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AUGUST/SEPTEMBER • 2020
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Accentuating the

SITE

**J. LOHR'S VINEYARD SERIES
SHOWCASES THE SUSTAINABILITY
LEADER'S TOP TERROIR**

story by David Gadd / photos by Jeremy Ball

*Regional Vineyard
Manager Steve Carter
in J. Lohr's Shotwell
Vineyard, which is
located in the El Pomar
District sub-appellation
of Paso Robles.*

The notion that wines are made in the vineyard is commonplace among vintners, but it's more than just a truism for J. Lohr Vineyards & Wines.

Proof positive is its Vineyard Series, which illustrates that with enough dedication and patience, the essence of special sites can be wholly captured in the bottle.

That's a tall order given that J. Lohr owns or has long-term partnerships with more than 4,000 vineyard acres, mostly on California's Central Coast, where larger-than-life founder Jerry Lohr was a viticultural pioneer: Lohr's original 1972 plantings in Monterey County served as the foundation of what would later be officially designated the Arroyo Seco AVA, now one of the state's premier cool-climate appellations. J. Lohr Winemaker, White Wines, Kristen Barnhisel currently crafts four Vineyard Series wines at a state-of-the-art facility the company opened adjacent to its vineyards in Greenfield in 2014: the crisp, marine-influenced J. Lohr Arroyo Vista Chardonnay; the aromatic, Musqué Clone 809–based J. Lohr October Night Chardonnay; and the taut, tangy J. Lohr F&G Sauvignon Blanc and J. Lohr F&G Pinot Blanc from the Franscioni & Griva Vineyard.



President and COO Jeff Meier with stainless-steel fermenters inside J. Lohr's Paso Robles facility for small-lot production.

J. Lohr Winemaker, White Wines, Kristen Barnhisel in a vineyard in the Arroyo Seco AVA.



In the mid-1980s, Lohr turned his gaze further south to the Cabernet Sauvignon growing in the warmer region of Paso Robles, again becoming a trailblazer in what many now consider California's most promising viticultural area. Sensing that potential, Lohr built a winery dedicated to red wines there in 1988. One of J. Lohr's most celebrated offerings, the Vineyard Series Hilltop Cabernet, has distinguished itself as a classic expression of Paso Robles terroir and is now crafted by Red Wine-maker Brenden Wood. The J. Lohr Fog's Reach Pinot Noir from Arroyo Seco and the J. Lohr Highlands Bench Pinot Noir from the Santa Lucia Highlands are also made at the Paso Robles facility, which is geared toward small-lot fermentation.

There's another person who knows the story of the Vineyard Series as well as Jerry Lohr himself: Jeff Meier, who's been an integral part of J. Lohr for more than three decades. After starting as a harvest hand in 1984, he was promoted to winemaker in 1995 and then to President and COO in 2013. Given that trajectory,

it's unsurprising that he brims with insight about the birth, evolution, and future of this special collection.

Meier explains that the Vineyard Series was first conceived in the mid-1990s when Lohr realized it was time to augment the popular, wide-market J. Lohr Estates varietals grown across the winery's vineyard holdings with a new tier of terroir-driven wines. To do so, "we tried to identify the best fruit and the vineyards with the most long-term potential from our [sites] in Paso and Monterey," says Meier:

The Vineyard Series debuted in 1998 with the release of the 1995 Hilltop Cabernet Sauvignon and 1996 Arroyo Vista Chardonnay, both of which were originally single-vineyard wines. The former won a gold medal at the prestigious London Wine Trade Fair alongside Opus One and Beaulieu Vineyard's Georges de Latour, but the Vineyard Series' concept eventually evolved to focus on capturing terroir rather than embodying specific plots. "Things changed over time," Meier says. "We worked on refinement of sourcing,



Fruit from the Beck, Gean, and Shotwell estate vineyards (pictured from left to right) in Paso Robles is used for J. Lohr's iconic Hilltop Cabernet Sauvignon.

tighter spacing, better clonal material, and so on. We consistently aimed for improving quality vintage after vintage, which has led us to where we are today."

Fast-forward just over 20 years and the premise behind the tier remains, even as the Vineyard Series portfolio has grown to include more wines with their own proprietary names. Each varietal benefits from the winery's steadfast focus on "accentuating the site," in Meier's words, as specific plots are targeted to contribute their distinct character to the final expression. "[The wines] are from the highest-quality blocks and employ [modernized] techniques," he says. "They're predominantly aged or fermented in French oak with 30–65% new cooperage. The Pinots are typically nine months in barrel and six months in bottle before release; the Cabernets spend 16–18 months in oak and five to six months in bottle before release. The goal for these wines is to help show the consumer and the restaurateur what J. Lohr is really capable of doing from a quality standpoint."

The aforementioned Hilltop Cabernet—"a benchmark for the series, along with the Arroyo Vista Chardon-

nay," according to Meier—now comes mainly from three J. Lohr estate vineyards in Paso Robles. "The Shotwell Vineyard in the cooler El Pomar District provides structure, tremendous color; and Cabernet savoriness; the 1,600-foot-elevation Beck Vineyard in the Creston District brings super-bright, heavily pigmented fruit; and the westernmost Gean Vineyard in the Adelaida District contributes pure, beautiful crème de cassis aromatics and soft tannins," Meier notes.

Fruit of this quality called for upgrading production methods accordingly. "In 2006, we developed a second winery in Paso Robles specifically for small-lot production," says Meier, "with 6-ton and 12-ton open-top fermenters and a French-made Vaucher-Beguet Mistral sorting system that removes overripe and underripe fruit and stems. This allowed us to get the optimal level of ripeness out of our small blocks. In Greenfield, we've been able to do the same for the whites."

Instrumental to the success of the Vineyard Series is Steve Carter, a graduate of the University of California, Davis, who began working with Lohr as a viticulturist in 1989 after moving back from New Zea-

land, where he and his wife had planted their own small vineyard. As J. Lohr's Paso Robles properties expanded and demanded more attention, Carter was named Vineyard Manager in 1995 and Regional Vineyard Manager in 2016. "We started out with vineyards we called Paso 1 and Paso 2," Carter says. "I've seen this expand through the years as consumers have come to rely upon J. Lohr as a brand that they can trust." Now, he notes with a grin, "We're up to Paso 24."


Given the prominence of Bordelais varieties in the Vineyard Series—from the Hilltop Cab to the El Pomar Vineyards Malbec and the rare Saint-Macaire from the Buena Vista Road Vineyard (the latter two are exclusively sold to members of J. Lohr's wine club)—Carter and his vineyard team have worked for the past ten years with a Bordeaux-based consultant, whose experience proved invaluable. "He taught us things we didn't think were possible in terms of manipulating irrigation," says Carter. "Contrary to what I was taught at UC Davis, we now use longer irrigations to mimic a rainfall and then go eight to ten weeks in summer without a drop of water. At first, I was sure this was



doomed to failure, but in fact it has worked phenomenally well," as putting stress on the vines during the hot months "burns all the pyrazines out of the fruit," he explains. "Green character in the wines is a thing of the past."

Part and parcel of the Lohr legend is sustainability, which contributes to the success of the winery's entire portfolio. This year marks the tenth anniversary of J. Lohr becoming one of the first producers to earn the Certified California Sustainable Winegrowing distinction from the California Sustainable Winegrowing Alliance (CSWA); earlier this year, the company was recognized with the Green Medal Leader Award by the California Green Medal Sustainable Winegrowing Awards, which honors vineyards and wineries serving as standard-bearers in sustainability.

To further signify the wines' distinctive qualities, the Vineyard Series packaging has recently been revamped for the first time in 20 years. The luxurious new labels enhance the proprietary names with an elegant script that distinguishes the series from J. Lohr's other tiers while emphasizing the origin of each wine. The updated packaging will continue to roll out as new vintages are released, with promotional events anticipated for 2021.

While it's rooted in decades of experience and progress, the J. Lohr Vineyard Series nevertheless aims to surprise. As Meier reflects back on the inaugural J. Lohr Hilltop Cabernet Sauvignon from the stunning 1995 vintage, he can't resist making a prediction that will surely keep longtime devotees of the tier on their toes: "2019 will be the Vineyard Series Cabernet vintage of the last 20 years." 

J. Lohr Vineyard Series Tasting Notes by Publisher Meredith May



J. Lohr 2018 Arroyo Vista Chardonnay, Arroyo Seco, Monterey County (\$25)

Following scents of honeyed lemon and pound cake, chamomile and pear blossom add an unctuous quality to the mouthfeel before a finish with a zing of salinity. **91**



**J. Lohr 2018 October Night Chardonnay,
Arroyo Seco, Monterey County (\$25)** Aromas of orange peel, lemon custard, and vanilla introduce this extroverted white. Within an array of floral tones, toasted coconut merges with lemon tart. Acidity lifts the flavor profile as honeysuckle and gardenia keep things exotic through the finish. **93**



**J. Lohr 2018 Fog's Reach Pinot Noir,
Arroyo Seco, Monterey County (\$35)** This deep, dark, and shadowy Pinot Noir exudes formidable aromas of beetroot, cinnamon, nutmeg, and earth as well as lush and delicious flavors of black cherry-tinged coffee bean. Rhubarb meets fudge on the finish, leaving you desiring more. **93**



**J. Lohr 2017 Hilltop Cabernet Sauvignon,
Paso Robles (\$35)** One of Paso Robles' most luxurious Cabs, Hilltop waxes a magic wand of flavor and aromatics over its juicy core of blueberry and cassis. A small amount of Petit Verdot and Malbec adds an echo of violets and an iron-like minerality. **93**



**J. Lohr 2017 Tower Road Petite Sirah,
Paso Robles (\$35)** Fresh boysenberry merges with stark and pungent hints of roasted coffee bean and violets on the nose of this dense, rich red. Sweet berry and dark chocolate wash over the palate, joining dry, mineral-wrapped, and teeth-coating tannins before purple flowers bloom midway. It's a powerhouse with poise. **93**



**J. Lohr 2016 Cabernet Sauvignon,
Carol's Vineyard, St. Helena, Napa Valley (\$60)** Winemakers Steve Peck and Brenden Wood created this stunning, densely textured red with aromas of cigar leaf and black fruit that lead to a sumptuous mouthfeel. Coffee beans, violets, leather, and black cherries engage in a sensuous dance as notes of slate and creamy plums accentuate the palate's bold lines. A portion of the proceeds from this wine supports early breast cancer detection in memory of Jerry Lohr's late wife, Carol. **95**

A Guiding Light

PHOTO: JEREMY BALL




We have opened our eyes to the fact that we can do more to reflect the diversity that exists within our industry. A publication like ours has not only the ability to promote these diverse voices but a duty to offer them a platform on many levels.

WOW. WHAT A MOMENT IN TIME.

The year so many of us predicted would be “special” has turned out to be one of the most mind-, body-, and soul-altering experiences of our collective lives—and we’re just halfway through it. In my letter for the January issue of our sister publication, *The Tasting Panel*, I spoke of looking forward with 20/20 vision; in April, I wished everyone health and safekeeping as a pandemic swept the globe. And now, in July, I write as many of us are radically adjusting our vision of what a fair and inclusive society truly looks like.

It’s a start. We have opened our eyes to the fact that we can do more to reflect the diversity that exists within our industry. A publication like ours has not only the ability to promote these diverse voices but a duty to offer them a platform on many levels. That’s why we at *The SOMM Journal* and *The Tasting Panel* have asked our editors and photographers to reach out to the national community of somms, bartenders, retailers, and restaurateurs to tell their stories as well as to journalists who can shine a guiding light for a growing support group.

One of the messages we are hearing loud and clear is that the wine and spirits industry is not providing enough opportunities to Black people, particularly when it comes to management and other leadership roles. As we have all mentored aspiring professionals and passed the batons to our colleagues in the past, we are now taking steps to address that lack of representation, in part by hiring new writers for both magazines. In this issue, you’ll meet Contributing Editor Wanda Mann, whose column “Wine With Wanda” will cover her many adventures in wine. Based in New York City, Mann is a Certified Specialist of Wine and has been writing about our industry for over a decade. She believes that “wine opens up the world and has the power to bring people together.” We agree wholeheartedly.

But we also realize that so many of our trade professionals—no matter their race or ethnicity or gender, their status, credentials, or talent—have lost their jobs. Day by day, so many are learning to reinvent themselves, just as we are. So, with some patience and effort, we will persist in proving our commitment to outreach, to keeping us all connected. And we will ultimately be better for it. 

Meredith May
Publisher & Editor-in-Chief



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THE SOMM JOURNAL

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PHOTO: ALEXANDER RUBIN

Beehives in the garden of Round Pound Estate in Rutherford, CA.

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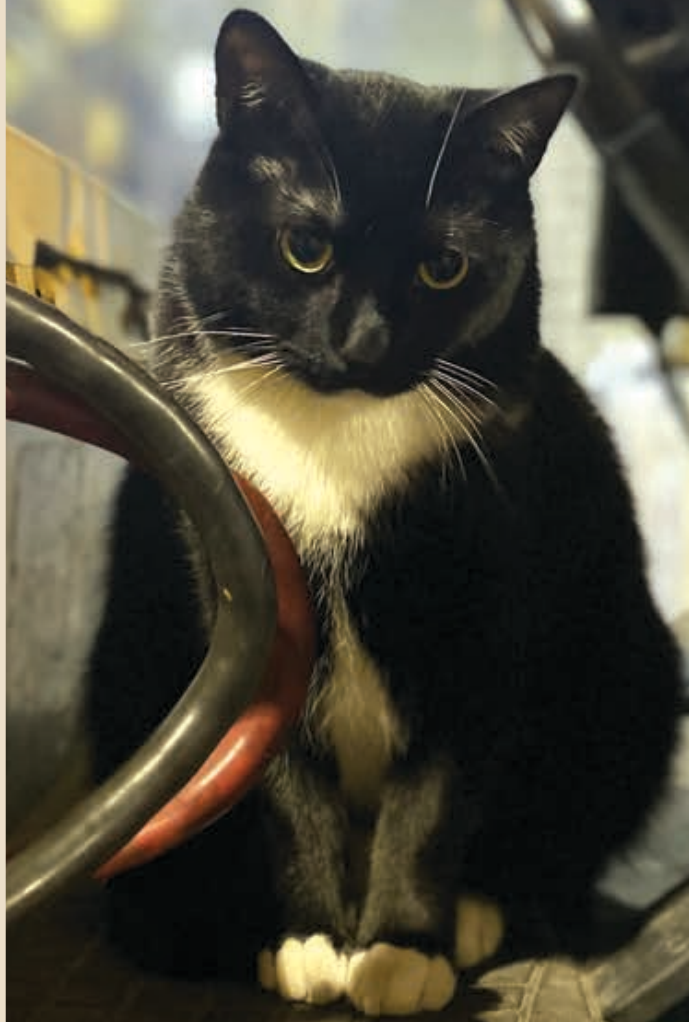


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MAISON FONDÉE EN 1776

LOUIS ROEDERER

CHAMPAGNE

VINTAGE 2013

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LOUIS ROEDERER
HAND IN HAND WITH NATURE



PHOTO: PHOTOSIBER VIA ADOBE STOCK

Overoaked, Overwrought, and Overblown

IMAGINING A POST-CHARDONNAY WORLD

WILL CHARDONNAY EVER go away? It's a fascinating question particularly for Americans, as most of us have never lived in a time when Chardonnay wasn't the dominant white varietal wine. I recently came across a piece I wrote in 1985 for *USA Today* about the ubiquity of Chardonnay. Thirty-five years later, it's still true.

Why does Chardonnay's popularity show so few signs of waning? Let me say right off that I know there are great examples from all over the world, but there are also mind-numbing multitudes of "B-minus" versions that one might charitably call serviceable.

What I find frustrating about so many of these Chardonnays—and California Chardonnays in particular—are not the wines themselves but rather the pretenses with which they're presented. Too many winemakers hammer on about the importance of a cool climate and the goal of expressing elegance yet continue to make Chardonnays that are overripe, overhandled, overoaked, overwrought, and overblown. Why aren't those winemak-

ers—why aren't we—just over it already? Do we really covet Kim Kardashian even as we claim a preference for Audrey Hepburn? Winemakers may have moved their vineyards to cooler places, but most seem to have forgotten to move their mindsets there too.

Yet, in trying to imagine a post-Chardonnay world, I can't help but wonder what we all would drink instead. Riesling? One might wish. But despite the ardent endorsement of legions of sommeliers and other pros in the trade, Riesling—even dry Riesling—has sadly never gained broad traction. Pinot Grigio? Too much of it has all the charm of tap water.

What about Sauvignon Blanc? Given its great rise in quality in California over the past ten years, it arguably should be the answer. But for many, memories of all those weedy, cat-pissy Sauvignons of yesteryear persist. It's a shame, because in places like Napa and Sonoma, some of the best wines that have ever been made are the Sauvignon Blancs emerging today from wineries like Lail Vineyards, Spottswoode,

Accendo Cellars, Eisele Vineyard, AD-AMVS, Rudd Estate, Massican, Cliff Lede Vineyards, Turnbull Wine Cellars, Chimney Rock, and Arkenstone.

In a post-Chardonnay world, maybe there would be more room for Grüner Veltliner, Friulano, and Godello. All of these, and too many other white grapes, get so little attention from Americans.

All things considered, I'm impressed when I come across a really spectacular California Chardonnay, as it's still a rarity. (Among the ones I think highly of are those from Hudson Ranch, Brewer-Clifton, Ramey Wine Cellars, Sanford, Freestone from Joseph Phelps, Stony Hill Vineyard, and ROAR, each of which is made in a different style.) It takes a lot of integrity to make something outstanding when you could have gotten away with merely ordinary. **RSJ**

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



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Vaccinating Against Lost Revenue

SURVIVING IN THE BRAVE NEW RESTAURANT WORLD

THOUGH MOST MARKETS have begun reopening, we in the hospitality business are far from being able to breathe a sigh of relief behind our masks. Social distancing mandates are greatly restricting restaurant seating, and no restaurateur can manage for long at 50% or even 70% capacity; operating costs are simply too high. Now more than ever, then, effective revenue-boosting and profit-enhancing strategies will be critical to our survival.

This is the time to tighten up plans for reopening fully, beginning with a serious look at product mix (also known as PMIX, this is a report that divides sales into major and minor categories and shows gross sales in dollars and quantities of all items over a given period). Assess which items on your food and beverage menus are bestsellers and which fall short. Use that information to eliminate dogs (slow-moving, high-cost items) and create more stars (high-moving, low-cost items).

Next, perform a SWOT analysis. This should be a holistic and, more importantly, honest assessment of your restaurant's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats. Your next pivot (I'm really beginning to hate that word) might reveal itself in the strengths and opportunities sections. For example, if you have a reputation for amazing cocktails, you could offer at-home cocktail kits or a booklet of your restaurant's signature recipes accompanied by some housemade mixers. But it might as easily be borne out of weaknesses and threats. If a weakness is that you only serve upscale dinners, take a page from Alinea's book and serve a casual family meal to go.

A SWOT analysis can also be used to transform your business model. This doesn't necessarily mean changing your concept but rather changing how your

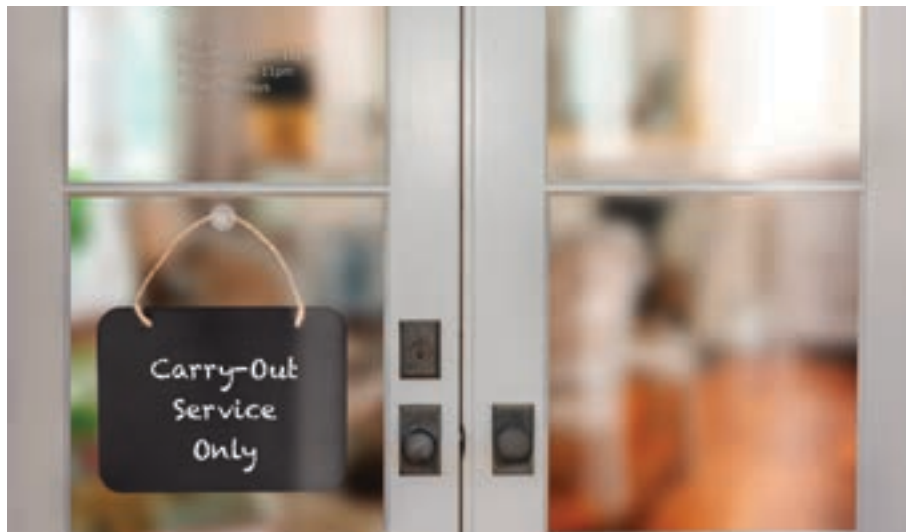


PHOTO: ADOSQL/EPHOTO VIA ADOBE STOCK

concept operates. For example, Bresca, a Michelin-starred restaurant in Washington, D.C., now offers multicourse dinners to go. This allows them to sell hundreds of orders a night, far more than they could ever serve in their small dining room. Coupled with lower overhead and labor costs, this takeout program has essentially increased the restaurant's revenue and margins relative to dine-in business.

Next, consider PMIX and SWOT in tandem. Review the costs and margins associated with bestselling items. Often they are loss leaders (say, happy-hour oysters that hopefully drive beverage revenue) or not as profitable as other items. Less popular items might provide better profit margins. Remember this important fact, which seems to elude all but the savviest operators: On any given menu, there will always be a bestseller and a worst seller. The key is to ensure that the bestsellers are high-margin, high-profit items and slower sellers are loss leaders or lower-margin products. It is important to look at profit dollars, not percentages—after all, you don't deposit percentages in the bank.

Identify the items that provide the most gross profit dollars and create a plan to shift the PMIX to them.

Lastly, prepare for a new operating reality. We don't know how long social distancing will be necessary, but it's safe to say that many measures will be enforced at least through the end of the year. Make a plan, but remember that your needs can and will change, so flexibility is key. A sensible financial and operational assessment can help restaurateurs create, rather than merely navigate, a new reality. **SJ**

There will always be a bestseller and a worst seller. The key is to ensure that the bestsellers are high-margin, high-profit items and slower sellers are loss leaders or lower-margin products.

91 *points*

Tasting Panel | Somm Journal

2017 CABERNET SAUVIGNON

Aromas of wild cherry and mocha cedar are irresistible. Concentrated notes of black raspberry, dark chocolate, and a hint of mint layer on the palate. This is an especially easy drinking red from a high elevation site.

—*Meridith May*

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MAIDEN RELEASE





Embracing Coastal Community

SOMMELIERS SEIZE THE UMAMI-DRIVEN POTENTIAL OF THE UNI SPAGHETTI AT BORN & RAISED IN SAN DIEGO, CA

by Michelle M. Metter

WITH ACCESS TO abundant seafood and fresh produce from area farms, San Diego is the holy grail for foodies seeking coastal, multinational cuisine. For this month's Pairing Up column, we visited chef Ted Smith at Born & Raised, one of several establishments from fellow chef Jason McLeod and his partners at Consortium Holdings.

One dish in particular "really encompasses our community as a whole," says Smith: a base of uni butter with Madeira reduction and lemon beneath fresh spaghetti

and uni "tongue," which is topped with grated salt-cured egg yolk, housemade chili oil "for a touch of heat," and chives. The fresh pasta arrives daily from Assenti's Pasta just down the street, while the uni is sourced from a local fisherman and prepared by sister restaurant Ironside Fish & Oyster; the egg, meanwhile, comes from Hilliker's Ranch in nearby Lakeside.

When suggesting a wine to pair with the uni spaghetti, Wine Director Rafael Peterson likewise opts to keep it local. "This dish is rich and decadent,

with the umami flavors of the uni pairing with the sweetness of the uni butter and Madeira. We've recently added a skin-contact orange wine by the glass from Los Pilares. It's made from 100% Assyrtiko, a Greek variety that does very well in the San Diego mountains. The wine delivers very dry stone-fruit flavors of apricot and tangerine, with a weighty mid-palate and high acidity. One of the things that impressed me the most is the crisp texture—it's like biting into a fresh Golden Delicious apple."

Read on for suggested pairings from three more sommeliers in the region.



PHOTO: RAPHAEL PETERSON

Born & Raised Wine Director Rafael Peterson suggests pairing the San Diego restaurant's uni spaghetti with a locally made orange wine.

PHOTO: JUAN VALENCIA



Rick Arline, Wine Director, Auburn, Los Angeles, CA

"For this dish, I'm looking for a wine with acidity, freshness, and texture, and Biondi's Etna Bianco Outis, a Carricante-based blend, hits the nail on the head. The nose shows notes of lemon skin, honeysuckle, dandelion patch, and hay. On the palate, the zippy acidity works in tandem with flavors of white peach, fresh pear, and grapefruit, with just a hint of minerality."

PHOTO: MEGAN HURST



Katie Edgecombe, Wine Director, Paon Restaurant & Wine Bar, San Diego, CA

"I recently had a chance to visit an Escondido winery called Speckle Rock Vineyards and was blown away by their 2019 Estate Falanghina. I believe this unique Italian varietal to be [a] perfect wine to pair. It has just a touch of sweetness, with flavors of citrus blossom, golden apple, and honeydew melon. The light, zippy finish is the perfect palate cleanser for this amazing dish."

PHOTO: JOSUE CASTRO



Claudia Horta Meza, winemaker and sommelier, Casta de Vinos, Baja California, Mexico

"The Casta de Vinos 2019 Grenache Pitaya Rosé from the Valle de Guadalupe is an exotic pairing with strong textures and flavors. The high acidity in the wine potentiates the citrus flavors of the Madeira-lemon reduction by lowering the fat of the fresh uni butter. The fruity wine's flavors are concentrated by its six months [spent] on the lees; together with the salt, they soften the umami flavor of the uni, and the low alcohol stabilizes the spiciness." ❖

7 DEADLY



ONE GOOD SIN LEADS TO ANOTHER

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“Gracious Service, Not Servitude”

ANDRÉA FULTON-HIGGINS CALLS UPON HER EXPERIENCE TO GET THROUGH THESE TOUGH TIMES

ANDRÉA FULTON-HIGGINS has been, as they say, around the block. While serving as Wine Director at Lark Creek Inn in Larkspur, California, she was hand-picked by none other than Master Sommelier Fred Dame to succeed him in the same position at classic Monterey dining destination The Sardine Factory, where she worked from 1989 to 2001. That tenure was followed by stints at The Elba Corp. and Louis B's in Austin, Texas, as well as The Joel Palmer House in Dayton, Oregon, from 2009 to 2016. She has also worked with Evening Land Wines, Hanzell Vineyards, Justin Vineyards, Riedel Crystal, and the *Wine Spectator* Wine Experience in addition to holding positions in retail wine management. What *hasn't* she done?

The more pressing question, according to Fulton-Higgins, is what to do now that the entire industry has had what she calls “a head-on collision” with coronavirus. What she mourns is the progress the trade has made. “After 25 years, sommeliers had finally been able to shed the old stereotype of snooty men in tuxes slamming 5-pound tomes on tables to becoming more like fun experts affectionately called ‘somm,’” Fulton-Higgins says. “One such somm is Jared Hooper, Wine Director of Faith & Flower in L.A., who describes Beaujolais as ‘Pinot Noir’s New Jersey cousin,’ tells dirty jokes, drives a Camaro, and is a whole lotta fun to hang out with!” Unfortunately, she fears that the wine business’ newfound accessibility will be compromised by the pandemic.

Fulton-Higgins recently connected with Hooper to discuss where the industry currently stands—and what their new roles may be within this new reality. “We need to shift to stay relevant,” she recalls

PHOTO COURTESY OF ANDRÉA FULTON-HIGGINS




him telling her: “I’ve been doing Zoom tastings and working with retail partners. It’s not a lot of money, but I do it to stay in the game and to keep busy. Staying in communication is the key, not just with potential clients but also with other somms. I’ve been meeting with winemakers and visiting vineyards. It’s so hard to stay on top of rules and regs, but it’s important to stay healthy.”

“And sane,” Fulton-Higgins replied. “In today’s restaurants, the sommelier sets the mood with what I call ‘gracious service, not servitude.’ We greet our guests at the table, purring ‘come into my house, let

me make you comfortable.’ Reading the table is the most important part of our job—and now we have no table to read. Getting back to that place is now our challenge. If your guests cannot travel to you, perhaps you can travel to them. I see several opportunities here.”

Catering is one example: Fulton-Higgins recognizes potential in “traveling to people’s houses and providing food and wines for small groups, bring[ing] the restaurant to them. I know more than a few somms who are great cooks, some professionally trained.” As party planners and hosts, mobile somms could “come up with different themes, like seasonal celebrations. Bring along a winemaker—not a boring

one. Sell wines at the dinner; tell great wine stories; teach wine and food pairing; bring artwork, cookbooks, or curated music [selections] to entertain and educate. . . . The key is being absolutely approachable, not laughing when someone wants sweet wine but showing them the absolute best sweet wines they’ll ever have.” In other words, doing what sommeliers do!

These are hard times, but hard times can be “the perfect opportunity for somms to get out into the real world,” Fulton-Higgins asserts. With a little luck, those opportunities may continue to beckon long after the pandemic is over. 



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Lia Jones

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, DIVERSITY IN WINE AND SPIRITS *by Michelle M. Metter*

PHOTO COURTESY OF LIA JONES



LIA JONES IS the Executive Director of nonprofit organization Diversity in Wine and Spirits and a featured educator at SommCon's annual conferences in Washington, D.C., and San Diego. With two decades of experience in hospitality, Jones is also a consultant for the industry, helping organizations worldwide with the implementation of diversity and inclusion programs.

Q: How did you come to found Diversity in Wine and Spirits?

I have been in the hospitality industry for decades, and for the most part I have faced racism, discrimination, and sexism—a bunch of -isms. And it becomes old after a while. I got tired of complaining and having to fight for myself. I wanted to stand up and fight for everyone who doesn't have a voice.

Q: What have been some of your major accomplishments to date?

I had a successful private-dining company in my early 20s, and at that age, at that time, it was pretty self-validating. But starting a global nonprofit to help all spectrums of marginalized professionals in food and beverage—that's something to talk about. However, we are only just beginning to see the fruits of our labor; only when I see the culture shift to [become] more inclusive . . . will I feel that I have had a "major" accomplishment.

Q: Who were your mentors and what impact have they had on your professional growth?

To be honest, I haven't had mentors in the wine community, but a few [people] that I look up to and admire are [South African winemaker] Ntsiki Biyela, [Master of Wine] Mary Gorman-McAdams, [wine journalists and critics] Dorothy Gaiter and John Brecher, and [Master of Wine] Jancis Robinson—she's always a good read. I think Ntsiki has had the most impact on me. Visiting South Africa, I had the privilege of interviewing her for my nonprofit. Since then, I've continued to watch her make something out of nothing. She's an

inspiration, for me and for up-and-coming women winemakers in South Africa.

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

So, I have one wine story about Prince that is so incredibly ridiculous I don't think anyone would believe it. I am a huge fan [of his], so for one of my birthdays, my boyfriend at the time got us a package deal that included a two-night stay at the Roosevelt Hotel in L.A., a dinner for two, and a private concert with about 50 Prince fans. At the time I knew very little about wine, so my boyfriend took it upon himself to order [a bottle that] was exceptional.

The bill came and my boyfriend looked at it with great confusion. He shook his head, said he had forgotten his glasses, and asked me to look. At this time Prince's *3121* album had come out, and we were so confused because the wine was that exact price with tax. We talked to the staff and management, and it turned out that my ex thought he ordered a bottle that was 300 bucks because he couldn't see without his glasses.

I started taking off my jewelry to get ready to go in the back to wash dishes to Prince songs all night, but luckily he had enough money on his credit card to pay for it. I felt bad, so I drank the sediment in the decanter and took the empty bottle with me. Prince found out about it and gave us a shoutout during the concert in jest, asking how the Château Pétrus was and wishing me a happy birthday. So, because I was born in '84, even though it wasn't a great vintage, I would love to share a 1984 Château Pétrus with Prince. *SM*

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Old Vines and Amphorae

THE WINES AND WINEMAKING TECHNIQUES OF THE IBERIAN PENINSULA TREAD A PATH CARVED BY HISTORY

IN THIS ERA of closed borders and social distancing, travel to far-flung wine regions remains sadly out of reach. But catching a flight isn't the only option for embarking on an enological journey: We can still open a bottle and taste the world. Now more than ever, I appreciate wine's ability to transport me to places I've yet to visit and beloved destinations alike. Among the latter is the Iberian Peninsula, which is home to Portugal and Spain and encompasses some of the world's most famous wine-producing areas, including the Douro and Rioja as well as lesser-known appellations with their own rich histories and impressive wines—two of my favorites being Alentejo and Somontano.

The large clay vessels known as amphorae are popping up in cellars around the globe as the must-have blast-from-the-past winemaking tool, but they never left Alentejo. According to Pedro Ribeiro, General Manager and winemaker for Herdade do Rocim, *talha* wine—aka wine made in amphorae—“is the epitome of [the region's] millenary wine culture.” He continues, “Here, the techniques developed by the

Romans . . . have been safeguarded [and] handed down from generation to generation throughout history, almost without change. Nevertheless, there is more than one way to make wine in talhas, with certain [regional] variations according to local tradition. . . . With vinho de talha, we are able to express our terroir [through the] amazing purity [of] our fruit [without it being masked by] barrel aging.” Herdade do Rocim produces red and white amphora wines, including its 2019 Amphora Branco and 2019 Amphora Tinto; for those looking to explore additional producers, I also recommend the Herdade do Esporão 2017 Moreto Amphora and the José Maria da Fonseca 2017 José de Sousa Red.

Meanwhile, Somontano in northeastern Spain produces some of the country's most intriguing wines. The climate and terroir nurture a diverse selection of grape varieties from Chardonnay to Gewürztraminer; but the ancient Garnacha vines in Viñas del Vero's high-altitude Secastilla Vineyard are one of the region's true treasures. “The Secastilla wine [is born] in a

100-year-old vineyard in the valley with the same name at the foot of the Pyrenees Mountains,” says manager and winemaker Jose Ferrer. “We cultivate old bush-vine Garnacha amongst the ancient olive and almond trees, which have always [grown] there.” Crafted to be a true expression of terroir, the wine has been nominated as the Best Spanish Red Wine and Best International Garnacha by the International Wine Challenge competition. For a taste of Somontano, the limited-production Viñas del Vero 2014 Secastilla Garnacha is a great pick. As for recommendations of other Somontano producers, try the unoaked Enate 2019 Chardonnay 234 and the Bodega Pirineos 2014 Cabernet Sauvignon Selección Crianza. *sj*

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



PHOTO COURTESY OF VIÑAS DEL VERO



PHOTO COURTESY OF HERDADE DO ROCIM

▲ *Herdade do Rocim's General Manager and winemaker, Pedro Ribeiro, poses with amphorae.*

◀ *Jose Ferrer of Viñas del Vero in the Spanish producer's high-altitude Secastilla Vineyard.*

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Bright

SIDE

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LOOK

SAME

GREAT WINE

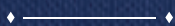


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A Case Study in Moxie

FROM **BAR HELIX** TO **CABANA X**, DENVER'S KENDRA ANDERSON SHOWS HOW TO PIVOT IN STYLE

IN MY INAUGURAL COLUMN back at the turn of 2018, which introduced readers to the bar scene here in Denver; I referenced the just-opened Bar Helix—"a lounge in the white-hot RiNo neighborhood that exudes disco-era glamour"—as a prime example of the "wealth of ingenuity distinguishing the [city's] industry these days." Ironically, it's all the more exemplary now that it's no longer operating as Bar Helix but rather a whole new concept: Cabana X.

tor of Hospitality, Christine LeMieux, brought in some fabric she was using for a craft project. "It was pretty—bright colors and flowers—and when I saw it, I thought of [fashion designer] Lilly Pulitzer," Anderson recalls. "It's not really my taste, but it popped into my mind—and all of a sudden I saw it all: this society maven who lives in Palm Beach and has this glamorous outdoor lifestyle. I realized I could take that and build it around Bar Helix. A cabana puts you in mind of lying poolside at a



Though some of the Negroni variants for which Bar Helix is known remain on the Cabana X cocktail list, the primary focus is on drinks with "that whole beachside vibe—Mojitos, sangria," owner Kendra Anderson says.

would now be the apparel of choice.

And come mid-June, Cabana X would open with a food-and-beverage program that, while decidedly more casual than that of Bar Helix, captures Anderson's inimitable style nevertheless. "Our muse is [still] a globe-trotting luxury lover," she points out. "They still want their caviar; and I still have [to pour] Ruinart, because I'm me." But she's also serving up fabulous Mojitos with pineapple rum and cucumber soda, Cognac-laced rosé sangria, and Aperol Spritzes in the form of shaved ice. The menu, meanwhile, is divided into three categories, each inspired by a different destination. On the inaugural version, shrimp rolls appeared in the Martha's Vineyard section, tacos al pastor with Campari-roasted pineapple under Tulum, and that caviar on toast points with lemon crème fraîche under Palm Beach; on the next iteration, Anderson says, "We're going to go to Mykonos, Ibiza, and Negril."

And after that? "I wish I could answer that—that's what keeping me up at night," Anderson admits. Even if Colorado avoids a second major wave of closures this summer, she's only committing to the Cabana X concept through Labor Day. "Obviously the weather is a big factor," she says. Whether it can waylay the force of nature that is Anderson herself remains to be seen. ❏

Anderson calls the fried clams featured on the inaugural menu "quintessential Martha's Vineyard, with a kick of spice in the dredge and a really lovely Green Goddess aioli."



It wasn't long after Colorado's restaurants and bars were ordered to close in mid-March that owner Kendra Anderson realized her sexy date-night haunt wasn't built to withstand a pandemic. "I didn't feel good about trying to sell that model," she admits. But neither was she about to abandon the brand aesthetic she'd worked so long and hard to develop. As she was pondering her next move, it struck her that the patio attached to the shuttered burger joint next door had gone unused for months—and an idea began to form based on the fact that "I was desperately craving a vacation."

It crystallized when Anderson's Direc-

resort; if you're Pulitzer, maybe you have an actual cabana boy running out to you, bringing you snacks. So Cabana X came to be the metaphorical representation of the getaway my staff and I couldn't have: We could take the bar on vacation [instead]."

With the landlord's permission to operate the adjacent patio as well as her own and the (admittedly aggravating) permitting process underway, Anderson and her team began planning everything from the menus to the decor and staff uniforms. Where Bar Helix is dark and cozy, its outdoor alter ego would be color-splashed and sea-breezy; where little black dresses were the norm for staff and guests alike, resort wear

PHOTOS: KAYLA JONES

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— ZAC BROWN, PROPRIETOR

92
POINTS

TASTING PANEL
2018 CABERNET SAUVIGNON

91
POINTS

TASTING PANEL
2018 PROPRIETARY RED BLEND WINE



A Happy Marriage

BALANCE IS IMPERATIVE—THOUGH DIFFICULT TO ACHIEVE—
IN FRUIT BEERS by Jessie Birschbach

LATELY I'VE BEEN drinking a lot of wild beers made with fruit, from lambics to sours. And I'm not the only one: They're wildly popular (pun intended), and respected breweries like Austin's Jester King and LA's Cellador Ales have made a name for themselves by brewing their farmhouse-style ales with fruit. This craze got me thinking, though:

spontaneous fermentation? Is it that the specialty styles they're competing with lend themselves best to being combined with fruit? Arguably, it is, thanks to their signature tart character, which can be attributed to processes like spontaneous fermentation and blending techniques. But I also don't think fruit beer in general deserves the bad rap it gets.

ale—work with the fruit that's being featured? The latter's flavors should always complement the base style, not overpower or sweeten it. With the Pyramid, for example, you should still be able to smell and taste the grainy, malty character of the wheat beer along with the tangy apricot.



Perhaps this is why fruit beers aren't as respected: The balance is all too often skewed toward the sweeter, fruitier side. 21st Amendment Brewery's Hell or High Watermelon Wheat maintains a solid balance of fruit and beer, in my opinion. (Are you noticing a pattern yet? Wheat beer works really well with fruit.) Bell's Brewery's Cherry Stout is another classic example, as is the Stiegl Radler, which combines beer with grapefruit or lemon. Last week, the new Paulaner Grapefruit Radler was just what I needed while sitting in a lukewarm kiddie pool with my son. Where the tiny pool fell short in terms of refreshment, the beer compensated. Plus, considering it has an ABV of just 2.5%, I didn't feel the need to take a nap after. My son, on the other hand ... *sj*

Jessie Birschbach is a Certified Cicerone and substandard homebrewer. She's also still learning, so if you have a suggestion or comment, please contact her at jabs@sommjournal.com.



PHOTO: PHOTOMYSIA VIA ADOBE STOCK

Why aren't regular ol' fruit beers—which the Beer Judge Certification Program (BJCP) simply defines as any beer made with any combination of fruit—considered as cool as their trendier counterparts? (The BJCP categorizes fruit lambics and fruit sours separately from fruit beers, as the former have long been established as their own styles.) Is it their lack of high acid and/or

After all, I have Pyramid Apricot Ale to thank for my eventual love of craft beer: I drank that stuff like water in college, and because it was well made and well balanced, it served as a bridge to other styles.

Fruit beers can involve any base style, a fact that stresses the importance of harmony: Does the style of beer—be it an American wheat, a stout, or a blonde

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TRAILBLAZING CENTRAL COAST WINES



Megan McCollough,
Winemaker

2018
**CABERNET
SAUVIGNON**
CENTRAL COAST

92
POINTS

Vintage 2017
The Tasting Panel
June 2020



2016
**PROPRIETARY
RED WINE BLEND**
CENTRAL COAST

92
POINTS

The Tasting Panel
June 2020



by Janet Fletcher

By Any Other Name

THE PERFECT CHEESE PAIRINGS FOR THE ROSEBUD COCKTAIL

SOME NEWS REPORTS suggest that people are drinking more as they hunker down at home. At my house, no changes. I'm pretty sure of it. Having healthy, long-standing routines around alcohol consumption makes it unlikely that stress will send us off the rails.

One unbreakable custom at my house is the Friday night Rosebud. When we are at home, and sometimes when we are not, we start the evening with this beautiful drink. My husband, Doug, thinks he invented it, and I have seen no evidence to the contrary.


Several years ago, Doug invested in all the accouterments to make Martinis: Baccarat glasses, fancy gin, an expensive cocktail shaker. But it wasn't long before we admitted to each other that we didn't much like drinking them. What to do with all this costly gear?

Enter the Rosebud: 4 ounces of dry, high-acid white wine and 1 ounce of Campari, shaken with ice and strained into a chilled Martini glass with an orange twist. We have ordered Rosebuds (on Friday nights, of course) in airport bars, in a Saigon hotel, and in New York City's Little Italy. We have to talk the bartender through the recipe, which is how we learned, from the barman in Little Italy, that a Rosebud is a Bicicletta. But he was wrong about that. A Bicicletta includes club soda and is served over ice. The Rosebud remains a Fletcher creation (we think).

The ideal cheeses to accompany a Rosebud are fresh, tart, and spreadable—the kind you might drizzle with olive oil and sprinkle with herbes de Provence. Here's a trio of favorites:

Blackberry Farm Brebis is a fresh, rindless sheep cheese from the famed Blackberry Farm resort in Tennessee. Think of it as the sheep's milk equivalent of fresh chèvre, although it's lighter on the tongue and less tangy than most fresh goat cheese. It has a clean, lemony flavor. Make it your own by folding in sautéed scallions and garlic.

Meredith Dairy Marinated Sheep and Goat Cheese comes from a family-run farmstead creamery in Australia, near Melbourne. In that country, it's the bestselling marinated cheese, a crowded niche there. Moist, pudgy, creamy cubes of fresh cheese float in an olive oil–canola oil blend with thyme, black pepper, and garlic. Crostini required.

Cypress Grove Purple Haze, from the California creamery that makes the inimitable Humboldt Fog, is a rindless goat disk flavored with lavender and fennel pollen. Put it in an ovenproof ramekin, drizzle with olive oil, and warm in a moderate oven until it just quivers, about 5 minutes. Enjoyed alongside a Rosebud, this cheese will transport you to the Amalfi Coast with its Mediterranean aromas. 

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Katerina Axelsson, founder and CEO of Tastry.

Digital Palate

IS TASTRY THE FUTURE OF WINE COMMERCE?

AS THE FOUNDER and CEO of Tastry, a leader in AI-driven sensory science, Katerina Axelsson believes that consumers will soon purchase food and beverages according to recommendations driven by their own unique set of flavor preferences. Axelsson, who studied chemistry at California Polytechnic State University, previously worked at a custom-crush facility, where she witnessed wineries struggle to promote wines through subjective reviews and tasting notes. So, in 2016, she founded Tastry to improve how the industry “matches individual wines to individual consumers.”

The company’s core mission is to help producers make and market expressions that will be readily embraced by wine drinkers. To achieve this, Tastry’s team of chemists analyzes thousands of flavor compounds, determining how they interact to comprise the palate of a given wine; those comprehensive findings are then shared with winemakers through interactive reports that can be used to either find

people whose palate preference matches their wines or to craft selections that would be more appealing to a broader range of consumers.

Axelsson likes to say that Tastry’s team “taught a computer how to taste,” and the results are impressive: For example, by using its proprietary Computational Blending technology, the company helps wineries make the best possible blend from available stock to align with the preferences of their intended audience—demographically, geographically, or by price point—based on their research of thousands of consumers’ palates across the country.

Retailers also stand to benefit: By gaining access to Tastry’s digital palate quiz via in-store kiosks or the company’s Insights Dashboard, consumers can see whether a wine matches their palate before they buy. Businesses can also get to know their shoppers’ individual tastes through the dashboard, which can then assist managers and category buyers in making educated decisions regarding product mix.

As wine-buying habits shift, Tastry has doubled down on its commitment to domestic and international wineries by partnering with BottleTribe, a new e-commerce retailer. Through Tastry, boutique winemakers can upload exclusive bottlings, expanding their reach to shoppers nationwide. All wines on BottleTribe are also featured on the BottleBird app—available on Apple and Android devices—where users can browse a growing list of labels that they can choose to purchase directly or from local retailers.

“We are dedicated to helping artisans around the country and celebrating the passion they put into their craft,” Axelsson says. “Whether you’re an expert or new to wine, we want to open up a whole new world of wine to you and help you find your next favorites.” **ST**

For more information about Tastry’s technology and its applications, contact hello@tastry.com.

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On Our Radar

Seeking something new and different? Below are a few libations that recently caught our attention, along with some ideas on how to consume them.

by Eric Marsh

La Pivón Spanish Vermouth

(\$29/750-mL) Both the Blanco and the Rojo styles of La Pivón Spanish Vermouth are made from macerated herbs and botanicals as well as Valencia oranges before they're aged in oak barrels. Maybe because I tasted them in 80-degree weather, I was more taken with the Blanco. Orange peel on the nose is accompanied by woody spices; the mouthfeel is silky and full, and orange pith is prevalent on the palate along with subtle notes of thyme and rosemary. It would be perfect on the rocks with an orange twist before a light seafood dinner on a late summer evening. 3 BADGE BEVERAGE



Uncle Val's Peppered Gin (\$39/750-mL)

Uncle Val's has three gins in its lineup: Restorative, Botanical, and Peppered. Restorative has a seductive floral bouquet accompanied by coriander and cucumber; Botanical exhibits lively lemon zest and lingering sage on the palate. But it's the piquant, savory Peppered expression that's the most notable, with its sweet and tart fragrance of charred red bell pepper underpinned by juniper. On the palate, vegetal and smoky notes, along with some funk and black pepper, bring mezcal to mind. This would work well in a Bloody Mary, Gimlet, or a dry Martini garnished with plump halkidiki olives. 3 BADGE BEVERAGE



PULP CULTURE (\$15/4-pack 355-mL cans)

Melding medicinal herbs and superfoods with spontaneously fermented fruit juices, L.A.-based brand PULP CULTURE encourages you to "find balance with your buzz." All four expressions—Think, Restore, Hustle, and Relax—drink like hard kombucha and are non-GMO, gluten free, vegan, 99 calories, and 4.9% ABV. Relax is the most dynamic of the four, mixing wild-fermented, cold-pressed apple, lemon, and blueberry juice with lavender, valerian root, and reishi. If there's any guilt about the alcohol content, those botanical adaptogens should absolve it.



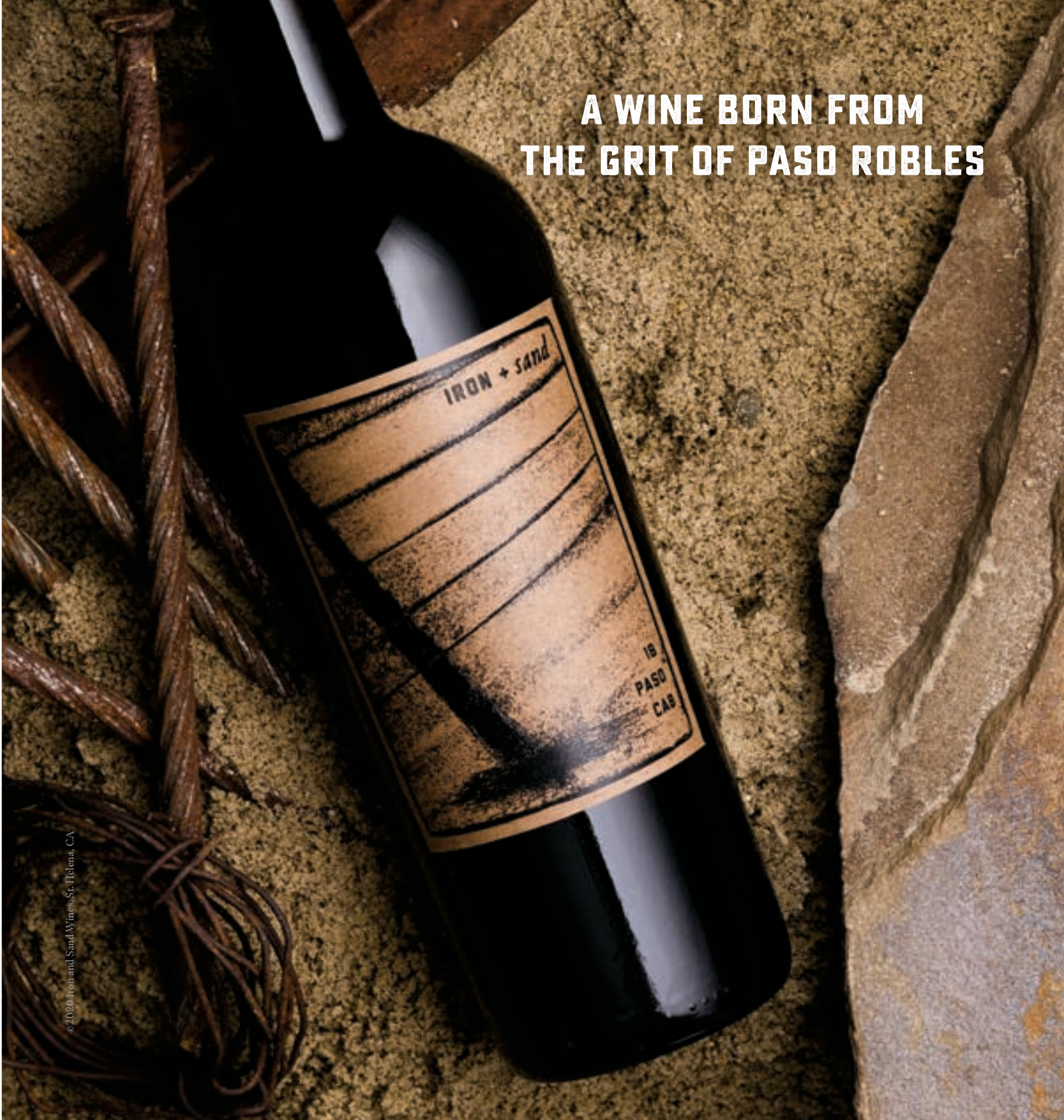
Cask Cartel Zodiac Black Cherry Barrel Rested Vodka (\$25/750-mL)

So convincing is the dominant flavor of this barrel-rested 70-proof potato vodka that you might think you've just bitten into a Luxardo cherry. But there's more to it than that, as oak-derived notes of maple, baking spice, and black pepper show up on the scene to yield a profile redolent of cherry pie before its fiery kick reminds you that you're drinking vodka, not cherry liqueur. Try it in a twist on an Old Fashioned, or, more refreshingly, in a Tom Collins or Cape Codder.

Grand Brulot (\$43/750-mL)

While the bottle is as regal as the name, there's also something comforting about this handcrafted, VSOP-based café liqueur. The Cognac—a blend of Ugni Blanc and Colombar grapes—is aged four to five years and then melded with a separate blend of 100% Ecuadorian Robusta coffee bean essence and brandy, making for a slightly sticky concoction that, along with the expected coffee flavor up front, exhibits notes of vanilla, clove, star anise, and cinnamon. Enjoy solo as a digestif after some Michelin-starred takeout, or mix with vodka and cream (or whatever alternatives you have on hand) for a quarantine variation of the reliable White Russian—and then slouch on the couch and rewatch *The Big Lebowski*. \$J



A black and white photograph of a wine bottle lying on its side on a sandy surface. The bottle is the central focus, with its label clearly visible. The label has a rustic, hand-drawn appearance with the words 'IRON + sand' at the top. Below this, there are several horizontal lines, and at the bottom right of the label, it says '18 PASO CAB'. To the left of the bottle is a wicker basket, and to the right is a large, flat rock. The background is a textured, sandy surface.

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Resounding Applause

ECHOLANDS IS MASTER SOMMELIER/MASTER OF WINE DOUG FROST'S FIRST FORAY INTO WINERY OWNERSHIP by Meredith May

DOUG FROST HOLDS the rare distinction of being one of just four people who can call themselves both a Master of Wine and a Master Sommelier. As an educator and ambassador, he's traveled the world to spread the gospel of various wine regions and has judged at some of the industry's top competitions, including the San Francisco International Wine Competition and the San Francisco World Spirits Competition. A prolific writer, he's also penned many an article on all things vinous, including contributions to *The SOMM Journal*. And now, as a feather in his cap, Frost has added winery owner to his vast repertoire.

In partnership with investor and conservationist Brad Bergman and winemaker Taylor Oswald, Frost is introducing Echolands Winery with a lineup of three wines this summer. They're currently sourcing grapes on a négociant basis as they develop their sustainable estate vineyards on the Oregon side of the Walla Walla Valley AVA—the winery is on the Washington side—but in either scenario, their commitment to showcasing the world-renowned fruit of the region is clear.

"We chose the name Echolands to



Doug Frost, MW, MS, is CEO and owner of the new Echolands Winery in the Walla Walla Valley AVA.

reflect our fundamental reliance on the landscape, the vines, and the very special sites where our wines are grown," says Frost. "In truth, all wine is an echo of the landscape: of the vines planted there and the sound that they make in the form of their fruit. Winemaking cannot create qualities that are not there in the grapes. Like the creature of mythology known as Echo, we can only express what is given to us." sj

As part of its commitment to biodiversity and conservation, Echolands plans to support The Nature Conservancy with a portion of its profits. "The growth of vines and the production of grapes is merely a part of the health of a [vineyard]," CEO/owner Doug Frost says. "We're not going to use pesticides or herbicides and we're planning to utilize manure from local sheep, chickens, and cows to fertilize our land."

Three Echolands wines, all from the Walla Walla Valley AVA, debut this summer: a 2018 Syrah from the Les Collines Vineyard; a 2018 blend of 40% Cabernet Sauvignon, 40% Merlot, 18% Cabernet Franc, and 2% Petit Verdot from the Seven Hills Vineyard; and a 2019 Grenache from the Rivière-Galets Vineyard.

Echolands 2018 Syrah, Les Collines Vineyard, Walla Walla Valley AVA, Oregon (\$38) Scents of café latte and summer plum intertwine, as do distinctive flavors of brambly heather and wild strawberry that glide across the palate with a dash of white pepper. They're characterized by a straightforward yet vivid acidity that brings out a certain energy in this bright and shiny wine, whose tannins go from rigid to demure as it opens, only to end in a streamlined, lavender-soaked finish. **97**

PHOTO COURTESY OF DOUG FROST

PHOTO COURTESY OF ECHOLANDS



EVERY WINE HAS A STORY.

IT'S JUST THAT OURS SPANS HUNDREDS OF YEARS AND HAS BEEN HANDED DOWN FATHER TO SON EIGHT TIMES OVER.



HERZOG LINEAGE
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TERRIBLE BARBECUES, Amazing Grapes

CLINE CELLARS REAPS THE REWARDS OF
SUSTAINABLE FARMING IN THE PETALUMA GAP

story by Jessie Birschbach / photos by Clara Rice



The Cline Cellars Sonoma Coast Pinot Gris, Syrah, Chardonnay, and Merlot are all made with fruit grown in the Petaluma Gap AVA, as is the Cline Cellars Sonoma County Pinot Noir.

ESTABLISHED AT THE END OF 2017, one of the youngest AVAs in the country is named for its distinguishing geographical feature: the Petaluma Gap. Powerful winds from the Pacific Ocean funnel through this coastal mountain opening, venturing inland to the town of Petaluma before heading southward into San Pablo Bay.

The phenomenon has long made an impression on producers operating within its path, including Cline Cellars. “When we bought our first property here in Sonoma [in 1989] and lived on it,” founder Fred Cline recalls, “that wind would come barreling over the mountains, and because of it we never really had any barbecues outside in the evenings. The wind would be howling.”

Decades later, that frustrating inability to keep a coal fire alight would be counterbalanced by the opportunity to produce cool-climate wines as one of the AVA’s largest vineyard holders. Cline Cellars farms its 650 acres of vines here sustainably—as it does with its other estate properties in Carneros and Oakley—but North Coast winemaker Tom Gendall feels that his colleagues’ efforts go far beyond the sustainability benchmark.



Fred Cline, founder of Cline Cellars, at Catapult Ranch in the Petaluma Gap.

“We want to make great wines and . . . keep making them for a long time, and looking after the land and our environment needs to be a focus if we intend to do that.” —NORTH COAST WINEMAKER TOM GENDALL

“‘Sustainable’ was built into the company, so getting certified was very simple and just a matter of paperwork,” says Gendall, noting that they suspended pesticide and herbicide usage in 2001, installed solar panels in 2004, and continue to recycle their winery water for vineyard irrigation. “This year I will be looking into our options for organic certification, because I believe we are very close to meeting that standard too. We want to make great wines and . . . keep making them for a long time, and looking after the land and our environment needs to be a focus if we intend to do that.”

Mirroring the vineyard team’s low-intervention approach are Gendall’s methodical winemaking practices, which range from minimizing sulfur usage and fermenting with house-cultured malolactic bacteria to vinifying blocks separately in 150 stainless-steel tanks and multiple small bins. He says that these methods all serve to intensify the fruit character of the wines, adding that all Cline Cellars reds and about 40% of its whites ferment

An owl box in the Catapult Ranch vineyard.



FACING THE WIND

Cline Cellars owns three vineyards on the east side of the Petaluma Gap. They're all planted on west-facing slopes, exposing them to both afternoon sun and relentless wind, which helps to mitigate fungal disease and ripen the fruit by lengthening hang time. See below for brief assessments of each property.

CATAPULT RANCH

- ▶ According to Gendall, "Catapult Ranch is our biggest vineyard and our oldest"; it yields the largest amount of fruit, with "big, bright fruit flavors and a little [earthiness] too."
- ▶ Planted in 1998
- ▶ The most southerly vineyard in the Petaluma Gap, with mostly Diablo clay and Gouling clay loam series soil
- ▶ Varieties: Pinot Noir, Chardonnay, Pinot Gris, Syrah, Merlot, Viognier, Malbec, Nebbiolo, Sangiovese, and Roussanne
- ▶ Vertical-shoot-position (VSP) trellis system; spur pruned with two cordons (arms trained along wires)

DIAMOND PILE

- ▶ "In 2002, [Diamond Pile] was planted to more modern Dijon clones," Gendall says, adding that the site "gives moderate yields of fairly small clusters with concentrated, exotic flavors and nice spice elements."
- ▶ Planted in 2001
- ▶ Near Green String Farm (of which Cline is a partner), it's the winery's northernmost vineyard; mostly Clear Lake clay with Diablo and Gouling
- ▶ Varieties: Pinot Noir, Chardonnay, Viognier, Pinot Gris, Syrah, Roussanne, Pinot Blanc, Riesling, and Gewürztraminer
- ▶ VSP trellis system; spur pruned with two cordons

LAZY M

- ▶ "Yields are painfully low here and the canopy is very light," Gendall says, "but we get phenolic ripeness in this vineyard at much lower Brix than the other two, allowing for juicy wines with vibrant flavors; real earthy, savory characteristics; and lots of depth."
- ▶ Planted in 2008
- ▶ Clay loam soils (heavier and deeper than Catapult Ranch's)
- ▶ Varieties: Pinot Noir, Pinot Gris, Chardonnay, Syrah, Sangiovese, and Viognier
- ▶ Basically dry farmed, as limited access to water results in minimal irrigation (twice a year at most)
- ▶ Head-pruned, own-rooted (ungrafted) vines

with native yeasts, with that percentage increasing every year. In addition, bentonite is used to heat-stabilize the whites, but no other fining agents or enzymes are used. A gentle cross-flow filtration system, meanwhile, prevents wine loss.

Cline says that he uses the term "biology" as a blanket term when discussing many of the winery's sustainability-related efforts—including its reliance on a herd of roughly 1,500 sheep "to help graze all the grass [and weeds] and to bring in new 'biology' into the soil [via sheep droppings]" twice a year for the past decade. Cline Cellars also sources compost teas from BioFlora, a company that develops custom nutrient programs based on vineyard samples. "We use a helicopter to spray



Cline Cellars North Coast winemaker Tom Gendall at Green String Farm in Petaluma, CA.



A sheep takes a break from weed control in the Catapult Ranch vineyard.



The dogs of Cline Cellars and Green String Farm.

teas with cultured biology into targeted areas [of the vineyard]," Cline explains. "Our vineyards are surrounded by trees, and when the tea drifts onto the trees, it [makes them healthier as well]. The first year we used it after harvest, we couldn't believe how long the leaves ended up staying on the vines."

Fittingly, Cline was connected to Bio-Flora through the person who's been the biggest influence on the winery's sustainability program since its inception: Bob Cannard. The farmer, who sells organic produce to some of Northern California's top restaurants, conceived a farming approach called the Green String Method that, among other principles, avoids the use of pesticides and herbicides—the same method that inspired Cline Cellars' own farming practices. Cline and Cannard are partners in Petaluma's own Green String Farm, which has given locals access to high-quality, reasonably priced organic produce since 2008.

Cline notes that the pivot toward sustainability hasn't come without sacrifice: It's more expensive and time-intensive, but in his opinion, it's all been well worth the cost. "It's taken about a decade to get all the Roundup out of the soil," he says, joking that it's now easy to tell the difference between his vineyards and others in the area "because we've got weeds in ours."

Just as a dedication to sustainability has benefits that outweigh its challenges, so does farming in the notoriously windy and foggy Petaluma Gap. "The challenge

is the advantage: long hang time," Gendall says, noting that it "allows for fantastic flavor development without too much sugar accumulation." He continues, "Every harvest is its own roller coaster, but planning, watching the weather, and waiting are all key. We usually start picking Pinot Gris at the end of September, with Pinot Noir

coming in mostly in October. Then Viognier, Chardonnay, and Syrah . . . along with Merlot, Roussanne, and Nebbiolo all come in late. Most years we finish picking in November. We have naturally low-yielding vineyards and the fog can be problematic with mildew issues, but the wind helps dry the canopy nicely." ❧

Tasting Notes



**Cline Cellars
2018 Pinot
Gris, Sonoma
Coast (\$13)**

Refreshing yet substantial; peach yogurt, mandarin orange, and lemon peel glide over river rock on the smooth, weighted palate and end in minerality.



**Cline Cellars
2018 Syrah,
Sonoma Coast
(\$13)**

Rich, dark, and savory; blueberry and black cherry compete with a substantial, meaty umami note laced with freshly cracked pepper. Medium-plus body and well-integrated tannins.



**Cline Cellars
2018 Merlot,
Sonoma Coast
(\$15)**

Plush and roasted; raspberry and strawberry mingle with lightly roasted coffee over a top note of dried basil. Medium-bodied and velvety.



**Cline Cellars
2018 Pinot Noir,
Sonoma County
(\$15)**

Spicy and floral; raspberry, dark chocolate, and cinnamon reverberate under aromatics of purple flowers. Medium-plus body with a silky texture.

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LARGE FORMAT LOOKS AT THE BIG PICTURE

AT BERKELEY'S WINE SO CRU, A 1-LITER SAUVIGNON BLANC BOLSTERS CUSTOMER LOYALTY DURING SHIFTING TIMES FOR ON-PREMISE

Silverado Vineyards has created a 1-liter by-the-glass option exclusively for its on-premise customers, who are proving to be more valuable than ever in the wake of restrictions imposed on restaurants and bars across the country. President Russ Weis explains the strategy behind the new format: "Our Miller Ranch Sauvignon Blanc (\$25 at retail) continues to grow, and it now represents about 30% of the business. We launched a 1-liter Sauvignon Blanc for restaurants because we wanted to give them something that wouldn't have a basis of comparison at retail. It rolled out to select markets last year, and based on its success, we took it national this year. Then everything changed in the world of on-premise, and the response from our customers has been really positive."

We met with Kamolnutt "Nu-Beer" Putthongvilai at her wine lounge, Wine So Cru, in Berkeley, California, to ask about the 1-liter and what's working best for her business during this difficult time. She loves sharing her passion for wine and strives to create a relaxing neighborhood hangout under any circumstances.

A Certified Sommelier with the Court of Master Sommeliers, Nu-Beer has gained her on-premise experience and widespread wine knowledge from her time spent managing beverage programs in San

Francisco for the Westin St. Francis, M.Y. China, and Crystal Jade. Wine So Cru opened in late 2018 and serves as a wine bar and merchant, selling wines from across the world.

Describe the vibe and the wine list at Wine So Cru.

Wine So Cru is a very relaxing wine lounge with a charming personality and youthful soul at 18 months old. The place was designed for wine lovers to feel comfortable in an environment that feels like home. Upon walking in, you will be greeted with a friendly smile, and as you move into the lounge area, there's a huge mantle of art frames paying tribute to party animals over the fireplace. It's a great place to gather with friends in the afternoon and transforms into a speakeasy at night.

Our menu consists of over 40 wine selections by the glass, which include sparkling, rosé, white, red, dessert, and fortified wine. Our menu is usually updated on a monthly basis with approximately 25% new wines to choose from.



PHOTOS: CLARA RICE

Kamolnutt "Nu-Beer" Putthongvilai at her wine lounge, Wine So Cru, in Berkeley, CA.

You are a customer of the 1-liter as a BTG option. Why are 1-liters such a good value, especially now?

The 1-liters equal five to six glasses, depending on the size of your pour, compared to three to four glasses with the 750-mL bottle; that's 33% more wine! But aside from getting more, the cost per ounce is less as well. It is so important to be smart about spending during these trying times, so the 1-liters make a lot of economic sense.

Why are they more convenient?

Believe it or not, the Silverado Sauvignon Blanc 1-liter bottles

are actually lighter than the typical 750-mL bottles. And it's a twist-cap bottle, so it's easy to open and ready to pour. When you are serving it by the glass, if you don't use the whole bottle, you can simply twist the cap back on.

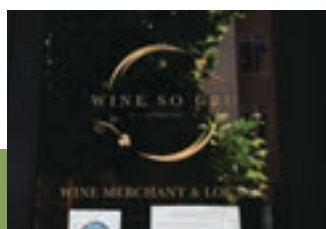
Do you think it's more important to have trusted brands at times like this?

Due to the indoor restrictions on our industry, we are unable to pour a taste for our customers, so having a trusted name like Silverado is extremely important. Silverado is known for quality, and that takes time to build. So, when you want to make a purchase before taking it for a test drive, you are always better off going with a brand that has established a reputation for making quality wine.

Can you describe the wine's flavor profile?

The Silverado Sauvignon Blanc has a straw color, and the nose is clean with medium-plus intensity. Aromas abound with tropical notes and grapefruit, passion fruit, mango, pineapple, and lemon. On the palate, the wine is dry with hints of lemon zest. Medium-plus acidity keeps it crisp and refreshing. When I sip it, I imagine sitting on a patio, looking at a vineyard.

Thank you, Nu-Beer. I think that is something we can all appreciate right now.





THE SOMM *Joury*

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

Disciplined Winemaking

AFTER TWO DECADES, **CHAD MELVILLE** IS FINDING HIS GROOVE ON HIS FAMILY’S 120-ACRE STA. RITA HILLS ESTATE

AS CALIFORNIA’S REOPENING process progressed in early June, Melville Winery was permitted to welcome fans back to its tasting rooms in the Santa Ynez Valley as well as to its satellite location in downtown Santa Barbara’s Funk Zone district. “It’s so good to have the team back in place,” says co-owner and head winegrower Chad Melville. “Customers seem to be appreciative and so accommodating when it comes to wearing masks at the winery and following the rules.”

Melville and his brother Brent planted vines at their Sta. Rita Hills estate 23 years ago, yet he believes that the wines are just now hitting their stride in the vineyard and in the cellar. “I have to say that the quality of the fruit is really impressive,” he tells *The SOMM Journal*. “I have a philosophy that for winegrowing [to be successful], it takes good farming practices and farmers who understand their land.”

According to the winemaker, factors that vary from block to block in the vineyard are soil types (from sandy to loam to clay), row orientation, and vine density. Seventy-five percent of the estate is planted to 17 different Pinot Noir clones: “One clone may point to high-toned notes of rose petal, while another brings out deeper, darker cherry or blueberry,” Melville says.

My tasting notes reflect the obvious thread of earthiness that links the wines while fluctuating in intensity. Melville proposes that it’s likely a result of whole-cluster fermentation. “Ripe stems are key for Pinot Noir,” he explains. “Not only do they bring out that earthiness, they also offer a beautiful [flavor profile] of tea and white pepper, [as well as] a savory soy-sauce component that balances out the bright red fruit that’s connected with Pinots from Sta. Rita Hills.”

Melville notes that the winery practices organic farming, minimizes the use of sulfites, and avoids new oak to preserve the personality of its wines, but he discusses lees aging with particular reverence: “Lees are the soul of the wine—I rely on them not only to protect the wine but for their ability to articulate aromatics and texture.” —*Meridith May*

“The vines are finally hitting maturity, which is evident in their depth and concentration. This is my vision—to have our estate represented in an honest fashion,” says Melville Winery co-owner and head winegrower Chad Melville.

Melville 2017 Estate Pinot Noir, Sta. Rita Hills (\$38) Utilizing 16 of the estate’s 17 Pinot Noir clones, this red-fruited roundup of flavor and texture starts with pungent aromas of damp tilled soil and mushroom. It’s an earth mother to its core, with a tart cherry middle and enthusiastic acidity. Sugared beets add a slightly chalky mouthfeel on the finish, making for an accomplished wine. **94**

Melville 2018 Pinot Noir, Anna’s Block, Sta. Rita Hills (\$60) Earthier on the nose than on the palate, this red hails from an 8-acre parcel on a north-south orientation; planted on sandy loam, the vines run east to west, allowing the fruit to ripen evenly. It’s a stunning Pinot Noir that experienced 30 days of total skin and stem contact and aged for 18 months in 15- to 20-year-old French oak barrels. Distinct flavors of cinnamon, spiced cedar, and brandy-soaked cherry are threaded with white pepper and tart cranberry. **96**



Melville 2018 Estate Syrah, Sta. Rita Hills (\$38) Five different clones are planted on well-drained sandy loam and fermented 40% whole cluster with skin contact for 35 days. The ripe plum and plum skin that define the palate of this dense red are seasoned with spiced tomato, black-peppered pomegranate, and a brushy heather finish. **93**

PHOTO: ERICK MADRID

Toasting to Another First

DONNA STONEY TRACES HER PATH FROM SOCIAL WORKER TO WINEMAKER *story by Mark Stock / photos by Nick Klein*

DONNA STONEY did not take a direct path to winemaking. Instead, it's been a gradual transition fueled by gumption.

Last fall, Stoney launched her eponymous label to become Oregon's first Black female winemaker. She operates out of the Willamette Valley, sharing a cellar with Andreas Wetzel at Chateau Bianca. Presently, her portfolio includes Pinot Noir, Pinot Gris, Chardonnay, and a rosé of Pinot Noir.

It's not the first time she's been a pioneer in her field. As a social worker, she was the first Black female case manager for Oregon's Department of Human Services. While she's no longer managing

culture and wanted to be a sommelier: "I love the extraordinary [differences in how varietals taste] and understanding the history behind the viticulture," she says. Following graduation, she sought to purchase a vineyard but lacked the funding.

It wasn't until about five years ago, when she retired from county work, that a friend introduced her to Bertony Faustin, who commands the cellar up the valley at Abbey Creek Vineyard and was Oregon's first Black winemaker. Suddenly, Stoney was knocking out her WSET coursework while

opportunities. Though Stoney has been breaking them down by utilizing the problem-solving skills that she mastered during her years as a social worker—including adaptability and fierce initiative—it's her view that inclusivity really starts with conversations and direct action. "It's uncommon to see a person of color as the face of a wine label, let alone a woman," she says. "I believe there need to be more mentorship opportunities, more access to scholarships, and lastly, support" from consumers as well as the trade.



cases, she's still in the business, running Stoneybrooke Residential Services to set people with developmental and intellectual disabilities up in group homes in east Portland.

Juggling social work and wine production isn't easy, but as her father told her early on, when it comes to business, you have to crawl before you can walk. And if her dedication is any indication, Stoney's vision of becoming a full-time winemaker will be realized sooner rather than later. "I'm real persistent sometimes," she says, "especially when it's a dream and a passion like this."

That passion was ignited during Stoney's college years in the 1990s, when she discovered that she had a zest for wine



applying and fine-tuning her knowledge firsthand at Abbey Creek, where she learned how to prune a vine and blend a wine. "[Faustin] helped me understand the importance of building my brand and [gave me] insights on how to demonstrate what my label stands for," Stoney says.

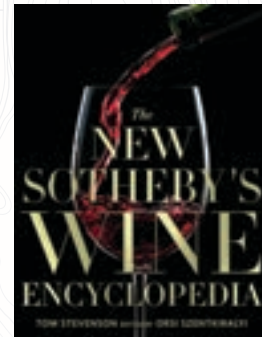
It seems outlandish for Oregon to get its first Black female vintner as late as 2019, but the industry has always been lacking in terms of diversity. Many barriers persist, from financing to educational

In the meantime, she persists. "The one thing you must know about me [is that] I continue to study and learn until it becomes second nature," she asserts, adding that her goal as a winemaker is "to find a balance between what I know my consumers want and what story [the wine] can tell only by its taste." The story of Stoney Wines will continue to unfold, reflecting both its founder's mettle and hope for an industry that's changing for the better. *sj*

THE SOMM JOURNAL

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In Association With National Geographic



In the spirit of continuing education for beverage professionals, *The SOMM Journal*, in association with SommCon, invites you to participate in a one-of-a-kind webinar series that will take you on a virtual tour of the unique terroirs of the wine world, guided by what has been called one of the most essential wine reference books:

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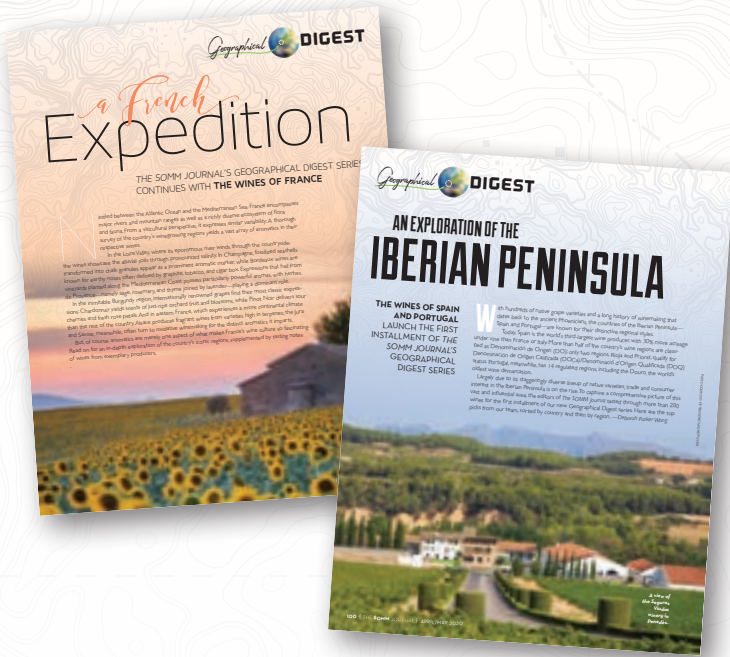
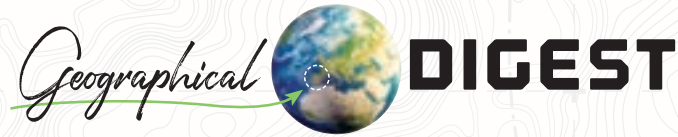
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Access is free to trade professionals and consumers, who will have the ability to purchase wines via our retail partner, BottleTribe.

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

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THE CENTRAL COAST GROUP PROJECT NEARS CULT STATUS WITH ITS NEW LABELS

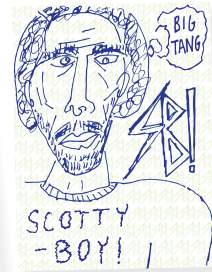
story and photos by Jessie Birschbach



Scotty-Boy!
 Fine Wines & Super-Coolers
 Grenache Blanc 60%
 Chardonnay 40%
 Full Carbonic/Skin Contact
 Santa Barbara County
 "Buellklong" c. 2019
 aka. "Canned Bellini"
 aka. "My Power Animal..."
 Produced & Bottled by CCGP
 Buellton, California
 Alcohol by Volume: 13.5%
 Net Contents: 750 ml
 Ingredients: Grapes. (Nothing Added/Nothing Taken Away)
 GOVERNMENT WARNING: (1) According to the Surgeon General, women should not drink alcoholic beverages during pregnancy because of the risk of birth defects. (2) Consumption of alcoholic beverages impairs your ability to drive a car or operate machinery, and may cause health problems. CONTAINS SULFITES



SCOTTY-BOY!
 FINE WINES & SUPER COOLERS
 SKIN CONTACT "BLUSH" 2019
 SANTA BARBARA COUNTY
 CHARDONNAY 43% (214 DAYS ON SKINS)
 CHARDONNAY 40% (BARREL FERMENTED)
 PINOGRUYERE 17% (190 DAYS ON SKINS)
 PRODUCED & BOTTLED BY CCGP
 BUELLTON, CALIFORNIA
 ALCOHOL BY VOLUME: 13%
 NET CONTENTS: 750 ML
 INGREDIENTS: GRAPES. (NOTHING ADDED/NOTHING TAKEN AWAY)
 GOVERNMENT WARNING: (1) ACCORDING TO THE SURGEON GENERAL, WOMEN SHOULD NOT DRINK ALCOHOLIC BEVERAGES DURING PREGNANCY BECAUSE OF THE RISK OF BIRTH DEFECTS. (2) CONSUMPTION OF ALCOHOLIC BEVERAGES IMPAIRS YOUR ABILITY TO DRIVE A CAR OR OPERATE MACHINERY, AND MAY CAUSE HEALTH PROBLEMS. CONTAINS SULFITES.



SCOTTY-BOY!
 fine wines & super-coolers
 2018
BIG TANG
 syrah
 santa barbara county
 produced & bottled by CCGP
 buellton, california
 w/ love
 alc. by vol. : 16%
 net contents: 750ml
 ingredients: grapes. (nothing added/ nothing taken away)
 skin contact: 451 days
 GOVERNMENT WARNING: (1) ACCORDING TO THE SURGEON GENERAL, WOMEN SHOULD NOT DRINK ALCOHOLIC BEVERAGES DURING PREGNANCY BECAUSE OF THE RISK OF BIRTH DEFECTS. (2) CONSUMPTION OF ALCOHOLIC BEVERAGES IMPAIRS YOUR ABILITY TO DRIVE A CAR OR OPERATE MACHINERY, AND MAY CAUSE HEALTH PROBLEMS. CONTAINS SULFITES.

The back labels of the Scotty-Boy! wines.



Friends of Scott Sampler (fourth from left), winemaker/proprietor of the Central Coast Group Project, volunteer to help him with various tasks at the winery. Pictured from left to right are Evan Taubenfeld; Gary Preston; Jessie Birschbach, Managing Editor, The SOMM Journal; Matt Irelan; Marty Marcus; Eric Lane; Matt Sullivan; and Mike Roth, co-owner/winemaker, Lo-Fi Wines.



Scott Sampler with the new Scotty-Boy! Buellklong, whose label features a picture of him at 19.

THE FIRST TIME I met Scott Sampler, winemaker/proprietor of the Central Coast Group Project (CCGP), I cried.

In January 2014, my wife and I were visiting some producers in the Buellton Bodegas, a string of warehouse wineries in Santa Barbara County, when Sampler crashed our tasting. "Come check me out," he said, pushing up the glasses on his nose being held together with black tape. "I'm right next door."

Palate-fatigued but charmed by Sampler's half-smile, I agreed to stop by—and I'll be forever grateful we did. A sample of his CCGP Syrah, freshly stolen from a barrel, remains the most beguiling, third-eye-opening sip of wine I've ever experienced. Even following a full afternoon of tasting, I became the gum-chewing Violet Beauregard in *Willy Wonka & the Chocolate Factory*: Never before had I so intensely, viscerally perceived a wine's flavors as I made my way through each of its rich, structured layers—the blueberry, the damp soil, the fresh rosemary. Yet for all the wine's concentration and complexity, the sum of its parts had already achieved harmony. Considering that the Syrah was still in barrel, this baffled me. Have you ever stared into the eyes of a baby and seen an old soul? Sampler's wine was just that. And as I processed all of this, a tear snuck its way out of my eye.

A Paradoxical Philosophy

This story may sound dramatic, but it's the (sort of embarrassing) truth. Later I'd learn why the wine had been so impactful: Sampler extends his macerations for an absurdly long time—so long that there's risk of spoilage, especially given his minimal use of sulfur during bottling. While some traditionalist winemakers in Barolo steep their grapes on the skins and solids for as long as 50 days, Sampler has gone as many as 500—and he does this with some of the best fruit in Santa Barbara, sourcing from Thompson, White Hawk, and Lerner Vineyards (to name a few).

The native Angeleno describes his methods as "primitive wine-making supercharged with inert gases and modern hygiene." He adds, "I'm pushing the chemistry to the edge by leaving the wine on the skins for so long. It's a lengthy, controlled, oxidative pro-

cess.” He also compares his approach to “making sauce” (likely thanks to his Italian-American mother) and to painting (likely a nod to his father, a renowned African-American artist and designer)—but that’s a different story.

The result of this mix of traditional and experimental methods is a *vin de garde* with edge. Dare I say that the uniqueness and quality of the small-production wines that Sampler’s paradoxical philosophy yields have launched CCGP on a trajectory to become the next Central Coast cult wine.

Full disclosure: Six years later, Sampler and I are dear friends. But make no mistake, it was his extraordinary wine that connected us. Besides, in the years since our first encounter, my emotional tasting experience has been vindicated by both the somm community and high scores from the wine media. CCGP has graced the well-regarded wine lists of Blue Hill at Stone Barns and Racines in New York as well as Beverly Hills’ Spago and Vespertine in Los Angeles. The CCGP Blood Orange Viognier was the only wine that the late Jonathan Gold mentioned in his famous 2017 review of Vespertine (not by name, but Wine Director Terence Leavey says that’s what he poured).

Integrity in the Face of Uncertainty

“Sampler,” I said on the phone recently, “I keep seeing all these posts listing Black winemakers. Why aren’t you on them?” The pause on the other end of the line lasted a while.

“It’s nice to see a greater awareness of Black winemakers in an industry that truly lacks diversity,” he replied, “but I’m not sure I feel comfortable yet taking focus away from the important issues that inspired this moment. I’ve witnessed horrible racial and social injustice my entire life and it’s amazing to see even a little bit of progress. So, to answer your question, I suppose I’ve been thinking more about what I can do to help continue this progress than getting on a list.”

The fact remains, though, that Sampler deserves some kind of break. CCGP has been severely impacted by the effects of COVID-19, as he estimates that 90% of his sales can be attributed to on-premise accounts. Not to mention that he’s been

a one-man band for eight years, surviving thanks to his small but diehard fanbase. The time and labor required for *élevage* alone mean that his wines must retail at a high price just for him to break even; most are around \$80.

So, to better navigate current market conditions, he knows he needs to scale up and/or offer a more accessible line—but neither option is something that one person can do alone. Although, that said, CCGP does live up to its name in the sense that friends and fans occasionally



help with various winery tasks. In fact, before we ended our call, I agreed to help him bottle some new wines.

A few weeks later in mid-June, I arrived at the winery, where Sampler and I stood in front of three towering 1,500-gallon steel fermenters. He opened the spout on one of them and joked, “I’m calling these my plague wines,” referencing the fact that they’d be released just a few days after our bottling session. Upon moving into a different winery warehouse in Buellton a few years ago, he’d had to acquire the tanks as part of the lease agreement but felt that they wouldn’t allow him to be as intimate with his wines as his usual 1.5-ton, chest-high fermentation bins did. Because he’d be “unable to feel what’s going on in the bottom of the fermentation bin,” Sampler explained, he’d be forced to do pump-overs rather than frequent gentle

stirrings over long periods of time. He did think, however, that the tanks would make the perfect carbonic maceration vessels.

These tanks—and the need to create a new channel for sales—were the impetus for CCGP’s new Scotty-Boy! label. Retailing for about \$24–\$28, all three expressions—Scotty-Boy! 2018 Big Tang Syrah, 2019 Skin Contact Blush, and Grenache Blanc/Chardonnay Skin Contact Buell-

long—went through various fermentation processes, including full carbonic fermentation, spontaneous alcoholic fermentation, and post-fermentation extended maceration. (It’s worth noting that the Big Tang broke Sampler’s maceration record.)

Sampler has categorized his new label as *vins de soif*, meant to be enjoyed fresh however the consumer desires (with ice, in a cocktail, et cetera). But word to the wise: Try these wines by themselves first. They’re as fascinating as they are delicious, “made with integrity but . . . also meant to be accessible and fun,” as Sampler puts it. What’s more, just like his fine wines, they can be categorized as natural wines: Sampler not only uses no or minimal effective sulfur at bottling but also avoids inoculation, additives, fining, and filtering.

Bottled and released alongside the Scotty-Boy! lineup was the brain-boggling CCGP L’ARGE D’OOR 2017 Sangiovese, which is meant to be a more affordable, mid-tier option at \$36; the fruit spent 171 days on the skins and two years in barrel. I found the tank sample to be reminiscent of a fresher Ripasso della Valpolicella and can’t wait to see what it’s like after six months in bottle.

On the bottling line the day after I arrived, while mindlessly applying labels, I watched Sampler hurry over to an urgent task; he once again was pushing up the glasses on his nose, this time held together with blue tape. Suddenly it hit me that he was completing a circle and starting another—or rather we were, as it also occurred to me that I’ve been a part of this Group Project ever since that first sip of Syrah. I just so badly want everyone else to experience being a part of it too. So please, *join us.* ☺



Top Chef contestant David Viana prepares his Kosta Browne Kitchen Series recipe—a rendition of Alice Waters' sauce gribiche—in his home kitchen in Asbury Park, NJ.

Dishing Up Creativity

KOSTA BROWNE'S NEW DIGITAL SERIES WITH TOP CHEF CONTESTANTS GIVES HOMEBOUND FOODIES SOMETHING TO SALIVATE OVER

by Jonathan Cristaldi

THE “BEST NEW thing in the world,” to borrow a phrase from MSNBC host Rachel Maddow, happens to fall within the realm of food and wine pairing: the Kosta Browne Kitchen Series, which the California winery's passionate team launched earlier this summer as a creative response to lockdowns prompted by the COVID-19 pandemic.

The series rallies former contestants from season 16 of Bravo's *Top Chef*, challenging them to craft a recipe inspired by a Kosta Browne wine that they then prepare in their home kitchen. The idea is to watch “great personalities cook and tell stories about food and wine,” says Kosta Browne Senior Estate Director Regina Sanz. “Think David Chang and Alton Brown on a Zoom date.” The first three episodes of season one, which debuted in June, featured celebrity chefs David Viana, Michelle Minori, and Edmund “Eddie” Konrad: Read on for a Q&A with each chef as they dish about the details of their recipes and the joy of cooking with wine.



David Viana is the executive chef/partner of New Jersey's Heirloom Kitchen. In 2018, he was nominated for a James Beard Award for Best Chef: Mid-Atlantic. Viana paired his dish, halibut with truffle sauce gribiche, with the Kosta Browne 2018 Russian River Valley Pinot Noir.

EPISODE ONE: CHEF DAVID VIANA

Q: **Jonathan Cristaldi: Which qualities in wine make it a great ingredient to cook with?**

David Viana: Good food and good wine lead to great conversations. And that's exciting for me as a chef. . . I love the acidity, stone fruit, and crisp notes [of white wine]. I love to cook with wine that I like to drink. It doesn't have to be expensive, but you have to enjoy drinking it.

Q: **Your sauce gribiche is a spin on Alice Waters' recipe. Tell us about that.**

I mimicked the sauce for a long time and eventually began playing around to make it my own. I make it with mayonnaise instead of olive oil, and I make it very smooth. It's a rustic sauce; Alice's approach at Chez Panisse was to make it chunky and full of salty bits and vinegar, and I made it very fine-textured. I chose this dish after tasting Kosta Browne's Russian River Valley Pinot Noir. I wanted to pair it with [something] that would highlight what I love about the wine. There's a wonderful salty and herbaceous quality in the sauce, and the rich, fatty element really brings out the fruit in the Pinot, creating this round mouthfeel with a kind of bright lift.

Q: **What projects are you working on right now?**

I'm involved with Camp EDMO [see more information in Michelle Minori's interview]. I'm also opening up a Portuguese restaurant! COVID got me cooking at home three meals a day and I began working on recipes my grandmother would make, [which made me] fall in love with my Portuguese roots. The restaurant will be in Asbury Park, New Jersey, and is named Lita after my mother. It will be Portuguese- and Spanish/Iberian-inspired, and we're hoping to open in September.

Kosta Browne 2018 Russian River Valley Pinot Noir (\$115) Shimmering and translucent ruby-purple hue. Vibrant, perfumed aromas of black cherry, cola, and cedar spices. Ripe red cherry and raspberry find succulent brown spices and dark chocolate on the palate. Juicy and refreshing, with excellent tension, grip, and a long mineral finish.



Michelle Minori currently resides in San Francisco, CA, and is the former executive chef of Barzotto. In Los Angeles, she also worked at Flour & Water and was the co-opening chef for Faith & Flower.

EPISODE TWO: CHEF MICHELLE MINORI

Q: **Jonathan Cristaldi: What are your thoughts on the relationship between wine and food?**

Michelle Minori: Sometimes I'll be cooking and think: This needs some acidity or a punch of flavor. Adding a splash of wine can add so much dimension to a dish. There is the obvious use of lots of big red wine when braising meats, but there are also so many opportunities to add a splash of white to the pan to create something new, balanced, and nuanced. I almost always use a wine reduction in my pasta dishes. There's so much science and precision involved in winemaking as well as cooking. But there is also intuition—a connection to the earth . . . that the ingredients came from. There is a story behind every single bottle of wine in the same way that every dish has a story or a connection to an ingredient or a technique.

Q: **For your episode, was the recipe inspired by the wine, or was the wine pairing inspired by the recipe?**

It's always my goal to cook seasonally and regionally, celebrating the land around



Minori selected the Kosta Browne 2018 Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir to accompany her roasted corn agnolotti with wild prawns and chorizo.

me. I knew that I wanted to make an agnolotti because that was a pasta we served at the James Beard House the night I was first introduced to Kosta Browne. Corn always feels so special to this season with its coy sweetness that works well in savory applications. So I aimed to create something impressive yet approachable, and I love the acidity that comes through in Kosta Browne's Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir. I knew that the body of the wine could stand up to the richness of a stuffed pasta mounted with lots of olive oil and fresh seafood, and the acidity would balance that out and refresh your palate, making you want to come back for more.

Q: What projects are you working on right now?

In an effort to help promote equity in the world, I've recently created [an online] Chef Series with Camp EDMO. It's an award-winning nonprofit camp for kids with honor system pricing. That just means you pay what you can. They're making high-quality educational enrichment programs accessible to everyone regardless of income, socioeconomic status, or background. You can watch a video and read more about it at campedm.org/chef.

Kosta Browne 2018 Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir (\$115)

Gorgeous translucent ruby hue. Aromas of candied rose petals, Bing cherries, and black tea leaves. Impeccably fresh with terrific grip and layers of black cherry, flamed orange peel, clove, brown spices, cardamom, and rose water.



PHOTO: SHEA EVANS



Eddie Konrad, who currently resides in Philadelphia, PA, is a veteran of New York's Del Posto and Philadelphia's Le Bec Fin. Konrad paired his Chardonnay poached lobster with the Kosta Browne 2018 One Sixteen Russian River Valley Chardonnay.



PHOTO COURTESY OF EDDIE KONRAD

EPISODE THREE: CHEF EDMUND "EDDIE" KONRAD

Q: Jonathan Cristaldi: How do you like to incorporate wine into your cooking?

Eddie Konrad: I'm trained in classic French and Italian techniques, and wine is used a lot in sauce work and marinades, pâtés, and charcuterie. Since sauce making was a big part of my education, I've always loved the fact that wine is one ingredient—grape juice. It has sweetness, bitterness, and acidity, and I use it as a seasoning. I might reduce the wine or even finish fish dishes with raw wine.

Q: That was your approach with the lobster, right?

Eddie Konrad: Exactly. I finished the lobster and brushed it raw with the One Sixteen Chardonnay because it's so complex and has every flavor profile in it—sweet, sour, umami, and a little smoke, which helps with body. [Glazing] the lobster when it's warm gives it this woody freshness . . . and pulls out all these elements in the wine. I poached the lobster in a blend of Chardonnay and tarragon stock.

Q: What projects are you working on right now?

Eddie Konrad: I'm supporting Project Black and Blue from BA Craftmade Aprons in Minnesota. You can nominate someone [in the food industry] and they will work to see how they can assist [them]. For instance, I had a friend drop a pot of stock and suffer third-degree burns, and they helped him with buying food and grocery delivery during his recovery. I was planning to open a restaurant in Philadelphia, but the pandemic has put that on hold for now.

Kosta Browne 2018 One Sixteen Russian River Valley Chardonnay (\$85)

Minerally and bright with lemon zest and immeasurable freshness. Salted Meyer lemon and candied ginger aromas find pithy grapefruit on the palate, which is long and mineral-driven in a reductive style. *sj*



PHOTO: SHEA EVANS

Season two of the Kosta Browne Kitchen Series will launch on August 27. Check out behind-the-scenes interviews with each chef on Instagram @kostabrownwinery. As of this writing, contestants Justin Sutherland, Brandon Rosen, Brian Young, and Caitlin Steiner from Top Chef season 16 are confirmed. For more information, visit kbkitchenseries.com.



United Sommeliers Foundation

Many Sommeliers, One Community

Founded during the COVID-19 crisis in response to the nationwide shuttering of businesses, the United Sommeliers Foundation aims to provide immediate financial assistance to sommeliers who are experiencing a pause or termination of their employment due to circumstances beyond their control.

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Vina Robles Vineyards & Winery's Creston Valley Vineyard
in the Creston District AVA of Paso Robles.

A Phenolic

MIRACLE

PRODUCERS SHARE THE KEYS
TO UNLOCKING THE INTRINSIC
INTENSITY OF PASO ROBLES
CABERNET SAUVIGNON

by Randy Caparoso

PHOTOS COURTESY OF PASO ROBLES CAB COLLECTIVE



The DAOU Family Estates property on DAOU Mountain.



PHOTO: RANDY CAPAROSO

Daniel Daou, proprietor/winemaker at DAOU Family Estates.

The main buzzword in Paso Robles

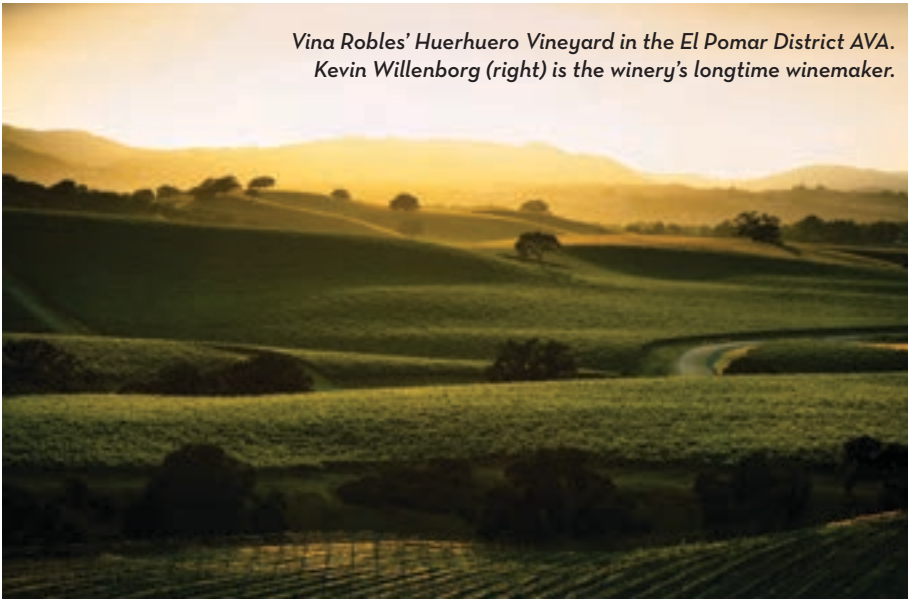
over the past five or so years has been “phenolics” for one simple reason: The region’s varied terroir, delineated by 11 AVAs, delivers a level of phenolic content that’s so high it’s almost miraculous. This metric is what’s typically used to measure the quality of Cabernet Sauvignon—which comprises over 10,000 acres, or roughly 50% of plantings, in Paso Robles—as well as other predominant grapes like Merlot, Cabernet Franc, Malbec, and Petit Verdot.

DAOU Family Estates proprietor and winemaker Daniel Daou—whose DAOU Mountain estate rises as high as 2,200 feet above sea level in Paso Robles’ Adelaida District AVA—opts to define phenolics as “what you see, smell, and taste in a wine.” But to officially measure multiple categories of phenolic compounds, trained technicians can conduct a laboratory procedure called the Adams-Harbertson tannin assay; first introduced in 1999 by the University of California, Davis, it is used to assess the astringency levels in both wine and must. WineXray, a Napa company founded by UC Davis graduate Scott McLeod and Italian wine veteran Gianni Colantuoni, later modified the assay to include total anthocyanins.

The process gives growers the advantage of gleaning how different levels of phenolic content can result from different rootstock, clone, and trellising selections as well as from other viticultural factors like the timing and methodology of canopy management. In the winery, meanwhile, Adams-Harbertson tannin assays can provide winemakers with distinct roadmaps for decision-making related to skin contact (pre- and post-fermentation), fermentation temperatures, yeasts and nutrients,

EDITOR’S NOTE: THIS IS PART TWO IN A SERIES FEATURING MEMBERS OF THE PASO ROBLES CAB COLLECTIVE; PART ONE RAN IN THE JUNE/JULY 2020 ISSUE.

Vina Robles' Huerhuero Vineyard in the El Pomar District AVA. Kevin Willenborg (right) is the winery's longtime winemaker.



and more. This information is especially crucial during fermentation, according to Daou, because at that stage “nobody can taste a wine to determine if it is balanced or if enough tannins are extracted, given the . . . residual sugar and carbonic acid in fermenting musts.”

Daou breaks down the five essential categories of phenolics that the assay is able to gauge:

- Total anthocyanins (grape skin pigment, indicative of wine color)
- Free anthocyanins (anthocyanins that bind with tannins to form polymeric pigments)
- Bound anthocyanins (the total amount of polymeric pigments found in wine that affects textural qualities like mouthfeel, density, sweetness, and more)
- Tannins (polymerized phenolic compounds derived from skins and seeds, providing structure, astringency, power, and longevity to red wine)
- Total phenols (all of the other phenolic and non-color phenolic compounds derived from skins and seeds, including tannins)

Regarding how some of these elements are reflected in the finished wine, Kevin Willenborg, longtime winemaker at Vina Robles Vineyards & Winery, explains, “You see higher color with higher anthocyanins and increased astringency with higher tan-

nin levels as they react to salivary protein in your mouth. However, if you can create higher levels of polymeric pigment [anthocyanins binding to certain types of tannins during fermentation and aging], you notice richer mouthfeels, creamier textures, and a reduction of perceived astringency. The color in these pigments is also more stable and does not readily degrade as much when aging in the bottle. To get these compounds, you have to balance the vine . . . and create the substrates in the grape to have the ability of forming polymeric pigment during fermentation and aging. Terroir plays the most crucial role, but [viticultural] practices along with clone and rootstock selections are also important.”

The East-West Factor

Daou explains that, after measuring about 600 Bordeaux and Cabernet Sauvignon wines from around the world with the Adams-Harbertson tannin assay, “we have yet to see one that has the phenolics that our top wines get from DAOU Mountain. This is a result of very unique terroir consisting of calcareous clay . . . soils not common in California and a climate that matches Napa Valley’s St. Helena in most years; [it’s] only a little cooler, with far fewer heat spikes.”

Because of the Adelaida District AVA’s proximity to the Pacific, Daou is bullish on the advantages that operating on the west side of Paso Robles gives to his closely



spaced, dry-farmed estate. However, says Craig Stoller, proprietor and Director of Winemaking at Sextant Wines, "When people talk about Paso Robles, they usually want to talk about west and east sides, but it is [more relevant] to talk about north versus south. The Cabernet Sauvignons grown in the San Miguel, Estrella, and San Juan Creek districts to the north are generally higher in pH because they come out of warmer climates—the result is [flavors] that are often earthier, something typical of warm-climate grape growing. [When] you go all the way to the south in Santa Margarita Ranch, you get cooler days and nights, great color, and intense fruit, although sometimes it's harder to get Cabernet to fully ripen."

Because Sextant is located in the middle of the region, farming over 160 acres in the El Pomar and Templeton Gap districts, it gets "the best of both worlds—lots of sun and cooling winds, which come through the Templeton Gap in an east-west direction," Stoller continues. "The result is Cabernet Sauvignons with some blue fruit and great acid balance. The beauty of Paso Robles is that we're so close to the ocean, [which] gives us our cool nights and probably the biggest diurnal swings in the state. It's all about . . . our combination of climate and soil. While entirely on the east side of Highway 101, we are still growing in limestone, particularly linne calodo or siliceous shale soils, similar to what you find in Adelaida and

Willow Creek on the west side."

Willenborg concurs with Stoller regarding the beauty and potential of the terroir, noting, "We started measuring phenolics in our lots long ago, comparing our five estate vineyards, which [are located in the] Adelaida District on the west side and Creston, El Pomar, Geneseo, and Estrella on the east. After looking at the phenolic numbers and tasting the resulting wines, we were encouraged to see profiles similar to some of the better vineyard blocks in Napa Valley. Typically, we see extremely high levels of phenolics in our wines from the Adelaida and Creston AVAs; [this

Craig Stoller, proprietor and Director of Winemaking at Sextant Wines.



Sextant Wines' RBZ Vineyard in the El Pomar District.

An aerial view of Calcareous Vineyard.



creates] our most structured wines for aging, although we may have to manage tannin extraction to balance. We get good phenolic levels and very balanced tannins from our vineyards in El Pomar, Geneseo, and Estrella, with our softest tannins coming off our Estrella blocks."

The Impact of Rootstocks and Clones

According to Stoller, "Rootstocks primarily influence productivity: You can choose rootstocks that are devigorating or rootstocks that are more vigorous, with pros and cons either way. [But] clonal selection may be an even [more important] factor

[of productivity than rootstock], especially for Cabernet Sauvignon. You can plant high-yield UC Davis clones like [Foundation Plant Services] 08 or 04, which have much bigger berry and cluster size than selections [like] trademarked ENTAV-IN-RA material from France, which generally give looser clusters and smaller berries, resulting in darker wines with [higher phenolics]. We work with eight different Cabernet clones [and have] found that the best wines are made from a spice rack of these selections—a little bit of cigar box, some pyrazine, some earthiness, [and] blue and darker fruits. Some [clones are] more aromatic than others."



Calcareous Vineyard winemaker Jason Joyce.



Daou, for his part, is partial to two rootstocks: “1103 Paulsen is great for dry farming and does not shut down easily during drought years, but my favorite is 420A because it is low vigor, producing smaller berries with higher skin-to-juice ratios [that result] in higher phenolics. The issue is that 420A does not handle calcareous soils as well—higher percentages of calcium carbonate lead to chlorosis, [which turns] leaves yellow and stops vine growth. By contrast, 1103 Paulsen handles calcareous soils quite well. Therefore, we utilize both rootstocks at about 50/50 on our mountain site, keeping a close eye on each block; 98% of [the blocks] are planted to

11 clones of Cabernet Sauvignon, three clones of Cabernet Franc, and all of the other Bordeaux varieties.”

The Winemaking Variables

Despite his background in organic chemistry, Calcareous Vineyard winemaker Jason Joyce describes his job as a matter of “managing phenolic content” while “avoiding scientific over-analysis and data as much as possible.” He notes that unlike a sommelier, “data can’t read a room, and concentration of anthocyanin can’t react to a meal’s progression” when it comes to pairing.

Joyce believes that the true advantage of working with Paso Robles terroir, given its capacity for high phenolics and “routine physiological ripeness at ideal pH levels

warmer years in Bordeaux, when they get the best color and most phenolics, that are considered the superior vintages—and that is something we can get almost every year in Paso Robles.”

Given Daou’s clonal expertise, Joyce consulted directly with him on Cabernet Sauvignon clones when planning a new vineyard planting several years ago. However, instead of selecting a separate clone for each block, Joyce planted two to three clones in each, mixing them in a random fashion so that they could be harvested all at once—thus achieving “more inherent variability in possible flavors and textures.” It’s fitting, then, that Joyce considers the Signature Cabernet Sauvignon—sourced from those multi-clone blocks—to be Calcareous’ most interesting cuvée.

“IT IS THE WARMER YEARS IN BORDEAUX, WHEN THEY GET THE BEST COLOR AND MOST PHENOLICS, THAT ARE CONSIDERED THE SUPERIOR VINTAGES—AND THAT IS SOMETHING WE CAN GET ALMOST EVERY YEAR IN PASO ROBLES.”

—DAOU FAMILY ESTATES PROPRIETOR/WINEMAKER DANIEL DAOU

below 3.7,” is that “we don’t need as much barrel tannin, thus requiring less new oak to fill in textural ‘holes.’” Plus, he adds, “Press wine is often more complex and better structured than free-run, which I consider essential to our wines’ expression of place.”

DAOU Family Estates, by contrast, exclusively utilizes free-run juice. Daou says that he takes “great pride” in producing “dry, balanced wines averaging 14–14.7% alcohol—a departure from many California Cabernets that have 16% or more with lots of residual sugar.”

Despite the link between phenolics and quality, Stoller maintains a flexible perspective that’s informed by more than just his own vineyard properties. “Classic Bordeaux, for instance, is far from inky, and there you can get maturity and ripeness at 23 degrees Brix and still make a beautiful, full-flavored wine at 12.5% alcohol. Our approach, if anything, has more to do with vineyard management, like pulling leaves to get ideal filtration of light on our fruit.” That said, contends Daou, “It is the

For Willenborg, it’s a matter of balancing sensations intrinsic to the terroir of Vina Robles’ vineyards, which are dispersed across five different AVAs: “For our Estate Cabernet Sauvignon, for instance, I want a rich yet not too aggressive structure, befitting a great Paso Robles Cabernet. For this, I usually find a sweet spot of tannin level in our Huerhuero Vineyard in the El Pomar District, balanced by the more structured Cabernet from our Creston Valley Vineyard [in the Creston District]. I also like blending the stronger cassis tones found in Huerhuero with the darker cherry notes in Creston. For good measure, we’ll blend some Petit Verdot from Huerhuero for added structure and color, without increasing aggressive tannin. We don’t, however, use Cabernet from Jardine Vineyard [in the Estrella District], as the tannins are just a bit too soft for the overall style we want to create. But if you prefer a full, structured style for extended aging, our Mountain Road Reserve Cabernet Sauvignon [from the Adelaida District is distinguished by its] rich layers of polymeric pigment.”

{ cover story }

Beyond ORGANICS

Bonterra Organic Vineyards

DEBUNKS STEREOTYPES AND MITIGATES THE
EFFECTS OF CLIMATE CHANGE BY SCALING UP
BIODYNAMIC® FARMING

by Courtney Schiessl

Biodynamic wine often conjures images of boutique producers, tiny plots of land, and hard-to-find bottles, but one of California's largest organic wine pioneers is working tirelessly to debunk those stereotypes.

After decades of honing their expertise in Biodynamic farming and winemaking, the team at Mendocino County's Bonterra Organic Vineyards has expanded the winery's Demeter-certified Biodynamic vineyard acreage while advocating for the regenerative farming movement in Sacramento and on Capitol Hill. Now overseeing five Biodynamic properties, they're proving it's possible to craft high-quality wines while regenerating the health of the land and helping to shape long-lasting climate policy.



Biodynamic farming incorporates natural preparations such as compost that improves soil resiliency and powdered quartz, which enhances photosynthesis when applied to budding fruit in the fall.

A rainbow extends over Butler Ranch in Mendocino County.





Every animal found in Bonterra's organic vineyards serves to enhance the vitality of the land.

A HOLISTIC APPROACH

Bonterra is determined to bridge the gap of understanding that surrounds Biodynamic farming, which is often viewed as an esoteric system due to customs like burying cow horns and tracking the cycles of the sun and moon. As Director of Vineyards Joseph Brinkley summarizes, "Ultimately, the goal is to create a thriving self-sustaining ecosystem: Rather than purchasing nutrients, for instance, Bonterra turns grape skins and stems into compost that then goes back into the vineyard. In Biodynamics, we ask, 'How can we enhance the fertility of a farm system with living things?' The answer, in short, is to augment the organic practice of restoring a farm's natural vitality by eliminating non-organic, synthetic inputs with a methodology that treats the farm as a living organism, one that is enhanced by nature's beneficial cycles."

Because each property has unique and evolving needs, the team aims to customize its strategies accordingly—just as individuals take their own approaches to personal health based on what's best for them. "We all understand wellness," says Rachel Newman, Bonterra's Director of Marketing. "The techniques we use for Biodynamic farming are just the vehicles to help us create similar beneficial outcomes in the vineyard."

Brinkley compares their holistic view to the philosophies of Eastern versus Western medicine: Rather than treating

symptoms, they seek to prevent disease altogether: "It's a bit of a different perspective on how you approach farming," he says.

Brinkley and his colleagues emphasize that, when striving to make the concept more accessible to consumers and the trade alike, communicating the motivation behind Biodynamic farming is often more important than demonstrating that you've mastered the applications themselves; that said, they've implemented a number of techniques they can point to as successful. For example, they make nine natural teas and composts from herbs, minerals, and manures, adding them to the soil to improve its resiliency and hasten photosynthetic processes—among other benefits—on a schedule that's timed with seasonal, celestial, and lunar cycles. Biodynamic calendars that track these rhythms of nature also help determine optimal times for picking, racking, and blending wines.

A BIODYNAMIC HUB IN MENDOCINO

Before Bonterra embraced Biodynamics, it distinguished itself as a leader in California's organic movement when it began farming organically in 1987. Though it's now widely known for ranking among the country's largest organic wineries, Newman says that Bonterra took a leap of faith when it put wines labeled "Made with Organic Grapes" on store shelves three

decades ago. "Back [then], organic farming was not the cool trend it is now," says Newman. "The team saw how it transformed our vineyards . . . even though our peers thought we were crazy at the time" given the absence of notable consumer demand for organic wine.

Organic pioneer Jim Fetzer independently dove into the world of Biodynamics in the 1990s, planting and farming his McNab Ranch property under the expert guidance of the late Alan York, a consultant of Biodynamic viticulture. McNab was certified by Demeter in 1996, and Bonterra continued these practices when it acquired and adopted it as its home vineyard in 2001. Since then, the team has developed four more Mendocino County properties: Butler Ranch, Blue Heron Ranch, and, most recently, Ledford Ranch and Chalfont Ranch. From three of these vineyards—McNab Ranch, Butler Ranch, and Blue Heron Ranch—Bonterra creates its emblematic single-vineyard, biodynamically farmed wines: The McNab, The Butler, and The Roost.

Over the years, Mendocino County has emerged as a hub for Biodynamic viticulture; according to the Mendocino Winegrowers collective, over 1,000 acres of vineyards in the county are now Demeter-certified Biodynamic. "When you get outside of our area [and look] at different locations and appellations, you realize how special Mendocino County is," says Bonterra winemaker Sebastian Donoso.

Part of what makes it a hotbed for Bio-



"WE NEED TO HAVE PRODUCTIVE CONVERSATIONS ABOUT THINGS THAT WORK AND BE WILLING TO HEAR AND UNDERSTAND EACH OTHER. IN ORDER TO DO THINGS A DIFFERENT WAY, YOU HAVE TO KNOW WHAT THE POSSIBILITIES ARE."

—vineyard director Joseph Brinkley



Bonterra's Demeter-certified Biodynamic Blue Heron Vineyard.

dynamic agriculture is its climate. While many California wine regions are exposed to Pacific Ocean fog—either by direct coastal influence or east-west valleys—the inland portion of the county, where Bonterra's vineyards are located, is arid.

"Other counties have trouble farming organically because of moisture and mildew pressure," says Donoso, noting that the dry growing season reduces the need for synthetic sprays. Diurnal temperature swings, meanwhile, help the grapes develop more flavor while retaining acidity.

The shared values among Mendocino County residents have also allowed organic and Biodynamic philosophies to thrive. "In the 1960s and 1970s, Bay Area residents came up here to get back to the land," says Jeff Cichocki, head winemaker for Bonterra. "It propagated an environment where people embraced Biodynamic farming." As a result, travelers from across the U.S. and around the world have visited the area to teach and learn about the concept, taking their findings with them to make inroads in their own communi-

ties. Some of those techniques have since become "standard practice," Cichocki says, noting that, for example, "People are planting cover crops and have no idea that it started in organic agriculture."

GOOD FOR THE ENVIRONMENT— AND THE WINE

Given that conventional farming methods are still the standard in many of the top viticultural programs, converting and



Bonterra winemaker Sebastian Donoso, vineyard director Joseph Brinkley, and head winemaker Jeff Cichocki.

adhering to Biodynamic principles can seem like a daunting challenge even for university-trained winemakers who are open to changing methods. But Bonterra finds it worthwhile to go beyond its organic practices to work biodynamically because the benefits to the vineyards are so readily apparent. “The vineyards are much fuller with life,” says Cichocki. “The vines are healthier and the fruit is more vibrant.” According to Newman, “We believe Biodynamic farming is the right thing to do when possible because we have the data to know this is an impactful way to farm.”

Naturally, the benefits extend far beyond the confines of the vineyards: A study commissioned by Bonterra in partnership with Pacific Agroecology LLC in Davis, California, indicates that organic and Biodynamic practices do in fact have potential to aid in the fight against climate change—confirming a longtime assumption of the systems’ proponents. Conducted from 2017 to 2018, the study examined carbon storage across more than a dozen vineyards farmed conventionally, organically, and biodynamically;

compared to the benchmark conventional vineyard, vineyards farmed in accordance with organic methods stored 9.4% more soil organic carbon (SOC), while those farmed with Biodynamic methods stored 12.8% more SOC than conventional methods. Not only does increased carbon storage generate long-term health benefits in the soil itself, it also helps to mitigate climate change on a broader scale by keeping more carbon dioxide, which accelerates global warming, underground.

It’s crucial to note that protecting the environment doesn’t come at the expense of wine quality; in fact, the Bonterra team insists that the quality imparted by Biodynamic practices is precisely why their three single-vineyard wines made with Biodynamic grapes are their flagship cuvées. “The list of names of high-end producers that are farming biodynamically speaks for itself,” Brinkley says, adding that, in his view, the shelf life of an opened biodynamically farmed wine is greater than that of its conventionally farmed counterparts.

While vines that aren’t pumped full of



Bonterra’s three single-vineyard biodynamically farmed wines: The McNab, The Roost, and The Butler.

synthetic additives may produce lower yields, they allow the fruit to reveal its full potential—and the Bonterra team is more than content with that trade-off. “We’re not asking the vine to do too

much, which allows us to find what the terroir can deliver,” Cichocki says.

Because Bonterra is working to introduce the merits of wines made with Biodynamic grapes to more consumers, quality is more important than ever. “We can be doing everything right in the vineyard, but if we don’t have a terrific wine, people won’t come back to it,” says Newman. “One bad experience can switch someone off of a category, so we need to overdeliver on expectations.”

Cichocki refers to The McNab and The Butler—the former a Bordeaux blend, the latter typically a red Rhône blend—as “kind of a blank canvas,” adding, “We make the best wine each year for those vineyards” and skip a vintage if the conditions aren’t perfect. The Roost, which comes from the Blue Heron Ranch Vineyard’s Chardonnay plantings, acts as a Burgundian-style complement.

Unsurprisingly, Bonterra takes a hands-off approach to winemaking. “When you’re producing wines in a non-conventional way, you have less flexibility in the winery to get the wine where you want it to be. You have to find the balance in the fruit from the beginning,” Brinkley says. “The Biodynamic approach allows us to find [a] balance” that’s ultimately reflected

in the finished wines.

Adds Donoso, “These wines have to represent and showcase where they come from—otherwise, we defeat the purpose.”

SETTING THE STANDARD

Recently, Bonterra has taken steps to convert more of its organically farmed land to Biodynamic farming; over 400 acres of its 1,000-acre Mendocino vineyard holdings are now Demeter-certified, which “speaks tremendously to the commitment we have to Biodynamic farming,” Donoso says.

Bonterra’s initiative to assist scores of California farmers in converting their land to organic practices is just another example of its mission to make a positive impact. By looking beyond its own winery to its supply chain, it’s increasing the state’s regenerative vineyard acreage and creating a collective environmental impact, all while growing its own core line of organically farmed wines. “Because we were among the first organic farmers in California . . . it was a lot of learning and establishing best practices on our own . . . [so] we take a sense of pride in our leadership,” Newman says.

Bonterra is also using its experience

with regenerative agriculture to advocate for meaningful climate change legislation in state, federal, and international arenas, thereby helping to drive impactful policies that support long-term climate health. In 2019, Brinkley joined members of 75 top U.S. companies to meet with a bipartisan group of lawmakers as part of Lawmaker Education and Advocacy Day (LEAD on Climate); the 2020 edition of LEAD, meanwhile, saw a record-breaking 300 companies virtually gather on Capitol Hill. In partnership with sustainability nonprofit Ceres, Brinkley also conducted one-on-one meetings in 2019 to advocate for increased federal funding in the Farm Bill for regenerative agriculture programs.

Brinkley hopes that seizing such opportunities to share Bonterra’s successes in scalable regenerative agriculture will enact positive change even beyond the wine industry. “We need to have productive conversations about things that work and be willing to hear and understand each other,” he says. “In order to do [things] a different way, you have to know what the possibilities are.” By using its platform as a leader of organic and Biodynamic farming in the U.S., Bonterra isn’t just determined to make good wine—it’s determined to shape our planet for the better. »



Bonterra’s McNab Ranch Vineyard is also Demeter-certified Biodynamic.

Dear Good Somm/Bad Somm,

I'm not in the restaurant industry, but my boyfriend works as a sommelier. I've been quarantined with him for a while now, and I have to ask: Are all somms this self-obsessed? Clearly he needs to get out of the house—somewhere he can show off his neglected pocket squares—so I don't have to watch him sharpen his corkscrews or listen to him talk about sugar levels. How can I help keep the peace while we're stuck in close quarters?

Sincerely,
 Trapped in Somm Land

Good Somm

Dear Trapped in Somm Land,

Because we're dealing with such heightened stress levels, quarantine can amplify relationship issues that you might not have been fully aware of before. Try for a moment to put yourself in his shoes, as not having a workplace to go to these past few months has surely caused him to have intense uncertainty about his future. It makes sense that he's grasping at things that make him feel comfortable—like his love for wine—to weather the storm.

The fact that you're going through this experience together creates a special opportunity for you to either grow closer or drift further apart; if you want the former, both of you should aim to have a listening ear and a sense of respect and understanding about what the other person needs. And if what he needs is an outlet to maintain skills he's learned on the floor, maybe he can try doing playful wine service with the meals you cook at home together. How's that for a win-win?

Best,
 Good Somm

BAD SOMM

Dear Trapped in Somm Land,

Quarantine seems to be shining a bright light on your boyfriend's self-absorption. Does he demand constant attention and only want to talk about things that involve him? An overblown sense of self-esteem can be impressive initially, but after a while it can run thin. Speaking on behalf of the poor souls who have had to deal with me over the years, I feel obligated to tell you that these behaviors will ultimately create a gulf in your relationship. Just like booze sales, breakups seem to be surging these days . . . and it sounds like you're about to become a statistic.

Signed,
 Bad Somm

PHOTO: DISOBEY ART VIA ADOBE STOCK



Dear Good Somm/Bad Somm,

I've been asked to lead my very first tasting webinar. Any tips for making a great presentation?

Sincerely,
 Going Virtual

Good Somm

Dear Going Virtual,

Congratulations! Public speaking can be nerve-racking, but the secret to feeling comfortable is to prepare as much as possible beforehand. Of course, in terms of structure, it's helpful to have a PowerPoint with brief notes that you can elaborate on as the presentation unfolds. Before you go live, try to do a couple of run-throughs and also make sure to test your microphone, camera, and internet connection so that nothing goes awry when the time comes.

Webinars, like most presentations, are essentially just storytelling—so try to start with a funny or engaging anecdote that ties into the core of your message. As things progress, make sure to continually engage your audience by asking questions or having them participate in brief surveys. Lastly, speak from your heart: This will create a genuine connection with your viewers that they'll remember long after they log off.

Yours truly,
 Good Somm

BAD SOMM

Dear Going Virtual,

Webinar? I fantasized that you said "wine bar"—that's how desperate I am to delete Zoom forever and get back to the real world. But hey, good luck with that. ☹️

Regards,
 Bad Somm

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



Tasty Crossbreeds

TAKING A CLOSER LOOK AT MODERN HYBRIDS

CROSSING *VITIS VINIFERA* with non-*vinifera* grapevines has historically produced varieties that are significantly more disease-resistant than their European parent but also poorer in quality. In the search for alternative ways to control grapevine diseases while reducing the use of synthetic herbicides and pesticides, a cadre of modern hybrids—second- and third-generation interspecific varieties—are demonstrating considerable promise in both the vineyard and the glass.

A team of researchers from universities in Trento and Udine in Italy and Geisenheim in Germany recently published a groundbreaking study of the 2013, 2015, and 2016 vintages of 16 disease-tolerant hybrids. It analyzed their lipids, volatile compounds (low-sulfur compounds and esters derived from fermentation), and non-volatile compounds (grape tannins, anthocyanins, and minerals) and compared the data to that of *Vitis vinifera* varieties.

Chemically, disease-tolerant and *vinifera* varieties are identical in terms of the types of compounds they contain, though the levels of some of those compounds vary. Hybrids have higher amounts of polyphenols and their tannins are typically lower (though more evident in some hybrids than in others). Lower levels of anthocyanins (color pigments) were found to be the biggest differentiator between the hybrids and *vinifera* varieties, while vintage variability was identified as a significant factor in overall wine quality. Interestingly, low-volatile sulfur compounds contribute complex aromas like quince, truffles, and flint in disease-tolerant varieties but present as off-flavors in *vinifera* wines.

Among the white varieties studied were Muscaris and Souvignier Gris, created in 1987 and 1983, respectively, by German

scientist Dr. Norbert Becker. Souvignier Gris, a cross between Cabernet Sauvignon and Bronner, is a cultivar with a loose canopy and robust red-tinged skin that is compared to Pinot Gris; Muscaris, a Solaris and Yellow Muscatel hybrid, resists both mildew and frost to produce acidic white wines with intense nutmeg notes. It was approved in Austria as a Quality Wine Grape Variety in 2018.

Christof Winkler-Hermaden, who runs his family's eponymous winery in the Vulkanland Steiermark region of Styria, started trialing Muscaris and Souvignier Gris ten years ago. "Both are easy to cultivate," he says. "We are spraying 85–100% less and seeing much better soil structure in these vineyards."

Having vinified both varieties, Winkler-Hermaden notes that Souvignier Gris shows more complex aromatics than its reputation for neutrality suggests, evoking "a blend of Sauvignon Blanc (gooseberry, passion fruit); Riesling (apricot); and Pinot Gris (pear, classic Pinot Gris mist)." It also boasts fresh, lively acidity that exhibits minerality very well. Depending on the climate, soil, and ripening potential of the vineyard, it can deliver a high-quality expression.

Winkler-Hermaden's Muscaris vines are now in their 11th year, producing full-bodied wines that are similar to Pinot Blanc on the palate. "If picked at the right time, [Muscaris] exhibits aromatics of honeydew melon, lemons, grapefruit, and nutmeg," he says. "We'll be able to produce a Riedewein [single-vineyard designate] with this variety in the future."

Although he hasn't vinified them himself, Winkler-Hermaden has tasted wines



PHOTO: DEBORAH PARKER WONG

Christof Winkler-Hermaden is a producer in the Vulkanland Steiermark region of Styria, Austria.

produced from two of the red varieties featured in the study, Carbernet Cortis (a cross between Cabernet Sauvignon, Merzling, Zarya Severa, and Muscat Ottonel) and Carbernet Carbon (another Cabernet Sauvignon–Bronner hybrid). He compares them to Cabernet Franc, though he notes that "they are typically made with a lot of wood and the addition of tannins, which obscures their varietal character."

Winkler-Hermaden—who is a member of the quality-obsessed producer consortium Steirische Terroir & Klassik Weingüter (STKW)—adds that several of his colleagues in Styria are also trialing disease-resistant varieties, including fellow STKW member Weingut Frauwallner, Kobatl, BIO-Weinbau Thünauer, and Ploder-Rosenberg. **ST**

PULLING BACK THE CURTAIN
ON A RUTHERFORD

asis

**ROUND POND
ESTATE**
IS SHINING A NEW LIGHT
ON ITS NATIONALLY
DISTRIBUTED LABELS



*The long driveway
leading to the Round
Pond Estate winery.*



Sister-and-brother duo Ryan MacDonnell Bracher and Miles MacDonnell run Round Pond Estate as the second generation behind the business.

story by Jonathan Cristaldi / photos by Alexander Rubin

A row of palm trees nearly as tall as young redwoods frames 1,000 feet of the driveway leading from Rutherford Road to Round Pond Estate Winery, which was established by Bob and Jan MacDonnell on land they purchased in Rutherford, California, in 1983. It is one of the most striking views in the town's namesake appellation. But for all its majesty, it is the mere tip of a 468-acre oasis that includes 362 acres of prime Napa Valley vineyard land as well as 5 acres of gardens, several fruit orchards and berry patches, olive orchards and an olive mill, beehives, goats, chickens, dogs, and one old pole barn that was featured in the opening credits of the 1980s television series *Falcon Crest*.

In the late 2000s, the MacDonnells began ushering guests through one of the sprawling gardens hidden behind the winery. "We started bringing people out to pick peaches, to see if they could find the peach notes in our Sauvignon Blanc," says second-generation proprietor Ryan MacDonnell Bracher, who today runs Round Pond with her brother Miles MacDonnell. "We started picking the blackberries and cassis for folks tasting the Cabernet. We brought in a chef and began creating pairings. The garden offered us a way to tell our whole story by bringing together the olive oil and red-wine and balsamic vinegars we produce along with food from our gardens, all paired with our wines."



The garden plays an integral role in the tasting experience at Round Pond Estate.

Today, winery guests are occasionally hosted in that garden, where they can sample not only Round Pond's three nationally distributed wines—Sauvignon Blanc, Rutherford Cabernet, and Reserve Cabernet—but also numerous small-production direct-to-consumer (DTC) bottlings. The portfolio as a whole swirls around Bordeaux-style bottlings featuring the Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, Malbec, Petit Verdot, Cabernet Franc, and Sauvignon Blanc planted throughout the property, but it also features delicious Super Tuscan-style blends made with the Sangiovese also grown here as well as a Nebbiolo, a rosé of Nebbiolo, and several other blends featuring Italian grapes.

Round Pond's first vintage rolled off the bottling line in 2002, when Bob and Miles decided to retain a portion of the grapes that the family had been selling to Beaulieu Vineyards for their own use. Since 2008, renowned consultant Thomas Rivers Brown has overseen production with the help of John Wilson, a Brown protégé who worked at Outpost, Littorai, and

Vine Cliff. Given that 80% of Round Pond wines are sold through wholesale, it may come as a surprise to on- and off-premise buyers that winemakers of their pedigree are at the helm. "We sell our wines countrywide," says Miles, "and 50% of our wholesale business is restaurant-driven." As of this writing, it's not yet clear how the COVID-19 pandemic will ultimately affect the winery's on-premise business, but buyers will continue to see allocations of the Sauvignon Blanc, Rutherford Cabernet, and Reserve Cabernet.

"One thing we want to make clear to the trade is that we don't buy any grapes" for those core labels, says Miles—all three are 100% estate-grown. "The only other wine we have that is Napa-designated and not from our Rutherford estate is our sister label Kith & Kin, a Bordeaux blend made from some of our Rutherford estate fruit along with select Cabernet sites [in] St. Helena, Howell Mountain, and Oakville." The goal of Kith & Kin, first produced in 2009, "was always to make really great wine at an affordable price," says Ryan—

and at an SRP of \$40, it is exactly that.

In 2011, the MacDonnells quietly purchased an Oakville vineyard called M-Bar—their first new vineyard in more than a decade. Both Mondavi and Opus One have been known to purchase M-Bar grapes, according to Miles, who adds that, as of the 2018 vintage, Round Pond is "transitioning the name from 'Rutherford Cabernet' to 'Estate Cabernet' and will include 'Napa Valley' on the label." In spring 2021, 3,000 cases of the newly designated wine will be released as a blend of Rutherford and Oakville fruit. (The 2017 Rutherford Cabernet is currently on the market.)

In 2023, the MacDonnell family will celebrate the 50th anniversary of their arrival in Napa Valley; in anticipation of that milestone, Ryan and Miles have also decided to pay tribute to the MacDonnell matriarch—their mom, Jan—with a new label for their Round Pond Reserve Cabernet. With the release of the 2017 vintage this fall, Jan's maiden name, Bovet, will grace the label. Both Ryan and Miles acknowledge that their mom's family surely



A bird's-eye view of Round Pond Estate.

inspired their dad's passion for farming: The Bovets were Swiss natives who settled in San Mateo in the 1920s, where Jan's dad tended a vineyard and made wine called Chateau Bovet. "Someone on Mom's side also owned a vineyard in Napa, and although the details are vague, she had a heavy hand in this whole affair" of wine-growing on a family estate, says Ryan.

Additionally, around the time of this issue's publication, roughly 6,000 cases of the Round Pond Estate 2019 Sauvignon Blanc will be released. "We have a variety of Sauvignon Blanc clones planted by the Napa River, and in harvesting each year, we make three passes in the vineyard," Miles explains. "First to get a round of high-acid and green-apple notes, second for more evolved stone-fruit flavors, and [third] at Brix levels of around 24 to add creaminess and balance out that high acid of the first pick."

If Round Pond has drifted from your radar, it's time to reacquaint yourself with this Rutherford estate and its world-class wines. *SJ*

Tasting Notes



Round Pond Estate 2019 Rutherford Sauvignon Blanc, Napa Valley (\$28) gorgeously aromatic scents of fleshy white peach and Marcona almond lead to a rich and creamy palate with decadent notes of lemon bar and sweet baking spice underscored by wet river stones. Generous and long with zippy green-apple acidity.



Round Pond Estate 2017 Rutherford Cabernet Sauvignon, Napa Valley (\$75) The nose exudes aromas of raspberry framboise and mocha-tinged purple flowers. The expansive palate is packed with black cherry, plum, and blueberry as well as savory mint and Pádrón pepper, scorched earth, cedar, baking spices, and crème de cassis. Pronounced, fine-grained, and grippy tannins require some time to mellow.



Round Pond Estate 2017 Bovet Reserve Cabernet Sauvignon, Napa Valley (\$110) Blackberry, warm fig, spice cake, dark chocolate, and mint define the nose. The palate features ripe, chewy tannins with great grip along with flavors of plush blackberry compote, a touch of almond paste, and subtle yet sweet notes of rich balsamic and raspberry coulis. This is a powerhouse that won't begin to shed its baby fat—as Thomas Rivers Brown calls its ripe, opulent, and youthful style—for another decade.

Canna-Beverage 101

THE INFUSED BEVERAGE CATEGORY IS RAPIDLY GROWING—AND DIVERSIFYING

story and photo by Rachel Burkons



CURRENTLY BOOMING IN legal markets across the country, the THC-infused beverage category is reinventing itself through new technologies that have dramatically improved the integration of cannabinoids—which are famously not water-soluble—into liquids. In the early days of the regulated cannabis marketplace, infused beverages not only were high in sugar and low on sophistication but also, with the use of certain emulsifiers, often had a funky flavor, oily residue, and chemical aftertaste.

But thanks to recent advancements, a new and chic class of brands is achieving seamless cannabinoid integration that results in clean, refined flavors. These nano-emulsified cannabinoids make infused products even more desirable for alcohol drinkers accustomed to fast-acting effects, as they're absorbed through the mucus membrane of the mouth rather than metabolized by the liver. The result is a high with a more rapid onset but a shorter duration; unlike traditional edibles, which can take 45 minutes to two hours to take effect and last for hours more, the effects from consuming an infused beverage can be felt in 15 minutes and last for roughly an hour.

Here are just a few of the many types of THC- and CBD-infused beverages that are taking off, as well as some of my favorite California-made products.

“Wines” and “Beers”: While strict regulations prohibit cannabis companies from using terms like “wine” or “beer” in their branding, marketing, and packaging—as cannabinoids are patently disallowed from inclusion in alcohol products—dealcoholized wines and beers that have been infused with cannabinoids are rapidly gaining in popularity.

Try These: House of Saka, Rebel Coast, Two Roots, High Style Brewing Co.

Top Pick: Viv & Oak Shimmering Scar-

lett—which stands out for being a THC-infused “red wine,” as most competitors are whites—offers a vibrant nose of violets and soft bubbles.

“Spirits”: This is an exciting category because it appeals to sophisticated consumers whose bar carts are already well stocked. Packaged in large-format bottles rather than single servings, these non-alcoholic products are intended for mixing into mocktails and cocktails.

Try These: Tinley's '27 Elixirs

Top Pick: Artet is a cannabis-infused apéritif with a great, balanced flavor that begs to be swapped into any of your favorite low-ABV cocktails.

Sodas: With the sparkling beverage craze reaching new heights in 2020, it's no surprise that growth in this segment is robust. Category leader Cann, launched in May 2019, sold 150,000 units in California in its first six months on shelves.

Try These: Cann, Lagunitas Hi-Fi Hops, Creative Waters

Top Pick: Calexo Citrus Rose channels the spirit of sunny afternoons in beer gardens into large-format bottles that beg to be shared.

Coffees and Teas: From cold-brew coffee to infused tea bags and even RTD tea-based drinks, this diverse segment is a stalwart of the cannabis beverage category.

Try These: Somatik Cannabis Infused Cold Brew, Kikoko, Soul Grind CBD Infused Cold Brew

Top Pick: Subtle Tea's line of CBD- and THC-infused drinks focuses on adaptogenic blends like Jasmine Green Tea With Lychee, infused with 25 milligrams of CBD. *sj*

For reviews of these products and more information on cannabis beverages, visit rachelburkons.com and follow Burkons on Instagram @smokesipsavor.

Coming Together

CORRALEJO AND THE POINT LOMA FISH SHOP PARTNER TO AID SERVICE INDUSTRY WORKERS

by Eric Marsh

PHOTOS: ARLENE IBARRA



Jenny Harris, manager of Point Loma Fish Shop in San Diego, CA.

CORRALEJO TEQUILA—whose crystalline, azure, and crimson bottles tower over the agave-spirit section of backbars thanks to their tall, slender shape—will mark its 25th anniversary next year. As COVID-19 continues to thwart most celebratory plans across the planet, at least in the traditional sense, the brand has found an alternative way to commemorate its success: collaborating with bars and restaurants to fund programs that provide meals for laid-off service industry workers.

The Point Loma Fish Shop in San Diego, California, is one such partner. While the popular bar and restaurant in the Point Loma neighborhood has been open for just two years, manager Jenny Harris says that it was able to establish a solid rapport with the area's residents prior to the pandemic, and they have remained loyal even in these protean times, helping the Fish Shop stay afloat by ordering to-go food and cocktails. So, through its partnership with Corralejo, the restaurant is paying it forward to local service professionals whose livelihoods have been affected by COVID-19.

"Corralejo and the Fish Shop understand that this pandemic hit all of us hard," says Harris. "We wanted to team up and give to those in our industry [who] needed help; we did this in different ways—delivering meals [and] essentials and putting together packages of groceries for [them]. I know it is cliché, but we really are one big family in this industry and we take care of each other."

The fresh seafood served at the Fish Shop pairs exceptionally well with cocktails featuring Corralejo, which is the house tequila. Corralejo Silver serves as the base of the ever-popular Margarita, while the Spicy Peach Margarita melds Corralejo Reposado with triple sec, lime, peach purée, and fresh jalapeños.

The hacienda where Corralejo is produced dates back to 1755, but owner Don Leonardo launched the brand as a commercial venture in 1996. While it's difficult to predict what the state of the world will be in 2021 when Corralejo's anniversary rolls around, Katherine Foley, Brand Manager for Infinium Spirits (Corralejo's U.S. partner), says that the brand's primary goal is to continue fostering relationships like the one it has with the Fish Shop "while taking care of [those partners'] communities."

Meanwhile, customers who stop by the restaurant for to-go cocktails can see how that relationship seems only to be solidifying—in the form of the tequila-based slushies Harris has recently been developing with Corralejo Silver in Watermelon Paloma, White Sangria, and Spiked Peach Bellini flavors as well as Pineapple with a coconut cream float. "For whatever reason, slushies are *the thing*," she jokes. ❧



Point Loma Fish Shop's Mexican Mai Thai Slush is made with Corralejo Silver Tequila.

{ cocktails }

Lead bartender Ajaree “Mo”
Chomchom of Brickhouse Bar &
Grill in San Francisco, CA.



PHOTO: HARDY WILSON

THAT'S THE

SPIRIT

**PURPLE BRANDS' REDWOOD EMPIRE WHISKEY AND
D. GEORGE BENHAM'S GIN ARE A SUCCESS STORY
FOR THE ON-PREMISE INDUSTRY**

BY ERIC MARSH

Have you heard, said, or read the word “pivot” yet today? Probably—especially if you’re in the hospitality industry. Throughout the pandemic, restaurant and bar owners have had to pivot more than just about anyone—though at this point they may feel more like they’re being tossed about in a maelstrom in a rickety boat. Following temporary closures, most made the switch to takeout and delivery business; many also became markets and liquor stores. Some have reopened for dine-in service; others did so only to close again. It all amounts to a lot of dizzyingly hard work for owners and the few staff members they’ve been able to keep aboard.

The new normal is, to say the least, capricious. In this time of volatility, it’s paramount that establishments maintain high quality standards so as to not only preserve their existing customer base but also attract new customers. In many cases, on-premise buyers have to scale back and be more discerning about what they buy, so it’s worth making note of what influences their decision-making.

In that vein, we reached out to four beverage directors at establishments that carry Purple Brands’ Redwood Empire Whiskey and D. George Benham’s Gin to learn what they like about the spirits, why they feature them in their house cocktails, and what they value about their relationship with the Sonoma County–based wine and spirits company.

“Robert Carter from Purple brought us Mason jars when we could barely afford to keep the doors open,” explains Kim Kobasic, co-owner of Brickhouse Bar & Grill in San Francisco, of how Purple Brands is supporting businesses that carry its prod-



Kim Kobasic is co-owner of Brickhouse Bar & Grill in San Francisco, CA.

“ NOT ONLY DOES PURPLE BRANDS MAKE EXCEEDINGLY GOOD SPIRITS, IT GIVES BACK TO THE BAR COMMUNITY IN A TIME OF NEED AND THE ENVIRONMENT—ONE TREE AT A TIME. ”



Laura Sanfilippo is co-owner of Duke's Spirited Cocktails in Healdsburg, CA.



ucts. Five of Brickhouse's current to-go cocktails showcase Redwood Empire and Benham's. The signature Blueberry Muse, for example, contains Redwood Empire Pipe Dream Bourbon along with blueberry, lime, and mint. "The nutty, toasted nature of the bourbon grounds what would otherwise be a very fruity summer concoction," Kobasic explains. The Better Days cocktail, meanwhile, is made with Benham's Sonoma Dry Gin, elderflower, grapefruit, and lime; Kobasic says that "the juniper and spice of the gin creates a wonderful balance with the floral liqueur and sour bitterness of the grapefruit."

As the establishment continues to weather the storm of the current crisis, Kobasic says she and her small staff are looking forward to celebrating Brickhouse's 20th anniversary later this year—at least in some capacity.

Just north of the Bay Area in Healdsburg, California, Laura Sanfilippo of Duke's Spirited Cocktails says that she



Purple Brands makes the spirits featured in many of Brickhouse's to-go cocktails.



Ling & Louie's President and CEO John Banquil.

and co-owner Tara Heffernon have had a solid rapport with Purple for years and that they've carried both Benham's and Redwood Empire—which are distilled in the neighboring town of Graton—since their inception in 2016 and 2017, respectively. In fact, Sanfilippo remarks that when Benham's was coming to fruition, she and Heffernon “consulted on the gin and were on blind-tasting panels when they were developing botanical percentages.”

No wonder, then, that Benham's Sonoma Dry Gin and Duke's housemade tonic water are, in her words, “a match made in heaven.” They're featured in the Benham's Gin & Tonic, which is one of eight drinks Duke's offers on tap. The bar's reliance on its draft system meant it was ahead of the curve when it came to developing a to-go beverage list, and Sanfilippo and her partners had large batches of cocktails ready-made for efficient portioning, not to mention access to refrigerated storage space. The only question was

how to package them, so they obtained a canner that they now use to can carbonated cocktails and began implementing Purple's jars to send off their still libations, including the house Manhattan featuring both Redwood Empire Pipe Dream Bourbon and Redwood Empire Emerald Giant Rye.

Ling & Louie's Asian Bar and Grill has two locations in Arizona as well as one each in Texas and Idaho. Of the Scottsdale location, says Ling & Louie's President and CEO John Banquil, “Before the pandemic we averaged about 18% in takeout and delivery sales. Today . . . over half of our sales are derived from takeout and delivery.” The restaurant uses Redwood Empire's bourbon-rye blend, Lost Monarch, in two of its most popular to-go cocktails: the Louie's Old Fashioned with blood orange liqueur and five spice and the Elvis Manhattan, which also contains peanut butter whiskey, crème de banana, and bitters.

A more recent addition to the Scottsdale Ling & Louie's cocktail list is the Monk's Tea Time, which mixes Benham's Sonoma Dry Gin with Yellow Chartreuse, green tea syrup, and fresh citrus. “Ben-

PHOTO: SPENCERTALIAFERRO



Made Restaurant's Smoked Old Fashioned is made with Redwood Empire Pipe Dream Bourbon.

ham's Gin accentuates the herbal notes of the Yellow Chartreuse and the green tea for a light [yet] complex drink,” he says, adding that its juniper note is not overbearing, “which allows for a greater diversity of gin-based cocktails that will appeal to a broader audience.”

In the midst of the pandemic, some restaurants are actually managing to attract new clientele as internet searches lead people in search of open establishments to new haunts. In Sarasota, Florida, Made Restaurant Beverage Director Spencer Taliaferro says that “we've had a lot of people coming in who we had never met, who had never dined with us or had our drinks before.” He gives an example of a couple from Vail, Colorado, who recently purchased a second home in Sarasota. “They started coming in two or three times a week,” following Taliaferro on social media, and before they returned to Colorado, they picked up three large-format cocktails from Made.

When Florida ordered bars and restaurants to close for dine-in service on March 30, Taliaferro says that he opted to “view it as an opportunity” and set about creating cocktails that would not only travel well but keep well. Two that have become staples contain Purple spirits: the Smoked Old Fashioned with Redwood Empire Pipe Dream Bourbon, dandelion root-cane syrup, and root bitters and the Bee's Knees, which showcases Benham's Sonoma Dry Gin.

In keeping with Made's from-scratch, sustainable ethos, Taliaferro says that he seeks to stock the bar with “brands that have purpose.” That's what drew his attention to Redwood Empire: “[It's] an amazing company given the fact that they plant a tree for every bottle they sell.” At the time of this writing, Redwood Empire has planted 185,343 trees in partnership with the nonprofit organization Trees for the Future. What's more, using a program set up by *ServiceIndustry.tips*, Redwood Empire has donated \$7,000 to furloughed service-industry workers in the Bay Area.

So, not only does Purple Brands make exceedingly good spirits, it gives back to the bar community in a time of need and the environment—one tree at a time. **SJ**

SAINT-JOSEPH IS

Gaining Clarity

PHOTOS: OLIVER FOUX



Saint-Joseph's contemporary producers recognize the region's great potential.

AS THE QUALITY OF
SAINT-JOSEPH
WINES INCREASES,
SO DOES OUR
UNDERSTANDING
OF THE NORTHERN
RHÔNE

by David Ransom

ASK ALMOST ANYONE for a description of Saint-Joseph and you'll invariably get this answer: "It's complicated." But is it really? Let's take a closer look at this intriguing yet often underrated key appellation of the Northern Rhône.

Stretching for almost 50 kilometers along the right bank of the Rhône River, Saint-Joseph lies to the south of Condrieu and to the north of Cornas. This sliver of an appellation offers a stark contrast to the gently sloping, limestone-rich alluvial plains of the Southern Rhône. Composed mainly of granite, its imposing hillsides rise directly from the riverbank, where they're lined with steep terraces that anchor the vineyards in place. These terraces, often no more than one or two rows deep, make viticulture a labor of love for local producers: Unable to use modern equipment such as tractors to navigate the tight spaces, they must do almost everything by hand.

In recent years, Saint-Joseph has experienced a rise in quality as producers gain new perspective of what their vineyards—and, as a result, their wines—can offer the world. The cru, which has long taken a back seat to better-known neighbors like Crozes-Her-

mitage and Côte Rôtie, is now being seen as a rising star by the producers of the Northern Rhône, many of whom make wines from multiple communes in the area. “[They’re] recognizing the potential in Saint-Joseph and are focusing more and more on quality vineyard sites and good farming practices,” says Sam Stoppelmoor, Wine Director at Compagnie des Vins Surnaturels in New York, where Saint-Joseph wines are offered by the glass and bottle.

Over the years, winemaking here has changed significantly. Whites were the dominant focus prior to the arrival of phylloxera, after which a gradual shift toward reds took place as vineyards were replanted and both winemaking techniques and tastes evolved. According to Inter-Rhône, reds now represent 87% of total production, which was about 5.6 million bottles in 2019, with roughly 20% exported. These numbers are growing.

Syrah is the king of reds in the Northern Rhône. As a varietal wine in Saint-Joseph, it generally presents as more elegant in the northern areas of the cru and possesses more roundness in the south; producers are authorized to add up to 10% of white varieties. Marsanne and Roussanne dominate white wine production and are fast approaching the quality



Saint-Joseph extends just over 31 miles along the right bank of the Rhône River.

associated with neighboring Condrieu and Hermitage.

So what are sommeliers saying about the wines of Saint-Joseph? For its increasing quality, expanding production, and perceived “value” relative to the rest of the Northern Rhône, the region is now firmly on their radar. “Given its terroir-driven approach and true representation of the region, I personally think Saint-Joseph

wines are some of the most versatile in the Northern Rhône,” says Oscar Chinchilla, FWS, Beverage Manager and Wine Director at The Maybourne in Beverly Hills, California. “But value is perhaps the greatest strength of this appellation, making the wines a smart, though admittedly bold, move to pour by the glass. . . . [Its] most complex obstacle is competing with the more recognized appellations of the north, like Crozes-Hermitage, Côte Rôtie, and Cornas.”

Stoppelmoor agrees. “The reds can be ethereal and aromatic or bold and beautiful; the whites can be textured and deep or fruity and fresh,” he says. “And since Saint-Joseph has only a few big-name producers and a variety of winemaking styles within the region, it presents a terrific opportunity for a sommelier to actually have a conversation with the guest.”

So, despite the insistence of the region’s producers, négociants, and wine professionals, Saint-Joseph really isn’t all that complicated—at least no more than other appellations of the Northern Rhône. As its increasingly exceptional wines become more available, so, too, will clarity about how they stack up against their neighbors. *SJ*



The majority of Saint-Joseph’s hillside vineyards are composed of granite.

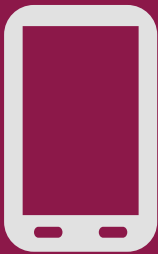


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Drawing from the *Diaspora*

ISRAEL'S MODERN WINE INDUSTRY got its start when Baron Edmond de Rothschild founded Carmel Winery in the late 19th century. As the owner of Château Lafite, the Baron naturally turned to the grapes of Bordeaux for his new venture. As his advisors predicted, they proved beautifully suited to Israeli terroir: Cabernet Sauvignon, Petit Verdot, Malbec, and Cabernet Franc still make up the historic winery's flagship bottling, Carmel Limited Edition.

The country's contemporary winemakers draw not only on this long tradition but also on their own international travel and training experiences to produce world-class Bordeaux-style varietals and blends that solidify the Israeli wine industry's place on the world stage. We spoke with five vintners whose global perspective informs their wines.

**HOW ISRAEL'S
WINEMAKERS
HAVE LEARNED
TO CRAFT SUPERB
BORDEAUX-STYLE
WINES**

by David Gadd

A row of Cabernet Sauvignon in Carmel Winery's vineyard.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF WINES OF ISRAEL



Zory Arkin, CEO of Bravdo Winery, inspects a Cabernet Sauvignon bunch.

BRAVDO WINERY

An award-winning nanotech pioneer, inventor, and professor at Hebrew University in Jerusalem, Bravdo Winery founding partner Oded Shosyov did his postdoctoral work in protein engineering and biotechnology at the University of California, Davis, from 1987 to 1990. The winery's namesake and co-founder, Ben Ami Bravdo, is also a scientist, specializing in horticulture and genetics. "Both our viticulture and enology practices are New World at its best," says Shosyov. "We are science-driven farmers and winemakers."

The partners chose to grow grapes in the Judean Foothills because the climate there offers "a wide gap between daytime and nighttime temperatures," says Shosyov. "This results in optimal photosynthesis during the day and low metabolism at night, guaranteeing sugar accumulation and intense color. The limestone- and clay-rich soils impose constant stress on the vines, which drives rich, concentrated flavor." The impressive Bravdo 2014 Coupage contains 40% Cabernet Franc, 33% Shiraz, and 27% Cabernet Sauvignon. "The Shiraz adds fruity and black pepper flavor as well as bright red color," says Shosyov of this admittedly not-quite-Bordeaux-style blend.

JERUSALEM WINERIES

Lior Lacser, formerly of Carmel Winery, is the newly appointed winemaker at Jerusalem Wineries. After graduating from law school, the former sommelier developed a passion for wine that led him to France. "Burgundy was the best starting point," he says, as "the place where terroir is in the

center, winemaking is done in the vineyards, and tradition is everywhere."

In addition to working under Bordeaux-based consultant Michel Rolland and with Peter Stern—who has developed wineries in both Israel and California—Lacser has lived and worked in Australia's Margaret River region. "Every time you get the chance to work with a top-quality winemaker, you get to share years of experience, unique points of view, and a deep understanding of the wine industry," he says. "Then you take all those views and start building your own vision and philosophy."

A varietal expression of a grape that's usually used for blending in Bordeaux, Jerusalem's 4990 Reserve Petit Verdot is aged 13 months in French barriques. With Lacser now in charge, you can expect future vintages to show a modern approach to what he calls a "classic Old World" style. "I have a deep respect for the New World," he professes, noting that he admires its "clean, analytical, serious winemaking."

TEPERBERG WINERY

Olivier Fratty, winemaker at Teperberg Winery in the Judean Hills since 2006, was born in France but emigrated to Israel with his parents as a child. After completing his bachelor's degree in plant science from Hebrew University's Faculty of Agriculture, he returned to his birthplace to obtain a *diplôme national d'oenologue* from the University of Bordeaux at Talence on the Left Bank. There he gained firsthand knowledge of traditional winemaking at estates in Pessac-Léognan and Saint-Émilion while conducting research at Château Smith Haut Lafitte on the influence of barrels on the color and flavor of red wine. "I learned to listen to and respect the terroir," says Fratty, "and to obtain the best possible quality from the grapes."

Unlike its Right Bank counterparts, the Teperberg Legacy Cabernet Franc is drawn from higher-elevation vineyards. "In a warm country like Israel, mountain vineyards permit us to obtain better acidity, richer fruit, and fresher, more dynamic wines," Fratty explains. His approach melds the best of both worlds: "I take the notion of terroir from the Old World and varied techniques from the New World while retaining the greatest respect for the fruit."

TABOR WINERY

Or Nidbach was appointed winemaker at Tabor Winery in the Lower Galilee in 2014 after graduating from UC Davis with a bachelor's degree in viticulture and enology. "My time in California exposed me to new and sometimes unique winemaking methods," says Nidbach, "but my winemaking style has also been shaped by tasting and traveling around the world."

Grown at 1,500 feet and hand-harvested at Kibbutz Malkiya, his elegant flagship wine, Tabor Malkiya, is a 100% Cabernet Sauvignon that expresses the dry Upper Galilee terroir, where Tabor's strict conservation efforts mean irrigation is rarely used. "Malkiya Vineyard is planted on a unique soil structure called Bar-Kochva, made of [limestone] rocks that do not hold water," notes Nidbach. "This puts the vines under constant stress and contributes to the quality of the berries." Nidbach is rightfully proud of his success with Bordeaux-style wines: "The northern Galilee gives us some of the best Bordeaux grapes, and I think the wines speak for themselves."



After it's hand-harvested, Cabernet Sauvignon goes through meticulous berry selection at Tabor Winery.

KISHOR WINERY

Often described as the Michel Rolland of Israeli wine, Itay Lahat is in constant demand as a consultant to Israel's leading wineries. After graduating in horticulture from the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, he obtained his graduate diploma in enology and a graduate certificate in viticulture from the

University of Adelaide in Australia. "It's been 20 years since then—20 years of experimenting in grape growing, winemaking, and wine drinking," says Lahat. "My style and philosophy are ever-evolving and influenced by my ongoing experience."

One of his clients is Kishor Winery, located in a residential community for adults with special needs. The Kishor Misgav Red is a blend of Cabernet Sauvignon, Cabernet Franc, and Petit Verdot grown at 500 feet. "Kishor winemaker Richard Davis and I were looking to express the fullness of Bordeaux varieties cultivated under the unique conditions of the Upper Western Galilee, with balanced acidity and well-structured tannins," Lahat explains, adding that the goal was "a wine that would be pleasant to drink fairly young but also had the ability to age well."

CARMEL WINERY

Back at the historic Carmel Winery, Yiftach Peretz is bringing extensive experience to what is still one of Israel's most important producers. Appointed chief winemaker in 2018, Peretz holds a degree in enology and viticulture from the University of Milan in Italy's Lombardy region, where he also worked at Monte Rossa in Franciacorta and Poderi di San Pietro in San Colombano (which itself makes a Bordeaux-style blend).

The Carmel Admon Vineyard Cabernet Sauvignon is representative of how deeply Bordeaux grapes are rooted in Israel after more than a century of cultivation in what was once foreign soil. "I consider Admon a pure Israeli wine," says Peretz. "It's a very powerful Cab, but with elegance, a balanced mouthfeel, and impressive tannins. It



The barrel room at Carmel Winery.

has some qualities of the Old World and some of the New World, but I think this distinction is out of fashion."

Indeed, the fact that Israel can now be thought of as "the New Old World" is nowhere more apparent than in the superb Bordeaux-style wines its internationally trained winemakers produce. **94**

Publisher Meridith May's Tasting Notes

The following bottle images may not match the reviewed vintage.



Bravdo Family Vineyards 2014 Coupage, Judean Foothills (\$35)

Notes of brandied cherries and red flowers enter the nose and palate. This well-structured wine offers up dynamic acidity and complex, layered flavors of dates, dark red fruits, white pepper, and spiced oak. **92**

THE RIVER WINE



Teperberg 2017 Legacy Cabernet Franc, Judean Hills (\$70)

This reserved and dignified wine stands tall, with a stoic entry on the nose and palate as well as towering structure. Aromas range from balsamic to boysenberries, dried violets to espresso. Tannins are grainy but the mouthfeel is plush, with dark fruit and dark chocolate melting on the finish. **96**

ROYAL WINE CORP.



Jerusalem Wineries 2016 Reserve Petit Verdot, Judean Hills (\$28)

This *mevushal* (pasteurized) Petit Verdot offers aromas of plum-soaked tobacco and dark chocolate. Violets and chocolate mint sheathe the palate. Dry, chalky tannins feed into the balanced acidity of the wine, which finishes with a satisfying wash of blackberry and vanilla. **92**

ALLIED IMPORTERS



Tabor 2016 Malkiya Cabernet Sauvignon, Galilee (\$60)

Aged for 24 months in French oak followed by an additional 12 months in bottle. Slate and tar are enveloped in black plum while dry coffee tannins build a dynamic red with a regal mouthfeel. Dark chocolate coats blue floral tones and persists on the finish. **95**

ROYAL WINE CORP.



Kishor Vineyards 2016 Misgav Red, Galilee (\$37)

Acid and oak are well integrated with notes of boysenberry and blueberry in a body of lush, creamy vanilla. Well-built, chewy, and sleek. **94**

ISRAELI WINE DIRECT, LLC



Carmel Winery 2016 Cabernet Sauvignon, Admon Vineyard, Galilee (\$40)

This wine's heady perfume includes cedar, black olive, and black plum. Aged 15 months in French oak, it exudes flavors of creamy blackberry and soy sauce. Deep, rich, tarry notes of dried violets and black olives emerge, ending in undertones of mineral-rich soil. **95**

ROYAL WINE CORP.

Ancient Peaks' 857-acre Margarita Vineyard is planted to 14 varieties across five major soil types.

YEAR PLANTED
1999

TOTAL ACREAGE
857.1

ELEVATION
1,100'



- | | | | |
|----------------------|----------------|------------------|----------------------------|
| ● Cabernet Sauvignon | ● Pinot Noir | ● Chardonnay | ● Petite Sirah |
| ● Zinfandel | ● Viognier | ● Cabernet Franc | ● Pinot Gris |
| ● Sauvignon Blanc | ● Syrah | ● Muscat Blanc | ★ Oyster Ridge Event Venue |
| ● Merlot | ● Petit Verdot | ● Malbec | |

MAP COURTESY OF ANCIENT PEAKS

The Mind's Eye

ANCIENT PEAKS' "BE A WINEMAKER FOR A DAY" EXPERIENCE OFFERS INSIGHT ON THE IMPORTANCE OF BLENDING

by Jessie Birschbach

BLENDING MAY BE the most important winemaking practice at Ancient Peaks Winery, at least as far as Executive Vice President Amanda Wittstrom-Higgins is concerned. "Our estate Margarita Vineyard sits on a 14,000-acre ranch, so from one end to another, there are a ton of different microclimates; as a result, our wine-making team has an array of colors to paint with when they put together that final blend, and I think that's a hallmark of our [estate]," she explained in a short film preceding the Ancient Peaks webinar "Be a Winemaker for a Day."



PHOTO: JESSIE BIRSCHBACH

Trade members participating in the webinar received a blending kit from Ancient Peaks.

“Wine represents three things—time, place, and people. There’s the concept of terroir, but when it comes down to the human aspect . . . the area where we really have control is in that final blend.”

—Director of Winemaking Mike Sinor

The observation seemed to foreshadow a major theme of the interactive online experience, which streamed at the end of May. In advance of the occasion, four different Ancient Peaks wines were delivered to the doorsteps of hundreds of participants (including myself), along with some reading material, a tasting mat, a 325-milliliter bottle, a graduated cylinder, a small funnel, and a 500-milliliter beaker.

Wittstrom-Higgins—the consummate host, even virtually—kicked off the webinar with a bit of background. “The families [who] own this vineyard are three local agricultural families, and our drive and determination when we created this winery was really to share a story of this place,” she noted. “It’s a beautiful place. It’s wild. It’s rugged.”

The lush, untamed Santa Margarita Ranch AVA property is located in the southernmost subregion of Paso Robles; Wittstrom-Higgins described the Ancient Peaks Renegade red blend as a “tip of the hat” to the larger AVA. The rich, briary and peppery wine is always based on Syrah, but the 2017 vintage also includes Malbec, Petit Verdot, Zinfandel, and Petite Sirah. The lack of restriction invites a parallel to the zeitgeist of Paso Robles: More than half of the region is planted to Cabernet Sauvignon, said Wittstrom-Higgins, but “the legacy of our region really hasn’t been set yet—you’ll know us for our world-class Cabs but also our Rhônes and daring blends.”

Leading the blending session were Ancient Peaks Director of Winemaking Mike Sinor and winemaker Stewart Cameron. While taking similar approaches to blending, they framed their methods within

different metaphors. “I use the analogy of a wine being a house,” said Cameron. “You have to have the structure itself, which I associate with Petit Verdot because of its structure and rigidity. You have to have the furnishings—a sofa, a bed, all the stuff that goes inside the house. I associate that with



The webinar, hosted by Ancient Peaks Executive Vice President Amanda Wittstrom-Higgins, was also led by winemakers Mike Sinor and Stewart Cameron and the winery’s sales team—with a quick guest appearance by SOMM Journal Managing Editor Jessie Birschbach.

varieties like Merlot and Malbec, [and] to a certain extent Zin—but I think Zinfandel plays more of a role in the kitchen, where it’s a spice.”

Sinor, for his part, presented a convincing case for something I had admittedly never considered: that a winemaker may in fact blend to *create* varietal typicity. “Wine represents three things—time, place, and people,” he said. “There’s the concept of terroir, but when it comes down to the human aspect . . . the area where we really have control is in that final blend. That’s why we tend to focus on that aspect of winemaking. Even at DRC [Domaine de la

Romanée Conti], they’re making blending decisions.” During the winemaking process, he went on, “You’re always following your mind’s eye where you want to go. We really want the vineyard first and foremost [to come through] and then the variety.”

In addition to the 2017 Renegade, participants had received a 2017 Zinfandel, 2017 Merlot, and 2016 Petit Verdot. As an exercise, Sinor and Cameron asked us to create a Merlot/Petit Verdot blend and a Merlot/Zinfandel blend. The difference between the two was immediately obvious by color alone.

In the meantime, Wittstrom-Higgins fielded questions. Ken Walsh from San Diego asked the winemakers how many variations they would typically try before getting the Renegade blend to its desired state. The short of Sinor’s answer was that it depends on the vintage; in a challenging

year, he estimated, the blending can take “upwards of a couple weeks.”

Sinor and I agreed that the Petit Verdot was showing incredibly well—so after the webinar, I finished my blend of 65% Petit Verdot and 35% Merlot and named it Sinor’s Ghost. And although I wrote the name on the bottle with a cheeky smile, Sinor’s words will always play in my head when it comes to determining variety ratios: “The mind’s eye is all up to you. It can be a singular decision, a group decision—but there has to be a decision, because without a plan you’re just leaving it up to chance.” S|J

FINDING SOLACE *through* EDUCATION

**THE SOMM RELIEF
PROJECT**
LAUNCHES ITS WEBINAR
SERIES WITH A REVIEW OF
GLOBAL TERROIR

by Lars Leicht



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SOMMICON & THE SOMM JOURNAL

Since the onset of the global shutdown incited by the COVID-19 pandemic, somms have been doing what somms do best: helping, serving, and educating. Traditional engagements such as conferences and live tasting groups have been temporarily removed from the equation, and as a result, the entire community has had to find ways to reinvent itself.

In that spirit, *The SOMM Journal* and sister publication *The Tasting Panel* have partnered with SommCon to form the SOMM Relief Project, an initiative that aims to help sommeliers and nonprofit organizations impacted by the ongoing crisis. Seed donations from the Banfi Vintners Foundation and the Boisset Collection, along with contributions from viewers of the project's accompanying webinar series, have been used to provide grants to both the United Sommeliers Foundation and qualifying wine professionals.

"These are uncertain times for all of us," says Meridith May, Publisher of *The SOMM Journal* and *The Tasting Panel*. "It is important for us to invest in improving ourselves, continue our education, and ponder how we can best prepare for a future that will certainly bring many changes."

The webinar series commenced on April 30 with "Global Terroir," exploring production from the perspectives of participating principals and winemakers in Franciacorta, Burgundy, Uruguay, Mexico, California, and Washington. The premise of the discussion, as with all webinars to follow, was to examine how terroir and winemaking techniques can work in tandem to yield extraordinary wines with truly distinctive flavors and a sense of place.

That sense of place seems even more fundamental in this period of limited travel and instability. Before the webinar went live, panelist Jean-Charles Boisset pointed to his current location, the Château du Clos de Vougeot, as a potential source of solace. "The Cistercian monks living there from the 12th century saw all kinds of plagues and disasters come and go," he told his fellow panelists. "It still stands, and we will still be standing when this is all over."

21st-Century Terroir

BODEGA GARZÓN

presented by Managing Director Christian Wylie

PHOTOS COURTESY OF BODEGA GARZÓN



Bodega Garzón Managing Director Christian Wylie.

It's fair to say that Uruguay is a sleeper among wine-producing countries. Though its viticultural tradition dates back to the 19th century, it didn't enter the fine-wine world's radar until the turn of the millennium.

For any region, the path to fame is forged by producers uniformly dedicated to quality, pioneers willing to challenge conventional attitudes, and—perhaps most importantly—bold outliers making investments driven by a spirit of innovation. Bodega Garzón, the brainchild of successful Argentine businessman Alejandro Bulgheroni and his wife, Bettina, fulfills all three qualifications.

Alejandro initially purchased land off of Uruguay's Atlantic Coast with a goal of harvesting wind energy there. But, according to Bodega Garzón Managing Director Christian Wylie, Bettina was concerned the windmills would irrevocably alter the pristine landscape, so Alejandro went back to the drawing board and settled on wine production after studying the geology and topography of the property.

In 2007, with help from Italian wine consultant Alberto Antonini, the first vines were planted on 71 acres; an additional 525 were planted in subsequent years. More than 20 different varieties, predominantly Tannat and Albariño, are planted across 1,200 different blocks. "It was a big experiment," Wylie said of the decision to plant vines instead of other crops, but "the area was so rustic that only vines could survive."

The vineyards are planted in the county of Garzón, which is 100 miles east of Uruguay's traditional viticultural regions, Colonia and Canelones; they're also just 11 miles from the Atlantic Ocean and the idyllic town of José Ignacio, which is known for being a celebrity destination during summer in the Southern Hemisphere. The Bodega Garzón winery, which was the first facility of its kind outside of North America to earn a LEED Silver certification, represents the company's commitment to sustainability.

"In the glass you feel the energy, the tension, the vibrancy," Wylie said of Bodega Garzón's portfolio. "The wines have high drinkability and act like a bridge between New World and Old World styles."



The Bodega Garzón winery was the first facility of its kind outside of North America to earn a LEED Silver certification.

Embracing the Fruit

CA' DEL BOSCO

presented by USA Ambassador Jacob Gragg



PHOTOS COURTESY OF CA' DEL BOSCO

*Ca' del Bosco USA Ambassador
Jacob Gragg.*





The vineyards and winery of Ca' del Bosco (above and facing page).

Considering Franciacorta literally translates to “short France,” one might be tempted to draw a comparison between the region’s sparkling expressions and Champagne. Its French connection, however, has nothing to do with the wine; the name was allegedly derived from *courtes francae*, a tax-free zone established in the area by the Frankish empire during the Middle Ages.

Roughly 400 miles separate Franciacorta from Champagne to the northwest—a distance that’s clearly reflected in the finished wines, as its morainic soils retain less water than the chalky and limestone-based soils typically found in the French region. In addition, the climate is warmer; noted Ca’ del Bosco USA Ambassador Jacob Gragg, “so we are able to get total physiological and phenolic ripeness. Ca’ del Bosco does not harvest based on purely retaining higher acidity.” He added that the winery takes advantage of a lower dosage so as to preserve a purer fruit character.

Because there isn’t a long history of grape growing or wine production in the area, said Gragg, Ca’ del Bosco founder Maurizio Zanella had to embrace a broader view of global viticulture in order to set his own standards. “Our region itself was pretty young,” Gragg explained, “so he looked at some of the greatest wine producers in America, in France, and in other places to emulate what they were doing.”

Ca’ del Bosco, he continued, seeks to uncover the land’s potential for growing sparkling wine grapes by placing a continual focus on viticulture rather than on winemaking techniques. For example, the winery’s so-called “berry spa” thoroughly cleanses the grapes to remove foreign matter and residue before pressing. “We focus on making the purest wine possible,” Gragg said. “We accept that we’re still young, with so much to learn from Franciacorta’s terroir.”



PHOTO: GIUSEPPE LA SPADA

Ca’ del Bosco founder Maurizio Zanella.



CAMPAGNA FINANZIATA AI SENSI
DEL REG. UE N. 1308/2013
CAMPAIGN FINANCED ACCORDING
TO EU REG. NO. 1308/2013

“*Earthly and Cosmic Energy*”

DOMAINE DE LA VOUGERAIE

presented by Jean-Charles Boisset

PHOTO: ALEX RUBIN



*Jean-Charles Boisset, vintner/
proprietor of the Boisset Collection.*

If you know anything about Burgundy native Jean-Charles Boisset, you know that he’s a man of the world. A passionate enophile and peripatetic as well as a savvy investor, he’s widely known for rejuvenating historic California wine estates like Buena Vista Winery, Raymond Vineyards, and DeLoach Vineyards—but to know Burgundy is to know Boisset.

“I was born where I sit today looking at the Château du Clos de Vougeot,” he told the webinar audience from the grounds of the 11th-century monastery and its adjoining vineyards. “So I am definitely a product of the terroir. I am a ‘terroirist’ in many ways, thinking always about the sense of place, the alchemy of the plant, the weather, [and] obviously the soil, but most importantly the passion of the people. This is what we have done in Burgundy for many centuries.”


Boisset grew up at his father’s eponymous Jean-Claude Boisset winery in Nuits-Saint-Georges and established Domaine de la Vougeraie with his sister Nathalie in 1999. But they found that the vineyard soil had been compacted from tractor work over the course of the decades and was no longer yielding fruit of the quality they were looking for: “The soil was really inactive,” he said, “so we decided to reintroduce horse plowing as well as many varieties of composting. We use over 18 different compost recipes to feed the terroir.”

Boisset noted that they also use the vineyard-management technique known as selection massale to replant vineyards with cuttings from the area’s historic vines. “This is really what a terroir approach should be,” Boisset explained. “It is very low impact, very authentic, very faithful to the sense of place.”

The majority of Boisset’s vineyards in both France and California are farmed organically or biodynamically, an approach that he said makes for “magical wines with earthly and cosmic energy.”

The view from the Château du Clos de Vougeot’s adjoining vineyards.

PHOTO COURTESY OF BOISSET



Cline Cellars' 100-year-old Zinfandel vines in Oakley, CA.

Smaller Yields, Bigger Flavor

CLINE CELLARS

presented by winemaker Charlie Tsegeletos

Winemaker Charlie Tsegeletos is a 20-year veteran at Cline Cellars, a virtual poster child for the distinctive terroir of southern Sonoma County. He joined our webinar from the Five Sisters Ranch Chardonnay vineyard on the Sonoma side of the Los Carneros appellation. (For more on Cline Cellars, see page 38.)

Tsegeletos explained how morning fog shrouds the area and a marine breeze known as the Carneros Express mitigates afternoon heat. In terms of terrain, vineyards on the valley floor have a clay hardpan and the hillside sites are blanketed in well-drained, thin volcanic soils; both limit yield and provide flavorful grapes.

Established in 1983, the Los Carneros AVA is renowned for its cool-climate Chardonnay and Pinot Noir; Cline Cellars produces both and is also known for its

single-vineyard Zinfandels, but its claim to fame and focus are the Rhône varieties that owner Fred Cline found growing on his Contra Costa property when he purchased it in 1982. On their original rootstock, its ancient vines were planted by Italian and Portuguese immigrants in the late 1890s and early 1900s; they're protected from phylloxera by the deep sandy-loam soils of the Big Break and Bridgehead vineyards.

Convinced of these varieties' ability to raise the profile of not only the area but domestic winemaking as a whole, Cline gained notoriety as one of the original "Rhône Rangers" in the 1980s as he promoted the cultivation of grapes such as Carignan, Mourvèdre, Grenache, and Syrah.

Cline Cellars deploys a herd of sheep



PHOTOS COURTESY OF CLINE CELLARS

Cline Cellars winemaker Charlie Tsegeletos.

for weed control and creates a compost using vine prunings, pomace from the property's olive oil production, grape pressings, and ground oyster and crab shells; when melded with the soil, it promotes gradual ripening and deep concentration. In the winery, the team relies on natural yeast and does not fine the wines.

"[This approach has] been working pretty well for us," said Tsegeletos. "We don't get big yields, but we get big flavor."

The Island of Red Mountain

THICK SKINNED

presented by winemaker Tim Henley

MAP COURTESY OF THICK SKINNED



For California native Tim Henley, making wine in Washington is all about perspective.

For example, Red Mountain is the fifth-oldest (and the smallest) of Washington's 14 AVAs but was recognized just two decades ago. Vines cover over half of its total surface area, and while it's part of the Yakima Valley, where Chardonnay dominates, red Bordeaux grapes rule here. Though part of the Cascades, Red Mountain stands isolated by gaps on either side—and despite its name, it has an elevation of just 1,400 feet. "I grew up next to the Sierra Nevada mountain range," Henley told the webinar audience. "When I moved up to Washington, I looked at it and I said, 'That's a mountain?' It's a hill!"

That said, he believes that Red Mountain's distinctive geology and microclimate make it more than worthy of its

own appellation. In a region known for rainfall, its annual precipitation is just 5 inches, and while it experiences "a lot of daytime sun, a lot of warmth," in Henley's words, the nearby Yakima River and the northerly breezes that pass through at night help moderate the arid conditions. "Red Mountain is kind of an island off by itself," he added. "It has a unique weather pattern."

The region's silty loam, which is high in calcium and alkaline, drains well and allows roots to reach deep into the earth. From the Heart of the Hill Vineyard, Henley sources mainly Cabernet Sauvignon, blending in what he calls a "key component" of Malbec to soften it as well as a "top note" of Petit Verdot. To defend themselves from the elements, the grapes develop a thick skin—hence the label's name—which in turn adds character and body to the wines.

Terroir-Quila

LA ADELITA

presented by founder Chris Radomski

PHOTO COURTESY OF LA ADELITA



La Adelita founder Chris Radomski in the Jalisco Highlands.

Some might have you believe that wine and spirits should be viewed as entirely disparate entities, but don't tell that to Chris Radomski. The co-founder of successful brands in both categories—award-winning single-vineyard wines from Napa Valley and Duke Bourbon Whiskey—Radomski believes that his newest venture, La Adelita Tequila, exemplifies the parallels that exist between the two, especially through the lens of terroir.

"My true heart is wine," he said during the webinar. "But I had the opportunity to start looking into tequila and traveled Mexico extensively, meeting different people to understand the lay of the land." Through these travels, Radomski came to appreciate the distinctions between lowland and highland agave and diligently observed how consumer perception of tequila was changing. "I think tequila has evolved from doing a lime shot on your hand . . . into something very exquisite," he said. "Over time,

Americans have come to understand the nuances in those regions and the importance of terroir in tequila."

For La Adelita, Radomski wanted fruit-forward agave from the red soil of the Jalisco Highlands, which is located southeast of Guadalajara at an elevation of 7,000 feet. In a nod to his enological background, he found a distillery, Hacienda La Capilla, that had a similar appreciation for wine, farmed single estates, and possessed a deep respect for terroir. While the concept isn't addressed by the strict regulations that surround tequila production, Radomski considers it to be a unique selling point of La Adelita.

"There are very few tequilas out there that are truly estate offerings akin to making a great wine in France, or in Uruguay, or in Napa Valley, based on terroir, agriculture . . . and production methods," he said. "I think people are looking toward tequila as a spirit that is most [similar] to wine." ■

THE ICONIC WINE REGIONS OF

Italy

by Lars Leicht



MAP: IRYNA VOLINA VIA ADOBE STOCK

The ancient Greeks called Italy Oenotria, or “land of the vine.” The name still applies today: Dappled with vineyards, modern-day Italy produces more wine than any other country in the world.

From bargain Pinot Grigio and Prosecco to world-class Barolo and Brunello, Italy’s vinous diversity is mind-boggling. The boot-shaped country encompasses plantings of more than 1,000 varieties—among them well-known grapes like Barbera and Montepulciano as well as the more obscure Oseleta and Schioppettino—which grow in soils that run the gamut from sand, clay, and limestone to schist, gravel, and volcanic.

Italian wine denominations denote history and tradition, but they don’t tell the full story. Denominazione di Origine Controllata e Garantita (DOCG) is the country’s top classification, but thanks to Super Tuscan and other declassified wines, many prestigious (and expensive) expressions are designated as the lower-rung Indicazione Geografica Tipica (IGT). The world of Italian wines can sometimes seem as tangled as a bowl of spaghetti, but like that dish, function triumphs over form.

Italy’s unique terroir was the focus of a recent webinar series, a joint effort between SommCon, *The SOMM Journal*, and sister publication *The Tasting Panel* that benefited the SOMM Relief Fund. We gathered nine producers, six of which were represented by women; a recap of their presentations can be found under their respective regions in this digest.



Piedmont

Bordering France and Switzerland in Italy's northwestern corner, Piedmont is the country's largest and oldest region: It helped lead the charge for unification when the House of Savoy launched the 19th-century campaign to unite the peninsula.

Surrounded on three sides by the Alps, Piedmont takes its name from the Latin roots *ped* ("foot") and *mont* ("mountain"). The Po River, Italy's longest, originates here and runs the length of the region. Due to the combination of mountainous terrain and river delta, only about 30% of the land area is suitable for vineyards.

Piedmont is known for its quality, with more DOC (42) and DOCG (17) designations than any other region. More than half of the wine produced here is red: Nebbiolo makes prestigious Barolo and Barbaresco, but Barbera is the most widely planted variety.



Turin, the capital of Piedmont.



WEBINAR SPOTLIGHT:

MARCHESI DI BAROLO

During her webinar presentation, Valentina Abbona shared “a romantic tale that took place over 200 years ago” when the last Marchese di Barolo, Carlo Tancredi Falletti, married the last French noblewoman Juliette Colbert. “When she came to Barolo,” Abbona said, “she was thrilled to see grapes growing spontaneously but disappointed that no proper wine was made from them.”

Rejecting the fizzy, sweet wines of the day, Colbert insisted that the grapes be fermented dry and aged in oak, even building underground cellars for this purpose—and, as a result, contemporary Barolo was born.

The Marchesa died in 1864 without heirs, bequeathing all of her wealth to charity. Abbona's family acquired the property in 1929

and she now represents the sixth generation; to provide a glimpse of Marchesi di Barolo's history to the webinar attendees, she showed off centennial casks still in use at the winery alongside newer vessels of various sizes.

This aging regimen “follows our winemaking philosophy [by] reflecting the different shades of our terroir,” she said. “We respect the biodiversity of our area and know our grapes . . . and how each vineyard has been managed historically to best express and enhance its character.”

Of the many varieties her family cultivates on 500 acres throughout Piedmont, Abbona calls Nebbiolo the most sensitive in terms of how it performs in various types of terroir. “Barbaresco and Barolo are within 15 miles,” she pointed out, “but the same grape gives such different results that they call the wine by place rather than by variety.”

Barolo itself is divided into two major soil types: The sand and marl of the younger Tortonian soils to the west yield fresher wines, while the heavier clay and limestone of the older Serravallian soils to the east result in fuller-bodied expressions. The town of Barolo, where Marchesi di Barolo is located, benefits from both. “Our family expression of Barolo del Comune di Barolo synthesizes this richness and diversity all in one wine,” Abbona said.



Valentina Abbona of Marchesi di Barolo.

PHOTO COURTESY OF MARCHESI DI BAROLO

PHOTO: MARCO SARACCO VIA ADOBE STOCK



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CASCINA CASTLET

Considering that their ancestors have dwelled in the area since medieval times, Maria Borio's family has been a vital thread in the fabric of Costigliole d'Asti for centuries. She has run their winery, Cascina Castlet, since 1970, encouraging innovation within every aspect of

the business along the way.

Borio yielded the floor to winemaker Roberto Austa, who noted that while Costigliole d'Asti has just 6,000 inhabitants, it boasts Piedmont's largest area under vine. The soils of this landlocked province's rolling hills, nestled at the foot of the Alps, appear white and light gray from deposits of calcium carbonate and ancient seashells. This terroir is

"about 2 million years in the making," Austa said. "The soil is generally poor in organic material. The vines here get a little stressed, so they yield more intense, fruit-forward wines."

The expressions that hail from Cascina Castlet's four main vineyards—Briccone, Gioda, Fubine, and Briccossino—tend to be full-bodied, deeply colored, spicy, and rich, with aromas of dark red fruit and medium aging potential. Best known for its Barbera, which is typical of the area, the winery also grows Chardonnay, Cabernet Sauvignon, Nebbiolo, and a rare indigenous grape called Uvalino, which Borio helped rescue from extinction.

After harvest, which is conducted by hand, a portion of the grapes undergo brief air drying as part of the appassimento process, a Cascina Castlet signature that's rarely used locally for dry reds. Austa uses barriques, tonneaux, and large casks for aging, depending on the wine.

Cascina Castlet farms organically and plants roses at each row head, which isn't purely an aesthetic choice—the bushes serve as an early warning system for maladies such as mold or fungus, as symptoms manifest earlier there than they do on the vines. Artificial bird nests are scattered throughout the property to help promote biodiversity and insect control, and water used in the winery is recycled for vine irrigation. "We live on the land and with the land," Austa explained. "We try to respect [it] in everything we do."

PHOTO COURTESY OF CASCINA CASTLET



Maria Borio and Roberto Austa of Cascina Castlet.



CAMPAGNA FINANZIATA AI SENSI DEL REG. UE N. 1308/2013
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GIOVANNI ROSSO

Davide Rosso pivoted his family's century-old business from grape growing to winemaking over 25 years ago, but in many ways he's only strengthened his focus on the vineyard. He often says that "wine should be a perfect copy of its terroir. To do that, we must be rigorous in the small details."

There is certainly no lack of attention to detail when it comes to working with ten different crus in Serralunga, one of the most prestigious areas around Barolo. "I am not simply a Barolo producer but a Serralunga producer," Rosso said during the webinar. "The terroir varies from one cru to another, and that must be respected when working in the vineyard."

That respect involves not only organic farming but also meticulous pruning of the vines and tilling of the heavily calcareous soils. In the winery, Rosso—who studied enology in Burgundy—takes a non-interventionist approach, relying on natural yeasts, long maceration in cement tanks, and aging in large, untoasted French oak casks.

The lineup of wines he produces includes five Barolos, four of which—Serralunga, Cerretta, Serra, and Vigna Rionda—are single-cru bottlings from the same village. These expressions reflect variations in exposure, elevation, and soil type through their differences in color, body, structure, tannins, and aging potential. Vigna Rionda, which hails from a lower part of the cru planted by Rosso's maternal grandfather in 1946, is the crown jewel of his Serralunga holdings and bears a label dedicated to his mother, Ester Canale Rosso.

During his presentation, Rosso was joined by Daniele Dellanoce, who oversees business development to help share Giovanni Rosso with consumers all over the world. The "unique nature of Barolo," Dellanoce concluded, is that the winery can "reap the gift of different expressions and different DNA in every single vineyard, even [if they're] just a few meters away from each other."

PHOTO COURTESY OF GIOVANNI ROSSO



Giovanni Rosso 2016 Barbera d'Alba

DOC Donna Margherita (\$20) Aromas of sweet lettuce, plum, and nutmeg lead to bright acidity, which sparks undertones of spiced cedar and balsamic.

VIAS IMPORTS

Marchesi di Barolo 2017 Barbera d'Alba

DOC Peiragal (\$35) Named for Barbera d'Alba's sloping, stony, limestone-filled hills, Peiragal is matured for one year in small, medium-toasted French oak barrels. Sumptuous yet clean notes of peppered plum, soy sauce, hazelnut, and violets abound within pitch-perfect acidity.

FREDERICK WILDMAN

Michele Chiarlo 2016 Reyna Barbaresco

(\$50) Lovely scents of cherry, cinnamon, and nutmeg lead to dry tannins and a texture akin to cherry skins. The palate is clean and focused, with a prominent acid structure as well as notes of rose petal, new leather, and white pepper that stay consistent from start to finish.

KOBRAND

Giovanni Rosso 2015 Barolo DOCG (\$50)

A pungent nose of earth, ripe cherry, and saffrafras gives way to a broad mouthfeel, with a tartness that spreads from cheek to cheek. It's sweetened by a confection of rose petals, violets, and raspberries, and the finish is earthy yet bright.

VIAS IMPORTS

Marchesi di Barolo 2014 Barolo del Comune di Barolo DOCG (\$80)

Made with fruit sourced from estate vineyards situated on sloping hillsides and deemed "historical crus," this is a mineral-driven and light-hearted 100% Nebbiolo. Calcareous clay, gray sandstone, and quartz sand influence the spicy aromas of bay leaf, tobacco, and Kalamata olive. Plum and savory earth tones line the palate as dry baking spice accents rose petals.

FREDERICK WILDMAN



Veneto

Spanning from the canals of Venice to the dramatic heights of the Dolomite Mountains, the Veneto produces an impressive range of wines. It has 14 DOCGs, 29 DOCs, and ten IGTs, but two areas are primarily responsible for its rank as Italy's top producer by volume: Prosecco and Valpolicella.

Though parts of the biregional Prosecco denomination reach into Friuli, its heartland lies in the Veneto, with the DOCG designation given to wine made in hillside vineyards between the towns of Conegliano and Valdobbiadene.

Formed by ancient glaciers, the Valpolicella zone stretches south from the Lissini mountain range to the valley around the city of Verona and west from the volcanic hills of Soave to Lake Garda. The latter's influence makes for lighter-bodied Bardolino, which primarily includes Corvina, Rondinella, and Molinara. Essentially the same grapes make Valpolicella—which generally increases in body and structure from west to east—and its variants Ripasso and Amarone.



Giusti Asolo Prosecco Superiore DOCG, Conegliano Valdobbiadene (\$28) An extra-dry Prosecco with a yeasty, floral nose. Flavors of pear, ginger, and honeyed nougat evolve out of the persistent bubbles. Fine acidity and delicate minerality add to the appeal.

ROMANO BRANDS

Masi 2018 Masianco Pinot Grigio delle Venezie DOC (\$15) This very special blend of Pinot Grigio with Verduzzo offers up aromas of sweet white tea and peach, an unctuous texture, and notable sapidity. Lively salinity wraps around spiced jasmine and honeyed notes of apricot and lime.

SANTA MARGHERITA USA

Corte Quaiara 2016 Campo al Salice Garganega Veronese (\$17) Lemon-drenched almond mesmerizes on the nose of this wine made with old-vine Garganega grapes. Lean and edgy with vivid acidity, the palate displays a stark minerality as well as notes of seashells and lime zest. White flowers bloom on the finish.

ROMANO BRANDS

Masi 2015 Brolo Campofiorin Oro, Valpolicella (\$15) This Corvina-based red runs the gamut from earthy and floral to savory. Bay leaf, white pepper, and cigar leaf merge on the raisinated finish.

SANTA MARGHERITA USA

Allegrini 2012 La Poja Monovitigno Corvina Veronese (\$100) Corvina expresses itself through deep, grainy, plum-washed tannins and dried violets. Sumptuous dark chocolate aligns with Moroccan spices on the exotic and expressive palate.

LUX WINES

Sartori I Saltari Valpolicella Superiore DOC (\$35) This Corvina-based blend (with Rondinella, Croatina, and Corvione) was grown in calcareous soil and exudes a lush nose of spiced flowers and espresso. Leather and tobacco lead the way on the palate, where they're accented by a chalkiness and bright acidity that puts a spotlight on dense, dark blue fruit.

ROMANO BRANDS

Masi Costasera 2015 Amarone della Valpolicella Classico (\$50) A Corvina-dominant blend with portions of Rondinella and Molinara, this gracious and delicious Amarone Classico is effortlessly seductive from nose to palate. The grapes are dried via the appassimento process for more than 100 days and aged 24 months in casks, resulting in a deep, concentrated, and tarry palate of black fruit. Red licorice, espresso, caramel, and oak are layered with teeth-drying tannins.

SANTA MARGHERITA USA

Sartori I Saltari 2010 Amarone della Valpolicella (\$50) Raisin and dried figs appear on the nose and palate of this wine, which has a deep, inky black-carmine hue. Notes of plum skin, mint, tobacco, and cherrywood are rich and generous.

ROMANO BRANDS



WEBINAR SPOTLIGHT:

Masi stores its bamboo racks in a network of hillside farmhouses with ventilated attics.

MASI

Sandro Boscaini is nicknamed “Mr. Amarone” with good reason: He has served as the sixth-generation leader of one of Verona’s most prominent family wineries, founded in 1772, for over a half-century. Boscaini also instigated changes to perfect Amarone four decades ago by reducing oxidation and shortening the drying time for grapes, while his father pioneered the ripasso method by refermenting fresh wine on pressings leftover from Amarone production. Boscaini later changed that style for Masi’s original ripasso wine, Campofiorin, by using partially dried grapes rather than pomace, resulting in a more elegant character.

To mitigate the effects of climate change in the vineyard, Boscaini has been a proponent of the ancient pergola vine-training method, which uses a high canopy to cover the fruit; he also initiated the revival of Oseleta, an indigenous variety with small berries and bunches, to add character to Amarone. Five years ago, he took Masi public (the family still controls 75% of the shares), and this year he partnered with a new U.S. importer, Santa Margherita USA. Clearly no stranger to reinvention, Boscaini then oversaw the transformation of the experience offered at Masi’s tasting rooms into online tastings.

Masi’s long history and the business acumen of its leadership give it the advantage of working in some of the best terrain within the highly variable Valpolicella territory. It produces five different Amarones—three of which are limited-production single-vineyard wines—and dries the grapes old-school style on bamboo racks in a network of hillside farmhouses with ventilated attics. The wines are then aged in 600-liter Fusto Veronese barrels.

“When the quarantine is over and people start to leave their homes,” Boscaini said recently, “they will find us where we have been for centuries: with our feet firmly planted in the vineyard and [with] the ability to present real value with our wines.”



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LIVIO FELLUGA

If millennial Laura Felluga is concerned about reinventing herself both personally and professionally in the wake of COVID-19, she can look for inspiration from her late grandfather, Livio Felluga. The founder of his eponymous winery and a fourth-generation winemaker in northeastern Italy, he served during World War II and spent several years in a prisoner-of-war camp.



PHOTO: JEREMY BALL

Laura Felluga, proprietor of Livio Felluga and sixth-generation winemaker.

“By the time he came home . . . he had lost everything,” Laura said. “Italy was in crisis; the landscape was devastated. Young people were leaving the countryside for factory jobs in the cities. But we are a family of farmers—we are tied to the land.”

Despite this exodus and the tradition of the time to make simple wines in bulk, Livio firmly believed in Friuli’s winemaking potential. In 1956, he bought his first vineyards and set about revolutionizing how wine was made and consumed there. “He had a daring vision and intuition of buying and restoring ancient plots to produce wine of quality,” explained Laura. “But everybody thought he was crazy!”

Friuli’s hillside soils are predominantly rocky flysch with chalky clay and sandstone. Livio Felluga straddles three appellations: Friuli Colli Orientali, Rosazzo, and the sandier Collio. To visually display the origin of his wines, Livio “chose [an] ancient map and turned it into a label to speak to the consumer even if he wasn’t there to do so,” Laura added. “[His winemaking philosophy] was to convey a sense of place and a reflection of the terroir.”

Andrea Felluga, Laura’s father, makes three reds and nine whites that both the winery and Friuli as a whole are broadly known for. “My grandfather bet on Pinot Grigio,” Laura said. “He wanted to show it as a noble variety that, when properly grown, can provide great depth and complexity [as well as a] velvety and pleasant character. It is still one of our main focuses alongside our iconic Terre Alte.”



MAP: LESNIEWSKI VIA ADOBE STOCK

Friuli-Venezia Giulia

The northeastern region of Friuli–Venezia Giulia borders Austria and Slovenia; to the south is the Adriatic Sea and to the west, the Veneto. Friuli was a key outpost for the Roman Empire as well as part of the Byzantine spice route; its capital city, Trieste, also served as a port for the Austro-Hungarian Empire.

Positioned between the Alps and the Adriatic, Friuli has both significant diurnal shifts and a long, mild growing season that helps the fruit strike a balance between sugars and acid. This is indisputably white-wine country, led by Pinot Grigio and Friulano, but the region’s reds include Merlot, Cabernet Franc, and Cabernet Sauvignon that express cool-climate characteristics. Among the indigenous varieties are Picolit, Ribolla Gialla, and Verduzzo—which generally produce full-bodied whites with notes of stone fruit and almond—as well as red grapes Refosco dal Peduncolo Rosso, Schioppettino, and Tazzelenghe, which possess lean fruit flavors and distinct tannins.

Livio Felluga 2018 Pinot Grigio, Friuli Colli Orientali (\$27) Delicate aromas of lanolin, honeyed pear, and peach blossom lead to an opulent palate. Tinged with lime zest and sweet tapioca, a stony quality paves the way for a nectar of apricot and peach.

MAISONS MARQUES & DOMAINES

Livio Felluga 2017 Terre Alte Rosazzo DOCG (\$80) One of the world’s most astounding white wines, this blend of Friulano, Pinot Bianco, and Cabernet Sauvignon is like a blazing ray of sunshine. The vivid aromas are defined by lemon ice, white grapefruit, and honeysuckle. A tangerine creaminess envelops the palate within a lithe structure; multidimensional notes of caramelized cashew, jasmine, and buttered croissant enter midway.

MAISONS MARQUES & DOMAINES

Tuscany

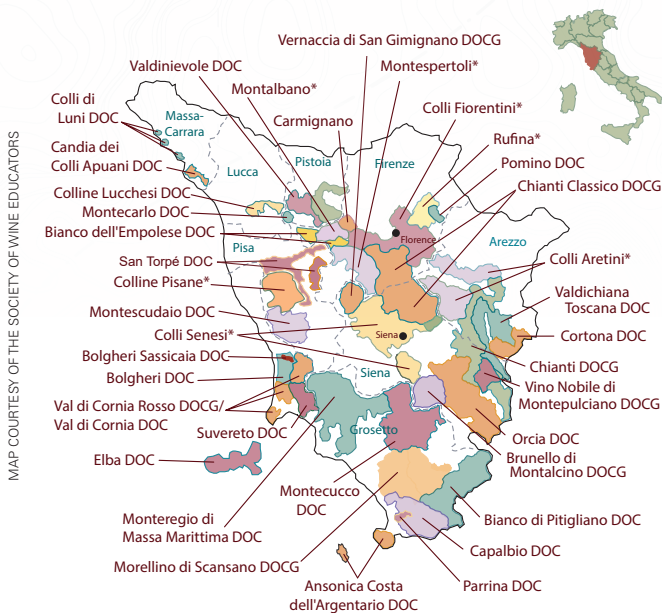
Tuscany is perhaps Italy's most iconic wine region—and Chianti is its jovial ambassador. It's usually a blend aged six to 30 months that includes at least 80% Sangiovese, and like all things Italian, it can be quaffable or complex, depending on classification.

The soils and climate of Chianti differ from neighboring Montalcino, where Brunello must be 100% Sangiovese aged five years, including a minimum of 24 months in oak. Further to the southeast, *Vino Nobile di Montepulciano* calls for just 70% Sangiovese (locally known as Prugnolo Gentile) with two years of aging, including one in oak.

Tuscany's coast is unfavorable to native Sangiovese and was not considered wine territory until the 20th-century discovery that French varieties fare well there. That development launched the concept of Super Tuscans in coastal Bolgheri as well as in Chianti, where producers used Cabernet, Merlot, and other international varieties that had not been recognized by the DOC regulations. Despite being largely designated as Italy's lowest classification, *Vino da Tavola*, Super Tuscans not only gained international prestige but garnered premium prices.

Poggio al Tesoro 2016 Sondraia Bolgheri Superiore DOC (\$85) This blend of 65% Cabernet Sauvignon, 25% Merlot, and 10% Cabernet Franc—grown in deep, gravelly soils in the coastal area of Maremma—is a project from proprietor Marilisa Allegrini, who's known for her wines from the Veneto. Aged for 18 months in French oak (50% new), it's a perfumed, silky, broad-shouldered red, with notes of red, purple, and blue fruit meticulously integrated with chocolate and licorice.

LUX WINES



MAP COURTESY OF THE SOCIETY OF WINE EDUCATORS

*Subzones of the Chianti DOCG



WEBINAR SPOTLIGHT:

POGGIO AL TESORO

Sixth-generation winemaker Marilisa Allegrini's name is often associated with tradition, especially through the lens of her family's storied property in Verona. But when she and her brother Walter first traveled to Bolgheri on the Tuscan coast, they were enchanted by the viticultural experimentation they witnessed on this so-called new frontier. "Tuscany is the home of Sangiovese, but here, it represents only 2% of the crop," she noted. "Poggio al Tesoro does not have a single Sangiovese vine!"

PHOTO COURTESY OF POGGIO AL TESORO



Marilisa Allegrini of Poggio al Tesoro.

Allegrini credits the pioneering Marchese Mario Incisa della Rocchetta for planting Cabernet here in 1944. "Thanks to his intuition," she pointed out, "Bolgheri proved an excellent terroir for international grape varieties."

Though its first wines were marketed in the late 1960s, Bolgheri didn't earn DOC status until 1983; that exclusively applied to its white and rosato wines, but it was revised in 1994 to include Cabernet-

based reds. Following another update in 2013, Cabernet Franc, Cabernet Sauvignon, and Merlot—which historically perform well there—can each represent part of a blend or comprise 100% of a Bolgheri DOC bottling. Syrah and Sangiovese can only make up 50% of a blend, by contrast, while Petit Verdot is limited to 30%.

For white wines, Vermentino is key. It can be blended with two others—Sauvignon Blanc and Petit Manseng—but Allegrini prefers it on its own. "We planted clones from Corsica," she explained. "The wine is very intense, very rich, very [mineraly]. We don't need any other variety with it."

Poggio al Tesoro encompasses two vineyards in the area known as Soprastada, located alongside Bolgheri's picturesque cypress-lined road: Via Bolgherese and Le Grottine, which each have about 17.3 acres under vine and feature soils of mainly sand and gravel. It also owns two other vineyards in the area: the 123-acre Le Sondraie, which is close to the coast and serves as a source for Vermentino, and the 15-acre Valle di Cerbaia, which sits just outside the appellation and is primarily used for experiments with clones, varieties, and vine training. Allegrini practices organic viticulture on all four properties.

"I love Bolgheri very much," Allegrini told the webinar audience. "It is a beautiful place where the stars align!"

**WEBINAR SPOTLIGHT:***Castello Banfi in Montalcino.***CASTELLO BANFI**

When Jgor Marini tells the story of Castello Banfi, he likes to remind people how different the wine world was when the Mariani family founded the estate 42 years ago. "That part of Tuscany was in the middle of nowhere," he said. "Montalcino was practically unheard of. Times were tough and Brunello was not well known."

Adding to the challenge was the fact that in the estate's early years, it was "the new kid on the block, coming from the U.S. into a very closed environment," notes Marini, who serves as Banfi's European Region Manager. "It was not easy to be accepted . . . [and] they had to build relationships from scratch with producers and the community."

Today, of course, connoisseurs of fine wine follow a well-worn path to Montalcino for its renowned Brunello—and Castello Banfi, for its part, is now widely recognized as a respected producer and beacon of hospitality. It's also a dedicated steward of its 7,200-acre estate, tending wooded areas and planting organic fruit groves and wheat fields.

In addition to constructing irrigation lakes and implementing water-filtration systems, the Banfi team has invested in a thorough analysis of the 29 different soil types present on the property. This research helped them narrow down a selection of 600 presumed Sangiovese clones growing throughout Montalcino to a dozen that they publicly registered; for their own vineyards, they selected the three that were determined most likely to produce consistently outstanding Brunello when planted together in polyclonal vineyards.

The state-of-the-art winery, which undergoes frequent updates, houses patented hybrid fermentation tanks of stainless steel and wood to separately ferment grapes from each parcel of, in Marini's words, Banfi's "constellation of single vineyards." This approach preserves the character of the different micro-terroirs before the lots are judiciously blended.

Beyond its clonal research, Banfi has published and shared results of its extensive work with soils, fermenters, custom aging barrels, and even a new vine-training method so that neighboring producers can benefit from its findings. Banfi and Montalcino have come a long way, indeed!

Poggio al Tesoro 2016 Il Seggio Bolgheri Rosso (\$40)

A vibrant blend of 40% Merlot, 30% Cabernet Sauvignon, 20% Cabernet Franc, and 10% Petit Verdot with meaty, peppered black fruit and fine acidity. On the palate, notes of tar, anise, and slate form the backdrop of this velvety powerhouse. The finish is marked by salinity and dried violets. LUX WINES

Lamole di Lamole 2017 Chianti Classico DOCG (\$22) Roses, new leather, sour red berries, and cinnamon form a quartet of outstanding aromas. Acidity enlivens notes of dried cherries and cocoa powder on the palate, where white pepper lingers alongside cherry skins and a soft, brightening echo of rose petals.

SANTA MARGHERITA USA

Lamole di Lamole 2016 Chianti Classico Riserva DOCG

(\$25) Tempered by secondary aromas of fennel, cedar, bay leaf, and Romano cheese, fragrant boysenberry is arresting on the nose. But fruit commands attention at once on the palate: Dark cherry and blueberry are coated in milk chocolate, which melts away to reveal a slight salinity. The finish is quite dry, with accents of beet and balsamic. SANTA MARGHERITA USA

Lamole di Lamole 2015 Gran Selezione Chianti Classico

DOCG (\$40) This tremendously expressive red offers up leather, Kalamata olive, and tarry black fruit on the nose. The luscious, opulent mouthfeel is shadowed with dark fruit, soy sauce, and oregano. Sour cherry surfaces and aligns with an acid structure that immediately beckons you to take another sip.

SANTA MARGHERITA USA

Castello Banfi 2015 Brunello di Montalcino DOCG (\$80)

Lit from within by bright, ripe fruit as well as brandied plum and cinnamon-coated cherry, this well-structured wine is built to last yet superbly approachable. The rich and slightly spicy mouthfeel encompasses echoes of tomato leaf, tarragon, and rosemary, which are outlined by bright and energetic acidity. BANFIVINTNERS

Castello Banfi 2015 Poggio alle Mura Brunello di Montalcino

DOCG (\$100) Named for the walled hilltop of vineyards surrounding Banfi's medieval castle, this formidable red ferments in stainless steel and ages at least 24 months in 90% French oak and 10% Slavonian casks; it also spends 24 months in bottle before release. Notes of tobacco and blackberry preserves wash over the palate, where they're sparked by salted cherries. Roses and cinnamon add a sense of grace. BANFIVINTNERS

Castello Banfi 2013 Poggio all'Oro Brunello di Montalcino

Riserva DOCG (\$200) This magnificent single-vineyard wine comprises Sangiovese clonal selections grown on the hilltop of the Banfi castle that's known as "the golden knoll." The nose exudes notes of black licorice, new leather, dark chocolate, cherry, and espresso, which give way to a chewy and fleshy palate of drying plum-skin tannins. Strokes of violet and cigar leaf converge in a haze of roasted coffee bean, and as the wine continues to open up, blackberry preserves spread generously across the tongue.

BANFIVINTNERS

Le Marche

A hilly region that lies between the Apennines and the Adriatic Sea in central Italy, Le Marche is known for Verdicchio grown in four separate DOCs/DOCGs: Castelli di Jesi, Matelica, and their respective Riserva designations.

The region's primary grapes, however, are Sangiovese and Montepulciano, which are stipulated in varying percentages as part of the blend for four of Le Marche's 15 DOCs, one of its five DOCGs, and its only IGT. (Sangiovese is included in two other DOC blends and Montepulciano in three.) Varieties largely unique to Le Marche, meanwhile, include Biancame, Lacrima, Montonico Bianco, and Passerina. Like Verdicchio, Maceratino is almost exclusive to this region—as is Pecorino, though it also grows in neighboring Abruzzo. Vernaccia Nera, used to make a sparkling red, is genetically identical to Grenache but evolved here in isolation for centuries.

Velenosi 2016 Roggio del Filare Rosso Piceno DOC Superiore (\$60) This expression comprises the two grapes permitted in the DOC, Montepulciano and Sangiovese. Tobacco and plum begin the journey on both the nose and the palate, both of which are deep, rich, and generous. Dotted with black pepper, espresso washes over the lush fruit. The chewy texture complements vivacious acidity and a dry, chalky finish.

VIAS IMPORTS

The hilly region of Le Marche.

PHOTO: OLGA DEMCHISHINA



WEBINAR SPOTLIGHT:

VELENOSI

Le Marche is one of Italy's lesser-known regions, but Marianna Velenosi is determined to change that. She has a good start thanks to the significant progress made by her parents—particularly her mother, Angela Velenosi.

"When my parents founded the winery in 1984, they were young and had no money," Marianna recounted during the webinar, with Angela sitting beside her. "They were self-made pioneers with no capital, no recognized territory, [and] little know-how, but [they had] a lot of passion, energy, and willingness to learn from both experience and mistakes."

Today, Velenosi remains an ambassador for Le Marche as one of the region's leading family-owned producers, with 360 acres under vine. Italy is still its biggest market, but 70% of its annual production of 2.5 million bottles is exported to 52 countries.

"Our region is a miniature of Italy," Marianna said. "We have a long coastline, beautiful beaches, the country's most important fishing harbor, and charming towns on the seaside and in the mountains, with a wealth of nature preserves and national parks."

Marianna noted that while her family is proud of their wines' high ratings in key industry guides, they continue to set and accomplish new goals, including converting to organic farming and eliminating pesticides in 2017. Where they're situated in the southern part of the region—which is crossed by rivers flowing from the Apennine Mountains to the Adriatic Sea—the soil is a mix of clay, silt, and sand. Cool nightly winds flowing from the Balkans, meanwhile, help mitigate high daytime temperatures during the summer.

"There are several microclimates within the region," Marianna said. "They are ideal for several different varieties, especially our indigenous ones, but the [grapes] have different personalities according to the different areas where they grow."

*Velenosi proprietor
Marianna Velenosi.*



PHOTO COURTESY OF VELENOSI

Campania

Usually typified by its bustling capital city of Naples, Campania was part of the Magna Graecia, the name given to the coastal colonies of ancient Greece; it takes its name from the Roman term “Campania Felix,” or “fertile countryside.”

Today, that countryside is responsible for growing some of Italy’s most noteworthy wines. Renowned for Aglianico, the primary variety used to make full-bodied Taurasi reds, Campania also boasts a trove of aromatic, minerally, and full-bodied white wines made from grapes such as Falanghina, Fiano, and Greco. At the heart of Campanian wine production is Irpinia, a mountainous inland area best known for the city of Avellino, 75 miles east of Naples. An intricate network of hills and valleys centered around the Apennines, Irpinia harbors a multitude of terrain types, resulting in wine styles that can drastically differ from vineyard to vineyard.

Tenuta Cavalier Pepe 2019 Irpinia Rosato (\$25) An ode to the Gulf of Naples, this estate-grown rosé of Aglianico features sublime aromas of dried cherries and roses. A flood of tangerines and raspberries immerses red licorice and a powdered finish of perfumed talc.

ROMANO BRANDS

Naples, the capital of Campania.



MAP: ROBERT BIEDERMANN VIA ADOBE STOCK



WEBINAR SPOTLIGHT:

TENUTA CAVALIER PEPE

Tenuta Cavalier Pepe is named for founder Angelo Pepe; in 1998, the entrepreneur was knighted by Italian president Oscar Luigi Scalfaro for helping to stimulate southern Italy’s economy by providing jobs while improving the quality of winemaking in the region. But the true *cavaliere*—Italian for “knight”—in shining armor has been Pepe’s daughter, Milena.

Milena was born in Brussels, Belgium, where her father became a successful restaurateur. She grew up working in the restaurant, studying languages, and being involved in both church activities and scouting, yet she was always dreaming of the magical vineyards back in her father’s native Italy. During college in Belgium and the Netherlands, she focused on marketing and management before moving to France to study viticulture and enology. After apprenticeships at M. Chapoutier in Hermitage and Domaine de la Janasse in Châteauneuf-du-Pape, she set her sights on her paternal homeland.

Irpinia, a rural district in the Apennines about 50 miles southeast of Naples, has a strong tradition of grape growing and winemaking that includes several generations of Milena’s family. That said, in this conservative area, some people needed to get used to the idea of a woman at the helm—let alone a blonde with a Belgian accent. Milena quickly set out to prove herself by conquering daunting tasks singlehandedly, including winemaking, office management, marketing, and communications. From evolving the house style to overseeing packaging details, Milena established an imprint that remains firm today in the wake of the winery’s growth.

Tenuta Cavalier Pepe’s 150 acres are planted to varieties indigenous to Campania—Aglianico, Fiano, Greco, Falanghina, and Coda di Volpe—and yield wines that fall within three DOCGs: Taurasi, Fiano di Avellino, and Greco di Tufo. The property has a guest house as well as a restaurant, La Collina, which looks out over the countryside. *sj*



CAMPAIGN FINANCED ACCORDING TO (EU) REGULATION NO. 1308/2013.

Milena Pepe of Tenuta Cavalier Pepe.



PHOTO COURTESY OF TENUTA CAVALIER PEPE

PHOTO: PEFISSEFVIA ADOBE STOCK

Tuscany:

A DEEP DIVE INTO CHIANTI AT LAMOLE DI LAMOLE

by Lars Leicht

*The Lamole di Lamole
estate lies in the
northern limits of the
Chianti Classico region.*





Pictured from left to right: Patrizia Piazzini, Hospitality Coordinator at Lamole di Lamole; Alessandro Marzotto, Hospitality and Wine Shop Manager at Lamole di Lamole; Andrea Daldin, winemaker at Lamole di Lamole; and Lars Leicht, VP of Education at The SOMM Journal. Standing behind Leicht are Jacob Gragg, U.S. Brand Ambassador at Ca' del Bosco, and Jon McDaniel, founder/CEO at Second City Soil.

“Chianti” is a powerful word in that it simultaneously conjures not only images of a wine and a place but also an aura of simplicity. The region is at once straightforward and incredibly complex.

The estate of Lamole di Lamole lies at the heart of this pleasant contradiction. Arguably Italy’s most well-known and important wine region, Chianti is one of the world’s most visited viticultural zones; it has enchanted travelers for centuries yet remains unspoiled, save the occasional T-shirt and trinket shop.

Surrounded by dense woods, the hilltop hamlet of Lamole lies at the northern limits of Chianti’s Classico area, where its most historic and prestigious wines are made. And while it’s located in the municipality of Greve—just a few kilometers outside of the highly touristed city of Florence—Lamole could be considered the poster child for rural Tuscany.

Winemaking here is a dream job—that is, if you dream like Lamole di Lamole winemaker Andrea Daldin, who relishes the challenge of treating wine from distinct vineyard sites like the pieces of a puzzle. “Our greatest challenge is in the variability of the territory,” Daldin recently told *The SOMM Journal*. “We must interpret the territory and its typicity, highlighting its differences. A wine must be the expression of a place.” He aims to produce quality expressions in a way that sustains Chianti and Lamole’s winemaking culture, but the estate also helps to literally sustain the area’s wildlife, which, by Daldin’s calculation, consumes roughly 10–20% of what the vineyards produce.

Another goal of Daldin’s is to preserve Lamole di Lamole’s inherent elegance and structure, which he attributes in part to the altitude of its vineyards, through what he has come to call the “Lamole

method.” For example, during fermentation, the estate’s red grapes (primarily Sangiovese) are first vinified *in bianco*—off the skins—as one would for a fresh white wine. When the alcohol content of the free-run must reaches about 6%, he puts it back in contact with the skins to achieve greater extraction. He deems this necessary because the skin of Sangiovese is notoriously stingy about yielding color in general, let alone when it’s grown between 1,500–2,150 feet above sea level—an altitude that’s conventionally considered to be the variety’s upper limit.

To prove his point, Daldin took me on an off-road tour of four of Lamole di Lamole’s five principal vineyards and expanded on what the Lamole method entails. At the 27-acre Vigneto Campolungo site, Daldin does not green harvest but instead returns to the vineyard at three separate intervals in the fall, harvesting dif-

ferent bunches at their ideal point of ripeness; he uses about a third of its production for Gran Selezione, a single-vineyard classification of the Chianti denomination that requires a longer aging process in the cellar than does the Riserva designation. The soil is a mix of stony Macigno with limestone (Albarese) and shale (Galestro), its tell-tale reddish-brown color revealing traces of natural iron and magnesium.

The vines, meanwhile, are between 11–38 years old and are planted on centuries-old stone-walled terraces that the Lamole team painstakingly restored and actively maintains. “These walls are an integral part of our microclimate,” Daldin noted. “They limit erosion on the hillside, aid in drainage, reflect sunlight to help photosynthesis by day, and release warmth at night to moderate the cool, high-altitude temperatures.”

In Lamole’s highest vineyard, Le Masse, Daldin showed me older Sangiovese vines

explained. “This blade of land is a small natural terrace on a very steep slope. The vines sink their roots into the underlying bedrock as if they’re holding on for their life. The altitude here is a fundamental character of our wine.”

Old Sangiovese vines that date back to 1945 as well as newer plantings in the Il Prato and Grospoli vineyards—which range between 1,500–2,000 feet above sea level—are head trained so that they can draw warmth from the rocky soils. Daldin prefers to use a mix of the older Sangiovese Grosso clones available here and newer plantings of clones with smaller berries. The higher ratio of skin to pulp on the fruit of the newer vines, he explained, gives a greater concentration of tannins, polyphenols, and anthocyanins.

“One is not better than the other;” Daldin said regarding old versus new. “They are simply different. But you can get

if a problem is identified, it’s spot-treated immediately. This “precision agriculture” approach means that they enter the vineyards more often, so they use low-impact tractors to avoid compacting the soil.

“Man serves the plant, not the other way around,” Daldin summarized. “What we see on the surface is the expression of what is happening in the soil. The soil is the brain of the vine; it is what makes the decisions. The soil is fundamental for winemaking, so we have to treat it well!”

The winemaker also likes to compare a vineyard to an automobile: The sun is the fuel, the leaves are the gas tank, the vine’s trunk is the chassis, and the root and soil are the motor and electrical system. Then, he added, “You need a good driver”—and having worked at Lamole di Lamole since 1993, he’s more than equipped to fill that role.

Daldin himself is a transplant to Tuscany,



Lamole di Lamole’s Vigneto Campolungo and Le Masse vineyards.

planted *girapoggio*, meaning that the rows run along the horizontal contour of the hill as opposed to *ritichino*, in which they run vertically up and down the hill. While the latter is less costly to plant and manage, this approach was taken to best expose the canopy and fruit to the site’s southern exposure—an important factor when planting at over 2,000 feet above sea level. Average summer temperatures at Le Masse can be nearly 10 degrees Fahrenheit cooler than in the valley, and harvest at this higher elevation could take place as much as a month later:

“This is heroic viticulture,” Daldin

great balance between freshness from the younger vines and structure that can only come from an old vine.”

Lamole di Lamole has farmed sustainably and organically for more than a decade, making it among the first Chianti producers to do so. Though copper and sulfur are considered natural products, the vineyard team has reduced their application and works with materials such as essential oils of orange, propolis, and aloe vera to strengthen the plants’ resistance to disease. Instead of employing a regimen of periodic blanket treatments, they deploy a drone to monitor the health of the vines;

having moved there with his family as a young teenager. He was born in Trentino–Alto Adige as the middle child of five siblings and originally set out to become a priest. Though his path changed, he does see a spiritual aspect to his current vocation—especially when he’s standing in these picturesque mountain vineyards. “They say that Lamole is the waiting room for paradise,” he joked. “I did not become a priest, but here I feel close to heaven.” ❧



CAMPAGNA FINANZIATA AI SENSI DEL REG. UE N. 1308/2013
CAMPAIGN FINANCED ACCORDING TO EU REG. NO. 1308/2013

Complex Terroir and SAVORY CHARACTER

by Stuart Roy

**THE VALPOLICELLA
EDUCATION
PROGRAM PROVES
HOW MUCH THERE
IS TO LEARN ABOUT
THIS HISTORIC WINE**

One of the many things I love about the wine industry is interacting with people on all sides of the business, from winemakers and farmers to somms and servers. I also love crisp, clean wine with low alcohol and balanced acidity, so when an opportunity came up to participate in the Valpolicella Education Program (VEP) earlier this year in Italy, I jumped at the chance.

When I asked my bosses for time out of market in Las Vegas, where I serve as Director of High Image Accounts for Southern Glazer's Wine & Spirits of Nevada, they were skeptical. But VEP isn't just another boondoggle: Organized by the Consorzio Tutela Vini Valpolicella under the patronage of the University of Verona, it's a highly specialized certification course attended by business leaders from around the world. When I got my first "study packet" weeks before the trip, I knew it wasn't going to be a walk in the park!

Our home base was charming and romantic Verona, which is crowned by Valpolicella's production area. As we walked through a first-century Roman gate toward the Arena—a stone amphitheater in the city center that predates Rome's Colosseum by 30 years—it became clear that even Verona's sidewalks show terroir: These polished slabs of locally quarried pink marble reflect the iron in the surrounding hills, and they're pocked every few yards with ancient nautilus fossils (which is remarkable given that the nearest sea is now almost 100 miles away). As you venture further into town, the marble gives way to rounded stones from the nearby Adige River.

On the first night, we dined at an unassuming old trattoria, enjoying course after course of Veronese specialties: traditional pastas, risotto made with the local wine, and stewed meats. We numbered two dozen, but at least twice as many bottles were opened that served as beautiful examples of Valpolicella: DOC, Classico, Valpantena, Ripasso, Amarone, Recioto, and Grappa di Amarone. These wines were contributed by members of the consorzio, but the restaurant owner described each one as proudly as he did the dishes from his kitchen.

It took willpower not to overindulge, but an intensive week awaited. We spent the following three days at the consorzio's countryside villa, which has been converted into an education center; there, we listened as professors, journalists, winemakers, and growers covered everything from basic label and trademark regulations to strict rules governing both winemaking and winegrowing.



SOMM Journal VP of Education Lars Leicht and Stuart Roy, Director of High Image Accounts for Southern Glazer's Wine & Spirits of Nevada, taste through a lineup of Valpolicella wines.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF CONSORZIO TUTELA VINI VALPOLICELLA



The Valpolicella Consorzio Tutela Vini countryside villa was converted into an education center where professors, journalists, and winemakers covered all things Valpolicella.



Olga Bussinello (third from left), Director of the Consorzio Tutela Vini Valpolicella, is pictured with newly minted Valpolicella Wine Specialists who passed the Valpolicella Educational Program in January 2020: Stuart Roy, Director of High Image Accounts for Southern Glazer's Wine & Spirits of Nevada; Rebecca Wang; Rupal Shankar; Sarah Marsh; Phyllis Chan; and Franco Zhang.

We studied Italy's status in the global wine market as the world's leading producer, second-largest exporter, and third-largest consumer. Valpolicella, for its part, is one of Italy's top wines in terms of sales volume, value, and popularity, and it continues to make gains in these respects around the world. Classmates from Canada, India, England, Hong Kong, and China compared notes on their own markets.

The course also applied a scientific lens to the grapes and terroir of Valpolicella, the latter of which is defined by the path carved by ancient glaciers as well as Lake Garda to the west and the Lessini Mountains to the north. The region's 13 valleys cover 74,000 acres or 116 square miles—just a bit less than the total surface area of Las Vegas, but unlike the uniform desertscape of Sin City, Valpolicella's terrain

varies widely in elevation and exposure. Soil types range from morainic, alluvial, and calcareous to volcanic, limestone, and gravel as well as sand, clay, and impenetrable marble. Air and soil temperatures, humidity, wind, and precipitation all shift dramatically from east to west and differ within each valley. In short, said our tasting guide, Filippo Bartolotta, "Valpolicella is massively complicated."

Indigenous grape varieties Corvina, Corvinone, and Rondinella are well adapted to these conditions and lend themselves to the appassimento process, which not only serves to dry the grapes but transforms their physiology, in part by concentrating vital elements such as resveratrol and stilbenes.

Corvina—named for the word for "crow" thanks to its dark skin—is the

I THOUGHT I KNEW VALPOLICELLA BEFORE, BUT I QUICKLY LEARNED THERE IS ALWAYS MORE TO DISCOVER. I WAS PARTICULARLY CHARMED BY HIGH-ALTITUDE EXPRESSIONS WITH NO OAK INFLUENCE BUT INSTEAD BRIGHT FRUIT, ZESTY ACIDITY, LOW ALCOHOL, AND EMINENT DRINKABILITY.

backbone of Valpolicella blends. Nick-named “the Queen” by some winemakers, it contributes notes of crisp cherry and plum as well as, in some cases, hints of citrus, mint, and balsamic. Corvinone, meaning “big crow,” is larger with thicker skin, which imparts tannins and deeper color; typical descriptors include ripe blackberry, tobacco, and sweet spices. Together, Corvina and Corvinone must make up 45–95% of a blend. Finally, Rondinella, meaning “swallow,” can comprise 5–30%; its contributions of color, savory and floral flavors, salinity, and sapidity are sometimes overlooked. These three grapes are often joined by other ancient indigenous varieties like the small-berried Oseleta or the color-intensive Croatina.

Like many, I once considered Amarone to make up its own category, but I now see it as a type of Valpolicella. Here’s an oversimplified explanation: To craft Amarone, Valpolicella grapes are dried for about 90 days to concentrate their sugars before crush, a tradition begun in ancient times to raise alcohol content and stabilize the wine for travel. Ripasso, meaning


“repass,” is yet another Valpolicella wine, wherein young wine is added to a cask of the spent pressings (skins and lees) of Amarone. The sweet Recioto, meanwhile, is essentially an Amarone with its sugars not fully fermented out; it was produced as the original Amarone for millennia until 20th-century preferences yielded the dry version. In fact, “Amarone” literally means “big bitter one,” with “bitter” being used here to mean “dry.”

In various sessions throughout VEP, we sampled hundreds of Valpolicella, Ripasso, Amarone, and Recioto wines. After we completed the academic sessions, we were literally put to the test during a rigorous three-hour final exam that included multiple choice and essay questions, some of which involved blind tasting. After “graduation,” we tasted dozens more wines in multiple sessions and dinners, during which we conversed freely with winemakers and owners alike.

The week concluded with Anteprema Amarone, the annual debut of the latest vintage—which this year was 2016, marked by a cool and wet spring, a

reasonably hot summer without extremes, and a pleasant autumn, allowing healthy fruit to ripen gradually. We met with producers and tasted about 60 new releases, which could be broadly described as elegant, balanced, complex, and well structured, with flavors of dark fruit and sweet spice. Moderate alcohol and acidity made them both rich and refreshing.

I thought I knew Valpolicella before, but I quickly learned there is always more to discover: I was particularly charmed by high-altitude expressions with no oak influence but instead bright fruit, zesty acidity, low alcohol, and eminent drinkability. Overall, producer style stood out more than broader territorial differences, and wines made with traditional techniques really shined.

My biggest takeaway? Valpolicella stands out for its complex terroir and savory character. As wine writer and VEP guest speaker J.C. Viens told me, “Valpolicella is an intellectual wine like Burgundy: It is all about complexity and balance.” 



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Purity

WITHIN REACH

RUFFINO MAKES ORGANIC PROSECCO ACCESSIBLE FOR AMERICANS

by **Jessie Birschbach**

IT'S NO SECRET that the Prosecco DOC's zone of production is vast: It encompasses roughly 23,000 hectares of vines, which spread across various territories within each of the northeastern provinces of Friuli–Venezia Giulia and Veneto.

The Prosecco grape's historic name is Glera, a white variety native to northern Italy that can be traced back to the days of the Roman Empire. The DOC dictates that Prosecco must comprise at least 85% Glera; the remainder can include other white varieties such as Verdiso, Chardonnay, Pinot Bianco, Pinot Grigio, Bianchetta Trevigiana, Perera, and Glera Lunga. Interestingly, one black grape—Pinot Nero—is permitted when it's vinified as a white wine. In addition to its eponymous DOC classification, Prosecco can be made in a variety of styles, including spumante and frizzante (sparkling and semi-sparkling) and, as of this year, Prosecco Rosé.

Ruffino winemaker Gabriele Tacconi.





The La Solatia Estate Organic Vineyard at the Poderi Ducali winery in the Prosecco DOC.

Within the massive region, Ruffino farms 126 hectares of organic estate vineyards at its Poderi Ducali winery in the Veneto. Although the company has been growing Prosecco via conventional farming methods since 2010, Vice President of Global Marketing Julie Rossman says that her colleagues have “seen rising health awareness fueling demand for [organic] products coupled with a trend of consumers trading up [in quality].” In response, they introduced Ruffino Prosecco Made with Organic Grapes earlier this year; now available nationwide, it’s one of the first products of its kind to hit the U.S. market. “As the number-two Prosecco brand

in the U.S., Ruffino is proud to provide consumers with a high-quality organic offering,” Rossman says.

According to winemaker Gabriele Tacconi, “Ruffino has invested heavily in sustainable practices over the years, and sustainability remains a key focus for the winery.” In that vein, it’s implemented the Ruffino Cares project, which Tacconi says aims to promote “corporate responsibility across three pillars: environmental sustainability, responsible drinking, and giving back” to organizations like Dynamo Camp—which hosts recreational activities for children affected by illnesses and disabilities—through employee volunteer

programs and other initiatives. Currently, Ruffino acquires roughly 35% of its energy from renewable sources while recycling more than 85% of its waste.

In an effort to improve farming practices within the Prosecco DOC, the producer also collaborates with institutions such as the University of Florence and the University of Milan as well as various environmental and agricultural programs. For example, it’s partnering with Vivai Cooperativi Rauscedo—the largest vinicultural nursery in the world—to research new disease-resistant rootstocks and hybrid vine varieties. *sj*



Ruffino Prosecco Made with Organic Grapes Encased in an effervescent yet velvety glove, fresh and vibrant flavors of white peach, green apple, and lime pith mingle under a fragrant top note of orange blossom water.

RUFFINO VENTURES INTO RTD



Another new sparkling Ruffino beverage will launch this fall: Ruffino Wine Spritz. With an ABV of 6%, both flavors—Arancia Rossa and Limonata—will be available in 12-oz. cans and bottles.

Ruffino makes the number-one Italian sparkling rosé and number-two Prosecco in the U.S., but the spritzes mark the producer’s first foray into the immensely popular RTD category. “We believe consumers will seek out the Ruffino Wine Spritz because of the brand’s strong expertise in the Italian sparkling category; [our] dedication to high-quality ingredients; and the fun, vibrant, portable packaging,” Rossman says.



Wine Is a Dialogue

CHERON COWAN, GENERAL MANAGER OF NEW YORK'S ESCA, ON WHAT MAKES TEACHING THE MOST FULFILLING PART OF HER JOB

MY ROUTE TO beverage management has been rather . . . unconventional. I somehow skipped the sommelier position and abruptly graduated from server to management and beverage management, but that's not to say that my tenure as a server didn't prepare me.

I spent 15 years working as a waiter in three New York City restaurants: Blue Water Grill, Gramercy Tavern, and Blue Hill. All of these venues not only offered ongoing wine instruction but were led by formidable female wine directors. Seeing women in these positions made me realize, however unconsciously, that the prospect of moving in the direction of beverage management was feasible.

Upon focusing my efforts solely on hospitality and leaving my artistic endeavors behind, I found myself almost stumbling into my first position as an assistant beverage manager. In all honesty, my passion for wine grew incrementally, whereas my appreciation for hospitality was much more of a driving force at the onset.

Since then, via diligence and hard work, I have advanced to wine director and general manager positions and have curated *Wine Spectator* award-winning wine lists. Through trial and error, too, I have learned the importance of developing positive relationships with reps. But when I step outside of the restaurant and attend wine events, I often find myself overcompensating just to be seen and heard. I always wear a suit and often start out by introducing myself as a wine director or general manager. If I have my green Advanced Sommelier pin, I will either wear it or place it where it can be easily seen. I almost feel as if there is an invisible rite of passage



PHOTO COURTESY OF CHERON COWAN

that I have never been privy to, and by the end of the event, I find myself standing off to the side and watching as these somewhat innocuous but homogenous groups of people form. I often self-evaluate as I leave these events, asking, "Should I have done or said something differently?"

What brings me the most joy, though, is when I am on the floor tending to guests and when I have the opportunity to facilitate a tasting with the staff. While teaching, I emphasize that wine is a dialogue, but before I do so, it's important to me to assess the needs of individual staff members.

If someone is just starting on their journey of learning about wine, I may emphasize the importance of trusting one's senses. When teaching a more knowledgeable staff member, I may focus on clarity of vocabulary when interacting with guests. And when engaging the guests themselves, my utmost priority is to not only meet but exceed their expectations.

Ultimately, my greatest goal is to create an environment of accessibility, fun, and acceptance. After all, wouldn't it be boring if all we ever drank was white Burgundy, no matter how delicious it is? **SJ**

A Zest FOR LIFE

PROVENCE ROSÉ RISES TO MEET THE CHALLENGES OF 2020

by Christy Canterbury, MW

As we venture further into summer—aka rosé season—it's clear that the *joie de vivre* the category brings to our lives feels more necessary than ever. The COVID-19 pandemic has changed many aspects of human behavior, including how people in the United States are buying and consuming wine. Shutdowns across the country have altered what we drink and how we drink it—but have they affected the stateside appetite for rosé? Given that the category made up 9% of the global wine market in 2018, according to consumer research agency Wine Intelligence, it seems all but guaranteed that its popularity isn't fading away anytime soon.



PHOTO: ZOÉ LEMONNIER



This is especially true when it comes to Provence rosé, whose sales in the U.S. rose 32% between 2017 and 2018. Young wine drinkers primarily drove this impressive growth, and considering that many of them are enduring this confinement period alone or sequestered with family, they might be especially eager to seek consistency through their wine-purchasing habits during this time of instability. As a result, they're contributing to a rise in at-home drinking that, combined with factors like a steady demand among younger demographics for premium wines and the

enduring allure of Provence as a region, is helping to ensure that the thirst for Provence rosé remains strong in 2020.

Reopening Offers Opportunities for Premiumization

As consumers begin to reemerge from the shutdown in regions that have halted the spread of COVID-19, they'll likely be more enthusiastic than ever to safely share a glass of wine with friends, family members, and colleagues. Such experiences have been out of reach for months, and rosé's inherent association with happy, relaxing,

and celebratory moments will make their return even more enjoyable.

As many establishments plan to reopen with new or expanded areas for outdoor seating, imbibers will also be looking for quaffable rosé to keep the heat at bay—and some of them might be more willing to splurge given the novelty of on-premise imbibing post-lockdown. Perfectly poised to offer that premium experience is Provence rosé: Regularly available in large-format bottles, it's prime for those looking to toast together—even if groups are limited in number—and add a sense of conviviality to the occasion.

According to Wine Intelligence, the United States has the largest share (26%) of premium wine drinkers—which the agency defines as those who drink wine at least once per week, typically spending over \$15 off-premise. It's worth noting that the lasting effects of the economic downturn prompted by the pandemic will potentially impact the price of Provence rosé, as will the 25% tariffs placed on still French wines in October 2019 and, possibly, the additional tariffs being considered by the United States Trade Representative as of press time. However, the Conseil Interprofessionnel des Vins de Provence (CIVP) recently reported that export prices of Provence rosé dropped approximately 12% in the first quarter of 2020, a trend that could help compensate for the tariffs while driving further state-side growth.

Share of Premium Wine Drinkers (PWD)
(Amongst All Regular Wine Drinkers)

	Share of PWD	Number of PWD (in millions)
US	26%	21.8
China	25%	13.3
UK	23%	6.6
Germany	21%	5.7
Spain	28%	5.4
Japan	17%	5.0
Australia	31%	3.1
Canada	18%	3.0
Russia	37%	2.8
Brazil	7%	2.7
Portugal	17%	0.8

Source: Wine Intelligence Global Trends-in-Wine-2020, March-2020, Page 42

Quality of Rosé by Region
(Base: purchased rosé in past 3 months)

Country	Rating Out of 7*
Provence (France)	6.1
Other French Regions	5.8
Italy	5.6
Spain	5.5
California	5.5
Other US States (NY, WA, OR)	5.3

*Rated on a 7-point scale with 7 = "very highest quality" and 1 = "very lowest quality"

Source: Perception US des vins rosés et vins de Provence rosés - CIVP, Page 14 // translated into English

That said, while sheltering in place, Americans have proven that they're willing to spend on wine even as they avoid other expenses, including dining out, booking vacations, and buying cars and large household items. Thus, the established premium price point of Provence rosé may be able to hold, especially in leading markets. Additionally, for consumers who are less affected by the downturn and eager to splurge, this could be a fortuitous moment to introduce them to high-end and small-production rosés, including barrel- and cellar-aged expressions.

The Steadfast Appeal of Provence Rosé

A Wine Opinions survey published in March found that the biggest competitors of Provence rosé largely hail from other French regions. However, U.S. consumers familiar with a wide variety of rosé-producing areas consistently highlighted three characteristics that distinguish Provence expressions from other French rosés: their liveliness, their salinity, and their pale color.

Tellingly, the survey also found that 80% of respondents who regularly purchased French wines were already buying Provence rosé, which hints at the untapped potential that lies in attracting consumers who mostly drink Californian wines. Wine Intelligence studies have found that all consumer age brackets are purchasing more U.S. wines than they were pre-pandemic, but that doesn't mean that the perception of Provence as a world leader in quality rosé production is on the decline: Wine Opinions reported that consumers who purchased rosé in the three months preceding the survey's

release gave Provence the highest average quality rating of 6.1 on a scale of 7. Moreover, 48% of millennial respondents gave the region a rating of 7.

Unquestionably, the most successful producers of Provence rosé have well-established branding strategies. During times of economic insecurity, consumers frequently fall back on labels they're familiar with to reduce perceived risk, and while this works to the advantage of the top brands, it poses challenges for small-production

wines. Fortunately, sommeliers and retail professionals are known for employing creative techniques to sell handpicked boutique rosés, largely by venturing beyond the most common question posed by consumers: "How does it taste?"

By sharing anecdotes involving the archeological finds on certain estates, agricultural and sustainability-related practices, or the historical relevance of centuries-old producers, they can engage their customers in the fascinating narratives behind



PHOTO: JULIE LIMONT



lesser-known small-production brands. They may also mention whether or not a particular Provence rosé is packaged in a unique bottle, as proprietary bottles like those from Château Sainte Roseline, Château Minuty, and Château Miraval often have interesting stories behind them. For those seeking more beauty in their lives during trying times, aesthetics can make more of a difference than usual!

Meanwhile, wine buyers should note that Wines of Provence rosé exports from January through April 2020 dropped 14% compared to the same period in 2019, according to the CIVP. In short, there is no time like the present to secure your allotments of Provence rosé, especially for the summer season.

A Shift in Wine Culture

Wine Intelligence has also found that while consumers are drinking more wine, they

don't feel more educated as a result. But regardless of their proficiency, consumers certainly have an opportunity to engage themselves in wine-related education on their smartphones and other devices while largely confined to their homes. This is a critical time—especially as prime rosé season unfolds in the Northern Hemisphere—for sommeliers and retail staff to educate interested consumers on the intricacies of Provence rosé, including the distinguishing qualities of Côtes de Provence's various terroir denominations.

During the shutdown, individual producers in Provence as well as the CIVP have been engaging directly with consumers through outlets like Facebook Live and Instagram Live. Additionally, Vins de Provence plans to host weekly digital rendezvous with chefs, sommeliers, and industry influencers on Instagram to help consumers understand the quality that Provence rosé offers.

The rise in at-home consumption is also fortuitous for the category in that, according to Wine Intelligence, consumers who drink two or more days a week tend to drink more rosé than those who drink once a week or less; additionally, 25% of rosé drinkers consider themselves “high-involvement” consumers, whereas only 19% of non-rosé drinkers do. They also report having more confidence and knowledge about wine, reinforcing that rosé drinkers are prime consumers with whom to interact.

Speaking of developing relationships with consumers, Wine Intelligence reports that regular wine drinkers in the U.S. name food-pairing potential as a key factor of choosing which rosé to buy. With this in mind, wine professionals can engage in pairing-related discussions, which can naturally segue into an exploration of grape-growing and wine-production principles. U.S. consumers continue to exhibit a willingness to pay more for items that fit their lifestyle, especially environmentally friendly products; such wines have long been a hallmark of Provence, as the favorable climate enables producers to farm with fewer herbicides and pesticides when possible. While eco-friendlier wines produced via organic and Biodynamic farming tend to cost more, well-heeled and high-engagement consumers seem undeterred by their price tags.

And while the mantra among U.S. consumers has been to drink Provence rosé (and, frankly, any other rosé) young, a discussion around food and wine pairing can also explore the heightened level of character present in high-quality rosé that's been left to rest in bottle for an extended time period. Some producers are making rosé that's specifically meant to be enjoyed several years down the road, and the Rosé Research Center has been training winemakers in crafting styles that last well beyond the summer after harvest. This approach will only enhance Provence's already exceptional quality, which in turn should entice consumers to extend rosé season beyond the summer months. **WJ**

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