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CORRECTION

Brooke Herron's story on Syrah fermentation practices in our October/November 2021 issue has been updated online to reflect an editing error regarding the various decisions that go into the use of whole clusters. We regret the error.

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Showing Up



Meredith May

“Most of life is showing up. You do the best you can, which varies from day to day.” —*Regina Brett, American author, inspirational speaker, and newspaper columnist*

WHILE WE DON'T theme every issue of *The SOMM Journal*—and hence don't produce an editorial calendar—we acknowledge that we only write about a certain set of topics. Here you'll find articles on wine from all over the globe; interviews with producers and buyers; and opinion or focus pieces by our columnists.

The latter are certainly diversified, covering everything from the art of winemaking to the hospitality business, from wine faults to beer styles, and from the Chicago market to the dining scenes in Denver and Phoenix. In this issue, we introduce two new columns. First, Vince Anter has been traveling the world as host of Amazon Prime wine show *V is for Vino*. His experience on the ground offers an immersive glimpse of various regions that our two-dimensional pages can only support in words and photos, but it enables us to join him in exploring Prosecco in the Veneto on page 36.

Second, if we did have to claim a keynote for 2022, it would be sustainability. So starting with this issue, the California Sustainable Winegrowing Alliance and the Wine Institute will be addressing this movement and diving deeper into its causes, concerns, and values. Check out page 30.

We're keeping busy on all the fronts that matter to our industry, with education being our main mission. In the new year, we hope to see you in person at the events we sponsor; as you can see from our recap of the Le Best Sommelier Competition (page 82) and of the Louis Roederer 242 Collection tasting we hosted (page 64), many of you are already showing up. If you'd like to be invited to such events, send an email directly to me (see masthead)—that way we can reach out to let you know of the many opportunities that we have planned. Of course, they usually include good food and great wine. Thanks for joining us.

Happy New Year! 🍷

REBEL

WITH A CAUSE

CA' DEL BOSCO
MAKES AN ADDITION
WITH AN EDITION

BY LARS LEICHT

*Ca' del Bosco
founder and president
Maurizio Zanella.*

Maurizio Zanella might not exactly admit to rebellious tendencies as a youth in late-1960s Milan, but he partially credits his success today to a lifelong desire to shake up the status quo. “I was very young, 13 to 14 years old, but I didn’t want to go to school,” he recounts. “So my family sent me in exile to this small house that they just bought in the middle of nowhere, where there was only forest.”

His parents had acquired the property—called Ca’ del Bosco, or “house in the woods”—as a place to raise crops for use at home, including grapes to make wine. When the young Zanella arrived, his informal education was entrusted to the property’s caretaking farmer, Antonio Gandossi, “but this farmer very soon became my partner in crime to buy some [additional] land, plant some vines, and start what is now Ca’ del Bosco in a very passionate way,” he says. “Wine is something that gave me the opportunity to make my life different, because I was in love with [it].” Together, they built their “dream” venture step by step, and while Zanella is proud of what the winery has accomplished over the years, he declares that “we are not finished; we think we can [always] do something interesting.”

The latest “interesting” development involves Ca’ del Bosco’s flagship Franciacorta DOCG wine, Cuvée Prestige. Using a designation previously practiced by a few Champagne houses but not in Franciacorta, Zanella has assigned chronologically numbered “Edizione” labels to his multivintage Cuvée Prestige white and rosé starting with the current release, Edizione 43, which marks the 43rd rendition of the wines since they debuted in 1976.

He emphatically describes the wine as multivintage instead of employing the term



The Ca’ del Bosco winery in Franciacorta.

“nonvintage,” which is commonly used by producers of Champagne (or, as Zanella habitually refers to it, “that wine from the north of France, east of Paris”). A multivintage blend typically aims to highlight house style over vintage variation, which means that its profile “doesn’t change dramatically as the vintage-dated Franciacorta can,” according to Zanella. But because Ca’ del Bosco is relatively young, its style continues to evolve; as he puts it, “We don’t want something that is always the same, so there are small differences between editions. For the Ca’ del Bosco philosophy, nonvintage was a wrong term. The richness of Cuvée Prestige is achieved because we use different reserve wines; the best wine of each single harvest is held back, some in stainless steel and some in used barrels, [and] applied as a painter uses colors. Only if you have many colors can you give a painting real soul.”

Tighter Rules, Greater Glory

Zanella firmly believes that Franciacorta, which is still young compared to other sparkling wine regions, must follow strict rules to achieve greater acclaim. “Franciacorta is the only denomination that has changed rules nine times since 1990,” he says, citing yield reductions; the removal of elevation limits for vineyards; and the 2017 introduction of another grape, Erbatmat, to the permitted lineup of Chardonnay, Pinot Noir, and Pinot Bianco. Technically, it’s a reintroduction, as Erbatmat was used in the 18th century until it faced extinction. It’s since rebounded and is now allowed in up to 10% of the blend, adding acidity to counter the impact of climate change. Though Erbatmat will likely never be the dominant grape, Zanella views it as another key modification.

“In an area that does not have a long tradition of sparkling wines, the only way



The multivintage Edizione 43 marks the 43rd rendition of Ca' del Bosco's flagship Franciacorta DOCG wine, Cuvée Prestige.

to get all producers going in the same direction is to make the strongest rules," he says. "The fact that Franciacorta has [among] the strongest rules in the world doesn't mean it's the best sparkling wine in the world, absolutely not, but those strong rules help us to get where we want to be. You cannot buy the culture, you cannot buy the traditions, but the strong rules help you to grow culture and tradition that would take more time otherwise."

Another factor that distinguishes Franciacorta, according to Zanella, is that 70% of the producers currently farm organically; if that figure reaches 90%, it will become obligatory for the remaining 10%. "It will no longer be a choice; it will be the rule," he says. "But we have a lot to do. We have not finished our job."

A History of Trailblazing

Ca' del Bosco was also the first winery to employ the designation "Satèn," now used exclusively in Franciacorta for bottle-fermented wine made only from white grapes (predominantly Chardonnay) with fewer than 5 bars of pressure. Zanella originally called the wine Crémant, but with the legal elimination of the term *méthode champenoise* in the EU and the relegation of Crémant to bottle-fermented wines from elsewhere in France, he had to rename it.

Even some of his still wines were revolutionary: Zanella points out that, in 1980, he became one of the first producers in Italy to release a pure Chardonnay. "It was unique, why? Because it was a mistake! We were told it was a different clone of

Pinot Bianco, and the nurseries sold them together," he explains. "It shows that Italy was not focused on quality in those years, but we made something special from it."

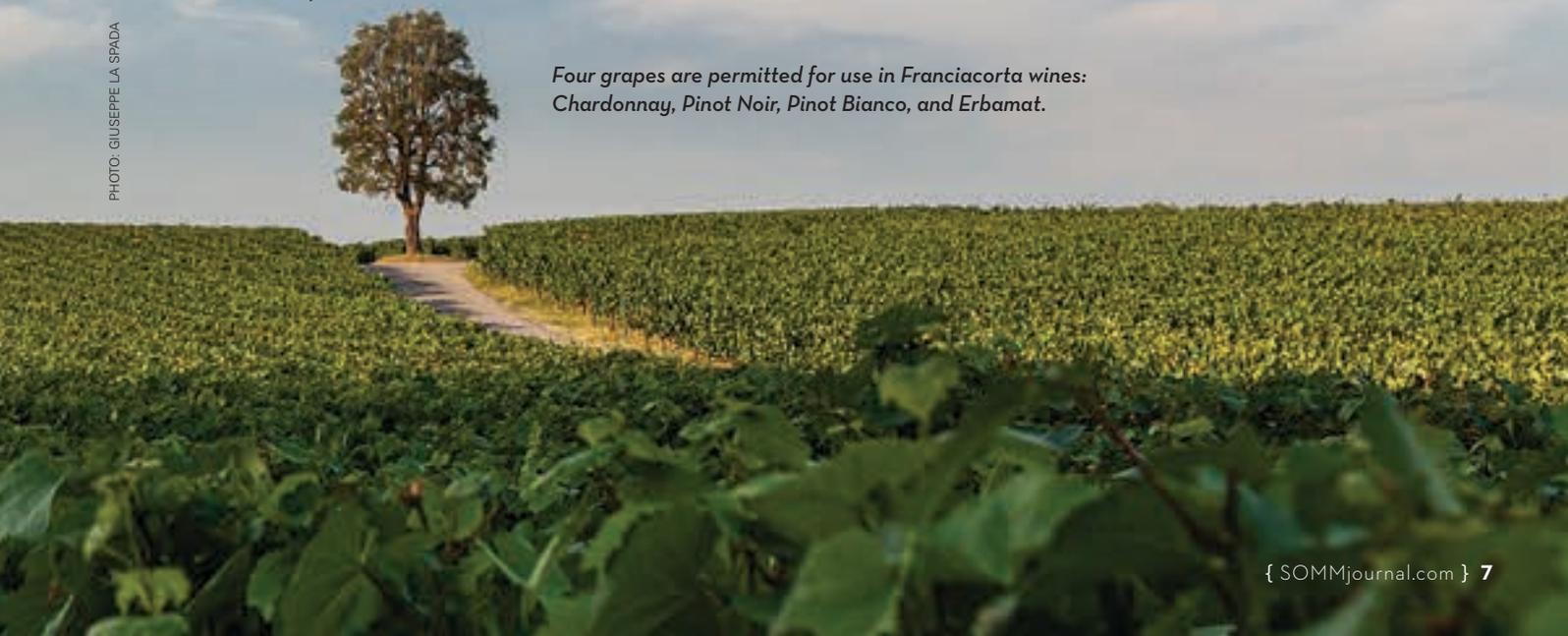
While current plantings in Franciacorta are roughly 85% Chardonnay, 10% Pinot Noir, and 5% Pinot Bianco, Ca' del Bosco is bullish on the Pinots, with closer to 25% Pinot Noir and 11% Pinot Bianco. In fact, the newly released Cuvée Prestige Edizione 43 has only 2% Chardonnay. Zanella says Pinot Noir is key for ageworthy wines, giving great character with ten to 20 years on the lees. The addition of Erbatmat in future vintages, with its high acidity, will also contribute austerity and ageability to Franciacorta wines. "We make the rules according to our land," adds Zanella. "We have to rely . . . on international varieties, but it is very important to give a local nature to our wines."

Ca' del Bosco wines are now exclusively Extra Brut, as Zanella believes that dosage is unnecessary given Franciacorta's relatively warm climate compared to that area in the north of France, east of Paris; that's one of many factors, along with barrel aging for a rounder profile, that make his interpretation of the region special. "Franciacorta is a wine that coincidentally has bubbles. . . . By law this is a wine first, not a sparkling wine," he says.

From advocating for stricter rules and introducing Italy's first still Chardonnay to pursuing new designations, Zanella continues to prove he's a rebel at heart. "I still go in the streets," he says of his willingness to advocate for Franciacorta's best interests. "I don't shut up if I don't need to." ❧



Four grapes are permitted for use in Franciacorta wines: Chardonnay, Pinot Noir, Pinot Bianco, and Erbatmat.



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Ca' del Bosco Makes an Addition With an Edition

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The Le Best Sommelier Competition Showcased Six Beverage Pros' Mastery of French Wine and Floor Skills Alike



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PHOTO COURTESY OF SOPEXA

Lindsey Becker-Schwartz took first place at the Le Best Sommelier Competition in New York City last October.

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GET TO KNOW THE SPIRITS OF

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by Randy Caparoso

When a Winemaker Becomes a Sommelier

I'VE LOST COUNT of the number of sommeliers who have “crossed over” to the other side to become winemakers. Erin Miller is a member of a rarer class: accomplished winemakers who opt to become sommeliers. This past summer, when Miller met with Dan Prentice, the general manager of Charlie Palmer’s Dry Creek Kitchen in Healdsburg, California, Prentice saw something, shall we say, appealingly offbeat in Miller and immediately offered her the position of wine director: “I now get to work on a side of the wine industry winemakers rarely see,” says Miller. “I take the same approach I’ve always taken as a winemaker—learning something new every day.”

With 21 winemaking harvests under her belt, Miller has done stints at Oregon’s Evening Land Vineyards and the Anderson Valley–based Twomey Cellars, among other places; more recently, she has worked as a consultant, allowing her greater flexibility to spend time with her family (she has a daughter and two sons, all under 7). With bachelor’s degrees in mathematics and Russian, plus a master’s in viticulture from the University of California, Davis, she may be one of the most well-rounded sommeliers in the world.

Miller has also accumulated six barrels of her own wines over the past three vintages, but they’re still sitting at home. “I don’t know if the world needs to see another small wine label,” she says. “My position at Dry Creek Kitchen allows me to enjoy the part about winemaking I had always loved the most, which is helping people increase their appreciation of wine, especially by demystifying it.”

She also relishes working with tasting menus, as it allows her to delve into “the extra dimension of the wine experience we never get to do as winemakers, except

at home,” Miller explains. “As a winemaker, my instinct is to explore all the dimensions that you can create in a wine. With a Sauvignon Blanc, for instance, you can ferment and age in steel drums, in barrels, or in tanks and create lengths of flavor going in different directions. . . . In the restaurant, you can do something similar by pairing a wine with a dish . . . but when we take that

Creek Valley. “Both wines successfully bring out the texture in the dish,” particularly the creaminess of the cheese, she said.

Another surprising pairing came in the form of the Rockpile 2017 Jack’s Cabin Zinfandel, which had the acidity to balance the tomato conserva, while the sweet peppers brought out its peppercorn-like spice. It was a perfect



PHOTO COURTESY OF ERIN MILLER

After long working as a winemaker, Erin Miller is now the wine director at Charlie Palmer’s Dry Creek Kitchen in Healdsburg, CA.

dish and pair it with multiple wines, each wine can take it even further.”

To illustrate her point on my recent visit, Miller had me taste one of Dry Creek Kitchen’s seasonal pastas, roasted eggplant casoncelli with goat cheese, ricotta, tomato conserva, sweet orange peppers, mint, and balsamic reduction. With it, she explained, she likes to pair both a white and a red: the Cruess Fiano, a rounder, neutral barrel-fermented style grown in the Russian River Valley, and the A. Rafanelli Merlot from Dry

example of how a wine can complement the flavors and textures of a dish even as the latter highlights complexities in the former that might otherwise have gone unnoticed. “That’s what excites me,” said Miller. “I originally joined the wine industry because it fulfilled my passion for science and art. I love that you can do the same thing as a sommelier in a restaurant, and [I] hope that my background as a winemaker can help take guests’ experiences to another level.”

A black and white photograph of a wine bottle lying on its side on a sandy surface. The bottle is the central focus, with a label that reads "IRON + sand" at the top and "19 PASO CAB" at the bottom. To the left of the bottle are some dried twigs or branches, and to the right is a large, flat rock. The background is a textured, sandy surface.

**A WINE BORN FROM
THE GRIT OF PASO ROBLES**

©2021 Iron and Sand Wines, Sr. Helena, CA

The natural draw of the historic hot springs, Iron Spring and Sand Spring, propelled Paso Robles into a bustling destination in the late 1860's. Today, wine, especially Cabernet, is what draws us to Paso Robles.

IRON + sand



PHOTO: WANDA MANN

Orange Crush

SOMMELIER AND RETAILER **DOREEN WINKLER** SHOWCASES AN ANCIENT CATEGORY IN NEW YORK CITY

NO LONGER THE best-kept secret of self-proclaimed wine geeks, orange wines have stepped out of the shadows—and sommelier Doreen Winkler is a formidable force in their renaissance.

Winkler describes herself as a “natural wine sommelier.” In 2013, during her tenure at the Michelin-starred Aska in Brooklyn, New York, she was tasked with creating a list consisting solely of natural wines and became enchanted with orange wines in particular because “there’s always something exciting in the glass.” Admitting that she is now “obsessed” with them, she launched Orange Glou in 2019 as the world’s first and only subscription service focused exclusively on otherwise white wines that owe their hue to extended contact between the juice and the skins after pressing. Last June, Winkler opened a brick-and-mortar Orange Glou at 264 Broome Street on the Lower East Side of Manhattan.

Orange wines may seem like a new trend to consumers, but the country of Georgia has been making them in large, egg-shaped clay vessels called *qvevri* for 8,000 years. At the store, Winkler showcases around 100 different skin-contact wines from all corners of the world, including not only Georgia but also Slovenia, Italy, Greece, the Czech Republic, South Africa, and the U.S. Because these natural, organic, and Biodynamic wines are made in limited amounts by independent producers, many of them are incredibly difficult to find; that makes Winkler’s prices—bottles go for \$19–\$99 at retail, while subscriptions start at \$105 for three bottles per month—all the more impressive. In short, Orange Glou is filling the void for those who want to break away from the mainstream and veer off the beaten path.

Like their red, white, and rosé counterparts, orange wines come in a wide range

of styles. While many are fresh and quaffable in true *glou-glou* fashion, that’s only part of the story; Winkler also features aged wines with umami and texture to show a more complex side of the category, feeling that many of the best examples share an “unpretentious but mind-blowing” character. And bubbly lovers will delight in the store’s selection of *pét-nat* and traditional-method orange sparklers.

When I visited the shop, I was captivated by the range of orange shades, from subtle to dramatic, in the bottles lining the shelves. But the compelling selections at Orange Glou make it clear that orange wines are not just eye candy: They are the real deal and worthy of serious consideration. For more information, visit orangeglou.com. **SJ**

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

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ROSA REGALE

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by Ruth Tobias

New York Stories

RINO NEWCOMER THE GREENWICH CHANNELS THE SPIRIT OF ITS NAMESAKE NEIGHBORHOOD

FROM A BASQUIAT lithograph to a rare Ricky Powell photo of the Beastie Boys, the artwork splashed across new RiNo restaurant The Greenwich celebrates New York City. So do the cocktails, with names like Alphabet City and The Bowery. And so do the bold flavors anchoring the menu of executive chef Justin Freeman, whom owner Delores Tronco met while she was operating the much-touted (if sadly, due to the pandemic, short-lived) Banty Rooster in the neighborhood for which her new venture is named. But make no mistake about it: The latter was destined for right here, right now.

Dishes like the pork cutlet with creamed-corn chermoula and thrice-cooked potatoes in 'nduja mayo speak to chef Justin Freeman's penchant for pungency.



PHOTOS: DAVID WILLIAMS

That's thanks not least to Tronco's wine program, which meets Denverites where they are: still not quite as comfortable as in the realm of craft beer and spirits, but finally ready to edge into less familiar terrain. As Tronco explains, "When I tackled the wine list, I had a couple different objectives. [Just as] a great wine is balanced, I thought about making a balanced list. The first thing was to [size it] to cover all or most of the classic bases but then [go] straight into some creative, fun territory—a balance between Old World tradition and newer, more playful natural wine. Also, of course, a balance between white and red, with a small rosé, orange, and sparkling [selection]." The second thing was that "I wanted to price them in a way that made them accessible. You could have the greatest wine list in the world,

but if it's so large that it's difficult for the average consumer to take in [and if] ... most of your bottles are over \$100, it becomes less accessible. I wanted to encourage people to take some chances [on] something new."

So bring on the Uruguayan Cab Franc and Friulian Pignolo; bring on the blends of Alibernet and Dunaj from Slovakia, Cinsault and País from southern Chile, and Grüner Veltliner and Welschriesling from the Burgenland. "I can't keep the Pustza Libre on the shelf," says Tronco, speaking of another Austrian blend of Zweigelt and Pinot Noir. "[Guests] say, 'Oh, I know Pinot, but I don't know Zweigelt—this seems cool.'" Another case in point is a Rhône Valley Ugni Blanc/Viognier blend that "it's been fun to get feedback on," she says. "Here's this grape that people normally thought of as a throwaway, but if you treat it the right way, you can make a really beautiful wine. It's a great winter white—it's not all acid and brightness. [This is] totally Ugni Blanc season!"

Meanwhile, in the likelihood that The Greenwich will draw its share of verifiable grape geeks, Tronco is developing a reserve program—itsself balanced between higher-end, older-vintage bottles and emerging small-production brands that are otherwise hard to come by in Colorado. In the former category, she plans to price a Remelluri 2012 Rioja Gran Reserva at \$180 instead of the \$250 it warrants because "I just want to see somebody enjoy it"; in the latter, she's looking at bringing in non-interventionist Portuguese label Filipa Pato & William Wouters and Mendocino's Las Jaras, whose "whole schtick is 1970s California when it was reminiscent of the Old World, before it got bombastic."

If the success of her core list is any indication, the program should be a hit. Returning to Denver after her years in Manhattan, she admits, "I really didn't know what to expect, but fully 25% of our sales is wine." Clearly, her clientele is buying the simple motto she's selling: "Life's too short to drink boring wine." ❧



The Greenwich owner Delores Tronco.

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NORTON



Choose your favorite

FROM MENDOZA, ARGENTINA,
THE LAND OF MALBEC





by Wes Hagen

Angel's Advocate

RECAPPING A MAGNIFICENT MEAL AT THE RITZ-CARLTON BACARA, SANTA BARBARA

CONSIDER THIS MY LOVE letter to Santa Barbara County wine and food. After three decades of welcoming groups of somms and wine buyers here, I still get the same question: "When will Santa Barbara wine country get its proper respect?"

The answer is clear: right now. In October, *Forbes* declared it the "most exciting wine region in the world"; in November, *Wine Enthusiast* awarded it the 2021 Wine Star Award for region of the year while also naming Bien Nacido Vineyard one of the world's top ten vineyards, along with Romanée-Conti, Cannubi, and To Kalon. It's a good time to love Santa Barbara wine.

And the food is its equal, evidenced by a recent meal I had with my wife at steakhouse Angel Oak in the Ritz-Carlton Ba-



Octopus salad was paired with Bien Nacido 2019 Estate Pinot Noir.

cara—one of the most memorable I have ever had outside of Europe's Michelin-starred properties. Manager Madelaine "Maddie" Sahit, veteran Bacara sommelier Nanette Rapuzzi, and up-and-coming somm Tammi Herron provided a night full of bubbles, Burgundy, and gorgeous plates executed at the highest level by chef Efe Onoglu, including a dish of A5 wagyu that changed the way I look at beef.

It was a magical night: As the warm fall



Reflected in the wall of glass lining the balcony, the lights of the dining room seem to glimmer like stars over the Pacific Ocean.

sky over the Pacific turned salmon and then indigo, the glass panes lining the balcony reflected the pendant lights in the dining room, setting a magical scene reminiscent of a Harry Potter feast at Hogwarts. The setting might have eclipsed the food if it weren't so beautiful—but it was, starting with the Morro Bay oysters that greeted us, accompanied by glasses of Moët & Chandon Impérial Brut and a white asparagus salad with parsnips that reminded me that I really need a personal vegan chef.

But so much for veganism! The beef tartare, a blend of prime rib-eye and A5 wagyu mixed with spices, red onions, and microgreens, was perfect on toast points; the fat from the wagyu and the firmness of the rib-eye played graciously with the minerality and acidity of the Simonnet-Febvre 2011 Vaillons Chablis Premier Cru brought by Rapuzzi and Herron. Subsequent courses fell as gracefully as the setting sun

over the ocean, from a crispy quail salad and a stunningly composed octopus salad to a creamy, sweet, and spicy mushroom dish—all amazing with the Bien Nacido Estate 2019 Pinot Noir.

The climax of the meal came with the A5 wagyu steak: Four ounces were plenty to share with my mostly vegetarian wife, who decided it was certainly worth savoring. In fact, it was a rare revelation, moving my goalposts for beef forever—take all the most delicious elements of foie gras and prime steak, and you'd be scratching the surface—while the Bien Nacido Pinot cleansed the palate with each sip.

Here's a strong suggestion to our friends at Michelin: Next time you're in town, stop in for a sunset dinner at Angel Oak. Thanks to the whole team—including Shalom, our server—for a magical evening that could have only happened here on the American Riviera. **SJ**

Angel Oak's fried quail salad.



PHOTOS: WES HAGEN

J. LOHR SIGNATURE CABERNET SAUVIGNON

“My signature on the label indicates that this wine is a personal statement for me, looking to encompass thirty-five years of Paso Robles winegrowing experience and history in a single bottle.”

J. Lohr

2017 VINTAGE

95

POINTS

tastingpanel

March 2021



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Floating Through Port

TO VISIT SOME OF THE REGION'S MOST FAMOUS ATTRACTIONS, JUST FOLLOW THE RIVER DOURO

THE DOURO REGION of Portugal is one of the world's top travel destinations, standing out especially among wine lovers as it offers unrivaled gastronomic experiences as well as many other leisure activities and sightseeing opportunities. After all, what better way to discover and understand world-class Portuguese wines than to taste them in the *quintas*, or wine estates, where they're made?

The best way to get to know the area as a whole is to visit its three UNESCO World Heritage Sites: the historic centre of Oporto, the Alto Douro wine region, and the Côa Valley, a site of rare prehistoric rock art. A stroll through Porto reveals boutique shops, a thriving restaurant scene, a vibrant art community, impressive public statuary, and, above all, extraordinary architecture, thanks to the city's history under the influence of the Celts, Romans, and Moors as well as its role as one of the world's most important ports.

Port's famous wine cellars, meanwhile, are located in Gaia, across the River Douro from the historic centre via the Luís I Bridge, which was designed by Gustave Eiffel's team of architects. They offer every style of Port for guests to sample before heading upriver into the majestic Douro Valley.

Along the aforementioned 557-mile river are the outstanding terroirs that produce Port. Traveling its length, visitors have the opportunity to explore the innovations in wine that the region developed in ancient times, such as the *lagares*, or stone fermenting tanks, in which grapes were crushed by foot. In addition to Port, the Douro produces highly regarded red, white, and rosé table wines from indigenous varieties.

And while exploring the wines of the region, travelers will discover much more. The River Douro demarcates part of the Portuguese-Spanish border and is home to the most pristine riparian environment on the Iberian Peninsula. Set along it, the Douro International Natural Park encompasses 75 miles of olive and almond groves as well as juniper, oak, and chestnut trees. It is also renowned for its biodiversity as home to several rare bird species.

History buffs will be equally delighted by the region, beginning with a tour of Castro de São João das Arribas, a fortified settlement dating back to the time of Roman occupation. Many of the towns in the Douro appear to come straight out of the Middle Ages, with their prominent castles and other ancient structures.

And for the outdoor adventurer, trails ideal for mountain biking and casual hiking course through the Douro Valley. Along them, one can take guided tours of the vineyards, wander through cork oak forests, and explore picturesque villages.

Famous the world over for its natural beauty and viticultural heritage, the Douro belongs on every wine lover's bucket list. For more information, visit ivdp.pt, the website of the Instituto dos Vinhos do Douro e do Porto. 



Rabelo boats anchored near the historic Port lodges of Porto.

Terraced vineyards line the River Douro.



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Pouring Memories

PHOENIX RESTAURATEURS **SCOTT AND KATIE STEPHENS** SHARE THEIR STORY THROUGH THEIR WINE LISTS

AT PHOENIX RESTAURANTS Beckett's Table and Southern Rail, owners and sommeliers Scott and Katie Stephens share more than their knowledge with their guests; they share their memories of a treasured place and time. "About a third of the wine list at Beckett's Table [represents] our love story, our vacations, and our travels," explains Katie.

That Schramsberg Vineyards sparkling? It was served at their wedding and honors a magical afternoon the couple spent tasting wines with proprietors Jack and Jamie Davies in Calistoga. A pour of Domaine du Pegau is a snapshot of the time they spent with Laurence Féraud at her estate in Châteauneuf-du-Pape. A glass of Massolino Barbera d'Alba captures a day with Franco Massolino in Serralunga d'Alba in Piedmont, while one of Sottimano is an ode to Andrea Sottimano, who welcomed them into his home in Neive, Barbaresco.



"The opportunity to walk the vineyards, meet the winemakers, and break bread with them is so rewarding," notes Scott. "Those wines are representative of our times in Europe, the United States, and even our own backyard in Arizona." At both restaurants, co-owned by executive chef Justin Beckett and his wife, Michelle, transporting guests into their world is an emotive form of hospitality. As Katie puts it, "We want people to fall in love with wine. It doesn't have to be expensive or intimidating; it just needs to

tell a story and be a wonderful part of their experience." Adds Scott, "When you put your nose to the glass, it should invite you to open that book."

Speaking of books: For my own book *Arizona Wine: A History of Perseverance and Passion*, Scott shared the epiphany he and Katie

rated. At Beckett's Table, where the menu is sophisticated comfort food, the list is international in scope, whereas at Southern Rail, which serves Southern-inspired American fare, it's largely domestic, including a rotating selection of 30 Arizona wines. Among the producers that Scott welcomes



PHOTOS: CHRISTINA BARRUETA

Above: *Beckett's Table and Southern Rail owners and sommeliers Scott and Katie Stephens. Left:* *A lineup of Arizona wines at Beckett's Table.*

had about the category in 2011, when Rob and Sarah Hammelman of Sand-Reckoner Vineyards poured them a stunning glass of Malvasia Bianca. That tasting was a catalyst for the Stephenses to become passionate local wine champions, traveling to vineyards across the state, helping in harvests, and writing new narratives with the winemakers they now call friends. "People have completely embraced Arizona wines and it's absolutely outstanding," says Scott. "Nothing gives me more pleasure than to see those bottles go out every night."

Though there is some overlap, each restaurant's wine program is distinctly cu-

the opportunity to introduce to guests are Lightning Ridge Cellars ("Ann Roncone's 2018 Montepulciano is just so well made"); Cove Mesa Vineyard ("Emil and Cindy Molin's Vermentino is phenomenal"); and Callaghan Vineyards ("Kent Callaghan's 2020 Love Muffin is a killer rosé").

"All these winemakers have shared something of great value with us—their generosity, their craft, their homes—and in turn we need to do the same with their story," he continues. "When you bring all those pieces together—the experience, the story, the wine, and the food—it's a remarkable moment. It's nirvana." **SJ**

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Photo: Massimo Vitali



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Defying the Odds

CHEF DANNY LLEDÓ'S **XIQUET** REACHES FOR THE (MICHELIN) STARS IN WASHINGTON, D.C.

WHEN CHEF DANNY LLEDÓ began developing the concept for Xiquet in the Washington, D.C., neighborhood of Glover Park back in 2015, he was certain of two things: One, the intimate restaurant would showcase modern Valencian cuisine from the wood-fired exhibition kitchen, and two, that it would earn a Michelin star. What he could have never conceived was that a global pandemic would shut down the country mere weeks before it was to open. As shelter-in place mandates roiled the hospitality industry, Lledó's dream—and his investment—were in peril. Yet with tenacity and imagination, the team at Xiquet made both his visions come true.

Even putting COVID-19 aside, Lledó was facing some challenges from the get-go. The restaurant is located in a hard-to-reach quadrant of the city, far from the economic and dining center of D.C. It centers on a lesser-known style of Spanish cuisine in a town where José Andrés is the reigning king of the genre (his Minibar holds two Michelin stars). Construction issues, too, were among the expected hurdles. Then came the pandemic, and the walls came (figuratively) crashing down—escalating into a global crisis just as the construction was wrapping up in March 2020. By the time Lledó realized the full impact that was to come, it was too late to do anything but forge ahead.

First, contractors were hindered by shutdown measures in completing the work required to get the doors open, and scheduling the requisite inspections was near impossible. Second, global supply chain interruptions made sourcing not only construction materials but also food and wine increasingly difficult and more expensive. Third, the tariffs on EU wine imports were also heavily impacting Xiquet's extensive wine program. Lledó's vision of serving authentic Spanish food

PHOTO COURTESY OF XIQUET



As shelter-in place mandates roiled the hospitality industry, Lledó's dream—and his investment—were in peril. Yet with tenacity and imagination, the team at Xiquet made both his visions come true.

and wine was in jeopardy from an execution standpoint.

The next issue was building a capable and inspired staff who would be on board with Xiquet's ethos. In a city like D.C.—where hiring is difficult in normal times, let alone during a pandemic—“it was immensely challenging to find and train employees,” admits Lledó, especially for a new restaurant run by a relative unknown.

Enter Didier Fertiliati, a French native who spent years in Spain, where he and Lledó had become fast friends; Lledó describes him as “the best maître d' in Europe.” Together, they worked to refine the concept as well as to build the team. Fertiliati's perspective on everything from

design to service helped build the foundation on which the Xiquet experience rests: a 14-course tasting enjoyed as a progression through three separate areas of the restaurant. It begins with canapés and aperitivos at the chef's counter on the first level. Guests are then transported to the airy top-floor dining room before finally concluding the meal in the mezzanine lounge with sweet treats both liquid and solid.

Ultimately, the pandemic caused painful setbacks, from constantly changing timelines to unanticipated expenses, before Lledó could present Xiquet to the world. But the world has certainly responded: Xiquet has achieved its first Michelin star and is well on the way to its second! 

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The Jell-O shots at Alias are made in rotating flavors with clarified citrus and Tito's Vodka.

Liquid Science

RICHIE MOE EMBARKS ON A NEW CHAPTER OF INNOVATION AT CHARACTER AND ALIAS IN PHOENIX, AZ by Christina Barrueta

RICHIE MOE, CO-OWNER of Character Distinctive Dining and cocktail bar Alias in Phoenix, Arizona, once had his sights set on being a Hollywood pyrotechnics engineer before one major obstacle dissuaded him: the years of required studies in chemistry. Now he's lighting up the local beverage scene instead with his ingenious cocktails. "Chemistry got a lot more interesting when booze was involved," Moe says with a laugh.

For his newest venture, Moe joined forces with his onetime employer, friend, and now partner, Peter Kasperski, a renowned wine expert and restaurateur. Time spent under Kasperski's tutelage at Cowboy Ciao and Kazimierz World Wine Bar served as a springboard for Moe's career, and in the ensuing years he founded or oversaw acclaimed cocktail programs at establishments such as Citizen Public House and Citizen R+D (where he was a partner), Binkley's Restaurant Group, and Square One Concepts.

Fast-forward to the opening of Character, whose kitchen is helmed by chef Justin "Red" Hauska, and Alias, the cocktail lounge hidden away behind the restaurant. At Alias, Moe rules a realm where a Bloody Mary becomes an Italian Fog topped with arugula crema and cucumber "dots," handmade absinthe candy is part of an innovative take on the Sazerac, and liquid nitrogen transforms a Mojito served on an LED light pad.

We spoke with Moe to learn more about his inspirations, his approach to molecular mixology, and his ambitious plans for Alias.

Where do you get your inspiration?

Absolutely everywhere. Peter taught me to always be conscious of my surroundings—sights, smells, and flavors. Ideas come to me all the time. If I think of something in the middle of the night, sometimes I can't



PHOTOS: JACQUELINE HANNA

At cocktail bar Alias in Phoenix, AZ, Richie Moe serves his Mojito on an LED light pad.

sleep. I have to get it out of my system and drive to work, even if it's just to get a start and see what the next steps in my weirdo vision are going to be.

Some of your cocktails are chef-inspired.

Chef Red is so talented. One day a buddy said, "This tomato sauce is so good, I want to drink it." So I turned it into our Bloody Mary. Sometimes it's just as simple as that. Another example is Chef's octopus dish with slow-roasted pineapple that he makes with Sriracha, clove, and cinnamon. He gave me the rendered pineapple juice and we turned it into our Oaxacan Fire House with Mezcal Naran.

What is your R&D process like?

Balance is so important. We're measuring in grams and using test tubes to balance acid and sugar. I have a setup with ascorbic acid, tartaric acid, citric acid, lemon juice, and lemon crystals, along with cane sugar, simple syrup, demerara, muscovado, and

agave. For example, I know I'm not going to like a dark, raisin-y muscovado sugar with a bright, vibrant coconut-blueberry foam. There's a lot of deductive reasoning that goes into it first.

Talk about your Jell-O shots.

Years ago I made three-layer tequila Jell-O shots served in hollowed-out eggs. The bottom layer was tomato and watermelon, the middle layer was sugar and citric acid, and the third was lime Jell-O and lime. I wondered if I could get the middle layer clarified enough to make clear Jell-O shots, and then I started injecting flavor and color. I did 2,000 of those for Arizona Cocktail Week one year and they became really popular. At Alias, they're made with clarified citrus and Tito's Vodka [in] rotating flavors like pink lemonade and watermelon.

But there's a method to your molecular madness.

It has to have an application. As showy as the liquid nitrogen in our Shattered Mojito is, it serves a purpose. Flash-freezing the mint pushes all the essential oils out and intensifies the flavor. I've done a lot of trial and error with liquid nitrogen and use it quite a bit. "Molecular" is a very general term—pretty much, if you're using any sort of manipulation or science, it's molecular.

What's next for Alias?

We have six seats at the bar, and I've always wanted to do an omakase-style tasting menu for cocktail dining. I'm planning a menu called Sounds with sound-wave manipulations. I've already been experimenting with frozen olive juice; as it defrosts, I set up a subwoofer outside and the vibrations make the oil rise to the top and the sediment drop to the bottom. And I'm working on activated ingredients that I can magnetize to move around in a cocktail glass for a future dinner. *sj*



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To Lees or Not to Lees

HOW AGE DRIVES COMPLEXITY IN SPARKLING WINE

AFTER TASTING THE Piper-Heidsieck Hors-Série 1971 (\$499), a rare, late-disgorged Champagne that spent 49 years resting peacefully on its lees, I was inspired to delve deeper into the role yeast autolysis plays in the flavor development of sparkling wine.

The wine, which is the first release of the new Hors-Série range, was made by then-cellarmaster Claude Demiere; an equal blend of Chardonnay and Pinot Noir that was sourced from 12 different Grand Cru villages and did not undergo malolactic conversion, it is characterized by concentrated aromas and flavors attributed to the low-yielding vintage. Émilien Boutillat, who was appointed chief winemaker in 2019, disgorged the wine in February 2021, selecting a 2019 Chardonnay for the Brut dosage of 10 grams per liter.

Describing autolytic characteristics in wine that has undergone lengthy periods of aging on the lees can be tricky, largely because these aromas and flavors aren't part of a routine sensory experience and are inherently more challenging to pin down as a result. Because Boutillat and I were tasting different bottles that showed slight variations, we compared notes during our Zoom session to compile a summary of descriptors for the wine: delicate yet complex aromas of honeysuckle, golden hay, dry garrigue, hazelnut, quince paste, and caramel; beautifully balanced and intense flavors of toast, baked apple, nutmeg, orange zest, and prune; and chalky minerality with lemon pith that persists through an incredibly lengthy finish. For this taster, it was the epitome of mineral expression.

In addition to the Hors-Série 1971, I also tasted the Telmont 2006 Blanc de Blancs Vinothèque (\$209) with Telmont president and shareholder Ludovic du Plessis. In a joint partnership with Rémy Cointreau, du Plessis is reviving a house



he describes as “a sleeping beauty” by reducing the winery’s carbon footprint and converting the estate to organic viticulture by 2025.

The 2006 Vinothèque, which spent a minimum of three years on the lees and another 12 in the cellar, is a vinous wine with miniscule bubbles and notes of marzipan, brioche, young pineapple, and lip-smacking Granny Smith apple that culminate in a toasty, savory, umami-driven finish. While du Plessis is planning comparative tastings to zero in on the sweet spot for lees aging at Telmont, which he believes is highly dependent upon vintage, this wine is a prime example of what researchers in Tasmania and South Africa have discovered about lees aging post-secondary fermentation: namely, that the base wine plays the dominant role in determining the complexity of a late-disgorged sparkling wine and that overall wine age has a much

greater impact on the development of the characteristic flavors most commonly associated with sur lie aging.

While lengthy aging on the lees contributes to sensorial changes, enhanced foaming properties, and the development of the characteristics that winemakers refer to as autolytic, these researchers found that aging base wine on or off the lees produced similar aroma profiles irrespective of grape variety.

To better understand the impact of lees aging on flavor development, expert tasters participating in the trial were asked to evaluate base wines and tiraged wines for six sensory characteristics: autolytic, spicy, toasty, honeyed, nutty, and earthy. Chardonnay base wine aged without lees



showed significantly more intense nutty and honeyed flavors and, after 24 months of aging, its concentrations of compounds associated with malty, cooked, potato-like, honeyed, and floral aromas were more than 99% higher than those in the base wine aged on the lees.

While Pinot Noir aged on the lees had intense honeyed character and positive aromas of nuts and vanilla, it didn't fare as well over time, showing increased levels of sweaty, cheesy, and rancid notes after 24 months. Having focused only on yeast-derived volatiles, researchers are now calling for further study on the effects of fruit-derived volatiles on the perception of flavor in sparkling wine. **SJ**

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by Honore Comfort, vice president of international marketing, Wine Institute

Thinking Cap

CAPSTONE CALIFORNIA BRINGS INNOVATION AND TECHNOLOGY TO WINE EDUCATION

PEOPLE BUY AND sell what they know. This axiom is fundamental to wine education; our challenge as wine professionals is based on the fact that there is *so much* we need to know. While it helps that wine appeals to naturally curious people, the team at the California-based Wine Institute has taken a different approach to enhancing education.

Californians are hardwired to be different in transformative ways. Embracing innovation and technology is in our DNA, and it's driving our recent initiative to teach the world about the state's wines. Called Capstone California, this new education program seeks to transform the learning experience, making a wealth of information accessible and approachable to wine professionals around the globe.

ductory Level 1, Intermediate Level 2, Advanced Level 3, and both Expert and Ambassador Level 4—the in-depth multimedia program touches on all elements of California wine, from history and theory to geography, law, and business. It also includes a robust and exclusive collection of resources such as aerial maps of major regions, AVA maps based on GPS and Google Earth technology, and varietal maps by acreage. What's more, it's multilingual, available in Japanese and German with French, Polish, Russian, Simplified Chinese, and Spanish versions in development.

Capstone California was developed by an international panel of wine experts, led by Master Sommeliers Evan Goldstein and Tim Gaiser; that included Wayne Belding, MS; Madeline Triffon, MS; Sandy Block, MW; Sara Schneider; Sara d'Amato; Virginie Boone; Fred Swan; and *SOMM Journal* editors Deborah Parker Wong and Randy Caparoso.



Aerial maps are among Capstone California's many assets.

The Nuts and Bolts

Capstone California explores the diversity and breaks down the complexities of the Golden State wine world. Built on a digital platform and based on original content, it encompasses an extensive, structured, and rigorous curriculum that facilitates critical knowledge for wine professionals.

Offering four levels of study—Intro-

ductory Level 1, Intermediate Level 2, Advanced Level 3, and both Expert and Ambassador Level 4—the in-depth multimedia program touches on all elements of California wine, from history and theory to geography, law, and business. It also includes a robust and exclusive collection of resources such as aerial maps of major regions, AVA maps based on GPS and Google Earth technology, and varietal maps by acreage. What's more, it's multilingual, available in Japanese and German with French, Polish, Russian, Simplified Chinese, and Spanish versions in development.

A Strong Start

Significant interest in the program is already readily apparent; to date, more than 2,000 participants have enrolled worldwide, from Canada to Europe.

Capstone California meets them where they are on

their educational wine journey. However, the dedication and commitment required to complete its highest levels is such that completion earns them the title of Certified California Wine Expert (CCWE) or Certified California Wine Ambassador (CCWA). Graduates also have the opportunity to teach Capstone California courses at all levels and lead seminars around the



Capstone California helps wine professionals explore the state region by region.

world as well as to participate in an immersive educational wine tour of California.

A capstone is defined as a high point or crowning achievement; by the same token, Capstone California empowers wine professionals to reach the apex of their careers using the power of knowledge gained through innovation and the efficiency of technology. You can begin your Capstone California experience today by visiting capstonecalifornia.com. S|

Editor's note: The Inside Sip on California Wine will appear in each edition of The SOMM Journal henceforth. Authored by Wine Institute contributors, the column will provide an insider's look at the latest developments in California's wine community. Wine Institute is an advocacy group of 1,000 California wineries and affiliated businesses that initiates and advocates state, federal, and international public policy to enhance the environment for the responsible production, consumption, and enjoyment of wine. The organization works to improve the economic and environmental health of the state by leading sustainable winegrowing efforts via the California Sustainable Winegrowing Alliance and by showcasing California's wine regions as ideal destinations for food and wine travelers.



Belle Glos
THE BEAUTY OF PINOT



Texas sommelier Tiffany Tobey is a graduate student in viticulture and the GM/sommelier at Thirty Eight & Vine in Fort Worth, TX.

A Thirst for Knowledge

TEXAS SOMMELIER **TIFFANY TOBEY** IS ONE TO WATCH story and photo by Lori Moffatt

IF THE TEXAS wine community were to organize an improv troupe, dynamic sommelier Tiffany Tobey could be the star. Recently, as we chatted over chilled glasses of passion fruit wine she'd brought back from a recent trip to Israel, I asked, "What's your dream scenario [for your career]?" Tobey—who's currently a graduate student in viticulture at Texas Tech University as well as the GM/sommelier of Fort Worth wine bar Thirty Eight & Vine—didn't miss a beat in painting a paradisiacal future that included a combination winery, tasting room, and animal-adoption facility, possibly featuring rescued big cats "just to look at." That said, she added, "My end goal, really, is to make my own wine. After I get my viticulture degree, I'd like to do enology. Then I'll have my hospitality business degree, my somm certifications, viticulture, and enology . . . and see what happens. What's cooler than understanding wine inside and out?" When opportunity knocks, in short, Tobey answers the door—often in a vintage jacket and a piece of her grandmother's jewelry.

Tobey grew up in California but spent her high school and college years surrounded by vineyards in the Texas Panhandle, near Lubbock. While pursuing her business degree at Texas Tech, she went to Italy to study sustainable wine tourism "on a whim," she said—and changed her career course after a few days immersed in the country's romantic heritage. After graduation, she served as a somm at Delaney Vineyards in Grapevine, whose owners sourced grapes from her old stomping grounds in the Texas High Plains AVA, then went to work at the elegant Hilton Anatole in Dallas until the pandemic shut things down.

In between jobs, Tobey said, "My COVID thing was beef jerky." Sommelier-made beef jerky? Why not? A brief stint at a Dallas-area country club hadn't been a good fit, so Tobey hunkered down for a while in her kitchen, making jerky primarily for friends and family. "It's my late grandmother's recipe, made from London broil, and it takes days to do," she explained. "I started

making my own flavors because I really like pickles. Spicy-pickle beef jerky basically kept me afloat the rest of lockdown."

Tobey said that while she misses the structure and sales volume of a hotel group, she's learning invaluable skills at Thirty Eight & Vine, where guests can try wines by the ounce as well as the glass from dispensers along the wall. "For example, I've never paid much attention to labels before," Tobey said. "But here, people try wines because the [visible] labels are cool. So now the artwork is important. It's fun to see people have their 'aha' moments at the wine wall, when they discover something unusual they really like."

A cheerleader for Texas' promising terroir, Tobey remains receptive to experimentation in the wine world, whether it's natural fermentation or the use of non-*Vitis vinifera* grapes. "I try not to be in a box," Tobey said. "The fact that I don't understand what someone is doing doesn't mean I can't appreciate it. It just makes me want to learn more about it." **SJ**



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Connection on Tap

IMAGINE NATION BREWING CO. POURS POSITIVE PROGRESS IN MISSOULA, MT by Jessie Birschbach

IT'S NOT UNCOMMON for a brewery to serve its community or aid a particular cause in the process of producing delicious brewskis: Women-owned Lady Justice Brewing, which partners with organizations to support women and girls in its home state of Colorado, and Los Angeles-based Crowns & Hops, a Black-owned brewery that empowers people of color through community building and other efforts, are just two examples. Historically speaking, too, beer has played a role in bringing society together, with some anthropologists citing it as one of the main reasons why humans transitioned from a hunter-gatherer lifestyle into an agricultural existence: We had to grow enough grain not only to make bread but to brew beer.

The potential for human connection shared over a beer is undeniable, and on a recent trip to Missoula, Montana, I forged a durable bond with Imagine Nation Brewing Co., which is the first brewery in the country to build a dedicated space for community transformation. I noted its door when I first walked into Imagine Nation's colorful taproom, where husband-and-wife team Robert Rivers and Fernanda Menna Barreto Krum sat at a small table under a chalkboard listing the brewery's current selection. Above it was the phrase, "We are because of each other," and as Soundgarden's "Spoonman" played to the beat of our cheerful conversation, portraits of Gandhi, Nelson Mandela, and Ruth Bader Ginsburg quietly observed from their place on the wall.

Rivers and Krum—whose backgrounds are in international peacebuilding and trauma psychology, respec-

tively—met in Romania and worked together in conflict zones from Africa to Asia. But after about 20 years, as much as they loved "working in the trenches," said Rivers, "I hit a wall. And when we returned to Missoula, we had dreams of building a retreat or educational center but realized that would be difficult to do without having something else to offer besides programs." So in 2015, they opened Imagine Nation Brewing Co.—and since then they've hosted almost 4,000 community events and contributed about 25% of the brewery's net profits to support at least 500 local organizations.

The success of Imagine Nation's community space is fortified by the couple's expertise, which inspires creative ways to earn more money for these organizations. "We sit down . . . and we ask them, 'What is your goal with this event?'" said Krum. Their experience working with marginalized people has perhaps made them all the more sympathetic and determined, even in the face of adversity. Last summer, when the brewery hosted a Pride event on behalf of Missoula's LGBTQ+ community, bear spray was extinguished into the crowd on their patio. "It was a full-on hate crime . . . but to see the resilience and hope and togetherness that that community maintained even after, I found myself in tears," said Rivers.

All this is not to say that the beer alone isn't a good enough excuse to visit. The goodwill might have gotten me through the doors, but it was the flight of Imagine Nation's latest New England-style IPAs that kept me there. The citrusy, guava-like Stardust hazy lingered



Fernanda Menna Barreto Krum and Robert Rivers own Missoula's Imagine Nation Brewing Co., the first brewery in the country to offer a dedicated space for community transformation.

on my palate as Rivers discussed the similarities between brewing and making art: "For me, the most important ingredient of beer is the intention that goes into it. Yes, we do try to create art [in the form of a good beer], but the real purpose of creating that art is to help facilitate a space where people can sit around that art form and connect so that we can somehow push forward in our society—to create a space where we can come together and address the challenges that confront us, which, let's face it, are myriad at this point." SJ

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



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Until Next Wine . . .

THE SOMM JOURNAL TEAMS UP WITH **V IS FOR VINO** EXECUTIVE PRODUCER AND HOST VINCE ANTER

WELCOME! I HAVE BEEN given the fun task of writing a recurring column about my adventures across the wine world—but who am I to be entrusted with guiding you, the beverage professional, through an array of picturesque landscapes and dusty cellars full of timeless, transformative wines? I ask myself that question sometimes. It all started coming together in 2017, when I created a TV show called *V is for Vino* not only as an easy way for newbies to learn more about wine and approach it without fear but as an opportunity for veterans to dive deeper into the regions they know and love. Fast-forward to today, and we just finished filming our fourth season—that's 16 episodes and too many bottles of wine to count! So, in each of these columns, I'm going to detail one of the locales that we filmed in and share some knowledge that I obtained during our visit.

Our first stop is the Prosecco region in Italy, which we explored in Season 2. It was a big episode for us at the time, as it was our first international venture and a bit of a pinch-me moment. I flew into Venice feeling Bourdain-esque (I even copied one of his outfits) and came to learn the cold truth very quickly: Most of the Prosecco that Italy sends to the U.S. pales in comparison to the Prosecco Italians drink.



V is for Vino host **Vince Anter**.

So what makes the difference between average and great Prosecco?

We start where all wine starts: terroir: There are two DOCs and four DOCGs in Prosecco. At the DOC level, the region's principal grape, Glera, is grown and machine-harvested on giant flatlands, where it generally produces medium-quality wines. Compare that to the DOCG zones, where grapes are grown at higher altitudes on super-steep hills (as in black-diamond steep) and hand-harvested. They're dynamic, balanced, and picked at the peak of ripeness.

The second factor that defines great

Prosecco is fermentation. Most bulk wineries bottle as soon as a hurried fermentation is complete. But because Prosecco doesn't age on the lees in the bottle, opting for a long, slow, low-temperature Charmat is ideal; three to six months is not unheard of to develop complexity and richness on the lees in the tank as well as better bubbles.

You, finally, are the last element that makes great Prosecco. You have to be willing to appreciate it for what it actually is: wine that deserves to be made well and enjoyed as such. Find a small local wine shop that miraculously carries small-batch Prosecco (because there isn't a lot of it imported); bump the retail price you're willing to pay up from \$13 to \$20-plus; and support the winemakers who work their way through the painstaking process of importation and distribution in order to bring their wines to our country. Whatever you do, just save the less expensive wines for your spritzes—which, I must add, are consumed with reckless abandon in Prosecco.

*Until next wine,
Vince* 

Episodes of V is for Vino are available to view on visforvino.com, Amazon Prime, Roku, and YouTube.

V is for Vino visited the Prosecco region in Season 2.





LIFE IS MEASURED BY MOMENTS

ESTATE GROWN SPARKLING WHITE | CLARKSBURG, CALIFORNIA

Stunning fruit aromas of ripe Meyer lemon, pear and stone fruit, with hints of freshly baked sourdough bread.

©P

HERZOGWINE.COM





The Fruits of Our Labor

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT HARVEST INTERNING

AS HARVEST WRAPS UP in the Northern Hemisphere, now is a good time to credit some major contributors to its success who rarely get mentioned: interns. Books could and should be written about the other unsung heroes in our industry, vineyard laborers, and the essential role they play. But leaving that larger topic aside, this column is dedicated to the (typically) young people who choose to intern for a winery's harvest crew.

What motivates someone to sign up for eight to 14 weeks of grueling physical labor over long hours in often brutal conditions? Soon-to-be graduates of enology programs are often required to intern; others are looking to fund their global travels with their modest pay; some are considering a career change—and yes, a few think they're signing up for two months of swirling and sipping wine while watching the sunset.

Depending on the size of the winery, there may only be one intern or as many as 40. It's obvious when the interns from a particular Sonoma County megaproducer have arrived because they swarm the local Safeway in their neon-orange crew T-shirts, stocking up for the long weeks when food becomes fuel and dollars need to go far.

A solo intern for a small operation will likely get the chance to experience all facets of production: fruit sorting, destemming, pressing, pumpovers, filling barrels, adding nutrients, and monitoring fermentation. Those at larger facilities may be asked to perform only one function for the duration of the harvest: The night-shift press operator, for instance, will operate a press all night long for weeks on end. While this may sound much less interesting, it offers the chance to go deep. Not only will that person master a crucial winemaking step, they will come away stronger, having just undergone a serious test of their mettle.



What's more, interns bring so much more than just their labor. Often from foreign countries, they share their language, their food, and their music with their crew. When they're working well together toward their common goal, the happy sounds of people laughing, exchanging stories, and falling in love fill the crush pad. This brings sighs of relief to the permanent staff, who know all too well that during harvest, a crew sinks or swims as one.

The sooner aspiring winemakers embrace the menial, repetitive, and physically demanding aspects of this business, the nearer they are to truly becoming winemakers. People can crack under the pressure. Some walk off the job. It's striking that those in closest physical contact with the wine are paid the least: One has to develop a passion for the process to stick with it. No other reason will suffice.

The best interns are reliable, good at

following orders—as with restaurants, there can be only one head chef—and curious. Asking questions is mutually beneficial. The best winemakers don't follow recipes; pausing to explain or justify their choices gives them an opportunity to reflect on their practices.

If you're looking for advice on how to make the most of harvest, here it is: Arrive with an open mind. Accept that every winemaker is different and you are here to learn from this one. Settle into the work, don't fight it, and get into a happy groove. Make the decision to laugh when you get wet. (You'll be laughing a lot.) Prioritize sleep and nutrition and drink water every chance you get—everything feels worse with a hangover. Above all, remember that happiness under adverse conditions is a choice. And know that one day, a year or so in the future, you will have a chance to sip and swirl that wine while relaxing at sunset. *sj*

RUFFINO

DAL 1877

TWO ICONIC WINES.
DECADES OF 90+ SCORES.

J.L. Ruffino



2015
RISERVA
DUCALE ORO

CHIANTI CLASSICO
GRAN SELEZIONE DOCG

90 POINTS

Wine Advocate
July 2020

2017 MODUS
SUPER TUSCAN
92 POINTS

Anthony Dias Blue
July 2020

recipe for

SUCCESS

CAKEBREAD RISES TO THE TOP *by Lars Leicht*

PHOTO: ALEXANDER RUBIN



Jack and Dolores Cakebread with their sons Bruce, left, and Dennis, right.

When Jack and Dolores Cakebread founded their eponymous California winery in 1973, their goal was straightforward: to make top-quality, fruit-forward, food-friendly wines that reflected the soils in which the grapes were grown. They started with Chardonnay and Cabernet Sauvignon on 22 acres of prime vineyard land in Rutherford. Nearly 50 years, 578 more vineyard acres, and several more varietals later, the next generation of the Cakebread family—sons Dennis and Bruce—is staying true to that guiding principle.

“It’s all about the fruit that comes in from the vineyard, and my job is not to mess it up,” says director of winemaking Stephanie Jacobs—in jest, as she does have the leeway to try out new winemaking methods. For example, she recently began fermenting the brand’s signature Chardonnay with native yeasts, and she also now uses concrete eggs for certain varieties. “I think there are always different directions that you can go in while still maintaining a signature



Cakebread's Suscol Springs Vineyard.

PHOTO COURTESY OF CAKEBREAD

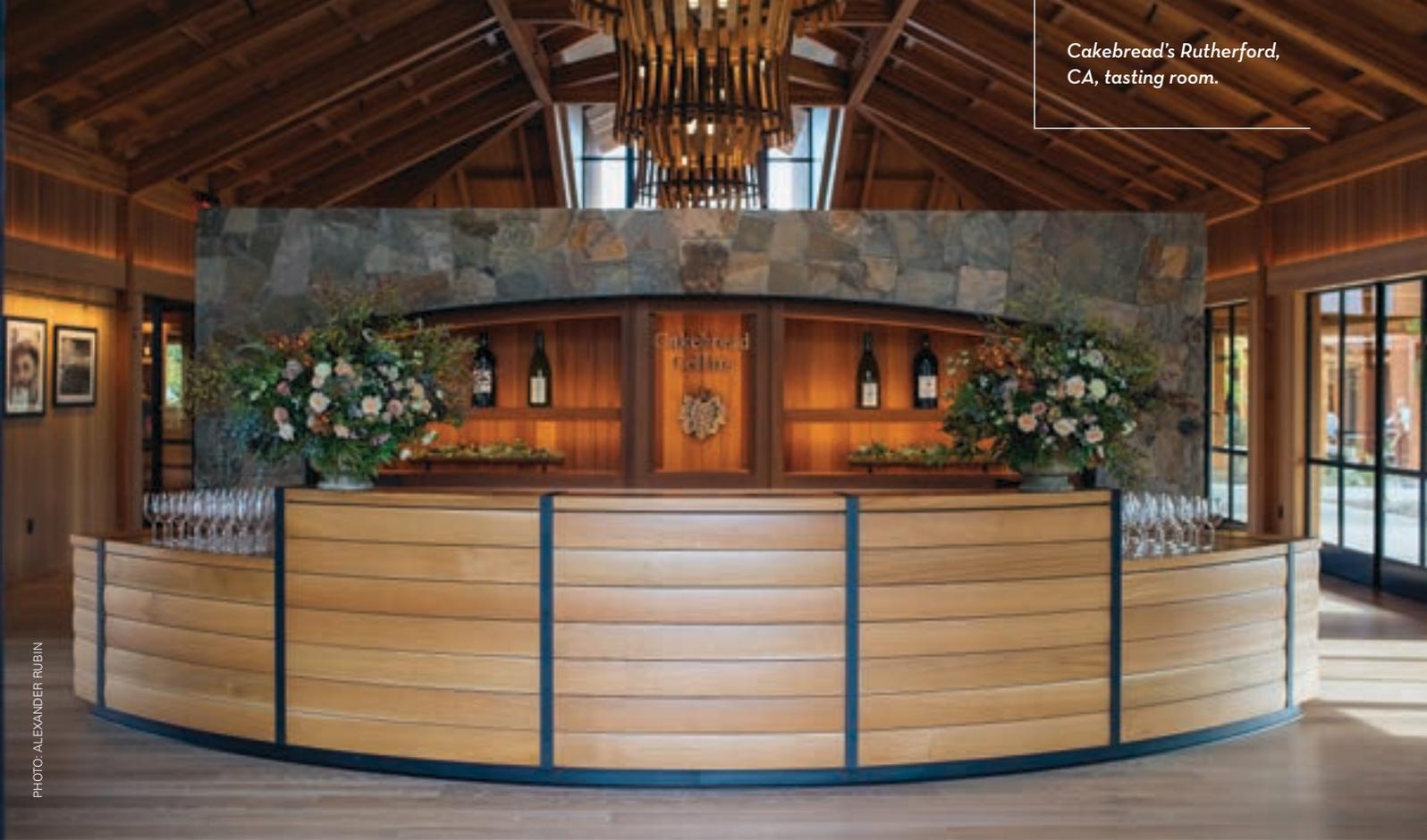


PHOTO: ALEXANDER RUBIN

style," she explains, describing the latest vintage of the Chardonnay as "a nice, bright, crisp [wine that still] falls into the Cakebread style."

Jacobs joined the winery in 2004 as an enologist, rising through the ranks before eventually being appointed as the fourth winemaker in Cakebread's history in 2017. Along the way, she's had the opportunity to work with predecessors like Bruce (who served as winemaker from 1979 to 2002 before assuming the roles of president and COO) and Julianne Laks, helping her achieve a sense of continuity. That said, VP of operations Aaron Fishleder concurs with her that the Cakebreads are not dogmatic when it comes to the methodology taken to achieve their desired goal. "The family wants a little innovation; they want a little trying of new things here and there," he says. "We are true to our style, but there is a difference as things have evolved. . . . We're not making the same wines we were making 50 years ago because, frankly, the family wouldn't want that, and I think our team would be kind of bored. That would be 'making the doughnuts,' so to speak."

PHOTO COURTESY OF CAKEBREAD



Growing Portfolio, Growing Challenges

Expanding the Cakebread portfolio to include new varieties has brought new challenges for the team, as they want to avoid taking a cookie-cutter approach to vineyard management and tailor their production techniques to each individual variety in order to bring out a distinctive character that is still compatible with the winery's signature style. "We have amazing vineyard sites, and I think that's 95% of the game. Everything else can follow if we have that," says Fishleder.

Jacobs points out that some of the vineyards have varied terrain, which offers opportunities for varietal diversity. "Some of the sites are so unique that there are several vineyards up there. There could be a small parcel that is not suitable for Cabernet, so [we ask,] what is it suitable for? And now we've got mountain Sauvignon Blanc! There's a lot of thought that goes into it"

Cakebread's sustainability bona fides includes certifications through such programs as Napa Green, Fish Friendly Farming, Bee Friendly Farming, and Green Fleet Pioneer.

A quest for the best terroir for Pinot Noir, meanwhile, led them to purchase vineyard acreage in the Anderson Valley, and they've expanded further into Carneros, Calistoga, and Napa Valley as well.

Jacobs admits that while it's "fun" to work with different varieties, the logistics of production can get complicated when fruit from different sites ripens at the same time. "It's like Tetris in a way," she adds, "trying to put all the pieces together in a timely way."

But Fishleder is quick to praise the dexterity of Jacobs and her winemaking team in successfully processing "not only . . . the differences in varieties [but] the differences in varieties from particular sites [as well]." The Sauvignon Blanc alone, for example, features a blend of fruit whose sources span from vineyards in Calistoga, located to the northwest of Rutherford, to the hills southeast of Napa.

Regardless of the source, Jacobs prefers to ferment the Sauvignon Blanc mainly in stainless steel, with a portion going into cement eggs; she says the latter vessels not only maintain a more consistent temperature and encourage natural movement of the lees because of their shape but also provide micro-oxygenation similar to a bar-



rel while avoiding the influence of oak. For Chardonnay, however, she prefers barrel fermentation: “We want that wood impact, that creaminess, that texture that the wood gives to the wine along with the lees contact.” For the Pinot Noir, as with the Chardonnay, she relies on native yeast to start fermentation, then inoculates with commercial yeast halfway through the process; she says this preserves natural complexity but also lets her “sleep at night” knowing the must will fully finish fermenting.

Fermentation temperatures vary by varietal as well. Jacobs ferments the Sauvignon Blanc cold at around 50 degrees Fahrenheit while increasing the temperature by a few degrees for the Chardonnay. She raises it to closer to 85 degrees for the Pinot Noir and over 90 degrees for the Bordeaux varieties in order to extract color, anthocyanins, and structure at the beginning of fermentation. In any case, constant monitoring is required, as the status of the wine during fermentation can “change at the drop of a hat,” she says.

In Service of Symbiosis

Beyond varietal and site differences, the winemaking team must deal with vintage variations that require them to adapt their technique accordingly. Jacobs points out that in a drought year, when the Cabernet Sauvignon is more concentrated and richer

in color and tannins, she will ferment at lower temperatures, while in a cooler season she will keep the temperature warmer longer with more skin contact to extract color and structure. “You never know what you’re going to get every year until you actually get into it,” she says. “There are some vineyards where it is difficult to extract the color, so you do have to work the fruit more than I would have thought in a drought vintage. I thought it would be easy—that the color would just come pouring out of the fruit; that’s not necessarily the case in some vineyards.”

That, says Fishleder, is where experience comes into play, but technology can lend a much-needed helping hand too—for example, by monitoring vine stress to judiciously determine when to irrigate. Cakebread also utilizes a water management system made up of a network of gravel and drain tiles woven through the vineyard deep beneath the vines that draws excess water to the southwest corner of the property, where it’s expelled either into a reservoir and recycled for frost protection and irrigation or into a stream feeding the Napa River. Soil-related and low-impact farming practices like composting, reducing herbicide use, avoiding synthetic fertilizers, establishing wildlife corridors, and applying microbials to improve vine balance further contribute to the vitality of the vineyards. “Healthy vines

come from healthy soils,” he continues. “We want to make sure these vineyards are here in 50 years more.”

To further ensure its longevity, Cakebread is also working to reduce water and energy use in the winery and recycles what’s currently used in winery operations for irrigation; the permeable paving stones in the winery’s parking lot, meanwhile, drain through to a gravel bed that filters the water before replenishing the groundwater supply, and microturbines have been installed to improve energy efficiency while heating and cooling. Other sustainability-related efforts have earned Cakebread certifications through such programs as Napa Green, Fish Friendly Farming, Bee Friendly Farming, and Green Fleet Pioneer, the latter of which was awarded due to its use of electric forklifts and tractors, and it’s currently transitioning its properties with red varietals to organic farming, starting with Maple Lane Vineyard in Calistoga.

The brand’s philosophy of framing wine as “an enjoyable accompaniment to life,” in the words of Dennis Cakebread, also positioned it to be an early pioneer of Napa’s farm-to-table movement. The vegetable garden Dolores Cakebread started on a small plot behind the winery is now planted with 40 beds that yield produce year round, enabling culinary director Brian Streeter to plan seasonal menus for



Cakebread director of winemaking Stephanie Jacobs.

educational programs, seminars, blending sessions, cooking classes, and wine-pairing lunches and dinners. "It is part of our story, our heritage, how they started the business," Streeter points out. "The relationship between wine and food is symbiotic—one makes the other taste better. The family takes as much pride in our hospitality as they do with the winemaking."

In the market, Cakebread's quality is underscored by its elegantly simple packag-



Cakebread VP of operations Aaron Fishleder.

ing: cream-colored labels adorned by the winery logo and signature grape bunch. "We can barely keep it in stock," says David Reuss, wine director at Shanahan's Steakhouse in Denver. "As soon as our guests are ready to upgrade their experience, it's nice to show them the elegance and refinement of Cakebread. It's simply fun to open people's minds to classic and refreshing wines from California."

Noel Patron, VP of food and beverage

for Dallas-based chain Cru Wine Bar; notes that Cakebread Sauvignon Blanc is a hit particularly in warmer markets: "It's hot in Texas, so cool, crisp Cakebread Sauvignon seems to sing for nine to 12 months of the year." Though he switches up his selections often, Cakebread remains a staple, he adds: "There's a warm and fuzzy feeling for a brand that has name recognition and always delivers comfort with quality."

The Sauvignon Blanc is also a longtime staple on the wine list at Charleston's in Fort Worth, according to general manager John Felmet, who recently decided to offer it by the glass as well as the bottle despite its higher price point. "We took a leap, but it's been well received," he says. "We sell a ton of it by the glass." He recounts how he convinced a regular customer who was "hooked" on another brand of Sauvignon Blanc to try the Cakebread, and it instantly became their new favorite. Felmet recently added the Cakebread Pinot Noir to his list as well: As he puts it simply, "It's easy to sell because it tastes great."

The next generation of the family would agree; no wonder they're working so diligently to preserve Jack and Dolores Cakebread's vision. **SJ**

tasting notes



Cakebread Cellars 2020 Sauvignon Blanc, Napa Valley (\$35)

Ninety percent of this Sauvignon Blanc, sourced from estate ranches and vineyards in Carneros, Suscol Springs, Ruth-erford, and Calistoga, is aged five months in neutral French oak, while 5% ages in tank and 5% in concrete egg. Blended with 1% Sémillon, it's aromatic, with scents of lemon and dill that lead to flavors of white flowers covered in melt-

ing lime sugar. There's a pureness on the palate: The crystal clarity of the acidity and a wave of pink grapefruit and tropical fruit are heavenly. **93** —*Meridith May*



Cakebread Cellars 2018 Suscol Springs Cabernet Sauvignon, Napa Valley (\$130)

This blend of 85% Cabernet Sauvignon and 15% Merlot comes from Suscol Springs estate vines, planted on rocky outcroppings to yield small, concentrated berries. Spending 22 months in 70% new and 30% neutral French oak, it's an invitation to luxury—as exhibited by plump, ripe blue fruit; a coating of dark chocolate; and firm

tannins that bend as it continues to open up. Marvelous acidity and a weaving of minerality throughout reveal its power and finesse. **97** —*M.M.*



Cakebread Cellars 2019 Pinot Noir, Two Creeks Vineyards, Anderson Valley, Mendocino (\$45)

Two Creeks Vineyards includes grapes from two estate sites in the Anderson Valley, where the cooling influence of the Pacific allows for slow, even ripening. Each block is fermented separately and aged three months before blending; the wine then sees ten months in (35% new) French oak barrels. Scents of dried leaves after a rainfall, cray-

on wax, and red plum are outstanding. The plush, pillowy mouthfeel is awash with wild strawberry and tilled soil. Dried rose petals and balsamic have an effect on the minerality that, along with bright acidity, keeps the wine fresh on the palate. **95** —*M.M.*

Somm's-Eye View

SOMM GEO ENABLES USERS TO DEFTLY NAVIGATE THE WORLD OF WINE AND SPIRITS by Deborah Parker Wong

An aerial map of Portugal's Cima Corgo region from SommGeo Tours.

TEACHERS IN THE WORLD of wine and spirits often spend endless hours developing study tools for their students, in particular maps that will help them better visualize the places they are studying. For educators like me, Greg Van Wagner's SommGeo platform has eliminated the need to spend so much time creating overlays of PDOs to scale for topographic maps. The usefulness of these maps cannot be underestimated; they're one of the best ways to convey the totality of the terroir.

A Pennsylvanian who makes his home in Aspen, Colorado, Van Wagner is a career sommelier and wine director who has traveled to over 60 key wine and spirits regions around the world—from Galicia and Greece to Scotland and Jalsico—and is clearly obsessed with technology. Van Wagner developed SommGeo as an interactive atlas that provides a wealth of concise information on wine history, geography, production laws, and producers. Not only did he do all of the coding for the site, he also authored all the content that resides there. "It's all [the information] you need to excel as a modern sommelier," he says.

SommGeo has three key features: SommGeo Tours, SommGeo Globe, and SommGeo Maps, all of which provide a rich, saturated visual experience that combines navigable maps, still images, and informational text geared toward all levels of wine study.

SommGeo Tours is billed as a SommFoundation Virtual Enrichment Trip, featuring as it does 22 archived tours of key wine regions. The tours—which are optimized for Chrome and Firefox browsers—allow you to click through slides combined with interactive, animated maps that you can move around as you please, zooming in for an up-close look at a vineyard or winery or out for a bird's-eye view of a region; dropped pins



IMAGES COURTESY OF GREG VAN WAGNER



An up-close look at Bethel Heights Vineyard in Oregon's Eola-Amity Hills AVA.

show key points on the maps. The tours also include details on production, wine styles, and dramatic photos of vineyards and estate maps for individual producers.

SommGeo Globe is a powerful feature that serves as a window to the world, allowing you to enter a particular location and pick from a drop-down menu that leads you to an interactive aerial map of your selection, which you can pan across, zoom in on and out of, and even rotate. A PDO map, meanwhile, can be zoomed out so that you can see the whole appellation highlighted over a full-color topographical map.

Van Wagner knows the value of vibrant, high-resolution maps that can be downloaded or printed, so for **SommGeo Maps** he's created 100 of them using GIS

software. As someone who spends considerable time adding rivers to regional maps, I appreciate that rivers are particularly well illustrated in these maps, which show PDOs and PGIs highlighted in color over a greyscale topographical background.

As an advocate and benefactor of SommFoundation, a California-based 501(c)(3) nonprofit corporation committed to assisting beverage professionals to achieve their full potential, Van Wagner has developed an exceptional tool for students, educators, producers, salespersons, and enthusiasts alike. **Those who donate \$85 or more to SommFoundation receive one year's access to SommGeo as a benefit.** To quote Van Wagner, "Your virtual travels with SommGeo will be the next best thing to being there." ❏

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THIS HOLIDAY SEASON



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BY SARAH GRAYBILL

Esmé's extruded Cheetos.



PHOTOS: DAN PIOTROWSKI

A Taste for Community

PATRONS EXPERIENCE ART AND PHILANTHROPY ALONGSIDE WORLDLY CUISINE AT **ESMÉ**

THERE'S A FRESH face on the block in Chicago's Lincoln Park neighborhood, and her name is Esmé. French for "beloved," the restaurant was created by former Next chef and James Beard Rising Star Chef finalist Jenner Tomaska with his wife/partner, Katrina Bravo, to offer a 12-course tasting menu that transports patrons all over the world from a dining room filled with the work of established and emerging artists.

Since Esmé's debut last August, Tomaska and Bravo have been preparing to host collaboration dinners with these artists and other creatives, all of which will have a philanthropic component. For example, they'll pour Michael Lavelle Iris Rosé from California's Central Coast, which directly donates to The Roots Fund, a nonprofit that helps uplift people of color in the wine industry; Temperance Beer Co. in Evanston, Illinois, which supports a different nonprofit each month; and Chicago's own Marz Community Brewing Company, which founded a kitchen to employ furloughed chefs and feed the food insecure during the pandemic.

When possible, their collaborators' pieces will remain on display in the restaurant during the one- to three-month menu runs, giving guests a chance to "discover a producer, artist, or artisan they didn't know about and not only support them but tell others about their work: They [can] come in and see Amanda Rivera's stunning wallpaper and take photos to share her brilliance with others; purchase art from exhibitors like Danielle Klinenberg; or fall in love with Polly Verity's folded sculptures," Bravo says.

According to her, Esmé evolved from experiences she and Tomaska had both at Next and at the now-closed MK under the mentorship of chefs Erick Williams and Michael Kornick, whose own beliefs and

practices inspired their focus on incorporating such concepts as giving back, creating community, and showcasing creativity into the guest experience.

Meals the couple shared at restaurants around the world also served as influences. "I'll never forget sitting down at Pujol in Mexico City and feeling com-



Esmé beverage director/operations manager Tia Barrett.

pletely swept up into the world of the restaurant—I couldn't stop smiling," Bravo says. "[Such meals] underscore the power that restaurants have to transport us. All these moments became points of inspiration as Jenner and I dreamt about opening a restaurant together someday."

Operations manager/beverage director Tia Barrett oversees the beverage program, which includes craft cocktails, beer, non-alcoholic offerings, and a 50-bottle wine list that spotlights underrepresented voices in the industry, such as women- and BIPOC-led producers, in addition to the aforementioned wineries with philanthropic missions. "There's an emphasis on Biodynamic or certified organic wines, while considering approachability as well as unexpected offerings that inspire education and discovery among guests," Bravo says.

The food also often comes with a mem-



Katrina Bravo runs Esmé with her husband/partner, Jenner Tomaska.

orable backstory. One of Esmé's hottest menu items, the Cheeto, is the result of an invention that offers patrons a new look at an old snack. "A friend's father helped build the machine we use to make the dish—essentially a grain extruder that has been jury-rigged to produce this specific menu item," Tomaska says.

On New Year's Eve, Esmé will host its first collaboration dinner with Chicago-based photographer and videographer Paul Octavious, whose work studies subjects over time. Octavious' pieces will be on display and the menu will be available through the end of February—but no matter when patrons find their way to 2200 N. Clark Street, Esmé will be there with something new to awe and inspire them. "We hope that the experience [here] is one of discovery," Bravo says. "We hope that it transcends our walls, not only because they had a memorable meal but because they leave taking a piece of the restaurant—whether it is tangible or intangible—with them." **sj**



DEEPLY DISTINCTIVE

EXPLORING DOURO WINES FROM **QUINTA VALE D. MARIA**

Quinta Vale D. Maria is located alongside the Torto River among the hills of the Cima Corgo subregion in Portugal's Douro Valley. Dating back to 1868, this traditional *quinta* (estate) commands a privileged view of over 89 acres of vineyards, some of them home to vines more than 80 years old. Today it is part of Aveleda, established in 1870 by the Guedes family, who have expanded its production to the Douro Superior subregion.

Every wine created at Quinta Vale D. Maria tells a story, reflecting the singular nature of the individual plots from which they come. Respect for this unique terroir is critical to revealing both the diverse characters of indigenous grape varieties and the magic of field blends. Quinta Vale D. Maria preserves such local traditions as plowing vineyards by horse and treading handpicked grapes by foot in granite *lagares* in accordance with the rhythms of ancient times. Each detail is important to ensuring unmatched quality in the wines, widely recognized for their distinctiveness.

Quinta Vale D. Maria has captured the attention of wine lovers across the globe as it communicates the Douro region's identity and traditions. Visit quintavaledonamaria.com to follow its story—and please enjoy responsibly.



Quinta Vale Dona Maria

The truest expression of the Douro Valley, this wine is a field blend of 41 different grape varieties, all grown together in an old vineyard. Deep, complex notes of fresh violets elegantly merge with dark berries and ripe prunes. All the signature aromas of the Douro take tasters on a remarkable journey.

Quinta Vale Dona Maria Vinha da Francisca

A departure from Douro tradition, this vibrant and fresh wine illustrates the promising future of the region while reflecting the consistency of excellence that Quinta Vale D. Maria consumers have grown accustomed to, time and again corroborated by the trade and press.



Vale Dona Maria Vinhas do Sabor

Quinta Vale do Sabor is located in one of the least known yet most special valleys of the Douro Superior. This quinta is distinguished by the sinuous curves of the Sabor River, where grape varieties such as Touriga Franca, Touriga Nacional, Tinta Roriz, Alicante Bouschet, and Baga are all planted on vines between 10 and 35 years old. The terroir here is ideal for creating wines with a deeply fruity and mineral style. Vale D. Maria Vinhas do Sabor is a highly concentrated yet fresh and lively red. Striking on the nose thanks to the exuberance of its raspberry, blueberry, and blackberry aromas, it also boasts floral touches and a long, fresh finish.



Around the World in D.C.

SPANISH COMFORT FOOD AND MODERN VIETNAMESE CUISINE WHISK DISTRICT DINERS ABROAD SANS PASSPORTS

by Kelly Magyarics

WHAT HAS JOSÉ ANDRÉS been up to lately—besides traveling the world to feed those in need as the founder of World Central Kitchen? Converting the Bethesda location of his longtime tapas hot spot, Jaleo, into a Spanish take on the all-day diner (called, appropriately enough, Spanish Diner). For his latest project, the renowned chef, author, humanitarian, and veritable national treasure (who lives nearby when he isn't globetrotting) was stirred by the simple, satisfying home cooking he grew up with.

My August visit coincided with La Tomatina, Andrés' homage to the yearly festival (and messy food fight) held in Valencia. Though it was canceled this year due to the pandemic, Andrés went ahead with an entire menu dedicated to the late-summer farmers market darling. I sipped a wildly addictive Tom Mare made with black pepper-infused Gin Mare, tomato water, rosemary syrup, and lemon while dining on a Catalan salad of salt cod, tomato, olive oil, and olives as well as a tomato and watermelon salad topped with pistachios, Caña de Cabra cheese, and a drizzle of PX Sherry reduction.

Like any diner worth its salt, this one serves up breakfast all day; here, it takes the form of eggs fried in olive oil and topped with crispy potatoes plus your choice of chistorra, morcilla, jamón, and/or smoked salmon. The section of the menu labeled "La Cocina de la Abuela," meanwhile, offers such hearty dishes as beef tripe stew with chickpeas and mac and cheese with Manchego and chorizo. No offense to Grandma, but those dishes seemed more

fitting for the chilly weather ahead than the summer heat we were experiencing, so we opted instead for the chef's greatest hits: crispy patatas bravas, delicate slices of acorn-fed jamón ibérico, pan con tomate, and a G&T with custom-made tonic. For dessert? Tomatoes, of course, in the form of a marmalade with olive-oil and brioche ice creams.

On the D.C. waterfront, another chef is paying tribute to his culinary heritage. After launching in October 2020 and then shuttering for a few months, Moon Rabbit, a modern Vietnamese restaurant named for the virtuous rabbit in the Buddhist Jataka tale, reopened last winter in the InterContinental Washington D.C.—The Wharf. Chef Kevin Tien playfully references his experiences as a first-generation Asian American

through dishes like pan-fried turmeric catfish with smoked dill tartar, evoking a McDonald's Filet-O-Fish; shrimp grilled on sugarcane skewers; and charred cabbage with peanut romesco. A close friend and I plotted

Spanish Diner's Tom Mare cocktail with black pepper-infused Gin Mare, tomato water, rosemary syrup, and lemon.



Crawfish noodles with crab-fat butter at Moon Rabbit.

our dining strategy over delicate White Negronis featuring Nolet's Silver Gin, grapefruit-infused Belvedere Vodka, Dolin Vermouth, and grapefruit liqueur. It would have been all too easy to fill up on the shareable small plates, but our server thoughtfully reminded us to save room for the crispy fried chicken lacquered with chili-maple fish sauce and crawfish noodles with crab-fat butter. The true star of the night, however, was the tender pork blade, fragrant with lemongrass and served with scallion pancakes, lettuce leaves, and hoisin for a choose-your-own-adventure Asian taco even better than a fancy fast-food fish sandwich. **\$J**



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Discover the labels of our wineries on Prosecco.it



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{ winery spotlight }

PHOTOS COURTESY OF SILVERADO VINEYARDS



A TALE OF

TWO

TERROIRS



**SILVERADO VINEYARDS BARES
THE SOULS OF ITS SINGLE-
VINEYARD NAPA CABERNETS**

by Nell Jerome

The term *terroir* is sometimes misused and often misunderstood. When two wines from the same vintage, crafted from the same varietal by the same winemaker, taste distinctively different, reflecting the sites where they're grown, it earns its significance. Silverado's single-vineyard Cabernets GEO and SOLO are two such worthy wines.

Celebrating its 40th anniversary this year, the storied Silverado Vineyards was famously founded by Walt Disney's daughter Diane Miller and her husband, Ron; all of its wines are estate-grown, -produced, and -bottled, which earns it the distinction of being one of the few true estate wineries left in Napa. What's more, most of them are single-vineyard expressions, designed to reveal the uniqueness of their *terroir*:

SOLO, Silverado's flagship, is not only a single-vineyard but also a single-clone Cabernet with a rich history. The winery was named after the vineyard at the base of the hill on which it's perched; the vineyard in turn was named for the nearby town of Silverado, where pioneers came in search of silver, gold, and, eventually, vineyard land.



Abel McFarland was a silver miner who arrived in Napa in the 1870s and established a vineyard in the area now known as the Stags Leap District. After Prohibition, Harry See (of See's Candy fame) restored it and was one of the first vintners to plant Cabernet grapes there. Over a 20-year span, his team created a unique clone of Cabernet, so when the Miller family purchased the site, they proudly became stewards of both the land and the clone.

As Russ Weis, president of Silverado, notes, "Vines change from vintage to vintage, and the variations on the theme [of the parent fruit] become so distinctive that occasionally, the result is an exceptional clone"—so exceptional, in fact, that the University of California, Davis, designated UCD 30 as one of only three heritage clones of Cabernet in California. The Millers loved the idea that the Disney Silverado Heritage Clone (as it's also known) was a variation on a theme, playing its own interpretation of Cabernet every vintage as expressively as a soloist. In 2002, they released the first vintage of Cabernet made exclusively from UCD 30 and named it SOLO.

Explains Weis, "The *terroir* is so diverse in Silverado Vineyard, with its steep shale soils in the back and gentle slopes in the front. Working with identical vines, [we] still [get] layers and nuances [from] each block of the vineyard. This is where [SOLO's] stone fruit, plum, and cherry characters come from. And the powerful, refined texture makes it so ageworthy."

GEO is also a single-vineyard Cabernet crafted by Silverado's winemaker of 31 years, Jon Emmerich. Around the same time that McFarland was planting Cabernet in his vineyard, another Napa pioneer, Henry Hagan, was growing it at the base of the Mt. George volcano in what would become the Coombsville AVA. His resulting Cedar Knoll wine was memorably entered in the Universal Exposition of 1889 in Paris, where it won a silver medal. Recognizing how unique the site was, the Miller family purchased it, restored it, and named it after the volcano; when Coombsville became an appellation in 2011, the proud custodians



of its great legacy knew they had to do something special to mark the occasion. In 2012, they created GEO to honor Mt. George Vineyard, where Cabernet vines thrive in the well-drained, tufa-laden volcanic soils and cool bay breezes.

Examining why *terroir* is so essential to GEO, Emmerich explains, "Terroir is not just soil and topography—climate plays a big role. Mt. George is pretty close to the [San Pablo] Bay, and the vineyard is just under the fog line. There is a cool thermal blanket in the morning, and then the sun breaks through and the temperature rises—but not as fast as it does up valley. As a result, the fruit can develop complex flavors without the sugars racing out ahead. That is why GEO, with its brambly black fruit character and a broad, chewy texture, has that mid-palate texture that is so 'Mt. George.'"

The Silverado team also believes that "terroir" extends beyond the land and sky to include viticultural and winemaking practices that yield the "soul" of a wine. Certainly these two classic Napa Cabernets represent the heart and soul of Silverado. *SJ*

Help Us Help Our Industry

HOW TO SPONSOR POSITIVE CHANGE AND OPPORTUNITIES THROUGH **SOMMFOUNDATION**

PHOTOS COURTESY OF SOMMFOUNDATION



SommFoundation Chair
Thomas Price, MS.

ATTENTION WINEMAKERS, JOURNALISTS, wholesalers, importers, retailers, restaurateurs, wine educators, wine business leaders, Masters of Wine, Master Sommeliers, and other trade professionals: We ask you to give back to our industry.

We all know how difficult the last two years have been for so many people, especially those in the wine and spirits business. Record numbers of workers are quitting as staffing issues plague the entire country. As a result, employees are overworked and exhausted, and bidding wars for workers have become common. COVID continues to plague us, and we are learning to live with it. As we settle into this new era, we can't know for certain what the future will look like, but the old normal is likely gone forever.

SommFoundation is a 501(c)(3) California nonprofit corporation whose mission is to assist in the education and professional development of people working in wine and spirits. We aim to make meaningful impacts on individuals seeking to further their development in our industry, and since our inception, we have awarded over \$1 million in scholarship funds and provided enrichment opportunities for over 1,000 people.

We recognize the urgent need to provide more opportunities to people who have generally been underrepresented in our business. This year, we added three new members to our board of directors to better reflect the diverse nature [continued on page 54]

SommFoundation's Somm Camp program recommenced in 2021 after a hiatus due to the pandemic.



Setting the new standard for
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SommFoundation Chair Thomas Price, MS, with Sarah Thomas at the 2020 Rudd Round Table mentorship program.

of our community, and last month, we established our Commitment to Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (statement available on our website at sommfoundation.com/about). In addition, SommFoundation has joined with the Court of Master Sommeliers, Americas, to provide annual Introductory Courses at five Historically Black Colleges and Universities starting in 2022. Our SommGeo program, meanwhile, continues to expand and evolve as one of the greatest wine technology tools available to students and enthusiasts alike (for more information, see page 44 and visit sommfoundation.com/sommgeo).

Take an active role in transforming our industry. Think of the lives you can impact through developing programs with SommFoundation: This could be a trip to Burgundy for a sommelier working in a remote area of the country who doesn't have the same access as a resident of New York or San Francisco; a mentorship for a young wine writer; or a scholarship for a single mother pursuing her Master of Wine accreditation. It could be a stage at a world-class establishment that would be otherwise out of reach or funding for a student seeking a wine business degree.

Your contributions will help create these opportunities. Whether you are in-

terested in participating in a fundraiser or creating a scholarship, an enrichment or stage opportunity, or a mentorship program, we can work with you to achieve these goals.

Here are various ways you can help:

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SommFoundation gives special thanks to the many patrons and sponsors who have supported us over the years. We could not do this work without you. We hope many of you reading this today will join this generous and distinguished group. 

To learn more, please visit sommfoundation.com or email us at info@sommfoundation.com.

Thank you from all of us at SommFoundation:

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Please participate in our annual survey on how SommFoundation can best serve our community. To access, scan the QR code at right.



SPECIAL PROMOTION



THE CHARMING TASTE OF EUROPE

There are places in Europe that have a timeless charm, where the highest quality products with distinct flavors are born. Products that evoke such charm and embody the culture, history, art, and heritage of their respective regions. The Charming Taste of Europe is a unique project that connects the flavors of wine from Italy and France, as well as fresh fruit from Greece, and introduces the United States and Canada to these exquisite items that evoke all of Europe's beauty and grace.

Italy is proud of the wines of Abruzzo, one of the oldest vine regions in the world, growing in a territory surrounded by the Apennine Mountains and the Adriatic Sea with an ideal microclimate. With three National Parks and more than ten national and regional reserves, Abruzzo territory, indeed, has a natural predisposition for winegrowing, with proof of a solid winemaking tradition dating back to ancient times. The fabulous properties of the wines from the inland Abruzzo were first mentioned by Pholybius, a Greek historian who lived between 205 and 123 B.C., and afterwards, in the texts of Roman authors Ovid and Pliny the Elder. Today, the production of wine has spread to the whole region and has evolved rapidly in quality over the last half century, becoming with no doubt the most significant segment of the region's agriculture with over 32,000 hectares of vineyards producing more than a million hectoliters of wines Doc each year, and almost 80% are made with Montepulciano grapes. Considered the king of Abruzzo wines, Montepulciano d'Abruzzo has become one of the Italy's most famous reds, thanks to its versatility, high quality, and typically affordable price point. Many historical documents show that Montepulciano has been present in the region since the mid-1700s, where it found the best conditions for growing. Montepulciano is a late-ripening grape characterized by a thick skin, which gives the wine its intense color, a nice medium structure and a good amount of tannins, usually mild. It can be produced in different ways, from young, easy-drinking wines to the more complex and ageable Montepulciano d'Abruzzo Riserva.

The campaign is co-funded by the European Union and aims to promote the merits of European agricultural products, such as quality, tradition, traceability, safety and high production standards. Quality is one of the greatest assets of the producers across the EU in their attempt to meet the consumer demand, to increase the competitiveness of the EU products on US and Canada markets.



To learn more about the campaign visit www.charmingtasteofeurope.eu/en.



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Eric Carucci and his wife, Lindsay, in front of their tasting room in Los Olivos, CA.



Wave of the Future

WE ENVISION CULT STATUS FOR CARUCCI WINES

SOMETIMES YOU STUMBLE upon a winemaker who is producing fewer than 800 cases and know in your soul that their wines deserve recognition: The time is now to introduce Eric Carucci, for whom we predict a bright future.

The self-taught winemaker's small but inviting tasting room in Los Olivos, California, showcases cool-climate Central Coast wines that impressed us with their light touch, opulent textures, and superb aromatics. Carucci is on hand to conduct tastings and offer an overview of the many vineyard sites he sources from. Whether by walk-in or invitation, it's a must visit, especially for wine buyers interested in adding the Carucci label to their lists or shelves.

Carucci 2019 Grenache, Morro View Vineyard, Edna Valley (\$49) This cool-climate vineyard is located just 5 miles off

the Pacific and experiences a near-daily ritual of morning fog and onshore winds. Planted in 2009 on Tierra loam soils, the grapes are organically farmed. A whisper of sweet rose, raspberry, and white pepper arises from a glass of this wine, which has a delicate mouthfeel; a heavenly, extroverted body; and notes of fresh strawberry, red beet, dried rosemary, and blood orange set against chalky tannins. "The '19s are more giving right out of the bottle," explains Carucci, "versus the shy 2018s." Aged in 100% neutral 500-liter French oak puncheons. **94**

Carucci 2019 Cabernet Franc, Portico Hills Vineyard, Los Alamos (\$49) In the newly adopted AVA of Los Alamos, red varieties are planted on sandy loam soils with veins of limestone on the steep slopes of Portico Hills Vineyard. Aromas of

dried violets are mirrored on the palate of this wine, a balance of savory and spice with drying minerality. Shishito pepper and green pea offer expressive herbal notes, but red fruit and floral tones simultaneously carry it through to the lengthy, exquisite finish. "This is a taste of the Loire with a healthy dose of California sunshine," remarks Carucci. **94**

Carucci 2018 Syrah, Duvarita Vineyard, Santa Barbara County (\$45) This cold and windy vineyard with sandy soils is located just west of the Sta. Rita Hills boundary and yielded a 100% whole-cluster Syrah that's savory and deep, with aromas of cured meat that show as salty and grilled on the palate. Dried plum-skin tannins reveal sweet tobacco and basil. You can smell and taste the beach, but the plump, ripe fruit is also memorable. **95** *ST*

Sommelier
Cristie
Norman.

Brand-New *Old Worlds*

THE **CLINK DIFFERENT** CAMPAIGN PARTNERS WITH SOMMELIER CRISTIE NORMAN TO OFFER A NOVEL PERSPECTIVE ON BORDEAUX AND GERMANY

by Jessie Birschbach

PHOTO: WADE VANDERVORT

“**T**here’s no way a person can actually be that sweet and mean it,” I thought to myself when I met Cristie Norman. At the time, she had just landed a coveted sommelier position at Spago in Beverly Hills; having formerly worked as a sommelier at chef Wolfgang Puck’s flagship restaurant myself, I assumed her kindness to be a result of our professional connection or even her young age of 21. But I’ve since watched her embody this trait again and again over the years, primarily as a pillar in the Los Angeles somm community known for hosting tasting groups, master classes, and a popular beginner’s wine class called “The Online Wine Course.”

Now, at 27, Norman has already had a tremendous amount of influence on the wine industry: In addition to being named one of *Wine Enthusiast’s* 40 Under 40 Tastemakers as well as its 2020 Educator of the Year, she co-founded The United Sommeliers Foundation, which has raised over \$1 million and awarded more than 1,000 grants to those in need in the somm community since its founding at the onset of the pandemic. So, needless to say, I was

wrong to doubt her to begin with: Norman’s sweetness truly comes from the heart.

Perhaps this is why I’m particularly honored to update the industry on what my charitable friend is up to these days, apart from her new gig as the lead sommelier at Delilah at the Wynn Las Vegas hotel. When we spoke recently, she was in the restaurant’s cellar, creating Excel formulas to significantly reduce the manual data entry for identifying wines on guest tickets: a vital efficiency.

Norman seemed more excited, however, when I asked her about her involvement in the successful Clink Different campaign, a collaborative effort between the Conseil Interprofessionnel du Vin de Bordeaux (CIVB) and the Deutsches Weininstitut (DWI) that began in May 2019 and has since spawned a seminar series, study and press trips, restaurant promotions, pop-up

PHOTO COURTESY OF CLINK DIFFERENT



A Clink Different wine tasting in Los Angeles, CA.

tastings, and more, all to promote the lesser-known wines of Bordeaux and Germany. The program’s mission aligns well with her own professional interests: “While many of my peers get excited about new and upcoming winegrowing regions, I have always been more interested in delving deeper into learning about regions that have been perfecting their craft for hundreds of years,” she said, adding that she’s aimed to serve as an “advocate by

educating about and sharing my favorite [wines] from Germany and Bordeaux. I’ve attended their events in the past and started working with them in different capacities, so . . . my partnership with Clink Different today is the result of an organically developed relationship over the course of several years.”

Read on for Norman’s fresh perspective on these two classic wine areas.



Philipp Wittmann of Weingut Wittmann in the Rheinhessen has been organically farming with his family since 1990; the winery was certified Biodynamic in 2004.

Not-So-Sweet *Germany*

As sommeliers, we're already aware that Germany is the number-one Riesling producer in the world. Other dominant grapes include Spätburgunder (Pinot Noir), Grauburgunder (Pinot Gris), Weissburgunder (Pinot Blanc), and Silvaner; these cover 103,180 hectares (254,205 acres)—many situated on incredibly steep banks along the Mosel and Rhine rivers (and their offshoots)—across 13 wine regions that are concentrated in the southern and southwestern part of the country. We know too of Germany's cool climate due to its location at the 48th–51st parallels. But rather than reviewing the aforementioned regions, perhaps it's more important to take a broader view and reexamine our preconceived notions of the country's wine industry. "I think a lot of consumers associate [Germany] with sweet white wine, but 24% of its production is red wine and 13% is rosé. Only about one-third of wines produced [there] are considered sweet wines," said Norman.

Not only are Germany's wines drier than generally perceived, the country is actually the third-biggest producer of Pinot Noir in the world (behind France and the U.S.) at 11,660 hectares (28,812 acres), according to the International Organisation of Vine and Wine. "I think this is a great time to start introducing guests to Spätburgunder from Germany," said Norman. "We see so many high-quality wineries out of California opting to make Old World-style Pinot Noir, and I think that the domestic market would be really receptive to it, especially on the West Coast."

GERMAN ANSWERS TO DOMESTIC TRENDS

Given that the U.S. is Germany's top export market, German producers seem to be strategically adapting to trends like those listed below to improve their odds of international success.

Sparkling wine: As of 2018, Germany has ranked third in global sparkling wine production, producing 14% of wines in the category (behind France and Italy), according to Wines of Germany, as demand for the category continues to rise.

Rosé: In 2020, the category represented 13% of all Quality Wine made in Germany, which includes styles like Weissherbst, Blanc de Noir, and Rotling. Ranging in color and sweetness level and available as both still and sparkling, the latter is made by blending red and white grapes prior to fermentation.

Younger, more diverse voices: Generation Riesling is a 540-member organization of German winemakers 35 and younger—making it the largest organization of young winemakers in the world as well as a networking platform that aims to generate interest in German wines, particularly the all-important Riesling, among young consumers. And in the Rheingau, over 1,000 students are enrolled in wine-related studies at Geisenheim University. This new generation is setting the trajectory of German winemaking and determining how it responds to future trends.

Organic farming: Germany has a long history of organic farming. In fact, roughly 10% of German vineyards (103,180 total hectares, or 26,193 acres) are certified organic, though it's worth noting that nearly all vineyards are farmed either organically, biodynamically, or sustainably without formal certification.

Low-alcohol wines: German Kabinett wines are typically low in alcohol.

PHOTO COURTESY OF DEUTSCHES WEININSTITUT

Bordeaux's Other Color

Bordeaux is perhaps the most influential wine region in the world. At the outset of our studies, sommeliers are taught to regard its major regions and 1855 classification system as the gold standard as we familiarize ourselves with its signature grapes: Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, Cabernet Franc, Carménère, Petit Verdot, Malbec, Sauvignon Blanc, Sémillon, and Muscadelle. These varieties, planted on the southwest coast of France and totaling 110,800 hectares (275,275 acres), according to the CIVB, are influenced by the Atlantic Ocean and, usually, one of the region's three major rivers: the Garonne, the Dordogne, and the Gironde estuary.

I could list Bordeaux's 65 appellations but, again, we should know this, or at least a few major handfuls (she said, loosening her collar). What's more important today is helping consumers explore their diversity. "I think a lot of consumers associate Bordeaux wines with red wines"—especially its most planted grape, Merlot—"but there are a lot of fantastic wines that are white, rosé, sparkling, and, of course, sweet!" said Norman. "I'm very surprised at how many guests ask for Sauternes by the glass where I work now in Las Vegas. It's probably the most requested dessert wine. Less than 1% of production in Bordeaux is sweet, so it really speaks to the quality and reliability of the region that Sauternes has created such a presence in the international marketplace."

Another interesting fact to consider is that the average price of a bottle of Bordeaux in the U.S. is \$20. The often exorbitant classified growths, which are what Americans traditionally think of when they think of Bordeaux, only account for 4% of the region's production. *sj*

BORDELAISE ANSWERS TO DOMESTIC TRENDS

Behind China, the U.S. bought the most Bordeaux in both volume and dollar sales in 2020, according to the CIVB. And interestingly, the U.S. is Bordeaux's number-one export market for whites, again both in value and volume; it's no wonder, then, that the region's producers are eager to adhere to recent domestic trends through their offerings.

Younger, more diverse voices:

In Bordeaux, organizations and educational institutions are helping to bring a fresh perspective to centuries-old winemaking practices. Bordeaux Oxygène is an association of young vintners that represents 44 estates and 25 Bordeaux AOCs, while the University of Bordeaux's Institut des Sciences de la Vigne et du Vin was founded in 2009 to help influence the future of winemaking through research and development.

Earth-friendly farming: Today, more than 75% of Bordeaux's vineyards are certified organic, Biodynamic, or sustainable, up from 35% in 2014; as of 2020, over 19,000 hectares are farmed organically. Also, in response to climate change, varieties like Malbec and Colombard that are more suited to warming conditions have seen substantial growth in plantings over the past decade, while six new grapes that are similarly adaptable have been approved for production.

Rosé: Following AOP regulation since 1936, the production of rosé has doubled in the last decade, now encompassing a range of styles.

Sauvignon Blanc: Bordeaux offers two distinct dry styles of Sauvignon Blanc—both a structured version (often blended with Sémillon and other grapes) and a more modern, fruitier version (also generally blended).

Marine Dubard's sustainably grown Bordeaux Sauvignon Blanc is an excellent alternative to New Zealand's versions.



{ marketplace }

Presenting The

RUBUS

PROJECT

THESE IMPORTER-CREATED WINES STRIKE A BALANCE
BETWEEN TERROIR AND VALUE **BY DAVID RANSOM**

*Rubus sources its Icono Malbec from the Paraje Altamira in
the Uco Valley, Mendoza, Argentina.*



It's not often that a wine importer and distributor creates a proprietary label that stands the test of time. Yet that's the case with The Rubus Project, a brand that Fran Kysela, MS, first introduced over 20 years ago and now sells across the country through his Winchester, Virginia–based company, Kysela Pere et Fils.

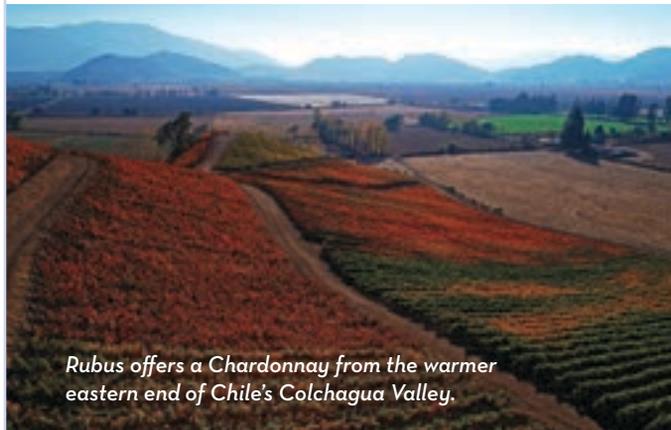
As a Master Sommelier with years of experience in the marketplace, working for such companies as E. & J. Gallo and Kermit Lynch before hanging out his own shingle, Kysela has a good handle on what consumers look for and also how they purchase it. So when he set out to create his own line of varietal wines, he knew it would have to grab the attention of both retailers and their customers.

“Customers want continuity and consistency. They want to build a relationship with a brand they can go back to time after time,” says Kysela, who first released Rubus to the market in 1998 with one expression; it now boasts over a dozen different wines from all over the world. “I’d been thinking of starting my own label for some time, but [I] knew I would need to make a statement and not simply throw wine in the bottle and offer it at a good price. The 1997 vintage in California was very good, and I thought this might be the time to start it, so I bottled a Lodi Old Vines Zin in conjunction with Amador producer Bill Easton and put it in a few select stores. It was an instant hit, and the first year I sold over 1,200 cases.”

BUILDING THE BRAND

Thinking he may have struck a chord with consumers, Kysela started the process of identifying other growers with which to partner, carefully researching the best regions for each varietal he wanted to produce at value prices. Case in point, he says: “I knew if I wanted a Pinot Noir, I would have to

PHOTOS COURTESY OF THE RUBUS PROJECT



Rubus offers a Chardonnay from the warmer eastern end of Chile's Colchagua Valley.



From Limoux in southwest France, Rubus' Blanc de Blancs Brut is composed of 30% Ugni Blanc, 30% Airen, 30% Colombard, and 10% Chardonnay.



The Lessini hills of the Veneto are the source of Rubus' Italian Pinot Noir.

The Rubus Project began in the late 1990s with a Lodi Old Vines Zinfandel made in collaboration with Amador producer Bill Easton.



look outside Burgundy, as Burgundian Pinot is very expensive and there is also none to buy.’

His research eventually led him to the Lessini hills in Italy’s Veneto region. “Northern Italy grows a lot of Pinot Noir, and it’s good fruit and still affordable,” Kysela explains, adding, “Though with the coming shortage in Europe for available wines to export, fingers crossed it stays that way.” The caveat shows his command of global production trends, which helps him stay ahead of the curve when sourcing, changing course when supply issues warrant it.

Another goal of his was to secure long-term relationships with growers. “One of the advantages we have with the Rubus line is the ability to present consistency from year to year by working with the wineries we partner with on an ongoing

basis,” says Kysela. On that note, he’s quick to point out that The Rubus Project is not bulk wine—it’s made under contract with select producers that allow him a hand in its vinification and aging.

“Many of the labels in the Rubus line are made in conjunction with producers we already work with to import their own labels, so these wines are not spot-market or bulk products that we just arrange to bottle and slap a label on,” says Kysela. “We’re in control of these wines from day one, and we are in constant contact throughout the year to make sure [they’re] being made to our exact specifications.” In fact, he and his team spend a significant amount of time each year on the road, visiting each producer to make sure their wines are worthy of the Rubus label.

IN THE MARKETPLACE

Randall Horst, wine manager and head wine buyer at retail shop Vintage Cellar in Blacksburg, Virginia, has been carrying Rubus for well over a decade and is a big fan of Kysela’s proprietary line. “We originally picked up the Napa Valley Cabernet in 2010, and in the first year we sold over 100 cases,” he says. “When you consider that most Napa Valley Cabernets retail at \$50 and above, then compare the Rubus Napa Valley Cabernet at \$32.99, the quality-to-value ratio . . . is untouchable.”

Horst, whose store caters to Virginia Tech professors and wine-savvy visitors on game day—when the town can see the arrival of as many as 65,000 football fans—is a firm believer in giving his customers good value and feels the entire Rubus portfolio delivers on all fronts. “The

Cabernets, both the California appellation and Napa Valley, are refined and deliver good fruit and well-structured tannins without being overly oaked, and the Old Vines Zinfandels do the same. I often see Zinfandels that reach 18% ABV, [while] the Rubus, particularly the Blue Label Reserve Zin, shows restraint by keeping the alcohol lower and presenting good balance."

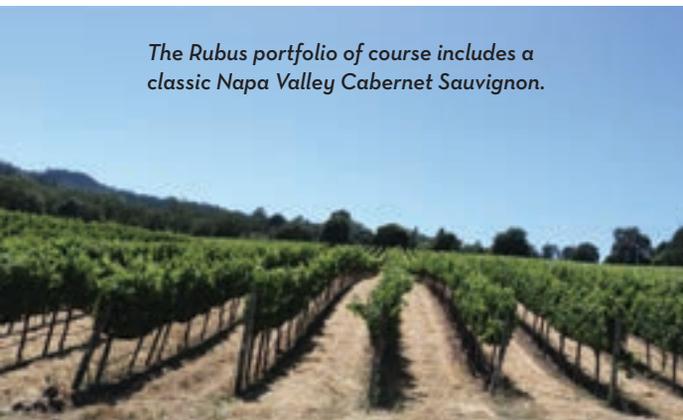
Horst also knows that private-label wines in particular require strategic marketing efforts in order to gain consumer confidence, and he employs numerous strategies to promote Rubus, from hand-selling to regularly holding comparative tastings in the store. "One of the tactics we've embraced over the years has [simply] been to open a bottle and let people taste it. Once they get that personalized attention, the Rubus line shines every time," he says, adding that as a result, "I've sold in excess of \$100,000 worth of wines from The Rubus Project since bringing it aboard."

That's no small accomplishment for a brand without a signature name, known property, or recognizable face behind it—though Kysela works hard to get his team into stores to offer personal support as well.

WHAT'S NEXT

Kysela's son Joe—the "Fils" in Kysela Pere et Fils—believes that with the reopening of the hospitality sector, selling on-premise is the next step for the brand, and he's quietly ramping up his efforts. "The Rubus wines are really a slam dunk for by-the-glass programs, which more often than not tend to focus on grape variety over label recognition when selling a wine," he says. "If we can offer restaurants a high-quality pour at a price point that allows them to make a good profit, then we will do well in the market, particularly with wines like the Colchagua Chardonnay or Lessini Hills Pinot Noir, which offer both so effectively." S

The Rubus portfolio of course includes a classic Napa Valley Cabernet Sauvignon.



TASTING NOTES

The Rubus Project's portfolio changes slightly as buyer trends move the dial. The following notes cover its most popular wines at present (though availability varies by state of distribution). Along with these, The Rubus Project currently produces a Waipara Valley Sauvignon Blanc, Corbières Vin Gris Dry Rosé, Barossa Valley Shiraz, Tempranillo-based Calatayud Proprietary Red, Limoux Sparkling Brut Rosé, Lodi Reserve Zinfandel, California Cabernet Sauvignon, and Languedoc White Blend. For more information, visit kysela.com.



Rubus Wine Selections Old Vines Zinfandel, Lodi (\$15)

Sourced from the home of some of California's most historic Zinfandel plantings, this blend with 2% Cabernet Sauvignon aged in oak for nine months. A classic California old-vine Zin showing full body; ripe fruit; and

notes of prune, raisin, and spice, it's perfect for pouring by the glass.



Rubus Wine Selections Cabernet Sauvignon, Napa Valley (\$33)

Here's everything you'd expect from a Napa Cab: ripe fruit; refined, silky tannins; and notes of currant, blackberry, and chocolate. A long-term relationship with the producer keeps the 100% Cabernet at an

unbelievable price.



Rubus Blanc de Blancs Sparkling Brut (\$13)

Lively and fresh, this Brut from Limoux in southwest France is a perfect apéritif or lunchtime wine. Made from 30% Ugni Blanc, 30% Airen, 30% Colombard, and 10% Chardonnay, it shows

apple, peach, and a hint of brioche. The price is truly great for a French sparkler.



Rubus Wine Selections Chardonnay, Colchagua Valley, Chile (\$12)

This classic 100% Chardonnay from the warmer eastern end of Chile's premier white-wine region shows the distinctive minerality and great acidity that makes Colchagua so

exciting. After vinification in stainless steel, 25% of this wine spends time in oak, lending just enough toast and vanilla flavors to complement food.



Rubus Wine Selections Pinot Noir, Veneto, Italy (\$13)

This Italian Pinot Noir is sourced from 20-year-old vines in the Lessini hills in the Veneto's Colli Berrici. The area's calcareous and volcanic soils lend complexity while its cool nights help develop aromatic structure; the

result shows notes of cherry and blackberry, a hint of spice, and a well-rounded finish.



Rubus Wine Selections Icono Malbec, Mendoza, Argentina (\$19)

Sourced from the Paraje Altamira in Mendoza's preeminent Uco Valley, this hand-harvested 100% Malbec spends 12 months in French barriques before it's lightly filtered and bottled. Offering rich, ripe

plum and currant as well as dried blackberry and hints of chocolate spice, Icono is Argentine Malbec at its most classic and affordable.



The Wine of TOMORROW

The launch of Louis Roederer's multivintage Champagne, Collection 242, was held at restaurateur Michael Chow's art studio in downtown Los Angeles, CA.

LOUIS ROEDERER
LEAVES NONVINTAGE
BRUT BEHIND
TO INTRODUCE
COLLECTION 242,
AN EXCEPTIONAL
MULTIVINTAGE
CHAMPAGNE

story by Michelle Ball / photos by Jeremy Ball

How does an elite producer that's been in operation for as long as the United States has existed modernize during an age of climate change and shifting viticulture practices? In the case of pioneering Champagne house Louis Roederer, the answer lies in making innovation core to its craft. After more than a decade of investment and development, the family-owned brand recently scrapped its popular nonvintage Brut Premier to join the prestigious multivintage category with the introduction of Collection.

The newest offering from the Cristal producer debuted at an intimate dinner in downtown Los Angeles. In partnership with *The SOMM Journal*, Louis Roederer hosted a small group of well-respected local sommeliers and wine buyers at Michael Chow's art studio, an expansive converted warehouse in an industrial complex. Immense, colorful works by the prominent artist and owner of famed restaurant Mr. Chow are suspended throughout the vast space, which provided an inspired backdrop for the celebration.



At the table, pairings conceived by sommelier Naureen Lyon and served by Michael Chow's culinary team included lobster vermicelli, crispy fried prawns, rich filet, savory satay, and pot stickers.

The night commenced with the 2013 Blanc de Blancs, a lively wine that paired beautifully with savory, nutty chicken satay and rich lobster vermicelli. Like all of Louis Roederer's vintage Champagnes, this wine is estate-bottled and -grown on hillside plots on what the winery calls La Côte, located in Avize in the heart of the Côte des Blancs. Louis Roederer, which was founded as Dubois Père & Fils in 1776, was one of the first négociants to acquire vineyards beginning in 1850. Although Louis was only 21 when he inherited the business from his uncle in 1832, his belief that grower Champagne was the best way to control quality was well ahead of its time. Today, the family owns over 600 acres in the appellation, of which 50% are organically certified—making Louis Roederer the largest grower of organically farmed grapes in Champagne.

The raciness of the Blanc de Blancs contrasted beautifully with the generous weight of the next bottling: the 2014 Vintage Champagne made predominantly from Pinot Noir (71%), with Chardonnay (29%) providing freshness. "It is a wine that is very dear to the heart of Champagne Louis Roederer," noted Xavier Barlier, SVP marketing and communication, who explained that the grapes came from

the winery's original estate vineyard on La Montagne in Verzy, and were the first among its vineyard holdings to be converted to Biodynamic viticulture. Barlier, who has been with the company for two decades, paraphrased a Native American proverb to describe the challenge that such an endeavor requires, saying: "No branch is foolish enough to think that it is not connected to the tree"—his point being that their vineyards do not exist in a vacuum and are affected by the choices that nearby growers make on their own land. Therefore, they need to collaborate with their neighbors in order to effectively grow organically and biodynamically.

As Barlier put it, the wine is made with "as little makeup as possible" and a low dosage to highlight the generous fruit. Sean Van Straatum, F&B director of Oakmont Country Club in Glendale, took notice of the "beautiful mouthfeel, with an evolution of nougat; [it was] energetic and salty." Others observed its structure and spice, including *SOMM Journal* publisher/ editor-in-chief Meridith May, who noted "nectarines [that] dissipate on the tongue; [the palate is] broad and generous, with a hint of gingerbread, curry, and jasmine."

To round out the lineup of Louis Roederer vintage Champagnes, which

prepped our palates for the unveiling of the multivintage release, the 2014 Vintage Rosé was served with Mr. Chow's signature "Ma Mignon," a filet mignon rolled in a crust of garlic, spices, and bread crumbs; it may very well have been the most brilliant pairing I've experienced in my lifetime.

Although Champagne is one of the few regions legally allowed to blend red varieties to produce rosé, Louis Roederer chooses not to. "It's one of the few rosés in Champagne that is made by skin contact [and not by blending]. And why is it so few are made by skin contact? Because if you miss [the optimal time to end the process], you cannot un-bake your cake," Barlier explained of achieving the sparkling's particular shade of salmon.

Historically, the winery did not produce a rosé, believing the wine to be a completely different process from Champagne, but it later opted to build a separate facility specifically for saignée-method rosé in response to market demand. The 2014 cuvée blends Pinot Noir (67%) from warmer plots in Louis Roederer's La Rivière vineyard in Cumières with Chardonnay from cooler areas of the property, where limestone soils retain less heat. Jacquelyn Alcarez, beverage director



Event guests included Sean Van Straatum, F&B director, Oakmont Country Club; Courtney Bunn, director of beverage, EDITION Hotel; Xavier Barlier, SVP marketing and communication, Maisons Marques & Domaines USA; Michael Loomis, beverage director, Mr. Chow; Naureen Lyon, L.A. district manager, Maisons Marques & Domaines USA; Liz VanderVen, wine director, Wing Hop Fung; and Scott Lester, consultant, Camino Industries.

at Barbrix and All'Acqua in Los Angeles, noted the rosé's profile of "melon, orange peel, and watermelon rind," while Marcus Voglrieder, corporate beverage director at Nobu Restaurants, picked up on the exotic spice rack, describing "flavors of ginger [and] cumin that meld together with depth and subtlety."

Finally, Collection 242 was introduced as a multivintage Champagne with Chardonnay (42%) and Pinot Noir (36%) that embodies all three of Louis Roederer's Grand Cru estate vineyards; the remaining percentage is Pinot Meunier from its trusted grower partners, which Barlier notes is a critical component to the harmony of the blend, as the varietal shows well even when the wine is young. "This wine is the first of its kind, [marking] the 242nd harvest of Louis Roederer. And what I love is

it wasn't a marketing concept. I was never involved in the creation of this wine—it was [kept] secret from me," Barlier said with a laugh, though he found it to be a genius idea nonetheless.

Collection, which will bear a different number with each subsequent release, has replaced the nonvintage Premier Brut. The latter offering, introduced in 1984 and crafted to be consistent each year, was created for the purpose of releasing a wine annually regardless of the vintage conditions; therefore, it had to be nonvintage due to the often-unpredictable weather in Champagne. Yet, in less than a generation, everything has changed: As Naureen Lyon, sommelier and L.A. district manager for Louis Roederer's import subsidiary, Maison Marques & Domaines, added, "Nonvintage was created to suit a



What struck Scott Lester, director of service and operations at Camino Industries, in tasting the 2013 Blanc de Blancs was "the beautiful mouthfeel, texture, and brilliant acidity reminiscent of a great Chablis. The classic chalkiness and limestone were present, with just the right amount of stone fruit to take you there."



Also in attendance were Caitlin Stansbury, director of beverage, Jonathan Club; Ian Blackburn, buyer/educator, Merchant of Wine; C.J. Lin, senior buyer, Wing Hop Fung; Meghan Burton, beverage director, Mother Wolf; and Paul Kalemkarian, president, Wine of the Month Club.



Tasting Panel and SOMM Journal publisher/editor-in-chief Meridith May (left) with Matthew Turner, wine director, Thompson Hotel; Szymon Piechaczek, F&B director, Sunset Marquis Hotel; Marcus Voglieder, corporate beverage director, Nobu Restaurant Group; and Jacquelyn Alcaez, beverage director, Barbrix and AllAcqua.

model that made sense for the time, [but in] the 21st century, climate change has changed the Champagne landscape. It is warm enough to put out truly exceptional wines with unique character every year. So why not do so?"

Twelve years ago, cellar master Jean-Baptiste Lécaillon considered that very question: Can we make a better Champagne and leave nonvintage behind? And so they did. The backbone of Collection 242 is the 2017 harvest (54%), which is blended with what the winery calls its "perpetual reserve" (34%), drawn from a solera-style system it started in 2012. Using a temperature-controlled, stainless-steel tank, this reductive environment preserves the wine's freshness, adding energy to the blend. The final component (12%) includes fruit sourced from young vines in Cristal's estate block; composed of the 2009, 2011, 2013, 2014, 2015, and 2016 vintages, it aged in oak and contributes complexity, richness, and texture to the finished wine.

Barlier envisioned how, a century from now, this solera-style approach might evolve and continue to add character to each release. "Every year, you replace what you use. So this is a complicated proposition, and the idea is that every year is a bit the same philosophically but [also] a bit different," he explained.

The wine retails for \$55–\$65, making it far more accessible than vintage Champagnes of comparable quality and far more competitive in price compared to other multivintage producers in the category. Yet, like vintage Champagne, the multivin-

tage is intended for cellaring. "The name is Collection . . . [which hints] at the idea that you want to keep that wine," Barlier noted. "242 [will] forever [represent] my 20th year with Louis Roederer and the 90th birth year of my mom. So there is a symbolic [element]."

The feedback from the buyers and somms was overwhelmingly positive. Caitlin Stansbury, director of beverage at the Jonathan Club, felt strongly that the wine is a thoughtful response to our times, stating, "This is a brilliant concept to be able to make Champagne—real quality, ageable Champagne—more accessible to a generation that's not going to have the same financial advantages that their parents were able to enjoy." Courtney Bunn, director of beverage at the EDITION Hotel in West Hollywood, called it "vibrant and youthful [as well as] a versatile match with food," while Meghan Burton, beverage director at Mother Wolf in Los Angeles, hinted at the nuanced, "elegant notes of marzipan and oyster shell. It evolves to a creamier palate with notes of pear tart." Matthew Turner, wine director at L.A.'s Thompson Hotel, also found the wine to be elegant and "beautiful," not to mention "surprisingly affordable."

Collection's varietal blend will fluctuate year to year depending on the strengths of the vintage—dictated in part, of course, by climate change. Even in Champagne, which has generally benefited from warming temperatures, there have been consequences including heavier rain, hail, and other unpredictable weather cycles. Yet



this has also given producers like Louis Roederer the opportunity to improve quality and adopt more ethical and sustainable viticulture practices, as it's easier to control diseases under warmer, drier conditions.

Looking to the future of winemaking in the region, Lyon summarized it best: "There is no reason to make [Collection] taste like the wine of yesterday. Jean-Baptiste and his team have a freedom now that only comes with being courageous. They are not running this side by side with their biggest seller, Brut Premier; they are replacing the old model. One cannot get to second base without taking [one's] foot off first. They are pioneers, and like daring leaders, they will have many followers." ❧

Sea Change

ASSESSING THE IMPACT OF NEW ZEALAND'S SAUVIGNON BLANC SHORTAGE

by Randy Caparoso

SALES OF NEW ZEALAND Sauvignon Blanc have absolutely exploded over the past three years: In 2019 alone, the category grew 38% in the U.S., according to *Fortune*. Consumers love these tart and herbaceous yet fruit-forward wines—as do many savvy sommeliers, who have been showcasing them in by-the-glass programs, typically pricing them at an easy-to-swallow \$10 or less.

But in 2021, due to brutal spring frosts, the Sauvignon Blanc crop in New Zealand's Marlborough region was down by 19–30%, according to reports by *Falstaff* and *The Drinks Business* magazines. That spells trouble for this high-demand category. Marlborough—which is home to 159 of New Zealand's 731 wineries—currently crushes approximately 73% of the country's Sauvignon Blanc harvest each year. John Gorman, vice president of sales and marketing for Southern Starz Inc., an

importer based in Huntington Beach, California, elaborates: "To give you an idea of the commitment to Sauvignon Blanc made by Marlborough growers, there are currently 28,360 hectares of Sauvignon Blanc planted in that region alone. That's over 70,000 acres. To put it in perspective, *all* of the wine grapes in Sonoma County add up to about 62,000 acres, and Napa Valley has about 43,000 acres."

Actual tonnage paints a better picture of the potential global ramifications of the shortage: In 2020, 457,000 tons of Sauvignon Blanc were crushed versus about 370,000 tons in 2021—a nearly 20% drop. When there is a grape shortage, the compulsion among growers—of which there are 531 in Marlborough, representing 72.5% of the country's total—is to raise prices accordingly. Indeed, because "most of New Zealand's Sauvignon Blanc is controlled by growers, not wineries,"

says Gorman, "they have the industry over the barrel." One example is the Marlborough Grape Growers Cooperative, consisting of 80 members farming 700 hectares in 107 vineyards: Describing itself as a "branding service," it supplies many of the region's large wineries and private-label bottlings contracted by the global export market. The question, asks Gorman, is whether contract growers such as these will "shoot themselves in the foot by raising prices excessively, or will they exercise common sense?" Advanced bidding on 2022 fruit (prior to bud burst) is already in full swing, further indicating the likelihood of price increases.

There are, of course, numerous independent wineries that grow much of their own fruit. As Gorman notes, "Bigger name brands like Brancott, Kim Crawford, Villa Maria, and Cloudy Bay will do their best to keep their prices down as part of their



long-term branding.” But it’s still unclear whether there will be an immediate impact on value-priced brands, particularly the private-label bottlings that are exported to the U.K., Australia, and the U.S. (now New Zealand’s biggest market). Many of these are packaged for grocery and retail liquor chains. Costco, for instance, sells dozens of New Zealand brands on top of its own private label, the Kirkland Signature Marlborough Sauvignon Blanc, which currently retails for just \$6.99; according to Gorman, “Early attempts by certain big players to negotiate increases on the 2021 vintage with buyers such as Costco have met heavy resistance—they were basically told to pound sand.”

From Gorman’s perspective, the buying power of the big-box stores combined with the shortage of raw juice wrought by the 2021 vintage may ultimately have two consequences: 1) higher on-premise pricing and 2) long-term stylistic changes in premium styles. In the first case, “price increases may incur some resistance from sommeliers and the on-premise industry,” he contends. “The question here is, what would be the impact of New Zealand Sauvignon Blanc [by-the-glass] prices going from \$8–\$10 to \$12–\$15? Will the hospitality industry in the U.S. go for it, or will they move on to something else?”

Gorman, who has a longer memory than most of today’s on-premise buyers, likens this market shift to the 1980s,

when an acute shortage of Pouilly-Fuissé, combined with a hefty price increase, forced many restaurants to turn to Mâcon-Villages as a substitute. By contrast, however, “there really is no ‘next door’ to pivot to if you want to move away from New Zealand,” he notes. “[But] if I was a sommelier looking for high-quality[, value-priced] Sauvignon Blanc, I might explore Chile’s Casablanca Valley, Elgin in South Africa, or maybe other New Zealand areas like Waipara.” Proving him right, in early November *The Drinks Business* reported that the multinational Accolade Wines would be pushing the Chilean Sauvignon Blanc it produces under the Mud House label in place of its Marlborough offerings.

To be sure, Marlborough is still in the driver’s seat when it comes to the ever-growing varietal category, thanks to its sheer supply, quality, and affordability. Yet the other result of the shortage may be the recognition that, in Gorman’s words, it “could really benefit from style variation, especially if it is to compete in the more premium price ranges.” At the moment, he says, “There is a lot of sameness, since growers pick Sauvignon Blanc more or less at the same time and process it in the exact same way. There’s always a shortage of tank space, especially at contract winemaking facilities, so practices like extended skin contact are very rare, [especially] due to pricing pressure.” This get-it-in/get-it-out

approach has been fine for the massive amounts sold in bulk to the big conglomerates who are always looking to shorten the three-tier systems in the U.S. with their lower-priced private labels. Gorman points out that over 95% of the Sauvignon Blanc planted in New Zealand is the University of California, Davis’ FPS 01, a “bulletproof clone that has done well for [the country], giving high yields with low disease pressure while maintaining a textbook varietal character.” In Gorman’s opinion, however, it might behoove New Zealand producers to consider a wider variety of French clones to increase diversity and build “a stylistic bridge between Sancerre and New Zealand. This would help breathe a little more life into the category.”

Gorman adds that a few of New Zealand’s small- to medium-sized brick-and-mortar operations are now doing exactly that: exploring new clonal material and experimenting with styles suited to the premium market. He hopes this trend will evolve. As a result, while on-premise buyers will invariably see price increases (15–20%, by his estimate), they can also likely expect to see a little more innovation in the wines themselves, which would better position the New Zealand Sauvignon Blanc export market in the wake of increased prices driven by the current grape shortage. sj



The All-Purpose Grape

**OUR "BALANCING
ACT: CHARDONNAY
AT ITS BEST"
WEBINAR EXAMINED
HOW STYLE MANIFESTS
IN THE GLASS**

by Jessie Birschbach

If a sommelier earned a penny every time they heard a patron claim to dislike Chardonnay and then politely acquiesced to that same guest's request for a Chablis, we might actually make what we're worth for once. Bitter commentary on the state of our embattled service industry aside, the point I'm making is that Chardonnay wouldn't be so polarizing if consumers realized just how multifaceted it is.

Exploring this duality made for a fascinating webinar, with thanks going not least to the educational and entertaining guidance of our moderator, Master Sommelier Andrea Robinson, and the cartographic help of Greg Van Wagner and his SommGeo vineyard-map platform (see more on page 44). "I'm excited about this panel because we all know and love our Chardonnay, and we know that it has a chameleon-like ability to express itself beautifully and yet diversely across soils, microclimates, terroirs, and also across [production] processes," said Robinson. "We have the great opportunity in talking to each of the panelists to drill down on some of the elements of choices, environments, and circumstances that drive stylistic expression of Chardonnay in the glass."

Like the other installments in our Geographical Digest series, "Balancing Act: Chardonnay at Its Best" was produced in partnership with *National Geographic* and kicked off by our VP of education, Lars Leicht. Before yielding the floor to the panelists, Robinson noted that she hoped the virtual discussion would not only promote a greater understanding of the classic white grape but provide strategies to improve its image, especially among younger consumers: After all, the savvier among them might already know that Chablis is cool-climate Chardonnay.



The Home Ranch block of Sangiacomo Vineyard in Los Carneros.

LLOYD CELLARS

Chardonnay: Lloyd Cellars Carneros Chardonnay

Style: Big, classic California Chardonnay

Growing Sites: Sangiacomo (Kiser, Home Ranch, and Green Acre blocks) and Truchard vineyards, Los Carneros

Presenter: Rob Lloyd, winemaker/proprietor

It was fitting to commence the webinar with a tasting of Lloyd Cellars Carneros Chardonnay, as winemaker/proprietor Rob Lloyd has been focused on the grape for most of his career, having worked at not one but two Chardonnay powerhouses, Rombauer and La Crema. But in 2008, with a little encouragement from his wife, Bonnie, Lloyd took a risk and opened his own winery, the Napa-based Lloyd Cellars, as well as a consulting firm.

When introducing Lloyd, Robinson described the Sangiacomo Vineyard as an iconic Chardonnay growing site on the Sonoma County side of Carneros, thanks in part to a reliable pattern of fog and cooling breezes from the nearby San Pablo Bay. According to Lloyd, however, it's not just the weather that makes the



property—which serves as a source for roughly a dozen more respected producers—special. “I’m a Cali boy, and my dad would always drink these big California Chardonnays,” he explained. “So when I was at [the University of California, Davis,] I ran trials adding in malic acid and doing other things trying to make these big, rich Chardonnays. But then I started working with Sangiacomo and realized, ‘Oh, I don’t [need to] add anything; there’s already a high malic content thanks to the area’s [silty loam] clay soils.’ This and the use of 100% malolactic fermentation help to impart the incredibly creamy mouthfeel that Robinson noticed in the featured wine.

The Chardonnay’s richness could also be attributed to Lloyd’s use of American oak versus French oak during fermentation, which, once toasted, results in a fleshier, more aromatic wine due to the higher number of wood lignins, according to Lloyd; employing temperature control at 48–50 degrees Fahrenheit helps to seamlessly integrate the oak’s influence



into the finished wine. “If I’m making a Russian River Chardonnay, I’ll use French, but American works really well with this Carneros style—[it’s] not overpowering at all,” he said. Unusually, Lloyd refrains from using sulfur until bottling and instead relies on the natural carbon dioxide produced during fermentation to preserve the wine and prevent spoilage, adding yet another layer of smooth complexity. It then rests on its lees for ten months before bottling.

Robinson also noted that the Chardonnay’s buttery density was countered by a juicy component: While Sangiacomo is responsible for its voluptuous body, a small amount of Chardonnay with higher acidity levels is blended in from the Truchard Vineyard for balance. Lloyd showed the audience the difference in the size of two clusters: The larger and plumper cluster came from Sangiacomo, while the smaller, hens-and-chicks Wente clone cluster came from Truchard. “You’re a little Monet-like,” Robinson told Lloyd. “You’ve got these little, discreet dots of complexity and you’re holding them together with that nice spine of acidity.”

CUVAISON ESTATE WINES

Chardonnay: Cuvaison Estate Chardonnay

Style: One foot in Burgundy and one foot in California

Growing Site: The Cuvaison estate vineyard, Los Carneros

Presenter: Dan Zepponi, president and CEO



PHOTOS COURTESY OF CUVAISON

A decade after Cuvaison made its first vintage of Napa Valley Chardonnay in 1969, a family of fourth-generation vintners from Switzerland, the Schmidheins, acquired the winery and secured 400 acres of land just north of the San Pablo Bay. In 1983, this estate vineyard found itself positioned roughly in the center of the new Los Carneros AVA, which earned its designation due to its cool climate, ranked a Region I on the Winkler Scale.

Today the Los Carneros pioneer sustainably farms additional cool-climate vari-

eties like Pinot Noir and Sauvignon Blanc. But Chardonnay remains its highly lauded specialty, a fact that president and CEO Dan Zepponi attributes less to its terroir and more to its innovative and constantly evolving vinification program.

“We’re on the Napa side [of Carneros], at the base of the Mayacamas. So rather than being flat, we have 16 different hills,” he said, adding that while the area has a “pretty uniform” distribution of clay that extends roughly 3–4 feet deep, there are different growing aspects and elevations

“combined with different clones and rootstocks.” Cuvaison’s estate site, he continued, is “sandwiched between” the well-known Hudson and Hyde vineyards, “so we’re right in that pedigree [of location]. But what we do is really look at different vinification techniques to differentiate [among the] six Chardonnays [we produce from] the site—if you taste each one, they’ll be dramatically different.”

Steve Rogstad, who has been in charge of Cuvaison’s winemaking program since 2002, played an instrumental role at the

Cuvaison’s estate vineyard and pond in Los Carneros.



start of his tenure in the rebuilding of the winery, taking a small-lot approach to optimize the estate's 20 blocks of Chardonnay vines.

Likely the most fascinating aspect of vinification at Cuvaison is exemplified in its Méthode Béton Chardonnay; made in concrete (or *béton* in French) eggs, it's the winery's take on an unoaked Chardonnay. While Zepponi informed the audience that he dislikes the term "unoaked," he seems to dislike Chardonnays made in stainless steel even more, establishing the impetus for Cuvaison's proprietary method: "We actually stir [the wine] on the lees [about once a week] for an entire year, then we retain the [spent] lees and reintroduce them to the next vintage," he explained. "We do this because the lees are [still going] through autolysis, and that's what we're looking for—to bring that creaminess and . . . viscosity."

Robinson was quick to note that au-

tolysis, which refers to the breaking down of yeast cells, not only creates textural complexity but also helps to protect the wine from spoilage. Zepponi, for his part, believes that it adds a rich "biscuit-and-brioche character that gives weight that you don't get in a stainless-steel tank."

To provide another example of Cuvaison's breadth of Chardonnay styles, Zepponi presented the 2019 Estate Chardonnay, which he described as "hitting right down the fairway," as it doesn't err too much toward either the mineral-driven Burgundy style or the richer California style. He attributed his success in maintaining the style to being able to blend from Cuvaison's 20 different lots for consistency from vintage to vintage. "Not to say that we don't [also] make a very hedonistic style of Chardonnay or a more restrained Burgundy-like style," said Zepponi, suggesting that we had only just begun to scratch the surface of Cuvaison's diversity during the webinar.



Cuvaison 2019 Estate Chardonnay, Los Carneros, Napa Valley (\$30)

Ripe scents of pineapple and gardenia arise on the nose before a bounty of peach, guava, tangerine, and lime cake glides across the palate. A lick of salty slate perks up the richness of this silky beauty.

93 —*Meridith May*



Cuvaison 2019 Chardonnay, Kite Tail, Los Carneros, Napa Valley (\$50)

Grown on the estate's windiest and coldest sites with the thinnest soils, this superb direct-to-consumer release grabbed our attention with its creamy mouthfeel, revealing a dreamy array of cookie dough, mascarpone-apricot tart, and lemon chiffon.

As it continues to develop on the palate, we pick up vanilla, coconut, and green apple. Aged 16 months in (50% new) French oak. **95** —*M.M.*



The Wente clone displays a hens-and-chicks bunch formation.

WENTE VINEYARDS

Chardonnay: Wente Vineyards Riva Ranch Vineyard Chardonnay

Style: Aromatic, tropical, round, rich, and full-bodied

Growing Site: Riva Ranch Vineyard, Arroyo Seco, Monterey

Presenter: Aly Wente, VP of marketing and customer experience

Aly Wente, VP of marketing and customer experience for Wente Vineyards, *almost* managed to keep her promise to the audience to efficiently pack in all 138 years of the producer's history into a ten-minute presentation—and she certainly earned points for trying. Although the story of her family's winery officially begins with the purchase of 47 acres in the Livermore Valley in 1883 by her great-great-grandfather, Carl H. Wente, Aly started with Carl's son, Ernest, who was one of the first people to graduate from UC Davis (then known simply and charmingly as "Farm School"). Ernest managed to procure cuttings from the nursery at the University of Montpellier in southern France through one of his professors, which he combined with some cuttings from Meursault obtained through Charles Wetmore in the Livermore Valley; planted in 1912, they eventually became the genetic platform from which nearly all California Chardonnay would be launched.

The creation of the famous Wente clone—which is said to be planted in some variation or another in 75–80% of California vineyards today—didn't happen in a lab (though UC Davis enologists did eventually heat-treat the clone to keep it virus free in the 1950s and '60s). Rather, it was the result of tasting over time: Ernest and his brother Herman would walk the vineyard, sampling the Chardonnay grapes on each vine to find the most expressive fruit, particularly that with characteristics of green apple, floral musqué, and stone fruit. "But they'd also look for the healthiest vine," said Aly, who noted that they would graft the best of both worlds and propagate the vines. Soon enough, Wente had established itself as the go-to for Chardonnay sourcing in California.

While showing us an image of a hens-and-chicks Chardonnay cluster grown in Wente's Riva Ranch Vineyard within the Arroyo Seco AVA, Aly breezed over the fact

that her aunt and grandmother wrote the petition for the Monterey subregion, which became an official appellation in 1982, and instead focused on the "super-concentrated tropical flavors" of the grapes, derived from their extended hang time. In fact, Wente harvests Riva Ranch one month later than the Chardonnay at its Livermore estate. To enhance the richness of the Riva Ranch fruit, the wine goes through 90–100% malolactic fermentation and is aged in both French and American oak. Robinson, who serves the wine as part of a program she runs for a major airline, said that she loves it for its nutty base note, adding that "the beauty of barrel-fermented, luscious, stone-fruited Chardonnays [from California] is that they're delicious to drink on their own" as well as to pair with food.

Wente, which is California's longest continuously running family-owned and -operated winery, now oversees about 3,000 acres of vine, all farmed sustainably. Its winery is also certified sustainable. "We've sort of always been that way," said Aly. "My great-grandfather Ernest believed that the soil was our insurance policy, and if you don't take care of the land, you're not going to have a viable business to pass down to the next generation." That sentiment is also reflected in the winery's falconer program for pest control and the technology it uses: Wente was one of the first producers to purchase a zero-emission tractor, allowing the machine's manufacturer to conduct testing within its vineyards.



Wente Vineyards 2019 Chardonnay, Riva Ranch Vineyard, Arroyo Seco, Monterey (\$22) What we love about this iconic estate-grown white is its round, rather

voluptuous body. Less rich than in former vintages, it's lovely, with notes of lemon blossom and pineapple and striking acidity further enlivened by tarragon, sage, and white pepper as well as a thread of oyster-shell minerality. A small percentage of Gewürztraminer was added. **93** —M.M.

CHALONE VINEYARD

Chardonnay: Chalone Vineyard Estate Chardonnay

Style: Ripe fruit balanced by minerality and acid

Growing Site: Chalone Vineyard, Chalone AVA, Monterey County

Presenter: Greg Freeman, winemaker

PHOTO: SOLEDAD COMMERCIAL PORTRAIT PHOTOGRAPHY



Seasoned winemaker Greg Freeman has nearly two decades of experience making wine in the Santa Lucia Highlands region, not far from Chalone's remote estate property in Monterey. The native Texan's degree in microbiology and chemistry eventually landed him a job in the lab at Hahn Winery in 2003, and not long after, he became one of its winemakers. Having joined Chalone Vineyard in February 2021, he noted that his presentation was taking place in the midst of his first harvest at the historic property.

His current view of the stunning Pinnacles National Park is rather different from the one he enjoyed in the past: Chalone Winery is positioned on a plateau in the

Gavilan Mountains, where it's the Chalone AVA's sole commercial winery. "I drive out there in the thick fog coming from Monterey and then shoot up through the clouds right when I get to the winery," said Freeman. "[The vines get] all that early morning sun [that the valley doesn't]. It's also not as windy as the valley floor, or as cold." The estate's elevation at 1,800 feet keeps it above the fog line, making it warmer and drier (with less than 15 inches of rain annually) than neighboring subregions, but its close proximity to the cold water of the 2-mile-deep, 60-mile-long Monterey Bay results in diurnal swings of 40–60 degrees.

But it's the Chalone AVA's volcanic limestone soil that makes it truly unique, at least here in the United States. Robinson noted that she typically associates the little bit of salinity she detected in the Chalone Vineyard Estate Chardonnay with white Burgundy, also famously grown in limestone soil.

Planted in 1919, the property is Monterey's oldest vineyard, but it truly came into its own after being acquired by

pioneering winemaker Dick Graff in 1964. It was Graff who eased the challenge of wine-making in the remote area by connecting it to both utility lines and water pipelines in 1986, meaning the winery no longer had to truck in water and rely on generators.

That said, traversing its 750 contiguous acres to farm the 200 planted to vine still comes with a hefty cost. Proprietor Bill Foley, who also owns Chalk Hill Estate, pays to pump water almost 8 miles from the Salinas Valley, and the hilly vineyard must be pruned and harvested by hand. It's a small price to pay, however, for the ripe yet balanced, mineral-driven Chardonnay that results.



Chalone Vineyard 2019 Estate Chardonnay, Chalone AVA, Monterey County (\$30) Earthy aromas of buttered pear, biscuit, and pistachio are mesmerizing. The mouthfeel is stunning; bright and crisp, with shining gems of golden apple, pineapple, and honeyed ginger as well as minerality that speaks to the terroir of the Chalone Bench of the Gavilan Mountains. **93**—M.M.

Pinnacles National Park peeks over the hill at Chalone Vineyards.

PHOTO COURTESY OF CHALONE VINEYARD AND SIEVE ZWACK PHOTOGRAPHY





METZ ROAD

Chardonnay: Metz Road Riverview Vineyard Chardonnay

Style: Bright and fruit-forward, with savory, nutty complexity

Growing Site: Riverview Vineyard, Monterey

Presenter: Casey Di Cesare, winemaker

Thanks to its diverse estate vineyards, spanning the length of the Salinas Valley in Monterey, the breadth of Scheid Family Wines' portfolio is surely something to be proud of. Not only are all the sites certified sustainable through the Certified California Sustainable Winegrowing program but over half of them—representing more than 1,500 acres—are farmed organically. A wind turbine towering over the winery campus in Greenfield, meanwhile, powers the entire state-of-the-art facility (while generating enough power for another 125 homes in the area).

All that investment is reflected in wines like the small-lot, single-vineyard Metz Road label, another source of pride that winemaker Casey Di Cesare described as the “crown jewel of Scheid Family Wines in terms of Burgundian varieties.” It’s produced with fruit from the Riverview Vineyard, which is located on the eastern banks of the Salinas River and experiences the typical Monterey morning fog followed by intense sun. But as Di Cesare noted, “In the afternoons starting around 2 p.m., we [see winds of] 20-plus miles per hour, and that shuts

down photosynthesis in the vine, which extends our hang time.”

It’s this combination of conditions that perhaps separates Riverview from the neighboring Santa Lucia Highlands while imparting a luscious tropical-fruit character to the Metz Road Chardonnay. When Robinson asked if the “savory quality in the middle that you’d normally associate with that Monterey profile was a result of the soil,” consisting of decomposed granite and sand, Di Cesare explained that lassoing the site’s terroir into the glass was the impetus for Metz Road. But, in order to do so, on-



PHOTOS COURTESY OF METZ ROAD



Scheid Family Wines' Riverview Vineyard in Monterey County.

site fermentation with native yeast became imperative. "What makes this brand special is that we're really trying to get that terroir in congruence with that native-yeast fermentation," he added, and laughed as he shared an image of Metz's in-vineyard "winery"—essentially a little trailer on a concrete slab. Needless to say, it's quite different from the producer's main winemaking facility, but it's necessary to avoid the influence of commercial yeast.

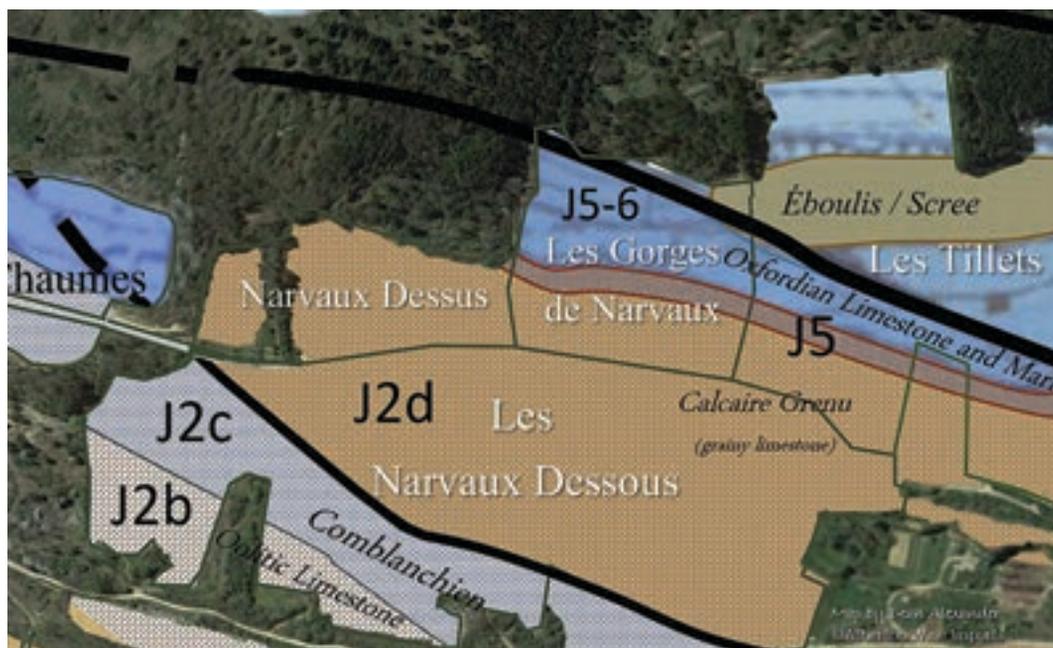
According to Di Cesare, Metz Road has served as a study in the intricacies of native fermentation, as he and his team have been sending out samples to a lab for DNA fingerprinting, whereby they're analyzed relative to commercial yeasts. At risk of venturing too far into the technical details, the competition of various strains (nonsaccharomyces and saccharomyces

alike); the level of their activity during fermentation; and their eventual autolysis contribute to the aromatics, mouthfeel, and overall complexity of the wine. Unlike the rest of the Chardonnays in the webinar, Metz Road does not go through malolactic fermentation: "We like to leave that crisp acidity to express the region. And we're getting a nice richness from the lees stirring that comes from those nonsaccharomyces at the start of fermentation," said Di Cesare. The clever young winemaker has a point: How can he truly conduct a site's terroir to sing in the glass without inviting its resident microscopic choir?



Metz Road 2019 Chardonnay, Riverview Vineyard, Monterey (\$30) What we love about the 2019 vintage of this estate-grown, single-vineyard, small-lot Chardonnay from the Scheid family is its aromatics and texture. Tropical fruit forms layers atop citrus and a sea breeze—and that's just its intriguing perfume. The perky, jazzy white shows salty minerality that weaves through lemon verbena, chamomile, and vanilla, offering a leesy mouthfeel that charms with a lush character. Whispers of croissant meld with buttered pear and grilled pineapple on the finish. Aged 14 months in French oak. **93** —*M.M.*

SCHEID FAMILY WINES



An overlay of soil profiles onto Domaine Latour-Giraud's Narvaux vineyards in Meursault.

DOMAINE LATOUR-GIRAUD

Chardonnay: Domaine Latour-Giraud Meursault Les Narvaux

Style: Powerful yet balanced, lean, and dry

Growing Site: Les Gorges de Narvaux, Meursault, France

Presenter: Vincent Morrow, MS, wine director at PRESS Napa Valley

"I'm not a winemaker," said Master Sommelier Vincent Morrow, wine director of Napa Valley restaurant PRESS, "but I do have the privilege of showcasing one of my favorite domaines, and it's also relatively under the radar." Despite this humble proviso, the MS then dove into a level of detail regarding geological events unmatched by any winemaker on the panel—a necessary review considering that Morrow was covering the Côte d'Or and, particularly, Meursault.



In fact, before reviewing the formation of the Alps during the Jurassic era—which left behind a roughly 200-million-year-old seabed and, subsequently, the glorious limestone escarpment on which Burgundy hangs its hat—Van Wagner, Robinson, and Morrow pointed out a few things about Meursault. Although the appellation may not boast any Grand Cru vineyards, it's

known for its higher concentration of domaines than other Côte d'Or subregions (as well as more subterranean cellars due to its low water table). Historically, négociants typically focused on the Montrachet villages (Puligny and Chassagne); though that meant slower sales for Meursault producers, it also afforded them the

time to age their wines longer. The result of these factors was the broader, richer style that became associated with the village (although that generalization applies much less today).

A map of Meursault showed a yellow band of Premier Cru vineyards traveling about halfway through the appellation. Morrow noted that these vineyards rest on a sort of sweet spot in the appellation: atop limestone, not too high on the hill, and not too low on the fertile valley floor. Domaine Latour-Giraud's 16-acre

climat, Les Gorges de Narvaux, is located on a steep slope just above this band of Premier Crus and serves as the source of its Latour-Giraud Meursault Les Narvaux.

While the vineyards surrounding Les Gorges de Narvaux contain a sort of uniform grainy limestone, its own soils are half grainy limestone and half Oxfordian and Kimmeridgian limestone and marl. The slender ribbon of iron that divides the soil types "was formed during the Jurassic period when there wasn't as much oxygen," Morrow explained, "and you really don't have too much of that in the Côte d'Or." Les Gorges de Narvaux is also one of Meursault's coolest sites, but its higher elevation allows for better sun exposure—giving the wine "a balance of tension and energy but also power while somehow maintaining elegance," he said.

Part of Meursault's winemaking culture for generations, the Latour family joined forces with a distilling clan, the Girauds, in 1958. Renowned white Burgundy winemaker Jean-Pierre Latour has been at the helm of the domaine's winemaking program since 1990, and during his tenure, Latour-Giraud has converted its estate vineyards to organic farming. The Latour-Giraud 2019 Meursault Les Narvaux is fermented with indigenous yeast in stainless steel; finished in barrels that Jean-Pierre individually monitors; and then aged in 20% new oak with minimal racking until he feels the wine is ready to be hand-bottled.

More Standout Chardonnays

In addition to the wineries featured in the webinar, impressive wines from the following producers grabbed our attention.

Muirwood 2020 Chardonnay, Zanetta Vineyard, Arroyo Seco, Monterey (\$22) Experiencing breezes off the Pacific Ocean, Zanetta Vineyard, owned by Muirwood's Zaninovich family, is situated in one of the coolest microclimates in Monterey County. Aromas of lemon verbena and vanilla wafer offer a preview of the richness of this wine, which aged sur lie in French and American oak. Opulent in style, it's a ray of sunshine that leaves notes of sage, fig, ginger, and crisp pear on the palate. Striking acidity and a salty finish leave us wanting more. **93** —M.M.



ASV WINES

Château d'Étroyes 2018 Mercurey Blanc Les Ormeaux, Burgundy, France (\$47) Floral aromas are wrapped in tropical fruit. The steely mouthfeel is rimmed by lemon, lychee, and powdered stone. Plucky acidity performs a high-wire act, balanced by a clean, pure sense of terroir. **94** —M.M.



KYSELA PERE ET FILS, LTD.

Merry Edwards 2019 Chardonnay, Olivet Lane Vineyard, Russian River Valley, Sonoma County (\$68) Wenté clone Chardonnay was 100% whole cluster-pressed and aged sur lie for nine months to produce this just-released white. Aromas from a flourishing garden include jasmine, hyacinth, and pear blossom. Mouth-filling and creamy notes of lemon meringue see a touch of toasted oak, caramel, and mango. **94** —M.M.



MAISONS MARQUES & DOMAINES

Solomon Hills Estate 2019 Belle of the Ball Chardonnay, Santa Maria Valley, Santa Barbara County (\$100) This exquisite Chardonnay comes from 22-year-old vines planted in one of the coolest sites in the Santa Maria Valley, whose proximity to the Pacific (which exposes it to the wind and other elements) and unique sandy soils give the wine a demeanor that stands out. Barrel-fermented using native yeast, it went through malolactic, then aged sur lie for 16 months in (55% new) French oak to yield a graceful, silky texture and a freshness akin to new linen at its lean and stylish beginning. The salty sea-breeze effect on the nose leads to a flavor profile of gingerbread and key lime enhanced by bracing acidity. **96** —M.M.



MILLER FAMILY WINE COMPANY

Domaines du Cellier Aux Moines 2018 Santenay Premier Cru Beauregard, Côte de Beaune, Burgundy (\$88) Chardonnay grapes grown on deep, stony terroir with high limestone content create bright, distinctive notes of toasted coconut, banana, and tapioca. The leesy, chalky texture lingers, with refined acidity matching its high tone against a generous layer of vanilla bean and lemon cake. **96** —M.M.



Smith-Madrone 2017 Chardonnay, Spring Mountain District, Napa Valley (\$42) From steep, dry-farmed estate vineyards with rocky soil on top of Spring Mountain, this white aged ten months in French oak and offers aromas of butter pecan and lemon oil. Rich notes of banana cream pie, lemon verbena, salted pear, and honeyed peach make for a layered, structured palate. The acidity performs well and the finish is crisp. **94** —M.M.



And here are some great value Chardonnays.

J. Lohr 2020 Riverstone Chardonnay, Arroyo Seco, Monterey County (\$14) Stones deposited by the Arroyo Seco River influence the vines' growth in this cool growing area, limiting soil depth. The Mt. Eden Clone, known for tight clusters and concentrated fruit, makes its debut in this vintage, which was barrel-fermented and hand-stirred weekly for seven to nine months in American, Hungarian, and French oak—resulting in stunning clarity on the palate. Accented by perky acidity, earthiness strikes a chord with notes of fresh peach and tangerine. Vanilla nougat leaves a splash of texture on the toasty finish. **93** —M.M.



Cline Family Cellars 2020 Chardonnay, Sonoma County (\$15) With top notes of toasty mocha and a peach-vanilla custard middle, this expressive white is layered and complex, overdelivering on flavor and texture. It's also super-food-friendly. **90** —M.M.



Highway 12 2020 Carneros Highway Nueva Chardonnay, Carneros (\$17) Toasty and mouth-coating, with flavors of toffee, vanilla, and banana within an endlessly creamy texture. The name Nueva is a nod to this wine's balanced, modern style: Good acidity keeps it fresh and vibrant, while a lemon-tart effect shows on the lush finish. The fruit is sourced from Sangiacomo Family Vineyards' Kiser, Home Ranch, and Green Acres vineyards, with a small percentage of grapes from La Prenda Vineyard, located within a half-mile of Home Ranch. **92** —M.M.



Pillar & Post 2019 Chardonnay, Sonoma Coast (\$24) A squeeze of lemon on the nose is backed by bright notes of white pear in this lively, modern wine with a clear-cut mineral tone. Ginger-snap and tangerine blossom lean in midway, but the fruit is outstandingly vivid. Aged in stainless steel and neutral oak. **92** —M.M.



PAUL HOBBS WINES



Maitre d' Roberto Pennacchiotti, manager Dario Nenci, and chef Antonio Guerra of Vitique in the Tuscan town of Greve, Italy.

PHOTOS: DAVIDE BISCHIERI



A Match Made in

Paradiso

**VENISON IS THE PERFECT FOIL FOR
LAMOLE DI LAMOLE CHIANTI CLASSICO DOCG**

by Lars Leicht

TO COMPLEMENT OR TO CONTRAST? That's the fork in the road (pun intended) to perfect wine and food pairings. At Vitique restaurant in Greve, Italy, chef Antonio Guerra and manager Dario Nenci take a route straight down the middle.

Vitique sits in the heart of Tuscany in the Chianti region, where culinary tradition emphasizes the simple preparation of a rich key protein, such as wild game, with

few additional ingredients; even sauces are rare. That makes a nice foil for the contrasting flavors of the region's often zesty wines. But Vitique is decidedly atypical. Though Guerra sources his raw materials locally, he draws influence from across Italy to prepare them with seasonings and sauces that build multiple layers of flavor, freshness, and acidity. "Rather than replicate a [traditional] dish," says Guerra—who was born and raised in Milan but has roots in Campania and Puglia—"I prefer to remember the flavors of it and propose them in a different way."

That leaves Nenci, a self-described 100% Tuscan, open to "complement the contrast" when pairing. Noting that the seasonal prix fixe menu revolves around meat and fish that's often grilled or smoked and the use of local herbs and fruit, he explains, "Our dishes call for wines that are fresh, with good acidity. The concept of acid on acid is key to our offerings." One of his go-to reds is local: Chianti Classico DOCG from Lamole di Lamole, whose estate in the northern part of the Classico zone includes some of the highest-altitude vineyards in the region. The Sangiovese, Cabernet Sauvignon, and Merlot that go into this wine are planted at 1,378–2,140 feet (the upper limit for Sangiovese vines in Tuscany) on west- and southwest-facing sites, ranging in age from six to 40 years of age, with stony soils composed primarily of schist and sandstone marl. After vinification with brief maceration, the wine ages in stainless-steel tanks for six months; then it's transferred to large casks (for the Sangiovese) and used barriques (for the Cabernet and Merlot).

Nenci considers the "considerably elegant" result a surefire match with such signature dishes as smoked eel with potatoes cooked under ash, accompanied by scallions and hibiscus tea; grilled venison and trumpet mushrooms with a compote of sour cherry, chamomile, and mustard seed; and grilled sea bass with horseradish and sweet frying peppers. Nenci sees the pan-Italian experience offered by Vitique as unique for local customers as well as passing tourists, calling it "kind of a journey across Italy that starts in Tuscany."

According to Guerra, the recipe at right can be made with beef or portobello mushroom instead of venison. Additionally, if a grill is unavailable, the meat can be cooked in a pan on a high flame for 5 to 8 minutes (turn it continually until browned on all sides). *SJ*

Venison loin with red wine and black cabbage at Vitique.



Grilled Venison Loin With Red Wine and Black Cabbage *serves 4*

for the red wine sauce:

- 2 cups Lamole di Lamole Chianti Classico DOCG
- 4 tablespoons sugar
- 3–4 cloves
- ½ teaspoon cinnamon

Combine ingredients in a saucepan and bring to a boil. Then lower the heat to a simmer until the mixture thickens to a gel-like consistency. (Can be made up to a day in advance.)

for the black cabbage:

- 1 pound black cabbage leaves (or kale or chard)
- 1 clove garlic
- 3 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil (preferably Tuscan) to taste
- 3½ ounces Parmigiano-Reggiano

Set aside about 8 of the best-looking cabbage leaves to grill just before serving and sauté the remainder in olive oil with the garlic. When it is browned, add a small glass of water. Transfer the mixture to a food processor; add the Parmigiano-Reggiano, and blend until fully integrated and creamy. (Can be made up to a day in advance.)

for the venison:

- 21 ounces venison tenderloin, deboned and left whole
- Preheat your grill to 575 degrees Fahrenheit. Once the sauces are prepared, cook the whole tenderloin directly on the grill, continually rotating it on all sides, until it is rare to medium rare, about 3 to 5 minutes. Once done, let it rest about 8 minutes.

to serve:

In the meantime, cook the cabbage leaves on the grill. Then slice the meat into 4 pieces and let them rest on paper towels for about a minute. Finally, spoon the wine sauce and creamed cabbage onto each plate, place a slice of meat on top, and garnish each with 2 of the grilled cabbage leaves.

{ competitions }

The Hospitalian Ideal

THE LE BEST SOMMELIER COMPETITION SHOWCASED SIX BEVERAGE
PROS' MASTERY OF FRENCH WINE AND FLOOR SKILLS ALIKE

by Wanda Mann



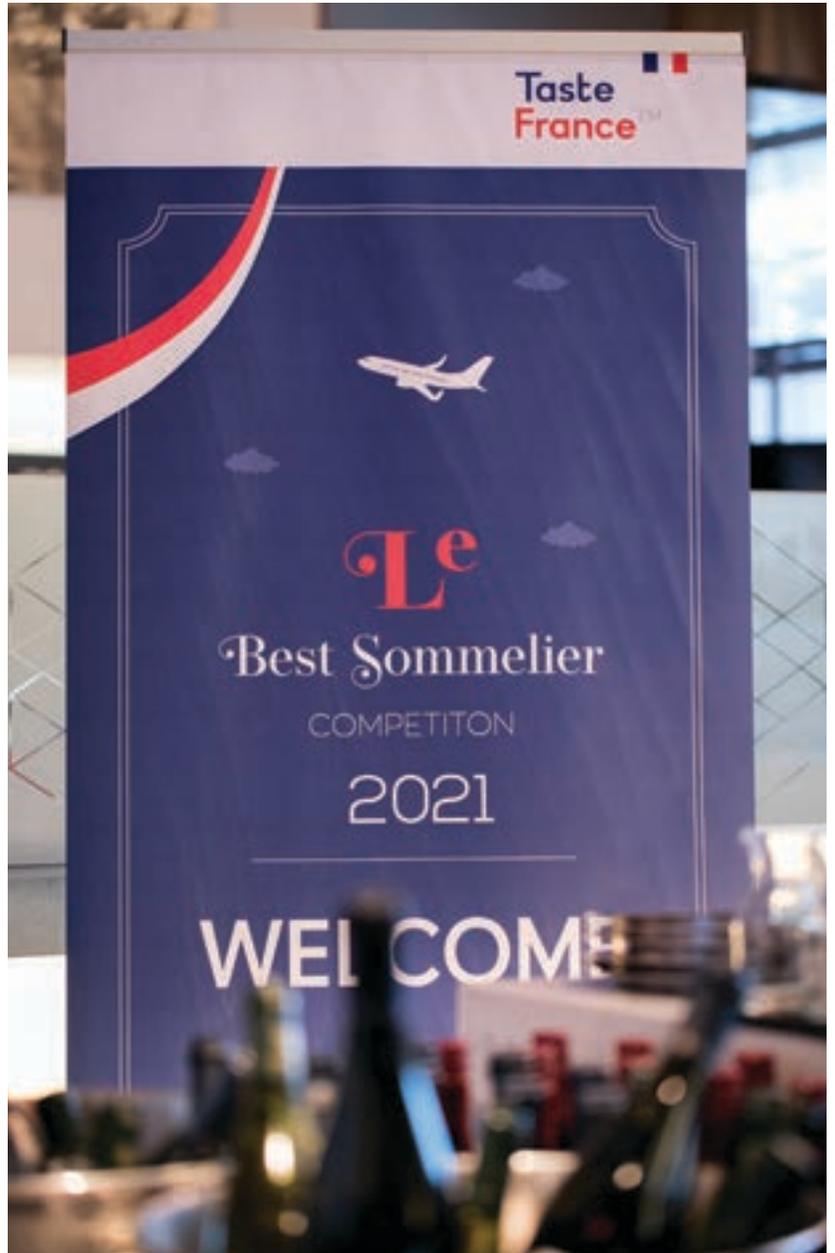
Alycia Abreu, Ashley Broshious, and Lindsey Becker-Schwartz took third, second, and first place, respectively, at the 2021 Le Best Sommelier Competition.

The Le Best Sommelier Competition was held in October 2021 at Charlie Palmer Steak in New York City.

The media often overemphasizes the glamorous aspects of the sommelier profession: access to exceptional wines, travel opportunities, and interactions with top producers. But it takes tenacity, passion, and stamina to achieve and maintain success as a sommelier. On October 26, six contestants gathered at Charlie Palmer Steak in New York City to showcase their skills at the Le Best Sommelier Competition, presented by Taste France (tastefrance.com), an initiative of the French Ministry of Agriculture.

Launched in 2019, Le Best Sommelier is an annual competition for U.S. sommeliers that focuses on theory, service, knowledge of French wines, and the ability to communicate with consumers. The finalists were selected from an initial cohort of 40 sommeliers from around the country who participated in virtual classes on various topics, including “How Tradition and Innovation Work Together,” “The Dynamic Languedoc,” and “The Loire Valley: A Passion for Diversity.”

Once the online curriculum ended, all participants were asked to submit an answer to an essay question, and the finalists were brought to New York City for the in-person competition: Alycia Abreu, beverage administrator at City Winery in New York City; Lindsey Becker-Schwartz, sommelier at RPM Seafood in Chicago, Illinois; Ashley Broshious, founder of Into the Vines in Charleston, South Carolina; Robert Leonard, sommelier at The Fearrington House Restaurant in Pittsboro, North Carolina; Benjamin Schwartz, captain and sommelier at Swift & Sons in Chicago, Illinois; and Sarah Trubnick, wine director and educator at The Barrel Room in San Francisco, California, and founder of Northeast Wine Company.



PHOTOS: LYDIA LEE PHOTO

“You can know every single Grand Cru in Burgundy, but if you do not have that skill set of wanting to please the guest and desire to create a unique experience, then everything else is secondary.”

**—Yannick Benjamin,
Le Best Sommelier
Competition
judge**



Mary Gorman-McAdams, MW; Sheri Morano, MW; and Yannick Benjamin served as judges at the event.

Their performances were assessed by an all-star panel of judges: Yannick Benjamin, co-founder of Wine on Wheels and co-founder/beverage director at Contento in New York City; Mary Gorman-McAdams, MW, director of the International Wine Center in New York City; and Sheri Morano, MW, senior partner at RingIT, Inc., in Raleigh-Durham, North Carolina.

The French wines for the seminars and the event were provided by Taub Family Selections and included bottlings from Loire Valley producer Saget La Perrière, which “has been a sponsor of Le Best Sommelier since its inception three years ago and hopes to continue supporting [it],” said Susan-Anne Cosgrove, vice president of marketing and public relations at Taub Family Selections. “Le Best Sommelier’s focus on education via personal interactions, tasting, and industry leaders’ insights gives participants a multifaceted and holistic view of French wines that will stay with them throughout the evolution of their careers.”

After a rigorous day spent designing their ideal French wine list and being interviewed by the judges, the finalists

took the stage in front of an audience of wine professionals. Each was presented with a different six-course menu featuring dishes from Japanese, American steakhouse, fusion, and other cuisines; they had a total of seven minutes to review it, make detailed recommendations for pairing it with French wines, and explain the rationale behind their picks. The crowd was enthralled, often nodding in agreement or audibly gasping at a particularly audacious suggestion. As the judges retreated for deliberations, attendees could be overheard sharing their predictions on the results.

Thunderous applause broke out when the winner was finally announced: Lindsey Becker-Schwartz. In addition to the prestige of being recognized as Le Best Sommelier, her prize included an all-inclusive trip to France in 2022. Why did she devote time to participating? “I think [the] Le Best Sommelier competition is important because it did such a good job of testing a wide variety of real-life skills a successful sommelier must have,” she said. “The questions were clever because I felt like they pushed me to think about things

I hadn’t thought explicitly about—like my personal philosophy regarding food and wine pairings, for example. It ended up testing not just my French wine knowledge but multiple skills.”

It’s safe to say that no one cheered louder for Becker-Schwartz than her husband—and fellow finalist—Benjamin Schwartz. “I actually loved competing against my husband,” she admitted. “How lucky are we to be at a similar level in each of our careers and to be able to share this intense and incredible experience?”

Becker-Schwartz made a strong impression on the judges. As Gorman-McAdams put it, “Lindsey was highly knowledgeable about French wines. She was also quick on her feet, [proving] an excellent communicator—engaging and friendly—and she showed a lot of creativity both when creating her ‘ideal’ French wine list, going beyond the familiar while not making them daunting. She also showed imagination and thoughtfulness when creating pairings in the moment. Lindsey is a top professional, with a fabulous sommelier career ahead of her.”



The six finalists raise a glass to one another.

Morano appreciated how Becker-Schwartz unraveled misconceptions about French wine: “Too often French wine is mentioned as being expensive, only for special occasions, and hard to understand. In her answers, Lindsey demonstrated the exact opposite, [showing] that there are French wines for all price points and occasions and that, while the wines of France will always be classics, there are new and innovative wines, regions, and producers as well.”

Le Best Sommelier not only tested French wine knowledge but also hospitality acumen. “Lindsey has all the qualities of a great hospitarian first and foremost,” said Benjamin. “You can know every single Grand Cru in Burgundy, but if you do not have that skill set of wanting to please the guest and desire to create a unique experience, then everything else is secondary. Lindsey had all of the qualities that were needed to earn the title of Le Best Sommelier, which were humility, kindness, [and] passion, and she had the desire to want to be better in her craft. The future looks bright for her, and I wish her continued



The Le Best Sommelier Competition was presented by Taste France, an initiative of the French Ministry of Agriculture.

success. My only advice to her is that she never loses her curiosity.”

Only one competitor could be recognized as Le Best Sommelier, but the runners-up also found value in the experience. “The Le Best Sommelier Competition is so important for sommeliers, as it makes us think about our knowledge and how we share it in a different way,” noted Broshious, who took second place. “This went beyond knowing all the AOCs and their regulations into why these regions and wines are special. [It not only] made me utilize my passion for French wines but helped me to understand how to spark that passion for others.”

Abreu, who came in third, agreed:

“Competitions can be a really valuable tool to push ourselves outside of our comfort zones, and Le Best Sommelier is a great example of that. The structure of this competition was unique compared to some of the other sommelier and wine competitions out there—it’s clear that the judges thoughtfully designed the challenges in a way that allowed us to dig deep into our personal philosophies as sommeliers, and I honestly feel I’ve walked away a better wine professional because of it.” She wasn’t alone: All the finalists demonstrated the level of passion and knowledge required to be an influential ambassador for French wine in all its timeless elegance and enduring relevance. S

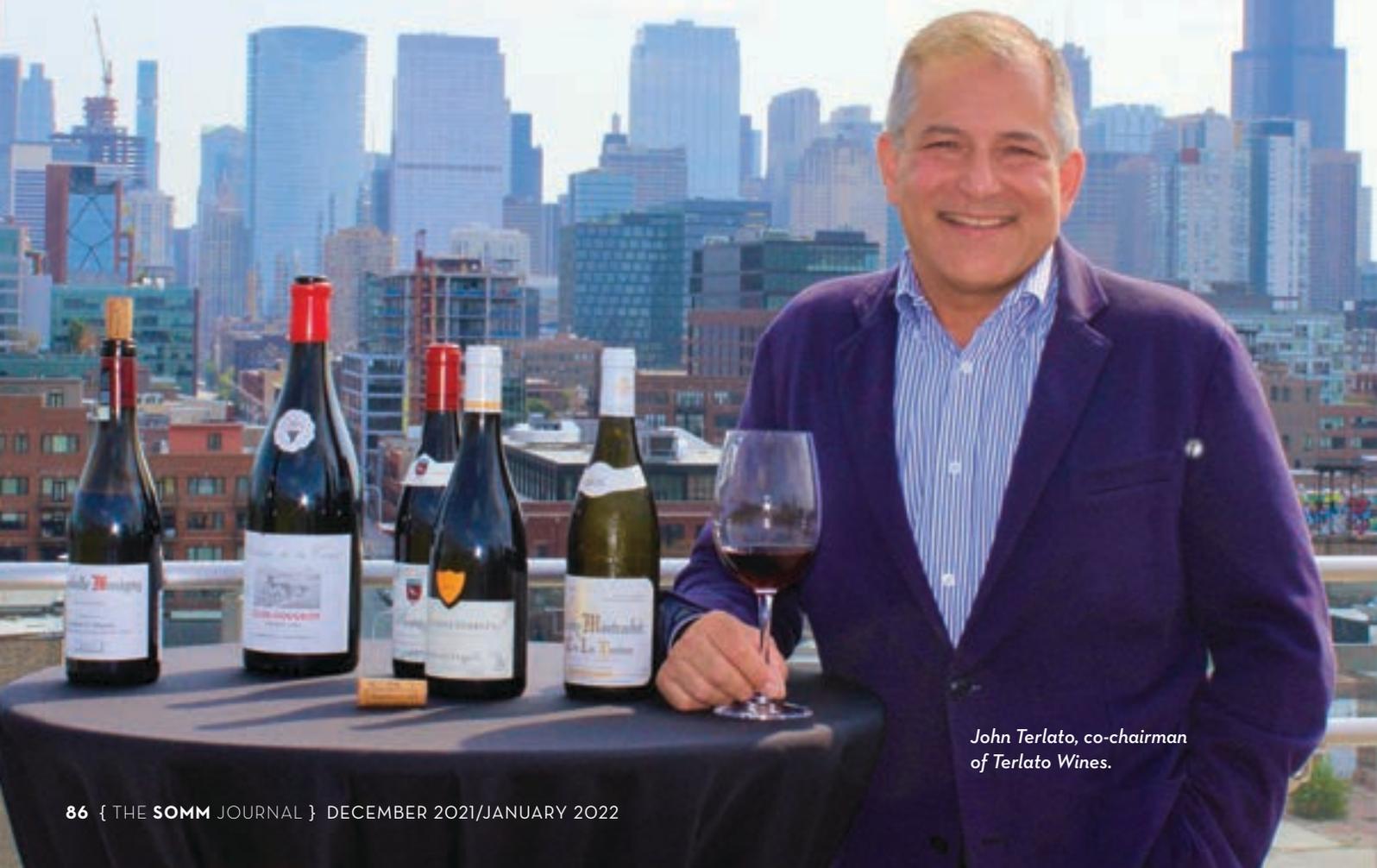
A THOUSAND Little Details

A RECENT CHICAGO
TASTING CAST A
SPOTLIGHT ON THE
BURGUNDIES IN
**TERLATO WINES' CRU
COLLECTION**

story and photos by Sarah Graybill

ON A SUNNY September day on a rooftop in Chicago, Master Sommeliers mingled with media members and chefs chatted with restaurateurs as a host of Burgundian wines made its way into their glasses—and conversations. Michelin-starred restaurant Ever, owned by acclaimed chef Curtis Duffy and Michael Muser, turned out to be quite the scenic location for a tasting of Terlato Wines' CRU Collection.

While Terlato's portfolio includes more than 80 brands from around the globe, the CRU Collection specifically is devoted to smaller-production, terroir-driven wines. Though it now includes estates from other iconic regions, it initially focused on Burgundy, as reflected in the selections Terlato



*John Terlato, co-chairman
of Terlato Wines.*

Hogsalt Hospitality wine director James Bube, MS, and Matthew Owens, director-sales division at Southern Glazer's Wine & Spirits, were guests at the event.

poured for the occasion: Château de La Tour; Domaine Jean-Louis Chavy Puligny-Montrachet 1er Cru Les Perrières; Aurélien Verdet Hautes Côtes de Nuits Le Prieuré; and Domaine Pierre Labet Meursault Les Tillets and Beaune Clos du Dessus des Marconnets Rouge as well as François Labet Île de Beauté from Corsica. As a bonus, the company also shared the wines of GAJA and Lanson.

"[These] wines represent an identifiable place: the families' vineyards," John Terlato, co-chairman of Terlato Wines, told me in a follow-up interview. "This has been a common thread for the 80-some years

journey from vineyard to bottle. Ultimately, he hoped, the tasting would deepen attendees' connection to and understanding of the CRU Collection, particularly its lesser-known yet higher-end selections.

Guest James Bube, MS, wine director for Chicago-based Hogsalt Hospitality, confirmed as much, noting that while there seems to be an unquenchable thirst for the greatest climats of Burgundy among industry professionals, the wines they yield are increasingly sold directly to wealthy collectors or flipped at auctions—or they simply sit beyond the financial grasp of those tasked to purchase and sell them; the



made the region famous in the first place."

Of particular note, the Domaine Labet Meursault Les Tillets offered a warm, buttery opening marked by yellow fruit; on the palate, green pear and spearmint joined hints of white chocolate and watercress. The François Labet Île de Beauté from Corsica, meanwhile, delivered aromas of red fruit such as cherry as well as ink and floral spices.

Terlato noted that when his family started out in wine, "retailers were selling Sherry, Port, and Muscatel for 39 cents a gallon. My father and grandfather decided they would focus on the world's greatest wines; they sold Burgundy, Bordeaux, and German wines." Wines of this sort, he added, tend to hold their own: "I'm not a 'flashing lights, wave the flag' kind of guy. I'd much rather sit face to face with someone, tell them a story about a wine family and what they're doing, and then let the wines speak for themselves. I rarely need to talk about [them]."

Terlato paraphrased François Labet in pointing out that the difference between great wines and extraordinary wines lies in attention to a thousand details: No one moment or task is, in and of itself, a silver bullet. "You really have to have the discipline and the commitment to pay attention to [all of them]—if one can focus and commit that way, you've maybe positioned yourself to create something extraordinary," he said. "My wish is to bring [such] wines to people. It is what my father did back in the '50s and '60s, it's what my brother and I carried into this generation, and [it's] what we will carry into the next generation." ❧



Chicago restaurant Ever hosted the tasting, which featured a lineup of wines from Terlato's CRU Collection.

that our family has been involved in the wine industry. We've had the good fortune to have relationships with extraordinary wine families that continue to be committed to making these 'wines of place.'" He added that he appreciates the chance to host events like this one, as they provide a forum for sharing both the larger-scale histories of the producers and what he called "smaller gem" anecdotes about their origins, their farming practices, and finally, their thought processes along their wines'

tasting, then, was an exceptional opportunity for buyers to explore them, gaining both valuable personal enrichment and tableside credibility in the process. "There were many wines featured . . . that illustrate the increasingly deft winemaking acumen of top producers to produce great wine from cooler, less-heralded regions of Burgundy, especially in warm vintages," Bube told me post-event. "For Burgundy to stay relevant, it's important [that] consumers have the opportunity to glimpse the savoir faire that



PHOTOS: JENNIFER OLSON

Think Ink

TATTOO GIRL WINES
CELEBRATES FREE THINKERS
AND DISCERNING DRINKERS

WHILE SOME BRANDS aim to please everyone, others aren't afraid to take a point of view. William Weaver's Washington State-based Tattoo Girl Wines is very much of the latter ilk.

The name came after a lot of research: Weaver and his wife, Jean, pored over news about brands making a splash in the marketplace with a succinct message, knowing that their own first impression needed to be instantly clear and compelling. Finally, they settled on a brand identity that would put the spotlight on millennials and younger consumers, particularly women with tattoos. After all, target marketing can be wildly effective: If you really know your model audience, chances are good you can sell them something. In the case of Tattoo Girl, that something is wine that punches well above its weight for the price.

"We have found great joy traveling in the wine regions of Italy and France," says Weaver of the couple's foray into the industry. "We love the history, diversity, and style of wines for each particular region we visit. But for the most part, it was the story and inner beauty inherent in [the] wines that kept us coming back for more."

Tattoo Girl's own story began with its launch a few years ago. Early on, sourcing consistent wine was a bit of an issue; fortunately, however, the Weavers soon found Ancient Lake Wine Company director of winemaking Brandon Rice and his crew in Quincy. Here, the wines are assembled with grapes from five vineyard sites in the Wahluke Slope and Ancient Lakes AVAs.



Brand founders Jean and William Weaver.



Tattoo Girl national sales manager Jason Neri and Bob Paulinski, MW.

The brand aesthetic is, of course, tattoo-inspired, centered around labels adorned with pen-and-ink illustrations by Adam Isaac Jackson, a Tacoma-based artist and designer who's worked with an impressive list of clients such as Nike and Ray-Ban. Featuring different women flexing their many tattoos, the bottles appeal especially to those with their own expressive body canvases, according to Weaver. "We found an audience that really had not been given a voice in the wine world," he says, as even today's more open-minded and diversity-oriented marketplace is prone to fixating on the same milquetoast slice of the societal pie.

Tattoo Girl, by contrast, celebrates its namesake community. Weaver says that as they devised the labels, there was some psychology at play—namely frequency illusion theory, or the tendency to see something seemingly everywhere after seeing it for the first time; in this case, target consumers could see themselves represented in a market segment that typically doesn't cater to them. But there's more to it than the labels: On social media, the company features "Tattoo Girls of the Month," selected from their followers. "As a result, we have had truly great feedback . . . and are often receiving beautiful stories and sentiments from our fans about the meaning behind their tattoos," Weaver says.

Of course the wines themselves are crafted to be as boldly expressive and individualistic as their audience. Presently, the Tattoo Girl portfolio includes five wines ranging from \$13 to \$15: a Washington Riesling, Chardonnay, Cabernet Sauvignon, and red blend as well as a Columbia Valley Rosé, all notable for their vibrant fruit and relatively low alcohol. The most recent vintage of the Chardonnay was just featured on the "Top 14 U.S. White Wines Under \$15" list by *Wine Enthusiast*.

Weaver cites several mentors as big reasons why the brand continues to thrive—people like Marcus Miller, president of fellow Washington winery Airfield Estates, who helped him locate prime vineyard sites, and distribution vet Bob Falvo, "who refined our approach and directed our momentum as we began building to become a national brand." In addition, he says, "We are fortunate to have a fantastic team," including national sales manager Jason Neri and Bob Paulinski, MW, who works with Rice in crafting the wines. No wonder Tattoo Girl is on schedule to be positioned in all 50 states, plus the District of Columbia, by the end of this year. That's an incredible feat for a brand so young.

In a quest to give back as much as they've been helped, Weaver has teamed up with an organization he's long supported, Pheasants Forever—donating both wines and funds to help it in its ongoing efforts to preserve the habitat of its namesake. (So maybe avid birders are Tattoo Girl's next big audience?)

Needless to say, the ink on the wall suggests more good things to come. "We are excited for the future of our brand and will continue to cultivate our wine industry relationships along the way and always provide a product we are proud of," Weaver says. *sj*

Tasting Notes

Tattoo Girl 2018 Cabernet Sauvignon, Columbia Valley, Washington (\$15)

With an ABV of 13.8%, this is a balanced, streamlined blend of 77% Cabernet Sauvignon, 12% Merlot, 9% Malbec, and 2% Petit Verdot. Ripe cherry, cassis, and blackberry form a partnership on the round palate as high-toned acidity maintains the wine's inherent elegance from start to finish. **91** —*Meridith May*

Tattoo Girl 2020 Rosé, Columbia Valley, Washington (\$13)

A thrilling, delicious, and expressive rosé of 100% Syrah, with aromas of pink grapefruit and pomegranate. A harmonious gathering of salted red berries and minerality is sweetened by a garden of roses. **93** —*M.M.*

Tattoo Girl 2020 Riesling, Columbia Valley, Washington (\$13)

Wahluke Slope and Snipes Mountain fruit (96% Riesling and 4% Chardonnay) make a magical connection in one of the best Washington State Rieslings we've tasted. Aromas of honeyed apple and lemon meringue give way to a luscious palate of peach nectar and magnolia blossom. Lithe viscosity is matched by fine acidity, and apricot and tangerine have staying power thanks to underlying minerality. **92** —*M.M.*

Tattoo Girl 2018 Red Wine, Columbia Valley, Washington (\$15)

This blend of 69% Merlot, 15% Malbec, and 16% Cabernet Sauvignon shows an array of flavors and aromas, including grainy notes of dark chocolate-covered cherry that introduce a wave of texture and taste. Spice and smoky oak combine with grip and grace. **91** —*M.M.*

Tattoo Girl 2019 Chardonnay, Columbia Valley, Washington (\$13)

Despite its value price, this modern, ultra-energetic white exceeds expectations; it has a brisk and bright tone, with tangerine and lime saturating the palate up front. Secondary flavors of oregano and pea tendrils, melded with subtle notes of oak and minerality, underline its crisp nature. **93** —*M.M.*



PHOTOS: SZCHERS

Laura DePasquale is senior vice president of sales and commercial operations for Southern Glazer's Wine & Spirits' Domaine and Estates Artisanal Wines division.

Getting the Job Done

LAURA DEPASQUALE HAS BIG PLANS FOR SOUTHERN GLAZER'S NEW ARTISANAL WINE DIVISION by Amy Antonation

"I'M MOUTHY. People who know me know this to be true." So says Laura DePasquale, senior vice president of sales and commercial operations for the new Domaine and Estates Artisanal Wines division of Southern Glazer's Wine & Spirits. Even over a crackly Zoom interview, I can verify that. I'd scheduled the meeting in anticipation of writing a profile of her after her promotion to the position last July, and she had plenty to say—though hardly any of it was about herself.

DePasquale boasts a long list of credentials as prestigious as some of the wines she

speaks about. In addition to a career in fine wine sales spanning two decades, she became only the 13th woman to be awarded a Master Sommelier diploma in 2004 (and one of just 28 to date); served on the Court of Master Sommeliers' board of directors as both a member and vice-chair; and currently sits on the boards of both the Wine Educational Board's Collisioni Food Project and the Best USA Sommelier Association. But she brushed aside discussions of her qualifications, saying, "What I'm more excited about is the new path that Southern Glazer's is taking in regard to wine."

So we switched gears, jumping right into a discussion of the Domaine and Estates Artisanal Wines division. DePasquale began selling its portfolio in the Florida market in 2016, expanding to Texas in August 2021 with a renewed focus on an educational approach for boutique wine buyers; enhanced customer service; and a commitment to engaging tastemakers in the development of portfolios.

"One of the great things about Southern Glazer's is we do have these incredible internal resources," DePasquale noted, pointing to the quarterly "artisanal

academies” the division created to raise the bar for the local wine community. “Buyers in our top restaurants weren’t getting access to taste the great wines of the world like Hermitage and single-cru Barolos,” she explained. “They knew them academically, but they weren’t tasting the wine in order to be able to walk to the table and say, ‘This wine is perfect for you this evening.’ It was an ‘aha’ moment when we realized they didn’t have access.” So in 2017, they began hosting sit-down tastings at their corporate headquarters for buyers, followed by an optional, more casual “bonus” tasting that, DePasquale noted, almost all buyers opted to stick around for: “We did Burgundy, natural wines, Loire Valley. We showed weirdo grapes next to Barolos and Barbarescos,” she said. “We brought in Master Somms and Masters of Wine. We had so many of our buyers say, ‘Thank you. That was the first time I’ve tasted these wines.’”

Of course, due to the pandemic, the academies are currently off the table (though they are slated to return, depending on the public health situation) and much of the hospitality industry has been in free fall. Although premium and rare wine sales have not slowed appreciably, according to DePasquale, buyers are stretched thin. (She recalls one prominent somm telling her about the time he had to wash dishes until 2 a.m.) So the Wine Haus was born: Southern Glazer’s rents a house somewhere in Florida and sets up tasting stations “very far apart” throughout it; eight to ten buyers book an appointment time and choose up to 70 wines to taste. “We are your somm,” said DePasquale, likening the experience to a restaurant reservation. “It makes great use of time and samples and, most importantly, continues to grow our community.” And at a time when the community you love can also be the community that makes you sick, it has gone off without a hitch. Wine Haus tastings will continue in Florida and Texas, launching in other states as Domaine and Estates expands.

DePasquale acknowledges that while Southern Glazer’s has the reach and resources to give buyers illuminating, customized experiences, its size also makes the company complicated to navigate.

The result of its efforts to smooth the path for wine suppliers and buyers alike is SG+, a more robust customer-service model. The most exciting element of SG+, according to DePasquale, is the refinement of the shipping process. The company is currently delivering in refrigerated trucks and experimenting with the same sort of technology that alerts parents who have left their child alone in the back seat of a car. It has also revamped its shipping boxes, delivering fine wines (which are generally purchased by the bottle due to rarity and cost) in recyclable six-bottle shippers that are sealed for security and temperature control. Drivers are receiving enhanced customer-service and basic wine training, and end-to-end delivery temperature control is in the pilot

phase. DePasquale noted that customers are most excited about this development. After all, she added, “Wine is a living, breathing thing that requires care.”

Granted, in the face of container shortages across all industries and extreme weather conditions throughout the U.S., shipping challenges are significant. (At the time of our interview, Hurricane Ida was pummeling Louisiana and on its way to causing serious flooding in New York and New Jersey, while Billings, Montana, had recently recorded a high of 100 degrees at a time of year when its average temperature hovers around 70 degrees. “It’s misery for our fine wines,” DePasquale lamented.) So Southern Glazer’s is taking its time. “No one is going to die if they don’t get their Burgundy Grand Cru in July,” she pointed out. “We’d rather wait so we can get [the shipping] right. It matters to our generational wineries in Europe and around the world that the product is handled correctly.”

“The fact that Southern Glazer’s created this position really shows they’re not messing around, because I am not a wallflower. They chose a leader for this position.”

—Laura DePasquale



But perhaps DePasquale’s most exhilarating task so far has been creating the new division’s Florida portfolio. “I got to put on my commercial hat and my MS hat,” she said. “What’s going to be splashy and sexy? Where can we be risky? It’s split in terms of being very classic versus very creative, with a natural wine book and edgy Greek and South American suppliers.” She’s equally excited about the brand-new Texas portfolio and, as the company explores the possibility of expanding to California in 2022, has already begun building a book for that state. One of DePasquale’s key strategies for selecting the wines is engaging the tastemakers: “Who is the influencer? Who is trendy?” The answer she receives can shape her picks: For instance, she explained, Burgundy and classified

Bordeaux are in exceedingly high demand right now, with grower Champagne not far behind; natural wines are still hot but are cooling off just a bit. That tactic will surely come in handy in the future, as long-term plans include building unique portfolios for New York, Colorado, Nevada, and Washington as well as infiltrating smaller markets based on their gastronomic cultures (think Charleston, North Carolina, and Portland, Oregon).

By establishing Domaine and Estates, DePasquale asserted, Southern Glazer’s has demonstrated its commitment to fine wine. Its selection of DePasquale to head the effort—as well as its allocation of considerable resources to fund it—further proves it isn’t just paying lip service to growing the division. “The fact that Southern Glazer’s created this position really shows they’re not messing around, because I am not a wallflower,” she said. “They chose a leader for this position. They hired someone they knew would get the job done.”

chilling with Chilean Reds

AT A RECENT ONLINE TASTING,
CONO SUR UNCORKED WINES AND
THE STORIES BEHIND THEM

by Sarah Graybill

As a toast to International Pinot Noir Day on August 18, well-known Chilean producer Cono Sur Vineyards & Winery hosted a “Cool Red” virtual tasting. Attendees joined Cono Sur winemaking director Matías Ríos and Sarah Tracey, a sommelier and writer, on a journey through some of the brand’s standout reds.

Ríos, who joined the Colchagua Valley-based winery in 2003, assumed his current position in 2018 and began overseeing every stage of production from the vineyard to the cellar. Every Monday, he and the rest of the winemaking team—Guillermo Sanchez, Carol Koch, and Mauricio Valderas—meet to taste and decide the best blends for each label, a process that has been instrumental in the success of each of the wines featured during the web session: the 2020 Bicicleta Reserva Pinot Noir, the 2016 Limited Edition 20 Barrels Pinot Noir, and the 2018 Organico Pinot Noir.

As the title of the event suggested,

participants were encouraged to chill their wines prior to the tasting to ensure the best experience; once uncorked, they opened up beautifully. First, we experienced the young Bicicleta Reserva Pinot Noir’s robust notes of cherry, raspberry, plum, and strawberry; hints of earth; and fine tannins. Next, we enjoyed the elegance and intensity of the 20 Barrels Pinot Noir, with its juicy yet balanced flavors of sour cherry, raspberry, plum, and hints of toast as well as its smooth tannins. We ended with the Organico Pinot Noir, which showed a complex nose of sweet wild fruit, including cherries and berries, and was well rounded and juicy on the palate, with soft tannins and toasty elements.

As Ríos walked the audience through the lineup, he peppered his notes with anecdotes about the wines, giving them

With the Bicicleta line, the winery pays tribute to its bike-riding vineyard workers.



new meaning. For example, the name “20 Barrels” was born in 1996, when the Cono Sur team determined they had reached their potential to become Chile’s first

producer of ultra-premium Pinot Noir. “That year, we gathered a group of barrels that we felt were exceptional, generating great expectations and taking up a special area within the barrel room,” explained Ríos. “Months passed and several rounds of selection were made before there were only 20 barrels left, the chosen number, to which the team enthusiastically gave special care and attention.”

Ríos shared that the 20 Barrels line began with a Pinot Noir from the Casablanca Valley. “We chose a very special terroir for this variety in an extreme western part of [the valley] close to the Pacific Ocean,

PHOTOS COURTESY OF CONO SUR



currently one of Chile's coldest estates, [which] grows Pinot and white varieties," he said. "The release was soon followed by a Sauvignon Blanc and a Chardonnay, and, as we had the necessary conditions to continue this exciting project, Cabernet Sauvignon was added . . . originating from some of Alto Maipo's oldest vines; then a Syrah from the Limarí Valley's extreme north; and finally a Merlot from the esteemed Colchagua Valley."

The Bicicleta wines, meanwhile, pay tribute to the vineyard workers who ride their bikes to work each day. "Upon arriving at the vineyard, one can see this method of transportation, all lined up and waiting for the workday to end," Ríos said. The essence of the wine, in his view, "is the spirit of a bicycle and its original qualities—[representing] a diverse and natural path . . . into the world and sustainability—as well as the attitude of those who use [bicycles, who signify] a search, a challenge, and discovery. And with that, it has transformed into the brand's icon."

Ríos noted that Cono Sur's organic range of wines has also been very well received as matching the quality of its sister labels stride for stride. Organic and sustainable production is a point of pride for him and a facet of the brand he feels passionate about, as he was instrumental in the company's move to become a Certified B Corporation.

"At Cono Sur, I have been able to develop myself as a winemaker and express my personality in our wines, [resulting in] a sustainable production system with organic vines and integrated vineyard management," Ríos said. "[We are] always aiming for top quality, respect for the environment, and the challenge of developing innovative wines that represent the great diversity of terroirs we have in Chile. It has



Cono Sur's estate in the Colchagua Valley town of Chimbarongo.

certainly been a dream come true."

The event concluded with a cocktail demonstration by Tracey, who topped a traditional Pisco Sour with Cono Sur Pinot Noir, pouring it over the back of a spoon to create a lush layer of wine on the surface of the drink—called, of course, a Cono Sour. Participants left well acquainted with the versatility of the brand's red wines: very cool indeed. *SJ*

Tuning in to Etude

SEASON TWO OF **SOMM SESSIONS** BEGINS, STARRING AN ESTATE-GROWN PINOT NOIR by Stefanie Schwalb

FROM SUCCESSION TO *The Morning Show*, plenty of hit TV series returned to the airwaves this season full of suspense, betrayal, and (sometimes) murder. Of course, we in the wine world don't want to be outdone, so *The SOMM Journal* has relaunched its own web series—sans over-the-top theatrics; instead, it's all about entertaining through education. Call it Season 2 of *SOMM Sessions*, Episode 1: "Cool and Coastal," set on California's Central Coast and starring Carneros-based Etude Winery's 2018 Grace Benoist Ranch Estate Grown Pinot Noir.

Hosted by Treasury Wine Estates education manager Gillian Ballance, MS, and *SOMM Journal* VP of education Lars Leicht in September, this virtual session showcased the rich history of Pinot Noir as it found its footing in the Golden State

and the enticing traits that keep the grape's audience captivated. After all, what's a character without a compelling narrative arc—and Pinot Noir has it in spades.

Spoiler Alert: Pinot Noir Is Particular

Quoted as saying "God made Cabernet Sauvignon, whereas the Devil made Pinot Noir," legendary winemaker André Tchelistcheff wasn't wrong: Producers who want to work with it need to brace themselves for multiple plot twists. "Pinot Noir is definitely a challenging grape," said Leicht. "It prefers cool climates, loves calcareous clay soils, is a bit stingy with color, is one of the earliest to undergo bud break, and is also susceptible to rot."

The thin-skinned, delicate variety is deep blue-violet in hue and yields sweet, initially



PHOTOS COURTESY OF ETUDE WINERY

Etude Winery in the Carneros AVA.

colorless juice from small, tightly clustered bunches. It doesn't tend to travel well and is known for being finicky about where it's planted. "Pinot Noir mutates easily and has genetic instability," explained Ballance. "Because of that, there are so many different offspring of this variety, and it needs to find

The Grace Benoist Ranch Vineyard on the Sonoma side of the Carneros AVA.





Etude winemaker Jon Priest.

the right home. It will try to mutate and adapt to its situation, but generally speaking, in warmer climates Pinot Noir loses acidity fast—because it’s an early ripener—while in very damp climates it can be prone to rot because of those tight clusters.”

The Backstory

Thought to originate in Mesopotamia, Pinot Noir is an ancient varietal with more than 1,000 variants. The first written reference to the grape was made by historian and wine lover Pliny the Elder, and it was the Romans who brought the grape to France in the first century. “The Romans had conquered most of Europe, were spreading the taste for wine, and were planting grapevines everywhere they went,” said Leicht. “One of the keys in Burgundy is those small parcels—very special parts of the land that have great limestone in the soil to bring out a lot of the character. It’s something the ancient Romans figured out and that the monks picked up on in the Middle Ages.” When Napoleon confiscated church holdings and the land was returned to the people, inheritance laws created a patchwork of thousands of tiny vineyards divided among several owners, resulting in uneven quality. “There are tremendous differences from parcel to parcel, literally sometimes from row to row,” added Leicht. “That’s the beauty of it.”

Of course, while Burgundy is its homeland, Pinot Noir’s storyline has proven spellbinding in other cool-climate regions across the globe. In the Southern Hemi-

sphere, Tasmania in Australia and Central Otago in New Zealand are among the areas with ideal growing conditions for it to thrive, as are Germany, Oregon, and, of course, California in the Northern Hemisphere. “Pinot Noir is the sixth-most-planted red grape variety in the world, yet there are only 277,000 acres,” noted Ballance as “a testament to the difficulties of growing this variety.” California, she added, is home to roughly a third of the world’s plantings.

The Big Reveal: All About Etude

Established as an AVA in 1985, Carneros spans both Napa and Sonoma counties; Grace Benoist Ranch is situated in the latter. In the early 1980s, Etude’s founding winemaker, Tony Soter, “decided to plant 500 acres [in Sonoma] in partnership with Treasury Wine Estates, which at the time was assuming the brand and growing it,” said Ballance, calling the sustainably farmed vineyard “an incredible patchwork” of soil types, including alluvial, volcanic, and several different clays.

Grace Benoist Ranch was developed in the early 2000s—the culmination of an 18-year journey to find the most suitable terroir in the region for Etude’s estate vineyards. It is certified by the California Sustainable Winegrowing Alliance as well as Fish Friendly Farming, which Ballance believes is another “great reason to enjoy the wine.” In addition to seven Chardonnay clones, the ranch is home to nine heirloom and eight additional Pinot Noir clones, each grown in its own individual vineyard block; averaging only 8 acres

in size, they contain varying soils and rootstocks. Spacing is dense to ensure low per-vine yields of fully concentrated fruit. The use of clones is one of the keys to the complexity and intrigue of Etude wines, allowing a diversity of expression within the same vineyard.

In fact, multiple clones from different parts of the site go into the Etude 2018 Grace Benoist Ranch Estate Grown Pinot Noir, which spends about ten months in mostly neutral oak barrels after a bit of cold soaking and open-top fermentation, explained Ballance. “[Current winemaker] Jon Priest likes to use open-top fermenters to let some oxygen into the process along with some very gentle pumping over. He believes great wine is made in the vineyard and [through] sustainable farming,” she added.

In short, working with Pinot Noir can lead to some cliffhangers. “The key with anybody making it—and Jon has done this—is you have to surrender yourself to it or let it think it’s doing the winemaking, not you,” concluded Leicht. “The worst thing a winemaker can do is try to force a Pinot Noir. If you have the patience, clearly you can get a wine like you’re getting out of Etude.” *sj*

Editor’s note: Visit the SOMM Sessions section of sommjournal.com to catch up on missed episodes—or binge-watch the whole series.



Etude 2018 Grace Benoist Ranch Estate Grown Pinot Noir, Carneros (\$47)

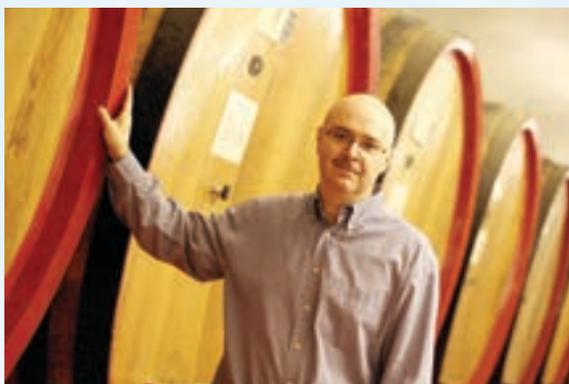
From the northwest corner of Carneros, where winds off the Pacific come through the Petaluma Gap to keep the site cool, this wine offers layered flavors of tree bark, roasted coffee bean, mulberry, and sassafras that maintain an overall earthy character. Black plum, baking spices, and cigar

leaf add depth to its spicy finish of dried lavender. **94** —*Meridith May*

A Tradition of Trailblazing

EXAMINING THE EPIC SUCCESS STORY OF **RUFFINO**

by Wanda Mann



Ruffino winemaker Gabriele Tacconi.

A FAMILIAR AND WELCOME presence in wine glasses around the world, Ruffino has stood the test of time by nimbly honoring tradition. Yet its reputation for trailblazing is indisputable as well: Founded in Chianti in 1877, Ruffino was the first winery to export Chianti DOCG to the United States after the appellation was made official in 1984, for instance. And it isn't content to coast on past triumphs: While respecting its signature style, winemaker Gabriele Tacconi refuses to stagnate.

"Our earthy, terroir-driven wines, like the Riserva Ducale, are Italian staples and have long been a gold standard in Chianti production," he says. "In addition to our renowned Chianti portfolio, we also use modern cellar techniques [to make] Super Tuscan-style wines like our Modus [Latin for 'The Method']. This is an elegant, full-bodied red wine that expresses Tuscany with three noble grape varieties," namely Sangiovese, Merlot, and Cabernet Sauvignon. With expressions like Modus, he continues, "We're really able to step outside the box of more traditional [production] and offer wine lovers a less expected, more contemporary expression of Ruffino"—one that he recommends with beef-stuffed manicotti in Bolognese sauce.



Ruffino's 30-hectare Montemasso estate in Chianti.

The fruit for Ruffino's Brunello di Montalcino comes from Greppone Mazzi.



Ruffino also produces Alauda, a Super Tuscan whose name, inspired by the elegant birds that soar through the Tuscan skies, means “Skylark” in Italian. Tacconi says he dared to be different in the creation of Alauda, which is made only in exceptional years and is considered “a contemporary expression of the region”: “What sets it apart is that Cabernet Franc makes up the core of the blend, an uncommon selection for Tuscany, which tends to favor Sangiovese. This was a personal decision of mine. It was important to me to highlight how this delicate varietal expresses itself in a distinguished way at our Poggio Casciano estate. We blend it very carefully with Merlot, which gives it an elegant softness and structure. While it’s certainly a modern Super Tuscan . . . we honor tradition by incorporating the rare native Colorino grape to round out the blend.” Bistecca Fiorentina or risotto with pork sausage and lamb shoulder are Tacconi’s suggested pairings for Alauda.



Although the production guidelines for Brunello di Montalcino do not permit the unbridled creativity that Ruffino employs in creating its SuperTuscans, Tacconi is no less proud of the precise craft that goes into its Greppone Mazzi Brunello di Montalcino. “We use only the finest hand-harvested

grapes in production,” he explains. “Elegant and rooted in the terroir of Montalcino . . . this wine [is made] from selected clones of Sangiovese called Sangiovese Grosso, locally referred to as Brunello, or ‘little dark one.’ Known for its power, longevity, and elegance, this grape produces a wine that excels not only in structure but also in finesse.” He recommends pairing the classic bottling with a rich and hearty dish like lamb or seared duck breast with grilled portobello mushrooms.

More than 140 years old, Ruffino is still going strong; what’s the secret to its longevity and continued relevance? Of course, Tacconi can’t reveal its treasure trove of confidential info, but at least part of the answer is obvious: make great wine! “The real ‘secret’ to producing our exceptional wines is having access to the best vineyards with the highest-quality fruit,” he says. “Ruffino has, over the years, grown its collection of estates in Tuscany’s most important fine wine appellations.” To learn more about them, visit ruffino.com. 

The Subtleties of

SUBSTANCE

One of the first technical details a sommelier learns is that “full-bodied” means high alcohol, typically 13.5% or above. The term is often used interchangeably with “big,” so when a customer asks for a “big red wine,” does that mean they simply want a high-alcohol wine, or one with a lot of fruit and spice character that just happens to have high levels of alcohol, tannin, and acidity? Seeking answers, our “Big Reds: Old World vs. New World” webinar—held October 12 as part of our ongoing Geographical Digest series in partnership with *National Geographic*—examined whether placing the category within the fusty binary framework of continental geography helps to solidify its meaning.

“Achieving a full-bodied red is a point of pride for winemakers, but does that very definition vary between the Old and New Worlds?” questioned moderator and *SOMM Journal* VP of education Lars Leicht as he prepared to introduce the participants. “Does ‘big’ mean brawny or bodacious? Broad-shouldered or breathtaking? We’ll explore the subtleties with six producers, evenly split on either side of the pond.” As usual, Master Sommelier Greg Van Wagner served as our assistant tour guide with his SommGeo platform, an incredible tool that Leicht often describes as “Google Earth meets wine country.”

OUR “BIG REDS: OLD WORLD VS. NEW WORLD” WEBINAR PROVED FULL-BODIED WINES ARE MORE DIVERSE THAN YOU THINK

by Jessie Birschbach

PHOTO COURTESY OF SARTORI DIVERONA

CAKEBREAD CELLARS

The Red: Cakebread Cellars 2018 Suscol Springs Cabernet Sauvignon, Napa Valley

Presenter: Stephanie Jacobs, winemaker

Winemaker Stephanie Jacobs' presentation unfolded in front of a large window that revealed a comprehensive view of Cakebread Cellars' winemaking facility. As she reviewed the producer's storied past, beginning in 1972 with Dolores and Jack Cakebread's purchase of the 22-acre Sturdivant Ranch in Rutherford, members of her team would walk past a row of large tanks, splashing through a puddle on the recently cleaned red floor. It appeared appropriately busy for a winery whose portfolio features fruit from 16 estate vineyards scattered across 600 acres throughout the Napa and Anderson valleys.

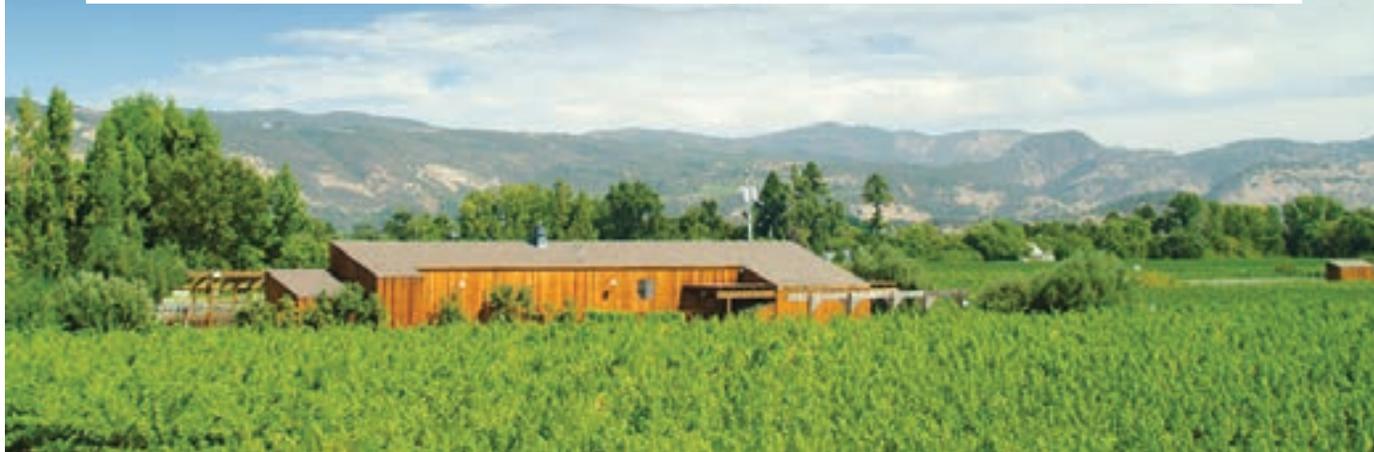
Nearly 50 years after that initial purchase and the subsequent release of a 1973 Chardonnay made by Jack Cakebread, the producer is well known for its food-friendly, fruit-forward wines. Jacobs, only the fourth person to hold the title of winemaker in Cakebread's history, opted to present the inaugural release of the Cakebread Cellars Suscol Springs Cabernet Sauvignon. Located on the southern end



of the Vaca Mountains, the site is made up of three parcels; the original portion, planted in 2007, is situated next to the Arroyo Creek plot, planted in 2009, while the third, appropriately named Suscol Mountain, is adjacent to both at a higher elevation and was planted in 2016, with more plantings added in 2017 and 2018. The vineyard's highest point now reaches up to 1,364 feet, according to Jacobs: "I was up there on Friday, as we're still picking away at the fruit, waiting for it to get a little riper. It was very cold." She

noted that Cakebread's Dancing Bear Vineyard on Howell Mountain, also part of the Vaca mountain range, is picked much earlier than Suscol Springs, which they typically don't begin to harvest until the first week of October.

The lower Arroyo Creek area of Suscol is made up of bale loam clay, but as the vineyard climbs the mountain, the soil becomes rockier and more volcanic, combining with the cool conditions—thanks to wind from the San Pablo Bay—to produce "concentrated fruit with lots of acidity, lots of firm tannin structure, and very small berries," said Jacobs. The resulting Suscol Springs Cabernet Sauvignon, with an ABV of 14.7%, offers a heightened level of freshness and tension as well as floral aromas that Jacobs noted are common for all varieties grown throughout the site. (For more on Cakebread, see page 40.)



QUINTA DOS MURÇAS

The Red: Quinta dos Murças 2013 Reserva, Douro, Portugal

Presenter: Frank Paredes, president, NOW Wine Imports, and brand ambassador, Esporão

Quinta dos Murças is older than the Douro Valley, the world's oldest demarcated wine region: The former dates back to 1714, while the latter, a UNESCO World Heritage Site since 2001, became official in 1756. Today Murças is owned by Esporão, a family-owned Portuguese company that aims to become the largest producer of organic wine in the world. In fact, Frank Paredes, Esporão brand ambassador and president of the company's U.S. importer, NOW Wine Imports, said it was the acquisition of Murças in 2008 that established Esporão's presence in the Douro DOC.

Murças' vineyards—located on the right bank of the Douro River in both the lower Cima Corgo subregion and the higher, cooler, slightly rainier Baixo Corgo subregion—encompass 383 acres, 118 of which are precariously planted to indigenous varieties. Well, somewhat precariously, anyway: Unlike most of the Douro's steep, terraced hillside sites, the majority of Murças'



vine rows (82%, to be exact) run vertically. When reorienting the property in 1947, the winery's proprietors believed that this method allowed for not only a higher

density of plantings (which is said to cause the roots to dig deeper due to competition) but also more uniform sun exposure, improved aeration, and less erosion.

However, it wasn't just the row orientation that attracted Esporão to the estate: "After taking over, we brought in a French viticultural team for the purposes of soil study throughout the entire property," said Paredes. "We [discovered that we] have eight distinct soil types, with schist as the predominant soil. The soils . . . make it distinct but [so do] the elevation, the solar exposure, and closeness to the river." The schist contributes to the minerality of the wine while helping to retain heat, which in turn allows for more uniform maturation throughout the growing season. All of this is naturally ideal for the native grapes grown on the estate: Tinta Roriz, Tinta Amarela, Tinta Barroca, Touriga Nacional, Touriga Franca, and Sousão, all 100% certified organic by the European Union as of this year.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF QUINTA DOS MURÇAS

The vineyards of Quinta dos Murças in the Baixo Corgo subregion.



Vineyard management is performed by hand in the unforgivingly hot climate of the Douro, yielding a mere 3.8 tons per acre. Paredes told the audience that the Cima Corgo vineyards produce wines with more concentration, while the vineyards of the Baixo Corgo yield wines with heightened freshness and elegance. A field blend of the aforementioned indigenous grapes, which are carefully crushed by foot in an 8-ton *lagar* (a shallow rectangular trough), the Quinta dos Murças 2013 Reserva was described by Paredes as a full-bodied, rich, intensely black-fruited wine, with the caveat that "'full body' for us means finding the balance between aromatics, fruit, tannin, acidity, and mouthfeel," he added. "It doesn't mean big and brawny but rather taking what our vineyards provide and presenting it in the most balanced way possible."

Quinta dos Murças 2013 Reserva, Douro, Portugal (\$45)

Grown on the right bank of the Douro River on the Quinta dos Murças estate, this field blend of Touriga Nacional, Touriga Franca, Sousão, Tinta Amarela, Tinta Barroca, and Tinta Roriz shows fresh aromas of red plum and salted beet. On the plush entry are notes of ripe red berries, caramel apple, chocolate, and marzipan. Creamy and bright, it's a gorgeous expression of terroir. **94** —*Meridith May*

ESPORÃO GROUP



Scheid Family Wines' Hames Valley Vineyard in Monterey County.



SCHEID FAMILY WINES

The Red: VDR "Very Dark Red" 2019 Proprietary Red Blend, Monterey County

Presenter: Dave Nagengast, VP of winemaking

Although the Scheid family has been growing grapes in Monterey County since the early 1970s and began making wine under the Scheid Vineyards label in 1989, they wouldn't broadly distribute their first wine made from one of their roughly 40 grape varieties until 2011, six years after the completion of their state-of-the-art winery. In fact, Scheid Family Wines' (SFW) VP of winemaking, Dave Nagengast, was hired in 2002 to help design the facility with a thoughtful, small-lot approach to large-scale winemaking in mind. Processing over 3,000 acres of sustainably certified grapes, the winery is also certified sustainable as well as 100% powered by renewable wind energy from a 400-foot-tall wind turbine towering over the campus.

Doubling down on the company's commitment to sustainability, the veteran winemaker noted that Scheid Family Wines is currently 100% herbicide free and in the process of transitioning over 1,500 acres for organic certification. In the midst of this process (and, presumably, several other winemaker duties), Nagengast chatted with us from an office on SFW's Greenfield property, which is "centrally located . . . to our estate vineyards located up and down the [Salinas] Valley." Na-



gengast's mustache quirked with a smile, however, with the caveat that his presentation would focus mostly on the estate's warm, southernmost site, the Hames Valley Vineyard, as this is the primary source of the Petite Sirah and Petit Verdot featured in SFW's VDR Proprietary Red Blend.

The acronym stands for "Very Dark Red"—a fitting moniker given Nagengast's description of it as "a big, bold wine with a lot of impact yet approachable, with a smooth, polished finish." He added that the winemaking team is able to achieve this character because the Hames Valley grapes receive less influence from the cooling Monterey Bay than do other SFW sites. "We get very hot days, over 100 degrees sometimes, but the nights cool down a good 50 degrees, so there's a big range," he noted. "This gives the vines a chance to



VDR "Very Dark Red" 2019 Proprietary Red Blend, Monterey County (\$25)

The opaque red-black hue of this blend of Cabernet Sauvignon, Petite Sirah, Syrah, Petit Verdot, and other reds—produced with 100% renewable wind energy and aged in French and Hungarian oak for 14 months—denotes a concentration that aptly matches its moniker. A nose of blackberry preserves and dark chocolate also shows depths of soil. Tongue-drying roasted-coffee tannins are a driving force, taking the palate to a higher level: tarry, chewy, bold, and passionate. Within a balanced structure, VDR possesses power and energy that truly deliver. **92** —M.M.

rest at night, [which in turn] allows us to ripen the fruit slowly, with an extended hang time. The tannins are able to soften up a bit, but the flavors continue to get more intense."

Blended with the Hames Valley Petite Sirah and Petit Verdot is Cabernet Sauvignon from SFW's San Lucas Vineyard. Whereas the former site is ranked as a warm Region IV on the Winkler Scale, San Lucas is a level cooler at Region III, which is "ideal for ripe, fruity Cabernet Sauvignon," said Nagengast. "And when these varieties—respected for their deep color, concentrated flavor, power, structure, and length—come together, they complement each other really well."

JUSTIN VINEYARDS & WINERY

The Red: JUSTIN 2018 ISOSCELES, Paso Robles

Presenter: Joe Spellman, MS, national accounts manager

JUSTIN Vineyards & Winery founder Justin Baldwin acquired his first parcel of land in 1981 with the intention of making a Bordeaux-style wine. But as Master Sommelier Joe Spellman, a JUSTIN national accounts manager, was quick to point out during the webinar, “We think of Bordeaux as ‘big’ wine these days, and a lot of it is, but the original idea of Bordeaux, frankly, was to be a little more elegant.” At JUSTIN, this sense of restraint is due not only to winemaking practices but to the climate and the calcareous soils of Paso Robles’ west side.

Although JUSTIN does source from east-side sites like its Mill Road Estate property in the Geneseo District and its Creston Road Estate in the El Pomar District, Spellman believes that for the flagship ISOSCELES blend, there are benefits to focusing on grapes from its west-side properties in the Adelaida District. “We find value in fruit from all over the region, but it is much cooler near the Santa Lucia [Mountains in the west]. We’re higher in elevation [and] have a broader diurnal shift and frankly more moisture too, so all those are big advantages,” said Spellman.

The geographical evidence supporting the Master Sommelier’s affinity for the region’s west side included a map of the San Andreas Fault, a precipitation graph based on marine influence, and Paso-centric maps depicting temperature degree days



and soil types as well as their depth. Spellman said, “Probably our most interesting and intense property for grape-growing [in terms of character] is the Adelaida Road Estate, which sits . . . at 1,800 feet in elevation” and shares a similar profile with JUSTIN’s other west-side properties, namely Justin Estate, DeBro Vineyard, Carmody McKnight, and Starr Ranch and Runway: All are located on the Pacific Plate side of the San Andreas Fault, meaning “most of what we have is old seabed,” noted Spellman. These vineyards—planted mostly on hill-sides with calcareous limestone soils that



are low in potassium (which purportedly aids acid retention) and magnesium—can support vines by retaining moisture even in dry months while also providing good drainage during the wet season.

The Adelaida District is primarily a cool Region II on the Winkler Scale, though parts of it qualify as Region III. The area is impacted by winds—coming from the Salinas Valley to the north through the Templeton Gap to the west and over the Cuesta Grade highway to the south—that push moisture in the form of fog and light precipitation over the Santa Lucia Mountains that then drift into the Adelaida Hills. They quickly dissipate as they travel east, bestowing roughly 35 inches of rainfall on Adelaida annually, compared to roughly 14 inches in eastern Paso. Spellman said that the combination of moderating winds, higher elevation and precipitation, and calcareous soils yields a “really great style of fruit” and presented the JUSTIN ISOSCELES as a testament. The wine hardly needs an introduction, as it’s considered by many to be one of Paso Robles’ most iconic expressions. “It’s a very powerful wine in terms of richness, color, depth, and fruit. [It’s] not mega-tannic, and I think that’s often what it’s thought of being,” said Spellman.

JUSTIN’s tasting room and vineyards in Paso Robles.





Native grape varieties dry during the appassimento process.

SARTORI DI VERONA

The Red: Sartori di Verona 2015 Reius Amarone della Valpolicella Classico, Veneto, Italy

Presenter: Andrea Sartori, president and CEO

Although the founder of Sartori di Verona was technically Andrea Sartori's great-grandfather, Pietro Sartori, the president and CEO attributes the success of his family's Valpolicella-based winery to his grandfather, Regolo Sartori. Pietro was a restaurateur at heart, and with the purchase of the Villa Maria restaurant—and its vineyards—in Negrar, Sartori di Verona was officially established in 1898. The family would make wine to sell at the restaurant, but it was Regolo who had the vision of producing wine for the world, and in 1947 the winery released its first Amarone. It expanded over time to become available in several other countries, including the U.S., by the late 1960s.

Today Sartori di Verona exports over 80% of its wine to more than 70 countries, thanks not only to Andrea's grandfather

PHOTOS COURTESY SARTORI DI VERONA



and other key family members but also to his own business savvy—and his discontent with Valpolicella's *négociant* model. In 2000, the winery partnered with large Verona farmers' co-op Cantina Sociale Colognola ai Colli as a way to assume control of the winemaking process from "grapes to glass," according to Andrea, enabling

the family to produce authentic Veronese wines for the global market.

As the former president of the Consorzio per la Tutela dei Vini Valpolicella, Andrea is naturally a vocal proponent of the Veneto, one who has made the promotion of Veronese wines a vital part of the producer's culture. "The Veneto is a prolific region," he said. "Out of the 670,000 hectares of vines in Italy, the Veneto accounts for 100,000. And out of the 45 million hectoliters of wine produced, 12 million are produced [here], so we are very important for the wine [industry] in Italy. The Veneto also has some of the most successful appellations worldwide, like Prosecco, Pinot Grigio, Recioto, Soave, Bardolino, and, of course, Amarone [della] Valpolicella."

Sartori di Verona's winery, now over 120 years old, is located in the Valpolicella Classico region, roughly 6 miles outside of Verona and 18 miles from Lake Garda. Among the grapes it sources are indigenous varieties like Corvina, Corvinone, and Rondinella trained on the region's traditional pergolas, a system that protects clusters from the sun and minimizes



PHOTOS COURTESY SARTORI DI VERONA



The oak casks of Sartori di Verona.

frost damage while increasing airflow to mitigate vine disease. Sartori maintains that Corvina and Corvinone are the best grapes for appassimento, the famed drying process of Valpolicella wines.

The Sartori di Verona 2015 Reius Amarone della Valpolicella Classico comprises 50% Corvina Veronese, 30% Corvinone, 15% Rondinella, and 5% Cabernet Sauvignon; after appassimento, the grapes ferment in temperature-controlled stainless-steel tanks for 30 days before they're transferred to concrete tanks for

malolactic fermentation. The wine spends three years in medium and large oak casks, then rests in bottle for six months prior to release. "The best way to describe Amarone, or all wine from Valpolicella, is that cherry finish," said Sartori. "[The Reius is] a rich, complex wine with a big structure and, most of the time, big alcohol [up to 15% ABV], but because of the softness of the tannins, the roundness, and this cherry finish, the alcohol is very well integrated. For being so big and structured, it's still a quite soft and easy-to-comprehend wine."



Sartori di Verona 2015 Reius Amarone della Valpolicella Classico, Veneto, Italy (\$50)

Spiced plum and sandalwood are enveloped in notes of roasted coffee. Though the concentration here is stupendous, balance is maintained throughout the expression of dark blue fruit. Earthy yet poised. **96** —M.M.

Sartori di Verona 2017 Montegradella Valpolicella Classico Superiore, Veneto, Italy (\$15)

Grilled beef and salted plum converge with leaves gathered on a forest floor and ripe red fruit. This is an elite wine, showcasing bright acidity in an earthy body. Worcestershire sauce and dried heather unite on the finish. **92** —M.M.

SHAW-ROSS INTERNATIONAL
IMPORTERS

MARQUÉS DE RISCAL

The Red: Marqués de Riscal 2012 Gran Reserva, Rioja, Spain

Presenter: José Luís Mugauiro Jr., proprietor



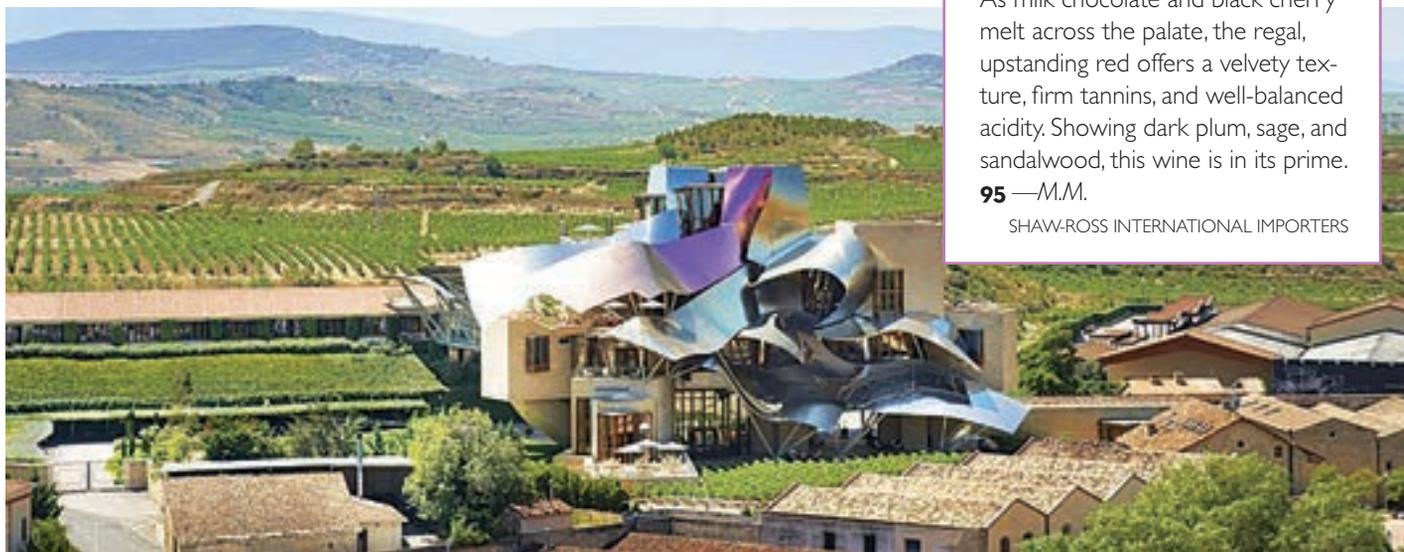
“At Marqués de Riscal,” said fifth-generation proprietor José Luís Mugauiro Jr., “we still believe in tradition.” And how could they not? Founded in 1858, the producer is one of the oldest wineries in the region and is nearly singlehandedly responsible for the traditional style of Rioja wine. Before it was established, Guillermo Hurtado de Amézaga (aka the Marqués de Riscal) and his family had returned to their native town of Elciego from Bordeaux; armed with winemaking knowledge and the help of a French consultant, Hurtado de Amézaga applied Bordelaise winemaking techniques and technology to his estate-

grown fruit. In 1895, Marqués de Riscal became the first non-French wine to win the diploma of honor at the L'Exposition du Bordeaux, and the Spanish wine industry would never be the same. Thanks to Marqués de Riscal, Rioja—particularly the Rioja Alavesa subregion—continues to be known today for its extended aging regimen as gleaned from Bordeaux.

Marqués de Riscal exports more than 60% of its production and can be found in over 110 countries. It owns 500 hectares of estate vineyards, but according to Mugauiro, “We also source from our neighbors, selecting only [from] the best plots, and [the farming] is all under our control.” The producer handpicks its fruit, and in the winery, the grapes are hand-selected at the sorting table. “We believe in quality, not quantity,” he added.

The estate is located in Álava on the north bank of the Ebro River in dry and sunny Rioja Alavesa, where Tempranillo and other Spanish grapes like Graciano thrive in the nutrient-poor, chalky, clay alluvial soils. The larger-than-life proprietor told the audience how his father talked renowned architect Frank O. Gehry into designing the ultra-modern Hotel Marqués de Riscal—swathed in twisting metallic ribbons—on the property by opening a bottle of 1929 Marqués de Riscal, the

The Hotel Marqués de Riscal and vineyards of Rioja Alavesa.



architect's birth year; in 2021, it helped propel the estate to a #2 ranking on the annual World's Best Vineyards list.

Although Mugauiro called Marqués de Riscal's wines generally “fresh, elegant, and easy to drink,” its concentrated Gran Reserva is made with old-vine Tempranillo (up to 80 years) and roughly 20% Graciano and Mazuelo; after aging 32 months in French oak, it rests in bottle for three years prior to release.

The National Day of Spain happened to fall on the same day as the webinar, so Mugauiro ended his presentation by proudly raising a toast to his homeland; given his family's history, it's quite likely that any Spaniard would be proud to have him represent their country. *sj*



Marqués de Riscal 2012 Gran Reserva, Rioja, Spain (\$50)

Spiced oak and tobacco leaf on the nose lend intrigue to this blend of Tempranillo, Graciano, and Mazuelo. As milk chocolate and black cherry melt across the palate, the regal, upstanding red offers a velvety texture, firm tannins, and well-balanced acidity. Showing dark plum, sage, and sandalwood, this wine is in its prime.

95 —M.M.

SHAW-ROSS INTERNATIONAL IMPORTERS

A Grand Tour

FAMED WINEMAKER **ANDY ERICKSON** CLIMBS TO NEW HEIGHTS WITH EXPEDITION

by Meredith May

"The goal is to push this vineyard to the limit and to produce the most exciting wine possible. This truly is Napa at its peak." —winemaker *Andy Erickson*

ANDY ERICKSON HAS some remarkable brands on his winemaking resume, among them Screaming Eagle, Staglin, and Dalla Valle, and he unquestionably understands the nature of Napa Cabernet. For his latest venture, he's serving as winemaker for Seven Apart, whose Expedition expression is a small-production (60-barrel) odyssey; made with grapes blended from the winery's Base Camp and Stags Ridge vineyards, it's aged for 18 months in French oak. Stags Ridge sits on a volcanic plateau, yielding what the winery refers to as "extreme mountain-grown" Napa Cabernet at an elevation few vineyards reach.

Mike Wolf, an acclaimed vineyard manager, has joined the team at Seven Apart and will manage all 18 of its estate sites; his first project will be to replant the recently acquired 5-acre Base Camp Vineyard and 3 adjoining acres. Wolf, who has a B.A. in history, has managed vineyards at Beckstoffer and Scarecrow, among others, and is respected by Napa Valley's top winemakers.

Seven Apart's allocated wines are showcased at its new tasting room, which opened in October. It's limiting the number of guests to only ten per day due to the small scale of its production. Reservations are required; for more information, visit sevenapart.com/visit.



Seven Apart 2019 Expedition, Napa Valley (\$450/3-pack) Big, bold, tarry notes take on mel-low hints of toasted marshmallow and dark chocolate, making for a breathtaking adventure of flavor and texture. Black fruit melts across the mouth, and a core of minerality is surrounded by fig preserves, dried violets, and intense blackberry. Tannins are pronounced, with a savory, satiny slide of meatiness. Well built from the inside out, this wine is certainly on another level. **98**

PHOTOS COURTESY OF SEVEN APART WINERY



The private wine library at Elusa's new hospitality center.



Elusive Until Now

ELUSA WINERY OPENS ITS LIBRARY FOR THE FIRST TIME AS PART OF A WORLD-CLASS HOSPITALITY EXPERIENCE by Meridith May

ON THE NORTH END of Napa Valley, Calistoga winery Elusa is nestled in the foothills of the Vaca mountain range. Produced in partnership with lauded winemaker Thomas Rivers Brown, these small-lot wines are a decade in the making; now, they're finally making their debut in the outside world. While they are currently available exclusively to Elusa's wine club members and guests of its new hospitality center, we anticipate that they will soon begin landing on prestigious wine lists.

Brown began his California winemaking career in 1997 and has since made a name for himself as a noninterventionist, creating wines that showcase the vineyard foremost. Renowned wine critic Robert M. Parker Jr. has awarded his Cabernet Sauvignon wines 25 perfect 100-point scores over the past decade.

"Calistoga is home to some of the world's most unique vineyards, passionate growers, and grapes of impeccable quality," says Brown. "I am thrilled to have this opportunity to create wine in my hometown with the team at Elusa," whose aim is "to celebrate the individuality of the

terroir, commencing with the inaugural release of our estate vintages and single-vineyard wines."

Elusa 2018 Cabernet Franc, Kenefick Ranch Vineyard, Calistoga, Napa Valley (\$95)

Cab Franc and Cab Sauvignon do especially well in the diurnal swings of this vineyard, benefiting from a long hang time that allows them to ripen perfectly. The wine is distinctively concentrated, with sumptuous blue fruit that acts like a spa treatment for the palate. Boasting a generous texture that layers vanilla, white pepper, graphite, and lavender, it's almost as dense as a chef's reduction sauce, with minerality and acid structure that keep it fresh.

Elusa 2018 Cabernet Sauvignon, Calistoga, Napa Valley (\$125)

Scents of salted raspberry, sage, and vanilla are gentle yet arresting. The plush entry triggers a hedonistic rapture as concentrated black plum and anise drench the palate. However structured and balanced this wine may be, its focal point is an elegant mouthfeel that's

akin to a down comforter, reflecting the warmth of Calistoga's valley-floor vineyards.



"Minimalistic is the best descriptor for our winemaking process," says Elusa winemaker Thomas Rivers Brown. "Elusa wines reflect this as well as the unique growing conditions of Calistoga."

Savoring Each Sensation

PHANTOM CREEK ESTATES IS OUR NEW FAVORITE HAUNT IN THE OKANAGAN VALLEY by Meridith May

"Floating, falling, sweet intoxication. Touch me, trust me, savor each sensation. Let the dream begin, let your darker side give in to the power of the music of the night."
—*"The Music of the Night," The Phantom of the Opera*

UNDER THE GUIDANCE of consultant Olivier Humbrecht, MW—one of the leading authorities on organic and Biodynamic farming—is Phantom Creek Estates, its vineyards spanning across two benches in Canada's Okanagan Valley in British Columbia.

Mark Beringer, whose vast knowledge reflects almost 30 years of experience, is its new winemaker. As the great-great-grandson of Beringer Vineyards founder Jacob Beringer, he was destined to uphold the family tradition. Beringer worked for Benziger Family Winery in Sonoma, then became vice president of winemaking at Duckhorn Vineyards. In 2009, he joined Pinot Noir house Artesa as VP and winemaker; in 2015, he returned to Beringer Vineyards as chief winemaker up until now.

The winery has been awarded organic certification by Ecocert Canada, with 2021 marking its first certified organic vintage. Additionally, the winery is moving forward with Biodynamic certification, paving the way for another landmark ecological statement—especially impressive from a Canadian winery of Phantom Creek Estates' size.

The wines reviewed below are the best we've tasted from the Okanagan Valley.



Mark Beringer is the new winemaker for Phantom Creek Estates.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF PHANTOM CREEK ESTATES



Phantom Creek Estates 2018 Riesling, Okanagan Valley, British Columbia, Canada (\$33) Fermented with indigenous yeast for over four months, this rich Riesling matured in stainless steel. Within a buoyant mouthfeel, notes of honeyed apricot, papaya, and wet stone are expressive. An edge emerges on the mid-palate, enhanced by a squeeze of lime on the tart, energetic finish. **93**

Phantom Creek Estates 2018 Phantom Creek Vineyard Cuvée, Okanagan Valley, British Columbia, Canada (\$60) A blend of Cabernet Sauvignon, Petit Verdot, Malbec, and Cab Franc, this luxurious red has an entry that's more satin than silk, more finessed than rich, more fleshy than flashy. Tongue-coating chocolate and boysenberry intertwine with sage for weight and mouthfeel. Blue-floral tones integrate into the spiced cherry core, then expand on the lengthy finish. **95**

Phantom Creek Estates 2018 Becker Vineyard Cuvée No. 26, Okanagan Valley, British Columbia, Canada (\$60) From a high-elevation vineyard, this blend of 47% Cabernet Sauvignon, 46% Cab Franc, and 7% Merlot aged 19 months in (36% new) French oak. Espresso and tarry notes define the dense entry before dried violets and a soaking of black fruit arise within an overt tannin structure. Plum skins and anise on the finish leave a memorable impression. **94**

Phantom Creek Estates 2018 Kobau Vineyard Cuvée, Okanagan Valley, British Columbia, Canada (\$80) This blend of 44% Merlot, 35% Cabernet Franc, and 21% Syrah was grown on the gravelly soils of Kobau, a south-facing vineyard that gets early morning sunshine. Alongside ripe and rich fruit, graphite and herbal notes reveal themselves before blackberry, sage, and heather unite with spiced cocoa and toasty oak. **93**

Such Great Heights

TRACKING THE TRAJECTORY OF COLORADO WINE

by Stacy Slinkard

COLORADO'S WESTERN SLOPE is home to the highest vineyards in North America. Surrounded by mesas and mountains and experiencing dramatic diurnal temperature shifts, it's a remarkable place to grow grapes. From Viognier and Riesling to Chambourcin and Syrah, the varieties cultivated here reflect how the Colorado wine industry has been experimenting, expanding, and exceeding expectations over the past decade.

The state has two official AVAs, Grand Valley and West Elks; the former delivers 75% of the state's grapes. Winemaking here presents considerable challenges: In addition to extraordinary elevations ranging from 4,000 to 7,000 feet, this part of the Rocky Mountain region has a continental climate that generally boasts 300 days of sunshine followed by decidedly cool, crisp evenings, but it can of course experience wild weather that ensures an abbreviated growing season. Doug Caskey, executive director of the Colorado Wine Industry Development Board, conveys his excitement that local winemakers are "exploring new frontiers" through ongoing experimentation with cold-tolerant varieties such as Aromella, St. Vincent, Verona, and Chambourcin as well as lesser-known *Vitis vinifera* grapes like Graciano, Teroldego, Cinsault, and Lemberger. Though Merlot, Cabernet

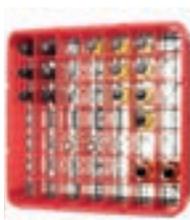
*The Grand Valley AVA grows 75%
of Colorado's winegrapes.*

Sauvignon, and Riesling are Colorado's most planted varieties, accounting for more than 30% of the vines, and many other familiar favorites like Chardonnay and Cabernet Franc anchor the landscape, savvy growers are working with these less common Old World varieties while offering avid support for the hardier hybrids that can withstand the region's often-unpredictable patterns of early- and late-season frost, snow, and hot summer temperatures. Here are a few producers to know:

Red Fox Cellars, in the high desert of the Grand Valley AVA, maintains a keen grip on Italian varieties, from Dolcetto to Nebbiolo and Teroldego, while nearby **Carlson Vineyards** makes a 100% Lemberger in which tart cherry meets bright acidity in a purely Austrian style.

Tucked between the quaint mountain towns of Paonia and Hotchkiss on the chalky soils of West Elks, **The Storm Cellar** is a boutique winery with a fierce focus on elegant high-elevation whites and rosés. Husband-and-wife team Jayme Henderson and Steve Steese are building delightful, aromatic wines of distinction from Riesling, Grüner Veltliner, Viognier, Muscat, Gewürztraminer, Chardonnay, and Chambourcin here in Colorado's highest-altitude AVA, where their vineyard sits at 6,000 feet (they also source fruit from the Grand Valley). To visit The Storm Cellar is to learn the story of how two highly accomplished and gutsy sommeliers quit their day jobs to go from pouring wine to making wine.

Jack Rabbit Hill Farm is a Biodynamic winery and organic craft distillery that is making waves with its innovative reusable-packaging program. For his CapRock Zero Waste Organic Gin and Vodka and MEI Zero Waste House Vodka, founder Lance Hanson has developed a program that echoes old-fashioned milk delivery: When a crate of ten gin or vodka bottles with etched labels is delivered to a Colorado restaurant, empty bottles are picked up and brought back to the distillery to be cleaned, refilled, and delivered again. According to Hanson, his is the first and only company to use this refill-reuse program; the hope is to get at least 100 uses out of each bottle. And now he's expanding the initiative with the launch of a single-serve wine bottle program



West Elks is the smaller of Colorado's two AVAs.

called Circo (for circular economy). It's his creative, sustainable answer to canned wine, offering refillable 7-ounce bottles of red, white, and rosé.

Set in the heart of the Grand Valley AVA, family-owned **Colterris Winery** boasts stunning vineyard views and a glimpse of the iconic Mount Garfield. Containing 100% estate-grown fruit from 80 acres of vines grown on alluvial soils, its Petit Verdot and Coloradeaux, a Bordeaux-inspired blend, showcase the quality and consistency of Colorado's largest winegrowing zone.

Carboy may be the state's fastest-growing brand, having opened four tasting rooms in Palisade, Littleton, Denver, and Breckenridge in just under five years. Emphasizing guided tastings and tours at all of its locations, Carboy recently acquired two vineyards in Grand Valley, where it's planting

hardy varieties like Teroldego and Zweigelt along with proven extreme-weather hybrids such as Chambourcin and Marquette to add delicious diversity to the Cabernet Franc and Albariño already growing there. Carboy's sparkling wine program is fun and feisty, including the Tempranillo-based Rosé La La La and the lively Native Fizz Sparkling Rosé, made with a co-fermented blend of hybrid grapes.

A pioneering force in Colorado's craft beer culture, the Fort Collins-based Odell Brewing Company (OBC) has recently embarked on a creative small-production wine enterprise. Dubbed the **OBC Wine Project**, winemaker Travis Green explains, "This is a wine story told by craft beer makers." Though they also package in bottles, Green is proud of the snazzy canned products' ability to capture fruit: "The cans don't continue to evolve—[rather,] they are a snapshot of the wine in the tank." Among the more daringly innovative examples is The Final Touch, a lively, funky, unfiltered orange wine made from 100% Aromella, which sees nine days of skin contact and ages in beer barrels for eight months.

In short, thanks to the more than 50 different grape varieties growing at significant elevations, Colorado wines now encompass an impressive range of styles and price points. From sophisticated Bordeaux-inspired blends and funky pét-nats to clean, crisp, high-acid whites, they represent a truly distinct growing region. It's proving to be one to watch. **SJ**



IMAGE COURTESY OF JACK RABBIT HILL FARM

Circo, Jack Rabbit Hill Farm's answer to canned wine, consists of a red, white, and rosé packaged in refillable 7-ounce bottles.

Many of Liechtenstein's hobbyist winemakers grow their grapes in Balzers, where Castle Gutenberg stands.

An Up-Close Look at LIECHTENSTEIN

THIS EMERGING WINE REGION IS READY FOR ITS BIG REVEAL

by Roxanne Langer

THE ROMANS GOT AROUND. They even made it to Liechtenstein, a tiny country of only 62 square miles nestled between Austria and Switzerland, with Germany a stone's throw away. And as we all know, where the Romans went, vineyards were planted. It is believed that grapevines have existed in what is now the Principality of Liechtenstein for over 2,000 years; though there is some evidence that a Celtic tribe might have beat the Romans to cultivating grapes in the area, it's the latter who are credited with creating and fostering a local wine culture long after the Celts were gone. In Balzers, the most southerly town in Liechtenstein, there is archeological evidence of a wine press from 1385 as well as an intact wine press from 1777. The latter is nicely hidden in a beautiful old building adjacent to a small vineyard in the middle of town. In order to see it, you have to know someone. Making that connection is truly worth the effort.

Clearly, elevation wasn't an obstacle for the Romans, as they didn't hesitate to plant vineyards at 1,500 feet and higher on Liechtenstein's valley floor, which is surrounded by peaks of up to 8,527 feet. Though unbeknownst to them, this landscape sits in a unique location at the juncture of two climate zones: alpine, which is cool and wet with up to 80 inches of pre-

cipitation annually, and continental, which is warm and dry. In fact, the valley sees about half as much precipitation as the higher elevations—yet it gets only about 1,110 hours of sunlight during the growing season of March through October; luckily, the famous *foehn*, a rain-shadow wind that comes from the south, assists in warming it, helping the grapes to ripen. The Rhine River running directly through the valley, meanwhile, helps moderate its climate and contributes minerals to its soils.

Wine was one of Liechtenstein's main exports until the 19th century. However, with the arrival of the railway—which brought with it much less expensive foreign products—commercial wine production in the country slowly ground to a halt. In the early 20th century, several bad vintages along with vine parasites furthered its demise until a half-century later, when local producers armed with better scientific knowledge ushered in an ongoing viticultural renaissance.

Today, vineyards are around every corner—tucked into small plots between houses, terraced on hills overlooking castles, and even planted at elevations of 2,800 feet, where some growers are experimenting with the Léon Millot hybrid grape, which ripens early while showing strong resistance to fungal infections and

diseases. Liechtenstein's key red grapes, meanwhile, include Pinot Noir, which has reigned supreme since the 17th century, as well as Blauburgunder, Rotburgunder, Zweigelt, Gamaret, Garanoir, Pinot Meunier, St. Laurent, and Merlot. Among whites, Chardonnay, Riesling, Saphira, Johanniter, Pinot Blanc, and Sauvignon Blanc are the main contenders (although the first known white grape grown in Liechtenstein was Elbling, dubbed *Vitas alba*—literally “white grape”—by the Romans).

The country is home to a strong contingent of some 100 hobbyist winemakers, who all seem to know one another and help each other out by sharing the use of large equipment and even communal labor. In the U.S., many of these hobbyists would be considered professionals, as they are allowed to sell their extremely high-caliber wines to private individuals. One such producer, Christian Putzi, makes a wine from the hybrid Saphira grape under his label, Balzner Saphira Runda Böchel, that could easily compete in the U.S. marketplace in the \$25–\$30 range (check out his Instagram account [@balzner-saphira](#) for details).

As for the country's four commercial producers, Liechtenstein now operates under the European wine-quality system, so they use the AOC classification. I recently visited and tasted at three of them.



Arnold Hoop tastes from barrel.

Weinbau Hoop GmbH

Annette and Arnold Hoop started their winery by leasing a small vineyard with 450 Pinot Noir vines in 1988. They quickly added another 800, and by the 2000s, they had incorporated several other varieties into the mix, including Merlot, Zweigelt, Garanoir, Pinot Meunier, Chardonnay, Riesling, Gewürztraminer, Pinot Blanc, Müller Thurgau, and a few white hybrids. As they've continued to grow, they've also added liqueurs, spirits, and a sparkling wine to their portfolio. The Hoops work as a team: Annette is quite the businesswoman, while Arnold, who has a wonderfully big personality, makes the wine. In addition to the two expressions below, I tried a phenomenal Riesling in barrel: Fruity and floral, it was unctuous but had great acidity and a lovely, long finish. The Hoops are open to exporting to the U.S. For more information, visit weinbau-hoop.li.

Weinbau Hoop GmbH 2019 Bardella Müller Thurgau Nice and fruity, with good acidity, some minerality, and notes of almond on the finish.

Weinbau Hoop GmbH 2018 Viscarage Lovely notes of toast, green and yellow apple, a hint of butter, and pear; the finish is short but pretty.

Harry Zech Weinbau

While studying business administration at college in Switzerland, Harry Zech was offered an apprenticeship as a winemaker in Vaduz, the capital of Liechtenstein, and from there his career was set. He transferred to the University of Applied Sciences in Wädenswil to finish his studies in enology and was able to take over a winery in Vaduz directly after. A relatively reserved, quiet man, Zech is completely committed to wine quality. With approximately 7 acres under vine in six different locations along with 1.5 additional acres in biodiversity-friendly "ecological compensation areas," his vineyards are all certified Biodynamic. They're planted to white grapes Riesling-Silvaner, Pinot Blanc, Muscaris, Johanniter, Chardonnay, Sauvignon Blanc, Sauvignac, and Sauvignon Soyhières as well as some reds: Pinot Noir, Chambourcin, Gamaret, Merlot, and Cabernet Sauvignon. Zech's wines show the great care he takes in the vineyard; these wines, not yet exported, would do very well in the U.S. For more information, visit hz-weinbau.li.

Harry Zech Weinbau 2019 Chardonnay Lion Vaduz AOC Hints of vanilla, Granny Smith apple, butter, pear, and lemon meet lovely acidity and a long, beautiful finish.

Harry Zech Weinbau 2018 Le Rendez-vous Vaduz AOC Neither filtered nor fined, this blend of 50% Gamaret, 48% Merlot, and 2% Cabernet Sauvignon sees 18 months in both first-year and second-year oak. Boasting black berries and black cherries, it's slightly floral, with a hint of mint and a long, juicy finish. *sj*

Hofkellerei des Fürsten von Liechtenstein (The Princely Winery of Liechtenstein)

Principalities tend to come with princes, and the Principality of Liechtenstein is no exception. The Princely Winery of Liechtenstein sits below the castle of reigning Prince Hans-Adam II, so visitors have an amazing view of the royal household on the hill while the prince has an equally amazing view of his vineyards. It's worth noting that there's a sommelier in his family: Princess Marie, the prince's daughter-in-law, who's married to his second-born son, Prince Constantine.

Set on rich schist and calcareous soil, the estate grows Chardonnay and Pinot Noir using both traditional and modern cultivation methods, and the grapes are all handpicked. I didn't try the Chardonnay, but the Pinot Noirs I tasted suggested that the winery is transitioning from a bigger style to a more elegant one.

It's also gearing up to export these wines to the U.S. in the near future with a focus on high-end restaurants, where they should easily pique the interest of savvy sommeliers. Contact commercial sales manager Steffen Rau at s.rau@hofkellerei.li for details.

Hofkellerei des Fürsten von Liechtenstein 2017 Pinot Noir Bocker Bold, with notes of raspberry and strawberry that move toward florals and a hint of tobacco.

Hofkellerei des Fürsten von Liechtenstein 2019 Herawingert Pinot Noir Beautiful and elegant from the get-go, with bright cherry; slight earthiness; lively acidity; and a long, smooth finish.



A view of Castle Vaduz from the vineyards of Prince Hans-Adam II.

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.



Louis Roederer Collection 242, Champagne, France (\$63)

For all its freshness and finesse, Roederer's new multivintage release (see page 64 for the technical details) also exhibits notable warmth and generosity. On the nose, ginger joins baked apple and frangipane tart; the mouth, meanwhile, fills all the way up with sun-bathed orchard fruits, plus hints of lime zest and oak spice. The finish, like the perlage, goes on and on. **94**

MAISONS MARQUES & DOMAINES



Louis Roederer Vintage 2014, Champagne, France (\$79)

The vintage may have been marked by "clear, sharp contrasts," to quote the tech sheet, but the straw-hued result is not: Rather, the blend of 71% Pinot Noir and 29% Chardonnay is soft, smooth, and rich, showing bruised-peach aromas with undertones of nuts and honey before nectarine and lemon chiffon settle on the palate with a dash of nutmeg. **93**

MAISONS MARQUES & DOMAINES



Bouvet Ladubay Brut Excellence Crémant de Loire, France (\$18)

Starbright straw in the glass, this Loire Valley sparkler sprinkles its scents of lemon drop, honeydew, and green pear with salt and yeast, while similar flavors join hints of white peach and key lime to a light but soft mouthfeel before a finish of vanilla spice. **90**

KOBRAND



Domaine Carneros by Taittinger 2017 Brut Cuvée, Carneros (\$36)

Positively Olympian in terms of endurance, lift, strength, and grace, this soaring, searing blend of 53% Chardonnay, 44% Pinot Noir, and 3% Pinot Gris earns all the superlatives. Pale gold, with a persistent bead to match its persistent length, it starts with aromas of nuts and dried jackfruit as well as pear compote and peach nectar before filling the mouth with lime-orange sherbet, crisp golden apple, and creamy poached pear as well as electrifying acidity. Dollar for dollar, it's got the strength of ten wines. **95**





Bread & Butter Prosecco DOC, Italy (\$16) Bread & Butter's motto is "Don't overthink it," which is good advice when it comes to this straightforward yet appealing Prosecco. Nearly ice-pale in hue, it nevertheless delivers a bounty of caramelized golden apple and Bosc pear on the nose; on the lively palate, there's an almost cider-like quality, lifted by crisp acidity. **90**



Corvezzo Prosecco DOC, Italy (\$13) The pale lemon hue is a clue to the steady stream of lemony acidity that distinguishes this organically grown Prosecco from many others in the extra-dry category, giving it a clean lift almost belied by its nose of golden apple, salted cantaloupe, and honeysuckle. On the palate, ripe pear and a touch of lime curd enter the conversation. **90**



ORIGINS ORGANIC IMPORTS



Domaine Carneros by Taittinger Cuvée de la Pompadour Brut Rosé, Carneros (\$45) What a crowd pleaser: I tried this blend of 60% Pinot Noir and 40% Chardonnay with industry friends who, to a person, perked up after a long afternoon of tasting to rave about its balance between delicacy and liveliness. Boasting a creamy mousse and, as one put it, "fruit in all the right places," it delivers its aromas and flavors of rose and freesia, juicy tangerine, and wild strawberry drizzled in crème anglaise effortlessly. **95**



Herzog Wine Cellars: *Chardonnay Two Ways*

Not only is Herzog's new Brut Chardonnay the first bubbly in its Special Reserve series, it's also the first wine in the producer's entire portfolio to be made by the traditional method—which is to say it's special indeed. Explains Herzog marketing director David Whittemore, "It has long been a desire of our winemaking team to bring a Champagne-style Chardonnay to market. We chose the Russian River Valley, renowned for high-end sparkling, as an ideal fit for the style. . . . The source and process [went] hand in hand in planning this wine."



Herzog Special Reserve Méthode Champenoise, Russian River Valley (\$60) Here's quite the come-hither charmer, at once bright and rich. Scents of golden apple, lime, and vanilla wafer come in waves, followed by flavors of pear nectar and juicy tangerine on a creamy palate that gets its zip from an energetic bead. A touch of marzipan on the finish rounds it all out. **92.5**



Meanwhile, though this column is dedicated solely to bubbles, it's worth noting that Herzog has also recently released its **2020 Special Edition Chalk Hill Chardonnay** (\$60). Like the other wines in the Special Edition series, it's a small-lot expression designed to showcase the terroir of its source, including the volcanic soils found in this part of Sonoma. Ten months of aging in new and neutral French oak yield a lush profile of lemon custard, honey-dipped apple, and vanilla. **93** *SP*



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In partnership with *Domaine Bousquet*, Timothy O'Neal (pictured at left) and his *Black Wine* bandmates plan to donate a portion of the proceeds from the wine sold at their shows to research on Crohn's, a disease that's impacted their lead vocalist, Robert Jackson.



PHOTOS COURTESY OF TIMOTHY O'NEAL

Leaving It All on the Floor

TIMOTHY O'NEAL RISES TO MYRIAD CHALLENGES AS THE WINE DIRECTOR AT FHIMA'S IN MINNEAPOLIS, MN by Kate Newton

WHEN TIMOTHY O'NEAL heard about a potential job opening while playing pool at a Minneapolis dive bar last summer, he didn't think it would lead to the most exciting and multifaceted professional opportunity of his life: a post as the wine director and sommelier at downtown Moroccan-French restaurant Fhima's that would have him simultaneously serving as the official somm at the Minnesota Timberwolves' stadium and, for an upcoming concept, conceptualizing what may eventually be the Twin Cities' largest wine list.

Granted, once you're in the orbit of charismatic chef David Fhima, O'Neal discovered, surprise duties like selecting wines for the fans at the Target Center or sifting through Fhima's 10,000-bottle collection of rare and high-end bottlings in preparation for that new concept—a three-story, multimillion-dollar French restaurant set to open in 2022—are all part of the appeal of what's "certainly the most complex sommelier position of my career," he says. His first order of business was to completely revamp the Fhima's wine program to suit both its menu, which he describes as bursting with "flavor and considerable spice," and its multicultural clientele who'd previously, lacking a somm to guide them, gravitated toward cocktails. When he started, "it was an event if a bottle went out," he says; now, just a few months later, wine sales are up "like eightfold." "It's a remarkable difference [that shows] what having a sommelier in a restaurant like that can do," O'Neal adds.

The same applies to the Target Center, where Fhima oversees the concessions menus. Looking to improve their wine offerings, stadium executives entrusted O'Neal with picking a flagship red and white from their new partner, E. & J.



O'Neal (right) with his boss, chef David Fhima, whose namesake restaurant has prepared more than 600,000 meals for Minnesotans in need over the course of the pandemic in partnership with Minneapolis-St. Paul food bank Second Harvest Heartland.

Gallo—he opted for the Louis M. Martini Sonoma County Cabernet Sauvignon and J Vineyards & Winery Chardonnay after tasting through 40-plus selections—as well as serving as an on-demand somm both in its courtside dining area and its suites, which will allow him more flexibility to showcase a variety of wines through, say, multicourse pairing dinners. Feedback has already been overwhelmingly positive: "Guest experience goes through the roof with a qualified sommelier in a suite that appreciates wine," O'Neal says, adding that he expects "word will spread" among fans—not to mention other NBA franchises, which can stand to benefit from

evolving their beverage programs and boosting sales in the process.

One could argue that it's all part of the "LeBron effect," or the rising interest in wine among athletes in recent years: something O'Neal has seen firsthand as he rubs elbows with the players, who often come into Fhima's after games and rank among the many patrons who have responded enthusiastically to his pairing suggestions. As a result, he now keeps a "players' box" in the cellar with selections tailored to various teammates' preferences. "The way they swirl wine is vigorous, like they've all been trained or they all have swirling contests," O'Neal says with a laugh. "They are familiar with the terminology and I think they look at it as a little competition to see who's drinking what."

Before joining Fhima's, O'Neal was staying busy during the pandemic with his bandmates, writing material for their group Black Wine (on Instagram @blackwinerocks), a name he says is "a throwback to Malbec from Cahors being the darkest ever produced." They're currently working on a full-length album that's a "blend of rap, rock, blues, and punk," not to mention preparing for a December show at iconic Minneapolis venue First Avenue and finalizing a partnership deal with, fittingly, Argentine Malbec producer Domaine Bousquet. "If you can't get signed to a record label anymore, and your name is Black Wine, maybe go to a wine label for a little support," he says.

Whether he's spreading the good word of wine in a stadium packed with fans or onstage at a gig, O'Neal feels like he's "in the prime of my existence" after weathering the uncertainty of the pandemic: "I'm doing exactly what I've wanted to do." ❧



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