

# THE SOMMELIER JOURNAL



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first  press

*Brandy*

# BRANCHES OUT



*Germain-Robin is made in small batches in manually operated Prulho pot stills.*



*Fat Thumb, Speculator, and The Claim premium brandies from California-based Argonaut, a new label from E. & J. Gallo.*



*California Brandy House, the first standalone tasting room dedicated to luxury California brandies, opened last fall in downtown Napa, CA, at 1300 First Street, Suite 309.*

## WITH ITS TWO CALIFORNIA BRANDS, E. & J. GALLO LAUNCHES A NEW AGE FOR THE LONG-BELOVED CATEGORY

BY RICHARD  
CARLETON  
HACKER

Even during these ever-changing and challenging times, California brandies have retained a relatively steadfast position in the spirits marketplace. But the category is poised to undergo a dramatic revitalization and expansion thanks to the efforts of one of California's winery giants—E. & J. Gallo.

Founded in Modesto by brothers Ernest and Julio Gallo in 1933—the same year Prohibition was repealed—E. & J. Gallo remains a family-owned company to this day, producing award-winning wines and spirits that encompass more than 100 different brands sold in over 100 countries.

E. & J. Gallo made the savvy move to enter the domestic brandy market with its eponymous brand way back in 1975. But now, with the growth of the once-again fashionable category, it's extending its reach dramatically—from its 2017 acquisition of Germain-Robin, California's pioneering luxury brandy, to the recent launch of in-house premium entry Argonaut. (It has also ventured into the apéritif sector with Lo-Fi vermouth and amaro.)

These distinctive product extensions mark an exciting new chapter in E. & J. Gallo's lengthy success story. To see how they appeal to modern consumers, we spoke with Britt West, vice president and general manager, spirits, for E. & J. Gallo; David Warter, lead blender and distiller for Germain-Robin; and Rita Hansen, lead distiller for Argonaut.

**Q** California is famous for its wines, but how does California brandy fit into the overall picture as far as the consumer sees it?

**Britt West:** There's no argument that there was a lot to prove when we started reinvesting in premium California brandy. As spirit drinkers branch out and look for new things to enjoy, either in cocktails or for sipping, we're seeing a growing interest in brandy. We are excited to offer wine drinkers something new to explore and to learn about [when it comes to] the multiple flavor profiles found in brandies distilled from flavorful California grapes.

**Q What were the reasons behind E. & J. Gallo's expansion into brandy, and how has the category evolved into today's upscale Germain-Robin and Argonaut brands?**

**BW:** We have seized an opportunity for innovation. Unlike the constraints you have with Cognac, American distillers have more freedom in brandy making, particularly in choosing the grape varieties to create original and distinctive styles and taste profiles. We are one of the few countries that can use white and red grapes, which provide an enormous and unique range of flavors that are found nowhere else in the world.

**David Warter:** California is home to world-class vineyards and winemaking, so what better place to make brandy than in California? Traditionally, brandy is made from grape varieties that have relatively low flavor, like Ugni Blanc. Argonaut and Germain-Robin are distilled from more flavorful California grape varieties such as Pinot Noir, Grenache, Barbera, French Colombard, Riesling, Viognier, and Sémillon sourced from top-notch California vineyards.

Our distillation methods are also unique. Germain-Robin is made in extremely small batches using manually operated Prulho pot stills. Hubert Germain-Robin, being a fifth-generation distiller, personally taught our distillation team his secrets, which result in an incredibly rich distillate. Argonaut... is a blend of alembic and column distillations[which] allows our team to blend the fruit-forward column style with the rich alembic mouthfeel to create expressions unlike any other.

For Germain-Robin, we utilize medium-plus-toasted wide-grain French oak barrels, using both new and older barrels to develop mouthfeel and dried fruit and nutty characters. For Argonaut, we age in ex-bourbon and wine barrels that allow us to introduce a wide range of oak notes. Once we decide on a final blend, the brandy is put back into older barrels to marry for around 12 more months before bottling.

**Q Where did the colorful Argonaut brandy names come from?**

**Rita Hansen:** [People taking part in the] California gold rush[who were nicknamed "the Argonauts;"] searched for adventure and opportunity. We tapped into that spirit to explore what California brandy can be.

During the gold rush, a miner would open his purse, offering barkeeps and merchants to take a pinch of gold dust as payment. Those with fat thumbs would receive a more generous reimbursement. Similarly, when I blend Argonaut Fat Thumb, I have the luxury of drawing from our alembic brandy stocks. This blend has a higher percentage—or "fatter pinch" [in reference to the story behind the name]—of alembic brandy, resulting in [an expression] that showcases the rich character of those [stocks]. Saloon Strength is a nod

to California brandy's popularity in the mid-1800s, crafted to ensure that all of the complexity and depth of brandy shows through even in cocktails.

**Q What about Germain-Robin's California Alembic Brandy and Select XO Barrel—why would a mixologist select one over the other?**

**DW:** Germain-Robin brandies are crafted to be sipped [as though] straight from the grape source, [reflecting its journey from] the hand-distillation all the way through





Germain-Robin products on display inside California Brandy House.

[to] the aging process—seven years for GR and 12 years for XO. [Both] can be [enjoyed] in a cocktail, but with the extra oak age on XO, I appreciate that most on its own.

**Q Both Coffey stills and alembic pot stills are used for the new Argonaut brandies. Why?**

**RH:** Argonaut blends many different California grape varieties that are distilled on both continuous and pot stills. Additionally, the final product is made by blending [distillates] of varying ages to craft each unique expression. Each distillation type brings its own character and strength to a blend. Continuous distillation highlights very specific attributes, like pear, cherry, or apricot; the results can be blended with the rich, complex distillate from the alembic still, building a blend that embraces the fruit-forward California brandy style.

**Q What about off-and-on premise marketing—how will consumers and mixologists become aware of these new brandies?**

**BW:** The base ingredient, grapes, gives bartenders wonderful fruit and floral notes plus complex flavors for improvisation. For example, Argonaut Brandy lends itself to bitter cocktails, stirred cocktails, sours, or even tropical cocktails that might traditionally employ rum as their base spirit. Plus, our California Brandy House in Napa is the first standalone consumer-oriented tasting room dedicated solely to luxury California brandies. We've led educational seminars about the history of California brandy and the brandy cocktail at bar and beverage events. In addition, we have assembled a team of brand ambassadors and advocates in California, many of whom are bartenders themselves, that partner with the trade for brandy education and cocktail development. And we also partnered with cocktail historian David Wondrich to develop a "cocktail tree" (see facing page) tracing the role brandy played in cocktails before whiskey was the spirit of choice. In fact, brandy has played a leading role in classic cocktails dating back to the 1800s. . . . As David Warter says, "Just get them to taste it!" *sj*

## Tasting Notes

**Argonaut Saloon Strength, California (\$38)**

A 91-proof blend tailor-made for cocktails, with notes of spiced apple, pekoe tea, and cider that converge on the nose. The liquid warms the palate with a glassy entry that's piqued by white-peppered papaya and apricot preserves. The orange-peel finish incorporates some cinnamon for an Irish whiskey-like flavor. **93** —*Meridith May*



**Argonaut Fat Thumb, California**

**(\$50)** A reinvention of American-style brandy, this rich and delicious 86 proofer is a crowd-pleasing sipper with dreamy aromas of cream soda and maple-kissed peach. There's an echo of a fine Cognac style, with flavors of dark chocolate, dates, charred orange skin, and apple tart. **95** —*M.M.*

**Germain-Robin California Alembic Brandy, California (\$75)**

Aged seven years in French Limousin barrels. Sandalwood and fig grace the nose, while pekoe tea and maple syrup-laden peaches caress the palate. Midway, sumptuous flavors of coffee and chocolate are joined by soothing notes of cherries and dates. Stark white pepper and nutmeg prickle the tongue on the finish. 80 proof. **96** —*M.M.*



**Germain-Robin Select XO Barrel Alembic Brandy, California (\$125)**

Deep aromas of caramel coffee resonate as notes of cigar leaf and walnut with a hint of earthy moss emerge on the palate. Minerality binds the flavors with a dash of black pepper. The long finish expresses black cherry, cedar, and cherry pith. 80 proof. **98** —*M.M.*



**Argonaut Speculator, California**

**(\$38)** Gallo has once again struck gold with Speculator, a cocktail-worthy blend of quality brandies that aged for three to 16 years. The result is a motherlode of thick dandelions, lemongrass, and balsa wood, with a slightly spicy finish and just the faintest whiff of smoke. 86 proof. **94** —*Richard Carleton Hacker*

# Life Goal: Be Like Steven

PHOTO: JENNIFER OLSON



*Frank Tokwin*

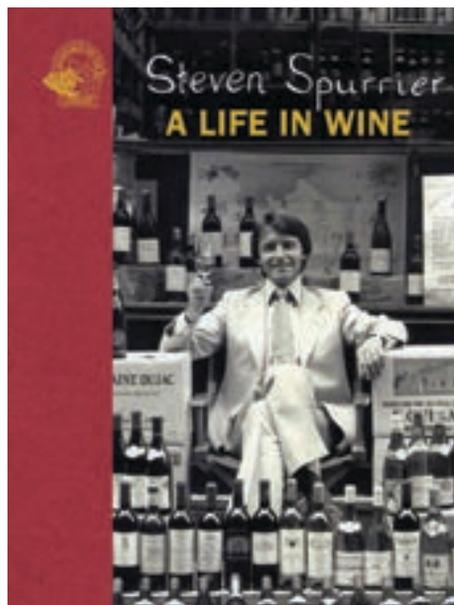
~~~~~  
*Here's to you,  
Mr. Spurrier; as  
the rest of us carry  
onward and, we  
can only hope, up-  
ward through the  
fog of 2021, may  
our inner Steven  
light the way.*

**WITH THIS ISSUE**, we bid a fond farewell to our longtime London correspondent, Steven Spurrier. While you can read his final column on page 64, I highly recommend that you also pick up a copy of his just-rereleased memoir, *Steven Spurrier: A Life in Wine* (Académie du Vin Library, [academieduvinlibrary.com](http://academieduvinlibrary.com)). After one long year of sheltering in place, there may be no more thrilling read for the frustrated bon vivant or stymied globetrotter in you.

To say that his autobiography is the stuff of cinema is no stretch, given that his most famous feat—organizing the legendary Judgment of Paris competition that put California on the wine-world map—was actually turned into a 2008 feature film, *Bottle Shock*, in which he's portrayed by no less a thespian than Alan Rickman. Literary comparisons likewise abound in the multiple tributes from illustrious industry figures that serve as prefaces to the book: Candide, Dorian Gray, and P.G. Wodehouse's Stanley Featherstonehaugh Ukridge, to name a few. But it's possible that no author yet has conceived of a character quite like Spurrier; a walking—and merrily self-acknowledged—contradiction of naivete and hedonism, whimsy and erudition, farsightedness at all the right moments and, well, blind spots at all the wrong ones.

Though a jack of all wine trades and a master of most, Spurrier has been nothing so much as a gambler throughout his career—and while some of his bets paid off splendidly, others brought him to near-ruin. Yet in lean times as in flush, he has lived as well as anyone possibly could. Houseboat-on-the-Seine well. Avid-art-and-antiques-collector well. Champagne-on-the-supersonic-Concorde well. Wine-fridge-in-the-Triumph-convertible well. If you're not increasingly jealous with the turn of every page, you're . . . lying. Yet whether picking up a hitchhiker carrying live chickens in Greece; lunching on pâté de foie gras, cold grouse, and 1945 Pomerol with a friend in prison; or dutifully taking part in, shall we say, extralegal bottling practices as a young trainee in Bordeaux, the natural raconteur has you rooting for him every step of the way. His good cheer, remarkable generosity, surprising humility, and capacity for equanimity simply compel it.

These are, of course, qualities we could all use a little more of in times of trouble. (We could also all use his wine cellar; but that's beside the point.) So here's to you, Mr. Spurrier; as the rest of us carry onward and, we can only hope, upward through the fog of 2021, may our inner Steven light the way. SJ



# A HIDDEN GEM AMONGST THE GIANTS



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*Wintertime in the Burgundian village of Beaune.*



PHOTO COURTESY OF MENTZENDORFF & CO LTD



*Nemanja Pejčic is wine director at Il Palio Restaurant Group in San Diego, CA.*

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# Flavor First

AN INTERVIEW WITH COLUMNIST **KAREN MACNEIL** ON HER NEW STEMWARE

by Meredith May

PHOTO: SUSAN WONG



~~~~~  
“A line of practical,  
flavor-focused,  
affordable,  
and beautifully  
designed German  
crystal wine  
glasses for food  
service is long  
overdue.”  
~~~~~

**THE USUAL AUTHOR** of this column, Karen MacNeil, recently came out with a new line of wine glasses called Flavor First. Why? I decided to ask her myself.

**Q:** **Meridith May: Does the world really need another line of wine glassware?**

**Karen MacNeil:** The world doesn't need another wine glass that costs \$30–\$70 a stem. And it doesn't need a special glass just for Armenian Areni. But a line of practical, flavor-focused, affordable, and beautifully designed German crystal wine glasses for food service is long overdue.

**Q:** **What do you mean by “flavor-focused”?**

To date, stemware has been named after either a wine region (the Bordeaux glass; the Burgundy glass) or a varietal (the Chardonnay glass; the Zinfandel glass) and so on. One day, I found myself wondering why wine glasses couldn't just be based directly on flavor. And so began a couple of years of experimentation.

**Q:** **Experimentation?**

People have gotten glass-weary. There are now so many differently shaped glasses for so many varieties that some people have resorted to single “all-purpose” wine glasses. But one glass isn't really good for all wines, just as 27 different varietal shapes are way too many. I experimented to try to figure out the fewest number of glasses you'd need to cover 95% of the wines you'd ever drink. My answer was three basic glasses: one for crisp and fresh wines, one for creamy and silky wines, and one for bold and powerful wines. [In fact,] that's how the three glasses are named: Fresh & Crisp, Creamy & Silky, and Bold & Powerful. And for super-casual restaurants, we also made a glass we call the Petite Stem, which has no stem—but it does have a foot so you can swirl the wine. And no separate line of white wine glasses!

**Q:** **What's wrong with white wine glasses?**

They're very impractical in food service because they usually require a separate dishwashing rack. Plus smaller white wine glasses make no sense. White wines can be as complex as reds, and they also need oxygen to open them up. The Flavor First glasses are all the same height.

**Q:** **What else makes them distinctive?**

Besides the focus on flavor and their affordability, the Flavor First glasses all have a slightly larger foot so that they are well balanced when you swirl the wine. Most wine glasses are designed by designers who think about the glass when it's empty. I thought about the glass when it's full. **SM**

For more information and pricing, contact Frank Biller at [frank.biller@theoneidagroup.com](mailto:frank.biller@theoneidagroup.com).

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by Randy Caparoso

*Turley Wine Cellars winemaker Tegan Passalacqua (right) oversees a Zinfandel harvest at estate vineyard Steacy Ranch in Lodi's Mokelumne River AVA.*



PHOTO: RANDY CAPAROSO

# Back with a Zingeance

AMERICA'S GRAPE HAS EARNED ITS RETURN TO WINE LISTS

**OF ALL THE MAJOR** wine varieties, Zinfandel is probably the one for which today's sommeliers have the least enthusiasm. Sure, it has historic connotations as "America's grape" (even though, as we now know, it originated in Croatia) because, in the 1800s, Californians found that it was the easiest to grow in the state's Mediterranean climate and produced the most consistent wine; that counts for something. But somewhere between the 1970s and the 1980s, the varietal became a caricature of itself, as big, jammy styles made from ultra-ripe grapes gained popularity among consumers. If winemakers couldn't get their alcohol lower than 17%, no problem: They simply added water, adjusted acidity, and tacked on a ton of oak flavor—preferably American oak that added sweet vanillin, charred, dilly, and/or furniture polish-like qualities.

Their formula for "America's wine" might also contain Petite Sirah. It has been a common practice to blend anywhere from 10% to over 20% of the grape into commercial

Zinfandel to add color, tannin, blacker fruit, and spice notes, but it has as little to do with the pure taste of Zinfandel as oak does. Petite Sirah is an embellishment, nothing more, but somewhere along the line it became an expected component, along with jammy fruit and chunky wood.

Much Zinfandel is still made this way—but the good news is that more and more of it isn't. Just over ten years ago, for instance, Turley Wine Cellars—once the poster child for huge, jammy Zinfandels—began taking more control over its vineyard sources to obtain fruit with better sugar and acid levels. As a result, its vineyard-designate wines became fresher, more floral—pure Zinfandel is more flowery than jammy—and better delineated in terms of site-specific characteristics.

In fact, Zinfandels need no longer be fat, sweetly fruited, or oaky: They're now as terroir-distinctive, balanced, and food-versatile as any American Pinot Noir, and they're more so than most Cabernet Sauvignons. Turley, like Ridge Vineyards, still

employs a little new oak (20–25%) in its cooperage program, but at least its Zinfandels now taste like, well, Zinfandel rather than something pumped up by the vinous equivalents of steroids. Meanwhile, numerous other craft brands are now picking grapes earlier to allow for native yeast fermentation (as Turley and Ridge have always done) and to retain more natural, acid-driven edginess as well as aging strictly in neutral wood. Progress.

Napa and Sonoma Zinfandels still show sturdy tannins, and they can be quite big and ripe—but these qualities are often dictated by their hillside or clay soil origins, not by the machinations of the winemaker. You can now buy single-vineyard bottlings from Lodi or Contra Costa County that are soft yet zesty, red-fruited, and earthy, reflecting the sandy soils they're grown in. Paso Robles Zinfandels tend to be very ripe but mineral, with surprising acidity—characteristics born of their terroir. Crafted in these serious styles, the grape is worth any sommelier's attention. **§**



Jordan

# grateful pours

The most important toast of 2021 is to the restaurants. The resilience, creativity and stamina of our friends in the on-premise world over the last year has been nothing short of remarkable. Cheers to you.

*Jordan*

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# New York Tough, Italian Style

## DEFEAT IS NOT ON THE MENU AT IL GATTOPARDO

### IL GATTOPARDO IN MIDTOWN

Manhattan was a welcome stop on the whirlwind of wine tastings that filled my calendar before the pandemic. Greeted with a kiss on each cheek and a hearty “Ciao, Wanda,” I felt transported to Italy the moment I walked through the restaurant’s doors.

The host venue of events ranging from trade tastings with prominent producers to intimate dinners where bottles of Brunello and Barolo flowed freely, Il Gattopardo was and is an integral part of New York City’s wine community—not unlike a social club for which the only membership requirements are a love of fine Italian food and wine.

And then along came COVID-19, an unwanted guest that has crippled New York’s restaurant industry and prompted almost daily announcements of permanently shuttered businesses. A September 2020 report issued by the Office of the New York State Comptroller states that there were 23,650 bars and restaurants in the city in 2019, but “over the next six months to a year,” as many as 12,000 could go out of business due to the pandemic.

The Il Gattopardo team has no intention of ranking among them. Managing director Gianfranco Sorrentino; his wife, director of operations Paula Bolla-Sorrentino; and chef/partner Vito Gnazzo are no strangers to adversity, having debuted the restaurant just a week after 9/11. The tragedy and its lasting impact on the city taught them to expect the unexpected: “Every ten years or 15 years, something happens, and you have to face it,” says Sorrentino. “But I didn’t expect the *pandemia*.”

Adapting to ever-changing state and local guidelines, Sorrentino set up elegant outdoor seating areas that he described as evoking “the feeling of a piazza in Europe” at both Il Gattopardo and their Upper West Side restaurant, The Leopard

PHOTOS COURTESY OF PAULA BOLLA-SORRENTINO



▲ Gianfranco Sorrentino, Paula Bolla-Sorrentino, and chef Vito Gnazzo with their Gambero Rosso “Top Italian Restaurants” award.

at des Artistes. They also felt confident enough about the industry’s recovery to renovate another of their businesses, Mozzarella & Vino.

Delivery was never a significant part of the business model at any of their restaurants, but as with many business owners, the pandemic forced the trio to reconsider. “I always told my customers, ‘Don’t get delivery; come to the restaurant!’ But business changed, so we paid a lot of attention, time, effort, and money to revise our menu [and] make something more affordable, [easier] to carry away, and [easier] to warm up,” explains Sorrentino. (To ensure that delivery meals are still fresh by the time they arrive at their destination, he says, they avoid using third-party delivery services.) Many customers also order wines to accompany their meals, and Sorrentino is replenishing his inventory of older bottlings with purchases made via auction. He is also a champion of natural, organic, and Biodynamic wines from small, lesser-known Italian wineries.

Beyond focusing on the survival of his own businesses, Sorrentino serves as an advocate for the citywide restau-

New York Governor Andrew Cuomo with ▼ Gianfranco Sorrentino.



rant industry as the president of Gruppo Italiano, a nonprofit that fosters Italian culinary culture through educational series and scholarships. It keeps its membership base of restaurants, producers, importers, and distributors informed through online events, and it partnered with the Association of Italian Chefs in New York (AICNY) to pen an open letter to Governor Andrew Cuomo with recommendations on restoring the industry.

“In the wine business and food business, the relationship is important. I tried a couple of the virtual tastings—and yes, we have to keep going, absolutely—but it’s not the same feeling as when you are with 25 or 30 people and exchanging ideas and comments and feelings. But we’ll get there,” says Sorrentino.

Yes, we will: One day I’ll return to Il Gattopardo to wine and dine with the community that I miss so much. And when I do, hearing “Ciao, Wanda” again will be music to my ears. *sj*

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

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# May We Suggest a Colorado Syrah with Those Ribs?

FOOD HISTORIAN ADRIAN MILLER ON DIVERSIFYING AMERICAN WINE CULTURE

**OF THE MANY** wonderful things for which Colorado is known, a Black American culinary tradition is not among them, for obvious demographic reasons; neither is a robust wine industry, for various geographical reasons. And yet the state is home to one of the nation's foremost scholars on the former, Denver native Adrian Miller—who's now using his considerable clout to raise awareness for the latter while, ideally, helping to make it more inclusive as a new member of the Colorado Wine Industry Development (CWID) Board.

It should be noted that Miller isn't, by his own admission, much of a wine expert; though he has written eloquently on the subject of "red drink," it isn't Cab or Merlot he means but rather a beverage category that runs from West African *bissap* (hibiscus tea) to Tropical Punch Kool-Aid. But no matter; for two reasons. One, he's the ultimate multi-hyphenate. With a law degree from Georgetown, he has worked in the White House under President Clinton and in the office of former Colorado governor Bill Ritter; and today he serves as the executive director of the Colorado Council of Churches; along the way, he became a food historian almost by accident. Winning a James Beard Award for his first book, *Soul Food: The Surprising History of an American Cuisine, One Plate at a Time* in 2014, he went on to publish *The President's Kitchen Cabinet: The Story of the African Americans Who Have Fed Our First Families, From the Washingtons to the Obamas* in 2017, and this spring will mark the release of *Black Smoke: African Americans and the United States of Barbecue*. At the rate Miller acquires know-how, in short, he could probably earn a Master of Wine certification in record time.



PHOTO: BERNARD GRANT

Ultimately, the goal is to "expand the imagination of foodies" and professionals alike with respect to forging a wine culture that's more inclusive from a societal, geographical, and culinary perspective.

But reason two for joining the CWID board of directors is even more important: As he puts it, "I thought it was a good opportunity, because I do have this desire to bring diversity initiatives to the food and beverage industry—and wine certainly needs that. What can I do to help not only bring diverse audiences to Colorado wine but also talk to the industry about outreach?"

Though as of press time he was just getting started, his first program was scheduled for February 17 in honor of Black History Month: an online discussion with Denver sommelier Kendra Anderson (profiled in my August/September 2020 column) and William Davis, the Denver-based director of education for Wilson Daniels, about "Black winemaking,

Black history, and the challenges African Americans have in the industry," in his words. He plans to host similar virtual panels throughout the year, from March for Women's History Month through to next Chinese New Year.

And then there's National Barbecue Month in May, for which Miller's organizing an event to celebrate Black vintners alongside the pitmasters who shaped and continue to shape the great American pastime of low and slow meat cookery. Ultimately, he says, the goal is to "expand the imagination of foodies" and professionals alike with respect to forging a wine culture that's more inclusive from a societal, geographical, and culinary perspective. Bring on the fried catfish platter with a bottle of Colorado Riesling. 

# 100



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# The Wine Glass of the World

## EXPLORING THE NEXT STOP ON THE CENTRAL COAST BEAT: MONTEREY COUNTY

**LAST ISSUE, WE LEARNED** how coastal influence and climatic and soil-based diversity impact the 12 AVAs of Paso Robles. We're continuing on that theme as we head north into the vineyards of Monterey County—an area of great significance in California history. Monterey was the capital of Alta California under the rule of both Spain and Mexico for much of the 19th century, and before California earned U.S. statehood, it was the only port where taxable goods were allowed to land.

Fast-forward 175 years: Monterey County is home to the Salinas Valley, which is nicknamed “the Salad Bowl of the World,” but the region could perhaps just as easily be likened to a wine glass. Between the historic Cannery Row, a world-class aquarium, the greatest golf courses on the West Coast, and an amazingly diverse array of wines from value-driven to ultra-premium, Monterey is one of my favorite areas in which to travel, eat, discover, and relax.

Though it's difficult to define all eight AVAs (not including the overarching Monterey AVA) in just a few hundred words, consider this primer a motivator for digging deeper into the region through your own wine exploration.

Starting in the south, the Hames Valley, San Antonio Valley, San Lucas, and San Bernabe AVAs are the furthest away from the cooling influence of the Pacific Ocean and the wind tunnel that runs north and south from Monterey Bay. Hot-weather grapes—Cabernet Sauvignon, Petite Sirah, and both white and red Rhône varieties—particularly thrive in the San Antonio and Hames valleys; San Lucas and San Bernabe receive a touch more bay influence that makes the latter the better contender for Burgundian varietals like Pinot Noir and Chardonnay, while the former has great success with Cabernet Sauvignon, Sauvignon Blanc, and Merlot as well as Chardonnay. Soils within these four AVAs are diverse but can generally be defined as loam-based with deposits of gravel, clay, and ocean sand.

Lying closer to the bay, the northern AVAs of Monterey focus more on cool-climate wine production. The Santa Lucia Highlands likely enjoys the greatest reputation for quality in the ultra-premium category; it's famous for the Pinot Noir, Chardonnay, and Syrah planted on its slopes in gravelly sand loam that offers drainage and yields small berries. Located in the center of Monterey wine country, Arroyo Seco is partially sheltered from the bay breezes and has dozens of mesoclimates that allow both cool- and warm-climate varietals to thrive in the shaly, loamy soils. And in Carmel Valley, collectors seek out complex Bordeaux-style wines from the AVA's warmer elevated sites along with Pinots and Chards from its cooler vineyards.

Finally, on the eastern edge of the county is the Chalone AVA, which is famous for Monterey's oldest vineyards, established in 1919; a marginal climate defined by both warmth and Pacific influence; and rare, decomposed granite and limestone soils. These characteristics combine to make wines of great depth, finesse, and aromatic power.

To conclude, it should also be noted that the greater Monterey AVA is home to large-scale cool-climate vineyards that produce incredibly solid, value-based Pinot Noirs: They're perhaps among the best under-\$20 expressions of the grape in the world. 

The Central Coast (North) extended area.

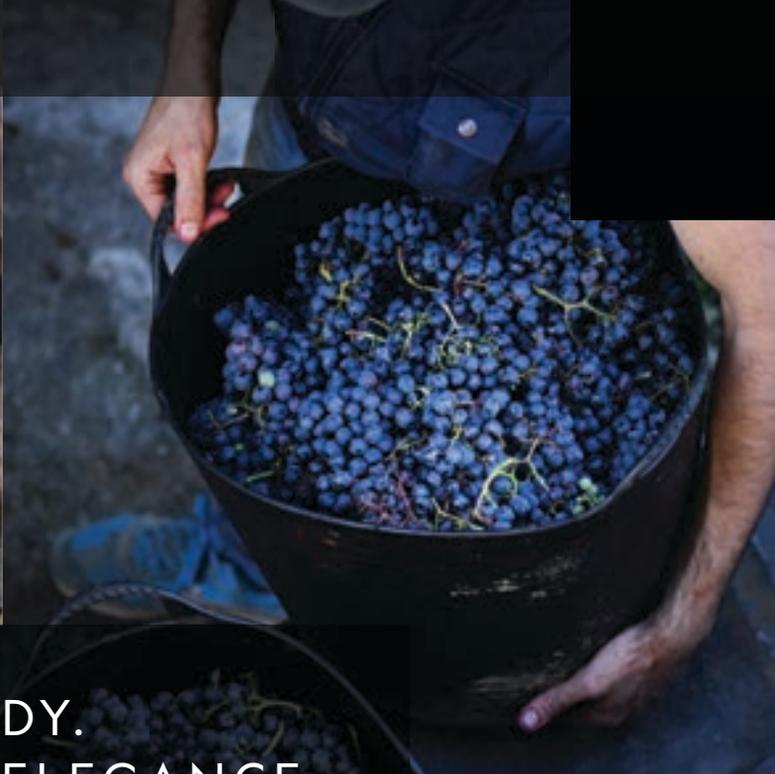


### My Top Monterey Drinking Spots

**FINE DINING:** Passionfish (*passionfish.net*) in Pacific Grove has one of the best-priced wine lists I've ever seen as well as Michelin-quality food.

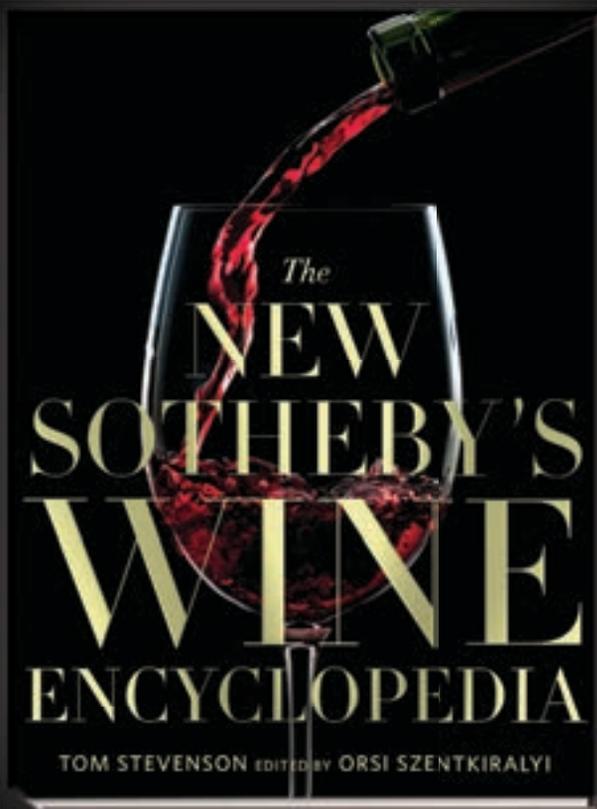
**BEER:** Alvarado Street Brewery in Salinas and on Cannery Row is my current favorite brewery in the U.S. If you knew how much I love beer and how much I travel, you would know what a statement that is.

**WINE:** Scheid Family Wines (*scheidfamilywines.com*), which has tasting rooms at its winery in Greenfield and in Carmel-by-the-Sea, might just make the best wines at their price point in California right now. Its ascendancy in the past decade has been nothing short of phenomenal. Pisoni in the Santa Lucia Highlands is another favorite—Gary Pisoni is quite a character and is known for his hospitality. If you can get an appointment (contact [info@pisonivineyards.com](mailto:info@pisonivineyards.com)), you will not be disappointed. Feel free to say Wes Hagen sent you. Finally, Bernardus Winery (*bernardus.com*) in Carmel Valley offers world-class tasting experiences in an amazing setting.



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# Fragrant Heritage

A NEW LAW HELPS PROTECT BIODIVERSITY IN THE FRENCH COUNTRYSIDE

## AN INFAMOUS ROOSTER NAMED

Maurice and a gaggle of contented geese have helped ensure biodiversity in France. In the face of complaints about the noises and smells typical of the countryside, the French Parliament passed a law on January 21, 2021, protecting what it calls the “sensory heritage” of its rural areas.

While the primary intention of the ruling is to help local officials tasked with mediating disputes between vacationers and local residents (more on that later), it introduces sounds and smells into the French environmental code as recognized characteristics of natural spaces. In doing so, it’s able to protect them the same way it does the land, the quality of the air, and the biodiversity of plant and animal species.

French Minister for Rural Affairs Joël Giraud celebrated the adoption of the law, which he said aims to “define and protect the sensory heritage of the French countryside”—be that in reference to livestock manure, church bells, the raucous buzz of cicadas, or the growl of diesel tractors.

As residents of the nation where the loosely defined concept of terroir originated, winegrowers in France are increas-

ingly choosing to promote biodiversity in their vineyards. Over the last two decades, a plethora of national and regional certification programs—all of which prioritize biodiversity among their initiatives—have been introduced and are being widely adopted. As such, the new ruling represents an unexpected win for them as well.

That also applies to producers on the small island of Oléron off the Atlantic coast of western France. There, vineyards surround the village of Saint-Pierre-d’Oléron, where Maurice was put on trial in 2019 for disturbing the peace. The rooster has come to symbolize the growing polarization between rural and urban France, and the pandemic has only fueled tensions as city dwellers seek refuge in the countryside during prolonged lockdowns.

Winegrowers in Oléron and the surrounding department of Charente-Maritime produce Cognac, Pineau, and dry wines from Ugni Blanc, Folle Blanche, Colombard, Sémillon, Sauvignon Blanc, and Montils as well as Cabernet Franc, Cabernet Sauvignon, and Merlot. Their websites promote enotourism and the rich biodiversity of their estates. Tourism is the region’s largest industry; vaca-

tioners flock to the Atlantic coast to enjoy the beaches and the local seafood, including the highly prized oysters cultivated in Marennes-Oléron, which account for 45% of the nation’s oyster production.

Cited by Christophe Sueur, mayor of Saint-Pierre-d’Oléron, as “common sense,” the sensory heritage ruling also entrusts regional heritage inventory services formed to implement the requirements of the 2003 UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage—in this case the *L’Inventaire Général du Patrimoine Culturel* for Poitou-Charentes—with the task of identifying and qualifying the cultural identity of rural areas, including their sounds and olfactory elements. This process will help protect them through heritage-professional training programs, funding, public-education initiatives, and the like. The French government has been given a six-month deadline to present the court with a definition of “abnormal neighborhood disturbances” that may include environmental factors; local elected officials will then be able to use these guidelines to resolve neighborhood conflicts while preserving the terroir. [SJ](#)



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**FIVE** MINUTES WITH ...

# Courtney Bunn

DIRECTOR OF BEVERAGE, JW MARRIOTT LOS ANGELES L.A. LIVE AND THE RITZ-CARLTON, LOS ANGELES, CA by Michelle M. Metter



## COURTNEY BUNN IS THE DIRECTOR

of beverage for the JW Marriott Los Angeles L.A. LIVE and The Ritz-Carlton, Los Angeles, a 1,000-room dual-hotel property in the heart of downtown; steps from the Staples Center; it's the host venue for numerous awards shows. A U.S. Army veteran and travel-addicted sommelier, she is a Certified Wine Specialist and was recently named a "30 Under 30 Emerging Leader" by the California Travel Association.

### Q: Tell me about your current role.

The combined property has been my work home for three years, and it has never run short of challenges or opportunities. My role as director includes overseeing several bars and lounges in addition to the restaurant beverage [program]. From meeting vendors to training staff and creating pop-up bars, the site is exciting and the role diverse.

### Q: What led you to where you are now?

Ah, my wine journey, [which is] far from over. Wine made its way into my life after my time in the service. I attended the Culinary Institute of America and fell in love studying it. I have kept myself in roles surrounded by wine and spirits ever since. I always consider myself a student in wine, never done learning!

### Q: How have you adjusted your buying strategies during the pandemic?

Buyers everywhere are adjusting now, [whether they want to] or not, to keep pace with business. I have certainly pulled the brakes on purchases in every category, [with] beer making the order sheets the most [due to] its limited shelf life. [Last year] gave way to new opportunities to taste and learn: I am a huge fan of SommCon's digital buyers' tastings, [and] I spend more time than ever learning about winemakers' styles and vineyard histories through digital presentations and conferences.

### Q: Are you currently helping to mentor a team?

A team, no. A few individuals, yes. The restrictions on food and beverage [operations] in L.A. have left so much of my team displaced. The struggles our industry has endured in the last year still sit in the air. The silver lining in the loss of colleagues and teams is the resiliency and realness in those relationships. Regardless of place, we lift each other up. Fewer hugs and late-night tastings, more video calls and group texts for 2021 bonding.

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

It must be a bottle of bubbly, and my love list is long in that category for a good reason. I would raise a glass with [CrossFit Games champion] Tia-Clair Toomey. I am obsessed with her athleticism and dedication to her training. 

*San Diego-based wine journalist Michelle Metter is the co-founder and director of SommCon USA. The SOMM Journal and The Tasting Panel are proud supporters of SommCon and its mission of continuing education and training for the global wine industry. Follow Metter on Instagram @michellemetersd.*



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# Don't Confuse Training with Education

**TRAINING IS ONE** of the most fundamentally misunderstood activities within the beverage industry. The confusion largely stems from a failure to recognize that it's distinctive from education insofar as its primary purpose is not to instruct but to boost revenue.

Staff training should focus on imparting knowledge by not only providing a description of a product but also promoting an understanding of it in order to enhance and enrich the guest's experience. Rather than sharing technical details, convey the stories that make the product exciting—and your net result will be an improved financial position.

This concept is more easily understood in the context of a restaurant's food program. There is a reason servers are trained to know the chef's history and culinary philosophy, the provenance of key ingredients, and the major techniques used to prepare each dish; your beverage program should be similarly communicated.

When training, people often focus on the doldrums of "what," as in "What is the region, subregion, appellation, harvest date, vinification vessel, oak profile, et cetera?" Yet in my nearly two decades as a sommelier, I cannot remember a single instance of a guest seeking a wine based on technical details like whether it spent at least 12 months in 80% new French oak, was at least 72% Cabernet Sauvignon, was harvested in October, or had a minimum of 14.2% alcohol. All of that information is irrelevant to your patrons, so why would you spend time emphasizing it during your valuable pre-shift time with your staff? Focus instead on the "how" and "why": Why is this wine special? How does its story, and/or that of the producer, enhance or benefit the guest experience? How is it best experienced? Why does it pair so



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*Most sales are made from a feeling of connection and excitement—not by rote recitation of technical details.*  
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well with a certain dish? After all, these experiential details are what guests are ultimately looking for—especially when the price tag is high.

Remember, most sales are made from a feeling of connection and excitement—not by rote recitation of technical details. Think about the sales approach used by most car commercials: They show the vehicle cruising down a beautiful road, passing through nature or a vibrant city as

it delivers its passengers to a fun activity or event, to conjure the sense of excitement that owning the car will bring.

This exact technique can easily be applied to wine training. Do yourself a favor and ditch the tasting sheets, pour the wine for your staff, and simply encourage a discussion: Ask them what they taste, why they like it, what menu items it might pair well with, how they would describe it to a guest, and so on. As the conversation unfolds, you can begin to offer pertinent tidbits of the story behind the region, wine, or winery, providing talking points and descriptive language to help them round out their knowledge and elicit excitement among your guests.

Using this approach, you'll be empowering your staff with the appropriate tools for their job and the confidence to use them correctly. Remember, sommeliers cannot physically be part of every wine transaction, but truly effective ones can absolutely influence them all with proper training. 

# TIME BUILDS CHARACTER

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OUR HISTORIC VINEYARDS IN CONTRA COSTA COUNTY ARE AN ENDANGERED SPECIES. THE SOIL AND TOPOGRAPHY HAVE BEEN LIKENED TO A SANDY BEACH. VINES PLANTED OVER A CENTURY AGO ARE HEAD-PRUNED AND DRY-FARMED, YIELDING SMALL BERRIES WITH AMAZING FLAVOR. THE RESULTING WINES ARE SOULFUL EVIDENCE THAT TIME DOES INDEED BUILD CHARACTER.

# Where Bordeaux Meets the Rhône

WITH CABERNET AND  
SHIRAZ, PENFOLDS  
BRINGS THE BEST  
OF THE OLD WORLD  
TOGETHER IN THE NEW

by Stefanie Schwalb

PHOTOS COURTESY OF TREASURY WINE ESTATES



*Old-vine Shiraz in  
the Barossa Valley.*

**IN VITICULTURE AS IN** real estate, location, location, location is everything. That's because, depending on where it's planted, a grape can express a range of different personalities. Two great examples are Cabernet Sauvignon and Syrah/Shiraz: Both make themselves at home in France and Australia, where the terroir shares a handful of commonalities, such as maritime effect, but also plenty of differences that both varieties reflect. Throughout the webinar "Where Bordeaux Meets the Rhône," held on January 11 as part of SOMM Sessions, our monthly educational taste-along series with Treasury Wine Estates, all eyes, ears, and palates were focused on South Australian Cabernet Sauvignon and Shiraz as represented by the famed Penfolds estate.

Led by Lars Leicht, VP of education for *The SOMM Journal* and *The Tasting Panel*, and Treasury Wine Estates education manager Gillian Ballance, MS, the class provided a glimpse into the winery's region, history, and industry impact along with a tasting of the Penfolds 2018 Bin 389 Cabernet Shiraz (see also page 53). There was also a surprise guest in attendance—Tim Irwin, Penfolds' regional general manager—who shared some insights on the company's winemaking techniques, including the blending of these two distinct varieties.

Located 10,000-plus miles apart from one another, South Australia and France naturally have differing climates, each of which offers its own advantages for the grapes grown there. With France's marine-coastal climate comes a greater diurnal temperature shift and greater precipitation, whereas Australia enjoys roughly 500 more hours of sunlight a year—an additional 1.5 hours per day. In Bordeaux, Cabernet is renowned for its complexity, structure, and, of course, pedigree, while in Australia, it's celebrated for being smoother, less tannic, and more berry fruit-forward.

As for Syrah, it's revered in the Rhône Valley (especially in the north around Hermitage) for being deeply colored, multilayered, and full of black-fruit flavors as well as for its structure, elegance, tannins, and ageability. In Australia—the only other place in the world where this variety may come from vines as old as 100–150 years—the southerly latitude, winds off the Southern Ocean, and influence of the

mountains all play a role in giving Shiraz more concentration, making it spicier and bolder with a smoky edge.

One of Australia's oldest wineries, Penfolds was founded in 1844 when Dr. Christopher Rawson Penfold and his wife, Mary, purchased the 500-acre Magill Estate right outside of Adelaide at the foot of the Mount Lofty Range. The couple was among the first wave of migrants to colonize that part of South Australia. "They bought their estate for 1,200 pounds, built a cottage called The Grange, and planted vineyards," said Ballance. "Dr. Penfold quickly established a medical practice, all based on growing grapes and creating tonics that he would prescribe as medication—fortified

that point, Penfolds, and most of Australia for that matter, was still producing a lot of fortified wines." In the late 1940s, Schubert was sent to Europe to work with Port and Sherry producers, but he also went to Bordeaux to study its winemakers' approach to such techniques as barrel maturation. "Max always said it's [as much about] getting the wine into the oak as the oak into the wine and finding that balance," said Irwin.

That holds true for the Penfolds Bin 389. Renowned for its heritage and consistency, it was first produced in 1960—just nine years after the first vintage of Penfolds' legendary Grange. "It is often referred to as 'Baby Grange' because components of the wine are matured in the same barrels



**Grange barrels rest at Penfolds' Magill Estate in Adelaide, South Australia.**

wines, essentially." As the business grew substantially, Mary took care of the home-stead, including the vineyards; when her husband died, she took over winery operations and began to build on his success. The Magill Estate remains the spiritual home of Penfolds, complete with a highly awarded fine-dining restaurant. Penfolds also owns a cellar door and winemaking facility in Nuriootpa in the Barossa Valley as well as acreage across the South Eastern Australia wine region, including in Tasmania.

A key player in Penfolds' evolution was Max Schubert, its first chief winemaker and the creator of Penfolds Grange, who was at the helm from 1948 to 1975. "Max was very pivotal in bringing Penfolds into the modern age," Ballance noted. "Up until

that held the previous vintage of Grange," Ballance explained.

As for blending Cabernet and Shiraz, Irwin observed that it's quite common in Australia: "When you think about what they add to a wine, you're getting things like the perfume, the intensity from the Cabernet, [along with] chocolaty tannins, [and] then the Shiraz brings this opulence, flashiness, and generosity of fruit. It's something altogether different." He added, "The thing I love about Bin 389 is it is so approachable now, but it will age ten, 20, 30, 40 years with great vintages. It's really exciting to see how tertiary characters come into a wine, and I think both varieties will play a role depending on where it is in its life." ❧

# Giving Pyrazines the

# Green Light

IT'S TIME TO RETHINK  
RIPENESS IN  
CALIFORNIA REDS

by Kate Nowell-Smith

**BY ALL ACCOUNTS**, the 2020 harvest in Napa, Sonoma, and surrounding counties was among the most devastating on record. The impact of the wildfires in terms of fruit lost to smoke taint is something growers and vintners will be sorting out for months, if not years, to come.

But while fires get all of the attention, there is another byproduct of global warming that I see as a far bigger long-term threat to the quality of wines produced in California, and that is the ever-increasing phenomenon of grapes reaching excessively high sugar levels before they are considered phenologically ripe. Fruit that achieves "optimal ripeness" often yields wines that must be heavily manipulated, are high in alcohol, or both. Say your fruit comes in at 28 degrees Brix. That means there are roughly 280 grams per liter of sugar in your must, so the resulting wine will have a potential alcohol level in the neighborhood of 16.5%. It's well on its way to being a Port!



*Author Kate Nowell-Smith is winemaker/GM at Sei Querce Vineyards in Geyserville, CA.*



Mindful of this trend, winemakers and viticulturists are working hard in many different ways to reverse it. Much is being done that keeps us hopeful, including canopy management and irrigation programs designed to help grapes stay cool during what we now euphemistically refer to as “heat events” (those 100-plus-degree days); experimentation with yeasts that naturally convert less sugar into alcohol; and trials with rootstocks and varieties that ripen sooner while retaining more acid.

Meanwhile, I do see one silver lining to the threat of both rising temperatures and more frequent wildfires (beyond an increasing awareness among winemakers of their carbon footprint, which is of course a necessity): It may finally encourage more producers and consumers alike to reconsider their definition of ripe fruit—especially when it comes to Cabernet Sauvignon, arguably the variety most heavily impacted by climate change in California.

When I’m walking the rows near harvesttime, I’m using all of my senses to

evaluate ripeness. With respect to Bordeaux varieties in general and Cabernet Sauvignon in particular, before I have even tasted the fruit, I want to see the stems beginning to lignify and turn brown, and I want to see a fairly uniform, deep color in the cluster. Putting a berry in my mouth, I want the skins to give a little; next I’ll chew the seeds, which should be separated out from the pulp and turning brown, to check for tannin maturity. If they’re underripe, there will be a sharp hit of bitterness; when ripe, they will give a nice crunch and taste pleasantly nutty.

I’d guess that most California winemakers would be with me so far. Our opinions as to what the fruit should actually taste like, however, diverge—and that makes all the difference in the world for the final product.

Ripeness, in general, brings fruit flavors forward. So a ripe Cabernet Sauvignon grape, properly farmed in favorable conditions, should give you a nice burst of delicious flavors—blackberry, black currant, raspberry, and so on. But what about the naturally occurring methoxypyrazines (MPs) found, to a greater or lesser extent, in all Bordeaux varieties? These compounds are responsible for a wide variety of “green” flavors, from green bell pepper to green beans to hints of thyme and sage. For a good decade or more now, many winemakers have dreaded MPs as the enemy; they leave their fruit on the vine long after all other ripeness parameters have been met in an effort to ensure that not a single hint of greenness remains.

It is this intolerance for MPs that needs to be reexamined for the good of the wine, the consumer, and the industry at large. I get it—once picked, MP levels stay relatively unchanged, and their flavors can become more prominent over time if we aren’t careful; I’m not suggesting that notes of canned asparagus or jalapeño should dominate our Cabernets. But I do want us to reembrace the delicious herbaceous notes that occur naturally in many varieties thanks to MPs. All too often, waiting to harvest until every last vestige of greenness is gone means that the fruit will have

lost complexity, varietal typicity, and clarity of flavor. All roads lead to raisination: An overripe must becomes a sort of raisin-prune stew. It will also be excessively high in potential alcohol, will probably have suffered damage from birds and other critters (due to those tasty sugars), and may have trouble fermenting to dryness without serious intervention on the part of the winemaker. Furthermore, the longer fruit is left on the vine, the greater the chance that a fire will strike, causing smoke taint that renders the entire harvest unusable.

The question I ask is: Why are we giving up so much in order to avoid one naturally occurring, potentially delicious flavor component? As a winemaker and consumer, I embrace wines that are naturally lower in alcohol, higher in acidity, complex, fresh, and ageworthy. Many great wines are made this way. I would like to see California Bordeaux varieties reenter this fold. S



FOR A GOOD DECADE OR MORE NOW, MANY WINEMAKERS HAVE DREADED MPS AS THE ENEMY; THEY LEAVE THEIR FRUIT ON THE VINE LONG AFTER ALL OTHER RIPENESS PARAMETERS HAVE BEEN MET IN AN EFFORT TO ENSURE THAT NOT A SINGLE HINT OF GREENNESS REMAINS.





**Dear Good Somm/Bad Somm,**

When the pandemic is finally over, I'm going to host a small party for my circle of friends. There's just one problem: I was planning on exclusively serving wine, but one friend doesn't drink, which is hard for me to make sense of as a sommelier. Is it necessary to find a nonalcoholic option just for them?

Thanks,  
 Harried Host

**Good Somm**

Dear Harried Host,

Of course you have free rein over your party's rules of engagement, from the table design and decorations to the food and beverages—but that doesn't mean you shouldn't be accommodating. Quite the opposite, in fact: A good host would go out of their way to make guests feel welcome no matter their personal preferences. After all, there are many reasons a person might decline an alcoholic beverage.

As a hospitality professional, you're probably well aware that plenty of tasty drinks can be made sans alcohol, so I'd pick one or two mocktails and make them available for all of your guests so no one feels singled out. My go-to is to serve virgin Piña Coladas in fresh coconuts or fancy gourmet tea—try Mariage Frères from Paris—in wine glasses with ice and your choice of garnish.

No matter what you decide, just remind yourself that it will be amazing to get together with your friends after such a long hiatus. The conversation will flow with or without wine as you catch up, reminisce, and simply enjoy each other's company. What's actually in the glass seems all but irrelevant when we're in the presence of those we care about.

Sincerely,  
 Good Somm

**BAD SOMM**

Dear Harried Host,

As long as they're not on their phone in the corner of my apartment or sucking the oxygen out of the room as they monologue about [fill-in-the-blank topic that no one cares about] all night, they're good in my book. Beverages of all kinds, alcoholic and non, flow freely in this household—my friends stay thirsty, and hydration is key!

Cheers,  
 Bad Somm

**Dear Good Somm/Bad Somm,**

Pandemic permitting, a friend of mine is getting married at a beautiful winery at the end of the year. I want to bring a plus one—my girlfriend, who loves wine—but I'm not actually sure if I'm allowed to. How should I approach it?

Best,  
 Pining for a Plus One

**Good Somm**

Dear Pining for a Plus One,

First and foremost, ask yourself whom you're putting first here, yourself or your friend? Keep in mind that if there wasn't a plus one indicated on your invitation, it's likely because the guest count is limited due to their budget or the venue's capacity. Depending on your situation, it's best to have a conversation well in advance to see if it's possible to bring your girlfriend, but if you're casually dating instead of in a serious, long-term relationship, it's probably best to just let it lie. Use your best judgment and don't make this something worth burning a bridge over: This is your friend and their partner's day and you have to respect their decision. That said, I'm confident you'll have many opportunities to visit wineries with your girlfriend in the future—what better way to strengthen not only your love of wine but your bond with each other?

Yours truly,  
 Good Somm

**BAD SOMM**

Dear Pining for a Plus One,

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Signed,  
 Bad Somm

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

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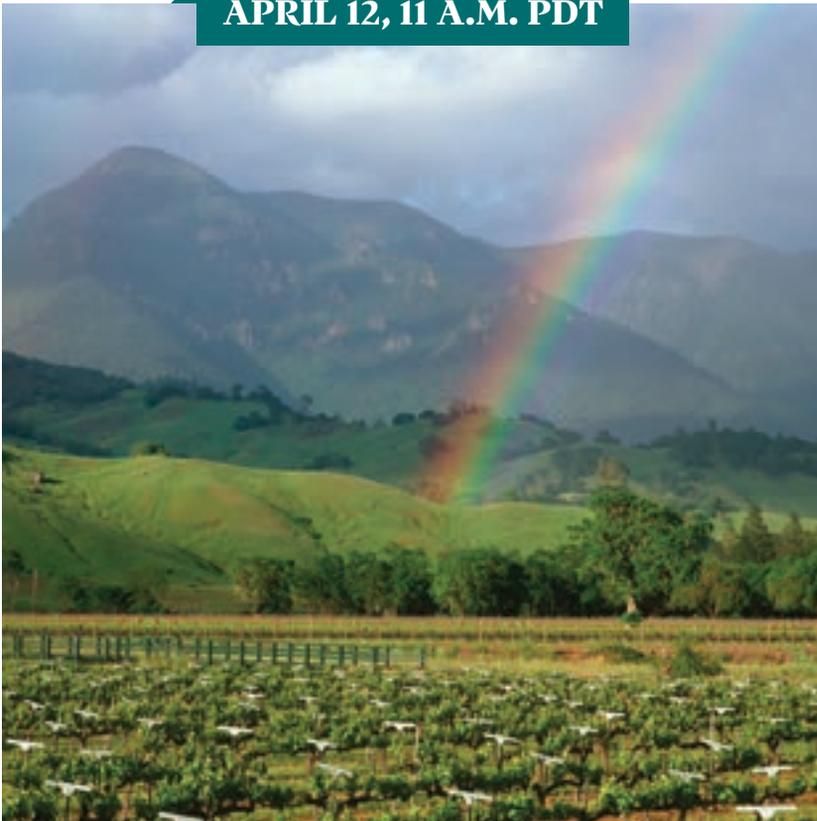


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by Michelle M. Metter

# The Juggle Is Real

IL PALIO RESTAURANT GROUP  
WINE DIRECTOR **NEMANJA  
PEJČIĆ** OVERSEES SOME OF  
SAN DIEGO'S BEST CONCEPTS

photo by Rafael Peterson



**HOSPITALITY WASN'T THE FIRST** profession Nemanja Pejčić (pronounced *Neh-ma-nyah Pay-chich*) envisioned for himself, but after leaving his job as a registered nurse in his native Serbia, he took his first industry position aboard the Queen Mary 2 cruise liner. More than a decade later, one might say he is exactly where he was always meant to be (and he has the awards for several wine lists he's created along the way to prove it).

Born in Belgrade, Pejčić moved to New York City in 2008 after landing a job at Oscar Café in SoHo and went on to work alongside chef Wylie Dufresne at WD-50, followed by The Lambs Club in Midtown. By 2013, though, he and his wife sought a slower-paced lifestyle, so they traded in skyscrapers for the shores of San Diego. His California CV nonetheless reads like a serious foodie's bucket list, including notable gigs at Juniper and Ivy and The Marine Room; now wine director at Il Palio Restaurant Group, he oversees a portfolio of concepts that includes Osteria Panevino, Saltwater, The Butcher's Cut Steakhouse, Osetra Seafood & Steaks, and Greystone Prime Steakhouse & Seafood.

**Osteria Panevino** is a small and casual Sicilian-style eatery that's popular among locals, while **Saltwater**, a seafood restaurant that opened last year, remains temporarily closed due to the pandemic—but it typically operates with a wine list featuring 140 selections. "When creating this program, my goal was having wines that drink well now," says Pejčić. "I wanted all wines featured to be at [their] peak and ready to deliver [the best possible] experience to our guests."

Of the group's three steakhouse concepts, **Butcher's Cut** is the most casual, with a versatile wine list equally divided between the Old World and the New. **Osetra**, meanwhile, also serves seafood (including, of course, caviar) within a dimly lit yet energizing ambiance as well as a fine collection of tête de cuvée Champagne, mineral whites, and large-format library reds from Italy and Napa. Finally, the list at **Greystone** features over 1,100 selections; the restaurant was one of seven in San Diego County recognized with *Wine Spectator's* "Best of Award of Excellence."

Pejčić says that giving back brings him joy, and he's been fortunate enough to do just that both on and off the clock over the course of the pandemic. He notes that Il Palio Restaurant Group owners Vincenzo Loverso and Alessandro Minutella and their management team provided much-needed leadership as the restaurants struggled at the onset of the pandemic, keeping their staffs hard at work providing thousands of meals for first responders in March 2020. In his spare time, meanwhile, Pejčić serves as a member of the nonprofit Serbs for Serbs, which works to better the lives of families in need in the Balkans through humanitarian aid and other projects.

And, like many parents, Pejčić is currently juggling the demands of his career with those of his home life in unprecedented ways, in part by helping his two children with their remote schooling. Fortunately, San Diego's temperate weather provides plenty of opportunities for stress relief: Silver linings come in the form of family time spent cycling, going on weekly runs, playing basketball, cooking, and hitting the beach. ❧

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# Sparkle Motion

"Sometimes I doubt your commitment to Sparkle Motion," moans one frenzied pageant mom to another in a scene from cult classic *Donnie Darko*. Well, don't doubt ours. In this column, we at *The SOMM Journal* rate the most notable sparkling wines that cross our desks and lips each issue. Given the wide range of production methods, styles, and price points the category covers, we've devised the following system to score each on its own merits.

## 1 BUBBLE

Simple but satisfying.

## 2 BUBBLES

Satisfying and a little more complex.

## 3 BUBBLES

A strong example of its kind.

## 4 BUBBLES

A superb example of its kind.

## 5 BUBBLES

Stellar by any standard.

**For details on submitting wines for review, contact managing editor Ruth Tobias at [rtobias@tastingpanelmag.com](mailto:rtobias@tastingpanelmag.com).**



**Besserat de Bellefon NV Bleu Brut, Champagne, France (\$60)** Refinement and charm converge in this blend of 45% Pinot Meunier, 35% Chardonnay, and 20% Pinot Noir, whose classic, well-defined nose of green apple, lemon, and yeastiness meets a palate with not only a touch more creaminess than expected but downright playful flavors of lemon meringue, orange blossom, and almonds spiced with tangerine zest, saffron, and sea salt. The slightly tongue-in-cheek tech sheet suggests you pair it with "three shrimp, six oysters, and a cornet of French fries," but we disagree—given the finish, you should have time for at least four shrimp. **93**



**Goldeneye 2017 Brut Rosé, Anderson Valley (\$65)** The pale hue of strawberry-peach sorbet, this traditional-method sparkler of 60% Pinot Noir and 40% Chardonnay offers up graceful notes of sour cherry and baguette that meet flashes of pink grapefruit and cinnamon-dusted almond in the mouth, where its chiffon texture presages a finish laced with fresh orange. **92**

THE DUCKHORN PORTFOLIO

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**Laetitia NV Brut Cuvée, Arroyo Grande Valley, San Luis Obispo County (\$28)** The appeal of this blend of 43% Pinot Noir, 34% Chardonnay, and 23% Pinot Blanc starts with its persistent pinpoint perlage and continues through scents of makrut lime leaf, grapefruit ice, and bread smeared with salted butter. Similar flavors join pear leather and Brazil nut, while the clean yet rounded mouthfeel points to the moderate finish. **92**



**Alta Vista NV Brut Malbec, Mendoza, Argentina (\$17)**

Sporting a light salmon color and a cheerful mousse, this Uco Valley-sourced, Charmat-method rosé of Malbec aims to please with bouncy red plum and pomelo on the nose, while the soft yet juicy palate is blanketed with close-knit flavors of Rainier cherry, pink grapefruit, and ripe peach. **92**



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**Venturini Baldini NV Marchese Manodori Reggiano Lambrusco Frizzante DOP, Italy (\$19)** A full eight months before Thanksgiving rolls back around, we already know at least one wine we'll be serving for the big feast. This blend of four Lambrusco grapes—Marani, Maestri, Salamino, and Grasperossa—exudes holiday spirit with aromas of cranberry, red plum, and touches of herb and balsamic, the latter of which reappears on the rather savory, well-structured palate along with bright cherry and pepper. **93**



**Chronic Cellars NV Spritz & Giggles Brut, California (\$17)** Between the name and the Day of the Dead-inspired graphics on the label, it's clear from the get-go this bubbly is built for fun. An abundance of apple blossom, peach, and strawberry from start to finish make it a good bet for a (socially distanced) brunch gathering or picnic date. **88** \$1



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BY **ANDREA ROBINSON**

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# Black Is the New Red

## BIEN NACIDO ESTATE'S BLACK LABEL CONTAINS THE CREAM OF ITS SYRAH AND PINOT NOIR CROP *by Ruth Tobias*

**JUST AS BIEN NACIDO ESTATE** rests on the foundation of its famed name-sake vineyard, so its Black Label wines form “the pillars of [its] portfolio,” says Will Costello, Master Sommelier and ambassador of Bien Nacido and Solomon Hills Estates. “They’re what provide its structure”—namely by epitomizing just what’s so special about the Miller family’s Santa Maria Valley property, established in 1973.

Take the Old Vines Reserve Pinot Noir, which speaks to Bien Nacido’s history insofar as it’s made from original plantings across three blocks. As Costello points out, these “own-rooted, ungrafted 50-year-old vines are a rarity in California and the wine world in general”; only 56 cases of the soon-to-be-released 2018 vintage were made, reflecting the preciousness of the age-limited yield.

Then there’s The XO Syrah, named in part for the X Block from which it has been sourced since the debut vintage of 2014. “Bien Nacido was the first vineyard in all of cool-climate California to be planted to Syrah, which had been [considered] unproducible” in the area up to that point, Costello explains. But Qupé founder

Bob Lindquist proved conventional wisdom wrong—and the Millers right—when he made his first Bien Nacido Syrah to great acclaim back in 1987.

According to Costello, XO is also a nod to the “terminology used for the second in command on a naval ship, [and] the reason it’s called Executive Officer leads to the third pillar”: The Captain Pinot Noir, christened in honor of third-generation estate member Robert Miller, who served as captain of a Ticonderoga-class battleship in World War II. It’s sourced from Block 40—essentially a monopole, says Costello, as the fruit it bears “goes only to our estate program”; planted in 2001, it occupies “the steepest, windiest part of the vineyard with the most exposed limestone—which is also a rarity in California.”

Given Black Label’s low case production, it should come as no surprise that sales are geared toward high-end buyers, on-premise and off (as well as to DTC channels). “We focus on small indie wine shops where the customers have a relationship [with the staff] and understand that these are wines meant for collectors,” Costello says, as well as on “restaurants that have an investment in their cellar.” If you’re lucky enough to get your hands on some of the current vintage, the tasting notes at right reveal what you can expect. *ST*

PHOTO COURTESY OF BIEN NACIDO AND SOLOMON HILLS ESTATES



*Will Costello, MS, is ambassador of Bien Nacido and Solomon Hills Estates.*



◀ **Bien Nacido Estate Black Label 2018 Old Vines Pinot Noir, Santa Maria Valley, Santa Barbara County (\$100)** An earth mother: lithe and graceful yet with a primal, even carnal sense of terroir. Notes of cinnamon, roses, dark maple, and salted strawberry preserves join a sleek mouthfeel, whose refined acidity finishes with an orange-peel brightness. The Pomard clone grapes, first planted in 1973, add profound maturity to those well-defined aromatics. **96** —*Meridith May*



◀ **Bien Nacido Estate Black Label 2018 The XO Syrah, Santa Maria Valley, Santa Barbara County (\$100)** From vines planted 37 years ago, this Syrah is now in its fourth vintage. Aged 16 months in French oak at a relatively low 13% ABV, it’s abundant in notes of plum and blue heather that resonate with the chalky, coffee tannin-laced mouthfeel. The persistence of blue flowers on the mid-palate melds with the varietally classic flavors of grilled meat and black pepper. That gaminess, along with minerality and Provençal herbs, stimulates the senses in ways reminiscent of the Northern Rhône. **96** —*M.M.*



◀ **Bien Nacido Estate Black Label 2018 The Captain Pinot Noir, Santa Maria Valley, Santa Barbara County (\$100)** Cherry-drenched earth is brightened by minerality, while white pepper, baking spice, and exotic floral notes charm the palate, which delivers an unexpected middle note of cherry pie and saddle leather. The vines from which this wine is sourced sit at 1,100 feet on limestone soils, 16 miles from the Pacific. Aged for 16 months in French oak (45% new). **97** —*M.M.*

# A Year to Drink Pink

## CELEBRATING THE OFFICIAL DEBUT OF PROSECCO DOC ROSÉ

by Rachel Macalisang

**WINE LUMINARIES AROUND** the globe gathered virtually last fall to celebrate the new Prosecco DOC Rosé, a long-awaited category approved by the EU for export at the beginning of this year. The designation requires a blend of 85–90% Glera with 10–15% Pinot Nero to impart a soft pink color. In addition, all bottles of sparkling Prosecco rosé must be labeled “millesimato,” indicating that at least 85% of the fruit used was harvested during the labeled vintage.

Broadcasted from the breathtaking Teatro Mario Del Monaco in Treviso—a province known for its high-quality Prosecco—and hosted by professional speaker Pietro Polidori, the event incorporated elements of gastronomy and music to showcase the new denomination. Representing Casa Prosecco DOC USA, the official press office for the Prosecco DOC in the U.S., Gino Colangelo of New York-based communications agency Colangelo & Partners noted that with the merging of the two categories, “rosé is now a four-season wine, and one can drink Prosecco every day.” A representative from Casa Prosecco DOC Germany, Elke Fierenz, also weighed in, remarking how special Italy’s wine industry is for capturing “the art of living and *la dolce vita*” in its expressions.

Chairman Stefano Zanette appeared on

behalf of the Consorzio Tutela Prosecco DOC, which was established in 2009. He noted that 2020 saw the production of about 500 million bottles of Prosecco, some 15–20 million of which will qualify for the Prosecco Rosé designation. Furthering the use of sustainable winegrowing and winemaking practices will continue to be a major priority in future vintages, according to the consortium’s general director, Luca Giavi, who explained that “respecting the environment is [a] sign of commitment to protecting the denomination and defending the area.”

To pay homage to the history and culture of Italy, performers Federica Gasparella, Nicola Zambon, and Paolo Polon performed “Buone Nuove, Norina” and “Pronta lo Son” from the Gaetano Donizetti opera *Don Pasquale*. Top Italian chefs, meanwhile, joined the webcast to prepare masterful pairings for the new category, including Graziano Prest, who made lobster tartare with Prosecco rosé cream; TV host Lidia Bastianich, who presented an antipasto; and Carlo Cracco, whose beautiful persimmon salad featured salted caramel,

cocoa, and crispy walnuts.

Masters of Wine from around the world also expressed their enthusiasm upon sampling the Consorzio Tutela 2019 Prosecco Rosé DOC Brut Millesimato. Italian sommelier Alessandro Scorsone described the brilliance of the wine’s pale-pink pearls of bubbles as “fireworks” and noted stand-out aromas such as roses, wild berries, and citrus. Brooklyn-based writer and speaker Christy Canterbury praised the ballet slipper-pink color and exotic nose of guava and passion fruit. And Konstantin Baum, the youngest MW in Germany, spoke favorably of the vibrant notes of strawberry and raspberry.

The celebration of the world’s most popular sparkling wine concluded with the song “Quanto Amore” from another Donizetti opera, *L’Elisir d’amore*, and a toast to, in Polidori’s words, “a pink and sparkling future full of success.” For more information, visit [casaprosecco.com](http://casaprosecco.com). SJ



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{ cover story }

*Transcending*

# BORDERS

DELICATO'S LUXURY **TRANSCENDENT WINES**  
PORTFOLIO SPANS THE GLOBE

*San Bernabe Vineyard is located in the foothills of the Santa Lucia Mountains in the southern reaches of Monterey County.*

*by Michelle Ball*

PHOTO COURTESY OF DELICATO FAMILY WINES

**D**elicato Family Wines built its business on affordability, producing accessible wines for the everyday consumer. Over the past decade, however, it has been building an aspirational collection into its portfolio with terroir-driven expressions that span international borders.

The company traces its beginnings to California in 1924, when Gaspare Indelicato, an emigrant from Sicily, settled there and planted his first vineyard after taking odd jobs to work his way across the United States. Today, the company is run by his grandson, CEO Chris Indelicato, who in 2019 created Delicato's Transcendent Wines sales division. "Our company has evolved over the decades as we have grown in the wine business," says Indelicato. "Focusing on luxury wines and forming Transcendent . . . was a natural progression in our long-term strategy to build a world-class portfolio. Partnering with other family-owned wineries is a great fit for us from a relationship and values perspective."

The purchase of Napa Valley's Black Stallion Winery in 2010 marked Delicato's first foray into the premium wine market (the brand's flagship Cabernet Sauvignon cuvée,



PHOTO COURTESY OF DELICATO FAMILY WINES

***Black Stallion winemaker Ralf Holdenried samples barrel lots to decide on the final blend for the winery's flagship Napa Valley cuvée, Transcendent.***

Transcendent, inspired the division's name). Yet the company began laying the foundation for the Transcendent portfolio long before it ventured into Napa Valley, starting with a vineyard whose name, like that of its namesake AVA, has rarely been seen on a label until recently: San Bernabe.

The history of San Bernabe Vineyard,

located at the southern end of Monterey County, dates back to the mid-1800s. When Delicato purchased the property in 1988, it was considered one of the largest contiguous vineyards in the world, with more than 8,000 acres planted. But the company's leadership quickly realized the expansive property's enormous potential for quality and over the years have invested in planting varieties suited to its best parcels. They sold off most of the land in the southern portion to concentrate mainly on the northern end, carving out roughly 100 blocks with 22 microclimates that stretch across the 1,800 planted acres Delicato farms today.

The defining feature of the broader San Bernabe AVA, established by the TTB in 2004, is aeolian soils on ancient, stabilized sand dunes. "Those soils give us a really nice brightness," says winemaker James Ewart—who has worked with the vineyard since 2000—noting that these wind-derived, low-nutrient soils produce round wines with great concentration. By contrast, on the western end of the vineyard along the foothills of the Santa Lucia Mountains is a limestone ridge with shaly loam soils known as the Lockwood series. "Those soils give us a little more texture in our wines," Ewart adds.



Over the years, the Indelicato family has worked closely with Ewart to redevelop San Bernabe Vineyard, elevating the quality of the site's fruit and channeling the terroir of the AVA into the wines it yields. The Aussie transplant always knew he wanted to be a winemaker like his father before him, but recognizing that he could always reach out to him for cellar advice, Ewart decided to earn his master's degree in viticulture. He started working for Delicato as a viticulturist at San Bernabe and enjoyed the experimentation involved in tailoring a particular block to a specific program. "That's what attracted me [here] and that's what gets me excited today," says Ewart. "The Indelicatos always encouraged us

to learn, explore, and do R&D," even before they had an official program in place for luxury wines.

Such a program now exists in the form of Diora, a new brand under Ewart's care that represents small-production bottlings made from select blocks in San Bernabe Vineyard as well as from Delicato's River Road Vineyard in the neighboring Santa Lucia Highlands. Nine barrels were blended to produce the inaugural single-vineyard San Bernabe **Diora 2018 La Grande Majesté Pinot Noir (\$40)**, which focuses on a specific block of clone 115 grown on aeolian soils. Smaller amounts of clones 828 and 777 were also included for structure, producing a dark, concentrated style of Pinot Noir whose plush blackberry and cola aromas give

way to notes of raspberry pie and black tea that lead with ample fruit and grip. Ewart notes that even if the exact site from which it's sourced may change depending on the vintage, the label's intent of highlighting blocks of distinctive character through small-batch expressions will remain consistent.

Showcasing the esteem of Napa Valley is the aforementioned Black Stallion Winery in the Oak Knoll District at the southern end of the Silverado Trail; with a name that pays tribute to the equestrian center that once stood on its property, it works with esteemed growers for its Cabernet Sauvignon, sourcing from 15 of Napa's 16 sub-AVAs in addition to its own estate. Yet rather than producing vineyard-specific Cabernet Sauvignon, winemaker Ralf Holdenried opts to "capture [the] terroir of the region through blending. "I have wonderful vineyards to work with—from valley-floor vineyards to mountaintop vineyards," he notes.

In highlighting the various microclimates in his final blends, Holdenried's emphasis is on craftsmanship and adapting to the vintage. This is especially true for the **2016 Transcendent Cabernet Sauvignon (\$150)**, which, like its predecessors, was composed of the best 20 barrels. Because 2016 was a drought year, the blend relied heavily on fruit from a vineyard on Howell Mountain, which contributed softer tannins than is typical of the area; although this particular appellation usually represents a small percentage of the wine, Holdenried believes that it shows its greatest potential during short, warm, and dry growing seasons. The dichotomy between boldness and softness is captured with this bottling, which leads with luscious dark layers of black currant, black cherry, and graphite; the powerful dark-fruit intensity of the palate is framed by soft, silky edges and spicy notes of clove.

One would think that a German-born winemaker who grew up on a vineyard in the Rheinhessen would be taken aback by the rich, opulent style of Napa Valley wines. Yet Holdenried credits it for "open[ing his] eyes" and encouraging him to be more flexible in the pursuit of his craft. "Napa Valley is still the new frontier in winemaking. Even today, we grow vineyards where no one has grown before. That still encapsulates, to me, innovation," he adds. "We're still evolving, and I see that in myself. I certainly make wines very differently today than I did ten, 15 years ago in Napa because the culture of improving things, I feel, is much stronger in Napa [than in Germany]."

True to its name, the Transcendent Wines division has carefully designed its collection to include wines that transcend the ordinary. Each of the wineries featured represents the best of its respective category and speaks clearly to its place of origin, from the complex soils at Schloss Vollrads, Germany's oldest wine estate, to the supercentenarian Shiraz vines that star in Torbreck's RunRig bottlings.

## MAIPO VALLEY, CHILE:

### THE SOUL OF ALTO JAHUEL

Located at the foothills of the Andes Mountains, Santa Rita's Alto Jahuel estate vineyard in the Maipo Valley features alluvial terraces that provide idyllic conditions for Cabernet Sauvignon. Gravelly, well-drained soils are irrigated by snowmelt, allowing the vines to be dry farmed despite the arid, hot summers. While temperatures often exceed 90 degrees Fahrenheit during the peak of the growing season, nighttime temperatures can drop by up to 40 degrees, helping to preserve the grapes' freshness. Here, a block of old vines planted in the late 1960s is responsible for the winery's most prestigious bottling: Casa Real Cabernet Sauvignon. First released in 1989, it's also among Chile's most respected wines.

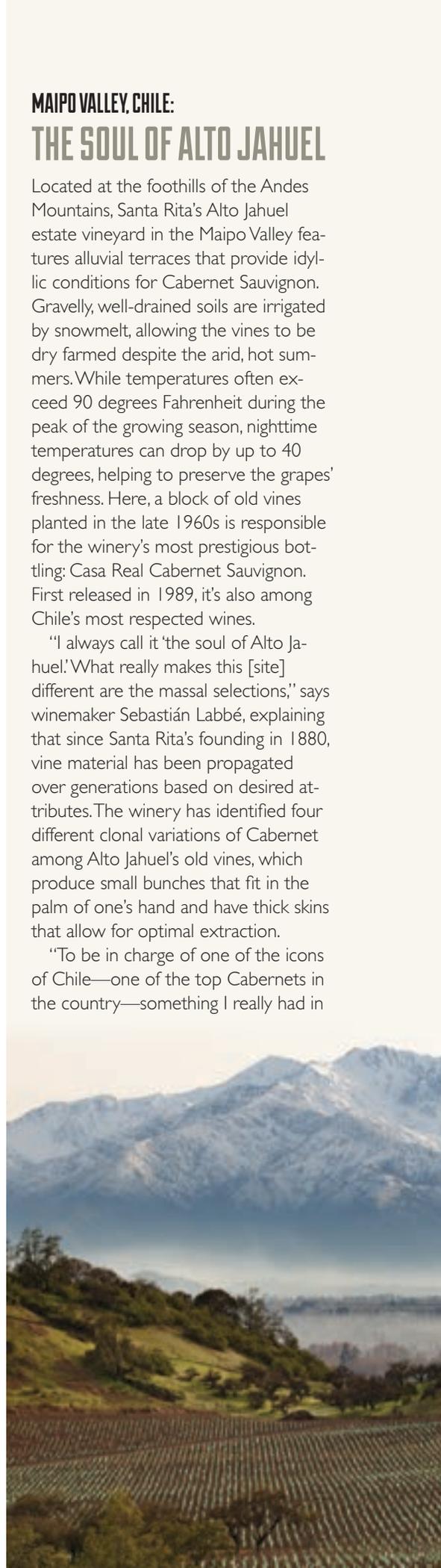
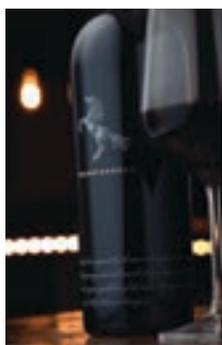
"I always call it 'the soul of Alto Jahuel.' What really makes this [site] different are the massal selections," says winemaker Sebastián Labbé, explaining that since Santa Rita's founding in 1880, vine material has been propagated over generations based on desired attributes. The winery has identified four different clonal variations of Cabernet among Alto Jahuel's old vines, which produce small bunches that fit in the palm of one's hand and have thick skins that allow for optimal extraction.

"To be in charge of one of the icons of Chile—one of the top Cabernets in the country—something I really had in

PHOTO: JEREMY BALL



PHOTO: JEREMY BALL



my mind was to keep a hands-off approach. So I'm very traditional in terms of vinification," explains Labbé. Although farming practices have changed over the years, perhaps most notably through the decision to eliminate the use of pesticides and herbicides starting in 2015, the winemaking approach has been consistent. Grapes are hand harvested, batches are kept small, and fermentation is carried out by native yeast; extraction, meanwhile, is aggressive at the beginning when there's no alcohol present and gentle when there is. "I think this is how Casa Real has been made since the first vintage in 1989," says Labbé. "When we do a vertical tasting in ten years, it would be ideal for me not to see the change in hands in terms of who's in charge."

Casa Real is made only in top vintages, and several have been skipped over the past decade, including the 2016. But the **2017 Casa Real Estate Bottled Cabernet Sauvignon (\$150)**, the first vintage crafted by Labbé, is nothing short of sublime. The first whiff is seductive, offering savory notes of aged leather and volcanic rock on a foundation of cassis that's present without being overt. Fine tannins frame briary flavors, while waves of anise and cedar linger long after each sip.



PHOTO COURTESY OF DELICATO FAMILY WINES

*Torbreck Vintners works with many of the oldest Shiraz vineyards in the world, dating as far back as 1856.*

## BAROSSA VALLEY, AUSTRALIA: OLD WORLD SHIRAZ VINES IN THE NEW WORLD

Barossa Valley is home to the oldest producing Shiraz vineyards in the world. These own-rooted relics were planted in the mid-1800s and yield clusters whose looser bunches, which take longer to mature, distinguish them from their modern counterparts. Torbreck Vintners has positioned itself as an old-vine collector by contracting with the growers that maintain a large percentage of these historic sites in addition to farming many of them itself. Among those it oversees, six established between 1856 and 1901 form the foundation of its old-vine program. "What age does it brings an X-factor—it brings in texture and elements that we think give the wine incredible longevity," says winemaker Ian Hongell.

The RunRig Shiraz is a reflection of those six sites, whose fruit is harvested, vinified, and matured separately for roughly 30 months. Then the best barrels are assembled to make the final wine. "Each site has a very distinct personality in terms of what it brings to the blend," says Hongell, noting that these vineyards ripen six to eight weeks apart due to differences in elevation, soil, climate, and rainfall, resulting in very different profiles. "Whether it is the elegant spice from the north with fine tannins, the robust licorice [and] dark-coffee notes from the center of the valley, or the plummy of [the fruit from] the south, each brings an attribute that makes the wine complete."

Hongell started at Torbreck in 2016 after working with Barossa legend Peter Lehmann for nearly two decades. The move gave him the chance to partner with his father, a longtime vintner and grower for the brand, and pursue a style of winemaking he was passionate about. "It gave me a chance to find great boundaries in winemaking and have a very close association with the wines to be able to experiment," says Hongell, noting that he and his colleagues are constantly striving to push the boundaries of their craft.

The **2017 RunRig Shiraz (\$225)** reflects the cooler conditions of its vintage, which resulted in higher natural acidity and bright aromatics. It's dark and brooding, with an aromatic tapestry of toasted hazelnuts, roasted coffee, and faint undertones of sage; the palate is dense with savory layers of allspice, shoyu, and black plum framed by super-fine cacao-nib tannins.



PHOTO: JEREMY BALL

PHOTO: JEREMY BALL

*Santa Rita's Alto Jahuel Vineyard is situated at the foothills of the Andes Mountains in Maipo Valley, Chile.*

PHOTO COURTESY OF DELICATO FAMILY WINES

## GERMANY:

# 27 GENERATIONS OF FAMILY WINEGROWING HISTORY IN THE RHEINGAU

Schloss Vollrads is synonymous with German wine history. As one of the world's oldest wineries still in operation, it also possesses the earliest documentation of a wine bill, notarized in 1211. In addition, it was the first to designate its wines based on quality tiers, coining the term "Kabinett" in 1716 and thereby informing buyers that its best wines were kept in a separate cellar.

"It's such a unique feeling to continue a line of winemakers who were running such a place for hundreds of years," says winemaker emeritus and senior global brand ambassador Dr. Rowald Hepp, adding that being there for even a fraction of that history is a "priceless" opportunity. Hepp was close friends with the late Count Erwein, the last of the Griefenclau clan, 27 generations of which had owned the winery for nearly a millennium; following his death, Hepp took on the role as winemaker in 1977 and has stayed ever since.

The Rheingau-based producer focuses exclusively on Riesling, crafting ten to 15 expressions of the varietal in any given

year. Hepp attributes the distinctive profile of the wines to the soil: While drilling a new well in 1998, he and his team found that the roots of their vines—which averaged 35 years of age—reached 18 meters deep. Hepp saved the drilling cores, which revealed six unique layers of rock permeated by the vine roots: a top layer of loess followed by gravel, calcareous soil, red slate, black slate, and quartz. Although he admits there is no scientific proof of what these minerals contribute to the wine, he believes varieties with a long hang time like Riesling must be affected. "Riesling always looks for cool climate and complex soils, which offer a wide range of minerality," says Hepp. "For elegant, racy Rieslings, you need different minerals. It doesn't matter if you have just one, you need to have all in a good balance in your soils; otherwise you never find the best expression for Riesling."

The grapes in the **Schloss Vollrads 2018 Kabinett Riesling (\$35)** were destemmed and sorted before they underwent three days of cold maceration prior to fermentation with native yeast. "If we give our grapes the chance to have [skin] contact with the juice, then the enzymes in the berries crack the cells of the skins and extract more flavor," explains Hepp, noting that this can only be done if the grapes are fully ripe or bitterness will be extracted

from the seeds. The result is a wine with lively, palpable texture; aromas of honeysuckle, petrol, and lemon peel; and off-dry flavors of tangerine that are offset by sprightly acid.

The Transcendent Wines portfolio also includes the **2018 Ayler Kupp Kabinett Riesling (\$34)** from Bischöfliche Weingüter Trier, which farms 200 acres of ancient vineyards on the steep blue-slate slopes of the Mosel River. This single-vineyard wine offers expressive notes of pear, jasmine, and fleshy honeydew, which are lifted by acidity before the tingly, lemon-tea finish. The **Franz Keller 2018 vom Löss Pinot Noir (\$38)**, meanwhile, hails from a benchmark estate in Baden; situated in the region's sunny volcanic hills, it helped establish Baden's reputation for world-class wines made from Burgundian grapes. This expression offers an intriguing interplay of bright red fruit and earth, with a nose that suggests cranberry, mushroom, and wet black stone; a flow of bright red cherry on the palate is framed by a whisper of oak and firm structure.

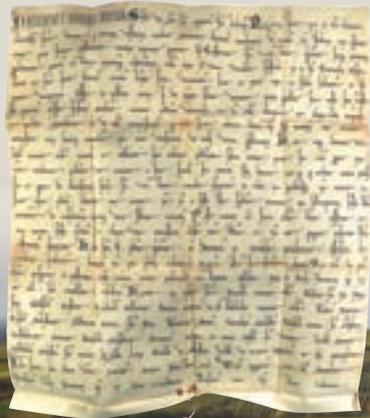


PHOTO: JEREMY BALL



PHOTO: JEREMY BALL

PHOTO COURTESY OF DELICATO FAMILY WINES



*This original document notes the sale of three casks of wine on November 18, 1211.*



PHOTO COURTESY OF DELICATO FAMILY WINES

*Schloss Vollrads' estate and castle were owned by the same family for 27 generations.*



Larry McKenna, known as the “Godfather of New Zealand Pinot Noir,” performs a punchdown in a fermentation bin.

## SINGLE-VINEYARD PINOT NOIRS OF OREGON



PHOTO: JEREMY BALL

Rounding out the Transcendent Wines portfolio are Willamette Valley Pinot Noirs from Dobbes Family Estate in Oregon, which serves as a domestic contrast to Escarpment in Martinborough and Franz Keller in Baden.

### **Dobbes Family Estate 2018 Grand Assemblage Pinot Noir (\$30)**

This multivineyard blend captures a snapshot of the 2018 vintage in the Willamette Valley. Rose hips and red cherry lead on the nose and palate with flavors of raspberry and mulling spices matched by well-balanced acidity.

### **Dobbes Family Estate 2017 Patricia’s Cuvée Pinot Noir (\$50)**

Named in honor of the founder’s wife, Patricia, this cuvée is a full-bodied Pinot Noir crafted from four vineyard sites and matured in a significant portion of new French oak (40%). Dark black cherry and ripe blueberry shine with notes of sweet tobacco leaf and boysenberry pie. The wine possesses an opulent mouthfeel, soft tannins, and ample acidity that adds considerable length on the finish.

## MARTINBOROUGH, NEW ZEALAND: THE GODFATHER OF ESCARPMENT

Winemaker Larry McKenna has built a reputation for producing many of New Zealand’s finest Pinot Noirs. When he moved to Martinborough in 1986, he believed the district to be ideally suited to high-end expressions of the grape, given that its cool maritime climate, ocean breezes, dry summers, and free-draining alluvial soils all make for excellent growing conditions for Burgundian varieties.

Since Escarpment’s founding in 1999, McKenna has crafted its winemaking style to showcase the beauty of Martinborough Pinot Noir and ensure its rightful place on the global stage. The winery and its sustainably farmed vineyards are located along a large ridge above the Huangarua River on ancient gravelly terraces. Its flagship single-vineyard Pinot Noir, Kupe, is named for the Polynesian voyager who first discovered New Zealand and hails from a high-density 4.5-acre planting whose character stems primarily from the Abel Pinot Noir clone—originally thought to

have been propagated from cuttings taken from Burgundy’s Domaine de la Romanée Conti estate.

The **2018 Kupe Single Vineyard Pinot Noir (\$95)** is a delicate mélange of cut sage and red cherry with a touch of sandalwood, yet its mouthfeel is robust, with layers of depth that peel away to reveal a core of pomegranate. With prickly red fruit, roobios-tea tannins, and endless length, it’s a true expression of New World Pinot Noir that’s crafted in accordance with classical winemaking traditions like fermentation with native yeasts and traditional punchdowns. *SJ*



Among the many soil types found in Lodi are the Jahant AVA's shallow, pinkish sandy clay loam with root-restrictive layers and Sloughouse's mix of low-vigor reddish sand, silt, and volcanic gravelly loam.



PHOTOS: CANTLIN BEVER PHOTOGRAPHY

# The Lowdown on Lodi

AN ONLINE MASTERCLASS PROVES THE NEXT BEST THING TO BEING THERE by Kimberly Norris

PHOTO: ERIN NORRIS



Author Kimberly Norris is general manager of Barnoa Wine Bar & Bistro in San Clemente, CA.

**BEFORE TAKING THE** Lodi Winegrape Commission Masterclass with well-known author Elaine Chukan Brown last fall, I knew very little about Lodi—the region, its history, or its wines. At a time when travel is limited, I feel very lucky to have had this virtual experience.

I had applied through SommFoundation to attend a four-day field trip to Lodi during the 2020 harvest; it was canceled due to the pandemic, but to my surprise and delight, I was selected to participate in an online alternative. Shortly after I was notified, I received two boxes in the mail. The first contained soil samples from the region's seven AVAs; the color and textural differences between them clearly illustrated the distinctiveness of each subzone. The second box, containing 12 bottles of Lodi wine, was a real treat, and it was all I could do to not prematurely dive into a personal tasting.

The Masterclass was divided into two two-hour sessions in which Brown was joined by Lodi-based winemakers and growers. When they spoke about their vineyards, you could feel their passion for and commitment to LODI RULES for Sustainable Winegrow-

*Mustard grows as a cover crop in Lodi's Mokelumne River AVA.*

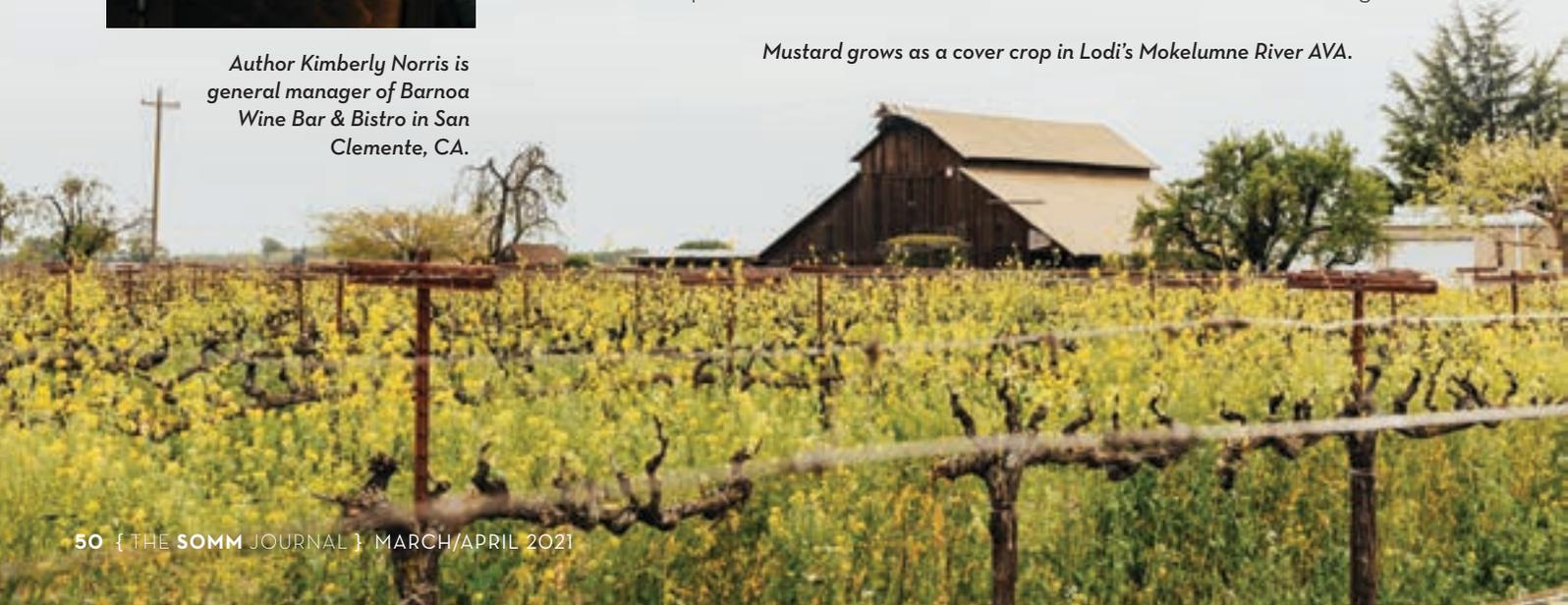
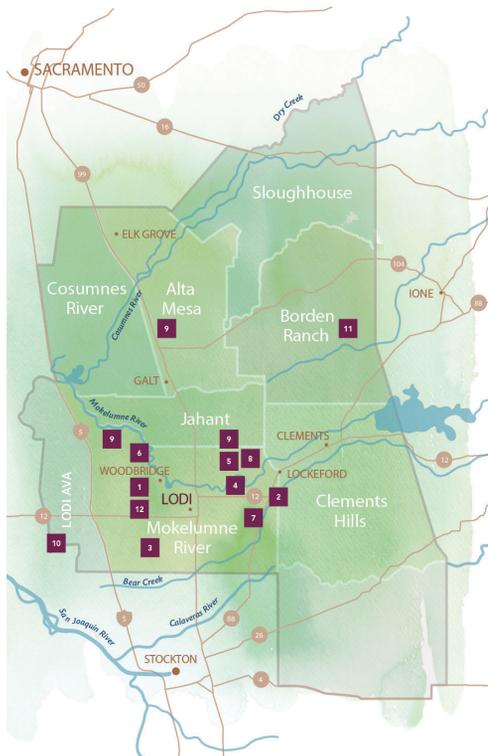


PHOTO: STEPHANIE RUSSO PHOTOGRAPHY

# SommFoundation x Lodi Wine Masterclass

A map of the vineyards featured in the Lodi Winegrape Commission Masterclass was sent to attendees in advance, along with the wines they yielded.



- 1. BECHTHOLD VINEYARD | MICHAEL DAVID CINSAUT | Growers Phillips Farms**  
A 25-acre own-rooted, dry-farmed Cinsaut vineyard planted in 1886 in deep sandy loam on 10 x 10 spacing. Farmed in accordance with LODI RULES.
- 2. STAMPEDE VINEYARD | FIELDS FAMILY ZINFANDEL | Growers Jeff & John Perlegos**  
An own-rooted Zinfandel vineyard dotted with Mourvedre and Mission originally planted in the 1920s in Tokay and Kingdon fine sandy loams and laid out in an unusual diamond pattern on 10 x 10 spacing.
- 3. MARIAN'S VINEYARD | ST. AMANT ZINFANDEL | Growers Bruce & Jerry Fry**  
An 8.3-acre own-rooted vineyard planted in 1901 in deep, well-draining sandy loam with typical yields less than 2 tons/acre. Farmed in accordance with LODI RULES.
- 4. KIRSCHENMANN VINEYARD | TURLEY WINE CELLARS ZINFANDEL | Grower Tegan Passalacqua**  
A head-trained, dry-farmed, own-rooted Zinfandel vineyard planted in a bend of the river on the east side of the Mokelumne River AVA in 1915 in sandy loam with underlying chalk and limestone.
- 5. LOUIS ABBA VINEYARD | MCCAY GRENACHE | Growers Louis & Phil Abba**  
An 8.32-acre vineyard planted in 2008 in Kingdon and Tokay fine sandy loams on VSP trellis. Farmed in accordance with LODI RULES.
- 6. MULE PLANE VINEYARD | PRECEDENT CARIGNAN | Grower John Shinn**  
A 1920s own-rooted planting 1300 feet from the Mokelumne River in well-draining Tokay sandy loam with typical yields of 6 tons/acre. Farmed in accordance with LODI RULES.
- 7. LEWIS VINEYARD | LANGETWINS CENTENNIAL ZINFANDEL | Grower Charlie Lewis**  
A goblet-trained, spur-pruned vineyard planted in 1903 in well-draining, beach-like, alluvial soils. Farmed in accordance with LODI RULES.
- 8. ACQUIESCE INGÉNUE VINEYARDS | Growers Rodney & Susan Tipton**  
Four vineyard blocks (Clairette Blanche, Grenache Blanc, Bourboulenc, Picpoul Blanc) planted between 2008 and 2016 in alluvial sandy loam on vertical trellis. Farmed in accordance with LODI RULES.
- 9. OAK FARM ALBARIÑO VINEYARDS | Growers Oak Farm Vineyards, Jonathan Wetmore, Ron Silva**  
Three vineyards planted in sandy and clay loams in Mokelumne, Alta Mesa, and Jahant AVAs between 2012 and 2016 on VSP and quadrilateral trellis. All are farmed in accordance with LODI RULES.
- 10. UNDER THE SEA VINEYARD | KLINKER BRICK GRENACHE BLANC | Grower Ben Kolber**  
A 3-acre block planted in lush deep peat and Delta mineral soils on 10 x 5 spacing 19 feet below sea level on the south-western border of the Lodi AVA. Farmed in accordance with LODI RULES.
- 11. CLAY STATION VINEYARD | BOKISCH VERDEJO | Grower Markus Bokisch**  
A 144-acre vineyard planted in Redding gravelly clay loam to Verdejo and other varieties in Borden Ranch AVA in 2011. Farmed in accordance with LODI RULES.
- 12. SPENKER RANCH, BLOCK 4 VINEYARD | MARKUS DOMO | Grower Greg Burns**  
A head-trained Carignan vineyard planted in sandy loam in 1900 in Mokelumne River AVA. Gill Creek Ranch and River Song Vineyards contribute 17% Merlot and 16% Zinfandel to the Domo blend.

ing, created in 1990. Truly exceptional as California's original sustainable-viticulture program, it focuses on not only the healthy farming practices that result in wonderful grapes and glorious wines but also com-

munity engagement and employee education. The strong growth of this remarkably progressive community was evident even in an online seminar: I felt as though I were in Lodi for a couple of hours each morning, listening to exhilarating stories—including one about a parachutist who survived an emergency landing in the region's sandy soils.

I was familiar with only a couple of the bottles prior to the class, but when I opened the Turley Kirschenmann Vineyard Zinfandel, it was like visiting an old friend. It's such a beautiful wine that never disappoints with its richness of dark plum, nice tannin structure, and long finish. The class sampled three other Zinfandels as well to explore how all the producers have their own style—from lighter, Pinot Noir-like expressions to heavier ones reminiscent of Saint-Émilion. We learned how they were grown, picked, and made as well as of the handshake deals many growers and winemakers rely on instead of contracts, showing the mutual trust fostered here.

Tasting with the producers was extremely educating and eye-opening. While trying the McCay Cellars Grenache, with its pretty red fruit and dried herbs, we

saw a picture of growers Louis and Phil Abba, whose 76 years of farming experience testify to the commitment of the local community to their work. Then there was the Precedent Mule Plane Vineyard Carignan, a variety commonly used by home winemakers during Prohibition. I really enjoyed the different varietals we tasted, from the Bokisch Vineyards Verdejo to the Oak Farm Albariño to the Klinker Brick Grenache Blanc, which undergoes a long soak to bring out the fruit. I discovered that the grapes for the Michael David Cinsaut came from ungrafted, own-rooted vines planted way back in 1886. I was surprised to learn about the plethora of wineries in Lodi and the diversity of their products, and I've decided this will be the first region I visit when the world opens up again.

In fact, this enrichment class has inspired me to travel and learn much more as soon as possible. The opportunities and educational experiences that SommFoundation provides to industry members are priceless, and the tools it offers can enhance your career and further your passion for wine, keeping the subject exciting and fresh. **\$J**

PHOTO: STEPHANIE RUSSO PHOTOGRAPHY



Grower Jeff Perlegos sifts Kingdom and Tokay fine sandy loams in the Stampede Zinfandel Vineyard, planted in 1928 in Lodi's Clements Hills AVA.

# TOP-TIER WINES FROM THE **BOTTOM** OF THE **WORLD**

RECAPPING THE GEOGRAPHICAL DIGEST  
“**SOUTHERN HEMISPHERE**” WEBINAR IN ASSOCIATION  
WITH SOMMCON AND NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC

by Jessie Birschbach



In my opinion, the concept of Southern Hemisphere versus Northern Hemisphere wine can be as hard to define as that of the Old versus the New World. Indeed, when our most recent Geographical Digest webinar set out to provide an overarching review, we examined each producer case by case and found notable differences among them—even those located within the same subregions.

Sure, there are some commonalities to be found among wines grown in the Southern Hemisphere. On the whole, this part of the globe receives more UV radiation yet is actually cooler than the Northern Hemisphere. Also, because the seasons are reversed, harvest typically occurs from February to as late as May. Yet as moderator Lars Leicht, *The SOMM Journal's* VP of Education, discovered when he asked our presenters about their 2020 harvest, variations exist even on that score.

You can find much more detail on the subject in *The New Sotheby's Wine Encyclopedia*, our partner in the Geographical Digest series along with *National Geographic* and SommCon. But first, read on to learn more about each of the handpicked producers we met from the bottom half of our world.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF TREASURY WINE ESTATES



A view from the vineyards: Penfolds' historic Magill Estate building.



**WINE:** Penfolds 2018 Bin 389 Cabernet Sauvignon/Shiraz (\$80)

**PRESENTER:** Tim Irwin, regional general manager at Penfolds

**LATITUDE/LONGITUDE:** 34 degrees south, 138 degrees east

Most wine professionals are familiar with Penfolds' 176-year-old origin story, in which the good doctor Christopher Penfold prescribed his Tawnies and fortified wines to ill patients. Still, a black-and-white image of the Adelaide, Australia-based winery's historic Magill Estate being built by horse and cart helped our knowledgeable webinar audience to appreciate its heritage all over again. And when they were reminded of the tenacity and ambition of Max Schubert—the winemaker responsible for creating the world-renowned Grange label in the 1950s—it no doubt reaffirmed their faith in Penfolds' signature style: ageworthy wines born of innovation and blending.



Max Schubert, the winemaker who created Penfolds' world-renowned Grange label in the 1950s.

If Grange represents the brightest star of the Penfolds portfolio, Bin 389 is certainly within the same mighty constellation. Celebrating its 60th year of production in 2020, Bin 389 is referred to as "Baby Grange" because it ages in American oak barrels that held the previous vintage of Grange. The combination of "predominantly Cabernet Sauvignon with Shiraz," according to Penfolds regional general manager Tim Irwin, is also like Grange in that it's a multiregional blend, sustainably sourced across the Coonawarra and Barossa Valley regions; Irwin attributed the wine's structure to this geographical diversity.

The sturdy framework of Bin 389 reflects its ageability—such a large part of Penfolds' culture that the company provides a "rewards of patience" recorking service, as its wines typically outlast their corks. Irwin suggested that the 2018 Bin 389 would still be drinking well up to 2050.

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**WINES:** Argento 2018 Finca Altamira Malbec (\$30), 2018 Finca Agrelo Cabernet Franc (\$30), and 2018 Finca Agrelo Malbec (\$30)

**PRESENTER:** Juan Pablo Murgia, winemaker at Bodega Argento

**LATITUDE/LONGITUDE:** 33 degrees south, 68 degrees west



“This is a journey of intention for soil health and fruit purity,” said Bodega Argento chief winemaker Juan Pablo Murgia, who added that the best way to reach the destination is through sustainable and organic farming. “Today, all of our wines are certified sustainable, and we are releasing a new collection of wines that are also certified organic. This is an exciting time for us, and we are very proud to be one of the largest organic producers in Argentina.”

The winery was established in 1998 in Cruz de Piedra in central Mendoza’s Maipú subzone with the help of renowned enologist Alberto Antonini and international vineyard consultant Pedro Parra, who worked to develop its vineyard sites throughout the region. Its holdings

consist of five vineyards totaling 450 hectares: Finca Altamira in the Uco Valley and Finca Alto Agrelo, Finca Ugarteche, and Finca Carrizal in Luján de Cuyo as well as the Maipú property. It was in 2012 that Bodega Argento began its organic conversion program; it’s certified as such by Agencert as well as certified sustainable by Bodegas de Argentina.

Finca Alto Agrelo is the largest vineyard at around 232 hectares, which range from 3,215 to 3,540 feet in elevation. One of the pillars of Bodega Argento’s organic viticultural program is soil-health analysis, which it has conducted for Alto Agrelo as well as Altamira. Murgia shared an aerial shot of Agrelo overlaid with an electroconductivity analysis; the image appeared as a tie-dyed pattern of green, yellow, and blue across dozens of vineyard blocks, peppered in red and white squares representing the different soil profiles identified by the team. These help them to determine the optimal rootstock, variety, and irrigation regimen for each block.

To showcase these efforts, Murgia presented a trio of expressions from Bodega Argento’s new Single Vineyard series, representing both Finca Agrelo and Finca Altamira. “We believe that organic is the best way to express the terroir, and this journey will continue,” reiterated Murgia; indeed, the winery’s Estate (\$11) and Reserva (\$15) ranges—both widely available in the U.S.—now denote on their labels that they’re certified organic, sustainable, and vegan.



**Argento 2018 Finca Altamira Malbec, Mendoza, Argentina**

Plush and elegant, with meaty notes that accompany violets, licorice, and blackberry preserves. Mulberry-washed cedar is spiced with vanilla and cinnamon. **93**

PACIFIC HIGHWAY WINES  
& SPIRITS

*Argento’s Agrelo Vineyard ranges in elevation from 3,215 to 3,540 feet.*

PHOTOS COURTESY OF ARGENTO



**WINES:** Bodega Norton 2016 Privada Family Blend (\$26) and 2018 Reserva Malbec (\$19), Mendoza

**PRESENTER:** David Bonomi, winemaker at Bodega Norton

**LATITUDE/LONGITUDE:** 33 degrees south, 68 degrees west

Named for British engineer Edmund James Palmer Norton, who planted the estate in 1895, Bodega Norton has been owned by Gernot Langes-Swarovski (of jewelry-industry fame) since 1989; Swarovski's son, Michael Halstrick, serves as its president and CEO. Winemaker David Bonomi claims that it is the largest winery in Mendoza—quite a feat considering that the region produces around 75% of Argentina's wine.

Bonomi and his team create 60 expressions from five different estates totaling 2,000 acres in the Luján de Cuyo and Uco Valley subregions of Mendoza. The lowest-elevation property, Medrano, rests at almost 3,000 feet; the highest, La Colonia, is

located at just over 3,600 feet. Compared to regions such as Australia's Barossa Valley, Napa Valley, and Burgundy, Bonomi noted, Mendoza not only enjoys the highest altitude but the lowest amount of annual rainfall at 9 inches, decreasing disease pressure. (Interestingly, despite the overall desert climate, Bodega Norton relies mainly on drip irrigation via the meltwater of the Andes.) It's worth noting too that unlike these renowned areas, most of the vines in Mendoza—and Argentina as a whole—are grown on their own rootstock.

Bonomi feels that high altitude is paramount to producing the best, most aromatic Malbec. "The variety is the key that opens the terroir," said the third-gen-

eration winemaker, presenting the Bodega Norton Reserva Malbec as the portfolio's "most important" version. The native Argentine also presented the Bodega Norton Privada Family Blend, a combination of Cabernet Sauvignon, Malbec, and Merlot that was originally made just for the founding family; as he told the audience, "Our heart is our Malbec. Our mind is our Privada."

**Bodega Norton 2018 Reserva Malbec, Mendoza** A big-bodied, silky red with a brooding side. Concentration of rich, meaty notes with dark chocolate and blackberry preserves. Elegant yet plush—a fantastic steak wine. **92**



*The entrance to Bodega Norton's winery in Mendoza.*

**WINE:** Viñas Queirolo Intipalka 2018 Gran Reserva No° 1, Ica Valley, Peru (\$50)

**PRESENTER:** Luis Gomez, winemaker at Viñas Queirolo

**LATITUDE/LONGITUDE:** 13 degrees south, 75 degrees west

PHOTOS COURTESY OF VIÑAS QUEIROLO



At the end of Viñas Queirolo's presentation, Leicht made the telling observation that "[its] vineyards look like an oasis in the desert." He was referring to the producer's Ica Valley Vineyard, planted 500 meters above sea level about 37 miles from the Peruvian coast. An aerial view of this 600-hectare mountain-desert property validated Leicht's remark: Resembling a pixelated oval straddling the Ica River, it's the only green for miles around, surrounded by a hilly dune system. Combined with the output from its other vineyard in the Cañete Valley—encompassing roughly 100 hectares, it's the source for the Santiago Queirolo brand—Viñas Queirolo is able to produce more than 10 million bottles a year, an extraordinary feat considering its humble beginnings.

A few years after leaving Genoa, Italy, to settle in Lima, the Queirolo family established Viñas Queirolo in 1880, selling their wines and pisco in their namesake tavern in the district of Pueblo Libre. Following nearly a century and a half of expansion, acquisition, and, more recently, renovation, the winery is run today by the third generation of the family, along with winemaker Luis Gomez and fellow Argentine viticulturalist Alejandro Sejanovich.

Where the mountain plots on Viñas Queirolo's endlessly sunny Ica Valley property provide a rocky and calcareous home for Tannat, Petit Verdot, Cabernet Sauvignon, and Sauvignon Blanc, the flatter valley sites offer plusher digs of sand, limestone, and clay for the Malbec, Tannat, Syrah, Merlot, Chardonnay, and Sauvignon Blanc vines grown there. Placing them within geographical context, Gomez explained, "There are two main Peruvian geographic characters. The first is the Andes Mountains, which stops the rain formed in the rainforest in the east from heading west. The second and more important is the current of the Pacific Ocean. The Humboldt Current takes the cold water and raises it to the surface," cooling the air in a way that prevents precipitation and creates southern Peru's arid climate. "Remember," he added, "the climate of Peru should be tropical, but where our vineyards are, especially in the Ica Valley, it's the opposite."

To showcase this uncommon terroir, Gomez presented the Viñas Queirolo Intipalka N° 1. The flagship blend features 55% Malbec and 45% Tannat—the two grape varieties that Gomez believes "make the best wines in the [Ica] Valley."

*Viña Queirolo's oasis-like vineyards within the Ica Valley.*



**Intipalka 2018 Gran Reserva N° 1, Ica Valley, Peru** A showpiece blend of 55% Malbec and 45% Tannat sourced from high-elevation desert vineyards that influence its concentration. Aromas of cherry, coffee, and terroir come through. Acidity is augmented by the flavor of sour cherry while earthy notes of soy sauce, mulberry, beetroot, and blackberry are deep and inviting. It's luxury unleashed. **95**



**Intipalka 2019 Chardonnay, Ica Valley, Peru (\$14)** From Viñas Queirolo's Ica Valley vineyards 1,500 feet above sea level, this seductive white greets the nose with vanilla and chamomile. Its round, leesy body shows butterscotch and tropical fruit. **92**



**Intipalka 2019 Malbec, Ica Valley, Peru (\$14)** Juicy with spiced cranberry and black cherry. Underbrush and coffee tannins add depth. Plum and slate meet midway, joining sensations of earth and leather. **92**



**WINE:** Reyneke 2016 Syrah, Stellenbosch (\$29)

**PRESENTER:** Johan Reyneke, owner/winemaker at Reyneke Wines

**LATITUDE/LONGITUDE:** 33 degrees south, 13 degrees west

PHOTOS COURTESY OF REYNEKE



"I'm not a trained viticulturist or enologist or anything like that. My story is a funny one," said Johan Reyneke, owner/winemaker at Stellenbosch's Reyneke Wines. And he was right. But it's also incredibly inspiring.

"I started by studying law," the South

African native explained. "I sucked at it. I fell in love with philosophy. I got a degree in environmental ethics, focusing particularly on environment and development. I fell in love with a girl in Pasadena and spent a year in California, following the love of my life, who I ended up marrying. But when I came back, I had to find a job." Thanks to his love for the outdoors and his willingness to work his way up, he found a position as a farm laborer—and it was this experience that, along with his educational background, helped to shape the environmental and cultural integrity of his winery.

Perhaps the fact that he's a kind man who has witnessed the lasting damage of apartheid also plays a role. Thanks to his Cornerstone Project, all permanent employees are provided with not only fair pay but also housing, benefits, and educational opportunities, with the long-term goal of ensuring their financial independence.

Acquiring a property established in 1893, Reyneke converted it to organics in 1992 and bottled his first wine in 1998. As South Africa's first Biodynamic winery,

the estate is Demeter certified as well as certified organic and sustainable through a number of international programs such as Ceres and the Integrated Production of Wine. Serving as proof of these endeavors were pictures of smiling farmers wearing T-shirts reading "Vine Hugger" and long-lashed cows peeking through a row of Cabernet Sauvignon vines.

The resulting wines, made with minimal intervention, are vibrant in character. Sipping on his perfumed and savory Syrah, Reyneke described his property's granitic soils and relatively cool climate thanks to the sea breezes it enjoys. He then left the audience with one of his favorite quotes from the book *Life of Pi*: "There can be no greatness without goodness."



**Reyneke 2016 Syrah, Stellenbosch, South Africa**

Made with organic grapes, this dense, tannic red has a yin-yang pattern of dominant savory and lighthearted floral tones. Notes of licorice and granite reflect the vineyard soil as black pepper comes through with grace. **93**

VINEYARD BRANDS

**WINE:** Craggy Range 2020 Te Muna Road Vineyard Sauvignon Blanc, Martinborough (\$23)**PRESENTER:** Julian Grounds, chief winemaker at Craggy Range**LATITUDE/LONGITUDE:** 41 degrees south, 175 degrees east

As avid wine enthusiasts, the Peabody family set out to make a world-class wine that would speak to its place of origin—even if that wasn't their own homeland of Australia. Indeed, after exploring not only the land down under but also France and the United States, the Peabodys fell in love with New Zealand—specifically two distinct pieces of untouched land on the North Island introduced to them by local viticulturist Steve Smith. In 1998, Craggy Range was born with one vineyard each in the Hawke's Bay and Martinborough regions. But what was so special about these sites?

Gimblett Gravels Vineyard, the winery's 250-hectare slice of the Gimblett Gravels winegrowing district in Hawke's Bay, is part of a 323-hectare swath that, 6 million years ago, was covered by the Ngaruroro River but today is a mosaic of river stones, silt, and gravel. "Geologically, New Zealand is very young, probably the youngest as a viticultural country," said Craggy Range's chief winemaker, Julian Grounds. "So these soils are still changing and merging."

The Peabodys feel strongly that their youthfulness lends freshness and purity to the Syrah and Bordeaux grapes planted here, which "aren't traditionally varieties achieving a level of ripeness and intensity outside of [the] warmer, classic regions" they're typically grown in, Grounds explained. "Hawke's Bay is sunny but not hot or warm; [it's] more moderate, [so] for us it's these gravels that are key because of the refraction of heat, the retention of heat—[distributing it] throughout the canopy but also [stimulating] root growth. Also, any rain quickly drains through these soils and we end up with very low-yielding vines."

Craggy Range's Te Muna Road Vineyard in Martinborough sits on even younger soils at 30,000 years old. Their porousness provides abundant oxygen and makes for happy vines, according to Grounds. Displaying a striking image of a softball-sized, cross-sectioned sandstone covered in green volcanic ash, he noted finding roots in it to underscore the mineral interplay between plant and soil.

The vines don't get too comfortable, though. Grounds noted that because New Zealand lacks significant landmass to serve as a shield, it's vulnerable to weather systems; in the case of Te Muna Road, which is located on the North Island's southern coast, it's exposed to Arctic winds that make it the perfect site for cool-climate varieties like Pinot Noir and Sauvignon Blanc, which reflect the fresh, aromatic, mineral-driven style of Craggy Range.

**Craggy Range 2017 Te Muna Road Vineyard Pinot Noir, Martinborough, New Zealand (\$50)** Grapes from the higher of the vineyard's two terraces are fermented with indigenous yeast to produce this wine, whose notes of candied watermelon and raspberry play out with searing acidity. A gossamer of cherry, beetroot, red tea, and cocoa creates a delicious elegance. **94**

KOBRAND



PHOTO COURTESY OF CRAGGY RANGE

An autumnal aerial view of the Gimblett Gravels Vineyard in Hawke's Bay.



**WINE:** Viña Santa Rita 2017 Casa Real Cabernet Sauvignon, Alto Jahuel, Maipo Valley (\$150)

**PRESENTER:** Sebastián Labbé, winemaker, ultra-premium range, at Viña Santa Rita

**LATITUDE/LONGITUDE:** 33 degrees south, 70 degrees west

The history of Viña Santa Rita starts in 1880 with a few European cuttings—among the first in Chile—but for the purposes of our webinar, the date to remember was 1989: the first vintage of the iconic Chilean Cabernet Sauvignon Casa Real.

One of Chile's best-known producers, Viña Santa Rita (see also page 46) farms 3,000 hectares of vines in Alto Jahuel, a subregion of the Maipo Valley. But one particular block of Cabernet Sauvignon on this large estate has consistently produced wines of "a very defined character, with higher aromatics and very nice structure," said winemaker Sebastián Labbé, who oversees Viña Santa Rita's ultra-premium range. "And this is basically how Casa Real started."

Produced only in exceptional years—you won't find an '00, '06, or '16 vintage—Casa Real is sourced from what is now called the Carneros Viejo Vineyard, whose 29 hectares of Cabernet Sauvignon include some 50-year-old vines. Labbé believes the vineyard's well-drained soils are a suitable home for the grape: "The alluvial terraces of Maipo Valley achieve an even ripening and a character that's very unique," he said. Thanks to the cold masses of air coming down from the Andes Mountains, diurnal temperature swings help to cool down the site, contributing what he described as the "little cedary notes" that he finds to be common in Alto Jahuel wines.

Combined with "traditional winemaking" practices, Labbé added, these conditions produce a "Cabernet Sauvignon that is robust [and] intense, with sweet tannins and great aging potential." *SJ*

TRANSCENDENT WINES



## ADDITIONAL TASTING NOTES

### ARGENTINA

**Eccentric 2020 Chardonnay, Mendoza, Argentina (\$10)**

Weighty, ripe, and lush with mango and vanilla wafer. The rich and oak-centric palate leads to a caramel finish. **90**

GRUPO PEÑAFLOR



**Finca Flichman 2018 Reserva**

**Cabernet Sauvignon, Mendoza, Argentina (\$15)** Striking notes of licorice bathed in dark chocolate, blueberry, tar, dried flowers, and tobacco. Savory but gentle in the mouth and noteworthy for the price. **91**

SOGRAPE/EVATON

**Mascota Vineyards 2018**

**Unánime Merlot, Mendoza, Argentina (\$23)** This 100% Merlot sourced from Uco Valley vineyards in Gualtallary, Tunpungato, is a lush, magnanimous red overflowing with blackberry and plum. Notes of dark chocolate, black pepper, and cigar leaf set a savory tone. Prime acidity keeps this impressive wine tasting fresh through the lengthy finish. Aged in French oak for 12 months. **93**

MASCOTA VINEYARDS



### CHILE

**Château Los Boldos 2020 Grande Reserve Sauvignon Blanc, Cachapoal Andes, Chile (\$21)**

Staggering notes of clean, fresh-squeezed grapefruit. Dots of tarragon, a thread of minerality, and floral tones weave through the bright fruit. **92**

**Château Los Boldos 2019 Grande Reserve Merlot, Cachapoal Andes, Chile (\$21)**

Chewy tannins meet ripe black cherry and raspberry. Espresso and earth show up midway, while slate joins spiced toast on the finish. **90**

**Château Los Boldos 2019 Vieilles Vignes Syrah, Cachapoal Andes, Chile (\$15)**

Aged 12 months in French oak, this wine offers aromas and flavors of spiced coffee, blackberry, and slate. It continues to develop with an earthiness sweetened by black licorice and soy sauce. **91**

pairing  
up



Ranch 45's beef stew is the ultimate winter comfort.

# Savoring the Season, Seaside Style



PHOTOS: NOUSHIN NOURIZADEH

Pam Schwartz is general manager and sommelier at Ranch 45 in Solana Beach, CA.

## RANCH 45'S BRANDT BEEF STEW KEEPS A COASTAL COMMUNITY COMFORTED

by Michelle M. Metter

**UNDER A MILE AWAY** from the Pacific Ocean in Solana Beach, California, is Ranch 45, a restaurant and butcher shop that sources its meat exclusively from Brawley, California-based Brandt Beef. For passers-by, the aromas of its Brandt beef stew are irresistible, drawing them off of the streets to warm them on cool nights.

The recipe comes courtesy of celebrated local chef Aron Schwartz, who has been lending his skills to the kitchen while on furlough from his high-profile post as executive chef at the Marriott Marquis San Diego Marina. His wife, Pam Schwartz, serves as general manager and sommelier at Ranch 45, which has continued to serve the community throughout the pandemic, adapting through several stay-at-home

orders to bring comfort when people need it most.

For the hearty dish, Aron starts with chunks of Brandt New York strip and tenderloin, searing the meat to a golden brown; he then adds potatoes from nearby Chino Farm as well as carrots, celery, and onions. (Daily visits to the farm were part of the chef's pre-pandemic routine, as the Chino family is known for growing some of the highest-quality produce in Southern California.) The ingredients then simmer in rich, unctuous Brandt beef stock for several hours to develop the stew's flavors, proving that good things are worth waiting for.

Pam suggests pairing the dish with Macedon 2017 Pinot Noir. "From the country of Macedonia, this stunning Pinot

is named for Alexander the Great—the original Macedon—and hails from an area noted as the 'crossroads of the ancient world and the birthplace of wine.' It originates in Gradsko, [which shares] the same latitude as Burgundy and the Russian River Valley. The 40-plus-year-old vines grow where two major weather fronts collide . . . yielding virtually no rain and consistent wind. The result is a wine of terrific elegance and complexity [that's] rich yet linear—pretty, but with depth and power. I chose this wine because of the depth in body and flavor. The unique terroir and dark fruit complement the richness of the dish."

Read on for additional pairing recommendations from a skilled group of sommeliers.

PHOTO: ANDY RYAN



**Ali Yakich**

*Wine and beverage director,  
Flagstaff House Restaurant, Boulder, CO*

The Belle Pente 2017 Gamay Noir from the Willamette Valley is such a special, big, spice-driven Gamay. Belle Pente practices organic and Biodynamic viticulture with its three-level gravity-flow facility. The name means “beautiful slope,” [referring to the property] in Yamhill-Carlton, which inspires [owner] Brian O’Donnell to draw inspiration from Old World wine-growing traditions. I think the terroir leads this Gamay to be the perfect pairing with beef stew. The vines were planted in 1994 and the winery has celebrated the difference in its estate Pinot Noir versus [its] Gamay Noir ever since. It has such a warming spice on the palate, finishing with medium tannin and dark fruits; slightly rustic cedar notes complement the rich beef and aromatics.

PHOTO: ASHLEY LEVIERE



**Paul Solomon**

*Beverage director and  
restaurant manager,  
Chicago Firehouse Restaurant, Chicago, IL*

[An] impressive project spearheaded by Michel Rolland, Clos de los Siete [is] a Malbec blend that is both an ode to the

respected region of Mendoza in Argentina . . . [and] a tribute to the producer’s native Bordeaux. The 2017 vintage is complex and balanced, with a creamy mouth-feel. The palate is full yet elegant, with dark berry fruit, dark chocolate, velvety tannins, and fresh acidity [that] cuts the richness; the integrated tannins complement the luscious dish.

PHOTO: IRIS RODRIGUEZ



**Garland McClure**

*Sommelier, The Forest Club, Houston, TX*

The Domaine Denis Bachelet 2017 Gevrey-Chambertin Vieilles Vignes is an inviting combination of sweetness derived from both dark fruits and delicate

touches of oak. Although still young, [the wine features] a pure bouquet of dark cherries, plums, cassis, and violets. Distinct earth scents, smoke, and minerality lead into a rich medium weight with supple touches of spice. A dish of this nature screams for a slightly fruity red with a rich, earthy intensity [that isn’t] overbearing. A classic chilly-night beef stew paired with a classic Gevrey-Chambertin.

**José Carlos Delgado**

*Sommelier, Mourad, San Francisco, CA*



The Domaine Dumien-Serrette 2017 Patou [hails from] a roughly 3-hectare vineyard planted in the early 1920s in the village of Les Savaux

in the Northern Rhône’s Cornas AOC. Since 1515, the family has lived off the fruits of their labors in Cornas, and in the 1930s they purchased the Patou vineyard and got into grape production.

Jumping to 1983, current family [proprietor] Nicholas Serrette decided to take the leap and craft his own wine instead of selling to famous producers in the area. He’s of the old guard—a vigneron of traditional practices like using whole clusters crushed by foot, concrete-vat fermentations, [and] long aging in very old oak barrels, to name just a few. This 100% Syrah expresses flavors and aromas of dark cherry, pomegranate, and violets, with a dusting of meaty smoked paprika and olive tapenade [that] is braised beef’s best friend. It is a pairing of like characteristics, expressing delicate savoriness yet being rich in textures and length. One will never outshine the other; even the unctuousness of the braising liquid would be tamed by the wine’s gripping but fine-grained tannins and bright acidity, while the delicate nature of the wine itself won’t overpower the delicate cuts of [meat].

*Michelle M. Metter is a San Diego-based writer, publicist, and event producer. To be considered for an upcoming Pairing Up column, contact her at metter@fastforwardevents.com.*

# RAIDING THE CELLAR

SANDRA TAYLOR DISHES  
ON HER NEW ROLE AS  
TEAM SOMMELIER FOR THE  
LAS VEGAS RAIDERS

*Sandra Taylor is head sommelier at the  
Las Vegas Raiders' Allegiant Stadium.*

**STORY BY ALLYSON REEDY**  
**PHOTO BY MONA SHIELD PAYNE**

When the Las Vegas Raiders' state-of-the-art Allegiant Stadium opens to fans this season, there will be an added bonus for those lucky enough to own suites: a wine program run by the stadium's head sommelier. Sandra Taylor took the position, a rarity in the NFL, at the onset of the 2020 season, but since the pandemic prevented attendance last year, her work will really pick up this fall as fans—fingers crossed—fill the new venue to cheer on the Raiders.

Team owner Mark Davis "wants the stadium to be one big party for everyone when it opens this season," Taylor says. To that end, she will meet individually with all 150 Allegiant Stadium suite owners to curate a selection based on their preferences and interests. In addition to featuring wines from official team sponsor Robert Mondavi and Charles Woodson's Intercept, a label from the namesake former Raiders player, Taylor will then sort through the Southern Glazer's and Constellation portfolios and cull them down to a manageable list of choices for her clients. "I'm going to make sure each suite feels we've created this together for their liking," she says. "I want to pick their brains and make each collection in the suites their baby, so they feel like they're in their own living rooms."

Taylor's relationship with the NFL started long before she became certified as a sommelier in November 2018: In the early 1990s, she was the spokesmodel for NFL Charities, selling 50/50 raffles at fundraising tournaments held during Super Bowl week to support the Wounded Warrior Project, youth sports-training facilities, and former players in need of assistance. Along the way she met and befriended Davis, with whom she now attends the Super Bowl every year; in fact, it was when they were in Miami for Super Bowl LIV that they discussed the possibility of offering a somm service at Allegiant Stadium. Given that the Raiders' training camp has been in Napa for the past 25 years, the idea of bringing an in-house sommelier to Las

Vegas to conduct VIP experiences seemed like a no-brainer.

Besides her wine expertise, Taylor is an excellent speaker and presenter, as evidenced by her other occupation: She has worked as an actress in Hollywood for 30 years, appearing in *Under Siege 2* and several Garry Marshall movies, including *The Princess Diaries*, *Raising Helen*, and *Runaway Bride*. Then a trip to the Italian region of Piedmont changed the course of her career: "That's where I had my aha moment, where I had my epiphany and decided it's going to be wine," Taylor says. "I absolutely left my heart in Piemonte, and when I got home, I started studying at UCLA and then got certified through NASA [North American Sommelier Association]."

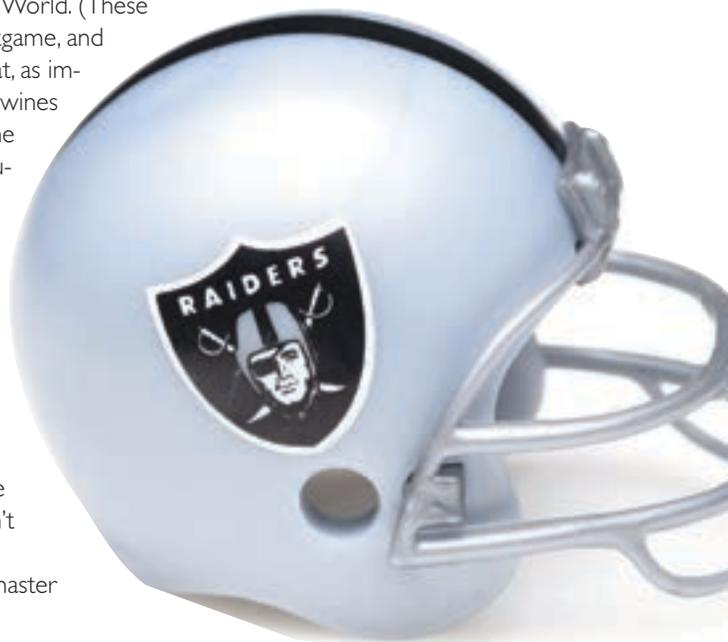
As it turns out, acting and hospitality have a lot in common. Taylor's decades of experience as an actress helped her tremendously during the service portion of her certification exam while informing her approach to interacting with people about wine. "You have to perform [to] be a good storyteller," she points out. "I feel like that's really my specialty. . . . Being a great storyteller is what sets me apart, and that comes from me being an actress." Her penchant for combining entertainment and education will come into play with the interactive face-off tastings she plans to host on the stadium's club level, covering themes like Champagne vs. Prosecco and Old World vs. New World. (These will occur pregame, postgame, and at halftime to ensure that, as impressive as the featured wines may be, football is still the focus.) "I'm trying to educate but make it fun," Taylor says. "Give them a little extra story they can walk away with and go, 'Wow!' I want to [address] all the questions I had at the beginning of my career, because chances are if I didn't know these things, other people don't know either."

Besides curating the master

wine list, tailoring collections for each individual suite, and hosting the tastings, Taylor also wants to build a standout cellar of special off-list and reserve bottlings. This is Las Vegas, after all—a city where revelry and indulgence are almost obligatory, and you'd better go big or go home. "I think if we're up at halftime, people are going to be like, 'Bring a bottle of Dom! Bring Cristal!'" Taylor says with a laugh. "I just want to make it an extra-special experience for people coming to the stadium. I want to integrate wine into football." SJ

*For more on Taylor and her work in the wine industry, follow her on Instagram @thebeverlyhillssommelier.*

*Given that the Raiders' training camp has been in Napa for the past 25 years, the idea of bringing an in-house sommelier to Las Vegas to conduct VIP experiences seemed like a no-brainer.*



One of the five medieval bastions in the city of Beaune serves as a cellar for Domaine Chanson.

# Supreme Balance

BURGUNDY'S 2019  
VINTAGE IS NOT TO  
BE MISSED

by Steven Spurrier

PHOTO COURTESY OF DOMAINE CHANSON

PHOTO COURTESY OF CATHERINE PETRIE



*Catherine Petrie, MW, is a buyer for London-based importer Lay & Wheeler.*

## The U.K.

is the biggest export market for estate-grown Burgundies, and in normal years, January is Burgundy Month in London. The dozen or so specialist merchants that host events during that time all visit the region the previous autumn to order samples they collect right after Christmas, ensuring they're as fresh as possible for the tastings. Often, as many as 100 wines are presented from dozens of domaines across Burgundy, from Chablis down to the Mâconnais, so the retailers and buyers for restaurants (now all sadly closed certainly until Easter) have a very wide choice. For the observant wine writer, these tastings are the best of the year, and show the remarkable quality of Burgundy today.

Not only were this year's tastings canceled, but I am on lockdown in west Dorset. So for a vintage report, I have turned to Catherine Petrie, MW, a buyer for specialist importer Lay & Wheeler who has allowed me to quote her verbatim.

## A Vintage of "High-Stakes Drama"

"This is the first and, I expect, only time in my career where I have had the pleasure of tasting and buying a vintage that I was also present for during its entire production. From January until December, I lived [at the prestigious Comte Armand estate in Pommard, experiencing] every bitter, frosty spring dawn and every sweltering minute of high summer.

[So] I am intimately familiar with the throes of the growing season and its many moments of high-stakes drama, [but] even so I have been stopped in my tracks by the calibre of the wines. . . . Between their supreme balance and their graceful power, they are far greater than the sum of their parts. That goes for both colours. I've been trying to think back to the last Burgundy vintage when both red and white were genuine five-star quality: 2010 perhaps?

But this vintage is tinged with disappointment for many growers: Yields are down by up to 30–50%. This is due to a combination of spring frost, cold weather at flowering, and the summer drought."



*Domaine Chanson owns 43 hectares of Premier and Grand Cru vineyards in the Beaune appellation.*

### The Whites: Powerful Yet Graceful

“Charles Ballot of Domaine Ballot-Millot hit the nail on the head when he summed up the 2019 whites in three words: *‘matière, densité, fraîcheur,’* [or] ‘substance, density, freshness.’ There is something genuinely seductive about their power and volume, [which are] made irresistible thanks to their freshness.”

### The Reds: Ripe but Refined

“The past decade has not been short of great red Burgundy vintages. Like 2015 and 2018, 2019 is certainly borne of a warm, ripe year, but its bright freshness means that the wines are not weighty or overly rich. What really marks the vintage out as top quality, however, is the character of the tannins: They are so graceful and elegant, ripe but refined, setting the wines apart from the more muscular, structured 2018s and dense, rich 2015s. This, combined with the red-fruited freshness [contributed by] decent acidity, means that the style of the reds is what we might call ‘classical.’ That is to say, the acidity is given equal billing to alcohol and tannin, making for wines of perfect balance. This is a special vintage, so purchases at the top end [and] an exploration of the successes of the lesser communes are equally advised.”

### Notes from the Author on Domaine Chanson’s 2019 Releases

The wines from Domaine Chanson are probably my most preferred Burgundies—not the grandest by any means but perhaps the most expressive of each appellation, all grouped around Beaune, where the estate owns 43 hectares of exclusively Premier and Grand Cru vineyards.

The wines rest in barrel in one of the five medieval bastions that defended the city of Beaune, conceived under Louis XI and completed under Francis I; the four-story structure with 8-metre-thick walls is exceptional at maintaining a constant level of temperature and humidity.

The Bollinger family took ownership of Chanson in 1999, and marked improvements in quality and recognition have resulted from their investments over the past two decades. In lieu of the London tasting, I was sent ten half-bottles: four whites and six reds. Here are my notes.

## WHITE

**Savigny-Les-Beaune Hauts-Marconnets Premier Cru** White wines are very rare in Savigny, yet the marl, chalk, and limestone soil on this elevated site encouraged the planting of 2.18 south-east-facing hectares close to the hills of the Beaune Premier Crus. Both supple and fresh with the vintage’s depth of fruit, this will show brilliantly; the 2012 in my cellar is at its peak.

**Pernand-Vergelesses Les Caradeux Premier Cru** This vineyard of 1.9 hectares is ideally located on a mid-slope close to the hill of Corton-Charlemagne; it shares with the renowned Grand Cru not only its soil structure and elevation but also its pronounced, long-lived mineral characteristics. Cellar for the medium to long term.

**Chassagne-Montrachet Les Chenevottes Premier Cru** Chanson’s 2 hectares here are located next door to the Grand Cru Le Mon-

trachet, which makes this a “must buy.” It’s one of the best expressions of Chardonnay grown on clay and limestone soil—supple yet firm, rich, and long.

### Beaune Clos des Mouches Premier

**Cru** Of its 4.5 hectares in what is perhaps Beaune’s best-known Premier Cru, Chanson has planted 2 to Chardonnay on an upper slope facing Pommard to the south. Lots of structure here for the future.

## RED

### Savigny-lès-Beaune La Dominode

**Premier Cru** Formally owned by the Lord of Savigny, this vineyard, set on chalk-based soils on a northeast-facing mid-slope, produces wines with high-toned aromas and great vibrancy.

### Pernand-Vergelesses Les Vergelesses

**Premier Cru** Chanson owns 5.4 hectares in this appellation’s best vineyard, enough to ensure a selection of only the best barrels for the final bottling of the Premier Cru. A wine of controlled firmness, with depth, length, and vigour yet elegance.

### Beaune Clos des Marconnets Premier

**Cru** Firmness and refinement are the characteristics of this site located at the northern end of the Beaune AOC. Opening up at five years, the wines it yields are better at ten or more.

### Beaune Les Grèves Premier Cru

Perhaps my preferred Premier Cru due to the supple, seductive richness derived from its sandy, gravelly soil. Opens early, but benefits from seven to ten years in bottle.

### Beaune Clos des Mouches Premier Cru

Ideally located on the Clos des Mouches hill looking south toward Pommard, where the proportion of clay in the limestone soil brings vigour, richness, and great depth of fruit.

### Beaune Clos des Fèves Premier Cru

All 3.8 hectares of this walled-in monopole are owned by Domaine Chanson in the very heart of the Beaune Premier Crus. It is recognised that, were the vineyards to be reclassified, Clos des Fèves would become a Grand Cru. Total class.

The magic of Burgundy lies in its fascinating vineyards. Chardonnay and Pinot Noir are planted to express the site, not the varietal; nowhere else can this complexity of terroir be found. The 2019 vintage conveys it to perfection. 





THE  
**SOMM**  
*Jour*ny

THE NEOCLASSICAL  
BORDEAUX STYLE  
OF NAPA'S  
**PATEL WINERY**

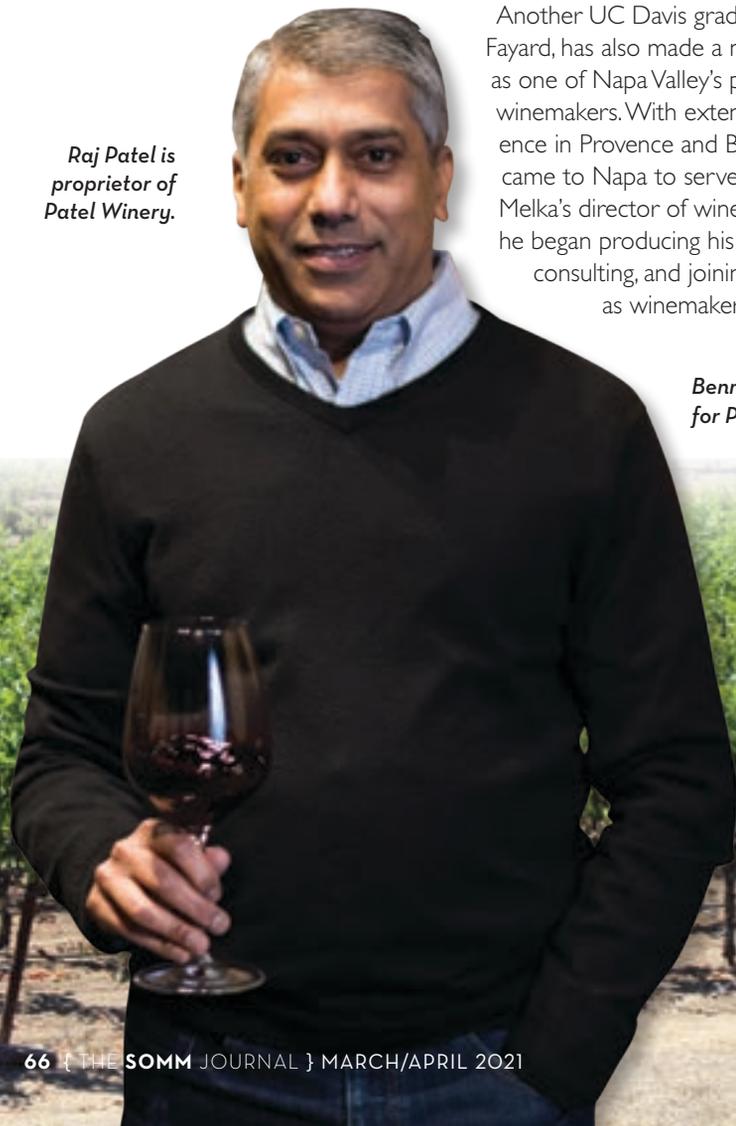
# Elegance Exemplified

**BORN IN GUJARAT, INDIA**, Raj Patel moved with his family to Northern California in 1972 and went on to study at the University of California, Davis, before interning at Robert Mondavi Winery. The clarity of Patel's vision for producing world-class Napa Cabernet Sauvignon was confirmed in 2007 with his first release, which gained him high scores from leading critics and generated his star power.

"We believe that great wine is made in the vineyard," says Patel. "Sourced from the finest vineyards in Atlas Peak, Coombsville, and Napa Valley, every Patel wine is passionately crafted to express the uniqueness of its terroir and exhibit a distinct personality."

Another UC Davis graduate, Julien Fayard, has also made a name for himself as one of Napa Valley's preeminent winemakers. With extensive experience in Provence and Bordeaux, he came to Napa to serve as Philippe Melka's director of winemaking before he began producing his own labels, consulting, and joining Patel Winery as winemaker. *STJ*

*Raj Patel is proprietor of Patel Winery.*



**Patel 2017 Sauvignon Blanc, Napa Valley (\$60)** A gathering of kiwi, lime, and pink grapefruit makes for some of the most stunning aromatics we've experienced from this variety. The brilliant clarity of sweet summer peach is delectable. Mineral notes adhere to succulent floral and fruit tones. **94**

**Patel 2016 Malbec, Napa Valley (\$125)** An aromatically appealing beauty with notes of lilac and plum plus a hint of jasmine. The meaty body and dried-floral tannins receive a dose of dark chocolate. Espresso ties up the blue and black fruit in a desirable bundle as blue flowers bloom in the glass. **95**

**Patel 2016 Cabernet Sauvignon, Coombsville, Napa Valley (\$150)** Plums slathered in dark chocolate, dried violets painted with anise seed, and coffee notes surround structured tannins. Generously juicy, this gift for the palate surges with floral tones and an underlying minerality that points to Coombsville soil. **98**

PHOTOS COURTESY OF PATEL WINERY

*Bennett Vineyard in Coombsville is a primary source for Patel's Cabernet Sauvignon and Merlot. ▼*



# The Jealousy of Bavarians

AN OVERVIEW OF THE **BOCK** BEER STYLE, PART I by Jessie Birschbach

**WHEN I WAS GROWING UP**, my mom never let me eat sugary cereals—meaning I had to settle for certain “healthy” versions like Grape-Nuts. I ended up growing quite fond of the malty, toasty, pebble-like cereal, though, and I’ll bet this is why I’m now enamored with the similarly malty, bread-like flavor found in bock beers.

Perhaps, too, it’s the spirit of my German ancestors guiding my palate toward a style balanced to malt rather than hops—or it’s the sommelier in me that recognizes how well bocks complement spicy foods and desserts, both of which are notoriously challenging to pair. I’m also drawn to the ample range of substyles within the category, from the generally golden-colored and creamy Maibock to the typically dark brown, concentrated Eisbock.

For all these reasons, bock is indeed one of Birschbach’s favorite beer styles—so much so that I’m making it the focus of my next two columns, which just so happen to fall within the time of year bock is associated with: spring!

## ONE FOR THE HISTORY BOCKS

I’ve seen differing versions of the bock style’s origin story in respected beer resources, but the gist of it is this: In 1612, the Bavarian duke Maximilian I hired Elias Pichler, a brewmaster from Einbeck—a town known at the time for its signature *Ainpöckisch* bier (aka *Ainpöck*)—to come to Munich to recreate the style at the royal brewery, the Hofbräuhaus. Some claim that Pichler was actually held captive for a few years to make it. Whether the duke did so because he was driven by jealousy of

PHOTO: ANDREY SHEVCHENKO VIA ADOBE STOCK



*The Hofbräuhaus tavern in Munich.*

the north’s superior beer or because its exportation had simply been slowed by the start of the Thirty Years’ War, we can’t be sure.

It’s also unclear whether the beer Pichler created was similar to the original Ainpöck beer—or, as the Bavarians called it in their wonky dialect, “bock” beer. But we do know that he brewed it according to lager tradition (using a lager yeast, maturing the beer in cold storage, and so on) and called it “Maibock.” Meant to be consumed in the spring (“Mai” means May), it was the first real bock as we know the style today, and the Bavarians went bananas over it.

## MAIBOCK BREAKDOWN

A good Maibock (aka pale bock or helles bock) should be robust but light, powerful but finessed, and strong yet

refined. The golden beer is perhaps the most balanced of the bock category; though the worst examples are cloying, the best are creamy and soft yet crisp, thanks to the moderate hop bitterness that is higher than that of the other styles. But like them, Maibock balances to the malt side, with rich, toasty, bread-like flavors. It’s slightly elevated in alcohol, but its weighty warmth is well integrated thanks to the plushness of the malt, making it the perfect drinking experience on a chilly spring day.

## MAIBOCK BY THE NUMBERS

- **Main ingredients:** Pils or Vienna malt base with some Munich malt; Noble hops (Saaz, Hallertau, Spalt, and Tettnang); lager yeast; soft water preferred
- **ABV:** 6.3–7.4%
- **IBUs:** 23–25
- **SRM (i.e. Standard Reference Method, a color standard for beers that typically ranges from 2 to 40 degrees, 2 being a pale straw color and 40 being black):** 6–11

Part two of the bock series will appear in the April/May issue of *The SOMM Journal* and include an overview of doppelbocks, Eisbocks, and dark bocks. *SJ*

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



# Beyond the Jadot of a Doubt



## AT **DOMAINE FERRET**, **POUILLY-FUISSÉ** DEMONSTRATES MANY PERSONALITIES

**THE FIRST DOMAINE IN** Pouilly-Fuissé to begin bottling on its own estate was Ferret, in the late 1940s—not long after the creation of the appellation itself in the Mâconnais of southern Burgundy in 1936. Originally founded in 1840 by the namesake family, it was purchased by famed French vintner Louis Jadot in 2008; today it oversees 42 vineyard acres.

The wines are 100% Chardonnay, and the portfolio is divided into three tiers: Classic, Têtes de Cru, and Cuvée Hors-Classe. Tête de Cru and Cuvée Hors-Classe are the precursors of a much-deserved upgrade to a higher classification: Premier Cru sites within Pouilly-Fuissé are currently under consideration by INAO (Institut National de l'Origine et de la Qualité). Some in the region think they will be approved with the 2020 vintage. —*Meridith May*

**Domaine Ferret 2018 Pouilly-Fuissé Tournant de Pouilly (\$76)** Tournant de Pouilly lies in the northern part of the Fuissé region. Averaging 60 years of age, its vines are planted on fossilized oyster shells and limestone-rich silt. Linear notes of lemon sorbet are lightly seasoned with thyme and tarragon. Chamomile carries through to a yellow-apple richness, while a sweetness ensues with sugared Asian pear. **96**

**Domaine Ferret 2018 Pouilly-Fuissé 2018 Hors-Classe Les Ménétrières (\$76)** This wine comes from a 2-acre vineyard that borders the village of Fuissé. The vines range from ten to 40 years old, while the soils go from shale on one end to pearly slabs of granite on the other, with limestone subsoils. With a richer style, it's a paradigm of lemon-verbena starkness and vanilla-wafer luxuriance. Tart lime, yellow apple, and chamomile flowers are lovely and liting. **97**

**Domaine Ferret 2018 Pouilly-Fuissé Clos des Prouges (\$58)** This Tête de Cru is produced only in top vintages. The Clos is located in the heart of Fuissé on 5 acres of limestone marl. Fermentation and aging begin in barrels before the wine is finished sur lie in stainless-steel tanks over a five-month period. Lovely notes of oregano and basil meld with tangerine and lime. Though fleshy and round, it unspools a thread of scintillating minerality while its fine acid structure showcases its tenses side. **95**

**Domaine Ferret 2018 Pouilly-Fuissé Tête de Cru Les Perrières (\$58)** Sourced from vines averaging 35 years of age, this wine hails from a 2.5-acre site above the Le Clos parcel on the domaine's property. Lime blossom and honeysuckle create a floral creaminess on the nose and palate. Stony undertones, ginger, and just-ripe pineapple converge with a powdery, floral mouthfeel before orange chiffon makes an exquisite appearance on the finish. **96** SJ

A view of the *Domaine Ferret* estate.

IMPORTED BY KOBRAND/  
OWNED BY MAISON LOUIS JADOT

PHOTO: KURT ECKERT

# Less Is Más

## MUCHO MÁS SEEKS TO SIMPLIFY THE SUBJECT OF SPANISH WINE FOR THE U.S. MARKET

by Rachel DelRocco Terrazas

**MUCHO MÁS TRANSLATES** simply to “much more,” a phrase that could initially make you wonder what you might be getting yourself into. But this new line from Félix Solís Avantis is worth approaching unreservedly, as the wines are more subtle and precise in flavor than you might expect from the name—never mind the suggested retail price: \$9. They make the case that Félix Solís is a leader in creating a dynamic future for Spanish wines that are delicious yet accessible.

Take the user-friendly, straight-to-the-point label: It’s designed not to overwhelm consumers new to the category but rather to keep them laser-focused on the wine in a way that makes Spain feel familiar. In other words, its sleek simplicity conveys the essence of the liquid inside. The red is a modern-style blend of Tempranillo sourced from northern Spain and the Toro DO with Garnacha from northern Spain and Syrah from Castilla-La Mancha. With a lush and



full texture, it offers black-fruit aromas rounded out by flavors of vanilla bean. Unlike its appellation counterparts, this wine sees only four months in second-use American barrels; the result is just a touch of oak, which balances the earthy character of the grapes.

The white expression, meanwhile, features Verdejo, a grape that’s not often seen outside its native Spain but that deserves much more attention for its apricot aromas and green, grassy flavors. These qualities also make it a prime candidate for blending with Spanish-grown Sauvignon Blanc; additionally, the wine contains some Chardonnay that has seen three months of barrel aging, along with significant bâtonnage, to soften the sharp fruit tones of the other varieties and add a creamy texture. With high tones of bright peach and base notes of tropical fruits and vanilla, the blend is sourced from multiple

regions of Spain; working outside the stiff regulations of individual DOs allows the Félix Solís team to choose the grapes with the best qualities for their purposes.

Not only is Mucho Más a match for any domestic blend in terms of approachability, it’s also accessible from a packaging standpoint: The company has prioritized eco-friendly initiatives such as 3-liter bag-in-boxes, in which the red blend retails for a mere \$18 (the white blend is not yet available in the U.S.). Not only does it give consumers access to a quaffable and food-friendly wine laced with the nuances of Spain at an affordable price, the alternative packaging will make sharing a glass with friends and family easier and more economical—once we can safely enjoy their company again, that is. **SJ**

{ retail }

*Playing  
the Hand  
They're*  
**Dealt**

# Independent Retailers in California's Bay Area Prove That Resilience Isn't Optional

by Nell Jerome



**R**ob McMillan, executive vice president and founder of Silicon Valley Bank's Wine Division and author of its annual "State of the Wine Industry Report," predicted in February 2020 that oversupply in the wine market, combined with a decrease in U.S. consumption, would result in the "best wine retail values in 20 years." This came neither as a surprise nor good news for an industry that was already facing wildfires, tariffs, and other headwinds.

But things were about to get much worse. In March, on-premise businesses across the country were shut down as a result of the pandemic. As restaurants and small wineries faced devastating closures, large retailers and suppliers benefited from a change in consumer behavior created by the stay-at-home orders. Independent wine shops, for their part, faced their own set of both challenges and opportunities. We interviewed proprietors from some of the most popular boutique retailers in California's Bay Area to get their perspective on the past year and their hopes for the future.

## Doc's Wine Shop, HAYWARD, CA

For Darren Guillaume, CS, owner of Doc's Wine Shop in Hayward, pricing has been the biggest setback. "It has been difficult since distributors dumped large volumes of wine \$5 below max discount, allowing [chain stores] to sell products for . . . well below retail," he said, "making consumers think that mom-and-pop retailers are always overpriced. My hopes are that small retail shops get the same pricing as big-box stores, [but] my prediction is that [even if] the [Biden] administration removes the 25% tariff placed on Old World wines, the cost savings will not return to previous levels."

PHOTO COURTESY OF DARREN GUILLAUME



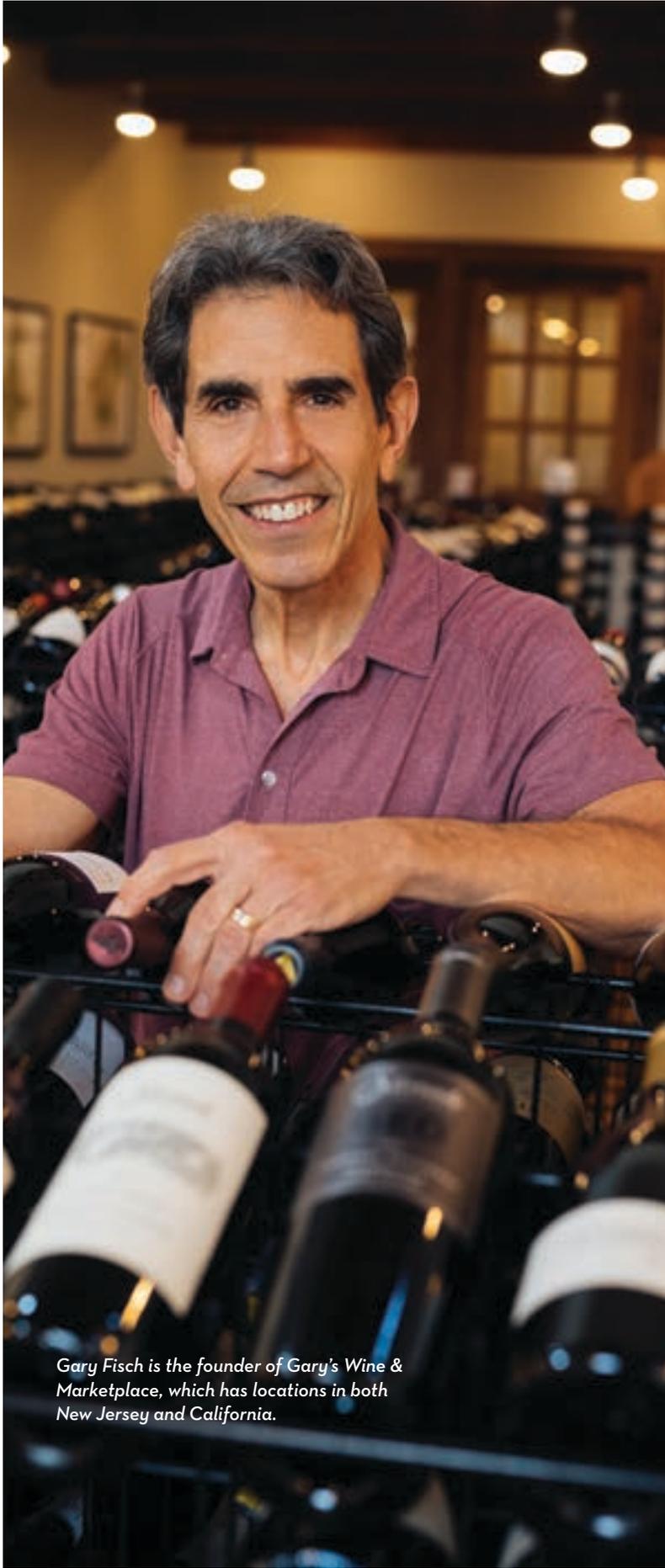
*"Education, service, and quality selections properly stored should be the reason [to] shop at privately owned wine shops."*

Darren Guillaume, CS, owns Doc's Wine Shop in Hayward, CA.

In addition to the pricing challenges posed by the competition, the North Bay wine shop was impacted by California's strict shutdown guidelines. Even when allowed to open, it could admit no more than two customers at a time, despite a "building code that normally allows up to 45 people," according to Guillaume. Traffic also decreased due to the closure of area restaurants, causing Doc's to shorten its business hours; Guillaume estimated that, as of December 2020, it had dropped by 60%. The store was further hurt by the lack of purchases for holiday parties, which usually make up 40% of its seasonal sales. What's more, while many retailers and wineries have benefited from the pandemic-inspired increase in online sales, Doc's does not have a license for shipping.

It did, however, offer after-hours local delivery for case sales to ease purchases for its customers—who also find it easier to learn about wine at Doc's, thanks to Guillaume's certification through the famous French Culinary Institute. Guillaume takes pride in always offering excellent assistance and advice, which he sees as a key advantage of independent wine shops. "Education, service, and quality selections properly stored should be the reason [to] shop at privately owned wine shops," he added. "We can't carry everything, but what can be provided in knowledge and service cannot ever be priced."

For more on Doc's Wine Shop, visit [docswineshop.com](http://docswineshop.com).



*Gary Fisch is the founder of Gary's Wine & Marketplace, which has locations in both New Jersey and California.*

## Gary's Wine & Marketplace,

**ST. HELENA, CA**

When the Napa Valley location of this New Jersey-based store celebrated its official grand opening in December 2019, no one could have predicted the turn of events to come just three months later. Located in a St. Helena space previously occupied by Dean & DeLuca, Gary's was a welcome fixture to wine country's busy Highway 29, presenting a diverse selection of almost 400 Napa labels as well as imports, beer, spirits, gourmet foods, and an in-store deli that is a telltale sign of owner Gary Fisch's East Coast roots. But then the pandemic hit.

As Fisch recalled, "2020 started off as a great year for us, and then in March, California was the first state to implement shelter-in-place orders. We had to close for walk-in business, but we were able to prepare takeout meals and continue online sales for groceries, wine, and spirits. When the restaurants closed, we knew that [people] were eating and drinking at home more and we wanted to make it easy for them, [so] we began promoting daily takeout specials on social media, offering wine specials, and hosting virtual tastings with local vintners." In short, Fisch added, "We made the best of the situation and did what we could for our customers."

With social distancing guidelines in place, Gary's was finally able to reopen at the end of May while continuing curbside pickup and local delivery services through its mobile app. But things took another cruel turn in late September when wildfires blew through the north end of Napa Valley, forcing area evacuations. Again the staff had to pivot. To serve first responders and the community, Gary's stayed open on a limited basis—until, a week before Christmas, California imposed another shutdown on the county. But if "2020 was a year we'd all probably like to forget," Fisch pointed out, "it reminded us how food, wine, and community can bring us together. I am confident we'll get through this and am optimistic about the future."

For more on Gary's, visit [garyswine.com](http://garyswine.com).

PHOTO: ALEXANDER RUBIN

# Golden Gate Wine Cellars,

## SAN FRANCISCO, CA

Major cities were arguably hit hardest by the shutdowns due to their dense populations and the sheer number of businesses affected. Golden Gate Wine Cellars, which is in San Francisco's Balboa Terrace neighborhood near San Francisco State University, felt the effects immediately and needed to react. "Between March and June, sales were way down as I was figuring out how to transform my business," noted Frank Melis, who founded the shop in 2005. "Foot traffic went to zero. My wine club sales dropped 60%—I experienced a similar drop during the 2008 recession. Most people who subscribe to my wine clubs don't have extra disposable income and canceled their memberships."

But Melis persevered, continually coming up with new ways to survive and to help his customers.

"By midsummer, I did [manage] to re-strategize operations—curbside pickups, local deliveries, virtual tastings, et cetera," he explained. "I [also] created a 'stash' system for my clients. They might not want to order a full case at one time, so we keep the wine they purchase and ship it once they have a full case, offering free shipping."

Meanwhile, Melis went above and beyond to help his employees too. "My hours changed dramatically; since we were not allowed to have foot traffic [or]

conduct weekly wine tastings, we closed daily at 3 p.m. and closed completely on Saturdays," he said. "I laid off some staff members but paid everyone out of my own pocket."

Many expected things to improve before the all-important holiday season, but the Bay Area's shelter-in-place mandate continued. "As corporate parties were canceled, so was gift giving," Melis said. "I have clients that usually purchase 50–150 single bottles of wine as gifts, and they did not buy any." But Melis' ability to adapt paid off, as did his loyalty to California wineries. "The holidays were very good, all things considered," he said. "We did see a larger amount of gift cards that were ordered via our website. Since we only stock California wines, I did not want to panic and revise my inventory . . . [and] by staying the course, I saw and felt the support of my out-of-state and out-of-country clients. [I] saw a robust rebound in the third quarter and an even better fourth quarter, almost equaling total sales of 2019, which was a big surprise."

As for 2021, said Melis, "My hope is that we get this virus under control and get everyone vaccinated so we can try to reach pre-COVID normalcy. I hope not too many businesses disappear, as they are the heart of the U.S. economy. It hurts me to see many boarded-up shops. I try to live 'glass half full,' but the 2020 fires will not help, as many wineries will have way less or no wine at all to offer, so I am [only] cautiously optimistic. [Still,] I am lucky to have made a living out of my hobby, and I hope to continue for many more years to come. I am very humbled and appreciative of everyone's kindness and support."

For more on Golden Gate Wine Cellars, visit [ggwc.com](http://ggwc.com).



*Josiah Baldivino, owner of Oakland, CA's Bay Grape, with his family.*

PHOTO COURTESY OF JOSIAH BALDIVINO

## Bay Grape, OAKLAND, CA

Josiah Baldivino, owner of Bay Grape in Oakland, credits the fact that he did good business during a challenging year to the overwhelming support he received from the neighborhood as well as to the creativity of his "very small but mighty staff." Combined with hearty holiday sales, these factors ensured that the shop remained profitable in 2020.

Though he had to make adjustments, including reducing employee hours by 30% and canceling weekly in-store classes, he never lost sight of the significance of personal attention to the success of a small business. "We are still able to offer one-on-one sommelier-level assistance with all guests," he asserted. "As owners, we have realized that it is important to spend the time to educate your staff. We do this by opening a blind bottle every shift and then talking about not only how the wine smells and tastes but also where it is from, who is the producer, and what makes the wine so special. It is also nice to just chill and catch up."

While industry-news headlines herald the increase in business for value-brand sales and large retailers, then, small establishments like Bay Grape are seeing consumers experimenting with new varietals and luxury wines, proving their services invaluable. "We probably sold more orange wine this year than Target sold hard seltzer," joked Baldivino. An increase in online sales and holiday gift purchases helped make up for lost profits during the shutdowns. The store offered additional incentives to consumers, such as hand-curated gift packs, to further increase revenue. "[Customers] basically told us what they were and were not into and then we chose wine for them accordingly," Baldivino explained. "It was our way of offering what we do best to guests not able to make it to the shop."

Reflecting on the year behind us, Baldivino noted that continued support for small businesses, in terms of both patronage and positive feedback on social media, would help them stay motivated and get through these challenging times. But he also offered a piece of advice to his colleagues in the trade: "Realize how lucky you are and how many people would love to trade spots with you. If you are reading this magazine, your life is a lot better than most. Smile. Life is not perfect, but it is good."

For more on Bay Grape, visit [baygrapewine.com](http://baygrapewine.com). ❧

PHOTO COURTESY OF GOLDEN GATE WINE CELLARS



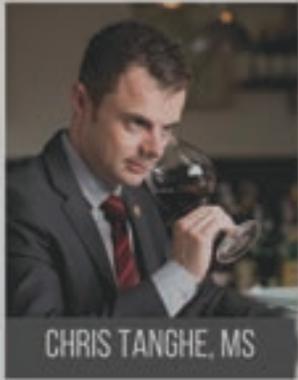
*Frank Melis opened Golden Gate Wine Cellars in San Francisco in 2005.*



LIA JONES



SERENA HARKEY



CHRIS TANGHE, MS



KAT THOMAS



MATTHEW CRAFTON

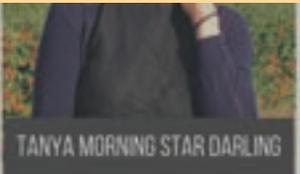


ANGELA GARGANO

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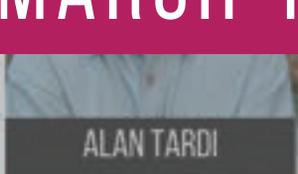
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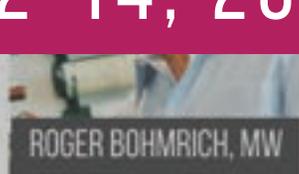
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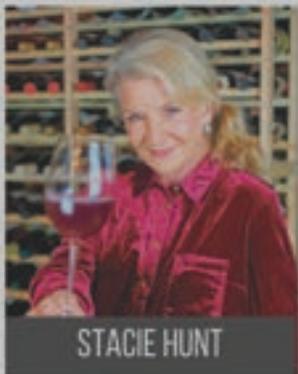
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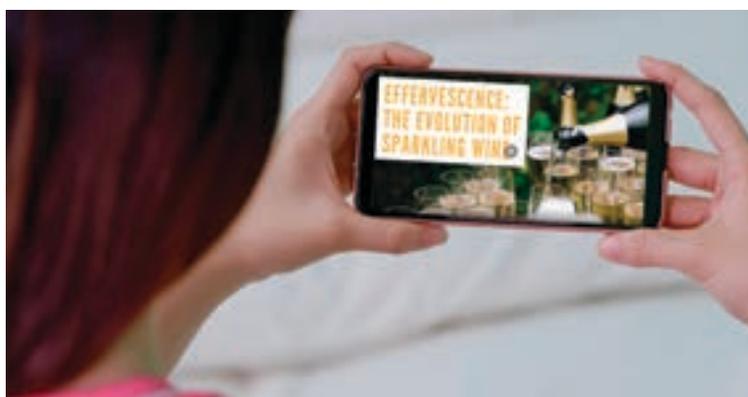
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# An Uphill Battle

NEW YORK'S WINE RETAILERS FACE CHALLENGES ON MULTIPLE BUSINESS FRONTS

by Cheron Cowan

**NEW YORK'S WINE SHOPS** are fighting an uphill battle, as navigating shipping laws, tariffs, and both local and state regulations has become increasingly difficult—and consumer choice may become a casualty.

First and foremost, by law, every wine store in New York state must be a non-franchise entity, meaning one person cannot own multiple venues; as such, they are small businesses for which adhering to interstate shipping laws is a time-consuming endeavor. For instance, only 16 states allow wines from out-of-state retailers to be purchased by and shipped to their respective residents—and the amount of wine they allow per shipment varies.

Jeremy Block, owner of Some Good Wine in New York City's Greenwich Village, finds the "ambiguity in [interstate] laws frustrating," adding that he's incurred fines due to confusion regarding the regulations. What's more, argues Tom Wark, executive director of the National Association of Wine Retailers (NAWR), the necessity of shipping exclusively via FedEx and UPS "is a burden for consumers [as] it hinders availability. . . Wine is being sold by smaller and smaller companies. We need the flexibility."

The difficulty of complying with local and state laws makes resources like the NAWR and Sazerac Company CEO Mark Brown's influential "Industry News Update" invaluable to the average New York beverage retailer, says Christy Frank of upstate outfit Copake Wine Works. She notes that an email she once received from the New York State Liquor Authority in regard to a plastic-bag ban was one of the few direct communications she's ever received from an official source. As for Block, who likewise often learns of regulation changes from his industry peers, he

PHOTO: JEANNA SUNG



*Christy Frank is partner at Copake Wine Works in Copake, NY.*



*Jeremy Block (left), owner of Some Good Wine in New York, NY, with mayoral candidate Andrew Yang.*

says that the state's lack of communication makes the level of oversight it has over businesses like his all the more frustrating. For instance, he believes that its "mandating of mutual contract"—which sets strict terms on retailers' payments to wholesal-

ers—is extreme: "No other industry has that."

Adding to the turmoil is the fact that the 25% wine tariffs imposed in 2019 have yet to fully impact the consumer, as wholesaler inventory that's been sitting in warehouses is incrementally being replaced with higher-priced tariffed product. According to Ben Aneff, managing partner at Tribeca Wine Merchants and president of the US Wine Trade Alliance (USWTA), "These tariffs are in a state of limbo until the next U.S. Trade Representative, Katherine Tai, is confirmed by Congress." That means he, too, is in limbo: "For 20 years, [Tribeca Wine Merchants] has focused on small producers from the EU. [We] rely on great importers and distributors. Can they [still] afford to bring these people in? Some great, small producers can be lost to other markets: What if we lose the opportunity to work with the next Kermit Lynch?"

Meanwhile, according to Frank, the advent of COVID-19 is making the potential effects of an imminent price increase even more concerning by driving affluent clientele from the city upstate, where they are able to purchase esoteric and/or highly allocated wines at more moderate price points from retailers like hers. What happens when those customers return home to even higher prices than before?

Unfortunately, at the end of the day, these challenges will be passed down to all consumers, who are at risk of losing access to emerging producers. And what is most frustrating is that they won't even know what they're missing. *sj*



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