collaboration with the land through the lens of their interpretation of estate vineyards. *sj*



Winemaker Dave Nagengast, pictured inspecting Pinot Noir vines in the Riverview Vineyard, oversees production at Scheid Family Wines.

Scheid Vineyards 2022 Estate Sauvignon Blanc, Monterey County (\$25) Winemaker Dave Nagengast ferments this wine entirely in stainless steel for three months. Fresh on both the nose and palate, the aromatic white begins with vivid green scents of chervil and oregano along with a whiff of lemongrass. The floral entry is brimming with honeysuckle and jasmine, accompanied by tart pineapple and a splash of green tea. The grapes hail from two estate vineyards: one in the Arroyo Seco AVA, which sees foggy mornings and cool afternoon winds, and the other in the San Lucas AVA further south and inland, where long, warm days alternate with cool nights. **93**



Riverview Vineyard:

The Home of Metz Road

Created to eke out world-class single-vineyard Pinot Noirs and Chardonnays from the Monterey AVA, the Metz Road label, which is overseen by winemaker Casey Di Cesare, is named for the road that runs alongside the Riverview Vineyard.

It's unusual for the wind not to be blowing at the 338-acre site, which overlooks the Salinas River adjacent to Pinnacles National Park. The coastal fog that descends in the evening lingers through mid-morning the next day, and the steady ripening of the fruit shows in the immaculate balance of these wines.

Metz Road 2021 Estate Chardonnay, Riverview Vineyard, Monterey County (\$30)

Mouth-filling toffee, coconut, and banana lead to a bright, lemony middle. Acidity is balanced by oak and lasting notes of crème brûlée. With a defined body weight, this wine—which aged on lees in French oak barrels for 12 months—possesses a vivacious quality. **93**



2020 Metz Road Estate Pinot Noir, Riverview Vineyard, Monterey County (\$35)

Sumptuous and earthy yet with gossamer wings, this sustainably farmed, French oak-aged red is packed with ripe fruit. White pepper engages the palate, releasing wild strawberry and tobacco. The result is a jewel, with bright acidity and lingering notes of pomegranate and espresso. **94**



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After establishing himself with the launch of Belle Glos Pinot Noir in 2001, fifth-generation winemaker Joe Wagner began making Cabernet Sauvignon in 2004.

PHOTO COURTESY OF COPPER CANE WINES & PROVISIONS

Quilt Cabernet

UNCOVERED!

HOW JOE WAGNER IS CRAFTING
A NEW PATTERN OF SUCCESS IN
NAPA VALLEY **BY STEFANIE SCHWALB**

Joe Wagner knows a thing or two about Napa Valley—and Cabernet. As a fifth-generation winemaker who was born and raised in the region, he's seen its evolution and that of its signature grape firsthand. While his family's humble beginnings in the industry culminated in the launch of Caymus Vineyards in 1972, Wagner has been immersed in it since his teenage years, when he began working closely with his grandfather and father. They initially wanted to focus their efforts on Pinot Noir and Riesling, but Cabernet proved to be best suited to the climate—and the rest is history. Soon enough the variety was being cultivated throughout the Valley, where many producers were attempting to emulate Bordeaux. This effort to produce wines that would stand toe to toe with those of France marked the birth of the Napa Valley style of cult Cabernet.



PHOTO COURTESY OF COPPER CANE WINES & PROVISIONS

KENNETH KIRBY
Hope Valley Country Club



KELSEY HERNANDEZ
Fleming's Tampa



JASON BRADLEY
Walt Disney World Swan Hotel



MELISSA HEMMINGWAY
Bonita Bay Club



As on the cover, this article features images of buyers from across the nation who carry Quilt.



Wagner launched Quilt in 2015 and has expanded the brand's lineup with an eye toward "consistency, continuity, character, and quality."

But the elitism that began to flourish in the years to follow held no appeal for Wagner on the grounds that it alienated a large segment of consumers. "It's something that personally bugged me because, being born and raised here and loving the area for not just its beauty but its history and what it's known for, I want people to be able to access it and its wines," he says of the mindset that laid the foundation for Quilt Wines.

Having found his footing as a winemaker with the launch of Belle Glos Pinot Noir in 2001, Wagner put the lessons he learned from that project to good use when he began making Cabernet in 2004, "applying some of the techniques that I had developed for Pinot Noir to it," he recalls. "I saw some success and failures throughout that process, but overall, it [helped me] refine what I thought an accessible cult-style Cabernet could be. . . . We released our first vintage, the 2014 classic Cabernet, followed by the 2013 Reserve Cab [known since the 2017 vintage as The Grace of the Land], and they were really well received." As a collection of wines comparable to true Napa cult Cabernets at a price point of around \$50, Quilt proved a welcome addition to the marketplace.

"To me [a more affordable price point] means there's the ability to . . . get access to a larger swath of potential customers in the future," he notes, pointing out that while many of today's consumers are gravitating toward other Cab-producing regions like Paso Robles as a matter of value, Quilt was designed to keep Napa Cabernet in the running for their affections.

JUSTIN LILES
Pelican Sound



BLANCA COSTA AND DREW BLAKE
Papa's Raw Bar



NOI NGUYEN, MIN NGUYEN, AND ANDREW APLIN
Sealand





In fact, the winemaker believes that the brand could even pique their interest in Napa enough to inspire them to visit the region to learn more. "We want to keep getting people moving up and down that price ladder and just exploring the world of wine," he says. And his mission thus far has been accomplished.

Indeed, since its official launch in 2015, Quilt Wines has experienced tremendous growth beyond even Wagner's expectations. "We've had our struggles being able to maintain production at the level of what the demand is, so we've had to take a few price increases to maintain inventory, but it's all worked out—we're still in that \$40 to \$50 range," he says. "I'd say the growth of it year over year comes down to a philosophy I learned early on in my career that I have stuck with for years, and that's really focusing on on-premise and making sure we've incentivized pricing for the restaurants to pour our wines by the glass and give their customer an experience." That said, the pandemic gave the brand reason to make moves in off-premise channels as well. "People are now going out to the wine, liquor, and grocery stores we're in, seeking us out, and purchasing our bottles, which is just a testament to the line," Wagner says. "It makes me very happy to see that people like it and they want to bring it home with them. There's nothing that can make you happier as a winemaker."

As for Quilt's evolution moving forward, Wagner says that his team is always experimenting with an eye toward "consistency, continuity, character, and quality." They're also working to



PHOTO COURTESY OF COPPER CANE WINES & PROVISIONS

CLINTON HARWELL
Temple, TX



JAMIE HOWELL
Ambrosia



MARCELLO PALAZZI
Osteria Tulia



JOSE FUNDORA
Cork & Glass





expand the brand's offerings beyond its core products, namely the flagship and Reserve Cabernets, a red blend called The Fabric of the Land, and a Chardonnay; in addition to the recent introduction of a Fumé Blanc, "we're just now releasing some small lots of individual appellations so that people can experience the differences between, say, Oak Knoll and Atlas Peak and Calistoga and Rutherford—then they can see what the individual components are that make up the quilt of the patchwork that's Napa Valley," he explains. "We're not releasing all of the appellations every year because not all of them perform great every year; so we just release the ones that stand out individually."

Finally, they've launched a new label that serves as a stepping stone to Quilt. "We've created a sub-brand that we call Threadcount by Quilt. It started off with a red blend; we're [also] doing some Paso Cab and a Sauvignon Blanc all at a price point that's \$20 to \$30 so people can get acquainted with us," Wagner explains. "If they fall in love with the wines, maybe they'll seek out Quilt Cabernet from Napa Valley. We're really trying to [get] those customers that have not broken above a \$20 price point to understand the depth of what Napa Valley is and get more involved in fine wine." After all, he adds, the region offers plenty to discover: "There's a customer out there for everything, so I always encourage people to work with the land and make their wines their own way, because there's somebody out there who also has a palate that's similar to theirs." SJ

TIM CANNELL
Lake Nona Golf & Country Club



ANGEL ROSARIO
Palm Beach Yacht Club



LARRY LASS
La Piazza



**BETH SARGENT AND
MICHAEL NADEAU**
Delray Dunes Country Club



WHAT THE SOMMS ARE SAYING ABOUT QUILT

Spearheaded by fifth-generation winemaker Joe Wagner, Quilt Wines is rewriting the script of Napa Cabernet by offering top quality at an accessible price. Here's what a few sommeliers had to say about the wine.



"Tastes change. The modern palate is always evolving, and we are all contributing to this and subjected to it. For most of my professional career, I have seen our tastes grow to want more. New flavors and exotic experiences are in demand now more than ever, but what continues to be constant is the desire for boldness in what we eat and drink. Quilt Napa Valley Cabernet Sauvignon exemplifies this. . . . While being rich and strong, it is balanced and offers an enjoyable experience to those [who] are familiar with the wine or those [who] are trying it for the first time." **—Alex Bruggenthies, general manager, national wine program, Smith & Wollensky Restaurant Group, Inc.**



"Quilt is the next generation of Napa Cabernet almost by definition; Joe is the next generation in the family after Chuck, and he takes some of the best qualities of his father's teachings and combines them with modern techniques to extract flavors and aromas at an intensity rarely seen. The resulting wine is one that can be enjoyed with food but [is] not so bold that it cannot be enjoyed on its own—a quality that very few Napa Cabs can claim."

—Bretton Lammi, director of beverage, Prime Hospitality Group LLC



"Joe Wagner knows how to make high-quality Napa Valley Cabernet Sauvignon that does not require five to ten years of aging to consistently drink as it should each vintage. Quilt Cabernet Sauvignon is an absolute game changer in this aspect. [Both it] and Quilt Grace of the Land Reserve Cabernet Sauvignon have been fixtures on our wine lists at Sawgrass Country Club & Beach Club for years now, loved by our members young and not so young. Joe Wagner exemplifies how to bridge the wine-consumer generational gap like no other winemaker!"

—Bo Cure, wine and spirits director, Sawgrass Country Club, Ponte Vedra Beach, FL

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Bubbling Over With

Excitement

CHAMPAGNE LOUIS ROEDERER UNVEILS THE 2015 VINTAGE OF CRISTAL IN SAN DIEGO

story by Michelle M. Metter / photos by Rafael Peterson

WHEN YOU GET an invitation to taste the newest release of Champagne Louis Roederer's Cristal at one of San Diego's most talked-about restaurants, you change all your plans, find a baby-sitter, and RSVP immediately. I for one couldn't say no to the opportunity to enjoy bubbles, shared plates, and conversation with some of the city's top beverage buyers on a sunny evening at Wolf in the Woods last June.

Inspired by the culture of New Mexico, Wolf in the Woods blends Native American, European, and Hispanic influences on both its menu of small plates and in the interior of its dining room, decorated with folk art. It's an aesthetic that embraces you from the moment you walk in the door, and the sense of intimacy it has so effortlessly created made it the perfect backdrop for the launch of the 2015 vintage of Cristal.

That year, explained event co-host Xavier Barlier, senior VP of marketing and communications for Roederer importer Maisons Marques & Domaines USA, was an extraordinary one in



Maisons Marques & Domaines USA senior VP of marketing and communications Xavier Barlier (right) with district manager Jana Lemersal.



Louis Roederer Champagnes were paired with maize, hen of the woods mushrooms, and summer truffle, among other dishes.

which the Champagne region was recognized as a UNESCO World Heritage Site. In keeping with the continental trend of the decade, it was marked by a mild, wet winter and a hot, dry summer that saw record-breaking temperatures and water stress until the second half of August when rain brought relief to the vines, which ultimately produced juicy, ripe, and concentrated grapes.

Cristal hails from sustainably worked vineyard plots that have been built up since 1845. In a rare occurrence not seen since 2002, the 2015 version was sourced from all 45 20-plus-year-old plots eligible for inclusion in the blend of this iconic cuvée. According to the official tasting notes, the result possesses “a deep yellow hue [and] includes ultra-fine, dynamic bubbles with an intense, concentrated bouquet of yellow fruit (white peach, Mirabelle plum) [plus] a concentrated toastiness in the form of roasted hazelnut and almond aromas.” For me, the texturally vibrant blend of 60% Pinot Noir and 40% Chardonnay conjured orange blossom and citrus as well as stone fruit and floral aromas; it’s ready to drink now, though I’d like to revisit it in a year or two to see how it’s developing.

Joining Barlier at the tasting was Jana Lemersal, district manager for Maisons Marques & Domaines USA; together they introduced the Cristal 2014 Rosé. Pink-



Wolf in the Woods owner Johnny Rivera and executive chef Carmine Lopez.

hued with slightly coppery tints, the blend of 55% Pinot Noir and 45% Chardonnay with a dosage of 7 grams per liter was expressive of trim, ripe fruit. The winemaking team uses a unique method they refer to as “infusing,” which allows them to extract the ripe character of the Pinot Noir while preserving freshness: Small amounts of Chardonnay juice are added to the Pinot Noir maceration prior to fermentation.

Wolf in the Woods executive chef Carmine Lopez, who leads the kitchen for the restaurant owned by Johnny Rivera, prepared a special menu for the evening. Designed to spark conversation at the table, the first course of Maine lobster was presented for sharing. Combining stone fruit, mixed greens, candied pecans, rosemary focaccia croutons, pickled onion, and fennel-pollen goat cheese, the dish was a stellar match for the Louis Roederer 2015 Philippe Starck Brut Nature from Reims, whose aromas of ripe fruit, citrus peel, and vanilla complemented the New Mexican lavender vinaigrette accenting the lobster.

Not to be outdone, the intermediary course of maize, hen of the woods mushrooms, and summer truffles is one of my favorite dishes at Wolf in the Woods (if you go, order it—you won’t regret it). It’s based on creamy polenta that’s blended with mascarpone and pecorino and topped with sundried-tomato drizzle,

a fresh quail egg, and locally sourced watercress. Blackened opah with New Mexican Hatch red chile, bone marrow jus, smoked Bordeaux trout roe, crème fraîche, and smashed potatoes followed, aptly paired with the 2015 Cristal.

The meal wrapped up in spectacular fashion with the presentation of a sparkler-topped cake flavored with elderflower and summer citrus, which was fitting for such a fête: By the end of the evening, we attendees felt like we were celebrating the formation of new friendships as much as the release of the latest vintage of Cristal. *s|*



Citrus-elderflower cake capped off the celebratory event.

Time Is on Our Side

AGING NEW WORLD WINES

story and photos by Richard Carleton Hacker

I ONCE ASKED Paso Robles winemaker Austin Hope how well he thought his flagship Treana red blend would age. “I don’t know,” he replied. “No one’s ever kept it long enough to find out.”

To be sure, there’s an old adage that while Europeans buy wines to age for the future, Americans buy wines to drink that night. This generality was somewhat disputed by a 2018 Wine Business study, which found that just 20% of U.S. wine buyers “admitt[ed] that they drink the wine within 24 hours of purchase.” That said, the study also found that 39% drink it within a one- to two-week period, while only 6% lay their bottles down for long-term aging. Thus, it’s clear that many consumers never realize the potential of what could have been a stellar bottle rather than an immediately drinkable quaff.

As proof, I can tell you that Austin Hope’s inaugural 2000 vintage of Treana, a blend of Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, and Syrah—which I finally opened this year after properly storing it—has an earthiness blanketed by thin but firm tannins along with layers of raspberries, blueberries, and nuts that linger through a long finish. It was much softer and more luxurious than it was upon release.

Similarly mouth-filling results occurred when I recently uncorked a Craggy Range 2002 Sophia from Gimblett Gravels, New Zealand. Upon acquiring the French oak-aged blend of Merlot and Cabernet Franc blend in 2004, I wrote that it could be aged up to 2014. Indeed it could—and beyond, it turned out. It was medium-rich when I tasted it almost two decades ago, but aside from throwing a bit of sediment, it has evolved into silky chocolate fudge and tannin-soaked oak.

But it isn’t just red wines that can age gracefully. A Penfolds 2002 Yattarna Chardonnay was thick, rich, and creamy when I finally uncorked it this year. Says Kurtis Ogasawara, director of winemaking

Cork seepage is often an indicator of how well a wine has aged. ▶



The author recently opened some New World wines he’d been storing from the 2000, 2001, and 2002 vintages to see how well they had aged.

at Robert Mondavi Winery, “High-quality white wines are also ageworthy, such as our Reserve Fumé Blanc, [which] is . . . bright and fresh—ideal for aging, as the aromas and palate grow more expressive over time.”

Other factors also contribute to a wine’s ageability. “It is rare for two wines to have identical long-term aging power because of each wine’s unique pH and phenolic content,” says Cakebread winemaker Niki Williams. “By using pH levels as our guide, we can ensure our wines have the acidity levels and a sturdy phenolic backbone needed to prevent the breakdown of fruit that happens naturally as wines age.”

Meanwhile, Burgess Cellars has just released a 1993 Napa Valley Cabernet Sauvignon Vintage Selection 10 Year Old as part of its Library Release program. A warm summer and an early harvest

led the winery to earmark this wine for cellaring. “I think acid is a vital component to aging,” says Burgess winemaker Meghan Zobeck. “If you don’t have enough acid, the wine is dead on arrival. . . . The more vibrant and alive the fruit is when you pick, the more longevity the wine possesses!”

As general manager of the Ultra Luxury portfolio at Constellation Brands, Jason Smith, MS, offers insight into enjoying well-aged New World wines. “I prefer to decant an older wine and taste immediately,” he says. “Decanting for a long period of time . . . likely will not improve its quality and, conversely, has a chance of decreasing the quality!”

Indeed, although many New World wines are resilient enough to age gracefully, they become delicate in the process, so pour—and drink—them slowly. After all, time is on your side. *sj*

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THE **SOMM** JOURNAL

How I Spent My

SOMM-er Vacation

Over the past few decades, I have guided press, trade, and consumers through wine regions around the world, but this summer, for the first time, I became an official SOMM Camper. I was invited by my friend, colleague, and boss, *SOMM Journal* publisher Meredith May, to attend—and chronicle—one of the magazine's renowned educational SOMM Camps, joined by a band of sommeliers from around the country. Destination: Sonoma County. Setting: vineyards and wineries that indicate profound respect for the myriad terroirs of this rural and sometimes underappreciated wine region. Theme: Wow, look what Sonoma can do!



LETTERS FROM OUR SONOMA SOMM CAMP

story by LARS LEICHT / *photos by* CHRIS HOWARD



SOMM Campers and Counselors met up at Ferrari-Carano Winery to kick off the three-day event.



Dining al fresco at Ferrari-Carano Winery in Healdsburg, CA.

The Sonoma County AVA encompasses 19 sub-AVAs that speak to its range of microclimates as well as an impressive number of grape varieties that adapt to each. Soil types vary wildly from hill to hill and sometimes within a single plot, while proximity to the Pacific Ocean and San Pablo Bay plays an influential role in the styles of wine made here. Visiting Sonoma, you'll quite often hear the word "diversity" when it comes to both vineyard sites and the wines they produce.

Since I never went to sleepaway camp as a kid, I thought it would be fun to take this opportunity to offer my report in the form of the classic camper's letter back home. After all, I did feel like a child on holiday during the trip, free to roam, absorb, and develop as a person and wine lover. Here are my missives to you, dear reader.

DAY 1:

A Most Welcoming Dinner

Dear SOMM and Dad,
 What a way to begin this experience. It was a typical travel day, with airline delays and ground transportation travails, but once we campers all arrived in the dreamlike setting of the garden at Ferrari-Carano in Healdsburg, any lingering stress melted away—aided by a delicious glass (or two) of Ten of Cups from Banshee, a sister winery in the Foley Family Wines portfolio. Taking its name from the tarot card that symbolizes harmony and joy, this bottle-fermented nonvintage Brut is a blend of Chardonnay, Pinot Noir, and Pinot Meunier that's aged two months in neutral French oak and 24 months in the bottle before disgorgement. Bright and aromatic with hints of tropical fruit, it represented an auspicious start as the late-day sun bathed the surrounding Dry Creek Valley vineyards and a cooling breeze showed us firsthand the coastal influence that mitigates the warm summer afternoons.



Once we were seated at a long table in a sycamore grove alongside the mansion on the property, Sarah Quider, vice president of winemaking for Foley Family Wines, welcomed us with a glass of **Ferrari-Carano 2022 North Coast Fumé Blanc**, which was first released in 1986. A third of the wine is fermented in barrel, the rest in stainless steel, and the vines are trained along an open canopy to encourage more tropical-fruit aromas and a round mouthfeel. A salad of grilled Bosc pear, housemade stracciatella, pistachios, and pomegranate dukkah plus crisp sourdough bread was paired with the Fumé. At once refreshing yet complex, the wine showed flavors of apricot, peach, pear, and a



Sarah Quider, vice president of winemaking for Foley Family Wines, was our welcoming host.

hint of lime zest that wrapped around the flavors of the dish.

Quider next introduced the **2019 Tré Terre Chardonnay** from the Russian River Valley, which was served with a cured trout crudo accompanied by compressed Asian pear, fermented estate-grown pluots, Sterling Royal caviar, puffed wild rice, and avocado mouseline. The grapes for Tré Terre are hand harvested and cluster pressed; the wine is then barrel fermented with native and cultured yeasts. After completing malolactic fermentation, it's aged sur lie with weekly bâtonnage for five months. Once blended, it is returned to neutral barrels for several months before bottling.

Inevitably, campers asked for an update on the current harvest. Quider reported that at that point in early August, the grapes were just starting veraison, about three to five weeks behind schedule. That makes this bloom period the longest in recent history, leading to an uncommon scenario in which there are both berries and flowers on the vine at the same time. Heavy rainfall spurred tremendous growth, necessitating frequent leaf thinning and canopy management; moisture and the resulting grape shatter also sparked the region's first instance of downy mildew. Quider said the harvest—during which the picking of white and red grapes will, unusually, overlap—will be well below average in volume and yield wines with lower alcohol content.

For a grand finale, we tried one of Ferrari-Carano's top Cabernet-based wines. **The 2016 PreVail West Face** is a blend of 66% Cabernet Sauvignon and 34% Syrah grown on the steep slopes of Lookout Mountain at the junction of the Alexander Valley, Knights Valley, and Chalk Hill appellations. Rising from 500 to 1,400 feet above sea level, the site sits on sandstone and sandy loam soils that result in low yield. The destemmed grapes undergo a five-day cold soak followed by pumpovers once or twice daily. After malolactic fermentation, the wine is aged in (45% new) oak barrels stored in underground caves for 18 months. Showing deep blackberry and cassis as well as fennel, tobacco leaf, and cigar box, it was a brilliant pairing for chef Alec Graham's Chardonnay-brined pork schnitzel with shaved estate zucchini, pear agrodolce, and charred preserved lemon.



The 2016 PreVail West Face is a blend of 66% Cabernet Sauvignon and 34% Syrah.



DAY 2:

A Busy One

Dear SOMM and Dad,

Today I got to be onstage, moderating a panel of some brilliant Sonoma winemakers as they talked about their unique terroir and signature styles; my fellow campers asked a lot of great questions too, so it was a fantastic learning experience. (Check out my friend and colleague Jonathan Cristal-



AR Lenoble Jordan Cuvée Brut Champagne.

di's coverage of the "Signature Styles" seminar on page 78.)

After the seminar, we paid a visit to another beautiful Healdsburg property, **Jordan Vineyard & Winery**, where guest

services manager Whitney Beery, director of marketing and communications Kendall Busby, and national sales director Brad Butcher warmly welcomed us with a glass of **AR Lenoble Jordan Cuvée Brut Champagne**. No longer producing California sparkling wine since selling their J Winery, the Jordan family partnered with the Malassagne family of Damery, France, to make this special nonvintage cuvée to serve at the winery and sell in California only. The blend of 30% Grand Cru Chardonnay from Chouilly, 35% Premier Cru Pinot Noir from Bisseuil, and 35% Pinot Meunier from Damery is aged on lees for four years and gets a dosage of 5 grams per liter. It made for a celebratory welcome and a delightful palate cleanser for the group, who had tasted through some big red wines at the seminar.



Jordan grower relations manager Dana Grande (left) and winemaker Kari Van Dyk led the tasting at the winery.

We were seated at umbrella-shaded tables on the terrace alongside the chateau for an al fresco lunch. While Jordan executive chef Jesse Mallgren personally presented each dish on his lavish menu, assistant winemaker Kari Van Dyk and grower relations manager Dana Grande led the wine tasting.

Red leaf lettuces grown on the estate were presented with navel oranges, candied pecans, and goat cheese as well as the **Jordan 2021 Russian River Valley Chardonnay**. The grapes were harvested

and pressed at night to preserve their freshness and acidity. Half of the wine was fermented in stainless-steel tanks, the other half in French oak barrels selected for their tight grain and light toast, all to highlight the purity of the fruit, according to Van Dyk. (The winemaking team has also begun experimenting with concrete eggs and is so pleased with the result that they are investing in more, she said, because the concrete yields brighter flavors than oak.) She added that the wine undergoes only partial malolactic fermentation to

avoid any buttery component.

Unlike the stereotypical California Chardonnay, the wine was true to Jordan's declared Burgundian style, showing flavors of citrus, including lemon zest, and citrus blossoms as well as Asian pear. Grande pointed out that she has changed her sources to favor grapes that will make a wine that's lower in alcohol with more citrusy flavors. "This wine is intentional," she said. "It is exactly what we want to do."

Mallgren then presented what was probably the most ambitious and provoc-



◀ *Dining at Jordan Vineyard & Winery's estate property was truly memorable.*



Pan-seared scallops with beurre rouge and chanterelle mushrooms alongside the Jordan 2019 Cabernet Sauvignon from Alexander Valley was a surprise pairing.



Jordan executive chef Jesse Mallgren.

ative pairing of SOMM Camp: pan-seared scallops with beurre rouge and chantrelle mushrooms alongside the Jordan 2019 Cabernet Sauvignon from Alexander Valley, which saw the addition of 10% Merlot, 8% Petit Verdot, and 2% Malbec and aged in French oak. Part of the reason it worked so well is that the wine was well balanced between acidity and fruit, including flavors of black cherries and berries accented by a note of dried herbs. The 2019 growing season was cooler than average for the area, Grande explained, adding that while a heat spell around Labor Day raised sugar levels, the tannins were still green. Many growers wanted to pick early, but the Jordan team waited, and their patience was rewarded: "Each vineyard, each varietal, each site has its own expression of when it is ready to go," Grande asserted.

The savory portion of lunch concluded with a more conventional pairing: Wagyu strip sirloin with fennel and kohlrabi purée was like a magnet to the **Jordan 2007 Alexander Valley Cabernet Sauvignon**, served from magnum. Of course, Mallgren's use of the same wine in the sauce helped seal the bond, as did the vibrant acidity that Jordan's Cabernets demonstrate. Grande reported a change in sourcing practices for the Cabernet Sauvignon as well; the team has opted to use less estate fruit and rely on growers who can provide grapes best suited to Jordan's target style. "The 2007 was a spectacular vintage for our growers as well as our estate vineyards," she said.

Added Butcher, "Jordan is more about a house style. We kind of just put our nose down and do what we do," namely focus on their Chardonnay and Cabernet Sauvignon along with a top-notch hospitality program. What lucky campers to have enjoyed all three in one breathtaking afternoon!

A Visit to Hamel Family Wines

When we got to our next stop, **Hamel Family Wines** in Sonoma proper, I ran into a couple of dear friends. Geoff Labitzke, MW, is one of the most brilliant, talented, and generous wine educators I know. I was delighted to find the mentor and supporter of so many up-and-coming sommeliers at Hamel, which appointed him as its first general manager just over a year ago. He is flanked by hospitality manager and Advanced Sommelier Petra Polakovicova, whom I have known for over a dozen years since we traveled on SommFoundation Enrichment Trips together, and Hamel national sales manager Austin Merrick.

The whole team was genuinely and visibly excited to show campers around the property, so after brief introductions at the winery, we took our first vineyard walk of SOMM Camp. The Hamel Family Ranch Vineyard is made up of eroded volcanic material, primarily iron-rich red-clay loam over metavolcanic gravel and bedrock. Located on the western base of the Mayacamas Mountains at the foot of Whitman Canyon, the 124-acre site is considered to be high valley floor at around 400 feet above sea level. Sonoma Mountain to the west buffers it from cool Pacific breezes in the afternoon, while evening fog throughout the growing season refreshes the air after hot after-



Hamel Family Wines general manager Geoff Labitzke.

noons. It's planted to Cabernet Sauvignon, Cabernet Franc, Merlot, Petit Verdot, Grenache, and Zinfandel.

"Sonoma Valley wines haven't found an identity behind a single variety," Labitzke said, "but the basalt and rhyolite in our vineyards provide a distinctive signature." While both are volcanic in origin, rhyolite formed from silica-rich magma in such a way that its iron and magnesium are more readily absorbed by vines, giving notable salinity and minerality to the wine.

Back at the winery, the focus stayed on



Impressive architecture at Hamel Family Wines.



dirt. We tasted the **Hamel Family Wines 2023 Sauvignon Blanc**, which contains 25% Sémillon; both varieties are grown in the 6-acre Tres Palmas vineyards in the town of Kenwood, located 7 miles northwest of the Hamel Family Ranch Vineyard. The volcanic soil here in the gently sloping foothills of Sugarloaf Ridge is mostly well-drained, dark, and cobbly. Forty percent of the wine is aged in 800- to 1,000-liter casks of Austrian, French, and Italian oak, the balance in large concrete eggs. Minerally and taut, it showed notes of apple blossom and sage with hints of lemon zest and grapefruit.

In addition to the aforementioned, Hamel owns two other vineyards: Nuns Canyon, located 6 miles northeast of the winery, sits on steep slopes made up of fractured basalt at elevations ranging from 1,200 to 1,600 feet; Armor Plate is a 5-acre plot adjacent to the Hamel Family Ranch Vineyard with vines planted in the late 1800s. Three-quarters of the total acreage of the four vineyards are dry farmed, and biodynamic techniques are used to manage the vines according to the needs of each 1.25-acre lot. "It is a level of precision and dedication that I have not seen in my 45 years in the wine business," declared Labitzke.

DAY 3:

Covering Lots of Territory

Dear SOMM and Dad,

We started our day in the Russian River Valley—or rather under it, in the caves of **Thomas George Estates**. There, Jonathan Cristaldi led a seminar with more brilliant winemakers to discuss the common threads of Sonoma wines; see my report on page 84.

Next we headed to the southeast part of Sonoma Valley and the **Gloria Ferrer** estate, just above San Pablo Bay. As our camp bus pulled into the parking area, we were guided to our designated spot by none other than **Harry Hansen**, senior vice president of winegrowing and winemaking.



Harry Hansen is senior vice president of winegrowing and winemaking for Gloria Ferrer.

Hansen said Home Ranch, planted to 60% Pinot Noir and 40% Chardonnay, "reflects our house style." The property has five distinct soil types and elevations ranging from 50 to 325 feet. By comparison, Gloria Ferrer's 128-acre Circle Bar Ranch, also in Carneros, is made up of 13 different blocks featuring eight distinct soil types and elevations ranging from 50 to 280 feet; it is planted to 80% Pinot Noir and 20% Chardonnay. But both sites

Thus proving his attention to detail, the man behind this legendary Sonoma sparkling-wine producer welcomed us with a glass of **Gloria Ferrer Brut Rosé**. Made entirely with free-run juice, it's predominantly Pinot Noir with about 8% Chardonnay for structure. Noting its dosage of 12.1 grams per liter, I found the wine distinctively fruit forward, with flavors of watermelon and strawberry. "It's very much about the place that you are in," Hansen told us from our perch surrounded by vineyards on the Gloria Ferrer Home Ranch. The now 207-acre property was purchased in 1982 and the winery was opened in 1986, making Gloria Ferrer the first sparkling-wine producer in the Carneros subregion of Sonoma.



Gloria Ferrer Brut Rosé is predominantly Pinot Noir with about 8% Chardonnay.



The Gloria Ferrer 2015 Royal Cuvée is a blend of 67% Pinot Noir and 33% Chardonnay.



The nonvintage Gloria Ferrer Blanc de Blancs.

have been farmed using chemical-free, climate-smart farming practices for most of the past decade and are in the process of being certified organic. In both cases, the Pinot Noir is planted in rocky volcanic soils on the highest ridges while the Chardonnay is planted in the clay-rich soils of the lower sections.

The warm days and cool nights of the Sonoma side of Carneros, which sees breezes and morning fog in the summer, present ideal conditions for sparkling-wine grapes. Vineyard director Brad Kurtz pointed out that Circle Bar Ranch is closer to San Pablo Bay and therefore has a cooler microclimate, with both budbreak and harvest taking place seven to ten days later than they do at Home Ranch.

Still in the vineyards, we were next served the **Gloria Ferrer NV Blanc de Blancs**. Made from first and second pressings of Chardonnay, it spends 30 months on the lees, has a dosage of 12 grams per liter, and presents apple and citrus notes with a creamy finish. Meanwhile, we learned about the estate's founders, José and Gloria Ferrer, who fell in love with what is now Home Ranch because it reminded them of their native Catalonia in Spain, where the Ferrer family has for generations owned Freixenet. Hansen recounted that José's father, who did not survive the Spanish Civil War, dreamed of producing sparkling wines in the U.S. Over 40 years later, when José realized that goal, he named it in honor of his wife, Gloria. "Ours is both a dream and a love story," Hansen said.

In the 1990s, the Ferrers' winemaking team traveled to Champagne and acquired cuttings of 17 different Pinot Noir clones and four different Chardonnay clones, all specific to sparkling-wine production. Today those vines have an average age of 30 years; Kurtz said they

will likely have another 15 to 20 years of productivity thanks in great part to the organic practices being introduced. "The yields are lower [with organic farming], but the quality is higher," he said. "We are bringing our vineyards into balance."

That's not all Gloria Ferrer is doing to uphold its status as a Certified California Sustainable Winery and Vineyard while working toward certification as an organic grower. Steps taken to reduce its carbon footprint include chipping rather than burning vine cuttings, using lighter-weight bottles, and operating an electric tractor. On the social front, it provides a fair wage for its employees and meets or exceeds the standards for health-care and retirement packages. No wonder that the average tenure of its 23-member team is 18 years.

Answering campers' questions on the current vintage, Hansen reported conditions similar to those we'd been hearing about across the region—everything is weeks behind the norm. It's a poignant fact that, for the first time in memory, veraison in Champagne was ahead of that in Carneros by as much as ten days.

With that in mind, we moved uphill to the winery's vista terrace for a simple family-style meal with some not-so-simple wines. The **Gloria Ferrer 2015 Royal Cuvée** is a blend of 67% Pinot Noir and 33% Chardonnay from vineyards located at the highest point of Home Ranch. The grapes are hand harvested and cluster pressed; only the first pressing is cool fermented in stainless steel before bottle aging on lees for six years. The first vintage was 1984, which the Ferrers presented to the king and

queen of Spain during a reception at San Francisco's Spanish Consulate in 1987. With a dosage of 11.7 grams per liter, the fresh and elegant wine offered flavors of green apple, crisp pear, and subtle lemon zest.

Produced only in select years, the

Gloria Ferrer 2013 Carneros Cuvée

is the second-most recent vintage of the house's tête de cuvée, the most recent being the 2017 Carneros Cuvée Rosé. Made from 65% Pinot Noir and 45% Chardonnay, also from the peak of Home Ranch, it's handpicked and cluster pressed; only the first-press juice is used. After cool primary fermentation, the wine is bottled and spends eight years on the lees. With a dosage of 11.6 grams per liter, it showed a soft mousse and a slight but pleasant oxidative note along with flavors of brioche, cinnamon, red apple, and grape peel.

Though still crisp, the richness of the **Gloria Ferrer 2001 Royal Cuvée** ensures it lives up to its regal and dignified name; with age, its fruit-forward flavors have yielded to more pronounced notes of Asian pear, lemon custard, fresh ginger, bread crust, and baking spices.

Library tastings, called the Extended Tirage Experience, are among the special offerings of Gloria Ferrer's hospitality program. It also features vineyard walks, tapas and caviar pairings, lunch and brunch tastings, and even a dedicated experience for those with furry friends, which includes treats for the four-legged as well as the two-legged. "Hospitality is part of our lifeblood," said Hansen, and we SOMM Campers were happy beneficiaries of it on this sunny day in Carneros.



Hansen shared a recently (2022) disgorged selection of the Gloria Ferrer 2003 Carneros Cuvée Library Selection. Extended bottle aging has given this wine deep flavors of nectarine, quince, baked apple, and a hint of pie crust, yet it is still remarkably vibrant and fresh.



Hilary Cline is spearheading a new focus on Sonoma-grown varieties at Cline Family Cellars.

This sign was posted on Highway 121 (Arnold Drive) by Cline Family Cellars.



Winemaker Katie Hoggins addresses the campers at Cline Family Cellars.

Communing at Cline Family Cellars

It was just a short ride down the road to **Cline Family Cellars'** Carneros property, where we were greeted at the ranch door by CEO John Grant. He told us how founders Fred and Nancy Cline had converted the former horse farm into not only a winery but a visitor's center with garden cabanas and a spring-fed pond. That said, "the family is genuinely farmers," he declared. "Cline is putting the country back into wine country."

The couple started Cline Family Cellars in 1982 in Oakley, California, with a focus on Zinfandel and Rhône varieties, expand-

ing to Carneros in 1989. Today, three of their seven children are active with the company. Daughter Hilary is spearheading a new focus on Sonoma-grown varieties, including Pinot Noir and Chardonnay; she and her sister Megan recently launched Gust, a label consisting of small-production Pinot Noir, Chardonnay, and Syrah from their family's Petaluma Gap vineyards (its name both alludes to the reliable winds that blow out the morning fog daily and nods to the fresh ideas of a new generation). Their brother Henry helps manage the vineyards, for instance overseeing the ongoing redevelopment of the varietal se-

lection, though Fred stays closely involved in the viticulture.

Campers were welcomed with a brief tasting of two wines. The **Gust 2021 Petaluma Gap Pinot Noir** was sourced primarily from Catapult Ranch, with 15% coming from Diamond Pile; both vineyards were planted by Fred to Dijon clones in the 1990s. Aged for 15 months in French oak barrels—50% of them new, sourced exclusively from the Rousseaux cooperage—it was rich, round, and expressive, showing great red fruit on the nose with notes of earth and spice. The **Cline Fog Swept 2021 Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir** came mainly from the same two vineyards, Hilary told us, with a bit of Carneros fruit. She described it as a "bigger" blend with a little less new oak. It offered bright cherry, pomegranate, and wild strawberry framed by notes of vanilla and toasted oak.



Tackling a Pinot Noir Blending Challenge

Winemaker Katie Hoggins and director of winemaking and viticulture Tom Gendall then introduced an activity for the afternoon, tasking us campers with blending a 2022 Pinot Noir using wines sourced from three Sonoma Coast vineyards. One was Catapult; located on the east side of the Petaluma Gap, it was planted in 1997 to Dijon clone 115 along with heritage clones 5, 13, and 31 in predominantly clay loam soils on top of compacted volcanic ash and rhyolite. Morning fog lingers on most summer days, followed by persistent afternoon breezes. The diurnal shift can be over 25 degrees, ensuring a longer hang time is required to develop full, rich fruit flavors. The second was Diamond Pile, which faces west on the southern side of Sonoma Mountain in the Petaluma Gap. Here, low-yielding Dijon clone 115 and heritage clone 2A ripen late and tend to yield small clusters of thick-skinned fruit. And the third was J. Poppe: The Clines' home vineyard in the Los Carneros AVA and their oldest property in Sonoma, it was purchased in 1989 and planted to Dijon clones 113 and 114. It takes its name from the 19th-century landowner who built the estate farmhouse now used as Cline Family Cellars' tasting room. Soils here are clay loam with medium fertility; yields are low and



The campers were divided into five groups to present the best blended Cline Pinot Noir. Here, CW Kelley of Dolce Riviera in Dallas, TX, makes the final blend for his team.

the fruit is both concentrated and vibrant.

The campers were divided into five groups and given 375-milliliter sample bottles and graduated beakers for measuring the blends. After a lively discussion, each group presented their designated team name and blend to the judging panel, which included me, Hoggins, Gendall, Meridith May, and *SOMM Journal* COO Bill Brandel. We had our work cut out for us, because they all presented excellent blends, but there could only be one winner: Up Too Early took home the prize offered by *The SOMM Journal*, \$200 per person: Its blend of 70% J. Poppe, 20% Catapult, and 10% Diamond Pile was crafted by Paul Krikorian, wine director



Team Up Too Early took home the top prize in the Pinot Noir blending challenge at Cline Family Cellars: Pictured are winners Paul Krikorian, David Fletcher, Nadejda Cutitaru, Lonna Applegate, and Jim Gallagher.

at The Lodge at Torrey Pines in La Jolla, California; David Fletcher, general manager and director of beverage at L'Escale Restaurant in Greenwich, Connecticut; Nadejda Cutitaru, head sommelier at La Grande Boucherie in New York City; Lonna Applegate, general manager at Restaurant Beck at Whale Cove Inn in Depoe Bay, Oregon; and Jim Gallagher, assistant wine specialist and wine buyer at Diablo Foods in Lafayette, California. While they can be proud that all of the campers will get a bottle of the blend they helped create, they should also know that Hoggins and Gendall were taking notes, so they may have influenced the Cline or Gust wines of the future!



A White-Wine Send-Off

SOMM and Dad, it seems like just yesterday—OK, 48 hours ago—that we started this adventure with a glass of **Banshee Ten of Cups**. How better to close the circle of SOMM Camp than with a guided tasting of three more Banshee wines led by winemaker Alicia Sylvester?

Sylvester has a palette of vineyards throughout Sonoma County from which she produces site-specific wines as well as blends that reflect the character of the region. Having made wine across the globe, she said she appreciates the freedom she has at Banshee to craft wines with a sense of place. Though Banshee specializes in Pinot Noir, our tasting



At the Banshee tasting Room in Healdsburg, we tasted and talked white wine with “The Wine Guys,” Jeff Jenssen and Mike DeSimone, along with Banshee winemaker Alicia Sylvester.

was focused on whites to appropriately mark the occasion of a signing of the new book *White Wine: The Comprehensive Guide to the 50 Essential Varieties & Styles* by authors Jeff Jenssen and Mike DeSimone, which was simultaneously taking place in Banshee’s tasting room in downtown Healdsburg.

There, a generous spread of cheeses, oysters, and caviar awaited us along with the **Banshee 2022 Sonoma County Sauvignon Blanc**. Sylvester called it a “classic porch-pounder,” adding that it contains a little Muscat to round it out. A blend from different vineyards in the region, it was refreshing and flinty with notes of kiwi, lime, and honeydew. The **Banshee 2019 Sonoma Coast Chardonnay** showed flavors of ripe melon, kiwi, and kumquat plus a hint of minerality and even a slight waft of petrol; Sylvester described it as “a silk robe with the prize underneath.” Finally, the **Banshee 2019 Sonoma Coast Morning Light Chardonnay** is a small-production wine available to Banshee’s wine-club members. Crisp and bright, it showed honeysuckle and mint flavors with a hint of dried herbs.

Banshee’s tasting room is a popular spot in downtown Healdsburg, and our time there proved why—as it had at every winery we visited in sensational Sonoma. *SJ*

Thank You to Our SOMM Campers

- Amin Alavi**, wine director, J Carver’s, Austin, TX
- Lonna Applegate**, general manager, Restaurant Beck at Whale Cove Inn, Depoe Bay, OR
- Daniel Camacho**, wine director, Rise Soufflé, Dallas, TX
- Caylin Caster**, wine buyer, BevMo and Gopuff, Lafayette, CA
- Paul Coker**, director of beverage, Montage Healdsburg, Healdsburg, CA
- Nadejda Cutitaru**, head somm, La Grande Boucherie, New York, NY
- Joshua Fischer**, wine director, Red Ash Italia, Austin, TX
- David Fletcher**, GM/director of beverage, L’Escale Restaurant (Greenwich Hospitality Group/Delamar), Greenwich, CT
- Jim Gallagher**, assistant wine specialist/buyer, Diablo Foods, Lafayette, CA
- Kaitlin Green**, wine director, Halls Chophouse, Nashville, TN
- Darren Greenspon**, sommelier/wine buyer, KAI at the Sheraton Grand at Wild Horse Pass, Phoenix, AZ
- Kathleen Hawkins**, wine director, Miru and Tre Dita, Chicago, IL
- CW Kelley III**, Dolce Riviera, Dallas, TX
- Paul Krikorian**, wine director, The Lodge at Torrey Pines, La Jolla, CA
- Jeff Menzer**, wine director, The Mick Brasserie, Scottsdale, AZ
- Kristin Neumann**, Certified Sommelier, Flagler Steakhouse at The Breakers, Palm Beach, FL
- Louise Olivares**, sommelier, Napa area
- Mike Rice**, beverage director, Alexandria Restaurant Partners, Alexandria, VA
- Patrick Ross**, general manager, Myron’s Prime Steakhouse, San Antonio, TX
- Anthony Salazar**, restaurant beverage manager, Peak, New York, NY
- Courtney Youngblood**, sommelier, Bern’s Steak House, Tampa, FL
- Alex Zengotita**, beverage manager, CentraArchy Restaurant Group, South Florida



Our wonderful campers against a backdrop of Gloria Ferrer’s vineyards in Carneros.



The prestigious panel, from left to right: B. Wise general manager Colin Heinrich; Herzog director of winemaking David Galzignato; Trione winemaker John Duckett; moderator Lars Leicht, SOMM Journal VP of education; Notre Vue winemaker Alex Holman; Far Niente winemaker Michael Accurso; Ferrari-Carano winemaker Rebecka Deike; and Paul Hobbs director of winemaking Jacob Pickett.

A VIVID VIEW OF *Vintage* *Variation*

OUR SONOMA SOMM
 CAMPERS LEARNED ABOUT
 THE FACTORS THAT IMPACT A
 WINERY'S "SIGNATURE STYLE"
 FROM YEAR TO YEAR

story by **Jonathan Cristaldi**
 photos by **Chris Howard**

Back in August at *The SOMM Journal's* Sonoma SOMM Camp, representatives from the magazine and two dozen guests gathered in a tasting hall at the luxury Vintners Resort in Santa Rosa, California, for a seminar titled "Signature Styles" featuring seven Sonoma-based winemakers.

Lars Leicht, VP of education for *The SOMM Journal*, began the session by asking the panelists to address the challenges of adapting to vintage variation. Warmer years in Sonoma have typically led to high critical praise, while cooler years are met with a cool response. So how do wineries deal with these ups and downs?

For Michael Accurso, winemaker for Far Niente Wine Estates' EnRoute Winery and Post & Beam, it comes down to water: "It's scarce, so if you don't have it, you're in trouble," he said. "If your vines are established, you're probably doing better in drought years. We put in the infrastructure of drip irrigation with the idea that it's better to have it and not use it rather than need it and not have it." Paul Hobbs Winery director of wine-making Jacob Pickett added that "good vintages are good for all and bad are [usually] bad across the board, but in Sonoma, you can have 25-degree differences in the county and have colder spots of a site that shine in warm years and vice versa. So there's always some variety or site that will have an excellent year."

Colin Heinrich, general manager at B. Wise, noted that "heat is a big factor [that's] certainly not unique to Sonoma, but we are doing overhead sprinklers to dampen heat spikes, and that goes back to water use." He added that concerns about the unpredictability of climate change have led to a boom in research on vine material and rootstocks that do



better in warm climates. "The future is in new rootstocks," agreed NotreVue winemaker Alex Holman, "and there's more effort to get these rootstocks that are more in tune with drought conditions."

David Galzignato, director of winemaking at Herzog Wine Cellars, expressed that "in Sonoma, it still feels 'mom and pop' to me. It's all about relationships you have with growers, which gives you more

flexibility during fires or drought." Foley Family Wines winemaker Rebecka Deike then raised the issue of labor challenges from vintage to vintage. "It's expensive to live here," she said, "and finding the right labor is critical."

Read on to find out how this group of winemakers views their individual approach to crafting a "Signature Style" and how it translates in the glass.



All in the Tannin:

B. WISE VINEYARDS

"I fell in love with wine in Europe in the 1990s," began Heinrich, "and I've worked with B. Wise for over 15 years now." B. Wise Vineyards' estate property and winery were established in 2002 on Moon Mountain in the Moon Mountain District AVA. The producer also operates a tasting lounge in Kenwood, California, and a tasting space called the B. Wise Loft at BRION in Yountville.

"We mostly make wine from our Moon Mountain estate," explained Heinrich. "The Moon Mountain District was established in 2013 as an AVA, and Monte Rosso is the famous and iconic site associated with the appellation. The soils are very red soils like on the eastern benches of Oakville; iron oxide is the mineral that causes the redness, and we want our wine to express that minerality."

Heinrich noted that his approach is to craft wines with balance and refined tannins, and he believes he and his team are able to make "more elegant, less aggressive wines that are easy to drink" thanks to practices such as farming by hand—from pruning and thinning to harvest—and planting cover crops. B. Wise has seven clones of Cabernet Sauvignon planted, which "give us blending nuances," said Heinrich. "We have a master cooper we work with, [Ramiro Herrera,] the only American master cooper, and to help us achieve our ideal tannin profile, we buy trees from France and make specific barrels for specific sites."

TASTING NOTE

The **B. Wise Vineyards 2019 Cabernet Sauvignon** presented at the seminar is a 100% varietal wine offering aromas of dusty herbs, baking spices, and tobacco. Medium- to full-bodied, with rich, warming earth notes and cassis as well as layers of blackberry preserves; toasty, warm baking spices; fine-grained, polished tannins; and a spicy finish.

Wine for the Ages:

TRIONE VINEYARDS & WINERY

Trione head winemaker John Duckett grew up in Santa Rosa, California, and was a competitive swimmer at the University of California, Davis, long before he knew the school offered a program in wine education. He's not sure how it happened, but he ended up switching his major to viticulture and enology, and after graduation, he landed at Jordan Vineyard & Winery in the Alexander Valley.

"I'm new to Trione, and so 2023 will be my first harvest," he explained. "The winery has been around since Henry Trione started a mortgage company in Sonoma and bought vineyards [while also] convert[ing] orchards to vineyards." In his 2015 obituary in *The Press Democrat*, Trione was described as the last of the Santa Rosa "power brokers" who helped usher in unprecedented growth for the city beginning in the 1950s.

"Today, we source grapes from the Russian River Valley [and] the Alexander Valley, and we have a small plot outside of Rockpile. We make Sauvignon Blanc, Pinot Noir, Zinfandel, and Cabernet Sauvignon," Duckett said. "Our Block Twenty One [Cabernet Sauvignon] bottling comes from the northern end of Alexander Valley near Cloverdale on the eastern flank of the Russian River Valley, at the base of the Mayacamas. The soil is quite gravelly there, rather than being of the typical Goldridge loam-based soils, and the vines struggle more with more drainage. We get rid of pyrazines with that struggle."

Duckett added that he aims for a more reserved, less extracted style of Cabernet Sauvignon with lower alcohol. "My goal is to make ageworthy Cabernet," he concluded.



TASTING NOTE

Aged 24 months in French oak, the **Trione Vineyards & Winery 2018 Block Twenty One Cabernet Sauvignon** is a blend of the best components in the cellar: 78% Cabernet Sauvignon, 10% Malbec, 8% Merlot, and 2% each Cabernet Franc and Petit Verdot from the Alexander Valley. Notes of cassis and blackberry are intermixed with dried sage, rosemary, and thyme as well as black olive and dusty mineral notes. Medium-bodied, with an expressive midpalate salinity and lovely plum and tart black cherry. Featherweight tannins glide to a long finish marked by crushed cacao nibs and wild herbs.

Mind the Soils:

NOTRE VUE ESTATES

Grapes have been grown on the Notre Vue property since 1869, and today the producer "has 700 acres of estate land, with 200 planted to vine before the Kincade Fire [in 2019], down to 175 now," Holman told us. The Notre Vue estate, he added, "straddles [the border between] the Russian River Valley and Chalk Hill appellations, so I could put either AVA on the label, but I label based on soil types."

The Balverne label, for its part, has been around since the early 1980s and was a cult wine; though production ceased in 1991, it was resurrected in 2012. The expression Holman presented, the Balverne 2019 Cabernet Sauvignon, "could be labeled as Russian River Valley Cabernet, but we call it Chalk Hill. The soils are heavy basalt, with baseball- to bowling ball-size boulders. Then it transforms to [volcanic soils high in] in magnesium and calcium, which makes farming challenging," he said, adding that "Cabernet Sauvignon tends to result in a more delicate wine when grown in these soils, with more dried fruit and an intricate balance of fruit flavors."

Yields are low—barely 3 tons per acre—and even lower on hillsides. "The magnesium in the soil is a ripeness inhibitor to some degree," noted Holman, who earned a degree in chemistry at San Francisco State University. "It means petioles have low potassium uptake, and that means the tartaric acid equilibrium is in flux during aging. So if you do a potassium foliar spray [late in the growing season], you can accidentally add potassium. That can shift the pH to higher pH, and you get flabby wine, so you lose acid and bright red fruit. We have to pay careful attention to our potassium levels."



TASTING NOTE

Holman only used native non-saccharomyces yeast in the fermentation of the **Balverne 2019 Cabernet Sauvignon**, which aged 18 months in one- and two-year-old barrels to add midpalate weight. His signature style seems to be a classic take on Cabernet: a bit delicate and nuanced, as he explained in his presentation. Heady blackberry mingles with graphite notes on the bouquet of this medium- to full-bodied red, which offers complex flavors of wild herbs, violets, and dark chocolate framed by supple, structured tannins.

The True Coast: **PAUL HOBBS WINERY**

Pickett reminded the audience that Paul Hobbs launched his eponymous label in 1991 with Cabernet Sauvignon from a Carneros vineyard owned by Hyde Vineyards' Larry Hyde, along with a Chardonnay made with grapes sourced from Richard Dinner in Sonoma Mountain. Today, Hobbs can boast of owning estate vineyards throughout Sonoma County and Napa Valley and across the world.

The Missouri-born Pickett, meanwhile, got into winemaking in his home state and ended up at Early Mountain Vineyards in Virginia, where he met Hobbs. "I've been working for him ever since," he said.

Pickett decided to showcase the Paul Hobbs 2021 West Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir, which hails from a vineyard on what he calls the "true coast" in reference to the newest AVA in Sonoma County: West Sonoma Coast. "What we try to capture is the salinity and tension you get from grapes growing on the coast," he said, adding, "There are these great redwoods, and all their aromatic sap mingles with coastal sea breezes, and we try to translate [that] in the glass."

The West Sonoma Coast ranges in elevation from about 400 feet to 1,800 feet. Some of the lower vineyards are perched on precipices that plummet down to sea level, while others are planted in steep, unforgiving terrain that follows the San Andreas fault line.

The aforementioned "salinity and tension" that Pickett said they aim to capture "comes naturally from the fog and Goldridge soils and microclimates," he asserted, "but we work on it in the winery too. We try to create diversity in the cellar through different sizes of fermenters and a mix of concrete, steel, and a wide variety of oak from around 20 coopers" for Point Noir and Chardonnay alone.

Regarding the fermentation process, Pickett clarified that large, shallow fermenters "will have more surface area and [impart] more depth" in the final wine, "while a tall fermenter that is conically shaped might give us more red-fruit notes. So we are constantly looking to elevate the freshness, and we use all these diverse elements in the cellar to create that freshness in the glass."



TASTING NOTE

To produce the **Paul Hobbs 2021 West Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir**, grapes were hand sorted while cold (17% whole-cluster inclusion) and fermented with native yeast in small, open-top stainless-steel tanks, followed by a five-day cold soak and 15-day maceration. After spontaneous malolactic fermentation in barrel and aging for nine months in (33% new) French oak, the wine was bottled unfined and unfiltered. Notes of bright Bing cherry and elegant cedar meet red-floral tones. Medium-bodied, with fine-grained tannins balanced by citrus-kissed acid tension and ample minerality. Finishes with energy and freshness.



Talcum-Powder Soils:

ENROUTE WINERY

EnRoute Winery was founded in 2007 by Far Niente Wine Estates; its name is a nod to the journey taken to produce the best Pinot Noir possible. Inspired by its joint passions for the grape and for the unique climate and terroir of the Russian River Valley, EnRoute is dedicated to capturing the essence of pure varietal and terroir expression. "With Pinot, my aim is to craft it with elegance and finesse but also restraint," offered Accurso, who joined the company in 2018. "If you let Pinot hang on the vine for too long, it loses its varietal characteristics, essentially doing the grape and wine an injustice."

EnRoute's four vineyard sites offer a fair amount of diversity, planted as they are to a mix of Dijon and heritage clones. "My favorite two clones for west Sonoma County are 115 and 667—sort of the peanut butter and jelly of Pinot clones," explained Accurso. "[The] 115 gives a meaty, savory sensorial approach, while the 667 brings deeply concentrated, brooding dark fruit. I try to stay away from 777 if possible, as it's a little too fruit-forward without the texture I look for."

Accurso noted that producers and growers in west Sonoma County "are blessed with Goldridge loam soils," which he describes as "very fine and talcum powder-esque. If you are walking around in the vineyards in the summer and your pants aren't bleached white, then you are not in prime vineyard real estate. These soils are incredibly well drained and not susceptible to common diseases like phylloxera and esca. It's common to see vines planted on AXR rootstock from back in the 1980s."

In the winery, Accurso prefers his fermentations to be "low and slow" because, in his words, "Pinot Noir tends to ferment hot and quickly, but that does not allow for advantageous extraction. Heat also blows off the volatiles, and you lose a lot of aromatic integrity of the wine." All in all, he's after wines of balance and typical Pinot character. Judging by the wine he presented during the seminar, the EnRoute 2021 Les Pommiers Pinot Noir, he's got some exceptional raw ingredients to work with to craft a classic Russian River style of dark-toned fruit with plenty of depth and concentration but also lightness from the acidity and plenty of structured tannins.



TASTING NOTE

Fermented mostly in open-top stainless steel with a tiny percentage in concrete Nomblot tanks and aged ten months in (33% new) French oak, the **EnRoute 2021 Les Pommiers Pinot Noir** offers beautifully sumptuous dark fruit—ripe black cherries, spiced plums—as well as elegant notes of purple flowers and muddled strawberries layered with rich, toasty cedar; powdery tannins; and a firm backbone of grippy acidity.



A Toast to Coopers:

FERRARI-CARANO

A Humboldt County native, Deike worked as an intern at Jordan Vineyards in 2000. “I learned a lot from Rob Davis,” she said of Jordan’s longtime winemaker, who retired a few years ago, “and after four years with Rob, I left to work at Ferrari-Carano and have now been there for 19 years!”

Deike worked on the white-winemaking side for a decade but now works with both reds and whites. The wine she presented, the Ferrari-Carano 2018 PreVail Back Forty Cabernet Sauvignon, “comes from hillside plantings on Ferrari-Carano’s RockRise Mountain vineyard at 1,100 feet elevation in Alexander Valley, well above the fog layer on most days.”

The site was planted in 2000 to Cabernet Clone 337, and the wine’s name refers to the back 40 acres of the site from which it’s sourced. “It’s a high-density planting with VSP trellis,” explained Deike, “which creates competition for the nutrients and water in the soil.” The soil there is rhyolite, a silica-rich, dusty volcanic soil with boulders; it’s shallow and offers minimal nutrients, which forces vines to venture deep into the ground.

“We get blackberry straight up from the soil and clone, and the tannins don’t get too rough. That’s the signature of the wine and the site and clone. Ferments are in stainless and inoculated with commercial yeasts. We do pumpovers until ferments are finished, and then we barrel down, and that’s the exciting part!” she exclaimed. The utilization of three different coopers—Darnajou, Taransaud, and Baron—that produce thin staves with a medium-plus toast is as much a hallmark of the PreVail style as the use of 70% new oak, which “doesn’t so much overpower the wine,” said Deike, “but adds toast and sweetness.”



TASTING NOTE


Rich aromas of blackberry, crème de cassis, cherry cordial, cigar box, and cedar lift out of the glass of the **Ferrari-Carano 2018 PreVail Back Forty Cabernet Sauvignon**. The palate is incredibly dense, dripping with ultra-ripe blackberry and cassis, and the tannins have a granularity about them. The inky, luscious fruit lingers on the finish with emerging scorched-herb notes and dusty minerals.

From 80/20 to 20/80:

HERZOG WINE CELLARS

David Galzignato, an MBA graduate of Sonoma State University, is 26 vintages into his winemaking career and, by all accounts, is loving his work as director of winemaking for Herzog Wine Cellars. The Herzog family, whose viticultural history goes back eight generations, started making wine in the U.S. in 1948 after emigrating from Czechoslovakia. “We are a kosher winery,” Galzignato explained matter-of-factly, “which is important to our identity but doesn’t tell the whole story of who we are.”

The Herzog Special Reserve Alexander Valley Cabernet was the first wine Galzignato was put in charge of at the winery and “marks the first representation of my signature [style].” It’s Herzog’s entry-level Reserve wine, and Galzignato hopes it achieves the aim of, in his words, “exciting wine drinkers [about] Herzog and [showing] a quality-to-price ratio.”

Historically, the base blend for the Special Reserve comprises grapes from the Warnecke Vineyard, a site rich in volcanic and clay soils along Chalk Hill Road in Healdsburg. Galzignato said that Warnecke fruit used to represent roughly 80% of the blend and that another 20% came from a couple of sites north of Warnecke in well-draining, rockier soils. Galzignato’s instinct was that those rockier sites were better, so for the 2021 vintage, he flipped the blend proportions and eliminated the use of press juice, opting to bottle only the free-run. 



TASTING NOTE

Aged in French and American oak, the medium- to full-bodied **Herzog 2021 Special Reserve Alexander Valley Cabernet Sauvignon** offers plenty of dark berry fruit; a rich tapestry of satiny tannins; and a deep, chalky, mineral midpalate, finishing with decadent chocolate notes. Downright delicious.



Our “Sonoma’s Common Thread” panelists from left to right: Lancaster winemaker David Drake; Jamie Benziger, winemaker at Imagery; moderator and SOMM Journal editor-at-large Jonathan Cristaldi; Matthew Heil, director of fruit supply at Copper Cane Wines & Provisions; J Vineyards winemaker Nicole Hitchcock; Buena Vista winemaker Brian Maloney; and Thomas George Estates winemaker Nico Cantacuzène.

THREADING IT ALL TOGETHER

SONOMA WINEMAKERS DISCUSSED THE TIES THAT
BIND THEM AT OUR RECENT SOMM CAMP

STORY BY **LARS LEICHT** / PHOTOS BY **CHRIS HOWARD**



At our Sonoma SOMM Camp in August, much was said about the diversity of the region, especially regarding its soils, elevations, and winemaking styles. But what are the common traits found by winemakers here? Morning fog is undoubtedly one of them, as we witnessed firsthand on our August 4 ride from the Healdsburg area to Thomas George Estates in the heart of the Russian River Valley. So too is the afternoon sunshine that warmed our al fresco lunches each day and the cool evening breezes that refreshed us for dinner. For producers, that all adds up to one thing: bracing acidity levels that give Sonoma wines their bright fruit character, structure, and ability to age well.

Moderator and *SOMM Journal* editor-at-large Jonathan Cristaldi brought together a panel of six winemakers from around Sonoma for a seminar titled “Sonoma’s Common Thread: What Ties the Region Together Despite Diverse Soils and Climates.” Campers gathered in Thomas George’s long caves, dug underneath a ridge that overlooks the Russian River and Mount St. Helena—not that we could see either one even if we climbed out and tried to peer through the thick fog.

Worth the Wait: J Vineyards & Winery

“When I think of Sonoma wines, I think of when I first came to the Russian River Valley 20 years ago,” said Nicole Hitchcock, winemaker for J Vineyards & Winery. “We had to wait for acidity to come down to harvest—these grapes maintain their acidity for an unusually long time.”

Hitchcock presented her **J Vineyards Cuvée 20**, a nonvintage blend of Char-

donnay, Pinot Noir, and Pinot Meunier made with grapes from the southern part of the Russian River Valley; while the entire valley is cool, she noted, the further south the vineyard is located, the more impact there is from the morning fog and coastal winds. Hitchcock harvests the grapes at a lower-than-usual ripeness for sparkling wine to, in her words, “highlight the acidity that gives the sparkling wines of Sonoma County a lift.”

She performs selective malolactic fermentation on certain lots of the wine in order to balance the acidity; most of the wine is fermented in stainless steel, but some of it is placed in neutral casks “with lots of bâtonnage,” she added. It ages sur lie for 30 months in bottle, resulting in what she calls a juxtaposition between acidity and creaminess. “When it comes down to what is in the glass, we want it to be balanced,” she said. “This wine has a little bit of everything I like about sparkling wine. It is unique, showing fruit intensity with minerality and toastiness.”

Indeed, the wine offered flavors of pear, apple, and lemon as well as notes of hazelnut and brioche and a creamy toastiness. Launched 20 years ago, the label was named to celebrate what was then the 20th anniversary of the winery and is considered both the flagship and introductory wine of the portfolio, she said.

Crossover Energies: Buena Vista

“The fog and the wind are unifying factors,” agreed Brian Maloney, vice president of winemaking for Buena Vista Winery. But he was also quick to point out what he called the “diverse energies” of the region, represented by a wide array of microclimates and as many as 31 soil types.

Maloney presented his **Chateau Buena Vista 2021 Carneros Chardonnay** as an example of a wine that “celebrates what Chardonnay has come to be not just in Sonoma but in all of California” and pointed out that its “beautiful acidity” is uplifted by minerality from the clayey, rocky soil in certain parcels of the ranch. “Our winemaking is straightforward,” he added. “We like to let nature take its course and provide the conditions for the wine to make itself.”

With only 6,000 12-bottle cases made, the small-production expression was

sourced from three different vineyards within the Carneros appellation—Herman, Thornton Ranch, and Southern Sonoma—and hand harvested at different times because of the geological diversity of the soils. Whole-cluster pressed and barrel fermented with malolactic in wood, it aged in a combination of Hungarian and French oak for 14 months. Asked about the decision to use Hungarian oak and the differences between it and French oak, Maloney said that, in either case, it’s all about the quality of the cooperage. The French oak tends to impart more intense spice and vanilla flavors than the Hungarian, he noted, but the difference is less pronounced than that between French and American oak.

The Chardonnay showed rich fruit and minerality, flavors of Bosc and Asian pear as well as peach, and creaminess on the finish. Maloney said that because of its acidity, it can be cellared for five to ten years, and he often pours verticals of multiple vintages to prove the point. “These are wines that last,” he declared. “They don’t fade. This is what Carneros Chardonnay has been for years.”

Milking Local History: Belle Glos

Matthew Heil, director of fruit supply at Copper Cane Wines & Provisions, presented the **Belle Glos 2021 Dairyman Vineyard Pinot Noir**—aptly named given that it came from a property that was once a dairy farm and pasture. He too talked tectonics and pointed out how the San Andreas Fault determined the area’s mix of marine sediment with volcanic soils. But, as with the previous presenters, the discussion came back to “always waiting for the acids to settle,” in Heil’s words.

The Dairyman Vineyard sits in the southern alluvial plains of the Russian River Valley east of Sebastopol and 16 miles from the Pacific Ocean, where it stays cool thanks to morning fog and afternoon breezes. Heil said the soils are made up of a mix of well-drained loam, clay, and volcanic material, which “allows us to make a powerful Pinot Noir [that’s] rich and complex.” The grapes were picked very ripe at about 24 to 25 Brix, and while he noted that “not a lot of people are comfortable with that” because fermentation can quickly get out of control, he used dry ice to keep the must



cool. The grapes were machine picked at night and fermented in stainless steel for two to three weeks without native yeasts.

Aged in 60% new French oak barrels, the wine showed good structure and polish, with dark, rich fruit and hints of baking spices. Heil said it can easily age for five to seven years thanks to vibrant acidity that holds the wine together.

Respect for the Land: Lancaster Estate Winery

"We're not trying to make Alexander Valley Cabernet Sauvignon," said winemaker David Drake of Lancaster Estate Winery as he presented his **2019 Winemaker's Cuvée**. "We're making a Lancaster Estate Cabernet Sauvignon."

To Drake, one of the most important common traits in Sonoma is a respect for the land. "We're a laid-back bunch," he declared, "but there's only one vineyard in the county that is not yet certified sustainable."

Located on the southern tip of Alexander Valley on the border of the Knights Valley and Chalk Hill AVAs, Lancaster Estate is a 70-acre property with 50 acres of vines planted on several different soil types to classic Bordeaux varieties, including Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, Cabernet Franc, Malbec, Petit Verdot, and Sauvignon Blanc. Drake said there is a 10-degree ambient temperature difference from one side of the plot to the next due to elevation changes and differing proximities to the coast.

The Winemaker's Cuvée, a blend of 82% Cabernet Sauvignon and 14% Merlot with small percentages of Petit Verdot

and Malbec, aged in 50% new French oak with medium-plus toast. It showed complexity, concentration, and richness with flavors of black cherry, blueberry, and plum supported by solid tannins and vibrant acidity.

A Family Creative Legacy: Imagery

Ironically, said Jamie Benziger of Imagery, the commonality of Sonoma is its diversity: The distances between vineyards and the variations between soil types, elevations, and microclimates are what give the region the ability to successfully grow different grape varieties and make fruit-forward wines that are, in her words, "very approachable and also agreeable" due to their acidity, balance, and soft tannins.

Benziger formally took over as winemaker for Imagery when her father, Joe Benziger, retired in 2017. While the storied family is perhaps most recognized for their eponymous sister winery that focuses on traditional winemaking styles and varieties, she relishes the creativity that is the hallmark of Imagery: Founded by Joe in 1986, the label is known for showcasing esoteric varieties that would otherwise be used in small percentages in blends and thus go unnamed on the labels. "I am fortunate to work with a lot of different varieties and see how they work with each other," Benziger declared. "Sometimes you gotta step outside the box and break rules."

She presented what she called "our take on GSM," whose total production is just 150 cases of 12 bottles each: the **Imagery 2021 Noir Nouveau Pinot Noir**,

which blends 87% Pinot Noir from the Sonoma Coast with 8% Syrah and 5% Mourvèdre from the Sonoma Hills. All of the grapes were farmed organically; after harvest in early October, they underwent a five-day cold soak and were gradually warmed before frequent pumpovers.

"The Pinot Noir is the old, true representative of [its] vineyard," Benziger said, adding that the site typically sees morning fog and afternoon sunshine. The Syrah adds structure, while the Mourvèdre gives the wine a hint of spice on the finish. "It speaks to the diversity of Sonoma," noted Cristaldi, bringing the presentation full circle.

The Apple of the Winemaker's Eye: Thomas George Estates

"No doubt about it, acidity is the key thing of this region that connects all these wines," said Nico Cantacuzène, winemaker for Thomas George Estates, adding that another commonality is a sense of community among Sonoma winemakers who share knowledge and offer sound advice. He compared it to Burgundy, where cellar masters represent generations of commitment and impart their wisdom accordingly. On the other hand, Cantacuzène, who worked as a lab technician at Benziger in the late 1990s, praised the kind of creativity presented by wineries like Imagery. "If you did that in Burgundy," he noted, "you would be murdered!"

Following the Burgundian model, all of Thomas George's wines are small-lot, single-vineyard or single-block estate wines made to reflect the idiosyncrasies of their terroir, including the **Thomas George Estates 2017 Cresta Ridge Vineyard Pinot Noir**, a single-vineyard wine from the Green Valley sub-AVA in the Russian River Valley. Positioned just 10 miles from the Pacific Ocean, it is the most coastal of the producer's vineyards and therefore the one most influenced by fog. The soils are sand and clay, which lends the property—formerly an apple orchard—to dry farming, Cantacuzène noted.

"Single vineyards express Pinot Noir the best," he added. "Blends might be great, but they couldn't represent the singularity of Green Valley." The wine showed great balance between acidity and fruit flavors along with earthy tones and hints of sage. It could have just been the power of suggestion, but some of us got notes of Red Delicious and candied apple. SJ



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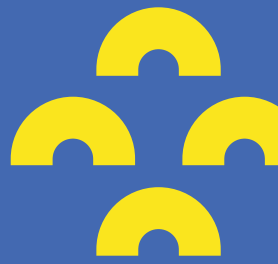
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One CABERNET at a Time

VIÑA CARMEN IS RAISING THE PROFILE OF THE ALTO JAHUEL SUBREGION IN MAIPO VALLEY, CHILE

by Wanda Mann

“A sense of place” isn’t just a marketing term for Viña Carmen; it captures the essence of the producer’s winemaking approach. Part of the Santa Rita Estates portfolio, Carmen was founded in 1850 as Chile’s first winery and makes wines in the country’s most renowned valleys: Maipo, Apalta, Casablanca, Colchagua, and Leyda. Nestled within Maipo is the Alto Jahuel subregion, “the heart of Carmen brands,” says winegrowing director Jaime de la Barra, where “we are devoted to Cabernet Sauvignon and its different styles” as well as to “pushing the boundaries of this grape variety.”

The Alto Jahuel subregion, described as “the heart of Carmen brands” by winegrowing director Jaime de la Barra, is located in the Maipo Valley.





Viña Carmen winegrowing director Jaime de la Barra.

The world's most widely planted red wine grape, Cabernet Sauvignon may be ubiquitous, but Carmen is committed to showing that it needn't be homogenous. A treasure trove of diverse terroirs, Carmen's Alto Jahuel vineyard is located at the foot of the Andes Mountains on the

south bank of the Maipo River. Spanning 2,400 hectares, it boasts diverse exposures and altitudes along with 16 different soil types. In 2014, Carmen replanted 423 hectares to eight Cabernet Sauvignon clones and rootstocks to support long-term viability and premium quality.

Technical director Andrés Ilabaca explains that Alto Jahuel's varied terroir directly impacts the flavor profile of its Cabernet Sauvignon: "When you take grapes from the alluvial part of the Maipo, you can get a richer, very soft, sweet tannin," he says; meanwhile, fruit from the hillside is "fresh, it's floral, it's mineral; it is a quite intense and very refreshing style of wine. [Though] different, both are very, very good quality."

But what distinguishes Alto Jahuel Cabernet Sauvignon from that of the larger Maipo region?

For Ilabaca, the aforementioned sweet tannins make the wines more approachable at a younger age without sacrificing longevity. De la Barra adds that the tannins' character can be directly attributed to clay soils that are not as prevalent in other parts of Maipo: For instance, "in Puente Alto [another celebrated Chilean region for Cabernet], you have a lot more lime and sandy soils. Here, you have clay, and this is normally associated with the quality of the tannins. A lot of clay will give you aggressive wines, [but] in not-so-high concentrations [it] gives you much more texture."

To further capture the nuances of Alto



Founded in 1850, Carmen also produces wines from the Casablanca Valley.



Jahuel Cabernet Sauvignon, Carmen microvinifies 44 smaller plots to create the three leading wines in its portfolio, two of which are blends; in addition to Cabernet Sauvignon, Carmen's vineyard in Alto Jahuel is planted to Cabernet Franc, Petite Sirah, Chardonnay, and Pinot Noir. What's more, Carménère was found here in 1994, a discovery that placed Chilean wine in the spotlight.

Carmen Gold, the icon wine of Viña Carmen, comes from four different blocks in Alto Jahuel. The 2020 vintage, a blend of 92% Cabernet Sauvignon, 6% Cabernet Franc, and 2% Petit Verdot, aged in French oak barrels for 24 months. "Carmen Gold is the gold of Alto Maipo. A world-class Cabernet Sauvignon, it is elegant and delicate, with a unique depth," notes de la Barra.

Carmen Delanz Alto Jahuel is a Bordeaux-style blend of 72% Cabernet Sauvignon, 23% Cabernet Franc, 3% Petit Verdot, and 2% Petite Sirah. Ilabaca describes it as "the true expression of our terroir in Alto Jahuel—floral and refreshing, with very juicy tannins." Though it aged in French oak barrels for 18 months, he adds that the oak influence is "very limited."

Finally, **Carmen Gran Reserva**—a 100% Cabernet Sauvignon aged in both French oak barrels for 14 months and in stainless steel tanks—"is a good reflection of what Carmen is: a single-vineyard Cabernet Sauvignon [that's] rich and

generous," says de la Barra. "Fruit-driven yet complex, it's textbook Cabernet Sauvignon."

Looking toward the future, Carmen has embraced practices that will preserve its land and winemaking integrity. "We spend 90% of our time on the vineyards. To make it as smooth and simple as possible in the cellar, we try to pursue all the details in the vineyards," says de la Barra. "We are, of course, moving on

the regenerative agriculture. We started with baby steps in 2015, and today, we [have] fully embarked on these practices." They aim to combat climate change and extreme weather events with cover crops and a "living soil" initiative to monitor active bacteria and fungi, contributing to vineyard health.

Alto Jahuel may not be a household name for wine lovers—yet. But Carmen is changing that, one Cabernet at a time. *sj*



Viña Carmen technical director Andrés Ilabaca.



Take Your Time With That Wine

MAKING AN ARGUMENT FOR EXPERIMENTAL AGING

TIME IS WINEMAKING'S magic ingredient. Trial and error through the ages has resulted in distinct and magnificent aging regimens intended to accentuate a given wine's best attributes, be they complexity, suavity, or freshness. But sometimes it can be fun to buck conventional wisdom and experiment by cellaring expressions that aren't typical candidates for aging.

Let's say the life of a wine begins once it's been legally declared wine (or once it's gone as far down the paths of primary and malolactic fermentation as it's meant to). Some wines are then aged in a combination of barrels, tanks, and/or bottles for years prior to release, and many are then cellared for even longer. Gran Reserva Riojas famously must age for a minimum of five years in total, with a minimum of two years in barrel and two in bottle. Sherries take it further; held as they are in a solera/crianza system that is continuously adding to and subtracting from the stock.

At the other extreme are wines such as Beaujolais Nouveau, which is bottled as soon as fermentation is complete and

rushed to market to be consumed immediately. Heck, try asking interns to stop sipping on semi-fermented Chardonnay, which in all its yeasty, fizzy sweetness is undeniably appealing, and your requests will undoubtedly go ignored.

Countless wines fall between these extremes, and many grape varieties can be given a range of treatments and result in quality wine. But what of bottlings not typically considered ageworthy? Here is my secret sauce for spicing up your drinking life in, as luck would have it, a budget-friendly way: Play around with aging "atypical" wines, meaning less complex, lower-priced wines not generally deemed candidates for aging. With roughly five to 15 years, you may get surprisingly gratifying results. I've had more success with whites and rosés than reds, but don't let that deter you; it comes down to personal preference.

Because not all wines improve with age, there's a risk you'll sacrifice fresh, bright, fruity aromas and flavors in the pursuit of rounded, nuanced notes. Aging a Vinho

Verde, for example, might not result in much other than a muted, bland drink past its prime. But other wines can punch way above their weight class when given some age. Dry Riesling may surprise you, and I personally love a good ten-plus years on Chenin Blanc. I recently enjoyed an Idlewild 2015 The Bee Flora and Fauna White, a blend of Italian varieties produced in Northern California. This wine was aromatic, zippy, and delicious in its youth, but I'm so glad I cellared some bottles, because over time new notes evolved: Candied apricot, toasted almond, and lemon verbena showed themselves, and the wine became seamless while developing a gorgeous golden color. It wasn't better, necessarily, just delicious in a different way.

I marvel at how time can change a wine in ways that cannot be mimicked by other winemaking practices. Respecting the process and anticipating the reward is part of the pleasure derived from aging wine. Don't be afraid to take a chance here and there on something that everyone else says should be drunk young. **SJ**



A Historic and Unspoiled Wine Region

TASTING THE WINES OF ABRUZZO

COASTAL BREEZES ALONG the Adriatic Sea cool the high-altitude vineyards of Abruzzo, which stretches across the Apennine Mountains in central Italy just 60 miles from Rome. Boasting over 80,000 acres of vineyards, it is one of the most productive grape-growing regions in the country. Renowned for its iconic Montepulciano d'Abruzzo, it sports other outstanding varieties as well, from the crimson-pink Cerasuolo d'Abruzzo to the fresh and much-respected white-wine grapes Trebbiano d'Abruzzo and Pecorino. (It's worth noting that the Abruzzo region has also produced many well-known Italian Americans, including Dean Martin, Rocky Marciano, Mario Lanza, Bradley Cooper, and Ariana Grande.)

According to Abruzzo wine producer Francesco Paolo Valentini, "In the last two decades, the winegrowing sector in Abruzzo has experienced tremendous growth, and quality has increased considerably. Young producers have a different mindset and [are] not interested in solely commercial concerns but focus instead on product typicity and originality."

We received 24 wines from the region via the Consorzio Tutela Vini d'Abruzzo, and while we were impressed with all of them, we chose our favorite two from each of the four varieties sent. **SJ**

The Abruzzo region stretches across the Apennine Mountains in central Italy.



Tenuta I Fauri 2021 Pecorino, Abruzzo Pecorino DOC, Italy

(\$21) Flavors of marzipan and hazelnut are deep and rich. Honeyed pecan coats the mouth before a long-lasting finish of lemon and white flowers. **91**

WINEBERRY AMERICA



Talamonti 2022 Trabocchetto Pecorino Abruzzo DOC Superiore, Italy

(\$27) It's love at first sniff thanks to exceptional aromas of kiwi, lemongrass, and prickly pear. As jasmine perfumes the glass, the wine reveals a delicate

viscosity and a smattering of peach, pineapple, and marzipan. **94**

PALM BAY INTERNATIONAL



Nic Tartaglia 2022 Cerasuolo d'Abruzzo DOC, Italy

(\$23) Scents of salted roses lead to flavors of cherry and red tea. Basil and thyme hit midpalate, while salty cranberry zings on the finish. The texture is light as air. **93**

TERRA FIRMA WINE COMPANY



Jasci & Marchesani 2022 Cerasuolo d'Abruzzo DOC, Italy

(\$25) This rose-colored sipper is youthful and fresh, with bright strawberry as its lovely perfume. On the spectacular entry, notes of cranberry and orange are

highlighted by keen acidity; summer watermelon appears on the dry, lengthy finish. **93**

VOTTO WINES



Chiusa Grande 2022 Donna Sophia Trebbiano d'Abruzzo DOC, Italy

(\$40) Honeysuckle, Asian pear, and a dollop of lime chiffon grace the palate of this wine, which is elegant and silky with peanut brittle and a caress of chamomile.

Strongly sapid on the finish, it exhibits an innate freshness. **94**

THE HARVEST IMPORTING

Pasetti 2022 Tenutarossa Trebbiano d'Abruzzo DOP Superiore, Italy

(\$40) Super-bright and crisp, with a salty character and zingy acidity, this white glistens with just-squeezed lime seasoned by chervil and brushy herbs. **93**

AMANZIO TAMATI-TOSCO WINES



Cascina del Colle 2019 Mammot Montepulciano d'Abruzzo, Italy

(\$35) Persistent aromas of coffee and blackberry are mirrored on the palate of this velvety red, which glides across the mouth with dark chocolate-covered

cherry as balsamic and black olive align with chalkiness and bright acidity. Aged 18 months in stainless steel. **95**

CAPITAL WINES



Fattoria La Valentina 2019 Riserva Bellovedere, Montepulciano d'Abruzzo DOC, Italy

(\$60) Bellovedere is produced only in years with optimal weather conditions. Fermented in conical Slavonian oak for 30 days

and aged for 18 months partly in those vessels, partly in other oak, and partly in concrete, this wine is bottled in the appropriate phase of the moon. Juicy plum and black olive wash over the palate with balsamic and black currant; the effect is plush yet elegant, with fine acidity weaving through coffee and cedar. **97**

DALLA TERRA WINERY DIRECT

{ tastings }



AN
ITALIAN
INTERLUDE
IN THE
GRAND CANYON STATE



THE **CONSORZIO TUTELA DEL GAVI**
PAYS A VISIT TO PHOENIX TO TASTE
WITH ARIZONA SOMMELIERS



Author and SOMM Journal VP of education Lars Leicht with Consorzio Tutela del Gavi global ambassador Sara Repetto, social media manager Ilenia Nicorelli, and president Maurizio Mantobbio.

STORY BY LARS LEICHT
PHOTOS BY GRACE STUFKOSKY

Rraving the August heat, a delegation from the Consorzio Tutela del Gavi traveled to Arizona to present what is arguably one of Piedmont, Italy's most undervalued wines in the U.S. market.

Sommers from Phoenix, Tucson, Scottsdale, and points between converged to meet the consortium president, Maurizio Montobbio, at the JW Marriott Desert Ridge Resort & Spa in Phoenix. They were eager to learn more about Gavi's red and white soils, its combination maritime and alpine microclimate, and the intricacies of the Cortese grape from which its wine is exclusively made.

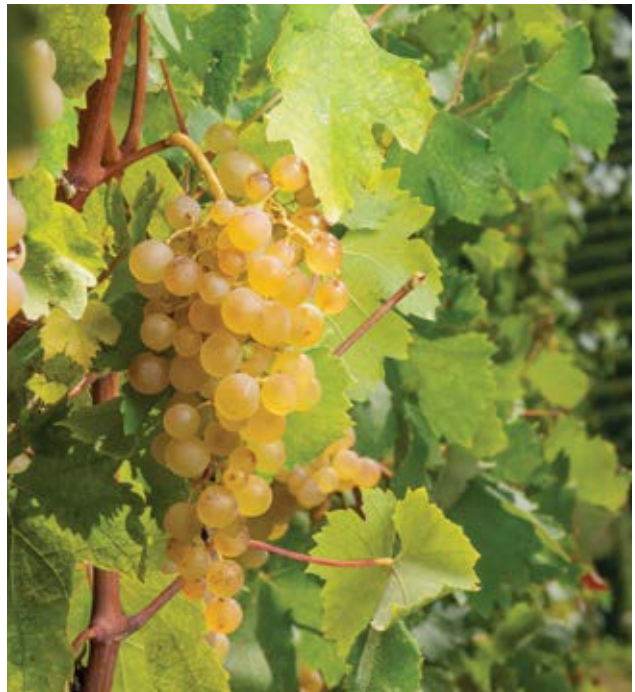


PHOTO COURTESY OF THE CONSORZIO TUTELA DEL GAVI

Cortese on the vine in Gavi.

Together we tasted 12 beautiful representations of Gavi, most of whose producers farm sustainably, many organically, and some biodynamically. Generally speaking, the wines showed fruit and white flowers on the nose and citrus and almond on the palate, plus some minerality with age. Gavies from the *terre rosse* (red clay) and gravel alluvial soils in the warmer north tend to be fuller-bodied, while those grown in white clayey–calcareous marl soils of marine origin in the south of the denomination are usually more elegant and delicate, with greater aromatics.

Each wine had its own story, its own unique profile, and its fans among the attendees, but the consensus could best be described as: “Gavi, where have you been all our lives?” Comments from the trade were enthusiastic, reflecting admiration for the wine’s gentle approach; bright acidity; and long, clean finish. Several vowed to add a Gavi or two to their wine list, especially considering its affinity with food: Chef Angelo Sosa of resort restaurant Tía Carmen had prepared a buffet of Southwestern-inspired cuisine, and the pairing of wines and dishes from two seemingly disparate worlds had guests amazed—and coming back for more. (Fresh oysters and king crab legs were an appreciated match as well.)

Here are the wines we tasted and the stories behind them.



Castello di Tassarolo Orsola Gavi:

Massimiliana Spinola left the countryside to pursue a career in contemporary art under the bright lights of New York and London. In 2005, her father’s failing health brought her back to her family’s vineyards, which she also found in poor condition, and she immediately converted the entire 45-acre property to organic viticulture. The grapes for her Orsola Gavi are grown on marl and silty clay at 985 feet above sea level.



La Toledana Vigne Rade Gavi:

A castle built in the early 1500s today serves as the winery on the Martini family’s 5-acre estate, where Cortese grapes have been grown in calcareous marl soils at 656 feet above sea level for over 180 years. Strict selection in the vineyards and minimal intervention in the winery are the producer’s hallmarks, yielding a wine with fresh floral character yet great structure and ageability.



La Zerba Il Galletto Gavi:

This is also a family-run estate in the village of Tassarolo, where 12 acres of vineyard on distinctly red clay surround the winery at 1,476 feet above sea level. The property has been under the ownership of the Lorenzi family since 1973 and has been producing wine since 1989.



Michele Chiarlo Le Marne Gavi:

Grapes are selected from vineyards of clay marl soil in the high hills near the town of Gavi and whole cluster-pressed before the wine is aged on the lees for greater complexity. Chiarlo is known for his focus on single-site expressions of Piedmont’s indigenous varieties.



Araldica Castelfero La Luciana Gavi:

Founded in 1954, Araldica is a cooperative of 140 members focused on the classic wines of southern Piedmont. Since 2002, it has controlled the 64-acre La Battistina estate in the province of Alessandria, where exclusively Cortese vines are grown on calcareous clay soils.



Tenuta San Lorenzo Gavi:

The San Lorenzo estate has ancient roots; a document dating from the 17th century, housed in the Novi Ligure communal library, attests to its existence in the 1600s. It was also the location of a decisive battle on August 16, 1899, that resulted in the final removal of French troops from Italian soil.



◀ Guests gathered at *Tía Carmen* in the *JW Marriott Desert Ridge Resort & Spa* in Phoenix, AZ, to taste through a range of Gavi wines.



▲ *Tía Carmen* chef Angelo Sosa prepared a buffet of Southwestern-inspired dishes and seafood for the event.



**Enrico Serafino
Grifo del
Quartaro Gavi:**

Founded in 1878 by Enrico Serafino, this producer is still family owned. The grapes for this wine are sourced from a 15-acre vineyard in Monterotondo di Gavi, with marly, white chalky, and clay-rich soils on sloping hills. The name Grifo del Quartaro refers to an antique coin used by the Genovese lords who once owned vineyards in the Gavi area.



**Stefano Massone
Masera Gavi:**

This wine is sourced from six municipalities in the Gavi DOCG zone on hills located between 820 and 985 feet above sea level. The Cortese vines were planted in 1978 on poor calcareous clay soils with an eye toward keeping yields low for greater concentration. The wine is aged for two or three months on the lees.



**La Raia Vigna
Madonnina Gavi
Riserva:**

In 2003, the Rossi Cairo family purchased the 445-acre Demeter-certified Biodynamic farm near Novi Ligure from which this wine comes—specifically a single vineyard situated on a southeast-facing hillside on limestone clay soil, where some of the estate’s oldest vines dwell.



**Villa Sparina
Monterotondo
Gavi:**

This cru wine was obtained from a small heritage vineyard of Cortese planted in 1945 in the township of Gavi; facing south and southwest, it sits at 1,020–1,150 feet above sea level on clay and marl soils. The producer is known for its uniquely shaped bottles, modeled after an ancient vase found in its cellars.



**Bruno Brogla
Gavi:**

Representing the best production of Brogla, this wine is made from south-facing vines planted in 1953 and 1955 on calcareous marl soils at 980–1,150 feet above sea level on the producer’s La Meirana estate in the township of Gavi. Brogla is today in its third generation of family ownership.



**La Mesma Vigna
della Rovere
Verde Gavi
Riserva:**

This family business was founded by three sisters in 2001. They have a total of 62 acres, including 37 in Monterotondo and 25 in Tassarolo, where the south-facing Vigna della Rovere Verde—named for a monumental evergreen oak tree nearby—sits on red clay soils at 985 feet above sea level. The grapes for this wine are hand harvested from 50-year-old vines. §J



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The Bottle of Dorian Gray

ASSESSING HOW A RANGE OF ARGENTINE MALBECS SHOW THEIR AGE

WHEN I FIRST started representing South American wines in the late 1980s while working as a sales representative for an importer, producers insisted that every vintage was a great one. Of course, closer study—and greater focus on quality production with subsequent vintages—proved otherwise. That said, I would argue that these wines show fewer variations from vintage to vintage than do their counterparts in the Old World.

Another difference between New and Old World wines, in my opinion, is how they age. Mature Bordeaux, Burgundy, Barolo, and Brunello, for example, tend to lose color and primary fruit flavors, while tertiary aromas of tobacco, cedar, licorice, and even tar steal the show. I've never found these qualities to the same extent in New World wines; they seem to hold on to their fruit character longer, making it harder to guess their age. Much like the titular character in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, it's as if New World wines have made a pact for their hidden portrait to age and fade rather than aging themselves.

These arguments were recently brought to light when I tasted two single-vineyard Malbecs from Argentina's Alta Vista winery, each of which was represented by expressions aged ten, eight, and four years. Though a ten-year-old

premium wine isn't necessarily "old," it would be considered to be approaching its prime in the aforementioned "Big B" appellations. Here are my observations.

The first wine hailed from the Temis Vineyard in Uco Valley, planted in 1938 to ungrafted vines on sandy soils with some silt, boulders, and a layer of limestone at 3,412 feet in elevation. The **2019** was rich, velvety, and lush with dark fruit, including red plum and blackberry; I, Baby Boomer that I am, detected a hint of black Chuckles candy as well as blueberry tart, with hints of graphite and tar on the finish. The **2015** was leaner and showed more red fruit—cherry, raspberry, and a touch of ripe pluot—plus hints of tree bark, spikier tannins, and notes of cedar on the finish. And the **2013** showed forest floor on the nose in addition to raspberry jam, quince, and red currant; it was even leaner than the 2015 but still full and fruit-driven, with underlying flavors of cinnamon and clove.

Next, I tasted three expressions from the Serenade Vineyard, situated at 3,450 feet in Luján de Cuyo and planted in 1935 to ungrafted vines on clay loam soils over a layer of boulders 12 feet below the surface. The **2019** showed bright red

fruit—raspberry, ripe strawberry, and Amarena cherries in syrup—as well as lean tannins. Grippy and slightly smoky, the **2015** had more tannic backbone and higher acidity, with notes of ripe plum, blackberry, black cherry, graphite, and an unusual waft of petrol. And finally, the **2013** exhibited a musky note; more animale; fleshy, tart, distinct notes reminiscent of RC Cola; spiced, stewed fruit; mature tobacco leaf; dried cherries; and gentian root.

The 2019s, representing the most recent releases currently for sale on the U.S. market, had beautiful structure, but I would cellar them a little longer. The ten-year-old versions showed some tertiary characters but still had tons of fruit and body. I would love to see how they continue to develop. If offered just one to drink today, I would opt for either of the 2015s, which I found to be more balanced overall.

None of these wines show their age the way comparable Old World crus would, but they do maintain elegant structure. Dorian Gray may have sold his soul to stay forever young, but Temis and Serenade show that extended youth itself is the soul of mature Argentine Malbec. **SJ**



A view of Argentine producer Alta Vista's vines.

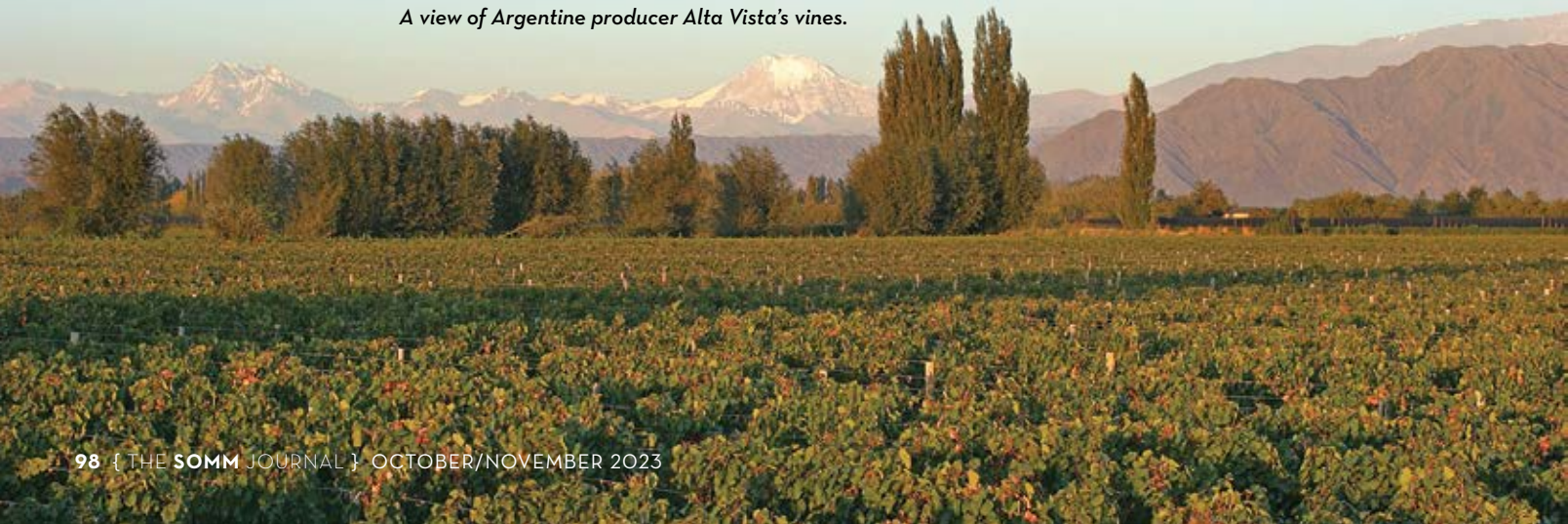


PHOTO COURTESY OF ALTA VISTA

Pietro 17's wines are the new kids on the block in Italy's Le Marche region.



Marche to a Different Beat

INTRODUCING “NEW KIDS ON THE BLOCK” **PIETRO 17**

by Meridith May



Laura Giuliani and Alexander Rocca are the founders of Pietro 17 in Le Marche.

FOR A BREATHTAKING coastal area along the Adriatic on Italy's eastern side, Le Marche doesn't receive as much attention as some of the country's more recognizable wine regions. Bordered by Tuscany, Umbria, and Abruzzo, it has nevertheless begun to garner praise for its white Trebbiano and Verdicchio wines and Montepulciano-based reds, and it has the potential to gain further momentum in terms of both quality and global distribution.

Le Marche is where Cesare Mondavi was born, and perhaps the U.S. owes reverence to the area as the homeland of Robert Mondavi and hence of California's first wine dynasty. A few years ago, it also became a retirement dream for the Chicago-born Alexander Rocca and Italian native Laura Giuliani, who took over a 2-hectare vineyard in the small village of Staffolo that was planted in 1970. “We changed everything,” explains Rocca. “It was an entire . . . restructuring process for these 50-year-old vines on clay

soil, changing out poles, wires, and planting an additional 4-plus acres in 2021. We completed the work just in time for 2021 budbreak.”

Rocca and Giuliani, who met in the summer of 2003 at a Verdicchio festival, consider themselves the “new kids on the block” of the region, where they're happy with their inaugural releases from 2021 as well as those from the subsequent vintage. I tasted two of their wines and was impressed enough to devote this page to them. *SM*



Pietro 17 2022 Marche Bianco IGT, Italy

(\$45) This orange wine composed of Trebbiano and Malvasia from 50-year-old vines tastes of dried tangerine peel, green tea, and chamomile with a wash of peach and peach skin. Minerality is key, and the chalky mouthfeel sets an elegant tone. **94**



Pietro 17 2021 Verdicchio Riserva, Castelli di Jesi Classico DOCG, Marche, Italy

(\$50) In its first vintage, this wine aged in a mix of wood, cement, and ceramic before spending a year in bottle. Aromas of white flowers, toffee brittle, and lime chiffon create an olfactory paradise. On the searingly crisp palate, fresh apple, lemon cake, honeysuckle, and a pinch of salted pineapple meet a refined mouthfeel. Vanilla-powdered white-flower petals coat the tongue before a finish of hawthorn creates a desire for the next sip. **95**



Pietro 17 is named for Rocca and Giuliani's home address at Contrada San Pietro Numero 17 in Staffolo in the heart of the Castelli di Jesi zone, which sits at over 1,200 feet in elevation.

{ winery spotlight }

*Harvest approaches in
Wente's Wetmore Vineyard
in the Livermore Valley.*

seeds of PROGRESS

**WENTE VINEYARDS AIMS
TO FURTHER ITS STATUS
AS AN ENVIRONMENTAL
LEADER THROUGH ITS RECENT
SUSTAINABILITY INITIATIVES**

by Kate Newton

When Wente Vineyards director of vineyard operations Niki Wente, who represents the fifth generation of her family's business, formed an internal committee focused on sustainability several years ago, it seemed like a natural extension of what the winery had been doing for much of its 140-year history.

Decades after her great-great-granduncle Herman Wente presciently noted that "we don't hesitate to adopt a practice which has been carefully thought out, even if it may take a generation to accomplish the desired results," Wente Vineyards launched its Farming for the Future program in 1990. Focused on implementing water and energy conservation, growing cover crops, composting, and other environmentally sound practices in their 3,000 acres of estate vineyards in the Livermore Valley and Arroyo Seco regions long before "sustainability" was a mainstay in the lexicon of producers (let alone consumers), it and other initiatives gave fourth-generation winegrowers Eric and Phil Wente the expertise necessary to help write the Wine Institute's Code of Sustainable Winegrowing Practices, the foundation for the Certified California Sustainable Winegrowing (CCSW) program administered by the California Sustainable Winegrowing Alliance (CSWA).

Wente became one of 18 pilot wineries to achieve the certification in 2010 and has retained it every year since, performing an annual audit process that requires continuous improvement in the vineyards and winery as well as in the treatment of employees: the sort of challenge tailor-made for a committee dedicated to upping the ante, especially in the wake of the company's 2022 California Green Medal Leader Award from the Wine Institute. "We're trying to figure out what's next for us. We don't want to just say, 'Oh, we did it, we achieved it and that's all' . . . so we have a group of people from every business



Wente Vineyards director of vineyard operations Niki Wente spearheaded the formation of the winery's sustainability committee, which aims to not only further environmentally focused initiatives but educate employees about its goals.



Wente's estate properties, including its Riva Ranch Vineyard, are certified by the Certified California Sustainable Winegrowing program.

unit”—from procurement and sales to marketing and human resources—“that comes together to talk about how we can continue to structure ourselves for the future and create meaningful goals that matter to us as people, that matter to our business, and that matter to our community at large and what we want to strive for next,” says Niki. “Right now we’re really focused on educating our internal workforce and supporting our community . . . but I think next year we’re going to be focused on how we can create long-term vision and long-term goals we can be really proud of, because I think that’s what’s meaningful to the industry as a whole.”

Among the people spearheading the committee is Andy Lynch, who first joined Wente in 2006 as a lab assistant and became a winemaker and the head of quality, among other roles, before he was appointed earlier this year as the winery’s first director of safety, quality, and sustainability. “I think it was a really important move for us as a business, and I’m really glad we have Andy, someone who’s really passionate about [these subjects], who could step up and take on this role,” Niki

And while the trio of elements central to his responsibilities may seem disparate from an outside perspective, Lynch sees the formation of the position as Wente’s way of, in his words, “very visibly and very tangibly saying what is important to the business and important to [its] culture” both day-to-day and long-term. “Safety, quality, and sustainability are culturally synergistic and rely on similar business systems to be successful. All three of these fields are truly about putting people first; they provide a framework for continuous improvement that helps push us all to be better,” he says. “Safety enables quality and they both enable sustainability, so they’re linked. I think that’s one of the beautiful things about these fields—each of [them] moves the culture in a positive direction and . . . in a holistic, healthy, empowering fashion while improving business results.”

Lynch’s oversight extends “from soil to customer,” as he puts it, a scope that’s encapsulated by one of his chief responsibilities: overseeing the aforementioned annual certification process for the CSWA. Working closely with Niki—whose expertise enables her to “handle the viticultural side pretty much by herself,” he



last year with Sustridge Sustainability Consulting, but the winery’s leadership undoubtedly found it worth the effort, as it yielded highly encouraging results in terms of the tangible effects of its sustainable practices. Wente registered under 25% of the average winery’s annual CO₂ emissions: 10,628 liters versus 45,782. But for Niki, the confirmation of her and her colleagues’ progress over the years didn’t provide an excuse to rest on their laurels; instead, it gave them more context on which areas of the business they needed to target in order to drive down those numbers even further. “When we did [the] audit, [we found that] the vineyard side of our operations is the number-two impact on our CO₂ output, [which] shows a lot on how we can improve,” she says. “It [involves things like] tractor usage: How can we reduce tractors in the field and minimize passes; can we combine and do two things at once so it’s less CO₂ emissions and less diesel usage? And that’s been something that our team has been really excited about working on, because it gets their creative juices flowing.”

That willingness to alter long-held practices has paved the way for another project in the vineyards in partnership with the Alameda County Resource Conservation District (RCD): a carbon-farming plan through the California Department of Food and Agriculture’s Healthy Soils Initiative. As part of the trial, one block is undergoing discing with cover crops and compost so that it can be compared



Wente Vineyards’ new packaging denotes its status as a Certified California Sustainable Vineyard and Winery by the California Sustainable Winegrowing Alliance.

PHOTO COURTESY OF WENTE VINEYARDS

says. “People . . . respect him as a leader and respect his opinions and his insights, so when he comes in and asks us why we’re doing something in a certain way because he’s trying to learn and help us to improve, no one’s looking at him like, ‘He’s encroaching on my business.’ They’re thinking, ‘Andy just has institutional knowledge . . . and also has this eye on sustainability, so he really can help us to be better at what we’re doing.’”

says—and other leaders, he gathers the documentation needed and goes beyond the certification’s requirements “to make sure that we’re really hitting the mark we say we’re hitting.” All told, he estimates it requires roughly 500 hours between them, but “in the end, it’s satisfying to know that we do what we say we do and can hold our heads up very high.”

Even more arduous was the third-party greenhouse gas audit Wente completed



PHOTO: STEPHANIE RUSSO

Wente Vineyards' sustainability committee and its fifth-generation winegrowers—Jordan, Niki, Karl, Christine, and Aly—played an instrumental role in implementing the winery's transition to lightweight glass bottles to reduce its carbon emissions.

to another block with just compost. "It's been a really interesting experiment so far. We've generally run a no-till operation . . . and that's [been] our philosophy on how to continue to sequester as much carbon as possible by not releasing it. But we do see some benefits from doing the discing and then seeding, because then you're reducing the amount of noxious weeds; you're also seeding with a carbon-sequestering seed. . . . So far, it's looking pretty good—the vines look really healthy and happy. I mean, we did get about 20 extra inches of rain, so that could have helped!" Niki says with a laugh. "But we intend to continue to test the soils and see the results with the RCD and make a plan on how we want to proceed [in] future years with them." Such partnerships with local agencies are valuable, she explains, "because [these organizations] definitely have a lot of different ideas with a sustainable lens—and they also have a lot of funding too, so why not rely on our neighbors to help us with different positive projects that can be funded through state programs?"

Meanwhile, to address Wente's most significant driver of emissions—procurement, packaging, and shipping—Niki, Lynch, and other members of the sustainability committee have long pushed for

a transition to lightweight glass bottles. Now, they're finally rolling out with the current vintage releases courtesy of a new energy-efficient bottling line installed last year, which Lynch says "is leaps and bounds in terms of quality over the previous bottling lines, so it really kind of re-establishes our baseline and moves the needle so far that it's incredible." The new equipment has not only enabled the use of lightweight glass but allows Wente to lower freight costs by bypassing a stage of the transportation process. Because it can now directly receive bulk deliveries of both the glass and the cardboard cases they're shipped in, these materials no longer have to be transported to and assembled at a separate facility before arriving at the winery. This should result in "tremendous greenhouse-gas savings," Lynch notes, adding that Wente will likely perform another audit in a year to gauge just how much progress they've made with that "transformational" change.

While there have been concerns among producers that a widespread transition to lighter glass might result in dissatisfied consumers, many of whom have long associated bottle heft with quality, Wente's leadership has been relieved to find that's not the case, as the change hasn't negatively impacted sales. "The consumer perception, that's what enables [this transition] in the end—the consumer doesn't mind at all. So, they're setting the standard for sustainability, and we're just listening to them," says Lynch. Adds Niki with a laugh, "Honestly, now I find myself going through and pulling bottles off the shelf at the grocery store and sort of silently judging when I'm feeling that it's heavy, like, 'Wow, they really need to lighten this glass!' Which is funny, because I used to be like, 'Oh, heavy glass, this is a beautiful bottle of wine.' . . . I'm glad that the click happened for me, because once you see the numbers, it's pretty staggering how much that packaging really does impact your overall greenhouse gas emissions."

Those who aren't aware of the impact will fittingly be the target of several Wente marketing campaigns planned for next year that Niki notes will be "completely driven on trying to educate the consumer on what light glass means, because I think there is still confusion. But I do think [people are] starting to understand that, 'Oh, the light glass is actually better for the environment—makes sense

when you think about it, but before, I was just thinking about how nice those heavy bottles felt.'" And as the lighter bottles head to market, people might also take note of another change to the packaging: Wente's Certified California Sustainable Vineyard and Certified California Sustainable Winery certifications courtesy of the CSWA will be represented on all front labels with their respective logos.

As Lynch settles into his new role and turns an eye toward pursuing additional certifications for Wente in the future—zero waste, carbon neutral, and regenerative farming are among his potential targets, in addition to several focused specifically on safety—he's constantly reassured by the fact that, thanks to the support of Niki and the other members of the sustainability committee, he doesn't have to go it alone. "That group is so good because not only are we like-minded, we challenge each other and are dreamers. And I think we're able to say



PHOTO COURTESY OF WENTE VINEYARDS

Andy Lynch, who first joined Wente in 2006 as a lab assistant, was appointed earlier this year as its first director of safety, quality, and sustainability.

openly and honestly to each other, 'Whoa, maybe not now,' or, alternatively, 'What's step one? Let's learn more and take the first step in that direction. Can we pilot something like that, can we learn enough that tells us if that's a feasible direction for our business in the near future or far future?'" he says. "We can plant seeds and see how interest fosters over time, and it doesn't have to be that the onus of change and of generating the good ideas and the right things to do is on one person—it's on us as a team." ❏

In Praise of the Middle Child

A PRIMER FOR CAB FRANC DAY

by Wes Hagen

“Cabernet Franc . . . might be described as the feminine side of Cabernet Sauvignon. . . . Because Cabernet Sauvignon has so much more of everything—body, tannin, alcohol, colour—it is often supposed to be necessarily superior, but I have a very soft spot indeed, for its more charming and more aromatic relative, Cabernet Franc.” —Jancis Robinson

Wine geeks and history buffs already know the stories. In 1631, Cardinal Richelieu delivered the Cabernet Franc vine to an abbot named Breton at the Abbaye de Saint-Nicolas-de-Bourgueil in the Loire Valley. The grape thrived, traveled, and mutated, yielding both natural and human-created hybrid offspring—Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, and Carménère—and now, December 4 is designated Cabernet Franc Day (the date is an homage to the Cardinal’s last day on earth). To celebrate, on December 3, *The SOMM Journal* is co-sponsoring Cab Franc Day | Paso Robles 2023; the event, consisting of a seminar and grand tasting, is being held at the Cass Winery Event Center in Paso Robles, California. For more information and to purchase tickets, visit cabfrancday-pasorobles.com.

The timing couldn’t be better, as we are seeing a renewed interest in and passion for Cabernet Franc worldwide. Acreage is increasing, and regions in countries as varied as Bolgheri in Italy, Villány in Hungary, Luján de Cuyo in Argentina, and the Finger Lakes in New York are claiming Cabernet Franc as their key red grape. In that spirit, let’s take a closer look at it.

Villány, Hungary.



CABERNET FRANC *at a Glance*

- It was first developed in the Basque region of Spain, a hybridization of Morena and Hondarribi Beltza.
- In areas that are just a touch cooler than the greatest regions for Cabernet Sauvignon, Cabernet Franc is considered to make a wine superior to that of its offspring.
- Viticulturally, it thrives in gravel, limestone, sand, and clay.
- As late as 1961, it was twice as widely planted in France as Cabernet Sauvignon (14,000 hectares versus 7,000). Today, roughly 64,750 hectares of Cabernet Franc are planted worldwide, compared to 339,936 hectares of Cabernet Sauvignon.
- It thrives not only in the Loire Valley and Bordeaux but also in British Columbia, the East and West Coasts of the U.S., South America, and still other areas (see following page).
- Winegrowers in Bordeaux maintain that Cabernet Franc has less color intensity than Cabernet Sauvignon but that it adds aromatic intensity, with notes of raspberry, violets, and spices. Additional flavors and esters include red plum, strawberry, cassis, cherry, roasted pepper, chili pepper, iris, violet, and gravelly mineral.
- It has medium to medium-high levels of fruit, body, acid, tannin, and alcohol.
- It pairs well with anything grilled—burgers, chops, vegetables—as well as strong cheeses.



Tuscany, Italy.



Loire Valley, France.



Luján de Cuyo, Argentina.

REGION BY REGION

Loire Valley, France (Chinon): This is the spiritual home of varietal Cabernet Franc. Showing a marked elegance, with floral notes and a chalkiness expressive of the terroir, Chinon reds are still a bargain, especially given that they can age gracefully for a decade or more. In *The World Atlas of Wine*, Hugh Johnson writes, “A hundred years ago Chinon’s wine was rated the equal of Margaux. In charm, if not in force or structure, it can come surprisingly close today. . . . For its quality it is absurdly undervalued.”

Bordeaux, France (Pomerol): Merlot is the star on the Right Bank, but the Best Supporting Actor award goes to Cabernet Franc, which balances Merlot’s pluminess with floral notes, complex spice including pepper, and red-berry aromatics as well as tannin structure and firm acidity. According to Stéphanie Barousse, deputy CEO of Château de la Dauphine, “Merlot [tends to] ripen early [and] can be a problem in hotter years. I don’t want my alcohol levels to become unbalanced, so we’re going to use more Cabernet Franc in upcoming vintages.”

Tuscany, Italy (Bolgheri): SuperTuscans Ornellaia and Sassicaia elicit great passion in sommeliers and wine lovers worldwide, and Cabernet Franc is one of the international varieties (along with Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, and Syrah) that make these vaunted and modern wines possible. According to the website of the Bolgheri e Bolgheri Sassicaia Consorzio di Tutela, Bolgheri Cab Franc possesses “sweet, ripe dark fruit with balsamic notes of Mediterranean scrub” to make for a wine that’s “well rounded [and] vibrant with fresh acidity, dense tannic texture, [and] a lengthy finish—[plus] savory notes that evoke the nearby sea.” Echoing Barousse, Axel Heinz, former winemaker at Ornellaia, says that “Cab Franc has been key to the success of hot vintages like 2003 or 2009.”

Villány, Hungary: This southern region of Hungary is having great success with varietal Cabernet Franc, here called Villányi Franc. Per the Wines of Hungary website, “Villányi Franc is usually medium to deep ruby with red [fruit] and blackberry aromas. There may be slight jamminess and notes of dry fruit along with pronounced spice derived from oak aging. It is a full-bodied, complex, expressive wine with a long finish.”

Luján de Cuyo, Argentina: Cabernet Franc is still a minor player in this subappellation of Mendoza—where the hot, arid climate is mitigated by the average elevation of the vineyards at 1,000 meters—but it’s quickly building a reputation for varietal and blended Cab Franc wines that are refreshing, taut, and elegant. “Cabernet Franc taught us to forgive pyrazine qualities in reds, because they enhance the expressiveness of the wines [in Argentina],” says Daniel Pi, chief winemaker at Bemberg Estate.

Finger Lakes, New York: The East Coast of the United States has historically struggled (since the days of Thomas Jefferson!) to produce world-class red wine. But today it can be argued that Cabernet Franc has rushed to the rescue and is now producing wines worth seeking out from Virginia all the way to the Finger Lakes region. They include refreshing rosés; Beaujolais-like, stainless steel-fermented reds; and fuller-bodied but elegant cool-climate reds. Explains Treleaven winemaker Matt Denci, “It’s not a big monster grape. [While] Cabernet Sauvignon is high acid and high tannin and Merlot is plush and fruity, Cab Franc is the middle child; it does a little bit of everything.”

To Be Perfectly Franc



PASO ROBLES TO HOST A WEEKEND OF EVENTS FOCUSED ON THE GRAPE IN DECEMBER by Cindy Lowe Rynning

IN PASO ROBLES, where over 65% of red wines produced comprise Bordeaux varieties, Cabernet Franc thrives. The region's varying microclimates and terroir play a significant role in the success of the grape, as it flourishes in a variety of conditions.

A veritable (or should we say *varietal*) celebration of Cabernet Franc will be held the first weekend of December in Paso Robles, and the events already planned promise to be a testament to the region's burgeoning status on the global wine stage.

The commemoration will commence with an exclusive media-only dinner on **Saturday, December 2**, at DAOU Family Estates, where a tasting of wines from six sponsoring producers will be followed by a paired dinner curated by Neeta Mittal, founder, co-owner, and CEO of LXV Wine, and DAOU executive chef Spencer Johnston.

Sponsored in part by *The SOMM Journal*, educational tastings and seminars will be held at the Cass Winery Event Center on **Sunday, December 3**, from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. Mittal explains, "We're keeping the vision of Bordeaux in Paso Robles and elevating the experiences to be more than just a tasting event. We're asking all participating wineries, over 20, to bring a creative, educational element to the presentations. We'll show and discuss the language [of Cabernet Franc] so that all can understand it, not just drink it. Our passion for [the grape] is unrivaled, and Paso Robles is becoming a discovery for many."

Led by wine educator Wes Hagen, the tastings will focus on Cabernet Francs from six wine regions: Chinon and Pomerol in France, Bolgheri in Italy, Villány

PHOTO COURTESY OF LXV WINES



Neeta and Kunal Mittal are the organizers of Cab Franc Day | Paso Robles.

in Hungary, Luján de Cuyo in Argentina, and the Finger Lakes in New York. Meanwhile, a panel of leading producers, winemakers, owners, and industry professionals will be moderated by Matt Kettmann, senior editor at *The Santa Barbara Independent*; delving deep into Paso Robles Cabernet Franc, it will explore such topics as terroir, the growing process, the cultivation of the grape in Paso as compared to Bordeaux, and the strong emergence of the variety in the market.

In a region that was formerly known for its Zinfandel, how did Bordeaux varieties make their mark in Paso Robles? Maeve Pesquera, senior VP of strategy and business development at DAOU Family Estates, shares her thoughts: "With over 60% of the 40,000 planted acres in Paso Robles AVA consisting of Cabernet Sauvignon and Bordeaux

(CAB) varieties, CABs have long played a dynamic part in the region. In the 1970s, Dr. Stanley Hoffman, under the guidance of André Tchelistcheff, planted some of Paso Robles' first Bordeaux varieties on the mountain now owned by the Daou family. Gary Eberle came to Paso Robles expressly for the purpose of growing and making Bordeaux varieties 50 years ago, and other legendary vintners have followed. When Georges and Daniel Daou came to Paso Robles, they understood the potential of establishing the region as a world-class producer of Bordeaux-varietal wines. With the creation of the Paso Robles CAB Collective a decade ago, we've all been able to take the potential of the region to new heights."

It certainly doesn't hurt that Bordeaux grapes are beloved by winemakers: Jeff Streckas of ONX Wines notes, "[Cab Franc] is my favorite variety. It can represent different terroirs and vineyards. I love that [it] can show indigenous characteristics of herbaceousness. It's one of the varieties that you know what you have in the glass. In Paso Robles, Cabernet Franc offers the aromatics of Saumur and Bourgueil in the Loire Valley but ... the structure of the Central Coast."

Adds Dracaena Wines owner and winemaker Lori Budd, "Cabernet Franc grows extremely well in Paso. We love our east-side vineyards because of the warm temperatures and calcareous soil. It expresses true fruit notes." In 2015, Budd founded the annual Cab Franc Day after lamenting the fact that "there [was] a proclaimed day for many grapes but not for Cabernet Franc. It clearly deserved a day of its own." And now, thanks to her, it has one. **SJ**

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Mastery in the Montagne de Reims

DURING A DINNER AT RÉPUBLIQUE IN LOS ANGELES, **CHAMPAGNE PALMER** SHOWED THE GREAT POTENTIAL OF CHARDONNAY FROM THE REGION

by Jessie Birschbach

IF YOU HAVEN'T HEARD of Champagne Palmer, then I might suggest you review some materials on GuildSomm's website. In its expert study guide on Champagne, you'll find this: "The Chardonnay of the Eastern Montagne differs from that of the Côte des Blancs. Some might say it is less classic, but it is arguably a different sort of classic—and just as ageworthy, as anyone who has tasted mature vintages of Palmer Blanc de Blancs will testify."

Indeed, I left a dinner at Los Angeles restaurant République in late June struck

colades he mentioned as he guided our long table in the center of République's airy dining room through the dinner. Just before we were seated, Vervier explained that Palmer's history dates to 1947, when seven "very established winegrowers" based in the Montagne de Reims came together to create the first Champagne Palmer blend in order to highlight the region's terroir. With dreams of exporting internationally, the group came up with the name based on a British biscuit brand called Huntley



PHOTO: RICHARD WYKAE

by the vivacity and structure of Palmer's wines, particularly its older vintage bottlings. It was baffling: How could a producer from a Champagne region we've been taught to revere for its Pinot Noir, the Montagne de Reims, craft such a stunning portfolio of Chardonnay-dominant (and, in some cases, Chardonnay-heavy) wines, including a Blanc de Blancs that received the coveted Judges' Selection award as best traditional-method sparkling white at this year's TEXSOM?

Palmer's managing director and enologist, Rémi Vervier, seemed particularly proud of this among a slew of other ac-

& Palmers that was served in the best Champagne houses at the time (which also evokes the buttery brioche notes in the wines, derived from extended aging on the lees).

"We are Montagne de Reims experts," said Vervier. With its winery and cellar in Reims, Palmer sources from over 500 acres of Grand and Premier Cru vineyards in the region; for example, amid the "ocean of Pinot Noir" growing here, **Palmer's Blanc de Blancs** is sourced mainly from the rare Chardonnay-dominant Premiers Crus of the Trépail and Villers-Marmery villages.



PHOTO: JESSIE BIRSCHBACH

Champagne Palmer managing director and enologist Rémi Vervier displays the 1996 Champagne Palmer Collection bottling.

Palmer could also be defined by its use of reserve wines in blending. Its Champagne **Palmer Rosé Solera**, for instance, includes 8% reserve Pinot Noir from a solera established over 40 years ago. Vervier noted the recent completion of a carefully constructed facility in which only the reserve wines are celledar "to keep [them] in perfect condition."

What we tasted next was a vintage Champagne lover's dream: The **2015, 2012, 1999, and 1996** were all showstoppers, but the latter brought down the house. Vervier explained that every bottle of vintage Palmer is manually disgorged and tasted by the winemaker every two years and that the number of bottles released depends on the producer's assessment of each vintage's aging potential. As Vervier spoke, crisp notes of raw ginger wafted up from the 27-year-old wine, which not only lived up to Palmer's promise of long-lasting freshness but seemed as though it would keep that promise for years to come. **||**

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Changes Are Afoot in France's Smallest Region

THE **ARBOIS AOP** ADMITS NINE NEW VARIETIES IN RESPONSE TO CLIMATE CHANGE *by Emily Johnston Collins*

NINE NEW ACCESSORY VARIETIES

have been admitted to the Jura's Arbois AOP. This change to its regulations, published in September 2022, allows for the inclusion of recognizable varieties like Chenin Blanc and Gamay as well as the local, but nearly extinct, red grape Enfariné. The amendments are intended to help winemakers cope with climate change, though they will not provide a quick fix to the extreme temperatures and dry spells increasingly impacting the region. This is especially true for those who choose to plant Enfariné—the only new variety admitted in Vin Jaune production—which can only be purchased from seed. It will take an estimated 15–20 years to establish a vineyard from seed after the necessary massal selection. Will the AOP laws have changed again by then?

Cédric Ducoté, general manager at Domaine Rolet, was the first to mention the changes when I made a trip to Arbois last June. The rules state that each new variety can comprise up to 5% of a winemaker's vineyard plantings individually, or, when grouped together, they can encompass up to 20% of plantings. Do-

maine Rolet plans to plant four of them, including Enfariné, in the next few years. However, finding available vineyard space may be challenging: In the Jura, vineyards are often straddled by cow-grazing land for the production of Comté cheese. Since Comté is a much more lucrative agricultural product, there isn't much land to sell to the vigneron of France's smallest wine region.

During my visit to Domaine Bénédicte & Stéphane Tissot, sommelier Pablo Menut introduced the winery's renditions of Jura's traditional varieties: Chardonnay, Savagnin, Pinot Noir, Trousseau, and Poulsard. As he poured, he listed the nationalities of his recent winery guests: "Foreigners know our wine better than the French," he concluded. I wondered how Jura fans abroad might react to seeing new varieties blended into their favorite wines, if only at a regulated 10% of the assemblage. I thought of Vin Jaune, the golden jewel of Jura that has been made with 100% Savagnin since the AOC was established in 1936. Now it could see the addition of the aforementioned Enfariné, which, according to the ampelographic tome *Wine Grapes*,



PHOTOS: PAUL ZINK

Sean Magruder, wine educator for Sandhi Wines; author Emily Johnston Collins; Cédric Ducoté, general manager at Domaine Rolet; Paul Zink, Central Coast wine sales at Revel Wine; and Fanny Poncet, shipments team member at Domaine Rolet.

was first listed by name in the Order of the Parliament of Besançon in 1731, when it was ordered to be eradicated. Today, about a hectare of plantings exists, some of it tended by revered Jura winemaker Jean-François Ganevat.

Ducoté described the grape as having high acidity that could balance the freshness of Poulsard and Trousseau in hot vintages. He added, "We don't drink the same wines today as 40 years ago, so 40 years from now will also be different." While gradual change is hard to detect, the AOP modifications provide tangible evidence of a region in transition. *sj*

A view of Les Planches-près-Arbois.





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Doubling Down

A VISIT TO SIBLING NAPA PROPERTIES **BARDESSONO HOTEL & SPA**
AND HOTEL YOUNTVILLE RESORT & SPA

by Richard Carleton Hacker

ONE OF ONLY 28 LEED Platinum Certified hotels in the United States, the bucolic Bardessono Hotel & Spa in Yountville, California, boasts modern, airy architecture amid lush landscaping linked by meandering walkways and waterways. It's perfectly complemented by its sister property just up the road, Hotel Yountville Resort & Spa: With its spacious pool, in-room fireplaces, and proximity to local shops, this oasis designed to resemble a vineyard estate is the perfect wine-country retreat.

Further linking both properties is the deep understanding of California cuisine shown by their new executive chef, Rick Edge, who oversees both Bardessono's restaurant, Lucy, and Hotel Yountville's guests-only Heritage Oak Café. No stranger to creating luxurious menus, Edge has honed his epicurean talents over 30 years in some of the country's most

celebrated hotels and restaurants; beginning his career at Pacific's Edge restaurant in the Hyatt Carmel Highlands before joining the PlumpJack Group, where he oversaw multiple properties, he went on to lead teams at Indian Springs Calistoga, Napa Valley Country Club, and RH Yountville Restaurant.

Among his most memorable achievements was cooking for Julia Child while working as a sous chef in Boston. "I will never forget plating the first course of a tasting menu and shaking because I was nervous," Edge recalls. "I then told myself to relax, because I knew I was executing the dish perfectly, so there was no need to be nervous, just confident." That confidence has manifested itself in the menus he has developed for both resorts.

"I am very passionate about staying within the seasons and highlighting local products," he says. "Lucy's [vegetable]



PHOTOS COURTESY OF THE BARDESSONO HOTEL & SPA AND HOTEL YOUNTVILLE RESORT & SPA

Rick Edge is executive chef at the Bardessono Hotel & Spa and Hotel Yountville Resort & Spa in Yountville, CA.

Seared trout with gnocchi, snap peas, cashew soubise, and piquillo coulis at Bardessono Hotel restaurant Lucy.





Adam Kerr serves as director of food and beverage at both resorts.



Housemade treats greet resort guests' pets.

garden will play an integral part in the menu. I will [also] be introducing a version of a duck dish at Bardessono I have done in the past with dried strawberries, a bittersweet orange sauce, fennel, and roasted beets. Down the line, our plan is to start introducing more dining options for Hotel Yountville guests, including private wine dinners. I also have a very strong sous chef, Inti Gonzalez. . . . Once I get my menus in place at Bardessono and have the team trained and up to speed, I will be collaborating with him more [to provide] more continuity between the two menus [of the hotels] while still letting them stand alone."

Also on Edge's team is director of food and beverage Adam Kerr; who brings to the table a wealth of experience that includes working at Thomas Keller's The French Laundry. His wine lists are heavily local. "Hotel Yountville has a smaller list," says Kerr, "highlighting the greats of Napa Valley while introducing a few smaller productions that need to be noted. I'm concentrating on building a half-bottle collection for our guests . . . while providing a bottle program that brings incredible value. For Bardessono . . . our guests' personal cellars contain more classics than we can ever accumulate, so I have focused on labels that specialize in fewer

than 300 cases by producers who, if you don't know [them], you should."

As an added plus, both resorts are pet-friendly, as indicated by the Yappy Hour they host on Mondays featuring Barkessono Biscuits. "The Barkessono Biscuit is a homemade doggie treat that we give out to our four-legged friends," says Edge. "The recipe is long-standing and top secret. I don't even know what goes in it!"

Needless to say, a stay at Hotel Yountville or Bardessono is a great way to ensure that both you and your pets get pampered in style in Napa. For more information, visit bardessono.com and hotelyountville.com. SJ



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GARNACHA  GRENACHE

One European Grape, Endless Discovery: The Rich Diversity of Garnacha/Grenache Will Elevate Your Holiday Pairings

With more wine styles produced from Europe's vineyards than perhaps from any other grape variety, Garnacha/Grenache offer something for everyone, regardless of season, occasion, or preference. The **versatility** and expressiveness of European Garnacha/Grenache lends itself to a variety of terroirs and winemaking approaches, translated into a variety of styles ranging from **sparkling to still (whites, rosés or reds; either light or full bodied) to fortified sweet wines, all with multiple food pairing possibilities.**

Highly sensitive to variations in growing conditions, in both time and place, the variety requires European winemakers attuned to how Garnacha/Grenache, from each given terroir and vintage, can be best interpreted and handled. An art that winemakers across the Mediterranean have mastered, building upon centuries of knowledge passed on from one generation to the next. Not only are several styles of wine produced from the red variety (Garnacha Tinta or Grenache Noir), there are also four additional clones of the same grape -- a white variety (Garnacha Blanca or Grenache Blanc), a pink-skinned variety (Garnacha Gris or Grenache Gris), a red-fleshed variety (Tintorera) and a so-called 'hairy' variety (Garnacha Peluda) -- that add more options to the winemaker's anecdotal spice rack and to the consumer's palate. These clones add layers of complexity and generate stylistic **diversity across the European Geographical Indications in which they are grown.**

The majority of plantings are of Grenache Noir or Garnacha Tinta. A grape variety

that grows well in many places and capable of expressing its local growing conditions, European Garnacha/Grenache may produce very different wines.

There is great diversity of style within Europe, varying from appellation to appellation, and even from vineyard to vineyard. "Depending on the region it [Garnacha/Grenache] is from and what's like climate there, it can show different characteristics such as depth in fruit, acidity, and texture," explains New York-based sommelier Charlotte Berdenseny.

In spite of the grape's ability to transform and transcend, its quality and provenance - in any of its style - is preserved, protected, and guaranteed by the **European Union's Protected Designations of Origin (PDOs) and Protected Geographical Indications (PGIs) quality schemes** which include regionally-specific checks, controls, traceability, labeling, and winemaking guidelines that differentiate products while promoting their place of origin. Each wine appellation is distinct in terroir and production techniques, which provides a plethora of quality wines from Europe. If you see PDO or PGI labels on any food or drink, you can rest assured that you will be rewarded with excellent quality and European standards on safety, authenticity, respect for the environment and sustainability, and the characteristics of European agricultural products, particularly in terms of their quality, taste, diversity or traditions among others.

Sparkling, White, and Rosé, Oh My! European Grenache is used to create **sparkling** wines of fresh, youthful

character. With floral and fruity notes, these wines pair well with everything from fruit salad, sushi, desserts and fresh fruits to fried foods. No Holiday table is complete without bubbles and Sparkling Garnacha, with its fruity and flowery notes, makes it the perfect wine to celebrate.

Light-bodied white wines are crisp and mineral with stone fruit and citrus aromas, such as apple, peach, and lemon. Pour them with a seafood platter, summer salads or scallop risotto. A white wine style that is the perfect for Holiday favorites such as roast turkey with all of the fixings.

LIGHT BODIED WHITES



LIGHT, CRISP, MINERAL

Apple, peach, lemon, quince, saline



PDOs Calatayud, Campo de Borja, Cariñena, Somontano, Terra Alta and Roussillon GIs



Raw shellfish, summer salads, scallop risotto

Sometimes life calls for a **full-bodied white** wine, and these same regions do not disappoint. In yet another iteration of European Garnacha/Grenache, plump, rich, and rounded white wines deliver whiffs of citrus oils, honey, currants, and melon. These more robust wines call for bolder dishes, like fried chicken or glazed ham. They are the perfect complement to holiday tables featuring a variety of seafood such as scallops, sashimi or lobster.

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FULL BODIED WHITES



PLUMP, RICH, ROUNDED

Citrus oils, honey, flowers, currants, melon



PDOs: Catalunya, Campo de Borja, Cariñena, Somontano, Terra Alta and Roussillon GIs



Fried chicken, glazed ham, fresh seafood with aioli

Want to fill your glass with a pretty color? There's rosé for that. Fruity and refreshing, **rosés** of Garnacha/Grenache from Europe tend to exhibit notes of strawberries, watermelon, rhubarb, and roses. Enjoy them with a round of appetizers, like grilled tuna, chicken salad or a charcuterie platter.

ROSE



DELICIOUS, FRUITY, REFRESHING

Strawberry, watermelon, rhubarb, roses



PDOs: Catalunya, Campo de Borja, Cariñena, Somontano, Terra Alta and Roussillon GIs



Grilled tuna, chicken salad, charcuterie

Renowned Reds of Past and Future

Wine drinkers may think of European Garnacha/Grenache as the iconic red variety they know from GSM (Grenache, Syrah, Mourvèdre) blends, but there is so much more to discover within this category. Produced across European Geographical Indications, varietal red Garnacha/Grenache wines run the gamut from light and refreshing to full-bodied and concentrated.

For the Thanksgiving table, scout out Garnacha/Grenache wines with more decisively fruit-driven tones. These will blend better with the sweet notes of Thanksgiving staples like cranberry compote, sweet potatoes and yams, creamy pumpkin soups and the like. Save the more firm mineral wines for the December holiday celebrations, from Hanukkah to Christmas. As winds blow colder and meals grow heartier in winter months, few things are as comforting as full-bodied red Garnacha/Grenache from Europe. Robust and concentrated, these

wines often present tantalizing notes of blackberry, currant, allspice, anise, and tobacco.

Light-bodied reds tend to be fresh, ruity, and bright in structure with red

LIGHT BODIED REDS



FRESH, FRUITY, BRIGHT

Strawberry, raspberry, cherry, pepper



PDOs: Catalunya, Campo de Borja, Cariñena, Somontano, Terra Alta and Roussillon GIs



Indian curries, burgers with smoked gouda, chorizo in red wine

berry aromas such as strawberry, raspberry, and cherry, which are ideal with the warm spices in holiday roasts. Don't be surprised if you get a kick of black pepper, too. Balanced and high in acid, these wines are great choices when looking to cut through fatty, spicy foods like curries, burgers with smoked gouda or chorizo in red wine.

As winds blow colder and meals grow heartier in winter months, few things are as comforting as **full-bodied red** Garnacha/Grenache from Europe. Robust and concentrated, these wines often present tantalizing notes of blackberry, currant, allspice, anise, and tobacco. Heavier meat dishes are a no-brainer. For the lover of full, structured and concentrated red wines, these wines pair perfectly with show-stopping main courses such as lamb, baked ham or prime rib. "I particularly love pairing Grenache with all things that are encompassed in BBQ," suggests Berdensy. "There are so many varieties of flavors... the concentration of fruit and depth [of Europe's Grenache] is so versatile and complements the meat well, but also the smooth richness can stand up to the umami flavors of the soy as well as the pickled components."

FULL BODIED REDS



FULL, ROBUST, CONCENTRATED

Blackberry, currant, allspice, anise, tobacco



PDOs: Catalunya, Campo de Borja, Cariñena, Somontano, Terra Alta and Roussillon GIs



BBQ ribs, grilled sausages, lamb chops

Sweet, Sweet Victory

Europeans are also keen on **fortified sweet** wines - and yes, they're made with Garnacha/Grenache.

The range is vast, from fruit-driven whites and strong, black-fruited reds (Grenat), to the dried fruit-tinged spicy Ambré or Tuilé wines.

Not to mention vintage wines like Hors d'Age or the long-aged Rancio styles.

These wines may be characterized by notes of dried fruit, jam, leather, coffee, or cocoa, depending on their style and place of origin, and are not just for dessert! Experiment by pairing these wines with figs and cheese platters. For a refreshing but gourmet dessert option, consider pouring some sweet nectar with home made brownies, key lime pie or simply a generous fruit salad.

Naturally, there's nothing like pumpkin pie with a mouth coating vin doux naturel, or a fortified sweet wine. These are specialties of Roussillon PDOs. They are also an excellent "liquid dessert" when a chunk of pie seems too ambitious after a large meal. Somm's favorite style for Thanksgiving desserts tend to be "ambré", whose caramel and nutty flavors tend to work well with almost any pie: pumpkin, apple, pecan or chocolate.

FORTIFIED SWEET WINES



FRUITY, GENEROUS, SWEET

Dried fruits, jams, leather, coffee, cocoa



Roussillon GIs



Chocolate, Desserts, Fruits, Cigars

Experience the diversity and range of European wines by pairing an entire holiday meal with Garnacha alone from hors d'oeuvres to dessert, you'll see that Grenache fits in perfectly. Every bottle is a unique experience. **The European cornucopia of Garnacha/Grenache's wine styles is a perfect link to all of your holiday moments.**

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International Intrigue

AT LEGENDS SPIRITS, CHRIS RADOMSKI CHANNELS HIS EXPERIENCE CRAFTING 100-POINT WINES INTO THE CREATION OF PREMIUM SPIRITS

by Richard Carleton Hacker

CHRIS RADOMSKI IS a multifaceted wine and spirits entrepreneur, so it is not surprising that his newest venture, Legends Spirits, is an equally multifaceted, internationally focused purveyor of wine and spirits brands.

"The Legends portfolio was built around authentic craft brands we believed to be synergistic and complementary to each other," Radomski says. "When I thought of [the name] Legends, I related the word to the history of the craft, the legendary way

Valley brand whose wines received multiple 100-point ratings from the demanding palate of Robert Parker and the creation of additional award-winning wines from Argentina, Italy, France, and Spain as well as California, Radomski teamed up with Ethan Wayne, the youngest son of late actor John Wayne, to produce the aptly named Duke Kentucky Straight Bourbon Whiskey (\$42).



PHOTOS: MCCALL MILLER PHOTOGRAPHY

Chris Radomski launched Duke Spirits—inspired by bottles of whiskey found in late actor John Wayne's archives—in partnership with Wayne's youngest son, Ethan.



Radomski's Legends Spirits portfolio includes bourbon and tequila brand Duke, tequila brands La Adelita and Celosa Rose, mezcal brand Mahani, and rum brand Gouverneur, among other labels.

things were done. Each spirit and wine [in our portfolio] is paying respect to their category and paying homage to the old-fashioned process. There was no mandate to find a gin or a rum, for example—just an overriding idea that great brands in the right categories would be considered if they met the standards and the philosophy of Legends Spirits."

Following a partnership in a Napa

Inspired by bottles of whiskey found in the elder Wayne's archives, the label is crafted by Radomski with the team at Greenriver Distillery in Kentucky and has now expanded to include a sophisticated and meaty 9 Year Old Grand Cru Founder's Reserve (\$125) and a sweet, slightly smoky Grand Cru Reserve 9 Year Old Kentucky Reserve Rye (\$125), both of which are aged in French oak bar-

rels that previously held California wine; a Cabernet barrel-finished 14 Year Old Kentucky Bourbon will launch in time for this holiday season.

Of course, any fan of John Wayne's knows that many of his Westerns were filmed in Mexico. His love of that country and its tequila has also led to the production of Duke Founder's Reserve Grand Cru Reposado (\$65), aged three to six months; Extra Añejo (\$140), aged three years; and a limited-edition Extra Añejo (\$299), aged six years and packaged with an image of the actor on the label; all are finished in ex-red wine barrels of French oak. A portion of the sales from every bottle of Duke tequila is donated to the John Wayne Cancer Foundation.

Also in the Legends portfolio are two other tequila brands. La Adelita consists of five single-estate Highland expressions: Blanco (\$42), Reposado (\$50), Añejo (\$60), Extra Añejo (\$140), and Cristalino Black (\$80), which have proven their staying power in a dramatically growing category. And the company's newest release is Celosa Rose (\$129), a delicately crafted single-estate joven that—true to

its name—has a faint pinkish hue derived from the French oak red-wine barrels it rests in for 28 days.

Celosa, Radomski notes, “was the brainchild of José Antonio Alonso Beckmann, 12th generation in the Cuervo tequila-making family and a descendant of Don José Antonio de Cuervo. *Celosa* means ‘jealous’ in Spanish. I loved the name so we set out to do something different, making a high-quality joven and finishing it in Cabernet barrels, which was in my strike zone.”

With such a wide range of tequilas, could mezcal be far behind? Radomski’s all-encompassing reach now includes Mahani (\$75), a collaboration with French spirits producer Hugues Pietrini. The artisanal joven mezcal is handcrafted—using no electricity, artificial yeasts, or pesticides—by third-generation master mezcalero Humberto Juan Hernandez in the mountains of San Juan del Río surrounding Oaxaca; the result is a refreshingly smooth-textured mezcal that invites both sipping and cocktail experimentation. A Mahani Martini, anyone?

Speaking of Martinis, Radomski and Pietrini have also created a uniquely delicate Mediterranean gin, Belle Rive (\$65), which, as its name implies, evokes the luxurious aura of the South of France. Indeed, many of the botanicals used in Belle Rive are harvested from this picturesque region, including jasmine, rose, lavender, and juniper as well as lemons from the French Riviera town of Menton. Fittingly, the gin is distilled and bottled in Cognac by the historic Merlet distillery.



Among Radomski’s wine ventures is Napa Valley label *As One Cru*.

And finally we come to Gouverneur (\$85), a ten-year-old rum blended from various Caribbean sources on Saint Martin (which itself has no distilleries). The creation of master blender Olivier Kleinhans, who has produced both agricole and molasses-based rums, Gouverneur combines these two Caribbean styles. The rums are aged separately in French oak barrels on the island, where the heat and oceanic climate accelerate the maturation process. They’re then sent to Cognac for final blending and bottling, undergoing an additional resting period after both processes.

In addition to building a world-class portfolio that also includes wine brand *As One Cru*, Radomski has expanded his ventures to encompass the launch of The Masters Music Series, featuring live performances by Nashville artists such as country group Runaway June, and organizing music festivals that benefit charities like the John Wayne Cancer Foundation



La Adelita offers five single-estate Highland expressions: **Blanco** (\$42), **Reposado** (\$50), **Añejo** (\$60), **Extra Añejo** (\$140), and **Cristalino Black** (\$80).

and K9s for Warriors, which pairs U.S. veterans with service dogs for mutually beneficial results.

Between the exposure such initiatives offer and the reach of Radomski’s portfolio to the world’s most prestigious locations, including London, Paris, Cannes, and Saint-Tropez, the global influence of Legends Spirits is just beginning. SJ

WHAT’S NEW FROM LEGENDS SPIRITS

Celosa Rose Joven Tequila Rose (not rosé) is a new style of Cabernet Sauvignon barrel-aged tequila. The brand’s elongated, agave leaf-like bottle, with its heavy black cap of Monterrey marble and molded piña-shaped base, is as unique as the pinkish-hued joven inside. The aging process for the spirit, which is distilled from seven-year-old Blue Weber plants grown and harvested at Jalisco Highlands distillery Hacienda La Capilla, softens the agave influences, resulting in a sweet, fresh, red fruit-accented profile with a long, silky finish.

Mahani Joven Mezcal Seven-year-old Espadín agaves are harvested, chopped into chunks, roasted in earthen pits, crushed by a horse-drawn tahona, and fermented in wooden vats for four to six weeks. These traditional techniques give this double-distilled artisanal mezcal a soft, sweetly smoky countenance that belies the image of the fierce-looking Zapotec warrior on the label.

Belle Rive Mediterranean Gin This delicate-tasting gin’s name translates to “beautiful shore,” and indeed, the label designed by French artist Marie Field evokes the spirit of the distinctive liquid inside the bottle, which is produced in Grasse—the perfume capital of the world—from organic wheat grown in the Champagne region with water from Cognac and distilled five times. The juniper is gentle and the remaining botanicals are subtle, making for a soothing, almost ethereal Martini.

Gouverneur 1648 10 Year Old Rum The name 1648 refers to the year of the signing of the Treaty of Concordia, which determined the coexistence of the Danish and French nationalities of Saint Martin, where this rum is aged. Coming primarily from Marie-Galante, Guadeloupe, and the Dominican Republic, cane sugar-juice derived rum agricole and dark molasses-based rum are aged separately; blended in Cognac without sugars or artificial coloring; and finally put into French oak barrels for additional maturation. This process yields a complexity of flavors that gently burst upon the palate, among them candied cherries, chocolate, dark fruit-soaked oak, and a touch of citrus; the result can turn a mediocre Mai Tai into a stunning cocktail. But to fully appreciate it, sip it straight or on the rocks.

Mind the Gap

THE **SEBASTOPOL HILLS** NEIGHBORHOOD OF THE RUSSIAN RIVER VALLEY IS HEAVILY INFLUENCED BY THE PETALUMA GAP

by Jonathan Cristaldi

IN THE LATEST INSTALLMENT OF our series on the six neighborhoods of California's Russian River Valley (RRV), we shine the spotlight on Sebastopol Hills, tucked into the southernmost stretch of the region. The coolest of the six, it produces wines of elegance imbued with bright natural acidity.

Here, over 1,000 planted acres are spread across at least 50 sites at elevations ranging from 100 to 500 feet. As in many RRV vineyards, these are strewn with Goldridge-Sebastopol-Cotati fine sandy-loam soils atop an ancient marine layer of Wilson Grove Formation (fine and medium grains of marine sandstone formed in an embayment of the Pacific Ocean some 3–5 million years ago). The most significant weather conditions that define the Sebastopol Hills are coastal wind and fog. A heavy marine layer fun-

nels in through the Petaluma Gap, bringing intense winds that have permanently bent trees along ridgetops in a southeasterly direction.

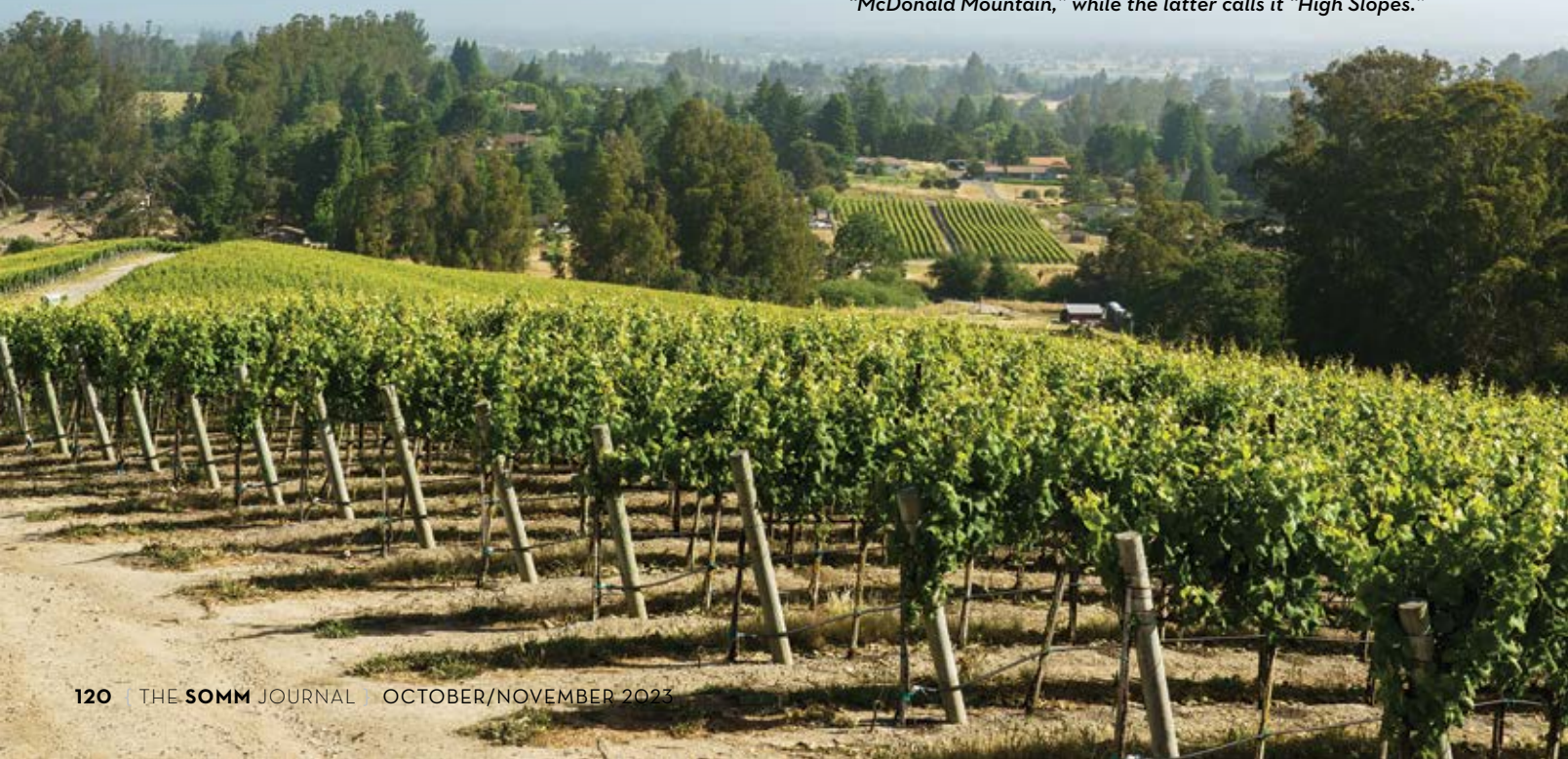
Collectively, wineries within the Sebastopol Hills produce bottlings of Pinot Noir; Chardonnay, Zinfandel, Syrah, Pinot Grigio, Riesling, and Gewürztraminer. We recently tasted a lineup of Pinot Noirs from four iconic Sebastopol Hills producers hosted by Theresa Heredia, director of winemaking at Gary Farrell Winery; winemaker Greg Stach of Landmark Vineyards; senior winemaker Zidanelia Arcidiacono of Sonoma-Cutrer Vineyards; and Fred Scherrer, owner and winemaker for Scherrer Winery.

Not surprisingly, in the late 1990s and early 2000s, when many of the vineyards in the RRV were planted, Sebastopol Hills was considered too cold to grow

grapes. Scherrer noted that prior to Prohibition, it was home mostly to apricot and plum orchards. Because the growing season is quite cool, grape clusters tend to be small, with thick skins and high levels of natural grape acids. "I'm looking at the acid levels instead of Brix levels for my picking decisions," said Heredia. "I'm used to seeing acid levels akin to German Riesling," added Scherrer, while Arcidiacono explained that, "during the summer season, you can actually experience and see the heavy line of fog rolling into the city of Sebastopol and settling into the vineyards. These specific conditions allow the grapes to ripen slowly while retaining a bright acidity." Stach, for his part, told me that "the past few [warmer] years have brought more ripening, while acid [levels] have been a little less," but he is excited for the 2023

Gary Farrell and Scherrer both source grapes from Emeritus Vineyards' 30-acre Pinot Hill Vineyard, but on their labels, the former calls it "McDonald Mountain," while the latter calls it "High Slopes."

PHOTOS COURTESY OF EMERITUS VINEYARDS

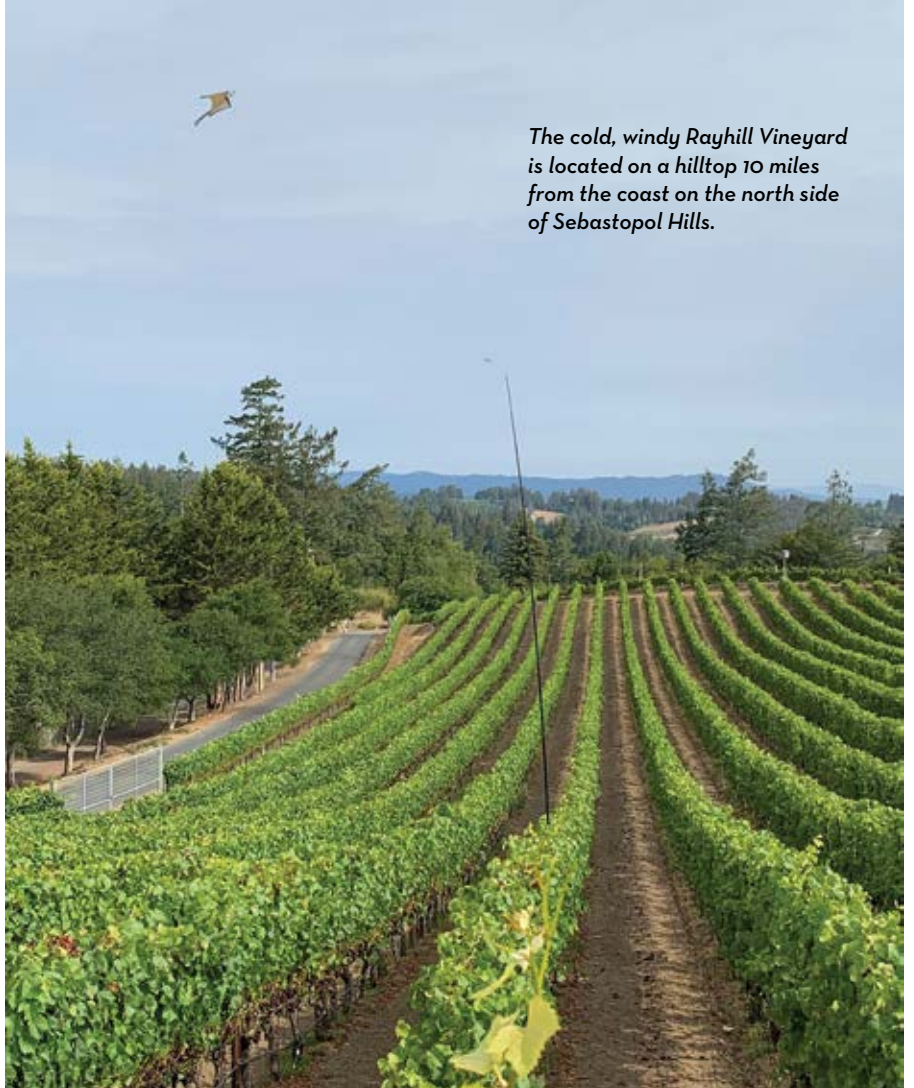


harvest, which, as of late July, was on track to be a high-acid year.

Additionally, “yields [here] are excruciatingly low,” Scherrer noted. “Around 2 tons per acre are what we hope for in ‘good years.’ I think of the character of the area as kind of like the *Donny & Marie* show—a little bit country, a little bit rock and roll. You’ve got coastal tannic concentration, that racy acidity, and still a sense of generosity.”

Reflecting on the RRV neighborhoods, Stach said he doesn’t believe in blending them; he believes that each neighborhood’s identity is lost in the process and the wines become homogenized. Scherrer; meanwhile, suggested that combining adjacent neighborhoods works well, as does blending “the whole rainbow.” But, he warns, “you don’t want to skip around” and blend just two nonadjacent neighborhoods such as, for instance, Sebastopol Hills and Middle Reach, as the slightly more diverse components don’t meld as seamlessly.

In July, a group of independent vintners announced that it had formally submitted a petition to the Alcohol and Tobacco Tax and Trade Bureau (TTB) for the adoption of a Sebastopol Hills AVA. The boundaries of the new AVA would remain in the Russian River Valley. *sj*



The cold, windy Rayhill Vineyard is located on a hilltop 10 miles from the coast on the north side of Sebastopol Hills.

TASTING NOTES

Sonoma Cutrer 2019 Owsley Vineyard Pinot Noir, Russian River Valley (\$50)

From the 90-acre Owsley Ranch estate, which is inundated regularly by fog funneling in through the Bloomfield Gap. Aromas of dusty red cherry and cranberry are laced with salty crushed stones. Full and rich in the mouth, with a midpalate density and plump tannins lightened by crunchy red fruit and a firm backbone of tart acidity.



Landmark 2018 Rayhill Vineyard Pinot Noir, Russian River Valley (\$75)

Perched on a hilltop with mostly western exposures, Rayhill Vineyard is a cold, windy site 10 miles from the coast on the north side of Sebastopol Hills, across the valley from the town of Freestone. Pinot clones 667, 777, and 115 combine to deliver lovely red berries, including ripe strawberries, and plums laced with dark chocolate. Fleshy and full-flavored, with intense spices redolent of bay laurel, cedar, and sandalwood framed by black-tea tannins and fresh, crisp acid tension.



Gary Farrell 2018 McDonald Mountain Vineyard Pinot Noir, Russian River Valley (\$70)

Grapes are 40% whole-cluster fermented to naturally de-acidify the juice, which at harvest contains 10–11 grams per liter of TA; the finished wine has 7–8 grams. A beautiful potpourri of cherry pit; bitter blood-orange rind; and dried, crushed tea and bay leaves recalls the bay laurel and eucalyptus trees surrounding the vineyard. The palate is bright and focused with smoky clove, cherry, baking spice, and cedar.



Scherrer 2017 High Slopes Pinot Noir, Russian River Valley (\$78)

Fred Scherrer says this site is his last pick of the season, typically in September. Clone 667 grafted to Schwartzmann rootstock is fully destemmed, cold-soaked, and fermented bone dry. The resulting Pinot is round and voluptuous yet full of freshness and lift. Following sagebrush and a hint of eucalyptus, ripe, fleshy black cherry is framed by sappy tannin and tangy blood-orange acidity, while the finish reveals elegant cedar, smoky clove, and a brooding saline minerality.



**CLOSING
TIME**

PHOTO: ROBBIE ZIEGLER



Amalfi Coast 90210

NERANO BAR LEAD LAIRD TRUEX CREATES COCKTAILS FIT FOR AN ITALIAN BEACH VACATION

by Jessie Birschbach

THERE ARE PLENTY of al fresco dining options in Beverly Hills, California, but perhaps none go as far to immerse guests in an outdoor setting as Nerano, an Italian restaurant born out of owners Andy and Carlo Brandon-Gordon's deep love for the Amalfi Coast. In keeping with the vibe is the fresh coastal Italian cuisine prepared by executive chef Michele Lisi, including items like the *assaggio di tre*, which features three crudos: yellowtail in citronette with Fresno chiles and crispy capers; salmon in ponzu with red onion, cucumber, mint, and pink peppercorns; and ahi tuna with yuzu, Castelvetrano olives, kumquat, and salmon roe. But naturally it was the handcrafted cocktails of Nerano's bar lead, Laird Truex, that caught our attention.

Part of Nerano's opening team in 2016, Truex ascended to his current position thanks in part to his willingness to step up his contributions during the pandemic but also to his thoughtful, seasonal approach to mixology. "I'll talk with ... Lisi about an upcoming seasonal menu, and that is my starting point," says Truex, who also works with Nerano's newly appointed wine director, Guido Di Fusco. Speaking of wine, Truex's go-to pairing is the linguine Nerano, which is tossed with zucchini, basil, and provolone, with a glass of the Marisa Cuomo 2022 Ravello Bianco from the Amalfi Coast. Truex feels that the wine complements Nerano's "authentic Southern Italian dining experience."

The same could be said of Truex's


TOP FIVE FAVES

1. My cat
2. The holidays because there is no traffic in Los Angeles
3. Visiting Lake Tahoe
4. Quiet time
5. All sports

TOP FIVE PET PEEVES

1. Early arrivals before the restaurant is open
2. Texting while driving
3. Restaurants that are too bright
4. Dirty bathrooms
5. Clutter

personal favorite cocktail at Nerano, the Amalfi Coast-inspired Come Basil Sorrento, which includes Lamoncello (a brand of limoncello created by a Nerano server), Neft Vodka, oleo saccharum, basil, and fresh lemon juice.

The NorCal native, now in his eighth year at the restaurant, has one piece of advice for up-and-coming mixologists: "Learn your product and experiment. I've learned a lot about flavor profiles by asking a lot of questions and experimenting." 

THE FRANCIACORTA FILES

BRUSHING UP ON
BRESCIA WITH
CA' DEL BOSCO

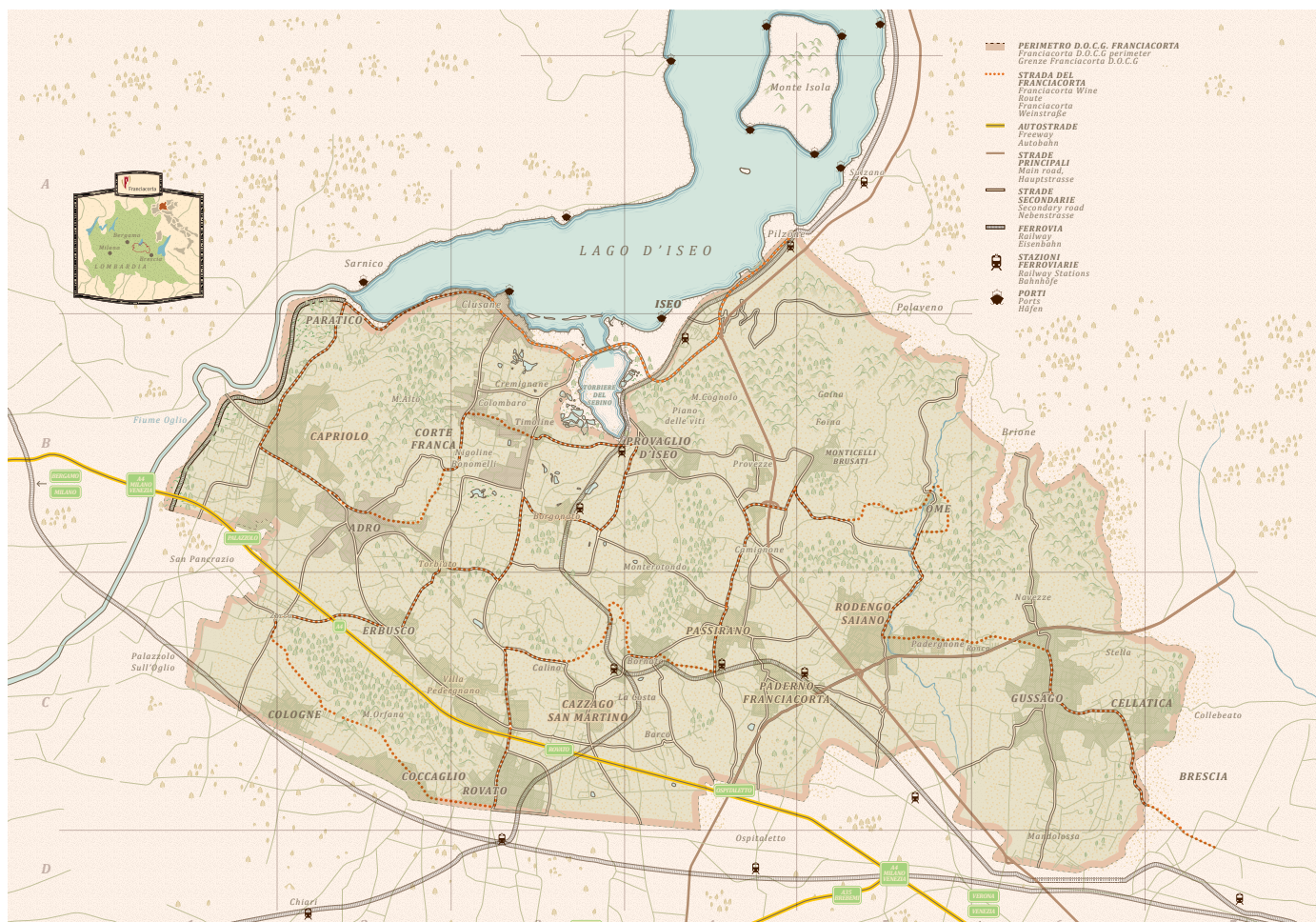
by *Lars Leicht*

Italy's most renowned metodo classico sparkling wine has its roots in the Italian Renaissance, and Franciacorta is undergoing a rebirth of its own in the 21st century.

A UNIQUE TERROIR

Franciacorta is a designated winemaking zone in the province of Brescia at the extreme northern edge of the Po river valley. Bordered by Lake Iseo to the north, the river Oglio to the west, and the province's eponymous capital city to the east, it sits at the foot of the Italian Alps, its rolling hills formed by glaciers that pushed the land forward to create a prow of gravel and sand over limestone. Heavily strewn with stones of various shapes, types, and colors, these morainic soils—rich in silt as well as sand but generally poor in clay, a composition that makes them thick but permeable—are considered ideal for growing wine grapes, aided by the mountains that block cold northern winds in this continental climate and lakes that mitigate temperature extremes.

**Franciacorta sits at the foot of the Italian Alps
in the province of Brescia, Italy.**



AVINOUS HISTORY

In the Middle Ages, Franciacorta was dotted with monasteries, churches, and abbeys as well as the vineyards that had been here since prehistoric times. The name, first documented in 1277, is a derivation of the Latin *francae curtes*, meaning “exempt from paying taxes,” a courtesy granted by the government to the religious institutions of the time.

In the late 12th century, local economic reform led to the planting of many new vineyards in formerly forested areas. By the Italian Renaissance, the area’s wines had become the subject of literature and research. Brescian physician and scholar Girolamo Conforti wrote his *Libellus de Vino Mordaci*, which could be literally translated as the *Book on Biting Wines*, in 1570. “Biting” was an allusion to the wines’ frothy and vibrant character; Conforti extolled the virtues of these “tangy and lively-tasting wines which do not dry out the

mouth in the way acerbic and austere wines do and do not soften the tongue like sweet wines” and praised them as a healthy part of a diet, a tonic and restorative for growth, a relaxant, and a stimulus for socializing. So convinced was he of their salubrious nature that he opened his book with the definitive statement, “Nature has given man nothing more useful than wine.”

Napoleonic land registries in the early 19th century showed that over 1,000 acres of vineyards were dedicated to the production of *mordaci* wines, which an 1821 Italian wine guide gave instructions on decanting. And a 1908 geological survey of Franciacorta demonstrated how advanced its viticulture had become.

MODERN DEVELOPMENT

In 1967, Franciacorta became one of the first Italian wines to be granted the country’s new Denominazione di Origine Controllata (DOC), and in 1995 it was the first traditional-meth-

od sparkling wine in Italy to receive the additional Garantita (Guaranteed) designation (DOCG). The term “Franciacorta” was trademarked in 1991, as was “Satèn” in 1995 (replacing the previously used term, “crémant”) to indicate a Franciacorta wine made with Chardonnay, either exclusively or in a blend with up to 50% Pinot Bianco, at a maximum dosage of 12 grams per liter. In 2008, the area’s still wines, originally designated as Terre di Franciacorta DOC, were reclassified as Curtefranca DOC and Sebino IGT (Indicazione Geografica Tipica).

The rules of the denomination have evolved over the years (read on for specifics). As of 1993, Franciacorta was no longer required to bear the words *metodo tradizionale* on the label (in contrast to Italy’s other traditional-method sparklers), and in 2002 a European Union decree allowed Franciacorta wine to be designated by the word “Franciacorta” only, with no further description

including the DOCG mention, on the grounds of its unique renown. For the same reason, a 2004 regulation by the Italian government requiring the word *Talento* to appear on the labels of Italy's traditional-method wines excluded the Franciacorta DOCG area from using this term in conjunction with its appellation.

PRODUCTION RULES

Franciacorta's technical production rules were first approved in 1991 and modified in 1993 and 1995. In 1996, the Consorzio per la Tutela del Franciacorta approved a self-regulating viticultural code that is stricter than the national government's DOCG production standards. Current Franciacorta DOCG standards regulate the growing zone, vine spacing and training, emergency-only irrigation, yield, vinification, dosage, alcohol content, label statements, bottle size, and release date. Other key requirements include:

- The use of Chardonnay and/or Pinot Nero with the addition of up to 50%

Pinot Bianco and 10% Erbatat, a historic indigenous grape that's gradually being reintroduced. Franciacorta Rosé must contain up to 65% Chardonnay and at least 35% Pinot Nero, as well as up to 50% Pinot Bianco and 10% Erbatat, while Franciacorta Satèn must use a minimum of 50% Chardonnay and a maximum of 50% Pinot Blanc.

- Cellaring time: For Franciacorta, 18 months; for Franciacorta Rosé and Satèn, 24 months; for vintage-dated Franciacorta, Rosé, and Satèn, 30 months; and for Riserva Franciacorta, Rosé, and Satèn, 60 months

- Residual sugar: Zero-dosage wines must contain 0 grams residual sugar per liter; extra brut, less than 6 grams per liter; brut, less than 15 grams per liter; sec, between 12 and 20 grams per liter; and demi-sec, between 17 and 35 grams per liter.

THE STORY OF CA' DEL BOSCO

In the early 1960s, Annamaria Clementi Zanella needed a refuge from her daily life in industrial Milan—and

so did her rebellious son Maurizio, who couldn't help but get in trouble in the big city. So she bought a house in the woods in 1964 and called it just that: Ca' del Bosc' in the local dialect. A few years later, the young teen was exiled there and soon befriended the caretaker, who instilled an interest in Maurizio in the vines he was planting. When the Consorzio Franciacorta offered members a trip to visit the vineyards and wineries of Bordeaux, Maurizio told his mother he would like to go—not mentioning that it was mainly an excuse to see Paris. But he turned out to be more intrigued by the wines than he expected, and the rest, as they say, is history. After subsequently studying at the University of Bordeaux and paying frequent visits to Champagne, Maurizio returned home to Ca' del Bosco and transformed the winery into Franciacorta's leading producer; he also served as the Consorzio's president for a few years, helping to raise the quality and reputation of the region's wines.

Harvesttime in Franciacorta.



The Ca' del Bosco Franciacorta Wines



Ca' del Bosco Cuvée Prestige Edizione 45: Ca' del Bosco's flagship, Cuvée Prestige represents the essence of its production area's terroir and winemaking philosophy. This particular edition is a blend of the 2020, 2019, and 2018 vintages, which make up 68%, 29%, and 3% of the wine, respectively; comprising Chardonnay, Pinot Bianco, and Pinot Nero from 218 certified-organic vineyards, it matured for 25 months sur lie and is classified as an extra brut.



Ca' del Bosco Cuvée Prestige Edizione 45 Rosé: The Pinot Noir that represents 80% of this blend—made with grapes sourced from 18 certified-organic vineyards—is from the 2020 vintage, while the 20% Chardonnay is equal proportions of 2019 and 2020. It aged for 30 months sur lie and is classified as an extra brut.

Ca' del Bosco 2018 Vintage Collection Satèn: The designation of this blend of 85% Chardonnay and 15% Pinot Bianco from 14 certified-organic vineyards recalls the word "satin," an allusion to its softness; it fermented for five months in small oak casks and then spent 48 months sur lie.



Ca' del Bosco 2014 Annamaria Clementi Dosage Zero Riserva: Named in honor of Maurizio Zanella's mother, a constant inspiration to him, this blend of 76% Chardonnay, 15% Pinot Nero, and 9% Pinot Bianco was harvested from 22 certified-organic vineyards, fermented in small oak casks, and aged eight years sur lie.

It has zero dosage—no added sugar—in order to offer the finest expression of the different terroirs of Franciacorta in the Ca' del Bosco style.



CAMPAIGN FINANCED ACCORDING TO (EU) REGULATION NO. 1308/2013

The Ca' del Bosco cellar.

The vineyards of Tuscan estate Tenute del Cabreo.

A Tour of Italy, BOTTLE *by* BOTTLE

EXPLORING THE COUNTRY'S PREMIER WINE REGIONS THROUGH THE LENS OF **KOBRAND FINE WINE AND SPIRITS** *by Lars Leicht*

For lovers of Italian wine, the Kobrand portfolio offers a range of delights both classic and innovative. Each year, the importer showcases some particularly fine examples during an incomparable road show, Tour d'Italia, which headed to Miami, Houston, Phoenix, and Los Angeles this September. *The SOMM Journal* has put together the following primer on the participating producers and their signature wines so that readers who were unable to attend can get a comprehensive look at some highlights of Italian viticulture.

A view of Tuscan estate Biserno.



Villa Matilde was founded in 1961 in Campania.

CAMPANIA



THE REGION: **Campania**

has a long viticultural history even by Italian standards. The ancient Greeks and Romans both revered it for its indigenous varieties, volcanic soils, and innovative techniques in the vineyard—such as training the grapevines to stakes rather than to trees or using the bush method, as was traditionally practiced in ancient times—as well as in the winery.



THE PRODUCER: **Villa**

Matilde was founded in 1961 by Francesco Paolo Avallone, a successful lawyer whose passion for the ancient Roman wines of Campania was inspired by descriptions in chronicles of the time. Totalling 310 acres dedicated to local varieties, Avellano's three estates are today overseen by his son and daughter, Salvatore and Maria Ida.



THE WINE: **Villa Matilde Taurasi**

DOCG is made from 100% Aglianico. It undergoes maceration for over 20 days with frequent pumpovers and délestage before aging in a mix of Allier oak barriques and Slavonian oak casks for 12 months, followed by extensive bottle aging.





Medici Ermete is among the oldest Lambrusco producers in Emilia-Romagna.




Friulian estate Pighin was founded in 1963.

EMILIA-ROMAGNA

THE REGION: **Emilia-Romagna**

is world-renowned for its gastronomic as well as its viticultural traditions. It's the source of various egg pastas; meat sauces like Bolognese; and, of course, Parmigiano-Reggiano, Prosciutto di Parma, mortadella, and other delicacies for which frothy dry Lambrusco is an ideal pairing.

 **THE PRODUCER:** At 130 years of age, **Medici Ermete** is among the world's oldest and best known Lambrusco producers. Currently under fifth-generation family ownership, it blends historic expertise with modern and original style.

 **THE WINE:** **Concerto Reggiano Lambrusco** was the first iconic single-vineyard Lambrusco. Grapes from the prestigious Tenuta La Rampata vineyard are organically grown in clay soil with limited yields, producing a dry, sparkling red wine whose lively bubbles are achieved through natural fermentation.



FRIULI

 **THE REGION:** **Friuli** is Italy's mountainous northeastern frontier, where Italian, Slavic, and Teutonic traditions merge in terms of both culture and winemaking.

 **THE PRODUCER:** **Pighin** was founded in 1963 by brothers Ercole, Luigi, and Fernando Pighin, who purchased a 500-acre estate and planted much of it to vine; in 1968, they acquired another 75 acres in the neighboring Collio DOC, among Italy's most prestigious viticultural areas. The winery remains under the management of Fernando Pighin and his family.

 **THE WINE:** **Pighin Pinot Grigio Friuli DOC** is made from fruit grown in gravelly, sandy subsoil that forces the vines to root deep into the earth in search of water. As they struggle, their fruit grows more concentrated, resulting in a full, well-structured wine with remarkable minerality. Seeing no malolactic fermentation or oak contact, this is a pure expression of the Pinot Grigio grape and of Friulian terroir.



PIEDMONT


 **THE REGION:** **Piedmont** is perhaps best known for Barolo, called the "wine of kings and the king of wines," but this northwestern region at the foot of the Alps holds a royal flush when it comes to wine production, being home to Barbaresco, Barbera, Dolcetto, Gavi, Arneis, and Asti, to name but a few.

 **THE PRODUCER:** The family-owned **Michele Chiarlo** keeps a tight focus on Piedmont's indigenous varieties, which it grows in exceptional vineyards. Its top two, Cerequio and La Court, are recognized as UNESCO World Heritage Sites.

 **THE WINE:** **Cipressi Barbera Nizza DOCG** takes its name from the cypress trees that line the crown of the hillside La Court, renowned for its magnesium-rich calcareous-clay marl of marine origin with a good amount of silty sand. The wine ages for one year in large oak casks before further barrel aging.



SARDINIA


 **THE REGION:** **Sardinia** is an extraordinary land with a history of viticulture that dates back 5,000 years, earning it the ancient name *insuli vini*, or "wine island." With its isolated villages separated by miles of rough terrain dotted with thousands of ancient stone structures known as *nuraghe*, Sardinia can seem lost in the past—but its renewed focus on indigenous grape varieties has captured the attention of the wine world for the foreseeable future.

 **THE PRODUCER:** **Agricola Punica** specializes in Carignano. Founded in 2002, it brought together renowned names in the wine industry, including the legendary late consulting winemaker Giacomo Tachis, Cantina Santadi president Antonello Pilloni, and Tenuta San Guido president Marquis Nicolò Incisa della Rocchetta, to help produce the wines. Its vineyards in the southwest region of Sardinia are an example of the island's viticultural history and potential.


 **THE WINE:** **Barrua Isola dei Nuraghi IGT** takes its name from one of its two vineyard sources in the Sulcis region on the southern part of the island, where sandy soils are mixed with limestone and clay. It's composed primarily of Carignano, an indigenous grape prized for its elegance and velvety tannins, along with Cabernet Sauvignon and Merlot, which add structure and complexity to the blend; the three are vinified separately and then aged together in 40% new and 60% second-year French oak barriques for about 18 months.

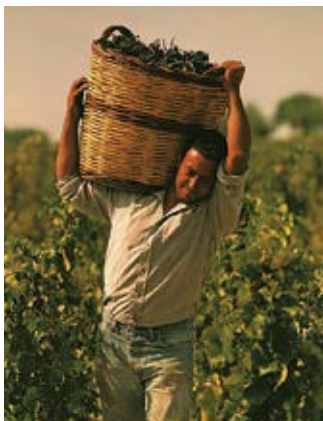


SICILY

 **THE REGION:** In the ancient land of Sicily, there is a renewed appreciation for indigenous varieties such as Nero d'Avola, which is the hallmark grape of the Noto DOC near the city of Siracusa on the southeastern part of the island.


 **THE PRODUCER:** **Feudo Maccari** was founded in 2000 by Antonio Moretti, known for his Tuscan labels Tenuta Sette Ponti and Poggio al Lupo. The 250-acre estate just over a mile from the Ionian Sea is made up of separate feudal properties that Moretti purchased and unified and features more than 50 separate plots.

 **THE WINE:** **Saia Sicilia** is made from 100% Nero d'Avola grapes grown on 20- to 30-year-old vines planted in south-facing vineyards 80 meters above sea level, where the soil is volcanic with deposits of white sand and chalk. The wine is fermented in stainless-steel tanks with regular punchdowns; blending takes place first when the wine is placed in oak, then again during the first racking. **Saia Sicilia** spends a total of 12–14 months in barrique.



Harvest at Sicily's Feudo Maccari.

TUSCANY

 **THE REGION:** Tuscany's signature variety is Sangiovese, the lead player in the blends of Chianti and Vino Nobile di Montepulciano, but the unique climate and rocky, clay-rich soils of **Montalcino** in the region's south allow this grape to stand on its own as Brunello, a full-bodied 100% varietal wine capable of long aging.

 **THE PRODUCER:** **Tenute Silvio Nardi** is a cornerstone in Montalcino today, yet it was once considered an outsider, moving here as it did from neighboring Umbria in 1958 to begin making Brunello—a wine that was then little known to the outside world and would not gain its sterling reputation for decades to come.

 **THE WINE:** **Silvio Nardi Brunello di Montalcino DOCG** is sourced from the Nardi family's Manachiera and Casale del Bosco estates and produced in limited quantities. The grapes are hand harvested and the wine is aged in two types of oak.




 **THE REGION:** As noted above, Tuscany's **Montalcino** zone is renowned for Brunello, made exclusively from the Sangiovese grape and aged a minimum of four years before release, when it spends at least two years in wood and four months in bottle.

 **THE PRODUCER:** **Tenuta La Fuga** is a small estate in the Camigliano district southwest of the town of Montalcino that benefits from soils abundant in fossils and volcanic sediments. It is owned by Ambrogio Folonari and his son Giovanni, whose family's legacy of winemaking in Tuscany dates back to the 18th century.

 **THE WINE:** **La Fuga Brunello**

di Montalcino is grown in vineyards that are situated at 400 meters in elevation near the town of Montalcino, sheltered by Mount Amiata, and kept dry by sea breezes coming across the hills to the west. Aged in large Slavonian oak casks, this full-bodied wine shows considerable aging potential, with notes of red berries and leather, high acidity, and polished tannins.



 **THE REGION:** Tuscany's western coast, known as the **Alta Maremma**, is particularly well suited to Bordeaux varieties. A maritime influence cools the heat of the Tuscan sun north of Bolgheri in Bibbona, where the soil is distinctly loamy, with sand, silt, and a small percentage of clay.


 **THE PRODUCER:** **Biserno** reunites Lodovico and Piero Antinori, the namesakes of the original founders of what is today known as Marchesi Antinori Srl. Together they founded this estate in collaboration with legendary consulting winemaker Michel Rolland.

 **THE WINE:** **Il Pino di Biserno** is a blend of Cabernet Franc, Merlot, Cabernet Sauvignon, and Petit Verdot from relatively young vineyards that's distinguished by its balance and finesse. Sixty percent of the wine matures for 12 months in new and second-passage French oak barriques, the remainder in stainless-steel tanks.



 **THE REGION:** The **Chianti Classico** subregion of Tuscany's Chianti zone is renowned for fiercely defending its winemaking

traditions yet also embracing innovation in terms of both winemaking techniques and blends.


 **THE PRODUCER:** **Nozzole** is a roughly 1,000-acre estate in the rugged yet picturesque hills of Greve in Chianti, where vineyards and olive groves thrive.

 **THE WINE:** **Nozzole Chianti Classico Riserva DOCG** is a classic Chianti made from 100% estate Sangiovese, aged in oak barrels for 24 months.



 **THE REGION:** **Chianti** is one of the world's most famous viticultural areas, reputed not only for the traditional style of Sangiovese-based wines it has been producing for hundreds of years but also the Super Tuscan blends that became widely known in the late 20th century.

 **THE PRODUCER:** **Tenuta Sette Ponti** is owned by luxury-goods entrepreneur Antonio Moretti. The estate lies in the Colli Aretini subzone of the Chianti zone in a remote valley and is named for the seven medieval bridges crossing the Arno River on the road from Arezzo to Florence.

 **THE WINE:** The flagship wine of Tenuta Sette Ponti, **Oreno** is named for the river that runs through the property. The soils are a blend of clay, sand, and stony Galestro limestone. Grape clusters are reduced to one or two per branch to assure concentration and quality in this blend of Merlot, Cabernet Sauvignon, and Petit Verdot, which is aged in Allier barriques.





Salviano-Castello di Titignano in the heart of the Orvieto DOC.

THE REGION: Tuscany's **Chianti Classico** subregion is made up of five villages, one of the most renowned of which is Greve, whose stony soils are ideal for making wines with great aging potential.

THE PRODUCER: **Tenute del Cabreo** is owned by the aforementioned Ambrogio and Giovanni Folonari. Among Tuscany's top winemakers, they preside over seven estates, each in one of Tuscany's primary areas of production.

THE WINE: **Cabreo Il Borgo Toscana IGT** debuted with the 1982 vintage in 1985. It is made from Sangiovese and Cabernet Sauvignon grapes grown in the Fattoria di Zano vineyard, which is planted at 300 meters above sea level on clay and stony soils. Matured 16 months in oak and six months in bottle before release, it shows aromas of black fruit and earth as well as a polished, velvety character.



THE REGION: Tuscany's **Bolgheri** subzone has become world famous for its high-quality native whites and international-style reds.

THE PRODUCER: **Campo al Mare** was founded in 1999 by Ambrogio and Giovanni Folonari.

THE WINE: **Campo al Mare Bolgheri DOC** is made from Merlot, Cabernet Sauvignon, and Cabernet Franc grown in the clay and sandy soils of a vineyard overlooking the Tyrrhenian Sea. Matured for about a year in one-year-old French barriques, this is a wine of great concentration and complexity, showing aromas of black fruit and licorice, a velvety texture, and a long finish.



THE REGION: **Bolgheri's** affinity for Bordeaux varieties was discovered by Tenuta San Guido founder Mario Incisa della Rocchetta when he planted his first vineyards there in the 1940s.

THE PRODUCER: **Tenuta San Guido** is hailed as a standard-bearer of Italian enology as the creator of the first Super Tuscan wine, Sassicaia, which debuted in 1968.

THE WINE: **Guidalberto** is a blend of Cabernet Sauvignon and Merlot, which are separately fermented before they're blended and



aged in French and American oak barrels. The wine's aromas of ripe, concentrated berries are offset by restrained yet spicy oak notes. Intense red fruit flavors and an elegantly supple texture are supported by ripe, silky tannins, while the Merlot contributes sweet black fruit.

THE REGION: Tuscany's

Montepulciano zone is home to **Vino Nobile**, an archetypal Italian red wine made from at least 70% Sangiovese along with other local grape varieties.

THE PRODUCER: **TorCalvano** was purchased in 1994 by Ambrogio and Giovanni Folonari. The pristine 48-acre estate dates from the 14th century. At 984 feet above sea level, the soil here is made up of clay and stones.

THE WINE: **TorCalvano Vino Nobile di Montepulciano DOCG** is a classic **Vino Nobile** made from 100% Sangiovese and matured 20 months in traditional large casks. It expresses delicate floral aromas and is balanced and elegant on the palate.



UMBRIA

THE REGION: **Umbria** is often referred to as "Italy's green heart" for its dense forests and abundant agriculture. Bordering Tuscany, it is a lesser-known region that surprises enophiles with delightful values.

THE PRODUCER: **Salviano-Castello di Titignano** is owned by the Rocchetta family of Sassicaia fame. Their Salviano estate extends over 5,000 acres surrounding Lake Corbara and the banks of the Tiber River in the heart of the Orvieto DOC production zone.

THE WINE: **Salviano Castello di Titignano Orvieto Classico Superiore DOC** respects the

ancient tradition of blending indigenous varieties Procanico, Grechetto, and Verdello. It shows citrus and tropical fruits typical of the former two grapes along with a minerality and sapidity that comes from the vineyard's limestone soils.



VENETO

THE REGION: **Veneto's** Valpolicella zone

is a unique area with soils derived from ancient glaciers; a microclimate moderated by the surrounding mountains and Lake Garda; indigenous grape varieties including Corvina, Corvinone, and Rondinella; and a winemaking history that dates back past the ancient Romans.

THE PRODUCER: **Buglioni** is the eponymous estate of Alfredo Buglioni, who turned his business acumen gained from experience in the textile industry into a vision for producing fresh, modern, high-quality wines that express the terroir of the Valpolicella Classico zone. His wines are fully sourced from the 153-acre certified organic property.

THE WINE: **Il Lussurioso Amarene della Valpolicella Classico DOCG** got

its name from its long-lasting, luxurious finish. It is made from 100% estate fruit that comes from Buglioni's Vigneto San Pietro in Valpolicella's zona classica, where dark clay soils have a high gravel content. Grapes are manually harvested around mid-September and undergo the drying process known as *appassimento* until January.





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