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DECEMBER 2023/JANUARY 2024 • \$10.95

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IN GOOD

company



Members of the Cakebread Cellars wine club and other guests gathered last September to mark the winery's 50th harvest in Napa Valley.

PHOTO: JIMMY WOLF

CAKEBREAD CELLARS

MARKS 50 YEARS IN
NAPA VALLEY—AND
LOOKS FORWARD TO
THE NEXT 50

BY DEBORAH PARKER WONG

IT'S BEEN A MILESTONE YEAR for Cakebread Cellars' Dennis and Bruce Cakebread, culminating with a coast-to-coast tour as the brothers traversed the country throughout October, hosting dinners and tastings in honor of the winery's 50th harvest. This extraordinary achievement places Cakebread among just a handful of family-owned Napa Valley wineries with 50 vintages to their credit.

Established in 1972 with the purchase of the 22-acre Sturdivant Ranch in Rutherford, it's now one of California's best-known and -loved wineries—that much was obvious from the camaraderie and deep appreciation expressed by guests and wine club members at the 50th anniversary harvest celebration that Cakebread hosted in its expansive central courtyard in September. In keeping with its emphasis on culinary hospitality, guests grazed on dishes from not only its culinary team but also Michelin-starred Napa restaurant Morimoto and St. Helena's The Charter Oak as well as cheeses and oysters from local purveyors. An impressive parade of library wines, including Pinot Noirs and Sauvignon Blancs in large-format bottles,



Party guests dined on bites courtesy of Cakebread Cellars' culinary team, Michelin-starred Napa restaurant Morimoto, and St. Helena's The Charter Oak as well as cheeses and oysters from local purveyors.



Cakebread Cellars co-owner Bruce Cakebread (second from left) and VP of sales and marketing Laura Webb (right) chat with members of the winery's wine club during the event.

were the highlight of the afternoon event. With every sip, the wines bore witness to decade after decade of well-crafted vintages.

Throughout the afternoon, Bruce Cakebread spent time chatting with guests and extolling the charms of his granddaughter, representing the fourth generation of Cakebreads as a winemaking family. Aaron Fishleder, vice president of operations, told me that the winery's recent acquisition of the Ahmann Vineyard in Carneros was designed "to secure the future of the family's fourth generation"—a mission that's also being fulfilled by the talent behind Cakebread's well-curated hospitality program. "We're ready," he said. "We've got one of the best teams in the business in place now, and the synergy has never been better."



Partygoers enjoy the celebration.

County side of the region. According to Fishleder, 174 acres of Chardonnay and Sauvignon Blanc are undergoing redevelopment on the property, which is being farmed according to regenerative organic standards. Sustainability practices across the company's 18 estate vineyards in Napa Valley, Anderson Valley, and Sonoma Valley are overseen by director of vineyard operations Jessica Luke Baumgartner, who leads the viticulture team and manages grape growing.

In fact, Cakebread is tackling a host of changes related to reducing its carbon footprint; with 771 of 1,873 acres under vine, there's every incentive to reduce inputs and conserve resources. While it's implementing organic farming practices across all of its properties, Cakebread sources as much as 70% of its fruit, so Fishleder is making a big push toward en-

The Dream Team

Fishleder, who joined Cakebread in 2020, has spent the past few years building a "dream team" of technical and managerial talent intended to take the company into the future. In April 2023, just after flowering, Niki Williams joined Cakebread as winemaker. Williams, who is lauded for her artistic yet light-handed approach to her craft, had long been on Fishleder's radar before becoming the linchpin of Cakebread's winemaking team, which also includes Jane Dunkley, a native of Australia who leads Bezel Wines—a collection of expressions sourced from the Central Coast AVAs of Edna Valley and Paso Robles that was introduced in 2022 to elevate the everyday drinking experience—and Sally Johnson Blum, a Napa Valley veteran who joined Mullan Road Cellars in 2023. Founded by Dennis Cakebread in Walla Walla, Washington, in 2011, Mullan Road opened a new tasting room in Woodinville, just 45 minutes north of Seattle, last summer to tap the direct-to-consumer interest there.

PHOTO: SARA SANGER

A Defining Chapter

The past few years have been pivotal for Cakebread Cellars in other ways as well. With the purchase of its sixth vineyard in Carneros, the aforementioned 209-acre Ahmann Vineyard, Cakebread not only made the largest acquisition in its history but doubled its acreage on the Napa



couraging its growers to forgo synthetic herbicides and adopt its practices.

Additionally, as a silver-level member of International Wineries for Climate Action (IWCA) since 2022, Cakebread is part of the Race to Zero campaign, a United Nations-backed global effort through which IWCA's member wineries have committed to achieving net zero emissions by 2050. The company itself has ambitiously pledged to reach net zero by 2030, when it also aims to have 50% of its power generated by on-site renewable sources.

Other changes have been underway for some time: Consider the breathtaking 2019 renovation of Cakebread's Rutherford tasting room, which yielded a marvel of reclaimed redwood described as "Frank Lloyd Wright integrated with a nature aesthetic" that exudes comfort under soaring ceilings. In the winery, custom oval-shaped



Brian Streeter is executive chef at Cakebread Cellars.



cement tanks standing on tall legs now number 24 as Cakebread continues to reduce its use of oak barrels. During a recent tasting, Fishleder poured me two 2022 Sauvignon Blancs: one aged in a combination of stainless steel, neutral oak, and cement egg and the other in 85% cement and 15% stainless steel. They were remarkably similar yet distinct; with seamless intensity and a saline finish, the wine aged in multiple vessels was more accessible, while the primarily cement-aged rendition was more youthful and austere, with a bright pop of acidity on the midpalate.

We also sampled the 2010 Benchland Select Cabernet Sauvignon from a rare cooler vintage, which showed depth on the midpalate thanks to notes of earth and cured meat, and the 2018 Benchland Select, a luscious, dark-fruited, and velvety wine with a finish of rich oak that continues to integrate with each passing year.

Anniversary Bottlings

As an ode to the winery's first Chardonnay, Cakebread Cellars released a 50th Anniversary Chardonnay Collection that showcases four single-vineyard estate wines, all hailing from Carneros: Cuttings Wharf, Foster Road, Milton Road, and Tinsley Ranch. Winemaking was tailored to

each site, so each wine stood on its own merit, but the overall theme was delicacy and intensity. Foster Road showed the most Burgundian-like intensity along with less-ripe tree fruit; Milton Road, the only wine to undergo 100% malolactic conversion, was floral, with ripe tree fruit and white pepper; Cuttings Wharf had notes of young pineapple, guava, and mangosteen as well as a flinty, precise balance; and the newer blocks of Tinsley Ranch showed delicate, greener fruit and nervous acidity.

In a departure from tradition, the labels for the anniversary bottlings (of which a limited number are still available for purchase) feature photographs taken by winery founder Jack Cakebread, who trained with Ansel Adams. When you enter the winery tasting room, you'll see an exhibit of dramatic black-and-white photographs also taken by Jack Cakebread; on an amusing note, you'll even find pickleball paddles adorned with the winery's logo in the gift shop. Beyond the refined hospitality it offers and even the wines themselves, there's an authenticity to Cakebread that draws wine lovers to it: Here, good company will always be a prerequisite for the enjoyment of good wine and good food. *§*

As an ode to its first Chardonnay, Cakebread Cellars released a 50th Anniversary Chardonnay Collection that showcases four single-vineyard estate wines from Carneros: Cuttings Wharf, Foster Road, Milton Road, and Tinsley Ranch.

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PHOTO: KATE NEWTON



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What Somms Will Be Sipping in 2024

WHAT A YEAR! In 2023, I attended a record number of wine tastings in New York City and beyond. I love the ongoing education these events provide: The wine world is constantly evolving, and tastings are often where I first learn about different grape varieties, wine styles, regions, and trends.

Thanks to some recent experiences that piqued my interest, in 2024, I plan on taking a deeper dive into ageworthy rosé; single-vineyard Brunello di Montalcino and Barolo; and wines from Long Island, Languedoc, the Canary Islands, Sicily, and Virginia, among other places. (And you can't convince me that attempting to taste every Champagne on the planet

isn't a worthy New Year's resolution.)

In this spirit of wine education and insatiable curiosity, I asked a few sommeliers which wines they tasted in 2023 that they must have more of in the new year. There definitely seems to be a heightened interest in unique white wines from around the world. Consider their picks to add to your collection or wine list.

PHOTO: STEVEN FRAGALE



LISA KOMARA

*Beverage director,
Blackfoot Hospitality,
New York, NY*

A new discovery I've made this year that I thought was so cool is wines that are normally vinified red that are vinified white. I've encountered two in particular: a Sangiovese Bianco and a Pinot Nero Bianco. It's amazing that removing the skins immediately, especially with Sangiovese, produces such a crystalline white wine! And it's really fun to drink a white with the classic flavors of citrus and stone fruit but with the added subtle nuance of red fruits.

PHOTO: ELLEN SILVERMAN



ARTHUR HON

*Beverage director,
The Modern,
New York, NY*

One region that I would like to explore more in 2024 [is Australia, including] the mineral-driven Chardonnays produced by Patrick Sullivan and Joshua Cooper. The precision and refreshing quality of their wines really overdeliver and surprise Old World Chardonnay drinkers in a delightful way.

PHOTO: DANDY NOEL



TIFFANY TOBEY

*Owner/sommelier,
Tiffany's Toast, Dallas, TX*

The wine I have fallen in love with out of Portugal is a crisp, zesty Alvarinho produced by Soalheiro; the pairing abilities are endless and the price is friendly. The desire for different Spanish whites has been elevated by the exploration of Cava, due to the rise in numbers of people using Cava for Mimosas instead of other sparkling wines. I've tasted plenty of whites from Spain lately and must say that the Viura grape variety keeps making me come back to it. Rioja Blanco can be made in many different styles, but the Bodegas Obalo Blanco has me constantly wanting to pop a bottle.

PHOTO: COS LINDSTROM/CAPTURING OUR SENSE PHOTOGRAPHY



MAIA PARISH

*Owner/sommelier, The
Wine Suite, Denver, CO*


Aligoté accounts for 6% of all vines in Bourgogne and has a long history in France. I have sampled a few Burgundian styles, with my favorite [coming from] Bouzeron. My palate longs for these über-tart wines with floral characteristics. During a trade tasting with Craft Wines, I experienced the American sister: Jolie-Laide produced [its] first Aligoté in 2022. The grapes come from two vineyards, Las Cimas and Siletto, in the northern [part] of the Russian River Valley.

PHOTO: MAGGIE KIRKLAND



ANDREW MOSBLECH

*Director of hospitality,
Humble Spirit,
McMinnville, OR*

[I'm enjoying] high-altitude whites from the Dão and Douro: [They're] dynamic [and] food-friendly, with energy, identity, and value, [such as] Encruzado from the Dão and Rabi-gato from the Douro. Also sub-appellation Burgundy like Monthe-lie and St. Aubin, [where] next-generation wine-makers [are] taking a natural approach yet making clean wines—aka "hippies with hygiene." 

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

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NEW RELEASES



TASTES BETTER OUTSIDE



The White Zin Dilemma

ON TURNING THE TIDES OF TRENDS

WINE TRENDS AREN'T always fathomable. I distinctly remember, for instance, the befuddlement I felt as a sommelier watching the meteoric rise of White Zinfandel in the 1980s. In those days, my peers and I were all flush with enthusiasm for the types of California Chardonnays and Cabernet Sauvignons that had bested French Grands Crus in the 1976 Judgment of Paris—and yet we couldn't give Chateau Montelena or Stag's Leap away. The vast majority of consumers preferred fruity wines such as Blue Nun or Wente Grey Riesling.

Grey Riesling, for the record, wasn't a Riesling. The name was given to whites made from Trousseau Gris in an attempt to capitalize on consumer tastes for Riesling-style wines. My response was to specialize in authentic German *qualitätswein*: classic Rieslings from growths such as Scharzhofberger, Wehlener Sonnenuhr, and Ürziger Würzgarten. If they liked their wines fruity, I figured, I was going to give them the best fruit-driven wines in the world. For a few short years in the early 1980s, this strategy actually worked.

Alas, by the middle of the decade, the

market for German wines in general was dead in the water. Instead, domestic brands such as Kendall-Jackson and Glen Ellen had saturated the market with \$5 or \$6 Chardonnay, ushering in a crushing tidal wave of soft, fruity, buttery whites that would take at least 20 years to subside. (Remember “cougar juice”? That wasn't too long ago!)

Meanwhile, consumers were finally beginning to gravitate toward Cabernet Sauvignon—which was great, except for the fact that not every dish is ideal with it. By the early 1990s, I had trained the staffs in my multi-unit restaurant group to push hard on Pinot Noir, a far more versatile red with food. I think we were extremely successful, but let's face it: Pinot Noir did not become mainstream until the movie *Sideways* came out in 2004. That should tell you a lot about consumer obsessions—they're often more about following the crowd than having actual taste.

I was recently struck by a *New York Times* column about efficiency, in which the author reflected on the “sheer joy” of setting a “vinyl record carefully on the turntable” despite the obvious conve-

nience of digital music. No one has to guess why vinyl records have returned with a vengeance—there is something compellingly organic about listening to music in an analog format, rife with auditory imperfections. By the same token, it should not be hard to understand the current madness for imperfection in wines, particularly murky, prickly natural wines.

The positive thing about trends, even those we object to, is that they are usually indicative of some kind of evolution in consumer tastes. The thirst for natural wines, after all, is not too far off from the appreciation of terroir-driven greats such as Romanée-Conti, Tempier, Musar, and Vega Sicilia—all of which are often as raw as can be. To my mind, natural wines are just a gateway to that higher class of producer (one can hope!).

Wine professionals stand to benefit, then, from not only recognizing and embracing trends but taking the guests who are interested in them to places you want them to go—ideally, of course, into the realm of higher-quality wines that enhance your cuisine, your program, and ultimately your business. **SJ**



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More Dollars and Sense

HOW TO PRICE POURS AND CONTROL COSTS BY THE GLASS

IN MY OCTOBER/NOVEMBER 2023

column, I explored tips and tricks for maximizing the profitability of your by-the-glass program. These included 1) knowing your competition, 2) differentiating rather than duplicating your selections, and 3) focusing on “hidden gems.” While such tactics are paramount to maximizing profitability, it’s also important to take a deeper look at the finances of by-the-glass programs in order to understand how to price your wines and control costs without negatively impacting the guest experience (or the perception thereof).

What to Charge

An industry standard is that the price of one glass should cover the cost of the bottle—reason being that, if only one glass of a given bottle is sold before the wine turns, you’ll at least break even. Generally speaking, fine-dining establishments estimate four 6.25-ounce glasses per bottle, while most other restaurants pour five 5-ounce glasses per bottle. The CoGS (cost of goods sold) percentage for these wines are 25% (400% markup) and 20% (500% markup) respectively. However, there has been an increasingly disturbing trend of serving industrial or big-box brands at 700%–1000% markups (14%–10% CoGS). The only acceptable excuse for this would be if the markup were based on purchase price after a quantity discount. For example, a \$15 bottle of wine purchased at a quantity discount of \$10 per bottle can be marked up to a greater degree provided that the multiplier is based on the purchase cost, not the front-line cost. Any other application of extreme pricing will damage rather than benefit wine revenue, as it discourages people from ordering additional glasses—or worse, encourages them to refrain from wine altogether in favor of beer, cocktails, or nothing at all.

Pricing Hidden Gems Versus Common Stock

The aforementioned standard is based primarily on common wines. When pricing hidden gems, a shrewd operator is able to take a greater margin without risk that their guests will feel gouged; the latter’s lack of familiarity with the wine means that they’re also unaware of competitive sets against which to benchmark pricing. Additionally, lesser-known brands of commonly expensive wines (for example, Barolo or Chablis) allow for higher markups provided that the price is in line with what consumers expect for the category.

Cost Controls

There is no one-size-fits-all model for portion control. Since the majority of restaurants execute by-the-glass programs from the bar, there are easy ways to implement measured pours that do not include reliance on the naked eye. Every bartender will assure you they can pour accurately. They cannot. Go ahead, ask them to pour a perfect 5 ounces into a wine glass: I’ll eat this magazine if it measures out to exactly that amount. Then have them measure out 5 ounces, 5.5 ounces, and 6 ounces in three glasses and set them next to each other to indicate the almost imperceptible differences in fill level.

Granted, I detest the use of a measuring cup during service for reasons of product purity; I’m also not a fan of “club service,” whereby the wine is poured into a small carafe and the glass is filled tableside—not least because the extra glassware requires increased

labor and storage. Rather, I recommend each service bar keep wine glasses filled with a measured pour of colored water. Bartenders can then pour adjacent to the control glass in order to match the level.

With proper pricing and portioning, there can be no doubt that a well-managed wine by-the-glass program is the most significant driver of profitability for a restaurant. I hope these lessons push yours to new heights! *sj*



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Hallowed Haunts

THE JURISIN FAMILY LEADS A CULINARY RENAISSANCE IN NORTHERN ARIZONA WINE COUNTRY

IT ALL BEGAN in a picturesque Arizona mining town, where a hamburger joint captured the hearts of locals and tourists alike. When Michelle and Eric Jurisin sunk their savings into a restaurant perched on Cleopatra Hill in Jerome, little did they know it would spark almost three decades of hospitality entrepreneurship. Today, their Haunted Group boasts six restaurants and two boutique hotels in Southwestern wine country.

The Haunted Hamburger opened in 1994 and was instantly popular. “From day one we had lines; it was amazing,” remembers Michelle, who explains that hospitality is in her blood. “Because of my family, I’ve had a love of food since I was a little girl,” the Rhode Island native asserts. “My father had a delicatessen, and I grew up with Italian grandmothers and Sunday dinners with 30 or 40 people.”

By 1999, the Jurisins had opened a second spot, Jerome Brewery—but over time, its focus shifted from beer to wine, and it was rechristened as Grapes Restaurant & Bar. In 2000, when the family relocated to nearby Cottonwood, their desire for an upscale Italian chophouse resulted in their third venture, Nic’s Italian Steak & Crab House. “My husband likes a side of pasta with his steak or his fish,” says Michelle. “Back East, it was common,

PHOTOS: CHRISTINA BARRUETA



Haunted Group co-founder Michelle Jurisin.

but 20 years ago, you couldn’t find an Italian steakhouse here.” Predictably, they had another hit on their hands; to alleviate the hour-long waits, they transformed a historic theater across the street into The Tavern Grille.

In the ensuing years, the Jurisins would open Pizzeria Bocce Patio Bar, featuring wood-fired Neapolitan-style pizzas; Crema Craft Kitchen, serving breakfast and lunch; STRADA @ Bocce, offering Italian street food in an industrial venue



A Mimosa flight with breakfast tacos at Crema Craft Kitchen in Cottonwood, AZ.

constructed from eight shipping containers; and The Tavern Hotel “to import our customers,” says Michelle with a laugh. Along the way, they turned The Haunted Group into a family affair: Daughter Nicole is the managing partner of The Tavern Hotel and has a hand in many restaurant operations, including the beverage programs, while son Eric is the chef at The Clinkscale Restaurant, located in boutique hotel The Clinkscale, which the Jurisins opened in Jerome in 2021.

Through it all, they have played a part in the renaissance of Cottonwood, now known as “the heart of Arizona wine country.” As Michelle notes, “After we opened Nic’s, tasting rooms started to open and Cottonwood became

a stop on the Verde Valley Wine Trail.” In fact, hotel guests can now admire vineyard views: In October, noted musician and winemaker Maynard James Keenan’s Merkin Vineyards Hilltop Winery debuted next door to much fanfare.

Celebrating food, community, and the adopted hometown they love, the family ensures that their hospitality shines through in every Haunted Group establishment. “If I’m going to spend my life living in a small town,” says Michelle, “I’m going to make it the best and something that people will enjoy.” **SJ**



Wood-fired artichokes with lemon aioli at Pizzeria Bocce Patio Bar in Cottonwood.



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In the Cloud

KUDOS TO **KUMOYA**, A JAPANESE GEM IN DENVER'S LOHI NEIGHBORHOOD

IF EXPANSION WERE A DRUG, The Culinary Creative Group (CCG) would be in dire need of an intervention. Good thing it isn't, because CCG operates more than a dozen of Denver's most exciting restaurants and bars, four of which opened in 2023 alone: joining such favorites as modern steakhouse A5, Middle Eastern eatery Ash'kara, and hopping taqueria Mister Oso were breakfast-and-brunch joint Fox and the Hen, Detroit-style pizza parlor Red Tops Rendezvous, Latin-inspired lounge Ay Papi, and dazzling Japanese destination Kumoya.

On a recent visit to the latter—whose name loosely translates as “Cloud House” in a nod to the ethereal lighting throughout the dining room and adjoining lounge Bar Kumo—my companions and I indulged in not only pristine sushi, including luscious otoro topped with dollops of uni and caviar, but also all manner of delectable small plates, among them buttery miso-broiled eggplant garnished with bubu areare; a decadent milk-bread sando filled with fried pork, Napa cabbage, Asian pear, and curry aioli; and slices of seared wagyu brightened by pickled wasabi and mustard greens. Bite after bite was stunning—but while kudos for the menu go to chefs Corey Baker and Max Mackissock, CCG managing partner/general manager Nicole Lebedevitch earns equal credit for a beverage program that's built to enhance every last morsel.

Naturally, the cocktails incorporate Asian ingredients with flair—lychee, cherry blossom, matcha, togarashi—but they're not overly flamboyant, ensuring that “the food stays the shining star,” in Lebedevitch's words. Take the Brine, a play on a Dirty Martini that's subtly distinguished by salted plum as well as house-pickled onions, or the Umami, which combines Japanese whisky, mushroom-infused rum, and dashes of shoyu and black-garlic

molasses in a glass rimmed with Okinawa brown sugar and sesame seeds. “It sounds complex, [but it] finds this very pretty balance [between] salty, sweet, and savory,” she says.

Speaking of umami, “you've got a lot of [it] in Japanese cooking, lots of misos and salts and things . . . so lighter, higher-acid wines” that refresh the palate and “make you want to go ahead and take another



The Brine cocktail features French gin and vermouth, pickled-onion brine, and salted plum.

bite of food are really what I thought of,” Lebedevitch explains. The wine list's emphasis is thus decidedly on sparklers and whites: Think Champagne, white Burgundy, and German Riesling as well as such fun stuff as Jacquère from the Savoie and skin-contact Pinot Gris from Mendocino County, supplemented by a handful of almost exclusively light-bodied French reds.

As for saké, Lebedevitch freely admits that “I underestimated [its] power” in building the one-page selection, which she's already expanding: “People want to explore and want more offerings.” To that

Kumoya's wagyu tartare is topped with a soy-cured egg and accompanied by toasted shokupan.



PHOTOS: CONNOR STEHR

end, she encourages them to “start with the [sakés] that are really beautiful and move into the things that are a little bit lighter and less complex; [that way] you're not missing those nuances, because as you continue drinking, you start to lose the ability to identify flavors.”

Not that that's necessarily a problem, especially as the evening wears on and guests migrate over to Bar Kumo, where the vibe is rather more freewheeling. “The late-night food . . . is fire,” asserts Lebedevitch, adding, “Who knows if a saké bomb's around the corner?” *SJ*



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On Beaches and Burgundies

IN CONVERSATION WITH **NANETTE RAPUZZI**
OF THE RITZ-CARLTON, AMELIA ISLAND

by Emily Johnston Collins

PHOTO: BARON ERIK SPAFFORD




As the only sommelier at Amelia Island, Nanette Rapuzzi, a WSET Diploma candidate, runs all of the resort's wine events, oversees the wine list, and conducts wine training sessions for staff.

THE WHITE SAND BEACHES that surround The Ritz-Carlton, Amelia Island, in Florida are just one reason that Nanette Rapuzzi loves her job as the resort's assistant food and beverage manager and sommelier. Having grown up in the coastal city of Lima, Peru, she says, "Living by the beach is a necessity!"

Rapuzzi began her hospitality career upon moving from Peru to California; after 15 years with The Ritz-Carlton Bacara, Santa Barbara—where she worked her way up from barback to sommelier—she relocated to Florida in 2022. As the only sommelier at Amelia Island, Rapuzzi, a WSET Diploma candidate, runs all of the resort's wine events, oversees the wine list, and conducts wine training sessions for staff. (That's another thing she loves about her job: overhearing servers repeating to guests the knowledge that she's imparted.)

I first met Rapuzzi when she was working at Angel Oak, the restaurant at The Ritz-Carlton Bacara. It was thanks to her influence that I was able to join her team of sommeliers as they oversaw the impressive wine cellar. Counting inventory was a multiperson job: Rapuzzi would count bottles from South America and California, and I would tackle the intricate selection of crus from France. The wine program at Amelia Island, she assures me, is more manageable for one person, yet she is eager for the opportunity to grow it. For starters, she says she wants to add "for sure more Santa Barbara County wines and grower-producer Champagnes," which align with the resort's seafood-oriented cuisine. But if she can build the list further, she would love to have a deep selection of Burgundies.

Granted, purchasing new wines at The Ritz-Carlton is not as straightforward as it would be at a standalone restaurant. New purchases need to be approved by a string of managers, so preparedness is key. Luckily, this is one of Rapuzzi's strong points, helped by the fact that she spends her free time studying wine.

Rapuzzi's WSET Diploma exams are not offered nearby, so she elects to take them in Napa. This allows her to reconnect with the vineyards, winemakers, and sommeliers that made her so passionate about wine in the first place. Reflecting on these trips and her studies, she says humbly, "I feel like a wine asset to The Ritz-Carlton, Amelia Island." 

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The Grand Cru Connection

CALIFORNIA IS HOME TO AMERICA'S BEST VINEYARDS, BUT HOW SHOULD WE PROMOTE THEM?

THE AMERICAN WINE INDUSTRY

is built on compelling stories: the Spanish missionaries of the Rio Grande Valley, the gold rush of 1849, the post-Prohibition era, the 1976 Judgment of Paris. But what tales does its future hold?

Simply put, the next chapters should zero in on our appellations. With an AOC system dating back to the 1930s, France has a multi-century head start on defining great terroir; the American AVA system, by contrast, is just 45 years old. Still, think of its progress—there are 269 AVAs today, with 149 of them in California alone. Yet while advocating for those AVAs is critical, I'd argue that the most vital assets we can promote are our best vineyards.

Burgundy has its hallowed appellations, but its importance comes down to its most prized Grand Cru sites: Échezeaux, La Romanée, and Corton, to name a few. And the California winemakers I spoke to all agree that we have our own Cortons and La Romanées—"vineyards that consistently make great wine with

a personality and a DNA," as winemaking consultant Jean Hoefliger puts it. "In Napa, of course, To Kalon [in Oakville] would come to mind." La Pelle winemaker Maayan Koschitzky agrees that To Kalon is one of our top vineyards. "A great terroir is a true showcase of a great wine," he says, adding that the best sites "outperform vintage and make standalone wines that are benchmarks year after year."

But how do we identify them for consumers? Is it right to refer to these sites as "Grands Crus"? Joanna Wells, winemaker at Model Farm Wine and Signal Ridge Vineyard, thinks we shouldn't have to. "We use the term 'heritage' to define vineyards that offer deep historical viticultural significance," she says. "There are industrywide efforts [by] Historic Vineyard Society, Foundation Plant Services [and its] heritage clone collections, and Hudson Valley Heritage Wines, to name a few, [which] are working to protect these important vineyards and continue their legacy."

Maya Dalla Valle of her namesake

estate in Oakville argues, "There is an opportunity to create our own applicable terms and expressions and not co-opt the terms traditionally used in Bordeaux and Burgundy in the Napa Valley." Instead of using the French terms "Grand Cru" and "Premier Cru" to identify the best American vineyards and communicate to the consumer that these sites hold the key to identifying fine wine, we could codify a system of vineyard classifications using words like "heritage," as Wells suggests, or a host of other descriptors that could become U.S.-specific: "Signature" or "legacy" come to mind. Right now, there's no wrong answer, but it is time to start the debate. Let's draw definitive distinctions between European sites and American sites, because our legacy indeed depends on it. 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 @jcristaldi.

A drone shot of Signal Ridge Vineyard, which climbs to 2,742 feet in the Mendocino Ridge AVA.





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Harvesttime Ha'ahòni

SHINING A LIGHT ON INDIGENOUS FOOD SOVEREIGNTY

"In the Diné language, ha'ahòni translates to 'perseverance.' [Autumn] is a season that tests endurance, relying on ancient wisdom and adherence to the laws of nature. . . . During this period, we reflect on the collective labor, toil, and sacrifices made for the greater good of the community." —Danielle Goldtooth

PHOTO: CHANELLE SINCLAIR/@IAMCHANELLE



Dii IINÀ—Food from Start to Finish
founder Danielle Goldtooth.

DANIELLE GOLDTOOTH—a forager, rancher, mixologist, and member of the Diné (Navajo) tribe as well as the founder of educational dining experience Dii IINÀ—Food from Start to Finish—epitomizes the spirit of perseverance in her mission to promote awareness of the concept of food sovereignty in the Southwest. As owner of Garden Bar PHX, I had the privilege of hosting Goldtooth and her husband, chef Alan Moore, for an autumnal feast (see sidebar) that showcased an array of produce both foraged and grown on local farms and ranches, including their own.

"This dinner has been two years in the making and was actually quite emotional," Goldtooth said. "When I initiated Dii IINÀ, we lacked the produce and resources on our land. Now, living off the grid on our own property, we can account for every ingredient's growth, origin, and cultivation methods. We've

fostered relationships with local ranchers and other farms, such as the TigerMountain Foundation, a nonprofit co-op that teaches people how to farm in their own backyards."

Later, I caught up with Goldtooth to learn more about what food sovereignty means to her and her hopes for the future of her home region.

Q: What is food sovereignty?

The idea of food sovereignty is that [by] utilizing ancient wisdom, modern technologies, and sustainable practices, we [can] feed our communities with less impact on the earth while taking back a fundamental freedom we have neglected. . . . In a nutshell, food sovereignty is the right to access culturally appropriate food without ecological destruction; we are working with the earth instead of against it, using traditional wisdom to guide us for the future.

Q: How can consumers and businesses support this initiative?

Unfortunately, good intentions sometimes lead people to forage without understanding or respecting the origin of food and how to honor the ingredients. To best support this initiative, collaborate with your farmers and communities, learn about their culture, and heed their guidance. . . . We are in the early stages of [a program] centered around foraging with bartenders. This will encompass an overnight camping trip, education on responsible foraging, and a focus on respecting the land while incorporating foraged items into beverage programs.

Q: How can people learn more about your efforts?


People can email me directly at dii.iinaculinary@gmail.com or follow me on Instagram at [@danielle.goldtooth](https://www.instagram.com/danielle.goldtooth). . . . We believe [that] sharing knowledge and building meaningful relationships [are] key to our mission. By working together, we can help protect and promote the vital concept of food sovereignty. 



PHOTO: MICHELLE ARENT/
@MICHELLEARENTH

The Heat Island Effect, created by Garden Bar PHX bartender Aspen Bingham, featured Hendrick's Gin, chiltepin tincture, desert-bloom cordial, sage, and orange flower water.

An Autumnal Feast Courtesy of Dii IINÀ

First course: An Arizona-grown cruditè board (including items cultivated by Dii IINÀ—Food from Start to Finish founder Danielle Goldtooth) featuring cauliflower, peppers, hybrid cucumber-melon, tomatoes, radishes, seed crackers, and glazed pumpkin seeds

Cocktail: Heat Island Effect combining Hendrick's Gin, chiltepin tincture, desert-bloom cordial, sage, and orange flower water

Second course: Sumac-cured quail egg yolk served with Milagro tequila—lime foam

Cocktail: Black Diamond Aqua Fresca featuring Black Diamond watermelon (grown on Goldtooth's land), sugar, water, and dried hibiscus flowers

Third course: Mesquite-smoked Arizona quail with a sumac, chiltepin, and agave glaze accompanied by herbed Hasselback potatoes and roasted Arizona farm vegetables, including pumpkin and squash (from Navajo Agricultural Products Industry) and okra

Cocktail: Forgotten Apple Daiquiri incorporating aged rum and caramel-apple shrub made with foraged apples

Fourth course: Sheep's cheese cheesecake with salted caramel topping on an amaranth—foraged acorn flour crust

Cocktail: Reposado Acorn Old Fashioned featuring Milagro Reposado, acorn syrup, and bitters



A CHARMING EUROPE TO DISCOVER

Delicious wines from two well-known wine Regions worth exploration

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

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

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

These 2 wines region promotes **the Charming Taste of Europe**, a special project that links the flavors of those wines from Italy and France with the fresh fruit from Greece, and further introduces the United States and Canada to these exquisite items that recall all European beauty and grace. Through the superb high-quality Italian and French wines, and the juicy kiwis and cherries from Greece produced with the artistry of agricultural traditions, this campaign will awaken **the senses and a new culinary consciousness by connecting food, cultures, and territories**. A campaign that will undoubtedly offer the occasion to bring the European charm into one's life

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by Allison Jordan, executive director, California Sustainable Winegrowing Alliance, and vice president, environmental affairs, Wine Institute

Tiny Bubbles, Big Ripple Effect

RINGING IN A MORE SUSTAINABLE NEW YEAR WITH CALIFORNIA SPARKLING

WHAT REPRESENTS THE HOLIDAYS

better than a glass filled with bubbles? Fortunately, California can easily meet the demand: More than 300 wineries in the state make sparkling wine in various styles, from very dry (natural) and dry (brut) to slightly sweet (extra dry) and sweet (sec and demi-sec), using the traditional varieties of Chardonnay and Pinot Noir as well as many other grapes, among them Pinot Blanc and Pinot Gris.

Consumers are seeking out California sparkling wines not only for gift giving, ringing in the New Year, or simply unwinding after their party guests leave but for pairing with everything from charcuterie boards to crab Louie to Basque-style fried chicken. (For more suggested pairings, visit discovercaliforniawines.com/recipes-list.)

As the fourth-largest wine-producing region in the world, California is a global leader in the sustainability movement, with 80% of its wine being produced in a certified-sustainable winery; over 60% of its vineyard acreage, meanwhile, is also certified. Being good stewards of the land and being good neighbors are principles that are deeply rooted within the California wine community, and with many producers using sustainable practices to achieve water and energy conservation, healthy soils, better air and water quality, and enhanced relations with their neighbors and employees as well as to make high-quality expressions, people can also feel good about their wine choices during the holiday season.

Domaine Carneros Winery, J Vineyards & Winery, and Korbel Winery are just three examples of well-known sparkling producers that are also Certified California Sustainable (CCS) wineries. (For a full list of CCS wines, wineries, and vineyards, visit californiasustainablewine.com.) The sustainability-related credentials


PHOTO COURTESY OF WINE INSTITUTE



More than 300 wineries in California make sparkling wine.

and annual goals of Domaine Carneros, for example, are so comprehensive that the winery received the prestigious California Green Medal Sustainable Winegrowing Leadership Award in the business category in 2019; Korbel Winery, meanwhile, has reduced its energy and water consumption by more than a third over the past decade. These wineries are also focusing on creating a more inclusive guest experience: J Vineyards & Winery, for its part, created an innovative culinary program, known as the “Shifting the Lens

Series,” to give a platform to various guest chefs specializing in cultures and cuisines rarely represented in wine-country restaurants and tasting rooms.

Just like the tiny bubbles in a delicious sparkling wine, the aforementioned sustainability practices create a ripple effect: Each producer that pushes for ongoing improvement in this arena helps encourage the entire California wine industry to keep driving toward healthier communities, not to mention a healthier planet. From grapes to glass, their wines are made by people who have made deliberate choices in the vineyard and winery to use responsible practices so that consumers can do good while drinking well. So, this holiday season, encourage your customers to grab a bottle of bubbles—or another California wine—and toast to the growers and vintners doing the right thing! 

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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Parenting 101

ON RAISING A FINE WINE

WHEN ASKED WHICH of their wines they like the best, winemakers often reply, “These wines are like my children—I love them all equally.” That may be a diplomatic answer to keep marketing departments happy, but it also speaks to an important truth about winemakers: We take responsibility, and we don’t rest until the wine has been bottled, flown the coop, and nestled nicely in someone’s cellar. Even then, we are not fully satisfied until we know it has aged the way we hoped it would. Much like parents, no?

This analogy has been with us for centuries and has worked its way into our speech. The French term *élevage*, which roughly translates as “raise,” describes how a wine is looked after between the end of fermentation and bottling. This is an essential stage in its maturation process; as with a child, a wine that has been neglected is rarely the better for it. So what happens when we are separated from a wine that has not completed its *élevage*?

When a departing winemaker leaves unfinished wines behind, their successor must ask two key questions: “Where did these wines come from? And where are they going?” The goal is to preserve their spirit—or enhance it if necessary. I’ve written about the virtues of making wine without a lot of numerical data, but this is an instance in which lab numbers are vital. High volatile acidity suggests spoilage organisms that may still be active. Sulfur dioxide should be checked and corrected if appropriate. Lurking residual sugar will need to be fermented.

Sometimes the wines that give us the most cause for alarm in the production

phase are the most sublime once finished. There is always an emotional attachment to them, problem children or not: We don’t want to hand them over to someone who might not recognize their unique qualities and blend them away into something less exciting.

There is also one’s reputation to consider: The strengths or faults of a finished wine fall squarely on the producer’s shoulders. Sometimes a winemaker leaves before the high scores roll in and credit is given; conversely, I have “inherited”

wines that were jaw-droppingly flawed. In those cases, I’ve had the unenviable job of telling the owner that their wines were irredeemable and must be destroyed. Fortunately that is a rarity; most wines are left in decent or better shape.

Regardless, this is where the concept of intellectual generosity becomes vital. Assume that your predecessor knew what they were doing and did the best they could with what they had. Then pull up your boots and make that wine the most delicious possible. *SJ*



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NUANCED, REFINED, *and* SUBLIME

by BOB PAULINSKI, MW

A view of Victoria's Yarra Valley.

PHOTO COURTESY OF WINE VICTORIA

THE COOL-CLIMATE WINES OF THE MORNINGTON PENINSULA AND YARRA VALLEY TELL A COMPELLING STORY

in victoria

PHOTO: KATHERINE JAMISON



Winemakers Jeremy Magyar and Richard McIntyre of Moorooduc Estate in the Mornington Peninsula.

PHOTO: LEE HALLACK



Vineyards in Victoria's Mornington Peninsula.

Australia is the world's sixth-largest country by landmass. Wine is produced in each of its states, which together encompass more than 60 designated growing regions with over 400,000 acres under vine. Wine styles naturally vary greatly across this vast land, playing a role in the broader story of Australia's evolution and its current place as one of the world's most cutting-edge, adaptive, and exciting wine-producing countries.

One region brings this story into focus like no other: Victoria, the southernmost state in continental Australia. It's home to 600-plus wineries across more than 20 regions that are set apart by various factors, but a primary driver is climate.

Victoria regions like Geelong, Macedon, Upper Goulburn, Gippsland, Beechworth, and Strathbogie Ranges can produce noteworthy cool-climate wines; however, the two that are best known internationally are the Mornington Peninsula and Yarra Valley. When I lived in Melbourne, I routinely made day trips to both of them, and while they share a cool climate, they yield vastly different expressions.

The Mornington Peninsula, which juts out into the icy waters of the Southern Ocean, has a maritime climate that results in cool, extended growing seasons that are much longer than those in most inland wine regions. Its low, rolling hills experience rainfall in the winter and spring followed by dry summers. Irrigation is uncommon, and frost is rarely a concern.

The area has a long grape-growing history, with early plantings dating back to the late 1800s, but it didn't become established as a wine-producing region until the late 1970s and early 1980s. In 1997, the Mornington Peninsula received its GI (Geographical In-

dication) status, and today, there are over 60 wineries here, most of which are family-owned. The region stakes its reputation on Pinot Noir along with Chardonnay and aromatic grapes like Riesling, Pinot Gris, and Viognier. Small plantings of Shiraz and Cabernet Sauvignon are also found, producing restrained, nuanced wines that are the antithesis of the ripe, dense versions from other parts of the country.

What can one expect from a Mornington Pinot Noir? With a diversity of soils and weather patterns within its small boundaries, this is a young region, which invariably leads to a range of styles; while the use of oak, especially new oak, tends to be restrained, maceration times vary, as does the use of whole-bunch fermentation. Yet the vast majority of Pinot Noir here shows a vibrant red-fruit note with a savory undertone, along with a telltale backbone of lively, brisk acidity. These are not wines built on high extraction and power but modern expressions showing vibrant aromatics, finesse, elegance, and purity.

While the Yarra Valley sits just north of the Mornington Peninsula, it tells a vastly different story. It is about 100 miles from the Southern Ocean, with the



PHOTO COURTESY OF WINE VICTORIA

The estate of Yering Station in the Yarra Valley.

Dandenong Ranges to the south providing a moderate cooling effect and, on the other end, the Great Dividing Range shielding the region from the high heat of the north. The resulting continental climate features a wide diurnal temperature swing that provides two benefits: easing vine stress and allowing for the

grapes to retain brighter, fresher fruit character and acidity.

The Yarra Valley's winemaking history dates back to the 1830s, the earliest days of Victoria wine. While the region escaped much of the blight of phylloxera, it didn't fare as well with the shift in consumer preferences to full, concentrated, and



PHOTO COURTESY OF FOWLES WINE

Matt and Luise Fowles of Victoria estate Fowles Wine.

fortified wines in the early 20th century. Its revival didn't come until the 1970s as preferences changed again to wines resembling those produced here.

Upon my first visit to the region, its rolling green topography and cool temperature immediately reminded me of Burgundy. It is an interesting place to travel through, as each twist of the road reveals an entirely different vista: Due to its vast range of hills and valleys and their varying microclimates, aspects, and elevations, it facilitates the production of compelling wines with a keen sense of place. A frost risk exists in the coolest years, and due to the free-draining soils, judicious use of irrigation is common.

The region is split into the Upper and Lower Yarra. The former is cooler, with a greater focus on Pinot Noir and Chardonnay, which share center stage. The Pinot Noir tends to show notes of rose petal and red berry along with a savory element and bright acidity. For Chardonnay, while oak treatments vary, the fruit expresses more citrus versus tropical notes as well as ample acidity. The warmer Lower Yarra, meanwhile, is the home of brilliant, ripe Shiraz and Cabernet Sauvignon. Recent plantings include Nebbiolo, Arneis, Gamay, and Grüner Veltliner.

Conveying a true sense of place, the highly expressive wines of Victoria are not the commodity bottlings that stigmatized the country for years. The new face of Australian wine is artisanal, quality-minded, and innovative yet possesses a strong link to its historical past. Victoria has positioned itself well with a broad range of bottlings that can hold their own against the world's top wines, and while some are not easy to find, the effort to seek them out will be amply rewarded. *SJ*

TASTING NOTES



Yering Station 2020 Shiraz Viognier, Yarra Valley, Victoria, Australia (\$36)

A well-extracted wine with deep color and pronounced aromas with intensity and breadth. Black fruit, red raspberry, blood orange rind, and smoky and savory notes of star anise are joined by integrated tannins. Good weight on the palate is supported by sound acidity to provide lift as well as extended

length on the back palate. Develops beautifully with aeration. 97% Shiraz and 3% Viognier. **92**



Fowles Ladies Who Shoot Their Lunch 2021 Wild Ferment Chardonnay, Strathbogie Ranges/Yarra Valley, Victoria, Australia (\$35)

An adventurous, highly expressive style heaped with personality and artisanal character. Pale yellow in color; it offers notes of pear, nectarine, citrus zest, and lemongrass along with aromatic intensity. Body is

midweight and oak influence is minimal, yet it shows ample presence supported by bright acidity to keep it lively on the palate. **91**



Moorooduc Estate 2019 Pinot Noir, Mornington Peninsula, Victoria, Australia (\$32)

Garnet core, with some fade at the rim of the glass; fine aromatic intensity, with dark cherry, pomegranate, and notes of Provençal herbs. Good presence on the palate and quite concentrated, with subtle oak influence and a sound midweight style. Despite

showing ample acidity, it's soft, with extended length: a beautifully crafted wine. **91**

A Sparkling SUPERBLOOM

story by RUTH TOBIAS photos by STEPH MEYERS

WITH A REFRESHED LABEL,
SCHARFFENBERGER CELLARS
BLOSSOMS ANEW IN THE
ANDERSON VALLEY

Even by California's high standards, the Scharffenberger Cellars estate in the Anderson Valley town of Philo is bucolic. Gently rolling hills surround the vineyards, walnut and pear trees grace the lawn in front of the winery, an English-style garden flourishes at the entrance to the tasting room, and blackberry bushes line the path to a redwood grove in the middle of it all. No wonder 63 of the property's roughly 200 acres have been granted to the Anderson Valley Land Trust for conservation purposes, while another 120 are dedicated to the Pinot Noir and Chardonnay (along with about 1% Pinot Meunier) that, in the form of traditional-method sparkling wine, capture all that natural Mendocino County beauty in a bottle.

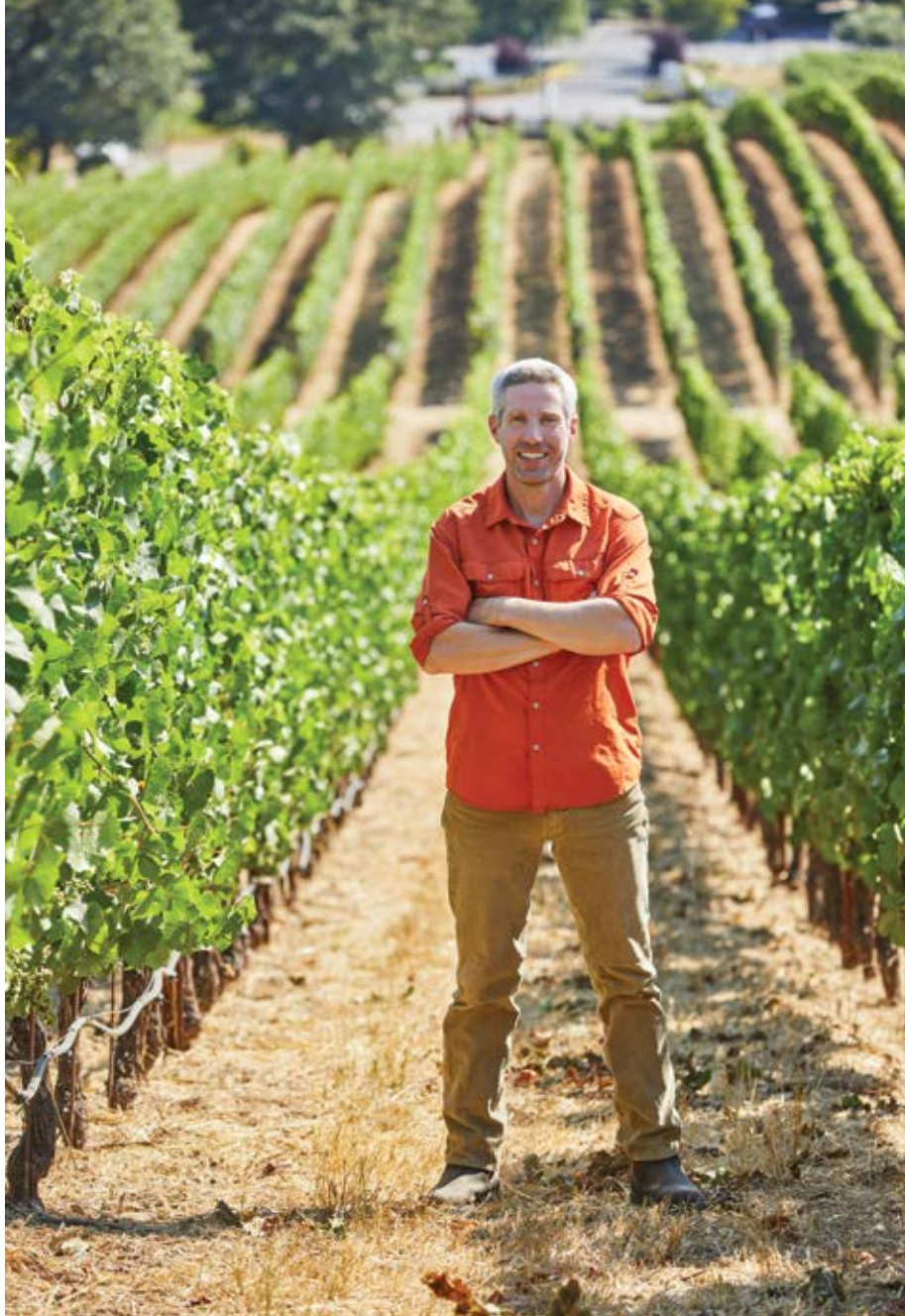


In November, Scharffenberger launched new packaging that's "more in line with what we're doing as a brand," in winemaker Jeffrey Jindra's words. The label is now simply adorned with a California poppy, "which in the springtime is littered throughout the vineyard here," he explains. As the official state flower, "it's iconic, it's beautiful, and it has an elegance that speaks to our area and the quality of the wine." It's an emblem, in short, of what has been the producer's mission since its founding 40-plus years ago: to establish "the paradigm of what sparkling [wine is] in California . . . not to be Champagne but to be Mendocino" as it conveys everyday luxury to the trade and consumers alike.

"THE BEGINNING OF LUXURY"

As an all-around bon vivant in the late 1970s, John Scharffenberger had plenty of occasions to drink bubbly—and his impression of the domestic stuff at the time was, "well, not all that good," says Jindra. So the University of California, Berkeley, graduate in biogeography—a self-designed discipline combining plant and soil sciences—got to work. "He looked at where the scene was, where people were planting, what they were doing, and kind of went against the grain. . . . He'd done some studies and visits to Champagne and, looking at maps and climate [patterns], he found that the Anderson Valley"—where commercial grape growing was still a new enterprise, according to Jindra—"would offer him an opportunity to pursue not just sparkling wine but world-class sparkling wine."

Launching the brand in 1981 with a production facility in Ukiah, he achieved enough success early on to form a



Jeffrey Jindra
is winemaker at
Scharffenberger
Cellars.

partnership with Champagne Pommery, which financed the 1991 purchase of the Philo property and the construction of the winery there. But in the wake of several ownership changes, the founder saw an opportunity to pursue other avenues, and eventually Scharffenberger was on the market.

Enter Champagne Louis Roederer. Given that its own sparkling-wine house in Philo, Roederer Estate, was already purchasing fruit from Scharffenberger, says Jindra, "it just made sense that Roederer would make an offer to acquire this property." It did just that in 2004, purchasing the winery and the brand with the intention of restoring the equity. With that accomplished, he explains, "Now we're making a push toward that next chapter [and creating] something that really fits in" with the rest of the French company's portfolio while working to, in Roederer Collection president of U.S. wineries Nicole Carter's words, "expand our points of distribution within the world of on-premise," which represents a significant percentage of the brand's business. Hence the refreshed label design: "Our idea was to premium-



The Brut Rosé Excellence is Scharffenberger Cellars' bestseller.

"It's very important to us, to our philosophical approach, to provide a journey in sparkling wine that starts with an entry-level [product] and takes you all the way up to prestige sparkling. We want to capture the imagination of the next generation of sparkling drinkers and keep them on that journey as they begin to graduate up in their flavor profiles when it comes to everything with bubbles."

**—Roederer Collection
president of U.S. wineries
Nicole Carter**



ize these wines," says Carter, adding that "people are always so surprised to find quality traditional-method at this price point," which ranges from about \$25 to \$40. "It is important that we elevate what the consumer sees and what the buyer sees in the package. New packaging is always a conversation starter; it's not the conversation ender; so the hope is to start new conversations."

On that note, Carter continues, "It's very important to us, to our philosophical approach, to provide a journey in sparkling wine that starts with an entry-level [product] and takes you all the way up to prestige sparkling. We want to capture the imagination of the next generation of sparkling drinkers and keep them on that journey as they begin to graduate up in

their flavor profiles when it comes to everything with bubbles. . . . Scharffenberger represents the entry point, so the quality is paramount to making sure they stay with us. . . . We all have those 'aha' moments in our wine journeys where all of a sudden your paradigm changes around what you like, what you can appreciate—you know that a shift has happened. Our goal with Scharffenberger is to be that first shift"—in other words, "the beginning of luxury."

THE SCHARFFENBERGER STYLE

They couldn't have picked a better place to achieve it. "The nice thing is that, with the grapes that grow in this area, we're able to have Old World finesse with New World fruit-forwardness," says

Jindra. That's thanks in no small part to the diurnal temperature shifts of up to 50 degrees that occur in various parts of Mendocino County—Scharffenberger sources from other growers in the region in addition to cultivating its own grapes—whereby "that warm day bakes in fruit flavors but the cold night really preserves the acid," as does morning fog that "brings a little blanket of cool, moist air, which grapes love," Jindra adds. He also credits the area's gravelly loam soils with small pockets of clay for "bring[ing] forward a wine that is dense with flavor but light on its feet. We have sought after plots that have well-drained soils with good water-holding capacity, allowing the roots to procure water and nutrients as needed throughout the growing season."

Harvest typically starts in mid- to late August and continues through late September. "We end up pressing all of the juice," Jindra explains, but "what we focus on is the cuvée fraction, [which] for us is the first 125 gallons per ton," along with no more than 5% of the *taille*, or mid-cut (the rest gets sold off). After primary alcoholic fermentation, for "roughly 80% of the wines, we're going to encourage malolactic fermentation to occur; [for] roughly 20%, we're going to try to inhibit it. . . . We want something that's going to be round, rich, California in style but also with a backbone and freshness, and that's where that non-malo component can bring a bit of life to a blend."

Speaking of blending, Jindra relies on "a panel of palates" during assemblage that includes colleagues from other Roederer Collection wineries. Working with his fellow winemakers allows him to "help push what we do to that next level [and] make that best representation of the brand," with about 15% of each release being composed of solera-held reserve wine so that it "tells the story not only of that primary vintage [but] of all your vintages past," in Jindra's words. "Every year you're adding that new layer and new point of interest to that overall conversation" while also maintaining consistency. Once blended and bottled, the wines spend a minimum of two and a half years en tirage and at least six months under cork after disgorgement.

Of the resulting wines, what Jindra calls Scharffenberger's "foundation" are its Brut Excellence (\$25) and Brut Rosé

Excellence (\$29). The former, a blend of 60% Chardonnay and 40% Pinot Noir, “has traditionally been the mainstay for the brand since its inception,” he notes. “Having something that is serious but approachable is a key element to what we’re doing, [and this] is very inviting. . . . It’s made in a malo style, so the aromatics become a little bit more coffee cream, hazelnut, and then you get the nice brioche tones from the time on the lees” along with ripe apple, Anjou pear, and hints of green melon. But with “a thirst for sparkling rosé on the rise,” in his words, the Rosé—composed of 55% Chardonnay and 45% Pinot Noir, of which about 5% is vinified as red wine—has recently “moved into lead position and become the driver of our brand.” As he explains, “Pinot Noir has really risen to be the crown jewel of the Anderson Valley, and this is a way to showcase [its] nice berry fruit; the fact that it’s gone through malolactic fermentation also brings that nice creaminess, so it’s kind of like having berries and cream.” Strawberry shortcake and raspberry flecked with raspberry leaf lead the way on both the nose and the velvety yet clean, clearly etched palate, met by touches of orange, red apple, and rose.

Several other wines in Scharffenberger’s portfolio are sold DTC. Take the Brut Black Label (\$30), which Jindra calls “a late-disgorged presentation of our classic Brut,” spending seven years on the lees. “This really just shows the benefit of having patience—it’s something that continues to build mouthfeel and [moves] away from the primary flavors [toward] more of the tertiary aromas and flavors, but what I find fascinating is how much more texture and sucrosity builds with this wine. As a result, we’ve scaled back the dosage level.” Aromas of pastry crust, almond cookie, and orchard fruit announce the blend of 63% Chardonnay and 37% Pinot Noir, which combines a glossy texture with lifting acidity amid flavors of lemon peel, peach, and coffee bean.

Then there’s the Scharffenberger Crémant (\$26), a 50/50 blend of Chardonnay and Pinot Noir “that has been a staple here since well before my time,” says Jindra. Its name is a reference to its style: “It’s bottled at two-thirds of the pressure, so in the end there [are] fewer bubbles, which leads to a softer, creamier mouthfeel. . . . With the Pinot, [we’re allowing

for] a little bit more skin extraction. . . . Because you’re macerating on the skins during the pressing cycle, [it] ultimately releases a little bit more of that fruit character. The pH is also slightly higher, so it feels softer as well. And then to finish it off . . . we’re at a dosage level that brings us into the extra dry category at 18 grams [of residual sugar], whereas everything else is averaging that 8- to 9-gram level here.” Pillow-soft the Crémant most certainly is, its creaminess underscored by a buttery note, yet there’s a firm freshness to the apple and pear fruit it carries along, accented by lime leaf.

Finally, the 2018 Blanc de Noirs (\$40) marks not only Jindra’s first harvest at Scharffenberger but the return of vintage-dated wines to the lineup after a several-



Jindra calls the style of Scharffenberger Brut Excellence “serious but approachable.”

year hiatus. “In the years that warrant it, it’s something we’d like to continue to do to show the expression of a vintage and the quality of the fruit that comes from [it],” he notes (they also made a 2019 Blanc de Blancs). “But there’s no incentive to do it just to do it; it’s really about when the wine [is] above and beyond what an average year would produce.” In this case, he adds, “What I like about the wine is that each [component]”—namely 38% Pinot Noir, 36% Pinot Meunier, and 26% Pinot Gris—“is bringing something to the table,” with the Meunier delivering “a really big acid impact to the overall blend” while “the Pinot Gris is bringing

an oily texture and also a little of those stone-fruit aromatics. And then the Pinot Noir really becomes the backbone—it’s the power; it’s the grace.” Undergoing no malolactic conversion, the elegant blend shows raw almond, toast, apricot, and apple on both the nose and a palate that conveys freshness as well as fullness thanks not least to crisp acidity and hints of lemon meringue.

PREPARING FOR THE FUTURE

Whether 2023 will yield vintage wine remains to be seen. During harvest, which began on August 25, “the yields look[ed] promising and so [did] the quality—sugar, acid, and flavor have been in good places,” says Jindra. “But it is far too early to truly know what to expect. Generally these decisions are not finalized until all the cards are on the table; our assemblage process will start in February and it is not until then that we know how all the pieces fit together.”

In the long term, the team at Scharffenberger is continually making improvements in the vineyard, whether by choosing a greater variety of site-appropriate rootstocks and clones than were planted here in the past or by moving away from a “hard-to-manage” Geneva Double Curtain system toward “more of a vertical trellis and doing it with cane pruning instead of having a full established cordon and spurs,” in Jindra’s words. He adds that they’re also striving “to farm for the next generation.” While Roederer goes about converting its Anderson Valley properties to organic farming “where and when possible,” they’ve already achieved Fish Friendly Farming certification and are working on “bringing health to our soils through cover crops in the spring [and] reincorporating compost,” to which they add housemade biochar. Produced from fallen trees and pulled vines, “it provides nutrient-holding capacity and water-holding capacity, which brings life to your soil,” Jindra explains; adds Carter, “What I love is that . . . we’re creating that charcoal element from our own vine material and putting it back into the soil, so it’s a beautiful cyclical approach.”

Not to mention a means to a warm homecoming for those beloved poppies upon their return next spring—a gorgeous symbol of Scharffenberger Cellars’ own impending superbloom. **SJ**

THE **FUTURE** IS

Family

PHOTO COURTESY OF QUINTESSENTIAL



*The Kreps family of Quintessential:
Steve Sr., Dennis, and Steve Jr.*

QUINTESSENTIAL
CELEBRATES 20
YEARS OF BUILDING
A REVOLUTIONARY
WINE PORTFOLIO

STORY BY *Jessie Birschbach*

PHOTOS BY *Anna Beeke*



In 2003, the third installment in the *Matrix* film series, *The Matrix Revolutions*, was released, sealing the franchise's position as one of the most beloved of all time. Roughly a decade prior to its debut, Dennis Kreps had his own *Matrix*-like realization while working for a large wine importer and marketer: "I wasn't enjoying the corporate life wearing the pinstripe suits and the red ties," he recalls. So he connected with his father, Steve Sr., who was already a well-respected sales veteran, having entered the wine industry in 1973 as a bartender before starting his own wine brokerage in the Midwest. In 1996, Dennis and his father joined a few other partners in establishing a wine agency that offered several high-end producers, "but there were too many cooks in the kitchen," says Dennis, adding that even after a few years of success, "we decided to get out of it and do things our own way."

It was this period of self-discovery and growth that led them to open Quintessential in 2003, just as *The Matrix* was experiencing its reboot. What began as a portfolio of roughly a dozen wine brands now represents 44 wineries, 12 countries, and, most importantly to the Krepsses, 33 *families*. "We only represent multigenerational family-owned and -operated wineries that are building for future generations," says Dennis, who manages the business' day-to-day operations. "We didn't want to work with wineries that are worried about this quarter's bonus or a fiscal number. It's about what they're doing over the next ten, 20, or 30 years . . . because that's the way wine business should be executed. It's not an annual number—it's about doing things the right way for the long term."

While Quintessential is now recognized for its portfolio of wines from all over the world—including the largest selection of Domaine and Cru Beaujolais among U.S. importers and a notably wide range of Spanish wineries—its unconventional approach wasn't terribly common in the early 2000s. "Initially there was pushback from wholesalers and industry leaders, and they would come to me and say, 'You're doing it wrong. If you're going to be an importer, you must be a specialist. Look at all the other successful importer companies out there,'" says Dennis. "Well, I won't mention company names, but some of the examples they used have since gone out of business. And I remember responding to them by saying, 'But we are specialists. We specialize in family-owned and -operated producers. We specialize in good people.'"

Specializing in good people has been great for Quintessential's longevity. In 2023, the company celebrated its 20th anniversary, while Steve Sr. marked his 50th year in the industry. As for what Dennis thinks Quintessential might look like in 20 more years, he notes that "I have an 18-year-old who just went off to college, a 17-year-old, and a 14-year-old. . . . They all say they might want to work for Quintessential. So, for me, it's about creating something that will last and providing an opportunity for them to grow if they choose to. My brother . . . has a 1-year-old and a 2-year-old, so we've got another generation behind this next one. If my kids or my brother's kids wanted to step in and take over, that would be ideal, but we work hard to not put any pressure and expectations on them." That said, it seems as though the next generation—surrounded as they are by great examples of family legacies—might be destined to lead their own revolution in the industry.



Max and Gerard Bozoghlian, owners of Carlitos Gardel in Los Angeles.

An Extended Family Affair

Considering that it's also family-owned and -operated, Argentine steakhouse Carlitos Gardel in Los Angeles made for the perfect spot to celebrate Quintessential's 20th anniversary in late August, with its sommelier and co-owner, Max Bozoghlian, serving as co-host alongside Quintessential Southern California area sales manager Ann Garrett. Garrett noted that after five years with Quintessential, "I've watched the company grow but really keep to its core value of working only with family-owned wineries. When I go to meet with [the Krepsses], it's truly a family experience with kids and cousins running around. It's just so warm and wonderful."

Joining Quintessential representatives at the event were a group of the City of Angels' top sommeliers and buyers as well as members of the *SOMM Journal* team. Said Quintessential director of communications Louise Jordan, "It was an absolute pleasure to celebrate Quintessential's 20th anniversary with such a talented group of Los Angeles-based sommeliers and buyers. The eight outstanding wines we enjoyed from Quintessential's global portfolio are emblematic of the amazing quality, complexity, and range of our wineries." Read on to learn more about those wines, their respective pairings, and, of course, the rich stories of kinship behind them.

◀ **Angeleno sommeliers and representatives from The SOMM Journal and Quintessential enjoy the first course of Quintessential's 20th anniversary dinner at Carlitos Gardel.**



“We are specialists. We specialize in family-owned and -operated producers. We specialize in good people.”

—Dennis Kreps

First Course

Our meal began with two types of crostini: the first with goat cheese, anchovies, and chimichurri and the second with creamy chicken liver pâté. Perfect with both was the fresh and silky **Champagne Palmer Blanc de Blancs** (\$102), which won the Judges' Selection award at TEXSOM in 2023. Established in 1947 by seven grower families, the Palmer house has made a name for itself by producing incredibly ageworthy and elegant Champagne from Premier and Grand Cru sites within the Montagne de Reims.

Second Course

Thankfully, the two white wines served with Carlitos Gardel's grilled veal sweetbreads had sufficient acidity to cut through the richness of the offal. An unusually complex example of the variety at \$22, the **Matetic Vineyards 2021 EQ Coastal Sauvignon Blanc** from Valle de Casablanca in Chile is made by what's considered to be one of the country's pioneering cool-climate producers. The Matetic family, whose forebears emigrated from Croatia to Chile in 1892, established Matetic Vineyards in 1999 between Chile's coastal Valle de Casablanca and San Antonio regions, where they farm roughly 200 acres both organically (officially since 2002) and biodynamically (they've been Demeter certified since 2013).



The second course featured the Matetic Vineyards 2021 EQ Coastal Sauvignon Blanc and the Gustave Lorentz 2018 Riesling Grand Cru Kanzlerberg.

As we enjoyed the creamy charred sweetbreads, Garrett mentioned that the average age of the wineries in Quintessential's portfolio is 88 years old. Helping to drive that number up is Gustave Lorentz, a revered Alsatian producer founded in 1836. Currently run by sixth-generation winemaker Georges Lorentz, the estate encompasses 81 acres in the hills of Grand Cru Altenberg de Bergheim and an additional 4 in the Grand Cru Kanzlerberg, all of which were certified organic by Eco-cert in 2012. Singing in harmony with the decadent course was the dry, opulent, and complex **Gustave Lorentz 2018 Riesling Grand Cru Kanzlerberg**.



Third Course

Three Quintessential red wines accompanied a prime New York sirloin served with mashed potatoes. A reserved set of steak knives also made an appearance; imported from Argentina, they were crafted by a family-owned artisanal knifemaker, in keeping with our theme for the night. "The father makes the knives, and the son makes the sheaths. They're very special," said Bozoghlian.

First in the trio was the bold **Cortonesi La Mannella 2018 Brunello di Montalcino**; the label, whose inaugural release debuted in 1990, is now made by third-generation winemaker Tommaso Cortonesi. His family planted their 138-acre La Mannella estate vineyard in the

1970s, dedicating just 19 of those acres to the production of Brunello, and began selling their wine in 1985.

Next in the trio was the **Bel Colle 2013 10 Anni Barolo Riserva**. Founded in 1977 by three brothers in the Verduno comune in northwestern Barolo, the winery has been in the care of Luca Bosio, a third-generation Piedmontese winemaker, since 2015. The well-structured, chocolaty expression was sourced from vines averaging 50 years of age and aged for ten years; at an astounding retail price of \$70, it's yet another example of Quintessential's keen ability for acquiring wines of incredible value.

Although all three reds served during our meal showed beautifully, it was perhaps the **André Brunel 2020 Châteauneuf-du-Pape Les Cailloux Rouge**—made by a family that has been a stalwart in the Southern Rhône for eight generations—that paired best with the sirloin and mashed potatoes, the latter of which also included a touch of pumpkin puree. The peppery red fruits in the Grenache-dominant blend with Mourvèdre and Syrah matched perfectly with the slightly earthy sweetness in the otherwise buttery potatoes, while the solid structure held up to the red meat.



Fourth Course

As an Argentine, Bozoghlian might have been a touch biased, but he chose to

serve just one wine with the marbled prime rib-eye cap, showcasing the **Pascual Toso 2020 Alta Cabernet Sauvignon** all by its briary, red-berried self. Pascual Toso, which has made wine in Bozoghlian's homeland since 1890, consults with renowned American winemaker Paul Hobbs to make this 100% Cabernet Sauvignon, sourced from Las Barrancas Vineyard's 60-year-old vines at 2,500 feet above sea level in the Maipú subregion of Mendoza.



Dessert Course

Featuring meringue, homemade dulce de leche, and chopped peaches, the dessert we enjoyed, called postre Gardel, was made from a recipe developed nearly 30 years ago by Carlitos Gardel's executive chef and matriarch, Azniv Gardel. The soulful dish was a deserving partner for the rich and nutty **Quinta do Vallado 20 Year Old Tawny Porto**. The Portuguese producer is owned by Francisco Ferreira and João Ferreira Alvares Ribeiro, representing the sixth generation of a family who has been making wine in the Douro Valley since 1716. Made up of both single-variety and field-blend plots, some planted over 100 years ago, Quinta do Vallado's estate holdings spread across 250 acres in the Douro, two-thirds of which have been organically farmed since 2014. Its 20-year-old Tawny is a blend of old-vine Tino Roriz, Tinta Amarela, and Tinta Fraca, among other grapes. **SJ**

An Italian Tour de Force

KOBRAND'S TOUR D'ITALIA BRINGS THE COUNTRY'S TOP REGIONAL WINEMAKERS TO KEY U.S. CITIES story by Lars Leicht / photos by Anna Beeke



A lineup of brands presented at Kobrand's Tour d'Italia in Los Angeles.

SINCE 2012, Kobrand Fine Wine and Spirits' Tour d'Italia has been a much-anticipated trade event—an annual opportunity to meet and taste with top Italian winemakers.

Principals travel to a different mix of cities each year; the lucky locales in 2023 were Miami, Houston, Phoenix, and Los Angeles. *The SOMM Journal* caught the finale at Andaz West Hollywood in September; and though it was their fourth tasting in as many days with hours-long flights between, the producers seemed energized and positive.

"It's a tour de force for us because we are in a different city every day," said Giovanni Folonari, who was on hand to represent several of his Tuscan wines, all imported by Kobrand since 1968. "We love our job, so we love to tell people what we are doing."

He and fellow tour veteran Niccolò Marzichi Lenzi of Tenuta di Biserno agreed that interest and knowledge among attendees have improved each year: "I've seen a great increase in attention to Italian wines in general and in the quality of Italian food here," said Marzichi Lenzi. "That helps us in presenting the wine."

Alberto Chiarlo, whose Michele Chiarlo wines have been imported by Kobrand for over 45 years, noted that the



LA somms and buyers came out in force to taste through a range of Italian wines.

tour "is essential because we can connect with our best customers. It's not only about the brand, it's about Italy as a great mosaic of wine regions."

Alessandro Medici, fifth-generation owner of Medici Ermete, said the events help him usher in a renaissance for Lambrusco in the U.S.: "Educating people about Lambrusco has gotten easier thanks to the earlier efforts of my father and grandfather, but it is still missionary work."

Despite the tight schedule, long days, and constant interaction, Giovanna Moretti, owner of Sette Ponti and Feudo Maccari, finds the experience invigorating. "When I get back home, I am full of energy and recharged!" she said.

Their Wines in Their Words

Here are excerpts of *The SOMM Journal's* interviews with the producers. Though it was the end of the tour, none of them had run out of words.

Medici Ermete Lambrusco di Sorbara DOC Phermento Pet-Nat

"It's a Lambrusco di Sorbara re-fermented in the bottle. We leave the lees in the bottle with no dosage; that's why it is cloudy but extremely refreshing and drinkable—a very food-friendly wine." —estate owner Alessandro Medici

Niccolò Marzichi Lenzi of Tenuta Biserno.



Tenuta di Biserno Biserno Toscana IGT “This is a blend of Cabernet Franc, Merlot, Cabernet Sauvignon, and a touch of Petit Verdot. Our 40-hectare estate has many different soils and exposures, which give us different components to work with. Our goal is to make a wine that has elegance but power at the same time.” —estate owner *Niccolò Marzichi Lenzi*

Alberto Chiarlo and Adam Verona of Michele Chiarlo.



Michele Chiarlo Barolo Riserva DOCG Cerequio “This is our flagship from Cerequio, one of the very first cru vineyards. The soil has almost four times as much magnesium as other areas, which gives the wine finesse, character, and recognizable balsamic notes. The 2016, very shy up until recently, is starting to express itself more; it has a long life ahead.” —estate owner *Alberto Chiarlo*

Francesco and Salvatore Avallone of Villa Matilde.



Villa Matilde Avallone Falerno del Massico “Falerno, the favorite wine of ancient Rome, disappeared after phylloxera. My father was able to recover and multiply some ancient vines, in 1965 planting the first modern-age Falerno vineyard. Today we make that wine with an evolution of winemaking’s best traditions and techniques.” —estate owner *Salvatore Avallone*

Tenuta di Nozzole Chianti Classico Riserva “Chianti has a long story in Tuscany, but I am proud to say this wine is different. . . . We decided to use only Sangiovese, all from our estate in Greve in Chianti.” —estate owner *Giovanni Folonari*

Tenuta di Cabreo Il Borgo Toscana IGT “This is one of the first so-called Super Tuscans; we started making it in 1982. [It’s] a blend of one-third each Sangiovese, Cabernet Sauvignon, and Merlot.” —estate owner *Giovanni Folonari*

Tenuta di Nozzole Il Pareto Toscana IGT “This comes from the same property as Nozzole, a Super Tuscan [made from] 100% Cabernet Sauvignon [that’s been] produced since 1987. Cabernet is very international, but here it tastes Tuscan.” —estate owner *Giovanni Folonari*

Tenuta San Guido Sassicaia Bolgheri Sassicaia DOC “Sassicaia is one of the most iconic wines of Italy, maybe the world. [Behind this] blend of 85% Cabernet Sauvignon and 15% Cabernet Franc . . . is the beautiful story of a visionary man, Mario Incisa della Rocchetta, who opened the

way for Super Tuscan wines.” —sales and marketing director *Guido Baldeschi*

Pighin Pinot Grigio Collio DOC “Crisp, full, and minerally on the palate with a slight salinity and flavors of pineapple, green apple, even bread crust. It is floral and complex but not overpowering. Fresh and elegant to enjoy young, [it] will continue to evolve over time.” —estate owner *Roberto Pighin*

Tenute Silvio Nardi Brunello di Montalcino DOCG Poggio Doria “This is from a single vineyard planted in 1998 on volcanic soil in northwest Montalcino. [Owner] Silvia Nardi created it to help distinguish between this property and our single-vineyard Manachiara in the southeast of Montalcino.” —export manager *Ida Achilli*

Tenuta Sette Ponti Oreno Toscana IGT “Oreno is the name of a little river that crosses our estate. A blend of 50% Merlot, 40% Cabernet Sauvignon, and 10% Petit Verdot, it represents the beginning of our winery with its first vintage in 1999. I love Oreno because it is Tuscan and I am Tuscan.” —estate owner *Giovanna Moretti*

Feudo Maccari Saia Sicilia DOP “My love is also Saia, our Nero d’Avola from southeastern Sicily. The grape is to Sicily what Sangiovese is to Tuscany.” —estate owner *Giovanna Moretti*

Buglioni Amarone della Valpolicella Classico DOCG Il Lussurioso “We don’t like barrique-aged Amarones that are super tannic, sometimes jammy, and don’t go with food, so we decided to use big casks that allow us to have a fruit-forward Amarone with greater acidity and less tannin. We never stop the fermentation; we let it go to the end when the sugar is almost gone.” —estate owner *Mariano Buglioni*

Agricola Punica Barrua Isola dei Nuraghi IGT “Barrua is made from 85% Carignano, the indigenous variety of southern Sardinia; the remainder is Cabernet Sauvignon and Merlot. It is a modern blend; Carignano is the backbone of the wine, while the two French varieties provide softness and finesse.” —sales and marketing manager *Salvatore Santus* 



It's a Feature, Not a Bug

FRUIT FLIES ARE TEACHING US MORE ABOUT HOW WE IDENTIFY ODORS

DUE TO THEIR REPUTATION as vectors for *Brettanomyces* and their unwelcome presence when discovered swimming in one's glass, fruit flies have long been viewed as annoying pests by wine drinkers. But as research subjects, they're surprisingly beneficial: Their brains are teaching us more about how we humans learn to differentiate aromas.

Working in collaboration with the Salk Institute for Biological Studies in La Jolla, California, researchers studying fruit flies at Cold Spring Harbor Laboratory (CSHL) in Cold Spring Harbor, New York, have discovered two different types of olfactory neurons attached to the business end of our odor receptor cells: reliable olfactory neurons, which consistently identify odors, and unreliable neurons, which respond to odors unpredictably over time and "learn" to distinguish nuanced odors through experience.

Of our sensory systems (vision, olfaction, taste, hearing, and balance), olfaction is one of the oldest. Our olfactory neurons, which our bodies have the capacity to regenerate, are directly connected to the olfactory bulb, which relays impulses to other brain regions like the somatosensory cortex. The random way unreliable neurons respond originates from circuits deep within the brain—a scenario that, according to researchers, suggests they serve a significant purpose.

The study, conducted by CSHL associate professor Saket Navlakha and Salk Institute researcher Shyam Srinivasan, is based on research that was done years ago by former CSHL assistant professor Glenn Turner, who noticed during trials that some of the olfactory neurons of fruit flies fired consistently while others varied. At the time, those differences were dismissed as background noise and didn't warrant further investigation. In 2022, Navlakha and Srinivasan decided

to take another look, and their research, which also employed fruit flies, identified the origin and purpose of the variability.

As part of the study, the team isolated a small group of reliable neurons that responded the same to similar odors and, as a result, help the fruit flies quickly discern different smells. They also isolated a much larger group of unreliable neurons that respond less predictably when detecting similar smells. These are the neurons that help flies—and us, for that matter—to identify nuanced aromas in, for example, wine as well as to discern novel odors and group them together. The flies' aversion to unfamiliar odors can be predicted based on the activity of the neurons those odors induce. (You might question how research done on fruit flies could apply to humans. While the human nose of course differs from that of a fruit fly, not to mention those of other mammals, at the microanatomical level our olfactory systems are essentially the same.)

While these neurons are useful, the researchers point out that they require many repeated exposures to take full advantage of their ability to "learn." This news won't come as a surprise to those students of wine whose mantra is "taste, taste, taste" when it comes to mastering sensory analysis.

The results of this study could help explain how, through our unreliable neurons, we learn to differentiate between similarities detected by other senses such as taste, sight, and hearing and how we respond based on those sensory inputs—much like the process of transduction, in which our neurons convert aroma and taste compounds into electrochemical signals that our brains can perceive.



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2023 Best in Show Winners

Amaro Best in Show: Foleto Heritage, Amaro Proibito

Calvados Best in Show: Pere Magloire XO

RTD Non-Alcoholic Best in Show: Lyre's Non-Alcoholic
Amalfi Spritz

American Blended Straight Bourbon Best in Show: Nelson's
Green Briar Distillery, Nelson Brother's Classic Bourbon

Cognac Best in Show: Hardy, Noes d'Argent Fine
Champagne Cognac

RTD Wine-Based Best in Show: Croft Pink & Tonic

American Blended Straight Bourbon Best in Show: Widow
Jane, Lucky 13 Bourbon

Flavored Rum Best in Show: Cane Botanical Rum

Rum Overall Best in Show: Papa's Pilar Rum, 2022 Legacy
Edition Release

American Bourbon Single Barrel Best in Show: Henry
McKenna, Single Barrel

Flavored Vodka Best in Show: Smoke Lab, Smoke Lab
Aniseed Vodka

Scotch Speyside Single Malt Whisky Best in Show: Glenfiddich 14
Years Old

American Bourbon Small Batch Best in Show: Elijah Craig,
Small Batch

Fortified Wines Best in Show: Cinzano, Vermouth Bianco

Shōchū Best in Show: HIGA SHUZOU CO. LTD, Zanpa White

American Cask Finished Best in Show: Garrison Brothers,
Guadalupe Texas Straight Bourbon Whiskey Finished in A
Port Cask

Gin Best in Show: Fords Gin

Tennessee Whiskey Best in Show: Uncle Nearest Premium
Whiskey, Master Blender Edition Batch 012

American Rye Best in Show and Whiskey Overall Best in
Show: Bespoke Spirits, "The Epic" Straight Rye Whiskey

Liqueurs / Cordials Best in Show: Ancho Reyes Chile Liqueur

Tequila Añejo (100% Agave) Best in Show:Codigo 1530, Barrel
Strength Añejo

American Straight Bourbon Best in Show: Brother's Bond
Bourbon, Original Cask Strength Bourbon

Mezcal Best in Show: Peloton De La Muerte, Maguey Criollo

Tequila Blanco / Silver / Platinum (100% Agave) Best in Show and
Tequila Best in Show: Siete Leguas, Blanco

Aquevit Best in Show: Bareksten, Aquavit

Non-Alcoholic Spirits Best in Show: Lyre's Non-Alcoholic,
Classico Grande

Tequila Extra Añejo (100% Agave) Best in Show: San Matias, Gran
Reserva Extra Añejo

Armagnac Best in Show and Brandy Overall Best in Show:
BHAKTA Spirits, 1973 Armagnac

Other World Single Malt Whiskey Best in Show: Paul John,
Mithuna

Tequila Reposado (100% Agave) Best in Show: Tequila Ocho,
Reposado Barrel Select

Cachaça Best in Show: Novo Fogo, Silver

Pisco Best in Show: La Madrina Torontel

Vodka Best in Show: Chopin Vodka, Organic Rye

The Château Roubine estate in Provence.



PHOTOS COURTESY OF CHÂTEAU ROUBINE

La Vie en Rose

CHÂTEAU ROUBINE IS THE ESSENCE OF PROVENCE by Marci Symington

"ROSÉ IS A LIFESTYLE," says Doug Simon, national sales director for Royal Wine Corp., the New Jersey-based distributor for Provençal estate Château Roubine. Indeed, the fact that it's more than just a beverage is part of rosé's universal allure: It symbolizes *joie de vivre*. And thanks to brands like Château Roubine, you don't have to travel to France to experience it.

"Château Roubine is history in a bottle," Simon asserts. Located in the heart of Provence near the town of Lorgues, the vineyards on which Château Roubine stands date back to Roman times. In the 14th century, the land was owned by the medieval order of the Knights Templar; since then, many well-known Provençal families have continued the tradition of winemaking at the storied estate. In 1994, it was purchased by Valerie Rousselle, who, for the past 29 years, has been its head winemaker, passionately leading its conversion to certified-organic and -sustainable farming practices while laying the

groundwork for future generations to take over.

Here in "the home base for rosé," as Simon calls Provence, the Mediterranean climate affords the warm days and cool nights that are ideal for varieties such as Grenache, Syrah, and the rare Tibouren. From these and other grapes, Château Roubine produces some red and white wines, but its specialty is rosé; "something with the way rosé finishes begs you to have another taste," says Simon in reference to the five labels the producer began to import to the U.S. ten years ago. To name three, Sainte Béatrice (\$20), familiarly called "Sainte B," contains Grenache, Cinsault, Cabernet Sauvignon, and Syrah and offers flavors of citrus and stone fruit; La Vie en Rose (\$25) is the winery's bestseller on the import market, featuring



a blend of Grenache, Cinsault, Syrah, Tibouren, and Rolle; and the premium Château Roubine (\$30) is a Cru Classé—of which there are only 18 in Provence—made with Grenache, Mourvèdre, Cinsault, Syrah, Tibouren, and Rolle. Its label features an image of the chateau, while the bottle glass is embossed with the Knights Templar crest.

These wines can be found both on-premise and in a few retail operations like Central Market in Texas, ABC Fine Wines & Spirits in Florida, Binny's Beverage Depot in Illinois, and Total Wine & More nationwide—proving vacation is just a sip away. As Simon concludes, "Château Roubine brings


St. Tropez and Provence to you right here in the United States. I only look at a bottle of Provence rosé and it relaxes me; then I drink it and it transports me to Provence." 



PHOTO: KIRK WEDDLE

Jerome Chladil, district manager, South Texas and Oklahoma, at Santa Margherita USA (SMUSA), pours for guests during a recent dinner hosted by SMUSA at Qi Austin in Austin, TX.

TAKING IT to the TABLE

**SANTA MARGHERITA
USA SHOWCASES ITS
ESTATES AT A SERIES
OF DINNERS ACROSS
THE COUNTRY**

The Santa Margherita Gruppo Vinicolo traces its roots back to 1935, when its namesake brand was founded in northeastern Italy by Count Gaetano Marzotto. Over four generations as owners, the Marzotto family has built what they like to refer to as a mosaic of regional wineries dedicated to the production of premium-quality wines through sustainable practices. In 2014, the Marzottos established Santa Margherita USA (SMUSA), their wholly owned import company.

SMUSA strongly supports the sommelier community through educational initiatives and participation in sommelier conferences. This year, SMUSA teamed up with *The SOMM Journal* to host a series of trade lunches and dinners focusing on key wineries: MASI in Verona; Kettmeir in Alto Adige; Lamole di Lamole in Greve-in-Chianti; Ca' del Bosco in Franciacorta; and its newest property, ROCO Winery in Oregon. Read on for the *SOMM Journal* team's reports from Washington, D.C.; Austin; and Las Vegas (our report from Chicago will appear in the February/March 2024 issue). —Lars Leicht

An Evening Worthy of a CURTAIN CALL

KETTMEIR AND LAMOLE DI LAMOLE OFFER NEW PERSPECTIVE
ON PAIRINGS AT A RECENT AUSTIN DINNER

story by LARS LEICHT / photos by KIRK WEDDLE

Italian wines, Chinese cuisine, and Austin sommeliers: If you asked this New Yorker to put these three terms together in a sentence, let alone write a magazine feature on them, I might be hard-pressed to do so unless I had an experience like that of August 7, 2023. It was an evening that defied expectations and shattered myths, yet at the same time it wouldn't surprise anybody who knows a little something about the subjects at hand. In my mind's eye, it unfolded like a play in six short acts.

The setting: *Qi Austin, a stylish, upmarket restaurant featuring a menu of farm-to-table Asian cuisine with a world-class wine list to match.*

The cast: *somms, buyers, and writers, supported by local and national team members of importer Santa Margherita USA (SMUSA).*

The plot: *a trade gathering to learn, unwind, compare notes, and exchange stories over great food and wine.*

ACT 1: As our characters gradually entered, tentative small talk ensued, furtive glances were exchanged, and jockeying for seats began. Any tension was broken by Jerome Chladil, SMUSA's district manager, South Texas and Oklahoma, who flitted about the room, filling glasses with the **Ca' del Bosco Edizione 45 Cuvée Prestige** and igniting stimulating conversation. Seats at the table soon filled since there wasn't much standing



SMUSA's Southwest director of sales Vanessa Sloan, associate brand manager Martha Bednarek, and district manager, South Texas and Oklahoma, Jerome Chladil share a moment of levity before the company's trade dinner in Austin, TX.

room and the restaurant had reached capacity—a pretty good sign for a Monday night in August when the early evening temperatures were still over 100 degrees Fahrenheit and power outages were rolling through the outskirts of town. But in our corner of Qi, there was electricity in the air.

"I did not know anyone at that table," confessed Sarah Arceneaux of Side Street Hospitality in Fredericksburg, Texas, "but I was able to find meaningful connections and people in common with almost everyone I spoke with at the table." Likewise, Andrea Manrique, sommelier at Wine For The People in Austin, said she ended up bonding with several tablemates: "We did not know each other, but we hit it off."

ACT 2: The tabletops rapidly filled with shared plates of Qi's signature salad, shrimp har gow, and scallop-caviar shumai. The **Kettmeir 2022 Pinot Bianco** had already

been poured when the producer's **2022 Pinot Grigio** joined the fray. White wines from Alto Adige with Asian cuisine? Perhaps not a shock given the former's crisp citrus and notes of white berries as well as the latter's savory character and minerality, but they made for an eye-opening pairing all the same.

"I absolutely love the high acid, vitality, and crisp fruit in Kettmeir's Pinot Grigio," declared Joshua Fisher, wine director at



Red Ash Italia in Austin; he noted that he pours it by the glass there because he finds it a “solid, dependable, and delicious wine that can stand up to robust flavors.”

ACT 3: Next, a red wine—the **Kettmeir 2021 Pinot Nero**—appeared on the scene with Qi’s signature Shanghai soup dumplings as well as steamed veggie dumplings and Akaushi beef potstickers. Mirroring the pasta course that precedes the entree in Italian cuisine, it was a happy match given the complementary flavor profiles.

“The Pinot Nero paired with most dishes,” reflected Malon Lemoins, manag-

think of pairing Chianti with Asian-inspired foods; however, it was perfectly matched,” Arceneaux asserted. “Most people get caught up in the idea of classic food-and-wine pairings; as a working sommelier, [I think] it’s so fun to really get out of the box and have it go so swimmingly well.”

John Roenigk, owner of The Austin Wine Merchant, agreed: “I just don’t get why [pairing Asian cuisine with wine] would be any different from any other fine cuisine and wine. I’ve heard some . . . expert folks in the past mention that they felt Asian cuisine didn’t need wine as it already had its own ‘balance’ of flavors. I disagree.”



The guests enjoying conversation are, from left to right, Sarah Arceneaux, sommelier at Side Street Hospitality in Fredericksburg, TX; SMUSA’s Martha Bednarek; SOMM Journal VP of education and author Lars Leicht; Malon Lemoins, managing partner/sommelier at Blurred Vines in Austin, TX; and Brandon Stevens, director of food and beverage at Nonna Osteria and Silo Prime at The Fairmount in San Antonio, TX. (On the far left is Nathan Prater, owner of Somminfluence LLC.)

ing partner and sommelier at Austin’s Blurred Vines, who praised its balance. Manrique declared it her top wine as well, admiring its “soft red fruit and earthiness with the dumplings,” then delivered the line that was worth more than a five-star review from any theater critic: “It was yummy.”

ACT 4: Here we reached the point of tension intrinsic to every play: in this case, the drama of pairing red wine with seafood. Qi served up its salt-and-pepper lobster tails, and SMUSA threw down its **Lamole di Lamole 2020 Maggiolo Chianti Classico DOCG**. “Most people don’t

Roenigk started his career in Houston selling wine to and developing wine programs for Asian restaurants, which gradually began to embrace the art of pairing; he cited examples of Mexican restaurants that did the same. “At the end of the day, I think good wine goes with good food,” he said.

ACT 5: Clearly this was the climax of the play, that moment when the big guns come out: Peking duck, honey Akaushi beef, and Mei Choy pork belly paired with the **Lamole di Lamole 2019 Lareale Chianti Classico Riserva DOCG**, a blend from estate vineyards.



The wines of Lamole di Lamole were paired with, among other dishes, seasonal vegetables in a taro bird’s nest.

“What more could you want with Peking duck than an elegant Chianti Classico?” asked Fisher, adding that the savory wine offered “earthy notes of garrigue and underbrush to frame a satisfying core of sour cherry and cranberry flavors, with sturdy tannins very well integrated.” Manrique also put the pairing of pork belly and Lamole di Lamole Lareale Chianti Classico in her top three.

ACT 6: If the meat course was the climax, then the fifth course served as our play’s denouement, when the strands of the plot converge and matters are resolved. Western cuisine typically builds a meal from light to full without turning back, but Asian cuisine will often reintroduce a lighter note. Sesame chicken, fresh truffle-egg fried rice, seasonal vegetables in a taro bird’s nest, and baby bok choy with shiitake mushroom were a fresh touch after the rich meat; likewise, the **Lamole di Lamole 2017 Vigneto di Campolungo Chianti Classico Gran Selezione DOCG** provided lift. The Gran Selezione, which hails from a single high-altitude vineyard and is aged longer than the Lareale, showed finesse and elegance.

Of course, there was a curtain call. As a series of desserts both delicate and rich were served, the somms returned to their favorite wines, and each came away with new friends, new ideas, and new perspectives: not a bad performance for a sultry Monday night.

A Worldly AFFAIR

AT CHINGLISH CANTONESE WINE BAR IN LAS VEGAS, SOMMELIERS GATHERED TO DISCOVER AN ITALIAN WINE COMPANY'S NEW OREGON TREASURE

story by CHRISTINA BARRUETA
photos by MONA SHIELD PAYNE

One August evening in Las Vegas, Nevada, a select group of sommeliers gathered for a cross-cultural tasting hosted at Chinglish Cantonese Wine Bar. With a playful name referencing the Chinese-English conversations held in co-owners Ken and Kitty Heck's bilingual home, Chinglish prides itself on its authentic Hong Kong cuisine crafted by Kitty's parents, acclaimed chefs Po Fai and Anna Lam. Their six-course menu was paired with the exceptional wines of ROCO Winery; the Oregon producer was recently acquired by Santa Margherita USA (SMUSA), the American arm of Santa Margherita Gruppo Vinicolo, which was founded by Count Gaetano Marzotto in Italy in 1935.

With pre-dinner glasses of ROCO's aromatic **2019 RMS Brut Rosé** in hand, guests mingled with our hosts for the evening: Ken Heck, who serves as Ching-



Harley Carbery, corporate wine director at Station Casinos, with Vittorio Marzotto, fourth-generation family owner of Santa Margherita Gruppo Vinicolo and SMUSA vice president of strategic initiatives.



Guests were poured a ROCO Winery lineup that included the 2021 The Stalker Pinot Noir, 2021 Gravel Road Pinot Noir, 2019 RMS Brut Rosé, 2018 Gravel Road Chardonnay, 2019 RMS Brut Blanc, and 2019 Private Stash Pinot Noir.

lish's sommelier, and Vittorio Marzotto, SMUSA vice president of strategic initiatives. The effervescent welcome was the perfect introduction to ROCO, whose winemaker, Rollin Soles, co-founded renowned Oregon sparkling-wine producer Argyle Winery decades ago.

As we took our seats, Heck noted that the nontraditional food pairings we were about to experience were designed to showcase the wines' versatile appeal. With a friendly "buona sera," Marzotto then began sharing the story of ROCO Winery's acquisition in 2022. "It was an

important step forward for us," he explained, "as it would be the first footprint outside of Italy to become part of our family mosaic. I traveled through Oregon and Washington State looking at potential winegrowing areas, and in terms of terroir, I found that in the Willamette Valley. I fell in love with this winemaking region, and ROCO founder Rollin Soles' winemaking style felt very much in line with ours."

While the elegant **2019 RMS Brut Blanc** was being served with crispy vegetarian eggrolls scented with ginger and

shallots, Marzotto continued the story of “the pioneer of *méthode Champenoise* in Oregon.” In 1987, Soles and his wife, Corby Stonebraker-Soles, purchased a hillside property in the Chehalem Mountains AVA, planting their Wit’s End Vineyard to Pinot Noir and producing their first wine in 2003. In 2013, Soles left his role as consultant at Argyle to concentrate full time on ROCO and expanded the vineyard to 20 acres, adding more clones of Pinot as well as a block of Chardonnay.

Marzotto then turned to ROCO’s Gravel Road label, which was paired with the next two courses. “These are our flagship wines, and I like how the

and balanced acidity paired beautifully with steamed scallops topped with roe and nestled on translucent cellophane noodles. “Chardonnay is still very niche in Oregon, but I think it has tremendous potential to really become something special for the Willamette Valley,” noted Marzotto, as guests nodded in agreement. Describing the thought behind the course that followed, Heck highlighted the **Gravel Road 2021 Pinot Noir’s** prominent fruit notes and the influence of barrel spices: “To complement this, we’ve chosen a beef satay with some spice of its own and a touch of peanut and hoisin that really bring forward the

more of that mushroomy *sous bois*, or forest floor, flavor rather than the vegetal bitterness of fresh green stems. It creates much more complexity and structure.”

The main event arrived in the form of a showstopping duo: ROCO’s powerful **2019 Private Stash**, a small-production Pinot Noir sourced from a 2-acre plot on the estate vineyard, made for a lush partner to delicate crepes folded around crackly-skinned Peking duck, housemade hoisin sauce, and julienned cucumbers and scallions. A signature Chinglish dish, the duck marinates for a minimum of seven days in a dry-aging cabinet before being roasted in an oven handmade in



Peking duck crepes were paired with ROCO’s Private Stash Pinot Noir.



Chinglish owner Ken Heck was a gracious host.

wines are sourced from [vineyards in] three sub-appellations—Wit’s End in Chehalem Mountains, Marsh Estate in Yamhill-Carlton, and Knudsen in Dundee Hills,” he said. “Because the Willamette Valley is around the 45th parallel, it has an affinity with the Old World like France and Italy in terms of terroir; it is the same parallel that cuts through northern Italian regions like Lombardy and Veneto. The wines are very interesting stylistically, and their elegance is similar to [that of these] European regions.”

This was evident in the **Gravel Road 2018 Chardonnay**, whose generous fruit

red fruit from the wine.”

Next came **The Stalker 2021 Pinot Noir**, offering rich earthiness and layered dark fruit that perfectly complemented tender cubes of pork char siu lacquered with a honey-soy glaze. Marzotto elaborated on the name, a reference to grape stems or stalks, as he described Soles’ innovative fermentation process. “I think that this is the only Pinot that is destemmed and restemmed,” he said. “Rollin separates the stems from the grapes, and while the grapes cold-soak, he ages the stems from green to brown for seven days. When reintroduced, they release

Hong Kong by a master fabricator. “We marinate it from the inside out with star anise, cardamom, and coriander; and they complement the Private Stash so well,” said Heck. “The hoisin brings out the fruit, but to me, the spices, especially star anise, are the whole reason for this pairing.” “Spot on,” said one of the impressed somms as the room murmured in agreement.

A decadent dessert of dark-chocolate truffle cake capped off a memorable and enlightening evening of Asian cuisine paired with New World wines rooted in Old World winemaking tradition.



SMUSA hosted its MASI Agricola lunch at Italian restaurant Modena in Washington, D.C., last June.



VIVA IL VENETO

MASI SHOWCASED ITS EXEMPLARY VALPOLICELLA AND AMARONE DURING A LUNCH TASTING IN WASHINGTON, D.C.

story by KELLY MAGYARICS / *photos by* KAREN SAYRE

If Valpolicella is the wet-aged steak of wine, Amarone is the dry-aged version. This was the clever analogy used by Anthony Apostolakos, U.S. director of MASI Agricola, during a lunch held in June at modern Italian restaurant Modena in Washington, D.C., to showcase the brand's Veneto reds—a younger, fresher style and a more mature, complex one. “The longer you dry a cut of meat, the more it changes; it’s the same with dehydrating grapes,” he explained.

Joining Apostolakos at the event were several representatives from importer Santa Margherita USA—Lisa Milano, director for New York, New Jersey, and Mid-Atlantic; Camilla Giordano, district manager for D.C. and Maryland; and associate brand manager Martha Bednarek—along with buyers, sommeliers, and wine directors from the metro D.C. area.

Apostolakos began with a history lesson about the Valpolicella region and the winery, which celebrated its 250th anniversary last year. Thousands of years ago, winemakers began relying on the appassimento method to dry grapes for months on straw mats or bamboo racks, concentrating sugar levels and flavors to satisfy the Romans’ unquenchable thirst for super-sweet Recioto wines.

Today, the Valpolicella region is famous for Amarone. While it draws on these ancient Roman practices, the category only dates back to 1950, when a handful of producers, including MASI, started experimenting with using appassimento for drier wines. As they’re dehydrated, Corvina (the main variety in the wine), Rondinella, and Molinara undergo a wildly fascinating transformation whereby they take on the appearance of deflated balloons and their

profile evolves from notes of fresh cherries to cherry jam and balsamic vinegar. Likewise, the fermentation that stops and starts over a six-month period boosts concentration and layered nuances. The resulting wine was initially, and confusingly, called Recioto Amarone, but the DOCG fortunately changed labeling requirements in the 1990s so that the sweet wines would be known as Recioto and the dry ones Amarone.

Thanks to groundbreaking producers like MASI, Amarone has come a long way since the early days of heavy oxidation and overextended fermentation that often rendered flawed, undrinkable wines. “Today we use yeast cultivated from our cellars; we know that pergola is the best system for training; and we better understand elevation, exposure, and the grape percentages . . . to use—versus relying on



field blends,” Apostolakos explained. MASI has also determined best practices for appassimento, selecting looser clusters of grapes to counter gray mold and making use of Valpolicella’s unique natural cycle of humidity and temperature fluctuations to allow the thick-skinned grapes to dehydrate slowly and evenly. Crush typically occurs around 80 days after harvest, but MASI waits 100 days to allow for more weight loss and concentration.

Before delving into three expressions of MASI Amarone, attendees at the lunch sampled the **2021 Bonacosta Valpolicella Classico D.O.C.G.**, most of which aged four months in 60- to 90-liter Slavonian oak barrels (20% of the Corvina aged in small casks of both new Allier and Slavonian oak). It offered notes of tart cherries with a hint of cinnamon, a medium body, and a pleasing finish.

“We like Valpolicella bright . . . with a bit of spice from the Molinara,” Apostolakos said. “It’s our everyday drinking red—I compare it to Venetian Beaujolais.” It made for a synergistic pairing with potato gnocchi with water-buffalo butter, wild mushrooms, and parmesan. “It’s really vibrant and fresh, with tons of fruit,” Milano agreed.

Bill Mounts of A&A Wine and Spirits in Gambrills, Maryland, who also does wine training and consulting for Wegmans grocery stores, believes Valpolicella speaks



Anthony Apostolakos, U.S. director of MASI Agricola, led guests through the production process that makes Amarone so complex and multilayered.

to consumers’ penchant for lighter-style wines. “Lately, it’s all about being a little bit lighter, a little bit fresher, and talking about the things in the vineyard that make wine this way,” he said. “Something like this is an absolute home run.”

While Valpolicella showcases youthful primary aromas and flavors, the aging process used for Amarone—appassimento, long fermentation, and bottle aging—coaxes out secondary and tertiary aromas and adds body and texture. Two Amarones were served with beef tenderloin with potatoes, asparagus, and black garlic. Both hailed from Costasera, a series of west-facing vineyards in the Classico zone that takes advantage of the ripening benefits of exposure as well as the sunlight reflecting off of Lake Garda.

As Apostolakos put it, grapes for the **2017 Costasera Amarone della Valpolicella Classico D.O.C.G.** are “amplified” by a long appassimento, making them “semi-dry yet still alive.” A touch of botrytis leads to a bright, full-bodied, non-oxidized wine that’s drinkable now—perfect for consumers too impatient to cellar—though it’s also capable of aging for decades after seeing up to 30 months in a combination of Slavonian and Allier oak barrels. It requires no decanting, so diners can order it right from the list and immediately delve into its smooth tannins and notes of baked cherries, plums, dried herbs, and coffee.

The **2017 Costasera Amarone della Valpolicella Classico D.O.C.G. Riserva** is similarly produced, though it sees ten extra days of appassimento and an extra year and a half in Slavonian and Allier oak. It also contains, in addition to the three traditional Amarone grapes, 10% Os-



Gnocchi with water-buffalo butter, wild mushrooms, and parmesan was paired with the approachable MASI 2021 Bonacosta Valpolicella Classico D.O.C.G.

eleta, a variety praised for its high tannin content that nonetheless fell out of favor after phylloxera. The “lost grape of Valpolicella” was rediscovered in the 1980s, and MASI petitioned for its optional inclusion in Amarone. “Oseleta makes an Amarone with . . . cherries and [a] velvety characteristic along with this fine tannin woven throughout,” Apostolakos pointed out, adding that it could be a pinch hitter for California Cabernet Sauvignon.

The event concluded with a tasting of Italian cheeses alongside the **2013 Campolongo di Torbe Amarone della Valpolicella Classico D.O.C.G.**, which hails from a single vineyard at 1,300 feet in elevation that’s been producing wine since the 12th century. After harvest, the grapes are dried in the vineyard—a true experiment of terroir—before being aged for 36 months in Slavonian oak. The highly allocated wine is bold and brooding yet elegant, bright, and fresh; drinkable now, it will evolve for decades.

Nial Rhys Harris García, beverage director and sommelier for The Conrad Hotel DC, summed up the consensus of the guests as he noted that “the Veneto region is among the most interesting wine regions in the world, and appassimento is a very interesting winemaking technique.” For his part, Apostolakos believes the region provides the perfect introduction to Italian wine for the American palate: It is, after all, home to the beloved Prosecco and Pinot Grigio as well as easy-drinking Valpolicella and, of course, Amarone, which is undeniably more concentrated and complex yet still approachable. If the Veneto is the bridge to Italian wine, MASI is the ultimate destination in Valpolicella. *SP*



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"Napa Valley's Green Scene" panelists Ivo Jermanez, vice president/winemaker at Grgich Hills Estate; Sarah Vandendriessche, winemaker at Elizabeth Spencer; Jaime Araujo, founder of Trois Noix; and Jackson Family Wines winemaker Chris Carpenter with moderator Martin Reyes, MW.

Ingredients for Action

NAPA VALLEY VINTNERS TACKLE THE TOPIC OF SUSTAINABILITY
AT **SOMMCON 2023**

story by Deborah Parker Wong / photos by Rafael Peterson

SUSTAINABILITY IS A CATCH-ALL term that's tossed around casually to refer to just about anything even remotely related to climate action, resource conservation, and land stewardship. But for Martin Reyes, MW, and the panel of winemakers that joined him for the "Napa Valley's Green Scene" session at SommCon in San Diego in September, achieving sustainability requires taking concrete steps with the intention of ensuring the viability of the planet, the

broader community, and the wines that are grown and produced in Napa Valley well into the future.

A man of many talents and founder of his own consultancy, the Reyes Wine Group, Reyes is an industry leader. In addition to his professional accomplishments and the many hats he wears, which include joining importer WineWise as partner in 2022, he's a passionate advocate for climate action and the co-founder of the Napa RISE event series,

which has elevated the discussion around sustainability initiatives in Napa Valley to new heights.

The session opened with an impassioned plea by Reyes to budding activists: "Start a study group so you can relearn together and climb on the shoulders of those like our panelists, who are leading the charge." From there, each panelist spoke about their work while reinforcing their message through the wines they presented.

TROIS NOIX

First up was Jaime Araujo; the founder of Trois Noix, whose name means “Three Nuts” in French, she views wine as a catalyst for social change. Trois Noix is a Certified B Corp, which means that its practices have been assessed across five categories: governance (which concerns accountability and transparency); worker welfare; community welfare; environmental stewardship; and customer impact. “Being small makes it easier to track the requirements for B Corp, and we work on it every single day,” she said. “We query vendors about what they are doing; we’ve moved to cotton instead of tree

in Napa Valley, winemaker (and Slow Food activist) Chris Carpenter oversaw the certification of hundreds of estate acres by California Certified Organic Farming (CCOF) in 2022. He spoke passionately about the failure of chemical fertilizers, which have merely served as a Band-Aid on depleted soils: “Chemical inputs end up in the groundwater, the lakes, and the oceans,” he pointed out. “The results are pollution, pests, and vine diseases.” He believes that vineyard health can be restored by keeping the soil in a vegetative state with plants that feed it: “The job of the farmer is to harvest energy, which is the symbiosis of plants and microbes.”



SommCon attendees get the scoop on sustainability efforts in Napa Valley.

paper labels; and [we’ve] addressed bottle weights and other aspects of packaging.” For instance, she recently packaged a Sauvignon Blanc in recycled bottles from Conscious Container. Such efforts are key when it comes to “being proactive for the future of our planet and . . . prioritizing what matters most in our climate-action efforts,” she told Reyes.

The Trois Noix 2021 Muir-Hanna Vineyard Chardonnay, hailing from Napa’s Oak Knoll District, was powerful, with tropical-fruit intensity. Grower Bill Hanna, a direct descendant of naturalist John Muir, is currently working to introduce regenerative farming to the historic designated vineyard.

JACKSON FAMILY WINES

As the man responsible for “turning the ship” of farming at Jackson Family Wines

Carpenter presented the producer’s 2019 Mt. Brave Cabernet Franc. Made from Mount Veeder fruit grown above the fog line, it exuded lavender and violets; bright, focused notes of mulberry and black tea; and restrained tannins. “Quality has gotten better since the conversion,” he said. “It’s got to make economic sense to convert and follow the regenerative path.”

GRGICH HILLS ESTATE

Ivo Jermanez’s stewardship of his family’s Grgich Hills Estate, where he is vice president and winemaker, has made him one of Napa Valley’s most trusted sources for insight into organic practices and regenerative organic certification, which the winery achieved in 2023. Grgich Hills is a veritable case study in the economic benefits of organic farming: “The current yearly cost of farming a single acre of

vineyard in the Napa Valley is \$15,000 on average, while our costs are \$11,000 per acre,” Jermanez said, resulting in savings of more than \$1 million every year. “On top of that, our yields are above average as well”—depending on the variety, he can produce 0.5–1 ton more fruit than is standard in the region.

Of course, the resulting wines are also far above average: The Grgich Hills 2018 Yountville Cabernet Sauvignon was fresh and red-fruited, with a sublime balance between umami and oak.

ELIZABETH SPENCER WINERY

Cabernet Sauvignon from a block adjacent to the Grgich vineyard in Yountville was presented by Sarah Vandendriessche, winemaker for Elizabeth Spencer, which is owned by the Boisset Collection. Vandendriessche, who has been with the winery since 2010, works with consulting winemaker Heidi Peterson Barrett in the cellar while coordinating all the sustainability initiatives for Boisset’s California estates. She has a committed relationship with their farmers: “We’re working with growers that are increasingly becoming certified. In terms of agriculture, the wine industry is small, but we’re highly visible. We are a bullhorn of the green message, and we should be putting our money behind our messaging,” she said.

The Elizabeth Spencer 2018 Yountville Cabernet Sauvignon represents a major milestone for the brand, which was established 20 years prior to the vintage in 1988. Though built to age, it uses a relatively high percentage of neutral oak, which has long been a marker of the winery’s house style. After five years in the bottle, it was still deeply saturated, showing well-knit, muscular tannins and varietal typicity, including dried herbs and a savory finish.

In his closing comments, Reyes left the room with an upbeat and hopeful attitude. “We are making a great product in Napa Valley, and we can [make it even better] by including more people who have agency in our discussions, by focusing on climate action, and by calling for action,” he said. “We can do more by asking where our food comes from and by making diversity a priority. These are the ingredients for action. We need to focus on that power and ride the groundswell of momentum that brought us together here today.”

Land and Lineage

ON-PREMISE EXCLUSIVE **SEVEN RANCHLANDS** PAYS HOMAGE TO THE CLINE FAMILY'S ROOTS IN SONOMA AND BEYOND

by Kate Newton

FINDING A FITTING NAME for a wine brand—one that encapsulates its true character and the niche it aims to fill in the market while simultaneously setting it apart from the crowd—is a seemingly simple task that can prove anything but. In the case of Cline Family Cellars' Seven Ranchlands, though, the label practically christened itself: A tribute to not only the producer's seven ranches but the seven children of founders Fred and Nancy Cline, it's appropriately emblazoned with the patriarch's handwriting, while the screwcaps that top the wines are engraved with all of the second-generation Clines' names.

"We really wanted to honor those seven vineyards, and it just so happened



PHOTO: EMMA K. MORRIS

In making Seven Ranchlands exclusive to the on-premise market, the Cline family and their winemaking team wanted to establish food-friendliness as the central tenet of the brand.

Cline Family Cellars founder Fred Cline with his daughter Hilary, who serves as the winery's VP of DTC and marketing; Cline's son Henry and daughter Megan also have roles in the family business.

that seven is our lucky number as a family," VP of DTC and marketing Hilary Cline said during a phone interview while on a recent trip to the Midwest, where she was presenting Seven Ranchlands—exclusive to the on-premise market since its launch in 2021—to buyers in cities like Madison, Wisconsin, and St. Paul, Minnesota. "With this concept, we really wanted to lean into expressing the vineyards as much as we possibly could, keep[ing] the wines really food-friendly and not [going] over the top with oak or winemaking

technique. . . . [And] I think we wanted to make the distinction that while there are vineyards on all the properties, they are truly ranches as well. One we run cattle on, we have sheep [mitigating weed growth]—so different kinds of activities [beyond viticulture are] happening on them as well."

Of those seven properties, the four that provide fruit for Seven Ranchlands are located in Sonoma County (Hilary noted that the line could potentially expand to include the remaining three,

the Big Break and Bridgehead vineyards in Contra Costa County and Meadowbrook Ranch in Tehama County, in the future). The region has served as the home base of Cline Family Cellars since 1989, after the Clines bought a 350-acre horse farm—160 acres of which now constitute their J. Poppe Vineyard—in the Carneros AVA and moved their winemaking operations there from Oakley in Contra Costa County. J. Poppe, which contributes grapes to the Seven Ranchlands Merlot and Cabernet Sauvignon, experiences a daily breeze coming off of the San Pablo Bay that's known as the "Carneros Express," cooling the vines planted on shallow clay and loam soils and extending hang time while concentrating flavor. Similarly maritime-influenced are the Catapult and Diamond Pile vineyards in the Petaluma Gap, which are sources for the Seven Ranchlands Chardonnay and Pinot Noir. Finally, the fourth of the family's Sonoma estates, the Jacuzzi Vineyard in Carneros,

provides fruit for the collection's Sauvignon Blanc.

Even though her family has been well established as farmers in Sonoma County for over 30 years, Hilary noted that launching new brands like Seven Ranchlands and their Sonoma AVA Series allows them to continually view the region through a new lens and pass on that perspective to consumers. "For a long time, my dad was selling a lot of our Sonoma fruit . . . to other large producers that loved the fruit so much that they bought ranches in the area, but [he] was definitely one of the first people who thought to grow Pinot and Chard in that really cool-climate Petaluma Gap region of Sonoma. For a long time we weren't even really making wines from that area—we were so focused on our Contra Costa properties," she said. "I think it's really fun to now be able to make wines from our own vineyards where we put so much effort into farming sustainably."

Ensuring that Seven Ranchlands' range of varieties is grown in the ideal terroir across the properties while also maintaining relationships with third-party growers that meet the winery's standards may seem like a tall task, but director of winemaking and viticulture Tom Gendall is more than suited to the balancing act. Having previously exclusively managed the Sonoma properties as assistant winemaker, he expanded his purview to the other Cline sites after his promotion in 2020 and, according to Hilary, has "really honed [our] sourcing so every block has an intended use. Of course when we bring it in, we always decide if it's going to go to [that] intended use, but . . . having that framework and structure in advance really helps [us approach] how we're going to farm the different blocks and move forward with them through the year. He's revolutionized how we did that." Securing the right growers, meanwhile, involves "constantly assessing and seeing how we can improve or if we're happy where we are," she added; once they've found a good fit, they seek to lock in those partnerships with long-term contracts.

Since its inception, Cline has avoided the use of herbicides and pesticides and employs practices like the planting of cover crops and the use of compost to enrich the soils, and sustainable farming remains the standard for Seven Ranch-

lands as it does for all of the winery's brands (whose labels tout its status as a Certified California Sustainable producer). "My brother Henry[, who serves as vineyard manager; has] been really great, I think, [in terms of] having some fresh eyes on the vineyards and new technologies," Hilary said. "One of the biggest battles we fight [in] farming the way we do is weed control, so . . . we were spending a lot of time weed whacking; Henry's been able to look at some under-row mowers and try to get those going. We're in the process of replanting about 300 acres . . . over the next couple years, so that's a really big undertaking as well, but we're trying to set those up to be a little more efficient to farm also. I think we're taking the learnings my dad has had over the past 40 years and trying to use best practices [to] set up these new vineyards,

wines are versatile with respect to pairing with a wide range of cuisines. Take the Chardonnay, for example: Hilary explained that "there's oak to it because I think at this price point people are expecting [it] to have a little bit of weight . . . but [Gendall] did a great job maintaining freshness, maintaining acidity, letting the vineyard come through on it. . . . And the Cab, it's the same thing—it's not overly tannic or overly huge; it's a softer Cab that has acidity and that you can enjoy with food." She noted that she's also been excited about the response to the current release of the Sauvignon Blanc in the 2022 vintage: "You don't always think Carneros for Sauvignon Blanc, but it's been producing a really beautiful wine, so I think people's reactions to that have been exciting to see."

The aim to please on-premise partners has informed every facet of the



PHOTO: EMMA K. MORRIS

Most of the fruit for the Seven Ranchlands Pinot Noir hails from vineyards in the Petaluma Gap subregion of Sonoma County, including the Cline's Catapult and Diamond Pile ranches.

which is super exciting, and it's been great to see Henry take it on." And while the 2023 harvest in California didn't exactly go as planned for many producers due to record-breaking rainfall early in the season—condensing the typical timeframe for harvest so much that Gendall, Henry, and the rest of the Cline team had to scramble to bring in the crop—Fred noted that the resulting "fruit is fantastic": "We've been able to harvest at the right sugars and acids and everything, so it's really worked out well."

Once the grapes reach the winery, Gendall focuses on the aforementioned food-friendliness above all, ensuring the

brand, from the streamlined, UPC-free packaging and easy-to-open screwcaps to the flexible price point. "We're really trying to give restaurants an opportunity to make good money on these wines, especially since they're not competing with any retail price points," Hilary said, adding, "We've seen a lot of restaurants, clubs, and hotels have a lot of success with [Seven Ranchlands] for their banquet programs, and those are the people who are offering the full range of the wines, which has been amazing to see." Given the inspiration behind the brand, it's only right to have the whole family represented. **\$**

Everything Happens for a *Résonance*

HOW BURGUNDIAN
PRACTICES DISTINGUISH
ONE OREGON WINERY

by Ellen Clifford

RÉSONANCE WINES is what happens when a renowned Burgundy producer applies Burgundian practices to a stand-out New World appellation. In this case, the Burgundian producer is stalwart Maison Louis Jadot; the ever-evolving appellation is Oregon's Willamette Valley.

The techniques Jadot uses at Résonance may be similar to those it uses in France, but the aim is not to make the same wines. Much as it is in Burgundy, the end goal is to use tried and true approaches to elevate and exemplify unique terroirs. The wines don't imitate those of Burgundy so much as sing the song of Oregon in a Burgundian key. "The name of the product is not 'Louis Jadot: Oregon,' it is 'Résonance,'" explained winemaker Guillaume Large. Although the accent over the "e" is an homage to the winery's French origins, the word is meant to evoke the "echo" reverberating between Oregon and Burgundy.

The first step to establishing Résonance took place in 2013 with the acquisition of the Résonance Vineyard in Yamhill-Carlton, which was planted to ungrafted rootstocks in 1981. A 2014 purchase in Dundee Hills followed, and when unplanted land next to the original Yamhill-Carlton



PHOTOS COURTESY OF RÉSONANCE WINES

Résonance winemaker Guillaume Large.



Résonance Wines' barrel cellar.

vineyard became available in 2015, the Jadot team pounced on it, both to plant more vines and to build their winery and tasting room. In addition, Résonance has acquired a vineyard in Eola-Amity Hills that has yet to be bottled. The project was initially led by Jacques Lardière, the formerly retired technical director of Jadot who had worked for the producer from 1970 to 2012; he was joined by Large in 2017.

Résonance is Jadot's first venture in the New World. Why Oregon? "We wanted a place we could plant Chardonnay and Pinot Noir following exactly the same methods; we're [at] almost the same latitude," said Large at a recent tasting of the wines held at Los Angeles restaurant 71Above. Other potential locations considered for expansion included New Zealand and Chile; in the end, however, Oregon won out, serendipitously enough—as it happens, 1859 was the year that both Louis Jadot and the state of Oregon were founded.

The vineyards are organically dry farmed, which Large believes allows the roots of the vines to dig deep, yielding fruit that best expresses the terroir. Attention to detail comes in the form of handpicking and separately vinifying plots before blending, while barrels are sourced from Jadot's chosen cooperage, Tonnellerie Cadus. Working our way through four bottlings revealed how these Burgundian practices show Oregon in its best light; see our tasting notes for three of the four wines at right.

One more Jadot tradition to be continued at Résonance in the future is the creation of a wine library. A substantial number of bottles from each vintage will be saved and periodically recorked in order to be perfectly preserved for decades, if not centuries, to come. **\$**

Tasting Notes



Résonance 2021 Chardonnay, Willamette Valley, Oregon (\$40) The combination of volcanic and sedimentary soils in three vineyards brings expression to this elegant example of Chardonnay, balancing minerality, tension, and acidity-born direction with the purity of its aromatics—citrus, yellow fruit, white

fruit, and floral notes. The aging regimen of 15 months in (25% new) oak adds a welcome hint of vanilla to the lithe palate, tinged with silky lemon and guava. **93** —*Meridith May*



Résonance 2021 Pinot Noir, Willamette Valley, Oregon (\$40)

This bottling follows the négociant tradition of Louis Jadot, whose team has formed relationships with other growers in addition to relying on the estate's Résonance and Découverte (Discovery) vineyards. Long macerations (about four

weeks), slow extractions, and aging in (30% new) French oak are ingredients in the recipe for the final result: a wine with a light cherry-red color; aromas of red and black cherry, and spicy floral accents. The palate brings all that together with finely grained tannins; healthy acidity; and a finish of tilled soil, cranberry, and herbal notes. **92** —*M.M.*



Résonance 2018 Pinot Noir, Découverte Vineyard, Dundee Hills, Willamette Valley, Oregon (\$72)

Set on Jory soils—red and volcanic—the Découverte Vineyard in the Dundee Hills was the second site acquired by Résonance. More tart and earthy than Résonance's other Pinot Noirs, this wine

boasts intense minerality and menthol, black cherry, sweet tobacco, and red plum. Aged 17 months in (30% new) oak, it's robust but has integrated tannins and refreshing acidity, leading to a soy sauce-laced umami finish. **95** —*M.M.*



▲ Kimber Stonehouse is director of beverage purchasing and analytics for the Scottsdale, AZ-based Prime Steak Concepts.

One Glass at a Time

KIMBER STONEHOUSE OF PRIME STEAK CONCEPTS ON CRAFTING THE IDEAL BEVERAGE LIST

story by Marci Symington
photos by Grace Stufkosky

CRAFTING UNIQUE WINE LISTS for nine restaurants across six states may sound daunting, but Kimber Stonehouse is up for the challenge. As director of beverage purchasing and analytics for Prime Steak Concepts, a company based in Scottsdale, Arizona, Stonehouse oversees operations at Dominick's Steakhouse, Steak 44, Ocean 44, Steak 48, and Ocean 48 across several states, including Texas, Illinois, Pennsylvania, North Carolina, and California as well as Arizona, where she works directly with Prime Steak Concepts co-founders Jeff and Michael Mastro. (The brothers were also behind Mastro's, a collection of high-end steakhouses that, in 2007, was sold to a private equity group and is currently owned by Landry's.)

Trained as a classical pianist, Stonehouse moved to Phoenix in 2003, where she applied for a position selling wine at Cost Plus World Market. This part-time job turned into a profession, leading to opportunities to hone her skills at such Phoenix favorites as Sportsman's Fine Wine & Spirits and LGO Hospitality. She discovered that wine retail came naturally. "I had experience selling my skills as a [piano] teacher; wine is a commodity and something a customer could take home with them. I enjoyed waiting on people and talking with them about what they were interested in," she recalls.

In 2017, Jeff Mastro offered her a position at Prime Steak Concepts. At the time, the Mastro brothers owned Dominick's Steakhouse and Steak 44 in Arizona as well as Steak 48 in Houston and Chicago. Steak 44 gets its name from its prominent location

on 44th Street and Camelback Road in Phoenix; having achieved tremendous success in their home state, the brothers branched out to other locations with Steak 48, a name that alludes to Arizona's status as the 48th state.

Jeff needed someone to conduct competitive research to develop their beverage menu for the Chicago restaurant. "I visited the market to assess the competition, and I went to what I call the 'cool kid' places to see what they were doing that we weren't," Stonehouse says. Acknowledging that not all trends align with their brand, she still believes that she can gain tremendous insight from the research process: "I can see where they're pushing the envelope. I can look for patterns and get information just by being on the ground with the cool kids ... and then I come back and ask myself, 'What do we need to try ... what are we missing?'"

According to her findings, customers in Chicago, the third-largest city in the U.S.,

Stonehouse sees each concept as having its own personality and customizes both the bottle and the BTG lists accordingly. Considering several factors, including price, flavor profile, and availability, Stonehouse says, "I don't want ten Cabs that taste the same; I [also] try to find a balance so that, for example, not all whites are heavily oaked—there are some that are crisp and some that sit on the fence." This kind of analysis prompted her to revisit the lists at Steak 44 and Dominick's Steakhouse, where, for instance, she added the Cliff Lede Cabernet Sauvignon BTG because "the servers loved selling it by the bottle and felt it would sell well on the BTG list."

Cabernet Sauvignon producers like Hundred Acre are a sure bet for the steaks at Dominick's Steakhouse in Scottsdale. ▶



▶ **At Dominick's, one of the restaurants for which Stonehouse builds the wine list, burrata with pickled onions and tomato jam might be paired with Champagne Pol Roger 2012 Cuvée Sir Winston Churchill.**

preferred not only internationally known wines but also those considered, in her words, "non-mainstream," at least in the context of by-the-glass (BTG) offerings. Stonehouse therefore augmented the list with such BTG selections as Albert Bichot Chablis, Craggy Range Te Muna Road Sauvignon Blanc, Domaine Faiveley Pinot Noir, and Emeritus Pinot Noir.

Ocean 44 opened in 2018 in the upscale Scottsdale Fashion Square mall. There, Stonehouse says, "We are known for steak, so [we] will always have a great selection of Cabernets. But for Ocean, I find that seafood is fantastic with Chardonnay from Burgundy," so she suggested procuring the Domaine Long-Depaquit Les Vaillons Premier Cru BTG as well as adding a high-end

bubbly to the BTG selection, namely Krug Grande Cuvée 170th Edition.

The latter proved so popular that at Steak 48 in Charlotte, North Carolina, Stonehouse added Veuve Clicquot La Grande Dame, a wildly successful move. At the Steak 48 in Houston, where Texans like their reds big and bold, Stonehouse offers Hundred Acre's Fortunate Son The Diplomat BTG. And at the recently opened Steak 48 in Beverly Hills, she has put on the BTG list both "interesting" whites like La Scolca Gavi dei Gavi Black Label and Champagnes such as Perrier-Jouët Blason Rosé, Bollinger Special Cuvée, and Taittinger Comtes de

Champagne—because evidently customers in the LA area like to celebrate.

Stonehouse also crafts the cocktail menus for each location, focusing on sourcing locally. For example, Chicago's signature cocktail list features FEW Rye Whiskey from Evanston, Philadelphia's Steak 48 pours Bluecoat Gin, and Great Wagon Road Rúa Whiskey is featured in Charlotte's Signature Manhattan. "It's a nice nod to the local," she says. "It's important to reflect that location, not just what I like to drink, not just what Jeff Mastro likes to drink, but also what the people there will enjoy."

Stonehouse believes her approach to developing beverage programs reflects the culture of Prime Steak Concepts as a whole. As she explains, "It's important to me that our BTG list represents us as a company and represents the location. If the three concepts in Arizona don't have the same product mix, then why would Houston, Charlotte, or Chicago be the same? It takes more work but makes [things] more dynamic." **\$J**

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Sanguine for Spain

IN CONVERSATION WITH PEDRO GARCIA, MANAGING DIRECTOR FOR THE U.S. AND CANADA AT **FÉLIX SOLÍS AVANTIS**

Q: What is the state of Spanish wine in the U.S. market today?

The Spanish category has had to deal with some serious headwinds since October 2019, when 25% tariffs were imposed on our goods, [followed by] COVID. This led to some very serious trading conditions for us in the U.S. Today I am happy to say that we see the light at the end of the tunnel. In terms of value, on-premise is our main engine; we are [also] doing well in the e-commerce [space]. But Spanish wines still have less than 2% share in the U.S. . . . We still have a long way to go.

Q: What advantages does Spain offer to the off-premise segment?

I think we've got a great story to tell. Consumers are looking for good value—everybody likes a deal—and I feel, and I think a lot of my colleagues would agree, that Spain still delivers the best bang for the buck. If you're looking for a wine that is going to wow you for a lot less than what you might be paying out of California or France or Italy, you're going to get that from Spain. Spain's got so much diverse terroir and . . . diverse grape varieties; [it has] old vineyards; [it has venerable] aging traditions. When you bundle all this together, you can pay \$20–\$30 for some really exciting wines.

[Spain is] also the largest organic grape-growing region in the world. Younger consumers are looking for healthier things to drink; consumers [in general] are drinking less, but they want to drink something better. So we think that organic wines are a tremendous opportunity here in the U.S. market.

Q: What other opportunities are currently presenting themselves for Spanish producers such as Félix Solís Avantis in the U.S.?

We're seeing sangria continuing to grow. A lot of U.S. consumers enjoy the ready-

PHOTO: MERIDITH MAY



Pedro Garcia is managing director for the U.S. and Canada at Félix Solís Avantis.

instance,] we're playing in the red blend category,

to-drink aspect, the flexibility, and the fun mixology [offered by] sangria, so that's a continued point of interest for Félix Solís. The sparkling category is auspicious as well, so we've identified [it] as a tier-one priority. Our Charmat-method and CO₂-injected bubbles are both continuing to grow a lot [both] on-premise and off-premise.

As for still wines, the U.S. market overall is drinking more white wine than red wine; the white category is robust. We're seeing that we can sell as much Albariño as we can get our hands on, so we're trying to ramp up our capabilities [for producing] Albariño out of Rías Baixas. . . . We're also focusing on our New Zealand Sauvignon Blanc brand, Southern Ocean, while aiming to grow additional Spanish white varieties in the U.S., primarily through our Mucho Más White Blend and Blume Verdejo from Rueda, which we're really excited about because . . . we feel that these wines have a lot of the flavor characteristics that Sauvignon Blanc and Chardonnay drinkers are looking for.

[When it comes to] Spanish reds, Rioja's still king in the U.S., but I feel that that gives us a unique opportunity to develop other wines in our portfolio. [For

[which] U.S. consumers are shopping more enthusiastically and more often than they are for Tempranillo—so the path to finally growing the Spanish share in the U.S. market [is] by way of a brand that's disruptive like [the aforementioned] Mucho Más, [consisting of] multivarietal, multiregional blends that are stylistically modern, juicy, and easy to drink. As far as DOs go . . . what we're most excited about as a company on a regional and national level is Ribera del Duero, which produces big, bold, dense, juicy reds that have a lot of similarities to California Cabs, and we think it could be an easy segue for a Cab drinker, [especially given] our value proposition: The fact that we grow the grapes, make the wine, and sell it to ourselves as a U.S. importer means we can really deliver an attractive price. . . . With these macroeconomic headwinds that we're all seeing globally and with inflation here in the U.S., we think that there might be some down-trading, so our strategy for 2024 is focusing on our premium blends and DO wines between \$13 and \$30 [while showing that, besides] value, the cultural richness of Spain makes it an exciting choice for wine enthusiasts worldwide. *ST*

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PUTTING THE / IN INITIATIVE

AT SOMMCON 2023, A PANEL OF WINERY REPRESENTATIVES
DISCUSSED WHAT THEY'RE DOING TO ADDRESS CLIMATE CHANGE
AND THE FUTURE OF SUSTAINABILITY

story by Lars Leicht / photos by Rafael Peterson



From left to right: Colleen McLeod Garner, director of sales-West for Casa Azul; Joseph Brinkley, director of regenerative development at Bonterra Organic Estates; Bodegas Muriel general manager Javier Murúa; SOMM Journal global wine editor and panel moderator Deborah Parker Wong; Wente Vineyards director of safety, quality, and sustainability Andy Lynch; and Wine Spoken Here founder Tim McDonald.



Deborah Parker Wong leads the “Climate Change and the Future of Sustainability” seminar at SommCon in San Diego, CA.

Unless they’re sipping under a rock, pretty much everybody in the wine industry is aware of the undeniable impact that climate change has had on viticulture and the growing importance of sustainability in winegrowing. Wineries not addressing it in one form or another are increasingly few and far between, and sommeliers—not to mention a growing contingent of consumers—have a deep interest in what winemakers are doing to adapt so that the wines we sell (and, perhaps more importantly, drink) reflect our current reality.

So it was no wonder that the seminar “Climate Change and the Future of Sustainability” filled the room at SommCon in San Diego this past September, attracting attendees with a keen interest in the subject. The panel itself was a significant draw as well: It was led by moderator Deborah Parker Wong, who, as global wine editor for *The SOMM Journal* and the national editor, U.S., for the Slow Food organization’s *Slow Wine Guide*, is intently in tune with steps that wineries can take—and are taking—to address climate change.

The journalist, educator, analyst, and sensory consultant has found the subject to be unavoidable during her decades in the industry, and it has now become a passion. “I didn’t start out as an activist but [as] a curious journalist, and now I have become one,” Parker Wong said in her opening remarks. “The future of sustainability in the alcohol-beverage industry relies on the actions we take today.” As she introduced the panelists, she asked each of them to offer a snapshot of their initiatives and emphasized the importance of such practices. “Sustainability is an action,” she reminded the audience, “and it requires initiatives to move the needle forward for our industry.”

Wente Vineyards

Andy Lynch of Wente Vineyards has a long title—director of safety, quality, and sustainability—for good reason. “I’ve been tasked to put specific energy behind those three initiatives separately,” he pointed out. “My role is further proof that Wente prioritizes sustainability; after all, the family has been farming the same land for 140 years,” including 2,000 acres in the Livermore Valley AVA 30 miles east of San Francisco and another 1,000 acres in Arroyo Seco near the Santa Lucia Highlands east of Monterey.

Wente Vineyards is currently run by the fourth and fifth generations of the Wente family, including Niki Wente, who oversees all viticultural operations and maintains sustainability as a key focus. That focus is reflected in practices across the company: Wente Vineyards partnered with Monarch Tractor to pilot the use of electric tractors in its vineyards; it uses smart irrigation to provide water only to vines in need, determined by readings from sap load sensors on every vine; and its vineyards are farmed under a no-till policy to keep carbon dioxide in the soil. The deployment of a falconer and strategic positioning of owl boxes around the vines discourages four-legged fruit thieves and has accounted for a significant reduction in grape loss. And on the production side, Wente recently made the switch to glass bottles that are 20% lighter in an effort to reduce the greenhouse-gas emissions from its production and shipping operations; so far Wente has offset 300 tons annually, which represents enough energy to charge the cellphones of all Californians once. “It’s in the family’s DNA,” said Lynch. “They’ve always operated this way. And it doesn’t stop with family—it runs throughout the business.”

To ensure its sense of stewardship extends to its employees, the company offers paid parental leave, volunteer time off, and mental-wellness benefits. It also supports over 50 nonprofits in the U.S. and has raised over \$1 million in donations for local schools in the Livermore Valley through its Wente Foundation for Arts Education.

Lynch tasted the Wente Vineyard 2021 Riva Ranch Chardonnay, which saw the addition of 1% Gewürztraminer, with the audience; 10% of the wine was fermented in stainless steel and the balance in a combination of new and second-use French and American oak before it aged sur lie for six months and underwent 100% malolactic fermentation. It was a crisp, fresh start to the tasting—and a reminder that sustainability can also taste good.

Wente Vineyards director of safety, quality, and sustainability Andy Lynch.



Muriel Wines

Bodegas Muriel general manager Javier Murúa.



It's no secret that the conversion to organic winegrowing can be long and arduous; in fact, if you ask Bodegas Muriel general manager Javier Murúa, he will tell you that it has taken millennia.

Murúa began his presentation by pointing out that the ancient Romans introduced winemaking to his native Rioja Alavesa in north-central Spain. Fast-forward to the Middle Ages, when Rioja was part of the Kingdom of Navarra and enjoyed lighter taxes than those paid on wines from other regions to favor local trade. Rioja continued to develop its own distinct winemaking identity through the centuries, and a year after it obtained an official designation of origin in 1925, Murúa's grandfather José—who owned vineyards in El Ciego and sold Rioja wines in nearby cities—founded his own winery. By the 1970s, he was farming by organic standards. Murúa's father, Julian, followed in his father's footsteps, first by working as a winemaker for several different producers and then, in 1986, by reviving the family winery under the name Muriel, combining the first two letters of Murúa, Rioja, and El Ciego.

When Murúa joined the winery, he worked with his father to expand the business while building upon traditions. In the late 20th century, they realized that few growers were paying attention to the quality of the vineyards: Both pesticides and synthetic fertilizers were being overused, killing local fauna and, subsequently, the soils themselves. "The grapes were dependent on fertilizers and made wines that were more generic, with no expression of terroir," said Murúa. In 2021, Muriel converted half of its vineyards to organic viticulture, and by 2024 they will be fully certified.

Murúa said the vines, most of which were planted between 1975 and 2005, have responded in a near-miraculous way. "The consequences of moving [to] organic include more balanced vineyards in terms of quality and quantity, more flowers and subsequent fruit on the vines, and more diversity in the surrounding plant life," he explained. "The wines have changed [in terms of their] aromatic profile and are now more floral and fruitier. There is more concentration and complexity; they have a huge identity and are so different from those [made with grapes] sourced from other growers."

As an example, he presented his Viña Muriel 2019 Solariego, a 100% Tempranillo hand harvested from different vineyard plots planted in 1973, 1975, and 1986 in El Ciego; released in 2023, it represents the first vintage of Muriel's wines to be certified organic. Fermented for 15 days in stainless-steel tanks before aging for 24 months in French oak followed by time in bottle, it was a great example of what Murúa described as the winery's house style: "modern but easy drinking, [with] fruit present [and] a soft and easy texture."

Murúa also noted that his family founded the Maga Foundation in 2009, a nonprofit initiative created to promote and support education-related projects for children in developing countries. Muriel covers all of the foundation's operating costs so that donations go fully to the individual projects.

Bonterra Organic Estates



Joseph Brinkley, director of regenerative development at Bonterra Organic Estates, didn't quite say he misses the daily contact with the vines and soil that he had in his former position as vineyard manager for the same company, but there was a wistful look in his eye when he talked about the transition to his new role. "I went from running vineyards to talking about them," he said. Then again, few are more qualified to take the lead on the subject, both for Bonterra and for the industry. Brinkley has long been at the forefront of promoting the climate benefits of regenerative organic farming; his personal initiatives include meeting with Congress and showing that this style of farming can successfully be practiced at scale.

Bonterra Organic Estates is based in Mendocino County, California, 100 miles north of San Francisco in what Brinkley described as a "classic Mediterranean climate" with diverse soils and topography. The company's establishment as a B Corp in 2015 represented a shift in business strategy to emphasize not just profitability but making a positive impact on the community and environment. Notably, Bonterra is also Regenerative Organic Certified through the Regenerative Organic Alliance, which builds on organic certification with requirements concerning soil health, animal welfare, and worker fairness. Of these three pillars, the latter addresses the equitable treatment of employees, including their right to a living wage and a fair grievance process. "It is a robust process," he said, "and subject to a yearly audit, which includes interviews with our workers."

Regarding the aforementioned advocacy duties, Brinkley represents Bonterra in working at the state and federal levels to support regenerative organic agriculture and encourages consumers to use their buying power to support companies employing these practices. This has been a particularly busy year for him, as the U.S. Farm Bill is up for renewal; every five years, Congress must reauthorize and pass this piece of bipartisan legislation, which includes \$6 billion in annual funding to help improve soil health, increase water quality, conserve wildlife habitats, protect soil-enriching carbon, and build resilience to extreme weather fueled by climate change.

Noting that one of the goals of Bonterra's advocacy efforts is "to incentivize farmers to make better decisions," Brinkley explained that he has been a vocal campaigner for increased funding for technical assistance that would give farmers the resources to transition to organic. He has also worked to obtain increased funding for organic research and for reforming crop insurance to provide a safety net for those who embrace practices that improve soil health and sequester carbon. Brinkley emphasized that organic viticulture is an important means of reducing greenhouse gases and perhaps one of the most straightforward. That said, "packaging [has] the biggest impact," he pointed out. "About 30% of greenhouse-gas emissions [in the wine industry] are from bottles. The cost of glass is huge, just in its creation and its transportation. In addition to lightweight glass, we continue to see exciting alternatives, including paper bottles, bag-in-box, plastic, and aluminum cans. Our research on alternative packaging is constantly evolving and complex, [but] marketing teams and the market still want glass."

Brinkley concluded his presentation by sharing the Bonterra Estate Collection 2021 Cabernet Sauvignon, made with estate fruit grown in gravelly loam soils at Butler Ranch in Mendocino County. The wine fermented in a mix of stainless steel and barrels, undergoing ten to 14 days of malolactic fermentation followed by 12 months of aging in (30% new) French oak barrels. The label indicates that the wine was "made with organic grapes" and bears the Regenerative Organic Certified seal.

Bonterra Organic Estates director of regenerative development Joseph Brinkley.

Fowles Wine



Tim McDonald, founder of public-relations consulting agency Wine Spoken Here, started his presentation for client Fowles Wine with an apology: "Sorry, no Australian accent!" Those of us who have known McDonald from his decades in the industry were already aware of that but had no doubts in his ability to tell the winery's story.

Fowles Wine is located in Victoria, Australia's Strathbogie Ranges, a high-altitude, cool-climate region north of Melbourne. The 4,500-acre property includes 360 acres of vines in two vineyards, Upton Run and Billi's, which are situated between 1,400 and 1,800 feet above sea level and experience strong diurnal shifts and frequent winds. The soil is sandy clay loam overlying decomposed granite and Callabonna clay bedrock, interspersed with massive granite outcrops.

Owner Matt Fowles, whose family has been farming since the 1850s, believes in a "life on the land," according to the winery's website, and grows produce and raises livestock alongside the vineyards on his farm. He promotes biodiversity among the vines by maintaining beehives and insectariums and even works with the University of New England to refine the property's habitat for microbats, which help vineyard

health by devouring pests. Weeds that grow between the rows are smothered rather than cut, conserving moisture in these well-drained soils and negating the use of herbicides. Finally, McDonald noted that the winery, which is certified by Sustainable Winegrowing Australia, practices no-till agriculture.

McDonald presented Fowles' 2018 Ladies Who Shoot Their Lunch Wild Ferment Shiraz, which, like the rest of the portfolio, is made with indigenous yeast and without added sulfites. It spent 12 months in a variety of vessels, including new and neutral oak as well as stainless steel. The memorable name was inspired by the Fowles family's passion for hunting and gathering, and the wine is crafted to complement the textures and flavors of game.

Tim McDonald, founder of public-relations consulting agency Wine Spoken Here, was on hand to represent Fowles Wine.

Casa Azul

Colleen McLeod Garner is director of sales-West for Casa Azul.



For those who thought organic agriculture for tequila was completely different from that for wine, Colleen McLeod Garner, director of sales-West for Casa Azul, was there to set them straight. "Working organically in agriculture means being good stewards of the land, and that's the same for wine as for spirits," she said. "Some people cut corners, but not us."

McLeod Garner said it took three years for the brand owners to develop Casa Azul Organic Tequila in partnership with Las Americas, the second distiller in Mexico to become certified organic by the United States Department of Agriculture, which entails following guidelines that cover soil quality, pest and weed control, and use of additives. The agave plants must be grown in soil that has not been treated with synthetic fertilizers and pesticides; the producer must also eschew the use of genetically modified organisms (GMO).

Eladio Montes, a third-generation agave farmer turned distiller, is the current owner of Las Americas; it's known as NOM 1480 on the Mexican registry of distilleries for tequila, which is regulated and classified similar to Champagne. Montes' son runs the distillery operation, based in the lowlands of Jalisco, and his daughter oversees bottling. Las Americas grows its estate agaves within 31 miles of the distillery, tending the fields by hand without pesticides or chemicals. After harvesting, the Montes family rotates the agave crop with corn or other plants. The new agave pups are planted by hand in the dark volcanic soils of the valley floor, which eventually impart herbaceous and earthy flavors in expressions like the Casa Azul Blanco Organico; made from slow-cooked agave piñas fermented with wild yeast, it undergoes double distillation in stainless-steel pots with copper coils. The tequila then rests in stainless-steel tanks for two to three months, which allows it to naturally oxygenate, before it's gently filtered to remove any solids. SJ

Thinking Global, Drinking Local

I DARE SAY that we live in a golden age for wine. In my opinion, never has the bar been higher for quality nor has wine been healthier for our bodies and our planet as a result of widespread sustainable and organic farming and production practices. The wine world is also a better place today thanks in great part to sommeliers who educate their guests with the stories behind unique wines from unexpected places.

I recently escorted a group of international wine lovers through Tuscany, where we visited wineries both large and small, tasting through their portfolios and purchasing wines to either ship home or enjoy with our meals together. One of the highlights of that trip, at least for me, was that several members of this disparate crowd also brought wines from their home regions to share.

Sheryl from Colorado brought a set of canned blends of Cabernet Sauvignon and Syrah from Denver-based producer The Infinite Monkey Theorem. Serge from British Columbia, Canada, brought a Cabernet blend from Clos du Soleil in the South Similkameen Valley and a Merlot from LaStella Winery in the Okanagan Valley. Liam from Ireland brought a bottle of Lusca, a Merlot made in Dublin's North County.

And guess what? None of them sucked. Even Gregorio, our host at agriturismo estate Il Civettaio in Paganico—which produces Maremma Toscana DOC and Toscana IGT wines—was generous in his commentary. Were they the best wines we had on our trip? Not by a long shot, of course. We visited top producers in the Chianti, Montepulciano, and Brunello zones. But each wine in that sampling of local pride was respectable and enjoyable.

While on this convivial journey, I was reminded of my friend and winemaker Christian Scrinzi of Gruppo Italiano Vini; several years ago at the *SOMM Journal*-sponsored Cru Artisan College, he predicted that the future wine market would greatly favor inimitable terroir-based wines like Brunello, Burgundy, Barolo, and Bordeaux as well as those from Chile's Maipo Valley, Argentina's Uco Valley, Napa, Sonoma, Germany's Rhine River regions, and Styria in Austria—all worthy of shipping around the world for their unique character. At the same time, Scrinzi hypothesized that wines meant for daily consumption would be made locally. This in turn reminded me of Thomas Jefferson's belief in the winemaking capacity of Virginia and the eventual United States, all 50 of which produce wine today.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF LARS LEICHT



Lusca Merlot is made in Dublin, Ireland's North County.



Enophiles from the U.S., Canada, Germany, Ireland, and Argentina enjoy a tasting in Montalcino as part of a ten-day tour through Tuscan wine country.



One tour participant brought cans from Denver, CO-based winery Infinite Monkey Theorem to share with the group.



Which brings me to another recent trip, this one to Arizona with Jay Bileti of the American Wine Society, who graciously hosted me on a tour of Sonoita wine country last August. Every winery we visited, including Deep Sky Vineyard (for which he consults), presented excellent wines that demonstrated an ideal combination of varietal character and local terroir. But the average retail price of the wines we enjoyed is around \$40—which doesn't seem to be in line with Scrinzi's ideal of everyday approachability. The same goes for the wines Serge brought from British Columbia, which sell for the Canadian equivalent of around \$50 U.S. Lusca is even more precious: Liam reported that it retails in the local market for around \$80 U.S., which could buy a lot of Guinness. Obviously, the canned wines from Denver come closer to a college-student budget at \$18 for a four-pack, but that's still more than a six-pack of Coors (with no promise that they can float in the Colorado River the way the beer can, as proprietor Pete Coors demonstrated in a television ad years ago).

Despite the high price for local wine, I still believe in thinking global and acting local. The range of Long Island and Finger Lakes wines available to me in my home base of New York are not exactly bargains but do represent good value. I'm even more spoiled at my home in Umbria, Italy, where I can get delicious, world-class wines to enjoy daily for under \$20 for a 750-milliliter bottle—even less if I buy in bulk.

So, what does the future hold for wine lovers? I would like to think there will be higher quality and greater value at all levels, provided that local producers are able to achieve the economies of scale needed to balance their costs and pricing—and that the somm community is on board with expanding their guests' horizons. *SJ*

A red logo with the text "CAB FRANC" in white, stylized capital letters. The word "CAB" is above "FRANC".

CAB
FRANC

goes global

From BEST SUPPORTING ACTOR to STARRING ROLE

CABERNET FRANC AROUND THE WORLD

BY ERIK SEGELBAUM

Parenting is a thankless job. You work hard to raise your children, and yet you're often disregarded as they forge their own path. This has certainly rung true for Cabernet Sauvignon parent grape Cabernet Franc, whose child has tended to receive most of the limelight. (How is it, for instance, that when people say "Cabernet," they *always* mean Sauvignon, that attention-seeking little offspring?)

Fortunately, Cabernet Franc is finally coming (back) into fashion and claiming its rightful spot as an apex variety—one that's produced in a myriad of styles, from weedy and brooding to pretty and polished. It is precisely this diversity of expressions that make Cab Franc a perfect international variety.

Our first stop on the global Cab Franc tour is naturally the Loire Valley—the homestead, if you will, of Cabernet Sauvignon's parents (the other being Sauvignon Blanc). It is here, especially in the regions and sub-appellations of Anjou, Saumur, Chinon, and Bourgueil, that the grape thrives (for more on the Loire Valley, see page 80). Thanks to their cooler climates and microterroirs, Loire Valley Cabernet Francs routinely express a range of "garden store" flavors—including everything from fertile black potting soil and loam to leaves, forest floor, and green vegetables—and tend to yield gentle background tannins, despite the variety's potential for being full-bodied and monstrously tannic. Due to a combination of appellation laws and stylistic preferences as well as terroir, new oak is limited if used at all. Often best with both age and a chill, these wines are darlings among sommeliers and consumers who prefer a brighter, fresher, earthier, and more vegetal expression of the variety.



*A vineyard near
Montsoreau in
France's Loire Valley.*

In Italy, Tuscany is seeing the broad adoption of Cabernet Franc as both a monovariety and a dominant blending grape. Tuscan producers, unfettered by heavy-handed DOC or DOCG laws, have a penchant for rich, full-bodied wines and tend to apply plentiful oak to fully ripened grapes. In stark contrast to the earthier Loire Valley expressions, the results are rich and intense wines with plush tannins and structure for days. Some of the best expressions hail from the south of the Chianti Classico zone near Siena. While monovarietal Tuscan Cab Francs tend to be quite pricy (and arguably well worth it), the grape is increasingly showing up in blends. Tuscan producers, it seems, believe that Cab Franc is capable of putting the “super” in Super Tuscan.


Further to the east, Israel's distinctively Mediterranean climate is proving to be incredibly well suited to Cab Franc, which is grown all over the country (though some of the best comes from the Judean Hills and the Lower Galilee). Unripe green pyrazine notes are virtually nonexistent in the region's wines, as the hot sun and terra rosa soils give the grape everything it needs to achieve full potential. When Baron Edmond de Rothschild of Château Lafite Rothschild established Israel's modern vineyards in the late 1800s, he

planted what he knew: Bordeaux varieties, including what is thought to be the country's first Cab Franc vine material. Nearly a century and a half later, the grape is absolutely thriving. Like their Tuscan counterparts, Israeli winemakers are not afraid to use rich oak on their robust and fully ripened fruit. The resulting wines are showstoppers that can give most Napa Valley cult wines a run for their money on any steakhouse table. The only thing that Israel hasn't quite figured out yet is how to charge more for these stunners, making them some of the best values to be found.

South of the equator, regions on both sides of the Andes exhibit spectacular though stylistically dissimilar examples of Cab Franc. In Chile, the Maule, Colchagua, and Maipo valleys represent the majority (though certainly not all) of the country's best versions. While their terroirs differ; generally speaking, the combination of higher elevation, more rainfall, and inbound winds from the coast create more vegetal and pyrazine aromas. Thanks to modern winemaking practices, including the judicious use of oak, these aromas tend to appear in near-perfect balance at the center of the Venn diagram for Cab Franc: not too earthy, not too weedy, but just right.

On the Andes' eastern slopes lies another Goldilocks region for Cab Franc: Argentina's Mendoza region, including the Uco Valley, is an absolute sweet spot. While many of the plantings are at high elevations, the grape is able to ripen sufficiently to diminish potentially harsh pyrazines. This is due largely to the extremely dry conditions: With no humidity, there are no airborne water molecules to diffuse solar radiation. Extreme elevation does, however, dramatically change the angle at which sunlight reaches the vines; the result is maximum solar penetration, leading to excellent phenolic and sugar ripeness.

Mendoza's unique combination of altitude, latitude, and aspect allows for the production of both warm- and cool-climate expressions, often from the same subregions. Therefore, Argentine winemakers have plenty of options when it comes to showcasing Cab Franc, which has been gaining serious traction both on its own and as an increasingly significant blending partner for Malbec.

Whether full-bodied and polished, lighter-bodied and earthy, or anywhere in between, Cabernet Franc is proving itself a versatile global star. As its popularity and plantings increase worldwide, expect to see even more of it. 



The Royal Treatment

SHOWCASING REMARKABLE DIVERSITY AND COMPLEXITY, CABERNET FRANC YIELDS ITS MOST REGAL EXPRESSIONS IN THE LOIRE VALLEY

story and photos by Kate Newton

AS IMMERSION TRIPS for enophiles go, few are more gratifying than a visit to the Loire Valley focused entirely on Cabernet Franc. In October, I joined a group of media professionals on a journey through the region as its interprofessional body, InterLoire—which represents 2,700 winegrowers in the Nantais, Anjou-Saumur, and Touraine appellations as well as the IGP Val de Loire—was rolling out a new campaign with marketing agency Sopexa. Dubbed “Go On! Bloom Big,” it seeks to summarize the wines’ collective identity with an alliterative flourish by focusing on “the four Fs”: fresh, as in crisp, light, and low in alcohol; fruity; floral; and fair, meaning made in harmony with the land.

Sustainability is a major tenet of the latter point, and the Loire—which is France’s third-largest AOP and its most diverse in terms of terroir, stretching as it does across the entire country—has certainly risen to the occasion: 70% of estates and 80% of the region’s vineyard land currently hold an environmental certification of some kind, and the goal is for 100% to earn either High Environmental Value (HVE) or organic Agriculture Biologique (AB) certification by 2030. The resulting quality of the wines hasn’t gone unnoticed by consumers beyond the borders of France, who helped drive the Loire Valley to its highest-ever export value of 195 million euros in 2022; that year, 22% of the region’s bottlings were exported, which the InterLoire aims to

boost to 30% in 2030 as it places a greater focus on its all-important red grape, which is responsible for 53% of red-wine production in the Loire Valley.

We encountered ample evidence of all four Fs while tasting dozens of wines over the course of the trip: Read on for highlights of our foray into the finer points of Cabernet Franc.

Chinon

In the shadow of the medieval *Forteresse de Chinon*, built during the tenth century, are the newly renovated headquarters of the *Syndicat des Vins de Chinon*, where we engaged in a blind tasting of wines from throughout the appellation, which is home to roughly 200 producers yielding more than 12 million bottles annually. We sampled 36 of them, not only noting that trademark florality and freshness as a common thread but decisively singling out our favorite of the bunch: the eminently drinkable and vibrantly red-fruited 2022 *La Peau de l’Ours* from *Domaine de la Marinière*. The following morning, we had the privilege of visiting the certified-organic 19-hectare estate, bordered by dense forest on the eastern edge of the appellation, and meeting winemaker Boris Desbourdes, whose family has been farming there since 1965. Having finished harvest the week before, Desbourdes and his father, Renaud, were hard at work in the cellar, where they produce ten different cuvées emblazoned with charming



Cabernet Franc awaits harvesting on the Château de La Grille estate in Chinon.

label designs crafted by a former school friend of Desbourdes’.

At the nearby *Château de La Grille* estate, dedicated entirely to Cabernet Franc, harvest was still well underway; the vines, the oldest of which are 60 years old and are planted in yellow tufa and chalky clay soils, surround a *château* dating back to the 15th century, though its current owners took over the property in 2009 and subsequently earned HVE certification. Following a tour of the vineyard and winery, where loads of grapes were being destemmed just outside, co-owner Jean Martin Dutour poured a rare treasure for us: a 100% Cabernet Franc sparkling rosé, whose delicate yet dynamic character, soft bubbles, high acidity, and floral-tinged notes of stone fruit primed our palates for the next phase of our journey.



A view from a boat on the Loire River of the village of Candé-Saint-Martin and the roughly 850-year-old church at its center.



Rémy Mabileau of Domaine Frédéric Mabileau and Chez Odette restaurant; Xavier Amirault of Domaine Amirault-Clos des Quarterons; François Audebert of Maison Audebert & Fils; Vincent Delanoue of Domaine de la Noiraie; and Pascal Lorieux of Pascal et Alain Lorieux gather for a winemakers' lunch featuring the wines of Bourgueil and Saint-Nicolas-de-Bourgueil.

Bourgueil and Saint Nicolas-de-Bourgueil

Like Chinon, Bourgueil and Saint Nicolas-de-Bourgueil are sub-appellations of Touraine; established as AOCs in 1937, both focus on Cabernet Franc as their main grape and are known for producing elegant, ageworthy expressions as well as convivial wines abundant in red fruits like raspberry and cherry that can be enjoyed young. We delved into this spectrum during an al fresco lunch at Chez Odette—the restaurant of producer Domaine Frédéric Mabileau—elevated by the presence of five local winemakers, who proudly showcased their bottlings to pair with one of the most delicious meals of the trip; a highlight was the light yet well-rounded wines of Domaine de la Noiraie, which came alive on the palate when paired with a dish of candied eggplant, Bleu des Causses cream, fig, and hazelnut with chili and shiso.

After lunch, we toured the nearby winery of one of our winemaker hosts, Xavier Amirault of Domaine Amirault-Clos des Quarterons, who biodynamically farms the 53 plots of vines on the terraces and hillsides of his Saint-Nicolas-de-Bourgueil estate across a diverse array of soils, including silt, flinty green clay, tuffeau, and gravel on limestone. The excursion then went underground, delving deep into the 1,000-year-old former limestone quarry where Amirault ages roughly 90% of his wines for a minimum of 18 months in a variety of barrels, amphorae, stainless-steel and concrete tanks, and other

vessels as he continuously experiments with the proportions he places in each: “Every year you have to clear your brain of what you did last year,” he noted. He also credited the humidity and consistent temperature of the cave for providing a hospitable environment for maturation, quipping of the quiet, cool refuge that “if you grow [in the vineyard] above, you’d want to be here if you were a wine!”

Saumur

Though it was a whirlwind in which we tasted more than 100 expressions over the course of an afternoon, I found the hours we spent in Saumur to be perhaps the most satisfying of the trip due to both the caliber of the wines and the hospitality of our hosts, first at a group tasting featuring ten producers representing the Saumur and Saumur Puy-Notre-Dame AOCs—the latter of which is the smallest and youngest of the nine Cabernet Franc appellations in the Loire—and then during a guided walk through the vineyards.

While the Loire’s characteristic red fruit and freshness abounded in the wines presented at the group tasting, they were notably powerful, structured, and rich in complexity with good length, especially those from Saumur Puy-Notre-Dame. I was particularly enchanted by a trio of wines from certified-organic estate Domaine de L’Enchantoir: the 2021 Ilôt des Biches Saumur Rouge, which showed lovely fruit character and minerality; the 2019 Le Pied à l’Etrier Saumur Puy-Notre-Dame, whose notes of strawberry and silky texture gave way to a long finish; and the 2018 Clos du Petit Chavannes, featuring jammy notes of black fruit and spice enlivened by tannins and bright acidity.

We then gathered in the medieval-era tunnels underneath the village of Souzay-Champigny, heading uphill past the ancient cave dwellings that are carved into the limestone hillsides before venturing for several kilometers through the vineyards surrounding the village. At several points along the way, representatives from the area’s producers were there to greet us and pour wines from their own little slice of Saumur amid the vines, but the favorite wine of the evening for many in our group was the final one: the light, unoaked, and incredibly vivacious 2021 Clos Saint Père from Château de Targé. Seeking to deviate from tradition, as the plot from

which the wine hailed typically produces intense, structured wines, 14th-generation vigneron Paul Pisani-Ferry sought to craft what he called an “aromatic and juicy” expression, professing that he and his peers “have to shake off the dusty image of Old World wine” to continue to stand out on the global market—and Clos Saint Père certainly embodied the opposite.



Jean-Noël Million of Saumur-Champigny producer La Source du Ruault pours his wines for a tasting in the vines outside the village of Souzay-Champigny.

Anjou

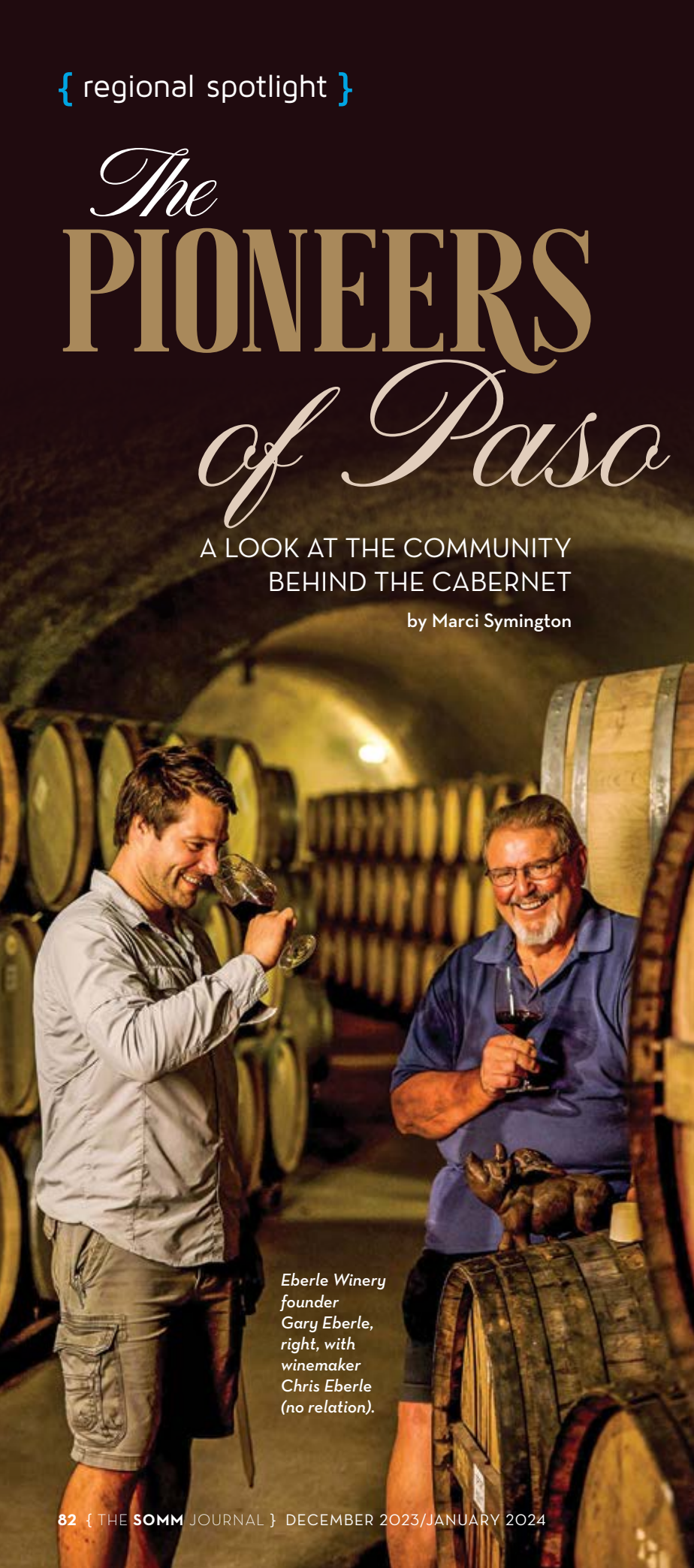
Among the vineyards we visited on our tour through the Anjou, Anjou Brissac, and Anjou Villages AOCs on the final day of our trip was an experimental plot overseen by the Institut Français de la Vigne et du Vin. Just over 100 variations of Cabernet Franc, including three new clones, can be found on the property, where they’re planted on grafted vines in Jurassic limestone soil. While the institute does do some microvinification, it primarily sells plant material to nurseries, including Sunridge in California, and fruit to cooperatives.

The institute’s director, Etienne Goulet, noted the importance of conservation and encouraging diversity in terms of plant material, as different mutations within the same variety of course can yield a fascinating array of expressions. Dating back 40 years—admittedly the blink of an eye given Cabernet Franc’s centuries-old history in the Loire Valley—the property is living proof that this storied grape is still undergoing a metamorphosis. **SJ**

The PIONEERS of Paso

A LOOK AT THE COMMUNITY
BEHIND THE CABERNET

by Marci Symington



*Eberle Winery
founder
Gary Eberle,
right, with
winemaker
Chris Eberle
(no relation).*

California has a rich winemaking history dating to the 1700s, when Spanish missionaries established 21 missions stretching from San Diego to Sonoma along the historic El Camino Real and planted grapevines to produce sacramental wine. In the late 19th century, Paso Robles—with its Mediterranean climate, calcareous soils, and high diurnal temperature swings—became a major draw for commercial winemakers, many of European ancestry. In the decades to follow, Zinfandel and Rhône varieties such as Grenache, Syrah, and Mourvèdre would prove to be their calling cards.

However, in the 1970s and 1980s, winemakers like Gary Eberle, Justin Baldwin, and Michael Mooney came to the Central Coast region to plant Cabernet Sauvignon and other Bordeaux varieties. These pioneers overcame many hurdles—not the least of which was to educate the public on Paso's location (no, it's not to be confused with the West Texas town of El Paso)—to show the world that California's so-called "Rhône Zone" could also produce world-class Bordeaux blends.

Along the way, they influenced a host of talented individuals who also recognized the area's potential, paving the way for Cabernet dominance. Enter brothers Daniel and Georges Daou, who, after achieving tremendous success in the tech industry, turned their eyes to Paso to realize their lifelong dream of establishing a winery. In 2013, Daniel convinced seven producers to start the Paso Robles CAB (Cabernet and Bordeaux) Collective (PRCC). Joining DAOU Vineyards were J. Lohr Vineyards & Wines, JUSTIN Vineyards & Winery, Adelaida Vineyards & Winery, Eberle Winery, Vina Robles Vineyards & Winery, and Chateau Margene. A grassroots organization whose aim is to raise awareness for the region's Bordeaux varieties and to set the standards for its winemaking, the PRCC now has over 25 members—including a new generation of like-minded producers such as Benom Wines, Copia Vineyards, and Glunz Family Winery, which are helping to raise the bar on quality, innovation, and customer experience. Read on to get acquainted with a few of them.



Justin Baldwin is founder of JUSTIN Vineyards & Winery.

JUSTIN BALDWIN

JUSTIN Vineyards & Winery

"I like doing things that others haven't done," says Justin Baldwin, founder of JUSTIN Vineyards & Winery. "I was drawn to that pioneering aspect of being one of the early founders and early participants in the Paso wine industry. Nobody, including me, would have guessed it would have enjoyed [such] incredible success."

As an investment banker, Baldwin lived and traveled world-wide before settling in Los Angeles. For his second act, he dreamed of crafting premium Bordeaux wines along the Central Coast of California. "When I started, I had no intention of violating my number-one rule of winemaking, 'Don't quit your day job'; I was just trying to make wine and have fun," he recalls. In 1981, he planted 160 acres in the Adelaida District off Chimney Rock Road. "I had read and studied about [Paso's] soils, rainfall accumulation, and the history of the area. But I didn't know how that would translate into wine," Baldwin says, admitting that the first planting was "a bit of the roll of the dice." The gamble paid off, producing as it did JUSTIN's flagship wine, *Isoceles*, a blend of Cabernet Sauvignon, Cabernet Franc, and Merlot that is featured in some of the world's top restaurants.

Today, in addition to its 1,000 acres of vineyards, the JUSTIN estate is home to a luxury hotel, the JUST Inn, and a Michelin-starred restaurant; although Baldwin sold it to The Wonderful Company in 2010, he remains involved in blending trials and marketing initiatives and is committed to advancing the interests of the Paso community. "Paso has unique growing conditions, and coupled with the fact that [it] really is Southern California's wine region, I see continued measured growth," says Baldwin.



GARY EBERLE

Eberle Winery

When Gary Eberle came to the region in 1973, he "fell in love with Paso Robles," he says, adding, "Here [you find] some of the nicest people you'll ever meet. We also have some of the most spectacular restaurants and hotels and many things for people to do besides taste wine."

A man of many talents, Eberle played football for Penn State and received a master's degree in invertebrate zoology before changing his career path from geneticist to winemaker. While a doctoral student of enology at the University of California, Davis, he accompanied two professors on a quest to find the



Eberle Winery's barrel cellar.

next great red wine-producing region along the coast. "I was the sherpa. . . I carried all the soil samples, and we marched all over, primarily [in] Paso Robles," he recalls.

Discovering that the region possesses the ideal terroir for producing red wines, Eberle co-founded Estrella River Winery & Vineyards there in 1973 before opening Eberle Winery in 1979. In 1980, he became the first producer to use the Paso Robles designation on a Cabernet label—even before he co-submitted the petition to create the appellation with Herman Schwartz, Victor Hugo Roberts, and Tom Martin in 1983.

Eberle has since stepped away from winemaking, hiring Chris Eberle (no relation) as Eberle Winery's principal winemaker in 2015. With a smile, he says, "I knew I became more valuable selling wine than making wine, and we are very fortunate that Chris is a better winemaker than I ever was—although I was close."



Michael Mooney established Chateau Margene with his wife, Margene.

MICHAEL MOONEY

Chateau Margene

"I am passionate about Paso and believe we produce phenomenal, distinct wines," says Michael Mooney, who operates Chateau Margene on 9 acres in the Creston District with his wife of 46 years, Margene, and son Jon, who serves as assistant winemaker.

Mooney, who is from Los Angeles, was looking for a change after a successful career as a stockbroker. While tasting at Eberle and JUSTIN on a weekend trip to Paso, he realized there was big talent in the small town. It became his aspiration not just to produce wine but to create world-class Bordeaux blends—one he's been living up to since 1998.

Reflecting on Paso's growth and developing reputation, Mooney recalls the year Daniel Daou approached him with the idea of starting the PRCC. "The mission of the PRCC is not to compare [the region] to Napa. The mission is to bring people to Paso Robles . . . to stay in our hotels, eat in our restaurants, tour our vineyards, talk to the winemakers, and see what we do. It's not about saying we are better or worse; it's just to show who we are," says Mooney.

Whether big or small, he adds, every member of the PRCC has a common goal: to promote Paso. "It is about, 'Let's get the word out.' The Creston District is distinct from Adelaida, from Willow Creek, from Estrella. . . . Everybody's got their own style," Mooney says.



Daniel and Georges Daou of DAOU Vineyards.

DANIEL AND GEORGES DAOU

DAOU Vineyards

"When we came here," Daniel Daou says, "we had a slogan: 'Live the dream—come to Paso.'" He and his brother Georges have been doing that ever since the late 1990s. Born in Lebanon and raised in France, they left the tech industry to turn the Central Coast on its head.

Like many of their aforementioned peers, they found the climate and the soils they believed would produce superior wine in Paso. Pointing out that he "grew up in Europe," Daniel asserts, "the European palate doesn't like jamminess; they like acidity and minerality. They like elegant, earthy wines. We happen to have European soils in Paso—soils you don't find in the rest of California," namely clay topsoil with a limestone shelf that affects color, aroma, texture, minerality, and acidity. "When I made [my] first wine out here, it shocked me; we can achieve phenolics that no other place on earth can," he says. "And the best part is we can overdeliver to the consumer [on quality for price]."

Drawing on their knowledge of the California market, the Daous reasoned that their focus needed to be on Los Angeles first. "The mindset was if [the PRCC] can convince the Southern California consumer that within three to four hours they can be in a world-class place with world-class wine, hospitality, and food, then we all win," Daniel explains. And while Paso stands on its own merits in that regard, the brothers dream big. "I think we can compete with Napa—and Bordeaux for that matter. The sky is the limit," says Daniel.



Harvest is a family affair for the Glunzes.

STEVE AND MATT GLUNZ

Glunz Family Wines

"Paso Robles is [a place that's] hard not to fall in love with. It's through [media] exposure and groups like the CAB Collective that we can truly see how far Paso has come in the ten years we've been here," says Steve Glunz of Glunz Family Wines, a 40-acre property in the Geneseo District where he and his brother Matt grow 10 acres of Cabernet (in addition to sourcing other varieties from wine regions along the Central Coast). Located on the east side of Highway 101 amid picturesque rolling hills, Geneseo is known for its warm days and cool nights, the latter of which are thanks in part to the breezes from the Templeton Gap. "Where we are positioned is ideal for Cab," Steve notes.

He and Matt are two of ten children who left a multigenerational wine- and beer-distributing business in Chicago to raise families and pursue winemaking in Paso, whose style of "wine is very easy to fall in love with," says Matt. "We both love acid and these cool nights that give us this bright, refreshing character. These wines truly make themselves; all we do is try to grow the best grapes we can."

The brothers have now been joined by their parents and a few siblings; in terms of sheer numbers, in fact, the Glunz family could well shape the future of Paso. Harvest is a family affair; during which children and adults start picking together at 2:30 a.m. in order to finish by 9 a.m.—just in time for the kids to attend school. "Our mom and dad come over and help us process the fruit. So, the last couple of years, we have had three generations of family on the crush pad," says Steve.



Copia Vineyards owners Anita and Varinder Sahi.

ANITA AND VARINDER SAHI

Copia Vineyards

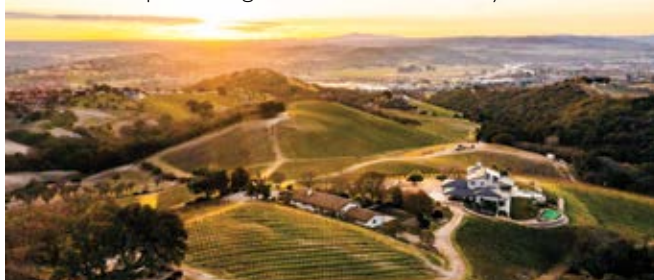
"Storytelling is a passion of mine, and [we are] able to tell our story through our wines every year—not only the journey of two people meeting but our passion for making wine together," says Anita Sahi of her and her husband Varinder's 50-acre Willow Creek District estate, Copia Vineyards.

Varinder is an engineer from Punjab, India, who holds both a master's degree in business and a degree in enology from UC Davis. In 2015, he met Anita, a former restaurant professional and broadcast journalist, and within a year they had moved to Paso as harvest interns; in 2017, they produced their first vintage. "It was a match made in heaven," recalls Varinder.

While their vineyards (including an additional 26 acres in the Adelaida District) are planted to both Bordeaux and Rhône varieties, Varinder says that Cabernet holds a special place in his heart: "To me, it is the most complete grape. It has color, it has phenolics, and it really grows well in Willow Creek and Adelaida, [where] we get [a] long hang time."

Adds Anita, "We are new to the CAB Collective, but the Cabernet program [at Copia] is a very special focus of ours. We went from 100 cases in 2017 to 350 with the next release, the 2021, which is still aging. It is nice to see it is resonating with people."

She hopes that it will continue to do so in the long term. "I enjoy the fact that every year provides the opportunity for a unique experience and story inside the bottle, let alone what others are experiencing around that bottle," says Anita.



Copia Vineyards' Kiler Canyon Estate in the Willow Creek District AVA.



Benom Wines' Arnaud and Guillaume Fabre.

ARNAUD AND GUILLAUME FABRE


Benom Wines

"The goal is to form a bridge between France, where we grew up, and where we are now [in order] to create drinkable wines [that] still have quite a bit of power," says Arnaud Fabre, who runs Benom Wines with his brother, Guillaume. Located in Tin City, a Paso hub of wineries, shops, and breweries, Benom gets its name from a French word meaning "a project together," which alludes to the brothers' shared heritage and passion for winemaking.

Arnaud and Guillaume were born into a multigenerational winemaking family with roots in Languedoc-Roussillon and Bordeaux. Looking to create a style of wine that wasn't bound by France's AOC restrictions, Guillaume moved to Paso Robles in 2005, interning at L'Aventure Winery before becoming assistant winemaker there. In 2007, he launched his own company, Clos Solène, which is named for his wife.

At Guillaume and Solène's wedding, Arnaud met and fell in love with Chloé Asseo, the daughter of L'Aventure owners Stephan and Beatrice Asseo, whereby he joined his brother in Paso. In 2015 the brothers created Benom, with Guillaume serving as farmer and winemaker and Arnaud—who calls the brand "the backbone of our history"—as head of marketing and sales.

Drawing on their family history in Bordeaux, the brothers focus on Cabernet-based wines. But they also take advantage of the diversity of grapes that can be grown in Paso to experiment with various blends such as Les Deux Frères (French for "The Two Brothers"), which combines Grenache, Cabernet Sauvignon, and Tempranillo. "In Paso, we can do blends we cannot do in France [because of regulations], so we play on the uniqueness [of the region] to find the best balance," says Arnaud.

For its inaugural release, Benom produced 200 cases of two wines; today, production is up to 3,000 cases, all sold DTC through Benom's wine club. The Fabres are excited to announce that they have recently purchased 60 acres in the York Mountain District, 22 of which they plan to plant. "Destiny brought us here, and our goal is to stay; Paso is so special," says Arnaud. "We want to continue the history, to plant vineyards for our kids and have them develop [the land] if they want." 

neighborhood

CRAWL

DISPATCHES FROM THE RUSSIAN RIVER VALLEY PINOT FORUM

by Wanda Mann

Many winemaking dreams are built on—and sometimes dashed by—Pinot Noir, which is often called the heartbreak grape: The reigning diva of cool-climate red varieties, it's delicate and challenging to grow. Still, when planted in the right location and carefully vinified, it can produce wines that express an extraordinary sense of place. California's Russian River Valley (RRV), for instance, has over the past couple of decades solidified its status as a premier region for the grape. What makes this Sonoma County AVA a Pinot Noir superstar?

Greg Morthole, winemaker for Davis Bynum, shares a compelling reason for its success: "The Russian River Valley is in the sweetest of spots tucked within the [Coast Ranges] 20 miles from the ocean. [Vines are] planted on valley floors, slopes, and hillsides on a wide range of diverse soil types derived from several different mother rock formations, [ensuring] a range of wines and styles. . . . You could spend a lifetime in the Russian River Valley studying the effects of the intersection of these natural phenomena on Pinot Noir—and indeed, some of us do."

Agrees Landmark Vineyards winemaker Greg Stach, "The Russian River is really



A few of the 33 vintners and approximately 60 sommeliers who participated in the Russian River Valley Pinot Forum in July.

a unique place to grow Pinot Noir. The combination of California sun and cooling fog creates a variety of different interpretations of Pinot, from rich and powerful to lean and more elegant."

Last July, around 60 industry professionals, including sommeliers, wine buyers, and restaurateurs, were invited to experience the region's prowess with respect to Pinot Noir at the immersive Pinot Forum presented by Russian River Valley Wine-

Preceding a slate of activities that included vineyard walks, cellar visits, guided tastings, and winemaker presentations, the forum kicked off at Emeritus Vineyards with a "Welcome to Our Neighborhoods" seminar. Moderated by Master Sommelier Evan Goldstein, it provided an in-depth overview of the RRV.

Goldstein noted that he finds value in the concept of "neighborhoods," as the RRV's subregions—namely Sebastopol

against Middle Reach, for example, it quickly becomes clear that [the differences are] akin to [those] between the Côte de Nuits and the Côte de Beaune. Education, coupled with tasting, will remain job one to get a better understanding of these variances. In and of itself, this need suggests [that the] Pinot Forum has a genuine *raison d'être*."

Burgundy may be the birthplace of Pinot Noir, but the RRV contains more soil types than all of France—the most famous being Goldridge, which Martinelli Winery winemaker Courtney Wagoner described as "a fine and fluffy sandy loam that is found throughout the Russian River Valley. Very [good] drain[age] and low nutritional load make it ideal for anything to grow in it." Different pockets of the region also have varying altitudes, mesoclimates, and heat indexes that impact the flavor profile of the finicky grape. Though its neighborhoods are not official designations—

Balletto Vineyards vice president/ winemaker Anthony Beckman speaks about the Laguna Ridge neighborhood at the "Welcome to Our Neighborhoods" seminar.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF JENNY KELLER PHOTOGRAPHY ON BEHALF OF PINOT FORUM



▲ **SOMM Journal publisher/editor-in-chief Meridith May and East Coast editor/author Wanda Mann with Emeritus Vineyards president Mari Jones and Greg Morthole, winemaker for Davis Bynum and chair of the 2023 Pinot Forum.**

growers. In an impressive display of camaraderie, 33 wineries joined forces to host the gathering. As Mari Jones, president of Emeritus Vineyards, explained, "We have an incredibly strong community, and we really like working together—I sometimes think that the winemakers have more fun than the guests!" Asked why they invest time and resources to host the event, Jones added, "We feel it's important to share how remarkable our appellation is and to educate our great trade partners on our region and why our wines are among the best in the world. It's the best way to ensure that the Russian River Valley continues to be a strong brand for trade and consumers alike. I believe that no wine list in the world can be considered complete without a Russian River Valley Pinot Noir section, and education is key to achieving this."



Hills, Green Valley, Laguna Ridge, Santa Rosa Plains, Eastern Hills, and Middle Reach—are known: "The Russian River Valley is not monolithic, and the fact that we have so many consumers who have a singular . . . vision of the rich and succulent examples of the Middle Reach as their sole benchmark suggests that there is work to be done," he said. "Once you have had the occasion to taste side by side wines from the Sebastopol Hills

Green Valley is the only one of the bunch that is also an AVA—the neighborhood concept is deeply ingrained in the RRV winemaking community, with good reason: Studies conducted by Dr. Roger Boulton at the University of California, Davis, compared Pinot Noirs from the six areas and found that they had unique elemental compositions, which he calls "fingerprints."

While tasting through wines presented by Balletto Vineyards, Joseph Swan



▲ **Riggs Lokka**, assistant vineyard manager at Emeritus Vineyards, discusses the regenerative farming practices used by many Russian River Valley winegrowers.

Winery, Kosta Browne, Paul Hobbs, and Sonoma-Cutrer; Pinot Forum attendees learned that **Laguna Ridge** is the smallest neighborhood. It is situated between the Santa Rosa Plains to the east and Green Valley to the west and is known for lush, earthy, and spicy Pinot Noir with softer and rounder tannins.

Sebastopol Hills, a series of undulating hills, is the youngest neighborhood, with few vineyards developed before 1990. Cooler and windier than the rest of the RRV, it was long thought to be too cold

for wine grapes. But the naysayers were proven wrong, and today it's planted almost exclusively to Pinot Noir, which yields higher-acid wines known for their ageworthiness—as reflected by bottles we sampled from Hartford Family Winery, Lando Wines, Patz & Hall, Scherrer, and Senses Wines.

Green Valley has been an AVA since 1983; its defining characteristics are the aforementioned Goldridge soil and plentiful fog. Flowing in from the south rather than the west, the latter is responsible for a diurnal temperature shift of as much as 50 degrees in a day, which allows for slow flavor development and acid retention. Pinot Noir from this neighborhood boasts bright red fruit and a lean, gentle mouthfeel; we tasted examples from DuMOL, Emeritus Vineyards, Marimar Estate, Ron Rubin, and The Calling.

Santa Rosa Plains is the largest neighborhood. Located between the city of Santa Rosa and the Laguna de Santa Rosa wetlands, it is an expanse of low-lying plains at the heart of the RRV, where it's known as the engine of the region due to its size and productivity. The wines it makes—like those presented by La Crema, Martinelli, Pellegrini-Olivet Lane, and Trione—are soft and savory, with balanced acidity.

The northernmost neighborhood, **Middle Reach** is situated just south of Healdsburg and Dry Creek Valley close to the Russian River. It's home to

▼ **Attendees toast during a dinner at Gary Farrell Winery & Vineyards.**



▼ *Visiting trade guests enjoy the Bacchanalia festivities at La Crema's Saralee's Vineyard.*



▲ *Winemaker Julien Howsepian hosts a production tour of Kosta Browne's facility on the first day of programming, joined by other participating producers.*



some of the oldest vineyards in the RRV: There are Pinot Noir plantings from the 1960s that still produce grapes here. Hot days and cool nights lend themselves to ripe and richly textured wines that are higher in tannin and lower in acid, as shown by Davis Bynum, Gary Farrell Winery, Joseph Jewell Wines, and Landmark Vineyards.

Eastern Hills is, fittingly, the easternmost neighborhood. Following the western edge of the Mayacamas mountain range, it has gently rolling hills as well as steeper slopes and valleys; diverse soils; and a warm climate with less fog influence. Wines from this area are known to be deep, bold, and intense; Notre Vue Estate and Ancient Oak Cellars provided examples.

By delving into these unique areas, the seminar—and the Pinot Forum as a whole—shattered many preconceived notions that even wine professionals may hold about the RRV. As Mari Jones mused, “Sometimes you can be a little bit of a victim of your success. I find that sometimes people think that all Pinot Noir from the Russian River Valley is the same and that because we are a very established region, there isn’t innovation happening. The reality is that farmers and winemakers here are at the forefront of sustainability and innovative farming and winemaking techniques. Our region’s long, rich history gives context and knowledge to confront and adapt to the

concerns of today, but we don’t allow that history to limit what we do—we build on it.”

This message resonated with attendees. While Luis Garcia, sommelier at the three-Michelin-starred Per Se in New York City, acknowledged that “I include Russian River Valley in the wine program because it is an iconic, benchmark wine region of the world,” he added that the forum gave him additional context for appreciating it: “I was surprised [by] the spirit of community and collaboration prevalent between the growers and winemakers as well as the variety of stylistic expression between neighborhoods. I was particularly drawn to the Pinot Noirs of the Green Valley.”

Kyli Curtis, sommelier at Pappas Bros Steakhouse in the Dallas–Fort Worth area, can’t imagine the restaurant’s wine list without RRV Pinot Noir: “Including Russian River Valley Pinot Noir in our wine program is paramount because of the reputation it’s created for itself—when you order a Pinot from RRV, you know you’re getting high quality,” she said. “These wines have an unmistakable brightness that you don’t get anywhere else—always an easy sell to any guest.” She was also “surprised and happy to learn that so many of the winemakers in the Russian River Valley are in it together: They ask each other for advice, taste each other’s wines, and collaborate in such a friendly way. I don’t know that I could say

that about any other wine region. It was very inspiring!”

“For Russian River, the proof is in the pudding. . . . We can theorize all day why Pinot from the Russian River Valley is so exceptional, much of which is likely true, but at the end of the day, Russian River has proven over time to produce world-class wines consistently,” summarized Kosta Browne winemaker Julien Howsepian. “While California offers many great regions suitable for Pinot Noir, none match Russian River Valley in its depth, concentration, and polish.”

And in addition to making fantastic wine, the region’s producers also know how to party! The 2023 Pinot Forum concluded with its traditional Bacchanalia, hosted this year at La Crema’s Saralee’s Vineyard. How often do you get to see winemakers who, just hours before, were leading seminars on climate change, regenerative viticulture, and native yeast fermentation decked out in togas? “I don’t know when the Pinot Forum Bacchanalia first started, but it’s been going on for a long time, and [it] seems fitting to end two and a half days of RRV Pinot Noir learning and adventuring with a nod towards Bacchus, the Roman god of agriculture and wine,” said Greg Morthole with a laugh. “Who doesn’t like to dress up anyway? The Bacchanalia gives everyone a chance to be who they really want to be, in toga form.”

For more information, visit pinotforum.com. SJ

Bordeaux Breezes Through Chicago

SOUTHERN GLAZER'S WINE & SPIRITS HOSTS A GRAND CRU CLASSÉ SEMINAR IN THE WINDY CITY

by Amy Bizzarri

WHILE KING CHARLES III was at the Palace of Versailles sipping 2004 Château Mouton Rothschild at a state banquet, Chicagoans were also enjoying the best of Bordeaux's wines at a seminar hosted by Dave Carini, SVP/general manager of Southern Glazer's Wine & Spirits of Illinois' Signature Luxury Wine & Spirits division, on September 20, 2023. Master Sommeliers Laura DePasquale and Serafin Alvarado, along with Dan Snook of Bordeaux négociant Maison Joanne, guided industry guests as they tasted 18 Grand Cru Classé wines in a sun-filled space overlooking the Wrigley Building clock tower and the Chicago River.

"Bordeaux wines have become increasingly asked for by Chicagoland consumers both at restaurants and retail stores, especially over the past six or seven years," said Carini. "These world-class red blends have a richness and an elegance that should be offered next to great Napa Valley Cabernets and other Cabernet-based red wines." Added DePasquale, "Palates evolve . . . and new wine drinkers who prefer less oak have entered the market. This has led to a rediscovery of Bordeaux."

Bordeaux's commercial system is unique: Wine in the famed region is sold to négociants that, in turn, sell to wholesalers and retailers. The first négociants were established in 1620; today, almost 400 registered négociants are operating in Bordeaux. One of them is Maison Joanne: Founded by Paul Joanne in 1862 and run today by the family's fifth generation, it's one of the most significant operators in the en primeur market in the world.

"With Bordeaux, especially older vintages, provenance is everything," said Snook. "The wine travels direct from the château to Maison Joanne, then to Southern Glazer's, and then to you, the consumer." DePasquale called Maison



PHOTO: AMY BIZZARRI

tannins are super ripe and soft. Vineyard management is so much better now. This is the message we're trying to convey: Even if it's young, the wine is ready to go. Chuck it into a decanter for half an hour or so, and you'll be singing." Added Alvarado, "It's a common theme across Bordeaux—winemakers are looking for less extraction and picking earlier. There's a lot more identity, château by château."

◀ ***Eighteen Bordeaux wines were poured at Southern Glazer's Wine & Spirits' Grand Cru Classé tasting in Chicago in September.***



PHOTO COURTESY OF SOUTHERN GLAZER'S WINE & SPIRITS

▶ ***Dave Carini, SVP/general manager, Signature Luxury Wine & Spirits, for Southern Glazer's Wine & Spirits of Illinois, addresses the audience.***

Joanne "amazing to work with . . . because they only work with classified vintages. From these top-tier wines, we research what we like."

Favorites among the featured wines included the 2019 Château La Gaffelière, described by DePasquale as hailing from "a warmer, elegant vintage" that was also "one of the first vintages where winemakers truly paid attention to their tannin management," according to Snook. "The

Of the 2017 Château Hosanna, Snook advised, "This is a great vintage to enjoy now—just pop and pour." As for the 2018 Château Grand-Puy-Lacoste, he noted, "It's pure class. . . . It's cashmere. . . . It's a wine that offers intellectual satisfaction." And DePasquale admitted that "I can't smell the 2009 Château Guiraud without wanting to put it behind my ears as if it were perfume. It's that knee-weakening amazing." SJ

From BBQ to Beverage Management

CHEF JEFFRY WIESINGER IS AMONG THE HOSPITALITY PROFESSIONALS BENEFITING FROM THE CULINARY INSTITUTE OF AMERICA'S MASTER'S PROGRAM

AWARD-WINNING CHEF JEFFRY

Wiesinger—who co-owns Jeffry's Wine Country BBQ with his wife, Kathleen, in Paso Robles, California—is passionate about food, wine, and his community. Starting in the industry as a dishwasher at age 15, he went on to earn associate and bachelor's degrees in culinary arts and food-service management. Fast-forward a couple of decades: Having established himself as a successful chef and business owner, Wiesinger was searching for potential alternate revenue streams during the pandemic when he decided to head back to school, this time attending The Culinary Institute of America (CIA). There, he earned his latest achievement, a master's of professional studies degree in wine and beverage management. The unique program combines the theory and tasting of global wines with the fundamentals of business and strategy; delivered primarily online, its curriculum includes global wine tasting kits shipped to students' homes combined with week-long in-person residencies in Napa, California.

"Earning a master's degree and attending the CIA were always lifelong goals of mine," he says. "I discovered the CIA's master's degree program in wine and beverage management in early 2021. It was at that point that I decided to pursue the program . . . from one of the most prestigious hospitality . . . and culinary institutes in the world."

The hard work was worth it. "There's no way to sugarcoat it—balancing life, career, and school is incredibly difficult," Wiesinger acknowledges. "I owe a great deal to my wife, my team at work, and my network of friends and associates for helping me balance the workload with my personal responsibilities and career." Of particular value were the Napa residencies, where "the opportunity to meet my classmates in person and share some of the most incredible wine experiences

PHOTO: KATHLEEN WIESINGER



Award-winning chef Jeffry Wiesinger is among the graduates of The Culinary Institute of America's master's program in wine and beverage management.

of our lives was very special," he recalls. "We were able to forge tight bonds that helped make the program much more interesting and enjoyable rather than simply completing the assignments online alone."

His favorite part of the program? Getting to create a house wine for Jeffry's Wine Country BBQ as his capstone project. That wine, named Surrender to the Flow, has been a huge hit, and Wiesinger plans to work with local winemakers to create more unique and delicious blends. "Between the knowledge and the con-

fidence that I have gained through the program, I look forward to continuing to grow my business [while] looking for opportunities to expand into other segments of the food and beverage industry," he said. "Earning this advanced academic degree . . . has bolstered my entrepreneurial spirit and given me the confidence to pursue other ventures." SJ

For more information on the CIA's master's program in wine and beverage, visit masters.culinary.edu/wine.

"Between the knowledge and the confidence that I have gained through the program, I look forward to continuing to grow my business [while] looking for opportunities to expand into other segments of the food and beverage industry. Earning this advanced academic degree . . . has bolstered my entrepreneurial spirit and given me the confidence to pursue other ventures."

An Exploratory Journey Through Northeastern Italy

THE VIEW FROM SOMMFOUNDATION'S RECENT ENRICHMENT TRIP

Forging a Sensory and Emotional Connection

story and photos by Mercedes Cowper, DipWSET, CS

WINEMAKING IS AT the heart of Italian culture. The country's deeply rooted pride in its long winemaking history was palpable during SommFoundation's recent northeastern Italy enrichment trip led by *SOMM Journal* VP of education Lars Leicht. The group consisted of ten sommeliers from across the U.S. with a myriad of industry experience, perspectives, and knowledge.

From day one the trip was impeccable, beginning with a tour and dinner at Ca' del Bosco in Franciacorta; there, we visited the "berry spa," in which the freshly harvested grapes undergo a rinse through bubbling water that gently washes away impurities on the skins, resulting in wines that have an astonishingly low risk of faults. As we learned about the history of Ca' del

Bosco and the wine style of Franciacorta, it was quickly understood that describing Franciacorta simply as "Italian wine made in the méthode Champenoise" would be a disservice to its history, its producers, and the wine itself. As with Champagne, there is no substitute for Franciacorta, which is a true expression of its region, terroir, and culture.

One of the most significant impacts of the trip was seeing firsthand the changing terroir of northeastern Italy. Sommeliers spend hours studying the nuances of wine regions around the world, using illustrations, photographs, maps, and their imaginations to form an image of the landscape. But an entirely new perspective is gained by physically standing in, for example, the Kettmeir vineyard in Alto

Adige (aka Südtirol) surrounded by tall, steep hillsides. There, we saw firsthand how the sun shines at differing angles on the vines throughout the day while drinking wine made from said vines and learning more about the region's viticultural techniques. Likewise, driving from Brescia to Alto Adige offered a master class in the varying terroirs of Italy: snowcapped hillsides, snaking rivers, vineyard plains, and the occasional miniscule plot of vines near the highway.

While it's vitally important to have strong knowledge of wine theory, our ability to create a sensory and emotional connection with wine is what opens the door for guests to be intrigued to try something outside of their comfort zone. Because of the SommFoundation enrichment trip, I have gained authentic personal experience to allow me to speak passionately about Italian wines and why they are worth enjoying in the U.S. and beyond.

Mercedes Cowper, DipWSET, CS, is beverage manager at the Willard InterContinental in Washington, D.C.

A view of Lake Caldaro from the Altenburg/Castelvecchio overlook.

Exploring the Vibrant, Food-Friendly Wines of Alto Adige

story and photos by Alessandra Esteves, DipWSET

BEFORE I HAD the opportunity to travel through Alto Adige courtesy of SommFoundation and *The SOMM Journal* with a group of wine professionals in September, it was hard to imagine that Italy's smallest, northernmost wine region could leave such a profound impression.

Bordering Austria and Switzerland, Alto Adige boasts stunning scenery: crystal-line blue lakes, lush vineyards, and apple orchards are all framed by the imposing Dolomites mountain range. The climate is continental with cold winters and warm summers, and the whole region experiences an Alpine influence via breezes that come from the mountains in the morning and evening. Vineyards are planted on south- or southeast-facing slopes on mostly calcareous and clay soils, receiving ample sunlight to allow full ripening of the grapes. Viticulture is expensive, as most sites can only be managed by hand.

Alto Adige is known for producing elegant white wines with bright acidity and mineral texture as well as medium- to full-bodied reds with herbal notes. Gewürztraminer, here called Traminer Aromatico—which derives its name from the village of Tramin—is said to originate from this region. Lagrein, meanwhile, is the most important red variety, with a long tradition: Documents have been found from 1097 A.D. that indicate the date of harvest for the grape.

During our trip, we visited Kettmeir Winery in Caldaro, which celebrated 100 years in 2019 with the opening of a new state-of-the-art facility and hospitality center. Kettmeir produces traditional-method sparkling wines; whites from Pinot Grigio, Pinot Blanc, Gewürztraminer, Chardonnay, Sauvignon Blanc, and Müller-Thurgau; and reds from Pinot Noir and Lagrein, the latter of which is produced in inert tanks and aged in large wooden casks



Tasting Pinot Nero next to the winery at Kettmeir.

for six months, allowing the tannins to mellow. The wine has a deep color, with aromas of violets, fresh and ripe black fruits like plum and cherry, and green herbs; the palate is full, with moderate alcohol, bright acidity, and a bitter-almond finish, which complemented the richness of the speck—the local specialty of cured ham—we paired with it while dining al fresco overlooking Lake Caldaro.


When we returned the next day to taste a range of wines, the most surprising part was a flight of white wines paired with pasta with freshly shaved truffles. Crisp and floral, with notes of green apple and chalky minerality, the Kettmeir Pinot Bianco is unoaked but aged on the lees for four months to lend extra complexity and a touch of creaminess—a texture enhanced by the crunchiness of the truffles, making for an unforgettable pairing.



The view from Kettmeir Winery overlooking its vineyards and a church in Caldaro.

Pinot Bianco is a mutation of Pinot Gris, but it closely resembles an unoaked Chardonnay; in Alto Adige it exudes a pure mineral character in a light and elegant style. Kettmeir blends the grape with Chardonnay and Pinot Noir to produce its *Athesis Brut Metodo Classico*, a traditional-method sparkling wine that ages 24 months *sur lie* and is excellent as an *apéritif*.

Pinot Noir, locally called Pinot Nero, thrives in the region and now constitutes 10% of the total plantings. Kettmeir produces an excellent version made with grapes grown in calcareous soils at an altitude of 600 meters that are then fermented in inert vats and aged for six months in large oak barrels. Following an aromatic nose of crunchy red fruits like cherry and strawberry, white pepper, and savory tones, a hint of red apple skin appears on the elegant palate with fine tannins and wild-berry flavors.

We spent only one night in the region, but it left a lasting mark on us, and we all promised to return very soon. If you are passionate about hiking, biking, kayaking, and learning about the fascinating blend of Italian and German cultures and traditions, this region is the place to be. Beyond this, the warm hospitality, delightful cuisine, and excellent wines are also compelling reasons to visit Alto Adige. 

Alessandra Esteves, DipWSET, is co-founder and director of wine education at Florida Wine Academy in Miami, FL.

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PART ONE OF OUR SALUTE TO
THE REGION'S WINE LEADERS

by Meridith May

Alice Warnecke Sutro serves as winemaker and grape grower for her own label, SUTRO, while working in agriculture for her family's business, Warnecke Ranch & Vineyard. "I make wine for the love of the land, and when you love something, you want to do everything with it," she says. "SUTRO Cab is bold and complex, like the many great wines from volcanic regions worldwide."



PHOTO COURTESY OF SUTRO WINE CO.




PHOTO COURTESY OF ALEXANDER VALLEY VINEYARDS

Cyrus Alexander explored Northern California in the mid-1800s, calling the spot he chose to settle "the brightest and best spot in the world." In 1962, the Wetzel family followed his lead, and today the Alexander Valley pioneer's historic property is home to their Alexander Valley Vineyards (AVV). Of the wine they named for him, AVV founder Hank Wetzel says, "CYRUS is the ultimate expression of the special place that my family calls home, showcasing both our region and winemaking style."



THE ALEXANDER VALLEY WINEGROWERS

association is gearing up to present one of its most successful educational outreach programs for the trade in spring 2024: the Alexander Valley Cab Academy. *The SOMM Journal* is a proud media sponsor, and our own senior wine editor, Jessie Birschbach, will serve as a “camp counselor.”

As a tribute to this region, home to 32 wineries and 77 vineyards, we will highlight noteworthy selections that represent it in its best light over the course of the next three issues. Additionally, we will explore how Cabernets from different districts of the narrow, 20-mile-long and 8-mile-wide AVA vary in style. These districts are, from north to south, Maacama, Healdsburg, Jintown, Geyserville, and Cloverdale. 

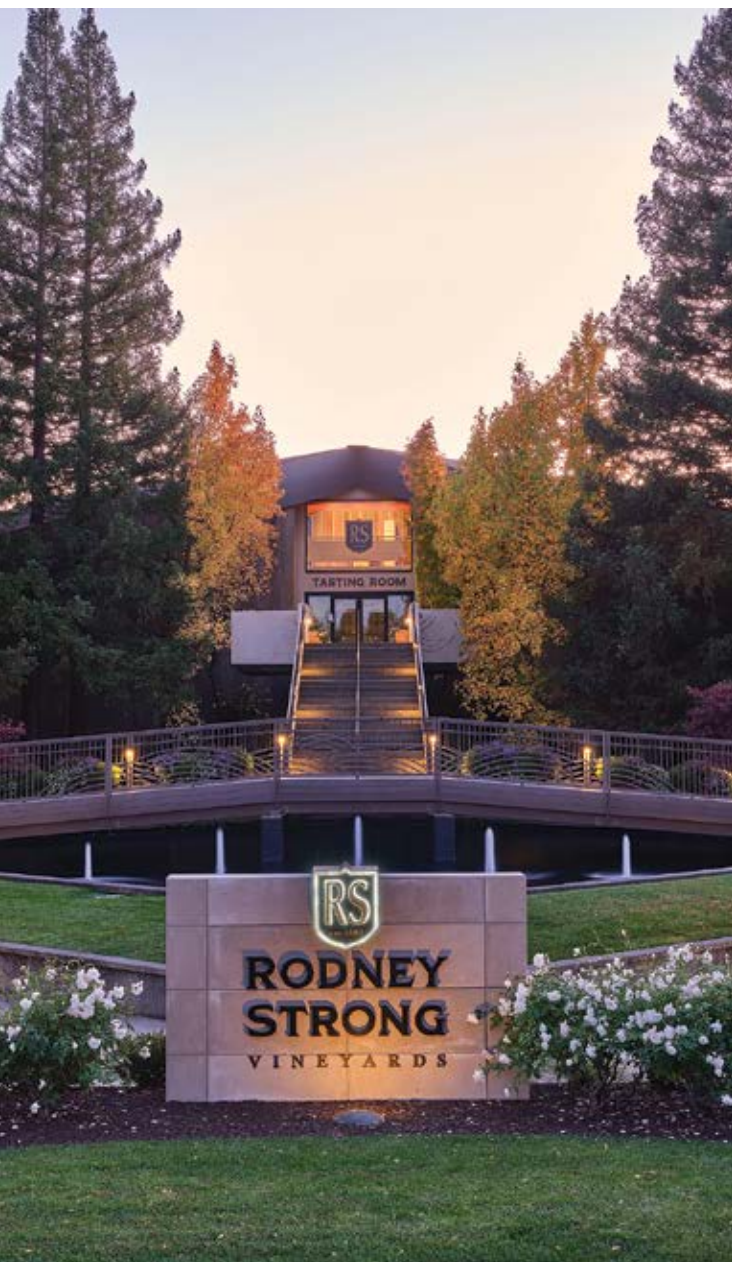


PHOTO COURTESY OF RODNEY STRONG VINEYARDS

The entrance to Rodney Strong Vineyards in Healdsburg.



Alexander Valley Vineyards 2017 CYRUS, Alexander Valley, Sonoma County (\$75) Winemaker Kevin Hall has complete control over this blend of 58% Cabernet Sauvignon, 21% Merlot, and 16% Cab Franc with some Malbec and Petit Verdot; each lot sees 12 months of barrel aging in the winery's naturally cooled underground cave, while the final blend spends an additional year in oak. Notably well structured, the result—which is dedicated to Cyrus Alexander, the region's namesake, who made his home there in 1840—is a deep, dark, and sensuous red with dusty plum-skin tannins. Dark chocolate exudes personality-plus with cardamom, cedar, violets, and black cherry. Chewy and fleshy, CYRUS is a ballroom dancer on sweet earth, built to show both power and elegance. **98**



Rodney Strong Vineyards 2019 Alexander's Crown, Alexander Valley, Sonoma County (\$90) Alexander's Crown is known as the first site in the AVA to produce a single-vineyard Cabernet Sauvignon in 1971. This wine is grown on its 63 acres just south of Jintown, impacted by the Pacific Ocean's cool breezes. If its plush texture doesn't lure you in, its intricate notes of tobacco and lavender will. Silky and luxurious, it's anointed with mocha, boysenberry, and roasted coffee. Aged 24 months in (100% new) French oak. **96**



Trione 2019 Block 21 Cabernet Sauvignon, Alexander Valley, Sonoma County (\$80) Wild strawberry, spiced cedar, and a thrill ride of electric acidity guide this expressive red. Toasty notes of vanilla merge with sweet tobacco and tart cherry. Tannins are firm, but the juicy profile delivers freshness. **95**

Stonestreet 2018 Estate Cabernet Sauvignon, Stonestreet Estate Vineyard, Alexander Valley, Sonoma County (\$65) From the winery's Monument Ridge blocks, situated at altitudes of up to 2,400 feet, this is a fleshy, muscle-bound athlete. Notes of espresso, tobacco, fennel, and blackberry persist. Plum, graphite, and dried violets, along with Italian herbs marked by dusty tannins, add to its persona. The finish leaves a spicy trace on the tongue. **96**



SUTRO 2020 Cabernet Sauvignon, Alexander Valley, Sonoma County (\$75) Alice Warnecke Sutro brands this world-class expression as a “volcanic woman-powered vine-to-bottle wine.” We find it incredibly silky and juicy, with balanced intensity. Sweet soil notes, black cherry, and sage are well-integrated partners. **98**

A Path of His Own

CHARLESTON, SC, CHEF **JASON STANHOPE** ON OPENING THE QUINTE AND LOWLAND

story by Helen Mitternacht / photo by Paul Cheney

SOMETIMES, leaving the familiar behind is the best way to reinvent yourself.

That's the case for Charleston, South Carolina-based chef Jason Stanhope, who spent 15 years at FIG—where he earned a James Beard Award for his work in 2015—before leaving last August, when the owners of local sister restaurants The Quinte and Lowland offered him the chance to revamp them after their abrupt closure earlier this year.

"This gave me a chance to redefine all the things I've been working on over the years," Stanhope says. "FIG . . . doesn't need to be redefined, because [it] has managed to stay relevant in the most beautiful, classic way. I was excited to create a path that was more my own and create an experience for our guests that is a little more tailored to me and the vision I have."

When we spoke prior to their opening in November, Stanhope explained that he had changes in store for both restaurants housed at boutique hotel The Pinch, which was once a military billiards and cigar parlor. The Quinte, for example, whose most recent incarnation was as a chi-chi oyster bar, would become "a lot less precious," he said. "It will be super approachable and you should feel comfortable walking in, whether you're coming from a meeting in a suit or from a fishing trip. It's still going to be an oyster bar, but we also will cook Southern classics. The food is non-cerebral, so it doesn't interfere with conversation and relaxation."

Meanwhile, Lowland, right across a cobblestone alley from The Quinte, would be "the most tavernest tavern ever taverned," Stanhope joked. "It will be cozy, and with the colors and the fireplaces and the mix of leather and wood, you just know you're walking into a tavern." As for the food, Lowland "will not only celebrate tavern classics but also



"I was excited to create a path that was more my own and create an experience for our guests that is a little more tailored to me and the vision I have."

Jason Stanhope is executive chef at The Quinte and Lowland.

have some very personal cuisine upstairs, where every night I feel like I'm hosting a dinner party in my home. I love to showcase the great ingredients we have around here. It's not fine dining, just really great [and] fun, approachable food—but you might be eating that food off this incredibly crafted plate or sipping wines out of the most thin-stemmed wine glass ever," he noted.

Guided by GM Sam Stresing, the cuisine-driven bottle program as Stanhope described it would feature both Old and New World wines, with producers ranging from Germany's Egon Müller and the Loire Valley's Château de Plaisance

to Hundred Suns in Oregon's Willamette Valley and Sandhi in the Sta. Rita Hills. Stanhope was also determined that the list would include plenty of Champagne, which he declared himself to be "recklessly in love with."

The chef was excited about his new ventures but admitted to having some trepidations. "It's all a challenge—[opening] one [restaurant] is a challenge, so two is definitely a challenge," he said. "We don't want to take ourselves too seriously, although we do take hospitality seriously. At the end of the day, we are just trying to make people have a magical, unforgettable experience." 

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Barefoot Cellars NV White Zinfandel, California (\$7) E. & J. GALLO WINERY

Barefoot Fruitscato NV Lemonade, USA (\$7) E. & J. GALLO WINERY

Barking Dog 2021 Pinot Noir, Chehalem Mountains, Oregon (\$36) BARKING DOG

Barking Dog 2022 Rosé Pinot Noir, Chehalem Mountains, Oregon (\$26) BARKING DOG

Black Box 2021 Merlot, California (\$20) E. & J. GALLO WINERY

Burtech Family Vineyard 2018 Cabernet Sauvignon, Napa Valley (\$85)

Carol Shelton 2022 Wild Thing Viognier, Central Coast (\$22)

Dominio del Soto 2019 Tempranillo, Ribera del Duero, Spain (\$25)

Grieve Family Winery 2020 Sauvignon Blanc, Napa Valley (\$95)

Grieve Family Winery 2021 Double Eagle Sauvignon Blanc, Napa Valley (\$50)

Hamel Family Wines 2018 Isthmus, Sonoma Valley, Sonoma County (\$90)

Hamel Family Wines 2018 Nuns Canyon Vineyard, Moon Mountain District, Sonoma County (\$160)

J. Lohr Vineyards & Wines 2019 Cuvée St. E., Paso Robles (\$50)

J. Lohr Vineyards & Wines 2021 Tower Road Petite Sirah, Paso Robles (\$35)

J. Lohr Vineyards & Wines 2022 Bay Mist White Riesling, Arroyo Seco, Monterey (\$13)

La Marca 2021 Prosecco Rosé D.O.C.G., Italy (\$19) E. & J. GALLO WINERY

Lingua Franca 2021 Avni Pinot Noir, Willamette Valley, Oregon (\$40) CONSTELLATION BRANDS INC.

Lloyd Cellars 2022 Chardonnay, Carneros, Napa Valley (\$42)

Marques de Casa Concha 2020 Heritage, DO Puento Alto, Chile (\$60)

Messina Hof Wine Cellars 2020 Paulo Father & Son Cuvée Tempranillo, Texas High Plains, Texas (\$60)

The Landing 2020 Boathouse Chardonnay, Northland, New Zealand (\$23) COOPER IMPORTS LLC

Theopolis Vineyards 2020 Petite Sirah, Yorkville Highlands, Mendocino County (\$42)

Thomas George Estates 2017 Chardonnay, Cresta Ridge Vineyard, Russian River Valley, Sonoma County (\$45)

Wiens Cellars 2022 Solace, Riverside (\$32)

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Tear Down That Wall

THE COURT OF MASTER SOMMELIERS, AMERICAS, HAS PLANS TO REMOVE BARRIERS TO ACCESS FOR HOSPITALITY PROFESSIONALS

THROUGH THE IMPLEMENTATION

of a new strategic plan that removes barriers to access, the Court of Master Sommeliers, Americas (CMS-A), aims to continue to restructure the hospitality industry by providing an inclusive space for mentorship and networking for all aspiring professionals—and ultimately to elevate the hospitality experience worldwide.

The planning process has been a comprehensive and collaborative effort,

identified focus areas for future success. These include:

- Increasing recognition of CMS-A and its members as leaders in the hospitality industry
- Fostering innovation and growth by cultivating an engaged and dynamic professional community
- Becoming the leading certification for beverage and hospitality professionals



Julie Cohen Theobald is executive director of the Court of Master Sommeliers, Americas (CMS-A). “Our organizational mission extends beyond exam administration,” she says.



Attendees of the CMS-A's inaugural Women's Sommelier Symposium in Santa Barbara, CA.

involving extensive research, analysis, and input from the Master Sommelier community. The board of directors and staff also sought the guidance of professional third-party experts in organizational management and strategic planning, whose expertise aided in developing a plan grounded in best practices and sustainability.

Through interviews, surveys, and listening sessions, the board gained valuable insights into the challenges and opportunities facing our industry and

“As we move into this new phase of growth and development, we are excited to share our vision for the future and the steps we will take to guide our organization for the next several years. We're grateful to those who participated in our research studies, giving us insight into the obstacles faced by our community and the opportunity to make a positive impact within the beverage industry,” says CMS-A chair Michael Meagher.

With the strategic plan in place as a compass for growth, CMS-A continues to



Michael Meagher is chair of the CMS-A.

focus on nurturing a space for professional network building among those who share its passion for hospitality as they seek to advance their careers. With various mentorship resources, including the annual Women's Sommelier Symposium, CMS-A provides its members with the tools to build impactful connections in the industry.

“Our organizational mission extends beyond exam administration,” says Julie Cohen Theobald, executive director of CMS-A. “We are a source of inspiration, connection, and education that has built successful career paths for leading hospitality professionals across the globe. This new strategic plan will help us expand our impact by creating a space of opportunity and community for beverage professionals at the highest standard.” SJ

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Island Impact

JUSTIN GONZALEZ IS MAKING A SPLASH ON MARTHA'S VINEYARD

by Jillian Dara

IN 2019, Justin Gonzalez moved from New York City to Bali with the intent to retire after nearly two decades in the hospitality industry. But fate interfered with his plans: After returning to the States for what was supposed to be a brief visit, he found himself grounded by the pandemic. A six-month contract with the Life House hotel group (owned by Blue Flag Partners) to help open its first property on Nantucket, Massachusetts, turned into a three-year stint at various establishments in Blue Flag Partners' portfolio before he stepped into his current role as general manager of food and beverage at boutique hotel Faraway Martha's Vineyard.

There, the recent opening of The Pelican Club exemplifies what he does best: "making an impact," he says. The tequila-forward sushi bar in historic Edgartown may have initially caught some flak from tradition-minded locals, but Gonzalez says its novelty is what distinguishes the "sexy and fun yet unpretentious outdoor cocktail lounge, [which is] serving the best sushi on-island." We asked him to elaborate on the concept and his role within it.

Q: Where did the idea of pairing tequila and sushi come from?

Why not? Their flavor profiles work so well together. Over the years I have worked with all of the major tequila brands, mostly during my 17 years in NYC—from Don Julio, Patrón, [and] Clase Azul to Casamigos, Cincoro, and Komos. In 2011, I opened one of NYC's first mezcal bars, [Viktor & Spoils,] working side by side with Leo DeGroff [son of "King Cocktail" Dale DeGroff], Steve Olson, and Andy Seymour. Working with that amazing group of bartenders took my knowledge and appreciation for agave spirits to the next level.

PHOTO COURTESY OF FARAWAY MARTHA'S VINEYARD



Q: Why is this idea so novel for Edgartown?

It is novel for Martha's Vineyard as a whole, if not the islands in general. What I have learned in the last couple of years is that the islands are not big on change, and some operators are a bit intimidated [by] trying something new—especially when the season to make your impact and [get a] return [on investment] is so short. [But] despite a segment of the population fighting inevitable change, many people are looking for something fresh, something new. That is human nature, after all.

Q: Do you feel as though The Pelican Club and Faraway are ushering in a more modern era of hospitality in Edgartown?

Absolutely! All it takes is for one brave soul to make that first step to show the others that [change] is safe or OK. If it is anything like what is happening [with Blue Flag's properties] on Nantucket, we are going to make [other operators] stand up and say to themselves, "What is going on over there?" As a matter of fact, I know that we have had the owners of certain local establishments in early to check out what we are doing.

Q: What are your goals for the future?

Personally, I want to continue to develop unpretentious [yet] high-end establishments—places where no detail is missed, and we do [everything] with our own swag. One of my goals is to reimagine pub fare, taking it to the next level while [keeping it] accessible and familiar. I also want to continue developing programs that support addiction and substance abuse. This problem has been a part of the industry for quite some time. For many years it was just seen as part of the biz. Now operators are making a concerted effort to address this plague. **\$J**

the MAVERICK at the FOOT OF THE MOUNTAIN

Luca Bosio Vineyards Reveals Another Side of Piedmont

BY JESSIE BIRSCHBACH

PHOTOS COURTESY OF LUCA BOSIO VINEYARDS



THIRD-GENERATION WINEMAKER LUCA BOSIO HAS OVERSEEN HIS FAMILY'S BUSINESS, NOW NAMED LUCA BOSIO VINEYARDS, SINCE 2013.

Perched in the northwestern part of the country like a tilted crown, Piedmont (aka Piemonte) has earned its reputation as the king of Italian wine thanks to its two best-known reds: Barolo and Barbaresco, both of which are varietal Nebbiolo wines named after the village in which they are grown. Budding sommeliers just beginning to explore the quintessential area quickly discover its complexity, as it encompasses a whopping 19 DOCGs and more DOCs than any other region in Italy at 41. In fact, the heart of Piedmont has often been referred to as “spaghetti junction” due to its convoluted network of appellations.

Students of the region will also be wowed by its beauty. Enveloping it almost entirely are the colossal, sparkling-white Alps (its name translates as “foot of the mountain”). The Alps are a major influence on its continental macroclimate, creating a rain-shadow effect that results in a wet spring; a hot summer; a

foggy fall; and an even foggier, cold winter.

While the Po Valley is also located in the region, it's far too fertile for wine grapes; consequently, less than 5% of the region's vineyards can be classified as flat, as most are planted in the foothills south of the valley within the provinces of Alessandria, Asti, and Cuneo. These slopes create tremendous variation in aspect, elevation, orientation, and, in turn, meso- and microclimates for winegrowers—for whom southern exposure is paramount—to work with.

Given the region's standing, it's important for us as wine professionals to ask ourselves how well we really understand Piedmont. Yes, you know what the well-structured and perfumed Barolos and Barbarescos should taste like, but what about Nebbiolo d'Alba or Nebbiolo from Roero? And while you're probably familiar with the major communes of Barolo, have you had an expression made exclusively from the fruit grown in Verduno? If you're well versed in the wines of Luca Bosio, you might be able to affirmatively answer the above questions—but if you aren't, I suggest you read on, as this report will focus on the producer, which has indeed made enough of a mark on the foot of the mountain to warrant the spotlight. That said, it will also serve as a broad overview of Piedmont that just might reframe your perspective on Italy's preeminent wine region.

LOCATED IN SANTO STEFANO BELBO, LUCA BOSIO VINEYARDS' MOSCATO D'ASTI VINEYARDS ARE AMONG THE OLDEST OF ITS FAMILY-OWNED PROPERTIES.

Winemaking Traditions

Wine has been made in the hills of Piedmont since the reign of the Roman Empire. Traditional methods include careful grape selection through hand harvesting; long macerations; gentle pressings; and extended periods of aging in large, used oak casks (typically French or Slovenian). In the 1990s, some producers retreated a bit from extended extractions, but most today keep the grapes on the skins for 30–40 days while submerging the cap to optimize color, flavor, and tannin structure.

Born in Alba in 1987, third-generation winemaker Luca Bosio says that winemaking “has been my passion from the very beginning,” and he means it: His first memories are of wandering as a young child through the vineyards that his grandfather inherited from his great-grandfather in the Langhe in the early 1960s. As other locals were moving out of the countryside to escape economic crisis, Bosio’s grandfather stayed and began selling grapes and wine to local accounts; in the late 1970s and early 1980s, Bosio’s father expanded the business to sell the family’s grapes and wines internationally.

Bosio, for his part, attended an enological high school—yes, that’s a thing in Alba—and went on to study enology, viticulture, and microbiology in college. He returned home in 2012 from the University of Turin with the equivalent of a master’s degree in enology to implement innovations at his family’s winery, including the development and use of native yeasts; the reduction of additives like sulfur dioxide; and a new marketing strategy. “For example,” says Bosio, “in Barolo, ‘reserve’ usually only means four to five years of age, so we created a blend [aged] ten years so that



THIRD-GENERATION WINEMAKER LUCA BOSIO (RIGHT) WITH HIS WIFE, VALENTINA (LEFT), AND PARENTS, VALTER AND ROSELLA.

it’s a serious version of Barolo that still remains accessible out of the gate. . . . For me, innovation is a mentality, not just winemaking practices.”

Bosio’s extensive education and sense of dedication prompted his parents to not only offer the young winemaker the chance to lead the family business but rename it Luca Bosio Vineyards. Since 2013, under Bosio’s guidance, its vineyard holdings have increased to 1,000 acres in Piedmont (where it sources fruit from 300 acres to produce its Luca Bosio Vineyards wines and Truffle Hunter brand) and an additional 1,000 in different areas between the Langhe and Monferrato; the management of the vineyards is entrusted to roughly 150 different growers whose work is overseen by the Luca Bosio Vineyards team until they take over the vinification process.

In 2015, Bosio purchased the Verduno-based winery Bel Colle, which was founded by brothers Franco and Carlo Pontiglione and Giuseppe Priola in the late 1970s. Winemaker

Mario Albrito, who marked his 25th harvest in 2023, has remained at the helm and continues to be a mentor to Bosio today.

Bosio compares his two main labels with great pride: “Bel Colle is very respectful of tradition and works mostly with single vineyards. We [at Luca Bosio Vineyards] try to be respectful in the same way . . . but we take a more modern approach [by], for instance, [using] more precise ways to determine when to harvest or how to do our vinification.” Bosio has also launched an organic wine label, Passato, which he calls “essentially just the organic version of Luca Bosio Vineyards.” As he expands his portfolio and seeks to raise its profile on the global wine stage, he notes, “I feel strongly that both my portfolio of wines and the *real* Piedmont are yet to be discovered. . . . Sometimes it’s easy to think we know an area like Piedmont because we know these ten to 15 wineries, but if you go a step further, you can discover something new that you wouldn’t expect.”

BEYOND THE MOUNTAINS

Luca Bosio Vineyards’ reach not only extends through Piedmont but stretches east into the Northern Italian region of the Veneto. The UNESCO World Heritage Site, known for its rolling green hills, is the source of the Glera featured in the producer’s Prosecco, which is made from carefully selected, hand-harvested bunches gently pressed and macerated at cold temperatures of 41–50 degrees Fahrenheit for ten to 12 hours before fermentation in temperature-controlled stainless steel.



Luca Bosio Vineyards di Nonna Angela NV Prosecco DOC, Veneto, Italy (\$16) Subtle aromas of crème fraîche, white rice, and gardenia lead to a brisk note of lemon verbena on the palate. Honeyed graham cracker and green apple are surrounded by zippy bubbles and high acidity. **92**
—Meridith May

A Survey of the Land

Aside from Barolo and Barbaresco, Piedmont is home to several wines of note. Common in the region are varietal wines whose names are appended with the district in which they're made: Nebbiolo d'Alba, Barbera d'Asti, Barbera d'Alba, Moscato d'Asti, and the rare Ruchè di Castagnole di Monferrato, to name a few. Langhe Nebbiolo is the catch-all appellation for declassified Barolo and Barbaresco as well as for wines that include up to 15% of other varieties like Cabernet Sauvignon. And Roero is Nebbiolo made in the hills northwest of Alba on the light, sandy soils of the River Tanaro's left bank (where Arneis also thrives). Bosio believes that Roero is Nebbiolo for a new generation, noting that his version is a less tannic, more fruit-forward and accessible wine than Barolo or Barbaresco; if it's perhaps not quite as ageworthy, "you still feel Piedmont, and you still get those Old World notes."

As for Barolo, while it can be produced in 11 communes, five of them represent roughly 90% of its land: La Morra, Barolo, Serralunga d'Alba, Monforte d'Alba, and Castiglione Falletto. Among the remaining six is the aforementioned home of Bel Colle, Verduno, which "has been a kind of hidden gem in the world of Barolo for many years," says Bosio. "I'm not sure why it's not more popular, as the wines are some of the best. It's probably because . . . we're just four or five wineries, whereas in Serralunga d'Alba, there are at least ten. . . . But in terms of the quality [of Verduno's wines], I remember that as my enology professor, one of the best in the country [at the University of Turin], was explaining the difference between the communes, he said, 'If you are blind tasting Barolos, you will recognize Barolo from Verduno because it's the closest in profile to Barbaresco. It's



TO THE LEFT OF THE BEL COLLE WINERY ARE NEBBIOLO VINEYARDS FOR BAROLO PRODUCTION; TO THE RIGHT ARE PELAVERGA PLANTINGS IN VERDUNO, ONE OF ITALY'S SMALLEST DOCS.



NEBBIOLO VINES THAT PRODUCE BEL COLLE BAROLO SIMPOSIO.

much more elegant [and] finer in terms of structure.' And I agree—wine from Verduno always has an elegance about it. Ninety percent of our Barolos are from Verduno. Luca Bosio uses some vineyards in La Morra, which is close to the border of Verduno. Barolo from Bel Colle is 100% Verduno."

Situated in a natural southwest-facing amphitheater, Bel Colle's Monvigliero Vineyard is characterized by a particularly dry climate and light, loose soils that push the vines to yield quality fruit. From Monvigliero come Barolos of finesse and elegance that, without renouncing a hint of austerity, prove to be true symbols of Verduno as they display one of the widest and most complex aromatic ranges in the entire appellation, including prominent notes of flowers and spices. (To preserve these intense aromatics, the grapes used for Bel Colle's Barolo as well as its Barbaresco wines are placed in contact with dry ice for a short period of time before fermentation in

temperature-controlled steel tanks.)

The most commonly found soils in Piedmont are calcareous marl and sandstone with varying percentages of sand and clay. Bel Colle's Borgo Castagni Vineyard is representative of this, but with a twist: The veins of gypsum that course through its calcareous clay soils are said to intensify the aromas of the winery's Barolos.

The calcareous clay soils in the Langhe hills on the right bank of the River Tanaro in Barbaresco, for their part, are thought to produce Nebbiolo's most radiant expression. The small, south-facing vineyard of Pajorè, of which Bel Colle owns 1 hectare, has historically been the area's most important cru and is the source of the winery's Barbaresco Pajorè.

THESE MOSCATO D'ASTI VINEYARDS IN CASTIGLIONE TINELLA ARE PARTLY OWNED BY THE FAMILY OF LUCA BOSIO'S WIFE, VALENTINA.



Bel Colle 2013 10 Anni Barolo DOCG Riserva, Piedmont, Italy

(\$70) This formidable, polished red offers cherries drenched in cinnamon and sweet tobacco. Rose petals entangle with dusty cocoa tannins on the juicy finish. **96** —M.M.



Bel Colle 2018 Simposio Barolo DOCG, Piedmont, Italy

(\$60) This austere wine evolves to show momentum and energy through lyrical notes of dried roses, ginger, and rooibos tea. Brisk cherry skin and dusty sandalwood make for a balanced composition. **95** —M.M.



Bel Colle 2019 Barbaresco DOCG, Piedmont, Italy

(\$50) Oregano-kissed cherry, wet leaves, and violets show definition in this juicy, salty, and graceful red, which offers a hint of sage on the finish. **95** —M.M.

Key Grapes

Piedmont's three main red grapes are Nebbiolo, Dolcetto, and Barbera (the region's most planted red variety), while Cortese, Arneis, Erbaluce, and Favorita (Vermentino) are the most commonly grown white grapes behind Moscato Bianco, which generally becomes the peachy sparkling dessert wine Moscato d'Asti.

Moscato holds a special place in Bosio's heart, as he believes that it offers the most complexity out of all the grapes in Piedmont. "When I was 3 or 4, I remember my grandfather giving me my first wine experience, a sip of Moscato," he recalls. "My mom didn't know at the time of course, and she would have been mad,



LUCA BOSIO BELIEVES THAT MOSCATO OFFERS THE MOST COMPLEXITY AMONG THE GRAPES OF PIEDMONT.

but I still remember how delicious it was—and that's when I realized [that wine] would be my future. . . . Yes, it's sweet, but Moscato Bianco from Monferrato is unlike any other example. It's very special to me. We still source it from the vineyard my grandfather planted. I think Moscato deserves way more attention. It's a serious and important white wine from Northern Italy." Luca Bosio's ver-



EGIDIO AND ANGELA BOSIO, WHO FOUNDED THE BOSIO WINERY IN 1967, ON THEIR WEDDING DAY.

sion retains the natural sweetness of the grape (and carbon dioxide) through the use of cold temperature to arrest fermentation. Its Tropical Moscato, meanwhile, is made with both Moscato Bianco and real fruit in a way that preserves the aroma and structure of the delicate grape.

And while Barbera was once considered to be pedestrian, the wines it produces are now taken much more seriously, especially those hailing from Asti and Alba. The grape tends to thrive in the region's warm areas, where it requires a later picking time to ensure ripeness and adequate acidity. Barbera d'Asti is the grape's most classic form, and the Luca Bosio version as well as the Truffle Hunter Leda Barbera d'Asti come from vines averaging 25 years of age in the villages of Castagnole delle Lanze and Costigliole d'Asti at 200–300 feet above sea level. Named after the family's loyal truffle-hunting dog, Leda, the latter wine is another clever innovation of Bosio's, as it's meant to pair with any dish containing truffle along with a wide array of other foods.

SAVED FROM EXTINCTION

Harbored within Bel Colle's estate is the rare red grape Pelaverga, of which only 15 hectares remain today in all of Verduno. The variety was originally brought to the region in the 17th century by a native priest, who cultivated it for religious and medicinal reasons, but was almost decimated by phylloxera in the 20th century. "Pelaverga is a less-structured red that will remind [you] of a Syrah because of the pepper notes, Pinot Noir for the color, and Nebbiolo for the tannin and mouthfeel," says Luca Bosio. "Here we are already sold out for production. We don't have enough of it."



Bosio Winery 2021 Truffle Hunter Leda, Barbera d'Asti DOCG, Piedmont, Italy (\$15) Blanketed with spiced

mulberry and mushroom, this bright, dynamic, and earthy red has a svelte mouthfeel. **92** —M.M.



Luca Bosio Vineyards 2021 Barbera d'Asti, Piedmont, Italy (\$18)

Sweetmeats, pomegranate, and an earthy

core define this energetic red fermented and aged in stainless steel. Lean and lively notes of wild strawberry meld with salty minerality on the finish. **92** —M.M.



Luca Bosio Vineyards 2021 Moscato d'Asti DOCG, Piedmont, Italy (\$18) A deliriously delicious spar-

kler with tangerine and almond weaving through honeysuckle. The bubbles are light and airy, and crisp acidity ensures it maintains its freshness. **93** —M.M.



Luca Bosio Vineyards 2021 Arneis, Lange, Piedmont, Italy (\$20) Palate-

cleansing notes of salted almonds and tart pineapple and mango are further refreshed by keen acidity. Honeyed white flowers and lime blossoms accent the nose and palate, continuing through the powdered-vanilla finish. **94** —M.M.



Tropical by Luca Bosio Ginger Lime Moscato, Italy (\$18) Bursting with zesty ginger and jasmine, this is one fizzy surprise. Candied lime and lime blossom accent the Moscato's citrus-orange persona. **92** —M.M.

Tropical by Luca Bosio Strawberry Moscato, Italy (\$18) From its authentic strawberry aromas to its fresh berry flavor, this hedonistic sparkler caught our attention at first sniff. Crisp and refreshingly satisfying, it conveys balance and purity. **91** —M.M.

Tropical by Luca Bosio Mango Moscato, Italy (\$18) Clean, sweet, and ripe mango notes fill an unctuous yet spritzy frame. Floral tones of white petals, pineapple, and candied ginger are delicate from start to finish. **91** —M.M.

Tropical by Luca Bosio Passion Fruit Moscato, Italy (\$18) Lush notes of the tropics, including gardenia and orange sorbet, place passion fruit on a fizzy pedestal. **92** —M.M.





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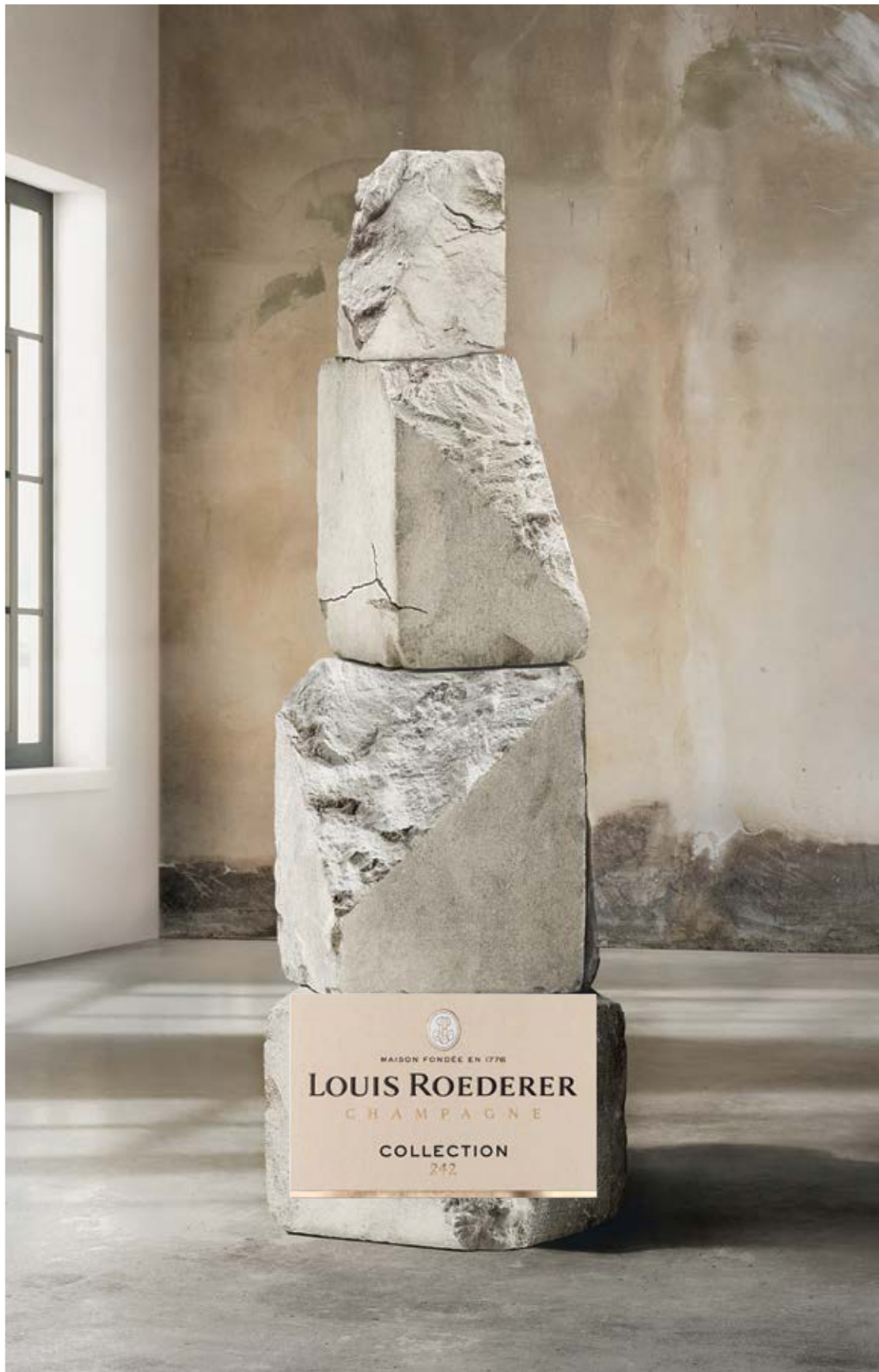


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