

THE SOMM JOURNAL

Gran Reserva's Ucúquer Vineyard borders the Rapel River in the Colchagua Valley of Chile.

TURNING WATER(SHEDS) INTO **wine**

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CHAMPAGNE

ROSÉ 2013

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LOUIS ROEDERER
HAND IN HAND WITH NATURE

THE SOMM JOURNAL

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Vins de

Virtual

BEHIND THE SCENES
OF THE **MILLÉSIMES**
ALSACE DIGITASTING

by Stefanie Schwalb

*Sample kits were sent
to Millésimes Alsace
DigiTasting attendees in
advance of the event.*

guster en réel
reconnaissez en virtuel



PHOTOS COURTESY OF GIVA



Kaysersberg is a village on Alsace's wine route.

Anyone who has coordinated a wine tasting or even attended one knows that numerous elements need to come together to guarantee its success. When the pandemic took over the world last year, the benefits of in-person experiences—face time with producers, a range of wines to sample, the energetic buzz of the venue—somehow needed to be translated online after live events were canceled or postponed indefinitely.

With so many obstacles to overcome, such as shipping costs and delays as well as the lack of an easily replicable formula for developing a virtual tasting, some wineries and trade organizations didn't attempt to do anything comparable to what they usually organize during a typical year—which made the large-scale experience pulled off by the relatively small entity that is the Conseil Interprofessionnel des Vins d'Alsace (CIVA, also known as the Alsace Wine Board) all the more impressive.

Held June 7–9, CIVA's inaugural digital wine fair, the Millésimes Alsace DigiTasting, featured 100 producers—70% of them organic, Biodynamic, or in conversion—and 400 wines. In attendance were 3,750 accredited media and wine professionals from 55 countries, who were able to book 15-minute sampling appointments with winery representatives; participate in three multilingual webinars guided by industry experts; and view short videos covering topics that succinctly defined what makes Alsace and its wines so unique. The event was, in short, an enormous endeavor for the CIVA team, who sourced all of the necessary packaging, shipping, and promotional materials themselves from local artisans and businesses within 45 miles of their offices to guarantee a limited carbon footprint; they also collaborated with the wineries to taste all of the samples before they were bottled and shipped. Given the tremendous amount of work the fair took to execute, its representatives have been widely credited for delivering an online experience that was perhaps even better than a traditional tasting, as attendees could enjoy it all at their own pace.

Discussions and Discoveries

In January, sommeliers and media professionals were able to sign up on the Millésimes Alsace platform to learn about all of the featured producers and the wines available for sampling. They could then use filters to search for wines based on criteria such as color, sweetness level, vintage, variety, and appellation or for producers using benchmarks like their distributor and/or importer and their environmental practices.

Based on their preferences, attendees could choose to receive either four or eight sample kits, each of which included four 3-centiliter recyclable bottles in the Alsace region's traditional flute shape from a specific winery. They could also opt to add "discovery boxes" developed to provide the sort of surprise they might experience at in-person events, when they head to a table and taste a wine previously unknown to them. To help elevate the tasting experience, each sample also included a QR code for easy access to technical information on the Millésimes Alsace platform.

Once attendees selected their samples, they were able to reserve spots for the aforementioned one-on-one meetings with producers to discuss the wines, the production process, or anything else that piqued their interest. They could even arrange virtual chats with producers they didn't order samples from. Ultimately, attendees ordered 10,000 sample kits and participated in 2,000 meetings over the course of the fair's



The white wines of Alsace are renowned for their high acidity, exceptional aromatics, and freshness.

three days, helping them to broaden their exposure to and appreciation for aspects of Alsace they may not have known about

beforehand. These exchanges benefited both well-known and under-the-radar producers.



Meeting the Moment

The Millésimes Alsace DigiTasting also featured three webinars that addressed topics of critical importance to the region, including consumer preferences, environmental responsibility and impact, and its singular terroir. One session brought together a panel of esteemed wine professionals, namely French television host and journalist Sophie Menut-Yovanovitch; U.S. television host and sommelier Matthew Kaner; Marc Almert, who was named Best Sommelier of the World 2019 by the Association de la Sommellerie Internationale and has roots in both Switzerland and Germany; and Alsace winemaker Séverine Schlumberger of Domaines Schlumberger.

The discussion delved into how Alsace producers are currently meeting consumer demand with their vibrant, terroir-driven whites, celebrated for their high acidity, exceptional aromatics, and freshness. These qualities make them particularly food-friendly, especially as culinary enthusiasts increasingly skip heavy multicourse meals flush with dairy and cheese in favor of lighter, vegetable-driven cuisine. Commonly suggested pairings for the region's wines include pork, risotto, summer squash, fish, and Thai or Sichuan dishes.

And as the demand for sparkling wine continues to bubble up, the appellation is also in a perfect position to satisfy wine lovers' needs stateside with Crémants d'Alsace that are comparable in taste and quality to Champagne at half the price, making them an excellent option for everyday as well as special occasions. As for

reds, it's important to note that Pinot Noir is gaining significant traction in the region. Over the past ten years, wineries have been on a learning curve, often picking the variety too early, aging it too long, or using it predominantly for the production of Crémants d'Alsace rosés. However, Alsace Pinot Noir has made enormous progress, and a growing number of producers are committing themselves to developing elegant, cellar-worthy bottles going forward.

In another session, Menut-Yovanovitch was joined by Canadian sommelier and journalist Rémy Charest as well as Alsace winemakers Marie Zusslin of Domaine Valentin Zusslin and Xavier Baril of Domaine Fernand Engel to discuss the region's dedication to and respect for the environment. Because the land is typically passed down from generation to generation, producers see themselves as its stewards, with the integrity of the wine and its journey from vineyard to table playing an essential role in their daily life.

Approximately 15% of Alsace's vineyards are certified organic, Biodynamic, or in conversion, making it one of the greenest regions in France and Europe overall. At a time when sustainability is top of mind and consumers want to know the origins of what is on their plates as well as in their wine bottles, the sophisticated offerings of Alsace are meeting their needs—and actually have been for quite some time.

In the third and final session, which focused on the region's terroir, Menut-Yovanovitch was accompanied by wine-

makers Sébastien Mann of Domaine Jean-Louis et Fabienne Mann and Samuel Tottoli of Domaine Kirrenbourg as well as Alsace enologist and conference host Thierry Fritsch. Composed of sandstone rock that's millions of years old, the patchwork of terroir in Alsace is impacted by an array of exposures, soil types, and microclimates; the vineyards also benefit from Alsace's location at the foothills of the Vosges Mountains, which provide a rain shadow that allows for optimal sun exposure. Here the term "terroir" has expanded to include the telluric current that moves underground through the region (the "energy of the place," if you will) as well as its biodiversity. And as the grapes are typically hand-harvested—even in steep vineyards—and horses are still used to transport grapes, producers have developed an intimate connection with and commitment to the land they work on, which flows down through the generations.

Rooted in a wealth of history, Alsace wines continue to prove how exemplary they are to drink by themselves or enjoy with food due to their palpable energy. The fact that such high quality coincides with affordability ensures that Alsace's impact on the wine industry is as potent as ever. *SJ*



MILLÉSIMES
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Vineyards surrounding the Alsace village of Mittelbergheim.



THE SOMM JOURNAL

AUGUST/SEPTEMBER 2021

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Winemaker Julien Fayard oversees the Beau Vigne label for Napa-based company ATC Wines.

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PHOTO: RAFAEL PETERSON

Jacopo Felleni is owner and GM of Nonna in Westlake Village, CA.

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MULLAN ROAD CELLARS

A WASHINGTON STATE WINE

by
Cakebread
Cellars



In 2012, Napa vintner **DENNIS CAKEBREAD** was drawn to Washington state for its wine quality, camaraderie, and diverse geography. He set out to craft a wine that embodies both the rich history and unique terroir of the Northwest.

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In Praise of “Mom Somms”

WOMEN WINE PROFESSIONALS TACKLE WORK ISSUES HEAD-ON IN A WEBINAR HOSTED BY THE COURT OF MASTER SOMMELIERS

IN MARCH OF THIS YEAR, the Court of Master Sommeliers hosted a Zoom “listening session” addressing the challenges of, as they put it, “mom somms.” The event was kicked off by Emily Wines, MS, and moderated by Jen Huether, MS and mother of two. Three San Francisco–based sommeliers sat on the panel: Rebecca Fineman, MS (who has one child); Shelley Lindgren (two children); and Haley Moore (two children). Melissa Monosoff, MS, pitched in as a co-host.

Starting with some straight talk, Huether reflected on “how hard it is for any parent in our field, especially mothers, who are most likely the primary caregivers . . . during crucial times, [[for instance] while breastfeeding or healing and bonding with a baby. Sadly, mothers often leave the field or move into a different element of the wine business instead of sticking to being a sommelier on the floor.”

Monosoff is not a mother; but she knows full well the inequities women face: “We are not asked the same questions as men during interviews,” she noted. “We’re often asked if we plan to have children, which is illegal in most states. We have to justify the gaps on our résumés for when we’ve been away having children. Opportunities, pay, and schedules are unequal, even when women have better qualifications and stronger skill sets. One thing we know, though: The ultimate skill set of parenting is multitasking. Efficiency is key, at home or in restaurants!”

Moore, who had both of her children while serving as a multiunit wine director, addressed one of the most fraught situations for women: requesting maternity leave. “It’s about finding what makes you invaluable to your organization and owning it,” she said. “Maybe it’s financials, maybe wine training—what is it that your company values most? Make yourself irreplaceable.” After all, she pointed out, “Companies are legally compelled to support your maternity leave, but it’s much easier for everyone if they *want* to support you. When telling your boss you’re pregnant, go in with a plan. . . . This is how we will prepare; this is what will happen while I’m gone and when I return. It doesn’t matter if the plan changes, it shows that you know that what you are doing impacts the business and that you care about making it work for everyone.”



Haley Moore is the founder and CEO of San Francisco-based consultancy and event-planning company Acquire.



Shelley Lindgren is co-owner and wine director of A16 in San Francisco, CA.

PHOTO: FRANKIE FRANKENY

Other takeaways from the session:

- Learn to delegate, teach others how to do your job, and create systems for doing the majority of work from home.
- Recognize the pressures you put on yourself. The inevitable guilt you feel for being neither at home nor at work enough is a waste of energy.
- You need not choose between career and family: Do your part to break the stereotype that mothers cannot be the ultimate professionals. Fineman passed her MS exam with a baby on her hip.
- End the stigma of tasting with children around—normalize the role that wine plays in everyday life.

No one expected the discussion to solve all the problems shared by women sommeliers around the world, but as Moore put it afterward, “The overarching message was that being a mother and sommelier is tough but possible. . . . Our goal was to inspire other mothers.”

For more on this topic, see page 114.

Jen Huether, MS, is an industry consultant and spokesperson.





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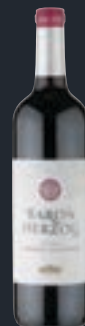
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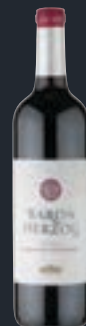
ROSÉ



WHITE ZINFANDEL



CABERNET SAUVIGNON



OLD VINE ZINFANDEL



MERLOT



by Wanda Mann

The view from the bar at Le Pavillon.



PHOTOS: THOMAS SCHAUER

Acclaimed chef Daniel Boulud (left), who recently opened Le Pavillon in New York City with Blake Bernal (right) as head sommelier.

A Culinary Oasis Shimmers in Midtown

WITH THE OPENING OF **LE PAVILLON**, CHEF DANIEL BOULUD PROVES HE STILL BELIEVES IN NEW YORK

COVID-19 FORCED the city that never sleeps to take an extended slumber, but New York City is coming back to life. Acclaimed chef Daniel Boulud, for one, has roused the Big Apple's dining scene with the opening of his grand restaurant Le Pavillon, located in the gleaming new skyscraper One Vanderbilt on East 42nd Street, just across the street from Grand Central Terminal in Midtown Manhattan.

The cultural and financial treasure that is the city's restaurant industry suffered ineffable losses because of the pandemic, including the permanent closure of many beloved businesses. Now that NYC has broadly reopened, the fate of restaurants is viewed by many as a barometer of my hometown's future success. "I can't think of a more fitting moment to open Le Pavillon," Boulud announced upon its launch. "Despite the many, many challenges that we have faced in the last year, our commitment to creating this dining destination never wavered and, in fact, we are more certain than ever that this celebration of cuisine, nature, and architecture is exactly what New Yorkers need right now. It is my sincere hope that this is an opportunity to celebrate New York City for all of us."

My recent visit to Le Pavillon for a media dinner hosted by importer Vineyard

Brands made for an elegant foray back into the world of wine events. Visually breathtaking, the 11,000-square-foot restaurant boasts a stunning view of the Chrysler Building and can accommodate up to 120 guests (the expansive bar area alone seats 46). The space beautifully softens the modern design of the soaring glass-and-steel tower it's housed in: An indoor oasis of lush plants and trees, it brings nature indoors and creates a sense of calm in the heart of Manhattan.

After the dinner, I asked Vineyard Brands president and CEO Gregory Doody about the bond between importers and restaurants. "Our relationships with restaurants are critical to the long-term success of Vineyard Brands, as they are for any fine wine importer," he said. "With very few exceptions, the strongest fine wine brands have foundations that are built around their presence in restaurants." And the return of restaurants like Le Pavillon in particular is especially critical "on the heels of the pandemic," he added. "For a chef with the renown of Daniel Boulud to open such an ambitious space shows a real belief in the city of New York that many of us are feeling even more strongly now that we've been set free. Also, it's a nice nod to New York's culinary history; the initial Le Pavillon

was a landmark of [Manhattan's] restaurant scene" from 1941 until its closure in 1972.

The menu showcases the seasonal bounty of Northeast fishermen and farmers, while the wine list reflects the French and American sensibilities of both the new restaurant and its predecessor. According to head sommelier Blake Bernal, "Currently, there are 750 selections on the list and growing. Naturally, the goal of the program is to have a heavy emphasis on French classics—particularly Champagne and red and white Burgundy—while also having a curated selection of American wines. The reasoning behind a deep American selection is because of the impact that the original Le Pavillon had in New York. It introduced French haute cuisine to American culture, and in turn I'd like to reintroduce the incredible American wines that are being made today back into a classical French restaurant."

Boulud was born into a farming family in Lyon, France, but New York City proudly claims him as one of our own. His Le Pavillon reminds the world that this is still a place where big dreams can come true. *W*

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

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by Ruth Tobias

A CRAWL THROUGH DENVER'S NEWEST WATERING HOLES

The Big Boom in Barrooms



Cocktails with a view of Coors Field at The Rally Bar in McGregor Square.

BAR HOPPING'S BACK, BABY—and in the Mile High City, where 70% of the eligible population was vaccinated at the time of this writing, there's a slew of new venues to add safely (knock wood) to the itinerary. I covered one of the highest-profile openings of the year to date, **Forget Me Not**, in my April/May column, but hot spots have been popping up all over; here are some of the most notable newcomers.

Ghost Donkey:

Located smack at the edge of the Union Station train platform, this LoDo outpost of the agave-centric New York flagship is the kind of place where fabulous mistakes were meant to be made. The ambiance—fantastically louche yet somehow cozy—telegraphs as much in a haze of pink and purple neon; so do equally flashy yet complex concoctions like the Mole Negroni, best paired with either truffled nachos or another Mole Negroni.



PHOTO: WERK CREATIVE

Ghost Donkey's Burro Tropical with tequila, rum, passion fruit liqueur, milk soda, ginger, and lemon.

a daring blend of Syrah, Amaro Nonino, cold brew, and tonic.

The Rally Bar: Anchoring The Rally Hotel in McGregor Square less than a baseball's throw from Coors Field, this is prime real estate for game-day people-watching. The setting's so see-and-be-seen, in fact—enhanced by a massive chandelier suspended over the bar from a couple stories up—that it could attract a crowd while serving nothing but, well, Coors; happily, the drinks live up to the decor, from the tequila-based, sour-meets-spicy Golden Sombrero to the pretty-in-purple Rally Up with Family Jones vodka, St. Germain, butterfly-pea tea, and citrus. (Don't pass on the pretzel-crusted Scotch eggs with raclette fondue either.)

The L: For all the polish on its owners' resumes—Adam Hodak was Bonnano Concepts' longtime beverage director and Alex Lerman most recently served as head bartender at the NoMad Bar in New York—this little slice of South Broadway eschews slickness for the dim-lit, down-to-earth vibe of a true barroom, warmed by the mural of blooming flowers that covers one wall. The beverage list is likewise unpretentious (you want a can of Utica Club or a shot of Tito's, you got it) but no less savvy for that: Even the house wines, an IGP Var Viognier and a Conca de Barberà DO Trepat, buck convention, while seasonal cocktails like the El Camino with avocado oil-infused mezcal, Manzanilla Sherry, watermelon, aloe, celery, lime, and black pepper shimmer. **||**

PHOTO COURTESY OF ATÖST



The tasting lounge at atöst in Golden, CO.

atöst Lounge: Though the location of their tasting room in a suburban industrial park off a Route 6 frontage road may seem inauspicious, the launch of Kyle and Cindy Pressman's line of handcrafted aperitivos last winter was anything but. The brand (*atost.co*) has quickly garnered quite the local cult following with its four stunning, not to mention stylishly packaged, core expressions—Roots, Woods, Bloom, and Citrus—and limited seasonal editions; behind the bar, the couple showcases their portfolio's versatility in flights, spritzes, and cocktails like the vodka-based Bloom Martini with rose-honey syrup.

PHOTO COURTESY OF THE RALLY BAR

Good for the earth,
great in the glass.

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POINTS

THE TASTING PANEL



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Santa Barbara Snapshot

HOW TO PLAN A PERFECT WEEKEND IN WINE COUNTRY

OVER THE PAST FEW ISSUES, I took readers on a whirlwind tour through the more than 40 Central Coast AVAs between San Francisco Bay and Santa Barbara; now it's time to visit some of these areas in depth, exploring the new hospitality options available to wine lovers as California reopens for tourism.

Ernest Hemingway once said, "Invent from what you know[—]that's all there is to writing," so let's start in the place I know best: Santa Barbara Wine Country.

The region is home to no fewer than seven AVAs (as well as some growing areas that deserve designation), all within a 30-minute drive. Love Pinot Noir and Chardonnay? Santa Maria Valley and the Sta. Rita Hills produce some of the greatest examples in the New World. Prefer Rhône-style wines like Syrah and Viognier? Ballard Canyon and Alisos Canyon await. Heck, we even have an amazing AVA for Bordeaux fans: Happy Canyon of Santa Barbara. Come for the Sauvignon Blanc, stay for the Cabernet Sauvignon. Here are a few suggested stops:

Buellton: The Buellton Marriott, Andersen's, and Sideways Inn are all central to Santa Barbara's subregions. Walk to Ellen's Danish Pancake House for breakfast, Rudy's Mexican or Taco Roco for lunch, and the Hitching Post II or Industrial Eats for dinner. Tasting-room tour highlights

include Ken Brown, Alma Rosa Winery, Loring Wine Company, Crawford Family Wines, and Hitching Post.

Lompoc and Santa Maria: If an average high temperature in the low 70s in August sounds refreshing, that's because it is. Lompoc and Santa Maria are a bit rustic, but the price is right, allowing you to spend less on lodging (and air conditioning) and more on the delicious local Pinot Noir and Chardonnay. In Lompoc, don't miss Floriano's Mexican Food, Eye on I (Street), Sissy's Uptown Cafe, Mi Amore Pizza and Pasta, or Thai Cuisine, and hit up the Wine Ghetto to taste through samples from 12 wineries in one go; a mile away are two of my own favorite tasting rooms, Brewer-Clifton and Longoria. Santa Maria/Orcutt boasts Trattoria Uliveto, Far Western Tavern, The Garden, and Shaw's Steakhouse & Tavern as well as Pappy's or Kay's Orcutt Country Kitchen for breakfast, while recommended tasting experiences range from urban stops such as Nagy and CORE Winery to the vineyards at Presqu'île, Riverbench, and Cambria.

Solvang/Santa Ynez/Los Olivos: The kitschy but fun Danish village of Solvang is

packed full of tasting rooms and bars such as Arrowsmith's Wine Bar and the Sanger Family of Wines, and it's only a short drive from wineries like Beckmen Vineyards and Buttonwood Farm Winery & Vineyard. Santa Ynez and Los Olivos are both quaint Old Western towns turned wine destinations; in the latter, my favorite stops are Tercero, Liquid Farm, Andrew Murray Vineyards, Dragonette Cellars, and Bien Nacido Estate, and in the former, Gainey Vineyard and Carr Vineyards & Winery. For dinner, try Sear Steakhouse in Solvang; SY Kitchen, Brothers Restaurant at the Red Barn, and Bob's Well Bread in Santa Ynez; and Los Olivos Wine Merchant & Café and Nella Kitchen and Bar in Los Olivos.

Visit sbcountywines.com for further details, or email me at the below address: As an ambassador for Santa Barbara Wine Country, I am happy to help you curate an amazing trip for you and your friends and family. All curious explorers welcome! sj

Wes Hagen is California marketing manager for Miller Family Wine Company. Follow him on Instagram @wes_hagen or, to submit ideas or samples for future installments of this column, contact him at whagen@millerfamilywinecompany.com.

PHOTO: MOODBOARD VIA ADOBE STOCK



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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@sommjournal.com.



Laurent-Perrier Blanc de Blancs Brut Nature, Champagne, France (\$100) Like the fabulous Ultra Brut (see our review in the April/May issue), this beauty highlights Laurent-Perrier's status as a pioneer of zero-dosage bubbly. Six years of bottle aging ensure it's less sleek and stark than it is bright and shiny, radiating citrus along with sparks of brioche, almond, pear, and a wash of seashells-at-the-seashore minerality in concert with the dazzling bead. Texture meets pizzazz with a dash of bitter lemon. **94**



PHOTO: © LAURENT-PERRIER



Mezza di Mezzacorona Italian Glacial Bubbly Rosé, Vigneti delle Dolomiti IGT, Italy (\$13) "Italian glacial bubbly" may sound bracing, but this rosé from the foothills of the Italian Alps is rather softer and more generous than the description suggests. With a bronze tinge to its blush hue, the blend of estate-grown Chardonnay, Pinot Bianco, and Pinot Nero delivers notes of juice-packed apricot, star fruit, and melon both on the nose and in the relatively creamy body, where a hint of almond flickers amid shades of cherry. **88**



PRESTIGE WINE IMPORTS



Venturini Baldini Cadelvento Lambrusco Spumante Rosato, Italy (\$22) Another fun-filled bottle from this Reggio Emilia estate. Amid sweetly floral aromas, peach and plum give red fruit a run for its money on the nose; clean yet pretty in the mouth, the blend of 85% Lambrusco Sorbara and 15% Lambrusco Grasparossa gives off summer-morning vibes—equal parts sprightly and soft—with a squeeze of ruby grapefruit and a touch of almond bitterness toward the finish. **92**



MASSANOIS IMPORTS



Vera Wang PARTY Prosecco DOC, Italy (\$25) That this Prosecco is as light and frothy as a wedding gown should come as no surprise, given that its creator is arguably the most famous bridal designer of the past 20 years. It's made by Araldica, a Piedmont-based producer known for Moscato d'Asti, which may account for its easy-drinking character: At 12 grams per liter of residual sugar, it offers up notes of ripe honeydew, even riper peach, and sweet citrus that flirt with lively, upfront acidity. Of course Wang designed the gorgeous silver bottle—Carrie Bradshaw would approve. **90**



PHOTO COURTESY OF VERA WANG PARTY

ROYAL WINE CORP.



De Valloie NV Paramour Rosé, Saumur, Loire Valley, France (\$17) The red fruit that mingles lightly with roses (plus a hint of brininess) on the nose builds on the juicy, spice-sprinkled palate to include ripe red plum, red currant, and pomegranate. Composed of 60% Cabernet Franc and 40% Grolleau Noir, it's an easy pleasure. **90**



ASGRAM



Kizakura Piano Sparkling Sake, Japan (\$8) Playing a medley of ripe Asian pear, banana, honeydew, and star fruit, this naturally fermented sparkling junmai saké is as light on the palate as an impromptu tickling of the ivories; even its suggestions of sweetness and creaminess are fleeting. All that lingers is a sense of simple refreshment. **88**



WISMETTAC

Westwood 2018 Legend

Proprietary Red Blend, Annadel Gap Vineyard, Sonoma Valley

“In its third vintage, this superbly expressive red blend of Cabernet Sauvignon, Syrah, and Mourvèdre emits scents of jasmine, plum blossoms, and cafe mocha.”

97 pts.

THE **tastingpanel**
MAGAZINE

Winemakers Philippe Melka and Maayan Koschitzky fermented the wine in closed-top stainless steel tanks as well as a French oak upright tank. Aged in 30% new French oak for 20 months. The palate mirrors the nose, adding a graceful array of floral notes with more robust flavors ascending to heavenly levels of black raspberry, coffee, and dots of white pepper that cause the mouth to salivate.

WESTWOOD
LEGEND

© 2018

WESTWOOD

ANNADEL GAP VINEYARD

38°17'30" N - 122°27'27" W

11 E Napa St. #3, Sonoma, CA 95476

westwoodwine.com

Photography: Alexander Rubin - Mariana Calderon

Going Au Naturel

IN PHOENIX, **SAUVAGE BOTTLE SHOP** OWNER CHRIS LINGUA ENCOURAGES “EXPLORATION OVER EXPECTATION”

“I’M LOOKING FOR A RED WINE,” says the young man who has just stepped into Sauvage Bottle Shop in downtown Phoenix. “Great!” responds proprietor Chris Lingua with an amiable grin. He follows up with questions: light or dark red? Style? Price range? Enjoying with food or on its own? Soon he’s ringing up a bottle of Le Mazel Larmande, a vibrant Syrah made with whole-bunch maceration and wild yeast, and enthusiastically describing it as “a cool deep dive” into the low-intervention wines he loves—all without getting into a discussion about specific varietals. “I think it’s a little backwards to approach things from the varietal,” he later tells me. “What Chardonnay means to you could be very different from what it means to me. The questions are important, not the varietals. My ethos is exploration over expectation.”



PHOTOS: CHRISTINA BARRUETA

Chris Lingua is the owner of Sauvage Bottle Shop in Phoenix, AZ.



With spirits as with wine, Sauvage customers know to expect the unexpected.

In 2018, Lingua opened his 160-square-foot shop at The Churchill, a collective of ten local businesses. “I don’t have much space, so I zeroed in on one thing—clean, delicious, adventurous wines,” he explains. “I have high-acid whites and broody dark reds and the entire spectrum in between.”

This philosophy extends to his thoughtfully curated selection of apéritifs and spirits.

Looking for a wine to pair with seafood? Lingua may choose an Austrian pét-nat like the Meinklang Foam Vulkan Somló. Planning a Thai feast? It could be the Nathalie Banes Tiki Gamay from France he reaches for. Or you could find yourself leaving with a bottle of Patrick St. Surin clairin, the traditional rum of Haiti, or Pampleau, an aromatized Sauvignon Blanc from Oregon macerated with Meyer lemon and grapefruit.

“For me, the big fork in the road toward natural wines is using indigenous yeast and no added sugar,” says Lingua, who also eschews the vanilla and wood flavors imparted by oak. “It’s a personal preference. I don’t like my wines to taste like anything other than the grapes they’re made with.”

It’s this purity that, in his view, provides the clearest picture of a region. “You want to travel through your glass to that year, that weather, that snapshot. And that’s what you get when you have something *sauvage*, something wild, something made in the old way, stripped of all the industrial practices. If you’re manipulating that snapshot, then you’re bending Mother Nature.”

Minimal-intervention practices, by contrast, ensure that the distinctive character of nature’s perfect imperfections is celebrated in every bottle. “It’s like music—I want to hear the pops, the hisses, and the scratches in a record rather than a sterilized CD version,” Lingua says. “I want to be the conduit to connect people to the same exhilarating wines that excite me. Ultimately, I consider myself just a DJ trying to play the song you want to hear.”



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PHOTO: FRAQUADRO VIA ADOBE STOCK

Four Things Every New Sommelier Should Know

YOU STUDIED YOUR BEHIND OFF, passed the test, and got the job: You're officially the sommelier and buyer for a restaurant. It's quite an achievement—but your work has only begun, so you need to be prepared. The first program I ever ran was a fluke: I was working as a server at a brand-new hotel restaurant when suddenly the wine director quit and the head sommelier was fired. As the only employee with any certifications, I inherited their duties despite having no training, no plans in place, and no mentor to help me. If I could go back in time to that moment nearly two decades ago, this is the advice I would give to my younger self.

Know your role: Many inexperienced sommeliers fundamentally misunderstand the nature of their job. Interacting with guests and guiding their wine selections is the fun part, but a sommelier's primary responsibility is not to provide service so much as to run a well-organized, profitable program with the help of a well-trained staff. The depth and breadth of your wine knowledge may have gotten you your position, but it's your mastery of the


technical aspects of running a beverage program—finance, operations, training, and more—that will help you keep it. Embrace such mundane but essential tasks as invoice coding, inventory, cost-of-goods calculations, and wine-list editing. They are vital to your success.

Be a good buyer: New buyers often get caught up in the pseudo-celebrity of their positions. After all, suppliers and distributors will wine and dine them, give them tickets to events, and offer all sorts of other incentives in the hopes of gaining coveted placement on wine lists. This can foster a false sense of entitlement at the expense of the sales reps, who should be treated as peers and partners. Always respond to their requests for meetings (even if the answer is a polite “no”); don't use their limited sample budget to fuel your drinking habits; and remember that purchasing power alone does not a great sommelier make—supplier relationships should be mutually beneficial, not one-sided.

Maintain the magic trifecta: Honesty,

courtesy, respect. These three simple words serve as a mantra for every interaction I have with my colleagues, superiors, subordinates, suppliers, and guests. To be clear, honesty doesn't mean being unnecessarily blunt, so if, for example, you dislike a wine and aren't sure how to communicate that to a distributor, it's best to politely indicate that it simply isn't right for your program. If you then provide feedback as to what you are ultimately looking for, it will only serve to improve your interactions and prevent wasted time.

Don't be selfish: Your wine program really isn't about you. Sure, you can put your own unique stamp on it, but remember that it ultimately must serve the needs of your business and, more importantly, the desires of your guests. Don't force *pét-nat* on people who want Champagne. When a guest asks, “What do you recommend?”, take a moment to ask them questions about what they like.

Adhering to these four simple principles will set you up for a long and successful career ahead. Cheers! 

ANTIGAL

WINERY & ESTATES

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Choose One. Tell Many.



CONSISTENCY OVER THE YEARS.



Why Barrels Still Matter

THE JUDICIOUS USE
OF OAK WILL ALWAYS
BE IN STYLE

The Forêt de Tronçais in central France is one of the world's most renowned oak forests.

WINE PRODUCERS originally used traditional 59-gallon oak barriques because they were the lightest, cheapest, and least breakable storage and transportation vessels available. In the last century, however, they became a stylistic choice, used for their contribution to a wine's character—some would say to a fault: Many critics now complain of overoaking, while environmentalists decry the cutting down of trees. So, with all of this talk about moving away from barrels, why do many winemakers—myself included—still choose to work with them?

First, it bears mentioning that today's fresh, fruit-forward wines are often all the better for not spending time in oak. Large concrete tanks can be perfect for unfussy reds, while smaller concrete eggs can lend a creamy texture to whites thanks to the continued lees suspension that their shape encourages. And in the spirit of "everything old is new again," orange wines are often kept in amphorae, which predate barrels. For that matter, if it's simply a question of imparting a bit of oak character to an everyday wine, oak chips can be tossed into stainless-steel tanks for a fraction of the cost.

However, when the goal is a complex, ageworthy, nuanced wine, then barriques,

with their specific surface-to-volume ratio, become critical. And there is enormous diversity among them: The factors that determine what a particular barrel can offer a wine include the species of oak and its origin; the seasoning; the thickness of the staves; the application of wet or dry heat to bend those staves; the toast level; and the barrel's age.

Winemakers turn to different coopers according to their needs, which go well beyond their desire to add a hint of almond nougat versus vanilla to a Chardonnay (although that also matters). Is the goal, for example, to enhance color stability in a Pinot Noir prone to pigment fallout? Oak tannins form long, stable chains with the wine's anthocyanins, keeping these color-giving molecules in suspension. What about when something is needed to soften the tannins in a grippy Cabernet Sauvignon? Those same chains, in combination with barrels' slow oxygen ingress, do exactly that. There is also nothing like new oak to balance out the green notes in a Cab Franc, and if one wants to discourage reduction in Syrah, a barrel is indispensable. Finally, because of the evaporative loss that comes with oak, winemakers can even use it to fine-tune a wine's alcohol content.

Understanding how each type of barrel can influence their wine is an important part of a winemaker's job. Cooperages vary in terms of not only specifications but also consistency. In learning this the hard way, I have had to give up on certain makers because their barrels, while sometimes wonderful, are not reliable. Large wineries can blend out the effects of an overly toasted or tannic barrel on a wine, but smaller producers faced with this dilemma have nowhere to run to, nowhere to hide.

Finally, winemakers are increasingly looking for ways to minimize their carbon footprint, which means calling into question each input in the winemaking process. The good news is that many of Europe's finest oak forests actually owe their survival through the centuries to the wine industry, which is so important to France that the vast majority are carefully protected with the help of organizations like the Programme for the Endorsement of Forest Certification.

For oak-aged wines, I would argue that, after pick date, the most important decisions facing a winemaker are choice of cooper, toast level, and barrel age. Watch this space for further exploration of these topics. **SJ**

THANK YOU

RESTAURANTS

THE FIRST DATE

THE FIRST ANNIVERSARY

THE LUNCH THAT CREATED THE DEAL

THE DINNER THAT CLOSED THE DEAL

SUNDAY FAMILY NIGHT

TABLE FOR ONE

OUTDOOR DINING LAST SUMMER

OUTDOOR DINING LAST WINTER

TAKEOUT

BEING THERE



THE PLACE WHERE TOASTS HAPPEN

SILVERADO

— 40 YEARS —

1981 - 2021

Cha McCoy

FOUNDER OF CHA SQUARED CONSULTING, LLC, LISBON, PORTUGAL,
AND NEW YORK, NY by Michelle M. Metter

PHOTO COURTESY OF CHA MCCOY



IF YOU DON'T ALREADY KNOW

Cha McCoy by now, you should. As the founder of Cha Squared Consulting, LLC, she has made waves in the wine industry, for years racking up well-deserved awards for her work in making wine more accessible. A certified sommelier and WSET Level 3 candidate, McCoy continues to bring advancement opportunities to members of the hospitality industry while delivering unparalleled experiences to her clients. We caught up with McCoy to learn more about her impressive career; further information can be found at chamccoy.com and on Instagram @cha_squared and @flightcruw.

Q: What led you to a career in the wine industry?

Travel. I was living abroad in Italy, completing my MBA and, [with access] to vineyards, [I started] learning about wine directly from winemakers—which completely changed my career path but also my lifestyle. I realized not many people in my community would get to have such an experience. When I returned to the U.S., I sought out a job at my neighborhood wine shop, which allowed me to share my experiences and educate wine lovers in Harlem. I will be excited to have the world back open [so] I can reboot the wine tourism experiences I host [in connection] with my wine club, Flight Cru.


Q: Your work is built around opening doors, whether by providing experiences or fostering careers. Was this always your mission?

My mission has always been to be of service and to build a community using food and beverage as my vehicle. When I recognized the lack of access and opportunity for Black women in F&B, I made it my priority to create safe spaces for education and to make genuine connections with my wine event series, The Communion, in 2017 instead of asking for permission from the gatekeepers of this industry or waiting for their acceptance. [I also choose] venues that are more welcoming [and] collaborate with restaurateurs that honor the same mission. [I'm] inviting more people to the table beyond the "it" list, ... challenging the typical wine vernacular, and allowing others to feel comfortable with expressing their palate during tastings.

Q: What should our readers know about Lip Service?

Lip Service is a foreign-language initiative focused on hospitality. It includes a fundraiser program with 501(c)(3) [nonprofit] In The Weeds to provide language-learning resources to BIPOC hospitality professionals. Currently, there are 11 students enrolled in the pilot version for 2021. In addition, it is a charge to the greater hospitality industry to simply do better with [respect to] accepting others and to truly create a hospitable environment for all. By asking everyone to invest in learning a second language, I am challenging my peers in this industry to stop using language as a barrier to keep us apart and instead use it as a bridge to connect us with our guests and [our colleagues].

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

This is difficult, [but] my first choice is Harriet Tubman—she has become my North Star in many ways. As a conductor on an unpaved journey, she was a woman of faith, service, and conviction, and that's how I see myself. I would have a nice glass of traditional-method sparkling wine from the Finger Lakes AVA with her, as she chose this region to be her final resting place. 

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 @michellemettersd.

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93 POINTS

TASTING PANEL
LA SPLENDEUR DU SOLEIL CHARDONNAY 2018

93 POINTS

TASTING PANEL
LA PETITE GRACE PINOT NOIR 2018

92 POINTS

TASTING PANEL
LA BELLE FÊTE ROSÉ OF PINOT NOIR 2019

THE DIRTY BUSINESS OF

Clean Wine

by Erik Segelbaum

Images like this stock photo echo the “clean wine” brand aesthetic.

IF YOU ARE ACTIVE ON SOCIAL MEDIA and engage with wine-related accounts, you’ve doubtless been targeted by advertising from self-proclaimed “clean wine” companies. While their campaigns suggest that their products are better for you than “regular” wine because they are more concerned with your overall well-being than other producers, the fact is that they’re engaging in deceit and scare tactics. These brands, which now command a multimillion-dollar segment of the wine market, are preying on consumers who may not understand that most of their claims are immaterial if not hyperbolic or even downright false. Ironically, while they disparage manipulation when it comes to production, they have no problem with it as a marketing strategy. Here are some of the most misleading tricks.

Continued on page 32

PHOTO: MARINA VIA ADOBE STOCK



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PASO ROBLES,
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93
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2018 VINTAGE

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February 2021

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PASO ROBLES
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Manipulation by Insinuation

A common ploy among these companies is to make true statements about their products that imply uniqueness, when the reality is that those statements can and do apply to most any wine. For example, many promote their wines as being low-carb with no added sugar; the problem is not that this is false but rather that it's true of virtually every dry table wine. Consumers who don't know that, however, are bound to extrapolate otherwise; when they see an ad for a brand that claims to be low-sugar accompanied by a photo of a sugar-filled wine glass, they will infer that other brands are high-sugar.

Another example involves the suggestion that an evil corporate wine empire is putting profits before people, whose bodies they fill with as many toxins as possible. Take all the different chemicals and other additives that are legally permissible in wine production. Some brands will reference them to imply that these ingredients are common, when in fact only a handful of high-volume, low-cost commercial brands use them. Just because something is legal doesn't mean that everyone is doing it. On the contrary, tens (if not hundreds) of thousands of family-owned, small-production wineries make fantastic wines without additives.

Meaningless Terms

One of the worst offenders in the category is a brand whose slogan is absolutely meaningless: "Pure Natural Wine." It's all over the company's website, packaging, and social media feeds. It sounds great, but as every reader of this magazine surely knows, there is no legal definition for either adjective; marketers are free to use the terms "pure" and "natural" however they want with zero burden of proof.

They can also fabricate sexy-sounding statistics like this one, taken directly from the site's landing page: "We estimate that less than 0.01% of the world's wines meet our strict criteria." Yet they fail to indicate what those selection criteria are or how (and by whom) they were measured. As it



MANY PROMOTE
THEIR WINES AS
BEING LOW-CARB
WITH NO ADDED
SUGAR;
THE PROBLEM IS
NOT THAT THIS IS
FALSE BUT RATHER
THAT IT'S TRUE OF
VIRTUALLY EVERY
DRY TABLE WINE.

happens, I estimate that less than 0.01% of all pet names in the world meet my strict criteria for what a pet should be named. Do you see how absurdly arbitrary and baseless that phony statistic is? The use of words like "pure" and "natural" is designed to trick consumers into thinking that the brand's wines are better for you than any others. Of course, this is categorically false.

Obscuring Transparency

Though I completely agree that there should be more truth in labeling when it comes to the wine industry, the fact that most wineries don't list ingredients on the package does not mean that there is anything in the wine that is bad for you. It means simply that they don't have to; what they do have to do, however, is submit their labels for approval before the wine is finished, and sometimes even before the grapes are harvested—which means they may not know exactly what the wine will contain in what amounts. Yet by the logic of the marketing departments for these "clean" wine companies, a restaurant chef who doesn't list every ingredient in a dish must be hiding all sorts of harmful things in it.

Meanwhile, these brands claim to serve as models of open information and transparency. Yet their websites show they're anything but. To give an example, when I went to the aforementioned company's homepage and clicked on links labeled "Additive Free" and "Organic Farming," I was directed not to an explanation of these assertions with facts to back them up but rather to a sales page. I also found it impossible to locate tech sheets for many of these brands. In some cases, it wasn't even clear what grapes were in the wine or where they were grown.

Ultimately, it is up to individual consumers to make decisions that they feel are best for them. Unfortunately, the "clean wine" movement has done a stellar job of muddying the waters surrounding the concepts of transparency, accuracy, and integrity. Buyers beware: That "healthier" bottle you're drinking may turn out to be snake oil. **SJ**



2018
90
POINTS
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Raising the Game

IN NAPA'S OAKVILLE AVA, **C. ELIZABETH** DOES GOOD WHILE DOING WELL WITH ITS SINGLE-VINEYARD CABERNET SAUVIGNON

by Deborah Parker Wong

IN FEBRUARY OF THIS YEAR, Dave and Christi Ficeli, co-founders and owners of C. Elizabeth Wines in Napa Valley's Oakville AVA, made the heartfelt decision to donate 50% of the proceeds from the sale of their coveted C. Elizabeth 2017 Cabernet Sauvignon to fire relief efforts as part of a six-week campaign with the Napa Valley Community Foundation. When the Tubbs Fire broke out in October 2017, Dave was standing on the

ing a singular Cabernet Sauvignon became a reality when they began collaborating with Nancarrow, who led them to Game Farm Vineyard just north of Goosecross. Having discovered the rarified 40-acre site abutting the Silverado Trail during his time at Duckhorn, Nancarrow was able to get his hands on some Cabernet Sauvignon from its Rock Pit parcel for C. Elizabeth, the first two vintages of which were sourced solely from that heavily cobbled

profile the team was after: The 2016 vintage was the tipping point: Working with select cooperages from Pennsylvania and, to a lesser degree, Missouri, he perfected his "recipe" for small-pore American oak barrels made with thin, water-bent staves and aged a minimum of three years prior

PHOTO: UNTAPPED MEDIA



PHOTO COURTESY OF C. ELIZABETH



C. Elizabeth Wines co-founders and owners Christi and Dave Ficeli.

crush pad of Goosecross Cellars (where the label is crafted) and tasting the fruit of the vintage with winemaker Bill Nancarrow; although Goosecross was spared from damage, the couple was nonetheless inspired when wildfires struck Napa Valley again in 2020 to "give back to the community that has given so much to us since our arrival," Christi said.

Such openness of spirit is par for the course when it comes to the Ficelis, who began C. Elizabeth in 2014 as a passion project. Their long-held dream of produc-

ing a singular Cabernet Sauvignon became a reality when they began collaborating with Nancarrow, who led them to Game Farm Vineyard just north of Goosecross. Having discovered the rarified 40-acre site abutting the Silverado Trail during his time at Duckhorn, Nancarrow was able to get his hands on some Cabernet Sauvignon from its Rock Pit parcel for C. Elizabeth, the first two vintages of which were sourced solely from that heavily cobbled

block. In 2016, however, Nancarrow began selecting fruit from the vineyard's Trailside lot, which has a layer of loamy-ferrous topsoil and produces wines with more body and weight as well as floral aromatics and dense, creamy tannins. He now relies on a blend of both lots. From the beginning of his partnership with C. Elizabeth, Nancarrow made the unconventional choice of using American oak in his barrel program, experimenting with different wood sources, coopers, and treatments to achieve the richer flavor



PHOTO COURTESY OF C. ELIZABETH

C. Elizabeth winemaker Bill Nancarrow.

to use. Finishing the wine in these neutral barrels results in well-integrated secondary aromas that complement its profile without dominating it. Although the percentage varies with each vintage, just 30% of the 2017 spent 21 months in new oak; because it "was a delicate vintage," says Nancarrow, "devoting a higher percentage of the blend to neutral oak really let the beauty of the Cabernet Sauvignon shine."

At 244 cases—of which a few remain—the vintage represents the largest case production yet of the micro-lot wine. Retailing at \$150, it shows blue-floral aromas; striking varietal character of cassis and dark, plummy fruit laced with white pepper; and the silky, fine-grained tannins that are a hallmark of Game Farm Cabernet Sauvignon. For more information, visit celizabeth.com. **SJ**

A DIVINE STORY





The iconic
'Vaio Armaron'



SEREGO ALIGHIERI
DAL 1353

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{ somm spotlight }

Where Sunshine and Coastline Meet

NATURAL WINE

A CONVERSATION WITH SCHUYLER
"SKYE" MUNROE OF **VINO CARTA**
IN SAN DIEGO, CA

story by Michelle M. Metter / photo by Rafael Peterson

SCHUYLER "SKYE" MUNROE is like most San Diegans in that he migrated to the city, attracted by its promises of sunshine and a laid-back lifestyle. Childhood memories of summers spent in Los Angeles coupled with frustration at the lack of mentorship in the Charlotte, North Carolina, market left him longing to head west—so when he serendipitously connected with a team of sommeliers from San Diego during the Washington, D.C., SommCon in 2018, he seized the opportunity to make a life-altering change.

"I was lucky enough to receive a scholarship for the convention and, feeling very grateful, I decided to offer my help in any way possible to support the event," says Munroe. "Over many, many hours of polishing glasses, I made friends with some amazing San Diego somms," including Molly Brooks, Rusti Gilbert, and Woody van Horn. Van Horn helped him find a position at a Baja-themed establishment in the city, Death by Tequila, where he worked until

he met Patrick Ballow, a partner at Vino Carta. Munroe has been serving as a sommelier, bartender, and sales representative at the wine bar and shop in San Diego's Little Italy neighborhood ever since.

Since its inception almost six years ago, Vino Carta has grown to offer as many as 500 different SKUs, with a special focus on smaller-production and natural wines; along the way, Ballow and his partner Brian Jensen have developed a large following as well as a popular wine club. "The idea originally was to bring new wines to San Diego—new varietals, new regions, new styles—and to do it without dogma," Munroe explains. "I consider myself lucky to be able to stand on Patrick and Brian's shoulders and continue to promote and discover new wines to bring to our customers."

Natural wine has found its way into the national spotlight, and San Diegans are as curious about it as anyone. Admitting that "it's kind of hard to wrap my head

around the category, as it's pretty ambiguous," Munroe says that he classifies it as "wine that comes from organically farmed grapes, [is] fermented with native yeast, and [contains] no additions of any kind, with the exception of sulfur at bottling."

He also recognizes that, "at its worst, the category becomes full of hypebeast wines of process," as he puts it. But "at its best, natural wine can give you the purest glimpse of terroir possible in the world of wine. Some of my favorite producers right now include Jean-François Ganevat, Château de Béru, Maison Stephan, Cavallotto, Envinat, Thibaud Boudignon, Âmevive Wines, Arnot-Roberts, Réka Koncz, Les Deplaudes de Tartaras, Dominique Lafon, Dominique Belluard, [and] Hiyu Wine Farm."

A trip to Vino Carta is a must for any wine professional visiting the city, who will likely find Schuyler behind the bar—unless he's soaking up the sunshine at the beach or on a hike. It is San Diego, after all. **sj**



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Assault on Pepper

AS THE CLIMATE STRAINS, WINE COMPLEXITY WANES

WINE PROFESSIONALS USE the markers that differentiate grape varieties as guideposts when assessing quality and style and/or when blind tasting. Wine enthusiasts relish the complexity of their favorite expressions, a factor that contributes significantly to their enjoyment.

Wine is one of the foods richest in volatile aroma compounds, linked to as many as 1,000 of them. That said, only 80 or so—including the monoterpenols responsible for the floral notes in Muscat (among other varieties) and the thiols that impart aromas of passion fruit and grapefruit to Sauvignon Blanc—have been widely studied. In fact, the molecule responsible for the pronounced peppery notes found in several French grapes—including Syrah from the Northern Rhône; Gamay from Beaujolais; and Duras, Fer, Négrette, and Prunelard, grown in South West France—was only recently discovered.

Until 2008, knowledge of the aromatic compounds that account for the varietal character of red wines, especially free compounds directly extracted from grapes, was limited to methoxypyrazines, the culprit responsible for undesirable green notes in Bordeaux varieties. The discovery in an Australian Syrah of rotundone, a sesquiterpene responsible for those peppery notes, shed new light on its sensory significance.

Rotundone had been hiding in plain sight; it had remained undetected by researchers in not only wine but food products such as *Piper nigrum*, or black pepper, which has more than 50 volatile compounds. These researchers speculate that several factors complicated its detection, including the fact that 1) the molecule appears late during sensory evaluation sessions, when judges no longer expect to encounter any molecules of interest and therefore may be less attentive, and 2) there is a specific anosmia for it, with 30% of tasters unable to detect it.

In any case, the days of comparing a glass of Northern Rhône Syrah to a strip of peppered bacon now appear to be coming to an end: Researchers at the École d'Ingénieurs de PURPAN in Toulouse, France, anticipate that the peppery notes attributed to rotundone in Syrah grown in warmer climates will be lost due to increased temperatures and less precipitation during the ripening stage.

Unlike other aroma compounds in grapes that are derived from odorless precursors released during production or formed during fermentation, rotundone is directly extracted from berry skins during winemaking. In the context of climate change, strategies are being proposed in both the vineyard and the winery to help produce wines with

consistent rotundone levels.

In addition to developing drought-tolerant rootstocks, the Toulouse researchers have identified specific clones that produce higher concentrations of rotundone, including Duras clones 554 and 654; they are also focusing on later-ripening clones of varieties like Tardiff, because later picking dates appear to be another significant factor in maximizing rotundone in wines (as do extended macerations in the cellar). If we lose the peppery notes that we know and love in Syrah and Gamay, producers will have the option of recreating those markers by blending with wines made from varieties such as Duras and Tardiff.

Loss of complexity is just one indicator of the impact that climate change is having on the characteristics that we associate with benchmark wine styles. And this unfortunate scenario isn't confined to the warmest growing regions of France. It's hard to imagine tasting Grüner Veltliner without its telltale notes of white pepper or losing the fragrant green peppercorn that is found in Cabernet Franc. Without them, differentiating between grape varieties will become increasingly more difficult, and consumers will be forced to look elsewhere for their favorite complex flavors. S|



Now the days of comparing a glass of Northern Rhône Syrah to a strip of peppered bacon appear to be coming to an end.

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pairing
up

Contento's quinoa risotto with fava beans, green peas, and fresh herbs in parmesan-basil sauce.

Keen on Quinoa

AN ANCIENT GRAIN AND FRESH GREEN VEGGIES MAKE FOR A WHITE WINE-FRIENDLY "RISOTTO" AT CONTENTO IN EAST HARLEM, NEW YORK

by Michelle M. Metter

PHOTO: MIKHAIL



Contento chef
Oscar Lorenzini.

PHOTO: MIKHAIL



Contento co-owner
and wine director
Yannick Benjamin.

ONE OF THE MOST stunning dishes at newly opened restaurant Contento in New York City's East Harlem neighborhood is the quinoa risotto. While speaking to both his Peruvian roots and his love for the Mediterranean, this deceptively simple creation also reflects chef Oscar Lorenzini's keen understanding of how aromas, flavors, and textures complement one another. Particularly impressive is the fact that its presence and depth does not come from any centerpiece protein. Though cooked exactly the way you would cook Italian short-grain rice to make risotto, the quinoa has an incredible crunchiness that, combined with fava beans, green peas, and fresh herbs in a parmesan-basil sauce, makes for a brilliant mosaic of perfectly executed ingredients.

Contento co-owner and wine director Yannick Benjamin notes that while "the quinoa dish is certainly savory ... it does have a sweet finish because of the green peas and creamy parmesan, along with that hint of basil. So, it's key that I have a wine that will be bigger than the dish [as well as] plenty of acidity to cut through the intensity of the sauce. I also want a wine that will have some residual sugar to go along with the generosity of the dish. I recently served a 2019 Chenin Blanc from Paumanok Vineyards on the North Fork [of Long Island] ... owned by the Massoud family. They oversee [everything from] vineyard management to vinification, which allows them to ensure the quality of wine. This is one of the best American Chenin Blancs that I know of, and from a molecular standpoint, it shares a lot of the same properties of the quinoa dish, which is why the flavors are intensified when they come together. I absolutely adore how the minerality of the wine expresses itself with the quinoa and green vegetal aspects of the dish [to] create a perfect harmony of texture and umami."

We asked two other wine professionals to weigh in with suggested pairings for Contento's quinoa risotto.

William Marengo

Wine director, 2 Spring,
Oyster Bay, New York

What stands out most for me about the quinoa dish is richness (butter, stock, and cheese) juxtaposed with green flavors (favas, green peas, and herbs), the latter of which often prove tricky to pair with because of some natural bitterness. The first thing that comes to mind as a potential pairing is Austrian Grüner Veltliner because of its hallmark herbal character. Franz Hirtzberger's 2017 Ried Kirchweg Smaragd is a beautiful single-vineyard expression from the Wachau appellation that would just sing with this dish. Made from fruit planted on windblown loess soils, picked rather late, and tempered in large used barrels, the wine is at once opulent and well-toned on the palate to match the unctuousness of the dish. A few years of bottle age have rounded out the texture of the wine nicely, and the classic vegetal and white pepper notes on the mid-palate make [it] the perfect foil to chef Lorenzini's latest creation.

Haley Moore

Founder and CEO, Acquire,
San Francisco, California


The favas, green peas, and basil scream for Grüner Veltliner! Grüner can range from lean and mineral-driven to round and rich ... with underpinning acidity; best to accompany this dish with a full and textured example of Grüner to balance the richness of the parmesan and the risotto-style cooking technique. Domaine Ott is a [fourth-generation] Biodynamic estate [in] the Wagram. [Its] 2017 Reid Stein is an iconic example of Grüner with stone fruit, white pepper, and the classic green notes that this varietal is famous for. The Stein Vineyard is located in the Kamptal; *stein* means "stone," and this site is composed of stony soils on sand. Sandy soils combined with a long maceration time and extended lees aging produces a wine with rich texture and mouthwatering acidity. **SJ**



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{ varietal spotlight }

A Champion of Chenin

ROCOCO WINEMAKER NATALIE BROWN IS ON A MISSION TO PROVE CHENIN BLANC'S VERSATILITY AND BRING THE GRAPE BACK INTO VOGUE

by Meredith May

ROCOCO WINES BEGAN IN 2016, when Natalie Brown stumbled upon four rows of old Chenin Blanc vines sandwiched in the middle of a block planted to Chardonnay and Merlot in Los Alamos, California. "Chenin Blanc was not on my radar," she says, but this chance "meeting" motivated her to explore the variety in a big way.

Her second stop for sourcing the grape was Clarksburg, an AVA that Brown claims is "championing" Chenin Blanc. The next was Shell Creek Vineyard back in Paso Robles, Brown's hometown; this vineyard was originally planted in the 1970s and has one of the largest holdings of the grape in the area, with 25 acres.

But even as she expanded her search for distinct terroir throughout California's Central Coast where Chenin Blanc has survived, she also studied the variety in South Africa, where its use is widespread and the climate is

Natalie Brown spreads the good word on Chenin Blanc.

fairly similar to that of California; the experience influenced her decision to emulate the style of Chenin Blanc made there. In addition, because “Chenin Blanc is not actively planted in California on a large scale,” she points out, she began leading new plantings while continuing to do her diligence by scouring the region for existing vineyard sources.

“Chenin’s story in California—[going from] one of the most widely planted wine grapes in the 1960s to its scant acreage today—makes working with these small and scattered old plots of vines particularly poignant; it’s almost as if they are an endangered species,” Brown acknowledges. “Because of their age, in a way, the vines have wisdom. Combined with the grape’s versatility in the cellar, [that makes] Chenin Blanc . . . the perfect choice to study California’s terroir.”

Brown secured the following sites for the 2020 vintage and shared her bottlings with me. See the sidebar for my notes. *§*



Head-trained Chenin Blanc at Chalone Vineyard, first planted in 1919.

Rococo 2020 Own Rooted Chenin Blanc, Los Alamos, Santa Barbara County (\$24) Just west of the new Alisos Canyon AVA, this site sits on an alluvial wash of sandy loam. Warmer than Santa Maria to its north and Los Olivos to its south, it retains only 3 acres of Chenin from its original planting in 1974. This wine has an earthy, dusty character. Wet stone, lanolin, and chamomile lead the flavor profile, which finishes with salinity that seems to ride in on grapefruit peel. Edgy and way cool. **94**

Rococo 2020 Chalone Chenin Blanc, Chalone AVA, Monterey County (\$40) This head-trained, 2-acre parcel contains the oldest Chenin Blanc in Monterey County. Sitting at a high elevation on the west side of the Gabilan Mountains, it is above the fog line, which means the vines get more sunlight. Floral flavors and aromas join together with high-toned minerality, which floods the palate. White pepper sparks just-ripened stone fruit. **93**



Rococo 2020 Chenin Blanc, Vista Verde Vineyard, Paicines AVA, San Benito County (\$28) Though it’s one of the furthest inland, this 900-acre site is the coolest property Brown uses for her project: Carved out from the original Almaden Vineyard, it’s one of the most remote in California. While Chenin Blanc is a fraction of its varietal makeup (the majority is Pinot Noir), the complexity of its volcanic soil and rolled

alluvial stones results in a mouth-filling, unctuous white. The delicacy of the flavors is noteworthy, as is the subtlety of its mineral components (compared to the racy, stony character of some of the other expressions). Melon, chickpea, and chamomile are expressive, and the finish of lemongrass and pine nut is also quite aromatic. **95**

Rococo 2020 Shell Creek Chenin Blanc, Paso Robles Highlands District (\$24) Of the vineyards Brown works with, Shell Creek has the largest portion of acreage planted to Chenin Blanc. “Variation in the large block can change from heavy clay to sand within a single row,” she says. Limestone, ubiquitous in Paso Robles, can also be found throughout the site. The result is a white with verve, searing acidity, and flavors of toasted coconut and caramel that connect with salted pear and key lime. Viscous and exciting; rich and bright. **95**



Rococo 2020 Old Bailey Ranch Chenin Blanc, Adelaida District, Paso Robles (\$28) Dry farmed on own-rooted stock in 1969 by the Bailey family, whose high-elevation vineyards are mostly planted to Cab and Zin. This 2-acre parcel at the bottom of the ranch sits on clay over limestone near a seasonal creek. The wine is sumptuous, with tropical, nectar-like notes of peach, pineapple, and papaya. Both its fruit and its creaminess expand on the chalky palate.

Strikingly beautiful, with a fine acid structure and a lengthy finish. **96**

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Turning *Water(sheds)* Into Wine

CONCHA Y TORO
RELAUNCHES ITS
GRAN RESERVA
LABEL TO REFLECT
ITS MISSION OF
PROTECTING
CHILE'S RIVERS

by Jessie Birschbach

PHOTO COURTESY OF CONCHA Y TORO

An aerial view of the Ucuquer Vineyard, the source of Gran Reserva's Sauvignon Blanc, along the southern bank of the Rapel River.



The Palo Santo Vineyard, which provides the fruit for Gran Reserva's Cabernet Sauvignon and Malbec, is positioned along terraces formed by the Tinguiririca River.

One of the most striking features of South America's topography is the shape of Chile. Long and skinny, it occupies 3,000 miles of the continent's west coast and serves as a symbol of one of the country's most important resources: its rivers, which ensure that water reaches even its driest regions.

In recognizing these waterways as the lifeblood of its homeland, Chilean wine icon Viña Concha y Toro has made watershed-preservation efforts one of its greatest priorities—efforts that come to life for consumers through its Gran Reserva line. Although Gran Reserva has been quietly collecting scores of 90-plus points over the past several years, it's officially set to relaunch in September with new packaging for its 2019 Malbec and Cabernet Sauvignon; it's also adding a fresh new varietal, Sauvignon Blanc, to the U.S. portfolio in January 2022. The newly designed label on all three expressions will reflect not only the river-shaped terroir the brand represents but also its dedication to protecting Chilean waterways—a mission that primarily entails the establishment of biological corridors to harbor native species; the reduction of water use; and the move toward 100% renewable energy.

An Influence Worth Preserving

As powerful as the Pacific Ocean's moderating influence is on Chile's 800 miles of coastal vineyards, much of the country experiences warm and dry growing conditions. Although the close proximity of the Andes Mountains helps to cool nighttime temperatures, the Central Valley subregion of Colchagua Valley is particularly arid, so preserving watersheds here is crucial. A 2019 index reading from the World Resources Institute's Aqueduct project, which evaluates global water risks, puts the area in the "extremely high" category of water stress, with the "ratio of total water withdrawals to available renewable surface and groundwater supplies at more than 80%."

However, there's more to the Colchagua Valley than its warm climate and rich soils. Like the Pacific Ocean, two rivers play a distinct role in shaping the character of Gran Reserva's grapes and, ultimately, its wines. The hillside Ucuquer Vineyard from which the Sauvignon Blanc comes is located along the southern bank of the Rapel River, while the Palo Santo Vineyard to the south, the source for the brand's Cabernet Sauvignon and Malbec, is positioned along terraces formed by the Tinguiririca River, a tributary of the Rapel, along the Chilean Coastal Range.

The 1,094 acres planted to vine on the well-drained granitic and clay loam soils of the roughly 2,400-acre Ucuquer Vineyard property are located just 10 miles from the Pacific Ocean. The semi-arid climate here would perhaps be too dry for growing three different clones of Sauvignon Blanc were it not for the cool, humid marine air delivered through the valley via the

Rapel River: The fact that the vineyard's remaining acreage is covered in forest is no accident, as is the case with the Palo Santo Vineyard, which harbors 467 acres of forest in addition to its 768 acres of vine: Viña Concha y Toro has partnered with the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC), an international forest-management nonprofit, to preserve the area's native flora and fauna. For example, the initiative is helping to save the *Persea lingue* tree, which is officially classified as being threatened by habitat loss. This tree and the forest as a whole aid in watershed-protection efforts like flood reduction, climate regulation, and erosion prevention.

In 2019, Viña Concha y Toro was the first winery in the world to become certified through the organization, having implemented a Conservation Management Plan to protect the biodiversity of its terroir; it covers responsibilities like biodiversity monitoring, fire prevention, and the regulation of recreational activities. Meanwhile, the winery, which is also a Certified B Corporation, has reduced Gran Reserva's water usage by 14% since 2014 (both the Ucuquer and Palo Santo vineyards practice water preservation via drip irrigation) to ensure a water footprint that's 22% lower than the industry average; since 2010, it has been a member of the Water Footprint Network, a nonprofit foundation that helps businesses and government agencies reduce their usage. Finally, Gran Reserva is on track to achieve 100% renewable energy in both its vineyards and winery.

And Gran Reserva winemaker Marcio Ramírez is already starting to notice the results of these efforts. "We are now see-



At the Luminary Hotel in Fort Myers, FL, the Gran Reserva Cabernet Sauvignon is paired with organic lamb chops marinated in a Dijon-rosemary sauce, finished with a demi-glace, and served over goat cheese grits with “ocean greens.”

ing wildlife roaming around the vineyard, returning to their original habitat,” he says. “We are recreating the natural conditions for the basin to become a ‘Great Reserve’ of biodiversity.”

Ramírez, a native Chilean, has made wine for Concha y Toro for over two decades; early in his tenure, he learned from one of Chile’s most influential winemakers and Concha y Toro’s longtime technical director, Enrique Tirado, who currently oversees esteemed sister winery Viña Don Melchor. Grateful for their influence, Ramírez strives to express the terroir created by each vineyard’s neighboring river. “The riverbanks moderate the temperature and help produce a much slower . . . maturation process, creating aromas, flavors, and colors that are much more concentrated and wine with a great fruity expression and color,” he explains.

Just as the Ucuquer Vineyard has the Rapel River to thank for its climate moderation, so can Palo Santo similarly credit the Tinguiririca—which has also partly influenced the vineyard’s soil profile. Though the Chilean Coastal Range is responsible for its primarily colluvial soils, which Ramírez says are “red in color thanks to the clay and granite content characteristic of these mountains,” the flatter areas contain soils that “are whitish-yellow in color and correspond to the Tinguiririca river terraces, which are an alluvial formation.”

Ramírez keeps his winemaking practices

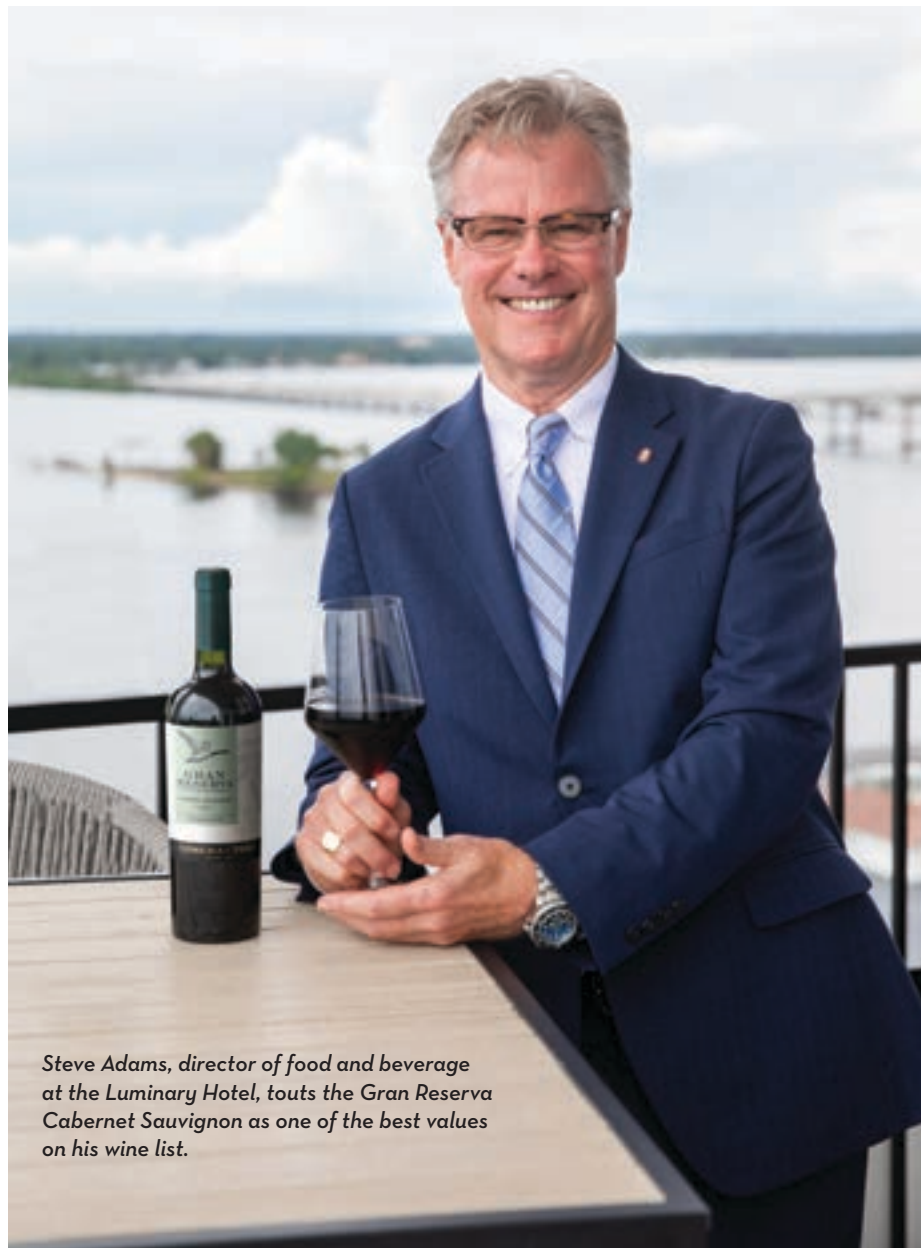
simple in order to best express the riparian character of the sites; for instance, both the Malbec and Cabernet Sauvignon are destemmed before undergoing a gentle fermentation in stainless steel and, finally, aging for just ten months in French oak barrels and large foudres—all in an effort to maintain the purity of the fruit. The Sauvignon Blanc, meanwhile, is aged in stainless steel.

Southern Hospitality Meets the Southern Hemisphere

Perhaps it’s thanks to his Southern hospitality, but the first thing you’ll notice about Steve Adams, director of food and beverage at the Luminary Hotel in Fort Myers,

Florida, is his easygoing cordiality. The nearly 30-year industry veteran joined the Luminary Hotel & Co. from Callaway Resort & Gardens in Pine Mountain, Georgia, and his background is made all the more endearingly obvious when one hears him sing the praises of “Concha y Toro-uh,” particularly its Gran Reserva Cabernet Sauvignon.

Located on the banks of the Caloosahatchee River, the 12-story hotel opened last September as part of the Marriott Autograph Collection, a group of independent, upscale hotels within the Marriott International portfolio. Adams’ employer, Mainsail Lodging & Development, specializes in lifestyle hotels designed to deliver unique experiences inspired by the



Steve Adams, director of food and beverage at the Luminary Hotel, touts the Gran Reserva Cabernet Sauvignon as one of the best values on his wine list.



Gran Reserva winemaker Marcio Ramírez says the brand is “recreating the natural conditions for the basin to become a ‘Great Reserve’ of biodiversity.”

communities in which they’re located, “so our relationship and positioning with the Fort Myers River District is key,” he says. The timing of the opening came with its own set of challenges due to the pandemic, he adds, but “we’ve been sold out pretty much every weekend ever since.”

Adams, who is also a certified sommelier, manages all aspects of food and beverage planning for the Luminary Hotel & Co.—a tall order, considering that it encompasses six different dining and drinking venues in addition to the newly opened 40,000-square-foot Caloosa Sound Convention Center. At the pinnacle of these establishments is the hotel’s signature restaurant, The Silver King Ocean Brasserie, which Adams describes as a modern, “laid-back fine-dining experience” offering fresh seafood and locally sourced fare. “I think the people of Fort Myers want that quality of good food, quality of wine, and quality of service without the stuffiness,” he says. This ethos has inspired him to build the wine list around bottles that overdeliver—including that Gran Reserva Cabernet Sauvignon: “It’s really an outstanding wine for the price” at \$50, says Adams. “You can enjoy this just as much as you can enjoy a higher-priced bottle.”

When it comes to pairings, Adams suggests the organic lamb chops marinated in a Dijon-rosemary sauce, finished with a demi-glace, and served over goat cheese grits with “ocean greens” (seagrass, spinach, sea beans, ice plant, verdolaga, and oyster leaf). The lamb chops “will pair great with

the Gran Reserva, as it isn’t overpowering,” he explains. “It’s a silky-soft kind of Cab and a great, consistent wine to keep in your pocket.”

Quality, price, and pairing ability aside, another element makes Gran Reserva’s presence on Silver King’s wine list all the more appropriate. Like the Tinguiririca and the Rapel, the Caloosahatchee River plays a vital role in the health of the surrounding ecosystem and was earmarked as a focus of the U.S. government’s Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan, which in 2000 provided guidelines for protecting and preserving the water resources of central and southern Florida, including the Everglades. While the project is currently at a standstill, the Luminary—which Adams says has already helped to revitalize the downtown Fort Myers area—aims to uphold Marriott and Mainsail’s shared mission to respect any of the areas in which its hotels are established.

To the north in Birmingham, Alabama, Carlos Cisneros, charismatic wine director and sommelier for restaurants Bocca Ristorante and Bistro 218, carries a few Concha y Toro wines and marks Gran Reserva as one of his favorites in the company’s portfolio. He notes that more of his guests are seeking out environmentally conscious wine brands than ever before, particularly millennials—and he believes that Chile is uniquely positioned to meet the demand. After taking a GuildSomm master class about the country roughly five years ago, the sommelier (who is certified through both the Court of Master Sommeliers, Americas, and WSET) has been fired up on its wines. “To see what Chile has been doing as a whole, all the French winemakers, the sustainability practices, and the blending of Carménère is so fascinating. . . . I think [Chilean] wines are more balanced than [those of] Napa. I think there’s more terroir expression, and the price points blow my mind. They exceed expectations,” says Cisneros.

He also concurs with the Gran Reserva team that conserving water in such an arid region “is hugely important,” adding that sustainability is not only “a great selling point [but] something that everybody needs to be more aware of in the wine industry to succeed and to last.” Whether Cisneros realizes exactly how true that statement is on so many levels, we know for certain that Gran Reserva does. **SJ**

Tasting Notes



Concha y Toro 2019 Gran Reserva Cabernet Sauvignon, DO Marchigüe, Colchagua Valley, Chile A pre-phylloxera field selection of 88% Cabernet Sauvignon, 9% Malbec, 2% Cabernet Franc, and 1% Syrah from the Palo Santo Vineyard along the southern banks of the Tinguiririca River. At 13.5% ABV, this silky red is undeniably approachable. Aromas of black cherry, vanilla, and brushy earthiness are engaging. Rich, ripe notes of mulberry, nutmeg,

and spiced plum are accentuated by black pepper and mocha. There’s a chalkiness mid-palate, wrapped around supple tannins. Tobacco leaf and cinnamon confirm the wine’s layers of flavors. Well-structured and opulent. **93** —*Meridith May*



Concha y Toro 2019 Gran Reserva Malbec, DO Marchigüe, Colchagua Valley, Chile Sitting almost 600 feet above sea level, the Palo Santo Vineyard is home to the grapes that comprise this wine. The blend of 90% Malbec and 10% Syrah originates on colluvial soils, influenced by coastal breezes from the Tinguiririca River; and is aged ten months in French oak barrels and 5,000-liter casks. Aromas of black fruit accompany the tarry, beefy nose; the palate, meanwhile, is a vibrant patter of blackberry, plum, orange peel, and iron around a lean core of minerality. There’s an Old World personality here, with striking acidity and a finish of sweet and tart fruit. **92** —*M.M.*

All Hail the (Napa) Cab

BLACK STALLION ESTATE WINERY WINEMAKER **RALF HOLDENRIED** AND WINE WRITER **KAREN MACNEIL** JOIN FORCES FOR A VIRTUAL TASTING

by Rachel Burkons

PHOTO COURTESY OF KAREN MACNEIL



THERE ARE FEW better ways for enophiles to kick off a Friday happy hour than tasting fabulous wines with not only the producer who crafted them but a legendary wine writer to boot. So when Napa-based Black Stallion Estate Winery winemaker Ralf Holdenried and Karen MacNeil, author of *The Wine Bible*, came together on May 7 for a virtual tasting, consumers and trade members alike tuned in via Facebook Live and Zoom to start their weekend just a little bit early.

As the hosts tasted through Black Stallion's **2016 Transcendent Napa Valley Cabernet Sauvignon (\$160)**, **2018 Gaspare Estate Vineyard Cabernet Sauvignon (\$75)**, and **2018 Napa Valley Cabernet Sauvignon (\$30)**, they explored everything from Holdenried's childhood in German wine country to his approach to winemaking. Read on for a few highlights of the fascinating conversation or watch the full version at facebook.com/karenmacneilco.



Karen MacNeil, author of *The Wine Bible*.

*Black Stallion
winemaker Ralf
Holdenried.*



On the Development of a Wine-making Philosophy

MacNeil kicked things off by getting to the core of Holdenried's relationship with wine, established through both his upbringing and his formal education at the legendary Geisenheim Grape Breeding Institute, the only German institution to award higher academic degrees in winemaking. "I grew up with the culture, and the connection to wine for me was there from the very beginning," Holdenried said. "[Then] moving to Geisenheim was like, 'Oh wow, I'm going to make this my career.' . . . To take [winemaking] to an academic level was very exciting. The passion and camaraderie that was created there around wine was very intense. It shaped me . . . and I really look back on [it and have] a lot of fond memories."

They've sustained him throughout his career in California. "Germany is such a different place to make wine, but what is transferable is the fundamentals about

. . . working with the land," Holdenried observed. Case in point: the Black Stallion 2018 Napa Valley Cabernet Sauvignon. Because it's made with fruit sourced from sites throughout Napa Valley, he said, the winemaking process centers around "taking those puzzle pieces from [each] vineyard and making them fit." When MacNeil compared blending to cooking as a means of combining distinct parts to form a newly integrated whole, Holdenried concurred. "The goal with different vineyards and characteristics is to create a layer of different flavors," he explained. "Each vineyard brings something different to the table, and I'm trying to showcase Napa Valley Cabernet as much as I can."

On the Definition of Great Cabernet

Shifting to the 2018 Gaspare Estate Vineyard Cabernet Sauvignon, MacNeil commented that the wine expressed "blue-fruit bounce, an energetic pickup

where it echoes in the back of your mind in this blueberry-fresh way. It's so important because Cabernet needs freshness, right, Ralf?" Holdenried immediately replied, "Yes! I hear people using the word 'tension.' If you're talking about good balance, it [means the wine] has a tension on the palate that really works—acidity, fruit, tannin, complexities that bounce off one another."

For MacNeil, that quality was reflected in the wine's "sense of precision—you feel like there's not a molecule out of place"—as well as in its mix of fruit and more savory elements. "With Cab in general," she pointed out, "you see all of this reference to blackberries and black cherries, but I always think that, in some of the best Cabernets in the world, there's something subliminally a little green there: chaparral or sage or green tobacco."

Holdenried agreed. "We have moved away from [the] herbaceousness that was very pervasive in the '80s, and maybe some of us have overswung the pendulum and opened up canopies too much, harvested grapes too late, and really lost [our understanding] of what Cabernet is all about. I'm trying to keep that light green characteristic in the wine, but it has to work and match with the other characteristics I'm trying to keep. It's hard to describe how to achieve that . . . [but] to find that right moment is very critical to me, when the herbaceousness turns savory and the fruit hasn't quite turned into jam yet. To find that sweet spot is the key to a successful harvest."

On the Making of Transcendent

The tasting culminated with a discussion of the 2016 Transcendent Napa Valley Cabernet Sauvignon, through which Holdenried is, in his words, "trying to put [his] best foot forward!" In addition to estate fruit, "we have a number of growing partners across Napa Valley; there are five or six vineyards that have risen to the top for me and built the foundation for this wine," he added.

Once he selects the best 20 barrels from those premium vineyards, it's simply a matter of fine-tuning. "Usually it's at least two barrels that really bring that wine to life," Holdenried explained. "Even though the vineyard sources may change from year to year, the goal I have for this wine is the same: to combine concentration and elegance in the bottle." *sj*

The San Francisco Wine School will host its annual Gala Fundraising Dinner and Auction on November 6.



PHOTO COURTESY OF THE GLANCY WINE EDUCATION FOUNDATION

Widening the World of Wine

THE **GLANCY WINE EDUCATION FOUNDATION** IS COMMITTED TO SUPPORTING UNDERSERVED COMMUNITIES *by Alder Yarrow*

THE PAST 18 MONTHS have laid bare a number of uncomfortable truths about the hospitality industry. The double whammy of the pandemic and racial justice movements exposed the fragile economics of the restaurant business for both owners and employees while driving some much-needed scrutiny of the lack of diversity and history of privilege that have plagued the wine industry since its inception.

We've got a lot of hard work to do to support anyone and everyone who wants to build a career in the wine and hospitality industries—no matter their race, gender identification, sexual orientation, or background—and to make sure that they can make more than a living wage. One of the many places we might begin this work is in wine education, which is why we founded a nonprofit organization, the Glancy Wine Education Foundation, in 2020. Many jobs in our industry pay well below equivalent positions in other sectors, which means that many people who are truly passionate


about their field cannot afford the education they need to advance (or even begin) their careers. This is especially true for members of the BIPOC community, who continue to face significant social and financial obstacles to success and representation in the wine and hospitality industries.

The foundation's mission is to provide scholarships within underserved and minority communities to further the recipients' professional wine education, raise their earning power, and increase diversity in the industry. We believe in the power of education to improve the prosperity of those who seek a career in wine or hospitality, and we are dedicated to making it accessible to anyone on that path.

Partnering with the San Francisco Wine School, we have provided more than \$118,000 in scholarships to candidates seeking to increase their hiring prospects through wine education. Many of our scholarship recipients lost their jobs as a result of the pandemic and have used the

time to work toward credentials or bolster their knowledge, and we're particularly proud to support them in those efforts.

As we finish our first full year of operation as a nonprofit organization, we're reaching out to the industry for assistance with two main objectives: to encourage deserving candidates to apply for our scholarships and to encourage members of the industry to support our efforts through donations and sponsorships, including for our annual Gala Fundraising Dinner and Auction at the San Francisco Wine School, now celebrating its tenth anniversary, on November 6.

You can learn more about the foundation, our volunteer board of directors, and the upcoming Gala on our website, glancywineeducationfoundation.org. Please spread the word. 

Alder Yarrow is the vice president of the Glancy Wine Education Foundation board of directors.

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Jewel in the Rough

THE RHÔNE VALLEY VINEYARDS APPELLATION **COSTIÈRES DE NÎMES** IS READY FOR ITS BIG REVEAL by Stefanie Schwalb

“**COSTIÈRES DE NÎMES** is a really special area, and it’s one that needs to be taken far more seriously and with more gravitas than it is,” said Master Sommelier Evan Goldstein during a recent virtual seminar about one of France’s youngest appellations, classified in 1986. “I often hear people referring to [it] as ‘the Rhône’s best-kept secret,’ but it shouldn’t be, because it’s an area that’s unto itself.” Led by Goldstein and Michel Gassier, owner and winemaker at Domaine Gassier, the discussion and guided tasting provided a wealth of intel on the appellation’s history and terroir while introducing the audience to an impressive range of producers and styles.

Costières de Nîmes represents 8% of production in the Rhône Valley Vineyards with 7,010 planted acres. Some 71 producers and nine cooperatives produce

153,000 hectoliters annually in roughly equal amounts; that adds up to 20.4 million bottles, of which 43% are red, 48% rosé, and 9% white. White wines here are made primarily from Grenache Blanc, Roussanne, and Marsanne but can also include varieties such as Bourboulenc, Clairette, Viognier, and Vermentino (locally known as Rolle). For rosés, Syrah, Mourvèdre, and Grenache must make up 80% of the blend; the remaining 20% can be Carignan, Cinsault, and/or certain white varieties (though their inclusion is less common, as they’re less widely grown). For reds, the main varieties are also Syrah and Grenache along with Mourvèdre, which again must make up at least 80% of the blend. Supporting grapes include Carignan, Cinsault, and Marselan. “There’s definitely an elegance and a freshness to the wines

coming out of the Costières de Nîmes,” said Goldstein, “that’s established with the whites, carried through with rosés, and you see [it] with the reds too, which once again comes from the unique terroir.”

A Look at the Landscape

Though the southernmost appellation in the Rhône Valley Vineyards, Costières de Nîmes is also the coolest. “When people say the further south an appellation is, the warmer it is, that’s a misnomer for us because of our proximity to large bodies of water—first the marshes and second the Mediterranean,” said Gassier. Which isn’t to say its climate is extreme. The area sees about as much rain as Napa and Sonoma do at approximately 29 inches per year: “It falls mostly in December, January, and

Costières de Nîmes lies in the western part of the Rhône delta, where the landscape is relatively flat and dotted with marshes.

PHOTO: © DAVID Z.

February. There's a lot of sunshine—300 days—and an average temperature of 58 degrees Fahrenheit, which is pretty mild," he explained. "Winters aren't very hard. It's frequent not to have any frost at all." In short, he added, "We have a really interesting microclimate due to cooler sea breezes, [yet] we are very classically Rhône in terms of the [other aspects of] terroir and varietals that we grow."

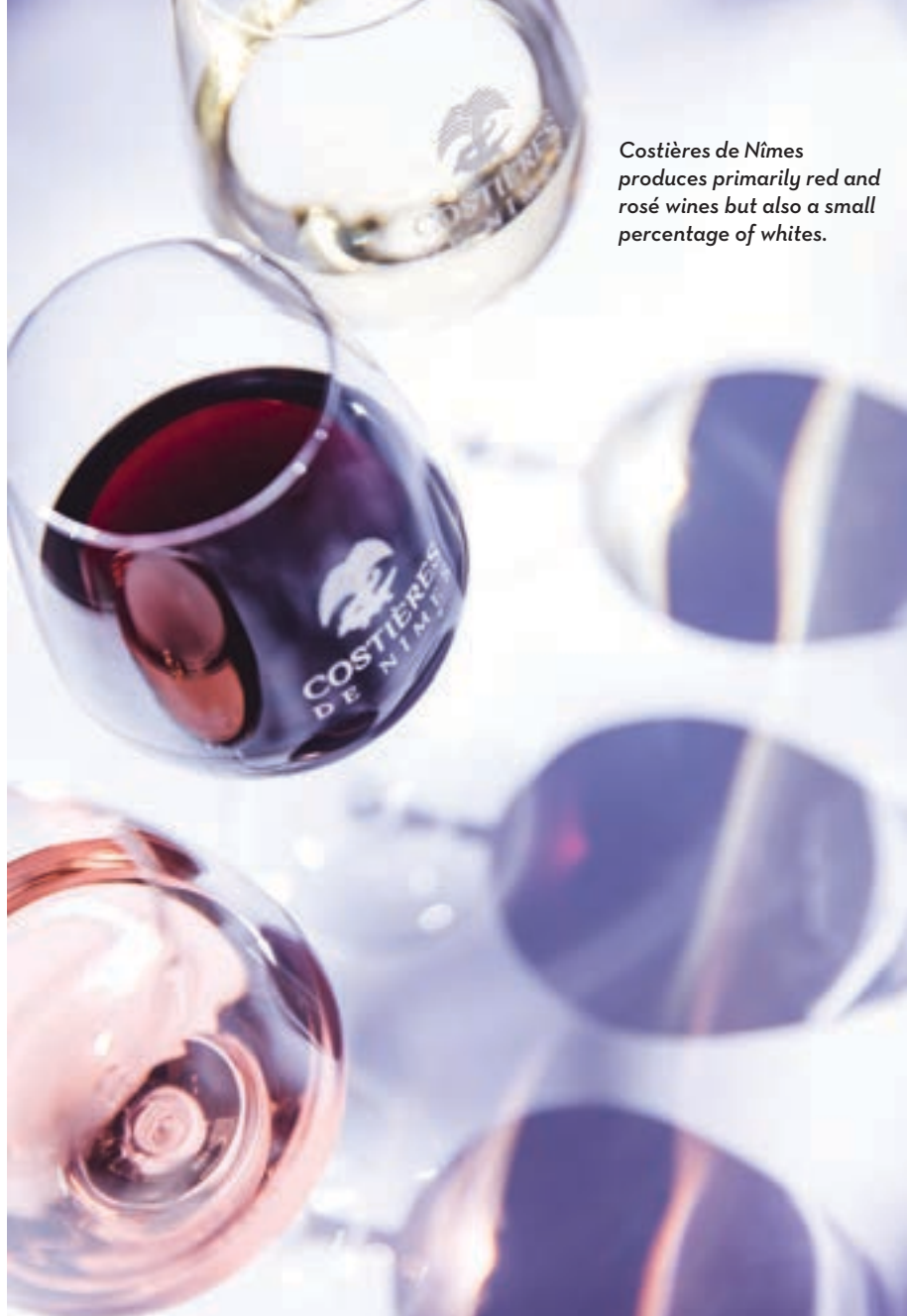
Situated approximately 49 kilometers southwest of Avignon, Costières de Nîmes lies in the western part of the Rhône delta where the Rhône, Durance, and Gard rivers meet before flowing out into the Mediterranean. Marshes are therefore a feature of the relatively flat, low-lying landscape, whose soils were formed from river sediments deposited several million years ago and include the classic *galets roulés* ("rolled pebbles") that you see throughout the Rhône Valley Vineyards.

Sustainability is key to the region's agricultural system, Gassier asserted, noting that Costières de Nîmes is at the forefront of organic farming here, with 25% of its vines now being grown organically. "We are part of a large number of environmental initiatives," he said, singling out the Costières de Nîmes Environmental and Landscape Charter; the European Life + BioDiVin project; and Viticultural Landscape Laboratories in particular. "We're trying to protect not just our ecosystem but the beauty of the landscape that was given to us."

Out of the Past, Into the Future

Vines have been growing in Costières de Nîmes since ancient times; the Celts were the first to make wines here after learning their craft from the Greeks. It wasn't until 31 B.C., however, when Roman legionaries settled in the area, that viticulture really took off—and by the 14th century, it was thriving, as was the reputation of the wines, which were being supplied to the Avignon papacy. However, at the turn of the 20th century post-*phylloxera*, growers began to plant highly productive varieties that would yield only ordinary wines for decades to come.

Enter a new generation of winemakers, whose work gives Gassier hope for the future of Costières de Nîmes. "Right now, it's really interesting. Most of the wines that you're tasting are made by the sons and



Costières de Nîmes produces primarily red and rosé wines but also a small percentage of whites.

PHOTO: © CHARLÈNE PELUT

daughters, or grandsons and granddaughters, of producers—young people [who] have studied winemaking, traveled, worked in different countries, and come back with a different idea of what wine can be," he explained. "This is really what's lifting the appellation. The potential was always there. We kind of lost track of it for 100 years, but now we're back at it, and everybody is very gung-ho about putting the appellation back on the map."

Many vineyards have been in the same families for several generations; because their land is paid for, these proprietors can put more resources toward production without charging excessively for it. The result is an amazing price point for the quality. So why hasn't an appellation

crafting such well-made, well-balanced, and well-priced wines gained more attention stateside? "It's sort of a [region] without a home," Goldstein theorized. "It used to be [considered part of] the Languedoc, but now it's not—which I think was the right call. It's Rhône, but it's not *really* Rhône. It's sort of like a person without a country ... and because of that it flies under the radar." This may not, however, always be the case, he added. "Being more proactive [in terms of promotion] is going to be a huge piece to [a higher profile]. It's also incumbent on all of us to not only spread the word of the incredible price value of these [wines] but help people understand where Costières de Nîmes is [and] what its wines are like." ❧

The Clarity of *Complexity*

PRODUCERS EXPLORED THE AROMAS OF KEY GRAPES FROM AROUND THE GLOBE FOR OUR "THE LURE OF WHITE WINE SCENTS-ABILITY" WEBINAR

by *Jessie Birschbach*

As moderator and *SOMM Journal* VP of education

Lars Leicht noted, the latest installment in our "Winery Close-Ups" series in partnership with *National Geographic* and *SommCon* played "on the theme of aromatherapy, which is a pseudoscience based on aromatic materials with claims for improving psychological or physical well-being." Eyes twinkling, he added, "I know a good, aromatic white wine makes me feel better." Though the comment was made in jest, it's a sentiment many wine drinkers can identify with: There's no denying the joy that can be found in breathing in the abundant complexity of a well-made white wine.

Over the course of the webinar, we nosed our way through some of the most expressive whites the world has to offer, picking up interesting tidbits along the way—like the fact that Vermentino typically loves coastal conditions or that sommeliers can liken Vinho Verde to a cool-climate Chardonnay with a Portuguese twist in order to improve its familiarity among their guests. The virtual roundtable also included a brief tour of each region represented by the participating wineries courtesy of sommelier Greg Van Wagner's *SommGeo* platform, which offers three-dimensional, high-resolution maps as well as in-depth regional and producer information.



PHOTO COURTESY OF UTOPIA VINEYARD & WINERY



Pinot Gris



Winery: Utopia Vineyard & Winery

Presenter: Dan Warnshuis, owner and winemaker



Wine: Utopia 2020 Pinot Gris, Ribbon Ridge, Oregon



Aromatics: Lemon, lime, green apple, geranium, and peat



A quick glance at Utopia's landing page denotes its French influence: Although its founder and winemaker, Dan Warnshuis, grew up in California's San Joaquin Valley, he told the audience he was most "inspired by the small vigneron in Burgundy," launching into a long list of reasons ranging from their grower-producer model to their use of organic and Biodynamic farming practices. In the 1980s, during his successful career in the tech industry, a visit to the Willamette Valley—where he sampled its Pinot Noir and Pinot Gris—convinced Warnshuis that a close-to-the-land lifestyle akin to that of a French winemaker was also possible in the United States.

Warnshuis eventually found what he was looking for in Ribbon Ridge, a small sub-AVA (roughly 5¼ square miles) that sits on a hill above the Chehalem Valley floor within the Chehalem Mountains AVA. The latter is protected by both the Coastal Range to the west, which acts as a rain curtain and keeps the region warm and dry, and the Cascades to the east, which block the scorching winds coming from the Columbia Gorge. Ribbon Ridge, however, experiences a longer, cooler growing season than the rest of the appellation, one that's ideal for the grapes that Utopia's 17 acres of dry-farmed, organic vineyards harbor: Pinot Noir, Pinot Gris, Chardonnay, and Riesling.

"I purchased this land as a horse pasture in 2000 and developed it from scratch," Warnshuis said proudly of the estate, which is situated about 500 feet above sea level. The winemaker presented the Utopia 2020 Pinot Gris, a vintage that "saw low yields due to poor weather conditions during flowering but overall delivered outstanding quality of fruit, making for a memorable vintage. A warm, dry growing season [continued a trend of recent years]." That was true even in Ribbon Ridge's slightly cooler microclimate; as a result, the grapes were picked relatively early at 20.5 Brix, giving the wine "quite a bit of racy acidity," said Warnshuis. In addition to the citrus and floral aromatics, he added, a "peaty, spicy, smoky finish adds [a] little complexity"; Warnshuis attributed that spicy character to Ribbon Ridge's marine sedimentary soils, including the Willakenzie profile, which are "very finely textured and make it difficult for the vines to extract water." He ferments and ages the wine in stainless steel, and "because of the Brix, I never touched it with oak," he said. Taking responsibility for every decision from vineyard to cellar is a testament to the winemaker's uncompromisingly intimate relationship with his grapes, his wine, and his land—how very French of him.

Revisiting Vinho Verde's White Grapes

Master Sommelier Alexander LaPratt has worn many hats: Currently a partner in Brooklyn, New York, restaurant Atrium DUMBO and an adjunct professor for the International Culinary Center; he has also, at various points in his career, served as a sommelier in some of the nation's top restaurants. But his presentation revealed that the role he may enjoy most is ambassador for one of Portugal's largest DOCs.



PHOTOS COURTESY OF VINHO VERDE

"When we're talking about aromatic whites, one region that should be on everyone's radar is Vinho Verde," LaPratt said before leading a brief breakdown of the area.

Land and Weather

Designated in 1908, Vinho Verde is one of Portugal's oldest appellations. It's now divided into nine different subregions: Moving south from the northernmost subregion of Monção e Melgaço are Lima, Cávado, Ave, Basto, Sousa, Amarante, Baião, and Paiva, all of which are named after rivers or towns within their borders. The broader region is situated between two major rivers—the Minho to the north and the Douro at its southern end—and its greatest climatic influence is the nearby Atlantic Ocean, which delivers cool breezes to the valleys that run through it from east to west.

Elevation increases from east to west as well, helping to drain the large volume of rain Vinho Verde receives, mostly during winter and spring; summer and fall, meanwhile, are dry and warm. "It's hot but a pretty temperate climate all around," said LaPratt. In the vineyards, trellising is used to combat diseases like mold or mildew.

Grapes and Dirt

As in Beaujolais and Crozes-Hermitage, most of the soil found throughout Vinho Verde is composed of granite. But the advantage of this material in such a rainy region, according to LaPratt, is that as the quartz, feldspar, and mica components of the granite break down, the quartz remains on top and the rest sifts through the cracks. "The quartz provides great drainage, [though] eventually the vines will have to reach deep enough to hit those denser [clay-like soils] to take advantage of the water retention," he explained.



A grape bunch from a vineyard in Vinho Verde.

All grapes cultivated in Vinho Verde are indigenous to the area, including its biggest star, Alvarinho, which is often blended with the similarly floral Loureiro or Trajadura to add body. Other grapes grown in Vinho Verde include Azal, Arinto, and Avesso; the latter, found in the Baião subzone, "reminds me of a cool-climate Chardonnay," said LaPratt.

While noting that a myriad of winemaking techniques are causing some exciting wines to emerge from the region, the Master Sommelier insisted that, above all, "I always have to have an undeniable sense of place [in a wine] that allows me to transport my guest. And you get that with Vinho Verde."

Albariño



Winery: Marqués de Murrieta

Presenter: Arthur de Lencquesaing, export director for Marqués de Murrieta

Wine: Marqués de Murrieta Pazo de Barrantes 2018 Albariño, Rías Baixas, Spain

Aromatics: Pineapple, peach, white flowers, rose petal, butter, and menthol

Located in the coastal Val do Salnés subzone in northern Rías Baixas, the Pazo de Barrantes winery was founded in 1989 in the ancestral home—actually a medieval castle—of the Creixell family, owners of the well-known Rioja-based producer (and Pazo de Barrantes' parent company) Marqués de Murrieta. Val do Salnés is not only the oldest subregion of Rías Baixas but also the coolest and wettest, with a mild average temperature of 55 degrees Fahrenheit and just over 2,000 millimeters of precipitation on average per year. Arthur de Lencquesaing, export director for Marqués de Murrieta, described the area as “being completely surrounded by water” thanks to the Atlantic Ocean and neighboring rivers.

De Lencquesaing noted that the 10,000 acres of vine within Rías Baixas are divided into roughly 22,000 plots, “which means that many of the wines have been sold to négociants” and few wines are estate grown. Pazo de Barrantes, by contrast, boasts one of the largest estate vineyards in the region at

30 acres. The soils found here consist of decomposed granite, the high pH of which helps to maintain acidity in the wines, according to de Lencquesaing, who added that granite's ability to generate warmth by reflecting the sun is equally “important for Albariño, as it helps the grape to reach the right [level of] maturity.”

The thick-skinned, pale-yellow varietal accounts for 96% of the plantings within Rías Baixas, according to de Lencquesaing. “It's one of the smallest white grapes in the world and requires this long vegetative cycle, which is where the granite reflecting the sun helps.” Perhaps, though, the most fascinating aspect of Pazo de Barrantes is its approach to viticulture. Its estate is reminiscent of Roman ruins: Square-shaped 6-foot columns made of granite stand guard at the end of each row of vines, buttressed by another heavily leaning column. These are called *parrales*, across the top of which runs a long pipe supporting a pergola trellising system that creates a forest of vines growing high above the ground. “One of the riskiest things here [for growing grapes] is the mildew. [These vines] being



PHOTOS COURTESY OF PAZO DE BARRANTES

nearly 2 meters high helps [to reduce risk],” de Lencquesaing explained.

Under the direction of winemaker Elena Cores, with the help of Marqués de Murrieta head winemaker María Vargas, the hand-harvested Albariño is destemmed and gently pressed before it goes through a long, temperature-controlled fermentation at 50 degrees Fahrenheit “to keep the aromas intact as much as possible,” said de Lencquesaing. Two to six months of lees contact also contribute to the unadulterated aromatic profile of bottlings like the Pazo de Barrantes 2018 Albariño and single-vineyard Pazo de Barrantes La Comtesse Albariño that he presented during the webinar.

MAISONS MARQUES & DOMAINES

The vineyard and winery of Pazo de Barrantes in Rías Baixas.





The winery and vineyards of Cantina Mesa in Sardinia.



Vermentino di Sardegna

Winery: Cantina Mesa

Presenter: Kristina Sazama, wine educator for Santa Margherita USA

Wine: Cantina Mesa Giunco Vermentino di Sardegna, Italy

Aromatics: Mango, lemon zest, wild herbs, and salinity



If you haven't been lucky enough to visit Italy's wine regions, you've hopefully at least had the good fortune to learn about them from Kristina Sazama: The super-intelligent wine educator for Santa Margherita USA (who holds a WSET diploma) is incredibly thorough and thoughtful in her presentations, particularly when it comes to capturing the nuances of a particular region.

The island of Sardinia, which Sazama likened to a "huge outdoor museum of soil types," was no exception. She recounted the moment she "realized the diversity of Sardinia's soil" as she was driving south

to Cantina Mesa in the southern region of Sulcis Iglesiente, where "you've got the Mediterranean Sea on one side of the road and on the other side, these cliffs where you can really see the changes."

The clay-based soils of Cantina Mesa's 163 vineyard acres naturally have an effect on the grapes' aromatics, but the area's biggest influences are the Mediterranean and its boisterous winds—specifically the temperate, dry winds of the Maestrale ("Mistral" in French) from the northwest and the hot, abrasive Sirocco winds from the southeast. "The Maestrale helps to moderate warmer temperatures and reduce disease pressure, so mildew doesn't stand a chance here," enabling Cantina Mesa to farm organically, said Sazama.

A video loop of Cantina Mesa's estate vineyard revealed not only how close the vines are to the Mediterranean but "how much [they] are beaten up" by the winds, she noted as the audience watched the



leaves of bush-trained Vermentino whip back and forth. "The Vermentino ends up with thicker skins due to this constant battering," she added, "and in the glass this means increased aromatics. Remember, a lot of the aromatic compounds and precursors from the wine are from the skins."

Founded in 2004 by Sardinian native Gavino Sanna, Cantina Mesa focuses on the production of indigenous grapes. The Giunco

Vermentino di Sardegna presented during the webinar is a 100% varietal wine fermented at a moderate temperature of 17–18 degrees Celsius "to get more of a textural quality," said Sazama. She noted that its freshness makes it an excellent alternative to Sauvignon Blanc—one that's perhaps a tad more interesting thanks to its Italian pedigree: "It's aromatic but [also] both powerful and refreshing at the same time, which I think a lot of your guests are looking for."

SANTA MARGHERITA USA

Vermentino



Winery: Banfi

Presenter: Igor Marini, regional manager for Europe

Wine: Banfi La Pettegola Vermentino, Toscana, Italy

Aromatics: White peach, pear, apricot, grapefruit, sage, rosemary, and yellow flower



Although Banfi's European regional manager, Igor Marini, admitted that Tuscany isn't known for its white wines and that the producer itself is a specialist of the broody Brunello di Montalcino, he singled out its La Pettegola Vermentino as its bestselling white wine and perhaps "the best white we're producing now."

The bottling is made with 100% Vermentino from both coastal vineyards in the Maremma region of southern Tuscany and inland vineyards in Montalcino, a

blend that Marini insisted gives the wine its high-toned aromatics, rich texture, and "great balance."

To preserve Vermentino's intense nose, he added, the "winemaking needs to be very protective of [the grape's] aromas," so the Banfi team employs reductive techniques like temperature-controlled fermentation—"usually at 13–16 degrees Celsius" (55–61 degrees Fahrenheit)—in stainless steel as well as avoiding pumpovers and malolactic fermentation.

"But why is our Vermentino so successful?" asked Marini. The answer, of course, was in accordance with the webinar's theme: It's all about the nose. "There's a link between smell and our state of mind," he said. "The style reminds us of the seaside; it's a very Mediterranean type of wine. Even though we're growing some of these grapes inland, it's still very fresh." Marini added that each of wine's notes—sage, rosemary, white peach, pear, apricot,



PHOTOS COURTESY OF BANFI

thyme, citrus zest, grapefruit, geranium, yellow flowers, and a finish of honey and almond—evokes memories of summers by the sea and "positive vibes."

La pettegola is both the lighthearted nickname of an Italian coastal bird and a term that refers to a neighborhood gossip—which is fitting given that word of their namesake wine's reputation has spread far and wide.





PHOTO COURTESY OF CÀ MAIOL



Trebbiano di Lugana

Winery: Cà Maiol

Presenter: Kristina Sazama, wine educator for Santa Margherita USA

Wine: Cà Maiol Lugana, Italy

Aromatics: Apple, pear, mandarin, minerality, and a bittersweet almond finish

A sweeping image of the vineyards and winery of Cà Maiol reveals the producer's close proximity to Lake Garda. Sazama noted that although Italy's largest lake, at 143 square miles, does in fact have a tempering effect on the Lugana region's weather; its geological history plays an equally important role in influencing the producer's portfolio.

From above, this appellation in the province of Verona, which exclusively produces white wines, appears as a semi-square-shaped area bordering the southern shores of Lake Garda. The long lake is flanked by morainic hills on both sides, but its bulbous southern end is surrounded by flatlands. The plain-like region, carved by the path of a glacier, features a mix of clay and limestone soils, which in turn creates incredibly aromatic and full-bodied white wines. "Lugana was underwater for quite

a long time," said Sazama. "About 10,000 years ago, Lake Garda stretched to cover the whole region. As the glaciers retreated, they left a lot of rather muddy clay in the area, but there's also the sediments of marine life, [which formed] limestone."


She displayed another image of Cà Maiol's Trebbiano di Lugana Vineyard, which comprises a beige type of clay peppered with limestone pebbles; as the vines venture deep into the ground, they encounter lighter layers of stratified limestone. "Clay brings the power to the wine, and the Cà Maiol Lugana is pretty powerful aromatically. People say that limestone brings freshness and elegance to the wine, so those layers too [in addition to the cooling effect of the lake] are influencing the aromatic profile," noted Sazama.

Trebbiano di Lugana, also known locally as Turbiana ("because Italy," joked Sazama), could be described as if "an unoaked



Trebbiano di Lugana is also known locally as Turbiana.

Chardonnay and zesty Pinot Grigio had a love child. There is sort of a lakeside quality to it, but it also has enough body to make it a year-round wine," she explained, adding that the wine's price and uniqueness make it a worthy alternative to both varietals. Cà Maiol's 100% Trebbiano di Lugana is fermented cool in stainless steel, and malolactic fermentation is avoided to retain acidity and preserve the grape's fresh character.

Although Cà Maiol was established by Walter Contato in 1967, it's named for the farmhouse structure (now its headquarters) built on the property in 1710. It was the first Lugana-based producer to earn the Tre Bicchieri award of excellence from Italian wine publication *Gambero Rosso* and continues to be recognized today for its whites made with indigenous grapes. 

SANTA MARGHERITA USA

The promotional flyer for a virtual tasting of Heitz Cellar wines hosted in June by Southern California-based specialty grocery chain Gelson's.

In the HEITZ

A VIRTUAL TASTING AT SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA-BASED GROCER **GELSON'S** TRANSPORTS ATTENDEES TO THE ACCLAIMED NAPA WINERY

by Kyle Billings

NOT ALL ZOOM meetings are created equal. In June, Southern California-based specialty grocery chain Gelson's definitively proved as much with its online tasting of the wines of Heitz Cellar. Registrants were invited to prepurchase two bottlings from the celebrated Napa producer to enjoy alongside a medley of cheeses curated by Gelson's "tastemaster" and American Cheese Society Certified Cheese Professional Lisa Ali.

Jake Cheung, director of marketing for Gelson's, emceed the collaborative affair, which saw Ali trading insights with members of the Heitz Cellar team: director of winemaking Brittany Sherwood, cellar estate director Erik Elliott, and managing partner Carlton McCoy, MS. It was clear from the start that Gelson's had perfected the art of the virtual gathering: The waiting room sparked to life at exactly 6 p.m., and Cheung wasted little time in fondly welcoming the audience before he introduced each speaker.

The tasting centered around two

Heitz Cellar selections—the 2017 Napa Valley Chardonnay and the 2015 Napa Valley Cabernet Sauvignon—paired with a mélange of fromage that varied from nuanced, herbal goat cheese and tangy feta to Parmigiano-Reggiano and aged cheddar. Cheung deftly passed the proverbial ball to the Heitz team to delve deeper into the producer's winemaking philosophies, starting with the Chardonnay. "2017 was a great vintage for white wine," said Sherwood, one that enabled them to showcase "delicate fruit aromatics and retain acidity" in the finished expression.

Hand-harvested at night, the fruit was sourced from four Napa appellations: Oak Knoll, Yountville, St. Helena, and Rutherford. The combination of textured elegance and green-apple aromatics imparted by the cooler appellations with notes of white flowers and stone fruit from warmer sites provided a sense of balance, while an aging regimen of 24 months in 30% new oak (followed by 12 in bottle) added the finishing touch of mature tannins.

Sherwood then proceeded to sing the praises of the Cabernet Sauvignon, noting that "this vintage is one for the books." Sourced from Rutherford and Saint Helena, the grapes were picked in early September; destemmed, pressed quickly, and fermented for under a week. The freshness of the style was a hallmark of founder Joe Heitz, whom Elliott described as "an old-school guy [who] did things with integrity."

Throughout the tasting, the Heitz team highlighted the influence of the past on the winery's vision for the future. Before he joined the winery in 2019, McCoy said, "I felt that Heitz was one of the most important wineries in America." Yet it refuses to rest on its laurels: "We're never done asking questions," he added. "What we did yesterday was great, but how can we be better tomorrow?"

The Gelson's team likewise clearly set out to impress: Seamless in execution, the tasting provided a level of deliciously informative engagement palpable even to participants stuck behind a screen. **SJ**

Gelson's presents
An Online Tasting with Heitz Cellar

FEATURING
Brittany Sherwood – Director of Winemaking
Carlton McCoy – Managing Partner and Master Sommelier
Erik Elliott – Cellar Estate Director

FEATURED WINES TO BUY IN-STORE
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Heitz Cellar Napa Valley Chardonnay - \$28.99
(Special pricing above will be available on 6/22 & 6/23)

PAIRED WITH
Gelson's Custom Cheese & Charcuterie Plate - \$23.99 (Serves 2)
Laura Chenel Thyme & Rosemary Marinated Goat Cheese, Kolios Organic Greek Feta, Parmigiano Reggiano Riserva 3 years, Tillamook 2010 White Cheddar – paired with Mitica Migos Pajarero Figs, Maestri Coppa Italiano, Kelly's Jelly Marionberry Habanero Jelly and Ines Rosales Sweet Tortas

zoom Wednesday June 23, 6pm
RSVP and pre-pay for the cheese plate at [gelsons.com/heitz](https://www.gelsons.com/heitz)

Pricing for the wines and pick up for the cheese & charcuterie plate will be on 6/22 & 6/23. Further communication with zoom details to follow. Inquire at Front Desk for more information.

IMAGE COURTESY OF GELSON'S





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A LOOK AT **INNISKILLIN**,
CANADA'S LEADING PRODUCER
OF THE LUSCIOUS NECTAR
KNOWN AS ICEWINE

Finding the
**SWEET
SPOT**

by Michelle Ball





“We didn’t invent icewine, but I think we’ve perfected it,” says Inniskillin winemaker Bruce Nicholson, referring to his fellow Ontarians. “I think we do it better than anybody in the world.”

W

hen you say icewine, I say Inniskillin. Although the winery didn’t invent the style, it’s practically synonymous with it—and for good reason: As the leading Canadian producer of this luscious nectar, it was also the catalyst for the country’s growing reputation as a fine wine region.

Like the United States, Canada underwent its own Prohibition in the early 1900s, which led to a moratorium on permits for new wineries and industry consolidation under government control. Quality suffered as a result. So when Karl Kaiser moved from Austria to the Ontario town of Niagara-on-the-Lake in the late 1960s, he was spurred to make his own wine instead. He purchased vines from Donald Ziraldo, whose family owned Ziraldo Nurseries, and later returned with a sample product. That bottle sparked a fruitful partnership: Together, Kaiser and Ziraldo petitioned the Liquor Control Board of Ontario for over two years before they were finally granted a winery permit in 1974—the first new license issued since 1929!

They named their new venture for the Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers, who in the early 1800s had farmed the plot of land on which their winery now stood and who embodied their pioneer spirit—a prominent theme in their story. Not only did they help institute Canada’s Vintners Quality Alliance (VQA) appellation system in 1988 but they also sought to encourage a workforce of homegrown winemakers by becoming early patrons of the Cool Climate Oenology and Viticulture Institute at Brock



By Canadian law, grapes destined for icewine cannot be harvested until temperatures have dropped to at least -8 degrees Celsius (17.6 degrees Fahrenheit).

University in 1999. In short, Kaiser and Ziraldo helped lay the groundwork for other wineries throughout Canada, and today, nearly five decades since Inniskillin's inception, the province of Ontario alone boasts over 180 producers, which make 95% of the country's icewine.

Being from Austria, Kaiser was familiar with *Eiswein*—as icewine is known both there and in its probable motherland, Germany—and thought Niagara's extreme climate would be well suited to its production. After their initial crop was entirely consumed by winter-starved animals, he and Ziraldo made sure to protect their Vidal grapes with nets the following year and produced their first, and one of Canada's first, successful commercial icewines in 1984. They've never skipped a vintage since. Inniskillin, and the wineries that followed it, transformed the once-rare beverage that Europeans had made only in years of hard freezes into a reliable player in the sweet wine category.

High Risk, High Reward

In fact, the brand's prominence in the market can almost make you forget about the enormous challenges involved in the production of icewine. "There's great risk in leaving your grapes on the vine and hoping that you'll get [the right] conditions," explains Randy Dufour, VP of exports for Inniskillin, referring to the

temperatures required by Canadian law to harvest grapes destined for icewine: -8 degrees Celsius, or 17.6 degrees Fahrenheit. Inniskillin winemaker Bruce Nicholson, for his part, chooses to wait until a day or two after the temperature has dropped to -10 degrees Celsius (14 degrees Fahrenheit) before picking. Compare his approach to reducing a pot of stock on the stove: The more the water evaporates, the more the flavors intensify. "In this case, the volume is down because more water freezes, but the quality is better," insists Nicholson, a Niagara native who worked in the Okanagan Valley for 20 years before moving home to assume his position at Inniskillin in January 2007.

Brix typically measures between 38.5 and 41.5 by the time Nicholson finally begins harvest. Although he's experimented with various sugar levels, he avoids grapes that are higher than 42 Brix, as they increase the risk of problems such as sluggish fermentation and volatile acidity. "[A] higher sugar level doesn't mean it's better. There's a window, a sweet spot," he explains.

The work itself is arduous: Imagine hand-picking frozen bunches of grapes during the coldest hours of the night and attempting to haul them to the press before the sun threatens to melt them. Today, extremely efficient mechanical harvesters alleviate much of this stress while posing little risk of damage to the frozen berries, which are



immediately crushed in the vineyard using heavy-duty, hydraulic basket presses. "I can't tell you how many presses we broke initially trying to press marbles—they're literally marbles," says Dufour, who admits that it's nearly impossible for him to tell the difference between processed grapes, which appear perfectly intact, and unprocessed ones without tasting them. But "when you pick them up and put them in your mouth, you can tell," he says; a berry without juice tastes "like it lost its soul."

In addition to late harvests, the aforementioned reduction in yield is another



THE ICEWINE COMETH (WITH FOOD)

Icewine's versatility with food should be explored beyond the dessert course. Why? It's all about acidity—the key to any great pairing. Icewine's inherent freshness cuts through fat and cleanses the palate, preparing it for the next bite.

With 9–10 grams per liter of acidity—roughly 30% more than your favorite Chablis—Inniskillin icewine is a spectacular match for rich, buttery foods such as gorgonzola, prawns in *beurre blanc*, and foie gras. Here are a few favorite pairings Inniskillin founders Karl Kaiser and Donald Ziraldo included in their book *Icewine: Extreme Winemaking*; the recipes can be found at greatestatesniagara.com/recipes.

- Braised pork belly in miso ramen with Gold Vidal Icewine
- Sweet-and-savory Chinese five-spice pork ribs with Riesling Icewine
- Chocolate soba noodle salad with soy-cured duck breast with Cabernet Franc Icewine
- Vanilla pineapple upside-down cake with Pearl Vidal Icewine



key difference between icewine and table wine production. "Imagine, we're pressing and pressing, and just a tiny droplet of nectar is squeezed out; instead of juice flowing out of these presses, it's just a trickle," Dufour explains. "The yields are 5–10% of what we'd get [for] a table wine." To put it another way, nearly 10 pounds of grapes go into a 375-milliliter bottle of icewine compared to 2.5 pounds in a 750-milliliter bottle of table wine.


What's more, the vines lose quite a bit of fruit before harvest even arrives. Fragile berries naturally fall off during winter storms, or birds and other animals may consume them (protective nets aren't foolproof). That's why the majority of icewines are made from Vidal: The hearty, thick-skinned hybrid was developed to withstand severe weather conditions.

But while Vidal-based icewines possess (ironically enough) a tropical character that's nothing short of delicious, the bottlings that Inniskillin makes from other varieties are exceptional. Dufour notes that he's often asked at the beginning of a tasting why the portfolio contains so many different versions of the style, to which his standard response is: "Ask me again at the end of the flight." In his 17 years with the winery, no one has ever asked him twice. Unlike many other sweet wines, such as Sauternes, in which botrytis is a key factor, icewine is a pure expression of grape variety. "I think that's what makes these so interesting: the [range] of flavors and styles. Even though they're all icewines, each has its own characteristics, whereas if you had

botrytis, botrytis becomes that dominant flavor profile," explains Dufour.

It's All About Acid

Those familiar with table wine production might assume that harvest dates play an integral role in the development of acids as well as the level of grape sugars, but Nicholson says the former also has to do with yields insofar as the longer harvest is delayed, the less fruit will be left on the vines. Physiologically speaking, once the vines are dormant, the grapes have fully ripened and development has ceased; as he explains, "When the water in that fruit is frozen, it not only concentrates the sugars but it concentrates the acids as well." The freshness of these acids adds balance and lift to the palate despite the high levels of sugar: "By definition, icewine is going to have a high concentration of sugar, so you need that acidity—it's the backbone of the wine." A typical bottling may contain 9–10 grams of acid along with 200 grams of residual sugar per liter: You might compare it to a perfectly ripened peach that is sweet, tart, and mouthwatering.

The high acidity also acts as a preservative, allowing consumers to store an opened bottle of icewine in the fridge for up to a month after opening to enjoy in small amounts at the end of a meal. And unlike Sauternes and other late-harvest wines, which may contain 13% or more ABV, icewine clocks in at around 9% ABV—leaving you with a little less guilt and more room for the foods it pairs so well with (see sidebar on facing page). 

Tasting Notes

Inniskillin 2018 Pearl Vidal Icewine, Niagara Peninsula VQA, Canada (\$55) Ripe yellow stone fruit lingers on the nose, joined by flavors of baked pear, kumquat, and ripe pineapple. The weight is luscious, but it's balanced by lively acidity that comes in at 10.5 grams/liter, adding lift to the finish.

Inniskillin 2019 Riesling Icewine, Niagara Peninsula VQA, Canada (\$80) Alluring aromas of baked green apple, white flower, beeswax, and honeycomb emerge from the glass along with flavors of apple compote, hints of ginger, and distinct petrol notes. Warm honey and tangerine linger after each distinctly juicy sip. Although this bottling contains 230 g/L of residual sugar, its acidity is off the charts at 12.53 g/L. A strong, creamy blue cheese would make for an ideal match, as would a citrus-driven dessert like tangy Meyer lemon curd.

Inniskillin 2019 Cabernet Franc Icewine, Niagara Peninsula VQA, Canada (\$100) Crushed raspberry and strawberry pie mingle with subtle hints of rosehip tea and orange peel. The palate is rich with tongue-coating notes of brown sugar and bright pomegranate tannins.

Inniskillin 2018 Gold Vidal Icewine, Niagara Peninsula VQA, Canada (\$90) Winemaker Bruce Nicholson enjoys the extra layer of spice that oak adds to Vidal, especially when the must contains higher sugar. To keep it from overpowering the fruit, he matures this icewine for only four months in new French oak after roughly three weeks of barrel fermentation. The result is a viscous nectar with more intensity than the Pearl Vidal: Grilled peach and cardamom aromas meet flavors of flan, candied orange peel, and caramelized sugar before an unctuous finish.

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REFLECTING ITS

Origins

THE POETIC SPIRIT
OF DANTE RESIDES
IN THE WINES OF
SEREGO ALIGHIERI
BY LARS LEICHT

A viale dei cipressi
("avenue of cypresses")
runs through the
Serego Alighieri estate.





The Serego Alighieri property in Sant'Ambrogio di Valpolicella, Italy.

*M*edieval poet, writer, and philosopher Dante Alighieri is an Italian icon who represents both the country's greatest traditions and its boldest innovations. He's long been compared to Shakespeare in that he left a literary legacy that's still meaningful today, yet Dante was so much more. For instance, he set linguistic precedent when he broke with using Latin over vernacular in poetry and literature, thus giving birth to modern Italian language. He also became embroiled in politics, and when a rival faction of the Guelph party to which he belonged took control, he was exiled from his native Florence to Verona, where he lived in relative prosperity under the patronage of its ruling family. His descendants flourish there today, almost seven centuries later, on land purchased in 1353 by his son, Pietro.

Countess Massimilla di Serego Alighieri, a member of the 21st generation since Dante, currently produces wine on that historic estate in partnership with the Boscainis, the family behind another regional icon, Masi Agricola. In 1973, her father, Count Pieralvise di Serego Alighieri, started collaborating with the Boscainis, who provided technical support and international distribution. Since the 1980s, the production of Serego Alighieri's wines has been supervised by the Masi Technical Group, a team of enologists, agronomists, marketing experts, chemists, food-production technicians, and other experts who serve as a winemaking consultancy.

It's hard to resist drawing parallels between the writing of "the Supreme Poet," as Italians refer to Dante, and the contemporary wines of Serego Alighieri. Like his epic poem, *Divina Commedia*, published in 1320, the estate is a treasure trove of innovation, adaptation, and history that remains poignantly relevant today. In its approach to production, the Masi Technical Group steadfastly employs certain traditional practices in the vineyards, the cellars, and even the *fruttai*, the aerated barns used to dry the grapes for Amarone during the appassimento process.



Countess Massimilla di Serego Alighieri is the 21st-generation proprietor of her family's Valpolicella estate.



Raffaele Boscaini heads up Masi Agricola's Masi Technical Group, which supervises production for Serego Alighieri.



IN THE VINEYARDS

For starters, unlike many producers in the Valpolicella region, which rely primarily on Corvinone for full-bodied and deeply colored Amarone, Serego Alighieri puts more emphasis on Molinara in its Vaio Armaron Amarone della Valpolicella Classico DOCG. The autochthonous variety was historically key to the appellation, but its use has been all but abandoned over the past few decades; as Serego Alighieri's dedicated enologist, Andrea Tella, explains, the denomination rules were updated a few years ago to require only Corvina and/or Corvinone (45–95%) and Rondinella (5–30%) in the production of Amarone, with up to 25% of other indigenous grapes, including Molinara, becoming optional.

Admittedly, says Tella, Molinara “has one defect: It is light in color. The modern palate wants color, so many producers set it aside. But to us it contributes great freshness, fragrance, acidity, and especially notes of spices.” The historic clone used by Serego Alighieri is reproduced from pre-phylloxera vines that still grow in the courtyard of the estate's villa. “It is important as a symbol for Serego Alighieri, the result of a dedicated [propagation] project, and helps our biodiversity. We use it not so much to make a wine that pleases market demands but to preserve a piece of our history and style, which gives added value,” Tella says. Despite the option to emphasize what he calls more “generous”

varieties, then, Serego Alighieri's estate blends have not changed over the years (while still respecting the letter of the law).

IN THE FRUTTAIO

For appassimento—wherein grapes for Amarone are left to wither for 90–120 days depending on vintage conditions—farmers traditionally used bamboo racks called *arele* that were left over from the production of silk, which is no longer a viable industry in the region. Over the years, many producers streamlined the process by instead putting the grapes into wooden boxes in the vineyards during harvest and then stacking them in the *fruttaio*; in more recent times, plastic bins have replaced the boxes because they are easier to work with and sterilize.

At Serego Alighieri, however, appassimento still takes place on *arele*, which is “challenging,” notes Tella, as “they are large and require more manual labor to move the grapes. But without a doubt they greatly contribute to the microclimate that forms between the bunches. They allow for better passage of air and make it easier to control the grapes on their flat surface rather than looking over the sides of the boxes.”

Fortunately, of the three, bamboo is the best system, according to Tella: Because it's not porous, it's just as easy to sterilize as the plastic, while wood is difficult to clean and will absorb any leaking juice

or moisture in the air. And unlike plastic, bamboo can help regulate the ambient temperature of the grapes, which could grow mold if they get too warm. It's also part of Serego Alighieri's terroir, as it's found growing along the riverbanks nearby. “It has always been here and is one of our natural resources,” Tella says. “We believe very much in using the *arele*. The reasons to the contrary have to do with the extra work involved, but that is compensated by the resulting quality.”

IN THE WINERY

In the cellars, Tella uses another local resource: 600-liter casks of cherrywood traditionally known as the *fusto Veronese*. Cherries were historically another key crop of Verona, so the wood was readily available; in centuries past, he explains, people “used what they had.” But working with cherrywood can be difficult, as it's more porous, prone to oxidation at best and leakage at worst. “It gives me a lot of headaches,” he says, bringing a palm to his forehead. “For long-term aging, the *fusto Veronese* is not manageable,” as it can result in oxidized, orange-colored wine with high volatile acidity. So, to maintain house style, Serego Alighieri ages its Amarone in oak barrels for three and a half years, followed by a much shorter period in cherrywood to add character. “We don't want to make vinegar, after all!” Tella adds. “But a short passage in cherry after aging



Serego Alighieri enologist Andrea Tella.



in oak helps emphasize certain aspects. Oak gives us notes of vanilla, toast, mocha, and cacao; the cherry contributes more balsamic notes and hints of fruit preserved in spirits. These are the flavor aspects of our tradition."

The product range of Serego Alighieri also reflects restraint directed by tradition. It includes three single-vineyard wines under its estate label: the Vaio Armaron Amarone della Valpolicella Classico DOCG, the MontePiazzo Valpolicella Classico Superiore DOC, and the Casal dei Ronchi Recioto della Valpolicella Classico DOCG. Under the Possessioni label, the winery makes a red blend of Corvina, Molinara, and Sangiovese as well as a white Garganega/Sauvignon Blanc.

Serego Alighieri does not produce a Ripasso, which is made by adding fresh Valpolicella over the pressings of Amarone; the winemaker must leave the pressings a bit wet, thus sacrificing the Amarone's structure. Instead, a portion of the fruit for the MontePiazzo Valpolicella Classico Superiore DOC undergoes brief appas-

simento before being added to the already fermenting wine, inducing a secondary fermentation and yielding a richer wine that still shows freshness.

"With MontePiazzo, we manage to give something more," says Tella. "The resulting wine has more polyphenols and anthocyanins, and on both the nose and palate there are hints of prunes, raisins, and spices, especially cinnamon and clove. The presence of Molinara heightens these flavors even more."

THE AGE-OLD QUESTION: TECHNIQUE OR TERROIR?

When it comes to the debate of whether Amarone is driven more by technique or terroir, Raffaele Boscaini, who leads the Masi Technical Group, is happy to weigh in. Like producers of Champagne, another wine for which the discussion is often heated, the group has painstakingly developed its own yeasts that are "ideal for [the] conditions," he says, as "the appassimento process concentrates a high amount of sugars during a particularly cold period. You run the risk of having a heavy, oxidized wine if you're not careful. . . . [These yeast strains] carry on at a normal pace, not too fast but not dying off too quickly."

Amarone can absolutely be a terroir-driven wine, Boscaini insists, noting that the point is proven on the Serego Alighieri estate. "These soils and the [slopes]

southwest [orientation] toward Lake Garda have a very definitive impact on the resulting wine," he says, "and that is doubled when you consider the microclimate during the appassimento." The fruttai, he pointed out, are located on the estate in the lower foothills of Valpolicella's Classica area, which is warmer and more humid than the rest of the region in early winter when appassimento takes place. "Generally, those are ideal conditions for some botrytis, which generates glycerin and yields wines with greater richness," he explains. "Not too much, of course—at 6 grams per liter of residual sugar, we're just a little more than bone dry." He says that as a result, the wines are already well evolved even before they go into the barrel: "It's like they're already born adult."

Boscaini is proud that, with the Masi Technical Group's careful guidance, Serego Alighieri maintains traditional techniques while still producing wines suited to contemporary palates. "I am convinced that all the necessary techniques applied by the [group] are not contrary to tradition," he says. "In fact, it is tradition that inspires us to innovate."

Boscaini also realizes that because the wines are distinct, they may not appeal to everyone, but they'll always have a solid fan base. "Most consumers want a wine that is pleasing at the right price," he says. "It must be authentic and reflect its origins"—assuming an identity that's as poetic yet forthright as Dante himself. **sj**

J. Lohr's Paso Robles Cuvée Series Is a Reflection of Bordeaux Terroir, Paso Robles Style

CONFUCIUS POINTED OUT that reflection is the noblest method of achieving wisdom, and for the past 23 vintages, J. Lohr winemakers have proven it by considering house style and past blends in the creation of their Cuvée Series. These special, small-lot wines continue to underscore the world-class status of Bordeaux varieties in Paso Robles; as we dive into the 2017 releases, which are produced from the best blocks within J. Lohr's sustainably farmed estate vineyards, we experience the team's interpretations of Saint-Émilion, Pomerol, and Pauillac terroirs through the lens of Paso Robles.

It was in this vintage that the region saw some relief from a five-year drought during the winter, followed by extreme heat in September 2017. The resulting wines showed the highest level of ripeness since 2014, according to J. Lohr director of winemaking Steve Peck and red winemaker Brenden Wood.



J. Lohr 2017 Cuvée POM, Paso Robles (\$50) Though extreme conditions impacted Paso growers in September 2017, Peck states that "our Merlot crop was several weeks away from harvest and came through the heat spike unharmed." The concentration of flavor and ripeness in this blend of 77% Merlot and 23% Malbec shows exquisitely through layers of violets, graphite, and mocha-laden plum. The knock-your-socks-off mouthfeel, dynamic tannins, and berry skins leave a lasting impression. **94**

J. Lohr 2017 Cuvée PAU, Paso Robles (\$50) Inspired by the Grand Cru wines of the Pauillac district of Bordeaux, this blend contains 67% Cabernet Sauvignon, 27% Cabernet Franc, 5% Merlot, and 1% Petit Verdot. At 14.9% ABV, it shows a mysterious opaqueness with its inky, black-purple hue and earthy slate aromas. Savory notes of Worcestershire; teeth-grabbing, chalky tannins; tobacco; and crushed violets make a grand statement. **95**

J. Lohr 2017 Cuvée St. E, Paso Robles (\$50) Inky and deep, this Cabernet Franc-dominant blend with 30% Cabernet Sauvignon and small amounts of Merlot and Malbec is the most savory—and, we find, the most elegant—of the Cuvée Series wines. It's wired with black olive, pencil shavings, silky earth tones, and espresso. Fruit emerges midway among earth and dried herbs with the sensation of black cherry in blackstrap molasses. **95**



PHOTO COURTESY OF OUT EAST WINES

Rhône in Place

THE CO-FOUNDER OF Out East Wines, Patrick Mitchell, produces a Champagne and a Côtes de Provence Rosé, and he has just introduced his third wine, Out East 2017 Hermitage—a limited-edition run of 1,000 individually numbered bottles. "[For] a contemporary wine brand, partnering with a world-class producer of Hermitage like Cave de Tain was a dream," explains Mitchell. "The fact that Out East Hermitage is the first-ever Hermitage appellation wine to be released by an American company is something we are incredibly proud of and provides [us] an amazing opportunity [to] share these exceptionally crafted wines with a new audience." To purchase, visit vinoshipper.com/shop/out_east.

Out East 2017 Hermitage, Northern Rhône Valley, France (\$90) Chewy, meaty, and juicy with notes of ripe mulberry, briar, cedar, and cinnamon. Lush and seamless, this 100% Syrah offers up black coffee and a dash of white pepper. Chalky tannins take a firm grip, then release, exuding a regalia of dark fruit on the finish. **96**

From the Smoky Mountains, James Ownby Reserve Tennessee Straight Bourbon Whiskey is a nod to its namesake's accomplishments. It is bottled at Ole Smoky Distillery, the most-visited distillery in the world.




This Whiskey's ON FIRE

JAMES OWNBY RESERVE IS SOUTHERN HOSPITALITY FOR THE PALATE

IT WAS TEN YEARS AGO that Joe Baker opened Ole Smoky Distillery in Gatlinburg, Tennessee, taking his 100-year-old family moonshine recipe to retail. "We faced challenges from licensing to scaling up; we were running out of product in the beginning, [and] we had to hire more employees," says Baker. "But truly, my greatest joy comes from creating opportunity for other people." Today the lineup of Ole Smoky Moonshine encompasses 25 products, from White Lightnin' to Apple Pie and Mountain Java.

And now, Baker and his master distillers have created their first Tennessee Straight Bourbon Whiskey. From the Smoky Mountains, this new release was named to honor one of the first distillers to settle in the area, James Ownby, Baker's great-great-great-great-great grandfather.

James Ownby Reserve Tennessee Straight Bourbon Whiskey (\$40-\$45)

Charcoal filtered and aged in virgin American charred oak barrels, this whiskey offers heady and mesmerizing aromas of brown-sugared cedar, apricot, and pecan. Warming the palate with oatmeal, maple syrup, and a dash of black pepper, the liquid coats the tongue with a rich, creamy, nectar-like texture that bursts with orange peel and pekoe tea. **96** 



Joe Baker, co-founder of Ole Smoky Distillery, is James Ownby's great-great-great-great-great grandson.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF OLE SMOKY DISTILLERY

The Biltmore's newly opened al fresco lounge, Spire Bar.



Shine On, You AZ Diamond

FOLLOWING A MULTIMILLION-DOLLAR RENOVATION, THE **ARIZONA BILTMORE** BURNISHES ITS ICONIC STATUS

story and photos by Christina Barrueta

LIKE MANY WHO HAVE VISITED the Arizona Biltmore, A Waldorf Astoria Resort, I have a treasure trove of magical memories. My husband and I have lingered on Squaw Peak Terrace at happy hour, sipping craft cocktails paired with foie gras croquettes or fried chicken skins with smoked cheddar sauce as the setting sun lit Piestewa Peak. We've experienced wonderful wine dinners at the now-closed Wright's at the Biltmore, featuring such celebrated wineries as Caymus, Penfolds, and Heitz Cellar. And we've attended unforgettable special events in the private dining room—including the time we were seated with Veuve Clicquot winemaker Pierre Casenave while dining on a multicourse feast paired with the Champagne house's 1989 La Grande Dame rosé and Château Climens 1983 Premier Cru Sauternes, among other bottles.

Since its debut in 1929, dignitaries and luminaries have created their own memories at this stunning Phoenix resort, crowned the "Jewel of the Desert." Clark Gable and Carole Lombard honeymooned here, as did Ronald and Nancy Reagan (every president from Herbert Hoover through George W. Bush has been a guest). Marilyn Monroe was photographed lounging at the Catalina Pool; composer Irving Berlin penned "White Christmas" here; and Frank Sinatra, Sammy Davis Jr., and Liza Minelli purportedly regaled guests around the grand piano in the lobby. Elizabeth Taylor, Fred Astaire, and Marlon Brando all visited the property, as have Taylor Swift, George Clooney, and Elton John—to name just a few.



Cocktails at the Art Deco-themed Wright's Bar.

Beguled by the beauty of the Sonoran Desert, brothers Charles and Warren McArthur envisioned the Biltmore as an invitation-only retreat for the Hollywood elite. "Phoenix Heralded Around World as Biltmore Opens Today," proclaimed the front page of *The Arizona Republican* when it opened on February 23, 1929, with an extravagant three-day fête. A third brother, Albert Chase McArthur, served as architect. He had studied as an apprentice draftsman under Frank Lloyd Wright, who briefly served as a consultant on the project. After the stock market crash in October of that year, the brothers sold to chewing-gum magnate William Wrigley Jr., one of their original investors; in 1973 it was sold by the Wrigley family and opened to the public.

Set on 39 acres, the Biltmore still captivates guests with its glamorous history, while the daring design showcasing indigenous materials continues to define this sanctuary of luxury and leisure. The roof and decorative beams were built with

Architecture, whose aim was to preserve the artistry of the property while incorporating new elements in keeping with the innovative style of its original architects. Their meticulous attention to detail shows throughout the property in bespoke fabrics, updated palettes, imported Italian Bisazza tile, and new amenities.

The Art Deco motif of Wright's Bar has been magnified by a sultry color scheme, striking ironwork, and eye-catching tile reminiscent of peacock feathers. Wright's at the Biltmore is now Renata's Hearth, which pays tribute to Latin and Southwestern cuisine via its wood-fired oven and smoker; stationed in alcoves at the restaurant's entrance, a "Mezcal Maven" greets guests while stirring up smoky libations and a "Guac Star" makes guacamole and slices up the prized *jamón ibérico de bellota* to order. It's a perfect prelude to mouthwatering dishes such as pristine oysters accented with jalapeño aguachile, charred octopus à la Veracruz, and juicy Jidori chicken kissed with mesquite smoke. For the enophile, the



Mesquite-smoked chicken at Latin- and Southwestern-inspired restaurant Renata's Hearth.



The lobby is graced by a stained-glass art piece titled "Saguaro Forms and Cactus Flowers."



The Arizona Biltmore, A Waldorf Astoria Resort, completed a \$70 million renovation this spring.

32,500 pounds of Arizona-mined copper, and the 250,000 famous Biltmore Blocks that make up the bulk of the resort's construction were crafted on site using local sand. The lobby, meanwhile, sets the mood with "Saguaro Forms and Cactus Flowers," an exquisite stained-glass panel based on a Frank Lloyd Wright illustration and gifted to the resort by Mrs. Wright.

On May 1, 2021, the Arizona Biltmore unveiled its grand transformation after a dazzling \$70 million renovation skillfully executed by Virserius Studio and PHX

wine list ranges from bottlings by Arizona's acclaimed Page Spring Cellars and Rune Wines to 1985 Bordeaux still nestled in their original crates.

Outdoors, the aforementioned Squaw Peak has become home to the Spire Bar, an al fresco lounge anchored by a magnificent 30-foot spire encircled by firepits and soothing water features. It's one of the property's most striking additions, paying homage to Wright's bold aesthetic, with colorful tiles and ambient lighting that are especially beautiful at night.

Adjacent to Spire Bar is the new adults-only Saguaro Pool, where guests who reserve covered daybeds or cabanas staffed by personal attendants can dine on fresh seafood while sipping Piña Coladas out of pineapples. Take note of the colorful Italian mosaic accents, including the tiles at the bottom of the pool, which echo the stained-glass piece in the lobby.

One of the most popular of the resort's six other pools, the family-friendly Paradise Pool, has undergone a redesign. Fifteen luxurious cabana suites boasting living rooms, kitchenettes, full bathrooms, and air conditioning have been added along with a swim-up bar, a splash pad, and a towering 65-foot triple water slide called Twist.

Also new to the property are the Tierra Luna Spa and a 3,000-square-foot, state-of-the-art fitness center: The former incorporates desert botanicals and "cosmic connections" into its services—including rose quartz massages, indigenous mud treatments, astrology readings, and the use of CBD-infused balms and oils—while the latter hosts classes such as yoga and aqua aerobics.

So even as its storied past continues to resonate, the Jewel of the Desert is sparkling brighter than ever, setting the stage for frequent guests like me to make enchanting memories well into the future. **SJ**

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**OUR WEBINAR SERIES CONTINUES
WITH "IT'S ALL ABOUT NAPA" IN
PARTNERSHIP WITH NATIONAL
GEOGRAPHIC AND SOMMCON**

BY JESSIE BIRSCHBACH



THE FUTURE OF NAPA IS MALBEC

WINERY: Patel Winery

HQ: Napa Valley

PRESENTER: Raj Patel, owner



"My first knowledge of wine was when I started working at Robert Mondavi as a lab tech," said Raj Patel, whose biochemistry degree from the University of California, Davis, helped land him an internship there. Although he later went into the world of finance, the experience stuck with him and eventually led him to return to the wine industry, establishing Patel Winery in 2007.

"We started out at 100 cases, and we're trying to get to 2,000," said Patel, whose focus is on sourcing each variety he uses from its ideal home within Napa Valley. He currently produces a Cabernet Sauvignon from Coombsville, a Malbec from Atlas Peak, and both a Sauvignon Blanc and a Cabernet Sauvignon from Rutherford.

Patel Winery's Malbec is grown in the iron-rock soil of Stagecoach Vineyard in Atlas Peak, which ranges from around 1,200 to 1,700 feet in elevation.

The humble yet shrewd proprietor believes the grape has great potential in Napa, as evidenced by the increased acreage being planted to it. "It's really nice from a stylistic and purity-of-fruit standpoint," he said. "But the key is to compartmentalize it." To that end, he makes ten to 15 different Malbecs—some barrel fermented, some not; some aged in new oak, some in neutral; some stirred on the lees, some not; and so on—to "come out with different layers" after blending. Aiming to showcase the natural harmony between fruit and tannin, this approach to winemaking falls under the direction of renowned French winemaker Julien Fayard. "Julien really makes wine in the vineyard," said Patel. "We try to keep our hands out of the process as much as possible."

Although Coombsville has only been an AVA since 2013, Patel has been sourcing Cabernet Sauvignon from the area since 2007. "Coombsville is unique in the sense that you get really nice fog in the morning," he explained. "It stays cool; you get a longer growing season well into the last weeks of October [or] first weeks of November. The seed becomes nice and brown. The berries are small. There's a unique nose to it that you don't get from other AVAs."

Patel Winery's total production has increased to about 1,000 cases today, but given the incredible quality of its wines, we suspect it won't be long until it gets to that 2,000.

As the moderator of our Geographical Digest webinar series, *SOMM Journal* VP of education Lars Leicht, reminded us, only 4% of the wine made in California comes from Napa Valley. The widespread perception, however, is that the percentage is much higher—perhaps because Napa, established in 1981, is easily the most famous winemaking region in the U.S. There are a number of reasons for its world renown. But before our panel of some of its top wine professionals helped the audience to explore them, Napa Valley Vintners senior director of marketing communications Teresa Wall offered a quick refresher course on the appellation that might benefit readers too.

Napa is of course celebrated for Cabernet Sauvignon, but its diverse terroir "provides a great opportunity to produce many different styles" of the grape, she explained, as well as "a lot of [other] varieties." In addition to 33 different soil series, "we are blessed with a Mediterranean climate, which only 2% of the earth experiences. . . . It depends on the year, but usually from May or June through September and sometimes October; you won't see rain here in Napa." Even so, she added, "Temperature varies drastically from the top to the bottom of the valley. . . . As you go north it gets warmer because it gets narrow, so the heat gets trapped." The topography is likewise highly varied: "At the very bottom, in Carneros, we're at sea level, and yet you've got the ranges on both sides that bring us up to more than 2,000 feet [elevation] in some areas."

These variations set the stage for the creation over the past few decades of 16 sub-AVAs, "or what we call nested AVAs," said Wall. "If you see [Napa Valley] on the bottle, that means it probably doesn't fit within these subregions."



Patel Winery sources its Malbec from Stagecoach Vineyard in Atlas Peak.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF PATEL WINERY

"THE BEST IS YET TO COME"

WINERY: Chappellet Vineyard & Winery

HQ: Pritchard Hill

PRESENTER: Cyril Chappellet, CEO

After selling his stake in the wildly successful coffee-vending-machine company he had built, Donn Chappellet had a persuasive meeting with the so-called "dean of American winemakers," André Tchelistcheff, that led him to purchase what is now the family estate's original 320 acres in the rocky hills east of Oakville in 1967. Cyril Chappellet—one of Donn's sons and the current CEO of Chappellet—was 10 years old at the time, when most wineries were being established on Napa's valley floor. "For the first 30-some years, we had no neighbors," said Cyril nostalgically.

Today, this area, set on a rugged peak in



PHOTOS COURTESY OF CHAPPELLET

the Vaca Mountains ranging from 800 to 2,000 feet in elevation, is known as Pritchard Hill, and Chappellet certainly has neighbors. In fact, the list of producers this pioneering estate shares the hillside with reads like a who's who of California Cult Cabs: Bryant, Continuum, and Colgin, to name a few. No wonder the unofficial subregion—named after homesteader Charles Pritchard, who grew grapes on what is now the Chappellet property in the 1800s—is considered one of Napa's grand crus, though it's worth mentioning that the Chappellet family holds the trademark for the Pritchard Hill name and has no intention of petitioning for AVA status anytime soon.

It's not just the high elevation relative to much of Napa Valley that makes Pritchard

An aerial photograph of the Chappellet Vineyard estate. The foreground shows a large, well-maintained green lawn. In the middle ground, there are rows of grapevines in a vineyard. In the background, a large body of water, Lake Hennessey, is visible, surrounded by rolling hills and mountains under a clear sky. A large building with a blue roof is visible in the lower right corner of the image.

An aerial view of the Chappellet Vineyard estate and winery; Lake Hennessey is in the background.

Hill and the Chappellet estate so special. Cyril told the audience that, after half a century, his family has gotten to know the diversity found in each of their blocks, spanning roughly 100 acres, with more than 80 acres of Cabernet Sauvignon: the different soil conditions, the microclimates, and the clones that work best within their parameters. "My job," he noted, "is to turn over a better piece of property with a better culture for the next generations so that they have an easier shot of being able to do the right thing."

Chappellet's Pritchard Hill estate has been farmed organically "for years and years," said Cyril. Designed from wood to blend into the natural landscape, the winery uses solar power, and the team is careful about their water usage. After all,

nearby Lake Hennessey is "Napa drinking water," he pointed out. "We want to make sure we're not adding anything that could be detrimental. So [we use] absolutely no pesticides, and we watch our erosion."

Although winemaker Phillip Corallo-Titus—who's been with Chappellet for over 37 years—and his team shoot for consistency, said Cyril, "nothing is automatic," so they aren't afraid to adjust blending ratios and oak regimens to ensure that the wines like those presented, the Chappellet Signature Cabernet Sauvignon and Pritchard Hill Cabernet, are "lovely to drink right away but [able to] age well." Such assured practices may cement Chappellet's longtime status as one of the leading wineries in Napa Valley—but as Cyril promised, quoting his father, "The best is yet to come."



**Chappellet
2018 Pritchard
Hill Cabernet
Sauvignon, Napa
Valley (\$250)**

A silk road ascends to a dynamic peak, where a hallelujah of flavor and texture rings out. The juiciness of this tamed beast shows through its opaque black fruit. A savory middle carries tar, tobacco, and Worcestershire notes. A triumphant red. **97**
—Meridith May



REGION IN THE ROUGH

WINERY: Calla Lily Estate & Winery

HQ: Pope Valley

PRESENTER: Cary Gott, winemaker



Calla Lily winemaker Cary Gott (right) with assistant winemaker Kelly Deianni.

Pope Valley “is not a heavily populated area; there’s no real city here,” said veteran winemaker Cary Gott. “There’s a garage and a gas station, and that’s about it.” It’s not even an official sub-AVA, but Gott believes it’s one of Napa Valley’s best-kept secrets—which is why his latest project, Calla Lily Estate & Winery, is located there.

Nestled into the eastern side of Howell Mountain at an elevation of just over 800

feet, Calla Lily is planted to 20 acres of Bordeaux varieties. Gott showed off a flowering Cab cluster and told the audience that his team will be picking their estate-grown fruit at the end of September; harvest generally begins a bit later here than it does on the valley floor because the area is cooler; according to Gott. And yet “one of the things that is different about the Pope Valley climate is that we don’t get the morning fog and high clouds that are typical of a major part of Napa Valley.” As a result, he added, Calla Lily’s vines tend to produce smaller, more concentrated berries, resulting in structured wines and higher aromatics.

The winemaker—who represents the fourth generation of a family of growers—then shared an image of his vineyard with Howell Mountain in the background. “Our soil is fairly like a bench soil,” he said, pointing to a particular acre of vines that are “35 years old at least. It’s one of the few remaining blocks of AxR1 rootstock with the old Martini clone; virtually 99.9% of all of those vineyards are gone on the coast

because they were killed by phylloxera. . . . Our vines are pruned very tall, and they don’t produce a lot of grapes—maybe 2 to 2¼ tons per acre.”

The resulting fruit, he explained, “makes stunning wine in a lighter style” that he and assistant winemaker Kelly Deianni “always blend into” Calla Lily’s varietal Cabs, whose elegance he described as reminiscent of the winery’s namesake flower. Gott presented the Calla Lily 2016 Ultimate Red as an example: The blend of 84% Cabernet Sauvignon, 6% Cabernet Franc, 6% Malbec, and 4% Merlot is made in what he called “classic Napa production,” utilizing such methods as three-day cold soaks, cultured yeast blends, pumpovers about three times a day, and separate fermentations for free-run and pressed wine. When the wine is dry, he added, “Kelly and I decide whether or not to leave [it] on the skins” so that it might pick up more tannin and aromatic character. “It’s a great style of wine, and that’s due to the excellent soil and gentle winemaking,” he said proudly.



REVISING THE AMERICAN DREAM

WINERY: Guarachi Family Wines
HQ: Atlas Peak AVA
PRESENTER: Alex Guarachi, founder and CEO

PHOTO: JEREMY BALL



Chilean native Alex Guarachi attended San Jose State University on a soccer scholarship, but just as he was about to sign a contract with a professional team, he injured himself. “My American dream of playing professional soccer was gone,” said Guarachi. Upon graduation, he was trying to figure out what to do with his life when he came up with the idea to import wines from South America—“and 35 years later, here I am,” he mused.

Admittedly, it wasn’t exactly as easy as all that, according to Guarachi, whose friends thought he was crazy for trying to

sell Chilean and Argentine wine in California. But he felt strongly that Californians would be more open-minded than most American consumers at the time, and he was right; in 2010, his company, Guarachi Wine Partners, was named “Importer of the Year” by *Wine Enthusiast*. By then, Guarachi had already launched his own label, Guarachi Family Wines, having released the first vintage—made by revered winemaker Paul Hobbs—in 2007.

However, said Guarachi, “I could not find the quality and consistency [of fruit] I was looking for, so in 2014, I bought a great 145-acre vineyard called Sun Chase at the top of Petaluma Gap in Sonoma Coast, which produces beautiful Burgundian-style Pinot Noirs, and later, [I purchased] Meadowrock at the top of Atlas Peak.” He described the 50-acre Meadowrock site (32 of which are planted to vine) as a “fixer-upper”—but one with great potential given its red volcanic soil, which contributes to “good concentration and good structure.” In 2016, Guarachi hired Julian Gonzalez, formerly of Hobbs Consulting, as chief winemaker.

Bordeaux varieties thrive within Meadowrock Vineyard, which ranges in elevation from 1,400 to 1,760 feet. As elsewhere in the Atlas Peak AVA, the site gets plenty of sun, being above the fog line, “but at night it really cools down in a big way,” according to Guarachi. He told the audience that the terroir ensures his grapes achieve “the right ripeness,” resulting in great minerality

and, in turn, great aging potential.

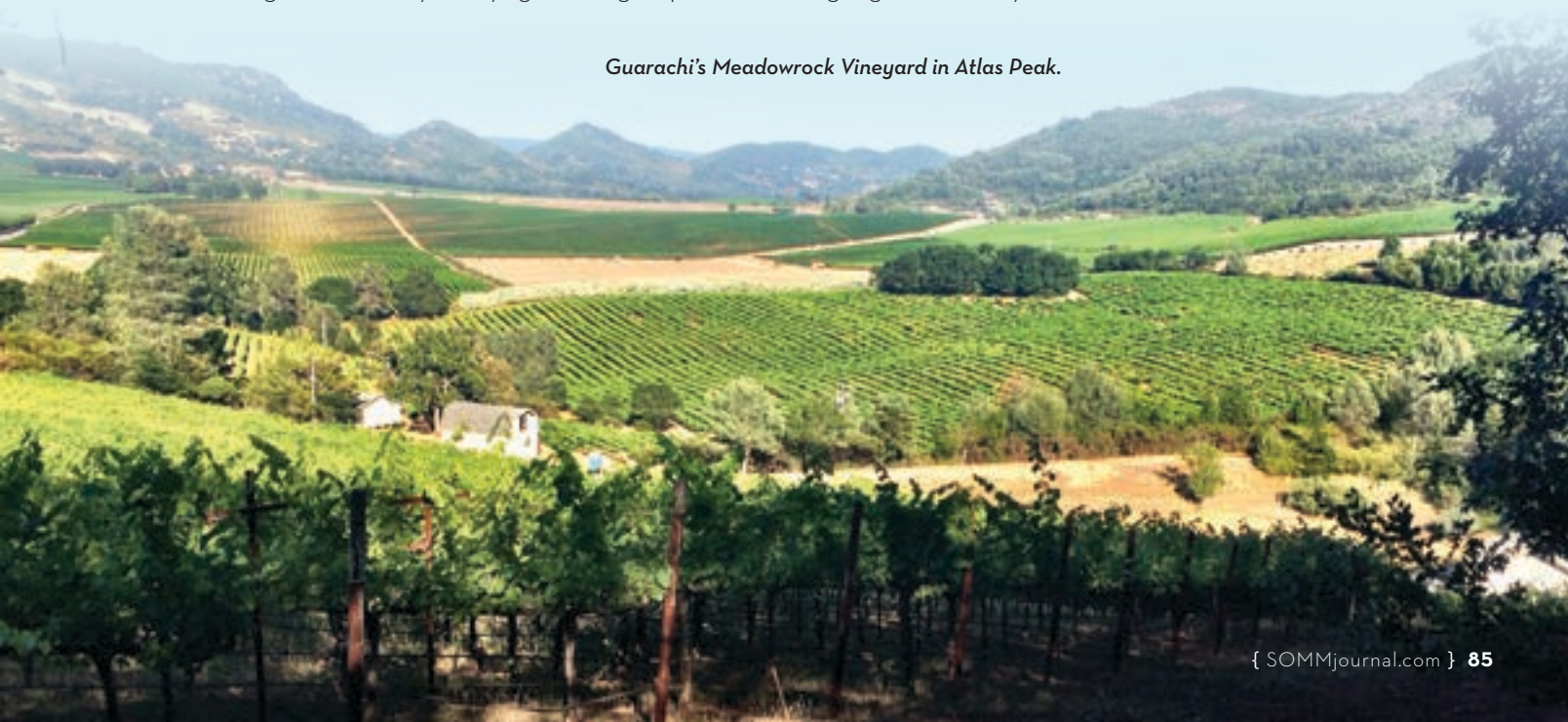
As examples of Meadowrock’s promise, he presented the Guarachi Family Wines 2017 Napa Valley Cabernet Sauvignon and 2017 G by Alex Guarachi, a Bordeaux blend. While the latter contains Cabernet Sauvignon, Malbec, and Petit Verdot, the former is a 100% Cab that Guarachi described as big, rich, and ageworthy, adding, “It’s a testament of what can be done at Atlas Peak.” And perhaps, too, it’s a testament to the resilience of the American dream.



Guarachi Family Wines 2018 Cabernet Sauvignon, Meadowrock Vineyard, Atlas Peak, Napa Valley (\$95)

Concentrated, with spiced notes of black and red fruit. Tight-fisted tannins broadened by the minute as the dry, dusty mouthfeel is held together by the wine’s fine structure. Drenched with coffee and sandalwood, a juicy flow of black fruit wraps around the palate. **98** —*M.M.*

Guarachi’s Meadowrock Vineyard in Atlas Peak.



A SCRAPPY VISIONARY

WINERY: Louis M. Martini

HQ: St. Helena AVA

PRESENTER: Michael Eddy, director of winemaking



“Let’s start with our history,” said Louis M. Martini director of winemaking Michael Eddy. After all, according to the UC Davis alumnus, it’s the winery’s storied past that helps to “ground us in who we are today.” And the quintessential American dream is foundational to it.

In 1899, at the age of 12, Louis M. Martini traveled by himself from Genoa, Italy, to San Francisco to join his father in earning a living as a fisherman. The pair would trade the cioppino they made from their leftover catch for grapes, allowing the young boy to try his hand at making wine. After returning to Italy to learn the technical side of the craft, he established the L.M. Martini Grape Products Company in Kingsburg, California, to make sacramen-

tal wine during Prohibition—and in 1933, just as “the noble experiment” ended, he erected a winery in St. Helena. Five years later, he bought what was then the Goldstein Ranch in Sonoma; the historic site, first planted in 1886, is now known as Monte Rosso Vineyard. The Cabernet vines Martini planted there in 1940 are still growing today.

The moral of the story, according to Eddy, is that Martini showed both “vision and scrappiness” throughout his life. These traits have carried over into subsequent generations: The winery was one of the first to use temperature-controlled fermentation, install wind machines to prevent frost—the latter thanks to Martini’s son, Louis P.—and bottle a varietal Merlot.

“Ultimately, you see this vein of three concepts,” said Eddy. “One, we’re very focused on red wine . . . appropriately so, being in the heart of Napa. In fact, I make ten Cabs today—I I if you count the rosé. [Two, an] attraction to working with a lot of mountain sites. . . . And [three,] this idea of innovation and not being too stuck with tradition. We’ve been willing to break some rules here and there, and that comes primarily from our founder.” The Louis M. Martini 2017 Cabernet Sauvignon reflects as much: Sourced from mostly high-elevation vineyards, it’s made from

Cab along with a few non-Bordeaux varieties like Petite Sirah and is aged primarily in (29% new) French oak, with just “a little bit of new American” to bend the rules in true Martini fashion.

Eddy admitted that serving as the first non-family member to make wine at Martini is a lot of weight to carry. “I’m not trying to make any of the wines the Martini gentlemen tried to,” he insisted, “but what I do is absolutely inspired by and informed by who we are and where we’ve been.”



**Louis M. Martini
2017 Cabernet, Napa
Valley (\$45)**

Perfumed with wild strawberry, iron, and coffee bean, this wine possesses exceptional vibrancy. Bittersweet chocolate leads and engages the palate, while big shoulders hold up layers of coffee, black plum, and cured meats. Plum-skin tannins and pencil shavings coat the tongue. **94**—M.M.

E. & J. GALLO WINERY

Louis M. Martini’s Monte Rosso Vineyard.



Derek Benham, founder of Purple Brands, proprietor of Scattered Peaks, and avid surfer.

**Scattered Peaks
2017 Small Lot
Cabernet Sauvignon,
Napa Valley
(\$125)**

Celebrated winemaker Joel Aiken is at his best with this masterfully crafted red sourced from both Morisoli Vineyard in Rutherford and Sage Ridge Vineyard, perched high on the hills above Lake Hennessy. Concentrated notes of cedar, slate, and a slathering

of grainy-textured dark chocolate meld with black cherry and plum. Sophisticated and regally structured.

96—M.M.

PURPLE BRANDS

PERFECT GROWING (AND SURFING) CONDITIONS

WINERY: Scattered Peaks

PRESENTER: Joel Aiken, winemaker



Although Scattered Peaks was the newest winery to participate in the webinar, it's overseen by the most veteran winemaker, Joel Aiken. After more than 40 years in the business—including 27 at Beaulieu Vineyard—and a short stint in retirement, Aiken agreed to collaborate with Derek Benham, founder of the Northern California-based wine and spirits company

Purple Brands, on the label, now entering its fourth vintage.

Aiken started by offering up his long-earned perspective on making wine in Napa. "At [Beaulieu], we'd do sometimes 5,000 tons a year from at least 50 different vineyards—from the south in Carneros to the north in Calistoga from Spring Mountain in the west to Howell Mountain, Chiles Valley, and Pope Valley in the east. I learned how to use Cab from different parts of the valley as other people might[, for instance,] use Merlot to soften the wine." Comparing the Napa Valley of the early 1980s to that of today, Aiken noted that he was grateful for the "disaster that turned out to be a blessing": phylloxera. Rather than replanting the vineyards in slapdash fashion, growers thoughtfully executed their plans for everything from row spacing to use of new clonal material and thereby "upgraded the overall quality of Napa Cab immensely."

Lucky for Benham, Aiken is now

parlaying his incredible experience into making wine at Scattered Peaks. An avid surfer, Benham named his brand after the phenomenon by which waves approaching the shore split off and create different peaks—appropriate given that "we make a lot of our wine with mountain fruit," said Aiken. In fact, three-quarters of the fruit in the powerful but approachable Scattered Peaks 2018 Napa Valley Cabernet Sauvignon comes from the Usibelli Vineyard in the hills of the Pope Valley, although, he explained, "I always insist we have some [fruit] from Rutherford" as well.

The Scattered Peaks 2017 Small Lot Cabernet Sauvignon, meanwhile, is derived from fruit grown in two sites: the Morisoli Vineyard "in the sweet spot of the best part of the Rutherford Bench" and Sage Ridge Vineyard "up in the steep, rocky hills." The former contributes tannins and power, the latter softness, according to Aiken—but "the blend of the two," he added, "is pretty fabulous."

A view of Silverado Vineyards as the sun sets over the Stags Leap District.



"NOT A LITTLE WINERY ANYMORE"

WINERY: Silverado Vineyards
HQ: Stags Leap District AVA
PRESENTER: Russ Weis, president



In the late 1950s and early 1960s, Walt Disney's daughter Diane Miller fell in love with Napa while visiting its wineries with her mother, Lillian. Her husband, Ron, a former pro football player, would initially stay behind to work at Walt Disney Productions, but eventually he joined her—and the couple decided to “throw a little winery [up] on the hill” overlooking

Silverado Vineyard, one of the first sites to grow Cab in what is today the renowned Stags Leap District (SLD) AVA, explained president Russ Weis. With that, Silverado Vineyards was established in 1981. “As Ron noted a few years before he passed away, ‘Well, it’s not a little winery anymore,’” Weis added.

Initially selling their fruit from the historic vineyards on their estate to neighboring wineries, the Millers eventually began creating their own expressions of the Napa Valley varietals they loved from their vineyards, which Silverado winemaker Jon Emmerich, “who’s been with us for 31 years now, has really been able to play with,” said Weis. All 360 planted acres (out of 600 total) are sustainably farmed, from Mt. George—established on the slope of its namesake ancient volcano in Coombsville in 1868—to the aforementioned Silverado Vineyard. With the latter, Silverado helped put SLD on the map, but that’s not its only contribution to the Napa wine industry: In 1999, UC Davis granted heritage status to the Disney-Silverado Cabernet Sauvignon clone, one of only three Cab clones in California to receive that honor.

As Weis explained, in the 1950s, Silverado Vineyard was owned by See’s Candies founder Harry See, who “planted it to Chardonnay mostly, but a little bit of it was Cab. His viticulturalist, John Brock, [developed the clone] over the years through massal selection. We call it the See Selection, [though] Davis designated it the Disney-Silverado Heritage clone. [Also known as] UCD-30, it is the [sole] source of our SOLO, which is a [100%] single-vineyard Cab. It’s our way of honoring Brock and See and this unique California clone.”

Emmerich—along with Elena Franceschi, assistant winemaker for 26 years—produces the Silverado Vineyards SOLO Cabernet as a pure expression of SLD. The Silverado Vineyards GEO Cabernet Sauvignon is likewise meant to represent its unique source, Mt. George Vineyard. Thanks to the water-holding capacity of the chalky tufa soils there, the result of igneous activity, “you’re able to balance the vines with minimal irrigation,” said Weis. “It’s a miraculous spot. Coombsville produces this really broad, chewy, fleshy generosity of texture that we’re all looking for [as a winemaking team]” who, in Weis’ words, is “all about Napa.” **SJ**

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The Makings of a

BOUTIQUE EMPIRE

ATC WINES TAKES A
NIMBLE APPROACH TO
REVERSE-ENGINEERING
THE WINE BUSINESS

story by Michelle Ball / photos by Jeremy Ball

Founder and CEO Charles Bartlett established ATC Wines in 2008. "People see us now and go, 'Oh, what a great business, you guys are doing so well.' But they don't know how much time and hard work it took to get to this point," says Bartlett.



How does a traditional winery get its start? At minimum, a wine-maker would secure a grape contract and then purchase barrels and other necessary equipment. Next, they'd pour their heart and soul into producing the wine,

creating a brand, securing the packaging, and so on—and that's on top of the expense and time they'd have to invest if they chose to plant a vineyard or build a winery from the ground up. After all that, the budding producer would still need to *sell* their wine and build a clientele to have any hope of recouping their costs.

But what would it look like to defy the traditional approach? What if the producer focused on the end user before conceiving the brand to ensure that it gains a competitive edge by overdelivering in value? Since markets are always in flux, you would need to do all of this within a short time frame to ensure success—but how? For Napa Valley-based Appellation Trading Company, also known as ATC Wines, the answer lies in leveraging local relationships and access to high-quality wine available in the commodities market. This lean and savvy enterprise has built a small yet growing empire with a highly efficient team of executives and winemakers, and they're doing it all within the walls of a 10,000-square-foot facility in south Napa.

"Growing up in Napa, I always wanted to work in the wine business," recalls Charles Bartlett, the founder and CEO of ATC Wines. After spending decades in the printing industry and commuting from the Bay Area to Napa Valley, he quit his job in 2003 to be closer to home. There, he worked with many wineries as a print broker, focusing on wine labels and occasionally buying a few barrels himself to resell in small amounts.

When the economy crashed in 2008, many producers found themselves saddled with finished wine they couldn't sell. They needed cash on hand, yet they couldn't risk discounting their product, as that makes it difficult to increase prices later while also potentially damaging a brand's

ATC head of marketing David Zurovski and general manager John Galvin.



"WE HAD THAT FOUNDATION IN THE SALES PROCESS OF UNDERSTANDING OUR CUSTOMERS' BUSINESS AND THEN MAKING SOMETHING CUSTOM TO MEET THEIR NEEDS—AND DOING IT AT A PROFITABLE LEVEL."

—ATC WINES GENERAL MANAGER JOHN GALVIN



reputation, particularly if it's considered high-end. In launching ATC Wines that year, "what we found was we could buy some inventories below FOB [pricing] and help them protect their brands by, let's say, re-labeling and selling them [to exporters]. And so we started to get into the private-label business," explains Bartlett.

Their clientele soon expanded to include online wine clubs and wineries looking to fill a particular niche in their programs. "We were really working from the inside out. I learned a lot about bulk [wine] and blending to improve the wines," he says. Between that know-how and his insider knowledge of Napa Valley, Bartlett could guarantee his clients a high-quality product.

With his business-to-business concept growing, he onboarded his longtime friend John Galvin as ATC's general manager in 2013. The pair had worked summer jobs together as teens, and Galvin had referred him to the printing company they once worked for. Galvin explains that their shared background in that industry gave them an intuitive edge: "We both had that foundation in the sales process of understanding our customers' business and then making something custom to meet their needs—and doing it at a profitable level."

As the economy recovered, the commodity market for high-quality wine had shrunk, and so had ATC's access. Yet it had already created demand—often the greatest challenge for any business. Bartlett and Galvin knew they needed to tighten their control over their supply chain, so they decided to build their own facility and install their own bottling line; this not only added legitimacy, as their clients enjoyed

visiting the space and tasting the wines, but gave them greater control over quality and price because they were no longer at the mercy of a custom-crush facility or mobile bottler. As Galvin puts it, "You could almost characterize our early days as a broker, and then [we moved] into the *négociant* business"; today they're bottling 200,000 cases a year at their facility on average.

They've also acquired a handful of brands, including Edict Wines, which was once made by renowned winemaker Julien Fayard—who's now a key member of ATC's team (more on that later). "I was excited about keeping some of the brands and their legacy going," says Bartlett, "because some of them have such a rich tradition and history. It's great to be a part of that and keep it going into its next life."

In 2018, David Zurovski, the former vice president of Wine Access, joined the company to lead its marketing efforts. Zurovski has lived in Napa Valley for over two decades and has held nearly every position in the wine industry at one point or another—from the tasting room to the winery to the marketing department—yet his superpower is using data analysis to better market, sell, and create new brands. He was also key in establishing ATC's relationship with Vivino, of which he was once the director of North America; the wine app and e-marketplace not only offers producers insight as to what shoppers want but also allows them to sell directly to their customers through their platform. "We develop wines and brands around the data that we get from the marketplace," explains Zurovski.

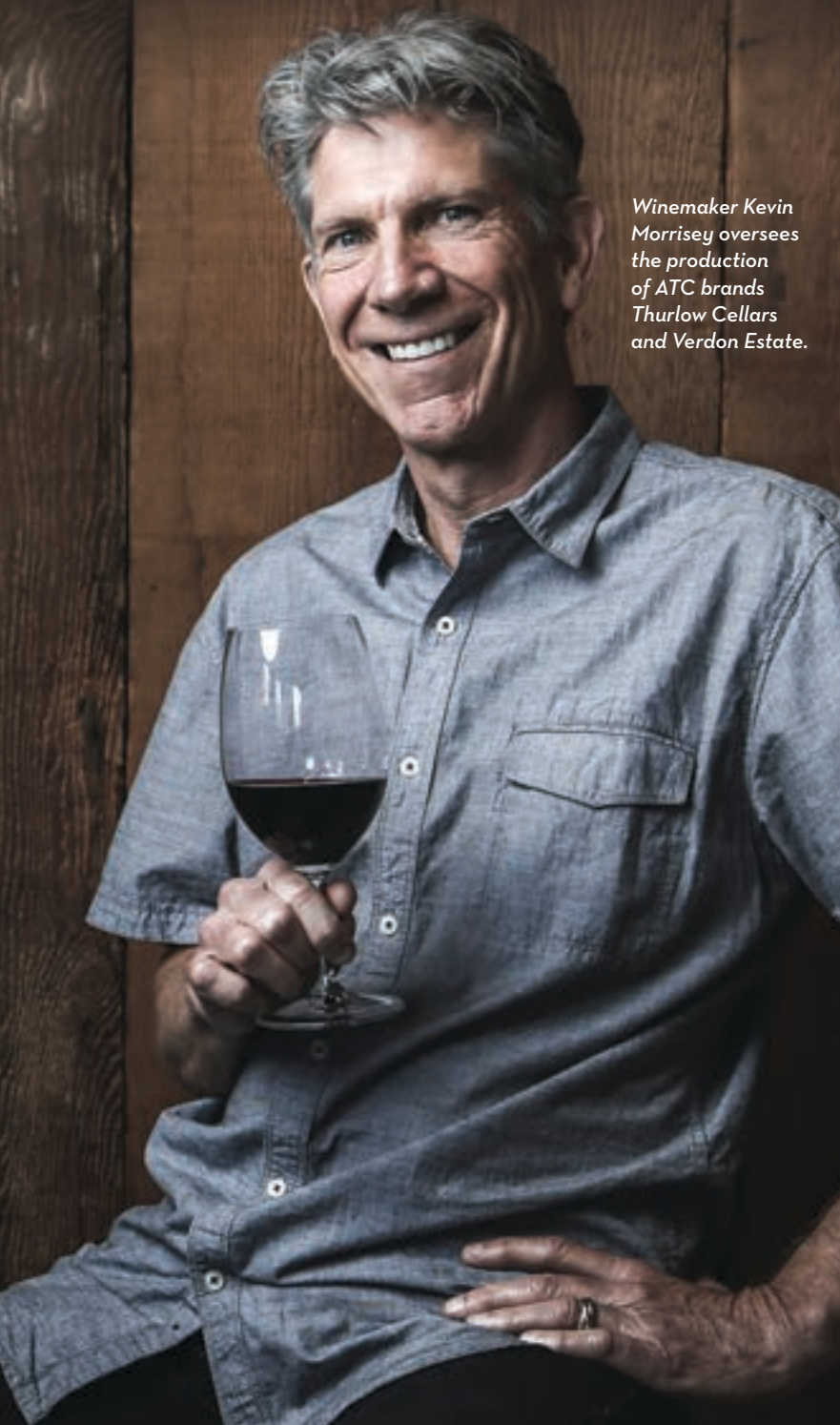
Bartlett notes that not every winery has

the flexibility to target specific price points and take advantage of certain trends; ATC's access to exceptional juice and low overhead gives it an edge. "You would never get the quality of bulk [wine] that we get if it was on the market. It doesn't go on sale, so to speak—it's all relationship-driven," says Bartlett. "It's an important outlet for [these wineries] to have us and those like us in their back pocket. Because if you have a big harvest, you need to do something with the wine." This is especially true since wineries prefer incremental growth, and bumper crops drastically increase inventory when there may not be a market to sell it.

As for being a "relationship-driven" business, ATC's team has established strong credibility thanks to their years of living and working in Napa Valley. "We are known as a good source for purchasing quality wines at a fair price from a number of wineries," explains Galvin, "and we're keeping it discreet so that the wines we buy aren't going to compete with the brand of the source winery."

In addition, ATC contracts with several highly skilled winemakers, each of whom has their own distinctive approach. They also have a sense of confidence in the brands they produce, either because they were responsible for crafting the wine from the beginning or because they assembled the blends from a broad palette of wines gathered through ATC's sources—which are themselves growing, says Galvin: "We're getting larger volumes of super-quality wines from fantastic luxury producers throughout Napa and the North Coast."

A Look at ATC's Brands and Winemakers



Winemaker Kevin Morrisey oversees the production of ATC brands Thurlow Cellars and Verdon Estate.

Refinement and Balance: KEVIN MORRISEY

"Kevin is all about systems and structure," Zurowski says of the ATC winemaker for both Thurlow Cellars and Verdon Estate. Morrisey, a former student of New York University's elite film school, spent ten years in show business as an electrician and cameraman before choosing to reinvent himself and try his hand at winemaking. While attending graduate school at the University of California, Davis, he secured a harvest internship at Château Pétrus in Bordeaux in 1997. He later worked under famed Napa Valley winemaker Tony Soter, founder of Etude Winery, who helped him refine his approach. "That was an amazing two years in my career because I was hungry for knowledge, and Tony was ready to turn [day-to-day operation] over in a way where he could walk away from it and feel like it was in good hands," explains Morrisey.

During his time in Napa Valley, Morrisey became captivated with mountain-grown Cabernet Sauvignon. "These hills are magic," he muses. "There are so many mountaintops up and down both sides of the valley. You walk 10 feet and you're in a different soil and a different sun exposure." Although the fruit can be challenging to work with, as it's chock-full of tannins, he loves the wines it produces. "These vineyards are on rocky hillsides—very little topsoil, very stressed. They make very intense fruit," explains Morrisey. "You get very little, but it's precious."

These mountaintop vineyards were the inspiration for Thurlow Cellars, which produces only a handful of barrels made from several of the valley's sub-AVAs. The winery's full-bodied **2018 Kingsnake Cabernet Sauvignon (\$88)**, of which only three barrels were made, is sourced from Howell Mountain and shows elegant, high-toned blue fruit laced with hints of picante spice as well as black fruit and subtle tones of salted black licorice and flint. Morrisey describes the 2018 vintage as "ideal," as it allowed for the grape skins and seeds to fully develop, producing supple, round tannins.

Morrisey appreciates the autonomy the ATC team gives him to create a style he wants. "One of the great things about working with these guys is they say, 'Kevin, make it the way you like it,'" he explains. "They don't want everything to taste like an ATC wine, and for me that's pretty cool. The wine should taste like where it comes from."

With Verdon Estate, the intention is to deliver high-quality wines at a great value. "They're quintessential Napa Valley [with] great stylistic character," explains Morrisey. The **Verdon Estate 2017 Proprietary Red (\$58)** from Blueline Vineyard, composed primarily of Cabernet Sauvignon (50%) as well as Malbec (30%) and Merlot (20%), offers hedonistic pleasure with aromas of brown sugar and kirsch amid flavors of juicy black plum and cassis.



Chad Alexander makes wines for Perrin + Dobbs and Typhon Estates.

The Winemaking Geologist: CHAD ALEXANDER

One could say that Chad Alexander cut his teeth on mountain fruit. He grew up on Mt. Veeder with his mother, Rita, who worked for The Hess Collection, and by age 14, he was working in the winery too. There, he learned the trade from the vineyard crew as well as then-winemaker Robert Craig and eventually began developing his palate. He spent eight years at the winery, earning extra money while attending college to study geology. "After that, I worked for USGS doing tsunami research, but I kept coming back into the cellar. I grew up with the Mondavis and the Coppelas—it was a much smaller valley back then," recalls Alexander. "I just loved coming into the barrel room and smelling everything."

When Craig left to establish his own namesake brand in 1994, he encouraged Alexander to join him. The geologist turned winemaker spent the next ten years with the boutique producer, known for its hillside Cabernets, and launched his own wine consultancy firm in 2006.

His experience as a geologist has been critical to his expertise in the vineyards. "I'm definitely a minimalist when it comes to winemaking," he says, noting that he likes to work closely with vineyard management teams for updates on shoot thinning, fruit exposure, watering schedule, and so on. "I think it's really important to be tied in with the vineyard to get what you want in the fruit."

Alexander has assisted ATC Wines with various projects since its inception, but his current role is winemaker for two distinct brands: Perrin + Dobbs Vineyards and Typhon Estates.

The **Perrin + Dobbs Vineyards 2018 Pitch Black Cabernet Sauvignon (\$42)** hails from Paso Robles and is based on Cabernet Sauvignon (85%) with a small amount of Syrah (15%). Alexander enjoys the blueberry notes Syrah adds to the wine and the fleshiness it contributes to the mid-palate. The wine is showy, with boysenberry aromas, red-cherry flavors, and soft fig tannins. While the brand falls outside of ATC's Napa-centric portfolio, sourcing from Paso Robles offers undeniable quality at a competitive price. "My favorite thing to do is make the absolute best wine at a value, whether it's \$100 or \$30," says Alexander.

The **Typhon Estates 2018 {SOLIS} Cabernet Sauvignon (\$108)** from Atlas Peak is a classic example of Alexander's approach to making wine from mountain vineyards. Each of the brand's small-lot bottlings are produced with native-yeast fermentations at his winery; to extract as much flavor as possible, he cold soaks the grapes for one week, conducting regular pumpovers throughout. "I want to have a mouthful of fruit juice, if you will, before I even start fermenting," he explains. After fermentation, he employs an extended maceration, chilling the bins to allow the flavors to steep. The whole process takes roughly 45–60 days before the wines are moved to barrel. The result is an opaque expression with silky tannins; a core of black fruit; notes of cigar leaf and tar; and subtle hints of mocha on the finish.

The Master Blender: JULIEN FAYARD


Originally from the French Riviera, Julien Fayard joined Philippe Melka's elite team of Napa Valley winemakers in 2006. He spent eight years managing dozens of custom-crush clients before launching his own consulting firm in 2013, Fayard Winemaking. "You learn fast" when processing as many as 600 different lots per vintage, Fayard says of his time with Melka.

In early 2019, the new proprietors of cult Napa Valley producer Beau Vigne approached Bartlett to gauge his interest in acquiring the winery's remaining inventory, as they weren't interested in continuing the brand. Bartlett, who knew the original owner of the winery, was shocked. "That is one of the most iconic cult brands in this valley," he recalls. So he countered with an offer to also purchase the brand, which he now considers to be the "crown jewel" in ATC's portfolio: "It was too good to pass up."

As Napa locals, the crew at ATC would have been familiar with Fayard's reputation even if he hadn't worked for Edict Wines before they acquired it. So while the 2018s of Beau Vigne were still in barrel, they quickly contacted Fayard to shepherd the vintage into bottling and assume the role of winemaker moving forward. "When Beau Vigne was purchased, Julien was a natural fit for it, and he was excited to come in and take that brand on," says Zurovski, who considers Fayard to be "a master blender."

To be sure, Fayard brings technical expertise as well as experience in crafting luxury wines, but it's his relationships with many of Napa Valley's most prestigious vineyards that will continue to elevate Beau Vigne into the future. This includes renewed contracts with both longtime sources like Beckstoffer Vineyards' Georges III Vineyard and up-and-coming estates. "That's one thing I'm really excited about. There's a ton of vineyards that have been used in production but were never marketed right," says Fayard. In stewarding a legacy brand like Beau Vigne, he believes it's important to maintain customer expectations by remaining true to the original style while making incremental changes to improve upon it. "We know what we can do in Napa—I just want to bring a little more freshness to the wine," he adds.

That includes the **Beau Vigne 2018 Reserve Cabernet Sauvignon (\$200)**, which exudes opulent dark-fruit aromas with flecks of tobacco leaf and black pepper. It's bold but silky, with a mélange of red and black fruit; notes of chaparral, mineral, and medium-roast coffee; and a persistent, glossy finish. The **Beau Vigne 2018 CULT Cabernet Sauvignon (\$150)**, meanwhile, is a classically bold Napa Cabernet whose earthy forest-floor aromas mingle with cassis, black plum, and spicy coriander. Rich and full-bodied with a deep core of black fruit and layers of espresso, it has soft tannins that maintain their grip through the focused, lengthy finish. *sj*



Julien Fayard is looking to some of Napa Valley's most venerable vineyards for the Beau Vigne label.

All for As One, As One for All

A NEW CALIFORNIA WINE BRAND SPEAKS TO MULTI-HYPHENATE PRODUCER CHRIS RADOMSKI'S SENSE OF PEOPLE AS MUCH AS PLACE

by Ruth Tobias



As One Cru founder Chris Radomski with a member of his "crew," Eli Lippman.



A BUILDER OF BRANDS must by necessity be a builder of relationships; all along the chain of supply and demand, the strength of the latter is critical to the success of the former. But in speaking with industry vet Chris Radomski, one begins to wonder whether, for him, it's the other way around—whether the wine and spirits labels he's founded over the years were ultimately a means to the end of cultivating the close friendships he so clearly cherishes. After all, he might say, what's a good bottle of Cabernet or bourbon for if not making connections and memories over?

Actually, he does more or less say as much when telling the story behind his latest project, Napa Valley wine brand As One Cru. It starts, he explains, "a long, long time ago, [when] I was fortunate enough to partner and work with incredible people on producing multiple 100-point wines." On the heels of that label's success came others designed to introduce consumers to the great wine regions of the world—projects that "introduced me to a lot of people [as] I traveled the world" in turn, says Radomski. "Australia, Chile, Argentina, Italy—it truly was a global operation." It also made him realize that, in his words, "my greatest joy in the wine business was sharing [bottles] and meeting people. I'd do staff tastings and open up \$2,000 worth of wine and they would ask, 'Why?'" His response in a nutshell: "Why not? How could you describe [this] without experiencing it?"

To this day, Radomski expresses his admiration for his former wine partners—but "as we know, paths can open and close, leading us to amazing [new] opportunities and relationships," he says. Such a fork in the road led Radomski to establish Duke Spirits in 2013 in collaboration with the son of its namesake inspiration, none other than silver screen legend John Wayne; starting as a whiskey brand, Duke recently released its first tequila (see our June/July issue for details) thanks yet again to Radomski's knack for fostering ties with the right people at the right time.

To elaborate, about five years ago, Radomski formed Legends Spirits, a principal company with "a wine and spirits platform [of]

great brands that were synergistic in areas that were desirable to the public. Bourbon was a big one; so was tequila; and so was wine, my first love.” With one box checked and two to go, he says, “I started working on the right relationships and found an amazing gentleman in Mexico who owned a hacienda with hundreds of acres of [agave] plantings . . . [and] who was handpicking the piñas and controlling every aspect of the operation.” Comparing it to the production of a cult Cabernet, he points out, “I approach everything

about all kinds of things [including] a few I can’t mention, but mostly we’re asking: ‘What are you cooking tonight? What are you drinking tonight?’ We’re all from completely different backgrounds and we’ve all been through a lot, but we all enjoy life; we love food, we love wine, [we love] our friends and families, and we love sharing stories. You would think we are all related.”

No doubt they’ve got quite the tales to tell. Besides himself and Díaz, the high-powered group includes former pro hockey player Russ Courtnall; Matt Zubrod,

meanwhile, Radomski worked through his longtime Napa Valley network to secure “incredible fruit sources” before turning to yet another “old friend of mine, Ehren Jordan, who runs Failla Wines. I said, ‘I’ve got this great project; would you take me in as a custom-crush client?’ And he said, ‘Well, we don’t do that—but we’ll take you.’” (After all, that’s what friends are for.)

The small-production results so far include a Cabernet Sauvignon made with fruit from Oakville and St. Helena and aged in 100% new French oak as well as a Pinot Noir from Stanly Ranch in Los Carneros, which aged in second-use Cabernet barrels for two years. Radomski is releasing the first bottlings to his mailing list in August; the remaining cases will see limited distribution in five states for starters. Assuming, that is, he doesn’t wind up uncorking them all to share with every acquaintance he makes along the way. **81**

PHOTO: CRAIG TURPIN



Chris Radomski’s As One Cru crew includes Matt Zubrod, culinary director of famed Aspen, Colorado, resort The Little Nell (here pictured in its cellar).

from a fine wine background, so it was clearly exciting.” In 2019, Radomski checked the next box by launching La Adelita Tequila in partnership with his new friend, whom he calls a “visionary,” namely Martín Díaz of Hacienda la Capilla; together, they oversee everything from farming, harvesting, and distillation to brand design, sales, and marketing.

Which brings us to As One Cru. As Radomski continued to explore opportunities for his next California wine project, he says, “I started thinking: ‘What is the purpose, what is the story behind it?’ and I started thinking about my friends. There’s [a bunch] of us all on a text thread, and if you looked at it, you’d be surprised. I mean, we talk about our families, we talk

culinary director of famed Aspen, Colorado, resort The Little Nell; media exec Eli Lippman; and international businessman Tom Ferry. During one such conversation, Radomski broke the news: “‘I want to create a new wine about us, around us, something we can share with others. We embody the ethos of what I want it to be.’” As he explains, “[We’ve all] worked really hard in our lives, but not one of us could roll into Napa and do this. But together, we can. These are real people behind this who love wine and have great palates. That’s been the idea. I may have kicked it off, but the whole group’s insanely capable; it’s almost like a winemaker by committee. We’re the As One ‘crew’” (pun intended).

To produce the actual As One Cru,

Tasting Notes

As One Cru 2016 Cabernet Sauvignon, Napa Valley (\$150) In its first vintage, this wine exhibits a seamless mouthfeel, with intense fruit notes enveloping the palate. Elegantly appointed tannins bring freshness to the fore, with a finish of brandied plum. Ripe, with a fine acid structure. Releases August 2021. **97** —*Meridith May*

As One Cru 2017 Cabernet Sauvignon, Oakville, Napa Valley (\$150) A robe of black velvet shows on entry and in the deep purple-black hue. The aromas of brown-sugared boysenberry and roasted coffee bean are swarmed by a mouth-filling body of dark chocolate and finely grained tannins. Releases January 2022. **99** —*M.M.*

As One Cru 2018 Pinot Noir, Los Carneros (\$50) Fresh black-cherry aromas are perfumed with rose petals. Intense floral notes gloss the palate, and graceful, sweet earthiness shows itself through a sensuous texture. Focused and floral, the wine aged in second-use Cabernet Franc barrels. **96** —*M.M.*

THE

Sharpest BROADCAST

OUR FIRST “WINERY CLOSE-UPS” WEBINAR
SPOTLIGHTED SOME OF THE WORLD’S BEST
PINOT NOIR GROWING SITES

WillaKenzie Estate is located in the Yamhill-Carlton AVA in the northern portion of Oregon’s Willamette Valley.



by *Jessie Birschbach*

When *SOMM Journal* publisher Meridith May promised our audience that we’d be seeing some of the best growing sites for Pinot Noir “close up,” in the spirit of the

webinar’s title, I don’t think we realized just how close we’d actually be getting. That was thanks not only to the incredible insights our panel of accomplished winemakers offered in response to razor-sharp questions from moderator Andrea Robinson, MS, but also to the virtual assistance of SommGeo and its creator, sommelier Greg Van Wagner: The three-dimensional-map platform covers all of the world’s classic and emerging wine regions along with in-depth producer information (for more on SommGeo, visit sommfoundation.com/tools-sommgeo). These combined components made for one of the most thoroughly fascinating webinars we’ve presented in partnership with *National Geographic* this past year.

“We say that Pinot Noir broadcasts its site more so than any other grape,” said Robinson, a sentiment with which every winemaker on our panel adamantly agreed before launching into the particulars of their own site.

PHOTO COURTESY OF WILLAKENZIE ESTATE

Dach Vineyard

ANDERSON VALLEY, MENDOCINO, CALIFORNIA

SommGeo Sound Bite: “There are a number of top wineries here that see a lot of success with Pinot Noir, and the unique factor for this region is the great air conditioner of the Pacific Ocean. The proximity to that influence makes a huge difference. Typically these [coastal] areas see more fog, are cooler, and are definitely more suited toward Burgundy varieties. But in the far north of Mendocino, particularly in the Anderson Valley, [the weather] really tends [to suit] Burgundy grapes. It’s a Region I on the Winkler scale; there are huge diurnal shifts, often 40–50 degrees. Many producers have embraced organic and Biodynamic viticulture.” —Greg Van Wagner
Winery: Domaine Anderson
Winemaker: Darrin Low

Although Jean-Claude Rouzaud of esteemed Champagne house Louis Roederer first visited the Anderson Valley in the early 1980s, Domaine Anderson wasn’t officially born until 2011, when the family acquired the 17-acre Dach Vineyard. With just 2,500 acres planted to vine, the small AVA encompasses redwood forests along the Pacific coast and benefits from a marine influence that results in a longer growing season than anywhere in the state; winemaker and California native Darrin Low told the audience that it amounts to ten to 14 days more hangtime, especially in the “deep end of the Anderson Valley” closer to the ocean.

Today Domaine Anderson owns 50 acres of vineyards throughout the region, but Dach, which has been certified organic since 2014 and Demeter-certified Biodynamic since 2016, remains its flagship site. Low said the approach to farming, the growing conditions, and “staying out the way” of the vineyard by carefully monitoring all facets of the extraction process during vinification combine to create a balanced and elegant yet powerful Pinot Noir: “The healthy soil and

living organisms, particularly the microorganisms and the fungus and mycelium in the soil, will help the roots of our vines . . . and this will translate to less manipulation in the vineyard. [The wine then becomes an] expression of our farming and the terroir of the site,” said Low, stipulating that “the trick is to ride that fine line with texture between weightlessness and concentration. You can have that transparency [from Pinot Noir] but also that density as well. That’s a beautiful Pinot Noir, and you can get that in the Anderson Valley.”



Domaine Anderson 2017 Pinot Noir, Anderson Valley (\$45)

There’s a real slip on the palate to it, as if all the edges of the tannins have been buffed. I’m also getting a really seductive tea quality and gaminess. It’s lovely. —Andrea Robinson, MS

The presence of striking acidity within a depth of boysenberries and cola makes for one dynamic red.

White pepper-sprinkled Luxardo cherries go earthbound with mushrooms and dried leaves before the remarkably savory finish leaves a fine trace of plum skin on the palate. **94**

—Meridith May

MAISONS MARQUES & DOMAINES



PHOTOS COURTESY OF DOMAINE ANDERSON



Clos des Ursules

BEAUNE, BURGUNDY, FRANCE

SommGeo Sound Bite: “The Côte d’Or is the birthplace of top Pinot Noir and Chardonnay. Largely split into the Côte de Beaune and the Côte de Nuits, a range of well-known village appellations line the limestone escarpment.” —G.V.

Winery: Maison Louis Jadot

Winemaker: Frédéric Barnier

Maison Louis Jadot was founded in 1859 after Louis Henry Denis Jadot purchased and renamed a renowned négociant. Jadot and his family had been acquiring Premier and Grand Cru vineyards since their arrival from Belgium in 1794, and as the export business grew, so did their vineyard holdings; today, the company owns 528 acres of vineyards in the Côte d’Or, 280 of which are part of Premier and Grand Cru sites.



Winemaker Frédéric Barnier has been with Maison Louis Jadot for over a decade, learning under beloved Burgundian winemaker Jacques Lardière, the former head of the company’s winery team, who surely influenced Barnier’s approach to growing and vinifying Pinot Noir: “Pinot Noir is a sensitive, fragile grape variety,” said Barnier. “Here in Burgundy, we have many faces—many types of soils, situations, locations, and exposures, so of course if we are using a grape variety that it is too strong, we will never see the differences between, for instance, Volnay and Pommard and the Beaune.” But Pinot Noir makes such nuances easy to discern: To expand on Barnier’s example, although the AOPs of Pommard and Volnay aren’t far from each other, grapes from the latter tend to be a bit more structured than those from the former.

Louis Jadot’s Clos des Ursules Vineyard and its cabotte, as the small storage buildings typically found in the Côte d’Or are called.



PHOTOS COURTESY OF LOUIS JADOT

The wine that Barnier presented came from the Clos des Ursules in Beaune, purchased in 1826 as one of Jadot's first plots in Burgundy. The 2.29-hectare Premier Cru vineyard is located midway up a gentle slope that was originally owned and farmed by Ursuline nuns; today it is a monopole, as Jadot exclusively farms and produces wine from its clay and limestone soils, using organic methods and harvesting by hand. "In terms of winemaking, we're not doing a lot, and that's to respect the quality of the fruit," Barnier explained. "For the 2018 [vintage], we destemmed the fruit, [used] only the berries, and then [began] a slow process of maceration and fermentation with some pigéage, punching the cap to extract the tannins and color" before the wine spent roughly 18 months in cask.

"In Burgundy, we have to be transparent—we have to try to stay pure," Barnier concluded. "We work hard in the vineyard to make good fruit."

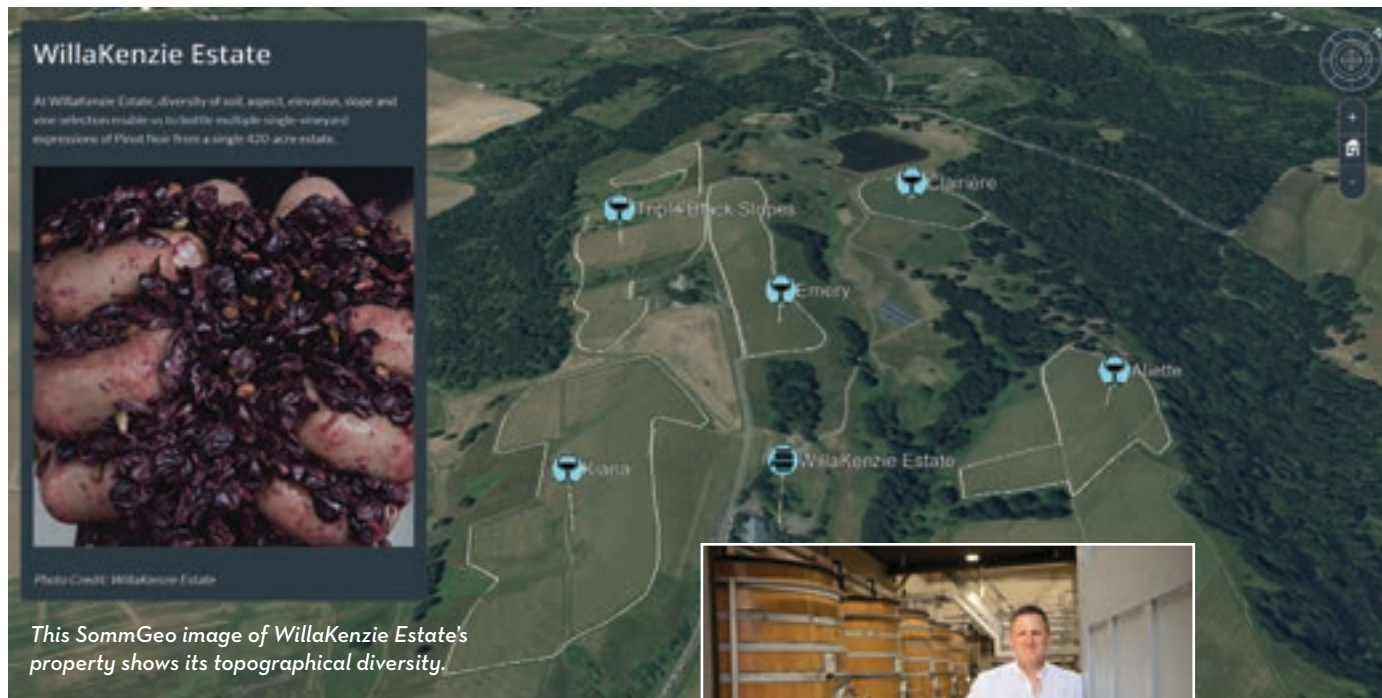


**Louis Jadot 2018 Clos des Ursules
Premier Cru, Beaune, Burgundy (\$90)**

I'm getting a lot of beautiful red fruit, elegant red currant, red cherries, [and] also a little bit of sanguine character, a wet metal like you've bit your tongue, a little bloody. It's very pointed and expressive. —A.R.

Brilliant aromas of summer cherry and a rose garden precede vivid glossiness on the palate, where mocha-tinged earthiness reveals white pepper and cinnamon-covered raspberry. There's an intensity midway that creates tension while ushering in a juicy flow of spiced pomegranate on the finish. **96** —M.M.





WillaKenzie Estate

At WillaKenzie Estate, diversity of soil, aspect, elevation, slope and vine reflections enable us to bottle multiple single-vineyard expressions of Pinot Noir from a single 420-acre estate.



Photo Credit: WillaKenzie Estate

This SommGeo image of WillaKenzie Estate's property shows its topographical diversity.



PHOTO COURTESY OF WILLAKENZIE ESTATE

Yamhill-Carlton

WILLAMETTE VALLEY, OREGON

SommGeo Sound Bite: "The Willamette has become a specialist of Pinot Noir; with over 70% of the valley's plantings devoted to the grape. Yamhill-Carlton is really one of the most important and classic subzones of the Willamette, where they have ancient marine and sediment soils. The whole appellation sits tucked into the base of the Coast [Range, which] creates a rain-shadow effect." —G.V.

Winery: WillaKenzie Estate

Winemaker: Erik Kramer

WillaKenzie Estate is located in the Yamhill-Carlton AVA in the northern portion of Oregon's Willamette Valley. Originally a cattle farm, the estate is named for the marine sedimentary soil series on which its vineyard is planted, reflecting the tradition that great wines express a true sense of place.

Bernard and Ronni LaCroute established WillaKenzie Estate in 1991. Bernard had come to Oregon from his native France to pursue his lifelong dream of winemaking after a successful career in technology; the rolling hills of the northern Willamette Valley reminded him of his Burgundian roots. In 1992, LaCroute

began planting to vine what is now 103 acres of the 420-acre estate.

Looking at a topographical map of WillaKenzie Estate makes its diversity of aspect obvious. "We're defined by a number of different ridgelines and a couple of different faults, which gives us varying aspects, exposures, and soil depths," said Kramer. "All that in turn creates a multitude of expressions of Pinot Noir."

The hydrogeologist turned winemaker described the general character of Yamhill-Carlton Pinot Noir as "moving between red and dark fruit but always [showing] a very noticeable savory, sometimes almost briny, kind of expression." But variation exists in the AVA and even the estate as well, he said, pointing to the difference between WillaKenzie Estate's floral and demure Alette Pinot Noir and the rich, brooding, and expansive fruit from its Emory Pinot Noir blocks.

To enable the varietal to fully express itself, Kramer and his team manage roughly 40 different parcels, all of which harbor different clone and rootstock combinations. Each block is then handpicked, typically destemmed, and fermented separately. Presenting the 2018 Pinot Noir, Kramer noted that he doesn't as much consider

aromatic profile when crafting his wines as he does texture: "For me, it's about creating something that offers almost an ethereal feel on the palate—something that enters with finesse and balance [as well as] some energy and really great length but [also] purity, clarity, and sense of place."



WillaKenzie Estate 2018 Pinot Noir, Yamhill-Carlton, Willamette Valley (\$55)

I often call Pinot Noir "silk pajamas for your palate," and that's what this wine feels like. —A.R.

Aromas of earth are sweetened by wildflowers and mocha. Scrumptious, sumptuous notes of strawberry and more mocha are elegantly joined by a unique thread of red tea with a hint of maple. The finish ushers in bright notes of cherry-flavored licorice and a touch of salinity. **93** —M.M.

JACKSON FAMILY WINES

Mount Harlan

SAN BENITO COUNTY, CALIFORNIA



SommGeo Sound Bite: “One really interesting and unique thing with Mount Harlan is that . . . we’re talking about elevation playing a major role, with vineyards commonly [located] at up to 2,200 feet. But a main cooling factor of this area is the Monterey Bay. This is really a rarity in that very seldomly do you have such a deep bay, [in this case] 2 miles, [and] all of that water . . . significantly cools the region. So when you’re talking about the Mount Harlan AVA, you’re really talking about Josh Jensen and Calera, one of the only monopole AVAs in America.” —G.V.

Winery: Calera

Winemaker: Mike Waller

After short stints at Domaine de la Romanée-Conti and Domaine Dujac in Burgundy, winemaker Josh Jensen returned to California convinced that he’d need to find some limestone in order to make Pinot Noir on par with the classic French region. In 1974, after a two-year search, he purchased a piece of land in San Benito County that was situated in close proximity to an old limestone quarry at 2,200 feet above sea level. “It’s in the middle of nowhere,” said Calera winemaker Mike Waller, “and to this day there’s still no electricity or running water.” Due to the remoteness of the appellation now known as Mount Harlan—which functionally remains a monopole—Calera is unable to utilize such equipment as mechanical pumps, so Jensen built a gravity-flow winery as a clever workaround.

Today, Calera—Spanish for “limekiln”—farms a handful of estate vineyards that Jensen carved out of a limestone escarpment in the upper elevations of the Gabilan mountain range in the late 1970s; more parcels were added in subsequent decades, including the 13-acre Ryan Vineyard, named for longtime vineyard man-

ager Jim Ryan, in 1998. All are certified by California Certified Organic Farmers. “A lot of the topsoils, especially with our Ryan Vineyard that gets up to 2,500 feet, are more of a decomposed granite—so [they’re] very porous, which means great drainage,” said Waller. “The average rainfall is only about 15 inches a year, which is a limiting factor for us. When we talk about the treachery of planting in places like this and only getting 15 inches of rain, our average yields these days are about a ton to a ton and a half to the acre, so very low yields.”

Staying true to Jensen’s love for Burgundy, Calera takes a hands-off approach to winemaking. “We’ve always used 100% whole cluster [and] native yeast. Basically we bring the grapes in, throw them in a tank, and let them go,” explained Waller. “Two weeks later we press them off, then we put them in barrel for 15–18 months. [Then we] rack them once and bottle.”

While sipping the latest bottling from Ryan Vineyard, Robinson noticed a “really pretty floral expression” as well as a chalky grip on the mid-palate, hinting at what some in the industry have dubbed “Mount Harlan minerality.” Whether we have to thank the AVA’s cool climate, its limestone and elevation, or the winery team’s minimal-intervention techniques, Calera is as Burgundian as California gets.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF CALERA



Calera’s Ryan Vineyard in the remote Mount Harlan AVA in San Benito County.



Calera 2017 Pinot Noir, Ryan Vineyard, Mt. Harlan (\$75)

Aromas and flavors of sweet earth and vibrant rose petals open this ethereal red. Jasmine takes shape with underlying notes of crushed rock and sugared beets. Hedonistic as it is, it gradually gentles, paving the way for the elegant finish. **96** —M.M.

Russian River Valley

SONOMA, CALIFORNIA

SommGeo Sound Bite: “The Russian River Valley is a specialist [in] Pinot Noir, and it’s perhaps the most recognized Sonoma region. It has consistent nighttime fogs, large diurnal temperature shifts, and Goldridge and Franciscan Assemblage soils, [making it] an ideal place for supple Pinot Noirs.” —G.V.

Winery: Merry Edwards

Winemaker: Heidi von der Mehden

After making wine for others for decades and changing the California wine industry through her clonal research and development, pioneering winemaker Merry Edwards finally had land to call her own with the purchase of an abandoned 24-acre apple orchard in the Russian River Valley in 1996. A year later, Merry Edwards Winery was established.

Today the producer sustainably farms 80 acres across the Russian River Valley, including that original acquisition, now known as Meredith Estate Vineyard. Winemaker Heidi von der Mehden noted that, at the time, the cool southern section of the AVA in which it’s located was part of the Sonoma Coast, not the Russian River Valley; that’s since changed, but the vineyard remains one of the coolest sites in the area. Von der Mehden noted that they sometimes have to wait until later in the day to accurately sample grapes due to the dampness from the fog, but after it burns off, “we have those coastal breezes daily, and it’s quite windy out there. It stays moderate throughout the growing season and allows our grapes to really develop texture and complexity and obtain a lot of phenolic content that many growing regions can’t quite grab on to.”



PHOTOS COURTESY OF MERRY EDWARDS



Merry Edwards' Meredith Estate Vineyard.

Zoom in on an image of the Meredith Estate Vineyard and you'll immediately notice its powdery gray Goldridge soil. "It's really sand-like and loamy. These are very well-draining soils made from decomposed sandstone, and there aren't a lot of nutrients in it," said von der Mehden, who also noted that the team often picks the fruit at the top of the slope two to three weeks earlier than that at the bottom for use in their vineyard-designate wine. "I'm looking for that phenolic content that's powerful but rounded," she added. "The fruit profile is usually classic Russian River Valley—dark berries, dark cherry fruit—so it's really a powerful wine."

After three years as associate winemaker, von der Mehden was handpicked by Edwards to be her successor in 2018. That she takes the philosophy of her great predecessor to heart was exemplified by her response to Robinson's comment on the vividness and density of the wine's color: "That's something that Merry always focused on and what I've continued to really focus on." Although von der Mehden attributes some of this intensity to the Merry heritage clone planted in two Meredith Estate blocks, whose hens-and-chicks multiformity results in a higher phenolic content, the color is also due to the producer's relatively high level of extraction.

"It's funny, many of my colleagues on this panel aren't trying to get too much extraction, but we're the opposite," she said. "This is the legacy from Merry and it's what I love about her wines, so I'm continuing her style. So, to do this, I'm fermenting at warmer temperatures. We're doing five punchdowns a day during peak fermentation. We're also taking samples to the lab during ferments and testing for phenolic content and asking, 'Are we getting everything we can out of these grapes?' Because that's our style. Sometimes I do have to back off. I'm tasting every day to make sure that I'm not going too far. I might press off a little bit earlier depending on the lot, but usually we're pushing the limits."

Whether it's Edwards herself setting new standards for the winemaking industry as a whole or von der Mehden doing her utmost to showcase the estate's Pinot Noir, it seems Merry Edwards will never cease to broaden our horizons.



Merry Edwards 2018 Meredith Estate Pinot Noir, Russian River Valley, Sonoma County (\$80)

A combination of scents—raspberry jam, tilled earth, and nutmeg—immediately captivates. The liquid floats across the palate with cinnamon-charmed cherries and dusty, supple tannins. This is an eye-opening red, with lively white-peppered cedar defining a luxe finish. **94** —M.M.

MAISONS MARQUES & DOMAINES

Though the 2018 vintage was the focus of the webinar, Merry Edwards has just released its 2019s; here's a look.



Merry Edwards 2019 Coopersmith Vineyard Pinot Noir, Russian River Valley, Sonoma County (\$73)

This vineyard is usually well manicured. But after the rains of 2019, the soils needed to dry out to reduce vine vigor; so the team let the site look "hairy," according to winemaker Heidi von der Mehden. This 100% destemmed, whole berry-fermented Pinot Noir was aged ten months in 68% new French oak. Aromas of patchouli and dark plum are heady and deep, and candied grapefruit, black plum, and licorice form a trio of immediately recognized flavors. With a plush and sensual mouthfeel, the wine erupts in an array of earth tones and gentler savory notes of black olive and balsamic. **95** —M.M.



Merry Edwards 2019 Olivet Lane Vineyard Pinot Noir, Russian River Valley, Sonoma County (\$80)

This historic Russian River Valley vineyard is farmed by the Pellegrini family; to promote better tannin development in the grapes, they implemented deficit irrigation, managing the amount of water reaching the vines while optimizing fruit yield and quality. Aromas of red roses in just-tilled soil lead to mocha and salted plum flavors. Chocolate-soaked cherries around a core of chalky tannins make an elegant arrival, broadening the palate. Dried floral tones persist throughout. A beauty. **97** —M.M.



Merry Edwards 2019 Klopp Ranch Vineyard Pinot Noir, Russian River Valley, Sonoma County (\$73)

Klopp Ranch Vineyard's moderate climate and sandy Goldridge soils serve as the base of this steady, opulent red, aged sur lie for nine months in (69% new) French oak. Earthy with brined cherries, chervil, beetroot, oregano, and celery root, it produces an herb garden of flavors at the start. Along with a good acid structure, its intense finish of cedar and plum and its silky mouthfeel complete the pleasure cycle. **96** —M.M.



Merry Edwards 2019 Georganne Vineyard Pinot Noir, Russian River Valley, Sonoma County (\$70)

From the nose of balsamic and clove-spiced plum, you can tell there's a big personality here. Chocolate and anise coat the tongue. Sandalwood, dried violets, and bergamot are tangled in a brandied-cherry base. Black olive and crushed stone come in on the finish. Aged sur lie ten months in (54% new) French oak. **95** —M.M.

Clayvin Vineyard

MARLBOROUGH, NEW ZEALAND

SommGeo Sound Bite: “New Zealand is home to tremendous mountains that have created these large valleys with alluvial soils there as the glaciers and the waters wore down the earth over its history. At the north end of the South Island, bordering the Cook Strait, you have the region of Marlborough—the most well-known New Zealand wine region. When you think of Marlborough, Sauvignon Blanc is what most often comes to mind, but I think the Pinot Noirs that are coming out of [there] are really some of the most exciting wines, even if you don’t see them as commonly. The southern area of Marlborough is really important for Pinot Noir. The soils are a little heavier clay, and when combined with climate, [they] work well with the grape.” —G.V.

Winery: Giesen Wines

Winemaker: Duncan Shouler

Perhaps there isn’t a producer in New Zealand that understands Marlborough better than Giesen Wines. Brothers Marcel, Theo, and Alex Giesen have been producing various tiers of wine from the area for over three decades, and their know-how is best exemplified in bottlings from their Clayvin Vineyard.

Winemaker Duncan Shouler called Marcel “a bit of a game changer” for buying the small block of land in the Southern Valleys of Marlborough in 1991. Unlike anyone else at the time, Giesen opted to plant Pinot Noir, Syrah, and Chardonnay in the clay-based, north-facing slopes of the vineyard. The vines were also planted in close proximity to one another in what Shouler described as the Burgundian style; where most producers in the area plant about 2,000 vines per hectare, Giesen planted 5,300 in hopes that the vines would focus more on survival than vegetative growth. “The site itself is very complex,” said Shouler. “There are several clay fans that feed through the vineyard, and we have many different clones and rootstocks.”

The 30-hectare vineyard, which is certified organic via BioGro New Zealand, is now divided into several blocks “by strips of two or three rows of different clones or rootstocks, which allows the subblocks to do the talking and not the clone,” Shouler

said, adding with a laugh that “[Marcel] certainly wasn’t thinking about efficiency or making a vineyard that was easy to grow fruit. He was thinking about the site.”

While most harvesting is done by hand, they do use a tiny, Italian-made harvesting machine called the Geier Crawler, whose gentle approach minimizes soil compaction. This is particularly important considering that Shouler views the vineyard’s clay-based soil profile as the driving force behind the wine’s texture. “With Clayvin you get this silky clay character through the mid-palate,” he explained. “It’s denser, like the soil. It’s such a direct relationship.”

Like many of his colleagues, Shouler believes that employing winemaking methodology such as minimal extraction is best when it comes to expressing a given site. “The vineyard gives us a lot of natural color and tannin, so it’s really a matter of holding back and letting the vineyard do the talking,” he noted. He also named inoculating with a *pied de cuve* “as one of the most important things we do” during the winemaking process; French for “foot of tank,” the technique involves harvesting wild yeast from the vineyard for use in fermentation. In Giesen’s case, using Clayvin’s natural yeast “allow[s] the vineyard’s microflora to express itself in the wine as well,” said Shouler, giving it a floral character that Robinson likened to “roses just starting to wilt in a heady expression.” Thanks to Giesen’s foresight, it seems that its Pinot Noir is in full bloom 30 years after the planting of Clayvin.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF GIESEN WINES



Giesen Wines’ Clayvin Vineyard in Marlborough.



Giesen 2016 Pinot Noir, Clayvin Vineyard, Marlborough, New Zealand (\$60)

Scents of wet leaves, cherry, and cinnamon become broad and juicy on the palate. Against a backdrop of perky acidity, cinnamon joins forces with clove and sassafras as wild strawberry surrounds a sweet yet slightly savory core of earth. The finish is dusky and floral. **93** —M.M.

PACIFIC HIGHWAY WINES & SPIRITS



Lloyd's proprietary open-top fermenter with a submerged cap operates like a French press.

Sta. Rita Hills

SANTA BARBARA COUNTY, CALIFORNIA

SommGeo Sound Bite: “Largely you have Pinot Noir and Chardonnay making a home in the Sta. Rita Hills, where you get a ton of fog and cool temperatures at Region I on the Winkler Scale. The region sits on the very western edge of Santa Barbara, just 4 miles from the Pacific Ocean. Local lore here that’s actually true says that for every mile that you go [inland] from the Pacific Ocean, the temperature rises 1 degree.” —G.V.

Winery: Lloyd Cellars

Winemaker: Rob Lloyd



After considering all the incredible areas in which to make Californian Pinot Noir, winemaker/proprietor Rob Lloyd carefully chose the Sta. Rita Hills to join the Napa-based winery’s portfolio of rich and rounded wines from the Alexander Valley, Carneros, and Clarksburg: “We definitely like getting a lot of extraction and a lot of color. I’m kind of known for making big Chards, so I need to have a big Pinot,” said Lloyd, who had successful stints at

Rombauer and La Crema before establishing Lloyd Cellars and his own consulting business with his wife, Bonnie, in 2008.

While sipping on the Lloyd Cellars 2018 Pinot Noir, Robinson marveled at the well-draining diatomaceous soil found within the winery’s pair of Sta. Rita sources, the La Viña and Rio Vista vineyards. In fact, the area boasts some of the world’s largest deposits of the chalky, fossilized algae as a result of past volcanic eruptions and earthquakes. “The boots don’t lie—I’ll be walking around the vineyard in black boots and I hop back in the car and they are white,” said Lloyd. “So [there’s] just a ton of powdery soil, and the fun thing for me is sourcing from two sites there.” Although the vineyards share a similar soil profile, Lloyd points out that Rio Vista is a bit warmer, as it’s located further inland, and features a bit of clay in its soils. “I really like how they come together and complement each other,” Lloyd added, describing La Viña as feminine and Rio Vista as masculine.

Perhaps, though, Lloyd Cellars’ bigger, richer style of Pinot is also a result of its proprietor’s uncommon winemaking techniques: Lloyd and his team have developed open-top fermenters with a submerged cap screen that “basically acts like a French press,” he said. The custom-made screens press the skins about 8 inches under the fermenting juice, eliminating punchdowns and extending maceration while minimizing pumpovers, reducing the risk of microbial infection, and requiring less yeast as a result of a faster ferment. “So rather

than me having to jump in and mix, we use what the yeast is naturally generating—the CO₂—and it constantly kind of mixes the wine. Then we’ll do once-a-day rack and returns to get that oxygen in and keep the ferment nice and healthy and active,” Lloyd said. He also noted that he’s not a “huge sulfur-dioxide fan,” so he seeks to both minimize and delay its use, instead relying on the aforementioned natural carbon dioxide to stabilize the wine. It’s a risky move for the winemaker, as it limits his production capacity, but in his view it’s one worth taking.

When Robinson asked about the diatomaceous soil’s impact on the wine, Lloyd said he believed that the higher acid found in the Pinot from La Viña had more to do with its closer proximity to the ocean. And rather than talk texture like most of the other winemakers, he noted he simply ensures that his Pinot passes what he calls “the bottle test,” asking, “Does it go down smoothly enough so that you want to open that second bottle?” A smiling Robinson then thanked Lloyd for sending her two. *SJ*



Lloyd Cellars 2018 Pinot Noir, Sta. Rita Hills, Santa Ynez Valley, Santa Barbara County (\$50)

It’s a beautiful expression; this, along with the Merry Edwards, is going more [in] the direction of the dark fruits, black fruits—a little bit more of the lusty dusty. —A.R.

Sourced from the La Viña and Rio Vista vineyards, the juice fermented in stainless steel and aged for ten months in French oak before spending an additional 12 months in bottle prior to release. The senses are piqued by aromas of earth, basil, and white pepper as the cool yet vibrant palate leads with cherry and briar. Dynamic acidity and a sleek texture allow notes of rhubarb, tomato leaf, and candied cranberry to shine. **94** —M.M.

THE BUILDING BLOCKS OF Cabernet

CONSTRUCTING THE
2019 VINTAGE WITH
**SEQUOIA GROVE
WINEMAKER MOLLY HILL**

by Deborah Parker Wong

Recently, I had the opportunity to join Molly Hill, winemaker of Rutherford, California, estate Sequoia Grove, in walking the vineyard and sitting down for a component tasting of some of the first wines vinified in the property's newly upgraded cellar. It provided the ideal moment to reflect on the producer's long history—and on Hill's talents.

Hill has been making wine at Sequoia Grove since 2008, but I first wrote about her in 2014 in my long-running *Tasting Panel* column "San Fran Insider," after she hosted a dinner at the Clift Hotel's Velvet Room to mark her 11th year at the winery. The vintages she showcased were some of that decade's most challenging: a 2010 and 2011. Yet they both received rave reviews upon release, and they remained beautiful several years later, when I pulled the bottles she gave me from the cellar.

Sequoia Grove
winemaker
Molly Hill.





The Sequoia Grove estate in Rutherford, CA.

Much had changed since my last visit to the Rutherford estate, where vines have been planted since 1865. It was founded in 1979 by James and Barbara Allen before being sold to the Kopf family in 2002, who invested \$15 million for renovations in 2017 that more than doubled the footprint of the original winery—housed in a renovated 100-year-old barn—and significantly upgraded the cellar and visitor experience.

Enhancements in the form of an ever-so-gentle Pellenc destemmer and sorting table as well as a state-of-the-art Willmes press that allows for precise press fractions have given Hill far more flexibility. “In the past, we found differences in flavor profiles based on the distance the wine traveled from one vessel to another,” she said. “With the adjustments that I can now make in the cellar, there is far more precision and consistency.” That level of control also allows her more leeway in deciding exactly when to pick.

In short, Hill and her team, which includes vineyard manager Jake Terrell, now have more room to do what they do best: craft wines that are emblematic of the renowned Rutherford AVA. She credits Terrell with insightful farming practices throughout the estate’s 75 acres of plantings, including the Sequoia Grove and Tonella vineyards, which have contributed to the evolving flavor profile of a precious few rows of Petit Verdot and to the more complex meat and sage flavors she gets from blends. But she also sources fruit from the longtime growers of such vineyards as Stagecoach, Morisoli, Lamoreaux, Healy, and Henry Brothers.

When I asked Hill about the evolution of her barrel-aging regimen, she told me she works with a mélange of coopers and prefers French over American oak as the key to achieving balance and a fuller expression of terroir. Her wines also benefit from a year of bottle conditioning before release, which allows for better integration of flavors and smoother tannins.

While the final blend of the Sequoia Grove 2019 Napa Valley Cabernet Sauvignon was not yet ready at the time of my visit, Hill invited me to taste the component wines that will make up the finished product from barrel. I was struck by how complete they already were; that’s not always the case, and it points to the meticulous work that’s being done both in the vineyard and the cellar at Sequoia Grove. Because they could arguably stand on their own, each component was deserving of its own tasting note. S|

Component Tasting Notes for the 2019 Napa Valley Cabernet Sauvignon

2019 Tonella Vineyard Block 7A Cabernet Franc:

Ruby-violet in the glass and medium bodied, with focused aromas of violet, lavender, dried Provençal herbs, blue plum, earth, bittersweet cocoa, and cedar. It’s very successful in showing restrained typicity, elegant fruit, and the balance for which this variety is so cherished.

2019 Stagecoach Vineyard Merlot:

An archetypal “mountain Merlot” with an amplified mid-palate of red and black raspberry, cassis, and dark spices, including black pepper, plus depth from carob and vanilla.

Sequoia Grove Vineyard Block D Red Wine:

This field blend serves as a snapshot of the eponymous estate vineyard, comprising 63% Cabernet Sauvignon, 20% Cabernet Franc, 12.5% Malbec from recently replanted blocks adjacent to Highway 29, and 4.5% Merlot. Fragrant with dried fennel seed, it’s a tapestry of red and black fruit supported by fine, silky tannins.

Tonella Vineyard Block 10B Cabernet Sauvignon:

Indicative of the relative warmth of the designated site, which lies west of the Silverado Trail on well-drained Bale clay loam. Tonella is planted to the Healy clone, which has specific markers of milk chocolate. It’s a focused, round wine with a mouth-coating plushness that unabashedly says, “Drink me.”

Tonella Vineyard Block 2A Cabernet Sauvignon:

Relying on a different pairing of clones and rootstock than Block 10B, this shows black cherry and plum, graphite, and espresso, as well as the classic dusty tannins that are considered a marker of the alluvial fans that make their way across the valley floor.

Sequoia Grove Vineyard Block D Petit Verdot:

Lifted aromas of violet and sage against a wave of dark fruit are supported by well-knit tannins around a voluminous frame. In the vineyard, the round, lime-green leaves and smaller bunches of this variety make it stand out against the darker-hued foliage of Cabernet Sauvignon.



As for the currently available **Sequoia Grove 2018 Napa Valley Cabernet Sauvignon**, it spent 20 months in 50% new French oak (with the remainder being second-use) as well as one year in bottle. Hill’s blending technique reaches high art here: The wine shows floral and star-anise aromas along with exceptionally pretty, focused fruit wrapped around a firm core of fine, decidedly silky tannins, including red and black currant that moves toward darker blackberry and mulberry through the finish. That pristine fruit radiates with bright acidity and the promise of unfurling over time.

The four-day Master of Wine exam includes both theory and a practical component that involves tasting and identifying dozens of wines.



“A Powerful Motivating Force”

A MASTER OF
WINE CANDIDATE
CONSIDERS THE
IMPACT OF A
SOMMFOUNDATION
SCHOLARSHIP ON
HIS FUTURE

by Phillip Anderson

I WAS SITTING IN MY CAR eating lunch one day last year when the phone rang. I was shocked and thrilled to find that I had been chosen to receive a David A. Carpenter Masters of Wine Scholarship from SommFoundation. As I sat there in the parking lot, I realized that someone I had never met believed I could pass the test—and that I'd better start believing it too.

The Master of Wine exam is a mentally exhausting experience that takes place annually over four days in locations around the world (except 2020, when it was canceled). You start the first three days with the practical portion of the test, centered on a flight of 12 wines that can come from any region: Day one is whites, day two is reds, and on day three, you get a mixed bag that includes sparkling and fortified wines. You have two hours and 15 minutes to answer questions about them, during which you might describe how the production techniques differed between three of the wines, where they originated, which grapes were used, and how you would sell them.

After lunch (and for the entirety of day four), you're back to work on the theory section of the exam, writing detailed essays about everything in the wine world, from the soil to the glass. The exact time allotted for completion is 21 hours and 45 minutes, and because the exam isn't multiple choice and requires lengthy answers, the grading process takes months.



Pictured at left, a lineup of wines from a Bordeaux tasting organized by The Institute of Masters of Wine; at right, Burgundy samples from a Napa Valley Wine Academy class.

I took the exam in June 2019 and received results in September. I passed theory and failed practical, yet I had never been so ecstatic to pass part of an exam! Now, to advance, I must again endure a mere six hours and 45 minutes of testing over three days. Piece of cake, right? No. Many who pass theory can't pass the daunting practical section. One reason is that the information you need to pass the former is freely available; some books are worth purchasing, but much of the best information is accessible online. Need to learn about a specific aspect of winemaking? The Australian Wine Institute has an article. Have a question about how a famous winery farms? Email them. It's fantastic how many viticulturists or winemakers will take the time to send a thoughtful response.

The practical section is different. The MW program hosts trade tastings of Bordeaux and Champagne each year in various cities, but this isn't enough. You must try a huge variety of wines and, for example, be able to tell that a given expression is not only a Pinot Gris but also that it is from New Zealand, spent six months on the lees, and aged two years in 75% new French oak barrels. Then, you must be able to explain how it differs in quality level and path to market from the Oregon Pinot Gris in the next glass. There

may be some savants who can do this after trying the wine once. I'm not one of them. There is therefore a serious financial commitment involved in buying the wines you must familiarize yourself with in order to pass the test. Students in wine-buying positions may receive a wide variety of free samples, but for many, expense can be a barrier.

Thankfully, SommFoundation has made a significant difference in my education by enabling me to purchase wines that I couldn't have afforded on my own and to stock my library with a wider range of bottlings for use in blind tastings. It has leveled the playing field, but more importantly, it has given me much-needed encouragement. There are times when I am tired of the program. I would like to spend more time with my family, and I would love to read a book about something besides wine! But the fact that David and Diane Carpenter and SommFoundation see me as a candidate worth investing in is a powerful motivating force. I get support from my family, but there is something about this scholarship that inspires me far beyond the wines that it purchased. It makes me feel as though achieving my goals is possible.

In my application for the scholarship, I mentioned that I have a desire to pay it

forward. I enjoy teaching people about wine and am always willing to work with students who are enrolled in the WSET program or other courses. If I can complete the MW journey, I will make a point of being the best mentor I can possibly be to my peers or anyone who is interested in learning about wine. If you have questions about the program, feel free to contact me at phillipdanielanderson@gmail.com. *sj*



Author Phillip Anderson is a recipient of SommFoundation's David A. Carpenter Masters of Wine Scholarship.

Success has been a long time coming for restaurateur Jacopo Falleni, the owner and general manager of Nonna, which is located just north of Los Angeles in Westlake Village, CA.

Grandma's GIFT

JACOPO FALLENI HONORS HIS ITALIAN ROOTS WITH **NONNA** IN WESTLAKE VILLAGE, CA

story by Meridith May / photos by Rafael Peterson

"If nothing is going well, call your grandmother." —Italian proverb

Although Jacopo Falleni was not an overnight success, he came to earn his top-notch reputation as a restaurateur through a series of hard-won victories.

The cuisine at Nonna focuses primarily on the traditions of Bologna in Emilia-Romagna. Chef Christian Trovato, who helms the kitchen, makes his pastas in house; pictured here is the cacio e pepe with black truffles.



While growing up in Florence, Italy, his dream was to open a cocktail bar and bistro. He lacked the resources to do so, but after graduating from hotel management school, he “was fortunate to be involved with a young woman whose family of chefs were prompted to get back in the business by my ambitions,” explains Falleni. “We opened Café Amici Mieì, and it took off.” It was so popular, in fact, that a Florentine entrepreneur noticed his talent and offered him an opportunity to open a gelato bar in New York City.

“I knew nothing about gelato,” confesses Falleni, but he decided to take the risk, enrolling in a six-month course in Bologna to gain a better understanding of the blend of cream, milk, sugar, chocolate, and the various pastes behind the gelato flavors he would soon be selling.

In 2000, Falleni opened Il Gelatone in Manhattan’s Murray Hill neighborhood; while the business did stunning numbers, New York was not a perfect fit for him, so after a couple of years, he returned to Florence. “I was still very young, and now the ability to speak English gave me an edge,” he notes. Landing a job at one of the city’s hot spots, Café Revoir, he was once again noticed for his sense of creativity and warm hospitality by an American businessman and restaurateur, who offered Falleni a general manager position at Café Fiore in Ventura, California.

It took only three years before he was able to open his own stateside restaurant,

Café Firenze, which received high acclaim from critics despite being tucked away in the relatively remote Southern California suburb of Moorpark. From there, he opened a more easily accessible location in North Hollywood before eventually selling both.

Capturing Nostalgia with Nonna

Discovering the city of Westlake Village, which borders Los Angeles and Ventura counties, set Falleni on a path toward an

even brighter future. He took jobs at several restaurants in this upscale community, and after making friends with—and eventually working for—the most respected hotelier in the area, John Notter, and operations manager Chris Cuijly of the Westlake Village Inn as well as his compatriot Tommaso Barletta, owner of Tuscany II Ristorante, Falleni was inspired once again to open his own place.

After purchasing an existing space with business partner Jhon Spina, Falleni remodeled and designed his new restaurant with the help of his friend Tania Russell. The rustic-chic decor of Nonna, which opened in 2018, was inspired by “a memory of visiting my two grandmothers,” the Italian singular for which is *nonna*, he reveals. “We have no matching plates, a variety of silverware styles, and mismatched chairs and imported European chandeliers—that’s what makes it homey,” he says of the spacious, whimsical dining room. “The silverware and glassware are vintage, but I commissioned [lighting designer] Tim Ferrie for the custom light fixtures, using copper refrigeration lining to create lights in shapes of whisks and birdcages.”

Further explaining the influence of his nonnas, Falleni adds, “Grandma’s house is where you hide from your parents and eat the best food in the world.” *sj*



Chris Barragan is lead bartender at Nonna as well as at The Arthur J in Manhattan Beach, CA. His skills have earned him top honors at competitions all over the world. In celebration of Negroni Week in September, Barragan and Falleni collaborated to create a Smoked Negroni.

Libation Station

Jacopo Falleni’s dream of opening his own cocktail bar evolved over the years as he adapted his bartending skills as well as his creativity with recipes to the various venues he’s worked at and owned over the years. The craft cocktail bar at Nonna, finally open in the wake of restrictions imposed by the pandemic, has been elevated to an even higher level with the addition of award-winning mixologist Chris Barragan. “It’s difficult to find someone as knowledgeable and dedicated,” Falleni tells *The SOMM Journal*. “In Italy we call it ‘white flies,’ or *mosche bianche*. They just don’t exist. Barragan is one in a million.”



PHOTO COURTESY OF ALISHA SOMMER
by Alisha Sommer

Maternal Forces In Sync

HOW THE WINE INDUSTRY CAN SUPPORT WORKING MOMS

"I think every working mom probably feels the same thing. You go through big chunks of time where you're just thinking, 'This is impossible—oh, this is impossible.' And then you just keep going and keep going, and you sort of do the impossible." —Tina Fey

CHALLENGES FOR MOTHERS exist at almost every level within the wine industry, from the vineyard to the tasting room to the C-suite. Winemaking is strenuous work, requiring considerable physical labor on an unpredictable schedule; during harvest season, it is not uncommon to work 60 or more hours a week. Women in these roles struggle to balance their desire to achieve their career goals with the needs of their families. "With my husband in the industry too, harvest is this wild time where we're both working excessive hours," says Jennifer Reichardt, winemaker and owner of Raft Wines. "We do want kids and have talked about timing, but we just don't know how it will work."

For Tahira Habibi, sommelier and founder of The Hue Society, navigating events was one of the more difficult parts of re-entering the industry after having a child. "Wine is always after hours. [For] a single parent, after-work hours are after-school hours. I had to bring my child with me," she says. "I would strap her on my back and go to tastings." Though she figured out ways to bring her child into her work environment safely, she experienced judgment from those around her. "Why can't child care be built in?" Habibi asks. "If restaurants can have water bowls for dogs, why can't there be a room for children to sit and color?" Now Habibi creates food and wine experiences with the intention of making them as accessible as possible. At Wine & Culture Fest in Atlanta this August, for instance, she will provide onsite child care for a nominal fee

PHOTO: KRISTAL SMITH



Tahira Habibi,
founder of *The Hue Society*, with
her daughter.

to all parents who might not otherwise be able to attend the celebration of BIPOC achievements in food and wine due to lack of available care.

While conversations about the relationship between career and family continue to occur over coffee among women like my friends and me, what kinds of conversations are industry executives and management teams having about the needs of working mothers in the industry? At Wente Family Estates, the strategy involves the strong presence of women in leadership positions. "Female leaders are integrated within every facet and discipline of the business," says Suzi Potts, senior vice president of human resources and head of

people for Wente Family Estates. "The organic and consistent inclusion of women creates a culture in which women support one another through daily connection, shared understanding, and compassion [for] the realities of pursuing your passion at work and at home. Each individual female leader's story and experience is unique, and our continued goal is to be an employer of choice for women within the industry. It is part of the fabric of the brand, the tradition of Wente Family Estates, and it is organic to our growth."

If every wine company were to take this kind of approach, we would be on the right path toward creating an industry that is more inclusive and supportive of mothers. **SJ**

Alisha Sommer is the director of marketing and e-commerce for Trois Noix Wine.

Fresh Voices is a collaborative effort between The SOMM Journal, The Tasting Panel, and 501(c)(3) organization Dream Big Darling. The concept centers around providing opportunities to and amplifying the voices of the next generation of women in the wine and spirits industry. To learn more about Dream Big Darling, visit dreambigdarling.org or follow @dreambigdarling_org on Instagram.

SANTA MARGHERITA USA:

AMOSAIC

of Italian Wines

*Santa Margherita
was established in the
eastern Veneto in 1935.*

Santa Margherita was founded in 1935, and over the past 80 years, we have added to our original estate in the eastern Veneto many wineries that incorporate the best terroirs across Italy. These territories include Alpine-influenced Alto Adige, the rolling hills of Lombardy, beautiful Tuscany, and the rocky coast of Sardinia. Santa Margherita USA is an import company representing these premium and ultra-premium producers—including prestigious Valpolicella estate Masi, the newest addition to our portfolio.

The Santa Margherita-Gruppo Vinicolo, our parent company, is one of the leading ambassadors of Italian excellence worldwide, from Venice and Rome to New York and Shanghai. Our bottles have written the history of Italian wine: Love and respect for the territory, attention to native grape varieties, a deep bond with tradition, and the endless pursuit of quality are our founding principles, and they drive our passion every day. The result is a “mosaic” of estates that focus on native grape varieties to produce a captivating range of expressions, each of which perfectly captures the subtleties and unique aspects of the aforementioned terroirs.

VENETO

The Veneto has an interesting landscape that encompasses both steep, pre-Alpine hills and stretches of plains warmed by the Adriatic Sea. It's no surprise, then, that this diverse area contains dozens of appellations and can produce wines with distinctive personalities, from the majestic Amarone and the delightful Prosecco to the well-loved Pinot Grigio and everything in between.



Prosecco Superiore DOCG

Accounting for only 17% of all Prosecco production, Prosecco Superiore DOCG is made from grapes grown between the historic hilltop towns of Conegliano and Valdobbiadene. Yields in this historic appellation, which was shaped by ancient glaciers, are the lowest in the Prosecco region (13.5 tons/hectare versus 18 tons/hectare in the broader Prosecco DOC).

Within the Prosecco Superiore DOCG is a collection of single-village wines called Rive. There are currently 43 established villages based on soil studies by the Conegliano School of Enology that can qualify as Rive; with yields that are lower still (13 tons/hectare), producers here, like those in Prosecco Superiore, can make all traditional sparkling wine styles except Extra Brut and Dolce.

Santa Margherita Valdobbiadene Prosecco Superiore DOCG

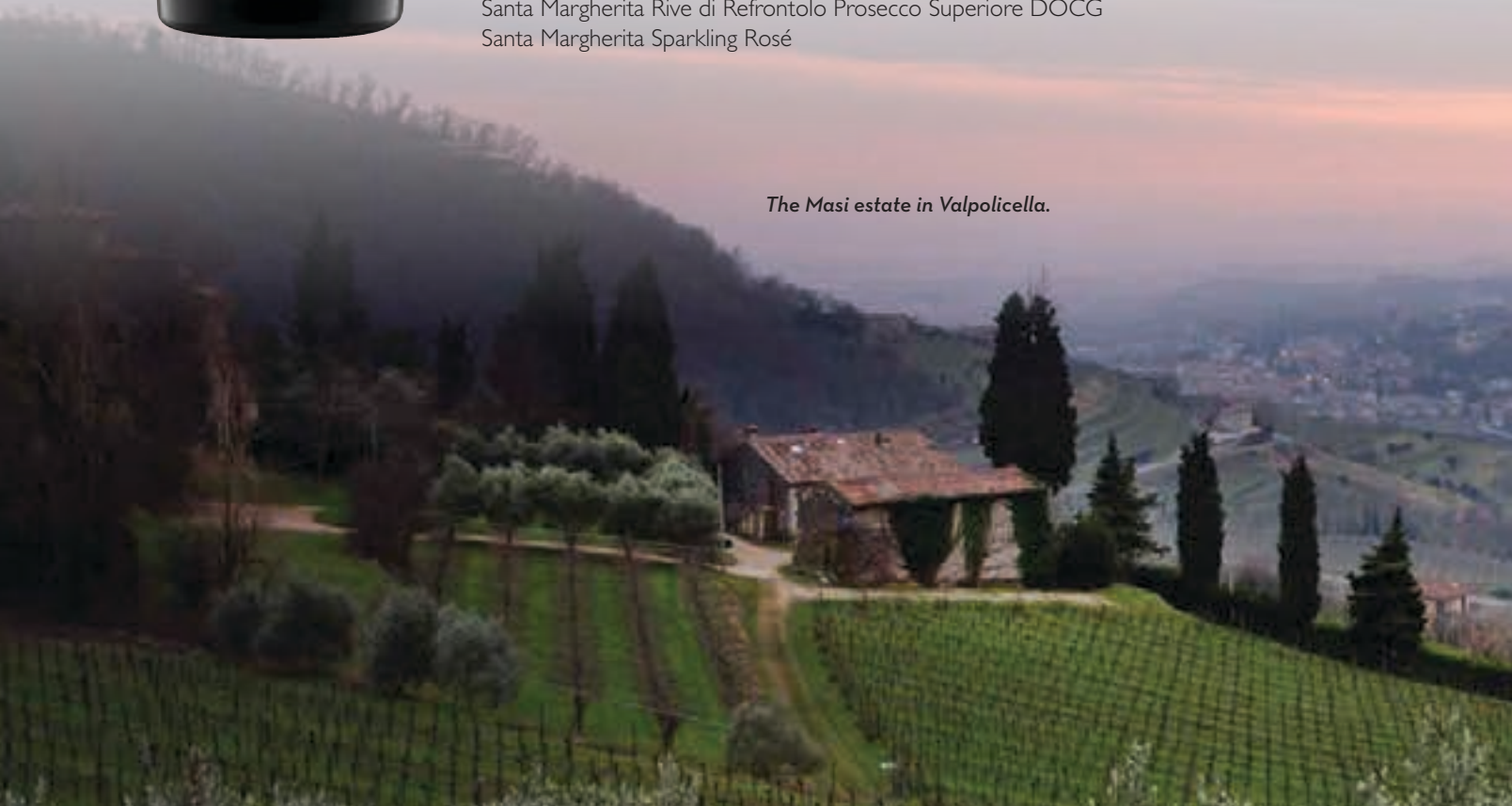
In 1952, Santa Margherita made its first vintage of Prosecco, helping transform a local sparkling wine into a global phenomenon in just a few decades. Most of Santa Margherita's vineyards are near Valdobbiadene, benefiting from pre-Alpine high altitudes, dramatic slopes, and shallow topsoil. Vineyards near Conegliano were shaped by more glacial activity as well as deeper soils and exhibit slopes that, while typically gentle, can reach astonishing gradients of up to 30%.

- **GRAPES:** 100% Glera
- **STYLE:** Dry with fine, lively bubbles; delicate fruity aromas; and a crisp finish
- **PRODUCTION:** Charmat (tank) method; rested on the lees for three months before bottling

Also look for:

Santa Margherita Rive di Refrontolo Prosecco Superiore DOCG
Santa Margherita Sparkling Rosé

The Masi estate in Valpolicella.



Prosecco Rosé DOC

Prosecco Rosé, which is allowed only in the broader Prosecco DOC (not DOCG) category, was introduced in early 2021 and is an exciting addition to the market, as it is affordable, accessible, and easy to drink. Pinot Nero was already permitted as a vinified white in the classic Prosecco DOC, but by allowing its addition as a red wine (10–15% maximum), guests can now be delighted by both the beautiful fruity flavors and delicate pink hue it contributes. Unlike Prosecco DOC, these wines must be vintage dated and can only be made in the drier styles, from Brut Nature to Extra Dry (no sweeter dessert styles are permitted).



Torresella Prosecco Rosé DOC

Torresella borrows its name from the dairy farm established in 1935 by the Marzotto family, who founded Santa Margherita that same year. Back then, milk was packaged in glass, and even today, Torresella continues to produce its bottles from recycled glass at the glasswork within its solar-powered winery in Portogruaro, Italy; this and many other initiatives meant to lower its carbon footprint have enabled Torresella to be certified sustainable by the Sistema di Qualità Nazionale Produzione Integrata (SQNPI).

- **GRAPES:** Mainly Glera with 10% of Pinot Nero from a single vintage
- **STYLE:** Dry, with notes of bright citrus and elegant strawberry lifted by lively bubbles that culminate in a juicy finish
- **PRODUCTION:** Charmat (tank) method; aged 60 days on lees and finished in Brut style

Also look for:

Torresella Pinot Grigio Venezia DOC
Torresella Prosecco DOC

Amarone della Valpolicella Classico DOCG

While Valpolicella may not be as widely known, the leading wine of this region, Amarone, is certainly familiar to many wine lovers. *Classico* indicates that the grapes for this wine were grown in the smaller historic area in which more dramatic topography develops greater character in the fruit, led by Corvina and Corvinone (which combined must be 45–95% of the blend). As part of the traditional method used here, known as *appassimento*, grapes are dried for months before fermentation begins to result in more concentrated wines; Corvina in particular continues to develop phenolic compounds and exhibit biochemical changes during the drying process for far longer than other grapes, enabling it to create plush and satisfying expressions that U.S. consumers love.



Masi Campofiorin Rosso del Veronese IGT

For more than 200 years, the Boscaini family of Masi has been vital to Valpolicella's evolution. Take the past 50 years alone: They not only introduced the Valpolicella Ripasso style in the 1960s but they also pioneered the double-fermentation technique for their flagship wine, Campofiorin. Due to modern vinification and the use of semi-dried grapes instead of just the skins as in the Ripasso method, Campofiorin exhibits freshness and density, reflecting the best characters of both Valpolicella and Amarone.

- **GRAPES:** 70% Corvina, 25% Rondinella, 5% Molinara
- **STYLE:** A fresh yet concentrated dry red wine with aromas of red cherry and spice; lively acidity; and plush tannins
- **PRODUCTION:** Double fermentation in which 25% of the grapes are partially dried before being added to the freshly fermented wine

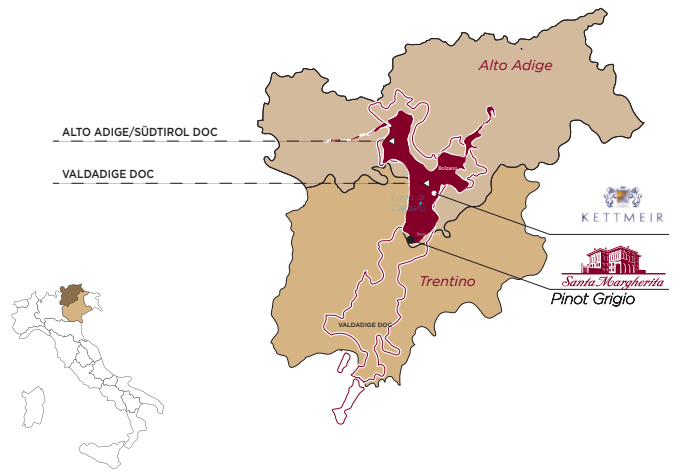
Also look for:

Masi Costasera Amarone della Valpolicella Classico DOCG
Masi Bonacosta Valpolicella Classico DOC
Masi Brolo di Campofiorin Rosso del Veronese IGT
Masi Masiano Pinot Grigio delle Venezie DOC
Masi Campolongo di Torbe Amarone della Valpolicella Classico DOCG
Masi Mazanno Amarone della Valpolicella Classico DOCG

ALTO ADIGE

Alto Adige DOC

Alto Adige (also known as Südtirol in German) is one of Italy's most notable but least discussed wine regions. Due to the mountainous topography, land suitable for cultivation is limited, so it accounts for less than 1% of all Italian wine production.



Santa Margherita Pinot Grigio Adige River Valley

From one vineyard to the next and even between neighboring rows of vines, a considerable range of microclimates can be found in Italy's northernmost winegrowing area. A similar diversity of soils, altitudes, and exposures also provides the magic that manifests as complexity in the glass, even though many of the wines are 100% varietal.

Santa Margherita Pinot Grigio gained its iconic status after 1961, when it became one of the first Italian Pinot Grigios to be vinified as a monovarietal off the copper-colored skins, thereby enhancing the brilliance and freshness of the fruit and bringing out the wine's enormous versatility.

- **GRAPES:** 100% Pinot Grigio
- **STYLE:** Dry, with intense aromas; appealing flavors of Golden Delicious apple and citrus; and a long, multilayered finish
- **PRODUCTION:** Cool-temperature fermentation in stainless steel



Kettmeir Pinot Grigio

An important element of this area is the *maso chiuso*, to use the name for a house and surrounding land large enough to guarantee income for a family of five. In practice, this means about 5,400 grape growers oversee 5,300 hectares of vines, which equates to just under 1 hectare per family! With over 100 years of experience producing wines in Alto Adige, Kettmeir has maintained multigenerational relationships with these small farms to deliver consistent and gastronomic white wines year after year.

- **GRAPES:** 100% Pinot Grigio
- **STYLE:** Dry and unoaked, with notes of orchard fruit (apple/pear) and crisp acidity
- **PRODUCTION:** Cool-temperature fermentation in stainless steel

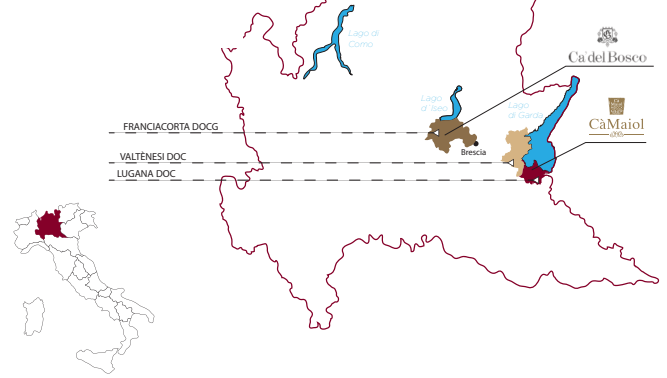
Also look for:

Kettmeir Pinot Bianco
Kettmeir Müller Thurgau
Kettmeir Pinot Nero

The Kettmeir estate in Alto Adige.

LOMBARDY

Lombardy is a quilt of mountains, hills, and plains encompassing the great Italian lakes, among them Lake Como, Lake Iseo, and Lake Garda, in the middle of Italy's northern stretch of provinces.



Franciacorta DOCG

The wines of Franciacorta, located about an hour outside of Milan on Lake Iseo, are made by the same technique used in Champagne: the *metodo classico* (traditional method), whereby flavors are derived from secondary fermentation (which creates the bubbles) and extended time on the lees. Franciacorta has a shorter history as a sparkling wine region than Champagne and is home to many pioneering winemakers, yet it has adopted a production code that is both stricter and more comprehensive than any other sparkling wine region in the world.



Ca' del Bosco Cuvée Prestige Edizione MV

Ca' del Bosco, founded in 1968 by Maurizio Zanella, has always considered the quality of the grapes coming out of the vineyard to be the most critical aspect in crafting a great wine with bubbles. Over the previous five decades, Ca' del Bosco has invested in the best vineyard areas of Franciacorta and now grows grapes in ten of the appellation's 19 communes. Elevation is a key marker of quality in Franciacorta, and Ca' del Bosco has the highest-elevation plantings in the entire region.

- **GRAPES:** Chardonnay-dominant, with Pinot Nero and Pinot Bianco
- **STYLE:** Extra Brut (roughly 1 gram/liter of residual sugar)
- **PRODUCTION:** Second fermentation in bottle; aged at least 25 months on the lees

The vineyards of Ca' del Bosco in the Franciacorta DOCG.

Lugana DOC

Much like the Finger Lakes in New York, Lake Garda was carved by ancient glaciers that once covered Northeast Italy before retreating north. They also left behind a very particular soil made up of stratified layers of clay and limestone, which now defines the DOC of Lugana. Broadly speaking, clay soils give power to a wine, while limestone emphasizes elegance. The main grape of this white wine-only DOC is Trebbiano di Lugana, also called Turbiana.



The terroir of Cà Maiol in the Lugana DOC.



Cà Maiol Lugana DOC

While Turbiana is not on every guest's radar, this wine's flavor profile combines the richness of an unoaked Chardonnay with the zesty acidity of an Italian Pinot Grigio. It moves effortlessly between the familiar and the exotic, combining the opportunity to explore a lesser-known region with an easy-drinking experience that guests gravitate toward.

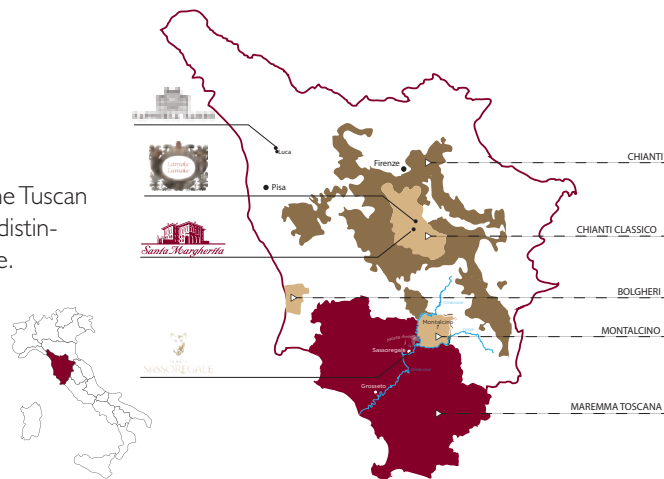
- **GRAPES:** 100% Turbiana
- **STYLE:** Fresh and unoaked, with a medium body and flavors of orchard and citrus fruit that lead to a juicy finish
- **PRODUCTION:** Cool-temperature fermentation and matured in stainless steel

Also look for:

- Cà Maiol Chiaretto (Groppello rosé blend)
- Cà Maiol Giomè (Groppello red blend)
- Cà Maiol Molin (Trebbiano di Lugana)

TUSCANY

No metaphor is over the top when it comes to describing the beauty of the Tuscan countryside. Red wine dominates production (over 90%), with Sangiovese distinguished as the most widely planted red grape both here and in Italy at large.



Chianti Classico DOCG

Chianti was one of the first wine zones in Italy to establish its own production regulations and protocols. Chianti Classico, which is its own DOCG completely separate from the Chianti DOCG, represents the broader region's historic heartland and produces its best wines. Requiring a higher base of Sangiovese relative to Chianti (80% minimum versus 70%), Chianti Classico recently created a new quality category above the Riserva designation called Gran Selezione.

Lamole di Lamole Chianti Classico DOCG

With vineyards planted as high as 2,130 feet (local regulations do not allow Chianti Classico to be grown above 2,290 feet), Lamole di Lamole makes award-winning wines that express the freshness of remarkable elevation. Lamole's own *metodo differita* (a deferred extraction method) helps capture the elegance and richness of its estate fruit.

- **GRAPES:** 80% Sangiovese, 10% Merlot, and 10% Cabernet Sauvignon
- **STYLE:** Notes of red cherry, earth, and warm spice within a full, rich body
- **PRODUCTION:** Traditional fermentation precedes six months of aging in large oak casks, followed by six more months in barriques of various toasts

Also look for:

- Santa Margherita Chianti Classico Riserva DOCG
- Lamole di Lamole Chianti Classico Riserva DOCG
- Lamole di Lamole Vigneto di Campolungo Chianti Classico DOCG Gran Selezione

Lamole di Lamole's Chianti Classico plantings.





Sassoregale's vineyards are just outside the town of Grosseto in the Maremma Toscana DOC.

Maremma Toscana DOC

The Tuscan Maremma is Italy's Wild West: This rugged, varied, and beautiful coastal area borders the Tyrrhenian Sea between the provinces of Livorno and Grosseto and is home to the legendary cowboys (*butteri*) that still tend the land today. Still sparsely populated and lacking in heavy industry, it has been named one of the cleanest spots in terms of air quality in all of Italy.

Sassoregale Vermentino Maremma Toscana DOC

Sassoregale's vineyards are just outside of the town of Grosseto, a stone's throw away from Montalcino. The vineyards here, farmed organically, are surrounded by virgin forests; here, flora and fauna create a natural habitat for the wild Cinghiale boar depicted on the winery's labels to represent its wines' bold and untamed soul. Vermentino is quickly becoming the most popular white wine from Tuscany thanks to its citrus-driven profile, with a fresh herbal edge of sage.

- **GRAPE:** 100% Vermentino
- **STYLE:** Dry, with flavors of robust citrus and stone fruit framed by herbal notes and a fresh finish
- **PRODUCTION:** Cool-temperature fermentation in stainless steel

Also look for:

Sassoregale Sangiovese Maremma Toscana DOC



Northwest Tuscany

The phrase "under the Tuscan sun" conjures images of a climate too warm for quality rosé production. However, in Lucca, an interesting microclimate is nestled in a little pocket outside this walled medieval town, located between the Apuan Alps, the Apennines, and the Tyrrhenian Sea.

Fattoria Sardi Rosé Toscana IGT

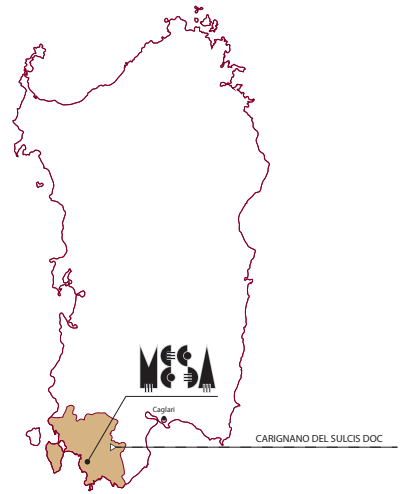
In this little corner of northwest Tuscany, very conscious winemakers have formed a close bond with the land, which has been in the same family for centuries. For over ten years, this Biodynamic and certified-organic estate has been focused on rosé production.

- **GRAPE:** 75% Sangiovese, 15% Vermentino, and 10% Syrah
- **STYLE:** Dry and crisp, with attractive floral notes of rose; raspberry aromas; and a bright, clean finish
- **PRODUCTION:** Rosé color extracted by brief maceration before a gently pressing of the grapes; fermented at low temperature



SARDINIA

Sardinia is a dream destination located about 150 miles off of Italy's west coast. Though the second-largest island in the Mediterranean, it's among the smallest of the country's wine regions in terms of production, representing only about 4% of all Italian wines. While Vermentino is thought to be indigenous to Piedmont (where it is called Favorita), 75% of all Italian Vermentino is grown on the island of Sardinia.



Vermentino di Sardegna DOC

Vermentino is Sardinia's most planted white grape, and the DOC covers the whole island. The grape is synonymous with the Mediterranean, as it's planted in several areas along the seashore, including Tuscany and Liguria (where it's called Pigato) as well as Corsica (where it's known as Vermentinu) and Provence (where it goes by Rolle) in France. Hallmark notes of bright citrus and crisp acidity are framed by the dried herbal character of thyme and rosemary rather than the fresh herbal note found in Tuscan versions.

Cantina Mesa Giunco Vermentino di Sardegna DOC

Giunco (*june-ko*) is sourced from three vineyard plots: Su Baroni, which is located in front of the winery and overlooks the Mediterranean Sea; Masainas Giunco, which is further inland yet still only 3 miles from the sea; and S'isca Piscinas, located 9 miles from the sea. Exposed to the constant winds, the Vermentino grapes grow rather thick skins, which are expressed in the cellar via a brief cold soak (ten to 12 hours) prior to fermentation at a moderate temperature. The result is a ripe expression with solid mid-palate weight and a salty kick on the finish.

- **GRAPES:** 100% Vermentino
- **STYLE:** Fresh and unoaked, with ripe stone fruit, a hint of tropical fruit, and fresh acidity
- **PRODUCTION:** Fermented in tank at a moderate temperature (26 degrees Celsius), then rested four months in tank before bottling

Also look for:

- Cantina Mesa Primo Bianco Vermentino di Sardegna DOC
- Cantina Mesa Primo Scuro Cannonau di Sardegna DOC
- Cantina Mesa Buio Carignano del Sulcis DOC
- Cantina Mesa Buio Buio Carignano del Sulcis DOC

The vineyards of Sardinian estate Cantina Mesa overlook the Mediterranean Sea.





The Man Behind the Brand



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