

■ THE SOMMELIER JOURNAL

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PHOTO: CAMERON INGALLS

Amanda Wittstrom-Higgins, Founder of Wine Speak Paso, is also VP of Operations for Ancient Peaks Winery. She's pictured at left with SOMM Journal Publisher/Editorial Director Meridith May and Managing Editor Jessie "Jabs" Birschbach. This educational event successfully united winemakers, wine educators, and wine buyers.

Taking Our Role as a Media Partner to the Next Level

RIGHT AFTER THE HOLIDAYS, Managing Editor Jessie "Jabs" Birschbach and I set off to the Central Coast to join the group from **Wine Speak Paso**, a new interactive seminar and tasting event that brought wine-buying professionals and winemakers together for some serious vino vernacular.

At the first *SOMM Journal* media event of the year, Wine Speak Paso Founder Amanda Wittstrom-Higgins, who also serves as VP of Operations for Paso Robles winery Ancient Peaks, did a spectacular job of uniting some of the most sought-after winemakers (i.e. Justin Smith of Saxum, Andy Peay, and Bruce Neyers) with Master Sommeliers (including Wine Speak Paso Co-Founder Chuck Furuya, wine educator Fred Dame, Nunzio Alioto, and Greg Harrington, as well as *The SOMM Journal's* Randy Caparoso).

We'll have more on this event in our April issue, but we are thrilled to launch into 2018 with a series of other adventures on our calendar for the new year: We hope to see you in Santa Barbara for **World of Pinot Noir** March 1–3; in Napa for the **Global Garnacha Summit** at the Culinary Institute of America at Copia on April 24; in Paso Robles for the **Hospice du Rhône** wine festival April 26–28, and in Las Vegas at the **Wine & Spirits Wholesalers of America 75th Annual Convention & Exposition** May 1–4.

Traveling wine education seminar **Cru Artisan College** will also return for another immersive series of events in Denver, New Orleans, and Napa—we will keep you posted through social media and online updates, but it would be most helpful if you can send me *your* contact information via

email at mmay@sommjournal.com so we can get you on the invite list. The all-day seminars and tastings are coming up May 14–18.

It's meaningful to us to be *part* of these events, not just to "cover" them as another media outlet. It's this sense of partnership that inspires us to bring these gatherings to life in print and share the experiences with our readers. We couldn't possibly write about all the events we're asked to attend, but we are wholly committed to documenting those with which we are truly and integrally connected. 

Meridith May

Casa Martini Global Director of Sparkling Wine Marco Mazzini joined Enologist and Wine Operations Director Giorgio Castagnotti in hosting a trade luncheon at Nerano in Beverly Hills, CA. Martini & Rossi produce the number-one Italian sparkling wine brand in the world.

first

press

FALLING IN LOVE WITH

Italian
Bubbles

A PORTFOLIO TASTING WITH MARTINI
& ROSSI'S SPARKLING WINE TEAM

first press



by Albert Letizia / photos by Cal Bingham

ALL OVER EUROPE, people associate Martini & Rossi's iconic ball and bar logo with such high-societal mainstays as auto racing, supermodels, and celebrity ad campaigns featuring the likes of George Clooney. In the U.S., however, the company is still sometimes viewed as more of a grande dame than a hip fashion statement.

Long established as one of Italy's most ubiquitous brands, Martini is reintroducing itself to a new generation of sommeliers and industry influencers in an effort to bring Americans up to speed on the state of Italian sparkling wines and Martini's crowning position in the category.

Casa Martini Enologist and Wine Operations Director Giorgio Castagnotti and Global Director of Sparkling Wine Marco Mazzini recently set out to impress a large lunchtime assembly of A-list sommeliers, social influencers, and bloggers on the longstanding virtues of Martini & Rossi.



Martini & Rossi Prosecco's pearlescent, delicate bubbles offer a creamy palate of dried white flowers and marzipan.

The event unfolded at Nerano restaurant in Beverly Hills, California, where the wines were paired with the exquisite Amalfi Coast-inspired cuisine of Executive Chef Michele Lisi.

Piedmont served as the birthplace of the Italian Spumante tradition, and since 1863, Martini has mastered the art of delivering a signature style that is vibrant, fresh, and light. The event at Nerano was not only meant to showcase the portfolio favorites Martini & Rossi Prosecco and Martini & Rossi Asti, but to roll out the new Martini & Rossi Rosé Extra Dry and the newly-packaged Riserva Speciale Bitter 1872.

Casa Martini continues to maintain vineyard locations throughout Piedmont and northern Italy. In 1895, Founder Luigi Rossi hired the engineer Federico Martinotti, who is recognized as the creator of the revolutionary sparkling wine production style known today as the Charmat method; in fact, in the 1930s, winemakers in Veneto-Friuli used the "Martinotti method" on their native Glera grapes, and hence, the Prosecco tradition was born.

The Bitter 1872, which draws its name from Martini's original amaro recipe created that year, stood in for Campari in the welcome cocktail for the Nerano luncheon: A riff on the classic Negroni, it also featured Martini Rosso Vermouth and Martini & Rossi Prosecco instead of gin. The result was a mouthwatering and less-boozy aperitif with all the complexity of a traditional Negroni, but with an elevated freshness and *frizzante* character.

The other new addition to the Martini portfolio is the Martini & Rossi Extra Dry Rosé sparkler made from Riesling, Chardonnay, Glera, and Nebbiolo sourced from Piedmont and Veneto-Friuli and tank-fermented. The finished product—which earned a Gold Medal at our San



The Martini Negroni Sbagliato is made with Martini Riserva Speciale Bitter 1872, with Martini & Rossi Prosecco replacing gin. The name Sbagliato translates to "mistake," but Italians may beg to differ: The cocktail is among the country's most popular.

Francisco International Wine Competition last year—was very well received by the sommeliers and members of the media not only for its balance and precision, but for its scents of peach blossom, wet stone, delicate red fruits, and finely-ground black and white pepper. The group was encouraged to add ice cubes to their glasses of rosé to further draw out its crisp notes of pink roses and strawberry.

As for the more classic members of the portfolio showcased at the luncheon, the first, Martini & Rossi Prosecco, comprises mainly Glera (85%), Pinot Noir, and Chardonnay; with additional emphasis placed on crispness, it exhibits aromas of green apples and pears with a backbone of bright acidity. Martini & Rossi Prosecco has been produced since the 1990s with an inimitably-Italian style, less dominant fruit, and more floral and mineral complexity than most members of the category.

As Castagnotti introduced the second Martini & Rossi mainstay, he quickly reminded the group, "There is nothing wrong with Asti!" The lush bubbly was a sweet and juicy guilty pleasure for most of the somms, with ripe melon, pear, and pineapple flavors from 100% Moscato Bianco grown in Asti DOCG.



Notes from the Somms



Andrea Scuto, Wine Director for Trattoria Amici in Glendale, CA, and Raimondo Boggia, CEO of Italian restaurant group OBICÀ USA.

"My favorite wine of the lunch was the Prosecco. I found it to be elegant, balanced, and refreshing with beautiful notes of white flowers, tart apple, and just a hint of subtle sweetness that perfectly complements the bright acidity. My impression of the Martini & Rossi brand has always been positive, but this lunch was a wonderful opportunity to refresh my knowledge and discover products I had not tried previously. In the past, I have thought of the brand as being primarily geared towards retail outlets, but I can see now how the products could be incorporated into a restaurant beverage program."

—Sharon Coombs, Beverage Director for Tom Colicchio's restaurant Craft in Los Angeles

"I was impressed with the fact of Martini's history, having been established two years after the unification of Italy! All in all, I would call the luncheon a wonderful re-introduction to an Italian classic."

—Paul Sherman, Lead Sommelier at Valentino in Santa Monica, California

"The Martini presentation gave me a completely new perspective on the brand. The Martini philosophy is one of quality, innovation, and tradition, and will certainly be successful for many years to come."

—Laurie C. Sutton, Wine Director at California Club in Downtown Los Angeles

"I truly loved the Prosecco due to how light and easygoing it was. It displays bright orchard and citrus aromas, a delicate palate filled with freshness, and a nice dry finish. My impression of Martini definitely improved. To see such passion for what they have created and to see the diversity of the brand opened my eyes. I had only really known them for the Asti, but it was wonderful to see what they have done with the perfumed, floral, and fruity Martini & Rossi Rosé Extra Dry!"

"I really enjoyed the classic Martini & Rossi Prosecco. I thought the crisp acidity and the citrus and peach notes really brought it home: a classic Prosecco and a great apéritif."

"The pairing of the wines at the Martini & Rossi/Nerano luncheon was sublime! The Martini Rosé Extra Dry was a perfect companion to the salad of artichokes, snow peas, and arugula."



Sharon Coombs, Beverage Director of Craft Los Angeles, with Paul Sherman, Lead Sommelier at Valentino in Santa Monica, CA.

"The Martini Special Bitter used in the Negroni was absolutely delicious: a beautiful balance of herbs, bitterness, and sweetness uplifted by the bubbles from the Martini & Rossi Prosecco."

—Raimondo Boggia, CEO of OBICÀ USA

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Guy Davis of Davis Family Vineyards with his son Cooper.

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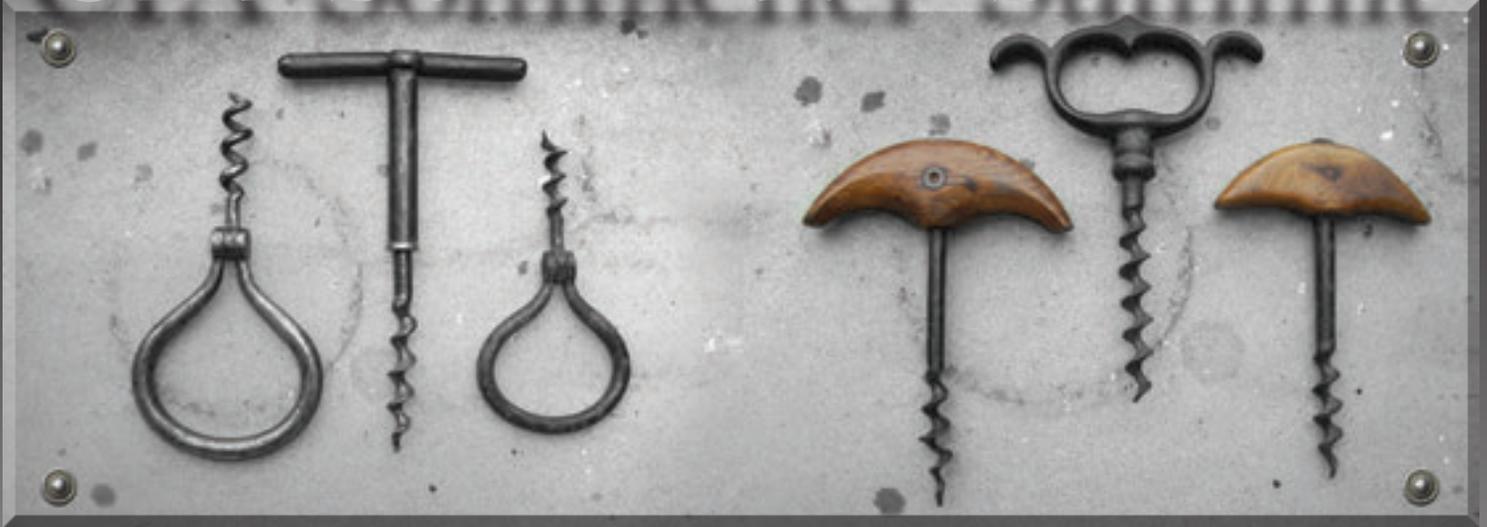
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A Pinot Noir cluster in the Appian Way Vineyard, located within the Russian River Valley AVA's Middle Reach neighborhood.

PHOTO: RANDY CAPARASO

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Event Photos: Alexander Rubin



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Zero Tolerance

INCIDENTS OF SEXUAL HARASSMENT within the hospitality industry have made frequent appearances in the headlines lately. The “boys club” atmosphere at many establishments has come to light, and several high-profile members of our community have been outed and banished from their restaurants.

This movement is long overdue. No one should be subjected to unwanted and repeated provocations while pursuing their livelihood. People in our business work hard, performing difficult and sometimes grueling tasks for long hours. Being hassled and humiliated in addition to these professional demands just doesn't cut it, and whether these incidents comprise verbal taunting or nonconsensual physical contact, they are not acceptable in any circumstance. “No” means “no.”

Too much of this bad behavior has gone unreported, because the victims have often been afraid—justifiably so—to stand up and say, “Stop!” Hopefully the increasingly open dialogue surrounding these issues will help alleviate those fears. It is also the responsibility of restaurant management to listen to the complaint, take it seriously, fully investigate it, and act appropriately and decisively.

The management staff of every restaurant should post a code of conduct in a prominent place. It's sad that this is even necessary, but it is. There should also be a “chain of command” that paves a clear and accessible route for placing complaints.

Sexual harassment in any form is repugnant. In order to make our workplaces safe for all, we should maintain a position of zero tolerance. —Anthony Dias Blue SJ

At the Intersection of Intersectional Feminism and Wine

AFTER PUBLISHING Karen MacNeil's “Beyond the Wine Glass, A New Glass Ceiling” feature on women in the wine industry in *The SOMM Journal's* December 2017/January 2018 issue, lifestyle writer Julia Coney wrote an open letter to our magazine pointing out the lack of African-American women represented in the many portraits that accompanied the story. (You can read Coney's full letter, and MacNeil's thoughtful response, on Coney's website at juliaconey.com.)

As proud as I am to have been a small part of MacNeil's feature, which was adapted from a keynote speech she made at the National Women for Winesense Conference, Coney's letter prompted a long and self-reflective pause: I hadn't noticed the lack of African-American women at this event, which in turn made me realize I do not know one black female winemaker. Not one.



This is why I'm thanking Coney here for bringing this lack of diversity to our attention. Her appeal for intersectional feminism not only in our magazine, but in the wine industry as a whole, added an illuminating layer to MacNeil's narrative of her own experiences of exclusion—and the need to break that cycle.

We want to use this dialogue as a platform for asking our readers what you believe we can all be doing to welcome more women of color into the world of wine and, in particular, onto the pages of *The SOMM Journal*. As Managing Editor, I can suggest we start a column or initiate some form of online outreach centered around the topic of diversity, but the fact remains that, as a white woman, I shouldn't be the person to spearhead this effort. Instead, we want to hear from you—and the first and most important thing I can do right now is to listen.

If you have any thoughts or suggestions on how we can continue this conversation, please email me at jobs@sommjournal.com. SJ

—Jessie Birschbach



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A New Order

FRENCH AMERICAN VINTNERS APPOINTS RICK BONITATI AS CEO OF ST. FRANCIS WINERY & VINEYARDS

THE FRENCH AMERICAN Vintners Board of Directors has appointed Rick Bonitati as CEO of St. Francis Winery & Vineyards in Sonoma Valley and Senior Vice President for the Western Operations of French American Vintners.

The Western Operations of French American Vintners operates several highly-recognized winemaking facilities in addition to St. Francis Winery, including Sequoia Grove Winery in Napa, Résonance Vineyards in the Willamette Valley of Oregon, and Domaine Carneros (in joint partnership with the Taittinger Family) in Carneros.

Bonitati's appointment reflects the company's aim to further develop its existing success by regrouping its western assets under one leader. The board also announced that Robert Aldridge has been

named Vice President of Finance for the Western Operations French American Vintners in addition to his current role as COO/CFO of St. Francis Winery.

Bonitati comes to St. Francis Winery and French American Vintners most recently from Paul Hobbs Wines, where he served as the COO. He has more than 30 years of experience in the fine wine business, including positions with Jackson Family Wines.

French American Vintners is owned by the Kopf family and comprises a number of prestigious wineries and vineyards in France in addition to its California and Oregon holdings, including Maison Louis Jadot, Maison Jean Loron, Domaine Ferret, and Château de Jacques. The Kopf family also owns the importing, sales, and marketing company Kobrand Corporation.



PHOTOS COURTESY OF KOBRAND CORPORATION

Rick Bonitati is the newly-appointed CEO of St. Francis Winery.



Bob Aldridge has been named Vice President of Finance for the Western Operations French American Vintners in addition to his current role as COO/CFO of St. Francis Winery.

Rhonda Carano Becomes New Senior Executive Officer and Manager of Ferrari-Carano Vineyards and Wine

RHONDA CARANO, Co-Founder of Ferrari-Carano Vineyards and Winery alongside her late husband Don Carano, has assumed the position of Senior Executive Officer and Manager for the Ferrari-Carano family of brands after Don passed away on October 3, 2017.

Since Ferrari-Carano is the shared vision of Don and Rhonda, who co-managed the company since its inception in 1981, the transition to Rhonda's new role will be seamless. "As a team, Don and I shared a dream," Rhonda says. "His insight and visionary approach in the wine industry back in the early 1980s—particularly his love for acquiring special vineyard sites—is the backbone of Ferrari-Carano's philosophy of creating memorable wines from vine to bottle."

Rhonda drives Ferrari-Carano's growth strategies and brings to the role 40 years of experience in business management, marketing, advertising, and creative design at Eldorado Resorts Inc.; Ferrari-Carano Vineyards and Winery; Lazy Creek Vineyards; Seasons of the Vineyard Tasting Bar and Boutique; Vintners Inn; and John Ash & Co. Restaurant. SJ



PHOTO COURTESY OF FERRARI-CARANO VINEYARDS AND WINERY

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Soil types and five decades of wine were on display at the Chateau Montelena tasting.

The Dream Continues

A RETROSPECTIVE TASTING OF CHATEAU MONTELENA CABERNET REVEALS THE SOUL OF AN ESTATE

CHATEAU MONTELENA CEO Bo Barrett recalls the days leading up to his first year working in the vineyards of the winery in Calistoga, California, quite fondly: "All I did was surf, dive, and ski," he told me.

When he joined the team in 1972, Chateau Montelena had just been purchased by his father, the late Jim Barrett. Built 90 years earlier, the massive

the "Dream Tasting," during which five decades of Chateau Montelena's wines were presented in two flights in the winery's cellars. Bo either made every wine or was closely involved in their production, and it was clear they represented a trip down memory lane for the 63-year-old winemaker. "You have to remember we were making wine in a time before there even

old. The wines, only roughly destemmed, were so tannic that the winemakers would leave them to macerate as long as 45 days in hopes the tannin would calm down. No one had heard of brettanomyces, and even when the Barretts did, they decided they liked a little bit of it to remain for its flavor.

While the fruit may have been handled roughly, the Montelena grapes in the 1970s made some phenomenal Cabernets (for me, the 1975 and 1979 were particularly stellar). As the tasting moved through the 1980s, 1990s, and 2000s, I made several solid conclusions: First, the Montelena wines have massive structure. Second, if you buy them, you better like brett; the Barretts clearly do, and a funky barnyard character is discernible in many of the vintages (luckily, it's not the Band-Aid or mousy side of brett). And finally, though the wines express a certain level of evolution, they often remain in a singular state for years and go into "stationary orbit," Barrett explained—unlike Chateau Montelena itself, which seems to be evolving just fine. **SJ**



At left, the instantly-recognizable entrance to Chateau Montelena's winery. At right, Chateau Montelena Owner Bo Barret and Winemaker Matt Crafton at the Dream Tasting.

stone structure came with 100 acres of Carignan, Mondeuse, Alicante Bouschet, Burger, Petite Sirah, and Zinfandel. It was a trial by fire for the younger Barrett, and his responsibilities only increased the following year as he went to work in the old cellars alongside Mike Grgich, Montelena's first winemaker.

In January, Bo's recollections served as an introduction to what the winery called

was a Napa Valley AVA, before there was a *Wine Spectator*, and before anyone knew of Robert Parker," said Barrett.

It was also a time when winemaking itself was considerably different. Most of the Montelena Cabernets were made with about 20 percent new oak until quite recently, and the oldest wines were made using what Barrett called a "solera" of barrels—some of which were up to 12 years

Karen MacNeil is the author of *The Wine Bible* and the editor of *WineSpeed*, the free digital newsletter.



PHOTOS COURTESY OF CHATEAU MONTELENA

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An Enlightening Moment

A SOMM EMBRACES THE **POWER OF OBSCURITY** IN WINE

by Randy Caparoso

IT WAS HARD to be a sommelier in 1996: In those days, most Americans drank either soft, “buttery” Chardonnays or fruity White Zinfandels. I would attempt to compensate for the limited nature of this collective palate by stocking wine lists with either alternative whites expressing a different fruitiness (like Pinot Gris, Riesling, or Albariño) or Chardonnays lighter in oak and alcohol. Soft, fruit-forward reds (such as Pinot Noir, Sangiovese, Lemberger, and the organic wines of Beaujolais) were also a go-to in those days.

But for all the smarts I thought I had, I was still insecure when it came to wines expressing less fruitiness than, say, minerality, as well as those couched in more austere, acid-driven structures. I would occasionally try my guests on Savennières, Picpoul, or Greco di Tufo, and I'd even throw in a Biancolella from Ischia or Vermentino-based whites from Provence or Corsica. But in the face of the inevitably dismal sales, my usual response was to beat a hasty retreat to the comfort zones of Pinots, Rieslings, and Chardonnays.

However, my attitude wholly transformed when I paid a visit to Colle Picchioni on the advice of Riccardo Cotarella, who had just begun consulting with this tiny estate located along the ancient Appian Way outside Rome in Italy's Marino district. There I met Paola di Mauro, who purchased the property in 1976 and began making wine from what was then an unusual menagerie of grapes: among them Cabernet Sauvignon, Cabernet Franc, Merlot, Sauvignon Blanc, and Sémillon, as well as the native Trebbiano and Malvasia di Lazio.

When I dropped into Picchioni in the late morning, Paola was in the kitchen and the smell of rosemary and olive oil cooking in the pan permeated the house. Her



PHOTO COURTESY OF LAURADIBASE VIA THINKSTOCK

The ancient ruins of an aqueduct just outside Rome in the Parco degli Acquadotti.

son Armando, who had just taken over management of the wine side of the family business, poured me a two-year-old Colle Picchioni Marino Bianco Donna Paola: a soft, dry, and fluid blend of Malvasia, Trebbiano, and Sémillon that was light and oily on the palate. What it was *not* was something big, thick, oaky, and fruity; in fact, it was slightly old-fashioned in its small and somewhat plain character.

As we sipped and talked, Paola brought over a fava-like white bean soup she had readied, over which Armando sprinkled dried chili flakes before stirring in a tiny dollop of red paste made from tomatoes, bell peppers, and olive oil. The taste was smooth and soothing, yet tingy and robust: Suddenly, the Donna Paola seemed to pop. Each sensation in the dish was intensified by the round, easy, and mildly-oily texture of the wine I had written off as too simplistic.

Paola then brought over a ceramic pot

containing what Armando called “Roman lamb”: bony morsels of lamb with chicken liver, rosemary, anchovy, white vinegar, pepper, and a generous dose of olive oil. “Now we will show you why we drink white wine with everything in Rome, even lamb,” Armando told me. I could not believe how the oil and herbs in the stew pulled together the soft, oozing quality of the white wine—and vice versa. “The dish is not a difficult one, but neither is the wine,” Paola added. “Great wine and food is not always complicated.”

My takeaway, which has stuck with me ever since, was that not every wine has to be about intensity, depth, or even acidity. Some of our most interesting wines, in fact, can be soft and simple. The important thing is to never give up on your own instincts, nor in your customers' ability to appreciate new wines—especially if placed in the context of the right dishes. If you show them, they will come around ... eventually! **SJ**

MAKING HISTORY...
AGAIN.

CHAMPAGNE
LA VICTOIRE
CHAMPAGNE, FRANCE

CHATEAU
BUENA VISTA
CABERNET SAUVIGNON
NAPA VALLEY

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THE TASTING PANEL

93 POINTS
WINE ENTHUSIAST

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Classic Estates

THE INTERNATIONAL EXHIBITION WINE SOCIETY POURS RHÔNE AND PROVENCE

THE INTERNATIONAL Exhibition Wine Society was founded in 1874 with the aim to supply wine to the “professional middle classes.” (In those Victorian days, the British upper classes stocked the cellars in their country houses with bottles from merchants in London’s Saint James’ Street. The lower classes didn’t drink wine, so the audience was well-targeted.) Today, The Wine Society (as it’s now known) has a second-to-none buying team that plows its profits back into acquiring new wines for its members while keeping stocks of older vintages. At a tasting early last December, participating producers from the Rhône Valley and Provence showed both young and superbly mature vintages.

Domaine Barge, Côte-Rôtie

2016 Condrieu Beautifully expressed with no exaggeration, just balancing acidity. To 2022. **92**

2012 Côte-Rôtie Le Combard Grown on steep volcanic soil. Floral nose; richer than expected on the palate with a refined and long finish. To 2025. **92**

2011 Côte-Rôtie Côte Brune Deep in color; rich, warm flavors, more tannins, and length. 2019–28. **93**

2011 Côte-Rôtie Duplessy A delightful, youthful, lifted, and almost “feminine” wine. To 2025. **92**

2010 Côte-Rôtie Duplessy Floral and pure, open and ready; not a keeper. To 2020. **91**

2006 Côte-Rôtie Duplessy Still young, but the spicy nose and sweet middle fruit offer elegance and charm. Perfect “à table.” To 2026. **92**

Domaine Jean-Louis Chave, Hermitage

2011 Hermitage Blanc Pale gold; honey-suckle bouquet; rich flavors, including yellow fruits, with complexity building to a mineral finish. A great wine for the cellar. **97**

2000 Hermitage Blanc Still young in color. Nutty with dry honey and superb fruit. Mature, yet with a decade in front of it. **96**

2014 Saint-Joseph Deep color; black fruits, natural depth, and perfect length. To 2024. **92**

2012 Hermitage Rouge Smooth aromas; the power kicks in while the finesse remains in this seamless blend of Hermitage’s best plots. 2020–35. **97**

2008 Hermitage Rouge Floral and still young with almost Côte-Rôtie–like finesse. To 2022. **92**

1990 Hermitage Rouge Superb color for its 27 years of age. A touch of spice and a sweet middle; beautifully poised with stunning quality. To 2030. **99**

Domaine Alain Voge, Cornas

2015 Saint-Péray Ongrie Oak-aged Marsanne produces summer fruits and long flavors. **91**

2015 Cornas Les Chailles Deep, rich, and smooth palate with a grip on the finish that’s unmistakably Cornas. To 2028. **92**

2006 Cornas Vieilles Vignes Rich, velvety red; a superb, savory Syrah that will be excellent to 2026. **93**

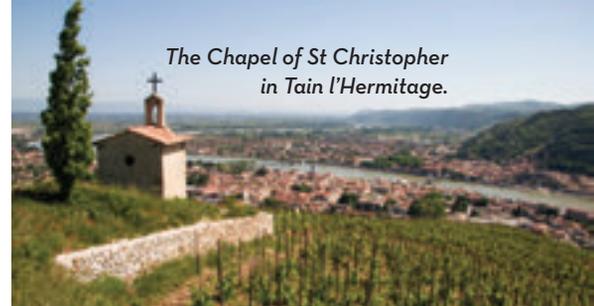
2005 Cornas Les Vieilles Fontaines A rich, classic Cornas combining florality and depth of flavor. Has a decade in front of it. **94**

Clos des Papes, Châteauneuf-du-Pape

2009 Châteauneuf-du-Pape Blanc From equal amounts of the appellation’s six permitted white varieties, a most interesting white Châteauneuf that can be kept to 2022. **93**

2014 Châteauneuf-du-Pape Bright, fresh, and lovely lifted fruit—very Burgundian. To 2024. **92**

2009 Châteauneuf-du-Pape Rich, wonderful warmth, purity, and structure from



The Chapel of St Christopher in Tain l'Hermitage.

Mourvèdre. Still young, with a great future to 2029. **94**

1990 Châteauneuf-du-Pape Deep red with no real age; marvelous richness, with spice and natural, unexaggerated sweetness. Wonderful now to 2025. **97**

Domaine de Trévallon, Alpilles

2015 IGP Alpilles Blanc Marsanne, Roussanne, Clairette, Grenache Blanc, and a touch of Chardonnay blend Rhône richness with Provençal florality. Lovely to 2022. **93**

2010 VdP des Bouches-du-Rhône

Half Syrah, half Cabernet. Spice and grip are perfectly matched here; natural richness and fine tannins indicate a future to 2025. **93**

2008 VdP des Bouches-du-Rhône

Shows great finesse and length, with just 13% alcohol. **92**

2005 VdP des Bouches-du-Rhône

Perfectly-expressed dark fruits tinged with garrigue; a serious wine. **93**

2004 VdP des Bouches-du-Rhône

Elegant and open; lovely vineyard expression. **92**

Mas de Daumas Gassac, Languedoc

2016 VdP de l'Herault Blanc Viognier’s peach notes convey this wine’s purity and vivacity. Delightful to 2022. **92**

2014 VdP de l'Herault 80% Cabernet. Garrigue spice with no hard edges. To 2026. **92**

2013 VdP de l'Herault Richer and smoother with more depth. Very good indeed. 2020–30. **94**

2012 VdP de l'Herault Very elegant and almost graceful in its finesse. Has a good future to 2028. **93**

2008 VdP de l'Herault A finely-textured expression of Cabernet from the south. To 2022. **93**

NEVER BEFORE,
NEVER AGAIN WINES.



APRIL 20, 2018 - SONOMA COUNTY, CA

The Sonoma County Barrel Auction is a rare chance to taste, and possibly own, a true Sonoma County original. It's an exclusive, invitation-only event for licensed members of the wine trade, featuring a selection of never before, never again wines from Sonoma County's leading vintners and growers. This year's auction will be held at the beautiful MacMurray Estate Vineyards™.

FOR DETAILS AND TO GET CONNECTED, VISIT SonomaWine.com/BarrelAuction



The Ransom Report is a column by *The Somm Journal's* East Coast Editor David Ransom. In each issue, David will discuss what's currently on his mind and in his glass gathered from conversations and experiences in the world of wine, spirits, and hospitality.

Re-examining France's Most Adaptable Spirit

THE UNFORTUNATE MISUNDERSTANDINGS OF **ARMAGNAC**

story and photos by David Ransom



Vintage Armagnacs spanning four decades at Darroze, one of the region's most respected négociants.



Claire de Montesquiou, Proprietor of the highly-regarded Domaine d'Espérance, makes Armagnac both to sell to négociants like Darroze and to bottle on her own.

FRANCE IS WELL KNOWN for producing some of the world's greatest brandies, most notably Armagnac, Calvados, and Cognac. All three have their merits and devotees, yet if you ask the average consumer about Armagnac, you'll most likely get a response that goes like this: "Well, it's like Cognac, isn't it, only more rustic?" Ask somms about Armagnac, and they'll invariably wax poetic about how beautiful a brandy it is before lamenting that their customers don't understand how it differs from Cognac and that it sells slowly as a result. Why is that?

A recent foray through the cellars in Gascony of Armagnac producers both large and small left me with a newfound appreciation of this exceptional yet often overlooked spirit. Seeking more context, I reached out to a couple of somms who are well acquainted with it and its perception in the marketplace for their opinion on how to best present and promote it in today's restaurant environs.

"We carry Armagnac in all our restaurants, but not always in the usual way," says Jerry Garbus, Operating Partner and Wine Director for a restaurant group in Manhattan Beach, California, that includes Manhattan Beach Post, Fishing With Dynamite, and The Arthur J. "While we do have a few on our brandy list, where Armagnac has found the most success and popularity is in our bar program, as a base spirit in cocktails. Armagnac profiles tend to be leaner, brighter, more defined, and with a little less sugar than those of Cognac, allowing us greater control of how we build our brandy-based cocktails."

Sommelier Andre Compeyre of Aldo Sohm Wine Bar in New York City is also a fan, though he sticks to a more traditional approach. "I use Armagnac as a tool to build customer loyalty," he says. "When a customer asks for a Cognac, I often suggest a vintage-dated Armagnac, explain the stylistic differences between the two, and wait to see their expression when they take a sip. Not only do they invariably thank me for the suggestion, but they often continue to try different producers on subsequent visits."

With records showing that brandy was being made in the Gascony region as far back as the 1300s, Armagnac's legacy is certainly cemented. Yet for all that history, Armagnac has never gained Cognac's notoriety or mass appeal. Whatever the reason, let's make this the year of the underdog and start championing France's oldest distillate in 2018. **sj**



Patrick de Montal of Château Arton in the Haut Armagnac subregion is the creator of the Blanche category of Armagnac, a bartender staple.

L'expertise BORDEAUX



Established in Bordeaux for 5 generations, Crus et Domaines de France is the Bordeaux specialist of the Grands Chais de France group. An important player in the Bordeaux marketplace, Crus et Domaines de France distributes the Helfrich family's 15 properties; 443 hectares representing the different appellations of the Bordeaux vineyard. Today more than 137 owners have chosen to entrust Crus et Domaines de France with the exclusive distribution of their châteaux. Crus et Domaines de France takes advantage of the unique distribution and logistics of the group to offer Bordeaux Grands Crus to more than 172 countries, under the best conditions. The Crus et Domaines de France team is made up of 25 specialists.

CRUS ET DOMAINES DE FRANCE

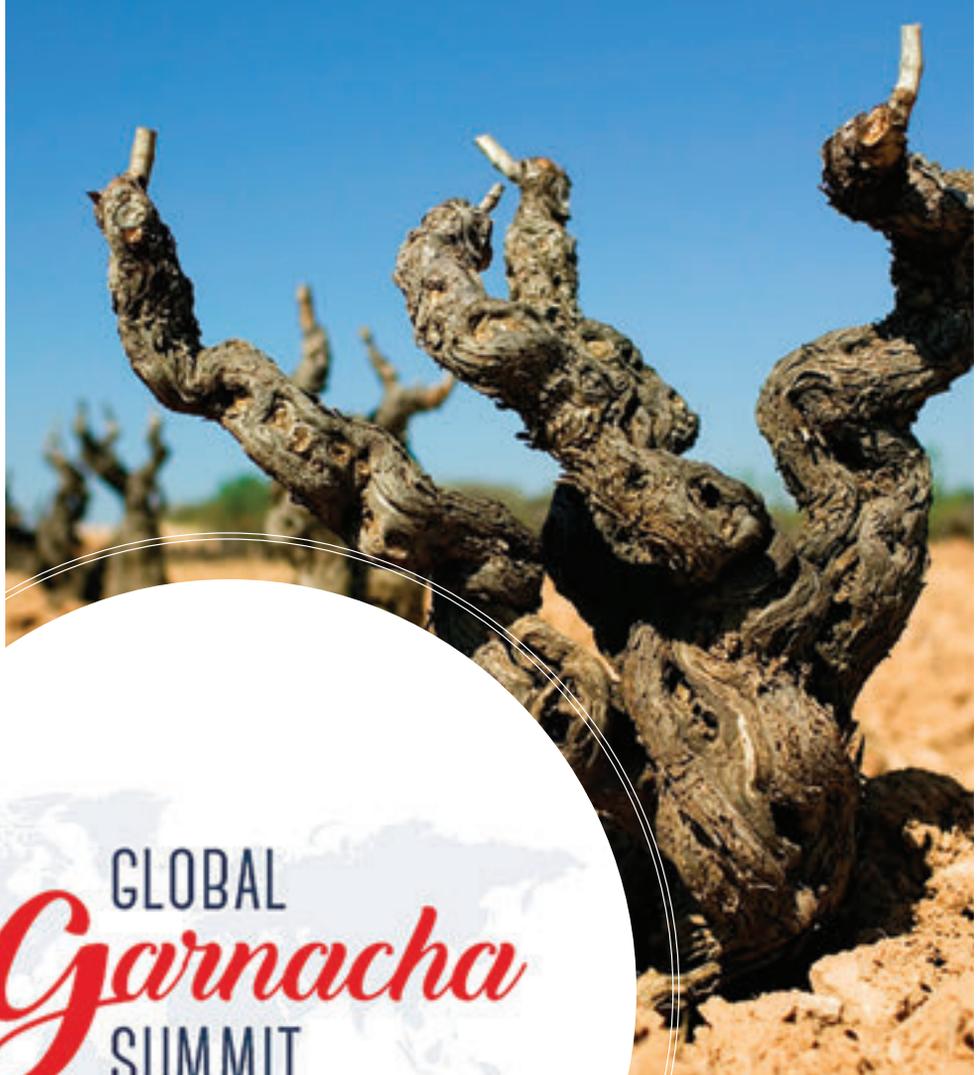
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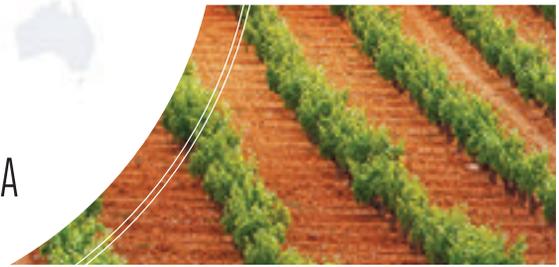
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April 24, 2018
The CIA at Copia, Napa, CA



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SOMMFOUNDATION!**

If you love to sell Garnacha/Gr-enache, tell us how it fits into your wine program and why you think the grape matters in the global wine world. The scholarship includes round-trip air transportation to and from Oakland or Sacramento airports; a three-night hotel stay in downtown Napa near CIA at COPIA; admission to the Global Garnacha Summit; and a free day to visit Napa Valley wineries.

*Send your entry via email to
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Immerse Yourself in *Garnacha/ Grenache*

Here's what you can expect:

An overview of the variety and its global impact

An Old Vines + Modern Wines seminar that explores how Garnacha/Grenache evolves with age

A tasting of 100% varietal expressions and blends to demonstrate how the variety expresses itself in different regions around the globe

A tasting highlighting differences in wines from varying altitudes in Garnacha's home region of Carinena DOP in Aragon, Spain

How Garnacha/Grenache can be best positioned in today's marketplace

A sensory exploration of the myriad styles this grape is capable of expressing via a walkaround tasting of food and wine pairings from California, France, and Spain, as well as an opportunity to taste an unusual (and literal) vertical of Garnacha

Finally, for those who want to flex their tasting muscles: a blind "guess the region" tasting competition with a \$1,000 first prize and \$500 second prize.

THE SOMM JOURNAL



April 24, 2018 CIA at Copia Napa

The Summit Program

The full-day Global Garnacha Summit features two seminars with limited seats, so please make sure to register early for your chosen selection.

Garnacha Unveiled 10 a.m. to 12 p.m.

A panel of leading producers from Spain, France, and California will explore the classic varietal characteristics of the variety; how it performs in different regions/terroir; and how it's interpreted by renowned producers from around the world. Master Sommelier Robert Bath, Professor of Wine and Beverage Studies at the Culinary Institute of America at Copia, will moderate the seminar.

Garnacha: The Perfect Partner 12:15 to 1:45 p.m.

This walkaround wine and food pairing featuring the Chefs of Copia will meld the signature flavors of Spain, France, and California with both 100% Garnacha and blends from around the world.

Garnacha Rising 2 to 4 p.m.

A panel of leading sommeliers, buyers, and distributors will discuss historical strategies for promoting Garnacha wines in addition to current consumption trends. The panelists will also exchange ideas for promoting Garnacha in today's marketplace with a focus on making it a "Millennial" wine of choice.

Blind Tasting of Garnacha/Grenache 4 to 4:30 p.m.

Led by The SommFoundation, with cash prizes of \$1,000 for first place and \$500 for second place.

Producers: If you'd like to participate on a panel or present your wines at this event, contact Meridith May at MMay@SOMMJournal.com.

Attendees: If you are a qualified sommelier, wine director, wine retailer, F&B director, or restaurateur, send an email with your address and job title to Meridith May at MMay@SOMMJournal.com.

Visit globalgarnachasummit.com for
Summit updates.

Radio-Coteau Winemaker and Proprietor Eric Sussman makes his wines, as well as his Eye Cyder hard ciders, with fruit from the estate property he purchased near Occidental, CA, in 2012.



Going Full Farm

RADIO-COTEAU WINEMAKER ERIC SUSSMAN LETS NATURE TAKE THE REINS AT HIS BOUTIQUE ESTATE

by Chris Sawyer / photos by Sean Desmond

At an elevation of 800 feet, the Radio-Coteau estate vineyard and farm features a gorgeous view of the Russian River Valley to the east.

WHEN WINEMAKER ERIC SUSSMAN founded his boutique brand Radio-Coteau in 2002, he set out to produce a series of small-production wines expressing the flavors and character of the pristine vineyard they hailed from.

Over the next decade, Sussman fulfilled that dream with his impressive chain of world-class wines; at the same time, he gained a reputation as one of the top boutique producers of Pinot Noir, Syrah, and Chardonnay made with fruit from the coastal regions of Sonoma County and Anderson Valley.

With those goals not only accomplished, but surpassed, the only thing Sussman felt he was missing was an estate vineyard he could call his own. He set his sights on a historic 42-acre farmstead above Occidental (located on a ridgetop at 800 feet, the property was first planted with grapes in 1896) and purchased it in 2012. Today, the site features a lovely two-story Victorian home, a rustic adult-sized

treehouse, and a series of redwood barns, as well as old Zinfandel vines planted in 1946. Like the younger blocks of Syrah, Riesling, Chardonnay, and Pinot planted on the property, the vines are farmed using organic and Biodynamic methods.

To capture the true personality of the estate, Sussman generally takes a more minimalistic approach to winemaking in order to produce balanced wines driven by acidity and freshness: All Radio-Coteau wines are made with free-run juice and native ferments. He also leaves them unracked to preserve the purity of the fruit, and has chosen to pick grapes earlier in the harvest season in recent years. "Once you've missed that point where acidity and flavors are in balance, there's no going back," says Sussman.

In 2017, this focus on allowing nature's influence to run its course with limited intervention produced two splendid releases: the 2014 Harrison Grade Syrah, a complex

wine with lofty aromas and vibrant flavors of dark fruits, roasted meats, wild herbs, and fresh violets, and the 2014 Lemorel Sonoma Coast Zinfandel. Named after the family who owned the property at the turn of the 20th century, the latter wine features gorgeous aromas of fresh berries, earth, and spice with lively flavors of ripe raspberry, wild strawberry, licorice, cardamom, cinnamon, and clove.

To encourage biodiversity on the property, Sussman and his team planted an expansive network of vegetable gardens and fruit trees and also raise heirloom breeds of goats, chickens, and turkeys in a cluster of well-groomed pens. Local species of deer, foxes, and bears, meanwhile, find refuge in an open space on the estate. SJ



The Radio-Coteau 2014 Harrison Grade Syrah from the Sonoma Coast is made with fruit from vines originally planted on the winery's estate property in 1999.

COMING TO A CITY NEAR YOU



MAY 14 ... MAY 16 ... MAY 18

The CRU ARTISAN COLLEGE is an ambitious three-city tour of Italian winemakers and educators, with each city hosting a full day's learning experience on the intricate world of wine. This intimate educational event will include culinary pairings and even cash prizes for volunteered competitive blind tastings, merging a well-rounded gastronomic and wine-focused adventure.

For more information, email SOMM Journal Events Director Francesca Marciano at Francesca@TastingPanelMag.com. \$50 tuition fee.

SCHOLARSHIPS AVAILABLE

Getting Your GOAT

DON'T LIKE GOAT CHEESE? TRY THESE!

by Janet Fletcher

IN MY WORLD, there are too many people who think they don't like goat cheese. I never argue with them, but I'm pretty sure what turns them off are those chalky, tangy, rindless fresh cheeses with a strong goaty aroma (I don't like them, either). But *chèvre*—the French word for goat cheese of any type—comes in a multitude of formats and styles, from cheddar to Gouda to blue.

I relish introducing my students to the varied cheeses that goat's milk can yield: cheeses that complement many wines beyond Sauvignon Blanc. Here are a few favorites I can count on to convert skeptics—I dare your customers not to love them.

Andante Dairy Tomme Dolce (CA) Washed with brandy and plum conserve, this 9-pound wheel is matured for about six months. The long cellar time yields aromas of caramel, garlic, aged beef, and roasted peanuts, with a sweet, mellow finish.

Brabander (Holland) This goat Gouda from the Brabant region is selected and

matured by acclaimed *affineur* (cheese ager) Betty Koster. Her signature techniques help develop the aromas in this firm, nine-month-old cheese. The fragrance reminds me of *cajeta*, the silky goat caramel.

Capriole Flora (IN) Capriole's newest cheese is a 6-ounce ashed beauty resembling French Selles-sur-Cher. When perfectly ripe, the rind will be wrinkled and the interior will be oozy and a little slumpy with an arresting mushroom aroma.

Garrotxa (Spain) A 1- to 1.5-pound wheel with a thin, hard, brownish-gray rind that looks like suede, Garrotxa is a goat cheese like no other. The interior is dense, semi-firm, and smooth with a nutty aroma and a sweet finish. Pair it with Sherry: a Fino or Manzanilla if the cheese comes early in the meal, or a richer Amontillado or Oloroso with dessert.

Haystack Dairy Queso de Mano (CO) Made with raw goat's milk from a farm operated by Colorado inmates and aged for at least four months, this cheese sports

a handsome natural rind dappled with character-inducing molds. The firm interior exhibits cave, toasted nut, and caramel aromas with deep flavor.

Montchevre Chevre in Blue (WI) This easy-to-eat blue from the largest goat cheese producer in the U.S. regularly wins its category in the American Cheese Society competition. A rindless wheel aged for about five months, it is moist, tender, and lightly-veined with a feta-like tang.

Mothais sur Feuille (France) Resting on a chestnut leaf that contributes a woody aroma, this little 7-ounce disk is as pretty as cheese gets. The gooey interior is almost drippy just under the tender rind; the aroma suggests cultured milk, green onion, and garlic. Totally luscious.

Persillé de Rambouillet (France) The word *persillé* is typically reserved for goat-milk blues in France, a rare category even among the goat cheese-loving French. This one is dreamy, moist, and mellow, with a toasty aroma that reminds me of saltines. Serve with walnut bread and Rivesaltes. 🍷



Somm
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TREASURY
WINE ESTATES

The Somm Foundation and Treasury Wine Estates Award \$25,000 in Scholarships on Seven-City Luxicon Tour

THE RECENT TREASURY WINE ESTATES Luxicon tour provided a master class in tasting techniques to sommeliers around the country while demonstrating how the deductive reasoning approach used by the Court of Master Sommeliers applies in a blind setting.

A total of \$25,000 in scholarships was awarded by the Sommelier Foundation to the 21 highest-scoring sommeliers in seven cities on the Treasury tour, which included a grand tasting of TWE's luxury portfolio. This year's tour included stops in Atlanta, Boston, Houston, Miami, New York, Las Vegas, and San Francisco.

Will Smith, TWE's Director of Wine Education, noted the Luxicon tour was designed "to help working sommeliers with their ongoing certificate education while sharing information and the opportunity to become familiar with Treasury's luxury portfolio, including iconic wines from Beringer, Beaulieu Vineyard, Chateau St. Jean, Etude, Penfolds, Stags' Leap, and Sterling."

Luxicon began with a Tasting Techniques seminar co-hosted by Master Sommelier and TWE Trade Education Manager Gillian Ballance and top sommeliers from each city. A blind tasting of four wines was staged at each seminar, with sommeliers asked to provide as many wine attributes as possible in a timed session using the grid method. The top three winners in each city were awarded a \$1,200 scholarship to help defray the cost of studying for professional wine certification. Winners are also spotlighted in a feature article in *The SOMM Journal*, which co-sponsored the events in each city.

The scholarship winners are listed by city below:

Atlanta: Joe Herrig, Fine Wine Key Account Manager, Georgia Crown Distributing; Juan Cortes, Sommelier; Natalia Pavlik, Mac's Beer & Wine Midtown Liquor

Boston: Nick Daddona, Beverage Director, Boston Harbor Hotel; Jodi Bronchtein, Sommelier, L'Espalier; Lauren Daddona, Wine Director, L'Espalier

Houston: Monica Townsend, Sommelier, Camerata at Paulie's; Menno Ozinga, La Griglia; Steven McDonald, Sommelier, Pappas Bros

Las Vegas: Peter Plaehn, Wine Specialist Negoce; Kirk Peterson, Beverage Director, Batali & Bastianich Hospitality Group; Norman Acosta, Sommelier, Rivea

Miami: Adrian Lopez, Sommelier, Los Fuegos; Eric Blais, Wine Director, USS Nemo; Tim Bubar, Faena Hotel

New York: Tristan Prat-Vincent, Wine Director, Park Hyatt; Allison Siena, Food & Beverage Director, Hilton Garden Inn Roslyn; Sean Dowling, Head Sommelier, Rare 650

San Francisco: Lindsey DeSmidt, Sommelier, Park Tavern; Jienna Basaldu, Echo & Rig Steakhouse at DOCO, Sacramento; Kim Oshiro, Argon Wine Systems.

Joining Ballance as presenters and co-hosts were Brahm Callahan, MS; Christopher Boyette, AS; Kyungmoon Kim, MS; Sur Lucero, MS; Ira Harmon, MS; Eric Hemer, MS, MW; and Jack Mason, MS.

Media Contact: jim.caudill@tweglobal.com 707-299-0796

*Gillian Ballance, MS,
is the Trade Education
Manager for Treasury
Wine Estates.*



Dear Good Somm/Bad Somm,

A lot of people ask me if I'm LGBTQ because I work in hospitality and love wine. It's starting to annoy me. Why do you think that is?

Sincerely,
 LGBTQ or Not?

Good Somm

Dear LGBTQ or Not?,

To clarify, are you asking us why people think you're a member of the LGBTQ community, or are you asking us why their inquiries annoy you personally? Your word choice seems to reveal a lot about your mindset, and I find it baffling and even worrisome that you apparently think being associated with the LGBTQ community is somehow offensive.

In all my years of working in service, I've never come across this stereotype. If anything, most of us are generalized as actors or creative types. I can count on one hand how many gay sommeliers I know of, and I know a lot of sommeliers.

I'm not sure why being called gay could be perceived as a negative thing, so this shouldn't be a source of agitation for you. The truth is that many of us are in this industry for the sheer love of food, beverage, and hospitality. In a professional setting, that's the only kind of love anyone should ever be concerned about.

Sincerely,
 Good Somm

BAD SOMM

Dear LGBTQ or Not,

I've been dealing with that nosy question for most of my working career, and I'll go ahead and echo my counterpart's reply: Who cares? Really? If you're worried people will think you're gay because you're a waiter or a somm, then you're in the wrong industry. Ours is an industry of hardworking LGBTQ people who should never be judged for their sexual preferences or gender identity in any setting, let alone a professional one. Why would it ever impact you personally if some soccer mom from The Valley is all bent out of shape about your personal business? We're here, we're queer, now let me decant your wine bottle and we can all move on with our lives.

Get over it,
 Bad Somm



Dear Good Somm/Bad Somm,

The chef I work for is a total jerk and his food is mediocre at best. People think he's a big deal just because he's covered in tattoos. Should I look for a new gig or just stick around for the money?

Sincerely,
 No Chef!

Good Somm

Dear No Chef!,

I'm sorry you're having problems with your boss, but there's a reason why there's only one head chef in a kitchen. They lead a team and often are under high pressure to not only create great dishes for the guests, but to also steer the ship and shape the destiny of the restaurant. Chefs are artists yet are also the fiercest competitors: They're constantly thinking about how they can build their repertoire. One of the best lessons I've learned in hospitality is to focus on the good of every situation. It can be tempting to complain, but it won't get you anywhere—at least, not in this industry.

Sincerely,
 Good Somm

BAD SOMM

Dear No Chef!,

I'm totally with you! Most chefs are complete megalomaniac jerks who need to be reined in from time to time. And the whole tattoo thing? If I have to look at one more chef with tattoos all over their hands and neck, I think I'll curl up in a ball and sip Chardonnay out of a baby's bottle until I wet my suit pants. But here's the thing: It's kinda hard to run a restaurant without a chef. They're sort of a necessary evil. My advice in two words: Yes, Chef! 🍷

Sincerely,
 Bad Somm

Please note that this column is a parody and does not reflect the views of The SOMM Journal. Follow the columnists at @goodsommbadsomm on social media and/or visit their page at goodsommbadsomm.com.

The Glory of Glera

A BRIEF SYNOPSIS OF THE **CONEGLIANO VALDOBBIADENE PROSECCO DOCG**

by Alex Russan

WITH ITS COOL climate, old vines, steep hillsides, and diverse soil types, the Conegliano Valdobbiadene Prosecco DOCG is a fortuitous place for a grape to grow. Glera—largely known as Prosecco until 2009—is the primary varietal to claim this honor; and I recently had the pleasure of tasting a dozen lovely and floral wines from the Italian region during an event at A.O.C. Wine Bar and Restaurant in Los Angeles.

We drink so much Prosecco on a global scale that, at the turn of the 21st century, we needed more to sustain our supply. The same year the Glera name was fully adopted, a decision was made to allow Prosecco production in a much more expansive area than in the past. Formerly known as the Prosecco DOC, the small and storied region was upgraded and renamed the Conegliano Valdobbiadene Prosecco DOCG after the two main villages within the region; a significantly larger area surrounding the DOCG, meanwhile, became the new Prosecco DOC.

Great wines are produced in both areas, but the DOCG, which produces

25 percent of all Prosecco, is where one should look for higher quality and smaller producers that adhere to longstanding traditions. To delve even deeper into site specificity, in 2009 the DOCG designated 43 delimited grape-growing areas within its boundaries known as Rives. Rives have stricter quality requirements and must be dated by vintage; for fans of Prosecco, they definitely offer the most engaging exploration of the region.

The wines we tasted at the L.A. event—hosted by wine educator/writer Alan Tardi, the DOCG's U.S. Ambassador—were all crisp, clean, and well-made. Most showed an intense floral character, with some exhibiting bright citric fruits and others riper, more pear-like fruits. The lineup represented all three current sweetness classifications: Brut (0–12g/L, the most common), Extra Dry (12–17 g/L), and Dry (17–32 g/L). Balanced with ample acid and minerality, the sweetness was always a pleasant and welcome player in each wine.

Temperatures are kept cool throughout the entire Prosecco production process



to help the wines retain their signature fresh and floral aromas. Although some Proseccos undergo secondary fermentation in bottle like many other sparklers, the vast majority do so in large pressure tanks called autoclaves (most remain in autoclave for three months prior to bottling). Large-volume aging and an accelerated release into the market also encourage Prosecco's typical vibrant and youthful aromatics.

As the DOCG continues to calibrate its rules and classifications, it will be enlightening to see continued developments emerge from this well-known and surprisingly diverse area. **ST**

The steep, lush hills of the Conegliano Valdobbiadene Prosecco DOCG.



PHOTO COURTESY OF THE CONSORZIO TUTELA DEL VINO CONEGLIANO VALDOBBIADENE PROSECCO DOCG



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PRESENTATION IS EVERYTHING

We've partnered with Chef's Roll and Somm's List, the global culinary and wine professional networks, to learn more about beverage experts from across the country.



PHOTO: MICHAL VENERA

Peter Heitz

Winemaker at Turnbull Wine Cellars, Oakville, CA

Q: Turnbull has been producing wine for more than 35 years. How do you pay homage to a consistent quality of production while still evolving year after year?

Turnbull Wine Cellars is blessed with a fantastic quiver of estate vineyards, each of which displays unique and fascinating terroir. As winemaker, my task is to convey the result of how we farm each vintage into the bottle. Our evolution is the result of accumulating additional seasons of knowledge and being able to harness this memory as each new season unfolds.

Q: When you're evaluating the blending process for your wines, which aspects of Turnbull's winemaking style do you keep in mind?

Our "style" is simply to capture the place and time. As I taste fruit, fermenters, young barrels, or matured wine lots, I'm always looking for the wines that transport me back amongst the vines. If I can capture that spirit in our blends, we have succeeded.

Q: Has there been a notable winemaker, vineyard, bottle of wine, and/or experience that has inspired you throughout your career?

As a fourth-generation Napa Valley winegrower, I'm inspired by my forebearers. Their fortitude and love of this blessed place led me to the joy I have today in continuing this tradition. The first wine that I can say sparked my fascination was the 1991 Dominus; at the time, I had not yet understood that wine can excite the heart and not just the senses.

If you are a mixologist or wine professional interested in being featured here or want more information on Chef's Roll and Somm's List, please email featured@chefsroll.com.

Jen Pelka

Owner of The Riddler, San Francisco, CA

Q: The Riddler's menu contains more than 100 Champagnes. What specifically did you look for when assembling it?

Like any wine list, we like to have a representation of the best producers across specific categories. Amongst Champagne, we focus on the best names in grower/producers and benchmark houses, as well as vintage variation, regional variation, and stylistic variation. I place a big focus on price points that are accessible to everyone, so we have beautiful selections from our favorite sparkling wine-growing regions outside of Champagne.

Q: What is your current favorite Champagne and snack/food pairing?

I'm all about the high/low, and I like richer foods to pair with. I typically go for things like French fries and Champagne or caviar with potato chips. At The Riddler, we're well-known for our tater tot waffles—literally, tater tots that we press in a waffle iron and top with decadent toppings like smoked salmon and caviar or prosciutto with grainy mustard, crème fraiche, and cornichons.

Q: What inspired you to open a Champagne-centric bar?

I've always wanted to open a Champagne bar—I love that it turns any evening into a true celebration. When I found this particular space, a tiny window-lined corner café that dates back to the late 1800s with a gorgeous wooden back bar, I knew it would be the perfect spot. SJ

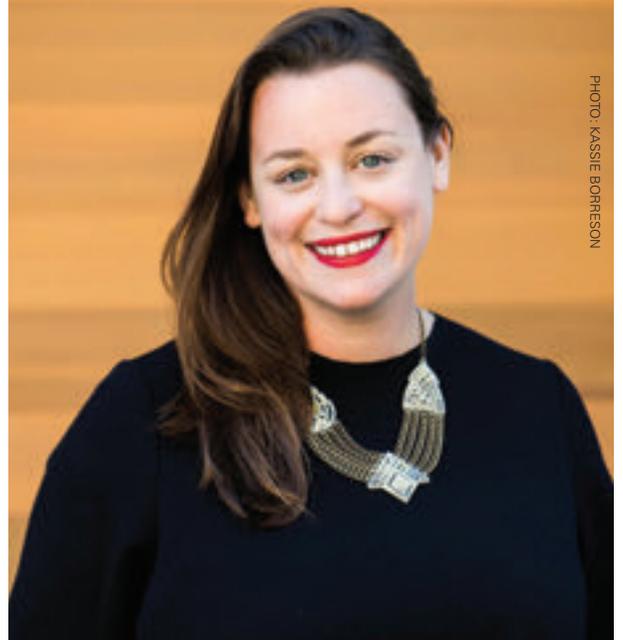


PHOTO: KASSIE BORRESON

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N°1 *For a Reason*

AFTER FOUR DECADES, **GRANDS CHAIS DE FRANCE** CONTINUES TO SHOW AN UNWAVERING COMMITMENT TO FRANCE'S PROUD WINEMAKING HERITAGE

by Karen Moneymaker

THERE IS A REASON France's leading wine and spirits exporter is called Grands Chais de France—there is nothing petit about a company with a 40-year legacy. Since its founding, the GCF Group has functioned concurrently as Winegrower, Winemaker, Cellar Master and Négociant with a mastery of the entire process that is hard to attain at such a high level—all while distributing nearly 40 million cases to 173 countries around the world.

The GCF Group's motto, "*des hommes, des terroirs, une passion*," translates to "people, terroir, passion." The simple yet impactful phrase also speaks to the company's commitment to those involved in every stage of its vast business proceedings, as well as the pride its employees take in cultivating wines from the greatest regions in France.

Founded in 1979 by Joseph Helfrich (who continues to serve as CEO to this day), the GCF Group is based in Petersbach, Alsace, giving it a central location within the European market and a strategic vantage point to French winegrowing areas.



In the Bubble

MEET THE ALL-STAR LINEUP OF MÉTHODE TRADITIONELLE WINES IN THE GCF PORTFOLIO

In 2016, the company's diverse portfolio of wines—sourced from the Val de Loire, Alsace, Jura, Bourgogne, Diois, the Rhône Valley, Provence, the Languedoc-Roussillon, Gascogne, and Bordeaux—captured a 78 percent export turnover share, securing its position as the number-one wine exporter (excluding Champagne) in France.

The GCF Group covers all aspects of the winemaking spectrum, from the prestigious still wines of Bordeaux and Bourgogne to the specialty wines of Vin Jaune and Vin de Paille in Jura and the famous Vendanges Tardives wines of Alsace. And with its award-winning sparkling Crémants from Alsace, Bordeaux, Jura, and Loire, the GCF Group also ranks as France's largest producer of méthode traditionnelle wines.

The GCF Group is based in Petersbach, Alsace, giving it a central location within the European market and a strategic vantage point to French winegrowing regions.



Calvet Crémant de Bordeaux

The Calvet Company has been making wines of distinction for almost 200 years since its founding in

1823 by Jean-Marie Calvet. It makes sense, then, that its Crémant de Bordeaux—meticulously hand-harvested and gently pressed—serves as a stunning example of the region. Calvet produces brut and rosé bottlings of their sparkling wines, taking advantage of Sémillon for roundness and fruit and Cabernet Franc for structure on the palate.



Maison Sauvion Crémant de Loire

Maison Sauvion's Chenin Blanc, Chardonnay, Cabernet Franc, and Grolleau vineyards are planted

on clay-chalk and silica soils, producing fruit that make delicate, elegant, and majestically well-balanced wines.



Maison François Martenot Crémant de Bourgogne

Located in the heart of Bourgogne not far from the city of Beaune, Maison François

Martenot has produced wines of authenticity and character since it was established in the 19th century. While most famous for its white and red Burgundy, the maison is equally proud of its Crémant de Bourgogne made from Chardonnay and Gamay.



Salasar Crémant de Limoux

Founded in 1890, La Maison Salasar produces a range of méthode traditionnelle and Crémant

wines from 60 hectares of vineyards; nestled in the foothills of the Pyrenees, they're planted to Chardonnay, Pinot Noir, Mauzac, and Chenin Blanc.



Arthur Metz Crémant d'Alsace

Since 1904, the House of Arthur Metz has invested in the growth and development of the Alsatian

wine industry, becoming the top producer of wines in the region without compromising quality or tradition. Alsace is the leading region in France for the production of Crémant sparkling wine and Arthur Metz is the leading producer of Crémant in the region—meaning each bottle is backed by years of experience and fidelity in the winemaking process. *sj*



Somm
Foundation

In Search of Convergence at

Italia del Vino 2017

The facade of the Cantina Mesa winery features patterns based on traditional Sardinian textiles.



Alexandra Thomas and James Lechner in the vineyards of Marchesi di Barolo.

A DIARY OF AN **ENRICHMENT TRIP** THROUGH ITALY

by James Lechner / photos by Faye Cardwell

WE AWAKE ON the shores of Lake Iseo, with our view from the terrace of the Araba Fenice hotel broadening as the morning fog melts. It is mostly anticipation that keeps the drag of jet lag at bay. Our group met formally at dinner the night before, though there is so much yet to discover. The itinerary for our Italian Enrichment Trip, Italia del Vino 2017, literally *sounds* great, reading almost like the lyrics to a tempo-driven song: Franciacorta > Sardegna > Barolo > Liguria > Trento > Veneto > Friuli > Treviso > then sleep.

One of my roles on the SommFoundation Board involves filtering hundreds of applications for each Enrichment Trip into a handful of potential attendees. The goal is to assemble a group that will drive each member to soak up all the experience offers. Having been lucky enough to attend Enrichment Trips prior to my time on the Board, I know how group dynamics can make a trip successful . . . or make it stumble. A great deal of time and effort is put into gathering the right pool of candidates: The decisions are never easy, and now I get to see firsthand whether our work has paid off.

I have to say, we nailed this one. These attendees work in some of the best restaurants in America—stretching from the heart of the Napa Valley to West Virginia with stops in Seattle, Houston, and Chicago—and their collective expertise is inspiring. We have a cadre of fearless Master Sommelier candidates, each at various stages of that journey, and also a brave soul striving for the MW. A few have traveled to Italy many times, while others have never make the trek. What better company than a pack of joyful wine nerds led by someone with intimate knowledge of the language, the land, and the finest producers?

We certainly would have been left adrift without this fearless leader, Faye Cardwell. More than just our guide, she would become an advisor, fellow traveler, and friend—but we didn't know that right away. In fact, we knew little about one another beyond the smattering of introductory emails exchanged prior to departure, but that unfamiliarity soon dissolved as we set about conquering that fast-moving itinerary. The following recaps the highlights of this unforgettable trip.

Awash in Ebullience at Ca' del Bosco

If you've seen one sparkling wine facility, you've seen 'em all, right? Not so in the case of producer Ca' del Bosco in the Lombardia region, where we witnessed the art of precision winemaking in full effect. We know Franciacorta is made in metodo classico typically with Pinot Nero, Bianco, and Chardonnay, but Ca' del Bosco goes a step further and washes the grapes prior to fermentation.

One of the most rewarding aspects of these Enrichment Trips is the element of surprise—you never know what you're going to discover. Our jet lag was now officially put to rest.

It All Comes Together in Sardegna

Having never traveled to Sardegna, I was particularly excited for this part of the trip. Our visit to Cantina Mesa winery, led by the irrepressible Luca Fontana and his marvelous wife, Maggie, gave us a sense of the true *character* of Sardinian wines. The Carigñano grown here is very special—spicy, salty, and full of life—but it's the Vermentino that shines, particularly when paired with the briny brilliance of Mediterranean shellfish. The group replenished our energy over layers of *panne fratau*, mountains of local pork, and shots of Mirto, the island's myrtle plant-based liqueur. We were now properly prepped for our mainland campaign.

Despite the early-early mornings and late-late nights, it quickly became apparent there would be no mid-trip slump. We all pushed each other to stay engaged, ask great questions, and continue probing for more opportunities to learn.

From Barolo to Treviso, Then Farewell

We could not have anticipated the magic of Marchesi di Barolo and the Abbona family, who are known for their ability to make visitors feel at ease. Over lunch with the group, Valentina Abbona discussed the simple distinction that sets the commune of Barolo apart from its neighbors: its position, ensconced in the surrounding hills.



The vineyards of Ronchi di Manzano in the Friuli region of Italy.

We then returned to the Mediterranean—specifically to the convergence of the sea and the Appennines, which makes the Ligurian climate perfect for Vermentino. Rather than elaborate, we'll file it under “You Had to Be There.”

From there, it was on to Trento and the science of autolysis at Ferrari, where we dined like royalty at Locanda Margon. It was in the Veneto that we were honored to be in august presence of Andrea Sartori, who not only runs his family's estate and Italia del Vino, but also the Valpolicella *consorzio* (consortium). What a force!

Our final day presented a fascinating contrast in economies of scale at two Friuli properties: large-scale agriculture at Ca' Bolani and the intimacy of Ronchi di Manzano, which is run by Roberta Borghesi and her daughters Lisa and Nicole. On our final night, we strolled the charming streets of Treviso in search of gelato and pizza. We said our goodbyes over scoops and slices, leaving with a sense of achievement in our quest to learn more about Italian wine, ourselves, and one another on this incredible journey. §

James Lechner is an Advanced Sommelier and a member of the SommFoundation Board of Directors.



Enrichment Trip participants pictured during our visit to Ronchi di Manzano. From left to right, back row: Brian McClure, Faye Cardwell, Micah Clark, James Lechner, and Lindsay Thomas. From left to right, front row: Alexandra Thomas, Alexis Davis, and Alexandra Stang.

**NYC-BASED
SOMMS AND
RETAILERS**
REFLECT ON THE
CITY'S BIGGEST
WINE TRENDS IN
2017—AS WELL AS
WHAT WE CAN
EXPECT IN THE
YEAR TO COME



Casa Lever features modernist architecture and Italian cuisine.

PHOTO COURTESY OF CASA LEVER

What's Next For New York City's Wine Scene in 2018?

by Vicki Denig



PHOTO: ALICE GAO

Caleb Ganzer, Wine Director and Managing Partner at NoHo's Compagnie des Vins Surnaturels in New York City.

THIS PAST YEAR, the East Coast wine scene experienced dramatic shifts in the way professionals and consumers alike approached the bottle. In New York City, where drinking opportunities are seemingly endless, hardly any wine-producing region went unrecognized. Sommeliers and retailers found themselves excited about a variety of appellations, both New World and Old World, that translated to greater diversity on wine lists and shop shelves.

"Wine bars are pushing the borders and boundaries of what people are used to seeing, and guests are happily indulging," says Caleb Ganzer, Wine Director and Managing Partner at NoHo's Compagnie des Vins Surnaturels. "Central/Eastern Europe is establishing itself in a powerful way, and the new wave of New World producers is catching on. Orange, skin-contact, and pét-nat wines are all establishing themselves as mandatory categories." Ganzer has personally fallen in love with small Oregon-based producers, as well as wines from the Czech Republic and Spain.

Speaking of Spain, the pros agree that 2017 was all about Iberian wines. Both Ganzer and Alexander LaPratt, MS, of Brooklyn's Atrium DUMBO expressed excitement about what Portugal was releasing, with LaPratt deeming the wines as "incredible" and diverse in style. Lorena Ascencios, Wine Buyer at Astor Wines & Spirits, says her shop will be expanding its Iberian selections in 2018, explaining that the wines of Galicia present mass appeal due to their freshness while Portuguese bottles show abundant character for a good price.

At Casa Lever in Midtown, Wine Director Carrie Lyn Strong found 2017 to be the year of wine lists with their own identities: "As chefs and restaurants raised their style and regional flags, so did sommeliers," she says. "Wine lists became religious books of somms' originality." The all-American wine list at Midtown's Agern and the magnum-focused list at Flatiron's COTE are just two examples of many. For Strong, coordination wasn't the focus; creating a niche and showing enthusiasm was what the year was all about. "People are excited to try new wines—and somms can't wait to pour them!" she adds.

LaPratt, meanwhile, saw 2017 as a period of important transition. Though natural wines remained popular, the acceptance of flawed natural wines was replaced with a passion for delicious, well-made wines produced by low-impact methods. "I think young sommeliers and consumers alike are starting to realize that the methods are important, as they have always been, but that the product has to be sound and not spoiled to be enjoyed and celebrated," he explains.

LaPratt's observation also carried over to the retail side, where the demand for organic, Biodynamic, and "naturally"-

produced wines was higher than ever. Ascencios echoes LaPratt's point on quality: "It needs to be pointed out that not all organic wines are good, so sifting through the offerings is always necessary." She also gives credit to importers and distributors who dedicate themselves to seeking out quality, making her purchasing decisions much quicker and easier.

Further downtown at Chambers Street Wines, Partner David Lillie reveals that bottles from the Loire Valley sold more than any other region. He adds that the store's Loire selection is almost entirely organic or Biodynamic wine from smaller estates offering moderate prices. Lillie also found consumers gravitating toward Piedmontese reds, both new and aged; wines from the Jura; and bottles from Georgia and its surrounding areas. Skin-contact wines from France, Italy, Spain, and the U.S. also experienced a rise in popularity.

Across the board, both sommeliers and retailers noticed a strong open-mindedness in their customer's drinking habits. "2017 was a learning year for consumers, who began to open their minds and palates to wine, enjoying lesser-known varieties, regions, and styles," says Strong. LaPratt agrees that wine drinkers have



PHOTO COURTESY OF CASA LEVER

Carrie Lyn Strong, Wine Director at Casa Lever.

become much more open to recommendations, especially those exposing them to lesser-known regions. "This really helps us get consumers the very best wine—this is a big win for everyone," she says. "Customers are open-minded and love trying something new, which matches what we offer overall very well," Ascencios adds.

So what can New York wine consumers expect this year? According to Ganzer, it's diversity—which he views as a huge win for the client. LaPratt predicts better values as both market competition and consumer knowledge continue to increase. Ascencios agrees in regards to off-premise, foreseeing "excellent wines at great prices." And at Chambers, Lillie predicts a continued interest in Piemonte reds.

Value, versatility, and voluminous amounts of Nebbiolo? Count us in, 2018. *sj*

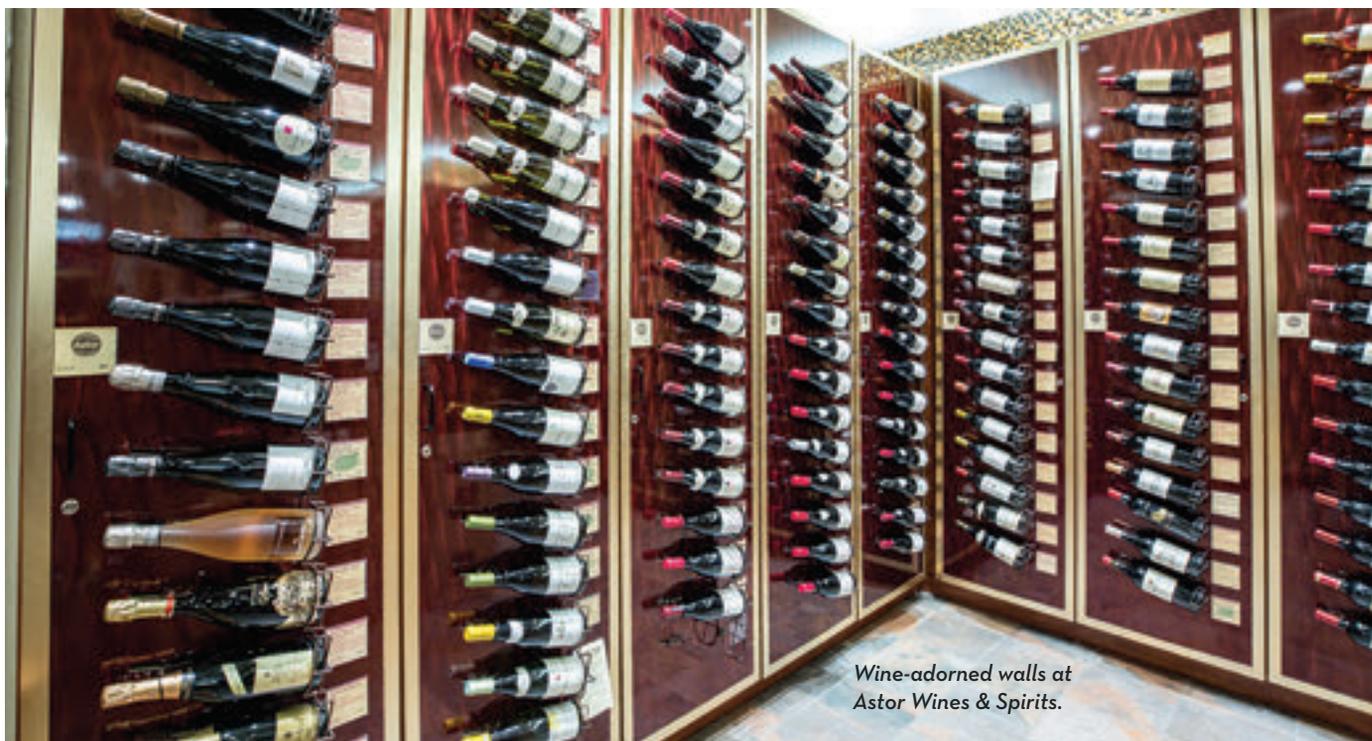
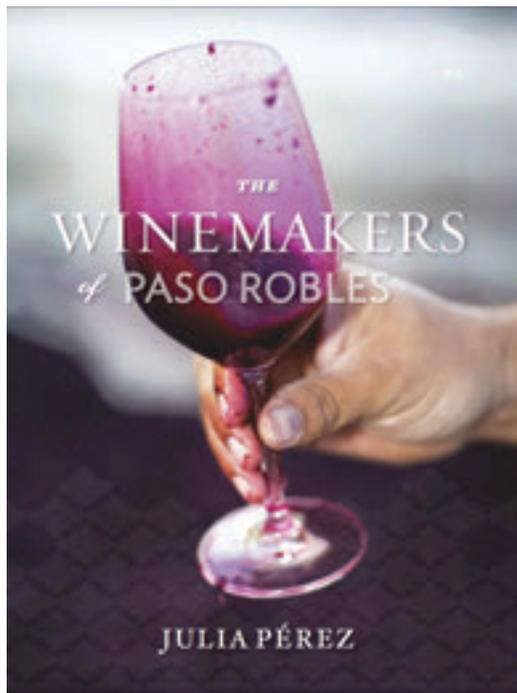


PHOTO COURTESY OF ASTOR WINES & SPIRITS

Wine-adorned walls at Astor Wines & Spirits.

Maturing in Parallel



AUTHOR PAUL HODGINS REFLECTS ON HIS BOOK *THE WINEMAKERS OF PASO ROBLES*

by Paul Hodgins / photos by Julia Pérez

AS A WINE JOURNALIST, I've always regarded Paso Robles as one of my favorite regions. I feel as if Paso and I grew up together: It transformed from a bucolic backwater into a respected wine region during the years I was learning how to be a wine writer. Paso's colorful history, tales, controversies, and characters showed me how complex, fascinating, and engrossing wine could be. It also inspired me to see young upstarts work hard, defy the naysayers, and achieve greatness.

Right around the time I began to contemplate writing a book about Paso Robles, I met a woman who shared my fascination with the area and my passion for telling great stories. Julia Pérez is a photographer of rare and discerning talent, as well as a visual storyteller of the first order. She spends days with her subjects to capture their essence, whether it's the determined face of a winemaker hard at work or a gnarled old Zinfandel vine at dawn.

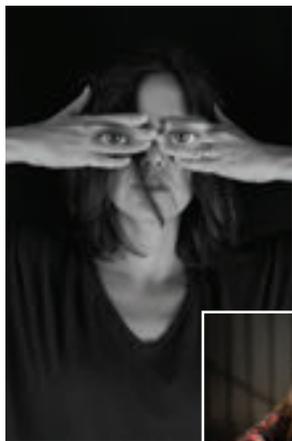
As Julia, her husband, and I explored the area and talked to winemakers and winery owners, we quickly realized it was their personal stories we wanted to tell.

We met scientists, artists, football stars, ex-teachers, bon vivants, and ancient hippie visionaries. Some were embarking on a second career in wine, while others were freshly-minted college grads. In a reflection of these diverse backgrounds, each followed their own unique path to the world of wine on California's Central Coast. We decided we'd leave it to others to analyze Paso's climate, geology, water resources, and the myriad other reasons for its success as a wine region. We would let the people who made the wine speak for themselves.

The Winemakers of Paso Robles is exactly what its name implies. Our book is not organized by winery, region, or varietal. There is little mention of tasting rooms, scores, or awards. Each profile is the result of many hours of work; we wanted to give each person his or her due and capture them with all their quirks and nuances. We aimed for truth, not beauty. Winemaking is full of grit, hard work, endless dedication, and the matchless satisfaction of making something irresistible that's intimately connected to the winemaker's philosophy of life. We hope we've achieved that result with our book, too. **sj**



Paul Hodgins, author of *The Winemakers of Paso Robles*.



*As the photographer for *The Winemakers of Paso Robles*, Julia Pérez worked closely with a myriad of subjects.*



Desparada Wines Winemaker and Proprietress Vailia Esh is featured in one of the book's many raw photos.

The Pursuit of Luxury

CONSIDERING THE **BENEFITS** OF SPENDING MORE ON WINE by Deborah Parker Wong

LUXURY WINE BRANDS rank among a handful of product categories that are an outright contradiction of the law of demand. Known as Veblen goods after the American economist Thorstein Veblen, luxury products like wine, cars, jewelry, and artwork occupy a rarified status among consumers who are inclined to buy more as the price increases.

While conspicuous consumption stands in direct opposition to the pursuit of quality for value that drives many a savvy wine buyer, neuroscientists have reported that when we buy luxury goods, we experience emotions of trust, security, contentment, and confidence over the duration of ownership. Apparently there's more to the experience of drinking a bottle of ultra-premium Champagne, even if its lifespan lasts just a few hours during dinner.

Authenticity and timelessness are considered the hallmarks of established luxury brands, but it's possible for newly-minted brands to achieve a similar status when their underlying concept demonstrates those principles. Champagne is unquestionably a luxury product, and many brands and wines of the highest quality occupy the rarified space of a Veblen good.

To further explore the taste of luxury, I sat down with Gilles de Larouzière, President and the eighth-generation head of the Reims-based Champagne house Maisons & Domaines Henriot. The company produces the Cuve 38 La Réserve Perpétuelle NV, a 100% Char-

donnay Côte de Blancs Grand Cru which spends five years on the lees and retails for \$599 per magnum bottle. Henriot releases 1,000 bottles of wine annually, with the 2012 vintage scheduled for release this year.

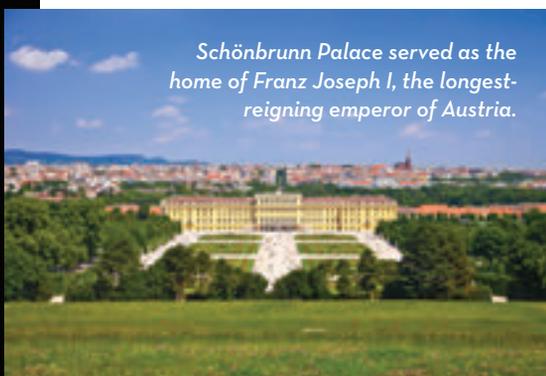
As a brand, Henriot achieved its opulent status when it was declared the court Champagne of Franz Joseph I, emperor of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Royal appointments may now be a thing of the past, but the traditional method of production—although modernized by the introduction

of the wire cage, stainless steel tanks, and the gryopalate—is itself authentic and timeless. “We employ the best techniques related to our vision of the wine,” said de Larouzière, who oversees the production of five different wines and 1.5 million bottles annually. “But it's not our goal to increase volume or accelerate our time to market.”

In an effort to quantify the value add of a wine like Cuve 38, I asked de Larouzière about the eight governing principles of luxury. “At a time when unsold wine was being poured into the Marne, my great-grandfather's patrimonial vision of the business prevailed,” he responded. Like many family-owned companies, the focused, engaging vision of its creator has been key to the longevity of the Henriot brand. Origin, obsession with perfection, rarity, and exclusivity meld with an attention to detail and appearance firmly reassuring the purchaser that the wine's price confirms its worth. “The identity of the place [Champagne] can be found in the bottle,” he said. ❧



Henriot's Cuve 38.



Schönbrunn Palace served as the home of Franz Joseph I, the longest-reigning emperor of Austria.

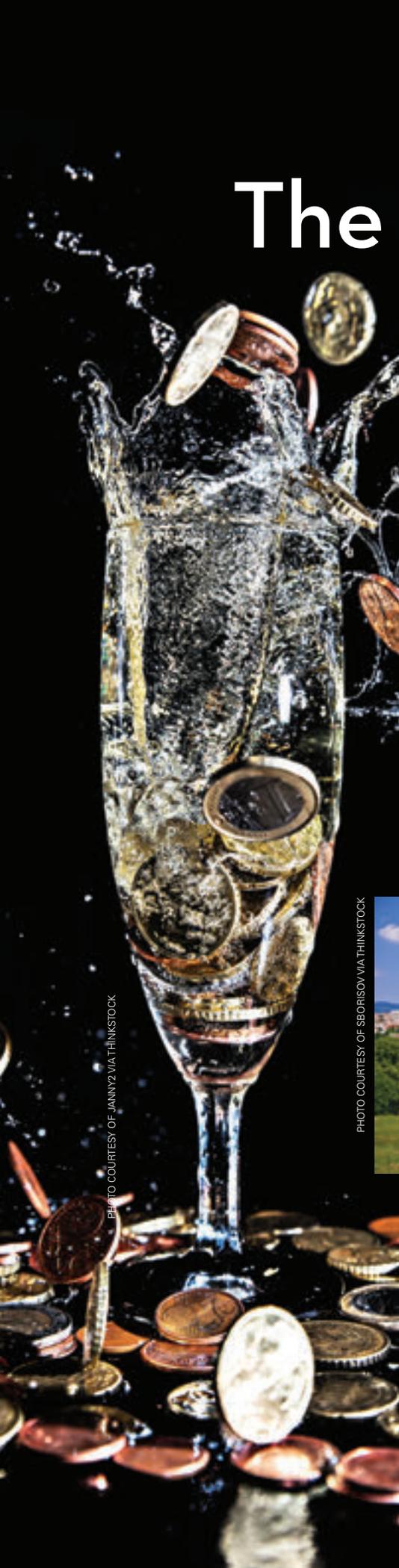


PHOTO COURTESY OF JANNY2 VIA THINKSTOCK

PHOTO COURTESY OF SBORISOV VIA THINKSTOCK

*Mid-bâtonnage at
Jordan Winery in
Paso Robles.*

PHOTO COURTESY OF JORDAN WINERY

A Stirring Case for Lees

SUMMARIZING AND ADVOCATING FOR **BÂTONNAGE**

by Alex Russan

I LOVE WORKING with lees: After fermentation, it's one of the more significant ways to guide style in winemaking. Depending on how long a wine sits on the lees (if at all) and how the lees are treated, they can result in a variety of tactile and aromatic changes.

The Lifecycle of Lees and Its Effect on Wine

When wine settles after fermentation, the lees fall to the bottom of the tank in two layers. Within a day, the heavier particles settle; known as the gross lees, those particles are mostly made up of leftover grape bits, dirt, and seeds. In the following days, the fine lees—the dead yeast cells left from fermentation that are a brighter white in color—settle on top of the gross. It's the fine lees that prove especially important in the winemaking process.

In the early life of white wines, a key function lees perform is absorbing oxygen. As a result, they protect a wine from oxidation and preserve fresh, youth-

ful characteristics. For wines undergoing malolactic fermentation, ML bacteria prefer anaerobic (oxygen-free) environments; nutrients released from the yeast also aid and encourage this process. *Bâtonnage*, or lees stirring, is most important early after fermentation, as it keeps the lees from compacting and exhibiting undesired hydrogen sulfide odors.

While they're beneficial for young white wines, lees can adsorb and indirectly destroy unbound color molecules in young reds—lowering the amount available to bind with and stabilize tannin. Oxygen is also beneficial to color and tannin binding, so lees' oxygen absorption can stifle these functions. Once the main flurry of binding has happened at around six months, lees can safely be added back into the wine.

At the risk of ruining sur lie-aged wines for you, what winemakers seek from lees aging is the decay of yeast cells and the emptying of their "guts" into a wine. Appetizing, right? This is the famous autolysis process, but because most wines are

bottled before the process is complete, it's rarely able to exert its full effect in most wines. Autolysis begins slowly with the degradation of the cell's membrane, which allows its insides to seep little by little into the wine; finally, after about a year, the membrane ruptures and the cell's contents are entirely released.

These contents, primarily mannoproteins, end up working much of the magic in lees aging: They incite an increase in mouthfeel and weight, and in red wines, they coat and soften tannins. *Bâtonnage* and warmer temperatures can speed up the autolysis process, and winemakers looking for emerging lees aromatics and their body-enhancing effects often stir every couple weeks.

Eventually, over a period of years, the lees break down completely and are fully absorbed into the wine. Lees do a host of other things: They can aid stability, tinker with the intricacies of aromatics, and mitigate susceptibility to spoilage bacteria. They're a useful tool for fine-tuning the style of a wine. **||**

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Where Denverites Are Drinking Now

IT'S HIGH TIME TO EXPLORE THE MILE HIGH CITY

by Ruth Tobias

ONE CAN EITHER look to the history books or current headlines to confirm Denver is practically built on booze: Purportedly founded over a barrel of whiskey in 1858, the city serves as the epicenter of a state consistently ranking third or fourth nationwide in both beer and spirits production. And in the midst of an extended hospitality boom that's yielded a staggering array of new bars, there's no better time than the present to drink it all in.

Consider the diversity in just a handful of recent openings. On a typical evening in the Mile High City, a very ambitious itinerary might unfold as follows: You could indulge in a sci-fi-inspired libation behind the freezer door of an ice cream parlor at Retrograde; shop for



PHOTO: KATE HOSS PHOTOGRAPHY

At the Denver location of Death & Company, Co-Founder Alex Day is aiming for "high-quality product and execution with a local tie-in."

collectible sneakers over orange-clove Whiskey Sours at nightclub-meets-shoe gallery SneekEazy; sip spiked punch while bowling strikes in the control tower of the old Stapleton International Airport, now home to Punch Bowl Social; sample dry-hopped Sauvignon Blanc in the former break room of a midcentury aviation factory taken over by urban winery Infinite Monkey Theorem; or splurge on a \$350 glass

A sampler of the house spirits served at The Family Jones House of Spirits in Denver.

PHOTO: ADAM LARKIN PHOTOGRAPHY



*Bar Helix Owner
Kendra Anderson.*

PHOTO COURTESY OF BAR HELIX

Manager Nick Touch works with Distiller Rob Masters to yield creations like black cherry–pistachio Gin Sours, vodka-based mango lassis and avocado–passionfruit Daiquiris featuring the house rum (which Touch describes as “grassy and vegetal, like a funky rum agricole”).

Such kitchen-driven stuff is tailor-made for pairing with Chef Tim Dotson’s seasonal small plates—think chimichurri-laced smoked-trout tea sandwiches or curried lamb–sweet potato stew with pickled raisins. Meanwhile, Touch is experimenting with an inventory of some 150 botanicals to create “a whole library of distillates” they can infuse into their cocktails at the distillery, and is also making his own line of vermouths and amari for the new year.

Speaking of 2018, Denver residents are breathlessly awaiting the imminent arrival of a duo of new venues from three of the biggest names in modern bartending. Multiplatinum proprietor Sean Kenyon is branching out to RiNo with American Bonded, a whiskey-focused bar he says “will have the polish of Williams & Graham with the edge of Occidental” (his internationally-renowned LoHi lounge and its edgy little sibling, respectively). “I’m not going to have an insane library—we’re going to curate some whiskeys that you haven’t seen on the regular but that you can drink every day,” Kenyon says. “With flights, we’ll be able to set, say, Old Grand-Dad next to Elmer T. Lee next to something from the Heaven Hill family that people have overlooked for a while. That’s exciting to me.”

And then there’s Death & Company. Come spring, David Kaplan and Alex Day will open an outpost of their New York institution in RiNo’s The Ramble Hotel. Though details are still

of rare Japanese whiskey at Izakaya Ronin, a casual pub in the basement boiler room of a sushi restaurant. And that’s only the very tip of the imbibers’ iceberg.

Two newcomers in particular point to the wealth of ingenuity being expressed within the local scene—and the greater hospitality industry as a whole—these days. One is Bar Helix, a lounge in the white-hot RiNo (for non-Denverites, that’s the River North Art District) neighborhood that exudes disco-era glamour right down to its Bump + Bubbles—a spoonful of caviar daubed on your fist to follow a shot of Champagne. As Owner/sommelier Kendra Anderson explains, Denver’s hyper-casual bar culture long excluded enophiles, who “had to commit to fine dining to find great wine” and the service that accompanies it.

Now Anderson is helping fill that much-lamented void via a temperature-controlled cellar filled with geeky picks and a staff trained to “make you feel cooler than you were before you got here”—whether they’re presenting sample-size “baby Negronis” to guests wary of Anderson’s favorite cocktail or pouring a complimentary round of the house digestif from a silver flask. (Witty bar snacks like lump-crab rangoons and tarts with foie gras parfait only enhance the high-low retro vibe.)

The other aforementioned rookie to thrive within the Denver dynamic is The Family Jones House of Spirits, a drop-dead gorgeous distillery and tasting room in LoHi (the Lower Highlands) anchored by a mezzanine-level copper still that shines above the sunken, semicircular bar and kitchen. Here, Bar



The Bar Helix Negroni substitutes Montanaro Aperitivo 6 PM for Campari, resulting in a softer profile.

PHOTO COURTESY OF BAR HELIX



An avocado-passionfruit Daiquiri with lime and chili at The Family Jones House of Spirits.

PHOTO: ADAM LARKEY PHOTOGRAPHY

sparse, Day says the plan is to “bring (their) ethos to Denver in a way that’s respectful.” “We love this city and see incredible opportunity here,” he adds. And while that statement may induct Day into a not-so-exclusive club of outspoken fans of this city, it goes without saying that there’s plenty of places to hold meetings. **SJ**

Dr. William Thomas Angove on a ride through Tea Tree Gully in South Australia.

THE GENERATIONAL AND ENOLOGICAL EVOLUTION OF ANGOVE FAMILY WINEMAKERS

A Complex Tonic

by Jessie Birschbach

RIGHT AROUND THE birth of Australian wine in the latter half of the 19th century, ten out of ten Aussie doctors would have likely agreed that wine was good for your health. Full disclosure, though, that back then some of these doctors might have actually doubled as winemakers. Penfolds, Lindemans, and Hardys? All established by physicians.

Included in this group of wine-loving MDs was Dr. William Thomas Angove, who emigrated to South Australia from England and founded Angove Family Winemakers in 1886. Angove originally made wine as a tonic for his patients, but considering the layered and vibrant McLaren Vale Angove Shiraz of today, one has to wonder if the doctor had bigger, more flavorsome plans.

Regardless, his penchant for producing dry and fortified wine transformed his side project into a full-time practice, laying the foundation for a family tradition that would instill this same work ethic in his descendants. This first manifested in William's son Thomas "Skipper" Carlyon Angove, who diversified and exported the Angove portfolio in addition to establishing the very first winery in the Riverland in 1910. Skipper was especially passionate about the distilled grape spirit he produced, St Agnes Brandy, which remains one of Australia's most beloved spirits today.

Skipper's son, Thomas William Carlyon Angove, became an authority figure in Australian wine in his own right. He earned a degree in enology and also oversaw the

expansion of his family's crush facilities in the mid-1900s and the planting of the Nanya Vineyard in the Riverland (one of the largest single vineyards in the Southern Hemisphere), among other accolades. He's also often credited for virtually inventing the boxed wine concept.

The Angove Family Enters the Modern Era

If the first three generations of Angoves expanded the family business, it was the fourth generation that gave it focus—thanks largely in part to John Carlyon Angove. "My father was extremely instrumental in modernizing what we did through the '80s and '90s," says Richard Angove, Joint Managing Director of Angove Family Winemakers. "He invested heavily in vineyards, particularly in McLaren Vale, and also in small-scale winemaking."

Richard describes Angove Family Winemakers as having "two sides," with one largely commercial in practice and the other reflecting John Carlyon's legacy of small-batch production. "The latter can handle right down to 250-kilogram batches," he explains. "It's all hand-picked and hand-sorted in a state-of-the-art small-scaled winery. On the other side, we can make great commercial wines."

Today, Richard and his sister Victoria represent the fifth generation of family winemakers as a duo—a first for the business, as previous generations only had one



John Carlyon Angove in the cellars of the Angove family's winery in 1980.



The Blanch Point Formation soil (the base of which is Tortachilla Limestone) of Warboys Vineyard formed below sea level 34-56 million years ago.



The new generation: Sophie, Richard, and Victoria Angove.



Victoria and Richard Angove as children in their family's winery.

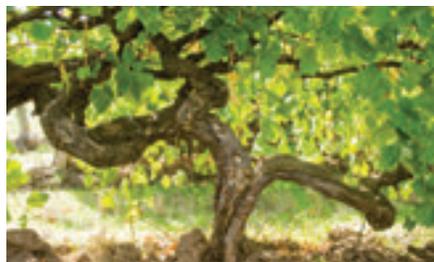
family member at the helm. As for what's in store for future generations, Richard says he and Victoria "want to continue to invest in our vineyards, our winery, and our people. We want to be one of the great growers of organic grapes and organic wines in Australia and around the world."

Angove Family Winemakers organically farms 100 percent of its family-owned vineyards, which span 500 hectares (roughly 1,235 acres) across Australia. "Those vineyards just seem to be better balanced and produce really good grapes packed with flavor, and it is all about taste at the end of the day," Richard says. "We want our vineyards to be there in a hundred years' time. We're very committed to family ownership, so for the sixth generation, I need to look out for our precious resource—our soils."

Carving His Own Path

Richard's own winemaking experience comes not only from growing up in his family's winery, but from travels and education he pursued away from home. After earning a viticulture degree from Adelaide University, Richard spent time in Napa, Spain, and Okanagan, as well as other winemaking regions in Australia.

With these new insights and experiences fresh in his mind, Richard returned to the family business in 2009 and transitioned from a production role to a position in what he calls "the pointy end of the winemaking business": sales and marketing. "When you're a winemaker, you grow the grapes, make the wine, and bottle it, then you think you're done—but that's prob-



Old-vine Shiraz: the main attraction in the Warboys vineyard.

ably about 15 percent of the job," he adds. "The other 85 percent is actually getting into people's houses and telling a story. That's truly hard work in this industry."

A Love Affair with McLaren Vale

Winemaking at Angove is a democratic process typically led by Chief Winemaker Tony Ingle, Richard, and Richard's father and sister. "For Warboys [Angove Warboys Vineyard Shiraz], we'll look at each barrel individually and work out the consistency of style," Richard says. "We challenge each other, but it works. We also try to get it right in the vineyard first, though, because if we can get the fruit right, that makes the winemaking easier."

Considered one of the brightest gems in the Angove portfolio, the Angove Warboys Vineyard Shiraz is a representation of the company's "best vineyard in McLaren Vale" that the winemaking team "works very hard on every year," Richard says. The vineyard consists of roughly 16 hectares (39.5 acres) of old-vine Shiraz "that produce extremely small crop and small berries, and

make lovely concentrated wines that really speak of where they grow," he adds.

Angove produces roughly 200 cases of the Warboys Vineyard Shiraz and Grenache: a small, handmade production. On the other—and larger—hand, Angove's facility is also capable of producing its McLaren Vale Family Crest label at around 10,000 cases.

Regardless of production size, the youngest Angove family members have been particularly keen on taking advantage of the Mediterranean climate of McLaren Vale, as well as the diversity within its 500-million-year-old geology. "What we love about McLaren Vale is its consistency in climate and beautiful variations in soils," Richard says. "The north is almost sand, and this is great for really lovely, perfumed Shiraz and Grenache wines. Further down there's clay soils, which make denser, richer wines, then even further south there are slightly-elevated alluvial soils that make elegant, really pretty wines. As a winemaker you can source from different parts of the region and have different blending options to make a really classic McLaren Vale Shiraz."



Angove's current love affair with McLaren Vale represents just one facet of the company's incredible history—a history Richard firmly believes will unfold even more fruitfully in the years to come. "I actually feel that although we're 132 years old, we've never been younger in terms of our outlook to the future," he says. "I think our best wines are still in front of us because every year we get the opportunity to make them again." ❏



THE SOMM *Joury*

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 "joury" will also feature an esteemed guest sommelier.



Brancaia 2012 Ilatraia IGT Rosso Maremma, Toscana, Italy (\$70) Ilatraia—a blend of 40% Cabernet Sauvignon, 40% Petit Verdot, and 20% Cab Franc—is named for a rugged hillside in Maremma, which is located a few miles from the Mediterranean coastline on sandy, clay soil at the foothills of the Uccellina Mountains. The wine estate was founded more than 30 years ago by Swiss couple Brigitte and Bruno Widmer; and they

brought a modern touch to a traditional wine region with their Super Tuscan wine. With its perfumed dense fruit of black cherry, plum, and spiced blackberry, the wine stays bold on the palate, though its tannins are round and sensuous. Savory tones of coffee, dark chocolate, and licorice linger on the tongue as the ripe, concentrated fruit encircles the heavy notes, soothing the character of the wine as it lingers on the finish. **95**

BRANCAIA WINERY AND WINES



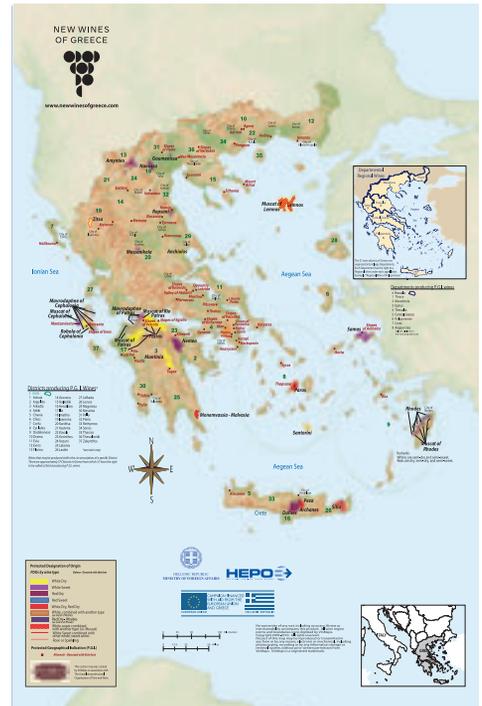
*Brancaia Winemaker
Barbara Widmer.*



Ponzi Vineyards 2015 Abetina Pinot Noir, Chehalem Mountains AVA, Oregon (\$105) Chehalem Mountains AVA is exclusively Laurelwood soil composed of a basalt base with Ice Age windblown sedimentary soils. Winemaker Luisa Ponzi plants all Pinot

Noir *clonal massale* to define the planting of several dozen clones in a single block. These clones are selected specifically for the site and are planted in a random style rather than an organized fashion. The nose ranges from high-toned red fruit of rhubarb and cranberry to hot cinnamon candy, sweet tobacco, and blue flowers. The violets and jasmine translate to the palate, where they converge with spiced raspberry, tangerine, and hints of caramel. Big and lusty. **95**

Brancaia's vineyards in Maremma on the Tuscan coast.



IMAGES COURTESY OF STELLAR IMPORTING COMPANY



Zacharias 2015 Nemea DO, Greece (\$13) This 100% Agiorgitiko from the region's major agriculturist, Elias Zacharias, is a feminine beauty with blue floral notes, blueberries, and lean acidity. Strawberry and walnut combine with ripe, soft tannins for a curious duo mid-palate, with a hint of vanilla and chocolate on the lithe finish. Nemea has become the top growing region for Agiorgitiko, and this winery's first plantings date back to 1960. **90**

STELLAR IMPORTING COMPANY

PHOTOS COURTESY OF BRANCAIA USA



PHOTO COURTESY OF BUTY

Buty Winemaker Chris Dowsett with Founder Nina Buty.



Buty 2014 Rediviva of the Stones, Rockgarden Estate, Walla Walla Valley, WA (\$60) A blend of

77% Syrah, 13% Cabernet Sauvignon, and 10% Mourvèdre from the Rocks District of Walla Walla Valley's Milton-Freewater appellation. The vines are grown on basalt cobbles, hence the name "redeviva of the stones." The scent of ripe cherry liqueur with just an echo of new leather is enticing. On the palate, red licorice adds a creamy texture with persimmons and beets. Laurel and heather add floral tones and the finish has a savory undercore. **93**



Wayfarer 2015 Pinot Noir, Wayfarer Vineyard, Fort-Ross Seaview AVA, Sonoma County (\$90)

From the rugged Sonoma Coast AVA comes this single-vineyard, estate-grown fruit from a 30-acre property on Goldridge soil dedicated to 16 specially-selected clones. The project began in the late 1990s with Jayson Pahlmayer and is now presided over by his daughter Cleo Pahlmeyer with Winemaker Bibiana González Rave. This Pinot Noir is a blend of the vineyard's 12 clones and speaks of big, bold flavors spiced with white pepper on a bed of slate. Deep blue fruit plays high notes with base notes coming from bark and balsamic. This has aging potential. **95**

Clos Du Val 2014 Three Graces, Hironnelle Vineyard, Stags Leap District, Napa Valley (\$175) Clos Du Val's Hironnelle Vineyards comprise 34 unique blocks, each with its own rootstock, soil type, and set of clones. Winemaker Ted Henry orchestrates as many as 50 fermentations of Cabernet Sauvignon for this red (99% Cabernet Sauv, 1% Cab Franc). As of 2014, Clos Du Val President and CEO Steve Tamburelli and Director of Operations Jon-Mark Chapellet decided to exclusively make estate-grown wines. This



PHOTO COURTESY OF CLOS DU VAL WINERY

Clos du Val Winemaker Ted Henry.

limited production wine is a perfect example, named for the image of the three mythological beings who have "graced" Clos Du Val's labels since the first vintage in 1972. Tannins are dry and acidity is high. The wine is spirited and energetic in nature, with black inky fruit and violets. Black pepper rears up but opens up to a wider, more generous mouthfeel. There's lots of room to grow here; with age, it will continue to emerge as a beautiful beast. **96**



GUEST
SOMMELIER
"Juryor"

SHARON
COOMBS,

Beverage Director for
Craft Los Angeles



PHOTO: CAL BINGHAM

Inama Vigneti di Foscario 2015 Soave Classico, Veneto (\$25) The Inama family, now in the third generation, has been producing wine for more than 40 years. They farm organically and take a minimalistic approach wherever possible: The result is a portfolio of wines that serve as a genuine reflection of the land, which, in the case of the Vigneti di Foscario, consists of sun-drenched basaltic lava soils on south-facing vineyards. The sunshine comes through in the glass: The golden yellow Garganega-based wine has aromas of white flowers and wet rocks followed by flavors of honey crisp apple, apricot, lemon curd, and a touch of marzipan. The creaminess of the wine is perfectly balanced with bright stone fruit-like acidity and briny minerality. **93** DALLA TERRA



Vietti 2014 Perbacco Nebbiolo, Langhe, Piedmont (\$26) Throughout the Vietti history, which dates back to the early 20th century, the winery has been both a trend-setter and a proponent of preserving the past. Being one of the first to produce single-vineyard wines in Piedmont—an example almost all of the top producers in the area have followed—shows the family's appreciation for the subtleties of character gleaned from each individual vineyard. For that reason, each parcel of cherished Nebbiolo is vinified and aged separately up to the point of selection for the various labels. The parcels perfect for earlier release will go into the blend for Perbacco, while those best suited for extended aging will be reserved for the Barolo bottlings. Vietti's Perbacco Nebbiolo has both structure and grace. The nose offers a subtle fragrance of dried violets, Earl Grey tea, and a hint of espresso, while the palate opens up to reveal complex savory flavors like fresh cranberries, cacao nibs, and dried mushrooms. **95** DALLA TERRA SJ



Serafin Alvarado, MS, Director of Wine Education
at Southern Glazer's Wine & Spirits, Interviews

CASSIE SAKAI,

WINE DIRECTOR AT
GIRL & THE GOAT IN CHICAGO



photos by Rebecca Peplinski

WHEN I FIRST MET Girl & the Goat Wine Director Cassie Sakai at Southern Glazer's School of Wine, her enthusiasm and eagerness to learn was immediately apparent. I recently had the opportunity to sit down and chat with Sakai about her rapid ascent in the wine industry and lessons she's learned so far.

Q: Serafin Alvarado: What was your first formative job experience that led you to where you are now?

Cassie Sakai: I was a server at 7 Lions on Michigan Avenue. When we opened, it was an All-American wine list, but it was really cool because it wasn't the usual suspects from mainly California, Washington, and Oregon; instead, it was things like Albariño from Edna Valley or Grüner Veltliner. That definitely piqued my curiosity to learn more about wine.

Q: How did you transition from 7 Lions to Girl & the Goat?

At that time, I had already taken the Court of Master Sommeliers Introductory Course and was preparing to take the Certified Sommelier exam. The training at Girl & the Goat was like 80 to 100 hours over the course of two and a half weeks, and at the very end of the training, I had to do a mock service with Chef Stephanie [Izard] the day after my Certified exam. It was a very stressful time of my life, but at the end of the day it all worked out. I got the job and in 24 hours I also had my sommelier certification!

Cassie Sakai, Wine Director at Chicago's renowned Girl & the Goat restaurant.

Serafin Alvarado and Cassie Sakai at Girl & the Goat in Chicago's West Loop.



Q: When did you become the Wine Director at Girl & the Goat?

About six months into the job, an assistant sommelier position opened. This was an entirely new position. Since the current wine director was managing three restaurants at the same time, they thought they needed someone to help out with some of the day-to-day tasks. Less than six months after that, my boss at the time, Jeremy Adler, left and I took over!

Q: In the eight months you've led the wine program, what have you accomplished that reflects your personal vision?

I think I have been able to expand our offerings to things that are a bit off the beaten path. We still offer the staples that most our guests will recognize, but they're maybe less predictable. As an example, instead of offering a Pinot Noir by the glass from a common region, I came across this beautiful Pinot Noir from Germany and added it to our by-the-glass offerings. The guest might have planned to have a glass of Pinot Noir anyway, but this piques their curiosity and sparks a conversation tableside.

Q: Have any recent finds particularly intrigued you?

I recently discovered this Nebbiolo from Roero in Piedmont. It had some age, but it was not that expensive because it wasn't produced in more famous regions of Barolo or Barbaresco. It still would be over \$100 on our wine list, but we concluded that if we have the right conversation with the guest, they'd realize they're actually getting a bargain for \$100. If this wine was grown a few miles away, it would be three times more expensive!

Q: If you were to pick one wine that tends to work well with Chef Izard's food overall, which would it be?

We once had a Jurançon Sec by the glass; it was bright and floral with high acid, which made it work especially well with the fat content in some dishes while cleansing the palate. It was one of Stephanie's favorite wines as well. Being atypical, it was a very hard sell, yet when we were able to convince guests to try it, most enjoyed it! Overall, I think high-acid, high-mineral whites like Grüner tend to work best.

Q: How is your wine list categorized?

Our white wine section used to be broken down by grape variety like Chardonnay, Sauvignon Blanc, and so on, plus "intriguing whites." People would ask me what "intriguing whites" meant, but it was just a catch-all category for any wine that did not fall under a popular grape heading. We had something similar for red wine: "engaging reds." So I eventually categorized the wine list by style—light, crisp, high-acid, richer, fuller-bodied, and aromatic, for example—and within each section we would list them from lightest to heaviest. This way it's a bit more self-navigating for people who don't want to talk to the somm.

Q: What advice do you have for any aspiring sommelier seeking to follow your career path?

I would say taste as much as possible. Taste objectively by trying to eliminate any preconceived notions, and read voraciously. You are never going to know everything there is to know about wine, so the most important thing is finding mentors who support your curiosity and hunger to learn. And never forget that at the end of the day, it's all about hospitality. *SJ*



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Star Lane Vineyard in Santa Barbara's Happy Canyon AVA.

A Shift from Physical to Personal

TYLER THOMAS OF DIERBERG AND STAR LANE VINEYARDS HELPS BROADEN THE DISCUSSION OF TERROIR TO RECOGNIZE THE HUMAN SIDE OF WINE PRODUCTION by Michael Cervin

TO MOST PEOPLE, “terroir” means the vineyard: its specific physical attributes, elevation, water pooling, degree of sun exposure, breezes, and types of soil composition. All of these characteristics work in tandem to make wine a unique expression of its site.

Moving beyond physical terroir, Tyler Thomas, Winemaker at Dierberg and Star Lane vineyards, focuses on a category less visible but nonetheless equally important: the people behind the wines. Coining this realm as “human terroir,” Thomas believes every person involved in the production of a wine directly affects its character. *The SOMM Journal* sat down with him at the Star Lane Estate in Santa Barbara’s Happy Canyon AVA to discuss the concept.

At Dierberg, everyone on the winery team—be that a six-week intern, seasonal enologist, or long-term employee—gets harvest goals, which Thomas says epitomizes how much of a “collaborative endeavor” winemaking truly is. “Part of sustainability is how you treat your people: How do we

set each other up for success? That’s our ethos,” Thomas says. “Great wine is not just about what it tastes like—it’s about doing things greatly.”

For Thomas, that extends to even the most far-flung part of a winery in terms of production: its tasting room. “If you can’t



Tyler Thomas, Winemaker at Dierberg and Star Lane vineyards, stresses the importance of “human terroir.”

give a hospitable experience in the tasting room, that will affect how your customer perceives the wine,” he explains. “You may not have made one single decision in the winemaking or the grape-growing processes, but the way you share the wine influences the consumer. It seems

abstract, but it’s really a long-term vision.” (“Long term” is a bit of an understatement for owners Jim and Mary Dierberg, who set goals extending as far as 250 years into the future when they founded their Star Lane estate.)

The concept of creating and marketing a site-driven wine can seem old hat to sommeliers, let alone consumers, Thomas says, but exploring the human elements of wine production can serve as an effective entry point for the discussion. “We are not machines in how we taste wine,” he adds. “Consumers consider price point, power of suggestion—there’s a psychological overlay to the physiological experience with your palate.”

While combining the physical and personal into one shared notion of terroir can seem like a daunting task, Thomas says it’s raised a collective awareness at both Dierberg and Star Lane that they’re “creating (their) own history.” “How do we interpret our Happy Canyon fruit in relation to the archetype of Cabernet or Pinot? In our winery’s infancy, does the consumer or sommelier care? Probably not,” Thomas admits. “But in 50 years, will it matter that the wine came from Star Lane? Absolutely.” ❧

PHOTOS COURTESY OF STARLANE VINEYARD



HUNDRED
ACRE

*Imagine tasting
16 Hundred Acre
library wines
with Jayson
Woodbridge
himself—accom-
panied by a
dinner prepared
by Jean-Georges
Vongerichten.*

HITTING THE *Hundred Acre* *Jackpot*

**JAYSON WOODBRIDGE SWEEPS
LAS VEGAS WITH THE NEVER
BEFORE, NEVER AGAIN TASTING**

by Ruth Tobias / photos by Mona Shield Payne



*Jean-Georges Vongerichten helmed the five-course
winemaker dinner that accompanied the Hundred Acre
“Never Before, Never Again” tasting.*





Chef Jean-Georges Vongerichten and Hundred Acre Founder/Winemaker Jayson Woodbridge.



Hundred Acre Wraith 2013, a blend from three of Woodbridge's top vineyards, was a big hit at the dinner.

Though far from Jayson Woodbridge's Napa Valley headquarters, Las Vegas couldn't have been a more fitting locale for the Never Before, Never Again

Tasting that the Hundred Acre Founder/Winemaker hosted at Sage in the ARIA Resort and Casino last December. Given long odds—a last-minute clothing mishap that left him in his winter coat, a hotel alarm that blared intermittently, a malfunctioning microphone—Woodbridge beat them all to deliver a masterful presentation of 16 library wines from an estate he admitted was itself a gamble when he launched it as an industry newcomer 18 years ago. "There was no business plan,

no projection," he said. "I just took every cent I had and went all in."

Proof that his high-stakes bet has paid off in spades was evident by a glance around the room filled with some 60 guests. They had flown in from all over for the occasion—mostly collectors who, Woodbridge told me, "have been asking if they could buy wine out of the library for years, and the answer's always been no. The library has always been off-limits to everyone." But with the winery's 20th anniversary in view, he said he felt ready to offer his fans some "perspective on the wine through time, because the one thing that Hundred Acre does incredibly well is handle time. And I wanted to be able to tell some stories about these vintages, what my experience was in making them, how I felt about them." Hence his eloquent preface to the tasting. "Wine,"

he began, "is a time machine. You're going back in time and tasting the mood of the winemaker, the mood of Mother Nature"—not to mention glimpsing into your own past. "Maybe your grandmother was making a pie and sent you to pick blackberries," he continued. "Maybe you smell cigar and some leather, and your father comes back to you."

To be sure, Woodbridge's 100% Cabernet Sauvignons are famed for the evocative intensity of their ripe-to-bursting and everlasting dark fruit interwoven with silken strands of spice, smoke, and cocoa. We started with a trio from the Kayli Morgan Vineyard near St. Helena, which has consistently produced wines marked by a shimmering defiance of their own gravity—including the 2006 vintage, "when a lot of wines were considered very rustic tanninwise," noted Woodbridge. "But there's a continuous line throughout Hundred Acre of fine, luscious, sexy tannins." To illustrate the extent to which such successes hinge on his spare-no-expense, make-no-compromise approach, he regaled the crowd with a tale about the time in 2009 he hired pilots to dry his vineyards via helicopter after a mid-harvest storm—adding, in his gleefully cantankerous style, that "I'd rather blow my head off than cut a corner or cheat a little, and I've got the guts to [expletive] do it." The crowd's

knowing laughter only spread as he added, "If anyone's offended by foul language . . . there's not a thing I can do."

We also tasted a few vintages from the Few and Far Between Vineyard—the Calistoga site for which Woodbridge paid the highest price per planted acre in Napa's history—and the Ark Vineyard at the base of Howell Mountain, which spans "three different beachfronts from three different epochs," he explained. "It's planted to different clones and rootstocks of Cabernet based on how the soil changes from the bottom to the top of the block."

From Ark came one of the most anticipated wines of the tasting, eliciting actual cheers upon its introduction: the Deep Time 2013, which emerged after four years in new French oak with all the multilayered richness of Black Forest cake checked by touches of savory spice. No less notable, however, was the Deep Time 2009 from Ancient Way Vineyard, especially considering Woodbridge no longer makes his Barossa Valley Shiraz ("every year was the most grueling torture festival," he said).

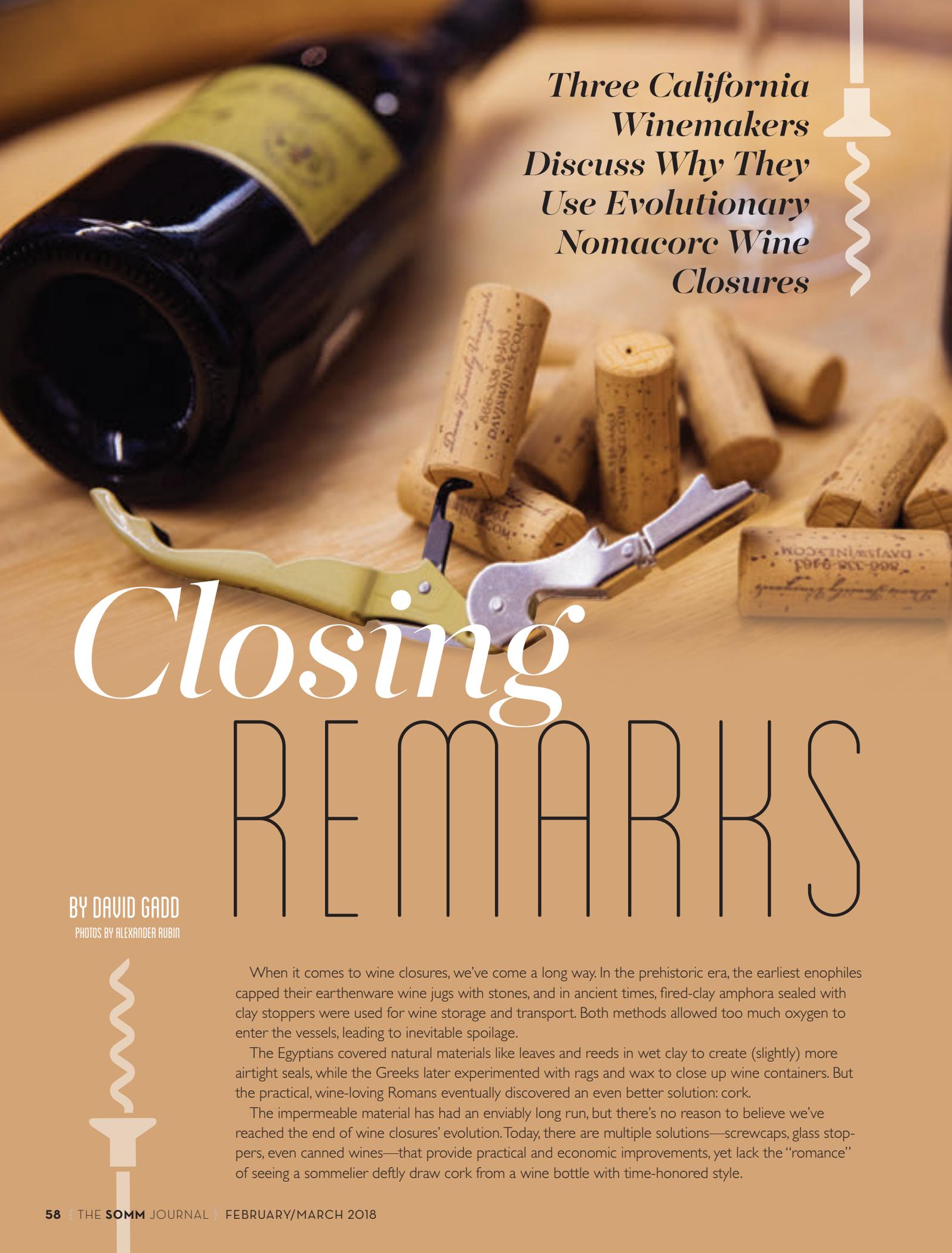
While enjoying the 2009 Deep Time, we realized it shared the same lip-smacking notes of candied black olive, baked plum, and leather as the other Ancient Way vintages we tried. The five-year-aged beauty was also nearly as Portlike in its grip as the

Just days after the tasting, news broke that Woodbridge had sold his wildly-successful value brands—Layer Cake, Cherry Pie, and If You See Kay—to Vintage Wine Estates. Hundred Acre Wine Group/One True Vine GM and COO John Hardesty explains the rationale behind the decision: "Hundred Acre is the base of operations—the crown jewel that haunts Jayson more than anything. The rest of it was always about being an incubator: Nobody at his level had gone, 'Hey, I'm going to make a \$15 wine that tastes like it should be \$30.' Our core competency is to create a given product and have the freedom to do whatever we want with it, and when it stops being fun, sell it. Once you go over a certain volume, it's not that fun anymore." We'll explore what this sole focus on Hundred Acre might entail in an upcoming issue.

2008 vintage of Woodbridge's own brandy-fortified wine, Fortification—and no literal description could top his metaphorical one: "Having a bottle of this in your cellar is like having a fast car, a [expletive] of guns, and a bulletproof vest, and you've gotta get out of Dodge because you've been a bad boy."

Still, the highlight of the afternoon may have been the newly-released Wraith 2013 (evidenced by the fact that it reappeared during the five-course winemaker's dinner that followed at Jean-Georges Steakhouse). "For years," Woodbridge explained, "I wanted to make a wine that was a combination of Kayli Morgan and Ark. I dialed the safe a thousand times in my head trying to figure out the possible combinations, and I couldn't do it." But following the purchase of Few and Far Between, he began experimenting with "the greatest of the three vineyards" until the blend finally clicked. "It set me free as a winemaker because I ran into the wall, and then I broke through the wall," he added. Does that mean the best of Hundred Acre is yet to come? In Vegas or not, you can bet on it. 





*Three California
Winemakers
Discuss Why They
Use Evolutionary
Nomacorc Wine
Closures*

Closing

REMARKS

BY DAVID GADD

PHOTOS BY ALEXANDER RUBIN

When it comes to wine closures, we've come a long way. In the prehistoric era, the earliest enophiles capped their earthenware wine jugs with stones, and in ancient times, fired-clay amphora sealed with clay stoppers were used for wine storage and transport. Both methods allowed too much oxygen to enter the vessels, leading to inevitable spoilage.

The Egyptians covered natural materials like leaves and reeds in wet clay to create (slightly) more airtight seals, while the Greeks later experimented with rags and wax to close up wine containers. But the practical, wine-loving Romans eventually discovered an even better solution: cork.

The impermeable material has had an enviably long run, but there's no reason to believe we've reached the end of wine closures' evolution. Today, there are multiple solutions—screwcaps, glass stoppers, even canned wines—that provide practical and economic improvements, yet lack the “romance” of seeing a sommelier deftly draw cork from a wine bottle with time-honored style.

In a response that manages to appeal to both nostalgia and innovation, global wine industry solutions company Vinventions has introduced a completely natural cork substitute—Nomacorc PlantCorcs™—that offers all the advantages of bark-derived cork without any of the disadvantages. In our last issue, we met some leading sommeliers who have wholeheartedly welcomed Vinventions' sugarcane-based Nomacorc closures as the wave of the future; on the production side, vintners are also eagerly embracing this new solution. In this issue, we'll meet three California winemakers who have adopted PlantCorc and are enthusiastic about this revolutionary advance in wine-closure technology.

A MOMENT OF EPIPHANY

Sonoma is not just on the edge of California wine country geographically; it's also on the edge of experimentation with alternative grape varieties and production methods, including the usage of cutting-edge wine closures.

At Davis Family Vineyards just outside Healdsburg, Guy Davis is as wildly enthusiastic about Nomacorc as he is about Sonoma terroir. After gaining harvest ex-

perience at Chave in the Northern Rhône and completing a stint at Sky Vineyards on Mount Veeder, Davis produced his first commercial vintage in 1995: 250 cases of old-vine Zinfandel from the Russian River Valley. In 1996, he bought his own vineyard there comprised of 100-year-old Zinfandel vines, and crushed his first vintage under the Davis Family Vineyards label a year later. He now crafts vineyard-designated wines—including Pinot and Chardonnay, as well as Rhône-style varietals and blends—from several other Sonoma properties as well.

Davis also had his own label in New Zealand from 1999 to 2000, where he observed the transition to screwcap. "Screwcaps took a little pressure off for the use of non-cork closures, but the more I looked at screwcap, I didn't like its inability to allow evolution of the wine in the bottle," he explains.

Like many wine consumers, Davis admits that he "loves the ritual" of cork. He has a less fond impression, however, of its well-documented inconsistencies. "Being a hands-on winemaker from vine to bottle, and also being the person doing sales, I don't like the fact that we accept a certain amount of failure in a product that costs

close to a buck apiece," he says.

The veteran winemaker first heard about Nomacorc about a decade ago, and credits somm-turned-vintner Pax Mahle for being "a year ahead of [him] in exploring Nomacorc" and for openly sharing his findings. Davis' own epiphany came six years later after he attended a blind tasting sponsored by Nomacorc at the Triangle Wine Experience in Raleigh, North Carolina. "They tasted us on two flights—six different wines, three of each per flight," Davis recalls. "Each of the three was bottled on the same day in three different closures; the first round was bottled for three years, the second for five years. Six out of six, I chose the Nomacorc. I had to pay attention to that!"

The encounter was all it took for Davis to get hooked on Nomacorc and begin introducing the closure to his own wines—first through trials on rosé and white wines, then by implementing it with his red wines in 2015. "On every level, it hit on what I was looking for," he says.

One of the qualities that emerged as a strong selling point for Davis was the adjustable oxygen transfer rate of Nomacorc closures, which allows the wine-





Davis Family Vineyards 2015 Throne, Russian River Valley, Sonoma County

(\$42) A blend of 58% Grenache, 28% Syrah, and 14% Mourvèdre, its similarity to a Chateauneuf-du-Pape is apparent. Earthy on the nose, the palate is all bright lights with a searing acidity and tart red fruit. Pomegranate, rhubarb, and spiced nutmeg are on the high notes, with a soil and heather on the low. A great food match.

—Meridith May

maker to fine-tune oxidization levels accordingly depending on what varietal they're working with. "I make a range of wines, from sparkling to Grenache, from Syrah to Pinot and Chardonnay," he says. "With Nomacorc, I can put a whole other level of winemaking into play. The closure I used for my Bordeaux blend is quite different from the one I use for the Grenache; I can open it up a little more."

As Davis describes it, "being able to dial it in for expression" with Nomacorc is a substantial plus for the savvy winemaker. The brand's all-natural commitment, however, could be viewed as equally important by winemakers who try to reflect the same approach in their craft. "I farm organically and my winemaking practices are fairly natural, so the fact that Nomacorc is 100 percent plant-based was a big factor in my decision," Davis says. "More importantly, there hasn't been one case where the bottle was oxidized. Not only do we not have TCA, but we haven't had a single flawed closure."

At the end of the long winemaking journey, this translates to a better experience for the end consumer who purchases wine for immediate consumption. "The average customer is only going to get one try to experience my wines, so I can't afford cork flaws," Davis says. Collectors also benefit from Nomacorc: "For people who do lay down the wines, their development in bottle really progresses," he adds. "I can follow the wines after bottling."

With his heightened confidence level in Nomacorc after such a positive introduction, Davis now distrusts the reliability of traditional cork. "I looked at the research on oxygen ingress; once you went down one level from the very top-quality natural corks, the bandwidth in variability was much larger," he says. "I love the consistency of Nomacorc—of being able to know that the same product will produce the same results." Critics agree not only with his philosophy, but with his winemaking style: Davis Family Vineyards was recently honored with Sonoma County Harvest Fair's Sweepstakes Award for its 2016 Russian River Valley Chardonnay, closed with Nomacorc Select Green.

APPEALING TO A NEW GENERATION

Michael Cruse of Cruse Wine Company, based in a retrofitted industrial space in Petaluma, was selected as the *San Francisco Chronicle's* Winemaker of the Year in 2016. An eight-year veteran of Merryvale's Starmont Winery in Carneros, Cruse represents a new generation of Sonoma vintners and is known for his "everything old is new again" approach to winemaking. "I saw some things that weren't being made," explains Cruse on what inspired him to start his own label.

Instead of *méthode champenoise* bubbly, he bottles rustic pét-nat sparklers. On the still wine side, meanwhile, he specializes in Valdiguié; the grape variety was previously known as "Napa Gamay" and was used to make Beaujolais-like California wines. But for all his innovation, Cruse says his winemaking itself is based in established practice. "I'm using traditional California grapes," he adds.

Cruse says he wants to catch "the Zeitgeist of light reds" and has some iconoclastic opinions about old-school wine snobbery. "Millennials are agnostic to regions," notes the freewheeling vintner. "They're not going to pay \$150 for a Cabernet just because it says Napa Valley on the label. They like things that are good; they like things that are reasonably affordable."

Appealing to this "new generation of wine drinker," Cruse created a red field blend of Valdiguié, Carignan, and Tannat called Monkey Jacket that's sealed with Nomacorc Select Green—a more practical (and affordable) solution than traditional cork. (A monkey jacket is a type of peacoat worn by Newfoundland sailors; at 800 cases, this is Cruse's "volume wine.")

Cruse first learned about Nomacorc from vintner Hardy Wallace, owner of cult label Dirty & Rowdy, and decided it was "ideal" to use with Monkey Jacket. He especially appreciates "not having to deal with failed corks and TCA," and was also pleased to see he shares the same carbon-neutral "mantra" as the closure's producer.



Cruse 2016 Monkey Jacket Red Blend, North Coast (\$25)

Bright red ripe tart fruit; cherry and cranberry edged in candied orange peel. The nutmeg comes across as a dusty, powdery tannin, all in a medium (just) plus body. Substantial yet more refreshing than rich. —Jessie Birschbach



THRILLED WITH PLANTCORC

Just a few freeway stops away from Davis Family Vineyards, Ryan and Megan Glaab produce their Ryme Cellars wines in Geyserville. Ryan is a former bioengineering student who transferred to the Viticulture and Enology program at California State University, Fresno; Megan studied winemaking in Australia, where the two met while working harvest at Torbreck. Between the two of them, they also have experience at Sine Qua Non, Marcassin, Peay Vineyards, and Pax Mahle's Wind Gap—quite a joint resumé.

Like Cruse, the Glaabs were fascinated with under-represented grape varieties and started their Ryme project with a ton of Aglianico in 2007 ("We've always been inspired by Italian grapes," says Ryan). Today, one of their strong suits is a duo of Vermentinos, labeled "His" and "Hers": "Hers" is pressed, settled clean, and bottled early, while "His" is picked later, destemmed, fermented on skins, and aged longer.

Clearly a busy ambassador for Nomacorc, Hardy Wallace also turned the Glaabs on to the closure as he did with Cruse; they were immediately "intrigued," Ryan says, and have now been using Nomacorc for two years. "The first year we did Vermentino, our quickest release, under Nomacorc closures, and we were super happy with the results," he adds.

When naming Nomacorc's advantages, Ryan has plenty of material to work from. "As far as all non-traditional corks go, it's best looking; extracts from the bottle well; it's made in the U.S.; it's not made from petroleum; and it's recyclable," he says. "It's a radical improvement on what we had before, and we've been thrilled with the product."



As the evolution of wine closures progresses, we can expect more and more winemakers to not only discover the benefits of Nomacorc PlantCorcs by Vinventions, but to pass the word along to their fellow vintners as well. As Guy Davis puts it: "If I didn't have confidence in Nomacorc, I wouldn't talk about it." SJ

"THE FIRST YEAR WE DID VERMENTINO, OUR QUICKEST RELEASE, UNDER NOMACORC CLOSURES, AND WE WERE SUPER HAPPY WITH THE RESULTS."

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{ cover story }

THE Aszú REVOLUTION

MODERN STYLES
REDEFINE THE HISTORIC
ELIXIR OF HUNGARY

by Deborah Parker Wong
photos by Ferenc Dancsecs

63

from grapes desiccated by noble rot in the Tokaj wine region of Hungary burst forth a plethora of traditional and modern wine styles. Rarest among them is the world's sweetest and most complex grape elixir, Eszencia: a honey-like nectar once reserved for royalty that's been coveted for centuries. The long history of wine made from aszú fruit (originally meaning "dried grapes," the term has evolved to include grapes with high sugar levels affected with noble rot, or *Botrytis cinerea*) in Hungary dates to the mid-16th century.



*The handpicking of aszú berries originated in 1641 via the *Regulamentum Culturae Vinearum* declaration, cited as documentation of the first instance of manual single-berry selection.*

By the year 1737, a three-tier classification system of the Tokaji vineyards was in place—notably predating the sweet wine classification of Port by several decades and Sauternes by more than a century.

Sweet and aszú Tokaji wine styles rely on clean fruit, botrytized bunches, or individual aszú berries. The latter are picked in multiple passes through the vineyard and then worked into to a paste or dough; varying amounts of this material are then macerated in fermenting must or wine. The two main grape varieties allowed are Furmint and Hárslevelű, but Sárgamuskotály (Muscat Blanc à Petite Grains), Zéta (Oremus), Kabar, and Kövérszőlő are also permitted and used in small amounts. Both sweet and aszú wines

are aged in Hungarian oak casks or barrels that can vary in size; two of the most common, Gönci and Szerednyei barrels, hold roughly 136 and 220 liters, respectively.

Finished wine styles are determined using a combined measure of minimum residual sugar and dry extract, which refers to the dissolved solids in the wines that have been elevated due to concentration imparted by noble rot. Traditionally, the wines of Tokaj have been made with oxygen freely available during fermentation, which occurs over a period of many years in some aszú styles. This practice helps stabilize the wine without contributing oxidative flavors and defines these traditional skin-contact sweet styles.

With Tradition Preserved, New Styles Emerge

Tokaj's producers and their wines are emerging from the dark shadow that obscured their glorious past. Attila Balla, President of Vinum Tokaj International, and Enikő Magyar, Project Director of Wines of Excellence, have been collaborating with the Hungarian Tourism Agency to serve as ambassadors for the region's inimitable wine culture.

"As part of a three-year campaign, we're educating the North American trade and consumers about traditional Tokaji wine specialties," Magyar told *The SOMM Journal*. "Followed by the successful 'The Year of Furmint' campaign in 2017, this year's focus will be 'The Year of Aszú' presented with the other sweet wine specialties. Our joint aim is to reposition aszú on the world's wine market: move it out from the category of being enjoyed at the end of a meal or for special occasions. Aszú can be utilized as a fascinating pairing partner; and



Attila Balla, President of Vinum Tokaj International, and Enikő Magyar, Project Director for Wines of Excellence.

The stages of botrytization over the course of a year.



we would like to move away from its position of being the wine of kings and make it one of the favorite wines of Millennial cocktail lovers, too."

Hungary streamlined laws regulating the wines of Tokaj as recently as 2013, making it easier for producers to navigate the hierarchy of noble sweet wines while maintaining centuries-old traditional wine categories.

While aszú berries picked one by one are the source of Eszencia's sky-high residual sugar content—one that can easily exceed 600 grams per liter (and must retain at least 450 grams in that same amount)—they contribute thoroughly unique flavors and characteristics to several balanced and modern wine styles.

Aszú wines with a minimum of 120 grams per liter of residual sugar can be labeled Tokaji Aszú. The term **Tokaji Aszú 5 puttonyos** applies to sweet wines that have a minimum of 120 grams per liter of residual sugar with minimum 9% ABV. The traditional **6 puttonyos** wines, meanwhile, are defined as having a minimum of 150 grams per liter of residual sugar; the category now includes the former aszú eszencia style, which would be seen on labels prior to 2013. Six puttonyos wines have what could be considered the widest range of style. Tokaji Aszú producers can decide whether to use the 5 or 6 puttonyos designations on their labels, and all the aszú wines must have at least 19% potential ABV.

Partly botrytized clusters are used to make a style known as sweet (édes) Tokaji



From left to right, back row: János Jarecsni, Chief Winemaker for Béres Vineyards and Winery; Edit Bai, Chief Winemaker for Chateau Dereszla; Enikő Magyar, Project Director for Wines of Excellence; Sándor Zsurki, Winemaker at Gróf Degenfeld Winery; and Károly Áts, Chief Winemaker at Grand Tokaj. Front row, from left to right: Péter Molnár, Ph.D., General Manager at Patricius Winery; Attila Balla, President of Vinum Tokaj International; and Zoltán A. Kovács, General Manager at Royal Tokaji Winery.

Szamorodni: a rich, powerful wine with a minimum of 9% ABV. Tokaji Szamorodni is made with bunch selection during harvest; the bunches contain a blend of aszú and non-aszú grapes and matured in Gönci barrels for a minimum of one year sometimes under flor, which results in a more oxidative style.

At the very apex of the style pyramid sits **Eszencia**, an elixir that is arguably the most unctuous and sweet grape alcohol in the world. Made solely from the free run

juice of the aszú berries, it rarely reaches above 3% ABV (though its alcohol content can range from 1.2–8%). Eszencia also must contain a minimum of 450 grams per liter residual sugar. There is no ceiling on the amount of sugar Eszencia can contain, and 700 grams per liter is not uncommon (the 2000 vintage reached an astonishing 900). The rarity and exquisite nature of this wine style almost guarantees it will be enjoyed in minute quantities—often with a spoon.

The Definition of Modern

Over the past several years, producers have introduced more reductive sweet wine styles protected from oxygen during fermentation. Often made with a ratio of botrytized berries comparable to late harvest wines (50–180 grams per liter of residual sugar), this category isn't regulated and botrytis isn't required, though it is often employed.

These wine styles, **late harvest** or **Tokaji (sweet) cuvée**, are ready for release as early as a year after harvest. Marked by acidity and complexity that balances and masks the impression of overt sweetness, they taste far drier on the palate and find an easy rapport with a wide range of ethnic cuisines, especially Pan Asian and Latin American flavors.

As the crown jewels of the Hungarian wine industry, Tokaji Aszú wines always possess a distinctive and incomparable character and lead curious consumers to unexplored places on their tasting journey. With the "Year of Aszú" campaign, that journey will offer plentiful possibilities for a renewed dive into the art of winemaking.

In their efforts to maintain and preserve traditional winemaking techniques, as well as the high production and quality standards required by the region, Tokaji Aszú producers formed their own self-regulatory body. While their styles may differ, all members are collectively committed to producing top-notch quality wines.

by reflecting this new focus on balance and complexity, modern-style aszú has proved it can no longer be defined solely by sugar or sweetness. With high levels of natural acidity and complex flavors that run from honeysuckle, peaches, and apricots to marmalade, rye bread, and roasted nuts imparted by noble rot, the natural wines of Tokaj are an authentic and utterly distinctive expression of their home country's rich winemaking history.

SIX OUTSTANDING HUNGARIAN PRODUCERS

Béres Vineyards and Winery

Béres Vineyards and Winery is located in the village of Erdőbénye, one of the oldest settlements in the region and home to the first written mention of the Furmint grape variety in 1611.

Established in 2002 by Dr. József Béres and his wife, Klára, the modern winery is housed in a 3,000-square-meter chateau on a 45-hectare (111-acre) estate. The vineyards include three well-regarded, steeply-sloped sites that are interplanted with plum orchards and native flora. Its beauty hasn't gone unnoticed: Béres bested 99 other wineries to win the title of Hungary's "Most Beautiful Vineyard" in 2015.



"I believe aszú is the best natural sweet wine in the world. Its complexity and unique production method makes this wine extraordinary in so many ways. When someone tastes aszú for the first time, they will embark on a whole new chapter in their lives . . . a chapter with more than 400 years of winemaking history behind it." —János Jarecsni, Chief Winemaker at Béres Vineyards and Winery

NEW WINES OF HUNGARY, INC.

Patricius Winery

Established by the Kékessy family—whose winemaking ancestral roots trace back to the 18th century—Patricius wines are cultivated from 85 hectares of eight vineyards based in five villages. The winery, located in a renovated ancient wine-press house in the Várhegy vineyard, employs gentle hands-off winemaking practices that take advantage of the gravity-flow vinification process.

Patricius offers dry, late harvest, and aszú wines both in single-vineyard and small-batch selections from its best vineyards. In 2016, it was recognized as "Hungary's Winery of the Year."



"Tokaji Aszú is a reference in the wine world for balance and uniqueness. This wine draws directly from the perfect location, climate, and microclimate conditions of the region while volcanic base rocks impart rich minerality thanks to active volcanism. Everything is provided in Tokaj to produce the best natural wines with elegance and purity." —Péter Molnár, Ph.D., General Manager at Patricius Winery

CLASSIC WINES, INC.

Royal Tokaji Wine Company

Co-founded in 1990 by respected wine writer Hugh Johnson, Royal Tokaji leads the region's recent renaissance and ranks among the world's most admired wine brands. The company owns 107 hectares of vineyards (roughly 264 acres), predominantly in the village of Mád, and ages wine in its 600-year-old cellar. Royal Tokaji's award-winning portfolio includes dry Furmint, late harvest, 5 and 6 puttonyos blends, single-vineyard aszù wines, and the legendary Eszencia.



"In the words of our Founder Hugh Johnson, Tokaji Aszù is 'a wine that would make angels sing out loud in praise.' The unique magic of Tokaji Aszù lies in the balance of thrilling acidity and sumptuous sweetness. Royal Tokaji's Red Label 2013 is the definitive example." —Zoltán A. Kovács, General Manager at Royal Tokaji Wine Company

WILSON DANIELS

Dereszla Winery

Dereszla Winery farms 30 vineyards encompassing 30 hectares (82 acres) in the heart of the Tokaj region. The winery is known for its extensive network of 200-year-old underground wine cellars employing a series of switchbacks that span more than half a mile.



"Aszù cannot be described with objective or subjective parameters: It is more a joint creation of the nature and the winemaker based on the satisfaction of the consumers. Tokaji Aszù is like a gold jewel for us: Its content, color, flavor, elegance, minerality, and harmonious acidity restore the uniqueness of Tokaj's production area." —Edit Bai, Chief Winemaker at Dereszla Winery

COGNAC ONE, LLC

Gróf Degenfeld Winery

Although the historic Degenfeld family winery was re-established as recently as 1995 by Marie Countess Degenfeld and her husband Dr. Thomas Lindner, her ancestor Count Imre Degenfeld founded the Tokaj Region Wine Producers Association back in 1857. From the beginning, the Degenfeld name has epitomized a respect for high-quality and modern technology combined with valuable traditions and strict business ethics.

Gróf Degenfeld's 35 hectares (86 acres) of vineyards are sustained organically; weeds are removed mechanically and never chemically. The property also includes four-star lodging at the Gróf Degenfeld Castle Hotel.



"The natural conditions of the Tokaj wine region are extraordinary, and our native grape varieties are optimized for this terroir. Noble rot provides a richness and concentration to aszù that's impossible to replicate, and, truthfully, these natural blessings combined with localized winemaking and aging techniques make the wine even more complex and elegant. In one word: immortal." —Sándor Zsurki, Chief Winemaker at Gróf Degenfeld Winery

NEW WINES OF HUNGARY, INC.

Grand Tokaj

Last but certainly not least, Grand Tokaj was founded by the Hungarian state in 1948 and is located at the intersection of the Tisza and Bodrog rivers. It's the largest winery in the historic Tokaj-Hegyalja (Tokaj "foothills") wine region—recognized as a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

Grand Tokaj's 66 hectares (163 acres) of vineyards account for 35 percent of the region's total output. It also purchases grapes from roughly 1,000 small producers across roughly 1,050 hectares (2,595 acres) of land. The winery's holding tank is capable of storing 66,000 hectolitres of wine, and a bottling plant capable of producing 10 million bottles annually is currently being built.



"Tokaji Aszù is the best Tokaj can offer to the world. I believe that a winemaker's personality always seeps through the wine, and my aim is to radiate happiness and joie de vivre through my wines. I am committed to this special wine and to the greatness of this region, and consider it a mission to restore it to its former glory." —Károly Áts, Chief Winemaker at Grand Tokaj 

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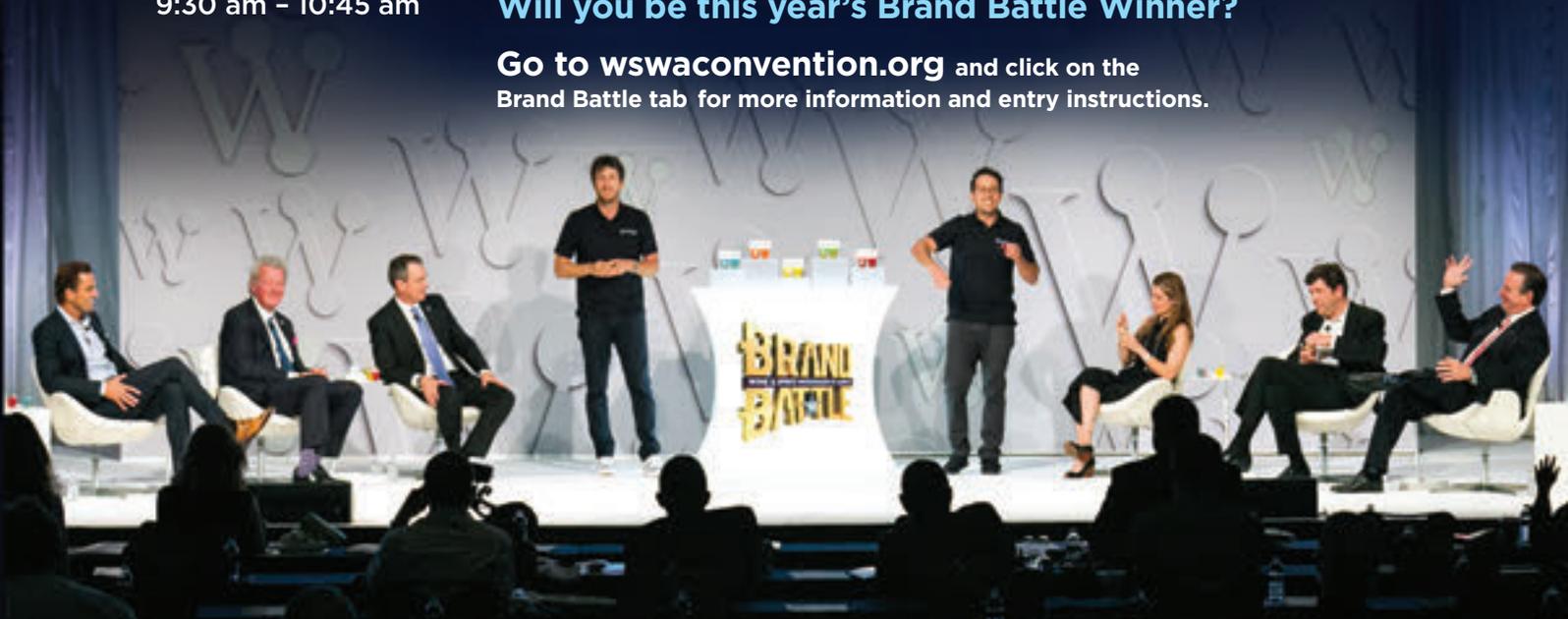
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DELINEATES FIVE
DISTINCTIVE
“NEIGHBORHOODS”
WITHIN THE AVA

story and photos by

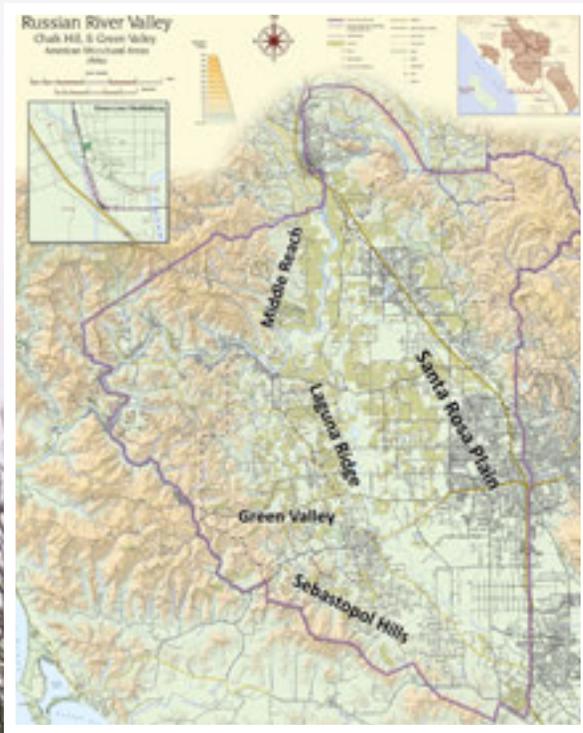
RANDY CAPAROSO

*R*urgundy is not simple to understand, yet it behooves the wine professional to know the differences between a Musigny and a Mercurey or Meursault vs. Mâconnais—both in terms of terroir and sensory ramifications.

Why should regions like California’s Russian River Valley be any different? In recent years, it’s become increasingly clear to growers and winemakers in the 160,000-acre Russian River Valley AVA that there are significant climatic and topographical differences in the appellation’s sub-areas, which are now being referred to as “neighborhoods.”

The necessity of this shift—stemming from a research-driven initiative started by the Russian River Valley Winegrowers organization in 2013—lies in the fact that each of these sub-areas manifests distinct sensory qualities in their Chardonnays and Pinot Noirs. Hence, the creation of the five Russian River Valley Neighborhoods: Middle Reach, Laguna Ridge, Santa Rosa Plain, Sebastopol Hills, and Green Valley.

Read on for the skinny on these neighborhoods, explored in order from north to south.



Halleck Vineyard

RESIDES WITHIN THE FOGGY,
SOUTHERNMOST RUSSIAN RIVER
VALLEY NEIGHBORHOOD OF
SEBASTOPOL HILLS.

Winemaker Theresa Heredia of Gary Farrell Winery in Rochioli Vineyard, which is located in the Middle Reach neighborhood.



MIDDLE REACH: Both the northernmost and warmest of the five Russian Valley neighborhoods, Middle Reach's immediate proximity to the Russian River results in denser fog banks and seasonal diurnal swings of more than 40 degrees. Some of the appellation's oldest and most iconic Pinot Noir vineyards—such as Allen, Flax, Rochioli, and Joseph Swan's Great Oak—are known for lush, cherry/red fruit-driven qualities and rounded structures, notwithstanding firm tannin and moderate acidity. The neighborhood's Chardonnays, meanwhile, pick up tropical fruit notes while retaining taut, lemony acidity. Yet winemakers like Gary Farrell's Theresa Heredia remind us that "Middle Reach is not all the same . . . the cobbly, riverbed soil of Rochioli gives beautifully-pure Pinot Noir; whereas the finer, silty Yolo series soil in Allen across the road produces earthier, more savory, and often exotically-spiced Pinot Noirs."

SANTA ROSA PLAIN: The flatter area east and south of the Middle Reach is not quite as warm as its northern neighbor, but the area is among the warmest in the broader appellation (cold pockets in flatter areas, however, are particularly susceptible

to frost). Soils vary but are predominantly in the clay-based Huichica series, in contrast with the Goldridge sandy loam associated with most of the Russian River Valley. Pinot Noirs are brightly red-fruited, suggesting cherry, raspberry, and strawberry, along with ample acidity. Vineyards that produce wines highly representative of these characteristics are Pellegrini Olivet

Lane, Benovia Winery Martaella, and Leras. Santa Rosa Plain Chardonnays are citrusy and often steely with minerality, epitomized by Benovia's La Pommeraiie, Russian River Vineyards' Tina's, and La Crema's Saralee's. You'll also still find Russian River Valley Zinfandel planted by Italians (notably, the Mancini, Pelletti, Barbieri, Gambogi, and Saitone families) as long ago as the 1890s in the Santa Rosa Plain.

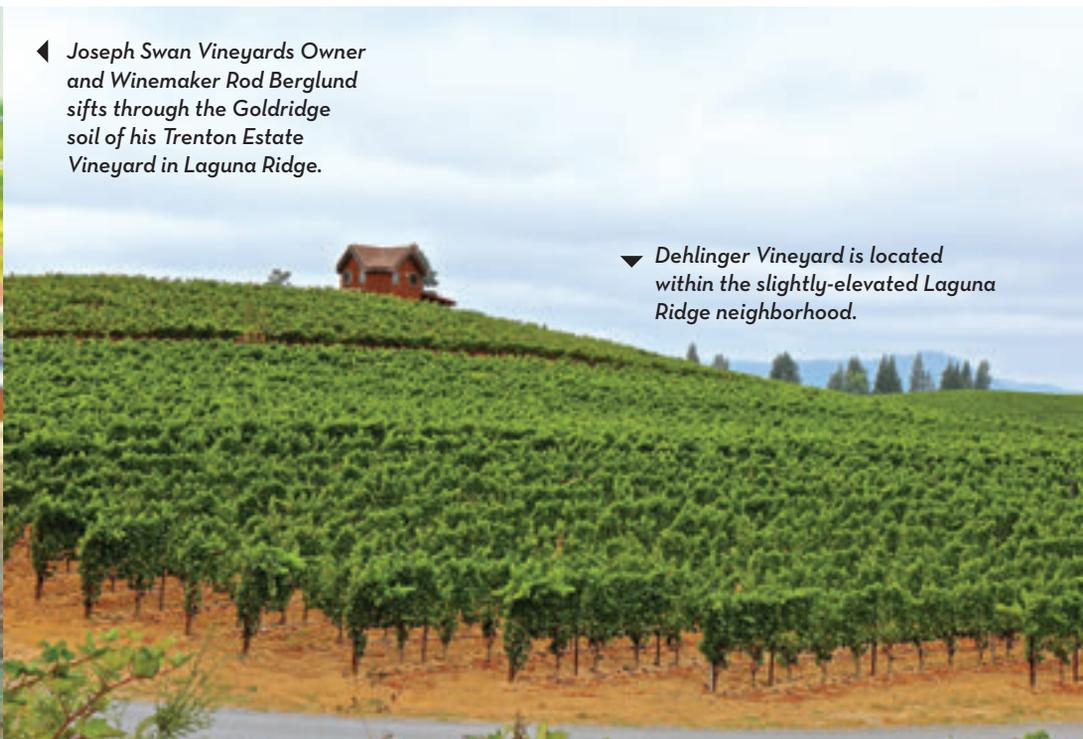
LAGUNA RIDGE: As the name implies, this is a slightly-elevated line of Goldridge sandy loam-cruised hills running in a north-south direction between Green Valley to the west and Santa Rosa Plain to the east. Laguna Ridge's climate is cooler than the Middle Reach and most of Santa Rosa Plain, but not as cold as Sebastopol Hills further south. Fog cover gives diurnal swings of 40 degrees during much of the growing season, resulting in wines defined by vibrant acidity. Pinot Noirs are richly structured with brambly, brushy spices (as with Dehlinger, Joseph Swan's Trenton Estate, and Merry Edwards' Klopp Ranch); Chardonnays (notably, Kistler Vineyards' Vine Hill as well as those from Ritchie and Zio Tony vineyards) are often minerally yet opulent and full-scaled.

Mike Sullivan is the Winemaker for Benovia Winery in the Santa Rosa Plain neighborhood.





◀ *Joseph Swan Vineyards Owner and Winemaker Rod Berglund sifts through the Goldridge soil of his Trenton Estate Vineyard in Laguna Ridge.*

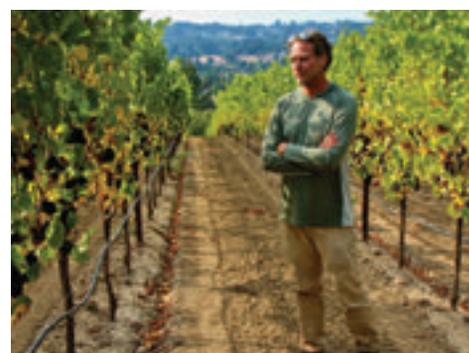


▼ *Dehlinger Vineyard is located within the slightly-elevated Laguna Ridge neighborhood.*

GREEN VALLEY: Among the coolest and foggiest neighborhoods, Green Valley is also dominated by Goldridge sandy loam. Although elevations and exposures in this hilly AVA vary considerably—higher elevation slopes can be blazing in hot vintages—Green Valley Pinot Noirs veer toward darker red fruits (black cherry, blueberry, and cranberry), forest floor nuances, and sumptuous textures. Chardonnays are acid-driven, deep, and sometimes long-lived. Dutton Ranch cultivates numer-

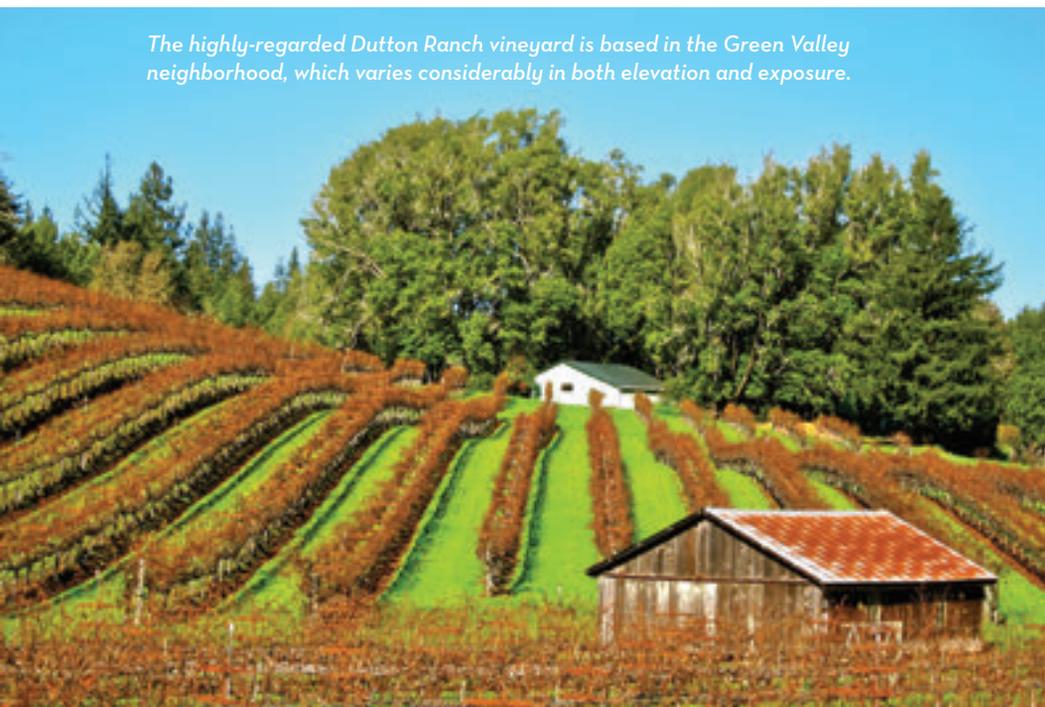
ous blocks in this neighborhood, which is also associated with vineyards such as Martinelli Winery's Jackass Hill, Keefer Ranch, Heintz, Hawk Hill, Hallberg, Iron Horse, and Marimar's Don Miguel.

SEBASTOPOL HILLS: Located at Russian River Valley's southernmost point, Sebastopol Hills' close proximity to Bodega Bay and the Petaluma Gap makes it the coldest, foggiest, and windiest



Balletto Vineyards Winemaker Anthony Beckman in Sebastopol Hills.

The highly-regarded Dutton Ranch vineyard is based in the Green Valley neighborhood, which varies considerably in both elevation and exposure.



of the five neighborhoods. Chardonnays can exhibit elevated acidity, lemon/citrus intensity, and sensations of mineral and silk, while Pinot Noirs are deep in black cherry and sometimes blueberry—or even with a pomegranate-like zip. Lean, acid-driven profiles are often savory with non-fruit qualities, but they can also retain a billowing, penetratingly-intense core of fruit. Prime examples of this iconic style of Russian River Valley Pinot Noirs are Balletto Vineyards' Burnside and Sexton Hill bottlings; Merry Edwards Winery's Meredith; Kosta-Browne's Kanzler; Littorai's The Pivot; and Klopp's Thorn Ridge, as well as the Pinot Noirs of Pratt, Maboroshi, DuNah, Umino, Halleck, and Suacci. ❧

For more information, visit the Russian River Valley Winegrowers website at rrvw.org.

The lineup of wines featured in the Central European seminar represented six countries.



Aiming at **THE CENTER**

**EXPLORING
THE WINES OF
CENTRAL
EUROPE AT
SOMMCON IN
SAN DIEGO**

**BY MICHELLE BALL
PHOTOS BY JEREMY BALL**

Despite the long history of winemaking in Central Europe, its wines' presence on the international market is in a stage of rediscovery after recovering from decades of Soviet occupation following World War II. During SommCon in San Diego, SommFoundation Chairman of the Board Jay James, MS, led a packed room of attendees through a captivating session that spanned six countries from the region, delving deep into what James called "the tremendous diversity" of its grape varieties.

Many of the indigenous grape varieties from these areas have survived despite outside pressure to undergo a winemaking process that's conventional and, as a result, profitable. As presenter and *SOMM Journal* Editor-at-Large Cliff Rames put it, "Some of these indigenous grapes have endured, and luckily we get to taste them."

REGION/COUNTRY:

TOKAJ, HUNGARY

The appellation of Tokaj in north-eastern Hungary is one of the world's oldest, most historically-celebrated winegrowing regions with a legacy dating back to the ninth century. Its wines were so highly regarded that it was declared the first closed winegrowing region in 1737, yet Tokaj nearly disappeared from international consciousness during the second half of the 20th century.

Following World War II, Soviets who viewed the grapes solely as commodities occupied the region. After enduring decades of policy and practices geared toward mass production until the fall of communism in 1989, the vineyards are again being privatized and young, innovative winemakers are working to re-establish Tokaj's former reputation.

One such company manager and winemaker is Péter Molnár, Ph.D., of Patricius Winery, who kicked off the session on the wines of Tokaj. "We tried to recover the knowledge that existed here before the Second World War," he told attendees. "Because of the socialist era, everyone had to sell their grapes to the state-owned company and the knowledge of the terroir nearly disappeared." In recent years, there has been significant financial investment to elevate Tokaj's presence worldwide while adapting to modern-day tastes through the pursuit of dry wines.



Patricius Winery General Manager and Chief Enologist Dr. Péter Molnár, Ph.D., reviews the history of Tokaj.



The Central European panel from left to right: Dr. Péter Molnár, Ph.D., General Manager and Chief Enologist of Patricius Winery; Cliff Rames, Editor-at-Large for The SOMM Journal and Founder of Wines of Croatia; Ioana Benga, Export Manager for Jidvei Winery; Jay James, MS, Chairman of the Board of SommFoundation; Christina Boutari, Winery Ambassador for Boutari; and Lars Leicht, Director of Trade Development for Castello Banfi Wines.



Jay James, MS, leads the panel on Central European wines at SommCon in San Diego.



Tokaj's geology offers idyllic conditions for its racy, late-ripening varieties. "Every hillside is different," attested Molnár, adding that single-vineyard winemaking is the focus in the region. Tokaj also contains more than 400 ancient volcanoes, which emerged 14–16 million years ago from the sea; as the water receded, the sediment left behind created a dynamic mix of soil types that generally encourage acid retention in grapes. Roughly 60 percent of the area is planted to Furmint, an indigenous, late-ripening variety—and the source for the revered Aszú wines—that takes particularly well to volcanic soils. "This is the best grape to express the differences in the terroirs," Molnár said.

MÁD 2015 Dry Furmint, Mád, Tokaj, Hungary

Dry Furmint has quickly assumed the title of a fashionable new wine in just a few short years. István Szepsy, Owner of Szepsy Winery, believed the grape's profile was well-suited for a crisp, dry style when he began experimenting with the wine in 2000. Since the grape is susceptible to *Botrytis cinerea*, the first step in ensuring a successful production process was to isolate clones resistant to the fungus.

István Szepsy Jr., Szepsy's son, represents the 18th generation of his family's winemaking history as he leads the winemaking team for MAD Wine and Szent Tamás Winery. That team is directly responsible for releasing one of the first dry Furmints to the international market. "There are very few wines that remind me of it," James said of Furmint during the seminar. "Albariño comes to mind, but not really, so it's a very unique palate profile." The low-alcohol, high-acid wine has broad palate appeal, especially for those who enjoy racy white wines with dense minerality like Chablis and Riesling.

The effort to push forth innovations like dry Furmint is transforming the country's wine-making traditions and increasing Tokaj's presence in the market as it continues to modernize in the post-communist era.

Tasting Notes Petrol, chalk, and green apple aromas are echoed on the palate with great length and minerality. —Michelle Ball



Wines of Excellence Project Director Enikő Magyar, SOMM Journal Publisher/Editorial Director Meridith May, and Vinum Tokaj International President Attila Balla helped oversee the Hungarian section of the seminar.

Patricius 2006 Aszú 6 Puttonyos, Tokaj, Hungary

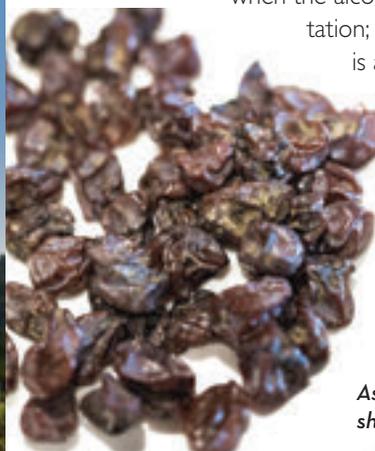
"The uniqueness of the aszú wine is the aszú berry itself," Molnár said as he offered a bowl of berries harvested a week before the seminar for us to sample. "We pick these berries one by one, and the fungus forms with the help of the local microclimate." Morning fog paired with ample sunlight during the growing season aid the fungus that grows on the Furmint grapes.

Since the grapes must be harvested individually, producing the wine is an extremely labor-intensive process. Each skilled worker at Patricius can harvest an average of 10–15 kilograms per day, and 95 percent of them are women: As Molnár puts it, men "don't have enough patience or the skills to pick them one by one. [Women] can do it much better."

Once the berries are picked, they hold their freshness for roughly 45 days while the base wine is made. The team at Patricius feels the optimal time for extraction and aromatics is made during early stages of fermentation. The aszú berries are added to the base wine when the alcohol content is around 6–8 percent during primary fermentation; once the pressing and fermentation is completed, the wine is aged in local Hungarian oak with gentle toasting to accentuate the flavor of the aszú berry itself without masking it.

Aging is dependent on the vintage: The 2006 was released to the market in 2016 after three years of barrel aging and seven years of aging in-bottle.

Tasting Notes Yellow peach, buttery pie crust, white mulberries, and avocado aromas. Crisp acidity balances the ripe stone fruit and honey character and causes the profile to really pop. Extreme length and silkiness. —M.B.



Aszú berries affected by noble rot were shared with seminar attendees.

REGION/COUNTRY:

TRANSYLVANIA, ROMANIA

The Jidvei Winery is in the Târnave DOC of the Transylvanian Highlands, located just north of the Carpathian Mountains that divide Romania in half. Because it's situated in one of the coolest growing regions in the country, Jidvei has planted almost the entirety of its estate vineyard to white grapes (a small share of red varieties is planted primarily for rosé and sparkling). "It's an area that's very good for aromatic wines because of the acidity, the cool climate, long summers, and long autumns that also allow for late harvest," explained Ioana Benga, Export Manager for Jidvei Winery. "Because of this, we are able to make wines that are a little bit special."

Romania's winemaking history dates back thousands of years, with the first written mentions of the Târnava Valley appearing around 400 B.C. But similarly to Tokaj in Hungary, the region has only recently been able to recommit to premium wine production in the wake of communism's decline. "In the past ten years, there's been an explosion of wineries in Romania," noted Benga. "They're smaller in size, but all of them are trying to bring something special to their wine. It's good for us as consumers because there's a lot of competition, so the wines are getting better and better."

According to Benga, Romania ranks 13th in total wine production worldwide—just slightly higher than New Zealand. "We drink most of our own wine, though we would like to bring it to other places, too," Benga said with a laugh.

Jidvei 2016 Maria Owner's Choice Pinot Gris, Transylvania, Romania

Benga poured Jidvei's premium "Owner's Choice" Pinot Gris, noting that the wine is "not a Romanian variety, but it's made in a way that I think is unique compared to other regions." The large, 2,500-hectare estate cultivates only 70 hectares (173 acres) of Pinot Gris, which is harvested manually just 15 minutes from the winery.



Jidvei's hyperoxidation approach puts it in what's sometimes known as "the brown juice club": During the hyperoxidation process, small amounts of oxygen are added to the must during primary fermentation, causing brown-colored particles to precipitate out. "The theory is to create an environment where all the compounds that are likely to oxidize during that first year of aging are oxidized now and settled out," James explained. "You sort of dispose of them early, leaving the fresh fruit and the beauty behind that's in danger of being wrecked."

Despite its increasing popularity, the process is quite risky and must be performed in an impeccably-clean environment with very precise temperature control.

Tasting Notes Pretty, white floral aromas with subtle hints of pear and fresh, mouthwatering green apple flavors. —M.B.



Ioana Benga, Export Manager for Jidvei Winery, reviews the region of Transylvania.

REGION/COUNTRY: CROATIA

“Croatia has an interesting connection to California,” said Cliff Rames as he described the quest for Zinfandel’s origins during his introduction of the Central European country. Although Primitivo was a DNA match for Zinfandel, the latter shared no relation with other grape varieties in Italy; this suggested its cultivation there was recent.

Geographically, Croatia appeared to be a plausible source, and once researchers began testing, they found numerous varieties that shared Zinfandel’s genetic material—including Plavac Mali. After years of study, they traced an exact match: seven vines that were locally called Crljenak Kaštelanski (historically known as Tribidrag) in the Dalmatia region of coastal Croatia.

Plavac Mali, native to the Adriatic Coast, is the offspring of Tribidrag and Dobričić. The region’s extremely dry conditions and lack of irrigation make viticulture difficult, and over the years, Plavac Mali was preferred over Zinfandel. “It held its acidity longer and had a thicker skin, which prevented disease,” explained Rames. “It also gave more structure to the wines in terms of tannin and was better managed in the vineyard.”

Milos 2007 Plavac Mali, Pelješac Peninsula, Dalmatia, Croatia

Rames presented a 2007 Plavac Mali from the Milos estate vineyard to show how well the wine can age despite its low acidity and higher alcohol content. The vineyard’s limestone terraces feature extreme 30-degree slopes that appear to be pure rock; trellising is considered sacrilege and vines are free to grow as they’re “left to their own devices in the blazing, rocky terrain of Croatia,” said Rames. The wine is fermented with native yeast and aged three years in neutral Slavonian oak.

Tasting Notes Intriguing aromas of mint, clove, and mushroom. On the palate, notes of bay leaf and green figs mingle around a tannic core of light roasted coffee, mint, chocolate, and plum pudding. A fascinating wine considering its maturity. —M.B.



Cliff Rames, Editor-at-Large of The SOMM Journal and Founder of Wines of Croatia, led SommCon attendees through both Croatia and Georgia.



REGION/COUNTRY: GEORGIA

It's not just Croatia that tugs at the wine-soaked heartstrings of Cliff Rames: Georgian wines earn a similar fondness. Archeological evidence points to southern Georgia as the earliest known cradle of winemaking; a recent find contained ample amounts of ancient grape pollen at a site in the region.

Grape-decorated pottery, estimated to be roughly 8,000 years old and containing residues of tartaric acid, was also found—a telltale sign of winemaking. In 2005, the Gotsa family discovered a 4,000-year-old bronze sword, another testimonial artifact to speak to the age of their four-hectare Asureti estate vineyard. Farmed Biodynamically, the vineyard is planted to 14 indigenous grape varieties, including Mtsvane.



Gotsa Family Wines 2013 Asureti Vineyard Mtsvane, Kartli, Georgia

Using traditional techniques, the winery team ferments the white Mtsvane grapes on the skins with native yeast in amphora vessels (called *qvevri*) for nine months. Holes are drilled in the amphora, and once fermentation is complete, the vessels are unplugged and the wine is gravity-fed into amphora below for an additional 16 months of aging. The resulting wine is bottled without filtration or sulfur.

The versatile style of these orange wines allows them to easily transition from course to course. "There's certainly enough tannin in this wine to go with steak," said Jay James. "I kind of feel like I need one at the moment!"

Tasting Notes Negroni-like aromas of dried Turkish apricots, orange peel, and hints of blonde tobacco. Tannic with flavors of burnt caramel and a slight hoppy quality on the finish. —M.B.



REGION/COUNTRY: SANTORINI, GREECE



Christina Boutari, Winery Ambassador for Boutari, represents Greek wines at the seminar.

Boutari Ambassador Christina Boutari's great-grandfather founded the winery in 1879, and it's since expanded throughout Greece to the islands of Santorini. The center of the island collapsed after the last major eruption in 1620 B.C., forming the half-moon of volcanic peaks seen today. Artifacts preserved by the ash prove that winemaking has occurred here for at least 3,700 years.

Santorini's warm and often extreme Mediterranean climate combined with its young, nutrient-deficient volcanic soils make farming nearly impossible for most crops. "You look at the soil and you think nothing could grow here, and for 200 years nothing did," Boutari said. "In fact, all that really grows here are vines, fava beans, tomatoes, and capers. Yet, the vines have thrived." Volcanic soils are typically very well-drained, but in Santorini, sheets of volcanic ash fused together to create a sponge-like surface that retains the precious drops of precipitation. This surface serves to aid the vines during the arid growing season.

The island's 1,000 hectares of grapes are cultivated using a unique, basket-like training system called *gyristi*, which causes the vines to form a canopy around the clusters inside. The canopies then protect the fruit from the island's high winds and harsh summers ("If you're looking for traditionally-trained grape vines, they're not there," said James, who visited Santorini last summer).

Because of its soil composition, Santorini was never affected by phylloxera and the root systems are 400–500 years old. The "basket" is removed roughly every 70 years, leaving one dormant bud which blossoms into a new vine on the old root system. "Santorini was almost like a laboratory for us," asserted James. "We got to see these young vines with old root systems that had incredible depth of minerality."

Boutari 2016 Assyrtiko, PDO Santorini, Greece

The indigenous white grape variety Assyrtiko dominates the region's plantings, occupying roughly 70 percent of the vineyards. "The wine has high acidity and a metallic, mineral character," Boutari said. "It even has a saltiness on the finish."



REGION/COUNTRY: SICILY, ITALY

The ever-charming Lars Leicht, Director of Trade Development for Castello Banfi Wines, set the scene as he introduced the Sicilian region of Italy: “We’ll start with a news flash—Sicily has seceded from the Italian union and has migrated to join Central Europe. They’ve also taken up a new national motto, saying, ‘Marsala, it’s not just for chicken anymore,’” exclaimed Leicht as the room erupted in laughter.

Although Sicily isn’t exactly in central Europe, Marsala shares similar struggles with its Eastern European neighbors in that its reputation has largely disappeared from the international scene. Due to the region’s high temperatures, its wines were historically made from overripe grapes; the high sugar concentration and solera process also allowed for long-term aging.

In the late 1700s, British merchant John Woodhouse traveled to Sicily and tasted Marsala. Believing that the wine could compete with the popular Ports, Madeiras, and Sherries of the time, he introduced Marsala to the international stage.



Florio 2003 Targa Marsala, Superiore Riserva Semisecco

Less than a century later after Woodhouse’s arrival in Sicily, the Florio family purchased the original Woodhouse wineries. “They still, to this day, have some of the greatest stocks of wines and a tremendous collection of older Marsala,” asserted Leicht, who hopes to reintroduce the market to Marsala by highlighting bottlings like the Targa that serve as a delicious apéritif with cheeses, nuts, and olives.

Tasting Notes Expressive aromas of toasted almonds and Medjool dates. Flavors of hazelnut, cooked brown rice, honey-tamarind, and lingering burnt orange on the finish with an oily texture. The honey-colored, semi-dry Marsala is aged for a minimum of seven years and made from 100% Grillo grapes. *SJ*



Lars Leicht, Director of Trade Development for Castello Banfi Wines, helps renew faith and much-deserved interest in Marsala.

The MYTHS BUSTER

DR. PAULO LOPES DISPELS LONG-HELD BELIEFS ABOUT CORK

by Deborah Parker Wong

WHEN IT COMES TO WINE STORAGE, old habits are hard to break. But Dr. Paulo Lopes, Research and Development Manager at Amorim Cork, advises that if temperature and humidity are maintained at the correct levels, wine can be stored upright with no ill effects. In fact, sparkling wine should *always* be stored upright: a little-known fact that seems lost on many wine experts. During the course of his groundbreaking research, Lopes has seen no difference in the amount of oxygen found in wines that have been stored horizontally or vertically.

Using science to debunk the myths that persist within wine culture is liberating largely because the facts can be even more compelling than the misleading maxims. In his recent presentation at the San Francisco Wine School on the reductive and oxidative nature of wine, Lopes made it abundantly clear that, after bottling, the main source of oxygen in wine comes from the cork itself. Atmospheric oxygen doesn't make its way through the cork (neither does mold, for that matter); rather, the air trapped in cork's lenticels, or pores, diffuses into the wine over a period of roughly three years.

Wines bottled under cork are impressionable in their youth (they're a bit like humans in this way). How a wine ages over an extended period depends largely on the amount of oxygen released by the cork during the wine's first few years in the cellar. Not surprisingly, different grades of cork contain different amounts of oxygen: A longer, higher-quality Grade A cork with fewer lenticels will release less. "Longer corks are much more homogeneous in oxygen release," said Lopes. "Also, due to the [sloping] shape of the bottle neck, the cork is less compressed and thus releases less oxygen."

Corks used to seal wine bottles have a lifespan of about 25 years, after which they begin to lose elasticity and can start to let atmospheric air into the bottle along their sides. "After ten years, a cork will lose only 1–2 percent of its elasticity," said Lopes. "And if stored in contact with the wine, it will absorb about 3 millimeters of wine."

But it's the temperature and humidity of the storage space that ultimately dictate the lifespan of the cork, which initially consists of 80–90 percent air: an amount that decreases by 10–15 percent over time. Lopes explains that at temperatures below 20 degrees Celsius (68 degrees Fahrenheit) and at 50 percent humidity, the head space in a wine bottle is as moist as vapor. Above 20 degrees Celsius, temperature has a huge impact on natural cork; it loses humidity faster than it can take in moisture from the wine and will eventually dry out. In the case of sparkling wine, corks absorb both liquid and gas as they pull carbon dioxide (CO₂) from the wine. The classic mushroom shape of a sparkling-wine cork is formed by its contact with CO₂.



PHOTO BY FORLASEN VIA THINKSTOCK



Dr. Paulo Lopes, Research and Development Manager at Amorim Cork.

WHO'S AT FAULT?

For many reviewers and wine judges, cork taint can be a scapegoat for a host of problems hovering elusively below the sensory threshold. “We see reductive and oxidative faults occurring at a much higher incidence than *brettanomyces* and 2,4,6-Trichloroanisole [TCA],” Lopes said during his presentation.

In tackling the dynamic winemakers face between working anaerobically or reductively and aerobically, Lopes dispels the myth that the former can successfully “freeze the wine in time.” Reactions can occur in the absence of oxygen, with the most notable being the formation of smelly sulfur compounds.

Lopes furthered this point in his research by using an unadulterated sample as a control along with four doctored samples of Chilean Sauvignon Blanc. He selected this control wine for its thiols—aroma compounds with tropical-fruit and citrus flavors. “Sauvignon Blanc has distinct markers; it’s very rich in sulfur-like compounds, including methoxypyrazines, which have grassy, vegetal notes and can be an indication of reduction,” he explained.

Oxidation in wine can occur via two pathways—alcohol or phenols. Either way, it’s relatively easy to identify and can be attributed to a host of factors not related to cork. Browning in white or red wines is a dead giveaway of oxidation. Too little nitrogen in the vineyard, heavy-handed pressing in the winery, and bottling at low temperatures can all contribute to oxidation.

The result of alcoholic oxidation is acetaldehyde, a sherried or aldehydic character that’s cherished in oxidative-style fortified wines like Sherry but detracts from the quality of still table wines. This results in a bruised-apple character on a palate that is flattened, dry, diluted, and bitter.

Reduction, on the other hand, doesn’t affect color; it’s detected by aromas and can cause astringent, buttery, or metallic flavors that originate from natural or added sulfur compounds. This family of volatile sulfur compounds can have a positive or negative impact on wine. Desirable compounds are formed by long-chain thiols, while the undesirable compounds that mask primary-fruit character and produce reductive off-flavors are short-chain thiols.

Because yeast produces sulfur dioxide during fermentation and there are other naturally-occurring sources of sulfites in wine, winemakers want to reduce the potential formation of sulfur compounds. Lopes showed us three reductive faults: hydrogen sulfide, which has the smell of rotten eggs; ethanethiol, a compound that’s reminiscent of garlic, natural gas, and pesticides; and one of the simplest sulfur compounds, methanethiol, which reeks of dirty drains and cabbage. For the latter, prevention is the only real “cure.”

Through these faults, Lopes demonstrated the vital role played by the oxygen transmission rate (OTR) in wines and the effect that particular closures have on the potential for reduction to emerge after bottling. In his studies, screwcaps were most effective at increasing levels of both good and undesirable volatile sulfur compounds (VSC); natural cork, meanwhile, fared better in showing lower levels of bad compounds and had an equal impact on certain types of good VSC. S

Mining for Gems in the Right Bank

TASTING THROUGH THE
WINES OF **POMEROL**
AND **FRONSAC**

story and photos by Panos Kakaviatos

THE POMEROL APPELLATION next to Saint-Émilion produces some of Bordeaux's greatest Merlot-driven wines. Pétrus is the most famous, but brands like Lafleur, Vieux Château Certan, L'Évangile, Trotanoy, and Le Pin, among others, represent the cream of the crop of some 150 estates packed into an area roughly three kilometers wide by four long.

One such top estate, Château La Conseillante, hosted a 20-vintage tasting late last year that showed how "fine, sensual, and seductive" Pomerol wine is, to quote Estate Manager Marielle Cazaux. The 1995–2015 tasting also yielded surprises that would interest sommeliers with access to these vintages.

The best for current drinking? The famous 1998, which has a floral nose that precedes a gorgeous palate of elegance

and power contradicting its age. "People in the industry always want this wine after trying it," said Cazaux. The 2001, meanwhile, exudes succulent truffle notes but doesn't match the finish of the 1998. Don't open any 2000s yet: Though the vintage already displays Pauillac-like grip, it should be splendid in five years. The tasty 1995—evolved and tertiary with champignon and leafy earth—would best be enjoyed now, whereas the underrated 1997 displays greater freshness and smoother tannins.

The 2005 beguiles with refined opulence and power, silky tannins, and distinct truffle and floral notes, but the two most recently bottled vintages, 2014 and 2015, are particularly stunning: The former exudes fresh, ripe red and black fruit with mint and tannic grip, while the latter is riper, deeper, and denser.

Pomerol Shows Team Spirit

Not all Pomerol is equal. Even in such a small area, terroir varies, as do blends that may include majority Cabernet Franc as well as some Cabernet Sauvignon. But Cazaux stresses that Pomerol's microclimate is common to all. "We know that streams flowing in certain directions cause lower rainfall than in nearby Saint-Émilion," she explained.

Another notable trait of Pomerol is its team spirit, enabled not only by the small size of the appellation but also by its lack of formal ranking. Saint-Émilion revisits its official ranking every ten years, making it more susceptible to fads, competition, and lawsuits, while Pomerol enjoys greater cohesion.

In their mutual goal of pursuing cleaner and more-precise winemaking, estates in both regions often share information on the latest vat-room and vineyard tech-



◀ *Château La Conseillante Estate Manager Marielle Cazaux with bottles of her Pomerol-based Bordeaux.*



◀ The vineyards of La Conseillante beyond the winery's gate.



The 2015 vintage from the largest estate in Fronsac, Château de La Rivière. ▶

niques to improve overall quality. For example, the aptly-named Pomerol Seduction functions as a group of estates, among them La Conseillante, that organizes group tastings (the wines range in price per bottle from \$40–\$240). “We don’t compete,” Cazaux said. “We work together.”

As most in the industry know, prices for top brands are reaching ever-higher thresholds. Pomerol, however, produces economically-priced wines that have improved in quality over the past decade.

Two other tastings I attended in December 2017—one at the Libourne office of pioneering Pomerol producer Jean-Pierre Moueix and the other with the Grand Cercle, a group of some 160 Bordeaux wineries that includes several Pomerols—prove that one can find quality Pomerol for less than \$50 per bottle.

Take Château Mazeyres, a 25-hectare, Certified Organic property that converted to Biodynamic viticulture in 2015. Here, gravelly, sandy, and clay soils yield excellent wine for a fair price. While it doesn’t exhibit the same density of higher-caliber Pomerol, the just-bottled 2015 vintage exhibits smooth succulence and fine depth. Even better is Château Bourgneuf: It’s sumptuous and flavorful with added nuance and elegance.

The wines of these and other value-conscious estates—including Châteaux La Pointe, Rouget, and La Grave—cost less than \$50 per bottle yet share the sensuality and finesse that denote Pomerol generally.

Long considered a subappellation of Saint-Émilion, Pomerol was granted independent status in the early 20th century. Its gently rolling plateau, located 19 miles (roughly 31 kilometers) northeast

of Bordeaux and two miles from the city of Libourne, slopes towards the Isle river valley and its confluence with the Dordogne. With just under 800 hectares of vines, its grapes are grown on soils that can be divided into three broad categories, Cazaux explains: the unique blue clay over iron known as the *crasse de fer* (found mainly at Pétrus but also at La Conseillante, among others) that yields wines of elegance and power; gravelly soils that yield very robust and powerful wines; and lighter, sandier soils responsible for more supple wines with lighter tannins. It’s to these soils that much of the less-expensive Pomerol wines can trace their origins.

“The less-expensive brands work especially well for restaurants,” explained Stéphan Maure of the *Vino Strada* bistro in Strasbourg, France. “They bear the name of Pomerol and its refinement but do not cost an arm and a leg.”

A Fine Showing from Fronsac

In recent years, the lesser-known Right Bank appellation of Fronsac has been enjoying justified critical acclaim for Merlot-driven wines made from excellent clay and limestone terroirs. Of similar size at 840 hectares, Fronsac is but a ten-minute drive from Pomerol, yet its dramatically hillier terrain is much different. Cooler soils of more limestone than clay make some observers wonder whether warmer vintages due to climate change are benefiting this appellation.

Ironically, Fronsac once was more famous than Saint-Émilion. In his experience with Right Bank wine-producing regions, Professor Henri Enjalbert stressed that until the beginning of the 19th century, Fronsac wines sold for higher prices than

those of the “best terroirs” of Saint-Émilion. Although forgotten for various reasons during the mid-19th and much of the 20th centuries, Fronsac today features dynamic, quality-minded producers who craft excellent wines often costing less than \$30 a bottle.

While assessing some 2015s from bottle in December at the Grand Cercle tasting, I found that many Fronsac wines confirmed fine showings from barrel nearly two years ago. Take Château Dalem: Its wines are rich and opulent, as its south-facing vineyards benefit from fine solar exposure. The 2015 vintage is particularly smooth, with juiciness and gravitas (one would not easily guess its 15% alcohol content). Even better is Château Haut-Carles; at 14% ABV, it conveys fresher floral aromatics with a hint of iron-like earthiness that lends density. This estate—with primarily south- and east-facing vineyards spanning some 20 hectares—has been consistent over at least the past five years, and the 2015 combines focus, freshness, and bright fruit.

The largest estate in Fronsac, Château de La Rivière, counts among the most beautiful in Bordeaux. Its vineyards enjoy considerable solar exposure on impressive slopes with easy drainage. The 2015 features spicy plum and tobacco-like aspects on a smooth and contoured palate that easily beckons further drinking—a dream selection for premium by-the-glass pours.

Sommeliers should seek out these and other Fronsac producers, which have shown remarkable qualitative consistency in recent years. Indeed, the quality may be equal to that of the early 19th century, though prices have not reached the “glory days” of that bygone era . . . at least, not yet. **SJ**

The SommCon seminar featured 11 producers from Rías Baixas to emphasize the great depth of expression in Albariño.

The Bright White Star of *Rías Baixas*



A RECAP OF THE RÍAS
BAIXAS **ALBARIÑO** SEMINAR
AT **SOMMCON**

by Michelle Ball / photos by Jeremy Ball



Advanced Sommelier Jill Zimorski led the in-depth Albariño tasting at SommCon in San Diego.



The extensive Albariño lineup poured at the seminar.

IN ITS THIRD YEAR, SommCon provided an engaging opportunity last November for sommeliers and wine enthusiasts to sharpen their knowledge by participating in a diverse slate of seminars in San Diego. Each session served as an in-depth crash course that packed a day's worth of studies into 90 minutes.

A deeper focus on the Albariños of Rías Baixas was led by Jill Zimorski, an Advanced Sommelier with contagious enthusiasm and a knack for storytelling. Zimorski traveled to Spain during her tenure as the first beverage director for José Andrés' ThinkFoodGroup; while there, she immersed herself in the native wine varieties and soon fell in love with those of Rías Baixas.

While the grape was originally thought to be a descendent of Riesling, its exact parentage is unknown—though DNA evidence does show it's indigenous to northwest Spain. Rías Baixas possesses a significant maritime influence, and salinity is a common characteristic of the grape. "The climate, the weather, the soil, and the conditions in [the northwestern Spanish region] Galicia are all really unique to the success of Albariño," asserted Zimorski during the seminar.

Galicia's climate is generally cool with a high rainfall of roughly 60 inches annually; however, abundant sunshine also allows grapes to fully ripen and maintain fruity aromatics while preserving Albariño's hallmark acidity. Granitic "mother soils" with more slate and schist in the southern DOs seem to come through in the wines: "Even though you can't quantify it, it's there," said Zimorski.

The tasting centered primarily around Albariño from the Val do Salnés appellation; a northwestern sub-zone of Rías Baixas, it boasts the highest density of plantings. "Stylistically, the wines tend to have a little more melon and citrus character," Zimorski explained. "As you move further south to O Rosal and Condado do Tea, the wines tend to be richer, riper, and more overtly aromatic with more yellow peach and more ripe fruits." While there are noticeable differences between the subregions, Zimorski believes the winemaker's decisions can overpower terroir. For blind-tasting purposes, she said she thinks "it's a 50-50 consideration in terms of where the wines come from, but also how are they being made."

After a lively discussion of 11 wines, Zimorski seemed to have turned a few guests into Albariño enthusiasts. "There's nothing funky, there's nothing dirty; it's just wet sand and wet rocks, and it tastes like sunshine," she quipped.

Tasting Highlights

Albariño can often be a tricky wine to identify in a blind tasting, as it mimics other varieties depending on where it's grown. "I was told when I first started tasting wine that Albariño will smell like Viognier but taste like Riesling, and that kind of illustrates the difference," explained Zimorski, adding that she'd also include Chablis partly because of the leesy quality many Albariños possess. Zimorski walked seminar attendees through the many expressions of Albariño, its history in Galicia, and why Rías Baixas is where the grape shows at its best. Here are some highlights from the tasting:



Condes de Albarei 2016 Albariño, Val do Salnés (\$15) Citrus-dominated aromas with hints of fresh apricot. Racy with delicious salinity and flavors of Meyer lemon zest on the finish.



Bodegas As Laxas 2016 Albariño, Condado de Tea (\$18) White jasmine, pear, and lemon verbena aromas. Herbaceous with sandstone minerality and oyster water notes that frame the mid-palate and allow the acid to pop.



Pazo de Señorans 2009 Selección de Añada Albariño, Val do Salnés (\$47) The only aged wine in the lineup and a valid argument for Albariño's aging potential. Viognier-like floral aromas mingle with fresh apricot and Marcona almonds. Minerality combines with salty sea breezes and lemony custard (a result of 30 months on the lees); they take your palate on a journey and fool you into thinking this may be Chablis. 🍷



{ world of pinot noir }

PINOT-Permutation

THE 2018 WORLD
OF PINOT NOIR
EVENT WILL
REFLECT ON
THE VARIETY'S
DISTINCTIONS

by Randy Caparoso

HAVING ATTENDED MORE than half of the World of Pinot Noir (WOPN) celebrations that have unfolded in California's Central Coast region over the past 18 years, this I can say with confidence: There is no better annual event in which to gauge the steady and dizzying ascent of American Pinot Noir.

Put it this way: When the inaugural WOPN was held nearly two decades ago, Oregon Pinot Noirs were still commonly considered feeble, Central Coast Pinot Noirs were characterized as mostly herbaceous, and North Coast Pinot Noirs were thought to be predictably fat or coarse. It is not so much solely that our Pinot Noir specialists have begun to nail an amazing balance of varietal intensity over the past decade, though that feat is impressive enough. Instead, as Thomas Fogarty Winery winemaker Nathan Kandler observed following last year's WOPN, it's more so that winemakers are finally getting away from emulating a homogenous "ideal" of Pinot Noir.

This year, ardent fans will taste, experience, and explore every nuance of the varietal at the 2018 World of Pinot Noir, planned for March 2–3 at the Ritz-Carlton Bacara resort in Santa Barbara.

The World of Pinot Noir will unfold at the stunning Ritz-Carlton Bacara resort in Santa Barbara March 2-3.

PHOTO COURTESY OF WORLD OF PINOT NOIR



Alma Rosa Winery's Richard Sanford—who once upon a time labored at his Sanford & Benedict Vineyard in the 1970s as the only Pinot Noir grower in Santa Barbara—recently summarized the latest Pinot-permutation for *The SOMM Journal*. “I am delighted that, after 45 years growing the grape, we are now witnessing Pinot Noir evolving into definable regional characteristics,” he says. Sanford also cites “pioneering of new sites,” “new clones,” “inquisitive young winemakers,” and “maturation of older plantings” (the “rustic, youthful edges” of iconic vineyards now being “rounded out by age”) as some of the major factors of this recent breakthrough.

PHOTO COURTESY OF TENLEY FOHL PHOTOGRAPHY



An extensive flight of Pinot Noir at a WOPN seminar.

As in past WOPN weekends, 250 select wineries from around the world—mostly California, but also from Burgundy, Oregon, New Zealand, and other regions—will participate in seminar, dinners, and more. The aptly-named Grand Tastings, meanwhile, will feature well over 500 bottlings of the latest groundbreaking Pinot Noirs, and there will be plenty of opportunities to hear from and converse with the best and brightest minds in the, well, *world* of Pinot Noir.

Read on for an abbreviated summary of some of the marquee events planned for the upcoming 2018 World of Pinot Noir. To register or find more information, visit worldofpinotnoir.com.

World of Pinot Noir Seminars

Discovering Cool Climate Terroirs of the Central Coast: A winemaker panel exploring the cool-climate terroirs and the highest-scoring Pinot Noirs of California's Central Coast will be led by *Wine Enthusiast* Contributing Editor Matt Kettmann.

Attack the Clones: Taste and discern the differences between key Pinot Noir clones with a winemaker panel including Greg Morthole of Davis Bynum, Heidi Bridenhagen of MacRostie Winery & Vineyards, and others.

World of Pinot Noir Seminar Luncheons

Exploring the Oregon-Burgundy Connection: A winemaker panel and tasting led by *Wine & Spirits Magazine* Editor Joshua Greene will explore Oregon's phenomenally close ties to Burgundy with a three-course Pinot Noir lunch prepared by Ritz-Carlton Bacara.

Annual International Pinot Noir Luncheon: Ritz-Carlton's Bacara culinary team will serve three courses to complement the wines of guest winemakers gathered from Austria, Burgundy, Chile, New Zealand, and South Africa's Stellenbosch region.

Tasting Through the Best of Burgundy: San Francisco Wine School Founder David Glancy, MS, will lead a panel of Burgundy experts and winemakers through a tasting and discussion of the best of Burgundy's most recent vintages. Glancy will also explore latest developments from the region, and the seminar will be capped by three-course lunch from Ritz-Carlton Bacara.

Rosé Lawn Party Atop the Bluff: A daytime lawn party will feature some of the finest international Pinot Noir rosés on Angel Oak's veranda, which overlooks a spectacular ocean bluff.

World of Pinot Noir Dinners

The Art of Japanese Cuisine and Freeman Winery Pinot Noir: Acclaimed chef Ken Tominaga of PABU (San Francisco and Boston) and Hana (Sonoma) will craft a multi-course, umami-inspired feast around the exquisite Pinot Noirs of Freeman Winery presented by owners Akiko and Ken Freeman.

The Bounties of the Santa Maria Valley—A Celebratory Farm-to-Fork Dinner: Ritz-Carlton Bacara Executive Chef Umit Kaygusuz will show why Santa Barbara is just as famous for its eponymous, locally-raised beef as it is for its fine Pinot Noirs.

101 Years of Single-Vineyard Pinot Noir Along the Historic Highway 101: Celebrated Pinot Noir pioneers Greg Brewer of Brewer-Clifton, Adam Lee of Siduri Wines, Wells Guthrie of Copain Wines, and Jonathan Nagy of Byron will combine 101 years of collective experience to tell their stories, making for an evening of food, laughter, and, of course, fabulous Pinot Noir.

Vintage Burgundy Dinner with the Guild of Sommeliers: This extraordinary, six-course culinary Pinot Noir experience will be hosted by the Guild of Sommeliers, with Master Sommelier Jay Fletcher leading a tasting of classic Burgundies from the Guild's extensive cellar. 



Narrative and Service

INDUSTRY VETERAN **JOEY RYAN** TAKES ADVANTAGE OF HIS EXPERIENCE IN RUNNING THE TU BEVERAGE PROGRAM

by Jessie Birschbach

JOEY RYAN HAS worked at every level of fine dining in a career spanning nearly two decades, and now he's capitalizing on this invaluable background as the Beverage Director at Tu, a new restaurant in Charleston, South Carolina.

After partnering with Duolan Walker-Li and Josh Walker to bring the popular Xiao Bao Biscuit to the Holy City, Ryan reunited the trio to create Tu's eclectic concept. The restaurant's small menu of shareable plates centers around Asian flavors while still remaining cleverly influenced by other cultures. "'Tu' basically refers to everything under heaven, so for us it's the rest of earth," Ryan explains. "Xiao Bao Biscuit offers guests cuisine from kick-ass grandmothers and street carts from various parts of Asia. At Tu, we're taking a similar approach to flavors but not restricting the menu to Asia. That provides lots of new pairing opportunities."

When it comes to wine pairings, Ryan prefers to remain as hard to peg down as Tu's concept. "I love non-geographical wine pairings, and some of the dishes we've offered from Asia beg to be paired with wines found in the south of France, for example," he adds. "We're also creating cocktails and pairing wines that relate to at least one specific dish on a rotating menu."

Like the multicultural food options, Tu's cocktail list reflects an "anything goes" approach—with mezcal as a prime example. "Years ago, mezcal was this weird category on the shelf that some bartenders loved to love, but many others really didn't," Ryan says. "It was something that offered the smokiness of Scotch, but wasn't only a one tonal product." When creating the restaurant's Harlem Rose cocktail—with rose liqueur, fresh lemon, and an aromatic floater of Plantation Pineapple Rum with Illegal Mezcal—for example, Ryan made sure not to mask the taste of the base spirit. "I wanted to celebrate the smokiness of mezcal but show that it could play nice with more elegant components," he adds. *§J*



PHOTO: TAYLOR DRAKE

Joey Ryan, Beverage Director at Tu in Charleston, SC.

ADVICE FROM AN INDUSTRY VETERAN

"Trends in the industry seem to change every year or so, from interest in different styles of wine, to programs that are heavily based on cocktails, to the increased attention craft beer received, especially after the recession. The most valuable component of any program is narrative and service: If a bar or restaurant doesn't have a cohesive narrative and team of people to share that story, it's not going to be a place you want to return to or tell your friends about." —Joey Ryan



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