

THE SOMMELIER JOURNAL

DECEMBER/JANUARY • 2018-2019  
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# THE SOMM JOURNAL

CATERINA  
ALLEGRI  
WITH HER  
MOTHER,  
MARILISA.

FROM THE  
VENETO  
TO THE

*Tuscan  
Coast*

WITH POGGIO AL TESORO,  
MARILISA ALLEGRI  
ESTABLISHES A SECOND  
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# THE SOMM JOURNAL

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## PUBLISHER / EDITORIAL DIRECTOR

Meridith May  
mmay@sommjournal.com

## EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Anthony Dias Blue

## CONTRIBUTORS

Jeremy Ball; Devin Berko; Cal Bingham; Rina Bussell; Ian Buxton; Leda Costa; AJ Crane; Jonathan Cristaldi; Paul Hoy; Nick Klein; Jess Lander; Albert Letizia; Rachel Macalisang; Michelle Metter; Lori Moffat; Timothy Murray; Mona Shield Payne; Rebecca Peplinski; Cliff Rames; Alexander Rubin; Courtney Schiessl; Fred Swan; Hardy Wilson

## CONTRIBUTING EDITORS

Kyle Billings; John Curley; Janet Fletcher; Richard Carleton Hacker; Karen MacNeil

## CORRECTION

In the October/November "CAC Cliffs Notes" editorial, we incorrectly stated that Sartori di Verona has partnered with Banfi for 15 years. The partnership has actually existed for 50 years. We regret the error.

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The SOMM Journal  
6345 Balboa Blvd., Ste 111  
Encino, CA 91316  
818-990-0350

## MANAGING EDITOR

Jessie "JABS" Birschbach, CS, CC  
jabs@sommjournal.com

## VP/ASSOCIATE PUBLISHER

Rachel Burkons  
rburkons@tastingpanelmag.com  
818-990-0350

## VP/SALES & MARKETING

Bill Brandel, CSW  
818-322-5050  
bill@sommjournal.com

## VP/FINANCE DIRECTOR

Anna Russell  
818-990-0350  
anna@tastingpanelmag.com

## SENIOR ART DIRECTOR

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*The Taste of the Americas trio from left to right: Mark Gambacorta, Regional Sales Manager for Fetzer Vineyards; Italo Jofré, Fine Wine Export Manager for Viña Concha y Toro, and SOMM Journal Global Wine Editor Deborah Parker Wong, DWSET.*

# *TOUR OF THE* **AMERICAS**

*EXPLORING NORTH  
AND SOUTH AMERICAN  
TERROIRS*

BY DEBORAH PARKER WONG / PHOTOS BY REBECCA PEPLINSKI



here's a yin and yang to winegrowing in the Americas: As the vines in North America are stirring to life, the vineyards in South America are ready for harvest. As much as Chile and neighboring Argentina have in common with California—namely international grape varieties, abundant sunshine, and, oftentimes, similar aspects of terroir—those similarities serve as a point of departure for differentiating the quality and style of New World wines.

To that effect, a stage was recently set at The Grill on the Alley in Chicago's Lincoln Park neighborhood for a friendly competition between hemispheres. Joining me for a comparative tasting that spanned the depth and breadth of Viña Concha y Toro's North and South American portfolios were Italo Jofré, the company's charismatic Santiago-based fine wine export manager, and a group of Chicago's leading sommeliers and retailers.

Our first flight deconstructed the terroirs of two Chardonnays poured alongside appetizers and a classic Caesar salad. After segueing into an in-depth look at two Pinot Noirs, the tasting then progressed through five monovarietal wines and Bordeaux blends paired with pan-seared salmon, chicken piccata, and composed steak salad.

## A TALE OF TWO CHARDONNAYS

Just 14 miles from the Pacific coastline, the Quebrada Seca Vineyard in the Limarí region lies in what's known as Chile's *costa* (coastal) terroir on the western edge of the Atacama Desert. "This desert is the driest place on the planet," Jofré said as he explained the factors of terroir behind the Marqués de Casa Concha 2016 Chardonnay (\$22). "The unique limestone soils of Limarí protect the acidity in the grapes, resulting in very fresh wines."

Given the arid nature of this cool coastal region, the limestone-rich clay soils also help retain water for the Mendoza-clone Chardonnay vines planted on the north bank of the Limarí River. Viña Concha y Toro Technical Director Marcelo Papa presses whole clusters and sends just 5 percent of the wine through malolactic fermentation before it spends 12 months in neutral barrels.

"The bright fruit of this Chardonnay took us by surprise," said Nancy Sabatini, Director of Wine Education and Sales for Mainstreet Wines & Spirits just outside Chicago. "There was consensus around the table that it was more Burgundian in style, with freshness and vibrant flavors of green apple and ripe lemon."

Limarí has now become Chile's go-to terroir for Chardonnay, with its riper styles readily compared to those from Northern California sites near the Russian River. In Mendocino's Sanel Valley, a narrow, 5-mile-long valley that formed as a flood plain of the Russian River, Bonterra's single-vineyard The Roost 2016 Chardonnay (\$45) is sourced from the Biodynamic Blue Heron Ranch

Viña Concha y Toro's iconic Don Melchor and Trivento Eolo Malbec.



vineyard. Located between the Russian River and a Blue Heron nature preserve, the vineyard lies 50 miles from the coast and sees a significant diurnal swing of as much as 50 degrees during the growing season. Dijon and Wente Chardonnay clones are planted to alluvial Riverine soils and the Hopland series of sandy loam over Franciscan bedrock of sandstone and shale.

Bonterra Winemaker Jeff Cichocki uses a gentle hand with the refined The Roost Chardonnay, which was first released in 2001. Crafted from 80 percent free-run juice, 70 percent of which underwent malolactic fermentation, The Roost sees 30 percent new French oak for 18 months and shows golden apple, lemon crème, and secondary notes of fragrant baking spice.

## DIALING IN PINOT NOIR

The cool nights and foggy mornings of Chile's Casablanca Valley, also a *costa* terroir, are ideal for Pinot Noir. The lion's share of the Cono Sur 2016 Ocio Pinot Noir (\$75) is sourced from the red clay and sandy granitic soils of El Triangulo Estate, with the remainder of the fruit hailing from nearby San Juan de Huinca in Leyda. Eighty percent of the wine sees an assortment of new and used French oak, with 20 percent aging more aerobically in large-format foudres. Cono Sur Winemaker Matías Ríos has dialed in the aromas and flavors of this region for a wine that shows meaty tobacco notes, complex red fruits, and harmonious oak elements.

"Our customers gravitate to Chilean Pinot Noirs, which are delicious and come from distinctive terroirs," Sabatini said, adding

# first press

that she sees this wine as one tailored for the American palate. According to Alan Blum, Wine Buyer and Cellar Manager for Sandburg Wine Cellar at Potash Markets, “Cono Sur Ocio occupies a middle ground between leaner, almost austere Burgundies and boldly fruit-forward California styles.” “It’s wine that tastes of place,” he added.

In North America, Fetzer Vineyards Vice President of Winemaking Bob Blue crafts the Beckon 2016 Reserve Pinot Noir (\$50) from one of Santa Maria Valley’s most renowned sites, Bien Nacido Vineyards. Pommard, Martini, Swan, Mount Eden, and a handful of Dijon Pinot Noir clones are planted to low-vigor Elder shale and Pleasanton loam soils on the property, which lies 17 miles inland from the Pacific coast at the foot of the Sierra Madre mountain chain. This particularly cool site relies on a slight elevation and north-south row orientation for optimal ripeness.

Blue, who marks his 31st vintage with Fetzer Vineyards this year, cold-soaks destemmed berries for several days and ferments in open-topped oak vats. The wine spends 11 months in 100 percent French oak. In terms of quality, Beckon Bien Nacido Pinot Noir demonstrates a hallmark coastal-region style from a proven site.

## REIGN OF THE BORDEAUX VARIETIES

In Mendocino, Bordeaux varieties perform exceptionally well on alluvial fans that lie over the sedimentary seabed of Bonterra Organic Vineyards’ 141-acre McNab Ranch. (The property is named for McNab Creek, which flows eastward through a confined box canyon to meet the Russian River.)

The single-vineyard McNab 2014 (\$55) is a Cabernet Sauvignon–dominant blend of varieties including Merlot, Petite Syrah, Malbec, and Cabernet Franc that showcases the terroir of this Biodynamic site, planted by Jim Fetzer in 2001. The wine sees



*Benson Zak, Wine Director at The Capital Grill, compares vintages of Don Melchor.*



*Certified Sommelier Christopher D. Harris and Kinzie Chop House owner Susan Frasca (in background) assess The McNab.*

24 months in a variety of 90 percent new oak and achieves a seamless integration of fruit, tannin, and acidity. “These wines are being built from the ground up,” Blum said. “Mendocino is an up-and-coming region that’s been working its vines and wines for

some time now. It’s good to see the region is finally being recognized for it.”

Fetzer Vineyards, which produces the Bonterra wines, marks its 50th anniversary this year. As an early adopter of organic and Biodynamic practices, the



winery was recognized as an industry leader in sustainability by the United Nations with the "Momentum for Change" Award in 2017. It farms more than 1,000 certified-organic acres in the Mendocino AVA, with approximately one-quarter of those vines also certified as Biodynamic.

Bonterra Winemaker Jeff Cichocki, who crafts The McNab, also selects top-performing Merlot lots from the vineyard for The Elysian Collection 2016 Merlot (\$25), produced with certified-organic grapes. Cichocki artfully blends up to 15 percent reserve wine into the new release, which sees 30 percent new oak and undergoes an oak regime featuring a mix of new and neutral barrels. The finished product shows classic, plummy varietal character with crisp and generous tannins for a veritable North American snapshot of the variety. The sheep that gazes from the wine's memorable label, meanwhile, serves as a tribute to the animals that graze the McNab vineyard during the winter months and contribute to the site's biodiversity.



**Mark Gambacorta pours for Amy Mundwiler, Assistant Wine Director at Maple & Ash.**

The tasting shifted southward once more to the Bordeaux variety championed in Argentina's Mendoza region: old-vine Malbec grown in Luján de Cuyo, the basis of the Trivento Eolo 2014 Reserva Malbec (\$85). "Trivento is named for the three winds that influence the vineyards there: the Polar, a cold wind from the south; the Zonda, a warming western wind sweeping down off of the Andes; and the Sudestada, or southeast blow, which brings freshness from the Atlantic and Río Plata estuary to the vineyards," said Jofré, who notes that the clay bands in the sandy loam soils help hold moisture in this dry, continental region.

The Eolo vineyard, a 10-acre parcel



**Amy L. Lutchen, Wine Director at Del Frisco's, has a keen interest in red wines from both hemispheres.**

planted in 1912, is fittingly named after Aeolus, the Greek god of the winds. Winemaker Victoria "Vico" Prandina cold-soaks destemmed berries for five days and utilizes a week of post-fermentation maceration to achieve the rich, dark color of the finished wine, which spends 18 months in 70 percent new French oak. Sabatini highlights complexity from old vines and the wine's additional bottle age as factors that allow it to develop its nuance and impressive mineral-focused character.

Focus then transitioned to the final pair of wines, both Cabernet Sauvignon. Winemaker Sebastian Donoso sources the variety from one of Napa Valley's widest and warmest points, the Rutherford AVA, for the Sanctuary 2015 Cabernet Sauvignon (\$40). He blends two very different blocks in the Beckstoffer Melrose vineyard: one planted to Clone 337 that gives him darker fruit and the fine, powdery tannins known as "Rutherford Dust;" and a second to Clone 4, which possesses the subtle pyrazines beloved in Napa wines. "Sanctuary is proving to be a classic expression of Rutherford's terroir," Donoso said of the wine, which spends up to 20 days on the skins and 15 months in 80 percent new French oak.

Viña Concha y Toro's iconic 2014 Cabernet Sauvignon Don Melchor (\$120) hails



**Viña Concha y Toro's Italo Jofré brought his firsthand knowledge of Chilean terroir to the tasting.**

from the Don Melchor Vineyard in Alta Maipo Valley, located just outside Santiago. Named for founder Don Melchor Concha y Toro, who first planted vines from Bordeaux in the Maipo Valley in 1883, the first vintage of Don Melchor wasn't made until more than a century later in 1987. At over 2,100 feet in elevation, the vineyard was planted to the coldest site in the valley on a gravelly alluvial terrace and spans 320 acres. Ninety percent of it is planted to Cabernet Sauvignon, which is supplemented by small amounts of Cabernet Franc, Merlot, and Petit Verdot.

For the 2014 vintage, Winemaker Enrique Tirado blended 92 percent Cabernet Sauvignon with 8 percent Cabernet Franc and held the wine on the skins for 20 days. Aged for 15 months in 65 percent new French oak, the finished wine is refined and complex with a lengthy, powerful finish. "Don Melchor is the most Bordeaux-like of any Chilean wine on the market," Blum explained. "Despite the French influence, it doesn't taste like Bordeaux or California. It's distinctly Chilean."

"This extraordinary vineyard has produced Chile's top Cabernet Sauvignon since the first vintage of Don Melchor released," Jofré added. Given its impressive track record, there's little doubt it will continue to do so. **SJ**



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*A quail perches on a post on the grounds of DeLoach Vineyards in Santa Rosa, CA.*

PHOTO: JEREMY BALL





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*An up-close view of one of the many volcanic rocks found in the vineyard at the Olianias estate in Sardinia.*

PHOTO: JEREMY BALL

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# Text Tasting



## **Tea Sommelier: A Step-by-Step Guide by François-Xavier Delmas and Mathias Minet**

Whenever someone asks me what they should do to prepare for the Level One introductory course and exam with the Court of Master Sommeliers, I always recommend the same book: Kevin Zraly's *Windows on the World*. It paints in colorful, broad strokes, offers plenty of pictures, and keeps dense and cumbersome subject matter light and entertaining enough for beginners to handle.

Although I myself am not a tea sommelier, I've loved tea as long as I can remember thanks to my English grandmother. I also much prefer the subtle and feminine complexities of tea to coffee, and while those are admittedly my only qualifications, I still feel quite strongly that *Tea Sommelier* is the tea industry's equivalent to *Windows on the World*.

The book also inserts humor where appropriate, particularly through the retro-style illustrations by Lauriane Tiberghien: I'll never forget the image of a maniacal lemon holding a cup of tea at gunpoint to signify that lemon kills the delicate flavor of any tea. I have only one minor quibble: the page dedicated to listing reasons why tea is better than wine. Many books on beer do this, too, and, as usual, it feels like comparing apples to oranges.

Reading *Tea Sommelier* has truly inspired me to continue my studies in tea—now I just need to figure out a way to get to Paris to take Level I at the L'École du Thé!

ABBEVILLE PUBLISHING GROUP



## **Beer Hacks: 100 Tips, Tricks, and Projects by Ben Robinson**

Perhaps this book's greatest attribute is its amusing design executed in the style of an airplane emergency card. Plenty of useful tips and tricks can also be found within its pages, like how to safely tap a keg or use a binder clip to stack bottles of beer in a pyramid in the refrigerator.

Although the content is basic and plays to the humorous side in lieu of pursuing a more educational angle, this book would make a great gift for any beer lover. It even comes with a bottle opener built into the cover, and I'm now convinced all books should come this way.

WORKMAN PUBLISHING

## { publisher's notebook }

# Sonoma County Barrel Auction Returns in May 2019

The Sonoma County Barrel Auction, set for May 3, 2019, is an invitation-only event for licensed members of the wine trade held at MacMurray Estate Vineyards in Healdsburg, California. Guests have the rare opportunity to taste, bid, and possibly own one-of-a-kind wines handcrafted for the auction by Sonoma County's legendary vintners and growers.

Auction lots range from five to 20 cases, giving buyers the opportunity to offer original wines for resale to their customers and ultra-premium wine collectors. Showcasing the exceptional stylistic range and world-class quality of wines from Sonoma County, the fifth annual Sonoma County Barrel Auction is a must-attend event for industry professionals.

For more information or to request tickets, visit [sonomawine.com/barrelauction](http://sonomawine.com/barrelauction).

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# Father of Invention

WITH PATENTS AND TECHNOLOGY PAVING HIS PATH TO SUCCESS, **DAVID PARRISH** HAS ESTABLISHED A NEW WINERY THAT LANDS HIM IN WORLD-CLASS TERRITORY *by Meredith May*

**EVER THE MAN** behind the scenes, David Parrish may not often get credit for his creativity, but now that he's finally earning the recognition he deserves for his wines, it's high time the industry takes note of his impressive backstory.

In the 1970s, Parrish developed new trellising techniques in Napa Valley alongside superstars like Robert Mondavi. These innovations—which garnered some awards back in 1976—are still heralded as he continues to update technology for the industry through his seven patented products. “My greatest invention was the ‘California Gable’ for table grapes,” Parrish said of one creation. (The 9-and-a-half-foot-wide crossarm helps light find the vines in mid-canopy for two separate lines of fruit, doubling production from 16 spurs to 32.)

Parrish tells *The SOMM Journal* that he would have never entered the wine business if it weren't for his grandfather, G. Earl Henderson, who planted 220 acres of grapes in the Paso Robles area in 1925 (his “Prohibition grapes” included Alicante, Charbono, and Zinfandel). “Thanks to my grandfather, land began increasing in value and vineyards were selling for \$3,000 an acre,” Parrish says. “Now you can expect to buy an acre for around \$30,000 to \$50,000 here in Paso.”

After Parrish moved to Paso Robles and decided to follow in his grandfather's footsteps (his father, a chiropractor, had no interest in the wine business, nor did any of his six brothers), he planted 40 acres of Cabernet Sauvignon on his Creston Ranch property in 1995. Nearly a decade later in 2004, he produced the first vintage under the Parrish label and soon opened a tasting room in downtown Paso Robles. An

PHOTO COURTESY OF PARRISH FAMILY VINEYARD



*David Parrish sources wine grapes primarily from his superior 30-acre Parrish Family Vineyard estate in the Adelaida District of the Paso Robles AVA. The company also owns 40 acres in the Creston District and 80 acres in the Templeton Gap District.*

additional 80 acres in Templeton and 30 acres in the Adelaida Vineyard, meanwhile, were planted in 2013 and 2014.

With the Adelaida District assuming a role as the “Rodeo Drive” of Paso Robles vineyard sites, Parrish opened his own winery off of Adelaida Road this summer that's outfitted with a tasting room and production barn. The ranch house-style architecture came courtesy of Reiss Design Studio of San Luis Obispo, and Parrish says the tasting-room building resembles his private residence.

Parrish Family Vineyards' world-class

Cabernet Sauvignon is *The SOMM Journal's* Discovery of the Month, though we've been enjoying Parrish's wines for several years. All of the winery's fruit is estate-grown in the Adelaida District using sustainable methods. **SJ**

## TASTING NOTES

*by Publisher Meredith May*

### **Parrish Family Vineyard Silken**

**Red, Paso Robles (\$50)** Rich and generous with remarkably silky blue and red fruit surrounded by anise, heather, and dark chocolate. Juicy cherry jogs alongside chalky tannins. **92**

### **Parrish Family Vineyard 2014 Clone 6 Estate Cabernet Sauvignon, Paso Robles (\$65)**

This wine, aged 22 months in French oak, unites aromas of espresso and blue flowers with dense notes of blackberry and plum serving as sweet cheerleaders. Concentrated berries maintain density and weight on the palate as the tobacco-spiced lushness creates a masterful wash across the mouth. **95**







**SLEEP SETTLES ALL THINGS.** IN WINTER THE VINES REST. THE CELLAR MASTER AND HIS TEAM REPEATEDLY TASTE THE CLEAR WINES YIELDED BY THE PLOTS HISTORY HAS RESERVED FOR CRISTAL. THE FINEST AMONG THEM WILL EARN THEIR PLACE IN A VINTAGE. **LA DIFFÉRENCE CRISTAL.**



# Do the Right Thing

RANDY CAPAROSO OFFERS SOME ADVICE  
FOR THE COMING NEW YEAR

PHOTO: PHILIP VIA ADOBE STOCK

*A vineyard in Chénas, Beaujolais.*

**WHEN I WAS** a young man and had never been kissed, I got to thinking about what I had missed. I've since found that the same sentiment happens to apply to my wine career.

I was 18 when I began working as a busboy in a white-cloth steakhouse. Since waiters obviously made more money, I asked my general manager what I needed to do to ascend the ranks. He said I should work hard, of course, but he also advised me to learn the wine list, so I went out and bought a bottle of every selection we offered—roughly 100 altogether. I did the research, starting a wine journal and label collection, and within six months I was able to turn in a detailed report. I got the promotion.

By 21, I talked my way into a sommelier position in a French restaurant, which served everything from Blue Nun to Lafite. I got into management and then a partnership, and after 28 years of walking floors and bussing tables, I finally transitioned to wine journalism, having never shed the habit of taking copious notes.

After more than 40 years of working in the industry full-time, the thing I'm still endlessly intrigued by is the simple fact that wine is an agricultural product prone to endless variations of seasons and weather events, as well as the endless ebb and flow of disease and insect pressures, droughts, floods, and the whims of individual growers.

I moved out into a gigantic vineyard eight years ago, and I now know more than ever what was little more than a theory when I worked in restaurants: that the best wines are grown, not "made." They're never *exactly* the same from year to year or even bottle to bottle, and if they are, something's wrong. You're drinking, or serving, *Stepford wines*—no thanks!

Of course, a growing segment of the wine-consuming public and the trade is also embracing this reality as words like "natural" and "raw" are increasingly bandied about. While it's been a long time coming, I just wished it happened 30 or 40 years ago, a time when I had to explain to countless guests why the wine they

ordered didn't taste exactly the same as when they had it the year, or night, before.

Imagine serving Domaine Tempier in the '80s or "Gang of Five" Beaujolais in the '90s: so wonderful with food and, like the thoughtfully conceived dishes of our finest chefs, so full of unexpected surprises. I used to exhort my staff to put a positive spin on things by proclaiming, "Every bottle is an adventure!" This mantra was bolstered by a stringent policy: All returns were accepted, no questions asked, for satisfaction guaranteed.

So, what's our Bottom Line message here at the start of 2019? It's simple: Stick to your guns, especially if you are trafficking in more authentic styles of wine grown and crafted with minimal intervention and compelling artistry. Not everyone may understand that, but if you know in your heart that you're delivering wines that are best for your guests, best for your dishes, and best for your restaurant's long-term goals, then put a crafty spin on it and double down. Every bottle, after all, *should* be an adventure. ■





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by Ruth Tobias

# Inside Denver's Most Exclusive Bars

**B&GC AND SUITE 6A ARE SMALL, SWANKY, AND SENSATIONAL**



PHOTO: ELLIOT CLARK

*A Martini is served alongside hors d'oeuvres at Suite 6A.*

**IN THE ALLEYWAY** behind the Halcyon Hotel in Denver's Cherry Creek neighborhood is a gray door marked "Private." No stray passerby would typically give the portal a second glance—unless, that is, they'd heard rumblings about a hush-hush little hideout tucked away in a basement behind the wall.

Despite the label, B&GC, aka Boys & Girls Club, isn't actually private: To enter, all you have to do is text the number listed on the business' website. However, it is secretive by the standards of this media-savvy city. According to Bar Manager Daryl Pryor, when B&GC opened nearly two years ago, press and social media were minimal, as the team "wanted to ensure" they were providing everything they "said [they] would on paper" before going public, Pryor explains.

At just 44 seats, B&GC is built for a bespoke cocktail experience—a fact I discovered firsthand on a recent Saturday night. After ringing the inconspicuous doorbell per the text instructions I'd received a few hours prior, my guest and I were led down a storage-area stairwell into a snazzy cubbyhole where Art Deco-inspired decor and piped-in jazz transported us to another era.

The multi-page cocktail list covers what Pryor calls "hipster classics you don't see a lot" such as the Liberal and the Betsy Ross, as well as complex yet smooth-as-glass originals like the Let Me Know with rum, applejack, aquavit, golden raisin/brown rice syrup, and lemon juice. The team also met our requests for impromptu creations featuring Sherry and Laphroaig with panache. "People expect this to be a rigid, unfriendly environment, which just isn't what we do," Pryor says. "We still like to be a little sneaky, but we don't want to challenge people too much—we want our drinks to stand the test of time."

Over in the RiNo district, New York's renowned Death & Co oversees both food and beverage for The Ramble Hotel. The sumptuous lobby lounge has been going gangbusters since it opened in May, joined soon after by the rooftop garden bar. Now the pièce de résistance has fallen into place: Suite 6A, a dark and sultry 21-seat bar, opened on the mezzanine in November. Though Suite 6A accepts walk-ins as well as email reservations, its capacity alone makes any visit a highly intimate affair.

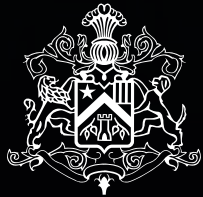
So do the offerings. According to Bar Manager Alex Jump, the bar team hopes the list of just five or six cocktails can serve as a "starting point" for guests before the bartenders "guide [them] toward something special." Changing weekly, the menu includes originals like the Champagne-topped Birthday Daiquiri to mix and match with an array of hors d'oeuvres like caviar-topped beet sorbet and lamb tartare. Here's to living it up in the Mile High City, no matter how discrete the venue. **SI**



PHOTO COURTESY OF SAGE RESTAURANT GROUP

*Outfitted in Art Deco-inspired décor, B&GC offers an expansive cocktail list.*





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# A Tale of Two Malbecs

COMPARING THE GRAPE'S **OLD WORLD AND NEW WORLD** STYLES

**MALBEC-BASED WINE** is a bit of a double-edged sword for me: something I have traditionally loved in its Old World European expression from France's Cahors region but have never quite embraced in its New World incarnation from Argentina. Not to say the more modern Argentine version is lacking in quality, but I grew up on Cahors Malbec, and you never forget your first love.

bec from a 10-acre vineyard in the Luján de Cuyo area, is a step above. It's a powerful, concentrated wine of great character that made me yearn for another sip.

The other Argentine Malbec, Rolland's **Clos de los Siete** (\$20; Deutsch Family Wines), costs significantly less than the Eolo but is no less refined in quality. Clos de los Siete, in which Rolland is a partner and not simply a consulting enologist, is situated in

legacy as France's home base for production of the grape. This release encompasses all the characteristics that make Cahors wines resonate: deep color, strong tannins, elegance, and an uncanny ability to age.

Of the three wines, two altered my perception of Argentine Malbec as the other affirmed my memory of Cahors. When I asked Rolland to identify what he believes is the perfect place for Malbec

PHOTO: DAVID RANSOM



*Michel Rolland and his Clos de los Siete Malbec from Argentina.*

Yet after recently tasting three Malbecs made by winemakers Michel Rolland and Germán di Cesare on both sides of the Atlantic, I was forced to pause for some unexpected reflection. The first, the **Eolo** (\$79; Fetzer Wines) from Argentine producer Trivento, was made by di Cesare in Mendoza. Founded in 1996 by Chilean producer Concha y Toro, Trivento is known mostly for wallet-friendly wines with broad appeal, but the Eolo, made from old-vine (1912) Mal-

Mendoza's Uco Valley. It's prime Malbec territory, enabling Rolland to create elegant blends in which the variety always plays a dominant role. This wine shows great structure and perfect balance—two key ingredients of Rolland's signature style.

The third wine was another Rolland offering, this time from Cahors. The **Château Lagrézette Le Pigeonnier** (\$290; First Growth Brands), a 100% Malbec masterpiece, is Rolland's ode to Cahors'



*Le Pont Valentré, a 14th-century stone bridge, crosses the Lot River in Cahors, France.*

production, he told me this: "Argentina is the best climate for consistently growing quality Malbec, as unlike France, Argentina can produce good Malbec from top to bottom, a distance of approximately 2,000 kilometers. It's not possible to do the same in Europe, as the region would span from London to Marrakech." The lesson here seems to be that whether your feet are planted in the Old World or the New, you shouldn't let presumption trip you up. **SR**

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## A BRIEF GUIDE TO **DOUBLE-CREAM** AND **TRIPLE-CREAM** CHEESES

# Triple-Double the Fun

by Janet Fletcher

**THE HOLIDAYS PROVIDE** plenty of occasions for sparkling wine, but to make the experience even more festive, just add cheese: Double- and triple-cream disks love Champagne's bubbles and brisk acidity, which cleanse the palate in the wake of these luscious bites. To freshen up the pairing, I've assembled this quick guide to the veterans and lesser-known newcomers leading this category.

But first, some definitions. The U.S. doesn't regulate the use of these terms, but most cheesemakers follow the French convention: "triple-cream" for cheeses that have 75 percent fat or more in the dry matter (FDM); and "double-cream" for cheeses between 60 and 74 percent FDM. These elevated fat levels come from mixing cow's, goat's, or sheep's milk with cream or crème fraîche, as milk alone would fail to yield products this rich.

Note that industry practice is to measure the fat as a percentage of the dry matter—the cheese with all water removed. Since most of these moist cheeses are roughly 50 percent water, the fat content isn't as extreme as it sounds. Ounce for ounce, cream-enriched cheeses like Cowgirl Creamery's super-successful Mt. Tam contain no more fat than Parmigiano-Reggiano.

**Vermont Creamery Cremont:** A perennial ribbon winner, this double-cream cheese contains roughly 60 percent cow's milk, 30 percent goat's milk, and 10 percent cream. The soft, bloomy rind will wrinkle and sag a bit as the cheese ripens, a sign that it's about to peak. A perfect Cremont has a sumptuous interior with a mushroom-like aroma and sour-cream finish.

**Nettle Meadow Kunik:** Made on a farm in New York's Adirondack Mountains that doubles as an animal sanctuary, Kunik is a triple-cream cheese produced in sizes ranging from 4 to 16 ounces. If possible, go with a larger wheel for a more pleasing proportion of rind to paste. Rare among triple-creams, Kunik is predominantly goat's milk, with just enough Jersey cow cream to boost it into the triple-cream ranks. It spreads like frosting and has a clotted-cream scent.

**Moser Screamer:** This new gem from acclaimed Swiss cheesemaker Ueli Moser owes its name to its purported ability to make tasters loudly exclaim their delight. (The label identifies it as a double-cream only because the Swiss don't recognize the triple-cream category.) A petite cow's-milk disk weighing a little more than 5

ounces, Moser Screamer has an inviting aroma of mushroom and crème fraîche, a rich golden paste, and a texture like whipped butter.

**Tulip Tree Trillium:** From an Indiana creamery, this bloomy-rind triple-cream has the buttery texture and lactic tones of Camembert. To distinguish it on the retail shelf, cheesemaker Fons Smits chose to produce and package it in squares. Smits, who sources his cow's milk from nearby family farms, works on a small scale and hand-ladles Trillium's curds into the molds. An early cheesemaker for Cowgirl Creamery, he helped develop the recipe for the aforementioned Mt. Tam cheese.

**Deer Creek The Blue Jay:** Bring out the demi-sec sparklers for this juniper-scented cow's-milk blue cheese. Produced by highly regarded Wisconsin-based producer Carr Valley Cheese for the Deer Creek brand, The Blue Jay resembles Italy's mellow Gorgonzola dolce cheese but is even more plush and voluptuous. Don't let the juniper scare you off—there's just enough of that woodsy scent to keep things intriguing. The label describes The Blue Jay as a quintuple-crème, but that's poetic license. **SJ**



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# Back to the Future

A RECAP OF THE **TERROIR PROJECT**, A PIONEERING BEER-WINE HYBRID EVENT IN LOS OLIVOS, CALIFORNIA

by Jessie Birschbach / photos by Jemma Wilson

**ON A HOT AFTERNOON** this fall, the first-ever Terroir Project event in Los Olivos, California, made history—albeit one that's already sort of happened in Belgium, where people have been making beer with grapes and other fruit for hundreds of years in the lambic style.

That beer, though, wasn't quite like this. Organized by Firestone Walker Barrelworks, the Terroir Project challenged a small group of some of the best breweries in the world to create their own version of a beer/wine hybrid while exploring the concept of terroir. (The hybrids technically classify as beer, as they had to contain 51% wort and 49% grape juice.)

The Terroir Project rules also stipulated that all participating breweries use the same grain bill (65–75% Pilsner malt; 25–35% unmalted raw grain) and maturation period in barrel or amphora (9–12 months). Grapes, meanwhile, had to have been harvested within 100 miles from the brewery.

"We left it open in terms of what yeast they wanted to use, but the idea was to take a basic broad stroke on the recipe and see how people interpret it," Firestone Walker Barrelworks Director Jeffers Richardson tells *The SOMM Journal*. "Next year everyone has to use the yeast on the skins of the grapes—only native yeast—so it'll be cool to see where that goes."

Richardson, who Firestone Walker spokesperson Sean C. Weir named as "the man behind all of this," can trace



*The Firestone Walker Barrelworks brass from left to right: Master Blender Jim Crooks; co-founder David Walker; Brewmaster Matt Brynildson; and Director Jeffers Richardson.*

the Terroir Project's origins back to a discussion he and Barrelworks Master Blender Jim Crooks had a few years back with Logan Plant, founder and CEO of the London-based brewery Beavertown. Two years to the day after the chat, the Terroir Project's seven beer/wine hybrids debuted this fall in Los Olivos at a Firestone vineyard. Thankfully, they were all refreshing enough to temper the afternoon heat.

In fact, when summarizing the character of these beer/wine hybrids, "refreshing" is perhaps the first adjective to come to mind. The acidity, while immediately apparent, is seemingly less aggressive than that typically found in sour beers and comes across as more fruit-sour than barrel-sour. Complexities specific to grape variety and barrel regi-

men then come into play: The common grapefruit and pineapple notes in New Zealand Sauvignon Blanc were particularly apparent in Garage Project's Savoir Faire hybrid. Perhaps the amphorae used allowed the fruit to shine brightest.

Regardless of the grape or barrel regimen used, potential was obvious in every example. Firestone Walker Barrelworks, a brewery and beer program with its own roots in wine due to its association with Firestone Vineyards, won a gold medal in the experimental beer category at this year's Great American Beer Festival for its Bière de Champagne style beer, Feral Brut. Crooks feels it's only a matter of time before the hybrid becomes a style category all its own: "It's not wine, it's not beer, but it's beautiful," he says. **SJ**





## PROJECT BEERS (2017 Vintage Grapes)

### **Barrelworks, Buellton, CA**

*Capt. Franc:* Cabernet Franc (Rock Hollow Vineyards, Santa Ynez Valley); 12 months in barrel; 9.8% ABV

### **Beavertown Brewery, London, England**

*Sense of Place:* Black Muscat (used as yeast starter), Pinot Noir from Kent Vineyards, and Pinot Noir and Chardonnay from Forty Hall Vineyard; 10 months in barrel; 7.2% ABV

### **Garage Project, Wellington, New Zealand**

*Savoir Faire:* Whole-bunch Sauvignon Blanc (Martinborough Vineyard); 11 months in amphora; 8.2% ABV

### **Jester King Brewery, Austin, TX**

*Terroir Project:* Syrah (Tyler, TX); 10 months in barrel; 6.7% ABV

### **Side Project Brewing, Maplewood, MO**

*Vidal Blanc:* Vidal Blanc (Noboleis Vineyards, Augusta AVA); 11 months in barrel; 8% ABV

### **Sierra Nevada Brewing Co., Chico, CA**

*Terroir Invitational Project:* Chardonnay and Chenin Blanc finished with Petite Syrah must (Clarksburg AVA, Sacramento Valley); 9 months in barrel; 9.4% ABV

### **Trillium Brewing Company, Boston, MA**

*Rkatsiteli:* Rkatsiteli (Westport Rivers Vineyard); 12 months in French oak; puncheon fermentation; 8.3% ABV

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PHOTO COURTESY OF MAURICE DIMARINO



## Maurice DiMarino

*Beverage and Wine Manager for Cohn Restaurant Group in San Diego, CA*

**Q: What first inspired you to join the wine industry and how did you get your start?**

I started working in restaurants in high school, and when I left college, the industry allowed me to travel around the world and pursue my interest in my major, art. I was not going to make a living with it, but traveling opened my eyes to how other cultures engage with food and beverage. It sparked an interest in me. I never thought I could have a career in this business, but once I fell into it, I was never going to leave.

**Q: You're responsible for overseeing the beverages for many different restaurants. What's your approach to deciding which wines you'll be adding to each menu?**

Wine is best sold when sold by someone with passion: If I were to mandate the wines, it would take away the passion of each restaurant buyer. Instead, I set up company-wide programs with suppliers. My buyers then have a bit more freedom to select the wines from those suppliers for their restaurants. When it comes to creating a new concept, I build the initial list so that the wines fit the concept. The buyers then take it and grow it with their selections.

**Q: Besides being a Certified Sommelier, you are also a Certified Cicerone and CRT certified in tequila. Do you think all sommeliers should look into increasing their beverage knowledge?**

Absolutely. When restaurant owners need to reevaluate their labor and see where they can save, the somm is the first job to go. However, restaurants will always need a bartender, server, or manager, so the people who stand out are those who can do more than one job. Plus, if you are sommelier, you typically enjoy learning and experiencing new things. The worlds of spirits and beer are so interesting that I think it's an easy and rewarding transition.

## Ziggy "The Wine Gal" Eschliman

*Expert, educator, journalist, and consultant of wine and spirits in Healdsburg, CA*

**Q: You've worked for more than 20 years to make wine more interesting and accessible to people. Do you think the public's understanding of wine has changed in that time?**

Absolutely! For example, many years ago, I created a radio show called *Vino Viernes*, which aired for years on the number-one Hispanic station in the Bay Area. I wanted to take any pretense out of wine so that everyone listening felt more comfortable to not only purchase wine in the store and on wine lists, but to bring wine to their table each evening. In general, the "understanding" of wine has most certainly changed across all demographics for the better. I like to think that my award-winning radio shows have played a little part in that.

**Q: What's the first thing you tell someone who wants to learn more about wine but isn't sure where to start?**

Taste and smell everything. Don't be afraid to ask questions. Go to wine bars and ask for tastes of things before you commit to a pour or flight of wine. Choose the wine that tastes good to you, at that moment. Our palates are different every day—even the mood you're in can play a part. And don't start off with a huge wine book that was written to appeal to the big-time enophiles that will just turn you off! Instead, embrace a Wine 101 type of book. There are many out there. ☺



PHOTO COURTESY OF HANNAH GART

*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](mailto:featured@chefsroll.com).*



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**Dear Good Somm/Bad Somm,**

As a vegan, I recently decided that I didn't want to drink any wines that were fined or filtered with animal products . . . but now I've also decided that I don't want to drink wines made with forced animal labor or animal fertilizer, either. What *can* I drink?

Sincerely,  
*Seeking Sound Selections*

**Good Somm**

Dear *Seeking Sound Selections*,

As we all know, many wines are filtered with fining agents like egg whites and other animal byproducts. Although these agents do not remain in the bottled wine, I understand how the practice might make some vegans uncomfortable.

The good news is that animal products and labor are increasingly being replaced by plant-based products and other methods, but unfortunately there's no regulatory body to inform consumers of this yet. So as of now, the only way to know if your wine is vegan is to contact the producer directly—you'll likely find they're more than happy to answer questions. Do the research and weigh your options!

Best of luck,  
*Good Somm*

**BAD SOMM**

Dear *Seeking Sound Selections*,

Remember wine is an agricultural product, not a 3D-printed commodity (yet!). It's grown by farmers on grape farms called vineyards, and as you may recall, there are animals on farms that do a lot of . . . stuff.

And that's the way it should be. Horses should be pulling plows and goats should be eating weeds and owls should be snatching up rodents and lady bugs should be eating pests—because if they're not doing that, then what are they doing? They can't just stay in the barn and watch *Jerry Springer* and *Ellen* all day! I say let the animals work as long as they're being treated humanely: It keeps them off the streets, out of trouble, and out of the glue factory.

Yours,  
*Bad Somm*



PHOTO BY TALEX VIA ADOBE THINKSTOCK

**Dear Good Somm/Bad Somm,**

I recently read about a young busboy who tried to save a wounded Robert F. Kennedy after he was fatally shot in 1968 at the Ambassador Hotel in Los Angeles. The busboy, Juan Romero, was remembered once again as a hero after his own death in October at 68. Was a sommelier ever known for doing something as heroic?

Sincerely,  
*Where's the Glory?*

**Good Somm**

Dear *Where's the Glory?*,

It's true that Juan Romero was only 17 when RFK was shot, and as he lay wounded, Romero cradled his head and placed a rosary in his hand. Romero said he was haunted by the moment for the rest of his life.

In my research, I can't name a sommelier involved in a similar act of heroism or tragedy. The one comparison I can mention is that during the reign of Louis XIV, the sommelier used a tastevin to check his lord's wine and food for poison. They literally risked death, so there was a certain amount of bravery involved!

Best,  
*Good Somm*

**BAD SOMM**


Dear *Where's the Glory?*

To the best of my knowledge, sommeliers are not exactly known for their bravery, and I've been in the business more than 20 years. There was a time I performed the Heimlich maneuver on a guy choking on a large chunk of sinewy lamb loin, which was pretty badass, but perhaps not exactly "heroic." All and all, I'd have to say my colleagues and I have never faced life-or-death stakes during service . . . and we'd prefer to keep it that way. ☺

Yours truly,  
*Bad Somm*

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





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**HENDRICK'S** 92 PTS

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*From left to right: Brennan Vineyards Winemaker Todd Webster; Spicewood Vineyards owner Ron Yates; Pedernales Cellars co-founder Julie Kuhlken and her brother, David Kuhlken; Bending Branch Winery General Manager Jennifer McInnis Fadel; and Duchman Family Winery Winemaker Dave Reilly celebrate the Texas harvest in Spicewood Vineyards' barrel room.*



# High Praise from the High Plains

THE ANNUAL **TEXAS FINE WINE DINNER** PUTS THE STATE'S GROWING WINE INDUSTRY ON DISPLAY *story and photo by Lori Moffatt*

**WHILE TEXANS HAVE BEEN** making wine since the late 1600s, when Spanish missionaries established one of North America's first vineyards in the El Paso area, commercial winemaking in the Lone Star State is still relatively young. In the 1960s, Texas Tech University chemistry professor Clinton "Doc" McPherson planted experimental vineyards in what is now the Texas High Plains AVA to learn which grape varieties thrived in the state's challenging climate.

Now one of eight AVAs in Texas, the 8-million-acre region west of Lubbock produces more than 80 percent of Texas' grapes, yielding Albariño, Grenache, Vermentino, Viognier, Tannat, and dozens more varieties. Here, grapes ripen slowly and retain acidity thanks to high elevations, sunny days, and cool nights.

Fruit grown in High Plains and other Texas AVAs then finds its way into wines made by some 400 wineries statewide. On October 19 at Spicewood Vineyards, five of Texas' most distinguished producers gathered for the fifth annual Texas Fine Wine Dinner, where guests enjoyed fare paired with outstanding wines from throughout the Hill Country and beyond.

Together, the five Texas Fine Wine members—Brennan Vineyards, Pedernales Cellars, Duchman Family Winery, Bending Branch Winery, and Spicewood Vineyards—work to educate both consumers and the trade about the potential of Texas-grown grapes. "The main issue that we deal with in Texas is lack of respect," says Brennan Vineyards owner Pat Brennan, whose winery in Comanche produces award-winning bottlings under the tutelage of Winemaker Todd Webster. "But when people taste our wines, it's a different story."

When it comes to selecting "the best wines suited for Texas' climate," Pedernales Cellars co-founder Julie Kuhlken advises reaching for varieties like Albariño, Tempranillo, Carignan, and Nero d'Avola before purchasing more familiar names like Chardonnay, Pinot Noir, and Merlot. But regardless of the grape, Duchman Family Winery Winemaker Dave Reilly says he's proud to support hardworking farmers in the state. "I started out as a grower, and I believe Texas wine should support Texas agriculture," he says. *SM*

## The Lone Star State Pairs Up

*Pairings featured at the Texas Fine Wine Dinner included the following:*

**Brennan Vineyards 2017 Lily** This floral blend of Roussanne and Malvasia Bianca paired beautifully with grilled shrimp.

**Pedernales Cellars 2006 GSM Mé-lange** A Rhône-style blend of Grenache, Syrah, Mourvèdre, Carignan, and Tannat, it complemented the beef tartare with Texas quail eggs.

**Duchman Family Winery 2017 Viognier** Crisp and aromatic with a nose of apricot and peach, this wine sang with halibut and sweet potato gnocchi.

**Bending Branch Winery 2014 Tannat** Notes of plum, cocoa, and vanilla brought out the sweetness of Texas quail.

**Spicewood Vineyards 2014 The Good Guy** This lush blend of Tempranillo, Graciano, Merlot, Cabernet Sauvignon, and Syrah accented the smokiness of grilled lamb.



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# Mid-Thirties

THE DRY CREEK VALLEY AVA TURNS 35

by Christopher Sawyer

**TO STAY AHEAD** in the wine game, it's important to follow the progression of appellations. That's especially true in Sonoma County, where a wide range of new varieties, clones, and modern farming techniques have yielded more world-class wines than ever before. One case in point is the Dry Creek Valley appellation, which celebrated its 35th anniversary this year.

When Dry Creek Valley officially became an AVA on August 4, 1983, it already had very distinctive conditions and a rich history that set it apart from other American winegrowing regions. Framed by rugged mountains to the east and west, this scenic rural valley is 16 miles long and 2 miles wide. With its mixture of warm days, cool nights, and complex soils, the region encompasses 9,300 acres of planted vines and is home to half of the Zinfandel vines in Sonoma County.

The AVA also possesses a large concentration of old vineyard plantings with direct links between the past and present, a legacy that began when Swedish immigrant S.B. Hallengren planted the first vines there in 1868. By the late 1880s, the valley had nine wineries and 883 acres of vineyards. Many of the fledglings of old Zinfandel and Petite Sirah vines still in existence today were planted by Italian families who settled in the region starting at the turn of the 20th century.

Among those pioneers was Giovanni Pedroncelli, who in 1927 purchased 90 acres of hillside land, including 25 acres of Zinfandel vines, west of Geyerville. After selling fruit to local winemakers, Pedroncelli planted new vineyards with budwood from the mother clone vines on his property; today, his flagship Mother Clone Zinfandel is distributed throughout the U.S. and in export markets around the globe.

After the repeal of Prohibition, a group of Italian farming families began developing classic field blends by interplanting Zinfandel with varieties like Petite Sirah, Carignane, and Mourvèdre. When the modern wine boom hit in the 1970s, a new breed of wine mavericks moved to the area and helped establish the Dry Creek Valley Association in 1974. By the time the AVA was granted just under a decade later, the valley had developed a true sense of identity that has only strengthened over the past 35 years.

This shared passion for crafting bold, complex, and spicy wines from high-quality grapes has resulted in new plantings of Bordeaux, Rhône, and Italian varieties. The dominant white grape is currently Sauvignon Blanc, while Cabernet Sauvignon and Merlot lead the reds. "Balancing the sweet fruit, retaining acidity, and capturing the unique character of the vineyard are our keys to working with Cabernet Sauvignon," says Winemaker Tim Bell of Dry Creek Vineyard, a quintessential winery founded by David Stare in 1972.

Among the proponents of Merlot is Ed Sbragia of Sbragia Family Vineyards, who, along with his son Adam, produces a fruit-forward style from his family's Home Ranch that balances wild berries, roasted plums, and cinnamon with plush texture and soft tannins. "Right now, I would argue that [Dry Creek Valley has] the highest amount of quality Merlots in the marketplace at all times," Sbragia says. "Since our family's first vintage, we've been striving to make sure our brand is one of them." ❧

*An old Lytton Springs Road sign in the Dry Creek Valley AVA.*

PHOTO: CHARLIE GESELL



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## CONEGLIANO VALDOBBIADENE PROSECCO SUPERIORE DOCG ANNOUNCES TWO CONTESTS TARGETED TOWARD SOMMELIERS

In celebration of the 50th anniversary of the region's appellation designation next year, the Consorzio of Conegliano Valdobbiadene Prosecco Superiore DOCG has launched two national contests for active U.S. sommeliers, wine buyers, and beverage directors.

Winners will be given the opportunity to visit Conegliano Valdobbiadene, the historic heart and pinnacle of Italy's Prosecco region located just 45 minutes west of Venice in the foothills of the Italian Alps.

### CONTEST DETAILS

**Instagram Contest:** Active sommeliers, wine buyers, or directors in the U.S. can enter the competition by posting a photo of a bottle of Prosecco Superiore alone or with a dish. Participants must include a pairing note or caption, tag @proseccocv, and include the hashtags #proseccosuperiore, #proseccosuperioredocg, #proseccoelevated, and #somminstagram.

Posters who meet these criteria will be entered to win an all-expenses-paid, three-day trip to Conegliano Valdobbiadene in 2019, including airfare, accommodation, and producer visits as a guest of the Consorzio. Candidates must be working actively in their place of business as an employee or consultant.

**Sommelier Essay Contest:** Those interested in participating in the contest can also submit a 1,000-word essay targeted to the wine-buying audience that explores how Conegliano Valdobbiadene Prosecco Superiore DOCG can be integrated more effectively into beverage programs, wine lists, and fine retail stores. The winning essay writer will also receive a three-day trip to the region in 2019 that includes airfare, accommodation, and producer visits.

The winning essay will also be published in the February/March 2019 issue of *The SOMM Journal*. As with the Instagram contest, candidates must be working actively in their place of business as an employee or consultant.

**Timing for Winner Selection:** After the contests conclude on January 15, 2019, the winner(s) will be selected and contacted by February 15, 2019.

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Connect with the Consorzio on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram or visit [prosecco.it](http://prosecco.it) to learn more about the region and its sparkling wines. For additional information, contact Charles Communications Associates at [press@charlescomm.com](mailto:press@charlescomm.com) or by calling (415) 701-9463.



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# Eugénio Jardim, Ambassador for Wines of Portugal

by Michelle Metter

**Q:** You've had a diverse career as an educator and brand ambassador in addition to establishing award-winning wine programs as a sommelier. What advice would you give to those looking to branch out into other directions professionally?

Every facet of the industry has something unique to teach a wine professional. I started my career working in retail and evolved into working as a sommelier and wine director. I had to understand the business from the point of view of both the consumer and business owners. I've learned how to follow my instincts and my palate, as well as how to consider the vital fiscal aspect of the business.

**Q:** As a Brand Ambassador for Wines of Portugal, what do you feel has changed over the past ten years in terms of U.S. consumers' understanding of wines from the region?

I've seen appreciation for this incredibly rich wine culture grow steadily since I started. Portugal is no longer only known for Port and Madeira: It occupies a well-deserved position amongst the most interesting wine-producing countries. The dry wines have improved immensely, and buyers and consumers have taken notice. Statistics indicate that steady growth in the U.S. market will continue.

**Q:** You also split your time as an importer. Tell me a little about your portfolio.

I maintained a great list at Jardinière in



PHOTO: FELIX SANCHEZ

San Francisco while working as the Wine Director. After my departure, I joined Esprit de Champagne, a small importing company specializing in Grower Champagnes. We work with grower families throughout the region and discover some truly unknown treasures.

**Q:** What do you believe are the top Grower Champagnes every sommelier should try?

I think Champagne should only be enjoyed on days that end in a "y"! From the Esprit de Champagne portfolio, I highly recommend the wines of Doyard-Mahé and Eric Isselee (Ct. de Blancs); Bochet-Lemoine and David Coutelas (Marne Valley); and Jacques Chaput (Aube). Mind you, we are not the only ones importing great Champagnes from small houses. I must give a shout-out to Pierre Péters, Prévost, Michel Fallon, and Jacques Selosse.

**Q:** You have ten minutes and one glass of wine. Who are you with, what are you drinking, and what are you listening to?

A few nights ago I had one of these "moments" at home with my friends while enjoying a 1969 Viuva Gomes Ramisco from Colares, Portugal—one of the rarest wines in the world. It was magical. We were listening to the wonderful Brazilian singer Tulipa Ruiz and to M83, a French electronic group based in L.A. How's that for a mingling of cultures? 🎵

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# A Most Exciting Future

LENDING SOME BACKGROUND AND PERSPECTIVE ON **SHERRY**



**IN THE OPINION** of Fermín Hidalgo, whose family has produced fine Sherry for several generations in the seaside town of Sanlúcar de Barrameda, Spain, the future of the category lies in its past. In October, Hidalgo accompanied a group I hosted for a visit to Jerez de la Frontera as we surveyed the extensive vineyards behind his family's famous fortified wines.

Vines were first brought to this region of Andalusia by the Phoenicians in 1100 B.C. Legend tells that the navigator

Magellan spent more on Sherry than on weapons for his voyage to discover the Americas, and in 1587, Sir Frances Drake attacked Cadiz and carried off 3,000 butts of the wine. The heist popularised Sherry in both the Court of Elizabeth I and the writings of Shakespeare.

One of Sherry's golden ages in the mid-19th century was dashed by phylloxera, but the early decades of the 20th century found the category conquering world markets. The subsequent period of overexpansion and decreasing quality in the 1960s was rectified as producers reduced the vineyard area by half and rediscovered the value of extended aging in historic above-ground cellars known as bodegas. (The fact that some of the solera-aged wines I tasted on the trip can trace their origins back a full century all but affirmed Hidalgo's assertion about Sherry's future.)

The major grape in the area is Palomino, which is supplemented by some Moscatel and Pedro Ximénez for the production of sweet wines. Sherry's biggest asset is its incredible diversity of styles—from the palest Fino to the dark amber of Oloroso, from bone-dry to dense richness—making it the only wine in the world that can truly complement every element of a multicourse meal.

*A vineyard in Sanlúcar de Barrameda, Spain.*

In order of serving, here are the Sherries built to match any menu:

## **Fino**

The purity of the Palomino grape ages imperceptibly under the non-oxidative *flor del vino* in 500-liter American oak butts filled to five-sixths. The sharp, yeasty aroma of this pale-yellow wine leads to a vibrantly refreshing palate. Usually 15–18% alcohol. Top brands are La Ina, Tio Pepe, and Valdespino's Innocente.

## **Fino “en Rama”**

Bottled off its lees without filtration, this Sherry is more vigorous and textured altogether yet still bone-dry.

## **Manzanilla**

If aged in Sanlúcar, the Palomino grape acquires tangier and saltier characteristics and is known as Manzanilla. Top brands are La Gitana and La Guita. Also made “en rama.”

## **Amontillado**

This style gains colour and nuttiness after 8–10 years under “flor”; it's then transferred to oxidative aging to gain additional colour and flavour while remaining dry. This is ideal either as an apéritif or as a partner for white meats and cheese.

## **Oloroso**

Ranging from rich amber to dark mahogany depending on time spent in barrel, this style is richly textured but not sweet, making it perfect for game and red meats.

## **Palo Cortado**

This complex, sought-after style offers the bouquet of Amontillado and the body of Oloroso. Marries well both with consommé and mature cheeses.

## **Generoso**

These are blended sweet styles typified by Harveys Bristol Cream as well as naturally rich wines from Pedro Ximénez and Moscatel grapes left on straw mats to concentrate their sugar. They're best consumed at the end of a meal. »



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# The Tasmanian Advantage

SMALL AND REMOTE, **TASMANIA** IS AUSTRALIA'S LEAST-KNOWN GREAT WINE REGION

by Fred Swan

*A cool-climate vineyard in Tasmania.*

**LOCATED 260 MILES** south of Melbourne, the island of Tasmania is the land down under the “Land Down Under.” Its capital city, Hobart, is actually closer to the Antarctic Circle than to Darwin, Australia.

On October 2, award-winning Australian wine writer Tyson Stelzer made the considerable trek to San Francisco to lead the second annual Tasmanian Showcase USA for U.S. trade and media. “Tasmania is Australia’s epicenter of cool-climate viticulture, producing wines that have set mainland Australia buzzing,” Stelzer told *The SOMM Journal*. “It is far and away Australia’s sparkling capital, but its still wines are also highly sought after there.” In fact, high domestic demand leaves just 5 percent of Tasmanian wine production available for export.

Particularly respected for his guides on Champagne, Stelzer said the Tasmanian advantage in the global sparkling wine category is considerable quality at an affordable price. Despite the aforementioned high demand and low vol-

ume, Tasmanian fruit sells for one-third the price of that in Champagne. “My strong belief, reinforced by many tastings and echoed by opinion leaders not only across Australia, but most notably the Champenois themselves, is that no region outside of Champagne produces sparkling wine as fine as Tasmania,” he explained.

That’s not to say wines from the two regions are the same, because, as Stelzer added, “Tasmania is a world away from Champagne in every way.” “While [Tasmanian] makers borrow the method and work fanatically to follow the quality cues of their northern French counterparts, no self-respecting Tasmanian sparkling maker is pretending to make Champagne,” he said. “Champagne has chalk; Tasmania does not. Tasmania has more sunshine and a more maritime climate.”

Tasmanian wines, however, are more than memorable enough to stand on their own. For example, the terrific Apogee 2014 Deluxe Vintage Rosé (\$98),

which shows notes of brioche, custard, underripe raspberry, spice, and dried lemongrass, is luxurious on the palate with a creamy mousse and mineral-tinged finish.

As showcased at the San Francisco event, Tasmanian Pinot Noirs can also make an exceptional impression. While their character varies appropriately between regions and vintages, they consistently show medium-plus body, moderate alcohol levels, and beautifully refined tannins. Most of the grape’s Tasmanian producers aren’t yet distributed in the United States, but they deserve to be. As for selections that are available here, the Dalrymple 2015 Cottage Block Pinot Noir 2015 (\$79) is long and profound with intense flavors of dried cranberry, tea, drying herbs, and sarsaparilla.

Tasmanian wines have an unmistakable wow factor: excellent quality, good value, and the mystique of a little-known region. Expect to see more of them coming this way soon. **SJ**





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# New Rules

SEBASTIEN LONG AND  
**MAISON DE GRAND ESPRIT**  
LAUNCH IN SOUTHERN  
CALIFORNIA AND  
ACROSS THE U.S.

story and photos by Kyle Billings



The Maison de Grand Esprit 2017 L'Être Magique Rosé from Côtes de Provence was featured at the "Discover French Wine, Reinvented" event in West Hollywood, CA.

**FOR HIS FORMAL INTRODUCTION** to the Los Angeles market, intrepid winemaker Sebastien Long could certainly have chosen worse than the picturesque setting of the Skybar Hut at the Mondrian hotel. Overlooking the Southland from the Sunset Strip, Long offered a fresh perspective on French wine.

The event, appropriately dubbed "Discover French Wine, Reinvented," was held August 22 in West Hollywood as part of a grand world tour to debut Maison de Grand Esprit, one of the newest producers in the Treasury Wine Estates portfolio. (The brand name, which translates to "House of Great Minds," aims to combine Old World credibility with New World winemaking techniques.) Long told attendees the intent of establishing Maison de Grand Esprit—which produces appellation wines from Bordeaux, Burgundy, Châteauneuf-du-Pape, and Provence, as well as Champagne under its sister brand, Cuvée Grand Esprit—was to reclaim intrigue for pedigreed wine regions while imbuing them with a modern sensibility.

As part of the tour, Long trekked to numerous Asian and American locales to share his passion for a brand he perceives as much-needed in the industry—especially as the younger generation of wine drinkers increasingly eschews Old World bottlings in favor of those from countries with relatively nascent vinous traditions, among them Chile and Australia. "What we've created with Maison de Grand Esprit resonates with people," he said. "The approach we had was toward the consumer and how can we reinvent [and] recreate French wine even with 2,000 years of history—how can we bring something younger, fresher, [that's] looking at the future?"

Long undoubtedly has the resumé and roots to bolster his ambitions. Born in Alsace to a family with its own winemaking traditions, Long spent his childhood running through vineyards in the Southern Rhône. After apprenticing as an adolescent at a few wineries in Burgundy and the Rhône Valley, he went on to study winemaking and wine marketing at Montpellier SupAgro's National Institute of Higher Education in Agricultural Sciences in Languedoc-Roussillon. Long has worked harvests in Sonoma and also oversaw wine production for 12 years in Australia, accumulating experience that inspired a vision now manifested in Maison de Grand Esprit.

The California affair was informal by design. Draped in the sunset's rosé glow, a young and energetic crowd enjoyed three selections from storied regions: a Grenache-based Provençal Rosé, a Crémant de Bourgogne, and, apropos to any celebration, Champagne (in this case, Cuvée Grand Esprit's Marquis de la Mystériale Champagne NV). Paired with passed appetizers, the wines were complemented by a DJ spinning tracks as disparate as Blondie's "Heart of Glass" and, fittingly, Dua Lipa's "New Rules."

The outline of a unicorn illuminated the center of the room, and while it provided an eye-catching backdrop for social media posts throughout the event, Long said it also served as a symbol of the brand's spirit. "The unicorn represents the master transformation," he explained. "It's one brand with different regions and different wine styles even though the wine overall has the same identity: fruit-driven wine; accessible now [with] great concentration."

The unicorn is also emblazoned on every bottle of Maison de Grand Esprit, perhaps as an intimation that the successful union of two wine worlds may no longer be relegated to fantasy. *—SJ*



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# Thickheaded Somms

EXAMINING THE **NEUROSCIENCE** BEHIND  
EXPERT WINE TASTING by Deborah Parker Wong

**AMONG OUR MANY** activities, wine professionals devote a considerable amount of time to perception: the state of being where we become aware of something through our senses. According to *Neuroenology* author Gordon Shepherd, wine tasting engages a larger portion of our brain than activities like solving complex math and listening to classical music. Given that activation is how we learn things and sharpen our cognitive skills, it's no wonder that tasters who spend hours every day stimulating the neural systems associated with perception make something as difficult as blind-tasting look so easy.

Shepherd, a Professor of Neuroscience at Yale School of Medicine, primarily focuses on biomechanics and how the physical act of tasting wine informs our perceptions. His work has inspired several columns that have appeared here in *The SOMM Journal* on the perception of color and how our brains create perceptions of aroma and taste. Anecdotally, I've seen firsthand that even a basic understanding of the mechanics of sensory physiology gives students an advantage as they learn to taste analytically and objectively.

In my own work with a group of adult wine enthusiasts—many of whom have had formal wine education and hold trade certifications—it's the study of wine faults that opened the doors to a far greater understanding of quality and the molecular world of volatile aromas. Researchers agree that individuals who are adept at naming the flavor descriptors of a wine are better at recalling memories of specific aromas, which makes it possible to recognize wines they've tasted previously.

Because a wine's distinct taste largely relies on volatile aromatic compounds and not on molecules that provide nutrition, Shepherd posits that it's possible for wine drinkers to concentrate exclusively on perceptual details of flavor. Meanwhile, in a 2016 study that compared Master Sommeliers' brains to those of a control group, researchers found that the sommeliers had a "thicker" sensory area. The sommeliers' brains showed "specialization" in the olfactory and memory networks, suggesting that sensory training might help the brain evolve well into adulthood.

When it comes to expanding one's perception of wine faults, Jamie Goode's book *Flawless: Understanding Faults in Wine* is an excellent reference. One of the most challenging aspects of studying the processes that ruin wine is bridging the world of academic research with the firsthand experiences of winemakers, and Goode does this very effectively when unpacking the complex topics of sulfur and oxidation. *Flawless* is one of the textbooks I require for the college classes I'm currently teaching on wine faults, and students seem to find it particularly helpful.

The 19th-century English artist William Blake wrote, "If the doors of perception were cleansed, everything would appear to man as it is: infinite." (Fittingly, Blake's feelings about mankind's limited perception of reality inspired another author, Aldous Huxley, to explore altered consciousness in his book *The Doors of Perception*.) Throughout history, however, wine's effect on perception has been most closely tied to a simple phrase in Latin, *in vino veritas*: "In wine lies the truth." Expert or not, most tasters are inclined to agree. **SJ**

*"The sommeliers' brains showed 'specialization' in the olfactory and memory networks, suggesting that sensory training might help the brain evolve well into adulthood."*

PHOTO COURTESY OF ROLF IMAGES VIA ADOBE THINKSTOCK



# Sardinian SURPRISE

DISCOVERING SELLA & MOSCA, SARDINIA'S FOREMOST WINERY, AND THE NEARLY-EXTINCT TORBATO GRAPE *by Cliff Rames*

*The Sardinian  
vineyards of  
Sella & Mosca.*

Wine appreciation, among many things, is a never-ending journey of learning and discovery. To wit, I once heard a famous winemaker say that by the time he dies, he hopes to know a thing or two about wine.

As I weave and sometimes stumble along on my own wine adventure, I keep his humble observation close to heart, as a new or previously unknown factoid often comes along to surprise and delight me. The story of Sardinia's Sella & Mosca is a case in point: Brimming with revelatory moments, the winery's heralded history, pioneering spirit, picturesque vineyards, and terroir-driven premium wines never fail to impress.

Sella & Mosca's story began in 1899, when two adventurous businessmen from Piedmont, Erminio Sella and Edgardo Mosca, arrived in the Alghero region of Sardinia. What they saw dazzled them: a Mediterranean jewel of an island shining with idyllic charm and enchanting landscapes. Sella and Mosca knew immediately that the hot, dry climate, sandy soils, and biologically diverse ecosystem would be well-suited to grape-growing, but they soon uncovered two more surprises. At the same time many European vineyards were being decimated by the phylloxera infestation, Alghero's vines—including those of a nearly-extinct indigenous white grape called Torbato—were happily thriving on their own rootstocks.



Excited by their discovery, the two men promptly acquired a 1,600-acre property known as I Piani. There, just 4 miles from the sea in northwest Sardinia, Sella and Mosca founded one of the largest and most successful grape-vine nurseries in Europe: Cultivating 1,600 varieties, they promptly established themselves as a leading source of new plant material in the post-*phylloxera* era. To promote biodiversity and natural protections for the vines, they planted alternating rows of oleanders, palms, maritime pines, eucalyptus, and other Mediterranean plants throughout the vineyard in addition to creating a 12-acre nature preserve adjacent to the nursery.

To maximize the advantages offered by I Piani's patchwork of sandy clay, limestone, and *terra rosa* soils, the vineyard was divided into quadrants, with white varieties planted closer to the sea in white soil and red varieties planted further inland in red soil. In this *terroir*, the grapes flourished, and in 1903 Erminio and Edgardo felt compelled to build a winery and begin producing wines exclusively from their estate-grown fruit.



**The Sella & Mosca winery is the largest facility of its kind in Sardinia.**

More than a century later, Sella & Mosca reigns as the largest winery in Sardinia. The heart of the estate lies in the Alghero DOC, which was established in 1995; there, the sprawling 1,200-acre I Piani plot holds the distinction of being the second-largest contiguous vineyard area in Italy. Winemaker Giovanni Pinna oversees the cultivation of the indigenous Torbato, Vermentino, and Cannonau varieties, as well as international grapes such as Sauvignon Blanc and Cabernet Sauvignon. Another 37 acres in the northeastern Vermentino di Gallura DOCG—the only DOCG on Sardinia—and 17 acres in the southern Sulcis DOC, meanwhile, provide Sella & Mosca with premium, estate-owned Vermentino and dry-farmed Carignano fruit, respectively.



*The cellars of Sella & Mosca.*

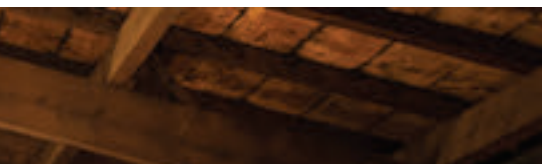
## Back from the Brink

Those surprised to learn of Cabernet Sauvignon from Sardinia are hardly alone, but according to Sella & Mosca North America Export Director Alfonso Gagliano, the variety has in fact been “thriving in Alghero for 110 years.” Earning consistently high ratings as well as awards from *Mundus Vini* and *Decanter*, the single-vineyard Sella & Mosca Marchese di Villamarina Alghero DOC Cabernet Sauvignon is a majestic, food-friendly wine of elegance and finesse. It also holds the distinction of being the only DOC-classified Cabernet Sauvignon produced in Sardinia.

It's the white Torbato, however, that shines as Sella & Mosca's most intriguing—and locally popular—wine. An ancient grape variety introduced to Sardinia in the 14th century by the Catalans, Torbato (Turbat in Spain; Malvoisie du Roussillon in France) earns its name from the cloudy, or turbid, must it produces, rendering it very difficult to vinify and clarify. Thin-skinned and susceptible to powdery mildew, fanleaf virus, and late ripening, Torbato nearly disappeared as growers ripped it out in favor of more reliable varieties. Yet founders Erminio and Edgardo believed in Torbato and persevered, rescuing it from near-oblivion so that it could be enjoyed by future generations.

Sella & Mosca is currently the only producer in the world to produce 100 percent Torbato varietal wines—under four separate labels, no less. The flagship Terre Bianche Torbato Alghero DOC, named for the ancient marine sedi-





Two versions of Sella & Mosca are served at Maxwell Park in Washington, D.C.

PHOTO: NICK KLEIN

ment-derived white soil in which it's grown, is currently the only varietally true Torbato imported to the U.S. and is quickly gaining cult status among sommeliers and wine geeks. An Alghero Torbato Spumante Brut, meanwhile, is due in 2019.

Among those sommeliers in the know is Brent Kroll, proprietor of Maxwell Park wine bar in Washington, D.C. He tells *The SOMM Journal* that he was blown away by his first taste of Torbato. "My introduction was the 2008 vintage, and it was ridiculously delicious," he recalls, adding that the wine was juicy and tropical like ripe Albariño yet showed a developed petrol note akin to aged Riesling. "What I really like about Torbato is its medium-plus body weight and its great concentration of fruit and savory limestone-mineral characteristics. I paired it with soft-shell crab and it totally crushed it."

Essential to Sella & Mosca's lasting success is its diehard commitment to tradition and innovation, which coexist harmoniously on the wind-sprayed, salty shores of Sardinia. "Sella & Mosca wines are truly, traditionally Sardinian," observes Gagliano, noting that 65 percent of Sella & Mosca wines are consumed on the island by locals and tourists. But thanks to Taub Family Selections, consumers in the U.S. can also now be surprised and delighted by one of Sardinia's sweetest secrets: the wondrous wines of Sella & Mosca. **\$J**

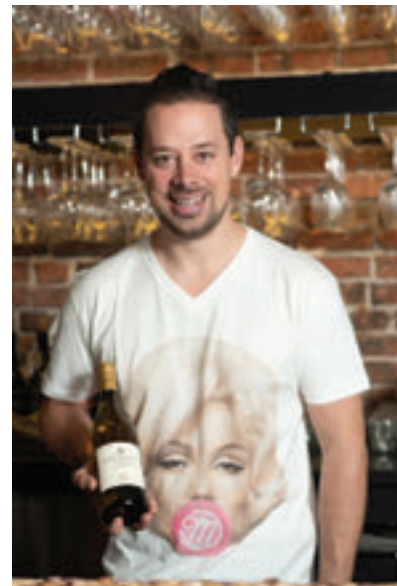


PHOTO: NICK KLEIN

Maxwell Park proprietor Brent Kroll is quick to praise Sella & Mosca's Torbato-based wines.

## Reviews by Meredith May, Publisher & Editorial Director

### **Sella & Mosca 2017 Le Arenarie, Alghero DOC**

**(\$18)** This wine is named for the erosion of ancient layers of sandstone on which these Sauvignon Blanc vines are grown. With a nose of vetiver and tarragon, the wine's mouth-filling creaminess tastes of lemon oil, red pepper, and slate.



### **Sella & Mosca 2016 Vermen- tino, di Gallura DOCG (\$27)**

A savory perfumed wine with notes of hazelnuts and shrubs. The creamy, luxe mouthfeel is sharpened a bit by fine acidity. Key lime shows on the mid-palate alongside the iconic nutty flavors of this esteemed variety.



### **Sella & Mosca 2014 Tanca Farra, Alghero DOC**

**(\$27)** A rustic beauty, this is an equal blend of Cabernet Sauvignon and Cannonau. Spiced herbs and exotic black tea season ripe cherries.





{ winery architecture }

# A PLACE IN THE *Sun*

EDGY BRAND **THE PRISONER WINE COMPANY**  
GETS A BEFITTING HOME OF ITS OWN

by Deborah Parker Wong / photos by Alexander Rubin

*A view of the impressive covered entrance  
into The Prisoner Wine Company's new  
winery just south of St. Helena, CA.*

*Ask any California sommelier* to name a trending wine style and “red blend” is all but guaranteed to rank among the top three replies. The category has grown by leaps and bounds, now accounting for more than 40 percent of new entrants in the U.S. wine market in recent years, according to a 2016 report by *Wine Business Monthly*.







*Chrissy Wittman, Director of Winemaking for The Prisoner Wine Company, has doubled the brand's portfolio during her tenure.*

Modern, ultra-premium red blends are hardly new to the scene: Wines modeled after traditional California field blends that rounded out Zinfandel with Cabernet Sauvignon, Syrah, Petite Sirah, and Charbono first appeared in the late 1990s. After The Prisoner Wine Company of St. Helena made its debut in 2000, the category rose to further prominence over the course of the decade as younger consumers' interest in monovarietal wines like Syrah and Merlot waned. Instead, these same varieties were being redeployed as components in sought-after blends.

### ***Brand Expansion***

After The Prisoner Wine Company was purchased from founder Dave Phinney, the transition in ownership ushered in a new phase of evolution: one charged to the capable hands of winemaker Chrissy Wittman. After helping finish out the 2015 vintage, Wittman officially moved her family to Napa in 2016 to become the brand's Director of Winemaking.

In addition to making three successive vintages with no discernable stylistic shift in the established labels, Wittman has doubled the portfolio, overseeing the addition of Syndrome, No. 39007, Headlock, ERASED, and Eternally Silenced. She also added The Snitch and Dérangé, which are available through distribution. "With blends, we have the ability to maintain continuity," says the winemaker, who sources fruit from more than 100 vineyards from the Central Coast—where she previously made wine at Scheid Vineyards and Wild Horse Winery—up to Mendocino.

Trained in ecology, biology, and agriculture, Wittman starts

finetuning her unconventional blends in the field. Tasting through the portfolio exposes an energy and lift that points to winemaking in smaller lots than one would expect. "There are several tasting room-only wines which are by nature small lots, including our rosé Syndrome and No. 39007, a Chenin Blanc/Viognier blend," she said. With production under 7,500 cases, Blindfold, the white counterpart to The Prisoner red blend, features Chardonnay, Roussanne, Viognier, Chenin Blanc, Muscat, and Vermentino.

The inaugural 2015 vintage of Dérangé, a barrel-selected blend of Cabernet Sauvignon, Petite Sirah, Merlot, Syrah, and Zinfandel from iconic Napa Valley vineyards, represents the upper end of the portfolio and retails for \$100. "Each variety brings something to the party: Cabernet provides structure and density; Petite contributes richness to the mid-palate; Merlot is dark fruit and juicy acidity; Syrah brings floral and spice notes; and Zinfandel is the glue that knits it all together," Wittman explains.

### ***Darkness and Light***

Unveiled in November, the reimagined winery was conceived by San Francisco architect Matt Hollis and interior designer Richard Von Saal, a Napa Valley native. The 40,000 square-foot space just south of St. Helena now unites a production winery, tasting lounge, open-view kitchen, and light-filled studio space dubbed "The Makery" under one roof.

Hollis has a stunning track record of winery design to his credit—among them Donum, Etude, Laird, Kenzok, and Gamble—and



**The interior of the new The Prisoner Wine Company winery was designed by Richard Von Saal, a Napa Valley native.**

is known for collaborating with clients on immersive experiences meant to enliven their respective surroundings. Meanwhile, as a former chef, Von Saal specializes in creating utterly distinctive restaurants, wineries, and residences that combine natural and highly polished surfaces in dramatic contrasts. In the new facility, visitors will notice packaging and label elements inspired by the brand's ethos mirrored in the materials and textures seen throughout the building.

The Prisoner blend's label is based on a dark etching by Spanish artist Francisco Jose de Goya (1746–1828) titled “La Petite Prisonnier,” which Phinney received as a gift from his parents as an adolescent. Over the course of his long career, Goya's work became deeply pessimistic and searching: The etching depicted on the label dates to 1807, the year Napoleon invaded Spain, and has long made the wine stand in stark contrast to the brighter, nature-inspired labels that began populating store shelves in the early 2000s.

Inspired by the label's color scheme, the new winery's black-and-grey palate is punctuated with splashes of red. Reclaimed wood accents, sourced from the original Bay Bridge, warm the gleaming finishes.

## *Rise of the Makers*

According to an August story in *The New York Times*, the facility is among several recent arrivals “shaking up the tourist scene in Napa Valley with interesting spaces, intimate

experiences, and an emphasis on dining and culture.” Napa Valley wineries have long partnered wine appreciation with cultural elements in the form of art, music, and cuisine, but through The Makery, The Prisoner Wine Company has introduced an artisanal experience to celebrate handmade objects and the talented makers behind them. These offerings are also inspired by the brand—this time by The Prisoner Wine Company's careful winemaking techniques and small grower partners.

Wittman and The Prisoner Wine Company Chef Brett Young will join a bevy of

local artisans in showcasing their creativity, which will serve as an integral part of the winery's tastings inside The Makery. The private space houses four open-format studios where artists can produce and display their wares as part of a memorable wine-pairing experience.

The opening slate of makers will include sculptor Agelio Batle of Batle Studio, who expertly casts writing instruments and sculptures from graphite. As an artist, Batle says he immediately gravitated toward the Prisoner aesthetic: “I enjoy contrast and exploring the connection between light and dark,” he explains. His piece “Ash Dancer,” a life-size skeleton cast in graphite that draws impressions of itself, will be featured alongside other wine-inspired items like ceramics, soaps, hand-milled pasta, wine jellies, artisan salts, jewelry, culinary bags, and cork apparel.

In addition to running the winery's open kitchen, Young will oversee The Yard on the other side of the property, along with a courtyard sheltered by living walls that houses a wood-burning oven and a culinary garden for herbs and produce. A Lodi native who trained in Singapore, the chef has developed a signature style of cuisine that relies on seasonal ingredients and a cross-cultural approach that bridges



**Prisoner Wine Company Chef Brett Young aims to elevate the wines through his pairing experiences.**




East and West. His fall-inspired dish of king salmon, sake kasu, squash, and tomato dashi pairs exceptionally well with The Prisoner Wine Company's nontraditional Merlot blend, Thorn. "In keeping with the brand aesthetic, we are going to push the envelope and create dishes that everyone can eat," Young says.



*The lighting accents in The Prisoner Wine Company's winery are made with reclaimed wood from the original Bay Bridge.*

For fans of The Prisoner Wine Company seeking a way to further immerse themselves in the brand and its guiding philosophies at the new winery, Property Director Brigid Harris recommends the 75-minute "The Makery Journey," which costs \$65 per person and is offered daily at 2 and 4 p.m. The tour, which ventures through the vineyard and culinary garden, also includes a tasting of five wines in The Makery.

The Makery also hosts elevated pairing experiences weekly Thursday through Sunday as part of the 90-minute "Makery Experience"; at \$125 per person, it features an assortment of Young's seasonal bites paired with limited-release wines. Guests are also welcome to simply enjoy a glass or wine flight (\$45) in the tasting lounge, and while reservations aren't required, they are recommended. For more information, visit [thepriisonerwinecompany.com](http://thepriisonerwinecompany.com). 

## *Tasting Through The Prisoner Wine Company Portfolio:*

**The Prisoner Wine Company 2017 Syndrome** An offering exclusive to the tasting room and wine club, this coppery rosé features Grenache, Syrah, Pinot Noir, Sangiovese, and Mourvèdre. It's floral and spicy with lively acidity and a juicy, refreshing quality.

**The Prisoner Wine Company 2017 No. 39007** This sumptuously textured Chenin Blanc and Viognier blend is intended to be "something in addition to Chardonnay." Made with grapes hailing primarily from Mendocino, it shows notes of coconut, apple, and melon.

**The Prisoner Wine Company 2017 The Snitch** This barrel-fermented Roussanne has abundant richness thanks to 14 months spent in barrel. It's balanced by notes of ripe pineapple and lemon drop that carry through the well-integrated finish.

**The Prisoner Wine Company 2016 Blindfold** A white blend that uses barrel-fermented Chardonnay as its base, this wine sees the addition of rich, floral notes from Roussanne and Viognier.

**The Prisoner Wine Company 2017 Headlock** Charbono from Calistoga, the dominant variety, partners here with Petite Syrah. Aromas of cola and brown spices add further complexity to layers of mulberry, graphite, and black pepper.

**The Prisoner Wine Company 2017 The Prisoner** Known for its drinkability, this wine expresses a consistent profile of cool, mineral-laden aromas; red and black fruit with mildly spicy tannins; and a touch of black pepper.

**The Prisoner Wine Company 2016 Saldo** This lively Zinfandel-dominant blend shows layers of red, black, and blue fruit alongside meaty umami notes and an earthy, spiced finish.

**The Prisoner Wine Company 2015 Thorn** A leaner Merlot-dominant blend, it's medium-bodied with signature notes of cedar on the mid-palate.

**The Prisoner Wine Company 2016 cuttings** This Cabernet Sauvignon-dominant blend sees the addition of Petite Sirah, Syrah, and Zinfandel. It's a touch resinous on the mid-palate and builds in intensity toward an espresso-tinged finish.

**The Prisoner Wine Company 2015 Dérangé** Balanced and finely tuned, this Zinfandel-dominant blend builds in flavor as it shows finesse and length worthy of its \$100 price tag.



# Treasured TIME

## TREASURY WINE ESTATES OFFERS SIPS AND SCHOLARSHIPS ON ITS NATIONAL LUXICON TOUR

by Meredith May, Ruth Tobias, and Deborah Parker Wong



*Treasury Wine Estates Education Manager Gillian Ballance, MS, sets up for the blind tasting in Seattle.*

**TREASURY WINE ESTATES** may have a global portfolio, but according to Education Manager Gillian Ballance, MS, the company has strived to maintain an outlook that's locally minded and personal. "We like to stay engaged with the somm community," says Ballance, a WSET Certified Educator who also holds a Diploma in Wine & Spirits from the organization.

Partnering with SommFoundation and *The SOMM Journal* to add an educational component to the company's annual seven-city Luxicon wine tour has proven vital to that mission. Prior to each Grand Tasting—a walkaround introduction to the luxury brands Treasury Wine Estates represents—Ballance leads a seminar on deductive tasting followed by a blind-tasting competition. The top three scorers each receive \$1,200 scholarships to apply to their own rigorous studies in wine.

To illustrate the initiative's success, Ballance recalls a recent encounter with a woman sitting for the Court of Master Sommeliers Advanced exam who told her, "I won the scholarship money in San Francisco last year, and that's why I'm here." "That's the goal, right? Or you can take the cash and buy a bottle of Krug," Ballance jokes.

Of course, whether or not they end up claiming victory, professionals attend with a goal to brush up on their tasting technique with the best in the business. On every stop of the tour, which this year visited Washington, D.C., Chicago, Seattle, San Francisco, Los Angeles, Miami, and Dallas, Ballance invites a fellow Master or Advanced Sommelier to serve as a co-instructor—not only to "create a bit of a local draw," as she puts it, but to reassure attendees that there's no one right way to study. "Everybody has different methods," she explains. "You can be wrong a lot, and it's a very humbling process," but eventually "you arrive at what a wine is by knowing what it's not."





*From left to right: Andy Lock, Sommelier at Cask & Ale in Madison, WI; Emily Wines, MS; Gillian Ballance, MS; Elizabeth Kowal, Assistant Wine Buyer at Geneva Wine Cellars; and Ryan Baldwin, Head Sommelier at the Waldorf Astoria Chicago.*

## Chicago

photos by AJ Krane

How fitting that a luxury icon should serve as the backdrop for Luxicon: In all its modern grandeur, The Peninsula Chicago set a five-star scene for both the tasting and the seminar that preceded it. Ballance's partner for the Windy City edition was Master Sommelier Emily Wines, the Vice President of Wine and Beverage Experiences for Cooper's Hawk Winery & Restaurants. Their collaboration begged the question of whether there could be two more auspiciously surnamed guides to lead one through the art of tasting.

The pair's detailed insights into the Court's deductive approach started with



*Emily Wines, MS and Vice President of Wine and Beverage Experiences for Cooper's Hawk Winery & Restaurants, with Treasury Wine Estates Education Manager Gillian Ballance, MS.*

the Beringer 2016 Oak Knoll District Luminus Chardonnay as a control wine. Ballance stressed the importance of sight in the evaluation process, admitting that she "got burned a couple of times" in the tasting portion of her own exam by, for example, neglecting to observe the copery glints in a glass of Pinot Gris.

Though her reputation as a Krug Cup winner preceded her, Wines put everyone at ease by reminding them that blind-tasting is no "parlor trick," but rather a practical means for sommeliers to "choose wines that are classic representations of what they should be." "It's one thing to recognize these aromas, but it's another to understand cause and effect," Wines continued.

To provide another example, Wines next blind-tasted a Penfolds 2015 Bin 28 Kalimna Shiraz, observing that its high color and viscosity likely located it in the New World. She then turned to the nose, adding, "I always try to think about what's driving the wine"—in this case, extracted black fruit laced with everything from olives and toasted herbs to smoke and tar. Similar notes on the palate combined with high alcohol and medium-plus yet silky tannins led her to a conclusion: Barossa Valley Shiraz. "Anyone want to challenge what Krug Cup said?" Ballance asked teasingly.

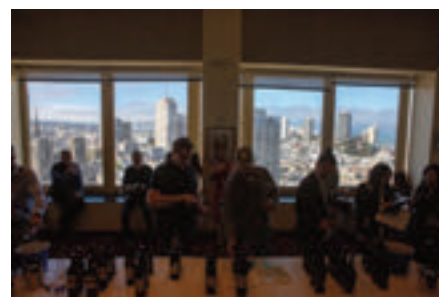
Then it was the guests' turn. All they

knew about the three reds poured before them was that they'd been chosen in accordance with a theme, but apparently they did an admirable job of evaluating them. Upon announcing the winners, Ballance praised the group for "writing novels" about the Bordeaux blends: the Maison de Grand Esprit 2015 Saint-Estèphe, the Chateau St. Jean 2015 Cinq Cépages, and the Mazzei Tenuta Belguardo 2013 Maremma Toscana.

The scholarships were awarded to Elizabeth Kowal, Assistant Wine Buyer at Geneva Wine Cellars and a sommelier instructor at the College of DuPage in Glen Ellyn; Ryan Baldwin, Head Sommelier at the Waldorf Astoria Chicago; and Andy Lock, Sommelier at Cask & Ale in Madison, Wisconsin. Everyone, however, benefited from the exercise: "I'm Certified and deciding whether to go for Advanced, but my career's been exclusively Italian and my biggest stumbling block is blind-tasting," said Anika Ellison, Sommelier at Chicago's Spiaggia. "What's helpful for me is discussing indicators, and they did a good job of spelling those out."

## San Francisco

photos by John Curley



*Somms enjoy the spoils of the Luxicon portfolio with a bird's-eye view of San Francisco.*

For the San Francisco Luxicon tasting held at the Mark Hopkins, Ballance teamed up with fellow Master Sommelier Chris Blanchard for an inspired orientation of the Court's tasting grid before a tough double-blind tasting.

Blanchard, the Director of Sales at Vine Hill Ranch in Oakville (he formerly served as the wine director at the now-



**From left to right: Sean Andrade, owner of AWG Private Chefs; Jordan Abraham, formerly of Mourad; Gillian Ballance, MS; Chris Blanchard, MS; and Greg Schuessler, wine buyer for Wilibee's Wine & Spirits at the Mark Hopkins.**

closed Michelin-starred restaurant Redd), said that blind-tasting is "something [he] approach[es] with a lot of humility." Modest he may be, but there's no question that Blanchard, a former rapper whose single "That's the Way Girls Are" reached the top 20 on the Billboard chart in 1987, absolutely enjoys his profession.

Ballance chose the elusive theme of Sauvignon Blanc from regions whose benchmark styles seem to fall all over the map. Factoring in vintage effect, climate shifts, and consumer trends make the theory aspect of the blind-tasting significantly more important—and, in many ways, even more challenging. "Old World wines are framed around structure while New World wines are built around fruit," said Blanchard, whose "management by exception" strategy for identifying origin helps narrow down the possibilities. "If you can go from 28 possible grape varieties to ten, your chances are considerably better."

The blind wines were revealed as the 2016 Squealing Pig from New Zealand's Marlborough region, the 2017 Labrinto from Chile's Maule Valley, and a 2017 Domaine de la Vauvise from Sancerre; all three showed a surprising range of ripeness and similar levels of pyrazines. After the points were counted, the tasters who scored the highest were Greg Schuessler, wine buyer for Wilibee's Wine & Spirits; Sean Andrade, owner of AWG Private Chefs; and Jordan Abraham, formerly of Mourad.

# Seattle

photos by Leda Costa

On the Seattle leg of the tour, the breezy, sun-drenched waterfront charm of the contemporary restaurant Westward provided a bit of friendly competition for Ballance herself—it takes major charisma to keep an audience from being distracted by a setting like that.

While walking participants through the Court's deductive tasting grid, Ballance implored them once again to not ignore sight, as "there are so many clues in the glass." She then observed the staining on the Penfolds 2015 Bin 28 Kalimna Shiraz: "Just from that, I think it's a warm-climate or highly pigmented varietal," she reasoned.

Yet Ballance was equally careful to emphasize an oft-overlooked aspect of the nose: its general condition rather than its specific character. Is the fruit in question fresh or dried, tart or jammy? Are you smelling the flesh or the peel or the pith? "There are so many boxes to check on the nose, but if you think about fruit condition, it'll help you before you jump into the descriptors," she explained.

Ballance concluded by sharing the mnemonic device she uses to ensure she fully evaluates a wine's palate: DATA-B, which stands for dryness, acid, tannin, alcohol, and body.

Going back to the basics, she added, means keeping a milk analogy in mind: Is the mouth-feel closer to that of skim or 2-percent milk? Further analysis may lead to indicators like phenolic bitterness: "Torrontés, Pinot Gris, and Grüner Veltliner can give you a little of that," Ballance said.



**The Seattle somms quietly blind-taste for their shot at a \$1,200 Luxicon scholarship.**



**Luxicon scholarship winner Sarah Zenner is the Wine Director for Westward in Seattle.**



**Seastar Restaurant Sommelier Stephanie Schrankel also won one of the Seattle scholarships.**



**Luxicon scholarship recipient Robert Richards is a co-proprietor at Tacoma Wine Merchants.**

Laberinto 2017 Maule Valley Sauvignon Blanc, and the Squealing Pig 2016 Marlborough Sauvignon Blanc. After tasting concluded, they headed out onto the patio overlooking Lake Union to further sniff, swirl, and sip at the Grand Tasting until the results were announced. Scholarships went to Westward's own Wine Director and Assistant GM, Sarah Zenner, as well as Seastar Restaurant Sommelier Stephanie Schrankel and Robert Richards, co-proprietor at Tacoma Wine Merchants.

Schrankel, for her part, admitted that furthering her education "was always just out of reach." "Now that it's a financial possibility, it'd be great to continue down that road," she said. Other guests found themselves appreciating the present moment as much as the future: Said Beth Hickey, Sommelier at Heartwood Provisions, "I'm tasting a lovely rosé and I just had [Penfolds] Grange, so I'm winning."



# Los Angeles

photos by Cal Bingham



*The SommFoundation and SOMM Journal scholarship recipients at Luxicon Los Angeles in the Intercontinental Hotel Indigo with Gillian Ballance, MS, and co-host Eduardo Bolaños (second and third from left): Alicia Ajolo of Terranea Resort, Enrique Martinez of Harvest in Laguna Beach, and Bob Henry, Wine Advisor for Whole Foods West Hollywood.*



*Brian Grandison (second from left), Lead Sommelier for Hakkasan Las Vegas, was among the somms who attended Luxicon Los Angeles.*

Brian Grandison, Lead Sommelier for Hakkasan Las Vegas, made the extra effort to journey to Los Angeles for the next stop on the Luxicon tour: "I have been tasting blind for a long time, and when I read about this in *The SOMM Journal*, I wanted to make the trek," he said. Another attendee, Andy Holzer of A-Frame Wine & Spirits in Mammoth Lakes, drove five hours from the Eastern Sierras to L.A. He wholeheartedly agreed with Grandison on the value of attending Luxicon: "I brought two of my employees along," Holzer noted.

As the proprietor of the largest-volume retail store for fine wines in the area, Holzer said he wanted to take advantage of tasting wines he typically lacks access to. "An afternoon spent tasting Georges de Latour, Penfolds, Etude, Château Minuty, and Cinq Cépages will be a

resource for fond palate memories," he added.

Scholarship winner Alicia Ajolo, Wine Director at Terranea Resort in Palos Verdes, said Ballance's presence at the event was the impetus for her attendance. "I read about the Luxicon Tour last year in *The SOMM Journal* and really wanted to learn from this amazing woman. There were many new tasting tools that clicked with me today," she said. "It's more than an hour's commute from the property where I work, but this event is that important for a lifelong lesson. It's about taking that next step as I head toward the big exam." ❧



*The Etude 2015 Heirloom Pinot Noir from Grace Benoist Ranch in Carneros is an estate-grown red with a perfumed nose of jasmine and white tea. Rose petals add to the bouquet on the palate as strawberry and cranberry accent the lush mouthfeel with a hint of wet leaves on the finish.*



*The Château Minuty 281 is a Côtes de Provence rosé with notes of fresh melon and honeyed chamomile laced with baby's breath.*



The Inferno area within the Valtellina is known for its scorching summer-afternoon sun and stone-terraced vineyards.



# A Fresh Take

A CHANGE IN THE GUARD AT VALTELLINA'S **NINO NEGRI** SIGNALS A NEW CHAPTER OF HIGH-QUALITY WINEMAKING by Courtney Schiessl

PHOTOS COURTESY OF NINO NEGRI



*The spicy, bold Nino Negri Inferno.*

**IT ISN'T EASY** to make wine in Valtellina. The northernmost area for Nebbiolo cultivation in Italy, Valtellina is an Alpine winegrowing region with marginal temperatures and steep slopes that require a painstaking level of hands-on management. Despite these challenges, Valtellina's largest producer, Nino Negri, has staked its reputation for more than a century on the phenomenal results that come from this extreme region.

Following the April retirement of Casimiro Maule, the winemaker who shaped Nino Negri's success over the past 40 vintages, the first releases from newly appointed Winemaker Danilo Drocco signal a new chapter in the winery's history. Lured by the prospect of crafting distinctive, high-quality wines from northern Italy's finest grape variety in some of the most enviable terroir in the world, Drocco plans to make his mark on Nino Negri's next century of success.

## Extreme Winemaking

Since its establishment in 1897, Nino Negri has worked to garner international recognition for the wines of Valtellina, a mountainous region located in the far reaches of Lombardy just south of the Swiss border. Unlike most of this area's Alpine valleys, Valtellina runs from east to west, creating a steep, south-facing slope that proves essential to grape cultivation in this cool climate.



Stone terraces cut into the side of this slope are largely planted with Nebbiolo: Locally known as Chiavennasca, it's the region's most prominent variety and must make up at least 90 percent of Valtellina or Valtellina Superiore wines. The slope of Valtellina is so extreme, in fact, that it's cheaper to lift boxes of harvested grapes directly from the mountainside by helicopter than it is to transport them by truck.

For Drocco, the awe-inspiring setting offered love at first sight. Born and raised in Piedmont, the winemaker has spent his 30-year career working in some of the Langhe's top wineries, including Prunotto and Fontanafredda. Upon hearing the news of Maule's retirement, Drocco couldn't resist interviewing for the position—and after he poured his wife a glass of Nino Negri's bold, spicy Valtellina Superiore Inferno, he says she too was sold on the venture.

Drocco now commutes three and a half hours from his home in the Langhe to the winery in Valtellina at the beginning of each week, but he considers the drive more than worthwhile. "Valtellina is special," Drocco says over lunch in Manhattan. "It's impossible to understand if you haven't been there, which is why everyone needs to visit."

### Another Side of Nebbiolo

After working closely with Nebbiolo in the Langhe, Drocco says part of the allure of taking over winemaking at Nino Negri was the chance to combine the familiar with the new. "The idea to do something in another place with the grape I know best was a great opportunity," he adds. Though Nebbiolo maintains classic varietal characteristics like complex flavors and aromas, strong tannic structure, and bright acidity, Valtellina's climatic and geographical conditions—which Drocco refers to as "extreme cultivation"—create unique expressions of the grape.

While Valtellina itself is not homogenous (Nino Negri owns 31 hectares of vines across several sub-zones of the region and works with additional vineyards, as well) Drocco emphasizes the importance of the area's stony soil. Since vines must dig deep into the ancient volcanic rock and granite to get water and nutrients, there is a distinct minerality to Nino Negri's wines. The

combination of intense sunlight and cool temperatures, meanwhile, creates a fine balance of concentration and acidity that also characterizes the wines of Valtellina. "There is a beautiful freshness to the finish of Valtellina wines," Drocco says. "I could not find that in the Langhe."

The traditional *Sfursat* method of winemaking, a trademark style of Nino Negri, also serves to distinguish Valtellina wines from Nebbiolos made elsewhere. Born from necessity, as temperatures in the past were too cold to fully mature these late-ripening grapes, the process requires vintners to pick the grapes early

highlight the Inferno area, aptly named for its scorching summer-afternoon sun, and the Sassella area, where the soil is deeper to the bedrock and richer than in neighboring subzones.

Drocco, however, plans to take the winery one step further, noting that "it's time for Valtellina to show the real potential of its terroir through single vineyards." Nino Negri already produces the Vigneto Fracia Valtellina Superiore, which is made from the original vineyard of the estate and known for its characteristic notes of Mediterranean herbs. Because the winery has strong holdings in Valtellina, Drocco sees



*The wines of Nino Negri are made in the Sfursat method, in which whole bunches of Nebbiolo dry in boxes.*

and dry whole bunches in boxes before pressing the uber-concentrated berries into rich wines with layered structure. "This is a wine made with no technology," Drocco notes, "only tradition." Nino Negri produces two *Sfursat* di Valtellina wines: the *Sfursat* Carlo Negri, named after the winery's founder, and the *Sfursat* 5 Stelle, which is aged exclusively in barriques.

### The Future of Valtellina

With a mission to garner broader attention for its home region, Nino Negri has taken strides toward distinguishing not just Valtellina as a whole, but the distinct subzones of the region, as well. The winery produces Valtellina Superiore cuvées that

more opportunities to highlight the great single vineyards of the region.

By drawing international focus to Valtellina's potential for world-class Nebbiolo, Drocco hopes to make additional investments in his second home and attract more local residents to work in the vineyards through pay increases. (Compared to the 200 man-hours required for the average wine region's harvest, Valtellina requires as many as 1,300, making it difficult to recruit workers.) Yet that has always been Nino Negri's goal: to elevate the status of Valtellina wines. After all, this may mark the start of a new chapter for Nino Negri, but the winery's story began long ago. **||**

**SINCE ITS INCEPTION IN 1883,**

Trapiche has successfully weathered the economic and environmental challenges that have long affected the Argentine wine industry. While the company's decisions have been made through the careful monitoring of international wine trends and strategic marketing plans, Trapiche hasn't shied away from taking risks to remain one of South America's leading premium wineries.

One sign of Trapiche's willingness to go against the grain arrived in the 1980s, when a mass movement in the country uprooted old vines to make way for orchards and the production of jug wine. Celebrating 100 years of business, Trapiche instead opted to launch its Medalla label, preempting the rise of foreign investment

in Argentine winemaking in the '90s and helping reignite interest in the birthplace of the country's fine-wine industry.

Argentina's original wine zone, known as Primera Zona, spans from Maipú near the country's western border to the upper Mendoza River in Luján de Cuyo approximately 15 kilometers to the south. Within Primera Zona, the altitude can range from roughly 700 to 1,000 meters above sea level; climatic conditions, meanwhile, vary from cooler temperatures to a continental climate akin to Napa Valley or a Mediterranean-type climate like that of Jerez, Spain.

Because European immigrants first established their wineries here in the late 19th century, some of the oldest Argentine plantings of Malbec can be found

in the area. Since the label's inception, Medalla Malbec and Cabernet Sauvignon wines have been sourced from premium vineyard sites within Cruz de Piedra (east Maipú) and Luján de Cuyo. When blended together, they speak to the legacy of the first vines in Argentina.

Planted at altitudes over 850 meters (roughly 2,789 feet) above sea level in clay-loam and gravelly soils, these vines reap all the benefits of their proximity to the Andes. Reduced protection from UV rays spurs the growth of thicker-skinned grapes rich in polyphenols, which impart improved structure and flavor.

Due to their altitude, the vineyards also experience significant diurnal shifts from day to night, enabling the grapes to hang

# FUTURE Is *Legacy*

**TRAPICHE MEDALLA SHOWS THE REWARD IN RISK AS THE ARGENTINE WINERY EXPANDS ITS VINEYARD HOLDINGS**

by Rina Bussell



longer on the vine to ripen while still retaining their acidity. The Andes provide shelter from the humid Pacific winds, lessening the risk of mold and mildew, while runoff from melting snow supplies pure water for irrigation via the Mendoza River. Yet despite the environmental factors that persist today, the fact remains that these vines have evolved for 50-plus years to yield the concentrated, structured, and dense fruit they're known for.

### Seeking Balance

In recent years, the focal point of fine-wine production in Argentina has moved further south into the reaches of Uco Valley, where calcium-rich soils and cooler climates produce aromatic, phenolically

ripe wines with a lower alcohol content and higher acidity. Other trends include an increase in the production of white wines, a low-intervention approach in the winery, and viticultural sustainability. The positioning of Argentina's wine regions near the Andes and the rocky, sandy composition of their subsoils have made the transition to sustainable viticulture easier; as these conditions help prevent the spread of harmful pests like phylloxera while reducing the need for fungicides.

Trapiche has expanded its own holdings to include sites in Tupungato, the northernmost Uco Valley region known for vibrant fruit with fresh aromatics. A major part of the company's focus, however, remains on strengthening the heritage of

Primera Zona while channeling its distinct terroir and lengthy vine age. Trapiche currently utilizes a more precise drip irrigation system to reduce water usage while increasing fruit concentration.

The winery aims to expand its sustainability efforts in the coming years as it continues to experiment with various winemaking methods, including harvesting earlier to achieve better balance in its wines, aging in older oak, or avoiding oak altogether in order to heighten freshness and highlight minerality. Regardless of these existing or potential adjustments, the desire to balance innovation and tradition while crafting high-quality wines from the cradle of Argentina will remain at the heart of Trapiche's mission. SJ



*The Andes shelter the Trapiche Medalla vineyards from humid Pacific winds.*



Marilisa Allegrini with her daughter, Caterina.





# FROM THE Veneto TO THE *Tuscan Coast*

WITH POGGIO  
AL TESORO,  
MARILISA ALLEGRINI  
ESTABLISHES A  
SECOND DOMAINE



*by David Gadd*

Italy's wine landscape is best known as a patchwork quilt of small producers who ply their own terroirs using local grape varieties, from Negroamaro in Puglia to Brunello in Tuscany, Nebbiolo in Piedmonte, and Corvina and Rondinella in the Veneto.

This quaint image, while historically accurate and still true to some extent, has changed over the past several decades. No longer provincial, Italian producers have ventured well beyond their traditional boundaries to explore other areas of the peninsula (Banfi's Piemonte wines and Antinori's Tormaresca in Puglia come to mind).

For Marilisa Allegrini, who heads the celebrated Veneto house of Allegrini alongside her brother Franco, the attraction of the Maremma—the coastal area of southwestern Tuscany—was hard to resist. "We used to go on vacation to the Maremma, and I always loved it," says Marilisa, who visited the U.S. earlier this year with her daughter Caterina to present wines from the family's Bolgheri-based estate, Poggio al Tesoro. Caterina, representing the seventh generation of her winemaking family, recently completed advanced studies in philosophy but is eager to follow in her mother's footsteps. We caught up with them over a luncheon at the downtown Los Angeles restaurant 71 Above, where their Bolgheri wines wowed members of the trade.



Marilisa Allegrini speaks with members of the trade about the Poggio al Tesoro wines at 71 Above in downtown Los Angeles.

*"It's very apparent that the Allegrini family has succeeded in making Poggio al Tesoro one of the jewels of Bolgheri."*

—JOHN DOWNING, ITALIAN WINE SPECIALIST AT K&L WINE MERCHANTS

## The Lure of **Bolgheri**

Bolgheri, the Maremma commune that shot to fame nearly a half-century ago with Super Tuscan wines such as Sassicaia and Ornellaia, is the playground of international (read: French) grape varieties once spurned in the rest of Italy. Cabernet Sauvignon, Cabernet Franc, Petit Verdot, and even Syrah thrive there.

In 2003, Marilisa and her late brother Walter began planning a major wine estate on the coast that would express their love of Bolgheri, which was granted DOC status in 1994. They wanted it to serve as a place where they could explore wines very different from those of their beloved Valpolicella, and today Poggio al Tesoro is one of the largest properties in Bolgheri with its 75 hectares of vines (the DOC itself is only 1,200 hectares). "Sassicaia and Ornellaia are our neighbors, and Le Macchiole is just across the street," Marilisa said.

Planted between the Tyrrhenian Sea to the west and the foothills of the Colline Metallifere to the east, their four vineyards enjoy the characteristic Bolgheri climate of moderate temperatures year-round, constant sea breezes, low humidity, and more sunny days than other parts of Tuscany: elements that merge to create the bold, ripe style the DOC is known for. The first plantings were of Cabernet Sauvignon and Cabernet Franc, the latter being a favorite of Walter's. "Here, we are planting on the alluvial plain, not in the hills as in Valpolicella," Marilisa noted.

Two of the vineyards are situated along the road that stretches north to south through the area. Le Grottine has excellent drainage for Cabernet Franc, Cabernet Sauvignon, and Petit Verdot, while the Via Bolgherese vineyard (named for the road) is dedicated to Cabernet Franc. Further north is the Le Sondaia vineyard, which is planted to Merlot and Syrah in its clay soils; Cabernet Franc and Petit Verdot in its sandy soils; Cabernet Sauvignon in stony soil; and, on even sandier soil toward the sea, Vermentino. The Valle di Cerbaia vineyard, meanwhile, is divided into two parcels, the higher with poorer soils for Cabernet Franc and Cabernet Sauvignon and the lower with



clay soils where the Allegrinis have planted Viognier and Petit Manseng.

"It's very apparent that the Allegrini family has succeeded in making Poggio al Tesoro one of the jewels of Bolgheri," said John Downing, an Italian wine specialist at Los Angeles retailer K&L Wine Merchants.

"Their wines express both depth and elegance and offer exceptional value at their given price points."

Marilisa said her family had high expectations for Vermentino, and history justified these feelings, as the variety was the first wine produced by Poggio al Tesoro.

(The 2017 SoloSole, which relaunches Vermentino production at the winery, is aged four months in stainless steel on fine lees.) During the luncheon, Nick Caballero, owner of Mirabelle Wine Bar in L.A., summed up Poggio al Tesoro nicely: "an allegory of Bolgheri in 750mL." **SJ**

## THE *Wines*



### **SoloSole Vermentino 2017, Toscana IGT**

100% Vermentino;  
\$25

A stellar example of Vermentino: intense yet beautifully refined with expressive minerality, tertiary aromas and flavors, and keenly balanced acidity.



### **Mediterra 2017, Toscana IGT**

40% Syrah, 30% Merlot,  
30% Cabernet Sauvignon;  
\$27

"The name means 'land in the middle,'" Marilisa said of this modern blend, referencing the vineyards' position between the sea to the west and the hills to the east. (Because 7 hectares of those vineyards lie outside the Bolgheri appellation, it carries the broader Toscana IGT.) Perfect for by-the-glass programs, this Super Tuscan delivers ripe, complex, fruit-driven flavors and vies with wines at much higher price points.



### **Il Seggio 2015, Bolgheri Superiore DOC**

40% Merlot, 30% Cabernet Sauvignon, 20% Cabernet Franc, 10% Petit Verdot; \$60

Named for the river that crosses Bolgheri, this classic blend of all five red Bordelais varieties shows heady black fruit aromas, exquisite poise on the palate, and a long, racy finish. Noting that the 2014 vintage received a 98-point score from *Decanter*, Marilisa added that "the 2015 vintage was outstanding for Bolgheri."



### **Sondraia 2015, Bolgheri Superiore DOC**

65% Cabernet Sauvignon, 25% Merlot, 10% Cabernet Franc; \$85

As Poggio al Tesoro's exquisite flagship, Sondraia has become one of Bolgheri's classic wines. With half the grapes coming from above the Via Bolgherese and the other half from below, this blend has an explosive nose, vigorous notes of black fruit and spice on a silky texture, and a lingering, herb-tinged finish. It's a stunning Super Tuscan with a thoroughly modern outlook.



### **Dedicato a Walter 2013, Toscana IGT**

100% Cabernet Franc;  
\$135

Marilisa's brother Walter Allegrini, who died in 2003, was the inspiration behind the family's Bolgheri project. This Cabernet Franc, the halo wine from Poggio al Tesoro, is dedicated to his memory. World-class elegance and poise defines this extraordinary effort. Marilisa said, "When I'm in the vineyards in the summer, I can see millions of stars, but especially I always see the constellation Cassiopeia—the big 'W' in the sky—and I know that Walter is there, watching."

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Fourth Annual

# SOMMELIER SUMMIT

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# WHAT TO EXPECT:

## SUNDAY, JANUARY 27

10:30 a.m. – noon  
12:00 – 1:30 p.m.

### Registration Lunch

*"A Taste of Santa Barbara" Sponsored by Jackson Family Wines*

*Get your palate ready with a taste of Santa Barbara! Explore the wines of this beautiful AVA paired with small bites prepared by CIA chefs.*

1:30 – 2 p.m.

### Welcome

*CIA Provost Mark Erickson warmly welcomes you to the summit, and you'll meet summit MCs Andrea Robinson, MS and Kevin Zraly before you get whisked away for a top-secret wine tasting experience.*

*Presenters: Mark Erickson, Provost, The Culinary Institute of America;  
Andrea Robinson, MS, The ONE Stemware, Kevin Zraly, Author & Educator*

3 – 5 p.m.

### General Session I Presented by Napa Valley Vintners

*A Special Tasting: Don't Ask, We Won't Tell*

*We'll kick off the summit with a truly one-of-a-kind wine tasting experience at Greystone presented by our friends at the Napa Valley Vintners.*

5:15 – 7:15 p.m.

### Reception Supported by Napa Valley Vintners

*We'll head to Greystone's historic barrel room for a top-secret walk-around food and wine tasting reception.*

## MONDAY, JANUARY 28

8 – 9 a.m.  
9 – 10 a.m.

### Breakfast & Late Registration

### 50 Year Perspective: Witness to the Wine & Food Revolution

*Presenters: Andrea Robinson, MS, The ONE Stemware;  
Kevin Zraly, Author & Educator*

10:30 a.m. – noon

### Breakout Sessions – Group 1

*Session 1: The Sommelier's Atlas of Taste*

*Authors Rajat Parr and Jordan Mackay will take you on a region-by-region journey through Europe as they explore the intricacies of the way wines from various subregions, soils, and appellations should taste.*

*Presenter: Jordan Mackay, Author, Rajat Parr '96, Winemaker, Sandhi Wines*

*Session 2: Charcuterie and Wine*

*Gain an understanding of the art of charcuterie and the wines that love it with our friends at Olympia Provisions. Charcuterie continues to gain popularity in wine bars, restaurants, and the like. So, how should you approach a charcuterie program? We'll dig into service and storage techniques, pairing how-to's, and dive into pairing principles featuring Oregonian wines.*

*Moderator: Larry Stone, MS, CEO & Co-Founder, Lingua Franca*

*Presenters: Elias Cairo, Owner & COO, Olympia Provisions;*

*Jess Hereth, Wine Director & Operations Director, Olympia Provisions*

(continued)

Fourth Annual

# SOMMELIER SUMMIT

CIA AT COPIA | JANUARY 27-29, 2019

## *Session 3: A Spirited Conversation*

*Presenters: Christie Dufault, CHE, Professor, CIA at Greystone;  
Leslie Merinoff Kwasnieski, Strategy + Liquid, Matchbook Distilling Co.*

## *Session 4: Digging in to Unique Terroir: Iberian Style*

*The SOMM Journal interprets terroir, winemaking styles and flavor characteristics with insight on selling points to your customers.*

*Presenters: TBD*

**12 - 1:15 p.m.**

**1:15 - 2:45 p.m.**

## **Lunch**

### **Breakout Sessions - Group 2**

#### *Session 1: The Sommelier's Atlas of Taste*

*Authors Rajat Parr and Jordan Mackay will take you on a region-by-region journey through Europe as they explore the intricacies of the way wines from various subregions, soils, and appellations should taste.*

*Presenter: Jordan Mackay, Author, Rajat Parr '96, Winemaker, Sandhi Wines*

#### *Session 2: Charcuterie and Wine*

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*Moderator: Larry Stone, MS, CEO & Co-Founder, Lingua Franca*

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*Jess Hereth, Wine Director & Operations Director, Olympia Provisions*

#### *Session 3: A Spirited Conversation*

*Presenters: Christie Dufault, CHE, Professor, CIA at Greystone;*

*Michael Griffo, Co-owner and Head Distiller, Griffo Distillery*

#### *Session 4: Digging in to Unique Terroir: Global Style*

*The Somm Journal interprets terroir, winemaking styles and flavor characteristics with insight on selling points to your customers*

*Presenters: TBD*

**2:45 - 3:15 p.m.**

**3:15 - 4:30 p.m.**

## **Break**

### **General Session II**

#### *Food and Wine Pairing on the Fly: Plant Forward*

*Enjoy the lively emcee skills of Kevin Zraly and Evan Goldstein, MS, as three sommeliers compete to pair mystery wines with three different courses in this spur of the moment live-action brown bag challenge. Play along as you choose the sommelier that convinced you that their pairing is the best in the room. Surprises await!*

*Moderators: Evan Goldstein, MS, President, Full Circle Wine Solutions and Master*

*The World; Kevin Zraly, Author and Educator*

*Sommeliers: John Ragan, MS, Director of Wine & Restaurant Operations, Union Square Hospitality Group; Jess Hereth, Operations & Wine Director, Olympia Provisions*

*Chefs: TBD*

**4:30 - 5:30 p.m.**

### **Post Pairing on the Fly Tasting**

*Now, it's your turn to decide which pairings worked and which didn't.*

**6 - 8 p.m.**

### **Library Wine Tasting and Dinner at Trefethen Winery**

*Our friends at the historic Trefethen Winery are hosting an exciting dinner at their*



estate to celebrate the winery's 50th Anniversary and the reopening of their barn. You'll enjoy a selection of their library wines, including some jewels from their earlier years, as well as a raw oyster bar paired with their dry Riesling and hearty bites from their winery chef, Chris Aken, featuring ingredients from their winter garden. And you'll leave with a fun keepsake from the interactive photo booth.

## TUESDAY, JANUARY 29

8 – 9 a.m.

**Breakfast**

9 – 11:30 a.m.

**Breakout Sessions: Somm Circuit Training**

### *Your Public Persona*

Learn the tools you need to develop presentation, communication, and professional persona during this rotational breakout. Whether speaking with guests in the dining room, developing your own brand, or simply managing your career, every sommelier needs to build essential communication skills.

*Presenters: Ken Fuhr, Communications Specialist, Clarity Media Group;*

*Karen MacNeil, President, Karen MacNeil & Company; Andrea Robinson, MS, The ONE Stemware*

### *Circuit Tasting*

Condition your nose, calibrate your palate, and sharpen your skills through this interactive session with the experts. This somm workout is comprised of a series of lightning-round sensory challenges. Our team of Master Sommeliers, Masters of Wine, and Winemakers will rotate you through several stations, while you learn firsthand their secrets to confident evaluation.

*Moderator: Bob Bath, MS, Professor – Wine & Beverage Studies, CIA at Greystone*

*Presenters: Molly Hill, Winemaker, Sequoia Grove; Peter Granoff, MS, Co-proprietor, Ferry Plaza*

*Wine Merchant & Wine Bar and Oxbow Cheese & Wine Merchant; Orietta Gianjorio, Sensory*

*Evaluation Expert, Orietta LLC; Peter Heitz, Winemaker, Turnbull Winery; Pam Starr, Owner/*

*Winemaker, Crocker & Starr; Dan Petrosky, Winemaker, Larkmead Vineyards and Massican Winery;*

*Tim Marson, MW, Senior Buyer, Wine.com; Dustin Wilson, MS, Co-Founder, Verve Wine;*

*John Ragan, MS, Director of Wine & Restaurant Operations, Union Square Hospitality Group*

11:30 a.m. – noon

**Break**

12 – 1 p.m.

**Lunch Sponsored by Wines of New Zealand**

1:15 – 2:30 p.m.

**General Session III: "Summit Finale"**

From ancient history to what the future holds, you'll hear from three experts on the evolution of the wine business from different perspectives.

**The Wine Archaeologist**

*Presenter: Patrick McGovern, Scientific Director, University of Pennsylvania Museum*

**Winery of the Future**

*Presenter: Ron Runnebaum, Assistant Professor, Department of Viticulture & Enology, UC Davis*

**The Future of the Sommelier**

*Presenter: John Ragan, MS, Director of Wine and Restaurant Operations for Union Square Hospitality Group*

2:30 – 3:30 p.m.

**Heritage Tasting**

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# STAGE PRESENCE

**SANTA MARGHERITA USA**  
POURS WINES FOR A GOOD CAUSE  
AT THE BILLY HARRIS DINNER SERIES

by David Gadd / photos by Alex Berliner

BILLY HARRIS EXUDES THE electric snap-crackle-pop energy of a downed high-tension wire. As the emcee of the Billy Harris Dinner Series, he wears a black-on-black-on-black shirt, tie, and sequined dinner jacket and sports oversized glasses with lenses the size of iPhone screens. Looking like he belongs in a 1950s supper club, Harris responds to questions with quippy, staccato one-liners that showcase his consummate polish and engaging intelligence. This is stage presence personified.



*Chef David LeFevre (left) of steakhouse The Arthur J. in Manhattan Beach, CA, is pictured outside the restaurant with emcee extraordinaire Billy Harris. "It's always amazing working with Billy," says LeFevre. "His energy and generosity make it easy to do the right thing and create mind-blowing food to help others in need."*



Originally from New Jersey but now based in Hollywood, Harris comes from a family of entertainers. The great vaudevilian Georgie Jessel, once known as “Master of Ceremonies of the United States,” was a cousin. By the age of 5, Harris says he knew how to “work a room,” and the born entertainer now puts that magic touch into play while hosting his eponymous wine-pairing charity dinners in collaboration with some of America’s top chefs.

The series, which assembles guests for a multicourse dinner accompanied by wines from Santa Margherita USA, is well on its way to selling out 36 nights this year. In September, Harris partnered with Chef David LeFevre at neighborhood steak-

house The Arthur J. in Manhattan Beach, California, where a crowd of mostly local denizens gathered for appetizers at the bar while waiting to be seated in the sleek dining room.

Relations Manager. “His level of enthusiasm and energy was contagious.” Friedman says Harris mentioned during that first meeting that he was working on a dinner series to benefit hunger- and culinary-focused charities. His list of restaurant partners happened to include a number of bucket-list chefs Friedman had always wanted to work with, among them Nancy Silverton, Thomas Keller, Missy Robbins, Roy Choi, Daniel Boulud, and Curtis Stone. “I knew with the versatility and breadth of wines in our portfolio we’d be able to find appropriate pairings for any of the dishes the chefs could come up with, and it also allowed us to connect with consumers,” Friedman

France with several Michelin-starred chefs and traveled around the globe to broaden his culinary scope. Eventually landing in Los Angeles, he succeeded Michael Cimarusti as chef at the celebrated Water Grill before bringing his talents to the surfside enclave of Manhattan Beach.

In addition to The Arthur J. (named for its founder), LeFevre and his partners, including Director of Operations and Beverage Director Jerry Garbus, own nearby gastropub Manhattan Beach Post and seafood sensation Fishing with Dynamite. All three restaurants reflect LeFevre’s roots, his extensive travels, and his culinary passion: preparing food that’s both artisanal and soulful.

CHEF DAVID  
LEFEVRE SPEAKS  
WITH GUESTS  
DURING THE  
BILLY HARRIS  
DINNER AT THE  
ARTHUR J., A  
NEIGHBORHOOD  
STEAKHOUSE  
IN MANHATTAN  
BEACH, CA.



house The Arthur J. in Manhattan Beach, California, where a crowd of mostly local denizens gathered for appetizers at the bar while waiting to be seated in the sleek dining room.

Once dinner began, Kristina Sazama, Wine Educator for Santa Margherita USA, was on hand to present the wines. The company partnered with the dinner series earlier this spring after previously collaborating at a wine luncheon during the Pebble Beach Food & Wine festival. “When Billy walked into the room, it was like a firecracker had gone off,” recalls Lisa Friedman, Santa Margherita USA’s Public

says. “Thanks to Billy, we’ve been able to showcase our wines alongside the best food in the country.”

True to Harris’ word, all proceeds from the live auction at each dinner benefit No Kid Hungry, a leading organization fighting childhood hunger, and The Trotter Project, which provides underserved youth with mentorship and scholarship opportunities in the culinary and hospitality industry.

A native of Madison, Wisconsin, and a graduate of the Culinary Institute of America, LeFevre began his career at the storied Charlie Trotter’s, first in Chicago and then in Las Vegas. He later stage’d in

“I’ve known Chef LeFevre for many, many years, along with other chefs across the country who are dear, dear friends of mine,” Harris says. “The Santa Margherita portfolio has been a great fit for all their various cuisines served at the dinner series. It’s great to have that caliber of a brand to work with, and, like me, they enjoy contributing to charity. It’s a beautiful thing.”

The Billy Harris Wine Dinner series will continue in 2019 in additional cities, with Santa Margherita USA returning as the exclusive wine sponsor with selections from all ten of its wineries. For more information, visit [billyharris.com](http://billyharris.com).



# THE MENU AND THE WINES

Cuisine by Chef David LeFevre of The Arthur J. in Manhattan Beach, California / Wines by Santa Margherita USA

## APPETIZERS

Foie torchon with figs  
Deviled egg with smoked salmon roe  
Roasted oysters with pancetta and creamed arugula  
TAJ Swedish meatballs with cranberry-kumquat compote

### **Santa Margherita 2017 Prosecco Superiore D.O.C.G. Rive di Refrontolo (\$35)**

An excellent partner for starter courses, this Charmat-method sparkler is made from 100% Glera grapes and ages on the lees in the tank for three months after secondary fermentation is complete. Crisp and refreshing on the palate, it delivers floral/white-fruit aromas and flavors with a lingering finish.

## FIRST COURSE

California Dungeness crab Louie

### **Ca del Bosco MV Cuvée Prestige, Franciacorta D.O.C.G. (\$50)**

Santa Margherita's acquisition in 2017 of the import rights to Ca' del Bosco brought one of Franciacorta's jewels to its portfolio. Founded by Maurizio Zanella, the noted Lombardy producer is a member of the Istituto del Vino Italiano di Qualità Grandi Marchi, an invitation-only consortium of Italy's top 19 wine producers. A blend of 75% Chardonnay, 15% Pinot Nero, and 15% Pinot Bianco, the Cuvée Prestige is ideal with seafood and should be served in a tulip-shaped glass.



## SECOND COURSE

French onion soup with braised oxtail

### **Kettmeir 2017 Müller Thurgau, Alto Adige-Südtirol D.O.C. (\$23)**

Grown in limestone soil on high slopes in the Soprabolzano zone northeast of Bolzano, this Riesling hybrid is vinified using a short maceration of the skins at low temperatures followed by fermentation in steel at a controlled temperature of 14–15 degrees Celsius (57–59 degrees Fahrenheit). It's creamy with bright notes of apricot and almond followed by a touch of salinity on the finish.

## THIRD COURSE

90-day dry-aged prime rib roast au jus with fresh horseradish cream, butter-laden mashed potatoes, and nutmeg-scented creamed spinach

### **Lamole di Lamole Chianti Classico Gran Selezione D.O.C.G. Vigneto di Campolungo (\$48)**

Chianti Classico created the new Gran Selezione designation in 2014 for its top-tier wines, giving a requisite 30 months of aging before release. This one—mostly Sangiovese with a dose of Cabernet Sauvignon—is a perfectly balanced stunner with a velvety mouthfeel and big, bold flavors kept in check by a mesh of fine tannins.

## DESSERT

Flambéed baked Alaska

### **Santa Margherita Sparkling Rosé (\$32)**

To signify the dramatic culmination of the meal, the lights were dimmed at the arrival of 90-plus plates of flambéed baked Alaska. The delightful Santa Margherita Sparkling Rosé—a blend of Chardonnay, Glera, and Malbec—showed beautifully amid the festivities with vibrant red-berry flavors and a crisp, incisive finish. **SJ**







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DIGGING INTO

# Nature

THE CASADEI FAMILY ADHERES TO A  
NEW PROTOCOL FOR ETHICAL FARMING  
IN TUSCANY AND SARDINIA

*The Castello del Trebbio castle was built in  
1184 A.D. by the infamous Pazzi family, noble  
Florentine bankers and rivals of the Medicis.*



by Michelle Ball / photos by Jeremy Ball

Nestled in the wooded mountains northeast of Florence, Castello del Trebbio is a medieval castle with an illustrious past that also serves as the family home of Anna Baj Macario and her husband, Stefano Casadei.

Anna's father purchased the property, where she and her four siblings were raised, in 1968. When her parents died just months apart in 1988, the family was forced to quickly decide its fate, and the young couple partnered with Anna's brother to finance the property. Together, they paid off the rest of their siblings over the course of a decade.

Although the family had always produced wine, a focus on high-quality farming and production didn't begin at Castello del Trebbio until the late 1990s. Stefano was already working in the wine industry as a trained agronomist and winemaker when he met Anna, and together he and his wife expanded their vision for the estate. In addition to their 150-acre vineyard, they cultivate olive trees, saffron, and spelt to produce homemade pastas. Passionate about olive oil, Anna manages their estate program and is also working on a cosmetics line made from leftover materials. A constant innovator, Stefano also founded Tecnovite Toscana, which provides consulting and management services for wine producers in the vineyard and the cellar.

While walking with Stefano, I found myself fascinated by the ingenuity of the Casadei properties. A natural solution to a classic problem awaited at every turn, including the planting of pumpkins in compost piles (the broad leaves provide shade in the summer months, reducing water use). "You just need to dig into nature and you'll find all of the solutions," Stefano told me with a smile.



**The Le Anfore line consists of small-batch, single-varietal wines from Casadei's traditional amphora program.**

## THE LE ANFORE PROJECT

In 2007, Stefano was invited to share his knowledge of modern European winemaking techniques with other producers in the Caucasus winegrowing region. During his visit, however, he was drawn to their traditional use of amphorae, and the winery has since experimented with vessels from Georgia for both fermentation and aging, incorporating small percentages in all of its final blends.

When Stefano's daughter Elena became involved at the winery, he tasked her with managing the amphora program. He says that while she thrived on that intimate connection to the grapes and



**All Chiantis from Castello del Trebbio are aged in large barrels in the castle's cellar. "We are keeping with tradition but also trying to change the tradition in a modern way," proprietor Anna Baj Macario explains.**



**At an elevation of 450 meters (roughly 1,475 feet) above sea level, the Lastricato vineyard is located in the Chianti Rufina DOCG, the smallest DOCG subzone in Chianti. The high altitude and large diurnal temperature swings allow for a longer hang time and the development of softer, more supple tannins.**



*Proprietors Stefano and Anna Casadei.*

the purity of their expression, she felt like her efforts were being reflected somewhat minimally in the broader portfolio. To solve this dilemma, they launched an amphora-specific label, *Le Anfore*, to produce small batches of wine fermented and aged entirely in amphorae.

The project stretches across all three of the family's wineries, comprising pure expressions of Sangiovese, Syrah, Cannonau (Grenache), Trebbiano, Moscato, Semidano, and Malvasco (Malvasia and Nasco). Unfortunately, the brand is not yet available in the States, but it's my hope that inquiries soon pour in, as I've never tasted wines—especially Syrah—quite like this. While the whites are made in a fashion akin to orange wine, taking on a grilled-peach quality due to extended maceration on the skins, the reds exhibit a minerality and varietal expression that causes one to question the widespread reliance on oak-aging.

## CASADEI: INTERNATIONAL VARIETIES IN SUVERETO DOCG

A few miles from the Etruscan Coast in Maremma, Tuscany, sits the medieval village of Suvereto, whose original stone walls still encompass the downtown area of this charming city on a hill. On the outskirts of a town in the recently established Suvereto DOCG is the Casadei estate, a 40-acre vineyard planted to international varieties like Cabernet Sauvignon, Cabernet Franc, and Syrah.

Stefano, who originally planted the vineyard in 1997, had reluctantly considered selling it over the years. In 2012, he and Anna met vintners Fred and Nancy Cline, the founders of Cline Cellars in Sonoma who had traveled to Tuscany in pursuit of purchasing a vineyard. Anna had already drafted the paperwork for the sale when Stefano and Fred took a walk through the estate. As they smelled the soil and discussed the future of the land, they quickly

realized that they shared the same ethical farming principles, so instead of a sale, a partnership was formed and the vision for the winery and tasting room was conceived. This year marks the winery's very first harvest on this estate property.

All Casadei wines are fermented only in amphorae or concrete before aging in a combination of amphorae and oak. The property is farmed according to the estate's BioIntegrale standards, which facilitates the use of horses and the proliferation of beneficial insects, including bees and wasps.

According to Stefano, several fruit trees are spaced throughout the vineyard that serve a greater purpose: Overripe fruit will fall to the ground and naturally ferment, making enzymes and yeast more readily available. The insects, meanwhile, devour the fruit and become carriers of the native yeast in the vineyard. "When the grapes are harvested, they'll easily start the natural fermentation and deliver unique aromas and characteristics to our wines," says Tommaso Venturi, Sales Director for all Casadei family wines. "This is a bit more complicated, but it's more personal and unique."



*The Casadei winery only uses vessels that allow for oxygen exchange, among them amphorae, concrete, and wood.*



*The Casadei team, which works closely with animals, is "obliged to respect the soil in a more natural way," Stefano says.*





*Designed by Stefano Casadei to replace tractors, this device is pulled by horses, supplemented with a solar-powered engine, and built to attach to a variety of tools. "It's a very technological machine pulled by a horse," jokes Casadei, who notes that the project was developed in conjunction with the European Union.*

## WHAT IS BIOINTEGRALE?

The Casadei family's BioIntegrale approach is an ethical protocol that extends beyond organic and Biodynamic farming. Although the vineyards managed by the Casadeis are all certified organic, they felt that they could go further by focusing not just on the materials applied to the vineyards, but the mechanisms used and *their* overall impact on nature, as well. Stefano says the intention is to cultivate a harmonious relationship with the land that ensures a healthy, sustainable environment while respecting the wineries' natural surroundings.

In addition to traditional organic and Biodynamic principles, BioIntegrale also addresses additional environmental considerations, including the use of horses versus tractors to avoid soil compaction, the implementation of renewable energy sources like solar, and the ecological management of waste through composting and percolation basins.

According to Casadei's longtime friend, Artemio Olianas, his native island of Sardinia is "the place where BioIntegrale was born." While Olianas' family moved to Tuscany when he was 8, he never forgot his beloved home. So when the restaurateur, who owns trattorias throughout

Florence, inherited land near the town of Gergei, he set out to plant a vineyard where he could produce Sardinian wines for his restaurants.

He lacked the viticultural experience to properly manage the estate, however, so in 2002 Olianas contacted Stefano for advice. One look at these rocky, rolling hills and Stefano was smitten, so they partnered to construct a winery and vineyard from the ground up. "As you can see, this land is really unspoiled," Venturi says. "The wine has been organic since the beginning, because it was the most natural choice. We have the perfect soil, a perfect microclimate, and a constant breeze that keeps the humidity and fungus away. But then Stefano realized that just being organic was not enough. We were basically the only tractors spoiling the silence of this place."

To reduce their impact, the pair transitioned from tractors to horses and introduced geese to maintain the weeds under the vines. Composts and cover crops are integrated to add vitality to the soil, and pest control is carried out solely by organic products. The use of sulfur is limited



*Near the Olianas estate lies one of the most well-preserved megalithic strongholds in Sardinia, Nuraghe of Barumini (circa 1478 B.C.). Roughly 7,000 of these ancient fortresses have been found throughout the island. Cannonau seeds have been found in multiple Nuraghe sites dating back 3,200 years, proof that Garnacha (Cannonau) was not imported by the Spanish during their colonization of Sardinia 500 years ago. In fact, the island may have been the genetic cradle of the variety.*

in the winery and all wines are fermented naturally without inoculations.

The property is located just 40 miles north of Cagliari on a hill surrounded by expansive, pristine views that yield more sheep than people. Among the indigenous varieties grown here are Vermentino, Semidano, Cannonau, Bovale (Mourvèdre), and Carignano (Carignane). In some ways, the terroir is reminiscent of parts of California, with calcareous, sandy soils and large diurnal temperature shifts that regenerate acidity, making for fresh, vibrant wines. As cleverly strategized, the Casadei portfolio has reaped all the benefits. *SJ*

## Tasting Notes

### **Castello del Trebbio 2013 Chianti Rufina Riserva DOCG Lastricato**

Made from 100% Sangiovese, this single-vineyard wine expresses aromas of tobacco, black figs, dried cherries, and molasses. The texture has a juicy cherry core laced with spicy black peppercorn. In comparison, the 2004 Lastricato holds up beautifully with aromas of dried figs, baked rhubarb, and pine resin. The palate is savory with flavors of bone broth mingled with rosehips, medium tannins, and firm acidity.

### **Castello del Trebbio 2016 Chianti Superiore DOCG**

Predominantly Sangiovese with small amounts of indigenous varieties (15% Canaiolo and Cilieggiolo). While their addition was once traditional, these native grapes are becoming less and less common as wineries turn to Merlot and Cabernet Sauvignon. Brambly red fruit, eucalyptus, and pomegranate burst from the glass and are echoed on the palate by subtle hints of graphite and tea-like tannins.

### **Casadei 2015 Cabernet Franc Filare 18**

Alluring aromas of black plums, forest floor, and black peppercorn mingle with notes of leather and baking spice. The palate is deep and savory with firm tannins, a core of black fruit, and a long, insistent finish.



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 Beauty of Imperfection

by Meredith May

## GREG BREWER OF BREWER-CLIFTON SHARES HIS MINDFUL APPROACH TO WINEMAKING

*"How slow life seems to me  
How violent the hope of love can be  
Let night come on bells end the day  
The days go by me still I stay"*

—Excerpt from "Le Pont Mirabeau" by French poet Guillaume Apollinaire

**GREG BREWER HAS** been up all night—and most of the day. A couple of naps in his upstairs lounge allow him to work around the clock in the tasting room/winery facility for Brewer-Clifton, located in an industrial area near the Lompoc Wine Ghetto in Lompoc, California.

Intention and focus are a mantra for Brewer, who sold his eponymous label to Jackson Family Wines just over a year and a half ago. Whether he has two or three winemaking assistants helping him or not, Brewer continues to

create a wine bearing his name. "I'm a full-time employee for Jackson Family Wines, and I have never been treated so well in my career," he says. "The winery has never felt more mine, and I take more risks now than before."

The vintages of the bottles on the Brewer-Clifton "Foundation Wall" range from 1996 to 2015, and the label design has remained the same throughout that time period. "I see this as a discipline more than a winery," Brewer confesses. "Nothing changes here—not the packaging nor the culture."

Working with neutral oak, cold fermentation, estate fruit, and a cooperage program that dates back 20 years, the small but super-efficient

**Brewer-Clifton Winemaker Greg Brewer says everything he does revolves around geometry and proportion.**

space was designed by Brewer himself. He has blocked all natural light from the winemaking facility, and electronic music is piped throughout to remove outside distractions. Even his tasting room in Los Olivos is spare and streamlined. "Nothing we do here has an X factor or a hook. We don't Photoshop or Autotune our wines," says Brewer, whose passions beyond wine include French poetry. "It's the imperfections that allow the beauty to show through."



**Diatom 2017 Katherine's Chardonnay, Santa Maria Valley (\$36)** Named for the diatomaceous earth made from the fossilized remains of ancient sea creatures. Katherine's is a 50-year-old self-rooted vineyard that butts up against the Bien Nacido Vineyard. Brewer says the wine is made in a cloistered environment, a "vacuum with a slow trajectory." Reaching an equilibrium of edge and roundness (no ML here), we find vanilla custard and lemon curd. **94**



**Brewer-Clifton 2015 Pinot Noir, Sta. Rita Hills (\$40)** Made from 120 assembled ferments that speak to clones, soils, and clusters both whole and fractional. From the 3D, Hapgood, and Machado vineyards, the generous fruit morphs with savory white pepper into a clove-y spice with soy and salted plum. Its stemmy flavor profile frames a drying persistence. **93**



**Ex Post Facto 2016 Syrah, Santa Barbara County (\$36)** Brewer's newest project is this cold-climate, whole cluster-fermented Syrah with exotic flavors and aromas of red fruit seasoned with lavender and peppercorn. Seamless and floral. **94**

**Brewer-Clifton 2015 Machado Pinot Noir, Sta. Rita Hills (\$80)** 100% whole cluster-fermented and aged in older barrels. Aromas of tilled soil and desiccated rose petals precede strawberries and delicate nuances of floral brush. **95**

PHOTO: JEREMY BALL







PHOTOS COURTESY OF ABC FINE WINE AND SPIRITS

*Au Bon Climat Winemaker Jim Clendene prefers channeling an Old World style in his wines.*



*Bob Lindquist, Winemaker for Qupé, shows off an old Syrah from his library.*

# Two Forefathers

## BOB LINDQUIST AND JIM CLENDENEN ARE WINE TRAILBLAZERS IN THE SANTA MARIA VALLEY

**AT THE WINERY** they established in 1982, friends Jim Clendenen and Bob Lindquist keep things fresh by evolving their partnership through Clendenen's Au Bon Climat and Lindquist's Qupé labels. "Every vintage is a new one—it never gets old or boring," Lindquist says. "Wine is a vineyard and weather commodity with wild variables."

Clendenen says he "cut his teeth" on French wine and makes achieving balance his highest priority. He also prefers channeling an Old World style: "I have never—and will never—follow trends for ripening or making more fruit-forward wines," he says. "I am not opposed to aging my Chardonnay and Pinot Noirs to 20 years." His Au Bon Climat 2016 Chardonnay is still in barrel, but the sampling was fresh, clean, and aromatic.

It's the Central Coast itself, particularly the climate of the Santa Maria and Santa Ynez growing regions, that inspires these veterans. "This area is special for what we do," Lindquist says. Inside the winery, which is hidden away within the boundaries of the Bien Nacido Vineyard, Clendenen is busy cooking lunch for his crew, as he does whenever he has a break from traveling. The winemaker, however, still has time to make a confident declaration: "The first name in California Syrah and California Rhône varieties should be Qupé," he says, "and the first name in California's Burgundian-style Pinot Noir and Chardonnay should be Au Bon Climat."

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**Qupé 2017 Marsanne, Los Olivos District (\$24)** Fresh, crisp, and elegant with exquisite floral notes threading through jasmine, gardenia, and mandarin orange. Farmed organically on an 11-acre vineyard. Roussanne is blended in (25%) for weight and contributes notes of cashew and baked apple. **92**

**Au Bon Climat 2016 Hildegard Estate White, Santa Maria Valley (\$21)** A blend of Pinot Gris, Pinot Blanc, and Aligote barrel-fermented and aged in French oak. Creamy and full-bodied with low alcohol. "I rack it, fine it, and put it back in the barrel," Clendenen says. **92**

**Qupé 2014 Sawyer Lindquist Vineyard Grenache, Edna Valley (\$35)** Bright and vibrant with red-tea aromatics, roses, and rhubarb spice. Planted in 2005, the vineyard was Demeter-certified Biodynamic in 2009. According to Clendenen, this cool-climate Grenache is handled more like a Pinot Noir in the cellar to preserve a light body and structure. **93**

**Au Bon Climat 2014 Knox Alexander Pinot Noir, Santa Maria Valley (\$50)** Named after Clendenen's son Knox, this wine features fruit from the Le Bon Climat estate as well as the nearby Bien Nacido Vineyard. Chocolate, cherry, and cranberry perfume this 20th vintage expression. A wash of white-peppered red fruit tingles from precise acidity. **94** [SJ](#)

Somms gather around the "Tree of Life" sculpture with Jean-Charles Boisset (bottom row, second from right) at the JCB Tasting Salon in Healdsburg, CA.



# THE COLOR OF crushed grapes

**DELOACH VINEYARDS** CELEBRATES THE MANY PROFILES OF PINOT NOIR AND CHARDONNAY DURING A TWO-DAY SOMM CAMP

by Michelle Ball / photos by Jeremy Ball



Harvest is the most thrilling time of year to visit any winery: There's a palpable excitement in the air as clusters of plump fruit cover sorting tables and forklifts zip by with barrels and bins as if engaged in a game of Tetris. All the while, fermentations bubble, filling the space with an ether of sweet, crushed grapes.

Fast-forward a few years, and there's nothing quite like tasting a wine you had a hand—or foot—in making. To help foster these experiences, *The SOMM Journal* and DeLoach Vineyards hosted an esteemed group of sommeliers and buyers from across the country for the third annual Harvest Somm Camp.

Located in the Russian River Valley and a member of the Boisset Collection portfolio, DeLoach Vineyards works with a remarkable number of growers throughout Sonoma and Marin counties to produce wines from meticulously farmed vineyards, each with a distinct climate and soil profile. Reflecting proprietor Jean-Charles Boisset's contagious enthusiasm for education, the two-day tour was chock-full of comparative tastings, vineyard tours, on-the-job winemaking activities, elaborate feasts, and of course, a plethora of releases to taste.

## day 1

The first wine to fill our glasses was the Le Royal, a 2015 Blanc de Noir that tickled the nose with aromas of fresh pastry and lemon zest, as we congregated around the "Earth & Sky" bronze statue in one of DeLoach's many gardens. Jeff Colton of Boisset explained that the sculpture symbolizes the company's deep-rooted commitment to the land while reaching for the stars—a guiding principle that would become increasingly evident in the hours to come.

The DeLoach family was one of the first pioneers in the Russian River Valley, where they focused on Chardonnay, Pinot Noir, and Zinfandel. In 2003, the Boissets purchased the estate and implemented the sustainable farming techniques seen here today. Like many of its vineyards, DeLoach is certified Biodynamic and organic, and while the health of the land and its surrounding environment is central to the company's philosophy, the fundamental intent is to produce a better glass of wine. "The less we have to do in the winery to allow the grapes to speak for themselves, the better," Colton explained.

Ken Hoernlein, Vice President of Sales for Boisset Collection, next set out to discuss "the birthplace of Pinot Noir and Chardonnay" beginning with a tour of Burgundy. The Boisset Collection, which now owns 25 properties across California and Burgundy, originated in 1961 when Jean-Claude and Claudine Boisset purchased the Les Evocelles vineyard in Gevrey-Chambertin.

Hoernlein explained that when Jean-Charles Boisset joined the business, the négociant winery produced about 300,000 cases annually. When Boisset posed a question to his father on why they "would have [their] name on something [they] wouldn't necessarily drink," the decision was made to make domaine-quality wines as a négociant from that point on. "To do that, you had to make a very serious commitment



*Standing on a knoll surrounded by native flora, fruit trees, beehives, and boxes sheltering baby barn owls, Jeff Colton of Boisset describes the principles of Biodynamic farming and the importance of biodiversity on the DeLoach estate.*



*In a comparison of Old World and New World profiles, DeLoach highlighted its estate and vineyard partners throughout Sonoma and Marin counties.*



*Somms examine a 3D map as Brian Maloney describes the geography of the North Coast.*

to your winemaking and your equipment, as well as long-term contracts with your growers," Hoernlein added.

Like California—though its story unfolded millions of years earlier—Burgundy can credit much of its terroir to upheaval. Tectonic shifts lifted the valley floor, which was previously marshland, and exposed ancient sea beds throughout the region. "Often Burgundy soil is much like a marble cake where you have clay and limestone mixed together on the same site, and if you took a slice of it, it would look swirled," Hoernlein explained.

After tasting through ten wines from the Chablis 1er Cru to the Clos de la Roche Grand Cru, we were introduced to the wines of DeLoach by Director of Sonoma Winemaking Brian Maloney. Although playing the second act to a Burgundy tasting would likely intimidate most winemakers, Maloney didn't skip a beat. Listening to him share his acute knowledge and understanding of wine, geology, and chemistry is akin to hearing a master violinist at work.

"Sonoma County and Burgundy are not the same place. We are much, much further south, so we have a more temperate climate throughout most of the year and our day length is shorter, but we do have some similar influences

in terms of our soil bases," Maloney said, noting that more than 30 soil series can be found throughout the county, ranging from marine-based sandstone to clay loams and volcanic soils. Like Burgundy, the best vineyard sites are also planted on well-drained soils with a poor holding capacity for nutrients and water.

In addition, Hoernlein notes that although Sonoma County is further south, Burgundy technically maintains more growing degree days due to its continental climate. The cold Pacific Ocean has a profound effect on nighttime temperatures, causing shifts of up to 40 degrees. "That's one of the secrets to the North Coast: That diurnal shift means the acid retention is huge," Maloney said. "Nighttime is where the acid goes to die, so if you have warm nights, the acid goes down. If you have cool nights, all that acid is regenerated. That does mean we tend to have higher sugars and higher acids compared to Burgundy." It made sense to the somms in attendance: With more sugar and resulting alcohol, the California wines balance out their acidity, resulting in greater power overall.

"There are all different terroir and different ripening styles, and what we're trying to do here at DeLoach is spotlight that," Maloney continued as he pointed



*The somms tasted through an extensive lineup of Burgundies from the Boisset Collection.*

to images of the winery's grower partners—each with a corresponding jar of soil—displayed on the walls. "We try and make sure that our wines really represent the terroir and that distinctive personality that's coming out of each vineyard."

After an enlightening introduction, we were swept away to visit the new JCB Tasting Salon in downtown Healdsburg. Upon arrival, Boisset warmly greeted us with bubbles to reset our palates. The emerald-green front room is adorned with jewelry, velvet, and leopard prints that surround the "Tree of Life," the Salon's iconic gold sculpture that repurposed 50-year-old Napa Valley rootstocks. "Our hope is to draw guests into a world of surrealism," Boisset mused. Though



conversations with the inventive entrepreneur trend toward the playful and imaginative, his company's projects and portfolio are undoubtedly executed with precision and careful consideration.

During our visit, we sampled two Crémant de Bourgogne wines: JCB N°65, made from 100% Pinot Noir in honor of Boisset's parents' anniversary; and JCB N°39, a 100% Chardonnay produced in celebration of the year his grandparents were married. Noting that Burgundy was once a significant producer of sparkling wine, Boisset said his intent with these bottlings was to meld the past with the present.

After we finished our bubbles, a mystery



**Jean-Charles Boisset serves somms the JCB N°3 Pinot Noir.**

sacrilege! A lot of people wanted to kill me," Boisset said with amusement.

According to Boisset, the number "3" in the wine's name signifies the marriage of two worlds, as well as the notion that their



**The group stands with hands raised during dinner as Jean-Charles Boisset leads them in what he calls the "Burgundy Song," a version of a drinking tune dating back to 1905.**

Pinot Noir was poured as Boisset challenged the somms to determine its origins. They grappled with whether to characterize it as New World or Old World before Boisset hinted, "Well, what if, we bring the best of what two worlds have to offer?"

He then revealed the wine as the JCB N°3 Pinot Noir; first conceived in 2009. Wines from three vineyards were crafted in Burgundy before being flown on Air France Flight 084 to San Francisco; upon arrival, they were driven in armored trucks to DeLoach Vineyards, where the blend was completed with fruit from five vineyard lots in Sonoma County. "The ultimate

unity is greater than the sum of their parts. "We wanted to bring the mouthfeel of Burgundy—the earth, the depth, the terroir; maybe a little restraint—and a little bit of the flamboyance through the aromatic expression of Sonoma," he explained.

The eventful afternoon closed at DeLoach Vineyards with a four-course farm-to-table dinner featuring ingredients from the winery's estate garden (aka the Theater of Nature). In addition to sharing pairings from DeLoach, Hoernlein challenged the somms' palates with more mysterious wines from the Boisset Collection's elaborate cellar:



**Emily Anderson, Wine Director for Tres Market Foods in Houston, TX, shows off her harvest attire at the DeLoach estate.**

## day 2

Back on the shuttle for an early-morning start, the somms attempted to tally up the wines we tasted the previous day (my notes put us at 36, give or take a few). By 7:30 a.m., our group was dressed in safety attire for that morning's harvest at the DeLoach estate. In our designated rows, we harvested just over a half-ton of La Tâche clone Pinot Noir: Roughly the size of a fist, the tiny black clusters burst with intense flavor; making for an ideal breakfast filled with antioxidants and tannin protein.

Back at the winery, we dispersed into small groups to execute various tasks. Somms sorted through cold clusters of handpicked fruit as others harnessed up for punch-downs, and after some semi-serious manual labor, it was time to turn back to tasting.

**Sami Seglin, Wine Director for Hog Island Oyster Co. in San Francisco, unloads her first bin of grapes.**





*Participants sample fermentations at various stages as Brian Maloney describes the process on a microbiological level.*



*The camp's last feast unfolded in the original cellars of the historic Buena Vista Winery, which was established in 1857.*

As Maloney invited us to sample wines at various stages of fermentation, a lively discussion ensued as he described the activity taking place on a microbiological level. DeLoach allows every fermentation to take off naturally with indigenous yeast, which adds a richness to the wine before local *saccharomyces* swoop in like a “big beach ball,” Maloney explained. He added that texture in wine is really about dead yeast, or nano-proteins, breaking down during fermentation. “When you have a lot more bodies, that’s a smaller surface-to-volume ratio and there’s a lot more of those nano-proteins coming out,” he continued. “So essentially you’ve built up a base mouthfeel into the wine that you wouldn’t have otherwise if it was just straight *saccharomyces*.”

Maloney went on to describe the battle that ensues: “*Saccharomyces* is incredibly efficient at gobbling up sugar *really* fast. That’s the goal: It wants to deprive everything else of sugar and then start polluting its own environment [with alcohol] to kill everyone else off,” he explained. “So in the end, all that’s left is *saccharomyces* in the tank. *That’s* what we want.”

After a well-earned lunch in the Theater of Nature, where we refueled on bowls of gazpacho made from the estate’s tomatoes, cucumbers, and watermelons, we filed back on the shuttle to visit Saitone, one of the oldest vineyard plantings in the Russian River Valley. Located on Olivet Road, the property was planted in 1895 as

a traditional field blend: a mix of primarily Zinfandel, Alicante Bouschet, and Carignan with small amounts of French Colombard, Petit Bouschet, and Grand Noir.

As we walked the 17-acre vineyard with Taylor Ramsey, Manager of Grower Relations for Boisset Collection, we sampled



*The somms sort La Tâche clone Pinot Noir from the morning harvest.*

the 2014 Saitone Vineyard Zinfandel. The wine, which burst with dusty aromas of hibiscus tea and tobacco with plummy red fruit, was incredibly mouthwatering. “That’s one of the best things about this site: the acidity,” Ramsey said.

We then traversed back to DeLoach Vineyards for a growers’ tasting with the owners of Pennacchio Vineyard, located in Sebastopol Hills, and van der Kamp Vineyard; based in the Sonoma Mountain AVA, the latter holds the distinction of being one of the oldest Pinot Noir plantings in California.

“These are all drought years, and the middle wine [2015] is going to be the

## A Trio of Select Wines

### J. Moreau & Fils Chablis 1er Cru Vaucoupin

This happens to be the southernmost Premier Cru vineyard in Chablis with a high concentration of Kimmeridgian soil. “You get a ripeness off this vineyard that you don’t get with any other Premier Cru Chablis,” Hoernlein said. Flinty and chockfull of citrus with subtle hints of guava and salty-biscuit notes, the wine fills out in the mid-palate with a slight hint of lemon curd balanced by mouthpuckering acid.

**DeLoach 2015 Maboroshi Vineyard Pinot Noir** Higher-toned with pronounced blueberry and pomegranate fruit with a savory backbone. During the comparative tasting on Day 1, the murmurs around the room proved this was one of the favorites. “It’s juicy, lingering, and has more in the ripeness of the palate,” said Joel Arias Quito, Sommelier at La Mar in San Francisco.

**DeLoach 2016 van der Kamp Vineyard Pinot Noir** Savory, wild strawberry; blonde tobacco; and hints of geranium emerge alongside firm tannins. The prickly texture on the finish is reminiscent of fresh raspberries.



**Siblings  
Malia and  
Ulysses van  
der Kamp.**



most severe," Maloney said as we tasted the 2014–2016 vintages of Pinot Noir from these two distinctive sites. Pennacchio Vineyard, which sits on Goldridge sandy loam soil, was planted entirely to Clone 115 in 2000 by Joe Pennacchio. Now in his seventies, Pennacchio personally farms the original 5-acre vineyard, and his son, Mark, recently added a 2-acre parcel of clone 667.

Due to the severe drought in 2015, yields plummeted from an average of 2.5 to 3 tons per acre to only 1.1 tons. "So, you knew it was going to bad—what did you do as far as farming was concerned knowing that it could be disastrous to get nothing?" asked Ryan Gerni, Wine Buyer at Davidsons Liquor in Highlands Ranch, Colorado. "You just live with it," Mark replied. "Once the berries are set, that's what you get. That's farming."

We then transitioned to sampling the wines of van der Kamp Vineyard with siblings Malia (a former somm) and Ulysses van der Kamp. Sitting at an elevation of 1,250 feet above sea level on the west side of the Mayacamas, the 25-acre vineyard comprises numerous Pinot Noir clones planted in various clay-loam soil series. "It's a fascinating vineyard with a lot of micro-terroirs," Maloney said as Ulysses passed around clusters of fruit harvested that morning from some of the oldest Pinot Noir vines in the state.

"Between our vineyard and Pennacchio, I think they're more similar than dissimilar," Malia said, adding that other DeLoach wines from the Russian River Valley tend to have a more opulent fruit profile "as opposed to us, where we have that mountain fruit with more pine and tannin flavors." Maloney noted that he believes van der Kamp wines are the most Barolo-like of the Pinot Noirs they work with due



**Joe  
Pennacchio  
and his son,  
Mark.**

to their textural quality and their floral, herbaceous characteristics.

We said our goodbyes to the growers, Maloney, and DeLoach Vineyards and set off toward Buena Vista Winery for our final feast. The Boisset family purchased this historic winery in 2011, retrofitting the

beautiful yet waning estate and breathing new life into the property. Buena Vista holds great significance for Jean-Charles, as this was the first California winery he visited as a child in 1980. He still recalls sampling Buena Vista wines from paper cups with his grandparents in a nearby hotel room, as Jean-Charles was only 11 at the time.

As we sampled exotic wines from Buena Vista—including Valdiguié, Chabono, Angelica, and a joint project from India—in the cellar of the oldest premium winery in California, we couldn't help but take stock of where we were. Gerni even presented us with a Cabernet Franc from his home state of Colorado, expressing our shared sentiments in a final toast: "This is truly what makes our business awesome. Cheers to everyone!" **\$**

## RUSSIAN RIVER SOMM CAMPERS

**Emily Anderson**, Wine Director, Tres Market Foods, Houston

**Rafe Gabel**, Senior Vice President of Restaurant Operations, Puccini Group, San Francisco

**Ryan Gerni**, Sommelier, Davidsons Liquor, Highlands Ranch, CO

**Phil Kang**, owner of Pearson's Wine & Spirits, Washington, D.C.

**TC Leroy**, General Manager, PRHYME: Downtown Steakhouse, Tulsa, OK

**Joseph Mayton**, Beverage Director, Rooh, San Francisco

**Vincent McGrath**, Dallas Country Club, Dallas

**Brian Munck**, Food & Beverage Manager, St. Regis, San Francisco

**Joel Arias Quito**, Head Sommelier, La Mar, San Francisco

**Tim Ryll**, Bar Director, Four Corners, Chicago

**Sami Seglin**, Wine Buyer, Hog Island Oyster Co., San Francisco

**Kori Tafoya**, Managing Partner, Royal Palm Tapas, Atlantic Beach, FL



**At Saitone Vineyard, planted in 1895 as a typical field blend, the somms sampled Carignan and hunted for white grapes.**



PHOTOS COURTESY OF GLENFIDDICH

*Malt Master  
Brian Kinsman  
is one of the  
faces behind  
the Glenfiddich  
Experimental  
Series.*

# MILLENNIAL APPEAL

**THE GLENFIDDICH  
EXPERIMENTAL SERIES  
OFFERS SOMETHING  
FOR EVERY CONSUMER**

by Ian Buxton

There's no shortage of commentators ready to criticize the Scotch whisky industry for an alleged lack of innovation, the suggestion being that millennials—perhaps the most devoutly desired demographic in history—find the category a turn-off in their pursuit of funky flavors.

It's certainly true the regulations surrounding Scotch whisky are closely written and carefully guarded by the Scotch Whisky Association (SWA). Quick to call out any infractions, supporters of the current system claim it protects both consumers and the valued traditions of a category long respected for its adherence to well-defined rules.

Flavor has been an area of vigorous debate, especially in regards to the use of various barrel types. Master Distillers will tell you that close to two-thirds of a Scotch's final flavor is derived from the cask in which it matured. Now the SWA mandates that casks must be of a type "traditionally used in the industry" while demanding that any distiller employing something beyond the run of the mill must be able to produce evidence of the effect it has on the finished product. If the result no longer provides the "taste and aroma and color generally found in Scotch whisky," it can't be labeled or sold as such.



So, there's probably no cannabis-infused whisky in the pipeline—at least, not from Scotland—but it seems these restrictions have sparked a new period of innovation for at least one producer: William Grant & Sons. Surely no one at the company would be bold enough to tinker with the taste, aroma, and color of its leading single malt, Glenfiddich?

Think again. The brand's Malt Master, Brian Kinsman, has been playing tunes with wood to remarkable effect for the Experimental Series, which Glenfiddich describes as “a new range of single malts that combines the brand's passion for pushing boundaries and collaborating with trailblazers beyond the world of whisky.”

The series debuted in October 2016 with the Glenfiddich India Pale Ale Cask Finish (43%; \$70), which claimed to be the world's first single malt Scotch whisky finished in IPA craft beer casks. Actually, bearing those SWA regulations in mind, it likely wasn't the first, but rather a revival of a long-lost traditional practice. Distillers of yore would certainly have reused beer casks and, as whisky and beer are old friends and good stablemates, the resulting dram certainly passed taste tests.


Kinsman proved he had more in the pipeline in early 2017 with the unveiling of his Project XX (47%; \$80) expression. The production process involved asking 20 whisky mavens from around the world to select a cask from the depths of Glenfiddich's Speyside warehouses, which he would then blend to create the finished product. Twenty experts, 20 casks—hence Project XX.

The label signified much more than a temporary break from his usual approach for Kinsman, who explains that the project acted as “an exciting challenge to marry [the casks] in a way that did justice to the original sources.” The melding of these disparate vessels yielded multiple personalities: the trademark pineapple character of a classic Glenfiddich bolstered by rich Port tannins with a hint of licorice and layered flavors of candy floss, cinnamon spice, and almonds.

Later in 2017, the unusual Winter Storm (43%; \$250) was released. It's the 21 Year Old Glenfiddich with a North American touch, as the spirit was finished in ice wine casks from Ontario's renowned Peller Estates winery. Wine

casks have historically been used in Scotland, but this is unusual and a bold use of the limited supplies of a premium extra-aged single malt. “Only the rarer whiskies could cope with the extra ice-wine intensity,” says Kinsman. “Armed with more tannins extracted from years in oak, these malts brought out a uniquely fresh lychee note rather than being overwhelmed by sweetness.”

The Experimental Series has evolved most recently through its fourth release, Fire & Cane (43%; \$50). It's a serious bargain that offers up an unexpected peaty twist on Glenfiddich that's tempered by the sweetness of rum-cask finishing. It's unexpected, certainly, and very much in the spirit of innovation that characterizes this Glenfiddich range.

This is clever stuff all malt fans can applaud: something fresh and different yet well within the rules of Scotch's heritage and tradition. Even those picky millennials should appreciate this! 

*Twenty global whisky experts each selected a cask for Malt Master Brian Kinsman to blend into Glenfiddich's Project XX expression.*



*The Fire & Cane bottling from the Experimental Series finishes in rum casks.*

THE BRAND'S MALT MASTER, BRIAN KINSMAN, HAS BEEN PLAYING TUNES WITH WOOD TO REMARKABLE EFFECT FOR THE EXPERIMENTAL SERIES, WHICH GLENFIDDICH DESCRIBES AS “A NEW RANGE OF SINGLE MALTS THAT COMBINES THE BRAND'S PASSION FOR PUSHING BOUNDARIES AND COLLABORATING WITH TRAILBLAZERS BEYOND THE WORLD OF WHISKY.”



Somm  
Foundation

# The Kindness of Strangers

A **SOMMFOUNDATION**  
SCHOLARSHIP RECIPIENT  
REFLECTS ON HER  
BENEFACTORS

story and photos by Jessica H. Green


**IN AUGUST**, I went for hike in Liguria and got lost—several times. Luckily, I was able to ask for directions in Italian. I had learned Italian during a year abroad, which was thanks to a college scholarship. The college scholarship was possible because I had received financial aid for high school.

Educational scholarships have been the great gifts of my life, and they all came from people who began as absolute strangers. Some I had the chance to meet, some not. Several were anonymous. Some of their names I know: John Motley Morehead of North Carolina; Richard J. Franke of Chicago; Jane Oliensis of New York and Assisi. This spring, just before my Master of Wine practical exams, a charitable foundation previously unknown to me came to my aid and changed my attitude toward my wine studies.

“Wine studies” sounds oxymoronic to anyone who hasn’t pursued them. Wine is pleasurable, delicious, and intoxicating, while study is arduous. The field of knowledge is vast and constantly changing. Mastering it can also be expensive. Courses, wine, and study trips can quickly deplete a bank account or exceed a credit card limit. Some students are supported in part by their employers, but all of us invest more than we can easily afford in the pursuit of learning about the world of wine.

*The hills of Liguria, Italy.*





*“Educational scholarships have been the great gifts of my life, and they all came from people who began as absolute strangers.”*

**SommFoundation scholarship recipient Jessica Green poses in a Chilean vineyard.**

We also invest our time: hours of class, of blind-tasting practice, of essay writing, of tests. And we invest ourselves. We commit to a qualification and may fail many times before we achieve it. Some of us may never succeed.

Friends and family members can find it difficult to understand the purpose of the journey. The response I hear most often to the news that I'm pursuing the Master of Wine qualification is, "What will you do with it?" I will keep doing exactly what I'm already doing, I reply: teaching about wine, writing about wine, enjoying wine, and sharing my knowledge.

I try to explain that most students who attempt to earn the MW title don't ever achieve it. The pass rate for the exams is

so notoriously—and outrageously—low that I sometimes say it's like the Olympics. Not everyone gets a medal, but I'm proud to compete.

That may be my game face, but the reality is much more complicated, with ups and downs, thrilling moments of discovery, and many more of self-doubt. When I first began my formal wine studies in a Wine and Spirits Education Trust (WSET) Level 2 class at the International Wine Center in New York, I felt comfortable right up until the exam ... and then I panicked. The course had covered more material than seemed possible to master, but I passed. I was hooked.


I continued with the WSET Advanced and Diploma classes even after my family

and I moved to France. There I found a fine band of fellow Diploma students, who constituted my first and best study group. We drove from our various homes—Marie-Josée on the Rhône, Fabien in the Languedoc, Regis and Olivier from Switzerland—and met in Mâcon at "Esprits de Vins," a WSET school run by the wonderful Hélène Touras.

During the weekend-long courses, we would study and eat together, laugh, learn, make mistakes, and encourage each other. That community of like-minded people made the process a pleasure. Many of us traveled to London to celebrate together as we collected our Diplomas at the grand Guildhall ceremony.

My subsequent Master of Wine journey, though, has often been lonely. It's a self-study program, which means the bulk of the work is meant to be completed alone rather than with classes and tutors. We do form study groups, and I've been lucky to work with some exceptionally gifted and lovely people, but the program itself doesn't seem to foster the same kind of camaraderie I enjoyed during my Diploma years. It can feel competitive at times, which doesn't make sense. It's easy to get discouraged.

So I was thrilled when, last May, I was awarded the inaugural David A. Carpenter Masters of Wine scholarship through SommFoundation, an organization that assists wine and spirits professionals to "achieve the highest level of proficiency and accreditation." The scholarship came with a cash award that generously covered my exam fees, flight, room and board during the exam—but even more valuable was the vote of confidence. I'd never met David and Diane Carpenter, but they were on my side. When I walked to the exam site each of the three mornings, I felt less alone.

I didn't pass the MW practical exam this year, disappointingly, but because of the Carpenters and SommFoundation, I'm not giving up yet. If you're also on the winding road of wine study, I hope we cross paths sometime. I know how difficult it is—but with a little help from each other, we'll get much further than we ever could alone. 

# Better Than the Day Before

**WENTE VINEYARDS CELEBRATES 135 YEARS AT A SEMINAR AND TASTING IN BOSTON** by Paige Farrell / photos by Josh Reynolds

**WHEN ASKED ABOUT** the winemaking philosophy at Wente Vineyards during a recent gathering in Boston to celebrate the company's 135th anniversary, fifth-generation winemaker Karl Wente said Wente Vineyards and its leadership are "in this for the love of the journey." "We don't make wine because we have to, we do it because we love to," he added. As the clan behind the oldest continuously operated family-owned winery in the United States, the Wentes have earned the title of "America's First Family of Chardonnay."

Just outside of Boston, Massachusetts, on a sultry afternoon in early September—the same day the Wente Sauvignon Blanc harvest began in Livermore Valley, California—a group of eager wine professionals gathered to honor Wente Vineyards' enormous contributions to the wine industry in the Golden State and beyond. Upon arrival, guests sipped glasses of the richly textured 2008 J. Schram Reserve sparkling wine from Napa Valley's Schramsberg Estate; made predominantly with Old Wente Clone Chardonnay, the wine also contains a small percentage of Pinot Noir.

Sponsored by Martignetti Distribution, the seminar and tasting were led by Bridget Epp, Vice President of Luxury Sales and Education at Wente Vineyards, and Todd Lipman, Wine Director of the wine festivals in Nantucket, Massachusetts, and Newport, Rhode Island. As the room filled to capacity, Epp raised her glass toward Lipman, proclaiming, "This is a talk borne of passion, a celebration of innovation in winemaking!" In response, Lipman tipped his signature derby hat and toasted "to Chardonnay, the chameleon grape!"

The discussion ventured back to 1883, when Carl Wente officially established his winery in Livermore Valley, an area famed for its enviable grape-growing condi-

tions. Those early vineyards were planted with Chardonnay cuttings from Charles Wetmore, the first President and Chief Viticultural Officer of California who had traveled to Meursault in Burgundy for vine cuttings.

Morning Fog Chardonnay, also from Livermore Valley and aptly named for the rush of morning fog over the vineyards, showed lively acidity and heady tropical fruits, while the 2016 Single Vineyard Riva Ranch Chardonnay from Arroyo Seco was voluptuous



*Bridget Epp, Vice President of Luxury Sales and Education at Wente Vineyards, led the seminar and tasting in Boston with Todd Lipman, Wine Director of the wine festivals in Nantucket, MA, and Newport, RI.*

Another pivotal year arrived in 1912, when Carl's son Ernest brought more Chardonnay cuttings to the property from Montpellier, France, adding to the plantings he'd brought from the Gier Vineyard in Pleasanton, California. These plantings birthed the famed Wente Clone, and in 1936, Ernest and his brother Herman released the first varietally labeled American Chardonnay. Today, the original Old Wente Clone has spawned an estimated 80 percent of Chardonnay grown in California.

The first Wente Chardonnay attendees tasted during the event was the 2017 Eric's Small Lot Chardonnay, a racy, high-toned wine from Livermore Valley. The 2016

with seductive salinity. The 2016 Nth degree Chardonnay from the Ernest and Herman vineyards in Livermore Valley, meanwhile, is only made in vintages deemed "exceptional": With pleasant minerality and appealing aromatics, it was the most layered and nuanced of the bunch.

An exploration of bottlings produced by esteemed wineries and derived from the original Old Wente Clone followed. "Every single day we strive to be better than the day before," Karl said of his family's company, and if that's the case, then consider the mission accomplished: Each wine, defined by pristine winemaking techniques and the shared lineage of a thoughtfully selected clone, showed effortless balance and grace. **WJ**



# THE DECEIVINGLY LARGE BOX

**WINES OF PORTUGAL CROWNS A SOMMELIER OF THE YEAR IN FIVE CITIES, INCLUDING LOS ANGELES, SEATTLE, AND HOUSTON**

by Jessie Birschbach and Lori Moffatt

A few years ago, Master of Wine Sheri Sauter Morano took a trip to the Vinho Verde region that drastically altered her perception of Portuguese wine. "I was blown away and so impressed with everything: the quality of the wines, the people, the underground Wi-Fi, the selection of gluten-free food," Morano says with a laugh. "The trip really demonstrated to me that there was so much more to it than I knew. Portugal is really in an interesting place right now, as it's beginning to really push its wines into the U.S. market."

wines of  
portugal **P**  
a world of difference



PHOTO: TODD WESTPHAL

*Wines of Portugal U.S. Ambassador Eugénio Jardim, Master of Wine Sheri Sauter Morano, and SOMM Journal Publisher Meridith May toast to a successful Los Angeles event.*





Perhaps it was this very experience that prompted Morano to quickly and enthusiastically agree to join Wines of Portugal U.S. Ambassador Eugénio Jardim in spreading the gospel of Portuguese wines stateside. The pair recently traveled to Los Angeles, Seattle, Atlanta, Houston, and Washington, D.C., to award five of the best somms in the country with their own trips to the European country. "Portugal is an untapped wealth of culture, food, wine, music, and so many other things," Jardim reflected after the Seattle stop. "I always say make me fall in love with the country and I'll fall in love with your wines, but the wines are not just this or that. They cover the gamut from sparkling, zingy, zippy, and bubbly to the most decadent, unctuous sweet reds or even amber Moscatels. It's wrong to put Portugal into a small box—the box is actually huge."

This Portuguese box Jardim and Morano emptied in each city proved quite substantial, indeed, as Jardim reviewed the immense scope of the country's wine history, growing regions, classification system, soil types, climate, and other related topics. Morano then augmented Jardim's information with a synopsis of the country's grapes and blends followed by a tasting of eight wines. These combined elements served to provide an incredibly thorough review before the written and oral exams.

A helpful discussion also ensued around how to best approach Portuguese wines both on- and off-premise. Although pronunciations can often be challenging for guests, Jardim suggested that simply using the term "old vines" can minimize the intimidation factor. Drawing parallels from these less-familiar grapes to more common varieties—for example, Vinho Verde to Sauvignon Blanc, Encruzado to Chardonnay, and Touriga Nacional to Cabernet Sauvignon—might be helpful, too; according to Jardim, it's worth the extra effort, as Portuguese wines can be "a refreshing, food-friendly alternative that overdelivers in price."

PHOTO: TODD WESTPHAL

*Wines of Portugal U.S. Ambassador Eugénio Jardim (second from left) with the top three L.A. somms: Ryan Bailey, Ryan Kraemer, and Brian Kulich.*



## The Competition Heats Up in L.A.

**First place:** Ryan Kraemer, Sommelier for 71 Above

**Second place:** Brian Kulich, Sommelier for Charlie Palmer Group

**Third place:** Ryan Bailey, Wine Director for NoMad Los Angeles

Wines of Portugal kicked off its tour in perhaps the most competitive of the five cities—Los Angeles—but the Angeleno somms were just as passionate as they were ambitious (a somm from Napa and another from Santa Barbara also made appearances).

Alicia Ajolo, Sommelier for Terranea Resort in Rancho Palos Verdes, was quite receptive to the Covela 2017 Rosé. "It's so versatile—it really pulls you in as it

warms in the glass," she explained. "You get these red florals on the nose and this beautiful, elegant, weighty body. This [wine] could be a great way to change a guest's perception of rosé given its weight."

First-place winner Ryan Kraemer, Sommelier for 71 Above in downtown L.A., had much to say about Portuguese wines in general, but perhaps his most knowledgeable

PHOTO: TODD WESTPHAL



**Good sportsmanship!** Pictured from left to right, L.A.-based somm Rick Arline, first-place winner Ryan Kraemer, and Montage Beverly Hills Beverage Manager Oscar Chinchilla celebrate Kraemer's win.

insight came regarding the Luis Pato 2013 Vinhas Velhas Tinto. "What I like about Luis Pato is that you can always find great vintages at amazing prices," he told *The SOMM Journal*. "You can have a wine on your list for around \$100 with 17 years of age and recommend it to someone who is looking for something with some age to it but doesn't want to spend a ton of money."



# Women Rule in Seattle

**First place:** Katelyn Peil, Wine Director for Purple Café & Wine Bar

**Second place:** Beth Hicky, Beverage Director for Ascend Prime Steak & Sushi

**Second place:** Alexandra Stang, Assistant Wine Director for Bastille Cafe & Bar

Next, in Seattle, a group of all-female somms shone brightly (the competition was so tight, in fact, that the race for second place ended in a tie). The demographic was especially fitting considering the new generation of Portuguese winemakers also skews female: "Nowadays, like in this room, the girls are taking over," Jardim says, adding that roughly 60 percent of enology graduates in Portugal are now women.

"Portuguese wines have that dual appeal," noted Alexandra Stang, the incredibly astute Assistant Wine Director for Bastille Cafe & Bar. "They have this food-friendly, savory, bitter finish the way Old World wines work with food, but they're not like what New World wine lovers say they don't like about Old World wines: dirty, funky, and rustic. There's more emphasis on fruit and they're just so food-friendly. I think that makes them fun to work with."



PHOTO: GRANT HINDSLEY

The Seattle victors: Beth Hicky, Katelyn Peil, and Alexandra Stang. Peil came in first while Hicky and Stang tied for second.



Katelyn Peil, Wine Director for Purple Café & Wine Bar, proudly displays a sign commemorating her scholarship trip to Portugal.

## Fast Facts on Portuguese Winemaking and Viticulture

- ✦ Evidence of winemaking in Portugal dates back to 2000 B.C.
- ✦ More than 250 native grape varieties grow in the country.
- ✦ Roughly 350 miles long, Portugal has 1,115 miles of coastline and a population of 10.8 million.
- ✦ DNA studies indicate that Portugal's native grape varieties are more closely related to the Iberian *Vitis silvestris* than the common *Vitis vinifera* vine.
- ✦ Portugal has more native grape varieties planted per square kilometer than any other country in the world.

Information sourced by Wines of Portugal.

PHOTO: GRANT HINDSLEY



*The Houston winners: Lindsay Thomas (third place), Matthew Crawford (first place), and Monica Townsend (second place).*

## The Lone Star State Goes European

**First place:** Matthew Crawford, Sommelier for State of Grace

**Second place:** Monica Townsend, Wine Director for Willie G's Seafood

**Third place:** Lindsay Thomas, Sommelier for Pappas Bros. Steakhouse

As the fourth most populous city in the United States with roughly 2.3 million residents, Houston is arguably Texas' most diverse culinary destination. It has the dynamic wine culture to match, and on September 29, seven sommeliers from Houston's top restaurants gathered at The Texas Wine School to immerse themselves in the wines of Portugal.

The sommelier with the highest score, Matthew Crawford of State of Grace, ultimately won the exclusive springtime Portuguese wine tour. "The guests in Houston are always looking for complex and delicious wines, and they often want to learn the stories behind them," Crawford said. "I can't wait to see the Douro River and hopefully some of the traditional boats used to transport Port to the cellars for aging in Vila Nova de Gaia. Most of all I'm excited to learn more about Portugal's wine, culture, food, music, people . . . all of it!"

"The competition was tough because Portugal is such a diverse country to study, which is what makes it great," added runner-up Lindsay Thomas of Pappas Bros. Steakhouse. "I love Portugal for its rich winemaking traditions, culture, and history, yet at the same time it's constantly encouraging innovation and experimentation to find what works best in its incredibly varied landscape. I love that some of the finest wines in the world, Port and Madeira, are still made to an incredible standard that has been upheld for centuries. You can find a Portuguese wine for every palate, personality, and occasion, and often at a wonderful value."



PHOTO: FELIX SANCHEZ

*Houston somms listen attentively to the Wines of Portugal presentation.*



PHOTO: FELIX SANCHEZ

*Steven McDonald, Sommelier for Pappas Bros. Steakhouse, entertains the panel of judges during his oral exam.*



# The Featured Regions (and Wines)

Although each city tasted eight different wines with some overlap between locales, one overarching message served as a common thread at each competition: Labeling Portuguese wines as traditional in style is an outdated notion. "There are some really dynamic, engaging, young winemakers who are going in and using the latest and the greatest techniques," Morano said. "On this tour we're presenting winemakers doing natural wine [and] whole-bunch fermentation, Biodynamic producers, and then, yes, a few traditionally driven producers, but in Portugal there's a little bit of everything."

This "little bit of everything" gets classified into three levels in terms of designation: DOCs/DOPs, of which there are 31, at the top; IG/IGP regional wines, of which there are 14, in the middle; and Vinho/table wines at the bottom. It's worth noting that a few well-made Portuguese wines are labeled Vinho as result of their respective producers choosing to work outside the regulatory confines established by the Comissão Vitivinícola Regional (CVR).

Three major climatic influences dictate the character of Portuguese wines: the Atlantic Ocean along the western coast creates a fresher style; the continental influence along the mountainous northeast-

ern side of Portugal results in a full-bodied, riper character; and the Mediterranean influence in the southern plains imparts a softer, more fruit-forward style.

The following trio of wines proved excellent examples of their respective region and climatic influence:

## Vinho Verde

Vinho Verde, the largest DOC in Portugal, covers 21,000 hectares of vineyards with primarily granitic soils. Its close proximity to the Atlantic Ocean

means heavy rainfall, a longer growing season, and moderate temperatures.

These combined elements translate to a lower alcohol content and high acidity. Blends typically consist of Loureiro, Alvarinho, and Trajadura.

The **Quinta de Soalheiro 2017 Alvarinho** from Vinho Verde is a perfect example of the region's signature freshness. Made by one of the pioneering producers of the area using grapes from a granitic vineyard planted in 1974, this is a bright yet substantial and minerality-driven Alvarinho capable of a decade of aging.



PHOTO: TODD WESTPHAL

## Alentejo

With hot, dry summers and cold winters, Alentejo benefits from a strong continental influence. The rural, flat region covers roughly one-third of Portugal.

Common red varieties include Aragonez, Trincadeira, and Alicante Bouschet as well as a handful of international grapes; making use of a more uncommon variety, however, is the **A Touriga Vai Nua 2017 Touriga Nacional**. Akin to a denser Beaujolais, this single-varietal wine goes through carbonic maceration and native fermentation before aging in stainless steel for three months. Sweet, ripe red and blue fruits remain bright at the core as lavender plays in the background.



PHOTO: TODD WESTPHAL

## The Douro

The Douro is the classic representation of Portuguese winemaking, particularly when it comes to Port. Declared a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 2001, this area, formally established in 1756, was Portugal's first demarcated and regulated region. The continental influence is also significant here, with summer temperatures reaching 120 degrees and eventually giving way to near-freezing winters. More than 60 native grape varieties are grown here in predominantly schist soils.


The **Quinta do Vallado 2015 Reserva Field Blend** comes from one of the oldest producers in the Douro Valley (the winery was established in 1716). This field blend from old vines, some more than 100 years old, features 45 grape varieties and is made using traditional techniques like the *lagares* method, in which the grapes are foot-treaded in granite vessels. Aged in 60 percent new French oak, the wine is dark and dense with gritty tannins; blackberry, plum, and a touch of vanilla suit the hefty structure. 



PHOTO: TODD WESTPHAL

PHOTO: FELIX SANCHEZ



Sheri Sauter Morano tastes along with the Houston attendees.

# Fifty Years of Secco Bertani Amarone

CELEBRATING  
A MODERN WINE  
BORN FROM AN  
ANCIENT METHOD

by Deborah Parker Wong / photos by Becca Henry

**WHEN WINEMAKER ANDREA LONARDI** took the stage at September's Full Circle Beverage Conference in San Francisco to present a tasting of Bertani Amarone Classico, he had what amounted to a Sommelier Justice League by his side: Master Sommeliers Brian Cronin, Tim Gaiser, and Peter Granoff, all of whom provided perspective and humor as they tasted through 50 years' worth of Bertani winemaking prowess.

Born and raised in a vine-growing Veronese family, Lonardi began his tenure at Bertani in 2012. Although he didn't personally make any of the wines tasted during the masterclass—though the 2008 Amarone was bottled in 2016—the pride he showed while presenting them was rather paternal. “The wines we are making today will be presented by another winemaker 50 years from now,” he told attendees.

## The Birth of Bertani Amarone

Being both modern and ancient, Amarone is a paradoxical style. Its rising popularity and commercialization in the 1950s gave the Valpolicella region a wine of true cult status: one that holds its own next to ageworthy Barolos and Brunellos.

Despite the well-worn anecdotes about the “accidental” discovery of the style, Lonardi contests that it was made intentionally at Bertani and, as such, the winery is actually Amarone's birthplace. It was first produced by Bertani after the producer purchased the Tenuta Novare estate in the heart of Valpolicella Classica in 1957, and while the label has never changed, Lonardi said climate shifts drive the style's natural evolution. “Climate change is a positive for the Valpolicella region, but I'm missing some of the traditional ‘greenness’ in the wines,” he explained.

The Amarone wines made at Bertani in the early 1980s saw their first flush of success on the international market in the late 1980s and early 1990s as consumers gravitated toward bigger, richer wine styles.

During its evolution in bottle, Lonardi sees Amarone progress through three stages of development: showing primary fruit like cherry, plum, and orange from seven to ten years; progressing toward sour cherry and secondary notes of chocolate between ten and 20 years; and, beyond 25 years, being dominated by secondary and tertiary flavors. “A nervous profile is what we desire most,” Lonardi said, adding that Bertani has persisted in building that character despite the ebb and flow of various trends over its history.

## An Interpretation of Terroir

By adhering to a house style, Bertani now finds itself in an optimal spot as consumer preferences turn to lighter, brighter wines that serve as an effective interpretation of Valpolicella's terroir. Lonardi credits a number of factors, including the region's higher altitudes among the Prealps mountain ranges, the temperate effect of nearby Lake Garda, and the limestone soil, but human factors have played a role as well.

Since Bertani established its winery in Valpantena and its vineyards in the old Roman site of Arbizzano di Negrar, it's ushered the estate into the contemporary era by transitioning from the traditional pergola trellising system to Guyot trellising and vertical-shoot positioning. The latter method allows the native Corvina Veronese and Rondinella grapes to yield expressions across a combination of volcanic basalt, chalky limestone, and clay soils.



**Master Sommelier Brian Cronin, National Manager of Wine Education for importer Taub Family Selections, with Bertani Operations Director Andrea Lonardi.**

“Corvina planted to basalt gives us flinty, higher-alcohol wines,” Lonardi explained. “Our limestone vigor is low and we taste tangy dark cherries, while iron- and manganese-rich clay soils are lower yielding and contribute welcome floral and strawberry notes.” Here in the cooler area of Tenuta Novare Corvina offers up a pepperiness similar to Syrah from the Rhône Valley, and Lonardi particularly enjoys the zesty notes the compound rotundone brings to Bertani wines.

At the masterclass, Cronin—who serves as National Manager of Wine Education for Bertani's importer, Taub Family Selec-



tions—pointed to the range of styles and distinctly different expressions achieved by various producers. “In Amarone production there are 10,000 ways of doing the same thing,” he said. Cronin also made an unexpected pop-culture reference during the event, noting that Hannibal Lecter enjoyed an Amarone with his dish of liver in Thomas Harris’ novel.

### Demonstrating Character

Acinaticum, a wine made from dried grapes beginning in the fifth century, is believed to be the precursor to the sweet wine Recioto della Valpolicella, from which Amarone was created. “The method for making Amarone may be easy to copy,” Lonardi said of the *appassimento* method, “but you cannot copy the place.”

To create the elegant, Burgundian-style wines Bertani is known for, Lonardi oversees a long, cool drying period spanning more than 100 days that allows the finished wine to better demonstrate the character of the vintage. Bertani is one of very few

producers carrying on this traditional and natural method, in which grapes are left to rest on the “arèle” (racks made from bamboo canes) in the drying room. There, they dry naturally and slowly without the use of any type of device to remove humidity. “If your temperature during drying is too warm, you lose water too quickly and get concentration of sugars but not complex flavors,” Lonardi explained.

Lonardi prefers these dry, cool conditions—with temperatures below 10 degrees Celsius—to better showcase a site like the Ognissanti, an estate cru that took its name from a church belonging to the Saint Thomas Aquinas friars. It also enables him to demonstrate how the soils affect the finished wines. “Bertani doesn’t manipulate the wines to create a market-driven style,” Granoff said as he remarked on Amarone’s ability to show vintage character with age. “With Bertani Amarone, people pay attention and recognize this style of wine for what it is and what it should be,” Lonardi added. **SJ**

## Tasting Through the Years with Bertani Amarone della Valpolicella



**1967:** This vintage is cited alongside 1964 as the warmest of the decade due in large part to a dry, hot summer; its wines weren’t bottled until the beginning of the 1980s. With notes of faded potpourri, dried plum, walnut, amaro, and celery salt, it’s an umami-driven wine in which the alcohol provided fuel for longevity. The acidity remains precise.

**1975:** Although 1975 is not considered a great vintage, Lonardi cited it as one of his favorites largely due to it being a cooler year. Pale and Pinot Noir-like, the wine showed orange peel, walnut, and leather notes while being quite linear. “Bertani has been considered the Burgundy of Valpolicella,” Gaiser said.

**1981:** Bottled after spending a decade in casks, this expressive and richly textured wine features hints of dried plums, walnut, anise, and mocha bolstered by dusty tannins. “Appassimento is an oxidative process, but the aging process of Amarone is reductive,” said Lonardi. “There is always a percentage of press wine in the final blend that brings tannins to the wine.”

**1998:** Bottled in 2005, this vintage is a more oxidative style dominated by black cherry and extracted darker fruits. Lonardi noted that it was “too warm at harvest,” resulting in a powerful nose. However, it shows muscle, remarkable structure, and persistence.

**2005:** Although the vintage suffered from hail, resulting in the lowest yields of the past 20 years, Lonardi credits the 2005 as the “most valuable wine for the future.” Compared by the panel to the 2010 for structure, power, and verticality, it features a distinct evolution of aromas and gives an overall impression of being seamless and complete. Balanced and fresh, it shows a mélange of tea, coffee, sweet tobacco, and cocoa.

**2008:** This highly aromatic, rich, and red-fruited yet elegant wine was bottled in 2016. “You can form a precise idea of the architecture of the wine,” Lonardi surmised while tasting. Chocolate tannins, truffle, and balsamic notes with a core of strawberry compote and orange peel precede lingering hints of freshly roasted coffee. Vibrancy reigns.

# TIME OF RECKONING

**KAREN MACNEIL** SHARES HER SECOND  
ANNUAL REPORT ON THE STATUS OF  
WOMEN IN THE WINE INDUSTRY

**LAST YEAR, MERRIAM WEBSTER'S** "Word of the Year" was *feminism*. As we near the end of 2018, this year's choice is anyone's guess, but *misogyny* seems like a good candidate.

In this one short year when women have seemingly achieved so much, we have simultaneously accomplished so very little. Indeed, now that the early waves of outrage and the initial high of the #MeToo movement have passed; now that Weinstein, Crosby, Lauer, Moonves, Ailes, Battali, Lasseter, and a cascade of others are—at least temporarily—toppled, we're faced with a starker reality: We live among men, and some of them subconsciously hate us.



ALEXIS PERCIVAL



BETH NOVAK MILLIKEN



ANNE MOSES



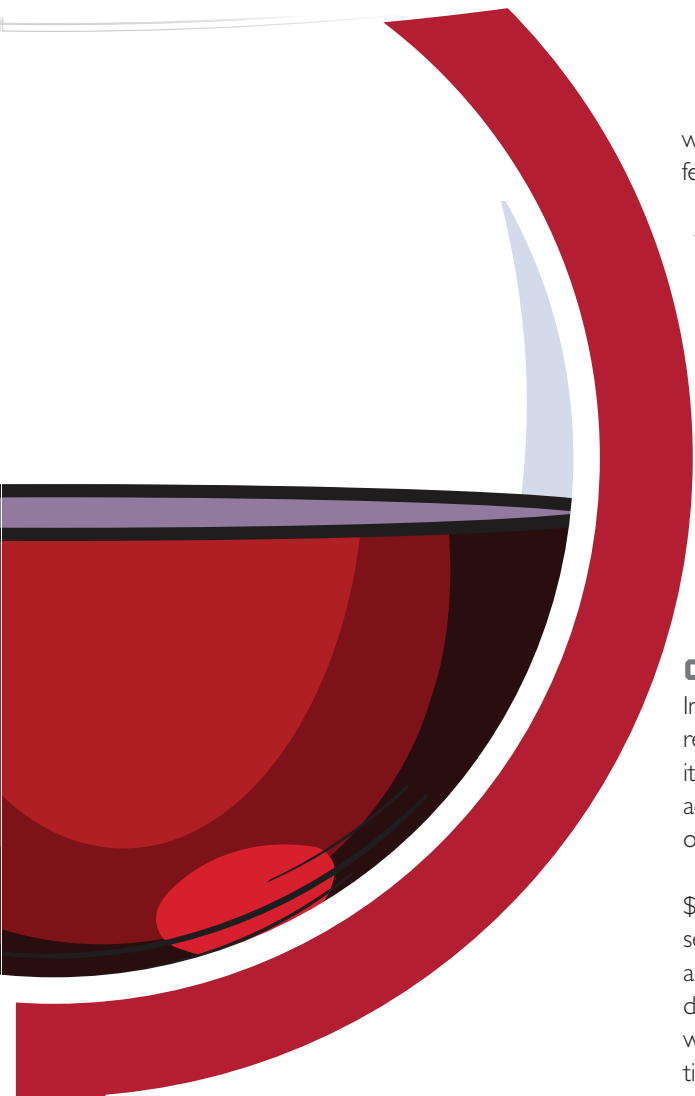
ANNETE ALVAREZ-PETERS



LARA ANDREIA DA SILVA RIBEIRO

The women pictured on the pages of this report were among those who participated in Karen MacNeil's *Women in Wine* survey and research.





It's hard to say that last sentence, but it's also hard to turn away from a year's worth of mounting reports of sexual harassment and sexual "misconduct" and *not* feel as though something very basic is wrong here.

That word, "misconduct," probably needs to be erased from the larger conversation altogether; as sexual misconduct is not about sex and certainly not about mere misbehavior. It's about using your gender to undermine, intimidate, and put someone in their place. It's about abusing your power to render someone else powerless.

Many women have been unjustly forced to navigate around or insulate themselves from situations where a possibility of harassment existed, but for women in the wine industry, there's a big complicating factor: wine itself.

When everyone's job involves drinking—when the professional and social contexts are blurred—how do you determine where the lines should be drawn? And even if you were sure when those lines were clearly crossed, wine often enters the equation again to serve as the perfect "cover." For how many calculating men in the industry have used wine as their excuse, if not their license?

## COMPENSATION AND REPRESENTATION

In doing research for this report, I found myself returning again and again to the relationship between harassment and advancement in the wine business. They are, it now seems to me, inextricably linked. Harassment is a direct way of blocking advancement, but blocking advancement is also a form—an especially insidious and often subconscious form—of harassment.

Let's look at the current status of women and their representation in the \$62-billion U.S. wine industry. Last April, a startling cover story in the business section of *The New York Times* revealed that among Fortune 500 companies, there are about the same number of women CEOs as there are CEOs named John (this despite the fact that Johns comprise roughly 3 percent of the population, while women represent 51 percent). Then in October, it was revealed that the already tiny population of Fortune 500 female CEOs had, over the previous few months, shrunk by 25 percent. It now stands at just 5 percent.



CATHY CORISON



CATHRINE TODD



CHRISTY CANTERBURY



GRETCHEN BRAKESMAN



JULIANA COLANGELO

PHOTOS COURTESY OF RESPECTIVE SUBJECTS



**THEODORA LEE**

Applying that same scrutiny to the wine industry yields a higher percentage. A report released this year by The Red Cabinet, an organization of 100 female wine executives in California, found that women CEOs ran 13 percent of the state's wineries with an annual production of more than 10,000 cases. (Wineries producing fewer than 10,000 cases were not surveyed, as small-production wineries are considerably less likely to have formal management structures.)

Interestingly, there were no female CEOs at wineries producing between 100,000 and 500,000 cases annually. But at wineries producing 500,000 to 1 million cases per year, 25 percent of CEOs were women. In other areas of executive management, the report found that women were significantly overrepresented in human resources and marketing and underrepresented in operations, sales, viticulture, IT, and winemaking.

The latter is a particularly interesting area, as a considerable amount of research suggests that women (especially those of child-bearing age) have some advantages over men when it comes to sensory skills. (See my May 10 report, "Women or Men... Who Has Better Wine Tasting Ability?" on [winespeed.com](http://winespeed.com).) I asked the trade associations of several of the top wine-producing states to estimate the percentage of female winemakers in their states, and



**KIMBERLY CHARLES**

while there is no firm research in this area, they responded as follows: an estimated 10 percent of winemakers in California are female, compared to 7 percent in Washington and 5 percent in New York.

This despite the fact that for the past 15 years, women have on average made up 42 percent of graduates from the prestigious Viticulture and Enology program at the University of California, Davis. Women, in fact, have earned more college degrees in general than men for the past three decades, and while the popular assumption is that more education equates to more money, that's not the case here: For the past 20 years, women have made about 80 cents for every dollar men earn for the same work. Last year, that figure rose marginally to 82 cents, according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.

As management level increases, however, the gender pay gap widens. Female chief financial officers, for example, experience the highest pay gap, earning just 77 percent of what their male counterparts do, according to a 2017 report by the College and University Professional Association for Human Resources (CUPA-HR).

## **GAINS AND LOSSES**

Unfortunately, in the wine industry, no broad-based salary surveys exist that track compensation by gender. The educational association GuildSomm, however, does



**LAURA DÍAZ MUÑOZ**

conduct its own annual report on the subject, and while the data set is small, last year's results show improvements over the prior year's. In 2016, women sommeliers were paid on average \$7,000 less annually than male sommeliers, but in 2017 the gap narrowed to \$4,000, adjusting for education, experience, location, and other factors.

One problem immediately apparent in any sommelier survey is that the proportion of women in the Master Sommelier community remains glaringly small. In the U.S. there are currently 182 Master Sommeliers, of whom just 29 are women.

It's hard to reconcile this number with any single explanation, but several women I've talked to say they're turned off by what they see as a "pin-kissing bro culture" proliferating amongst male sommeliers. For Masters of Wine, thankfully, the situation is better: Out of 380 MWs worldwide, 131 are women.

There are, of course, other forms of industry recognition beyond the MS and MW. Traditionally, industry accolades like Wine Enthusiast's Wine Star Awards go overwhelmingly to men, but in this year's *Top 100 People in the U.S. Wine Industry* list by IntoWine.com, 24 out of 100 were women. That includes the person in the number-one slot: Annette Alvarez-Peters, who serves as the Assistant General Merchandise Manager for Beverage Alcohol at Costco, America's largest alcohol retailer.





LESLIE SBROCCO



LINDSEY WALLINGFORD



MAIA PARISH

(Meridith May, Publisher and Editorial Director of *The SOMM Journal*, came in at #15.)

I know that when many of the women on this list—including me—began their careers, very few women had forged a path before them, meaning female mentors were in short supply. In an interview last year for *Prestige* magazine, Master of Wine and prominent wine critic Lisa Perrotti-

Brown, who serves as the Editor-in-Chief of *The Wine Advocate*, revealed that during her 27 years in the wine industry—having worked for nine companies in four countries in more than seven fields from marketing to purchasing to publishing—she's never once worked for a woman.

Of course, in every aspect of advancement, remuneration, recognition, and support, women of color have it particularly

hard. Not only are they not adequately represented, but when they do end up occupying high-level positions, they're often treated with shocking dismissiveness.

By way of example, Andréa McBride, a Black woman who owns the company McBride Sisters Wines with her sister Robin, recently told me this story after they both traveled to Cincinnati for a business meeting: "The night before, we went to a



**"IN THIS ONE  
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WHEN WOMEN  
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MUCH, WE HAVE  
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SO VERY LITTLE."**

**—KAREN MACNEIL**



MERRY EDWARDS AND HEIDI VON DER MEHDEN

restaurant and sat at the only table, which was a communal table,” she explained. “There were three gentlemen there, and the conversation went like this:

*Them:* Hi, are you from around here?

*Us:* No, we just flew in from California.

*Them:* Oh, are you flight attendants?

*Us:* No, we have a meeting with Kroger [the grocery store chain] in the morning.

*Them:* We had a meeting with Kroger today ourselves. Who do you represent?

*Us:* We don’t represent anyone. We own a wine company.

*Them:* Really? You guys own the company?

*Us:* Yes.

*Them:* Well, good luck with your meeting tomorrow. We know it’s difficult for small companies to get into Kroger.

*Us:* Actually, we’ve sold our wines to Kroger for many years.

“And then,” Andréa recalled, “there was this awkward silence.”

It’s safe to presume that few women in the wine industry can’t relate to Andréa’s story. Historically, though, the lack of Latina women in the wine industry has been especially surprising given the ubiquitous presence of Latino men, who now make up a growing percentage of workers in wineries, not just in the vineyards.

Fortunately, the news on this front is good: Quietly but steadily over the last few years, Latinas have joined vineyard crews in numbers that would have been unthinkable even a decade ago. In 2013,



REBECCA HOPKINS

for example, women represented fewer than 5 percent of vineyard workers in the Napa Valley. Last harvest, they represented nearly 30 percent, according to a 2017 report from UC Davis researchers Malcolm Hobbs and Monica Cooper.

That report, titled *Changing Gender Diversity of the California Vineyard Labor Force and Implications for Grape Production*, further revealed an enormous cultural and gender shift among vineyard workers. That shift has occurred not just at the lower rungs on the ladder: The researchers also found that by 2000, Latina women already held a significant percentage of managerial positions in California vineyard operations.

## BREAKING BARRIERS

Beyond these shifts in representation—in which much more progress remains to be made—what else has changed? While men in the wine industry have been conspicuously silent on the topics of women’s advancement and harassment, several large companies, among them Treasury Wine Estates, Constellation Brands, and E. & J. Gallo, have now established professional advancement programs for their women employees.

Harassment is, of course, a trickier issue, as it doesn’t have to be profound or overt to undermine women professionally. The unrelenting presence of subconscious harassment—being belittled, ignored, talked over; looked past, demeaned, interrupted,



MICHELLE METTER

reprimanded, corrected, or addressed as a junior; among countless other slights and abuses—takes a toll on anyone’s confidence and sends rivulets of insecurity coursing through one’s brain.

And sometimes on top of all that, there’s the insidious insult of being sexualized to the extent that one might well begin to imagine oneself as somehow less capable. Social wine events don’t “require” men to dress differently, but what of women? Are low-cut dresses and 4-inch heels just part of the cultural expectation? Can one really move on to become the CEO of a wine company if you’ve also been unfairly cast as the sexually provocative one?

Maybe, but I’m not so sure. I’m reminded of a sign in the women’s locker room of a health club I once belonged to: It pictured an older woman with the caption, “My only regret in life is that I didn’t tell more men to fuck off.”

For this year’s status report, I once again surveyed 160 women in the wine industry and asked them the following:

*In the wine industry, women remain underrepresented in most professional roles and at most levels, from entry to executive. What are the biggest barriers to women’s advancement?*

I presented 11 options, but respondents could also write in their own suggestions. The top response for the biggest barrier to women’s advancement:





REMI COHEN

"The perception by men that the wine workplace is already equitable when in fact it isn't."

Number 2 was:

"Men intrinsically feel more comfortable interacting with and promoting other men."

And number 3:

"There remains a deep-seated misogyny in American culture that is difficult to surmount."

All of this has given me pause. The



MEG MURRAY

status of women in the wine industry feels different, yet despite some very impactful gains, it also feels nascent and fragile and tentative. I can easily imagine a 2020 that, for the average woman, is not substantively different than 1990.

But I can also imagine a true New World wine industry that's a meritocracy—an example, perhaps, to other industries very much in need of their own reckonings.



KIMBERLY HOCKER

It's ours to build. The time is now. 



*Karen MacNeil is the author of the bestselling book The Wine Bible and the editor of the digital newsletter Wine-Speed. She has worked in the wine industry for 40 years. Reach her at [karen@karenmacneil](mailto:karen@karenmacneil).*

**"I CAN EASILY IMAGINE A 2020 THAT, FOR THE AVERAGE WOMAN, IS NOT SUBSTANTIVELY DIFFERENT THAN 1990. BUT I CAN ALSO IMAGINE A TRUE NEW WORLD WINE INDUSTRY THAT'S A MERITOCRACY—AN EXAMPLE, PERHAPS, TO OTHER INDUSTRIES VERY MUCH IN NEED OF THEIR OWN RECKONINGS."**

**—KAREN MACNEIL**



# The Birth of the GANJIER?

## ASSESSING THE FUTURE OF THE “CANNABIS SOMMELIER”

by Rachel Burkons

**MUCH HAS BEEN** written in recent months about the intersection of cannabis and wine. From conference seminars exploring terpenes and tannins to online debates examining potential industry investments and the swapping of best practices between cannabis cultivators and viticulturalists, there's a wealth of conversations to be had in the realm of wine and weed.

*The SOMM Journal* looks forward to exploring some of these intersections on our pages in 2019 and beyond, but to begin, we're particularly intrigued by what could be referred to as the “service element” of cannabis. Is there a place in the industry for a cannabis sommelier, and if so, what does that role look like and what tenets should it adhere to? Only time will tell, but here are a few of the steps the industry should take to make the *ganjier* a veritable position as legalization continues to make gains around the world.



## SEEKING CERTIFICATIONS

Any sommelier worth their pin will tell you that an unquenchable thirst for wine and spirits education is at the heart of what it means to be a sommelier. There's a big beautiful world of wine out there to explore: One could spend a lifetime with noses both in books and in the glass without mastering all there is to learn.

Cannabis isn't so different. In fact, due to the slowly lifting veil of prohibition, many questions remain largely unanswered about the plant. Much can still be done to deepen understanding of flavor analysis, the complicated interplay of cannabinoids and terpenes, and what role terroir plays in cannabis cultivation, among countless other topics.

So, what's a budding budologist to do if they want to hone their knowledge of the plant? Unfortunately, there's not yet a certification system akin to what we see in the world of wine and spirits, where in-depth educational opportunities and corresponding career paths abound. However, some emerging programs such as the Trichome Institute and Sativa Science Club are joining longstanding cannabis educational outposts like Oakland, California's Oaksterdam University, which walks students through the plant's life cycle from seed to smoke.

While these programs are working to create some sort of educational framework for consumers to understand how to cultivate and consume cannabis, the foundation they're laying is still quite rudimentary compared to the complexities closely examined in the world of wine. That's not to say there isn't an equal abundance of material regarding the trichomes of late-harvested versus dry-farmed flower; full-sun biodynamic versus light-deprivation cultivation techniques; or how the body metabolizes rare cannabinoids when ingested in edible form. These barely scratch the surface on cannabis-related topics that could be explored further in an academic forum.

The grim fact of the matter, though, is that people in this country are still going to jail for this plant, and the U.S. government's classification of cannabis as a Schedule I drug has driven cannabis research into the private sector. As a result,

the existing patchwork of data and knowledge lives somewhere between corporate interests and intergenerational wisdom passed from grower to grower.

## STRIVING FOR SERVICE

Given this status quo, perhaps it's unsurprising that there are no formal educational avenues for the true "cannaseur" just yet. But even if there were meaningful certifications to be had, where would that take the cannabis sommelier career-wise? The current legal landscape essentially limits cannabis sales to off-premise spaces, where retail dispensary employees—budtenders, as they've become known—are the sole gatekeepers of guest interaction.

If you've ever visited a dispensary, you already know that this budtender experience can run the gamut from helpful and informative to quite literally dazed and confused. Could a finely tuned certification program forge a new class of educated and engaged cannabis professionals? We can't predict the future, but emerging organizations like Budtender Fight Club, a traveling educational series, are already aiming to provide a path for career advancement as the cannabis industry continues to take shape.

Yet, the true future of the cannabis sommelier lies in the on-premise space. At the time of writing, no "cannabis restaurant" or "cannabis bar" legally exists in the United States, though the City of West Hollywood will soon announce the winners of a handful of highly competitive permits that would allow for sale and consumption in a restaurant-like environment. (Under existing law, these businesses will still be prohibited from carrying both cannabis and alcohol licenses.)

Despite some limitations, these permits should establish spaces where hospitality can be built into the cannabis experience and where chefs and ganjiers can work together to conceptualize and implement an entirely new standard of service. What exactly this service will look like is still, of course, undetermined: Will there be table-side tasting techniques where a cannasomm explains the nuance of flavor and how to match it with food? Will there be experts whose goal is to guide guests comfortably

*"Due to the slowly lifting veil of prohibition, many questions remain largely unanswered about the plant. Much can still be done to deepen understanding of flavor analysis, the complicated interplay of cannabinoids and terpenes, and what role terroir plays in cannabis cultivation."*

through an edibles experience? Or will there be a classic sommelier whose curated wine list has a designated cannabis-pairing section, complete with a cannabis humidor for guests to select their ideal strain?

The possibilities are seemingly endless, and like the organizations paving the way for formalized certifications, advocates in the onsite consumption space are rising in influence. The California-based group Crop-to-Kitchen Community (C2K), helmed by some of the leading tastemakers in the culinary cannabis space, is actively advocating for sensible regulations that would expand the reach of onsite cannabis consumption—possibly even for bar and restaurant spaces where you can order a glass of Pinot as your date puffs on a Granddaddy Purple vape pen.

As these spaces open up, so too will the service model of prospective cannabis sommeliers. Until then, make sure to check out upcoming issues of *The SOMM Journal* as we explore these intersecting worlds and advocate for the successful, inclusive future of this burgeoning industry. ■

*To learn more about cannabis' onsite consumption model or to suggest topics for upcoming columns, contact Rachel Burkons at [rachel@thecleverroot.com](mailto:rachel@thecleverroot.com).*

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{ label debut }



*The House of Suntory recently introduced Roku Gin and Haku Vodka to its portfolio.*



PHOTO COURTESY OF BEAM SUNTORY

# The Land of the *Rising Sun*

**THE HOUSE OF SUNTORY**  
RELEASES TWO NEW EXPRESSIONS:  
A VODKA AND A GIN by Kyle Billings

**THE HOUSE OF SUNTORY** is introducing two new spirits to its portfolio—and they aren't whisky. Founded by Shinjiro Torii in 1899, the legendary producer that established Japan's first malt whisky distillery is now releasing Roku Gin and Haku Vodka.

What may seem like strange bedfellows to casual observers are actually part of the country's rich craft-distillate legacy, whose practitioners are known for conjuring the muses of native ingredients and worldly imagination. "There's no mystery in Japanese philosophy—they look at the whole world for inspiration," says Johnnie Mundell, Brand Ambassador of Japanese Spirits for Beam Suntory.



*A bartender prepares a cocktail at the House of Suntory's L.A. launch party for the brand's new vodka and gin expressions.*

PHOTO: DEVIN BERKO



A tall, ginger-bearded resident of Hermosa Beach, California, whose brogue reveals his Scottish ancestry, Mundell embodies this international perspective as he debunks any discordance between these Japanese spirits. He explains that while he thinks of whisky as the Japanese spirit industry's "present"—"although [that] present is almost 100 years old"—he

a Japanese tradition in which each ingredient is harvested at its peak to ensure optimal flavor; in sourcing its six botanicals: sakura (cherry blossom) flower, sakura leaf, yuzu peel, sencha tea, Gyokuro tea, and sansho pepper. These ingredients, along with eight traditional gin botanicals also present in the spirit, are all featured proudly on Roku Gin's hexagonal bottle.

available in Japan from the very beginning," Mundell explains. "Using a vacuum distillation is much softer than regular pot distillation; you can achieve boiling point at a lower temperature."

The goal of these processes is to meld subtlety and depth of flavor; a combination that's always been the *modus operandi* of Torii's legacy. According to Mundell, this vision is often at odds with the ingrained preferences of the Western palate. "If you think about the Westernized version of Japanese food, we tend to like big, bold flavors," he explains. "The Japanese palate likes subtlety. They like the balance of nature and craftsmanship to reflect the space and the environment they're in."

That sense of subtlety and balance is also apparent in the masterful blending of the company's whisky: Suntory Whisky Toki. The spirit has evolved from Torii's original creation, which was serendipitously forced to mature differently than expected. "They made a whisky that was the young, smoky-style Scotch and it was not popular," Mundell explains. "So, [Torii] pivoted and used his skill in blending to make a whisky that was specifically designed for Japanese people. The translation for the U.S. audience today is that Japanese whisky is subtle, therefore it is approachable for somebody new to whisky, yet it's complex with depth of flavor and character for somebody who is really, really passionate about whisky."

The company blends a selection of whiskies from three distilleries—Hakushu, Chita, and Yamazaki—to produce the Suntory Whisky Toki expression, ensuring that each component offers distinctive traits and flavors rendered greater than the sum of their parts in the final spirit. Together, Suntory's Whisky Toki, Roku Gin, and Haku Vodka reflect the Japanese aspiration to channel nature's gifts at the height of their prime, ultimately creating a sensory experience that's equally satisfying. 

PHOTO: DEVIN BERKO



**Johnnie Mundell, Brand Ambassador of Japanese Spirits for Beam Suntory (right), works behind the bar at the launch party for Roku Gin and Haku Vodka at HNYPT in Los Angeles.**

sees gin "as a critical player in the future ... because of the balance of craft, nature, and accessibility." The vodka, meanwhile, is more representative of the past, as it makes use of classic Japanese ingredients.

Reflecting the ambition of the Japanese spirits industry, the Roku Gin showcases a bar culture keen to redefine the category while furthering the vision of Suntory's founder: "[The blenders] chose to do a modern take on what gin is," Mundell says. "Roku is fundamentally built on the traditional London Dry style, then we're taking distillates of six Japanese botanicals and that same blender's mindset that comes from the whisky family."

Roku Gin employs the practice of *shun*,

### Subtlety and Balance

The other new addition to Suntory's portfolio, Haku Vodka, marries two of Japan's most well-known natural resources: white rice and bamboo. In Kagoshima in the southern Kyushu prefecture, the fermentation process for Haku Vodka is stimulated using pure white rice and the extraction of sugars with a koji starter. The rice then undergoes two distillations in column and pot stills before the liquid is filtered through bamboo charcoal—a proprietary process at Suntory.

Known for its incredible density, the charcoal yields a final product with subtle yet precise flavors. "The vodka's much more about the history of what was

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*"The Japanese palate likes subtlety. They like the balance of nature and craftsmanship to reflect the space and the environment they're in."*

*—Johnnie Mundell, Brand Ambassador of Japanese Spirits for Beam Suntory*

# *Below the* SURFACE

CALIFORNIA'S RIBOLI  
FAMILY WINES  
EMBRACES ITS VALUES  
AS IT ENTERS A NEW  
"RENAISSANCE PERIOD"

*by Kyle Billings*

***Anthony Riboli concedes*** that many new patrons are introduced to Riboli Family Wines through the leviathan of Stella Rosa. Its presence is ubiquitous, saluting commuters nationwide from billboards and the ornate display cases of local grocers. "The success of Stella Rosa has been fantastic and we're still growing on that brand, but we're also using that success to reinvest," the fourth-generation winemaker tells *The SOMM Journal*.

Stella Rosa's rising tide is embraced at the company, but Anthony contends that when it comes to his family's broader impact on the wine industry, there's much more to the story. Prone to huddling together at a table near the entrance of their Madalena restaurant in Los Angeles, the Ribolis immediately appear as a united front to visitors both local and far-flung: During lunch hour, they're often met with a deluge of handshakes and greetings from old friends, passersby, and grateful patrons.

*The Riboli Creston Vineyard in the Creston District of Paso Robles, CA.*





*Members of the Riboli family from left to right: Dante, Anthony, Santo, Lisa, Cathy, Steve, and Christopher.*





*The Riboli Family of San Antonio Winery's newest facility in Paso Robles.*



Ensnconced in the Lincoln Heights neighborhood on the city's east side, Maddalena and the San Antonio Winery serve as an oasis among the steel and concrete of nearby downtown L.A. The restaurant proudly displays symbols of the company's history, including varnished redwood tanks, brick pillars, and sepia-toned pictures of the extended family tree.

The business' origins extend back more than a century to 1917, when members of the family immigrated from Italy to join other worldly pilgrims in this small urban hamlet. "You have this big wave of Western Europeans who settled right here," says Anthony's uncle Steve Riboli, who serves as Vice President of Riboli Family Wines. "This became their blue-collar community. There were multiple breweries here [and] multiple wineries."

Described as little more than a glorified garage at its inception, the San Antonio Winery was situated on Lamar Street amongst cheesemongers, tailors, and brewers. As the merchants' shops gradually shuttered over the years, however, the winery endured; now the oldest business of its kind in Los Angeles, it's drawing renewed attention as more residents and businesses move into the area. "Urban breweries and urban distilleries have all popped up," Anthony says. "In downtown L.A. we're as urban as you could get, and that used to be a negative for many years. However, that has changed."

### ***The Importance of Input***

Far from the corner table at the Maddalena restaurant and the surrounding Southland traffic, Anthony spends much

of his time during harvest season tending to the family's estate vineyards in Paso Robles, Monterey, and Napa Valley. The company's success has enabled a functional expansion, and the winemaker is eager to leverage a new national spotlight to showcase the entire Riboli Family Wines portfolio, including its San Simeon, Opaque, and Maddalena labels.

"We are a producer; we own estate vineyards, and we have a brand-new state-of-the-art winery in Paso Robles," Anthony notes. "We're covering everything from producer to importer to distributor to national sales to restaurant. It's pretty much all aspects of the wine business."

Both Anthony and Steve attribute the company's longevity to its intimacy with its audience's preferences. Anthony's grandfather, Stefano Riboli, labored for more than 40 years in the tasting room—built in 1946, it's one of the original tasting rooms in California—at San Antonio Winery, where guests' insights and feedback have provided a guiding light for Riboli Family Wines. "Direct-to-consumer retail is now very popular, but that was part of who we've always been," Anthony says. "I don't care if you're spending millions of dollars on a marketing campaign—that's what a lot of large companies want to do, to just create these marketing and consumer groups. But when you [talk to] consumers in your tasting room, that's real input."

Steve recounts a simpler time during the company's genesis, when consumers' tastes were, well, a little less selective. "There were two types of wines: red and redder," he quips. "That's what this community drank: red blends." As tastes evolved, so did the

business, yet despite the expansion of their operation, the Ribolis pride themselves on maintaining a core of authenticity that distinguishes their wines from a sea of other beverage choices. "When consumers go down the shelves at their grocery store, they're like, 'This is kind of scary,'" Steve says. "It's the same story: How do I build a relationship with you? How do you trust me in this crazy business of hundreds of thousands of labels of wines?"

### ***Telling "Real" Stories***

Another key to the sustained popularity of the family's portfolio, Anthony says, is that each brand is treated as its own distinct entity. "Too often people are bottling the same wine with multiple labels and that's not what we've ever done. Each brand has a real story: We don't make things up, because we don't need to," he explains.

Part of that legitimacy naturally stems from the efforts of the real-life faces behind these brands. Among them is family matriarch Maddalena Riboli, who's often regaled as the visionary whose influence and sage guidance laid the foundation of Riboli Family Wines for the majority of the 20th century. She continues to roam the expanse of her namesake restaurant, where her name is inscribed on the wall as well as on her eponymous bottlings of Paso Robles Cabernet Sauvignon, Monterey Chardonnay, and other wines.

"The best advice my grandmother has ever given to all of our family is that you've got to evolve—and I think that's the secret," Anthony says. "Sometimes old things become popular again and trends come back, but at the same time, you've got to



try new stuff. Sometimes it's not going to be a home run, but at least [you're] not getting stagnant. I think that's been incredible advice from her."

The company's history proves this guidance was repeatedly heeded, as Riboli Family Wines has undergone what Steve describes as three formulative evolutions since its founding. "Call it vision, perseverance, or luck, but we've been able to renaissance ourselves probably three times: once in the 1970s with the development of this restaurant, touching people with food and wine and hospitality, and again in the 2000s with an investment of \$50 million in estate vineyards and an ultra-premium winery," he explains. "The third time has to do with Stella Rosa—Stella Rosa taught us a lot. I consider that a renaissance period as well."

The publicity that came with Stella Rosa's success heightens the stakes for the company to remain relevant while inviting more guests into the growing family of Riboli Family Wines enthusiasts. Fortunately, Maddalena's ethos of evolution and intimacy bleeds into all interactions and projects at the organization, including its social media presence and its approach to business extending beyond its tasting rooms in Los Angeles, Ontario, and Paso Robles. Another guiding principle, sustainability, is on full display at the new winery, which runs on solar power and treats and reuses all wastewater.

According to Steve, the consistent application of Riboli Family Wines' direct distribution model plays a vital role in building and maintaining relationships through all market channels. "This industry, even though it's extremely sophisticated, is still very much relationship-based," he adds. "If you look at the big picture, the number of gatekeepers, there aren't that many."

He also suggests that building upon the company's original foundation is even more important as new consumers of wine seek out brands they see as both credible and compelling. "The new consumer . . . I don't think they trust—they second-guess," Steve adds. "Our job as a company is to embrace [them] one on one and through technology. We didn't open up because we made our money in oil, natural gas, or selling our dot-com company. We're just normal folks, and I think the 'millennial-plus' [consumer] really embraces that."

### ***Family First***

When looking to the future of his family's legacy, Anthony can hardly contain his zeal for what the marriage of the new winery and the Paso Robles terroir means for the company's winemaking potential. With the swelling costs of Napa Valley and Sonoma products becoming increasingly prohibitive for consumers, he believes world-class wines should be accessible enough to be enjoyed on more than just special occasions.

"We feel very strongly about Paso Cabernet because Napa and Sonoma are outpricing themselves—that's the reality," he explains. "We can provide a really nice bottle of Cab for 20 bucks that someone can drink on a Tuesday night, not one time a year or never. We just feel that Paso Robles is going to be the next major wine region, especially for Cabernet."

Steve, meanwhile, is embracing the challenge of conceiving what the next evolution of the company will look like. "A lot of people say, 'Well, let's go slow.' No," he says. "It's like a rushing river: You've got to ride the rapids as best you can."

The company's history of visionary leadership may have established its penchant for captivating broad audiences through exemplary wines, but the strata of Riboli Family Wines' past, present, and future ultimately lies on the bedrock of family values. "We're a family company and we have every intention to stay a family company. We're nurturing the next generation," Steve says.

The Ribolis will surely continue to grow the Stella Rosa brand while paving the way for their estate California brands to thrive, but on any given day, various family members can still be counted on to congregate in the Maddalena restaurant to share new ideas or offer well wishes to guests over a plate of spaghetti and meatballs. That's the funny thing about Riboli Family Wines: The more things change, the more they seem to stay the same. **SI**

*Riboli Family Wines'  
Stefano Vineyard is  
located in the El Pomar  
District of Paso Robles.*



# Wine Speak Paso Robles Returns January 7-10, 2019

INNOVATIVE TRADE SUMMIT FEATURES ALL-STAR CAST OF  
MASTER SOMMELIERS & WINEMAKERS

200+  
WINES

6  
MASTER SOMMS

4  
DAYS

1  
INTIMATE  
EXPERIENCE

At the conclusion of the inaugural Wine Speak Paso Robles trade summit last January, Chuck Furuya and Amanda Wittstrom-Higgins were both exhilarated and exhausted. The event had been a success, and people were already asking about the next one. But Furuya and Wittstrom-Higgins—the two friends who co-founded Wine Speak—were not quite ready to answer that question.

"The first Wine Speak was a grassroots effort, and we never pitched it as an annual event," said Wittstrom-Higgins, who is VP of operations at Ancient Peaks Winery. "But the feedback was so incredible, and it didn't take long to decide that we had to do it again." On that note, Wine Speak Paso Robles is set to return with an all-star cast of master sommeliers, winemakers and hospitality professionals on January 7-10, 2019 in the Paso Robles wine country. Wine Speak 2019 is billed as a premier industry summit that brings sommeliers, wine industry leaders and hospitality professionals together for an intimate educational journey.

*"We have worked hard to ensure that 2019 will be a step forward through different speakers, topics and added events, but our aim remains the same: to create a premier experience for wine industry professionals to grow and learn together,"* said Furuya, a renowned master sommelier and partner at DK Restaurants in Hawaii.

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Wine Speak Paso Robles 2019 will kick off with winery technical tours on January 7, with a focus on Rhône varieties and Bordeaux varieties. Featured winemaker seminars on January 8-9 will include "Creating The Perfect Blend" and "Cabernet Sauvignon: Inside and Out." Additional seminars include "The State of Zinfandel" and "What Syrah Can Be." A "Paso Paired" luncheon on January 9 will feature a three-course meal prepared by Chef Cheyne Jackson of The Range and expertly paired with interesting local wines.

January 10 is "Hospitality Day," and will include a seminar on "Building Your Brand: Aloha Style" steered by executives from Hawaiian Airlines. Industry anticipation is high for Wine Speak Paso Robles 2019 based on the success of the inaugural event.

*"I thought the event was so important because it brought together all of the different sides of our industry under one roof," said Matt Dees, winemaker at Jonata and a featured 2018 Wine Speak panelist. "I found it to be incredibly well organized and thoughtful in its approach, with lots of good conversation."*

For information and tickets on Wine Speak 2019, visit

**WINESPEAKPASO.COM**

## BRIEF SCHEDULE

### Paso Robles Winey & Vineyard Tours

With a Rhône and Bordeaux varietal focus

### Cabernet Sauvignon: Inside & Out

Panel discussion and tasting with Fred Dame, M.S., Eric Jensen, Helen Keplinger and Fred Scherrer

### Talk Story: A Different Perspective on Wine

Panel discussion and tasting with Meridith May, Jordan Fiorentini, Helen Keplinger and Shelley Lindgren

### Rhône Renegade: Mourvèdre & Grenache

Panel discussion and tasting with Cris Cherry, Justin Smith and Richard Betts M.S.

### "Taste of Paso Robles" Grand Tasting

Top 35 wineries representing the Paso Robles AVA

### Creating Your Perfect Blend

Panel discussion and tasting with Peter Neptune MS, Matt Kettmann, Amanda Wittstrom-Higgins, Mike Sinor and Stewart Cameron

### Paso Paired Luncheon

Hosted by Randy Caparoso, Fred Dame MS and Chef Cheyne Jackson. Lunch will be paired with four Paso Robles wineries including: Daou Vineyards & Winery, L'Aventure winery, Epoch Estate Wines and Tablas Creek Vineyards

### The State of Zinfandel

Panel discussion and tasting with Matt Trevisan and Fred Scherrer

### BYOB "Taste of the World" Dinner

Bring your own bottle that inspires others

### Hospitality Day

A full day with speakers Alisa Onishi - Hawaiian Airlines, Fred Dame MS, Chuck Furuya MS, Nunzio Alioto MS, Amber Karson Butler - Karson Butler Events, Cameron Ingalls - Acacia Productions



A portion of the proceeds benefit Dream Big Darling a non-profit 501C3 and all of the community charities it serves. The Dream Big Darling nonprofit will be responsible in collecting all donations and tickets sales.

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# The Prince of Santa Ynez

**P. BINGO WATHEN** APPLIES A LIFETIME OF EXPERIENCE TO HIS ROLE AS **WINE DIRECTOR** AT **S.Y. KITCHEN** IN SANTA BARBARA COUNTY

by Jessie Birschbach

**WHILE THEY MAY** not face the same pressures of those born into a royal family, the descendants of winemaking clans often feel forced to carry on their relatives' name and legacy in lieu of pursuing their own dreams. Perhaps this is why P. Bingo Wathen, son of Foxen Vineyard founder/winemaker Bill Wathen, wasn't initially on board with the family business. "I remember going to work with my dad starting at 5, 6 years old," Wathen recalls. "I'd then work on and off for him through my teens whenever he needed a hand, but I never really saw wine or restaurant stuff as a future."

After graduating from the University of California, Santa Barbara, with a degree in global studies, Wathen spent a few years working harvests in Spain before spending time in Bordeaux and Burgundy. "That was kind of life-changing being in the old country making Chardonnay and Pinot Noir—seeing the family heritage passing from father to son," he says.

Inspired, Wathen returned to the U.S. to work with his father and finally fell head over heels for wine. He also took an introductory course with the Court of Master Sommeliers, which "opened [his] mind up." "I was always interested in geography, history, and agriculture," Wathen says. "I realized being a sommelier was kind of all of that in one."

In 2013, Wathen began working at popular Italian restaurant S.Y. Kitchen in Santa Ynez as a bartender. While roughly half of the wine list is Italian, the other half represents the best of the local wine scene in Santa Barbara County while complementing the thoughtful farm-to-table cuisine. After alternating between the winery and the restaurant, Wathen made the decision to pursue the service side full-time. Shortly after he passed his Certified Sommelier exam two years ago, the wine director of S.Y. Kitchen moved on and Wathen took over the role. "I've learned more in the last two years doing this than I have the rest of my life, particularly the business side of things," he says.


Despite the transition, Wathen has made sure to keep one foot in the winemaking world. "I started making one barrel; now I make three to four every year. I never knew anything about the marketing and sales side and now I'm doing that all myself with my own label, Barieau. If I ever want to go back into it, I know a lot more now." 



PHOTO COURTESY OF ROB STARK PHOTOGRAPHY

## INDUSTRY ADVICE

*"Pay attention to your clientele and their taste: It's easy to want to sell what you want to drink, but that's not necessarily what people want. You're not always selling wine to other somms, and you're not always right about what the best wine is. It's up to the person who's drinking it."*

*—P. Bingo Wathen*





*The Man Behind the Brands*



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