

# THE SOMM JOURNAL

*Grazing in the sustainable vineyard at  
Allegretto Vineyard Resort.*

PHOTO: JEREMY BALL



## *Sustainable* PASO ROBLES

*The Region Is  
Leading the Way for  
Responsible  
Farming Practices*



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*The pursuit to craft world-class Riesling  
from the Finger Lakes.*

The pursuit to craft world-class Riesling brings Paul Hobbs back to his family roots in Upstate New York to create site-specific estate wines from the emerging Finger Lakes region. Planted high density on steep slate slopes, the estate boasts breathtaking views of Seneca Lake, as well as a hospitality center.



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# THE SOMM JOURNAL

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first  press

A VINEYARD'S

# visage

PAUL HOBBS WINERY  
UNVEILS ITS FIRST PACKAGING REDESIGN  
IN MORE THAN 30 YEARS

*by Kate Newton*

*Paul Hobbs Winery's George Menini Estate in the southwestern Russian River Valley is planted to Chardonnay and Pinot Noir.*

PHOTO: WILDLY SIMPLE PRODUCTIONS



*Paul Hobbs has never been the type to surrender to inertia.*

In the years since his winemaking career began with an internship at Robert Mondavi in the late 1970s, he's established his own wineries in California, New York, and Argentina as well as partnerships in Armenia, Spain, and France while engaging in consultant work that's transported him to vineyards around the world. However, when it came to the packaging for the Sebastopol, California-based Paul Hobbs Winery, which he launched in 1991, he long had a mentality that making major alterations to the classic label bearing his name was far from an urgent task.

Yet the concept that's inspired the recent redesign of the Appellation, Vineyard Designate, and Cuvée tiers that comprise the portfolio is one that's been ingrained in Hobbs' winemaking ideology since the winery's inception more than 30 years ago: By giving the vineyard or the appellation top billing on the label over the grape variety, Hobbs and his team are explicitly delineating which elements they believe hold the most influence over a given wine's character. With the old packaging—designed by Chuck House, whose portfolio includes some of Northern California's most iconic labels—"the varietal had hierarchy over the vineyard, and I was never really in love with that, but that seemed to be the appropriate thing at the time back in 1991 when I started the business," Hobbs says. "A lot's changed in 30 years in terms of how appellations are recognized by consum-



PHOTO: ERIK CASTRO

*Paul Hobbs Winery founder Paul Hobbs.*

PHOTO COURTESY OF PAUL HOBBS WINERY



*Paul Hobbs Winery recently underwent its first packaging redesign in over 30 years to more prominently feature its estate vineyards and partner sites as well as their respective appellations; pictured here are expressions from its Vineyard Designate and Appellation tiers.*





*The Cuvée collection, available exclusively to Paul Hobbs Winery mailing-list members, is distinguished from the other tiers by its more prominent leaf artwork and centered lettering.*

ers and obviously the press and trade. . . . We thought, well, when you think of great wines from Europe, and using that model, the vineyard is the place you really want to celebrate. What you choose to grow on it is almost [secondary]. We felt that we were ready to make that change . . . [while] putting more quality and definition into the label itself, more depth, to help the consumer make that distinction quite easily."

While appealing to the consumer is a driving goal of the redesign, for which the rollout began in February and will finish in July, assisting on-premise beverage professionals is an added benefit. Paul Hobbs Winery launched with a single tier of wines, and as the portfolio expanded, few alterations were made to the packaging to distinguish between them. "So, there was confusion in restaurants, particularly in dark cellars; somebody would order a bottle of Coombsville and end up [getting] a Beckstoffer To Kalon because

the server didn't read the To Kalon Vineyard [on the label]," Hobbs notes. "So those were little additive things that just bubbled up and [made us say], 'We really need to see what we can do.' Also, our quality had improved, and there were other [considerations] that [led us to think] the label could be more premium, so we made tweaks to add more definition to the artwork." They didn't want to deviate completely from the original packaging, however, so they've retained the black label—a choice made back in the '90s to "take the road less traveled" in a sea of white labels, Hobbs says—against which the signature leaf artwork, now revised slightly to appear more modern, creates a sharp contrast.

That's even more so the case with the Vineyard Designate wines, which are emblazoned with a single gold-foil leaf to denote each bottling's status as a single-vineyard expression, whether it hails from an estate property like Nathan Coombs

in Coombsville, Napa Valley, and George Menini in the Sebastopol Hills area of the Russian River Valley or a partner site like Napa's Beckstoffer Dr. Crane Vineyard. Hobbs' long-established propensity for vineyard-designate wines can be traced back to his travels to Burgundy in the 1980s, and since its launch, the Paul Hobbs Winery label has served as a conduit for that passion—one that's increasingly being shared by consumers, much to Hobbs' pleasure. "The name of the vineyard and building the reputation of the vineyard, you could see from the European model, particularly the Burgundian model, how important that was. And we thought that would occur as a region tends to mature. When I first came to the Russian River district, for example, and West [Sonoma County], it was just sort of beginning to be known . . . but we could see that as these labels went out into the market and as we learned more and consumers learned more, how it added value as



an asset of the whole proposition of the wine we were selling,” he explains. “The vineyard became extremely important to us, and there was no surprise in that. . . . We have clients [who,] when they’re drinking our portfolio, they love to try all of them and see how they differ, and that just continues to grow and build. I think we’re still in the infancy of that and just scratching the surface.”

Those interested in delving well below the surface can join Paul Hobbs’ mailing list, through which they can gain exclusive access to the winery’s Cuvée collection; the enlarged leaf artwork on its new labels compared to that on the other tiers signifies its place at the pinnacle of the portfolio due to the wines’ “rarity and exclusivity,” in that they represent specific blocks within Paul Hobbs’ most esteemed sites, Hobbs notes. “These are ultra-luxury products—a culmination of all my years of working experience,” he adds.



PHOTO COURTESY OF PAUL HOBBS WINERY

Regardless of which tier his customers are exploring, Hobbs is particularly excited to witness the potential the new packaging has for generating interest in Paul Hobbs’ “key four” estates, namely the aforementioned Nathan Coombs and George Menini as well as Goldrock in West Sonoma Coast and Katherine Lindsay, the winery’s original estate, in the Russian River Valley. “I didn’t have an estate vineyard planted until 2000, so I wasn’t able to really get into the game of growing my own grapes until a good nine, ten years after starting the company. Now we have a bevy of our own estates, and we have these great, pedigreed properties. So, I think what we’ve done here is going to elevate the awareness of these estates in the mind of the consumer,” he says, while potentially inspiring the more dedicated enophiles to eventually visit the sites themselves.

He has similar hopes for Paul Hobbs’ partner vineyards, some of which he’s had relationships with for decades, among them Hyde, Richard Dinner, and Beckstoffer. “These relationships [with growers,] they’re deep relationships, which I think is important in this business because there’s an intuition, and you want people who are really and truly engaged emotionally,” he says. “When there’s [that] emotional connection, the vines seem to somehow

respond to that”—creating a sense of place in the newly enhanced wines that, in Hobbs’ words, “has tremendous power.” “We want a legacy; we want this thing to go on,” he continues. “This [redesign] is that legacy. While the quality of wine you have come to expect from Paul Hobbs remains the same, we hope that when you pick up a bottle now, it will evoke a clearer sense of the wine inside—a focused but complex expression of a singular place.”

## THE ON-PREMISE IMPRESSION

“I am a longtime fan of [Paul Hobbs’] wines and have been utilizing them extensively during my tenure with Landry’s[, La Griglia’s parent company]. I appreciate how much care the winery is taking with these timeless labels and am excited to see the new vintage. In my opinion, the decision to emphasize appellation and vineyard site on the new labels is an excellent move. When selling the 2019 Paul Hobbs Coombsville Napa Valley Cabernet Sauvignon (which I have poured by the glass at two restaurants), I often find my guests somewhat confused by the packaging[, and as a result] I often have to clarify where the wine comes from and where it stands within the portfolio. This new label will make it much easier for my guests to understand exactly which wine they are enjoying when I present it to the table. Furthermore, I think the decision to keep Napa Valley on the front label is a necessary one, as Coombsville is still an appellation many wine lovers in Houston are not immediately familiar with.” —*Skyler Ring, wine director, La Griglia, Houston, Texas*



PHOTO COURTESY OF SKYLER RING

“We love the new labels. They are immediately recognizable as the familiar Paul Hobbs brand, but the vineyard names being more prominently displayed makes it much easier to navigate the many wines of the Paul Hobbs ecosystem. [They’re] very user-friendly to [both] the consumer and the restaurant and retail staffs that manage physical inventory.” —*Francis Schott, co-owner, Stage Left Wine, New Brunswick, New Jersey*



PHOTO COURTESY OF FRANCIS SCHOTT



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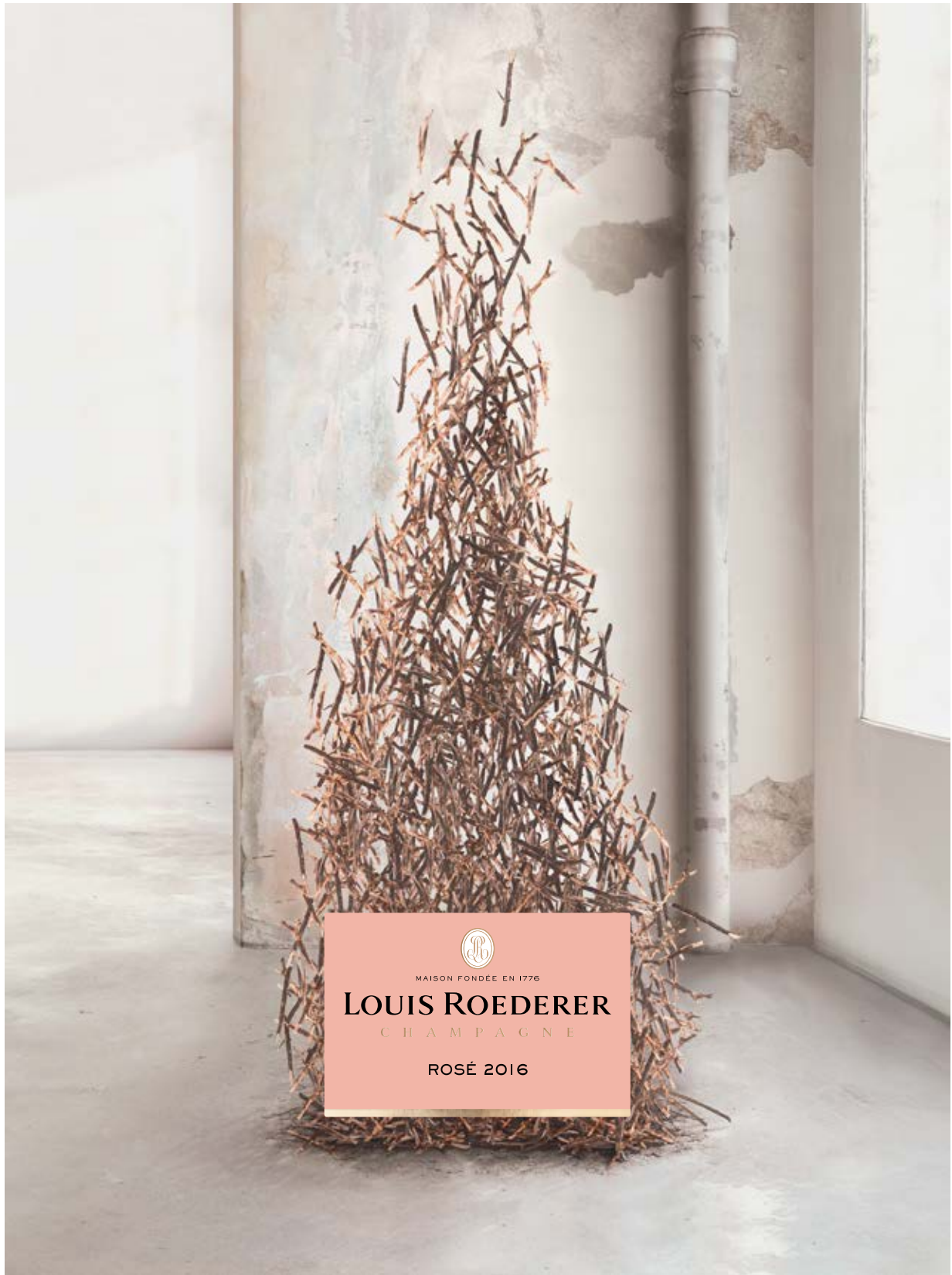
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# THE SOMM JOURNAL

APRIL/MAY 2024 • Vol. 11 No. 3

Winemaker for a Day

32

PHOTO: ALEXANDER RUBIN

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“Agriculture is a partnership rather than a profession—our product is more grown than made, and the seasons lend a slow and deliberate pace to our work. What’s remarkable about Clos du Val is the intentionality with which it was established. Every choice was made in support of our house style—the elegant, balanced, fresh, and vibrant Cabernet Sauvignon we are now renowned for. It’s my great joy and humble privilege to continue drawing that trajectory out into the future.”





Dishes from the opening menu at modern Italian hot spot Sartiano's.

# The Key to Success

IN NEW YORK CITY, **SARTIANO'S** LOCKS IN ON A WINNING WINE PROGRAM

A SELECT GROUP of wine lovers at buzzy Italian restaurant Sartiano's never has to worry that their favorite sips won't be on the list: The hot spot inside SoHo's Mercer Hotel offers patrons the opportunity to secure their beloved bottles in sleek lockers behind the bar. "I think it's a great option because there are not many places in New York City, let alone the country, that have a locker program at a public restaurant," explains Cameron Nadler, Sartiano's wine director (a position he also holds at private membership club Zero Bond).

The annual \$5,000 rental fee includes a \$2,500 credit toward wines acquired for storage in the locker and Nadler's assistance in sourcing rare labels and vintages. Tenuta dell'Ornellaia 2005 Masseto, Antinori 2009 Solaia, Quintessa 2012, Domaine de la Romanée-Conti 2020 Corton-Charlemagne, and Gaja 1995 Darmagi are just a few of the bottles that Nadler has obtained through his network of distributors and private sellers. "It's kind of endless with possibilities in terms of what people can request," he says. In addition to keeping the wine safe under lock and key, the lockers maintain its integrity at a cellar temperature of 57–60 degrees Fahrenheit.

With this luxury come some savings perks: Participating guests can also pur-

chase select bottles from the Sartiano's list at a reduced price, and the \$100 corkage fee is waived for the first bottle served from the locker and discounted by 50% for the second bottle. Other benefits include VIP access to reservations at Sartiano's and the Mercer Hotel's recently reopened lounge, SubMercer.

But diners don't need to rent a locker to benefit from Nadler's expertise; everyone can order from Sartiano's list of 500-plus wines. "We definitely are going more for an Italian vibe, but I've always found whenever you go to an Italian restaurant, it's only Italian," Nadler notes. "So we want to make sure that there is something for every kind of palate and every wine lover. We do a little bit of American and a little bit of French as well."

The kitchen team is led by three-time James Beard Award-winning culinary director Alfred Portale and executive chef Chris Lewnes. Inspired by restaurateur Scott Sartiano's family roots in Naples, the menu showcases both traditional Italian dishes and updates of Italian-American classics, from meatballs and baked clams to Dover sole piccata and veal chop parmigiana. The lasagna with wild mushrooms and black truffles set atop a Mornay-style sauce is a standout that Nadler recommends pairing with a Barolo: "I think the



PHOTO: TEDDY WOLFF

Cameron Nadler, wine director at Sartiano's, in front of the restaurant's wine lockers.

acid [in the wine] cuts through the sauce and kind of helps balance [its] creaminess. . . . I had a 2004 Damilano with that dish a few months ago, and it was incredible," he explains, adding that the "coconut kind of creaminess" of Chardonnay from the Sta. Rita Hills AVA in Santa Barbara County, California, is a winning match with "the heat of the Calabrian chili" in the bucatini with Maine lobster. To that end, his wine list includes selections from Sta. Rita Hills producers Liquid Farm, Rancho Las Hermanas, Sea Smoke, and Tyler Winery.

There's no shortage of Italian restaurants with great wine lists in New York City, but Sartiano's has locked in on a winning formula. *WJ*

Wanda Mann is a Certified Specialist of Wine and the founder of [winewithwanda.com](http://winewithwanda.com). Follow her on Instagram @winedinewanda.



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# In the Name of Good Taste

WHY LISTING SUB-APPELLATIONS IS MORE IMPORTANT THAN EVER



**BACK IN THE 1990S**, I used to hear this all the time from colleagues in the on-premise industry: “Why should I sell esoteric wines? My customers couldn’t care less. All they want is [fill in the blank].” At the time, of course, “blank” was Chardonnay, Pinot Grigio, Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, or White Zinfandel.

Times have obviously changed. The business of restaurant wine sales is much more fun than it was 20 or 30 years ago because consumers are more sophisticated and open-minded about unconventional varieties than ever before; retail stores and e-commerce have exposed them to the world’s incredible range of wines, while online resources have helped turn what was once obscure into common knowledge. As a result, many sommeliers now find that it is just as easy to sell, say, Albariño, Assyrtiko, Ribolla Gialla, Trousseau, Tempranillo, Lagrein, or any of the like as it is the international varieties.

So what is the next step for sommeliers conscious of playing a proactive role

in the evolution of wine consumers? That would be the recognition of sub-appellations, particularly for American wines. When perusing lists even in wine-savvy restaurants, I am still surprised to find descriptions that rarely (if ever) go beyond broad categories such as Napa Valley, Santa Barbara, Willamette Valley, or even Washington and Oregon.

Hey, I get it. It’s like the ’90s all over again in that many guests “couldn’t care less” about the sensory differences between a Cabernet Sauvignon grown in Coombsville and one grown in Ruthersford; a Chardonnay from Fort Ross–Seaview versus one from Green Valley of Russian River Valley; or a Pinot Noir from Sta. Rita Hills or Santa Lucia Highlands as opposed to one from McMinnville or Chehalem. The potential minutiae can still make the average consumer’s head spin. But as a professional, you know these distinctions exist in the most tangible ways—you can taste it in the glass. It’s on you to communicate the fact that, ultimately, terroir is what sets the finest

wines of the world apart from the rest rather than grape variety, blend composition, or brand prestige. It’s a challenge, but getting guests to appreciate terroir-related distinctions is paramount to promoting good taste, and it begins with the precise identification of American appellations and sub-appellations on your wine list, following the same standard typically used for European wines.

The beautiful thing about domestic wines is that they are better and more terroir-driven than ever. U.S. producers see the writing on the wall: Many consumers are getting too knowledgeable to equate quality with branding or concepts such as “varietal character.” Similarly, fewer and fewer people are choosing wines based upon numerical ratings. Just as sommeliers have for years, they’re seeing right through that facade and looking instead for wines that express an authentic sense of place.

This is progress, and it’s happening as we speak. It’s a good time to be a sommelier and play an active role in it. **SJ**

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# Hangover Helper

## WHY WINE GOES DOWN EASIER IN EUROPE

**I'M OFTEN ASKED** why one can drink European wine with little risk of a hangover when overseas yet not when consuming the same wine here in the U.S. Does it have something to do with increased amounts of sulfites for export product? The answer, in a word, is no. For one thing, sulfites are rarely if ever the cause of headaches. (For a detailed debunking of the myths surrounding sulfites, please see my "Winning at Beverage" column in the May/June 2023 issue of *The Tasting Panel*.) For another, just try to imagine the ridiculous scenario in which a winery could or would try to make the same wine in two different ways and then keep track of which stock went where. Talk about a distribution nightmare!

And yet there is ample anecdotal evidence that wine consumption overseas is less likely to produce hangovers and headaches. So what could be at play here? Well, simply put, it's all about science and body chemistry.

The single most influential factor at stake has nothing to do with modified sulfite levels and everything to do with the European diet in general. European cuisine, by desire and by law, is minimally processed: The use of many chemicals is restricted or outlawed altogether. Take as

an example Dannon strawberry yogurt. The European version's list of ingredients is quite small, consisting of yogurt, strawberry, fruit pectin, lemon juice, black carrot juice (for color), and milk minerals. It should come as no surprise that the U.S. version of the same product has three times the number of ingredients, including modified food starch, cane sugar, agar agar, gelatin, carrageenan, and calcium lactate. Or consider the U.S. version of Kellogg's Fruit Loops, which contains nearly four times the ingredients of its European counterpart, among them degerminated yellow corn, hydrogenated vegetable oil, cottonseed oil, soybean oil, soluble corn fiber, red #40, blue #1, yellow #6, zinc oxide, and pyridoxine hydrochloride. Our bodies can only process so much toxic input in a given period. When we're free from the heavily processed, chemically adulterated American diet, we have an easier time metabolizing toxins such as alcohol, ultimately leading to fewer headaches and hangovers.

Another critical factor influencing our ability to metabolize alcohol is stress. Typically, when most

Americans visit Europe, it's for a vacation. When on vacation, we are less stressed and more relaxed; the pressures of work and other obligations tend to be reduced or altogether eliminated. We are rarely in a rush and are generally moving more slowly. This allows our bodies to enter a more efficient metabolic state that helps us more quickly process and eliminate alcohol and other toxins. Additionally, it seems to me from personal observation that we drink more water in Europe (especially in the warmer months, when most Americans tend to visit), which certainly helps flush out our systems.

So yes, it's absolutely true that the same wines in Europe often lead to fewer headaches and hangovers than when consumed in the U.S. But it has absolutely nothing to do with augmented sulfite levels and everything to do with a better diet and fewer stressors. *sj*





SARDINIA'S HEARTBEAT



91  
points

**WINE ENTHUSIAST**

Carignano del Sulcis  
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2019



94  
points

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**GIUNCO**  
2022



93  
points

**tastingpanel**  
MAGAZINE

Carignano del Sulcis  
**BUIO**  
2021



# Pairing Is Sharing

DEMYSTIFYING THE PROCESS OF SELLING SHERRY

by Zachary Byers



**LET'S PLAY** a word-association game. Your word is *Sherry*. What comes to mind? The sickly-sweet stuff your grandparents drank? Low-quality cooking wine? Dusty, cryptically labeled half-bottles mixed in with the amari and Port at your local wine shop? That's the case for so many consumers, whose reactions to the fortified Spanish wine range from total confusion to marked distaste.

To me, this is a real shame, because what may be the most misunderstood wine in the world is also the most versatile. Thanks to the numerous styles it's made in—Fino, Manzanilla, Amontillado, Oloroso, PX, and cream—Sherry can be searingly dry and salty, lusciously dense and chocolaty, and everything in between. Considering that most of these disparate expressions are made from the same grape, their diversity is beyond special. To travel to their home region of Jerez, meet its people, and observe the history and culture surrounding these wines is to recognize the heartbreaking injustice of the fact that they're not being talked about and enjoyed more often.

Personal bias aside, though, I understand why those experiencing Sherry for the first time are challenged by its assertive aromas and flavors. The key to allowing people to make sense of these wines is context. That's why, if you order a glass on a Jerez patio, a little dish of olives comes along with it: Food pairings are a vehicle for better understanding the unique and potentially unfamiliar qualities of the wine.

This approach of consistently coupling Sherry with food is the inspiration the U.S. sommelier community can draw from to help introduce the category to a domestic audience. If you're in need of a starting point, look to some classic Spanish tapas: oysters with Manzanilla; olives or Marcona almonds with Fino; jamón with Oloroso; and chocolate with PX instead of the standard Port.

These ideas, however, are by no means representative of the full scope of what Sherry can do. A lot of wine professionals seem to think that they're barred from showcasing Sherry in their programs just because their restaurant or bar doesn't adhere to Spanish culinary traditions. But with some experimentation and creativity, you'll find that these wines have a place just about anywhere.

I recently traveled to Jerez to attend the annual Sherry Educator Course hosted by the Consejo Regulador de los Vinos de Jerez y Manzanilla, the governing body of the Sherry appellation. One of the most enlightening experiences was a pairing exercise involving ingredients like artichokes, wasabi, sardines, curry spice, and mole—some of the most challenging things to get wine to agree with. Yet astonishingly, there was a style of Sherry that solved each of these pairing riddles beautifully, serving as a powerful illustration that these wines can work just as well outside of their cultural boundaries as within them.

Given Sherry's versatility, employing it in a tasting-menu format can be a gold mine, giving sommeliers the opportunity to take the decision-making away from the guest and facilitate new experiences. For example, at The Wolf's Tailor in Denver, Colorado, where I serve as head sommelier, I pour a 35-year Amontillado with wagyu and wasabi. It's an extraordinary pairing that most guests wouldn't think to order for themselves.

If exciting consumers with Sherry is work, then let it be a labor of love. With these ideas and approaches in mind, the wine community can find novel and engaging ways to present Sherry and ensure that this great wine can be appreciated by a new generation. **SJ**



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# Savoring History

**THE HERMOSA INN HONORS THE ENDURING LEGACY OF ARIZONA'S PARADISE VALLEY**

**LAST NOVEMBER**, The Hermosa Inn, whose history dates back to the 1930s, marked the 100th birthday of Lon Megargee's renowned painting "The Last Drop from His Stetson." Once the residence and studio of the celebrated cowboy artist, the resort provided the perfect setting for celebrating this iconic work, which depicts a cowboy allowing his thirsty horse to drink from his upturned hat; originally gracing the cover of *Western Story Magazine*, it was later used in Stetson advertisements. Guests enjoyed bison chili and sipped 56-year-old whisky from Last Drop Distillers during the unveiling of a new guest-room amenity: special-edition Pendleton blankets adorned with the famous image. The special occasion also served as an introduction to Brian Peterson as the property's new executive chef.

Peterson, who worked at The Hermosa Inn from 2000 to 2005 before honing his skills around the Valley, now oversees all culinary operations, including LON's Restaurant and LON's Last Drop bar. His menus pay homage to the region's culinary heritage, featuring local purveyors and farmers like Ramona Button, a member of the Akimel O'odham tribe who cultivates native foods such as tepary beans and Pima corn.

"We get things from Ramona Farms like *ga'ivsa*, a roasted corn that cooks down like a porridge, so it's really rich and has a great depth of flavor," says Peterson. He also highlights classic Southwestern ingredients, from the masa that provides a crisp coating for octopus to the mesquite syrup that glazes his popular bison short rib. "It's served with a pine nut gremolata, smashed sweet potato, and caulini, which is a vegetable that you don't often see,"

*On the patio of LON's Restaurant at The Hermosa Inn.*



PHOTOS: CHRISTINA BARRUETA

*The Hermosa Inn's executive chef, Brian Peterson, and lead sommelier, Brian Downey.*

he explains. "It's a fun dish and guests seem to love it."

Lead sommelier Brian Downey is also a fan of Peterson's culinary approach. "Brian's food has a Southwestern twist, but with a lot of French technique and a focus on ingredients, and I'm really enjoying pairing wines with his style of cooking," he says. His extensive 800-label wine list provides endless possibilities, including Arizona producers like Deep Sky Vineyard and Merkin Vineyards as well as coveted bottles from California's Harlan Estate and Burgundy's Domaine de la Romanée-

Conti. "For example," Downey notes, "his short rib pairs really well with New and Old World Syrahs but also big reds from Bordeaux and Napa. Guests visiting the Inn feel like they're getting a true Arizona experience, especially with Brian's food capturing the style of the property."

Peterson's culinary artistry and Downey's wine expertise combine to create a unique opportunity to savor the rich tapestry of the Southwest. "I've loved this property since I first started out here and am excited to be a part of its history," says Peterson. "It's like coming back home." **SJ**



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PHOTO: NEIL JOHN BURGER

# An Artistic Approach

INDIENNE WINE DIRECTOR TIA POLITE SHOWS HER CREATIVE SIDE

by Emily Johnston Collins

**WHEN I TRAINED** as a sommelier in Italy, I studied regional wines and their traditional food pairings. Now, as wine director at Burmese restaurant The Dutchess in Ojai, California, I am no longer guided by European custom and instead rely on my own creativity when it comes to building a wine program. Curious to compare my list with that of another restaurant offering South Asian cuisine, I spoke with Tia Polite, wine director at chef Sujan Sarkar's Michelin-starred Indienne in Chicago.

Polite takes an artistic approach to her wine list, which is in fact organized according to art movements. Sprightly, approachable wines fall under the heading "Pop Art," while softly structured, elegant bottlings comprise the "Impressionism" section. Bold and structured wines are listed under "Baroque," and "Abstract Expressionism" contains some of Polite's more eclectic selections—from grape-and-apple co-ferments to Croatian Babić. In that way, she efficiently guides her guests

around a collection that comes primarily from Europe, particularly France, and California but also represents South America, Australia, and the Pacific Northwest.

Polite explained to me that Sarkar's cuisine combines the flavors of India with the techniques of the elite French chefs he trained under in London. "His menu," she added, "is so playful and artistically presented, we have to have a wine list that matches." Art also has a personal significance for the team: Both Polite and Sarkar have a background in painting, which she finds helps her communicate with guests who are intrigued by her list's unconventional format. "I... like taking the guest's guard down," she says.

As I expected, textured whites and fruity, spiced reds feature prominently on her wine list, as they do my own. I was surprised, however, to find that we carry many of the same California Central Coast producers. She credits this to the typical elegance of wines from the region

and to Sarkar's connection to Central Coast winemaker Rajat Parr, who grew up in the same town in India as he did. Parr's wines—which both Polite and I carry—could be considered a link between the Central Coast and South Asia, given that his style represents the former region while complementing of the flavors of the latter.

Despite the demands of her job at a relatively new restaurant—Indienne opened in September 2022—Polite has found time to continue her own wine education: She told me about working the 2023 harvest in Montalcino and discovering the charms of barrel-aged Rieslings in Germany. By a similar token, she aims to encourage her guests to explore: Her goal for the restaurant is to "sell more from the Abstract Expressionism page... the out-of-the-box wines." I can't wait to see how she channels her creativity through this section when I visit her at Indienne. **SJ**

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# Decelerating “the Rush to Dry”

A TEACHER LEARNS A LESSON IN WINE APPRECIATION

**AFTER MORE THAN** two decades of teaching Wine & Spirit Education Trust certification courses and academic wine classes, a new assignment at San Jose State University has provided the impetus for a sea change in my approach to educating wine-curious consumers.

My first in-person session with 45 young adults—many of whom are taking my wine-appreciation class as an elective in their final semester prior to graduation—has upended my plans for what the rest of their semester is going to look like. These students are not wine lovers yet, and if I pursued the curriculum that I had planned for them, it's likely they never would be.

Fortunately, I laid the groundwork for the class carefully, which has given me the opportunity to adapt. Based on the weekly assignments they've responded to, I have insights into their preferences, includ-

ing which aromas and flavors they prefer based on their limited experience with wine. But the direction I'm now taking these students didn't stem from those insights. It was only after a food-and-wine pairing exercise that included several high-quality dry wines across a range of varieties and styles—Champagne, Sauvignon Blanc, Barolo, and a particularly delicious Vietti Moscato d'Asti—that I saw the light.

These students are still learning what wine is and what it can be. They reminded me of my earliest experiences with fine wine and how it was that I came to love it. It began with an intriguing whiff of petrol from a glass of Riesling and the sheer delight I felt in discerning the tension between acid and residual sugar that is the hallmark of the German Prädikat system.

The significance of that early experience was rapidly overshadowed by what I'll call “the rush to dry.” From the moment I embarked upon my formal wine education onward, the emphasis has overwhelmingly been placed on dry

wines. Iconic sweet wines like Sauternes, Tokaji, and Trockenbeerenauslese entered the picture early on, but it was only after a few years of study that I gained any exposure to the *moelleux* wines of Vouvray, Austrian Rust, or Hungarian Spätburgunder Ausbruch.

What I have in store for my students is to begin their wine-appreciation journey by showing them wines with varying levels of residual sugar as a bridge to dry versions made from the same grape varieties. They'll still be learning about, say, dry styles made from the Bordeaux varieties and indigenous reds, but those will be wines they can explore further as they continue to broaden their preferences through experimentation and travel. For now, I can't wait to introduce them to Riesling, Gewürztraminer, Chenin Blanc, Grenache, Muscat, Malvasia, Lambrusco, Spätburgunder, and dozens of other glorious grapes produced in a range of styles. *sj*

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*What I have in store for my students is to begin their wine-appreciation journey by showing them wines with varying levels of residual sugar as a bridge to dry versions made from the same grape varieties.*

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# Defining and Defying

IN WHICH WE VISIT TWO INSTANT DARLINGS IN DENVER'S DYNAMIC LOHI NEIGHBORHOOD

## JUST NORTHWEST OF DOWNTOWN,

LoHi (short for the admittedly paradoxical-sounding Lower Highland) has long been one of Denver's most vibrant dining neighborhoods, but the slew of openings it's seen in recent months has been unusual even by its own high standards. From *Top Chef* alumna Carrie Baird's bustling breakfast-and-brunch joint Fox and the Hen to unlikely party place Nana's Dim Sum & Dumplings to chic French bistro Jacques (just to name a few), the newcomers are bringing a little bit of everything to the little bit of everything that was already here; two in particular, however, are bringing a lot of something special—something that's at once genre-defining and -defying.

In the case of Alma Fonda Fina, Guadalajara-bred chef-owner Johnny Curiel is putting such a personal stamp on Mexican cuisine that he's making it all his own; sit at the chef's counter, and he'll often be right there to tell you the story behind each dish himself. On a recent visit, a companion and I marveled at the complexities of everything we tasted, be it the bold flavors and textures

of agave-roasted sweet potato with "broken" salsa macha and fennel-whipped requesón (a type of fresh cheese sometimes compared to ricotta); the delicacy of applewood-cold-smoked bigeye tuna in wild mushroom aguachile dotted with avocado and chiltepin oil; or the intricacy of the tetela de calabacitas—a triangular, squash-filled masa pocket—set atop mole de novia sprinkled with pomegranate seeds and pasilla-infused salt. (As Curiel will explain, mole de novia is a mole blanco so called for its supposedly bride-like purity; his version features pine nuts, peanuts, almonds, and walnuts among myriad other ingredients.)

PHOTO: SHAWN CAMPBELL



From left to right, Alma Fonda Fina's guacamole with heirloom corn tortillas; agave-roasted sweet potato with "broken" salsa macha and fennel-whipped requesón; and smoked heirloom beets with jocoque, pickled golden raisins, and corn tortilla-nut brittle.

PHOTO: JEFF FIERBERG



Kawa Ni's rice cakes with shiso-flecked chicken meatballs and Napa cabbage in tan tan sauce.

Paired with, say, a sparkling brut from Mexico or a chia seed-speckled Guava Mezcalita, creations like these have made Alma an instant darling among Denverites in the know. *Fonda* translates roughly from the Spanish as "a casual neighborhood gathering spot"; that may be what Curiel

intended to open, but he seems to have a major destination on his hands.

A few blocks away, Kawa Ni is clearly inspired by the izakayas, essentially pubs, of Japan—but it's hardly beholden to their traditions, as chef-owner Bill Taibe adds Chinese, Korean, and wholly original twists to a menu that inheres, above all, in sheer fun. Kani-mango salad with spicy mayo and nori crumbs? Shaved broccoli miso goma with ham, burnt honey, and chili oil? Beef tataki with miso-aged tofu, persimmon, and barrel-aged soy? Skate katsu? Bring it all on, two friends and I said on our first visit, and so our server did—along with four or five other dishes, including rice cakes with shiso-flecked chicken meatballs in tan tan sauce, accompanied by cocktails like the tequila-based Maya Bae with coconut, sesame,


cucumber, pineapple, and lime. The joint was jumping from the moment we walked in to the moment we left going on three hours later; traditional or no, it's obvious that locals are treating it as a true izakaya—which after all, means "stay-drink-place." **sj**



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# Hard to Refute

## A SKEPTIC'S JOURNEY THROUGH BIODYNAMICS

**WHEN I DECIDED** to write an article about my experience in Languedoc-Roussillon, I wanted to discuss the beautiful diversity and value of wines found in the French region and how it has transformed from a hub of cheap bulk wine into a source of quality wines with character. But in the February/March 2024 edition of *The SOMM Journal*, Izzy Watson wrote a report on just that, in more depth than I could (I highly suggest you check it out). So I asked myself what I could bring to the table: What new perspective did I gain in the time I spent in Languedoc-Roussillon filming an episode for the fifth season of *V is for Vino*? The answer is that my understanding and appreciation for the often-misunderstood field of biodynamics changed.

a herd of sheep to help trim the grass and fertilize the soil between vineyard rows. He explained how biodynamics aimed to teach the plant to better adjust to and respond to its environment. But later, when I researched biodynamics online, I found it was largely dismissed as voodoo, with the bulk of the attention focused on its most controversial aspects.

Fast-forward to 2023 and my trip to Languedoc-Roussillon, where our featured winemaker was Gérard Bertrand, one of the most prominent advocates of biodynamics in the region (and arguably the world). As he explained, holistic medicine had worked for him as a person, and biodynamics is simply holistic medicine for the vineyards. In addition to increasing biodiversity, he emphasized



*A vineyard in the Languedoc-Roussillon region of France.*

the soil to regenerate and sustain production for years to come.

In the seven years since my tour of Tablas Creek, I've visited a lot of other wineries that employ biodynamic practices, even if they aren't certified. Some, like Bertrand, follow the lunar calendar in conducting their winery activities; some don't—though that one aspect of biodynamics often distracts from its true purpose: to create a self-sustaining ecosystem in which humans act as caretakers, not factory managers.

I'm not advocating for every winery in the world to switch to biodynamics or organics. But what I am saying is that I've gone from being a Midwestern kid who made fun of people who spent twice the price to make sure their blueberries were organic to an adult who cares about what he puts in his body and sees the benefit in practices that encourage the natural balance of a vineyard. I'll leave it for you to judge whether biodynamics make better wine, but the fact that it produces cleaner wine with less impact on the earth is hard to refute. If you want to hear more on the topic, you can watch Bertrand chat about it in our Languedoc-Roussillon episode, out now on YouTube ([@visforvino](#)).

*Until next wine,  
Vince*

*Episodes of V is for Vino and Vino First can be watched for free on YouTube at [@visforvino](#).*

PHOTOS COURTESY OF VINCE ANTER



*Author Vince Anter inspects grapes with Gérard Bertrand.*

I was first exposed to biodynamics way back in 2017 during season one of our show, when I met with Jason Haas at Tablas Creek Vineyard in Paso Robles, California. At the time, I knew just enough about wine tasting to be dangerous, but I knew almost nothing about viticulture and harvest. Haas and his team showed me the steps they took to minimize their human footprint, be it encouraging the proliferation of bees and wildlife or raising

the importance of avoiding chemicals and instead using natural ingredients to promote vineyard resiliency: Why give the vines an artificial solution for a problem they can solve themselves? The proof of effectiveness, he claimed, comes in several forms: First is the vineyard's ability to adapt to climate variation, diseases, and pests. Second is the harmony and longevity of biodynamically produced wines. And third is the ability of

# NEW

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*The Dirty Highlands cocktail contains 2.5 ounces Mijenta Cristalino, 0.75 ounces dry vermouth, a small dash of saline solution, and 1 barspoon of olive brine.*



PHOTO COURTESY OF MIJENTA TEQUILA

# Cleared for Takeoff

**MIJENTA TEQUILA'S LIMITED-EDITION CRISTALINO STANDS OUT FOR ITS COMPLEXITY IN A COMPETITIVE CATEGORY**

by Wanda Mann



PHOTO: ALEX STANILOFF

*A sizeable crowd gathered recently at Overstory in New York City to celebrate the launch of Mijenta Cristalino.*

**DON'T BE FOOLED** into thinking Mijenta's new limited-edition Cristalino (\$120) is some simple tequila based on its crystal-clear, colorless appearance. The latest addition to the brand's award-winning portfolio is a meticulously crafted and complex expression inspired by maestra tequilera Ana María Romero Mena's desire to, in her words, "bring together the art and science of crafting tequila."

Its foundation is Mijenta Blanco from the highlands of Jalisco, which takes a flavor-enhancing turn in symphony barrels: Composed of American oak from forests in Minnesota, Missouri, Pennsylvania, and Virginia, they're designed to give the Cristalino a specific flavor profile over the course of eight months. (To prevent the spirit from being overwhelmed by oak flavor, the wood was cured 36 months before the barrels were assembled, mellowing the tannins without sacrificing

aromatics.) Each source contributes a unique quality: Minnesota oak adds fresh and fruity flavors, while Missouri oak brings sultry notes of vanilla and spice. Pennsylvania oak imparts coconut, smoke, clove, and mineral notes, and the Virginia wood adds an extra dose of vanilla and coconut. After barrel aging, a precise and proprietary filtration method using vegan charcoal removes the color from the aged tequila while maintaining layered aromas of maple, caramel, coffee, coconut, toffee, citrus, honey, and cooked agave. These notes are also present on the sweet and silky palate.

Perfect for sipping neat or on the rocks, Mijenta Cristalino is also an ideal ingredient in crafting high-end cocktails. “Commercially, where we see the most significant opportunity isn’t even necessarily in the tequila market,” says co-founder and CEO Mike Dolan. “Rather, as vodka continues to shed market share, we’re targeting those drinkers who are looking for a spirit that’s still clear but has greater richness and complexity and also makes the perfect Martini.” The brand’s own recipe, called El Yerberito, combines

the Cristalino with Yellow Chartreuse, dry vermouth, lavender bitters, and a pinch of salt. “We’re thrilled with the initial reception to Ana María’s latest masterpiece. Aficionados, top mixologists, retailers, and distributors have gravitated around a common theme—ours doesn’t taste like any Cristalino they’ve experienced before. Ours, of course, is additive-free, and that’s exactly what we wanted,” explains Dolan. And judging from the enthusiasm of attendees at the recent Mijenta Cristalino launch party at Overstory cocktail bar in New York City, the tequila is certainly a palate-pleaser. Located on the 64th floor of an Art Deco building, Overstory has a wraparound terrace with 360-degree views of the city skyline that’s normally the center of attention, but it had fierce competition from the cocktails showcasing the new spirit.

Mijenta also stands out as the first tequila brand to earn B Corp certification in recognition of its commitment to environmental responsibility and positive social impact. Like Mijenta Blanco, Reposado, and Añejo, the Cristalino is eco-friendly: Pesticides and herbicides are never used

on the brand’s agave, the bottles and corks used for the final product are made from recycled glass, and the boxes are constructed from 100% post-consumer recycled paper. Mijenta’s community partnerships, meanwhile, include the Women’s Earth Alliance in Mexico, which uplifts women leaders working to protect their communities’ health, natural resources, and livelihoods.

There’s no denying the growing popularity of tequila, and according to Nielsen data cristalino is the fastest-growing style among consumers: In 2023, dollar sales increased by 39% over the previous year. Mijenta’s stellar reputation, illustrated by its recognition as the Agave Producer of the Year and Spirits Producer of the Year at the 2023 International Wine & Spirits Competition (IWSC), is sure to fuel interest in its expression of Cristalino—as clear and compelling as the vision of its founders. “With the Cristalino—and other Mijenta expressions moving forward—I am excited to experiment with different techniques and approaches that showcase the depth and richness of the agave,” says Romero Mena. SJ

PHOTOS COURTESY OF MIJENTA TEQUILA



### El Yerberito

- 2.5 oz. Mijenta Cristalino
- 1 barspoon Yellow Chartreuse
- 1 barspoon dry vermouth
- 2 dashes lavender bitters
- 1 pinch salt

Stir ingredients with plenty of ice and serve in a Martini glass. Garnish with a lemon twist.

### Espresso Martini

- 1.5 oz. Mijenta Cristalino
- 0.25 oz. Kahlúa
- 0.75 oz. espresso
- 0.5 oz. vanilla syrup
- 1 pinch Maldon salt

Shake ingredients vigorously with plenty of ice and strain into a coupe. Garnish with coffee beans.





{ events }

# Winemakers

# FOR A DAY

WHAT IT'S LIKE TO PARTICIPATE IN **RAYMOND VINEYARDS'**  
**SOMMELIER SELECTION COMPETITION**

story by **JONATHAN CRISTALDI**

photos by **ALEXANDER RUBIN**



*LEFT TO RIGHT: SOMM Journal editor-at-large Jonathan Cristaldi; Raymond Vineyards winemaker Thane Knutson; Katherine Wojcik, director of beverage programs and partnerships, IHG, Sonoma, CA; Omar Lima, lead sommelier, Sushi Note Omakase, Beverly Hills, CA; Ashley Pengilly, founder/creative director, Quintilis; Raymond Vineyards owner Jean-Charles Boisset; Karim Lakhani, chef, executive vice president, and food and beverage manager, Northwood Hospitality, Denver, CO; Raymond Vineyards vice president of winemaking Stephanie Putnam; Roddy Kirschenman, director of operations, Cunningham Restaurant Group, Indianapolis, IN; Lindsay Colucci, bar manager and sommelier, Shelter Harbor Golf Club, Charlestown, RI; J. Matt Nickels, wine manager, Jeff Ruby Culinary Entertainment, Cincinnati, OH; Cayleigh Starr, general manager, Lucille's and Starr Cellars, Montreal, Canada; and Theodore "Teddy" Halmi, general manager, The Vine Room, Naples, FL.*





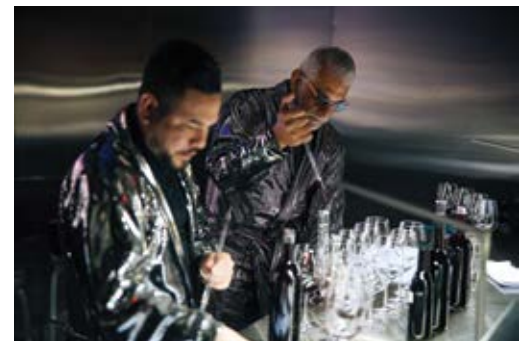
*Joe Papendick, Raymond Vineyards' director of gardens, leads a tour of the winery's "Theater of Nature."*

**IN LATE FEBRUARY**, as the last remnants of morning fog lifted above the vineyards in Napa Valley's Rutherford AVA, eight sommeliers readied themselves to participate in a major event at one of the appellation's crown jewels: Raymond Vineyards, a Boisset Collection winery that's celebrating its 50th anniversary this year; was hosting its 12th annual Sommelier Selection blending competition. The invitees would pair up to create a Cabernet Sauvignon-based blend, and the winning wine would be bottled as Raymond Vineyards Sommelier Selection, which is offered exclusively to on-premise accounts around the U.S.

The occasion kicked off with a tour of the "Theater of Nature," as Joe Papendick, Raymond's director of gardens, described a collage of biodynamically farmed plants on the property that's meant to represent a miniature vineyard ecosystem. Amid a circle of rose bushes, Papendick, who has the vibe of a plant whisperer, was speaking of the flower's significance at the ends of vine rows when J. Matt Nickels, wine manager for Jeff Ruby Culinary Entertainment in Cincinnati, Ohio, chimed in: "In France," he said, "with the Napoleonic code, different breeds of roses helped identify individual row ownership." Boisset Collection brand manager Kelly Hyatt added that rose bushes once "helped horses plowing the rows to know when to turn." Papendick noted that he hoped "the takeaway is clear that seemingly aesthetic touches in vineyards are often intentional, and everything serves a purpose."



*Jean-Charles Boisset himself was among the participants of the blending competition.*



*Omar Lima and Karim Lakhani hard at work on their blend.*



Lunch was served in The Red Room, where Jean-Charles Boisset led the group in his favorite song, "Le Ban Bourguignon."



He then handed the group off to Raymond vice president of winemaking Stephanie Putnam and winemaker Thane Knutson, who showed the somms around the winery before whisking them off to a portfolio tasting.

### GETTING TO KNOW THE HOUSE STYLE

To prepare the somms for their blending session, Knutson offered some words of wisdom: "We all have our own style interpretations, but as a group, we must work to come together to create a blend that is representative of the style of Raymond," he said. To that end, the group delved into a discussion of the 2021 and 2022 Sommelier Selection. The 2021 vintage featured 95% Cabernet Sauvignon and 5% Petit Verdot from Lake County, while the 2022 included 90% Cabernet Sauvignon from Lake County and Dry Creek plus 10% Merlot from Mendocino.

"I find the 2021 easier-drinking," said Karim Lakhan, chef, executive vice president, and food and beverage manager at Northwood Hospitality in Denver, Colorado. "It has a food-friendly quality that is



Theodore "Teddy" Halmi and Roddy Kirschenman with their Sommelier Selection blend.

great for us." Omar Lima, lead sommelier at Sushi Note Omakase in Beverly Hills, California, agreed with Lakhan: "The '21 has a rustic quality with brick-like mineral tension that makes it great with food." Roddy Kirschenman, director of operations for Cunningham Restaurant Group in Indianapolis, Indiana, called the '21 "very structured" while noting that "the '22 is fresh and lively and has more per-

fumed notes that the Merlot really brings out." Nickels concurred: "I like it when wine has that kind of floral quality," he said, adding that both wines were worthy of his wine list.

### THE COMPETITION BEGINS

After calibrating their palates, the somms were introduced to the charismatic Jean-Charles Boisset, owner of the Bois-





Raymond winemakers Stephanie Putnam and Thane Knutson prepare to announce the winner of the Sommelier Selection competition.

set Collection, who immediately raised the energy level. "Be as creative as you want and as wild as you want," he began, building to a passionate and rousing pep talk. "People want supple, delicate, velvety, sexy wine that they can drink!"

Before entering the blending room, everyone, including me, was outfitted with a newly designed blending robe. Ashley Pengilly, founder and creative director of fashion brand Quintilis, gave it a futuristic look: Think of a disco ball reimagined as an ultra-cool smoking jacket. "It will never stain," Pengilly explained, "and [it's] made from ultra-low waste materials."

As the somms broke into four teams of two, Putnam revealed the barrel samples for the 2023 vintage blending session: Cabernet Sauvignon from Napa Valley, Lake County, and Sonoma County and Merlot from Sonoma County. "Our only requirement is that your blend include no more than 20% of the Napa Valley Cabernet," she said.

I walked around and talked to the teams as they built their blends. Lindsay Colucci, bar manager and sommelier at Shelter Harbor Golf Club in Charlestown, Rhode Island, had teamed up with Katherine Wojcik, director of beverage programs and partnerships for IHG in Sonoma. "I want our blend to be consumer-friendly," said the bright-eyed Colucci, "and have that juiciness and approachability of California wines." Super focused on her measuring beaker, Wojcik added, "I'm hoping to create a balanced expression . . . that can satisfy the consumer idea of what Cabernet from California is." As

they debated how much Merlot to add to their seventh attempt, I wondered if either of them found their task challenging. Colucci said it was "all about adjusting your palate and picturing how the wine will settle into itself."

"It's definitely challenging to work with barrel samples," said Cayleigh Starr, general manager at Lucille's and Starr Cellars in Montreal, Canada, who partnered with Nickels. "We're working on micro-additions of each of the wines across numerous blends," she noted; indeed, every available glass seemed to be piling up on their table. Eventually, they decided to omit the Lake County Cabernet and use a minimal amount of Napa Cabernet while turning up the dial on the Sonoma components.

Kirschenman had teamed up with Theodore "Teddy" Halmi, general manager of The Vine Room in Naples, Florida. "We like two different styles of wine," explained Halmi. "I like a big punch in your face, and Roddy likes elegant and lifted reds." They aimed to compromise by bringing out floral notes in their blend.

Teammates Lima and Lakhan felt that tasting these young wines offered a glimpse into an aspect of winemaking they hadn't experienced before. "Each [barrel sample] on its own is too overwhelming," observed Lima. "Blending is critical to finding that balanced expression." A pensive Lakhan added with a wry smile, "We know we have to take ourselves out of the picture to make wine for the people—but you do want to make yourself happy."



SOMM Journal editor-at-large Jonathan Cristaldi samples the final blends in a blind tasting. Cristaldi chose Blend D as his top wine, and it came in first place after it was mistakenly announced as last place. (Imagine the relief!)

## A SURPRISE TWIST

Once each team had chosen their favorite blend, everyone broke for lunch. An hour and a half later, the somms returned, happily full of foie gras, fine Burgundian cheeses, and three wines from the Boisset Collection's import portfolio: J. Moreau & Fils Grand Cru Chablis, Jean-Claude Boisset Corton Grand Cru Les Renardes, and Domaine de la Vougeraie Chassagne-Montrachet Premier Cru Morgeot. Despite the extravagant lunch, the energy was anything but sleepy now that it was time to blind taste the competing blends, rate them, and wait for the big reveal.

As the results were tallied, the somms—only half of whom felt they could identify their own blends in the lineup—chatted in anticipation. When Putnam finally emerged with the results in hand, she announced the last-place entry—Blend D. Having chosen this wine as my top pick, I commiserated with its creators. But then, Putnam caught a tabulation error and quickly retreated to conduct a recount. It turned out Blend D was the winner!

The pandemonium that ensued only intensified as it was revealed that Blend D included zero Napa Cabernet. Still, it was the winner. Therefore, the 2023 Raymond Vineyards Sommelier Selection will be a North Coast–appellated wine of 66.5% Sonoma Cabernet, 23.5% Lake County Cabernet, and 10% Sonoma Merlot.

The confusion caused a great deal of mirth, but the somms got the last laugh: Jean-Charles Boisset himself had created a blend, and *his* was actually the last-place wine. "It shows you you can't do anything on your own," he said with a humble smile. J. Matt Nichols didn't miss a beat. "Thanks for making us all feel better," he cracked, to a round of hearty guffaws. **SJ**



# A Rich History of Farming

**SIMPSON FAMILY ESTATES OPENS OUR EYES TO MICHIGAN WINES** by Meridith May



Taylor and Sam Simpson.

**TAYLOR SIMPSON** and her brother Sam co-own Good Harbor Vineyards and Aurora Cellars on the Leelanau Peninsula in northwest Michigan. Hailing from a family who's farmed fruit since the 1950s and started growing grapes in 1980, they now oversee 300 acres of *Vitis vinifera* in the region.

Two miles east of the Lake Michigan coast, Good Harbor Vineyards is gifted with the moderating influence of the lake (provided it doesn't freeze) and high

elevations. When it is cold, snow cover provides protective insulation for the vines through the early spring. The region not only is blessed with long growing seasons but has developed into a popular tourist destination, which is always a boon for wineries. Aurora Cellars, meanwhile, is unique to the peninsula, as it is almost completely composed of hard, compact clay soil on rolling hills on the northern edge of this growing region.

While the team at *The SOMM Journal* and sister publication *The Tasting Panel* have been sampling an assortment of Michigan wines this past year, we have not come across such stellar examples as Simpson Family Estate's. The siblings' commitment to sustainability may not be distinctive, nor is their exclusive use of French barrels, but their talent for showcasing each variety's best characteristics as a matter of both terroir and technique is evident. Here is our praise for these wines from the 45th parallel—the famous halfway point between the equator and the North Pole along which Bordeaux and Northern Italy are also located.

*Isobel's Vineyard is the home of Good Harbor's Pinot Noir and Zweigelt, among other European varieties, in Michigan's Leelanau Peninsula.*



**Good Harbor Vineyards 2022 Pinot Grigio, Leelanau Peninsula, Michigan (\$17)** Notes of juicy pear and green apple define this balanced and impressive white. It's succulent yet steely, with wound-up acidity that strives to be edgy. **93**



**Good Harbor Vineyards 2021 Pinot Noir-Zweigelt, Leelanau Peninsula, Michigan (\$45)** Deep, earth-laden notes of fallen leaves and black cherry are inviting. Exotic spices surround soil-rich flavors of just-picked strawberries. Elegant, complex, seamless, and worthy of further exploration. **95**



**Aurora Cellars 2022 Sauvignon Blanc, Leelanau Peninsula, Michigan (\$24)** Taut acidity and crisp minerality combine with kiwi, pineapple, and sweet basil. Lime lights up the glass and delivers its zest on the divine candied finish. **93**



**Aurora Cellars 2020 Blaufränkisch, Leelanau Peninsula, Michigan (\$48)** Razor-sharp Old World acidity frames blackberry and underbrush. Cinnamon and bay leaf add to the texture of grainy tannins in a juicy core. Bright and focused, with a soil component that speaks to salinity on the finish. Noteworthy and food-friendly. **95**





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{ cover story }

*Sustainable*

PASO

ROBLES

THE REGION IS LEADING  
THE WAY FOR  
**RESPONSIBLE  
FARMING  
PRACTICES**

*by Bob Paulinski, MW*

*Hope Family  
Wines' estate  
vineyard was  
certified by  
Sustainability  
in Practice  
(SIP) in 2011.*



**M**y recent excursion to Paso Robles was an unexpectedly transformative experience. Sure, the region is stunningly beautiful, and its wines have unquestionably reached new heights—but what I found the most compelling aspect is its position at the forefront of a sustainability movement that could very well redefine winemaking in an era of quick and constant change. Here, the future is ripe with exciting possibilities that have the potential to reach well beyond Paso Robles.

There is no better way to fully understand the region's progress than by visiting wineries that are leading the way in this regard. Seven members of the Paso Robles CAB Collective are among them:

**Castoro Cellars, Riboli Family Wines, Allegretto Wines, Hope Family Wines, Vina Robles, Robert Hall Winery, and Pomar Junction Vineyard & Winery.**

### *Paso Robles at a Glance*

Paso Robles has a total vineyard acreage of just over 40,000—roughly equivalent to Napa Valley—of which more than 60% is planted to Cabernet Sauvignon and other red Bordeaux varieties. The region became an AVA in 1983, and 11 sub-appellations were established in 2014.

Paso Robles has a distinctively Mediterranean climate influenced by the nearby Pacific Ocean. Most vineyards are categorized as warm growing sites, though cooler pockets exist in the Templeton Gap, El Pomar, and Willow Creek districts. That said, the diurnal temperature range experienced here is one of the most extreme in the wine world. Sometimes reaching 50 degrees Fahrenheit, it contributes to an extended growing season that produces an elevated level of ripeness balanced by adequate acidity to provide lift on the palate.

Paso Robles typically sees limited annual rainfall—about 8 inches on the east side and 30 inches on the west side, mostly in the winter and early spring. About 40 different soil types have been identified, but the prevalence of calcareous soil with low fertility is a contributing factor to the heightened acidity levels in the wines. A vital element of these soils is the ancient seabed on the Pacific plate, distinguishing them from those of the northern and inland California AVAs.



*Hope Family Wines president and winemaker Austin Hope.*

PHOTOS COURTESY OF PASO ROBLES CAB COLLECTIVE

*“My job as a farmer is to give back more to the soil than I’ve taken from it by creating a healthy ecosystem. When the soil is alive through sustainable methods, what comes out is pure quality.”*

—HOPE FAMILY WINES PRESIDENT/WINEMAKER **AUSTIN HOPE**





*The Pomar Junction estate in Paso Robles' El Pomar District.*

### *Why Sustainability Matters*

For years, sustainability initiatives have been at the discretion of individual wine producers. Today, responsible viticulture is less about choice and more about necessity in the face of climate change.

The objective for my three-day trip to Paso Robles was to conduct a deep dive into the environmental practices that have increasingly taken hold across the region. Driving them is a desire to ensure the conscientious stewardship of resources and the health and well-being of workers and consumers alike as well as to guarantee the quality of the wines and the long-term financial viability of the local wine industry. All seven wineries I visited are engaged in various eco-friendly initiatives—some traditional, others a bit more extreme and experimental.

It's a healthy mix of tried-and-true methods and out-of-the-box thinking in acknowledgment that wine made at an artisanal level reflects its place of origin: This is a hallmark of the world's top wines. Preserving and nurturing not only the vineyards but often the land and natural resources surrounding them is a cornerstone

of long-term high-quality wine production. Paso Robles has long been engaged in such activities. In 1999, long before such programs as Napa Green, LODI Rules, and Certified California Sustainable Winegrowing were created, the Vineyard Team was formed by local growers and vintners dedicated to science-based sustainability research and practices. This entity is the parent of Sustainability in Practice (SIP), a certifying body whose motto is "people, planet, and prosperity."

One could argue that Paso Robles is a victim of its success; as its reputation has grown, so has the demand for its wine, increasing the pressure on natural

resources. Given that thoughtful and planful solutions are at the heart of continued industry viability, the good news is that a spirit of sharing and collaboration exists among the region's winemakers, who exchange knowledge for the betterment of all to address the challenges of climate change and strained resources.

### *What Sustainability Entails*

Conventional farming before the 1940s was effectively organic; synthetic inputs were not an option. Their subsequent introduction helped simplify grape-growing practices, target specific problems, and

**An owl box at Vina Robles.**





increase yields. However, the growers were unaware of the broader long-term implications of this approach, and gradually, the health of the vines and the ecosystems of which they're a part have been negatively impacted. What is known as "conventional farming" in many growing regions today is a misnomer—"industrial viticulture" is a more accurate term.

Fortunately, eco-friendly viticultural practices are gaining momentum worldwide, particularly in Paso Robles. Sustainable, organic, and biodynamic farming is common, and regenerative agriculture is increasingly being explored. Each has its guiding principles, with a degree of overlap. Granted, numerous certification agencies can create complex rules and regulations, so some producers choose to forego certifications altogether even as they adhere to prescribed principles.

The term "sustainable" has the broadest application. In Paso Robles, Sustainability in Practice (SIP) focuses on employee safety, recycling, habitat conservation, organic soil additions (chemical additions are allowed if deemed necessary), and responsible irrigation practices. One SIP trailblazer is **Pomar Junction**; as co-owner Matt Merrill told me, "We're a farming family; we manage thousands of acres. We were proud to be one of the founding members to be SIP certified."

**Hope Family Wines'** estate vineyard was SIP certified in 2011, and the winery is now in the process of helping all of its contracted growers achieve certification under SIP or Certified California Sustainable Winegrowing—an ambitious goal that is now 97% complete. Explained company president and winemaker Austin Hope, "My job as a farmer is to give back more to the soil than I've taken from it by creating a healthy ecosystem. When the soil is alive through sustainable methods, what comes out is pure quality. Responsible farming and resource conservation are at the heart of everything we do. We have farmed sustainably for more than 20 years, and . . . we are also pushing further into organic and regenerative practices on the estate vineyard."

At **Vina Robles**, which was SIP certified in 2012, initiatives to improve self-sufficiency and preserve resources have long been at the forefront. For example, during the planting of the first estate vineyard in 1997, an arborist was hired to save a declining

*Biodynamically farmed vines at Castoro Cellars.*



300-plus-year-old oak tree that would have otherwise been removed. Today, the tree still stands in Jardine Vineyard, and its likeness appears in the logo found on each bottle. Additionally, it's honored through a partnership with One Tree Planted and the Arbor Day Foundation, as the winery has donated a portion of the proceeds from red blend The Arborist toward the planting of over 35,000 trees to date. As part of a renovation in 2018, Vina Robles installed both a 1-megawatt solar array to offset its energy needs and a series of retention ponds that capture more than 3 million gallons of rainwater, serving as a sustainable water source for its facility while helping to relieve strain on the local community's resources. These initiatives are among the bounty of sustainability-related

efforts carried out by the winery.

Organic farming follows more restrictive guidelines. Again, there are several certification agencies with varying rules, but California Certified Organic Farmers (CCOF) is the most used in California. Its certification process, which takes three years, centers on vineyard management and aspects of wine production. The costs of organic viticulture tend to be higher than those for its conventional counterpart up front, but they level out over time. (Note that the established organic guidelines for the U.S. and Europe are not the same. Also, wines labeled as being "made from organic grapes" are not the same as "organic wine." The former applies only to the raw fruit; the latter applies to the finished wine.)





*Allegretto Wines owner Doug Ayres.*

**Castoro Cellars** is a pioneer of organic farming in Paso Robles, having initiated the transition in 2004. It is now the largest certified organic and sustainable winegrower on the Central Coast, boasting 1,600 acres of CCOF- and SIP-certified estate vineyards. Its westside vineyard properties are being farmed biodynamically, with its 148-acre Whale Rock Vineyard serving as the poster child for organic and biodynamic farming.

Biodynamic farming is an elevated version of organic farming. Dating to the 1920s-era teachings of Rudolf Steiner in Austria, it puts many of the same principles into practice while taking a broader, more holistic approach: The goal is to work with nature, not fight it, by building organic soil matter; increasing microbial activity, and improving root growth through a range of actions, including using natural soil preparations versus pesticides. A biodynamic calendar is followed to determine when to plant, prune, and harvest. Often, biodynamic vineyards experience an extended growing season that can lead to superior fruit quality and subsequently better wine. Demeter is the best-known certification for biodynamic farming.

Over the years, I've visited many biodynamic vineyards worldwide, and **Allegretto Wines** stands out above all the others. Its Willow Creek Vineyard is stunningly idyllic, home to vines in ideal health; the vine canopy boasts a perfect

fruit-to-leaf ratio. Owner Doug Ayres has fully embraced biodynamic viticulture. He uses terms like "stewards of the land," "harmony of space," and "mother earth" time and time again. We spoke at length about the importance of the biodynamic calendar, which is based on lunar cycles and organized by flower, leaf, fruit, and root days, focusing on balance.

The most exciting topic of the trip was Regenerative Organic Certification (ROC). Until recently, it was thought to apply only to small producers, but a building body of evidence shows it could prove scalable. This has the makings of a game changer. Preceded by organic certification, ROC builds on the basics of organics. The focus is on soil health, land management (including composting, cover cropping, and minimal tillage to reduce soil compacting and water runoff), animal welfare, and farmer and worker fairness standards. There is also an additional pathway to certification. If you're converting a non-organic vineyard, you can farm under ROC standards from day one and be jointly audited by an organic (CCOF) and ROC auditor.

While at **Robert Hall Winery**, I spent time with the managing director and head of sustainability, Caine Thompson. He discussed a successful three-year regenerative organic trial that ended in 2023. The results indicated improved water retention (hence less need for irrigation), improved canopy health, higher levels



*Sheep help manage cover crops in one of Riboli Family Winery's organic vineyards.*



*At Robert Hall Winery, drones transport predatory insects to eradicate mealybug populations.*

of carbon sequestration, and reduced predatory-insect and disease pressure. All 140 acres of the estate vineyards have now been converted to ROC and are pending certification. In 2021, O'Neill Vintners & Distillers, which owns Robert Hall Winery, also became the largest wine company in the U.S. to be certified as a B Corp, which requires upholding various social and environmental standards.

For those connected to the on-premise trade, including a section of regenerative organic wines on your wine list would





*Robert Hall Winery managing director and head of sustainability Caine Thompson.*

make for an outstanding talking point, especially in contrast to natural wines (which are often sourced from non-organic vineyards).

### *Beyond Certification*

The real-world examples of the sustainability movement that I witnessed on my trip were a testament to the resourcefulness of the wine producers, who blended common sense with modern technology and out-of-the-box thinking. Technology in wine production has boomed in recent years, including soil mapping to gauge water levels, allowing for more precise and timely irrigation, and canopy mapping, providing insect infestations to be identified and acted upon with targeted accuracy. At **Robert Hall Winery** and **Vina Robles**, drones carry and drop predatory insects like mini paratroopers to eradicate mealybug populations. It's a quick and efficient process that eliminates the need to run tractors and use sprays. Additionally, it's incredible to watch dogs trained to find leafroll virus in a vineyard before it's visible to the human eye at Robert Hall.

At **Riboli Family Winery**, I was greeted by winemaker Marty Spate. He was keen to focus on the winery, which I quickly discovered is a model of intentional planning to create an efficient and innovative production site. It's entirely solar-powered, using state-of-the-art technology to conserve electricity. The temperature of

the massive barrel room is controlled by ceiling vents that, thanks to the aforementioned diurnal swing, allow for the ingress of cool night air; by day, energy-efficient fans reduce electricity usage. The Paso Robles winery is certified by the California Sustainable Winegrowing Alliance (CSWA), putting it among the 5% of California wineries to receive this distinction. The facility recycles 100% of its water using on-site reclamation tanks for water purification, reusing the water in the vineyards through drip irrigation.

Riboli Family Winery farms ten vineyards—over 1,000 acres—in Paso Robles also according to the standards of CSWA. Additionally, four of the ten are either certified or in the process of being certified organic through CCOF. A herd of 400 sheep is moved among the vineyards for grazing, which lessens the need for the use of tractors, reducing soil compaction while returning organic matter to the soil. This makes cover-crop nutrients more readily available to vines than mowing and tilling them into the soils does. Says Anthony Riboli, "Our family has been farming and making wine for over 100 years, understanding how we treat the land will affect future generations of our family and our wines."

### *Can You Taste the Difference?*

Throughout my visit and in the weeks following back at home, I conducted a thorough tasting of the wines of Paso

Robles, with a heavy focus on Cabernet Sauvignon and other Bordeaux varieties. Some wines were sustainably produced, others not. I couldn't identify which were which with 100% certainty. However, the eco-friendly wines tended to show improved ripeness, balance, intensity, and length, along with more authentic varietal character. Specifically, they showed exceptionally low levels of pyrazines and heightened notes of blue and black fruit. With many at an ABV of around 14.5%, they displayed no alcohol heat, as their structure was ample enough to provide adequate support thanks to the high level of fruit maturity and nicely ripe tannins.

### *What Does the Future Hold?*

Expect an elevated level of experimentation with a sense of urgency from the Paso Robles wine industry. Eco-friendly methods of production will increasingly be embraced and go mainstream, and the story of regenerative organic viticulture will become progressively compelling, with some novel approaches likely coming into play that are not even part of today's discussion.

The message must be simple, consistent, and trustworthy for the consumer. The bottom line is that eco-friendly action can be taken, but the region will be judged by what's in the glass. If Paso Robles continues striving to that end, it will reach new heights that will be emulated around the world. *sj*



# A Q&A With Shelly Zanolli

PROPRIETOR AND TASTING ROOM MANAGER OF ZANOLI WINES  
IN PASO ROBLES, CA

**IN THIS 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 Shelly Zanolli of ZANOLI Wines.

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

Wine quality should always be top priority for guests to enjoy an exceptional tasting experience. Here at ZANOLI Wines, we source our fruit from legendary vineyards, setting the bar high with top-quality grapes.

[Additionally,] Jimmy Zanolli, our founder and winemaker, and I provide a one-on-one tasting experience with each guest. . . . By giving this personalized attention, we can cater to specific preferences and elevate the tasting experience.

Crafting the perfect wine-tasting experience involves attention to detail, including our tasting room's decor and design. By carefully selecting fabrics, colors, and textures, we created an atmosphere that helps our guests feel at home—like they are in my living room. When relaxed, they're more likely to enjoy the wine-tasting experience and recommend our tasting room to others.

Music is a big part of our life, and with Jimmy's record collection that he inherited from his grandparents, we knew we had to have a vinyl record area where guests could spin a record during their experience. Finding that perfect record reminds you of memorable moments and creates new memories with wine friends.

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

Here at ZANOLI, we are fortunate to have everything under one roof, making it easier to do tastings in the cellar. Jimmy

PHOTO: DANIKA DRUE



loves to teach and show guests around the production area. We offer barrel tastings, [an] Art and Science of Winemaking Experience during harvest, and private tastings in the cellar.

It's always great when you can interact with the principals of a winery during your visit. It adds a personal touch to the experience and allows [you] to learn more about the winery's history, philosophy, and wines.

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

Paso Robles has over 250 producers, and the AVA spans 25–45 miles. We are in Tin City, a small wine-community [marketplace that] has about 30 small brands; we all help and depend on each other. One of the most significant community events we have is the Forklift Parade. This is a way for all of us to dress up our forklifts for fun after a prolonged harvest and cut loose


during Christmastime—something we all look forward to!

**Q: Could you describe any unique or exclusive offerings that set your tasting room apart from others?**

We love to teach and want to bring the customers into our lives during harvest to show them how to make wine and get dirty with the grapes. From September to November, we explore the art and science of wine-making [through the aforementioned Experience]. We provide the opportunity to visit behind the scenes and [see] where the magic of winemaking comes to life. Guests can discover the secrets of harvest from critical picking decisions to grape crushing and fermentation. As a participant, you can compare and taste grapes at various stages of [production]. A tasting of our current wine portfolio follows this

immersive 90-minute experience.

**Q: How do you stay informed about industry trends to ensure that your tasting room remains competitive in the market?**

Engaging with the local community helps us promote the tasting room and allows for valuable insights into industry trends. By going out to do community outreach at other wineries and connecting with local businesses and organizations, we stay up to date on what's happening in the area and adjust our strategies accordingly. Plus, it's a great way to build relationships and show support for the community. 

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*Set for May 7–8 in Reno, Nevada, the Tasting & Tap Room Expo is the only event that's dedicated to education and networking for owners, operators, and managers of wine tasting rooms; for more information, visit [tastingroomexpo.com](http://tastingroomexpo.com).*



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# Making the Most of Mentorship

AN OPEN MISSIVE TO SOMM JOURNAL READERS

PHOTO: CHANDLER SCHWARTZ



*SommFoundation cellar master Jay Fletcher, MS, and SommFoundation board chair Thomas Price, MS, at the 2023 Rudd Round Table.*

## DEAR BEVERAGE COMMUNITY,

SommFoundation is proud to announce its new Mentorship & Advice Program. What began as a lively discussion at our annual board meeting in November 2022 developed into something we feel uniquely positioned to facilitate for our industry: supporting individuals who might need assistance as they try not only to navigate their professional lives but really determine who they are as individuals so that they may build lasting careers that feel aligned with their aspirations, strengths, and values. As board member Stephanie Caraway notes, "The inherent need for mentorship arises from the reality that change is steady and constant. In building a foundation of confidence and curiosity for the next generation, one has a fighting chance of embracing that change. A relationship with the self is the longest and perhaps most important. In seeking guidance, collaboration, and feedback, that investment in self can inspire an industrywide positive shift." As an organization, we feel that whole, content individuals can transform the wine industry.

For 21 years, SommFoundation has provided educational and career support to beverage professionals and has received countless scholarship and enrichment applications from candidates recounting their personal stories, struggles, and ambitions. We have the privilege of tapping into a wide network of experts who are motivated to mentor applicants whom we can match to their strengths: It's a highly customized process of examining potential mentors and mentees in order to initiate a synergistic relationship. In the words of SommFoundation director of media Larissa Dubose, "This program encourages a full-circle dynamic, as many past scholarship and immersion trip recipients will be among the mentors. There's an incredible ripple effect when an individual is willing and able to pay it forward."



**Writer and consultant Julia Coney with Brit Zotovich of Dreamcôte Wine Co. at the Court of Master Sommeliers, Americas' 2023 Women's Symposium.**

Some professionals are fortunate to have a workplace that cultivates self-discovery, goal-setting, and organic mentorship. However, as director of operations Emily Gold explains, "Many skilled and passionate individuals don't have access to mentors, networks, and a supportive community in ways that can have life-changing impacts on career opportunities. Our industry is strengthened when it is more inclusive and connecting in these ways, [both] within and outside our places of employment. This is the objective of SommFoundation and this mentorship program. We are deeply thankful to the mentors who have agreed to participate and work towards this shared goal."

Board member Shilah Salmon asserts that "mentors are crucial to help[ing] bright, motivated minds find the right place to thrive, especially in such a complex, dynamic global business as the wine industry. A peek behind the curtain to a young professional can shape an entire lifetime of work. This is how the industry prospers and stays relevant." Director of scholarships Ashley Hausman, MW, couldn't agree more. "I think of the time a few key mentors gave me when they had so little of it to share," she recalls. "Their counsel, wisdom, and hard questions encouraged me to wrestle with what path was best for me both academically and professionally. I am a fuller person [as a result—one] who is more confident and secure in my worth. As a mentor now myself, it is my greatest hope to help

others identify the gifts we all inherently possess so we might experience a more fulfilled, resilient industry."

In addition to our mentorship program, we will offer an ongoing advice program. We all need occasional counsel, a networking recommendation, or a brainstorming session; we plan to channel those one-time inquiries through that program. We also know, though, that when a professional is motivated to chart a particular course, they could use more structured guidance in the form of multiple interactions, goal markers, and action-based deliverables, which our mentorship program might better provide.

The best mentor/mentee relationships are collaborative and mutually beneficial. They take humility, hard work, and bravery on behalf of the mentee as much as they take patience, empathy, and compassion from the mentor. Says director of enrichment trips Tye Tavaras, "For

us, successful mentorship is twofold: It hinges on strategic placement of mentees with mentors who not only excel in their expertise but [who] champion and live inclusion, effectively opening doors and broadening horizons in our industry."


SommFoundation has been reforming its mission in recent years and striving to put community leadership at the forefront of its Scholarship, Enrichment, and now Mentorship & Advice programs. The four pillars upon which we have built this mission are representation, access, belonging, and transformation. Through our Mentorship & Advice Program, we aspire to address all these essential components, which create a healthier, safer, and richer



**Emily Wines, MS, with Riley Wathen Slack of Foxen Vineyard & Winery at the Court of Master Sommeliers, Americas' 2023 Women's Symposium.**

industry with strong leaders who demonstrate a wider range of perspectives.

Mentee applications open in May for a six-month placement beginning in June, followed by biannual opportunities to apply. We are limited to accepting only as many mentees as we can accommodate based on our mentor pool, but we intend to grow the mentorship program and pair more qualified applicants in fall 2024. We can't wait to see the support, progress, and momentum that you as a community are sure to create using this new framework. Visit [sommfoundation.com](http://sommfoundation.com) to learn more, and thank you all for your dedication to the future of our industry.

Sincerely,  
SommFoundation 



# In Steady Hands

## MEETING THE MAESTRO OF VIÑA DON MELCHOR

by Laura Ness

### THE NAME “DON MELCHOR” IS

revered throughout Chile in much the same way that “Opus One” is in Napa Valley and beyond. From Puente Alto in the Maipo Valley, Don Melchor is a Cabernet Sauvignon of soaring grace akin to a violin solo grounded by the earthy undertones of a deeply haunting cello. And the maestro behind it all is winemaker Enrique Tirado.

In many ways, the man and the wine are one and the same: intense but gracious, traditional yet experimental, and reverent of history yet acutely aware of the vagaries of each vintage. Tall and cool like the Andes, with a bit of snow in his hair, Tirado is thoughtful, pragmatic, and authentic yet a bit reserved, unfolding like the layers of the 2020 vintage, which reveals warm earth, smooth to-

bacco, and graphite before pomegranate emerges from its depths.

The similarities make sense: From the time he was tapped to join Concha y Toro, which owns the brand, right out of university in 1985 until the moment he ascended to general manager and technical director at Viña Don Melchor in 2019, Tirado has been quietly growing, along with the Don Melchor vineyard, into a symbol of elegant power. Set against the backdrop of the Andes, the vineyard was planted in 1883 by vintner and Concha y Toro founder Don Melchor with cuttings from Bordeaux that have evolved over a century and a half to become a massal selection unique to the 127-hectare site, which is filled with sandy, stony alluvial soils at 2,000 feet in elevation. Seven major plots of Cabernet Sauvignon are supplemented by smaller plots

*Viña Don Melchor  
general manager  
and technical  
director Enrique  
Tirado.*



of Cabernet Franc, Merlot, and Petit Verdot, which are in turn divided into many micro-plots that reflect the unique aspects of the terroir. Eighty percent of the vines are between 40 and 45 years old.

Tirado has had one single-minded purpose since his first vintage of Don Melchor in 1997, ten years after Concha y Toro's flagship wine debuted: to respect this terroir and make a Cabernet worthy of its name and lofty reputation (especially in its main markets of Brazil, Europe, the U.S., and China). Distilling the distinctive character of each micro-plot into a singular symphony is a vital part of that mission. “It is a combination of agriculture and art,” he told me at a recent lunch, noting that he employs at least six different French coopers, who use medium toast only. “I want to respect the natural expression from each parcel: not to mask or change them.” Consulting French winemakers, meanwhile, bring what Tirado calls “a global viewpoint” to the vinification of the wine, of which just 15,000 cases are produced each year. The label on the bottle features a rendering of the historic Melchor house, which serves as the brand's tasting room and hospitality center. Here, says Tirado, you can taste vintages dating back to 1987, paired with Chilean cuisine. “The fire-grilled lamb is my favorite,” he said while pouring a taste of the 2021 vintage, which displayed a smoky graphite nose and notes of fleshy dark fruit.

“Every year, you can create something new. I try to start fresh each time—it's the same vineyard, but each year is different,” he adds. “Still, I want that common line and personality to come through.” Under his purview, Don Melchor is surely in steady hands for many vintages to come. sj



# SAN BENEDETTO

*Acqua Minerale Naturale*

PRODUCT OF ITALY



San Benedetto water is the leading choice of wine sommeliers around the globe due to its perfectly neutral pH, balanced minerals, and zero sodium. It is a true palate cleanser and perfect match for the finest quality wines.

For over 65 years, the Zoppas family has taken great pride in producing beverages from one of the purest artesian water sources in the world, the underground springs of Italy's Dolomite mountains in Veneto.

San Benedetto is Italy's #1 water brand, held in highest esteem at home and abroad.





# WINE & BEVERAGE

S U M M I T

MAY 5–7, 2024

The CIA at COPIA | NAPA, CA

3 DAYS OF

**Immersive Tastings**  
**Business Workshops**  
**Industry Networking**

## Sunday, May 5

2 P.M. Registration and Refreshments

2:30 P.M. Welcome and Opening Remarks

### GENERAL SESSION I

2:45 P.M. **The State of Wine Education**

### GENERAL SESSION II

4:15 P.M. **All Hands Think Tank:  
Innovating Wine Education**

5:30 P.M. Summit Meet and Mingle Reception

### BOOK SIGNING

**Evan Goldstein**

*Perfect Pairings: A Master Sommelier's  
Practical Advice for Partnering Wine*

## Monday, May 6

8:30 A.M. Breakfast

9 A.M. Morning Remarks

### GENERAL SESSION III

9:15 A.M. **Dollars and Sense: Financial Fluency  
for the Wine and Restaurant Business**

10:45 A.M. Networking and Refreshment Break

### GENERAL SESSION IV

11:15 A.M. **Techniques on Tasting**

12:30 P.M. Family-Style Lunch

### GENERAL SESSION V

1:30 P.M. **Building Skills for Managing Teams**

2:45 P.M. Networking and Refreshment Break

### GENERAL SESSION VI

3 P.M. **Big Blind Tasting**

### HAPPY HOUR RECEPTION

4:30 P.M. **Well-Being in the Beverage Industry**

### BOOK SIGNING

**Andrea Robinson**

*Great Wine Made Simple:  
Straight Talk from a Master Sommelier*



## Tuesday, May 7

8:30 A.M. Breakfast

9 A.M. Morning Remarks

### GENERAL SESSION VII

9:15 A.M. **Negotiating for Yourself  
and Your Business**

10:45 A.M. Networking and Refreshment Break

### GENERAL SESSION VIII

11 A.M. **Hidden Gems: Innovative Career  
Tracks for the Curious Professional**

12:30 P.M. Bento Box Lunch and  
Walk-Around Wine Tasting

### GENERAL SESSION IX

1:30 P.M. **Pouring Possibilities: The Expanding  
Landscape of Beverage**

2:45 P.M. Networking and Refreshment Break

### GENERAL SESSION X · SPEED NETWORKING

3 P.M. **Confidence Coaching and  
Community Connection**

4:45 P.M. Farewell Toast

## Speakers Include



### TJ DOUGLAS

CEO & Founder, Drink Progressively Group



### EVAN GOLDSTEIN, MS

Master Sommelier & President, Full Circle  
Wine Solutions and Master the World  
Master Sommelier, San Francisco Giants



### DESIREE HARRISON-BROWN

Founder, Wino Noire  
Educator, Napa Valley Wine Academy



### MARY REZEK

Global Executive Coach & Founder,  
Mary Rezek



For full list of speakers  
and to register, visit  
[ciabevpro.com](https://ciabevpro.com)

*Schedule subject to changes.*



# Giving Voice to a Diva

## AN INTRODUCTION TO POLAND'S L'OPERA WINNICA

**AS A WINEGROWING REGION** in southwestern Poland, Trzebnica (pronounced *Treb-ZEB-nikka*) may not have a name that trips off the tongue—much less the palate, given how difficult its wines are to find in the U.S. But they're worth seeking out.

Vineyards were first cultivated on Trzebnica's hillsides in 1203; three years after that, Pope Innocent III began serving wine produced by the convent of Trzebnica for the Holy Communion during every Polish Mass. Soils in this region offer good drainage, while the climate, marked by low humidity and high winds, has been compared to that of Piedmont. Coincidentally, the winemaker at L'Opera Winnica (*winnica* means "winery") is Italian.

With three new wines available through PH Importing ([ph-importing.com](http://ph-importing.com)), L'Opera is now playing its vinous symphony in the U.S. We recently tasted these offerings, and thanks to their stellar and unique profiles, we're giving them high marks. *sj*

*Irmina Szpak is co-owner of L'Opera Winnica.*



PHOTOS COURTESY OF L'OPERA WINNICA

*L'Opera Winnica's logo is a musical staff whose lines mimic the shapes made by the hills in Poland's Trzebnica region.*

**L'Opera 2023 SOL SOL, Trzebnica, Poland (\$35)** Resistant to cold and disease, the white grape Solaris is highly aromatic. Aged on the lees in stainless-steel vats, this wine emits a fragrant tune of honeysuckle and yellow apple. At a low ABV of 13%, it's steely, with glassy purity, a fine thread of minerality, and equally fine acidity. **94** —*Meridith May*

**L'Opera 2023 CZAS NA, Trzebnica, Poland (\$37)** A harmonious blend of Solaris and Helios grapes creates a lean white wine with cut-glass texture and plenty of tension. Ripe pineapple and lemon verbena perfume the glass. On the palate is an echo of petrol, accompanied by honeyed peach and white flower petals. Aged in stainless steel, with an ABV of 13.5%. **93** —*M.M.*

**L'Opera 2023 TRIADA, Trzebnica, Poland (\$41)** Vibrant aromas of mocha and cherry lead to a savory taste profile in this rich, well-structured, and elegant blend of indigenous red grapes Cabernet Cantor, Cabernet Cortis, and Baron, which aged for six months in used, lightly toasted French oak and an additional three months in steel and in bottle. Notes of underbrush and woody earthiness are prevalent atop a base of Worcestershire and vanilla-coated blackberry. The low ABV of 13% is surprising. **93** —*M.M.*

PH IMPORTING

# Rob & Bonnie Lloyd

Rob Lloyd was the winemaker behind some of California's most successful Chardonnay producers. In 2008 he stepped out from behind the curtain, when he and his wife Bonnie launched Lloyd Cellars to produce wines that are of unequalled quality.



## UPCOMING EVENTS

April 19 - 20: California Wine Festival – Dana Point, CA

May 17 - 18: Pure Imagination Festival – Prescott, AZ

June 28 - 29: California Wine Festival – Carlsbad, CA

July 19 - 20: California Wine Festival – Santa Barbara, CA

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SCAN ME



# A Sustainable Success Story

**RECIPROCITY WINE IS COMMITTED TO REPLENISHING WHAT IT RECEIVES FROM THE LAND—AND THAT DEDICATION IS PAYING OFF**

by Stefanie Schwalb

**PROVIDING A SENSE OF PLACE** is the ultimate goal of great winemaking: if your team is doing it right, they have an inherent respect for the land and seek to replenish the resources they extract from it. A prime example? Reciprocity Wine in Paso Robles, California, where encapsulating—and preserving—terroir has proven to be the backbone of the brand's success.

Sourced from the 1,293-acre French Camp Vineyard—one of the region's largest sites devoted to certified sustainable and organic viticulture—Reciprocity's grapes are cultivated to produce wines that are true expressions of the Central Coast property, which has achieved California Certified Organic Farmers (CCOF) certification. "The location is special," says vineyard manager Greg O'Quest. "First, French Camp has well-drained soils mainly of Arbuckle sandy loam. Next, the elevation allows for a large [diurnal] temperature swing during the summer months—often [as much as] 50 degrees. Offering hot days and cool nights, this helps keep the acid in the winegrapes. In addition, the coastal influence helps . . . prolong ripening, [along] with the occasional morning fog."



PHOTOS COURTESY OF MILLER FAMILY WINE COMPANY

*Thornhill Companies vineyard manager Greg O'Quest.*



*The French Camp Vineyard in Paso Robles, CA.*

Since 1995, French Camp Vineyard has been leading the way in sustainability practices. “Without [us] caring for and being stewards of the land, there would be nothing for future generations, so [these practices] may be one of the most important aspects [of ensuring the land’s long-term viability],” O’Quest explains. “It was recognized early on that organic and sustainable farming . . . would be conducive to both the ecosystem and the employees—our two most important assets.”

To that end, the team employs deficit-irrigation methods that support conscientious water use, and they maintain a purposeful fruit-delivery and equipment-cleaning schedule to reduce their use during harvesttime. Investments in clean air via the implementation of cutting-edge technology that captures and stores fermentation emissions; the employment of special tools such as lysimeters to measure soil vitality and ensure treatments are done only as needed; and the utilization of cover crops to return nutrients to the land, bind soil particles, and prevent erosion play significant roles at French Camp as well. So does biodiversity: Falcons and owls are encouraged by the presence of raptor perches and owl boxes to control pests, while sheep help limit weeds.

To further guarantee the exceptional quality of the grapes within the vineyard, organic fertilizers are employed along with the introduction of native fauna to result in a unique symbiosis. “The relationship between organic fertilizers and wildlife is important in order to bring native populations back,” O’Quest notes. “Both soil fertility rates and insect populations are able to grow at levels seen in a healthy ecosystem when back in its natural state.” It’s a long process, he adds, which is why organic certification takes three years.

When it comes to making Reciprocity’s Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, Chardonnay, and Sauvignon Blanc, the entire production process—crushing, fermenting, and bottling—takes place at brand owner Miller Family Wine Company’s Santa Maria Winery, where the team monitors each step to ensure high quality. “The winery has to pass an inspection ensuring best practices and standards of process

in order to attain CCOF certification,” director of winemaking Jonathan Nagy says. “Grapes coming into the facility as organic must have all the proper paperwork identifying them as organic and are vinified separately [from other brands in the Miller Family portfolio]. Any additions to the juice or wine can only be made with pre-approved certified products.” Additionally, before the words “Made with Organic Grapes” can appear on Reciprocity’s labels, an external audit must be conducted to ensure compliance with organic standards.

Of course, the Reciprocity team doesn’t just practice what they preach in the vineyard and the production facility; they also employ sustainable packaging from corks and bottles to labels and shippers. For example, all

corks are natural and certified by the Forest Stewardship Council. This organization has also certified Reciprocity’s labels, which are made from fibers that are 80% recycled. All bottles consist of up to 35% cullet (recycled broken or waste glass), which means that they expel less energy when melted for further recycling.

Finally, says director of marketing Kate Eckert, “We are constantly committed to finding additional ways to drive conscientious initiatives for Reciprocity”; for instance, “we have partnered with 1% for the Planet, providing an opportunity to get further involved with organizations that have like-minded approaches to environmentally friendly practices.” In working with this program, Reciprocity gives 1% of all sales to programs that are as committed to caring for the earth as it is. *sj*

## The Wines at a Glance



The **Reciprocity 2022 Sauvignon Blanc** sports aromas of guava, passion fruit, mango, and pineapple with a touch of wet stone that translates to the palate, which finishes with a rich, viscous flourish.



Fermented and aged in French oak, the **Reciprocity 2022 Chardonnay** balances toasty notes of vanilla and baking spice with delicate hints of melon, tangerine, and lemon curd.



Following a nose of blackberry, blueberry, and violet, the **Reciprocity 2022 Merlot** delivers dark, jammy fruit flavors sprinkled with black pepper and hints of earth and smoke before a generous finish.



The **Reciprocity 2021 Cabernet Sauvignon**, which aged in barrel for 15 months, is fragrant with dark berries, cassis, and leather. Layers of brown spice and vanilla converge on the palate.



# Brilliant Archetypes

DELVING INTO THE PORTFOLIO OF C. MONDAVI & FAMILY'S **VILLA PEREIRE**

by Deborah Parker Wong



PHOTO COURTESY OF C. MONDAVI & FAMILY

**A VILLA WITHIN** sight of the serene Pereire Beach on the southwestern coast of France provided the inspiration for the wines of Villa Pereire (pronounced *pair-AIR*), C. Mondavi & Family's newest overseas wine venture. Just 30 minutes west of Bordeaux, the seaside village of Arcachon, which is heralded for its oyster harvest, is home to the picturesque 18th-century villa known to the locals as L'Éclat, or "The Brilliant."

The three wines that comprise the Villa Pereire portfolio—a classic Bordeaux Blanc, a monovarietal Merlot, and a Côtes du Rhône—were crafted from selected small lots by producers who harvested for ideal flavor profiles. The winemaking team at C. Mondavi had a hand in determining the final blends for the wines, which are clean and refreshingly archetypal. For instance, in the case of the white wine, a blend of 85% Sauvignon Blanc and 15% Sémillon that spent six months in neutral oak, vibrant grapefruit and saline notes make for a flavor profile suited to piquing U.S. consumers' continued interest in Sauvignon Blanc.

David Brown, president and CEO of C. Mondavi & Family, attributes the impetus for the development of the brand to the

*"With Villa Pereire, we selected producers that possessed [our] values, including a commitment to quality and sustainable techniques—a natural fit and a way to diversify our portfolio."*

—C. Mondavi & Family president and CEO David Brown

Peter Mondavi Sr. family's keen interest in paying homage to world-class regions: "We wanted to develop a brand from the ground up that would reflect our company values and appeal to a younger audience," he says. In support of Arcachon's renowned beaches and waterways, Villa Pereire donates 1% of sales to various approved environmental organizations as a certified member of 1% for the Planet.

"With Villa Pereire, we selected producers that possessed those same values, including a commitment to quality and sustainable techniques—a natural fit and a way to diversify our portfolio for a broader [consumer base]," says Brown. **SJ**

**Villa Pereire 2021 Côtes du Rhône, France (\$23)** A well-made, textbook example of Côtes du Rhône with a medium-deep hue as well as notes of beautifully lifted red fruit, including raspberry; cracked pepper; and star anise. Showing intensity and range, it has ample weight on the palate yet is so well balanced; enjoyable from the moment it's opened, it develops further with some aeration. Grenache provides the foundation, while Syrah adds layered complexity and a small amount of Mourvèdre lends aromatic range. **93** —Bob Paulinski, MW

**Villa Pereire 2020 Bordeaux Rouge, France (\$23)** This is very well crafted, possessing wonderful aromatics of cassis, ripe plum, blackberry, and dark cherry. A balanced level of concentration and weight meets a slight savory note and a texture that's medium-full, round, and accessible; subtle oak character lends polish and refinement. Nice length on the back palate along with well-integrated tannins. Produced entirely from Merlot. **92** —B.P.

**Villa Pereire 2021 Bordeaux Blanc, France (\$23)** Pale, youthful appearance with a slight greenish tinge. Lifted aromas of fresh herbs. Light citrus notes are bright and pure on the palate, which strikes a nice balance between vibrancy and richness while nicely layered oak adds complexity. Made from 85% Sauvignon Blanc and 15% Sémillon. **90** —B.P.

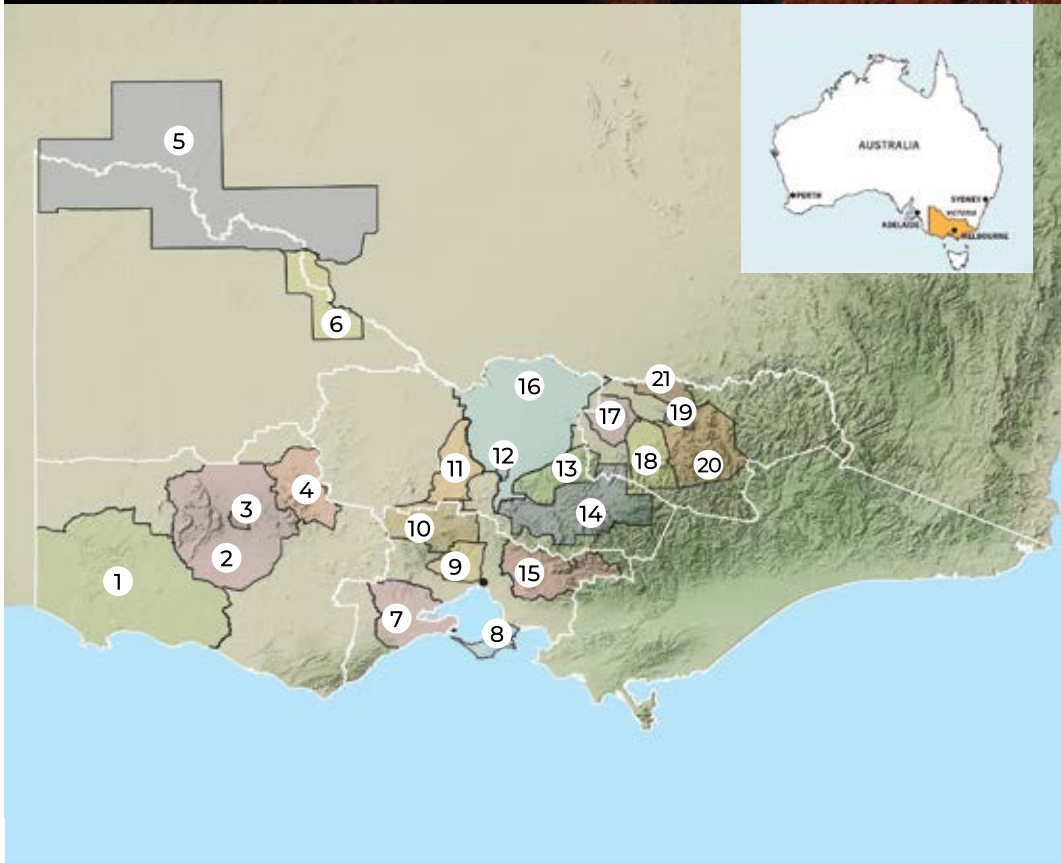
C. MONDAVI & FAMILY



# WINES OF VICTORIA

Victoria, located in the far south-east corner of Australia, is the smallest, yet one of the most bio-diverse mainland states in the country.

With 21 wine regions, Victoria's wines range from cool climate Yarra Valley chardonnay to coastal pinot noir from Mornington Peninsula, complex shiraz from the Grampians and world-class Rutherglen fortified muscat.



## 21 wine regions

1. Henty
2. Grampians
3. Great western
4. Pyrenees
5. Murray-Darling
6. Swan Hill
7. Geelong
8. Mornington Peninsula
9. Sunbury
10. Macedon Ranges
11. Heathcote
12. Nagambie Lakes
13. Strathbogie Ranges
14. Upper Goulburn
15. Yarra Valley
16. Goulburn Valley
17. Glenrowan
18. King Valley
19. Beechworth
20. Alpine Valleys
21. Rutherglen



# The Standout Cabs of the Alexander Valley AVA

## PART THREE OF OUR SALUTE TO THE REGION'S WINE LEADERS

**EVEN IF YOU'RE NOT TRAVELING** to Sonoma County in May to be part of the **Alexander Valley Cabernet Academy**, you can get a taste of the AVA with the last installment of this series on the best it has to offer.

Thanks to the influence of both the Russian River and the marine layer from the Pacific that passes through the Petaluma Gap, the grapes grown here cool off at night, experience foggy mornings, and are warmed by the sun during the day. The resulting Alexander Valley Cabernet Sauvignons have a common thread of plush tannins, vivid fruit, and fine acid structure.

The following wines have captivated us, tasting of sun-drenched days kissed by the Pacific breeze.

### Hawkes Wine

"This is 100% Cabernet Sauvignon from one vineyard in Alexander Valley planted by [my] family in 1995," says winemaker Jake Hawkes. "The ranch is a total of 115 acres, with the vineyard making up about 24 of that. It's a winemaker's darling of a vineyard, rocky and rugged and terraced with spectacular views in every direction. The soils are volcanic; bits of obsidian are sewn through the dirt like common stones. We make half a dozen lots of Cabernet from Pyramid every year and blend them in varying proportions to make this wine. The [results] are always dark, tannic, dense. The challenge here is balance: Pick when the acid is still there, press with freshness and aromatics in mind, [and] never [use] too much new oak."

Jake calls the 2018 bottling "a brooding, tightly wound vintage: looks purple, smells purple, tastes purple [with] Santa Rosa plum, currant, cassis. But there are other, non-fruit elements here, too: coffee, baking chocolate, a touch of fennel and coriander. Great acid for a wine with so much extraction; it somehow manages to feel both dense and bright on the palate. It's exciting to drink the 2018 right now but it also feels like a bit of a shame—it needs time to smooth out and open up. Drink 2024 through 2030."

**Hawkes 2018 Cabernet Sauvignon, Pyramid Vineyard, Alexander Valley, Sonoma County (\$95)** Violets shine through generous, vivid notes of blackberry and burnished cedar. Chocolate mint rings clearly on the midpalate, where tannins maintain a firm grip. **93** —*Meridith May*

*Spectacular views from Hawkes' Pyramid Vineyard.*



PHOTO COURTESY OF HAWKES



PHOTO COURTESY OF ACTA WINE

*The organically managed ACTA estate offers a welcoming hospitality center with an indoor tasting lounge, private wine cellar, third-floor viewing tower, and patio with 360-degree views of the Alexander Valley.*

### ACTA Wine

ACTA Wine is a partnership between longtime friends Dustin Moilanen and Alan Wildstein. What started 15 years ago as a bond forged over great wine and spectacular cars at a charity event led to the founding of ACTA Wine in early 2021. "The ACTA estate is the fruition of a five-year search. . . . Ultimately, we were looking for a piece of land we could preserve for the future of our family that had the characteristics required to work toward a world-class estate vineyard," says Moilanen. "We sought a location where climate, soil, and water were all conducive to great vineyards and resulting wine, where we could [farm] organically and with the best interest of the community in mind. We found that in Alexander Valley, just south of Jintown on 16 acres, with an existing winery and hospitality center that needed a little care and attention to restore its potential."

ACTA, he explains, is short for ACTA NON VERBA, which translates from the Latin as "Deeds Not Words": "This creed reflects our goal to ensure a great experience through our wines by way of taking care with every step."

**ACTA 2021 Cabernet Sauvignon, Chalk Hill, Alexander Valley, Sonoma County (\$90)**

Showing intensity of flavor, texture, and structure, this striking red is decked out in a satin-lined designer outfit. It's juicy to the core, with black fruit lingering on a bed of mocha and violets. Approachable and so drinkable now, this wine will no doubt age with grace. **97** —*M.M.*



## Alexander Valley Vineyards

The Wetzel family is continuing a tradition of family farming that began in the 1840s with Cyrus Alexander, who settled, built his home, and raised his family in the valley that's now his name-sake. When the Wetzels bought their Alexander Valley property in 1962, they were attracted by its natural beauty—rugged hillsides, rolling meadows, rushing winter creeks, and plentiful wildlife—and were determined to protect it. Today, the third generation is continuing this legacy as the fourth generation is growing up on the property they all love; organic farming is just a part of the winery's sustainability efforts.

"Sustainable agriculture, for me, means taking care of the land and keeping it in its pristine state," says third-generation owner Hank Wetzel. "One of the reasons I want us to farm that way is because we actually live here on the property." Head of operations Harry Wetzel IV agrees: "It is the right thing to do."

**Alexander Valley Vineyards 2020 Cabernet Sauvignon, Alexander Valley, Sonoma County (\$34)** Organically grown grapes were de-stemmed, fermented, and aged in (48% new) French and American oak for 26 months. Mouthwatering and well structured, with fresh and lively fruit and rich notes of soil, vanilla, and cedar. Black cherry and cassis are amped up by supple tannins and seasoned with clove and gingered cranberry. **93** —M.M.

PHOTO COURTESY OF ALEXANDER VALLEY VINEYARDS



*The weed-eating sheep at Alexander Valley Vineyards are nature's helpers.*

PHOTO COURTESY OF FRANCIS FORD COPPOLA WINERY



*Andrea Card is senior winemaker at Francis Ford Coppola Winery.*

## Francis Ford Coppola Winery


According to senior winemaker Andrea Card, "Unique sourcing for Archimedes creates a wine like no other. [The 2018 is] a beautiful Cabernet coupled with strength and grace." As for the other Francis Ford Coppola Cabernet Sauvignon we tasted, the 2020 Director's Cut, she calls it "a true reflection of the breadth of our beautiful home, Alexander Valley. Layered and textured, [it's] a wine that leaves you anticipating the next sip."

### **Archimedes 2018 Cabernet Sauvignon, Alexander Valley, Sonoma County (\$120)**

Francis Ford Coppola's grandfather Augusto named his first son Archimedes. This wine pays homage to Uncle Archimedes, a man who loved math and mechanics as much as his namesake, the great mathematician, astronomer, inventor, and engineer of ancient Greece. Concentrated, with an inky purple hue, the wine is sourced from some of the highest-elevation vineyards in Alexander Valley, ensuring prolonged sun exposure and consistent ripening. Deep, shadowed notes of black olive, sage, slate, and soy sauce prevail as dried violets merge with blackberry bramble and sandalwood. **97** —M.M.



### **Director's Cut 2020 Alexander Valley Cabernet Sauvignon, Alexander Valley, Sonoma County (\$36)**

Sourced from throughout the valley's microterroirs and aged for 24 months in French and American oak, this juicy, cinnamon-kissed red is recognizable by its iconic label from Francis Ford Coppola's personal zoetrope collection. It's energetic, with vibrant wild strawberry, plum, and bramble. Superb acid structure enlivens notes of prickly pear, red tea, mocha, and cedar. **92** —M.M. 



# Going for Greatness

EXPLORING THE SINGLE-VARIETAL,  
SINGLE-VINEYARD WINES OF  
**LIVIO FELLUGA**

by Wanda Mann

*Among the vines tended by Livio Felluga are those on these terraced hillsides in Friuli's Rosazzo DOCG.*



PHOTOS COURTESY OF LIVIO FELLUGA

*A trio of single-varietal, single-vineyard expressions has joined the Livio Felluga portfolio: Friulano Sgar, Pinot Grigio Curubella, and Sauvignon Potentilla.*

What elevates a wine from good to great? Andrea Felluga, who co-owns Friulian winery Livio Felluga with his siblings, doesn't falter in his response: "It's a wine of utmost complexity that gets better and better through aging, that has a heritage, and that has a legacy with the territory that pleases both your senses and your mind."

Over the course of the three hours that I recently spent tasting with Andrea in New York City, it became clear that achieving greatness as a producer is his mission—one he inherited from his late father, Livio Felluga. Often acknowledged as the patriarch of the wines of Friuli, Livio moved to this region in northeastern Italy in the 1930s and after World War II soon gained respect for reviving the old hillside vineyards of Rosazzo while introducing modern winemaking techniques. The torch passed to Andrea in 1994, and he is fully aware of the magnitude of his role: "The chain of quality doesn't allow for a weak link," he told me.

While attention to quality has long earned Livio Felluga's wines global acclaim, Andrea began to feel a piece of the puzzle was missing. Most of the

wines in the portfolio emphasized the art of blending; take the iconic Terre Alte, for example, whose current vintage contains Friulano, Sauvignon Blanc, and Pinot Bianco. “Blending is fun, but a few years ago, we realized that there was a spot in our portfolio to bring the single-varietal wine to the next level—to great,” said Andrea, noting that making a single-varietal wine poses a unique set of challenges: “If you make a blend wine, you want to show in the best way the character of the terroir, period. When you make a single-varietal great wine, you have to show both the character of the terroir and the character of the variety.”

But where to start? “We realized that we have some vineyards that, year after year, always give a particular character and that we used to blend with the other vineyards. When we decided to implement this project, we immediately thought of those vineyards,” explained Andrea.

Livio Felluga introduced three single-varietal, single-vineyard expressions with the 2018 vintage, featuring what Andrea considers the flagship grapes of Friuli: Pinot Grigio, Friulano, and Sauvignon. In the case of the former, Livio Felluga 2020 Pinot Grigio Curubella is a stellar example of how magic happens when a ubiquitous variety is made with greatness in mind. To craft it, handpicked Pinot Grigio grapes were destemmed and macerated on the skins for two days to yield a subtly coppery, rose-gold hue. (Traditionally, Pinot Grigio from Friuli made in this fashion is called *ramato*—*rame* means “copper” in Italian—but Andrea said he finds the term a bit “old-fashioned.”) Toward the end of fermentation, the wine was racked into containers made of *cocciopesto*, an ancient Roman style of concrete, and underwent malolactic fermentation for two weeks. Andrea described the result as a more “opulent” style of Pinot Grigio with a creamy texture and aromas and flavors of pears, peaches, and citrus, including lime blossom and lemon zest.

To Andrea’s surprise and delight, the Friulano grapes in the Sigar vineyard experienced a bit of botrytis in 2020, and he praised the aromas and flavors of “alpine resin, pine needles, and balsamic notes” this unexpected touch of noble rot imparted to the Livio Felluga 2020



Livio Felluga owner Andrea Felluga.

PHOTO: JEREMY BALL

Sigar, which also offers notes of citrus, green herbs, flowers, and candied lemon peel. Toward the end of fermentation, Sigar was racked into terracotta jars to allow micro-oxygenation and enhance its mineral character.

Livio Felluga Sauvignon Potentilla is named after a flower that grows on the hillsides of the Felluga estate whose name translates as “small flower with great power.” To make the 2020 vintage, handpicked Sauvignon grapes were macerated on the skins for a few hours and underwent one month of malolactic fermentation in large oak casks. “It’s not common to have Sauvignon go through malolactic fermentation, but I like the style of it,” said Andrea. The wine is creamy yet zesty and crisp (or “crunchy,” per Andrea), and the oak influence is quite subtle, allowing notes of elderflower, jasmine, citrus, and sage to shine through.

Although each of the three wines aged

in a different vessel, Andrea was adamant in asserting that “the character of the wine is led by the vineyard. . . . The style of the wine is not made by the vessel,” whose role is to enhance, not obscure, whether it’s made of terracotta, *cocciopesto*, or oak.

By identifying vineyards with exceptional fruit and implementing precise vinification techniques, Andrea has achieved his goal of creating monovarietal, single-vineyard wines that showcase both the terroir of Friuli’s rolling hills and the region’s key grape varieties. After leisurely savoring them, I agree they certainly meet Andrea’s additional criteria for great wine: “I would add, it is a wine that also improves not just in bottling and cellaring but also when you open the bottle and you spend half an hour, one hour, two hours in front of the wine and you establish a relationship with [it].”



# Rome Wasn't Built in a Day

HOW **EZIO RIVELLA** REVOLUTIONIZED ITALIAN WINEMAKING STANDARDS

PHOTO COURTESY OF LARS LEICHT



*Ezio Rivella was a renowned figure in Italian winemaking.*

**WHERE WERE YOU** when the page was blank?

Truman Capote's apocryphal question is one we should ask before second-guessing or criticizing anything that was done long ago within a context that today cannot be fully comprehended.

Ezio Rivella, my colleague for 15 years, friend for four decades, and mentor for life, was certainly there when the page was blank. A renowned figure in Italian winemaking, Rivella died earlier this year at the age of 90; that today we live in a golden age of wine, especially Italian wine, is thanks in great part to him and his business partner John Mariani, currently chairman emeritus of Banfi Vintners.

When people live a gloriously long life, the passage of time can blur the perception of how great the hurdles they overcame were and how monumental their accomplishments. Media reports of Rivella's passing have been justly full of praise—but the man was not without controversy.

"Tradition," he once famously said, "is a ball and chain." Taken out of context, it sounds like heresy. Rivella was given the nickname *Livella*—Italian for "level"—when he began contouring the hills of the newly founded Castello Banfi estate in 1978

PHOTO: A. BROOKSHAW

*Castello Banfi in Montalcino, Italy.*



to prepare the soil and give the vines optimal exposure. He brought in some of the first stainless-steel fermenting tanks to be used in the region; to farmers who saw them being driven across the rolling hills of Tuscany, it looked like a futuristic invasion force. Rivella and Mariani were criticized for their stated mission to craft “wines of the future.” But what was the context for that bold statement?

When the duo started in the industry in the mid-1950s, Italian wines were a far cry from what they are today. They appealed to a limited audience of Italian Americans, for whom their main selling point was their price. The wines were often lean and acidic, their worth based more on cultural norms and romantic notions than on anything intrinsic. Much of Italian winemaking tradition centered on quantity rather than quality, yielding peasant wines valued for providing precious calories to those who worked the land. They neither traveled nor translated well, and the country’s dogmatic insistence on adhering to the traditions that produced them didn’t help the situation.

Consider that Amarone della Valpolicella did not exist, at least not on a commercial scale, until the mid-1950s. Most Chianti was sold less for its vinous quality than for the fancy packaging (think long-necked “camel” bottles, pistol- and rifle-shaped bottles, and, of course, the straw flasks that were more prized as candle holders than as wine vessels). American tourists visiting postwar Rome were enamored with the brilliant tonality and vibrant freshness of the Frascati they enjoyed there—only to find that by the time it reached the U.S., it was yellowed by oxidation, dull, and insipid.

It was, in fact, through a Frascati producer that Rivella and Mariani met in 1956 and found in one another a kindred soul. Rivella was hired to improve the producer’s wines so that Mariani could successfully import them. He developed a technique that lowered the temperature of the white wines just before they naturally finished fermentation, locking in an almost imperceptible amount of carbon dioxide that would maintain freshness. Because haters gotta hate, that innovation earned Rivella yet another nickname—“Wiz of Fizz”—but it quietly changed one of the negative traditions of Italian wine, allowing the Frascati that Mariani sold in

The Big Apple to taste as fresh as it did in The Eternal City. Soon Rivella and Mariani joined forces in a lifelong mission based on the latter’s credo that “Italian wines will become popular when they become palatable.”

At that time, the market for fine wine in the U.S. had long been dominated by the French; Brunello and Barolo were a long way from standing shoulder to shoulder with Bordeaux and Burgundy. Brunello di Montalcino was not even imported to the United States in any quantifiable amount until the mid-1970s; the story goes that the late restaurateur Tony May of New York City’s Rainbow Room reached out to Mariani to source one because it was nowhere to be found in the U.S. Mariani brought it in for May



**Banfi's broad distribution network in the U.S. and other territories introduced Brunello around the world.**

but found it to be worn thin by the four years of barrel aging then required.

Mariani and Rivella started with baby steps, developing fermentation and bottling techniques to stabilize a traditionally fruity style of Lambrusco and, later, a Moscato-based wine that would appeal to baby boomers coming of age in the 1970s and spread through the U.S. market like wildfire. They turned a generation weaned on fruit juice and soda pop on to wine; knowing consumer palates would evolve in favor of drier and more sophisticated profiles, they would be

ready to meet the demand with world-class Italian wines.

Their commercial success led them to the then-sleepy town of Montalcino in 1978, where Mariani would invest in a huge tract of virgin land that he and Rivella would together build into a formidable wine estate. Fewer than two dozen producers were making Brunello, little if any of which was being exported to the U.S. Rivella and Mariani saw the potential but knew it would take years of development. Mariani had the acumen to know how the wine should taste, and Rivella the skill to make it so.

They planted Moscato but also Cabernet Sauvignon, Syrah, Merlot, Chardonnay, and Sauvignon Blanc to make some of the earliest Super Tuscans—wines that broke the laws and traditions of Italy but got the attention of the fine wine world. They kept their eye on the ball the entire time, intent on helping Brunello to reach its full potential. They studied the clones of Sangiovese, experimented with fermentation techniques, and lobbied to reduce the minimum aging time in barrel from 48 months to 36 and ultimately to today’s 24 months. Banfi’s broad distribution network in the U.S. and other territories introduced Brunello around the world, and most of Montalcino’s producers followed suit in one way or another. Rivella and Mariani built the proverbial better mousetrap, and the world beat a path to their door—as well as that of their neighbors.

Success didn’t come overnight. The first vintage of Castello Banfi Brunello di Montalcino, 1978, was introduced in 1983. Despite the publicity for the project, sales were slow because Brunello was still an unknown quantity. Rivella and Mariani tirelessly traveled the world like missionaries preaching the new gospel of Italian wine, but it wasn’t until 1994, when the American Institute of Wine and Food hosted a masterclass series titled “An American Winemaker in Tuscany,” that Brunello, with its 1990 vintage, got some serious traction.

Rivella and Mariani did not denigrate Italy’s winemaking history even as they showed that it was not always illustrious. They pulled the Italian wine industry—albeit kicking and screaming at times—into contemporary relevancy. On their blank page, they wrote its glorious future. *sj*



# Living La Dolce Vita



## A CELEBRATION OF FAR NIENTE WINE ESTATES IN LAS VEGAS

story by Erik Segelbaum / photos by Photographers of Las Vegas



In January, sommeliers and journalists gathered at Ferraro's Ristorante in Las Vegas for a dinner featuring the wines of Far Niente Wine Estates.

Old friends encountered new surprises when *The SOMM Journal* brought together a group of sommeliers and journalists for dinner at Ferraro's Ristorante in Las Vegas last January. This off-Strip bastion of Italian cuisine, helmed by executive chef Mimmo Ferraro, boasts one of the best Italian wine collections in the world. However, on the night in question, all attention was turned toward Napa Valley as John Rice, Western regional sales manager for Far Niente Wine Estates, introduced guests to two of the company's wineries: Post & Beam and Bella Union.

We were welcomed with a glass of Post & Beam 2022 Carneros Chardonnay, one of only two labels the winery produces (the other being Cabernet Sauvignon). Founded in 2020, Post & Beam is the Far Niente Wine Estates portfolio's most recent addition. It derives not only its name but its inspiration from the hand-hewn post-and-beam barns that dot the California landscape insofar as its goal is to create Chardonnays and Cabernets as classic and long-lived as the structures after which they were named. As Rice explained, "Post & Beam produces authentic Chardonnay and Cabernet Sauvignon with all of the essence and none of the pretense. Tapping into Far Niente's four decades of experience and expertise in producing California wines at the highest possible level has enabled us to craft wines with purity of style."

The 2022 Chardonnay, which served both as an aperitif and as the pairing for the first course, indeed demonstrated varietal purity and all the hallmarks of flavor one would expect from Carneros Char-

donnay without the burdens of excessive oak or heavy-handed winemaking. It showed well alongside insalata caprese with balsamic reduction and prime sirloin carpaccio with lemon oil and mustard. Rice told the attendees that Post & Beam “draw[s] upon the deep wine-making pedigree behind two Napa Valley icons: Far Niente and Nickel & Nickel. Their intimate understanding of Napa’s varied terroir, coupled with ready access to many prized Napa Valley vineyards, positions [them] to craft accessible expressions of classic Napa Valley varieties that can be enjoyed upon release.”

Of particularly appealing note is Post & Beam’s approachable price point at approximately \$35 retail: While cut from the same cloth as Far Niente’s Chardonnay, it’s less than half the price, representing an appealing, light-bodied gateway to Far Niente Wine Estates’ house style while being positioned perfectly for by-the-glass placements.

In preparation for the main course, Burgundy stems gave way to Bordeaux glasses as the Bella Union 2021 Napa Valley Cabernet Sauvignon was poured. Instantly, two things became apparent to the sommeliers in the room. One, despite being sourced from multiple appellations within Napa Valley, the wine gave the unmistakable impression of Rutherford dust (to use the term for the undeniably dusty character imparted by the ancient, mineral-rich soils that make the Rutherford AVA particularly well suited to world-class Cabernet). While the exact percentages of fruit from each AVA were not disclosed, it tasted as though the backbone of the blend came from Rutherford (which is, after all, Bella Union’s home base). Two, the wine showed a clear stylistic connection to the Cabernets that Far Niente and Nickel & Nickel have been famously producing for decades: A balance of Old World earth and New World fruit were framed beautifully by the judicious use of oak.

Bella Union is focused on blending Cabernet Sauvignon with other Bordeaux varieties meticulously selected from



**John Rice is Western regional sales manager for Far Niente Wine Estates.**



**Gabi Pinto, domestic wine buyer at Gary’s Wine & Marketplace in New Jersey, with Bretton Lammi, director of beverage for Prime Hospitality Group in Indianapolis, IN.**



**Sonja and Michael Regan are beverage coordinator and director of operations and beverage, respectively, for Hidden House Concepts in Phoenix, AZ.**

across Napa Valley. Rice explained that the winery “honors the legacy of our winemaking and farming expertise while celebrating the creativity and artistry of the winemaker in crafting signature wines that showcase the range of Cabernet Sauvignon expressions.” Established in 2012, it is currently constructing a new winemaking facility in the heart of historic Rutherford. Considered Far Niente’s “third act on Highway 29” along with the Far Niente and Nickel & Nickel wineries (per a press release), it is presently scheduled to open to the public this summer. Given the pedigree of the wine, the quality of the winemaking, and the relatively approachable price point (around \$80 at retail), it’s likely Bella Union’s tasting room will be flooded with eager consumers from day one.

While most attendees claimed that they did not have a sweet tooth, they were eager to make an exception for the paired course to come next. Dolce 2017 was on the docket, offered with a variety of desserts but at its best with Ferraro’s Pistachio Passion: pistachio cream atop a walnut crust. Founded in 1985, Dolce remains the only winery in Napa Valley (and one of the only wineries in the U.S.) that’s dedicated exclusively to the production of sweet wine—namely a Sauternes-inspired late-harvest blend of botrytized Sémillon and Sauvignon Blanc sourced from Dolce’s estate vineyard in Coombsville, a Napa Valley sub-AVA with a temperate climate ideal for the development of noble rot.

Lovely as the dessert course was, it was clear from a sip that this expression of liquid gold would work with savory courses too. Guests made a game of suggesting pairings: Foie gras and blue cheese both (unsurprisingly) received murmurs of approval, but there were plenty of other delicious proposals, such as duck confit salad with shaved pear and toasted pistachio.

What was most apparent from our dinner, meanwhile, was that the range of both styles and price points across Far Niente’s portfolio has helped position its family of brands as true icons of Napa Valley. **SJ**



# Facing Hurdles Head On

IN CONVERSATION WITH **KATIE CANFIELD**

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 our fourth installment, we interviewed Katie Canfield, owner/partner of O'Donnell Lane, a marketing and PR agency based in Sonoma, California. Canfield also serves on the board of Bâtonnage, is the mentor lead for its marketing and communications department, and led the execution of the Bâtonnage Forum in 2020 and 2021.

**Q: What inspired you to join the wine industry?**

Professionally speaking, it's always been about wine for me. Born and raised in Chico, California (aka the land of rice fields and orchards), I did not grow up with wine on the table—apart from the occasional bottle of Cook's or André for a celebratory toast—nor did I have much international exposure. The latter was something I knew I needed to change, so from high school on I found every avenue I could to travel abroad. Visits to Central and South America, China, and Europe fueled my passion for different cultures and, with that, the food and drink that define customs and traditions around the world. When I learned that one could develop a career in the wine industry, my fate was sealed.

**Q: What has been one of the biggest hurdles that you've experienced as a woman in the wine industry?**

A general feeling of scarcity among women working in wine and a mindset that there are not enough opportunities



*Katie Canfield serves on the board of Bâtonnage and is owner/partner of O'Donnell Lane, a marketing and PR agency based in Sonoma, CA.*

for women or enough jobs—especially in leadership—to go around. While this sense of scarcity is not unfounded, it has unnecessarily perpetuated situations where women in leadership neglect to build up those around them, perhaps to protect their own position that they worked so hard to achieve.

Of course, this is a generalization, and I've known incredible women in wine that have helped me in my career. But, espe-

cially at the start of it when trying to move up the ranks and make more money, I noticed there was not a lot of support from my superiors to help get me there. I am incredibly motivated to see that this mindset is starting to shift, but there is still a long way to go.

**Q: Why did you get involved with Bâtonnage?**

I came to Bâtonnage on the heels of a particular experience in my career where I discovered I was being paid a much lower salary compared to my male counterpart. It wasn't the first time in my career, I'm sure, but it was the first time I had addressed it head on and had it defended to me like there was no problem (by my male boss). It seemed taboo to ask my industry peers about how much money they made so that I could make an informed assessment of my current situation, which left me frustrated and angry.

Enter Bâtonnage, which at its core is a platform to facilitate conversation among women in wine. The only way that women and other underrepresented communities in the industry will be able to address and overcome issues like pay disparity is through transparency, and conversations in safe, welcoming, supportive environments can facilitate this. Beginning with the annual Forum and now the mentorship program, the organization continues to innovate in the ways we format these conversations, with the aim of continuing to evolve to ensure that we meet the needs of new folks coming into the fold—which will keep our industry moving forward. **SJ**

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- THE TASTING PANEL

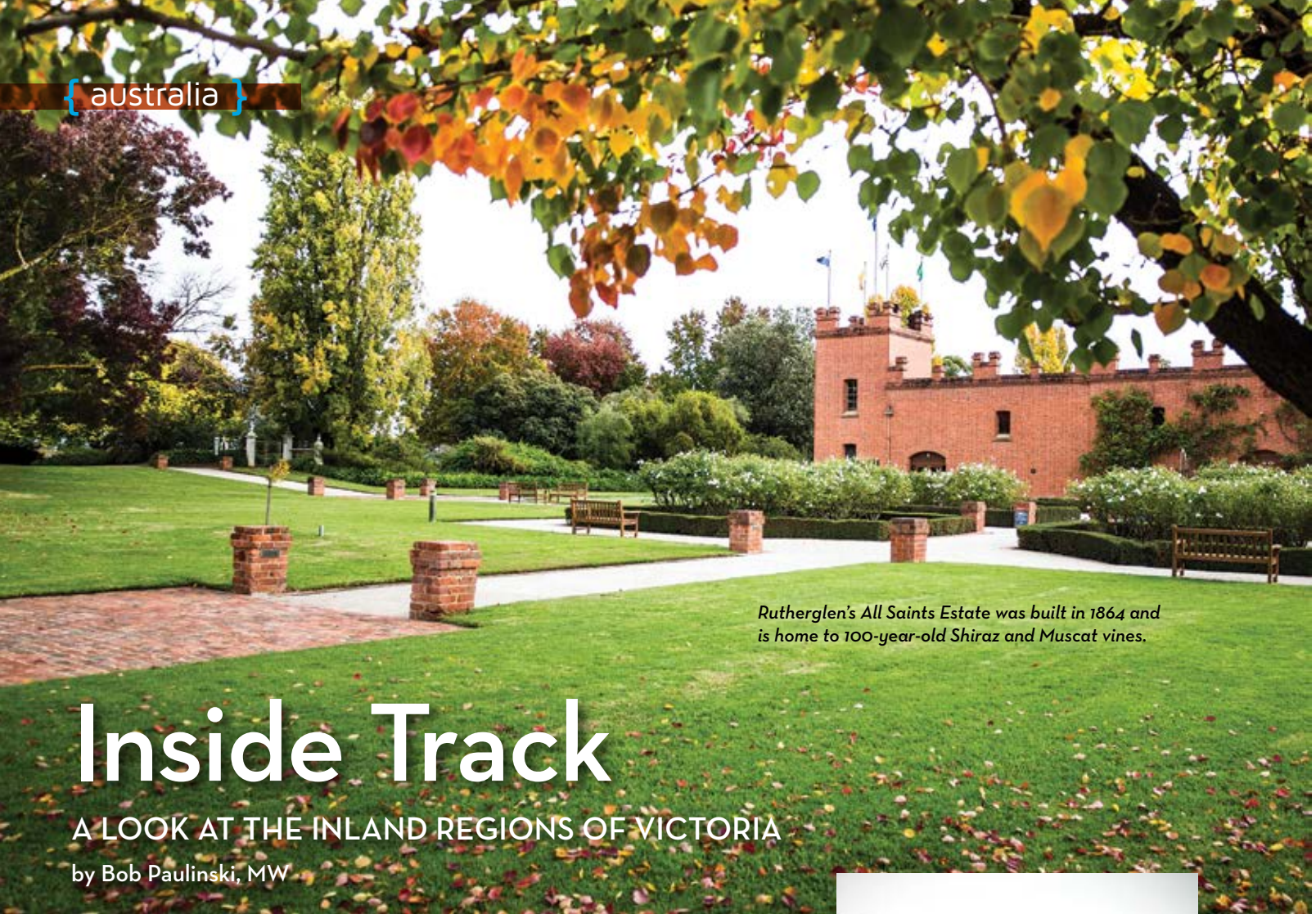
“SOMETIMES YOU JUST HAVE TO GO ALL IN!”

- WINEMAKER KEVIN MORRISEY

BOTTLED IN NAPA VALLEY

*Hazel* ✦  
& AXE





*Rutherglen's All Saints Estate was built in 1864 and is home to 100-year-old Shiraz and Muscat vines.*

# Inside Track

A LOOK AT THE INLAND REGIONS OF VICTORIA

by Bob Paulinski, MW

## AUSTRALIA IS A MASSIVE COUNTRY

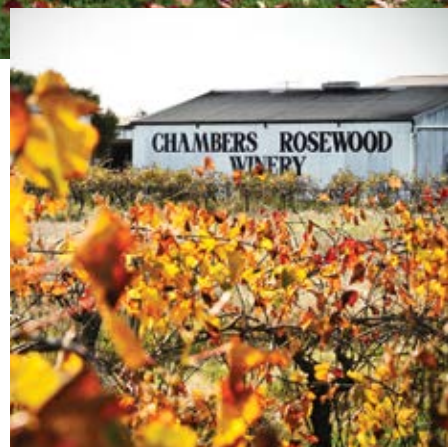
with a long history of wine production. Its vineyards are scattered over a 2,400-mile stretch extending from coast to coast primarily across the southern portion of the country. Over 60 designated growing regions offer an incredibly diverse range of wines to explore—but none more so than the state of Victoria, whose industry is steeped in tradition yet on the cutting edge of viticultural innovation.

Much of Victoria, which encompasses more than 20 regions, is impacted by the Southern Ocean, including the cooler coastal areas that garner the majority of attention. But the deep inland regions in the warmest part of the state hold important historical significance and have perhaps the most interesting story to tell. The focus here will be on the low-lying northern and western rim of Victoria, including Murray Darling, Swan Hill, and Rutherglen, the latter of which offers some of the most iconic fortified wines in the world.

In this continental climate, the warm, dry, and sunny growing season can see highs of 100 degrees Fahrenheit during the day and lows in the 60s at night, thanks in part to the cooling effect of nearby mountain ranges. The lack of humidity due to low rainfall helps to keep the vines free from fungal diseases and assists in guaranteeing the high yields so important to the region's place in the Australian wine industry.

About a six-hour drive northwest of Melbourne, Murray Darling—commonly though unofficially known as Sunraysia—extends from the border of Victoria with South Australia to Balranald, New South Wales, to the east; its vineyards are mainly located on the southern side of the Murray River by which it is divided. It's home to vast plantings of Shiraz, Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, Chardonnay, and Sauvignon Blanc, along with less-familiar varieties like Durif and Mondeuse.

Since 1988, when the first vines were



PHOTOS COURTESY OF CHAMBERS ROSEWOOD VINEYARDS

*Autumn at Chambers Rosewood Vineyards in Rutherglen.*

planted here, Murray Darling has developed into the second-largest wine region in Australia, long known as a source for the large quantities of affordable, accessible wine on which the Australian export market was largely founded. More recently, however, a burgeoning number of smaller, artisanal producers are increasingly focusing on grape varieties that are particularly well suited to warm growing conditions.





*Tasting at Buller Wines in Rutherglen.*

Adjacent to Murray Darling is Swan Hill, a small region that straddles the Murray River and thus the state boundary between Victoria and New South Wales. Although it has Geographical Indication (GI) status, it's often grouped together with its much larger neighbor. It should not be confused with Western Australia's Swan District or its subregion, Swan Valley.

Up until the 1960s, most Australian wine was fortified; indeed, in the early 1950s, nearly 85% of Australian grapes were used to produce fortified wine. By the mid-1990s this had changed, with over 90% being used for table-wine production. But Rutherglen, about a three-hour drive from Melbourne, continues to stake its claim in fortified wine, even as it increasingly produces table wine. Initially planted to vine in 1839, it survived the onslaught of phylloxera and continued to make wine during Australia's gold rush period. Today, most of its nearly 2,000 acres of vineyard land are concentrated in its northern half.

In recent years, Rutherglen has experienced renewed interest in its fortified wines, both domestically and abroad in the U.K., the U.S., and China. These wines are often called "stickies" or "liquid gold," the latter in reference to the aforementioned gold rush that occurred here. Muscat (along with Muscadelle) is the primary variety used to produce them. Locally often called Brown Muscat, it's picked late to achieve high sugar levels. Fermentation is stopped early with the addition of spirits that bring the finished wines to about 18% alcohol while retaining their elevated

level of residual sugar. They're aged for years in a solera-like system, a regimen that lends them their oxidative character. Deep gold in color, they're also incredibly concentrated and aromatic.

Although the production methods for these wines have remained largely unchanged, the naming conventions have evolved over the years. What's now known as Fortified Tawny or Fortified Vintage used to be called Port. Apera is the modern-day Australian name for wines produced in the style of Sherry, which are made in limited quantities. Rutherglen Topaque or Muscadelle are the terms now being used for what used to be called Rutherglen Tokay. The wines can also be labeled by the following terms provided they meet the associated requirements: Rutherglen Muscat is a blend of wines that average an age of three to five years and contain 180–220 grams per liter of residual sugar; Classic is a blend averaging six to ten years with 200–280 grams per liter of residual sugar; Grand has an average age of 11–19 years and 270–400 grams per liter of residual sugar; and Rare spends a minimum of 20 years in barrel and has the same amount of residual sugar as Grand.

Accorded GI status in 1997 and home to many new wineries, Rutherglen also produces full-bodied reds and, to a lesser degree, dry whites and sparkling wines. But the fortified wines it's famous for are uniquely Australian and world class. Some are like drinking a part of history thanks to small components of aged wine that can be about a century old. **SJ**

## Tasting Notes



### **Chambers Rosewood Vineyards Muscadelle, Rutherglen, Victoria, Australia (\$18/375-mL bottle)**

This viscous wine clings to the sides of the glass, showing a beautiful amber color with a slight greenish tinge at the edge. Incredibly expressive aromas of raisin, toffee, roasted coffee, mandarin orange, brown butter, and sweet baking spices. Creamy, sweet, concentrated, full, ripe, and layered on the palate; superbly balanced with an extended finish. As a bonus, this wine will remain in superb condition for several weeks after opening. **18% ABV. 94**



### **All Saints Estate Muscat, Rutherglen, Victoria, Australia (\$18/375-mL bottle)**

Amber-gold hue; viscous, rich texture. Sensational aromas of butterscotch, dried orange rind, caramel, and orange marmalade. Luscious, round, weighty, concentrated, and sweet, this wine has been fortified to 17% ABV but shows no heat. Extended on the back palate, with a long, satisfying finish, it's made from a blend of vintages, mostly five to eight years old, plus additions of older stock to highlight greater complexity. I suggest trying it slightly chilled. **92**



### **Buller Wines 2021 The Nook Petit Syrah, Rutherglen, Victoria Price, Australia (\$25)**

Made entirely from Durif, also known as Petite Sirah, for which Buller has opted to use an old-school spelling, Petit Syrah. Medium-deep purple/blue. Very good, lifted aromatics. Black fruit, ripe plum, mocha, aniseed, and vanilla notes with a bit of smoky oak. Full, round, weighty, nicely balanced, and well structured yet accessible, with soft tannins, it has the build to cellar another three or four years. **91**



# Natural Beauty

MARC PERRIN OF **FAMILLE PERRIN** PARTNERS WITH BRAD PITT ON A WINE POMACE-BASED SKIN CARE LINE

by Anna Maria Giambanco DiPietro

**A RETURN TO NATURE.** This is the phrase that came to mind when I discovered Beau Domaine, the wine pomace-based skin care line from fifth-generation vigneron Marc Perrin and his friend and business partner, actor Brad Pitt. As if overseeing the world-renowned, organically farmed Château de Beaucastel in the Southern Rhône (among other projects) weren't enough, Famille Perrin has invested decades of research and cutting-edge science into producing this game-changing line of unisex luxury products made with high-quality natural ingredients—all locally sourced in France.

After purchasing Château Miraval in 2008, Pitt partnered with the Perrins to improve the quality of the estate's wines. A longtime admirer of Château de Beaucastel, he became fast friends with Marc, their shared values and their mutual respect for upcycling, sustainability, regenerative farming, and excellent winemaking forging a deep bond. As Pitt tells it, "When the Perrins told me about the research they had conducted with a professor on the antioxidant properties

of the grapes and leaves, it clicked." Upon sampling the products, he was blown away by their efficacy and quickly became a partner. But "Beau Domaine is not meant to be a celebrity brand," he says. "It is an anti-aging cosmetics range for every man and woman."

To develop Beau Domaine, Famille Perrin married its profound respect for terroir with the work of Nicolas Lévy, a global expert on aging, and the research of University of Bordeaux enology professor Pierre-Louis Teissedre, Ph.D. Together, they identified the most potent antioxidants found in grapes, resulting in the formulation of GSM10, a molecule made from Grenache and Syrah seeds from Château de Beaucastel's vineyards, and ProGR3, a patented active compound made with plant extracts developed to combat the effects of aging. The gender-neutral line consists of a cleansing emulsion, cream, serum, and lightweight fluid creme available via [beau-domaine.com](http://beau-domaine.com), where shoppers can take advantage of a 20% discount when they sign up for a subscription plan.

Famille Perrin has produced fine wine at Château de Beaucastel, which was founded in 1549, since 1909. The Perrins' steadfast commitment to viticulture that respects the earth runs as deep as the roots of their sturdy vines. Marc's grandfather, Jacques, brazenly went against the grain in the 1950s, working exclusively with natural methods at a time when the industry was pushing the use of pesticides; currently, Château de Beaucastel is undergoing a major renovation in order to become "the most sustainable winery in the world," according to Marc. Of course, the Perrins' skin care products align with Château de Beaucastel's focus on sustainability: Says Marc, "In keeping with [my] family's pioneering approach to producing biodynamic wines, Beau Domaine's formulas contain between 96% and 99% natural ingredients, with a strong commitment to transparency and traceability."

In a world inundated with celebrity-backed products, Beau Domaine stands out. Yes, Pitt's handsome visage graces some of the promotional material, but what shines is the line's reliance on science and terroir, with a focus on the efficacy and sensory indulgence imparted by natural ingredients. As Marc puts it, "There is no waste in nature. This exemplary, circular system is the inspiration for Beau Domaine. What is obvious is also simple: To care for ourselves, we must care for and respect our Earth." SJ

*Beau Domaine founders  
Marc Perrin and Brad Pitt.*

PHOTO: SERGE CHAPUIS

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- Thomas Price, MS  
SommFoundation Board Chair



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# A Central Coast Cornucopia

FROM SUSTAINABLE SOURCING TO EXPERIENTIAL DINING, SANTA BARBARA COUNTY ABOUNDS IN CULINARY TRENDS

by Debbie Thomas

## NESTLED ALONG CALIFORNIA'S CENTRAL COAST,

Santa Barbara County boasts picturesque landscapes that span from the Pacific Ocean to the gentle slopes of the Santa Ynez Mountains as well as a rich cultural history that makes it a popular destination for state residents and tourists alike. Given that it's home to more than 275 wineries within seven AVAs plus 21 Michelin Guide-mentioned restaurants, there's no wonder we looked here for evidence of current culinary trends.

One trend in particular is emerging within the local community of chefs, restaurateurs, and sommeliers: sourcing from sustainable and regenerative farms. While sustainable farming aims to minimize negative impacts and maintain ecological balance, regenerative agriculture goes a step further by actively revitalizing the ecosystem.

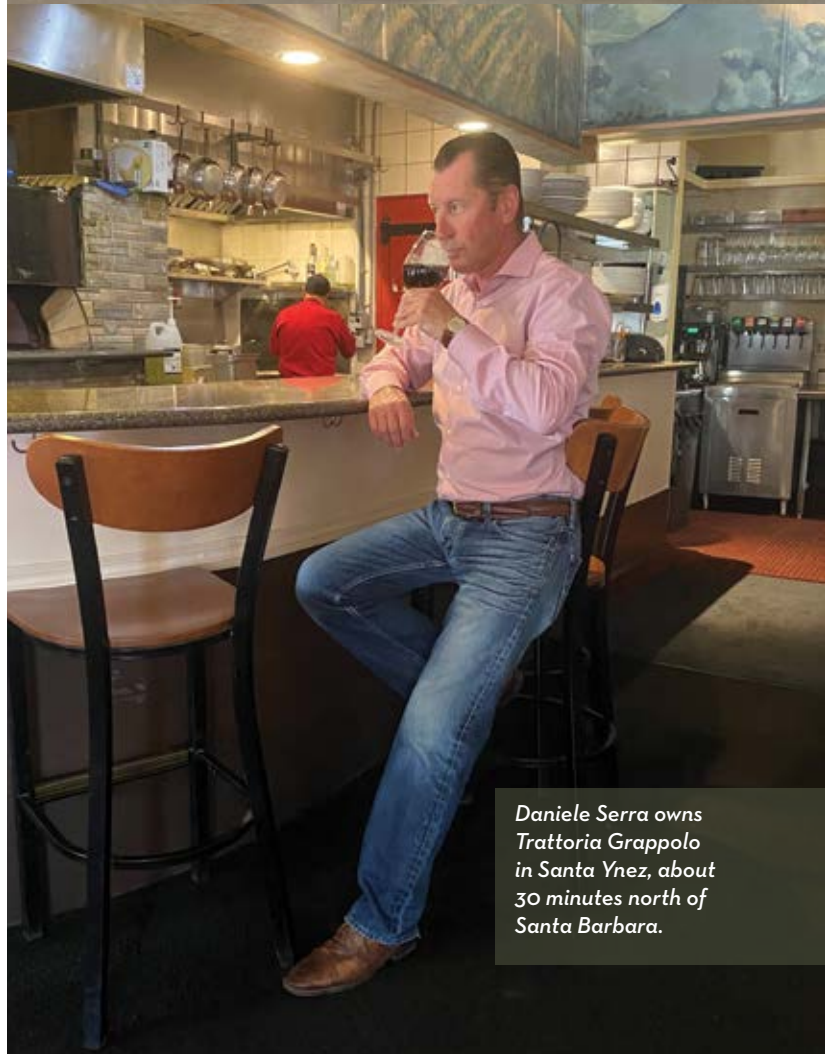
Nathan Lingle, the outgoing executive chef at Finch & Fork in downtown Santa Barbara, acquires much of his seafood locally from the Santa Barbara Channel through a vendor called Kanaloa, which is known for its sustainable sourcing. However, a good portion of the channel is a green sanctuary. "Purchasing from the local waters hinders [certain fish populations] regeneration, so I now opt to source our sea bass from Baja while still maintaining high quality and regional origins," says Lingle. "This choice contributes positively to the ecosystem."

Lingle also uses koji to ferment many of his proteins and vegetables. Besides adding a rich and savory flavor to foods, koji can play a role in sustainability efforts, including by converting food waste into nutrient-rich livestock feed in a more energy-efficient manner than traditional food waste conver-

PHOTO COURTESY OF KIMPTON HOTELS & RESTAURANTS

At Finch & Fork in downtown Santa Barbara, outgoing executive chef Nathan Lingle has developed a clean, simple culinary style that pays homage to local farms and fishermen.

PHOTO: SETH DOULTON



Daniele Serra owns Trattoria Grappolo in Santa Ynez, about 30 minutes north of Santa Barbara.





PHOTO: LAWRENCE BAGAWAN

*Noah Chow, manager at Meritage Wine Market in downtown Santa Barbara, notes that many traditionally produced wines are “natural” in that they involve minimal intervention, even if they’re not labeled as such.*



PHOTO: DEBBIE THOMAS

*Tristan Pitre is a sommelier at The Stonehouse Restaurant at San Ysidro Ranch.*

sion as well as by producing bioethanol as a potential eco-friendly alternative to petroleum-based products.

The Stonehouse Restaurant has been named the number-one restaurant in Santa Barbara by OpenTable. One culinary trend it has embraced is plant-based foods, for which it has a separate menu, according to sommelier Tristan Pitre. “Plant-based food production generally has a lower environmental impact than raising animals for meat, as plant agriculture typically demands less land, water, and energy while generating fewer greenhouse gas emissions,” he points out.

At Meritage Wine Market in downtown Santa Barbara, manager Noah Chow has noticed that “the younger wine customer is showing a significant appetite for natural wines, including orange wines steeped in tradition,” as he puts it. “The rise of natural wines and the preference for regenerative products underscore their increasing interest in environmentally conscious choices. It’s only fitting for natural wines, characterized by minimal intervention, to take center stage as a trend in 2024.” He’s also observing a growing love for Sancerre among his customers, and he’s having great success with the wines of the Southern Rhône Valley, attributing their increasing sales to their perceived better value compared to their domestic Rhône-varietal counterparts. Trattoria Grappolo owner Daniele Serra, for his part, says that Sangiovese is currently selling exceptionally well. He’s also observed a notable uptick in the sale of half-bottles, which “provide guests with the opportunity to pair each course and enjoy a greater variety.”

From velvety Pinot Noirs to crisp, elegant Chardonnays, Santa Barbara County’s own wines are naturally a draw at area restaurants. “A few years ago, Sea Smoke Pinot Noir was flying off the shelves, but now, while it remains popular, other producers like Foxen, Stolpman, Vega, Melville, Tensley, and Di Bruno have gained equal popularity,” says Serra. Additionally, though “[still] Pinot Noir and Chardonnay are the stars of the local wine scene,” in Pitre’s words, “more producers [are] using those grapes to make amazing sparkling wines in the region. Loubud Wines with their handcrafted sparkling wines is a great example, and the Blanc de Blancs that Racines Wines produces is also a world-class sparkling wine.”

Meanwhile, enthusiasts of fine dining have propelled a shift toward “experiential dining,” which incorporates entertainment, technology, storytelling, and multisensory stimulation to elevate meals. For instance, says Pitre, The Stonehouse’s patrons relish tableside preparations that provide a captivating spectacle for their enjoyment, be it the artful flambéing of steak Diane or the expert filleting of Dover sole.

Distinguishing itself as a dynamic and vibrant hub of the California wine industry, Santa Barbara County is flourishing thanks not only to its robust tourism but to the unwavering support of the local community—making it a shining beacon of exceptional cuisine on the Central Coast. **SJ**



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# Family Ties

**SIMON FAMILY ESTATE IS GROUNDED IN AN UNLIKELY IMMIGRANT BROTHERHOOD**

by Izzy Watson

**WITH A RESUME** that ranges from the vineyards of Israel to Screaming Eagle, Dalla Valle, and Atelier Melka in Napa Valley, winemaker Maayan Koschitzky is used to intriguingly unusual job offers. So when he received a call in 2018 from a total stranger identifying himself as a member of the Napa Valley Reserve and extending a dinner invitation, he trusted his instincts and accepted. The stranger turned out to be Sam Simon—a vintner whose intriguing story would soon dovetail with Koschitzky's own.

The conversation at that memorable and meaningful dinner lasted well into the night. Wine, they discovered, was not their only connection: Sam and his wife, Nada, are Armenian Catholics from Iraq who fled to the United States during the brutal regime of Saddam Hussein, while Koschitzky is an Israeli Jew whose ancestors survived the Holocaust. Sharing strong family values and immigrant experiences as well as a love of some of the world's most sought-after bottles, they forged a deep understanding, and by the end of the night, the unlikely "brothers" had become fast friends. They would go on to collaborate on a line of luxury Napa Valley wines: a project that came to fruition in 2021 with the release of the first bottles in the



PHOTO: SUZANNE BECKER BROOK

*Partners in business and in life, Nada and Sam Simon have realized a long-held dream with the creation of their family label, Simon Family Estate. Their firm belief is that wine is a way to nurture deeper understanding.*

Simon Family Estate portfolio.

The Simons recognized in Koschitzky an intangible soulfulness that underscores his undeniable technical skills. After spending decades making wine for themselves and visiting some of the world's most prestigious estates, they knew this intuition is what separates the great from the

extraordinary. And sure enough, in the short years since they met Koschitzky, Simon Family Estate has established itself with an impressive lineup of critically acclaimed wines, which also reflect the tenacity, dedication, and pursuit of excellence that have served Sam well in his myriad successful business ventures.

*The grapes for Simon Family Estate hail from some of Napa's best vineyards, including Tench, pictured here.*







*Simon Family's Double Blessings Napa Valley Cabernet Sauvignon duo comes as a set and reflects the contrasting personalities of Sam and Nada Simon's sons, Michael and Peter; according to their parents, one is complex and brooding while the other is more immediately approachable.*



Thanks to Koschitzky's considerable relationships with growers, Simon Family Estate enjoys access to some of Napa Valley's most iconic vineyard plots: Tench Vineyard and Vine Hill Ranch Vineyard in Oakville, Sleeping Lady Vineyard in Yountville, and Rocca's Collinetta Vineyard in Coombsville, to name a few. The resulting wines are meticulously crafted to convey the purity, elegance, power, and depth of their world-class fruit sources—not to mention Koschitzky's signature alchemy. They include Tigress Rosé, at once an ode to old-vine Grenache and an homage to Nada, being as vibrant and elegant as the co-proprietor and protective matriarch herself; Golden Ore Sauvignon Blanc, a racy Bordeaux-style version of the variety that spends 18 months in (70% new) French oak, lending it a complexity and texture that is almost unparalleled among its peers; and Napa Valley Cabernet Sauvignon, an enticing

blend of carefully selected fruit from a selection of pedigreed plots. At the pinnacle of the portfolio stands the Simon Family Estate Reserve, a handpicked barrel selection from top vineyard blocks on either side of Oakville with a soupçon of Coombsville grapes.

Despite a devoted following and mounting critical acclaim, Sam and Nada take nothing for granted. As the parents of twins, Michael and Peter, who are actively involved in the winery and have long-term plans to make it a multigenerational venture, they ensure that family remains at the heart and soul of their label, extending beyond relations to include their meticulous growers; loyal members; and Koschitzky and his wife, Dana, with whom they share bottles, laughs, and lingering meals together as often as possible. Quips Sam, "On our journey to bring Simon Family Estate to life, we can happily say our family has expanded!" *sj*



*Winemaker Maayan Koschitzky.*

## Tasting Notes

**Simon Family Estate 2022 Tigress Rosé of Grenache, Napa Valley (\$45)** Mineral-driven, with a glossy mouthfeel. Melon, white rice, rose petals, and cinnamon are demonstrative and clean. **94**

—Meridith May

**Simon Family Estate 2021 Cabernet Sauvignon, Napa Valley (\$150)** Teeth-grabbing tannins and a steady tension lead to notes of dried violets and dark-chocolate espresso. Dusty toasted oak is followed by a parade of underbrush and graphite. Grand and elegant, this is a powerhouse performer. **95** —M.M.

**Simon Family Estate 2021 Double Blessings Peter, Oakville, Napa Valley (\$175)** Named for one of Sam and Nada Simon's twins, this is a distinguished and austere blend of 57% Cabernet Franc and 43% Cabernet Sauvignon. Muscular, with a statuesque frame, it reaches great heights of complexity as chalky tannins unmask notes of coffee bean, slate, and tree bark. **96** —M.M.

**Simon Family Estate 2021 Reserve Cabernet Sauvignon, Napa Valley (\$350)** Grainy dark chocolate and roasted coffee bean leave a textural glow on the palate of this super-structured yet round and sleek wine. Violets bloom with tarragon and sweet basil while blackberry integrates with slate and black olive tapenade before dry plum-skin tannins melt across the mouth. **97** —M.M.



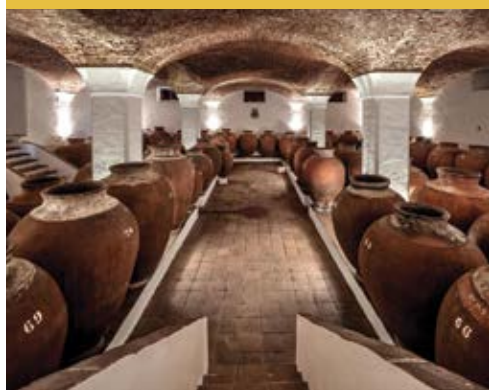
# DISCOVER ALENTEJO'S ALICANTE BOUSCHET!

**Vitis vinifera Alicante Bouchet** (Ah-lee-KANT Boo-SHAY) combines the structure of Cabernet Sauvignon with the warmth and flavors of the Mediterranean – forest berries, peppery black fruit, cocoa, and olives.

A French crossing of Alicante (a.k.a. Grenache) and Petit Bouschet (1886), Alicante Bouschet was introduced to southern Portugal's Alentejo (ah-len-TAY-zhoo) region over 100 years ago by the Reynolds family. Today, this most Portuguese of non-Portuguese grape varieties has become Alentejo's flagship red.



Today, this most Portuguese of non-Portuguese grape varieties has become Alentejo's flagship red.



#### ALENTEJO WINE REGIONS

- 1 Portalegre
- 2 Borba
- 3 Evora
- 4 Redondo
- 5 Reguengos
- 6 Vidigueira
- 7 Granja-Amareleja
- 8 Moura



With 96,369 acres/39,000 ha planted worldwide (Australian Wine Research Institute, 2022), Alicante Bouschet thrives in the Iberian Peninsula, but also pops up in southern France, California, and Algeria, among others. With its sunburn-protecting thick skin and ability to retain acidity, it is naturally well-adjusted to functioning in warmer climates. Alentejo boasts 8,765 acres/3,547 ha (2022) of Alicante Bouschet, accounting for close to 20% of red grape plantings, up from 6,254 acres/2,531 ha in 2018.

**As Alicante Bouschet was first introduced in** northern Alentejo, notably in the districts of Portalegre, Estremoz and Borba, these areas are home to older vines and more established brands. Nowadays fine examples abound throughout Alentejo.

In general, this teinturier (coloring) red-fleshed grape, nicknamed Tinta de Escrever (“writing ink”) produces dark-colored wines with prominent fruit, massive firm structure and high phenolic content. Lovers of mouth-filling “Big Reds” will naturally gravitate to Alicante Bouschet.

The most important style drivers are climate and yields. The grape’s naturally exuberant production is largely kept in check by Alentejo’s poor soils, harsh climate and widely practiced green harvesting. A key factor is hours of sun before the first rains (grapes here mature earlier and it normally rains later). Known for racking up of the highest summertime temperatures in all Europe, Alentejo does, however, include cooler high-altitude and

Atlantic-influenced areas. Portalegre in the São Mamede hills is green, cool, even wet in some parts, ideal for more elegantly styled examples. Alentejo also offers a range of soils – calcareous in Borba, volcanic in Vidigueira, for example.

**Alicante Bouschet is flexible.** It shines solo and plays well with others, including Petit Verdot, Syrah and Touriga Nacional. Of note is the Protected Designation of Origin for wines fermented and aged in amphora (called talhas), a continuous Alentejano tradition dating back over 2,000 years.

The grape’s massive structure equips it with the capacity to age, with the finest examples drinking beautifully at age 50. But, contemporary Alentejo winemakers have mastered the art of taming those tannins, offering polished, early drinking options.



**Winemakers have also embraced sustainability.**

In less than a decade, Wines of Alentejo’s award-winning Sustainability Program (WASP), has established the region as one of the world’s most progressive when it comes to sustainability. Members represent nearly 60% of Alentejo’s vineyard area and all Alentejo’s principal players participate.

Alentejo is poised to become the classic region for Alicante Bouschet: home to diverse, superb, sustainably made wines from a grape perfectly adapted to a warming world.



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# Small Plates and Sustainable Wines

## FINCA TAPAS & BOTTLE SHOP OPENS IN SAN DIEGO

story by Michelle M. Metter / photo by Rafael Peterson

**THIS ARTICLE IS** about Finca Tapas & Bottle Shop, newly opened in San Diego by Dan Valerino and chef-partner Joe Bower. It should not, therefore, start off by discussing restaurateur Tracy Borkum of the Urban Kitchen Group. But it is hard to tell the story of Finca without first talking, even briefly, about what helped inspire its existence.

As a self-proclaimed neighborhood wine shop within a restaurant, Borkum's CUCINA urbana flipped the script on wine sales and consumption when it opened more than a decade ago, waiving corkage for any of the 200-plus bottles it offered for sale when enjoyed on the premises. The model proved a hit, gaining favor among locals and leading to the creation of several other CUCINA concepts throughout Southern California.

In 2019, Dan Valerino was beginning to ruminate about Finca with CUCINA's success top of mind. "We wanted to create a concept that put the customer in the driver's seat with a tapas-driven menu that puts dishes on the table within eight to ten minutes from the time the guest orders," he says. "We are not trying to emulate the Spanish tapa but rather embody a way of dining that allows the guest to order as their appetite evolves" through a selection that includes smoked trout with an English muffin, avocado, bacon, and eggs; mushrooms St. Jacques with scalloped potato puree, Gruyère, bread-crumbs, parsley, and tarragon; fried chicken and caviar with crème fraîche dressing; duck confit croquettes with cherry-mustard dipping sauce; and bone marrow with red pepper jelly and grilled sourdough.

"We also knew that a bottle shop focused on sustainable wines where we could verify and guarantee organic practices would be a cornerstone of our concept," Valerino continues. "We offer an exclusively Spanish and California wine list and [are] currently moving 120 bottles



**Dan Valerino is co-owner of Finca Tapas & Bottle Shop in San Diego, CA.**

per day through the shop, ranging in price from \$20 to a \$182 Palo Cortado. It was really important for us to offer a point of view that was not just natty wines." In fact, Finca's vermouth program represents 20% of the establishment's overall sales; guests are even invited to start each meal with Finca's housemade vermouth for \$6 per glass or \$36 for a 1-liter carafe.

Originally from Cleveland, Ohio, Valerino went to college in Ashland, Colorado, on a vocal scholarship and also studied sports journalism while running a sports news website (which he's not shy about saying he hated). His first stint in hospitality was as a bartender at Applebee's, followed by a series of positions at the Desert Mountain Resort in Scottsdale,

"WE ARE NOT TRYING TO EMULATE THE SPANISH TAPA BUT RATHER EMBODY A WAY OF DINING THAT ALLOWS THE GUEST TO ORDER AS THEIR APPETITE EVOLVES."

—DAN VALERINO

Arizona. Here, Valerino moved from server to dining room captain and ultimately found himself running the beverage program for all five of the resort's dining concepts. In 2013, he and his then-roommate came to San Diego for a visit and decided to exchange desert vibes for beaches. Shortly thereafter, he landed at The Hake in La Jolla as

its general manager before moving on to work at the acclaimed Juniper & Ivy, where he met Bower in 2016—and the idea for Finca began to take shape.

In addition to Finca, Valerino is the owner and founder of Bottle Boon Consulting, a hospitality-management business that creates, staffs, and operates restaurant concepts, including Green Acre and Casa at Alexandria Real Estate's life-sciences business campus Campus Point, also in San Diego. The dad of a 5-month-old, Odalis, Valerino spends what little free time he has with her; his wife, Serina; and their dog, Chai, while attending the occasional virtual tea party thrown by his niece.

For more information, visit [finca.wine](http://finca.wine). 

# Green Is the New Burgundy

## A VISIT TO DOMAINE BORIS CHAMPY

by Laura DePasquale, MS, senior vice president, commercial operations Artisanal Wines, Southern Glazer's Wine & Spirits Americas

**WHEN WAS THE LAST TIME** you saw a bottle of Burgundy on a wine list under \$250? The price of wines from the region has soared in recent years. To make matters worse, severe weather events over the past few vintages have decreased supply and driven prices even higher, especially for whites from the Côte de Beaune.

Nearly all of Burgundy's producers are now engaged in sustainable, organic, and/or biodynamic farming in an attempt to strengthen the vines and combat extreme weather patterns. Some have taken to finding new vineyards at higher altitudes in the Hautes-Côte de Beaune.

Made up of 12 communes, the Hautes-Côte de Beaune today encompasses approximately 800 hectares at an elevation of 250–800 meters above sea level. It is mostly planted to Pinot Noir, but 20% of the vineyards are dedicated to Chardonnay and Pinot Blanc. It is here where we discovered the wines of Domaine Boris Champy.

Boris Champy, a Champenois by birth, previously worked as a technical director, winemaker, and estate manager for such incredible Napa and Burgundy estates as Dominus, Louis Latour, and Clos des Lambrays. With each successive role, he became more attuned to environmental impacts and firmly committed himself to organic and biodynamic farming. In 2019, he purchased the oldest continuously Demeter-certified estate in the Hautes-

Côte de Beaune from Didier Montchovet.

All 13 hectares of vineyards have been certified biodynamic since 1984. Boris immediately added 30 sheep to the Nantoux property, much to the delight of his and his daughter Maya's border collie, Napa. The sheep contribute



**Maya Champy of Domaine Boris Champy and her border collie, Napa.**

to the ecosystem of the farm by trimming cover crops and providing compost. Boris also planted fruit trees to enhance biodiversity: The apples, peaches, quinces, and kiwis are harvested and made into organic jam.

On a cool and overcast day, Maya and Napa took us up a steep, rutted dirt road into the vineyards. Here, we saw high-



**"There is an energy in every bottle of Boris Champy wine I tasted," says author Laura DePasquale.**

density plantings of old vines in a dramatic forest

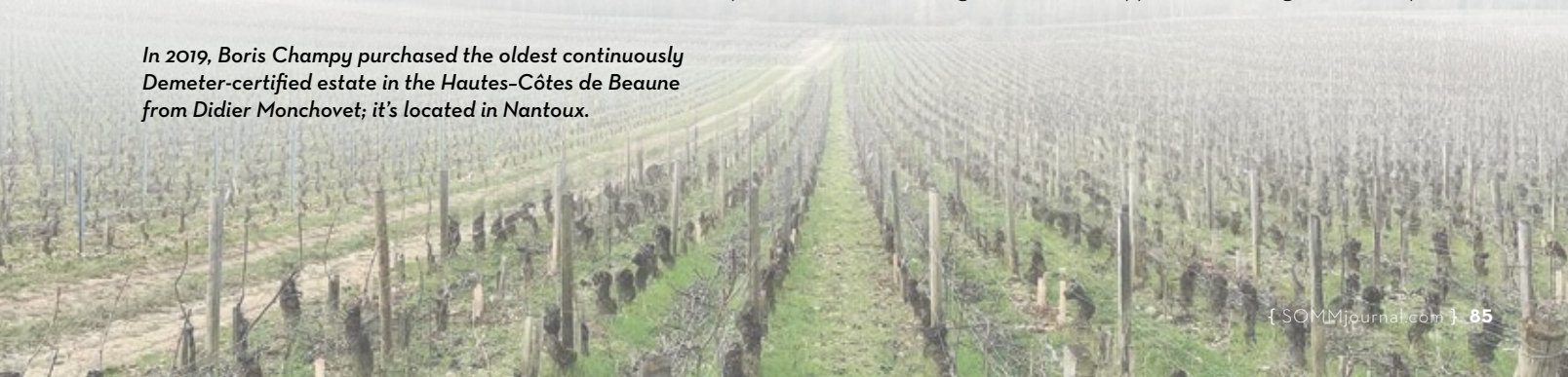
setting filled with birds. The air was just a bit sweeter.

It's a tiny winery, and space is at a premium. Its full-time employees work in all aspects of the operation. The grapes are hand harvested, hand sorted, and fermented spontaneously with native yeasts. A micro-dot of sulfur is added to prevent spoilage. Most wines are a majority whole-cluster. You can taste not only the terroir and energy in each bottle but the thought and love that go into Boris' stewardship of the property. While fresh and lively, these round, complete wines pack all the seriousness we Burgundy lovers expect. Tannins are ripe but firm.

Meanwhile, Boris is experimenting with a sparkling wine project as well as with barrels made from oak staves that have been submerged in the Atlantic Ocean.

The French Ministry has declared the area alongside the domaine's vineyards to be part of the Natura 2000 network of protected nature zones and has subsidized shepherds to graze sheep in an effort to bring eagles back to the land. They are back in all their winged glory—and the Champys are following their example. **SJ**

**In 2019, Boris Champy purchased the oldest continuously Demeter-certified estate in the Hautes-Côte de Beaune from Didier Monchovet; it's located in Nantoux.**





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- Welcome Dinner and Keynote

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  - Supply Chains and Sustainable Purchasing
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by Allison Jordan, executive director, California Sustainable Winegrowing Alliance, and VP of environmental affairs, Wine Institute

# Green Scene

SPRING IS THE SEASON TO CELEBRATE CALIFORNIA'S COMMITMENT TO SUSTAINABILITY

## SPRING IS A GLORIOUS TIME IN

California's vineyards, which span 149 unique AVAs across 615,000 acres. Not only are these vineyards the source of the high-quality grapes that make their way into the state's world-renowned wines but they also preserve open space and scenic beauty.



Each April, as California wine country turns bright green and a vibrant array of multicolored cover crops dots the landscape, California Wines celebrates Down to Earth Month as a way to highlight the Golden State wine industry's commitment to sustainable viticulture and winemaking through environmental stewardship, social equity, and community engagement. Wineries and regional associations across the state are hosting a variety of interactive events and activities—from wine tastings to eco-focused vineyard tours—that shine a spotlight on the sustainability efforts and initiatives underway across California.

Spring is also a time to celebrate the winners of the annual California Green Medal Sustainable Winegrowing Leadership Awards. For the past ten years, growers and producers that meet rigorous standards in California have been eligible to apply in four award categories, recognizing outstanding achievements in sustainability:

- The **Leader Award** is given to the vineyard or winery that demonstrates success in the following three areas of sustainable winegrowing and that inspires others.
- The **Environment Award** is given to the vineyard or winery that best demonstrates environmental stewardship.
- The **Community Award** is given to the vineyard or winery that is a good neighbor and employer; using innovative practices that enhance relations with its employees and/or communities.
- The **Business Award** is given to the vineyard or winery that best demonstrates smart business practices through the efficiencies and cost savings achieved by implementing innovative sustainability measures.

This year's winners are LangeTwins Family Winery and Vineyards in Lodi, which received the Leader Award; Gloria Ferrer in Sonoma, which received the Environment Award; Cooper-Garrod in Saratoga, which received the Community Award; and Vino Farms, LLC, in Lodi, which received the Business Award.

The California Green Medal Awards are presented by the California Sustainable Winegrowing Alliance, California Association of Winegrape Growers, Wine Institute, Lodi Winegrape Commission, Napa Green, Napa Valley Vintners, Sonoma County Winegrowers, and Vineyard Team. Since its inception in 2015, the program has featured an impressive judging panel of wine and sustainability experts whose cumulative professional wine experience often exceeds 150 years.

Visit [discovercaliforniawines.com/d2e](http://discovercaliforniawines.com/d2e) for a list of Down to Earth events and offers and [greenmedal.org](http://greenmedal.org) for a complete list of



## California Green Medal Leader Award Recipients

**2024:** LangeTwins Family Winery and Vineyards

**2023:** Treasury Americas

**2022:** Wente Family Estates

**2021:** O'Neill Vintners & Distillers

**2020:** J. Lohr Vineyards & Wines

**2019:** Silver Oak Cellars

**2018:** Bogle Vineyards

**2017:** Francis Ford Coppola Winery

**2016:** Jackson Family Wines

**2015:** Fetzer Vineyards

past and present California Green Medal winners. Then, open a bottle of your favorite California wine to toast winegrowers' and vintners' commitment to sustainability from grapes to glass. 🍷

*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.*



# Spirit of the Southwest

AT **AMANGIRI** IN CANYON POINT, UT, CHEF SUTTIPHAN NGAMTIPAKON HONORS THE RESORT'S REGIONAL HERITAGE

by Christina Barrueta

## NESTLED WITHIN THE MARBLED

canyons of southern Utah is the ultra-luxurious Amangiri resort. Its remote location, encompassing 900 acres on the majestic Colorado Plateau, attracts affluent travelers and high-profile guests who value discretion. Here at this exclusive hideaway, executive chef Suttiphon Ngamtipakon creates an extraordinary culinary experience that pays tribute to Native American cuisine and culture.

Raised in a Thai and Chinese household, Ngamtipakon developed a sophisticated palate at a young age. "When we dined out, I wasn't allowed to order from the kids' menu," he recalls, "so I grew up exposed to many different flavors." From culinary school onward, his gastronomic



PHOTO COURTESY OF AMANGIRI

*The Amangiri resort in Canyon Point, UT.*



PHOTO COURTESY OF AMANGIRI



PHOTO: CHRISTINA BARRUETA

**Amangiri executive chef Suttiphon Ngamtipakon (left) and his sage-roasted Colorado River rainbow trout with wild rice and chile rojo.**

exploration has continued. "I feel lucky that everywhere I have worked was a destination where I could absorb the culture," shares Ngamtipakon, who has hung his toque at the Beaches resort and spa in Turks and Caicos; The Nines Luxury Collection Hotel in Portland, Oregon; and Dorado Beach, a Ritz-Carlton Reserve, in Puerto Rico. "That diversity was a great experience in building my portfolio of food and flavors."

At Amangiri, Ngamtipakon has turned his attention to Southwestern tradition.

"We have a strong Navajo culture and we very much pay respect to that," he says. "We honor our surroundings, using ingredients like nopales, heritage grains, wild game, and seasonal crops. We also pay homage to Thailand, the birthplace of the Aman resorts, with a Southeast Asian influence on Utah ingredients—for example, trout marinated with lemongrass or spring rolls stuffed with bison."

Embracing the principles of *wabi-sabi*, the Japanese art of finding beauty in imperfection, Ngamtipakon approaches his menus with intention. A highlight is the "Spirit of the Journey" tasting: Inspired by the foodways of six tribes—Navajo, Pima, Maricopa, Paiute, Apache, and Hopi—"each dish tells a beautiful story," he explains. "We put a lot of thought and research into sharing [cultures] I feel [are] very underrepresented in the U.S." Diners embarking on this epicurean—and educational—journey may savor Navajo heritage

in the form of fry bread topped with juniper-braised bison short rib and nopales or explore the Maricopa tribe's river basin habitat through honey-glazed Uinta Valley duck with wild arugula and plums harvested from Amangiri's fruit trees.

In a similar vein, the beverage team incorporates local ingredients into cocktails such as the signature Prickly Pear Margarita and a Bee's Knees made with sage-infused honey, while the wine selection caters to the resort's discerning clients. "It includes wines that guests request personally, but we also have a dedicated wine cellar for those who bring their own," Ngamtipakon notes.

The reverence for Utah's rich history showcased in Amangiri's Native American-influenced architectural design, meanwhile, finds an echo in Ngamtipakon's guiding principles. "Coming from an Asian culture, respect for heritage and traditions is quite important to me," he affirms. "I'm inspired by our beautiful location and surrounding culture, and it's very important to me that I honor that inspiration." ❧



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# More Than Just the Product

IN CONVERSATION WITH **COMMUNITY WINE & SPIRITS' DAVID WEITZENHOFFER**

by Jillian Dara

**LAST FALL**, David Weitzenhoffer traded in the restaurant floor for a premium storefront when he opened Community Wine & Spirits in the Chelsea neighborhood of New York City. Applying his 25 years of experience in the industry, Weitzenhoffer reimagined what a brick-and-mortar retail shop could be, arranging wines by color and body rather than region and variety, all while providing educational opportunities through classes that cover everything from ordering wine to crafting a perfect cocktail to exploring specific growing regions or categories. Still, Weitzenhoffer says, "If they don't learn anything but have fun, that's just fine."

Here, he shares more about his new venture.

**Q: What has it been like to switch from wine director to store owner?**

Sommeliers and wine directors have a captive audience; if you ask for the wine list, you are going to order something from what is available. You aren't likely to get up and go to another restaurant because they don't have Ketel One or The Prisoner. Retail selections either need to be very niche or they need to have enough selections that make the consumer feel comfortable.

**Q: What's your philosophy when it comes to the off-premise market?**

I think if a brick-and-mortar store [owner] wants to compete with online [shops] ([though] they should also be online), they have to give consumers more than just the product. To me, experiences speak to the consumer and, as best as possible, should be meaningful to the individual and personalized if possible.



PHOTO: NICHOLAS KNIGHT STUDIO

**Q: Do you think more retailers should invest in educating consumers?**

Stores should invest in communication and hospitality, and they should employ those two things in a variety of ways [to make] the customer feel confident that they know what they are leaving with and got what they came for. It helps stores by creating customer loyalty, which increases sales velocity. It also helps them by challenging them to think about their space differently, [in a way that] creates a dynamic energy felt by customers and staff.

"Interactive," to me, means more than watching a video about a product—it means I, as the shopper, do something. A thing happens, and I interact with that.

**Q: Why did you decide to arrange your inventory by color and body?**

When sommeliers blind taste, one of the first things they identify is [a wine's] body. People can wrap their heads around that concept; my great-aunt, who only drinks Italian Pinot Grigio, knows it's white and light. This means that when she goes to that section, she will see her Pinot Grigio sitting next to Verdicchio. It leads to exploration without me ever saying a word to the consumer.

**Q: What are some of the latest wine trends that you're following?**

The jump in the quality of wines across the board. A \$10 wine today is so much better than the same wine would have been 30 years ago. That was achieved by sharing information—vignerons shared information and knew what to do in the winery and vineyard to achieve certain results. As a result, by the early 2000s, you had a sea of pretty good wine—but it all sort of tasted the same. To me, minimal-intervention wines were the answer to [this lack of variety]; the break from homogeneity also seized on a sense of health and youth but somehow harkened to ancient tradition. **\$J**





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