

■ THE SOMMELIER JOURNAL

FEBRUARY/MARCH • 2020  
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# THE SOMM JOURNAL

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# THE SOMM JOURNAL

FEBRUARY/MARCH 2020 • Vol. 7 No. 2

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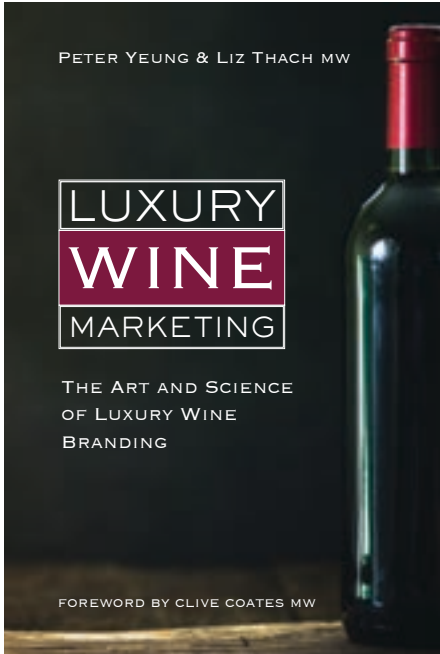
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Steven Spurrier



# Groundbreaking Branding

A PRIMER ON **LUXURY WINE MARKETING** MAY OPEN DOORS FOR YOUR BOTTLES



**PROCLAIMING A WINE** worthy of the luxury category is not as simple as charging a premium price: Its quality must be established with those in the know who use traditional measures to keep track of value. Luxury brands should have an exacting level of control over their messaging in order to stand apart from the crowd of high-end labels that seek to be referred to as luxury (or perhaps even be looked upon as a cult wine).

In their collaborative book, *Luxury Wine Marketing: The Art and Science of Luxury Wine Branding*, Peter Yeung and Master of Wine Liz Thach explain how luxury is “akin to art” while exploring how the category’s branding aims to tell the story behind the bottle. This approach conjures an impression of authenticity, which lends the necessary credence to handcrafted products.

The book traverses topics like business models, pricing, advertising options, the direct-to-consumer model, and the ability certain products have to open global markets. The task of earning praise from industry experts, collectors, and hard-to-impress “wine geeks,” meanwhile, can often be distilled down to a formula, according to the authors, who stress that navigating a luxury label through trade channels—all while dealing with allocation and brand image—demands true insight in today’s marketplace.

It also bears mentioning that *Luxury Wine Marketing* defines the difference between affordable luxury for commercial sales and the hard-to-get/highly sought-after collectibles largely designated for special occasions. After all, how luxury wines are perceived and ultimately sold is the key to their success. —Meridith May

## *The Ultimate Guide to Homebrewing: Techniques and Recipes to Get Brewing Today*

BY THE EDITORS OF THE HARVARD COMMON PRESS

**AS A NOVICE HOMEBREWER**, I always jump at the chance to read about every approach to the craft that I can. What stands out in this version by the Editors of the Harvard Common Press are the step-by-step instructions replete with slick photography.

There are a few unexpected surprises too, like interviews featuring industry greats and a “Gardening for the Homebrewer” chapter—which the little-old-lady gardener in me particularly loved. The vintage-recipes section, meanwhile, is chock-full of gems: If you want to know how to make an 1883 Guinness Extra Stout, this is right up your alley. For those who already have most of the classic homebrewing books out there, this one is worth adding to your library—its thoughtful methodology removes a little more of the guesswork that’s so common with most guides.

—Jessie Birschbach, *Managing Editor and Certified Cicerone* SJ



*Harvard Common Press is an imprint of The Quarto Group.*



# A Variety of

# of

**ALBARIÑO** SOLIDIFIES ITS PLACE IN THE HEARTS OF SOMMELIERS AT SOMMCON SAN DIEGO

*From left to right: Rick Fisher, Education Director for Wine Scholar Guild; Augusto Ferrarese, Corporate Beverage Director for Urban Kitchen Group; Bob Bath, MS; Kathleen Thomas, Wine Training Manager for Hakkasan Group; and Evan Vallée, Sommelier & Bar Manager for Huntress and Lumi.*



According to Master Sommelier Bob Bath, the saga of Albariño is not just “a story about a grape” but “a story about a place”: a statement he used to segue into an exploration of the variety late last year at SommCon San Diego. The seminar, titled “Albariño & Somms: A Focused Tasting from Rías Baixas,” was attended by a large group of professionals and enthusiasts eager to discover the versatility of one of Spain’s premier white grapes.

With Bath serving as moderator, the discussion was also guided by a group of well-known sommeliers: Kathleen Thomas, Wine Training Manager for Hakasan Group; Evan Vallée, Sommelier & Bar Manager for local restaurants Huntress and Lumi; and Augusto Ferrarese, Corporate Beverage Director for Urban Kitchen Group.

Rías Baixas, Spain’s preeminent wine-making area, is located in the northwestern region of Galicia—making it more Celtic than Castilian. Its nearly 10,000 coastal acres of vineyards share land with, and often surround, ancient manor houses and granite castles. Taking its name from a series of submerged river valleys known as “rías,” Rías Baixas has an Atlantic climate that maintains moderate temperatures

year-round, and while rainfall averages up to 65 inches per year, the vines also benefit from more than 2,200 hours of sunshine annually.

## The Birthplace of Albariño

Rías Baixas is barely 30 years old, but it’s already established itself as a world-class wine region thanks to the efforts of people like Marisol Bueno Berrío-Atehortua, the first president of the local regulatory body. Berrío-Atehortua has no shortage of female peers, as more than half of the winemakers in Rías Baixas are women.

The region comprises five subzones: Ribeira do Ulla, Condado do Tea, O Rosal, Soutomaior, and Val do Salnés, the latter of which accounts for more than 50% of Rías Baixas’ area under vine. It’s also the birthplace of Albariño, which thrives in the predominantly mineral-rich, granite-based soils and is mostly planted on 7-foot-high *parrals* (pergolas). This system allows for both the ventilation of the vine canopy and the even ripening of the grapes.

Joined by a handful of white and red varieties, Albariño accounts for 96% of all plantings in the region. The grape is typically produced as a varietal wine and was traditionally known to result in somewhat generically stylistic expressions; today, how-

ever, producers are showcasing Albariño’s ability to yield a tremendously diverse range of styles, including sparkling, barrel-fermented, and barrel-aged wines as well as versions that undergo extended lees aging. This is not the Albariño of yesteryear, and sommeliers have started to take notice: They’re quick to tout not only its value compared to wines of similar quality but also its ability to appeal to a wide variety of palates and cuisines.

## A Unanimous Appreciation

When the seminar progressed to the tasting portion, the wines did not disappoint despite the bar being set high for the first bottling: a 100% Albariño sparkling wine made via the traditional method. New to the export market, it exhibited a refreshing crispness and salinity, with notes of citrus and stone fruit—all of which are qualities the grape is known for.

The wines of Condado do Tea, Rías Baixas’ warmest subzone, showed vibrancy, minerality, and characteristics similar to Pinot Grigio, including flavors of stone and orchard fruit with slight hints of tangerine; that said, the group agreed that these wines not only were more fruit-forward but also had more invigorating acidity. To take advantage of the latter, pairings

## a diverse lineup

A range of Albariño wines from three of Rías Baixas’ five subzones were poured at the SommCon tasting. Here are the exceptional Albariños featured (excepting the **Altos de Torona 2018 Pazo de Villarei** from Val do Salnés):



**Bodegas As Laxas**  
2017 Sensum,  
Condado do Tea  
(\$55)



**Bodegas As Laxas**  
2018 Laxas,  
Condado do Tea  
(\$18)



**Bodega Pazo Pondal**  
2018 Leira  
Condado do Tea  
(\$15)



included ceviche and whole grilled seabass with a tomato and caper sauce.

The only blend present at the tasting, the Terras Gauda from O Rosal, was more texturally driven, with a creaminess and richness not present in the expressions of Condado do Tea. Thomas noted that these qualities, in addition to the wine's herbal notes, made it a perfect match for the Cantonese cuisine Hakkasan Group is known for.

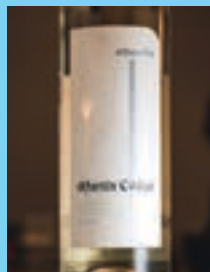
Val do Salnés fittingly represented the largest number of wines at the tasting, as well as the most diverse: Albariño showed its versatility through examples that had undergone stainless-steel aging, partial malolactic fermentation, and the aforementioned extended lees aging. Among the wines' notable attributes were salinity and high acidity; notes of citrus, orange flowers, orange zest, and stone fruit; and grassy aromas reminiscent of Sauvignon Blanc. Pairing suggestions, meanwhile, ranged from oysters, vegetarian dim sum, and whole roasted duck with honey and lavender to burrata with grilled peaches and pasta dishes.

Continually describing the wines as elegant and food friendly, the panel was unanimous in its assessment of Rías Baixas Albariño as possessing all of the hallmark characteristics of a premium bottling: sense of place, aromatic intensity, complexity, and ability to age. In the end, their overarching consensus was that Albariño should have a prominent place on every wine list—is it on yours? *SJ*

# Rías Baixas



**Terras Gauda 2018**  
Terras Gauda  
O Rosal, O Rosal  
(\$25)



**Bodegas Martín**  
Códax 2018 Martín  
Códax, Val do  
Salnés (\$16)



**Bodegas Martín**  
Códax 2018  
Burgáns, Val do  
Salnés (\$15)



**Adegas Terra de**  
Asorei 2018 Nai,  
Val do Salnés  
(\$16)



**Condos de Albarei**  
2018 Condos de  
Albarei, Val do  
Salnés (\$16)



**Pazo de Señorans**  
2010 Pazo Señorans  
Selección de Añada,  
Val do Salnés (\$55)



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*DeLoach Vineyards Leads SOMM Campers in a Regional Exploration of Wine and Vine*

*A new shoot emerges within the DeLoach Vineyards estate in the Russian River Valley.*

PHOTO: BETH BAUGHER



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*Joseph Herzog, General Manager for Herzog Wine Cellars. (See page 54.)*

PHOTO: TONY PINTO, PINTO PRODUCTIONS



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# The Three Ps

## URUGUAY'S WINE INDUSTRY HAS MORE TO OFFER THAN EVER BEFORE

**COMPARED TO ITS** neighbours Argentina and Brazil, Uruguay is tiny. Half of its 3 million inhabitants live in the capital city, Montevideo, yet the country harbours both the widest river (Río de la Plata, which is 45 kilometres wide at its broadest) and, at 2.5 billion years old, what may be some of the most ancient bedrock soil on the planet.

It also produces top-class footballers who it can't afford to keep as well as excellent, European-style wines that are more appreciated abroad than at home. During a first-time visit I made after Christmas, I found the landscape as appealingly charming as the residents and was left with a lasting impression that Uruguay is in the top league of "the three Ps," in which the Place and the People come together harmoniously to create the Product.

Roughly 9,000 hectares of vineyards span 15 of Uruguay's 19 departments, which straddle the 30–35 parallels south—the same latitude as the best vineyards in Argentina, Chile, South Africa, Australia, and New Zealand. But Uruguay is the only wine producer in South America with an

Atlantic climate, and its cool nights impart elegance and balance in the wines. The main grapes are international: Albariño, Chardonnay, Riesling, Sauvignon Blanc, and Viognier for the whites; Cabernet Franc, Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, Pinot Noir, Syrah, and especially Tannat for the reds.

Tannat, the major grape of Madiran and Irouléguay in southwest France, was introduced in Uruguay in 1870 by Basque immigrants and is the country's flagship variety—as Malbec is to Argentina and Sauvignon Blanc is to New Zealand. It is also, in my view, both more expressive and more varied in style than its French ancestor. Indeed, at a presentation of wines from Bodega Garzón in London five years ago, I complimented their internationally known consultant-enologist Alberto Antonini for being the "first man to tame Tannat."

Owned by Argentine couple Alejandro and Bettina Bulgheroni, Bodega Garzón encompasses 250 hectares of vineyards covering 1,000 different plots; a 19,000-square-metre sustainable winery with a capacity of 2.2 million litres; a vast restaurant under the direction of celebrity

chef Francis Mallmann, renowned for his "open-fire" cooking; and an 18-hole golf course. With Christian Wylie (formerly of Familia Deicas and Viña Santa Carolina) serving as General Manager, Eduardo Félix and Germán Bruzzone taking care of the vineyards, and Antonini overseeing the cellar, the results of channelling the aforementioned ancient terroir are plain to see in the glass.

The whites—especially Albariño—possess a floral character, with freshness, precision, and no loss of flavour; while the reds have marvellous colour, energy, and refinement both for now and for the future. (The sparkling wines, meanwhile, have a fine dry finish, and the 2019 Pinot Noir Rosé is simply delicious.) Bodega Garzón's range is wide, with several single-vineyard wines of distinct character; the top red, Balasto—usually a blend of Tannat and Cabernet Franc—has been accepted by the merchants of La Place de Bordeaux for European distribution, joining 100-pointers Masseto, Opus One, and Sena. Hats off to this worthy ambassador for a region on the rise. *sj*

*The vineyards and winery of Bodega Garzón.*

PHOTO COURTESY OF BODEGA GARZÓN







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{ one woman's view }



by Karen MacNeil

# To All the Somms I've Loved Before

PHOTO: MICROGEN VIA ADOBE STOCK

## KAREN MACNEIL REFLECTS ON HER BEST (AND WORST) EXPERIENCES WITH SOMMELIERS

**IN JANUARY**, as the decade got underway, I found myself thinking about the best experiences I've ever had with sommeliers (and a few of the worst experiences, too, though the former far outnumber the latter).

I should probably admit that I would have loved to have been a sommelier. Even to this day, when I'm dining in a restaurant and see a guest struggling with a wine list, I have a secret desire to jump up and try to help. In fact, I did do this once—and I ended up selling the party of ten \$1,200 worth of wine before anyone on the staff caught on. (The manager later told me I could come in anytime as his guest.)

The reason I feel compelled to lend a hand is because I remember—vividly—how terrible wine lists made me feel when I was a young woman starting out in the industry. It was pure agony to scan through those pages without having any idea what some of the words meant.

I think those of us who consider ourselves

knowledgeable about wine have gotten too comfortable: We've forgotten the fear, the discomfort, and the embarrassment of looking like a Luddite. We've also forgotten to be the most important thing a wine pro can be—empathetic.

I say this because my greatest experiences have never been when a sommelier tries to impress me with their knowledge. (I hope the somms who recently lectured my table on the use of Roussanne in Château de Beaucastel Blanc is reading this right now.) Frankly, showing off is just about the most off-putting thing someone in their position can do. Not to mention, it demonstrates a profound misunderstanding of service. Hello? It's about the guest, right?

The somms I love are the ones who don't ask you what kind of wine you'd like—if you knew what you wanted, you wouldn't be asking them to help you! They're the ones who gently, good naturedly, and cleverly get you to give them just a few hints so that they

can turn you on to something you never thought of trying. It takes confidence to do this, but guiding a guest toward a pleasurable experience that they didn't even know existed is the great joy of the profession.

Once, when I was in a very fancy restaurant in New York several years ago, I ordered a bottle of Puligny-Montrachet. The sommelier paused, leaned down, and intoned, "Madame, I regret to inform you that you've made an unwise choice."

I stood up quickly, looked him straight in the eye, and said, "And I regret to inform you that you've just violated one of the cardinal rules of hospitality. And now please bring my wine."

I'll leave it at this: He wasn't one of the somms I love. 🍷

*Karen MacNeil is the author of The Wine Bible and editor of the digital wine newsletter WineSpeed. Contact her at [karen@karenmacneil.com](mailto:karen@karenmacneil.com).*

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# Venturing Beyond Etna

## EXPLORING NERO D'AVOLA IN THE HEART OF SICILY

**FOR ALL THE** well-deserved fanfare that the Nerello Mascalese wines of Mount Etna are attracting these days, it's important to note that Sicily makes wine from one end to the other. After a recent trip to the city of Catania, where I delved into some excellent new releases, I seized a chance to travel into the island's interior. There, I found some pretty wonderful examples of Sicily's most-planted variety: Nero d'Avola.

Due to its dark color, good tannic structure, and pronounced fruit character, the grape was long shipped throughout Italy for use as a body-building blender in other regions' reds. In recent decades, though, Nero d'Avola has gained new popularity as a varietal wine thanks in no small part to producers like Planeta and Donnafugata, which have championed its uniqueness

and versatility after seeking a signature variety to elevate the island's reputation on the world stage. Often likened to Syrah, Nero d'Avola thrives in Sicily's hot Mediterranean climate and adapts well to almost every region on the island.

Imported by Winebow, a few readily available Nero d'Avola bottlings that inspired during my visit came from Regaleali, an estate first planted in the 1600s that's been owned by the Tasca d'Almerita family since the 1830s. Their version is made with fruit sourced from vineyards planted in the 1950s—making these vines some of the oldest on the island that are still producing. Also of note was the Nero d'Avola from Feudo Principi di Butera (self-imported), another centuries-old estate that was purchased by the Zonin family in the 1990s.

Lastly, I was highly impressed with what I tasted from Fabio Sireci of Feudo Montoni (imported by Wilson Daniels); its Vrucara Nero d'Avola comes from ungrafted vines grown off pre-phyloxera plantings that have been in production since the 1800s. The Vrucara vineyard, due to its geographical isolation and unconventional propagation practices, may produce the purest expression of Nero d'Avola on the island.

As Sicilian reds go, Nero d'Avola is undoubtedly the island's bread and butter: The full-bodied and at times muscular wines it yields are the fuel feeding Sicily's viticultural engine. Don't overlook them when adding new labels to your list in 2020—they're wonderful, food-friendly expressions that also offer good value. **SR**

*Nero d'Avola vines within Tasca d'Almerita's Regaleali estate.*



PHOTO: DAVID RANSOM



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# Here to Stay

## SONOMA COUNTY PRODUCERS CONTINUE TO EMBRACE RHÔNE VARIETIES

**MAKING USE OF** its diverse selection of soils and microclimates stretching from the Pacific Ocean to the Mayacamas Mountains, Sonoma County has been crafting world-class wines with Rhône varieties for the past three decades.

One of the trailblazers pushing the envelope with Grenache is Unti Vineyards' Mick Unti, who in 1998 planted the Tablas Creek and Alban clones of this noble grape on a 2.9-acre block at his family's Dry Creek Valley estate.

To preserve purity of flavor while vinifying the 2016 Unti, Grenache (20% whole cluster) was fermented with indigenous yeast and then aged in 620-gallon foudres. In addition to blending in a portion of Syrah to build structure and add complexity, Unti used a splash of Mourvèdre to impart spicy, peppery aromas in the finished wine. "To me, Mourvèdre is the player whose real gifts don't show up in the box score," says Unti, who was recently featured at a "Rhône Rendezvous" seminar at Graffenstein Grill in Sebastopol. "But there is definitely always that savoir-faire sexiness and seductiveness crossed with that meaty character that Mourvèdre brings to Grenache."

Another regional pioneer is winemaker David Ramey, who first fell in love with Syrah in 1978 while tasting inexpensive Rhône wines in Paris. He was later inspired to start working with the variety in California when he tasted the Neyers 1998 Syrah from Hudson Vineyard in Carneros in 2001; the following year, he began developing a series of blocks of Syrah and Viognier on the rugged, southwest-facing slope of Rogers Creek Vineyard on Sonoma Mountain—a cool-climate area influenced by strong maritime winds.

To capture the characteristic flavors of this site, he treats the grapes like Pinot Noir: "In the Northern Rhône, when you go from Cornas to Hermitage to Côte-Rôtie, you get closer and closer to Burgundy in terms of color, structure, and tannins," says Ramey, whose 2014 offering (which he shared at the seminar) features lavish aromas and flavors of dark fruit, dried blueberry, bacon fat, sea smoke, and savory spices.

Rhône wines are also a mainstay at Sonoma's the girl & the fig, where chef Sondra Bernstein launched her Rhône Alone program at the restaurant's original site in Glen Ellen in 1997. It originally featured a limited amount of wines made with aromatic white varieties like Viognier as well as intriguing expressions made with Roussanne and Marsanne; today, however, Bernstein and her team offer a much wider range of whites thanks to the new wave of crisp and refreshing styles of Grenache Blanc, Vermentino, Picpoul Blanc, and complex blends being produced in the county and elsewhere in California.


"I remember thinking that if we need to add Chardonnay to the list, we'll do it. But we never did," says Bernstein with a smile. 



PHOTO: KATHY NOLAN

*"In the Northern Rhône, when you go from Cornas to Hermitage to Côte-Rôtie, you get closer and closer to Burgundy in terms of color, structure, and tannins."  
—David Ramey*





# DON MELCHOR

2014	2015	2016
2011	2012	2013
2008	2009	2010
2005	2006	2007
2002	2003	2004
1999	2000	2001
1996	1997	1998
1993	1994	1995
1990	1991	1992
1987	1988	1989

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PHOTO: CHECHOTKIN VIA ADOBE STOCK

# Mutually Beneficial

## WHY WINE DESCRIPTIONS SHOULD BE INCLUDED ON YOUR LIST

**I'VE HEARD JUST** about every reason why restaurants avoid including descriptions on their wine lists, and none of them hold water: Imagine perusing a retail store with no shelf talkers or buying a car or an appliance with no details other than price. Most consumers don't automatically know that a Riesling Spätlese is usually medium-sweet, a Kabinett less sweet, and a Trocken completely dry, so why in the world would you not supply this most basic piece of information—and more—on your list?

"We want our guests to engage our servers" is one of the explanations commonly given for omitting descriptions, but the reality is that many guests prefer to make wine-buying decisions without seeking input. For some, it's a trust issue—especially for those who've been burned by previous restaurant experiences—and for others, it's simply a matter of wanting to make up their own minds.

Regardless of the reason, it's always in a restaurant's best interest to control a guest's decisions as much as possible. The right wine selection, for one, is more

likely to appeal to a guest's personal tastes while complementing the cuisine, and any time a wine enhances a dish, it does the same for the entire restaurant experience. But if someone isn't open to engaging verbally, the next best (and only) way to make a connection is through the wine list itself.

So, let's talk about what these descriptions should look like—and what they should do for you and your business.

**Descriptions should be differentiating:**

As sommeliers, we may understand the differences between, say, a French Chablis that's oak-less, crisp, and mineral and Chardonnays from Puligny-Montrachet or California that are bigger and lusher with abundant oak. Adding descriptions to deliberately contrast sensory qualities only increases the chances of your guests choosing the best possible fit for their needs—and what's best for them is best for you.

**Descriptions should lend context for lesser-known wines:** If, for instance, you

want to sell your guests on an uncommon variety like Sagrantino because it pairs exceptionally well with your wood-roasted chops, then you should convey exactly what makes Sagrantino special . . . which, of course, makes their meal that much more special as well.

**Descriptions should be insightful:**

Interesting wines are intrinsically something you can really geek out on. So, when a wine seems offbeat yet compelling—like, say, something from an ancient but somewhat obscure region that's skin-fermented in an amphora—by all means, put it on the list. Geekiness is good when it not only sells a wine but also ends up selling *you*.

**Descriptions should be food-focused:**

If a wine exists on your list for specific food-related purposes, you can't be afraid to steer guests in that direction by recommending dishes. There's no rule that says you can't talk about food on wine lists—if the information is relevant, sharing it makes perfect sense. **SJ**



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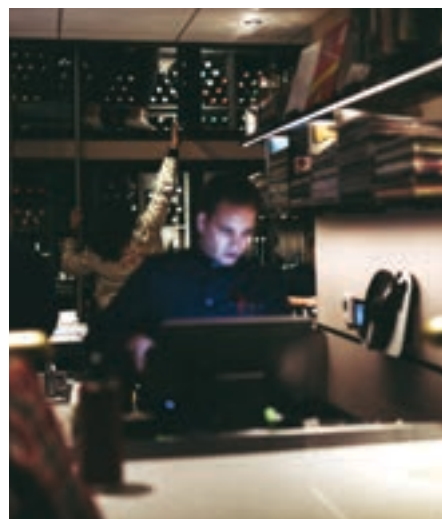


by Ruth Tobias

*At Sunday Vinyl, the playlist is as carefully curated as the wine list.*



*Master Sommelier Bobby Stuckey works the floor at wine bar Sunday Vinyl in Denver, CO.*



PHOTOS: MIKE THURK

# Grapes Meet Grooves

THE ACCLAIMED TEAM BEHIND FRASCA FOOD AND WINE OPENS DENVER WINE BAR **SUNDAY VINYL** by Ruth Tobias

**VIRTUALLY EVERYBODY IN** the American restaurant industry knows that Master Sommelier Bobby Stuckey has an extraordinary palate, an ultra-smooth personal touch, and a sharp eye for hospitality talent (not to mention two James Beard Foundation Awards for service to prove it all). But until recently, only his Instagram followers were likely aware that he also has a discerning ear, as revealed in posts about the records he spends his days off listening to. Enter Sunday Vinyl—the downtown Denver, Colorado, wine bar that showcases his passion for grooves as well as grapes.

Opened in December just steps away from the train tracks of Union Station, the latest project from Frasca Hospitality Group is in some ways an extension of its next-door sibling, Italian restaurant Tavernetta—a “late-night counterpart,” in lead sommelier Clara Klein’s words,

where the consummate skills of Stuckey’s whole crew, including Director of Operations Justin Williams and Wine Director Carlin Karr, are on display. But in many other ways, it’s a daring departure.

Most notably, there’s not a single bottle from Italy on Sunday Vinyl’s list. For a team that has achieved international renown for its Italian wine programs at Boulder flagship Frasca Food and Wine and follow-up Pizzeria Locale as well as Tavernetta, that’s a bold move—one that Klein couldn’t be more enthused about. France dominates what she describes as a “great mix of old-school and up-and-coming producers”—most of them sustainable, organic, and/or Biodynamic—but there’s plenty to explore from Spain, Germany, Austria, and even “those California staples that were unwavering amid the changes” wrought by one New World trend after another. The objective, Klein adds, is that every bottle serves as “the best representative of that grape or style, pound for pound and bang for buck.”

Naturally, the kitchen follows the cellar. Executed by chef de cuisine Charlie Brooks, a Gramercy Tavern alum, the eclectic menu—ranging from deviled eggs and pork

burgers to pâté de foie gras, striped bass with sunchokes, and cream puffs—is designed to accommodate the shifting moods of wine bar patrons as the night wears on.

The same could be said of the playlist. By putting together a record collection “almost like we’d build a wine list,” according to Williams, the Sunday Vinyl team (with the assistance of record club Vinyl Me, Please) aims to run the musical gamut: “French pop from the ’60s and ’70s, jazz, bossa nova, reggae—we don’t have one genre that we’re sticking to,” he says. (The fact that Stuckey can wax poetic about Suicidal Tendencies as credibly as he can Sangiovese may or may not mean the occasional punk track makes the cut—but it’s fun to speculate.)

That said, Williams explains that what they did commit to was “the quality of the sound”—custom turntables, hand-built speakers, and all—to ensure their guests can fully “plug back into an analog world.” As Klein conceives it, it’s a world where “with \$100 in your pocket, you can crush a couple of bottles with your friends”—and one where Denverites are already clamoring to live. **SJ**



*Chef Charlie Brooks’ lobster toast is an early menu favorite.*

# LET'S GET RIGHT *to the* POINTS...

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# Au Naturel

MAKING THE CASE FOR **RAW-MILK CHEESE** by Janet Fletcher

**ALL OF THE** attention paid these days to so-called natural wines makes me wonder if the world of artisan cheese has an equivalent. I consider all artisan cheeses to be natural if they contain only milk, culture, a coagulant (such as rennet), and salt. Seasonings like peppercorns, chilies, dried

Alas, the Food and Drug Administration makes life difficult for producers of raw-milk cheese, both foreign and domestic. As a result, many have abandoned the cause, but there are some notable exceptions. If you would like to showcase raw-milk cheeses in your own establishment,

perhaps as partners for “natural” wines, consider these standouts:

## **Cascadia Creamery**

**Sawtooth:** This small, family-run creamery in Washington makes only raw cow's milk cheeses. Sawtooth resembles

French Saint-Nectaire, but I would choose the former any day. It's fudgy in texture, with a thin, edible rind and a yeasty aroma. Serve it with dark bread or make it the centerpiece of a ploughman's lunch. I'd prefer to drink a saison-style beer with it, but a dry Riesling could work as well.

## **Jasper Hill Farm Alpha Tolman:**

This Vermont creamery initially struggled with the recipe for its alpine-style cheese, but now Alpha Tolman is completely engaging, with aromas of

brown butter, toasted walnut, bacon, and sautéed leeks.

## **Point Reyes Farmstead Original Blue:**

I used to reserve this tart, tangy California cheese for crumbling on salads, but lately I've promoted it to the cheese board. Maybe it's changed, or maybe I have, but I find it more mellow, compelling, and snackable than before—and I can't leave it alone.

## **Bellwether Farms San Andreas:**

A pioneer in producing sheep's milk cheese in the U.S., California's Bellwether Farms persists in this financially challenging niche. San Andreas, the creamery's firm, aged sheep cheese, is better than ever, with the aroma of a lamb chop brightened with lemon.

## **Vella Cheese Mezzo Secco:**

Similar to the creamery's beloved Dry Jack but younger, Mezzo Secco is a California original. Matured for four months (Dry Jack is cellared for eight months or more), this firm cow's milk tomme has a balanced, complete flavor and an aroma of nuts, hay, and stable. Dry Jack is made from pasteurized milk—give both a try and see which you prefer. **§J**



*Grazing cows surround the creamery at Point Reyes Farmstead Cheese Co. in Northern California.*

herbs, or beer don't disqualify them, in my view, although a purist might consider such cheeses manipulated.

That said, perhaps the best cheese analog to natural wines (a term I profoundly dislike) would be those made with raw milk. The most traditional cheesemakers want to work with it, as they're convinced that pasteurization removes flavor potential that is impossible to replace with purchased cultures.

*If you would like to showcase raw-milk cheeses in your own establishment, perhaps as partners for “natural” wines, consider these standouts.*



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by Irene Virbila

WHY THIS WRITER  
WOULD RATHER DRINK  
CHERISHED WINES IN  
THE COMFORT OF HER  
OWN HOUSE

# No Place Like Home

PHOTO: PHOTOSPINIT VIA ADOBE STOCK

**YOU'RE PLANNING A** dinner for six: a mix of wine professionals and besotted amateurs who all have special bottles they want to share. Do you go to a restaurant or have a dinner party at home?

No matter how wine-friendly the venue, it seems that most of us favor the latter option for several reasons. When multiple bottles are involved, corkage fees can be punishing. But even when you disregard the cost, it's hard to deny that wine service at home is superior—at least in terms of its relaxed tempo. You can stand the bottles up ahead of time, serve them at the optimal temperature, and decant—or not—without fuss. The host is in charge of the pouring, which means they can avoid topping off the slow drinkers' glasses too often while also managing to head off any greedy slurpers. You can compare and revisit wines, study the labels at length, or drink several examples of the same vineyard or vintage side by side.

In short, you control the pacing of the meal—and since everyone is sharing the same food, the experience of savoring the wine isn't as chaotic as it can be when each guest has ordered a different dish.

At home, you can take a long break be-

tween courses and go out to look at the stars or the waning moon. You can put on a record and listen awhile before returning to the table, but even more importantly, you can turn the music down and have a conversation without the strain of trying to make yourselves heard over a crushingly loud soundscape.

OK, the food may be less elaborate than a professional kitchen's, but that can actually be a plus—all the better, really, to show off the wines. And at the end of the evening, you can line up the bottles on the table like chorus girls and snap a photo to fix them in your memory.

Drinking at a restaurant, meanwhile, lacks that sense of autonomy. You have to wait for the somm or server to make their rounds, and too often the pours are calculated to finish off the bottle as quickly as possible. (And even if you don't finish it, it's frequently whisked away.) Reds are regularly served too warm, whites too cold, and the meal is interrupted again and again in the name of service.

Not to say that the experience at a fine restaurant with wine service to match can't be sublime. But it's typically a once- or twice-a-year splurge, which is why my

own group of wine lovers consistently opts for drinking our cherished wines at home—provided someone wants to cook, of course. **SJ**

## A Somm's Rebuttal

Perhaps it's because I'm a sommelier myself, but for me, sharing a bottle at a restaurant can be just as enjoyable as sharing one at home. If I know my fellow guests, I can bring a bottle from my own collection as a personalized offering. And if there's a sommelier in house, it can be fun to offer a taste to them and talk about it at length.

It's also worth noting that any server or somm worth their salt should be able to tell if the guest prefers to control the flow of their own wine. All this said, though, if you're going to dine out, the best thing to do is to support the beverage program and just buy a damn bottle!

—Jessie Birschbach,  
Managing Editor



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# The Happiest of Accidents

FATTORIA LE PUPILLE SAFFREDI CELEBRATES 30 YEARS

by Kyle Billings



**THE ACT OF** drinking wine is often an exercise in reflection—a tribute to the end of a day or even an era. The release of the 2017 Fattoria Le Pupille Saffredi is no exception, marking the 30th anniversary of a happy accident that nearly wasn't.

In 1980, on one of the many rolling hills of Maremma in Tuscany, Alfredo "Fredì" Gentili dedicated a vineyard to Cabernet Sauvignon in the hopes of finding a blending partner for the region's ubiquitous Sangiovese. But when his daughter-in-law Elisabetta Geppetti assumed leadership of the winery, she had another idea for the noble French grape.

"At the time she was only 20 years old. She was the one to realize that this vineyard has really amazing potential," says Clara Gentili, Elisabetta's daughter. "She decided to vinify this Cabernet separately . . . to make a new wine and dedicate it to my grandfather in his memory."

That vinous paean is Saffredi, the flagship of the Fattoria Le Pupille estate. The wine contains a blend of Cabernet, Merlot, and Petit Verdot from 14 hectares in the Pereta province of Maremma, located a stone's throw from the Tyrrhenian Sea—a distinguishing feature of this stretch of Tuscan terrain. "To me, it's the most important and powerful thing that we have," says Gentili. "The sea has a huge influence, not just on the wine but on everything in our wild countryside."

The rise of Saffredi after its inaugural release in 1987 fortified Elisabetta's stature in the wine world while her bold embrace of Cabernet Sauvignon yielded a new champion of Tuscan viticulture. "Cabernet can have so many different expressions, not just in Italy, but everywhere in the world," says Gentili. "What I think really makes it different is the final result that the producer wants to have on the wine. . . . The word to really describe Saffredi is elegance." SJ

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# WINE LIST

PHOTO: ARTUR VIA ADOBE STOCK

# You're Doing It Wrong!

## HOW TO CREATE A WINE LIST THAT DRIVES REVENUE

**YOU MAY NOT** want to hear this, but few sommeliers understand how to ensure that their beverage menus are effective sales tools. The wine list itself is one of the most common missed opportunities, and creating one that's well formatted and free of errors is merely the beginning.

The layout and organization of a list must be strategic. No matter the size of the program, never list in order by price: Instead of being encouraged to find an appropriate match for their needs, guests will stop when they reach their cost threshold. Take, for example, a couple seeking a bottle of Merlot around \$65. If their options are organized by price, they'll stop looking once the offerings exceed \$70. They won't see the \$76 Merlot from the winery they visited last year or the \$95 Merlot that they've seen costs \$135 elsewhere.

To organize a list that drives revenue, consider these three proven psychological factors:

**Steppers:** Your list must have reasonable price increments. Returning to the Merlot example, if you have only wines around

\$50 or north of \$100, there's no stepping stone between price echelons. Our \$65 spenders are going to choose one of the \$50 bottles, leaving money on the table. If the spread instead spans the \$50, \$70, \$90, and \$100-plus ranges, it becomes easier to move someone incrementally from, for example, \$65 to \$80. That \$15 differential equates to \$3/glass. Phrased that way, it becomes an easy sell.

**Compellers:** Pricing select recognizable wines below your competitors drives increased spends. Our \$65 Merlot drinkers see the wine that they know to be \$135 elsewhere for only \$95, thus compelling the purchase. Additionally, compellers create the perception of great value, thereby implying that more expensive wines are even better deals, which directly increases net average spends. Compellers must be offered at strategic price points. Offset their increased cost of goods with your by-the-glass program.

**Upper Limit Modifiers (ULMs):** This term refers to the most expensive

bottles within each category. That \$900 wine may not be selling regularly, but every time it does, it adds \$900 of gross revenue and a significant amount of gross profit to your wine sales. A vital function of ULMs is that they encourage an increased spend: While many people will avoid the most expensive bottle, the second most will appear more approachable. This way, we move guests' upper limits to a higher price point.

Finally, don't underestimate the value fortified and dessert wines can contribute to your bottom line. Don't be afraid to list apéritif wines first—and make sure to never list them with dessert wines. In addition to introducing a logical progression, it will help them become expected elements of the dining experience. Similarly, feature after-dinner wines on the dessert menu for additional exposure; include all sweet wines you have on offer, even those only available by the bottle.

A strategic and technically correct list incorporating the above factors is guaranteed to boost sales—and, in turn, your value to your employer. **»**

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POINTS

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In 1988, Silverado purchased the Mt George Vineyard in Napa Valley's Coombsville AVA – where vinifera was first planted 120 years earlier. Classic Claret varieties thrive on the deep, gravelly down-slopes of the volcano whose name the vineyard bears. Inspired by the vineyard name and Greek root for “Earth”—GEO represents the highest expression of single-vineyard Cabernet from this extraordinary place.

2016

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POINTS

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# A Wide-Angle Lens With a Laser Focus

HOW JESSE KATZ'S WORLDLY EXPERIENCE INFORMS HIS WINEMAKING STYLE

by Jonathan Cristaldi

**YEARS BEFORE HE** embarked on designing and building his label Aperture Cellars' new winery, cellars, and tasting room in 2016, winemaker Jesse Katz was a global traveler who visited more than 80 countries alongside his father, world-renowned photographer Andy Katz, beginning in the late 1990s. He graduated from California State University, Fresno, with a degree in enology, viticulture, and chemistry in 2007 and then went on to work stints at Château Pétrus in Bordeaux; Screaming Eagle, Lancaster Estate, and Robert Foley Vineyards in California; and Viña Cobos and Bodega Noemía in Argentina. In 2014, his Devil Proof wine became the highest-rated Malbec in the United States. I recently sat down with Katz to discuss his winemaking style, how the Aperture project is progressing, and more.

**Q: Jonathan Cristaldi: What was it like following your dad around as he photographed famous vineyards?**

**Jesse Katz:** My dad fell in love with wine—the culture of it—and got introduced to some very influential people at the time, including Robert Mondavi. He saw my dad's photos, completely fell in love, and encouraged him to do a book on the beauty of the vineyards and wineries in Napa and Sonoma. The first book was called *A Portrait of Napa and Sonoma*, and Mondavi wrote the introduction. That really kind of kicked off my father's career.

**Q: We're standing in what will be the new Aperture Cellars hospitality center, looking west. What are the vines we're looking at?**



*The future home of Aperture Cellars in Healdsburg, CA. Winemaker Jesse Katz produces richly layered Sauvignon Blanc, Chenin Blanc, and lavish red blends focused around Malbec and Cabernet Sauvignon.*



That tree line in the distance is the Russian River. This is the old Ponzo Ranch, which supplied [winemaker] Paul Draper's single-vineyard Ridge. That's from two blocks we kept here that were planted in 1912. We also have our field blend of mainly Zinfandel with a little Petite Sirah, Mourvèdre, and Carignan, all planted in the first decade of the 1900s.

**Q: There are a lot of young vines out there. What did you decide to plant?**

Phil Freese, our viticulturist, and I went through a 128-page soil map of our property by Dr. Paul Anamosa before deciding what to plant. Near the winery is mostly volcanic soil and gravel, so we planted Cabernet there. Moving toward the river, there's a beautiful layer of blue clay, the same found in Pomerol at Pétrus. We planted Merlot clones from Pétrus there. Closer to the river is heavier clay with less gravel and we planted Sémillon, with clones from Château d'Yquem.

**Q: In the last decade, you spent time in some legendary Bordeaux cellars while your dad worked on his book *The Club of Nine*. Is there something you learned at places like Pétrus and later at Screaming Eagle that influences your style today?**

I've been really fortunate and have taken pieces of my winemaking from almost every winemaker I've had the opportunity to surround myself with. Bob Foley was influential; he had a very artistic way of looking at the essence of the wine—not by the numbers. In Bordeaux, I think I picked up a mentality of how to look at things, like the attention to detail at Pétrus, where they would twist-tie every cane to every single wire. Back stateside, working at Screaming Eagle, I picked up on the art of blending under Andy Erickson and how to work with vineyards to gain the balance you want. *sj*

*For more on Katz, visit [aperture-cellars.com](http://aperture-cellars.com) and [devilproofvineyards.com](http://devilproofvineyards.com).*

# CELEBRATE

THE FLAVOR OF MEXICO





**Beer(d) Science** isn't just an excuse for an '80s movie pun: Each issue of *The SOMM Journal* will cover a different style of beer and related terminology to help our somms expand their beer knowledge.

## The Blab on NABLAB

**THANKFULLY WE'VE MOVED** past it—at least 'til next year rolls around—but you know what's not cool? Dryuary, aka Dry January. I couldn't tell you exactly why this trend of abstaining from alcohol annoys me so much (maybe it's because I drink alcohol for a living?) or why I'm not more supportive of people trying to better themselves—however fleetingly—but in the words of one of the great beer drinkers, Peter Griffith, it really grinds my gears.

### CLASSIC LOW-ALCOHOL BEER STYLES THAT ACTUALLY TASTE GOOD by Jessie Birschbach

reducing his alcohol intake. He refuses to quit drinking altogether, so he's now searching for some options that aren't completely devoid of flavor.

So, for the sake of my friend, I felt that a Beer'd Science on low-alcohol beer styles is in order. Perhaps this will encourage the lemmings to simply dial

lowing pair of styles, you'll likely be able to find a few domestic examples on the shelf at your local store. (For the record, though, you can sometimes find low-gravity beers on tap at craft breweries. In fact, I enjoyed a fresh Dark Mild at The Bruery in Placentia not too long ago.)

#### BERLINER WEISSE

**ABV:** 2.8–3.8%

A pale, crisp wheat beer with a lactic, sour character and dry finish, Berliner Weisse is traditionally served in Germany with some sort of sugary syrup (like raspberry or woodruff) to balance its tart character. Although there apparently aren't many versions of it in its home country anymore, there are a ton of domestic craft examples. Most see the addition of fruit: The Mikkeller Hallo Ich Bin Berliner Weisse Passion Fruit is one of my favorites.

#### GOSE

**ABV:** 4.2–4.8%

This vivacious, highly carbonated, tart, and fruity wheat ale always features a dash of coriander and salt. The style originated during medieval times in the German town of Goslar, but it really made its claim to fame in Leipzig. Anderson Valley Gose is a domestic classic in this style and Westbrook Gose is also highly lauded. *sj*

*Jessie Birschbach is a Certified Cicerone and substandard homebrewer. She's also still learning, so if you have a suggestion or comment, contact her at [jabs@sommjournal.com](mailto:jabs@sommjournal.com).*



*Gose was made popular in the German town of Leipzig.*

There's also the whole category of low- or no-alcohol beer, which is growing so popular that it now apparently needs its own acronym: NABLAB. Honestly, I haven't tried many of the alcohol-free options. My colleague says Heineken 0.0 tastes strikingly similar to good ol' fashioned Heineken, but for our purposes (and for the sake of my soul), let's not talk about the non-alcoholic side of this.

All this spoiled-beer-nerd complaining aside, my dear friend recently discovered that he has a health problem and, as a result, has had to alter his diet drastically—which means greatly

things back a bit, but whatever you do, please don't brag about it on Facebook. Thank god this piece is running in the February/March issue: If "Lower Aprilhol Beer" is ever a thing, I'd drown myself in White Claw, because that's the tasteless death I'd deserve.

Here are my two favorite styles under 5% ABV, with a bit of background to boot. Before I get into them, though, it's worth noting that I've left off small (aka low-gravity) beers like the British-born ordinary bitter (3.2–3.8% ABV) and Dark Mild (3–3.8% ABV), as these are typically best when consumed in their countries of origin—whereas, for the fol-



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# Exhausting

# Bliss

THE BROOKS  
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**6 A.M.:** YOUR alarm goes off. It feels like you just went to sleep 15 minutes ago, and if you're lucky, the rooster 25 yards from where you've been resting your head hasn't already robbed you of precious snooze time. If that didn't happen, then the sound of Chance the Rapper's "Acid Rain"—which your fellow intern has designated as your official call to duty—is likely already reverberating through your sleeping quarters, signaling the arrival of another 17 hours of work. If you're even more fortunate, the CBD oil you've been bathing in for the past week has helped you sleep all the way through the night: It quells the throbbing pain that's taken residence in your hands and forearms since manual punch-downs became an actual responsibility and not just an opportunity for a harvest selfie. When people ask about my experi-

ence with the Brooks Harvest Internship in Oregon's Willamette Valley, I never know where to begin. Usually the same 45–60 memories flash through my mind, evoking feelings of pure exhaustion, extreme frustration, and sheer bliss as well as recollections of serious debates about White Claw, bouts of delirious laughter, and other indelible moments. But I always wrap up this inner montage with a smile and a simple phrase: "It was really, really great."

When I applied for this internship a year ago through SommFoundation, I thought it would be a long shot given how competitive it is. However, after months of submitting applications and completing phone interviews, I finally got the call that myself and six other interns from around the world would be part of the 2019 Harvest Crew.

The hardest thing to wrap my head





around was the need to reevaluate everything I thought I knew about harvest and what it entails. So often you see pictures of [insert middle-aged man/woman] in a vineyard wearing a puffer vest from [insert winery] and swirling a glass of red wine in the sun. It's not that, but it is *this*: feeling bugs crawl across your neck; getting hosed in the face at 3 a.m. in 35-degree weather; enduring constantly wet socks and blistered hands; assembling and disassembling harvest machinery; sorting ice-cold fruit by hand; moving and topping off barrels; analyzing grape Brix/pH; and so on. Yet with all of this strenuous work came access to some of the most beautiful views of Oregon I'll ever encounter as well as some of the best wine in the country—not to mention a handful of pictures of various winery pets and what I hope will be lifelong relationships with some really talented people.

One of my favorite aspects of this internship was observing how Brooks Winery practices Biodynamic viticulture. It's a holistic, elemental approach that allows the final product to serve as the purest expression of the grapes that Brooks meticulously cultivates and selects to represent its efforts.

With the help of assistant winemaker Claire Jarreau, we learned about the process of winemaking on an instinctual level. Why is sanitation so important? What about the temperatures of fermentation? What are the mechanics of an effective pumpover? What's the best Shop-Vac



**Sommelier Karla Poeschel stomps on some Pinot Noir.**

for getting rid of fruit flies? The fascinating part of addressing such questions was doing so with six other individuals, all of whom have a different perspective with respect to how wine is made—and sold—in their part of the world. We became a makeshift family rather quickly as we bonded over our shared passion for this finicky intoxicant.

My usual position as a floor sommelier requires me to do something called receive inventory every Friday morning—a rather mechanical routine that starts with opening a box and placing bottles on a

shelf, to put it simply. It was a process that I took for granted until the internship, but I now understand the blood, sweat, and tears that go into making each handsomely wrapped little package and, for wineries like Brooks, the relentless dedication to the land and the quality of their products. I'm so thankful to SommFoundation; my fellow interns, who put up with me wearing sunglasses in the warehouse and supplied me with 6 a.m. shots of espresso; the family I've made at Brooks Winery; and all the inspiration I've received from the Willamette Valley. *sj*

**Brooks Vineyard and Winery hosted its annual harvest internship in the Willamette Valley last fall.**





# The Legend of Loring

PHOTO COURTESY OF LORING WINE COMPANY



THE WINE WEDNESDAY PODCAST INTERVIEWS CENTRAL COAST WINEMAKER **BRIAN LORING** by Meridith May

**BRIAN LORING IS** so passionate about Pinot Noir that you might call him obsessed—in the best possible way, of course. Loring started his love affair with wine while working in retail shops during high school and college, and after a foray into designing and writing software for submarine missile and torpedo launch systems, he was drawn back to the wine industry by the siren's song of Pinot.

He set out to produce his own wine and ultimately crafted his first bottling with a mere 3 tons of grapes purchased from Cottonwood Canyon Winery in 1999; fast-forward to today, when his Loring Wine Company produces about 7,000 cases of Pinot annually from vineyards spanning from the Santa Lucia Highlands down to Santa Barbara County. The company's portfolio also includes Chardonnay and sparkling wine, but Loring bottles about a dozen Pinot expressions, including amazing single-vineyard wines like Boekenoogen and Rancho La Viña as well as blends from AVAs like the Sta. Rita Hills.

Loring believes that in winemaking, "fruit is everything"—a viewpoint he shared during his recent guest appearance on the Wine Wednesday podcast, hosted by author Carrie Williams and radio veteran Randy Wang. He not only values working with trusted growers that share the same passion for producing great wine but also prides himself on creating expressions that celebrate the unadulterated glory of California Pinot Noir.

"People always talk about terroir as if it relates to an earthiness or dirt or some kind of old-age flavor," Loring commented. "Terroir really is all the combinations of things that make a vineyard unique. We in California, I think, should be focusing on the fruit flavors, and the fruit flavors are the expression of terroir in our vineyards."

To Loring, celebrating terroir means embracing being "complete wine geeks": "We want wines that when you come home . . . they embrace you," he continued. "We want them to be rich and bold and go with a lot of different foods. This is not something we artificially create—we think it's true to the vineyard, but the resulting wines fit . . . a lifestyle." **—SJ**

*Brian Loring, owner/winemaker at Loring Wine Company, enlists a variety of top growers and vineyard owners from several appellations to craft his Pinot Noirs.*

*"The wine that I produce is as much a reflection of the vineyard owner as it is of my winemaking skills. . . . It'd be boring if everything I made tasted the same," he said during a recent appearance on the Wine Wednesday podcast.*

**Loring Wine Company 2018 Pinot Noir, Boekenoogen Vineyard, Santa Lucia Highlands (\$54)** A nose of rhubarb and brush leads to a palate of dark-red fruit. The liquid saturates the tongue in an elegant, creamy body with notes of nutmeg and briar. The finish of dark cherry and plum bathes the mouth. **94** —Meridith May



**Loring Wine Company 2018 Pinot Noir, Cargasacchi Vineyard, Sta. Rita Hills (\$54)** Sweet and savory aromas of wild strawberry, dried herbs, and white pepper precede notes of rose petal heightened with an essence of spiced jasmine and green tea. What begins as a thread of cherry-flavored lollipop goes darker as it ventures toward black plum and an undeniable earthiness. Calcereous soil lays the groundwork for an inherent minerality. **94** —M.M.



To be considered as a guest on the Wine Wednesday podcast, contact Carrie Williams at [winednesdaypodcast@gmail.com](mailto:winednesdaypodcast@gmail.com). For more interviews, visit [winednesdaypodcast.com](http://winednesdaypodcast.com).



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by Deborah Parker Wong



# In Pursuit of Sensory Literacy

## A TASTING AT LA CREMA WINERY TAKES AN UNCONVENTIONAL—AND EDUCATIONAL—APPROACH

**WHEN SONOMA'S** La Crema Winery turned 40 last year, it celebrated the milestone with a unique exercise: Led by Dr. Henry “Hoby” Wedler, it was easily one of my top sensory experiences of 2019. Wedler, who has been blind since birth, studied chemistry at the University of California, Davis, and now serves as Sensory Innovation Director at Senspoint, a consulting practice he co-founded with several partners.

A native of Petaluma, Wedler has long explored the geology of Sonoma County and has worked extensively with local clients in viticulture and winemaking—including Jackson Family Wines, which acquired La Crema from founder Rob Berglund in 1993.

After conducting a brief overview of the winery's history and the terroir-related factors that influence the quality and style of wines grown on the Sonoma Coast, Wedler led a small group of professional tasters through six Russian River Valley AVA wines made by La Crema winemaker Craig McAllister. While Wedler designed the experience to improve sensory literacy, he also described it as a “thought-provoking way of telling the story of a great growing region like the Sonoma Coast.”

To begin, the 2017 Kelli Ann's Vineyard Chardonnay and the 2016 Bellflower Vineyard Pinot Noir were analyzed using all five senses. To help us connect aromas readily apparent in the wines with the aromas of microbial terroir from each

expression's respective vineyard, Wedler asked the group to moisten two vials containing soil samples with a small amount of water.

While the samples looked like they lacked organic matter, the water hydrolyzed microbes that in turn released distinct volatile-aroma compounds. The first vial held Cortina gravelly loam from Kelli Ann's Vineyard, which, in effect, is dried silt with clay-like aromas.

The second contained Goldridge fine sandy loam, a signature Russian River soil with ashy, volcanic, and petrichor aromas. (*Editor's note:* See Parker Wong's column on petrichor in the December 2019/January 2020 issue.) While it was richly scented, the Goldridge sample didn't smell of clay because the vineyard is further from the Russian River than Kelli Ann's. Not surprisingly, we found similar aromas in both wines and their respective soil types.

We were then asked to don eye masks and taste the remaining four expressions with Wedler's guidance. “[Humans] use eyesight to obtain 85–90% of the information we take in,” he said. “By using blindfolds and aromatic samples and by smelling soil samples, we allow ourselves to see



**Dr. Henry “Hoby” Wedler is the Sensory Innovation Director at consulting practice Senspoint.**

wine in a very unique and positive way.”

With that in mind, we began exploring a 2017 Chardonnay from Durell Vineyard—which predominantly comprises Los Robles gravelly clay loam—on the southern end of the valley. Using botanical ingredients, Wedler had created aroma samples modeled after the volatile-aroma compounds found in the soils and the wines; after being exposed to them, we were more readily able to identify

aromas that were mirrored in the wine and the sample.

After we repeated the exercise with the 2016 Annapolis Shell Ridge Pinot Noir, 2018 Sonoma Coast Chardonnay, and 2017 Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir, Wedler summarized the key factors driving the differences between Pinot Noir grown in Burgundy with that of the Sonoma Coast: soil composition; Burgundy's cool continental climate and summer heat, which creates more floral aromas; the influence of fog on the Sonoma Coast, which results in slower ripening; and, lastly, the mineral content of the water in both regions. The final result of this informative tasting? A fulfillment of Wedler's aforementioned mission: improving our sensory literacy. **SJ**



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# A Thorough Finish

**TEELING'S TEAM OF NEXT-GENERATION DISTILLERS MAKES NUANCED IRISH WHISKEY BY EXPERIMENTING WITH A MYRIAD OF CASKS** by Eric Marsh

**TEELING WHISKEY OWNS** a lot of casks: Cabernet Sauvignon barrels from California, Oloroso vessels from Jerez, aquavit containers from Scandinavia, and Sauternes vats from France, to name just a few. The Irish whiskey producer might age a spirit exclusively in one of these repositories—such as its Single Grain, aged in the California Cab barrels—or several of them, and despite the risk involved, the Teeling team is not afraid to experiment with cask-finishing even their most mature expressions.

As it happens, this approach has proven to yield distinctive, nuanced, and award-winning whiskeys largely thanks to the efforts of Teeling master distiller Alex Chasko. During a dinner he hosted last November at The Tasting Kitchen in Los Angeles, Chasko held up a glass of Teeling Single Malt and said that when he and his colleagues set out to make it, they aimed high. “We asked ourselves, ‘How can we make this single malt the very best?’” he added.

This ambitious question required much contemplation—not to mention tast-

ing—and, ultimately, was answered in five different ways. By the time Chasko and company were pleased with the finished product, the triple-distilled, 100% malted barley liquid had been vatted in Port, Sherry, Madeira, Cabernet Sauvignon, and white Burgundy casks, resulting at last in the consummate complex single malt. Showing tropical fruit on the nose and orchard fruit on the palate, it paired exceptionally well with the whiskey-brined pork belly, roasted apples, and beer-braised endive served at the dinner.

While Port, Sherry, rum, and bourbon finishes are nothing new, how about Sauternes? After aging in ex-bourbon barrels, Teeling's 24-Year-Old Single Malt undergoes a final round of maturation in casks that formerly stored the French wine—a process that imparts aromas and flavors of apricot along with a closing thread of minerality. The spirit, which was named the World's Best Single Malt at the 2019 World Whiskies Awards, drinks spectacularly on its own; at the dinner, however, it

also made a fine accompaniment to profiteroles with gelato and bourbon caramel.

Though not as mature, Teeling's Single Cask expression—which sees some 24 months in 80- to 90-year-old Spanish chestnut casks previously used to age brandy—was an equally ideal way to finish the meal, especially after one last spoonful of pine-nut tart with ricotta and chestnut honey.

While Teeling has distinguished itself through its experimental interpretation of Irish whiskey-making customs, Chasko and crew still craft their spirits with what he calls “a respect for generations past.” This philosophy is reflected in his eagerness to talk about the category's history and Irish folklore in general, but it's also clear that what's paramount to Teeling is making exceedingly good whiskey—however far it may stray from traditionalism. As for Chasko, it could be posited that he'd be excelling at his craft wherever he'd landed: As he noted self-assuredly in Los Angeles, “We make great whiskey. And that whiskey just happens to be made in Ireland.” **SJ**

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

PHOTO COURTESY OF DAVID TURNER



## Jennifer Wagoner

Wine Director, *Sepia and Proxi*, Chicago, IL; Chicago Ambassador for *Conegliano Valdobbiadene Prosecco Superiore DOCG*

**Q:** You've worked in wine all over the country, from New York to Miami to Chicago. Do you prefer one city to another?

These cities all represent something different for me because they relate to specific moments in my life. NYC inspired (and still inspires) me. It is responsible for igniting the passion and pushing me to reach higher. Miami is where I spent over a decade and was able to appreciate the opportunities that allowed me to grow as a professional. And Chicago is a familiar and familial place for me—I feel at home here.

**Q:** What's the most rare or unique wine you've had the privilege of trying?

Oremus Tokaji Eszencia while road-tripping through Hungary during aszú harvest.

**Q:** In the competitive world of sparkling wine, why are you pro-Prosecco Superiore?

I appreciate the motivation of Prosecco Superiore to elevate itself from a quality and care standpoint since the DOCG was founded in 2009. The wines are clean, fresh, and versatile and are also an incredible value. It's fun to chat with people who thought they weren't into Prosecco and then tasted a Cartizze or Rive bottling. The added complexity of these wines dispels any preconceived notion that all Prosecco is the same. These designations guarantee an elevated quality level, and guests appreciate that.

## Amy Thurmond

Head sommelier and wine buyer, *Leuca*, Brooklyn, NY; New York Ambassador for *Conegliano Valdobbiadene Prosecco Superiore DOCG*

**Q:** What would you say is your most controversial wine opinion?

I think it's that I would rather have a guest come in and drink a \$50 bottle of wine that they know nothing about than spend \$1,000 on a bottle that they select for the prestigious name. There are so many lovely producers out there that are smaller and making well-crafted, interesting wines that I feel consumers should know about. Wine can be very intimidating, and I understand that people like to stay in the places they are familiar with, but I believe it's my job to try and expand their horizons in a way that makes them feel heard but also gets them to try something new and exciting.

**Q:** What experience can you share from your recent trip to Conegliano Valdobbiadene that speaks to the region's character?

My favorite experiences often include standing and looking out at the vines, because the region's beauty speaks for itself. The steep slopes immediately convey the "heroic" viticulture that happens there, and it is something that has to be seen. However, my favorite memories are in a place called Osteria Al Castelletto, a tiny trattoria where everything is comforting yet chic—from the ceramic painted bowls that the pasta is served in to the fresh hydrangeas that adorn the countertops.

**Q:** What advice would you give to people just starting out as a somm?

Be voracious in your learning. When I was starting off, it felt intimidating to have to learn so much, but I set aside a little bit of time to study each day. Learning and sharing your knowledge is the best part of the job, so savor that. Taste as much as you



PHOTO COURTESY OF AMY THURMOND

can get your hands on, and if you have the privilege to visit wineries or wine regions, do so. It gives you an understanding that books cannot. The Prosecco Superiore DOCG is a perfect example of this—seeing the *rives*, or hamlets, in person with their steep slopes, you get a sense of how this intense terroir influences the wine for the better. *sj*

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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# Transformative Talks

EXPLORING THE INTERSECTION  
OF CALIFORNIAN AND  
BURGUNDIAN PINOT NOIR,  
**KOSTA BROWNE** TAKES ITS  
SEMINARS ON THE ROAD

story by Jonathan Cristaldi  
photos by Shaunte' Dittmar

**LAST DECEMBER**, a notable group of trade professionals gathered in a private room at The Battery in San Francisco, where they blind tasted a total of 12 wines from California and Burgundy. So unfolds the simple format for Sebastopol-based winery Kosta Browne's Pinot Talks seminars, which are embarking on an international tour this year with stops in Los Angeles, New York, Miami, Houston, Las Vegas, Pebble Beach, Chicago, Nantucket, Aspen, London, and Tokyo. "The idea is *not* to pit the two regions against one another," explained moderator Anthony Giglio, "but instead to explore where they intersect, learn from one another, and diverge."



*From left to right: moderator Anthony Giglio, Wine Director for American Express' Centurion Lounge; Elaine Chukan Brown, wine writer for JancisRobinson.com; Jeremy Shanker, MS, Wine Director for Michael Mina in San Francisco, CA; Ian Cauble, MS, founder of SOMMSelect; and Neil Bernardi, General Manager of Kosta Browne.*





A few of the Pinot Noirs post-reveal.

Kosta Browne Director of Brand Engagement Regina Sanz, who conceived Pinot Talks and now serves as host, explains that the mission of the discussions is to shine a light on the impressive quality of California Pinot Noir while cementing the category's rightful place on a global stage that tends to favor the great Grand Crus and Premier Crus of Burgundy. With help from leading voices in the industry, Pinot Talks also highlight how the concept of "style" is evolving as climate change prompts California producers to move toward cooler-climate expressions of Pinot Noir, such as those from Kosta Browne's Cerise Vineyard in Anderson Valley.

"I hope you'll be surprised and challenged by California and Burgundy—seeing where they connect, where they diverge," Sanz told the group. "Your opinions are critical in moving this conversation forward tableside."

After all the wines had been assessed, Giglio asked the room to vote before each reveal on whether a given Pinot Noir hailed from Burgundy or California. The following is an abbreviated version of the conversation—and, in some cases, the spirited debate—inspired by a select group of the revealed expressions.

**Wine: Domaine Robert Chevillon 2016 Nuits-Saint-Georges Vieilles Vignes**

**Votes:** 13% California, 87% Burgundy

"The wine is so fruit-focused [that] the tannin and grip for me really speak to the qualities that come from grapes grown in chalky limestone. It's that earthy component that puts it squarely in Burgundy—but the fruit is so forward and ripe."

—Neil Bernardi

"The flavors can change from cellar to cellar and by the way a grower picks. So, [I ask myself,] what's the relationship of the flesh to the fruit? In California, we don't have a lot of limestone, so there's more so just flesh. That is why, for me, the fleshiness of this fruit could mean it's a California Pinot." —Elaine Chukan Brown

"In Burgundy, you want as much ripeness as possible. But you get a lot of purple Pinots these days, like in Beaujolais, when it's over-extracted. I don't like that—I'd rather drink a Napa Cabernet."

—Ian Cauble

**Wine: Calera 2016 Jensen Vineyard Pinot Noir, Mt. Harlan**

**Votes:** 24% California, 76% Burgundy

"Both Ian and I called 'Grand Cru red Burgundy' on this because of the structure and ripeness." —Jeremy Shanker

"The reveal was a big surprise. I thought it could be California, [but] it had so much complexity I was convinced it was world-class Burgundy." —I.C.

"There's a roundness of fruit and acid that reminds me of early-pick Northern California, and I called Sonoma Coast." —E.C.B.

**Wine: Domaine Gros Frère et Soeur 2016 Clos Vougeot Musigni Grand Cru**

**Votes:** 26% California, 74% Burgundy

"There's no question that this wine was 'backward' in the glass and actually opened up over the course of the tasting. It received generally negative comments from the room." —Anthony Giglio

"As soon as we realized what the wine was, we forgave the faults and just talked about how it will be great in ten years. Why do we defend Burgundy once we know the reveal? Why don't we do that with California and New Zealand Pinot Noirs, which tend to carry the burden of proof? I'm not saying this is my personal feeling, but implicit biases tend to give passes to Oregon and Burgundy, whereas California and New Zealand have to prove themselves." —E.C.B.

"Historically, you have wines that are unfiltered and unfiltered from Burgundy, and when they show up at tastings and are not completely 'on,' we know they are going to have their day eventually. But New World wines, especially from California, are filtered, clean, and tidied up—clinically perfect. In Burgundy, it's small grower families in the vineyards ten hours a day, and they just go ahead and bottle the wine—a far cry from their tidied counterparts. And I think about that—so for me, there's forgiveness if a Grand Cru is not showing well in the moment. I'll taste it again half an hour later, or five years later, or ten years later—you have to kiss a lot more frogs in Burgundy to find the prince, but they emerge over time." —I.C.

**Wine: Kosta Browne 2016 Cerise Vineyard Pinot Noir, Anderson Valley**

**Votes:** 63% California, 37% Burgundy

"If the wine changes so much in the glass in a short time, is that a marker of Burgundy?" —*audience member*

"So many factors come into play—like oxygen, which for me, brings the truth out." —*I.C.*

"Personally, my first sniff and sip told me it was a Kosta Browne wine because of its elegance, but I ended up guessing Burgundy." —*E.C.B.*

**Wine: Domaine Ballot Millot 2015 Volnay Les Santenots 1er Cru**

**Votes:** 21% California, 79% Burgundy

"You don't go to Burgundy and talk about clones; you talk about the site and maybe the cellar. But in the New World, all I hear from producers is about clones. I think you can taste clonal differences, but mostly on younger vines because you have to eliminate lots of other factors—like site and winemaking. And as vines get to 15–20 years of age, the clonal signature fades into the background and the site really expresses itself." —*E.C.B.*

"It would take 20 years or more to understand one piece of ground year in [and] year out. That's the journey California is on, along with most of the world." —*N.B.*

"What about when these vineyards turn 100 years old? We have 100-year-old vines in Burgundy that we are just now seeing the potential of." —*I.C.*

"What changes are globally impacting Pinot? Like acquisition costs—what does it look like on the restaurant floor for allocations of California and Burgundy wines these days?" —*Regina Sanz*

"It has to make sense for your program but you also don't typically get an allocation—you have to support the distributor who has the allocation of the wine you want. If you're looking for a *Wine Spectator* Grand Award, it does make sense to have a vintage of every major appellation." —*J.S.*

"At SommSelect, most of my business is in Old World Burgundy. The tariffs

[proposed by the U.S. federal government] really scare me." —*I.C.*

"California is known globally as a producer of quality wine, which I think has exponentially increased since 2010." —*E.C.B.*

"In terms of Pinot Noir, we could be exporting more to other countries, but Cabernet, Chardonnay, and Zinfandel from California are known while Pinot is a weak spot for us. So that's a growth opportunity." —*N.B.*



*Kosta Browne winemaker Julien Howsepian was among the tasting participants.*

**Wine: RAEN 2017 Royal St. Robert Cuvée Pinot Noir, Sonoma Coast**

**Votes:** 71% California, 29% Burgundy

"This had everyone fooled—you all voted Burgundy at first, but as we approached this wine in our discussion, the votes began to swing back to California. Cellar master and enologist Melanie McIntyre [who made this wine with Carlo Mondavi] is in the audience. Melanie, what can you tell us?" —*A.G.*

"For us, it's all about farming organically in the vineyards. This cuvée was whole cluster—pressed with native fermentation and aged in neutral French oak barrels; [it was then] bottled unfiltered and unfiltered. It's a blend of two sites, including Fort Ross–Seaview, which is a really, really cold

site. But in 2017, as we picked grapes around 2 in the morning, it was 92 degrees. That's crazy." —*Melanie McIntyre*

**Wine: Domaine Pierre Guillemot 2017 Le Rognet et Corton Grand Cru**

**Votes:** 21% California, 79% Burgundy

"More than 90% of you first called this wine a California Pinot, but now that we're at the end of the tasting, the votes have

shifted toward Burgundy. This goes right back to our conversation earlier about giving Burgundy a break." —*A.G.*

It was almost universal: This Grand Cru had turned from night to day over the course of several hours, and as Giglio gave his closing remarks, all anyone could do was marvel at the beauty of the chameleon in their glasses. It was the kind of quiet ending to an intensive tasting that allowed time to reflect on the transformative powers of a great Pinot Noir—no matter where it hailed from. *sj*

For more information on the Pinot Talks tour, visit [pinottalks.com](http://pinottalks.com) and follow @PinotTalks on Instagram.





PHOTO: LIGHTFIELD STUDIOS VIA ADOBE STOCK

**Dear Good Somm/Bad Somm,**

I am a wine novice trying to learn the basics—my dream is to one day become a sommelier. I live in a trendy area where many restaurants serve what seem like pretty obscure wines. I guess it matches the neighborhood, but is it wrong that I just want to drink the basics? I love a classic Chablis or even a Napa Cab!

Sincerely,  
*Classics Never Go Out of Style*

**Good Somm**

Dear *Classics Never Go Out of Style*,

Whether it's a car, a book, a film, or a piece of art, classics provide a strong foundation for understanding their respective genres; they can sharpen your knowledge of the way things work but often demand a rigorous approach when it comes to fully appreciating their significance. For example, take Bordeaux and Burgundy: These regions produce some of the most revered wines in the world, but the 1855 Classification of Bordeaux and the Premier Crus/Grand Crus of Burgundy are not easy subjects to digest.

I admire you, though, for yearning to master the basics—that means you're on the right track. It seems like your neighborhood restaurants aren't an ideal place for building that foundation, but I encourage you to have a dialogue with sommeliers or wine directors to ask them about potentially placing more classics on their wine list. If not, find a new establishment where you can keep learning and exploring. I'm sure you'll find a place that embraces the classics as much as you do.

Best,  
*Good Somm*

**BAD SOMM**

Dear *Classics Never Go Out of Style*,

Let me ask, which "area" is this that you speak of? Brooklyn? Silver Lake? Austin? Please DM me, because I want to avoid it like the plague. What is going on with the scene in your town?! Do these sommeliers think they're Jesus? Elvis? Bacchus? Wine lists are meant to bring revenue to a restaurateur or retailer, and if they're too obscure, you should be surprised that these places even have customers coming through the door. I would just throw up my hands and order a beer or cocktail. Kudos to these egocentric somms who know what Mondeuse Noire, Hondarabi Zuri, and Gaglioppo are, but next time they try to serve you their esoteric bullshit, just turn around and walk out. Life's too short to be a lame trend chaser.

Signed,  
*Bad Somm*

**Dear Good Somm/Bad Somm,**

I'm a female wine director who traditionally wears a dress and a blazer to work. I recently felt very disrespected when the owner of my restaurant thought my assistant—a man dressed in a suit—was actually the director. When it comes to dressing to impress, what are your recommendations?

Sincerely,  
*Stuck with Suits?*

**Good Somm**

Dear *Stuck with Suits*,

It's disappointing to hear that the owner treated you this way. Women can be judged harshly on things that have nothing to do with their job performance and this is the perfect example—especially because it sounds like you were dressed just as professionally as your assistant.

Workwear should be the least of your worries, and hopefully one day we can all just wear whatever makes us comfortable and leave it at that: After all, what really matters is that you get the job done. I'm sure you're proving through your actions that you're an asset to the business, and if this owner doesn't see that, then I hope you're able to eventually find an employer who appreciates you for what you bring to the table—blazer or no blazer.

Yours truly,  
*Good Somm*

**BAD SOMM**

Dear *Stuck with Suits*,

Personally, I prefer my female wine directors in full cosplay. Tomb Raider? More like Cellar Raider! Wonder Woman? More like Wineder Woman! Harley Quinn? More like Henri Gouges Quinn! I can keep going ... 🍷

Regards,  
*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 website at goodsommbadsomm.com.*

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## Full Program

### Day 1: March 8th, 2020

8:30 – Registrations

9:30-10:45 – **“Ancient World, Old World, New World; The History of Wine in Six Glasses”**

Presenter: Max Kast, MS, Director of Education for Broadbent Wines

10:45-11:30 – Coffee break, featuring Japanese Sake

11:30-12:45 – **“Untangling Brunello vs. Barolo”** presented by The Somm Journal

11:30-12:45 – **“Napa Valley Rocks - Exploring Cabernet’s patchwork diversity”**, sponsored by Napa Valley Vintners

Presenter: Nicole Ramos, WSET L3, FWS, SWS, WSET Certified Educator

1:00-2:00 – Sponsored Lunch

2:15-3:30 – **“A Practical Approach to Blind Tasting Based on Theory and Deductive Reasoning”**

Presenter: Eric Hemer, MS, MW, Senior Vice President, Director of Wine Education, Southern Glazer’s Wine & Spirits of America

4:00-6:00 – Sparkling Wine Networking Hour sponsored, featuring Champagne Charles Heidsieck

### Day 2: March 9th, 2020

9:00 – Registrations

9:30-10:45 – **“Donnafugata’s Volcanic Sicily”**

Presenter: Antonio Rallo, Winemaker, CEO and co-owner of Donnafugata

10:45-11:30 – Coffee break, sponsored by WSET – Wine & Spirit Education Trust

11:30-12:45 – **“The Business of Sparkling Wine”**

Presenter: Matthew Citriglia, MS, Director of Wine Education for SGWS Florida

11:30-12:45 – **“The Pillars of Jerez: A Sherry Education”**

Presenter: Claire Henderson, Senior Brand Manager, González Byass USA

1:00-2:00 – Sponsored Lunch

2:15-3:30 – **“A journey to the unexpected: Exploring Prosecco through the lends of terroir and the individualistic wines of Franciacorta”**

Presenter: Kristina Sazama, DipWSET, MW candidate, Director of Education SMUSA

2:15-3:30 – **“A Tale of Two Counties: Leadership in Sonoma and San Luis Obispo, CA”**

Presenter: Joseph Spellman, MS, JUSTIN Vineyards & Winery

4:00-6:00 – Grand Tasting featuring more than 80 wines.

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More information at [floridawineacademy.com](http://floridawineacademy.com)



# “Learn It All”

## SOMMELIER NICK GERGEN OF SAN DIEGO'S JUNIPER & IVY SHARES INSIGHTS FROM HIS DECADES-LONG CAREER by Michelle M. Metter

PHOTO COURTESY OF JUNIPER AND IVY



**AS A ROCK CLIMBER,** Nick Gergen has long had a penchant for exploration that's also informed his career as a sommelier. While he didn't set out to work in the wine business, his rise through the hospitality ranks to his current home at San Diego's Juniper & Ivy is the result of equal parts hard work, opportunity, mentorship, and a humble approach to his craft.

Throughout his decades-long career, the Minnesota native has bussed and waited tables, tended bar, and served in management roles at establishments ranging from Red Lobster, Bare Back Grill, and Lou & Mickey's to the now-closed The Hake. Informed by this varied experience at chains, burger joints, and fine-dining restaurants, Gergen's hospitality ethos seems almost Zen-like. When imparting career advice to professionals who may follow a similar path, he remains focused on the long game.

"The one thing I stress to people is to be sure a path in wine is what you want. There is no rush," he says. "There is a lot that goes into all aspects of a restaurant, bar, or beverage program. Learn it all. Be the most diverse you can be. All the skills you gain are valuable to the employer, so you need to have a background in as many facets as possible."

Then, if wine is your calling, answer—which is exactly what Gergen has been able to do under the tutelage of the team at Juniper & Ivy, where staff training and education are a weekly occurrence. "The wine knowledge is outstanding," he says. "I've been lucky to be around people who have taken me under their wing to help me grow. But I realized quickly that in the wine community, that's really what we are all about—sharing knowledge."

Reflecting Gergen's affection for adventure, the list at Juniper & Ivy features offerings inspired by his travels; dubbed "Nick's Picks," they're meant to give guests the opportunity to explore unconventional selections like the Telmo Rodríguez As Caborcas Mencía and the Luis Pato Baga 2000 Quinta do Moinho Bairrada.

A fan of "fun and eclectic" sparkling wine, Gergen has set out to expand the restaurant's list accordingly. A current favorite? "Josh Orr [of Broadbent Selections] turned me on to Gusbourne English Sparkling Wine," he says. "It's right up there with the more premier Champagnes and is served during royal occasions." ❧

*Michelle M. Metter is a San Diego-based writer and wine event producer. Contact her at [metter@fastforwardevents.com](mailto:metter@fastforwardevents.com).*

*"There is a lot that goes into all aspects of a restaurant, bar, or beverage program. Learn it all. Be the most diverse you can be. All the skills you gain are valuable to the employer, so you need to have a background in as many facets as possible."*  
—Nick Gergen

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# Each Vintage Is a NEW CHAPTER

HERZOG WINE CELLARS' NEW LINEAGE TIER CELEBRATES  
NINE GENERATIONS OF WINEMAKING HISTORY

story by David Gadd / photos by Tony Pinto, Pinto Productions



*The new Herzog Lineage Momentus Sparkling White takes its place between the just-released Lineage 2019 Lake County Musqué Clone Sauvignon Blanc and Lineage 2019 Clarksburg Rosé.*

**W**hen you've been making wine for nine generations, you're bound to have something to celebrate. The Herzog family's 250-year winemaking tradition stretches from the stately 19th-century court of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, where founder Menachem Herzog was deemed a baron by Emperor Franz Josef, to a state-of-the-art winery on the California coast, where the Herzogs continue to push the boundaries of enological exploration.

Appropriately, in 2018, the family introduced Lineage, an aptly named tier of affordably priced wines that pays homage to that legacy. "They're hanging their heritage on this brand," explains David Whittemore, Marketing and Public Relations Director for Herzog Wine Cellars. The impressive pedigree of the new releases can be attributed to the know-how accumulated by each generation: As winemaker Joe Hurliman puts it, "Lineage really is an indication of the winemaking, the wine, and the grape knowledge of this family."

***"To start, you need to know your roots. The soil, the water, the air, the sunlight—everything's got to be just right."***

**—HERZOG WINE CELLARS GENERAL  
MANAGER JOSEPH HERZOG**





The new Herzog Lineage Momentus makes its debut at the Herzog family's Tierra Sur restaurant on the California coast.

## *A “Momentus” Occasion*

With five red, white, and rosé still wines already in the Lineage tier, the next logical step for the Herzog family was to add bubbles to the mix. They've done just that with Momentus, a new sparkling white wine made via the Charmat method that has 22 grams per liter of residual sugar. At 12% ABV, this non-vintage bubbly is perfect for serving to guests as a fresh and fruity apéritif; for those who prefer post-prandial bubbles, it also pairs beautifully with rich fruit- or chocolate-based desserts.

A surefire attractor for the curious consumer, the strikingly handsome angular bottle stands out proudly on retail shelves, easily differentiating Momentus from other sparkling wines at this price point.



Lineage launched with popular single-varietal wines and blends that appeal to a wide range of consumers; the fact that they're kosher, like all Herzog expressions, is simply an added bonus. "Our goal was to bring a quality \$20 wine to market. We know what quality wine is, and these wines are quality wines which just happen to be kosher," explains Herzog Wine Cellars General Manager Joseph Herzog, an eighth-generation viticulturalist.

### *Regionally Driven*

From the outset, Lineage was intended to reflect a sense of place by using grapes grown in regions best suited to each wine. "Nearly all of the fruit used to produce the Herzog Lineage series is farmed, harvested, and produced directly by Herzog Wine Cellars," says Hurliman. "This allows us to nurture the grapes to reach the high level of quality we want for the wine. Control over the farming of our grapes allows us to put quality over quantity."

The Herzog Lineage Sauvignon Blanc from Lake County is made from the aromatic Musqué clone and exudes tropical fruit on both the nose and palate. The Lineage Chardonnay, from a Herzog-owned vineyard in the Clarksburg AVA south of Sacramento, shows full-bodied yet elegant characteristics, with citrusy

overtones. Also from Clarksburg is the Lineage Pinot Noir, a fruit-forward explosion of cherry and strawberry; with a kiss of delicate oak, it possesses a sense of balance that's well suited to dishes like salmon or roast lamb.

The Lineage Cabernet Sauvignon, meanwhile, is currently sourced from Paso Robles—one of the most exciting appellations in the New World for Bordelais varieties. This Cabernet stands out due to its bold expression of black fruit with a hint of tobacco, making it ideal for pairing with roasts, steaks, and chops.

Historically, many wines produced in California have been field blends—a tradition that the Herzog Lineage Choreograph Red Blend harkens back to while upping the ante on complexity. Comprising 12 different grapes, including Portuguese varieties sourced from the Herzogs' Prince Vineyard in Clarksburg, it makes for a perfect accompaniment to hard cheeses and charcuterie. The Lineage Rosé, finally, is a Provençal-style charmer primed for warm-weather quaffing, either by itself or with Mediterranean-influenced cuisine.

Lineage's quality and price point are a natural fit for modern consumers and wine lists, and while the tier has proven to perform well in the off-premise space, it's also finding a strong niche in on-premise accounts. "The Lineage wines are still af-

fordable, even with a restaurant markup," Whittemore notes.

As the family turns the page on yet another decade spent honing their craft, its members are moved to muse on their legacy: "We are telling our family story, and each vintage is a new chapter," Joseph says. *sj*

***“Lineage really is an indication of the winemaking, the wine, and the grape knowledge of this family.”***

**—WINEMAKER JOE HURLIMAN**

## ***Tasting Notes***

**BY MERIDITH MAY**



### **Herzog Lineage Momentus Sparkling White Wine**

This non-vintage bubbly has a nose rich in floral fragrance: Jasmine and plumeria evoke beauty and delicacy. On the palate, the pearls disappear quickly, revealing ripe notes of pineapple and nectarine. A line of minerality works together with the low ABV and high acidity to keep things clean and fresh. **93**



### **Herzog Lineage 2019 Rosé, Clarksburg**

A red field blend with a gossamer edge to its onion skin–pink hue, it shows aromas of sweet melon, passion fruit, and light pekoe tea accented by dried tarragon. A dry, wet-stone saltiness comes in midway, where it's pampered by wild strawberry and pomegranate. This wine is exceptionally pleasant on the finish and pairs excellently with fish and chicken. **93**





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Master Sommelier Gillian Ballance, Senior Education Manager-Americas for Treasury Wine Estates.

# The Brightest

# STARS

## SHOWCASING THE WINNERS OF TREASURY WINE ESTATES' 2019 LUXICON TOUR

BY MID-JANUARY, *The SOMM Journal* and sister publication *The Tasting Panel* had awarded a whopping \$20,000 in scholarships in partnership with SommFoundation to the best and brightest wine buyers in Los Angeles, San Francisco, Atlanta, Chicago, Miami, and Washington, D.C.—all thanks to Treasury Wine Estate's (TWE) 2019 Luxicon tour. In each city, a challenging blind-tasting test was preceded by an extensive deductive-tasting seminar led by Master Sommelier Gillian Ballance, Senior Education Manager-Americas for TWE, and a local sommelier. The day culminated in a walkaround grand tasting—featuring the best of TWE's portfolio—where the winners were announced. They're showcased here at each tour stop (excepting Miami, which was held after press time).



photos by Olivia Smartt



Christine Tran, Managing Partner at Artisan Wine Depot.



Garo Eldemir, Director of Concessions at Global Gourmet.



Barbara Rooks, wine specialist and concierge at Artisan Wine Depot.

*Los Angeles*



PHOTO: DEVIN BERKO

*Eduardo Bolaños, head sommelier at Chi Spacca; wine steward Adam Sanchez of Annandale Golf Club; and Trevor Nare of Angler.*

*Washington, D.C.*

photos by Nick Klein



*Sean Rapoza, GM at Max's on Broad.*



*Sam Stronach, Wine Director at Buckhead's Restaurant & Chophouse.*



*Devin Sparks, Beverage Director at Perry's Restaurant.*

*Chicago*

photos by Rebecca Peplinski



*Timothy Evans, Wine Manager at Binny's Beverage Depot.*



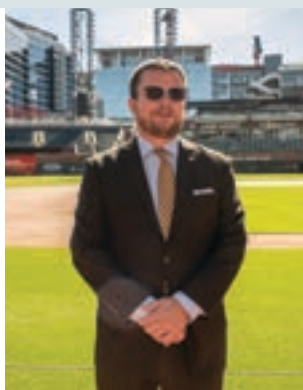
*Christian Shaum of Nesso Restaurant.*



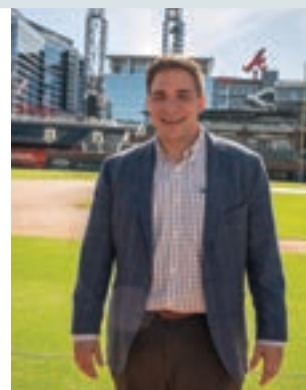
*Michael Dietrich of Francesca's on Chestnut.*

*Atlanta*

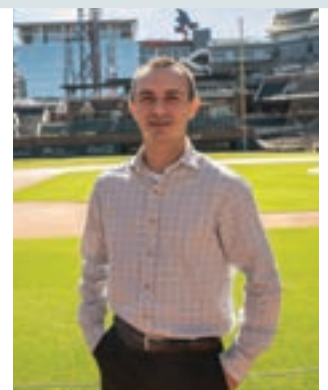
photos by Angie Webb



*Wilson Oswald of Ruth's Chris Steak House in Alpharetta, GA.*



*Christopher Gonzales of Horseradish Grill.*



*Vincent Steward of La Grotta.*



A close-up photograph of a champagne bottle being poured. The bottle is tilted, and a large, dynamic splash of golden liquid erupts from the neck, filling the upper two-thirds of the frame. The liquid is captured in mid-air, showing intricate patterns of droplets and bubbles. The background is a plain, bright white, which makes the golden liquid stand out sharply. The text 'THINK OUTSIDE THE BOTTLE' is superimposed in the center of the image, in a bold, black, sans-serif font.

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napa valley vintners



{ cover story }

# Home GROWN

HAHN FAMILY WINES'  
*Smith & Hook*

HIGHLIGHTS THE  
STRENGTH OF THE  
CENTRAL COAST

*Smith & Hook  
winemaker Megan  
McCollough in  
Smith Vineyard.*





*Hahn Family Wines Director of Winemaking Paul Clifton and Smith & Hook winemaker Megan McCollough enjoy a close working relationship.*

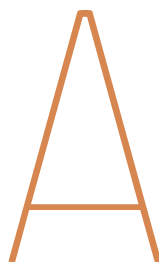


Surrounding yourself with people like Megan who are passionate about making the best wines at every price level—that's most important.

**-Director of Winemaking Paul Clifton**



*story by Michelle Ball / photos by Jeremy Ball*



As a 15-year-old growing up in Monterey County, Megan McCollough watched daily as a vineyard was planted just down the street from the house where she worked as a nanny. At the time, she didn't think much of it—grape vines aren't exactly at the forefront of any teenager's mind.

It wasn't until a decade later—after McCollough graduated from Cal Poly, San Luis Obispo, and started her career at Hahn Family Wines in the Santa Lucia Highlands AVA—that she realized the significance of that memory. She was raised in the southern reaches of the county, where Smith & Hook, the Hahn family's inaugural label, sources much of its Cabernet Sauvignon and other Bordeaux varieties. "At the time, that was a vineyard that Hahn was sourcing from," recalls McCollough, who was promoted to winemaker for Smith & Hook in 2017. "Years later, when I came to work here, that connection was made. That was pretty special for me."



The brand's name refers to separate parcels purchased by Nicky and Gaby Hahn in 1979; earlier that decade, they had been planted primarily to Cabernet Sauvignon. The Hahns' first entry into the wine business arrived the following year with the Smith & Hook 1980 Cabernet Sauvignon, named as an homage to the families who once owned those properties. Those familiar with the early days of Monterey County's viticultural history might recall difficulties with Cabernet: The grape proved arduous to ripen in the cooler climates up north, leading to high pyrazines and undesirable notes of bell pepper.

Despite these challenges, Smith & Hook maintained a strong following. The vineyards were largely dry farmed and yields were reduced so that the clusters could fully ripen. "I heard the fruit was fabulous, but they were only getting a ton and a half to 2 tons to the acre," says Director of Winemaking Paul Clifton, who oversees all production at Hahn Family Wines.

By the early 2000s, however, the writing was on the wall. Both vineyards were replanted to Pinot Noir and other cool-climate varieties, and the Hahns began sourcing Cabernet from warmer pockets along the Central Coast for Smith & Hook—including areas in the San Antonio and Hames valleys that are near McCollough's hometown. Remaining close to their roots, the wines are now designated as Central Coast, which allows for sourcing from multiple appellations. This provides not only an extensive spice rack of flavors but also excellent value for consumers.

Overdelivering on quality at every price was always paramount for Nicky Hahn. During Clifton's first week on the job, he recalls, Nicky conveyed his primary vision: "I will give you all the resources you need, but please try and make every wine taste twice the price." Clifton says, "That's been my mission ever since I started here."

When Clifton joined Hahn Family Wines in 2003, he landed in the midst of the transition from designating the wines as Santa Lucia Highlands to labeling them as Central Coast. Along with updating its packaging, the winery sought out new appellations better suited to Bordeaux grapes, among them Paso Robles. The team was

also given the flexibility to explore other parts of the region to determine the best sites and potential partners for the brand. "Building those relationships with our growers is so important, because you're putting a lot of trust and faith in them to do the quality work that we're hoping for," Clifton says. After many years of experimentation, such partnerships have proven

key to Smith & Hook's success.

As for McCollough, the self-proclaimed Cabernet fan has been with Hahn Family Wines since 2011 and served as the assistant winemaker for Smith & Hook prior to her promotion. She recalls seeing Nicky often in her early days at the winery and points to one memory that's always stood out to her: "He said to me, 'I hope you love



*As a teen, Megan McCollough watched as Hahn Family Wines planted a vineyard near her hometown in Monterey County. Years later, she found herself working for the winery.*



*Founded in 1980, Smith & Hook marked the Hahn family's entry into the wine business—a decade before they launched their namesake brands.*

what you do, because I love what I do," she says. "It's so true—if you can love what you do, you're never going to work a day in your life."

Since Smith & Hook is a by-the-glass staple on many wine lists, there's a conscious intention on the part of the winemaking team to blend for a consistent flavor profile year to year. Working with such a diverse array of terroir aids in this effort no matter the vintage, "but if I can also make it better in this current vintage than the last, that's the goal," says McCollough, who's also experimenting with fruit from the Paicines AVA in San Benito County.

McCollough and Clifton share a close working relationship that appears relaxed and effortless—in part because Clifton prefers taking the same hands-off approach once favored by Nicky. He says the Hahn patriarch always trusted his team to do what they do best: "The most important part of winemaking is that it starts with people," Clifton adds. "Surrounding yourself with people like Megan who are passionate about making the best wines at every price level—that's most important." SJ

## *Smith & Hook Selections*

Considering Smith & Hook wines are priced at just \$25 per bottle and aged in French oak, it's difficult to find a more compelling value for Cabernet Sauvignon that delivers both the purity of fruit and the structure coveted by red wine drinkers. Clifton shares that during Smith & Hook's early days, the team aimed to craft a wine that tasted more like a Napa Valley expression; that approach has since evolved, however, into creating layers of flavor that are truer to the brand's home region. "We want to be Central Coast," insists McCollough, "and we've found these excellent growing regions from which to pull from a price point that delivers incredible value to the consumer."

In discussing growing partners, McCollough lends insight into what each AVA contributed to the Smith & Hook Cabernet Sauvignon: Paso Robles, where the label sources from three subdistricts, dominates the blend, offering fleshy black cherry and heavy tannins; San Antonio Valley and Hames Valley add undertones of spicy black pepper and currant; and Arroyo Seco, which often sees thicker skins due to cool mornings, provides the backbone.



### **Smith & Hook 2017 Cabernet Sauvignon**

**(\$25)** Expressive and showy notes of black cherry and brambly fruit prickle alongside spicy hints of anise and peppercorn. Aged for 15 months in French oak (60% new), the wine is ripe and opulent through the mid-palate, with a firm grip and sweet oak tannins on the finish.



### **Smith & Hook 2016 Proprietary Red Blend (\$25)**

In 2013, Smith & Hook launched its first proprietary red blend, which predominantly features Merlot from the Arroyo Seco appellation as well as Petite Sirah, Malbec, and Cabernet Sauvignon. Aged 26 months in French oak, it has a generous bouquet that leads with fresh blackberries and juniper. The plush mid-palate is supple, with flavors of pomegranate, cherry, and dark chocolate as well as hints of espresso.



# A Strong START

REVEALING THE RESULTS OF THE INAUGURAL  
**CONCOURS D'SPIRITS COMPETITION**  
AT SOMMCON SAN DIEGO

A NEW COMPETITION for domestic and international spirits descended on San Diego last November in the form of Concours d'Spirits at SommCon, a leading convention for beverage professionals. Entries to the inaugural event, which was sponsored by *The SOMM Journal*, were assessed by a jury of 12 leaders within the wine and spirits industry.



This panel of renowned palates—comprising Master Sommeliers, Masters of Wine, and professional sommeliers—followed a blind format to ensure that all submissions were treated uniformly and impartially. The winning brands signify the highest levels of quality and craftsmanship for craft distillers and major brands alike, and in earning their medals, they received a stamp of approval from the experts as the best representatives of their respective categories.

PHOTO: JEREMY BALL



*The judges of the Concours d'Spirits competition, from left to right: Joe Spellman, MS, Winery Sommelier at JUSTIN Vineyards & Winery; Josh Orr, MS, Regional Manager at Broadbent Selections; Anthony Schmidt, Beverage Director at CH Projects; Eric Entrikin, MS, Chair of Concours d'Spirits; Meredith May, Publisher of The Tasting Panel/The SOMM Journal; Michael Kim Wolf, Associate Professor at the Culinary Institute of America at Greystone; Maurice DiMarino, Director of Beverage at Cohn Restaurant Group; Constantin Alexander, Director of Beverage at Hakkasan Group; Ira Norof, CSE, CWE, Director of Education at Southern Glazer's Wine & Spirits; and Erik Segelbaum, founder/principal of SOMLYAY, LLC.*



THE **SOMM** JOURNAL  
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Receiving the highest honors of the competition were the *SOMM Journal* Award of Excellence winners, selected by the magazine's editorial team. The judging criteria were based on aroma, flavor profile, texture, and finish.

Chatham Imports | **Crop Cucumber Vodka**  
E. & J. Gallo Winery | **New Amsterdam Gin**  
Heritage Distilling Co. | **Brown Sugar Bourbon**  
Legends Spirits | **Duke Grand Cru Founder's Reserve**  
Legends Spirits | **La Adelita Añejo Tequila**



DOUBLE GOLD  
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E. & J. Gallo Winery | **E. & J. XO Brandy**  
E. & J. Gallo Winery | **Familia Camarena Añejo Tequila**  
Haas Brothers | **Panamá-Pacific Rum 23-Year**  
J.J. Pfister Distilling Company | **J.J. Pfister London Dry  
Capitol Gin**  
Lyre's Non-Alcoholic Spirit Co. | **Lyre's Vermouth Rosso**



GOLD MEDALS

Brown Forman Corporation | **Slane Irish Whiskey**  
Chatham Imports | **Farmer's Botanical Small Batch Organic Gin**  
E. & J. Gallo Winery | **E. & J. VSOP Brandy**  
E. & J. Gallo Winery | **Argonaut Saloon Strength Brandy**  
E. & J. Gallo Winery | **Familia Camarena Reposado Tequila**  
E. & J. Gallo Winery | **High Noon Sun Sips – Grapefruit**  
Haas Brothers | **Panamá-Pacific Rum 9-Year**  
Haas Brothers | **ArteNOM Selección de 1579 Blanco Tequila**  
Haas Brothers | **Fuenteseca Cosecha Blanco 3-Year**  
MGP Ingredients | **George Remus Repeal Reserve Bourbon**  
MGP Ingredients | **Rossville Union Barrel Proof Straight Rye Whiskey**



SILVER MEDALS

Chatham Imports | **Martí Auténtico Plata Single Estate Rum 3-Year**  
Chatham Imports | **Martí Auténtico Dorado Single Estate Rum 3-Year**  
Duggans Distillers | **Asbach Privatbrand Brandy 8-Year**  
E. & J. Gallo Winery | **Argonaut Fat Thumb Brandy**  
E. & J. Gallo Winery | **Familia Camarena Silver Tequila**  
E. & J. Gallo Winery | **High Noon Sun Sips – Pineapple**  
E. & J. Gallo Winery | **High Noon Sun Sips – Black Cherry**  
E. & J. Gallo Winery | **New Amsterdam Vodka**  
E. & J. Gallo Winery | **New Amsterdam Vodka 100 Proof**  
E. & J. Gallo Winery | **New Amsterdam Original Gin**  
E. & J. Gallo Winery | **E. & J. VS Brandy**  
Haas Brothers | **Don Amado Reposado Mezcal**  
Haas Brothers | **Tequila Purasangre Blanco Fuerte**  
Heritage Distilling Co. | **Heritage Brown Sugar Bourbon (103 Proof)**  
Legends Spirits | **La Adelita Blanco Tequila**  
Lyre's Non-Alcoholic Spirit Co. | **Lyre's White Cane Spirit**  
Lyre's Non-Alcoholic Spirit Co. | **Lyre's Triple Sec**  
Lyre's Non-Alcoholic Spirit Co. | **Lyre's Dry Vermouth**





PHOTO: ALAN CAMPBELL PHOTOGRAPHY

# Speedy (Over) Delivery

KNOWN FOR ITS BESTSELLING CHARDONNAY, **RAEBURN WINERY** REVELS IN ITS SUCCESS IN THE RUSSIAN RIVER VALLEY

by Randy Caparoso

**THE STORY OF** Raeburn Winery, founded in 2013 by proprietor Derek Benham, has essentially been a race to the top: The Raeburn Russian River Valley Chardonnay is now one of the top-selling Chardonnays grown in its namesake region. It's an area that, in many ways, epitomizes what California Chardonnay is all about—if you define it in terms of intensity, an appealing generosity of fruit, and luscious texture, all restrained by a true sense of grace.

Winemaker Joe Tapparo has been with the winery since its inception, when it was established on a fabled Olivet Road site that once housed Cecil DeLoach's Pinot Noir facility; before that, it was home to Merry Edwards' first winery, which old-timers will recall as The Merry Vintners. When asked about the secret behind Raeburn's success, he responded in no uncertain terms: "We overdeliver at the price, which has been at a \$19.99 SRP. It's no surprise when you look at Mr. Benham's history with Purple Wine Company [which he founded in 2001] and, before that, Blackstone [a hugely successful brand Benham started in 1990 and sold in 2001]. The Raeburn brand has grown because he never cuts corners, no matter what."

For Tapparo, Raeburn's Chardonnay offers enormous sensory appeal. "A lot of winemaking love goes into it, and the fruit comes entirely from the Russian River Valley, which is very lavish in terms of intrinsic quality and, of course, cost. There is a lot of new French and Hungarian oak used in the program, which includes

75% barrel fermentation [the rest occurs in stainless steel]. It's labor-intensive—we'll do the stirring every two weeks to achieve the lees-influenced complexity expected in classic Russian River Valley Chardonnay—and from the fruit-sourcing perspective, we've managed to expand our long-term contracts with key growers."

Tapparo is understandably cagey when asked about numbers, but he notes that the wine's current production is "in excess

quality—in our case, the pure, distinctive quality associated with Russian River Chardonnay and Pinot Noir. . . . Don't forget, we are now just as competitive with our Pinot!"

Now in its third vintage, Raeburn's single-varietal Russian River Valley Pinot Noir is aged in French oak (25% new) and sells for \$23. "Typical of the Russian River Valley's cool climate, it has some power and concentration, but it's not overripe,"

## TASTING NOTES BY PUBLISHER/ EDITOR-IN-CHIEF MERIDITH MAY

**Raeburn 2018 Chardonnay, Russian River Valley** One of the most elegant, mouth-filling Chardonnays from this region—its stellar aromas of lemon verbena and spearmint fascinate. A creamy wash on the entry carries savory herbs and chamomile as key lime saturates the tongue; its citrusy sweetness accents the wine's high-toned acidity. **95**

**Raeburn 2019 Rosé, Russian River Valley** With its ballet slipper-pink hue and inviting perfume of raspberry and stone fruit, this stunning rosé brings a purity and freshness to the palate. A dusting of salty minerality encompasses notes of red berries and tropical fruit as a fragrance of plumeria permeates the finish. **93**

**Raeburn 2018 Pinot Noir, Russian River Valley** A multifaceted personality emerges from this complex red: We're entertained first with clove, briar, wild cherry, and cocoa on the nose, and then with a juicy, delicate, and lean body that's reminiscent more of rose petals and red flowers than forest floor. As the performance concludes, savory notes whisper backstage. **95**

PHOTO COURTESY OF RAEburn WINERY



*Raeburn Winery winemaker Joe Tapparo.*

of 100,000 cases." As a \$20 Chardonnay, it's often competing with expressions from less-coveted regions that are produced using shortcuts such as dipping bags of wood chips into giant tanks to replicate oak profiles.

When asked about this, Tapparo has a diplomatic answer: "While I have great respect for what many of my colleagues are doing with oak alternatives these days, it's just not in our company DNA to take these kinds of shortcuts," he says. "We have been successful by delivering high

Tapparo says. "It has that quintessential Russian River fruit profile of red cherry and raspberry, and it combines the delicacy associated with the appellation with that sense of lushness on the palate that everyone loves about Russian River Pinot."

If Raeburn continues on its current trajectory, the producer of America's favorite Russian River Valley Chardonnay may soon become known for crafting the country's favorite Russian River Valley Pinot Noir. Given its track record, who would bet against that? **SJ**



# a Bubbly Valentine

CELEBRATING THE CONQUESTS OF  
**CONEGLIANO VALDOBBIADENE  
PROSECCO SUPERIORE DOCG**  
AT NERANO IN BEVERLY HILLS

STORY BY KYLE BILLINGS / PHOTOS BY DEVIN BERKO

*The landscape of the  
Conegliano Valdobbiadene  
Prosecco Superiore DOCG.*



*Ca' di Rajo represents  
an Extra-Dry style of the  
Conegliano Valdobbiadene  
Prosecco Superiore DOCG.  
A creamy texture and  
aromas of white peach, crisp  
apple, and grapefruit zest  
are accented with scents of  
blooming acacia flowers.*

## The sun also rises

in Conegliano Valdobbiadene: In the reaches of the Italian northeast, vineyards ribbon the terraced contours of terrain between these two towns, which serve as the sanctum sanctorum of Prosecco Superiore DOCG production. Currently celebrating a decade of elevated status and 50 years since Prosecco's establishment as a region, the Conegliano Valdobbiadene Prosecco Superiore DOCG has a long name and a rich history, but despite its striking vistas and close proximity to Venice, this pocket of world-class wine producers is still hiding in plain sight—or in the immense shadow of its explosively popular style.

Prosecco's producers have long battled the perception that the category should be relegated solely to celebratory occasions, where it's as easily consumed as it is forgotten. Among those fervently countering this narrative is Iris Rowlee, one of three U.S. ambassadors for the Consorzio of Conegliano Valdobbiadene Prosecco Superiore DOCG, who recently congregated with a cadre of sommeliers and wine buyers in the loft of Nerano restaurant in Beverly Hills, California, for an event honoring the region's legacy.

"Everyone knows Prosecco, and it's often hidden within this larger name," Rowlee told the group. "People either dismiss it or think they know it without knowing about this little *superiore* sub-appellation of Conegliano Valdobbiadene."

The towns that lend their name to Conegliano Valdobbiadene—a constellation of 15 communes—lie at the eastern and western edges of the region, respectively, and are connected by steep undulating slopes. Home to the famed Cartizze vineyards, Valdobbiadene represents the productive heart of the appellation, while Conegliano occupies the cultural nerve center. The Piave River underlines the appellation, itself an apron of the Dolomite mountains to the north.

Within its borders, the dramatic landscape and the latitude—as well as the tempering influence of the Adriatic Sea—foster conditions for superior viticulture: Conegliano Valdobbiadene has "great diurnal fluctuation, rainfall, well-draining soil—everything a little Glera grape would want," said Rowlee in reference to the grape formerly known as Prosecco. By law, Glera must comprise at least 85% of the blends produced in the DOCG, joining composite grapes like French transplants Pinot Noir and Chardonnay in addition to indigenous



Iris Rowlee is one of three ambassadors for the Consorzio of Conegliano Valdobbiadene Prosecco Superiore DOCG.

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"Everyone knows Prosecco,

AND IT'S OFTEN HIDDEN WITHIN THIS LARGER NAME. PEOPLE EITHER DISMISS IT OR THINK THEY KNOW IT WITHOUT KNOWING ABOUT THIS LITTLE *SUPERIORE* SUB-APPELLATION OF **CONEGLIANO VALDOBBIADENE.**"

—IRIS ROWLEE

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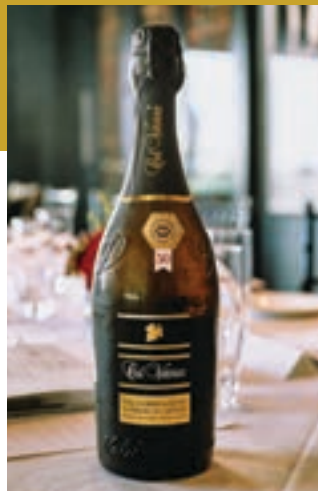




*Valdobbiadene Prosecco Superiore DOCG Brut Rive di San Pietro di Barbozza 2018 Nebbia, named for the fog that blankets the region, is a serious sparkler with fine, persistent bubbles. It's often mistaken for Champagne due to its weighty mouthfeel and minerality as well as its yeasty-dough finish.*



*Bacio della Luna's lean and mineral-driven Conegliano Valdobbiadene Prosecco Superiore DOCG Brut Millesimato 2018 offers a charming array of aromas, including jasmine and green tea, as well as flavors of ripe pear and citrus.*



*Col Vetoraz Valdobbiadene Superiore di Cartizze DOCG Dry is an eloquent expression of Prosecco Superiore, with notes of lavender, magnolia, and kiwi mingling with wet stone and honeyed orange peel.*



*A stunning example of its namesake subzone, Mionetto Valdobbiadene Superiore di Cartizze DOCG Dry exudes a fine zest of grapefruit alongside aromas of apple and pear. Lanolin and minerality are beautifully showcased in its texture and flavor.*

varieties. Made following the Martinotti (aka Charmat) method, the sparkling wine channels the herbal and spice-tinged qualities of its grapes, which complement its vivacious bubbles.

This playful elegance exists in tandem with the wine's seemingly limitless gastronomic potential, even at varying levels of residual sugar: Prosecco Superiore is made in four styles: Extra Brut (up to 6 grams per liter of residual sugar), Brut (up to 12 grams per liter), Extra Dry (12–17 grams per liter), and Dry (17–32 grams per liter). Back in Beverly Hills, Rowlee warned against any residual prejudice: "One thing that I thought I would want as a sommelier and as a high-faluting hipster was these really dry styles," she said. "[But] I found when I tasted across the board from producer to producer; a little bit of sweetness really works with Prosecco . . . and definitely makes it better [for] pairing with a lot more dishes."

At the event, guests bore witness to this versatility as various dishes were paired with expressions from prominent Prosecco Superiore DOCG producers. Bresaola rolls replete with goat cheese and dry-aged beef preceded an Italian-inspired spread that included insalata amalfitana, grilled Spanish octopus, butternut squash ravioli with brown butter sage, and Tahitian

vanilla panna cotta garnished with wild berry coulis for dessert.

Despite its global reputation of easy charm, Prosecco has a long tradition of academia that started in the Conegliano Valdobbiadene DOCG area. Conegliano in fact houses the School of Winemaking; established in 1876, it was the first institution of its kind to open following Italian unification. And last year, in addition to marking ten years of DOCG status, Conegliano Valdobbiadene was designated as a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

Within the DOCG designation at the apogee of the Prosecco pyramid, the quality levels in ascending order are Conegliano Valdobbiadene Prosecco Superiore DOCG, with its 15 villages; the Conegliano Valdobbiadene Prosecco Superiore Rive DOCG, with 43; and the Valdobbiadene Superiore di Cartizze DOCG.

In the local dialect, the term *rive* is used to denote the steep hillside vineyards that mark the area; in turn, labels marked "Rive" indicate terroir-expressive wines produced exclusively with hand-harvested grapes sourced from a single village or hamlet with a distinct soil type and microclimate.

This brings us back to the aforementioned Superiore di Cartizze DOCG, a

small subzone spanning 108 hectares within the municipalities of San Pietro di Barbozza, Santo Stefano, and Saccol on the eastern edge of Valdobbiadene. Its south-facing vineyards rest on ancient soils and benefit from a mild climate, resulting in complex and harmonious wines with a seductive mousse.

Conegliano Valdobbiadene, meanwhile, is filled with idiosyncrasies. On one hand, a patchwork of thousands of individual growers has unified under an interconnected vision, but on the other, biodiversity remains paramount. A regional body known as the Producers' Consortium has prioritized developing sustainable and site-specific practices while preserving the habitats of native plant and animal species. On one estate, a pulley system transfers straw baskets up dramatic terraces known as *ciglioni*, past aged mulberry trees in sloped woodlands amidst a menagerie of wildlife blanketed by fog (*nebbia*).

"In this region, you get to see these perfectly preserved ponds and these forested areas [as well as] the [greatest] diversity of flora and fauna I've come across in vineyards," Rowlee told the event attendees. If her mission was to convince them that Prosecco Superiore and all of its parts are worthy of a more discerning glance, then she undoubtedly succeeded. **SJ**

# The Southern California Wine Buyers in Attendance at Nerano

Charles Communications Associates founder Kimberly Charles, DipWSET, and Mark Averett, GM of The Georgian Hotel in Santa Monica.



The Gelson's team: Category Manager Ray Brych and Sr. Manager-Marketing Jake Cheung.



Oscar Chinchilla, Beverage Director at Montage Beverly Hills in Los Angeles.



Marcus Voglieder, Corporate Beverage Director for Nobu, with Sam Matatyan, proprietor of Village Liquor in La Crescenta.



Mandy Sparacino, Wine Director at Del Frisco's Double Eagle Steak House in west Los Angeles.



# BLURRING the **BINARY**

REPORTING ON THE **GLOBAL VS. DOMESTIC**  
PANEL AT SOMMCON SAN DIEGO

story by Michelle Ball / photos by Jeremy Ball



The Global vs. Domestic panel at SommCon San Diego from left to right: Dan Panella, Director of Winemaking at Oak Farm Vineyards; Erik Segelbaum, founder and principal of SOMLYAY LLC; Dave Muret, Senior Marketing Director at J. Lohr Vineyards & Wines; moderator Bob Bath, MS, Professor of Wine and Beverage Studies at the Culinary Institute of America; Nikolai St. George, chief winemaker at Giesen Estate; Chris Upchurch, co-founder/executive winemaker at DeLille Cellars and proprietor/winemaker at Upchurch Vineyard; Ralf Holdenried, winemaker at Black Stallion Estate Winery; and Gillian Ballance, MS, Senior Education Manager—Americas at Treasury Wine Estates. Not pictured is Kathleen Thomas, Wine Training Manager at Hakkasan Group.



*Panel attendees blurred the lines between Old World and New during an extensive tasting.*

For professionals, categorizing wines as Old World or New World is a useful tool, especially when it comes to education, tasting, and sales. Yet, as the industry continues to evolve on an international scale, the stylistic decisions of producers are making it more difficult to blindly discern a wine's origins. Climate change, meanwhile, will undoubtedly play a significant role in reshaping the viticultural norms of the future. So, is it time to reassess the use of historical terms to instead ask: Is this the right grape for this place? And is the world wine stage actually shrinking rather than expanding?

These questions were the impetus for the Global vs. Domestic discussion at SommCon San Diego, which intended to highlight wines—predominantly from the New World—that embodied their respective origins as true expressions of place. Moderating the eight-member panel was Master Sommelier Bob Bath, Professor of Wine and Beverage Studies at the Culinary Institute of America, who opened the conversation by asking, “Are we planting grapes in places simply because they’re popular, or do they really match the terroir?” The ultimate goal, he noted, was to challenge attendees to look beyond the GPS coordinates behind each wine and instead approach them with an open mind.





*Kathleen Thomas, Wine Training Manager at Hakkasan Group, presented the 2012 Paco & Lola Albariño from Rías Baixas.*

## Rías Baixas Albariño: PACO & LOLA

Despite its Old World origins, the 2012 Paco & Lola Albariño from Rías Baixas expresses a style that's atypical for this Galician variety. Traditionally, Albariño is known to yield fresh, crunchy expressions with enamel-ripping acidity, and while "this wine has all of that," mused Kathleen Thomas, Wine Training Manager at Hakkasan Group, "it's . . . more creamy, dreamy, and a little bit textured."

Paco & Lola is Rías Baixas' largest cooperative of growers, and this wine is crafted with a selection of the best grapes from its 2,000 vineyard plots; the fruit is grown on pergolas to maintain airflow in the damp marine environment. Considered to be an exceptional vintage, the 2012 spent nearly five years on the lees, which imparted palpable texture and a nuttiness that was more reminiscent of aged Chablis than of Albariño. Pineapple and loquats layered with marzipan, saltine crackers, and ample acidity make for a stunning and complex wine that should delight fans of white Burgundy and Albariño alike.



## Paso Robles Cabernet Sauvignon: J. LOHR VINEYARDS & WINES

Many have come to know California's Paso Robles region by way of Cabernet Sauvignon from J. Lohr Vineyards & Wines. Since 1986, founder Jerry Lohr's vision of controlling every step of the process from viticulture to winemaking has continued to pay off, and the winery's efforts have helped put Paso Robles on the map as a world-class area for Bordeaux varieties. Many producers have followed their lead: Nearly 50% of the broader AVA is now planted to Cabernet Sauvignon.

Hilltop, J. Lohr's first premier vineyard in Paso Robles, was the original source for the Hilltop Cabernet Sauvignon. The winery has since expanded dramatically, farming roughly 2,700 acres of estate vines throughout the region. Tighter spacing and clones with improved color and fruit concentration have upped the quality of its sites, and today, the Hilltop Cabernet Sauvignon now comprises the best fruit from its hilltop vineyards, including Shotwell and Beck.

"At J. Lohr, we embrace ripeness," Senior Marketing Director Dave Muret explained while presenting the supple 2017 vintage, which shows ripe, plummy fruit; hints of kirsch and dark chocolate; and soft, mocha-like tannins. "What we're looking for in this wine is something that can be enjoyed today."





## Marlborough Pinot Noir: CLAYVIN

The Giesen brothers have crafted wine in Marlborough for over three decades in various tiers, including their Single Vineyard Selection. This series celebrates wines that express the character of sites such as the Clayvin Vineyard: Situated in the hills of Marlborough's Wairau Valley, it distinguishes itself from the broader growing region with its high-density plantings of Pinot Noir, Chardonnay, and Syrah, rather than the more common Sauvignon Blanc.

This protected hillside block comprises an eclectic array of rootstocks and clones that contribute to the complexity of its wines. Chief winemaker Nikolai St. George shared that while Giesen Estate employs many Old World techniques, the Pinot Noir he presented to the panel was made in a New World style. "For me, New World philosophy is about purity of fruit. The decisions that I make are all about maintaining that purity," St. George explained, noting that the vineyard imparts a common thread of concentrated red fruit in the wines it yields. The 2014, a warmer vintage, exudes spicy notes of cinnamon and clove that frame a core of cranberry jam and strawberry with subtle hints of rose.



## Lodi Barbera: OAK FARM VINEYARDS

California's Lodi region has a long history of viticultural experimentation that dates back to the 1850s, when immigrants from Italy, Spain, Portugal, and Germany brought over vines endemic to their homeland. Many of these original plantings, most notably Zinfandel and Cinsault, still survive today.

Although Lodi is primarily known for Zinfandel, local production currently employs more than 100 varieties to varying success. But Dan Panella, Director of Winemaking at Oak Farm Vineyards, singled out Barbera as a "fantastic fit" for the region during the panel: The Piedmontese variety naturally maintains its acidity, which is important in Lodi's warm, arid climate.

"It has an interesting cherry-cola quality, which is a nice counterpoint to the big, jammy Zins," added Panella, whose family farms a 70-acre vineyard planted to 14 varieties. From his spice rack, he pulls a combination of oak profiles to frame the fruit during maturation, resulting in an opulent wine with fresh red fruit, kirsch, holiday baking spice, and enough acidity to support its ripe style.



*Master Sommelier Gillian Ballance, Senior Education Manager-Americas at Treasury Wine Estates, compared Chardonnays from Penfolds and Beringer.*

## Napa Valley and South Eastern Australia Chardonnays: PENFOLDS AND BERINGER PRIVATE RESERVE

Chardonnay, the world's darling white wine, is known for being heavily influenced by both terroir and winemaking techniques, among them barrel or malolactic fermentation, lees stirring, or maturation preferences. To highlight two radically different styles, Master Sommelier Gillian Ballance shared Chardonnays from Penfolds in South Eastern Australia and Beringer in Napa Valley.

Despite its New World location, Penfolds has a deep-rooted history of viticulture, having just celebrated its 175th year of production. Fruit for the 2017 Bin 311 Chardonnay is sourced from its cool-climate vineyard sites in the Adelaide Hills, Tasmania, and Tumberumba; matured in 25% new French oak for eight months, the wine displays a flinty, Old World sentiment with zesty acidity and flavors of pear and lemon peel.

By contrast, the 2017 Beringer Private Reserve Chardonnay stems from 35-year-old vines grown on Gamble Ranch in the warmer reaches of Napa Valley's Oakville district. Historically, the label was produced in a heavily oaked style, but more recently, Mark Beringer—the winery's eighth winemaker and the great-great-grandson of founder Jacob Beringer—has chosen to give the wine more lift while maintaining its curvy nature. It's richer as a result, with round and silky flavors of marshmallow that frost a core of tropical fruit.







## Israeli Cabernet Sauvignon: SEGAL

With over 5,000 years of documented archeological history, Israel could be considered the O.G. of the Old World; its winemaking evolution, however, came to a halt under the rule of the Ottoman Empire. It wasn't until the 1880s that Baron Rothschild of Lafite-Rothschild revived the Israeli industry with considerable investment, cultivating many of the Bordeaux varieties that continue to dominate the region today.

"As a sommelier, I'm looking for benchmarks. This, to me, is a benchmark Cabernet," noted sommelier Erik Segelbaum of the 2016 Segal Unfiltered Cabernet Sauvignon—one of the few commercially available versions of the variety that's unfined and unfiltered.

Situated in the mountainous and forested region of Upper Galilee, the vineyard sits between 1,300 and 1,800 feet above sea level and has a well-drained soil structure of deep clay and limestone that's reminiscent of Bordeaux's. The wine made a memorable impression, with dusty aromas of white pepper and coriander framing an immensely concentrated core of fleshy red currants and a tinge of salinity.

## Red Mountain Cabernet Sauvignon: UPCHURCH VINEYARD

Red Mountain is a small AVA in south-central Washington that's quickly becoming known for its world-class Cabernet Sauvignon and Merlot. Fifteen years after co-founding DeLille Cellars in 1992, winemaker Chris Upchurch and his wife, Thea, launched Upchurch Vineyard in 2007 with an intent to return to the classic vigneron model: farming and making wine from a single small plot. Their 18.5-acre vineyard is located on the southern tip of the AVA and produces roughly 3,000 cases per year.

During the seminar, Upchurch took a moment to respond to the question of whether the global wine stage is shrinking, answering emphatically, "Jesus, I hope not. The biggest sin we can possibly do is homogenize our wines to the point where they're all tasting the same." His personal goal, he said, is to glorify the fruit that he's spent so much time nurturing by embodying the terroir as wholly as possible.

Washington is often said to straddle the line between Old World and New: Its high latitude provides the ample sunshine and warmth needed for full ripeness, yet its grapes maintain an abundance of structure. The 2017 Upchurch Cabernet Sauvignon is an excellent example of the state's strengths, showing deep concentration of fruit—plum skin, black cherry, and cassis—and a full, plush mouthfeel framed by fuzzy tones of clay and graphite.

For more on Upchurch Vineyard, visit [upchurchvineyard.com](http://upchurchvineyard.com).



"THE BIGGEST SIN WE CAN POSSIBLY DO IS  
HOMOGENIZE OUR WINES TO THE POINT  
WHERE THEY'RE ALL TASTING THE SAME."

**-UPCHURCH VINEYARD WINEMAKER CHRIS UPCHURCH**

## Napa Valley Cabernet Sauvignon:

# BLACK STALLION ESTATE WINERY

Napa Valley has carved its name into collective memory as a New World region that rivals the Old World when it comes to producing Cabernet Sauvignon. This vaunted reputation has attracted a tidal wave of pro-

ducers, whose work holds an incredible amount of influence in the global industry.

One producer that's rather new to the scene is Black Stallion Estate Winery; its modern facility, located on the former property of an equestrian center along the Silverado Trail, was designed with the intention of crafting wines from Napa's premier vineyards. Rather than focusing on site-specific Cabernet Sauvignon, however, they choose to represent the region's utmost potential via blending. "I have a lot of respect for terroir; but I love the art of blending—using the best vine-

yards to create a wine that's more than the sum of its parts," explained winemaker Ralf Holdenried.

Roughly eight vineyards were considered for the blend that ultimately resulted in the 2014 Transcendent Cabernet Sauvignon; the lots were tasted blind to decide what would go into a final bottling composed from the top 20 barrels. Holdenried noted that he believes these various sites bring concentration and structure to the wine, which is rich and silky with opulent layers of black plum, maple, bacon, and star anise. SJ



*Ralf Holdenried, winemaker at Black Stallion Estate Winery in Napa Valley, presented the Transcendent Cabernet Sauvignon.*





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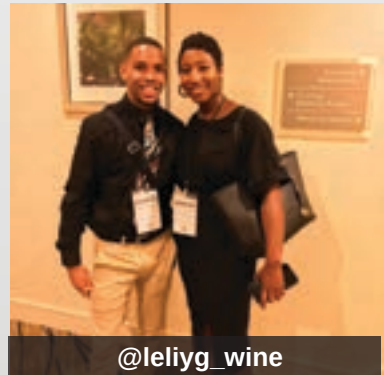
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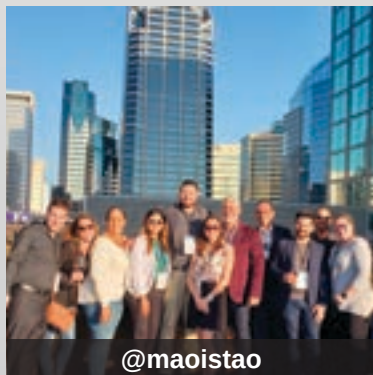
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Woody Van Horn is one of the most revered consultants in the hospitality industry.

# Where Are They Now?

CHECKING IN ON A FEW OF THE CULINARY INSTITUTE OF AMERICA'S MOST PROMISING GRADUATES

by Bob Bath, MS

**CONSIDERING THAT THE** Culinary Institute of America (CIA) has been a leader in industry education since its inception in 1947, it was only natural that it would embrace the opportunity to create rigorous programs specifically for wine: In 2010, it did just that at its campus ideally located in the historic Greystone winery in Napa Valley. Originally known as the Accelerated Wine and Beverage Program, this comprehensive, two-semester graduate certificate has since evolved into a master's degree in Professional Studies in Wine Management.

Over the past decade, the program has attracted a diverse range of talented students from all over the world who are now making a significant impact in many sectors of the industry.

Among them is Sean Crenny, who never dreamed that he would one day be working with acclaimed chef Thomas Keller. "I grew up in Long Island and went to the CIA in Hyde Park, New York. During my studies there, I was required to take a wine course. I fell in love with wine because of that class and decided to become a sommelier."



*Sommelier Sean Crenny educates the staff at TAK Room in New York, NY.*



*Cara Patricia and Simi Grewal of DECANTsf have developed wine programs and business plans using knowledge they gained at the CIA.*

After graduating, Crenny opted to enroll in the graduate program at Greystone to further his newfound passion for wine. “CIA Greystone provided the essential wine knowledge to be a sommelier. Throughout the program, we tasted hundreds of wines and learned how to describe and speak about wine confidently,” he says. “Having the opportunity to network with winemakers, business owners, and sommeliers from around the world has opened many doors for me throughout my career.”

Upon graduation from Greystone, Crenny began working at Keller’s restaurant Per Se in New York City; after five years there, he was given the opportunity to join the opening team for another Keller project, TAK Room. In addition to working the floor, Crenny educates the staff about the classic regions featured on the restaurant’s wine list.

Meanwhile, across the country, Cara Patricia and Simi Grewal are at the helm of DECANTsf; opened last year in San Francisco’s SoMa district, the education-focused retail shop and bar specializes in small-production wines and craft beer that embody core principles like sustainability. The pair met in the graduate program

at Greystone and reunited in 2013 after Grewal left her front-of-house position at Madison Park and moved back to San Francisco, where Patricia was working as a cellar sommelier for Saison.

“I owe my entire career to the graduate program,” says Grewal, who didn’t have a strong background in the industry prior to her time at Greystone. “When I arrived at the CIA, I knew I had an interest . . . but I wasn’t sure how best to channel that energy into a lucrative career. Most importantly, though, it taught me the fundamental principles of hospitality, which is something Cara and I emphasize daily at DECANTsf.”

A Chicago native and now an Advanced Sommelier, Patricia entered Greystone with wine-related experience; it was the connections she made with classmates like Grewal, however, that proved particularly fruitful for her career. “I knew from spending time with Simi in class that she was intelligent and meticulous—the type who would make a great business partner. Our capstone project at Greystone made me sit down and think about what I really wanted to do. I wrote the business plan [for] what would later lay the groundwork for DECANTsf.”

Another Greystone grad, Woody Van

Horn, spent six years in technology/operations roles both in the military and in private sectors that involved telecommunications, ballistic missile defense, and anti-submarine warfare before switching to a career in hospitality. “I had a culinary degree from the CIA’s Hyde Park campus and had already been in hospitality for over a decade—working at some of the best restaurants and hotels in the country—before enrolling in the program at Greystone,” he says. “It quickly became one of the best moments of my career. The care, thought, and presentations from the guest speakers that we were introduced to are truly some of the best in the industry. Those connections and conversations have stuck with me ten years later.”

Today, Van Horn—who started his own consulting company, WvH Hospitality LLC, three years ago—helps open restaurants; create beverage programs as well as menu and restaurant designs; and implement technology in the hospitality and cannabis industries. He also participates in prominent food and wine festivals across the country. *SJ*

*Watch for Part II of this feature in our April/May issue.*




# The *Winning* Combination

SOMMELIERS CONVENE FOR AN  
INTIMATE DINNER WITH  
**PASO ROBLES PRODUCERS** AT  
JUNIPER & IVY IN SAN DIEGO

story by Michelle Ball / photos by Jeremy Ball

**GATHERED IN A PRIVATE ROOM** on the second floor of one of San Diego's swankiest restaurants, Juniper & Ivy, a group of sommeliers, buyers, and members of the media took a break from the busy SommCon schedule to dine with representatives from a handful of Paso Robles wineries. The dinner was devoted to the Bordeaux varieties grown in the Central Coast region—especially Cabernet Sauvignon, which makes up a significant portion of the plantings there—and was hosted by *The SOMM Journal* and the Paso Robles CAB Collective.



*Juniper & Ivy's private room was filled with some of San Diego's best sommeliers.*



*Among those in attendance were Karla Poeschel, sommelier at Water Grill; Bob Bath, MS; Sela Arroyo, lead bartender/Beverage Captain at Fairmont Grand Del Mar; and Christophe Bureau, wine buyer/Banquet Captain at Fairmont Grand Del Mar.*

Master Sommelier Bob Bath, Professor of Wine & Beverage Studies at the Culinary Institute of America at Greystone, commenced the evening's proceedings by sharing that although he's lived in Napa Valley for the last 27 years, his heart is very much in Paso Robles. "When I looked at this region 30 years ago, I thought, 'Will the region ever know success? Is this ever going to happen?' But it is happening. It's really one of the most exciting areas in California," insisted Bath, who went on to highlight a few key characteristics that have led to the appellation's ascendancy.

### **Paso Robles' X-Factor**

First was the diversity of Paso Robles' terroir, which necessitated the formation of 11 sub-AVAs within the broader region. While most would generally consider the area to be hot, it actually ranges between II-IV on the Winkler scale, with wide variations in rainfall and soil composition depending on the location. In addition, the dramatic diurnal temperature swings and the commonly found calcareous soils aid

in acid retention, allowing for full ripeness, structure, and balance. This makes for a winning combination, especially in regards to the cultivation of Bordeaux varieties.

Bath then noted that Paso Robles vintners have a reputation for meticulousness when it comes to farming. "They're very particular about quality, and I think that's how you raise a region up," he said. "That's why Paso Robles has become so popular in only 30 years." Furthering their attention to detail, the region's producers are committed to farming responsibly. Paso Robles has an arid climate, so water scarcity is at the forefront of everyone's mind; as a result, many wineries are either certified sustainable, organic, or Biodynamic with the intention of preserving their agricultural traditions well into the future.

Despite expansion in recent years, Paso Robles still has a small-town feel: Many of its wineries are

both family-owned and -operated. In fact, every producer in attendance at the dinner boasted owners who were directly involved in day-to-day operations. Each epitomized not only Bath's enthusiasm but also the energetic growth so often attributed to the region.

### **The Presenters**

Before taking their seats for a delectable multicourse, family-style dinner, the guests were greeted with glasses of the 2018 Ancient Peaks Sauvignon Blanc, which lifted the senses with bright acidity and fresh notes of guava and kumquat.

Niner Wine Estates Director of Sales Tucker Spear, who's been with the winery since 2010, introduced the first bottlings of the night. Proprietors Richard and Pam Niner established Niner Wine Estates in 2001, and their son, Andy, now oversees operations as







**Kate Edgcombe, Wine Director at Paon Restaurant & Wine Bar, and Shannon McKinley, Wine Director at The Winery Restaurant & Wine Bar La Jolla, pose for a picture with presenter Tucker Spear, Director of Sales at Niner Wine Estates.**

President. The brand's estate vineyards are SIP Certified and all of its structures are both solar-powered and LEED Certified, making Niner Wine Estates one of the most environmentally friendly wineries in the business.

Likewise, its wines are intended to be elegant, balanced, and not overmanipulated. "I think that's what Paso Robles has learned over the years. We have no problem getting things ripe and jammy, but we want backbone and structure, so we're going to pick a little early," explained Spear. The 2016 Cabernet Franc highlighted this stylistic decision: Driven by spicy red fruits, graphite, and blue flowers, it complemented the lighter courses of the evening.

Although Paso Robles is still relatively young compared to other domestic regions, there are still a few historic treasures to be found here. Linda and Jim Madsen, co-owners of The Farm Winery with renowned Argentine winemaker Santiago Achával, reinforced this at the dinner as they shared bottles of their 2016 Cardinal Cabernet Sauvignon; only 114 cases were made from their 6-acre Old Bailey Vineyard, which is the oldest Cabernet Sauvignon-producing site in Paso Robles that's still in operation today. Planted in 1964, it's been described by the owners



**Sextant Wines assistant winemaker Alex Frost presented the winery's El Pomar Reserve Cabernet Sauvignon.**

as their "reason to make wine in Paso Robles," according to the winery's website. (The Madsens and Achával also manage another small estate in Willow Creek.)

Jim stressed to the attendees that the wine should be viewed separately from its varietal character: "Cardinal represents *this* single old vineyard," he emphasized. "When

you taste it, you know it couldn't come from anywhere else in the world." True to its pedigree, the wine boasted dusty pomegranate aromas and savory notes of red figs, raspberry-tea tannins, molasses, and red-plum skin.

The final presenter was California Polytechnic State University graduate Alex Frost, who joined Sextant Wines in 2015 and cur-

rently serves as assistant winemaker. In 2001, proprietors Craig and Nancy Stoller planted their first vines in the El Pomar District of Paso Robles with the intention of growing their already established nursery business; they quickly caught the wine bug, however, and launched their winery.

While the couple's passion for horticulture has led them to experiment with over two dozen varieties on their 95-acre property, their portfolio focuses primarily on Bordeaux- and Rhône-based wines. Their 2014 El Pomar Reserve Cabernet Sauvignon underscored the quality this part of the region is known for, and despite the use of 100% new French oak, the wine was quite soft and sensual, with plush red fruit, savory herbs, subtle hints of cocoa, and a silky texture.

As the dinner progressed, Bath pointed to both the past and present nature of the region. Previously known for ripe, high-octane Zinfandels, Paso Robles has evolved largely due to extensive research in farming and improved viticultural techniques. Its growing prominence has also led to an influx in talent attracted in part by the area's affordability. To that point, we've yet to see the full potential of Paso Robles, leading Bath to insist, "What you're tasting here is really the future." ❧



# A Beverage for the Ages

EXPLORING MEAD'S RESURGENCE AT SOMMCON SAN DIEGO

story by Michelle Ball / photos by Jeremy Ball

**LARGELY RELEGATED TO** homebrewing during the late 19th and the 20th centuries, honey wine (aka mead) is experiencing a contemporary resurgence—a trend reflected by the rise in meaderies across the United States from just 25 in 2003 to over 400 today.

Mead is linked to many ancient civilizations, including the Greeks, Romans, and Vikings; in fact, chemical analyses of pottery crafted circa 7000–6600 B.C. in a Neolithic village in China has proven that the oldest known alcoholic beverage came from a mixture of honey, rice, and fruit. “It’s the ‘What’s old is new again’ philosophy,” mused Master Sommelier Gillian Ballance, Senior Education Manager–Americas at Treasury Wine Estates, as she hosted SommCon’s first seminar devoted to mead in San Diego last fall.

*Panelists from Sap House and Lost Cause shared raspberry-based meads loaded with concentration, pronounced kirsch, and hints of hibiscus.*



Ballance said she found herself intrigued by the ancient beverage after attending a Somm Day event on mead at the University of California, Davis. There, she met Ash Fischbein, mead maker and proprietor at Sap House Meadery in Ossipee, New Hampshire, who joined the SommCon panel. “We get the benefit in the mead world of both wine and beer because there are no rules with making mead,” said Fischbein, who opened Sap House in 2011.

That said, there is just one require-



Ash Fischbein (left) of Sap House Meadery and Billy Beltz (right) of Lost Cause Meadery with Master Sommelier Gillian Ballance.

ment: Honey must account for 51% of the starting fermentable sugars by weight, but beyond that, the lack of restriction allows for endless possibilities. Mead can be still or carbonated; pure or infused with herbs, fruits, and/or spices; very sweet or bone dry. Its alcohol content, meanwhile, can range anywhere from 8% to 20% ABV. This necessitates some due diligence on the buyer’s part, but it also all but ensures that there’s a mead to match every palate.

“I think people really enjoy having something completely different that they can’t get elsewhere,” explained panelist Billy Beltz, co-founder of Lost Cause Meadery in San Diego, California. Surrounded by a sea of craft breweries, Beltz assumed off-dry to semi-sweet carbonated meads

would be best for attracting new palates. Instead, he’s seen many customers fall for meads distinctly different from the wines or beers they’re used to drinking.

At the SommCon seminar, Ballance and the participating producers succeeded in highlighting the category’s versatility. The tasting lineup began with a Moscow Mule riff made with Schramm’s Ginger Mead, vodka, and ginger beer to demonstrate mead’s efficacy among mixologists; next up were Heidrun Meadery’s traditional-method sparkling made from Hawaiian macadamia nuts and oak-aged, fruit-infused expressions from both Sap House and Lost Cause. Together, they revealed that mead is so much more than honey, water, and yeast—it’s a beverage for the ages. 



# SHARPNESS

VS.

# Softness

STORY BY JESSIE BIRSCHBACH / PHOTOS BY JEREMY BALL



*The seminar panelists from left to right: Alessia Botturi, California Manager, LUX Wines; Roberto Ruscito, Export Manager, Castiglion del Bosco; Sara Maule, Italian Fine Wine Specialist, Frederick Wildman; Lars Leicht, VP/Communication & Trade Relations, The SOMM Journal; Master Sommelier Brian Cronin, National Education Manager, Taub Family Selections; Sharron McCarthy, VP of Wine Education, Banfi Vintners; Davide Rosso, owner, Azienda Agricola Giovanni Rosso; and Adam Verona, North American Brand Ambassador, Michele Chiarlo.*



*Maisons Marques & Domaines SVP of Marketing & Communication Xavier Barlier and Roberto Ruscito, pictured with Lars Leicht (center), were on hand to represent Castiglion del Bosco.*



*Alessia Botturi discusses Tortonian blue marl, a soil commonly found in the La Morra commune of Barolo.*

## A SEMINAR DISTINGUISHING BRUNELLO AND BAROLO PUTS SOMMS IN THE HOT SEAT AT SOMMCON SAN DIEGO

**AS HE OPENED HIS SOMMCON** San Diego panel “*Not Since Lunch: Unconfusing Barolo and Brunello*,” *SOMM Journal* VP/Communication & Trade Relations Lars Leicht quoted an old friend: “When you compare Piedmont to Tuscany, you can tell by the landscape alone that things are going to be different.”

In conceiving the panel’s title, Leicht—who’s skilled at finding humor in the complications of Italian wine—was inspired by wine writer Harry Vaughn’s famous response when asked about the last time he mixed up Bordeaux and Burgundy. Although the geography of Piedmont and Tuscany are quite different, as Leicht’s friend can attest, the wines that the regions produce are often confused with each other. To illustrate this, Leicht played a clip from the 2012 documentary *SOMM* in which two MS candidates debate this quandary post-exam.

Considering the disparate origin stories of the wines presented at the panel, the conundrum only became more maddening. As Leicht said, “Go to Tuscany, [where] you’ve got the rolling hills—easy, flowing, open. [There’s a] mild climate, a little breezy. Even its people are more open, and the wines are more like that too. If you go to Barolo country, you’ve got these jagged hills and smaller vineyards. Piedmont is just on the other side of the Alps. There’s a lot of snow. It’s cold! If you walk into a small town in Piedmont, you’re probably going to get a scowl. These sound like tasting notes for Barolo: moody and closed!”

GuildSomm’s compendium of grape varieties has trained sommeliers to look for notes like tart cherry, rose petal, and licorice in Barolo wines. For Brunello, though, flavors like sour cherry, tomato, and balsamic as well as traces of herbs like thyme and rosemary are more apparent. While these characteristics are noticeably different, they’re complicated by a definite overlap in aroma and flavor.

One of the keys to avoiding confusion, then, lies in another characteristic altogether: texture. After having tasted through four

or five wines, Leicht made an observation: “There’s a sharpness to Nebbiolo, where Sangiovese has more of a softness.” Master Sommelier Brian Cronin, National Education Manager for Taub Family Selections, admitted to throwing a bit of a curveball with the Fontanafredda 2013 Barolo he presented. “I chose the Reserve because there’s a lot of ripeness and plushness in the middle of the palate,” he explained. “I wanted something to maybe seem a little more difficult because of this plushness, but I think the shape and the texture are still Nebbiolo.”

In terms of vinification techniques, Barolo must be 100% Nebbiolo and aged for at least three years (five for Riserva). Brunello, comprising 100% Sangiovese, must be aged for a minimum of five years (six for Riserva). In Piedmont, you’ll find calcareous soils and sandstone, both with dollops of clay deposits, while limestone, galestro, schist, clay, and even volcanic soils are common in Montalcino. Leicht, a former resident, said he was always astounded by the diversity of the topography during his bike rides through the Tuscan countryside. “One vineyard looked like somebody dumped a bunch of talcum powder in it. The next vineyard looked like somebody put coffee grinds in it; the next, like somebody dumped Crayola sienna crayons,” he recalled.

Putting aside my jealousy of Leicht’s time under the Tuscan sun, I had to tip my hat to him, as the industry veteran had seamlessly incorporated an engaging activity into the seminar: a live poll. The blind-tasting reveal is a common format, but witnessing the votes fluctuate before each wine was unveiled made it all the more exciting. And, of course, the packed hall of know-it-all somms was up for the challenge. As Leicht said, “We’re in a room full of professionals—you know the grid. Apply it. Ladies and gents, I ask you, wine number one: Is it a Barolo or a Brunello?” And with that, we eagerly began to swirl.

Read on for the results of the room’s assessment and a summary of each wine.





## *Fattoria dei Barbi* 2013 BRUNELLO

**AUDIENCE VOTE:** 38% Barolo, 62% Brunello

**PRESENTER:** Sara Maule, Italian Fine Wine Specialist, Frederick Wildman

**THINGS TO KNOW:**

- Fattoria dei Barbi is one of the oldest estates in Montalcino; dating back 131 vintages, it became the first Brunello to debut in the United States in 1962.
- Although Fattoria dei Barbi owns a total of 756 acres, just 64 make up the winery's estate in southeastern Montalcino.
- The Cinelli Colombini family, the winery's proprietors, have owned land in Montalcino since 1320.

“ I think a lot of people here say it's Barolo because this wine is very light [in] color, where usually Brunello is deeper. Fattoria dei Barbi is very elegant, and it's not more fruit, it's more earth. You can really feel the soil here. This is why, in my opinion, this Brunello is unique.” —Sara Maule



## *Renato Ratti* 2015 MARCENASCO BAROLO

**AUDIENCE VOTE:** 63% Barolo, 37% Brunello

**PRESENTER:** Alessia Botturi, California Manager, LUX Wines

**THINGS TO KNOW:**

- The Marcenasco vineyard is located in the La Morra commune of Barolo, a renowned area known for its feminine, delicate expressions.
- Renato Ratti owns 86 acres spanning six vineyards.
- Marcenasco predominantly comprises Tortonian blue marl. Wines grown in this soil are said to be soft and fruit-forward, with powerful aromatics.

“ Renato Ratti was truly a pioneer and innovator of Barolo. Having traveled extensively through Burgundy, Ratti returned to Barolo in the '60s and applied a similar classification system based on the famous French region. This later became the basis for Barolo's official delineation. In 1965, Ratti became the first producer in Barolo to use a single vineyard on the label.” —Alessia Botturi





## *Argiano*

### 2014 BRUNELLO DI MONTALCINO

**AUDIENCE VOTE:** 54% Barolo, 47% Brunello

**PRESENTER:** Alessia Botturi, California Manager, LUX Wines

**THINGS TO KNOW:**

- Argiano's estate is located in the southwestern corner of Montalcino, one of the warmest and driest areas in Tuscany.
- The winery's certified-organic vineyards forgo the use of synthetic chemicals.
- Argiano's soil profile consists of marl and clay with limestone.

Argiano is a historic producer in Brunello. The estate has been there for 500 years and is one of the founding members of the [Consorzio del vino Brunello di Montalcino]."  
—Alessia Botturi



## *Michele Chiarlo*

### 2013 CEREQUIO BAROLO

**AUDIENCE VOTE:** 70% Barolo, 30% Brunello

**PRESENTER:** Adam Verona, North American Brand Ambassador, Michele Chiarlo

**THINGS TO KNOW:**

- Located in the La Morra district, the 2.5-hectare Cerequio vineyard harbors vines averaging from 35 to 50 years old.
- Michele Chiarlo released his first vintage of Barolo in 1958. His sons Stefano and Alberto now run the winery, with Stefano serving as the lead winemaker.

Michele Chiarlo felt it was important to have [vineyards with] south[ern] and specifically southwest[ern exposure]. Something that Michele's father, Pietro, taught him is that the best vineyard sites are those where the snow melts first. It's fascinating to see when you drive through Barolo in December that the north side of the hill always looks like a glacier, with 3 to 4 inches of snow. The south side, especially Cerequio, has no snow at all—it's the first to melt. We think that this exposure is the best for making this unique wine." —Adam Verona





## Castello Banfi

### 2014 POGGIO ALLE MURA BRUNELLO DI MONTALCINO

**AUDIENCE VOTE:** 53% Barolo, 47% Brunello

**PRESENTER:** Sharron McCarthy, VP of Wine Education, Banfi Vintners

**THINGS TO KNOW:**

- Banfi's 2,100 acres of estate property in Montalcino are a "constellation of single vineyards" representing 20 soil types and 100 microclimates.
- The producer is known for its technological advancements, including its extensive clonal research of Sangiovese and its use of wood/steel hybrid fermenters.
- Named for the 12th-century castle its vineyard source surrounds, Poggio alle Mura is crafted using three Sangiovese clones Banfi selected out of 650 for an optimal Brunello expression.

/// This wine came about in the 1997 vintage. The vines were only five years old, but *Wine Spectator* actually gave us 96 points. We feel that in both good vintages and bad vintages, based on the clonal selections, that we're getting an extraordinary wine."  
—Sharron McCarthy



## Castiglion del Bosco

### 2013 BRUNELLO

**AUDIENCE VOTE:** 43% Barolo, 57% Brunello

**PRESENTER:** Roberto Ruscito, Export Manager, Castiglion del Bosco

**THINGS TO KNOW:**

- Although Castiglion del Bosco has opted not to use "organic" on its label, the wine is organically produced.
- Bosco's 103-acre Capanna Vineyard is divided into crus and then allocated to three different labels: Campo del Drago Brunello di Montalcino Cru, Milicento Brunello di Montalcino Riserva, and Brunello di Montalcino Black Label.
- Massimo Ferragamo purchased the estate in 2003, but the property's boundaries have remained unchanged for over 500 years.

/// As you can see on this map of Montalcino, Bosco sits isolated on this northwest corner. You don't see many producers around us and the property is huge. It represents 8% of the municipality of Montalcino, but we've divided our main vineyard into crus and most of our soils offer a very clear image of galestro [rocky, clay-based shale and sandstone slate]. We are the fifth-biggest producer in terms of hectares allowed to produce Brunello, but because of our commitment to quality, we don't buy grapes or juice and we keep low average yield. As a result, we rank 35th in terms of bottles of Brunello produced, so we can be considered among the smallest and most selective producers."  
—Roberto Ruscito





*Giovanni Rosso*  
**2014 BAROLO SERRALUNGA  
D'ALBA**

**AUDIENCE VOTE:** 89% Barolo, 11% Brunello

**PRESENTER:** Davide Rosso, owner; Azienda Agricola Giovanni Rosso (imported by Vias Imports)

**THINGS TO KNOW:**

- Giovanni Rosso Serralunga Barolo is a blend of fruit from nine vineyards ranging from 800 to 1,200 feet in elevation.
- Giovanni Rosso Barolos are fermented in concrete vats before they undergo a secondary malolactic fermentation in steel tanks; they're then aged in large French oak barrels.
- Twenty years ago, Giovanni Rosso became the first producer in Serralunga d'Alba to stop using chemicals.

Wine should be a perfect copy of its terroir. There's a minerality in this wine that expresses the character of Serralunga d'Alba: a lot of calcareous soil. I also subscribe to the concept of a softer fermentation, you know, with *délestage* [a maceration technique used to gently extract phenolic compounds and therefore produce a less astringent character] and so on, which is also important to keep the DNA of the terroir." —*Davide Rosso*



*Fontanafredda*  
**2013 BAROLO**

**AUDIENCE VOTE:** 70% Barolo, 30% Brunello

**PRESENTER:** Master Sommelier Brian Cronin, National Education Manager; Taub Family Selections

**THINGS TO KNOW:**

- What began as a hunting lodge and a residence for Vittorio Emanuele's mistress in 1858 was eventually transformed into a winery and 247 acres of vines; the property also harbors a forest and a village with a church and school.
- Employing indigenous yeasts, the winery ferments its grapes in both concrete and stainless-steel tanks.
- Fontanafredda practices sustainable farming (organic, integrated, and Biodynamic) and ensures that the local grapes it purchases are free of chemical residues.

The vineyards are this massive amphitheater. This is a Reserve coming from the La Rossa vineyard, which has a lot more calcareous soil. This brings out the minerality and texture—that nice powdery texture right down the center of your tongue." —*Brian Cronin* SJ



# MANY SHADES OF GREEN

THE EVOLUTION OF PORTUGAL'S

## *Vinho Verde Region*

STORY BY LARS LEICHT  
PHOTOS BY YVONNE ALBINOWSKI

*Vinho Verde has nine subregions:  
Monção e Melgaço, Lima, Cávado, Ave, Basto,  
Amarante, Baião, Sousa, and Paiva.*







*Bruno Almeida, sommelier at Tocqueville in New York, NY, recently held a series of master classes to educate fellow sommeliers on Portugal's Vinho Verde region.*

# M

ention the name Vinho Verde and you'll likely conjure thoughts of a fresh, cheery apéritif wine with bright acidity. Terms like complexity and ageworthiness may not necessarily come to mind, nor would pairings with meats, roasts, or cheeses, let alone a full meal. It turns out, though, that

these limited perceptions are as outdated and woefully uninformed as the notion that Chianti is just a simple, thin, and light wine that comes in a straw flask.

Like all great wines, Vinho Verde comes from a region that's complex and diverse. In the northwest corner of Portugal along the country's uppermost border with Spain, vineyards draw character from their proximity to the Atlantic Ocean and various rivers and tributaries as well as the surrounding mountainous landscape. Despite this, Vinho Verde's reputation was previously defined by inexpensive and slightly fizzy white and rosé in unconventionally shaped bottles (think J.M. da Fonseca's Lancers sparkling wine, packaged in a short and stocky clay vessel) that were wildly popular from the late 1960s through the early 1980s.

But, like all of the world's most acclaimed regions, Vinho Verde has evolved over time—very recent times, in fact. Relatively new innovations in grape-growing and winemaking technique make contemporary Vinho Verde a category of undeniable character and style that's completely transformed its image. Prior to this shift, the emphasis was more on quantity than quality, but a seed was planted nonetheless, according to Portuguese native Bruno Almeida, sommelier at Tocqueville in New York City. "We have to thank those big names for putting Portuguese wines on the map," says Almeida. "Now a new generation of winemakers are producing high quality even as production levels grow."



*The lineup at Bar Petite in Huntington, NY.*





*Bruno Almeida points out the difference between the ripening tendencies of Trajadura and Alvarinho. Pictured behind him are Dr. Ralph Parisi, Jim Botto, and Luigi Quarta, all of Luigi Q in Hicksville, NY.*



*Restaurant consultant Ross Greenberg applauds Bruno Almeida at the conclusion of the seminar. Sitting with Greenberg from left to right are Piero Casilicchio of Epicurean 360; Imane Khamkham of Sopexa; and Linda Machado, Patti Freeman, and Robert Freeman, all of Craft 387 in Plainview, NY.*

## Exploring the Region

Almeida recently conducted a series of seminars to help educate sommeliers on how sense of place is expressed in Portuguese wines. Vinho Verde, he noted, is Europe's largest demarcated wine region; its nine subregions are Monção e Melgaço, Lima, Cávado, Basto, Ave, Amarante, Baião, Sousa, and Paiva.

The Atlantic Ocean to the west endows Vinho Verde with high annual rainfall and a prevalence of cloudy, humid days. The aforementioned network of rivers and tributaries, meanwhile, spans from the

Minho to the north to the Douro on the region's southern boundary. Mountains to the east and south isolate it from the more continental climate experienced inland, and soils vary from heavy granite to sandy loam with high levels of chalk, alkaline, and potassium.

These conditions yield wines with fresh and lively aromas as well as moderate to high acidity, but the expressions of Monção e Melgaço are even more distinct: The area benefits from lower rainfall and higher temperatures than the rest of Vinho Verde and features granite-based soils characteristic of

the mountain ranges within its borders.

The Vinho Verde DOP distinguishes Monção e Melgaço as the only subregion authorized to produce wine exclusively from Alvarinho—one of seven indigenous grapes recommended by the local regulatory body out of the 19 permitted in the region—and label it as such. The others are only permitted to use Alvarinho in a blend with other varieties, among them Loureiro, Trajadura, Alvelhão, Borraçal, Pedral, and Vinhão. “[The other subregions] might even be a little jealous of that fact,” said Almeida. “Alvarinho grown in this area helps . . . Monção e Melgaço stand out.”

Almeida described the wines of Lima, Ave, Sousa, Basto, and Cávado as having a more coastal influence, making them lighter and more aromatic. The wines of Amarante and Baião, he added, tend to be crisp but richer as a result of warmer weather and soils with more schist.

The commonly used Trajadura grape has largely fallen out of favor for its tendency to ripen slowly, but the thick-skinned and bone-dry Alvarinho, on the other hand, is an early-maturing variety that's resistant to rot, powdery mildew, and other maladies. That's a coveted asset in a warm and wet environment like northern Portugal, where some say the moniker Verde—Portuguese for “green”—derives from the region's lush vegetation. Given that and other assets like its antioxidative qualities and relatively high alcohol content, it's no surprise that Alvarinho was recently permitted in white Bordeaux blends in response to climate change.

Across the border in the Spanish region of Galicia, the same variety is known as Albariño, where it appears in Rías Baixas wines known for citrus and tart-apple character; by contrast, in Portugal, the emphasis is more on a bouquet of tropical fruit as well as minerality. The grape's influence is spreading: It's now grown in California, Oregon, and Washington as well.

In his seminars, Almeida noted that Alvarinho's complexity appeals to those who enjoy Pinot Grigio, Grüner Veltliner, or Riesling. Describing it as an all-year-round wine, he hailed its vibrant acidity, medium to medium-plus body, aging potential, and multidimensional aromas.

“Vinho Verde is a perfect fit for Mediterranean, Thai, Indian, Middle Eastern, and Mexican cuisines,” he said. “Beyond [serv-



At the New York tastings, Almeida showcased six Vinho Verde wines from Monção e Melgaço.

ing as an] apéritif and pairing with light dishes like falafel, sushi and sashimi, fish tacos, and ceviches, it can also handle pork sandwiches, tempura, and fritto misto. Alvarinho from Monção e Melgaço can take it further with dishes like garlic shrimp, broiled cod, or a juicy pork chop.”

On Tocqueville’s international list, there are three Vinho Verdes—two of which hail from Monção e Melgaço. While they’re among the least expensive wines available, says Almeida, they also might be the most versatile. He often suggests guests try them alongside such offerings as the restaurant’s Moroccan-spiced braised lamb shank or its applewood-smoked, slow-roasted rack of Berkshire pork. SJ



Patti Freeman talks Vinho Verde with Dean Kois of Reststar Hospitality Group.

## The Best of Vinho Verde

**Alvarinho Deu La Deu**, which comes from the Adegas Cooperativas Regionais de Monção, could be described as a classic approach to Vinho Verde. It shows off flavors of tropical fruit that are both round and slightly tart, with elegance endowed from sandy soils.

**Muralhas de Monção** is from the same cooperative, but it was the only wine at the tasting that’s not 100% Alvarinho: Winemaker Fernando Moura blends in roughly 10% Trajadura and subjects a portion of the wine to malolactic fermentation. The result is linear, with citrus and almond notes.

Exemplifying the multidimensional nature of its variety, **João Portugal Ramos Alvarinho** is made from grapes grown in granite-dominant soils close to a riverbed in a climate that’s slightly warmer than what’s typically experienced in the region. After the grapes undergo a “cold soak” pre-fermentative maceration, about 10% of the wine ages in French oak. Showing notes of baked apple and good structure, it’s round and soft, but its minerality shines through.

A mineral character is also found in the **Quinta do Regueiro Reserva** from fruit grown at higher altitudes on the Melgaço side of the subregion; the wine expresses bracing acidity and chalkiness. Almeida explained that “reserva” is more of a marketing term in Portugal and does not denote extended aging.

From the oldest winery in Melgaço, **Soalheiro Granit** continued the common thread of minerality while also displaying bright fruit and great structure and texture. Extended lees contact imparts a slight yeastiness on the palate.

**Soalheiro Primeiras Vinhas** hails from the same winery and is made from organic grapes grown on 40-plus-year-old vines; a portion of the wine ages in oak casks. Its exceptional salinity—which can be attributed to the influence of the nearby Atlantic Ocean—complements its chalky minerality. With an average retail price of \$30, it was the most expensive of the wines featured, followed by the Granit at \$22; the first four range between \$12 and \$19.

All represent outstanding value—a quality not only consistent with Vinho Verde’s past but that also bodes well for its future.





**WITH LOVE**

FROM THE

**RUSSIAN**

RIVER

**VALLEY**

**DELOACH VINEYARDS** LEADS  
SOMM CAMPERS IN A REGIONAL  
EXPLORATION OF WINE AND VINE

**STORY BY CHRIS SAWYER**  
**PHOTOS BY BETH BAUGHER**

Pictured from left to right: Dylan Elliott, Digital Marketing Specialist, Boisset Collection, Yountville, CA; Ken Hoernlein, Vice President of Sales, Boisset Collection, Saint Helena, CA; Joette Callaway, Wine Director, Restaurant Medure, Ponte Vedra Beach, FL; Chris Sawyer, SOMM Journal contributing editor and sommelier at Gravenstein Grill, Sebastopol, CA; Judd Fruia, Beverage Director, Front Burner Group Dining, Dallas, TX; Jackie Eash, sommelier/Beverage Director, Sea Salt, St. Petersburg, FL; Jean-Charles Boisset, proprietor, DeLoach Vineyards and Boisset Collection, Saint Helena, CA; Paul Carayas, Beverage Director, Chez TJ, Mountain View, CA; Amy Ehrnsperger, Associate Director of Event and Conference Services, American Museum of Natural History, New York, NY; Peter Demarest, sommelier/master blender, Grand Bohemian Hotel, Charleston, SC; Vincent Havard, sommelier/proprietor, Mercy Wine Bar, Addison, TX; Paul Frampton, Wine Specialist, The Broadmoor, Colorado Springs, CO; Thomas Poor, proprietor, Bin 66, Rehoboth Beach, DE; Tom Bachmann, proprietor, Bin 66; Jonathan Rezabek, sommelier, The Wine Store, Alpharetta, GA; Kelly Crook, Beverage Manager, Mason's at Loews Vanderbilt Hotel, Nashville, TN; Julia Jinks, DeLoach Brand Manager, Boisset Collection, Yountville, CA; John Duhig, Beverage Director, American Museum of Natural History, New York, NY; Sara Pierce, Associate Brand Manager, Boisset Collection, Yountville, CA; and Patrick Egan, Marketing & Communications Director, Boisset Collection, Saint Helena, CA.



## ICONIC RUSSIAN RIVER VALLEY WINERY DELOACH VINEYARDS

has a lot to celebrate as it marks its 45th harvest this year: the collective advancement that the brand, the appellation, and the broader Sonoma County region have all experienced over the past five decades.

When Cecil and Christine DeLoach planted the first Pinot Noir vines on Olivet Road in 1971, the valley began its magical transformation from a pastoral agricultural zone dotted with orchards, pastures, and small groupings of gnarly old vines to the home of some of the most exciting Chardonnay and Pinot Noir vineyards in the New World. After releasing their first vintage in 1975, the family became major leaders of this conversion, with Christine playing an instrumental role in

helping the Russian River Valley earn its AVA status in 1983.

DeLoach Vineyards continues to make a name for itself today through not only its Biodynamic farming methods but also the impeccable winemaking techniques introduced by the Burgundy-based Boisset family, who purchased the winery in 2003. To study its evolution and the exciting future that lies ahead, I joined 13 sommeliers and wine buyers for the annual DeLoach Russian River SOMM Camp, an intensive educational series co-hosted by *The SOMM Journal* and the Boisset Collection that was held over two days last fall.



*Jackie Eash, sommelier and Beverage Director at Sea Salt in St. Petersburg, FL, takes a quick break between punch-downs.*



**DELOACH VINEYARDS CONTINUES TO MAKE A NAME FOR ITSELF TODAY THROUGH NOT ONLY ITS BIODYNAMIC FARMING METHODS BUT ALSO THE IMPECCABLE WINEMAKING TECHNIQUES INTRODUCED BY THE BURGUNDY-BASED BOISSET FAMILY, WHO PURCHASED THE WINERY IN 2003.**

## “The True Sense of Terroir”

During the opening-night dinner, second-generation proprietor Jean-Charles Boisset (aka JCB) called his family's purchase of DeLoach Vineyards a “dream come true.” Beyond providing a chance to extend their Burgundian roots into California, the acquisition represented a key step in the development of Boisset Collection, an integrated portfolio of luxury wines from the family's estate properties in Burgundy as well as from the historic Buena Vista Winery in Sonoma Valley and Napa Valley's Raymond Vineyards.

“Love for world-class Pinot Noir and Chardonnay knows no boundaries,” remarked Boisset, who recently released his JCB Passion Collection, a line of crystal glassware and decanters crafted by Baccarat. When asked why his family chose to start in the Russian River Valley rather than other winegrowing areas they'd researched in California and Oregon's Willamette Valley, Boisset replied, “In particular, we fell in love with Sonoma County and the true sense of terroir that makes the DeLoach Estate and the other dynamic sites we work with in the prestigious areas

of Sonoma Coast, Petaluma Gap, Carneros, and Napa Valley so special.”

Nestled in the rolling hills between the city of Santa Rosa and the small towns of Graton and Forestville, the 20-acre DeLoach Estate lies smack dab in the center of the Russian River Valley. In a departure from the volcanic soils and the sandy seabed to the east and west, respectively, the vines on the Olivet Bench are planted on Huichica Series soil, a clay-based loam layered on top of an ancient riverbed and rock formations pushing toward the surface. Unlike the fertile dirt found in the lower-lying areas, this soil naturally restrains vine vigor and yields while still providing plenty of nutrients for the vines; it also imparts minerality in the finished wines.

Less than 20 miles from the Pacific Ocean, lingering fog gives way to daytime sunshine, powerful maritime winds in the late afternoon, and cool air blowing in from the nearby Laguna de Santa Rosa wetlands at night. The resulting temperature fluctuation of 30–40 degrees allows the clusters to ripen slowly while developing complex flavors and retaining natural acidity.

The person behind the impressive new lineup of terroir-driven wines—crafted with high-quality fruit from the DeLoach Estate and other prestigious sites in the area—is Director of Sonoma Winemaking Brian Maloney, who earned his viticulture and enology degree at the University of California, Davis. He joined the DeLoach winemaking team just eight months before the Boissets purchased the brand. “I like to say I came with the property,” quips Maloney, who grew up nearby on his family's ranch on the Sonoma-Marin County border.



## Re-Energizing the Estate Vineyard

Although the DeLoach team received the coveted *Wine Enthusiast* Wine of the Year award back in 2004 for their 30th Anniversary Cuvée Pinot Noir, the health of the estate vineyard was in decline at that time due to depleted nutrients and microbial activity in the soil. This not only produced low yields but also made the vines vulnerable to harmful nematodes that were methodically eating the roots.

With this fragile ecosystem at a tipping point, the winery implemented a sweeping series of environmentally conscious changes: removing the vines at the estate once the 2004 vintage was complete; recharging the soil by tilling in compost while the land lay fallow in 2005; and, finally, beginning the process of rotating cover crops in a 17-acre section of the property that would become home in 2006 to eight separate blocks of Pinot Noir and three blocks of Chardonnay. Today, each block has its own distinct combination of clones, rootstocks, trellis systems, spacing, and row direction—all designed to capture the true essence of the terroir in the flavor profiles of the resulting wines.

To ensure the health of the vines, the sustainable and organic farming methods used during this period laid the foundation for the entire estate's transformation into a Biodynamic "Theater of Nature," a name the Boissets coined when the property was officially Demeter certified in 2009.

## Building the Theater of Nature

To learn more about the farming principles developed by Austrian scientist and philosopher Rudolf Steiner in the 1920s, the campers were joined by Joe Papendick, the Boisset Collection's Garden and Landscape Manager.

As Papendick explained, using a Biodynamic approach requires viewing an entire estate as a self-contained, self-sustaining system. This in part involves bolstering biodiversity by replacing synthetic chemicals with natural substitutes that include organic matter and manure from chickens, goats, and cows; planting fruit trees; and designing gardens and insectaries that at-

tract "good" bugs, which ward off potentially harmful ones.

Today, Papendick schedules a three-part series of applications in accordance with the lunar calendar; by capturing the energy of the earth, sun, and moon, it works to strengthen the soils and crops. The first step involves the use of specialty "teas" he makes with plants such as chamomile, stinging nettle, oak bark, dandelion, valerian, yarrow, and horsetails and either sprays or applies through the irrigation system to combat mildew. Second,

he utilizes cow horns stuffed with dung to create a manure-based tea, which is sprayed at the base of each vine to stimulate microbial activity when winter ends. Finally, he crushes silica (ground quartz) into fine crystals and dusts it on the vines to intensify photosynthesis and boost the vitality of each plant in the fall.

Over the past decade, the use of these holistic farming methods has fostered a healthier environment for the vines while elevating the pedigree of the Pinot Noir and Chardonnay programs to an entirely



*Boisset Collection Director of Winemaking Brian Maloney discusses the impact that maritime winds have on the Russian River Valley.*



*Hawk Hill Vineyard owners Bill (pictured) and Margaret Yarak are DeLoach grower-partners.*





*Local squab, prepared by chef Jesse Mcquarrie of Santa Rosa-based Feast Catering, was paired with two wines from Boisset Collection: the Chateau Buena Vista 2017 Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir and the Bouchard Aîné & Fils 2015 Clos du Roi Beaune Premier Cru.*

new level. This can be said not only of the estate but also of the other sites DeLoach works with in Northern California, which total nearly 160 planted acres that are either officially organic and Biodynamic or in the process of being certified. "Dead soils make bad wine," Maloney said during the camp. "If you look at our soils in comparison to other vineyards, you will see . . . much more potential in the quality of the wines we make and much more health [within the estate] as a whole."

## From Vineyard to Bottle

With harvest in full swing, day two at the DeLoach SOMM Camp began in the vineyards, where winegrower Sophie Drucker

provided an introduction to the terroir of the Olivet Bench and the clonal selections planted at the estate. To contribute to the 2019 vintage, the team picked the dazzling dark-purple clusters of the La Tache selection in Block 5 before moving on to the sorting table to remove any green material or underripe berries. They then tasted small-lot samples from grapes that had already been picked and measured the acid levels and pH of other samples at various points in the fermentation cycle.

In the cellar, DeLoach's Pinot Noir program focuses on traditional Burgundian winemaking techniques that include the use of native-yeast fermentation, small open-top fermenters, and a daily series of punch-downs; this approach helps meld

the pure flavors of the grape juice and skins, build structure, and preserve the subtle notes of minerality, wild herbs, and other natural characteristics that distinguish each block. To explore how these unique traits can add more complexity to the finished wine, the team tasted the DeLoach 2016 Estate Pinot Noir, which is made with a mixture of eight Pinot Noir clones all grown on the estate. In the glass, this elegant, richly textured wine features lofty aromas and deep flavors of wild berries, ripe plum, cherry cola, and spiced nuts as well as a fresh burst of natural acidity that leads to a long, rewarding finish. In short, it's a true exploration of the vineyard in every sip.

To compare various expressions from the 2016 vintage, the afternoon tasting also included three Boisset selections from Burgundy in addition to a pair of Pinot Noirs from Sonoma County that are part of the DeLoach Vineyard Designate Series. One was from the Maboroshi Vineyard in the Sebastopol Hills—a cool-climate area in the southeastern corner of the Russian River Valley—that featured dynamic flavors of dark fruit, strawberry, gingerbread, and hints of wild mushroom. The other was from the high-elevation van der Kamp Vineyard on Sonoma Mountain, which is home to the second-oldest Pinot Noir blocks in Sonoma County as well as newer clones spread across three soil types. According to Maloney, the finished blend from this vineyard has offered more savory character, weight, and firm structure throughout the years than the fruit he works with in the valley.

## A Different Approach to Chardonnay

Attention next shifted to DeLoach's Chardonnay program and the three main clones planted at the estate: the classic Old Wente Clone, a newer Montrachet selection, and the Clone 809 Chardonnay Musqué. To retain the estate benchmarks of fresh citrus, minerality, vibrant acidity, and rich texture, the team typically picks the grapes at 23–23.5 Brix: a big departure from the higher sugar levels that defined the sweet, fruit-driven style of the 1990s.

To investigate the intriguing characteristics of Chardonnay vines grown in



*Pictured from left to right: SOMM campers Chris Sawyer, Paul Carayas, Thomas Poor, Jackie Eash, Judd Fruia, Amy Ehrnsperger, John Duhig, Jonathan Rezabek, Paul Frampton, Vincent Havard, Tom Bachmann, Joette Callaway, and Peter Demarest with Joe Papendick, Garden and Landscape Manager for Boisset Collection.*



*Charleston-based sommelier Peter Demarest holds up a fresh bin of Pinot Noir grapes from the DeLoach estate.*

cooler areas, the campers embarked on an off-site visit to the Hawk Hill Vineyard in a hilly segment of the Green Valley of Russian River Valley AVA. With a rich history dating back to the 1820s, when Russian immigrants planted the first vines here, this terraced site comprises Heritage and Dijon clones planted in fluffy Goldridge soil; with their intense flavors, racy acidity, and great depth, the resulting wines have gained a reputation for quality.

"I love the richness and plushness," commented Maloney, who also makes single-vineyard wines from the nearby Ritchie Vineyard and from Stubbs Vineyard in Marin County. "And while there is a brightness to it, I consider this an example of what I think a California Chardonnay could be and should be."

## Lessons Learned

To connect the dots between DeLoach's past, present, and future, the closing-night dinner featured delicious offerings of old-vine

Zinfandel, which has been a trademark of the Olivet Bench and the eastern segment of the Russian River Valley since vines were planted in the 1880s. "I love the way each wine has its own unique profile, as well as spicy personalities and a little bit of attitude, that cannot be copied because of the age of the vines," said camper John Duhig, the Beverage Director at the American Museum of Natural History in New York.

In the end, the camp reinforced what those familiar with DeLoach Vineyards' 45-year legacy already knew. At the forefront is the fact that every DeLoach and Boisset Collection expression represents a complete team effort from talented individuals who share a passion for crafting exceptional wines. Equally important, though, is the Boisset family's long-term commitment to land stewardship as they work with the local community to preserve the land for future generations. As the somms concurred, that's a philosophy worth believing in—and a model all of wine country would do well to follow. *§§*





*Pictured from left to right: Leslie Sbrocco; Kristin Campbell; Alder Yarrow; David Glancy, MS; Mark Guillaudeu; and Jienna Basaldu.*

# ALL FUNDS AND GAMES FOR WINE EDUCATION

A LUXURIOUS  
EVENT AT THE **SAN  
FRANCISCO WINE  
SCHOOL** RAISED  
SCHOLARSHIP MONEY  
FOR INDUSTRY  
PROFESSIONALS

story by Jess Lander  
photos by Jenni Burgess

**WINE, FOOD, GAMES**, and philanthropy were all on the docket at the fourth annual San Francisco Wine School Luxury Wine Anniversary Celebration & Scholarship Auction, held last November in South San Francisco.

The evening benefitted the Glancy Wine Education Fund, a 501(c)3 nonprofit that provides scholarships to low-income members of the wine trade. According to San Francisco Wine School COO Kristin Campbell, "97% of the students it supports earn less than the living wage. The fund receives over \$100,000 in requests annually and has thus far assisted 37 professionals in advancing their careers." Founder/CEO David Glancy added, "We launched San Francisco Wine School in 2011 and assisted students in need from the beginning. It is thrilling to see the community support of the scholarship fund, which helps so many people pursue their dreams."

In addition to pushing the organization beyond a year-to-date fundraising amount



**San Francisco Wine School founder David Glancy, MS, kicks off the Somm Service Olympics.**



**Sommelier power couple Jienna Basaldu and Mark Guillaudeau revel in some spirited competition.**



**Celebrity judges Alder Yarrow and Leslie Sbrocco discuss the food-and-wine-pairing challenge.**

of \$60,000—breaking a record in doing so—the event increased the fund’s gross proceeds by one-third over the previous year: A portion of the money raised will go toward providing students affected by the recent California wildfires with full program scholarships.

The evening commenced with the Luxury Wine Tasting Bazaar, which featured pours from Spain, England, France, South Africa, Germany, Italy, and North America. Guests sampled the wines alongside caviar and appetizers as they perused and placed bids on more than 30 silent-auction items, including a 2012 bottling of Harlan Estate and VIP tickets to the 2020 World of Pinot Noir celebration in Santa Barbara.

Next, it was on to the Somm Service Olympics, which featured a head-to-head matchup between real-life partners Mark Guillaudeau of Michelin-starred Commis in Oakland and Jienna Basaldu—the first woman to win the Somm Smackdown competition in New York—of The Morris

in San Francisco. Introduced by Glancy as “the power couple of somms,” the pair went one-for-one in the decanter race and sparkling-wine relay, ultimately sealing their friendly tie with a kiss.

Attendees then relocated to the ballroom for the main event: a food-and-wine-pairing competition that unfolded over four courses. Basaldu and Guillaudeau selected a wine for each dish and were critiqued by celebrity judges Leslie Sbrocco—host of the PBS restaurant-review series *Check Please!* and the new nationally syndicated show *100 Days, Drinks, Dishes and Destinations*—and wine-blogging pioneer Alder Yarrow, a columnist for Jancis Robinson’s website who notoriously doesn’t believe in the art of pairing. Guests were also able to cast their votes after each course via their phones.

Before the meal, the somms shared their personal philosophies about pairing wine and food. “I think the wine is the background singer and the food is the pop

star, front and center,” said Basaldu. “Wine is there to harmonize, but you never want to outshine the pop star.”

“I also think in terms of music, but I think of it more as an orchestra,” added Guillaudeau. “I want the voices singing together and becoming much more than the sum of their parts.” In the end, his selections—including a curveball saké pairing with cocoa-rubbed lamb tenderloin—came out on top, besting Basaldu’s 3–1.

After the competition, the fun continued when those who purchased strands of beads earlier in the night tried their luck in a game of heads or tails to win a grand-prize package worth \$1,650. The event concluded with a live auction, during which attendees battled for major prizes like a tasting and tour at Maison Krug in Champagne and an Oceania cruise.

For more information on the Glancy Wine Education Fund, including how to donate, visit [sfwineschool.com/scholarships](http://sfwineschool.com/scholarships). **SJ**





# Meet Your Heroes

## A TRIP TO NAPA VALLEY LED TO A SERIES OF REVELATIONS FOR SOMMELIER JOSEPH SHAUGHNESSY

**HOW OFTEN ARE** we told, “Don’t meet your heroes”? In my experience, this advice has largely held up in my encounters with everyone from politicians to athletes: I’ve always been a bit let down by the reality of their lives.

Within the American wine industry, Napa Valley and the producers therein hold a similar rock-star status. Once underdogs, they’re now the undisputed champions, and as a result, winemakers across the country try to emulate their prowess (to cite another cliché: “Imitation is the sincerest form of flattery”). Based on my previous disappointments, I tried to temper my expectations prior to visiting the region on a trip organized by SommFoundation. Yet halfway through the first day, my monolithic view of Napa Valley wines had been usurped by one informed by nuance, terroir, and sustainability.



*Joseph Shaughnessy (center) with fellow sommeliers during a SommFoundation-led trip to Napa Valley.*

*The group walks through the vineyards of Chappellet on Pritchard Hill.*



The onset of this epiphany happened almost immediately during a visit to the prestigious area of Pritchard Hill. At our first stop, Chappellet, we spent the morning looking at the various soils of the vineyards while tasting wine whose grapes grew next to where we sat. There was an incredible sense of place to the experience that was heightened further when Master Sommelier Jay James (who serves as the winery's Director of Sales) opened a bottle of 1980 Chappellet Signature Cabernet Sauvignon. The entire group seemed enthralled, and on the bus ride back, a question was posed.

First, some background: Located just to the southeast of Howell Mountain but to the northeast of Oakville, Pritchard Hill overlooks the Lake Hennessey reservoir and exists outside of any Napa sub-AVA. Back in 2012, *Wine Enthusiast* published an article calling it "the best grape growing region in Napa you probably never heard of" (which is spot on, if you ask me). So, naturally, the question asked on the bus was: "Why is Pritchard Hill not its own AVA?"

James' response was both humbling and well informed. To paraphrase, there is a reluctance to let the Tax and Trade Bureau simply draw lines on a map and call it "Pritchard Hill." It seems counterintuitive, but the best way to preserve the identity and mesoclimate of this area might be to forego further sub-designation within Napa. That reservation makes a lot of sense when you see more appellations the

size of Chianti than that of Château-Grillet.

With my mind primed for more conversations about terroir, we rolled into Frog's Leap in Rutherford. Meeting charismatic founder/winemaker John Williams and his equally charming colleague Jonah Beer, the winery's Vice President of Trade Sales & Marketing, was one of those encounters that entirely validates one's choice to pursue a career as a sommelier. Almost immediately, we found ourselves in the gardens talking about Biodynamic polyculture, root depth, vine intelligence, the pyrazines found in Bordeaux varieties, and other geeky stuff that only seemed to make me—and the rest of the group—more interested.

Mostly, though, we discussed dry farming and its advantages. Prior to this trip, I would have been convinced that anyone attempting to dry farm in a climate as hot and arid as Napa's would have to sacrifice yields to do so. But Williams has been doing this for decades, through rainy seasons and droughts, and when I posed the question about yields, he assured me that it's never really been a problem. And why shouldn't I believe him? As demonstrated by the insects that fell on my notepad as I wrote, the vineyard was alive and buzzing with activity: Although harvest had ended weeks earlier, the workers were still at it (Frog's Leap grows 40 or so other crops, enabling it to employ people year-round). If I wasn't already sold, I certainly was after drinking a '95 Merlot—my favorite wine of the trip.

Everywhere we went inspired



*Frog's Leap founder/winemaker John Williams explains the advantages of dry farming.*

more revelations as the hegemonic view of Napa as a place focused solely on making a bigger version of Cabernet faded (though those places certainly still exist). What holds more weight in my mind now is the very thing that made the region famous in the first place: skilled producers showcasing a sense of place and purpose through wine. Because of that, Napa holds up to its reputation, and my caution about meeting my heroes was certainly unwarranted.

I am extremely grateful to Sommelier Foundation for this opportunity. Beyond providing an in-depth exploration of a world-class region, the trip enabled me to meet a group of passionate producers and sommeliers who care deeply about being the best ambassadors they can in the name of hospitality. The experience left me with greater knowledge, new friendships, and more confidence as a sommelier. For that, I couldn't be more thankful. *sj*





# Sniffing a Nun's Armpit

**NATHANIEL MUÑOZ** FOLLOWS HIS HEART—AND HIS NOSE—TO BAR AVALON IN L.A. *by Jessie Birschbach*

**IT'S ONE OF** those trite questions you hear over and over again in the wine biz: "What was your 'aha wine'?" But Nathaniel Muñoz, Beverage Director of the newly opened Bar Avalon in Los Angeles' Echo Park neighborhood, has an answer worth repeating.

During Muñoz's first week of serving at Soif, a cozy wine bar in Santa Cruz, partner/wine director John Locke sat him down, poured him a glass of wine, and asked him what he smelled. Despite having worked in restaurants since he was 14, the twenty-something knew nothing about wine, but Locke insisted. Finally, Muñoz blurted out, "It smells like must and sour peaches—like a nun's armpit!" Locke replied, "Good. Keep going."

The wine director encouraged his servers to be vocal about their unfiltered ideas, and while this would later have a great impact on Muñoz, at the time it surprised him. To his even greater astonishment, the wine was revealed to be a white blend called Coenobium; hailing from the Monastero Suore Cistercensi in Italy, it *actually* was made by an order of nuns (who apparently needed a bath). "I was like, holy shit, there's something about the connectivity of aromatics and nostalgia and ideas that brings us to some sort of correlation that connects people and wine," recalls Muñoz.

But we've jumped ahead. After high school, the native Angeleno moved to Santa Barbara, then Santa Cruz, and then Carmel, all the while working in restaurants as a server or GM—and all the while following a different relationship. "I've

always followed my love, is how I put it," jokes Muñoz. In 2012, he applied for the wine director position at Aubergine at L'Auberge Carmel, but after a flummoxing interview, the outspoken charmer—who had landed every job he'd ever applied for—was told he wasn't a good fit. "They asked me a bunch of wine questions and I couldn't answer them!" he says.

This experience with rejection lit a fire under Muñoz: That same month, he passed the Intro-level exam with the Court of Master Sommeliers, receiving the second-highest score; two months later, he took the Certified and again came in just behind the top scorer. Serendipitously, the position at Aubergine opened again, and this time he was hired on the spot. "Work motivated me to find wine and then wine motivated me to improve work," says Muñoz.

After three years spent helping to double the now-Michelin-starred Aubergine's revenue per guest, Muñoz headed south to serve as wine director at The Rose in Venice Beach, where he built a program that sold nearly \$2 million annually with a monthly revolving inventory of just \$200,000.

Now an Advanced Sommelier, he opened Bar Avalon last year in partnership with Revelator, an Atlanta-based coffee company. The concept, which shares a space with retail store EVE Bottle Shop, is meant to fill a void in Echo Park as a welcoming social space that serves American comfort food, wine, and coffee from morning to night. Muñoz's wine program is built on the Americas, which is looking like



## TOP FIVE PET PEEVES

1. Ketchup.
2. People who talk on speaker phone in a restaurant.
3. When people ask you a question and then answer it. "What Chardonnay do you have? This Littorai Chard—should I have that?"
4. Really mediocre restaurants that are slammed.
5. Allowing people to drink bad wine because it makes money.

## TOP FIVE FAVES

1. Food trucks and BYOB.
2. Kelly, my girlfriend. I love when relationships empower you to be a better you.
3. People who are excited about quality hospitality.
4. Variety-specific glassware.
5. Somm snacks—you know when the chef gives you that tiny ramekin of pork belly trim?

an increasingly savvy move given the tariff threats from the U.S. government.

After getting to know Muñoz, his semi-self-deprecating joke about always following his love takes on another meaning. At the risk of sounding trite again, I'm quite certain that love he's been following has come from within. *—SJ*



*The Man Behind the Brands*



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