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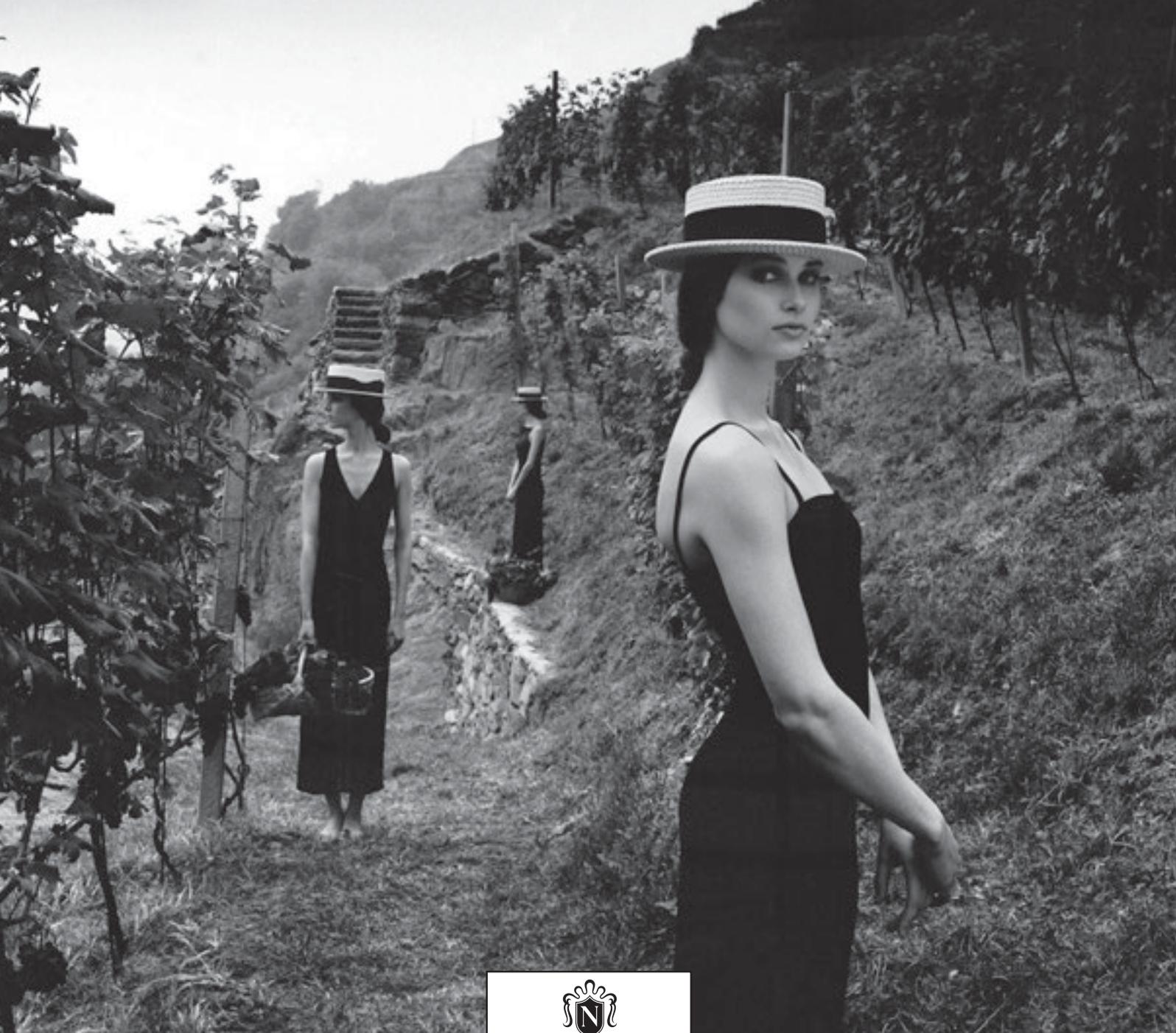


the **MOTHER** *Vine*

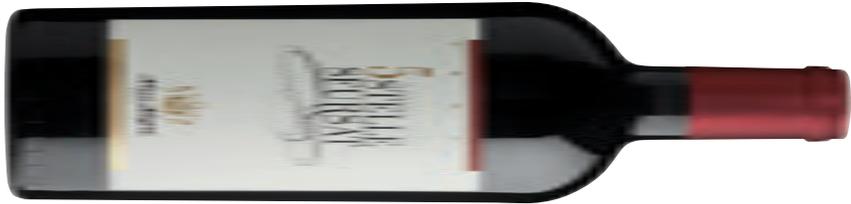
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Brandon Boghosian, Food and Beverage Director for University Club San Diego, and Josh Orr, Fine Wine Specialist for Epic Wines & Spirits in Santa Rosa, CA.

Who Do You Admire?

Josh Orr, Advanced Sommelier and Fine Wine Specialist for Epic Wines & Spirits in Santa Rosa, CA

story and photo by Brandon Boghosian

ADVANCED SOMMELIER, family man, and handsome devil: Josh Orr is an all-around stud I'm thankful to call a close friend and forever grateful to call a mentor:

Josh has sold me wine and put up with me for almost three years now. He's introduced me to wines that have become some of my favorites, and more importantly, he's been the single greatest influence on me as a sommelier.

It's tough to become a sommelier on your own—at least, it's

tough to become a good one. We taste and study in groups and have friends, colleagues, and partners who push us, drive us, and motivate us. What I'm saying is that no one is out there achieving their goals in this industry all by themselves. We refer to these groups of derelicts and drunkards and brilliant minds as the sommelier "community," because the profession doesn't exist without that key word: community.

In 2015, I could barely stumble my way through "The Grid." I've

since passed the Advanced-level tasting twice, and my chances of doing that without Josh would have been slim. I cannot possibly put a value on the hours he's spent across the table, counting down 25 minutes at a time, pointing out when I'm tasting like a moron, and then ensuring me I'm actually smarter than I am. Going through the exam process can feel a little like self-inflicted torture, and I couldn't imagine doing it without people like Josh in my corner. **SJ**

To submit to "Who Do You Admire?," email Managing Editor Jessie Birschbach at jabs@sommjournal.com.



Terlato Wines International CEO Bill Terlato (center) with viticulturists from the Friulian estate, Pierpaolo Sirch and Marco Simonit.



Pushing Pinot Grigio
UPWARD

**TERLATO WINES INTERNATIONAL CEO BILL TERLATO
ELEVATES ITALIAN PINOT GRIGIO IN THE
COLLI ORIENTALI DEL FRIULI DOC**

first press



by Courtney Schiessl

Italian Pinot Grigio can be described by a trio of terms: ubiquitous, straightforward, and inexpensive. This is well-accepted by American wine drinkers, many of whom rely on Pinot Grigio as a refreshing “catch-all” white wine that’s budget-friendly enough to buy in bulk. Yes, the category is popular, but is it interesting? Not so much.

Some producers, however, won’t settle for that depiction. Among them is Terlato Wines International, a pioneer of the Italian Pinot Grigio category in the U.S. Led by CEO Bill Terlato, the company has a mission to turn Pinot Grigio on its head by creating a premium, complex wine from one of northern Italy’s most exciting regions: Colli Orientali del Friuli. Enophiles who think they know this pervasive category have certainly not yet tasted the Terlato Vineyards Pinot Grigio.

Pioneering and Reinventing

It’s nearly impossible to find a wine shop or restaurant in the U.S. that doesn’t carry the grape. As Italy currently has more Pinot Grigio vines planted than any other country, a significant portion of these offerings are Italian, particularly from the country’s northeastern regions.

But when Bill, a third-generation member of the family company, assessed the overall Italian Pinot Grigio category in 2013, he believed something was lacking. “The wines were bland and neutral—nothing like what Pinot Grigio could be,” Bill says. “I knew we could make a benchmark Italian Pinot Grigio that was clearly different than the rest.”



He set out with a goal to redefine both consumer and trade expectations for Pinot Grigio while becoming a leader in the \$15-and-over segment, and, considering his company’s history, was well-equipped to do so. Bill notes that his father, Tony, “created the Pinot Grigio category here in the U.S.” back in 1978, when Italian Pinot Grigio was still a rarity. But as the category took off, large producers began sourcing fruit from less-ideal vineyards geared solely toward quantity. “Over the last 40 years, as volumes grew, the wines became commercial and industrial and quality suffered,” Bill adds. “I knew we could do better.”

Over its 60-year history, Terlato Wines International has established itself as a forward-thinking luxury wine producer after progressing from retail to importing, distribution, and eventually winery ownership and vineyard development.

Following in his father’s footsteps, Bill—who initially planned to attend law

Bill Terlato (left) sought to make his company’s hillside vineyards (below) the optimal source for Pinot Grigio.



PHOTOS COURTESY OF TERLATO WINES

school before falling in love with the family business during a stint as a sales rep—ventured outside the more common Veneto and Trentino-Alto Adige regions when looking for a home for Terlato's Pinot Grigio. Winemakers Primo Franco of Nino Franco Prosecco and Roberto Anselmi of Anselmi Wines (both of which are in the Terlato portfolio) instead steered him toward a property in Friuli-Venezia Giulia's Colli Orientali region.

Bill believed strongly in Colli Orientali's potential for producing premier Pinot Grigio and launched Terlato Vineyards' rendition of the variety from this 240-acre estate with the 2014 vintage. After increasing production with the 2016 vintage, the project quickly turned Terlato's goal into reality, as its Pinot Grigio is currently the fastest-growing in Italy, according to Nielsen data.

Friuli's Potential

When asked what sets the Terlato Vineyards Pinot Grigio apart from its counterparts, Bill's answer is simple: "Taste it and see the difference." The concentrated, complex wine is far more than the requisite porch-pounder Pinot Grigio consumers have come to expect: Several factors

contribute to its nuanced character; all of which relate back to the company's decision to solely use estate-grown fruit from the Colli Orientali region in Friuli-Venezia Giulia. "We believe that Friuli—specifically Colli Orientali in Friuli—is the best place to produce white wine in Italy, and we want to be the best in class," Bill notes.

Tucked into the corner of northeastern Italy and bordered by both Austria and Slovenia, Friuli has certainly made waves in the past decade for its ability to produce aromatic, expressive white wines. Colli Orientali and neighboring Collio are the two most important Friulian regions for quality winemaking; in the former, hills (*colline* in Italian) define the landscape and vineyards are planted along slopes or on terraces. Grapes here benefit from plentiful sun and warmth during the day, encouraging ripening in order to build full flavor and body, but cool air from the nearby Julian Alps also flows through the vineyards at night, preserving lifting acidity.

This push-pull of richness and refreshment defines the Terlato Pinot Grigio and the wines of Colli Orientali as a whole. And while Friuli's natural growing conditions for high-quality white wines have contributed excellent fruit to Terlato's Pinot Grigio, the company has bolstered the region as well. According to Bill, production of Friulian wines has grown more than 15 percent in just one year—more than any other Italian region—largely due to the success of Terlato Vineyards' Pinot Grigio.

Quality Over Quantity

The distinction that Terlato's Pinot Grigio is produced from estate vineyards is an important one. Beyond the natural advantages of hillside vineyards and excellent marl and schist soils, estate production allows Terlato to follow its grapes through the entire viticultural process. "It's about having complete control," Bill says. Opting for low yields and hand-harvesting, for instance, prioritizes quality over quantity despite the fact that these methods are more costly and time-consuming.

At its Friulian estate, Terlato has also partnered with viticulturalists Marco Simonit and Pierpaolo Sirch, known for their



Terlato Vineyards' Colli Orientali del Friuli project may have been created to elevate the category of Italian Pinot Grigio, but the estate's potential doesn't stop there. Terlato will launch an estate-grown Friulano, the region's local specialty, with the 2017 vintage.

namesake pruning method. Specifically designed to elongate the life of a vine, this approach has created a wealth of healthy old vines on the estate. "We have many older vines averaging 20–30 years in age which produce wines of exceptional quality," Bill notes.

While it might be easier and cheaper to sacrifice these viticultural methods in favor of mechanized ones, Bill feels the effort and expense are worthwhile given consumers' rising preferences for compelling premium wines over high-volume and low-cost options. The facts back up his theory: While many Italian Pinot Grigios can be found around the \$10 price point, Terlato expects 16,000 placements in retail shops and restaurants by the end of 2018 despite the slightly increased price.

Terlato Vineyards' Colli Orientali del Friuli project may have been created to elevate the category of Italian Pinot Grigio, but the estate's potential doesn't stop there. Terlato will launch an estate-grown Friulano, the region's local specialty, with the 2017 vintage.

To Bill, it simply establishes a natural extension of a company that's pushed boundaries for decades. "Our goal is to extend multiple generations into the future as a family-owned luxury beverage company," he says, noting that the fourth generation of Terlatos are currently entering the business. "We continue to produce and represent selected world-class brands and will continue to acquire vineyards in the best regions." ❧



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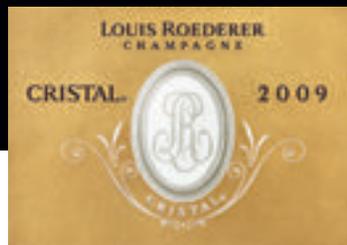
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SOMM campers cross a suspension bridge at Ancient Peaks in Paso Robles. See page 102 for more.



THE MOON IS WAXING, TOMORROW WILL BE THE RIGHT TIME TO PRUNE THE VINES. BY WAXING MOON, THE VINES ARE STRONGER, BUT THEY LOSE THEIR VIGOR WHEN THE MOON IS WANING. TO PRUNE AT THE PERFECT TIME, KEEP AN EYE ON THE MOON. **LA DIFFÉRENCE CRISTAL.**

Victoria James,
Beverage Director
at Cote in New York,
pours Domaine de
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PHOTO: DOUG YOUNG

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OMUNGERO SILVANAVIA VIA ADOBE STOCK

Automatic Headache

BREAKING DOWN **SERVICE CHARGE** VS. **GRATUITY**

THE OTHER DAY I visited a good friend who works as a bartender at a trendy restaurant in West Hollywood. Prior to my visit, I'd asked her how she was enjoying her new gig. The response was lukewarm, mostly based on the fact that the restaurant does not "allow tipping." Instead, they automatically add a "service charge" intended for distribution among the entire staff.

My friend, however, has done the math, and she's quite certain she's not actually earning a consistent percentage of that charge based on her sales. Grumbings around the restaurant theorize that the owner is pocketing some of the money to put toward his next restaurant, which, if true, disgusts me to no end. Her fellow bartender quit just the other night, in fact, after several requests to review the num-

bers went unanswered. The entire staff is now considering a walkout.

The unfortunate truth is that service charges are the property of the employer, and the ownership/management can distribute this money however they see fit. With most people unaware of this, it's imperative we learn the difference between a service charge and gratuity/tipping. The latter is the property of the employee, but it's worth noting that a mandated tip pool is perfectly legal. Further complicating this matter, the Consolidated Appropriations Act, signed into law by President Trump this spring, enables employers to include back-of-the-house employees in tip pools.

When I visited my friend that night, I made sure to leave her an actual cash tip: I trust her to distribute that money in the way she sees fit. When I received my bill

this week after lunch at a Mediterranean restaurant, I noticed a 15 percent service charge, so I again left a cash gratuity.

I don't always have cash on me, though—and frankly, as a diner, it's frustrating how much the cost of dining out can increase under these circumstances, as I can end up spending 25–30 percent of my bill on tipping *and* service charges. And that's coming from a former member of the service industry who knows exactly how hard my friends are working for these (hopefully) extra tips.

So, how do we fix this broken system? I wish I knew. In the meantime, let's at the very least remember that a service charge is a far cry from a gratuity or tip: The livelihood of thousands of members of the hospitality industry may depend on it. **SJ**

—Jessie Birschbach, Managing Editor

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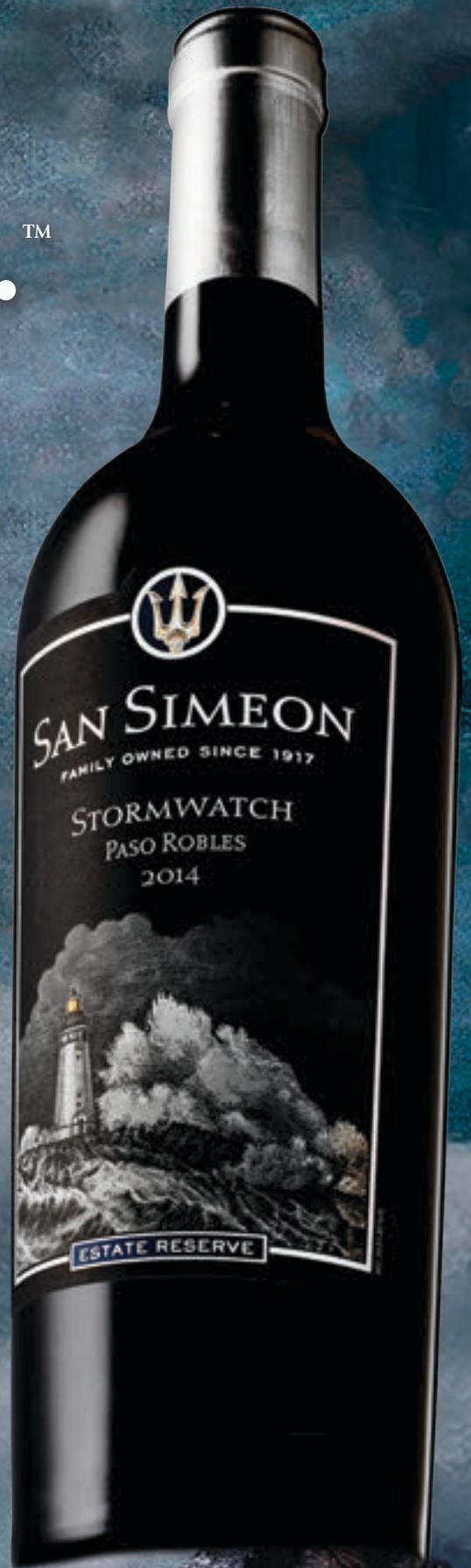
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SAN SIMEON

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REVELATION

THERE'S A NEW AGAVE SPIRITS CATEGORY IN TOWN:
IT'S CALLED **AVILA**, AND **REVEL SPIRITS** HAS IT LOCKED UP

PHOTO: CAL BINGHAM



THE MEXICAN STATE OF MORELOS, located northwest of Oaxaca, has a warm climate and specific terroir of pristine, alkaline-rich volcanic soil that add an unmistakable character to the agave grown there. Music entrepreneurs and Revel Spirits founders Jacqui Thompson and Micah McFarlane were introduced to the area by Minneapolis chef and restaurateur Héctor Ruiz, a native to the region. Ruiz's family owns and operates the farm and distillery where Revel is now produced.

With their business partner Susan Clausen, Thompson and McFarlane set out to market a high-end tequila. Instead, they ended up creating the world's first Avila, a new agave-based spirits category that combines the piña-roasting methods of traditional mezcal production with the modernized steaming techniques of tequila. "There's a huge learning curve when it comes to agave-based spirits," says McFarlane, who also serves as the CEO of Revel Spirits.

Made from 100 percent Blue Weber agave, the finished product is 80 proof and triple-distilled. Under the Revel name, there are currently two expressions available: Blanco and Reposado, with the Añejo Avila set for release this fall. **8** —*Meridith May*

Revel Spirits co-founders Micah McFarlane and Jacqui Thompson.

Revel Avila Blanco (\$55) Revel Spirits' piñas are thrown into a pit filled with volcanic rock from an "active" volcano in Morelos, Mexico. After they're covered with sand and leaves, the piña bulbs are roasted for 48 hours and uncovered for another 24 as a pipe inserted into the middle helps release smoke. With aromas of vanilla bean, key lime, and white chocolate, the spirit offers a clean, creamy mouthfeel with flavors of orange rind and white pepper that lead to a finish of fresh, green agave. **98**

Revel Avila Reposado (\$75) Triple-distilled and aged 12 months in American white oak barrels, this expression offers scents of saddle leather, fresh agave, butterscotch, and oatmeal with just a whisper of refined smoke. The palate is incredibly complex with a range of flavors including patchouli, bergamot, spicy sandalwood, lime, orange peel, and black-peppered toffee. The lingering finish and finely grained tannins caress the tongue with a rich texture. **98**

PHOTO: CAL BINGHAM



Fine sipping spirits, Revel's Blanco and Reposado Avilas are also superb serving as the base of high-end cocktails.

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A Man and His Vineyard

IN PRAISE OF THE LATE LESLIE RUDD'S EXQUISITE CABERNETS

WHEN LESLIE RUDD died in May at the age of 76, I hope a soft wind blew down the rocky face of the Vaca Mountains and nestled into the tender curves of his Napa Valley vineyard below. Indeed, it must have happened: Having stood in that very vineyard in recent weeks, how else could I explain the feeling of being wrapped in a gentle soulfulness? It's perhaps not an exaggeration to say that vineyard was Leslie.

I remember the first time I visited the corner of Oakville Crossroad and the Silverado Trail decades ago. It wasn't Rudd Estate back then, but rather a weary patch of vines that resembled bedraggled soldiers returning home from war. The vivid auburn red soil was there, and beams of sunlight bounced down from the canyon above just as they do today. But the vineyard itself was a neglected mess.

For Leslie, I suspect it was love at first sight.

Leslie was tremendously shy, but I grew to know him a little bit. In the 1990s, he was

one of the first people I talked to about my then pie-in-the-sky idea of creating a professional wine school within the Culinary Institute of America's Napa Valley campus. Leslie—a man who always walked the walk—donated the millions in seed money



The late Leslie Rudd with his daughter Samantha, who is now in charge of the estate.

it took to convert the crumbling-down Christian Brothers still house on campus to what would eventually become the Rudd Center for Professional Wine Studies.

I recently went over to Rudd to taste wines with Leslie's daughter Samantha (now head of the winery), Estate Director

Oscar Henquet, and Winegrower Frederick Ammons. As I pulled into the driveway, I was seized by the worry that somehow, without Leslie there, the magic of those wines would be gone.

It turns out, though, that the wines were more exquisite: a culmination, an embodiment, and an homage all wrapped into one. The 2014 Rudd Estate Proprietary Red (\$250; mostly Cabernet) had a texture so sumptuous it was like melted chocolate, yet it was uncannily fresh, vivid, and pure at the same time. Meanwhile, the 2014 Samantha's Cabernet Sauvignon (\$175) featured long swaths of violet blue fruit and a sensational structure.

"Leslie worked for years on this vineyard," Henquet told me. "He died knowing he understood it. That was his promise to Samantha, and that is the promise and foundation we will build on for the next generation." SJ

*Karen MacNeil is the author of **The Wine Bible** and creator of **WineSpeed**.*



PHOTOS: MATT MORRIS

Vineyard workers descend on Rudd Vineyards' Mt. Veeder Estate.

J. LOHR CABERNET

A CABERNET FOR EVERY COLLECTOR

From Napa to Paso



Beers Gone Wild Get Refined:

ACETOBACTER AND FLANDERS RED ALE

by Jessie Birschbach

I RECENTLY GOT to spend a little time in Austin, Texas. Despite my enthusiasm, and also due to the fact that it was closed the two days I was there, I was unable to visit Jester King Brewery. I certainly didn't leave the city thirsty, but I'm now back in Los Angeles and still have yet to try one of the brewer's beloved sours.

This got me thinking though about sour beers and acidic fermentation in general, not to mention one of my favorite beers within this genre: Duchesse de Bourgogne. (Settle down—I very much like Rodenbach, too!) Usually the wild yeasts and bacteria that cause acidic fermentation are bad things, but Belgian lambics, gueuze, and other sour beers embrace these spoilage organisms with open arms—or perhaps more appropriately, open fermentation vessels. There are many, but the organisms primarily responsible are *Brettanomyces* yeast, *pediococcus*, *lactobacillus*, *acetobacter*, and *enterobacter*. Several strains of each can be found in wood barrels, in the air, and who knows where else.

I could develop a whole series on each of these rascally bacterium, and maybe I will, but for now let's focus on acetic fermentation (as opposed to the lactic fermentation that happens when *lactobacillus* and *pediococcus* come to crash the party).

Acetobacter

Acetobacter oxidizes ethanol into acetic acid; in other words, it turns alcohol into vinegar. In most beers, it's considered a harsh off-flavor that's usually a result of bad sanitation practices in a draft system or brewery. You can have too much of it even in sour beers: In high quantities, it can end up tasting like astringent pickle juice.

As mentioned above, *acetobacter* is key to the acidic, tart character in lambic, gueuze, and Flanders red/brown beer styles. It's particularly common in oak-aged beers, as the wood permits some oxygen exchange.

The Burgundy of Belgium

Flanders red ale—often referred to as the Burgundy of Belgium due to its dry, wine-like finish—is a sour-ale style born in the West Flanders province. These complex, tart beers are typically aged for roughly two years in oak harboring *acetobacter* (among other naughty goodies like *Brettanomyces*), which sours the beer.

After the ale has matured, it's then blended with younger, fresher beer to achieve the desired level of acidity, which can range from mild to the sort of high-acid and even tannic finish you'd find in a red wine. For this reason, Flanders reds possess no hop flavor; at most, they have a very restrained hop character, as brewers instead rely on the acid to balance the plum and dark-fruit flavors in the beer. The oak will often impart a bit of vanilla character, as well, which can give it a sort of tart black-cherry-cream-soda essence. Alcohol levels range from 4.6–6.5%. **SJ**



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A Heel No Longer

THE WINES OF SOUTHERN ITALY'S PUGLIA REGION PREP TO TAKE THE WORLD STAGE

story and photos by David Ransom

WHEN WAXING POETIC about Italy's wines, how often does one include the wines of the Puglia region in Italy's southeast corner? Likely not very often, for until recently Puglia (sometimes called Apulia) had been regarded as an area focused on quantity over quality, as it's filled with co-ops making wine to fill other brands' bottles.

As for my own image of Puglia, the region is blessed with a very good climate for grape production, but this hasn't always translated to good wine. Ripeness and high alcohol content represent some of the hurdles to acceptance, especially regarding Primitivo, the region's signature red grape.

A recent trip to Italy's heel, however, showed me times have changed in Puglia, where the focus is now clearly skewed toward quality. Virtually all of its producers, both independent and cooperative, are working to increase awareness of the region as they dedicate resources to raising the image of its most well-known yet underestimated wines.

"We've made a concerted effort over the last 20 years to raise the quality of our wines," says Mauro di Maggio, Managing Director of Cantine San Marzano in Manduria (home to some of Puglia's most coveted Primitivo vines). "We are also helping secure the future for our vines by doing biodiversity research to help address climate change," adds Claudio Quarta, who owns three wineries in Manduria and Salento.

One of the areas where Puglia has actually led the way is in rosé production. The region kickstarted the category in Italy during the 1990s, and today many producers make rosé from a variety of native grapes. Probably most enticing for me is a style of rosé made from Negroamaro that's complex and often ageworthy while showing notes of minerality on par with white wine, making it well-suited to pairing with food.

I found Negroamaro particularly interesting, as this grape tends to ripen less than most others even in Puglia's hot climate. This makes it perhaps the ideal grape to thrive there and, as a result, producers utilize Negroamaro for a variety of wines—including, of course, red and rosé (though a few are making white and sparkling wines from the grape, as well).

So next time you seek to pull your wine program out of a rut, take a look at the wines of Puglia. They're still affordable and, in my opinion, well worth a look. ☺



Claudio and Alessandra Quarta of Claudio Quarta Vignaiolo.



Stefano Garofano of Severino Garofano makes some of Puglia's most interesting rosé from Negroamaro grapes.

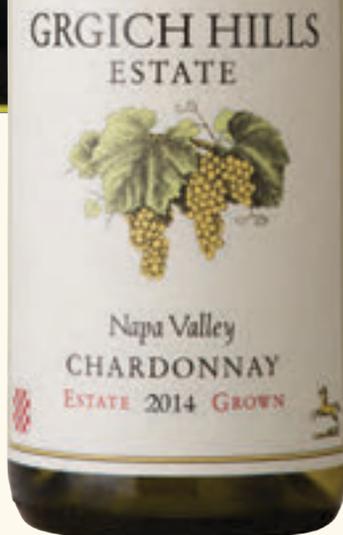
GRGICH HILLS ESTATE

NAPA VALLEY



*Miljenko "Mike" Grgich, Founder
Violet Grgich, President and Ivo Jeramaz, Winemaker*

93^{pts}
Wine Enthusiast



CELEBRATING AN AMERICAN LEGEND

Happy 95th Birthday!

Miljenko "Mike" Grgich

Dear Good Somm/Bad Somm,

I recently took part in a wine competition in which the grand prize was a free trip to France. While taking the test, I happened to notice the somm beside me cheating on his exam. He later won with flying colors. I'm embarrassed to look like a sore loser, so I tried to let it go, but several weeks later I'm still very bitter. What should I do?

Sincerely,
Do Snitches Really Get Stitches?

Good Somm

Dear Do Snitches Really Get Stitches?

The healthy-minded advice in this case would be to "let karma run its course." If you think this cheating sommelier's punishment is having to live with the consequences of his actions or some similarly altruistic notion, you're absolutely right! In this case, it just so happens that the consequences are an epic trip to France, so you can be sure he's living just fine.

I'd say that rather than letting this secret fester, you should inform the organizers of what you witnessed so they can run a more fair competition next year.

Best,
Good Somm

BAD SOMM

Dear Do Snitches Really Get Stitches?

Cheating is human nature. People do it in business, sports, and politics, so why wouldn't they in wine as well? The real question here isn't "Should you snitch or not?"—it's "Why are you competing in these ridiculous competitions and torturing yourself?" If you're truly a good somm, you could organize your own trip with plenty of freebies along the way.

I got into the wine business at a time when there were no Court, Masters, "pins," and competitions, so memorizing flashcards for a test doesn't impress me. Instead, why not take two somms of a similar weight class, place them in an empty fermentation tank, and have them battle it out using nothing but corkscrews and the jagged handles of broken decanters as weapons? That contest would result in some stitches a somm could be proud of!

Yours,
Bad Somm



PHOTO: RITYPE VIA ADOBE STOCK

Dear Good Somm/Bad Somm,

I recently heard robots may soon take the places of line cooks and waiters. Could sommeliers be next on the automation hit list?

Sincerely,
No Domo Arigato Mr. Roboto

Good Somm

Dear No Domo Arigato Mr. Roboto,

You're not alone in your fears. AI is certainly gaining ground not only in the manufacturing sector, as it has been for years, but in service as well. Automation has the potential to change the way we do business at every level of society. Who's to say a robot couldn't be taught to smell and taste wine, deciphering soil types and varietals by the chemical compounds present in any given glass? Or, at the very least, retrieve, open, and pour a bottle?

That being said, I do think the sommelier position can withstand the onslaught for the foreseeable future, as it seems diners still enjoy the excitement and relatability of human interaction. That's our edge!

Best,
Good Somm

BAD SOMM

Dear No Domo Arigato Mr. Roboto,

If the "excitement of human interaction" is our last remaining edge over a robot-somm apocalypse, I'd say we're doomed! Judging by the many aloof sommeliers I've encountered recently, we'd better pray a guaranteed minimum income system is established in our country quicker than a Champagne cork goes *pop!* 🍾

Yours,
Bad Somm

This column is a parody and does not reflect the views of The SOMM Journal. Follow the columnists at @goodsombadsomm on social media and visit their page at goodsombadsomm.com.

SOME HAVE WELL GUARDED
TRADE SECRETS

WE JUST CALL THEM
FAMILY TRADITIONS



HERZOG LINEAGE

NINE GENERATIONS
OF PATIENT WINEMAKING

Food Halls Meet Their Match

WHEN IT COMES TO DIVERSE DRINKING EXPERIENCES, THE MILE HIGH CITY RUNS DEEP

by Ruth Tobias



PHOTO: RYAN DEARTH

One of 15 cocktails available to order at Milk Market's MOO Bar.

WHY GO ON A BAR CRAWL when the bar crawl can come to you? In the last installment of this column in the June-July issue, we explored Zeppelin Station as the first food hall in Denver to house not one but two cocktail lounges; now, two *more* multi-concept destinations, Milk Market and BOOZ hall, have opened to further expand the city's variety of drinking venues clustered under one roof.

One of the city's best-known chef-restaurateurs, Frank Bonanno, is the mastermind behind Milk Market. Located in the LoDo neighborhood's Dairy Block building, the ambitious project houses 16 food-and-beverage stations, including a butcher's counter, scoop shop, coffeehouse-bakery, and pizzeria in addition to three watering holes.

Anchoring the emporium is MOO Bar, which Beverage Director Adam Hodak says he "built around beautiful cocktails that aren't simple but are simply executed." He believes "when upwards of 4,000 guests are coming in a day," they're not there for an intimate, bespoke experience; instead, "they care about a drink in their hand" while they soak up the scenery. As a result, MOO Bar's list features a mix of prebatched and easy-to-make concoctions featuring Colorado spirits, as well as what Hodak calls "soon-to-be classics"—like the Amo Ambra with tequila, ginger liqueur, passion-fruit, lemon, and habanero tincture—that are a bit more elaborate.

Across the way, the Cellar wine bar offers, in Hodak's words, "that retail feeling in a restaurant setting" with 20 offerings on tap and a Coravin device. Thirty-plus bottlings are also available for purchase "at basically retail pricing" (Colorado law doesn't allow off-premise sales in on-premise contexts, but it does allow consumers to take opened bottles home). There's also Stranded Pilgrim, a taproom pouring 20 Colorado beers and ciders on draft, several of them exclusive to Milk Market.

For added convenience, Hodak has curated beverage selections for many of the stalls. Take Bao Chica Bao, where you can order a variety of savory Chinese buns alongside kegged sake and Japanese wheat beer, or Lou's Hot & Naked, which serves up fried chicken to pair with whiskey and nitro bourbon cider: "It just gives you some flexibility" if you're unable to make multiple stops, Hodak explains.

As for BOOZ hall, it's exactly what it sounds like. This warren of tasting rooms—five in all plus an arts-and-crafts gallery—in Denver's River North ("RiNo") neighborhood operates as a rotating showcase for distillers and winemakers who "really represent the state," says partner Josh Sampson. With tenants like certified-Biodynamic winery Jack Rabbit Hill Farm and agave distillery State-38, guests "can walk into this place and fall in love with [their] favorite Colorado brand," Sampson adds. A burgeoning live-music lineup and planned food-truck pod will make it even more of a party: Mile High-style. **SJ**



The 3 Hundred Days of Shine moonshine tasting room at BOOZ hall is run by Army veteran-turned-moonshine-maker Mike Girard.



The Cellar at Milk Market offers nearly 20 wines on tap.

PHOTO: RUTH TOBIAS

PHOTO: RYAN DEARTH



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* OUR LABORATORY WILL TEST BOTH THE WINE AND THE CORK TO DETERMINE IF TCA IS PRESENT AND AT WHAT LEVEL. IF WE FIND THE BOTTLE TO HAVE TCA PRESENT AT GREATER THAN 1,0 NG/L, CORK SUPPLY WILL REIMBURSE THE WINERY FOR THE RETAIL RELEASE PRICE OF THE WINE.

A Higher Culinary Consciousness

MAKING CONNECTIONS VIA THE **VESPERTINE** DINING EXPERIENCE

story and photo by Jessie Birschbach



Spot prawn, roe, and claytonia paired with fermented hibiscus juice at Vespertine in Culver City, CA.

“As awestruck as I was by the hospitality and the artful, exquisite cuisine, the pairings by Wine Director Terence Leavey completely stunned me.”

WHICHEVER GALAXY YOU'RE from, the universal consensus seems to be that Culver City newcomer Vespertine—which topped the late Jonathan Gold's “101 Best Restaurants in L.A.” list last year—ranks among the most otherworldly dining experiences in existence. A small but vocal group of dissenters feel differently, however, with some claiming it lacks soul and humanity with an atmosphere that skews toward science fiction. Even Gold stressed that Vespertine is not for everyone, and while I'm not a food critic, I'm here to respectfully and adamantly disagree.

When my wife and I dined there earlier this year armed with certain expectations after reading a slew of reviews, two things were clear: The first was that the “zombie-” or “alien-like” servers, as some critics have called them, were very much alive. And the second—perhaps where I'm most qualified to present an opinion—was that Vespertine offers one of the best pairing menus in the Los Angeles area.

Yes, our strikingly beautiful server was wearing green, shimmering lipstick, and she and every other Vespertinian seemed to suddenly materialize as they presented food to the guests. If they were aliens, though, they were far more gracious than most earthlings: Every soft-spoken description came with a warm smile and sincere delivery. I even found myself taking the extended hand of a stranger a few times as we changed locales over the course of the evening.

Another powerfully personal connection came from Chef Jordan Kahn himself. After greeting us with a gentle, welcoming handshake, he walked us through the impetus for his concept to help us understand what to expect from the experience. He also handwrote a birthday card to my wife, and it's worth noting I didn't have to hire a xenologist to translate the thoughtful message.

As awestruck as I was by the hospitality and the artful, exquisite cuisine, the pairings by Wine Director Terence Leavey completely stunned me. I strongly believe that in order to truly honor the connection between food and drink, you cannot rely on wine alone. Leavey adhered to this conviction while catering to the visual element as well: a difficult task he and his colleagues managed to achieve with flying colors.

With a new drink arriving with each of the many courses, the beverage lineup included a Junmai Ginjo sake, sparkling redwood juice, a Belgian pale ale beer, and some truly incredible wine selections. The color similarity between the spot prawn dish and fermented hibiscus juice was striking, with the latter's floral tang complementing the charred, sweet nutty flavor of the prawn. My personal favorite pairing, a 1998 Rouge Bandol served with turbot, black trumpets, and strawberries, was likely the most I've ever seen a red wine respect the gentle flavors of a mild, white fish. Their shared red-berry and aged-mushroom qualities sealed the union.

Accused too quickly of lacking soul, the restaurant managed to connect with mine on multiple levels as we dined and drank our way through the multi-storied venue. Maybe the naysayers should have opened their third eye a bit more. Vespertine isn't a spaceship: It's L.A.'s culinary cathedral. **SJ**

LA VIEILLE FERME

Sparkling



Milking It

EXPLORING THE INTRIGUING QUIRKS OF MOZZARELLA DI BUFALA

by Janet Fletcher

MOZZARELLA DI BUFALA has taught Americans you can indeed milk a buffalo, and now a wave of new water-buffalo cheeses is proving how versatile this unusual substance can be. Created largely in the last 15 years in Italy, these intriguing formaggi di bufala range from runny Brie-like wheels to pungent blues. Thanks to a handful of innovative creameries, it appears we're in the midst of a buffalo stampede.

Mind you, Italy's bufala—formally *Bubalus bubalis*, a domesticated bovine of Asian origin—is not the same creature that once roamed the American West. After these hulking, horned animals (which, according to historians, have been in the Campania region around Naples for centuries) were decimated by the Nazis during World War II, herds were re-introduced to Campania from India. When two brothers from Lombardy in northern Italy decided to keep *bufale* on their farm near Bergamo to produce original cheeses, debuting their first creations in 2006, the launch made national news. Even in Italy, nobody had made bufala cheese beyond mozzarella.

These cheeses are now distributed in the U.S. under the Quattro Portoni brand while additional creameries in Lombardy, Tuscany, and Campania have jumped on

the bufala bandwagon. The animals' output is stingy—6 to 7 quarts a day versus 9 gallons for a Holstein cow—but the rich milk contains more protein and calcium in addition to more than twice as much fat as cow's milk. Surprisingly, it also has significantly lower cholesterol.

A skilled cheesemaker can adapt water-buffalo milk to almost any recipe, from fresh ricotta to hefty aged wheels firm enough to grate. At least three California enterprises—Ramini Mozzarella, Double 8 Dairy, and Morsey's—are trying to maintain their own water-buffalo herds in the state, but the going is slow. In the meantime, you can add novelty and excitement to any cheese board with these bufala selections from Italy:

From Quattro Portoni (Lombardy):

Casatica, a 2-pound cheese in the shape of a flattened log, has a thin, bloomy rind and a moist and supple interior. Released at three to five weeks, it resembles the cow's-milk Stracchino. It's delicate and milky-sweet with aromas of yeast and mushroom.

With its washed rind, squishy texture, and square, pudgy shape, Quadrello is clearly in the Taleggio family. The scent is sublime—damp cave, mushroom, and cultured milk—

and the finish is tart and tangy. A tawny port accompanies it beautifully.

Blu di Bufala is completely original: a tall 9-pound block with a crusty natural rind and a modest amount of blue veining. The interior is semi-firm and creamy with scents of yeast, mushroom, and roasted nut. Serve with chilled dessert wine.

From La Casera (Piedmont):

A 9-ounce disk that tends to slump to the point of collapse at room temperature, Camembert di bufala should be served cool (not cold) to delay the meltdown. Its pronounced porcini aroma should make Pinot Noir a good match.

Bergamino di bufala is a 4-pound semi-soft square with a bloomy rind, delicately milky flavor, subtle mushroom scent, and bright acidity. It demands a fresh and light white wine such as Gavi or Arneis.

From La Maremmana (Tuscany):

A three-month-old farmstead wheel weighing 12–14 pounds, Grossetano is firm—even brittle—with a gamy lamb-chop aroma and tart, lemony flavor. Reserve this intriguing, highly savory cheese for sophisticated palates. Serve in chunks like Parmigiano-Reggiano. **S**



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{ bottom line }

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PHOTO: MARKER VIA ADOBE STOCK

It Takes A Village

BREAKING DOWN HOW RESTAURANT SOMMELIERS CAN PERFORM AT THEIR HIGHEST LEVEL by Randy Caparoso

THE DAYS OF sommeliers existing exclusively in a world of wine cellars, trade tastings, free lunches, and busman's holidays are quickly coming to pass . . . or have they already? Wine specialists represent such large investments for serious, profit-driven "wine restaurants" that many a sommelier's job description now entails far more than composing wine lists, tracking stock, polishing glasses, and popping bottles.

Today's sommeliers are more likely to play the role of floor managers, maitre d's, and staff trainers. They organize seating charts, post schedules, hire and fire, conceive and execute special events, write newsletters or blogs, update websites, open doors in the morning for the prep crew, and lock up when everyone else is gone for the night. It appears that in order to be valued, you increase your worth by doing *everything*.

I performed such quasi-manager/sommelier duties for more than 20 years, developing my own approach while borrowing best practices observed in other successful companies. Much of my

perspective has also been based on the notion that in order to guarantee future success for your restaurant—or even an orderly multi-unit expansion, the dream of many a chef/owner—your greatest chance of being successful comes when you train each and every staff member as if they'll eventually take over *your* job.

Staff members trained to their full potential, after all, possess an experienced skill set equal to (or even surpassing) our own. Individuals with a developed instinct for accountability and sense of urgency—that is, a *manager's* feel for urgency and accountability—are always the most dependable. If we want to get to a place where we can trust our staff to perform at their highest level, the best way to facilitate that is to give them opportunities to do exactly that: perform tasks reinforcing a manager's mentality with the exhaustive wine knowledge of a sommelier.

Your own credentials as a sommelier or manager, after all, are only as strong as your establishment's, and it takes an entire team of strong, driven individuals

to make a restaurant flourish. Among the ideas that can help establishments reach this goal:

- Composing a thorough staff "primer" on everything from standards and procedures of service to all the wine and food components pertinent to your restaurant's cuisine and wine program. This can then be tested at a 100 percent pass rate.
- Assigning individual one- or two-page reports on specific subjects applicable to your wine program or cuisine. They can then be copied for the entire staff or posted on an in-house information site.
- Compelling senior staff to participate in new training efforts and then rewarding them with perks, further responsibilities, and, when appropriate, promotions.
- Encouraging staff to attend trade tastings as well as file official reports on their findings. This can lead to tangible opportunities to contribute to the wine program, making it *theirs* as much as anyone's.
- Utilizing staff for inventory: What better way to learn where everything is while increasing accountability? ❏



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A Jewel in the Crown of the “King of Wines”

BAROLO’S MOST REGAL PRODUCER RELEASES A WINE TO CELEBRATE THE **FONTANAFREDDA MGA**

by David Gadd / photos by Margaret Pattillo



The new Fontanafredda Barolo DOCG Proprietà in Fontanafredda at Kingsley in New York City.

BAROLO’S DISTINCTION AS the “king of wines and the wine of kings” has a solid grounding in historical fact. Barolo is home to the royal house of Savoy, who became the rulers of a newly unified Italy in the mid-19th century. Among the properties in Barolo, Fontanafredda in Serralunga d’Alba best embodies the region’s royal patronage.

In 1858, the Savoyard King Vittorio Emanuele II purchased the Fontanafredda estate, a former hunting lodge, as a gift for his mistress, Rosina Vercellana. Six years later, he bought the adjacent vineyards to produce wine for his own personal use. The couple’s innovative children then later improved the Fontanafredda wine estate, making it one of the greatest names in Barolo.

As the estate celebrates its 160th anniversary this year, the 250-acre Fontanafredda Barolo cru property in Serralunga d’Alba is the largest contiguous wine estate in the Langhe. (Additional properties in the communes of Barolo and Diano d’Alba bring the total acreage of estate-owned land to 305.)

A Barolo “Monopole”

Aside from its size and royal history, an additional special distinction now marks the historic Fontanafredda estate. After Barbaresco (Barolo’s great rival in Piedmont) completed the classification of all of its crus in 2007, wines from those crus were allowed an MGA—Menzione Geografica Aggiuntiva (Additional Geographic Mention)—to identify the cru of origin.

Yet when the MGA system was introduced for Barolo in 2010, the transition proved a bit trickier than it was in Barbaresco. After some characteristically Italian head-butting among producers due to differences in communes, styles, and opinions about geographic delineation, the Barolo MGAs eventually fell into place. There are now 181 Barolo MGAs, 170 of which are single vineyards and 11 of which are communes. There is only one cru, however; that is both an estate and a vineyard: MGA Fontanafredda.

At an altitude of 200–315 meters above sea level and with a prevalently southwest-facing aspect, MGA Fontanafredda comprises 144 acres, with 37 adjacent acres planted to Nebbiolo for the production of Barolo. The MGA straddles a border between soils of Helvetian and Tortonian origin, resulting in transitional characteristics with clayey marls and layers of clayey sand.

Italian producers cannot legally use the term “monopole,” but MGA Fontanafredda is essentially a monopole by another name. (Monopoles are quite rare in Barolo: Bricco Boschis has been a monopole of Cavallotto since 1948; Pira has been a monopole of Roagna since 1989; and Brunella is a very recent monopole of Boroli.) The largest monopole in the Barolo appellation, MGA Fontanafredda is also the only cru in the Barolo appellation named after a single estate; having never changed hands, it’s been a monopole of Fontanafredda for its entire history.

Fontanafredda has taken advantage of these distinctions to release a special wine representing and celebrating its unique MGA: **Barolo DOCG Proprietà in Fontanafredda.**

The majority of the Nebbiolo used for this new Barolo is from the clone called Rosé, which Fontanafredda prefers due to its soft, floral, and elegant nature. In adherence to tradition, the vinification process involves long maceration followed by fermentation in stainless-steel vats at controlled temperatures. The new wine stays in contact with the lees for about one month, followed by two years of aging in medium and large oak casks and an additional 12 months in bottle before release.

The newest jewel in the crown, Barolo DOCG Proprietà in Fontanafredda joins the estate’s three other Barolos—the appellation-designated Fontanafredda Barolo, the commune-designated Barolo Serralunga d’Alba, and the single-vineyard Barolo La Rosa—as the newest testament to the qualities of this majestic Piedmont property. **SJ**

Fontanafredda is imported by Taub Family Selections—Esprit du Vin.

Game Plan: Fontanafredda at Kingsley in New York City

Chef Roxanne Spruance is a natural-born champ. Her not-quite-three-year-old Manhattan restaurant, Kingsley, was voted Best New Restaurant and Best American Restaurant by Zagat in 2017 and earned a Michelin rating two years in a row, becoming one of the hottest tickets in a town brimming with buzzworthy new venues.

The former Michigan State University field hockey recruit has sports in her blood, but her passion for food and wine is every bit as strong as her talent on the playing field. “My parents are crazy Francophiles,” Spruance explains, “so I grew up smelling corks.” As a kid, she tagged along to top-notch restaurants in her hometown of Chicago, befriending sommeliers and winding up with an unpaid apprenticeship at esteemed restaurant Blackbird at age 15. Later, her first wine list, put together for a suburban Chicago restaurant when she was 23, garnered a *Wine Spectator* Grand Award.

In 2010, Spruance hit the Big Apple running with a coveted chef-de-partie position at Wylie Dufresne’s WD-50, followed by a sous-chef gig at Blue Hill at Stone Barns and the Executive Chef post at Alison Eighteen. Opening her own restaurant was as natural for her as lobbing a goal: “I wanted to succeed on my own terms, not somebody else’s,” the chef says of Kingsley, which is also her middle name.

With her longstanding passion, the chef is also naturally the wine buyer for the restaurant, where she features Fontanafredda on the all-Northern Hemisphere list. “What I like about Fontanafredda is that it’s very terroir-driven, and our food is very terroir-driven as well,” she says. “I prefer wines that are unique and specific”—a natural fit for a chef who prefers locally sourced produce.

When Spruance first tasted the new Barolo from the Fontanafredda MGA, it hit a sweet spot. “The MGA is super cool,” she raves. “The wine is very different from the baseline Fontanafredda Nebbiolo. It’s got a dark color in the glass and is earthy on the palate with pronounced minerality, herbaceousness, and an unbelievable anise note. The oak is super velvety but with enough acid balance to make it work with lighter dishes as well as heavier ones.”

Spruance may have a mantle full of trophies, but the chef shows no sign of slowing down. Is cooking a contact sport? “One hundred percent!” Spruance says. “And you have a game every night.”



Kingsley Chef Roxanne Spruance with the Fontanafredda Barolo DOCG Proprietà in Fontanafredda.

{ what we're drinking }

PHOTO: KEITH ROSENTHAL

From India with Love

GLOBAL TASTES UNITE THROUGH J'NOON WINES,
THE NEWEST MEMBER OF THE BOISSET COLLECTION

by Christopher Sawyer

AS A SECOND-GENERATION owner of the winery his family established in Burgundy in 1961, French vintner Jean-Charles Boisset of Boisset Collection has always possessed a rare ability to push the envelope when it comes to increasing quality, innovation, and style.

Boisset first brought his skills to America 15 years ago with the purchase of Sonoma County's DeLoach Vineyards in 2003. With the implementation of Biodynamic and organic farming practices similar to those used at his family's extensive properties in Burgundy, he transformed the fading vineyards at the estate into some of the top Chardonnay and Pinot Noir sites in the Russian River Valley within a five-year period.

Before the first bottlings of the 2010 DeLoach Estate Chardonnay and Pinot Noir were released, Boisset launched a new series of vineyard-designate wines made with pristine fruit from Hawk Hill Vineyard, Maboroshi Vineyard, Ritchie Vineyard, and other esteemed sites in Sonoma County. Once these programs were established, Boisset expanded his interest in California with new acquisitions: Raymond



PHOTO: KEITH ROSENTHAL

Kindred souls: Kapil Sekhri of Fratelli Vineyards and Jean-Charles Boisset of Boisset Collection, the creators of J'NOON luxury Indian wines, attend the brand's U.S. launch at Raymond Vineyards in St. Helena, CA.

Vineyards in Napa Valley in 2009 and the historic Buena Vista Winery in Sonoma Valley in 2011. On the side, he also began developing a monogrammed series of JCB luxury wines made with grapes grown in both California and Burgundy.

Today, the Franco-American spirit of the Boisset Collection unites the old and new worlds of wine via 25 independent wineries on two continents, an international presence on store shelves, and inclusion on wine lists in 80 countries around the globe.



The Boisset Collection and Fratelli Vineyard connect France, California, and India through a trio of expressions: Sparkling JCB No. 47, J'NOON Red, and J'NOON White.

Introducing J'NOON

The newest addition to the Boisset Collection family is J'NOON, an ultra-premium luxury brand made with world-class grapes grown in India. The genesis of this ambitious project unfolded in 2015, when Boisset was introduced to Kapil Sekhri, co-founder of Indian winery Fratelli Vineyards.

Known for its high-quality releases, the winery is located in Akluj, a small town in the Solapur district of Maharashtra southeast of Mumbai. Fratelli's 240 acres of vineyards comprise French and Italian grape varieties planted on a mixture of sandy, rocky, and clay-based soils along the right bank of the Nira River. Inspired by the fusion of India's singular culture and beauty, Boisset and Sekhri's collaboration is the first of its kind to produce luxury wines on Indian soil which will then be marketed outside the country.

Named for the Urdu word for passion, "junoon," the collection encompasses 2,400 limited-edition bottles of red, white, and sparkling wines made with hand-picked grapes from the Fratelli estate vineyards. Boisset and his Sonoma County-based Director of Winemaking Brian Maloney, who joined the team the same year Boisset Collection acquired DeLoach Vineyards, oversaw the production of the finished blends. "The goal of the project is to capture the terroir of the site and the true flavors of India inside each bottle we

produce," says Maloney, who attended the official U.S. launch of the brand, hosted by Boisset and his wife Gina Gallo, in early June at Raymond Vineyards in St. Helena, California.

The JCB No. 47, an elegant sparkling wine, draws its name from the year India gained its independence: 1947. Made with 100 percent Chardonnay grown in the sandy soils of Motewadi, this single-vineyard gem is crafted in the *méthode traditionnelle* style, with the early stage of fermentation performed in French oak barrels and the second in bottle. The end result is an elegant wine with alluring aromas of green apple, citrus, fresh baked brioche, roasted nuts, and subtle spices. On the palate, deeper notes of tropical fruits, exotic melons, and minerals accent the tangy flavors as they lead to a long, dry finish.

In the still-wine category, the J'NOON White blends 60% Chardonnay and 40% Sauvignon Blanc grown in the sandy and rocky soils of Garwar. Aged for 12 months in a combination of French oak barrels and stainless-steel tanks, this captivating wine

features fragrant aromas alongside lively flavors of fresh stone fruits, poached pear, melon, lime, lemongrass, jasmine, wild sage, and honey. "We wanted to make sure the acidity was prominent and the spice was not overwhelming the mouth. After all, I'm a very sensitive Frenchman, so the ultimate goal of this wine is balance," Boisset says with a smile.

To cater to the rapid growth of red-wine consumption in the Indian market, the J'NOON Red is an intriguing proprietary blend of Cabernet Sauvignon, Sangiovese, Petit Verdot, and Marselan (a French hybrid of Grenache Noir and Cabernet Sauvignon). Dark, rich, and full-bodied, the finished wine exudes deep notes of wild berries, black currants, and cherry accented with nuances of fresh violets, dark chocolate, clove, cedar, and pipe tobacco.

As the wine opens up, abundant layers of fruit and spice are balanced with a smooth texture, well-integrated tannins, firm



Celebrating the inaugural release of J'NOON Wines with the brand's co-founders: Kapil Sekhri of Fratelli Vineyards (top) and Jean-Charles Boisset of Boisset Collections (center left).

structure, and a long, silky finish, making it a generous and harmonious pairing with spicy sauces and decadent Indian cuisine. "When we started, we all realized there will be many pages to this story and an evolution as the brand develops," Boisset says. "We are excited to be the audacious innovators to do this together." ❖

{ champagne }

A Tranquil Moment with Didier Depond

LUNCHING WITH THE PRESIDENT OF CHAMPAGNE HOUSES SALON AND DELAMOTTE

by Deborah Parker Wong

Didier Depond proudly displays a magnum of Champagne Salon.

IN A RARE TÊTE-À-TÊTE, *The SOMM Journal* joined Didier Depond, President of the Champagne houses Salon and Delamotte, for an effervescent lunch featuring their current releases at San Francisco's Piperade.

We began with the superbly chalky 2008 Delamotte, which hails from just six Grand Cru villages. The 100 percent Blanc de Blanc brims with texture and ripe gold-en-apple notes, and after observing the intensity of fruit on the mid-palate, I queried Depond on the risk climate change poses to the houses' iconic style. He was quite circumspect in his response: "The culture of the vineyards in Champagne relies on balance, and we will balance them with this shift." Despite more extreme weather events like the freak hailstorms earlier this year, warming temperatures in this marginal growing region may in fact work to

the advantage of Champagne producers.

Addressing the elephant in the room, we discussed the hotly debated expansion of the Champagne AOP area by an additional 5 percent. "Historically, these approved areas were under vine," Depond said. "And, despite what you've read, there is only minor dissent among the members of the CIVC [Le Comité Interprofessionnel du vin de Champagne]. I'm really very pleased." The additional area gives the AOP some breathing room, as demand and supply previously ran neck and neck.

Depond and I then tasted the 2007 Salon: The wine exudes liquid minerals at first taste, showing notes of fresh dough and caramelized salted butter—described by Depond as "caramel au beurre salé"—with a thread of delicate white peach. There's a singular sensation in the mouth that leaves lemon and lime zest clinging to

the lips, lengthening an innervated finish.

"The wine was decanted and held at temperature," said Depond, who advocates for letting Salon catch its breath for up to two hours before service. Caught off guard, I questioned his decision to forgo most of the bubbles, but he persisted and pointed out that I described the wine as "innervated" despite it being almost tranquil in the glass. "It was a very high compliment indeed when [Domaine de la Romanee-Conti co-director] Aubert de Villaine observed that we had made a very fine Burgundy," he added.

Well-known as a man of his word, Depond says the 2008 Salon—a relatively small vintage produced only in magnum—will release in late 2019 after both of his highly allocated brands made their way to the fine-dining scene in Malaysia earlier this year. **SJ**

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PHOTO: LEIF CARLSSON

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PHOTO COURTESY OF FREDERICK WILDMAN

La Scolca CEO Chiara Soldati runs the estate with her father Giorgio Soldati, the founder's great-grandson.

Game-Changing Gavi

EXPLORING **LA SCOLCA**, THE NAME BEHIND THE GRAPE'S ICONIC STATUS

by Albert Letizia

IN THE CENTURY since its founding, the La Scolca estate has not only pioneered Gavi, but has elevated Cortese to world-class standing. In addition to being the first winery to produce quality bottlings of the variety, La Scolca ranks among the most historic white-wine producers in Italy.

I recently dined with La Scolca CEO Chiara Soldati, the fifth-generation family member whose vivacious persona makes an impression as memorable as her wine. Indeed, Soldati devotes as much attention to what's in a bottle of La Scolca—which will officially celebrate its 100th anniversary next year—as she does to sculpting the label to adhere to its respected reputation, synonymous with luxury and *la dolce vita*.

When Soldati is not overseeing all aspects of production, she jet-sets the globe, diligently making sales calls and, in working her worldwide network, even hob-knobbing with celebrities. Her unwavering mission is to make La Scolca as admired as Masi is in the Veneto, Gaja is in Barbaresco,

or Antinori is in Tuscany.

Planted in the Roverta Superiore region of Gavi, the La Scolca estate serves as the Grand Cru for Cortese. The volcanic soils contains a mixture of calcareous-clay, iron, and chalky limestone similar to that of Champagne and Chablis, and that terroir is expressed beautifully in the glass.

Sourced from 20- to 30-year-old vines, the lively and refreshing 2016 La Scolca White Label Gavi DOCG displays zesty lemon, almond, and stone fruit notes with a long, clean finish. Similarly, as the ultimate expression of the Cortese grape, the famed Black Label Gavi DOCG is the result of decades of family winemaking tradition, as the bottling is sourced from estate vines more than 60 years old.

In addition to exhibiting intense lemon citrus fruit with floral and flinty Chablis-like notes on the nose, the 2016 vintage has a medium weight on the palate with apple, almonds, and hazelnuts. Yet what is truly beguiling is that this concentrated, complex

wine ages with magnificent grace.

During our meeting, Soldati shared three back vintages from her cellar: the 2013, 2009, and 1995 Black Labels. The youngest still offers fresh notes of honey, spices, and dried fruits even after five years in bottle, and the 2009 is equally impressive with considerable gunflint, spice, tart lemon, and apple. Thanks to its terrific vigor and nuance, it's even more impressive on the palate, yet the 1995 Black Label at 23 years old is particularly show-stopping, elegant, and beautifully mature: a stunning wine on par with any excellent aged white Burgundy or Chablis.

The grand finale of the La Scolca lineup is the D'Antan, produced only in the finest vintages and aged ten years on the lees in stainless steel preceding an additional two years in bottle before release. It's an intense and powerful wine that demonstrates the longevity of La Scolca as a game-changing Gavi producer. **RSJ**

La Scolca is imported by Frederick Wildman.

full circle beverage conference

Full Circle Beverage Conference is a wine and spirits conference held exclusively for 100 retail and restaurant wine buyers, sommeliers, and journalists. This year's program will take place on September 5 - 7 at the trendy and modern W Hotel in San Francisco.

The three-day conference is a wonderful networking opportunity and will showcase wines and spirits from around the world in 15 educational master classes, workshops, lunches and breakout sessions led by an esteemed team of Master Sommeliers and Masters of Wine: Evan Goldstein, Doug Frost, Tim Gaiser, Keith Goldston, Peter Granoff, John Szabo and Madeline Triffon. Additional guest speakers include Wine & Spirits Magazine's Regional Editor and author of the acclaimed South American wine guide Descorchados, Patricio Tapia, and global amphora and Georgian wine expert, Lisa Granik MW.

Don't miss the **Full Circle Around the World Tasting** on Thursday, September 6, featuring a global selection of over 300 wines curated by Master Sommelier Evan Goldstein.

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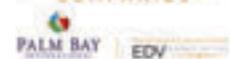
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{ new developments }

SEQUOIA GROVE WINERY,
ONE OF NAPA VALLEY'S PREMIER
PRODUCERS, DOUBLES DOWN
ON ITS FUTURE



PHOTO COURTESY OF SEQUOIA GROVE

vision + PASSION

by Michelle Ball

The *Weimer Clone* is a Samsonite, or suitcase, clone considered to be from Lafite. Rare and exotic, it's one of Sequoia Grove Winemaker Molly Hill's favorites for its intense wild-berry and floral aromas.

The *Healy Clone*, which exudes chocolate notes, comes from a vineyard next to the Spottswoode winery in St. Helena.

Clones 685 and 412 were planted per the suggestion of Andrew Walker, a renowned professor in the Viticulture and Enology Department at the University of California, Davis.

The Tonella estate vineyard contains a variety of soils that range from rocky red volcanic to bale clay loam on the western side. Here, 11 Cabernet Sauvignon clones are planted on four rootstocks. They include the following: 039-16, Schwartzman, 101-14, and 1616C.

PHOTO: JEREMY BALL

Sequoia Grove Winery has upped its game. Located on the gravelly soils of the Rutherford Bench, one of Napa Valley's premier producers of Cabernet Sauvignon is entering a new chapter:

Established in 1979, the family-owned winery is driven by a dedicated team of artisans who strive for constant improvement. That passion—paired with significant investments in farming, a new state-of-the-art winemaking facility, and immersive visitor experiences—only adds to the brand's already prestigious reputation for quality.

Sequoia Grove also recently welcomed Rick Bonitati, formerly of Paul Hobbs Winery, to help guide the future of the estate as its new President. "We're continuing to elevate quality wherever we can," Bonitati says. In this case, that focus starts in the vineyard.

QUALITY OF FRUIT *Comes First*

Over the years, Sequoia Grove has made substantial efforts to advance the vitality of its vines. The original Sequoia Grove estate vineyard, known as the best terroir in the region for growing Cabernet, was replanted in the 1990s, with careful attention given to matching the soil type to the proper rootstock and clone. One of those clones, unidentified at the time, eventually came to be considered Sequoia Grove's "special ingredient": Fondly called the Sequoia Grove Clone, it's now officially known as Cabernet Sauvignon Clone 29.

In 2006, the winery secured the Tonella Estate in Rutherford and replanted the 50-acre vineyard with 17 clonal-rootstock combinations. "The combination of a compelling site with the right clones and rootstocks yields the unique flavor characteristics of the terroir," explains Winemaker Molly Hill. From a sensory perspective, clone choice has greater influence over the wine's aromas and flavor profile while the rootstock affects the mouthfeel and texture. This diversity of clonal-rootstock combinations compels Hill to vinify each block separately before carefully blending them to produce elegant, balanced wines.

The estates are tended to by Vineyard Manager Jake Terrell, a recognized leader in green viticulture. One of his primary goals for Cabernet Sauvignon is achieving physiological ripeness at balanced sugar levels, yielding wines with greater depth of flavor and a lower alcohol content. Terrell works diligently to accomplish this through precise canopy and cover-crop management on a block-by-block basis.

For example, in more vigorous areas, he maintains a permanent cover crop that helps mitigate vine vigor by heightening competition and decreasing the available nitrogen. In blocks that need more nitrogen, Terrell includes nitrogen-fixing plants like sweet peas and vetch in the mix. Come May, the cover crop is mowed and quickly tilled into the soil to add nutrients, while every other row maintains a permanent cover crop in a system that's rotated every four years.

But what exactly does this approach do for the wine? Terrell



PHOTO: JEREMY BALL

Sequoia Grove Winemaker Molly Hill in the winery's Tonella Estate vineyard.

explains that a healthy, green canopy will actively ripen the fruit throughout harvest, achieving phenolic ripeness as opposed to the mere increase in sugar levels that occurs when vines begin to lose their leaves and the grapes dry. It's a labor-intensive approach that requires commitment, as it increases short-term costs and can take up to four years to bring results; the vines, however, will be healthier in the long term. With this "holistic vision" to guide them, Terrell says, Sequoia Grove can "really can farm the way we should be farming."

IN THE WINERY: *Temperature and Time*

Hill is known for her skillful touch and attention to detail in the cellar. She joined Sequoia Grove in 2003 as an Assistant Winemaker, and after proving her skill and expertise in the vineyards and cellar, Hill was later promoted to Winemaker in 2008.

For Hill, temperature and time are the two most significant winemaking tools available: Key decisions include how cool or how hot the fermentation should be, how long it should take, and how much time the fruit should spend on the skins. In the new winemaking facility, she has the space and equipment—including a multitude of tanks in varying sizes along with automatic pump-overs—to execute her tasks more efficiently and address the needs of each lot without feeling pressured to make room for the next incoming pick.

Regarding fermentation temperature, Hill says she takes a lot-by-lot approach. "I don't have one overarching style," she continues. "For me, it's based on the feeling of the vintage and the feeling of what we're trying to express from the site."

Over the years, Hill has experimented with various oak sources



Executive Chef Britny Maureze runs Sequoia Grove's first in-depth culinary program.



A beef-centric dish created by Executive Chef Britny Maureze to pair with the Sequoia Grove Cabernet Sauvignon.

and barrel coopers to highlight the individual nuances of each separately vinified vineyard block. After relentlessly evaluating the results of her trials, she determined that barrels from France married best with the quality of fruit, resulting in a transition over time to 100 percent French oak barrels. Hill emphasizes that while she's proud of the wines she made with American oak, she feels the switch will help her meet her

vision for enhancing complexity and quality at every price point. "That's the Napa Valley way in general: to continue to push the envelope," Hill says.

Though Hill is excited to christen the new winemaking facility this harvest, she says she also looks forward to testing out other aspects of the renovation, including the new rooms for individualized and customized guest experiences. "No matter what we're trying to achieve, the renovations and upgrades have provided our team with tools for us to succeed—be it winemaking, cooking, or [working] in the front of the house," says Hill. "To me, that speaks volumes about what Sequoia Grove stands for."

These curated guest experiences will feature an exploration of Cabernet Sauvignon as a food-pairing wine. With the development of the winery's first in-depth

PHOTOS COURTESY OF SEQUOIA GROVE



PREMIUM NAPA VALLEY CABERNET *By the Glass*

Sequoia Grove Winemaker Molly Hill crafts a Napa Valley Cabernet Sauvignon that's artistically expressive of the region as a whole. By blending various lots from exceptional vineyard sources primarily in the Rutherford AVA, the winery achieves a premium wine at an exceptional value.

Matt Ramos, Beverage Manager at Kayne Prime, a boutique steakhouse in Nashville, Tennessee, has been serving Sequoia Grove Cabernet Sauvignon by the glass since the 20-year industry veteran started at the restaurant four years ago. The wine's high-quality appellation pedigree and price have made it a staple he says guests ask for by name. "We look at Sequoia Grove as our more tannic, complex, textured wine. So, when we're describing the differences [between by-the-glass Cabs] to our guests, which is a very common question, Sequoia Grove is the one that has the tannin structure that a steakhouse lover is looking for," Ramos explains.

He adds the wine also strikes the perfect balance of "that Napa fruit" with the complexity and tannin structure "people have come to love in Cabernet." Although steak and Cabernet go



PHOTO: MATT RAMOS

Beverage Director Matt Ramos of Kayne Prime in Nashville, TN, relies on Sequoia Grove for a structured Cabernet Sauvignon option by the glass.

together like bread and butter, Ramos digs deeper to reveal the nuances of the pairing. Kayne Prime's steak options are split evenly between soft, buttery wagyu and half dry-aged USDA Prime, and Ramos says "a lot of times Sequoia Grove



PHOTO: BENJAMIN RUSNAK

Head Sommelier Jose Garcia at The Biltmore Hotel in Miami, FL, praises the "dusty factor" found in Sequoia Grove's Cabernet Sauvignon.

works better with the USDA Prime cuts." "Because of the meat's fattiness and charred flavors, USDA dry-aged steaks pair really well with tannin from a bolder wine," he explains. "That's what Sequoia Grove represents for us."



A fireplace warms the newly renovated visitor's center at Sequoia Grove Winery.

culinary program under the direction of newly appointed Executive Chef Britny Maureze, the opportunity to share the optimal pairings of Cabernet Sauvignon and curated cuisine is a compelling frontier for the team.

"I'm excited to help lay the groundwork for a truly special portfolio of culinary experiences that will be sure to distinguish us as one of the most memorable properties for those visiting Napa Valley," Maureze says. "Wine and food go hand in hand, and by presenting Cabernet Sauvignon to guests in an educational culinary setting, they will leave the winery with a firm understanding of how to experience Sequoia Grove wines at home."

STRIVING FOR *Better*

Bonitati says the Sequoia Grove team constantly pushes each another to ask, "How can we do better?" This enthusiasm for the future is clear with every encounter at the winery, and with the renovation nearly complete, Bonitati, Hill, Terrell, and other employees are focused on ensuring Sequoia Grove is regarded as a benchmark Napa Valley estate in the years to come.

As Hill puts it, "You can have the best grapes in the world, the best facility, and the best barrels, but if you do not have a team that is passionate, committed, enthusiastic, and knowledgeable enough to do what needs to be done, you're not going to be where you want to be at the end of the day. I think that we have that team, and I'm excited about our future." ❧

At The Biltmore Hotel in Miami, Florida, Head Sommelier Jose Garcia has served Sequoia Grove's Cabernet Sauvignon and Chardonnay by the glass since he was first introduced to the wines in 2014. Right away, he developed an appreciation for the estate's philosophy of focusing on the vineyards first and allowing them to shine in the glass: Garcia says that because most of his guests prefer Napa Valley wine, "they find in Sequoia Grove the characteristics they love." "They love the fruit and the terroir, especially Rutherford," he adds. "In my own experience with Rutherford, I love the dusty factor, which reminds me of Bordeaux."



Above left, William Lewis, Managing Partner at The Winery Restaurant in La Jolla, CA, finds Sequoia Grove very approachable in its youth. Above right, bacon venison wrapped with cocoa-espresso spaetzle in a blackberry-sage reduction "brings out the fruit in the wine [while] the tannins assist in the breakdown of the lean meat," Lewis says.



PHOTOS: ALAN DE HERRERA



Seared duck breast with duck confit, rhubarb, hibiscus gastrique, duck jus, and potato soufflé masterfully prepared by Chef Gregory Pugin of Palme d'Or, a French restaurant at The Biltmore Hotel in Miami, FL.

PHOTO: BENJAMIN RUSNAK

Meanwhile, at The Winery Restaurant in La Jolla, California, Managing Partner William Lewis has been a firm believer in the label for more than 20 years. "I was introduced to it through Morton's Steakhouse when I started there in 1995—the wine has always had a great quality-to-value ratio," Lewis says, adding that he also finds it very smooth and approachable in its youth. "Molly [Hill] has made Napa better and Napa Cabernet Sauvignon better. She's really raised the quality of the wines."

TASTING NOTES

2016 Napa Valley Chardonnay (\$28) Harvested between 21–24 Brix, this wine is zesty with aromas of lemon peel, Asian pear, and lemongrass. On the palate, it's silky yet vibrant as crisp citrus flavors layer with hints of cardamom.

2015 Napa Valley Cabernet Sauvignon (\$40) Long, silky texture with vibrant purple fruit and fuzzy mocha tannins. Approachable and ready to drink in its youth, but built to age.

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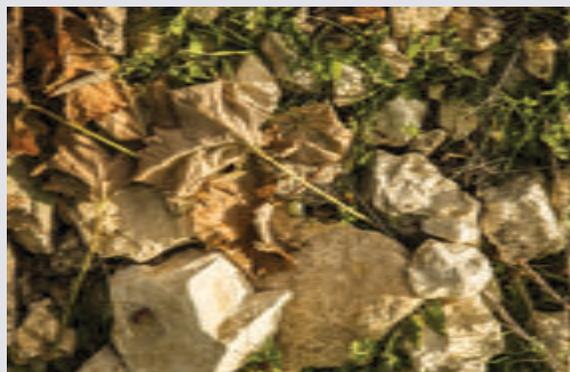
Native yeast-fermented Sancerre and Pouilly-Fumé define the character—and the category—of Pascal Jolivet's wines.

PASCAL JOLIVET'S SAUVIGNON BLANCS REFLECT THE LOIRE VALLEY'S VIVID EXPRESSIONS OF SANCERRE AND POUILLY FUMÉ

by Meredith May

AFTER TASTING THROUGH more than a dozen examples of thrilling white wines—their acidity like a whip, a tightrope, and a fine thread weaving and sparking on the tongue—you begin to understand the nature of Domaine Pascal Jolivet.

Winemaker Valentina Buoso joined Jolivet in 2013 after accumulating years of experience in Italy, California, Chile, Oregon, Australia, and New Zealand. She says she considers herself “passive” when it comes to her signature style, meaning she allows the fruit to develop its own natural potential and avoids the use of both chemicals to clarify the juice or cultured yeast to activate fermentation. “A shared philosophy was clear when [founder Pascal Jolivet] and I first met,” she admits. “We have the same points of view concerning the respect of nature and the grape—we like to make wine with the aim to allow the terroir to express itself.”



Limestone soils and calcareous rocks line the terrain of the Les Caillottes vineyard.



Valentina Buoso serves as the Winemaker for Domaine Pascal Jolivet. With a bachelor's degree in viticulture and enology, she wrote a thesis on the molecular characterization of wild yeast: a topic close to Jolivet's heart.

Jolivet established the winery in 1987 in the Loire Valley, where the domaine owns more than 120 acres of prime vineyards spread across the appellations of Sancerre and Pouilly-Fumé. According to Jolivet, Buoso's extensive knowledge of indigenous yeasts heightens the fruit character, elegance, and precision of the wines. "Valentina is a perfectionist and focuses on the quality of the juices coming from the organic grapes of our vineyards," says Jolivet, who practices Biodynamic winemaking. "As a result, the wines are fruit-focused, which perfectly integrates with the natural acidity and the magic of nature I am trying to grab when making the wines."



"We like to make wine with the aim to allow the terroir to express itself."

Tasting the 2017 Vintage

A complicated and early vintage in the Loire, the 2017 harvest began in early September and saw a 50 percent decrease in Pouilly-Fumé production over 2016; Sancerre, meanwhile, was down 20 percent from the previous year. The harvest showed promise despite a heat wave in June, and on a positive note, the vintage displays fine acidity and generous fruit despite quantity being lower than expected.

Here are our top picks after tasting through the line:

Domaine Pascal Jolivet 2017 Sancerre

(\$29) is sourced from three vineyards in the heart of the appellation with altitudes between 650–1,300 feet above sea level. The Les Caillottes vineyard proffers chalky soils; the Les Terres Blanches vineyard is a hilly site with compact chalk atop marl; and the Silex is punctuated with limestone and flint. The resulting acidity is cut like glass with notes of grass and lime wedge. **93**



Domaine Pascal Jolivet 2017 Sancerre Rosé (\$23) offers a sensationally clean nose and silky mouthfeel. Underlying notes of rhubarb, watermelon, and a hint of tarragon make this 100 percent Pinot Noir a standout. It's fermented in stainless steel. **92**

Domaine Pascal Jolivet 2017 Pouilly-Fumé (\$30) is sourced from 20 acres in three separate vineyards owned by Jolivet. The soils range from glacial to calcareous to clay-siliceous. Flinty and lean, white flowers surge with a chalky mouthfeel. Powdered lemon is on the nose and palate, engineering the acidity to high definition. **93**



Domaine Pascal Jolivet 2017 Pouilly-Fumé Les Terres

Blanches (\$41) is from a clay- and limestone-based single vineyard owned by Jolivet and located on the northeast side of the appellation. White chocolate and orange blossom present as the key perfumes on the nose and palate as searing acidity moderates the rich mouthfeel. Just-ripened pineapple, grass, and herbs are complex and make for a palate-refreshing white. **96**

Domaine Pascal Jolivet 2017 Les Caillottes (\$41) is achingly lean with a chalky mouthfeel and rigid acidity. However, any tenseness found from the minerals and acid is abated through a mid-palate of pears, peach, and apricot with a hint of anise. It's energetic with immense ageworthy abilities. **96**

Domaine Pascal Jolivet 2017 Sancerre Le Chêne Marchand (\$46) reflects the beauty of the due-south exposure site where its Sauvignon Blanc grapes are grown. Serious yet willowy, this powerful expression remains refined with notes of orange peel, matcha green tea, and grapefruit arise. Wet stone attaches to the palate and zings on the finish. **97** 



The challenging 2017 vintage proved a stunner for Domaine Pascal Jolivet: elegant white wines with roundness attached to fresh acidity and reds with lovely blue-floral and red-fruit tones.

Universal Declaration

REVIEWING PORT FROM THE 2016 VINTAGE

VINTAGES IN PORTUGAL'S Douro region are “universally declared” two to four times a decade when the quality of the harvest is perceived as being as good as it can be. This rule has to be respected, for the wines are deemed to improve for decades in the purchaser's cellar.

The 2016 vintage is only the second general declaration this decade after 2011, so when I attended a May tasting focused on that year's releases from The Fladgate Partnership, Symington Family Estates, and Quinta do Noval, I was very impressed indeed. According to the tasting book: “In the Douro Valley, no two vintages are ever alike and for the 2016s the keynotes are refinement and harmony. With all their elements in perfect alignment, the wines show exceptional balance and poise.”

Fladgate Partnership CEO Adrian Bridge acknowledged that the company placed the 2016s alongside such classic vintages as 1846, 1896, 1906, and 1966, while Charles Symington merely stated that “these are the best Vintage Ports that [he has] ever made.”

For such quality, the prices are reasonable—around £50 a bottle in bond. I have not added a drinking window to my accompanying tasting notes, but the general opinion is that these wines will be ready in ten years (as opposed to 20 in the past) and stay the course for at least two more decades. This is ideal, as a bottle of vintage Port is meant to be kept in pleasurable anticipation for years and then enjoyed around a table for a memorable end to any meal.

Taylor Fladgate

Lots of depth; exceptionally well-balanced with typical Quinta de Vargellas grip on the finish, yet with more grace than usual. **97**

Fonseca

Rich and deep with all the exuberance and spice of Fonseca compared to the firm restraint of Taylor; purity and structure indicate a long life. **96**

Croft

Lots of lush yet firm fruit; dense with very ripe tannins, this is a totally “British” Port with a floral touch present through notes of violets. **93** SYMINGTON FAMILY ESTATES

Graham's

Dense and rich with the habitually seductive Graham's fruit character; both floral and fleshy with ripeness, structure, and hints of dark chocolate; almost too good to wait for, but waiting is essential due to the length and complexity. **97**

Dow's

Fragrant and lifted nose; opposite to the richness of Graham's, it's fresh and even lean with a typically dry Dow's style. The violet notes from schist-based soil will show very well, making this a match for the superb 2011. **96**

Warre's

The charmer from the Symington portfolio; lovely taffeta nose with great purity and lift; slightly restrained and perfectly balanced with a good grip. **93**

Cockburn's

Lovely floral character and solid grip from 62% Touriga Nacional, but not over-



balanced; with hints of ginger and clove preceding the most elegant finish, this is an exceptional release. **96**

Quinta do Vesuvio

From one of the Douro's historical estates, Vesuvio has been bottled on its own for some years. This shows why: It's big but not massive with a “garriguey” Mediterranean nose, lots of flesh in the middle, and a muscular grip on the finish. **95**

Quinta do Noval

Full, rich, and very pure black fruit conjures blackberries with dark chocolate. Smooth and spicy with a lovely texture, it's a classic Noval, whose single vineyard always stands out. **95**

Quinta do Noval Nacional

From a 5-hectare plot of ungrafted vines; dense colour with equally dense yet floral fruit; abundant elegance and lift make this a vineyard wine of stunning quality. **98** SJ



In each issue, the editorial team at *The SOMM Journal* will deliberate through wine submissions and release final judgment on select wines that garnered scores of at least 90 points. The “journey” will also feature an esteemed guest sommelier.

The 100-Point Scores from the Côte d'Or

PHOTOS: JEREMY BALL



The inimitable Jean-Charles Boisset.

WE FOUND PERFECT BALANCE IN BURGUNDY-BORN JCB SPIRITS

THE JOURY WAS just minutes into tasting Jean-Charles Boisset's newest spirits project, JCB Spirits, when we reached our unanimous verdict: giving all three a weighty sentence of 100-point scores.

Hand-harvested, sustainably farmed grapes—mostly Demeter certified Biodynamic—from Boisset's estate vineyards in Burgundy make up the blend of Chardonnay and Pinot Noir used as the base spirit for three vodkas and one gin. It's a 15-year project for Jean-Charles, whose Boisset Collection includes more than 25 wineries and vineyards throughout Burgundy and California. “We had the luxury of time—we never rushed to make this,” Boisset told *The SOMM Journal*. “The wait has been so exciting, because it's finally released!”

After the varieties were fermented separately, the grapes aged for six months in barrel before blending, then rested an additional two months for the flavors to meld before distillation. The base spirit was distilled seven times and then filtered four times, resulting in its preternatural, silky mouthfeel. There's no vintage designation, but these inaugural, small-production releases originated from Burgundy's 2012 harvest.



JCB Gin (\$125)

is enhanced by the native flora that grows in the Biodynamically farmed vineyard gardens on the Boisset property. Dandelion, chamomile, lemon

balm, and more than 40 other botanicals (including 30 organic plants) are infused into this London Dry-style gin. Essence of sunflower, lilacs, and verbena come to life on the nose as the liquid, dotted with white pepper and caper berries, melts across the palate. Violets thread through the herbs for a spring-garden effect throughout. **100**



JCB Truffle Vodka (\$150)

is a true Earth Mother. More forest than garden, the Périgord black truffles infused into the base spirit bring out umami notes

that evoke a savory tonality. On the nose, magnolia and blue lilac come through with a lushness so broad that we took some time for reverie before the first sip. Despite the whisper of truffle, jasmine, rose petals, blueberry, and vanilla caramel all shine through on the lengthy, voluptuous palate. **100**



JCB Caviar Vodka (\$150)

We've ventured from garden to forest and now to the sea, where this vodka captures *merroir*, or marine terroir. Aromas of anise and cocoa

warm the nose, and there is a definite, resplendent scent of sea breeze guiding the way to the deeper palate flavors. Creamy licorice coats the tongue, dark chocolate brings a hint of saltiness, and tobacco leaf emerges boldly on the finish. It's easy to see this spirit is blessed by a unique infusion of ingredients: Caviar, Chardonnay, and Pinot Noir may have been a concoction conceived by Neptune himself. **100**



Maya and Naoko Dalla Valle of Dalla Valle Vineyards.

Cult-ivated

THE STORY BEHIND DALLA VALLE VINEYARDS' CELEBRATED STATUS

Since Naoko Dalla Valle and her late husband Gustav first acquired the land for Dalla Valle Vineyards in 1982, a considerable amount of winemaking history has unfolded on this 20-acre hillside vineyard.

Planted at elevations up to 450 feet above sea level on the eastern hillsides of Oakville, California, and officially founded as a winery in 1986, Dalla Valle has rested in the hands of some of Napa Valley's most preeminent winemakers, including Heidi Barrett and Tony Soter. Under the leadership of Winemaker Andy Erickson, Consulting Winemaker Michel Rolland and Vineyard Manager Edgar Alfaro—with their shared desire for viticulture and winemaking—produce wine rivaling the prestige often reserved for the great First Growths.

Since Gustav died in 1995, Naoko has earned a reputation for guiding the winery to legendary status for the sheer quality of its Cabernet Sauvignon and Cabernet Franc. In 2017, Naoko's daughter Maya became Dalla Valle's Director; armed with a master's degree in enology from Cornell University, she also earned a master's in vineyard and winery management from Bordeaux Sciences Agro.

The Dalla Valle Vineyards 2014 Cabernet Sauvignon from Napa Valley (\$200) was tasted now for this review, but it will thrive beautifully for 10–15 years. Impassioned with a wave of luxurious red and black fruit, it's voluminous with round tannins. This textural beauty's acidity imparts a balance of spice and grilled meat with a wave of dark chocolate, anise, and blue flowers. **99**



The Dalla Valle Vineyards 2014 Cabernet Sauvignon.

Lucky Number 13

RECOGNIZING THE BENNETT VALLEY AVA

Bennett Valley, a gently sloping, elevated valley located just southeast of Santa Rosa, is Sonoma County's 13th appellation. Situated between three mountain peaks, it features well-drained mountain benchland soils, volcanic rock, early morning fog, a long growing season, and cool marine breezes flowing from the Sonoma Coast and San Pablo Bay.

As one of Sonoma's smaller appellations, the Bennett Valley AVA is planted to less than 1,000



Westerhold Family Vineyards proprietors John Westerhold and Sharon Bauman.

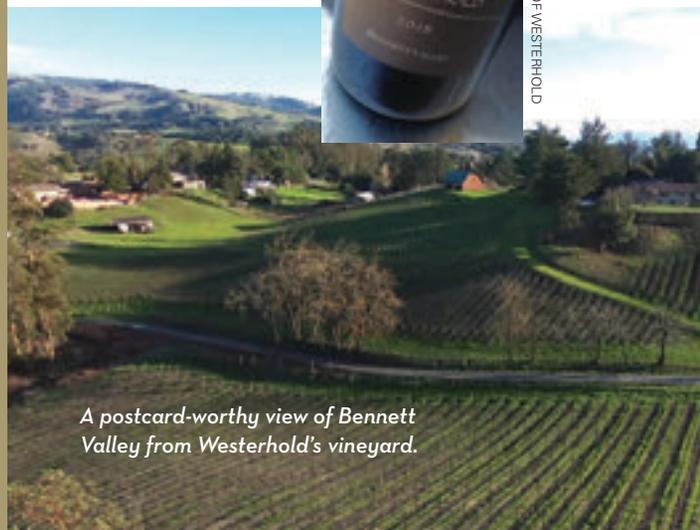
acres of vines primarily by family-owned grower brands; only one winery, Matanzas Creek, is open to the public. We recently tasted three wines from the region that piqued our interest.

The Westerhold Family Vineyards 2015 Pinot Noir from Bennett Valley (\$52) comes from a drought vintage. The grapes' thick, protective skins help produce a dense, unctuous texture: a mouthfeel that creates

a common thread in the three wines we tasted from the area.



PHOTO COURTESY OF WESTERHOLD



A postcard-worthy view of Bennett Valley from Westerhold's vineyard.

Winemaker Russell Bevan created a densely delicious red, deep and dark-hued with a nose of peppered plum and earth tones. Red velvet cake is a flavor characteristic of this wine. **95**

Bennett Valley Winemaker Jesse Katz, meanwhile, draws inspiration from his time spent in Bordeaux, where he tasted some of the best Sauvignon Blancs of his life. He was determined to create his label, Aesthete, as a tribute and even shipped barrels home from Bordeaux that were made especially for Haut-Brion Blanc.

Dry Stack Vineyard, with its marine clay-loam soils, is located on the eastern slope of Mount Taylor at 550 feet above sea level. The inaugural vintage of Aesthete 2016 Dry Stack Vineyard Sauvignon Blanc comes from an even ripening season, which Katz describes as “one of the most exciting vintages we’ve captured.”



“This is one of California’s finest examples of this Italian clone of Sauvignon Blanc planted in these gravelly, loamy soils,” Aesthete Winemaker Jesse Katz says of the Dry Stack Vineyard.



Aesthete 2016 Sauvignon Blanc, Dry Stack Vineyard, Bennett Valley (\$55)

The barrel program is evident in this weighty white. Perfumed tropical fruit creates a waft of summer pineapple, white tea, and gardenia, for starters. On

the palate, spiced melons and lemons develop floral characteristics. At mid-palate, the viscosity spreads to a creamy array of peach tart with a hint of salinity on the bright finish. **94**



Before temperatures dip below freezing during the winter months, Frostwatch Winery co-owner Brett Raven bundles up and heads outside to activate a frost-control system for the vines. Depending on the conditions, he will use either cold air drains or overhead microjet sprinklers that put just enough water on the vines to prevent damage. Pictured above are fruiting spurs encased in protective icicles hanging from the trellis wires.

Drink Frostwatch and Chill

THE MARINE CLIMATE GOES COLD IN WINTER FOR THIS CHARDONNAY

Frostwatch Winery co-owners Brett Raven and Diane Kleinecke met in the mid-1980s while attending the University of California, Davis. They purchased their Bennett Valley property in 1995, years before their 2002 first vintage. The Frostwatch moniker refers to the area’s diurnal fluctuations, which become more extreme in the winter when chilly air pushes off the face of Bennett Peak and settles over their vineyard: There have been mornings when they’ve found vines encased in ice.



A cluster of the Platt selection of Chardonnay, which goes into the Frostwatch Ophira Reserve: tiny berries, tiny cluster, big flavors.

The Frostwatch 2015 Ophira Reserve Chardonnay, Bennett Valley (\$45) is creamy—frequent stirring integrates the 100 percent new French oak—and unctuous with key lime and apricot on nose and palate. Aged for 19 months, it has a crème brûlée effect that’s lightened and lengthened by a fine acidity with a lemon edge. We paired this wine with sautéed shrimp and grilled chicken, noting its graceful and satisfying food-pairing abilities. **96**

PHOTO COURTESY OF AESTHETE

PHOTOS COURTESY OF FROSTWATCH WINERY

The Four Seasons

EXPLORING PLANETA'S DISTINCT EXPRESSIONS OF NERO D'AVOLA

by Izzy Watson

THOUGH THIS IS merely an introduction to Sicilian winery Planeta's masterful Nero d'Avola wines, I've done my best to address the great diversity of styles produced from the island's signature grape. Commonly known as a big, bold, tannic wine balanced by plentiful acidity, Nero d'Avola—Sicily's most-planted red grape—reveals its elegance and natural ability to express terroir when thoughtfully cultivated in specific areas.

The world started to take this spunky grape seriously—or at least noticed the Sicilian *winemakers* who were taking it seriously—in the 1990s. Years later, in 2005, the establishment of the Cerasuolo di Vittoria DOCG further legitimized its eminence. Beginning with the 2016 vintage, Nero d'Avola will be classified under either a DOC or DOCG appellation.

Planeta has long been committed to maintaining a high standard for Nero d'Avola. A family estate with generations of agricultural experience, it collaborates with other likeminded producers, as well as Sicily's regional organizations, to constantly push the overall quality of the island's wines. Its six boutique wineries are located in five diverse territories across the island, four of which produce a unique representation of Nero d'Avola. The fifth, Etna, is famed for its elegant, high-altitude wines crafted from indigenous varieties grown in volcanic soils.

While Planeta is among the most prominent in a small group of Sicilian producers that have worked to elevate Nero d'Avola's status, its scope doesn't account for its reputation: This can instead be attributed to the incredible quality and specificity of its wines, which is achieved due not only to the work of a committed team of agronomists and enologists, but to the land itself.

A rich diversity of terroir has resulted in a delightful variation in styles, and as a native Californian, I can certainly appreciate the need for diversity. While my home state's sunny weather is enviable, there's a reason we retreat to the mountains: seasonality. Fortunately for us, Planeta's size and foresight has enabled them to provide four considerably different expressions of Nero d'Avola that reflect their territories or respective DOC/DOCGs.

They can also loosely correspond to a time of year, as this concept of seasonality perfectly frames the character of each distinctive expression and its territory. Read on for descriptions of these wines and their seasonal style:

FALL: MENFI DOC

Appellation: Sicilia DOC

Wineries: Ulmo and Dispensa

Wine: Planeta La Segreta Nero d'Avola

We start where Planeta's journey with Nero d'Avola began: In the mid-1980s, Planeta planted on 59 hectares of land to establish the Ulmo vineyard, which surrounds a 16th-century farmhouse. Ten years later, the Ulmo winery was built on the banks of Lake Arancio, officially putting Planeta on the map.

Lake Arancio was once a river that traversed the valley within the Menfi territory, depositing pebbles and other riverbed silt like the down-reaching calcareous-clay that remains today. The result is an autumnal Nero d'Avola expressing notes of plum, chocolate, and mint with a succulent and lively character.

The Menfi territory makes up the lion's share of Planeta's vineyard holdings. Planted on more than 250 hectares, it is also home to the 160-hectare Dispensa estate a bit higher up in the Menfi hills. The vineyards feature soils that are perhaps chalkier than Ulmo and less gravelly; together, these sites produce La Segreta Il Rosso, a blend of 50% Nero d'Avola, 25% Merlot, 20% Syrah, and 5% Cabernet Franc.





SPRING: VITTORIA

Appellation: Cerasuolo di Vittoria Classico DOCG

Winery: Dorilli

Wine: Planeta Dorilli Cerasuolo di Vittoria

Grown on just 15 hectares of red, sandy-calcareous soils, Planeta's Dorilli Cerasuolo di Vittoria Classico DOCG wine evokes a release of tension and the budding of spring. Vittoria wines typically feature strawberry and cherry with a fresh, playful, and juicy character. *Cerasuolo*, in fact, comes from *cerasa*, which means "cherry" in the Sicilian dialect.

In the Cerasuolo di Vittoria DOCG, Nero d'Avola is blended with the buoyant Frappato variety in a ratio that ranges from 70–50% Nero d'Avola to 30–50% Frappato. The DOCG also requires a restrained maceration time to maintain the glossy red color of the wine. Dorilli leaves its Nero d'Avola on the skins for 21 days and consists of 30% Frappato.



SUMMER: CAPO MILAZZO

Appellation: Mamertino DOC

Winery: La Baronia

Wine: Planeta Mamertino

In the province of Messina within the Mamertino DOC lies La Baronia, Planeta's smallest estate at just 8 hectares. Surrounded by an ancient olive grove, the vineyard features alluvial soils that bring out the summery side of Nero d'Avola. Planeta's Mamertino highlights black cherry, citrus, tamarind, and seaweed with a fresh and velvety character. Mamertino blends 70% Nero d'Avola with 30% Nocera.



WINTER: NOTO

Appellation: Noto DOC

Winery: Buonivini

Wine: Planeta Santa Cecilia Nero d'Avola

In 1998, Planeta first harvested its Buonivini vineyards in the hilly Noto DOC. This estate features off-white, chalky, calcareous soils—producing a more elegant expression in contrast to some of the darker, denser versions of Nero d'Avola produced here. The DOC claims Noto is Nero d'Avola's southern Sicilian birthplace, and given its expression, it does seem a natural fit to the area.

At Buonivini, roughly 20 hectares planted to Nero d'Avola grow alongside Moscato di Noto (the rare variety is commonly used for dessert wine, but Planeta's rendition is dry). The Santa Cecilia Nero d'Avola calls for a colder time of year, offering a dense texture, deep baritone tones, and notes of balsamic, graphite, wild blackberry, and cherry. This 100% Nero d'Avola can be saved for a special wintery occasion down the line, however, as Santa Cecilia can age for up to ten years. S



{ meet the wine director }

The Wine NOMAD

WINE DIRECTOR **RYAN BAILEY**
BRINGS WIDE-RANGING
EXPERIENCE TO HIS LIST AT THE
NOMAD HOTEL IN LOS ANGELES

by David Gadd

BY THE TIME *THE SOMM JOURNAL* finally catches up with Ryan Bailey, Wine Director at the new NoMad Hotel in Downtown Los Angeles, he's just returned from VieVinum, the influential biennial Austrian wine exhibition held in Vienna, Austria. "I did ten days in Germany, traveling to the Mosel, Rheingau, Rheinhessen, and Pfalz—seven tastings a day!" Bailey says excitedly. "Then I took an overnight train to Austria and ended up going throughout the Wachau, Kremstal, and Kamptal, finishing up the trip in Vienna."

Travel is an essential part of Bailey's personal wine quest, and in the end, it benefits NoMad's restaurant guests as much as the somm himself. "It was a very eye-opening experience to have my perception of the style of producers like Alzinger or Nikolaihof completely changed by tasting through the entire lineup—really understanding what the backbone of their technique is," he adds.

The startlingly articulate Bailey was born in Sonoma County a scant 30 years ago. "I might be considered young by some standards," he admits, "but I've been a sommelier for ten years now. Having worked the floor in California, then in New York, and now back in California—and also being able to travel and work harvests—has really exposed me to a lot of classic wines."

Just before opening NoMad Los Angeles, Bailey spent six weeks in Portugal exploring and working harvest in the Douro Valley. The Port selections on the hotel's wine list reflect his experience: "One of the first purchases I made for the dessert wine list was a vertical of Warre's 1980, 1985, 2000, 2003, and 2007 and the single-quinta Quinta da Cavadinha 1998. I also pour the small-production Quinta do Infantado by the glass."

Bailey is also excited about small producers of Por-

*Ryan Bailey
in the cellar
at NoMad Los
Angeles, where
he serves as
Wine Director.*



PHOTO: CHEF'S LIST, COURTESY OF NOMAD

tuguese table wines. "I personally collect Ramisco from Colares," he says, referring to the red variety from the coastal region west of Lisbon. "Portuguese wine has the potential to catch a lot of people's attention in the next couple of years."

Bailey started his career while in high school at acclaimed Sonoma restaurant The General's Daughter, which whetted his appetite for wine. "I grabbed every single book I could get," he says. At 21, he moved to Sacramento and passed the Court of Master Sommeliers Level I and II exams, studied in the French Wine Scholar program, and became a Certified Sake Professional. "I went down the dark hole of sake for a while," Bailey says with a laugh. Originally intent on becoming a physical therapist, he reached "a definitive fork in the road" and redirected his career toward his new passion, continuing his wine education at The Culinary Institute of America at Greystone in St. Helena.

In 2013, Bailey was beckoned to New York by Dustin Wilson—then the Wine Director at Eleven Madison Park—whom he had gotten to know at RN74 in San Francisco. After staging at Chef Daniel Humm's flagship the very first night, he got a call the next day from Wilson about a



The interior of NoMad Los Angeles' restaurant was designed by Paris-based Jacques Garcia.

position at sister restaurant NoMad New York, where he staged the following night. Bailey was smitten: "The bottles that got opened, the guests who were there, the feel of the dining room—it was an excitement I was really attracted to," he recalls. "I came home, packed up my house, and was back in New York in two weeks."

Bailey was quickly promoted to Head Sommelier, contributing to education and events in addition to working the floor. In 2017, he accepted the call to open NoMad Los Angeles. "Los Angeles has a tremendous amount of potential for a

cornerstone wine program," says Bailey.

With 1,200 selections and an 18,000-bottle-capacity cellar, Bailey works to "curate the list with producers [he] trust[s] and love[s] that are also exciting." To peruse the list—a far cry from a hit parade of familiar names—is to share the wine director's wide-ranging experience; the five sommeliers working under him, meanwhile, bring enviable talent and polish to the world-class program. "At NoMad, service is a passion," says Bailey. "We want to make sure we approach every aspect of dining at the highest possible level." **SJ**

THE SOMM'S SELECTIONS *notes by Ryan Bailey*



Pierre Péters
2012 Cham-
pagne
L'Esprit
Grand Cru

Brut Blanc de Blancs A blend of four selected parcels from Le Mesnil-sur-Oger, Oger, Avize, and Cramant, this Champagne is ridiculously delicious and the perfect complement for Executive Chef Chris Flint's kanpachi crudo with white peaches, watermelon radishes, and jalapeños.

SKURNIK WINES



Presqu'île 2017
Pinot Noir
Rosé, Santa
Maria Valley
My favorite

rosés right now seem to be made from Pinot Noir, and this example from Santa Barbara is the perfect balance of ripe fruit with bright acidity. Matched with our foie gras torchon with miso, roasted strawberry purée, and pickled onions, it has just enough weight to hold up to the foie gras, yet its high-tone red fruit is very complementary to the roasted strawberry purée.



Tatomer 2016
Meeresboden
Grüner Velt-
liner, Santa
Barbara

Graham Tatomer, a true pioneer for Grüner Veltliner here in California, spent a good amount of time working in the Wachau at Weingut Knoll. His experience and palate have quickly established him as one of the best domestic winemakers. His Grüners have just the right amount of white pepper spice and are the perfect pairing for the chef's smoked eggplant lasagnette with Swiss chard, ricotta, and pesto.



Domaine
Jean-Louis
Chave 2011
Saint-Joseph
Chave's

domaine Saint-Joseph has quickly become my "desert-island" wine, and after a few years of bottle age, it's truly hard to come by better Syrah that overperforms for its value. Chef Chris' suckling pig confit with wild spinach, charred Rainer cherries, and bacon marmalade has many flavors that come together with such gravitas that it calls for a wine with equal complexity and depth. **SHIVERICK IMPORTS**



PICTURED LEFT TO RIGHT: CHUCK FURUYA MS, GREG HARRINGTON MS, FRED DAME MS, NUNZIO ALIOTO MS

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Premium ARGENTINA

CREATED FOR **TRAPICHE'S** 100TH ANNIVERSARY, **MEDALLA** CONTINUES TO SHOWCASE THE BEST OF ARGENTINA'S HALLMARK GRAPES

by Courtney Schiessl / photos by John Valls

THE YEAR WAS 1983, and Argentina's winemakers were in a bind. After years of high domestic wine consumption, Argentinians suddenly started drinking less wine, resulting in a significant surplus. But while some wineries chose to simply pull out their Malbec vines—dismissing a signature variety that would later become a global blockbuster—one of the country's most historic wineries instead opted to double down on its efforts to sell premium Argentinian wine.

That winery was Trapiche, among the largest exporters of Argentine wine, and that decision marked the birth of Medalla: Thirty-five years after the launch of Trapiche's premium, single-varietal Malbec and Cabernet Sauvignon, Medalla wines continue to win over American buyers and consumers alike by offering complexity and balance that far surpass their price.

El Gaucho's lamb featured with the Trapiche Medalla Cabernet Sauvignon

A Century of Excellence

In 1883, as phylloxera devastated European vineyards, Trapiche was founded in the heart of Mendoza. In those early days, Argentinian viticulture and winemaking were deeply transformed as rail transportation finally reached the region, enabling the delivery of thousands of gallons of wine to the rest of the country. Built next to the railway line so wine barrels could be easily loaded into wagons, Trapiche became the first winery in Argentina with its own train station.

In addition to helping establish Mendoza as a winemaking region, Trapiche created a new standard for quality in the area. Facing competition from imported European wines, the winery's leaders traveled to France to study winemaking techniques and styles; they ultimately gravitated toward Bordeaux, an inspiration that spurred the launch of numerous Trapiche wines crafted from French grape varieties in a powerful yet dignified style throughout the 20th century.

"I feel like I found a total gem in Trapiche," says Katie Lasley, Wine Captain at Portland's El Gaucho, which has been a longtime supporter of the winery's releases. "If I can share the winery's award-winning history with a guest who doesn't already have Trapiche on their radar, that's the goal."

In 1983, after 100 years of progress and innovation, Trapiche felt its century's worth of successful business warranted celebration. As the winery planned to launch a



Katie Lasley, Wine Captain at El Gaucho in Portland, OR.

new wine for its centennial, it encouraged local artists to submit designs for its brand and label. Victor Grippo, a painter, engraver, and sculptor from Buenos Aires, selected a

bronze medallion to commemorate Trapiche's century of excellence, thus informing the name of Argentina's first premium wine: Medalla.





El Gaucho's lamb with the Trapiche Medalla Cabernet Sauvignon.



El Gaucho features the Trapiche Medalla Cabernet Sauvignon by the glass alongside other selections from the line, including the Malbec.

The Medalla Standard

Medalla's inaugural vintage blended Argentina's flagship Malbec variety with Cabernet Sauvignon and Merlot, but the Medalla label now encompasses single-varietal wines grown at high elevations and aged in new French oak. The line, which currently includes Malbec and Cabernet Sauvignon, aims to showcase the country's best fruit.

Lasley, who plans to feature both Medalla wines and other Trapiche bottlings at El Gaucho this fall, currently sells the Medalla Cabernet Sauvignon by the glass,

which is no small commitment. "It's very clear to me that a well-chosen and affordable glass of wine can spark a lifetime love affair with all things El Gaucho," she notes. And although it maintains a sense of place, the Medalla Cabernet Sauvignon bridges a gap between Old World and New World flavor profiles with a richness that doesn't overwhelm or diminish complexity: According to Lasley, that's why she immediately snapped up the wine after tasting it for the first time.

That balance between full fruit, sophis-

ticated oak, and lifting acidity distinguishes the character of both Medalla wines, crafted by Trapiche Chief Winemaker Daniel Pi. It all starts at the source of the fruit: vineyards located in Mendoza's finest regions. Both the Medalla Malbec and the Cabernet Sauvignon hail from Maipú and Luján de Cuyo, which have proven over time their ability to craft concentrated and structured reds.

Both releases also prove to be fantastic food-pairing wines. "The acid, tannins, and body are all complementary to the mouthwatering char on our steaks," Lasley notes. Of the Medalla Cabernet Sauvignon in particular, she says she "thought guests would love the deep, rich flavor and elegant tannins—plus, the touch of earth and smoke serves as a little nod to [the restaurant's] cigar room."

In the 35 years since their launch, Trapiche's Medalla wines have become a fixture within the international wine industry as they triumphantly represent the quality and value of Argentine reds. As Trapiche progresses through its next century of winemaking, it's abundantly clear its commitment to excellence is stronger than ever. **SJ**



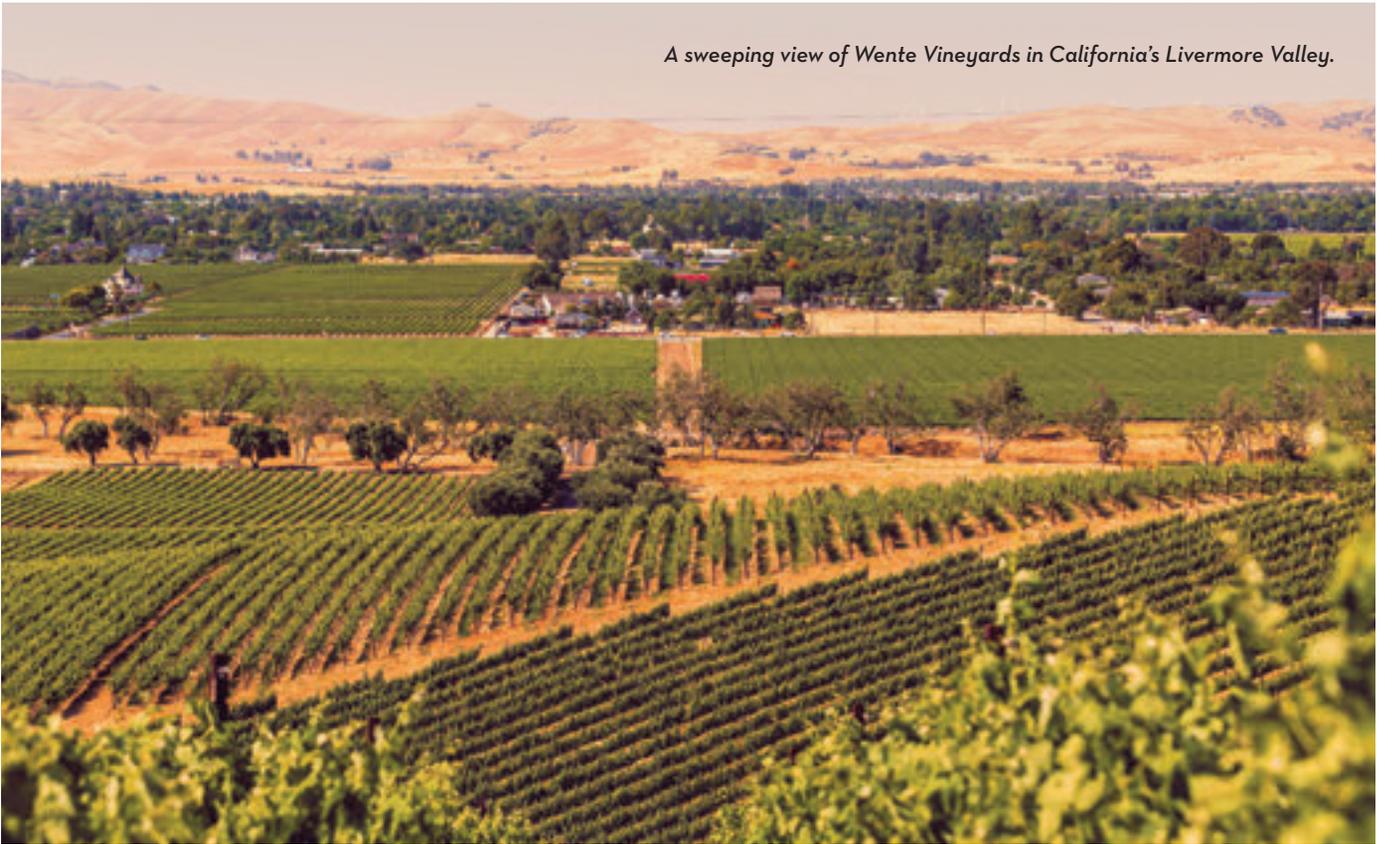
{ cover story }

The Wente family from left to right: Niki Wente, Fifth-Generation Winegrower and Viticulturalist; Carolyn Wente, Fourth-Generation Winegrower and CEO of Wente Family Estates; Karl D. Wente, Fifth-Generation Winemaker and COO of Wente Family Estates; Phil Wente, Fourth-Generation Winegrower and Co-Founder of Murrieta's Well; and Jordan Wente, Fifth-Generation Winegrower.

THE MOTHER

Vine

A sweeping view of Wente Vineyards in California's Livermore Valley.



CHARDONNAY, OUR NATION'S FAVORITE GRAPE, TRACES ITS LINEAGE TO WENTE VINEYARDS

by Michelle Ball / photos by Jeremy Ball

California's oldest continuously operated family-owned winery has an intriguing history that's helped shape the character profile of our nation's favorite grape:

Nearly eighty percent of all Chardonnay planted in California can trace its heritage to Wente Vineyards, celebrating its 135th anniversary this year in the historic Livermore Valley.

In fact, the famed "Wente clone" isn't a clone at all, but instead a selection of clones propagated over generations from multiple vines with a shared parentage. Its story begins when Livermore—a budding region for premium wine grapes—drew Carl H. Wente away from Napa Valley, where he had worked for Charles Krug, to purchase 48 acres in the Livermore Valley in 1883.

Chardonnay was first planted in the

area just one year prior by Charles Wetmore, then the President of California's State Viticultural Commission. He had obtained cuttings from Meursault in Burgundy, providing the budwood for neighboring farmers, and in 1908, Carl and sons Herman and Ernest sourced Chardonnay from one of these neighbors, the Gier Vineyard. Four years later, after Carl imported cuttings from the nursery at the University of Montpellier in southern France, these two sources provided the original genetic material for the various clones of Chardonnay originating at Wente Vineyards.

After Prohibition devastated the fine-grape market, Wente and Paul Masson Mountain Winery in the Santa Cruz Mountains served as the only two commercial sources left for Chardonnay. Eleanor and Fred McCrea of Stony Hill Vineyard in Napa Valley procured budwood for their new estate directly from Wente

in 1948 before they began supplying other producers, including Louis Martini and Hanzell, with cuttings from their property. These were all referred to by the vintners as the Wente clone.

Martini later allowed Dr. Harold Olmo, a viticulturalist from the University of California, Davis, access to budwood from these vines (Chardonnay FPS selections 04–08 are the result of Olmo's clonal trials and just one example of a commercial clone's linkage to Wente Vineyards). Olmo conducted numerous studies beginning in the 1950s, directly sourcing wood from vineyards like Martini and Wente with a goal to promulgate Chardonnay vines that ripened more evenly. Since the Wente family had been making their own selections over the years, planting new blocks with vineyard cuttings showing optimal evolution and flavor development, many of the heat-treated FPS clones we see today originated at Wente Vineyards.

"We're farmers first. Over the years, we've been purchasing land and farming more and more so that we can be in control of the quality of our fruit," says Fifth-Generation Winegrower and Viticulturist Niki Wenté.

Wenté Selections with Niki Wenté

Viticulture runs through Fifth-Generation Winegrower Niki Wenté's blood. Her father Phil has been tending to Wenté vines since 1974, and Niki was determined to follow suit by age 14. "Every time my dad talked about the vineyards, he did so with so much passion and love that it was easily absorbed," she says. "I loved being outside, I loved watching the vines grow, I loved everything about it."

After graduating from California Polytechnic State University in San Luis Obispo with a degree in wine and viticulture, Niki gained experience working in grower relations at Huneus Vineyards in Napa Valley before starting her career at Wenté Vineyards in March 2017. Driving through the vineyards that surround her childhood home, Niki points to one of the latest blocks she helped cultivate. After graduation, the family needed an extra hand during the 2014 harvest—the same year Phil happened to be making selections for new plantings.



Together they combed the vineyard, designating vines that showed ideal characteristics: a combination of strong physiology (disease-free, healthy vigor, and uniform cluster morphology) and highly defined flavors. "Every time we would find a vine, my dad would describe the flavors he was getting from that specific vine," Niki recalls, adding that they had the precise flavor characteristics of "green apple, musqué (floral), and stone fruit" in mind. "It helped me understand what I was looking for; then I would find a vine and have him taste it to check my work."

This passing of knowledge from one generation to the next has defined the clonal profiles we see today, but it's also provided a window into this family's intimate relationship with their vines. Although Phil has taken a step back from the day-to-day work in the vineyard, Niki's team has decades of experience: Both Senior Vineyard Manager Julio Covarrubias and Director of Viticulture Keith Roberts joined Wente Vineyards in 1974. "My dad has always taught me to try to rely on the team," Niki says. "I tend to take things on as my own personal problem, and he reminds me that I can't do this alone."



Niki, Karl, and Jordan Wente represent the fifth generation of the Wente family.



A beaming father, Phil Wente, with Niki and Jordan.

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*"Every time my dad talked about the vineyards, he did so with so much passion and love that it was easily absorbed. I loved being outside, I loved watching the vines grow, I loved everything about it."*  
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Nth Degree Wines: A Winery Within a Winery

When Fifth-Generation Winemaker Karl Wente started at Wente Vineyards in May 2002, the Nth Degree project had yet to be named. The Wente family had often discussed producing separate bottlings to showcase the quality of the region's terroir and heritage vines, but had never introduced a small-lot program to their portfolio of offerings.

Karl Wente's previous post-grad stints at Peter Michael Winery in Knights Valley and Brown Brothers in Victoria, Australia, provided him with considerable experience in boutique wine production, planting the seed for Nth Degree.

By the time the growing season began in May 2002, the idea of a "winery within a winery" had imprinted itself in Karl's mind. He worked with the viticulture team to choose the finest blocks for the project, then farmed them to their highest potential by instituting quality-intensive viticultural practices. "I was like a kid in a candy store getting to choose amongst the best blocks and do everything I could to stand on the shoulders of giants like my uncle Phil and the other people who were there," Karl says. "There's just a lot of great lineage of knowledge to work with."

After that first grueling harvest, during which Karl and the crew spent nearly 40 hours in a two-day period tending to the lot program in the cellar, the team decided that the wines called for their own designation. Karl recalls Phil saying, "You know, Karl's out there doing everything to the nth degree to try and make the best possible wines. So how about we call them the Nth Degree by Wente Vineyards?" Everyone agreed, and thus a brand was born.

Karl says the differences between this project, which began with roughly 500 cases of five varieties, and the rest of the Wente Vineyards portfolio lies in the details. "It's really about the oak profiles and the best fruit, which generally means we're dropping a little bit more fruit and spending more money in the vineyard," he explains. "We're also getting a smaller yield so we have a higher cost per ton." And thanks to the influence of new French oak barrels, sur-lie aging, and weekly bâtonnage, "it's definitely a higher touch, but all of our wines are loved, so I don't want to take away from the others," Karl adds.

Fifth-Generation Winemaker Karl Wente in one of Wente Vineyards' heritage blocks farmed exclusively for the winery's Nth Degree bottlings.



Defining the Wente Clone

The term “Wente clone” is commonly used in discussions involving Chardonnay, as the primary source of material for these clones was procured either directly or indirectly from Wente Vineyards. While numerous clones are considered to have a Wente heritage, there are two designations between these families of clones:

The source for much of the Chardonnay planted in the 1950s and 1960s, “**Old Wente**” Selections, aka clone 2A, refer to vines whose parentage is linked to some of the original selections made by second-generation growers Ernest and Herman Wente. They’re often characterized by a “hens-and-chicks” morphology (irregular berry size leading to uneven ripening of a cluster) and low yields with intense flavors.

Single Wente Clones, aka clone 4, refer to vines cultivated through formal grape programs like the aforementioned UC Davis Foundation Plant Services (FPS). The heat-treated mother vines of these clones—including FPS 04, 17, and 72—have been selected for specific characteristics and can trace their lineage to Wente Vineyards.

Expressions of Wente Chardonnay

As the nation’s “first family” of Chardonnay, Wente Vineyards produces four distinct offerings—including the Nth Degree Chardonnay, a small-lot expression from its heritage sites—and has recently released a fifth bottling in celebration of its 135th anniversary. The winery farms more than 3,000 acres of sustainably grown estate vines throughout the Livermore Valley and Arroyo Seco AVAs. According to Karl Wente, the Livermore estate contains alluvial, well-drained soils with lower nutrient content he feels can express more minerality. Arroyo Seco, meanwhile, has more nutrient-rich, gravelly soils, yet its cooler climate encourages a fuller fruit profile.



A beet salad with nectarines, frisée, and microgreens on a bed of herbed goat cheese prepared by Mike Ward, Executive Chef for The Restaurant at Wente Vineyards.

Wente Vineyards 2016 Morning Fog Chardonnay (\$18) This Chardonnay from the Wente estate in Livermore is fermented and aged in 50-50 stainless steel and oak barrels. Fleshy yellow stone fruit and toasted cashews along with green apple and orange blossom complete the profile of this crowd-pleasing wine.

Wente Vineyards 2016 Riva Ranch Chardonnay (\$22) This single-vineyard bottling from the Riva Ranch estate vineyard in the Arroyo Seco AVA is fermented in 90% oak and 10% stainless steel before it’s barrel-aged sur lie for eight months. Tropical aromas of dried pineapple and a touch of cardamom roll across the palate, where they’re heightened by the wine’s juicy acidity.

Wente Vineyards 2017 Small Lot Eric’s Chardonnay (\$30) Hand-harvested from select blocks, this wine is fermented and aged sur lie in stainless steel barrels for four months before bottling. Vibrant, tingling aromas of fresh green apple, lemongrass, and chalk yield a wine with tantalizing verve and texture. Dominant flavors include Meyer lemon and pear with palpable minerality.



Wente Vineyards 2016 135th Anniversary Celebratory Chardonnay (\$40) This limited-release bottling features a blend of Chardonnay grapes from the family’s estate vineyards in both Livermore Valley and Arroyo Seco in Monterey. The vintage label pays homage to the country’s very first varietally labelled Chardonnay, produced by the Wente Brothers in 1936. Aromas of yellow pear and elderflower mingle with just a whisper of oak. Fleshy tropical fruit, green apple, and sweet corn flavors balance the lingering crisp and flinty minerality, imploring another sip.

Wente Vineyards 2016 Nth Degree Chardonnay (\$70) Hand-harvested from select heritage blocks in the Wente Livermore Vineyard, this wine is barrel-fermented and aged in a combination of new and neutral French oak for 14 months. Only 21 barrels are produced. Crusty French bread and lemon curd transport the senses to a Parisian bakery as the voluptuous mouthfeel conjures yellow nectarine, macadamia nut, and papaya. *WJ*

World-Class

THE SISTER LABEL OF CHAMPAGNE
ALFRED GRATIEN, **GRATIEN & MEYER**,
PRODUCE LOIRE VALLEY CRÉMANTS
OF IMMENSE COMPLEXITY,
GRACE, AND POWER

Pedigree

by Jonathan Cristaldi
photos by Hardy Wilson



Gratien & Meyer President Olivier Dupré at Mourad in San Francisco.

ALFRED GRATIEN IS one of Champagne's great names. In an era where many Champagne houses have scaled to immense proportions, Gratien carries on much as it did 150 years ago. Fourth-generation winemaker Nicolas Jaeger continues the rigorous tradition of barrel-fermenting each lot in 128-liter neutral barrels that once held fine Chablis, producing Champagnes that Antonio Galloni, founder of the wine publication *Vinous*, says are "built on grace."

The same can be said of Alfred Gratien's Loire Valley sister label Gratien & Meyer, which produces terrifically complex Crémant sparklers fashioned with decades of knowledge gained since 1864, when Alfred Gratien bottled his first Champagne. Back in April, I sat down with Gratien & Meyer President Olivier Dupré at San Francisco's Mourad, a Moroccan restaurant run by Michelin-starred chef Mourad Lahlou. There, rising-star sommelier Tara Patrick has curated an impressive list of global wines—most notably a carefully curated selection of Champagnes and sparkling wines—to pair with Mourad's innovative dishes. Patrick currently carries the NV Alfred Gratien Classic Brut (\$110 on Mourad's list) and will soon offer the Gratien & Meyer Crémant de Loire Brut.

Though he sits among the pantheon of great Champagne producers, Alfred Gratien was a man of the Loire Valley: specifically, the hamlet of Richelieu some 30 miles southeast of Saumur (the Castle of Saumur is visible from the crush pad at Gratien & Meyer). The Art Deco-styled winery and its deep caves are dug into the mid-slopes of a steep hill on the south bank of the Loire River; from their perch, they overlook other production houses located along the river; while rows and rows of pristine, manicured

vines sit just above the facility on the top of the hill. There's even a small castle on the property dating back to the 1880s: After being fully refurbished, it now houses the restaurant La Table du Château Gratien, which opened last November with a Michelin-starred chef at the helm.

"We are one of the few cellars in the world where you go 'up' to the cellar," Dupré said as we tasted two current releases from Gratien & Meyer. "In the old days, a stable of eight horses carried the barrels up." Dupré elaborated on the brand's history, noting that Alfred Gratien was only 44 when he suddenly died in 1885. After his widow sold the winery to Jean-Albert Meyer, the Champagne house was named in Gratien's honor. "We've been producing Crémant in Saumur for about 40 years," Dupré said. "About ten years ago, we saw the trend for Crémant rosé in the French market, but we waited until the time was right to put our own mark on rosé Crémant."

That time came about five years ago, and from what I tasted with Dupré at Mourad, the company has succeeded in producing beautifully intricate and delicious Loire sparklers. The rosé—a blend of mostly Pinot Noir and Chardonnay—is about as rich and layered as they come at an SRP of \$16. But how are they able to produce such exquisite and finessed sparklers at an accessible price point? The secret, according to Dupré, lies with one element of the production process: the *liqueur de tirage*.

"We purchase 50 percent of the must and fermentation takes place in stainless steel, but we barrel-ferment our *liqueur de tirage*, which contributes incredible complexity," Dupré explained. I prodded for more details, but Dupré didn't want to give away the farm. Regardless of the details, the result is evident in both the Brut and Rosé Crémants, which offer a subtle, toasty brioche character on the finish.

For Gratien & Meyer's white and rosé offerings, half of the wine undergoes malolactic fermentation, lending a richness to the palate; after nine months in barrel, the winemakers blend and bottle this portion with the barrel-fermented *liqueur de tirage*, aging the rosé for 18 months and the whites up to two years in bottle. The final step is adding the *liqueur d'expédition* to balance out the acidity (the wines average 9–13 grams of sugar per liter).

Portfolio "Jewels" Make Their Mark

In 2015, Mionetto USA became the sole U.S. importer of both Champagne Alfred Gratien and Gratien & Meyer Crémant. "Gratien & Meyer and Alfred Gratien, owned by the same family that owns the Henkell & Co. Group, are the jewels in our portfolio," says Enore Ceola, Managing Director of Mionetto USA. "It made perfect sense for us to start developing these brands as our organization develops and is capable to handle multiple projects and segments within the sparkling wine category."

That same year, Florence Haynes, a notable winemaker with deep ties to growers throughout the Loire Valley, was brought on to make the wines. "Florence spent eight years consulting for cooperatives in the Loire Valley, and we knew her to fight for rigorous standards in the vineyards," Dupré said. "When we brought her on in 2015, she wanted to make her mark on rosé."

He's clearly grateful for her connections. "Growers are faithful, but they have to be tamed—even ones we've been working with for more than three decades," Dupré said. "But Florence really is involved in the vineyards, and thanks to her work with our growers, our grapes are picked at optimal ripeness. We want lower alcohols so that with the second fermentation, we're not increasing it too much. To make good wines, you need good grapes: It's that simple." Gratien & Meyer even pays growers to replant Grollot and Chenin grapes if they're not "well-adapted," as Dupré puts it; in their place, they're planting Pinot Noir and Chardonnay.

Longtime buyers should note the label change with the current release of Crémants. "We really want to make it obvious that Champagne Alfred Gratien and Gratien & Meyer are sister wineries," Dupré explained. The new front label of the Crémant bottlings now matches the elegant crown of the Champagne house, effectively drawing that distinction.

Both the Gratien & Meyer Crémant de Loire Brut and Rosé are available in the U.S. market and, in this author's humble opinion, would make for exceptional by-the-glass placements—especially considering they'd hit at roughly \$13–\$14 per glass. 



Tasting Notes

Gratien & Meyer Crémant de

Loire Brut Rosé NV Fifteen-day skin contact and 18 months of aging on the lees. Beautiful pale-salmon color with delicate beading. Bright and fresh nose of wild strawberry, cantaloupe, and sea spray. A beautifully frothy mousse gives way to terrific minerality, unfolding in layers of white peach and melon on a red berry-infused, bright-acid finish with a subtle brioche afterthought. 40% Pinot Noir, 40% Chardonnay, 15% Cabernet Franc, and 5% Chenin Blanc; 12g/L

Gratien & Meyer Crémant de

Loire Brut NV Aged two years on the lees. Green-gold with delicate beading; fresh lime citrus and mineral aromas. Velvety with a generous mousse cut by vibrant, mouthwatering acidity. A rich mid-palate of lemon cream, lime zest, and saline minerality gives way to an elegant finish tinged with a subtle brioche note. 40% Chardonnay, 40% Chenin Blanc, 15% Cabernet Franc, and 5% Pinot Noir; 12g/L

SOMM Journal Editor-in-Chief Anthony Dias Blue with Olivera Markovic of *The Bellini Buzz*.



Perpendicular Stones

TASTING THROUGH A **CAYUSE** VERTICAL WITH **ANTHONY DIAS BLUE**

story and photos by Albert Letizia

JAMES BEARD AWARD-WINNING author and wine writer Anthony Dias Blue has found a new love: Syrah. To celebrate and share his latest obsession, the *SOMM Journal* Editor-in-Chief recently hosted an impressive vertical tasting of enigmatic cult wines by Cayuse Vineyards in Walla Walla, Washington, inviting a few fortunate sommeliers, influencers, educators, and journalists to his home in the Pacific Palisades neighborhood of Los Angeles. There, they tasted and shared their thoughts on the 2007 through 2014 vintages of Cayuse founder Christophe Baron's Cailloux Vineyard Syrah.

Through the tasting, Dias Blue set out to give sommeliers and collectors who may have these wines in their cellars an opportunity to see how they're drinking firsthand without having to crack open their own bottles. "This is such a cult wine, so we get very little in California," Dias Blue says. "They're very expensive, very rare bottles. I would have to say that in my long 40 years of tasting wine I tend to have things I like and it changes. I'm coming to realize, though, that Syrah has some of the greatest potential and that Cayuse is really pushing the envelope."

While Dias Blue believes California Syrah—with the exception of some greats in Santa Barbara—can trend toward the mono-

lithic and overripe while generally demonstrating a lack of finesse, he says Baron and his team clearly have "an idea of what Syrah should be and how it shows itself in the Northern Rhône."

Cayuse currently produces 12 estate wines from fruit harvested on 51 acres of vines on ancient riverbed rock; in fact, "Cayuse" references the Native American tribe named by French-Canadian traders from the French "cailloux," which means "stones."

Baron developed a passion for farming while growing up in his family's centuries-old Champagne house, Baron Albert. Cayuse, the first winery in the Walla Walla Valley to fully implement Biodynamic farming methods in its vineyards, crushed its first Biodynamic certified fruit for the 2004 vintage.

The general consensus of Dias Blue's assembled group was that these extraordinary wines exhibited great power and should prove to be incredibly ageworthy. Attendees also concurred that they possess a unique blend of New World fruit character with distinct terroir that only becomes more established as the vintages progress.

These wines are highly allocated and the mailing list for Cayuse Vineyard is beyond full—but if you can find them, or if you have some, enjoy!

Points and tasting notes were provided by the following committee:

- **Anthony Dias Blue**, host
- **Paul Sherman**, sommelier and adjunct wine educator for UCLA Extension
- **Mary Thompson**, sommelier and General Manager at Talula's in Santa Monica, CA
- Influencer **Olivera Markovic** of The Bellini Buzz
- **Albert Letizia**, sommelier and *SOMM Journal* contributor

Cayuse 2007 Cailloux Vineyard Syrah (\$200±): 95 points

"Smooth, lush, meaty, and earthy. Youthful with no oxidation or degradation. I'm blown away by this stunning wine." —*Anthony Dias Blue*

"Bodybuilder in a velvet suit." —*Mary Thompson*

"Barnyard on the nose with intense, charred red meat and iodine on both the nose and palate. Very powerful and highly concentrated. This is a big wine that doesn't drink like an 11-year-old bottle." —*Albert Letizia*

Cayuse 2008 Cailloux Vineyard Syrah (\$170±): 93 points

"Silky and juicy with red raspberry. Lean, tangy, rich, and deep; lively yet intense with a spicy, long finish. Very linear." —*A.D.B.*

"Pretty, lush red fruit shows with the classic black and blue fruits. Black pepper, smoked meats, clay, and mushroom flavors." —*Paul Sherman*

"Stewed blackberry and plum take the lead on the palate. The strength of this is subdued in contrast to the '07. It is softer and silky but still has great structure." —*M.T.*

Cayuse 2009 Cailloux Vineyard Syrah (\$170±): 97 points

"Deep ruby with rich black fruit and a touch of heat on the nose. Luscious texture with black pepper, cassis, and cocoa on the palate. Very long finish with elegant tannic structure. Amazing example of what Syrah can be." —*M.T.*

"Ripe, cherry fruit; slightly tangy with bright acidity. Very well-balanced. The wine has a feminine touch with hints of dark chocolate and licorice." —*Olivera Markovic*

Cayuse 2010 Cailloux Vineyard Syrah (\$200±): 100 points

"Rich, fruity, and very pretty with a long, tangy finish of black raspberry. Very juicy and minerally. Brilliant, smooth, and clean." —*A.D.B.*

"Blackberry fruit; juicy and fruity with bright acidity. Complex and well-balanced with hints of leather, spice, and black pepper." —*O.M.*

"Seems to be the most Rhône-like to me so far in the lineup. Just awesome. Lean and focused but very concentrated with tobacco, black fruit, and stone. Very balanced and delicious." —*A.L.*

Cayuse 2011 Cailloux Vineyard Syrah (\$170±): 89 points

"Reductive. Spicy but flat. Mushroom and earthy flavors." —*A.D.B.*

"Intensely concentrated plum color with rose-hued edges. It's a little shut-down on the nose and in the mouth." —*M.T.*

"From a cold, wet growing season, which you can taste." —*O.M.*

Cayuse 2012 Cailloux Vineyard Syrah (\$150±): 93 points

"Stewed black fruits and black pepper with grippy tannins. This is a young and powerful Old World-leaning Syrah that will age well." —*P.S.*

"Intense depth of color with heat. Stewed fruit notes are plummy, rich, and ripe. Intense, gorgeous, and plush with the promise of continued development." —*M.T.*

Cayuse 2013 Cailloux Vineyard Syrah (\$200±): 95 points

"Cassis and ripe, complex cherry fruit. A long, pretty wine that's a little jammy and tangy." —*O.M.*

"Lots of minerality and terroir showing but still youthful with great potential to age." —*P.S.*

Cayuse 2014 Cailloux Vineyard Syrah (\$200±): 96 points

"An elegant and layered wine with a toasted nose. Juicy and tangy with a finish that goes on forever. Stunning." —*A.D.B.* ❖

Our panel reviewed eight consecutive vintages of Cayuse's Cailloux Vineyard Syrah at the L.A. home of Anthony Dias Blue.



Respecting Your Audience

HOW TO AVOID GIVING A **BAD WINE SEMINAR**

by Paul D. Poux, CSW

YEARS AGO, DURING a sales training for a major Champagne house, I witnessed the seminar leader stretch a scheduled two-hour session into four hours through lack of planning. After the leader lost our attention and we mutinied, I told myself that when it was my turn to teach, I would

for one section, it should be placed on more than one slide so the text can be more visible. This will keep the presentation moving and the audience engaged.

When a presenter places tiny images on slides, their impact is squandered. Find dramatic images to support your script and

still remember who you are and where you're from.

I've also been in dreary, sleep-inducing sessions where the presenter mentions a tantalizing story . . . and then never tells it. Good stories are vital to a successful seminar: Whether it's the 30,000 women



structure my seminar appropriately to show respect for my audience.

I've been to more bad wine seminars since then and, grimacing through the pain, have learned how to improve my own teaching as a result. This starts with your presentation itself. Instead of reading the text on PowerPoint slides aloud—proven to be ineffective—presenters should write a script to rehearse and learn as the primary method of telling their story. Text and images on slides are important but secondary, as their purpose is to amplify your script.

On that topic, text-heavy slides can compete for the attention of attendees. As much information as possible should be detailed in the script rather than onscreen, but if presenters have a lot of critical text

Wine seminar leaders can dramatically improve their presentations by removing branded borders, making images full-screen, and placing only the most critical text on top of the image. Only a small logo is needed for branding.

make them as large as possible—preferably full-page with necessary text overlaying the image. If a section warrants multiple images, each should get its own slide: It's unnecessary to linger on them for more than a few seconds, but they become more powerful in sequence.

Finally, regarding those fancy branded borders on projected slides: They remain fashionable, but they reduce your usable slide space and make it too busy. Clear the field by using just a small logo in the corner; for some slides, you can leave the logo off entirely. Don't worry: Guests will

who wove the baskets wrapping Chianti bottles, the Sicilian winemaker who spied workers adulterating her wine, or the first use of "bacon" to describe a Côte-Rôtie, anecdotes bring broader topics to life and, as a result, make teaching more effective.

I once had a seminar leader talk for 45 minutes straight and then look up, seeing us attendees as if for the first time, and say, "Oh, go ahead and start tasting." To avoid a similar disconnect, don't front-load all of your teaching before you begin tasting; instead, parse it out between the wines. The audience will get the entire picture by the end. **SJ**

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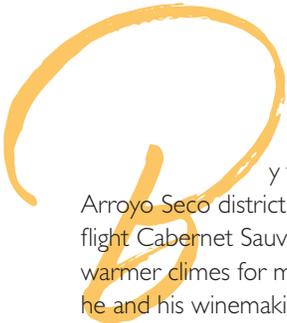
Quality

DEFINING THREE TIERS OF OFFERINGS FROM THE J. LOHR CABERNET PORTFOLIO

by Michelle Ball / photos by Jeremy Ball



Red Wines Winemaker Steve Peck has been with J. Lohr Vineyards & Wines since 2007.



y the early 1980s, J. Lohr's cool-climate vineyards in Monterey's Arroyo Seco district were firmly established. Jerry Lohr was anxious to add top-flight Cabernet Sauvignon to his growing portfolio and knew he needed to look to warmer climates for more Bordeaux-like conditions. In his quest for a new location, he and his winemaking team tasted hundreds of Cabernet Sauvignon samples from throughout California.

Lohr preferred the dominant fruit character and softer tannins found in the Cabernets from Paso Robles, so a decade after he first entertained expanding beyond Arroyo Seco, he planted his first vineyard there in 1987—directly next door to one of the properties whose wines he most enjoyed. Fast-forward to 2018, with J. Lohr Vineyards & Wines now farming more than 2,300 acres throughout Paso Robles with Cabernet Sauvignon as its primary focus. The company's properties span six sub-appellations in the region, enabling it to integrate flavors from a broad palette of fruit profiles while taking advantage of its extensive portfolio of estate-grown vineyards and history of long-term grower relationships.

J. Lohr produces three tiers of Cabernet Sauvignon: the Estates **Seven Oaks**, its entry-level wine that makes up the majority of its production; **Hilltop**, from its Vineyard Series, which originally began as a single-property offering and has since expanded to include a selection of multiple sites; and **Signature**, a very-limited release personally overseen by Jerry Lohr which focuses on the best lots in any given vintage.

Plush Fruit and Supple Tannins

Crafted to be drinkable upon release, all three tiers of J. Lohr Cabernet share a profile of lush fruit and supple tannins thanks to a combination of farming techniques, fermentation management, and individual oak programs.

In the vineyard, controlling irrigation is key. Winter rains make up the foundation of the vines' water needs, with additional hydration provided as needed through June. By then, the canopies are healthy and there's a reasonable amount of moisture in the soil.

The winery then allows the vines to "dry down," avoiding irrigation as long as possible and closely monitoring the vines' stress levels all the while. "By doing that, we're preventing the production of possible vegetal pyrazines by restricting their formation in June and July so that we're not relying solely on hang time in October to burn them off," explains Steve Peck, Red Wines Winemaker for J. Lohr. This method encourages fresher fruit character with a lower alcohol content. "It's very intentional and part of the house style and flavor profile we're targeting," Peck adds.

In the winery, softer tannins are achieved in part through fermentation techniques. Peck says the aim is to get the temperature to 90 degrees Fahrenheit "early" before Brix drops below 20. This drives the extraction of anthocyanins from the skins, and once that's done, the winemaking team decreases the temperature and reduces the number of punch-downs/pump-overs. In doing so, they limit the extraction of tannins later in the fermentation process when alcohols are present.

With each year, they're conscious of tailoring the oak profile to suit the vintage. In 2015, for example, the region experienced a cooler May with a large amount of shatter and an uneven bloom. This led to berry variation and more savory tones, so to accent those characteristics, Peck selected a lower toast to better match the wines.

When describing J. Lohr's approach to each tier, Peck explains that the winery's "goals are the same, but the tools [it uses] to execute on them are a little different." And while all three wines share similar traits, they're each characterized by grape sourcing and cellar techniques. **Read on for a full breakdown of each of J. Lohr's Cabernet Sauvignon-based tiers:**



The limestone-calcareous soils of Beck Vineyard.

SIGNATURE

J. Lohr introduced Signature, its first luxury-class Cabernet Sauvignon, just last year to honor Jerry Lohr's 80th birthday. The winemaking and viticulture teams collaborated to create this bottling, identifying three premier blocks as possible contenders and ultimately deciding on Cabernet from Beck Vineyard's Block 2.

Located in the Creston sub-appellation, the 115-acre vineyard is, according to Peck, best described as "a westside ranch on the east side" due to its high level of limestone and calcareous soils resembling crushed white chalk. Block 2 sits at an elevation of 1,700 feet above sea level and is planted to clone 337 on 110R rootstock, a combination Peck calls "amazing," as it epitomizes the "tortured vine" to produce extremely low yields, tiny clusters, and exceptional quality. The high elevation, meanwhile, allows for early ripening, which results in crisper fruit flavors with improved acid retention.

The grapes are harvested by hand and berry-sorted before crush; at this stage, Peck uses the Pellenc Extractiv', an innovative piece of equipment that slingshots



J. Lohr has been Beck Vineyard's exclusive fruit recipient since 2008 and purchased the property outright earlier this year. Vineyard Manager Zach Merkel now oversees this unique site.

the tiny berries and essentially bursts them. To ensure the juice can benefit from the full potential of anthocyanins and tannins, Peck then performs a series of *délestage*, or rack and returns, early in the fermentation process to extract every drop of juice from the pulp. These techniques allow for better extraction overall but would be nearly impossible to implement on a large scale.

To ensure it's drinkable upon release, the wine is aged in 100 percent new French oak for 17 months and bottled for nearly two years. "In a way, it's a 'Hilltop Reserve' in that it's a superlative experience in the current release," Peck says. "It's also a wine that would certainly hold with age, but it's not a wine you have to cellar long-term to get the most out of it."



J. Lohr 2014 Signature Cabernet Sauvignon (\$100) Concentrated and juicy black fruit with notes of caraway and anise. The luxurious, supple mouthfeel builds into plush tannins for a richer attack on the finish. —Michelle Ball

HILLTOP

The uplifted terraces and gravelly soils of the Hilltop Vineyard, which originally provided fruit for the Hilltop Cabernet, made for an exceptional wine. Yet with J. Lohr's vineyard acreage expanding throughout the region, Peck says the Hilltop Vineyard—located on J. Lohr's home ranch in the Estrella District AVA of Paso Robles—is not necessarily the winery's "best of the best" each vintage. "We began to see that we could make a better wine from some of the other sites that we had, including Beck," he adds.

Beginning with the 2007 vintage, Hilltop now features a blend of Cabernet Sauvignon from multiple "hilltop" vineyards grown at higher elevations. The 2015 Hilltop primarily consists of fruit from Beck Vineyard in the Creston District and Shotwell Vineyard in the El Pomar District AVA, although the Adelaide District's Gean Ranch has also been used in the past.

Specific vineyard blocks are slated as possible components for Hilltop, yet Peck says J. Lohr doesn't want to pass up new opportunities, either. After fermentation, Peck "barrels down" roughly 75,000 cases—nearly five times more than he needs—into French oak barrels, and over the next few months, the winemaking team tastes through each of the barrel lots to whittle it down to roughly 15,000 cases. "You already have to meet a really high threshold to be a part of those 75,000 cases, then we pull the best of the best to make the Hilltop blend," Peck says. The remaining wine is then added to the Seven Oaks Cabernet, thereby elevating the final blend of J. Lohr's popular, entry-level wine.



J. Lohr 2015 Hilltop Cabernet Sauvignon (\$35) Savory, brambly fruit with minty undertones that speak to the vintage. Dense mid-palate concentration with subtle, well-integrated oak characteristics. Aged in 75% new French oak for 18 months. —M.B.

J. Lohr's Shotwell Vineyard in the El Pomar District AVA.

The view overlooking the original home ranch that surrounds the J. Lohr Winery in the Estrella District AVA. The ranch serves as a major source for J. Lohr's popular Seven Oaks release.



J. Lohr's Lone Napa Valley Property Honors Jerry Lohr's Late Wife

J. Lohr's Carol's Vineyard in Napa Valley's St. Helena AVA is named for Jerry Lohr's late wife, who died in 2008 after a battle with breast cancer. To honor her legacy, the Lohr family has partnered with the National Breast Cancer Foundation for the past ten years, donating a portion of every bottle sold of Carol's Vineyard wines. This campaign, called Touching Lives, has to date helped fund more than 6,500 mammograms for women who couldn't otherwise afford them.

The Napa Valley location of Carol's Vineyard tends to produce a more robust expression of Cabernet with firmer tannins and a more angular structure than the winery's Paso Robles sites. Although Hilltop and Seven Oaks see small amounts of Petit Verdot and other Bordeaux blends, Carol's Vineyard instead features a significant amount of Petit Verdot (21% for the 2014 vintage).

J. Lohr Red Wines Winemaker Steve Peck says he enjoys marrying Petit Verdot with Cabernet Sauvignon, as it allows for better oak integration while increasing the wine's blue-fruit character and acidity. "Petit Verdot opens up a window into that savory blend and really helps showcase the oak," Peck explains.

SEVEN OAKS

Named for the original Seven Oaks Vineyard located near the winery, this wine is primarily composed of fruit from J. Lohr home ranch estate vineyards and satellite vineyards in the Paso Robles AVA. Roughly 60 percent of its grapes come from these sites, yet that amount continues to increase as J. Lohr expands its acreage.

Peck adds that the accessible, dense, and soft Seven Oaks Cabernet is a delicious everyday wine that's all about enjoyment. "I take an enormous amount of pride in Seven Oaks. This current vintage received 90 points and it's under \$20," he says excitedly.

Augmented by Peck's attention to detail in the cellar, J. Lohr's advantageous farming practices are further enhanced by its elaborate barrel program. The winery orders nearly 10,000 new American oak barrels annually for Seven Oaks—some from its "bread-and-butter" coopers and others from test lots.

In a way, Seven Oaks could be likened to a dish with layers of flavors crafted by an experienced chef. In this case, there's more than one cook in the kitchen: President/Director of Winemaking Jeff Meier and Assistant Winemaker Brenden Wood have worked alongside Peck for more a decade, tasting through innumerable barrel lots to perfect their oak program and create the final blend.

In part, this is exactly what sets J. Lohr apart: the experience and longevity of its team. "I've worked for many different wineries over the years—this one is really unique," says Senior Marketing Director Dave Muret. "Jerry is a true industry icon, but he constantly talks about his team. Everyone you meet here shares his and the family's long-term vision: a decades-long, vintage-to-vintage pursuit of quality."

J. Lohr Seven Oaks Cabernet Sauvignon (\$17) Crisp, plummy red fruit with subtle baking spice and soft tannins framed by fresh acidity. —M.B. 



{ outings }

Vintner Russell From of Herman Story Wines and sommelier Erick Cadena of San Francisco's Boulevard pump up the crowd during the live auction at Hospice du Rhône in Paso Robles, CA.

A REPORT FROM HOSPICE DU RHÔNE 2018 IN PASO ROBLES



Rhône Revelry and Reflection

by David Gadd

HOSPICE DU RHÔNE, the biennial rendezvous of Rhône wine professionals and enthusiasts, took over the Western-themed Paso Robles Event Center in April for a weekend of tastings, seminars, al fresco barbecue lunches, and dinners capped off by the event's live fundraising auction.

The SOMM Journal was on hand for the festivities this year and, after some courtyard camaraderie in three languages (French, English, and Australian), we settled in for four informative 90-minute tasting seminars covering a range of Rhône-related topics. These discussions were made all the more engaging by the arm's-length presence of some of the world's greatest examples of Rhône varietals and blends.

The next Hospice du Rhône in Paso Robles will take place April 23–25, 2020. Mark your calendars for one of winedom's "do-not-miss" events.

PHOTO: DAVID GADD



THE 2018 SEMINARS

South Africa's Cinsault Renaissance

Friday morning was dedicated to the Southern Hemisphere, beginning with South Africa. Moderator Lauren Buzzeo of *Wine Enthusiast* led the discussion among four South African Cinsault producers: Ryan Moster of Silwervis, Andrea Mullineux of Mullineux and Leeu Family Wines, Tremayne Smith of The Blacksmith, and Danie Styetler of Kaapsicht Wine Estates.

Cinsault, also known in South Africa as Hermitage, is one of the parents of Pinotage. Its low acidity and high yields mean that skilled viticulture is essential to making single-varietal Cinsault wines. The presence of heritage bush-vine Cinsault is now recognized as one of South Africa's viticultural treasures and is fueling something

The South African Cinsault wines proved to be the most revealing of the weekend.

of a revolution in the Swartland region. The examples presented during the seminar proved the most revealing of the weekend.

Among the nine excellent versions tasted, standouts included the highly extracted Kaapzicht 2016 "1952" Cinsault, W. O. Stellenbosch, and the stunning Leeu Passant 2015 Old Vine Cinsault, W. O. Franschhoek, with precisely delineated flavors and great depth—showing the potential of this variety when handled with expertise.

PHOTO COURTESY OF HOSPICE DU RHÔNE

A Sixth-Generation Crusade in the Barossa Valley

In Friday morning's second tasting seminar, five Australian panelists discussed wines from Hoffmann Vineyards in Australia's historic Barossa Valley. Moderator Chuck Hayward of Vinroads noted that Barossa has the oldest Grenache plantings in the world, grown mainly on a non-trellised "Aussie-sprawl" system. Grower Adrian Hoffmann described his efforts to preserve his family's farm, which has been producing grapes since the 1880s: a business spanning six generations. After rescuing the vineyard from possible sale, Hoffmann made it one of the most sought-after in the region and has become a noted spokesperson for Barossa viticulture and winemaking.

During the seminar, we tasted Hoffmann Vineyards-sourced Grenache, Shiraz, and Mataro (including some older vintages) from Michael Twelftree's Twelftree and Two Hands labels, Russell Johnstone's RBJ Vintners, Paul Heinecke's Soul Growers, and Chris Ringland and Adrian Hoffmann's North Barossa Vintners Collaboration. The Hoffmann Vineyards fruit showed beautifully in all of these wines—ripe, full-bodied, and massive with polished tannins and a full complement of spice on the finish.



Hospice guests attend a tasting seminar.

Favorites were the library RBJ 2002 Mataro-Grenache with beautiful bottle bouquet and dusty tannins and the massive Chris Ringland 2012 Dimchurch Cuvée Shiraz, which was essentially black-berry compote in a bottle.



John Alban; Morgan Twain-Peterson, MW; and Tegan Passalacqua discuss historic California Rhône vineyards.

Old-Vine Rhône Across California

On Saturday morning, John Alban moderated a discussion with vintners Tegan Passalacqua of Sandlands and Turley Wine Cellars and Morgan Twain-Peterson of Bedrock Wine Company. (Twain-Peterson, son of Ravenswood founder Joel Peterson, recently became a Master of Wine and is now one of just two California winemakers to hold this distinction.)

Both Passalacqua and Twain-Peterson (as well as Joel Peterson) are founders of the Historic Vineyard Society, a nonprofit organization established in 2011 that's dedicated to the preservation of California's historic vineyards. Upon application and approval, the HVS will certify any California vineyard currently in production that has an original planting date of at least 50 years ago, as long as at least one-third of the existing producing vines can be traced back to that date.

The Bedrock Wine Company 2016 Ode to Frances, a Grenache-based "ode to Châteauneuf-du-Pape" crafted by Twain-Peterson, comes from three vineyards planted in the 1880s and 1890s; his Bedrock Wine Company 2015 Gibson Ranch Heritage Wine from McDowell Valley in Mendocino, meanwhile, is a field blend of Syrah, Petite Sirah, and other grapes, some of which are sourced from 9-foot-tall old vines.

Another knockout was the Carlisle 2016 Two Acres, a cool-climate Russian River Valley Mataro field blend made by winemaker (and HVS team member) Mike Officer. The wine was suggestively complex with deep black-fruit and earth notes.



Winemaker Philippe Guigal.

"The Majesty of Guigal"

After his glowing introduction by moderator Patrick Will of Guigal's U.S. importer Vintus, winemaker Philippe Guigal joked that he had searched his suitcase thoroughly but found no crown, prompting him to playfully question the title of this seminar:

The wines on the table, however, proved the tasting session to be aptly named. For Rhône geeks, Guigal is the revered label that brought Côte Rôtie to prominence. Founded by Etienne Guigal in 1946 and now based at the Château d'Ampuis, which the family acquired in 1995, Guigal is now in its third generation under Philippe.

Philippe began the tasting with several Saint-Joseph wines—a white and six reds—that showed the strength of this oft-overlooked Syrah-based appellation. The session concluded with four of Guigal's Côte-Rôties, including the very small-production La Turquie from the 2005 vintage. As an awed silence fell over the room, Guigal quipped that the Hospice du Rhône audience was drinking a sizeable percentage of the vintage—a very generous and much appreciated end to a, yes, majestic tasting. *ST*

{ appellation translation }

THE *Goldilocks* FACTOR

TAKE NOTE: THE LANGUEDOC IS PEACEFULLY BUILDING AN EMPIRE OF SUPERIOR ROSÉS THAT STRIKE ALL THE RIGHT NOTES

by Jessie Birschbach / photos by Doug Young

An old bell rings through vineyards in the Corbières-Boutenac appellation.

PHOTO: GILLES DESCHAMPS

Master Sommelier Michael Meagher

once said “you can still do great things in board shorts and flip-flops,” and having grown up in San Diego, I naturally concur. It turns out, though, that Meagher wasn’t referring to southern California, instead referencing a sunshine-filled wine region in southern France: the Languedoc.

Meagher, who serves as Chairman Emeritus of the Boston Sommelier Society (which he founded) and the principal/owner of Sommelier On-Demand Hospitality Services, will lead a Languedoc-focused seminar at SommCon San Diego in November. During the Master Sommelier’s recent visit to the area last year, he was struck by the recent influx of foreign investment, as well as the trend of winemakers moving into the Languedoc. While many are migrating for the weather—perhaps even a better quality of life—it’s clear companies like Barons de Rothschild (Lafite) see potential waiting to be untapped in the region.

It appears they’re a tad late to the party: As representatives of a very tight-knit wine culture, the happy, sun-tanned producers in the Languedoc have been at it for thousands of years. In fact, one out of every three organic vineyards in France are located in the region. “You always just think of cheap, cheerful wine, but you don’t think about this organic movement having its roots—pun intended—in the Languedoc,” Meagher says. “That’s because they don’t need anything else than what nature provides.”

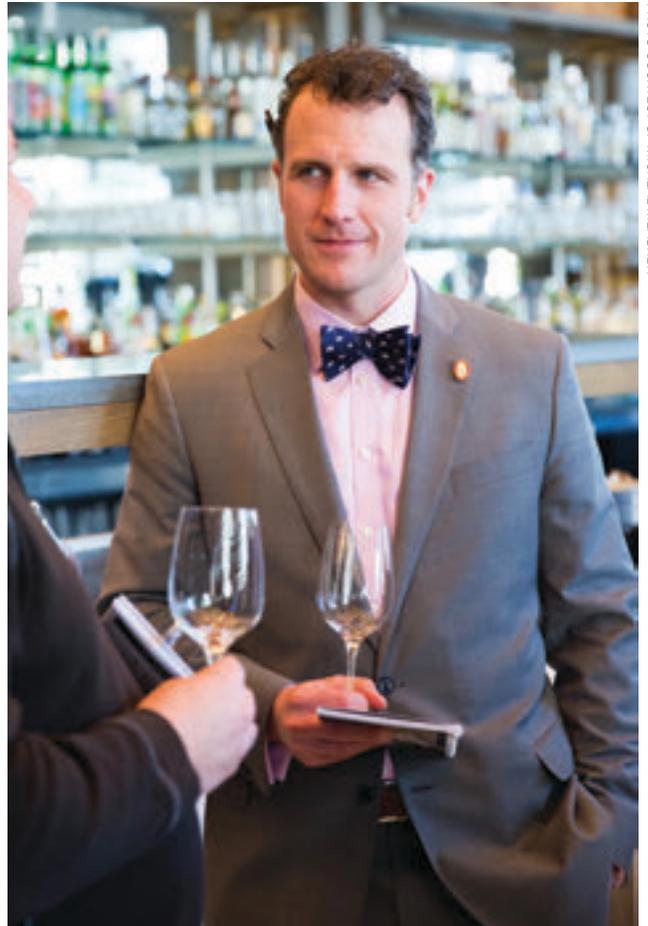


PHOTO COURTESY OF MICHAEL MEAGHER

Michael Meagher, MS, will lead a seminar on Languedoc wines at SommCon San Diego in November.



PHOTO: GILLES DESCHAMPS

The northern border of the Pic Saint-Loup AOP.

This perception ended up being yet another myth busted for Meagher as a result of his stay. "I was shocked at the wine quality," he said. "Their rosés have what I call the power of Goldilocks: They're not too light, not too heavy, not super-alcoholic, and not super-delicate. They possess this wonderful spectrum, a wonderful flexibility. You want wines that go with everything? Languedoc's the place."

Meagher's love affair with Languedoc rosé began where he got his own start: a bistro-type restaurant where the region "was all over the menu." But no matter the venue or concept, there are several benefits to offering this versatile category. "Wine lists embrace the Languedoc. It doesn't chew up a ton of your inventory, and there always seem to be good deals out there," said Meagher.

This value can be attributed at least in part to the region's size. In fact, the Languedoc produces more rosé than Provence: roughly 1,930,000 hectoliters versus 1,216,000. This is perhaps the final misconception Meagher seeks to debunk: "I want people to stop seeing it as this giant, monolithic wine region," he says. "It takes maybe an hour and a half to drive from Montpellier all the way down to Corbières. The food is amazing and the people will open their cellars to happily share their incredible wine."

Meagher says he'd attribute this higher level of quality not just to the sunny personalities of its people, but to its regionality and the thoughtful way the appellation has formed its current boundaries. "The Vin du Languedoc has really fractionalized in a smart way," he explains. "They kept the whole banner of AOC Languedoc but they've allowed its subregions, its crus, to really put forward the best wines they can and to reward those regions that have continued to push forward for quality."

Even as a Master Sommelier, Meagher admits the region can sometimes be a bit challenging to summarize. "But that being said, once the world grows into it, I think it's really going to put Languedoc at an advantage against these other emerging value markets. All these other places that are cutting quality just to get wines on the shelf are going to suffer."

Its wines clearly prove the Languedoc is a terroir-driven region: Appellations like Fitou, Corbières, Minervois, and Faugères all produce quality rosés reflective of their respective place of origin. "Some of the oldest AOCs/AOPs in France are down around this area. Château de Lancyre, which is up in Pic Saint-Loup, is really right up against the Rhône and oftentimes gets lumped into it, so their wines have this wonderful structure and their rosés really are underrated," Meagher says. "Then you look at something down toward Minervois like Château Coupe Roses—there's more limestone and schist and clay soil, so their wines tend to be a little bit more floral and less dense with a lighter body."

Whether the rosés are on the crisper or more substantial side, Meagher's visit to the Languedoc has resulted in a refreshing perspective and perhaps a more realistic, up-to-date assessment of the area. Don't let the weather fool you: As happy and easygoing as its culture may be, the Languedoc's wines are quite serious.



*Victoria James,
Beverage Director at
Cote in New York, pours
Domaine de Fontaine
by the glass.*



A SENSE OF ADVENTURE AT COTE

As the author of *Drink Pink: A Celebration of Rosé*, Victoria James certainly knows the category well, having packed her educated insight on various production methods and favorite producers into the tiny book. Aside from being one of New York's most celebrated sommeliers, James currently runs the wine program at Cote, a posh Korean steakhouse in Manhattan's Flatiron District.

James says she pours "one of the best values in the rosé world," the Domaine de Fontaine, by the glass at Cote. "Because it is from a lesser-known region [Corbières], it doesn't cash in on its big name, so the price is still moderate," James says. "The producer also isn't trying to chase trends in winemaking and remains traditional and honest."

James often relies on the Languedoc not just for value, but for quality as well. "There are so many great wines made today in the Languedoc that fly under the radar. Sadly, the nearby Provence region has ridden the wave of fame and the bulk of the Languedoc's pink wine has suffered because of this," James laments. "There are many gems from Languedoc, and the vast majority can be

better in quality than Provence and many other French regions. There are less restrictions on grapes used, so avant-garde winemakers can experiment and the results can be quite fantastic.”

Like Meagher, James also makes sure to highlight the region’s broad spectrum of styles. “I don’t think a sommelier can properly characterize a Languedoc rosé by flavor profile since the region is so diverse, but one can by philosophy,” she explains. “Overall, these wines are much more off the beaten path and can offer great value.”



“The Fontaine is fantastic as an apéritif with our steak tartare,” Cote Beverage Director Victoria James says. “The dish has pickled mustard seeds and Asian pear, which lightens up the richness of the raw beef. To match the freshness of the fruit and zing of the mustard seeds, the Fontaine picks up the acidity and refreshes the palate.”

Doc Doc Goose: Five Outstanding Languedoc Rosés

Château de Lancyre 2016 Le Rosé, Pic Saint-Loup (\$17)

A substantial medium-plus body supports the dark and tart red fruit in this Pic Saint-Loup–based rosé tinged with purple flowers. The noticeable, silky tannins are likely attributed to the blend of bolder varieties: 50% Syrah, 40% Grenache, and 10% Cinsault. This is an awesome direct-press, no-skin-contact, big-daddy rosé. The estate supports 198 acres of sustainably grown fruit on some of the coolest hillside in the Pic Saint-Loup, while the château—a 16th-century building built on the ruins of a 12th-century fort, has been run by the Durand and Valentin families since 1970.

HAND PICKED SELECTIONS



Chateau Sainte Eulalie 2017 Printemps d’Eulalie, Minervois (\$13)

This no-nonsense, medium-bodied rosé is made via the saignée method with a blend of Syrah, Cinsault, Mourvèdre, and Grenache grown in organic, certified-sustainable vineyards. (The Coustal family renovated the entire estate in 1996.) Dominated by ripe red raspberries and uber-ripe strawberries, it also features a dash of talcum and a touch of spice, which come to light in the background on the finish.

MICHAEL CORSO SELECTIONS



Gérard Bertrand 2017 Château La Sauvageonne La Villa Rosé (\$25)

The first read on this onion-skin-colored, fascinating, and super-dry rosé reveals its non-fruit qualities. A striking salinity plays against muted grapefruit and just-ripe, tense stone fruit within the sturdy confines of a silky medium body. A bit of fresh sage wafts about in the distance. Old-vine Grenache is co-fermented with Vermentino and Viognier (old-vine Mourvèdre is also used). Only free-run and first-press juice is used from a whole-cluster crush; fermentation starts in stainless and ends in barrel. Overall, this wine is electrifying.

USA WINE WEST



Mas Jullien 2017 Rosé, Coteaux du Languedoc (\$22)

This saignée rosé made with Carignan, Cinsault, and Mourvèdre is fermented and aged in stainless steel. In addition to a substantial red-fruit quality and obvious savory minerality, a bit of playful, juicy watermelon creates balance as a touch of Tajín seasoning complements the wine’s weight.

ROSENTHAL WINE MERCHANT



Puech-Haut 2017 Prestige Rosé, Saint-Drézéry (\$20)

Light cotton-candy color with a buoyancy to match, this fresher-style rosé offers white peach, Rainier cherry, green-tinged strawberry, a touch of spice, and white, floral character. Ending with a dry lemon-rind finish, this Grenache/Cinsault blend is Biodynamically farmed in the clay-limestone soils of Saint-Drézéry in close proximity to Pic Saint-Loup.

EUROPEAN CELLARS



{ what we're drinking }



Uncorking France's BEST-KEPT SECRET

CENTURIES-OLD VIN DE LIQUEUR PINEAU DES CHARENTES
PREPARES TO MAKE A BIG SPLASH

by Richard Carleton Hacker / photos by Josh Freedman

Pineau des Charentes can be served chilled as an apéritif while the headier rosé and Vieux varieties can make for refreshing digestifs. The fortified wine also has potential as an imaginative cocktail ingredient.

PINEAU DES CHARENTES MAP



IMAGE COURTESY OF COMITE NATIONAL DU PINEAU DES CHARENTES

QUICK: Think of a fortified wine other than Sherry or Port that's more widely consumed in its country of origin than it is in the rest of Europe and the United States combined. No, it's not Madeira, nor is it Muscat or Marsala.

Give up? The leader of this under-the-radar category is Pineau des Charentes, and if the name of this versatile, low-alcohol fortified wine (*vin de liqueur*) doesn't naturally roll off your lips, it's understandable.

"We export Cognac, but we drink Pineau des Charentes," is a proud saying among the people of the Charente-Maritime

département in France, where this popular yet geographically isolated beverage is made alongside its more well-known peer. In fact, with the Pineau AOC falling into the Cognac region, Pineau des Charentes producers must also be Cognac distillers, as the celebrated eau-de-vie serves as the integral ingredient that halts the wine's fermentation. It also helps give the vin de liqueur its unmistakable character.

Pineau des Charentes is made by adding eau-de-vie AOC Cognac to unfermented grape juice. Its creation, legend has it, was an accident: According to an oft-told tale, a Charentes winemaker put grape must in a barrel he thought was empty during the 1589 harvest, but the vessel actually still contained some eau-de-vie.

"Although these are sweet wines, they may start out sweet and heavy, but they don't finish that way. They have a nice, dry finish."

When he went to retrieve the barrel from his cellar a few years later, *voilà!* Pineau des Charentes was born, much to the everlasting delight of the locals: While Cognac has basked in the worldwide spotlight for hundreds of years, the complexities and virtues of Pineau des Charentes have been quietly cloaked in the shadows, where it's enjoyed only by those living in the adjoining regions of Charente and Charente-Maritime in western France.

According to Pineau des Charentes Ambassador Hoke Harden, however, that may be poised to change. Recently, Harden—who also happens to be a Society of Wine Educators–Certified Spirits Educator—recently lifted the veil covering the many attributes of Pineau des Charentes at a seminar in West Hollywood, California. Held at the award-winning restaurant Lucques, the event was attended by more than 30 top sommeliers and mixologists from the Los Angeles area.

Pineau des Charentes Ambassador Hoke Harden, a Society of Wine Educators–Certified Spirits Educator, with author and spirits expert Richard Carleton Hacker at a West Hollywood seminar celebrating the vin de liqueur.



Tasting Gallery



Tessendier's Pineau Park (\$20) is a white Pineau des Charentes aged between two and four years. Featured grapes include Montils, Colombar, and Ugni Blanc. Bright notes of apricot, fresh fig, and walnut fill the nose and palate.

BLACK SEA IMPORTS INC.



The 18-month-old Pierre Ferrand Blanc (\$29), made from Grande Champagne Ugni Blanc grapes, exhibited noticeable fruit upfront.

DEUTSCH FAMILY WINE & SPIRITS



Within the Très Vieux category, Bache Gabrielsen Pineau des Charentes is aged 20 years and features grapes like Ugni Blanc, Colombar, and Folle Blanche. This well-matured Pineau des Charentes includes flavors of walnut and dried apricots.

BCI

According to Harden, the Charentes region produces two basic types of its proprietary fortified wine: white, which is generally made from the same grapes as Cognac (Ugni Blanc, Colombard, and Folle Blanche), and vin de liqueur red or rosé (often used interchangeably) primarily made from Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, and Cabernet Franc. Reflecting the French penchant for regulation, the Cognac used for this fortified wine must generally be added in a ratio of three parts grape juice or must to one part Cognac, but this proportion can change depending on quality.

Moreover, both the eau-de-vie and the grapes must come from the same estate or vineyard and be made by the same producer. No sugar or other additives can be added to the mixture, and this fortified wine blend—or *mutage*—must be aged wholly in oak barrels. The maturation time can range from eight months to 20 years or more.

The wines tasted at the seminar included Blanc, which requires a minimum of 18 months of aging, including 12 months in oak; Rouge/Rosé, a category that requires 12 months of aging, including eight months in oak; Vieux,

with a minimum of five years of oak aging; and Très Vieux, with a minimum of ten years of oak aging. All end up with an alcohol content between 16–22 percent and are generally priced from \$17–\$50 (or more for some of the older Très Vieux wines).

“Although these are sweet wines, they may start out sweet and heavy, but they don’t finish that way,” Harden noted during the seminar. “They have a nice, dry finish.” The 18-month-old Pierre Ferrand Blanc, made from Grande Champagne Ugni Blanc grapes, indeed exhibited noticeable fruit upfront—predominantly grapefruit, peach, and plum—while the Château de Beaulon 5 Year Old Blanc had pronounced notes of apricots and honey with a surprisingly spicy finish. In all, the region currently exports 30 brands of Pineau des Charentes.

In many ways, the vin de liqueur is akin to vermouth, as it can be stored for weeks after opening if kept refrigerated. It can also be used as an imaginative cocktail ingredient or served chilled as an apéritif, while the headier rosé and Vieux varieties can make for refreshing digestifs. To be sure, after 429 years, Pineau des Charentes somehow remains a wine just waiting to be discovered. **sj**



Cognac Normandin-Mercier (\$27) is a red Pineau des Charentes made from Merlot. Aromas of hibiscus, Earl Grey tea, and dried cherry are savory and mouth-coating.



Aged for five years and with an ABV of 18%, **Château de Beaulon** is an old (vieux) Pineau des Charentes made from Semillon, Sauvignon Blanc, and other grapes. This is a fresh, fruity example of the category with hints of honeysuckle and vanilla. The mid-palate brings in tangerine and dried apricot.



A white Pineau des Charentes aged five years, **Réviseur** (\$30) contains only one grape: Ugni Blanc. This enables it to display the *rancio* nature that sometimes shows itself in this fortified wine. It conjures the scent of cedar or varnish with aromas of dried raisin.

LAIRD & COMPANY



DEEP TIES AND DIVERSE TERROIR

INDUSTRY PROFESSIONALS
LEARN FROM THE
**ALEXANDER VALLEY'S
FINEST PRODUCERS AT
CABERNET ACADEMY 2018**

by Ruth Tobias / photos by Alexander Rubin

As the group of industry professionals attending this year's Alexander Valley Cabernet Academy surveyed the hills surrounding Rodney Strong's Rockaway Vineyard, their view was striking enough to provoke some bold declarations. "This is probably the way Napa was 30 years ago," marveled Tom Laret, Sommelier at Hotel Captain Cook in Anchorage, Alaska. "There's nothing wrong with Disneyland, but if you want to come to wine country, this is it."

*HOOFING IT THROUGH THE
ROWS AT ALEXANDER VALLEY
VINEYARDS IN HEALDSBURG, CA.*

Gorgeous though the landscape was, Laret was referring above all to the California region's overriding sense of agricultural stewardship, driven more so by familial legacy than corporate interest. He was hardly alone in that assessment: Again and again over the course of the two-day camp, it was echoed by guests like Josh Ardizzoni of Atlanta's Marcel, who mused, "It's cool to be welcomed in, rather than admitted in, by people who are connected to the land and their way of life rather than their economic standing."

And what a down-to-earth welcome it was, from an alfresco feast of fried chicken at Trione Vineyards and Winery—where Denise Trione served rare cult beer Pliny the Elder to cleanse wine-worn palates—to a charming tour of Alexander Valley Vineyards by Head of Operations Harry Wetzel IV, who showed us the tiny cemetery where the property's original owner and the Valley's "founding father," Cyrus Alexander, was laid to rest.

Granted, if we all agreed that such a tight-knit community helps the appellation thrive, we also needed to recognize it wouldn't be here in the first place if not for exceptional terroir. Fortunately, members of the Alexander Valley Winegrowers Association—with the invaluable help of Master Sommelier Fred Dame and Certified Wine Educator Stefen Soltysiak—brought the group here to uncover that very concept in all its complexity.



A panorama of the Alexander Valley from the top of Rodney Strong's Rockaway Vineyard in Geyserville, CA.



Stefen Soltysiak, CWE, CS; Fred Dame, MS; Harry Wetzel IV, Head of Operations at Alexander Valley Vineyards; Nate Weis, Director of Winemaking at Silver Oak Cellars; and Jake Hawkes of Hawkes Wine share a laugh during the panel on microclimates at Hawkes Pyramid Vineyard in Healdsburg, CA. Soltysiak served as the panel's moderator.



A toast to the good life at Trione Vineyards and Winery in Geyserville.

DAY 1: MICROCLIMATES, GEOLOGY, AND SOILS

To that end, there may be few better guides than Munselle Vineyards' Bret Munselle. The winegrower used the bus ride from the Geyserville Inn to our first destination to give us a crash course on the multigenerational history of the Valley, orienting us within the landscape while pointing out houses his own family had lived in and plots they'd tended in decades past.

After a Champagne toast atop Hawkes Pyramid Vineyard in Healdsburg, panel moderator Soltysiak picked up where Munselle left off with a brief overview of the roughly 22-mile-long, 3-mile-wide appellation—including the little-known detail that it's generally 5–8 degrees cooler at its southern tip than at its northern end.

The microclimates, it turns out, are all over the map. Silver Oak Cellars Director of Winemaking Nate Weis used a chart-by-chart comparison of two vineyards, Alexander Valley Estate and Red Tail less than five miles south, to illustrate how the latter, though predictably cooler on average, has a higher maximum temperature due to radiation from compacted sandstone.



During a tour of Alexander Valley Vineyards in Healdsburg, camp attendees visited the small cemetery where Alexander Valley pioneer Cyrus Alexander is buried.



Houston wine consultant Nate Rose evaluates the first of many Cabernet flights at Hawkes Pyramid Vineyard in Healdsburg.



Laura Carpenter Hawkes of Hawkes Wine and Carpenter Wines serves up family-recipe brisket and ribs at Hawkes' Red Winery Vineyard.

Wetzel supplemented the lesson with a description of his Pinot Noir plot in an area where the grape is largely an anomaly: "It works just in that one spot with its own little sub-microclimate by the river," he explained. "You can't grow it anywhere else—it's too hot." He added that while this heightened ability for diversity "makes the Alexander Valley hard to explain, [it] also makes it interesting." (As Cassie Sakai, Wine Director at Chicago's Girl & the Goat, joked, "I feel sorry for the somms who are going to have to memorize all the sub-AVAs in ten years because the sites are so different.")

Considering this lofty potential for variation, Soltysiak asked the million-dollar question: "What defines an Alexander Valley Cabernet? There's always going to be a natural comparison between the Alexander Valley and the Napa Valley, especially where Cabernet is concerned, and it's a blessing and a curse to live in Napa's shadow."

We pondered the matter while tasting through our first flight. Weis credited "a little more acidity, softness on the mid-palate, and much more structured tannins" for the extent to which the Alexander Valley wines "tend to age amazingly and

more consistently, whereas Napa is more vintage-dependent." But as Jake Hawkes of Hawkes Wine pointed out, "It's funny how everybody brags about how long their wine is going to age, yet for the most part that's used as a tool to get people to buy the wine and drink it now."

Striking a balance between immediate and long-term drinkability, he continued, "is the challenge and the fun" of a newer wine region "where the future is more dependent on what's happening now than in, say, Bordeaux, where history can be a strait-jacket." To be fair, it also complicates the already-fraught issue of regional character. "I worked on some of the early Napa AVA applications. We had to prove typicity within the region, so we did tastings, and of course no one agreed on anything," Dame told the group. "How are you going to prove typicity when everyone has a different opinion?"

In other words, it seemed arriving at a general consensus on the region could be more challenging than anticipated. Luckily, we had a chance to regroup before our next seminar over a homecooked barbecue lunch at Hawkes' Red Winery Vineyard, where, as an added bonus, Dame held forth on the merits of collecting ageworthy wines for restaurant cellars.

Back in Geyserville at Trione, Soltysiak kicked off a colloquium on geology and soil types with an overview of the tectonic shifts that led to the region's current



Common components of Alexander Valley soil include greenstone and radiolarian chert.

geological makeup, which he described as "mostly old seafloor stuff, some of which is excellent to grow in," supplemented by various volcanic materials. Graywacke sandstone, greenstone, and chert count among the most advantageous bases for Alexander Valley soil, but serpentinite is also common.

Building on that ancient history, each



From bobcats to bullfrogs, the biodiversity of Ferrari-Carano's Back Forty site is "part of what makes it so special," Vineyard Operations Manager Todd Clow said.



At left, a lunchtime lineup of older vintages illustrated Master Sommelier Fred Dame's discussion on the benefits of building a cellar with ageworthiness in mind. At right, Ferrari-Carano's Pre Vail Ranch Back Forty blend is made from fruit grown 1,050-1,200 feet above sea level.



panelist offered an illuminating example of what Soltysiak called "the intricacies" of area farming today (reinforced, of course, by the wine samples before us). Veteran Jordan Vineyard & Winery Winemaker Rob Davis discussed the work he's doing with Munselle at the grower's Wasson Ranch to measure soil resistivity, explaining that the analyses "reproduce very closely what [he calls] a sensory profile" from vine to vine. This allows Munselle to zero in on the best practices for yielding "what [the winery is] looking for in Cabernet: cassis and blackberry flavors that are concentrated without a huge amount of hang time."

Trione Winemaker Scot Covington took the floor next to profile the winery's northernmost vineyard, Cloverdale Ranch's Block 21. At the three-acre site, overall loaminess gives way toward the river to "gravel streaks you have to manage" through careful irriga-

tion, Covington said (Davis then joked that the variability of vineyard drainage here is such that "with half an inch of rain, ducks are floating through some areas"). Rodney Strong Winemaker Greg Morthole also chimed in to describe the "well-drained, cobbly" Clough soils over clay in Alexander's Crown Block 1 that contribute to the "spicy, herbal tones" he derives from Clone 4.

Ferrari-Carano Vineyard Operations Manager Todd Clow concluded the program by painting a portrait of Prevail Ranch's Back Forty as "a finicky, fussy, cold place" at an elevation of 1,050-1,200 feet above sea level. With 30- to 50-degree slopes and "marginal" rhyolite and andesite soils—not to mention bald eagles, bullfrogs, and turtles—the property nevertheless yields what Executive Winemaker Sarah Quider described as that "blueberry, boysenberry, blackberry-jam characteristic" she strives for.

DAY 2: ELEVATION, TOPOGRAPHY, AND BLENDING

Speaking of elevation, it came into sharper focus the next morning at Rockaway, where Rodney Strong Director of Estate Vineyards Ryan Decker and Stonestreet Estate Vineyards Winemaker Lisa Valtenbergs detailed the particularly dramatic variables of hillside viticulture in the Valley.



Stonestreet Estate Vineyards Winemaker Lisa Valtenbergs and Rodney Strong Director of Estate Vineyards Ryan Decker led a panel with Stefen Soltysiak and Fred Dame on Alexander Valley's higher-elevation sites against the backdrop of Rodney Strong's Rockaway Vineyard.

Weather considerations run the gamut; a midsummer inversion layer, for example, speeds up the post-veraison ripening process. According to Valtenbergs, the fog that funnels through the Petaluma Gap gives the Cabernet grapes “more blue-fruit character and acid retention” than those that grow above the fog layer at 1,800 feet; they also “ripen a lot earlier and show more red fruit.” Harvest-time storms can also make slopeside picking treacherous.

Then there's the matter of row orientation. Both wineries have dismissed terracing as causing more problems than it solves in terms of soil-nutrient imbalance and potential erosion, so Stonestreet is now planting rows either straight up and down or diagonally across the slopes.

Rodney Strong, meanwhile, is working to align its rows with the sun's rays during the hottest part of the afternoon in order to protect the fruit. “That's really important at higher elevations where your UV light's much more intense,” Decker explained.

The hazards of farming steeper vineyards like Rockaway (at 600 feet) and Stonestreet's Rockfall (at 2,000-plus feet) are mirrored by the vines' own struggles at altitude. Valtenbergs compared the resulting small berries to mountain climbers who've “built up this protective layer of leathery, wrinkled skin.” “For Cabernet, that's fantastic,” she added. “You're getting

more color, more concentration, more power, and more depth.”

Ultimately, the testimonials from winemakers and producers “really drove home how much people sacrifice to farm up there,” Amy Mundwiler, Wine Director at Chicago's Maple & Ash, observed. “It's hard and the vines suffer—but it's worth it. The wines are beautiful!”

Qualities like color and concentration can obviously be maximized through the blending process as well, and when we arrived for our final presentation at the Francis Ford Coppola Winery, we heard firsthand how area winemakers have a variety of options for doing just that. The day prior, Weis had revealed how the differences between Red Tail and Alex-

ander Valley Estate highlight “what we do in terms of blending an Alexander Valley wine,” with the former lending structure to the latter's “lush, fruity” character and “soft, supple tannins.”

On day two, Coppola Director of Grower Relations Ryan Stapleton offered a macro-perspective on the subject by discussing his collaboration with contract farmers across the Valley to ensure appellation-level wines like Director's Cut and Archimedes showcase the best of the region's Cabernet. Winemaker Sandy Walheim also explained her team's approach to blending the grape with Petit Verdot, Cabernet Franc, and/or Malbec to ensure her wines accomplish this goal upon release rather than a decade hence.

Matt Michael, Winemaker at Robert Young Estate Winery, wrapped things up by describing his efforts to distinguish “fairly similar” blocks of Clone 7 and 8 Cabernet by farming and fermenting them differently. He said this helps determine “how you get to the place where you're creating exciting wines”—which, he acknowledged, is “a constant journey.”

Such humility had proven a hall-



The godfather of Master Sommeliers, Fred Dame, behind Don Corleone's desk—just one of many set pieces from The Godfather films on display at the Francis Ford Coppola Winery in Geyserville.



A marker in the vineyards of Francis Ford Coppola Winery.



Alexander Valley Winegrowers President Mark Houser and Trione Winemaker Scot Covington celebrate another successful Cab Academy.

mark of local winemakers over the course of the trip, but after tasting the Robert Young 2014 Scion Cabernet Sauvignon before us, Dame asked Michael if they were overdue for some boasting. "Alexander Valley wine has always been a great value. At the premium end, I actually think it's under the market—it should be in the \$100 range on a more consistent basis. What's in the bottle is certainly quite worthy of that," Dame said, adding cheekily, "I know your distributor's just going to love that idea, but feel free to tell them I said it." Rest assured the Cab Academy Class of 2018 would gladly stand up to sing the Valley's praises right alongside him. ■



This year's Alexander Valley Cabernet Academy attendees gather for a group portrait at Rodney Strong's Rockaway Vineyard in Geyserville.

THE ALEXANDER CAB CAMPERS:

- Gina Ogorzaly**, Wine Buyer, Zupan's Market, Portland, OR
- Antoine Boissonot**, Sommelier, Capa at the Four Seasons Hotel, Orlando, FL
- Tom Laret**, Wine Director, Captain Cook Hotel, Anchorage, AK
- Zach Carrubba**, Resort Sommelier, Mar'sel at Terranea Resort, Rancho Palos Verdes, CA
- Patricia Smith**, Beverage Manager, 5Church Charleston, Charleston, SC
- Cassie Sakai**, Wine Director, Girl & the Goat, Chicago, IL
- David Reuss**, Wine Director, Shanahan's Steakhouse, Denver, CO
- Benjamin Appleby**, Sommelier, Abe & Louie's – Tavistock, Boston, MA
- Adam Pucillo**, Beverage Director, LDV Hospitality
- Larry Caraviello**, Beverage Director, Kiawah Island Golf Resort, Kiawah Island, SC
- Patrick Olds**, Corporate Beverage Director, Louie's Wine Dive, Kansas City, MO
- David Bachrach**, Beverage Director, Mandarin Oriental, New York, NY
- Steve Olsen**, Wine Director, Docks Oyster Bar & Seafood Grill, New York, NY
- Todd Pavao**, GM/Corporate Wine Buyer, Luke's Cape Cod Fine Wine & Spirits, West Yarmouth, MA
- Scott Birch**, Wine Buyer, Vino Volo, Sacramento, CA
- Mark Guillaudeu**, Wine Director, Commis, Oakland, CA
- Alicia Ajolo**, Wine Director, Mar'sel at Terranea Resort, Rancho Palos Verdes, CA
- Joey Cottle**, Sommelier, Anthonie's Market Grill, Simonton, TX
- Nate Rose**, Independent Wine Consultant, Houston, TX
- Kat Kaliski**, Owner/Sommelier, Blends Wine Bar, Belton, TX
- Amy Mundwiler**, Wine Director, Maple & Ash, Chicago, IL
- James Nichols**, Owner, Perrine's Wine Shop, Atlanta, GA
- Josh Ardizzoni**, Sommelier, Marcel of Ford Fry Restaurant Group, Atlanta, GA
- Rom Askar**, Wine Buyer, Melrose Wine & Spirits, Los Angeles, CA
- John Ferguson III**, Bar Manager/Buyer, McConnell Concepts, 55 South, and Cork & Cow, Franklin, TN
- Stephen Meyers**, Owner, Sarabeth's & Docks Oyster Bar & Seafood Grill, New York, NY
- Matthew Sinclair**, Wine Buyer, Del Frisco's Restaurant Group, Tampa, FL
- Jonathan Walsh**, Wine Representative, Julio's Liquors, Westborough, MA

WANT TO WIN YOUR WAY TO PORTUGAL?

GET A LEG UP ON THE COMPETITION WITH A LITTLE HELP FROM THE JUDGES



Sheri Sauter Morano, MW



Eugénio Jardim



Beginning next month, *The SOMM Journal* will work its way around the country seeking five lucky winners to join us in Portugal as the **Wines of Portugal American Sommelier of the Year!** To get a sneak peek at what the judges are looking for, we caught up with Master of Wine Sheri Sauter Morano and Eugénio Jardim, who serves as Wines of Portugal's U.S. Ambassador.

As judges, what will you be looking for from the Wines of Portugal American Sommelier of the Year contestants?

Sheri Sauter Morano: We are looking for contestants who show a real enthusiasm for the wines of Portugal. They do not need to be experts in the region, but they do need to demonstrate a desire to learn. We are specifically looking for individuals who are active in the trade and demonstrate an aptitude for communicating about wine in general—people who will want to go out and get others excited about the quality and value coming out of Portugal.

Why should sommeliers and wine-buying professionals enter this competition?

Eugénio Jardim: Wine professionals are very curious about new and exciting regions, little-known (and sometimes unknown) grape varieties, and new and old winemaking techniques. This competition will afford the participants a chance to observe and discuss that and the many possibilities for utilizing Portuguese wines in their programs. And to top it all off, the winners will be offered a curated experience in Portugal!

In your opinion, what makes the wines of Portugal so unique?

SM: This category has seen explosive growth in export markets over the past few years and there is huge potential here in the U.S. This is a country actively looking to connect with both the trade and the end-user. Tourism is at an all-time high, so I believe the time is ripe to be talking to consumers about these wines.

EJ: The incredible concentration of indigenous varieties not found anywhere else in the world in itself is very exciting. Portuguese wines offer a breath of fresh air with their unique ability to pair with diverse cuisines and their unbeatable price-quality ratio.

What is one thing people don't understand yet about Portuguese wines?

SM: I think one perception people have is that Portuguese wines are either light white wines for early consumption or super-alcoholic big reds, but there is so much more than that! The styles have really evolved and there have been huge investments in modernizing the wine industry in Portugal. You can find everything from organic and natural wines to wines made for extensive aging to those designed for everyday consumption.

EJ: Their dry wines come in all different styles with a very specific terroir imprint. They're fresh, clean, and full of energy—the grape varieties may be difficult to pronounce, but they're very easy to enjoy!

What is one thing you can only learn about Portuguese wines if you visit Portugal?

SM: Visiting Portugal really drives home just how diverse the various regions are, even within a small county. I remember thinking the first time I visited that there was so much more to see, taste, and experience. What once helped define Portugal was its drive to explore and discover the world beyond its borders—today, I think it is our turn to discover what Portugal has to offer!



COMPETE FOR THE TITLE *** AND JOIN US IN *** PORTUGAL!

There's nothing like tasting wines right where they're made, and connecting ancient tradition to what's in the glass.

So how do you get there? **Compete for the title of Wines of Portugal Sommelier of the Year** for your city! If you live near any of the locations below, you'll have the chance to taste with Master of Wine Sheri Sauter Morano, Wines of Portugal Brand Ambassador Eugénio Jardim, and a Wine Editor from The SOMM Journal. Only **TEN** qualified somms will be selected to compete in each city, and those ten will go head-to-head on an exam, blind tasting, and oral presentation.

JOIN US IN:

- Los Angeles** - September 17
- Seattle** - September 19
- Washington, D.C.** - September 24
- Atlanta** - September 25
- Houston** - September 26

Only one winner from each city will be chosen, and that lucky winner will travel to Portugal's wine country and claim the title of **Wines of Portugal Sommelier of the Year!** *

HOW TO APPLY :

Visit www.sommjournal.com/Portugal to find the entry form. You must currently be working as a buyer on-or off-premise. **Entry deadline is 8/31.**

*Includes flight, hotel and meals/transportation in Portugal



WINES OF PORTUGAL SOMMELIER OF THE YEAR 2018



THE **SOMM**JOURNAL
www.winesofportugal.com/us

Industry influencers descended on The Culinary Institute of America (CIA) at Copia in Napa, California, for the Global Garnacha Summit.

A Cinderella STORY



Master of Wine Pedro Ballesteros Torres wrote the cover story on Garnacha for the April-May 2018 issue of The SOMM Journal.

AT THE FIRST GLOBAL GARNACHA SUMMIT, DOP CARIÑENA AND VIP TASTEMAKERS DISCUSS THE FUTURE OF SPAIN'S RISING-STAR GRAPE

by Jonathan Cristaldi / photos by Alexander Rubin

During the first annual Global Garnacha Summit held this past April at The Culinary Institute of America (CIA) at Copia in downtown Napa, all eyes were on Cariñena, a small Roman-era town in the Aragón region of northeast Spain.

Although the Carignan (Cariñena) grape is believed to have originated from this precise area of the Ebro Valley, wine production has shifted focus to Garnacha/Grenache, which is better suited to the arid, dry conditions of the region and very well could have first grown in these soils, as well.

The focus of the summit was to highlight old-vine Garnacha and its respective regional homes—including, of course, Cariñena, which sponsored the event in partnership with these other Garnacha-centric areas to host sommeliers and top wine buyers from around the world. Seminars and tastings, including an in-



The fascinating “Garnacha Unveiled” seminar featured a strong panel of Garnacha/Grenache evangelists. Pictured from left to right: moderator Bob Bath, MS, followed by panelists Randall Grahm of Bonny Doon Vineyard; Pedro Ballesteros Torres, MW; Emmanuel Kemiji, MS, owner of Miura Vineyards and Managing Director at Clos Pissarra; Chelsea Franchi, Sr. Assistant Winemaker for Tablas Creek Vineyard; Angela Osborne of Grace Wine Company; and Even Bakke of Clos de Trias in the Ventoux.

teractive blind tasting led by SommFoundation, were offered as Grenache producers from Cariñena, California, France, Australia, and Italy assembled to represent their respective wines.

The first seminar, dubbed “Garnacha Unveiled,” included Garnacha/Grenache evangelists Pedro Ballesteros Torres, Master of Wine and joint regional chair for Spain for the *Decanter* World Wine Awards; Even Bakke of Clos de Trias; Randall Grahm of Bonny Doon Vineyard; Chelsea Franchi of Tablas Creek Vineyard and Château de Beaucastel; Angela Osborne of Grace Wine Company; and Master Sommelier Emmanuel Kemiji, owner of Miura Vineyards and Managing Director at Clos Pissarra.



The Grenache vines of the Warboys Vineyard in McLaren Vale, Australia, bury their roots deeply in limestone for sustenance.

of which roughly 4,500 are in California alone.”

Ballesteros Torres also added some regional insights on Cariñena. “We have more old-vine Garnacha planted than any other region in Spain,” he said. “Every year brings many different micro-winemaking styles. We believe it is coming into its own because, simply put, it’s delicious.”

Moderator Bob Bath, MS and a professor of wine and beverage studies at The CIA, helped set the stage with Ballesteros Torres, who in turn provided a funny, expertly crafted, and vivid description of the Garnacha grape. “It’s a lot like the actor Daniel Day-Lewis: Every role he plays, he becomes a part of that role,” he said. “That’s like Garnacha—it takes on the personality of where it’s grown and the style in which it’s made. It’s not like Cary Grant, who was like Cary Grant in every part he played.”

Bath then motioned to Grahm, a venerable avant-garde winemaker he said had “referred to Grenache as the ‘Cinderella grape.’” “Today, we’re taking her to the ball,” Bath quipped, adding that roughly 90 percent of Garnacha grows between France and Spain. “It’s a significant crop for these countries, and in terms of global plantings, it ranks seventh. Why? Its adaptability. About 6,500 acres are planted in the U.S.,

Breaking Down Garnacha

Garnacha grape vines produce medium to large clusters of small- to medium-sized berries. It’s an early-budding, late-ripening variety with a high natural sugar content and moderate acidity. Clay soils give way to high-vigor Garnacha, but in sandy soils the vine is more restrained. It’s an incredibly drought-resistant variety which thrives in the hot, dry climates found throughout Spain and in France’s Rhône Valley, as well as in California’s Central Coast region.

In Spain, plantings of Garnacha Tinta can be found in Sierra de Gredos, Madrid, La Mancha, Mentrída, Priorat, Monsant, Valencia, Rioja, and Navarra, with heavier concentrations of vineyards in Calatayud, Campo de Borja, Somontano, and Cariñena. As we dove into the wines during the morning session, Bath zeroed in on DOP Cariñena, which lies midway between Madrid and Barcelona and was in the literal path of the Crusades.

In the third century B.C., Roman citizens of the city Caræ (modern-day Cariñena) consumed a blend of wine and honey, and roughly 1,800 years later, King Ferdinand I of Aragon demanded it for his trips to France. And while phylloxera ravaged Europe, the vines of Cariñena, rooted in sandy soils, escaped devastation. DO status was awarded in 1932 and, today, Cariñena is the largest of four DOs in Aragón with 35,588 acres under vine in 14 municipalities, as well as an astounding 1,540 resident growers all committed to Garnacha.

As the tasting began, Bath displayed an incredible photo of dark-red, iron-rich soils with 50- to 100-year-old head-trained vines rooted in jagged and fractured rocky schist and gravel. Any vine that can manage to snake its way through such treacherous terrain is more than deserving of a summit dedicated to its multi-faceted styles.

The following wines were sampled during the morning session:

Tasting Garnacha IN TEN WINES

Grandes Vinos 2017 Anayón Parcel 81 (Parcelas Selection)

Five cooperatives partnered in 1997 to work with vineyards in each of the 14 growing areas of DOP Cariñena. This was a tank sample from a field blend selection from 2.5 acres. Translucent ruby; bright red berry and red florals with wild-herb notes; ripe strawberries, chocolate-covered raspberries, grippy acid, and slate-like minerality with a sweet red-berry finish. 88% Garnacha, 8% Cariñena, and 4% Macabeo; 14.5% ABV; 2,000 bottles will be produced.



Clos Pissarra 2014 El Mont Vineyard, El Lloar Priorat

Made with fruit from vines more than a century old grown on extremely steep slopes of clay and granite soils in

double-cordon-trained vertical shoots. The vineyard borders a forest and yields a mere three-quarters of a ton per acre. Shimmering deep-ruby color; bursting with lovely red and black fruits, black currants, sweet tobacco, bright herbs, and nice, fine-grained tannins. Deeply concentrated on the palate but light on its feet, peeling away layers of black cherry, graphite, and purple flowers with a mocha-spice finished. 100% Garnacha; 15.7% ABV; 1,880 bottles produced.



Domaine du Péguau 2012 Cuvée Laurence Segueing to France, where Grenache is the second-most widely planted variety next to Merlot. The Pegau family has grown vines

since the 18th century, with 148 acres under vine amidst 11 vineyards throughout Châteauneuf-du-Pape. The same as the do-

maine's Reserve wine, this is whole-cluster bottling pressed into cement vats then aged 40 months in older oak. Pronounced, gorgeous notes of dried rose petals and Mediterranean herbs; round, rich layers of red and black cherry notes; and fabulous structure from supple tannins with cigar-box spice and black licorice on the finish. 85% Grenache, 9% Syrah, 4% Mourvèdre, and 2% other; 14.5% ABV.



Clos de Trias 2010 Vieilles Vignes

This is an absolute under-\$30 stunner produced by Even Bakke, an American ex-pat who purchased an estate in Ventoux in northern Provence and produced his first vintage in 2007.

From vineyards 65 to 90-plus years of age rooted in ancient soils similar to the limestone marl of Chablis at roughly 1,200 feet above sea level. 50% whole-cluster pressed. Inspired by Château Rayas' old barrels and aged in Demi-Muids for seven years before spending eight months in bottle. Deep ruby hue; creamy red-berry notes with high-toned minerality. Utterly delicious and layered with concentrated layers of black fruit, blue-fruit compote, and red berries with a salty, crushed-rock minerality on a long finish. 90% Grenache, 0–4% Syrah, 0–5% Carignan, 0–5% Cinsault; 15.5% ABV; 3,500 bottles produced.

Bonny Doon Vineyard 2015 Popelouchum Grenache

Moving into California and Washington, winemaker Randall Grahm took the stage to explain that he's "looking for something original, distinctive, and not an imitation of the work being done in Europe." "I found some 80- to 90-year-old vines in Oakley, California, and that was the first Cigare Volant," he said, adding that his wines exhibit a more experimental approach.

This fascinating wine sourced fruit from

two-year-old vines harvested from nursery rows and "fermented in a garbage can," said Grahm. "For me it has an elegance and Burgundian character—the kind I've been dreaming about for 30-plus years." In the glass, it's a touch cloudy. Ruby with orange hues, subtle red-berry fruit, and wild herbs or pine-needle spice; a lot of grippy tannins, bracing acidity, and a touch of something meaty with Mexican chocolate on the finish. Very small clusters; very small berries. 100% Grenache; 13.9% ABV; 150 bottles.



A Tribute to Grace 2015 Shake Ridge Ranch Grenache

Thanks to the presence of large rose quartz boulders surrounding the vines at Shake Ridge Ranch in the Sierra

Foothills, winemaker Angela Osborne felt an expression of "pink light" in this wine. There's certainly a high-toned candied cinnamon note that mingles with toasty and smoky elements, as well as more crushed-rock-like minerality. A creamy mouthfeel with candied red raspberry, pops of cinnamon, and Himalayan pink sea salt. 100% Grenache. Clone 362 on 3309 rootstock; 50% whole cluster; native fermentation. Aged in new and used 228- and 600-liter barrels. 13.8% ABV; 125 cases.

Tablas Creek Vineyard 2016 Côtes de Tablas

Considered the winery's entry-level wine, it's made with hand-harvested grapes from 147 blocks on certified-organic vineyards. Shimmering ruby with brick hues; notes of super-bright red berries, wild sagebrush, and white chocolate; juicy with sweet red-berry fruit, smoky with pops of Herbes de Provence, powerful woody tannins, and a vanilla-tinged finish. Beaucastel nursery cuttings. 55% Grenache, 25% Syrah, 13% Mourvèdre, and 7% Counoise; 13.5% ABV; 2,050 cases.

Bethany 2015 Old Vine Grenache

Turning to Australia, six generations of Schrapels have farmed the vineyards on the eastern slopes of the Barossa Range. Fantastic blood-orange citrus notes, toast, and toffee with distinct minerality. Fresh on the palate with juicy cranberry, orange zest, and milk chocolate with an intensely spicy finish. Vines range from 50–120 years old. The wine spent 12 months in a combination of stainless steel and new and neutral French oak. 100% Grenache; 14.7% ABV.



Bodegas Paniza 2015 Garnacha de Pizarra

The tasting circled back to DOP Cariñena for the final two wines. Balles-teros Torres

spoke of the unique “Illicorella” soils of Cariñena, comprised of fractured slate. Bodegas Paniza’s vines dive 10–15 feet in search of nutrients, and the grapes are fermented in stainless steel before spending eight months in French oak. Chocolate-covered strawberries and crushed slate-like mineral aromas; big, powerful, and expressive with massive concentration; sumptuous black fruits, black licorice, purple flowers, and a coffee-tinged, long finish. 100% Garnacha.

Bodegas San Valero 2015 Tierra de Cubas Garnacha Cariñena

Made with fruit from select old vines grown at 2,460 feet; fermented and aged in French oak. Sweet strawberry, red flowers, and fresh herbs. A spicy and vibrant wine with mouthwatering acidity, excellent fruit concentration, power, and energy with good structure. 80% Garnacha and 20% Cariñena.



Garnacha: A PERFECT PARTNER

As the morning session gave way to lunch, two dozen producers from Australia, France, Spain, Sonoma, Lodi, and the Central Coast of California joined the panelists for a walkaround tasting of 50 wines. Attendees had the opportunity to contrast and compare wine styles from far-flung growing regions and pair them with the signature cuisines of Spain, France, and California.

Although it grows only a small percentage of the variety—just under 1 percent of total plantings—Australia’s McLaren Vale and Barossa Valley are home to some serious old-vine material, with Yalumba’s 2012 Tri-Centenary Grenache (from vines planted in 1889) and the Yangarra Estate Vineyard Old Vine Grenache (from vines approaching 90 years) serving as prime examples.



Emma Brown of Penfolds with Bin 138, a Syrah/Grenache/Mourvèdre blend from Barossa Valley vines as old as 100 years.



Comprised mostly of Grenache, the Murrieta's Well Dry Rosé from California's Livermore Valley is brilliantly toned with strawberry and jasmine.



The Orin Swift 2016 Abstract Grenache from Sonoma County is dense, lush, and concentrated with some Petite Sirah and Syrah blended in.

Panelists for the afternoon “Garnacha Rising” seminar included (from left to right) Gilian Handelman of Jackson Family Wines; moderator Peter Granoff, MS, of Ferry Plaza Wine Merchant; Jay James, MS, SommFoundation Chairman; Haley Moore, Wine Director at San Francisco’s Stock & Bones Company; Pedro Ballesteros Torres, MW; Stevie Stacionis of retailer Bay Grape in Oakland, CA; and Emmanuel Kemiji, MS, owner of Miura Vineyards and Managing Director at Clos Pissarra.



Cult Grenache producer Joey Tensley of Tensley Wines in Los Olivos, California, poured his 2013 Colson Canyon Vineyard Grenache. When tasted side by side with Boutenac producer Château Ollieux-Romanis’ 2013 Atal Sia, these two wines showed they have more in common than not with dark plum, pepper, licorice, and exotic spices galore.

Stellar French examples included the Château Puech-Haut 2014 Prestige Rouge from 80-year-old vines in the Saint-Drézéry AOP; the Famille Perrin 2015 Domaine du Clos des Tourelles Gigondas, and Domaine des Gravennes’ unoaked Côtes du Rhône, which supports Ballesteros Torres’ belief that “Châteauneuf-du-Pape [producers] are the real heroes of the variety because they allow oxygen during fermentation.”

A “Chameleon” Grape

The focus of the afternoon session shifted from production to sales and consumer perception as moderator and Master Sommelier Peter Granoff of Ferry Plaza Wine Merchant put a panel of producers, retailers, and wine directors through

their paces. SommFoundation’s Jay James, MS; Gilian Handelman of Jackson Family Wines; Wine Director Haley Guild Moore of Stock & Bones Company; and Stevie Stacionis of retailer Bay Grape joined Ballesteros Torres and Kemiji, who rounded out the session.

To help consumers discover the variety, Stacionis regularly navigates her clientele from lighter to heavier styles and steers her Pinot Noir and Syrah fans to other wines they’ll enjoy. “Grenache is a chameleon,” added Moore, who sees the grape as less varietal-centric, making it easier for consumers to enjoy it as part of a blend.

As demonstrated by three wines tasted by the panel, serious efforts are underway to preserve Spain’s old-vine Garnacha. Both independent producers and cooperatives alike are paying growers the same amount to farm extremely-low-yielding old vines as they do for farming higher-yielding sites, opting

for a “real-world” compensation approach that aims to ensure a solid future for the vines and their wines.

Attendees tasted wines of old-vine Spanish fruit from Bodegas San Valero, which produces a lighter-bodied umami and red fruit–driven wine, and Bodegas Paniza, which shows spicy red fruit and more apparent oak. “These are some of the first results of an ongoing process,” said Bodegas San Valero General Manager Pedro Fatas.

In speaking to the less-extracted wine styles, Granoff pointed out the sweet/tart marker as a hallmark of typicality for the variety. This characteristic was noted in several of the wines tasted in the second flight, among them the 250-milliliter Ah-So canned rosé from Navarra, Spain.

The sole Grenache Blanc in the lineup, a 2016 Tablas Creek, found a fan in Moore, who enjoyed its firm structure and found it particularly suited to



pairings. One red selected to represent the New World was Chris Skinner's high-elevation Grenache from the El Dorado Hills' Fair Play sub-AVA: The fruit for this medium-bodied wine is grown on granitic soils, so most of its emphasis can be found on the mid-palate with more restrained fruit.

Bonny Doon's 2017 Clos de Gilroy, meanwhile, utilizes Grenache from Alta Loma Vineyard in the Arroyo Seco region of Monterey County, as well as Rancho Solo outside Soledad, California. The wine was characterized by Gram as "the Pinot Noir consumers are seeking—they just haven't discovered it yet." "Garnacha conveys a message," Ballesteros Torres added. "It's a long-season variety, and I question why producers are wasting the gift of a long, dry growing season on Pinot Noir."

Next from Down Under in McLaren Vale came a Yangarra 2014 High Sands Grenache, which weighed in with firmer tannins and deep, black fruit while possessing enough acidity to keep things fresh.

Ballesteros Torres' observation about aerobic winemaking was evident in the savory orange-zest and brown-spice flavors of the iconic Domaine du Vieux Telegraphue, a Grenache-dominant wine that includes Syrah and Mourvèdre. With an average age of 70 years, the vines grow on the stony plateau of La Crau



SommFoundation Director James Lechner and SOMM Journal Global Wine Editor Deborah Parker Wong lead a blind tasting at the summit.

in Châteauneuf-du-Pape. With global interest in the variety clearly on the rise, Ballesteros Torres' parting words signaled a note of caution: "Don't flood the world with Garnacha—think of its origins and plant wisely."

The summit concluded with a dramatic blind tasting; sponsored by *The SOMM Journal*, it was led by Global Wine Editor Deborah Parker Wong and SommFoun-

dation Director James Lechner. After 30 tasters doggedly attempted to identify the country of origin of six wines, Jay O'Leary from Jay's-Wine-Stop and Susan Meyer of St. Supéry Estate Vineyards & Winery prevailed—winning \$1,000 and \$500, respectively. When asked how he had differentiated the wines, O'Leary said the noticeably different levels of acidity helped steer him in the right direction. ❧

THE CARIÑENA CONTINGENT

A prestigious group of wine producers from Cariñena, Spain, attended the Global Garnacha Summit: In fact, *The SOMM Journal's* alliance with these producers was the impetus for the conference.

Pictured from left to right: Diego Pinedo of Bodegas Paniza; Pedro Fatas of Bodegas San Valero; Bob Bath, MS, Professor of Wine and Beverage Studies at the CIA at Copia; Jose Luis Campos of DOP Cariñena; Pedro Ballesteros Torres, MW; and Antonio Ubide, Ricky Ventura, and Head Winemaker Marcelos Morales of Grandes Vinos.



KEEPING IT ON THE DOWN-SLO

THE *SOMM JOURNAL*'S CAMPERS TRAVELED
FROM PASO ROBLES TO EDNA VALLEY TO
VISIT FAMILY-OWNED WINERIES

by Chris Sawyer and Meredith May / photos by Jeremy Ball

*C.J. Lin of W Bar at L.A.'s Wing Hop
Fung snaps a shot of a refreshing rosé
at Edna Valley Vineyards.*



SAN LUIS OBISPO COUNTY, or SLO, follows the Pacific Ocean along California's Central Coast from Arroyo Grande to Paso Robles. Venturing through the towns, cities, and beachfront communities dotting the inland hillsides of the Santa Lucia mountain range, *The SOMM Journal* handpicked a group of standout family-owned wineries and set out to document our experiences with nine wine-buyer "campers" in tow.



The Peachy Canyon Zinfandel from Mustang Springs Ranch.

Celebrating a Milestone at Peachy Canyon Winery

When Doug Beckett and his wife Nancy founded Peachy Canyon Winery in 1988, Paso Robles was a sleepy agricultural zone best known for its expansive ranches, fruit and nut orchards, and sulfur-rich mineral baths. Although Chardonnay, Cabernet Sauvignon, and Merlot vines as well as a few blocks of Rhône varietals were already in the ground, Doug chose to work with Zinfandel planted there by Italian families from the turn of the century to when his family arrived in the early 1980s.

In hindsight, he says wouldn't have done it any differently. "To me, Zinfandel is the benchmark that put Paso Robles and the California wine industry on the world map to stay," Beckett said during the opening night dinner for Paso Somm Camp. "It's a grape that has the ability to grow in the warm California sun and still has enough natural acidity to make world-class wines that are elegant, ageworthy, and very food-friendly."



Peachy Canyon Winery founders Nancy and Doug Beckett.

Named for the rural road where the early wines were made, the Peachy Canyon brand made its first big splash in 1992 when the Especial Zinfandel ranked among *Wine Spectator's* "Top 100 Wines of the World." As the years passed, Doug and his team went on to develop a wide range of bold, rich, and expressive wines with fruit from the family's four estate properties and other premium vineyards on Paso's west side.

This year, Doug, Nancy, and their sons Josh and Jake will celebrate the 30th anniversary of the winery with a special limited-release wine comprised of 80% Zinfandel, 15% Grenache, and 5% Syrah. All fruit used in the blend was grown a few miles west of downtown Paso Robles at the family's Mustang Springs

"In my opinion, the aromas and pure fruit flavors of these wines really reflect the sites where the grapes are grown without too much winemaker intervention." —Marilyn Snee, Sommelier

The view of the Edna Valley at dusk from Edna Valley Vineyards.



The 30th Anniversary Zinfandel from Peachy Canyon sources fruit from 35 acres of hillside vines dry-farmed and head-trained on the winery's estate Mustang Springs site in the Adelaida District of Paso Robles. Some Grenache and Syrah are added in.



Josh and Jake Beckett, who represent the next generation at Peachy Canyon Winery, look forward to carrying the legacy of their family's business into the future.

Ranch in the Adelaida District, one of 11 new sub-appellations that joined the greater Paso Robles American Viticultural Area in 2014. The modern Paso-style wine dazzles the palate with lush, fruit-driven flavors of wild berries and dark cherry coupled with layers of espresso, black pepper, and spice with tangy acidity.

Winemaker Robert Henson, who joined the team in 2015, previously worked in hospitality and trained as a chef before learning how to craft distinguished wines from Michael Michaud at the Central Coast's Chalone Vineyards. He handles the limited-release Zinfandel with similar techniques he used while working with Pinot Noir grapes; in each case, his goal is

to showcase distinctive flavors that reflect the grapes' place of origin.

"It's about walking a thin line between flavor, intensity, and balance," Henson said as he poured the new lineup of 2016 Zinfandel during the campers' visit to Mustang Springs Ranch. "If you want to progress, it's about finding consistency and capturing the nuances of the flavor profiles as the vines mature."

Another shining example of a limited-production wine released in 400 cases or less is the 2016 Mustang Springs Ranch Zinfandel, which features deep notes of cherry, rhubarb, dark plum, allspice, and blood orange peel.

For a spicier option from the same

vineyard, we tried the new 2016 Especial Zinfandel. Made with fruit from a single block of the Dusi clone, it's aged entirely in 30% new American oak and exudes sexy aromas and robust flavors of ripe red fruits, plum, raspberry, vanilla, licorice, and savory spice.

Also from the Adelaida District is the 2016 Mustard Creek Zinfandel, an intriguing wine made with fruit grown on Josh Beckett's property and aged in equal parts French and Hungarian oak barrels. The end result is a dynamic wine with lively notes of dark cherry, licorice, menthol, black tea, pepper, and pumpkin spice with a long, tangy finish.

Josh, who recently sold the Chronic Cellars brand he started with his brother Jake in 2004, says the new appellations have allowed more flexibility for the Peachy Canyon team. This is particularly true with the 2016 Willow Zinfandel, which features commanding notes of dried rose petals, fresh-baked blueberry tart, red cherry, raspberry, orange peel, cocoa, clove, cinnamon, and cardamom with a hint of chalkiness.

Although the wine is made with fruit from the Kiler Grove and Pelletiere vineyards in the Willow Creek District, Josh says labeling it with the more general "Willow" moniker enables Henson and the team to choose "from different sites in the Willow Creek District instead of relying on eggs from just one basket." "There have been times when we've done vineyard-designates that have received great acclaim, then someone new comes to town and they pay an exorbitant amount for the grapes and we lose the vineyard," Josh says. "For those reasons, we are not doing so many designates if we don't own the property, but instead putting more emphasis on the sub-AVAs we work with."

Another great example of this style is Vortex, a fanciful name for a blend that usually contains components of at least four single vineyards. The 2016 vintage sourced fruit from the family's Mustang Springs Ranch, as well as smaller amounts from the Kiler Grove, Hastings, and KelNik vineyards; in this showcase spanning several sub-AVAs, the fruit displays that desired varietal character with notes of allspice, clove, ripe plum, black cherry, blueberry, and white pepper with spicy fruit notes on the long, lingering finish.

Staying Cool at Ancient Peaks Winery

Located 22 miles south of downtown Paso Robles, the 1,000-acre Margarita Vineyard is one of the coolest growing areas in the southernmost part of the Paso Robles region. Buttressed to the west by the Santa Lucia Highlands and influenced by wind, fog, and rain blowing in from the nearby Pacific Ocean; it's home to a rare array of soil types, including dramatic outcroppings of shale and petrified oyster shells pushed up from the ancient seabed.

Although the first grapes on the property were planted by Franciscan monks in 1780, the modern renaissance began when Robert Mondavi Winery planted new vines in 1999. Two years later, the Rossi, Wittstrom, and Filippini families, who later established Ancient Peaks Winery in 2005, purchased Santa Margarita Ranch.

Led by Mike Sinor and Stewart Cameron, Ancient Peaks' winemaking team takes advantage of the long growing season today by cherry-picking the best lots: This approach produces an impressive series of wines that overdeliver for their price.

At the top of the chain stands the flagship Cabernet Sauvignon. The 2016 vintage features deep flavors of ripe raspberry, cherry, and blueberry layered with nuances of chocolate and spice, fine tannins, and a well-integrated touch of oak on the finish. Another striking wine was the 2016 Merlot, which shows distinctive notes of wild berries, cassis, black currants, and cardamom with firm structure and a velvety texture—a true steal at \$20 per bottle.

In the higher-end category is the 2014 Oyster Ridge, a proprietary blend of 51% Cabernet Sauvignon, 36% Merlot, 5% Syrah, 3% Petite Sirah, and 3% Malbec all grown in the ancient-sea-bed section of the vineyard and aged for 23 months, primarily in fine French oak barrels.

In addition to tasting these wines and the other annual estate bottlings of Sauvignon Blanc, Chardonnay, Zinfandel, and the Renegade Red Blend, the campers enjoyed a complete tour of the vineyards in a safari-style jeep driven by winery co-founder Karl Wittstrom; exhilarating rides on the zipline, which was added to the estate in 2011; and a delicious lunch at the Ancient Peaks tasting room in the quaint

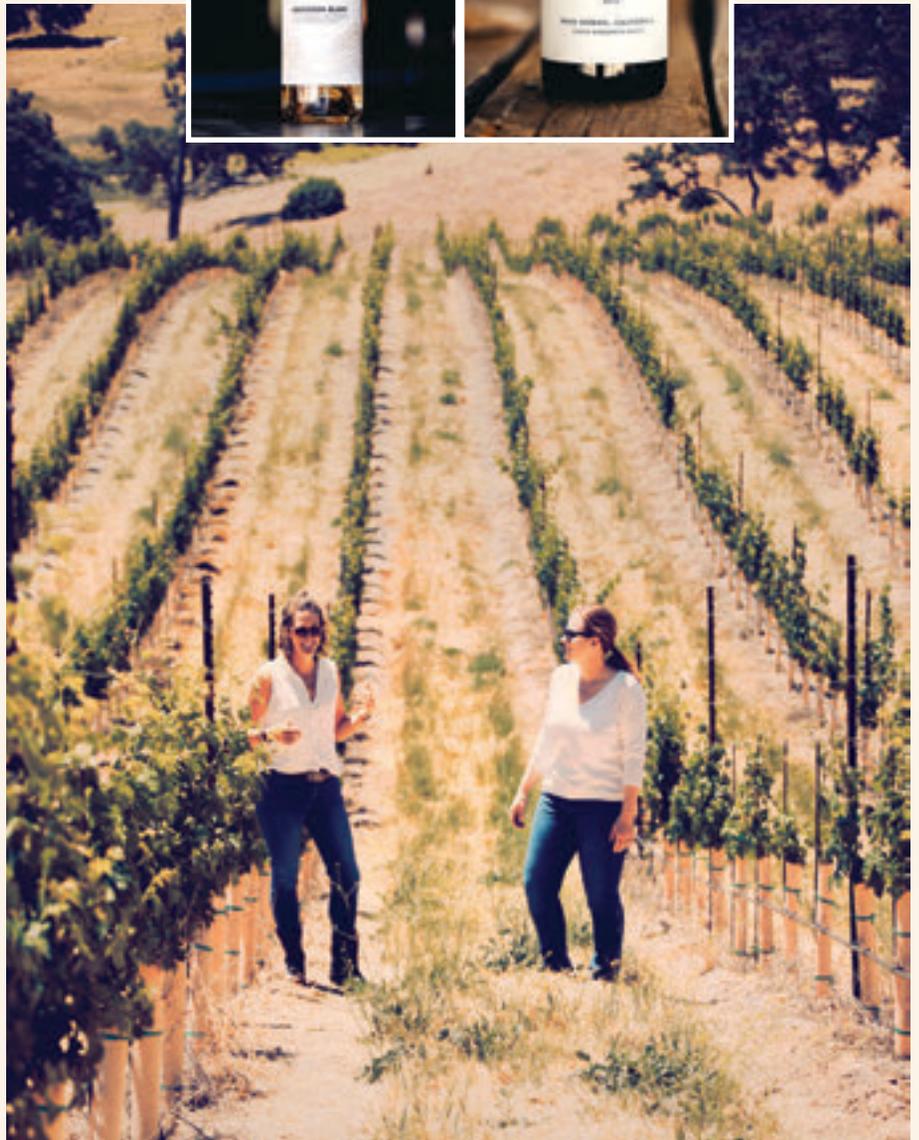
town of Santa Margarita. "Just as sommeliers are the gateway to consumers, we want to do our part to attract wine lovers to visit to the Margarita Vineyard, Oyster

Ridge, and the other great wine producers in Paso Robles area on a year-round basis," VP of Operations Amanda Wittstrom-Higgins said.

Ancient Peaks' stunning Sauvignon Blanc displays minerality with abundant aromatics and fruit.



The Ancient Peaks Renegade brand blends Syrah, Zinfandel, Malbec, Petit Verdot, and Petite Sirah.



Amanda Wittstrom-Higgins, VP of Operations for Ancient Peaks Winery, is pictured with SOMM Camp attendee Sharon Coombs, Beverage Director for E.P. and L.P. in West Hollywood, CA, in new Cabernet Sauvignon plantings. "We believe this site to have the best potential as a south-facing, high-density site that'll eventually show more color and character in the wine," Wittstrom-Higgins said.

Breaking New Ground at San Antonio Winery

When Santo Cambianica founded San Antonio Winery in the heart of downtown Los Angeles in 1917, his goal was to make prestigious wine on par with styles he grew up with in the province of Lombardia in northern Italy, as well as other award-winning wines he'd tasted from around the world. This business-savvy approach lives on today through the family's recent development of two exciting new vineyard properties and an impressive state-of-the-art winemaking facility in Paso Robles.

The first, the Riboli Creston Vineyard in the newly formed Creston District east of Templeton, is a pristine 320-acre property of vines planted on rolling hills. Its uncommon mixture of Arbuckle-Positas and calcerous soil works extremely well with Bordeaux varieties and Petite Sirah.



▲ Campers zipline over the vineyards at Ancient Peaks Winery.

▲ A petrified oyster shell at Margarita Vineyard.





Campers enjoyed this Rosé of Grenache from San Simeon, one of the signature labels from Riboli Family Wines.



Equally impressive is the new wine-making facility near Hwy. 46. Its 40-plus customized tanks allow Mayo and his team to keep each lot separate during the fermentation process. Using the slow *élevage* technique, they fill in the mid-palate to create complex flavor profiles while crafting the final blends of the signature San Simeon, Maddalena, Opaque, and Stormwatch brands in the Riboli Family Wine Estates portfolio.

Mayo tasted the campers on a set of barrel samples, beginning with a Syrah from the Maddelena Vineyard. Aged in a neutral barrel, the wine featured perfumed aromas and bright flavors of boysenberry, blueberry, dark chocolate, and cardamom. He followed it up with a big, rich, and opulent Cabernet Sauvignon with deep flavors of ripe berries, plush tannins, and flinty notes on the finish before the final offering: a brilliant expression of Petite Sirah from the Stefano Vineyard, which featured lively aromas of ripe blue fruits, blood orange peel, and spice. "In my opinion, the aromas and pure fruit flavors of these wines really reflect the sites where the grapes are grown without too much winemaker intervention," said Marilyn Snee, Sommelier at Upstairs 2 in Los Angeles, California.

The Riboli family's new state-of-the-art winery in Paso Robles.

The second is the 72-acre Maddalena Vineyard, which is planted on an old almond orchard in the El Pomar AVA southwest of downtown Paso. Named for family matriarch Maddalena Riboli, this vineyard and its mineral-rich Linne-Calodo soil see warm days and cool nights; planted to Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, and Malbec, it's also home to smaller blocks of Petite

Sirah, Syrah, and Primitivo.

Like the family's other local holdings at the Stefano, Pretty Penny, and Creston Highlands vineyards, the properties are sustainably farmed. "In 50 years, we'd like people to remember us for the things we added to the environment instead of the things we took away," said Winemaker and SLO native Ben Mayo, who joined the team in 2016.



The gate leading to Maddalena Vineyard in the Creston District of Paso Robles.

Pushing the Boundaries at Tablas Creek

When Tablas Creek Vineyard founder Robert Haas died earlier this year, the wine industry lost a rare maverick who foresaw the potential of planting Rhône varieties in California. After teaming up with the Perrin brothers of Château de Beaucastel in the late 1980s, Haas' exhaustive search for the ideal conditions for Mourvèdre, Grenache, Roussanne, and other intriguing Mediterranean grape varieties eventually led him to a special site on the western edge of Paso Robles just ten miles from the ocean. After purchasing the property and establishing the Tablas Creek brand in 1989, the original vine cuttings were propagated in 1994 and the first commercial crop was picked in 1997.

Through the years, Tablas Creek has played a major role in the promotion of Rhône wines in the New World. The current team, lead by Robert's son Jason Haas and Winemaker Neil Collins, continues to fine-tune the process of working with fruit grown on calcareous clay-based soils on the estate, which received an official Biodynamic certification from Demeter last year. "We really do think of this as an ongoing experiment, and every year we are trying new techniques,"



A big fan of Mourvèdre, Haas says the 2015 Esprit has been his favorite since the 2000s.



SOMM Journal-ists Meredith May and Chris Sawyer share a laugh with Jason Haas (left).



Haas said. "I'm very confident that what we are doing is going to be even better than where we are today."

After an interactive tour of the vineyard and an educational seminar focused on grafting Tablas clones to rootstock, Haas led the Paso SOMM Camp team through a comparative exploration of the current releases: the intriguing white wine bottlings of the rare grape variety Picardan and the fragrant Picpoul Blanc; the elegant Grenache Blanc-based Patelin de Tablas, which featured lively notes of fresh citrus, anise, and earth tones with a silky texture and bright acidity; and a vertical of the 2015, 2006, and 2001 vintages of the Esprit de Tablas Blanc, an homage to the famed Roussanne-based white wine blend from Beaucastel.

Following a stimulating discussion of the two distinctive pink wines—the Grenache-based 2017 Patelin de Tablas Rosé and the more intensive Bandol-style 2017 Dianthus Rosé—the focus turned to red wines and the flavor profiles

Haas demonstrated how to graft a clone to rootstock.

generated by the Mourvèdre, Grenache, Syrah, and Cunoise vines planted at the Tablas Creek Estate.

To cap off the experience, the campers tasted a vertical of the Mourvèdre-based Esprit de Tablas Rouge from 2015 and 2010, as well as the inaugural 2000 vintage. A big fan of Mourvèdre, Haas says the 2015 Esprit has been his favorite since the 2000s. "It's a grape that doesn't get the credit it deserves because it is difficult to grow and a struggle to ripen in many places in the Central Coast," he explained. "For that reason, you need a very long growing season and enough heat to give it that last little push to get it ripe. When it works, we feel it has everything you could ever want: dark red fruit with a great loamy-earthly character; chewy tannins, and the ability to develop an incredible meatiness over time."



Castoro Cellars proprietors Niels and Bimmer Udsen farm the largest organic vineyard property in the region.

Taking the Estate Route at Castoro Cellars

Located within the Paso Robles AVA, the Templeton Gap is known for its wind-tunnel effect, cool nights, and mornings influenced by the nearby coastal mountain range. Diurnal shifts in temperature can span more than 50 degrees Fahrenheit from morning to night.

Castoro Cellars—one of Paso Robles' oldest wineries—boasts some of the area's most beautiful vineyard sites. In addition to growing dozens of varieties and excelling in showing grape typicity, the winery also helps uphold Paso Robles' reputation as a premier growing region. "We grow all our grapes organically on our estate vineyards," proprietor Niels Udsen explained. "The diverse locations take advantage of micro-climates throughout Paso—lucky me!"

Its Whale Rock and Cobble Creek sites are farmed organically, while the other estate vineyards are SIP ("Sustainability in Practice") certified. In fact, it is Mesa Vineyard Management, Inc.—the leading vineyard management and development company for the Central Coast—that carries out these vineyard practices with the added direction of Niels and wife/fellow owner Bimmer Udsen.

The Udsens took campers on a tractor tour of the estate vineyards surrounding the tasting room, located near the flagship Whale Rock site. Named for the thousands of petrified whale bones found nearby, the vineyard contains soil high in limestone, broken sedimentary rock, and

water-transported gravel. Also the estate's youngest vineyard, it was planted in 2001 and includes Zinfandel, Primitivo, Tempranillo, Cabernet Sauvignon, Charbono, Chardonnay, Syrah, Pinot Noir, Pinot Gris, Carignane, and Grenache.



Castoro Cellars Winemaker Tom Myers, who has been with the winery since 1990, crafts wines from 11 vineyard locations in Paso Robles. The name "Castoro" is Italian for beaver, the childhood nickname of proprietor Niels Udsen.



Named for the ancient whale bones found on its namesake property, the Castoro Cellars 2015 Whale Rock Vineyard Cabernet Sauvignon is a broad-shouldered, ripe, and juicy red with a hint of minerality. Cherries and plums generously spread out across a palate sweetened by vanilla and made savory with a hint of graphite.

"WE GROW ALL OUR GRAPES ORGANICALLY ON OUR ESTATE VINEYARDS. THE DIVERSE LOCATIONS TAKE ADVANTAGE OF MICROCLIMATES THROUGHOUT PASO—LUCKY ME!" —CASTORO CELLARS PROPRIETOR NIELS UDSEN

Dramatic lighting illuminates the pastoral scenery of the Castoro Cellars estate vineyard.



Campers dine in the beautiful Edna Valley Vineyards tasting room overlooking Paragon Vineyard. Prepared by Chef William Torres of Farmhouse Catering, the four-course meal paired unexpected flavors with Edna Valley Chardonnay and Pinot Noir.



Capturing Elegance at **Edna Valley Vineyards**

Almost as if on cue, a strong gust of wind hit us as we entered the manicured grounds of Edna Valley Vineyards. The Pacific Ocean is a force of nature for the Edna Valley AVA, the coolest of California growing regions found just a half hour south of Paso Robles. With pronounced winds, the state's longest growing season, and the everyday arrival of creeping fog, the area

boasts Chardonnay and Pinot Noir as its most regal assets.

Yet more than 23 varieties are grown in SLO Wine Country, and along the seafront side of the Santa Lucia Mountain Range, wines develop intense flavors, natural acidity, and a true elegance.

Such is the case at Edna Valley Vineyards, with its breathtaking, postcard-worthy

views of the Seven Sisters range overlooking the iconic Paragon Vineyard. The influence of the Pacific just five miles away is immediately evident: The valley's north-west-to-southwest orientation creates a direct path of cool marine air; while calcareous and volcanic soils are responsible for the wines' fresh, balanced character.

For more than 30 years, Edna Valley



Vineyards has remained a focal point in its namesake region. Upon arrival, the group launched into a component tasting of the vineyard's Chardonnay—the first variety planted in the Edna Valley—organized by Winemaker Kamee Knutson and moderated by Director of Public Relations Lon Gallagher.

While most of the bottlings' stunning fruit hails from the Paragon Vineyard, it's the blending of sites throughout the Cen-

tral Coast—as well as a varied approach to oak regimens—that truly marks these wines as both individual works of art and integrated showpieces. The flagship award-winning Chardonnays left a memorable impression through their vibrant acidity, generous mouthfeel, crisp acidity, and balance. (In addition to Chardonnay, Edna Valley Vineyards also produces Merlot, Cabernet Sauvignon, Pinot Noir, Pinot Grigio, and Sauvignon Blanc.) ❧

The Edna Valley Vineyards 2016 Central Coast Chardonnay was named Best Chardonnay Under \$17 by The SOMM Journal's sister publication The Tasting Panel after editors tasted 75 wines in that price range.



San Antonio Winery Winemaker Ben Mayo (back row, center) with campers inside the barrel room at the newly built Paso Robles winery.

Our SOMM Campers:

Christopher Barragan, Sommelier/Bar Manager, Flemings Woodland Hills and Petit Trois, Los Angeles, CA

Sharon Coombs, Beverage Director, E.P. and L.P., West Hollywood, CA

Chuck Herrold, Sommelier, Nick & G's, Rancho Santa Fe, CA

C.J. Lin, Fine Wine & Spirits Advisor, W Bar by Wing Hop Fung, Los Angeles, CA

Fabrizio Nocilla, National Beverage Manager/Sommelier, Fig & Olive, Los Angeles, CA

Nanette Rapuzzi, Sommelier, The Ritz-Carlton Bacara, Santa Barbara, CA

Veronica Rauch, Manager/Sommelier, The Patio on Goldfinch, San Diego, CA

Marilyn Snee, Sommelier, Upstairs 2, Los Angeles, CA

Travis Welton, Director of Operations, Stonehaus at The Westlake Village Inn, Westlake Village, CA



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{ who's who in spirits }

Legendary brand creator David Ravandi is the founder of 123 Organic Tequila, El Luchador Organic Tequila, and Cráneo Organic Mezcal. He's pictured here among organic blue agave plants in Amatitan, Mexico.

The Tequila Wrangler

DAVID RAVANDI UPHOLDS THE
123 SPIRITS PORTFOLIO OF SMALL-BATCH, ORGANIC AGAVE BRANDS

HE'S A TRUE TEQUILERO renowned for two decades as the man behind Certified Organic renditions of the spirit—and now he can add mezcal to his repertoire. We first met David Ravandi in the late 1990s, several years after he developed Casa Noble, a tequila brand that soon ranked among the top in its class. When he sold it, he came away with an inherent understanding of how terroir affects agave as strongly as it does wine grapes.

In 2010, Ravandi conceived an artfully packaged new brand harboring a liquid that left a stunning impression: When 123 Organic Tequila (pronounced “Uno Dos Tres”) was conceived, he received high honors and scores from competitions, publications, and critics alike. The Blanco, Reposado, and Añejo expressions all possess mouthfeels, agave character, and finesse of superior quality.

As 123 Spirits' CEO and Master Distiller, Ravandi's motivation was to create “tequila for wine drinkers” by meticulously constructing layers of flavor, texture, and world-class taste profiles in his spirits. The double-

With an annual release of just 2,500 bottles, 123 Organic Tequila Extra Añejo Diablito is derived from higher-elevation agave and aged for 40 months in new French Limousin oak barrels.

123 Organic Tequila (pronounced “Uno Dos Tres”) was one of the first Certified Organic ultra-premium tequilas to emerge on the market.



distilled 123 Organic Tequila begins as 10-year-old 100 percent blue agave slow-roasted in an old-fashioned stone oven before fermentation without added yeast or sugar.

Industry gatekeepers expect 123 Spirits brands to stand out in a crowd of bottles behind bars and on shelves as agave spirits that consistently overdeliver by pushing the premiumization envelope. Ravandi's **Diablito Extra Añejo Organic Tequila**, for instance, hails from a single estate and spends 40 months in white French oak; the agave sourced for the spirit grows at an altitude of 6,000 feet above sea level, further emphasizing the influence of advantageous terroir. Diablito is limited to the release of just 2,500 bottles per year.

El Luchador Organic Tequila, a distiller's proof blanco, also comes from a single estate. Its name is based on the Mexican *lucha libre* culture, a style of professional wrestling in which competitors don colorful masks. The 110-proof

liquid offers notes of peppered lemon with a salinity attached to the clean agave profile. It's as powerful as you'd expect, but also silky-sweet, creamy, and complex with nougat, coconut, and agave building on the finish.

Given the current upsurge of artisanal mezcals, Ravandi is on top of his game with his most recent release: a single-estate organic mezcal named **Cráneo**. Organic Espadín agaves grown in altitudes higher than 5,600 feet above sea level in Santiago Matatlán, Oaxaca, are processed at the company's distillery under Ravandi's supervision. The resulting spirit possesses pureness and clarity with a lime and agave nose, herbal palate, lightweight mouthfeel, and subtle echo of smoke. While this joven mezcal is a fine sipping spirit, it excels in cocktails by enhancing complexity as a base ingredient.

A visionary in this category, Ravandi has helped herd agave spirits into ultra-premium positioning. We're excited to keep pace with him and his brands as he continues to lead in defining the craft category: It's not always as easy as 1, 2, 3. **SJ**

For more information, visit 123spirits.com.





Cork samples soak overnight during TCA batch testing of various lots at Cork Supply.

Saving Face

DEFENDING NATURAL CORK, THE SCAPEGOAT FOR WINE DEFECTS

story and photos by Deborah Parker Wong

WHEN WINE PROFESSIONALS encounter a sensory deviation in wine and the offending molecule isn't obvious, cork often takes the blame by default. While not every taster is capable of decoding a library of aromas at the molecular level, the ability to detect basic defects like *Brettanomyces*, volatile acidity, and Trichloroanisole (TCA) is fundamental to objectively assessing wine quality.

During a recent sensory exercise conducted by Ana Cristina Lopes Cardoso, Research and Development Manager at Cork Supply Portugal, a group of trained tasters—among them top Irish sommelier Julie Dupouy-Young and myself—were tasked with identifying TCA in wine at levels of 1, 2, and 4 parts per trillion (ppt/ng/l).

Lopes Cardoso staged a series of Duo-Trio tests in which one of three samples acts as the control to be matched. Not surprisingly, all the tasters could detect TCA, which has a very low threshold of 3–5 ppt—though very few tasters could find it at 1 or 2 ppt. Things got even more interesting when the tasters were also confronted with samples that had been heavily doctored with five different molecules that emulate TCA, including 1-Octen-3-ol, which smells distinctly of mushroom; geosmin, which is associated with the smell after a rainstorm; and 2,4,6-Trichlorophenol (TCP), a TCA precursor with a specific but hard-to-detect chemical odor.

Despite the existence of research identifying contamination molecules from production and storage premises for the past 25 years, it's easy to see why cork takes the rap when other moldy or earthy-smelling molecules are present



Ana Cristina Lopes Cardoso, Research and Development Manager at Cork Supply Portugal, leads a sensory training.

at detection thresholds: The majority of tasters simply can't identify or differentiate between them.

As the cork industry rushes to employ automated sensing equipment designed to weed out TCA-contaminated natural

corks, it's rare to find technologies currently available that screen for TCA and other "off-aromas." According to Cork Supply President/founder Jochen Michalski, this makes the Northern California-based company's service the most rigorous available in the marketplace today.

During a process Cork Supply has developed called Dry Soak 100 (DS100), which analyzes the headspace of heated cork, natural corks are subject to a rigorous round of sensory evaluation by at least three human sensors. "Although we've also developed an automated technology to screen corks called DS100+, I still have more confidence in our human-sensory DS100 screening method," Michalski says. "With DS100 we're also able to remove any other off-aromas."

But it's the latest research on corklins—compounds found in cork that react with flavonoids in wine to protect color and reduce astringency over time—that's shifting the cork industry's focus on sensory neutrality. Researchers are using near-infrared spectroscopy to grade corks and oak staves from low to high according to the amount of phenols they will release into wine. Given the cork industry's speedy adoption rate of technologies that add value to their products, winemakers may soon have another criterion—phenolic content—to consider when selecting grades of cork. **||**

Peak Los Angeles

USHERING IN THE **L.A. TIMES FOOD BOWL** AT **BARNSDALL ART PARK**

by Rich Manning



Frank Lloyd Wright's Hollyhock House in Los Angeles' Barnsdall Art Park.

I'M AT THE TOP OF LOS ANGELES ... or at least standing in Barnsdall Art Park some 460 feet above sea level makes it feel that way as I overlook the city's sprawling landscape. A wall of the park's main attraction, Frank Lloyd Wright's Hollyhock House, supports me as I lean back, glass of rosé in hand, and stare at a distant crane as it adds yet another set of wings to the City of Angels amid a slightly hazy sunset.

New music from singer-songwriter Father John Misty emits from a DJ stand and preaches to the choir: a hipster-dominant crowd with some sprawled on blankets and others scattered about the lawn. We're all here to watch a Q&A between Pulitzer Prize-winning food critic Jonathan Gold (who tragically died July 21 of complications from pancreatic cancer) and Daniel Humm, the chef behind New York's Eleven Madison Park and L.A.'s white-hot rendition of New York's legendary NoMad hotel. The talk will happen soon enough, but in the meantime, we're all content to gaze out at the sunset, sip our wine, and achieve maximum chill.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF BLINK CREATIVE



As part of the L.A. Times Food Bowl, Barnsdall Art Park hosted a Q&A between Pulitzer Prize-winning food critic Jonathan Gold, who died weeks later of complications from pancreatic cancer, and Chef Daniel Humm of New York's Eleven Madison Park and L.A.'s NoMad.



Silverlake Wine curates the wine poured at Barnsdall Art Park's Friday Night Wine Tasting fundraisers.

The park is hosting this conversation in conjunction with the *Los Angeles Times* Food Bowl, a month-long culinary festival responsible for dozens of epicurean-themed soirees held throughout town. Yet this atmosphere is hardly a one-night-only occurrence: Weekly on the hilltop all summer long, Barnsdall's Friday Night Wine Tastings serve as part social gathering and part fundraiser for the park's numerous art programs.

The seasonal fete creates a serene scene that's quintessentially Angeleno, effortlessly jettisoning bad thoughts of unending work weeks and traffic bouts that feel even longer. It's precisely the vibe those behind Barnsdall were going for when the wine-kissed shindig launched in 2009. "Barnsdall is known for its sunsets and Los Angeles is known for warm, dry weather," explains Barnsdall Foundation Board President Bill Macomber. "These conditions pair well with wines that are crisp, easy-drinking, and refreshing."

Barnsdall's pairing prowess extends to its partnership with L.A. wine shop Silverlake Wine, which selects a white and a rosé as well as two reds to pour at each get-together. On this particular evening, a quartet of two wines from France and one each from Spain and California echo Macomber's "easy-drinking" sentiment. "Being here is like being at your rich friend's house," says Silverlake Wine co-owner Randy Clement, who assists with the wine curation. "I mean, nothing's cooler than being on a hill with a Frank Lloyd Wright house, drinking wine."

This would normally be true, but once Gold and Humm take their seats in front of the crowd, "nothing's cooler" finds a way to up the ante. As the former interviews the latter for 45 minutes, the ensuing discussions on the architecture of food; the legacy of French chef Paul Bocuse, who died earlier this year; and two-ingredient cooking captivate the crowd. Their insights meld with the wine to create the perfect topping for L.A.'s metaphorical peak—especially considering we were in the presence of a culinary legend gone far too soon. SJ

Editor's note: The SOMM Journal team would like to extend our deepest condolences to the family, friends, and colleagues of Jonathan Gold. We will always hold a great love and appreciation for Gold and all he has done for our hometown of Los Angeles throughout his prolific career.



Stemless wine glasses are the perfect accessories for an evening at Barnsdall Art Park.

{ hungary }

A Future with History

NMR FOODSCREENER
TECHNOLOGY ALLOWS
THE **HUNGARIAN WINE
CONSORTIUM** TO
AUTHENTICATE WINE



The Tokaji museum wine inventory, considered a national treasure of Hungary, contains more than 350,000 bottles.

AS ONE OF THE first countries in Europe to delimit wine growing zones/vineyards, Hungary's rich history of wine production is well-documented. Although there's much debate as to when final legal recognition occurred in the 1700s, it's known that Prince Francis II Rákóczi of Transylvania classified 28 villages in the Tokaj region during the early part of the century.

Lately, though, it seems Hungarians are focused firmly on the future. Diagnosticum Zrt., a laboratory diagnostics leader in the country, joined Bruker Corporation in forming the Hungarian Wine Consortium; together, they've developed a Hungarian wine model based on Bruker's NMR FoodScreener technology that will be used to authenticate and identify Hungarian wines, including those from Tokaj.

The Hungarian Ministry of Agriculture, in addition to the European Union, commissions and funds the Hungarian wine identification and authentication program. Diagnosticum's key

value—it empowers the whole economy,' says Minister of Agriculture Sándor Fazekas, who signed the agreement between the Hungarian Ministry of Agriculture and Diagnosticum. "It is therefore imperative that the wine is of excellent and authentic origin to be presented to domestic and overseas customers."

Fazekas says the "essence of the strategic agreement" is that Diagnosticum provides "the technical background needed to draw the map of origin of Hungarian wines, and thus create a database based on a mathematical model." "We see great potential in the innovative work Diagnosticum is undertaking, which will unquestionably make the self-identification of Hungarian wine possible," he adds.

With wine forgery on the rise in central Europe, the Ministry is keen to combat fraud with the new NMR screening technology. These instances of forgery include counterfeiting, which can occur through the misrepresentation and mislabeling of grape



A team of young specialists at the Diagnosticum laboratory in Szerencs, Hungary.



The advanced NMR technology used for wine analysis and authentication requires just 5 milliliters of wine to identify more than 50 parameters.

role is to manage the wine laboratory by screening samples sent to them by wine producers from across Hungary. After Diagnosticum uses Bruker's FoodScreener to analyze different measurement parameters and produce a report, each individual wine sample is compared to a database of reference samples—the breadth of which differentiates the FoodScreener from other instruments on the market.

As a result of the collaboration between the Ministry and Diagnosticum, Hungarian wineries can submit their wines for analytical study free of cost for a yearlong period. Unavailable in Hungary until now, the resulting certificate gives foreign and Hungarian traders official verification of the origin and quality of the country's wines; according to Attila Balla, President/CEO of U.S.-based importer Vinum Tokaj International, this significantly improves their market position while simultaneously strengthening consumer confidence.

"The importance of wine goes beyond its pure market

varieties, blend origins, or vintages, as well as intellectual property infringement and wine adulteration.

According to unconfirmed expert estimates, approximately 20 percent of all traded fine wine is counterfeit, so it's unsurprising that anti-counterfeit technology companies are working hard to find solutions to this problem.

According to Balla, the 350,000-plus bottles of the Tokaji museum wine inventory are among the wines set for authentication and identification, yet those don't factor into the roughly 20,000 measurements Diagnosticum estimates it will have performed in Hungary by the end of the year. The company eventually plans to create a Hungarian wine map with Bruker by utilizing the analytical data.

Considering Hungary's innovative history with wine, perhaps this futuristic development is simply following tradition after all. ❏

—Story sourced via *The Resonance* and Bruker BioSpin Corporation



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Will and Danyelle Prouty own Division Wines in Portland, OR.



The Profundity of Stoop-Dwelling

SOUTHEAST PORTLAND'S DIVISION WINES MAKES A SECOND HOME FOR ITS NEIGHBORS story and photo by Jessie Birschbach

THIS WILL NOT BE a typical Closing Time—no industry advice here. Instead, we've opted to present a bit of social commentary regarding the potential of a local wine bar—in this case, Southeast Portland's beloved Division Wines—as a gathering place for friendly debate.

It was clear during a recent visit that owners Danyelle and Will Prouty hope to offer much more at Division Wines than full glasses of red or white. While the shop's interior has a somewhat industrial aesthetic, it still feels very warm and inviting—and that's by design. "We've worked very hard on this space. Every tile on the ceiling was placed by my hand," Will said as he ran his hands over the wood grain in the bar. "Sometimes it was frustrating and it took far too long, but the gradual process was very satisfying."

The Proutys, who have two children, have lived in the lush Southeast Portland area for almost 20 years. In 2011, they opened Division Wines as a retail store, but continuing to work other jobs while

raising young boys left them with limited time to focus on the shop. After they added the bar a handful of years later and started pouring wines by the glass, however, "it all became real," Will said.

"If you start in retail it's one thing, but if you sell someone a bottle, then you get to pour them a taste and they can react," he continues. "What's awesome about wine is that it's so subjective and endless—there's tons of opportunity to assure people that in order for you to be right, I don't have to be wrong. If we can't do that around wine then what are we going to do? Dissension is a beautiful thing as long as there's civility wrapped around it. We're not all supposed to like the same things, but we can still sit next to each other and be friends."

A longtime wine professional, Will keeps an interesting selection while Danyelle, the shop's self-proclaimed "behind-the-scenes girl," breaks down their offerings for guests. "The wines are kind of a mix. We're known as a shop with having a lot of fun, off-the-beaten path [options]," she said. "We have

a value village where everything is \$15 and under, and we don't have a ton of trophy wines—\$20 to \$35 is the sweet spot."

While roughly a quarter of the inventory is local, Will says he's equally drawn to wines from all over the world. As eclectic and global as their collection may be, however, the most important thing to the Proutys is providing a welcoming space for their local community.

"If you do a little stoop-dwelling, you talk to people, and I think that that's what the idea was here: to create a stoop where people can sit together and talk," Will said. "Bars or coffee shops or anywhere people sit are really valuable because we tend to only operate in our little circles we're comfortable with. But every once in a while in places like this, you end up sitting next to somebody you don't know and talking to them. You might identify your differences, but you'll start to recognize all the things you have in common: It could just be the weather, or it could be wine. I think that's powerful stuff, especially right now." ❧



The Man Behind the Brands



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