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OCTOBER/NOVEMBER 2025 • \$10.95

THE SOMM JOURNAL



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Summerring in Napa and Sonoma Valleys—and Beyond

PHOTO: ALEXANDER RUBIN



Chris Hanna of Hanna Vineyards in Alexander Valley with Meredith May.

From my seasonal headquarters in St. Helena, California, I wandered out just about every day—with several jumps to the Sonoma Valley—this summer to visit wineries with the intention of telling more stories than I have in years. . . . My days were filled with a variety of engaging encounters.

I REALLY FELT I was amongst 'em this summer: From my seasonal headquarters in St. Helena, California, I wandered out just about every day—with several jumps to the Sonoma Valley—to visit wineries with the intention of telling more stories than I have in years.

Apart from our intensive three-day Sonoma SOMM Camp (page 79), sponsored by the Sonoma County Winegrowers and Wine Victoria, my days were filled with a variety of engaging encounters; some are documented in this issue, while others will be featured in future editions of both *The SOMM Journal* and our sister publication, *The Tasting Panel*. Meanwhile, in this issue, we've got a great lineup of articles by some of the best wine writers in the U.S.

For our cover story (page 56), senior wine editor Jessie “JABS” Birschbach checks in with García Carrión, Spain's largest wine producer, to explore how the company's unique ability to capitalize on current industry trends has paved the way for the notable success of its sparkling wine brand Opera Prima on the stateside market.

Back in Napa Valley, editor-at-large Jonathan Cristaldi met Agustina Hobbs (page 5), who is following in the footsteps of her father, renowned winemaker Paul Hobbs, while carving her own path with the launch of her new label, ALH. Its inaugural release, a Cabernet Sauvignon—dominant blend from two blocks in the Nathan Coombs Estate vineyard, solidifies Agustina's status as a winemaker to watch.

In July, at our aforementioned Sonoma SOMM Camp, we made virtually every minute of those three days count, making stops at producers such as Rodney Strong Vineyards, where we learned about its state-of-the-art vineyard practices; DeLoach Vineyards, where a seminar and comparative tasting explored climatic impacts on the wines of both Sonoma and Victoria, Australia; and Dutton Ranch, which hosted our finale feast.

That same month, managing editor Ruth Tobias got a grand tour of Roederer Estate's recently renovated hospitality center (page 100) courtesy of winemaker Arnaud Weyrich and Roederer Collection president of U.S. wineries Nicole Carter. The terrace-flanked tasting room encapsulates the beauty of the acclaimed sparkling wine house's location in the Anderson Valley in California's Mendocino County while nodding to its roots in Champagne—much as its portfolio blends Champenois methods with the local terroir.

And finally, senior editor Kate Newton headed to Chicago (page 66), where Napa, California-based importer, marketer, and distributor Quintessential hosted a dinner showcasing single-vineyard wines from its storied portfolio—exclusively comprising family-owned producers—at upscale Italian restaurant Adalina.


Wherever your travels took you this summer, we hope they were as memorable and enlightening as ours—now onward to fall! ❄️

Meredith May

Like Father, Like Daughter

WITH **ALH**, SECOND-GENERATION VINTNER AGUSTINA HOBBS BRINGS A NEW WINE TO MARKET—ON HER GENERATION'S TERMS

STORY BY Jonathan Cristaldi / PHOTOS BY Alexander Rubin



Agustina Hobbs is the founder of new Napa Valley label ALH.



This story isn't about Paul Hobbs, and he's OK with that.

Hobbs has, after all, been in the spotlight for decades as the internationally acclaimed winemaker and vintner whose projects include Paul Hobbs Winery and Crossbar Winery in California and Hillick & Hobbs in New York; Viña Cobos in Mendoza, Argentina; Yacoubian-Hobbs in Vayots Dzor, Armenia; Crocus in Cahors, France; and Alvaredos-Hobbs in Galicia, Spain. This story just so happens to be about Hobbs' daughter, Agustina, who has launched a brand-new label all her own called ALH (short for Agustina Lindsay Hobbs).



Agustina with her father, Paul Hobbs, in the Nathan Coombs Estate vineyard in Coombsville.

"This is a wine for my generation," Agustina explains as she watches me swirl and sniff the newly released inaugural ALH 2022 Cabernet Sauvignon from across a picnic table. "There aren't a lot of wines that focus on trying to get young millennials into drinking wine."

She believes that two factors will give her an edge in attracting that demographic as well as Gen Z. One is that the wine comes from the iconic 68-acre Nathan Coombs Estate, which sits at the foot of the Vaca Mountains in Napa's Coombsville AVA, where I met her and her dad to learn about this project. The second is the suggested retail price of \$75—significantly lower than that of most Paul Hobbs wines, which run well into the triple digits.

I think she's right on both counts. The Hobbs name carries weight in the wine world, and Agustina, as the second-generation family winemaker, is poised to carry that legacy forward. She's starting in the right place—appealing to young, would-be wine drinkers who, one day, may trade

up to those \$300-plus bottles in the Hobbs portfolio.

For his part, Paul is content to let Agustina do most of the talking when it comes to ALH. What he did explain during our hour-long interview was that the naming of ALH was wholly intentional. To be clear, this is not "ALH by Paul Hobbs" or any other iteration of his famous name. It is, as simply stated on a striking label by Michael McDermott, ALH.

"The idea is to make it hers and to overdeliver at this price point. It speaks to her personality and interests, her vivaciousness and energy, and we selected plots from the vineyard that carry the weight of that. And Lord knows I didn't need another brand," he says with a hearty laugh.

Winemaking the Agustina Way

Born in the Sonoma County town of Healdsburg and raised in Argentina, Agustina spent summers traveling to California and frequently accompanied her father on business trips to new markets such as

Japan and the U.K. (Her mother, Mariela, who herself loved to travel, moved with Agustina to Spain for a year when Agustina was 8.) As a teen, Agustina also worked in the cellar at Paul Hobbs Winery during the summer with longtime cellar master Roberto Ruiz.

As she grew older, Agustina attended boarding school in Massachusetts. That was when she began to explore other career options and resisted following her father into the wine business; she wanted to forge her own path—psychology, law, medicine? Yet she kept being drawn back to wine and ultimately enrolled at Cornell University, where she studied viticulture and enology with a minor in hospitality and business.

After graduating in 2017, she traveled widely, completing harvests at Crocus (a joint venture between Paul and Bertrand Vigouroux) and Viña Cobos as well as Paul Hobbs Winery, where she also did an internship. Later, she gained sales experience in the Asian market before moving to New York in 2019 to "carry a bag" and

learn distribution from the ground up. There, she joined Empire Merchants as a business analyst. When the pandemic hit, she returned to California to help with the 2020 harvest before moving back to New York, where she eventually left Empire to work in sales for Southern Glazer's Wine & Spirits, focusing on on-premise accounts in Brooklyn.

In creating the ALH brand, Agustina was well prepared by her time working alongside Ruiz in the cellars; now she is immersing herself in the vineyard with her father as well as spending more time in the cellar, building her understanding of best practices. "I'm asking questions," she says. "I'm not a winemaker yet. I'm learning from my dad."

A Pedigree All Its Own

The inaugural release—a blend of 90% Cabernet Sauvignon, 7% Merlot, and 3% Cabernet Franc—comes from two blocks south of Kreuse Creek, which runs through the 68 planted acres of vines on the Nathan Coombs Estate. The grapes were handpicked, fermented with native yeast in stainless steel, and aged for 18 months in (one-third new) French barriques.

In the glass, the 2022 ALH Cabernet is gorgeously red-fruited, with loads of mulberry and crunchy raspberry as well as an elegant baking-spice character framed by fine tannins and lively acidity. Medium- to full-bodied, it opens in the glass with air, revealing the savory intensity typical of Coombsville, hints of garrigue, and violet flourishes. Its fresh acidity makes it just about as food-friendly as Cabernet from Napa Valley can come.

"Korean food is having a moment," says Agustina. "Cabernet Sauvignon with it—anything with umami—is great. Tomato sauce and eggplant? Go for Cab!" Her message is simple: This Cabernet is cool in every sense of the word, thanks to its firm spine of racy acidity. "You can have it with vegetarian dishes and even fish. It's a wine for many categories and many cuisines." With a production of roughly 3,500 cases, ALH is providing plenty of opportunity for wholesale buyers in markets such as Illinois, New York, California, Texas, New Jersey, and Florida—where Agustina has personally helped launch the brand this year—as well as several other states to snap up bottles for their clientele. 

The Somms Speak Out

I spoke to two on-premise buyers who shared their first impressions of ALH and discussed its place in their wine programs.

PHOTO: CHARISSA FAY



Jhonel Faelnar

Beverage director, NA:EUN Hospitality, New York, NY

At NA:EUN Hospitality and our restaurants Atoboy, Atomix, and Naro, our focus is on Korean concepts and flavors, and I'm always on the hunt for new producers to try to showcase thoughtful food and wine pairings through our distinct programs. I was introduced to ALH wines by Agustina Hobbs herself. I was intrigued by the story of Agustina's new project and curious about the influence of growing up with her famous dad. At the end of the day, the ALH wine speaks for itself—the fruit

quality is full and deep, showing the quality of the specific parcels chosen for this wine from the Nathan Coombs Estate. The balance and acidity in the wine make it a great pairing for medium- to full-bodied dishes, especially those with rich or focused sauces that aim to highlight complementary bold flavors in the wine.

PHOTO COURTESY OF MACARENA CARRILLO



Macarena Carrillo

Head sommelier, Cote Miami, and partner, GrapeCrush!, Miami, FL

Miami is a city that, contrary to what one might expect, loves Cabernet Sauvignon. One would think that whites and rosé are the most sought-after wines, but as a city, Miami loves a rich red! I was raised in Miami and have seen all of the phases and changes the city has gone through, which is why I'm so excited for ALH wines to be in our market. I have been with COTE Miami for four amazing years, and through a tasting I met Agustina; we bonded

over our Argentinian heritage. Upon tasting the wines in Coombsville, in the vineyard, I felt a sense of place and belonging—being right where you were meant to be the whole time. This feeling also translated into a mouthfeel: velvet, lush, and balanced. This is what Cabernet Sauvignon should be like! And the price point—finally, something for the everyday consumer and wine lover. Why should quality be so hard to afford? In terms of placement on a list, ALH has everything we look for: quality, price, and a story. I am so happy to be able to share ALH with Miami.

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PHOTOS: ALEXANDER RUBIN

Scenes from Sonoma SOMM Camp. First row: Lance Goldberg; Anthony “AC” Capobianco, Meredith May, and Ruth Tobias; Shannon Saulsbury; Carlos Cisneros; and Nicole Haarklau. Middle row: Stefania Lopez; Dwight Cunningham; Kate Kriven, Chris Armstrong, Adam Dromi, and Lisa Lambertus; and Thomas Delasko. Bottom row: Edan Ballantine, Arthur Pescan, Krishna Chapatwala, and Jenny Carr.

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CALLING
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Rhys Arisman is wine director at Mustards Grill in Yountville, CA.

PHOTO: ALEXANDER RUBIN


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Meet Me at the Waldorf

NEW YORK WINES SHINE AT **LEX YARD** IN THE NEWLY REOPENED HOTEL

WALKING THROUGH THE DOORS

of the Waldorf Astoria New York after the iconic hotel's shuttering in 2017 for an eight-year renovation was like reuniting with an old friend who looks better than ever. However, unlike most friends, the Waldorf Astoria is delighted to spill the tea on every aspect of her \$2-billion makeover.

In addition to its beautifully renovated and reimagined guest rooms and public spaces, the grand Art Deco hotel in Midtown Manhattan is poised to reclaim its position as a culinary power player; after all, it is the birthplace of the Waldorf salad and the Rob Roy cocktail. Embarking on its new chapter includes imbuing energy into the wine program. "The ethos of the wine list is embracing modernity while paying homage to the classics," says director of beverage Natascha Patterer.

In a nod to its history, the Waldorf Astoria's new signature restaurant, Lex Yard, is named after the legendary semi-secret train platform beneath the hotel. A gleaming two-story American brasserie with seating for 220 plus 18 at the bar; Lex Yard is helmed by award-winning chef-partner Michael Anthony, who will also continue on with his executive chef role at the acclaimed Gramercy Tavern. "It's both a pleasure and a privilege to be part of the iconic reopening of the Waldorf Astoria New York and to help shape the next chapter of contemporary American dining in this storied space. Collaborating with exceptional talents like Natascha Patterer on the wine program makes the experience even more rewarding," says Anthony.

Lex Yard's growing wine list currently offers about 650 selections, and Patterer's vision is for New York bottlings to be a dominant presence: "Bringing New York wines into a luxury space like this, my intention is to put a bit more of a scope on it and elevate it. . . . It's beautiful stuff," she says. They're joined by domestic wines from California, Oregon, Virginia, and other states as well as international offerings



Natascha Patterer is director of beverage at the Waldorf Astoria New York.

from appellations throughout France, Italy, Chile, New Zealand, and beyond. "My mother is from Spain and my father is from Austria, so you're going to find Spain and Austria sections on almost all the wine lists that I do," Patterer adds with a laugh.

And which wine does she suggest pairing with the aforementioned Waldorf salad, which was invented at the hotel in 1893? It now appears on Lex Yard's menu as "New Waldorf Salad," and lemon-tinged aioli has replaced mayonnaise in the mix of celery, apples, grapes, and walnuts. "I love the Channing Daughters Mosaico. . . . It's a field blend of Pinot Grigio, Chardonnay, Sauvignon Blanc, Tocai Friulano, Gewürztraminer, and Muscat Ottonel from the South Fork of Long Island. It's totally dry on the palate yet playfully aromatic, and, of course, it's delicious. It's a nice complement to the crisp apple and spiced nuttiness of the candied pecan while holding up nicely to the crunch of the celery and the tangy dressing," says Patterer.

Anthony also considers wine an



Chef-partner Michael Anthony helms the Waldorf Astoria New York's new signature restaurant, Lex Yard.

integral part of the dining experience. "As an American brasserie, Lex Yard [has a] wine philosophy rooted in a sense of place, embracing the timeless idea that what grows together goes together," he says. "At its heart, the program celebrates the depth and diversity of American winemaking. Guests might enjoy Merry Edwards Sauvignon Blanc from California's Russian River Valley alongside Long Island royal red shrimp or a pairing of Ridge Vineyards' expressive wines from Paso Robles with locally sourced sea bass. We also spotlight regional . . . producers whose enthusiasm, craftsmanship, and dynamic styles make them ideal partners for our seasonal, market-driven menu."

I have a strong feeling that Lex Yard's intriguing menu and wine list will have many New Yorkers declaring, "Meet me at the Waldorf!" I know I will. *sj*

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

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Compellers Are Propellers

IMPROVING REVENUE THROUGH TRANSACTIONAL PSYCHOLOGY, PART 2

IN THE AUGUST/SEPTEMBER 2025 issue, I explored the vital importance of “steppers,” one of the fundamental elements of transactional psychology, as a means of boosting revenue and improving guest experiences. The next piece of the transactional psychology puzzle is “compellers,” or wines that compel a guest to purchase them. These selections serve a vital function on their own but also work in conjunction with steppers to create significant impact.

Remember that wine, unlike the majority of consumables, is purchased for myriad reasons other than price and taste (though both of those elements are highly important). Any well-organized list, regardless of its size, will incorporate compellers into its various categories. There is no singular criterion for what makes something a compeller, though the best examples are varieties, appellations, or vintages (and often a combination thereof) that are widely recognizable to the majority of consumers. For instance, many consumers have visited locales like Napa, Sonoma, Provence, and Tuscany, making them more likely to be emotionally connected to and interested in consuming expressions from these regions.

Either way, the essential element here

is price. Compellers should be priced well below the competitive set and/or what a reasonable full markup would be. Let’s use a practical example of a Napa Valley Cabernet that tends to be priced around \$150 on most wine lists. If you instead price it at \$120, it performs several vital roles. First (and arguably most importantly), it might prompt a guest to purchase above their original threshold. Many will happily spend up to their break point—say, \$100—but will rarely be inclined to exceed it. However, when you position a compeller slightly above that threshold but far below the typical cost of the wine, it triggers the desire to take advantage of that amazing deal.

You might also remember from part one of this series that, generally, a 20% stepper is within acceptable limits for most consumers. Therefore, this wine that they know to be far more expensive elsewhere, placed at both an extremely appealing price point *and* at only a 20% increase from their ceiling, will most certainly compel them to make the purchase.

Before you panic about the increased cost of goods (CoGS) percentage, note that you should select only a few wines as compellers at strategic price points in certain categories. Their elevated CoGS will

be blended in with your fully marked-up bottles and will average out. Furthermore, the compeller will increase the net average spend for the guest. Remember, you don’t put percentage points in the bank. It’s far more beneficial for your operation to obtain \$120 of gross revenue at a higher CoGS percentage than \$95 at a lower CoGS. Here’s the practical math on that:

Wine 1: Cost \$31.67, list \$95, CoGS 33%, gross profit \$63.33

Wine 2: Cost \$50, list \$120, CoGS 41.67%, gross profit \$70

As you can see, the compeller not only generates higher gross revenue but also results in higher gross profit dollars.

Compellers create one last extremely important psychological benefit: the (hopefully accurate) perception that the rest of your list is also a great value, implying that more expensive wines are even better deals. If the \$150 bottle is only \$120 here, the \$200 bottle here must be closer to \$300 elsewhere. As guests are further incentivized to explore the list, they may very well end up with a higher-priced wine that is available at full margin, a definite double benefit in terms of revenue and profitability. **SJ**

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Something to Be Thankful For

HERE'S WHAT TO RECOMMEND FOR THE UPCOMING HOLIDAYS

FALL TEMPERATURES HAVE us stowing away our flip-flops, beach towels, and swimsuits along with the porch-pounder rosés and chilled reds that nurtured us through summer. Out come jackets and sweaters as we try to remember where we stashed our scarves and mittens. The air is crisp with the aromas of dried leaves and woodsmoke outside and redolent of pumpkin spice indoors. Heartier wines grace our dinner tables as we begin to ponder the horrors of holiday shopping.

As a weekly wine columnist for *The Washington Post* for 16 years before retiring at the start of 2025, I would typically now be thinking of wines to recommend for the family feasts soon to commence. For Thanksgiving's cornucopia, I'd advise, "Open one of everything": With so many flavors on the table, I'd tell readers, any wine is going to pair well with something. Just be mindful of what you nibble right before you sip.

Beyond that, here are some more focused suggestions for your retail customers.

First, don't give up on rosé. While even the pale, ephemeral pinks of Provence can help us transition to cold weather, fall is an ideal time for more substantial rosés from Tavel in the Rhône Valley or traditional rosados from Spain. American rosés often benefit from pairing with food rather than drinking alone. Two of my perennial favorites are Inman Family Wines' Endless Crush Rosé of Pinot Noir from the Russian River Valley (a small-production bottling available direct from the winery) and Barnard Griffin's Rosé of Sangiovese from Washington's Columbia Valley, an affordable and readily available option.

Second, as a harvest celebration, Thanksgiving is a great time to feature local wines. Wine is now produced in all 50 states and can often be found at farmers markets. It may be made from a grape most consumers have never tried or even

heard of, but that's half the fun. Based in the Mid-Atlantic, I enjoy access to fantastic wines from Virginia and Maryland and have tasted Pennsylvania, New York, Vermont, and North Carolina wines over the past year. There will certainly be at least one such wine on my Thanksgiving table. I'll also look for a local nouveau from the newly completed vintage to match the harvest theme.

And there are other strategies that might come in handy as well: Stock up on food-friendly varieties such as Pinot Noir, Barbera, and Riesling. Choose all American wines for the all-American holiday, buy wines from the country of your heritage, or consider my other catchphrase for the holidays (or any season): Bubbles go with everything.

It's been a tough year for many in the wine community—but as we raise a glass for a holiday toast, let's let the light reflect through the wine and remind us of what makes us most thankful. **ST**

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Has the Romance of Going Wine Tasting Oxidized?

RECENTLY, I RELOCATED FROM

Southern California, where I resided for decades, to downtown Napa. Around the corner from where I live, standing sentinel on the corner of Main and Clinton, looms a two-story stone building that dates back to the 1800s. Once a brewery, then (perhaps apocryphally) a brothel, then a Chinese laundromat, then a deli, it was taken over in 2002 by former pastry chef Garret Murphy; this charming old building, gutted and beautifully renovated, is now home to the Vintner's Collective, a tasting room featuring 20 small, local wine producers, most of which vinify fewer than 1,500 cases. Its gorgeous walnut bar downstairs, populated by both wine club members and out-of-town visitors, is a forum of wine-loving conviviality.

Some context: When I was (albeit unwittingly) doing research for my novel *Sideways* in the late 1990s, I found a romance—and a solace—in wending my way through breathtakingly bucolic scenery in the then-little-known Santa Ynez Valley, hopscotching from one winery to another. Foxen Winery's tasting room was nothing more than a tool shed, and I loved it! Sanford's was at the terminus of a dirt-and-gravel road where birdsong greeted me after another soul-crushing week in Hollywood. The rooms were often only open for three hours, and frequently I was the only one at the bar. Tasting fees were nonexistent. Fast-forward a quarter of a century, and wine tasting has become corporatized and expensive: It has lost its magic, its soul. Worse (to me), tasting rooms now often aggregate in one location (Yountville, Carmel, Solvang, Los Olivos) and require appointments as well as an outlay of cash. The romance of motor-ing through wine country is disappearing.

The Vintner's Collective, however, has restored my faith in tasting as a locus of



PHOTO: GARRETT MURPHY



PHOTO: KIM ERASMY

▲ *Vintner's Collective* proprietor Garret Murphy.

◀ Author Rex Pickett (front row, second from right) with friends at the Vintner's Collective in Napa, CA.

discovery. Sure, the journey is from one splash to the next rather than 10 miles on sinuous roads to the next winery, but the spacious bar is alive, stimulating. The wine is serious, yet the atmosphere is reminiscent of a local pub, with an ever-changing cast of characters and dozens of wines—otherwise hard to find—to enjoy.

In the afternoons, after my writing is finished for the day, I'll meander over and autograph hardcovers of my various *Sideways* books (there are three sequels to the original). Sure, there are tasting room fees, but they're more affordable than those charged by the big guns on the Silverado Trail, and the wines are just as if not more thrilling. Winemaker

home of cutting-edge small producers who couldn't afford a venue to showcase their wines—and a magnet for the wine lovers who seek them out. What they are doing is borderline unprecedented, given the scope of their list and the trenchant palate of Murphy.

Without the early days of wine tasting, I don't think *Sideways* would ever have been written. I needed that three-day bacchanal with my outgoing friend Roy Gittens to sow the seed of the idea. By the same token, I'm so transfixed by the Vintner's Collective, its rustic charm, and its sui generis business model that it makes an appearance in my next novel, *Sideways Burgundy*. ■



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by Deborah Parker Wong

Rethinking Wine Headaches

SHARING STRATEGIES FOR RELIEF

RED WINE IS far more apt to cause headaches than white wine. While histamines and tannins can pose challenges for wine drinkers who are particularly sensitive to those compounds, quercetin has been identified as the likely culprit for most wine-related headaches.

Quercetin, a pigment found in many plants, fruits, and vegetables, is one of the most common and well-researched flavonoids. With more antioxidant power than vitamin C, vitamin E, or beta-carotene, it is highly beneficial to human nutrition. However, high levels of quercetin like those found in ultra-premium red wines can interfere with the metabolism of alcohol by inhibiting the production of aldehyde dehydrogenase (ALDH), an enzyme produced by the liver that breaks down acetaldehyde. When acetaldehyde isn't metabolized fast enough, it can trigger hangover symptoms like flushing, headaches, and nausea.

The amount of quercetin present in a finished red wine is initially determined by the vineyard. Studies like an August 2006 report in the *Journal of Food Composition and Analysis* have found that prolonged sunlight

exposure during the growing season produces grape clusters with as much as ten times higher quercetin content than that found in shaded clusters. In 2023, researchers at the University of California, Davis, identified vineyard practices commonly used to produce ultra-premium wines that lead to higher production of quercetin, among them trellised vines, crop thinning, and leaf removal. While increased levels of quercetin are directly linked to viticultural practices, winemaking decisions concerning extended extraction, oak aging, and storage temperature can also contribute.


The way we metabolize compounds like histamines, tannins, and quercetin varies and is probably linked to our genetics.

For example, about 40% of East Asians have a genetic mutation that affects the functionality of the ALDH enzyme, which is why they disproportionately experience facial flushing and headaches when drinking alcohol.

For those afflicted by these headaches, there may be some relief in sight in the form of a compound extracted from the Japanese raisin tree (*Hovenia dulcis*). Dihydromyricetin (DHM) is widely known for its ability to promote alcohol metabolism in the liver and reduce hangover symptoms. While DHM supports the breakdown of alcohol and lessens its intoxicating effects, it doesn't directly influence the specific metabolic pathway involving quercetin's conversion to quercetin glucuronide that results in acetaldehyde buildup.

According to Daniel Morando, a wine industry veteran and founder of supplement brand The Wine Fix, DHM helps reduce excess acetaldehyde by enhancing the activity of ALDH. By accelerating the breakdown of acetaldehyde, DHM helps to clear it from the body more quickly.

Morando, who has spent the past 15 years working in wholesale wine sales across Southern California, discovered DHM while searching for relief from wine-induced headaches. "Two glasses of Napa Cabernet were giving me worse headaches than four bourbon Manhattans," he says. "I wasn't overindulging; I was reacting to something." That "something" was acetaldehyde.

Following a tip from a fitness influencer, Morando began exploring DHM. When he experienced relief, he founded The Wine Fix, selling bottles of 90 650-milligram capsules of pure DHM (no additives) online for \$50. After trialing various dosages, he recommends taking one capsule for every two glasses of wine. It's certainly changed his life for the better. "There are wines in my cellar I thought I'd never be able to enjoy again without consequences," he says. 



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Venerable Vintages

AT SCOTTSDALE, AZ, RESORT **THE PHOENICIAN**, A TREASURE TROVE OF A CELLAR LINKS PAST AND PRESENT

NO MATTER HOW many times I exit the elevator onto the top floor of Scottsdale, Arizona, resort The Phoenician, part of The Luxury Collection, J&G Steakhouse never fails to impress me. Glass walls frame panoramic desert vistas as gleaming chandeliers illuminate the grand fine-dining penthouse—but stored far below are other treasures to discover.

Mary Elaine's, the resort's original flagship restaurant, debuted in 1988 and held court for two decades as the Valley's grande dame of formal dining. Its tables were dressed in Wedgwood china, its kitchen was helmed by James Beard–awarded chefs, and its 40,000-plus-bottle cellar was assembled by Greg Tresner, Arizona's first Master Sommelier. When it closed in 2008 to make way for J&G Steakhouse, much of that legacy quietly remained in the climate-controlled subterranean cellar.

For general manager Frank Armanetti, bringing those buried treasures to light has been a privilege. A third-generation wine and spirits professional with more than 40 years of experience, he began his



PHOTOS: CHRISTINA BARRUETA

Frank Armanetti is general manager of J&G Steakhouse in Scottsdale, AZ.

journey at Armanetti Liquors in Chicago, the company his grandfather Leonardo founded in 1933. "The first time I came down here," Frank recalled as he recently led me on a cellar tour, "I spent two hours just looking at everything. Being in the business for so long, it was so cool just to see those old labels!"

He pulled bottles like a curator unveiling works of art: the Clarendon Hills 1999 Astralis from McLaren Vale, a Shiraz built to age gracefully; the Gaja 1997 Sorì San Lorenzo, a benchmark Barbaresco revered for its elegance and celebrated for its longevity; the Paul Jaboulet Aîné 1995 Hermitage La Chapelle, a Rhône legend with decades ahead of it; the Bouchard Père & Fils 1999 Beaune Grèves Vigne de L'Enfant Jésus, a Burgundy monopole named for a nun's prophecy of King Louis XIV's birth; and the Château Valandraud 1994 Saint-Émilion Grand Cru from the garagiste that would rise to Premier Grand Cru Classé B status.

Armanetti's sense of reverence for these gems carries into the tailored experiences of the dining room. When guests express serious interest in the wines, the server calls him over to personally present the reserve list as one of the few keyholders to the cellar. He guides diners to rare bottles that fit their tastes, budget, and/or sense of adventure, and while there's a chance a bottle might show its age, he's found that the anticipation is part of the charm—"especially since we price them very reasonably," he pointed out, noting they were celledared at their original retail price. "Some guests are just curious or want to celebrate an anniversary or special occasion," he added, recalling a recent guest who chose a Silver Oak 1985 Cabernet Sauvignon to commemorate a birthday.

"These are wines that have been locked away, so there's so much history, heritage, and passion," Armanetti reflected. "I've been blessed to grow up in this business, and opportunities like this are so special." SJ





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A Gateway to the World

IN CONVERSATION WITH TALES OF THE COCKTAIL FOUNDATION EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR **CHARLOTTE VOISEY**

FEW IN THE beverage alcohol industry have not heard of Charlotte Voisey, who, during an 18-year tenure at William Grant & Sons—one of the largest family-owned spirits companies in the world—headed its activation, advocacy, and ambassador programs while helping to turn brands like Hendrick's, Monkey Shoulder, and Tullamore D.E.W. into household names. A native of England, Voisey got her start in the business the same way many others do—working behind the bar.

Recently, Voisey embarked on a new chapter as the executive director of the Tales of the Cocktail Foundation, parent organization of the globally recognized (and attended) Tales of the Cocktail (TOTC) symposium held in New Orleans each July. I caught up with Voisey at this year's event.

Q: Was joining the hospitality industry something you always wanted to do?

No. I was not the type that knew exactly what they wanted while young. I always loved travel and knew that the hospitality industry could be a gateway to the world, so I studied hospitality management and, after graduating, went to work for a U.K.-based company with outlets globally. Stints in Buenos Aires and Barcelona preceded a return to London to head up the bar program at Apartment 195 in the early 2000s—my big break, which landed me U.K. Bartender of the Year in 2003.

Q: What prompted the move to your new role?

I spent 18 wonderful, exciting, dream-like years with William Grant & Sons, traveling the world and working with just the most beautiful of people. I didn't want to leave the industry, but it was time for a change, and the executive director role with TOTC's foundation gave me the op-



PHOTO: ERIKA GOLDING FOR TALES OF THE COCKTAIL FOUNDATION

Tales of the Cocktail Foundation executive director Charlotte Voisey at the 2025 Spirited Awards.

portunity to stay in the industry I love but to give back perhaps in a more meaningful way and [to] leverage my expansive network, skills, experience, and insight to inspire the next generation.

Q: What was it like to go from being a major sponsor at TOTC to cultivating sponsors?

I'm still on that learning journey. But I think one of the reasons that this was a great fit for me is that I understand the brand mindset. I've been on the brand side, so I understand the larger corporate organizations of our industry and what they need from organizations like Tales, which in some regards sets me up to be able to advise and anticipate their needs, better fulfill expectations on both sides, and better find the way that we can align objectives so that we're all successful.

Q: What advice can you give to those entering the bar and

hospitality industry in hopes of forging a career?

First, there have never been more options and career pathways in the bar and hospitality industry. So take time to research the options [and] find what you love or find real satisfaction in but also stay open to opportunities to grow and learn in new areas. Second, seek out mentors. A lot of what our industry does well is learned on the job. Find people who are great at what they do and observe how they do it. A good mentor will take the time to invest in you and your career.

Q: If you were a cocktail, which would you be and why?

So many choices, but I'm going to go for a French 75, because it would make me tall and elegant with a link to New Orleans—obviously very important to me these days. [It would be] made with Hendrick's Gin, not Cognac, which may ruffle some purists' feathers. 🍸

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It's Still the Economy, Stupid

TOOLS FOR OUTDOING THE COMPETITION IN UNCERTAIN TIMES

THE OTHER DAY I met up with an old friend in her San Francisco neighborhood. We walked around and chatted, the streets bustling with people just like us, enjoying the city's typically cool summer night. We stopped at an outdoor cafe known for farm-fresh ingredients and innovative small dishes, found a little table, and sat.

I ordered a bottle of the cheapest wine on the list, which was a \$75 Beaujolais. What was nice was that it was a small craft producer, not a big shipper's brand. We shared all our dishes, so our bill was barely over \$300 plus tip. We had a fantastic time, but when we both returned to our respective homes, we knew the same thing: It wasn't something we could do every night. In fact, we'd be staying home for the next few nights cooking for ourselves—at least until we could afford another casual, farm-to-table experience.

This is the reality today. Many restaurants are seeing regulars once a month at most instead of once or twice a week. For higher-ticket restaurants, instead of once

a month, guests are booking tables maybe once a year—or not coming back at all. No wonder places seem to be closing faster than they're opening up.

Why? As a political strategist famously said decades ago, "It's the economy, stupid." In these trying times, we just don't know what will happen tomorrow or next week. The good news is that we've been here before. There is a way to come out of it, fresh as a daisy, and it's by doing this: buying shrewdly and sticking to sensible products. That is, by using common sense.

If, for instance, you fall in love with a magical grower Champagne from a small producer you want to champion, you should still think twice about purchasing it, especially if you'd have to sell it for at least \$40 per glass. After all, you'd have to contend with guests who complain about why you're not offering a better-known brand or who balk at the price and ask why you don't offer a simple Prosecco. But even if all your guests could easily afford a \$40 glass of Champagne, you still need to think of the consequences: By

listing this, am I more likely to see those guests again tomorrow night or some time next week? Or are they more likely to not come back at all?

What holds true today actually holds true in any economic climate: It is far, far better to offer as high or higher a level of food, service, and wine at prices three or four times less than your competitors, the simple reason being that consumers are far more likely to return to *your* restaurant at least three or four times more often, as they perceive it to be the better value.

Lately, restaurants and wine bars offering cutting-edge, "cool-kid" wines have become a dime a dozen. But you *can* outdo your competition by offering choices with a stronger value, and to do that you have to buy with discipline while being mindful of the big picture. This doesn't mean deprioritizing quality or originality of product, but it does mean choosing wines in keeping with guests' budgets as well as with the experience you aim to provide. Do that and you are more likely to come out ahead. **\$**

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How About Them Apples?

COLORADO'S HAYKIN FAMILY CIDER IS A CATEGORICAL GAME-CHANGER

I'D SAY THAT Haykin Family Cider in Aurora, Colorado, is the best American cidery you've never heard of, except that, depending on where you live, you may in fact have heard of it. Certainly Denver diners know it by its placement on the menus of many of the city's best restaurants, among them BRUTØ, The Wolf's Tailor, Alteño, and Annette. But it's also sold in high-end off- and on-premise establishments in Illinois, Missouri, and California, where its accounts include none other than The French Laundry.

made from a single heirloom variety that Daniel calls "nothing like your grocery-store Honeycrisp": Deeply pigmented to resemble a dark rosé in the glass, it "has some structure and grip to it," he adds, thanks to the presence of tannins, along with notes of cranberry, red currant, and baking spice. Though native to Asia, it's in this case an obvious product of Colorado, whose "high elevation and semi-arid climate," in Daniel's words, tend to yield fruit that's "much more powerful and complex; the Niedz from Colorado is

our industry, nearly everybody is pasteurizing their products. We will never, ever pasteurize our products. So they're totally alive and changing."

But even referring to Haykin as a first-rate cidery that operates like a winery doesn't fully capture its essence as it moves into a new phase of operation. In addition to making elegant nonalcoholic ciders by a proprietary method that doesn't involve "dealcoholization in a chemical lab," as Daniel puts it, as well as fabulous acacia barrel-aged ice cider, the Haykins

have begun to produce pommeau, an oak-aged dessert cider fortified with apple brandy. Calling it "something like an apple Port wine," Daniel explains that they're making their own spirit with which to fortify it—which is to say that they're now entering into the distillation business: "We're not ready to launch the distillery yet, but when [we do], we will have a

whole bunch of oaked brandies that will be designed to compete with Calvados and Cognac; there will be unoaked eaux de vie for all sorts of cocktail purposes. . . . Another thing that's on our mind is apple-based vermouth. Why not? [And] maybe cocktail bitters based on apple brandy instead of grain alcohol. . . . We're starting to think about ourselves now as maybe less of a cider company and more of an apple company."

While all of that is still in the works, it's clear the Haykins are wringing every last drop of juice out of their acclaimed endeavor. Says Talia, "It's been really fun to see where we can take an apple." ❧

PHOTOS COURTESY OF HAYKIN FAMILY CIDER



Talia and Daniel Haykin own and operate Haykin Family Cider in Aurora, CO.

For that matter, I'd say that calling Haykin one of America's best cideries ignores the extent to which it has to date operated as much like a winery as anything, albeit one that works with "apples and apples only—no flavorings, no adjuncts, no sweeteners of any kind," in the words of owner Daniel Haykin, who runs the company with his wife, Talia. As at any good winery, their aim is to showcase three things: variety, terroir, and vintage. (Granted, as cider producers they're not legally allowed to vintage-date their bottles—but it's a factor nonetheless.) Take the Reserve Niedzwetzkyana, which is typical of what they do in that it's

orders of magnitude better than anything I've found [elsewhere]."

And that's just one example of many. Also of note is the Front Range Cuvée Méthode Ancestrale, whose name points to both its fruit source in the Rocky Mountains and the technique by which it's made, one that doesn't require the addition of sugar for the bottle fermentation that begets bubbles. From the 2019 vintage (I'll say it even if they can't), the six-year-old cider shows both remarkable freshness and hints of nuttiness; notes Daniel, "Good cider can age easily for five to ten years and [maybe] longer than that. This is very rarely done because, in



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PHOTOS COURTESY OF HOTEL BOULDERADO

▲ Jonathan Morse is bar supervisor at License No. 1 Liquor Bar in the historic Hotel Boulderado in Boulder, CO.

◀ The Hotel Boulderado became the first establishment in Boulder to get a liquor license in 1969.

A License to Experiment

IN THE ROCKY MOUNTAINS, A SURPRISE SHOWCASE FOR RUM AWAITS

WHEN THE ICONIC Hotel Boulderado opened in 1909, Boulder, Colorado, was a dry city and remained one until 1967. After restrictions were finally lifted, it was the first place to get a liquor license in 1969. That history inspired the creation of License No. 1 Liquor Bar, which opened in the hotel's basement in 2014.

Jonathan Morse is the bar supervisor at License No. 1, recently named one of Historic Hotels of America's top 25 most historic bars, taverns, and speakeasies. Given that the city infamously outlawed the "sale of demon rum and spirits" for so long, it seemed appropriate to ask Morse about the rum trends he's seeing right now.

Rum is made anywhere sugarcane can grow. Filipino brand Tanduay is one of the globe's biggest producers, followed closely by such brands as Bacardi, Captain Morgan, Mount Gay, and Appleton Estate. The market for rum is huge—worth an estimated \$17.4 billion, according to Future Market Insights.

Why is it so enduringly popular? Morse thinks it's because of rum's rich history, which spans different cultures, geographies, and climates, and because a lot of that history still shines through in the bottle. "There's an incredible range within rum," he says. "English, French, and Spanish styles each offer something unique, and I love exploring each. Most people have a limited scope of what rum can be, but there is so much more to it than the few expressions they might be familiar with."

Morse especially loves Jamaican rum, which is an English style, and uses it a lot at License No. 1. Smith & Cross' traditional Jamaican Rum and Appleton Estate's 12-Year Jamaican Rum are favorites. He also loves high-proof spirits, and Jamaican rums can deliver on that front.

Trend-wise, he's seeing a noticeable rise in tropical drinks right now. "I first got into rum through the [book *Smuggler's Cove: Exotic Cocktails, Rum, and the Cult of Tiki*] by Martin Cate, which is a must-read for any bartender," Morse added. "Tropical

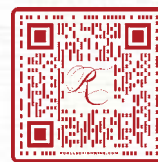
drinks are on an upward trajectory, and many are looking to revive rum. I'm also seeing rum used more often as the base spirit in riffs on classic cocktails. It's an underrated tool within the bartender's toolbox and offers a huge range of flavors to work with." It's also a great spirit to explore in a flight given the diversity of styles, he says, whether it's made using fresh sugarcane or processed molasses.

One of the standout specialty drinks at License No. 1 is Fugit About It, which blends Real McCoy 5-Year Rum with dark chocolate- and cardamom-infused Cocchi Vermouth di Torino, Pernod Absinthe, Tempus Fugit Crème de Cacao, Fernet-Branca, and housemade pecan-pie bitters. The bar also makes a classic Daiquiri and a Rum Negroni—but one of Morse's favorite rum cocktails to make is a Vieux Carré, with the rye swapped out for a Spanish-style rum. "I love the structure and complexity," he explains. "When you throw it in with brandy and all the traditional ingredients, it makes for a great way to use rum." ■



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Georgia on My Mind—and in My Glass

THE BIRTHPLACE OF WINE IS STILL GOING STRONG

OF ALL THE wine regions I have visited, I never expected the country of Georgia to be so life-changing. I knew it was the birthplace of wine and had tasted a few amber (orange) wines over the years, but my experience did not go much beyond that. What I found was a gorgeous, mountainous country between the Caucasus Mountains and the Black Sea with a warm, inviting culture that feels modern and vibrant while still respecting its heritage. Being there made me realize it's not just where wine began; it's where wine still feels most alive, and it reminded me of lessons we should carry into our day-to-day work in hospitality.

ishvili and his wife, Marina Kurtanidze, welcomed me into their living room, which doubles as a tasting room; there, we sipped wine by the fireplace before sharing a home-cooked meal. It was the feeling of hospitality every wine professional should strive to create for guests.

For many outside the country, Georgian wine means amber wine, those qvevri-fermented whites beloved by the sommelier crowd. They are remarkable, but Georgia cultivates over 500 indigenous grapes, producing reds, whites, and sparklings that stand with the best in the world. Vazisubani Estate's legendary winemaker, Lado Uzunashvili, poured me a dark, intense

reach global markets. Chateau Mukhrani leans on French cellar practices, and its Goruli Mtsvane—creamy, nutty, and structured—could stand alongside top white Burgundies. Vazisubani's 3 Qvevri Amber blends Rkatsiteli for citrus and body, Mtsvane for tropical fruit, and Kisi for stone fruit; it's an unconventional



The Caucasus Mountains define Georgia's terroir.

Georgia's winemaking history stretches back 8,000 years, with clay jars called *qvevri* buried underground and UNESCO World Heritage status to prove it. But the country is not stuck in the past. In the capital of Tbilisi, wine is everywhere, with bars and shops on nearly every corner much as in France, but the atmosphere is relaxed and inclusive. Georgians do not swirl and overanalyze; they pour, toast, and drink every drop. (Leave any trace behind and someone will tell you those drops represent your enemies.) At Iago's Winery in the Kartli region, Iago Bitar-

Saperavi, a perfect choice for lovers of ripe Zinfandel seeking something new. At a dinner later in the week, Baia's Wine proprietor Baia Abuladze poured me her honeyed, floral Qvevri Tsoolikouri, which showed finesse and purity. And Khareba's traditional off-dry red Kindzmarauli offered lush fruit and food-friendly sweetness. Georgia's diversity of styles reminded me why I fell in love with wine and showed me the importance of sharing that same sense of discovery with our guests.

Winemakers here honor tradition while using modern techniques to



PHOTOS COURTESY OF VINCE ANTER

Author Vince Anter (center) at Gotsa Wines with Beka and Nina Gotsadze.

approach to qvevri wines (which aren't typically blended) that works beautifully. These all pair effortlessly with both classic Georgian fare and the dishes found in Tbilisi's contemporary restaurants, proving they belong on a wide range of wine lists.

Georgia is a case study in how to protect heritage while embracing innovation, and I can't wait to promote it to wine lovers moving forward. I have not even elaborated on the food, a stunning blend of Middle Eastern, European, and Asian influences, or the *supra*, a traditional feast filled with toasts, music, and more wine than you thought possible. For that, you will have to watch our Georgia episode, out in November. This trip did not just add another pin to my map; it reaffirmed why I fell in love with wine in the first place.

Until next wine,
Vince 

Watch the V is for Vino Georgia episode and the rest of the series for free on YouTube @visforvino.

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Salty, Savory, Sensational

EXPLORING THE LITTLE-KNOWN WINE REGIONS OF **NORTHWEST SARDINIA**

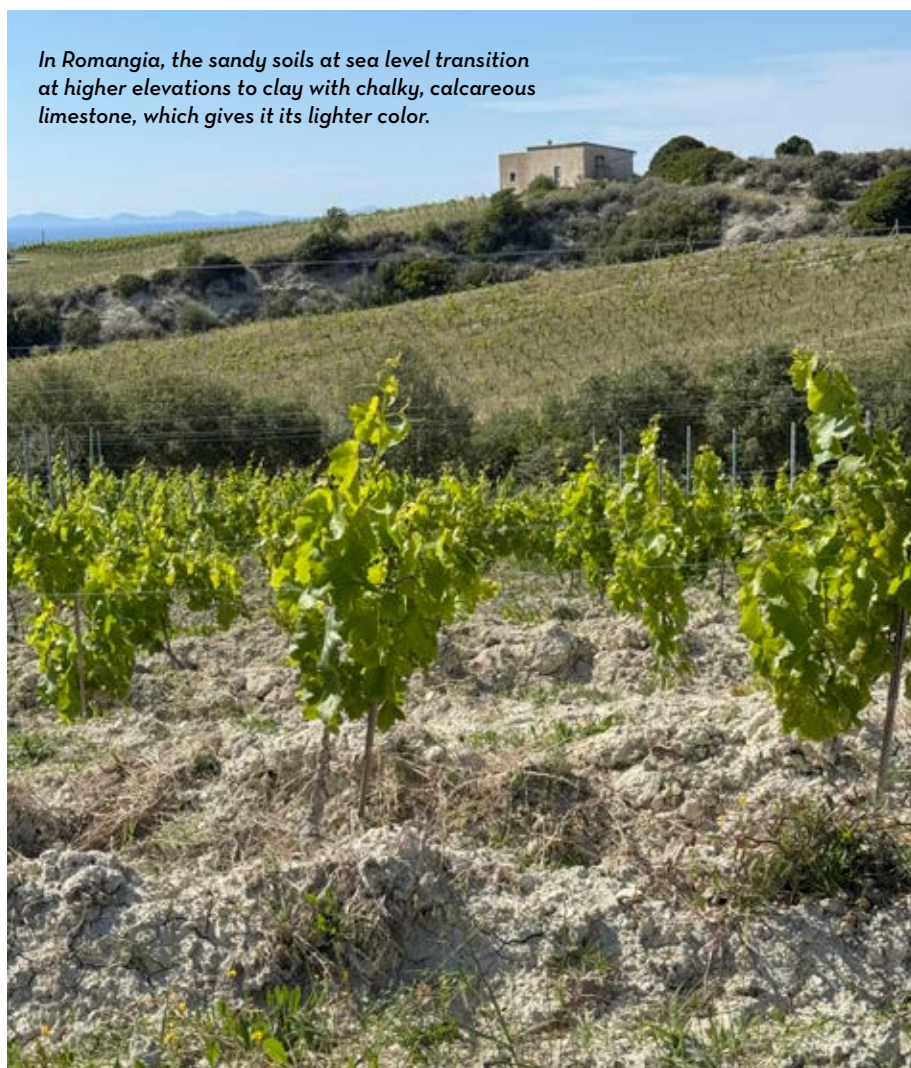
story and photos by Alissa Bica Raines

WHEN YOU LOOK at study materials like *The World Atlas of Wine* and Guild-Somm, references to Sardinian wine amount to just a paragraph or two. Vermentino is referenced as the white grape of note, while Cannonau (aka Grenache) is touted as the red. But little is mentioned of the topography of the Italian island or what grows best where and why. I was fortunate enough to visit this past May, and the wines I tasted from previously unknown-to-me regions were eye-opening.

Vermentino di Gallura in the northeast is the best known to those who've heard of Sardinian wine at all; as the island's only DOCG, it has the most prestigious reputation. While it does produce bright, racy versions of Vermentino ideal for pairing with the local seafood, I was told by many residents that its DOCG classification says more about the politics of wealth—it's the province of Sardinia with yachts regularly docked off the coast—than it does about producing better wines than other parts of



Podere 45 winemaker Gian Piero Saccu discusses Bidialgiu soils.



In Romangia, the sandy soils at sea level transition at higher elevations to clay with chalky, calcareous limestone, which gives it its lighter color.

the island. The wines I was most pleasantly surprised by were in fact from the northwest, an area bounded roughly by the city of Alghero on one side and the rural towns of Sorso and Sennori on the other.

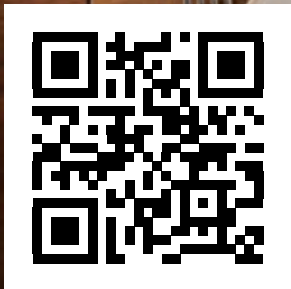
These are relatively new growing regions. After World War II, the Sardinian wine industry prioritized quantity over quality, sending much of the fruit from its vineyards to cooperatives or to be sold in bulk. In the 1980s and 1990s, the European Union offered financial compensa-

tion to growers to uproot their vines as a way to combat an oversupply of Italian wine, and many small farmers accepted the offer. But a rebirth came in the early 2000s as new producers began studying viticulture and planting modern clones on rootstocks better suited to the individual grapes and soil types.

This northwestern area consists of three subregions: Nurra, Coros, and Ro-

[Continued on page 36]

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mangia. Closest to Alghero, westernmost Nurra is home to large-scale producer Sella & Mosca and cooperative Cantina Santa Maria La Palma, which cultivate about 1,200 and 1,700 acres, respectively. But it's the smaller wineries, which together formed Vignaioli Nord Ovest Sardegna (ViNOS), an association for local winegrowers, that focus on expressing terroir as they elevate the area's viticultural reputation.

Nurra sits on plains at the foot of Mount Doglia, which is less of a mountain and more of a rolling hill; notes Podere 45 winemaker Gian Piero Saccu, "In Sardinia, we call anything over 200 meters mountains." Here, the soil—locally called Bidialgiu—is made mostly of clay, with quartz and dolomitic limestone. Rich in potassium and nitrogen, it releases less water than other clay-based soils, restricting the vigor of the vines and yielding smaller berries with a high skin-to-juice ratio that in turn creates the concentrated flavors and structure that are especially vital for Vermentino. These conditions, along with a 72-hour maceration, help Saccu to create textured, juicy Vermentino wines filled with bright citrus and almond flavors as well as stony minerality and a touch of saltiness from the nearby Mediterranean Sea.

Fellow Nurra winemaker Antonio Cargiaghe of Cantina Cargiaghe credits that sea air for yet another benefit: His vineyards are planted on a hillside with direct exposure to the cool mistral wind



Luca Careddu, who owns Carpante winery in Coros with his wife, Antonietta, explains the use of 140 Ruggeri rootstock in Coros.



Mario Bagella of Cantina Mario Bagella at his vineyards in Sorso.

that he says helps blow out some of the humidity and heat that can affect the vines. This not only keeps the grapes from overheating but also preserves acidity and freshness, particularly for Vermentino and red grape Cagnulari.

Cagnulari is a standout in both Nurra and its neighbor, Coros. With fewer than 1,000 acres planted in the world, it's a rare indigenous grape grown only on this part of the island, mostly in the Coros town of Usini. There are conflicting stories about its origin, but a leading theory is that it was brought to the island by the Spanish and is genetically the same as Graciano. Harvested after Vermentino in late September, Cagnulari has unusually large clusters with more than 300 small berries and needs soil high in clay, like that found in Nurra and Coros, to promote not only berry size but fertility and ripening. Winemaker Paolo Delitala of Ledà makes an outstanding, intensely alive example balancing savory white pepper and woody earth with raspberry, violets, and just the right amount of oak spice.

In a key difference from Nurra, the roughly 700 hectares of vines in Coros must be planted on 140 Ruggeri rootstock. This is because the calcareous soil in this area contains too much carbon and lime, which stops the vines from being able to photosynthesize. Through extensive research, growers found that 140 Ruggeri has a strong resistance to lime and chlorosis and were able to successfully cultivate vines here.

Overlooking the Gulf of Asinara, Romangia, the third region in the northwest, forms an amphitheater as it moves from sea level into the mountains and is made up of the neighboring towns of Sorso and Sennori. The former sits closer to the sea on ancient sand dunes and is drier than Sennori, receiving roughly 16 inches of rain annually, while the highest part of Sennori sees about 20. At Cantina Mario Bagella, the eponymous winemaker makes pretty expressions of Vermentino and Cannonau under the label ISORSO: The estate's sandy soil and proximity to the sea create heightened aromatics and saltiness in the white wines, whereas the reds are more powerful and concentrated but still feel airy, with a savory touch of the local herb called myrtle.

Slightly more inland, Sennori is situated among rolling hills with a higher concentration of chalky limestone as you move upward. The altitude (just under 1,000 feet) and cooler nights create a lifted, leaner version of Cannonau, even when it reaches 16% alcohol. Pensamentu from Cantina Sorres is a great example, with clean, mineral fruit; high acid; and a strong tannic structure built to age.

While there are a lot of exciting developments underway across Sardinia's wine regions—like the Cannonau and Granatza from central Mamojada and savory old-vine Carignano del Sulcis from southern Sant'Antioco—the Vermentinos, Cagnularis, and Cannonaus from Nurra, Coros, and Romangia are worth seeking out. **SJ**



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From Violins to Vintages

AT LA TOQUE IN DOWNTOWN NAPA, CA, **CHRISTINA STANLEY** HARMONIZES HER MUSICAL TRAINING WITH HER WINE EXPERTISE by Christina Barrueta

PHOTO: RYAN CARPENTER



Christina Stanley is wine director at La Toque in Napa, CA.

BALANCING A CAREER in the arts with a position at one of Napa Valley's most prestigious restaurants might sound like a daunting juggling act. For Advanced Sommelier Christina Stanley, La Toque's new wine director, it's simply two sides of the same artistic coin. "There are a lot of commonalities," she says, noting various parallels between music and wine, such as an intuitive approach to interpretation.

Armed with a bachelor's in music from San Francisco State University and an MFA in improvisation and composition from Mills College at Northeastern University in Oakland, the fifth-generation Napa native is as comfortable wielding a violin bow as she is decanting a rare Burgundy. "Violin is my primary instrument, but I play guitar and piano too," she explains. "I'm also a singer; I've performed in contemporary operas and toured the United States and Europe."

Her professional wine journey has been equally impressive, with stints at such esteemed spots as The Charter Oak in St. Helena, The Ritz-Carlton Bacara in Santa Barbara, and Oenotri in Napa preceding her role as wine director at The Slanted Door, also in Napa, whose wine list she built as a member of its opening team. But her pursuit of a Master Sommelier diploma demanded a change of pace. "I loved it there, but after my second attempt at master's theory, I really wanted to take a step back and focus on studying," Stanley recalls, leading her to become a floor sommelier at Goose & Gander in St. Helena. "The owners, Tricia and Andy Florsheim, are wonderful people. They do a lot for the community and for charity, and they really supported me while I was studying."

The strategic move paid off academically, even if her ultimate goal remained elusive. "I missed by just one point, and while that was disappointing, I had im-

[Continued on page 40]



From Sauvignon Blanc
to Cabernet Sauvignon,
Geyser Peak Keeps Climbing



Six scores of 90+ from The Tasting Panel.*

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La Toque, which serves seasonally driven, French-inspired cuisine from chef/owner Ken Frank, has held a MICHELIN star for over a decade.

proved tremendously," she explains. "So it was worth it as a good experience." But Stanley also realized what truly drives her passion for wine: "I wanted to get back into a buying position because I missed being creative and being able to curate a wine list and translate my personal love for wine to the guest. That's the most fun for me," she adds.

When longtime La Toque wine director Mike Lee left, the timing was fortuitous. Stanley had been part of La Toque's tasting study group for six years, even leading it for the past year. "I was so, so honored," she says of being offered the position by chef/owner Ken Frank in June. "It meant the world to me."

Now she's bringing her distinct perspective to one of the country's most celebrated dining destinations. La Toque has held a MICHELIN star for over a decade thanks to Frank's seasonally driven, French-inspired menu and a wine program renowned for its depth, featuring more than 2,500 selections. In short, the restaurant is a new stage where Stanley can unite her sophisticated palate with her artistic sensibilities.

Her role is both curatorial and collaborative. "Chef Frank and I do a lot of tasting together; now that we've gone through a few different menus, I've gotten a sense for his palate and what wines work with his dishes," she says, noting their

shared preference for "gastronomic wines that are complex with layers, texture, and depth." That approach was on full display in July, when the restaurant offered its ninth annual All Black Truffle Menu, where pairings highlighted Frank's long-standing expertise with the prized ingredient. Take, for example, the Peter Michael 2004 Le Moulin Rouge from the Santa Lucia Highlands poured alongside a dish of Wolfe Ranch quail *en demi-deuil* (a classic French preparation in which thin slices of truffle are tucked beneath the skin to perfume the bird as it roasts) in Albufera sauce. "It was a very luxurious dish," explains Stanley. "The Pinot Noir had this super-rich, almost mushroom broth-type of base and mouthwatering, sweet cherry fruit. It was a decadent pairing."

Looking ahead, Stanley is eager to put her own stamp on the list: "I'd like to get more Willamette Valley Pinot and Chardonnay on the list. I'm a huge fan of the [region's] Chardonnay and think it's underrepresented," she says, noting that she also plans to expand the presence of smaller, lesser-known California producers. "I worked harvest for [Sta. Rita Hills winery] Melville during the pandemic, and I had an opportunity to meet Sta. Rita Hills winemakers and people doing things in Santa Ynez Valley, like Àmevive and Tribute to Grace. Now I have an opportunity to work with them. It's exciting, especially

with a list like this, which is very traditional and deep with a lot of vintage variation. It's fun to be able to pepper in some new producers that are doing off-the-beaten-path things."

Granted, Stanley adds with a laugh, "I sometimes feel like two different people. . . . For Treasury Wine Estates' Christmas party, [national education manager and Master Sommelier] Gillian Ballance hired me to come in and sing arias, pair them with [Treasury's] wines, and explain why they work together. That was pretty wild."

Yet the overlap between her passions makes sense to her: "There's a lot of discipline involved in both fields," she muses. "I grew up practicing the violin, going over each note meticulously, for hours. That kind of sustained concentration comes in really handy with my Master [Sommelier] studies and the methodology. There's a continuity in the end, like when you're taking apart a musical phrase piece by piece. It's the same thought process when you're going through the deductive grid, being able to follow something to its conclusion so it all makes sense."

For Stanley, both music and wine are languages of rhythm, harmony, and structure—and at La Toque, she's surrounded by a cast of kindred spirits. "One of my favorite things about being in Napa is the incredible community," she shares. "We have so much talent here. It's amazing." ❧



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Infinite Possibilities

LLOYD CELLARS' INAUGURAL SAUVIGNON BLANC EMBODIES THE ESSENCE OF THE GRAPE AND THE CARNEROS APPELLATION

by Randy Caparoso

AT STANLY RANCH, a vineyard and luxury resort situated on a property spanning more than 700 acres in the southeast corner of Napa Valley's Carneros AVA, a gigantic steel sculpture shaped like an infinity symbol floats over a low hilltop of grapevines like a spaceship determined to make crop circles. As with any artwork, its meaning is in the eye of the beholder.

There was no doubt, however, what its surroundings meant to Rob and Bonnie Lloyd—owners of nationally distributed wine brand Lloyd Cellars—who recently hosted a dinner for close family and friends just feet away from “Infinity Hill” at The Grange, Stanly Ranch’s outdoor restaurant set in the middle of a chef’s garden. The occasion was the debut of the couple’s Lloyd Cellars 2024 Carneros Sauvignon Blanc (\$30), an impeccably crisp, pure (no oak!), steely, and dry iteration of the variety that hinted at the brininess scenting the chilly breezes blowing in from the nearby East Bay (summer nights in Carneros call for thick sweaters). Everything about the wine spoke to the universal appeal and the almost-infinite food-pairing possibilities of the grape: mouthwatering acidity, grapefruit, lemon, minerality, and, above all, an incredible lightness of touch.

Rob’s remarks at the table were as honest as the wine: “After making wine for 16 years,” he said in reference to his peerless track record as winemaker for La Crema, Rombauer, and a number of small handcrafted brands, “I was offered the fruit from a new planting by the Sangiacomo family. I could not turn down the opportunity to make a wine that, in a way, is the exact opposite of what you expect in a California Chardonnay.” In short, this was a chance for him to stretch his winemaking muscles and channel his talents in a new direction—one he was excited to take.



PHOTOS COURTESY OF LLOYD CELLARS

Bonnie and Rob Lloyd are the owners of Lloyd Cellars.

The Sauvignon Blanc was picked early enough to maximize natural acidity and finished half in stainless steel and half in concrete egg, ultimately yielding notes of “fresh peach, citrus blossom, and gooseberry,” in Rob’s words. Appropriately, just before we sat down for the first course, The Grange’s gardener gave me and my fellow guests a taste of fresh gooseberry cultivated in two large boxes—aromatic and palate-slaking (yes, just like Sauvignon Blanc) in a way we don’t get to experience every day.

The first course included just some of the virtually endless



Lloyd Cellars' 2024 Carneros Sauvignon Blanc is brand-new to its portfolio.

foods ideal for pure, tart Sauvignon Blanc: kampachi crudo with fresh-picked stone fruit and Fresno chili; peak-summer heirloom tomatoes with basil blossoms from the nearby Tenbrink Family Vineyards in Suisun Valley; fresh lettuce in a vinaigrette made with lavender, tarragon, and pickled green strawberry, all plucked from the garden just inches from our table; and sourdough focaccia dipped in 25-year-old balsamic. While the meal progressed delightfully from there, I kept going back in my mind to that wine and its indeed infinite pleasures. **SR**

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Author Alissa Bica Raines (second from left) with the members of her Los Angeles tasting group who also passed the Court of Master Sommeliers, Americas' Advanced Sommelier exam: John Cronin, Claudia Fox-Rosellini, Daniel Yeom, Christopher Dugan, and Matias Marroquin.



PHOTOS COURTESY OF ALISSA BICA RAINES

It Takes a Village

THE IMPORTANCE OF TASTING GROUPS FOR UPPER-LEVEL SOMMELIER EXAMS

by Alissa Bica Raines

IN FEBRUARY, 301 candidates sat for the Court of Master Sommeliers, Americas' Advanced Theory Examination; 89 passed. Of those, 87 chose to travel to Phoenix, Arizona, to sit for the three parts of the Practical Exam: Hospitality & Service, Business of the Sommelier; and Tasting. Then, on July 16, the Court announced 55 new Advanced Sommeliers—its largest passing class to date, representing three countries and 17 states. I was one of those ecstatic 55.

If you've taken any exam through the Court, you know it's a stressful process, though that isn't even the right word—phrases like “emotionally fraught,” “crippling anxiety,” or “suffocating pressure cooker” almost suffice when describing the experience. Upper-level exams are some of the most challenging and demanding tests in the world. The study process takes years, requiring sacrifice from candidates as they skip social functions and lose out on family time.

One of the hardest—and most isolating—parts is that most people don't really understand this. I had a lot of well-meaning friends who said, “You'll pass with flying colors!” not knowing that my peers and I are praying to just get a 60%—a D by academic standards. They'd also ask

about studying methods and materials, not knowing there isn't a course book we can simply peruse, as we can be tested on wine and spirits information from anywhere in the world.

The pressure is intense, to say the least, which is why my number-one piece of advice is to find a good tasting group, ideally with people taking the same level examination. It's invaluable for studying—you can cover more regions in-depth through shared notecards and tighten your tasting grid through practice and peer critique—but it's even more important for emotional support.

I had lived in Los Angeles for the past 17 years and formed strong bonds within my community. When I sat for, and failed, Advanced Theory in 2023, my group picked me up and kept me going. So,

when I moved to Cleveland, Ohio, in January of this year, the first thing I did was find a tasting group that luckily had another person sitting for Advanced. I not only tasted with him often but flew back to Los Angeles to meet with my group there. Maintaining that community was paramount to making me a better taster, as I picked up unique wisdom from each person. And when I got to

Phoenix, these were the people keeping me confident and sane. We tasted together the night before the exam and calibrated our palates the morning of the tasting portion. And after each section, we all took turns keeping each other from going down the rabbit hole of overthinking. I don't think it's a coincidence we all passed, going six for six from LA and two for two from Cleveland.

If you're from a small market, don't despair: Rely on family and friends for help; my husband blinded me every night and my parents babysat my son so I could study. You can also self-blind by emptying wines into 2-ounce bottles marked with a hidden answer key. But make sure you connect with your fellow candidates when you arrive to take an exam. Not only will these people support you during the process—I bonded with a candidate from New York who lifted me up (and wiped away some tears) when I needed it most—but they can be your new study buddies moving forward.

Lastly, while it's great to get that pin or diploma, be gentle with yourself and take time to be proud of your progress—it's a marathon, not a sprint. Pass or fail, we are always learning and becoming better beverage professionals. The Court's chairman, Michael Meagher, MS, quoted Winston Churchill at the opening and closing of our exam, and it was extremely fitting. “If you're going through hell,” he said, “keep going.”



Bica Raines with her Cleveland tasting partner, Andrew Albert, and Master Sommelier Shayn Bjornholm.

WELCOMING THE NEXT CHAPTER IN THE STORY OF PAUL HOBBS WINES
AND THE BEGINNING OF AGUSTINA HOBBS' OWN WINEMAKING LEGACY.



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Empire State Wines Shine at the 2025 New York Wine Classic

by Wanda Mann

SKYSCRAPERS AND BROADWAY

are synonymous with the Empire State, but don't forget vineyards. New York is often overlooked as a viticultural powerhouse; home to around 35,000 acres of vineyards and almost 500 wineries across 11 AVAs, it is the third-largest producer of wines in the United States. New York wines are more than ready for the spotlight, and the New York Wine Classic has played a pivotal role in their hard-earned recognition.

For 39 years, the New York Wine & Grape Foundation (NYWGF) has hosted the Classic to celebrate and honor the state's best wines. In July, this native New Yorker was delighted to host the event's virtual awards ceremony for the second consecutive year.

"The New York Wine Classic celebrates more than just great wine—it tells the story of a passionate, resilient, and innovative industry that continues to elevate its craft year after year," said Sam Filler, executive director of the NYWGF. "This competition is a platform for honoring the skill and creativity of our winemakers and growers while helping consumers discover the quality and diversity of New York wine."

The competition was fierce, with over 100 wineries submitting nearly 700 wines. For the fifth consecutive year, NYWGF partnered with the Beverage Testing Institute (BevTest) to manage the judging process. The expert panel included sommeliers, beverage directors, educators, retail buyers, and other seasoned industry professionals who blind tasted the wines

to ensure fairness and consistency; 12 platinum, 261 gold, 299 silver, and 80 bronze medals were awarded.

"We're incredibly honored—and still a little shocked—to be named Winery of the Year for the third time," said Peter

and Ashlee Weis, owners of Weis Vineyards in the Finger Lakes. "It's a true privilege to be recognized among so many outstanding New York producers. This award is a nod to the passion and hustle of our amazing team and grape growers; none of this would be possible without them." Weis also won the Best White Wine and Best Pink Wine categories.

"Wow," was the reaction from Ami Opisso, general manager of Rose Hill Vineyards in Long Island, to the winery's 2019 Clarity Cabernet Sauvignon being declared the



PHOTO COURTESY OF ROSE HILL VINEYARDS

Rose Hill Vineyards winemaker Patrick Caserta with a bottle of the producer's 2019 Clarity Cabernet Sauvignon, which won the prestigious Governor's Cup at the 2025 New York Wine Classic.



PHOTO: BOB KNILL

Peter and Ashlee Weis of Weis Vineyards won Winery of the Year for the third time in addition to Best White Wine and Best Pink Wine.

winner of the prestigious Governor's Cup, which is awarded to the wine deemed Best in Show. "We could not have dreamed of a better result to the first

GOVERNOR'S CUP WINNER

Rose Hill Vineyards 2019 Clarity Cabernet Sauvignon, Long Island

WINERY OF THE YEAR

Weis Vineyards, Finger Lakes

BEST IN CATEGORY AWARDS

Best Sparkling: Hudson Valley Vineyards Right Bank Blanc de Blancs, Hudson Valley

Best White Wine: Weis Vineyards 2024 Grüner Veltliner, Finger Lakes

Best Pink Wine: Weis Vineyards 2024 Dry Rosé, Finger Lakes


Best Red Wine: Rose Hill Vineyards 2019 Clarity Cabernet Sauvignon, Long Island

Best Dessert Wine: Billsboro Winery 2023 Après, Finger Lakes

Best Specialty Wine: Montezuma Winery Crimson Queen Cranberry & Rhubarb

year of entering our wines in this competition or a better wine to win. Clarity Cabernet Sauvignon is our vineyard's crown jewel. It exemplifies the quality, depth, and longevity that can be achieved in New York State wines when the stars align: an exceptional vintage; a vineyard at the peak of sustainable health; and a talented, non-compromising, purist winemaker," said Opisso.

In addition to congratulating the winners, New York Governor Kathy Hochul stated, "From Lake Erie to the Finger Lakes to Long Island and across the State, the caliber of New York wines made by our hardworking winery owners and farmers is second to none." I'll drink to that: As I always say, if you're not drinking New York wines, you're missing out!

For a full list of Best in Class and medal winners, visit newyorkwines.org/classic/new-york-wine-classic-2025. 

92 POINTS
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APRIL 2025

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

Night Harvesting Is a Sustainability Win-Win

SOMMS KNOW THAT SIGNIFICANT diurnal swings—the variances in temperature from daytime highs to nighttime lows—benefit wine quality. But did you know that winegrowers frequently take advantage of these shifts during harvest? Many collect grapes at night, when temperatures can drop between 20 and 50 degrees Fahrenheit.

California producers have a long history of embracing sustainable winegrowing, taking a holistic approach that balances environmental, social, and economic considerations. In fact, more than 90%

related costs) needed to cool them mechanically prior to crush. Conserving energy also results in a reduction in climate change—inducing greenhouse-gas emissions, another environmental value add.

Good for the People

Taking care of employees is a core tenet of sustainable winegrowing. Night harvesting provides more comfortable working conditions for vineyard crews and enhances worker health and safety by reducing the risk of heat-related illnesses

during the hot, sunny days that are common during harvest.

Good for Grapes and Wine

Cooler temperatures help stabilize sugar levels, preserve fresh fruit flavors and aromas, prevent premature fermentation and oxidation, and enhance the food-friendliness of balanced wines. Winegrapes are also less likely to be damaged when harvested at night, as the coolness protects the skins and pulp.

For these reasons and more, night harvesting has become a common practice in California's vineyards, especially in those wine regions experiencing high daytime temperatures. This is particularly true given that more frequent and intense heat waves are resulting from our changing climate. Night harvesting presents an innovative solution with multiple benefits from a sustainability standpoint. The practice not only ensures a safer and more comfortable working environment for vineyard workers and saves energy, it enhances the quality of the grapes that create complex, aromatic, and vibrant wines. *sj*

Authored by Wine Institute contributors, "The Inside Sip on California Wine" provides an insider's look at the latest developments in California's wine community. Wine Institute is an advocacy group of over 1,000 California wineries and affiliated businesses that initiates and advocates for state, federal, and international public policy to encourage the responsible production, consumption, and enjoyment of wine.



Vineyard workers harvest at night with overhead lights and headlamps.

of California wine is made in a Certified California Sustainable Winery, and more than 65% of the state's vineyard acreage is certified sustainable. Night harvesting is an example of a sustainable practice that has environmental, social, and economic benefits.

Good for the Planet

When harvested at night, winegrapes arrive at the winery at lower temperatures, reducing or eliminating the energy (and

October Is California Farmer and Farmworker Month

Each October since 2020, California Farmer and Farmworker Month has been shining a light on those who nurture and harvest California's 400-plus crops, ranging from nuts to vegetables and fruits, including more than 100 winegrape varieties. During the annual celebration, the Golden State's wine community—among them viticulturalists, vintners, winery employees, distributors, retailers, restaurateurs, and sommeliers—recognize the people who work hard to bring world-class wine to consumers across the state, the nation, and the world.

As the 2025 harvest comes to a close, it's the ideal time to open a bottle of California wine and appreciate the many hands that worked around the clock to bring it from the vineyard to you.



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RI
BE
RA
DEL
DUERO



“Way Too Many Wines”

NAPA VALLEY INSTITUTION **MUSTARDS GRILL** MARKS FOUR DECADES OF FOOD, WINE, AND COMMUNITY *story by Christina Barrueta / photos by Alexander Rubin*

WHETHER YOU'RE DUCKING INTO

Mustards Grill in the Napa Valley town of Yountville to fuel up between tastings or settling in after a day of vineyard hopping, the first thing you'll notice is the energy. Glasses clink over the lively hum of conversation as the restaurant's signature Mongolian pork chops and wood-fired roast duck—as well as those legendary onion rings—land on tables alongside chalkboard specials highlighting the on-site garden's bounty. It's a scene that's been playing out at this beloved area fixture for over four decades.

Mustards' fame extends to Napa's winemaking community, who've made it an informal clubhouse. “We're one of the watering holes of the Valley,” Knight acknowledges. “It's always been like that, and now we're welcoming the next generation. Every day, whether it's a vintner or winemaker, they're here relaxing, entertaining, or doing business.”

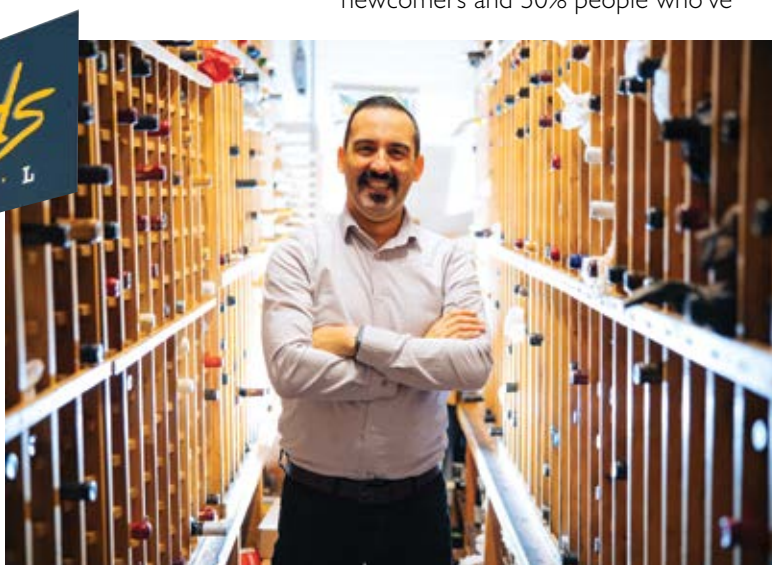
Accordingly, he says, “We've always made sure our wine program supports the community that supports us while also listening to what all our customers

ing when guests first see it,” he says, “but we like the structure of just one page. It's actually very user-friendly, and we can quickly guide them to wines they'd be interested in. There are a lot of fun things on the list, which is mostly California and French with a little bit of Oregon. There's Napa wine for our visitors, while our local winemakers and vineyard owners like to see Old World wines.”

That mix of influences mirrors the diverse, intergenerational crowd, where “we fluctuate between 50% tourists and newcomers and 50% people who've



Sean Knight is co-owner of Mustards Grill in Yountville, CA.



Mustards Grill wine director Rhys Arisman.

Since chef-owner Cindy Pawlcyn opened it in 1983, Mustards has been a community anchor. “It was one of the first to start the restaurant scene here,” explains co-owner Sean Knight, who has been Pawlcyn's business partner for 22 years, “and it continues as one of Napa's iconic restaurants.” Evidence of that includes spots on the *San Francisco Chronicle's* Top 100 Restaurants and the *Los Angeles Times's* Top 100 Restaurants in California this year alone.

want. It's evolved over the years, and it's something we're very proud of.” This year, Rhys Arisman stepped into the wine director role after 13 years with the restaurant, ready to build on the foundation laid by Knight, who asserts, “He's pushing it to the next level while keeping it fresh and interesting.”

Arisman now oversees the wine list with the famously cheeky title “Way Too Many Wines,” which consists of a single page packed on both sides with over 700 selections. “It might seem overwhelm-

been coming to the restaurant for years and are now grandparents with their grandkids,” says Arisman. “It's awesome.” Adds Knight, “We continue to focus on what has made us successful over the years. We're fortunate to have a loyal team with very little turnover, all sharing the vision Cindy started back in '83. Add in the feeling that you've stepped into a club surrounded by the stars of Napa Valley, and we hope people leave feeling their experience exceeded expectations.”

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PHOTO: ANDY KATZ

Revana owner Dr. Madaiah Revana.



PHOTO: ALEXANDER RUBIN

Reverance for Revana

THIS NAPA VALLEY WINERY DESERVES ACCLAIM

by Meredith May

REVANA IS MAKING a comeback. The winery produced estate Cabernet Sauvignon from 2001 to 2011 under the guidance of winemaker Heidi Barrett, who was also producing her own labels, La Sirena and Amuse Bouche, at the time.

Now, thanks to the winemaking talents of Thomas Rivers Brown, Revana is in a new phase, aided by in-house associate winemaker Rose Ballantine. “Brown is my mentor,” notes Ballantine. “He knows each block, each row, not just the vineyards as a whole.”

In addition to operating Revana, which became Napa’s first Indian-owned winery when it was founded in 1997, Dr. Madaiah Revana is also proprietor of two other estates: Alexana in Oregon’s Dundee Hills and Bodega Corazón del Sol in the Uco Valley, Mendoza, Argentina.

The Revana wines exhibit purity of fruit in the most classic of Napa Valley styles, showing power and concentration as well as grace. “We’re all concentrating on acid and backbone,” general manager Jeff Lewis explains. “Our goal is for these wines to get even better in ten or 15 years.”

Revana is located in the Napa Valley town of St. Helena.



Revana 2022 Cabernet Sauvignon, Napa Valley (\$125) Seamless and alluring, this ripe blend of 75% Cabernet Sauvignon, 15% Cabernet Franc, and 10% Merlot would be hedonistic if it weren’t so fresh. The palate is glossy and opulent, with notes of dried violets; mulberry; allspice; clove; and salt-cured, brandied black cherries. **95**

Revana 2018 Estate Cabernet Sauvignon, Napa Valley (\$225) Grown in the shadow of Spring Mountain, the fruit from Revana’s St. Helena estate shows a dynamic persona, even at seven years old. Blackberry and vivid black cherry are enhanced by exotic floral tones, black tea, and white pepper. Drying tannins add texture to the finish of plum liqueur. **96**

Revana 2021 Cabernet Sauvignon, Cold Springs Vineyard, Howell Mountain, Napa Valley (\$225) “This is our first off-site single vineyard, planted by Revana’s vineyard manager, Jim Barbour, who has managed some of Napa Valley’s most prestigious vineyards,” says general manager Jeff Lewis. The property is in the midst of a forest on a super-steep slope where volcanic soils mix with basalt boulders. Deep notes of mint chocolate are more than elegant—they are magnificent, matched with fine, chalky tannins as the feather-light liquid floats above the palate. **99**

PHOTO COURTESY OF REVANA

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Precision, Pageantry, and Pop

INSIDE THE ST. REGIS ASPEN RESORT'S CHAMPAGNE SABERING CHALLENGE

by Maia Parish

BUBBLES AND BLADES UNITE: This year at the 2025 Aspen Food & Wine Classic, The St. Regis Aspen Resort hosted the 120 Bottles in 120 Seconds Champagne Sabering Challenge. To commemorate the hotel company's 120th anniversary, it transformed its daily sabering ritual

neck for consumption.

St. Regis' own sabrage tradition began in 1904, when John Jacob Astor IV celebrated the opening of its hotel in New York City by sabering a bottle of Champagne. Now, sabering is a nightly occurrence at dozens of St. Regis hotels around

is pointed away from people. Remove the foil and loosen the cage but do not take it off. Keep your hand on the cage, then find the seam of the bottle. (Champagne bottles are made with two vertical seams; these are the weakest structural points, where the glass is likely to have a clean

PHOTOS: GREG DOHERTY



▶ **Stephanie Izard, Nyesha Arrington, Andrew Zimmern, and Tiffany Derry at the 120 Bottles in 120 Seconds event.**

▲ **Stoned Appetit's Kip Wilson tries his hand at sabrage.**

into a bold and unprecedented spectacle, inviting a select group of culinary, hospitality, and media luminaries to saber 120 bottles of Champagne in precisely 120 seconds. (Well, it took 50 seconds.) Those in attendance included celebrity chefs Andrew Zimmern, Tiffany Derry, and Nyesha Arrington; influencer Amanda McCrossin; Master Sommelier Bobby Stuckey; Aspen Mayor Rachael Richards; and acclaimed wine writers Prairie Rose and Julia Coney.

The practice of sabering champagne, or *sabrage*, dates back to the Napoleonic era. It originated with French cavalry officers, known as *hussars*, in Napoleon's army in the late 1700s. During the French Revolution, they achieved numerous victories, providing ample cause for celebration. While mounted on horseback, they would use their sabers—heavy military swords with a long cutting edge and, often, a curved blade—to open Champagne with a swift blow to the lip of the bottle. This movement would sever the

the world, whose guests are educated on the history of sabrage as they enjoy a complimentary glass of Champagne or cider. As Heather Steenge-Hart, area general manager at the Aspen location, explains, "Our evening Champagne sabering ritual . . . is a cherished tradition that marks the transition from day to night with a sense of celebration and ceremony. As the sun sets over Aspen Mountain, we honor the timeless artistry of sabrage—an emblem of our commitment to heritage, gracious hospitality, and creating unforgettable moments for our guests."

Successful sabering involves a few key steps. You should choose the right bottle: a traditional-method sparkling wine with a mushroom-style cork and wire cage. The wine should be chilled below 45 degrees Fahrenheit (a cold bottle has more internal pressure and less chance of cracking). Wipe the bottle to remove condensation, as dry glass is safer. Hold the bottle at a 45-degree angle and make sure the neck

break.) Using the blunt side of the saber, slide it back and forth along the seam toward the lip, using the force to break the lip. Inspect the bottle and pour gently.

St. Regis often partners with prestigious Champagne houses; depending on the location, it serves signature cuvées from such names as Krug, Ruinart, and Moët & Chandon. For the Challenge, the producer of choice was Telmont. Its *Réserve Brut*, composed predominantly of Chardonnay and Meunier with a touch of Pinot Noir, is a beautifully restrained, terroir-driven Champagne with a nose of bright green apple, lemon zest, fluffy biscuit, and almond. The palate is taut and racy with crisp orchard fruit and minerality. Paired with fresh-shucked oysters and Petrossian Caviar from Oysters XO, it made for a lovely kickoff to the Classic against the backdrop of the Rocky Mountains. (The fact that each participant in the Challenge received a saber crafted by Berkel was only a bonus.)



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SPARKLING BRANDS **OPERA PRIMA**
AND **JAUME SERRA'S** SUCCESS ON
THE U.S. MARKET IS CAUSE FOR
CELEBRATION FOR PARENT COMPANY
GARCÍA CARRIÓN

by Jessie Birschbach

*Opera Prima is García
Carrión's most successful
stateside brand yet.*

if you've been to a grocery store lately, you've likely seen it—and how could you not? At first glance, a bottle of Opera Prima could be mistaken for a glowing lava lamp beaming off the shelf. From its bright orange Mimosa to its blue, well, Blue Moscato, it seems there's an Opera Prima flavored sparkling wine inspired by every color of the rainbow, and what's more, the brand is being snapped up by thirsty consumers at a rate that outpaces its dimly colored competitors.

This is welcome news for Opera Prima's parent company, J. García Carrión, the fourth-largest wine producer in the world and the biggest in Spain. According to a June 2024 Nielsen report, although wine sales in the United States decreased 3.8% last year, García Carrión's sales were up 3.1%, largely thanks to the dramatic growth of Opera Prima. "Although the wine business is declining, we're up right now," says Jayme Chianella, García Carrión's national sales manager for the U.S. "We're going against what's happening with the market because we're becoming more in tune with the American customer, and we've restructured a lot of our brands—and these products, like our Opera Prima, are connecting with [young consumers]."



PHOTOS COURTESY OF GARCIA CARRION

In the retail stores in which it's sold, Opera Prima Mimosa typically sells up to triple the units of its direct competitors.



The reasons for Opera Prima's success are both as obvious as the large font on the brand's labels and as substantive as the refreshing Valencia orange juice and sparkling wine in its Mimosa: It's no coincidence that, according to the aforementioned Nielsen report, the wine-based cocktail category was the only segment in the wine category other than non-alcoholic wines to experience growth in 2024 at 33.2%. "We have the benefit of promoting a product that offers our audience so much of what they're looking for: bright, flavor-forward wines; social

engagement; authenticity; and sustainability. Tied into that great product is a great sales and marketing team behind it [at García Carrión]. Much of our role is delivering the brand's message in ways that truly connect—using the right tools, insights, and timing to keep momentum strong," says Eric Clappier, founder of Milwaukee, Wisconsin-based ad agency ADX Creative, which collaborated with García Carrión to develop a data-driven SEO strategy and digital advertising campaign with proven results. "Opera Prima now outperforms competitors in

organic search visibility, with top results not just for the brand [but] for individual SKUs as well."

This collaboration serves to complement García Carrión's other partnerships across all tiers of distribution, from its work with Republic National Distributing Company and independent state-level teams down to the retail level, where eye-catching POS programs with large-scale vendors like Kroger, H-E-B, Buc-ee's, Sam's Club, Safeway, and Albertsons have helped deliver a staggering statistic: According to another Nielsen report



with a broad view of the retail market for 2024, Opera Prima's Mimosa outsold leading brands such as André and Cook's at a velocity of 3.3 units per store per week, and this number continues to grow. In fact, this year, according to data from market research firm Circana, Opera Prima Mimosa outsold all André Mimosa SKUs combined in period three and ultimately sold two to three times more units per store than any other Mimosa. "Opera Prima Sparkling is one of the fastest-growing wine brands in the market today, driven by its approachable style, consistent quality, and exceptional value," says Chianella. "In recent years, [García Carrión's] growth in the U.S. has accelerated significantly compared to previous periods, thanks to strategic partnerships, a stronger presence in key retailers, and an increased focus on consumer engagement."

It's also worth acknowledging that, as of last year, Opera Prima has surpassed García Carrión's former brand leader, Jaume Serra Cristalino Cava, in sales volume. And while Opera Prima is made in the Charmat method and Jaume Serra via the traditional method, the brands' production processes share one major similarity: automation.

The former is made in the heart of La Mancha in a state-of-the-art wine-

making facility in which mechanization allows for total control over each step of production, from gentle pressings to fully automated bottling lines. Jaume Serra, meanwhile, is crafted in the seaside city of Vilanova i la Geltrú, where production is guided by lasers and machines stack pallets so bottles can rest during secondary fermentation prior to being moved into a facility equipped with gyropalettes. Efficiencies like these enable García Carrión to make a staggering 60 million bottles of Cava annually.

Head winemaker Marta Fontanals has worked for Jaume Serra for nearly four decades and attests that the area's mild temperatures, low rainfall, and sea breezes contribute to the character of the estate-grown grapes and, ultimately, the finished wines. Jaume Serra's production facility as well as its tasting room, located in a masonry building erected in 1647, are surrounded by wind-bent pine trees and grapevines just 5 kilometers from the Mediterranean, giving the brand its claim to fame as the closest Cava winery to the sea.

The savvy packaging and marketing mettle behind Opera Prima and balance between tradition and innovation behind Jaume Serra may have recently helped García Carrión achieve new heights in its stateside success, but its rise in the U.S.



Luciano García-Carrión is vice president and fifth-generation vintner of García Carrión.

has arguably been a long time coming. Like many Spanish producers at the time, founder J. García-Carrión took advantage of the spread of phylloxera in France and opened his first winery's doors in Jumilla in 1890. Fast-forward nearly a century later, when Luciano García-Carrión, current vice president of García Carrión, took over the commercial and marketing departments and began to help shape the company's international business, expanding into more than 150 countries, including the U.S., in 1997. Since then, García Carrión has been able to leverage its vast estate vineyards and multiple winemaking facilities in ten different DO and DOCA zones in Spain to produce a wide spectrum of brands for the U.S., ranging from fun, lighthearted sparkling wine cocktails to more serious, traditional expressions. Leave it to us Americans to go crazy over the bubbly stuff, but perhaps Clappier best encapsulates Opera Prima's current moment of triumph: "Opera Prima's rise is more than a marketing win—it's a reflection of deep collaboration within the García Carrión family. From growers and producers to planners, marketers, and sales teams, every partner plays an important role in the brand's success. That sense of teamwork—nimble, values-driven, and relentlessly focused on quality—continues to energize the sparkling wine space. And as the wine-based cocktail category grows, Opera Prima stands as both a pioneer and a promise of where it can go next." 

Still the One

GARCÍA CARRIÓN'S **PATA NEGRA** BRAND REMAINS AMONG THE PRODUCER'S MOST REGARDED

Although it also brings three Cavas—Brut, Organic Brut, and Cava Rosé, found mostly in larger accounts like Disney resort properties—to the portfolio of García Carrión, Pata Negra remains a tried-and-true still-wine brand for the company as well. “Pata Negra is García Carrión’s flagship premium collection, showcasing the rich viticultural diversity of Spain through vineyards in the country’s most celebrated Denominations of Origin,” says Jayme Chianella, national sales manager for the U.S. at García Carrión. “Each wine is crafted to transparently reflect the unique terroir it comes from—from the sun-drenched hills of Jumilla and the high-altitude vineyards of Ribera del Duero to the classic elegance of Rioja and the sea-breeze freshness of Pata Negra Cava. Meticulous vineyard care, parcel-specific vinification, and a blend of artisanal techniques with modern innovation ensure that every bottle delivers both authenticity and excellence.”

Located in Castilla y León in northwest Spain, Rueda is historically



known for producing Verdejo, but the Sauvignon Blanc grown in the area can be just as refreshing. Its gravelly soils and cool nights produce dry white wines with great acidity. Case in point: Pata Negra’s Sauvignon Blanc/Verdejo, typically a 50/50 blend of the two varieties.

Toro, Rueda’s neighbor to the west, offers an altitude ranging from 2,030 to 2,750 feet, tempering the region’s unforgivingly hot summer days. Pata

Negra’s Roble Tempranillo offers the zesty signature boldness found in Toro-based wines.

South of Madrid is the large region of La Mancha, where Tempranillo, known locally as Cencibel, is grown alongside international red varieties such as Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, and Syrah within DO-classified vineyards. Pata Negra’s Roble Red Blend is indeed representative of La Mancha as a blend of Tempranillo, Cabernet Sauvignon, and Petit Verdot.

In Rioja, arguably Spain’s most well-known and important wine region, Tempranillo is also king, occupying the majority of its roughly 160,000 vineyard acres. As the first region in Spain to earn Denominación de Origen Calificada status in 1991, Rioja represents the highest tier of quality in Spanish wine. Pata Negra’s Crianza Tempranillo, a deliciously traditional Rioja wine, ages for one year in American oak.



The Viña Arnáiz winemaking facility in Ribera del Duero.



The Blaufränkisch Boom

AFFORDABLE, FOOD-FRIENDLY, AND SOMETIMES AGEWORTHY, THIS GRAPE IS HAVING A MOMENT by David Furer

AMID AN INCREASE in interest among trade and consumers as well as a changing climate, the rise of relatively obscure grape varieties is fully emergent in the United States. A case in point is the Central European red-skinned variety known in Austria as Blaufränkisch, in Germany as Lemberger, in the Czech Republic as Frankovka, in Hungary as Kékfrankos, and in Slovenia as Modra Frankinja, to name just some of its monikers.

In 1976, the grape arrived in the U.S., specifically Washington's Yakima Valley, where Kiona Vineyards and Winery co-founder John Williams planted Lemberger

forward wine not requiring expensive oak élevage, with a built-in SEO that you can release to market at a \$20 SRP, is, in 2025, a feature and not a bug for sommeliers wishing to flex their nerd muscles," says JJ. "Its liquid intrigue is important because there's a lot of competition out there." Noting that his family has pushed Kiona's rock up a hill for 40 years, he claims that these days his phone is ringing off the hook with producers wanting to purchase Lemberger from Kiona as the largest grower of the grape in the U.S.; its 13 acres of plantings represent 4.8% of its 272 acres and 8% of its wine sales.



PHOTO COURTESY OF HERMANN J. WIEMER/PAUL BRISSMAN

Winemaker/partner Fred Merwarth of Hermann J. Wiemer in the Finger Lakes of New York.

ery's own Lemberger "is a staff favorite because of its versatility in pairing with our menu, and I love to have it as a glass pour for that very reason," she says.

In 1999, Hermann J. Wiemer planted his first Blaufränkisch vines at his namesake estate in the Seneca Lake area of New York's Finger Lakes region from material that had crossed the border from Ontario, Canada, where it was initially propagated at Cave Spring Vineyard by Hermann Weis of St. Urbans-Hof in Mosel, Germany. Winemaker/partner Fred Merwarth joined Hermann J. Wiemer in 2001; he too praises the grape's hardiness in cold weather and the ease with which it grows as compared to Pinot Noir, noting that "it rivals Cabernet Franc for durability." Meanwhile, Merwarth's partner, Oskar Bynke, holds hope for its future on the marketplace: Though 95% of the winery's sales are currently DTC, with the

[Continued on page 62]



PHOTO: SHAWN LINEHAN

A Blaufränkisch, aka Lemberger, harvest at Kiona Vineyards and Winery in Washington's Yakima Valley.

on his Red Mountain property as a hedge against the susceptibility to frost experienced by other varieties planted in the region's early days; he went on to produce the country's first commercial bottling with the 1980 vintage. Today, Williams' grandson JJ. oversees Kiona and those original vines. "Lemberger is experiencing a bit of a resurgence because wine salespeople are realizing that a fruit-

"One of my favorite things about Kiona ... is [its] history," says Maren McGowan, owner/general manager of Dovetail Joint Restaurant in Richland, Washington. "We've been selling [its Lemberger] for about five years, and it's such a great way to start a conversation with guests about Red Mountain wine." McGowan carries many other wines from producers who source grapes from Kiona, but the win-

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Lloyd by Robert Lloyd
Sta. Rita Hills Pinot Noir



2025 vintage, he plans to direct 50% of its Blaufränkisch production to wholesale channels, thereby making it accessible to the on-premise sector.

Vintner Morgan Beck has worked with Blaufränkisch since joining Johan Vineyards in Oregon's Willamette Valley in 2015. "There's always talk in Oregon about Pinot Noir, so every other red wine ends up being compared to it," she says. "[But] it's fun to have another variety that our customers can connect to and be comfortable with [and] that expresses another dimension of flavors and, often, [of] structure." Beck agrees that it requires less attention in the vineyard than does Oregon's favorite red variety and often expresses itself with greater versatility as well as balanced acidity. "It asks so little of us . . . while providing a wine that shows itself and its place with purity in any type of vintage," she adds.

"I love introducing guests to new varietals they may not be aware of yet," enthuses Raffaele Stuparitz, sommelier at Mizuna in Denver, Colorado. "Blaufränkisch's sophisticated yet friendly darker-fruit profile and pronounced spicy note produce an elegant expression that can be compared more to Pinot Noir . . . and we've perfectly paired Johan's [version] with quail, oyster mushroom, romanesco, and cherry jus." Also in Colorado, Madison Church, wine director at Breckenridge restaurants Rootstalk and Radicato, finds that the variety's "balance of floral, dark, plummy fruit with crunchy, herbal tannins makes it super versatile with our whole summer menu, though we specifi-



PHOTO COURTESY OF JOHAN VINEYARDS

Johan Vineyards in Oregon's Willamette Valley planted its first Blaufränkisch in 2010.

cally like it with a pork belly with plums that's currently on our tasting menu."

Kelsey Glasser, owner/sommelier of Arden in Portland, Oregon, is equally charmed. "Austrian varietals thrive in Oregon's cool climate, and [Johan's] Blaufränkisch is one of the standouts. [Coming from] the Van Duzer Corridor, where the whipping winds thicken the skins and give it beautiful structure and zipping acidity, [it's] more black-fruited while still being light and elegant enough [for] when guests want to drink local but also change it up from Pinot," she says. Glasser likes to pour it alongside Arden's grilled pork chop with huitlacoche, pickled onions, crema, and corn shoots, asserting that "the earthiness of the huitlacoche really brings out the forest floor in the Blau, with the pickled onions popping its acidity. . . . [But] I also have been using it in my weekly Oregon wine tastings as an example of the creativity and diversity that's now so prevalent here."

In Traverse City, Michigan, Trattoria Stella owner Amanda Danielson recently showcased Johan's Blaufränkisch at a tasting class along with versions from New Jersey's Beneduce Vineyards and Traverse City's own Left Foot Charley. In her view, "Blaufränkisch is one of the most versatile reds at the table—bright, spicy, structured, and endlessly food-friendly. . . . It's just as comfortable with poultry or game as with rich vegetables or braised meats." The veteran restaurateur regularly carries bottles from Left Foot Charley and other

Michigan producers, including Shady Lane Cellars on the Leelanau Peninsula. The former's Single Vessel Series, she says, "is excellent, offering three examples from the same vineyard, each fermented in a different vessel: amphora, puncheon, [and] barrique. Guests' curiosity turns quickly into loyalty. . . . [They] may not know the name at first, but once they taste it, they remember—and order again."

Left Foot Charley co-owner Bryan Ulbrich first planted Blaufränkisch in 2001. It wound up thriving, "so we planted a lot more of it, leading to it now being one of Northern Michigan's most-planted red grapes," the winemaker explains, appreciative of the "opportunity to allow a lesser-known red wine to do all the talking over a 'grander' variety from France or elsewhere."

Owner/winemaker Mike Beneduce of the aforementioned Beneduce Vineyards describes his Blaufränkisch wines to newcomers as a "mix between Pinot Noir and Syrah, with a fresh, spicy brambly-fruit character." Like Ulbrich, the fourth-generation farmer makes three distinct versions: a still dry rosé, a rosé pét-nat, and a classic dry red, all sourced from a 2-acre block where he's cultured a native yeast to use in his stainless-steel fermentations.

In short, there's a place for domestic Blaufränkisch/Lemberger on your wine list: Thanks to its cost-effectiveness, food-friendliness, and attraction for open-minded guests, it's long overdue for its time in the spotlight. *sj*



PHOTO COURTESY OF LEFT FOOT CHARLEY

Bryan Ulbrich is co-owner/winemaker of Left Foot Charley in Traverse City, MI.



SAVOR THE COLORS OF TIME

ÉTOILE, THE ULTIMATE WINEMAKERS SIGNATURE

AS SEEN BY ETIENNE FRANCEY

DOMAINES

*Ott**



PHOTOS COURTESY OF CAPARZO

The Caparzo estate in Montalcino, Italy.

Coming of Age

HOW **CAPARZO** PIONEERED TERROIR EXPRESSION IN BRUNELLO DI MONTALCINO

by Chris Howard

WITH THE RELEASE of its 2020 Brunello di Montalcino, Caparzo is celebrating a remarkable milestone: 50 years since the estate produced its first Brunello in 1970. At that time, the appellation was still nascent, with just 25 producers working fewer than 150 hectares; it has since become one of Italy's most prestigious growing zones, and Caparzo has emerged as one of the pioneering wineries that helped shape the reputation of the region, now a DOCG, on the world stage. Under the visionary leadership of Elisabetta Gnudi Angelini since 1998, it has balanced a deep respect for heritage with a forward-looking approach, embodying the very best of Montalcino's spirit.

From Hillside Obscurity to Global Icon
In the 1970s, when Brunello di Mon-

talcino was undergoing its most dramatic transformation, Caparzo quickly distinguished itself as an innovator, introducing one of the region's first single-vineyard Brunellos with La Casa in 1977. This trailblazing approach to cru designation helped establish the concept that Montalcino's diverse terroirs could produce distinctly different expressions of Sangiovese, a philosophy that would become fundamental to understanding the appellation's complexity. The estate's early commitment to terroir expression helped drive the quality revolution that would elevate Brunello from regional curiosity to global icon.

Today, Caparzo's 90 hectares of vineyards sprawl strategically across various hillsides throughout Montalcino, all positioned at elevations ranging from 220 to 300 meters above sea level. This

placement across multiple sites provides it with access to the full spectrum of Montalcino's renowned terroirs. Roughly split between the cooler north, with its Galestro soils and aromatic wine profiles, and the warmer south—with more clay-rich soils producing fuller-bodied wines—they allow Caparzo to craft blends that capture Brunello's full character.

These wines are all shaped by Montalcino's Mediterranean climate: Maritime breezes from the southwest deliver excellent ventilation and cool evenings, allowing Sangiovese to reach optimal ripeness while maintaining the balance and elegance that defines great Brunello. Caparzo's philosophy centers on low yields and meticulous hand harvesting, enabling each site's unique attributes to contribute to wines of remarkable complexity and aging potential.



Caparzo owner *Elisabetta Gnudi Angelini* (right) with her daughter, *Alessandra*.

A Far-Reaching Influence

When Elisabetta Gnudi Angelini took the reins at Caparzo in 1998, she brought both vision and substantial investment to a property primed for evolution. Working alongside her children, son Igino and daughter Alessandra, she pursued an ambitious goal: combining time-honored traditions with cutting-edge innovation to make wines that express the estate's terroir with uncompromised precision.

Gnudi Angelini's influence extends far beyond Caparzo, however. As one of the few women to own multiple top estates in Tuscany—including Borgo Scopeto and Doga delle Clavule—she has demonstrated that female leadership can drive progress in Italy's traditionally male-dominated industry. For instance, long before sustainability was mainstreamed in the wine world, Caparzo was implementing comprehensive environmental practices that would set new standards for responsible production. The estate was among the first wineries in Montalcino to install solar panels, reflecting its early recognition that renewable energy was the only path forward.

This green commitment extends

throughout the winery's operations: specialized wood pellet boilers utilize local resources, naturally climate-controlled cellars rely on air-channeling systems to save energy, and comprehensive recycling programs minimize waste. In the vineyards, Caparzo's sustainability efforts include employing pheromone diffusers to disrupt moth mating cycles, effectively protecting vines without chemical interventions; indigenous insects are utilized to combat other pests, while ongoing partnerships with universities in Siena, Florence, and Pisa focus on developing sustainable solutions for fungal diseases like downy and powdery mildew that are the bane of winegrowers everywhere.

These efforts have earned Caparzo certification through both ISO and Equalitas, the latter of which sets sustainability standards specifically for Italy's wine industry. Yet the winery's current goal of achieving zero carbon emissions reflects a commitment to environmental stewardship that extends far beyond regulatory requirements.

A Long-Term Vision

Caparzo's winemaking philosophy balances respect for time-honored methods—including aging in large Slavonian oak casks—with a modern approach such as the selective use of French barriques, allowing its wines to develop complexity while maintaining the clear expression of Sangiovese that defines the DOCG. The focus remains steadfastly on creating bottlings that will continue evolving for decades, reflecting both the patience required for great Brunello and the confidence that comes from working with exceptional terroir.

As Brunello di Montalcino continues its remarkable journey from little-known upstart to world-famed exemplar of Italian wine excellence, Caparzo stands as a key protagonist in its progress. Under the care of the Angelini family, it remains committed to the principles that have defined its success within Brunello's incredible transformation: utmost esteem for terroir, commitment to quality, and the vision to see beyond the present vintage to the legacy being crafted for future generations. *SM*

Tasting Notes



Caparzo 2023 Rosso di Montalcino DOCG, Toscana, Italy (\$27) In its youth, this wine displays its freshness through just-ripened red cherry, cinnamon-sugared rose petal, and spiced cranberry. The balance of acid and tannins contributes to a refreshing finish—it's silky and long, with subtle hints of freshly tilled soil. **93** —*Meridith May*



Caparzo 2020 Brunello di Montalcino DOCG, Toscana, Italy (\$55) Earthy aromas lead to a suede mouthfeel adorned with sweet tobacco, toasty mocha, and Luxardo cherry with a hint of balsamic. Acidity beams brightly through the wine's savory character. **93** —*M.M.*



Caparzo 2020 La Casa Brunello di Montalcino DOCG, Toscana, Italy (\$93) Stoic, with well-structured tannins that deliver tension and grip. Basil, oregano, and white pepper season pomegranate, quince, and black cherry. Forest floor and red tea combine for an opulent finish. **94** —*M.M.*



Caparzo 2019 Brunello di Montalcino DOCG, Toscana, Italy (\$111) Deep, rich, and delicious, thanks to complex layers of flavors that parade across the palate: dark chocolate-covered cherry, leather, grilled meat, violets, cinnamon, and tobacco. Acidity refreshes on the elegant finish. **98** —*M.M.*



At a recent dinner at Adalina in Chicago, Quintessential gathered a group of local beverage professionals to taste through a lineup of single-vineyard expressions from its portfolio, exclusively comprising family-owned producers (the welcome wine, Champagne Palmer Blanc de Blancs, was the sole multivineyard exception).

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DINNER IN CHICAGO**

STORY BY KATE NEWTON / PHOTOS BY REBECCA PEPLINSKI

There is perhaps no clearer lens through which to view the craft of winemaking than a single-vineyard wine: Touted for their sense of purity and ability to channel a crop into a harmonious whole, these bottlings are designed above all to speak to the specificity of their site.

In an effort to bestow the category with the level of consideration such specificity deserves, Napa, California-based importer, marketer, and distributor Quintessential gathered a group of beverage professionals at upscale Italian restaurant Adalina in Chicago's historic Gold Coast district in late July. There, the company's Northern Division VP of sales, Jon Hobbs, and Midwest director of national accounts, Tom Boswell, hosted a dinner paired with eight single-vineyard wines from its portfolio that—like all offerings from Quintessential—had yet another point of differentiation in that they were entirely produced by family-owned and -operated wineries. Founded in 2003 by Steve Kreps Sr. and Dennis Kreps, Quintessential shares the same overarching philosophy as many of the 50-plus multigenerational producers it works with from 12 countries around the world in that “place is everything,” in Hobbs' words. “We really curate our portfolio based on terroir and family,” he told the guests, “so you're going to get multiple examples of that tonight.”

After sipping a welcome glass of the crisp and mineral-threaded Blanc de Blancs (a multivineyard wine, it was the sole exception to the evening's theme) from Champagne Palmer—a domaine that's mastered the art of elegant Chardonnay in the Pinot Noir-focused Montagne de Reims—the attendees settled around the table for the first course, trading pleasantries and shared memories that spoke to the close-knit nature of Chicago's hospitality scene. Served alongside a truffled Caesar salad with black garlic, pink peppercorn, and yuzu were a trio of white wines: the Two Angels 2024 Sauvignon Blanc from California's Lake County; the Domaine Béranger 2022 Pouilly-Fuissé; and the André Brunel 2023 Cuvée Bécassonne from the Rhône Valley.

The first wine hails from high-elevation terroir prime for white winegrowing: Grown in a vineyard at 1,360 feet above Clear Lake on the slopes of dormant volcano Mount Konocti, the grapes derive their vibrancy in part from increased sun exposure that's tempered by cooling mountain air, which aids in preserving acidity. "You don't hear a lot about Lake County, but we think it's a great expression of Sauvignon Blanc," said Hobbs. Fermented in stainless steel for four months, it exuded crisp notes of guava, honeydew, and passion fruit on the nose and palate. "The fresh tropical notes paired beautifully with the flavors of the salad and were an excellent complement," noted Marsha Wright, wine director, Greek brands and bar brands, at DineAmic Hospitality.

The Domaine Béranger Pouilly-Fuissé is a "100% Chardonnay from a teeny-tiny [4.9-acre] parcel of land that's been farmed for



Double-cut lamb chops with mint-maple glaze, fennel, pistachio, and sesame seed paired with the Ironstone 2021 Reserve Rous Vineyards Ancient Vines Zinfandel from Lodi.



Master Sommelier Alpana Singh, owner of Alpana, and Brad Wermager, wine and spirits director at Wildfire and Big Bowl, share a glass of Champagne Palmer Blanc de Blancs before dinner.

about 200 years," according to Hobbs, by a family so entrenched in the hamlet of Pouilly that it used to be known as the Béranger District. Current owner Emile Béranger welcomes guests for intimate tastings in his cellar, where he shares his reverence for his homeland through wines cultivated on his 12.35-acre estate. Twenty-year-old Guyot-trained vines yielded this rounded and unctuous expression, which aged eight months in (30% new) French oak and offered a nose of stone fruit, honey, and vanilla that gave way to subtle flavors of lychee and hazelnut. Jackie Trabilsy, buyer at local wine and liquor shop Off Premise, commented that it had "a great creamy texture and a good concentration of fruit while still remaining elegant."

Antonio Carranza, corporate director of beverage, Americas, for Hyatt, expressed similar praise for the "perfectly balanced" Cuvée Bécassonne, a blend of 50% Rousanne, 30% Grenache Blanc, and 20% Clairette named for the game birds that winter in André Brunel's southeast-facing hillside vineyard atop clay soil and calcareous



Jon Hobbs, Quintessential's Northern Division VP of sales, co-hosted the dinner with Midwest director of national accounts Tom Boswell.

subsoil. Touting its elegance and versatility, as it also paired well with the subsequent course of gnocchi in pomodoro sauce and spaghetti alla chitarra made cacio e pepe style, he singled it out as “the most impressive of the white wines,” with a floral-tinged and slightly nutty profile that framed its notes of pear and peach as well as a surprisingly robust body that sets it apart from its regional counterparts. The winery has had plentiful time to hone its approach in the cellar, as it’s currently being led by fifth-generation proprietor Fabrice Brunel in crafting wines from Côtes du Rhône, Châteauneuf-du-Pape, and Val de Loire using eco-friendly practices such as cover cropping and eschewing the use of herbicides and pesticides. Graham Miller, director of brand management and chains, wine and spirits, for Burke Beverage Inc.—the wholesaler that represents the Quintessential portfolio in the greater Chicago area—also praised the wine’s pairing prowess, noting that its “floral nose and tree fruits on the palate, coupled with its medium-round acidity, really lent [themselves] to the fluffy consistency and red sauce of the gnocchi.”

The intended partners for the pasta course were, naturally, a pair of Italian reds: the Bel Colle 2021 Barbaresco Pajorè from Piedmont and the Cortonesi 2020 La Mannella Brunello di Montalcino from Tuscany. Third-generation Piedmontese winemaker Luca Bosio is at the helm of the former; a historic winery in the village of Verduno in the Barolo DOCG

that crafts terroir-driven wines like the Pajorè, grown in a 2.5-acre, south-facing vineyard in the town of Barbaresco (it’s also one of just 13 producers to make both Barolo and Barbaresco at the same winery). Fermented and macerated in stainless steel with regular pumpovers to impart structure in the finished wine, it aged two years in French oak and six months in bottle, yielding a spice-laden, floral-driven expression that was a stand-out for the dinner guests. “I think the wine has finesse, complexity, and a structured backbone that pairs perfectly with our Greek cuisine,” Wright said of its appeal for some of DineAmic’s concepts, while Trabilys noted that it “was quietly powerful, with a good tannin structure and well-integrated notes of flowers, fruit, and leather. [The wine] paired well with both pasta dishes, showing once again that Nebbiolo is always a great food pairing.” Brad Wermager, wine and spirits director at Lettuce Entertain You restaurants Wildfire and Big Bowl, for his part, found it to have “depth, richness, and a silky texture that impressed me.”

Cortonesi is also led by a third-generation winemaker—in this case Tommaso Cortonesi, whose portfolio comprises ageworthy single-vineyard expressions of Brunello and Rosso di Montalcino. La Mannella hails from a prestigious 138-acre property of the same name in north-west Montalcino that’s been managed by Tommaso’s family—who have lived in the walled city of Montalcino for over 200



Kandyce Alvear, beverage director at The Hoxton, and Antonio Carranza, corporate director of beverage, Americas, for Hyatt.

years—since the 1970s; one of the coolest sites in the region, it’s set atop rocky clay and sandy soils that yield a wine indicative of the layers of complexity Sangiovese can express, which are highly variable based on terroir. Offering earthy aromas of dark plum and blackberry that went lighter on the palate with red fruits such as ripe cherry, a hint of lavender; and elegant tannins bolstered by freshening acidity, it was set apart by the staying power of its finish of dried herbs and spices like thyme, sage, and nutmeg, bringing out the nuances in the well-seasoned sauces of both pastas.

With the final course—a choice of double-cut lamb chops with mint-maple glaze, fennel, pistachio, and sesame seed; tagliata-style charred filet with arugula, aged balsamic, and shaved parmesan; or salmon crusted with the skins of the potatoes used to make the gnocchi—came three more red wines, each of which would have proven a worthy finale in its own right: the Bodegas Muriel 2019 Reserva and the Luis Alegre 2019 Parcela No. 5, both Tempranillos from Rioja Alvea, and the Ironstone 2021 Reserve Rous Vineyards Ancient Vines Zinfandel from Lodi. Hobbs encouraged the group to take their time comparing the Tempranillos to note the differences between them despite their similar origins, adding that the Parcela No. 5 had to that point been unavailable in Illinois, “so this is the first time anyone’s tasted it [here].”

He also asserted that Tempranillo “is in my opinion the best value in wine



Rafaela De La Vega, senior business development manager at MICHELIN Guide, noses one of the three white wines served with the first course.

right now," and judging by several hums of perceived agreement from around the table, it was hardly an outlandish claim—particularly with regard to the Reserva, as the category is required to age at least three years (in this case, two years in French and American oak and one year in bottle), yet the wine has an SRP of just \$22. Bodegas Muriel traces its roots in Rioja to 1926, and today Julián Murúa Entrena and his son Javier marry the producer's traditional past with modern winemaking technology (its name, formerly Bodegas Murua, represents another marriage of the family's surname with that of their hometown of Elciego). They make the Reserva only in exceptional vintages with fruit from 25-year-old vines planted in nutrient-poor clay and limestone; a Mediterranean climate with maritime influences from the Atlantic Ocean creates ideal conditions for ripening, while the use of terraces prevents erosion and improves drainage. The resulting wine boasted a perfumed nose of ripe cherry, strawberry, and baking spice with a touch of mocha that gave way to vanilla-dipped dried fruit on the polished palate. "I carry the Muriel Rioja Reserva at one of our locations and the wine speaks for itself—it is elegance in a glass! It's very approachable [yet] refined and can be enjoyed with or without food," said Wright.

Under 10 kilometers to the northeast of Bodegas Muriel in Laguardia is Luis Alegre, which specializes in single-vineyard



Marsha Wright (right), wine director, Greek brands and bar brands, at DineAmic Hospitality, chats with SOMM Journal senior editor Kate Newton.

expressions of old-vine Tempranillo from high-altitude sites: In the case of the Parcela No. 5, the fruit was harvested from 45-year-old vines grown in the EU-protected Lagunas de Ruidera Natural Park at an elevation of 1,900 feet in mesohaline soils, characterized by salinity that's likewise present in the wine. The 2019 vintage was widely acclaimed in Rioja, with low yields and notable quality, and the Parcela No. 5 was no exception to the rule, boasting depth, structure, and freshness that emphasized its saline character threaded with notes of balsamic, cinnamon, red currant, and leather plus a touch of oak from 14 months of barrel aging. As a duo, Vermager found the Rioja wines to be the best pairing of the evening: "The seasonings, sauce, and lamb were all enhanced with both wines and the fruit in the wine was juicy and delicious," he said.

For Carranza, the Zinfandel was the "showstopper" of the evening: "Bold yet refined, this was a standout of the reds," he claimed. The family behind Ironstone Vineyards, the Kautzes, put down roots in Lodi in 1926 and started growing winegrapes to supply to area producers in 1968; 20 years later, they founded their own winery and have since expanded their vineyard holdings to roughly 7,000 acres in Lodi and the neighboring region of Sierra Foothills. With rich layers of blackberry, clove, licorice, black pepper, and vanilla on the nose and palate, this particular expression came from head-

trained vines planted in 1909 in sandy loam soils that yield wines of significant depth, concentration, and tannic structure, further accentuated by extended maceration and aging in French oak.

While each wine was indicative of its distinctive terroir, these vastly disparate parts formed an ensemble that was representative of Quintessential's greatest strengths—the most notable of which for Wright is exclusivity. "With the family-owned producers in the Quintessential portfolio, you can tell they value quality over quantity and take extreme pride in the wines they produce, and that's extremely important to me when I build lists for our restaurants," she said. For Carranza, its greatest asset is perhaps its diversity: "I really appreciate the thoughtful curation by Quintessential. Working with a portfolio that showcases such a wide range of varietals and family-owned producers is not only inspiring but also makes a meaningful difference to guests who are looking for authenticity and depth in their wine choices," he added. Miller went so far as to call the company a "one-stop shop," noting that "[Quintessential's] ability to work with generational family-owned wineries from the best growing regions all over the world gives our sales teams the confidence we need in an ever-changing market like Chicago." Ever-changing the city may be, but its love of a memorable meal—and exceptional wine to pair with it—springs eternal. **§**



“The No-Compromise Approach”

JORDAN VINEYARD & WINERY DOUBLES DOWN ON THE STYLE THAT MADE IT A CALIFORNIA ICON by Randy Caparoso

IN THE ANNALS of modern-day California Cabernet Sauvignon, there may be no producer that has achieved as much consistency of style and monumental success as Jordan Vineyard & Winery, starting with the release of its inaugural vintage—the groundbreaking 1976—49 years ago.

Brands come and brands go—more and more fantastic California Cabernet Sauvignons are produced each year—yet Jordan continues to hold its own. Through thick and thin, it's absolutely dominated the on-premise market as a fixture on fine-dining wine lists in every state of the Union for multiple reasons, some of which you may be surprised to learn.

First, sommeliers and restaurant buyers well know the sensory profile of a Jordan wine: It's a true medium-bodied Cabernet Sauvignon, never over-the-top “big” yet never exactly “light.” It has plenty of tannin and restrained oak (100% French oak since the 2015 vintage, to be exact) to bolster the palate feel, but more than any-

thing, it's driven by perceptible acidity. That has been the case for every vintage since the 1976, through all the phases of the category's evolution in the state—even when the most ultra-ripe, massively dense and oaky Cabernet Sauvignons grabbed all the accolades.

Restraint and acid balance, of course, are the hallmarks of a deliberately chosen style. It began when founders Tom and Sally Jordan purchased a 275-acre property on the Alexander Valley floor in 1972, adding another 1,300 acres on the current site of the Jordan estate two years later. The Jordans thought big, seeking to establish a winery producing estate-grown, Bordeaux-inspired Cabernet Sauvignons. Their original consultant, the legendary André Tchelistcheff, advised that this was certainly possible in the loamy alluvium soil of Alexander Valley.

The Jordan 1976 Cabernet Sauvignon, made with fruit assembled from more established vineyards in the AVA, imme-



PHOTOS COURTESY OF JORDAN VINEYARD & WINERY

diately stood out for its light, almost lean yet long and savory profile. Less lean was the entirely estate-grown 1977, but it fell in the same sensory vein, and the brand was off to the races: Restaurants across the country ate it up because the style not only was immediately accessible to guests but enhanced, rather than fought, virtually every dish, making it the perfect Cabernet for pairing.

The current Jordan Cabernet Sauvignon release, the 2021, is typical of the house in that it spent about a year in oak and



Jordan viticulturalist Brent Young, owner John Jordan, and winemaker Maggie Kruse.

another two years in bottle before its debut in May. Embodying the old saying “No wine served before its time,” the ’21 is far more layered and sumptuous than the earliest vintages of Jordan—it tastes of chocolate-covered black currant with dollops of cassis and just the lightest smidgen of peppery herbiness to remind you it’s Alexander Valley Cabernet Sauvignon—but the pervasive sensory quality, after all these decades, is its appreciable acidity, undiminished by restrained tannin and oak.

Wine, it is always said, is made in the vineyard, and it has never been any different for Jordan. Although Tom Jordan’s original vision called for 100% estate-grown and -bottled Cabernet Sauvignon, the last vintage to carry an “Estate Bottled” designation on the label was the 1993. Several factors led to the current makeup of the Cabernet Sauvignon, which hovers around 85% non-estate fruit, with the remaining 15% coming from the Jordan Estate.

In the mid-1990s, Jordan’s original plantings began to suffer from phylloxera, reducing both yield and quality. Rob Davis, who served as winemaker from Jordan’s founding until his retirement in 2019, began sourcing from vineyards elsewhere in Alexander Valley; meanwhile, in 1996, a new vineyard was established on the hillsides behind the winery.

When viticulturist Brent Young arrived in 2005, he immediately began implementing new soil-mapping technology while

taking a “deep dive,” as he puts it, into the right rootstocks and clonal selections for all the different soil types, taking a hard look at row direction as well as trellis and irrigation systems in both the estate sites and vineyards belonging to the winery’s grower-partners. As Davis was quoted at the time, “It was my mentor André Tchelistcheff who drummed into me the importance of soil. . . . Without great soil, we can’t produce great wines.”

That same year, the entire Jordan operation was taken over by Tom and Sally’s son, John, who assumed full ownership in 2007. Maggie Kruse, who began as an enologist in 2006 and was elevated to assistant winemaker in 2009 and head winemaker in 2019 upon Davis’ retirement, explains, “Twenty years ago, when John took over, we were given a mandate, which was simply to ‘improve quality.’ Out of necessity, Rob had already begun sourcing fruit from other vineyards. John just made it clear that the priority has to be to make better wine and don’t cut corners. Ask the same things every year—what are we doing to improve our fruit, our blends? It was, in fact, a matter of putting quality over estate.”

Young adds, “Farming is all about timing, projection, precision, and being proactive, not just reactive, to Mother Nature. Of course, we’ve seen it all: drought, heat spells, disease pressure, and more. The mandate we got was to think long term. This involves going back to organic

material to build up the health of soil and plants; the use of natural food-based fertilizers; planting cover crops between the rows; using three to five different rootstocks in the newly planted blocks; and selecting the clones that are not just right for each site but also give us the tannin structure and elegance that only enhances our established style of wine.”

In 2010 and 2011, the Jordan Estate vineyards ran up against yet another obstacle: a grapevine disease called red blotch. The industry would not actually diagnose the cause of this virus, which turns leaves red and debilitates growth, until 2016, but in 2018, the winery initiated another five-year project to replant its 118 estate acres of grapevines.

While Young notes that “it takes a good five years before you see the results of new plantings,” the future looks especially promising as the Jordan team begins to see yields from recently acquired sites such as the 40-acre Karlik Ranch property, also in Alexander Valley. “In 2021, we planted 28 new acres at Karlik,” explains Young. “There was existing Cabernet on the property, but [the vines] were old, tired, and full of virus. But the reason why we took it on is its amazing soils, largely cobbled sandy-loam soil. The advantage of sandy loam, even over our own hillside vineyards, is that the roots can go down 10 feet or deeper before reaching a hardpan. In most of our estate, we go just 26 inches before hitting rock or sandstone. In the great vineyards of Bordeaux, it’s all about the depth of root zones. We’re already seeing phenomenal results from this new site!”

Adds Kruse, “With the new and improved plantings coming onboard, I can see increasing estate fruit in our blends to maybe 25%, 30%, [in the] near future. The priority will always be increasing quality, and that’s going to come primarily from what we do in the vineyards. In the winery we’ve always taken the no-compromise approach. Nothing ends up in the final blend that doesn’t meet our standards. What doesn’t fit is declassified or sold, just like the grapes that are not up to snuff.

“The style of Jordan will remain the same. In fact, we will double down on it—elegant, balanced wines meant to go with food. This has been the key to Jordan’s success over the past 53 years. We’ll just continue to get better at it!” **SJ**



Jacob Gragg, Ca' del Bosco and portfolio wine senior manager for HERITA USA, and Tony Apostolakos, U.S. director at Masi Agricola, were the hosts of a recent dinner at the MICHELIN-starred Imperfecto in Washington, D.C.



CAPITOL CLASS

AT A DINNER IN WASHINGTON, D.C., **CA' DEL BOSCO** AND **MASI AGRICOLA** ANCHORED A STANDOUT EDUCATIONAL TASTING

story by STEFANIE SCHWALB *photos by* MICHAEL BUTCHER

Lars Leicht, VP of education for The SOMM Journal, with owner Brent Kroll and manager/sommelier Arthur Pescan of Maxwell Park and Pop Fizz Bar.



There was no better way to end the first day of the SommCon DC Summit than with a dinner specially prepared by chef Enrique Limardo at the MICHELIN-starred Imperfecto featuring Italian wines from the Veneto and Lombardy. Held on June 2, it was hosted by Tony Apostolakos, U.S. director at Masi Agricola, and Jacob Gragg, Ca' del Bosco and portfolio wine senior manager for HERITA USA (formerly Santa Margherita USA). An intimate group of sommeliers and wine buyers from the Washington, D.C., area gathered for the experience.

As the evening began, guests were greeted with a glass of Ca' del Bosco Cuvée Prestige Edizione 45 Extra Brut, the winery's flagship label. Ca' del Bosco is one of the oldest producers in Franciacorta, located in Lombardy almost equidistant between Verona and Milan at the foot of the Alps. Sourced from 218 certified-organic vineyards, the traditional-method multivintage blend contains Chardonnay, Pinot Bianco, and Pinot Noir; 68% of it is from 2020 and the remaining 32% from two other vintages. It features just 1 gram of residual sugar. "We're drinking wine mostly based on Chardonnay," said Gragg, "and it highlights what Franciacorta does best, which is showcase fruitiness without the need for much adulteration or almost any sweetness."



Carlos Boada, corporate beverage director, Seven Reasons Group (of which host restaurant Imperfecto is a part).

Next came a sampling of Ca' del Bosco's 2016 Annamaria Clementi Dosage Zéro Riserva, served alongside a starter of oyster and foie gras, fish tart, and mushroom soup. Gragg shared that the wine was created before the Franciacorta Riserva category was established—and even before the region became a DOCG—and it served as an inspiration to extend aging regulations. “In 1995, there were no laws pertaining to extended aging; they were written around this singular wine, which was named after the mother of Maurizio Zanella, who founded the winery when he was 17 years old,” he explained. Also a blend of Chardonnay, Pinot Noir, and Pinot Bianco, it's handpicked from certified-organic vineyards and undergoes oak fermentation, extended lees aging, and a patented oxygen-free disgorgement process with no additional dosage. This disgorgement process, which was invented in 2004, isn't the only innovation the winery has implemented in recent decades; Gragg also noted that, since 2013, every grape used in Ca' del Bosco's production is fully washed and dried before fermentation to preserve the wines' purity and expression.

For the final Ca' del Bosco wine of the evening, guests were treated to the 2015 Annamaria Clementi Rosé Extra Brut Riserva, paired with a crudo of local shrimp, cocktail sauce, zucchini, and caviar. Gragg described it as the winery's smallest-production wine, made only in select vintages; indeed, between 2003—the year of the wine's inception—and 2015, three vintages were skipped. Made entirely of hand-harvested Pinot Noir from three organic vineyards in the town of Erbusco where Ca' del Bosco is based, the wine is 100% fermented in barrel and undergoes an extended period of aging on the lees. Like the first wine we had tasted, it sees a small amount of dosage: 1 gram of sugar. “It's a very special wine,” said Gragg. “[In fact,] in 2015, we made just over 3,000 bottles of it, so we're literally drinking 2% of America's allocation.”

The focus then shifted east of Lake Garda in Lombardy to Valpolicella in Verona as Apostolakos introduced Masi Agricola, a seventh-generation family-owned winery that has just completed its 253rd vintage, and the four red wines he



had chosen to represent the region. The climate of Valpolicella, situated between Lake Garda and the Dolomites, plays a major role in the wines' character; he explained: “That whole area of Valpolicella is interesting because to the west you have Lake Garda, and to the north, they're skiing up in the Dolomites.” This incredible mix of thermal influences—cool alpine air from the mountains and warm breezes from the lake—creates a unique microclimate ideal for growing grapes.

Now in its seventh generation of family ownership, Masi Agricola has deep roots in the Veneto region; the Boscaini family has actually been making wine in Valpolicella since the 18th century. Apostolakos introduced Valpolicella's traditional trio of grapes, Corvina, Rondinella, and Molinara, by noting that they're collectively known as “the grandmother's recipe”—although, he added, “we don't use her kitchen,” meaning that production techniques have progressed substantially over the decades. The wine they yield, he further acknowledged, hasn't always had a stellar reputation. “Valpolicella on its own has a nice freshness, brightness, and good acidity, but it's not meant to be drunk for serious flavor,” he said. “One way to add intensity and complexity is by doing something called *appassimento*.” At Masi, this is done using bamboo racks and precise airflow techniques. While most people think the grapes are just being dried out, the pro-

cess actually changes them: As the water evaporates, the flavors get more concentrated, and the grapes develop deeper, more complex notes. “These grapes have thick skins and the ability to dry for a long time. They don't just dehydrate; they improve,” Apostolakos asserted. Historically, the technique led to the creation of Recioto, a sweet wine that eventually evolved to become Amarone in the 1950s. “The Venetians wanted to make a more interesting wine,” he explained, and did so by allowing the wine to fully ferment to dryness.

The first Masi wine poured was the 2020 Campofiorin Rosso Verona, paired with a risotto featuring artichokes, cacao nib mojito, and a cacio e pepe foam. First created in 1964, Campofiorin was developed as a bridge between Valpolicella and Amarone. It uses a double fermentation technique whereby the base wine is made from fresh grapes before a portion of semi-dried grapes is added for a second fermentation about six weeks later. “As producers, we needed a wine that could show a positive impression of the area,” Apostolakos explained. “This had ripeness, freshness, integrity, and drinkability. Campofiorin became a great wine that could expose the world to the potential of Valpolicella.” He noted that the wine became important for the winery and the region as a whole for that reason.



Two Amarones came next: the 2020 Costasera Amarone della Valpolicella Classico, paired with a squab duo of aged breast and confit leg, sweet potato aligot, truffle, and jus, and the 2018 Costasera Amarone della Valpolicella Classico Riserva, served with wagyu rib-eye from the Mishima Reserve program in a morel sauce. Apostolakos described Costasera as a label that sources fruit from five vineyards across five valleys overlooking Lake Garda. While both the Classico and the Riserva contain Corvina, Rondinella, and Molinara, the Riserva comes from a special selection of grapes—typically less than 5% of the fruit that goes into the standard Costasera Amarone. In addition, fruit for the Classico undergoes appassimento for 100 days while the Riserva fruit sees closer to 110 days. The longer they dry, the more complex the wine, according to Apostolakos. Both wines are aged in Slavonian oak barrels—the Classico for 28 months, the Riserva for 38–40 months. And finally, the Riserva also includes a small amount of Oseleta, a variety rediscovered by Masi owner Sandro Boscaini in the 1980s. “[In fact], he petitioned the Consortium, saying, ‘You must put this varietal back and have it as an optional grape,’” Apostolakos noted. “Today, producers use it to add structure, and some even replace Molinara with it.”



To end the evening, the 2019 Angelorum Recioto della Valpolicella Classico was served with Cacao 7, a layered dessert built around seven distinct chocolate elements, including a cacao cookie, sorbet, ganache, custard, a caramel tuile, a feuilletine crisp, and gelée. Made from Corvina, Rondinella, and Molinara and dried for about 100 days, the wine underwent a truncated fermentation to preserve the residual sugar, resulting in a wine with 14%–14.5%

alcohol. “We’re not drying them longer to get the sugar higher. We’re not doing a late harvest. We’re doing almost virtually the same technique [as for our table wines],” Apostolakos said. “But during the fermentation we will stop it, lower the temperature, and rack the wine, so the residual sugar is very high.” The result is a wine of balanced richness that’s ideal after dinner but also very impressive to drink on its own. “It’s got acidity and doesn’t have that slow, cloying sensation you get from a late harvest or ice wine,” noted Apostolakos.



Attendees were impressed by the whole experience. Thomas Delasko, general manager and sommelier at Via Sophia, praised the food pairings as “fantastic with Ca’ del Bosco” and called the Masi Riserva one of the most incredible Amarones he’s ever tasted. “It paired fantastically with the wagyu,” he added. Brent Kroll, owner of Maxwell Park and Pop Fizz Bar, emphasized the importance of mastering wines like these before exploring lesser-known Italian offerings: “These are classics in their regions and appellations, and they need to be learned before you get into obscure stuff that doesn’t have the same depth of history. They define what it means to take care of the grapes you’re growing and the place where you come from. These are the people doing it the right way.”



If It Ain't Broke . . .

DON'T UNDERESTIMATE WINE'S ABILITY TO TRANSCEND

IN MY FAVORITE little town in Central Italy, locals gathered at a lakeside restaurant on the last Saturday in August for an end-of-summer feast of Italian-style paella and mussels, accompanied by wine and sangria for those of age. There were about a hundred of us, ranging in age from 8 to 80. After dinner, our favorite sexagenarian DJ took command, and the night was accordingly danced away; everybody was on their feet, friends and family rocking to the beat of music from the '60s and '70s.

I've seen this phenomenon at weddings and other gatherings. Musical preferences and ages aside, people connect to the tunes of that era, especially at the right festive moment like a town party. They can't help but tap their feet, strum their fingers, and shake their collective asses. Technically, it's the sound of a specific time, but it still transcends generations.

The wine geek in me took that as an allegory for the current situation in our trade. The marketers, producers, sellers, and even somms among us are all wringing our hands and fretting about how to sell wine to the up-and-coming genera-

PHOTO: LARS LEICHT



Locals in a small Italian town gather for dinner and dancing.

Come Over October campaign started by my colleagues Karen MacNeil, Kimberly Charles, and Gino Colangelo is brilliant. My only critique is that it's limited to

tion. Young people aren't drinking wine, we're told; Ozempic and its counterparts are curbing diets and slowing consumption; we're communicating on the wrong channels. We need to change wine's image to keep up with the times.

And how did that work out for Cracker Barrel?

The doomsayers tell us that wine appeals mainly to boomers, but if they're leading the charge, guess what? Others will follow. Focus on the target: Set the table, lay out a good meal, pour some wine, and who wouldn't want to join in?

That's why, for example, I think the

a single month, but it's a start, a needed focus. Hopefully it inspires a return to giving wine its rightful place at the table, be it fine dining, a simple charcuterie board, a tuna sandwich, barbecue, or just snacks (all in moderation, of course). If that sounds like something that appeals especially to boomers, so what? Why ignore the biggest target audience and throw out the baby with the bathwater? So many in our industry are chasing rainbows when there are little pots of gold all around us.

So turn up the music, pop the cork, and let your hair down; if we let it, wine will connect the generations. **sj**



True Expressions of Languedoc

Domaine de Fabregues 2022 Le Coeur, Red Blend, Pezenas, Languedoc (\$45)

A blend of 80% Syrah and 20% Carignan, this is more flavorful and complex than many Rhône wines costing considerably more. Truly full-bodied but neither over ripened, oaked, or extracted, this is very impactful on the palate without being overbearing. Fruit notes recalling dark berries and cherries are accented with undertones of spices and wild herbs are firm by abundant but fine-grained tannins. ***Very impressive.***



CONTINENT WINES INC. • JOHN WADDELL

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BLACK PHARO

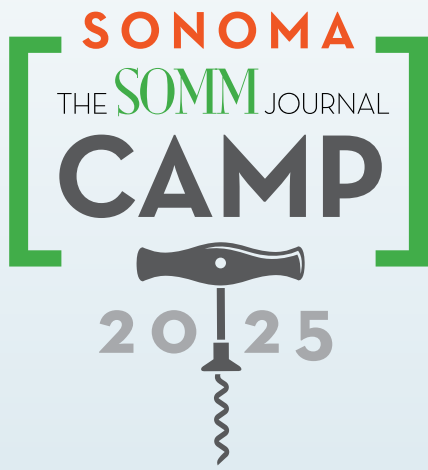
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Edan Ballantine, VP of operations, Americas, Hyatt Hotels
Elna Brager, owner, CellarFiller, Atlanta, GA
Jenny Carr, senior corporate director, food and beverage operations, Davidson Hospitality
Krishna Chapatwala, owner, Wine Shoe, Atlanta, GA
Carlos Cisneros, sommelier/beverage director, Bocca Ristorante, Bistro 218, and Sloane's Whiskey Bar, Birmingham, AL
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Daniel Gauthier, food and beverage director, Kona Village, A Rosewood Resort, Kona, HI
Lance Goldberg, wine buyer, GourmetPhile, Boca Raton, FL
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Tony Pecoraro, beverage director, Gleneagles Country Club, Dallas, TX
Arthur Pescan, manager/sommelier, Maxwell Park and Pop Fizz Bar, Washington, D.C.
Stevie Raeann, beverage manager, Chef Carter Concepts, Phoenix, AZ
Shannon Saulsbury, wine and saké program manager, Flagship Restaurant Group

PHOTO: ALEXANDER RUBIN



Attendees of our 2025 Sonoma SOMM Camp, pictured here at Rodney Strong Vineyards' Rockaway Vineyard in the Alexander Valley, came from all over the country to learn about the wines of not only Sonoma but also Victoria, Australia.



Attendees raise a toast to the first day of Sonoma SOMM Camp at Rodney Strong's Rockaway Vineyard in the Alexander Valley.

Future PROOFING

HOW **RODNEY STRONG VINEYARDS**
REACHES NEW HEIGHTS IN VINEYARD
MANAGEMENT AND WINEMAKING

story by **LARS LEICHT** photos by **ALEXANDER RUBIN**

IF THE SOMM CAMPERS NEEDED A PRIMER ON THE SOMETIMES EXTREME TERROIR of Sonoma County, the ride to our first dinner together was lesson enough. The road up to Rodney Strong's Rockaway Vineyard was so steep that our bus stalled out. The driver restarted the engine and brought us to the drop-off point, but the climb wasn't over for us; we continued on foot to the ledge where dinner would eventually be served before taking a flight of steps that brought us to the peak of Rockaway 750 feet above sea level. From this eastern slope of Alexander Valley just above Geyserville, we enjoyed a commanding view of the surrounding vineyards and the Russian River. Far in the distance, the fog was starting to roll in, pushing a cool breeze ahead of it. Justin Seidenfeld, Rodney Strong's senior vice president of winemaking and winegrowing, called it a "natural air conditioner."



Justin Seidenfeld (center), Rodney Strong's senior vice president of winemaking and winegrowing, with campers Elina Brager, owner of CellarFiller in Atlanta, GA, and Edan Ballantine, VP of operations, Americas, at Hyatt Hotels.

The 124-acre vineyard sits between Rodney Strong's two other Alexander Valley properties: Alexander's Crown to the south, the source of the Valley's first single-vineyard wine, and Brothers Vineyard to the north. Seidenfeld pointed out that the positioning of the three plots allows for a "kind of master class, if you will, in what terroir is. [The wines they produce] are all 100% Cabernet, all made in the exact same way, yet taste totally different because of the place that they're grown."

Camper Shannon Saulsbury, wine and saké program manager for Flagship Restaurant Group, noted that "while Rodney Strong is largely responsible for putting Alexander Valley on the map, the addition of the Rockaway Vineyard to the [winery's] portfolio is like zooming in on that map to one heavenly (and high-up) hill."

Rodney Strong replanted Rockaway in 2021. "Everything you see is pretty much brand-new," Seidenfeld said. "We're actu-

ally going to get our first full crop this year." In the vineyard makeover, he employed what he called "the most state-of-the-art farming practices that exist in the world today," including innovations created by the Rodney Strong team. They studied what he called the "sweet spot of vine spacing" as well as root-stock selection, soil-ripping depth, and mechanical weed control. Most significantly, they installed specialized irrigation systems that manage water application on a block-by-block basis. Sensors in the soil as well as on the canopy measure the humidity surrounding each vine to determine which ones need additional water and when. Avoiding blanket irrigation cuts water usage in half, which, on an estate-wide basis, accounts for saving hundreds of thousands of gallons at a time when water is at a premium, Seidenfeld pointed out: "We're doing more with less."

Saulsbury agreed that besides sustainability, the irrigation systems "also provide

the added service of stressing the vines at a precise level for desired complexity. For domestically produced Cabernet Sauvignon, complexity and concentration are paramount."

Seidenfeld emphasized that, in addition to having an immediate impact on the quality of the wines, the systems used in the vineyard are helping Rodney Strong to prepare for the future. "As technology and programming continue to get better, with the infrastructure we've installed, we've future-proofed our sites," he said. "We might not be perfect today, but . . . as we learn more, as we get better software and better tools . . . we'll get our vineyards to be even more efficient and make better-quality wines than we have today." He called it a "Winnie-the-Pooh philosophy: You get to where you're going by walking away from where you've been. Our process is not to be perfect today, but it is about always walking toward perfection. We'll never achieve it, but we're always going to pursue it with



Rodney Strong senior vice president of global sales and marketing Anthony “AC” Capobianco greets the group.



an open mind of learning and clear-set goals to produce wines of purpose that surprise and delight.”

When we descended from the mountaintop, so to speak, a veritable feast awaited us. Rodney Strong’s **2023 Chalk Hill Chardonnay** was served with a refreshing watermelon and cucumber salad topped with mint, chili flakes, cotija, pepitas, and grilled lime. Meanwhile, its **2019 Rockaway Cabernet Sauvignon** and **2022 Reserve Pinot Noir**, also a single-vineyard bottling, showed off their bright fruit flavors, balanced acidity, and

moderate alcohol content alongside six-hour pulled pork and chimichurri-marinated flank steak, accompanied by red jacket potato salad and grilled corn on the cob.

Then came the star of the evening: a 6-liter imperial of the **2012 Rockaway Vineyard Cabernet** that was delicious and certainly in its prime, being surprisingly fresh for a 13-year-old wine.

Thomas Delasko, general manager and sommelier at Via Sophia in Washington, D.C.’s Hamilton Hotel, called the dinner “unforgettable” and “one of the stand-

out highlights” of Sonoma SOMM Camp: “The food, the wine, and the panoramic vineyard views came together for a truly first-rate experience.” Carlos Cisneros, sommelier and beverage director at Bocca Ristorante, Bistro 218, and Sloane’s Whiskey Bar in Birmingham, Alabama, also described the evening as a highlight of the trip: “There was something about having dinner outside while drinking the wines—being able to smell the air, feel the warmth of the sun, and experience everything that the vines do felt very harmonized. It was a very special moment; as I sipped my wine and looked at our surroundings, I thought, ‘Wow, this is Sonoma!’”

Arthur Pescan, manager/sommelier at Maxwell Park and Pop Fizz Bar in Washington, D.C., agreed that after “a day of travel, Rodney Strong was the perfect setting to establish our sense of place. For a trip centered on Sonoma County, the evening allowed us to feel instantly a part of that story.” And Lance Goldberg, wine buyer at Boca Raton, Florida, wine shop GourmetPhile, called the evening “nothing short of mesmerizing.”

As rather decadent bites of crème brûlée–ricotta–lemon cheesecake and chocolate cake were served, we were treated to a sweeping amber sunset across Alexander Valley. The evening was literally downhill from there as we descended into the Valley and headed off to dream of the lessons and treats that awaited us at the rest of SOMM Camp.



Copper Cane Wines & Spirits director of fruit supply Matt Heil, Paul Hobbs director of winemaking Jeremiah Timm, Benziger Family Winery vintner Chris Benziger, DeLoach Vineyards VP of winemaking Brian Maloney, Handpicked Wines market manager Adam Dromi, Legend Imports owner Jane Lopes, and SOMM Journal VP of education/moderator Lars Leicht.

Cool

AS COULD BE

AT DE LOACH VINEYARDS, WE EXPLORED
 THE IMPACT OF CLIMATE ON THE WINES OF
SONOMA COUNTY AND VICTORIA, AUSTRALIA

story by RUTH TOBIAS photos by ALEXANDER RUBIN

Kicking off the first seminar of SOMM Camp, "Crossing Borders and Common Threads: A Comparative Tasting of Cool-Climate Wines From Sonoma County and Victoria, Australia," SOMM Journal VP of education and moderator Lars Leicht made a seemingly simple point that nonetheless clearly resonated with our audience at host winery DeLoach Vineyards: "Similar' means 'different.' ... And that's what we're going to see in the glass today."

At times in recent history, both California and Australia have been pigeonholed as producers of big, broad, even bombastic wines. But that overgeneralization doesn't account for—well, a lot of things, including relatively cool growing regions like Sonoma and Victoria; as guest Shannon Saulsbury, wine and saké program manager for the multistate Flagship Restaurant Group, put it, "If you are a lover of restrained, complex, and refreshing wines, the wines of Victoria and Sonoma ought to delight you all the same."



Presenting Benziger Family Winery's **2022 West Rows Chardonnay** from the Sangiacomo Vineyard in Los Carneros—which Saulsbury called “opulent and concentrated with crispy

Bartlett pear notes, some cedar and spice, and jaw-clenching lemon-curd acidity”—vintner Chris Benziger explained what makes the subregion special. “In Carneros, the fog comes in June, July, and August and parks itself there,” he said, leading to longer hang times during which “the acid kind of hovers; it doesn't really fall [even as] the fruit ripens. . . . The acid is staying alive,” allowing it to balance out the richness imparted by barrel fermentation (“We don't want Château Two-by-Four,” he joked) and lees aging with regular bâtonnage.



Also “showcas[ing] Sonoma's richness along with beautiful minerality,” in the words of Dallas-based wine expert Nicole Haarklau, was the Paul Hobbs **2022**

Chardonnay from the Russian River Valley. In addition to “relying on the coastal influence from the Pacific Ocean to slow down the ripening,” noted director of winemaking Jeremiah Timm, “we're selecting sites that are [set on] predominantly Goldridge soil. Why that's really important to Sonoma County is because Goldridge soil has nice drainage; it is a fairly fine soil. So it [also] gives you slow ripening conditions . . . that give us this beautiful concentration of flavor,” from grilled lemon to almond blossom to sea breeze.



Representing Attwoods in Victoria subregion Macedon Ranges, Legend Imports owner Jane Lopes recounted, “I texted [wine-maker] Troy [Walsh] yesterday and said, ‘Anything you

really want me to get across?’ He said, ‘It's cold. It's cold here. It's very cold.’ In fact, she added, it's Australia's coldest growing zone outside of Tasmania: During this year's harvest, while “other cool-climate regions were picking in the beginning of February, Macedon was just starting to go through veraison.” Accordingly, about 90% of its 245 vineyard acres are planted to Burgundian varieties, the latter of which we tasted in the form of Attwoods' **2023 Glenlyon Estate Chardonnay**, a linear and lovely expression of green orchard fruits and just-ripe nectarine as well as more luscious “white chocolate, jasmine, and preserved lemon,” in Lopes' words.



SOMM Campers gathered for the seminar at DeLoach Vineyards in the Sonoma County town of Santa Rosa.



Maloney presented two wines.



As VP of winemaking for DeLoach Vineyards, Brian Maloney introduced the first of two wines he was presenting, the **2021 Estate Pinot Noir** from the Russian River Valley—spe-

cifically the piece of property we were sitting on. “Where we’re located here is an area that we call the Olivet Bench,” he explained, a “natural uplift” set on shallow Huichica clay loam mixed with volcanic soils that original winery owner Cecil DeLoach planted to Pinot Noir way back in the 1970s; it has since been replanted and converted to organic and biodynamic farming under the current leadership of Jean-Charles Boisset. Enjoying “a very long, gradual growing season,” the vintage offered what Maloney described as “definitely that earthy element” as well as “brambly, dusty raspberry [that] I think is very distinct to this site in particular.”



The Russian River Valley-based Dairyman Vineyard, the source of Belle Glos’ **2022 Dairyman Pinot Noir**, is also set on shallow soils of sedimentary and volcanic origin—but, ac-

ording to Copper Cane Wines & Spirits director of fruit supply Matt Heil, “It’s a very fertile site . . . [with] pretty good

rainfall; we irrigate only as necessary.” He credited that terroir with imparting “richness and depth and structure” to the wine, full of blueberry, blackberry, and forest-floor notes, while noting that brand founder Joe Wagner’s implementation of cryoextraction prior to fermentation to preserve color and flavor and use of 60% new French oak also play a role in achieving the intensity he seeks. To balance it, Heil pointed out, “Sonoma County carries acidity really, really well.”



Handpicked Wines market manager Adam Dromi introduced the winery’s **2021 Wombat Creek Pinot Noir** with a charming description of the certified-organic source vineyard:

The highest in the Victoria subregion of Yarra Valley at 1,378 feet above sea level, it’s frequently visited by deer, kangaroos big enough to block roadways, and the namesake marsupials, which have special access to the site via “wombat doors.” It also sees occasional snowfall, Dromi noted by way of burnishing its cool-climate bona fides, as indicated by the juicy yet beautifully restrained Pinot it yields;



Representing the Victorian contingent, Wine Victoria U.S. program manager Kate Kriven explained to the audience, “We’re here to show that Victoria—Australia’s coolest mainland state—produces world-class wines, with a particular strength in elegant cool-climate varieties.”

hand-sorted and partially destemmed, the fruit for this vintage underwent fermentation in stainless steel to result in what he referred to as a “beautiful mixture of cherries, a bit of Campari, and some herbaceousness” as well as “pomegranate and rooibos tea,” in the opinion of camper Arthur Pescan, manager/sommelier at Maxwell Park and Pop Fizz Bar in Washington, D.C. To the question he sometimes receives from buyers—“Why should I care about Australian Pinot Noir?”—Dromi had a ready answer: “Everyone always thinks of Australia as Shiraz, but . . . there is amazing Pinot Noir; [consumers] trust you guys to show them something new and different and unique.”



Returning to present DeLoach’s **2021 Maffei Vineyard Zinfandel**, sourced from vines planted in 1937, Brian Maloney acknowledged that “Zinfandel has become a variety that

has been more associated with warmer climates across California. But to me, its origins, especially when we talk about the great wines of California, really come through in places like this, here in the center of the Russian River Valley,” where the grape represents “part of our history. It shows a different profile when you grow it in a cool-climate region. . . . It isn’t just prune juice. It isn’t just strawberry jam. It actually has a fresh vibrancy [and] higher-toned aromatics.” Agreed guest Edan Ballantine, VP of operations, Americas, for Hyatt Hotels, “Zinfandel seems to be making a sneaky comeback, and it was great to see it made in a style less robust than it was in the early 2000s.”

Perhaps even more than an in-depth look at their respective terroir, Pescan mused later, the seminar provided “insight into the dedication of these winemakers and growers. [Coming from] opposite sides of the world, they all shared a common language in care for their craft.” That care would be highlighted in the seminars yet to come—read on for details.

Panelists Tom Rochioli of Rochioli Vineyards and Winery; Ferrari-Carano winemaker Rebecka Deike; Ryan Rochioli; Kim Chalmers of Chalmers Wines; Legend Imports owner Jane Lopes; Balverne Estate winemaker Molly Lippitt; Gallo senior director of winemaking Michael Eddy-Cort; and J Vineyards senior winemaker Laura Fontaine with moderator Lars Leicht, VP of education for The SOMM Journal.



“Grown, Not Made”

EXPLORING THE INGREDIENTS OF TERROIR-DRIVEN WINES AT **MACMURRAY RANCH**

story by *Jonathan Cristaldi* / photos by *Alexander Rubin*

On a sweltering day in late July, SOMM Campers gathered in the historic barn at MacMurray Ranch in the Russian River Valley for the “Tapestry of Terroir: From Sustainability to Soil” seminar. Despite the heat, the wines from both Sonoma County and Victoria, Australia, showed beautifully; I’d encourage buyers to seek them out for their on- and off-premise programs.

Presenting the **Attwoods 2019 Moorabool Pinot Noir** from the Geelong subregion of Victoria, Legend Imports owner Jane Lopes explained that “the Moorabool Valley is slightly inland from the sea, with heat spikes and diurnal shifts more typical of a continental climate. [It’s] known for robust Chardonnay and Syrah” as well as Pinot Noir like the incredibly aromatic, medium-bodied version we tasted, which offered notes of Earl Grey tea, black truffle, rich earth, wild herbs,

and Chinese five-spice along with a meaty, fleshy richness.

Father-and-son team Tom and Ryan Rochioli reflected on their family’s farming history, which dates back to 1938, emphasizing their longstanding commitment to sustainability. “We didn’t make it 88 years without being sustainable,” Tom remarked, adding that the **Rochioli Vineyards 2023 Russian River Valley Pinot Noir** is a blend from “across our estate, spanning elevations from the Russian River up to 240 feet. . . . We have heirloom clones of Pinot Noir, and that alone reflects our family’s philosophy of serious farming.”

“Our vines are within a few hundred feet of the river; coastal breezes [also] influence our sites, and the wines are marked by high natural acidity,” said Ryan, who now oversees winemaking and “has

the freedom to shape the estate’s style,” according to Tom. That style showed in the wine’s tart red berry fruit, framed by baking spices of allspice and clove, blood-orange acidity, and supple tannins followed by a spicy, juicy finish.

Ferrari-Carano winemaker Rebecka Deike described how the certified-sustainable estate straddles Alexander Valley and Knights Valley, where western exposure provides “warmth that ripens Cabernet Sauvignon Clone 8, the last grapes harvested each year.” Its 1,200 acres of vines are widely spaced, “allowing dappled light on the fruit,” she explained, “while the ancient decomposed sandstone and gravelly loam soils impart vigor, concentration of flavor, and naturally robust tannins”; all that natural vigor means “no additions are needed to achieve color and structure.”

The **Ferrari-Carano 2021 Prevail West Face Red** from Alexander Valley she presented was rich and muscular, deep and minerally, with dark berry fruit and firm, chalky tannins. The blend of 67% Cabernet Sauvignon and 33% Syrah was sourced entirely from Blocks 20 and 22, which Deike regards as highly site-reflective.

Ravenswood founder Joel Peterson was among the first to prove that Zinfandel could yield world-class, site-driven wines instead of just jammy, rustic ones. Gallo senior director of winemaking Michael Eddy-Cort described the relaunch of the brand this past spring and his team's focus on making three single-vineyard Zins from MacMurray Ranch, Monte Rosso in the Moon Mountain District, and Teldeschi in the Dry Creek Valley. He stressed that brambly fruit and spice are the variety's hallmarks, while terroir can accentuate its acidity and amplify its spice character in the form of green peppercorn or black pepper. The **Ravenswood 2023 MacMurray Vineyard Zinfandel** displayed the latter along with bright red and dark fruit and cedar-spice intensity.

J Vineyards senior winemaker Laura Fontaine highlighted the Russian River Valley's diversity of soils and microclimates, crediting estate founder Judy Jordan's geological training as inspiration for the winery's entire ethos. "She [had] an acute awareness of . . . how those factors influence grape character," said Fontaine.

Twenty percent of the base wine for the **J Vineyards Cuvée 20** from the Russian River Valley came from MacMur-

ray Ranch, with its clay loam and sandy soils, while the majority was sourced from Sebastopol Hills, where cooler conditions extend harvest by nearly two weeks and preserve acidity. Composed of 50/50 Chardonnay and Pinot Noir, the wine aged five years en tirage, with some neutral oak adding creaminess to its fresh profile of ripe orchard fruit, baking spice, saline mineral tension, white flowers, and impressive acid-driven length.

With a 198-acre estate in the Heathcote subregion of Victoria, which is relatively warm, Chalmers Wines specializes in importing and trialing Mediterranean varieties such as Fiano, Pecorino, and Nebbiolo—many of which remain rare in Australia. It has been credited with transforming alternative-variety viticulture in the country.

Of the **Chalmers 2023 Vermentino**, managing director Kim Chalmers shared that her family pioneered the grape in Australia, producing the first bottling in 2004. "Vermentino thrives in sunshine," she noted, "and at Chalmers it is made with no acid adjustment; lees aging [is] used to translate the land directly into the glass." Light- to medium-bodied and highly expressive, the crisp, chalky wine was laser-focused with candied minerality (sea spray, oyster shell); lemon and lime zest; tangerine oil; and white flowers.

Balverne Estate's wines are sourced entirely from its 710-acre sibling, Notre Vue Estate, 350 acres of which are permanently protected as "Forever Wild" open space that Balverne winemaker Molly

Lippitt described in vivid detail—from the owl and hawk boxes to the irrigation ponds that support the winery's sustainability efforts. Situated at the warmer end of Russian River Valley and cooler end of Chalk Hill, its 250 planted acres "yield fruit with excellent texture," said Lippitt.

To preserve that texture while highlighting freshness and minerality, the **Balverne Estate 2024 Chalk Hill Sauvignon Blanc** was fermented in stainless steel and aged in neutral puncheons. Bright citrus and tropical fruit aromatics segued into a palate that recalled grapefruit and honeyed lemon, underscored by a touch of lemongrass and a crisp, saline clarity that captured the terroir.

During the Q&A, an attendee asked Lippitt about the challenges of growing Sauvignon Blanc in California. "We do our job best when we get out of the way and let the grapes show their quality," she said. "If you get the farming right and you let the winemaking be transparent, you'll have success."

On the topic of steering young people of drinking age toward wine, Kim Chalmers added her perspective: "We can't assume [they] want to come on the same wine journey we have. It's our responsibility to deliver wines at an approachable \$18–\$22 price point to tell our story. Wine is agriculture, not a factory product. People want to know where things come from—the beef they eat, the fibers in their shirts. Wine is the same: It's grown, not made, and sharing that story is part of bringing the next generation in."



Panelists Chris Armstrong, national sales manager for Fowles Wine; Marimar Torres, owner of Marimar Estate; Ram's Gate general manager/director of winemaking Joe Nielsen; Lisa Lambertus, North American manager for the Rathbone Wine Group; Tom Gendall, director of winemaking and viticulture at Cline Family Cellars; and Morét Brealynn Chavez, owner of Morét-Brealynn, with moderator Maeve Pesquera, marketing officer/executive vice president, luxury, for O'Neill Vintners and Distillers.



The Authenticity OF AWARENESS

AT RAM'S GATE WINERY, FIVE PRODUCERS SHOWED HOW THEY'RE MAKING A REAL ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT

story by **STACY BRISCOE** photos by **ALEXANDER RUBIN**

In an industry where the word “sustainability” has become white noise, it’s a breath of fresh air to find winemakers for whom the term has substantial meaning. “What is that definition?” Maeve Pesquera, marketing officer/executive vice president, luxury, for O’Neill Vintners and Distillers, asked the audience as she kicked off our seminar “Contributions to Sustainability and the Effect on the Wines,” hosted by Ram’s Gate Winery. “What does it mean to that person at your restaurant or wine shop?” We met five producers from Sonoma County and Victoria, Australia, who were able to guide us toward answering these questions.

“It’s a slower but more meaningful way toward success,” said Ram’s Gate general manager/director of winemaking Joe Nielsen, framed by the backdrop of the estate’s soon-to-be Regenerative Organic Certified vines. “Wine is a luxury; as a result, we should be more thoughtful and more meaningful in our practice. We’re not just trying to make great



Breck O'Neill is executive vice president, business development, at O'Neill Vintners and Distillers, which owns Ram's Gate.



wines for today—we're trying to be the best keepers of our land while we have it."

Ram's Gate has held the Certified Sustainable Vineyard designation from the California Association of Winegrape Growers and the Wine Institute since 2018; with proprietor Joe O'Neill of O'Neill Vintners and Distillers at the helm alongside the company's head of sustainability, Caine Thompson, it has also achieved both organic and regenerative farming certifications. Practices such as eliminating synthetic inputs, introducing sheep as natural lawnmowers, and reducing water usage have allowed its vines to become more resilient toward pest, disease, and climate pressures. The latest, most ambitious initiative is the integration of agroforestry: Planting fruit trees within the trellises further enhances biodiversity, improves the soil's water- and nutrient-holding capacity, and will—once the trees are old enough to bear fruit—provide produce to the winery's culinary program.

The two wines Nielsen presented during the seminar were a testament to the hard work done in the vineyard. Both exhibited full fruit ripeness—the **2023 Hyde Vineyard Chardonnay** boasted fleshy stone-fruit character while the **2022 Bush Crispo Vineyard Pinot Noir** offered strong aromas of warm cherry compote—yet they also displayed a naturally high level of vivacious acidity in conjunction with modest alcohol, giving them the potential to age with grace for decades.

"For me, sustainability is embodying the quote, 'The best fertilizer is the winemaker's footprints,'" said Morét Brealynn Chavez as she presented the **Morét-Brealynn 2024 Russian River Valley Pinot Noir**. "To me, [the vineyard] is where the wine is made." Chavez's eponymous boutique label epitomizes the efforts of small brands in the sustainable space—but big or small, every business matters when it comes to truly transforming the wine industry. "We can't affect change just one of us; it's [got to be] all of us," said Nielsen. And that's certainly true in Sonoma County, where 99% of vintners across the approximately 60,000 acres of vineyard are certified sustainable.

Tom Gendall, director of winemaking and viticulture at Cline Family Cellars, noted that for the multigenerational business, the concept of sustainability is personal.

"Founder Fred Cline started farming sustainably before there was even a certification for it," said Gendall. "He has seven children who grew up running around the vineyards where, at one point, they were spraying pesticides, herbicides, and other chemicals." The realization of what he was exposing his family to motivated Fred to transition toward more healthful farming and winemaking.

Today, the only spray utilized at Cline is sulfur dust, which is approved by many major third-party sustainability-certifying bodies. What that means for grape and wine quality, said Gendall, is that vines produce lower yields of berries with thicker skins and a deeper concentration of flavors—leading to a more flavorsome final wine, as displayed by the rich, full-bodied **2023 Hat Strap Chardonnay**.

Marimar Torres of Marimar Estate in Sonoma's Green Valley of Russian River Valley AVA shared her **2024 Don Miguel Vineyard Godello**—a somewhat under-the-radar variety, particularly in the States. Torres spoke of the region's challengingly



humid environment: Though her property was initially certified organic, she found that the inefficiency of approved sprays required several tractor passes throughout the season, significantly increasing CO₂ emissions. She has since focused instead on regenerative farming—implementing permanent cover crops, reducing tilling, and introducing biodiversity. The result, she said, is “healthier soils, healthier vines, better wines.”

Torres' success in this regard also comes from choosing the right varieties for the environment. Beyond the usual suspects, Pinot Noir and Chardonnay, Torres celebrates grapes from her native Spain, including Godello. “It’s from the Valdeorras region of Galicia in northwest Spain,” she explained, commenting that the climatic conditions there parallel those of her Sonoma vineyard. In the glass, it displayed aromatic similarities to the floral Albariño while presenting a ripe, citrus-forward palate: Meyer lemon, grapefruit, blood orange.



From the Land Down Under

“Our owner, Matt Fowles, does all his farming in nature’s image,” said Chris Armstrong, national sales manager for Fowles Wine in Strathbogie Ranges, a little-known GI in the high elevations of Victoria. Here, Armstrong noted, regenerative agriculture has proven the key to combating the two most prevalent challenges in the field: water shortage and moth infestation.

For the former, keeping a constant cover crop of native plants, which enhances the porosity of the soil, is key. “We work with a local arboretum to figure out which natives do what in terms of attracting specific beneficial insects or adding specific nutrients back into the ground,” he said. For the latter, he added,



Pesquera with campers Thomas Delasko, GM/sommelier at Via Sophia in Washington, D.C., and Tony Pecoraro, beverage director at Gleneagles Country Club in Dallas, TX.

the vineyard has its own natural defense mechanism: “We have old eucalyptus trees around the perimeter of one side of the vineyard, and we noticed that side didn’t have moth pressure.” Expert consultants revealed that these trees are a habitat for microbats, natural moth predators. Today,

Fowles, winemaker Matt Harrop, and their team are conducting several in-field experiments to increase the reach of those microbats throughout the property.

Armstrong presented Fowles’ **2023 Ladies Who Shoot Their Lunch Estate Riesling**. “[The name] is meant to reflect a story of provenance,” he said, “knowing where your food is coming from” (Fowles is a hunter as well as a

farmer). In this case, where the wine comes from is a strong vineyard with a healthy yeast population, allowing Harrop to wild-ferment his wines successfully. This, along with gentle micro-oxidation from large-format French oak and lees aging, results in a Riesling with a rounded palate well set against the variety’s naturally spiky acidity.

Representing Victoria’s Grampians region, Lisa Lambertus, North American manager for the Rathbone Wine Group, shared the complete antithesis to the stereotypical jammy Aussie Shiraz. Mount Langi Ghiran’s **2022 Talus Shiraz** was a Northern Rhône–like expression complete with black pepper and floral undertones. Both climate and clone can be thanked for that: “We’re a very cold

region. When all of Australia is done with harvest, three weeks later we’ll start,” said Lambertus, adding, “Our Shiraz, planted back in 1969, is a rare clone called the Swiss clone; today, every vine is propagated from [the] original old block.”

The estate was established in the 1960s, when, according to Lambertus, a surge of boutique wineries throughout Australia coincided with the era’s “back to the land” movement. “Langi was environmentally focused right away,” she said. Everything from varietal selection to vine spacing and trellising choices were based on minimal-intervention farming. “We don’t introduce anything foreign into the property—everything that’s there was there from the start.”

In contrast to Sonoma, Lambertus noted that only 50% of Australian wineries are certified sustainable. “There’s a lot of progress to be made,” she said.

Body and Soul

Wine merchant André Simon once said, “Wine is a ghost, food is a skeleton; when you bring them together, it’s body and soul.” Added *SOMM Journal* vice president of education Lars Leicht, who served as co-moderator, “You want to keep your body and soul healthy? You have to start with healthy wines.”

This is what all panelists agreed is becoming an increasingly important message to consumers: Wine *can* be healthy—when the proper steps are taken in the field, cellar, and bottle. “When it comes to the consumer, they care more about authenticity,” said Nielsen. “Authenticity is powerful and compelling. And the truth is, this is hard work, but the result is better wines.”

BEAR HUGS AND WARM EMBRACES

AT BANSHEE WINERY, WE ASSESSED THE
EFFECT OF TERROIR ON WINE STYLE

STORY BY RUTH TOBIAS
PHOTOS BY ALEXANDER RUBIN

Francis Ford Coppola winemaker Evan Schiff, Roth Estate winemaker Henry de Lambert, Merry Edwards winemaker Heidi von der Mehden, Chalk Hill Estate Vineyards winemaker Darrell Holbrook, Handpicked Wines market manager Adam Dromi, Banshee winemaker Jake Lachowitz, Herzog Wine Cellars winemaker David Galzignato, Chalmers Wines managing director Kim Chalmers, and SOMM Journal VP of education/moderator Lars Leicht.

PRODUCERS OFTEN REFER (AND DEFER) to their house style, but what does that mean exactly? By way of introduction to “Style Mavens: How Flavor Profiles Are Influenced by the Region’s Varied Microclimates and Elevations,” hosted by Banshee winery in the Alexander Valley town of Geyserville, moderator Lars Leicht, *The SOMM Journal*’s VP of education, acknowledged that the question is a tricky one: “Winemakers can influence style a little bit by their techniques in the winery, but what they can’t hide is the terroir.” With eight panelists from Sonoma County and Victoria, Australia, lined up for the seminar, he added, “We’re going to talk about . . . what the style of their wine is, where that comes from, and how it shows in the glass.”

Galzignato samples a white alongside Chalmers and Leicht.



Schiff presented Francis Ford Coppola's 2022 Archimedes Cabernet Sauvignon from the Alexander Valley.



Chalk Hill Estate Vineyards wine-maker Darrell Holbrook got right to it, claiming, "I'm very much a naturalist... I want the terroir to make the wine. I don't want to change [it]; I want to guide it

in the direction that it wants to go." Noting that the 1,300-acre estate has a lot of "white, chalky, volcanic ash embedded into the soil," he explained, "This is a type of quartz that lends very well to white varieties, [which] absorb that minerality. So for me, that's a good aspect of the terroir to use." Barrel fermented with native yeast, unfinned, and unfiltered, the **2023 Chalk Hill Estate Chardonnay**—which includes the producer's namesake proprietary clone—indeed boasted a mineral streak that cut through creamy sensations of "apples, pears, peaches, [and] a little bit of brioche," in Holbrook's words.

With Australian Chardonnay, said Adam Dromi, market manager for Handpicked Wines in the Victoria subregion of Yarra Valley, "You really have the full spectrum... from that big, oaky, buttery style to that crisp, high-acid, Chablis-esque character." Coming from a "very fertile" vineyard with "a lot of undulating hills [and] microclimates" that, he added, is also



home to a lot of varieties—from Pinot Noir to Shiraz to Nebbiolo—the winery's vibrant **2021 Highbow Hill Chardonnay** lands somewhere in the middle, with what camper Shannon Sauls-

bury, wine and saké program manager for the Flagship Restaurant Group, called both "laser-focused acidity and a white chocolate-macadamia nut confectionary backbone." In that way, asserted Dromi, it, like all of Handpicked's wines, "speaks of the place": Terroir-driven winemaking is "what our story is, and we'll stay true to it."



wine by sources in three different AVAs, which "makes it really fun when you sit

Presenting Ban-shee's pretty, cherry- and raspberry-fruit-ed **2023 Sonoma County Pinot Noir**, winemaker Jake Lachowitz emphasized the distinct contributions made to the

down and start blending." The Russian River Valley's "big diurnal shift... really helps with phenolic development but still retains your acid presence," he said, while the winds of the Petaluma Gap are responsible for "thicker skins" that translate into "plum skin and dark cherry characteristics." Finally, fruit from the "much cooler" Sonoma Coast "tends to be a little more intense, more savory, [and] minerality-driven."



Merry Edwards' **2022 Meredith Estate Pinot Noir**, by contrast, comes from a single site in the Russian River Valley, specifically Sebastopol Hills, which "to me has a signature style and

aromatics," remarked winemaker Heidi von der Mehden. "I always find really dark cherry—but also this interesting herbal component, like anise and green olive... But I also want something rich and full-bodied. Where this vineyard's located, it's only about 12 miles from the Pacific Ocean, [so while] the south-facing slope gets lots of sunlight and lots of anthocyanin development, those cool coastal breezes that come in the afternoon moderate the temperature, so you don't have any degradation of those anthocyanins,



SOMM Camper Jonas de Maere, sourcing wine manager for the Charlotte, NC-based Ahold Delhaize USA, enjoys a pre-seminar breakfast at Banshee.

[ensuring] that full, rich tannin development.” Hyatt Hotels VP of operations, Americas, Edan Ballantine was a fan, later enthusing, “If there is such a thing as a perfect Pinot Noir, this is probably it.”



Kim Chalmers of Chalmers Wines threw a curveball into the discussion by presenting, of all things, a stainless steel-fermented, unfiltered

2023 Nero d'Avola from the Victoria

region of Heathcote. The fruit grows at the top of a hill “with a really good diurnal swing” on “really mineral-rich rock with very little topsoil,” she said, adding that while “Nero d'Avola as a grape has elements of herbs, red fruits, and tar, the heavier volcanic soils are giving a strong, charry graphite note.” To Leicht’s comment that, compared to Sicilian renditions of the variety, “there’s no typicity in this to me—this is a whole beast of a different color; there’s even a slight hint of eucalyptus I’m getting,” Chalmers responded, “It is typical. It’s typical of Heathcote.”



Circling back to Chalk Hill with the **Herzog Wine Cellars 2021 PHENO Cabernet Sauvignon**, winemaker David Galzignato said, “It’s a corner of the Russian River [Valley] where people

don’t think about Cabernet; why would you plant Cabernet there? [Because] it’s warmer and because the soils have the volcanic stuff [that] actually makes the vines stress a little bit more, so you look for concentration of smaller berries.” That stress is furthered by the practice of “spoon-feeding” water to the vine toward the ultimate goal of maximizing the resulting wine’s phenolic content (hence the name). Following a five-day cold soak, Galzignato also dares to “get the fermentation temperature up to around 90 [degrees] to get some glycerol production and mouthfeel, because [the wine’s] going to go into 100% new French oak. So the style is big but balanced.” Agreed Ballantine, “After tasting amazing Pinot Noirs and Chardonnays for a couple of days, being smacked sideways by the Herzog PHENO was an interesting experience—this wine was full of brute strength and muscle. I was so impressed I Googled it and tried to buy a bottle, with no luck unfortunately” (fewer than 400 cases were produced).



“After the bear hug that David made,” joked Leicht, the **Roth Estate 2022 Alexander Valley Cabernet Sauvignon** was “like a warm embrace. There’s a lot going on, a

lot of different elements in here, but it’s almost comforting.” Winemaker Henry de Lambert explained that it comes from four vineyards throughout the appella-

tion—some warmer and sunnier; some cooler and foggier; some steeper and some more rolling, all offering a range of elevations, soils, and exposures; the result, which combines 88% Cabernet with 9% Merlot and small amounts of Petit Verdot and Malbec, made harmony of that diversity, featuring ripe black cherry and red plum accented by earth and sage.



Designating the **Francis Ford Coppola 2022 Archimedes Cabernet Sauvignon** from the Alexander Valley “our flagship wine,” winemaker Evan Schiff noted that its source

vineyard on Pine Mountain is one of the highest-elevation sites in Sonoma County: “It’s a lot of winding roads to get all the way to the top. The oak trees kind of clear out and [there’s] open space with lots of rocks. You can see goats running around. So it’s definitely very rugged. And because of the topography, the water flows downhill, [which means there’s] less water available to the plant. We also have a little bit of wind. So overall you see a smaller canopy, smaller berries, and very concentrated flavors. The fruit is pretty intense.” Seeing mostly French oak (80% new), the blend of 90% Cabernet with a bit of Petit Verdot and Malbec offered what he described as “plum and currants with a little bit of black pepper and anise; the tannins are smooth”—a feat given that “one of the biggest things that we try to corral in this vineyard is tannin”—“and the finish is very, very long.”

For Arthur Pescan, manager/sommelier at Maxwell Park and Pop Fizz Bar in Washington, D.C., the seminar “revolved around the question of how we as somms can shine a light on the uniqueness of each glass we pour. . . . Style is individual, and if it comes from care to the soil, the vines, and the process, it can both challenge and broaden people’s tastes.” That, of course, is the whole goal of SOMM Camp.



The entrance to St. Francis Winery & Vineyards in Santa Rosa, CA.

A Moment to Be SAVORED

PUTTING THEORY INTO PRACTICE AT
ST. FRANCIS WINERY & VINEYARDS

story by Lars Leicht / photos by Alexander Rubin

After a series of intensive seminars, the finish line for Sonoma SOMM Camp was in sight, with yet another breathtaking ride through wine country bringing us to dinner at St. Francis Winery & Vineyards.

We were warmly greeted there by Bordeaux winemaker Chris Louton at what he noted was the hottest time of the day, just after 6 p.m. He escorted us to a shaded patio overlooking the vineyards, where we were physically out of the sun but nevertheless enjoyed what he described as “sunshine in a glass,” St. Francis’ **2024 Sonoma County Sauvignon Blanc**, sourced from Sonoma County grower-partner sites and estate vineyards such as the 130-acre, certified-sustainable Wild Oak Vineyard at the foot of Sugarloaf Ridge and Hood Mountain. The wine was a bright welcome indeed, with ripe flavors of honeydew melon and apricot yielding to crisp notes of lime and tangerine accentuated by vibrant minerality. Louton revealed that he takes the last 10% of the press wine, which has lower acidity and notes of spice, and ferments it in acacia barrels to add smooth, creamy character.

At the reception we also enjoyed St. Francis’ **2022 Sonoma County Pinot Noir**. Made by winemaker Katie Madigan with fruit (some whole-cluster) grown

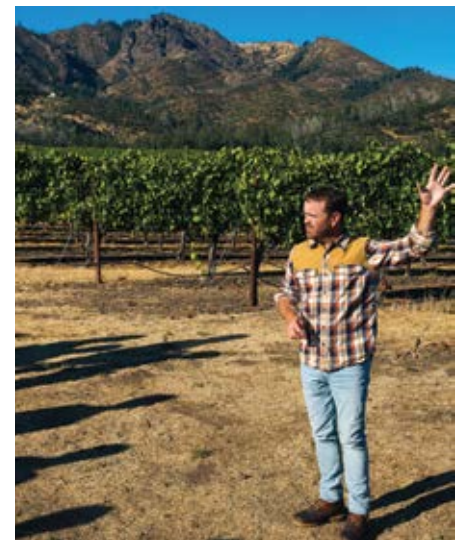
in the cooler areas of the county, predominantly Russian River and Carneros, it offered crunchy, juicy raspberry and pomegranate flavors. Louton called it “Sonoma County in a glass.”

Properly sated after our long ride, it was time to stretch our legs for a walk among the vines with director of vineyards Jake Terrell. A recognized leader in green viticulture, Terrell pointed out that St. Francis farms more than half of the fruit it vinifies, using its own crews at every step. Its four estate properties include the aforementioned Wild Oak Vineyard in which we stood, which was purchased in 1994 and praised by Terrell as a “Goldilocks vineyard—not too hot, not too cold”; it’s the source for most of St. Francis’ white wines and Bordeaux varieties. The nearby 82-acre Behler Vineyard was established in 1971, though it’s since been replanted and is now the primary source for Merlot. The 171-acre Lagomarsino Vineyard in the Russian River Valley was established in 1997 and grows Cabernet Sauvignon, Chardonnay, and Sauvignon Blanc. And finally, the 80-acre Rio Este Vineyard, also in the Russian River Valley, was established in 2018 and was the key source for the Pinot Noir we were drinking at that moment.



St. Francis winemaker Chris Louton.

“I always like to talk about sustainability,” Terrell continued, pointing out the winery’s attention to “the triple bottom line” involving the three E’s, namely equity on the social level and economic viability as well as environmental concerns. While the first two are fundamental—he pointed out that St. Francis’ employee benefit plans are the exact same for the vineyard worker as for the CEO and that “we have to be economically viable for



Director of vineyards Jake Terrell.

each of us to have jobs”—what is most important for his role is the environment. “When you farm 500 acres, you really have quite an impact,” he said. The winery’s vineyards are herbicide free, and it makes its own compost by mixing pomace with cow manure. Terrell’s team uses organic sulfur dust to prevent mildew and plants cover crops such as legumes and barley to add nitrogen to the soil. Louton pointed out that environmentally friendly steps are taken in the winemaking facility as well, including the installation of solar panels when the winery was built 25 years ago and the purposeful recycling of shrink wrap and the silicone backing from self-adhesive label rolls.

With that, we headed to dinner, which put a spotlight on St. Francis’ acclaimed hospitality program. Executive chef Peter Janiak’s sumptuous four-course feast was custom made for our camp’s focus on the wines of Sonoma and Victoria, Australia.

Dinner opened with a dual (not dueling) pour of Chardonnays alongside curried corn bisque. The **St. Francis 2022 Sonoma County Chardonnay** and **Yering Station 2021 Estate Chardonnay** from Australia’s Yarra Valley were both barrel fermented, providing the requisite complexity to match the bisque’s accents of candied Fresno chili, lemongrass, cilantro, and coconut.

The former wine was made with a combination of Russian River, Carneros, and Alexander Valley fruit; the grapes were harvested early to arrive cold at the winery, where they were whole cluster-pressed and fermented in different lots. The must underwent partial malolactic

fermentation, and the wine aged for six months in French oak barrels with bâtonnage to give it a rich mouthfeel. That creaminess, along with notes of baked apple, pear, and butterscotch, complemented the bisque like a warm hug on the palate.

The latter wine was sourced from five different vineyards that each sit on either sandy loam or red clay soils. It did not undergo malolactic and aged for eight months in 500-liter French oak puncheons (22% of which were new, the remainder being between one and six years old). Along with citrus and nectarine flavors, the wine’s focused acidity gave a laser-like lift to the richness of the bisque, calling out the lemongrass and coconut. Camper Lance Goldberg, wine buyer at GourmetPhile in Boca Raton, Florida, said the pairing “unexpectedly meshed together perfectly.”

St. Francis’ **2021 Sonoma County Merlot** took a solo bow as a pairing with Janiak’s summer truffle and mushroom glacé. Sourced mainly from the Behler and Wild Oak vineyards in the heart of Sonoma, the wine displayed rich aromas and balanced acidity that were the perfect foil for the king trumpet and maitake mushrooms, served on white polenta with English peas, parmesan, and crispy shallots.

The next duo was definitely more of a duel: St. Francis’ **2021 Old Vines Zinfandel** from Sonoma County and Fowles’ **2020 Ladies Who Shoot Their Lunch Shiraz** from the Strathbogie Ranges. They were paired with a smoked pork loin au jus accompanied by white bean

puree, burst blueberries, and zucchini in chimichurri. Both wines held their own in variations on a symphony of flavors.

Showing juicy raspberry and blackberry flavors with hints of dried cranberry and cinnamon, the Zin was sourced from dry-farmed vineyards around the county with an average age of 60 years: Terrell explained that it was really “not just Zinfandel” because many of the older vineyards contain field blends. It underwent malolactic fermentation and 16 months of aging in French oak barrels before blending and bottling.

The Shiraz, for its part, was wild fermented and underwent 12 months aging in 130-year-old English oak casks; the high-altitude, cool-climate vineyards north of Melbourne from which it came are made up of decomposed granite interspersed with large granite outcrops. Its intense flavors included black pepper, licorice, black fruits, and spice.

The evening perfectly rounded out our camp activities. “After a day of seminars, discussions, and tours, dinner at St. Francis was a way to see in practice a little of what we had learned,” pointed out Arthur Pescan, manager/sommelier at Maxwell Park and Pop Fizz Bar in Washington, D.C. “You can lose sight that all of that leads to a glass that is simply meant to be enjoyed, often with others and best with a great meal. Chef Peter’s pairings brought life into the wines—accentuating them, giving them color. We saw the wines as not just a reflection of Victoria or Sonoma or the winemaker behind them . . . but as a moment to be savored in each glass.”



Pictured with Sonoma County Winegrowers CEO/president Karissa Kruse (fifth from left), Truck Talks' featured growers were Joe Dutton of Dutton Ranch and Dutton Estate Winery, Chris Crispo and Audrey Bush of Bush Crispo Vineyards, Steve Dutton of Dutton Ranch and Dutton-Goldfield Winery, Duff Bevill of Bevill Vineyard Management, Simon Inman of Inman Family Wines, Diane and John Bucher of Bucher Wines, and Martinelli Vineyards & Winery's George Martinelli.

BOOTS ON THE GROUND

SPONSORED BY SONOMA COUNTY WINEGROWERS, **TRUCK TALKS** TOOK SOMM CAMPERS STRAIGHT TO THE SOURCE

introduction by **PATRICIA SCHNEIDER** photo by **ALEXANDER RUBIN**

Before our SOMM Campers split up into small groups to take vineyard tours, they were treated to a powerful orientation by Karissa Kruse, CEO and president of Sonoma County Winegrowers (SCW), who reminded attendees that Sonoma is not just a destination for world-class wine—it's a global leader in sustainable viticulture.

With 19 AVAs and more soil types than all of France, Sonoma County farms 57,518 vineyard acres, 95% of which are family-owned. In 2014, SCW committed to a plan to make it the nation's first 100% sustainable wine region. By 2019, 99% of vineyard acres were certified sustainable.

Kruse emphasized that sustainability extends beyond farming practices: Programs like the Employee Recognition initiative and the Leadership Academy invest directly in vineyard workers and their families. A video of the 2024 Leadership Academy trip to Washington, D.C., showed graduates engaging with policymakers, underscoring how a commitment to workforce development is reshaping Sonoma's agricultural leadership. Looking ahead, Kruse introduced the SCW's concept of the Farm of the Future, positioning Sonoma as a living lab with pilot programs involving electric trucks, smart sprayers, and carbon sensors. For the somms, her message was unforgettable: Sonoma wines embody not only their respective terroirs but a forward-looking vision of winegrowing. Now it was time to meet the people behind them.

A NEW WAY TO CONNECT

story by **PATRICIA SCHNEIDER**

photo by **ALEXANDER RUBIN**

This year's Sonoma SOMM Camp introduced a new format for connecting sommeliers with growers: Truck Talks, where vineyard rows replaced conference rooms and wines made from grapes grown on that very spot were poured from the tailgates of pickup trucks, bringing their terroir—and their backstories—into sharp focus as conversations unfolded against the backdrop of Sonoma's summer skies.

Truck Talks were hosted by Bucher Wines' John and Diane Bucher, Martinelli Vineyards & Winery's George Martinelli, Chris Crispo and Audrey Bush of Bush Crispo Vineyards, Joe Dutton of Dutton Ranch and Dutton Estate Winery, Simon and Kathleen Inman of Inman Family Wines, and Duff Bevill of Bevill



Dallas, TX-based wine expert Nicole Haarklau and Dwight Cunningham, owner of Vin ATL in Atlanta, GA, speak with Duff Bevill of Bevill Vineyard Management.

Vineyard Management. I joined the talk hosted by Bevill, a leader in Sonoma viticulture for more than 45 years. Bevill helped launch the California Sustainable Winegrowing Alliance in 2003, worked with the Sonoma County Winegrowers to reach 99% certified-sustainable vineyards by 2019, and in 2024 appeared on Wine Industry Advisor's "Wine's Most Inspiring People" list. Today, his company manages 1,200 acres across the Dry Creek, Alexander, and Russian River valleys.

My fellow participants included Dwight Cunningham, owner of Vin ATL in Atlanta, who stressed the value of hearing Bevill explain the day-to-day challenges growers face firsthand, and Dallas-based wine expert Nicole Haarklau, who called the experience "a full-circle moment—riding with a farmer, seeing the vines, and tasting the wine on-site." Meanwhile, Lance Goldberg, wine buyer at Gourmet-Phile in Boca Raton, Florida, attended the Inman Family Wines talk, where he walked the vineyard with Inman's grower, Jim Pratt. "I've always been fascinated by winemakers, but this trip really let me know the farmers are rock stars as well," he said.

Simple in design yet powerful in impact, Truck Talks emerged as a highlight of SOMM Camp—a candid, unfiltered window onto Sonoma winegrowing. Attendees left with not only tasting notes but stories and connections that will shape how they share Sonoma wines nationwide.

THE BEST CLASSROOM

story and photo by **THOMAS DELASKO, GM/SOMMELIER, VIA SOPHIA, WASHINGTON, D.C.**

There are wine tastings—and then there are rides with Joe Dutton. When I was invited to spend the afternoon bumping across Sonoma backroads with the co-owner of Dutton Ranch and Dutton Estate Winery, I knew I was in for something memorable. Still, nothing prepared me for the mix of education and hospitality that unfolded over the next few hours.

Joining me for the talk were campers Thomas Gallagher, owner of The Wine Authority in Richardson, Texas, and Elina Brager, owner of CellarFiller in Atlanta. Elina snagged the front seat of Joe's dusty pickup with lightning speed, leaving Thomas and me to climb into the back—the perfect vantage point for what Joe modestly called "a quick tour." In Dutton-speak, that meant rumbling past 1,200 acres of winegrapes and 400 acres of organic heirloom apples, spread across Green Valley and Russian River Valley like a giant, green patchwork quilt.

Our first stop was the barrel room. There, sitting like futuristic sculptures among rows and rows of French oak, were two concrete eggs—500-gallon fermentation vessels that cost a staggering \$20,000 apiece. They looked space-age, but their purpose is rooted in traditional craft: The oval shape keeps the lees constantly suspended in the wine, enhancing texture and complexity.

We tasted the Kyndall's Reserve Chardonnay, predominantly egg-aged, right there in the tasting room. It was voluptuous and textural, bursting with pear, baked apple, and a creamy richness that lingered long after each sip. Joe followed it with something unexpected: Dutton Cider Company's hard cider, made from Gravenstein and Golden Delicious apples grown on the property. I'm usually skeptical of cider, but this was dry, elegant, and delicately effervescent—a revelation rather than a sugar bomb.

Back in the truck, we rattled up a steep incline to a hilltop vineyard planted to Pinot Noir. The moment we stepped out, the payoff was clear: a postcard-perfect view stretching from Joe's vines all the way to Mount St. Helena in the distance. With the afternoon sun dipping gold across the hills, Joe pulled out a bottle of estate Pinot and poured us each a glass. The wine was bright, silky, and red-fruited—a classic Russian River Valley expression—but his conversation was focused not on tasting notes but business realities.

"This vintage, we've only sold about 75% of the crop," he said, more contemplative than worried. "It happens. The market comes and goes. We just keep farming the right way." That summed up Joe Dutton in a sentence: hands in the dirt, eyes on the long game, delivering quality vintage after vintage without chasing headlines.

As we headed back toward the winery, dust trailing behind us like a ribbon, I realized that SOMM Camp had offered us not just a lesson in wine but a master class in grounded, generational commitment to land, craft, and family. And the best classroom of all was the back of that pickup truck.



Steve and Joe Dutton of Dutton Ranch.

Sonoma growers and SOMM Campers gather around the fire after dinner at Dutton Ranch in Sebastopol, CA.



HANDS *and* HEARTS

A FAREWELL FEAST AT DUTTON RANCH *STORY BY PATRICIA SCHNEIDER / PHOTOS BY ALEXANDER RUBIN*

Following two and a half days of vineyard walks, presentations by growers and winemakers, fabulous tastings, and the debut of the new Truck Talks program, the finale of our 2025 Sonoma SOMM Camp unfolded in the heart of Green Valley at Dutton Ranch, a property that embodies Sonoma County's union of multigenerational farming and world-class winemaking. For over six generations, the Dutton family has cultivated grapes and orchards across the Russian River Valley and the Sonoma Coast, providing fruit to many of California's most acclaimed producers. Today, Dutton Estate Winery remains a standard-bearer of sustainable farming and a living reminder that great wines are born from painstaking stew-



Raising a glass to great wines tasted and new friends made.



Michael Loveisky, head sommelier at Maple & Ash in Chicago, offers a key takeaway from SOMM Camp.



Campers Shannon Saulsbury, wine and saké program manager, Flagship Restaurant Group; Zac Manning, corporate wine director, Two for Seven Restaurant Group; Jeff Degner, corporate wine buyer, Spec's; and Stevie Raeann, beverage manager, Chef Carter Concepts.

ardship of the land. Against this backdrop, we gathered once more for an experience that was no mere reception and dinner but a true immersion into Sonoma culture, framed by the wines and stories of the growers themselves.

The Dutton Ranch barn was the perfect setting—rustic yet newly updated, surrounded by 20 acres of estate vines. A single table stretched the length of the barn, seating 35 guests shoulder to shoulder. The arrangement set the tone: communal, generous, and unpretentious. Conversation flowed as naturally as the wine, with bottles lining the table for easy reach and platters of food passed hand to hand.

The program highlighted both established icons and boutique producers, each representing a facet of Sonoma's mosaic. Besides Dutton Estate, John and Diane Bucher, dairy farmers turned vintners, were on hand to represent Bucher Wines, which has become a reference point for Russian River Valley Pinot Noir and elegant Grenache. Also present was Martinelli Vineyards & Winery: Few families have as long a lineage in Sonoma as the Martinellis, who have farmed here since the 1880s. Today, the sixth generation carries forward the legacy, producing bold wines that capture Russian River richness. Bush Crispo Vineyards presented estate-grown Pinot Noir from its 13.5-acre family vineyard in the Russian River Valley, crafted with classic regional refinement. Founded by Japanese-born winemaker Nori Nakamura, Noria Wines has built a reputation for expressions that bridge California and Japanese sensibilities. Dutton-Goldfield Winery, a collaboration between grape grower Steve Dutton and winemaker Dan Goldfield, has become a benchmark for precise, terroir-driven wines. And grower/winemaker Kathleen Inman of Inman Family Wines is celebrated for her eco-conscious approach to delicate, expressive bottlings.

What distinguished the affair was not only the breadth of wines but the intimacy of the storytelling. Growers didn't simply pour; they sat at the table, answered questions, and shared the travails and triumphs of farming premium fruit. Dwight Cunningham, owner of Vin ATL in Atlanta, said he'd never look at a bottle of wine the same way again after hearing growers discuss the challenges of frost risk and canopy management. And Dallas-based wine expert Nicole Haarklau summed up the evening beautifully: "Sitting with the families who farmed the grapes brings the story full circle. You taste the wine differently when you hear [about] the hands and hearts behind it." ❧



Karissa Kruse, CEO and president of the Sonoma County Winegrowers, with SOMM Journal publisher/editor-in-chief Meridith May.



The terrace of the newly remodeled Roederer Estate Hospitality Center boasts a sweeping view of the Anderson Valley.

A ROEDERER ESTATE

Renaissance

A RENOVATED
HOSPITALITY CENTER
AND A PACKAGE REFRESH
SIMULTANEOUSLY
AFFIRM THE WINERY'S
CHAMPENOIS HERITAGE
AND ANDERSON
VALLEY TERROIR

by Ruth Tobias

CHAMPAGNE MAY BE THOUSANDS OF MILES from the West Coast of the United States, but there's one place in California where it doesn't feel quite so far away: Roederer Estate. Nestled in the gently rolling hills of the Anderson Valley in Mendocino County, the acclaimed 43-year-old sparkling wine house has obviously always honored its Gallic parentage—that would be Champagne Louis Roederer—through its gorgeous portfolio of méthode traditionnelle bottlings, made exclusively from estate-grown Pinot Noir and Chardonnay by two French-born winemakers to date: first Michel Salgues, a Champenois himself, and then Arnaud Weyrich, an Alsatian who's held the role since 2002. Yet there are other ways in which it aims to show its roots even as it luxuriates in its Golden State milieu; most recently, these include a hospitality center renovation completed in February by none other than designer Julia Rouzaud—the daughter of winery founder Jean-Claude Rouzaud and sister of seventh-generation Louis Roederer president Frédéric Rouzaud—and a package update that subtly blend elements of the Old World and the New.

With respect to the former, said Roederer Collection U.S. president Nicole Carter as we took in the views from the estate terrace on a balmy summer day, "What I love about it is we've retained our California redwood barn feeling with this beautiful juxtaposition of French influence and [more broadly] European influence." Lined with comfy banquettes and umbrella-shaded tables, that terrace couldn't feel more at one with its surroundings; Weyrich pointed out some of the native plants—manzanita, arbutus, coffeeberry, coast buckwheat—among which hummingbirds flitted as well as the sand-colored terra-cotta tiles beneath our feet, which Rouzaud has said were chosen to "reinforce the idea that soil is at the heart of winemaking; just as it shapes the grapes and the character of the wine, it also grounds the experience of the tasting room, creating a strong connection between the space and its terroir."

Likewise representing the soil is the colorful bar at the center of the tasting room built by French artist Aurélien Veyrat, who according to Carter "goes on the French version of Craigslist and finds bricks from abandoned factories, starts collecting them, and then shapes them with rainwater." A team of Belgians installed the polished concrete floor of the room, whereas the handmade terra-cotta tiles in the entryway came from Italy; local craftspeople, meanwhile, contributed the upholstery and did all the woodwork, including the stunning door to the facility. As Weyrich fascinatingly explained, "It's called sunk redwood. In the 19th century, the way they were able to ship redwoods from inland was either to move them through railroads . . . or send them [down] rivers. And some of those redwoods, [due to their] thickness and the density of the grain, they would actually sink. There was no way to retrieve them from the water, and they'd be covered by the silt and the mud. They've been recovered in the last many decades."



PHOTOS: DAMN HEIMANN

Arnaud Weyrich has been winemaker at Roederer Estate since 2002.



The focal point of the tasting room is a bar built by French artist Aurélien Veyrat from reclaimed bricks.

Indoors and outdoors, the new space addresses the concern that, in Carter's words, "the dynamics of how people taste wine at tasting rooms during COVID changed. Obviously, people want to be outside. . . . And then people started to crave education. They wanted more storytelling; they wanted to learn more about wine." To that end, Roederer Estate offers (in addition to selections by the glass and bottle) three flights: Priced between \$30 and \$125, they're designed to showcase everything from the difference between multivintage and vintage cuvées as well as between multi-site and single-vineyard expressions to varying dosage levels and formats—not to mention the impact of all those factors on how the wines age.

As for the packaging, said Carter, "Around 2021 or 2022, we started to hear from our distributors and salespeople that they felt like the packaging had gotten a little outdated, which happens"—but because "the brand equity for Roederer Estate is so strong and you want to retain it," they decided to tread carefully toward the goal of modernization on the one hand and making "a stronger connection to our parent" on the other: On matte instead of glossy front labels, the logo is now a little more pronounced and the lettering a little larger for easier legibility amid fewer embellishments; as Carter put it, "We wanted Anderson Valley to be more prominent than it was previously, and we wanted the

The Clark Road Vineyard is located on the cooler west side of the Anderson Valley.

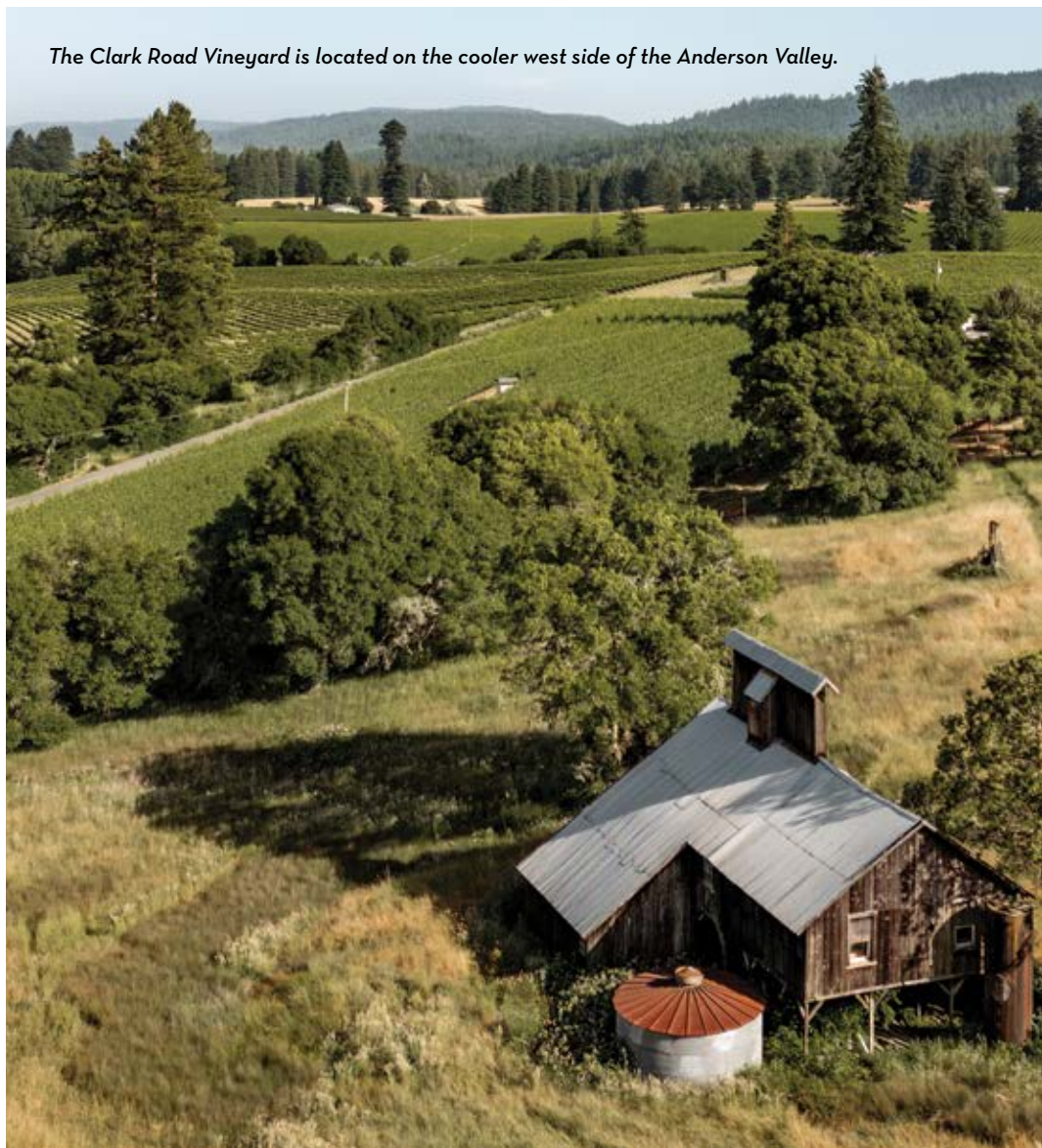


PHOTO: LAUREN SIEGEL



French heritage to come through" at the same time. The result, she asserted, is "so much cleaner; brighter; fresher." The back label, meanwhile, now lists such key information as the disgorgement date and, in the case of the vintage cuvées, the dosage level. "If it matters to you to buy *méthode traditionnelle*, how long it was aged is important," Weyrich pointed out, adding that "most customers, when they see 'brut' on the label, they don't always . . . know what to expect, because brut goes from 6 [grams of residual sugar per liter] to 12. So am I at 12, [or] am I at 6?"

Those numbers are relevant with respect to another change Roederer Estate has made over the past couple of years, in this case to its lineup: Noted Carter, "For me, the renaissance is about introducing new wines for the first time in three decades"—namely two single-



PHOTO COURTESY OF ROEDERER ESTATE



PHOTO: LAUREN SIEGEL

vineyard vintage-dated bubbly, Clark Road and Apple Alley. We tasted them together along with the winery's other core expressions, including the classic Brut, alive with green apple, white peach, and a hint of pecan brioche, and Brut Rosé, structured around aromas and flavors of red apple, cherry, blood orange, and toast; the bright, fresh, and salty 2019 L'Ermitage Brut, showing apricot, cream, and pear; the 2019 L'Ermitage Brut Rosé, which soars amid notes of strawberry shortcake and a tinge of smoke; and the gobsmacking 2007 L'Ermitage Late Disgorged Brut, rich and creamy after more than 16 years on the lees yet thrumming with tarte tatin, Fig Newton, and salted caramel plus a pinch of walnut and white pepper.

Presenting the 2021 Clark Road, disgorged in December 2024, and the 2020 Apple Alley, disgorged in February 2024,

Roederer Collection U.S. president Nicole Carter with Weyrich.

Weyrich mused, "It's going to sound very geeky what I'm going to say, but if the [Brut and Brut Rosé] are sparkling wines, these two single vineyards are really made as wines that [happen to] become sparkling. So there's something more vinous about them." From the cooler west side of the Valley, where according to him "I can let the Pinot hang longer to get more skin development but . . . still keep a fair amount of freshness," the Clark Road is an extra-brut (5.5 grams per liter) blend of 77.6% Pinot Noir and 22.4% Chardonnay, a small amount of which (7%) was fermented in oak with some *bâtonnage*; the result is wonderfully velvet-textured for the style, abounding in white strawberry, golden apple, and honeyed almond. From

a slightly warmer site, the Apple Alley, for its part, sees full malo, which is atypical for the house but gives the blend of 74.2% Chardonnay and 25.8% Pinot Noir with 6 grams per liter of dosage "that nice, crusty, soft, round, pleasant, very Champagne-like feel," in Weyrich's words, along with sun-drenched notes of apple and apple blossom, yellow plum, and slivered almond.

"It took me 20 years to make a single-vineyard wine—it's been a very slow process," Weyrich acknowledged, noting that intimate knowledge of a given site takes time. That said, he added, "We're a 40-year-old brand, so we're still very young compared to the mothership, which is 250 years old. We're learning as fast as we can." Of that there can be no question. **§**

Attendees of the Alexander Valley Cabernet Academy at lunch in Rodney Strong Vineyards' Rockaway Vineyard.

{ appellation spotlight }



Walking the

WALK

THE ALEXANDER
VALLEY CABERNET
ACADEMY WAS A
SHOW-AND-TELL
OF TERROIR

by Randy Caparoso

Terroir means everything in the sense that all the natural circumstances in which a grapevine grows have a direct impact on the quality of the fruit it yields and consequently on the resulting wines. But the word means nothing unless we can talk about the sensory qualities of those wines in a way that differentiates them from their counterparts.

In May, the Alexander Valley Winegrowers association (alexandervalley.org) hosted the 12th annual Alexander Valley Cabernet Academy, inviting sommeliers from around the country to walk through different parts of the Sonoma County sub-AVA and then sit down to taste the actual sensory distinctions between their wines, thus putting two and two together: Terroir matters.

Before we recap our findings, let's cover some basic facts about the region:

- Alexander Valley, defined as an AVA in 1984, occupies the northeast corner of Sonoma County and is home to the town of Geyserville and the cities of Cloverdale and Healdsburg.
- It is not a gigantic AVA—approximately 20 miles long and 8 miles wide—but its 15,000 acres of grapes produce more than 25% of the wines grown in Sonoma County (which is home to 19 AVAs in total).
- Its climate, like that of most of California's coastal regions influenced by the Pacific Ocean, is squarely Mediterranean; it experiences cool, wet winters and dry, warm-to-hot growing seasons marked by significant diurnal temperature swings, which help to produce ripe fruit balanced by fresh natural acidity. The devil, of course, is in the details: A dramatically contrasting topography—ranging from valley floors of gravelly clay loam at 130–400 feet in elevation along the Russian River, which runs through the appellation, to gravelly benchlands at 600–2,800 feet to rocky mountain slopes—creates a wide range of wine styles now being explored by artisanal producers.
- Cabernet Sauvignon rules the Alexander Valley roost because the grape loves the warm climate and rich yet well-drained soils.
- For over 50 years, restaurants and sommeliers have come to depend upon the round, voluptuous, crowd-pleasing styles of Cabernet grown in the Alexander Valley, epitomized by pioneering brands such as Jordan, SIMI, Rodney Strong, Alexander Valley Vineyards, and Silver Oak. In recent years, however, around 20% of the Cabernets have been coming off of higher-elevation sites above the fog line, where heightened solar ultraviolet light and narrower diurnal swings are producing grapes with thicker skins and increased phenolic content, resulting in darker, more robust and concentrated variations on the Alexander Valley style.
- It is inevitable that, over the decades, growers and vintners have begun to pinpoint distinct subzones within their appellation. Although most of them still blend wines from these areas to maximize quality, in the years to come, we will better understand the distinctive sensory qualities of wines coming out of the five districts of Alexander Valley: Cloverdale, Geyserville, Jintown, Healdsburg, and Maacama.



The lineup of wines for a seminar on blending.

Day 1

WEATHER AND MICROCLIMATES

The first day of camp began at Alexander Valley Vineyards, the very site where Cyrus Alexander, the Valley's namesake, built his original pueblo near to where he planted the region's first grapevines in 1843. Alexander Valley Vineyards partner Harry Wetzel IV and his vineyard manager, Junior Macias, presented their **2022 Alexander Valley Estate Cabernet Sauvignon**—a soft, silky, quintessentially valley-floor style of the variety that nevertheless possessed the intense cassis and herbal characteristics consumers have always found so captivating—as an introduction to the lush style indicative of the AVA's aforementioned climate.

Like their estate bottling, the **2021 Alexander Valley Organically Grown Cabernet Sauvignon** was aged in both French and American oak, which Wetzel candidly said is as much an economic as an aesthetic choice—prompting attendee Ryan Hess, sommelier at Badmaash in Los Angeles, to remark that strong value is also a “defining characteristic” of the Alexander Valley. The wine was deeper, spicier, and zestier than the conventionally grown bottling while retaining the lush profile of the region.

We also tasted the **Robert Young 2021 Thomas Meek Cabernet Sauvignon**, sourced from a valley-floor site dating back to the 1960s, which demonstrated both the velvet texture and tea-like complexity of the terroir, couched in the toasty richness derived from 100% French oak aging. The cushiony, ripe fruit profile of the **J. Rickards 2021 Cabernet Sauvignon**, meanwhile, was only enhanced by the use of 50% American oak.



Camp began with a seminar on microclimates at Alexander Valley Vineyards.

A seminar on geology and soils was held at ACTA Wine in Healdsburg.



GEOLOGY AND SOILS

That afternoon, Trione Vineyards and Winery winemaker John Duckett and ACTA Wine founder/winemaker Dustin Moilanen teamed up to demonstrate the impact of soil types on a lineup of wines, starting with the **Trione 2020 Cloverdale Ranch Block 21 Cabernet Sauvignon** from the northern reaches of the AVA. Dominated by the gravelly loam of benchland just east of the Russian River, this area produces a ripe, fruit-focused, distinctly floral style of Cabernet, zesty with acidity and plump yet still fairly concentrated. By way of contrast, the **ACTA 2021 Alexander Valley-Chalk Hill Cabernet Sauvignon** was, as Moilanen remarked, a “Goldilocks” of a wine—grippy yet velvety, fleshy yet muscular, and scented with both red and blue fruit—that reflected the combination of alluvial and clay soils in a vineyard whose boundaries overlap with those of the Chalk Hill AVA.

From there, we were mentally transported up into the hills east of Cloverdale at 1,000 feet in elevation, where rocky shale and sandstone soak in unabated sunlight to yield wines like the **Rodney Strong 2019 Brothers Vineyard Cabernet Sauvignon**. A decidedly darker, sturdier, chocolatier take on the variety, it remained as velvety and inviting as its counterparts.

If there were any lingering doubts that variant soil and geology affect a wine's character, the **Stonestreet 2019 Alexander Mountain Estate Cabernet Sauvignon** put them aside. Sourced from multiple sites set at elevations of over

2,000 feet well above the fog line, on craggy, chaparral-dotted perches exposed to wind, this was a savory, structured wine with relatively high phenolic content, showing a full range of aromas from red, black, and blue berries to wild scrub, forest floor, cedar, and nuances of 100% French oak.

Day 2

TOPOGRAPHY AND ELEVATION

The second day of camp started with a drive up, up, up to Stonestreet Estate Vineyards' Christopher's Vineyard in Pocket Peak, where we were greeted by Jackson Family Wines proprietor Christopher Jackson and Stonestreet winemaker Kristina Shideler. Pocket Peak, according to Jackson, is the proposed name of a prospective new AVA. While nested in Alexander Valley, this high-elevation area certainly merits recognition.

According to Jackson, it is all about the “constancy of wind, resulting in 15% less juice-to-skin ratios, thicker skins, and degradation of pyrazines in grapes like Cabernet.” Shideler commented on the “extremity of light at higher elevations,” leading to earlier budbreak and development of flavor compounds, which combine with narrower diurnal shifts than in the rest of the AVA (meaning the days are a little cooler and the nights a bit warmer) to give grapes “ample time to build out nicer tannin structures and polymers.”

Produced by Francis Ford Coppola, the **2022 Archimedes Cabernet Sauvignon**

A view of the Alexander Valley from Stonestreet Estate Vineyards' Christopher's Vineyard in Pocket Peak.



contains fruit from three vineyard sites that reach altitudes of 2,800 feet, making them the highest in the appellation. Florals, including rose petal, and even mildly peppery notes set the wine apart from the mainstream. By contrast, the **Jordan 2020 Cabernet Sauvignon**, culled from as many as 50 vineyard sites both valley floor and hillside, was more typical of the appellation in its plump yet acid-driven finesse. Meanwhile, the **Alexander Valley Vineyards 2020 Alexander School Reserve Cabernet Sauvignon**, made from a single vineyard on the valley floor, was round, rich, fruit-focused, and mildly herbal.

Finally, the **Stonestreet 2019 Rockfall Vineyard Cabernet Sauvignon** soared in still different directions: Almost peppery with cardamom-like spices and distinctly acid-driven, it offered violet fragrances, lots of blue and black berry notes, coffee undertones, and dense structure. At 14.8% ABV, it in some ways resembled a Napa Valley wine yet was still true to the Alexander Valley in its svelte feel and intoxicatingly floral profile.

BLENDING THE BEST

Our final tasting, led by Francis Ford Coppola director of winemaking Andrea Card and Rodney Strong winemaker Olivia Wright, focused on the blending of vineyard sources to achieve different iterations of the regional style. The **Francis Ford Coppola 2021 Director's Cut**, for



wine presented an almost unbeatable combination of value, complexity, and pure drinkability.

The **Alexander Valley Vineyards 2020 Cyrus** provided another lesson in blending: Containing 64% Cabernet Sauvignon, 25% Merlot, 7% Cabernet Franc, 2% Petit Verdot, and 2% Malbec aged in 50% each French and American oak, it achieved a plush, fleshy, more floral profile

compared to the brand's monovarietal Cabernets. In similar fashion, the **ACTA 2022 Deeds** (68% Merlot, 26% Cabernet Sauvignon, and 6% Cabernet Franc) was rich and fleshy, combining the velvetiness of the Merlot with the pungent herbaceousness of the two Cabernets to accentuate the qualities that have made Alexander Valley wines such a popular go-to, especially in restaurant settings.



Francis Ford Coppola director of winemaking Andrea Card leads a seminar on blending.

instance, craftily combines Cabernet Sauvignon, Petite Sirah (4.7%), Syrah (4.4%), and other grapes such as Cabernet Franc to double down on the sultry, balanced feel for which the Alexander Valley is known; the Petite Sirah and hillside-grown Syrah in particular added acid, meatiness, and distinctive spice elements to the wine's come-hither profile.

Wright talked about utilizing as many as 50 different vineyard lots in the **Rodney Strong 2022 Alexander Valley Cabernet Sauvignon** to meld the sumptuous texture of valley-floor sites with the higher-flying, floral (especially violet) character imparted by the winery's three highest-elevation vineyards (Brothers, Rockaway, and the now-historic Alexander's Crown); 8% Malbec contributed a hibiscus tea-like fragrance. At \$35 suggested retail, the



The Alexander Valley Cabernet Academy class of 2025.

What the Somms Had to Say

According to attendee Marie Mertz, chef/owner of *Todo Un Poco* in Elk Grove, California, "The Alexander Valley Cabernet Academy was an opportunity to discover the true essence of Cabernets from this AVA. It's about more than value, which we always expect from this region. It's also about how well these styles pair with food."

"The Alexander Valley wines of today are definitely about terroir," said Erica Williams, wine director at *Terranea Resort* in Rancho Palos Verdes, California. "It's also pretty awesome to experience how scientific and technical yet [impactful] the effects of talented winemaking can be, particularly when it comes to producing wines that only make it easier to please our guests."

Heather Missad, director of wine for *Bowdie's Chophouse* in Grand Rapids, Michigan, added, "There is no shortage of complexity or sophistication in these wines. In between the tastings we were shown older bottlings of the same wines, clearly demonstrating how effortlessly they age. They definitely belong among the finest Cabernets we can offer in our restaurants."

George Staikos, founder of *The Educated Grape* in New Hope, Pennsylvania, stated, "I was not aware of the sheer diversity and quality of wines now coming out of the appellation, especially in the high-elevation sites. Alexander Valley produces compelling wines that deserve the attention of all the country's top buyers, on-premise and off."

Roibin McAndrew, beverage liaison for *Hospitality Restaurants* in Cleveland, Ohio, concurred while summarizing the enthusiasm of all the visiting sommeliers: "The restaurant group that I represent has been selling Alexander Valley wines by the glass for a long time, admittedly because of their QPR. But the Cabernet Academy left me with a deeper understanding of the region's terroir. It was humbling to finally be able to see the vineyards, talk to the vintners, walk through their caves. The wines speak for themselves, but I now understand the whole story!" S

"WE ARE FARMERS"

The Real Roots of
ALEXANDER VALLEY

FARMING IS IN THE SOUL of the people who live in Sonoma County's Alexander Valley. This sentiment isn't a slogan—it's a way of life passed down through generations. You'll find families who live on the land they farm, where the same people who walk the vineyard rows are often the ones pouring the wines in tasting rooms. Especially during harvest, that connection becomes unmistakable. The hum of early morning tractors. The smell of grape must clinging to the air. Boots dusted with vineyard soil. These aren't just harvest clichés—they're everyday truths in Alexander Valley. Here, wine isn't about pageantry. It's about land, legacy, and labor. It's about knowing the vines, trusting the seasons, and sharing the results with humility.

Among the vines of ACTA Wine.

The following wineries reflect that spirit in their own distinctive ways, each deeply rooted in place, family, and farming.

Sutro Wine Co.

At Sutro, visitors are welcomed onto a multigenerational estate shaped by both agriculture and the arts. The Warnecke family has farmed this land for decades, and today, Margo Warnecke Merck and her niece, Alice Warnecke Sutro, manage the vineyards together while Alice oversees her own small wine label with an eye toward sustainability and creative stewardship. Her wines reflect the property's unique geology and native vegetation, while the duo's artist residency program invites creators to find inspiration among the vines, ponds, and preserved oak woodland. Sutro isn't just about farming—it's about preserving something timeless.

PHOTO COURTESY OF ACTA WINE



Bedarra Vineyards

Brigid and Jeff Harris built Bedarra Vineyards from a shared dream rooted in joy, adventure, and a love of the land. After long careers in wine marketing and finance, they brought their vision to life in Alexander Valley, naming their vineyard after the island in Australia where they honeymooned and undertaking the kind of farming lifestyle that's hands-on, heart-felt, and full of warmth. Today, Brigid hosts tastings in their intimate space overlooking a peaceful pond, where guests can sip wines and even take a pedal boat for a spin. The vineyard is small, but the hospitality is expansive.

Alexander Valley Vineyards

Few California estates carry as much historical weight as Alexander Valley Vineyards. In the late 1960s, the Wetzel family bottled a few cases of Cabernet Sauvignon for friends and family. That homemade wine became the inspiration for Alexander Valley Vineyards, founded by Hank and Linda Wetzel in 1975. Then 24 years old, Hank was solely responsible for producing 7,500 cases of wine while building the two-story structure that is still in use today. The Wetzels also helped establish the Alexander Valley AVA in 1984.

Fifty years later, the winery is iconic in a region that's known as a home of world-class Cabernet Sauvignon, and the family continues to live and work on the historic homestead of Cyrus Alexander—the Valley's namesake. Their farm includes expansive gardens, wine caves, and a restored one-room schoolhouse. Visitors may find chickens scratching between vineyard rows or a family member leading a tour. Here, the producer's wines are a reflection of its heritage: classic, expressive, and deeply connected to place.

Stuhlmuller Vineyards

Down a quiet stretch of Soda Rock Road, Stuhlmuller Vineyards sits surrounded by estate vines and bordered by wilderness. Owner and grower Fritz Stuhlmuller has spent decades crafting site-driven wines from this property, which lies at the intersection of three renowned growing regions: Alexander Valley, Chalk Hill, and the Russian River Valley. His barnlike



PHOTO COURTESY OF FRANCIS FORD COPPOLA WINERY

Andrea Card is director of winemaking at Francis Ford Coppola Winery.

tasting room exudes relaxed charm and is famously dog-friendly, welcoming four-legged guests as warmly as two-legged ones. But behind that easygoing exterior is a focused commitment to sustainable farming and meticulous vineyard care. Stuhlmuller's wines tell the story of this land, vintage after vintage.

ACTA Wine

"Deeds, not words." That's what *acta non verba* means, and it's a philosophy that drives everything co-founder Dustin Moilanen does. A veteran of the restaurant industry, Moilanen approaches farming with humility and precision, knowing that great wines begin in the vineyard. His Alexander Valley fruit is farmed with intention, and his wines are made with minimal intervention, allowing the land to speak. ACTA isn't about spectacle—it's about substance. Every bottle is a quiet reminder that action, not talk, is what truly matters in this business.


Francis Ford Coppola Winery

While Francis Ford Coppola may be known best as a movie director, there's a deep agricultural core to his winery that's often overlooked. Its Alexander Valley vineyards are managed with long-term sustainability in mind, and his team remains committed to water conservation, soil health, and preserving the vitality of the

land. Coppola applies his cinematic flair to the terroir, showing that even large-scale wineries can maintain a connection to farming when their values are in place.

Rodney Strong Vineyards

Rodney Strong is a name with reach—but its roots are firmly planted in Sonoma County soil. Under the leadership of proprietor Tom Klein, the winery has become a leader in sustainable farming and innovation. From solar-powered facilities to regenerative vineyard practices, the estate continues to push boundaries without losing sight of its agricultural foundation. During harvest, you'll still find winemakers and growers walking the rows, sampling fruit, and staying true to the hands-on spirit that built the brand. Community-driven, environmentally conscious, and deeply committed to quality, Rodney Strong lives up to its ethos on every level.

In Alexander Valley, farming comes first—not in theory but in practice. These wineries double as homesteads, ranches, family properties, and working farms, and when you drink the wines from this place, you're tasting more than the terroir: You're tasting the sweat, care, and pride of the people who know the land by heart. "We are farmers," the producers here will tell you. And in Alexander Valley, that still means something. 

Tasting Notes



Alexander Valley Vineyards 2022 Cabernet Sauvignon, Alexander Valley, Sonoma County (\$28) This wine gets off to a toasty start, with nutmeg, cinnamon, and a pinch of white pepper weaving through strawberry jam. Energetic and bright, it delivers plush tannins and a finish of cherry cola. Winemaker Kevin Hall blended in Malbec

and Petit Verdot for color; Merlot to add a hint of structured fruit, and a touch of Cabernet Franc for aromatics. **93** —*Meridith May*



Rodney Strong Vineyards 2021 Cabernet Sauvignon, Alexander Valley, Sonoma County (\$35) Carmine-black in hue, this Cab is made from free-run juice, which aids in refinement. Aged in (50% new) French oak for 18 months, it shows an elegantly sleek mouthfeel. Black cherry is slathered across the palate with cocoa and hints of

espresso and slate as acidity steels the tongue. As sturdy as it is graceful and plush, the wine is an example of Alexander Valley's present and future potential, without any herbal tones; it's chewy and weighty, and the ripeness of the fruit is just right. **93** —*M.M.*



Starlite Vineyards 2019 Cabernet Sauvignon, Napa Valley (\$175)

Producing handcrafted European-style wines is the forte of Starlite Vineyards, which tends 6 acres planted on a hilltop. Cocoa-dusted tannins are surrounded by ripe plum and coffee bean. Acidity is high-toned, with a gushing soprano-like flow

of mulled red berries partnered with alto notes of coffee and umami. **93** —*M.M.*



ACTA 2022 Deeds Red Wine, Alexander Valley, Sonoma County (\$80)

ACTA Wine is the creation of longtime friends and partners Alan Wildstein and Dustin Moilanen, the latter of whom serves as director of winemaking, guiding the winery's day-to-day operations. The pair sought a location where the climate,

soil, and water were all conducive to the cultivation of great vineyards and the production of great wine—which they found on a 16-acre site in Alexander Valley. Only 15 barrels of this structured and refined blend of 68% Merlot, 26% Cabernet Sauvignon, and 6% Cabernet Franc were produced. Luxurious notes of chocolate and plum are addressed by garrigue and soy sauce. A slightly salty tone enhances the ripe fruit and juicy freshness before the finish of coffee and cedar. **94** —*M.M.*



Bedarra Vineyards 2021 Estate Cabernet Sauvignon, Alexander Valley, Sonoma County (\$70)

Named after a remote island off the Great Barrier Reef in Australia, Bedarra is situated on a hillside. Aged 22 months in (40% new) French oak, this is a muscle-bound red, with deep, shadowed notes of graphite, new leather, Worcestershire, and dark chocolate. Fresh notes of plum attach to the palate, spotlighted by bright acidity. We were dazzled. **95** —*M.M.*



Stuhmuller Vineyards 2021 Reserve Cabernet Sauvignon, Alexander Valley, Sonoma County (\$50)

Black fruit rushes alongside dry, chalky tannins. As the wine opens, notes of dark chocolate and espresso show a creamy undertone, expressing satisfying richness, while the structure is tenacious in its athletic

provenance. **95** —*M.M.*



Sutro 2021 Cabernet Sauvignon, Warnecke Vineyard, Alexander Valley, Sonoma County (\$75)

Tension speaks to a youthful entry as dusty plum-skin tannins are exposed on the first sip. The wine's graceful persona is demonstrated by a linear dance: It's balanced, with unwavering backbone. Notes of graphite stretch toward the finish, greeted by juicy blackberry pie. **95** —*M.M.*



Francis Ford Coppola 2022 Archimedes Cabernet Sauvignon, Alexander Valley, Sonoma County (\$125)

An inky-black hue puts this wine's density on display, as do teeth-grabbing, dusty tannins. The palate is majestic and alert, with layers of plum, blackberry, graphite, espresso, and violet leading to an expressive,

complex finish. **97** —*M.M.*

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A Rhone Rangers **SHOWDOWN**

**SYRAH AND VIOGNIER PRODUCERS FACE OFF
DURING A SEMINAR AT RAM'S GATE WINERY**

story by Jonathan Cristaldi / photos by Alexander Rubin



On a picture-perfect Sunday morning in late June, the Rhone Rangers hosted a trade-focused seminar at Ram's Gate Winery in Sonoma. The bright, glass-walled space was packed as the event got underway, moderated by *SOMM Journal* publisher/editor-in-chief Meredith May.

After opening remarks from Rhone Rangers president Larry Schaffer, owner/winemaker of Tercero Wines, May introduced the seminar's focus: Syrah and Viognier. Though often overshadowed by more popular varieties in the U.S., "these are the OG Rhône grapes," she said, teeing up a comparative tasting of wines from producers across California, joined for good measure by one from Texas.

Syrah, May reminded the group, ranges from meaty and mineral to jammy and plush—"but is that a result of technique or terroir?" she asked. Meanwhile, Viognier, with its hallmark notes of peach, honeysuckle, and lychee, can become unbalanced if the alcohol tips too high. "In the Northern Rhône, it's exotic and lush," she pointed out. "Can California and Texas measure up?"



Cline Family Cellars
2024 Viognier, J. Poppe Vineyard,
Los Carneros

Planted in 1991 on rhyolitic soils—"granite that cooled fast," according to Cline Family Cellars director of wine-making and viticulture Tom Gendall—the J. Poppe Vineyard yields Viognier with expressive aromatics. Picked in late September, the 2024 vintage balances freshness with ripeness at 14% ABV. Floral, tropical, and textural, it's a polished California take on the Rhône Valley's key white variety.

"We're harvesting sunshine," Gendall said. "We want you to know it's Viognier but also that it's Californian." Minimal intervention in the cellar, minimal oak contact, and extended lees all help to preserve varietal character. One of three Viogniers made by Cline, this single-vineyard bottling sells direct to consumer for \$35.



Starfield Vineyards
2023 Estate Viognier, El Dorado

At 2,400 feet, Starfield's estate vineyard sees a shortened growing season, due in part to it receiving 10%–15% more solar intensity than do lower elevations. Wine-maker Rob Sinton picks early to capture freshness and herbal nuance. "For me, it shows up as coriander seed," he said.

Inspired by Condrieu producers Georges Vernay and François Villard, Sinton caps the use of new oak in the cellar at 35% and sees malolactic fermentation as essential to his house style. This particular wine underwent full malolactic and was aged in (25% new) French oak barrels from Remond, creating a creamy texture with notes of pineapple and hazelnut. May pointed out its lifted aromatics, which Sinton credited to the high-elevation site.

The wine retails for \$36 and is sold via independent brokers in California.



Thacher Winery
2023 Viognier, Hastings Ranch,
Adelaida District, Paso Robles

Thacher Winery has sourced from Hastings Ranch for 14 years. Initially, the producer intended to use Viognier for sparkling wine and picked it at 18 degrees Brix, but it showed so well that winemaker Sherman Thacher bottled it still. "That's when we really fell in love with the variety," said general manager Tony Quealy.

Now picked at 20 degrees Brix, the wine goes through full malolactic and is bottled unfinned and unfiltered; May noted its chalky minerality, which Quealy attributed to the site's limestone-rich soils. "We're not chasing Old World style," Quealy noted. "We want an acid-driven white."

Just 150 cases are produced; the DTC price is \$45.



Ram's Gate Winery
2021 Syrah, Richards Vineyard,
Sonoma Valley

To craft this wine, Ram's Gate sourced fruit from the 2-acre Richards Vineyard, tucked between the Mayacamas and Sonoma mountain ranges near Kenwood. Short daylight hours there make for a long season, and the Syrah is typically harvested in early October. "It's our favorite project," said assistant winemaker Rachel Bordes.

The vineyard, planted in 1999 and replanted with new clones in 2017, continues to express itself clearly. "Terroir trumps clonal material and technique," she said. The 2021 Syrah offers dark cherry, lavender, sage, and rosemary while showing lift and balance despite its 14.6% ABV; May called it "nicely layered." Bordes acknowledged its Rhône inspiration but added, "We're in California. Richness is part of what we do—but balance comes from stem inclusion, foot stomping, and native ferments."

The wine is available DTC for \$85.



William Chris Vineyards
2023 Syrah, Vintage Press Vineyard,
Texas Hill Country

Set in the Pedernales River Basin—a site that William Chris Vineyards co-founder/CEO Chris Brundrett hopes will one day become an AVA—Vintage Press Vineyard was planted ten years ago with the goal of making GSM (Grenache, Syrah, Mourvèdre, and Tannat) blends. But in 2023, the Syrah stood out on its own.

"This was the first Syrah we've bottled from this site," said Brundrett. Picked early to preserve natural acidity and oak-aged with skin inclusion, the wine offers dusty minerality, lavender, wild herbs, and violet within a satiny, medium-bodied frame.

May praised the elegance and notable acidity it shows at just 13.1% ABV. "We didn't set out to make this solo," Brundrett said. "But it showed so well in barrel, we had to." The wine is available DTC, and William Chris is seeking California distribution.



Zaca Mesa Winery
2016 Estate Syrah, Black Bear Block,
Santa Ynez Valley

Zaca Mesa's Black Bear Block Syrah hails from own-rooted vines planted in 1978 by Ken Brown using cuttings from Gary Eberle of Eberle Winery. Situated at 1,300–1,600 feet on fractured Monterey shale, the site receives only 16 inches of annual rainfall. "The vines really have to struggle," said winemaker/general manager Kristin Bryden. Zaca Mesa has narrowed its clonal focus in recent years while homing in on blocks best suited to Syrah.


The 2016 vintage, chosen as part of a re-release of library wines, reflects a classic season—moderate weather, gradual ripening, and staggered harvest. It's rich and structured, with black cherry, chocolate, and spice: "Cherry and chocolate just glide across a generous mouthfeel," May noted. It retails for \$78 and is distributed by Southern Glazer's Wine & Spirits.



Attendees tasted through six domestic wines—three Viogniers and three Syrahs.

The Rise of the American Rhône

Late in the seminar, someone asked: "Are people really buying Viognier?" Tony Quealy was blunt: "Rhône lovers? They're not scared of it. They get it and love it." Tom Gendall added that Sauvignon Blanc drinkers love the aromatics, while Chardonnay drinkers appreciate the texture. "Gone are the days of worrying over pronunciation," he said.

Syrah and Viognier may still live in the shadow of their Bordelaise and Burgundian counterparts, but these winemakers—and many of their peers—are proving that the U.S. has the climate, soils, and know-how to produce Rhône-style wines with depth, personality, and a clear sense of place. The grapes may carry echoes of their spiritual home, but in California and Texas, the wines they produce are sun-kissed, expressive, and entirely their own. 

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PHOTOS COURTESY OF CHATEAU BUENA VISTA

Chateau Buena Vista as it was in 1865... and as it is today.

History in the Making

HOW CHATEAU BUENA VISTA HONORS ITS PAST WHILE MAINTAINING MOMENTUM

by Stacy Briscoe

IT'D BE APPROPRIATE to start the story of Chateau Buena Vista with "Once upon a time..." There's an aura of fantasy, romance, and adventure interwoven into the legacy label that has undeniable historical significance in California's wine evolution.

Wine pros and enthusiasts likely have a base familiarity with how this tale goes. For those new to the fold or who perhaps just need a refresher, we'll travel back to 1857 when, after emigrating from his native Hungary and attempting wine-grape-growing in both Wisconsin and San Diego, Agoston Haraszthy finally settled in Sonoma County, where he purchased a 12-acre ranch called Buena Vista.

A Goldilocks location in terms of soil, weather, and, at the time, room for growth, Haraszthy continued to build his empire with the purchase of an additional 4,000 acres and the construction of two on-site wineries. During this expansion, he found time to visit the established wine regions of Europe, bringing back with him 350 different grape varieties with which to experiment in the New World.

The story that unfolded between the rise of "the Count" (as he referred to himself), his eventual downfall, and Buena Vista's current status as an area pioneer is

rich with twists and turns. Zooming into the 21st century, undoubtedly the most significant occurrence was the purchase of the property and brand by Jean-Charles Boisset's Boisset Collection in 2011. This is when the beauty of Buena Vista's past truly began to reveal itself, evolving into the modern magic that seeps through every vine, wine, and experience.

"A PIONEERING SPIRIT"

"When we took over, there were great wines being made under the old regime," says Patrick Egan, senior vice president of marketing for Boisset Collection. "But the focus was solely on Pinot Noir and Chardonnay coming from Carneros; there was very little mentioned about the history. And for us, the history of Buena Vista is paramount."

"We inherited and worked with the estate vineyard for a year, and honestly it was a bit of a disaster because of several different factors," adds winemaker Brian Maloney. "There was a lot of acreage that either needed replanting or shouldn't have been planted to winegrapes in the first place." Today, Maloney says he's producing his best Pinot Noirs and Chardonnays to date by working alongside growers throughout California's North Coast.

Speaking specifically about his Pinot Noirs, he comments, "We've shifted from being Carneros-centric to embracing the broader Sonoma Coast. This dual focus aligns with Buena Vista's foundational history, predating the creation of appellations, and allows us to craft wines that are more dynamic, layered, and true to the diverse environments that shape them."

In Maloney's view, "the Buena Vista legacy isn't just doing the same thing the same way for hundreds of years. It's a pioneering spirit." That spirit came to the forefront when, delving into the winery's history alongside historian Charles L. Sullivan (author of *Sonoma Wine and the Story of Buena Vista*), the team came to learn of the Count's influence beyond his home base in Sonoma.

"The estate as it was in the 1860s was so large that it reached over the edge of the Mayacamas and into Napa Valley," says Egan. The Count began a business of homesteading—selling plots of land to up-and-coming growers who in turn promised to make their wine at his estate. This entrepreneurial enterprise not only helped fund Buena Vista but also brought more growers, including many now-famous names, to Napa Valley, fueling the region's rise to the prominence it enjoys today.

AGEABLE AND APPROACHABLE

Another aspect of Buena Vista's evolution "was transforming from a Chardonnay and Pinot Noir house to extending across varietals *and* appellations," notes Egan. "Today, the . . . bestseller by far is the Chateau Buena Vista Napa Valley Cabernet Sauvignon."

In 2012, the winery released its first Napa Cabernet Sauvignon under Boisset's ownership, producing a humble 200 cases exclusively for tasting room visitors. "It lasted less than a month," says Maloney. "It was the first wine we ever sold for over \$100—and people just gobbled it up." Today, Buena Vista produces over 600,000 bottles annually of the expression, selling it both on- and off-premise.

Vital to the wine's style is generous midpalate weight and texture. "It's a Cabernet Sauvignon that shows very well early on its lifespan," Maloney says. "It still has a lot of structure and can certainly age, but it isn't something that needs ten to 15 years to be approachable."

The key to this ageable yet approachable style comes from respecting that each block speaks to its own piece of Napa terroir and treating the grapes in a way that expresses how the climate, soil, and elevation have stewarded the grape during its lifecycle. This necessitates using a variety of fermentation styles that are blended to yield the finished wine, including a warmer, faster fermentation that produces a softer, richer-fruited expression and what Maloney calls the

"classic valley-floor" style with extended maturation that cranks up the heat toward the end to extract even more flavor. "Then there's a variance with a cooler ferment and cooler aging regime that, particularly after the 30-day mark, gets velvety textures. Layering that structured-core style with the rich-extraction style—that's where the success comes from," he says.

Maloney also points to the wine's double exposure to new oak. "After malolactic and being in the original cask for 16 months, we make [large] blends and then flash it into new oak," he explains. That not only imparts strong aromas and flavors but also allows for higher levels of oxygen ingress. "Essentially you're aging the wine a bit quicker—without having to use micro-ox and oak adjuncts—and allowing the wood to soften the palate," he adds. In all, the wine sees an average of 28 months from initial ferment through maturation before being bottled for release.

So abundantly successful is the Chateau Buena Vista Napa Cabernet Sauvignon that in 2018 the estate purchased 45 acres in St. Helena planted to Cabernet Sauvignon and fellow classic Bordeaux varieties Petit Verdot and Cabernet Franc, which are also featured in the blend. "It was all older, virused vines that we've transitioned to newer plantings, and it's just now in the early 2020s that we're starting to see these grapes shine in the Chateau Buena Vista," says Maloney.



Agoston Haraszthy founded the Buena Vista estate in 1857.

"LIKE A FAIRY TALE"

Buena Vista prides itself on being at the forefront of California fine wine, driven by that pioneering spirit passed down by the Count. As a result, nothing is ever static at the estate; in a world where consumer preferences are evolving at an almost alarming rate, the historic winery is able to not just keep up but stay ahead of modern market demand.

Remember those 350 varieties the Count brought with him back in the day? There's a wine club for that. The Buena Vista Vinicultural Society brings together small-production bottlings of lesser-known wines—think Valdiguié, Charbono, and Ribolla Gialla—and classic ones like Zinfandel, Mourvedré, and Carignan from historic old-vine plantings throughout the state.

Not a drinker? Not a problem. "You can enjoy a whole-day's experience at Buena Vista and not even drink wine," says Egan. Walking through the property is like being transported back in time: Guests can tour either of the two wineries—which were both retrofitted in 2012 to maintain their original architecture, complete with pickaxe marks from the initial construction—and get lost in the epic hedge maze or check out the wine tool museum. Kids, pets, picnics—all welcome. "It's like a fairy tale," says Egan. "It's an extremely romantic story with lots of interesting characters. That's what makes Buena Vista relevant, exciting, dynamic—and fun." ❧



Inside Buena Vista's cellar.



The Shiraz Whisperers

TWO HANDS WINES IS A GAME-CHANGER IN THE BAROSSA VALLEY AND MCLAREN VALE

by Meridith May

WHEN TECHNOLOGY ACTUALLY reinforces nature and the results are in the glass, the steps taken to get there may have been laborious, but they're certainly worthwhile.

In Australia's Barossa Valley—one of the driest regions in the driest inhabited continent on Earth—water efficiency is key for producers like Two Hands Wines, whose team uses what's known as sap flow sensors to “communicate” with the vines that produce the Shiraz grapes for their wines. “We don't just monitor the moisture in the soil—and we certainly don't rely on that procedure,” explains Pierre-Henri Morel, proprietor and general manager of Two Hands. “We go deeper.”


Morel points out that most moisture detectors encourage the vines to drink more than they need. “Irrigation is based on assumptions of dry soils, so overwatering is a problem and is overbearing to the vine's stress level. If the vines get too much water, they are underperforming, and that's not a good thing. We send the sap flow needle all the way into the vines' vascular system to deliver just enough water to keep it at the right level of stress,” he explains. “Think of it like testing the blood pressure of the plant. If the vine is relaxed, the sap will flow, but if you keep spoon-feeding the vines too much water, they won't be able to perform to their best and will become complacent and lazy.”



Scottish Highland cows at Two Hands' Holy Grail Vineyard in Australia's Barossa Valley.

Utilizing sap flow provides nutrients and water to every part of the plant, but it also extends water efficiency, so overwatering is never an issue. “We were able to reduce water usage by 50%. This was a gradual training process where the vines can adapt for ultimate performance. We never plant a vineyard for us—we are planting it for the next generation,” says Morel, adding, “The day we pick, the wines are made. The vine-

yard is Formula 1 and the winemaker is the driver. You need a good driver to handle the car, but [it's] a championship car."

Some of the Shiraz that Two Hands makes hails from two regions 70 miles apart: Barossa Valley and McLaren Vale. The differences in the wines are definitive. As Morel notes, "The same piece of music from a different conductor can result in a completely different sound. We let each region's expression shine and [are] super neutral and consistent in winemaking, with similar time for skin contact and oak regimen" (the wines are aged 16 months in 20% new and 80% used French oak). 



Henri-Pierre Morel is general manager and proprietor of Two Hands Wines.



Tasting Notes

Two Hands Wines 2022 Lily's Garden Shiraz, McLaren Vale, South Australia Violets and anise shine in this cool-climate coastal Shiraz, whose subdued salinity is integrated into a generous flow of black plum. Black tea comes in on the midpalate, supported by a seamless backbone of graphite. Violets perk up again on the big, broad, and seductive finish. **96**

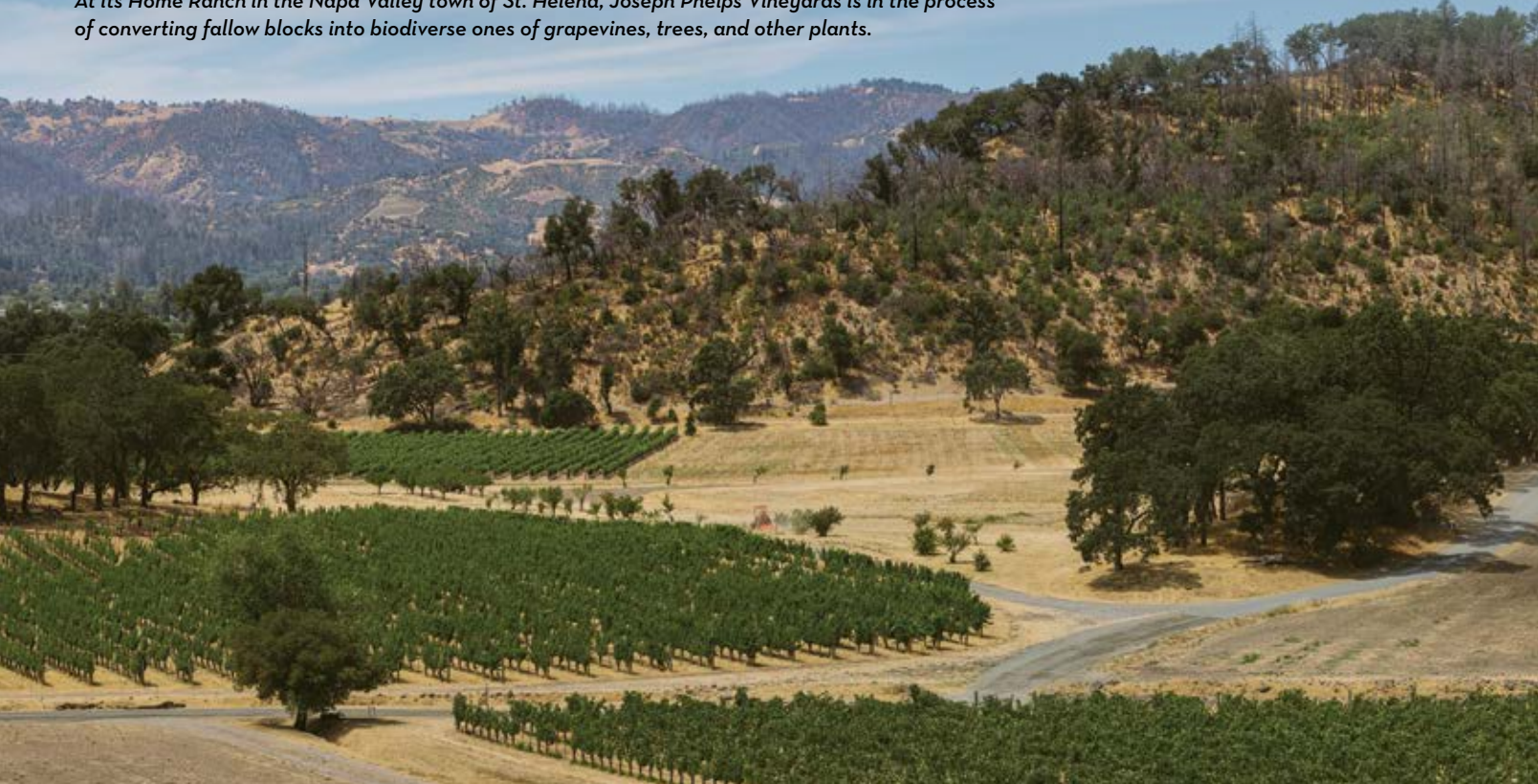
Two Hands Wines 2022 Bella's Garden Shiraz, Barossa Valley, Australia In this iteration of the Garden Series, Shiraz sports red and blue fruit that surrounds sweet oak; blueberry gelée, coffee, and soy sauce go savory and deep. The wine's elegance exists on a profound level, with more precision than its coastal partner shows. Acidity runs higher as well, making it a dynamic food partner. **96**

Two Hands Wines 2021 Waterfall Block Shiraz, Waterfall Gully Road, Burnside, Adelaide, Australia (\$125) "In the city of Adelaide, a rare place for a vineyard," offers proprietor and general manager Pierre-Henri Morel, "only three vineyards exist. Burnside is one of its suburbs, and the site was planted by a wealthy doctor on a steep slope in the back of his house. We trialed the grapes for the first and second year to see if they were up to par, and yes, they were." Morel also points out that "Burnside" in French is "Côte-Rôtie." It's serendipitous, given that the expression is reminiscent of wines from the Northern Rhône. Aromas of ripe black cherry and ginger lead to roasted meats, Worcestershire, and hints of coffee and umami. Buttery tannins meet a goosedown mouthfeel on the luscious palate before a finish of cherry and blood orange peel. Energetic, with long-lasting verve. **97**

Two Hands Wines 2021 Dave's Block Single Vineyard Shiraz, Blythmans Road, Blewitt Springs, McLaren Vale, Australia (\$125) This is an old vineyard planted on an elevated site of bleached white sand in the cooler northern subregion of Blewitt Springs. Blackberry and spiced pomegranate are sensuous and ripe, enhanced by silky chocolate that permeates the tongue. The wine's curvaceous form is molded around a backbone of notable structure, coaxing out a luscious oak-kissed finish with mocha creaminess. **98**

TERLATO WINES

At its Home Ranch in the Napa Valley town of St. Helena, Joseph Phelps Vineyards is in the process of converting fallow blocks into biodiverse ones of grapevines, trees, and other plants.



The Road to Agroenology

JOSEPH PHELPS VINEYARDS' "ROOTED IN TOMORROW" DINNER SERIES SIGNALLED A SHIFT TOWARD "SMARTER, MORE RESPONSIBLE" WINEGROWING

by Randy Caparoso

THE TEAM AT Joseph Phelps Vineyards has been traveling the country for the past several months to sow the seeds for a new approach to viticulture and winemaking that aims to better prepare the wine industry for inevitable changes to the environment.

As part of a dinner series whose theme was "Rooted in Tomorrow," Joseph Phelps president David Pearson partnered with chef Oliver English as well as English's brother Simon and sister Belle to present dishes and wines illustrating this approach, based mostly on regenerative farming practices. At the finale dinner in July on the winery's Napa Valley estate, Pearson started off the night by saying, "I know when 'regenerative farming' is men-

tioned these days, the response can be a rolling of eyes. But allow me to explain the seriousness of this. I was recently in Ardèche, France, where I saw the results of just one regenerative practice called crimping, where instead of tilling cover crops and grasses into the soil between rows, you are simply folding them over. The benefit is a far richer, fresher, almost lasagna-like layering of decomposed plant material. The impact on factors such as soil health, ground temperature, and photosynthesis is huge—the [rates of improvement], by 40%–50%, are nothing to sneeze at. If the objective of winegrowing is higher-quality wine, there is no better way. But if the objective is also taking a step toward a more natural biodiversity





The team at Joseph Phelps traveled the country over the past year hosting a dinner series whose theme was “Rooted in Tomorrow.”

as part of a healthier humanity, no question that should be the next step, which we are in the middle of taking at Joseph Phelps. This has been called agroecology. You can also define it as agroecology—a smarter, more responsible, results-oriented way of making wine.”

Added Oliver while introducing the courses composed by Belle and winery chef Tod Kawachi, “The dinners we have been doing across the country have been

more than about good food [and] great wine. We have also been exploring the future and power of food toward the goal of effecting meaningful social and environmental change. We’ve been doing it by focusing strictly on organic or regenerative sources, especially farms practicing biodiversity, while having a great time around the table!”

A highlight of the event was New York strip sourced from the White Buf-



falo Land Trust Center for Regenerative Agriculture at Jalama Canyon Ranch in Lompoc, California, which was served with a puree of regeneratively grown kohlrabi and organic sticky soy. It was accompanied by the 2006 and 2019 vintages of the winery’s famed INSIGNIA, the former of which proved a particularly phenomenal, umami-driven pairing.


Noted Pearson, “The 2006 INSIGNIA is clearly still full of life, energy, freshness, and youthfulness. This kind of longevity is precisely our goal today. If you look outside at our home estate, everywhere you see fallow fields. We are not just replanting, we are selecting plants to bring in as hedged perimeters around each parcel, establishing a ‘spine’ of fruiting trees [as a way] of introducing polyculture into the vineyard.

“It’s an incredible honor to helm an estate with over 50 years of amazing history. We will honor that by setting a sensible path for the next 50 years. The motivation is not to save the world but to make the finest possible wines. It will be a learning process, but we will start by seeing nature as a whole, steering our farming and winemaking practices toward achieving a better balance with our environment [and] within our own lives [through] how we eat and what we drink.” §

An Extended Family

**KHK IS A COLLABORATION OF
NAPA KNOW-HOWS**

by Meridith May



As the proprietor of KHK Wines, Jim Keller is the wrangler of the talented team that brought the label to life.

JIM KELLER IS KNOWN for his real estate prowess in Napa Valley, representing the third generation of his family to be involved in the industry. He's also the proprietor of KHK Wines (his surname is indicated by the first "K" in the brand's name).

The legacy of the late William Ames Hall ("H") is the success of Hall's Hospitality Management, based in Charleston, South Carolina. Hall's previous career involved overseeing the hospitality programs of some of the country's most prestigious resorts, ensuring they were well run at Ritz-Carlton properties in Florida, San Francisco, and Pasadena. He applied this experience to his own business, which has steadily expanded; today, his sons Billy and Tommy Hall run Halls Chophouses, Slightly North of Broad, High Cotton, and Rita's Seaside Grill in South Carolina and Tennessee.

The second "K" in KHK refers to renowned chef Thomas Keller, whose Napa Valley restaurant The French Laundry and New York's Per Se have earned him great acclaim. Keller—no relation to Jim—is the winery's ambassador and co-owner of the magnificent Howard Backen Estate on Pritchard Hill with Jim and the Hall brothers. "When Jim first told me about KHK, I said, 'Napa needs to offer more approachable wines.' Many younger generations simply can't afford what Napa is known for. KHK is changing that—connecting people across generations through something



KHK winemaker Thomas Rivers Brown.



Advanced Sommelier Jesse Rodriguez is the global sales director for KHK.



Renowned chef and KHK ambassador Thomas Keller (left) and Jim Keller (right) with NFL player Brock Bowers.

timeless: good food, good wine, and great friends!" says Thomas.

Rounding out the team are another three initials: TRB stands for Thomas Rivers Brown, KHK's lauded winemaker, who has been behind a bevy of star-studded labels such as Far Niente, Maybach Family Vineyards, Mondavi, Round Pond, Revana, and Schrader in addition to his own labels, namely Rivers-Marie, Caterwaul, and Dorsey.

Sales efforts are led by industry veteran and Advanced Sommelier Jesse Rodriguez, Dip-WSET, CWE, who will market the wines on a global scale. KHK is destined to be a brand worth knowing, buying, collecting, and selling to your customers. SJ



THE WINES

The 2023 vintage of KHK Cabernet Sauvignon is sourced from a Yountville vineyard controlled and farmed by grower Giancarlo Bettinelli, a friend of Jim Keller's. The site is in walking distance to The French Laundry and two more of Thomas Keller's world-renowned restaurants, Bouchon and Ad Hoc; KHK can be found at all three establishments.

Both the initial release of the 2021 Cabernet Sauvignon, a small production of 125 cases, and the 600-case 2022 vintage quickly sold out thanks to the group's restaurant and hospitality connections. The common thread of both releases is tamed tannins and an ultra-elegant mouthfeel. Says Jim, "We want to make an approachable wine for people to enjoy right away." As an upscale by-the-glass pour, the current vintage will dazzle. The inaugural release of the KHK Hillside from the 2023 vintage, meanwhile, was sourced from Jim and his wife Lindsay's home, Shiflett Ranch; just a mile from Yountville, it's been in the family for 85 years.

KHK 2023 Cabernet Sauvignon, Napa Valley (\$75) Energetic, with ripe notes of cherry tart and white-peppered violets. Clean and sturdy tannins take a bow on the palate with suede-like flavors of cocoa and plum that glide along a path of sweet oak. **97**

KHK 2023 Cabernet Sauvignon, Hillside, Shiflett Estate, Napa Valley (\$125) Big, broad, and dense, this youthful Cab extends a welcome in the form of round, slick notes of dark chocolate-covered oak. Dotted with white pepper and a hint of espresso and cayenne, it's focused within a creamy frame. Bracing mineral tones attach to the dusty and seductive palate. **98**

The common thread of both releases from KHK Wines is tamed tannins and an ultra-elegant mouthfeel. Says Jim Keller, "We want to make an approachable wine for people to enjoy right away."

The Chappellet property on Pritchard Hill.

Defying Gravititas

PHILLIP CORALLO-TITUS IS SERIOUS ABOUT MAKING STREAMLINED MOUNTAIN WINES FOR CHAPPELLET AND ACUMEN by Meridith May

THE ALPS, THE ANDES, and California's Sierra Nevadas are considered extreme terroir. In Napa Valley, mountain fruit from sites such as Mt. Veeder and Howell Mountain, located in the Mayacamas and Vacas mountain ranges, respectively, is associated with concentrated, muscled, tannic wines.

We cornered Phillip Corallo-Titus up on Pritchard Hill, home to Chappellet winery, where we found out how he tackles tannins—wrestling or at times gently coaxing them into submission for some of the most notable, streamlined, textural expressions we've tasted.

A straight shot south, the cooler Atlas Peak AVA is where he makes mountain wines for Acumen; these have a similar profile, their nuances clear but still astounding to the taste buds.

Corallo-Titus grew up in Sonoma, where his father, a radiologist, had an attraction to fine wine. He built a winery in St. Helena on the valley floor and named it for the family: TITUS. "Dad put me right to work," Corallo-Titus explained, "and the passion stuck, from the fascination of agriculture to the smell of fermentation and cooperage."

After studying viticulture, enology, and agronomy at the University of California, Davis, he applied for a crush job at Chappellet in 1981. "I left for five years with other wine job pursuits and then came back to Chappellet and stayed for the past 36 years," he said.

When Donn and Molly Chappellet first established their winery on the hill in 1968, the *St. Helena Star* called the mountaintop project the Cathedral, an allusion to its soaring beams that took the shape of an avant-garde wooden pyramid at 1,000 feet in elevation. Chappellet was only the second new winery to be built in Napa Valley after Prohibition (Robert Mondavi was first in 1966).



PHOTOS COURTESY OF CHAPPELLET

Phillip Corallo-Titus is winemaker for Chappellet and Acumen.

“Little did I know I would be spending most of my life in that pyramid,” said Corallo-Titus, who has seen the producer undergo an evolution over time. “When the next generation of Chappellets came in during the 1990s, more changes were implemented, and we looked at reinventing ourselves as a more modern winery. We bought new crushers, presses, [and] barrels and started replanting those 100 acres of vines.” The only sustainable way to do that was by tackling 5 acres at a time over the course of 20 years.

“Before it was made so clear that Napa Valley north of Oak Knoll is Cabernet Sauvignon country, the Valley was growing Riesling, Sangiovese, and a lot of Merlot—which now we know does better in a cooler region,” recalled Corallo-Titus. “It was a time of great investment, and in 2013, we built a new



Molly and Donn Chappellet in 1968, the year they founded their winery.



Acumen’s Edcora Vineyard is located in the Atlas Peak AVA.

winery on Pritchard Hill, which we call The Chai [pronounced *shay*, the name is the French word for ‘wine storeroom’].” It’s solar powered to maintain a constant temperature of 53 degrees, keeping the wines well preserved and fresh while maintaining deep color.

Pritchard Hill receives Pacific fog that comes through the Petaluma Gap in Sonoma County before turning north to Napa Valley. At these elevations—from 800 to 1,800 feet—it dissipates quickly, making for warmer days than Atlas Peak experiences. “You can feel that cold

morning air at our Atlas Peak Vineyards” where Acumen is produced, Corallo-Titus noted, adding, “As a winemaker, I look at aspects of hillside vineyards—do they face south? How much sun exposure are the vines seeing?”

Given the potential for intensity mountain fruit possesses, Corallo-Titus pointed out that it takes time and risk to ensure the wines still offer some softness. “I don’t believe it when I hear that wines are made in the vineyard,” he said. “There’s a lot to the process if you’re making well-proportioned, approachable wines.” SJ

Tasting Notes

Acumen 2022 PEAK Cabernet Franc, Atlas Peak, Napa Valley (\$110) With the addition of 15% Cabernet Sauvignon, 6% Merlot, and 2% Petit Verdot, this Right Bank-style red from Acumen’s mountain estate is a textural dream. Refined tannins are thoroughly displayed through the sensation of melting dark chocolate and luscious, creamy violet. Plum pudding weaves through sage, tobacco, and cedar. **96**

Acumen 2022 PEAK Cabernet Sauvignon, Edcora Vineyard, Atlas Peak, Napa Valley (\$175) When you have a vineyard named for a 6-carat diamond renowned as the largest of its kind in the world, there’s a lot to live up to. After tasting the majestic fruit that comes off this mountain estate at 1,600 feet in elevation, we can attest to its brilliance, which rivals the natural beauty of its namesake. Stunning aromas of s’mores lead to blackberries and violets bursting out of the ground, sharing space with an herb garden. Rocky, ashy mineral tones persist, aligned with plum-skin tannins. This is a luscious red, ever-changing in the glass. **98**

Chappellet 2022 Cabernet Sauvignon, Hideaway Vineyard, Napa Valley (\$200) This wine is an ode to concentrated, earth-laden mountain fruit from a vineyard located at 1,425 feet in elevation on the slopes of Pritchard Hill. Intense, dense, and supremely elegant, it’s built for endurance, with well-defined skyscraper tannins offering stature and structure. Notes of plum, cassis, espresso, and dark chocolate are a testament to its reined-in power and sense of place. **98**

Chappellet 2022 Pritchard Hill Cabernet Sauvignon, Napa Valley (\$325) Farmed for 57 years and replanted block by block over the past 30 years, Pritchard Hill remains a benchmark for Napa Valley’s superior mountain fruit. Winemaker Phillip Corallo-Titus aged this wine for 22 months in 100% new French oak. With an incomparable mouthfeel, it’s seamlessly elegant, offering notes of plum liqueur and melting dark chocolate-covered black cherry. Structured, round tannins show remarkable aplomb. **99**



The Clubhouse Alchemist

HOW **TIM HEALY** IS REWRITING THE BEVERAGE PROGRAM AT SILVERADO RESORT, ONE ARTICHOKE AMARO AT A TIME

by Jonathan Cristaldi

I SAT DOWN with Tim Healy, the new beverage manager at Silverado Resort in Napa Valley, expecting a quick chat and got a master class in beverage innovation instead. Over the course of an hour, Healy walked me through his unlikely path from city government to high-end hospitality and explained how he's quietly rebuilding Silverado's entire wine and spirits program from the ground up. Here are some highlights from our conversation.

Q: You didn't come into this industry the traditional way. How did a political science major end up in beverage?

I was working as a city council assistant in San Jose and just hit a wall. Long commutes, cubicles. . . . It wasn't for me. I bailed and moved to Tahoe, waited tables at a mom-and-pop, and then ran the ski program at the Ritz-Carlton, including the ski valet. That's where I really learned luxury hospitality—and how to train people from all over the world to deliver it.

Q: How did wine come into the picture?

At Schaffer's Mill near Truckee, I inherited a 4,000-bottle cellar. I had to inventory it, price it, and sell it—with no roadmap. That's when I got obsessed. I started tasting, reading, learning, and realizing that wine is just like history or politics: It's about storytelling.

Q: And now you're at Silverado with the opportunity to make a clean slate?

Basically, I walked into an aging wine list with a singular focus on Napa Cabs. Now I'm building a program with global reach. Many of our members are winemakers—they drink Napa Cab for work. When



PHOTO COURTESY OF TIM HEALY

Q: What about pricing? This is a resort, after all.

One of the first things I did when I arrived was [implement] lower prices on our high-end wines and rare liquors. While I believe Silverado Resort is a premier destination, I want to ensure people have the opportunity to enjoy special and memorable moments without the feeling of being gouged. If we have a rare bottle of Pappy or Michter's 20, I'd rather pour it at a fair price and buy another bottle next year than have it collect dust behind the bar.

Q: Any rules for vendors?

Bring me the weird stuff. Tell me a story. I'm not here to push the same old tech-money Cabernet. I want something with soul. And if I'm going to pour a \$100 dram, I want it to be experienced—not just shelved.

they come here, they want something different. I want to surprise them with Brunello, Amarone, even Slovenian reds.

Q: You're also overseeing five cocktail programs. How do you balance that?

Each outlet has its own vibe. The Mansion Bar does classic, high-volume. The pool bar is playful—quaffable drinks like a strawberry lemonade with Meyer lemon vodka, inspired by my childhood. The Grill is where I get nerdy—Mezcal Old Fashioneds, Cassis Margaritas with graham cracker rims, Negronis made with artichoke amaro.

Q: Favorite recent read?

The Count of Monte Cristo. There's a scene during Carnival in Rome that reminded me how wine, revelry, and human joy haven't changed much in centuries.

Q: What do you do when you're off the clock?

I was big into downhill mountain biking when I lived in Tahoe. . . . Since moving to Napa, I'm swapping the dirt trails for vineyards and road climbs. I've already scoped out a local bike shop and plan to get a road bike. One of my goals? Ride the back roads and visit vineyards from the saddle. **SJ**



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