

■ THE SOMMELIER JOURNAL

FEBRUARY/MARCH 2024 • \$10.95

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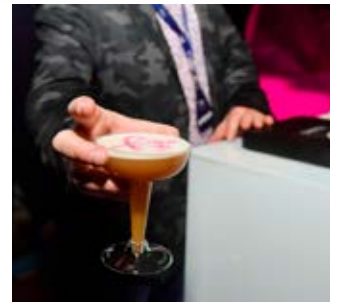
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Starting OVER

SARTORI DI VERONA REINVENTS ITSELF AS IT SEEKS TO EXPAND ITS PRESENCE IN THE U.S. BY LARS LEICHT

CATCHING UP WITH MY OLD FRIEND

ANDREA SARTORI in Verona on a brisk, sunny November day, I ended up with an earworm in the form of Chris Stapleton's hit song, "Starting Over."

*This might not be an easy time
There's rivers to cross and hills to climb*

STARTING OVER IS exactly what Andrea, the fourth-generation family proprietor of the Sartori di Verona winery, is doing in the U.S. market. Though he had been making annual visits to build his brand stateside since 1980, his longtime importer abruptly ended their 50-plus-year relationship in 2019. Andrea managed to sign a contract with Shaw-Ross International Importers in under a year, but just before the scheduled brand relaunch, the pandemic and subsequent international lockdown hit. Talk about rivers to cross and hills to climb. "I call it the perfect storm," said Andrea. "It is enough of a challenge to change importers under normal circumstances, but imagine when you throw in COVID!"

*And some days we might fall apart
And some nights might feel cold and dark*

ANDREA ESTIMATES THAT because of the new wholesale alignments, he had to switch about 60% of his distributors; luckily, that wasn't the case in the West, where he was already represented by Southern Glazer's Wine & Spirits, one of the nation's preeminent distributors of beverage alcohol. Now he is quite happy with the new situation. "The future of the market will continue to be challenging and not easy to manage," he told me, "but if you have the fortune to be with a powerhouse like Southern Glazer's Wine & Spirits, you'll manage to get ahead. It comforts us to have the most important U.S. distributor behind our brand."

Let's take our chances and roll the dice

Andrea's market focus remains fixed on on-premise channels, specifically the fine-dining segment. While his winery is equipped to satisfy the demands of large retail distribution, he sees little promise



PHOTOS COURTESY OF SARTORI DI VERONA

Andrea Sartori is the fourth-generation proprietor of Sartori di Verona.

in it. On a recent visit to California, Texas, and Florida—his first in several years—what he saw in so-called big-box stores confirmed that hypothesis. "The Italian sections have less space than ever," he

noted, "and it's commoditized. There are three Pinot Grigios, four Proseccos, and some Chianti, and price matters more than producer. Certain brands thrive, but you can count them on one hand."

On the bright side, he sees restaurant wine lists growing in quality, and he is responding by trimming his portfolio and emphasizing the premium wines within it. With his former importer, he was required to accept label modifications that meant his packaging for the U.S. market differed from that for Italy and other export markets; now the Sartori look is uniform everywhere. "That was the first thing we did," he said. "It doesn't make sense that what Americans would see is different than in the rest of the world."

What was previously known in the U.S. simply as Sartori Amarone della Valpolicella Classico is now labeled Reius Amarone della Valpolicella Classico; Sartori's Garganega, for which the fruit is slightly dried via the appassimento process, was formerly known to Americans as Ferdi but now bears its original name, Marani; the Sartori Valpolicella Classico is now a single-vineyard wine identified as Montegradella; and the Veronese IGT Regolo is now designated a Ripasso.

*But nobody wins afraid of losing
And the hard roads are the ones worth
choosing*

RIPASSO IS ESSENTIALLY a young Valpolicella that is repressed over the pressings of Amarone to yield a medium-bodied wine that is fuller than a Valpolicella but less complex than an Amarone. It is a big seller in Canada and northern Europe in particular but underappreciated in the U.S., where Andrea nonetheless firmly believes that there is a great future for it.

He sees another opportunity for growth with Soave as he prepares to introduce his single-vineyard Sella Soave Classico to the U.S. market. "I truly believe that Soave has a significant opportunity in the U.S.," he declared. "I don't want to say it will be the next Pinot Grigio, but it has all the characteristics to be the next great white wine of the market." Though he admits that, a few decades ago, it was seen as a commercial wine, it's his view that "we have to completely rebuild the market for Soave; premium examples of it are doing well in some markets, which



Constructed in the 17th century, Villa Maria is now Sartori's events center.

tells us that it is the route to follow in the U.S. We have to offer Soave to a new generation starting from zero, not based on memories of what it was but what it is today. The Soave of today has nothing to do with the Soave of yesterday."

*I can be your lucky penny
You can be my four-leaf clover*

TO HELP STRENGTHEN his position in the U.S., Andrea hired industry veteran Salvatore Napolitano as the winery's boots-on-the-ground representative. Napolitano started in September 2023 "to do in the U.S. the work we do in Italy every day when I can't be present there," in Andrea's words, which includes championing the wines among trade and consumers; training wholesale, retail, and restaurant teams; and simply maintaining a presence that personifies the brand. "He knows the market and the right people," Andrea asserted. Napolitano's priority will be New York, where he has already had notable success, but he will also travel to such key states as Texas, California, and Florida.


Home at the winery, Andrea has also made some changes, namely to his hospitality offerings. He recently completed a renovation of the 17th-century Villa Maria, formerly the family home where he grew up, which has been converted into an events center. He also refurbished the gate house at the entrance to the property to serve as a wine shop and launch point for estate tours, which feature tastings paired with foods such as chocolate-covered figs and various breads and cheeses.

Yet some things haven't changed. Renowned consulting winemaker Franco

Bernabei continues to give input to the winemaking team, including 23-year veteran Marco Delleva and his understudy, Luca Bonetti, who joined Sartori in 2019. And the Colognola grape-farming cooperative that gives Sartori control of production literally from the ground up remains part of the board of directors.

The quality of Sartori wines is another constant (see page 7 for my tasting notes). I've known Andrea and his wines for 36 years, working for much of that time for his aforementioned previous importer. In fact, my analogy of a country song for this chapter of his story seems appropriate as we've hung out together in many honky-tonks over the years as well as in more refined establishments. I have brought hundreds of sommeliers to visit his property, and their consistent response is that he represents a great story supported by wines of impeccable character, typicity, and integrity.

The German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche famously said, "Out of life's school of war—what doesn't kill me, makes me stronger," and despite a challenging restart, it is clear to me now that Sartori has emerged stronger and will continue to grow. When our recent conversation touched on mutual experiences in the U.S. market, I ironically asked Andrea if he had seen some changes in the market since 1980. "Enough," he replied, followed by a chuckle and an expletive.

*Some day we'll look back and smile
And know it was worth every mile* 



Corte Brà is the source of one of Sartori's single-vineyard Amarones.

TASTING notes



Sartori di Verona 2022 Sella Soave Classico DOC, Italy (\$16) Notes of almond blossom, honeysuckle, and vanilla bean on the nose. Flavors of apricot, ripe white peach, and subtle minerality merge with the great structure typical of a volcanic wine. Andrea Sartori pointed out that this was his family's first wine, produced by his great-grandfather Pietro to supply the family's hotel, the San Pietro in Verona, before Andrea's grandfather Regolo made wine the principal family endeavor.



Sartori di Verona 2022 Marani Bianco Veronese IGT, Italy (\$16) Creamy, bright, and long with aromas of wildflower honey and flavors of ripe white fruit. This is what I would call a red-wine drinker's white; Andrea deems it "a Soave on steroids." Garganega grapes from rocky calcareous vineyards in the *zona classica* of Soave undergo a slight appassimento, or drying, process; the wine is fermented in oak and aged on the lees.



Sartori di Verona 2019 Montegradella Valpolicella Classico, Italy (\$16) Hints of white pepper on the nose meet bright notes of Bing cherry on the palate, which finishes with hints of red licorice and cherry tart. Andrea feels that a classic version of Valpolicella—unadorned by oak aging, unencumbered by international grape varieties, and restrained in alcohol content—is what will attract a younger generation of wine drinkers. (It certainly attracts this taster from an older generation.)



Sartori di Verona 2020 Regolo Valpolicella Classico Ripasso, Italy (\$21) Round, jammy, and plummy with deep red-fruit flavors. Great intensity and minerality show its sourcing from high-altitude vineyards. Formerly a Rosso Veronese IGT, this has always been a popular selection; with only minor winemaking changes to qualify it as a Ripasso, it remains a delicious wine and a great value.



Sartori di Verona 2017 Reius Amarone della Valpolicella Classico, Italy (\$59) Notes of pink peppercorn, nutmeg, ripe plum, and cherries in syrup (which in Italy are called Amarena). This was formerly known in the U.S. simply as Sartori Amarone; it's now dubbed Reius, the name under which it has long been sold in Italy and other export markets.



Sartori di Verona 2015 Corte Brà Amarone della Valpolicella Classico, Italy (\$72) Though similarly savory, this single-vineyard Amarone has more structure and depth than the Reius, with notes of tobacco leaf and dried fruit including plums, figs, and cherries as well as hints of spices and herbs on the finish. It's an ideal accompaniment to dishes like porterhouse steak, roast duck, and game.

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PHOTO: HARDY WILSON

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—Amanda Ingram, Winemaker



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Cue the Fanfare

EVEN SOMMS LOVE THESE CELEBRITY WINES

LET'S BE HONEST: We wine industry pros often turn up our noses when we hear that yet another celebrity has added the role of winemaker to their resume. But are we being too hasty in our judgment? Sometimes. There's no denying that some actors, athletes, and musicians have leveraged their status to shill subpar wines to devoted fans who will buy almost anything their objects of affection endorse. But a select group of famous faces have smartly aligned themselves with respected winemakers to build their brands, and you can taste the difference.

"I have no problem with drinking wines made by celebrities as long as I am well informed about the grape sources and the individuals behind the winemaking process," says Joyce Lin, a New York City-based sommelier and founder of pairing-focused website 酒意思 SIP WITH JOYCE. "Take Miraval Rosé, for instance—a superb-quality, delightful Provençal rosé co-produced by Brad Pitt [and] Famille Perrin, a prominent fifth-generation wine producer [whose] legacy . . . dates back to the early 1900s."

Championship-winning point guard Dwyane Wade may have retired from the NBA, but his Wade Cellars label has dunked on naysayers who doubted his potential for success in the wine world. A longtime lover of wines from Napa Valley, Wade partnered with his friend Jayson Pahlmeyer, an acclaimed producer, to launch the brand—of which Femi Oyediran, sommelier and co-owner of Graft Wine Shop in Charleston, South Carolina, says, "We are big fans. They've exceeded expectations in engaging the wine community, creating inclusive opportunities for non-wine people to get involved and curating a culture of wine that's just entertaining. Standouts include Three by Wade Chenin Blanc, a delicious white that hints at a crisp cool-climate style and is just a perfect and rewarding bargain at under \$25." Wade continues to expand

PHOTO: BRUCE KUO



Joyce Lin is the New York City-based founder of pairing-focused website 酒意思 SIP WITH JOYCE.

PHOTO: JOEL CALDWELL



Femi Oyediran is co-owner of Graft Wine Shop in Charleston, SC.

his reach in the industry; in 2021, he joined the executive leadership board of the Department of Viticulture and Enology at the University of California, Davis.

"Queen of Hip-Hop Soul" Mary J. Blige is hitting high notes with her label Sun Goddess, whose portfolio includes a ramato style of Pinot Grigio produced in Italy's Friuli-Venezia Giulia region. Blake Leonard, president of wine for Stew Leonard's Wine & Spirits in New York, New Jersey, and Connecticut, extols Blige's partnership with the Fantinel family, who brings more than 50 years of wine-making experience to the collaboration. "My family and I have been friends with

PHOTO: ANDRES BEOVOA



Blake Leonard is president of wine at Stew Leonard's Wine & Spirits in New York, New Jersey, and Connecticut.

PHOTO COURTESY OF CHA MCCOY



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

Viarae. "I am thrilled to share my love of Prosecco with everyone through Viarae. It's carefully crafted, deliciously crisp, and the perfect beverage to celebrate *la dolce vita*," she says. And sommelier Cha McCoy, owner of The Communion Wine + Spirits in Syracuse, New York, agrees: "Viarae is a great example of a more gastronomic Prosecco, attributed to 100% Glera spending time on lees. [It breaks] the mold of . . . Prosecco [with] everything from apricot, honeysuckle, and baked peach [to] a mineral-driven finish screaming for a seafood tower."

Celebrities may not be just like us, but sometimes they produce wines that even we discerning sommeliers can love—proving that our palates might not be so different after all. **\$J**

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

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New Year, Age-Old Challenges

NAVIGATING WINE PROGRAMS THROUGH ECONOMIC CRISES

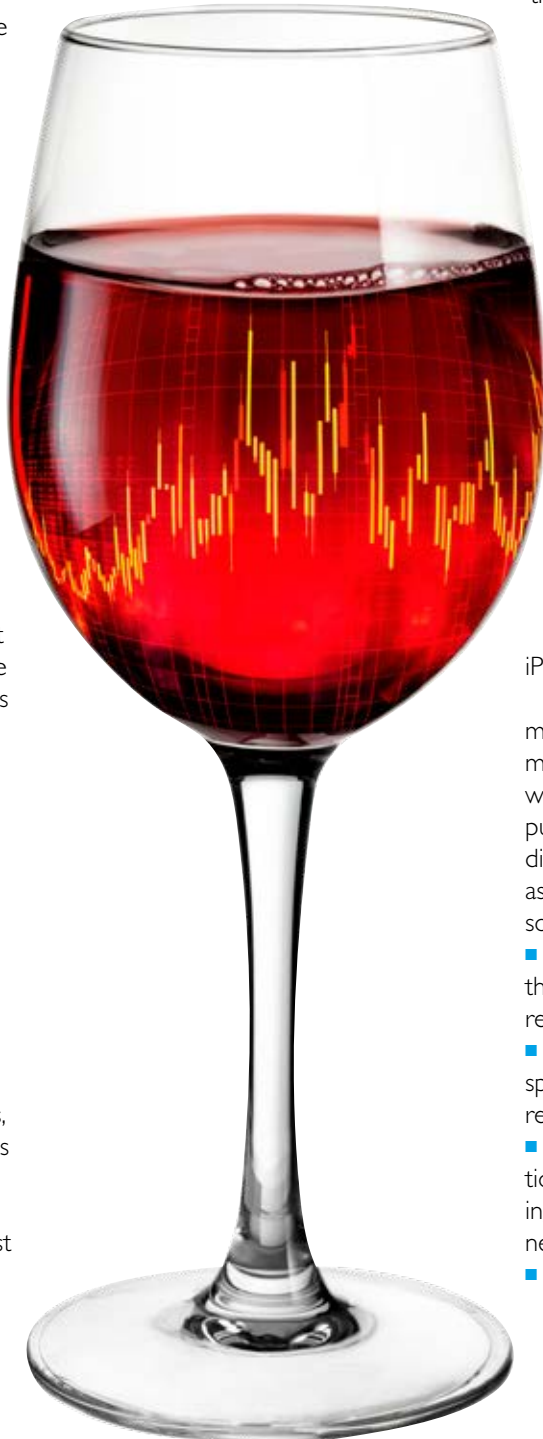
HOW STRONG IS the relationship between the economy and restaurant wine sales? Enough that one bad move—as a lot of ex-sommeliers and former restaurant owners can attest—could mean going out of business.

I took my first sommelier job in 1978. By 1988, I was a full-time restaurant manager still overseeing wine programs as I navigated seemingly endless economic crises. My present-day counterparts seem to share that challenge: In fall 2022, inflation rates in the U.S. reached 8.5%. I hadn't seen anything like that since the late 1970s.

Recession is a giant bogeyman, especially for sommeliers who are typically the first to go when Americans stop spending and restaurants tighten up their belts. When we were hit hard by recessions in 1982 and 1991, we were forced to make drastic adjustments to our wine programs just to survive. Many restaurant wine managers experienced similar challenges following the stock market crash of 2008.

In the new year, the industry faces a good news/bad news scenario. First, the big recession predicted in early 2023 never happened. Sales are sluggish, but they're not at a standstill. On the other hand, inflation rates, while flattening out during the course of the past year, are still a looming threat. The cost of everything, from wine to olive oil and napkins, is up. And we have no choice but to—as we used to say in the early '90s—deal with it.

How do you deal? Number one, adjust your program to weather the worst of times. I know most restaurants have already done that by reducing inventory—but instead of making cuts indiscriminately, you should be making



them strategically, in a way that gives you a competitive advantage.

Despite the twin threats of inflation and recession, consumers over the past three years have been behaving in remarkable ways—they are spending *more* on their products. More importantly, they are demanding higher-quality goods. The same compulsion that drives the demand for the latest high-tech products translates into what the wine industry has been calling premiumization.

Simply put, guests want *better* wines, which to them often means new and exciting wines. If you are still focusing strictly on popular brands, familiar appellations, and common varieties, you are not doing yourself a favor: Selling those kinds of wines is akin to selling outdated iPhones—they just don't work as well.

There are times when you as a sommelier can really demonstrate your mettle. This is one of them. You know what the best and latest wines are; now put your training, creativity, and merchandising skills to use. Guests are no longer asking for but *demanding* this. Here are some basic guidelines:

- Avoid wines sold everywhere else that do nothing to differentiate your restaurant.
- Focus on wines that pair well with specific dishes (guests, after all, go to restaurants to *eat*, not drink wine).
- Promote new or unfamiliar selections every which way possible, including through social media, print or email newsletters, tastings, and pairing menus.
- Taste (and test!) your staff on every new selection.

Welcome to 2024. It's time to go to work. 



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Even More Dollars and Sense

UNDERSTANDING BLENDED COST OF GOODS AND SALES FREQUENCY

MY LAST TWO COLUMNS FOCUSED

on maximizing the profitability of your restaurant through your by-the-glass program. Here, I explore two important concepts that, regrettably, most operators don't understand: A functional knowledge of how the blended cost of goods and sales frequency respectively (and connectedly) impact a program is essential to its profitability. Note that these apply unilaterally to wines by the glass and by the bottle alike.

When I was the corporate beverage director for Starr Restaurants, I oversaw a \$100 million-plus program. Monthly individualized emails to our 40-plus restaurants would be sent from a product cost manager demanding the same action: Increase prices on any wine whose CoGS (cost of goods sold, calculated by dividing the unit cost by the sale price) was too high. The report was generated by product cost management software and was based simply on the input per-unit cost and that unit's sale price. The program took no consideration of variables such as sales frequency. What this approach failed to take into account was how the sales of these wines impacted the overall profit position of the program.

You don't deposit percentage points in the bank: I've had to scream this from the rooftops so many times I almost want it inscribed on my tombstone! Not long ago, I was pouring Krug at \$45 per glass

at multiple restaurants. My cost was \$72 per half bottle, which equated to \$28.80 cost per glass or 64% CoGS. While I agree that that percentage sounds intolerable, that high-CoGS glass of wine was by design putting more dollars in the bank, even if the margin wasn't as good. Consider that every time a glass sold, it generated \$45 of gross revenue and \$16.20 of gross profit (revenue minus cost) for the business as well as garnering a \$9–\$10 tip for the server or bartender. Compare that to my second most expensive sparkling wine, which contributed only \$22 of gross revenue and \$14 of gross profit while amounting to a \$4–\$5 tip for the server; or to the entry-level sparkler that provided \$10 gross revenue, \$8.50 of gross profit, and \$2 to the server. Clearly, the Krug delivered the most gross revenue and gross profit as well as the best tips. As a bonus, it directly drove revenue up. Most people (myself included) do not go out intending to spend \$45 on a glass of wine, but when presented with something as special as Krug, which should be closer to \$85–\$90 per glass, they're excited about the deal. "Everyone deserves to try Krug," we would sincerely tell our guests, and we priced it approachably enough to allow them to. Typically that led to multiple glasses for the table.

The reason we could do this without negatively impacting our numbers

involves those two aforementioned factors. First is blended cost of goods: While the 64% CoGS for Krug was incredibly high, the \$10 glass of sparkling wine was running at only 15% CoGS. When averaged across all by-the-glass sales, the total program CoGS was within budget. For example, if only one glass of each was sold, then their blended (averaged) CoGS would be 39.5%; however, sales skewed dramatically toward the less expensive item. Which brings us to the second concern, sales frequency: That inexpensive sparkling wine outsold the Krug by 100 to one. In this way it offset the Champagne's inflated CoGS, resulting in a blended CoGS of 15.49% (considering 99 glasses at 15% and one glass at 64% CoGS).

In other words, if we were to assess this scenario solely on the basis of individual CoGS, we'd say that the price of the Krug by the glass should have been increased. In reality, however, every time it sold, it contributed more gross revenue and profit to the restaurant without fundamentally compromising its blended (total) CoGS budget while also generating more money for the service staff and making guests happy to boot. By the way, I ran Domaine de la Romanée-Conti, Lafite Rothschild, Harlan Estate, and many other "unicorns" at 60%–70% for the same reason and had the same positive result. ■

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In this image created with the AI system DALL-E, drones go to work in a vineyard.

5

Five Theoretical Wine-Industry Trends in 2024

FIVE MICHELIN STARS, AI AND REGENERATIVE FARMING, AND AN END TO LABOR CONCERNS?

OUT WITH 2023 and the final season of *Succession*; in with 2024 and the final season of *Curb Your Enthusiasm*. As for the wine industry, this year is going to be a gravy train for wine influencers. Here is what to expect (not really, as this is all utter rubbish, but read on anyway)!

[1] First, wine is going big at Michelin restaurants: Rumor has it that the Guide will introduce a fourth and fifth star to keep up with Yelp and Google ratings. Therefore, sommeliers need to plan now for a wine list that's up to the challenge of designing pairings for cuisine so advanced that patrons won't be able to see it, let alone smell or taste it. That task might prove challenging, but I have a couple of patent-pending suggestions. Categorize glass pours by size ("half-ounce pours \$100 and up" or "just the nose for

\$50"); sort bottles by country ("Napa" or "Napa Valley"); or dial up the exclusivity factor with one by-the-glass "house blend" of '95 Cheval Blanc stirred with barrel samples of To Kalon Cabernet Sauvignon in a decanter tableside and topped off with Salon Champagne. Call it the "Kurniawan Special" and price it at \$42,000 per glass (or one bitcoin/16 ETH).

[2] Second, the regenerative-farming fad will erupt into a full-blown regenerative pandemic in 2024 as grape growers climb into raised garden beds with AI. Farmers will turn to ChatGPT to help them transition their vineyards into regenerative-certified ranches—but because ChatGPT can only mine existing material on the internet (everyone knows that, right?), it will cause most vineyards to automatically reboot with AXR1 rootstocks, repeating the mistakes of past generations and accidentally bringing phylloxera back into the fold.

[3] Not to worry, however, since labor issues are about to be a thing of the past! This year,

massive layoffs in the IT sector (thanks, ChatGPT!) will inspire a generation of computer programmers and would-be CEOs to abandon their posts and head for the cash crops of Napa Valley as eager beavers looking for internships. They'll comprise the new labor force tasked with replanting those aforementioned regenerative vineyards that rebooted with AXR1. I'm sure you can picture driving along Highway 29 past Yountville now, passing fields full of bearded, wild-haired millennials wearing short-sleeve Bonobos tees and working for entry-level pay—\$250 per hour (or an unlimited supply of wine NFTs) and the negotiated right to "pick from home" three days per week over Microsoft Teams.

I know I promised five trends, but it's already February, and I'm over my word-count limit. **sj**

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

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Yin and Yang

WINE DIRECTOR JUSTIN MUELLER POURS ON THE CHARM AT **BECKON** AND **MAJOR TOM** IN DENVER, CO

LAST FALL, for the first time ever, the Michelin Guide came to Colorado, where it bestowed one star upon just five restaurants across the state. It came as no surprise to Denverites that Beckon was among them. Flanked by a 14-seat covered patio, the 18-seat chef's counter set in a tiny old bungalow in the RiNo neighborhood has been racking up the accolades ever since its opening in 2018 under the auspices of executive chef Duncan Holmes and director of experience Allison Anderson, whose guiding principles are intricacy and intimacy: highly sophisticated, microseasonal tasting menus on the one hand, extraordinarily warm and conscientious service on the other.

On a snowy night last December, a companion and I joined them for a special fifth-anniversary Winter Feast. Amid the expected luxuries—caviar and truffles, vintage Champagne and white Burgundy—lurked a number of totally charming surprises: clam risotto made with sushi rice and saké lees and accompanied by Wakatake Onikoroshi Junmai Ginjo, for instance, and a dessert of honey meringue with milk ice cream and sesame alongside Hatzidakis Vinsanto. The latter, I would come to learn, reflected a specific passion of wine director Justin Mueller: "I'm particularly proud of our dessert wine program. . . . It's a category that people are scared of, [but only] because they don't know it," he told me during a recent phone interview. "[They're like, 'Oh, it's . . . some lusciously honeyed, viscous liquid,' and I'm like, 'Well, no, it doesn't have to be.' It [can be] really high-acid and complex and multifaceted, and I think that's what [ultimately] turns people on. So having two pages of dessert wine that we pour by the glass"—including a full page of Madeiras dating back to 1860—"is really fun and I think elucidative too for guests."

Serving up stellar wines with a side of education comes only naturally to the Philadelphia-born Mueller, a onetime high-school teacher who has learned a great deal about hospitality in turn by working everywhere from The Olive Garden ("which I think is hilarious at this stage in my career," he admitted) to San Francisco's three-Michelin-starred Atelier Crenn. Such breadth of experience ensures that he's comfortable in the role of putting others equally at ease, whether he's pouring them a Grand Cru Riesling to complement a dish of squab, Mokum carrot, sunchoke, winter citrus, and Mar-

but also at its more casual adjacent sibling, Major Tom. "The idea from the inception was to have a killer Champagne list that was drastically undermarked for the space that we occupy . . . really as a way to get people drinking awesome Champagne at reasonable prices," he explained, citing a bottling of Bérèche & Fils he put on the list for \$94: "You can't find it at that price in a restaurant outside of France." The

Beckon and Major Tom wine director Justin Mueller.



PHOTOS: BEN PERRI



Beckon seats 18 at the counter and 14 more on the covered patio.

cona almond or introducing them to the concept of ageability through a selection of back vintages: "To be able to showcase 1980s and 1990s Napa and Sonoma wines that are tremendously made and not outlandishly expensive I think [is] cool because a lot of folks are like, 'I have a ten-year-old bottle—that's probably too old, right?' 'Not necessarily,' I tell them . . . and they're kind of dumbfounded at that," he said. "So to give people access to these things [and] build up [their] knowledge about wine is really a core tenet of mine."

As of January 2023, Mueller has been putting it into practice not only at Beckon

bubbles are supplemented by a still-wine list that "definitely has some classics like Oregon Pinot Noir but also some funky, oddball stuff that . . . doesn't have as much of a place on the Beckon wine list [but] that the service staff has really gotten behind," be it single-vineyard Counoise from California's Dunnigan Hills AVA or To Kokkinaki, a Greek red blend "from this tiny island called Tinos, where this guy and his son have literally 2 acres of vines and that's it." It may be "the yin to the yang of Beckon," in Mueller's words—but Major Tom is beckoning Denver's wine drinkers just the same. **SJ**

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SLO but Sure

ROBIN PURICELLI OF DOLPHIN BAY RESORT & SPA IN PISMO BEACH, CA, BREAKS DOWN THE EVOLUTION OF SAN LUIS OBISPO COUNTY

by Emily Johnston Collins

SINCE I MET ROBIN PURICELLI, I've always thought of her as an expert on San Luis Obispo (SLO) County wine; she in turn remembers me as the sommelier who correctly called the Ridge 2005 Monte Bello she brought to a blind tasting. Suffice it to say we both love the wines of California's Central Coast, so I took the opportunity to chat with Puricelli—who serves as the director of food and beverage at the Dolphin Bay Resort & Spa in Pismo Beach—about what's new in San Luis Obispo County.

Of the changes she has seen in her eight-year tenure at the property, the establishment of the SLO Coast AVA in March 2022 is “the most exciting thing that [has] happened in our area,” she says. Spanning the coastline from SLO County's southern border with Santa Barbara County to its northern border with Monterey County, the new appellation honors the bright style of wines produced in the area's cool climate. Puricelli, who used to make wine in the region herself, is proud of what it represents. “We can now identify [ourselves with a regional style] and make cool-climate wines with certainty,” she says, alluding to the increased recognition they are receiving thanks to the designation, which is also having positive effects on the wine program at Dolphin Bay.

Just a half hour's drive from Paso Robles, the resort has long catered to wine tourists, with its Lido Restaurant & Lounge garnering a Best of Award of Excellence from *Wine Spectator*. In the wake of the pandemic, however, liquor sales unexpectedly overtook wine sales. “We were always wine-centric—[but] all of a sudden, spirits exploded,” notes Puricelli, who found herself putting away the vineyard maps she likes to show guests and having conversations about locally sourced cocktail ingredients instead. In January, she even hosted a Whiskey vs. Wine dinner in collaboration with local distillery Rod and Hammer's SLO Stills. Yet since the creation of the SLO Coast AVA, she says she is finally seeing the return of wine tourism.

Puricelli hasn't made her own wine since 2019, though her Locura label is still available at Lido. Locura is a light-bodied Grenache from the Central Coast that she made expressly for the restaurant because, she says, “I wanted to pair a red wine with fish.” From the nearly 4,000 acres planted to vine in the SLO Coast AVA, she is also sourcing many other exciting local wines to complement the menu. She may soon need a new vineyard map to show guests. **SJ**



PHOTO: RUSSEL GARNER

An Ember Ignites

CHALLENGING THE STEAKHOUSE STEREOTYPE IN FOUNTAIN HILLS, AZ

FROM MY FIRST VISIT in 2021, it was apparent that Ember at We-Ko-Pa Casino Resort was distinguishing itself from the more traditional steakhouses popular in nearby Scottsdale with property executive chef Richard Pelz at the helm. Each of the dishes I tried revealed his creativity: beet “tartare” with an emulsified golden-beet “yolk;” spiced Marcona almonds, and goat cheese mousse; octopus ceviche with tangerine “caviar”; and herb-crusted veal cheeks with fava beans and pickled hon shimeji mushrooms.

A graduate of the Culinary Institute of America in New York, Pelz has globe-trotted throughout his career, which has taken him from New York City’s La Grenouille and Yountville, California’s Bottega Napa Valley to the Michelin-starred kitchens of Le Louis XV under acclaimed chef Alain Ducasse in Monte Carlo, France, and Martín Berasategui in San Sebastian, Spain, among others. Now in his current role as executive chef of the entire We-Ko-Pa property—located in the Fort McDowell Yavapai Nation, which covers parts of Scottsdale, Fort McDowell, and Fountain Hills—Pelz oversees all culinary operations from banquet service and in-room dining to five restaurants in



Ember sommelier Dennis Payne and We-Ko-Pa Casino Resort property executive chef Richard Pelz.

addition to Ember: “We want to create a destination,” he notes. “Doing things a bit differently gives people a reason to venture out of Scottsdale.”

Like Pelz, Advanced Sommelier Dennis Payne relies on decades of international experience to curate Ember’s wine list. “Over 800 wines from 29 countries are represented on the list, and I’ve been to 24 of those countries,” says Payne, whose career highlights include being the youngest sommelier to sell \$100,000 worth of wine during a single shift at Bern’s Steak House in Tampa, Florida. “I’ve worked for at least 50 of the wineries on my list, like

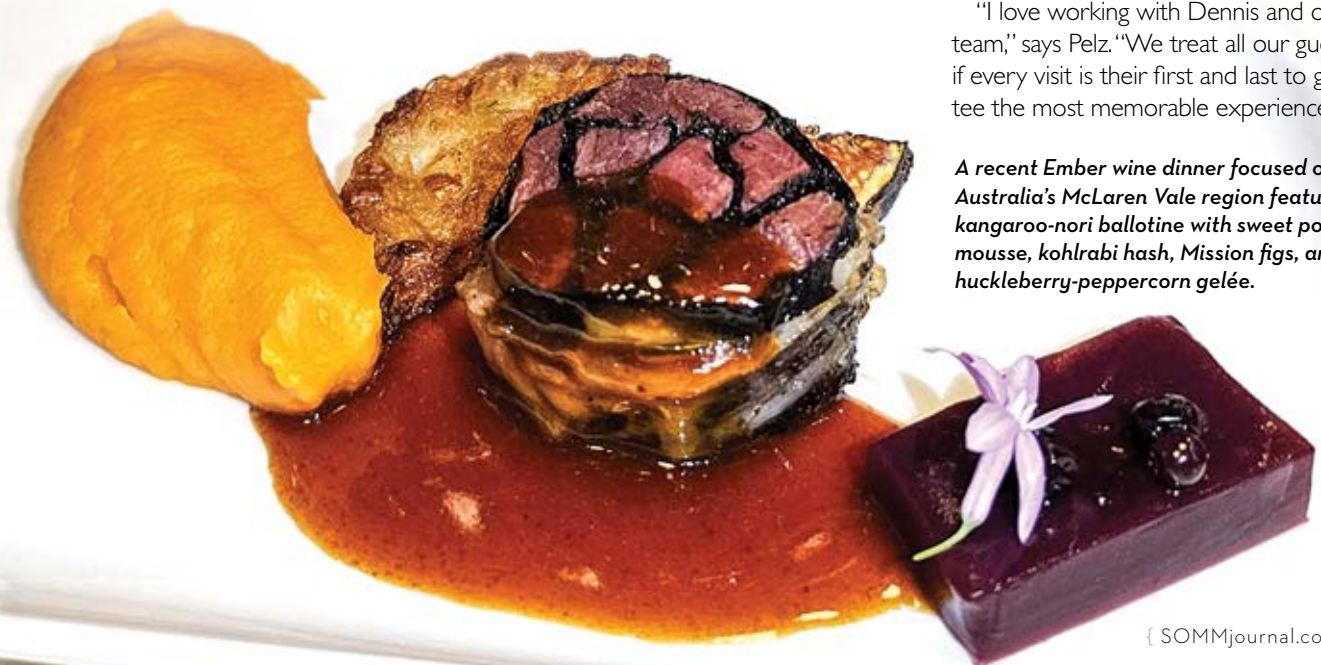
Loveblock in New Zealand, Angelo Gaja and Bruno Giacosa in Italy, and Juan Gil in Spain. I’ve also worked at all the wineries I offer as verticals, like Cain, Dominus, and Calon-Ségur. [And] I love to share the stories of these really cool wines and the family lineages.”

Payne also places an emphasis on maintaining a wide range of price points. “I have Screaming Eagle for \$9,000 and Harlan Estate for \$3,000, but I have great value on the list too,” he notes. “My goal is to see bottles of wine sitting on the tables, whether it’s a \$42 bottle of Pinotage from South Africa or an expensive red Burgundy.”

The team’s dedication to offering an immersive culinary experience is showcased in Ember’s sold-out wine dinners, which have been led by such notable guests as Ken Wright of Ken Wright Cellars, Lisa Peju of Peju Winery, and Fernando Frias of FRIAS Family Vineyard. Most recently, a spotlight on the wines of Australia’s McLaren Vale region allowed Pelz to display his finesse through courses like a crocodile cornet amuse-bouche, kangaroo ballotine accompanied by sweet potato mousse and huckleberry-peppercorn gelée, and Tasmanian ocean trout with red cabbage gazpacho.

“I love working with Dennis and our team,” says Pelz. “We treat all our guests as if every visit is their first and last to guarantee the most memorable experience.”

A recent Ember wine dinner focused on Australia’s McLaren Vale region featured kangaroo-nori ballotine with sweet potato mousse, kohlrabi hash, Mission figs, and huckleberry-peppercorn gelée.





A Nose for Nostalgia

WHY THE SMELL OF FRESHLY CUT GRASS PROMOTES RELAXATION

THERE'S MORE THAN alcohol at work when we pour a glass of grassy Sauvignon Blanc and feel a deep sense of relief.

For varietal wines like Sauvignon Blanc and Grüner Veltliner, grassiness is a positive aroma descriptor with which many consumers can readily identify. In a 2021 survey of 2,000 consumers commissioned by Swiss decongestant brand Olbas, the smell of fresh-cut grass ranked number one among 20 different aromas (not all of which were pleasant) in terms of its ability to recall childhood memories. Researchers have found that odor-evoked memories like those connected to the smell of grass are linked with the first decade of life and tend to be highly emotional, vivid, and specific.

The distinct smell of newly mown grass is the result of a volatile chemical cocktail known as green leaf volatiles (GLVs). GLVs are a combination of aldehydes (including hexanal and hexenal), terpenes, and pheromones that are released by plants in great quantities to act as a warning signal to other plants and insects when they are being damaged. Plants also emit GLVs to attract predatory insects when they are being attacked by pests and use them as protection against fungi and frost damage, as GLVs have antifungal properties that can inhibit the growth and development of certain fungal pathogens and also contribute to the overall stress tolerance of plants, making them better equipped to withstand environmental stresses.

Scientists believe that GLVs smell good to humans because they remind us of food: Vegetables release them when chopped and fruit releases them as it matures. In effect, we are genetically programmed to react positively to this smell, but the positive associations that many people have with these compounds can also be linked to childhood memories.


Known anecdotally as the Proust Phenomenon—so named for the French novelist Marcel Proust, “who was particularly interested in understanding the mechanics of his own being and the role memory played within it,” according to the book *Smell, Memory, and Literature in the Black Country*, edited by Sebastian Groes and R.M. Francis—this is what researchers refer to as olfactory nostalgia. Odors that evoke nostalgia have a positive impact on self-esteem, self-continuity, optimism, social connectedness, and a sense of meaning.

Interestingly, the aldehydes hexanal and hexenal contribute to the aromas of freshly cut grass and tomato leaf found in Sauvignon Blanc, particularly that produced in New Zealand and the Loire Valley. The factors that contribute to making New Zealand Sauvignon Blanc so distinctly grassy are many, but one is its location in the Southern Hemisphere, where growing regions receive 30%–40% more ultraviolet (UV) light than do their counterparts in the Northern Hemisphere at similar latitudes. In New Zealand, most of this UV is felt in the summer, but higher levels are present in the fall as well; meanwhile, cool coastal nights allow for long ripening while maintaining acidity. When combined with the approach of harvesting fruit at varying levels of ripeness, a production method that is now widely used in California, these factors can yield a blend with the level of grassiness desired for a particular style or brand.

According to Groes and Tom Mercer, with whom Groes cowrote a chapter on the Proust Phenomenon in the aforementioned book, the phenomenon's wider significance lies in triggering strong, emotive childhood memories that we may have forgotten, in a sense reconnecting us with our former selves. This

Odors that evoke nostalgia have a positive impact on self-esteem, self-continuity, optimism, social connectedness, and a sense of meaning.



olfactory nostalgia is considered beneficial because it affords us the possibility of perspective and contemplation. The next time you're swirling a glass of Sauvignon Blanc and appreciating its grassy aromas, take a moment to imagine your younger self and reflect upon what life choices, motives, and desires have brought you to today. 

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INNOVATION

Reigns Supreme

in Victoria

WEIGHT, DENSITY,
AND STRUCTURE ARE
THE CROWN JEWELS
OF THE REGION'S
INLAND WINES

by Bob Paulinski, MW

Australia is a vast country with a diverse wine culture that stretches across more than 60 regions; in terms of production by volume, it currently ranks fifth globally. All this means that there's a lot to sort out in order to make sense of the place—but if you dig deep into its story, you'll be richly rewarded. It has built its reputation on a foundation of tradition, innovation, resourcefulness, resilience, and a refusal to be complacent. Some of those words may appear to be at odds, but in this part of the world the seeming contradictions work to create an environment for intriguing and compelling wines that are worth searching out.

Take Victoria as an example. The fascinatingly complex southernmost state in continental Australia has a history of wine production that dates back more than 170 years. Here, more than 20 wine regions boast the widest range of climates of any state in the country. To varying degrees, many of them are impacted by the cold waters of the

PHOTO COURTESY OF BLUE PYRENEES ESTATE

*Blue Pyrenees Estate in the
Pyrenees region of Victoria.*

Southern Ocean, though generally speaking, as you move north to more inland areas, the temperatures get progressively warmer. Diverse topography, including a myriad of mostly ancient soils, also comes into play. And then there's the human element: Not content with the status quo, winemakers in Victoria are always pushing the boundaries when it comes to experimentation. These factors lay the groundwork for a wide range of unique and highly expressive wines.

In my previous article on Victoria (see the December 2023/January 2024 issue), I focused on the state's cool coastal and near-coastal regions, where broadly cool-climate varieties like Pinot Noir, Riesling, and Pinot Gris yield wines of nuance and subtlety, with bright aromatics and the vibrant acidity that is their hallmark, preserved by a typically restrained use of oak. This article will explore select inland regions that offer a compelling view of deeply rooted tradition while sharing an innovative spirit that ensures Victoria as a whole deserves to stand front and center on the world wine stage. In general, the emphasis is on wines with greater weight, density, and structure.

Not too many years ago, I lived in Melbourne while partaking in a two-year work project. It was a wonderful experience, and an added reward was the weekend trips I was able to take to the nearby growing regions of Victoria, which brought more surprises and a greater sense of adventure than any other



PHOTO COURTESY OF CHALMERS

At the Chalmers winery in Merbein.



PHOTO COURTESY OF MOUNT LANGI GHIRAN

In the winery at Mount Langi Ghiran.

place I've visited in all my years of traveling the wine world. Simply put, when you think you have it figured out, you invariably find that there is more to learn. For the wine nerd, this place is like Willy Wonka's Chocolate Factory in terms of its capacity for seemingly endless discovery.

Let's focus on the Grampians, Pyrenees, Bendigo, and Heathcote, which, starting less than a three-hour drive northwest of Melbourne, are contiguous from west to east in that order. Artisanal, family-owned wineries maintain a strong presence in these regions, which are generally warmer than their coastal counterparts—but not so much so that they result in jammy, baked, high-alcohol wines. The climate tends to be Mediterranean,



with large diurnal temperature swings; cool nights throughout the long growing season allow the vines to recover from the daytime heat, ensuring good acidity retention to provide lift, freshness, and focus to the wines.

This is mostly red-wine country, with Shiraz being king, though you'll also find brilliant Cabernet Sauvignon and other Bordeaux-style wines. White wines are fewer, but Chardonnay and Sauvignon Blanc, among other varieties, can show well. The growing presence of grape varieties, both red and white, that until recently had not been typically cultivated in Australia but are now more viable due in part to climate change is a development that is bound to get increased attention in the coming years. In addition, sparkling wines from these inland regions can be excellent, whether produced from Shiraz or nontraditional varieties.

Located in the western part of Victoria, the Grampians is a particularly fascinating region with over 1,600 acres under vine. It's a strikingly beautiful place, home to a large national park and lined with mountains to the east. Some may argue that its climate could be defined as cool. Perhaps so, but there is a good deal of climatic variability here, in part due to the terrain. Summers typically alternate warm to hot days with cool nights, thanks to the ocean, which is in close enough proximity

to provide a moderating influence. Autumn is generally mild and pleasant, and the growing season is extended. Winter is brisk. The soil here tends to be infertile, providing a natural means to reduce yields, which often improves fruit quality.

The primary player in the region is Shiraz, a variety that exhibits an incredible range of characteristics depending on the climate; the Grampians represents the cooler end of the spectrum. The results are among the most dazzling examples of the grape Australia has to offer. Possessing a distinct elegance, they show a purple hue when young, along with notes of dark red fruit, savory Damson plum, and cracked pepper. Cabernet Sauvignon from the Grampians can also be quite unique, refined, and nuanced, exhibiting notes of cassis and black raspberry, supple tannins, and sometimes subtle mint characteristics; occasionally, it's blended with Shiraz. Plantings of Pinot Noir and Chardonnay can also be found in the Grampians, where they're often used for sparkling wines.

Continuing further east is the Pyrenees, a rugged, scenic place with about 2,100 acres under vine. Its history stretches back to the 1840s, but it wasn't until the 1960s that its current reputation started to take shape. The mountain ranges and foothills typically display significant temperature variations from day to night; when visiting, you'd do well to pack clothes in prepara-

tion for experiencing all four seasons on a single day, especially during the spring and early summer. Winters, meanwhile, can be cold, with sharp winds. Soils are marked by deposits of gravel reminiscent of those found in Bordeaux, particularly in vineyards on the valley floor.

Here too, Shiraz is a major player, with plenty of excellent examples. The Pyrenees is also a rock-star region when it comes to Cabernet Sauvignon and other Bordeaux varieties. The wines often display an uncanny ability to strike a balance between power and elegance, showing very good ripeness and concentration tempered by layers of nuance and refinement along with solid aging potential.

To the east of the Pyrenees is Bendigo, which was the hub of the gold rush in the mid-19th century; today it has about 1,500 acres under vine. The temperatures here tend to nudge upwards, resulting in wines with more heft and concentration; Shiraz and Cabernet Sauvignon lead the charge, with nontraditional varieties gaining acreage.

A bit further east still is Heathcote, with about 4,500 acres of vineyard land. It's one of Australia's major sources for Shiraz, although it didn't gain its GI (Australian Geographical Indication) status until 2002. The northern part of the region is generally warmer and drier than the southern portion, though the influence of the Mount



Camel Range results in lower temperatures than Bendigo experiences. The soils drain freely but retain enough water to ensure that irrigation is not common.

Shiraz, which accounts for over 70% of plantings, tends to produce inky wines with good structure and density. They're well worth exploring, but as is increasingly the case in Australia, other grapes may someday steal the show: Heathcote is starting to make a name for itself with Ital-

ian varieties such as Aglianico, Fiano, Greco, Lagrein, Negroamaro, Nero d'Avola, Pavana, Vermentino, Sagrantino, Sangiovese, and Schioppettino. Having tasted a good number, I'm particularly optimistic about Fiano, Negroamaro, and Nero d'Avola, all well suited to climate change; the former is particularly good at maintaining acidity at high levels of ripeness. Non-Italian varieties like Grenache and Tempranillo also have an established niche.

The wines from these four regions are not the commodity bottlings that broadly defined the Australian export market for many years. Rather, they are distinctive, individualistic, artisanal wines with a strong sense of place. In other words, Victoria has as much to offer the wine lover as any other region in the world. And as it continues to evolve, each new chapter of its story brings something surprising and thought-provoking. **SJ**

Tasting Notes



Mount Langi Ghiran 2021 Cliff Edge Shiraz, Grampians, Australia (\$27) Concentrated purple hue with a well-extracted, deep core. Excellent, intense aromas of black fruit galore and cracked pepper. The palate is savory with good weight yet balanced and refined, with a nice integration of oak reflected in supple tannins. This wine developed well after a couple of hours of aeration and should also age well over the next five years or so. **92**



Blue Pyrenees Estate 2019 Red Blend, Pyrenees, Australia (\$45) Possessing a solid, deep core with a slight fade at the edge of the glass, this blend of 58% Cabernet Sauvignon, 32% Merlot, and 5% each of Malbec and Cabernet Franc is well structured, showing good concentration in terms of both aroma and flavor. It's got plenty of weight, yet it's refined and nuanced, with notes of roasted coffee, cassis, and smoky oak as well as evident but fine tannins that lead to an extended finish. It'll age well for another three to five years. **92**



Chalmers 2019 Felicitas Sparkling, Heathcote, Australia (\$42) A crazy fun bottle! Made entirely from handpicked Fiano by the traditional method, it sees more than three years on the lees and zero dosage. Pale in color, it sports a fine bead and a nice mousse; aromas of roasted nuts, a bit of bread dough, and citrus rind; and a good presence on the palate, marked by a gentle fizz and bright acidity to keep it lifted and fresh. A dry, refreshing, and unexpected yet highly satisfying sparkler. **92**

The Definition of

Prestige

WHAT'S LEFT FOR Domaines Schlumberger to prove? Founded in 1810 and still family-owned, it's got an impressively long track record. Its 300 acres of vines make it the largest vineyard holder in Alsace, with the largest share of Grand Cru sites. In fact, it possesses the most contiguous vineyard land in all of France. But seventh-generation vintner Thomas Schlumberger isn't one to settle for the status quo.

When Thomas assumed the role of CEO from his uncle in 2017, he recognized that his ancestors had created a formidable legacy: As he puts it, "We are the luckiest generation of this family because all of the generations before us really put a lot of energy and money into moderniz[ation] and into creating a vineyard which has no comparison." But he asked himself a fundamental question: "What, [like every] other generation before, can I do to make the company better when I give it to the next generation?" Joining him in this quest is his sister, Séverine, who manages public relations and sales.

One of Thomas' boldest actions has been the creation of Le Clos Saint Léger Grand Cru Riesling. Although there is no shortage of premium Riesling in the Domaines Schlumberger portfolio, he felt compelled to produce "a signature wine of the family, something that defines prestige and the idea of Schlumberger nowadays." His source for what he

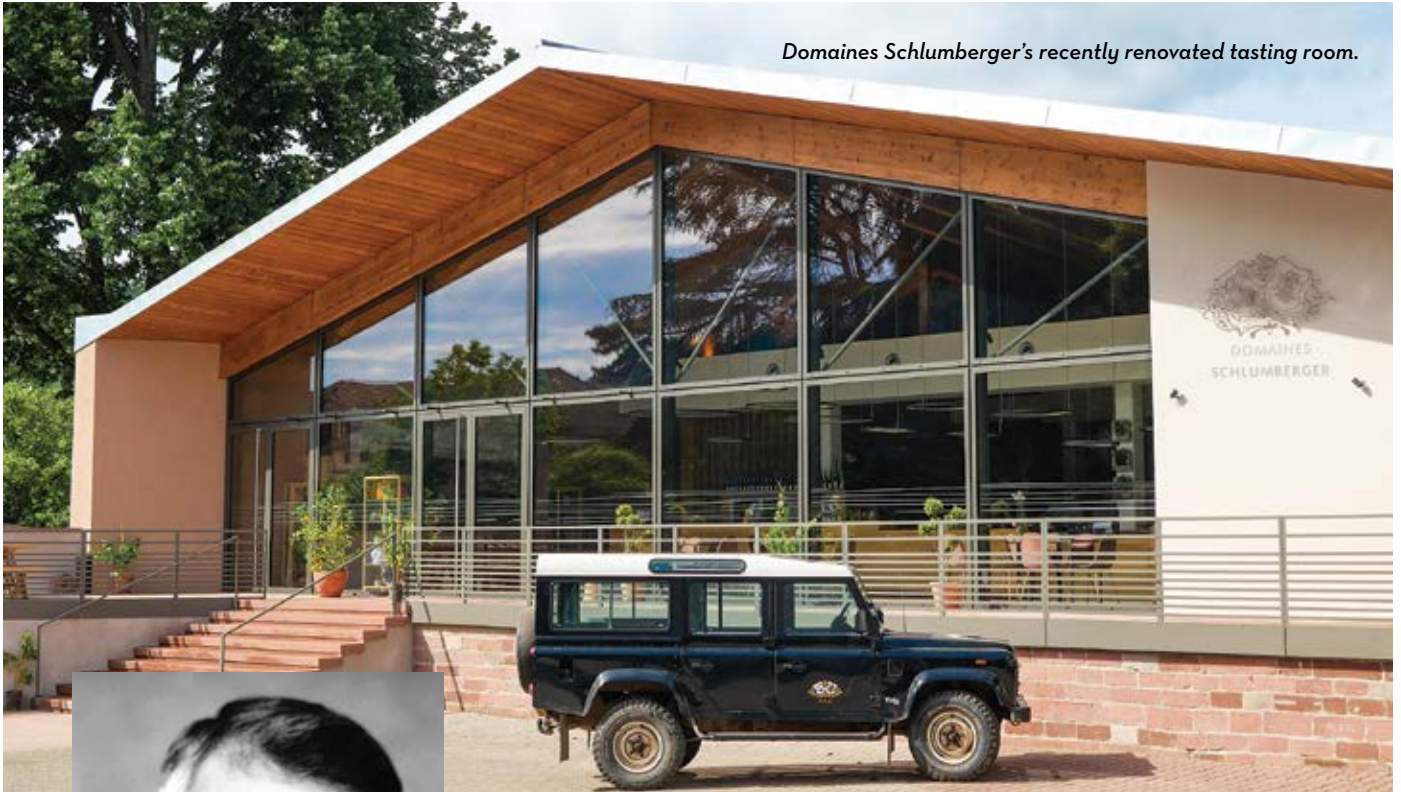


**DOMAINES
SCHLUMBERGER**
DEBUTS ITS
LE CLOS SAINT
LÉGER GRAND
CRU RIESLING

by Wanda Mann

PHOTO: VINCENT SCHNEIDER

Alsatian Grand Cru Kitterlé.



Domaines Schlumberger's recently renovated tasting room.



Thomas Schlumberger is CEO of Domaines Schlumberger in Alsace, France.

calls a "super-precise" Riesling with a lot of "finesse and style" is a 4-acre plot in Kitterlé, one of the four Grand Cru vineyards in which the domaine has ownership. Thomas selected this petite plot of grapes to create Le Clos Saint Léger Grand Cru Riesling because he believes it provides the best results year after year. He describes Schlumberger's 50 acres of Kitterlé as "kind of a horseshoe-shaped terroir with three different exposures [that's] based on volcanic sandstone, which is very [unusual] in Alsace; there are only a very few locations on volcanic sandstone, and Kitterlé is one of those. The vines [there] have 30 years of age, so they are perfectly well established in terms of root system and so on." Yields


are limited, but the soil encourages the growth of grapes with intense aromas and the structure needed for long-term aging.

The steep slant of the organically farmed slopes, as extreme as 45 degrees, requires the use of stone-walled terraces; horses are still used to plow this beautiful but treacherous terrain. ("We were the pioneers of introducing horses on the mountain, and that was a century ago," notes Thomas.) Le Clos Saint Léger's name was inspired by this topography. "By definition, a *clos* is surrounded by walls or forest. We have walls all around, and Saint Léger is actually the name of our historic church in the village from the 12th century. We are the continuity of what the monks used to do [i.e. make wine] back then," he adds.

After the "right spot" and the "right skills" were in play, "then the magic happened," according to Thomas. To truly distinguish Le Clos Saint Léger Grand Cru Riesling from the other wines in Schlumberger's portfolio, the producer adopted a different method of vinification. "Normally we use the big *foudres*, very large barrels," he explains. "In this case, we are using stainless-steel tanks to protect the wine from oxidation, to have a little bit more aging potential, and also to be able to release the wines a little bit later.

So, we just make a classic fermentation in a stainless-steel tank, and then we age the wines on fine lees, also in a stainless-steel tank, before we bottle it later on."

The debut vintage of Le Clos Saint Léger, 2017, is scheduled to reach the market this year. Asked how many bottles were produced, Thomas laughs and says, "Not enough"; the limited supply will be available only by allocation. (Release dates are pending on the 2018, 2019, and 2020 vintages.) Describing the climatic conditions of 2017, he adds, "We had a little bit of frost a little bit late in the [spring] season," followed by a "very hot summer with enough rain to secure the perfect maturity of the fruit." The result is a wine with "a lot of finesse and a lot of energy. It's a classic example of dry Riesling as we love it."

Le Clos Saint Léger lets the world know that Domaines Schlumberger has no fear of innovation as long as it's rooted in authenticity. Asserts Thomas, "It's really a vine growers' wine, which means that actually you take a single plot, you take a single varietal, and you only get what you get; [therefore] you have a vintage effect [that] is a little bit more obvious compared to other cuvées, where you can blend different plots for the same location or different varietals together. And that's exactly what we are looking for." 

{ italy }

From Lombardy to the Windy City

LAST OCTOBER, CHICAGO'S TOP SOMMELIERS GATHERED AT ADALINA TO EXPERIENCE SOME OF CA' DEL BOSCO'S MOST ICONIC WINES

story by Amy Bizzarri / photos by Studio Management



Sommeliers convened at Chicago restaurant Adalina for a Ca' del Bosco wine dinner in October.

NESTLED AT THE FOOT of the Alps in Italy's Lombardy region about 50 miles east of Milan, the tiny appellation of Franciacorta has been renowned for producing high-quality wines since ancient times; even Roman writer and naturalist Pliny the Elder (A.D. 23–79) noted the wines of *francae curtes* (the region's name derives from the Latin term for "lands free of taxes") in his *Naturalis Historia*. This tiny, terroir-driven and sustainability-minded DOCG offers some of the best metodo classico bubbles in the world.

Last October, *The SOMM Journal* invited some of the top sommeliers in Chicago to Gold Coast restaurant Adalina to meet Maurizio Zanella, founder and president of Franciacorta producer Ca' del Bosco. Jacob Gragg, Ca' del Bosco & Portfolio fine wine specialist for Santa Margherita USA, guided our deep dive into the region during an intimate dinner.



Maurizio Zanella is founder and president of Ca' del Bosco.

Guest *Barbara Glunz-Donovan* is co-owner of *House of Glunz Wine & Spirits*.



Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, and Cabernet Franc]. The game of the lamb chop played well with a wine that tastes earthy to me, while the plum mostarda met the wine and the lamb in the middle and lent a sweetness to the palate. [Meanwhile,] the idea of terroir inspired me to include a component of the land where I was raised in the Midwest: I grew up eating cabbage rolls, and so I stuffed cabbage with braised lamb shank and a rich lamb jus." But Rueth's personal favorite course was lobster alla scarpetta with the 2014 Annamaria Clementi Dosage Zero

Not having been raised in the business, Maurizio Zanella was a relative outsider to the wine world when he put the practices he learned as a young man in Burgundy and Bordeaux in service of establishing Ca' del Bosco. The first vineyards were planted in Erbusco in 1968, and since the inaugural release in 1978, Zanella's dream of producing sparkling wines on par with even the most prestigious of Champagnes has not only been realized but surpassed, thanks to his laser-like focus on quality and sustainability. Today, the organically farmed 600-acre estate produces eight sparkling wines as well as seven still wines—five reds and two whites. "For more than 45 years, I've been traveling the world, shining a spotlight on Franciacorta," said Zanella. "We are between the hammer and the anvil—between Prosecco and Champagne—because the average consumer is typically only familiar with these two appellations. They don't know Franciacorta—yet. . . . [but] when people finally try [it], there's nothing more to say. That's it. That's the sales presentation."

"Franciacorta is Champagne's more exciting sister," observed Adalina wine director Alexandra Thomas. "The versatility this wine brings to the table is breathtaking. I love opening guests' palates to finessed florals and spongy bubbles. Ca' del Bosco is the cornerstone of Franciacorta for me. They set the bar for quality and ethics when it comes to wines."

Zanella recommended that, when crafting a wine list, sommeliers classify Franciacorta as its own category out-

Adalina wine director *Alexandra Thomas*.



St. Regis wine director *Kat Hawkins* catches up with *Kolin Juckins*, director of wine at *The Racquet Club of Chicago*.

side of sparkling wine. "Franciacorta is a wine that incidentally has bubbles and thus deserves its own place on a wine list," he said. "I advise sommeliers to ask their clients, 'Do you want Champagne or something different?' Franciacorta is not the poor brother of Champagne; indeed, its quality is often superior."

Kat Hawkins, wine director at Chicago's newest luxury hotel, the St. Regis, noted that she was "thrilled to be able to tell the story of Franciacorta and of Ca' del Bosco at Tre Dita, our Tuscan steakhouse opening in early 2024," adding, "It's exciting introducing Franciacorta to guests for the first time; Ca' del Bosco will be an integral part of our glass pour list."

"Tasting all of the Ca' del Bosco wines was a privilege," said Adalina chef Jeff Rueth. "I felt like the most 'wow' pairing was the duo of lamb with Maurizio Zanella 2019 [an IGT Sebino blend of

Riserva. "The squash-lobster bisque was seasoned with Tahitian vanilla; that sweetness complemented the vibrancy of the wine. . . . There was [also] a yeasty quality to the wine that made me want to add bread and cultured butter seasoned with Espelette pepper to accompany the [dish]," he explained. "A story can be told through wine and food, and that's how I try to think when creating menus."

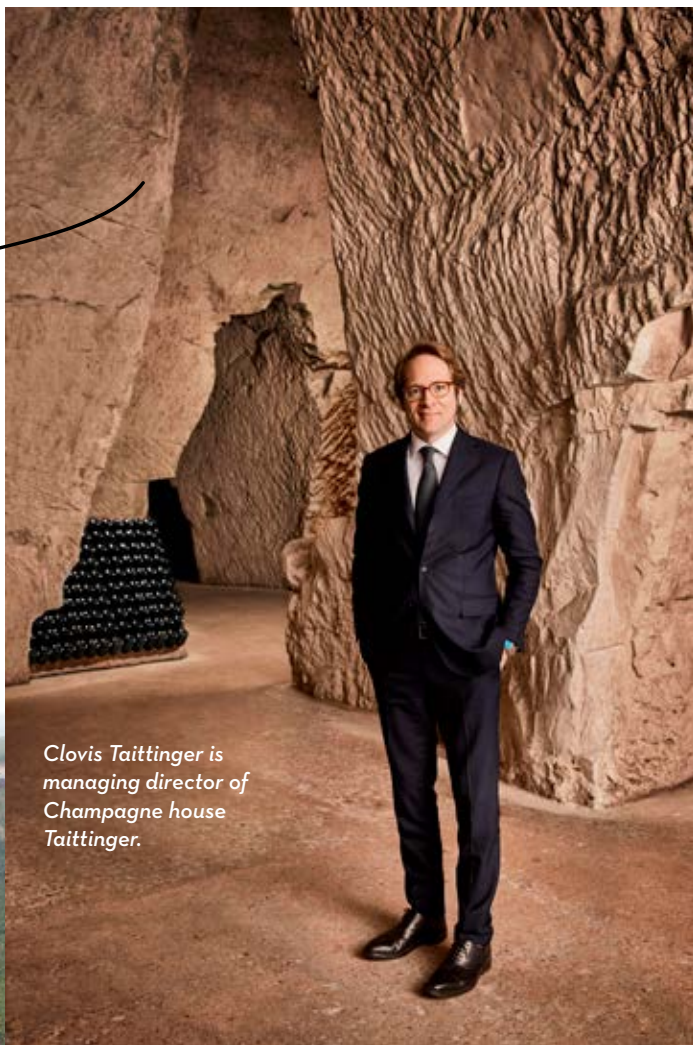
"Our guests want to explore and discover with wine," added Thomas. "And Franciacorta is a stunner at the table. I always want to take a moment to explain Franciacorta, no matter the level of familiarity with the region. We somms just need to be having more conversations about this wine, whenever the opportunity arises. The region is small but mighty in [terms of the] quality it brings to the table, so our conversations must be just as mighty at the table." ❧

Bubbles

and Banter

AN EVENING WITH **CHAMPAGNE
TAITTINGER MANAGING
DIRECTOR CLOVIS TAITTINGER**

by Kyle Billings



PHOTOS COURTESY OF TAITTINGER

Clovis Taittinger is managing director of Champagne house Taittinger.

Taittinger's Château de la Marquetterie in the commune of Pierry.

CLOVIS TAITTINGER, managing director of the renowned Champagne house that bears his name, wanted to talk about more than just the wine he was presenting when he paid a visit to Petrossian Restaurant in West Hollywood, California, last October. Seeking an oasis in the chaos of rush hour, guests who were invited to taste through a showcase of the producer's expressions were more than happy to oblige.

Upon their arrival at the unassuming brick building—where luxury bottles of Champagne were exhibited in the elegant foyer and display cases housed some of the finest caviar and salmon in the world—the attendees were welcomed with a glass of Taittinger Prestige Rosé by Petrossian's general manager, Christopher Klapp. Klapp charmed with confident hospitality, graciously pouring and sharing insights on the history of the restaurant.



As the group exchanged introductions, they were joined by the soft-spoken and unassuming Clovis, who was eager to learn more about his guests' backgrounds before the first pairing debuted: The aforementioned Taittinger Prestige Rosé, a blend of 85% white wine (Chardonnay, Pinot Noir, and Pinot Meunier) with 15% Pinot Noir to impart vibrancy, adeptly matched the briny freshness of caviar-topped blini and tsar-cut smoked salmon on cucumber.

Like the Wizard of Oz, Klapp ushered the congregants beyond a curtained threshold to a brilliant white parlor dotted with white orchids and dimly lit votives; there, a singular table awaited, with five of the newly released Zalto wine glasses framing each setting. A jazz quartet played softly in the background as Clovis commenced dinner with a brief welcome but demurred at the thought of boastfully presenting each Champagne. Instead, he opted to emphasize the power of wine in the context of the

company gathered to enjoy it, whom he reminded that the present is a continuation of the past. "People forget that part of history is what we enjoy now," said Clovis, himself part of a distinguished family legacy along with his sister, company president Vitalie, and his father, honorary chairman Pierre-Emmanuel.



During the first seated course—crab elegantly presented within a tin of caviar and passion fruit, green apple, and cilantro—Rachel Macalisang, French category specialist at Kobrand (Taittinger's import partner), introduced the accompanying wine, Taittinger Brut la Française. The Champagne demonstrated the consistency of the house style as a Chardonnay-forward blend with Pinot Noir and Pinot Meunier that is aged for three years on the lees—18 months longer than required—to create an aromatic, fresh, fruit-driven, balanced profile.



The next Champagne was the Taittinger Folies de la Marquetterie, paired with an egg tart topped with smoked salmon and, naturally, a small mound of caviar. An homage to the original vineyards purchased by the Taittinger family surrounding the Château de la Marquetterie, the single-vineyard cuvée is composed of 35 different plots vinified separately before it's aged in oak to yield a rich yet balanced palate.

With the presentation of the pièce de résistance, the Taittinger 2013 Comtes de Champagne, Clovis was at last compelled to speak at length on the wine, which expressed a triumphant tension between steely richness and verve. "It is the height of elegance, which is simplicity and sophistication," he said. The grapes for Com-



tes de Champagne hail exclusively from the Grands Crus of the Côte des Blancs, the crème de la crème of Chardonnay in Champagne: Avize, Chouilly, Cramant, Oger, and Mesnil-sur-Oger.

Perhaps inspired by the effervescent Champagne, the dialogue became more animated as Clovis solicited opinions on travel destinations and restaurant trends while mediating the inevitable debate on natural wine. A friend of his in turn captivated the group with the tale of an adventure involving an intrepid border crossing in the West African country of Gabon while importing a pallet of Champagne.



Dessert arrived in the form of Vacherousse d'Argental alongside Taittinger Nocturne Rosé. With a dosage of 17.5 grams, the wine had a lifted sweetness that partnered perfectly with the creamy and soft-textured cow's milk cheese.

When asked what he would do if he were not involved in Champagne, Clovis responded, "If I could do anything else, I would be a doctor out of a passion for health—not just health of the body but our social and emotional well-being as well."

For Clovis, good health includes drinking good wine with good company. Not unlike his wines, his contemplative approach was invigorating. S|J

A Historic Heavyweight

HOME TO VICTORIA'S FIRST VINEYARD, **YERING STATION** REMAINS A PIONEER IN AUSTRALIA'S YARRA VALLEY by Kate Newton

WHEN A PAIR of Scottish brothers planted grapevines in 1838 on the hill-sides of an area known by the indigenous population as Yering in Australia's Yarra Valley, they were the unwitting founders of a viticultural legacy that would propel the little-known Victorian region to prominence on the world wine stage. Their winery, Yering Station, was taken over by Swiss-born vigneron Paul de Castella in the 1850s, and at the 1889 Paris Exhibition, a submission from the producer became the only Southern Hemisphere wine to win a Grand Prix award.

Yering Station's trajectory toward greater fame seemed all but assured, but a period of dormancy followed—quite a lengthy one. Its current chapter didn't begin until 1996, when the Rathbone family acquired the property and immediately set about expanding its vineyard holdings and building new facilities while renovating the original winery into a cellar door that now serves as the centerpiece of its hospitality program. "The Valley is incredibly fortunate that we are less

than an hour's drive from the middle of Melbourne, which is a city of 3 and a half million people with a lot of tourism and very much an arts, food, and culture scene. We are on the doorstep—people come out and spend the day enjoying the region," says Yering Station's chief winemaker, Brendan Hawker.

Today, Yering Station produces several lines of cool-climate wines not only from its five estate vineyards—planted to 12 varieties and 27 clones in alluvial sedimentary soils—but from additional properties in the Yarra Valley and other Victorian subregions. Chardonnay, Shiraz, Viognier, Cabernet Sauvignon, and Pinot Noir are its flagship grapes, with the latter representing over one-third of its annual production of roughly 80,000 cases. "In terms of production size in Australia, we're tiny, but in terms of price point, we punch well above our weight," says Hawker. "There's not a lot of Yarra Valley wine that sells for under \$20 a bottle," as does Yering Station's entry-level tier, Little Yering (available in the U.S. for \$17). "For the Little Yering range, we want something that's uncomplicated, that's varietal . . . [yet] something that's generous and has some complexity. Moving into the Village [tier, available for \$27], that's

where we're focusing on 100% Yarra Valley [fruit] to piece something together that's fresh and bright but does have a lovely creamy [texture] to it—just those extra layers of complexity," he explains.

Like the Village tier, the wines in the Estate range (\$37) are typically a blend of seven to 14 different parcels and are "a little bit more precise and intense in [their] flavor and acidity," Hawker says. "Some consumers are really drawn to that extra power, while some like a bit more of the generosity [of the Village wines]. It's important to have that difference in style . . . that's all driven by the vineyards. There's no intentional wine-making difference" in his and his team's approach, characterized in part by wild-yeast fermentation, gentle cap management, and judicious use of new French oak for aging. Finally, at the pinnacle of Yering Station's portfolio is its Reserve line (\$100), crafted with the "best of the best barrels" earmarked during the winery's annual blind allocation tasting. At a recent tasting in Los Angeles, the 2021 Reserve Cabernet Sauvignon was a standout, described by Hawker as "a supremely elegant style of Cabernet" characterized by an "autumnal" perfume of forest floor, red currant, tobacco, and cedar.

In a region home to "pioneers and young upstarts," in Hawker's words, Yering Station strives to honor its status as the former while embodying the fresh perspective of the latter. Producing in a solar-powered winery and employing sustainable practices like drip irrigation, the use of cover crops, and composting, it's currently awaiting the results of an audit to become certified by Sustainable Winegrowing Australia. "The commercial reality is that if you aren't certified, you will be left behind," he says. "It's a very broad, sort of all-encompassing [approach that] . . . forces you to rethink"—a challenge that's easy to embrace for a winery that's already undergone a rebirth. SJ

Brendan Hawker is chief winemaker at Yering Station, which produces cool-climate wines from its five estate vineyards as well as from additional properties in the Yarra Valley and other Victorian subregions.



PHOTO COURTESY OF YERING STATION



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More than 100 winemakers and winery representatives gathered with friends and family to celebrate their participation in the 2024 Slow Wine Guide USA.



PHOTOS: PAIGE COMRIE

Driving Forces

SLOW WINE USA DEBUTS ITS 2024 GUIDE AT GRGICH HILLS ESTATE

by Deborah Parker Wong

LAST DECEMBER, a like-minded group of winemakers and winegrowers gathered to share the fruits of their labor and celebrate being part of the Slow Wine USA community while marking the release of the seventh edition of the *Slow Wine Guide USA*.

Upon arriving at the event, lavishly hosted by Grgich Hills Estate in Rutherford, California, they were greeted by the Slow Wine USA team, including myself as national editor; managing editor Pamela Strayer; and several of our field coordinators. Grgich's hospitality team set the stage for an unforgettable afternoon of camaraderie and wine tasting at stations organized by subregion (as in the guide), where producers from Oregon, New York, Mendocino County, Santa Cruz County, and the Central Coast joined dozens of their cohorts from Napa Valley and Sonoma County.

In her opening remarks, Grgich president Violet Grgich welcomed everyone to the estate, which serves as a guiding light for the adoption of regenerative farming methods in Napa Valley and be-



Grgich Hills Estate president Violet Grgich and Darrin Low, winemaker at Domaine Anderson in the Anderson Valley.

yond. "We are not only safeguarding the environment but reshaping the industry's approach toward sustainability," she said. "Our Regenerative Organic Certification signals a new horizon for wineries, and we are proud to be at the forefront of this movement in Napa Valley."

Grgich vice president of winemaking Ivo Jeramaz thanked attendees for prioritizing the ethos and praxes of the Slow Food and Slow Wine organizations. Jeramaz's ongoing efforts to educate the industry about the cost benefits of farming without



Slow Wine national editor Deborah Parker Wong with Grgich vice president Ivo Jeramaz and Kris Fade, co-founder of Analemma Wines in Oregon.

synthetic inputs and the best practices that have enabled Grgich's vineyards to thrive are a driving force for change.

In hosting the event, Grgich Hills Estate succeeded in bringing the Slow Wine community together in person for the first time in the history of the guide. This unprecedented in-kind donation has planted the seeds for the continued growth of the community, which increased by 29% between 2022 and 2023, as wineries are already stepping up to host the 2024 gathering. *sj*



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PART TWO OF OUR
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LEADERS

THE ALEXANDER VALLEY

Winegrowers association is gearing up to present one of its most successful educational outreach programs for the trade this spring: 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 two 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, Cloverdale, Geyserville, Jintown, Healdsburg, and Maacama. SJ

PHOTO COURTESY OF ALEXANDER VALLEY VINEYARDS



Cyrus Alexander built the Alexander Valley schoolhouse in 1868. A century later the building was moved to a hill overlooking the vineyards on the Wetzel family's Alexander Valley Vineyard estate and restored; its image is now featured on the Alexander School Reserve label.



Jake Hawkes and his mom, Paula Stone Hawkes.

PHOTO COURTESY OF HAWKES WINERY

Hawkes 2018 Cabernet Sauvignon, Stone Vineyard, Alexander Valley, Sonoma County (\$95)

The Hawkes family has been growing grapes in the same Alexander Valley vineyards for over 50 years. Referring to themselves as farmers who make wine, they don't believe in fining, using a lot of new oak, picking at 28 Brix, reverse osmosis, or advanced phenolic profiling: They simply aim to make wines that are pure and direct expressions of the place they come from. This rapturous red certainly succeeds on that front, taking flight with a parade of wet stone, licorice, blackberry, dark chocolate, and espresso. Sage-seasoned cedar adds an Old World tone, followed by a kiss of balsamic on the finish. **96** —*Meridith May*



Rodney Strong 2019 Rockaway Cabernet Sauvignon, Alexander Valley, Sonoma County (\$90)

Yielding this treasured single-vineyard expression, Rockaway was established in 1994, planted mostly to Cabernet Sauvignon along with the four other main red Bordeaux varieties. The site rises up to an elevation of 750 feet on well-drained, gravelly clay soils over fractured greywacke sandstone. The wine delights with a unique entry and grainy, lush flavors of dried flowers, roasted coffee, and ripe blackberry preserves. Notes of laurel and fennel are sweetened by mocha and amplified by toasted walnut on the teeth-gripping—yet ultimately elegant—finish. **97** —*M.M.*



PHOTO COURTESY OF ZIALENA WINERY

Robert Young Wine Estate 2020 Scion Cabernet Sauvignon, Alexander Valley, Sonoma County (\$76)

Sourced from the 448-acre Young Estate, this vintage of the winery's flagship Cabernet celebrates the 23rd anniversary of the first red wine bottled by the family in 1997; "Scion" refers to both a family descendant and a young shoot grafted onto a vine. Earth tones are clear, focused, and enhanced by savory notes of black olive, graphite, and licorice as vibrant plum and dry, grainy plum-skin tannins coat the tongue. Sandalwood notes are as elegant as they are exotic, spiced with white pepper and soothed by blackberry-vanilla liqueur. The texture turns to cashmere on the finish. **97** —*M.M.*



Alexander Valley Vineyards 2019 Alexander School Reserve Cabernet Sauvignon, Alexander Valley, Sonoma County (\$60)

Grown on a steep 30% grade, this is a limited-release, single-vineyard wine that focuses on the winery's best lots. It's floral and refined, with lavender and chocolate that melts on impact. Graphite increases in intensity on the midpalate, blurring the boundaries of savory fruit intensity and oak integration. Italian herbs, plum skin, and blackberry are flavorful and textural. **95** —*M.M.*



Nurtured today by Mark (pictured) and Lisa Mazzoni, Zialena is a family legacy that's named for the siblings' aunt (zia) Lena, known for her warm hospitality and her ravioli. With a rich history that spans over a century, their Geyserville estate has been stewarded by four generations.

Zialena 2019 Reserve Cabernet Sauvignon, Geyserville, Alexander Valley, Sonoma County (\$82)

This distinguished red crafted by Mark Mazzoni is rich and plush, with a creamy base of cassis liqueur. Supple tannins join a juicy flow of red fruit accompanied by olive tapenade, sweet tobacco, and red tea before a layer of maple and saffras descends on the finish. **95** —*M.M.*



Front row: Lars Leicht, VP of education, The SOMM Journal. Back row, from left to right: Pablo Cúneo, enologist, Bodegas Luigi Bosca; Francisco March, South American category specialist, Kobrand Wine & Spirits; Andrew Wolfe, Western United States sales manager, Antigal Winery & Estates; Carlos de Carlos, international sales director, Paul Hobbs Wines; and Germán Di Cesare, head winemaker, Trivento.

PHOTO: RAFAEL PETERSON



AN EVOLUTION IN EXTRAVAGANCE

OUR **"PREMIUM ARGENTINA: A NEW MOVEMENT
IN LUXURY WINE"** SEMINAR AT SOMMCON 2023
SHOWED JUST HOW FAR THE COUNTRY HAS COME

BY JESSIE BIRSCHBACH

N opening our “Premium Argentina: A New Movement in Luxury Wine” seminar in San Diego last fall, panel moderator Lars Leicht, *The SOMM Journal’s* VP of education, revealed a recent accomplishment on his bucket list: “I drove from Chile over the Andes to Argentina. It was thrilling, and what impressed me the most as we got over the border were the colors of the soil in Argentina. The vistas were striking, but the colors and the striations in the soils—the reds, the blues, the oranges, the yellows—were fascinating, and I couldn’t help but think what all that must do for the wine,” he said.

Prior to the late 1990s, those varied, mostly alluvial soils were planted to grapes that mainly ended up in cheap bulk wine; it took a lot of hard work and a little bit of luck for Argentina to get where it is today. But now we can truly say that, combined with the rest of the country’s extraordinary natural resources—the snowmelt and cold winds from the Andes Mountains; the sunny, dry, continental climate; the high elevations—this terroir is capable of producing some of the best Cabernet Sauvignon and certainly the best Malbec in the world. Read on to find out how Argentina went from drowning in plonk to sailing on a sea of luxury.



PHOTO: RAFAEL PETERSON

A packed house for “Premium Argentina” at SomCon 2023.

WINES: Bodega Norton Lote Negro, Valle de Uco, Argentina (\$45); Alta Vista Single Vineyard Alizarine Malbec, Luján de Cuyo, Argentina (\$55)

PRESENTER: Francisco March, South American category specialist, Kobrand Wine & Spirits

Kobrand Wine & Spirits South American category specialist Francisco March was on hand to discuss not one but two wines, Bodega Norton’s Lote Negro from the Valle de Uco and Alta Vista’s Single Vineyard Alizarine Malbec from Luján de Cuyo, as well as the differences between the two producers and the ways in which they complement one another within the Kobrand portfolio.

Established in 1895, Bodega Norton is not only Argentina’s oldest winery but also one of its largest, producing 25 million liters of wine each year. Today owned by the Swarovski family, it sources fruit from five different estates totaling 2,000 acres in Luján de Cuyo and the Valle de Uco. “Most of the premium Malbec is coming from these two areas,” said March, adding that the Bodega Norton Lote Negro, a blend of Malbec and Cabernet Franc, “is Uco Valley in a glass.”

Alta Vista is much newer and smaller than Bodega Norton. Founded by Patrick d’Aulan (whose family once owned Champagne house Piper-Heidsieck) in Luján de Cuyo in 1998, it produces only 3 million liters of wine a year. But it too has a claim to stake: In 2001, it became the first winery to make a single-vineyard wine in Argentina, as d’Aulan and Alta Vista’s French winemaker, Didier Debono, believed that the Malbec grown in Luján de Cuyo’s Alizarine Vineyard needed to be showcased on its own. Planted in 1923, the site sits at 3,000 feet in elevation, where it yields a mere one bottle of wine per vine, so production is highly limited.

Winding up his presentation, March reflected on the status of Malbec from Argentina today: “Malbec may be from Cahors, France, but it became an Argentinian citizen. Today Malbec is so diverse. Sometimes sommeliers tell me, ‘Oh, I already have a Malbec, I don’t need another for my list,’ but I think you should absolutely have more than one because it really is so diverse—there [are] so many layers to Malbec.”



WINE: Viña Cobos 2019 Vinculum Malbec, Mendoza, Argentina (\$70)

PRESENTER: Carlos de Carlos, international sales director, Paul Hobbs Wines

We of course had to include Viña Cobos in our seminar: The producer is one of a small handful of pioneers responsible for giving Argentine wine the credit it deserves. Established by renowned American winemaker Paul Hobbs in 1998, Viña Cobos earned an astounding 95 points from Robert Parker for its inaugural vintage before going on to earn 100 points from James Suckling for its 2011 Malbec, making it not only the first Argentine wine but the first South American wine ever to receive a perfect score.

Today, Hobbs runs Viña Cobos with head winemaker Diana Fornasero, assistant winemaker Nicolas Antich, viticulturalists Marina Miceli and Pablo Debernardi, CEO Jose Gimenez, and director of international sales Carlos de Carlos, who was on hand to present the velvety, rich Viña Cobos 2019 Vinculum Malbec.

Described by de Carlos as “Mendoza in a glass,” Vinculum gets its name from the Latin word for “to bond,” signifying the relationship between the winery and the farmers who supply its Malbec. “Vinculum is something new for us, and we’ve created it to honor our growers,” said Paul Hobbs in a webinar *The SOMM Journal* hosted last November, “Malbec Master Class With Paul Hobbs.” (See page 47 for a recap of the webinar, which we highly suggest watching on our website.)

Born of integrity, pride, and perhaps a little competitiveness, Vinculum is made with the best fruit that the team selects each year from a few of the roughly 50 growers they work with. The chosen farmers are celebrated at an educational lunch with the winemaking team, where they get to taste one another’s wines. The 2019 vintage highlights two growers from Luján de Cuyo and two from the Valle de Uco. “It has turned out to be a very interactive and collaborative program that has benefited us and them,” said Hobbs.

Indeed, it’s unlike any other program in Argentina. Most producers in the country require growers to deliver their fruit prior to payment, which they may not see for months. “So I saw this as an opportunity,” said Hobbs, adding that when he started paying them up front in the late 1990s, “[it] was a sort of radical shift.” The result has been a substantial increase in effort on the part of Viña Cobos’ grower-partners, and this is clearly reflected in the depth of Vinculum.



WINE: Trivento 2019 Eolo Vineyard Malbec, Luján de Cuyo, Argentina (\$120)

PRESENTER: Germán Di Cesare, head winemaker

Although it seemed most of the experts on our panel preferred the Malbec grown in the Valle de Uco, Trivento’s head winemaker, Germán Di Cesare, was perhaps Luján de Cuyo’s biggest champion of the day. “We can consider [Luján de Cuyo] the best region not only for the quality in terms of soil, weather, and everything else but also because [of] its story: [It’s here that] the wine industry in Argentina started” following a much longer tradition of viticulture in the country, he said—adding that his family was part of that history, as he is the descendent of Italian and Spanish immigrants who came to Mendoza in search of a better life in the early 1900s. “[Their influence is] why there are so many olive trees in our vineyards,” said Di Cesare.

The Mendoza River is one of Luján de Cuyo’s most defining and influential features, responsible for distributing its alluvial soils while separating the northern part of the region from the south. It also plays a role in cooling the otherwise hot air, helping to funnel in polar winds from the Andes—to which the winemaker likewise gave due credit: “We like to say



that our wine comes from the mountains, because they give us the altitude, the soils, the rivers, the water, and the thermal amplitude.”

Planted in 1912 by the aforementioned immigrants, the tiny 10-acre Eolo Vineyard, situated on the north bank of the river at 3,200 feet in Luján de Cuyo’s Vistalba district, is today the source of the velvety, bright Trivento 2019 Eolo Vineyard Malbec. A geophysical study of the site years ago determined that it contains four distinct parcels with varying soils: Trivento, which is owned by Concha y Toro, harvests and vinifies each parcel separately “to make the best expression of Luján de Cuyo,” said Di Cesare.

WINE: Antigal 2018 ONE La Dolores Malbec, Mendoza, Argentina (\$50)

PRESENTER: Andrew Wolfe, Western United States sales manager, Antigal Winery & Estates

Thanks to its high quality yet low \$15 SRP, it’s quite likely you’ve seen Antigal’s UNO Malbec in a retail store or by-the-glass program, but “the wine we chose to present today for the tasting is pretty much the best wine that we make,” said Antigal sales manager Andrew Wolfe of the Antigal 2018 ONE La Dolores Malbec.

Named after the proprietor’s grandmother, Dolores Cartoni, La Dolores Vineyard sits on sandy loam soils over calcareous substrate at an elevation of 3,600 feet in the Gualtallary district of the Valle de Uco. La Dolores Vineyard is the source of ONE, which is the first wine Antigal ever made, but an annual production of roughly 1,000 six-packs is not always guaranteed as Antigal’s winemaker, Miriam Gómez, won’t release the wine if the vintage is not to her standards. Noting ONE’s dark color—in fact the darkest of the lineup—Wolfe explained that the vineyard-management team drops fruit a few weeks ahead of harvest, leaving the remaining berries to develop more than they would have otherwise. This “makes for a really concentrated wine,” as does an aging regimen of 24 months in 80% new French and 20% American oak.

Antigal is located on the site of a historic winery in Maipú built in 1897, which was restored at the turn of the 21st century and now houses a state-of-the-art gravity-flow facility that produces wine from estate vineyards in the Valle de Uco and Maipú regions of Mendoza.



WINE: Bodegas Luigi Bosca 2019 Paraiso, Valle de Uco, Argentina (\$120)

PRESENTER: Pablo Cúneo, enologist

Having evolved in parallel with the development of the Argentine wine industry, Bodegas Luigi Bosca remains one of Argentina's few continually family-owned and -operated wineries. Founded in 1901 by the Arizu family, who were also instrumental in helping to establish Luján de Cuyo as an official appellation in 1989, Luigi Bosca is now one of Argentina's best-known wine brands. "Excellence has been the main objective since the beginning," said enologist Pablo Cúneo.

in the 1990s that enabled technological advancements such as the move to drip irrigation—all of which optimized the natural benefits of the terroir to "result in the current incredible quality of our wines," in Cúneo's words.

Luigi Bosca owns vineyards in Luján de Cuyo, Maipú, and the Valle de Uco, the latter of which is the source of the fruit for the Bodegas Luigi Bosca 2019 Paraiso; the label is meant to pay tribute to Finca El Paraíso, the location of the Arizu family home. "El Paraíso was purchased in 1926, and it became a kind of laboratory for us, planted with different grapes and trellising systems. It was in the 1960s [when] we started to blend Malbec with Cabernet Sauvignon, an innovation at the time," said Cúneo. Paraiso remains roughly the same today: The blend of 71% Malbec and 29% Cabernet Sauvignon comes from three different sites in the Valle de Uco, namely Gualtallary in Tupungato, Altamira in San Carlos, and Los Árboles in Tunuyán. "The Malbec from Altamira expresses a great deal of floral character. The Malbec from Los Árboles brings tannin, structure, and some cherry [and] black fruit notes. And the Malbec from Gualtallary, one of the highest areas of the Uco Valley at 1,250 meters [4,101 feet,] brings the red fruit character and the acid. The Cabernet is also from Gualtallary, and all of this brings complexity to the wine."

The industry veteran, who joined Luigi Bosca in 2017, provided an overview of Argentina's ascension from a reputation for plonk to wine-world renown, from its conversion to modern viticultural practices in the 1980s to its discovery of Malbec at roughly the same time to an economic boom

The producer vinifies each plot separately in small stainless-steel tanks and also ages them separately in French oak barrels. Each barrel is tasted prior to blending "to achieve our style that strives for intensity, precision of fruit character, complexity, and elegance," said Cúneo. Of all the wines presented, Luigi Bosca's was indeed the most beautifully refined.

Finca El Paraíso in the Valle de Uco.



PHOTOS COURTESY OF BODEGAS LUIGI BOSCA

MALBEC'S FIRST AMERICAN CHAMPION

RECAPPING
OUR
MALBEC
MASTER
CLASS WITH
PAUL HOBBS

PHOTOS COURTESY OF PAUL HOBBS WINES



Likely the first producer that comes to mind for a sommelier considering Argentine Malbec is Catena Zapata. After taking over the family business in the 1980s, Nicolás Catena Zapata slowly but surely modernized every aspect of winery operations—from overhauling the vineyards to implementing temperature-controlled stainless-steel tanks and new French oak barrels—and by the late 1990s, Catena Zapata was synonymous with Argentine wine. In short, Nicolás helped shift our perception of Argentina as a producer of mostly bulk wine to what it is today: the source of some of the world's best Cabernet Sauvignon and undoubtedly the best Malbec. But he wasn't alone in this endeavor: Paul Hobbs helped him upgrade Catena Zapata before establishing his own winery, Viña Cobos, in 1998. While the latter is never *not* mentioned among Argentina's pioneering, benchmark producers, does the wine industry give Hobbs enough credit for his role in elevating Malbec to the world stage? If it doesn't, it should.

Last November, we hosted a webinar titled "Malbec Master Class with Paul Hobbs." While chock-full of information on the history and evolution of Argentine wine, it also revealed Hobbs' pure love for the country and its signature grape as well as his drive to help them both succeed.

It all began when Hobbs was at a crossroads in his own winemaking career, having just arrived in Argentina in 1988: "I was looking to start my own winery but wasn't sure how I was going [to do it,] because starting a winery is a capital-intensive endeavor," said Hobbs. He ended up meeting Nicolás through the latter's brother: "It was a fortuitous situation that I went to school with his younger brother, and the day I met Nicolás was the day that began what we all know today as the rise of Argentina," he added.



Paul Hobbs founded Viña Cobos in 1998.

Pictures of Hobbs with antiquated winemaking equipment and of pre-modernized vineyards located at lower elevations with flood irrigation channels and waist-high vines (trained to protect the grapes from occasional hail) represented the Argentina that he first encountered. Working with Nicolás as Catena Zapata's winemaker, Hobbs would help to usher the country into the modern world of winemaking, talking growers into using trellising systems that would allow for more air and sunlight, netting to protect from hail (as well as from overexposure to Argentina's relentless sun), drip irrigation (rather than flood irrigation channels), and updated winemaking equipment.

But perhaps his biggest contribution involved a shift in the location of vineyards in the Mendoza province. "Our first move in 1992 was to plant at higher elevation,

The Viña Cobos winery in Luján de Cuyo, Mendoza, Argentina.

[which] I thought would get us to cooler climates. That was heavily opposed by the viticultural experts in the region at the time. They strongly felt that . . . the Valle de Uco would just be too cold for fine wine grapes and certainly not warm enough to ripen Malbec," said Hobbs. Today, it's arguably Mendoza's most reputable source of Malbec, characterized by high-altitude vineyards ranging from 2,800 to 5,550 feet; alluvial sandy soils with rocks layered in limestones; an average temperature of 57 degrees Fahrenheit; and an annual rainfall of 9 inches.

But Luján de Cuyo is equally important to Hobbs. Considered Mendoza's traditional fine-wine region, it sits at a lower elevation (2,100–3,300 feet), where it's known for a desert climate and alluvial soils. The key to success here, in Hobbs' view, is close proximity to the Mendoza River, not for irrigation purposes so much as for the fact that it "acts as a cold air duct funneled from the icefields of the Andes and provides cold nights. We want to be planted near the river," he said.

After experimenting in these two regions for Catena Zapata over the course of a decade, Hobbs founded Viña Cobos with the "goal not [to] build a commercial enterprise but to just study Malbec—to see if it was ageworthy and if it had the ability to reflect the delicate aspects of Argentina's microterroir," in his words. Considering the great recognition that the wines of Viña Cobos have since garnered, it's safe to say the answer is yes. *SH*

{ cover story }

THE TRIUMPH OF TEAMWORK

Sequoia Grove head winemaker Jesse Fox, executive chef Britny Maureze, and director of vineyard operations Jake Terrell.



A “fairy ring” of redwood trees on the Sequoia Grove property.

MEET THE PEOPLE WHO KEEP **SEQUOIA GROVE WINERY** IN THE GROOVE

STORY BY LIZ THACH, MW / PHOTOS BY HARDY WILSON



There is a legend that fairies dance on the stumps of fallen redwood trees; the saplings that grow from the base of the mother tree are said to form a “fairy ring.” At Sequoia Grove Winery in Napa Valley, California, visitors can actually taste wine while standing in the middle of one. It’s among the few wineries on earth where this is possible. “The trees that form this fairy ring and the others on the property are said to have been planted in the early 1900s,” Rick Bonitati, CEO of Sequoia Grove, told me as he handed me a glass of the producer’s 2022 Napa Valley Chardonnay.

As I raised the glass to the light, I noticed sunbeams cascading down from the top branches of the six 200-foot redwoods that encircled us. They turned the liquid to a shimmering gold, making the experience of smelling and tasting the fresh, crisp wine, with its mineral-edged notes of lemon and green apple, that much more enchanting. “Some people are confused as to why we call our redwoods ‘sequoias,’” continued Bonitati, “but these are *Sequoia sempervirens*, also known as coast redwoods, and they are the namesake of our winery.” (*Sequoiadendron giganteum* refers to the giant sequoia trees that are found primarily in the mountains.) “Redwoods on the valley floor of Napa Valley are rare, and so we

wanted to create this great experience [of tasting among the trees] to share with our guests," he added.

This being my own first visit to Sequoia Grove, I was excited to meet the team who helps to make the magic happen: namely those who craft the wine and produce the food pairings that have helped the winery to win "Best Tasting Room in Napa Valley" from *Napa Valley Life Magazine's* Best of Reader's Choice Awards the past three years in a row.

A Talented Trio

Though Sequoia Grove was founded in 1979 under the guidance of Andre Tchelistcheff—who encouraged its owners to plant Bordeaux varieties in the dusty soil of what is now the Rutherford AVA in the center of Napa Valley—the trio of artisans who tend the vines and make the wine and food here with the support of their vineyard, cellar, and hospi-

tality crews are relatively recent arrivals.

Director of vineyard operations Jake Terrell joined the team in 2018 following 20 years of experience managing such famous properties as E. & J. Gallo's Monte Rosso, JUSTIN Vineyards & Winery, and St. Francis Winery & Vineyards. In his free time, he enjoys tasting old white Burgundies with head winemaker Jesse Fox, who started at Sequoia Grove in 2022 after serving for 15 years in various positions at Harlan Estate, Amici Cellars, and Ram's Gate. Prior to that he trained as a chef, attending Le Cordon Bleu in Paris and working at several restaurants in Chicago before moving to Napa Valley to become chef de parti at the famed French Laundry.

It's perhaps due to his culinary background that when Fox talks about wine, he focuses on the components that make it food friendly, such as texture. It may also be why he and Sequoia Grove executive chef Britny Maureze seem to

work so well together in concocting truly creative wine and food pairings.

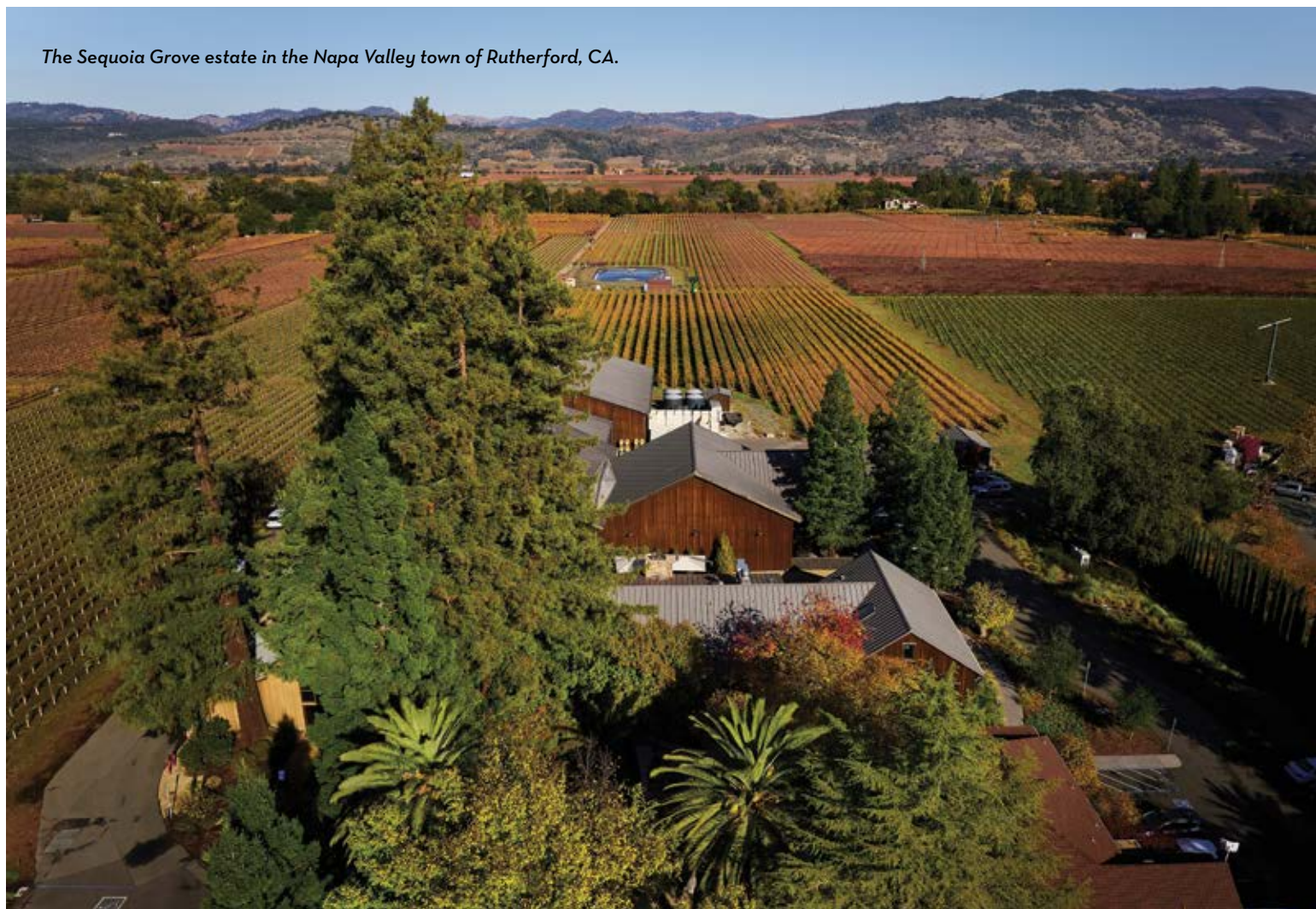
A graduate of the Culinary Institute of America, Maureze started at Sequoia Grove in 2018 after cooking at Chateau Montelena, St. Supéry Estate Vineyards & Winery, and Signorello Estate. She is known throughout Napa Valley for her talent in pairing Cabernet Sauvignon with unique vegetarian and fish dishes.

After introducing me to this trio, Bonitati wished us a productive tour of the estate. By its end, I was highly impressed with the camaraderie, respect, energy, and sense of fun that seem to revolve around Terrell, Fox, and Maureze even as they maintain a shared focus on the quality of Sequoia Grove's vineyards, wine, food, and customer experience.

In the Vineyard

As we walked toward the vineyard, Terrell and Fox provided more background

The Sequoia Grove estate in the Napa Valley town of Rutherford, CA.



on the history of the property. “[It] was actually part of a land grant given to George Yount in 1836,” said Fox. “Our tasting room is located in what was the original barn, built in 1908. It wasn’t until 1979 that Jim and Steve Allen bought the property and built the winery.”

Sequoia Grove is located on Highway 29, but as it’s set back from the roadway and surrounded by those tall redwoods, there is a peaceful, relaxed feeling on the grounds around the tasting room. Along with the trees, flowers and shrubs create intimate seating areas in front of the wine cellar and vineyard; a new executive kitchen and indoor dining area sit to the right of the tasting room.

We stopped to examine a small group of grapevines planted near some of the outdoor tables. “This is Jake’s petting zoo,” joked Fox. Terrell laughed, explaining, “It’s more like a petting vineyard, because we have planted many different grape varieties here and we encourage people to touch the vines and taste the grapes when they are ripe. It also serves as an educational component in our tours.”

Suddenly Terrell’s energetic border collie, Koda, joined us, and we followed her as she raced off toward the large vineyard. “This is the Sequoia Grove estate vineyard,” said Terrell. “It is 18 acres, planted to 85% Cabernet Sauvignon and 15% other Bordeaux varietals. We are situated on the Rutherford Bench, so the soil is primarily alluvial, with gravelly loam.” As his dog dashed ahead through the vines, he added that the trellis system is VSP with crossarms, which ensures that the leaves and grape clusters get more air and light. His team uses cover crops and is trying to reduce tillage to lessen the winery’s carbon footprint. “We are experimenting with an aerator-type machine that they use on golf courses instead of traditional tilling with a tractor,” he noted. Fox, for his part, reported that he and Terrell start tasting and testing the grape clusters around six weeks before harvest in order to determine the perfect time to start picking, which is done entirely by hand.

They both described the three other vineyards that Sequoia Grove owns. Tonnella Estate, also in the Rutherford AVA, is planted to 50 acres of primarily



WHAT THE SOMMS ARE SAYING ABOUT SEQUOIA GROVE

BY MARCI SYMINGTON

Patrick Wert

GENERAL MANAGER, CARBONE, MIAMI, FL

Carbone was established in the Greenwich Village neighborhood of New York City in 2013. Named for chef and co-owner Mario Carbone, it now has locations in Dallas; Las Vegas; Hong Kong; Doha, Qatar; and Miami—the latter of which opened in 2020 to serve Italian comfort food in a luxurious space in the heart of South Beach.

General manager Patrick Wert says that the sumptuous decor of the restaurant, incorporating vibrant velvet upholstery and Murano chandeliers, was designed to evoke the feeling of stepping into a scene from a movie. Complementing the ambiance as well as the cuisine—which Wert calls “classic Italian but done in a way that no one has ever done before”—the carefully curated wine list naturally leans on Italian selections, with Sequoia Grove Cabernet Sauvignon standing out as the sole California red available by the glass. In fact, explains Wert, “Sequoia Grove is one of the few listings by the glass that has been around since day one of the Miami opening. I think the one philosophy for Carbone is to stay true to the theme and identity of our unique restaurants, and on the wine side, we want to make sure people can find something they can connect with.”

To that end, he emphasizes the versatility of the wine, noting how well it pairs with several of Carbone’s standout dishes. Its dark fruit characteristics enhance and are in turn enhanced by the rich umami flavors of Carbone’s signature porterhouse steak and veal parmigiana; similarly, its subtle bell-pepper undertones are revealed when it’s served with the slow-cooked pork chop and peppers or the cherry pepper ribs. And its acidity beautifully complements the luscious richness of lobster drenched in a spicy tomato sauce. ➔



PHOTOS: PATTI BARRETO



Natalie Muehlfeld

**GENERAL MANAGER, THE BARN AT
ROCKY FORK CREEK, GAHANNA, OH**

Housed in a renovated barn, The Barn at Rocky Fork Creek in Gahanna, Ohio, combines elegance with rustic charm both inside its dining room and vibrant bourbon lounge and out on its patio, situated alongside the namesake creek.

To accompany the steak- and seafood-centric American cuisine the restaurant serves, general manager Natalie Muehlfeld offers Sequoia Grove Napa Valley Cabernet

Sauvignon by the glass and bottle. "It is a go-to for our staff; it's one of those wines that is universal yet special," she explains. "Some people get intimidated by many Cabs due to strong tannins, but [this one] has a smooth, rich, and forward taste, making it a good option for everyone. It is one of our top sellers."

Here in the Midwest where "corn and butter are our best friends," in Muehlfeld's words, The Barn chef Wayne Schumaker aims to highlight the Sequoia Grove Cabernet's versatility when it comes to pairing. "We're a steakhouse at heart," Muehlfeld says, which means that the wine is a frequent partner for beef, but she and her team find that it also "complements . . . dishes like the pan-seared salmon with corn succotash in a butter-based corn emulsion." Specifically, she notes, "With butter-based sauces and fatty filets such as New York strip, the wine cuts through, offering earthy tones. However, with a [leaner] dish like scallops or filet mignon, you'll get ripe, dark fruit flavors. The wine's flavor can change completely depending on the dish."



David Berson

**CO-OWNER/VICE PRESIDENT, PETER
LUGER STEAK HOUSE, BROOKLYN, NY**

Peter Luger Steak House in the Williamsburg neighborhood of Brooklyn, New York, is an old-school German beer hall-style establishment that's celebrated for its high-quality dry-aged steaks. Established in 1887 by German immigrant Carl Luger, the restaurant was purchased in 1950 by Sol Forman, who sought to preserve its traditional ambiance and timeless appeal. Today, it has outposts in Great Neck, Long Island; Las Vegas; and Tokyo, Japan.

David Berson, Forman's great-grandson, currently serves as the vice president of Peter Luger, which he co-owns with his grandmother and two cousins. He features the Sequoia Grove Napa Valley Cabernet Sauvignon by the bottle on the restaurant's wine list, whose selection, he notes, embodies the family's ethos of striking a balance between well-known classics and lesser-known gems.

Speaking to the approachability and balance of the wine, Berson adds that it's tailor-made for connoisseurs and novices alike. "Our bread and butter has always been Napa Cabernets, and Sequoia Grove is this flagship Cabernet that I think falls nicely into appealing to multiple taste preferences," he says. "It's a gentler red with easier tannins, and you can pair it with our sizzling bacon appetizer or porterhouse steak. I think it can seamlessly weave throughout a meal and be a good fit for our kind of tried-and-true menu."



Sequoia Grove's barrel cellar.

Cabernet Sauvignon; State Lane Estate in Yountville has 18 acres of vines on volcanic soil similar to that found in To Kalon Vineyard; and a new, as-yet-unnamed 104-acre Mt. Veeder property, acquired in 2023, will be planted to 31 acres of primarily Cabernet and other Bordeaux varieties at elevations of up to 1,700 feet.

"All of our existing vineyards and the winery are certified Napa Green," explained Terrell. Napa Green is considered to be the most rigorous of the sustainability certifications in California, with new guidelines to eliminate Roundup (which is still allowed by other certification programs) as well as much more stringent requirements for social equity, justice, and inclusion. "One of the positive actions that came out of Napa Green's focus on diversity inclusion is that we started offering ESL training courses for our workers, and one of our team members received a big award and was able to go to Washington, D.C., and meet Nancy Pelosi," Terrell stated proudly.

Other sustainability initiatives at Sequoia Grove include its involvement with MCE's Deep Green program, through which it is now using 100% renewable energy. The winery is also a member of 1% for the Planet and supports the non-profit Save the Redwoods League.



**Sequoia Grove
2021 Cabernet
Sauvignon, Napa
Valley (\$55)** Juicy
and sleek, with
a dusty core of
mocha and plum
skin. Tannins
smooth out on
the midpalate to
reveal dark fruit
and balsamic.

The finish endures, deliver-
ing coffee-cedar charm. **95**
—Meridith May

A Barrel Tasting

Koda led us out of the vineyard and into the barrel cellar where Fox had organized a tasting. Immediately, the clever border collie approached a barrel and attempted to pull out the plastic bung with her teeth. “Stop that, Koda,” Terrell gently scolded. With a laugh, Fox said, “Yes, Koda has a habit of pulling out barrel bungs. Once we didn’t notice in time, and some of the wine leaked out on the floor.” Koda obediently moved away from the barrel, and Fox grabbed a wine thief so we could begin tasting some of the 2022 wines that were still aging.

“We are about 50% estate wines and 50% from purchased grapes,” said Fox, citing such Napa Valley vineyard sources as Morisoli and Lamoreaux, both known for excellent quality and concentration. “This is the 2022 Cambium, and a lot of the grapes are from Stagecoach Vineyard,” he added as he deftly poured a stream of dark red wine in my glass. “Cambium is Sequoia Grove’s signature Bordeaux blend made from the very best lots and terroir.” (The name refers to the cellular plant tissue that results in a growth ring on a plant, thus linking the wine to the giant redwoods on the property.) Fox was responsible for creating the final blend for 2022, and the early results are stunning, with complex notes of blackberry, graphite, and toasted oak

as well as a pleasing hint of earthy mocha on the finish.

Fox described his winemaking philosophy as “focusing on phenolics with a special interest in color and tannins to achieve power with elegance.” He believes in doing multiple rackings as they do in Bordeaux, so he doesn’t need to filter the wines.

When it comes to Chardonnay, he is all about showcasing the special terroir of the vineyard from which the grapes come while maintaining a crisp freshness and minerality. Perhaps this has to do with his love of white Burgundies—but regardless of the reason, I found the two 2022 Chardonnays I tasted to be just as distinctive as the Cabernets for which Sequoia Grove is “primarily known,” as Terrell had noted earlier on the tour. (In fact, the winery was among the first in Napa Valley to receive recognition for the variety when it won “Best American Cabernet Sauvignon” in 1985 at the American Wine Competition.)



The tasting room is located in a renovated barn dating back to 1908.

The first Chardonnay, from Sonoma Coast, was unfiltered and brimming with golden apple, hay, minerality, and toasted oak; it also had a wonderful texture. The second, from Carneros, showcased vibrant grapefruit, green pineapple, and piercing acidity.

On the way to the executive kitchen, we visited the fermentation room, which was updated with an impressive array of new stainless-steel tanks and other wine-making equipment in 2018.

A Focus on Cabernet Pairings

“Though Sequoia Grove Cabernet paired with a grilled steak is always delicious, I like to challenge myself to do something a little weird and wild to surprise people and elevate our wines,” said Maureze after Fox and Terrell (sans Koda) had ushered me into the gleaming and spotless kitchen. “Cabernet is very versatile and can be successfully paired with many dishes. My favorite pairings with Cab are vegetarian and pescatarian.”

Indeed, the winery’s website features 24 different recipes that Maureze updates seasonally. Among the most unique are buttermilk-fried, five-spiced quail and waffles with Sequoia Grove Lamoreaux Vineyard Cabernet Sauvignon and seared cauliflower steak with chimichurri and roasted fingerling potatoes alongside Sequoia Grove Syrah.

Such dishes are served as part of the “A Taste for Cabernet” experience, which includes four courses paired with four

estate wines. It’s hosted in the elegant Cambium Room, where the towering redwoods are visible through the windows and a fireplace blazes during the cooler months.

As for my own experience, we concluded the tour by settling around a quiet table in the original tasting room and taking in the joy of the 2021 lineup—one of Napa Valley’s most celebrated vintages. By the time we were finished, I knew why so many locals have chosen to be members of Sequoia Grove’s wine club. The winery is truly a classic, with a portfolio whose quality and elegance stand the test of time. **\$1**

{ cuisine }

FROM *Vine* TO TABLE

IN PASO ROBLES, FOOD AND
WINE GO HAND IN HAND

by Debbie Thomas



Rachel Haggstrom
is chef at JUSTIN
Vineyards & Winery.

PHOTO COURTESY OF RACHEL HAGGSTROM



PHOTO COURTESY OF JULIEN ASSEO

PASO ROBLES, once a hidden gem in San Luis Obispo County, California, is quickly becoming a world-class wine region and culinary destination, with two Michelin-starred restaurants and three others featured in the Michelin Guide.

Among the local chefs, restaurateurs, and someliers who are actively shaping this evolution, one striking trend is a shift toward eco-friendly practices. It's not merely a box to check; it's a commitment that resonates with consumers.

Chef Rachel Haggstrom of JUSTIN Vineyards & Winery's The Restaurant at JUSTIN is a huge proponent of sustainability. In addition to receiving one star from Michelin, she and her team also received a Green Star award for their industry-leading environmental and ethical standards. "Having a seasonal menu is just a basic expectation," says Haggstrom. "[Sustainability] is now the whole experience, from waste to sourcing to [using eco-friendly] front-of-the-house products. All these factors force chefs to think more responsibly."

At Les Petites Canailles, a Michelin Guide–recommended restaurant, chef Julien Asseo paints culinary masterpieces with local, seasonal ingredients from sustainable farms. "Now more than ever, we source everything we can locally.

Chef Julien Asseo of Les Petites Canailles.

Sommelier Ali Rush is owner of 15 Degrees C Wine Shop & Bar in nearby San Luis Obispo, CA.



through the Court of Master Sommeliers. Rush has seen an emergence of wines from Nicaragua, Uruguay, and Mexico's Valle de Guadalupe. Additionally, she is toasting with sparkling wines from the U.K. such as Gusbourne. It's a trend she finds exciting: England's bottle-fermented sparkling wines have experienced significant growth due to the warming climate.

With upwards of 300 wineries currently operating, Paso Robles' status as a top wine and food destination is only growing. As a board member of the Paso Wine Alliance, MacDonal says that "the Alliance sees no way but up for Paso Robles. Paso Robles wine will never trend down." Agrees Haggstrom, "The . . . landscape is expanding rapidly, and I'm thrilled, because Paso not only boasts exceptional wineries but award-winning restaurants." Ali Rush, for her part, expresses the hope that Paso Robles will maintain its focus on artisanal wine production. Despite the trend toward acquisitions by significant industry players, she believes that smaller wineries will persevere and thrive in a landscape that's attracting global recognition for its diverse and high-quality wines while distinguishing itself as a vibrant culinary destination. *§*

People want to know where their food is coming from," he says. Asseo, whose menu is a testament to his French heritage, maintains an award-winning wine list with an emphasis on producers who practice minimal intervention, thereby reducing their carbon footprint. It's developed a cult following for its extensive selection of Burgundy wines—a Domaine Leflaive 2017 Bâtard-Montrachet recently sold for \$1,750—among other bottlings of elevated quality and sophistication, such as the 1996 Château Lafite, which went for \$1,900.

Les Petites Canailles is not alone among area restaurants that are setting themselves apart by showcasing globally sourced wines that harmonize with the cuisines represented on their menus. The trend toward featuring lesser-known wine regions and grape varieties is one that enophiles eagerly embrace.

During my meeting with Carole MacDonal, co-owner of Il Cortile Ristorante with her husband, Santos, she shared her enthusiasm not just for local producers but also the wines of the Mediterranean and Southern Europe. In 2023, Portugal claimed the spotlight as the premier European destination at the World Travel Awards, closely trailed by vibrant Spain; recognized as the top seaside metropolitan destination, meanwhile, was Dubrovnik, Croatia, a country whose wines encapsulate the allure of the Mediterranean. MacDonal also echoed Asseo's sentiment about the growing popularity of elevated and more expensive wines: "We are selling Tenute Silvio Nardi Brunello di Montalcino, Gaja 1978 Barbaresco, older vintages of Alban Grenache and Syrah, and Saxum wines in the \$300–\$400 range."

Ali Rush, the owner of 15 Degrees C Wine Shop & Bar in nearby San Luis Obispo, is a Level 3 Certified Advanced Sommelier through the Wine & Spirit Education Trust and a Level 2 Certified Sommelier



Carole MacDonal is co-owner of Il Cortile Ristorante with her husband, Santos.

{ first person }

Uncorking the DREAM

WOMEN WINE PROFESSIONALS REWRITE THE
NARRATIVE IN AND AROUND WASHINGTON, D.C.

by Nicole Ramée

Editor's note: At SommCon 2023, the *Tasting Panel* staff signed on to serve as mentors to industry talents on the rise; in First Person, our mentees take the opportunity to share their stories.

I NEVER HAD A CLEAR VISION OF WHO OR WHAT I WANTED TO BE. In community college, I changed my major four times before I graduated with a bachelor's degree in international trade and marketing from the Fashion Institute of Technology in New York City in 2016. My career in the fashion industry was short-lived, so I headed back to my hometown of Lambertville, New Jersey, and began working as a server at Nektar Wine Bar in nearby New Hope, Pennsylvania. In the fall of 2018, I passed the introductory exam for the Court of Master Sommeliers (CMS), and in 2019 I ventured back to New York to work for Danny Meyer's Union Square Hospitality Group. In October of that year, I enrolled in the Intensive Sommelier Program at the International Culinary Center, where I achieved my Certified Sommelier certification from the CMS. In early 2020, I moved to Washington, D.C., to work at such multiple-Michelin-starred restaurants as Xiquet by Danny Lledo, where I received Michelin's Sommelier of the Year award. I am currently the sommelier at Pineapple and Pearls.

While I had connected with many extraordinary people since arriving in the District, it wasn't until the summer of 2022 that I was introduced to Women of Wine (WOW), a community in the D.C., Maryland, and Virginia (DMV) area. I did not know just how many women industry pros it encompassed until I was tagged in an Instagram story calling out a tenured food critic who had struggled in an online forum to name a single female sommelier in the D.C. area. In a matter of months, 300-plus female sommeliers, winemakers, retailers, and educators across the DMV were showcased in a Google document that identified them as leaders in wine. Since then, WOW founders Vanessa Cominsky, Erika Parjus, Niki Lang, Angie Duran, and Tammy Gordon have been able to take this list and use it as the foundation for a new nonprofit called Vin.Vitalité. Their mission is to provide a resource for women who are seeking career mentorships, networking opportunities, and scholarships to further their education.

Now that you have read about my journey, here are the accounts of 12 badass women from the WOW community.



MERCEDES COWPER

Food and beverage manager/
sommelier, Willard
InterContinental

Mercedes Cowper says that "hospitality should be transformational, not transactional. It is synonymous with my paternal grandma, who had an uncanny way of making everyone around her feel cared for and always well fed. I think that exemplifies true hospitality."

Originally from Michigan, Cowper began her career as an event-management specialist. But she found herself spending her free time going to tastings at a wine bar near her office, so she took her studying to the next level and sat for the CMS's Introductory exam, which she passed in 2018.

Having moved to D.C. the previous year, Cowper started her service career as a host at a Michelin-starred restaurant in Forbes five-star hotel The Jefferson, where she became the wine director within a year while also receiving her WSET Level 3 certification. In such a short time, her fierce determination to become a sommelier became her reality.

In June 2022, she signed on as the food and beverage manager/sommelier at the Willard InterContinental hotel in D.C. and received an award for the best wine program in her company in 2023. She recently completed her WSET diploma and is enrolled in the CMS's Advanced Sommelier course.





JENNIFER ANDERSON

Sommelier, Bar Spero

Jennifer Anderson has done her fair share of traveling around the world, where she's been able to see firsthand the uniqueness of each region's terroir and winemaking traditions.

Anderson was born and raised in Seoul, South Korea; after high school, she set off to D.C. to major in international studies at American University. In 2010 she graduated with a bachelor's degree and began her career in the nonprofit sector, where she worked closely with organizations devoted to solving such issues as extreme poverty and human trafficking. After an intense eight years, she needed a break, so she packed her bags and traveled for a year. Her adventure began back in Korea at the Susubori Academy, where she studied the production of the country's traditional alcohol, soju. She was the youngest student of the craft, which turned a lot of heads.

She then traveled to France, Italy, and Spain, and along the way, she completed her WSET Level 3 certification. Returning to the United States, Anderson embarked on a cross-country road trip before making a two-month stop in Mexico. In 2021, she began working in the vineyard and tasting room at RdV Vineyards in the foothills of the Blue Ridge Mountains in Virginia; stints at Virginia's Linden Vineyards and noted D.C. tavern St. Anselm followed. Now a sommelier at Bar Spero, she shares that her ultimate goal is to open a Korean-focused bar in D.C., where she'll showcase both her roots and her love for the beverage community.



JILL ZANKOWSKI

Sommelier, Maxwell Park

Jill Zankowski is living proof that it is never too late to start your professional journey: Take every opportunity that you are given, because you never know where it might lead.

Born and raised in Pittsburgh, Zankowski went to Penn State University and graduated with a bachelor's degree in environmental resource management. Realizing that this was not the path for her, she started working at The Fairmont hotel in her hometown as a server; a year later she was promoted to food and beverage supervisor.

With some wine training under her belt, she was ready for both change and a challenge. In 2020, she moved to D.C. to help open Knead Wine, a takeout pizza and wine shop owned by Master Sommelier Jarad Slipp in Middleburg, Virginia. Soon after, she was hired on as beverage manager at the aforementioned St. Anselm. A year and a half later, she became general manager of Reverie by Johnny Spero. The restaurant temporarily shut down due to a fire in summer 2023, so Spero and the team took it on the road, organizing one-of-a-kind collaborative dinners around the U.S. as well as overseas in Kyoto, Japan, and Seoul, South Korea. With the constant travel, Zankowski wasn't always able to taste the food and wines they'd be serving in advance, so she had to use her expertise to create balanced pairings on the fly—an impressive feat by a true rock star.

You can now find her at Maxwell Park, a playful wine bar that features over 50 wines by the glass. When she's not pouring, she's working toward her WSET diploma (she's currently Level 3).



CARLY MAHER

Co-founder and director of Mid-Atlantic partnerships, The Veraison Project

With over a decade in the industry under her belt, Carly Maher is a dynamic, creative, and empathetic creative individual who wants to make the world a better place.

Born in San Francisco and raised in Alexandria, Virginia, Maher set off to New York City to pursue her passion for theater, graduating from New York University's Tisch School of the Arts with a BFA in the discipline. As many artists do, however, she found herself waiting tables, landing a job at Del Frisco's Double Eagle Steakhouse. It was love at first sip, and she pivoted from the stage to a career in wine.

Maher set off to California and dove in headfirst, starting in distribution at Southern Glazer's Wine & Spirits before returning to Virginia and moving to the supplier side of the business, where she now represents the Heritage Collection Fine Wine and Imports portfolio of Trinchero Family Estates as managing director. But her most notable success is as a co-founder of The Veraison Project. This volunteer-run 501(c)(3) nonprofit was established in May 2020 with a commitment to "reshaping the beverage industry, united by a shared vision of creating an industry that is diverse, equitable, and inclusive," according to its mission statement. The wine world is starting to take notice of its impact: Along with executive director Averiel McKenzie, Maher was named among *Wine Business Monthly's* 2023 Wine Industry Leaders.



ERIKA PARJUS

Co-founder and director of fundraising, Women of Wine/Vin.Vitalité

Erika Parjus has held every industry position possible in her decade-long career, which she started off by slinging sandwiches as a high school student in Florida. While earning a public relations degree at American University, she transitioned to guest-facing roles like hosting and serving at Zaytinya by José Andrés and other establishments around D.C. Along the way, she became curious about wine and took a management internship at RPM Italian, where she learned the ins and outs of the wine business—a pivotal moment in her professional journey. As she puts it, “I learned the business of wine before tasting.”

Since then, Parjus has worked a harvest in the Willamette Valley; served as beverage manager at D.C. Italian restaurant Centrolina; passed the CMS’s Certified exam; and launched her own wine bar, Bottles Wine Garden, with Angie Duran. In 2022, reflecting her core belief in friendship, community, and inclusivity, she co-founded Women of Wine, where she serves as director of fundraising.



MCKENZIE RICHERSON

Sommelier/manager, Maxwell Park and Pop Fizz Bar

Armed with a degree from the Oregon Culinary Institute, McKenzie Richerson began her career as a pastry chef. Her first position was with World Central Kitchen, a not-for-profit nongovernmental organization founded by José Andrés, where she helped cook for communities devastated by natural disasters; between deployments, she worked as a pastry chef and private chef. Following the onset of the pandemic, she finally landed in Washington, D.C., and now calls it home; there, she served as executive pastry chef at The Rosewood Hotel at the age of 23 before taking on the same role at Elcielo, a Michelin-starred Colombian restaurant.

Cooking took its toll over time, and Richerson moved from the back to the front of the house: Wine became her new outlet to geek out, learn, and form her craft. Having achieved her WSET Level 2 certification, she plans to sit for the CMS’s Certified exam in early 2024 while serving as manager and sommelier at the aforementioned Maxwell Park as well as Pop Fizz Bar; she also sits on the professional development committee for Vin.Vitalité.



LAUREN JENCIK

Sommelier, Bottles Wine Garden

If you want to move into a hospitality career from another field but aren’t sure if you should pack up your desk and give notice immediately, Lauren Jencik would advise you to keep your full-time job for now. Jencik toes the line by working as a humanitarian advisor at the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) by day and a sommelier at the aforementioned Bottles Wine Garden by night.

Initially fascinated with beer, she found herself becoming curious about wine and began going to tasting events at local shops, where she was able to learn about wines from around the world. One of her favorite shops was Grand Cata in the Shaw neighborhood, which showcases wines, spirits, and gastronomic products from Latin America.

Jencik, who has received her WSET Level 3 certification and sits on the professional development committee of Vin.Vitalité, intends to one day transition out of her government day job and make wine her full-time career. Although she does not have an exact timeline, she is determined to further her wine education and experience.



CAROLINE HERMANN, MW

Instructor, Capital Wine School

Caroline Hermann, MW, is a prime example of the fact that your passion and your career can be one and the same thing.

Hermann brings a unique perspective to the wine sector as an attorney with a focus on corporate sustainability, environmental law, and international trade. She began her wine journey in 2005, working in retail wine sales in D.C. while simultaneously pursuing her studies through WSET in New York City.

Hermann took her growing love for wine and merged it with her aspirations to further her career in beverage law in 2016: Today she leads the import-export program for wine, beer, and spirits at the U.S. Department of the Treasury’s Alcohol and Tobacco Tax and Trade Bureau. Her experiences as a lawyer have been an asset to her studies, specifically when it comes to tasting wine: Hermann compares deductive tasting to the analytical work of being an attorney.

After receiving her diploma through WSET, she also became a certified instructor, which led to a teaching position at D.C.’s Capital Wine School. Now a Master of Wine, she believes that everyone has something to bring to the table: There is always a seat for you.



REGINA MCCARTHY
General manager,
The Vineyards at Dodon

Maryland's viticultural roots run deep, and Regina McCarthy is one of the many people responsible for putting the state on the national wine map.

McCarthy's first job out of college was as a marketing coordinator for the Maryland Wineries Association. She met talented winemakers along the way—and two people in particular; The Vineyards at Dodon co-owners Tom Croghan and Polly Pittman, left a lasting impression.

In 2012, McCarthy published a book, *Maryland Wine: A Full-Bodied History*, which covers the state's remarkable 350-year heritage. She then decided to explore other sectors of the industry, taking positions in distribution and retail, but she missed working alongside winemakers. So in 2016, upon returning to her hometown of Crofton, McCarthy joined The Vineyards at Dodon as its director of client services, overseeing its hospitality program. Thanks to the continued support of Croghan and Pittman, she has now been promoted to general manager, leading a predominantly female front-of-house team.



MARCIE COX
Vineyard hand, Vox Vineti

Born and raised in Florida, Marcie Cox moved to D.C. to study biology at George Washington University. Post-graduation, she began her career as a laboratory technician at Walter Reed. While this fulfilled her love for science, she was in dire need of some human interaction. Having worked in hospitality in the past, she joined the aforementioned Reverie as lead bartender. It was here that her curiosity about wine was sparked.

After a break due to the pandemic, Cox stepped back onto the restaurant floor as Reverie's wine and service director in 2021, which gave her the opportunity to curate the wine program; the following year, Reverie received its first Michelin star. This marked one of the proudest moments of her career.

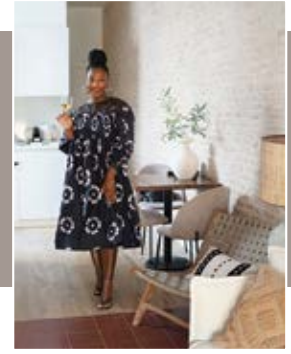
But she still felt the urge to get her hands dirty while uniting her love for science and wine—and today, Cox is a vineyard hand at Vox Vineti, a winery in Andrew's Bridge, Pennsylvania.



ALEXANDRA PADRON
Sommelier, Bresca

Alexandra Padron has proven that when you are young and determined, you can achieve anything. With a passion for craft cocktails as well as wine, Padron has worked her way up from captain to lead sommelier at Michelin-starred restaurant Bresca. Dedicated to increasing her knowledge of wine, she has passed WSET Level 2 as well as the Introductory level of the CMS and intends to take the Certified exam through the latter in the near future.

The hospitality industry can feel lonely and intimidating at times; gaining respect from peers, especially as a young woman, is challenging. Working alongside Bresca's lead bartender, Sara Chaudhuri, has therefore been particularly rewarding for Padron, as seeing other women thriving at their craft is inspiring; the two push each other to succeed while creating an outstanding guest experience.



DESIREE HARRISON-BROWN
Wine educator/influencer

Before Desiree Harrison-Brown began executing innovative campaigns with national brands as a content creator and became an educator at Napa Valley Wine Academy, she was working a 9-to-5 corporate job in project management. Feeling unfulfilled, she used social media to help find her voice and a community in the food and beverage space while going to wine and spirits tastings in her spare time to learn about what she was drinking. To share her wine journey, she created the lifestyle blog *Wino Noire*. This led her to enroll in the WSET program at Capital Wine School; she's now a diploma student.

As a young Black woman in the beverage industry, Harrison-Brown says it was initially hard to find community, mentorship, and representation. In 2020, she launched her own online wine-retail store, *Wino Shop*, in part to pave the way for minority women in the food and beverage industry.

These women are making their mark in all aspects of the industry, from hospitality to sales and marketing, as they help shape the future of the wine world with their fresh perspectives and innovative ideas. Along with so many others, they are inspiring one another to further their careers in wine while creating a more inclusive community in Washington, D.C., and beyond. ❧

LE PAPILLON

de France

OUR **LANGUEDOC** SEMINAR AT
SOMMICON 2023 REVEALED THE
REGION'S STRIKING TRANSFORMATION

By Izzy Watson

The Languedoc AOP was created in 2007.

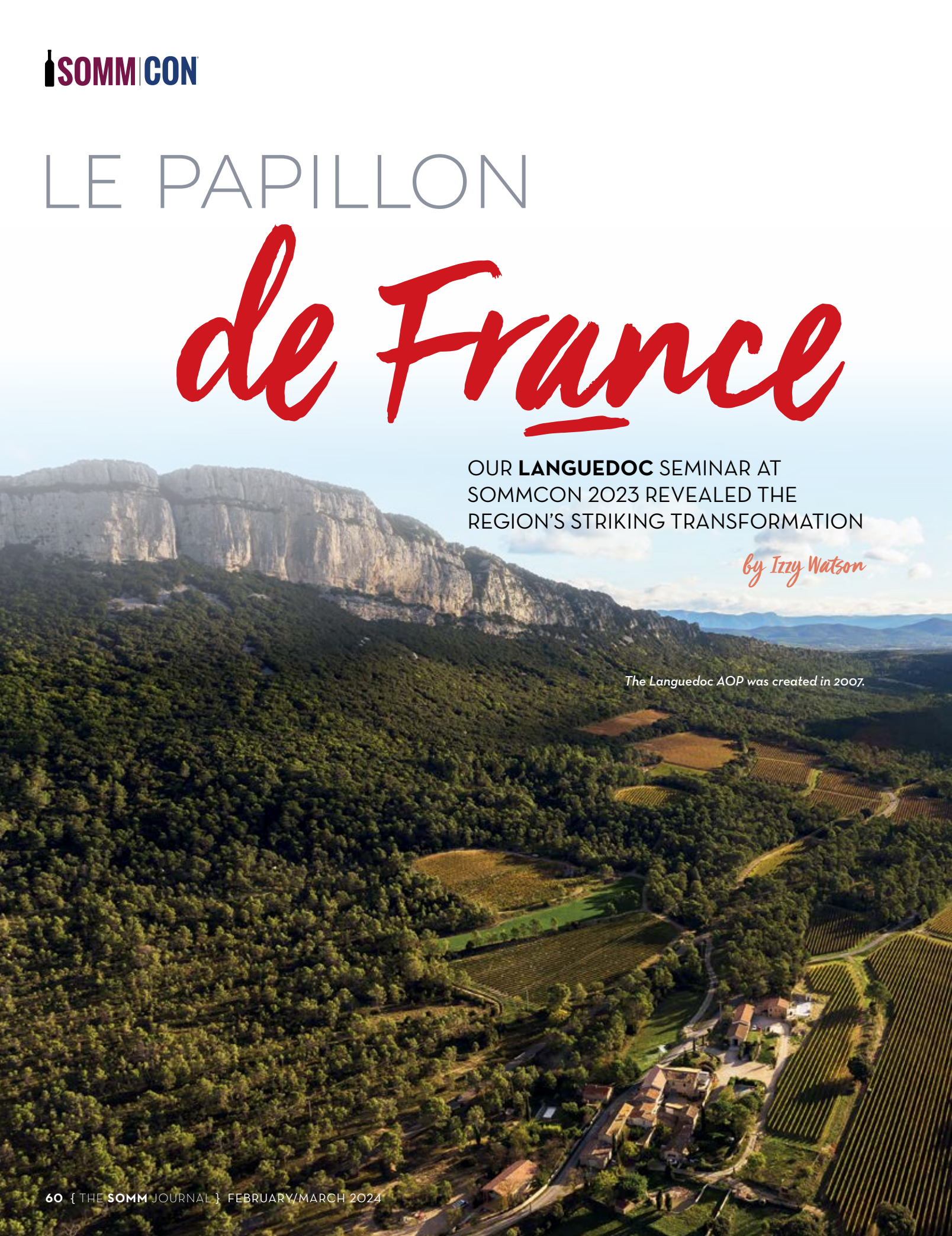


PHOTO: RAFAEL PETERSON



Our Languedoc panelists at SommCon, from left to right: Thibaut de Braquilanges, general director of Château de Lastours; Erik Segelbaum, founder of SOMLYAY, VP of The United Sommeliers Foundation, and ambassador for the Conseil Interprofessionnel des Vins du Languedoc; and Ioana Cosmina Bucur, COO of Princess & Bear.

PHOTO: RAFAEL PETERSON



A packed house of sommeliers at last year's SommCon in San Diego, CA.

“WE as an industry haven't really done a great job of relaying what the Languedoc truly is, and that's going to change right here, right now,” said Advanced Sommelier Erik Segelbaum, founder of hospitality agency SOMLYAY and VP of The United Sommeliers Foundation, as he moderated *The SOMM Journal's* “Languedoc Wines: A Fresh Approach to Wine Lists and Strong Bottom Lines” seminar at SommCon in San Diego last fall.

Segelbaum is an enthusiastic ambassador for Vins du Languedoc—and there's arguably been no better time than now to be in that position. Over the past few decades, driven by the enterprising nature of the producers in this southern French region, the Languedoc has gone through a dramatic transformation, proving itself to be a source of serious, terroir-driven wine while delivering exceptional value at every price tier.

Setting out to support this message were panelists Ioana Cosmina Bucur, COO of Princess & Bear, one of the largest importers of Languedoc wines in the United States, and Thibaut de Braquilanges, general director of Château de Lastours. Before soliciting their expert input, however, Segelbaum reviewed a few important regional benchmarks, which included a surprising number of firsts.

The Languedoc, which originally served as a gateway to France for the Romans in the first century, is where the process of *mutage* (the fortification of wine) was created by Arnaud de Villeneuve in 1285; additionally, it became the birthplace of sparkling wine in 1544, when the monks of St. Hilaire in Limoux invented La Blanche de Limoux—making it, not Champagne, the oldest sparkling wine in the world. Grape growers in the Languedoc are also said to have been the first to plant vines on hillsides. (To be fair, this happy accident began as a decree in 1709 by King Louis XIV, who declared that flatlands could only be used to plant cereal grains in an effort to prevent famine.) It was also here that, in 1873, Jules-Émile Planchon developed the technique of grafting, which helped the country to prevail over the phylloxera crisis of 1868.

There's no denying the 2,500-year-old region's great history, and yet these days it functions more as a hub of innovation, with an expansive vision to match its remarkably diverse terroir. Today the Languedoc represents 30% of France's and 10% of the world's organic acreage; an additional 30% of the region's vineyard land is currently being converted to organic farming. Sustainability is an ingrained mindset. There is a region-wide dedication to responsible environmental practices such as protecting animal habitats and collecting rainwater.

This embrace of organic farming is supported by the region's dry, windy climate, which discourages diseases like powdery mildew. A progressive approach allows for experimentation in the vineyards, especially when it comes to the considerable number of grapes

THE LANGUEDOC OF THE 21ST CENTURY

Although the Languedoc has been growing wine for 2,500 years, the region today is far different than it was just 50 years ago. In addition to 300 days of sunshine, it boasts:

- 3,000 winemakers
- More than 20 AOPs
- 80,000 acres of vines
- 26 key grape varieties: 60% red (including Syrah, Grenache, Mourvèdre, Carignan, Cinsault, Counoise, Piquepoul Noir, Terret Noir); 20% white (including Chardonnay, Roussanne, Marsanne, Viognier, Piquepoul, Bourboulenc, Clairette, Grenache, Chenin Blanc, Mauzac); and 20% rosé in addition to well-known sweet wines (Muscat Blanc) and sparkling wines (Mauzac, Chardonnay, Chenin Blanc, Pinot Noir)
- 30% of France's and 10% of the world's organic vineyards



La Clape was once an island, since connected to the mainland by alluvial deposits.



The first sparkling wine on record was made in Limoux.

permitted for cultivation. Representing 60% of production, the Languedoc's key red grapes (i.e. Syrah, Grenache, Mourvèdre, Carignan, and Cinsault) are also featured in most of its rosé, which accounts for 20% of production; its main white grapes (Grenache Blanc, Roussanne, Marsanne, Chardonnay, Chenin Blanc, Mauzac, Piquepoul, Bourboulenc, and Clairette) make up the remaining 20%. There are also, of course, the permitted grapes that lend Crémant de Limoux and Blanquette de Limoux truly local flair, including the aforementioned Mauzac, the principal variety of the ancestral sparkling wines.

When wine professionals think of the Languedoc, we often divide it into western and eastern regions, but Segelbaum and the Conseil Interprofessionnel des Vins du Languedoc team have taken a more thoughtful, modern approach by grouping it into three categories, albeit with a fair amount of overlap: Coastal Terroir, Atlantic Corridor, and Hills and Mountains. "These aren't appellations; these are groupings of regionality defined mostly by climate. And yes, there is a little bit of crossover, but these are stylistic umbrella regions that are helpful to us, because the reality is that the Languedoc is not all hot-climate and full-bodied

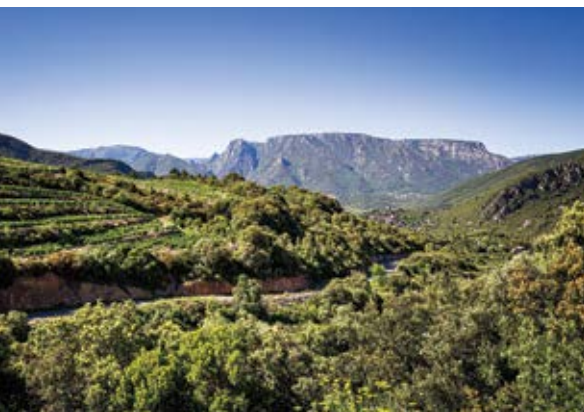
wines. It never has been," noted Segelbaum, referencing the increase in quality wines with fresh Mediterranean character that are now available to U.S. sommeliers.

The seminar featured eight different wines to illustrate the three terroirs, starting with sparkling: The Atlantic Corridor includes the notably sandstone-rich vineyards of Limoux (and the Blanquette de Limoux and Blanquette de Limoux Méthode Ancestrale appellations) in addition to the Cabardès and Malepère AOPs—all of which are influenced by the surrounding mountains, the westerly winds of the Atlantic Ocean, and the Mediterranean wind from the east. Grapes that thrive here

are Cabernet Franc, Cabernet Sauvignon, Mauzac, Malbec (aka Côt), Chenin Blanc, and Chardonnay. “There’s this drying wind that serves as a natural disease prevention. It’s not a cool climate, but it’s not super hot there either,” said Segelbaum. The Princess & Bear Sparkling Rosé AOP Crémant de Limoux, a Chardonnay-dominant blend with Chenin Blanc and Pinot Noir redolent of stone fruit and red berries, is sustainably farmed and worthy of representing the cradle of sparkling wine.

“Then you have Coastal Terroir, sometimes also called the Mediterranean, [which] is a warmer, humid, wind-infllected region,” Segelbaum continued. The area that hugs the coastline is perhaps best known for its Picpoul de Pinet AOP white wines, but it also includes AOP La Clape and a significant part of the regional appellation, AOP Languedoc; among the grapes that grow here are Piquepoul, Bourboulenc, Clairette, and Chardonnay.

The attendees sipped through five different representations of the Languedoc’s



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

expansive Hills and Mountains zone, which harbors the region’s most well-known, red wine–dominant appellations and is perhaps best defined by its higher elevations and volcanic soils, including *ruffe* (red sandstone), Jurassic limestone, basalt, and schist. Carignan, Grenache, Mourvèdre, and Syrah thrive in the substantial diurnal temperature swings that define both the dry, hot summers and the cold winters.

From north to south, the Hills and Mountains zone includes the Pic Saint-Loup, Terrasses du Larzac, Clairette du Languedoc, Faugères, Saint-Chinian, Minervois La Livinière, and Corbières



PHOTO: RAFAEL PETERSON

CATEGORIZING WINES BY CLIMATIC TERROIR

ATLANTIC REGION: red blends and sparkling wine from Limoux grown in sandstone and limestone soils and influenced by strong Atlantic and Mediterranean winds

- Princess & Bear NV Sparkling Rosé, AOP Crémant de Limoux

COASTAL: red blends and bold whites grown in sedimentary soils, limestone, clay, and sandstone and influenced by long, warm summers and mild, wet winters

- Domaine Valjulius 2022 Initial Blanc, IGP Coteaux de Béziers
- Château de Mus 2022 La Source Rosé, AOP Languedoc

HILLS AND MOUNTAINS: red wine–dominant zone with higher elevations and volcanic soils

- Château de Lastours 2022 Grand Vin Blanc, AOP Corbières
- Château des Adouzes 2020 Le Tigre, AOP Faugères
- Borie La Vitarèle 2022 Les Terres Blanches, AOP Saint-Chinian
- Château de Lascaux 2021 Carra, AOP Pic Saint Loup
- Hecht & Bannier 2019 Languedoc Red, AOP Languedoc

Boutenac appellations. “I work with a very small family-owned winery in this area,” said Bucur. “While they were digging for the foundation of a cellar 50 centimeters down, they found a 2-meter-thick bed of fossilized oysters, and yet they are very far away from the sea. . . . The salinity is there and doesn’t have to come from being on the coast. The freshness that the limestone gives to the wine is amazing.” In that vein, the exemplary Château des Adouzes 2020 Le Tigre from Faugères, made up of Carignan, Syrah, and Grenache, is a blend one wouldn’t typically describe as fresh, yet the savory, salty red was just that.

Although we’ve gone into detail on just a few of the wines featured at the seminar (see the sidebar for a complete

list), they all had one thing in common: unparalleled value. Whether wine buyers opt for a AOP Crémant de Limoux or a Syrah blend from Pic Saint-Loup, the potential for a higher profit margin is undeniable. “These wines can make you a lot of money. What the Languedoc can be for you, and more importantly your [customers], is sparkling wines that surprise and delight, vibrant rosés and white wines, fresh Mediterranean reds, and also some bolder reds, of course,” Segelbaum said. “Let’s not forget to tell the story of the Languedoc, because we all know millennials love a story: [It represents] the world origin of sparkling wine; the world origin of fortified wine; a leader in organics and sustainability; and versatile wines of incredible quality.”



From left to right: Carole Durris, international projects manager, EOC International; Katherine Keith, senior account manager, Gregory + Vine; Thibaut de Braquilanges; Erik Segelbaum; Estelle Nijhof, export market manager, Conseil Interprofessionnel des Vins du Languedoc; Emily Hardin-Lombardi, PR & communications manager, Gregory + Vine; and Helen Gregory, founder/president, Gregory + Vine.

THE THRILL OF THE

Huntress

For a handful of lucky San Diego-based sommeliers, much of the aforementioned information on the Languedoc was relayed the night prior to the seminar over an inventive five-course dinner at The Huntress in San Diego's Gaslamp Quarter. If only the other SommCon attendees could have also experienced one of host Erik Segelbaum's most convincing arguments for Languedoc wines: "One of the hallmarks of Languedoc is this incredible natural salinity in the wines—all of them, the red, white, and sparkling. And what's the number-one thing we put on food

to make it taste better? Salt. So, it stands to reason, and you'll see this tonight with each course, that when you have that background salinity, it makes a wine an even better food wine." And as we learned from the seminar, the other sure sign of a Languedoc wine is an "inherent freshness, even in the reds in appellations that we tend to associate with fuller-bodied varieties," he added.

The most striking example of these characteristics was delivered right out of the gate with the amuse-bouche, Baja Kumiai oysters served two ways: with

herb relish and toasted brioche espuma and over a pork chicharrón crumble. The crisp **Domaine la Grangette 2022 Poule de Pic AOP Picpoul de Pinet** (say that fast three times), bursting with citrus and salinity, set a high bar for the rest of the pairings. "AOP Picpoul de Pinet is one of the most underrated appellations that exists on the planet," said Segelbaum, thanks not only to the freshness, acidity, and food-friendliness of its wines but also to their price. "This is a perfect seafood/shellfish/oyster wine, and I would take this any day of the week over Chablis in terms

of total satisfaction, [considering] what it costs versus what it gives."

The honeyed **Château de Campuget 2022 1753 Viognier IGP Gard** too provided freshness of a sort not usually associated with the variety, which mirrored the fresh creaminess of the Dungeness crab salad with avocado, compressed apples, tarragon, cucumber, and green apple vinaigrette. And the **Château de Lastours 2022 Grand Vin Rosé AOP Languedoc** was as fascinating as it was delicious, as was the dish that accompanied it: grilled beets with hibiscus barbecue sauce and red amaranth.

Greg Clark, sales manager for San Diego and Orange County at import company Vintage '59, chimed in during the next course of roasted quail,



Baja Kumiai oysters served at The Huntress in San Diego.

PHOTOS: RAFAEL PETERSON



Josh Neimeyer is wine director at The Huntress.

pistachio-studded sausage, plum-honey glaze, and parsnip puree, as it was paired with one of the wines his company imports: the **Domaine Ollier Taillefer 2018 Grande Réserve AOP Faugères**. Although Faugères is one of the Languedoc's smallest appellations, it's also one of the more well known, offering fresh and savory reds, rosés, and whites. The Grande Réserve is equal parts Carignan, Syrah, and Grenache, all from organically farmed vines of at least 30 years of age. Clark attributed its bright character to the region's predominantly gray schist soils and high elevation (with an average altitude of 300 meters).

The **Heritage du Pic Saint Loup 2022 Tour de Pierres AOP Pic Saint-Loup** and the **Château de Pennautier**

2020 L'Ésprit de Pennautier AOP Cabardès accompanied lamb saddle with mushroom, dandelion-green stuffing, and huckleberry jus. "Pic Saint-Loup is pretty much always going to be Syrah-based red blends with more Mediterranean grapes," said Segelbaum, adding that Cabardès is likewise typically Syrah-based though may include different grapes less common to the Languedoc; for instance, "you see wines like this [Château de Pennautier], which is Syrah-dominant at 45%, but it's also 20% Merlot, 20% Cabernet Franc, and 14% Grenache. And this speaks a lot to what makes Languedoc so special: The ability for producers to harmonize the terroir of their vineyards with [the varieties they plant] is made easy [there]."

Although the group was a little leery

of the pairing of sweet crème fraîche panna cotta with the dry **Princess & Bear Private Label Brut Crémant de Limoux Rosé**, the dessert's mixed berry compote brought out the red-berried character of the wine, while its delicate bubbles washed away the creaminess of the dessert, leaving the palate clean and ready for another bite.

As lucky as the sommeliers were to experience the pairings, the teams in attendance from the Conseil Interprofessionnel des Vins du Languedoc, Gregory + Vine, and *The SOMM Journal* were just as fortunate to receive a slew of thoughtful observations from these talented professionals. "[The wines of Languedoc are] super food-friendly wines, and they were all paired with an extremely creative menu," said Chris Gluck, owner and founder of Wine Vault & Bistro.

Perhaps the most insightful feedback was from Cat Evans, wine buyer and manager at The WineSellar & Brasserie: "For me, the dinner really highlighted how many amazing wines France has to offer that fly under the radar simply because they're not from Burgundy, Bordeaux, [the] Loire, or the Rhône Valley. Multiply the inspired flavors [of the wines of the Languedoc] with the fact that *all* of them are affordable, even after all the import taxes and shipping costs that have raised the price of French wines exponentially in the last three years, and it makes finding these wines even more exciting." ❧

What's Old Is New Again

IN CHANDLER, AZ, A TALENTED F&B TEAM HONORS THE CITY'S HISTORY WHILE BUILDING THEIR OWN LEGACY

story by Christina Barrueta / photos by Grace Stufkosky

DOWNTOWN CHANDLER, ARIZONA, is undergoing an exciting metamorphosis thanks in part to restaurateurs Gavin Jacobs and Jackie Hall, who, since 2016, have led the charge in transforming historic spaces into dining and drinking destinations. A century-old newspaper headquarters houses The Brickyard Downtown, a trendy venue for global small plates and creative libations. A bungalow built in 1939 has been transformed into The Hid-

den House, a culinary hot spot and den of classic cocktails. And a historic theater has regained its opulent glory as the home of an upscale chophouse.



Elliott's director of operations Michael Regan.

den House, a culinary hot spot and den of classic cocktails. And a historic theater has regained its opulent glory as the home of an upscale chophouse.

In August 2023, Jacobs, Hall, and their director of operations, Michael Regan, honored Hall's late husband, Elliott, with the opening of their third establishment, Elliott's Steakhouse. "I think Chandler has been waiting for a more fine dining-focused restaurant," says Regan. "Providing a wider range of dining options enhances

the downtown experience and encourages more people to explore our little corner of town."

The building that the sophisticated steakhouse is located in was erected in 1912 and housed a grocery before it became the Rowena Theatre. "[It's] gorgeous, so we couldn't let the opportunity pass by to bring it back to life and show its full potential," says Regan of the elegant space,

which boasts restored brick walls, a lofty mezzanine, and a grand 47-foot bar.

Corporate chef Brent Tratten and executive chef Nick Gibbs collaborated on an approach that honors steakhouse tradition while incorporating innovative twists. "We wanted the classics well represented but also to have some fun, exciting flavors that you don't see every day," explains Regan. Thus the menu sports not only French onion soup, shrimp cocktail, and dry-aged cuts of beef but also foie



The Curtain Call is a dairy-free clarified milk punch made with coconut and almond milk, White Port, orange-clove oleo saccharum, and three different rums.

gras adorned with polenta foam and fig gastrique, steak tartare enhanced by bone marrow and chimichurri, and lobster bisque accompanied by toasted brioche slathered with creamy lobster mousse.

Under the guidance of Regan, an award-winning mixologist, and bar manager Michael Testa, cocktails are as much a highlight of the Elliott's experience as the fare. "Along with the classics are culinary-focused signatures using mixology techniques such as barrel-aging and infusions," says Regan. One showstopper is the Curtain Call, a dairy-free clarified milk punch made with coconut and almond milk, White Port, orange-clove oleo saccharum, and three different rums. "We use cinnamon-infused Smith & Cross, Plantation OFTD, and Ron Zacapa," says Regan. "The blend gives the drink a molasses-forward sweet and spicy finish."

And this talented team hasn't stopped there: In December, a beautifully updated 1940s cottage opened as Maple House, a combination coffee shop and late-night gathering spot serving light bites, beer, wine, and low-ABV cocktails (think Spritzes and Cobblers). With each unique space they restore, the group continues to advance Chandler's place in Arizona's culinary landscape. "We've always focused on three pillars: excellent drinks, excellent food, and excellent service," says Regan. "What's most important to us is creating a memorable experience." SJ

Elixir of the Goddesses

THREE FURIES WINES OFFER MYTHICAL ELEGANCE IN THE REAL WORLD

by Meridith May

PHOTOS COURTESY OF THREE FURIES WINES



Three Furies co-owner/winemaker Martin Mackenzie.

IN GREEK MYTHOLOGY, the Erinyes—also known as the Three Furies—were goddesses who were born from the blood of the gods mingling with the earth, resided in the underworld, and enacted vengeance on criminals for their wrongdoings. “They represent honesty and the relentless pursuit of truth,” offers Three Furies winery co-owner Shauna Mackenzie. “We produce three Pinot Noirs, each representing her own Fury and her own AVA and each with her own personality, which is derived from the land/terroir of each growing region and vineyard.”

Co-owner/winemaker Martin Mackenzie applies this philosophy of terroir-driven individuality to crafting the standout wines, showcasing the best that each appellation has to offer. For instance, he explains, “We chose Santa Lucia Highlands as one of our Furies because of its proximity to the ocean, the sea breezes, and the fog that, coupled with the radiant California sun, makes it a perfect growing ground for Pinot Noir.”



Martin Mackenzie uses dry ice to cool the temperature during ferments in French oak puncheons.

Three Furies 2018 The Angry One Pinot Noir, Santa Lucia Highlands, Monterey County (\$85)

Hailing from the Tondré Grapefield Vineyard, this is a distinctly delicious Pinot Noir with notes of devil’s food cake, black cherry, mulberry, cinnamon, and nutmeg. Floral notes permeate both nose and palate, contributing to its dynamic, energetic profile. As goddesses of vengeance, the Furies were known to pursue justice and truth: This wine shares their fiery spirit, revealing a tempestuous soul in which passion and intensity coexist. **97**



Hell hath no fury like The Angry One.

Three Furies 2019 Constant Vengeance Pinot Noir, Sta. Rita Hills, Santa Barbara County (\$85)

From the Rancho La Viña Vineyard, this Fury puts aside her rage and paints a backdrop of roses, lavender, and ginger-kissed hibiscus. Following that garden path, she spreads cinnamon over underbrush and white-peppered cherries. The wine’s buoyant mouthfeel is matched by a juicy flow of earthly delights. **97**

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Agenda Overview:

Day 1: Tuesday, April 30, 2024 (in-person)
All times listed are in PDT.

1:30 p.m. - 5:00 p.m.
Sustainable Vineyard and Winery Tour
(KG Vineyards & LangeTwins Family Winery and Vineyards)

5:30 p.m. - 7:00 p.m.
U.S. Sustainable Wine Walk-Around Tasting and Reception at Wine & Roses

7:00 p.m.
Welcome Dinner and Keynote Address
Dana Nigro, senior editor, Wine Spectator and managing editor, WineSpectator.com



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Day 2: Wednesday, May 1, 2024 (in-person and virtual)

All times listed are in PDT.

9:00 a.m. - 12:00 p.m. | Morning Sessions

Keynote Address

United States Secretary of Agriculture, Thomas J. Vilsack (*invited*)

Climate Change Impacts and Actionable Strategies for Adaptation and Mitigation

There is a compelling need for action to address the impacts of climate change on the U.S. wine industry. Dr. Steve Ostoja, director of the California Climate Hub, will provide an overview of the latest science on climate change impacts related to viticulture, dig deeper into the implications of the science and discuss what actions can be taken by winegrape growers to adapt and prepare. Dr. John Heckman, sustainability expert, will lead a conversation with several wineries dedicated to climate action about how to identify and prioritize climate smart practices. The conversation will provide concrete ideas for how to implement practices that help adapt to changes and achieve greenhouse gas reductions.

Sustainable Supply Chains: The Power of Sustainable Purchasing and Wine Packaging

Sustainable purchasing can influence suppliers and vendors and lead to a greater positive impact. By putting into place sustainable purchasing policies, vineyards and wineries can amplify their commitment to sustainability within their supply chain. Hear from vineyards and wineries about how they put these policies into place and how they in turn influenced their vendors' practices or approaches. A responsible packaging supplier will also share how they communicate their sustainability commitment to their customers and how they support wineries in their own storytelling.

12:00 p.m. - 1:00 p.m. | Lunch and Networking (in-person only)

1:00 p.m. - 4:00 p.m. | Afternoon Sessions

Sustainability Storytelling: Creating Content, Visitor Experiences and Sales

Sustainability is complex and comprehensive, and therefore communicating about a vineyard or winery's sustainability commitment can be challenging. In this session, Sandy Skees — author of "Purposeful Brands: How Purpose and Sustainability Drive Brand Value and Positive Change" and EVP, global purpose and impact practice lead at Porter Novelli — will discuss how to leverage your sustainability work in communications and storytelling. In a follow-up discussion, wineries and communications experts will share how they incorporate sustainability in their content, visitor experiences and sales meeting.

The People Pillar of Sustainability: Inclusive Workplaces and Hospitality

Social sustainability is about how businesses impact people, including employees and customers. While environmental aspects of sustainability are often well understood, there is growing interest and understanding on the social side of sustainability. Stakeholders are increasingly interested in worker health and safety, diverse and inclusive workplaces, hospitality and marketing. This panel of experts and wineries will explore these issues related to social sustainability and provide actionable examples of how to further invest in elevating the importance of social issues in the sustainability conversation.

THANK YOU SPONSORS





The Comeback Cocktails

THESE RETRO RECIPES ARE RINGING IN A RENAISSANCE BEHIND THE BAR



PHOTO: @THEJAMESCHARLESTON

The Apple Martini

The classic recipe for this drink, whose flavor recalls Green Apple Jolly Ranchers, is a simple concoction of apple schnapps, lime juice, and vodka—but some beverage professionals, including Kevin King of The James in Charleston, South Carolina (see recipe), are also incorporating fresh apple cider, hard cider, purees of different apple varieties, seasonal flavors like caramel, vermouths, and more to create their own twists.

The Appletini

- 2 oz. CÎROC Apple Vodka
 - 1 oz. fresh lemon juice
 - 1 oz. Granny Smith apple cordial*
- Shake ingredients in a cocktail shaker, strain into a chilled Martini glass, and drop in a cherry.

*Granny Smith apple cordial

- 25 whole Granny Smith apples
- 2,000 g sugar
- 20 g salt
- 20 g malic acid
- 5 g ascorbic acid

Put the ascorbic acid into a juicing container. Juice the Granny Smith apples straight into the ascorbic acid and gently stir to keep the vibrant color of the juice. Fine-strain the juice and blend it with sugar until fully dissolved. Add in the salt and malic acid, then finish blending, bottle, and refrigerate.

WE ARE EXPERIENCING the rebirth of retro cocktails whose heyday ranged from the 1950s to the early 2000s. For some, they might be a little cringe, but their enduring charm lies in the fact that they're lots of fun.

The Espresso Martini

This cocktail has been back with a vengeance for several years now—only this time around, people are enjoying it with cold brew; a plethora of coffee liqueurs such as Mr Black, Caffè Borghetti, or Galiano Espresso; and/or base spirits like tequila, mezcal, and Scotch instead of the standard vodka (see recipe for Garden Bar PHX's variation).



PHOTO COURTESY OF GARDEN BAR PHX

Cuppa Cold Coffee

- 1.25 oz. reposado tequila
- 0.5 oz. demerara syrup
- 3 oz. Cartel Roasting Co Desert City Dark cold brew coffee

Combine ingredients, stir, and strain into an Irish coffee glass. Top with a layer of Sherry cream* and sprinkle with cacao nibs.

*Sherry cream: Whip 1 cup heavy cream in a protein shaker with a tablespoon of Cream Sherry.

The Piña Colada

Created in the 1950s in Puerto Rico, the Piña Colada is a mainstay on cocktail menus once again, largely due to the fact that it's amenable to the addition of a wide range of other flavors, from cinnamon and pandan to passion fruit and blackberry—as beverage consultant Adam Way (follow him on Instagram @cocktailsbyadam) shows with his cocktail Three Sheets to the Wind.

Three Sheets to the Wind

- 1.5 oz. aged rum
- 0.5 oz. fresh lime juice
- 0.5 oz. fresh pineapple juice
- 0.5 oz. passion fruit puree
- 0.5 oz. coconut cream
- 0.5 oz. demerara syrup
- 2 dashes Angostura bitters
- 3 fresh blackberries

Add the berries and syrup to a shaking tin and muddle. Pour in the rest of the ingredients, add ice, and whip-shake. Strain over crushed ice and garnish with a bouquet of mint, a speared cherry, and two pineapple fronds.



PHOTO: CARLTON CANARY

The Midori Sour and Melon Ball


Midori, a liqueur renowned for its honeydew melon-like flavor due to the infusion of Japanese muskmelon, can add a pop of color to even the simplest sours. Designed to quench consumers' thirst for sour flavors and vibrant colors, renditions of classics such as the Midori Sour and the Melon Ball, among them the Melon Ball Smash from Liquid Architecture, are making a splash on bar menus.



PHOTO: LIQUID ARCHITECTURE LLC/@KHAASARUD

Melon Ball Smash

- 1.5 oz. Midori
- 0.5 oz. vodka
- 2 lemon quarters
- 2 orange segments
- 4 mint leaves
- 0.5 oz. simple syrup

Combine the mint leaves, lemon quarters, and orange segments with the simple syrup in a shaker. Add the Midori and vodka and shake vigorously with ice. Strain into a glass over ice and garnish with a mint sprig. 



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A Bottle of Red, a Bottle of White, and a Thin Blue Line

I COME FROM a long line of blue bloods. No, not royalty, but pretty close to it in some circles: officers of the New York City Police Department. When my oldest son, Christian, joined the NYPD academy a few years ago, I was asked to provide a list of family members who had served on the force; between my father, brother, uncles, and cousins, my boy was the 14th in succession.

I never donned the uniform myself; I did take several of the civil service tests in my formative years and was at one point called up, but I ultimately opted for a career in the beverage industry. Still, growing up in a police family, I was surrounded by the camaraderie that the field fosters while absorbing some of its life lessons, including a dedication to serve and constant awareness of one's surroundings.

My dad and brother retired in 1976 and 2001, respectively, so there was a stretch of time when our household didn't operate around the obligations and anxieties involved in being kin to actively serving officers. Then, two years ago, my son's entry into law enforcement rekindled memories of family members having to work on holidays and vacations being built around a police officer's schedule, laid out with military-like precision in what's known as "the chart." That's part of the price regularly paid by those who protect the public.

When my work in wine brought me into the fold of the somm community, certain characteristics felt very familiar. Carrying a cork puller is a lot different than carrying a weapon, and a tastevin is not a badge, but the kindred relationships among those who serve, be it in law enforcement or hospitality, have great similarities. And as it turns out, our

industry includes many people who have belonged in both worlds.

Holly Orchard, for one, alternated between work as a police officer and as a sommelier over the course of two decades. Before and between two six-year stints with the Santa Cruz and Palo Alto police departments, she worked on and off at different wine bars for a total of four years and then became proprietor of Savvy Cellar Wine Bar & Restaurant in Mountain View, California, for another five and a half years. Both jobs, she points out, entail irregular shifts. "All the normal people in your life work 9 to 5 Monday to Friday and get to go to parties and have weekends off," she notes. "Because of that, you end up spending more time with the people you work with. You bond with the people who understand the skill set required for that job."

Orchard acknowledges that the two careers tend to cause relatively early burnout because of the high-pressure working environment. "You have to have a thick skin and put in a lot of hours dealing with people," she says. "It wears you out, like a car that puts in more city miles than freeway miles." That's likely why most police departments offer a full pension after about 20 years of service and why the average floor somm is usually between 25 and 40.

Long after retirement, my father would stay in close contact with former colleagues and frequently attended gatherings of the 10-13 Club, a support organization with chapters around the country that's named for the NYPD signal code to assist an officer. Like sharing the "bartender's handshake" with fellow beverage professionals, it was a show of solidarity with those who went through the same rigors.

PHOTO: PALMA LEICHT



Author Lars Leicht's father, John P. Leicht, in uniform.

PHOTO COURTESY OF LARS LEICHT



Leicht with his son, Christian J. Leicht, at Christian's graduation from the New York City Police Academy.

PHOTO COURTESY OF HOLLY ORCHARD



Sommelier Holly Orchard is former proprietor of Savvy Cellar Wine Bar & Restaurant in Mountain View, CA.

Indeed, as Orchard points out, teamwork and loyalty are a big part of both jobs: "You have to be good at working on your own, but at the same time you have to pull your weight, or the team is not going to have your back."

That's when blood—and wine—prove thicker than water. **sj**

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Land of Plenty

**AT COPIA VINEYARDS & WINERY,
ANITA AND VARINDER SAHI CHALK UP THEIR
SUCCESS TO TRUE KISMET** by Meridith May

THE VIEW FROM the home of Anita and Varinder Sahi, owners of Copia Vineyards & Winery, spans their 50-acre Willow Creek District estate in Paso Robles, California. An additional 26 acres of vines are planted in Paso's Adelaida District; as Varinder, an engineer originally from Punjab, India, notes, "Our philosophy is not region-specific as much as [it is about] our intent for top quality. We want to make wines that best inspire us."

Anita, whose parents were born in Pakistan before migrating to Iran and then to India, is a former hospitality professional. She believes she and Varinder were meant to meet, and their kismet extended to their desire to make their own wines after they both served as harvest interns in Paso in 2016. Their first vintage together was 2017, and the luxurious wines they produce now are pitch-perfect, reflecting their talents while showcasing the land on which they built their dream.

"We're starting small and building a presence," says Anita. **SJ**



PHOTO: PETER SCHROEDER

Anita and Varinder Sahi.

Copia 2022 White, Willow Creek District, Paso Robles (\$47)

Tasting of sea-salted pear, hazelnut, and lemon blossom, this blend of 60% Roussanne and 40% Viognier comes from vineyards overseen by local producers Denner Vineyards and Caliza Winery. The saltiness tickles the tongue and leaves behind honeysuckle and jasmine. **93**

Copia 2021 The Source, Central Coast (\$65)

This elegant purple-red blend of 95% Syrah, 4% Grenache, and 1% Viognier releases a flow of violets, plum, and velvet cream surrounding a salty middle. Juicy and vibrant, with round tannins. **96**

Copia 2021 The Cure, Willow Creek District, Paso Robles (\$58)

Bright pomegranate and dark chocolate coat the palate of this winsome blend of 45% Mourvèdre, 28% Grenache, and 27% Syrah. Energetic notes of spearmint, laurel, and lavender add to the generous, plush purple fruit. **95**

Copia 2021 The Story, Willow Creek District, Paso Robles (\$58)

In this blend of 92% Grenache and 8% Mourvèdre, rhubarb and fennel engage with a coat of suede tannins as high-toned acidity lifts velvety notes of plum preserves. Generous and broad, with violets and dots of white pepper on the tip of the tongue. **94**

Copia 2020 Cabernet Sauvignon, Denner Vineyard, Willow Creek District, Paso Robles (\$80)

With the addition of 22% Syrah, this wine raises the bar for Cabernet. It possesses impeccable balance with a generous array of purple and blue fruit, while its seductively exquisite texture reveals a shadow of chalkiness and toasted oak. **98**

A view of Copia's Willow Creek District estate.

PHOTO: MYKALEA FAULCONER

Napa Reflections

AS WE PREPARE FOR OUR 2024 NAPA VALLEY SOMM CAMP, WE SALUTE TWO LABELS THAT HAVE CAUGHT OUR ATTENTION *by Meridith May*

Earthy Delights From Faust

FAUST CRAFTS limited-production Napa Valley Cabernet Sauvignon from its organically farmed estate vineyard in Coombsville. Winemaker David Jelinek practices minimal intervention in the cellar, allowing the Coombsville terroir and the inherent character of the variety to shine through.

PHOTO COURTESY OF FAUST WINES



Faust's vineyard in Coombsville, where the clay loam soils have excellent drainage capabilities and volcanic ash (aka tuff) contributes to the minerality of the wines.

Faust 2021 Cabernet Sauvignon, Napa Valley (\$65) Sourced from Faust's Coombsville vineyard along with other, cooler Napa Valley sites, this blend is composed of 85% Cabernet Sauvignon with some Merlot, Petit Verdot, and Cabernet Franc. A gracious mouthful of lavender and boysenberry pie is complemented by dusty tannins, while savory notes of tobacco and slate create a righteous backbone. A fresh acid profile ensures the youthful red is ready to bloom in high gear. **94**

Faust Wines 2020 The Pact Cabernet Sauvignon, Coombsville, Napa Valley (\$125) Coombsville's bowl-shaped depression holds the cool air and fog that funnels up from the San Pablo Bay. Aged 22 months in French oak, The Pact presents mouthwatering notes of espresso-laden blackberry enveloped in slate. Dark chocolate and violets lend the palate depth and richness, enhanced by suede tannins. Peppery stoniness adds gravitas on the lengthy finish. **97**



Philippe Melka's Craft Project, Moone-Tsai, Is "Inspired Winemaking"

AS MARYANN TSAI gained a reputation for creating fine wines from Howell Mountain, such as Beringer's Bancroft Ranch Merlots, her work instilled in her a passion for the region that she was able to further explore when she and husband Larry Tsai launched their Napa Valley label Moone-Tsai in 2003. Moone-Tsai's limited-production wines are crafted by celebrated winemaker Philippe Melka, whose vinous credits include Dominus, Hundred Acre, Haut-Brion, and Petrus.



Philippe Melka.

The Tsais' philosophy is clear, per their website: "If age and 'domain expertise' count for anything, we have come to appreciate the essential elements of inspired winemaking and well-crafted wines. Indeed, extraordinary fruit; thoughtful, inspired winemaking technique; and great French oak are foundational, with our accumulated experience, time-nurtured relationships, core operating values, and unwavering commitment to excellence as the difference-makers." **SJ**

Moone-Tsai 2019 Hillside Blend, Howell Mountain, Napa Valley (\$170) "Where possible, I will minimize winemaking techniques in the cellar so I can create a wine that tells the story of the vineyard. In the end, it must be about the fruit," notes Bordeaux-bred winemaker Philippe Melka. His inky-black blend of 62% Cabernet Sauvignon and 38% Merlot, grown 2,100 feet above the Napa Valley floor, is aged 18 months in (60% new) French oak. The mouthfeel is simultaneously chewy, fleshy, and dusty, with grainy tannins. Graphite and black tea leaves ignite the senses, juxtaposed with unearthed blackberries. **96**

Moone-Tsai 2019 Cor Leonis Cabernet Sauvignon, Napa Valley (\$330) Sourced from vineyards in Pritchard Hill, Coombsville, and St. Helena, this is the winery's signature Cabernet Sauvignon, whose name, Cor Leonis, means "heart of the lion," as reflected in the image of the bold animal on the label. Aged 18 months in (70% new) French oak, it's opaque carmine-black in the glass. Dried violets and grainy dark chocolate tangle with notes of boysenberry pie filling as plush, mouth-coating tannins luxuriously wind around the palate. **98**



The Romans called the brightest star in the Leo constellation Cor Leonis, meaning "heart of the lion." For us, it was the "mane" event of the evening we drank it.

Biodiversity Equals Stability

TRANSLATING THE LANGUAGE OF THE PLANET AT **FONDAZIONE SOSTAIN SICILIA'S** SECOND INTERNATIONAL SYMPOSIUM

story and photos by Deborah Parker Wong



Pictured from left to right at SOStain Sicilia's second International Symposium on Sustainable Interactions are moderator Anna Favella and panelists Maurizio Cellura, Marco Pistocchini, Attilio Carapezza, Paolo Fontana, Gianluca Sarà, Gaetano Benedetto, and Francesco Picciotto.

IT ISN'T WELL KNOWN that the Italian region of Sicily is home to the greatest biodiversity in the European Union, stemming from the fact that the island is a bridge between Europe and Africa, according to Gaetano Benedetto, president of the World Wildlife Foundation Italy Study Center. The drive to protect its flora and fauna is evident in the rapid adoption of organic certification by its winegrowers. With a dry Mediterranean climate and windy conditions that allow for fewer inputs in the vineyards, the island is naturally suited to organic production and has the most certified-organic land under vine of any region in Italy: over 37,000 hectares, which account for 35% of the country's total.

There are several factors driving sustainability efforts both in Sicily and on the mainland of Italy, many of which were discussed at SOStain Sicilia's second Inter-

national Symposium on Sustainable Interactions, held on October 5, 2023, in Torre del Barone di Sciacca. SOStain Sicilia is led by president Alberto Tasca d'Almerita and a board of directors composed of five producers who represent a cross-section of the industry: Giuseppe Bursi sits on behalf of cooperatives, Letizia Russo of large companies practicing organic agriculture and biodynamics, and Alberto Tasca and Alessio Planeta of family businesses.

SOStain was jointly established by the Consorzio di Tutela Vini DOC Sicilia and winemakers' association Assovini Sicilia in 2020. The agency, which does not allow members of its program to use synthetic herbicides, is based on the specifications of VIVA, a program developed by the Italian Ministry of the Environment and Energy Security in 2011 to promote sustainability within the Italian wine sector. SOStain's

main goals are promoting inclusivity, as producers do not have to be certified to participate in certain aspects of its program, and fostering the involvement of all players in the wine supply chain, making it one of the most progressive sustainability-certification programs to date.

The symposium was organized into three sections—Nature, Economy, and Society—with talks by 13 academic presenters (myself among them), followed by four partner presentations that demonstrated the agency of SOStain Sicilia in putting action behind its initiatives.

Ernesto Ghigna, European marketing director for O-I, introduced a wine bottle composed of 100% Sicilian glass; weighing 410 grams, it has a 90% recycle rate. Given the difficulty of achieving carbon neutrality in glass production, O-I relied on existing infrastructure in Marsala and a nearby cullet supplier to create

a one-of-a-kind “closed-loop economy” in which glass bottles are produced, sold, and eventually recycled into cullet, from which more bottles are produced. The initiative produced its first bottles in May 2023. In her opening remarks, Lucrezia Lamastra, president of SOS-tain’s scientific committee and professor at the Catholic University of Piacenza, noted that the annual carbon savings of the program are equal to 1,000 flights around the globe.

Among the compelling presentations, “Biodiversity as a Keystone in a Changing World” was riveting in its clarity. Gianluca Sarà, professor and coordinator of the ecology laboratory at Palermo University, stated in no uncertain terms: “Biodiversity is the basic layer of the foundation upon which sustainability is built. Any loss of biodiversity undermines the entire ecosystem, and it jeopardizes the flexibility and the resilience of our planet.” Sarà, who coordinates marine biology studies, described the need for a paradigm shift in which we see ourselves as protectors rather than exploiters of the ecosystem. The takeaway: Biodiversity equals stability.

Sarà’s talk served as the connective tissue for discussions by Paolo Fontana, entomologist at Fondazione Edmund Mach in Trento, about the impact of synthetic inputs on bees and the species’ viability as an indicator of environmental health and by Attilio Carapezza, entomologist and president of the Sicilian Society of Natural Sciences, about the unprecedented decline of insects. Carapezza noted, for instance, that Germany has recorded an overall biomass loss of 78%. “We cannot live without insects; they first emerged in the Devonian era, and their disappearance would shatter our existence,” he remarked. “A world without insects means a world without chocolate. The cacao plant is pollinated by a very tiny insect that has evolved for this purpose.” He pointed to the increasing threat of invasive species, which could result in the loss of palm trees and palm beetles.

Speaking on the topic of energy transition, Maurizio Cellura, director of the Center for Sustainability and Ecological Transition at the University of Palermo, began with citing the need for a universal language or “grammar” of sustainability, proposing a course to train educators in metrics and the skills needed for the



Author and SOMM Journal global wine editor Deborah Parker Wong was invited to discuss the sustainability-certification landscape in California and the market value of organic-, biodynamic-, and regenerative-certified wines.

transition to a sustainable economy. He pointed to the “tough choices” facing us as the raw materials critical to producing fuel cells, i.e. solar panels, decline. “We need to stretch our practice areas and to seek new renewable sources—those that will transfer us to a circular economy,” Cellura said. “To do that, we must develop synergies that connect the sourcing of raw materials and the supply chain to climate justice.”

In addition to moderator Anna Favella and Lamastra, who presented an overview of SOS-tain’s results to date, I was the only other woman and the only English speaker to present as part of a panel that day. My talk, titled “The Sustainability Certification Landscape in California and U.S. Market Trends,” provided a snapshot of where the California wine industry currently stands in terms of adoption of

and compliance with sustainable mandates. “The evolution of the wine-industry certification landscape in California has resulted in a dizzying array of regional and national certifying organizations that stand under the sustainability umbrella,” I explained. “And while these efforts have positioned California as a leader in sustainable practices in the United States, ours is a complex landscape that is constantly evolving and . . . particularly challenging for consumers to navigate in an informed and empowered way.”

This scenario stands in stark contrast to the streamlined and transparent certification system being championed by SOS-tain in Sicily. *Drinks Business* editor-in-chief Patrick Schmitt, MW, remarked that my talk had the effect of an “exposé” in pulling back the curtain on what passes as sustainably certified in California. S



FRANCOPHILES

UNITE

AT **CAB FRANC MASTERS**,
PASO ROBLES PRODUCERS
CELEBRATED THE
GROWING CLAMOR FOR
THE NOBLE GRAPE

BY CINDY LOWE RYNNING

PHOTOS: THEBRANDFOTO BY MELANIE NEGRİ



Wine educator Wes Hagen leads a discussion and tasting of Cabernet Francs from six different growing regions.



Producers and media guests gather at DAOU Vineyards for an exclusive four-course dinner prepared by the winery's executive chef, Spencer Johnston, and paired with an array of Paso Robles Cab Francs.

PASO ROBLES' VISION for the production of a classic Bordeaux variety became crystal-clear as industry representatives, members of the media, and consumers alike gathered there on December 2–3, 2023, to attend the Cab Franc Masters event. Cabernet Franc, the father of Bordeaux grapes, thrives in the Central Coast region's varying microclimates and terroirs, whose diversity ensures that there is an expression of the grape to suit every palate.

"People who know Bordeaux styles and blends are always very interested and excited about seeing Cab Franc—dominant blends and varietal wines coming out of Paso. I've sold Paso wines, and I have never seen a sommelier or a consumer be bummed when I say we're tasting Cab Franc," said wine educator Wes Hagen. Multiple experiences during the weekend, including the seminar he was on hand to conduct, proved his point.

Organized by Neeta and Kunal Mittal, owners of LXV Wine, the celebration was strongly supported by Linda Sanpei, founder/owner of communications agency Parker Sanpei, and Maeve Pesquera, senior vice president, strategy and business development, at DAOU Vineyards.

The festivities began with a lavish wine dinner for select media and producers at DAOU. The winery's executive chef, Spencer Johnston, curated a creative four-course menu with wines from not only DAOU but other event sponsors including LXV, Brecon Estate, CV Wines, J. Lohr Vineyards & Wines, and Hope Family Wines. Among them was the J. Lohr 2019 Cuvée St. E, which "offers earth and savory aromas," according to Steve Peck, the producer's wine director. "It is an homage to Bordeaux with its blend of mostly Cab Franc with Merlot and Cabernet



Matt Kettmann, senior editor of the Santa Barbara Independent, moderates a panel intended to help attendees understand Paso Robles Cab Franc in depth. Joining him from left to right are Hope Family Wines owner Austin Hope, LXV winemaker Jeff Streckas, Paso Robles Wine Country Alliance director Chris Taranto, and Bill Gibbs of Gibbs Vineyards.

Sauvignon." LXV winemaker Jeff Streckas explained that the LXV 2020 Reserve Cab Franc poured at the dinner is from a "postage stamp-sized vineyard of 1.5 acres on a steep hill in Los Alamos. It has fresh, vibrant aromas and flavors with high acidity." DAOU's 2021 Estate Cab Franc, for its part, was "powerful [yet] elegant and beautiful," shared Pesquera. "[Co-founder/chief winemaker] Daniel Daou has a love affair with Cabernet Franc. It's finicky but happy in Paso's Adelaida District, [which is] similar to Saint-Émilion."

"It's finally Cabernet Franc's time in this region," Hope Family Wines owner Austin Hope remarked while presenting the Austin Hope 2021 Cellar Select Cabernet Franc, which boasted notes of rich, savory spice and fig as well as plenty of balance. Robust and elegant with spicy fruit and oak, the CVWines 2019 Reserve Cabernet Franc came from grapes cultivated in an area known as the Estrella Bench, located about 13 miles east of downtown Paso Robles. And from the oldest Cabernet Franc planting in Paso Robles at 50-plus years was the Brecon Estate 2021 Reserve Cabernet Franc. "[We] treated these gnarly old crooners with the respect they deserve (read: [with a] gentle touch) and have since reaped the rewards. Once it opens, it has a story," said Brecon owner/winemaker Damian Grindley, who added that "the easiest way to judge the future of Cab Franc is by the

number of high-end winemakers putting their money where their mouth is and planting [the grape] in Paso Robles."

The final pour of the evening, a 2019 Cabernet Franc from DAOU sibling estate PATRIMONY, was finely polished. "It is the pinnacle expression of what we want to produce," stated PATRIMONY estate director Erik Johnson.

The next morning, attendees gathered at the Cass Winery Event Center for two seminars. First, Wes Hagen led a discussion and tasting of six Cabernet Francs from the Finger Lakes region of New York; Chinon in France's Loire Valley; Riparbella in the Maremma zone of Tuscany; Villány in southwest Hungary; the Uco Valley in Mendoza, Argentina; and Napa Valley's Oakville AVA. The goal was to help participants understand and appreciate the differences between regional styles of the grape.

Next, a panel designed to explore Paso Robles Cab Franc in depth was led by Matt Kettmann, senior editor of the *Santa Barbara Independent*. Bill Gibbs of Gibbs Vineyards discussed the ins and outs of growing the variety in the region; Jeff Streckas compared the winemaking processes in Paso Robles and Bordeaux; Austin Hope talked about the strong emergence of Cab Franc in the consumer market; and Chris Taranto, director of the Paso Robles Wine Country Alliance, described the landscape and terroir of Paso Robles in relation to Cab Franc.

Yet another highlight of the weekend was the Sunday afternoon Grand Tasting, showcasing over 20 local Cab Franc producers as well as food from Cass executive chef Charles Paladin Wayne (aka Chef Charlie), who served an array of passed appetizers and set up stations that featured fare from key growing regions for the grape such as Argentinian chickpeas and flatbread with chimichurri sauce, ratatouille with baguette slices, and the Hungarian potato dumplings called *shlishkes*—all of which surprised the palate alongside the wines. Among the participating winemakers was Steve Gleason, owner of Four Lanterns Winery, who reflected on how Paso Robles Cab Franc compares to its international counterparts: "On average Paso wines can be a bit bolder," he said. "Balancing pyrazines with these enhanced fruit flavors results in some very palatable wines."



LXV Wine owner Neeta Mittal (right) with Charles Paladin Wayne, executive chef at Cass Winery, which hosted the Grand Tasting on December 3.

By all accounts, Cab Franc Masters was a resounding success in terms of highlighting the grape's appeal. Consumer attendee Donna Cruciani noted, "I am familiar with Cab Franc as having an important role in red blends, but after experiencing Paso's Cab Franc Masters, I learned that this magnificent wine is amazing as a single varietal, too." And Gleason summed it up nicely: "The major takeaway was the quality of Paso Cab Franc: outstanding. We are a wine region that thrives on the unique and different. Cab Franc is not a long-lost grape, but it is not a mainstream grape either. I think it fits well into the culture of this community." ❧

Rising

to the Occasion



Pio Cesare wines tasted with author Wanda Mann at La Ciau del Tornavento in the village of Treiso, Barbaresco.

TRAVERSING PIEDMONT IN A bouncy van with Cesare Benvenuto Pio behind the wheel and his cousin Federica Boffa Pio riding shotgun, I sensed that there's no other place in the world where the fifth-generation vintners of Pio Cesare would rather be. Whether we were driving to their historic cellars in downtown Alba, to their vineyards in Barbaresco and Barolo, or to the Boffas' home for a meal, their joy was palpable, as was their commitment to serving as responsible stewards of their family's legacy.

Federica is acutely aware that all eyes are on her. The only child of the late Pio Boffa, a beloved icon of Italian wine, Federica became the proprietor of Pio Cesare when her father died at age 66 from COVID-19 in 2021. She was only 23. During my visit last fall, she was preparing to celebrate her 26th birthday.

PIO CESARE ENTERS A NEW CHAPTER IN PIEDMONT WITH FEDERICA BOFFA PIO AT THE HELM

by Wanda Mann



Federica Boffa Pio and Cesare Benvenuto Pio are fifth-generation vintners at Pio Cesare.



PHOTOS COURTESY OF PIO CESARE

Being tapped to lead an esteemed winery at such a young age while mourning the loss of a parent is almost impossible to fathom, but Federica rose to the occasion. “The most challenging aspect for me is being a very young woman at the helm of a very historical and prestigious brand, operating in a very traditional ‘old man’ business,” she acknowledges. “In the beginning, it was not very easy to present our family and promote our wines, especially old vintages—the majority of them were produced much before my birth—and to discuss winemaking techniques and work in the vineyards, especially because I didn’t study these subjects at school.” She credits her father for preparing her beyond what any school could have, however: “I have been very lucky because I had the opportunity of having such a great teacher, who encouraged me so much and made me fall in love with wine. He used to bring me into the vineyards when I was a little girl, telling me stories about Nebbiolo, about our terroir, our microclimate, our soil; then [we’d go] into the cellar, where wine was fermenting or completing the aging process. I have to admit that I probably learned much more with him than [from] going to university!”

In that light, Federica views her youth as an asset, not a liability. And she’s already wise enough to know that valuable lessons are often gained from mistakes; as she puts it, “It means I have a very long period in front of me where I can experiment with new things and sometimes make bad decisions, which will help me in improving my knowledge and my experience.” Of course, the fact that she does not have to go it alone helps.

Her mother, Nicoletta Boffa, with whom Federica shares an apartment above the winery, is a steadfast source of support and home-cooked meals. (I can attest that Nicoletta is a fantastic cook!) And her cousin Cesare, who worked closely with her father, has an intimate understanding of the business. Their many responsibilities include traveling to the more than 50 countries where Pio Cesare is sold while serving as ambassadors to a winery with more than 140 years of history. “The most important thing for our generation is never considering tradition as a suffocating burden but always as a promising starting point,” says Cesare. “For example,



The wine cellar at Pio Cesare.

we decided to expand our horizons and invest for the first time in two different [Piedmontese] regions outside the Barolo and Barbaresco area,” namely Alta Langa and Colli Tortonesi.

Cesare believes their Nebbiolo plantings in Alta Langa are an important step toward addressing challenges caused by climate change. “Here you may find higher altitude, fresher temperatures, and more abundant rainfalls and snowfalls [as well as] a very promising soil and terroir to produce complex wines with

great aging potential,” he says. As for their investment in Colli Tortonesi, it’s an integral part of their plan to increase Pio Cesare’s white-wine production, which started with Piodilei Chardonnay in 1981 and eventually expanded to Sauvignon Blanc. More recently, they have planted the indigenous grape Timorasso in Colli Tortonesi, from which they intend to make a wine “very similar to our Barolo [in that it will be] structured and powerful, with great longevity, but at the same time with great freshness, elegance, and finesse,” explains Cesare.

Pio Cesare’s portfolio may evolve, but for Federica, one guiding principle remains immutable: “The most important thing is continuing to be devoted to high quality without any compromises in order to produce great wines and great vintages like the previous generations,” she says.

I’ve traveled to many wineries, but my experience at Pio Cesare was uniquely intimate and emotional. While I thoroughly savored sipping exquisite old vintages of Barolo and Barbaresco as fresh white truffles rained down upon my plate, the opportunity to immerse myself in the home life of a winemaking family was the true rarity. I never had the opportunity to meet the late Pio, but his smiling face greeted me in photos throughout the Boffa home. At first, they filled me with sadness for the loss that Nicoletta, Federica, Cesare, and everyone who loved the man have endured. But I was also filled with admiration and respect for his legacy and for how the family behind Pio Cesare is passionately realizing his vision to ensure the future of the winery for generations to come. *SJ*

SOMMELIERS: The Secret Sauce of Business Success

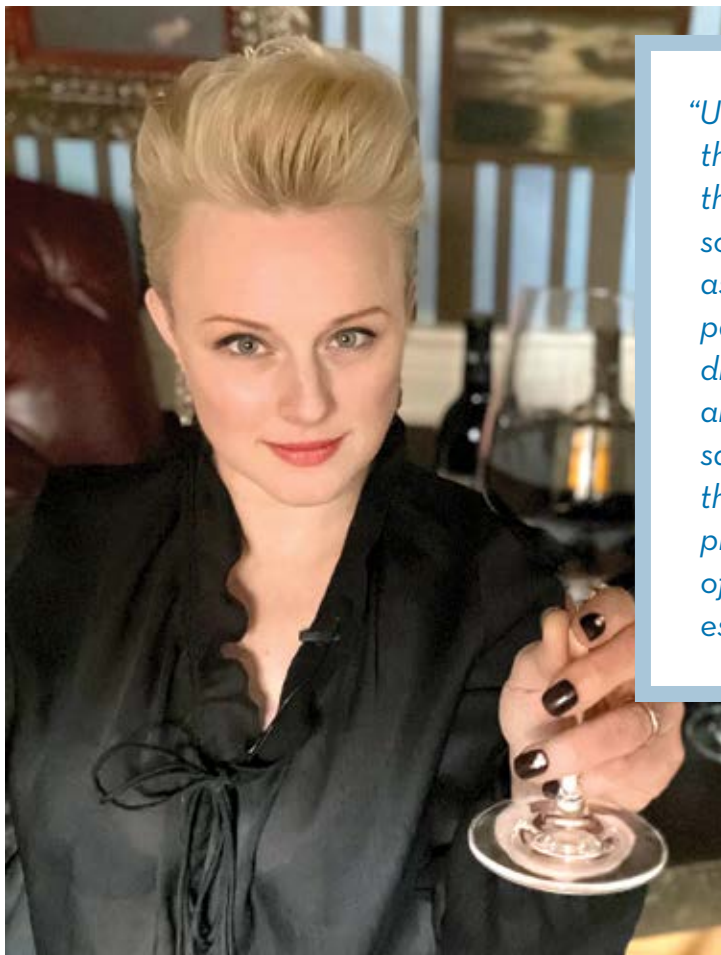
CERTIFIED MASTER SOMMELIER

Emily Wines is on a mission to teach the hospitality industry that a skilled sommelier is a business' best friend. Wines, who lives up to her name, found her calling when she was working in restaurants in college. "It was there I discovered a whole world of wine," she recalls. "I picked up a couple books . . . feeling like I needed to know more about it in order to be a more successful server and instantly fell in love with the stories, people, history, and culture behind wine."

Her current role as vice president of wine experience at Cooper's Hawk Winery and Restaurants allows her to expand on what she loves about being a sommelier: "Putting people at ease with wine, telling the stories, [and] making sure that everyone in the room is drinking wine," in her words. The special experience sommeliers provide is what makes them such an important part of the industry. "A sommelier is a crucial asset to the overall business equation, as they contribute significantly to the bottom line," Wines explains. "Understanding their stake in the business, sommeliers serve as strategic partners in driving wine and beverage sales, enhancing the overall profitability of the establishment. While outstanding food is integral to a restaurant's appeal, it is the sommelier's expertise in curating wine selections and maximizing beverage sales that ensures a well-rounded and financially sustainable operation."

As the industry evolves, there is a growing need for driven, enthusiastic professionals with a finger on the pulse of the business side of wine. But as Wines points out, "Before skill comes a solid foundation of integrity, work ethic, and passion for the product." Of course, education is vital to transforming that passion into a career. Certification and credentialing programs—including a "Business of the Sommelier" credential that Wines is currently

PHOTO COURTESY OF EMILY WINES



"Understanding their stake in the business, sommeliers serve as strategic partners in driving wine and beverage sales, enhancing the overall profitability of the establishment."

Emily Wines is vice president of wine experience at Cooper's Hawk Winery and Restaurants.

developing with the Court of Master Sommeliers, Americas—and accredited master's programs like the Culinary Institute of America's (CIA) master's degree in wine and beverage management help ensure the talent pipeline keeps flowing throughout the ever-changing industry.

Those inspired by Wines' journey can benefit from her pearls of wisdom in person at the CIA Wine & Beverage Summit, set for May 5–7 at the CIA at Copia, in Napa, California. There, in her words, she will delve "deeper into the mindset of a sommelier as a partner in the business rather than just as a taster and wine expert. We will be cov-

ering everything from how to do menu engineering to how to better leverage vendor relationships."

While she keeps an eye on the bottom line, Wines' answer is simple when asked what she enjoys most about being a sommelier: "I find the greatest pleasure in making people happy! Even if I am no longer on the restaurant floor, service and hospitality are at the core of everything I do." *sj*

For more information on the CIA's Wine & Beverage Summit and its master's program in wine and beverage, visit ciabevpro.com and masters.culinary.edu/wine.

Chronicles From the Cradle of Winemaking

**SOMM FILMS' LATEST DOCUMENTARY
IS PART HEARTWARMING FAMILY DRAMA,
PART GEOPOLITICAL THRILLER** by Amy Bizzarri

PRODUCTION COMPANY SOMM

Films' latest release, *SOMM: Cup of Salvation*, delves into the age-old connection between humans and terroir. The story begins at a family-owned winery in the fertile valleys of Armenia close to the border with Iran, where war constantly looms in the distance. It's there that Vahe Keushguerian and his beloved daughter, Aimee, work tirelessly to resurrect the winemaking traditions of their ancestors.

Many historians consider Armenia the cradle of winemaking. In 2007, a team of Armenian and Irish archaeologists found fermentation vats, a wine press, and storage jars in a cave in the village of Areni—evidence of the world's earliest known "winery," dating back to 4,000 B.C. Seeds found in the cave showed that the Neolithic winemakers who worked here had already domesticated the wild grape we now call *Vitis vinifera*, whose original cultivar emerged in the South Caucasus region over 8,000 years ago, according to archeological and genetic studies of modern wine grapes. Ancient Greek historian Herodotus (circa 484–425 B.C.) mentioned Armenia's wine trade in his written account of the Greco-Persian Wars, noting that he was especially impressed by the rafts, equipped with leather sails, that traders used to transport their goods down the Euphrates and Tigris rivers.

"I've been fascinated with Armenia ever since I was in middle school, when my history teacher mentioned that the Armenians can legitimately claim a historical continuity of some 4,000 years, making them among the most ancient peoples in the world," says SOMM Films founder and director Jason Wise. "Then she explained that the Armenian culture was almost wiped out completely by genocide. 'Why?' I asked myself, launching a lifelong quest to learn more about Armenia's rich heritage."


Born in Syria to Armenian parents, Vahe is the founder and CEO of winery incubator WineWorks. He moved to Armenia in 2009 and began crafting sparkling wines from indigenous grapes using the méthode champenoise, establishing Keush Wines—where he was eventually joined by Aimee—in 2013.

Cup of Salvation reveals the father-and-daughter team's mettle from the outset: Despite having to harvest their grapes in a landscape so immersed in conflict that they're forced to don bulletproof vests, Vahe and Aimee refuse to give up on their mission of crafting elegant sparkling wines from ancient grapes in their family's homeland. Then Vahe sets his sights even further, and the documentary takes a sharp turn. He travels undercover to Iran, crossing military checkpoint after military checkpoint on a quest to reach

vineyards deep in the countryside. His goal: to smuggle Iranian grapes back into Armenia and produce the first wine made entirely of Persian grapes since the 1979 revolution.

"Vahe is the most dynamic, fearless individual I've ever met," says Wise. "Over many glasses of wine, when he casually mentioned we were a mile from the Iranian border, sparking a conversation on Persia's storied winemaking tradition, the film changed course. . . . I knew I had to . . . follow the story and follow Vahe as he took on a daring search for ancient varieties."

Though *Cup of Salvation* plays out as a wine-splashed spy thriller, it's also an endearing tale of a father and daughter uniting to revive not only their family's winemaking history but also the once-celebrated viticultural heritage of their homeland, lost for centuries to religious and political conflict. "The idea that a human form of beauty and redemption can be found in wine has always pushed me to keep making these films, and I believe that's what happens in this movie," says Wise. "There is also the religious and spiritual significance of the idea that you drink something more than wine in [your] glass. Maybe it's just history and tradition, maybe more, but countless minds and hard work went into those grapes and that glass."

SOMM: Cup of Salvation began its limited theatrical run last October and will be available to stream on various platforms, including somm.com, in early 2024. 

{ bars }



▲ Rosevale Cocktail Room carries nearly 200 different vermouths.

viva VERMOUTH

IN NEW YORK CITY, **ROSEVALE COCKTAIL ROOM** BOASTS THE MOST EXTENSIVE COLLECTION OF BOTTLINGS IN THE U.S.

by Stefanie Schwalb

Carver Road Hospitality vice president of beverage and hospitality culture Francesco Lafranconi with Rosevale Cocktail Room's vermouth cart.



PHOTOS: AMY ELISABETH SPASOFF



▲ Tasting flights are accompanied by snacks.

Antonio Benedetto Carpano, who created Antica Formula); and details on the flights. Currently among the latter are The Founding Fathers, The World Tour, Old World vs. New World, Tour de France, Vuelta a España, Giro d'Italia, Vermouth di Torino Rosso, and Amato & Chinato. These flights, priced at \$38, consist of four 1-ounce pours paired with nibbles to complement their style. Additionally, the team is working to create a European-style happy hour; what's known as *la hora de vermut* in Barcelona, Spain, serves as one inspiration.

"Of course we're rotating the brands [on our list], but the most renowned countries for the consumption, production, and history of vermouth are Italy, France, and Spain," Lafranconi says. "Then there are other wine-producing countries

NEGRONIS. MANHATTANS. Martinis. Many of the world's most beloved cocktails contain vermouth; featuring a range of botanicals, the aromatized, fortified wine has a way of enhancing spirits—and lifting them. Granted, many consumers have never tasted vermouth on its own and may only recognize a handful of brand names, but a new program launched at New York City's Rosevale Cocktail Room aims to change that.

Rosevale, which is located at the CIVILIAN hotel in the Theater District, opened in November 2022 to offer an extensive list of handcrafted cocktails created by Francesco Lafranconi, a master mixologist and vice president of beverage and hospitality culture at Carver Road Hospitality, which operates Rosevale. Determined to position the venue as a trend-setting destination for the international bartending community, Lafranconi considered his admiration for vermouth, its rich history, and its range of styles; the fact that it has recently been undergoing a renaissance led him to build upon the buzz. "Thanks to their collaborative efforts, top figures in the beverage industry in the last ten years . . . [have] started to legitimize vermouth as an incredible, important flavor and modifier for cocktails [as well as something] to be enjoyed by itself," he says. "Since there's a strong presence of Italian [and other] European communities in New York, I wanted to have a place where guests could discover the fascinating world of vermouth, because I think

▼ Rosevale's Vermouth Book.



the fun with it is that it's still uncharted territory for many consumers."

Rosevale's program encompasses nearly 200 labels of vermouth. Carefully stored in temperature-controlled wine coolers, they're divided up into five different styles (and additional sub-styles), enabling guests to explore them individually by the 2.5-ounce pour or through selected flights—known collectively as the Vermouth Tours Experience—based on the expressions' aromatic complexity, country of origin, and level of sweetness. To guide them through the new offerings, Lafranconi and his team, including beverage director Alec Kass, developed the Vermouth Book, which provides information about how vermouth is made; pioneers in its production (such as

tagging along, whether it's Argentina, Australia, or the United States—particularly the West Coast, [namely] Oregon and California, but also New York. There's a lot of diversity there, [so]—[from] our young bar patrons in their 20s all the way up to a more mature audience in their 50s, 60s, and so forth—everyone is able to find their own favorites."

Rosevale's success so far "is giving me a lot of hope, [because vermouth is] a great product [that] also embraces the trend of low-ABV [drinks]," Lafranconi adds. "[Here], you'll discover so many vermouths all over the place; I think we are at the right time at the right place, and we have a great opportunity to be fine promoters of civilization through this incredible beverage." ❧

A Q&A With Stefanie Longton

GENERAL MANAGER AT **BENNETT LANE WINERY** IN CALISTOGA, CA

IN THIS NEW COLUMN, we go behind the scenes with the managers, owners, and operators representing the country's top tasting rooms and the brands behind them. For this issue, we met up with Stefanie Longton, a Bennett Lane Winery veteran who helped open the producer's tasting room in 2003 after gaining winery experience overseas in the Margaret River region of Australia. Over the course of nearly 20 years at the winery, Longton has seen Bennett Lane grow from a new kid on the block to an established Napa Valley Cabernet house. She takes pride in everything that happens there, from wine releases to the tasting-room experience for guests and everything in between.

Q: How do you ensure a positive and memorable experience for visitors in the tasting room?

Our biggest focus is hospitality. We know we have great wines, so the key is to blow guests away with our hospitality and atmosphere. As a family-owned winery, we like to keep the atmosphere elegant but casual and true to our brand image. We focus on seated tastings and really get to know our guests and have a lot of fun with them.

Q: How do you decide on the selection of wines offered in the tasting room?

We have three different flights available, each catering to a different guest experience. Our most popular is our Taste of Napa Valley, which includes our Chardonnay, Maximus Red Feasting Wine, and Cabernet Sauvignon. The fourth wine in this flight is changed quite often and is always one of our wine club-exclusive wines. This is a great way for us to give our guests a sneak peek into the benefit of membership and try an extremely limited release.

Q: How do you engage with the local community to promote the tasting room?



PHOTOS COURTESY OF BENNETT LANE WINERY

Bennett Lane's Cabernet Sauvignon can be poured on its own or in flights like the popular Taste of Napa Valley.

Bennett Lane Winery general manager Stefanie Longton.

We are very involved in our community, from the Calistoga Chamber of Commerce and Visitor's Center to the Calistoga Winegrowers [association]. Another way we engage with the community is through our local restaurants. Nearly all of the restaurants in town have our flagship Maximus Red Feasting Wine by the glass. This is a great way to connect with [them] and promote our wine to folks that are visiting and dining out.

Q: How do you collaborate with the winemaking team to ensure a seamless connection between the tasting room and the winery?

We are so fortunate to have a fabulous relationship with the winemaking team. One great collaboration is having them join us at our team meetings when we have a new release. This is such a great chance for the sales team to try the new wine personally with the winemaker and enologist and ask any questions they may have. It leads to a much stronger connection

to the wine for the staff than they would have by simply getting the winemaker's tech sheets.

Q: What strategies do you use to handle customer inquiries and feedback effectively?

One of our biggest strategies for customer service is the telephone. More and more small businesses these days no longer answer their phones for customer inquiries or have an auto dialer that answers for them and directs the call. We really pride ourselves on being available for our customers and trying to answer every call, whether it [involves] an appointment inquiry or a wine question. *ST*

The *SOMM Journal* and *The Tasting Panel* are proud to support *The Tasting & Tap Room Expo and Conference* at the *Reno-Sparks Convention Center* on May 7–8, 2024. Registration details can be found at tastingroomexpo.com.



A vineyard worker attends to the 2023 harvest.

A Golden Harvest

CALIFORNIA VINTNERS REPORT EXCEPTIONAL QUALITY IN 2023

THE CALIFORNIA WINE community is celebrating the exceptional 2023 vintage, following a late start to harvest. Winter rains revitalized soils and encouraged healthy canopies while cooler temperatures in spring and summer allowed grapes to gradually ripen. Many vintners predict that this vintage will be one of the state's finest, producing wines with beautiful flavors, vibrant acidity, and remarkable balance. We got the scoop from a few such producers:

Matt Brain, Alpha Omega, Napa County: "Fruit is showing deep color, complex flavors and aromas, and good acidity levels. I love the complexity of the vintage, and the sub-AVAs [of Napa Valley] will be quite distinct this year, truly revealing the appellation and soil type."

Lisa Amaroli, Benziger Family Winery, Sonoma County: "Fruit is showing great flavors, along with concentration and balanced acids at lower sugar levels. We have seen elegance and boldness, but there is something beyond that this year—I'd call it grace."

Renée Ary, Duckhorn Vineyards, Napa and Sonoma counties: "This year's Sauvignon Blanc shows bright and clean character. Merlot is displaying early flavor development, balanced sugars, and bright acids. Hearty tannins and complex flavors are hallmarks of this year's Cabernet Sauvignon."

Steve Lohr, J. Lohr Vineyards & Wines, Napa County, Monterey County, and Paso Robles: "It's been a nicely balanced year, and the quality has been so high. The flavors are just off the charts, particularly for Pinot Noir and Syrah as well as Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, and Cabernet Franc."

Aaron Lange, LangeTwins Family Winery and Vineyards, Lodi and Clarksburg: "I am very optimistic about the wines from the Lodi and Clarksburg appellations—probably more bullish and excited than [I have been for] any other year in recent history."

Nicholas Miller, Miller Family Wine Co., Santa Barbara County and Paso Robles: "The extended, mild season allowed for average berry size, significant color development, and great flavor."

Heidi Scheid, Scheid Family Wines, Monterey County: "The fruit is showing great varietal intensity, balanced acidity, lower alcohol levels, and deep color for red varieties. This feels like it's going to be one of those perfect years, with good yields and spectacular fruit quality!"

Christian Ahlmann, Six Sigma Ranch, Lake County: "The soil moisture was restored while the vines were dormant, and they loved every minute of it when they woke up in spring. The quality looks excellent, especially for Tempranillo and Syrah."

Frederic Delivert, Tolosa Winery, San Luis Obispo County: "This year reminds me of 2019. Pinot Noir and Chardonnay are expressing their coastal trademark—finesse and elegance with more earthy and mineral touches."

Hanna Linder, Wente Vineyards, Livermore Valley and Arroyo Seco: "I think it should be a really great year for red varieties. We have seen some great color and acid balance with really awesome flavors."

For a comprehensive look at the vintage, including specifics on the growing season, total wine-grape acreage, and most-planted grape varieties from 17 different winegrowing regions, read Wine Institute's 2023 Harvest Report by using the above QR code or visiting bit.ly/23harvest. 

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.

Sonoma County in Seven Courses

A TASTING AT AMAYA IN SAN DIEGO, CA, SHOWCASED THE STELLAR BOTTLINGS OF **BACIGALUPI VINEYARDS** AND **CONVENE WINERY** BY **DAN KOSTA**

story and photos by Michelle M. Metter

AS THE SISTER RESTAURANT to the three-Michelin-starred Addison at the Fairmont Grand Del Mar in San Diego, California, Amaya holds its own in a setting that exudes Tuscan charm. Balmy, sunny weather allows Amaya to make use of Aria Lawn, an 8,000-square-foot promenade located adjacent to the restaurant. It was here that Sonoma County made its own music during a seven-course tasting that showcased Bacigalupi Vineyards and Convene by Dan Kosta last July.

Hosts Nicole Bacigalupi and Dan Kosta teamed up to present wines from the Russian River Valley and the Sonoma Coast paired with plates from executive chef Bryn McArthur. After splashes of both producers' rosé of Pinot Noir, we were invited to sit at an expansive community table with the winemakers.

Readers no doubt know Dan Kosta as a verifiable legend of premium Pinot Noir production and the founder of cult favorite Kosta Browne. Launched under the DK Wine Group umbrella, Convene, his new venture with longtime winemaker Shane Finley, focuses on Russian River Valley and Sonoma Coast blends.

The first course paired Convene's 2021 Russian River Valley Chardonnay with pain perdu featuring roasted Chino Farms strawberries, pickled green strawberries, and lemon verbena. While the roasted berries accentuated the wine's hazelnut aromas, the pickled ones punctuated its notes of green apple and white flowers.

Had the tasting stopped right there, I would have left content, but a seat next to Nicole Bacigalupi granted me access to a wealth of information on the wines produced by her family, building anticipation for the pairings to come. As I came to learn, the Bacigalupis have 65 years of experience in grape growing, supply-



Baja striped bass with Weiser Farms potatoes, pluots, dragon's tongue beans, and beurre rouge.

ing fruit to some of Sonoma and Napa's most renowned producers; their grapes went into the Chateau Montelena 1973 Napa Valley Chardonnay that triumphed over many acclaimed French wines at the famed 1976 Judgment of Paris. Today, three generations of family members are involved in the day-to-day management of the winery, while Ashley Herzberg leads the winemaking team.

The second course of hazelnut-crusted Maine scallops with sweet-onion soubise and caviar was accompanied by Bacigalupi's 2021 Russian River Valley Chardonnay and 2021 Renouveau Russian River Valley Chardonnay. While both wines showed exceptionally well, the Renouveau is a special bottling, sourced from the same block that yielded the 1973 Chateau Montelena and available only to wine club members. Nicole described it as having "expressive aromas of white peach, satsuma orange rind, honeysuckle, toasted hazelnut, and lemon oil and a pal-

ate filled with layers of stone fruit on the front."

The third course immediately had my attention: a raviolo filled with wagyu beef-cheek sugo, fig, chanterelle mushroom, and brown butter nage alongside Convene's 2019 Campbell Ranch Pinot Noir and 2019 Sunchase Vineyard Pinot Noir, both single-vineyard wines from the Sonoma Coast. Showing dark garnet in the glass, the former, according to Kosta, offered flavors of "strawberry, red apple skin, rose petal, and hints of sandalwood, pine needle, and cherry cola," while the latter possessed more "plum,

blueberry, nutmeg, and cinnamon notes." They were followed by Bacigalupi's 2021 Bloom Ranch Pinot Noir from the Russian River Valley, which was paired with a dish of Baja striped bass, Weiser Farms potatoes, pluots, dragon's tongue beans, and beurre rouge. Medium-garnet in color, the wine displayed aromas of white pepper and cardamom as well as flavors of Asian spices that harmonized with the pluots and the sauce.

The final three courses featured still more Russian River Valley wines: the Bacigalupi 2021 Petite Sirah, served alongside honey-lacquered Liberty duck with pommes paillasson, braised cherries, and duck jus; the Convene 2021 Limerick Lane Zinfandel, which accompanied dark-chocolate cremeux with cherry, malt, and cocoa nib; and Bacigalupi's 2019 Diavolletti, a Port-style Zinfandel that complemented Cowgirl Creamery Mt Tam and Sicilian pistachio lavash. **sj**

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The Meaning of Mentorship

IN CONVERSATION WITH WINEMAKER PRIYANKA FRENCH

by Michelle Schromm, executive director, Bâtonnage

IN THIS LIMITED SERIES, we share stories from the women behind Bâtonnage, an industry group focused on creating positive change for women in wine. For the second installment, we interviewed Priyanka French, Bâtonnage's mentorship director and the winemaker at Signorello Estate in Napa, California.

Q: How did you become interested in wine?

I'm from India, where the idea of working as a winemaker wasn't something I was exposed to. As an undergrad, I studied food engineering and technology; I selected that major because I loved the subject matter—as opposed to the actual industry. Walking through a dairy factory or a Coca-Cola manufacturing plant wearing a hairnet, I quickly realized that wasn't the dream I was chasing. Then [on] one of the site-visit days, we went to the vineyards, and it was love at first sight. There was something so magical and attractive about the creative aspect of it alongside the science.

Q: What do you love about being a winemaker?

Winemaking is capturing time and place in a bottle. I find that to be one of the most fulfilling parts of my work. There is an importance to understanding the science of winemaking, but it's really the creative aspect—the ability to tell the story of a site—that is so exciting. And even when you're done with your work as a winemaker and you put the wine into a bottle, the story lives on and continues to evolve.

Q: What advice would you give to a young woman entering a wine-making career?



Priyanka French is Bâtonnage's mentorship director and the winemaker at Signorello Estate in Napa, CA.

PHOTO: BONAFIDE PRODUCTIONS

Find what you truly enjoy. When I was coming up through the industry, I felt it was all about checking the boxes to follow a predetermined path to success. But it's also important to ask questions like, "What grapes do I enjoy working with?" or "What kind of company or organization do I want to work for?" My advice is to continuously ask yourself those questions as you select the next internship or opportunity. It's not just about checking the boxes; it's about getting something that ultimately adds value to your growth as a winemaker.

Q: How do you feel the wine industry has changed over the past ten years?

When I came into the industry, we didn't have a platform to have real, honest conversations. There was a reluctance to share basic information such as salary that could help people advocate for themselves. While there is still a long way to go, I feel that we're now able to have these conversations.

Q: You began the mentorship program at Bâtonnage, which has supported over 2,300 mentor/mentee connections. How does this platform and community help you achieve your vision for the wine industry as a whole?

From my own personal experience, so much of my success has been thanks to so many people along the way who offered me good advice and feedback or who opened doors for me to an introduction or interview. This kind of community building and support is what we need to make progress for the industry. It has been wonderful to offer this kind of support through our mentorship program and really incredible to watch its organic growth and impact. *§*

Established in 2018, Bâtonnage is dedicated to supporting and empowering women through mentorship, community building, networking, and job opportunities. To learn more and get involved, visit batonnageforum.com.



How “The Bar Chef” Got His Name

IN CONVERSATION WITH SCOTTSDALE, AZ-BASED BEVERAGE DIRECTOR **CHRISTIAAN RÖLLICH** by Christina Barrueta

WITH A CAREER spanning over two decades, Christiaan Röllich’s life experiences have shaped him into the cocktail craftsman he is today. The Dutch-born talent currently oversees the beverage programs of acclaimed chef Matt Carter’s Scottsdale eateries, including Fat Ox, The Mission, and Zinc Bistro.

Röllich’s journey into the world of cocktails began in the idyllic town of Heemstede in the Netherlands “with windmills and cobblestone streets,” he recalls. “The first time I took my wife, she said it looked like something out of a movie.” Early stints included working at a local tavern at age 15 and at Amsterdam’s legendary Club iT, but all the while, Röllich was chasing Hollywood dreams, so in 1997, he packed up and headed to Los Angeles. While he may not have achieved movie-star fame, fate had another marquee role in mind—headlining talent behind the bar.

In 2007, Röllich found himself at Lucques, the top-rated restaurant in LA at the time. Inspired by its farm-to-table ethos and global flavors, Röllich developed a bar menu of seasonal, farmers market-driven cocktails featuring homemade vermouths and infusions, and soon did the same for sister restaurants Tavern and A.O.C. *Forbes* named him one of LA’s most innovative mixologists, and in 2019 he released a book, *Bar Chef: Handcrafted Cocktails*, which was nominated for a Tales of the Cocktail Foundation Spirited Award.

When the pandemic hit, a new chapter unfolded. Röllich relocated to Phoenix, where his wife is from, quickly making his mark as bar chef at Sanctuary Camelback Mountain resort. In 2023, he made another career shift, joining Carter’s restaurants as beverage director. “I spend a lot of time in the kitchen getting new

PHOTO: CHAD WHITTINGTON PHOTOGRAPHY



Christian Röllich is beverage director at Fat Ox, The Mission, and Zinc Bistro in Scottsdale, AZ.

ideas, and I love working with a chef that’s excited about everything,” he says. “Every time I see Chef Carter, he’ll say, ‘I have this really cool spice I’m using, have you tried it?’ or ‘I saw this on YouTube, what do you think?’”

Take, for example, Röllich’s work at upscale Italian steakhouse Fat Ox. In creating the Garden Rocket—a verdant blend of vodka, honeydew melon, and arugula-and-almond orgeat—“I was thinking of melon topped with pesto,” he says, while black cardamom was the impetus for the whiskey-based Spice Queen, which also contains turmeric, roasted chicory, and vanilla; in his view, “The unexpected bold flavors work really well together.” Then there’s the Green Gold; inspired by Carter’s pistachio chimichurri, the celadon-hued cocktail is a vibrant combination of tequila, pistachio syrup, and cucumber juice in a glass rimmed with dehydrated herbs and aromatic spices.

Expect similar creativity at The Mission’s



PHOTO: CHRISTINA BARRUETA

The Garden Rocket at Fat Ox.

two locations. Like Carter’s menu, Röllich’s list crisscrosses the landscape of Latin America. He recognizes the Asian influences in countries like Peru

by incorporating ginger, lemongrass, and yuzu into the tequila-based Rio Naranja, while the Mission Martini transforms the Espresso Martini through the addition of Panamanian rum, honey, and cinnamon. For the Archbishop, Röllich combines bourbon and mole orgeat shaken with egg white. “I thought, mole and orgeat are both made with almonds,” he says, “so let’s add those mole flavors like chocolate, cinnamon, and chile. It’s pretty dope.” Still other drinks pay homage to, say, Dominican *mamajuana*—a mixture of rum, red wine, honey, and herbs—and Peruvian *chicha morada* made with purple corn.

Now Röllich has his sights set on updating the beverage program at Carter’s Zinc Bistro, where he’s looking forward to experimenting with Pernod, Cognac, and other fine French spirits. “Zinc reminds me of Lucques, the restaurant that launched my career,” he enthuses, “so I’m super excited about it.”

For all his success, Röllich retains his insatiable curiosity. “I am always researching and learning, and I want to share that experience,” he says. “It’s been a fun ride so far, and I can’t wait to see what’s next.”



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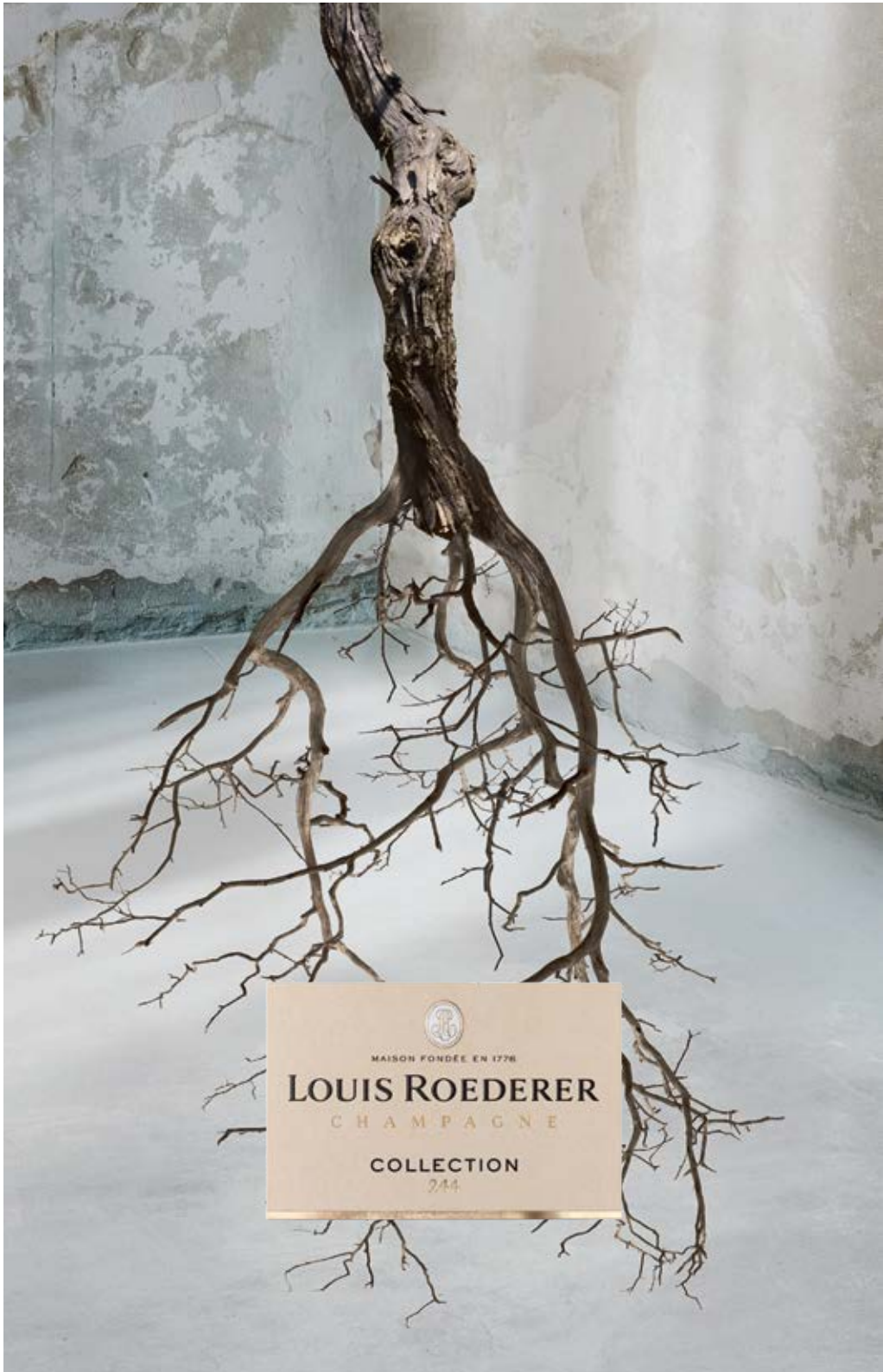
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