

THE SOMM JOURNAL

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Meredith May

While I love living in the Scottsdale area, Arizona is too hot for my dog, so I'm back in Napa for the summer. Here, the foggy mornings are delightful; the windy afternoons are, well, expected; and the cool evenings are perfect for dining al fresco.

Fittingly for the season, we're hosting several SOMM Camps, including our big Napa Valley Meets the World SOMM Camp in late July, which will be covered in our October/November issue. Even sooner, in our August/September issue, you'll meet the growers and winemakers behind the Alexander Valley Cabernet Academy. But first, you can open this issue to follow our counselors and campers to Washington State and Paso Robles.

Of course, education is always key to us here at *The SOMM Journal*. In this issue, you can join the attendees of a class on Madeira or a seminar on California's vinous playgrounds; enjoy a virtual tasting of Port and still wines from Portugal with the folks from Taylor Fladgate; and get updates on the state of the organic beverage market from the Millésime BIO expo in Montpellier, France. And you can also meet up with successful somms, wine directors, retailers, and distributors in Tucson, Phoenix, New York, and Chicago via our ongoing On-Premise spotlights and Roundup series.

I've said it before and I will say it again: AI cannot recreate the relationships we foster through networking and educational trips. These experiences keep us all connected, whether you are with us in person or living vicariously through our pages.

A publication built for professionals in the wine world should sound like the wine world. And the truest way to ensure we achieve that is to ask you questions about everything from staff training to blind tasting and managing inventory. We invite you into the conversation so that our stories become more than polished commentary and function more like a community hub, elevating the profession while moving the conversation forward. 

Marlborough brand Mount Fishtail is named for the mountain that looms over some of its vineyards.

A Different Side of *Marlborough*

MOUNT FISHTAIL BRINGS NEW DIMENSION TO THE NEW ZEALAND SAUVIGNON BLANC CATEGORY by *Kate Newton*



Born and bred in Marlborough, Jarrod Englefield was immersed in the region's burgeoning wine industry from his teenage years onward, but

it wasn't until he moved to Europe to import and distribute New Zealand wines that he began to fully grasp their impact beyond his home country's borders. "I actually never liked Sauvignon Blanc growing up, which is quite ironic being from here. I was more of a Pinot Noir man, but once I got to Europe, I really understood why New Zealand [Sauvignon Blanc] is popular," he recalls. "But I also got to understand pretty quickly why it is unpopular for some palates as well. And the key component, I suppose, was [that it] stands out on the world stage because of its aromatics—the punchiness and the tropical notes. It's not like any other region in the world, to be honest. A lot of countries are trying to replicate it. . . .

I suppose the other thing is our acidity, because we've got long, warm days, but it does cool off quite quickly here, so it does linger. . . . But then also that can be the love-hate relationship as well, where there can be too much acidity."

As he was drawn toward white wines like Sancerre and Pouilly-Fumé, Englefield couldn't help but contemplate how Marlborough expressions could potentially appeal to a broader global audience by emulating a "softer [style] more suited to a European palate," in his words, without losing their all-important aromas and acid-driven profile. He particularly noticed a gap in the market for sur lie-aged Marlborough Sauvignon Blanc, so when he returned to New Zealand and eventually helped to launch a new brand, Mount Fishtail, in 2020 as its commercial director, he set out to incorporate the technique in order to represent "the best of both worlds: the best of what we like out of Marlborough in the New World

[and] also what we've learnt [from] and what we like out of the Old World," he says. After trialing aging periods as short as three months and as long as ten, the team, led by winemakers Emmanuel Bolliger and Nicky Parish, settled on a six-month regimen that imparted desired midpalate weight as well as ideal levels of concentration and creaminess. In addition to MS (aka UCDI), the dominant, high-yielding Sauvignon Blanc clone in the region, they also employ Bordeaux clones BDX 316 and 317 as blending components, which contribute more aromatic and textural complexity, in addition to experimenting with aging in acacia barrels. And they directly manage the majority of the vineyards that provide their fruit rather than relying wholly on contracting with growers, giving them a greater level of control over the supply chain than most commercial brands.

The MS clone's evolution in New Zealand, where it makes up the vast majority



Emmanuel Bollinger and Nicky Parish lead the winemaking team at Mount Fishtail.

of plantings, has certainly been a global success story, but one that some view as having an unintended consequence: stylistic sameness. Though Englefield knew he and his colleagues were taking a risk by incorporating French clones to contribute what they saw as a much-needed point of differentiation, their instincts proved correct: The Mount Fishtail Sur Lie Sauvignon Blanc has gained a foothold in Europe, the United States, and other global markets, growing from 3,000 to 25,000 cases since its debut. Meanwhile, another brand Englefield, Bollinger, and Parish oversee, MIHA, ages its Sauvignon Blanc on the lees for two months and increased production from 12,000 cases for its debut 2024 vintage to 16,000 for the 2025 release.

It all amounts to a strategy that's highly atypical of a category known for quickly shepherding the MS clone from harvest to distribution. "A lot of the Sauvignons here, it's big-machine stuff—it's harvested, it's crushed, it's fermented, and then very quickly it's fined and then put in a bottle and chucked out to the market. And that's a little bit of our bugbear . . . but the wineries, they're under pressure to sell and get the run rate going and the wine turning over," acknowledges Englefield of the status quo. His team's sur-lie-aged wines, by contrast, typically aren't available in the U.S. market until eight to 12 months after they're harvested. "It takes an investment [to produce both brands,] because it takes time to get the wine in the bottle and then out to the market. So it's not for everyone. The accountants don't tend to like it," he adds

with a laugh. "But . . . we want to show a different side of Marlborough—and you can clearly taste it."

The State of the Category

Mount Fishtail's foray into relatively uncharted territory for New Zealand Sauvignon Blanc is particularly timely in the U.S. given that "over the past several years, guest preferences have clearly evolved. [They're] looking beyond the classic grapefruit, guava, and grassy profiles and instead gravitating toward wines that offer greater complexity [and] minerality; more nuanced fruit expression; and, most importantly, balance," says Certified Sommelier John Maraffa, corporate beverage manager at Morton's The Steakhouse, Morton's Grille, and The Oceanaire Seafood Room. When taking note of stylistic shifts that deviate from New Zealand's longstanding reputation—almost wholly informed by growers' reliance on the aforementioned MS clone—Maraffa explains, "The primary distinction I see is between wines that fully embrace the vibrant acidity, tropical fruit, and grassy notes traditionally associated with New Zealand Sauvignon Blanc and those that take a more layered approach. The latter use different techniques to build complexity—enhancing texture, emphasizing minerality, and bringing forward richer fruit profiles alongside more pronounced herbal aromatics."

For Luke Lawler, owner of Kansas-based distributor Ad Astra Selections, it's a "rapidly growing category" in which lesser-known producers are poised to

take advantage of the push, particularly among younger consumers, toward "lighter-bodied, lower-alcohol, higher-acid wines [as well as] this departure from a lot of the old-guard big brands that have always catered to baby boomers," he says. "New Zealand Sauvignon Blanc obviously fits perfectly into that." But, like Englefield, he sees its strengths and weaknesses as somewhat inextricable: "If you were at a restaurant and you were to order a Sauvignon Blanc by the glass maybe that came from California, the style could vary quite a bit. But I do think that people generally know what they're getting when they order a New Zealand Sauvignon Blanc. And maybe there's some good and bad to that, because you kind of have this somewhat homogenized style, but it's also a style that obviously lots of people really like," he says.

Often, though, when a region that's become synonymous with a particular grape achieves such consistency in style, that only serves to further accentuate varying degrees of quality, in the view of Advanced Sommelier Travis Hinkle, corporate beverage manager for Del Frisco's Double Eagle Steakhouse, Del Frisco's Grille, Strip House, and Strip House The Speakeasy. "Obviously for a long time what we were seeing stateside with New Zealand Sauvignon Blanc [is that it] would typically fall at an entry-level price point. And so some of those big brands that put it on the map, like your Kim Crawfords and your Oyster Bays and those sorts of things that have [a] high retail [presence] but are relatively affordable, that was kind of what people associated with the category, but . . . a lot of these smaller and more quality-minded producers are becoming more and more available. . . . That doesn't mean that it's always more expensive, but the quality is getting better, and people are more willing to pay a premium for high-quality examples," he says, concurring with Lawler that "there are all of these cultural forces that are converging to make it a real success story for this moment."

In Las Vegas, Nevada, Robb Horesovsky, sales manager at distributor Vin Sauvage, sees the present state of affairs as the product of a natural "evolution of wine drinkers growing up in the category, to some degree," in his words. "Typically,

something . . . becomes popular because it provides a lot of value," he notes. "Pretty much all of the production [in New Zealand] is quality-focused, so I think that that lent an opportunity for premiumization. . . . And while I don't think it's new for these wineries to be offering premium alternatives to their more value-price production, I think that the consumers have begun to pay more attention to it."

Englefield says he has certainly taken note of a handful of fellow Marlborough producers crafting wines that diverge from the typical style through the use of various clones and winemaking techniques, but they're "really focused toward the premium sector of the market. I suppose where we're trying to [tap] into is more of the commercial side of the market; a lot of those wines, they're going to be \$20 [or] \$25 to \$30-plus USD on the shelf, so they're not for everyone. We're delivering a wine that's [aged] six months on the lees for less than \$20 USD . . . [so] we're trying to be more accessible."



Jarrod Englefield is commercial director of Mount Fishtail and MIHA.

Playing "the Long Game"

Perhaps the most impactful strategy behind Mount Fishtail's growth in the U.S. is the focus not only on the on-premise market but specifically on by-the-glass placement, providing a low-commitment entry point that Englefield believes is vital to effectively educating people on what sets the brand apart. "The U.S. market, they know their wine, they're well educated. . . . It takes time, but then it's like a light bulb goes off," he says. "We started with a few thousand cases, we rolled it out to a few states, and then their customers want the wine and they come back and then you slowly build the cadence. And then you go to a new state, you do the same thing. The guys at [Mount Fishtail and MIHA distributor] Southern Starz have done a really good job, but it continues to

be heavy lifting in terms of why [people] should have this wine over the other styles of Marlborough Sauvignon Blanc, because there [are] a lot of [them]."

Mount Fishtail has been on the by-the-glass list at Big Canyon Country Club in Newport Beach, California, for several years, but when guests at a recent blind-tasting dinner contrasting Northern and Southern Hemisphere wines ranked it equally in preference with a Sancerre roughly double its price, their reaction reinforced how "it punches way above its weight class," according to Master Sommelier and wine director Steven Poe. "It's a style that, if you love New Zealand Sauvignon Blanc, you're going to love the wine, [or] if you've been on the fence, [it] can win you over. I did that dinner at the height of Sancerre's popularity . . . and that sort of tells you all you really need to know. And [then] you talk about the price point, and all of a sudden [Mount Fishtail] becomes kind of a no-brainer," he says, adding, "It just makes it a great success for us and for the members." Equally enamored with the brand are Lawlor's restaurant clients, which made the brand Ad Astra Selections' "top-selling Sauvignon Blanc from New Zealand in a pretty short time . . . because it fits into that competitively priced category: great packaging, the quality's really good, but then there is that little bit of difference that makes it unique from a lot of the others."

Assets equal to the brand's value are its versatility when paired with the lighter, often seafood-driven dishes claiming a growing share of menus at steakhouses, Hinkle notes, as well as its ability to

exceed even longtime fans' expectations "of what New Zealand Sauvignon Blanc tastes like. You get the ripe citrus, you get the green herbal notes, but . . . the sur-lie aging [brings] a little bit of an Old World sensibility to tame the hard edges." Concurs Maraffa, "I don't view it as a departure from the style but rather as a thoughtful refinement of it."

If it's not a departure, it's certainly a "discovery" that prompts those who try it to show an interest in learning more about the brand and the New Zealand Sauvignon Blanc category as a whole, notes Horesovsky: "When we get to the market and we go and show wines, we listen to our customer, we listen to what they're seeking in terms of price point, appellation, style, variety, et cetera. And then we present three or four options, and it's pretty obvious when the same wines get selected again and again from that lineup who's doing the work. What's in the bottle is super important . . . but telling the story and providing information is also really important. And I think [Mount Fishtail is] doing a fine job with that."

It's the type of feedback that Englefield seems to appreciate, as simply representing a new dimension of his home country means far more to him than whether he and his team are viewed as pioneers or even renegades. "We're definitely trying to push the boundaries in what we're trying to do with the Sauvignon, because at the end of the day that's our DNA. We're a Marlborough producer, and that's what we're bringing to our global partners, but we want to do it in a way that resonates with us," he says, adding, "We're here for the long game." §J

Tasting Notes



MIHA 2025 Sauvignon Blanc, Marlborough, New Zealand (\$13) Gemstone minerality shines as precious notes of lemon sorbet and white tea flowers

are punctuated by frisky acidity. Cut grass lines a path to a lively, refreshing finish. **91** —*Meridith May*



Mount Fishtail 2025 Sur Lie Sauvignon Blanc, Marlborough, New Zealand (\$17)

Thyme, sweet basil, and dill are pinpoint-precise as juicy lemon verbena unfurls with keen acidity. The wine's complexity lingers in the form of clean nuances of jasmine and crushed sea-shells. **93** —*M.M.*

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PHOTO: FARAEL PETERSON

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Substance winemaker Brennon Leighton discusses pruning techniques in the Sportfisher Vineyard in Washington State's Columbia Valley.



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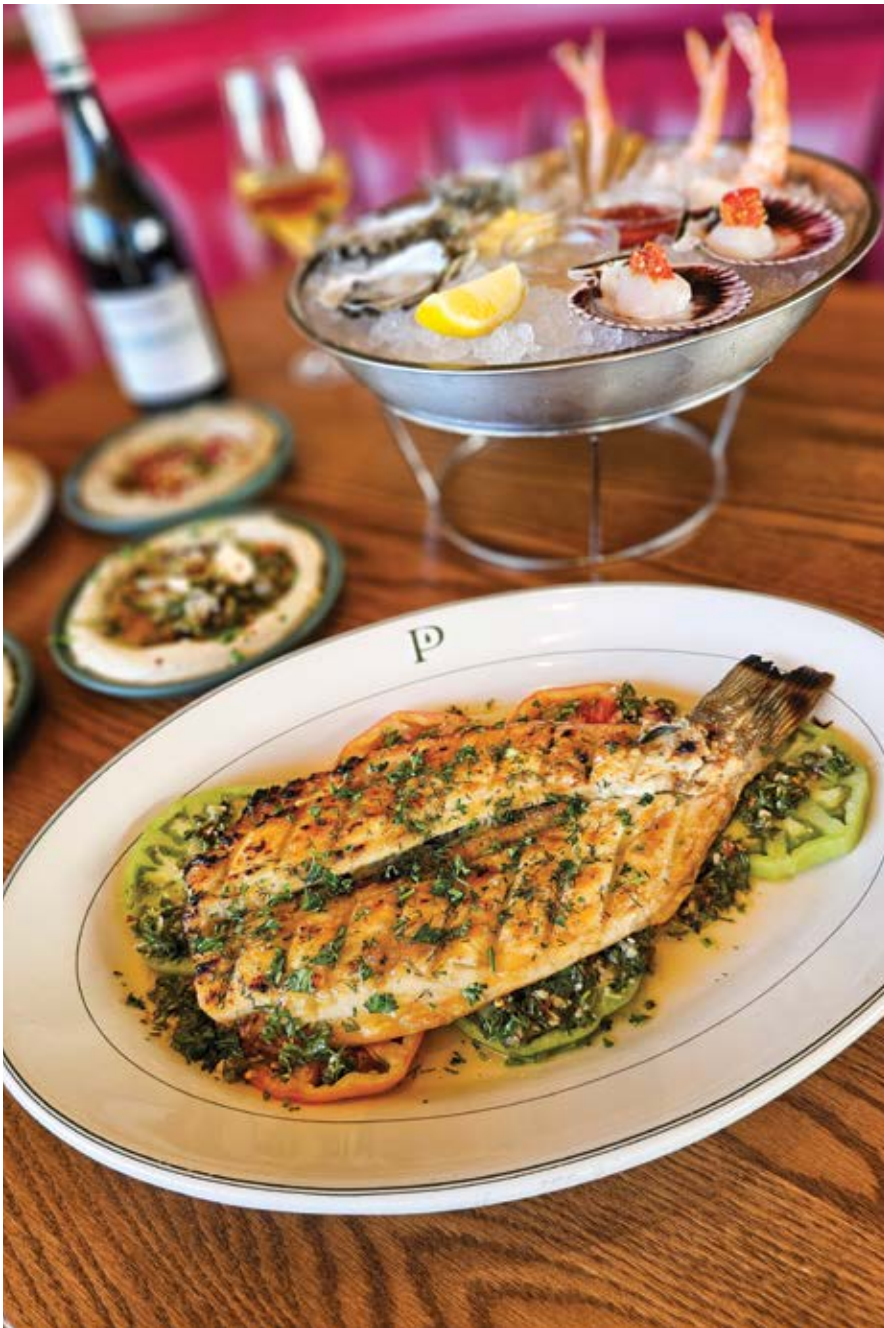
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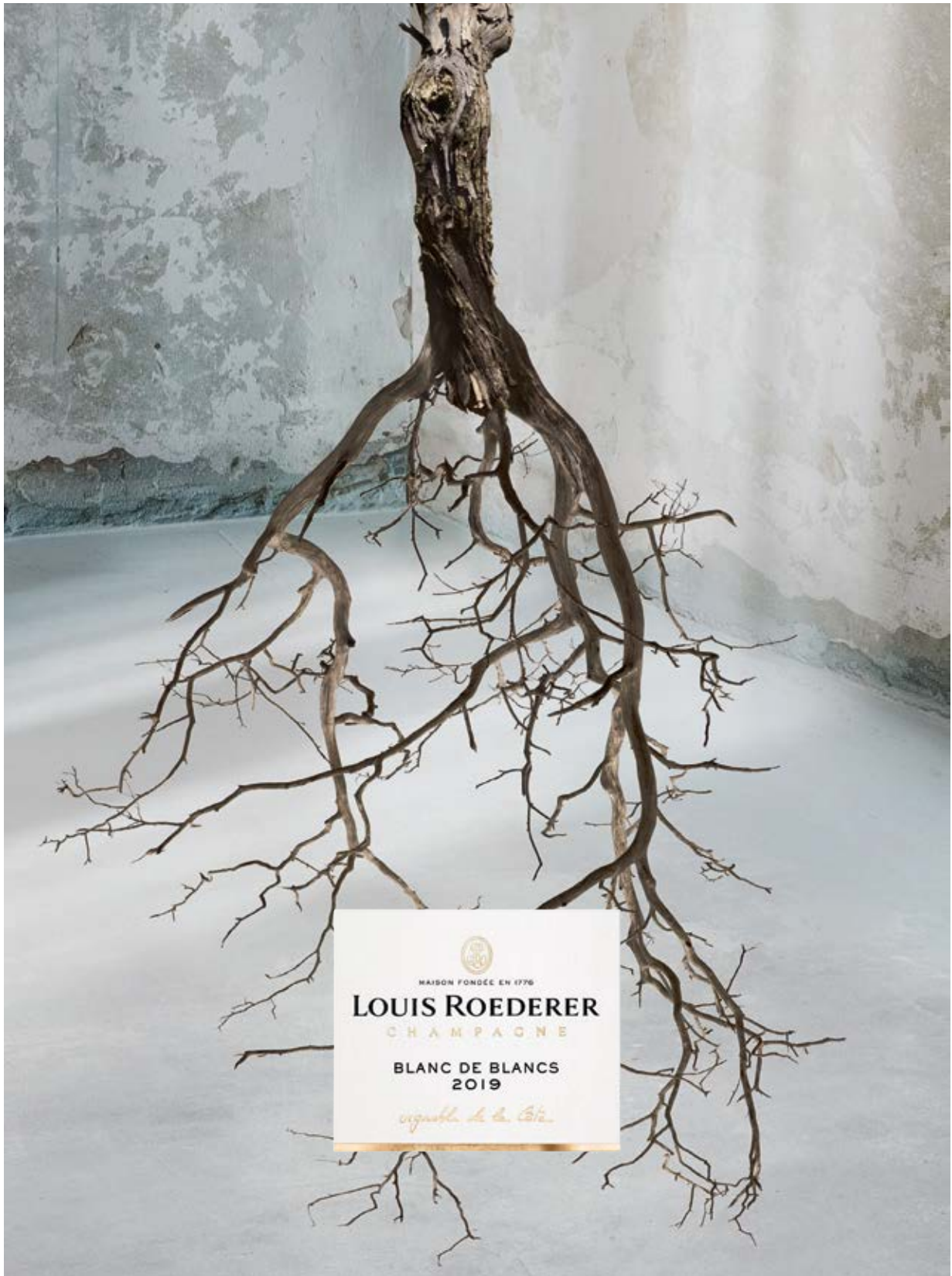
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LOUIS ROEDERER
HAND IN HAND WITH NATURE

Domaine Carneros Named Sustainable Business of the Year

PHOTO: CURT FISCHER



CERTIFIED BY THE California Sustainable Winegrowing Alliance, Napa Green Vineyard & Winery, Bay Area Green Business, and Fish Friendly Farming, Domaine Carneros received the Sustainable Business of the Year award from the Napa Chamber of Commerce, presented by MCE Clean Energy, earlier this

year. In partnership with Schneider Electric, Domaine Carneros deployed the EcoStruxure Microgrid in 2023, doubling the winery's energy generation capacity via the integration of 614 upgraded solar panels and ensuring uninterrupted operations during increasingly common power outages due to wildfires and severe weather events. Domaine Carneros also recycles and reuses water used in production to irrigate estate vineyards; reuses 25% of packaging materials annually while employing lighter-weight bottles to reduce shipping impacts; and has launched on-site grape pomace composting trials.

First NoLo Wines Made With Solos' Aroma Technology Enter Market

SOLOS, a leading innovator in the no- and low-alcohol (NoLo) beverage category, recently announced that its U.S. production facility is fully operational, with the first products made using Solos' patented Aroma Recovery System (ARS) entering the market. Additional facilities serve customers in Germany, Switzerland, Spain, and France, and Solos will soon expand to Mexico and Chile.



Early commercial traction is already evident. Oceano Wines, which focuses on terroir-driven wines from California's coastal vineyards, released its first alcohol-removed wines made with ARS in May under the Oceano Zero label, including a Chardonnay and Pinot Noir from Spanish Springs Vineyard (SRPs \$45 and \$55, respectively). Meanwhile, Rack & Riddle, Solos' exclusive partner for sparkling wine production, has already sold nearly half of its initial run of alcohol-removed sparkling wine crafted with ARS. For more information, visit solos-technology.com.

Reyes Beverage Group Acquires RNDC in 11 Markets

IN MARCH, Reyes Beverage and RNDC entered into an agreement for Reyes to purchase operations in Colorado, Arizona, Florida, Hawaii, Louisiana, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Texas, and Virginia as well as Washington, D.C. Reyes will run the acquired businesses separately from its current operations while it's in the process of taking on new suppliers and hiring teams for these markets.

Appellation Marlborough Wine Appoints Stephanie McIntyre as CEO



ESTABLISHED IN 2018


to safeguard the integrity, provenance, and global reputation of Marlborough wines, Appellation Marlborough Wine (AMW) has announced the appointment of Stephanie McIntyre as its new CEO.

With over 20 years of experience in Marlborough, McIntyre brings a wealth of expertise to her role, from international market engagement and media and communications leadership to event creation and executive work for various industry organizations.

AMW's Trust Mark appears only on wines that meet rigorous production standards: They must come from sustainably certified vineyards in Marlborough, be bottled exclusively in New Zealand, and be successfully assessed by an independent panel of industry experts.

The Wonderful Company and SGWS Expand Wine Distribution Agreement

THE WONDERFUL COMPANY has announced the expansion of its longstanding relationship with Southern Glazer's Wine & Spirits (SGWS) as part of an enhanced agreement that will support JUSTIN Vineyards & Winery and Lewis Cellars, based in Paso Robles and Napa Valley, respectively. JUSTIN, which has been distributed by SGWS for more than 30 years, will add ten markets within the distributor's national network, including Minnesota, Idaho, and Utah. Lewis Cellars will expand from five to 35 markets nationwide, allowing for greater reach in key states such as California, Florida, Texas, and Illinois.

The agreement comes as JUSTIN brings one of its most sought-after wines into broader distribution through the wholesale launch of its Reserve Cabernet Sauvignon. The brand has also expanded its core offerings with the introduction of a Central Coast Chardonnay. Lewis Cellars, meanwhile, recently unveiled a new tasting room on Napa Valley's Silverado Trail and debuted redesigned packaging. 


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Excitement Cues

IMPROVING REVENUE THROUGH TRANSACTIONAL PSYCHOLOGY, PART 6

MY GOAL FOR this series of columns is simple: to help you increase revenue and profitability as well as guest satisfaction by employing strategies based on transactional psychology. Before delving into the somewhat abstract but important concept of excitement cues, I'd encourage you to read the first five parts of the series (starting with the August/September 2025 issue) in order.

Why do people dine out? It's not because they can't cook or eat at home. It's because they want to have an experience. They want to be stimulated not just by the food and beverages a restaurant provides but by the ambiance, the service, their company, et cetera. The way you list and describe your wines can very much impact their experience (and also their desire to transact at a higher price point).

To explain how this works, allow me to demonstrate the opposite of an excitement cue. How many times have you asked a server for a wine suggestion, only to have them respond that expensive item X is "very popular"? An expensive and popular wine is the opposite of exciting, as far as I'm concerned—I want to hear them describe the wine they are recommending with enthusiasm.

When I am speaking to a guest about two wines, one of which is either more expensive or similarly priced but at a better margin, I can use excitement cues to make them choose that wine, much the way that a magician executes a card force. (To be clear, I do this only when I genuinely think it's the superior choice for their meal; if you don't have your guests' best interests in mind, you are manipulating them to their disadvantage and therefore providing an inferior experience.) I'll talk about the wine I prefer with more inflection, wider eyes, and a slightly bigger smile. I'll tell the story behind the wine and convey how they will feel when drinking it. The more effusive my tone of voice, the

HOW MANY TIMES HAVE YOU ASKED A SERVER FOR A WINE SUGGESTION, ONLY TO HAVE THEM RESPOND THAT EXPENSIVE ITEM X IS "VERY POPULAR"? AN EXPENSIVE AND POPULAR WINE IS THE OPPOSITE OF EXCITING, AS FAR AS I'M CONCERNED.

more descriptive words I choose, and the more convincing yet subtle my gestures, the more I will guide the guest in the direction I want them to go. Soon they'll be drinking a wine that is far more exciting to them than it would be had they simply picked it off the menu.

Note that excitement cues are provided not just by your verbal descriptions and body language but also by the wording of the wine list. With respect to the latter, I feel strongly about avoiding

vague category headers like "Interesting Wines." (For more on this, see my June/July 2023 column, "The 'Other' Category: Where Exciting Wines Go to Die.") Quite simply, they don't connote excitement. "Sommelier Selections" or even something as overt as "What We Are Most Excited About Right Now" is much more compelling.

Ultimately, excitement cues lead to a better experience for your guests and more revenue for your restaurant. **SJ**



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In Vino Poësis

The author in a vineyard in Santa Barbara County's Santa Ynez Valley.

I **SUBSCRIBE TO** the e-newsletter *Wine Industry Insight*. Lately, it's deluged me with links to doom-and-gloom articles about winery and tasting room closures, deracinated rootstock, stats on low yields, declines in wine club memberships. . . . It's a jeremiad for the ages.

In my April/May 2026 column, I asserted that this downturn is merely a correction, not a sign of the industry's demise; in fact, though volume was down in 2025, wine revenues were up. But in this article, I want to focus on something else. I've always been a wine drinker; but like many consumers, I used to go for the same bottle over and over. My (now ex-)wife and I rarely talked about the flavor profiles of what we were drinking, let alone the tech notes: soils, regions, time in barrel, and all the other details that wine geeks revel in.

Then, in the mid-1990s, I started attending weekly tastings at a tiny wine shop in Santa Monica called Epicurus. The fee was a nominal \$4. Every Saturday afternoon, it brought in a new distributor or winery rep or sometimes even a winemaker. I lived on the border between affluent Brentwood and rent-controlled Santa Monica (I resided in the latter; impecunious and always late on my rent). In the small, cordoned-off space where

the tastings were conducted, conversation was lively among the dozen or so of us wine aficionados. I confronted not only blatant snobbism but also my utter lack of knowledge of wine. I particularly loved the way everyone reached for adjectives about the bottlings. Being a professional writer and someone who was (and is) in love with words, I wanted to know more so that I, too, could enter the conversation with some degree of knowledge.

Because Epicurus had a limited selection, I imagined I'd learn more about wine from reading than tasting; besides, I didn't have the wallet my newfound cohorts—doctors, lawyers, real estate entrepreneurs—had and would need to rely on all the available information I could get my hands on. So I got a hold of Jancis Robinson's brilliant, voluminously comprehensive *The Oxford Companion to Wine*. Meanwhile, I discovered that the shop's main employee often uncorked bottles when the owner cut out early, claiming that he was unhappy with his salary and was assuaging his unhappiness by taking it out on the inventory. And I was the beneficiary. One late afternoon, we locked the doors and opened 20 Pinots!

My love of words, my love of language, started to infuse my love of wine in all

its manifold manifestations: countries of origin, grape varieties, aromas, flavors, tannins, acids. If we didn't like a certain wine, we would come up with humorous metaphors for our distaste—some of which found their way into my novel *Sideways*. But it was wine's mysteriousness, its gravitational pull, that shaped the poetry I found in it, a lyricism that in my view cannot be found in beer or distillates.

The wine industry is going to go through the vicissitudes that most every industry experiences, but the conversation that wine inspires is not going to evanesce. That conversation, in my opinion, brings people together; weeds out the ill-informed from the connoisseurs, the snobs from the true aficionados. Wine is the most noble, elegant common denominator known to humankind, right up there with great literature and cinema. In debating the merits of, say, a certain Pinot Noir, we enter into a dialectic, one that deepens our knowledge of wine, hoists us to higher levels of cognition, and helps us differentiate and hone our aesthetics. This, in my belief, is why wine is not in trouble. It has the unique capacity to make all of us poets to one degree or another. And that's its enduring significance. **sj**




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Reporting From Rhode Island

THE NATION'S SMALLEST STATE IS BIG ON WINING AND DINING

"I'LL ASK MATT. He'll know." These words quickly became my mantra during the second annual Rhode Island Wine Experience, aka Wine X, held in Providence in March. I was there to lead a tasting, "Global Wine Adventure," and moderate a panel discussion called "The Art of the Pour: Inside the Mind of a Sommelier"; from sorting out the tasting order to figuring out where I needed to be and when, festival sommelier Matt Gant was often my go-to source.

And I wasn't alone in counting on him. "Choosing Matt Gant as lead sommelier for Wine X was an easy decision because he embodies the exact spirit I want this festival to reflect: genuine hospitality, deep knowledge, and a demeanor that immediately puts people at ease," says Wine X founder Rosanna Ortiz. "Wine should feel welcoming, never intimidating, and Matt has that rare ability to bring sophistication and warmth together effortlessly."

Today, Gant serves as sommelier at Little Compton winery Sakonnet Vineyard, where he works in the vineyard as well as the tasting room, doing hands-on work such as pruning. But he honed his skills in some of the Ocean State's most acclaimed establishments, including the Coast Guard House and the Ocean House resort.

Which brings us to dining. Rhode Island may be our nation's smallest state, but dismissing its culinary bona fides would be a big mistake. Providence, its capital, is home to Johnson & Wales University's College of Food Innovation & Technology, which offers sommelier studies as part of its curriculum. Upscale steakhouse chain The Capital Grille likewise has its roots in Providence and hosted Wine X's Grand Tasting, while Track 15, where I led my tasting, is an 18,000-square-foot food hall inside the historic Union Station. And the city boasts two 2026 James Beard Award finalists: Loma (Best New Bar) and Nicks on Broadway chef/owner Derek Wagner (Best Chef Northeast). Wagner also headlined the Wine X Vintners Dinner.



PHOTO: XAVIER DELBREY PHOTOGRAPHY

The "Art of the Pour" panelists included Matt Gant, Nader Asgari-Tari, Amy Racine, author Wanda Mann, Elisa Wybraniec, Jon Diamond, and Matthew MacCartney.

The two years I have participated in Wine X have been a fantastic introduction to Providence's culinary scene, and I'm eager to head back for a leisurely weekend of wining and dining. Of course, I asked Gant for a few suggestions.

► Gift Horse

"Gift Horse is shellfish- and seafood-driven," explains Gant, who praises the raw bar's seasonal menu and sparkling wine selection. "I like to sit there and have my appetizer, a glass of wine, and maybe a fun spirit too." gifthorsepvd.com

► Oberlin

"Just trust your somm at Oberlin," Gant advises. "[The] food is more vegetable-, seafood-, and pasta-driven, which is also really fun for wine." oberlinrestaurant.com

► Sawyer's


Gant stumbled upon this neighborhood café, market, and wine bar and was intrigued by its list of low-intervention bottlings from around the globe: "I want to shine a light on them because they've got a

cool list, and if you're a little geeky, they can really hit that nerve." sawyersmkt.com

► Loma

This buzzy cocktail bar (@loma_bar on Instagram) "blew me away, not only with hospitality but with [the] finesse and balance" of its drinks, notes Gant. "I think it's the best cocktail I've had in over a decade."

► Sakonnet Vineyard

For an adventure in wine country, join Gant in the tasting room at Sakonnet Vineyard, home to the oldest vineyard in the Ocean State, and sample its Eye of the Storm Rosé, which he describes as "beautiful, juicy, fresh, [and] floral": "I call it the summer crusher because it's just so good, especially on a hot day." sakonnetwine.com 

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

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All in Good Fun

AT **PETIT CHELOU** IN DENVER, CO, CHEF DOUGLAS RANKIN AND SOMMELIER JACOB ROADHOUSE MAKE FOR THE PERFECT PAIR(ING)

THE DAY AFTER I attended a media preview of Petit Chelou in March, I posted about it on Instagram, writing, “Let’s face it, while many chef’s counters offer marvelous tasting menus, they’re not always fun—they can feel quite serious. [This one] is an absolute blast.”

It could have been otherwise: After all, Douglas Rankin, the chef behind the venture—which is, for the time being, ensconced within modern Chinese restaurant Hop Alley in Denver’s RiNo neighborhood—has a dead-serious reputation to uphold. Having built his career working for such culinary icons as Charlie Palmer, Michael Voltaggio, Chris Cosentino, Ludo Lefebvre, and José Andrés, Rankin went on to garner national acclaim in his own right upon opening Bar Chelou in Pasadena, California, in 2023, and he confesses that he initially resisted his wife’s appeals to downshift by moving to her hometown “because I was nervous to cook somewhere that wasn’t a big city. I was like, ‘Can I do what I want to do there? Are people going to receive it well?’”

But as it turns out, a change of scenery—and pace—has done Rankin good. “Now that I’m here, I can tell you honestly, I feel happy for one of the first times in my life,” he says, and that joy is precisely what distinguished the meal I had there from countless other multicourse extravaganzas. While it goes without saying that the food (which he describes as Japanese-inflected French bistro fare) was superb, from the first bite of kinmedai crudo with tonnato, yuzu kosho, and sudachi to the last lick of chestnut-hazelnut Mont Blanc in brown butter, it was his effortless yet enthusiastic banter with guests that completely disarmed me.

Well, that and his obvious rapport with Hop Alley wine director Jacob Roadhouse, an equally entertaining and enlightening presence behind the counter: “It’s



Petit Chelou chef Douglas Rankin.

been very hard for me to find a counterpart in my career who can do what he does,” shares Rankin, calling Roadhouse’s pairings “perfect, perfect. Not once have I been like, ‘Oh, this doesn’t work.’ We really click.”

Take one of his personal favorite dishes, mushroom tempura. The version I enjoyed featured hedgehogs; Rankin has since moved on to morels, but either way he takes pride in what he calls the “intention behind it every step of the way,” be it the trim that he dries, smokes, and uses as seasoning or the “really punchy sauce meunière underneath.” Roadhouse’s go-to pour with the dish is Goutorbe Bouillot Reflets de Rivière, a Meunier-dominant Brut Champagne from the Vallée de la Marne. “It has fresh, bright red-berry notes [but also] that salty kind of umami, leesy thing from the solera blending that just hits with the sauce,” he explains. “It’s perfect with the mimolette cheese . . . and the egg yolk that we throw over the top, too.”

Since Hop Alley opened in 2015, I’ve admired its wine program for its uncompromising focus on what’s now de rigueur: smaller-production exemplars of lesser-known varieties and regions that



Hop Alley wine director Jacob Roadhouse.

also complement the cuisine (no small feat given its sometimes intense spice and funk). “We’ve built this really cool reputation for having a perspective,” says Roadhouse. That’s evident with a glance at the two-page bottle list: Grower Champagne, Riesling, whites from the Jura, and especially Chenin Blanc abound, as do Nerello Mascalese and Spätburgunder. Granted, there’s also plenty of Burgundy, white and red—but “I have zero ambitions of selling Grand Cru Burgundy” at a Chinese restaurant where “the vast majority of [guests] probably don’t even know we have a wine list,” he admits. “So we just go to the outskirts and try to find the producers that are maybe going to blow up in five years but are relatively affordable for now.”

Of course, now that he’s also making purchases with Petit Chelou’s prix fixe menu in mind, “we’re able to work with some higher-end options,” he notes. Still, my favorite pairing might have been the hardly exorbitant yet highly energetic Maria & Sepp Muster 2022 Sauvignon vom Opok from Styria, Austria, alongside a dish of grilled squid with *crosmes* (Chinese artichokes) and kabosu citrus. It was inspired, eye-opening—and yes, just plain fun. **SJ**

PHOTOS: JEFF FIERBERG



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Virtù Honest Craft sommelier Michael Cozzi, chef/owner Gio Osso, and mixologist/director of operations Fernando Bambaren. ▼

PHOTOS: CHRISTINA BARRUETA



▲ Pictured clockwise: squid ink pasta with Manila clams and Calabrian chilis, ricotta gnocchi with fiddlehead ferns and spruce tip pesto, razor clam ceviche with pasta chips, and tuna tartare with pineapple and toasted coconut in a cucumber broth topped with passion fruit gelato.

Virtùosity

AT HIS RESTAURANT IN SCOTTSDALE, AZ, CHEF/OWNER **GIO OSSO'S** EVER-EVOLVING MENU IS POWERED BY COLLABORATION

I'VE VISITED VIRTÙ Honest Craft many times since its 2013 debut, but a few recent experiences there reminded why I keep returning: an al fresco dinner showcasing the wines of Il Borro and Pinino Estates, where I sat next to vintners Salvatore Ferragamo Jr. and his wife, Christine; the Maialino Experience, centered around a whole roasted suckling pig; and the Monthly Bar Series, featuring special bites and sips based on themes such as Aperitivo April and Amaro Hour May. "I don't want to be bored," says chef/owner Gio Osso, who tweaks his menu weekly. "I have to change things up."

It's a philosophy that has served him well. Six months after Virtù opened, *Esquire* named it one of the Top 20 Best New Restaurants in America; a James Beard Foundation nomination for Best New Restaurant followed in 2014. The accolades have kept coming, and this year, the Arizona Restaurant Association honored Osso with its Foodist Award for Food Pioneer.

His restless creativity traces back to a trip to Italy in 2005, when "the idea

of ever-changing menus using what's freshest or what's seasonal" inspired him, Osso recalls. A springtime trip to the restaurant confirmed his commitment to that vision as I sampled razor clam ceviche served with pasta chips, tuna tartare with pineapple and toasted coconut in a cucumber broth topped with passion fruit gelato, ricotta gnocchi tossed with fiddlehead ferns and spruce tip pesto, and squid ink pasta with Manila clams and Calabrian chilis.

But if Osso is behind the wheel, he's not driving solo. Sommelier Michael Cozzi and mixologist/director of operations Fernando Bambaren have both been with the restaurant for more than a decade; such longevity speaks to the collaborative process Osso fosters.

Cozzi describes the wine list as "Italian-focused [yet] eclectic. I like small-production and unique wines along with the classic Italian versions." In the latter case, if a guest is trying Nebbiolo for the first time, "I want the tannins to be firm. I want the acidity to be slightly elevated. I

want them to taste some earth," he says. "But it's nice to change things up, just like the food." "He's always trying to find new things," Osso agrees, mentioning the recent addition of a white Aglianico. "And it's the same with Fernando, who builds cocktails around the menu."

Bambaren takes an amaro-forward approach, which is fitting given that Virtù boasts one of the largest collections of amari in Arizona. Take the Frontier Justice, where bourbon meets herbaceous Amaro Montenegro; rhubarb-based Amaro Sfumato Rabarbaro; and Dimmi Liquore di Milano, a blend of grappa and stone fruit blossoms. But Bambaren is quick to note that "I'm not trying to find unfamiliar ingredients just to put them [out] there. It's about introducing flavors in a respectful way."

"Everything, including service and hospitality, starts with us as a team," Osso says. "We know what the ideology behind the restaurant is and how we complement each other. The three of us create the culture, and it's a lot of fun." ■



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A Sisyphean Struggle

SPRING FROST DAMAGE HAS DEVASTATING IMPACTS ON EAST COAST WINEMAKERS

IT'S EASY TO overromanticize wine; after all, the idyllic lifestyle of walking among manicured vineyards and communing with the land sounds as glossy as the magazines that chronicle this utopia. But wine is farming, and farming is hard, as Mother Nature is a capricious taskmaster.

Winegrowers in the Eastern United States learned this all too well in late April. Several days of summer-like temperatures over 90 degrees Fahrenheit encouraged vines to bud early. Then, on the morning of April 21, temperatures plunged well below freezing throughout much of the Mid-Atlantic.

Frost is not unusual in this region. Growers are accustomed to spending spring nights lighting fires, running fans, or operating frost dragons—noisy contraptions that shoot flames along vine rows to warm the air. But that Tuesday morning, the temperatures dropped too low and for too long for any of these measures to help. By the time this column is published, producers will have a clearer picture of the damage and whether secondary shoots survived to produce a smaller crop. Some higher-elevation vineyards were unscathed, but initial assessments frequently bordered on catastrophic.

Lee Hartman, winemaker at Bluestone Vineyard in Virginia's Shenandoah Valley, described the disaster as a "slow-moving train wreck"; he and his crew made their usual preparations, but "this wasn't just a frost. It was a hard freeze," he said. Emma Pope, communications manager for Black Ankle Vineyards in Mt. Airy, Maryland, posted on Facebook that the night was "unlike anything we've seen before," warning of the likelihood that the year's fruit was "largely if not entirely lost."

At Old Westminster Winery and Burnt Hill Farm in Maryland, vineyard manager Drew Baker reported that primary buds appeared "100% gone" across both sites, with an estimated loss of upwards of 100 tons of fruit—roughly 72,000 bottles of



PHOTO COURTESY OF BLACK ANKLE VINEYARDS

The impact of frost on the vines at Black Ankle Vineyards in Mt. Airy, MD.

wine. And while that revenue disappears, expenses for payroll, equipment, and farming inputs remain, as the vineyards must be maintained in optimal shape for next year.

Back in Virginia, Jim Law of Linden Vineyards lamented his first significant loss since planting his Hardscrabble Vineyard in 1985. "It is difficult to convey the gut punch of walking the vines after a devastating event like frost or hail," he said. "You feel physically sick and emotionally devastated."

Spring frost damage has become a familiar global occurrence in the era of climate change, as warmer winters nudge vines out of dormancy earlier. This year alone, Texas and Champagne also suffered significant losses.

Growers are pleading with consumers to visit local wineries and buy current releases to help them survive. In the Mid-Atlantic, the latter include many high-quality reds from the outstanding 2023 vintage. It's a great opportunity for localvore restaurants that routinely celebrate local farmers to support their respective winemaking communities.

At Allegro Winery in Pennsylvania, owner Carl Helrich—still replanting vines lost to a 2018 freeze—saw much of his vineyard frosted again. He compared the life of a grape grower to Sisyphus rolling a rock uphill, only to have it roll back down. "We think we have everything figured out," he said, "and then Mother Nature decides to kick us in the ass." ❧

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The Wonders of Italy

STRIKING A COMPROMISE BETWEEN PRESERVING ANCIENT RUINS AND PRODUCING CONTEMPORARY WINES

IMAGINE INVESTING IN a prized vineyard only to be told it had to make way for a museum. That's exactly what happened to wine producer Giuliano Franchini.

If you follow industry news, you likely saw the recent photos of an ancient Roman mosaic floor exposed in a vineyard in the Valpolicella Classica zone. Ah, the wonders of Italy! But the discovery presented a conundrum: What next? A

for that investment, but what about the average citizen who just wants a backyard pool? Italian law requires homeowners to report upturned relics, but common wisdom advises them to hush up lest authorities quarantine the site, send inspectors, expand the dig, and initiate a bureaucratic and financial nightmare for them.

Few would have blamed Franchini if he had covered up the mosaics he found

Here we have a real-life example of the classic joke: How do you make a small fortune in the wine industry? By starting with a large one. Franchini's multigenerational winery is modestly successful, but greater resources come from his thriving industrial steam-cleaning business. He purchased the plot known as Cortesele di Villa in order to add its single-vineyard wine to his portfolio. But after discovering the extent of the villa flooring below

PHOTOS: LARS LEICHT



PHOTO COURTESY OF FRANCHINI

Following the discovery of an ancient Roman villa there, Franchini's Cortesele di Villa vineyard in Valpolicella became an active archeological site.

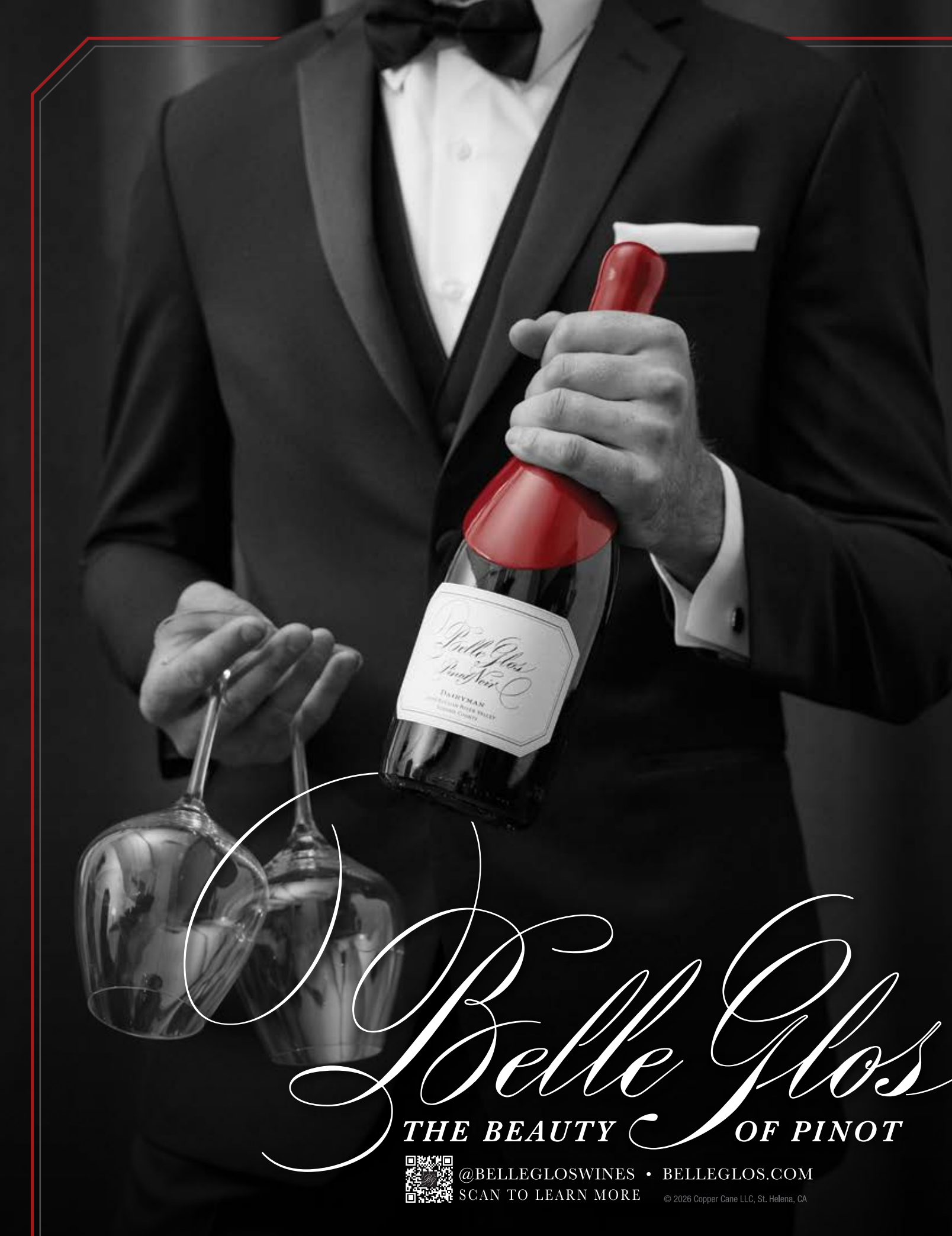
vineyard represents someone's livelihood. Should present-day gains be sacrificed to preserve a relic of the past?

This is an eternal question for a nation whose capital is nicknamed the Eternal City. Rome unveiled its first subway in 1955 and began construction on its second line in 1959, but it took over 70 years to build a third, as the dig often uncovered ancient ruins. In 2025, a new station opened that combined transit with a museum, melding functionality and preservation. Kudos to city and country

a few feet below his vineyard. The truth is that he knew of the ancient substrata when he purchased the land. As far back as 1877, previous owners had sold a section of unearthed mosaic to a local museum. They were unsure how much more lay below, but in the 1920s archeologists discovered more evidence of what was presumed to be a buried villa, as did probes in a far corner of the property in 1985. Due to a lack of resources, however, the hole was filled back in. Then along came Franchini.

the vines—2,900 square feet, including a winemaking area—he meticulously transplanted the old vines to another plot.

Cortesele di Villa is now an active archeological site open to visitors, while Franchini makes two indigenous Veronese blends inspired by the ruins, with labels depicting their mosaic artwork: the white Candidus and the red Imperium. His resourcefulness has both preserved a historical landmark and ensured contemporary productivity. Now *that* is the wonder of Italy. **sj**



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Are Mentors Necessary?

I OFTEN HEAR the word “mentor” when hanging out with up-and-coming sommeliers and wine scholars. When you’re just beginning to carve out a career in wine, it helps to know someone who’s already been down that path.

To me, though, the question of mentorship has always been a quandary. When I started as a full-time sommelier back in 1978, I actually avoided the idea of mentorship like the plague. This is despite the fact that the very first two American-born Master Sommeliers, Eddie Osterland and Richard Dean, were working in my hometown of Honolulu in restaurants not far from mine. I knew them, of course, but was deathly afraid of being unduly influenced by them. I was, frankly, determined to forge my own path—to taste, evaluate, buy, and sell wine in my own way, not someone else’s.

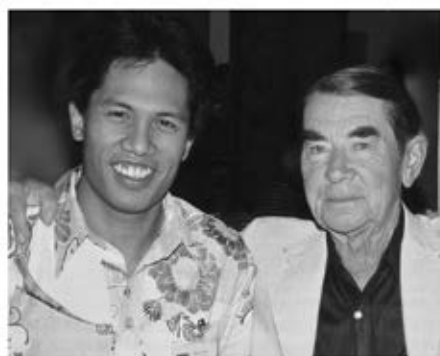
In 1981, however, I found myself sitting next to Ronn Wiegand while attending a wine conference. At the time, he ran a Honolulu wine school called The Grape Escape with Osterland. Ronn had such a formidable mind that it came as no surprise to me he would go on to become the first person in the country to hold both MS (in 1986) and MW (1991) titles.

I don’t remember why, but during a break Ronn mentioned what he thought was the best way to expand one’s wine knowledge, particularly with respect to associating sensory qualities with specific regions. “The way to do it,” he said, “is to go to Germany. When you taste the great German Rieslings, the impact of vineyards and regions on wines becomes crystal clear.”

During the 1990s, when I was finally in a position as a multi-unit wine director to do so, that was exactly what I did. And Ronn was absolutely correct: It was during those trips that the entire concept of terroir and its ability to create distinctions between vineyards finally sank in. So while Ronn wasn’t technically a “mentor,” as we had very few conversations over the years, the fact that at one point he dis-

pensed some life-changing advice made him something of an inadvertent one.

The only two people I can truly say were like mentors to me were Kermit Lynch and the legendary André Tchelistcheff—Kermit, well, because he’s Kermit. For years we met at least twice a year to taste his wines, and he was always good for stories and pep talks. To this day, I still perceive, and value, the entire world of wines the way Kermit (who’s now retired) did.



André was another matter. He was more like a martial arts master, ready to bop me on the head with a stick every time I did something wrong. That includes the time in 1992 when I asked him over lunch about the latest viticultural advances I had been reading about, particularly those related to trellising and canopy management that had resulted in claims that even larger quantities of great Napa Valley Cabernet Sauvignon could be produced as long as the fruit-to-leaf ratio on vines was kept in proper balance.

Suddenly a dark cloud seemed to roll over his thick brows as he said, “That is rubbish—you should not believe everything you read! You must not forget that



The author with mentors André Tchelistcheff in 1981 (left) and Kermit Lynch in 2010 (above).

when it comes to the vineyard, Mother Nature is still in charge, and Mother Nature has expressed her wish that great vineyards should grow only so much great wine in only so many places. There may be more Cabernet Sauvignon being grown in Napa Valley than ever before, but there will never be more than a few of true ‘private reserve’ quality.”

It was an important lesson not only in the significance of terroir but in the imperative of maintaining a healthy skepticism—one of many I’ve learned from my mentors over the years. So while I can personally attest to the benefits of finding yourself a career guidance counselor or two, it had better be someone who is willing to straighten out your head every time you have it screwed on backwards. Otherwise, what’s a mentor for? **sj**

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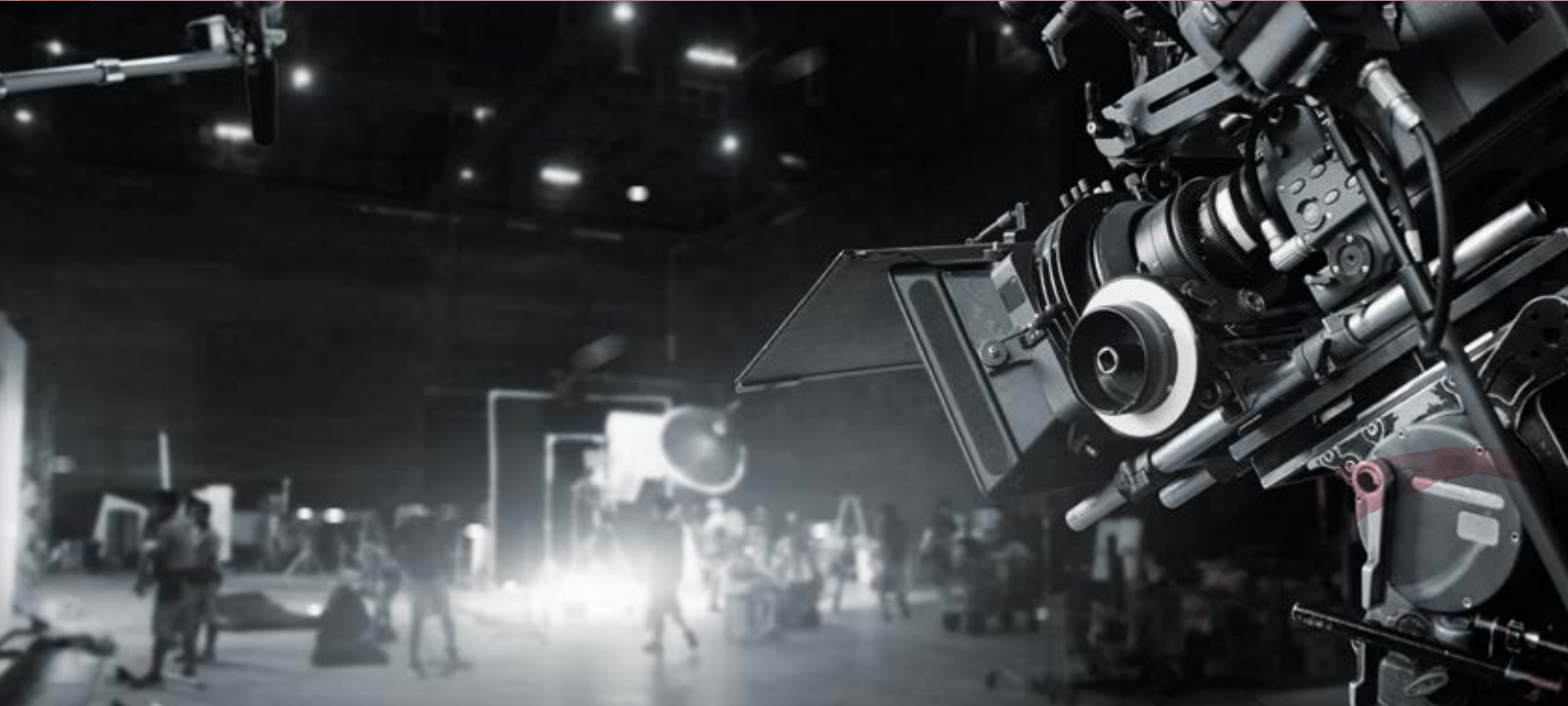
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FROM
SHOWRUNNER
TO
Somm

This column traces author **David Schulner's** life-changing journey from television writer to sommelier and back again. Schulner is also the co-writer, with Darren Star, of *Uncorked*, a show about winemakers in Napa that's currently in development at Netflix.



Goodbye Studio, Hello Steakhouse

IN WHICH “STAGING” TAKES ON NEW MEANING FOR OUR COLUMNIST

As the showrunner of *New Amsterdam* on NBC, I was in charge of a \$100 million company: We produced 22 episodes per year, each costing \$5 million. I employed over 200 people each season and oversaw multiple departments. My responsibilities ranged from approving every actor and director who stepped foot on set to deciding the decibel levels for each sound and music cue. And yet, during the strike by the Writers Guild of America and SAG-AFTRA in 2023, I couldn't get a job as a waiter.

My goal was to become a sommelier at a MICHELIN-starred restaurant. I wasn't being presumptuous; I knew I didn't have the credentials, and I planned to start small and work my way up. But I couldn't even get an interview. It turns out no one wanted a 50-year-old unemployed writer who hadn't worked in a restaurant in 25 years—even though, as I explained in all my applications, the best training for being

a showrunner is floor service. As a waiter, you might have one table on apps, another on dessert, yet another that needs a main refired, and they probably all need water. You have to be everywhere at once. It's the same for a showrunner: During production, I'll have one script in the writer's room, another being written, another being shot, and a few more being edited, and I've got to keep my eye on all of them. What's more, I've got to do it with a smile on my face, because I set the tone for the entire production.

When I wasn't filling out applications, I was picketing in front of Netflix, the closest studio to my house, for three hours a day. While marching back and forth on the line, I was also studying for my first Court of Master Sommeliers test. I listened to podcasts (GuildSomm, Wine For Normal People); I flipped through flash cards on my phone; I studied maps of wine regions. After picketing, I would go

back to my office, where I couldn't write, and I would blind taste, working my way through the grid. Throughout the strikes, everyone in Hollywood was day drinking, so it didn't feel *that* strange.

And then, in a stroke of luck, I found out that one of my favorite restaurants, Gwen, was hiring. Gwen is a MICHELIN-starred steakhouse and butcher shop where my wife and I have had many memorable dinners. Actor Joel McHale, a wine aficionado and a dear friend, was filming a TV show with Gwen's chef/owner, Curtis Stone. Was I willing to leverage my friendship with Joel, risk becoming a douchey Hollywood stereotype, and use my connections to jump in front of others more deserving than me just to get the gig?

CUT TO:

I staged at Gwen the next day. *sj*

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Unconventional Wisdom

HOW TIM HANNI, MW, HAS CHALLENGED THE STATUS QUO OF THE WINE WORLD

by David Furer

TIM HANNI, MW, has five decades of experience in wine, food, and hospitality under his belt. One of the first two Americans to achieve the title of Master of Wine, he's known for his pioneering work in demystifying wine preferences and perceptions, while his applied knowledge spans the disciplines of consumer and trade education, business consulting, and the culinary arts.

While growing up in Miami, Florida, Hanni immersed himself in French gastronomy, cooking for his friends and family before entering the professional kitchen. His first job was on the line at the legendary Bern's Steak House; he also worked at a Chinese restaurant run by a friend, thereby sparking an interest in Asian cuisine that has informed his perspective throughout his career. But his passion for wine was already burgeoning, and in 1979, he was hired as the buyer for Atlanta, Georgia, liquor retailer Happy Herman's, which he left in 1985 to launch his own wine importing company. Then, in 1988, Beringer Vineyards lured him west to serve as its director of communications, working alongside famous French chef and cookbook author Madeleine Kamman.

Hanni penned his groundbreaking 2013 book, *Why You Like the Wines You Like: Changing the Way the World Thinks About Wine*, after he was approached by Napa Valley pioneer Harvey Posert Jr. to write something that was inclusive of a wide array of personal tastes, since Posert abhorred dry wines. Hanni challenged conventional wisdom by encouraging his readers to embrace their preferences without regard to others' opinions. Today, as the founder of *winebusinesseducation.com* and *myvinotype.com*, he pushes the boundaries of wine education and appreciation while using data-driven insights to analyze markets and tailor marketing strategies for brands as small as Kieper-

PHOTO: DAVID SCHLOSS/INVENTIVE FILMING



sol in Texas and as large as Gallo. Having taught more than 4,500 students over the years, Hanni has also been an adjunct professor at Washington State University—where his online Business of Wine course is required for its wine business degree—since 2019; the Oregon Wine Board and Napa Valley Wine Academy also use his programs in teaching.

His latest book, scheduled for publication later this year, is *Wine Through the Looking Glass: The Portal to a New Wine Wonderland*. It's based on the idea that our tastes are shaped by four factors: genetic disposition (fixed behavior), neuropathway conditioning (forming new habits), neuroplasticity (involving brain structure), and psychology. "The ongoing research examines what each individual seeks from wine" so that they can have "both a sensory and perceptual [understanding] of [themselves]," he explains, adding that "the industry should look into the mirror to develop ways" to engage with new generations of wine drinkers.

Antony Moss, MW, the former qualifications director of the WSET program, encountered Hanni's guest-centric approach to wine and food in 2010. "Food and beverage pairing advice so frequently is framed as [a set of] categorical imperatives, including in WSET's texts at that time," he points out. "Tim not only demolished the assumptions behind such advice but more importantly provided a way forward . . . by detailing what it really means to put the guest at the center, starting with their preferences and recognizing that not everyone experiences [food and wine interactions] the same way. So simple!" Hanni helped WSET rewrite its sections on pairing wine with food and extended the

concepts to other beverages.

Hanni's work also impressed sensory scientist Virginia Utermohlen Lovelace, MD. The retired Cornell University associate professor and author of *Tea: A Nerd's Eye View* says that "Tim's focus on individual differences and his mission to help people appreciate these while allowing them to overcome [reliance on] dogmas convinced me to work with him" on a long-term study that found a correlation between attitudes about wine and physical sensitivities. Additionally, she notes, Hanni's efforts to formalize and popularize "the 'progressive wine list,' highlighting taste profiles rather than location-based categories, [has] helped servers to better understand and sell more sophisticated wine choices to their guests."

"Tim has been, from the first time I met him, a challenger of received ideas about wine, championing a more expansive view of wine quality," says Doug Frost MS, MW. "I can't say enough how much he influenced my thinking and gave me confidence in my views." SJ

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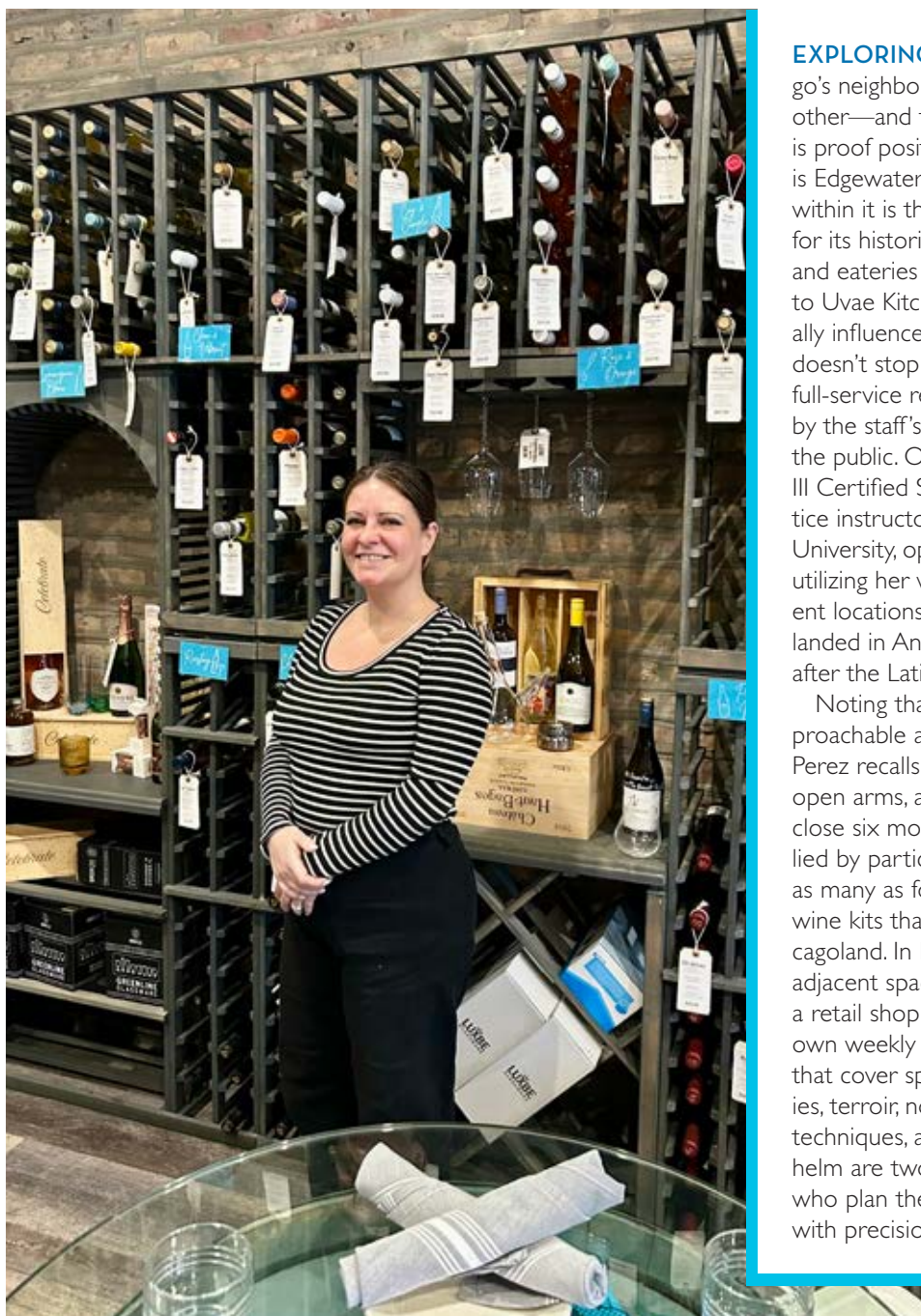


Irresistible notes of grapefruit, thyme and
gooseberry lead to a long, crisp finish.

A Taste for Teaching

ERIKA VIGEN AND SEAN SULLIVAN MAKE WINE CLASSES A CORNERSTONE OF UVAE KITCHEN & WINE BAR IN CHICAGO

story and photos by Marsha Wright



Lindsey Anderson-Perez is the owner of Uvae Kitchen & Wine Bar in Chicago's Andersonville neighborhood.

EXPLORING THE CULTURAL diversity of Chicago's neighborhoods can lead you on a journey like no other—and the city's expansive food and wine scene is proof positive. Among those notable communities is Edgewater, a quaint area on the north side; nestled within it is the Andersonville neighborhood, known for its historic 19th-century homes, shops, cafes, and eateries along historic Clark Street. It's home to Uvae Kitchen & Wine Bar, which boasts a globally influenced menu and extensive wine list. But it doesn't stop there, as it also offers something most full-service restaurants do not: wine classes taught by the staff's Certified Sommeliers that are open to the public. Owner Lindsey Anderson-Perez, a Level III Certified Sommelier and Level I Wine Apprentice instructor at Kendall College at National Louis University, opened Uvae in 2019 partly as a means of utilizing her wine education; after considering different locations throughout Chicago and its suburbs, she landed in Andersonville and named her establishment after the Latin phrase for "bunch of grapes."

Noting that she wanted Uvae "to be super approachable and not pretentious at all," Anderson-Perez recalls that Andersonville welcomed it with open arms, and when the pandemic forced it to close six months after opening, the community rallied by participating in Uvae's virtual wine classes—as many as four or even six per day—and ordering wine kits that could be delivered throughout Chicagoland. In November 2021, Uvae expanded to an adjacent space with The Fromagerie & Tasting Room, a retail shop offering wine and cheese as well as its own weekly wine classes focused on various regions that cover specifics such as common grape varieties, terroir, notable winemakers and their respective techniques, and recommended food pairings. At the helm are two members of Uvae's management team, who plan the classes from inception to completion with precision and, most importantly, passion.

Continued on page 36 ►



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Certified Sommeliers Erika Vigen and Sean Sullivan, who serve as Uvae's hospitality manager and bar manager, respectively, teach various classes at the restaurant that are open to the public in an effort to make wine more approachable.

Erika Vigen, a Level III Certified Sommelier who serves as Uvae's hospitality manager and class instructor, has been with the restaurant since March 2022. Vigen's path to wine was unique, to say the least: After earning her master of science degree at Loyola University and spending ten-plus years in project management at Fortune 500 companies, a trip to Sonoma, California, with some friends for her birthday changed her path completely as she fell in love with wine and opted to leave the corporate life behind.

Vigen often pulls inspiration for her classes from the tastings she conducts with a broad lineup of distributors, noting, "I'm constantly thinking about how I can use this wine not just for our list but for the wine club or a wine class." She also takes the community's needs into account. "I did a class on Port wine because people kept stating they knew nothing about

it," she explains, as well as a class titled "I Bet I Can Make You Like Chardonnay": "It was so amazing to see each attendee experience Chardonnay in its true form because most are used to the big, buttery, oaky California Chardonnays, and I treated them to a Burgundy, a Chardonnay from South Africa, and another from Washington State. Most attendees didn't even know these styles of Chardonnay existed!" she adds, noting that it gave them a new outlook on and appreciation for the variety. "It [was] a great reminder of one of the many reasons I got into wine in the first place: to teach others about it."

Vigen's approach to educating the public starts at the introductory level. "I'm a big believer in the basics," she says, adding that she asks questions to gauge the knowledge of attendees, who can range from people with a fair amount of education to novices who have never attended

a class or even a tasting before. But regardless of their experience, "I always approach wine education with passion, because people like listening to people who are passionate and not just repeating information," she says.

Fellow instructor Sean Sullivan, Uvae's bar manager and a Level I Certified Sommelier, has been with the team since early 2025. Formerly a professional classical ballet dancer, Sullivan worked in restaurants while in ballet school; once COVID hit, he returned to hospitality and learned wine so he could build the skill set necessary to help conceptualize lists at restaurants. His journey led him to Chicago, where he dined at Uvae and said to himself, "I have to work here."

When choosing wines for classes, Sullivan concurs with Vigen that it's best to "keep things approachable," in his words. While the classes often incorporate geology and history, Sullivan also likes to keep things interactive by leading attendees through wine-tasting techniques such as observing color, swirling, and sniffing as well as delving into the nuances of flavor profiles. "I don't want my classes to be presentations as much as I want them to be conversations," he says, adding that he's also steadfast when it comes to ensuring that the classes are dismantling preconceived notions about wine's accessibility. "I think wine still has a reputation for being pretentious and snobby to a degree, and I just want to remove that."

One of Sullivan's favorite classes he recently taught was on the wines of the Loire Valley. "We talked about the history of the Loire, its typical geological and geographical influences, and the political influences that led to the Loire as we know it today," he explains, noting that he also used the opportunity to explore wines from the region other than Sancerre, among them Chinon, still and sparkling Vouvray, and Muscadet. He took a more playful approach for another themed class, "Movies and Wine," held during Oscars weekend: "We showed clips from the different movies that had a notable wine quote . . . then talked about and tasted that particular varietal," he says.

Classes at Uvae Kitchen & Wine Bar are offered every weekend with a 20-person capacity per class; for more information and to purchase tickets, visit uvaechicago.com. **SJ**

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Show and Tell

FOR **BRAITHE GILL**, CORPORATE BEVERAGE DIRECTOR AT RALPH BRENNAN RESTAURANT GROUP, WINE SERVICE IS THEATER

FOR PENNSYLVANIA NATIVE Braithe Gill, taking over the beverage program at legendary New Orleans restaurant Brennan's represents a journey that started with family visits to the Crescent City and continued with a feeling that just kept tugging at her until she gave in and moved there. Well known in sommelier circles from her time as wine director at Danny Meyer's Union Square Cafe in New York City, Gill studied acting in college; while obtaining her BFA at New York University, she entered the service profession and eventually made it her career, attaining Level 2 certification from the Court of Master Sommeliers along the way. I recently caught up with Gill, now corporate beverage director for Ralph Brennan Restaurant Group, over a glass of wine at Brennan's in the heart of the French Quarter.

Q: What originally got you interested in wine?

I began studying wine when I started working at Union Square Cafe. There was a strong culture of education that drove my passion for beverage, and [I wanted] to acquire as much knowledge as possible. I worked my way up from back waiter to eventually become wine director.

Q: The Ralph Brennan Restaurant Group includes five outlets in New Orleans—Red Fish Grill, Napoleon House, Ralph's on the Park, and Café NOMA as well as Brennan's—and one in Anaheim, California, Jazz Kitchen Coastal Grill & Patio. Describe your job.

I lead the curation of the acclaimed wine, cocktail, beer, and nonalcoholic programs across [these] concepts. This includes the development of new partnerships and innovations: For example, I traveled to



PHOTO COURTESY OF BRENNAN'S

value of mentorship from my time at Union Square Cafe—[it's] so vital in this industry and a tradition that I am proud to carry on at Brennan's. Wine fosters community.

Q: What's your own service philosophy?

As the home of bananas Foster—which we make tableside—Brennan's is all about the show! Having a theater background myself, I love decanting, sabering Champagne, and the more exciting aspect of wine service. But also, building a personal relationship and rapport with the guest is fundamental to good service. For instance, when a guest seems hesitant about the world of wine, I shift the focus from direct

France on behalf of Brennan's specifically to develop and oversee its private Champagne label in partnership with Piper-Heidsieck—a custom-curated, exclusive blend called [Brennan's] Essential. Regarding staff, I'm always striving to cultivate enriching educational opportunities. My goal is to mentor my team to success and ensure they care about every detail of the beverage experience for our guests.

Q: Union Square Cafe's owner, Danny Meyer, literally wrote the book on service. How has he influenced you?

Working for Danny gave me a strong foundation in "enlightened hospitality"; [I share] his emphasis on kindness, empathy, and teamwork. I also learned the

questions to just building a genuine conversation—discussing dish preferences, whether they've dined with us previously, and the occasion for their visit. Our goal at Brennan's is to draw diners into a relaxed experience of enjoying a meal and a bottle with a friendly face. Our job is all about translating our knowledge into a language that anyone can understand.

Q: What do you do on your days off?

[I'm] a single mom, [so] my days off are usually spent with my kids—and there is no better way to spend one than exploring New Orleans. We are lucky to call this city home, a place where history, culture, and diversity aren't tourist attractions but the texture of everyday life. **ST**

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Tom Gamble is the founder of Gamble Estates in Napa, CA.

The Sauv-Vigneron

NAPA VALLEY VETERAN **TOM GAMBLE** TALKS HISTORY, REGENERATIVE AGRICULTURE, AND HIS FAVORITE WHITE GRAPE *by Stacy Briscoe*

TOM GAMBLE DESCRIBES HIMSELF

as a vigneron, which he defines as “a farmer who grows their vines in a specific fashion from which to make their own wine—and who would not grow the grapes in that fashion if they were just selling the grapes.” And he embodies the very essence of the word. According to the owner/proprietor of Gamble Estates, his family’s agricultural roots in Napa Valley dig deep into the region’s history. “We’re celebrating 110 years of farming going back to 1916,” he says as he climbs into his ramshackle old truck. “I can’t believe it when I say those numbers.”

Winegrape growing and winemaking, however, were family ventures he established himself; in 2005, he officially founded Gamble Family Vineyards, now Gamble

Estates, for which the grapes are sourced from 175 estate vineyards spread across Oakville, Mount Veeder, Yountville, and Rutherford. As a young boy, Gamble says, he enjoyed every aspect of farming, “from chasing the cows to moving the irrigation lines.” He’s brought that same dedication to stewardship to his wine business, and it shows in the quality not only of the grapes but of the wines they produce.

The winery’s Sauvignon Blanc program is a particular passion project for Gamble, who was inspired by trips to Europe after graduating college in the 1980s. “At the time, there weren’t any high-quality, premium Sauvignon Blancs in the U.S.,” he recalls. “I was blown away by the subtlety and sophistication of the Bordeaux Blancs, the aromatics of the Loire.”



When he purchased the Riverbound Vineyard in 1997—so named because of its adjacency to both the Napa River and Conn Creek—he saw the potential to craft domestic Sauvignon Blanc with European flair. He refers to it lovingly as the “Entre-Deux-Mers of Napa.” “This hill,” he says, pointing out the window as he drives along an unpaved backroad, “plays an important part in the vineyard: In the summer, during the growing season, we lose sun a bit earlier than elsewhere.” Those extra hours of shade in conjunction with the two surrounding bodies of water create a much-needed cooling effect in the warm upvalley region of Yountville, enabling the successful cultivation of white winegrapes.

Savvy site selection is one thing, but it's conscientious farming methods that truly allow Gamble Estate's vineyards to thrive and its wines to shine. Currently working toward certification through the Regenerative Organic Alliance, Gamble is a practitioner of regenerative agriculture who aims to prioritize the health and vitality of all living things—from soil microbes to fauna and flora in and around the site, including, of course, the vines themselves. This environmental attentiveness is particularly evident in early spring during the tail end of dormancy, when a permanent cover crop of native grasses and other plants covers the ground like plush green carpet. “As I've gotten more into regenerative organics, I've been able to improve my vine health,” says Gamble, pointing toward Sauvignon Blanc plantings established in 2005. “My practices allow for a healthier soil biome, keep microbes happy, [and] help this vineyard produce high-quality and high-value grapes, even though the yields have declined because of the age.”



Gamble oversees a nighttime Sauvignon Blanc harvest in 2025.

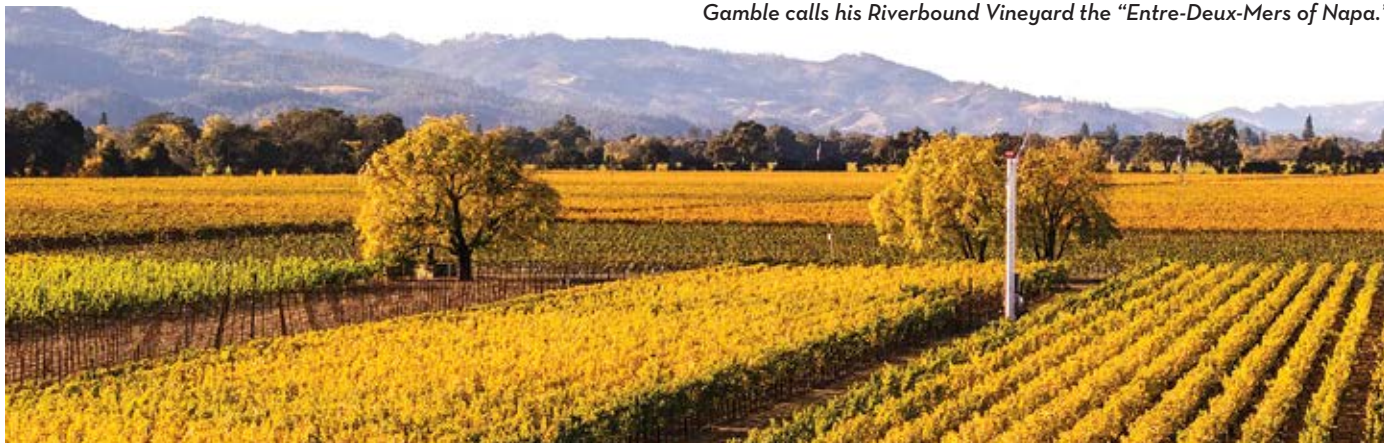
Newer plantings have benefited from not only a more disease- and drought-resistant rootstock than the older vines planted on 101-14 but Gamble's experimentation with tighter spacing. “The [new 039-16] rootstock is more vigorous, so closer plantings mean more competition between vines, controlling vigor,” he explains. These younger vines are also cane-pruned, whereas older vines are still trained on permanent cordon. “Adopting a small-vine mentality and planting a denser vineyard allows me to go to cane,” says Gamble. “With cane, roots and leaves use energy to support grape growth instead of [supporting] the permanent wood. I get fewer grapes per vine but more vine per acre,” resulting in increased concentration of flavor. “Every time I get brave enough to go to a smaller planting, the quality goes up,” he notes.

In the cellar, Gamble maintains the same meticulous attention to detail. Both the Gamble Estates Yountville Sauvignon Blanc and Reserve Sauvignon Blanc use a clonal mixture dominated by 30 (Musqué) and 530 (Ledson). With the fine European wines that originally inspired him in mind, he ferments and ages each in oak according to a specific—and impactful—barrel program. For the Reserve, it involves a blend of small (59-gallon) barriques and large (70-gallon) cigar barrels. According to Gamble, the latter vessel allows for a larger surface area of lees contact while reducing the need for stirring, thus limiting oxygen exposure. Aged for 18 months, the result is generous weight and textural mouthfeel alongside the variety's hallmark zesty acidity and floral aromas.

The Yountville Sauvignon Blanc, meanwhile, ages for just six months in 225-liter French oak barrels. It's a bit lighter and brighter, with a slightly leaner body and juicy, fruit-driven acidity. And yet—though it's more subtly integrated and sinewy than the Reserve—there is still a touch of wood-derived texture that lingers across the tongue and imparts depth and complexity.

Asked about his favorite food pairings, Gamble says that that texture as well as the acidity of both wines allow for a plethora of options: “My wife makes a ‘kitchen sink’ salad with fresh vegetables from [our] garden and a protein—chicken or fish,” he says. “But [the wines] also go really well with heartier dishes; we've had them with a Bolognese-style pasta. I think we make [them] very versatile in terms of pairings: food, occasions, and enjoyments.” In addition to being the consummate vigneron, he's also got the soul of a somm. S|

Gamble calls his Riverbound Vineyard the “Entre-Deux-Mers of Napa.”



Decanting Your Financial Future

WHY SO MANY SOMMELIERS FALL BEHIND ON RETIREMENT



by Joe Stephens

A FEW YEARS AGO,

I sat down with a sommelier in his late 40s who had built an impressive career. He had worked in some

of the best dining rooms in the country, led award-winning wine programs, and earned the respect of peers throughout the industry. His income over the years had been strong, but when we reviewed his finances, almost nothing was set aside specifically for retirement.

He looked at me and said something I've since heard many times: "I always assumed I'd figure that part out later."

In a profession built on patience, timing, and enduring craftsmanship, it's striking how often long-term financial planning is neglected. Before working in financial planning, I spent years on the floor. Over time, I noticed a pattern affecting the industry's finances that involves three factors.

The first is income. Unlike professionals with steady paychecks and automatic 401(k) contributions, sommeliers often earn through a mix of salaries, tips, incentives, consulting work, teaching gigs, and opportunities such as brand ambassadorships and supplier partnerships. That income variability creates a trap that is particularly acute in this industry: In a strong year, lifestyle tends to expand to meet income, and in a quieter one, there's always a reason to wait. As a result, sommeliers have to actively choose to save, but long-term planning rarely keeps pace.

The second is mobility. These days, somms move readily between restaurants, employers, cities, and opportunities, often building remarkable careers along the way. But they rarely accumulate the kind of employer-sponsored retirement benefits that more traditional professions take for granted.

The third is culture. Hospitality is built on generosity, immediacy, and experience. We invest heavily in knowledge, travel, certifications, and relationships—an essential mix, but they often come at the expense of personal wealth.

Over the years, I've met extraordinary professionals in their 40s and 50s who have deep industry credibility and strong lifetime earnings but little in the way of

- **Use strong earning years to your advantage.** Direct those earnings toward long-term savings to avoid lifestyle creep.
- **Automate your savings.** Set this up through your bank to avoid seasonal fluctuations.

Financial security is built through consistent decisions made early enough to



structured retirement savings. They haven't lacked discipline; they've lacked awareness of financial planning strategies that matched the cadence of their careers.

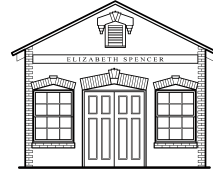
Planning for the future in this profession doesn't look the way it does for someone with a steady paycheck. It requires flexibility, saving more aggressively in strong earning years, and thinking creatively about how to fortify your retirement. Most importantly, it requires intention.

Here's where you start:

- **Fund your own IRA (if your employer doesn't offer a retirement plan already).** An IRA allows you to save for retirement savings independent of your employer.

matter. The goal isn't to step away from hospitality. It's to ensure that working in the industry at 60 or 70 remains a choice, not a necessity. ❏

Joe Stephens, CFP, is a Certified Sommelier and Certified Financial Planner with Associated Financial Planners, where he works alongside a team dedicated to helping wine and spirits professionals build long-term financial security. With experience across retail, supplier, and hospitality environments, Stephens grew up in the industry, working in his family's retail wine shops before going on to serve as luxury manager for E. & J. Gallo Winery in New Jersey.



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by Julie Berge, vice president of communications
and member relations, Wine Institute



PHOTO: JAMES COLLIER

St. Supéry Estate
Vineyards & Winery
winemaker Brooke
Shenk.



PHOTO COURTESY OF WINE INSTITUTE

Wente Family Vineyards
fifth-generation
winegrower/chief
revenue officer Aly
Wenté.



Robert Mondavi Winery
director of winemaking
Kurtis Ogasawara.



PHOTO: RICHARD MORLEY

Ramey Wine Cellars co-
president Alan Ramey.



PHOTO: JULEP DESIGNS

Keller Estate general
manager Angie Hallinan.

Choosing Hope

A LOOK AT THE LEADERS WRITING THE WINE INDUSTRY'S NEXT CHAPTER

AT A RECENT GATHERING attended by the leaders of regional wine associations from across California, we began with a simple question: "In one word, how do you feel about the current state of the wine industry?" The answers reflected the weight of the moment: "challenged," "uncertain," "uncharted." But one rose above the rest: "hopeful."

That may seem out of step with the headlines. The wine industry is navigating real pressures, from shifting consumer habits and growing competition to trade barriers and regulatory challenges. No one in the room was blind to those realities. And yet hope is critical to the kind of leadership that facing these challenges requires.

For me, the word "hopeful" brought into focus a theory that I have been developing over the course of my work with many of the industry's emerging leaders: The future of the industry will depend on people with vision as well as the hope needed to unite the community, interpret wine for consumers, and reimagine the possibilities.

To unite is to understand that our strength rests on what we can build collectively. Ours is a richly varied industry shaped by businesses of different sizes, histories, and points of view. The best leaders know how to turn that diversity into momentum. I see that ability in Brooke Shenk, winemaker at St. Supéry Estate Vineyards & Winery, whose work with the Wine Industry Zero Waste Collective shows how collaboration can reduce waste and cut both landfill waste and disposal costs.

To interpret is to translate wine's value for digital-first consumers who seek both authenticity and inclusivity. I see that skill in Aly Wenté, fifth-generation winegrower and chief revenue officer at Wente Family Vineyards, whose unconventional nationwide search for a social media intern turned the hiring process itself into an act of storytelling—one that showed how a 140-year-old winery could be brought to life for a new generation. And I see it as well in Angie Hallinan, general manager of Keller Estate, whose vision of hospitality is rooted in community in a way that reflects the owners' Mexican heritage. Her

approach is a reminder that wine brings people together.

To reimagine is to innovate in thought and practice. I see that talent in Kurtis Ogasawara, director of winemaking at Robert Mondavi Winery, who is helping usher one of California's most storied brands into the future through a combination of technical rigor, sustainable practices, and a clear vision. I see it, too, in Alan Ramey, co-president of Ramey Wine Cellars and author of *Pressing Matters: The Debates, Controversies and Mysteries That Have Shaped the World of Wine*, a book that explores various industry issues with an intellectual openness that points to another important quality of leadership: curiosity.

If "hopeful" was the word that echoed loudest at our meeting, perhaps it is because the leaders present understand what this moment demands: We need not simply to weather change but to proactively shepherd the industry into its next chapter. Our future will be shaped by those who can transmit our values with clarity, creativity, and conviction. **SJ**

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Chardonnay vineyards in the Haut-Mâconnais in Southern Burgundy.

GOLDEN

Age

CAVE DE LUGNY
CELEBRATES A CENTURY
OF CHARDONNAY IN
THE MÂCONNAIS

BY *Chris Howard*

In the April morning sun,

Emmanuel Nonain guides his new tractor between tight rows of Chardonnay. The red-brown clay in his family's vineyard above Lugny in the Haut-Mâconnais turns slowly in the plow's wake. At the beginning of the row, his father, Roland—who worked this land with his own father—watches to make sure his son runs a straight line so that the blade rotates the soil without clipping the young vines. Spraying would be easier, but like many next-generation winegrowers, Emmanuel is committed to working organically.

Behind them, a rapeseed field has erupted into blinding yellow, its blue-green cereals framed by oak forest. Roland, a hunter like many Burgundian winegrowers, mentions there are pheasants about. I've stepped into an Impressionist painting in progress—one depicting something that has been happening here, in the heart of Chardonnay country, for a very long time. This is what a centennial feels like on the ground deep in Southern Burgundy.

The Nonains are but one family within the fold of Cave de Lugny, which turned 100 this year. The largest cooperative winery in the Mâconnais, it has been the leading producer of white Burgundy since it was established in 1926 by a group of winegrowers determined to wrest control of their livelihoods from the powerful *négociants* who dominated the region's trade. The cooperative has grown steadily over the course of the century into something its founders could not have imagined: 201 member families farming 1,244 hectares across 31 Mâconnais communes and 20 AOCs to produce a range of fresh, unoaked Chardonnays prized for their quality and value while remaining rooted in the social values that define cooperative winemaking.



PHOTOS COURTESY OF CAVE DE LUGNY



Winegrower Isabelle Meunier and author Chris Howard share a toast.

Unlike some of Burgundy's historic houses, reference to whose founding in the 17th century still graces their labels but whose ownership has quietly shifted to foreign investment groups, Cave de Lugny remains entirely owned by its member families. Dismounting his tractor, Emmanuel plants his finger in the soil while Roland looks on, smiling. "We are in the *sillon*," he says, meaning the line cut into the earth by a plow. "You go forward in the furrow," he added, pointing down the rows of Chardonnay. The Nonains have been here since the beginning, Roland's father being among the cooperative's founding members; Emmanuel, a young father himself, represents the fourth generation in a furrow spanning 100 years.

In marking the anniversary, says Stéphane Garrigue, the cooperative's managing director, "We're closing a chapter, but we're opening another one." As the price of wines from the Côte d'Or has climbed beyond the reach of most consumers, a simple fact has come into focus: The Mâconnais offers the same grape variety from the same limestone terroir, representing the same ancient relationship between vine and vigneron, at prices mere mortals can afford. Cave de Lugny finds itself in the right place at the right time—and not for the first time. Serendipity has a history here.

In the 1970s, two American importers, lost in Burgundy's infamous fog, wandered into Cave de Lugny asking for directions to another estate. Invited in to taste the cooperative's flagship unoaked Chardonnay, Les Charmes, they struck a deal on the spot—and the U.S. market has remained one of Cave de Lugny's most important ever since. In fact, while

stateside sales of Chardonnay have softened broadly, Cave de Lugny continues to grow—a fact its members attribute not to luck but to doing things right. Today, Les Charmes is joined in the U.S. by two other unoaked Chardonnays: La Côte Blanche, a Mâcon-Villages cuvée, and Cœur de Charmes, a limited-production wine from old vines in the heart of the Les Charmes vineyard. All three share a signature profile as fresh, mineral, unadorned Chardonnays from the grape's native ground.

The cooperative model has long carried a stigma in fine wine circles; the assumption is that collective production means mediocre quality. Yet the families of Cave de Lugny have built something else entirely. "It's not like cooperatives back home," says Mario Sberna, an Italian member who came to work the harvest in 2018, fell for Lugny, and now farms 2 hectares of his own. "At co-ops in Italy, you bring your grapes, you take your money, you go home. Here, people say '*notre cave*'—our cellar, our cooperative. It's completely different."

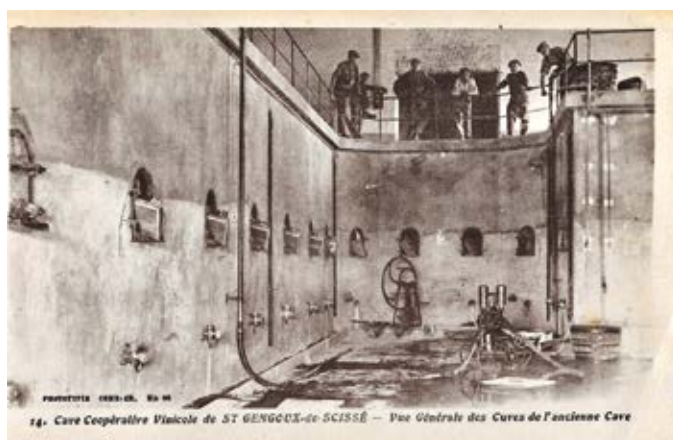
Isabelle Meunier, whose family has been farming in the Mâconnais since before Cave de Lugny's inception, tends 20 hectares of vines and is one of the cooperative's most active members. For instance, she sits on several of its committees, which tackle such concerns as environmental practices, engaging young vignerons, and community outreach; members are able to join according to their interests and their spare time, as much or as little as life allows. Before we sit down to dinner in her home, Meunier proudly shows me her father's first tractor, a fire-engine red McCormick Farmall

from the 1950s. It's being tuned up by Sberna, who is good with tools, for the centenary celebration, which will include a procession of tractors and their predecessors—horses, in other words.

Unlike privately owned estates, Cave de Lugny makes major decisions collectively—issues are put to a vote that must be carried by a majority—though it's modernizing its approach as a new generation takes the reins. At board meetings, decisions are now made by anonymous digital ballot, freeing younger members to step out of the shadows of their fathers or uncles to express their opinions. In 2024, the board passed a comprehensive Three-Year Quality Plan, which covers everything from vineyard selection and harvest timing to yeast trials and bottling protocols as part of the same commitment to quality and innovation that has made Cave de Lugny a leading producer in the region.

The cooperative spirit here is not merely democratic—it is Darwinian. Two hundred-plus families pooling knowledge, land, labor, and capital can do what individual growers cannot: invest in cutting-edge technologies, rigorous R&D, precision viticulture, and long-term initiatives whose benefits reveal themselves only over time, including a meticulous 12-year study to obtain parcel-by-parcel data on soil depth, vine age, and rootstock that will impact future harvest decisions. While these are particularly challenging times for the wine sector, evolution tends to favor cooperation.

The choice to make Chardonnays without oak defines Cave de Lugny's house style: Stainless-steel tanks preserve their natural character while allowing



Archival photos from the early days of the co-op.



Harvesttime for one of Cave de Lugny's 201 member growers.

for precise temperature control during fermentation. Full malolactic fermentation and aging on fine lees, from six to 18 months depending on the cuvée, round out the *élevage*. The result is terroir-driven Chardonnay of great purity and finesse that will satisfy devotees while winning over those turned off by the unctuous butter bombs of 1980s California. The Haut-Mâconnais terroir makes this possible, defined as it is by Jurassic limestone beneath clay and marl topsoils in a winescape so synonymous with Chardonnay that the eponymous village itself lies just a few miles from the cave.

I am here to taste the three still unadorned Chardonnays currently available in the U.S. with Marc Duffo, Cave de Lugny's head winemaker. Responsible for the annual production of 6.2 million bottles, he nonetheless evokes a quiet, almost monastic aura—channeling the Benedictine monks who made Burgundian wine what it is. We begin with the accessible, food-friendly entry point of the range, *La Côte Blanche* (SRP \$15). Spending six months on lees, the *Mâcon-Villages*—level wine is bright and fresh with notes of citrus, stone fruit, honey, and white flowers. Next is Lugny's flagship, *Les Charmes*

(SRP \$20), sourced from a single 220-acre vineyard set on chalk and limestone whose vines average 50 years old (some are as old as 92). Aged for 12 months on lees, it shows white flowers, acacia honey, and citrus on the nose; the palate is medium-bodied with delicate fruit and a slightly spicy finish. And then there's the *Cœur de Charmes* (SRP \$30), sourced from a 5-acre plateau at the heart of *Les Charmes*, whose oldest vines sit on prized Kimmeridgian limestone. Autumn yellow in the glass, it ages for 18 months on lees, followed by another 18 in bottle before release. The nose displays vivid aromas of tropical fruit, including crystallized pineapple, as well as a hint of grapefruit and a whiff of gunflint. On the supple, medium-bodied palate, concentrated fruits lead to a long mineral finish. Duffo, in monk-like fashion, nods and says, "The best wine is the one people like to drink."

Before catching the train back to Paris, I head up the hill to the *Saint-Pierre lieu-dit*, adjacent to *Les Charmes* in Lugny. Arriving at a freshly plowed field surrounded by vines and oaks gleaming in the late afternoon sun, I find the Luquet family planting a new vineyard. Quentin stands at the entrance to the plot, his

father already 50 yards down the row; together they've lined it with wires to plant perfectly straight, evenly spaced rows of vines—half Pinot Noir, half Chardonnay. In the shade of a nearby oak are Quentin's mother, grandmother, sister, nephew, wife, and 6-week-old daughter. As the golden hour approaches, the spring scene now feels less painterly than cinematic, almost overwhelming in its pure radiance. In a world that grows ever more chaotic, life goes on in the heart of Chardonnay.

Cave de Lugny's centennial celebration will be marked by the aforementioned procession through the vineyards and village—a living line that stretches back and points forward through time. Emmanuel Nolain, on his new tractor; will follow those who came before, including Isabelle Meunier on her father's red *Farmall*, and the horses and hands that have worked this land for centuries. It is a procession that tells the whole story—one that began in 1926 with a handful of families who decided that, together, they could do what none of them could do alone. And that has made the cooperative the leading white Burgundy producer in its 100th year—with the next generations already in the furrow. *SJ*

The Wine of Patriots

TRACING MADEIRA'S ROLE IN U.S. HISTORY WITH **COSSART GORDON**

by Deborah Parker Wong

THERE WASN'T AN empty seat in the private room of San Francisco restaurant La Connessa when Cossart Gordon CEO Chris Blandy took the floor to present "A Toast to Independence with Cossart Gordon & Miles Madeira." It was just one of many stops on a weeklong U.S. tour Blandy undertook to celebrate Madeira's role in the 250th anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence.

Introducing him, host Garret Nagle, Northern California sales manager at importer Vineyard Brands, shared an anecdotal observation that sent a wave of optimism across the room: "Madeira is having a moment in San Francisco, and it is happening because of you." But it's not just happening there. In terms of global sales, "we're having record years [across] the whole [fortified] wine sector year after year," according to Blandy, who added, "Our biggest challenges are coming from a supply point of view."

Madeira's enviable place in our nation's history tells a compelling backstory. "Any wine region in the world would love to have the authentic marketing hook that we have with the birth of the United States," Blandy said with delight as he cited ways in which Madeira shaped the American Revolution. In a nutshell, Madeira was a tax-free product because the island was considered a British port; a riot known as the Liberty Affair broke out over the seizure of a ship carrying Madeira belonging to John Hancock, inspiring further acts of rebellion (including the Boston Tea Party); George Washington relied on Madeira to soothe toothaches before battle; and Benjamin Franklin employed Madeira in his booze-fueled diplomatic negotiations with New York Governor George Clinton.

The word *madeira* in Portuguese means "wood," and the island of Ma-



PHOTOS COURTESY OF VINEYARD BRANDS



Cossart Gordon CEO Chris Blandy presented "A Toast to Independence with Cossart Gordon & Miles Madeira" at La Connessa in San Francisco, CA.

deira itself is heavily forested, with just 995 acres under vine—an example of "nano-viticulture," in Blandy's words. Tiny, terraced plots line its hillsides up to about 900 feet in elevation, above which its volcanic soils are too meager for cultivation. Blandy noted that lower-elevation plantings are being supplanted by bananas, which can produce multiple crops, making them more profitable for small growers.

While presenting five wines, Blandy spoke at length about the increased use of the Tinta Negra grape variety, which represents 80% of plantings on the island. Historically used to produce cooking Sherry, it's now getting its due as a component in all four styles of Madeira, and Cossart Gordon has invested in the Miles brand as a way to explore its potential. "We want to turn Miles into Madeira's Tinta Negra experts," he said.

Composed of 100% Tinta Negra, Miles Rainwater was the driest style we tasted, offering a mélange of dried fruits, including orange peel. The four Cossart

Gordon wines that followed had increasing levels of residual sugar: The Sercial, aged five years, was elegant, with nutty, citrus, honeyed, and saline flavors that

would complement oysters. The Verdelho, at ten years of age, was lightly caramelized, with notes of dried cherry. The 2013 Bual Colheita, bottled in 2024, showed vanilla, baked pear, golden raisin, and Brazil nut as well as notes of chocolate and beef bouillon. And the 1995 Malmsey, bottled in 2023, had an olive-green rim and flavors of coffee bean, fig, and chocolate along with smoky, woody notes.

During the question-and-answer session that concluded the tasting, one attendee seeking a talking point for retail sales asked Blandy which style he thought George Washington would have drunk. "Although there is nothing in the archives at Mount Vernon that describes either the style or the grapevine, we assume that it was Malmsey," he responded. "It was the main style that was being shipped during that period when people wanted something sweet."

The historic connections to our fledgling nation aside, Madeira holds plenty of appeal for modern-day consumers: Its rarity, complexity, and beauty are undeniable. **SJ**

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Lynmar Estate founders/proprietors Anisya and Lynn Fritz.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF LYNMAR ESTATE



No Compromise

HERE'S WHY WE PUT **LYNMAR ESTATE** ON A PEDESTAL

by Meridith May

LYNN AND ANISYA FRITZ founded Lynmar Estate in the Sonoma County town of Sebastopol in 1980. Their hands-on approach to ownership, coupled with the superb craftsmanship of general manager and winemaker Pete Soergel, has ensured the winery's high status over the decades: The acclaimed 100-acre property is the home of Quail Hill Vineyard, which harbors heritage vines planted in the 1970s.



Quail Hill Vineyard surrounds the winery, which is also home to a tasting room and an inn, Bliss House.

In total, Lynmar Estate farms 58 acres of Pinot Noir and 22 acres of Chardonnay across four vineyards, all of which are currently undergoing the three-year certification process required by California Certified Organic Farmers. It produces just 12,000 cases annually, a level of output that preserves the wines' stylistic individuality and consistency. "I've always believed that each business has the perfect size—the perfect point where everything works, where your employees are happy, your customers are happy, and you don't have to make compromises," notes Lynn.

The winery's culinary program is led by executive chef David Frakes, who trained at the California Culinary Academy and worked in San Francisco at La Scene Cafe & Bar in the Warwick-Regis Hotel as well as at The Ritz-Carlton under Gary Danko before becoming chef at the Applewood Inn in the Sonoma County town of Guerneville. His seasonal menu is inspired by the herb, flower, and vegetable gardens and orchards on the property. I'm looking forward to exploring the aromas and flavors of his cuisine in an article that will run later this year. **\$**



Lynmar Estate 2022 Chardonnay, Susanna's Vineyard, Sonoma Coast, Sonoma County (\$71) Featuring the Wente clone grown on a cool site in the Green Valley, this wine aged in (42% new) French oak for 14 months. Luscious, mouthwatering notes of candied lemon and pineapple upside-down cake are sprinkled with sea-breeze salinity. Wildflowers persist with a touch of vanilla on the vibrating finish. **97**

Lynmar Estate 2021 Pinot Noir, Quail Hill Vineyard, Russian River Valley, Sonoma County (\$79) Sun-drenched black plum and cinnamon-dashed dark chocolate are glorious on the entry of this estate-grown blend of 14 Pinot Noir clones. Black pepper sparks the midpalate, amped by bright acidity. Copper-penny minerality grabs the teeth before a savory, weighty ending of umami and roasted coffee bean. **95**



Lynmar Estate 2022 Pinot Noir, Summit Block, Russian River Valley, Sonoma County (\$93) The intensity of aromas, flavors, and textures here results in romance and opulence. Raspberry

and rose petal are vivacious with whispers of white pepper, red tea, persimmon, and candied watermelon. Tannins barely touch the palate, imparting a powdery, nutty coating on the tongue. **98**

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Not Seeing Is Believing

SHARE & PAIR SUNDAYS PROPOSES PUTTING BLIND TASTINGS IN A WHOLE NEW LIGHT—LITERALLY by Lars Leicht

IN THE SOMMELIER COMMUNITY, blind tastings are de rigueur—a rite of passage—slash—parlor game. The *Share & Pair Sundays* campaign, which encourages consumers to get together at least weekly to enjoy wine and food with friends and

Ferrer winery in Sonoma County, where he led a *Share & Pair Sundays*—sponsored demonstration and tasting for winemaker Kyle Altomare and general manager Melanie Schafer. He pointed out that in addition to helping tasters focus on their

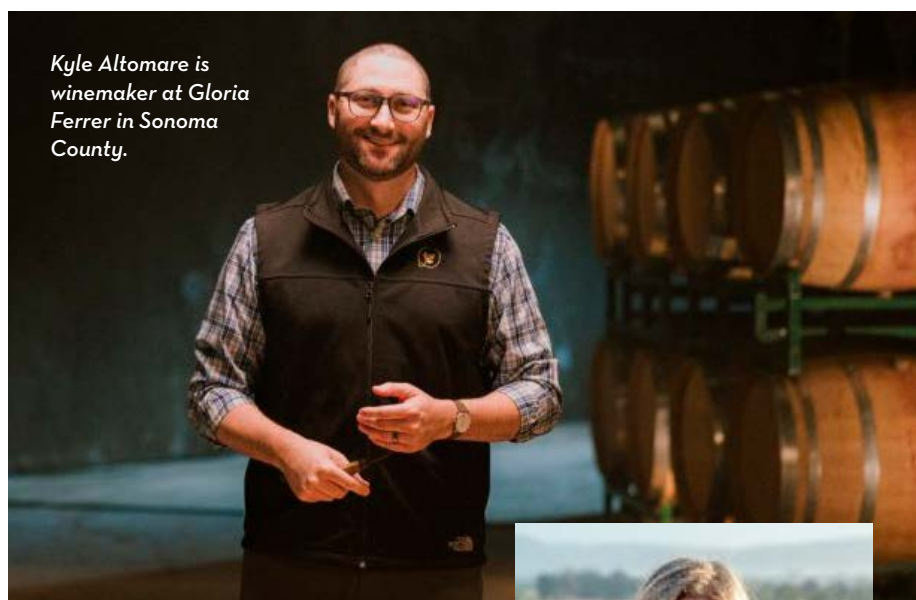
■ **Illumina 2021** is a composition of 94% Pinot Blanc and 6% Chardonnay from Carneros that aged two years sur lie. Wedler, Altomare, and Schafer described the wine as showing white fruit, white flowers, and citrus, including tangerine and pink grapefruit.

■ **Royal Cuvée** contains 67% Pinot Noir and 33% Chardonnay from Carneros and is aged five years en tirage. The group tasted vintages **2018** and **1998** side by side, noting that the older wine showed aromas of marmalade, candied ginger, caramel, and nutmeg, while the younger one offered bright red fruit and lemon.

■ **Carneros Cuvée** is composed of 55% Pinot Noir and 45% Chardonnay and spends nine years en tirage. Considered the 335-acre estate's tete de cuvée, it is made from the best fruit in select vintages. The trio tasted vintages **2015** and **2005** side by side. They reported that the younger wine possessed zesty citrus notes along with red apple and cinnamon, while the additional time on yeast gave the older wine enhanced flavors of lemon zest and pith plus subtle hints of ginger, pear, and wild fennel.



Kyle Altomare is winemaker at Gloria Ferrer in Sonoma County.



Gloria Ferrer general manager Melanie Schafer.

family, suggests taking blind tastings to a new level modeled on Tasting in the Dark, an immersive experience created by Dr. Hoby Wedler.

Wedler, a sensory expert and wine lover with a Ph.D. in organic chemistry from the University of California, Davis, has been blind since birth. For the past 15 years, his blindfolded tasting program has been opening doors to the world of wine aromas. *Share & Pair Sundays*, meanwhile, is an extension of the *Come Over October* campaign created by author and *SOMM Journal* contributing editor Karen MacNeil in partnership with marketing veterans Kimberly Noelle Charles, DipWSET, and Gino Colangelo. The trio saw Wedler's methods as a way to keep wine relevant by embedding it in recurring social habits.

Wedler recently brought his unique approach—and blindfolds—to the Gloria

senses of smell and taste rather than relying on visual clues to a wine's identity, blindfolds remove distractions in the room.

The group started by priming their senses with Wedler's custom-made aroma samples. They then explored five wines from the Gloria Ferrer portfolio:

Altomare described tasting blindfolded as “a wildly liberating experience” that brought out aromas he had never noticed before, including those aforementioned fennel notes.

So the next time you break out your wineglasses to conduct a blind tasting, consider throwing in some blindfolds as well for a whole new perspective. SJ

PHOTOS COURTESY OF GLORIA FERRER

TROPICAL

BY LUCA BOSIO

Crafted by 3rd Generation Winemaker



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Blood, Sweat, Tears, and Unicorns

A Q&A WITH TOP-TIER SOMMELIERS MARK GUILLAUDEU, MS, AND JIENNA BASALDU

by Ruth Tobias

Mark Guillaudeu, MS, participates in the tasting round of the Best Sommelier of the Americas competition in 2025.

PHOTO: WILL BUCALOY

TALK ABOUT A power couple. Based in New York City, Mark Guillaudeu, MS, is a sommelier at the three-MICHELIN-starred Eleven Madison Park (EMP), while his fiancée, MS candidate Jienna Basaldu, is a somm at The Modern, which holds two stars; between them, the list of credentials, accolades, and professional competition titles they've earned over the course of their careers is almost as long as the wine lists at those storied establishments. How do they do it? The short answer is: years and years of blood, sweat, and tears—all “while having a smile” on their faces, in Basaldu's words. But the long answer's more compelling.

Q: What's a typical day like for you?

Basaldu: Action-packed. This week alone, [I attended] a Clos Rougeard master class, the first that the estate's ever done; Skurnik's New York trade tasting; [and] an Ian D'Agata seminar on native hybrid and Italian grape crossings . . . all before going to work! But this is why I came to New York, right? I want to take advantage

of every professional opportunity that the city has to offer.

But on a typical day, I get up at 8 or 8:30. Right now, on Monday, I'll be teaching a master class on Abruzzo with a concentration on Pecorino at Eataly; I also teach at the Institute of Culinary Education. On Wednesdays, I have a blind tasting group at Per Se. A couple days a week, I participate in online theory groups. I'll do a little prep for my service, as I mostly work in the dining room [rather than the bar], where we have two different wine pairings that change constantly; at lineup, I have to very concisely educate the staff in a couple of minutes on these changes. So every day, I'm doing some kind of studying, some kind of theoretical review. I do also try to go to the gym every day, even if it's just 20 minutes; I have to in order to stay in shape for service. It is physically demanding. Our cellar is two floors down, and I pride myself on being quick—I can do it in two minutes. So I train for this. Then I go to work, and when I come home after my shift, I maybe review a little something here or there [before] getting to bed around 1:30 [a.m.].

Q: What's a highlight of your job? Guillaudeu:

When I get to do something special and tailored for someone. I remember [a couple] who had flown from London just to have dinner at EMP for their honeymoon. The previous summer, I had been visiting wine country in [England] . . . and it turned out that the restaurant where they had had their wedding reception was the same restaurant where we had gone before seeing *Macbeth* in the reconstructed Globe theater. So I talked to our on-site team that takes care of these kinds of things, and the guests were able to take home a hand-painted picture of the façade of that restaurant as a memory of their meal at EMP, of their wedding, of the connection that it just so happened we had. That was special to me.

Basaldu: Last Friday, we hosted a Jean-Louis Chave wine dinner: eight courses, five wines a course. Jean-Louis was there [along with] 40 guests, and it was one of the most fast-paced services I've ever

Continued on page 58 ▶



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*Advanced Sommelier
Jienna Basaldu is a
sommelier at two-
MICHELIN-starred
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worked. But we were pouring the most insane wines, [including a] 1990 Vin de Paille—that's a unicorn wine. I'm like, man, we're doing this really cool stuff at the most elite level. And I got to tell Jean-Louis what tasting his Hermitage Blanc meant for me many moons ago as a young sommelier, [how it changed] the way that I thought about Rhône whites and white wines [in general]. I got this picture of the two of us, and he was just beaming.

Q: What's the most memorable wine you've tasted recently?

Guillaudeau: It is less common that we don't open at least one iconic bottle [per night] than it is that we do. Just in the last four days, [we've poured a] 1991 Vogüé Musigny Blanc, 2018 Domaine de la Romanée-Conti Richebourg, 2009 Leflaive Bâtard-Montrachet, and the inaugural [commercial] vintage of Sassicaia, 1968. I've thought about [the latter] multiple times a day, every day, since I tasted it. . . . At that time, it was 100% Cabernet Sauvignon matured exclusively in old Slavonian oak barrels. And the expression of Cabernet in that glass—I was like, "It smells like walking through a cypress grove. Is this the same as what . . . we call eucalyptus when we're talking about aged Napa or Australian Cabernet?"

We're in Tuscany, there's undoubtedly cypress nearby; [are these] those volatile oils? Or is this a particular expression of this clone of Cabernet? Where did they get the cuttings for the original Sassicaia? Does anybody know? Can anybody find out?" I had so many questions. A lot of the other people around the room were like, "This is more interesting than it is delicious." And I was kind of the dissenter, where I was like, "I really think it's both. There might be more intellectual satisfaction than raw hedonism, but holy smokes, this is a piece of history—a wine that revolutionized Italian wine."

[The guest who ordered it] did it explicitly for the intellectual curiosity of the somms, so that every somm on the team could have a taste. When you have the kind of clientele that's willing to spend \$7,600 on a bottle because the sommelier team has taken good enough care of them over a long enough period of time that they actually care so much [about us], that is an extraordinary place to work.

Q: What tips do you have for sommeliers interested in joining you on the competition circuit?

Guillaudeau: It depends on the competition. In my mind, there are three types

of competitions, [but] the most common are regionally focused, and they're a really great way to train. Take [Austria Uncorked], which was the first competition that I won, as an example. I put in about 100 hours of prep and just saturated myself as completely as possible. That [meant] learning all the great information we had from the Austrian wine marketing board, going through the entire website in depth. I read every source on Austria that I could find: *Wine Atlas*, the *Oxford Companion*, *Sotheby's*, *GuildSomm*. I studied classic Austrian cuisine, Austrian history. I think the one place where a lot of people make mistakes in preparing for these kinds of competitions is [they] look at the world through wine-colored glasses: It's not just about the wine, it's also about the culture and the history—it's the whole picture you'd have table-side for a guest.

[For competitions like the *Chaîne des Rôtisseurs*,] I think a lot of people shortchange service, because it's hard to set up exercises for it, but [they] discount how productive visualization is. I have a set of dice, and each number on the dice corresponds to a different variable in a service scenario, so I just roll the dice. Whatever combination of variables comes up—that could be bottle size, a piece of equipment I don't have, sparkling by the bottle, decanting to aerate [or] for sediment, et cetera—I just go through it in my head, and I can keep rolling the dice and practicing service without even getting out of my living room. I find that really helpful, because if you go through it in your head enough times, your hands will follow when the moment comes.

Basaldu: Put yourself out there. Don't be afraid. Know that this takes time, and it takes tenacity. I didn't win my first competition until I had been competing for two years. And have fun! You have to love it when you win and when you don't, when you pass and when you fail. Remember that even if you don't win the prize, you're winning professionally. *ST*

The couple generously suggested that aspiring competitors seeking advice reach out to them on Instagram @dcsommurair and @jjenna_thedecantress.

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Davis Estates proprietors Mike and Sandy Davis started a tech company in their garage in 1989, building computing systems for leading science and aerospace clients. When they sold the company in 2010, the next chapter of their lives was destined to be in Napa Valley. Mike explains, "I saw a winery as a life experience rooted in hospitality, community, and shared enjoyment."



PHOTOS COURTESY OF DAVIS ESTATES

The Dynamic Balance of Yin and Yang at Davis Estates

by Meridith May

DAVIS ESTATES PROPRIETORS Mike and Sandy Davis were determined to make their family-owned winery a place for gastronomic adventures. With two full-time chefs in tow, they host private tastings for visitors to the estate designed by architect Howard Backen, which is located along the Silverado Trail on a 155-acre property in Calistoga, California.

Using fruit from four estate vineyards across Carneros, Rutherford, and Howell Mountain as well as Calistoga, winemaker Walter Leiva works with celebrated consultant Philippe Melka, whose vision helped to guide the direction of and philosophy behind the wines' personalities.



Mike and Sandy's son Brandon is the director of estate experience. Their inviting hospitality center is a hub of wine and food pairings.

talents in working with the architects and Sandy displaying an innate ability to position hospitality as an important element that augments visitors' interpretations of the wines, it's no wonder she refers to their partnership as "yin and yang." ❧

Leiva's background at fellow Napa producer Laird Family Estate, where he implemented fermentation management while overseeing blending and barrel programs, instilled his hands-on approach. In 2016, Cary Gott, who was making Davis Estates wines off-site, encouraged Leiva to join the winery, and in 2023, he was promoted to winemaker.

With Mike showing his entrepreneurial and creative



Davis Estates 2024 Sauvignon Blanc, Napa Valley (\$58) High-toned acidity and crushed stone give this spirited white its wings. A squeeze of lemon and a garden of green herbs tickle the palate. **93**

Davis Estates 2023 Cabernet Franc, Napa Valley (\$115) Aged 22 months in (60% new) French oak, this sumptuous and dense wine offers notes of blueberry, spiced sandalwood, and graphite. Warmed earth and ripe black cherry reap the benefits of a persistent violet tone—aromatic and textural—joined by a thread of cocoa and licorice. The result is disciplined, polished, and desirable, not decadent. **97**



Davis Estates 2022 Zephyr, Napa Valley (\$135) This startlingly silky blend of 53% Cabernet Sauvignon, 25% Cabernet Franc, and 10% Merlot with some Malbec and Petit Verdot glides across the palate, carrying notes of dark chocolate, new leather, plum pudding, and black cherry ganache. **98**

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A New Leaf

CHRIS UNDERWOOD LEFT THE DISTRIBUTION BUSINESS TO FOLLOW HIS HEART AT **HARPER'S REST WINERY** by Meridith May

CHRIS UNDERWOOD HAS been a force in the wine and spirits industry for decades, and his family's company dating back five generations, Young's Holdings, has specialized in retail, importing, distribution, and brand-building for over 135 years. What Underwood is more recently known for is his role as the former owner and CEO of Young's Market Company, the West Coast distributing giant that he ran alongside his father, Vern. Underwood sold half the family's interest in and management control of Young's Market Company in 2019 to RNDC (Republic National Distributing Company) and later sold the other half to RNDC in 2022.

"Things got pretty quiet for me after 2019," Underwood says. While he still owned supplier/marketing companies Wilson Daniels and Infinium Spirits, he toyed with the idea of retiring at age 55—but his instincts told him otherwise. "In my heart, I always knew I wanted to own a winery," he confesses. "And my love for the Russian River and Sonoma County, and especially for Pinot Noir, pretty much predicted where I would go."

After six years of searching for the right property, Underwood found his mecca: a 36-acre estate on Westside Road in Healdsburg in the heart of the Middle Reach neighborhood of the Russian River Valley AVA. He named it Harper's Rest for Reuben Harper, the agriculturist who farmed the property and was laid to rest there in 1857 beneath a bay laurel tree now surrounded by grapevines.

The wines are beautifully crafted by winemaker and general manager Vance Rose with fruit from the home ranch as well as Underwood's other estate property, Moon Dust Vineyard in Sebastopol Hills. Rose utilizes regenerative organic practices at both, and Moon Dust is Regenerative Organic Certified. "Quality is at the heart of Harper's Rest. Our wines



Chris Underwood is proprietor of Harper's Rest Winery.

speak for themselves at the table," insists Underwood, adding, "Our family has been deeply involved in fine wine for generations, and Harper's Rest is about applying that experience directly to the vineyard and cellar."

Harper's Rest is distributed through Wilson Daniels. [\\$](#)



PHOTO: JESSICA FIX

Harper's Rest 2023 Chardonnay, Russian River Valley, Sonoma County (\$50) Bright and focused, sunny and complex, with flavors of vanilla meringue, yellow flowers, pound cake, and lemon verbena plus a sleek propulsion of energy across the tongue. Its opulence is generated by a roundness on the palate. **96**

Harper's Rest 2023 Chardonnay, Moon Dust Vineyard, Russian River Valley, Sonoma County (\$50) Mellow notes of honeyed apricot and sandalwood are sparked by white pepper; and brioche and vanilla are delicately balanced by hints of saline. A touch of almond and broad strokes of lemon blossom add complexity to an already unique profile. **97**

Harper's Rest 2023 Pinot Noir, Russian River Valley, Sonoma County (\$70) A delicate veil of red cherry and cinnamon toast combined with precise, high-profile acidity shows grace, restraint, and, above all, balance. Earthier elements merge on the midpalate with umami, tobacco, and wild rose. **97**

Harper's Rest 2023 Pinot Noir, Moon Dust Vineyard, Russian River Valley, Sonoma County (\$70) Raspberry and hibiscus are surrounded by milk chocolate, giving this buoyant and juicy wine a gloriously refined, gossamer mouthfeel. Basil and sweet tobacco enter on the midpalate, getting a lift from the fine acid structure. A jasmine perfume lingers on the sensual finish. **98**

Harper's Rest was the former site of Arista Winery in the Middle Reach neighborhood of the Russian River Valley AVA.

PHOTO: JESSICA FIX

PHOTO: MIKE BATTERY



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PHOTOS COURTESY OF LUCA BOSIO VINEYARDS

Third-generation Piedmontese winemaker Luca Bosio, right, with his family.

The Endless Possibilities of Piedmont

A TASTING WITH **LUCA BOSIO** REVEALED THE VERSATILITY OF THE REGION'S WINES by Ellen Clifford



AS I SAT DOWN to taste Barolos, Barbarescos, and a selection of whites with Luca Bosio, an earnest and soft-spoken third-generation winemaker based in the Langhe, I was prepared for the blend of Piedmontese tradition and a young producer's evolved technique the wines would show. What I didn't expect was that they would pair so swimmingly with the menu at The Hideaway, an upscale Mexican steakhouse in Beverly Hills, California.

Born into a winemaking family, Luca Bosio strengthened his skills by studying enology at the University of Turin before returning to the Langhe to take the helm at his family's estate, established in 1967 as Bosio Family Vineyards. It rebranded as Luca Bosio Vineyards in 2012, and in 2015, it acquired Bel Colle, a producer built on time-honored practices such as hand-harvesting and long aging; at the time of its founding in Verduno in the 1970s, it was one of only 13 wineries permitted to produce Barolo and Barbaresco. Bosio's work was cut out for him as he aimed to merge those traditions with his focus on freshness, native yeast, and minimal sulfur.

The pairing possibilities offered by Piedmontese wine were brought into stark relief during our meal. The Luca Bosio 2024 Gavi, for instance, smelled of salted melon before opening into a full

but flinty palate. Its balance of mineral and honeyed notes fabulously complemented my salad's sweet corn kernels, crisp tortillas, and acidic tomatoes. The clean, stainless steel–vinified Bel Colle 2025 Langhe Chardonnay, meanwhile, showed a pear-forward nose and an even more mineral palate, whereas the Bel Colle 2025 presented punchy citrus on the nose along with herbal flavors. None of the wines was overpowered nor undercut by the mildly spicy salsa and salty tortilla chips, and all had the acidity to cut through thick, creamy guacamole.

As we turned toward the reds, Bosio reminded me that Langhe Nebbiolo was once a second-tier wine, created as a way to use grapes in a bad Barolo vintage. But the Bel Colle 2024 Langhe Nebbiolo proved that the Langhe DOC deserves a seat at the table: Though lighter and easier-drinking than Barolo, it was bright and full of characteristic cherry and floral notes.

"You will feel the winemaker in this wine," explained Bosio as we swirled and sniffed his namesake 2022 Barbaresco. Purple flowers and fruit coated my tongue, while the textured tannins melded into the wine beautifully, epitomizing balance. The third wine in the flight was the Bel Colle 2021 Pajorè Barbaresco, a single-vineyard bottling that featured Barbaresco's trademark firm yet velvety and lifted tannins—assertive without being aggressive.

Tannins aside, this trio of Nebbiolos shared one characteristic that facilitated their pairing with the second course: zingy acidity. We were served flautas, branzino fritto, and crispy cauliflower—and if there is one thing fried food needs, it's the mouth-cleansing effect of abundant acidity.

Our last course of chimichurri-accented wagyu beef, Chilean sea bass with chili glaze, and mushroom fajitas was accompanied by three astute Barolos from the Bel Colle property: the 2020 Simposio Barolo, 2021 Monvigliero Barolo, and 2015 10 Anni Riserva Barolo. The Simposio was the most easygoing of the bunch (to the extent that a Barolo can be easygoing!). Though sturdy, its tannins were well knit; the Slavonian casks in which the wine aged contributed hints of spice. The single-vineyard Monvigliero displayed pitchy tannins that were all the more agreeable with the protein and umami of our entrees. And the 2015



Luca Bosio Vineyards was established in 1967 as Bosio Family Vineyards in the Langhe region of Piedmont, Italy.

Riserva was entering its elegant era, with a slowly turning kaleidoscope of delicate floral and earthy aromas and mature, well-integrated tannins. Barolo is typically a wine meant for drinking with food, but I could have sipped this solo if it came down to it.

That said, the fajitas were a standout pairing. Mushrooms are a kissing cousin to truffles, a classic Barolo bedfellow, and their umami notes, in tandem with fatty, unctuous cheese, made the dish a perfect

partner I'd never have thought of.

Tasting through Luca Bosio's portfolio was like viewing Piedmont through a prism: Each wine segued effortlessly into the next, representing a unique color in the regional rainbow. And while truffles and a sturdy ragu will always be a classic match for the wines of Piedmont—after all, what grows together truly does go together!—Bosio represents a new generation of producers who aren't afraid to push vinous and culinary boundaries. SJ

{ travelogue }

THE SOMMS

Made Him Do It



BEHIND THE SCENES OF **SUBSTANCE'S** NEWEST SMALL- PRODUCTION LABEL



SOMM Journal managing editor Ruth Tobias; O'Neill Vintners & Distillers senior national account manager of on-premise Denise Van Herpen; Travis Hinkle, corporate beverage manager for Landry's properties Del Frisco's Double Eagle Steakhouse, Del Frisco's Grille, Strip House, and Strip House The Speakeasy; O'Neill Vintners & Distillers manager of brand activation and communication Helina Tucker; DineAmic Hospitality wine director Marsha Wright; Substance winemaker Brennon Leighton; and Mike Clark, buyer at MB Spirits, in the Golden West Vineyard in Washington's Royal Slope AVA.



The Substance booth at Taste Washington's Grand Tasting in Seattle, where Clark pronounced its Bx Bordeaux-style blend "killer. At \$50, it's worth every penny."

story by **RUTH TOBIAS** photos by **RAFAEL PETERSON**

Tattooed and goateed in keeping with his background in Seattle's 1990s-era punk rock scene, Brennon Leighton doesn't look like your average winemaker. Nor does he sound like one, citing Black Flag and Fugazi as his influences as much as, say, legendary Loire Valley producer Didier Dagueneau. And he certainly doesn't serve as your run-of-the-mill guide to Washington wine. In March, I joined him and three visiting sommeliers—Travis Hinkle, a Philadelphia-based corporate beverage manager for Landry's; Mike Clark, buyer at MB Spirits, the liquor retailer attached to New England grocery chain Market Basket; and Marsha Wright, wine director of Chicago's DineAmic Hospitality group—on a whirlwind two-day tour of the state sponsored by *The SOMM Journal*. To call it an eye-opening experience is an understatement: It was at once an immersion into the local terroir, a crash course in winemaking, and a deeply personal encounter with the self-described "irreverent and mavericky" mastermind behind the Substance brand.



Substance sources several varieties from Golden West Vineyard, including Pinot Noir, Cabernet, Merlot, and Chardonnay.

The seeds of inspiration for the trip had been planted a year prior, when Wright visited Leighton for the first time. Having bonded during a harrowing drive through a snowstorm from wine country to Seattle, the two unwound over cocktails at one of Leighton's favorite watering holes, where she asked him, "Why don't you make a Merlot?" As he recalled, "I go, 'Well, I just don't make Merlot.' She's like, 'Would

you make a Merlot for me?' And I said, 'Absolutely, and we'll name it Marsha Made Me Do It.' And then we thought, 'Why don't we do this with other people as well, and we'll call the wine Somms Made Me Do It.'" That vision would be realized via an intense and fascinating blending session—but not until we got a thorough grounding in some of the vineyards from which the bottling would come.

The Lay of the Land

En route to three select sites, Leighton provided an overview of Substance, a brand "originally created by another wine-maker," he explained. "Around 2012, [a former partner] and I realized that it was up for sale, and we really liked the label!" But they felt they could improve upon the juice behind it, producing "wines of substance, of purity, of integrity. We would source them from sustainable vineyards and make them the right way, doing native fermentation and extended maceration." The trick was to work with growers capable of higher-density plantings "so we'd get more intense, concentrated wines without spending so much money on the fruit, because that's typically the biggest cost prohibitor," he continued. "If I could keep those prices down, then I could make these wines for \$20 instead of \$60 or \$80. I can make \$150 bottles all day; what excites me is making wine that people can afford and enjoy."

Meanwhile, Leighton also gave us the lay of the land. As we drove north from the town of Prosser through the scenic Yakima Valley, he told us about the Missoula floods that inundated Eastern Washington thousands of years ago, forming its numerous hills, dales, and diverse soil profiles suitable for all



A lively welcome dinner at The Prosser House in Prosser, WA, was paired with a wide range of Substance wines.

sorts of agriculture—including the apple and cherry orchards as well as the mint and hops fields he pointed out, noting that “most winegrowers here also grow other perennial crops. I know about all of them because I’m competing with them for growing space: [For instance,] when I smell the hops, I know I need to start picking Syrah soon.” He described the region’s high-desert climate, marked by just 6–8 inches of annual rainfall in contrast to the considerably wetter conditions further west, and the “short, intense harvests” that typically begin in mid-September, sparking “a race to get things done before the first frost” in late October. He kept us apprised of our changes in elevation while observing that “the easy thing to understand about Washington is all the mountain ranges go east to west—Horse Heaven Hills, Rattlesnake Hills, Saddle Mountain, Frenchman Hills, Breezy Mountain—and all the slopes come off of them north to south.” It was an overview all the more masterful for being off the cuff.

We eventually arrived at Sportfisher Vineyard in the Columbia Valley AVA, a key source of Cabernet Sauvignon for Leighton, who remarked on the “talcum-y” quality of the soil—“it’s almost like this really fine loess” above hard basalt—and the two-vine trellising system that’s a hedge against the aforementioned freezes. We then had lunch atop a picturesque incline in the Golden West Vineyard in the Royal Slope AVA, from whose limestone and volcanic soils he gets Pinot Noir as well as some Cabernet, Merlot, and Chardonnay. Thanks to the moderating effect of the Columbia River on the site, “it doesn’t get too hot; it doesn’t get too cold—it’s kind of the perfect place,” he said, adding that he refuses to use copper as a fungicide there (or anywhere) because “it’s not salmon-safe. It destroys fish habitat. I use sulfur, so I can’t be certified organic, but everything else I do is organic.” He’s also particular about orientation: “Everything that I plant is at 22 degrees southwest. In late July, early August, 4 o’clock is usually the hottest part of the day, and I’m getting sun coming straight down the middle of my row, so I’m not cooking one side or the other; I’m getting very uniform ripening.”

Finally, we visited Evergreen Vineyard in the Ancient Lakes AVA, which, “to me, is a world-class vineyard,” he asserted. Yielding his Sauvignon Blanc, Pinot Grigio, and



Leighton preparing a Somms Made Me Do It blend for discussion.

Riesling, “it literally makes some of the best white wines in the world: mineral, earthy, high acidity, great focus.” Along the way, we of course tasted several Substance bottlings, including a 2021 Chardonnay, itself minerally and bready yet richly fruited, and the 2023 version, round and sunny yet fresh with cantaloupe; the newly launched 2025 Riesling, redolent of apricot, lemon, and baby’s breath; and a peppery, intriguingly savory

2021 Pinot Noir. With that, some people might have called it a day—but again, Leighton is not most people, and ours was far from over.

“Good Is Good”

Our two-hour midafternoon trip to Seattle provided a dramatic demonstration of Washington’s contrasting terroirs as high desert gave way to the Cascade Mountains—heavily forested and



“Wine is so weird,” Hinkle mused as he and Clark assessed a sample. “It’s just amazing how a tiny bit of tweaking totally changes it.” Agreed Clark, referring to a component blend of 60% Cabernet and 40% Malbec, “This is like the biggest fish in an aquarium tank. It’s going to make its mark on anything you put it in.”

snow-dusted under sometimes stormy skies—and then to the big city, where we repaired to a brewery to discuss the aforementioned blending trial, for which Leighton had chosen six top barrel lots from the 2023 vintage.

“You need to think more than you sip, because [otherwise] you’re going to wear your palate out before you figure out what you want to do,” he coached the somms. “What you smell and [taste], those things are going to change constantly—they will not be the same from when you decide now to when the wine’s in the bottle. But the one thing that doesn’t change is the mouthfeel. So focus on trying to get a mouthfeel that has continuity to it—whether it’s elegant and refined or big and bold, you’re putting together a narrative about the wine through the mouthfeel.”

While encouraging them to offer their opinions freely “because you can gain a lot by talking about it with somebody else—I don’t like to blend alone, I like to blend with people”—he had a couple of caveats. One, “I want to warn you that I don’t fuck with [percentages] under 5,” he said. “Nothing under 5% makes any difference. If you want to add 5% or 8% or 10% of something that’s cool and interesting, do that. But don’t exhaust

yourself trying to figure out something that’s not there.” And two, “when you put together the right blend, it’s so fucking obvious. If it’s not making sense, abandon ship and start over—you are forcing the idea. Wines have their own thoughts and are really good at telling you.”

We soon found ourselves in a charming nearby Airbnb, where catering chef Jack Rogers was preparing our dinner and the table was set for the trial, laden with bottles, glasses, beakers, and graduated cylinders galore. With a 100% Syrah from Boushey Vineyard; a 100% Merlot from Golden West; a 100% Cabernet Sauvignon from Sportfisher and Painted Hills; a blend of 70% Cabernet and 30% Malbec from three sites, Gearhart, Rosebud, and Stoneridge; a 100% Cabernet from Golden West and Northridge; and a blend of 60% Cabernet and 40% Malbec from Mrachek, Frenchman, and Golden West to consider—all of which had spent a year and a half in used French oak—the group got straight to work.

“The Merlot stands out to me,” said Wright. “It’s silky, it’s elegant, the mid-palate is very refined, and the finish is lingering yet friendly.” Hinkle singled out the Cabernet from Golden West and Northridge: “There’s a little more tannin here, but there’s also acid, and it just feels



balanced.” And Clark, for his part, called the 60/40 Cabernet-Malbec blend “a little bit more Old World, which I like.” From there, ideas began to fly: Hinkle proposed a 60/40 blend of wines two and five, Wright a 70/30 blend of wines two and six, and Clark a 70/30 blend of five and two, while Leighton himself played with a more Cab-dominated blend. Along the way, he offered insights into his approach, for instance noting that “if tannin is awkward when you’re blending, it will be awkward for the rest of its life. We all think that tannin softens over time, and it does, but the rest of the wine softens as well—it falls apart. So it’s very important to me that the tannins fall into place.”

The somms tinkered, tasted, talked, and tinkered some more; gradually, a plan for the Somms Made Me Do It wine began to take shape, and two strong contenders emerged. One contained 60% of the Cab-Malbec blend from Mrachek,



While working on her blend, Wright noted, "I'm thinking about my guests in our restaurants, so I want something that's very friendly with food."

Frenchman, and Golden West; 25% of the Merlot from Golden West; and 15% of the Cab from Golden West and Northridge. The other contained those same wines in different amounts: 60% of the Merlot and 20% each of the Cab and the Cab-Malbec blend. As we sat down to try them with our meal, Hinkle pronounced them "delicious. Here's what I think we just did: We reinvented Left Bank and Right Bank Bordeaux." That was perfectly fine by Clark, who repeated what had become our rallying cry over the course of the day: "Good is good."

Ultimately, they chose the former blend, of which Leighton is making 900 cases. Hinkle, Wright, and Clark have each committed to purchasing some for exclusive sale in their establishments, where they can proudly tell the tale of how the wine

came to be, right down to its custom label with a name of their choosing.

Tracing the Throughline

"Washington is a place that's hard to get to know," Leighton acknowledged by way of preparing us for a second full day of vinous adventure. Especially given that "we're not ones to toot our own horns," in his words, finding a clear throughline between "a lot of interesting wines with different perspectives from different personalities" can be tricky. But ultimately, he added, "They're all coming from the same DNA. I think Washington has something to say—a very beautiful thing to say. And quality wins out over time" when it comes to marketplace success.

Following a leisurely walk through Seattle's historic Pike Place Market and

brunch at the nearby Café Campagne (the first of five restaurants and bars to which Leighton, ever the bon vivant, would lead his merry cohort over the next 12 hours), we made our way to Taste Washington's annual Grand Tasting at the Lumen Field Event Center. There, to pair with bites from 75 chefs, some 200 local producers poured a dazzling array of expressions—and Leighton seemed to know just about all of them. We chatted with his friend Matías Kúsuplas, the winemaker for Massalto, Valo, and Gård, as well as Michael Savage of Savage Grace and Upwind's Hannah Coulson, among others; we sampled Gamays and Gewürztraminers, Grüner Veltliners and Vermentinos, Syrahs and Sangioveses. And we of course lingered at the Substance table, where a few bottlings we hadn't previously encountered stood out to the somms.

"I carry Substance Cabernet; it has always been my favorite. However, this single-vineyard Sauv Blanc? Beautiful," mused Wright, referring to a 2021 example hailing from the limestone soils of Sunset Vineyard, which according to Leighton saw no malolactic conversion in homage to Dagueneau. "The Rosé is awesome too; I think it's underrated," she commented after tasting the zesty yet floral 2022 vintage, which came from a block of Pinot Noir in the Evergreen Vineyard specifically grown for rosé. Another big hit was the 2019 Bx, a simultaneously vivid and earthy blend of 40% Merlot, 31% Cabernet Sauvignon, and 29% Cabernet Franc from the Klein Vineyard in Walla Walla Valley. "It has some good New World fruit but also hearkens back to its roots in the Old World," observed Hinkle, adding, "I love seeing the range and variety of Substance, and I think it's doing a great job representing Washington, [where] it's been really exciting to discover things that may not make it outside of the state that I don't always get to see."

As we decompressed afterward over more Substance Sauvignon Blanc and geoduck crudo at Taylor Shellfish Farms Oyster Bar, Clark echoed that sentiment. "On the East Coast, I see Cab, Pinot, Chard, Sauv Blanc. [So] I was very surprised at all the different varieties that I had no idea could be made here," he said—just as our travels the day before

The gang gathers at Taste Washington's Grand Tasting.



had opened his eyes: "We went from desert with hills to vineyards to what almost appeared to be a rainforest when we were driving up with all that fog, and now we're in the city. My perception of Washington before coming here was a lot different." Agreed Hinkle, "It gives you a better appreciation for how important terroir is and how it can change so quickly from place to place."

It was nearing 5 p.m., but the day was still young, at least by Leighton's estimation: Happy hour at beloved Chinese dive bar Gan Bei was in the cards, followed by a multicourse feast at hip Italian restaurant Mezzanotte and a nightcap at yet another cocktail lounge. In short, the passionate producer would leave no stone unturned—or bottle unopened—to prove to us that "there are so many great things that are happening in Washington outside of myself that I'm totally overwhelmed and amazed by on a daily basis," as he put it. But as for himself, he added, Substance allows him to give wine drinkers across the country the same opportunity he had given us: the chance to experience his home state in all its wildly diverse glory. "I'm that bridge between nerd and commercial," he said. "I'm trying to make punk rock into pop." As Hinkle responded, "That's the best place to be." SJ



Dinner at Mezzanotte in Seattle.



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Our “California’s Vinous Playgrounds” panel at Summit in the Sun in Miami, FL, included Kobrand Fine Wine & Spirits district manager for Central and North Florida Zach Mazur, Ram’s Gate Winery winemaker Joe Nielsen, moderator and SOMM Journal VP of education Lars Leicht, Domaine de la Rivière co-owner Geoff Bedrosian, Copper Cane Wines & Spirits founder Joe Wagner, and Brassfield Estate Winery VP of vineyard and winemaking operations Jonathan Walters.

Summarizing the **SUMMIT** **IN THE SUN**

WE KICKED OFF OUR TWO-DAY EDU-TAINMENT EXTRAVAGANZA IN MIAMI, FL, WITH A VIRTUAL TRIP TO THE GOLDEN STATE

STORY BY Ruth Tobias
PHOTOS BY Alfred Gugig

Ever the entertainer, *The SOMM Journal's* VP of education, Lars Leicht, managed to name-drop everyone from Thomas Jefferson to the Rolling Stones in his lively introduction to the opening seminar of Summit in the Sun, the trade gathering we hosted on March 9 and 10 at Miami Dade College’s Miami Culinary Institute in the heart of the Magic City’s Central Business District. But as the moderator of “California’s Vinous Playgrounds,” he was careful to tie all his loose references together into a tidy bow—much as the panel discussion itself would cover diverse terroirs in service of not only analyzing the presented wines but placing them neatly within the larger context of the Golden State’s rich viticultural history and traditions. As Mick Jagger sang it, “Thank you for your wine, California/Thank you for your sweet and bitter fruits” indeed.



St. Francis 2024 Appellation Collection Chardonnay, Russian River Valley, Sonoma County

“St. Francis holds a very special place in our heart. It’s one of the California wineries owned by the Kopf family, who also own Kobrand,” noted Zach Mazur, district manager for Central and North Florida at Kobrand Fine Wine & Spirits. St. Francis planted its first stake in Sonoma County in 1971 and has remained firmly embedded in the region to this day.

Channeling its years of expertise there, the winery recently launched a new premium line called the Appellation Collection, which includes a 2024 Chardonnay from the Russian River Valley (RRV). As Mazur described it, “There’s Fuji apple, citrus zest, and almond skin on the nose, [but from] the midpalate to finish, you’re going to get some toasted marshmallow and crème brûlée.” Indeed, because the expression underwent 80% malo-lactic fermentation and aged 11 months in (10% new) French oak, its pleasantly tart and savory characteristics were nicely offset by its creamier aspects.

The RRV is a premier appellation for Chardonnay due in part to its distinctive climatic fluctuations. Although it does experience plenty of warm sunshine during the growing season, Mazur explained, “The nights are cooled very quickly by fog rolling in off the Pacific Ocean. There’s a large diurnal shift between day and nighttime temperatures, which is great for retaining acidity in the grapes and allowing them to hang on the vine longer and create more phenolic ripeness.” Meanwhile, he added, “We have a mix of alluvial, so ancient seabed, and volcanic soil. This wine’s actually coming from closer down to the riverbed, [where] the roots of the vines have to dig really deep into that well-draining soil to reach water. This helps increase the minerality that you’re finding in [the wine.]”

Leicht asked him whether it could be considered a typical expression of the RRV. “With the terroir and the climate there, you’re able to produce a full-bodied, full-flavored wine [that] also [has] balanced acidity and not too much richness,” Mazur confirmed. “So, yes, this is going to be your quintessential premium Chardonnay from the region.”



Ram's Gate 2023 Hyde Vineyard Chardonnay, Carneros

Whether from the RRV or not, that more restrained style is in keeping with evolving consumer tastes, observed Joe Nielsen, winemaker at Ram’s Gate Winery. “There’s been a change in perception of Chardonnay,” he pointed out. “Minerality and freshness are often wanted over butter and oak. And I’m glad of that, because I’m making a Chard like that.”

Though Ram’s Gate is located on the Sonoma side of Carneros, the example Nielsen showcased hails from Hyde Vineyard on the AVA’s “dark side” (as he jokingly called Napa Valley). “Although we don’t own the property, we’ve been working with Larry [Hyde and] now Chris, his son, on the same two blocks since 2012 to mold the Chardonnay into something special,” he explained. “When you taste a Chardonnay from Hyde Vineyard, there’s a typicity [that shows through] regardless of the producer. [It has] inherent weight while staying light on its feet. I like a little bit leaner Chardonnay . . . so [I] play to California sunshine but keep the minerality as high as possible. And that’s really easy to do at this site.”

Working with two clones—Musqué, which makes up about two-thirds of the wine, and Robert Young—Nielsen starts the winemaking process with a surprising technique: browning out the juice for the first 48 hours. As Leicht elaborated, “It’s counterintuitive to the way you think white wine should be made, [involving] full exposure to oxygen. . . . It’s like leaving an apple out. And what that does is it makes some of the chemical compounds bind in a way that makes them easier to precipitate out,” thereby lowering phenols that contribute bitterness and, paradoxically, cause a finished wine to darken in color. Nielsen then does a native ferment in French oak, which he said “Hyde soaks up quite well,” and conducts malo on only the Robert Young-derived portion of the wine before aging it for about a year. The result proved as agile as he had indicated, complete with a floral aura and a streak of salinity.



Ram's Gate 2022 Bush Crispo Pinot Noir, Russian River Valley, Sonoma County

Returning to the RRV, Nielsen acknowledged that the 4-acre Bush Crispo Vineyard from which he makes the next wine he presented is a bit of an outlier in the region insofar as it's set not on sandy loam but on gravelly soils that "make for a very robust Pinot Noir," in his estimation. The Pommard clone and Dijon clone 115—whose berries "I call hand grenades," he said, "because they're really small, really powerful, and come with a decent amount of tannin—[are] often picked before I actually pick sparkling wine, and [even so, the fruit is] often around 25 Brix and over 14% alcohol. I do everything in the cellar to try to avoid extraction on this wine, to the point where, last year, I did just a few pumpovers the entire time it was in tank for two weeks. And it's still the most tannic; it's still the darkest. . . . This is a site that, despite my best efforts, [yields] the biggest wine that I make."

For that reason, Nielsen kept the 2022 vintage in (35% new) oak "for a year and a half, which is kind of a long time for Pinot Noir," he acknowledged, adding that he and his team "obsess about cooperage. We're working with about 24 different coopers in France. . . . We spend a lot of time tasting barrels and trying to think about the site first. So there might be seven or eight different coopers in the Pinot Noir . . . just to help narrate that site and make it a little bit easier for people to understand."

All that said, the wine was hardly a bruiser. Silky in texture, with earthy notes of cranberry, roasted strawberry, bay leaf, black pepper, and cola spice, it certainly conveyed the sophistication for which the RRV is known.



Domaine de la Rivière 2021 Heritage Block Pinot Noir, Russian River Valley, Sonoma County

So, for that matter, did the next wine. It was presented by Geoff Bedrosian, co-founder of Domaine de la Rivière, which he called "a very small family winery"—producing just 1,200–1,300 cases a year—in the RRV's Middle Reach neighborhood. "What's unique about the Middle Reach and particularly our site is the marine influence that we have," he said; though his and wife/partner Marla's property sits less than a mile from the Russian River, "what probably has more impact, because of where we're located on the bench, is the Petaluma Gap," through which fog and wind stream into the RRV. So "as much as we get intense heat, at times into the high 90s . . . we have this natural marine cooling effect," he continued. "Our average daily temperature ends up being in the mid- to high 80s [in the summer], and we can get down to 50 or 55 degrees nightly, which helps maintain that acidity."

Here, the couple has planted 11 acres to Pinot Noir—8 in their Red Barn Block, 3 in their Heritage Block, which Bedrosian said contains "a mix of gravelly riverbed and silty soil in one location and alluvial clay soils that have varying degrees of weightiness [in another]; we think both soil types create unique attributes to the wine that we're making." But, he added, the soils' contribution may be inextricable from that of clonal selection: "We're kind of clone geeks; how they actually complement the terroir that they're located in matters to us." The 2021 Heritage Block Pinot Noir we tasted contains two clones: 74% Mount Eden, which in his view "tends to be darker—dark cherry, dark raspberry—and finishes with a nice, silky kind of elegance," and the remainder Swan, expressing "brighter red fruit with a little bit of spiciness and maybe a floral aspect on the nose."

Each was fermented with native yeast to best express the vintage as well as the site, according to Bedrosian, and aged separately so the team—including winemaker Kale Anderson—can "monitor how they develop through the year" before undertaking the blending process, when "we literally argue over 1% or 2% of this or that clone, because it matters," he reiterated. Spending 11 and a half months in (37% new) French oak, the wine "stood out" to attendee Joseph Barton, director of beverage at Gaylord Palms Resort & Convention Center in Kissimmee, Florida, for showing "great balance and purity of fruit," in his words.



Belle Glos 2024 Clark & Telephone Pinot Noir, Santa Maria Valley, Santa Barbara County

“André Tchelistcheff said, ‘God made Cabernet, whereas the devil made Pinot Noir,’” Copper Cane Wines & Spirits founder Joe Wagner reminded the audience. “I think he was talking about the Martini clone specifically.” As he noted, “Back in the ‘60s and ‘70s, when Pinot Noir was first starting to grace the coast of California, a lot of the plantings were either Pommard or Martini, [but the latter] has fallen by the wayside because it’s a pain in the ass.”

Nevertheless, that’s what has been growing on own-rooted vines in the sandy and gravelly loam soils of the Clark & Telephone Vineyard since 1972, giving Wagner a formative lesson in trusting his instincts when producing Belle Glos Pinot Noir from the site. At first, “I was trying to pick it at 22.5, 23 Brix, on the restrained side, really being guided by the chemistry more than the physiological attributes of the fruit—and the wine kept turning out tasting like tomato paste,” he recalled. “But there was a brown spice element in there that I really liked. So I decided to throw sugars and acidity and pH to the wind and just say, ‘All right, let’s pick this when it’s right.’”

As a result, the 2024 vintage he presented “is fleshy, rich, and juicy but still has good acidity” thanks to the Santa Maria Valley’s coastal climate, he commented. “If you taste the Clark & Telephone against [Belle Glos’ other single-vineyard Pinot Noirs,] Dairyman and Las Alturas, there’s about 150 miles between each of those sites, and there are big differences in style, at least side by side.” But, he added, “We still want them all to have some sort of continuity. We want our reds to be on the bolder side. I like full extraction. I like a ton of character. I like them to be very showy [even] in their youth.”

That’s where signature techniques like cryoextraction come in. Layering destemmed, uncrushed grapes with dry ice prior to fermentation “to get [them] down to near freezing temperatures . . . we started seeing that those wines had so much color and richness and depth,” Wagner explained. After fermenting for 20–25 days, they go for about a year into (60% new) French oak; while “coopers [get] upset with us,” he admitted, “we have them cut their barrel size down from 59 gallons to 53 [for] just a little more concentration.” The wine’s intense profile of black cherry, sweet plum, and licorice and long, viscous finish certainly proved the wisdom of what he acknowledged are his sometimes controversial ways: “It was refreshing to hear him explain his perspective,” said Barton.



Brassfield Estate 2021 Eruption, Lake County

“We’re going in a totally different direction here,” began Jonathan Walters, VP of vineyard and winemaking operations at Brassfield Estate Winery in Lake County’s High Valley AVA, by way of introducing its 2021 Eruption—a fitting name not only insofar as the blend of Syrah, Grenache, Mourvèdre, and Malbec represented a shake-up in the lineup of Chardonnays and Pinots but also because it hails from a 5,000-acre property that’s home to a volcano. Volcanic soils produce wines that “tend to be a little more savory than fruity,” opined Walters, and Eruption’s no exception: “There’s this huge mineral-driven note that we have here.” They also “tend to have a very high redox potential with tannins,” he added, “which means we have to give the wine tons and tons of air during fermentation” via frequent pumpovers, “and we use lots of used barrels on this because we don’t need any more new oak structure; there’s already so much tannin. It’s aged about 12 months.”

But those soils aren’t the only distinctive feature of the estate, which yields 100% of the fruit for Brassfield’s wines. For one thing, said Walters, it’s located in a transverse valley into which “the wind dips down [and] really cools us off” in an otherwise warm region; for another, it sits at elevations between 1,800 and nearly 3,000 feet, an ascent that’s akin to “going 10 degrees in latitude. So [it’s as though] we’re growing in the same parallel as Bordeaux or Washington State. That gives us a very short, intense growing season” while ensuring high UV radiation, the ultimate result of which is “thicker skins, higher polyphenols, all these anthocyanins—and you can see in the wine how much dark color you get,” he continued.

Attendee Lesley Neves, sommelier at The Ritz-Carlton, Lake Tahoe, in Truckee, California, praised the wine as “unapologetic.” “Rich in body with ripping tannins but drool-worthy acid, [it’s] exotic with notes of blackberry, granite, and rosemary,” she enthused. “I cannot wait to pair this with a big pork chop smothered in mole sauce.”

For all their differences, Leicht saw a throughline in the wines worth noting: “I found structure in all of them, and [while] they’re beautiful in their youth, there’s nothing here that is going to fade away anytime fast.” Whether or not his assessment was a sly allusion to the Rolling Stones’ “Not Fade Away,” it was certainly truthful. S



PHOTOS COURTESY OF VINEYARD BRANDS

A bird's-eye view of the vineyards of Castelli di Jesi.

In Verdicchio Veritas

UMANI RONCHI CAPTURES THE PRECISION, DEPTH, AND ELEGANCE OF THE ITALIAN VARIETY

Contributed by Lars Leicht

ITALIAN WINE IS DEFINED by its remarkable diversity, with hundreds of indigenous grape varieties expressing the nuances of their origins. Among them, Verdicchio stands out for its ability to combine freshness, structure, and longevity—qualities that place it among Italy's most compelling white wines.

At its finest, Verdicchio offers a rare balance: vibrant acidity alongside textural depth, mineral tension paired with generous fruit, and immediate appeal complemented by the capacity to evolve beautifully over time. Umani Ronchi has consistently excelled in crafting wines with a strong sense of terroir and genuine complexity, delivering both character and value.

Based in the heart of Verdicchio Classico country in Le Marche along the Adriatic coast in central Italy, Umani Ronchi has played a vital role in shaping the identity of the grape. Early on, the winery embraced single-vineyard expressions, highlighting Verdicchio's ability to reflect a clear sense of place through freshness and distinctive minerality shaped by coastal breezes and elevated vineyard sites.

That vision continues to guide the winery today. Founded in 1957 and led by owner/CEO Michele Bernetti, a third-generation member of the Bianchi-Bernetti family, Umani Ronchi has become one of Italy's most respected producers. While the



Umani Ronchi owner/CEO Michele Bernetti.



The mature Verdicchio vines on the Umani Ronchi estate, many of which are 25–60 years old, contribute depth and consistency to the wines.

estate has expanded into Abruzzo and developed a broader portfolio rooted in indigenous varieties. Verdicchio remains at the core of its philosophy. Recognitions such as Gambero Rosso’s 2024 Italian Winery of the Year reflect the consistency of its commitment to excellence.

That commitment is particularly evident in the winery’s latest release, Historical Verdicchio dei Castelli di Jesi

DOC Classico Superiore, a limited-edition bottling made from 50-year-old vines meant to reflect its long-standing belief in Verdicchio as one of Italy’s great white wines. Le Marche—a largely hilly region dotted with historic towns and shaped by the interplay of mountains and sea—provides the ideal setting for this expression. In Jesi, clay-rich soils, vineyard elevations of 1,500 feet, and the cooling influences

of both the Adriatic and the Apennines combine to produce wines of precision, energy, and balance.

In the vineyards, fossilized seashells embedded in the clay—remnants of an ancient seabed—offer a striking reminder of the region’s geological history. Just miles from the coast, maritime breezes preserve freshness, while diurnal shifts in the hills maintain aromatic clarity. The result is a style that seamlessly blends Mediterranean warmth with a refined mineral edge, revealing notes of citrus, white flowers, and green almond often complemented by a subtle saline character. This profile gives the wines both versatility at the table and the aforementioned capacity for aging. At Umani Ronchi, this potential is further enhanced by a long-term approach to viticulture and winemaking. The certified-organic estate draws from a significant base of mature vines, many between 25 and 60 years old.

Umani Ronchi’s significance lies in its enduring commitment to Verdicchio and to the land from which it comes. Through single-vineyard expressions, organic farming, and a focus on mature vineyards, the estate continues to shape the narrative of the grape with clarity and purpose. The range of wines below offers a compelling perspective on Verdicchio’s versatility. S|J

**Umani Ronchi
2024 Casal de
Serra Verdicchio
dei Castelli di Jesi
DOC Classico
Superiore**

Bernetti describes this as the house’s “most classic” Verdicchio, spending five months in stainless steel with prolonged yeast contact. Following aromas of yellow flowers and kumquat, it explodes on the bright and zesty palate with notes of lemon curd and grapefruit before a lingering finish.



**Umani Ronchi
2022 Vecchie
Vigne Verdicchio
dei Castelli di Jesi
DOC Classico
Superiore**

Fruit from the Montecarotto Vineyard, planted in the early 1970s, spent a year in concrete before extended bottle aging. Aromas of lemon zest and spring flowers such as daffodils and daisies precede flavors of Meyer lemon and grapefruit.



**Umani Ronchi
2019 Vecchie
Vigne Historical
Verdicchio dei
Castelli di Jesi
DOC Classico
Superiore**

This tribute to Verdicchio’s aging potential hails from a single designated lot in the Montecarotto Vineyard and was released after five years of aging. Redolent of lemon pith, apricot, and white flowers, it’s creamy and round on the palate, with flavors of more apricot and a hint of vanilla.



**Umani Ronchi
2020 Plenio
Castelli dei Jesi
DOCG Classico
Riserva**

A poster child for Verdicchio’s aging potential, this wine was made with grapes from the winery’s Cupramontana Vineyard; 60% of it aged in stainless steel and 40% in large oak barrels. Earthy notes appear on the nose with hints of clay and petrichor, while the palate offers dried herbs, fresh ricotta, and hints of coconut custard pie as well as great minerality on the long finish.



style meets

SUBSTANCE



The “Estate of Mind” panelists at Summit in the Sun in Miami, FL, included O’Neill Vintners & Distillers director of winemaking, Central Coast, Amanda Gorter; Deutsch Family Wine & Spirits director of wine and spirits education Theo Rutherford; HERITA USA wine educator Aga Hilferty; Kobrand Fine Wine & Spirits district manager, Central and North Florida, Zach Mazur; Grupo Peñaflor North America sales director Duncan Keen; and Trapiche brand ambassador Agustina Brizuela.

OUR SUMMIT IN THE SUN SEMINAR “ESTATE OF MIND” SERVED AS A REMINDER THAT HUMANS ARE AN INTEGRAL PART OF TERROIR

STORY BY RUTH TOBIAS
PHOTOS BY ALFRED GUGIG

To get to the bottom of any wine, a serious taster must entertain much factual information, from climate and soil data to technical specifications. But in introducing one of the seminars we hosted at Summit in the Sun in Miami (see also pages 74 and 88), “Estate of Mind: Our Fruit, Our Style,” our trusty moderator, *SOMM Journal* VP of education Lars Leicht, pointed out that house style is an equally important consideration—albeit a more abstract one. “Technique and terroir . . . are always influenced by the winemaker’s signature,” he observed. “How do [wines] express not only their sense of place but their sense of being? [They] need to have that unique touch, that sparkle in the eye, that personality.” With that, he welcomed five panelists to discuss six wines that all reflected a point of view as much as a region and a vintage.



Robert Hall 2025 Sauvignon Blanc, Paso Robles

Presenting what she called “the very first regenerative organic–certified Sauvignon Blanc to be released from Paso Robles,” O’Neill Vintners & Distillers’ director of winemaking for the Central Coast, Amanda Gorter, described the wine as, first and foremost, “an expression of all of the hard work it took” for Robert Hall to become certified by the Regenerative Organic Alliance in 2024. Though our April/May 2026 cover story provides a full account of the conversion process, Gorter briefly summarized what it entailed, including “cover cropping, animal husbandry, [and] no synthetic chemicals or pesticides” as a means to “regenerating our soils” across 140 acres of estate vineyard in the California region’s Geneseo and Estrella districts. One of many positive results of these efforts has been a lower recorded temperature among the vines; given that Paso “can hit 115 degrees in a heat spell during the summer, [which is] pretty warm for Sauvignon Blanc,” Gorter could only be pleased that she’s been able to preserve the freshness she seeks from the variety.

Picking the fruit “a little bit early” at 21.5 Brix also helps, she noted, as of course does fermentation in stainless steel. And while the Musqué clone she uses is known for its floral qualities, “a signature of Paso and of the wines we’re making at Robert Hall is a mineral component: seashell, chalkiness, sea spray,” she added, further enhancing the wine’s fresh character amid notes of green mango, grapefruit, lime, and bay leaf—though “for a bit more texture on the palate,” she blends in 15% Grenache Blanc and ages on light lees for about six months.

Ultimately, Gorter mused, her “low-intervention approach” ensures she’s representing Paso Robles Sauvignon Blanc as “the best of both worlds: You get a little citrus and grass, but you’re also going to have some tropical flavors because of the heat. I always think of it as a little leaner than Napa Sauvignon Blanc, and you won’t get the aromatic impact that you see in New Zealand. But what we trade that in for is that mineral component.”



The Calling 2022 Terra de Promissio Pinot Noir, Sonoma Coast

According to Theo Rutherford, director of wine and spirits education at Deutsch Family Wine & Spirits, The Calling winemaker James MacPhail loves Pinot Noir “so much that he has an entire vine tattoo on his right arm.” No matter that, from a viticultural standpoint, the grape is notoriously finicky; after all, so is he. “And when I say he’s finicky, [I mean] he really wants to have full control over what goes on,” Rutherford noted, adding that the Terra de Promissio Pinot we were tasting “is literally made in his garage. It’s a very large garage, but it’s still his garage. If he wakes up in the middle of the night and goes, ‘You know what, we need to do one more punch-down today,’ he’ll get up and he’ll do a punchdown.”

Good thing, then, that the Karren family, who owns the acclaimed Terra di Promissio Vineyard on the Sonoma Coast, “will farm any way we like,” in Rutherford’s words. What MacPhail likes is sustainably farmed fruit, so that’s what he gets from the Land of Promise (to use the property’s translated name); he then lives up to that promise by fermenting with native yeast and carefully choosing French oak barrels (30% new) in which to age the wine for 15 months. “We use 26 different barrels for our entire program,” explained Rutherford. “If he sees a barrel that he really wants, then our finance person looks and goes, ‘Oh, shit,’ and writes the check. [But they] give him many different options. It’s a spice cabinet.”

Rutherford acknowledged that, in a blind tasting, “it’s really hard to sit there and completely pinpoint Sonoma Coast because it’s so vast; you can have so many different styles. But where Terra di Promissio is concerned, you’re getting those darker berries; you’re getting a Pinot Noir that has a little more structure, a little more oomph to it. That’s one of the things I love about it—it’s a bit of a meatier Pinot,” albeit brightened by lovely notes of sour cherry, pomegranate, and anise.



Lamole di Lamole 2021 Lareale Chianti Classico Riserva DOCG, Italy

Lamole di Lamole is located, appropriately enough, in the Chianti Classico UGA (Unità Geografiche Agiuntive) called Lamole. Introducing the winery's 2021 Lareale Chianti Classico Riserva DOCG, HERITA USA wine educator Aga Hilferty painted a thorough and colorful picture of what makes the region's tiniest UGA, and the estate in turn, special.

For one thing, it sits at a higher elevation than any other UGA—up to 2,139 feet above sea level—where cooler conditions not only ensure “super-fresh acidity” in the wines but also contribute “a significant floral note,” said Hilferty. So while “Sangiovese is always going to have cherry [and] herbal notes on it . . . there are so many similarities, in my opinion, between Sangiovese and Pinot Noir. When you smell both [the previous wine and this one], they're super pretty.” (It should also be noted that the wind at that altitude reduces fungal disease pressure to the point that the viticultural team can farm organically; in fact, Lamole di Lamole's vineyards are certified organic.) For another thing, she explained, the soils in the producer's terraced vineyards are composed of not only “schistous, crumbly” Galestro but also Macigno Chiantigiano, or “huge red-colored rocks . . . with a lot of iron, a lot of manganese and magnesium. So the wines of Lamole are going to be very mineral.”

But “what we do in the winery is also very different,” Hilferty continued. “When you have Sangiovese, you often have a very rustic style of tannin, right? They're a little grippy; they might be chalky [or] a little dusty.” With that in mind, Lamole di Lamole's winemaker of 33 years, Andrea Daldin, “invented the *metodo differita*, which is basically a deferred method of extraction.” As she described it, it involves a separation of the juice from lightly pressed berries; when it ferments to 6% alcohol, “we introduce it back to these berries,” causing a chemical reaction that “allows our tannins to be silky and smooth, unlike many Sangiovese-based wines.” As we tasted the wine, its tannins proved her point on a palate brimming with cranberry plus hints of violet, nutmeg, and sage.



Trapiche 2021 Cabernet Sauvignon Finca Laborde, La Consulta, Valle de Uco, Mendoza, Argentina

Even higher in elevation at 3,400 feet is the vineyard from which this wine hails; according to Grupo Peñaflo North America sales director Duncan Keen, who presented the wine with Trapiche brand ambassador Agustina Brizuela on behalf of WX Brands, it even sees frost, which is why it was planted in a pergola system back in 1960—a system that also happens to protect against the strong UV radiation at this altitude. Nevertheless, the sun's rays make an impact: “You will be struck by the color; the radiance, of this wine,” said Keen. Meanwhile, due to its proximity to the Tunuyán River; the site “is full of stones,” he explained, “and the [vine] roots go really deep into all that sort of pebble gravel. When a drop of water comes in, it goes down. So you get very small clusters and a lot of concentration.”

And yet overt power is not the essence of the Trapiche 2021 Cabernet Sauvignon Finca Laborde. “People used to think that Cabernets from Argentina were all bold, heavy, with too much oak,” Brizuela pointed out. “[Our] idea was to try to produce Cabernet Sauvignon that could compete with other Cabernets from the world; we were looking for elegance and just a little less alcohol content.” To that end, added Keen, “The winemaking team tries to collect a bit earlier, keeping the Brix and the alcohol down so that it's not eventually so voluptuous.”

Aging for 18 months in French oak and weighing in at 14.5% ABV, the resulting wine nonetheless showed typicity, in Keen's view. “On the nose, I always get red fruit, but the first characteristic of all Cabernet in Argentina that maybe is more particular is the red bell pepper [note] that holds up,” he said. Attendee Lesley Neves, sommelier at The Ritz-Carlton, Lake Tahoe, in Truckee, California, declared the expression “classically beautiful, with sharp flavors of ripe blueberries and fresh jalapeños, while finding a balance between acid and tannin at the extreme end of texture.”



Robert Hall 2024 Cabernet Sauvignon, Paso Robles

The second Robert Hall wine in the lineup “started out as [expressing] varietal typicality, but it’s become really site-specific,” said Amanda Gorter. As with the Sauvignon Blanc, she credited regenerative farming practices for that. “This is a 2024 Cabernet Sauvignon, and in 2024, we had a hot harvest. [Our] control block had eight days in the canopy over 100 degrees during the growing season; the regenerative block had one day. What that means is we [had] less dehydration [and] fuller berries.”

To be sure, “Paso’s known for ripeness because we have so much sunshine,” Gorter pointed out, and “this is [also] going to have some riper flavors to it because of that warm vintage.” But on the flip side, she added, “Paso is actually uplifted seabed. That means that we have a higher-calcium soil and we’re able to retain more natural acidity”—a blessing given that “a fresher kind of expression is what we’re targeting right now at Robert Hall.”

One might be surprised, then, to learn that the 2024 vintage contains 14% Petite Sirah. The grape is “always really jammy,” acknowledged Gorter, but it makes for “kind of a pretty balance,” in her view, especially because “this vineyard is starting to feel a little bit more floral. Also, if I can put Petite Sirah in Cabernet early, we can help balance and stabilize our tannins and our phenolics earlier.”

Fermented with ambient yeast, the wine aged for about 16 months in French oak—15% new, the rest neutral. “I’m a huge proponent of lower oak, letting the wines say what they want to say,” Gorter asserted. This one, indeed rather pretty, spoke of blackberry and blueberry compote accented by charcoal and slate.



Sequoia Grove 2022 Cabernet Sauvignon, Napa Valley

“When people think Napa, this is what they’re thinking about,” asserted Kobrand Fine Wine & Spirits’ district manager for Central and North Florida, Zach Mazur, by way of summing up the Sequoia Grove 2022 Cabernet Sauvignon. Blended with small amounts of Cabernet Franc, Merlot, Malbec, and Petit Verdot, “it’s big, bold, rich, with a lot of dark fruit—this is your steakhouse wine, and a lot of customers and consumers love this style.”

So does Sequoia Grove winemaker Jesse Fox, who has a penchant for expressions that are “a little bit more fleshy, a little bit less restrained, [with] a little bit more oak,” said Mazur—in this case 60% new French barrels, in which the wine spent 18 months. But as a Cordon Bleu-trained chef, Fox naturally also seeks balance. That’s where sourcing from both the western and the eastern edges of the Rutherford AVA comes in. “He has fruit from both sides of the Valley to be able to make the best wine he can from this region,” noted Mazur.

Specifically, he continued, “40% of what is in this wine is coming from the Tonella Vineyard, which is going to be on our eastern range, the Vaca range. It’s a little bit higher [in elevation, with] volcanic soil. This is going to add a lot of power and minerality to the wine. But then we also have Sequoia Grove and Morisoli on the opposite side of the Valley on the Mayacamas Bench,” making up 11% of the wine (the remaining 49% hails from Atlas Peak, Coombsville, Howell Mountain, and Calistoga). These vineyards contain alluvial soil, making the wine “a little bit softer.” Either way, though, “you’re going to get that cocoa powder, that Rutherford dust” on the palate, Mazur pointed out, along with black raspberry and black plum, mocha, and pepper-dashed yet velvety tannins.

Ultimately, our panel discussion gave attendees a lot to chew on. Holli Perkins, food and beverage manager at the Ponte Vedra Inn & Club in Ponte Vedra Beach, Florida, enthused, “I am currently preparing for my WSET Level 2 exam, and this seminar was exactly the kind of immersive learning I needed. The panelists were incredibly knowledgeable, and the way they spoke about their regions, terroir, and winemaking traditions brought everything to life.” Neves, for her part, observed that “an estate is more than a place from which fruit comes”; it also reflects “the approach taken in how the fruit is handled by humans. How does it speak once it’s in the glass, sharing its story with the world?” The rhetorical question reminds us that true style is inextricable from substance. SJ



▲ The 2026 Millésime BIO trade exhibition in Montpellier, France, drew roughly 1,400 exhibitors and thousands of visitors from around the world.

Forces of Nature

AT THE ANNUAL **MILLÉSIME BIO** TRADE EXHIBITION, ORGANIC WINES PROVE THEY'RE MUCH MORE THAN A PASSING TREND by Kate Newton

THE RISE OF organic viticulture is hardly a novel concept in France, especially in Languedoc-Roussillon, often referred to as the birthplace of the country's organic wine movement. So it's only fitting that the region has also played host for the past 33 years to Millésime BIO, the world's largest trade exhibition exclusively featuring not only organic wine but beer, cider, spirits, and, as of this year, no- and low-alcohol beverages.

Thousands of attendees, nearly a quarter of them visiting from abroad, flocked to the Montpellier Exhibition Centre in late January to sample the wares of roughly 1,400 exhibitors; 14% of the participating producers were first-timers, reflecting the ongoing commitment of local trade association and organizer SudVinBio to make the fair financially accessible for small, family-owned wineries while maintaining that all producers, regardless of size, are provided with the same services and booth space. "[We do

this] because wine is what matters—it's not your marketing power or how good you are at building wonderful stands," says Millésime BIO committee chair Jeanne Fabre, who oversees wine tourism at her family's winery, Famille Fabre, in Luc-Sur-Orbieu. "[And] because it's organized by winemakers, it's connected to the reality of the profession. It's not a big machine, it's human-scaled . . . and I think that's really what we want to keep."

That dedication to accessibility is one of the major reasons producers repeatedly return to Millésime BIO in a market crowded with trade events. "We have been participating in the Millésime BIO trade fair for ten years, and we have seen it evolve and grow while always maintaining its identity, particularly the unity among exhibitors," says proprietor Carole Mathias of Burgundian winery Domaine Alain Mathias. "We greatly appreciate the identical and neutral stands; the focus is truly on the wines and the producers,

not all the marketing surrounding them. While we may feel the competition from other fairs in terms of attendance, the visitors are of very high quality, which we consider more important than the sheer number of visitors."

Among the first-time attendees, meanwhile, was Evmorfia Kostaki of Kostaki Winery on the Greek island of Samos, who noted that her family pursued organic certification "to preserve our own health as much as the environment. By being organic, not only are we able to have healthy vines and make better wine, but we stay safe while doing it." She added that their vineyard, which is situated within a Natura 2000-protected area, is the first on the island to be certified as organic. "What we value is that the wine professionals attending Millésime BIO appreciate and actively seek organic wines, [and] they are also aware of the hard work required to bring a high-quality organic wine to the market and respect the efforts of the producers."

Millésime BIO is organized by Languedoc-Roussillon-based trade association SudVinBio, which has long aimed to make the

▼ fair financially accessible for small producers.



▲ Jeanne Fabre, chair of the Millésime BIO committee, views the organic category as “the future of wine.”

Andrea Costa, co-proprietor of Piedmontese producer Marengo, cited similar reasoning for the winery’s organic conversion a decade ago—“Our goal is to make wines that are both pleasant to taste and as healthy as possible for us”—while noting that “Millésime BIO is like the Olympics for wineries that play our game. For three days we connect with wineries and customers who share our values [and] produce outstanding wines. . . We go home inspired [and] motivated to keep improving.”

While Fabre acknowledges that the prevailing mission of the fair is “to sell wine first,” attendees are also encouraged to participate in panel discussions and tastings as well as off-site wine tours “to [help] foster the values, the new trends, [and] the new ideas in the organic wine world.” The same philosophy applies to new features like the aforementioned no-/low-alc section and an area dedicated to biodynamic wines created in partnership with Demeter and Biodyvin, adding even more variety to Millésime BIO’s already diverse offerings. Equally diversified is the jury of sommeliers, wine sellers, winemakers, and other trade professionals behind the Challenge Millésime BIO competition, which awarded 182 gold, 217 silver, and 55 bronze medals to wines

in advance of the fair that could then be tasted in yet another dedicated area to lend further visibility to the winners.

For many producers, the expo’s aforementioned sales-driven mission leads them to prioritize making connections with importers that can open the doors to new markets. Kostaki notes that because this was her first trade fair outside of Greece representing Kostaki Winery, which had its first vintage in 2023, she relished “the opportunity to show our wines to a very large and diverse number of wine professionals. Our goal to connect with importers in Europe was successful since there was a large number of visitors from Scandinavia and Benelux, which were some of our target markets.”

It also afforded her the chance to engage closely with a well-educated audience whom she believed would be open-minded about her winery’s relatively niche focus, as she explains: “We produce modern wines from Muscat Blanc à Petits Grains, yet in a very gastronomic, textural, and mineral style—not what most people have in mind when thinking about this misunderstood grape. We’ve seen that everybody is reluctant at first to taste our wines, but we get them on our side immediately once they’ve tasted them! This is why traveling and showing our wines firsthand

is especially important, and Millésime BIO gave us the chance to do this. The ultimate goal of Kostaki Winery is to become the benchmark producer for Muscat Blanc à Petits Grains, and finding partners around the world that share our vision is extremely important for achieving this.”

Even in a setting where “every single prospect is a serious potential buyer,” in Fabre’s words, breaking into the notoriously complicated U.S. market is a lofty goal for many of the producers at Millésime BIO. But she views the rising profile of organic wine—projected to increase in North America at a compound annual growth rate of 10.4% from 2026 to 2033, according to a report by consulting firm Grand View Research—as a cause for optimism as well as an incentive for producers who have been cautious to embark on the costly and logistically challenging journey of organic conversion. “I think the first step [to enter the U.S. market] is really difficult because it’s a state-by-state policy; when you’re out of it, you need to infiltrate the system, and it’s a high cost for a little domaine,” she says. “But the American market has always had a big crush [on] French wines, and [while the category] was a bit full, occupied already by the pioneers that [initially] took the market share, now maybe there is room for new actors.”

Another bright spot, of course, is the fact that millennials and Gen Z are the audience largely driving the steady expansion of organic wine both in Europe and stateside. “The new generation, what they want most is not just new [things] but storytelling. . . It’s quite easy to talk a lot about our organic core values because it [speaks] to the new [consumers seeking] authenticity. . . [and] you can’t do more authentic than what nature gives,” Fabre explains. By embracing the inherent strengths of organic viticulture, Millésime BIO reflects a reality in which its producers increasingly refuse to be pigeonholed as unconventional: “It’s not just a matter of ideology and choice,” she adds. “People are discovering slowly but quicker than before that the planet has limited resources, and we can’t just waste. So I think it’s not a trend, organic wine—it’s just the future of wine.”

“Grand Beginnings. Endless Possibilities”

CRESTA BLANCA'S SLOGAN PERFECTLY ENCAPSULATES THE REINVIGORATED WINE BRAND

by Amanda M. Faison



Fifth-generation winemaker Aly Wente is Wente Family Vineyards' chief revenue officer.

CRESTA BLANCA IS PROOF that it's never too late to reinvent yourself. Located in California's Livermore Valley, the 144-year-old winery has roots that tie it to the very beginning of California's wine industry: Founded in 1882 by Charles Wetmore, it won the Grand Prix award at the Paris Exposition in 1889 with a Sauvignon Blanc-Sémillon blend, marking a huge turning point in the state's vinous history. After Prohibition, however, Cresta Blanca changed hands and went dormant, becoming a storage facility for other wineries and ultimately landing in the hands of Schenley Distillery, a large East Coast-based company. The Cresta Blanca label was also sold.

Though the 315-acre estate went uncultivated for decades, Phil Wente, fourth-generation winemaker at fellow Livermore Valley producer Wente Family Vineyards, has long recognized its value. In 1977, he began calling Schenley annually, asking if the company was interested in selling it. "Finally in 1981, they called me," Phil says. "They said, 'You've been the most persistent, are you still interested?'" His answer was an immediate "yes." Then, in the early 1990s, the opportunity to acquire the rights to the Cresta Blanca label came up, and the Wente Family jumped on that too. "We were able to reunite the [label with the estate]," he explains. "It's a little like Coppola's journey to get Inglenook back onto Inglenook property." And so began the winery's revival.

It's well deserved, given Cresta Blanca's legacy. Wetmore was a driven visionary who understood that California had the potential to make great wines, but the way wineries were going about it in the late 1800s was "helter-skelter," as Phil puts it. "They were growing the wrong varieties in the wrong places." Wetmore, who was California's first agricultural commissioner, traveled to France to explore viticulture in Burgundy and Bordeaux. He procured cuttings from the great châteaux, brought

them back to the Livermore Valley, and made it his mission to educate growers in the fundamentals of sound winemaking. He also bought a beautiful swath of land and named it Cresta Blanca for the white limestone cliffs abutting the property.

The Wenté family itself has deep California roots. C.H. Wenté, “my great-grandfather, was a contemporary of Charles Wetmore,” Phil says. “He started Wenté [Family Vineyards] in 1883, one year after Cresta Blanca.” C.H. had immigrated from Germany and, not knowing any English, begun working for a German-speaking winemaker named Charles Krug. He eventually sought out Wetmore to learn more about the Sauternes style of winemaking, which would ultimately become the backbone of Wenté Vineyards’ sweet yet crisp Sauvignon Blancs.

So a kinship was already there when Phil began his pursuit of the Cresta Blanca property. “I was persistent because of all the history, the beauty, and the quality of the vineyard land and soil,” he explains. “It was 150 acres of vineyard and 165 acres of hillside pastureland. In 1980, we started getting into the sparkling business, and we were scratching our heads on where to locate [that] operation. When [the acquisition opportunity] came up, we transferred the [Cresta Blanca] facility into sparkling.” The Wenté family has since restored the property, adding a tasting room, event center, restaurant, and golf course—though in reinvigorating the brand, they’ve opted to make the wines in their own production facility.

Cresta Blanca is named for the limestone cliffs surrounding the property.

All of this segues nicely into the present day and Cresta Blanca’s new releases as of this past spring: a 2024 Chardonnay, a 2025 Sauvignon Blanc, and, yes, a nonvintage Blanc de Blancs made from 100% Chardonnay. Relaunching the line with only white wines was intentional. “It was the original concept of Cresta Blanca, [it connects to] the white cliffs that outline the edge of the property, and the story ties to Wetmore and the Paris Exposition,” says fifth-generation winegrower Aly Wenté, Wenté Family Vineyards’ chief revenue officer. Moreover, while both Phil and Aly agree that it isn’t the ideal time to launch a brand, the category of luxury white wines happens to be one of the few that is growing in a down market.

So the Wentés have confidence in the wines and the story they tell. Their target market is high-income millennials who seek products made with intention, which Cresta Blanc has in spades. But “I always caution that you can’t just rely on a great story or history, because a lot of people can talk like that,” Phil says. “You have to also deliver the sizzle.”

And the wines do deliver in terms of quality. The Chardonnay (\$30), which spent nine months in (30% new) French oak, is reminiscent of Honeycrisp apple and freshly picked white nectarine. The Sauvignon Blanc (\$25), which aged in stainless steel and acacia barrels, practically jumps out of the bottle with bright, lively notes of green melon and Meyer lemon. And the sparkling (\$35), which is Monterey-appellated and spent six years

en tirage in Cresta Blanca’s caves, makes its debut with crisp and elegant undertones of golden apple and fresh brioche. Fresh packaging with French blue accents is designed to champion the brand’s modern style: “This doesn’t look like a brand that my [grandparents] are drinking,” Aly says.

With the relaunch, the Wenté family is excited to further shine a light on the Livermore Valley, a growing region that compares to Napa Valley in terms of terroir but that rarely gets the same attention. It’s oriented west to east (most valleys are north to south), with its mouth opening to the San Francisco Bay 30 miles to the west, ushering in sweeping winds in the afternoon. These cool the grapes, producing beautiful acidity and ensuring that Cresta Blanca’s whites have a telltale refinement and crispness. Now that they’re lining liquor store shelves, Cresta Blanca, under the Wentés’ stewardship, has become a story of then and now coming together to create something entirely new. *SJ*

Tasting Notes

Cresta Blanca 2025 Sauvignon Blanc, Livermore Valley (\$25)

Plump and juicy, with expressive salted peach and honeysuckle that flow generously across the palate. The acidity is bright and refreshing. **92** —*Meridith May*

Cresta Blanca 2024 Chardonnay, Livermore Valley (\$30)

Woody notes grace this round-bodied wine with flavors of lemon curd and crème brûlée. **92** —*M.M.*

Cresta Blanca NV Blanc de Blancs, Monterey (\$35)

Made in the méthode Champenoise, this sparkling white delivers vivacious acidity. Orange blossom and mango are revealed as the fine mousse dissipates. **93** —*M.M.*



An entree of penne with chicken, Parmesan cream, mushrooms, tomatoes, and almonds accompanied the red wines served at a Kobrand luncheon during Summit in the Sun in Miami, FL.

From the Iberian Peninsula to the Florida Panhandle

KOBRAND'S PORTUGUESE PRODUCERS GAVE SUMMIT IN THE SUN ATTENDEES PLENTY TO PONDER story by Lars Leicht / photos by Alfred Gugig

ONE OF THE PLEASURES of attending a wine conference lies in discovery, be it experiencing a new wine or revisiting a familiar wine in a different context. While the bottlings of Portuguese producers Quinta da Pedra and Principal presented at our luncheon on day two of Summit in the Sun in Miami, Florida, in March were likely novel to our guests, having been introduced to the U.S. market just last year, I was fortunate to have tasted them at our SOMM Camp in Portugal last year. But here in Miami with an eager

group of wine professionals, they shined in new ways.

Zach Mazur, category specialist for the Portuguese portfolio of Kobrand Fine Wine & Spirits, kicked off the luncheon by presenting two Alvarinho-based wines from Quinta da Pedra in the Monção e Melgaço subregion of the Vinho Verde appellation in Alto Minho. He then introduced two red blends of French and Portuguese varieties from Principal, a winery in the coastal Bairrada region of central Portugal. Here's a closer look.

QUINTA DA PEDRA was established in 1908 on an estate with predominantly granite soils, which give its wines bracing acidity and minerality. Gentle slopes provide excellent drainage and optimal exposure to sunlight; the vines are trained to have higher canopies that enhance photosynthesis, resulting in ripe fruit despite the cooler climate. "These wines are very different from the traditional light style of Vinho Verde," Mazur told us. "They are fuller-bodied, have a bit more alcohol, and are not effervescent."



Portuguese” blends of indigenous Touriga Nacional with Cabernet Sauvignon and Merlot. Similar to those of Bordeaux, the vineyard soils are rich in limestone and clay that give the wines expressive fruit and an overall brightness.

- **CaCariO₃** offers up aromas of dark berries, cedar, and minerals. It possesses a medium structure and great persistence.
- **Principal Grande Reserva** has a deep ruby color and rich black fruit. Aromas of mint and other herbs yield to light hints of spice and smooth tannins.

Teaming up with our host venue, Miami Dade College’s Miami Culinary Institute, chef Victor Santos of Tín Tín in Little Havana carefully crafted the menu to accompany them all, starting with a Little Gem Caesar salad for the whites and chicken penne with sauteed mushrooms and tomatoes in Parmesan cream for the reds. Summit attendee Joseph Barton, director of beverage at the Gaylord Palms Resort & Convention Center in Kissimmee, gave high marks to the pairings. “The Alvarinhos had that bright freshness and mineral backbone that make them always food friendly, while the reds showed balance and structure without losing depth,” he said.

For the big finish, Mazur showcased not one but three special Ports:

- **Taylor Fladgate Late Bottled Vintage Port** is in a category that was created by its producer with the 1965 vintage, which was bottled and released in 1970. We enjoyed the 2019 vintage, which showed rich, complex flavors of dark cherry and black fruit.
- **Taylor Fladgate 20-Year-Old Tawny Port** is a blend of red grapes indigenous to the Douro Valley that aged in a combination of small barrels and large casks. The result is jammy, with notes of spices and nuts. Taylor Fladgate also releases Tawnies at ten, 30, 40, and 50 years of age, the latter being a recent addition to the lineup.
- **Taylor Fladgate 1975 Single Harvest** was a fun closer—especially when we realized that it was older than many



- **Graça da Pedra Alvarinho** is vinified in stainless steel. It’s bright and fresh, with vibrant notes of citrus and stone fruit.
- **Milagres Alvarinho** is also fermented in stainless steel but is finished for at least 12 months in neutral French oak barrels, undergoing bâtonnage for about half of that time. It too shows fresh stone fruit alongside silky notes of citrus preserves and yellow flowers.

Attendee Holli Perkins, food and beverage manager at Ponte Vedra Inn & Club in Jacksonville, appreciated the opportunity to taste the two expressions side by side. “They had their own distinct differences, [but] both were quite delicious,” she said. “I enjoy wines that are not as mainstream and have a unique structure to them.”

PRINCIPAL was founded in 1979 and quickly became recognized for its “Super

of the attendees. Coming from Taylor Fladgate's reserves of cask-aged Ports, which are more extensive than those of any other Port producer, it was elegant and floral with notes of wild honey, tea, rose hip, and dried fruit.

The Ports were classically paired with a selection of cheeses accompanied by roasted nuts, jam, and crackers. Each was a treat, but the buzz was most notable for the 1975 Single Harvest, called a Colheita. Mazur said it was aged in small oak barrels for 50 years and then bottled ready to drink, as opposed to Vintage Port, which is made only in the best years and spends just two winters in large oak casks before aging for ten to 20 years in the bottle



Zach Mazur is category specialist for the Portuguese portfolio of Kobrand Fine Wine & Spirits.

to gain its signature tertiary flavors. The 2018 is the most recent Vintage Port to be released by Taylor Fladgate, he pointed out, adding that the decision to declare a vintage is left up to individual producers rather than to a government agency.

"For me, the 1975 Single Harvest Port stole the show," declared Barton. "It had this incredible balance of richness and freshness that only comes with real age. It showed especially well alongside the blue cheese, which is a pairing that never gets old."

Indeed, enjoying Ports while overlooking the Port of Miami from the Culinary Institute's seventh-floor dining room is something we all agreed we could get used to. It was another learning experience to savor. *§*



PHOTO COURTESY OF RICHARD CARLETON HACKER

SOMM Journal contributor Richard Carleton Hacker with David Guimaraens, head winemaker for The Fladgate Partnership, at Fonseca's Quinta do Panascal.

Port Producers Universally Declare 2024 a Vintage Year

Unless you are a sommelier or a Port connoisseur, April 23 may not hold much meaning. But besides being St. George's Day—which celebrates the patron saint of Portugal as well as England, where Port wine has historically enjoyed great popularity—it is the date that universally declared vintage Ports are traditionally announced, indicating that a majority of producers agreed that the year's harvest was spectacular and committed to bottle-aging their wines for two years prior to release. Unfortunately, due to no less an adversary than Mother Nature, there has been a seven-year hiatus since the last vintage Port was universally declared.



"Climate conditions have had a significant impact in recent years," says David Guimaraens, head winemaker for The Fladgate Partnership, which encompasses the historic Port houses of Taylor Fladgate, Fonseca, and Croft. "Since 2017, we've experienced a succession of extremely hot vintages, and many of these wines did not show the balance, longevity, and house style we require for a classic vintage declaration." Now all that has changed, with The Fladgate Partnership being among the first to announce on April 23 that their 2024 Ports heralded a universally declared vintage year.

Fonseca's 2024 vintage is a fusion of black cherry, cassis, and black currant with a touch of mint, while the Taylor Fladgate 2024 vintage offers woodland fruit, sinewy tannins, and herbal notes. Rounding out the portfolio, the Croft 2024 vintage boasts an abundance of plump fruit such as ripe strawberry as well as notes of clove and eucalyptus.

"While this represents our smallest and rarest declaration to date," acknowledges Adrian Bridge, managing director of The Fladgate Partnership, "the wines are of truly exceptional quality." —Richard Carleton Hacker

Kace Sarvis, wine director/assistant GM at Old Brea Chophouse in Corona, CA, ziplines over the Ancient Peaks vineyards of Santa Margarita Ranch.



“When Paso Wins, WE ALL WIN”

story by Christina Barrueta / photos by Jimmy De



Allegretto Vineyard Resort proprietor Doug Ayres (in the cowboy hat) welcomed the 2026 Paso CAB Camp class with a sunset toast on the property's hilltop vineyard.

**AT PASO CAB CAMP
2026, THE CASE
FOR THE CENTRAL
COAST REGION
WAS MADE IN SOIL,
STEWARDSHIP, AND
SOLIDARITY**

Early in the morning, our coats pulled tight against the cold wind, we stood among the fog-shrouded vines on Copia Vineyards and Winery's 50-acre property in Paso Robles' Willow Creek District. "This is normal," said owner/winemaker Varinder Sahi of the chilly conditions. "It's one of Paso's three pillars: proximity to the Pacific, the Templeton Gap that lets this marine layer in, and calcareous soil of fossilized marine life that gives our wines freshness and acidity."

The occasion was Paso CAB (Cabernet and Bordeaux) Camp, hosted in March by the Paso Robles CAB Collective (PRCC) in partnership with *The SOMM Journal*. Founded in 2012, the PRCC has spent more than a decade making the case that this Central Coast region produces some of the world's finest Cabernet Sauvignons and red Bordeaux-style blends. It is now California's fastest-growing appellation, having expanded from 17 wineries in 1983—the year it was established—to more than 250 today, set among 40,000 planted acres. To maintain that momentum, the PRCC gathered some 50 of the nation's top wine professionals for a three-day immersion trip through the region's 11 sub-AVAs—Adelaida District, Creston District, El Pomar District, Paso Robles Estrella District, Paso Robles Geneseo District, Paso Robles Highlands District, Paso Robles Willow Creek District, San Juan Creek, San Miguel District, Santa Margarita Ranch, and Templeton Gap District—where we'd meet the people and taste the wines that define them.



The Riboli lineup included Jada Vineyard & Winery's 2024 Lotus Eater Sauvignon Blanc and San Simeon's 2022 Reserve Cabernet Sauvignon and 2023 Stormwatch, a Bordeaux-style blend.

Day One

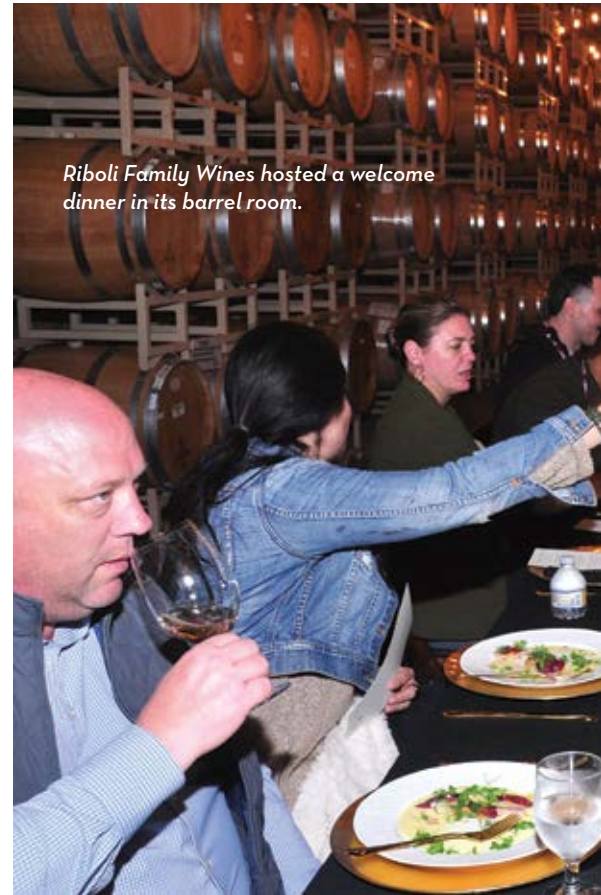
Fresh off the plane, we hopped on a bus to collect Doug Filipponi, co-owner of Ancient Peaks Winery, for the ride out to his 14,000-acre Santa Margarita Ranch in its namesake AVA, Paso's southernmost. "We have five distinct soil types here on the ranch," he said. "Cabernet tastes different in each one, so it gives our winemakers different colors to paint with." The proof arrived at lunch, as we sampled Ancient Peaks' mineral-driven Oyster Ridge Cuvée—a blend of Cabernet Sauvignon, Cabernet Franc, Petit Verdot, Merlot, and Malbec—and plush Cabernet Sauvignon paired with barbacoa and shrimp tostadas.

Afterwards, the campers split up: Some went ziplining, while others, including me, went foraging. Ancient Peaks co-owner Karl Wittstrom joined naturalist Jackie Redinger as we picked a wild bouquet of blue dicks, California golden violets, and purple sage. "When you go back home and think of Ancient Peaks wine," Wittstrom urged, "I hope you remember this beautiful spot and the experiences you had."

We then dropped by our hotel, Allegretto Vineyard Resort, which sits on 20 acres in the Estrella District that are both biodynamically and organically farmed. Proprietor Doug Ayres wasn't about to let us check in without a proper introduction: In the piazza, we mingled over glasses

of several estate-grown wines, including Heart of the Vine, a five-varietal Willow Creek blend, and Della Vita Cabernet Sauvignon and Tannat. "Winemaking is an expression of joy and love for the land," said Ayres. "The more you take care of the earth, the more it brings back to you in wine production." A tour of the property ended at the Mount of Olives, its highest vantage point, where we watched the sun set as alpacas grazed among the vines.

Day one closed at Riboli Family Wines, where we toured the production facility before making our way to a beautifully set table for a convivial welcome dinner with winemakers Marty Spate, Brian Benson, and Nate Hall as well as chef Justin Lewis. Riboli's San Simeon label features 100% estate-grown fruit from certified-sustainable vineyards; Jada Vineyard & Winery, which oversees 89 organically farmed acres in the Willow Creek District, joined its portfolio in 2021. Showcasing both brands, the menu included hamachi crudo with San Simeon 2025 Grenache Rosé; spring burrata salad alongside Jada's 2024 Lotus Eater Sauvignon Blanc; slow-roasted pork belly accompanied by Jada 2021 Jersey Girl, a blend of Syrah and Viognier; braised beef short rib with San Simeon 2023 Stormwatch, a Bordeaux-style blend; and a caramel-chocolate tart that gave San Simeon's 2022 Reserve Cabernet Sauvignon the final word.



Riboli Family Wines hosted a welcome dinner in its barrel room.

Day Two

While half the group headed to Hearst Ranch Winery in the Estrella District, I began my morning at Hope Family Wines in the Templeton Gap District, where vineyard director Stasi Seay and national brand ambassador CJ Gormley deconstructed Austin Hope Cabernet with the help of barrel samples from its constituent AVAs. The Geneseo District's calcareous-clay mix contributes "robustness," said Gormley, adding that the Creston District's sandy loam provides "structure as the backbone," while the Estrella District's gravelly soil "pulls out fruit characteristics," according to Seay. Along the way, we were entertained by the Hope family's newest recruit: Risotto, a Lagotto Romagnolo puppy who joined them upon the acquisition of a new vineyard that came with a 10-acre truffle orchard (the Italian breed is prized among truffle hunters).

As the others moved on to Brecon Estate in the Adelaida District, our next stop was the aforementioned Copia Vineyards and Winery. There, Varinder and his wife/partner, Anita, greeted us with



As part of its sustainability efforts, J. Lohr Vineyards & Wines operates the largest tracking solar array of any winery in North America.



J. Lohr president/CEO Steve Lohr and his father, founder Jerry Lohr.



Copia Vineyards and Winery vineyard manager Ivan Gonzalez demonstrates pruning techniques at the Willow Creek District estate.

their 2021 Cabernet Sauvignon, the first vintage to come from the Sustainability In Practice (SIP)-certified, organically farmed vineyard we were standing in. Vineyard manager Ivan Gonzales led a demonstra-

tion of various pruning styles as we tasted the 2022 Cabernet Sauvignon and The Pursuit Petit Verdot. "Anytime we make a single-vineyard, single-block wine, we call it The Pursuit," said Varinder, "as in the pursuit of making the best possible single-varietal wine." "It's kind of fun," Anita smiled, "to drink the wine right next to the single block of vines they came from."

The group reassembled at J. Lohr Vineyards & Wines in the Paso Robles Estrella District, where we donned hard hats and safety vests and gathered around the team, including winery founder and local legend Jerry Lohr and his son Steve, who serves as president and CEO. The latter walked us through a history stretching back more than five decades. "We got our start here in Paso in 1986, but that's not when we started making wine," he pointed out. Jerry, a farmer's son from South Dakota, began to explore California's winegrowing regions in the late 1960s; in 1972, he planted his first vineyards an hour north of here in Monterey County. According to Steve, those early plantings were an act of calculated optimism involving 11 different variet-

ies—some proven and some speculative. From the cool-climate vineyards in what would later become the Arroyo Seco AVA, Chardonnay, Riesling, Valdiguié, and Pinot Blanc thrived, producing standout wines. But the Cabernet Sauvignon and Merlot struggled, and so for their "big reds," Jerry started looking elsewhere.

That search led him first to Napa Valley, where he acquired what is now Carol's Vineyard in St. Helena, named after Jerry's late wife. While the site was capable of producing world-class Cabernet Sauvignon, Napa was never meant to define J. Lohr; as Steve put it, his family had no desire to be "a little fish in a big pond." Instead, they turned toward Paso Robles, where they could help shape the story from the ground up. The first vineyard they purchased here, located less than a mile east of the eventual site of their winery, gave them a now-iconic foothold in the region; it's home to seven majestic oak trees, a detail that fans of J. Lohr will recognize immediately from its Seven Oaks label. Over the past four decades, J. Lohr has steadily expanded its footprint in the area, and today it's the largest grower-producer in



Adam Montiel moderated the “Paso Bordeaux and Blending Session” panel featuring Brecon Estate winemaker/owner Damian Grindley, Opolo Vineyards winemaker James Schreiner, Allegretto Wines proprietor Douglas Ayres, Serial Wines winemaker Jeff Kandarian, and Ancient Peaks founding winemaker Mike Sinor.

Paso Robles. Steve was quick to emphasize, however, that “the scale is not the most important aspect—what we care about is the quality.”

To illustrate that history lesson through a tasting, Jerry ushered us into a barrel room to start with a wine he described as “underrated and not really being championed right now: Merlot.” As we enjoyed the 2024 Cuvée POM, an Adelaida District blend of 68% Merlot from Rain Catcher Vineyard with 32% Malbec from Stairway Vineyard, Jerry spoke about his long affection for the grape. “Carol and I spent quite a bit of time in Bordeaux,” he recounted. “I actually have a picture that’s from 50 years ago when we were at Pétrus, the home of Merlot. We’ve always loved Merlot, even though Cab is such a big part of us.” He then plunged his wine thief into a barrel of 2024 Signature Cabernet Sauvignon. “This is our best Cabernet,” he said proudly, “and it comes from just west of the freeway. I’d put this up against any Cabernet; it’s just damn good.”

Ian Herdman, J. Lohr’s vice president of production, took over for the next leg of the tour, a highlight of which was the “sustainability climb.” Following him outside up to catwalks above rows of PolarClad-insulated stainless-steel tanks, we had the perfect vantage point to see some of the initiatives that have earned the winery a Green Medal Leader Award. The massive array of solar panels stretched across the landscape “is the largest tracking system in

any winery in North America,” Herdman explained. “When it was put in, it covered 92% of our power here. Since then, we’ve expanded, so our next project is to bring more solar power to the winery.” In the near distance was a nutrient-rich compost field fed by grape seeds, skins, and stems along with other organic matter—and the wide stretch of grass next to that wasn’t landscaping. “That is what we call a CIMIS field, [which stands] for California Irrigation Management Information System,” said Herdman, describing how an aircraft flies in a grid pattern over the plot with sensors that measure evapotranspiration to help them determine the most water-efficient methods possible for irrigation.

Lunch on the patio followed, paired with J. Lohr’s 2023 Arroyo Vista Chardonnay and Los Osos Merlot, before we headed back into the barrel room for the “Sustainability: Organic, Biodynamic, Sustainable, and Regenerative Farming” panel discussion moderated by writer Samantha Cole-Johnson. Along with J. Lohr, Hope Family, and Copia, DAOU Vineyards, LXV Wine, and Robert Hall Winery each presented a wine that reflected its sustainable philosophies and practices, be they organic (eschewing synthetic products); biodynamic (treating the vineyard as a living ecosystem); sustainable (generally avoiding harm); or regenerative (rebuilding soil health and biodiversity). Speaking to the latter, Kryss Speegle, executive vice president of winegrowing at O’Neill

Vintners & Distillers—which owns Robert Hall—described the One Block Challenge, an initiative launched in 2025 by the Regenerative Viticulture Foundation in partnership with the winery that invited growers to dedicate a single vineyard block to regenerative viticulture for at least a year. Designed as “a respectful way to help people explore it without asking them to do a broad-brush one-time conversion,” in her words, it has shown promise thus far, with 50 growers currently participating and sharing their results.

At Opolo Vineyards in the Willow Creek District, sweeping hilltop views set the stage for winemaker James Schreiner to share Opolo’s Cabernet Sauvignon; crowd-pleasing Summit Creek red blend; and a Sauvignon Blanc he described as “a new release, something lighter, playful, and more fruit-driven—just kind of Opolo-fied.” In the barrel room, he joined four other winemakers, each of whom brought a wine composed of a key Bordeaux variety to the “Paso Bordeaux and Blending Session” moderated by broadcaster and podcast host Adam Montiel. Mike Sinor of Ancient Peaks summed up Petit Verdot as “the two-by-fours in the house. . . . It gives structure, but restraint is key,” while Damian Grindley of Brecon Estate noted that Cabernet Franc “lifts the aromatics up front and brightens the acidity but also adds tension.” Armed with their knowledge, we got to work on our own blends, mindful that the winning submission would be announced at the final dinner of camp.

Arriving at DAOU Vineyards after dark, we stepped off our buses to grab our cameras even before taking a glass of its 2025 Discovery Rosé: A full moon had



DAOU Vineyards reserve winemaker Michallan Mott looks on as senior winemaker José Santos discusses the wines being served with dinner.



Serial winemaker Jeff Kandarian, center, with Nick Rule, wine consultant, Colonial Wines & Spirits, Little Rock, AR; Carson Mathews, GM, Beau's Wine Bin & Spirit Shoppe in Oklahoma City, OK; LeAnn Calhoun, manager/sommelier, Edmond Wine Shop, Edmond, OK; Micheal Grealey, beverage director, Horseshoe Bay Resort, Horseshoe Bay, TX; Mario Salazar, assistant GM, ReWard Restaurant Group, Bedford, TX; and Daniel Eddy, sales manager, ABC Fine Wine & Spirits in Orlando, FL, at the after-party hosted in Serial's tasting lounge downtown.

risen above the famous illuminated "Life Is Beautiful" sign, and we all wanted to capture the moment on DAOU Mountain.

That setting alone tells much of the producer's story. Rising 2,200 feet above the Adelaida District, DAOU is the highest-elevation winery on the Central Coast. Here, cool Pacific breezes flow through the Templeton Gap 14 miles away, contributing to a significant diurnal temperature shift that impacts the wines. The steep slopes are blanketed in calcareous clay soils, similar to those found in Saint-Émilion on Bordeaux's Right Bank. They're precisely what winemaker Daniel Daou had spent eight years searching for before landing in Paso Robles in 2005.

Laura Reynolds, ambassador for DAOU and sister label PATRIMONY, shared the history of Daou and his brother Georges, who were born in Lebanon and raised in France after their family fled the country's civil war. In 2007, following the sale of their successful healthcare software company, they founded their winery with a mission to prove Paso Robles capable of world-class Cabernet. Back then, the region "had only about 8% planted to Cabernet Sauvignon," Reynolds explained. "Now we have almost 52% planted. And it really is because two brothers believed in themselves." In that spirit, DAOU (which is now owned by Treasury Wine

Estates) is today experimenting with a sixth Bordeaux variety—the rare Arinarnoa. "We're always competing against ourselves," Reynolds said.

That dedication was on full display as senior winemaker José Santos and reserve winemaker Michallan Mott introduced the wines poured throughout dinner. The Rosé that had greeted us, a Provence-style Grenache Noir, "was a cooler vintage than the previous year and a little challenging," Santos acknowledged, "but able to express beautiful quality." Next came the 2024 Estate Sauvignon Blanc, which he described "as very stylistically DAOU—bold and powerful yet very elegant."

Mott then took the floor. The 2023 Reserve Chardonnay from Willow Creek was built around Daniel's vision of "keeping it fresh, with bright acid and lovely minerality," she said, while the 2022 Reserve Merlot—the first vintage of the variety that DAOU produced, hailing primarily from the Templeton Gap AVA—"is the Cab lover's Merlot." And the 2022 Seventeen Forty, which she called a "fan-favorite" Bordeaux blend, serves as "a great representation of what the components of Bordeaux can do. There's structure from Petit Verdot, beautiful fruit from Cab Franc, and femininity and lightness from Merlot."

The final pour was the 2021 vintage of Soul of a Lion, the celebrated Caber-



net Sauvignon that the Daou brothers named in tribute to their father. Santos offered one parting detail worth noting: the use of barrels made with a rare French

oak known as *bois rosé*, whose special compounds act as natural enhancers of the wine's fruit character. "These trees are very rare," he concluded, "so it's a special way of bringing our terroir into our wine."

After dinner, our boisterous group was whisked downtown to Serial Wines' moody, atmospheric tasting lounge for an after-party. A John Anthony Wine & Spirits brand, Serial was conceived in 2015 by vintner John Anthony Truchard and executive winemaker Jeff Kandarian to showcase the diversity of Paso Robles through a series of district-designate and single-vineyard wines.

Designed by craftsman Richard von Saal, the space is decorated with custom metal screens that echo the moth logo on the Serial labels as well as works by international artists such as Dan Hillier and Lente Scura. The hospitality we received there was as warm as the setting: John Anthony La Dame Michelle Blanc de Blancs and two Serial blends—a Chardonnay-dominant white and a Grenache-driven red—bid us welcome before Kandarian gathered the group. "What you see around you is commissioned artwork that we carry onto our bottles," he explained. Each new release plays a part in telling a coherent, ongoing story about Paso Robles, and the art on each label has a connection to the site from which the wine is sourced, while Roman numerals mark its place within the series.

A generous host, Kandarian made clear that Serial's entire portfolio—including Viognier, Clairette Blanche, Syrah, and Zinfandel—was fair game for tasting that evening, though his focus would be on three of its Cabernet Sauvignons. In contrast to the 2022 Serial Paso Robles Cabernet Sauvignon poured at the blending seminar, he had chosen the 2021 vintage of the expression—the brand's most widely distributed—sourced from vineyards in several of Paso's districts;

the 2022 Serial XVI Defiance, one of the aforementioned limited-release bottlings, featuring grapes from the Faulkner family's sustainably farmed, 35-degree slopes above Creston Valley; and the 2023 Cabernet Sauvignon from Hawks Hill Ranch, planted between 1,400 and 1,900 feet in the Adelaida District and yielding just 48 cases. As Kandarian explained, "I wanted you to see what the Serial collection is really about—from an AVA wine that captures Paso Robles more broadly to vineyard-designate wines that reveal the character of individual sites across vintages. Together, they show the contrasts, the throughlines, and the larger story we're building."

"We love having you guys here," he added with a grin. "I'm happy to tell you about any of our wines in greater detail, but most importantly, I'm just happy to be a camp counselor." Laughter followed and glasses clinked as we mentally prepared for day three.



At LXV Wine, campers tasted through barrel samples and attempted to identify which ones made it into the producer's 2024 Meso Cabernet Franc.

Day Three

Mimosas made with Castoro Cellars' Brut Méthode Champenoise Blanc de Blancs were a civilized way to start the final day of camp, followed by bottles of 2023 Sauvignon Blanc and Cabernet Sauvignon. Founded in 1983 by Niels Udsen, Castoro Cellars is a family-owned, sustainability-driven estate in the Templeton Gap District. "I've been around here since we were only 15 wineries," Udsen recalled as we gathered at the edge of the Whale Rock Vineyard—named "because of this," he explained, holding up a whale bone fragment found on the site. Today, Castoro's certified-organic farming program is backed by extensive solar installations to power its electric tractors along with UV-

light robots that control powdery mildew.

From there, half of us went to McPrice Myers Winery while I repaired with the rest to the Willow Creek District property of LXV Winery owners Neeta and Kunal Mittal, where winemaker Jeff Streckas welcomed us with glasses of Blanc de Franc, which he described as "a new white Cab Franc inspired by some of the white Sangioveses of Italy." He then conducted a barrel tasting to show how decisions around cooperage and oak usage shape LXV's elegant wines, challenging us to guess which barrels made it into the final glass we tasted. One sample aged in neutral oak; another in Taransaud, which he called "a sweet-spot barrel"; another in Montpensier, "which has become my kind-of-signature Cabernet Franc barrel"; and the last in Darnajou, "what I call a spice barrel." The latter two ended up in the 2024 Meso, a Cabernet Franc sourced from a steep block of the organically farmed G2 North Vineyard.

two from 2024 so we could compare the impact of conventional farming controls with that of regenerative organic trials. "Something we've seen consistently across vintages," Speegle noted, "is that the regeneratively farmed wines are more lively, with more freshness, savory lift, and structure." Over lunch on the patio, Ella Donnelly-Wright, sommelier at Jessica's at Swift House Inn in Middlebury, Vermont, agreed, noting that she found the regenerative wines "more balanced." "I think regenerative farming allows the core qualities of the grapes to shine through that were previously masked," she later elaborated. "These wines are also more likely to have less intervention in the cellar, meaning the reduction in usage of things like oak and sulfur, which can also mask deeper notes of the fruit."

Back at Allegretto, we attended the "CAB Is King" seminar, featuring pours from Eberle Winery, Glunz Family Winery & Cellars, Castoro Cellars, San Simeon

Robert Hall Winery showcased its line of Estate Grown Regenerative Organic Certified wines at an al fresco lunch.



The group reunited at Robert Hall Winery in the Geneseo District, where director of winemaking Amanda Gorter greeted us with Cavern Select Fumé Blanc before leading us to the patio, where handlers waited with birds of prey that served as ambassadors for the raptor program the winery uses for ecological pest control. In the barrel room, Gorter was joined by Kryss Speegle, who expanded on sustainability-related topics she'd discussed the previous day. Meanwhile, they let the wines in our glasses make the case for regenerative viticulture, pouring two from the 2022 vintage and

Wines, JUSTIN Vineyards & Winery, and McPrice Myers Winery. Having joined us on some of our excursions, wine writer and moderator R.H. Drexel singled out such highlights as "getting a barrel sample from Jerry Lohr and sitting next to Gary Eberle, a legend and icon in the wine space who was a co-founder of Paso's appellation status." "We needed recognition, so I drew up the boundaries and the weather meteorology and the soil science," Eberle explained. He paused before adding, "And I'm also the cutest winemaker," a comment met with laughter and applause.

During the Q&A, Erich von Landsberg, general manager at Hal's The Steakhouse in Nashville, Tennessee, asked whether Paso could drift toward Napa-style pricing. "Paso wine is all about approachability, affordability, and availability," said San Simeon winemaker Marty Spate, to which Matt Glunz added, "At one point it did seem like the pendulum was starting to swing that way. It was a concern, so we said, 'Whoa, let's slow down.'" The guard-rail, he suggested, is community culture: "Ego just screws things up. Paso's lack of ego is one thing that separates us, and I feel like we've brought that pendulum back to the center."

The conversation continued at Eberle Winery in the Geneseo District. Winemaker Chris Eberle—no relation to Gary, who had quipped at the seminar, "I think he changed his name to get the job"—greeted us with his 2024 Estate Chardonnay as "a reprieve from all the



Moderated by R.H. Drexel, the "CAB Is King" panel included Eberle Winery proprietor Gary Eberle, Glunz Family Winery & Cellars GM/winemaker Matthew Glunz, Castoro Cellars winemaker Tom Myers, San Simeon Wines winemaker Marty Spate, JUSTIN Vineyards & Winery winemaker Scott Shirley, and McPrice Myers Winery's McPrice "Mac" Myers.



Blair Zachariasen, assistant general manager at Wall to Wall Wine & Spirits in West Des Moines, IA, meets a hawk up close at Robert Hall Winery.



DAOU Vineyards and PATRIMONY Estate ambassador Laura Reynolds with Matthew Poalise, beverage manager of The Birchwood in St. Petersburg, FL, at the Grand Tasting at Eberle Winery.



Aaron Sherman, owner of Grapevine Wines in St. Louis, MO, accepts the blending competition Award of Excellence from Paso CAB Camp team member Simone Rubio.

reds." With that, some attendees lined up for a fireside chat with Gary, while others made their way down to the caves for the Grand Tasting. Joining the wineries on our itinerary were other PRCC members such as Chateau Margene and Dilecta Wines, whose pours I was glad not to miss.

The finale unfolded at JUSTIN Vineyards & Winery, where winemaker Scott Shirley had collaborated on the menu with executive chef Rachel Haggstrom at the estate's MICHELIN-starred restaurant. "It was a privilege to have her create culinary masterpieces to go with the wines I wanted to feature," he said, having chosen some library bottlings for the occasion. The 2015 Justification, a Cabernet Franc–Merlot blend, arrived with braised

oxtail in oyster-mushroom consommé; the 2014 Reserve Cabernet Sauvignon accompanied braised beef cheeks with Périgord truffle over vegetable risotto; and the 2014 Isosceles was served alongside sheep's milk cheese and tomato jam. As a fitting coda, Aaron Sherman, owner of Grapevine Wines in St. Louis, Missouri, was announced as the Award of Excellence winner for his submission to the blending competition.

Once again, CAB Camp delivered exactly what it promised: a boots-on-the-ground exploration of Paso Robles as an emerging world-class wine region whose dramatic diurnal swings, patchwork of soils, and distinctive geography coax something extraordinary from every

vineyard block. But what defines it goes beyond climate and calcium carbonate: We had three days' worth of evidence that its vintners are passionate stewards of the land for the sake of both wine quality and long-term viability. "Our hope," Amanda Gorter had told us, "is that in the future we will no longer be calling it regenerative farming—just farming." And these producers' commitment to sustainability is matched by their commitment to one another. As McPrice Myers' Mac Myers summed up, "I'm only able to make wine like this because I'm in a place like this. We're a tight-knit community, and everyone cheers each other on. When Paso wins, we all win, and we all believe that deeply." ❧

Vinous Vanguard

THESE SOMMELIERS ARE DOING THEIR PART TO PROMOTE TUCSON, AZ, AS A DESTINATION FOR ENOPHILES

by Christina Barrueta

MENTION TUCSON, ARIZONA, to outsiders, and they're likely to picture a dusty landscape dotted with cacti and cowboys rather than a fine-dining scene. It may come as a surprise, then, that in 2015, Tucson became the first city in the country to earn UNESCO's coveted City of Gastronomy designation, awarded to places with a rich agricultural heritage and indigenous culinary traditions that continue to drive their foodways. More recently, the MICHELIN Guide bestowed a Three Key award to local hotel Canyon Ranch Tucson and announced it would be covering the Southwest, including Arizona, as of this year, bringing added attention to the state.

On that foundation, fine wine culture is thriving. Geography helps in that regard: Tucson is within easy reach of Southern Arizona wine country, where its longest-established AVAs—Sonoita and Willcox—are about a 90-minute drive away. Local producers are part of the conversation, their labels showcased alongside benchmark bottlings from all over the world.

Propelling that wine culture forward is a determined group of sommeliers. In February, *SOMM Journal* publisher/editor-in-chief Meridith May and I joined three of them for a roundtable at Bob's Steak & Chop House at Omni Tucson National Resort: Bob's general manager Vila Jarrell, David Mills of Hacienda del Sol Guest Ranch Resort, and Loews Ventana Canyon Resort bar manager Joshua Osteen.

It's not unusual for this trio to gather. Jarrell has formed a study group that includes Mills and Osteen and that meets monthly for blind tastings covering various regions and styles, with everyone contributing bottles. A recent session explored white Burgundy, with village wines lined up against Premier Crus. "We had maps, quizzes, and tasting grids for each



PHOTO: CHRISTINA BARRUETA

Bob's Steak & Chop House general manager Vila Jarrell.

participant to follow during the tasting," she added.

That passion for education extends into the dining room. For Mills, who oversees all of Hacienda del Sol's beverage programs, getting staff to engage genuinely with wine rather than merely recite tasting notes from a sell sheet is the goal. "I hold classes with my employees on Saturdays, and before I even tell them anything, I ask them to give me a fruit or a characteristic that sticks out," he shared.

"I want to get their opinion first before I tell them mine. I think that's so important. And that knowledge instills more confidence in the guests."

Osteen, a cicerone as well as a sommelier who covers eight outlets at Loews Ventana Canyon, has a similar philosophy of training. "We're stewards, trying to pass along everything that we learned from our own mentors," he remarked. He adapts his approach to each team member, aware that some are just begin-



**Hacienda del Sol Guest Ranch Resort
sommelier David Mills.**

ning to learn about key grape varieties while others might be ready for blind tasting drills. "I try to home in on what level they're at so that at the end of the day, we're all getting excited about wine together," he said.

Jarrell, for her part, views hospitality "as an apprenticeship program." Her own experience includes stints at The Greenbrier Resort in West Virginia, Nemaquin Resort in Pennsylvania, and the Durant location of Choctaw Casino & Resort in Oklahoma, where large cellars and grand-scale dining rooms honed both her palate and her standards for service. For instance, she considers presentation a key responsibility: "I think it's important that you present the wine bottle, even if you're pouring by the glass," she said, "because if you don't, you're doing a disservice to the winery." Another signature is the use of a service cart stocked with tools and glassware. When guests order noteworthy bottles, she wheels it out, then decants tableside: "I'll angle the cart in a way that I'm making sure that everybody's watching," she added with a smile. "I want [other tables] to ask, 'What are they having? How do they get that

service? How do we get that wine?'" It's a way to ignite curiosity and remind people that good wine is part of what makes dinner feel special.

That engagement doesn't stop with standard service. All three somms are involved in coordinating wine dinners that bring guests closer to featured producers and regions; meanwhile, Mills organizes one of Tucson's signature annual events, the Argentina Heart & Soul Wine Tasting, which showcases dozens of bottlings

market is a fraction of what's available to Scottsdale and Phoenix. . . . We often have to drive an hour and a half to Phoenix for portfolio tastings."

None of this dims their outlook, however. Jarrell, Mills, and Osteen all hope the city's future holds more opportunities for somms to collaborate and learn in a structured environment as well as more visible, formal wine service in the dining room. Whether it's Jarrell pouring tableside in the center of a buzzing steakhouse,



Loews Ventana Canyon Resort bar manager Joshua Osteen.

from regions like Salta, the Uco Valley, Luján de Cuyo, and Patagonia. "We have 400–500 people on the property tasting these wines," he noted, adding that live music and food such as meat sizzling on a parrilla augment the festivities.

But the trio was also candid about the challenges they face. For instance, in addition to the aforementioned concerns about training staff unaccustomed to traditional wine service, said Osteen, "What we have available in the Tucson

Mills leading a blind tasting that teaches servers to trust their palates, or Osteen advocating for a higher share of allocated bottlings in the market, they maintain the same conviction: Wine culture thrives when knowledge is shared.

"We're all the same—in the business of promoting wine—and the more education, the better for all of us," Jarrell pointed out. "We will always be selling wine . . . and we'll always continue to keep learning." SJ

{ on-premise }

INTRODUCING PINYONS NEW RAW BAR MENU
ROTATING DAILY OYSTER SELECTION
SCALLOPS ON THE HALF SHELL
DISHI SHRIMP

Shore Thing

As beverage director at Phoenix, AZ-based restaurant group Hi Noon Hospitality, Adam Rozansky creates the wine programs for Ingo's Tasty Food, Pinyon, and Buck & Rider.

HI NOON HOSPITALITY BEVERAGE DIRECTOR **ADAM ROZANSKY** IS MAKING WAVES IN ARIZONA

story and photos by Christina Barrueta

A SONOMA COAST Chardonnay paired with freshly flown-in oysters. A Croatian Pošip poured alongside loup de mer garnished with salsa verde. A Cypriot Cabernet Franc influenced by sun and sea air to accompany a porterhouse chop with black-garlic tahina. At seafood and steak spot Buck & Rider and coastal Mediterranean restaurant Pinyon, Hi Noon Hospitality beverage director Adam Rozansky has built two of the Phoenix, Arizona area's most distinctive wine programs around the concept of bringing the coast to the Southwest, whether that means the Pacific Ocean or the Aegean Sea.

Rozansky himself grew up in the Pacific Northwest, specifically Oregon, where his grandfather "was a wine collector, so that's what tempted me to learn about it when I was younger," recalls the somm, who even

started a wine club in college while pursuing a finance degree. Upon graduation, "I tried my hand at wealth management for about six months, but . . . didn't love it," he adds. A job as a wine apprentice with Arizona-based restaurant group LGO Hospitality opened the door to a career far more aligned with his interests, and within two years he'd been promoted to buyer, helping build the wine programs at Chelsea's Kitchen and Buck & Rider, which was then in that company's portfolio. In 2022, "to try something new," he returned to Oregon and took winemaking classes; worked a harvest at Illahe Vineyards, a sustainable winery in the Willamette Valley; and helped open a wine shop in Salem with French restaurateur and collector Bernard Malherbe. Meanwhile, he continued working as Buck & Rider's wine consultant with Adam Strecker and Emily

Collins, who had formed Hi Noon Hospitality after splitting from LGO Hospitality.

When the opportunity to become their beverage director emerged in 2024, he was ready to return to the Grand Canyon State. "We all get back into hospitality because we love people," Rozansky says. "It felt right—I get to be in the restaurant game and connect with people." In his current role, he oversees seven Valley locations across three concepts: Ingo's Tasty Food, an all-day neighborhood café, as well as Pinyon and Buck & Rider.

At the latter, he's created what he calls a maritime wine program. "We prioritize wines that come from within 30 miles of the ocean," he explains, to complement the restaurant's focus on seafood: It updates its raw bar menu twice daily as fresh catch from around the world is flown in. Among 22 wines by the glass,



A selection of wines from the list at Pinyon, which maintains a coastal Mediterranean theme.



Oysters, charcoal-grilled fish such as loup de mer, and hummus with pita are all on the menu at Pinyon.

"we have an amazing Chardonnay from Tyler Winery, which is just a few miles from the coast" in Santa Barbara County, he says, "and we just brought in Birichino Saint Georges Pinot Noir [from the Santa Cruz Mountains], whose grapes are grown about 12 miles from the ocean. Both play perfectly with the cuisine. But we always have a Sancerre too because it's grown on fossilized seabeds, so it's coastal in some sense."


With Pinyon, which opened in Scottsdale in October 2025, Rozansky saw an

opportunity to build something entirely new to accompany a menu inspired by Strecker's travels to countries like Spain, Italy, Greece, Turkey, Morocco, and Malta in a "quest to find the best food of the Mediterranean," in his words. Dishes like tomato salad tossed with feta, walnuts, and pomegranate dressing and lamb shakshuka with spiced kofta in a rich, harissa-spiked tomato sauce are supplemented by a rotating selection of hummus plates that can be topped with everything from pomegranate seeds and Turkish pine nuts to blistered tomatoes and chickpeas alongside warm, made-to-order pita. Meanwhile, a Josper charcoal grill imported from Barcelona turns out smoky tenderloin skewers with rice pilaf and filet of turbot with beet chermoula and Lebanese slaw.

"I was excited to have a blank slate," notes Rozansky, "so I looked around and didn't think anyone [in the area] was doing island wines and wines around volcanoes. We had some Corsican and Sardinian wines at the shop up in Oregon, and I thought cool wines like those would work." Pinyon's list reflects that instinct, featuring wines like Azienda Agricola Tornatore Etna Bianco from Sicily, Surrâu Limizzani Vermentino di Gallura from Sardinia, Ca'n Verdura Viticultors Supernova Moll from Mallorca, and Makarounas En

Arhi from Cyprus. "I just wanted to see if they would play well with the cuisine. And it's been perfect," he continues.

What has surprised Rozansky most is the response from guests. When he pulled the first month's product mix, the top three wines were a Brunello, a Vermentino, and a Rioja—not what he would have predicted for a brand-new Scottsdale restaurant. And the evidence that guests were willing to venture from the predictable has only grown since: "The way people have dug the wine list has been very warm and endearing," he says. Case in point: Jeune Red, a younger-vine label from Lebanon's legendary Chateau Musar, offered by the glass. "I was told we're en route to be the number-one seller of Musar Jeune in the country," he says, pausing with a little amazement. "It shows we have something special here."

As Hi Noon continues to grow—Buck & Rider will soon open a Florida location—Rozansky remains focused on his mission of providing something special indeed. "I hope people see the time and energy that we put in everything we do," he says. "You can come into any of our restaurants and you're going to have a consistent and amazing experience from start to finish. It's the way we do hospitality—because every single guest is important to us." 



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THE 2026 LOS ANGELES INTERNATIONAL WINE COMPETITION *2026 Results*

The 2026 Los Angeles International Wine Competition (LAIWC), now in its 91st year, continues to serve as a platform connecting wineries with key trade and consumer audiences. Judged blind by an international panel of Masters of Wine, Master Sommeliers, buyers, and other industry professionals, the competition highlights wines with both technical merit and strong market potential. Medal-winning wines are showcased during the LA County Fair, where they are presented through curated flights and by-the-glass programs, offering real-time consumer feedback and visibility at scale. In addition, judges lead educational seminars featuring winning wines, providing context, storytelling, and direct engagement that resonate with today's on-premise and retail environments. This integration of evaluation, exposure, and education positions LAIWC as a valuable resource for buyers seeking wines with proven appeal. We are proud to present this year's gold medal and Best of Show winners.

1924 2024 Bourbon Barrel-Aged Cabernet Sauvignon, Lodi DELICATO FAMILY WINES

About Face 2023 Red Blend, Central Coast SLOUCH HAT WINES

Aesthetic Wines 2022 Cabernet Sauvignon, California AESTHETIC WINES

Agua Dulce Winery NV Quatro Burros Red Blend, California AGUA DULCE WINERY

Alexander Valley Vineyards 2022 Estate Cabernet Sauvignon, Alexander Valley

Alexander Valley Vineyards 2021 Sin Zin Zinfandel, Alexander Valley

ARIEL Vineyards 2024 Cabernet Sauvignon, Paso Robles J. LOHR VINEYARDS & WINES **BEST OF CLASS**

Bagratuni 2022 Reserve Areni Red, Vayots Dzor, Armenia CORK & BOTTLE IMPORTS

Barefoot Bright & Breezy Pinot Grigio, USA GALLO

Barefoot Cellars 2024 Red Moscato, California GALLO **BEST OF CLASS**

Barefoot Cellars NV Pink Moscato, California GALLO

Barefoot Cellars NV White Zinfandel, California GALLO

Barefoot Cellars NV Riesling, California GALLO **BEST OF CLASS**

Barefoot Cellars NV Sauvignon Blanc, California GALLO

Barefoot Cellars NV Chardonnay, California GALLO

Barefoot Fruitscato NV Peach Flavored Wine, California GALLO **BEST OF CLASS**

Barefoot Fruitscato NV Mango Flavored Wine, California GALLO **BEST OF CLASS AND BEST FRUIT WINE**

Barefoot Fruitscato NV Pineapple Flavored Wine, California GALLO

Barn Raiser 2023 Pinot Noir, Russian River Valley BOTTLE BARN

Bearboat 2024 Chardonnay, Willamette Valley, Oregon BLUE RIDGE SPIRITS & WINE MARKETING **BEST OF CLASS**

BINAH 2022 Blanc de Blancs Sparkling Wine, Pennsylvania BINAH WINERY **BEST OF CLASS**

Black Stallion Estate Winery 2023 Cabernet Sauvignon, North Coast DELICATO FAMILY WINES

Black Stallion Estate Winery 2024 Chardonnay, Napa Valley DELICATO FAMILY WINES

Blank Canvas Wine 2023 Cabernet Sauvignon, California BLANK CANVAS WINE

Blank Canvas Wine 2022 Artisanal Red Blend, California BLANK CANVAS WINE **BEST OF CLASS**

Blank Canvas Wine 2024 Chardonnay, California BLANK CANVAS WINE

Blumenhof Vineyards & Winery 2025 Rayon d'Or, Missouri **BEST OF CLASS**

Borgo delle Rose NV Agricola Cimolai DOC Prosecco, Italy AGRICOLA CIMOLA **BEST OF CLASS**

BORN Junmai Daiginjo Dreams Come True Yume wa Masayume, Fukui, Japan MUTUAL TRADING

BORN Junmai Daiginjo Gokuhizo, Fukui, Japan MUTUAL TRADING **BEST OF CLASS**

BORN Junmai Daiginjo Wing of Japan, Fukui, Japan MUTUAL TRADING

BORN Junmai Daiginjo Tokusen, Fukui, Japan MUTUAL TRADING

BORN Junmai Daiginjo Hoshi, Fukui, Japan MUTUAL TRADING

BORN Junmai Daiginjo Gold, Fukui, Japan MUTUAL TRADING

BORN Muroka Nama Genshu, Fukui, Japan MUTUAL TRADING

Bota Box NV Nighthawk Red Blend, USA DELICATO FAMILY WINES

Bouchard Aîné & Fils 2024 Heritage du Conseillier Pinot Noir, France BOISSET COLLECTION

Brecon Estate 2023 Cabernet Franc, Adelaida District, Paso Robles

Carol Shelton Wines 2021 Rockpile Reserve Cabernet Sauvignon, Sonoma County **BEST OF CLASS**

Carol Shelton Wines 2019 Florence Reserve Petite Sirah, Dry Creek Valley **BEST OF CLASS**

Carol Shelton Wines 2021 Peaceland Zin Zinfandel, Fountaingrove District **BEST OF CLASS**

Carol Shelton Wines 2023 Albini Zinfandel, Russian River Valley, Sonoma County

Carol Shelton Wines 2024 Barbera d'Oakley, Contra Costa County **BEST OF CLASS**

Carol Shelton Wines 2023 Old Vine Wild Thing Zinfandel, Mendocino County

Carol Shelton Wines 2023 Rockpile Reserve Zinfandel, Sonoma County

Carol Shelton Wines 2023 Old Vine Monda Zinfandel, Cucamonga Valley **BEST OF CLASS**

Carter Estate Winery NV Daybreak Muscat, South Coast **BEST OF CLASS AND BEST FORTIFIED WINE**

Carter Estate Winery 2016 Cuvée Prestige Brut Sparkling Wine, South Coast

Chacewater 2025 Chardonnay, Lake County

Champagne M. Marcoult NV Champagne Orée, Champagne, France **BEST OF CLASS**

Château Bois Malot 2020 Tradition Bordeaux Superieur AOC, France EARL MEYNARD

Chateau Chantal 2024 Proprietor's Reserve Pinot Noir, Old Mission Peninsula, Michigan

Chateau Chantal 2023 Select Harvest Gewurztraminer, Old Mission Peninsula, Michigan

Chateau Chantal 2024 Chardonnay, Old Mission Peninsula, Michigan

Chateau Chantal 2024 Semi-Dry Riesling, Old Mission Peninsula, Michigan **BEST OF CLASS**

Chateau Chantal 2024 Late Harvest Riesling, Old Mission Peninsula, Michigan

Château d'Abzac 2023 AOC Réserve, Bordeaux Superieur, France BARON D ANGLADE

Château de Malleret 2022 Cru Bourgeois Exceptionnel, Haut-Médoc, France **BEST OF CLASS AND BEST BORDEAUX**

Château de Malleret 2023 Cru Bourgeois Exceptionnel, Haut-Médoc, France

Château de Malleret 2025 Blanc de Noirs Sparkling Wine, France

Château Lamothe-Vincent 2025 Bordeaux Blanc Réserve, Bordeaux AOC, France SCEA VIGNOBLES VINCENT

Château Lamothe-Vincent 2024 Héritage, Bordeaux Superieur AOC, France SCEA VIGNOBLES VINCENT

Château Lamothe-Vincent 2023 Les Crus Mathelot, Bordeaux Superieur AOC, France SCEA VIGNOBLES VINCENT

Château Le Bonalguet 2025 Millésime, Bordeaux AOC, France EARL BONALGUE SAINT GERMAIN

Château Leoube 2025 Rosé, Côtes de Provence, France

Château Leoube 2025 Le Secret Rosé, Côtes de Provence, France

Château L'Isle Fort 2022 Bordeaux Superieur AOC, France SCEA DOMAINE DE L'ISLE FORT **BEST OF CLASS**

Château Marjosse 2025 Bordeaux AOC, France SARL PIERRE LURTON

Château Valentons Canteloup 2022 Bordeaux Superieur AOC, France EARL MEYNARD

Clos du Bois 2024 Chardonnay, California GALLO

Cougar Crest Estate Winery 2022 Estate Cabernet Franc, Walla Walla Valley, Washington

Crane Lake NV Chardonnay, California BRONCO WINE COMPANY

Crazy Good Wines 2023 Cabernet Sauvignon, California BRONCO WINE COMPANY **BEST OF CLASS**

Creekstone Winery NV Nacoochee White Muscadine, Georgia HABERSHAM WINERY

DeLoach Vineyards 2024 Certified Sustainable Chardonnay, California BOISSET COLLECTION **BEST OF CLASS**



2024 J. LOHR ESTATES
RIVERSTONE CHARDONNAY

2024 J. LOHR ESTATES
PAPERWHITE UNOAKED CHARDONNAY

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DINO 2024 Rkatsiteli Brut Sparkling Wine, Kakheti, Georgia CGW/GEORGIA PRODUCTS, INC. **BEST OF CLASS, BEST SPARKLING WINE, BEST OF SHOW, AND BEST WINE OF COMPETITION**

Drylands 2025 Sauvignon Blanc, Marlborough, New Zealand **BEST OF CLASS**

Eberle 2023 Vineyard Selection Cabernet Sauvignon, Paso Robles

Eberle 2023 Estate Cabernet Sauvignon, Paso Robles

Eberle 2025 Estate Muscat, Paso Robles **BEST OF CLASS**

English Newsom Cellars 2023 Montepulciano, Texas High Plains, Texas

English Newsom Cellars 2024 Dry Riesling, Texas High Plains, Texas

Fort Berens 2024 Pinot Noir, Lillooet BC VQA, British Columbia, Canada **BEST OF CLASS**

Fort Berens 2022 Red Gold Reserve Cabernet Franc, Lillooet BC VQA, British Columbia, Canada **BEST OF CLASS AND BEST RED WINE**

Fort Berens 2024 Small Lot Pinot Gris, Lillooet BC VQA, British Columbia, Canada

Gekkeikan Junmai Traditional Sake, USA GEKKEIKAN SAKE USA

Gershon Bachus Vintners 2019 Vertunmus Petit Verdot, California

Goldchmidt Vineyards 2024 Fidelity Sauvignon Blanc, Russian River Valley

Goldchmidt Vineyards 2024 Singing Tree Chardonnay, Russian River Valley

Hester Creek 2022 Undici Red Blend, Okanagan Valley BC VQA, British Columbia, Canada

Hester Creek 2022 Old Vine Merlot, Okanagan Valley BC VQA, British Columbia, Canada

Hester Creek 2021 Old Vine Brut Blanc de Blancs, Golden Mile Bench, Okanagan Valley, British Columbia, Canada **BEST OF CLASS**

Highlands 41 2023 Black Granite Red Blend, Paso Robles RIBOLI FAMILY WINES

Highlands 41 2024 Chardonnay, Monterey RIBOLI FAMILY WINES

IZUMIBASHI Yamada Juro Ume Shu Flavored Sake, Kanagawa, Japan MUTUAL TRADING **BEST OF CLASS**

IZUMIBASHI Kimoto Kuro Tombo Kimoto, Kanagawa, Japan MUTUAL TRADING

J. Lohr Vineyards & Wines 2023 Seven Oaks Cabernet Sauvignon, Paso Robles

J. Lohr Vineyards & Wines 2023 Hilltop Cabernet Sauvignon, Paso Robles

J. Lohr Vineyards & Wines 2024 Chardonnay, Arroyo Seco, Monterey

J. Lohr Vineyards & Wines 2024 Riverstone Chardonnay, Arroyo Seco, Monterey **BEST OF CLASS**

J. Lohr Vineyards & Wines 2024 Paperwhite Chardonnay, Arroyo Seco, Monterey **BEST OF CLASS**

Jeff Runquist Wines 2023 Cabernet Sauvignon, Three Way Vineyard, Paso Robles

Jeff Runquist Wines 2023 Reserve Cabernet Sauvignon, Three Way Vineyard, Paso Robles

Jeff Runquist Wines 2023 Tannat, Silvaspoons Vineyard, Alta Mesa District, Lodi

Jeff Runquist Wines 2024 Grenache, Three Way Vineyard, Paso Robles **BEST OF CLASS**

Jeff Runquist Wines 2024 Barbera, Amador County

Jeff Runquist Wines 2023 Graciano, Three Way Vineyard, Paso Robles

Jeff Runquist Wines 2023 Zinfandel, Cooper Vineyard, Amador County

Jeff Runquist Wines 2023 Estate Grown Zinfandel, Peroni Ranch, Amador County **BEST OF CLASS**

Jeff Runquist Wines 2024 Estate Grown Grenache, Peroni Ranch, Amador County

Jeff Runquist Wines 2024 Pinot Noir, Lone Oak Vineyard, Russian River Valley

Jeff Runquist Wines 2024 Pinot Noir, Sisters Vineyard, Los Carneros, Napa Valley

Jeff Runquist Wines 2024 Touriga, Silvaspoons Vineyard, Alta Mesa District, Lodi **BEST OF CLASS**

Jeff Runquist Wines 2024 Lagrein, French Camp Vineyard, Highlands District, Paso Robles **BEST OF CLASS**

Jeff Runquist Wines 2024 Viognier, San Joaquin County, River Junction

Jessie's Grove Winery 2023 Matriarch Red Blend, Lodi

Jessie's Grove Winery 2025 Steel Chardonnay, Lodi

Johnson Estate Winery 2024 Concord, Lake Erie, New York **BEST OF CLASS**

Johnson Estate Winery 2022 Founders Red Blend, Lake Erie, New York

Johnson Estate Winery 2023 Marechal Foch, Lake Erie, New York

Johnson Estate Winery 2024 Sparkling Traminette, Lake Erie, New York **BEST OF CLASS**

Johnson Estate Winery NV The Queens Catawba Sparkling Wine, Lake Erie, New York

Johnson Estate Winery 2023 Toasted Oak Chardonnay, Lake Erie, New York

Johnson Estate Winery 2024 Black Locust Riesling, Lake Erie, New York

Johnson Estate Winery 2024 Dry Riesling, Lake Erie, New York

Johnson Estate Winery 2024 Semi Dry Riesling, Lake Erie, New York **BEST OF CLASS**

Johnson Estate Winery 2024 Niagara, Snow Tiger, Lake Erie, New York **BEST OF CLASS**

Keuka Spring 2024 HJW Late Harvest Riesling, Seneca Lake, New York **BEST OF CLASS AND BEST LATE HARVEST WINE**

Keuka Spring 2020 KSV Zweigelt Blanc de Noirs, Finger Lakes, New York

Keuka Spring 2024 Brusco Classic Semi-Sparkling Red, Finger Lakes, New York

Keuka Spring 2024 Classic Riesling, Finger Lakes, New York **BEST OF CLASS**

Keuka Spring 2024 Tuller Riesling, Seneca Lake, New York

Keuka Spring 2024 Dynamite Gewurztraminer, Seneca Lake, New York

Keuka Spring 2024 Classic Traminette, Finger Lakes, New York **BEST OF CLASS**

KINOENE Hanayaka Takumi No Kaort Junmai Ginjo, Chiba, Japan MUTUAL TRADING

Korbel NV Blanc de Noirs, California

Korbel NV Brut Rosé, California

Korbel 2021 Natural Sparkling Wine, Russian River Valley **BEST OF CLASS**

Kosmic Kitty 2024 Sauvignon Blanc, California SOUTH BAY WINE GROUP

Lake & Vine 2024 Pinot Noir, Santa Lucia Highlands BLUE RIDGE SPIRITS & WINE MARKETING

Lakeridge Winery Southern White NV White Blend, Florida

LaZarre 2025 Albariño, Edna Valley LAZARRE WINES **BEST OF CLASS**

Le Vigne Winery 2022 Merlot, Paso Robles **BEST OF CLASS**

Le Vigne Winery 2025 Rosé, Paso Robles **BEST OF CLASS AND BEST ROSÉ WINE**

Le Vigne Winery 2025 Sauvignon Blanc, Paso Robles

Les Bourgeois Vineyards NV Fleur du Vin Red Blend, Missouri

Les Bourgeois Vineyards 2024 Norton, Missouri

Les Bourgeois Vineyards 2024 Vignoles/Traminette White Blend, Missouri **BEST OF CLASS**

Lucas & Lewellen 2021 Clone 6 Estate Cabernet Sauvignon, Santa Ynez Valley **BEST OF CLASS**

Lucas & Lewellen 2023 Estate Pinot Noir, Santa Barbara County

FROM THE BIRTHPLACE OF WINE TO BEST OF SHOW IN AMERICA



2026 LOS ANGELES
INTERNATIONAL WINE
COMPETITION
BEST OF SHOW



2026 LOS ANGELES
INTERNATIONAL WINE
COMPETITION
BEST OF CLASS



2026 LOS ANGELES
INTERNATIONAL WINE
COMPETITION
BEST OF DIVISION



2026 LOS ANGELES
INTERNATIONAL WINE
COMPETITION
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Lucas & Lewellen 2025 Estate Chenin Blanc, Santa Barbara County

Luna Nuda NV Prosecco, Treviso DOC, Italy
BLUE RIDGE SPIRITS & WINE MARKETING

Luna Nuda 2024 Pinot Grigio, Vignetti delle Dolomiti IGT, Italy
BLUE RIDGE **BEST OF CLASS**

Maddalena 2023 Estate Reserve Cabernet Sauvignon, Paso Robles
RIBOLI FAMILY WINES

Marchesi Vineyards 2024 Valentino Riserva Primitivo, Columbia Valley, Oregon

Mazurans 2024 The Governor's Cellar Rosé, Hawke's Bay, New Zealand
MAZURANS VINEYARDS LTD

McBride Sisters Collection 2024 Sauvignon Blanc, Marlborough, New Zealand

McGrail Vineyards 2022 A Jó Élet The Good Life Cabernet Sauvignon, Livermore Valley
BEST OF CLASS

McManis Family Vineyards 2024 Barbera, Jamie Lynn Vineyards, California

McManis Family Vineyards 2024 Cabernet Sauvignon, Lodi

McManis Family Vineyards 2024 Petite Sirah, Lodi
BEST OF CLASS

McManis Family Vineyards 2024 Zinfandel, Lodi

McManis Family Vineyards 2024 Viognier, River Junction
BEST OF CLASS

McPherson Cellars 2024 Clairette Blanche, Texas High Plains, Texas
BEST OF CLASS

McPherson Cellars 2024 Reserve Roussanne, Texas High Plains, Texas

McPherson Cellars 2024 Les Copains Rhône Style White Blend, Texas High Plains, Texas

Meadows Estate Vineyard and Winery 2021 GSM, Umpqua Valley, Oregon
BEST OF CLASS

Michael David Winery 2023 Freakshow Cabernet Sauvignon, Lodi
BEST OF CLASS

Michael David Winery 2023 Freakshow Red Blend, Lodi

Michael David Winery 2023 Freakshow Zinfandel, Lodi
BEST OF CLASS

Michael David Winery 2023 Cinsault, Lodi

Michael David Winery 2023 Inkblot Cabernet Franc, Lodi

Michael David Winery 2022 Lodi Zin Old Vine Zinfandel, Lodi

Michael David Winery 2024 Freakshow Chardonnay, Lodi

Michael David Winery 2024 Symphony, Lodi

Mimosa Royale NV Orange Fruit Wine, California

Mimosa Royale NV Mando Fruit Wine, California

Mimosa Royale NV Apple Fruit Wine, California
BEST OF CLASS

Mimosa Royale NV Watermelon Fruit Wine, California
BEST OF CLASS

Mimosa Royale NV Berry Fruit Wine, California

Miro 2024 Reserve Chardonnay, Olivet Ranch Vineyard, Russian River Valley
MIRO CELLARS **BEST OF CLASS**

Miro 2023 Reserve Zinfandel, Coyote Ridge Vineyard, Dry Creek Valley
MIRO CELLARS

Miro 2024 Pinot Noir Reserve, Anderson Ross Vineyard, Russian River Valley
MIRO CELLARS

Miro 2023 Petite Sirah, Coyote Ridge, Dry Creek Valley
MIRO CELLARS

Miro 2023 Reserve Cabernet Sauvignon, Pine Mountain Vineyard, Sonoma County
MIRO CELLARS

Momokawa Nigori, Snow Tiger, Japan
SAKÉONE **BEST OF CLASS**

Mystic Hills Vineyard 2021 Cabernet Sauvignon, Monterey County

Mystic Hills Vineyard 2021 Unforgiven Bordeaux Blend, Monterey County
BEST OF CLASS

Native9 2023 Pinot Noir, Santa Maria Valley
BEST OF CLASS

Native9 2023 Cabernet Sauvignon, Ranchos de Ontiveros, Santa Ynez Valley

Native9 2023 Chardonnay, Rancho Vinedo, Santa Maria Valley

Navarro Vineyards 2025 Rosé, Anderson Valley

Navarro Vineyards 2025 Pinot Blanc, Anderson Valley
BEST OF CLASS

Navarro Vineyards 2024 Chardonnay, Anderson Valley

Noravank 2024 Areni Rouge, Vayots Dzor, Armenia
CORK & BOTTLE IMPORTS

Oso Libre Winery 2021 Por Vida Estate Red Blend, Adelaida District, Paso Robles
BEST OF CLASS

Peak Cellars 2023 Dry Riesling, Okanagan Valley, BC VQA, British Columbia, Canada

Peak Cellars 2022 Goldie White White Blend, Okanagan Valley, BC VQA, British Columbia, Canada
BEST OF CLASS

Pennyroyal Farm 2022 Blanc de Blancs, Anderson Valley

Pennyroyal Farm 2024 Anyhow Blanc White Blend, Anderson Valley

Pillitteri 2023 Vidal Icewine, VQA Niagara-on-the-Lake, Canada
PILLITTERI ESTATES WINERY

Pillitteri 2017 Family Reserve Gewurztraminer Icewine, VQA Niagara-on-the-Lake, Canada

Pillitteri 2024 Commendatore Sparkling Vidal Reserve Icewine, VQA Niagara-on-the-Lake, Canada
BEST OF CLASS

Pillitteri 2022 Cabernet Franc, VQA Niagara-on-the-Lake, Canada
PILLITTERI ESTATES WINERY

Pillitteri 2022 Gemini Cabernet Sauvignon, Canada
PILLITTERI ESTATES WINERY

Piper Sonoma NV Blanc de Blancs, Sonoma County
FOLIO WINE PARTNERS

Poplar Grove 2022 Cabernet Franc, Okanagan Valley BC VQA, British Columbia, Canada

Poplar Grove 2022 CSM Red Blend, Okanagan Valley BC VQA, British Columbia, Canada

Poplar Grove 2022 Merlot, Okanagan Valley BC VQA, British Columbia, Canada
BEST OF CLASS

Poplar Grove 2023 Reserve Chardonnay, Okanagan Valley BC VQA, British Columbia, Canada

Ra Ra Wine Co. 2025 Riesling, Cole Ranch, Mendocino County

Ra Ra Wine Co. 2025 Grenache Rosé, Dry Creek Valley

Ra Ra Wine Co. 2025 Melon de Bourgogne, Alexander Valley

Ra Ra Wine Co. 2025 Gewurztraminer, Redwood Valley
BEST OF CLASS

Relax NV Alcohol-Removed Sauvignon Blanc, California
DELICATO FAMILY WINES

Rosenthal Malibu Estate 2021 G Collection Trifecta Reserve Red Blend, Malibu
BEST OF CLASS

Rosenthal Malibu Estate 2022 G Collection Petit Verdot, Malibu-Newton Canyon

Rosenthal Malibu Estate 2022 G Collection Cabernet Sauvignon, Malibu-Newton Canyon

Rosenthal Malibu Estate 2022 G Collection Cabernet Sauvignon, Malibu-Newton Canyon

SakéOne Junmai Ginjo G Joy, Japan
SAKÉONE

San Sebastian Winery NV Noble Vintners Red, Florida

Sho Chiku Bai Sparkling Sake Shirakabegura MIO Nigori, Japan
TAKARA SAKE USA INC. **BEST OF CLASS**

Sicilia Vineyards 2022 Teroldego, Sutter County

Sicilia Vineyards 2025 Fiano, Sutter County

Slouch Hat 2023 Fall Out Pinot Noir, Santa Barbara County
SLOUCH HAT WINES

Slouch Hat 2023 Parade Rest GSM, Santa Ynez Valley
SLOUCH HAT WINES

South Coast Winery 2022 Cabernet Sauvignon, South Coast

South Coast Winery NV Diamante Sparkling Spumante, Temecula Valley

South Coast Winery 2025 Pinot Grigio, South Coast

Spellbound NV Incantato Prosecco DOC, Italy
FOLIO

Stoneleigh 2025 Sauvignon Blanc, Marlborough, New Zealand
DELICATO FAMILY WINES

Sycamore Ranch Vineyard & Winery 2025 Viognier, Santa Ynez Valley

Sycamore Ranch Vineyard & Winery 2024 Petit Verdot, Paso Robles

Taylors 2024 Special Release Chardonnay, Adelaide Hills/Clare Valley, Australia WAKEFIELD TAYLORS WINES

Tengumai Yamahai Jikomi Junmai, Yamahai, Ishikawa, Japan
MUTUAL TRADING **BEST OF CLASS**

Terranean Wines 2023 Grenache, Paso Robles

Thirsty Owl Wine Company 2024 Diamond White Wine, Finger Lakes, New York

Tierra Luna Cellars 2021 Cuatro Stellas Red Blend, North Coast

Tiger Mountain Vineyards 2024 Petit Manseng, Georgia

Trentadue La Storia 2023 Cabernet Sauvignon, Alexander Valley **BEST OF CLASS**

Trentadue La Storia 2023 Estate Merlot, Block 500, Alexander Valley **BEST OF CLASS**

Trentadue La Storia 2023 Cuvée 32 Estate Super Tuscan Blend, Alexander Valley

Trentadue La Storia 2024 Sauvignon Blanc, Russian River Valley **BEST OF CLASS**

TYKU Ultra Premium Junmai Daiginjo Sake, USA **BEST OF CLASS**
UMANO 2022 Saperavi, Qvevri, Kakheti, Georgia CGW/GEORGIA PRODUCTS, INC.

UMANO 2020 Saperavi, Mukuzani, Kakheti, Georgia CGW/GEORGIA PRODUCTS, INC. **BEST OF CLASS**

Unshackled 2023 Cabernet Sauvignon, Central Coast THE PRISONER WINE COMPANY

Victor Hugo 2023 Zinfandel, Templeton Gap, Paso Robles **BEST OF CLASS**

Vinosanto Vineyards 2023 Moscato, San Luis Obispo

Wakefield 2025 Merlot, Clare Valley/Limestone Coast, Australia WAKEFIELD TAYLORS WINES

Wakefield 2025 Jaraman Chardonnay, Adelaide Hills/Clare Valley, South Australia, Australia

Whitehaven 2025 Sauvignon Blanc, Marlborough, New Zealand GALLO

Wiens Cellars 2023 Nebbiolo, Temecula Valley

Wiens Cellars 2023 Reserve Cabernet Sauvignon, Temecula Valley

Wiens Cellars 2023 Reserve Syrah, Temecula Valley

Wiens Cellars 2023 Prestance Cabernet Sauvignon, Coombsville **BEST OF CLASS**

Wiens Cellars 2025 Arneis, Temecula Valley **BEST OF CLASS & BEST WHITE WINE**

Wiens Cellars 2024 Reserve Chardonnay, Riverside County **BEST OF CLASS**

Wiens Cellars 2025 Vermentino, Temecula Valley

Wiens Cellars 2025 Falanghina, Temecula Valley

Wiens Cellars 2025 Intento Bianco White Blend, Temecula Valley

Wiens Cellars 2025 Sauvignon Blanc, Temecula Valley **BEST OF CLASS**

Wolff Vineyards 2022 Dijon Clone Selection Pinot Noir, San Luis Obispo Coast

Wolff Vineyards 2023 Old Vines Chardonnay, San Luis Obispo Coast

Wolff Vineyards 2024 Dry Riesling, San Luis Obispo Coast **BEST OF CLASS**

Z. Alexander Brown 2023 Uncaged Cabernet Sauvignon, California DELICATO FAMILY WINES 

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Old Kentucky Home

COX'S SPIRIT SHOPPE & EVERGREEN LIQUORS MEETS THE BEVERAGE NEEDS OF THE GREATER LOUISVILLE AREA, ONE NEW LOCATION AT A TIME by Kate Newton

AMONG THE TRUTHS UNIVERSALLY

acknowledged is that bourbon is always king in Kentucky, and there's no exception to it at Cox's Spirit Shoppe & Evergreen Liquors, an employee-owned retailer based in Louisville that has steadily spread over the years to surrounding communities such as Bardstown, La Grange, Mt. Washington, Shelbyville, Shepherdsville, and Taylorsville. Now with 26 locations, "we're still in growth mode," says CEO Mike Fisk, adding that their latest opening in the Louisville suburb of Hillview represents "more to come" in terms of their planned expansion across the state.

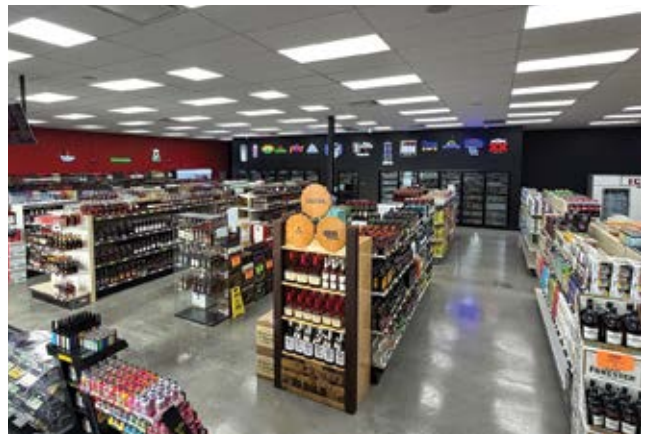
But while every store aims to have "a little bit different product mix and a little different personality . . . to make it more of a neighborhood-liquor-store feel, with some of the best customer service you'll find in any retail [business]," Fisk notes, their connection to the local whiskey community is a constant. In addition to "having the distilleries come to us" in the form of in-store events with master distillers and other representatives, the company runs a burgeoning business in which it partners with corporate clients on distillery visits where they can select their own barrels, among other personalized experiences. "That's not something that a lot of people outside of Kentucky are able to do, so we definitely take advantage of that," he continues, calling their proximity to some of the world's biggest distilleries "a blessing": "Kentucky's always last to the table on a lot of trends, [but] bourbon was the opposite."

Another feature that sets the company apart within the ever-encroaching footprint of big-box retailers are the tasting bars it's installed in all Evergreen Liquors stores. What started as an outlet to attract customers with sample pours of allocated bottles like Pappy Van Winkle 23 Year at lower prices than they'd find on-



◀ Cox's Spirit Shoppe & Evergreen Liquors CEO Mike Fisk.

◀ *Cox's Spirit Shoppe & Evergreen Liquors recently opened the 26th location of its chain of retail shops, most of which are in the greater Louisville, KY, area.*



PHOTOS COURTESY OF COX'S SPIRIT SHOPPE & EVERGREEN LIQUORS

premise evolved into a major selling point for those looking to taste bottles before purchasing—and it certainly doesn't hurt that industry celebrities like Jim Beam master distiller Fred Noe might stroll in and rub elbows with fellow shoppers. One location in the bustling downtown Louisville neighborhood of NuLu features a full-service bar with cocktails, draft beer, and wine and bourbon by the pour, but Fisk is quick to stress that "we are not a bar that sells bottles. . . . Our tasting-bar business is less than 20%, 25% of the overall store's business [in each location they're installed], so it's really driven customers to taste something and then pick it up off the shelf, which was the end goal."

A reliable tenet of a successful business model that rings especially true in 2026, in Fisk's view, is simply to not put all of one's eggs in one basket. In Cox's Spirit Shoppe & Evergreen Liquors' case, that applies whether it's embracing hemp-derived beverages—and communicating directly with lawmakers and stakeholders to make sure the retail industry's interests are reflected in constantly evolving regulations—or keeping an ear to the ground on trending products such as the

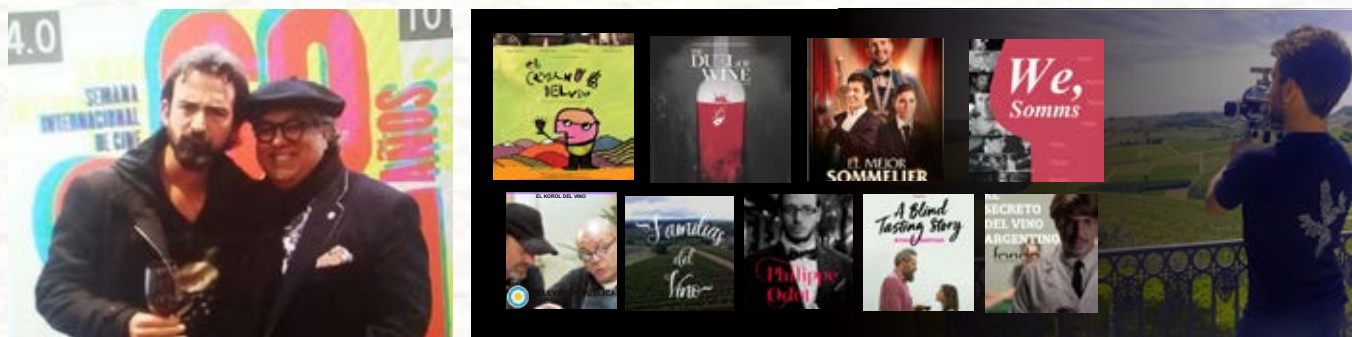
ready-to-drink and flavored categories while being mindful of oversaturation. In Kentucky, of course, shopping is highly seasonally driven as well, with white wines like Sauvignon Blanc and Pinot Grigio ascending around the Kentucky Derby and Cabernet Sauvignons and red blends reclaiming their throne once the weather cools. But regardless of what's on offer, he says, "[The] thing that we have to continue to push forward is looking at how [to] better serve our customers with value and giving them the products that they're looking for at the right time, in the right manner, and at the right price."

Another prevailing view of his is that many industry-wide anxieties can be assuaged by the fact that the beverage business is a cyclical one. "What craft beer did, what bourbon has done, what RTDs are in the process of doing, everything in this business is circular," he says. "Liquor's not going anywhere—it's just a matter of what people are buying. I think people are shying away from the expensive stuff and trying to find their tried-and-true again." And if you have 26 businesses equipped to meet them where they are, that's all the better. **SJ**



WHEN CINEMA FALLS IN LOVE WITH WINE

Charlie Arturaola and Cactus Cine Return with The Master of Wine



A NEW FILM, A DECADE OF EXPERTISE

Buenos Aires-based Cactus Cine—creators of the award-winning *El Camino del Vino* (International Critics' Prize, Mar del Plata) and *El Duelo del Vino* (Berlin, San Sebastián selections)—returns to complete their celebrated trilogy with the bold finale, *The Master of Wine*."

Charlie Arturaola, wine ambassador with 25+ years in the industry and former world champion taster, leads this journey through climate-resilient viticulture. The film weaves real winemakers and sommeliers into compelling narrative cinema—education wrapped in storytelling.



"A decade learning that wine's true message isn't in the glass—it's in the emotional connection between maker and drinker. Cinema can bridge that."

— Charlie Arturaola

"The key was not trying to film wine, but falling in love with the people who make it. Their passion guides every frame."

— Nicolás Carreras, Producer

CLIMATE, TERROIR, AND REAL STORIES

Brenda, a New York wine journalist, recruits Charlie Arturaola—a reclusive sommelier with a profound understanding of terroir—for an ambitious project: **mapping** resilient wine regions in a climate-changing world.



Scouting locations already featured in the companion micro-series include Patagonia (Argentina), Mid-Atlantic wine country (USA), and Mexico (Guanajuato, Querétaro, Chihuahua, Veracruz)—short-form content exploring the wineries and their integration into the film. European scouting is underway.

The project continues to identify exceptional regions, grape varieties, and winemaking voices worldwide for this cinematic selection.

Production 2026 | Premiere 2027

CONNECT WITH THE FILM

themasterofwine@cactuscine.com

Instagram: @themasterofwine.themovie

PRODUCTION INQUIRIES

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Nicolás Carreras: nico@cactuscine.com



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EQUAL PARTS

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Quintessentia Amaro Nonino 50% Alc./Vol. (100 Proof). © 2021 Nonino. All rights reserved. Photo: Emma J. Photography

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