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We Are Family

PHOTO: JENNIFER OLSON



A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Luke Tobin".

From the Boscainis of Masi Agricola to Miller Family Wines as well as the Nonino distilling dynasty, this issue will introduce you to a number of multigenerational companies that have persevered through thick and thin, with love for what they do and for one another.

THE TOLL THAT 2020 HAS TAKEN ON US AS HUMANS,

citizens, and professionals alike is undeniably extraordinary. In the simultaneous midst of a pandemic, sociopolitical upheaval, and economic uncertainty, we've begun, generally through no fault of our own, to lose our sense of connection to other people—friends, neighbors, colleagues, customers—and there are undoubtedly times when we all feel terribly alone in the grand scheme of things.

But it's important to remember that we are not alone. In our interconnected industries—production, retail, hospitality, media—we are family. Family members can't always prevent the worst from happening, but they are always there to support you when it does.

This letter is my first as the managing editor of *The SOMM Journal*, a title most recently held by Jessie "JABS" Birschbach. I am also managing editor at sibling publication *The Tasting Panel*, a position I had occupied for just three months when our staff embarked on a trip in March 2019 to the Wine & Spirits Wholesalers of America Convention & Exposition in Orlando to host a wine and spirits competition; because I live in and work remotely from Denver, it was a rare opportunity for face time with my new co-workers.

On our second evening in Florida, I received a phone call that changed my life irrevocably: My husband, Brit, had been killed in a car accident. Though I don't remember much about the next several hours, I do know that JABS kept me company the entire night while our publisher, Meridith May, and VP of finance Anna Russell sprang into action to arrange my flight home; over the next few days, they all spent an inordinate amount of time ensuring I was cared for back in Colorado while continuing to run the competition despite their own sure trauma. They became, in one devastating instant, not just colleagues but family.

Due to the long, hard hours they keep and the nature of their work—making their guests feel at home—those in the hospitality business likewise tend, even in normal times, to operate more like kinfolk than mere associates. In these anything-but-normal times, they're pulling together more than ever, collaborating on joint projects to nourish and supply their communities as well as pooling their talent and resources to explore new business models that may point the way toward a fairer, more sustainable future for food and beverage service. Documenting their plight—and their indomitable spirit in spite of it—is and will remain a crucial mission for us; after all, our magazines only exist because of them. In that sense you could say that *The SOMM Journal* and *The Tasting Panel* are their babies as much as ours.

As for the wine industry, it too has always been family-oriented, built on farms and estates passed down through the decades and centuries. From the Boscainis of Masi Agricola to Miller Family Wines as well as the Nonino distilling dynasty, this issue will introduce you to a number of multigenerational companies that have persevered through thick and thin, with love for what they do and for one another. That is what it's all about—and while we can't promise that the fall and winter will be any easier than the spring and summer, we can promise we'll be here for you, sharing your stories, struggles, and successes, all the while. ❧

An
ITALIAN
Conundrum

**MASI CONFRONTS THE
EXISTENTIAL QUESTIONS
BEHIND AMARONE**

by Lars Leicht



PHOTOS COURTESY OF MASI AGRICOLA

Raffaele Boscaini represents the seventh generation of family stewardship at Masi Agricola.

Vineyards in Valpolicella.

first press

As it often does in Italian wine country, a lively debate has recently begun between the traditionalists and innovators of Piedmont.

This one is centered on the value of single-site, “cru,” or “Bric” Barolo versus that of multi-vineyard blends. With a nod to the chicken-or-egg theorem, the blends came first: Combining complementary characteristics from different sites, they are a point of pride for old-school winemakers, who defend the classic style as the true and righteous path to a harmonious, complex reflection of terroir. Certain subzones provide more structure and intensity, others finesse and elegance, still others suppleness, and the Barolistas build their reputation by mixing those elements into a well-guarded “secret sauce.” Yet it’s the “Bric” Barolos that command top dollar: Such is the attraction of showcasing a single plot of land as a unique expression of place.

Meanwhile, in the Valpolicella region some 225 miles east, a similar discussion about top-production Amarone is underway—and Raffaele Boscaini of Masi Agricola is passionate about it. “How much has Amarone ‘become’ the territory?” he asks, alluding to the extent to which it reflects its terroir. The answer is “very little”—and that, he adds, is a shame.

As seventh-generation leader of his family’s wine company in Sant’Ambrogio di Valpolicella near Verona, Boscaini is closely tied to the territory of which he speaks. His grandfather Guido essentially invented the Ripasso method, in which freshly fermented Valpolicella wine is “re-passed” over the pressings of dried Amarone grapes to make a wine of intermediary complexity. And for his contributions both to improved production methods in the appellation and its promotion around the world, his father, Sandro, earned the nickname “Mr. Amarone.”

Does that qualify Raffaele as Mr. Ama-

rone Jr.? He prefers to think of his potential role as the less diminutive Mr. Amarone II, he says, as these are different times with different challenges. But the fundamental question he is confronting is this: Is Amarone more about technique or terroir?

“It is true that Amarone is developed in the winery,” Boscaini says, referring to the 90- to 120-day *appassimento* or withering process that the grapes undergo in aerated lofts before vinification. A traditional loft, called a *fruttaio*, has large windows that facilitate airflow in good weather but can

sit at roughly the same elevation—350 to 415 meters above sea level; and are planted to the same mix of indigenous grapes, namely Corvina, Rondinella, and Molinara. But their soils, and thus their wines, are very different.

The slopes of humus-rich, crumbly limestone in Mazzano are terraced by traditional stone walls called *marogne*. Wind exposure here keeps the grapes free of botrytis, helping to yield austere, edgy, masculine wine, says Boscaini. The soils of Campolongo di Torbe are also loose but



In the cellar of the Masi estate, located in Sant’Ambrogio di Valpolicella, near Verona.

be shuttered in damp or rainy conditions. “Appassimento characterizes Amarone, but it also takes place in our microclimate; [it’s] still subject to local weather after the actual harvest,” he points out. “If we approach it more as a winery wine than a territory wine, we risk standardization.”

As an example of the graces of single-vineyard Amarones, Boscaini likes to point to two wines in Masi’s Cantina Privata series: Mazzano and Campolongo di Torbe. In the 1950s, his grandfather started separately vinifying these two sites, which are just under a mile apart as the crow flies;

well drained and more volcanic, with rocky red Eocene limestone indicating a high iron content that contributes minerality to the finished wine. Because there is less wind here, the grapes have more glycerine, resulting in soft tannins, elegance, and hints of almonds.

Of course, Boscaini doesn’t completely discount multi-vineyard blends, but he maintains that they too must reflect their terroir. All of the fruit for Masi’s *Costa-sera* Amarone, for example, comes from southwest-facing sites in Valpolicella’s *Zona Classica*; *costa sera* is the local term for a

vineyard exposed to warm afternoon sun so that the grapes achieve the ripeness ideal for appassimento.

As for the larger Valpolicella area? Boscaini firmly believes that young, non-appassimento wines from any subzone, at the base of the stylistic pyramid, have a responsibility to be imminently drinkable, designed as they are for everyday consumption—but just like Amarone, Valpolicella should reflect where it comes from. “[It] must have dignity, like any wine,” he says, “presentable in different structures and different ages. But the scope of Valpolicella is to allow you to drink more than one glass to accompany a meal.”

Like Barolo (and for that matter Burgundy), Valpolicella is home to diverse microclimates with variations in soil, altitude, exposure, and weather conditions. But the idea that one producer might have access to—and therefore the ability to blend from—vineyards in all 11 valleys of Valpolicella has never become a reality. Nor is it ever likely to, given the logistical challenges posed by the region’s size: The acreage under vine there is almost four times the total area of Barolo, and the average vineyard in Valpolicella twice the size of that in Barolo. And there are historical as well as geographical differences: For instance, in the 19th century, Barolo producers deliberately looked to Burgundy as a production model, while the top-tier wine of Valpolicella, Amarone, was born of what could be described as no less than a happy accident.

In ancient, cooler times, simple Valpolicella could not muster alcohol content high enough to withstand transportation; drying the grapes provided extra sugar to ferment into alcohol for travel-worthy wines. The result was Recioto, a fruitier expression. Sometimes, however, fermentation would run its course to fully convert sugars into alcohol and yield a dry wine; initially considered a mistake, the process eventually became a choice. Being the opposite of sweet, the result was called *amaro*, Italian for “bitter”; the suffix “-one,” which indicates large size, was added to make the name Amarone, or “the big bitter [dry] one.” It’s been marketed as such for no more than 75 years.

Over the decades, the consortium responsible for appellation rules gradu-



In his efforts to boost Valpolicella’s international reputation, Sandro Boscaini garnered the nickname “Mr. Amarone.”



Grapes undergoing the appassimento process.

ally started to tighten regulations on yield and bottles produced, hoping to make Amarone more premium. But to many winemakers, especially Raffaele Boscaini—who, for the record, does not belong to the consortium—it is not enough.

“Amarone needs more,” says Boscaini. “It needs more qualitative steps; it needs more vision. They have this treasure in their hands but they don’t know what to do with it.”

For example, Boscaini asserts, international varieties such as Cabernet Sauvignon and Merlot should be banned from

Valpolicella, Recioto, and Amarone (this is already a Masi house rule). He believes Amarone should be made exclusively from subzones, select hillsides, and single sites. Yield should be further reduced, he adds, and stricter selection enforced.

“Each producer should have some small-production Amarones to show diversity,” says Boscaini. “There is still so much to discover and study deeply for Amarone to truly represent this territory.” SJ



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Shelf Life

ACADÉMIE DU VIN LIBRARY IS REISSUING SEMINAL WINE TEXTS WHILE PRODUCING SOON-TO-BE CLASSICS

STEVEN SPURRIER GUARANTEED

his legacy in the wine world way back in 1976, when he organized the earthshaking Judgment of Paris; he could have rested on his laurels ever since. But he most certainly has not. In fact, as *The SOMM Journal's* own London correspondent, the merchant turned writer, educator, and vintner is launching his latest column, "The Wine Observer," in this issue (see page 44).

What's more, in late 2018, his extraordinary career took on a whole new dimension with his venture into publishing. Spurrier is the co-founder of and brand ambassador for the Académie du Vin Library, which he conceived, in his words, "as I was deploring the state of wine books today. . . . Our purpose is to bring back the literature of wine, which I think we are doing." The catalog includes both updated classics such as Hugh Johnson's *The Story of Wine: From Noah to Now* and new titles like *Chateau Musar: The Story of a Wine Icon*, all handsomely bound as glossy, gold-trimmed hardcovers (note to self for holiday gift lists).

The commemorative edition of Michael Broadbent's *Wine Tasting* is a delight. Far from a mere reprint, it contains multiple forewords, both old and new, by the likes of Johnson, Jancis Robinson, and the late Harry Waugh and Gerard Basset; essays on Broadbent's life, influences, and impact; useful editor's notes for context; and a greatly expanded glossary compared to that in my 2003 edition, spanning ten languages as opposed to only three. (Until you know the Spanish word for "a blend of semi-sweet and almond bitter tastes" [*almadrado*] and the Russian term for a "slightly artificial floral aroma" [transliterated as *parfyumernyy aromat*], can you really call yourself a wine expert?)

Another special treat is Fiona Morri-

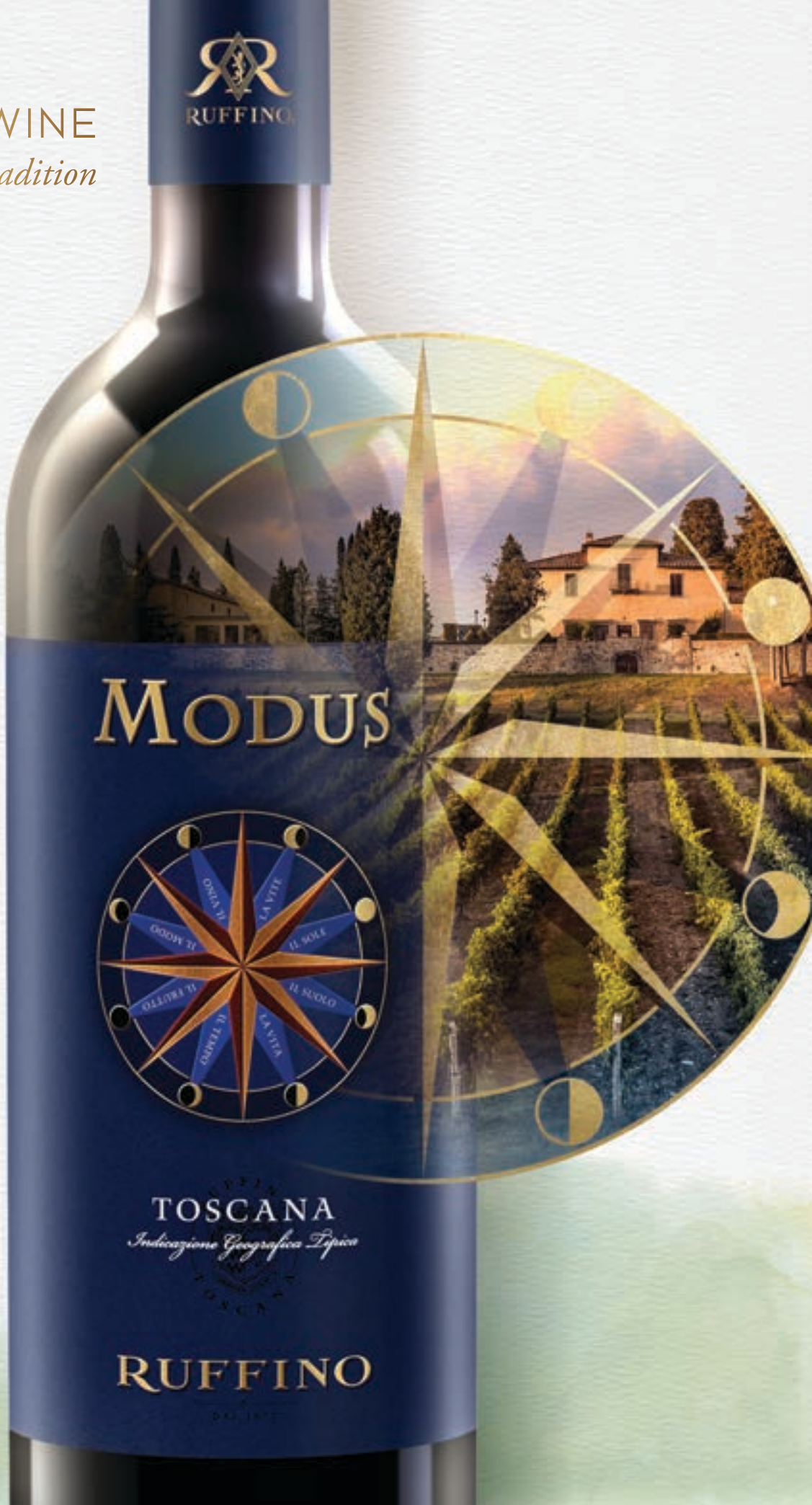


Spurrier is the co-founder of and brand ambassador for the Académie du Vin Library, which he conceived, in his words, "as I was deploring the state of wine books today. . . . Our purpose is to bring back the literature of wine, which I think we are doing."

son's *10 Great Wine Families: A Tour Through Europe*. One might imagine that the price of intimate access to some of the most renowned producers on the planet would be fawning coverage, but as Johnson points out in his foreword, the Master of Wine and member of Bordeaux's Thienpont dynasty through her husband, Jacques, "properly sees [her subjects] as her peers." The resulting profiles are no less clear-eyed for being up close and personal, delving into tragic accidents and high-stakes sibling rivalries as forthrightly as they do into the traditions and innovations of the multigenerational estates.

Also in the current catalog is a primer on Sherry charmingly subtitled *Maligned, Misunderstood, Magnificent!* and two anthologies, *In Vino Veritas: A Collection of Fine Wine Writing, Past and Present* and *On Bordeaux: Tales of the Unexpected from the World's Greatest Wine Region*. Up next, as if he weren't busy enough, is an update of Spurrier's own autobiography, *Wine—A Way of Life*. And after that? Keep tabs on future publications the new-fashioned way: by visiting academieduvinlibrary.com or following the company on Instagram @[academieduvinlibrary](https://www.instagram.com/academieduvinlibrary). —Ruth Tobias SJ

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Nate Ready is the owner of Hiyu Wine Farm in Oregon's Hood River Valley.

PHOTO COURTESY OF NATE READY

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Francesca Nonino is the sixth-generation brand ambassador for Grappa Nonino.



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A Tribute to Tony Terlato

by David A. F. Sweet



Tony Terlato graced the inaugural cover of The SOMM Journal in 2014.

Through hard work born of great vision, Tony helped shape the U.S. wine market into the behemoth it has become.

SINCE HIS DEATH this summer at age 86, countless headlines have recognized Tony Terlato as the man who introduced Pinot Grigio to the United States, a mission accomplished after he sampled nearly 20 labels in Portogruaro, Italy, in one sitting. But few acknowledge the full extent of the achievements he made during his 60 years in the wine business.

At the time of his birth in Brooklyn a year after Prohibition ended, that business barely existed. Huge in Europe for centuries, wine was little known in the U.S., whose citizens preferred spirits and beer. But upon joining the modest wine-import company owned by his father-in-law, the honest, pragmatic businessman began to transform the industry. For instance, restaurant wine programs were practically unknown until Tony arrived on the scene and assisted proprietors in creating them.

In short, through hard work born of great vision, Tony helped shape the U.S. wine market into the behemoth it has become—and the company he worked for into a juggernaut that now sells its own Pinot Grigio. Terlato Wines is today one of the biggest private firms in the third-largest city in the country, Chicago—which is not exactly known for its vineyards. But it's a major player despite its Midwestern roots, thanks to its leader's many talents. Think of the roles he thrived in: retailer, distributor, importer, marketer, vineyard owner, and more. To modify the cliché, he was a jack-of-all-wine-trades—and master of all. It's no surprise that Tony, who never graduated from college, earned the Horatio Alger Award for extraordinary initiative along the way.

Having enjoyed many bottles of his flagship Santa Margherita brand in fine restaurants while living in New York, I finally met Tony for an interview about 15 years ago. It was held in a mansion that the company purchased in 1995 and restored in the suburbs of Chicago; driving up the gravel driveway to the 26,000-square-foot brick estate set on more than 6 acres, I felt as if I were arriving at a European château.

The meal that followed our conversation might be familiar to other guests who've arrived at the mansion from around the country and the world to be wined and dined in the signature Terlato fashion. After hors d'oeuvres in the gourmet kitchen—perhaps smoked salmon and duck liver mousse buttressed by glasses of rosé—they would sit at the long wooden table below an 18-foot sculpted ceiling for course after course: risotto with mushrooms and smoked bacon, arugula salad with pomegranate and goat cheese, and so on, along with more wine. Special guests were always invited to Terlato's annual truffle dinners, a feast hard to describe in words. Tony's graciousness, interest in his guests, and knowledge of food as well as wine were on display at all occasions.

Family mattered so much to Tony. He took great pleasure each year in cooking for his own on Christmas Eve, telling stories in the kitchen while surrounded by his wife, children, and grandchildren. The good news is that his sons, Bill and John, are well positioned to continue running the business while welcoming the fourth generation of family ownership—ensuring that the Terlato name should generate laudatory headlines in the wine world for decades to come. **SJ**

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One of the best things about wine is that it is not easy to understand—that expertise requires mental, physical, and emotional commitment over a long period of time and that, even then, it will remain a mystery in many ways.

Just Another Buzz?

THE CASE AGAINST DEMYSTIFYING WINE

I CAN ALREADY hear the tsk-tsking and envision the letters to the editor—“What is she *thinking?*”—but I believe there’s a case to be made that wine *should be* intimidating.

I’ve come to this conclusion only recently, after watching producers and purveyors lose their footing in presenting fine wine as something rarified and special. It is now promoted as just another buzz to drinkers who aren’t in the mood for craft beer or a cocktail. *Hell*, guzzle that wine from a can. Or post that glass of rosé on Instagram—the ultimate example of being cool while not needing to know anything.

All of this strikes me as very wrong.

Let me try to be careful with my language here. I do not mean that wine should be used as a sort of microaggression to reinforce barriers of class or race. As a young American wine journalist in the 1980s, I remember all too well the feeling of being looked down upon by my

Oxford-educated “colleagues,” who used wine to convey their sense of privilege and make it clear to me that I was not one of them.

Rather, I mean that one of the best things about wine is that it is not easy to understand—that expertise requires mental, physical, and emotional commitment over a long period of time and that, even then, it will remain a mystery in many ways. This is why I’m bothered when I hear people say they want to “demystify wine.” I think to myself: *God, no*. Precisely because wine is ultimately unknowable, education in the subject becomes an intriguing lifelong pursuit. And along the way, we fall in love ever more deeply with it.

But, I can hear you asking, should wine really be *intimidating* exactly (as opposed to wonderfully complex)? I would argue that intimidation isn’t necessarily a bad thing. For me, it was the challenge that propelled me forward. Maybe it’s the

same for athletes. I’m sure a high jump looks daunting to aspiring track-and-field stars—but that’s what makes clearing the bar so rewarding.

Writing about the narrowing of what he calls the “aspiration gap,” blogger Tom Wark of Tom Wark’s Fermentation: The Daily Wine Blog has suggested that wine is ceasing to be the beverage that upwardly mobile people aspire to, especially as beverages like craft beer and cocktails are increasingly positioned as wine’s “equals.” Will this narrowing, he wonders, impact wine sales?

I’m not sure about sales. But I am quite sure that something important will be lost if wine becomes just another drink with alcohol in it. **SJ**

Karen MacNeil is the author of *The Wine Bible* and the editor of the digital newsletter WineSpeed. You can reach her at karen@karenmacneil.com.



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Unmasking Your Restaurant's Pandemic Potential

IT'S HARD TO believe that we would be yearning for the days when our biggest problems were *only* Australian wildfires and EU wine tariffs, but at every turn, 2020 has delivered yet another blow to our industry. The year has started a war on restaurants.

However, our enemy (call it Twenty Twenemy?) seriously underestimates the resilience of our strong, supportive community. We can deal with back-to-back double shifts and demanding guests. We can handle being triple-sat with no busser and a broken expo printer. We can persevere through the most ridiculous circumstances—getting a 1-star review because parking was hard to find or receiving no tip because someone resented having to wear a mask—and yet we push on, ceaselessly and with resolve. Let us make it clear that 2020 will *not* defeat us!

But it's about time we started creating a new normal rather than waiting for the old normal—which frankly wasn't all that great—to resume. As strategic operators, we have to be nimble, flexible, and creative as we change our businesses for the foreseeable future. This might mean making temporary plans that we regularly review, adjust, and improve. The most effective

businesses routinely do this as a matter of course, not just while in crisis mode. Look at Netflix, which once upon a time exclusively sent DVDs by mail before it shifted to digital streaming and, later, developed its own production studio. Over the years, it has succeeded by re-tooling its business model in response to a changing environment.

I don't have all the answers on what to do. Every restaurant is different, and so is every market. However, there are always opportunities to respond to shifts in demand. The low-hanging fruit is a well-conceived takeaway menu; Rose's Luxury in Washington, D.C., for example, has been serving multi-meal, rather than just multicourse, packages. But don't stop there. Beyond offering food to go, creating experiences is the name of the game. Consider Canlis in Seattle: With innovative outdoor programs such as drive-in movie and "crab shack" nights, it's meeting consumers' desire for nourishment beyond mere sustenance by giving them an opportunity to enjoy something new and different.

In addition to designing experiences, work on integrating as many sell-in opportunities as possible. Note, however, that these must be value-adds, not just spend

generators. For restaurants to survive, they must maximize per-cover revenue. People are less likely to order the same number of extras—drinks, desserts, sides, et cetera—while at home than they are in a restaurant. A typical diner might have a cocktail, a few glasses of wine, and even an after-dinner drink when dining on-premise. When they're planning a to-go meal, you'll be lucky if they order two beverage items.

You can control this by offering drink pairings and packages. Get creative with flights and combinations. My favorite idea is one I call "the full meal deal," which would include an apéritif, a half-bottle each of white and red wine, and an amaro at a lower price than the a la carte total would be. While your margins might not be quite as high, your gross revenue, net average spend per cover, and profit dollars will all increase. This is just one of many ways a restaurant can augment revenue while enhancing the guest experience.

It's important to consider the big picture by remembering all of the things that you love about going out and finding ways that you can offer something similarly experiential for diners at home. They'll be happier and, with a vital ancillary revenue stream, so will you. **SJ**



ENJOY.

Joel Gott



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From the Front of the House to the Root of the Vine

IN OREGON, SOMMELIERS BRING A DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVE TO WINEMAKING



PHOTO COURTESY OF SARAH CABOT

Sarah Cabot is the winemaker for Precept Wine.



PHOTO COURTESY OF NATE READY

Nate Ready is the owner of Hiyu Wine Farm.



PHOTO COURTESY OF ANDRÉ HUESTON MACK

André Hueston Mack is the founder of Maison Noir Wines.

AS YOU PROBABLY KNOW, more and more sommeliers these days have been making the transition to winegrowing. For the most part, they're not producing the same kinds of wine as the rest of the industry: They're *sommeliers*, after all, and their experience affects their winemaking philosophy and approach.

Since 2014, Sarah Cabot has found her calling as head winemaker for Precept Wine, producing over 100,000 cases a year. Says Cabot, "I'm OK with making \$15 Pinot Noir, especially since it might be someone's first taste of Oregon Pinot ever. That's quite an honor; and so the challenge is to make a \$15 Pinot that is as beautiful as a \$59 one, which I also make."

Gaining eight years of restaurant experience in Boston and Seattle before attaining her winemaking degree at Seattle's Northwest Wine Academy undoubtedly shaped Cabot's approach: "What matters most to me are primary fruit, pure flavors, and acidity," she says. "I try not to put a lot of oak or overwork any wines. I avoid microbial growth, Brett, oxidation, [and] anything [else] that gets in the way of food-and-wine interaction."

When Cabot got the job offer for her current position, she was standing in the

middle of a beautiful vineyard in Santa Barbara, where she had considered working. "As soon as I [accepted]," she says, "I didn't have to think twice. Oregon is where I started and where I was first welcomed into a community. I'll always be drawn to the more acid-driven wines of Oregon."

The hospitality glory days for Hiyu Wine Farm's Nate Ready were at The French Laundry in Napa Valley and Frasca Food & Wine in Boulder, Colorado. Ready left the restaurant industry in 2006 to work with winemakers in Friuli, Napa Valley, and Willamette Valley before purchasing a property in the Hood River Valley with his partner, China Tresemer, in 2012.

Ready has taken the perspective he gained in restaurants to extremes. "As a sommelier," he explains, "you accumulate an incredible reservoir of ideas, but it's the experience selling wine that has helped me most. There are a lot of talented growers and winemakers, but most of them have just a generic idea of the general public's tastes. The reality is that it's a lot more diverse than they think." That makes the Hood River region, which he similarly views as among the most diverse in the world, the ideal place to work. "We have extremely cold areas and extremely hot areas,

all just a 20-minute drive from each other," he notes. "Consequently, we grow over 150 varieties of grapes, all in interplanted blocks. We make about 50 different wines and utilize a huge span of historical techniques and genetic material to produce our wine."

In addition to maintaining a 30-acre vineyard, he adds, he and Tresemer also "farm a garden, orchards, pastures, [and] a forested area and [run] a restaurant where we serve dishes utilizing food we've grown or raised."

Maison Noir Wines founder André Hueston Mack, who became the first African American to win "Best Young Sommelier in America" in 2003, has worked the floor at The French Laundry as well as at Per Se in New York. "In chef-driven restaurants," says Mack, "wine exists to enhance food, not the other way around. It's about perspective—as sommeliers we are taught to evaluate a finished product, which is the opposite of a typical winemaker, who starts with raw product. That's why we pick early to prevent overripe wines and to retain acidity. Acid is the amplifier; it cranks up dishes. That's why Oregon was always the obvious choice for me, because here I can produce exactly those kinds of wines." ■

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PHOTO COURTESY OF EHLERS ESTATE



Laura Díaz Muñoz is the winemaker and general manager of Ehlers Estate in Napa Valley.

PHOTO COURTESY OF CATTLEVA



Cattleya founder Bibiana González Rave makes wine in Napa, Sonoma, and the Santa Lucia Highlands.

Finding a Home Far from Their Hometown

TWO WINEMAKERS FROM COLOMBIA AND SPAIN PLANT ROOTS IN CALIFORNIA

GROWING UP IN MEDELLÍN, Colombia, Bibiana González Rave was not surrounded by vineyards or much of a wine culture. But sips from half-bottles shared with her father during family celebrations made an indelible impression and sparked her passion. Determined to become a winemaker, she pursued enology and viticulture in Cognac and Bordeaux before heading to California in 2004; after several years of working for such respected wineries as La Crema, Au Bon Climat, Qupé, and Lynmar Estate, she founded her own label, Cattleya, in Sonoma County in 2012. "I found that California has the terroir and resources to invest fully into wines that are pure expressions of place and a great representation of the philosophy of the people behind them," she explains. "I love making elegant but powerful wines, and I feel like California is the perfect place for it."

Of course, Rave also embraces the influences of Colombia and France in crafting her portfolio of wines from Sonoma, Napa, and the Santa Lucia Highlands, which she says "represent a little bit of who I am as a Latina growing up in Medellín, with salsa

music playing in the background every day. I love the intensity of aromatics and flavors [in wine, but] at the same time, I like beauty, and I am very sensitive to bitterness, so I tend to avoid pressing the fruit too hard. [Appreciating] vivid and intense beauty in wine, I think, comes from my Colombian heritage." She even named her label for her homeland's national flower, the Cattleya trianae orchid—though she acknowledges that "everything I do, from farming to winemaking practices, was learned in France. The traditional approach that is so determinedly focused on terroir was engraved in my brain at a very early stage."

Hailing from Spain's bustling capital city, Madrid, winemaker and general manager Laura Díaz Muñoz of Ehlers Estate in St. Helena became enchanted by wine during family vacations to Galicia, where she sipped Albariño with her father while watching the fishing boats. At age 18, she enrolled in a wine-tasting class, and although "I just had no idea what wine was about," she recalls, "I was so intrigued, and it tasted so good."

From that humble start, Muñoz went on

to study winemaking in not only Spain but also Chile and New Zealand. She came to Napa Valley in 2007 and "fell in love with the wines, the diversity in the valley, the good life." Napa became home, but she firmly believes that "each winemaker takes a little bit of all his or her past experiences into their winemaking. We all create a signature around our wines. I learned the traditional way of making wine, but . . . I'm always curious about trying new things. I believe mostly in being respectful to the potential and personality of a grape and [finding] the best expression of a site."

Rave's and Muñoz's journeys began on two different continents, but the experiences with wine that they shared with their fathers led them to the same place. Proudly inspired by their homelands, studies, and travels, each has made their mark, far from home, in one of the world's most prestigious winemaking regions. *sj*

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

The Essence of California's Central Coast

BIEN NACIDO &
SOLOMON HILLS

- ESTATE WINES -





Dear Good Somm/Bad Somm,

What are some good beverage options for election night?

Regards,
The Ballot & the Bottle

Good Somm

Dear The Ballot & the Bottle:

The United States has an interesting history when it comes to the relationship between elections and alcohol. Our first president, for example, was known to bribe voters with booze: In his recent book *Last Call: The Rise and Fall of Prohibition*, Daniel Okrent writes, “When twenty-four-year-old George Washington first ran for a seat in the Virginia House of Burgesses, he attributed his defeat to his failure to provide enough alcohol for the voters. When he tried again two years later, Washington floated into the office partly on the 144 gallons of rum, punch, hard cider and beer his election agent handed out—roughly half a gallon for every vote received.” This practice was known as “treating” or “swilling the planters with bumbo” (slang for rum).

My suggestion would be to vote early so you can unwind that night with my pairing of choice—an American wine, be it from a blue state or a red one!

Sincerely,
Good Somm

BAD SOMM

Dear The Ballot & the Bottle,

This might be the only time in Good Somm/Bad Somm history that I’ve felt compelled to step off of my sarcastic pedestal: The truth is that no amount of alcohol can help us escape the grim reality of how much is riding on this election. Then again, it certainly can’t hurt. First, vote like your life depends on it—then reach for your beverage of choice to take the edge off as the numbers come in. As long as it’s not a god dang “quarantini.” If I hear that word one more time, I’m going to break my Martini glass and use it as a shiv.

Yours truly,
Bad Somm

Dear Good Somm/Bad Somm,

When I was in Tuscany last year, I had Chianti in a wicker basket in the most picturesque and beautiful setting. I can’t seem to find this bottle anywhere on my home turf and no other Chianti I’ve tried tastes the same—what’s the solution?

Respectfully,
Under the Tuscan Sun

Good Somm

Dear Under the Tuscan Sun,

There’s nothing more beautiful than ambling down a narrow cobblestone road in Italy, past picturesque wine shops whose owners claim, “Il vino è la mia vita,” and gelaterias that serve you freshly churned scoops on a hot summer day, experiencing the romance of museums and multicourse meals at the local trattorias. It’s amazing how traveling can truly teach you how to slow down and enjoy life, even when you get back home. Though you may never recapture that exact moment or find that exact wine, the most important thing is to keep creating more memories wherever you are. Good luck!

Best,
Good Somm

BAD SOMM

Dear Under the Tuscan Sun,

Here’s what you do: Get yourself some hay and glue it onto a bottle of the cheapest Chianti you can find. Dump half the wine out and fill the rest of the bottle with water. Then pay someone twice its price and have them serve it to you under a tree in their backyard. Make sure they smile in your face while talking about how fat and ugly you are in Italian and adding lunch items onto the check that you didn’t actually order, knowing you’ll still pay because you’re from the United States. *Buona fortuna, stupido Americano!* 🇺🇸

Signed,
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.

FAMILY

Introducing two new members

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Drumroll, Please

INTRODUCING SANTA BARBARA COUNTY'S SEVENTH AVA: **ALISOS CANYON**

THE PEOPLE OF Santa Barbara wine country have a personality quirk that is vaguely un-American: We are notoriously patient. Whereas petitioners in Paso Robles had no fewer than ten American Viticultural Areas approved simultaneously a few years back—a process that led the Alcohol and Tobacco Tax and Trade Bureau (TTB) to put a temporary moratorium on sub-appellations—we in Santa Barbara like to go the slower route, adding an AVA about every five to seven years. I should know, as I researched and wrote the petitions for four AVAs in Santa Barbara County.

We started in 1981 with the establishment of the second AVA in California and the third in the U.S.: Santa Maria Valley, known for its cool winds, fog, and sandy soils—perfect terroir for Chardonnay and Pinot Noir—as well as for the venerated Bien Nacido Vineyard. The Santa Ynez Valley (est. 1983) covers a massive assortment of climates, soils, and plantings; in fact, within a 30-mile corridor from Lake Cachuma to Lompoc, it grows 72 varieties, more than anywhere else in the world. Sta. Rita Hills (est. 2000), carved out of the cool-climate area between Lompoc and the Buellton Flats, is a textbook Winkler Region I appellation. Happy Canyon of Santa Barbara (est. 2009) gave us a hot, arid growing area with large diurnal swings, perfect for Cabernet and Sauvignon Blanc. In my petition to establish the Ballard Canyon AVA (2013), I described it as a

peripheral promontory with a marginal climate ideal for most Rhône varieties. The creation of the Los Olivos District (est. 2016) was necessary to express the “core” of the Santa Ynez Valley, containing as it does many of the appellation's most important vineyard sources for Cabernet Franc, Sauvignon Blanc, and other French as well as Italian and Spanish varieties.

On August 25, the TTB published its final ruling to approve Santa Barbara County's seventh AVA: Alisos Canyon. Encompassing 5,774 acres, it's the highly defined “heart” of the Los Alamos wine-growing subregion, which will likely require the designation of multiple AVAs in the future to account for its diversity of soil and climate types. Here's what you need to know about it:

- **Climate:** The Alisos Canyon AVA exhibits the distinct influence of the San Antonio Creek Valley, which runs directly from the mouths of the Alisos and Comasa canyons to the Pacific Ocean 20 miles to the west. The ingress of cooling marine winds and fog through the valley helps define the climate of the AVA as a Winkler Region II.
- **Soil:** Soils are based on weathered sandstone and shale from the Paso Robles and Sisquoc formations, with a rare limestone streak running throughout the AVA. High calcium content from siliceous shale pebbles and marly limestone aids in grape-

skin thickening, thus increasing extraction, color, and tannins in red varieties. The “clayey matrix” provides higher cation exchange capacity (CEC), which is beneficial as positively charged clay soil particles are necessary for the uptake of macro- and micronutrients by the vines.

- **Key Grapes:** What should you try first? Syrah, Grenache, Viognier, and Cabernet Franc are the standouts for me. Look particularly for Thompson Vineyard designates from Dovecote Estate Winery (with which I have worked), Bedford Winery, The Ojai Vineyard, and Jaffurs Wine Cellars.

Located just two hours north of Los Angeles and 45 minutes from downtown Santa Barbara, the Alisos Canyon AVA is a tiny but exceptional Rhône-focused region ready for exploration. Wines from the aforementioned producers as well as Sine Qua Non and Tensley will define the appellation until other growers start planting here and area winemakers produce new vintages. **SH**

Wes Hagen is the brand ambassador and former winemaker for J. Wilkes. He worked as winemaker and vineyard manager at Clos Pepe Vineyards and Estate Wines for 21 years and served on the board of directors for both Santa Barbara County Vintners and Sta. Rita Hills Winegrowers Alliance. Follow him on Twitter and Instagram @weshagen.

The Alisos Canyon AVA was approved by the TTB on August 25 in a ruling that went into effect September 24.

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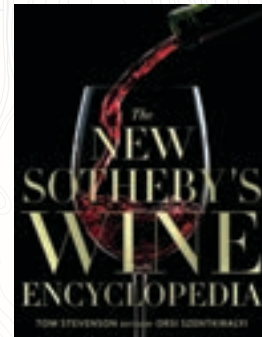
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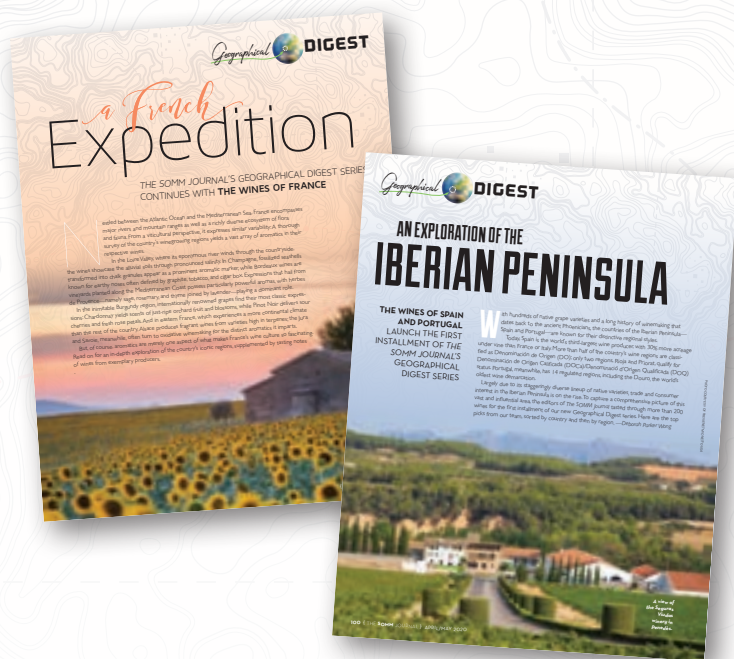
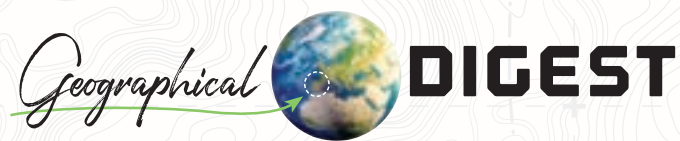
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2020

October 22, 9 a.m. PDT: Domestic Bliss: The West Coast (California, Oregon, and Washington) (recap in December issue)

November 19, 9 a.m. PST: Pure Expression: Finding Balance Between Vineyard and Winery (recap in January/February issue)

December 16, 9 a.m. PST: The Southern Hemisphere: From Down Under to the Top of the Andes (recap in March/April issue)

2021

January 21: An Exploration of Renowned Single Vineyards (recap in April/May issue)

February 18: Technique or Terroir: Is It Production or Nature That Makes These Wines Great? (recap in April/May issue)

March 18: Italy: North to South (recap in June/July issue)

April 22: Luxury from Remarkable Sites (recap in June/July issue)

May 20: A World of Bordeaux Blends (recap in August/September issue)

June 24: Western Europe (recap in October/November issue)





Bebida Loca

ACCLAIMED DENVER CHEF **DANA RODRIGUEZ** BRANCHES OUT WITH A LINE OF SPIRITS AND A NEW BAR TO SHOWCASE THEM

THOUGH IT WAS thrust upon her by a bullying ex-manager, Denver chef Dana Rodriguez proudly answers to the nickname “Loca.” To the Juárez, Mexico, native, it’s a badge of honor, hard-won over the course of two decades spent resolutely working her way up from washing dishes at Panzano under its then-chef, the James Beard Award-winning Jennifer Jasinski, to earning multiple Beard nominations of her own as the co-owner of wildly popular Latin-inspired restaurants Work & Class and Super Mega Bien. Now she has bestowed the name in turn on both a soon-to-launch brand of organic agave spirits and the bar she’s opening to showcase them: Doña Loca and Cantina Loca, respectively.

Some might say it really is a little crazy to forge ahead with not one but two new business ventures in the midst of a pandemic while striving to maintain two others at half-capacity, but Rodriguez thinks there’s no time to waste when it comes to “taking care of the land and taking care of each other,” as she describes the impetus behind Doña Loca. “It had been in my head for a long time [that] we always talk about sustainable food but not about sustainable drink,” she says, and she wanted to educate her guests on “what it takes to create a brand from the bottom up, like I always do, from the roots.”

That’s why, in 2018, she happened to be in Oaxaca doing research when a major earthquake hit. “I saw with my own eyes how the people lost years and years of production,” she recalls. “It takes years to grow an agave plant. . . . All their hard work [was] gone in 30 seconds.” That experience spurred her to think of Doña Loca as “a platform for all of the mezcaleros to have a good future.”

To ensure as much, Rodriguez took her



PHOTO COURTESY OF DANA RODRIGUEZ



PHOTO: RUTH TOBIAS

Dana Rodriguez is chef-partner at Work & Class and Super Mega Bien in Denver, CO, and the creator of spirits brand Doña Loca, with partners Scott Kiere and Karen Ashworth under the corporate nonprofit Digame.

search for small, traditional (read: low-intervention and -impact) producers to almost, well, crazy lengths. For instance, one fifth-generation distiller partnered with her after she tasted his wares in a bar in Santiago de Tequila, found his certification number (Norma Oficial Mexicana) on the back of the bottle, rented a car, and showed up at his property uninvited—and initially unwelcome; with less than a day before her return flight to Denver, she pleaded for 30 minutes of his time and wound up staying for six hours. She has taken equal care in choosing charity partners for the brand, starting with a Oaxacan widows’ cooperative.

This fall, Doña Loca will make its debut at various local establishments with a core lineup of three tequilas—blanco, reposado, and añejo—and three mezcals made from the Espadín, Tobala, and Tepeztate agave species; not long after that, Cantina Loca will open its doors. Rodriguez happily describes the ambiance as “feminine, with a lavender tree inside. . . . I’m trying to make it cute and soft but also badass, like me.” She’s less happy about the fact that her guests won’t be able to relax there until she’s ready to add table service to takeout business—but no less resolute. In classic Loca fashion, she says, “I keep fighting. One day things will go back to normal. I’ll make it work.” **ST**



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Slicing into the Season

FIVE CHEESES TO SAVOR THIS FALL

WITH SUMMER NOW officially in the rearview mirror, my appetite is revving up for cheeses I haven't enjoyed in months. Yes, cheeses have seasons: Some are only made in spring and summer; others only in fall. The fresh chèvre that brightens summer salads loses allure when the weather cools and I start to crave heartier aged cheeses; for instance, Manchego, cheddar, certain pungent blue cheeses, and intense Swiss Alpine wheels just hold more appeal for me in autumn, when I'm drinking a lot less rosé and a lot more big red and desert wines.

If your tastes follow the same trajectory toward stronger flavors, consider these five selections, all of them at their peak of desirability in sweater weather.

Meadow Creek Grayson (Virginia):

Produced in the Blue Ridge Mountains on a family farm dedicated to grass-based dairying, this washed-rind square from raw cow's milk resembles Taleggio but typically delivers more character.

Helen Feete has been making it for 20 years and it has never tasted better: yeasty, beefy, and garlicky, with a supple texture.

Stepladder Creamery Paso Vino

(California): Cheesemaker Jack Rudolph says he was inspired by Queso Ibore and Manchego when he developed the recipe for this new cow's milk wheel. Like those Spanish cheeses, Paso Vino is firm and nutty, with notable acidity and admirable flavor balance. It spends two days early in its life steeping in Paso Robles Syrah, which imparts an enjoyable vinous note, before it's aged for five months.

Rogue Creamery Rogue River Blue

(Oregon): Released only in the fall, this cow's milk beauty is wrapped in Oregon grape leaves steeped in pear spirits. Last year it won the World Cheese Awards with a 100-point score, marking the first time an American cheese has ever

come out on top. It's creamy, fruity, rich, and bold—but never biting.

Spring Brook Farm Reading (Vermont):

Modeled after French raclette, this raw cow's milk wheel is regularly washed with a brine solution containing bacteria from older wheels, a technique that transmits flavor much as a starter does for sourdough bread. After three to five months of aging, Reading (pronounced "Redding") has a dense, creamy semisoft texture and an aroma suggestive of roasted peanuts and mushrooms.

Stockinghall Cheddar (New York):

A collaboration between New York retailer Murray's and Old Chatham Creamery, Stockinghall took "Best of Show" at the 2019 American Cheese Society competition. It is a stunning year-old cheddar made with pasteurized cow's milk that shows classic aromas of roasted nuts, fresh-cut grass, and candle wax along with a subtle sweetness and the category's signature tang. **SJ**



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Garnish with lemon twist and rosemary



Taint or Terroir?

A TIPPING POINT FOR THE APPRECIATION OF SMOKY WINES

WILDFIRE IS CERTAINLY a factor of terroir: This unwelcome truth is bringing about a shift in the U.S. wine industry's attitude toward the flavor of wine made from grapes that have been exposed to smoke.

After historic fires in 2017, many winemakers in Oregon and Washington decided to embrace the volatile compounds associated with smoke exposure in grapes such as guaiacol and 4-methylguaiacol, which are released during fermentation. While using techniques like whole-bunch pressing to minimize smokiness, they didn't try to hide it entirely.

Because these volatile phenols reside in grape skins, whites and rosés that are pressed off of the skins immediately after harvest carry less risk for taint. Winemaker Darryl Joannides of Viola Wine Cellars in Portland made a lightly smoked Dolcetto rosé that was a hit at local wine bars. "We focused on making younger, fresher styles that we could get to market quickly," he says. "If I'm faced with that situation again, I'm planning on making as much rosé as I possibly can." Teutonic Wine Company's Barnaby Tuttle, meanwhile, produced a skin-contact Riesling that tested for high levels of guaiacol in a style he dubbed Rauchwein (a play on Rauchbier, or "smoked beer" in German). The resulting wine had a subtle smoky aroma, more texture than the average Riesling, and a mezcal-like finish.

In his 2019 book *Flawless: Understanding Faults in Wine*, Jamie Goode characterizes smoke taint as an automatic fault. But

it's one winemakers are going to have to contend with, given the fourfold increase in forest fires in the Western U.S. since 1986 and the fact that, according to a recent article in *The Lancet*, the number of days per year of high bushfire risk in Australia is expected to increase as much as 70% by 2050.

comes in contact with the enzymes in their mouths, which break them down and release them.

It's not possible for winemakers to eliminate the risk of producing a red wine that's faulted by offensive phenols, but they can mitigate it through carbon filtering, reverse osmosis, and manufactured yeast strains.



What can we expect as winegrowers in Australia, Chile, France, and the United States are increasingly forced to adapt their winemaking practices and styles to account for devastating fire seasons?

Consumers enjoy the flavor of smoke in many food and beverage products, including wine: When derived from the process of aging in toasted oak barrels, low levels of guaiacol and 4-methylguaiacol are described positively as toast, smoke, char, and even camphor. But when they overwhelm a wine's varietal character, they're treated as a fault. In the extreme, smoke-tainted wines are often described as smelling and tasting like a wet ashtray, medicine, or burnt bacon (which some of us admittedly enjoy).

Sensory testing at the Australian Wine Research Institute (AWRI) has shown that up to 20% of people cannot taste smoke flavors in wines that others find unpalatable. For the remaining 80%, the smoky phenols can go undetected until the wine

According to researchers at AWRI, oak treatments and tannin additions can also mask some of the effects of mild smoke exposure by amplifying the same compounds that are found in wood smoke, including lactones, eugenol, and guaiacol. Some of these also exist in certain grape varieties, like Syrah.

What can we expect as winegrowers in Australia, Chile, France, and the United States are increasingly forced to adapt their winemaking practices and styles to account for devastating fire seasons? Anticipate more rosés, early-drinking reds, and even skin-contact whites as they seek to get the most out of high-quality fruit that might otherwise be destined for the bulk market due to smoke exposure. **SJ**

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Beer(d) Science isn't just an excuse for an '80s movie pun: Each column covers a different style of beer and related terminology to help somms expand their beer knowledge.

Double Dankness, Bro

WRAPPING OUR (HOP)HEADS AROUND THE **IMPERIAL IPA** STYLE

by Jessie Birschbach

I'M OFTEN ASKED (OK, I've been asked twice, but still) about the difference between an American IPA, a double IPA (DIPA), and an imperial IPA. Here's the simplest answer: The latter styles are both higher in alcohol and hoppier than the former, which is defined by the Beer Judge Certification Program (BJCP) as a "decidedly hoppy and bitter, moderately strong American pale ale" at 5.5–7.5% ABV

(IPAs). Granted, whether humans can even perceive the maximum number of units is debatable; 6–100 IBUs is thought to be the typical range of perception, and most beers fall within it.

I must confess that as much as I love beer, I am anything but a hophead. Perhaps this is why I much prefer imperial IPA to the plain ol' IPA any day. Although its hop level actually measures higher, its bitterness is tempered much more

do so in a snifter—or a pokal (a short, tapered, pilsner-like glass with a stem), if you want to get real fancy. And pair it with something rich and/or creamy, like *cacio e pepe* or cheesecake.

Dogfish Head 120 Minute IPA

Although the words "AGES WELL" appear right on the front of the label, I recently enjoyed a freshly made Dogfish Head 120 Minute Imperial IPA. On the nose: candied hops both floral and resinous, golden syrup, and a soft French bread note. On the palate: a similar hop profile, plus banana and caramel, with a creamy weighted texture that finishes in a lengthy, tingling bitterness. It's worth noting that the BJCP actually lists the Dogfish Head 60 Minute Imperial IPA as a classic example of an imperial beer style. But I'm totally down with this more *extreme*, 16% ABV version, broseph. Super-pumped to see how it develops over a year or two. **SJ**



PHOTO: КИРИЛЛ РЫКОВ VIA ADOBE STOCK



and 40–70 on the International Bittering Units (IBU) scale. The terms "double" and "imperial" as well as "extra" and "extreme"—I'll bet the latter came about as a result of the bro culture that all too often bleeds into the world of brewing—all mean the same thing: an even gnarlier IPA.

In fact, the hoppier imperial version of the already hoppy IPA style can get as bitter as any beer can on the IBU scale, at 60 to a staggering 120 IBUs (which admittedly creates a bit of a gray area within the category, given the aforementioned maximum IBUs for American

effectively by a stronger (7.6–10% ABV), sweeter malty backbone, which counteracts the hops to result in increased smoothness. Examples include Stone Brewing's Ruidation IPA and Russian River Brewing Company's Pliny the Elder; if you've not yet enjoyed this style, please

The More Brew Know Brewers determine the IBU level of a beer by measuring in parts per million how much isomerized alpha acid is dissolved into it. Alpha acid, which occurs naturally in hops, is not soluble in water unless it is first chemically converted to isomerized alpha acid via a boiling process. Hop varieties that are high in alpha acid, such as Citra and Chinook, are often used in hoppier beer styles like the American imperial IPA.

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.

It's a Bountiful Day in the Neighborhood

DISCOVERING
HIDDEN GEM
VINEYARDS
WITH
ZINFANDEL
SPECIALIST
BOB BIALE

*Robert Biale
Vineyards founder
Bob Biale.*



PHOTO: ERICA COLE

OUR BACKYARDS HAVE become more intimate spaces to many of us as of late, so we can understand why Bob Biale truly cherishes his historic “backyard” mini-vineyards in Napa and Sonoma as “hidden gems.” Each under an acre in size, these sites are home to tremendously expressive Zinfandels (and a Barbera) stewarded by Biale and his team.

According to Biale, the 2018 vintage, with its cool and moderate temperatures, produced a bountiful harvest. “The Biale 2018 red wines from Napa Valley and Sonoma that we are now releasing are emblematic of the excellent vintage,” he says, “characterized by deep flavors, dark color, fine texture, freshness, and overall excellent balance.”

We explore these inconspicuous but outstanding sites through three new releases. —Meridith May

Valsecchi Vineyard

Just outside of the town of Sonoma, Valsecchi is one of only a few Zinfandel vineyards—and the oldest existing vineyard—within the Carneros AVA. Since 1995, Biale has been allowed a ton or two of grapes by Ron Mick, owner and grandson of the site’s original owner, John Valsecchi, who planted it around 1900. Hidden behind a farmhouse, Valsecchi could have easily been overlooked, but the wines it yields have proved it an extrovert.

Robert Biale Vineyards 2018 Zinfandel, Valsecchi Vineyard, Carneros, Sonoma Valley (\$58) Spiced cranberry and a fine acid structure add to the juicy texture, with milk chocolate melting over the palate. The brushy middle is tempered by white pepper and a red-plum tartness on the finish. **93**



PHOTO COURTESY OF ROBERT BIALE VINEYARDS

A knotty old Zinfandel vine in Valsecchi Vineyard.

Falleri Vineyard

This half-acre site was first planted in 1924, but Biale has been producing wine from Falleri since 1993. Driving along the eastern edge of town in Calistoga, he spotted the old, head-trained vines and found out that no one was claiming the fruit from them, so he struck a deal. The vines sit on loamy clay soils at the base of Mount St. Helena in the warmer northern part of Napa Valley.



Robert Biale Vineyards 2018 Zinfandel, Falleri Vineyard, Calistoga, Napa Valley (\$58) Aromas of oregano, sage-seasoned cherry, and rhubarb entice the nose before white pepper and chocolate meld with heather and pomegranate. This wine is bright and elegant, with floral scents that float above the glass while lavender calms the palate. **94**

Gaudi Carli Vineyard

Located just across the street from Falleri, this tiny site may contain the only old-vine Barbera grown in Napa Valley, according to Biale; planted a century ago, it has been overseen by the Torrigino family for the past 80 years. Biale's Gaudi Carli Vineyard Barbera debuted with the 1995 vintage. "It's a perfect fit for our Italian heritage," says Biale.

Robert Biale Vineyards 2018 Barbera, Gaudi Carli Vineyard, Calistoga, Napa Valley (\$50) Defined by Old World acidity and Morello cherry character, this fleshy red is spiced with cinnamon and laden with earth and sweet tobacco. Deep plum, encompassed by soft cedar notes, rounds out the palate. **94**

When Push Comes to CHEV

Sarah and Michael Browne of Browne Family Wines.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF BROWNE FAMILY WINES

WINEMAKER MICHAEL BROWNE CRAFTS HIS OWN LABEL IN APPRECIATION OF OLD-SCHOOL WORKMANSHIP

"I CAN'T STAY IDLE," says Michael Browne. "Since moving to Sonoma County in the early '90s, I've always dreamt of having my own family winery—a place where I can be hands-on in every fine detail and have the freedom to continue to innovate and pursue my craft."

He certainly didn't sit still for long after building Kosta Browne with partners Dan Kosta and Chris Costello. Lauded for the craftsmanship of the brand's inimitable Pinot Noirs, Browne went on to create the CIRQ label in 2009 as a nod to his family's history—as well as his own—in the performing arts. And now he has launched CHEV from his estate winery, Browne Family Wines, in the Russian River Valley. "CHEV and CIRQ are my sole focus now," he insists, anticipating the opening of his newly renovated property, with its 360-degree view of the Valley, in spring 2021.

We were fortunate to taste the first vintages of CHEV. Here are my notes.
—Meridith May



CHEV 2018 Chardonnay, Russian River Valley, Sonoma County (\$80) Aromas of lemon verbena, tarragon, and chamomile are an herbal-sweet delight in this luxuriously textured white. Vibrant tangerine, candied pineapple, and dried herbs add to the ripe, creamy mouthfeel. **94**

CHEV 2018 Pinot Noir, Russian River Valley, Sonoma County (\$80) Cinnamon, cranberry, and beetroot are vivid on the nose, and the entry of dried herbs with startlingly bright Bing cherry is noteworthy. There is a freshness to this wine from start to finish, marked by an undeniably fine acid structure, as well as an earthiness that's lifted and sweetened with a hint of cocoa and orange peel. **94**



Tony and Christine Lombardi.



The Lombardi 2018 Hill Justice Vineyard from the Petaluma Gap is one of several single-vineyard Pinot Noirs that the Lombardis select from distinguished sites in Sonoma County. This rocky, red-soiled, steeply sloped mountain property has an impact on the finished wine's intensity, elegance, and backbone.

Message in a Bottle

WINE MARKETER, PUBLIC RELATIONS PRO, AND VINTNER
TONY LOMBARDI STUNS WITH HIS 2018 VINTAGE

TONY LOMBARDI HAS been on the marketing and public relations side of the wine industry for decades—and he's still one of the best in the business. I suppose his segue into production, working alongside his wife, Christine, to start their own namesake label, was a natural progression.

Lombardi grew up in Sonoma County in a family of small-business owners who ran restaurants, markets, and clothing shops. His great-grandfather, Nazzareno Lombardi, immigrated to the U.S. in 1914 from the small town of Sassoferrato in the Italian region of Le Marche with his childhood friend Cesare Mondavi; they lived in Iron Mountain, Michigan, before coming to Petaluma in 1947. "I got to hear my grandfather's immigration story and his friendship with the Mondavi family and how much they loved their trips to their Lodi farm," Lombardi tells *The SOMM Journal*. "Growing up in a large Italian family, wine has always been a part of my life—[I remember] drinking it from small glasses at the kids' table at Sunday night dinners."

After buying and selling wine for Safeway in the late 1980s and early 1990s, Lombardi got his big break in 1998, when he joined the hospitality team at Clos du Bois in Geyserville, California. From 2000 to 2015, he held senior leadership positions in marketing, public relations, and sales for some of the largest wine companies in California.

The Lombardis founded their eponymous label in 2013 with a single barrel each of Chardonnay and Pinot Noir. Together with winemaker Cabell Coursey, they now make small lots of both varieties from vineyards on the Sonoma Coast; the Pinot Noir is sourced from a family of growers in the Petaluma Gap. "I want Lombardi Wines to grow organically," the vintner explains. "I learned once, make one less case than is demanded. Creating future demand [for] my wines is a guiding philosophy." —Meridith May *sj*

Lombardi 2018 Chardonnay, Sonoma Coast (\$44) Lombardi brings out the best of the cool Sonoma Coast's rugged terroir for this stunning wine, which is 100% barrel fermented in (10% new) French oak and aged 14 months. A perfume of white chocolate, dill, and key lime is mesmerizing. Showing focused acidity and salty mineral undertones, the palate is lean, modern, and bright, with a cut-glass texture and notes of green apple and white flowers. It finishes with lemon drop and summer peach. **96**

Lombardi 2018 Giusti Ranch Pinot Noir, Russian River Valley, Sonoma County (\$68) Giusti Ranch was founded in the 1870s and has harbored a plethora of crops over the years, though grapes have been its mainstay since 2000. Barrel aged in (50% new) French oak for 14 months, this wine possesses varietal correctness across the board, with a balance of fruit and acid. Cocoa-dusted pomegranate is an eye-opener; while heather, blackberry, cinnamon, and white pepper add to its elegance. **95**

California Under Fire

DESPITE EXTENSIVE DAMAGE, HEROIC EFFORTS BY LOCAL VOLUNTEERS HAVE SAVED PARTS OF THE STATE'S WINE COUNTRY FROM MAJOR BLAZES

by Jonathan Cristaldi

ON MONDAY, AUGUST 17, multiple lightning strikes sparked the SCU and LNU Lightning Complex fires, now the third- and fourth-largest wildfires in California history, respectively. More than 1.6 million acres burned in just over three weeks, and the flames continued to spread through Labor Day weekend.

California Governor Gavin Newsom described the fires as “historic in terms of magnitude, scope, [and] consequence.” Heat spikes only made matters worse: Temperatures rose to 113 degrees Fahrenheit in St. Helena over Labor Day. Despite both them and the thick blanket of smoke and haze that kept most residents indoors, essential vineyard workers kept the harvest season fully underway.

Both the LNU Lightning Complex fire in Napa, Sonoma, and Lake counties and the CZU Lightning Complex fire in Santa Cruz and San Mateo counties particularly impacted Northern California wine country. By September 8, the former blaze, which began near Lake Hennessey, had reached Lake Berryessa and Vacaville to the south-east and neared Howell Mountain in the opposite direction.

Winemaker Jeff Morgan of the Berkeley-based Covenant Wines obtains grapes from all over Napa and Pope Valley, where some of his vineyard sources were “pretty much next to the fires,” he told *The SOMM Journal*, though he believed his Cabernet grapes survived unscathed; when we spoke, he'd done a microferment and taken berry samples to ETS Laboratories for testing (which, however, was experiencing three-week delays in obtaining results). He'd also just fermented some Napa-Carneros Pinot Noir. “It may be the best Pinot Noir I have ever made in my life,” he said enthusiastically. “Carneros is possibly the least impacted of all the appellations in Northern California; somehow, it seems to have dodged most of the recent smoke. I've also got some Cabernet from the same vineyard coming in soon, and I'm feeling bullish about that as well.”

The fires in Pope Valley sprang up so fast that, rather than wait for Cal Fire, locals took matters into their own hands, assembling volunteer crews to protect



Jeff Morgan is winemaker at Covenant Wines in Berkeley, CA.

A fire break created by Piña Vineyard Management at Oat Hill Road and Butts Canyon Road near Middletown, CA.

PHOTO COURTESY OF COVENANT WINES

PHOTO: JOHNNIE WHITE

the vineyards, homes, and other properties in the blaze's path. At the same time, other volunteers helped bulldoze a 4-mile fire break against the Hennessey fire, which was threatening wineries on Pritchard Hill.

With "an in-house fire chief, fire truck, and a pressurized water tank" at his disposal, Chappellet president and CEO Cyril Chappellet credited quick action by his brother Dominic, the winery's longtime vineyard manager Dave Pirio, assistant vineyard manager Andrew Opatz, and Pritchard Hill Fire Chief Kevin Twohey with helping to keep the fire at bay. "This team was able to work with [our] neighbors OVID and Colgin to coordinate six bulldozers to open roads and build" the aforementioned fire break, he said, adding that initial laboratory tests came back negative for smoke taint and that microferments showed "promising early results."

Davie Piña of Piña Vineyard Management is the volunteer chief of the Rutherford

PHOTO COURTESY OF COVENANT WINES



A Pope Valley vineyard spared from the flames.

Volunteer Fire Department. He was the first responder to the scene on Hennessey Ridge. "You couldn't get to it—it was in a canyon with no roads," he explained. "I had to start thinking about the best place to create a break." Piña's vineyard crew sent two dozers up behind Chappellet to help its team and volunteers from OVID build up a line around its vineyards.

Meanwhile, Piña's business partner Johnnie White, who lives a couple of miles from Michael Mondavi Family's Oso Vineyard in Pope Valley, saw the fire coming toward his house. As Piña pointed out, the vineyard's "heavy organic cover crop would have offered plenty of fuel for [it]. Cal Fire wasn't there. So we took this on ourselves." White's team built a break along the avenue into and around the vineyard, aiming to cut the fire off and keep it out of Oso, the Aetna Springs



PHOTO: JEFF VELLA

Rattlesnake Rock, Big Basin Vineyards' premier Syrah block, was impacted by the CZU Lightning Complex fire.


Resort, and Pope Valley entirely. Working for four days straight before Cal Fire took over, they created a 50- to 60-foot break with six dozers as far as they could along Oat Hill Road, heading north toward Butts Canyon Road. Their heroic efforts—though they'll say they were just doing their job—saved Calistoga and Pope Valley from potentially catastrophic damage.

As for the CZU Lightning Complex fire, it disrupted life in Big Basin Redwoods State Park, leveling most of the landscape and impacting wineries and vineyards in Santa Cruz. Big Basin Vineyards proprietor Bradley Brown had just finished bottling the 2019 vintage the day the evacuation orders came. His property, perched at 2,200 feet, includes not only his winemaking facility and estate vineyards but also the home he'd spent five years building. "The fire burned within 2 feet of the property," he said, destroying his house and a nearby woodshed full of glass bottles and metal ladders that incinerated, melting it all into abstract puddles; the winery, however, survived.

In addition, several acres of vines were singed, including his premier Syrah block, Rattlesnake Rock, which Brown worries may not develop shoots in the spring. Yet somehow, he remains optimistic, despite concern for his crew and the residents of Big Basin. "Doug Spillman, who does tractor work in our vineyard, lost his house, but he's doing well," said Brown. "He's busted his ass to source our rental generator and bring up water and fuel." With about 10 tons of Grenache and Syrah, Brown plans to make a one-off wine—perhaps a pét nat rosé—and donate a portion of the proceeds to Big Basin Redwoods State

Park. "I'm an environmentalist and nature lover; [which is] why I named the winery after the state park. My favorite hike in the Bay Area is there."

By Brown's account, members of the nearby Bonny Doon community "spent 12 straight days digging fire lines" and saved many homes in the process, while Beauregard Vineyards "dodged the bullet." But there were losses too: McHenry Vineyard did not escape the flames, which destroyed winery equipment and a cache of library wines, said Brown.

Growers and vintners were already bound to butt heads over the fact that vineyard crews are being spread thin as the COVID-19 pandemic sidles up to the 2020 harvest season; that problem is now compounded by the stress of heat spikes, blazes, and smoke taint, which winemakers all over Northern California began the cumbersome process of testing for even before the fire was fully contained on September 22. Some grapes will indeed be unsuitable for fine wine, while others may require more vigorous testing. Instead of simply canceling contracts with already struggling growers, larger companies with the means to practice patience should keep an open dialogue and work toward a mutually beneficial compromise. Some will do the right thing; some will not. 

Resources

For the latest updates on the California wildfires, follow @calfireLNU, @calfireSCU, and @Cal_Fire on Twitter or visit the Cal Fire website at fire.ca.gov.

Nial Garcia

WINE DIRECTOR, THE CONRAD, WASHINGTON, D.C. by Michelle M. Metter

PHOTO COURTESY OF SOMMCON



WHEN SOMMCON LAUNCHED in Washington, D.C., two years ago, Nial Garcia joined its sommelier leadership team alongside some of the city's other top beverage professionals. Circumstances have certainly changed, but he continues his pursuit of a life in the wine industry—a journey that began during his childhood in Rías Baixas.

Q: Tell us your backstory. Why did you pursue a career in wine?

In Rías Baixas, wine is part of the culture. My parents would always have a bottle of wine at the table; I helped my neighbors when it was time to harvest; and I even got in trouble for eating grapes with my friends directly from the vines. When I came to live in the United States in 2008, I realized that I was missing that part of my past. [As a student,] I was working as a server at a restaurant called Blue Duck Tavern to pay my bills; lucky for me, the restaurant had a great wine list, and soon I realized that I could recover the part of my childhood that I was missing if I just studied about wine. In 2013, I quit college and passed the intro exam for the Court of Master Sommeliers. In 2015, I [became a] Certified Sommelier with the Court, and that allowed me to develop my career and passion in wine.

Q: Hospitality workers have been among the hardest hit by the pandemic. What has your experience been as the wine director of The Conrad?

At the beginning of March, it seemed like a busy month for The Conrad. We had weddings, private dinners, meetings, and lots of events booked. I was buying wine for all those events, and it was a happy moment, receiving the wines and organizing the cellar [to meet] the high demand. Suddenly everything changed. Not only were events starting to be canceled but we got the news from the mayor's office that we had to close the restaurants and bars. I was heartbroken

to close down the outlets that we had put so much effort into opening less than one year before. I also got the news from the hotel management that I was furloughed, and I have been in the same situation since then.

Q: What are you doing in the meantime?

The first few months of COVID, there was a lot of Instagram live streaming by multiple wine professionals that allowed me to learn and stay focused. Little by little, there have been more organized webinars and Zoom meetings. . . I've enjoyed and learned from webinars organized by SommCon, GuildSomm, Wines of Israel, Austrian Wines, Bourgogne Vignerons, and plenty of others. I also did some studying on my own, but it has been difficult to stay . . . disciplined.

Q: You have one glass of wine and ten minutes. What are you drinking and who are you with?

I would love to drink some 2009 Pazo Señoráns Albariño. This is an amazingly complex Albariño that spends a minimum 50 months on the lees, and 2009 is the current release. I would share this moment with Darlin Kulla, [who] is not only my partner in life but one of the most amazing sommeliers I've ever worked with. *SM*

Michelle Metter is the co-founder and director of SommCon USA. The Tasting Panel and The SOMM Journal are proud supporters of SommCon and its mission to provide continued education and training for the global wine industry.



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Looking Back Through the Eyes of a Legend

REMEMBERING *DECANTER* MAGAZINE WITH FORMER PUBLISHING DIRECTOR **SARAH KEMP**

ANGLO-IRISH WITH a dash of Prussian, Sarah Kemp joined the commercial department of *Decanter* in 1985 and became publishing director a decade later. She left in early 2017 following a management change by the owners, Time Inc., when it became plain to her that, in her words, “the policy they wished to pursue would be better served by someone else.”

Her shell-shocked and tearful staff, more like a family than employees, rallied round to give her a going-away party, where they presented a memorial book containing three dozen tributes from luminaries representing the entire world of wine, from Piero Antinori to Aubert de Villaine. A couple of years prior, a similar book had been presented to my hero and mentor, Michael Broadbent, on his retirement after 433 columns without a break over 36 years—and of course it had been Sarah who had planned and organized it all. In “Life with *Decanter*,” chapter 14 of my memoir, *Wine—A Way of Life*, Sarah is featured throughout as, quite simply, she was *Decanter*.

Before I met Sarah in the late 1980s upon my return to London from two decades in Paris, I knew *Decanter* well as a magazine. The first edition in June 1975, which sold for the modest price of 40 pence, had the line “How to buy Bordeaux and keep your bank manager happy” on the cover and a story titled “The Confessions of a Lady Wine Bar Proprietor.” Both articles could be equally relevant today. I became a regular on



Sarah Kemp at the 2011 Decanter World Wine Awards.

PHOTO COURTESY OF DECANTER

the magazine's tasting panel and, in early 1993, found myself seated next to Sarah at the Black Tie Benevolent Wine Charity Dinner, Broadbent being on her other side. I told her of the recent demise of my stint running the Harrod's Wine Department. "You're well out of that," she replied. "Come and work for *Decanter*." My first column, "Wines of the Future," appeared that October and continued, along with many other articles, until April 2020, when I reached a grand total of 318 bylines (still unapproachably short of that of Broadbent).

Working with Sarah was a joy: Every idea was considered and many accepted as she spread her net wider and wider across the wine world to attract the most interesting people to put before her reading public. Although her predecessor, Colin Parnell, had created the *Decanter* Man of the Year award with Serge Hochar of Chateau Musar in 1984, Sarah soon took the baton, and the roll call of recipients—her last being Viña Errázuriz's Eduardo Chadwick in 2018—truly honored those whose creative dedication had helped to make the global wine industry what it is today.

Sarah's first big breakthrough with respect to transforming *Decanter* from a mere magazine into a cultural touchstone was the Fine Wine Encounter. Opening with 100 tables at Marylebone's The Landmark Hotel in 1996, the two-day tasting was designed to take the most interesting wine producers out of the pages of the magazine and introduce them to the public. Then as now, all tables were the same size, at 2 by 1 meters, and the rule was that, although importers could lend a hand, either the owner or winemaker had to be present—the key idea being that readers could meet and interact with the producers.

Thus, across three spacious rooms, the owners of classed growth Bordeaux and other top estates from across Europe were joined by the likes of Chadwick, Al and Boots Brounstein of Napa's Diamond Creek Vineyards, Simon Barlow of Rustenberg in Stellenbosch, John Buck of Te Mata

in Hawke's Bay, and many others. The six master classes hosted during the event were always exceptional; one, in 2008, brought Lafite, Latour, Margaux, Mouton, and Haut-Brion on stage together for the first time ever outside of France. From 2000 onward, satellite events throughout the year were devoted to the best of Bordeaux, Italy, Spain and Portugal, and the New World. Both the London wine scene and participating producers from near and far reaped the benefit.



Author Steven Spurrier with Sarah Kemp on his 70th birthday in 2011.

Then, in 2004, came the *Decanter* World Wine Awards (DWWA). Although the International Wine & Spirit Competition pioneered the field of competitions in 1969, *Wine Magazine's* International Wine Challenge had grown from its inception in the early 1980s to dominate it; in the late 1990s, I suggested to Sarah that *Decanter* follow suit, only to get the reply, "*Decanter* does events, not competitions." But around Easter 2003, Sarah called to say, "I think the time is right. You set the rules and we'll present it at Vinexpo in June."

The rules were simple. Judges would sit in parties of four, with one senior judge per table, and evaluate flights of no more than 12 wines grouped by region and type; price and other necessary but non-identifying information (such as varietal

percentages and appellation level) were provided, and a regional chairperson for each major wine region or country was on hand to confer with the tasters. The first year's 4,500 entries quickly rose to over 10,000 to surpass that of the International Wine Challenge and reached 17,000 in 2017. The DWWA remains today the world's largest and most respected wine competition.

Sarah created *Decanter.com* in 2000 and, recognizing the growth potential of the Asian market, launched *DecanterChina.com* in 2012 to coincide with the first *Decanter* Asia Wine Awards (DAWA) in Hong Kong that autumn. Co-chaired by myself and Jeannie Cho Lee, the event has grown in stature every year.

Finally, only Sarah could have pulled off the Shanghai Fine Wine Encounter, which opened at the Ritz-Carlton in November 2014, bringing the five directors of the Bordeaux First Growths together again and holding master classes with Angelo Gaja, Peter Gago of Penfolds, and Dom Pérignon's Richard Geoffroy. "[It's] probably the most successful thing I have ever done" is her modest comment on this now-annual event.

Currently, Sarah is anything but retired: She has worked closely with the wine club 67 Pall Mall to present 50 master classes via Zoom since mid-March and is hosting her own podcast, "The Wine Conversation," with such prestigious guests as Jean-Michel Cazes, Jane Anson, and Hugh Johnson. In short, she is once again serving as a bridge between producers and consumers, illustrating an appreciation of wine from grape to glass.

Around Easter this year, I myself laid down my pen at *Decanter*—a sensible move as there has not been a trade tasting since—to spend most of my time in Dorset, where I can see the south-facing rows of Chardonnay in Bride Valley Vineyard from my study window and where my stone-flagged cellar, which averages 10 degrees Celsius, contains bottles that reflect my mantra: "Drink for mood, not for food." But of course I cannot leave the wine world, which has been my life for 55 years. No longer a participant, I have become an observer—and as such take great pleasure in continuing to contribute to *The SOMM Journal*. ☞

PHOTO: DACOTA HENNEAU



THE
SOMM
Joury

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

Highly Polished

NICKEL & NICKEL'S 2018 SINGLE-VINEYARD WINES ARE SHINY, YOUTHFUL, AND ALL SO DIFFERENT

by Meridith May

SINCE 1997, Oakville-based winery Nickel & Nickel has been devoted to making single-vineyard, 100% varietal wines from Napa Valley's top sub-AVAs. Consideration of soil, rootstock, clonal selection, exposure, and sustainable farming practices takes high priority in crafting the portfolio. We recently tasted through the new 2018 releases; here are our top picks.



Nickel & Nickel winemaker Joe Harden.



C.C. Ranch is just off Silverado Trail in Rutherford, CA. The Cabernet Sauvignon that Nickel & Nickel sources here comes from a mere 15 acres on the 115-acre property. It's one of the many significant Napa Valley sites highlighted by Nickel & Nickel's single-vineyard program.

Nickel & Nickel 2018 C.C. Ranch Cabernet Sauvignon, Rutherford, Napa Valley (\$125)

The fruit for this broad-shouldered, statuesque red comes from 15 specially selected acres of the 115-acre C.C. Ranch just west of the Silverado Trail, where vines grow on well-drained gravelly loam soils. The nose exudes seductive scents of lavender, brown-sugared black cherry, and the tiniest hint of eucalyptus. Fine tannins envelop notes of violets while black pepper dots slate, soy sauce, and black olive, and black-cherry skins linger alongside nutmeg-kissed oak. The iconic dusty mouthfeel of Rutherford is prevalent. **96**

Nickel & Nickel 2018 Martin Stelling Vineyard Cabernet Sauvignon, Oakville, Napa Valley (\$185)

This vineyard, planted on deep volcanic loam over clay and gravel, is also the primary source for Far Niente Cabernet Sauvignon. Only 2 acres are devoted to the production of this limited release, which is aged for 18 months in 50% new French oak. Dusty tannins line up with bright boysenberry and plum skin. Elegant and broad-shouldered, the wine dives into a cavernous well of intense fruit and spice before coming up with graceful notes of sweet lavender and jasmine. **96**

Nickel & Nickel 2018 State Ranch Cabernet Sauvignon, Yountville, Napa Valley (\$125)

The fruit for this “stately” wine is grown on sun-drenched, rocky loam soil. Aromas of espresso, fennel root, and pencil shavings show a youthful and headstrong demeanor. Firm tannins add to the powerhouse notes of leather, roasted coffee, and clove along with the blackest of fruit. **95**



Nickel & Nickel 2018 Kenefick Ranch Cabernet Sauvignon, Calistoga (\$125)

Well-drained alluvial soils at the base of Calistoga's eastern hills distinguish this vineyard, which produces small, concentrated berries. Seeing 20 days of skin contact and 18 months in French oak, the wine travels from tightly wound to lush and juicy in minutes. Leather, soy sauce, and balsamic notes venture deep as a sinewy quality highlights shadowed black fruit and burnt orange peel. **96**

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Anthony Avila prepares for his first official harvest as head winemaker at Bien Nacido Estate.

**FORMER STOCKBROKER
ANTHONY AVILA
TAKES ON HIS FIRST
HARVEST AS HEAD
WINEMAKER AT BIEN
NACIDO ESTATE**

STORY BY MICHELLE BALL / PHOTOS BY JEREMY BALL

*One of the first
Chardonnay
clusters
harvested this
season from
Bien Nacido's
sister vineyard,
Solomon Hills.*

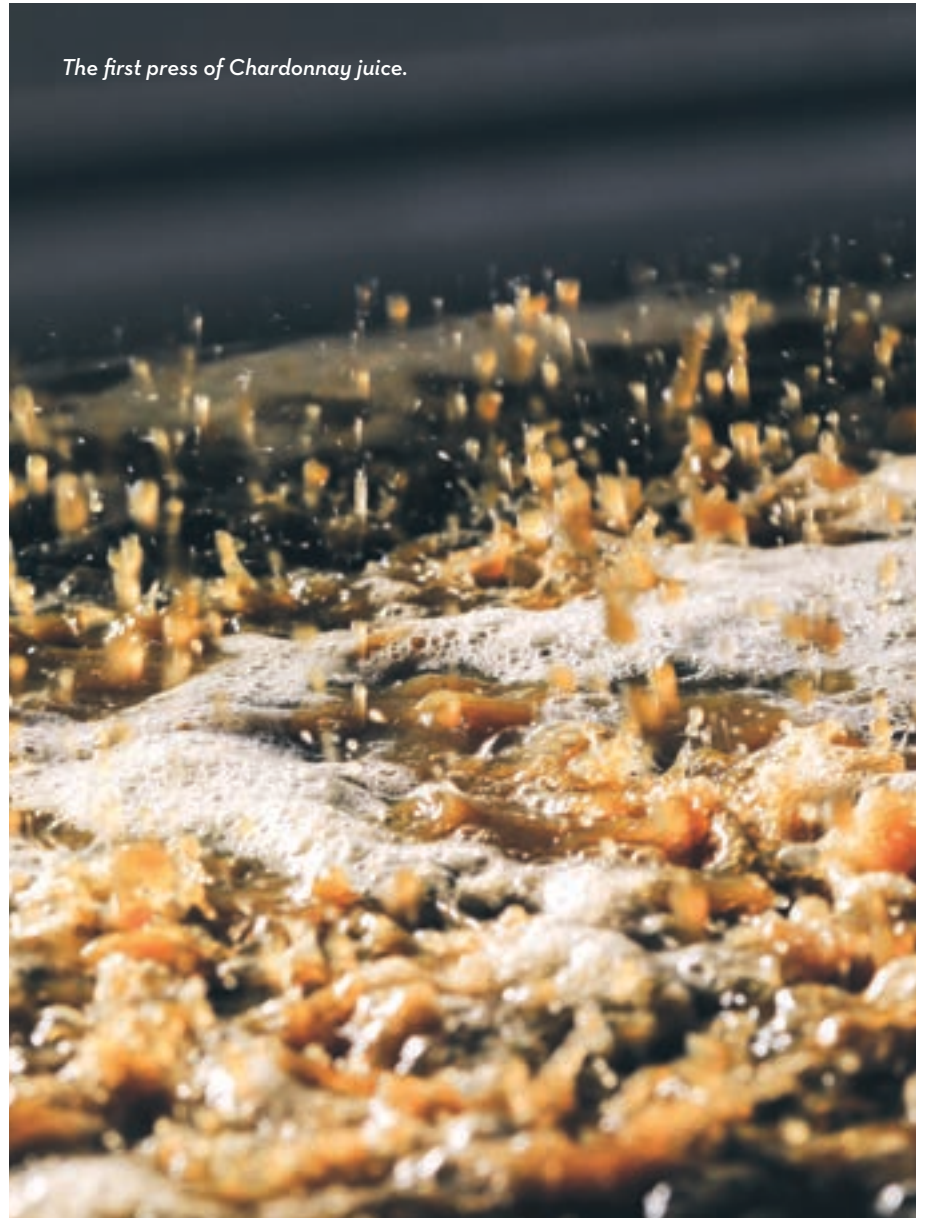


The first press of Chardonnay juice.

Preparing for his first harvest as head winemaker at Bien Nacido Estate, Anthony Avila reflects on the journey he took to this famed spot in the foothills of the Santa Maria Valley. Less than a decade ago, Avila packed up his office in Phoenix, Arizona, and drove back to his home state of California, abandoning his life as a stockbroker in exchange for a low-paying harvest internship in the Sta. Rita Hills.

The alumnus of California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo, had developed an appreciation for wine as a student working as a server at fine-dining restaurants; upon graduation, the finance career he had planned on failed to live up to his expectations—in fact, he bluntly describes it as “truly miserable.” So when the opportunity to leave his desk job arose in the fall of 2011, Avila took it. He found himself at Fe Ciega Vineyard (which coincidentally translates to “blind faith”), working for one of Santa Barbara County’s winemaking pioneers, Rick Longoria. “I just loved it,” he recalls. “We were out at Rick’s vineyard, working outside—netting, irrigation, all sorts of stuff—and working at the winery. I never looked back.”

After that, Avila spent a harvest in Marlborough and another in northern Patagonia, followed by a stint at Bien Nacido Estate. When an internship in Montalcino fell through in 2013, he reached out to the winery to see if anyone was looking for help in the area. Instead, he was offered a full-time position as cellar master, from which he was quickly promoted to assistant winemaker. In summer 2019, Avila took the reins as interim winemaker, finishing the 2018 wines that were still in barrel; that December, he sat down with the Miller family proprietors to taste through the wines he’d made. “Then they asked me if I would take over as the head winemaker full time,” recalls Avila. “I’m so thankful



to them for giving me that opportunity.”

The historic Bien Nacido Vineyard for which the winery is named has earned a prestigious reputation over the decades and is often referred to by winemakers and journalists alike as one of California’s grand cru estates. Having spent most of his career here, Avila is understandably focused on winegrowing, not just wine-making. “This is *our* vineyard, so we have a common goal with the farming team,” he explains. “We’re trying to make world-class wines that taste like these historic vines. So we do all the hard work in the vineyard.” Each block is hand-farmed with meticulous precision, using organic inputs whenever possible, by the vineyard’s dedicated long-time management crew.

“

At the end of the day, I get to hold up something that is a product of all my hard work. It’s visceral, it’s real, and it brings people a ton of happiness. I just love that aspect of it.

—Anthony Avila

”

The Two Sides of Bien Nacido Vineyard

The Bien Nacido Vineyard is one of the most recognizable names in Santa Barbara County if not the whole state of California: West Coast wineries both large and small have sourced fruit from the site for decades and prominently display its name on the label. Yet the property is quite diverse, and many winemakers secure long-term leases on specific sets of rows with a distinctive pedigree.

As Avila puts it, "There are really two different Bien Nacidos, based on generational plantings." The original sites date back to 1973; these own-rooted blocks, planted exclusively to Pinot Noir and Chardonnay, are located on gentle, south-facing slopes the team calls "The Bench." Then there are the hillside blocks that Avila refers to as "Bien Nacido 2.0." These were too steep to farm with traditional tractors, but more recent advancements in equipment technology have made their cultivation possible.

Avila considers himself privileged to work with both the older and younger blocks. "I like them equally—they're each very, very distinct," he says, alluding to the differences in texture. The winemaker judges the tannins in the old vines to be quite high yet really fine compared to that of the younger vines, which he finds to be more persistent and "a bit more masculine, for lack of a better term."

In addition, the expansive 650-acre vineyard contains four distinct soil types. "We only get to make wine from two vineyards," acknowledges Avila—the other being Solomon Hills, also owned by the Miller family—but the Bien Nacido terroir is so varied "that it's almost like making wine from several different vineyards." As the team continues to build the brand, which only started with the 2007 vintage, they've started to focus on particular blocks for their reserve wines. These include a Pinot Noir called Old Vines that's sourced from plantings dating back to 1973 and another called The Captain, which comes from the vineyard's highest-elevation block, planted in 2006. Production will remain small, yet the winery is in the ideal position to isolate distinct sites to add to its program as client contracts open up.

Naturally, Avila takes a light hand in the cellar. Fermentation is carried out exclusively with native yeast, and the wines are aged primarily in neutral French oak before they're bottled unfiltered and usually unfinned. As he sums it up, his philosophy is "Good farming, good barrels, and time."

Vintage is also a key factor in his approach. The 2019 growing season was quite cool, resulting in smaller berries with thicker skins that made for denser, darker, and more tannic reds requiring even less new oak. Contrast that with the sunny 2020 growing season, which has averaged 75 degrees Fahrenheit without the typical "June gloom" that Santa Barbara County often experiences—so called for the marine layer that lingers throughout the day. "I think it's going to be a great vintage," says Avila. "With those big berries being juicy and having slightly thinner skins than in a colder year, I think we're going to see a vintage that's a little softer and a little more elegant." He anticipates that the 2020 Pinot Noirs will be a touch friendlier and more widely available upon release than those of the previous year.

No matter the vintage, Avila generally prefers a minimum 5–10% whole-cluster bunches in his red fermentations because they add "just another layer that can almost complete the tannin matrix." Thanks to that tannin structure as well as their acidity, the resulting wines walk an admirable line between readiness to drink and ageability.

Now entering into his 12th harvest, Avila can't help but contrast his day-to-day existence with what it could have been. "All of us thought we wanted these high-powered, high-paying, flashy jobs, and that's just not true," he says. "At the end of the day, I get to hold up something that is a product of all my hard work. It's visceral, it's real, and it brings people a ton of happiness. I just love that aspect of it." SJ

The iconic Bien Nacido Vineyard is located in the foothills of the Santa Maria Valley.



MERIDITH MAY'S TASTING NOTES



"We always say our wines take their influence from the sea and the sky," says Avila, holding a glass of freshly pressed Chardonnay. "The whites tend to be very mineral, almost saline, and they're very phenolic. They've got a lot of drive, structure, and good acidity, and that's because of how small the berries are."



Bien Nacido Estate 2018 Pinot Noir, Santa Maria Valley, Santa Barbara County (\$60) There's a reason the cool-climate Bien Nacido Vineyard is world-renowned. Grace, fluidity, texture, aromatics, and a connection to the soil on both nose and palate take this Pinot Noir, which is aged 16 months in (30% new) French oak, to great heights. Fragrances of earth, dried leaves, and red plum with a hint of ginger and roasted coffee emanate from the glass. White-peppered rose petals join cherries seasoned with thyme and oregano to head into a juicy whirlpool marked by Old World acidity. Spiced oak influences a finish of balsamic and tobacco leaf. **98**



Bien Nacido Estate 2018 Syrah, Santa Maria Valley, Santa Barbara County (\$60) Splashed with 1% Viognier; this wine was grown on west-facing blocks 16 miles from the Pacific Ocean and aged 16 months in (24% new) French oak. Pungent, earthy aromas abound, accompanied by grilled meat and blackberry. The superb vintage yields layers of dark chocolate, espresso, and dried violets, while minerality holds the juicy mouthfeel in check. Ripe, rich plum and brown sugar are luscious, taking on cedar spice on the finish. **95**



Bien Nacido Estate 2018 Chardonnay, Santa Maria Valley, Santa Barbara County (\$45) Steely, high-toned citrus is an exciting entry for this whole cluster-pressed Chardonnay. Aged sur lie for 16 months in (20% new) French oak, the wine shines with white flowers: lemon blossom, chamomile, and a hint of jasmine. Precision and searing acidity define its character, along with Asian pear and lemon oil. It will hold up well against spicy and other powerfully flavored dishes. **93**



Solomon Hills Estate 2018 Pinot Noir, Santa Maria Valley, Santa Barbara County (\$60) Vines grow on sandy soils on the westernmost—and coolest—site in the Santa Maria Valley AVA, just 10 miles from the Pacific Ocean. Alluring aromas of bright cherry, green tea, and sweet earth come to life in this Pinot Noir; aged in (30% new) French oak for 16 months. Jasmine and roses lead with a bright acidity that keeps the palate fresh. Heather; nutmeg, new leather; and cranberry ensure further complexity. **96**

Solomon Hills 2018 Estate Chardonnay, Santa Maria Valley, Santa Barbara County (\$45) From 21-year-old vines grown 10 miles from the Pacific on the Solomon Hills Vineyard's distinctive sandy soils, this edgy, extroverted Chardonnay shows a spark of jasmine and ginger. Fresh-squeezed lemon is made more vivid by a line of salinity that runs through to the finish. Just-ripe pineapple, grapefruit zest, and cinnamon are kindred souls. **94**

MILLER FAMILY WINE COMPANY

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HOW THE NONINO FAMILY TRANSFORMED GRAPPA FROM FIREWATER TO A PREMIUM SPIRIT

by Michelle Ball

Three generations of the Nonino family: Giannola (center) with her daughter Elisabetta (left) and granddaughter Francesca (right).



PHOTO: JEREMY BALL



PHOTO: JEREMY BALL

Francesca Nonino calls her grandmother Giannola “the Grappa Queen,” adding that “[she’s] a concentrate of energy and passion. Grappa is her life. She put all of her soul in this product.”

When Francesca Nonino describes the legacy of her family’s business, Grappa Nonino, she does so with such visceral enthusiasm and reverence that you can’t help but be entranced. “When I was little, the Nonino story was almost like a fairy tale,” says the sixth-generation brand ambassador, who credits the tremendous efforts of her grandparents Benito and Giannola for elevating Grappa Nonino—and the grappa category as a whole—to the status it enjoys today.

Based in Friuli–Venezia Giulia, the family business was established in 1897 by Orazio Nonino, who bartered with local winemakers to exchange a portion of his grappa for their grape pomace. At that time, grappa had a poor reputation as a harsh distillate, but Orazio’s grandson Benito and his wife, Giannola, set out to revolutionize how the spirit was made.

“My grandfather really understood the importance of respecting the raw material” from the outset, says Francesca, who emphasizes that the family continues to exclusively use fresh pomace from sources no farther than a two-hour drive from the facility. By contrast, Italian law allows for the distillation of pomace from the beginning of harvest in August through the end of June the following year. If the pomace is stored for too long and the yeast begins to spoil, however, there’s a higher likelihood that off-flavors will appear in the final distillate. “We are completely against stocking the raw materials. That means that we distill day and night,” Francesca notes, adding that Benito, now 85, still sets his alarm in the middle of the night to cut the heads and the tails of the distillate.



PHOTO: CAL BINGHAM

Jeff Cirace is co-owner of and buyer at V. Cirace & Son, Inc., in Boston, MA.

Serving Fans of Grappa, Both New and Old

Jeff Cirace, co-owner of and buyer at V. Cirace & Son, Inc., in Boston, Massachusetts, is a passionate advocate for grappa: His family’s shop, which was established in 1906, boasts one of the largest selections of the spirit in the country, with roughly 100 products in stock. Yet the category was long a difficult sell due to its poor reputation. “Distillers like Nonino have really changed that mentality and brought grappa to a whole other level,” insists Cirace. “They’ve upped the game. I have the opportunity to offer the consumer a very elegant style of grappa, which they’ve always thought of as fiery. But that’s just not the case anymore.”

Though in the past Cirace’s grappa customers consisted primarily of older Italians, Americans’ newfound interest in premium imported spirits such as Cognac and single malt Scotch has extended to other categories. “They’ve expanded their horizon and tasted some grappas that are, in my opinion, as good or better than some XO Cognacs,” says Cirace.

That opinion is shared by David Othenin-Girard, spirits buyer for Los Angeles' K&L Wine Merchants, who says that Nonino "historically set a standard that is rarely matched in the category." He believes that while there is budding interest in grappa, those willing to purchase a premium product like Nonino are already somewhat familiar with it.

Othenin-Girard notes that the program at K&L focuses on high-quality grappas, as inexpensive bottlings can reinforce the negative stigma long associated with the spirit. This limits the number of brands they can sell, as producing grappa with fresh premium pomace can be highly expensive, but he believes it's worth the tradeoff. "People assume that because you're using the leftovers from wine, you can use anything and it will be good," explains Othenin-Girard, "but that's obviously not true. I think the freshness and the quality of the grapes are so important to the ultimate quality of the product."

Othenin-Girard's favorite label from Nonino is the Picolit Grappa, which he describes as "the crown jewel" of the portfolio if not the whole category. As he puts it, "I think very few grappas made by any producer anywhere get close to the quality and the complexity that that spirit offers."

At Westchester Wine Warehouse in White Plains, New York, wine and spirits buyer Ned Morello also chooses to run an elevated grappa program. "In my mind, grappa is one of the truest distillate expressions you can have. You're trying to get it right right out of the still," says Morello, who prefers the unoaked expressions of the spirit. "To me, Nonino is the gold standard." He names the Nonino il Merlot di Grappa as his personal favorite, describing it as both rich and round. "The fruit really jumps right out of it and the aromatics are fantastic," he adds. "The finish echoes on and on... It's truly one to be savored at the end of the meals."



PHOTO: DOUG YOUNG

Ned Morello is the wine and spirits buyer at Westchester Wine Warehouse in White Plains, NY.



PHOTO: REBECCA PERLINSKI

Armando Vasquez co-owns La Scarola in Chicago, IL.

As a digestif, grappa is often served at the end of the meal. That's why Armando Vasquez, co-owner of popular Chicago eatery La Scarola—which services a strong Italian clientele—has made after-dinner drinks a fixture on his menu. After trying various grappas over the course of his 22 years in business, he says he chooses to exclusively offer Nonino "because it's a good product [that has] had a really good response from the customers." Like Morello, he also prefers the opulent, slightly sweet mouthfeel of the Nonino il Merlot di Grappa.



PHOTO: JEREMY BALL

Sixth-generation brand ambassador Francesca Nonino.

To accommodate the unpredictable influx of pomace during harvest, Nonino boasts 66 artisanal pot stills, whereas the average for a distillery of its size is only six to 12. Maintaining its emphasis on quality means partnering exclusively with premium wine producers in addition to sourcing from the family's own estate vineyard; because the fruit is not only farmed at a higher standard but also rarely hard-pressed, the leftover skins contain more juice and therefore retain more flavor.

But the Noninos' most significant innovation was their decision to focus on single-varietal grappas in the early 1970s. This had never been done before on a commercial scale, as producers would traditionally combine all of their pomace before distillation. To make an even greater impact, Benito and Giannola chose to start with Picolit, an indigenous grape unique to the region that produces only a few intensely concentrated berries per bunch.

The couple set out on their new endeavor by asking their winery partners to separate the Picolit from the rest of the pomace. They were immediately met with resistance, as this required additional labor and space. But Giannola was persistent and approached the wives of the winemakers for help. "Thanks to the cooperation of women, she was able to collect the first batch of Picolit pomace," says

Francesca, admitting that they also paid extra for the privilege.

When the first drop of Picolit grappa fell from the still, the room was filled with a succulent perfume of acacia honey, quince, and raisins—a bouquet that Francesca notes is nostalgic for Friulanos who grew up with the variety. That was the first time that the Noninos made the connection between the region's terroir and the spirit's character, a leading principle that guides their process today. "In fact, my grandmother said, 'Benito, Benito, we did it!'" Francesca recalls of the story that has been passed down over the years. Since the first production was so limited, they chose to package it in a handblown perfume bottle, indicating that the expression was the crown jewel of Grappa Nonino. Today, each bottle also arrives with an identity card that includes the vintage, the bottle number, and the bottling date along with the signature of Giannola, whom Francesca refers to as

the "Grappa Queen."

The Noninos are a tight-knit and passionate clan who clearly love what they do, and Francesca is committed to protecting that legacy. "I feel that it's in my blood," she says. "All of the female role models in my family worked in the distillery. I feel like I'm part of something bigger." When she herself was learning the craft of distillation, she recalls, her grandfather would tell her, "You need to be able to put the essence [and] the soul of the vineyard in the glass—or you need to change your job."

Continuing to focus on indigenous varieties like Picolit is part of that mission. Cultural artifacts in their own right, they carry a sense of nostalgia that reinforces the family's ability to craft a spirit with a true sense of place. "The first time I distilled was a little bit emotional," recalls Francesca. "The thing is, you're immediately able to understand from that first smell the essence of the raw material." ❧

Francesca, Giannola, and Elisabetta Nonino with Terlato Wines team members Kanchan Kinkade and Jamie Wideman (first and second from left) and Josh Wagner (right).



PHOTO: JEREMY BALL



PHOTO: CAL BINGHAM

Nonino on display at V. Cirace & Son, Inc., in Boston, MA.

Tasting Notes

Nonino il Moscato di Grappa

An excellent option for those new to grappa, with distinctive Muscat characteristics of orange blossom, honey, and nectarine. The silky mouthfeel lifts on the finish with flavors of lemon peel and white peach skin.

Nonino lo Chardonnay di Grappa

Light amber in the glass, this grappa offers caramelized notes of toffee and hazelnuts layered with hints of brioche.

Nonino Picolit Grappa

The 40th-anniversary vintage of this rare, prestigious, and complex grappa bursts with notes of blueberry, rosemary, and honey that evolve in the glass with each nosing. A thick viscosity coats the mouth, mimicking an oak-aged spirit.

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**STORY BY JONATHAN CRISTALDI
PHOTOS BY ALEXANDER RUBIN**

Growing up in a winemaking family, entrepreneur Judy Jordan, the founder of J Vineyards & Winery, developed an early appreciation for sparkling wine. In the 1980s, that meant French sparkling wine, as producers of California bubbly were few and far between. Their nascent movement needed a champion—and found it in Jordan.

With a keen focus on soils—she majored in geology at Stanford—Jordan recognized the potential to grow Champagne-quality Pinot Noir and Chardonnay in the Russian River Valley. In 1986, with assistance from her father, Tom Jordan (the founder of Jordan Winery & Vineyards), she ushered J Vineyards & Winery (JVV) into existence, focusing solely on sparkling wine production; by the early 1990s, the portfolio had grown to include still Pinot Noir and Chardonnay as well as Pinot Gris and rosé. In 1996, she purchased the former Piper Sonoma property, adjacent to Rodney Strong in southern Healdsburg, and opened her tasting room three years later.

Early fans of JVV came for the wine and stayed for the hospitality—Jordan was among the first vintners in Sonoma to focus on pairing wines with food for guests. Today, the culinary experience is front and center. After buying the estate in 2015, the Gallo family remodeled the space in front of the winery to make way for The Bubble Room—a beautiful, high-ceilinged, airy space that combines upscale aesthetics with characteristically down-to-earth Sonoma charm, thanks in part to abundant natural light and bubbly-inspired chandeliers.



Head winemaker Nicole Hitchcock oversees this year's Chardonnay harvest.

“I describe [our] style as
***unapologetically
California.***”

—head winemaker Nicole Hitchcock



JVW director of consumer experience Lindsey Auchter.

Since 2015, JVW head winemaker Nicole Hitchcock has overseen the production of the nearly 30 wines in the current portfolio, including a series of riveting single-vineyard Pinot Noirs sourced from five estate sites in the Russian River Valley and one on the Sonoma Coast. In JVW's 36-year history, just three other winemakers have held the reins: the Israeli-born Oded Shakked, George Bursick, and Melissa Stackhouse. "We had decades of experience with approach and protocols," says Hitchcock, "and what I brought to the table was a fresh pair of eyes." She credits associate winemaker Scott Anderson and longtime cellar master Martin Guzman with giving her invaluable historical insight. "I wasn't going to come in and change things overnight," she says; rather, her ambition was to improve upon the house style by finessing existing techniques and introducing still wines to augment the bubbles on which JVW's reputation was built.

Portfolio Highlights

JVW sparkling wines are made in the traditional method. "I describe the style as unapologetically California," says Hitchcock, who notes that abundant sunshine "sets us apart from other sparkling wine regions throughout the world," aiding in ripeness that's nevertheless balanced by scintillating Sonoma acidity.

Fans of JVW's sparklers know to expect the kind of toasty and complex character

that only comes with bottle age—a core tenet of the program. "Our flagship Cuvée 20 sees a minimum of three years aging, with two and a half years on the lees and then six months of bottle aging," explains Hitchcock, while the late-disgorged wines age a minimum of seven years. (For those of you doing the math, Hitchcock is still riddling her predecessor's late-disgorged wines.) "I've learned I have to take detailed notes, because eight years from now, when I'm trying to remember what I was thinking about in 2020, those notes will be invaluable."

As for her still wines, all of the Pinot Noir Hitchcock works with has single-vineyard potential. "Each site gives very specific traits—and in my book, site trumps clone irrespective of the vintage," she says. Lots not classified as vineyard-designate wines are included in the Russian River Valley Pinot Noir.

JVW has six estate vineyards: BowTie, Eastside Knoll, Foggy Bend, Canfield, and Cooper in the Russian River Valley and Annapolis Ridge, which rises to nearly 1,000 feet above sea level on the Sonoma Coast. Annual production for most of the bottlings from these properties ranges from 600 to 800 cases. I sampled several examples side by side, noting the differences Hitchcock mentioned. For instance, Eastside Knoll, located five minutes south of the winery on Eastside Road, consists of undulating hills with bright-red Huichica

series and rocky soils. One of the first sites Judy Jordan worked with to make sparkling wine, the early-ripening vineyard produces beautiful, elegant yet juicy Pinot Noir: Canfield, by contrast, is the last to ripen as the coolest of the sites, located on the border of the Petaluma Gap AVA. It harbors five Pinot clones on fluffy Goldridge loam that yield a distinctly savory style, loaded with minerality, tobacco, and leather.

Hitchcock also has a few new releases up her sleeve. Last year, she debuted the Noir Collection, which showcases the standout lots of each vintage; the 2017



Multicourse tastings are held in The Bubble Room.

Edition No. 2 was released earlier this year. Labeled the Tale of Two Coasts, just 450 cases were produced to showcase the marriage of two coastal Sonoma sites with wildly different qualities: the bright, fruit- and acid-driven Annapolis Ridge component meets the more savory notes characteristic of Canfield. Buyers should also keep an eye out for a new Russian River Valley Chardonnay and the 2014 J Vineyards Blanc de Blancs (\$95); aged five years on the lees and disgorged this past spring, the latter is coming to market in November.

The Bubble Room

Most visitors come to JWV for the standard Signature Tasting, while others opt for the more in-depth Legacy on the Terrace Tasting. But the top tasting option—which consumers and members of the trade alike are invited (indeed highly encouraged) to experience—is the five-course tour de force of food-and-wine pairings presented in The Bubble Room.

As the director of consumer experience for JWV, Lindsey Auchter, DWS, CS, CSW, leads a passionate hospitality team in building upon the pairing program that

Judy Jordan pioneered and that “longtime members loved coming in for,” as Auchter puts it. The culinary experience provided today is impeccably polished, incredibly precise, and well expressed through a thought-provoking menu that—impressively—changes every six weeks.

The gastronomic treasures that await are fashioned by chef Carl Shelton, an alum of Michelin 3-star The Restaurant at Meadowood in St. Helena as well as Healdsburg’s Spoonbar and Boka in Chicago, with the input of Auchter and her crew. “The way we think about food and





Lobster gnocchi in roe-infused, caviar-topped beurre blanc, served with Parker House rolls and the J Vineyards & Winery 2011 Late Disgorged Russian River Brut.



A pairing of small plates and wines on the JVW terrace.

wine here is [that] it starts with the wine,” Auchter explains, “showcasing our distinct style of California ripeness but with acidity and vibrance to pair with an array of cuisines. We’re not tied to any [one] food tradition at J, but we’re focused on telling the story of a sense of place.”

Shelton is an avid forager, and he seeks out ingredients within a 25-mile radius from the winery to shine a light on the Russian River Valley. “Our driving inspiration is the wine,” he says. “We get excited and inspired by fresh, seasonal ingredients, but we always let the wine determine what direction to go.” That way, Auchter notes, “[even] if there’s an ingredient we can use to give a nod to other areas of the country, like Maine lobster, we’ll source it and tie in something local.” She adds that the pairings offer visiting beverage professionals innovative ways to think about how bubbles can complement an array of foods: “We want members of the trade to think outside of the box and to challenge themselves while realizing the complexity that our portfolio offers.”

It’s almost impossible to walk out of The Bubble Room without some newfound inspiration. On my visit, for instance, I was positively floored by a dish of the fluffiest gnocchi I’ve ever had, floating in *beurre blanc* infused with harvested roe beneath perfectly cooked lobster and generous dollops of Tsar Nicolai caviar. Served with Parker House rolls, it was accompanied by the J Vineyards 2011 Late Disgorged Russian River Brut (\$110). It just dazzled. While the wine’s toasty nuttiness found an echo in the rolls, I discovered its lovely sea-spray aromas with a bite of sauce-coated gnocchi, lifted by the caviar and lobster—which drew out an oyster-shell minerality that I hadn’t initially perceived in the glass. It was a seamless experience to move from wine to dish and back again, providing a sense memory I’ll never forget.

And that’s the point. It’s all about inspiring while educating, insofar as everything Shelton does comes back to the wine, whether he’s drying vines to use for fuel when grilling or smoking, capturing disgorgement yeast to incorporate into sourdough starter, or even repurposing spent lees to make cultured butter. The result is a master class in pairing.

And it doesn’t stop at the dinner table.



tasting notes

J Vineyards & Winery Cuvée

20 (\$38) Beautiful rose-gold hue. Baked Granny Smith apple, fresh pear, and honeydew melon. Immediately expansive and creamy with a distinct mineral finish punctuated by crushed Marcona almond, jasmine, and vanilla nougat.

J Vineyards & Winery 2017 Russian River Pinot Noir

(\$40) Extremely rich and decadent. Blackberry compote tinged with vanilla and sweet oak spices, deep candied cherry, forest floor, and brown baking spices. Compact, with silky-smooth fruit and a long, sensual finish.

J Vineyards & Winery 2017 Barrel 16 Pinot Noir

(\$90) Super-ripe blueberry and blackberry with notes of black-cherry liqueur and *crème de cassis*. Silken dark-berry fruit, underbrush, and dark salted chocolate are all supported by juicy acidity on a long mineral finish.

J Vineyards & Winery 2017 Eastside Knoll Vineyard Pinot Noir, Russian River Valley

(\$65) Broad and mouth-filling with loads of creamy blackberry, blueberry, and black cherry. Terrific baking spices, sweet cedar, and crushed stones on a lengthy and intriguing finish.

What really sets JVV apart from its neighbors is the collaboration that occurs between Shelton, Auchter, and Hitchcock, who brings the chef and hospitality director in during dosage trials to offer insights that ensure perfect pairings. Their work led to the creation of a Demi-Sec (\$45), which I tasted alongside a sticky cake made with Santa Rosa plums—and wow! As I practically licked my plate clean, Auchter summed it up best: “There’s a lot of thought put into the experience, and it’s always evolving.”

The same could be said for the estate as a whole. While steeped in its heritage as a producer of excellent sparkling wines, the talented JVV winemaking team has used their remarkable vineyard sources to yield equally scintillating, heady Chardonnays and Pinot Noirs that are incredibly ageworthy yet packed with upfront drinking pleasure. For the trade and consumers alike, discovering these soulful wines through an outstanding hospitality program makes JVV an essential stop along the route through California wine country. *SJ*



One Fish, Two Fish, Redfish,

White Wine

COMPLEMENTING A FRENCH-AMERICAN CLASSIC AT **ELVIE'S** IN JACKSON, MISSISSIPPI

by Michelle M. Metter



PHOTOS COURTESY OF ELVIE'S

Hunter Evans is chef/owner of Elvie's in Jackson, MI.

Redfish almondine is an Elvie's signature.



JACKSON, MISSISSIPPI, NATIVE Hunter Evans discovered his love for cooking in his teens and took his first kitchen job at acclaimed chef John Currence's Bouré while in college. As a student at the Culinary Institute of America in New York, he staged under Eric Ripert at Le Bernardin and Daniel Boulud at Café Boulud and Daniel, landing a gig upon graduation with Danny Meyer's Union Square Hospitality Group before returning to his hometown to fulfill his dream of opening a restaurant there. Inspired by memories of its namesake, his grandmother, in New Orleans as well as his travels through Europe, Elvie's offers a modern Southern take on traditional French cuisine.

Evans' redfish almondine starts with locally caught fish that's lightly breaded, seasoned with salt and pepper, and seared in a hot skillet. Served in brown butter with charred lemon puree, toasted almonds, capers, chives, and fresh parsley, it's plated on a bed of slightly wilted Bibb lettuce that adds a touch of bitterness to contrast the sauce.

Calling the dish "a great balance of richness and brightness," Elvie's sommelier Brandi Carter explains that "I tend to let the food shine for our pairings, and the 2019 Pierre Amadieu Roulepiere Côtes du Rhône Blanc complements [it] beautifully." The 50/50 blend of Grenache Blanc and Clairette delivers aromas of "underripe peach, almond extract, lemon zest, honeydew melon, toffee, and pizza crust," in her view, while "on the palate, [there's] ripe pear and underripe peach that starts slightly creamy and fades into a pithy grip[, plus] medium acid and medium body. . . The brown butter completely wipes away all of the [wine's] lingering bitterness, and charred lemon puree lifts [its notes of] peach and lemon zest."

Here are pairing suggestions from three other sommeliers.



PHOTO COURTESY OF ELVIE'S

Elvie's sommelier Brandi Carter.



PHOTO COURTESY OF HALEY MOORE

HALEY MOORE

Founder, Acquire, Orinda, CA

"Redfish almondine is a classic Louisiana dish. The fish is lightly breaded and the sauce is nutty and rich, balanced by fresh lemon flavors. There is nothing better [to accompany it], in general, than Champagne, but [its] richness . . . calls for something truly special: Laurent-Perrier Grand Siècle No. 24 is a blend of 2004, 2006, and 2007, coming from 100% Grand Cru vineyards [and] aged eight to ten years on the lees. The nutty richness of this wine would pair perfectly with the almonds in the sauce, and the delicate acidity will balance the preserved lemons."



PHOTO COURTESY OF MINA GROUP

MARTIN SHEEHAN STROSS

Principal, Consorzio Wines, San Francisco, CA

"This dish calls out for something rich and spicy, like a Smaragd Grüner. I particularly love the wines from F.X. Pichler in the Wachau. These are full-bodied whites that can stand up to the decadence of the fish itself but also maintain their unique herbal edge to highlight the Bibb lettuce and parsley. The wines from the Kellerberg Vineyard age beautifully, and with the brown butter and almonds, I'd reach for a slightly older bottling, such as 2010."



PHOTO: JOSUE CASTRO

JESSE RODRIGUEZ

Strategic director of wine and spirits, Fast Forward, Bluffton, SC

"Jean-Claude et Romain Bessin Chablis La Forêt, I feel, is always a stunning Premier Cru from the left bank of the Serein River in Chablis. [The] 2018 rendition offers heightened tones of preserved lemon, quince, and . . . floral tones of white roses. With a chalky refinement and 13.5% alcohol, this is a fantastic [choice] if you are looking for something French." SJ

Michelle M. Metter is a San Diego-based writer and event producer for the beverage industry. Reach her at mmetter@mac.com.

Beyond "Skunky"

HOW TO TASTE AND EVALUATE FLOWER

by Rachel Burkons



THINK BACK TO your earliest explorations of wine, and you'll likely recall that the mechanics of tasting were an essential lesson. Mastering techniques that allow you to tease out aromas on the nose, pick up nuances on the palate, and observe lingering flavors on the finish is key to evaluating wines, and teaching consumers these skills is an important goal for wine professionals in restaurants and tasting rooms everywhere.

As the cannabis hospitality industry continues to develop and consumers seek knowledge about the flower they're smoking, teaching people how to taste it is becoming a cornerstone of education in the sector. It's a particular necessity in the culinary cannabis space, where tastings and pairing dinners operate similarly to the wine dinners we're already accustomed to.

If you think cannabis tasting notes start with "skunky" and end with "weedy," think again: Like grape varieties, cannabis strains are individuated and nuanced, and flavors across the category range from soft white florals to ripe tropical fruits, herbs, citrus, and black pepper. I teach my guests a simple three-step method to help them evaluate and understand these characteristics. Follow along with these steps below—and as we say to novice wine tasters, practice, practice, practice!

STEP 1: NOSE

As with wine, when tasting cannabis, the vessel matters. Though high-quality products in the legal marketplace are typically packaged in glass, there's a whole host of reasons that your flower might come in plastic, which can interfere with your ability to perceive its aromas. If this is the case, after you've purchased it, transfer it to a glass jar or pre-roll tube, clearly label it, and store it in a cool, dark place (sound familiar?). Now you're ready to evaluate it: Simply pop the lid, stick your nose in the jar or tube, and inhale deeply. This brings lifted citrus and floral aromatics to the forefront.

STEP 2: PALATE

I prefer to use a joint with a filter for this step, but an extremely clean pipe or bong will work as well. Bring the joint to your lips and, without lighting it, inhale. We call this a "terpene pull" or "dry pull," and it brings the brightest and truest expression of flavor to your palate. Here, you can detect nuances and zero in on secondary flavors such as herbs and other botanicals, moving from generalities such as "floral" and "herbal" to "jasmine," "sage," or "rosemary."

STEP 3: FINISH

The third step is the most fun: Light your flower! As you first draw smoke into your mouth, you'll note its mouthfeel, which can range from light and acidic to deep, dense, and heady. On the palate, you'll pick up tertiary flavors: deep spice, ripe tropicality, and, of course, the signature "gas" notes of cannabis. **S**

PHOTO: RACHEL BURKONS



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— **LORENZO MUSLIA**
PARTNER AT ANDIS WINES

2018 Painted Fields Old Vine Zinfandel, Sierra Foothills (\$25)

This elegant blend of 50% Zinfandel, 30% Primitivo, 10% Petite Sirah, and 10% Barbera speaks to the constrained power of all four varieties. Saturated in plum and heather, it’s lushly textured on the palate, where a keen dash of white pepper adds a slight dryness to the long, blue fruit-filled finish. — Meridith May

2018 Barbera d’Amador, Sierra Foothills (\$30)

Receiving an Award of Excellence for the 2017 vintage, this wine continues to stand up to our highest regard—plus we love the name. Estate-grown fruit offers a deep, resonant perfume of cherries and earth. The mouthfeel is astounding: so focused on thrilling Old World-style acidity, which is joined to ripe blueberry and pluot as well as the signature note of white pepper mentioned above. — Meridith May

The Dawn of “Ribolization”

A NEW ERA FOR **RIBOLI FAMILY WINES** ARRIVES WITH THE LAUNCH OF THE **RIBOLI ESTATES GROUP**

by Jessie Birschbach



PHOTOS COURTESY OF THE RIBOLI FAMILY

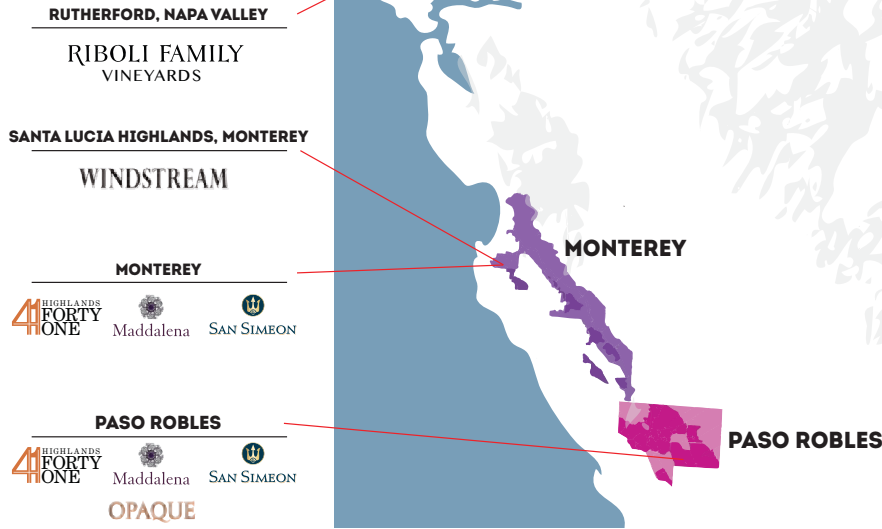
Anthony Riboli, fourth-generation vintner for Riboli Family Wines.

RIBOLI FAMILY WINES in Los Angeles has survived Prohibition, the Great Depression, and two world wars. But if you ask fourth-generation vintner Anthony Riboli to name his family's biggest accomplishment of the last 100 years or so, it's "owning our own estate vineyards."

Never mind that the Ribolis have transformed the small facility they established in 1917 in the Lincoln Heights neighborhood just north of downtown L.A. into a popular restaurant, gift shop, and tasting room—the oldest business of its kind in the city. (They operate two additional tasting rooms in nearby Ontario and in Paso Robles.) Never mind that their Stella Rosa brand is now the bestselling 750-milliliter imported Italian wine brand in the United States or that, in 2018, *Wine Enthusiast* declared Riboli Family Wines "American Winery of the Year" while acknowledging its historic roots.

Instead, consider that they're adding yet another milestone to this impressive list through the recent introduction of a new division: Named the Riboli Estates Group, it's dedicated solely to the family's portfolio of ultra-premium and luxury estate-grown wine brands, including San Simeon, Maddalena, Opaque, Riboli Family Vineyard, Windstream, and the newest label, Highlands 41. All are sourced from the 1,300-plus vineyard acres the Ribolis own and sustainably farm in accordance with Certified California Sustainable Winegrowing standards in Napa Valley, Paso Robles, and Monterey County.

Both the Highlands 41 Cabernet Sauvignon and the Darkness Red Blend are sourced from the Creston Highlands Vineyard in Paso Robles.



For a detailed breakdown of the varieties and soil profiles within the Riboli family's estate vineyards, visit riboliwines.com.

The family business' late patriarch, Stefano Riboli, long dreamed of owning estate vineyards in Paso Robles, and in 2014 that wish was fulfilled with the completion of his namesake vineyard in the El Pomar District. Two years later, the family saw another dream come to fruition with the opening of the Riboli Family Winemaking & Event Center, also in Paso Robles; the state-of-the-art production facility, which is powered entirely by solar panels and recycles 100% of its wastewater, has taken their operation to the next level.

"Having control of both your vineyards and your winery is huge," says Riboli, noting as an example that outside growers tend to object to the "lost dollars" involved in control measures like dropping clusters. By cultivating their own fruit, "we've eliminated having to have this sort of fight . . . and [can] make decisions based on quality," says Riboli. "In the winery . . . we're getting layers of aromatics that we did not get before when we were making our wine at a custom crush facility, and I think a lot of that is attributed to cleanliness in general: hygiene of equipment, clean fermentations, clean floors, everything. It gives us this increased aro-

matic, bright, very direct fruit quality that wasn't there before in our estate wines and really allows where they're grown to shine through."

Overseeing the estate portfolio alongside Riboli is national sales manager Paul Hecht, a 40-year industry veteran who was initially hired to manage Stella Rosa. Hecht, who has been with the company for over a decade, says he first recognized the need for a new division that would focus on the estate portfolio a few years ago after witnessing the incredibly positive response to the estate-grown brands at the Monterey Wine Festival. The overwhelming success of Stella Rosa "made us really good businesspeople and really good marketers," Hecht points out. "It forced us to understand and manage our own growth, and it's prepared us for what we're taking on now, which is to be involved in the California premium wine business. Now we have the opportunity to really share with consumers, the trade, and our distributors our core business of growing and producing wine sustainably in Paso Robles, Monterey, and Napa." The Riboli Estates portfolio, he adds, reflects market trends such as the growth of Cabernet

Sauvignon to surpass Chardonnay in sales, the rising profile of Paso Robles as a wine region, and increased consumer spending in the super-premium, ultra-premium, and luxury wine tiers.

Paul affectionately calls getting to know and love the hardworking Riboli family through their wines as the "Ribolization" process. Perhaps, given the laser focus of the newfound Riboli Estates Group, that phenomenon will spread faster than ever. S

Highlands 41

Just released this year as the newest member of the Riboli Estates Group, Highlands 41 is named for both the hills of the Creston Highlands in Paso Robles, where the family's vineyards are planted, and the road that skirts them, State Route 41. The historic highway "goes all the way from Yosemite, down through Paso, and all the way up to Cambria. The name Highlands 41, to us, really ties that ocean influence into the calcareous soil of Paso and the soils of our estate vineyards in Monterey," says Riboli.



Highlands 41 2018 Estate Reserve Cabernet Sauvignon, Paso Robles (\$15)

Bright cranberry and dark, ripe blackberry are complemented by spicy cinnamon and graphite. With a medium-plus body and firm acid to buttress it, the style of this Paso Cab is not too rich; the result is an excellent value.

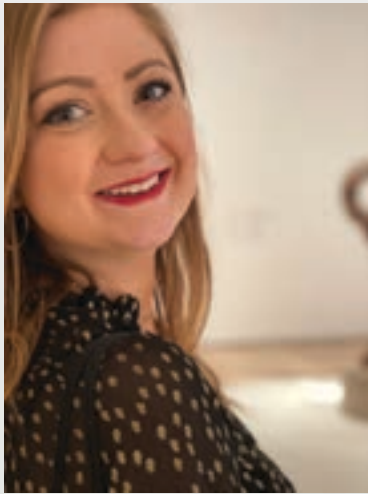


Highlands 41 2017 Estate Reserve Chardonnay, Monterey County (\$15)

Like the Cab, this Chardonnay is just rich enough: crème fraîche, ripe pineapple, and lemon curd on a creamy, weighted palate. The finish is dry yet tinged with fresh, salted butter.



Coming to a Crossroads in New York City . . . and Beyond



Michelle Wozniak, sommelier and manager at Marc Forgione.

WILL THE ROLE OF THE BEVERAGE PROFESSIONAL EVER BE THE SAME?

by Cheron Cowan

CREDITED WITH COINING the term “pivot” in a modern economic context is Silicon Valley entrepreneur Steve Blank, who launched eight technology startups before going on to teach entrepreneurship at such prestigious institutions as Stanford; Columbia; the University of California, Berkeley; and New York University. He defined the act of pivoting not as altering the product itself but rather as making “a substantive change to one or more of the . . . canvas components” of a business model, such as targeted customer development and strategic growth.

This concept is certainly resonating with the hospitality industry during the pandemic. And if that industry must change drastically, so must its job descriptions. With so many businesses on the brink of closure, is it not realistic to assume that the positions of wine director, sommelier, and beverage manager will be reimagined to require just as much, if not more, managerial acuity than beverage-related knowledge?

The SOMM Journal recently connected with four New York–based wine professionals, who detailed the expansive duties they’re now required to execute in order to navigate this economic crisis.

Michelle Wozniak, sommelier and manager at Marc Forgione, says that she and her colleagues are doing their best to adapt in these times, adding that they have been “auctioning off more expensive [wines] and [selling] some items at cost to help generate cash flow.” As one of two managers currently on staff, she’s maintaining a QR-coded wine menu, repurposing excess by-the-glass product into sangria, bringing back fur-



Caleb Ganzer, wine director and managing partner of Compagnie des Vins Surnaturels.



PHOTO: KYRO KARAVAS



**Corkbuzz assistant beverage director
Amber Rill.**

loughed employees for outdoor dinner service, and making sure the staff is executing proper safety protocols—all while prioritizing the needs of the guest.

Like many other New York City restaurants, Corkbuzz's 13th Street and Chelsea Market locations have been selling their extensive wine selection online at retail pricing (that is, a 1.5-times markup). Once they opened for outdoor dining in mid-July, both wine bars maintained that pricing model, according to assistant beverage director Amber Rill; a \$25 corkage fee was then added to table service. "So, for example," Rill explains, "you can get [a] \$250 bottle of Chateau Musar for \$125 and we will open it tableside for an additional \$25." While implementing this new business model, she and just two other colleagues were working out of the Chelsea Market location, and Rill adds that she's adopted an entrepreneurial mindset to brainstorm additional cash-flow options, such as offering curbside pickup. "We have had to take it a day at a time," she says, "because there has been so much change day to day."

Meanwhile, at Cote, a team of six sommeliers was reduced to a team of one: award-winning somm Victoria James, who serves as the steakhouse's beverage director/partner. Immediately after restaurants were forced to shutter in March, James and her remaining colleagues pivoted to selling an extensive to-go menu that included complete meals for four to six people and wines and cocktails at reduced pricing.



Cote sommelier Victoria James.

To do so, they teamed up with Goldbelly, a platform that allowed them to ship food nationally while maintaining quality standards. "Initially, I was putting together tasting packs to sell, but I just got too busy," James admits, adding that she hasn't purchased wine since March in an effort to minimize expenses. When the restaurant commenced outdoor service, its seating capacity became a fraction of what was offered inside, with only four tables on weekdays expanding to eight on weekends. But, left to manage without her team, James had more than enough to keep herself occupied: She not only worked the floor but also helped to implement the use of a QR-coded wine list while simultaneously developing a training model for hourly employees as they returned to work.

Finally, Caleb Ganzer, wine director and managing partner of *Compagnie des Vins Surnaturels*, opted to respond to the debilitating limitations caused by the coronavirus by starting a new venture outside the city: He and his team have opened a pop-up wine bar, *Supernatural Lake*, in the Finger Lakes region, where they also offer overnight cottage rentals featuring such wellness activities such as yoga, biking, and kayaking as well as a live-music lineup. The 300-SKU wine list promotes both global and local labels. "We have great interest from our neighbors and NYC patrons," Ganzer says, noting that with 45 seats for outdoor dining, "we also just have more space to work with."

The bar's prospects for revenue, especially given the additional cash flow from renting out rooms, contrast starkly with that of *Compagnie des Vins Surnaturels*. The latter venue has had some success with selling wine packs at retail and converting its *Wine Boot Camp* class into a virtual format that can accommodate ten times what the in-class setting offered, but its eight outdoor tables simply cannot generate the capital needed to make rent in Little Italy, even with the help of a Payment Protection Program (PPP) loan. Still, Ganzer remains nimble and hopeful as he responds to the crisis.

As restaurants continue to grapple with an uncertain future, "pivot" has become the 2020 mantra for hospitality businesses doing everything they can to survive. So, too, has the role of beverage professional evolved into that of a jack-of-all-trades. The longer this pandemic lasts, the more likely we are to see the following job ad: "Seeking manager, with some beverage knowledge." *SJ*

A Dire Prognosis for the Hospitality Industry

- According to a report from the James Beard Foundation, as of April 13, restaurants had on average laid off 91% of their hourly workforce and 70% of salaried employees due to coronavirus-related closures. A later report found that more than 55% of respondents in July "chose the financial pressures of closing and re-opening as a reason they may have to close their restaurant permanently": a 20% increase from a May survey.
- In a National Restaurant Association poll conducted in May, 75% of respondents said it's unlikely their restaurants would be profitable within the next six months.
- The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics estimated that the hospitality industry created 502,000 jobs in July—but the industry is still down 2.6 million jobs since March.

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Adelaida District AVA.*

**PASO ROBLES' SOILS ARE
THE KEY TO ITS THRILLING
CABERNET SAUVIGNON**

**by Randy
Caparoso**

“Terroir,” esteemed wine writer Hugh Johnson once famously said, “is the sum of many things. . . . It need not be terrifying at all.” Even so, a surprising number of American wine professionals are still reluctant to talk about terroir out of the belief that wine quality is 1) defined more by the clarity or intensity of varietal character than by sense of place and 2) more reliant on favorable climate than favorable soils.

But for regions like Paso Robles, which is just beginning to carve out its place in the wine world—particularly thanks to its top grape, Cabernet Sauvignon—delivering varietal character with exceptional clarity or intensity is not enough: You can find examples of “typical” Cabernet Sauvignon from virtually any winegrowing region in the world.

If the question, then, is what makes Paso Robles’ Cabernet Sauvignon stand out from the rest, the answer lies in the region’s distinctive soils and topographies, which are capable of producing incredibly food-friendly wines with deep, bright, soaring aromatic profiles that are buoyantly balanced by sturdy yet rounded, textured, acid-driven structures. As a result, they’re capable of complementing everything from umami-rich seafood stews to Chinese takeout, making for a sommelier’s dream scenario: popular variety, maximal versatility.

To explore this topic, the Paso Robles CAB Collective put me in touch with seven of the region’s Cabernet Sauvignon specialists: Jeremy Weintraub, winemaker at Adelaida Vineyards & Winery; Steve Cass and Sterling Kragten, proprietor and winemaker, respectively, at Cass Winery & Vineyard; Michael Mooney, proprietor/winemaker at Chateau Margene; Austin Hope, proprietor/winemaker at Hope Family Wines; Soren Christensen, winemaker at Hearst Ranch Winery; and Anthony Yount, winemaker at Sixmilebridge Vineyards.

Winemaker Jeremy Weintraub in Adelaida Vineyards & Winery’s Viking Vineyard.



PHOTO: RANDY CAPAROSO PHOTOGRAPHY

Exploring the Soil Types of Paso Robles

The Paso Robles AVA encompasses 11 nested AVAs that range from river bottoms and level terraces to hilly and mountainous terrain. According to the Paso Robles Wine Country Alliance website, more than 30 major soil series can be found within the appellation. Many of the top Cabernet Sauvignon sites are located in the Monterey Formation outcroppings—which date back as many as 23 million years ago to the Miocene Epoch—running through the California Coast Ranges. These properties are dominated by sedimentary rocks consisting of calcareous shales, sandstone, and mudstone.

Typical of many Paso Robles sites, there are five predominant soil series within Adelaida Vineyards & Winery's 16.5-acre Viking Vineyard in the Adelaida District AVA. The property is planted mostly to Cabernet Sauvignon and sits on a steep, south-facing mountain slope that tops 1,695 feet in elevation just 14 miles from the ocean. According to Weintraub, these soils are:

- **Calleguas:** Shallow (0–16 inches), well-drained clay loam; moderately alkaline (8.0 pH)
- **Calodo:** Shallow (10 inches), porous calcareous shale and sandstone; moderately alkaline (8.0 pH)
- **Danville:** Deeper (1–5 feet), well-drained sandy loam alluvium; slightly alkaline (7.5 pH)
- **Linne:** Weathered soft shale, sandstone, and clay loam (up to 3 feet); moderately alkaline (8.0 pH)
- **Nacimiento:** Fine, silty clay loam (up to 3 feet); moderately alkaline (8.0 pH)

The common denominator is the relatively high pH values of these soils, which have a direct impact on the acidity of the grapes and the structure of the resulting wines. They could be contrasted with, say, those of the vaunted Cabernet Sauvignon sites in the vicinity of Napa Valley's Rutherford area, which are marked by gravelly sandy loams with neutral to acidic pH (5.0–7.0).

Also in the Adelaida District, Sixmile-bridge Vineyards' Cabernet Sauvignon plantings grow in Linne-Calodo series soils,



Hearst Ranch Winery winemaker Soren Christensen.

which, according to Yount, are “shale-based [and] very high in free lime content, with pH [values] as high as 8.5.” And on the east side of Highway 101, 70 of Cass Winery & Vineyard's 145 acres are devoted to Cabernet Sauvignon in the Paso Robles Geneseo District AVA. They hover close to 1,000 feet in elevation in the sandy to heavier-clay alluvial soil of the Huer Huevo Creek Watershed, but there are also slightly alkaline calcareous elements found in the six basic soil types within the estate.

While Hearst Ranch Winery has produced its Private Reserve Cabernet Sauvignons from an Adelaida District AVA mountain site, its primary focus is

on its Saunders Vineyard estate in the Estrella District. According to Christensen, the Saunders Vineyard ranges from “a sedimentary Monterey Formation with a generous sandy overlay at our lowest elevations to iron-rich red clay alluvial types with river-polished cobblestones in the Arbuckle [a slightly acidic terrace alluvium] and Nacimiento soil series.”

At Hope Family Wines, Hope sources primarily from the Adelaida, Estrella, Creston, Geneseo, and El Pomar districts of Paso Robles, which he says generally fall in the “Nacimiento and Los Osos complex”—the latter being a deeper yet well-drained sandstone/shale with a slightly



Cass Winery & Vineyard winemaker Sterling Kragten.

acidic pH (6.0–6.5). “What’s important,” adds Hope, “is the presence of calcareous deposits, be it large outcroppings or smaller shale stones that add permeability, like vermiculite in gardening soil.”

Taking Advantage of Variability

“One thing about Paso Robles,” says Hope, “is that it isn’t flat.” Due to changes in elevation, “soil variability just within one vineyard block can be significant,” he adds. “A grower must always think in terms of having ‘a vineyard within a vineyard,’ especially when making planting or replanting decisions.”

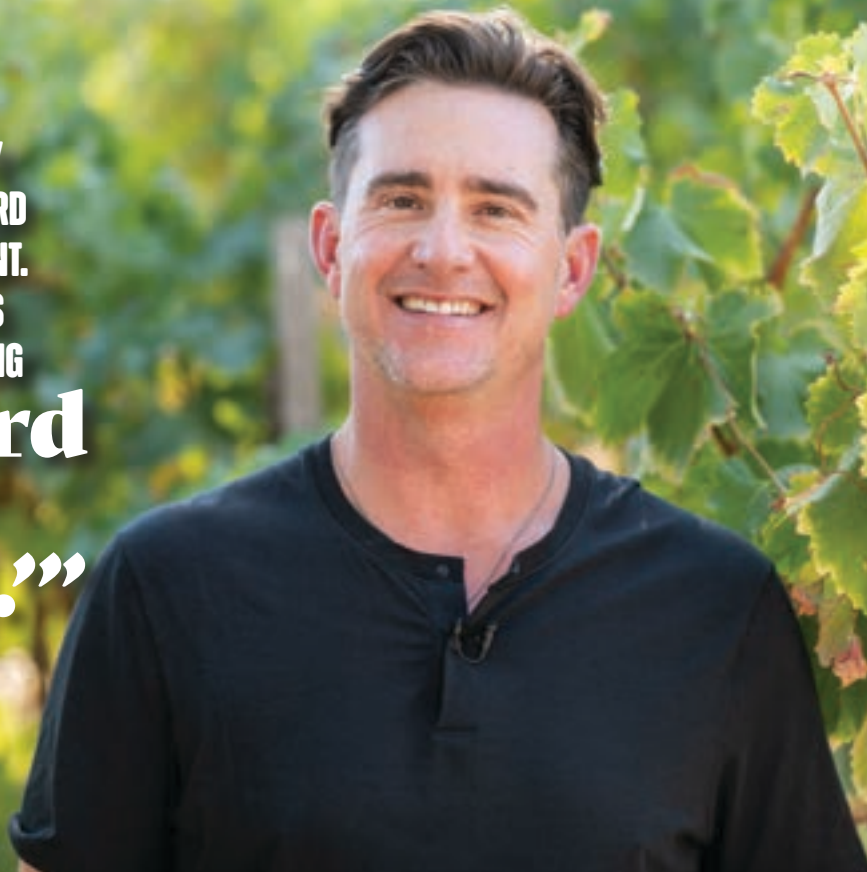
Weintraub notes that the advantage of the extreme slopes and soil variability in the aforementioned Viking Vineyard is that they “induce the formation of hundreds of aromatic and flavor compounds in grapes.” He continues, “Soils may be super-thin or nonexistent at the top of slopes, but these are our distinguishing factors.” Yount agrees: “When we planned the Sixmile-bridge estate in the Adelaida District, we knew the flagship would be Cabernet Sauvignon, and so we chose the rockiest sites to plant.”

Cass, by contrast, chose to plant Cabernet Sauvignon in the heavier clay soils present on his estate because “we wanted

good water-holding capacity. Cabernet requires 2,900 hours of temperatures above 50 degrees during the growing season, which we get. Bordeaux, for instance, averages 2,900 hours, but they’ll have difficulty ripening Cabernet in the cooler years. That’s why it’s important to maintain good soil moisture.”

As for the hilly Hearst Ranch estate in the Estrella District AVA, its elevation ranges from 700 to 810 feet, though Christensen cites “the cooling wind that blows in daily from the Pacific Ocean” as an equally significant factor in planting decisions. Vine rows are oriented in an east-west direction to channel air move-

“ONE THING ABOUT PASO ROBLES IS THAT IT ISN’T FLAT. . . . SOIL VARIABILITY JUST WITHIN ONE VINEYARD BLOCK CAN BE SIGNIFICANT. A GROWER MUST ALWAYS THINK IN TERMS OF HAVING ‘a vineyard within a vineyard.’”



Hope Family Wines proprietor/winemaker Austin Hope.

ment. Alluding to the region’s notorious diurnal swings of 40–50 degrees Fahrenheit—generally considered to be the steepest in California—Christensen adds, “Our row orientations help the vines rest at night in preparation for another day of robust Paso Robles sunshine.”

Impact on Sensory Qualities

Mooney, whose Chateau Margene estate is located in the Creston District AVA, says its “well-drained soils”—which primarily comprise clay and sandy loam as well as some sandstone and Monterey Formation shale—“allow us to deficit-irrigate, delivering ripe black-fruit aromatics and flavors with rich phenolic content and well-balanced pH. . . . We rarely need to acidulate our wines.”

Paso Robles soils in general, says Hope, “can be limiting to a vine, but in a positive way. They help create a natural balance of canopy-to-fruit ratios. This type of balance is ideal because it means the vines go

through fairly easy transitions of early-season canopy growth to concentration of fruit intensity [later] in the season, resulting in high anthocyanins; soft tannins; and ripe, dark fruit characteristics that are naturally layered and complex.”

Christensen, for his part, prefers to keep the alcohol levels of his Estrella District Cabernet Sauvignon around 14%: “This enables us to deliver on our promise of balance, which can be tricky in Paso Robles’ warm climate. The heavy clay in some of our better sites helps vines retain just enough water to self-regulate through most of the growing season, allowing them to ripen fruit at a leisurely pace, with less vulnerability to desiccation during heat waves.”

Long known for its bright, layered style of Cabernet Sauvignon, Cass Winery takes full advantage of the aforementioned six soil types in its dry-riverbed estate, which is planted primarily to clones 8 and 337. Explains Kragten, “Our sandier soils help



PHOTO: RANDY CARPARGO PHOTOGRAPHY

Cass Winery & Vineyard proprietor Steve Cass in his namesake vineyard.



Sixmilebridge Vineyards winemaker Anthony Yount.



Michael Mooney is proprietor/winemaker at Chateau Margene.

elevate the already aromatic 337 and create softer, well-rounded tannins, leading to lighter, elegant wines with lots of cherry. By contrast, we planted clone 8 in our heavier clay soils with some decomposed limestone, producing darker, richer Cabernets with more tannin and acid backbone. I'll blend the two, going heavier with the clone 8, to produce our Cass Reserve, adding 337 to entice the nose, whereas in our Cass Signature, it will be closer to an even split between the two clones to produce a more balanced style."

Over in the more mountainous Adelaidda District, Weintraub readily explains what makes the area stand out among the subzones of Paso Robles if not California as a whole: "The high pH of our limestone soils results in wines with low pH, meaning lots of acid and structure—probably the opposite of most high-end wines grown in other regions. Our oldest vines were planted in 1991 and with that age comes not just fruit but lots of other aromatics,

like tobacco, chocolate, and potpourri. We get quite a bit of tannin from all our Viking plantings, largely because of the 1,800-foot elevation and slopes [that are] up to 30 degrees in spots. Quercetin, a type of flavonol that grapes synthesize in reaction to UV rays, is like a natural sunscreen [that] adds further to the color enhancement of our wines" by deepening pigmentation.

Yount expands on the district's many assets, noting that "the high free lime content and high elevation create expressive aromas in the Sixmilebridge wines—brightly pitched with red fruit, botanical notes, and just a hint of savory elements. On the palate they're very structural, with round tannic grip and great length from the abundant natural acidity. Compared to other Cabernet Sauvignon vineyards I've worked with in the Paso Robles area, the one distinctive quality I get . . . is energy—a liveliness and tension with rich fruit and texture. [It all adds] up to very thrilling wines!" *sj*



After author Leo Buscaglia,

the youngest of four children, penned the memoir *Papa, My Father* about his childhood experiences, his brother asked him: "Did we have the same father?"

The long and complex relationship between Chile and Argentina could also be described as a sibling rivalry: common history, similar background, early mutual reliance, frequent cross-border tension. Both were colonized by Spain in the 16th century, gained independence in the early 19th century, and then fought side by side to help liberate Peru as well. They squabbled over Patagonia a few times, had their

own arms race, and endured military dictatorships in the mid-20th century. Over the years they have entered into peace treaties with and entertained conspiracies against one another. Most relevant to our discussion, starting in the 1990s, both saw a dramatic rise in the fortunes of their wine industries.

On either side of the Andes, the political and economic stability of recent decades has encouraged foreign counsel on and investment in winemaking, increasing the global popularity of the wines in turn. Vast quality improvements have brought both countries to prominence on the world's

enological stage, and our webinar "Traversing Chile and Argentina," held on July 30 as part of a series conducted with SommCon to benefit the SOMM Relief Project, showed why. Eight participating winemakers rightfully boasted about the diversity of their terroirs and styles, the virtues of their historic vineyards, and the excitement of their vinous frontiers.

Those who tuned in could not help but marvel at what appears to be no less than the dawn of a golden age for winemaking in Argentina and Chile.

PHOTO COURTESY OF TRAPICHE

Traversing the Andes

RECAPPING THE SOMM RELIEF PROJECT'S
WEBINAR ON CHILE AND ARGENTINA

by **Lars Leicht**

Jeff Mausbach, right, and Alejandro Sejanovich are co-owners of Tinto Negro.



Tinto Negro's La Escuela Vineyard in Paraje Altamira.



ARGENTINA

Tinto Negro

JEFF MAUSBACH, co-owner

They say converts are the most zealous, which explains why Midwestern U.S. native Jeff Mausbach described his 20-year career in the wine business as “preaching the gospel of Argentina’s unique character and expression of its many terroirs.” Historically, the Argentine wine industry privileged quantity over quality for local consumption only, but in the 1990s, it pivoted to focus on quality. Tinto Negro, founded by Mausbach and Alejandro Sejanovich just a decade ago, is the logical outcome of an evolving winemaking culture that is finally embracing its potential and the inherent complexities of its terroir.

The pair became friends while working at the iconic Catena Zapata. Though often credited with helping to put Argentine wines on the world map, it’s a large winery; they decided instead to take a boutique approach. “We specialize in our signature

varietal, Malbec, but we do it with a twist,” Mausbach said. “We make different Malbecs from different appellations at different altitudes [with] different soil types and different temperature profiles. We show how Malbec changes and how [it] really can improve as we focus on ever higher-altitude, higher-quality vineyard sites.”

Even the brand name is a “celebration of the essence of Malbec,” according to Mausbach: *Tinto negro* is Spanish for “black wine,” a term that well suits the variety. Mausbach used Google Earth to illustrate how the portfolio is “staircased up the Andes,” including entry-level wines made from vineyards he and Sejanovich manage in Luján de Cuyo and mid-tier wines from the Uco Valley as well as bottles from their prized estate vineyards in the Paraje Altamira appellation.

The extent to which they obsess over terroir is evident in their Finca La Escuela label. In addition to a single-vineyard Malbec from across the namesake 8-hectare

vineyard, they also bottle single-block, or what they call “single-soil,” Malbecs made from four distinct parts of the vineyard. El Limo is named for a block of silty soil that delivers bright red fruit and fresh acidity; La Piedra comes from a patch of rocky limestone-dominant soil to show black fruit flavors and salty minerality; La Grava, which means “Gravel,” is grown in a block covered with small stones and pebbles, yielding Malbec with flavors of red-fruit preserves and structured tannins; and La Arena is sourced from a sandy plot that makes wine with deep, dark stone-fruit flavors and a big, soft mouthfeel.

Yet another single-vineyard bottling comes from an estate property nearby that’s simply called “1955” in reference to the year its vines were planted. “It’s old-vine Malbec, and we think it’s one of the great national treasures of Argentina,” declared Mausbach. “It grows very small berries with great balance and acidity. This is our icon wine.” Given his zeal, you could say that Tinto Negro’s restoration of the 1955 vineyard is the viticultural equivalent of a gospel revival.

Trivento

GERMÁN DI CESARE, chief winemaker

Germán Di Cesare could be the proverbial poster child for Argentine culture. If you search the Trivento chief winemaker's name online, you are as likely to find him singing a national folk song as conducting a wine tasting. As comfortable on horseback as he is in the cellar, he even looks more like a gaucho than an enologist.

Though he apologized for his "Mendozaian" accent during his webinar presentation, he is clearly proud of where he comes from and exudes that passion when he presents his wines—especially Malbec, which he called "synonymous with Argentina," adding, "It is our queen. It is an elastic variety, it has diversity, it expresses itself well in different parts of Argentina. From north to south, it always makes very good wines—different qualities, but always very good. . . . It can shine on its own or in a blend with other grapes." He went on to sing the praises of its most common characteristics: deep color and aromatics of red and black fruit with notes of flowers, especially violets. On the palate, it can be round, velvety, and even juicy with some tension, especially when planted in high-altitude, stony soils.

The wine region that he professes to love most—an opinion clearly reinforced by his facial expression as he described it—is Luján de Cuyo, which is located on the outskirts of Mendoza and has a desert climate with intense sun exposure and cooling breezes that venture down from the Andes at night.

"Luján de Cuyo is a very beautiful place with a long tradition of viticulture," Di Cesare declared, noting that immigrants first planted Malbec there in the 19th century.



PHOTOS: JOHN CURTLEY

"It is the place where Malbec started to be the Malbec that we know today. There is plenty of legacy here, plenty of old vines, [and] a lot of small vineyards where you can feel the passion of the owners because those vineyards were planted by their grandfathers."

The Mendoza River, which flows through the region on its journey from the Andes to the eastern plains, has a strong influence on the vineyards, most of which contain alluvial soil. According to Di Cesare, there are strong differences between Malbec grown on either side of the river: To the north, in the areas of Vistalba and Las Compuertas, the soils are frank (a mix of sand, clay, calcium carbonate, and humus) with river stones both on the surface and deeper down, yielding Malbecs that are more structured and tannic. To the south, in the areas of Perdriel and Agrelo, there is much more clay, which imparts a rounder fruit character and softer tannins.

"The main differences between the Malbec coming from the north and the south are very obvious on the palate," Di Cesare said. "Luján really is a treasure for us, and this combination of elements is a miracle to me." Now that's something to sing about.

Trivento's Eolo Vineyard in Luján de Cuyo.



Trapiche

DANIEL PI, director of winemaking

Trapiche director of winemaking Daniel Pi has an acute sense of Argentina's winemaking history, a grasp of its state-of-the-art present, and a keen eye toward its future.

When the winery was founded in the late 19th century, he said, railways already existed to conveniently connect it to the nation's most important market, Buenos Aires. It was a heady time, when the president of Argentina wanted to incentivize local producers to compete with those in Bordeaux, whose wines were in high demand among the tango set. Growers were encouraged to plant vines brought in from Bordeaux that represented every varietal cultivated there at the time, including Malbec. After European vineyards were devastated by phylloxera, Malbec disappeared in the French region—but thrived in Mendoza.

"Malbec had been a very important part of the Bordeaux blend," Pi pointed out, "which is why we have it in Argentina. We now have a beautiful assortment of pre-phylloxera Malbec DNA material that you cannot find anywhere else in the world."

Trapiche went on to become Argentina's largest wine producer, with a wide portfolio ranging from entry-level to prestige labels, but it never forgot its roots—literally. According to Pi, Argentina is home to roughly 220,000 hectares of vineyard tended by 22,000 growers, which means that the average grower oversees just about 10 hectares of fruit. When Pi realized that most of Trapiche's fruit was coming from these small, independent farmers, he decided it was time to give credit where credit is due. "Everybody is focused on terroir," he said, "and rightfully so. But for me there is another important factor: the human factor. It is about the people who decide to

One of the Malbec vineyards showcased in Trapiche's Terroir Series.





PHOTO COURTESY OF TRAPICHE

transform this landscape and interpret their vineyards in a different way.”

After meeting with many of them, Pi came up with a way to pay tribute to the family growers who consistently deliver premium grapes and give the wines an identity: Trapiche’s Terroir Series, whose labels bear the names of their vineyards. “Every year we select the three best Malbecs from exceptional vineyards to communicate Trapiche’s essence—the richness of diversity,” he explained. “That is the most important [aspect] of terroir[-driven] wine, the interpretation of the growers.”

He recalled the honor of meeting one of those farmers, Felipe Villafañe, who was 103 when they put the name of a vineyard he had planted in 1945 on a dedicated bottling. “This was a very good challenge for us,” Pi said, “and a very nice thing we did.”

But Pi doesn’t focus solely on the heritage of Argentine viticulture. For its Costa & Pampa label, Trapiche has looked forward to pioneer winemaking on the country’s Atlantic coast, managing a facility dedicated to white varieties from dry-farmed vineyards, including Sauvignon Blanc, Chardonnay, Pinot Blanc, and Albariño.

Historic yet cutting-edge, big yet focused on the little guy: That’s a good plan to stand the test of time.

El Esteco

ALEJANDRO PEPA,
chief winemaker

When Alejandro Pepa talks about taking Argentine wines to new heights, he means it literally. Located over 600 miles north of Mendoza in an isolated patch of the Calchaquí Valley at 1,700 meters (5,740 feet) above sea level, his Cafayate winery, El Esteco, cultivates some of the highest vineyards in the world.

The Calchaquí Valley typically enjoys warm, sun-soaked days and cool nights, with an average diurnal temperature shift of 35 degrees Fahrenheit, according to Pepa. The soils are generally rocky and poor, though sandier in some spots and more calcareous in the foothills, with a high concentration of minerals. Both underground springs and snowmelt from the mountains are used for irrigation; the water’s high mineral content helps nourish the vines. To the west, the Quilmes Mountains separate Calchaquí from the Andes, while the Aconquija range to the east separates it from the lush forests south of the city of Salta. The result of the latter is a wall against humidity and therefore against fungal diseases that might impact the vines, a factor that allows El Esteco to farm with fewer inputs.

“The intense light here gives the grapes thicker skins,” he told the webinar audience, “and the broad thermal range allows for gradual and complete ripening. Our wines reflect this dry climate and high minerality from the soils. It really is a beautiful valley.”

Pepa started his presentation from a tower atop the winery with commanding vistas of the vineyards, nearby towns, and surrounding mountains. He shared the view to the west, where the landscape



PHOTOS COURTESY OF EL ESTECO

was green and marked by lush forests and rivers within a national reserve, and then to the east, where it was all brown desert and mountains. In many ways, this seems an unlikely place for viticulture, but French immigrants David and Salvador Michel recognized its potential way back in 1892 when they founded El Esteco and quickly gained a reputation for their pioneering spirit and high-quality production.

Pepa then came down from the tower and turned his phone camera to the winery for a virtual tour of its wooden casks, tonneaux, tanks, small barrels, and cement egg fermenters. He also talked about the dedication of his all-local team, a hallmark of El Esteco since its establishment in this rural part of northwestern Argentina.

“The weather conditions, soils, climate, precipitation, [and] high altitude are all a very important part of the terroir,” he said. “But for me, the people and [their] wine-making are [also] an integral part.”

The Calchaquí Valley accounts for less than 3% of Argentina’s wine production, Pepa noted, but its unique character is unmistakable. “When you open the wine from this high-altitude place,” he said, “it is possible to find these special flavors.”

The El Esteco estate in Cafayate.





Montes' vineyards in the Apalta region of the Colchagua Valley.

CHILE

Montes

AURELIO MONTES JR., chief winemaker

The webinar's transition from Argentina to Chile was appropriately made by Aurelio Montes Jr., who has worked in both countries: He was winemaker for five years at Kaiken in Mendoza, a Montes property.

"People not that familiar with Chile and Argentina might think we're in the ... same area," said Montes. "Even if we are so close, this huge range of mountains, the Andes, makes a tremendous difference in our soils, climate, culture, and, of course, the people. Working on both sides of the Andes has been a unique experience!"

On this cold winter's day in South America, sitting on the terrace of Montes' Apalta estate overlooking his family's hillside vineyards, Montes Jr. described the long, thin country where he was born. "Chile is a unique and amazing country," he declared. "We have so many different types of terroirs, depending on where you are—in the north, in the south, near the coast, near the Andes. If I had to describe Chile in one word, I would say diversity."



Located in the Colchagua Valley region of the Central Valley 100 miles south of Santiago, Apalta was granted its own Denomination of Origin just two years ago. Aurelio Montes Sr. was a pioneer in the area when he founded his winery in 1988 and began to grow vines on the hillsides. Many were skeptical, but Montes was so pleased with the results of his first harvest that he decided to test out plantings on ever higher, steeper slopes, and other winegrowers eventually followed. To show the range of the Colchagua Valley, he also cultivated vineyards in Marchigüe 25 miles from Apalta and closer to the Pacific Ocean, where the wines produced are more vibrant, with bigger tannins and deeper flavor, than those of Apalta, which

his son likened to thoroughbred racehorses. "When you blend the two," he said, "you get a unique personality with both elegance and power."

Though Montes Jr. declared his family to be in love with Colchagua, he said it also seems to be in their DNA to search out new places to make wine. To the north of Santiago, west of the seaside town of Zapallar, they planted vines on 136 acres in the coastal reaches of the Aconcagua Valley. With a markedly cooler climate due to its proximity to the Pacific Ocean, Zapallar Vineyard is home to Pinot Noir (74 acres), Sauvignon Blanc (32 acres), Chardonnay (20 acres), and Syrah (10 acres). On another extreme, they planted in Chiloé to the far south, whose cool climate Montes Jr. compared to that of the Pacific Northwest—though it's mitigated by their vineyard's location on the more sheltered east side of the Mechuque islet, where the water is 2 degrees Celsius warmer on average than the water off of Santiago 750 miles north.

"Though we are very far south here, because we are isolated, we are protected from the open ocean and can really make the vines grow," he exclaimed. "We continue to try to find new, beautiful places to produce [the] premium wines of Chile."

Viña Maquis

RICARDO RIVADENEIRA,
executive director and winemaker

To present the contemporary wines of Viña Maquis, executive director and winemaker Ricardo Rivadeneira dove deep into history.

The Colchagua Valley estate dates back to the 17th and 18th century Jesuits who planted some of Chile's first vineyards there. It was owned by two of Chile's presidents in the 19th century, when it was replanted (like much of the country) to all of the varieties used in Bordeaux at the time, and bought by Rivadeneira's great-grandfather in 1916; it has belonged to his family, the Hurtados, ever since. "Over the centuries, it is clear that the owners fell in love with this place and the wines they got from here," said Rivadeneira. "Maquis has a long track record for producing quality wines."

The vines it cultivates now are a massal selection of the old Bordeaux plantings, which reflected an unusual emphasis on Cabernet Franc and yielded wines that "made a reputation for Maquis," Rivadeneira said. "Old timers who taste our wine today remember how [our] wines ... have



PHOTOS COURTESY OF VIÑA MAQUIS

always been very elegant, [with] the ability to age well for decades."

Thanks to its location at the confluence of the Tinguiririca River and Chimbarongo Creek, the Maquis estate is usually about 4–5 degrees Fahrenheit cooler than the rest of the relatively warm Colchagua Valley. "These two rivers that surround our vineyards have a huge effect on their temperatures," Rivadeneira explained. "They protect us from spring frost and lower the maximum temperatures in summer. That is crucial to the character of [our] wine," with its aromas of fresh fruit, florals, and fine herbs.

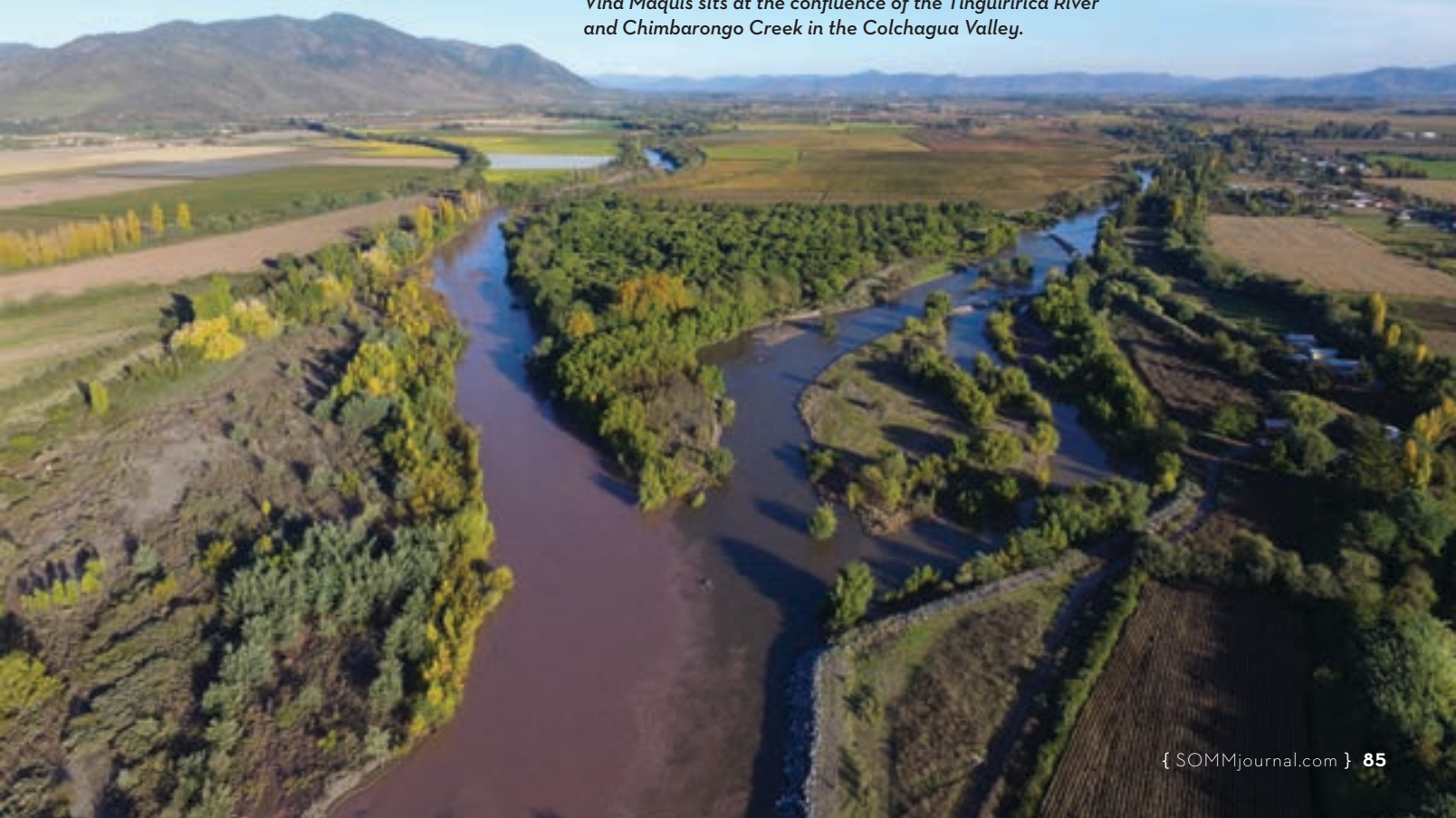
The rivers also have an influence on the

soils here. "Obviously we have alluvial soils in a place like this," Rivadeneira pointed out, "but we have a unique combination of a topsoil [that's] sometimes 2–3 meters deep, with a lot of clay—40%, sometimes almost 50% clay—[and that's] set on deep gravel. So whenever you dig a soil pit in Maquis to survey the soils, you always find gravel at some depth."

While the gravel drains excess water, the clay retains moisture, he said, so they are able to dry farm so long as rainfall is at normal levels throughout the winter and spring. As a result, the vines produce small, concentrated berries that make for powerful wines.

The rivers also encourage the presence of wildlife, which Maquis fosters with biological corridors and gardens. The estate's vineyards were among the first in Chile to be certified sustainable. "Maquis is full of life," said Rivadeneira. "This natural way of managing the vineyard plays a very important role in the purity and definition of the wines we produce here. In the end, the wines of Maquis are not what many people call 'author wines' or 'winemaker's wines' but rather wines where the hand of the winemaker disappears to reflect where they come from."

Viña Maquis sits at the confluence of the Tinguiririca River and Chimbarongo Creek in the Colchagua Valley.



The Almahue Vineyard in Cachapoal Valley is one of Bodega Volcanes' sources.



Bodega Volcanes de Chile

BEN GORDON, managing director

Diversity of terroir was a common theme throughout our webinar, but volcanic soils were a perhaps unexpected example. Ben Gordon, managing director of the aptly named Bodega Volcanes, discussed the winery's laser-like focus on what turns out to be Chile's most common yet underappreciated feature.

The country sits at the meeting point of the Nazca Plate under the Pacific Ocean and the South American Plate. In this offshore area known as a subduction zone, the ocean's crust began to slide under the Continental Plate millions of years ago, resulting in the formation of mountains and volcanoes where earthquakes and eruptions continue today. Chile has 2,900



Ben Gordon is managing director of Bodega Volcanes.

volcanoes in total, 500 of which are considered active; 60 have erupted within the last five centuries, the most recent in 2015.

These volcanoes are located mainly

in the Andes, but Chile has a variety of magmatic formations, classified across four zones from east to west. Zone A, running from the ocean to the coastal mountains, has the most ancient soils, composed of granitic igneous rock that formed through the cooling and solidification of lava. Zone B in the intermediate highlands has volcanic rocks interspersed with limestone. Zone C, which covers most of the Central Valley, has the least volcanic influence with sedimentary soils, while Zone D, located in the foothills of the Andes, has the greatest.

From four valleys mostly in Zones B and D, Bodega Volcanes produces a total of 11 boutique wines across four different tiers. "It's not based on one volcano," Gordon said of the winery's mission, "but a quite complex idea of volcanic activity that has created all these different soil types. We are ultimately looking to reflect Chile's unique landscape as a seismic country."

Volcanic soils generally have good drain-

PHOTOS COURTESY OF BODEGA VOLCANES DE CHILE

age, low organic content, and limited fertility, according to Gordon. These conditions result in relatively small grapes that struggle to fully ripen, ensuring good acidity, concentration of flavor, and pronounced texture.

“Underripeness means the wines are generally more savory than fruity,” he said. “So often Chilean wines can be one-dimensional; rich and fruity is the norm, but volcanic soils offer wines with delightful acidity and an ideal combination of that Chilean fruitiness you expect with volcanic minerality that pleasantly surprises you.”

Bodega Volcanes was launched 12 years ago as a Viña Undurraga project spearheaded by winemaker Pilar Díaz, who teamed up with geologist Gonzalo Henriquez to find the vineyard sites best suited to it. “I love her style,” declared Gordon. “She’s making wines that have these neat flavors . . . and bring this volcanic terroir to life.”

He added that consumers who are willing to try something new are the target audience. “We’re a relatively new kid on the block,” he admitted. “But we’re very proud of what we’re doing in terms of putting the volcanic soil element of Chile on the map.”



Pilar Díaz is winemaker at Bodega Volcanes.

Concha y Toro

MARCELO PAPA, technical director

Concha y Toro technical director Marcelo Papa echoed the theme of Chile’s diversity. “[It’s] a pretty crazy country in terms of geography and climate,” he said. “We have many types of soil, many types of weather; we have on one side the influence of the Andes Mountains, but then [on the other] we have proximity to the Pacific Ocean, which is so cold here that we don’t get sharks but penguins.” Papa then offered up the example of Limarí in northern Chile, almost 1,000 miles from Chiloé to the far south.

An illustration showed how the mountain range along Chile’s coastline, which peaks at just over 10,000 feet at the midpoint, is almost nonexistent up in Limarí, giving the Pacific unfettered influence on the area. At about 200 meters above sea level and nearly 18 kilometers from the coastline, Concha y Toro’s Quebrada Seca Vineyard enjoys cool ocean breezes nightly that make for cloudy mornings until the wind shifts to favor blue skies and high luminosity in the afternoon.

“Almost every morning it is cloudy with no direct sunlight and stays that way for about 50% of the day,” Papa explained. “Then you get fantastic sunlight. It’s enough to get good ripening, but not enough to burn off acidity and freshness.”

He compared the Limarí vineyard to three other areas acclaimed for Chardonnay and Pinot Noir: Puligny-Montrachet in Burgundy, the Santa Maria Valley on California’s Central Coast, and Sebastopol in the Russian River Valley. Charting temperatures over the course of 60 days before harvest—a period he called critical for defining the flavors of both varieties—he showed that the highs were similar, with peak summer temperatures at Quebrada Seca reaching a maximum of only 75 degrees Fahrenheit, though Burgundy got cooler faster and Sebastopol stayed warmer. The lows were also similar, though Santa Maria was typically cooler and Sebastopol showed the greatest diurnal shift. “This is a fantastic area to grow Chardonnay and Pinot Noir,” said Papa. “It’s good for other varieties too, but we have a treasure here for those two. In the future, it will be one of the top areas globally.”

The soils here are a rich mix of sand, clay, and loam from alluvial, colluvial, sedimentary, and coastal sources. “In Chile, we generally don’t have a lot of calcareous soils, but this area does,” he said. “It’s the type of clay that produces excellent Chardonnay.” Papa pointed out that the vineyard is on a plateau containing deposits of ancient calcium carbonate from the peaks of the Andes, resulting in “a style of [both] Chardonnay and Pinot Noir that is more Old World, more Burgundian,” he added. “It is salty and minerally, with a low pH. We ferment in barrels, which is a good way to craft it. It is not going to be opulent but will have high acidity and minerality. That is the style from here.”

Concha y Toro’s Quebrada Seca Vineyard in Limarí.



SOARING FLAVORS

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The *SOMM Journal's* editorial team tasted through more than 100 wines from Argentina and Chile. The following section is a roundup of some of the most outstanding among them, representing an array of regions and subregions.

ARGENTINA

The Andes Mountains create an astounding panoramic backdrop for Argentine wine country. They also define its terroir, with high-elevation vineyards stretching for more than 1,200 miles from north to south.

The first Malbec was planted in Mendoza by the French agroscientist Miguel Aimé Pouget in 1853. Though native to Bordeaux, where it was once the basis for many of the most famous and ageworthy wines of Saint-Émilion and Pauillac, Malbec went virtually extinct in France after phylloxera rapidly decimated vines across Europe. Argentine Malbec is a clone that produces smaller, tighter grape bunches with distinctive phenolics.



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Along with Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, and a handful of Italian and Spanish grapes, Malbec was historically used to make mass quantities of *vino de mesa*, or table wine, for locals who weren't overly concerned with quality to pair with the beef-heavy regional cuisine. These *Vitis vinifera* grapes flourished in the sandy soils atop limestone, chalk, clay, and gravel substrates at the base of the towering Andes, where the high-altitude desert climate with abundant snowmelt for drip irrigation formed surprisingly exalted conditions for grape growing.

Most of Argentina's wine regions and subregions are located in the northern sector of the country, with Mendoza nestled between northernmost Salta and Patagonia in the far south.

SALTA (region)

Salta was built around the prolific silver mines from which Argentina takes its name. Just south of the Tropic of Capricorn, it has a subtropical highland climate that can be hot and humid by day but experiences great diurnal shifts into dry, cool nights. Its most famous subregion is Cafayate, where vineyards may reach 6,000 feet in elevation, but others within the Calchaquí Valley sit as high as 7,800 feet, making them some of the highest-altitude plantings in the world.

Salta (and Cafayate in particular) is known for austere and aromatic wines with developed structure and linear acidity. It's particularly famous for its perfumed yet crisp white wines crafted from Torrontés Riojano, likely a cross between the

ancient Muscat de Alexandria and the pink-skinned Criolla Chica, though it also produces fruit-forward styles of Cabernet Sauvignon and Malbec and often uses Uruguayan Tannat in its red blends.

El Esteco 2018 Malbec, Calchaquí Valley, Argentina (\$25) Deep, intense, generous boysenberry and plum combine with a savory character of black coffee, spiced cedar, and a hint of truffle before the luxurious, spicy finish.

FREDERICK WILDMAN & SONS



Colomé 2018 Auténtico Malbec, Calchaquí Valley, Argentina (\$40) From vineyards located at 7,500-foot elevations in the northwestern part of the country, where the sunshine produces thicker-skinned grapes, this red offers va-va-voom on its perfumed floral nose. Violets and plum define a dreamy palate that's creamy yet fresh and focused. Subtle black pepper runs through it, along with notes of fig, clove, and dense blue fruit.

FOLIO FINE WINE PARTNERS

Amalaya 2018 Gran Corte, Salta, Argentina (\$20) This Malbec-based blend from high-elevation vineyards, which also contains 9% Cab Franc and 6% Tannat, shows a graceful yet plush persona with notes of lavender, jasmine, and white-peppered plums. A flush of vanilla on the finish, combined with bright acidity, makes for fine food pairings.

FOLIO FINE WINE PARTNERS

Colomé 2019 Estate Torrontés, Calchaquí Valley, Salta, Argentina (\$12)

Aromatics are in high gear for this high-altitude white. Spicy scents of lemon and caramel meet an exacting grapefruit tartness, chamomile flowers, and subtle peach on the palate, whose freshness owes to the vibrant acidity.

FOLIO FINE WINE PARTNERS

MENDOZA (region)

Situated in the eastern foothills of the Andes at the base of the towering Mount Aconcagua, Mendoza is home to many high-elevation vineyards, ranging in altitude from 2,500 feet on the valley floor to 7,500 feet above sea level (with a few brave vigneron planting even higher up). Mendoza encompasses a number of important subregions, including Maipú, Luján de Cuyo, and the Uco Valley. The latter two are among the most notable high-altitude growing areas in Argentina, producing high-quality wines that have become global superstars. Within them, subzones such as Los Chacayes, Tunuyán, Paraje Altamira, Tupungato, and Agrelo also produce world-class wines that are beginning to share the spotlight with Mendoza's more established powerhouses.

While soil types vary, substrates of alluvial loam over clay and limestone dominate much of the region, which is dependent on an ancient infrastructure of reservoirs, channels, and waterways built by early native populations, long before the arrival of European colonists.

It was in Mendoza that Malbec underwent a transformation in the late 1980s

and early 1990s, as area producers took it from a homely, slightly sour, and trivial wine to the global phenom it has become. Now the region is world-famous for its juicy and lush Malbecs. Each of its subregions presents a slightly different style, however: Some are elegant, others exude qualities akin to Bordeaux, and still other, especially surprising Malbecs are made with a hat tip toward Italy, the ancestral home of so many Argentine winemakers.

Zolo 2019 Unoaked Chardonnay, Mendoza, Argentina (\$11) Sustainably farmed from high-elevation estate vineyards in Tupungato and Agrelo, this Chardonnay delivers tropical notes of mango and summer peach that are juicy, bright, and fresh. Chamomile flowers bloom mid-palate, and soft white petals linger on the tongue long after the finish.

VINO DEL SOL



Alma Negra Brut Nature Rosé NV, Mendoza, Argentina (\$22) Scents of cranberry and lime stay with you throughout this blend of Malbec and Pinot Noir; produced in the traditional method, it spent eight months on the lees to deliver a delicate mouthfeel at a low 12.5% ABV. Soft bubbles vanish quickly to reveal strawberry, dried herbs, tomato leaf, and white chocolate.

VINEYARD BRANDS



Trapiche 2015 Iscay Malbec-Cabernet Franc, Mendoza, Argentina (\$70) “Iscay” translates to the number two in Quechua, the native language of the Incas who lived in the Andes. Here, it symbolizes the merging of vine and terroir through the science and art of viticulture. Lavender on the nose and palate is exquisite, sweetening and enlivening the blueberry and bright vanilla notes that follow. The addition of black pepper and spiced leather enhances the luxe finish.



Bodega Norton 2019 Barrel Select Malbec, Mendoza, Argentina (\$15) Brazilian artist Romero Britto designed the label for this French oak-aged old-vine Malbec. Focused scents of cherry, vanilla, and black plum lead to a palate that’s creamy with spiced blackberry and dark chocolate. Black pepper barely dots the plum-brandied lushness.

KOBRAND

Norton 2019 1895 Colección Malbec, Mendoza, Argentina (\$12) A nod to the year the winery was founded in 1895, this is a deep and concentrated red, with briar, tobacco, and plum notes. A great entry-level wine.

KOBRAND



Proemio 2016 Grand Reserve Winemaker's Selection Red, Mendoza, Argentina (\$27) Aged 18 months in French oak, this blend of 50% Malbec, 40% Cabernet Sauvignon, 5% Syrah, and 5% Garnacha grown at high elevations is silky and lush. Spicy notes of cassis and ripe black cherry precede a finish of chocolate and cedar.

1821 FINE WINE & SPIRITS

~
MENDOZA IS HOME TO MANY HIGH-ELEVATION VINEYARDS, RANGING IN ALTITUDE FROM 2,500 FEET ON THE VALLEY FLOOR TO 7,500 FEET ABOVE SEA LEVEL (WITH A FEW BRAVE VIGNERONS PLANTING EVEN HIGHER UP)
 ~



UCO VALLEY (VALLE DE UCO) (subregion)



Bodega Norton 2018 Reserva Malbec, Uco Valley, Mendoza, Argentina (\$20)

Iron filings and grilled meat are sweetened by black plum on the nose. Seriously savory notes of balsamic and black olive come through on the first sip, joined by black fruit, slate, and espresso to make for a deep, dark red with a finish of tobacco and cedar. The grapes come from some of the winery's oldest vineyards; aged 12 months in French oak, they see additional time in bottle.

KOBRAND

Tapiz Sparkling Malbec Rosé, San Pablo Estate, Uco Valley, Mendoza, Argentina (\$18)

This unusual sparkler, produced in the Champagne method, comes from a single vineyard that sits 4,430 feet above sea level. Amid aromas of roses and raspberries, the bubbles quickly dissipate to reveal a stunning palate of persimmon before releasing a parade of tarragon, cinnamon, and white pepper that ends with an earthy finish.

VINO DEL SOL



Vinos de Potrero 2019 Potrero Chardonnay, Uco Valley, Mendoza, Argentina (\$17)

Lively and modern, with scents of lime chiffon, oregano, and chamomile. The glassy, gliding mouthfeel offers notes of pineapple and lemon blossom accompanied by bright acidity. Peach comes in midway for a pop of sweetness on the creamy finish.

M IMPORTS



Vinos de Potrero 2019 Potrero Malbec, Uco Valley, Mendoza, Argentina (\$17)

Situated in the high-altitude Gualtallary zone of Tupungato in the northern section of the Uco Valley, this youthful red shows such promise, with aromas of violets and dark chocolate and a juicy freshness on the palate. Plums, dates, and toffee make it bright and user-friendly.

M IMPORTS



Vinos de Potrero 2018 Potrero Reserva Malbec, Uco Valley, Mendoza, Argentina (\$24) Juicy, meaty, and vivid with plum, dark cherry, and mocha; delicious and plush with dry, chalky tannins and broad shoulders. Fermented in cement vats and aged 12 months in oak, this is a wine to watch!

M IMPORTS



Trapiche 2015 Terroir Series Malbec, Finca Coletto Single Vineyard, El Peral, Uco Valley, Mendoza, Argentina (\$50)

Expressively keen notes of leather and licorice combine with a bright acid structure while vivid boysenberry, sage, and basil ride on a juicy, plush texture. The grapes come from 58-year-old vines grown at an elevation of over 3,500 feet.



Maal Wines 2018 Biutiful Malbec, Campo de los Andes, Mendoza, Argentina (\$22)

The stony and sandy soils, high elevation, and abundant sunshine of Campos de los Andes in the prestigious Uco Valley bring out the best in this medium-bodied, unoaked red. Freshness defines the nose and palate, with aromas of blueberry and wild strawberry as well as flavors of blue fruit, persimmon, and apple. Streamlined tannins and a dusting of cocoa appear on the finish.

VINEYARD BRANDS

PARAJE ALTAMIRA

(sub-subregion)



Susana Balbo 2019 Signature Rosé, Altamira, Uco Valley, Mendoza, Argentina (\$20) Altamira's high elevation; big, stony vineyards; and desert climate with an abundance of sunlight add to the personality of the Malbec grown there. The blend of 60% Malbec and 40% Pinot

Noir is quite a duo and this textural beauty, sourced from over 3,800 feet above sea level, shows both structure and grace. Its light onion-skin hue may look pale, but a woody perfume with jasmine and rose petals defines a strong character. Clean with an underlying chalky minerality, its fresh notes of watermelon, white flowers, and strawberry strike a chord with crackling acidity. Nervy and delicious.

FOLIO FINE WINE PARTNERS



Argento 2017 Single Block Malbec, Paraje Altamira, Valle de Uco, Mendoza, Argentina (\$55) From an organic vineyard, this red is blessed with superior aromatics, a deluxe mouthfeel, and balanced acidity. Violets and blueberry meet with a meaty texture while sweet tobacco, tilled soil, bay leaf, and cumin underscore deep-rooted minerality.

PACIFIC HIGHWAY WINE & SPIRITS

THE ANDES MOUNTAINS CREATE AN ASTOUNDING PANORAMIC BACKDROP FOR ARGENTINE WINE COUNTRY. THEY ALSO DEFINE ITS TERROIR, WITH HIGH-ELEVATION VINEYARDS STRETCHING FOR MORE THAN 1,200 MILES FROM NORTH TO SOUTH.



Tinto Negro 2018 Finca La Escuela Malbec, Paraje Altamira, Mendoza, Argentina (\$45) Vibrant aromas of boysenberry and blue flowers complement mouthwatering notes of blueberry and dark chocolate, plus iron filings and an inherent chalkiness on the mid-palate. Heather, brush, and soy sauce bring this wine to a salty finish.

VINEYARD BRANDS



Tinto Negro 2018 Finca La Escuela La Grava Malbec, Paraje Altamira, Mendoza, Argentina (\$35) The small stones and pebbles that give this site its name must play a role in the floral character of this wine. Lavender and plum are present on the nose, while the palate shows distinct purple flowers, blue fruit, and stony minerality that influences a mouthfeel reminiscent of dried flowers. Notes of coffee bean and grilled meat are deep and dark on the finish.

VINEYARD BRANDS



LOS CHACAYES

(sub-subregion)

Tinto Negro 2019 Limestone Block Malbec, Los Chacayes, Tunuyán, Mendoza, Argentina (\$17)

Grapes grown on vines at 4,000 feet above sea level on rocky, limestone soils impart distinctive minerality on both the nose and palate. Blackberry and plum create lift, with lavender liting on the mid-palate. Cocoa, mint, and toasted oak finish things off nicely.

VINEYARD BRANDS

TUPUNGATO

(sub-subregion)

Luca 2018 Pinot Noir, Tupungato, Uco Valley, Mendoza, Argentina (\$35) Laura Catena is one of Mendoza's winemaking pioneers; here she crafts a small-production, Burgundian-style Pinot Noir from Tupungato, the northernmost subregion of the Uco Valley. The label is named after her first son, and its grapes are sourced from high-elevation old vines with low yields. Deep and savory on the finish, it shows Old World acidity as well as spiced cherry, raspberry, beetroot, and new leather.

VINE CONNECTIONS

Tapiz 2012 Las Notas de Jean Claude, Tupungato, Uco Valley, Mendoza, Argentina (\$100) This Bordeaux blend based on 91% Merlot is sourced from a single vineyard at an altitude exceeding 4,000 feet above sea level. The grapes are fermented in stainless-steel tanks for 12 days and aged in new French oak for 18 months. The nose shows ripe boysenberry with an earthy quality; upright tannins make for a statuesque profile enhanced by chalk, dried violets, and truffles. With Old World acidity and precision, it indeed drinks like a high-end Bordeaux.

VINO DEL SOL



Tapiz 2014 Black Tears Malbec, San Pablo, Tupungato, Uco Valley, Mendoza, Argentina (\$50) Tapiz is Spanish for "tapesty," an allusion to

the weaving together of high-altitude fruit and oak in wines such as this. Seductive dark chocolate perfumes the dark, opaque liquid that gives the wine its name, with added aromas of blueberry and blue flowers. Juicy from the start, it reveals notes of pomegranate and orange peel along with soft, round tannins and meaty depth. Spicy oak on the finish adds to its intensity. Aged in new French oak for two years.

VINO DEL SOL

LUJÁN DE CUYO (subregion)

Bodega Norton 2016 Privada Family Blend, Luján de Cuyo, Mendoza, Argentina (\$40) Grapes from 50- to 90-year-old vines yield this outstanding, elegant yet lush blend of 40% Malbec, 30% Cabernet Sauvignon, and 30% Merlot with big notes of leather, espresso, and black olive. Black cherry washes over black pepper on the finish.

KOBRAND

Bodega Norton 2016 Gernot Langes, Luján de Cuyo, Mendoza, Argentina (\$105) An exceptional blend of 50% Malbec, 40% Cabernet Franc, and 10% Cabernet Sauvignon from the estate's oldest vines. Aromas of bloody meatiness, licorice, leather, and black plum are seductive. From its bright start onward, the wine is lit from within, capturing violets and plum-skin tannins along with subdued notes of coffee bean and cedar. An inspired drinking experience.

KOBRAND

AGRELO (sub-subregion)

Argento 2018 Single Vineyard Finca Agrelo Cabernet Franc, Agrelo, Luján de Cuyo, Mendoza, Argentina (\$40)

The Cab Franc aged in concrete eggs for ten months, while an added 5% Malbec aged in concrete eggs (70%) and French oak (30%), also for ten months. The result exudes notes of dark violets and black coffee. Luxurious and well-built with firm tannins, optimum acidity, and a slightly chalky mouthfeel. Black raspberry comes through to lift a palate that finishes with dried heather.

PACIFIC HIGHWAY WINE & SPIRITS

Susana Balbo 2017 Brioso, Finca Dominio, Agrelo, Luján de Cuyo, Mendoza, Argentina (\$45) This single-vineyard blend of 41% Cabernet Sauvignon, 32% Malbec, 22% Cabernet Franc, and 5% Petit Verdot spent 15 months in 100% new French oak. Following a heady nose of grilled meat, cassis, and beetroot, the juicy plushness of the palate mesmerizes. Generous boysenberry and black cherry are guided by creamy milk chocolate, and the tannins are upright and teeth-coating, with blue floral notes. Distinguished!

FOLIO FINE WINE PARTNERS



Mythic Barrel 2016 Malbec, Perdriel y Agrelo, Luján de Cuyo, Mendoza, Argentina (\$50) This winery's best plots of Malbec are sourced for a magnificent, ripe, and powerful red that's aged 12 months in new French oak to show voluminous, meaty notes of dark chocolate and black cherry. Pencil shavings, sweet earth, and violets serve as a dynamic trio of flavors mid-palate. Broad strokes of black coffee and plum-skin tannins are notable in the texture on the finish.

WINEBRIDGE

Casarena 2017 Lauren's Single Vineyard Cabernet Franc, Agrelo, Luján de Cuyo, Mendoza, Argentina (\$30) The Agrelo district is known for its stellar Cab Francs, and this vibrant single-vineyard offering certainly showcases its virtues. Planted in clay, loam, and stones and aged 18 months in new French oak, it sends up a perfume of violets and plums. Black coffee and dried blue flowers elegantly permeate the palate, which delivers plush tannins and good acid structure; dried herbs and mocha define the finish. Built for aging.

VINE CONNECTIONS



Casarena 2017 Naoki's Single Vineyard Malbec, Agrelo, Luján de Cuyo, Mendoza, Argentina (\$30) This single-vineyard stunner is more proof that Malbecs from this area are noteworthy. Its grapes grew on a plateau of limestone, which gives it its thread of minerality—though its charm begins with floral sweetness on the nose. Notes of boysenberry, plum, pencil shavings, and balsamic glide on the deluxe palate.

VINE CONNECTIONS

Zolo 2010 Black Petit Verdot, Alto Agrelo, Mendoza, Argentina (\$40) This 100% Petit Verdot is farmed at 3,444 feet above sea level. Fermented in stainless-steel tanks for about 15 days, it then rests on the lees for 16 days and ages in French oak for 18 months. Concentrated and teeth-gripping tannins accompany dusty violets, vivid cranberries, and blueberries that come in midway with white chocolate and bay leaf. Sweet spice shows on the finish.

VINO DEL SOL

MAIPÚ (subregion)



Proemio 2017 Terroir Red Blend, Maipú, Mendoza, Argentina (\$13) A great value wine, blending 50% Malbec, 25% Cabernet Sauvignon, and 25% Petit Verdot. Ripeness on the nose is undeniable, coming through thanks to extroverted scents of blackberry preserves, spiced tea, and violets. Rich and seductive notes of roasted

coffee, cocoa, and boysenberry pie make for a juicy, easy-drinking palate that's well balanced between oak, tannins, minerality, and acidity.

1821 FINE WINE & SPIRITS



Proemio 2017 Reserve Syrah-Garnacha, Maipú, Mendoza, Argentina (\$20) Grown at elevations exceeding 2,600 feet and aged 12 months in French oak, this aromatic red shows notes of plum and spice and silky tannins. On the palate, flavors of tobacco, black pepper, soy sauce, and black cherry run deep.

1821 FINE WINE & SPIRITS



Proemio 2018 Single Vineyard Petit Verdot, Maipú, Mendoza, Argentina (\$20)

This voluptuous red overdelivers on all accounts. Cassis and dark chocolate are fresh and intense. Plush tannins are surrounded by a surge of earth, beetroot, and blueberry, with violets and plums following on the finish.

1821 FINE WINE & SPIRITS

EXPECT PATAGONIAN WINES TO EXUDE ELEGANCE, UNDERSTATED ORCHARD FRUITS, AND TANGY ACIDITY STRATIFIED BY CHALKY MINERALS, SALINITY, AND CRUSHED HERBAL NOTES.

PATAGONIA (region)

Located about 800 miles south of Mendoza, windy and wild Patagonia is known more for adventure travel than fine wine culture. Reaching the southernmost limit for wine production at 41–54 degrees latitude south, it is considerably cooler in climate than its northern brethren, even though its vineyards are much lower in elevation at 900–1,200 feet above sea level. Early Italian settlers in Patagonia did plant grapes here, and some old-vine vineyards still exist, primarily in the Río Negro subregion; a modern industry didn't develop until the mid-1970s, however, and only in recent years have Patagonian wines received serious consideration by critics and consumers.

With the Río Negro and Neuquén rivers now flanked by vineyards planted in the past two decades, Patagonia is all about cool-climate varieties—grapes have historically struggled to ripen fully here—but warming weather patterns have nudged it into more commercial territory. Pinot Noir, Chardonnay, Sauvignon Blanc, Semillon, and Argentine Torrontés Riojano, for instance, are flourishing in key microclimates across the region. Patagonia is also home to Argentina's nascent sparkling wine industry. Be they still or bubbly, expect the wines to exude elegance, understated orchard fruits, and tangy acidity stratified by chalky minerals, salinity, and crushed herbal notes.



RÍO NEGRO (subregion)

Wapisa 2017 Sauvignon Blanc, Los Acontilados Estate, San Javier, Río Negro, Atlantic Patagonia, Argentina (\$15) This exciting

and aromatic wine is named for the whales that can be viewed from the vineyards it's sourced from, located just off the Atlantic Ocean. High-wire acidity defines the lean palate of dried herbs, salinity marked with gingersnap, and pink grapefruit.

VINO DEL SOL



Aniello 2018 006 Riverside Estate Pinot Noir, Alto Valle de Río Negro, Patagonia, Argentina (\$17) The southernmost wine region in South America, Río Negro has a cool, dry climate that's superb for Pinot Noir. This rose petal-scented version offers wild strawberry and floral notes that seem to melt on the tongue. Rooibos tea and chalky, earthy minerality make it lithe and lean. Gorgeous.

GLOBAL VINEYARD IMPORTS

CHILE

One of the longest and narrowest countries in the world, Chile is known for its incredibly diverse geography and terroir. Its winegrowing regions span 870 miles from north to south, from the 31st to the 42nd parallel. Flanked by the Pacific Ocean to the west and the Andes to the east, Chile has a primarily Mediterranean climate, and the summers are dry, with little rain outside of the Central Valley and in the south. Luckily, ancient Incan farmers dug extensive irrigation channels from the Andes to the plains (much as they did on the eastern side of the mountains in Mendoza, Argentina). Granitic base soil is predominant, with clay, sand, and loam topsoils as well as parcels of volcanic ash soils found throughout. The wines that come from Chile's phylloxera-free vines are often higher in flavonoids, antioxidants, and resveratrol than those from most other countries.

CASABLANCA VALLEY (region)

The cool-climate Casablanca Valley region is renowned for its steely Sauvignon Blancs and unoaked Chardonnays—but Pinot Noir also thrives here, quite surprisingly given its heavy granitic base soil beneath dry clay.



Albamar 2019 Estate Chardonnay, Casablanca Valley, Chile (\$12) Foggy nights and cool ocean breezes have a wonderful effect on this standout Chardonnay. Scents of lemon verbena, apple tart, and dried herbs lead to a palate with brilliant acidity. It finishes with lemon blossom, vanilla custard, cashew, and brioche.

GLOBAL VINEYARD IMPORTS



SAN ANTONIO VALLEY (region)

San Antonio Valley is a tiny seaside region known for Pinot Noir, Chardonnay, and Sauvignon Blanc (as is its well-known subzone, Leyda Valley). Rainy in the winter, it's cool and breezy even in the summer; its ocean-misted vines producing elegant wines with restrained aromatics and racy acidity.

Amayna 2019 Sauvignon Blanc, Leyda Valley, San Antonio Valley, Chile (\$25) The Pacific Ocean's Humboldt Current keeps the Leyda Valley, a small subregion of the coastal San Antonio Valley, cool and marine-influenced; the winery is just 7 miles from the ocean. A subtle perfume of mango, lime, and ginger emerges with the first sip, joining scents and flavors of jasmine. Absolutely one of the most unique Sauvignon Blancs we've tasted.

VINE CONNECTIONS



CENTRAL VALLEY (region)

The Central Valley is Chile's breadbasket, growing fruits and vegetables that are exported the world over. Though its highly saline, potassium- and nitrogen-poor soils don't evoke a natural haven for grape growing, a Mediterranean climate complete with abundant sunshine and vast diurnal shifts seems to prop up vines well. Three of Chile's most famous regions dot the Central Valley: the Maipo, Colchagua, and Maule valleys.

Maipo to the north is divided into three prominent subregions: Alto Maipo, Central Maipo, and Pacific Maipo. Over rocky granite, their topsoils differ: from saline-rich alluvial soil in the Pacific region to higher-altitude granite and porous rock in Alto Maipo in the Andes foothills. Further inland, the hotter, drier Alto and Central Maipo areas produce developed and rich reds from Cabernet Sauvignon and Carménère; the Pacific Maipo is known for austere, refined wines with gentle phenolics.

The Colchagua Valley is legendary for its powerhouse Cabernet Sauvignon, Syrah, Malbec, and Carménère. Of all Chilean reds, it is these that rival wines from California's Central and North coasts and even from Bordeaux and Cahors. The region is hot and dry, with a long growing season; nights can be cool, preserving acidity, but phenolic ripeness is a guessing game in some vintages, and high-alcohol wines a potential result.

The Maule Valley is expansive, producing everything from bulk wine to Rhône varieties, high-octane Cabernet Sauvignons, and the Carménères that put Chilean wines on the international map decades ago. One of the oldest growing regions in the country, it has a cool, wet climate and volcanic soils that influence its diverse microterroirs as well as its Old World styles, though experimentation is common among Maule Valley winemakers.

Bodega Volcanes de Chile 2017 Tectonia Grenache-Petite Sirah-Mourvèdre, Central Valley, Chile (\$25) Plush and round, with scents of ripe plum and currants. Meaty palate, chewy tannins, and notes of beetroot, spiced cedar, cinnamon rolls, and dark chocolate. A stony thread runs throughout.

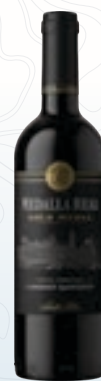
VIAS IMPORTS



Concha y Toro Casillero del Diablo 2019 Reserva Carménère, Central Valley, Chile (\$12) This blend of 88% Carménère and 12% Cabernet Sauvignon has a longtime reputation for consistency, freshness of fruit, and great value. A hardy and stalwart red at 13.8% ABV, it delivers alluring scents of cocoa, vanilla, pomegranate, and dried herbs as well as notes of sage-kissed Bing cherry that dive into a creamy underscore of licorice, black plum, and toasted marshmallow.

FETZER VINEYARDS

MAIPO VALLEY (subregion)



Santa Rita 2017 Medalla Real Gold Medal Single Vineyard Cabernet Sauvignon, Maipo Valley, Chile (\$17) The grapes for this blend of 92% Cabernet Sauvignon and 8% Cabernet Franc are sourced from Santa Rita's stony vineyards in the subzone of Alto Jahuel. The semi-arid climate is perfect for Bordeaux varieties, and it shows in this balanced beauty. Scents of chocolate-covered cherry are bright and inviting, and the palate offers bold flavors and dusted-cocoa tannins with grip. Ripe rhubarb, orange zest, and blueberry are noteworthy and offer a tremendous palate feel. Acidity enlivens the fruit while cinnamon, cedar, and licorice provide a creamy finish with extra oomph.

DELICATO FAMILY WINES

THE CENTRAL VALLEY'S HIGHLY SALINE, POTASSIUM- AND NITROGEN-POOR SOILS DON'T EVOKE A NATURAL HAVEN FOR GRAPE GROWING—BUT A MEDITERRANEAN CLIMATE COMPLETE WITH ABUNDANT SUNSHINE AND VAST DIURNAL SHIFTS SEEMS TO PROP UP VINES WELL.

ALTO MAIPO (UPPER MAIPO) (sub-subregion)

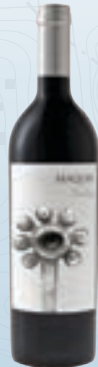
Viña Quebrada de Macul 2016 Domus Aurea Cabernet Sauvignon, Upper Maipo Valley, Chile (\$70) Produced from old vines in the Clos Quebrada de Macul vineyard, which overlooks Chile's oldest wine-producing area, Macul. This unfiltered red, whose name means "house of gold," offers structure, structure, and more structure that is indicative of its regal terroir. Gritty tannins and a slate-dry palate bring out tobacco, balsamic, and new leather. Dark chocolate comes in midway atop blackberry and cedar spice.

GLOBAL VINEYARD IMPORTS



Montes 2018 Alpha Syrah, Colchagua Valley, Chile (\$22) Imagine a wine that's big and robust with concentrated flavors, all within a lighter frame—this extroverted red is the result. Showing black olive, balsamic, cigar, and slate, it leads its savory notes into a velvety channel of fennel root and vanilla.

KOBRAND



Viña Maquis 2013 Viola Carménère, Colchagua Valley, Chile (\$55) Thanks to the addition of 15% Cabernet Franc, this stunning, spicy Carménère—produced from the best vineyards on the estate—shows a complex base of flavor and aromatics. Scents of red flowers and cherry jam lead to a brilliant entry of vibrant red fruit. The plush, silky texture and tremendously expressive notes of raspberry, rose petal, and orange marmalade won us over.

GLOBAL VINEYARD IMPORTS

Casa Silva 2018 S38 Los Lingues Single Block Cabernet Sauvignon, Colchagua Valley, Chile (\$30) Soil studies and microvinifications have ensured that this label produces some of the finest Cabernet Sauvignon made from grapes grown in the foothills of the Andes. Aged in new French oak for 14 months and in bottle for at least one year, this earth mother displays lavender, black olive, and sandalwood in a powerhouse package. Lush tannins play into a dark and mysterious core of spice and black cherry.

VINE CONNECTIONS

COLCHAGUA VALLEY

(subregion)



Montes Limited Selection 2017 Carménère, Colchagua Valley, Chile (\$17) Meaty aromas join iron, heather, black plum, and vanilla to make the nosing quite an experience in itself—which is always a welcome sign. Paired with good acidity, smoky tones of charred meat add to the depth of black pepper, granite, and smooth notes of lush boysenberry.

KOBRAND



Calcu 2019 Reserva Especial Sauvignon Blanc-Sémillon, Colchagua Valley, Chile (\$13) It didn't take a *calcu* (magician) to create this iconic blend from the foothills of the Andes, but the resulting flavors of dried herbs and lime are remarkable. Lean and edgy, the wine shines.

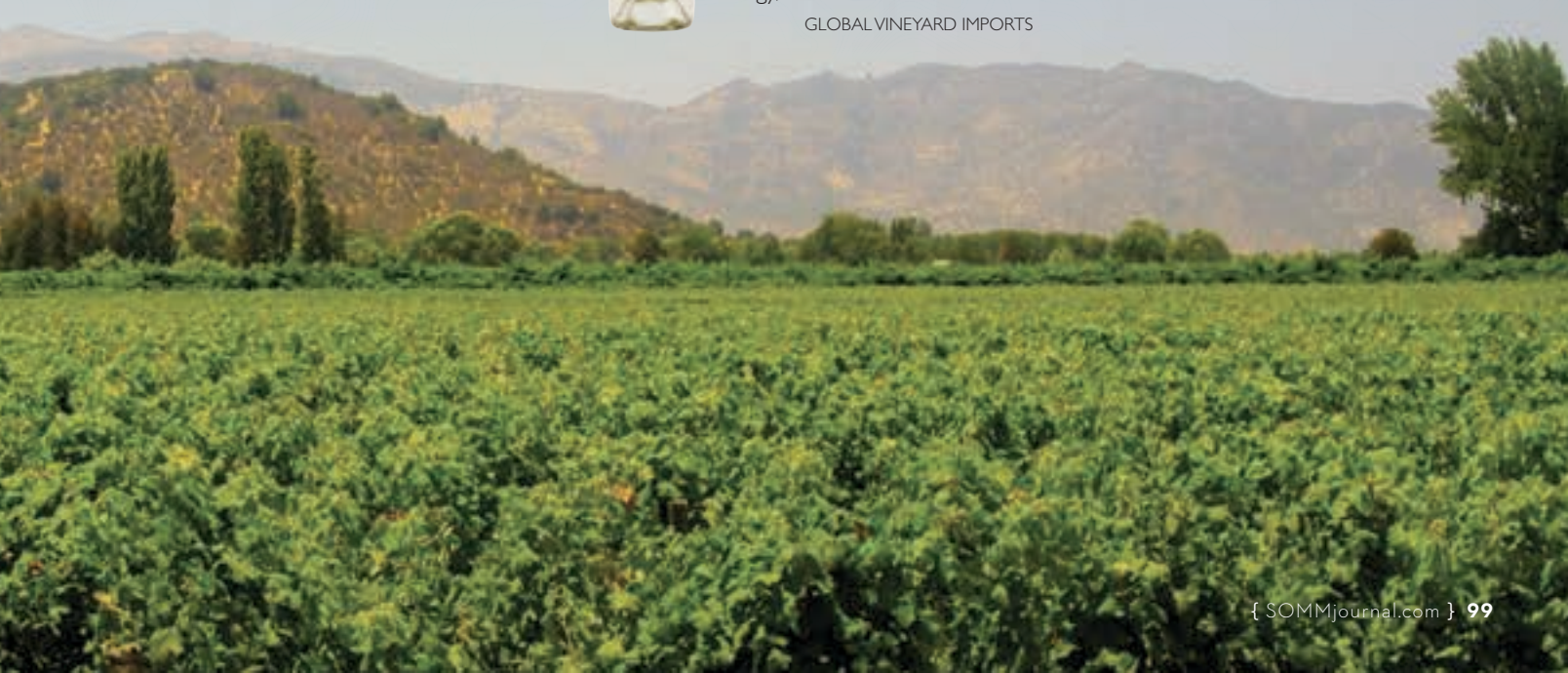
GLOBAL VINEYARD IMPORTS

APALTA VALLEY

(sub-subregion)

Apaltagua Grial 2017 Carménère, Apalta Valley, Colchagua Valley, Chile (\$75) Perfumed with bright violet, plum, and boysenberry, this sun-kissed red is sourced from 60-year-old vines in Chile's prestigious Apalta Valley. Dried heather sides with a juicy component of concentrated blue fruit that rises to the top of this satin-textured beauty.

GLOBAL VINEYARD IMPORTS



MAULE VALLEY

(subregion)

Bodega Volcanes de Chile 2017 Parinacota Limited Edition Syrah-Carignan, Maule Valley, Chile (\$25) Named for the volcano in the Atacama Desert, Parinacota translates as “Flamingo Lake.” A blend of 70% Syrah and 30% Carignan from old vines dating back 100 years, this well-built liquid asset has tremendous depth and a luxurious texture. Ensnoring heavenly dark chocolate and blueberry, the velvet coat draped over the palate is dappled with coffee tannins and finishes with strong notes of leather and slate.

VIAS IMPORTS

Gillmore Winery 2014 VIGNO Carignan, Maule Valley, Chile (\$40) This label is part of the Vignadores del Carignan (aka VIGNO) project from Chilean producers dedicated to the production of a grape that has shown great promise here. Gillmore’s 50-year-old estate vines

are dry farmed in the Loncomilla area of the Maule Valley, 30 miles from the Pacific. Pungent aromas of grilled meat, black pepper, and blackberry preserves give way to heady flavors of black fruit, including black cherry. Washed with fennel root, soy sauce, and mint, they keep the wine deep, dark, and intriguing.

GLOBAL VINEYARD IMPORTS

SOUTHERN CHILE

(region)

Southern Chile is home to Bío Bío, the Itata Valley, and the Malleco Valley, which are cooler and even wetter than the Central Valley. Historically, this region has produced little in the way of fine wine; however, it is here that producers are exploring Alsatian varieties and styles, planting Gewürztraminer, Riesling, Chardonnay, Pinot Noir, and

even a bit of Pinot Gris. These wines, with their bright acidity and delicate aromatics, may achieve greatness, provided there’s continued focus on modern viticulture and vinification techniques along with time and persistence. Itata is still famous for País from some of the oldest vineyards in the country, but much of its production is held back for Chilean wine drinkers.

MALLECO VALLEY

(subregion)

Bodega Volcanes de Chile 2017 Tectonia Chardonnay, Malleco Valley, Chile (\$25) Eleven months of aging in French oak and the influence of volcanic soils bring out vivid aromas of brioche, oregano, and lemon curd. The richness imparted by vanilla wafer, mango, baked apple, and bread dough is heightened by lithe acidity. Minerality adds a lean edge to the finish. sj

VIAS IMPORTS



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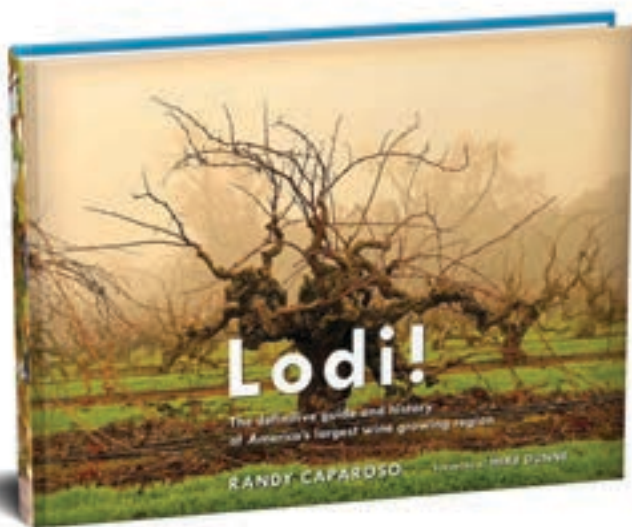
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A New Look at Lodi

WINE VETERAN RANDY CAPAROSO IS SET TO PUBLISH A NEW BOOK ON THE REGION

by Bruce Neyers



I'VE KNOWN RANDY CAPAROSO for over three decades now. I've sold wine to him and I've bought wine from him. I've sought his advice on everything from grape sourcing to restaurants. He's one of the most fascinating information resources to pass my way in my career, and he has finally distilled much of his knowledge into a book that's billed as "The Definitive Guide and History of America's Largest Wine Growing Region," due for release in spring 2021.

Randy has made his home in Lodi for the past ten years, after moving from Hawaii to the mainland U.S. to oversee the wine lists for Roy Yamaguchi's restaurant group. Since then, he's worked as a writer, a consultant, and, perhaps most important, a communications director for the Lodi Winegrape Commission. Over much of this same period, we at Neyers Vineyards have increased our use of Lodi-grown grapes, and we have witnessed many of our friends and neighbors do the same.

A book like this is especially important now, with the wine industry going through a period of substantial change. Randy both captures the history of Lodi and explores the technical elements that have made this grape-growing region so vital to California.

He has set up a Kickstarter to see the project to fruition. I encourage you to visit kck.st/2E7HKmu for information on how you can participate. **SJ**

Bruce Neyers is the owner/grower of Neyers Vineyards and former national sales director for Kermit Lynch Wine Imports.

RELEASING THE

genie

THE MAGIC OF PROVENCE IS IN
THE CREATIVITY OF ITS PEOPLE

by Christy Canterbury, MW

*Provence is nearly as famous
for the shapes of its bottles
as for the wine inside them.*



PHOTO: CEDRICK SKRZY

Researchers at the Centre du Rosé in Vidauban are expediting cross-breeding projects designed to optimize the performance of emblematic Provençal varieties.

From viticulture and vinification to facility design, packaging, marketing, and tourism, Provence's wine industry is a powerhouse of innovation. In fact, the region created a series of awards to laud the most dynamic ideas of the year: The Provence Wine Innovation Trophies are the French trade equivalent of the Cannes Film Festival.

How serious is Provence about these awards? Though they're delayed until 2021 due to COVID-19, the current jury chairman is a Nobel Prize winner in physics!

Advances in Viticulture and Vinification

The Institut National de l'Origine et de la Qualité (INAO) is a cautious body that carefully studies all proposals to amend France's appellation regulations. This doesn't mean that the nation's grape growers, winemakers, and scientists aren't pushing every edge of the envelope: They certainly are.

In Provence, a major emphasis has been placed on optimizing grape performance for rosé winemaking in the face of climate change. The introduction of the EDGARR program at the Centre du Rosé in Vidauban allows researchers to refine the characteristics of emblematic Provençal varieties, namely Rolle (aka Vermentino) and Cinsault, not dissimilarly to the way coaches train athletes. Resistance to vine disease and water stress as well

as inherent structure, balance, resistance to oxidation, and aromatic potential are all scrutinized in the hopes of expediting cross-breeding projects that typically take much longer than growers can afford to wait under the circumstances.

Additionally, Provence winemakers are using a wide array of tools to facilitate their work. Various gauges installed in the vineyard can help growers tend their vines in ways that even frequent visits may not, as they can help measure variables related to concerns like water stress and soil moisture levels that could easily escape human perception. Irrigation can be automated, which is particularly helpful given that water usage is generally strictly controlled. Disease pressure, meanwhile, can be detected earlier by drones.

Automation also helps grape growers in

their epic fights to prevent hail damage to their fruit and to the vines themselves. Romain Roubaud of Château Nestuby uses an alert system that notifies his smartphone of approaching thunderstorms that may carry hail; he can then decide whether to release balloons carrying silver iodide to seed the clouds, lowering their temperature and converting the would-be hail into slush or snow. Automated hail cannons are also available to provide the same results. And if approved, another new system could help winemakers combat sunburn as well as hail: retractable shade installations, which are already being used in commercial fruit and vegetable production in France.

Meanwhile, in the winery, the push toward ever-higher quality continues. Optical sorters—installed years ago at cutting-edge estates like Château d'Esclans—are

becoming more common. Other Provençal producers are experimenting with a wide variety of vessels to increase freshness and energy while amplifying aromatics in their wines, from clay amphorae (for example at Château Saint Ser) to stoneware (Venise Provençale and Mas du Moulin) to concrete eggs (Château la Martinette).

Packaging Developments

Provence boasts a long history of eye-catching packaging. Many châteaux present their rosés in bottles with proprietary shapes; Château Sainte-Marie recently debuted a limited-edition collaboration with designer Zac Posen. And today's producers are turning heads in even more elaborate ways. Some incorporate metallic elements on their bottles, like the flashy "lace" Christian Lacroix put on Château Sainte

In Provence, a major emphasis has been placed on optimizing grape performance for rosé winemaking in the face of climate change.

Roseline's Lampe de Méduse. For the second vintage in a row, Château Gassier has released limited-edition bottles featuring six iconic scenes of Provence on the labels. Meanwhile, both Château Minuty's

Packaging is both an art and a science in Provence.



exuberantly colorful bottles, designed by Zosen & Mina, and Mirabeau's rosé cans offer a stark, contemporary contrast to more somber, traditional labels with hand-drawn châteaux, while the Augmented Reality labels of Ravoire & Fils' Manon cuvée provide access to video content and wine information via an app. All are great ways to get a bottle of rosé on every table in a restaurant.

While consumers may pay less attention to bottle closures than to shapes and labels, they remain a priority for producers and sommeliers alike: No one wants shipments returned due to bad corks. French company Diam has been making wine professionals' jobs easier for well over a decade now by offering closures guaranteed to be free of cork taint. Its

Estandon since 2015. What's more, the company now also sources base materials from cork trees in Provence, revitalizing a sector of the local economy.

Adventures in Tourism and Marketing

Though most of us can transport ourselves to Provence only through sips of rosé during the COVID-19 crisis, we can take heart in planning future visits to wineries that offer experiences far more varied than the standard tastings with a plate of cheese and charcuterie. If you like your wine served with a bit of flair, for instance, check out the VCANTER device used at AIX Rosé. There is no large format too big for this striking service aid, which elegantly

The birthplace of rosé just keeps reinventing itself. Innovation is a critical mission for this classic wine region—because the more things change, the more they can stay the same.



Vineyard technology such as soil-moisture sensors can detect issues that a grower's five senses may not. This is especially helpful with young plants like this newly planted grafted vine.

newest closure, Origine by Diam, ups the ante for eco-friendliness, as it's made from only three ingredients: cork, beeswax, and a binder composed of vegetal polyols. If sustainable wines are a focus for your restaurant or retail shop, bottles corked with Origine by Diam offer a great selling point; Mirabeau has been using it since 2017 and

serves precise pours of wine with the turn of a crank—no heavy lifting required.

For more elaborate examples, Château Saint-Pierre has turned a cellar it no longer uses into an escape room for the gaming set. Guests of Château l'Escarelle can bring a glass of rosé into the estate's butterfly garden, where they can try to identify the

87 different biotypes flitting about. Studious types can try out their five senses on the Château Nestuby tour by smelling different aromas, "blind touching" different elements in the vineyard and winery, examining and placing photos of the vine life cycle in proper order, and so on, as well as blind tasting. Adventurers can opt for wine tours by sidecar (limos are so last decade!) with tour organizer La Belle Échappée or by e-bike to work off some of those glasses of wine along the way. Those who just want to relax can choose from an extensive array of evening events, from concerts (more than a dozen wineries host them) to film screenings (Sainte Roseline) and stargazing with telescopes and field glasses in the company of the Aixois Astronomy Enthusiasts (Gassier).

And if you're planning a vacation that entails never leaving the beach, you can use the Vins de Provence Augmented Reality Map to virtually explore the terroir of the region's vineyards or try the Destinations Vins de Provence app. Once you've found producers that you're interested in, check out the TWIL (The Wine I Love) app developed by the son of the winemaker at Château Saint-Martin Cru Classé to arrange a delivery of Provençal rosés straight to your hotel room.

In short, the birthplace of rosé just keeps reinventing itself. Innovation is a critical mission for this classic wine region—because the more things change, the more they can stay the same. And that's exactly what consumers want from Provence. **||**



The Man Behind the Brands



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