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Winemaker Graham Wehmeier looks toward a bright future.

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first  press

blending in to STAND OUT

TOP WINEMAKERS WEIGH IN
ON THE COMPLEXITY OF AN
IMPORTANT TECHNIQUE

*Girard Winery
winemaker
Glenn Hugo.*

An aerial view of the Clos de los Siete “campus” in Argentina.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF DEUTSCH FAMILY WINES



by Lars Leicht

Several years ago, when he was a restaurant wine buyer and I worked for a national importer, Theo Rutherford and I had a memorable discussion about the nuances of wine blending. Now that we're both in wine education roles—he as the senior manager, wine and spirits education, for Deutsch Family Wine & Spirits and me as VP of education for *The SOMM Journal*—we took the opportunity to turn that conversation into a webinar we co-hosted last October; joined by James MacPhail of The Calling in Sonoma, Glenn Hugo of Girard Winery in Napa, and renowned “flying winemaker” Michel Rolland.

Though they have different priorities and goals, all three winemakers use the same technique to meet their objectives: blending. As Rutherford posed questions to uncover the commonalities in and distinctions between their work, Rolland was quick to clear up a fundamental misconception regarding the technique. “Some think that when [a winemaker relies on] just one variety . . . he or she is not blending,” he pointed out. “Yes, we are blending, because we can have different lots . . . so blending is absolutely necessary to make wine.”

MacPhail, who blends different Sonoma vineyard and barrel lots for his The Calling Pinot Noir, noted that the process begins well before the literal act of blending. “A lot of people think that blending is when we're sitting down at a big table with 100 glasses—you know, a little of this and a little of that,” he said. “For me it really starts in the vineyard, with the different sites that lend themselves to different flavor components.”



James MacPhail
is winemaker at
Sonoma County
winery The Calling.



for the wine's style . . . coming from the soil and from the location."

Blending Varieties

There are, of course, many elements involved in blending, starting with grape selection. Hugo likes to "work on the complexity" of the Girard Cabernet Sauvignon at the same time as he makes Artistry, a unique blend of Cabernet Sauvignon, Cabernet Franc, Merlot, Malbec, and Petit Verdot, because he views the two wines as complementary. "Some Cabernets will work better in Artistry than the Girard Cabernet Sauvignon," he said. "I'm always thinking about other varieties that can mix in to add nuances. We don't want to change it from being a Cabernet blend necessarily, but . . . just the smallest amount of [Petit Verdot] can change a blend and add a lot of complexity."

Rolland's Clos de los Siete—the result of a cooperative project involving four Bordeaux winemaking families and wineries on the same vast property, which they refer to as "the campus," in Argentina—is also a blend of multiple varieties; roughly 50% Malbec, 20% Cabernet Sauvignon, 20% Merlot, and 10% Syrah, it can vary from vintage to vintage and in recent years has included small amounts of Cabernet Franc and Petit Verdot. The fact that it is also "a blend of wineries," said Rolland, makes for "the most complicated blending you can imagine" and thus "a perfect example" of the process: He sits with each of the four partners four times a year to come up with their contributing blend, then works with them all together to determine the final blend. No wonder he compared blending to a workout: "Blending is my cardio."

Hugo echoed that sentiment. "When we sit down to a bunch of samples in front of us and start breaking out the beakers and working on what percentage of what—so much work went into getting to that point, to get all the different selections," he said. "I think we all want to walk up to that table at that moment and have as much variety to work with as possible. We start early in the process, thinking about all the sub-AVAs in our region. Having all these different sources [is] a big part of putting all the tools in our toolbox."

Rutherford asked the winemakers if they blended for a certain style. Hugo, pointing out that he came from the restaurant industry, said he strives for food-friendly wines: "I'm thinking about wine on the dinner table. We're looking at that balance of acidity, tannin, fruit, and the combination of

oak we use to accomplish all those things." MacPhail, meanwhile, stated his goal as varietal typicity. "To me Pinot Noir is all about the layers," he said, adding that each vineyard is akin to a color on a painter's palette. When the right mixture is achieved, a portrait of Pinot emerges: "It's supposed to evoke emotion, it's supposed to evoke thought, it's supposed to be stimulating in a lot of different ways."

Rolland emphasized that while winemakers might have certain goals, they shouldn't impose a thumbprint. "Obviously you are not looking for your signature; you are looking for the best wine you can make in the place you are," he declared. "Our goal is not to look for our style—our goal is to look



Blending Vintages and Appellations

Most California appellations allow for the inclusion of up to 5% wine from a vintage other than that declared on the label and up to 15% from areas other than the declared appellation. Both MacPhail and Hugo appreciate that flexibility.

MacPhail said that for his platinum-level, vineyard designate-tier Pinot Noir, which sees 15–16 months in French oak, he'll often consider blending a small percent-

age of the current vintage into the aged wine before bottling: "It's just enough to make it more fresh, more lively, to spark it up a bit."

Hugo too uses younger vintages to impart freshness and youthful character and older ones to add depth and complexity. "That can have a tremendous impact on the overall quality of the wine," Hugo said. "Just playing with something that adds a little bit of texture, complexity, fruit-forwardness, tannin structure, or acidity ... is a really useful tool."

Blending Barrels

MacPhail pointed out that the delicate nature of Pinot Noir dictates that he use barrels that are custom made for the variety, endowing more elegant character due to their medium to low toast, staves bent by water or steam rather than fire, wood source, and/or cooperage. He said he constantly experiments with wood and is currently conducting about 20 separate barrel trials. "In the art of blending, that's one more component to the winemaking that gives those layers," he explained, as different barrels impart different characteristics into the wine.

Rolland declared that, in general, the

quality and consistency of wine barrels as well as the variations that can be made for specific varieties and types of wine have improved dramatically in recent years—and therefore so have blends: "We are much better off than we were 30 years ago."

Considering Climate Change

Rolland views climate change as more of a phenomenon than a crisis, at least when it comes to winemaking. He believes it is easier to make better blends today than four decades ago because grapes ripen better, making for better component wines, though the steady increase in alcohol levels is a concern.

MacPhail identified the impact of warming temperatures on Pinot Noir: "Obviously Pinot Noir needs the sun to ripen, but it does not like the heat," he said. Observing that over the past decade harvest has come earlier, he also sees positive aspects to the warmth: "It's about tempering it and managing it, but it is still giving us some pretty incredible fruit and flavors to work with" when blending.

Hugo said recent wildfires have influenced his practices. "We're all just sitting on pins and needles hoping we don't have to deal with that again," he added, noting



his hesitancy to delay harvest for fear of fires coming through. "It's pushing us to make decisions that we would have looked at differently in the past, for sure."

Complex Choices

Rolland said the final blend should be greater than the sum of its parts. "That's the magical thing about blending: There is no magic, just hard work, a lot of tasting, and a lot of understanding of what is happening in the blend. We have to find the right synergy between the wines," he continued. "People think we need to take the best and blend the best to have the best wine. It's not true. Sometimes we have to blend something that is not really the best, but it makes a really good synergy in the final blend."

Hugo agreed that certain lots may not impress on their own but turn out to make the blend better: "They have nuances to them that don't make them a complete wine, but in a blend they add so much to the overall complexity of a wine," he said, characterizing them as "donut hole fillers."

"There is a lot of complexity to blending," he added. "It starts with the grapes in the vineyard and continues all the way through to the bottle. Every step of the way there are nuances."

Despite its challenges, none of these winemakers would give up their seat in the game, especially Rolland, the most experienced of the three. The globetrotting winemaker put it succinctly: "Blending is my life." ❧



Consultant and "flying winemaker" Michel Rolland created Argentina's Clos de los Siete as a cooperative project involving four Bordelaise winemaking families and wineries.



PHOTO: KAYLA JONES

Tropical cocktails are a focus at Denver, CO, steakhouse A5.

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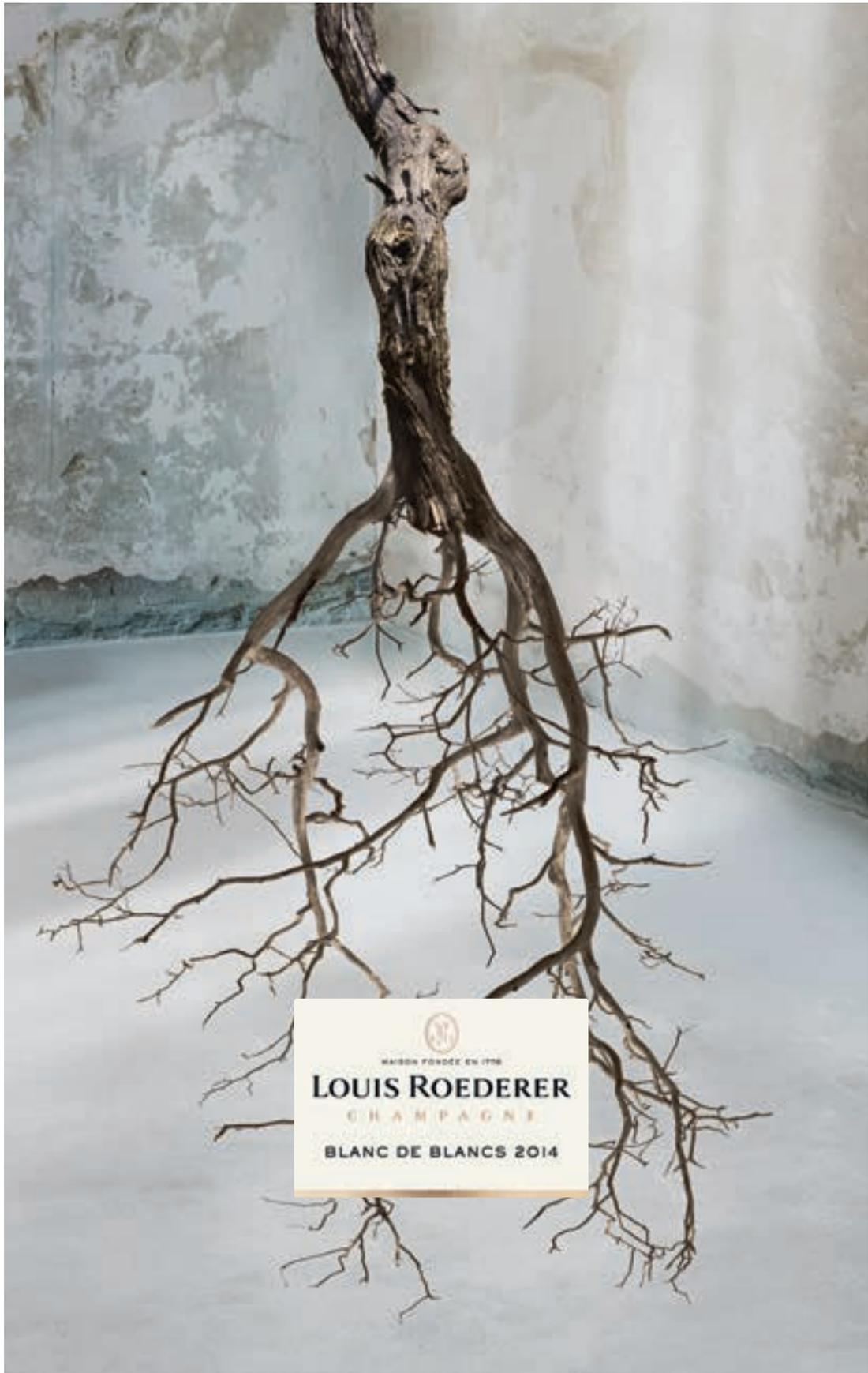
PHOTO: ALEXANDER RUBIN

Lunch is served with Bodega Garzón wines at Morimoto Restaurant in downtown Napa, CA.

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LOUIS ROEDERER
HAND IN HAND WITH NATURE



by Randy Caparoso

“Honesty and Freshness”

AUTHENTICITY UNITES THE WINE LIST AND MENU AT TINY PIZZERIA
GUANTONIOS WOOD FIRED IN LODI, CA

ON A RECENT field trip out to Shake Ridge Ranch in Amador County, California—known for world-class wines crafted by the likes of Helen Keplinger, Angela Osborne, Annie Favia, Andy Erickson, and others—I got the chance to spend quality time with Nick Guantone. Guantone is a seasoned chef who worked in kitchens and butcheries up and down the West Coast for 16 years before taking the plunge and opening his own restaurant in March 2020 (perfect timing).

He envisioned Guantonios Wood Fired as a neighborhood eatery that specialized in his passions: farm-to-table pizza and salads. That neighborhood was his hometown of Lodi, where you might think a restaurateur would be “stuck” selling the fat, fruity, commercial style of wine the area is known for. The beauty of being your own boss, however, is that you can do what you want. Guantone’s other passion is natural wines—generally handcrafted bottlings that are relatively low in alcohol and oak, high in acid, and often a little funky. Countless sommeliers have the same predilections but still end up stocking gigantic Cabernet Sauvignons, assembly-line Chardonnays, and the popular Pinots because, well, that’s what sells. Guantone’s attitude was “take it or leave it”: If you come to my restaurant, you drink what goes best with my food. And since day one, there have been long lines waiting to get in; his customers are drinking his wines like water.

While walking the Shake Ridge hillsides, Guantone shared the secret of Guantonios’ success, starting with the concept of authenticity: “Authenticity is being true to where you’re at, what you’re doing, what’s in your heart,” he mused. “No town needs another pizza restaurant, but I felt there was a gap missing in terms of high-quality food made from scratch—a menu driven by talking to the local farmers, seeing what they have that’s current. I put together my wine



PHOTO: RANDY CAPAROSO

Chef Nick Guantone with Shake Ridge Ranch owner/grower Ann Kraemer.

list with the same eye for freshness and authenticity as the ingredients in my dishes.”

One of the few upsides to opening in the middle of the pandemic was that Guantone was able to sell bottles of wine to go, and so he made the sensible decision to price them at retail. Whether picking up takeout or sitting down, then, guests could enjoy Lodi-grown wines like Sandlands Carignane, Haarmeyer Chenin Blanc, Monte Rio Mission, and Birichino Cinsaut for \$25–\$35. The resulting sales volume allowed him to invest in personal favorites like Occhipinti’s Siccagno, a wild and woolly Sicilian Nero d’Avola priced at \$65, for the program as well. As he pointed out, “Arianna Occhipinti makes wines with the same sense of nuance and rawness as younger California winemakers, plus the similarities in terroir between Sicily and regions like Lodi are intriguing.”

We were at Shake Ridge to taste owner/grower Ann Kraemer’s newly released Yorba 2020 Greco di Oro, a celebration of nuance and originality. “I love the light, super-lemony Greco grown by Ann,” said Guantone. “She likes [it] with Dungeness crab, but I’m already thinking of wild halibut in season, maybe braised with cream and finished with salsa verde.”

For his house wines, meanwhile, Guantone prevailed upon favorite winemakers to customize labels exclusively for the restaurant. Acquiesce, a Lodi winery specializing in unoaked Rhône-style whites, contributes a Grenache Blanc/Viognier blend, while Haarmeyer produces what it calls Bodega Lodi Red from old-vine Zinfandel and Syrah. Both wines sell for \$8 a glass and \$20 a bottle. “The lightness of the Acquiesce white,” said Guantone, “complements the lightness of our dishes, consisting of seasonal produce. The advantage of a native yeast-fermented red like the Bodega is it goes with most of our pizzas, made with naturally risen dough and ingredients like housemade hot sauce and our own pickled vegetables.” When a restaurant’s program “is focused on honesty and freshness,” he added, “getting guests to drink unfamiliar wines is not an issue. When they know what you’re doing, they’re all aboard!” **SJ**

Randy Caparoso is the author of Lodi!: The Definitive Guide and History of America’s Largest Winegrowing Region, the first book to explore the story behind the historic appellation; it’s currently available for sale on kitchencincoress.com.



Belle Glos

THE BEAUTY OF PINOT



Going By the Glass in the Big Apple

RAISE YOUR GLASS if you've been disappointed by the paltry and pitiful by-the-glass selections at many wine bars! One notable exception is Temperance Wine Bar, which opened last July at 40 Carmine Street in New York City's West Village. When I visited in November, director of operations A.J. Ojeda-Pons said the list boasted 144 offerings ranging from still, sparkling, and sweet to dry, fortified, classic, and funky: Name the style and you're likely to find it by the glass at Temperance.

Why so many choices? Ojeda-Pons, who laughingly shared that his unofficial title is "the wine mastermind behind Temperance," explained the rationale for the expansive list: "I wanted to spread the love to all of the winemakers I know, all the amazing wine regions I have visited, and all the wines that I have loved and worked with throughout my career in the wine industry. So, a rotating list is the way to go so I can shine a bright light on all of them."

In addition to overcoming the usual construction and permitting challenges of opening a new establishment, the team had the added pressure of developing an efficient system for managing so many open bottles. "Wine storage was a big concern for me from the beginning, but we worked really well in managing that, so storage is not a problem. We conquered the wine-preservation challenge with the Berman Le Verre de Vin system, which allows us to keep the sparkling wines bubbly and vacuum seal the still wines," Ojeda-Pons told me. "We of course also use the Coravin system for the most luxurious pours."

It's not just the quantity that's impressive; the diversity of Temperance's list represents a wine wonderland that encourages guests to take their palates on an adventure. "The focus is highlighting 100 grape varieties that tend to be overlooked,



Temperance offers nearly 150 wines by the glass in a welcoming and unintimidating setting.



PHOTOS: LIZ CLAWMAN

A.J. Ojeda-Pons is director of operations at Temperance in New York, NY.

obscure, lesser known, [and] off the beaten path. . . This has always been a passion of mine, because as sommeliers, we study so much of the mainstream that we forget there is a universe [beyond] all of the international grape varieties," Ojeda-Pons explained, adding that Temperance encourages curiosity among its staff by providing training and funding WSET certification.

On a recent visit, I decided to venture out of my comfort zone and sipped an orange wine from Spain made with Airén as well as a Prokupac from Serbia and Listán Negro from the Canary Islands. But Temperance isn't just a temple for wine geeks, as my companion, who prefers more familiar wines, discovered. In terms of price range, too, the list has something for everyone, with many glasses under \$15 and around \$20 and splurges ranging from \$30 to \$130.

Temperance's 55 seats are spread out over four rooms, each with its own distinct design. The colorful and cool ambiance—

from the disco ball in the restroom to the eye-catching art and photography gracing the walls—perfectly matches the far-from-ordinary wine list, and the food menu meets the challenge of complementing a plethora of wine styles and regions. "Our menu is eclectic and fully international," Ojeda-Pons said. "It is composed of small, shareable bites. Some guests come for one bite and a glass; some guests create full-on dining and pairing experiences."

Temperance does offer a small selection of nonalcoholic wines, but the bar's name is clearly tongue in cheek. Once you enter those doors, the call of nearly 150 intriguing wines by the glass is hard to resist. For more information, visit temperancenyc.com. 

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

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If You Build It, Will They Come?

ESTABLISHED RESTAURATEURS ARE BETTING ON A DOWNTOWN DENVER REVIVAL

AS IN MOST cities across the nation, the decimating impact of the pandemic on Denver's downtown continues to be felt; according to the Downtown Denver Partnership, average daily "users" of the area (defined as residents, employees, and visitors combined) numbered just 79,531 in November 2021, compared to 224,668 in November 2019. Yet you wouldn't know it from the quartet of high-profile restaurants that all opened here that same month.

Granted, their success may depend less on increased activity overall than on the reputation and savvy of the operators behind them: All four represent known quantities, which doubtless hold more allure in times of uncertainty than does the unknown. YumCha Dumpling & Noodle Bar is essentially a casual extension of chef-owner Lon Symensma's long-standing modern Asian destination ChoLon next door. Apple Blossom reflects the steadfast farm-to-table sensibilities that sibling team Paul and Aileen Reilly built their name on at the much-missed Beast + Bottle. Robert Thompson, who founded the now-national franchise Punch Bowl Social here in Denver, has brought his knack for eye-popping decor to bear on convivial tapas joint Three Saints Revival. And then there's A5, a spiffy but hardly stuffy steakhouse from the prolific Culinary Creative Group.

Interestingly enough, the A5 space was previously home to one of the city's most exciting fine-dining concepts, also run by



PHOTO: KAVLA JONES

Martini service at A5.

Culinary Creative; called Morin, it served the likes of veal sweetbreads on pain au lait and marrow custard garnished with fried tendon alongside, say, field blends from Baja, Mexico, and sparkling pear wine from Oregon. Why replace something so fiercely original? Not surprisingly, it had plenty to do with the pandemic, according to director of hospitality Kevin Burke: "Right now, a challenging restaurant didn't feel to us like it spoke to the moment and [to] what we really wanted the community to feel when walking into . . . our space. What was important for us is this sense of familiarity. People know how to interact with a steakhouse, so there's not a lot of guest education that we have to do—which was super-attractive. Really, for the past year and a half, it has felt like the hospitality business has been on the front lines of having to educate the public about how to conduct themselves. We've kind of felt like people's mothers. . . . So the idea of opening a concept where we had to teach people how to engage with it, I don't think any of us had something in the tank for that."

That doesn't mean the menu doesn't have its surprises. From crab salad on French toast to replace your average crab cake appetizer to a side of sunchokes in brown butter with mole blanco and chile vinaigrette, exec chef/partner Max Mackissock continues to show his signature style of subtle subversion—and the bar follows suit. Be it a Gimlet combining Japanese gin with cinnamon, almond, and ginger; a bottle of pét nat Carignan from Mendocino tucked among the Champagnes; or an extensive after-dinner selection of aged rums rather than whiskeys, the goal is still to present something to guests that "you can have a conversation about," acknowledges Burke. But these days, he's just as happy to pour a Napa Cab: "I personally had not drunk a lot of [it] in the past five or six years, and getting back into that . . . has been a really excellent exercise, because those wines have their fierce defenders, and it was a blind spot of mine to kind of dismiss them," he adds. "They bring a lot of pleasure to the table." Here's hoping they bring a lot more foot traffic with them. **SJ**



PHOTO COURTESY OF THREE SAINTS REVIVAL

The colorful interior of Three Saints Revival.

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The Sage of San Bernabe

JAMES EWART REFLECTS ON LIFE AS THE WINEMAKER OF **DIORA**

by Jessie Birschbach

JUST AS 2021 drew to a close, I sat down with longtime Diora winemaker James Ewart for a good old-fashioned Instagram Live interview. Although rain was forecasted in the evening, the sun shone through the window to light the cheerful expression Ewart wore while sitting in his office at Diora's winemaking facility in King City, California. The Australian winemaker would occasionally shoot a glance to the San Bernabe Vineyard just outside, as if to check on a sleeping baby.

The Monterey-based winery has quite a history as it was originally part of a California mission, but it started to look the way it does today in 1972, when it underwent planting to encompass 8,800 acres' worth of grapevines. At one point it was the largest contiguous vineyard in the world, but after the Indelicato family of Delicato Family Wines purchased the vineyard in 1988, they eventually recognized the area's potential to grow Pinot Noir and Chardonnay and began paring the site down to 5,800 acres, of which 1,800 are planted to vine. Since 2004, San Bernabe Vineyard has represented the majority of the eponymous San Bernabe AVA, deemed special thanks to its wind-derived Aeolian soils.

What struck me most about my conversation with Ewart was how grateful he seemed to have had the opportunity to work on the same project for over two decades, fine-tuning his process on the same land—including both the San Bernabe estate and, later, Diora's River Road Vineyard in the Santa Lucia Highlands—while working with and for the same supportive family. To be sure, my impressions were lubricated by a trio of incredibly well-balanced, affordable, Monterey-appellated Diora wines: La Belle Fête Rose of Pinot Noir; La Splendeur du Soleil Chardonnay, and La Petite Grace Pinot Noir. Read on for a few choice excerpts from our interview.



PHOTO COURTESY OF DIORA

Q: Why is Aeolian soil so special that it warranted the creation of an AVA?

San Bernabe was granted in 2004, and . . . two-thirds of the AVA is this Aeolian soil, so picture sandy, rolling hills. It's basically beach sand, very porous. [Not only do] viticulturists have a much easier time . . . managing these vineyards, preventing vine and pest diseases, but it really helps to drive the quality of the wine.

Q: As somms, we're familiar with cool Monterey weather, but what is San Bernabe like?

We're about 60 miles southeast of the Monterey Bay. We really don't get any direct influence because the Santa Lucia mountain range acts as a rain shadow . . . so it's a great place to grow grapes and not have to worry about pests and diseases. San Bernabe these days can get up to 100 degrees, so we get ripe flavors—nice dark cherry in our Pinots and ripe pineapple for our Chardonnays. But . . . the nights can get

down to 50 degrees, so we have a really large diurnal split, up to 32 degrees a day, so that's probably the major influence on the grapes. But within that, we've got lots of different aspects, slopes, and soil types, which can play out in the wine.

Q: After more than 20 years, how have you seen Diora evolve?

I've been very fortunate to experience an evolution as a driver of that with my team, who have very diverse backgrounds. Back in 2000 we were making a lot of wine and growing a lot of grapes for other people. But as the third generation of the Indelicato family has taken over the business, they really transitioned to a case-good business. So a lot of those trials that I did back then with the vineyard team, with new clones . . . different rootstocks, different trellising systems, they're really paying off . . . today. Not a lot of winemakers get to see that. But we're still learning, and that's what gets me excited every year. **\$**



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Royal Ossetra caviar atop smoked potato custard with sea beans, pink lemon, and herb meringue.



The Secret Garden

RESERVE DELIVERS A MAGICAL DINING EXPERIENCE IN SCOTTSDALE

TUCKED AWAY IN Old Town Scottsdale is a culinary jewel box: Upon arrival, guests are led from a shaded porch lined with oleander and bougainvillea past glowing wrought-iron lanterns to an elegant cocktail parlor. Ensnared in cozy seating nooks defined by tufted settees and flickering candlelight, they relax with pre-dinner libations before being escorted to their table in a dreamy garden surrounded by vine-covered ochre walls and lush greenery.

Seven years before Reserve was unveiled in 2020, its owner, Christian Lewkowicz, had purchased a restaurant named Café Monarch that was later relocated to a larger space in a former design showroom across the street. It then operated as a private event venue until Reserve's debut. "The original Café Monarch was so magical," says Lewkowicz. "With just 32 covers a night, we've now turned it into something incredible."



A5 Miyazaki wagyu strip loin is served with rosemary sprigs, which are meant to be dipped into a wagyu fat candle and then brushed on the beef.

An impressive roster of talent resides at Reserve. Executive chef Benjamin Wald studied at École Ducasse in Paris and spent time at the three-Michelin-starred Inn at Little Washington, while chef de cuisine David Brito formerly worked at



PHOTOS: CHRISTINA BARRUETA

Chef de cuisine David Brito, Advanced Sommeliers Wesam Kawa and Juliette Dottle, owner Christian Lewkowicz, and executive chef Benjamin Wald at Reserve in Scottsdale, AZ.

Kai, Arizona's only AAA Five Diamond and *Forbes Travel Guide* Five Star restaurant. "It's a collaborative effort between the team," says Wald. "We put 100% into everything we do, from showcasing the best ingredients the world has to offer to making sure that the aesthetic of the dish is as powerful as the flavors. We want guests to feel as if they've entered an oasis where every detail has been curated for them."

That skilled team also includes Advanced Sommeliers Wesam Kawa and Juliette Dottle, who ensure the pairings are just as spectacular as the food. "With almost 3,000 wines and 70 wines by the glass between both restaurants, we're as meticulous and thoughtful as possible in creating a harmonious experience," adds Kawa. "My favorite pairing currently is the Henriques & Henriques 2000 Madeira Boal Colheita with the celery root-apple velouté, hazelnuts, and country ham. It's a thought-provoking pairing that gives such depth and flavor to that creamy soup."

Other exquisite pairings in the 12-course *dégustation* may include a glass of Krug Champagne with Royal Ossetra caviar atop smoked potato custard with sea beans, pink lemon, and herb meringue, partnered with a crispy baton of *pommes paillasson* adorned with preserved lemon aioli and edible blooms. Or you might sample the Heitz Cellar Trailside Vineyard Cabernet Sauvignon, built for sipping alongside every luxurious bite of A5 Miyazaki wagyu strip loin, accompanied by multiple components: rosemary sprigs meant for dipping into a wagyu fat candle and brushing on the beef; fines herbes purée; a mélange of root vegetables (radish, turnip, kohlrabi, and sunchoke); and a rich jus graced with Banyuls.

"Reserve showcases our passionate team in their mission to provide a once-in-a-lifetime memory," says Lewkowicz. "That's all we can hope for as restaurateurs—to have that type of impact on a guest's dining experience." ❧

the Women Behind

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MEET THE WOMEN LEADERS
SHAPING OUR WINES
FROM GRAPE TO GLASS



PICTURED: ELIZABETH KESTER, DIRECTOR OF WINEMAKING. ALY WENTE, VP MARKETING & CONSUMER EXPERIENCE. NIKI WENTE, SENIOR VINEYARD/VITICULTURE MANAGER.

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Vintage of the Moment

RECAPPING A STELLAR HARVEST ON THE CENTRAL COAST

VINEYARD MANAGERS AND winemakers are not above hyperbole, especially when it comes to their wines. We constantly see them prematurely celebrating the “Vintage of the Decade” or even the “Vintage of the Century” in the media, even when it’s, say, only the second year of the decade and one-fifth of the way into the 2000s.

Then we have a vintage like 2021 on the Central Coast. I am happy to declare, without hesitation, that 2021 is the Vintage of the Moment, and I will cautiously describe our excitement in hopes that you’ll be inspired to taste these wines and make your own determination of quality.

Morgan Twain-Peterson, owner of Bedrock Wine Co., has the rare insight of both a Master of Wine and a winemaker who sources grapes from up and down the 41 AVAs of the Central Coast. “It was a pretty typical vintage from what we saw in our few vineyards in Monterey/Santa Clara counties,” he says. “The only exception was Massa Vineyard in the mountains above Carmel, where crops were down almost 60%. [It was] generally a mild, even year

where quality was good and acids fresh—be it Wirz [Vineyard] Riesling in Cienega Valley or Brosseau [Vineyard] Chardonnay in Chalone. Mild weather and heavier crops made for a later than normal year on the Central Coast; we started [harvest] on August 1 and pressed our last tank the week before Thanksgiving.”

Further south, the 11 sub-AVAs of the greater Paso Robles region fared as well as—if not better than—the northern Central Coast. Chris Taranto, communications director for the Paso Robles Wine Country Alliance, recaps the vintage: “A dry winter led to small clusters, small berries, and intensity and flavor that come with struggle. A blazing hot summer could have wrecked what cool winter and spring produced, but the weather was mild, especially around harvest, with only mild heat spikes. The 2021s should be special—with the concentration and depth you would expect but also a nuance and elegance similar to 2011, [if] perhaps with a touch more flesh.”

Meanwhile, in the southern AVAs of the Central Coast, producers in Edna Valley/

Arroyo Grande, the Santa Maria Valley, and the Sta. Rita Hills are celebrating what will result from some of the longest hang times and greatest flavor/color development ever seen in these regions. The excitement in the Santa Maria Valley has been palpable from the first cluster picked to the last; Nick de Luca, grape sales manager for the Miller Family Wine Company (Bien Nacido, Solomon Hills, French Camp) notes how persistent the Pacific Ocean’s influence was on the area’s coastal vineyards: “The one thing that really struck me about 2021 in [Santa Barbara] County was the week of drenching fog toward the end of September. I really don’t recall ever seeing it persist so late. I’d say that the fog was the defining aspect of the Santa Maria and Sta. Rita Hills Chardonnay vintage.”

Summing up the excitement in not only the Santa Maria Valley but the entire Central Coast, Twain-Peterson adds: “As always, the star blocks like Bien Nacido Z Block Syrah are among the best wines from the entire state, but just about everything is pretty darn good—it will be a fun year to work on blends.” SJ

“The 2021s should be special—with the concentration and depth you would expect but also a nuance and elegance similar to 2011.” —Chris Taranto

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Getting Down to Business

WHY EDUCATION IS VITAL TO THE FUTURE OF THE WINE INDUSTRY

by Yellymary Montalvo, WSET Level 3, SWS, director of education at the North Carolina Wine Academy

WHETHER WE'RE SOMMELIERS, buyers, producers, or retailers, wine professionals often forget about one very important element of our industry: the fact that it is not all glitz and glamour but a business in which education is critical.

I sometimes find myself wishing that I could say I have been working in this exciting field for longer than the past decade. Sadly, this is not the case, which brings me to why education has been my cause for the past three years.

Why is it so important? Well, let me guide you through how I joined the industry. I come from very humble beginnings in Puerto Rico, and my family wanted me to aim for the traditional careers of lawyer or doctor. So I followed the “professional academic” route, settling for law school and successfully completing my law degree.

Once I began working at a law firm, I quickly understood that it was certainly not my passion. I moved to the mainland, where I started discovering the culture of wine; within a year, I decided to leave the legal industry and open my own wine bar with zero business background. As I broadened my network and progressed in my education, I came to understand all the myriad possibilities for forging a career in wine and grew frustrated that I had not known about them until I was 30 years old. I had acquired so much student loan debt in formal education while there was an entirely different option that I could have pursued instead.

Aspiring wine professionals have so many career options to choose from, from education and commercial enterprise to newer tech-oriented professions in online sales and, of course, social media, which is an uber-popular option given

the power wine influencers exert on market trends. But no matter the field, it is imperative that the industry open its arms to inclusivity in every aspect. I never experienced wine as a young adult in Puerto Rico, and I was not exactly welcomed as a brown girl with an accent when I ventured into the wine industry ten years ago.

Outreach to broader demographics is vital, as it could offer a life-changing opportunity for those who want to better themselves but view college as daunting and financially impossible. I am forever grateful to those who did welcome me into the wine industry with mentoring, scholarships, and opportunities to grow; this is the time for all of us to pay it forward and spread the gospel that wine offers many paths to a formal career. Let's start by mentoring and facilitating access to education; bringing awareness to the nuts and bolts of the business; and mak-

ing a commitment to create a beautifully diverse industry with opportunities for anyone who wants to share our passion for this wonderful profession. SJ

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



PHOTO: JEANNE ALBERS



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Learning to Perceive

WHY WINE TASTERS CAN'T ALWAYS SEE THE FOREST FOR THE TREES

PROFESSIONAL WINE EVALUATION is a fundamental example of perceptual learning, a process that relies on prior experience to improve our abilities, which results in long-lasting changes to our perceptual system. For example, when an expert taster evaluates a wine made from *Sémillon*, their perceptual state includes not only the wine they are tasting but also previous wines they have tasted and their perceptions of those wines. In short, it involves far more than the immediate impressions the wine delivers to our senses; it is intrinsically bound to our prior experiences.

While perceptual learning plays an important role in evaluating wine, there's another phenomenon related to perception that arises from the wine itself: perceptual interaction. When our olfactory system is confronted with complex aromas, we often perceive them as a single aroma due to odor blending in a process known as configural perception (our perception of the smell of coffee as a single aroma is just one of many examples). At the same time, we are able to isolate individual odors within complex mixtures, as in the case

of detecting a fault in wine, through what is known as an elemental perception process. The rules that govern these processes are poorly understood, but the contradiction they present raises the question: How do these types of perception facilitate or complicate matters for wine tasters?

I was recently tasting a flight of eight young semi-sweet and sweet wines from Bordeaux, all of which were made from *Sémillon*, vinified with some percentage of botrytized fruit, and aged in oak. While the wines were characteristically complex, they didn't exhibit the classic markers of orange marmalade, candied orange zest, or overripe orange that are characteristic of the style and indicate the grapes were subject to noble rot. As I compiled an aroma profile for the wines, the absence of this descriptor was puzzling to me.

Recent studies concerning the aromas of noble rot-affected dessert wines have revealed the importance of a well-known phenomenon in perfumery, perceptual blending, that results in the perception of confectioned-orange aromas. Researchers identified two lactones re-

sponsible in this case: One is a compound that's associated with oak aging (3-methyl-4-octanolide, a whiskey lactone that has coconut, celery, and fresh wood aromas), the other with *Botrytis cinerea* development (2-nonen-4-olide, a newly discovered lactone that's oily, coconut-like, and rancid).

While it was evident that noble rot had contributed to the sweetness of the young wines I was evaluating, the two specific lactones that result in the perception of candied-orange aromas weren't detectable in them. Yet it's very likely they would emerge with age.

Configural perception can present a dilemma for olfactory experts of all kinds, as specific training and repeated exposure to odors mean that we are better at elemental perception of odor mixtures; we can be better at detecting the parts than we are at perceiving the whole. This is where perceptual learning comes into play. Sensory experts are keenly aware of this adaptation and develop the ability to move fluidly back and forth between perceiving the individual elements of an aroma and perceiving the blend. S|

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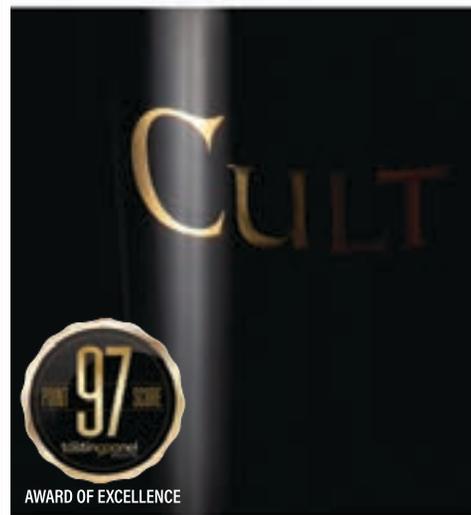


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Viva El Valle

SURPRISES AWAIT IN MEXICO'S MOST POPULAR WINE REGION

“UP-AND-COMING”: Too often this phrase is used as a polite substitute for “not quite there yet.” So naturally, when my friend Josh pitched me on a Mexico episode in the “up-and-coming” wine region of Valle de Guadalupe for *V is for Vino*, I was skeptical. I had rarely come across Mexican wines on menus and was never told by friends in the wine community to seek them out; information online was minimal as well. But all it took was one trip across the border to realize that a Mexico episode needed to happen. Having filmed it in October 2020 (see season 3, episode 2), I can confidently say that not only is the Valle de Guadalupe worth your time, it's worth going out of your way for. The experience changed the way I look at Mexican wines as well as the entire country and its people.



With over 100 wineries, the Valle de Guadalupe is Mexico's most popular winegrowing area.

I was surprised to learn that Mexico has a tremendous amount of winemaking history: Its first grapes were planted in the 1520s, making it the oldest winegrowing country in the Americas. However, the new wave of winemaking in the Valle de Guadalupe, which is by far the most popular winegrowing area in Mexico, didn't start until around the 1970s, and it's really only in the last ten to 20 years that it's experienced some major growth. Thanks to wine- and tourism-related investments into the region, the Valle now has over 100 wineries.



V is for Vino host Vince Anter with Adrián García of Vinícola Retorno.

Another surprise to me was how wildly the grape varieties vary. Because the Valle has no strict laws or expectations placed upon it, winemakers are able to grow whatever they like, which to me is half the fun of Mexico! You may find oaked Chenin Blanc, Nebbiolo, and ripe and fruity valley-floor Tempranillos in one tasting room. The next may have elegant, high-altitude, low-alcohol rosés and lean Mourvedrés from a mountain-shadowed microclimate. And the next, classic bottle-aged Cabernet blends and Mexico's very own native Mission grape. There are traditional, historic estates; young, hip purveyors of natural wine; and hole-in-the-wall garagiste operations, all within a few miles of each other. And since there's no hard consensus as to which grapes work best in the region yet (though Nebbiolo and Tempranillo are front-runners), each winery offers an exciting, unique experience.

Most importantly, the quality of Mexican wine is elevated compared to other “up-and-coming” regions I've visited, and it's largely a result of the community. The winemakers still get together, break bread

(or tortillas), and compare notes. They help each other grow and evolve, loan each other equipment, and collectively try to answer the question that's now at the forefront of their minds: Who do we want to be in five years, ten years, and beyond? But while they figure that out, we have the benefit of enjoying their first-rate experimentation and growth in real time.

Unfortunately, these wines are likely to be tough to find in your local market, as few are exported. Your best bet is to take the hour-long road trip from San Diego across the border and see for yourself. In addition to the wineries, what awaits you are luxury boutique hotels, quaint casitas, warm people, and what may possibly be one of the world's best food scenes . . . but that's a story for another time (or you can watch the Ensenada episode of *V is for Vino* for a taste).

Until next wine,
Vince 

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

PHOTOS COURTESY OF V IS FOR VINO

COMPLEMENTS TO THE CHEF



HERZOG LINEAGE

ESTATE GROWN | FAMILY CRAFTED



by Kate Norwell-Smith

The Pros and Pitfalls of Skin Contact

THE FIRST EXPOSURE I had to making skin-contact white wines is indelibly etched into my brain because it involved personally foot-stomping 30 macro-bins full of Chardonnay clusters, one after another. After crushing each bin, I covered it with a lid, which sent the yellowjackets that feasted on the sweet fruit swarming toward the remaining open bins. Imagine what kind of greeting I had stepping into the last few, but happily, after about five to ten stings, the sensation simply became a blur—and sipping that Chardonnay a decade later, I have only fond memories.

Allowing juice from white grapes to remain in contact with their skins is an ancient practice. Most notably in Georgia, Slovenia, and parts of Italy, it gave rise to so-called “orange” wines, some of which are still given six months or more on the skins. But just as not all skin-contact whites are natural wines, nor are they all orange wines. It is important not to lump these three distinct yet often overlapping terms together; in doing so, one can overlook the nuances that skin contact as a stand-alone technique can impart.

“Skin contact” in winemaking terms simply means that the berries have been crushed to allow the juice to run free and interact with the surrounding skins. This maceration can go on for hours, days, weeks, or months, depending on the winemaker’s goal. Often cooler temperatures are employed to discourage the

onset of fermentation; however, fermenting whites on their skins is also practiced. Once the prescribed amount of contact has taken place, the liquid is pressed off the skins and continues on its path toward becoming wine.

What can be gained and lost by this technique? While the progression is not completely linear, if one thinks of sparkling wine at one end of the continuum and 18-month skin-contact orange wines stored outside in amphorae at the other, a pattern emerges. Grapes intended for light, fresh, high-acid sparkling and white wines are pressed extremely gently immediately after picking. This limits oxidation, the release of potassium and nitrogen, and the extraction of phenols into the must. The result is a more reductive, brighter wine with a lower pH that has little to no perceptible tannins, astringency, or bitterness on the palate. (In the case of full-bodied sparkling wines, a rich mouthfeel is built back in by aging the wine on the lees and through the addition of sugars and grape spirits—but still, no bitter tannins in sight.) Increased maceration will extract more color-, flavor-, and texture-giving phenols while lowering the wine’s acidity. Maturation on the skins after fermentation ups the complexity and intensity of volatile aromas and increases the likelihood that the wine will undergo a complete malolactic fermentation, which can lead to umami- or cheese-like lactic notes.

Consider Pinot Grigio, a variety that can, depending on the winemaking approach, produce a pale, light, crisp, fruit-forward white; a delicately copper-hued, fuller-bodied wine with notes of caramelized apricot and marmalade; and a full-on orange wine with intriguing volatile aromas as well as nutty, savory flavors and grippy tannins.

The pitfalls associated with skin contact are real: An overly macerated Gewürztraminer—think grandma’s soap dish on steroids, married to an extremely bitter finish and zero freshness—is full of lost potential. Pungent Rieslings rarely benefit from flabby pH levels and increased astringency. If the fruit is not pristine, contact with botrytis on the skins can lead to runaway enzymatic oxidation and a musty, tired wine. Careful tasting on a daily or even hourly basis, closely monitored temperatures, and attentive pressing are all necessary to make the most of this technique.

The winemaker I was foot-stomping for in 2011 was experimenting with giving a small percentage of his Chardonnay approximately three hours of time on the skins, not to alter its color, flavor, or aroma but to simply build a bit more body into the wine. It was a subtle shift, to be sure, but this is the sort of detail that can take a wine from good to great. Sometimes the most artfully employed skin contact is the one we aren’t even aware of. **SJ**

*Perfect pairings,
twist left*



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BY SARAH GRAYBILL

Winding Back the Clock

ARMITAGE ALEHOUSE OFFERS A TASTE OF THE OLD WORLD

ON ARMITAGE AVENUE in Chicago's Lincoln Park neighborhood is a door that leads you back to a time when a restaurant's warmth emanated from fireplaces, light glowed from candles, and music trickled from a piano. Within the walls of Armitage Alehouse, which opened last fall, "It's London circa 1926," as the venue's website states. Conceived by local hospitality group Hogsalt, Armitage is a British pub-inspired establishment with Anglo-Indian flourishes (plus a few signature dishes from Hogsalt's other properties).

the list consists of about 100 exclusively French and American selections with a focus on "curry-friendly" wines. "Beaujolais and lighter reds highlighting freshness and drinkability take center stage . . . [along with the] Loire and Alsace, [which] get the nod for whites to check out with our curry offerings," he says. "In addition, we of course hit the classics hard, with a bit more of a focus on Bordeaux from France and Cabernet Sauvignon from the United States, as it's unsurprisingly our top-selling category."

in every step of the buying process, from meeting with reps to taste wines he has not had to ascertaining supply availability to seeking the best price per volume. Once the wines are in house, he helps ensure that the staff is prepared to describe and deliver them in a way that does them justice. "We keep an internal app with all of the important details about the wines [across] our [restaurant] group for management and servers, and it's my job to keep this up to date," he says. "I then schedule myself into pre-shift with our managers at the respective locations to preach the gospel [of the wines] to our service staff."

The app also offers store-specific pairing suggestions. However, Bube emphasizes the importance of allowing patrons to entertain their own tastes and whims. "Our staff is capable of handling questions table-side if asked, but we don't 'yuck' our guests' 'yum' by stepping in between the Cabernet order [and] the chilled seafood. Different strokes for different folks," he says.

Still, when the opportunity does arise to spotlight a true gem, Bube likes to call attention to Yves Chaley Hautes-Côtes de Nuits Les Rousselots. "It's a tiny estate that shares a hill in Curtil-Vergy with Domaine de la Romanée-Conti's Hautes-Côtes de Nuits parcel," he says, "and Yves makes a lovely, honest, and soulful Burgundy from the [site] that we sell for \$69. . . . There's something I find very personal and nostalgic about Burgundy's cooler reaches, as these were the first wines from the region I could afford to taste and are among my most cherished wine memories."

No doubt Bube's affection for such wines is a draw for Armitage's patrons. "We really focus on delivering the highest-quality experience day to day," he points out, "and are very grateful that many of our guests are excited to return." SJ

Armitage Alehouse channels 1920s London.



According to Master Sommelier and Hogsalt wine director James Bube, Hogsalt's vibe is dressy and refined yet accessible. At Armitage, that translates into abundant wood furnishings and accents, low lighting, spacious seating, and a myriad of other subtle details.

To pair with the overall experience, Armitage's wine program also reaches back to the Old World. Thus far, Bube notes,

Bube also prioritizes viticultural integrity, noting that he tends to favor wines that are conscientiously farmed without dogma. In short, he says, "I like a list with a mix of well-known brands that are successful for their quality and value as well as smaller, up-and-coming producers. As we don't currently have floor sommeliers, I shy away from overly intellectual lists that require a heavy lift from our servers. The list has to work for the restaurant, not the other way around."

To that end, he takes the utmost care

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Isabel Mitrakis

ISABEL MITRAKIS
WINEMAKER



by Allison Jordan, executive director, California Sustainable Winegrowing Alliance, and VP of environmental affairs, Wine Institute

Green From Grapes to Glass

CALIFORNIA PRODUCERS LEAD THE WAY IN SUSTAINABLE WINEGROWING

BEING GOOD NEIGHBORS and good stewards of the land is an important professional and personal value to the California wine community. Many of the state's growers and vintners have been using sustainable winegrowing practices for decades, with educational efforts beginning as early as the late 1950s; in the past two decades, they have made a strong commitment to sustainability and transparency, as evidenced through the many educational and certification programs that have emerged.

Since 2003, the California Sustainable Winegrowing Alliance (CSWA)—a partnership between growers and vintners—has promoted sustainability from grapes to glass. CSWA oversees the California Sustainable Winegrowing Program, a robust collection of educational resources that includes the California Code of Sustainable Winegrowing, which covers over 200 sustainability practices. CSWA also launched Certified California Sustainable Winegrowing, a third-party certification program, in 2010.

As the fourth-largest wine-producing region in the world, California has one of the most comprehensive and widely adopted sustainable winegrowing programs in the world, fostering a culture of continuous improvement and leadership in sustainability.

What Is Sustainable Winegrowing?

Sustainable winegrowing involves a comprehensive set of practices that are environmentally sound, socially equitable, and economically viable. Growers and vintners throughout California have adopted them to grow and make high-quality grapes and wine, respectively. These practices conserve water and energy, maintain healthy soil, protect air and water quality, enhance relations with employees and communities, preserve local ecosystems and wildlife habitats, and improve the economic

PHOTO COURTESY OF THE WINE INSTITUTE



Sheep are nature's lawnmowers.

vitality of vineyards and wineries. Some examples include:

- Employing sheep, cover crops, owls, and raptors to control weeds and pests
- Using drip irrigation and process ponds to conserve water
- Composting, recycling, and reusing to minimize waste
- Providing employee training and recognizing contributions to sustainability efforts
- Addressing diversity, equity, and inclusion issues to enhance communities

What Is Certified California Sustainable Winegrowing?

Certified California Sustainable Winegrowing provides annual third-party verification that a winery or vineyard has adopted and implemented stringent sustainable winegrowing standards based on the California Code of Sustainable Winegrowing and has committed to continuous improvement in those areas. In addition to implementing required practices that address the environmental and socially responsible aspects of sustainability, companies must determine the areas in which they need to improve and focus their resources in ways that will best help them achieve their sustainability

goals year after year. Vineyards and wineries must also measure and track metrics for water, energy, greenhouse gas emissions, and nitrogen and comply with restrictions on crop-protection materials.

Currently, 80% of California wine is made in a Certified California Sustainable winery, and more than



2,400 vineyards totaling 204,857 acres are certified; certified wineries must source at least 85% of their grapes from certified vineyards (and 100% of their grapes must come from California). Since 2017, participants have had the option to put a certification logo on their labels, and there are now over 12 million cases of wine with the logo.

A Commitment to the Future

The families who own most of California's vineyards and wineries are dedicated to the land and strive to maintain a healthy and beautiful environment for themselves, their neighbors, and wine-country visitors. They make decisions for the long term so they can pass thriving businesses on to future generations. Their dedication to sustainability reflects their desire to be world-class producers known not only for their high-quality wines but also for the conscientious way in which they produce them.

Learn More

To find Certified California Sustainable wines, wineries, and vineyards, visit californiasustainablewine.com. To learn more about California wines and the industry's commitment to sustainability, visit discovercaliforniawines.com. To take a free one-hour course on sustainable winegrowing, visit ambassador.discovercaliforniawines.com. 



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{ pairings }

good CATCH

ST. SUPÉRY'S COMMITMENT TO THE ENVIRONMENT IS REFLECTED IN ITS **GREAT SUSTAINABLE SEAFOOD** INITIATIVE

by Marci Symington

The St. Supéry Rutherford Estate Vineyard Merlot is chef Tod Kawachi's choice with sockeye salmon glazed with red miso.

PHOTO: MEG SMITH



St. Supéry maintains a strong commitment to certified Napa Green, Bordeaux-style estate wines, including Sauvignon Blanc and Cabernet Sauvignon, which hail from over 500 developed acres at its 1,535-plus-acre Dollarhide Ranch in northeast Napa.

AS St. Supéry Estate Vineyards & Winery chef Tod Kawachi wraps up a YouTube cooking demonstration on sockeye salmon sustainably sourced from Alaska's Copper River and glazed with red miso and red wine, he notes that his suggested pairing is the St. Supéry Rutherford Estate Vineyard Merlot. "Fish can go with red wine," affirms Kawachi, who aims to view pairings through an unconventional lens. "Even if you have a beautiful, hearty red wine at the table, it shouldn't scare you from preparing or ordering a seafood dish to go along with it."

St. Supéry was founded by third-generation French vintner Robert Skalli on the principles of sustainable farming in 1982; its current owner, Chanel, Inc., continues to expand that commitment along with the production of certified Napa Green, Bordeaux-varietal estate wines, including Sauvignon Blanc and Cabernet Sauvignon, from over 500 planted acres at its 1,535-plus-acre Dollarhide Ranch in northeast Napa as well as 35 acres of Cabernet Sauvignon, Cabernet Franc, Merlot, and Petit Verdot in Rutherford. Following its core philosophy, St. Supéry encourages the sustainable sourcing of seafood to pair with wines like the aforementioned Merlot and Cabernet Sauvignon in addition to its Élu red Bordeaux-varietal blend. To that end, in April 2019, it created The Great Sustainable Seafood Tour, an initiative that aligns it with restaurant partners and seafood purveyors that share the goal of preserving the land and oceans. In the words of winemaker Michael Scholz, "We believe in sustainability because we believe in maintaining our lands and farms for the generations of the future, maintaining a viable food supply and understanding where it was sourced, and, of course, drink[ing] some great wine while we are doing it."

At first, The Great Sustainable Seafood Tour focused on pairings with St. Supéry's estate Sauvignon Blancs, which offer the quintessential combination of salinity, acidity, and texture, before expanding to include other expressions in the portfolio. A landing page on the winery's website connects consumers with the many facets



Striped bass three ways brings out the salinity, acidity, and texture in St. Supéry's estate Sauvignon Blanc.



Oysters with verjus cucumber granité. The shellfish comes from Carlsbad Aquafarm, Southern California's only oyster farm.

of the initiative, including a list of restaurants serving sustainable seafood dishes with St. Supéry wines: Among the examples are the “Kick Ass Sea Bass” paired with the Napa Valley Estate Sauvignon Blanc at Café Blue in Austin, Texas; the “Seacuterie” board with the Napa Valley Estate Cabernet Sauvignon at Mile Marker One in Gloucester, Massachusetts; and togarashi-dusted Verlasso salmon with the Dollarhide Estate Vineyard Sauvignon Blanc at Sunnyside Restaurant in Tahoe City, California. Another list, meanwhile, features the seafood purveyors that share the company's passion for environmental stewardship, including Carlsbad Aquafarm, Southern California's only oyster farm; the Verlasso Salmon aquaculture farm; Tsar Nicolai Caviar; cultivators of American white sturgeon caviar; Royal Hawaiian Seafood; and Little Cranberry Lobster, a lobstermen's co-op in Maine.

Still another link leads to a collection of sustainable seafood recipes with pairings developed by Kawachi, a Seattle native with a long resume of stints at wineries and fine restaurants like the Hotel Bel-Air in Los Angeles and Roy's Kahana Bar & Grill in Maui, Hawaii, as well as at the Culinary Institute of America at Greystone in Napa. As a chef instructor there, he taught a class on seafood and seafood fabrication, stressing the importance of aquaculture, fish farming, and hatcheries.

Acknowledging the substantial buying power of chefs, Kawachi believes he can make a difference by supporting purveyors that are farming or sourcing locally and

sustainably. He's particularly supportive of the Monterey Bay Aquarium's Seafood Watch program, a downloadable guide that aims to inform consumers of responsible seafood choices.

On St. Supéry's website, wine enthusiasts can sign up to watch the chef at work during the many virtual tastings and cooking demonstrations the winery holds during the summer months (past episodes can be found on its YouTube channel). During the “Say Yes! Red Wine and Sustainable Seafood” demonstration, Kawachi dared consumers to shake the stigma of combining seafood with red Bordeaux varieties like St. Supéry's Merlot or Cabernet Sauvignon: “Our red wines are not too incredibly tannic, not too hot or high in alcohol. They are well balanced and have a nice acid finish. That is going to be key to being able to match up with almost any food, and in this case, seafood.”

Through recipes like red wine-poached cod à la nage, roasted Ōra King salmon with herb beurre rouge, and cioppino, Kawachi presents several ways to prepare a seafood dish that can pair well with a heartier red—for example by poaching a fish filet in red wine, creating a butter sauce with a red wine reduction, or using ingredients rich in earthy flavors, such as mushrooms, rosemary, and thyme, that pull in herbaceous and tannic notes to stand up to the body of the wine. Not surprisingly, utilizing the same wine in the recipe creates a bridge from the plate to the glass. “When you go to take a sip of it, and you have it in your glass, you have the

familiar flavor in your mouth,” Kawachi says.

He warns that the type of seafood matters: Meatier fish like grouper, sea bass, sturgeon, and steelhead trout are some of his favorites, but “watch out for oily fish like anchovies and mackerel that can make the wine taste metallic.” Overall, when it comes to the recipes, he adds, “I try to make [them] fairly simple and straightforward so it doesn't intimidate people from wanting to give it a try.”

To further promote The Great Sustainable Seafood Tour, the winery holds an annual recipe contest, encouraging the pairing of sustainable seafood dishes with its sustainable wines for an opportunity to win a trip to Napa Valley worth \$3,500. For more information, visit stsupery.com. 

St. Supéry 2017 Dollarhide Estate Vineyard Cabernet Sauvignon, Napa Valley (\$110)

This 100% estate-grown single-vineyard Cabernet Sauvignon hails from the winery's Dollarhide Ranch. The property is known for its steep rolling hills—reaching upwards of 1,100 feet—as well as some flatlands and seven lakes rife with wildlife. Aged for 20 months in 100% French oak (54% new), the wine offers a broad and generous mouthfeel with chewy tannins. The fruit is ripe and almost gobby, becoming more streamlined as it opens up. Dark berries are lush and sweet with hints of brown sugar. Acidity and chalky lift are well defined and have the mouth imploring for that next sip. Refined, elegant, polished, and poised. **96** —*Meredith May*

St. Supéry 2018 Merlot, Rutherford Estate Vineyard, Napa Valley (\$70)

Ripe plum, cinnamon bark, crushed stone, and a dollop of white pepper just start to describe this intensely deep and ripe single-vineyard Merlot from St. Supéry's Rutherford Vineyard. Luscious dark cherry usurps the palate with pleasure, storming forward with a plush yet mighty mouthfeel. **94** —*M.M.*



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Sparkle Motion

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

1 BUBBLE

Simple but satisfying.

2 BUBBLES

Satisfying and a little more complex.

3 BUBBLES

A strong example of its kind.

4 BUBBLES

A superb example of its kind.

5 BUBBLES

Stellar by any standard.

For details on submitting wines for review, contact managing editor Ruth Tobias at rtobias@sommjournal.com.



J 2014 Blanc de Blancs, Russian River Valley

(\$80) The inaugural release of J Vineyards & Winery's blanc de blancs is as pretty as they come: Scents of lime curd, salty hazelnut, and golden apple waft from the glass before the latter dances over to join tangerine, white and yellow peach, and a touch of breadiness on the mineral-edged, mouthwatering palate. **93**



E. & J. GALLO



J Cuvée 20, Russian River Valley

(\$38) Hello, ripe pear; hello, vanilla; hello, peanut and cashew—this light gold blend of 51% Chardonnay, 40% Pinot Noir, and 9% Pinot Meunier greets you with gusto on the nose while bearing flavors of lemon tart and peach cobbler on a creamy palate with a snappy, slightly quinine-bitter finish. J Vineyards & Winery's inspired suggestion to serve it alongside seared black cod with caramelized cauliflower and Meyer lemon is, truth be told, one we can't get out of our heads. **92.5**



E. & J. GALLO



Valdo Floral Spumante Rosé Brut, Italy

(\$16) As splashy as the bottle it's housed in, awash in a floral design, this spumante is composed of 75% Nerello Mascalese from Sicily and 25% Glera from the Veneto. Cheerful scents of strawberry and cherry presage the flavor profile, also marked by ripe melon and a stream of lemon-lime; though it doesn't lack for sweetness at 10 grams per liter of residual sugar, the sensation of freshness is what lingers. **91**



TAUB FAMILY SELECTIONS



Schramsberg 2012 Reserve, North Coast

(\$130) What a remarkable nose: After seven and a half years en tirage, this golden blend of 88% Pinot Noir and 12% Chardonnay spills like a cornucopia with aromas of candied squash, brioche, roasted nuts, and honeysuckle before an equally sumptuous, nutty palate of dried apple, quince, orange, and just a hint of butterscotch unfolds amid a lovely, lasting bead. Even the acidity is rich. **95**



Moët & Chandon Brut Rosé Impérial, Champagne, France

(\$63) Textbook from the mousse onward, this salmon-hued blend of primarily Pinot Noir and Pinot Meunier with a smaller percentage of Chardonnay emits aromas of raspberry and yeastiness that make room for flashes of apricot, almond, and floral notes; the palate, meanwhile, sits in the center of the Venn diagram linking consummate freshness to red-berry fruitiness to elegance, framed by the slightest of tannins. **93**



MOËT HENNESSY USA

Continued on page 42

MAKE IT POP!

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Moët & Chandon 2013 Grand Vintage Extra Brut, Champagne, France (\$64)

Speaking of textbooks, here's Champagne at its Champagniest. Combining 41% Chardonnay with 38% Pinot Noir and 21% Pinot Meunier, it offers up aromas of toast and apple with a hint of honeyed nuts; green apple tumbles onto the palate with a dash of salt, a stripe of chalk, and a squeeze of lemon that lingers for some time. Zippy yet seamless. **94**

MOËT HENNESSY USA



Champagne Roland Champion Carte Blanche Blanc de Blancs Grand Cru, France (\$73)

Sourdough, nuts, lemon, and a hint of mushroom make up the complex nose of this 100% Chardonnay, which rolls out on the nervy palate to reveal the savorier side of apple and pear before a finish of bitter orange zest. **92**

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Risata Moscato d'Asti DOCG, Italy (\$15)

Fruity, frizzante, and all-around festive, this is what Moscato d'Asti is all about. Peach, honeysuckle, and a touch of sweet citrus on the nose reverberate on the lively (if not long) palate, where flashes of cream soda and lychee appear.

90

PRESTIGE BEVERAGE GROUP



SPOTLIGHT ON

Champagne Bruno Paillard

Alice Paillard is very much of the “if it ain't broke, don't fix it” school of winemaking. As the second-generation owner of Champagne Bruno Paillard points out, “My father always told me it takes three generations to build a Champagne house, so I am very cautious on the time it takes . . . to reach people's mind and palate and heart, and a lot of it's about continuity and consistency”—especially when it comes to the winery's flagship expressions. Its Premier Cuvée, she says, “is the wine my father had in mind when he founded the maison. He built his portrait of a wine that for him was what he wanted to say about Champagne.” While



PHOTO: STUDIO CARRELLI

reflecting “mainly terroirs that are on the chalk,” it also shows “all the nuances and subtleties of different villages. It's a wine of assemblage—of terroirs, of grapes, and of years. . . . That's why I can really say it's a capsule of Champagne through our interpretation.”

As for the Premier Cuvée Rosé, she adds, “The ambition [is] to show the delicacy of Pinot Noir: Sometimes we say Pinot Noir gives the body and structure and Chardonnay gives the finesse and elegance, but Pinot Noir has great, great finesse. . . . Yes, you will see an explosion of fruitiness, of crisp, small red berries . . . but also a lot of tension and salinity on the finish, which is very surprising for a rosé. It's a wonderful companion to food—that's the bottle I always have ready.”



Champagne Bruno Paillard Première Cuvée, France (\$60)

Talk about balance: Clean and streamlined yet lively and zesty, this pinpricked bubbly's got it. Yeasty aromas quickly make room for scents of tarte tatin, almond, and ripe Bosc pear; the latter of which carries over to the palate amid the ribbons of lemon zest and oyster-shell minerality that define the finish. **93**



Champagne Bruno Paillard Première Cuvée Rosé, France (\$65)

Despite the pale orange hue, this is no shy wine: It's bright yet graceful from stem to stern. Plenty of strawberry and red currant meet hints of cranberry, pink grapefruit, and sugared brioche on the nose, while more strawberry commingles with blood orange on the palate, whose fullness is balanced by clean acidity and mineral hints. **93**

SERENDIPITY WINE IMPORTS



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Treasure Trove

THE COLLECTION OF RARE WINES AT SAN YSIDRO RANCH'S **STONEHOUSE RESTAURANT** IS WELL WORTH THE TREK *by Jamie Knee*

I RECENTLY HAD the opportunity to visit San Ysidro Ranch, known by locals simply as The Ranch. This bit of Santa Barbara, California, history is where none other than John F. Kennedy and his wife, Jackie, spent their honeymoon; the resort has also hosted such personages as Winston Churchill and now regularly welcomes Hollywood celebrities who come here for relaxation, privacy, and the ultimate Santa Barbara experience.

Tucked away on 500 pristine acres in the Santa Ynez Mountains, The Ranch is home to the Stonehouse Restaurant, set in a rustic stone structure that looks like a charming old home but was actually a 19th-century citrus-packing house. A recipient of *Wine Spectator's* Grand Award, which recognizes extraordinary commitment to wine service, it offers an unrivaled dining experience featuring locally driven cuisine and a world-class wine cellar holding 12,000 bottles from 70 different regions across the world.

"Everyone gets stellar service here, in addition to wine, food, and an experience they can't get elsewhere," says Tristan Pitre, Stonehouse's wine director. The Advanced Sommelier, who has worked in the industry since age 16, notes that the restaurant's guests are truly interested in the story behind it and regularly make the hour-and-a-half drive north from Los Angeles to visit; there's even a large influx of guests from San Francisco in addition to established clientele from around the globe.

Pitre works the floor five nights a week, which gives him insight into what his patrons are looking for. He says many of the locals are interested in trying wines from Europe, and there is no shortage to choose from on the 2,200-label list—including a vertical of Domaine de la Romanée-Conti Montrachet. However, travelers to the area quite often want to

PHOTO: JAMIE KNEE



Tristan Pitre is wine director at the Stonehouse Restaurant on San Ysidro Ranch.

immerse themselves in the wine and food of the area. Pitre will recommend items such as lobster and fresh-caught uni from local waters or dishes made with chanterelle mushrooms grown on the property, paired with Sta. Rita Hills Chardonnay or Pinot Noir. Younger diners, meanwhile, are eager to taste low-intervention and/or sustainable wines from the Santa Ynez Valley. While the list offers bottles at every price point, the sweet spot is in the \$200–\$300 range; there are also 16 wines by the glass.

In 2018, Stonehouse's cellar was destroyed in a mudslide. The restaurant closed for a year, and the cellar took an additional year and a half to rebuild. The silver lining was that Pitre had the op-



PHOTO COURTESY OF SAN YSIDRO RANCH

The Stonehouse wine cellar houses 12,000 bottles from 70 different regions.



PHOTO COURTESY OF SAN YSIDRO RANCH

The historic San Ysidro Ranch is located on a 500-acre property in the Santa Ynez Mountains.

portunity to assemble it from scratch, including low-intervention producers like Sicilian wine COS and Canadian brand Pearl Morrisette in its expansion. But the pièce de résistance is a collection of every vintage of Château Petrus from 1945—its first after World War II—to 2016. With the 1945 Petrus being one of the most counterfeited wines in existence, it is extremely rare to have certified-authentic bottles. Guests are excited to see the collection, and Pitre takes a few groups down to the cellar to get an up-close look nightly.

It's just another example of Stonehouse's commitment to service, as the staff, in Pitre's words, considers it "their job to tend to your every need, so you can be immersed in your dining experience and the people you are with." SJ

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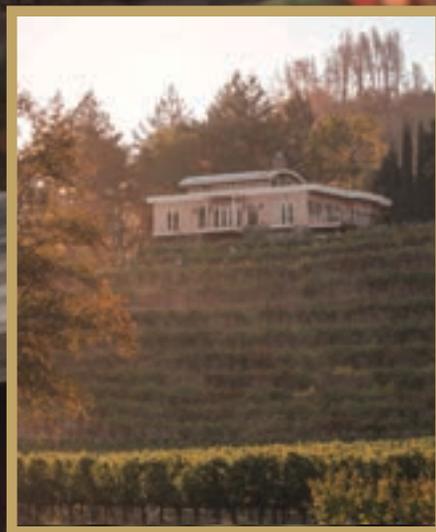
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Winemaker and viticulturist Graham Wehmeier was hired in 2020 to help write a new chapter at Diamond Creek Vineyards—making him just the third winemaker in the heritage brand's history.

a cut ABOVE

**PROMOTING RESPONSIBLE
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WORLD-CLASS TERROIR AT
NAPA VALLEY'S
DIAMOND CREEK
VINEYARDS**



The offices and winery of Diamond Creek Vineyards are nestled on the hillside overlooking the Red Rock Terrace Vineyard.



A sign along Diamond Creek points to the three vineyards equidistant from that spot.

STORY BY MICHELLE BALL / PHOTOS BY JEREMY BALL

Since its inception in 1968, Napa Valley's eminent Diamond Creek Vineyards has had only three winemakers. The 20-acre vineyard was established by Al and Adelle "Boots" Brounstein on Diamond Mountain at a time when nearly all other producers were cultivating the valley floor. As Al prepared the land for planting, he noticed a film of red and white dust on the tractor. After having it tested, the couple divided the property into three blocks based on their distinct soil profiles, naming Volcanic Hill for its fluffy, volcanic ash; Red Rock Terrace for its rocky, red-tinted soils rich in iron; and Gravelly Meadow for its pebbles strewn across an ancient riverbed. Growing Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, and Cabernet Franc, they kept the wines separate for their first vintage in 1972 to see if there were noticeable differences in the profiles. The distinctions were obvious and dictated the creation of Diamond Creek Vineyards' signature wines: single-vineyard Cabernet Sauvignons named for the soils imprinted on their character.

Since the majority of the vines are over 50 years old, yields are exceedingly low, resulting in roughly 2,000 cases per year; as a result, allocations are quite limited and there is never a shortage of demand. Every cluster is precious, leaving no room for error—yet 2020 had other plans.

When Graham Wehmeier was entrusted with the role of winemaker and viticulturist at Diamond Creek Vineyards that year, he could not have imagined that the wildfires that ravaged the area would yield any silver linings, especially since the winery was less than halfway through harvest when the Glass Fire erupted on September 27. Yet while many growers chose to leave their fruit on the vines, knowing the smoke would likely render them worthless, Wehmeier saw it as an opportunity to experiment and learn. "I would never ever call [2020] a gift, but we made the most from it," he reflects one year later, having concluded his second vintage at the historic property. Although 2021 offered dramatically lower yields—roughly 1 ton per acre in some blocks—the fruit quality was exceptional, and the insight the new winemaker gleaned from 2020 helped fast-track his understanding of the vines.

"By playing around with ripeness, pick dates, different extractions, temperatures, and maceration times, it was just incredible what I was able to try without having to worry about ruining it, because it was already ruined," he explains. Although the



Nicole Carter was recruited for her extensive experience in Napa and Sonoma and now leads the Diamond Creek team as president. She also oversees the other wineries in the Roederer USA portfolio, including Merry Edwards.



Over half a century old, Diamond Creek's gnarled vines yield only a few precious clusters each.

flavors were still obscured by smoke taint, these trials provided insight into texture and tannin quality that could have taken him years to learn otherwise.

One of the more critical findings for Wehmeier regarded the soil's impact on the wines' personalities. Volcanic Hill is more powerful, producing the consummate Napa expression with dense tannins and dark plum character; Red Rock Terrace, by contrast, offers more elegance and lively red fruit. So he adjusted his fermentations and macerations for each, extracting more from Red Rock Terrace and less from Volcanic Hill. The result? "Well, they actually end up the same [as before]. The terroir is so strong, you could never turn Red Rock into Volcanic. You can try [to] make a bigger Red Rock, but it gets uncomfortable since that's obviously not what it's meant to do. Same for Volcanic: I liked pulling back on extraction and taking a light touch with that one, but it's still never as elegant as Red Rock. It still wants to be a powerful, dense type of Cabernet," says Wehmeier.

This finding reinforced the importance of site at Diamond Creek and guides Wehmeier's overarching philosophy that, in his words, "a lot of winemaking is just

letting the vineyard be itself and getting out of the way as much as possible." This is a rather convenient tack to take in a winery where space is limited, he acknowledges: "With hillside tannin, you don't need a lot of time in the tank . . . [or] a lot of maceration, and extended maceration has never been a part of the formula here." Each vineyard's wines are kept separate and fermented in small, open-top fermenters; luckily given the space constraints, the blocks they come from ripen sequentially due to differences in aspect and temperature. The winemaking process, including *élevage* for 20 months in new French oak, is consistent across all expressions, which one could argue offers a pure encapsulation of the terroir; but Wehmeier still hopes to make some subtle shifts in the future to further accentuate each site's character.

A Winemaker With a Viticulturist's Mentality

Like everything in 2020, the interviews for Wehmeier's position took place over Zoom. The process was a joint effort between the French team of Louis Roederer, which acquired Diamond Creek in March of that year, and Nicole Carter, president

of Diamond Creek and Roederer USA. In replacing incumbent winemaker Phil Steinschreiber, who had been there since 1992 and assisted in the interview and transition process, "we had sketched a profile in our minds of what the personality type is here. You've got a very famous heritage brand, but we do a lot of DIY," explains Carter, referring to the all-hands-on-deck mentality of Wehmeier's small crew. "We were also looking for somebody who is both a winemaker and a viticulturist." In other words, because the vineyard is over 50 years old and many of the vines will eventually need to be replaced, they needed someone with the knowledge to assess the property through a winemaker's lens.

Wehmeier previously managed the vineyard teams at both Cornell Vineyards and Futo Estate, boutique producers known for mountain-grown Cabernet Sauvignon. In comparison to their wines, he says, "The style that [Diamond Creek is] going for is more classic, more finessed, perhaps [with] slightly lower alcohol, but really just . . . elegant Cabernet that has something more in common with perhaps the older Cabernets of California. It's not purely focused on power and density—it's looking at more of a complete package."

Since Wehmeier joined Diamond Creek, he's walked the vineyards daily, marking the vines with colored flags to assess which will need to be replanted, which can be used to collect cuttings for new plants, and which will benefit from updated trellising. Wehmeier notes that the clusters are currently quite exposed, which was likely needed in the past to encourage ripening. But with climate change increasing the frequency of intense heat waves in Napa, that's less of a challenge, so he aims to shift back to a system with higher leaf coverage and possible head-training for some of the new plantings.

In addition to his plans for the vineyard, he's hoping to make some minor adjustments in the winery, specifically by partnering with barrel coopers that offer what he calls "more transparency in the oak"

A Forgotten Treasure in the Cellar It's not often that a wine is bottled and forgotten in the cellar—especially at a winery whose production is as tiny as Diamond Creek's. Made as an experiment only five times in the producer's history, the Three Vineyard Blend remained undisturbed for years until president Nicole Carter came along and found about 200 cases of the 2013 vintage; after she tasted through the library, "I just sat back and said, 'We have to release this,'" she says, adding that the wine will become a staple in Diamond Creek's portfolio beginning with the 2019 vintage.

in that they make barrels with a relatively restrained impact. “I’m really excited about the site specificity and having the vineyards really pop out when you taste them. But all the wines are really successful [already],” explains Wehmeier, who understands the careful balance between accentuating the terroir in a way that honors the founders’ intentions and pleasing the winery’s loyal clientele. “What I’ve learned in the short time I’ve been here is that Volcanic Hill really wants to be that great Napa Cab—power, density, that’s what it’s all about. Whereas Red Rock and Gravelly, they can do that too, but they might be happier in a scaled-back, more classic sense.”

Wehmeier sums up his vision for the future, shaped largely by those aforementioned trials he conducted in 2020: “We’ve had 50 years of treating all the vineyards almost identically, so we know a lot about [them when] looking back through the wines. I still like that approach, but I also feel like we’re ready to start making some little tweaks in the winemaking . . . that really help bring out the strengths of each rather than treating them the same way.”

The Roederer Chapter

Although news broke in early 2020 that Diamond Creek Vineyards had been purchased by Maison Louis Roederer, a family-owned operation led by Frédéric Rouzaud, the relationship between the two companies dates back over two decades. In 1997, Rouzaud’s father, Jean



Wehmeier scoops a handful of gray earth from the lower section of Volcanic Hill Vineyard.



Three Vineyards, Three Terroirs, Three Personalities

Gravelly Meadow: *Cool | 5 acres planted in 1968 on an ancient riverbed with stony soil | Blue fruit*

“I like to use the word ‘cerebral,’ [as this wine is] sort of a puzzle sometimes,” says Diamond Creek winemaker Graham Wehmeier, who notes that its profile has changed over the years with the warming climate. “To me, the hallmark of this wine is always this beautiful line of minerality that runs right through the middle. It always has a graphite character . . . that distinguishes it from the others,” president Nicole Carter adds.

Red Rock Terrace: *Warm | 7 acres planted in 1968 on iron-rich soil | Pomegranate and blackberry*

“[This wine] has this unique ability to balance between red- and black-fruit flavors,” remarks Carter. Adds Wehmeier, “It’s more about finesse than it is about power for me. It’s still a powerful wine, but power is not what it’s all about. It’s more electric and it often seems fresher to me.”

Volcanic Hill: *Warmest | 8 acres planted in 1968 on fluffy volcanic ash | Dark fruit, including plum*

“[This is] a modern Napa Cabernet—it’s always powerful in terms of its density. What makes it special in the realm of Napa Cab is its incredible tannin structure—this depth, length, and quality of the tannins,” notes Wehmeier.

Claude, held a celebration dinner at La Tour d’Argent in Paris to mark his 30th year as leader of Maison Louis Roederer. He invited representatives from 30 of the world’s top wineries, including the Brousteins, initiating what would become a longtime friendship.

Maison Louis Roederer, which includes the iconic Champagne house of Louis Roederer, is known for focusing on wineries, among them Merry Edwards, Roederer Estate, and Scharffenberger Cellars, with a rich history and maintaining the legacy of their respective founders. In March 2020, it appointed Carter as president of Diamond Creek along with the other prominent members of its U.S.-based

portfolio. “We’ve inherited wines of great terroir, and it’s our job to protect them for the next generation,” explains Carter.

“In some ways . . . the third chapter of Diamond Creek [is] the Roederer chapter,” reflects Wehmeier. “In some ways all the constraints have been removed in terms of [investment]; the sky seems like the limit in terms of what we can do. Really rebuilding for the next 50 years, that’s how I think about it in terms of the vineyard and hopefully the winery.” He notes that between climate change and evolving palates, among other things, many more new challenges lie ahead—but luckily for Diamond Creek Vineyards, the proof has always been in that treasured dirt. **SJ**

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Image courtesy of European Gamacha/Grenache Quality Wines © Chris Martinez

Wine has an undeniable ability to unite people across place and time. Grape varieties, likewise, transcend geographic and historic bounds in unique growing areas around the world. As one of Europe's star native varieties, Garnacha, as it's known in Spain, and Grenache, as it's known in France, plays several roles in quality winemaking in Europe and beyond. Whether it's the featured artist or a supporting actor, European Garnacha/Grenache has become embedded in the fabric of winemaking, particularly in the appellations located in the south of France and in northeast of Spain, where it originated.

Garnacha/Grenache is one of the world's most widely planted grape varieties, but its origins can be traced back to this small corner of the Mediterranean. While it's the seventh most planted grape variety in the world, and the fifth most planted red

variety, nearly 93 percent of the globe's Garnacha/Grenache vines are found in Europe. Its highest concentrations of plantings are in France and Spain, with 54.9 percent and 41 percent, respectively, including an exceptional number of old-vine plantings. While most commonly planted as a red variety (tinta/noir[®]), European Garnacha/Grenache also exists as a white variety (blanca/blanc), grey variety (gris), tintorera and the Peluda variety (aka "hairy Grenache").

This versatile European grape has enough power and grace to stand on its own as a varietal wine, such as in Spain's PDOs Cariñena, Calatayud or Campo de Borja, and it's also prized as an ideal component for blended wines, such as in France's Roussillon Geographical Indications. As a late-ripening variety, Garnacha/Grenache is perfectly suited to Europe's Mediterranean

climate and soils, and it's distinctly influenced by every landscape and microclimate to produce wines of great diversity.



Image courtesy of European Gamacha/Grenache Quality Wines © Grandes Vinos y Viñedos

Generally known as a lush and fruity variety, European Garnacha/Grenache can be used for red, white, rosé, sparkling, and fortified wines.

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In spite of the grape's ability to transform and transcend, its quality and provenance - in any style - is preserved, protected, and guaranteed by the **European Union's Protected Designations of Origin (PDOs) and Protected Geographical Indications (PGIs) quality schemes.**



These classification systems include regionally-specific checks, controls, traceability, labeling, and winemaking guidelines that differentiate products while promoting their place of origin, particularly in terms of traditions, diversity, quality and taste. Five Spanish PDOs, 14 French PDOs, and three PGIs are devoted to Garnacha/Grenache. Each one is distinct in terroir and production techniques, which provides a plethora of quality wines from this part of Europe, all made from Garnacha/Grenache.

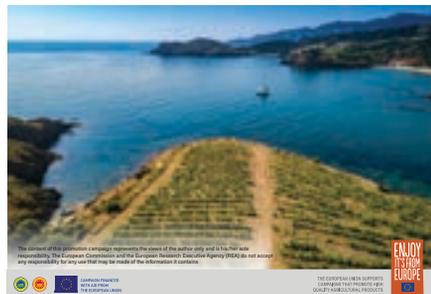
The five PDO regions in northeast Spain are considered the birthplace of Garnacha. DO Calatayud is one of Spain's highest and most arid growing regions, but elevations ranging from 1,000 to 3,600 feet and wide diurnal temperature swings help promote flavor development in limestone and slate soils. To the northwest, DO Campo de Borja's continental climate - with cold winters, and hot, dry, and windy summers - offers ideal growing conditions for Garnacha. One of Spain's oldest winegrowing regions, DO Cariñena, is undergoing a quality revolution as winemakers seek to elevate Garnacha wines through contemporary production techniques. This area, which is also Spain's largest Garnacha-producing region, is known for its significant diurnal temperature shift in summer and for its common brownish limestone over and under rocky subsoil.

Nearby, the small region of DO Somontano at the transition point between the Ebro River Valley and the Pyrenees Mountains - hence its name, meaning "at the foot of the mountains" - is relatively lush with higher rainfall. But it shares hot days, cool nights, and poor soils of mostly pebbles, sandstone, and clay, that makes Garnacha grow successfully. Even more distinct is DO Terra Alta, which experiences a Mediterranean climate that leans more continental in winter, although sunshine and winds are abundant across limestone and clay soils.



In neighboring France, the large region of Roussillon is home to 14 AOPs (Appellations d'Origine Protégée): Collioure, Côtes du Roussillon, Côtes du Roussillon Villages, Côtes du Roussillon Villages les Aspres, Côtes du Roussillon Villages Camarany, Côtes du Roussillon Villages Latour de France, Côtes du Roussillon Villages Lesquerde, Côtes du Roussillon Villages Tautavel, Maury Sec, Rivesaltes, Maury, Banyuls, Banyuls Grand Cru and Muscat de Rivesaltes, as well as 3 IGP in

Garnacha/Grenache produces excellent old-vine wines that are elegant, complex, and age-worthy. Old vines produce low yields with concentrated flavor, small berries that provide more color and structure, and strong, deep roots that can thrive in excessive heat and drought while promoting nutrient uptake. These same characteristics make European Garnacha/Grenache a sustainable variety. The vines are drought-resistant, adaptable, self-sufficient and self-sustaining. Known as a "water-stress" variety, it's not as dependent on rainwater or irrigation, as many other grapes. As recognized at the 2011 World Climate Change and Wine Conference held in Marbella, Spain, **European Garnacha/Grenache is arguably the most eco-friendly grape in the world as climate change poses new challenges in winemaking.**



Southern France: Côtes Catalanes, Côte Vermeille and Pays d'Oc, most of all primarily dedicated to the production of Grenache and encompassing different terroirs, with soil types ranging from sand or schists to clay and chalk.

Having already withstood the test of time, Garnacha/Grenache is uniquely poised to ensure the perseverance of quality European wine production for posterity.

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IN Classical FASHION

OUR “ICONIC GRAPES,
DISTINCTIVE REGIONS”
WEBINAR PROVES
THERE’S NO PLACE
LIKE HOME

by *Jessie Birsehbach*

For our ongoing Winery Close-Ups webinar series, we capped off 2021 with a session on a fittingly grandiose topic: “Iconic Grapes, Distinctive Regions.” Perhaps, though, a more accurate title might have been “Iconic Grapes, Iconic Regions,” as our panel was stacked with renowned producers from areas that, many would argue, produce the most emblematic versions of the grapes in question. (Just for fun, it also included a lone mezcal producer, who asked us to consider a distillate made from agave grown not in Oaxaca but in Michoacán.)

“I think we’re living right now in a golden age of winemaking,” said series moderator and *SOMM Journal* VP of education Lars Leicht. “There are certain grapes and certain areas that are indelibly linked to—and [that] virtually define—each other . . . and we’re going to take a look at some great examples today.”

As usual, Greg Van Wagner was on hand to lend us his expertise through a demonstration of SomGeo, his virtual-map platform, while Lynn Fletcher, COO of SommFoundation, showed up to invite attendees to participate in an essay contest for the chance to win a slew of scholarships.

Grape: Tannat

WINERY: BODEGA GARZÓN

REGION: MALDONADO, URUGUAY

PRESENTER: CHRISTIAN WYLIE, MANAGING DIRECTOR

Christian Wylie sat among tall, tulip-shaped concrete tanks during his presentation. "This is where we ferment the Tannat that we're having today," said the managing director for Bodega Garzón as he swirled the intensely dark wine in his glass. Although it must have been quite cool in the fermentation cellar, Uruguay is itself very cool: In fact, the country is one of the few South American wine regions with an Atlantic climate.

Garzón's expansive winery and resort are located in Maldonado, a growing area heavily influenced by the Atlantic Ocean. "We've got a straight line to Antarctica and we're only around 10 miles from the ocean," Wylie said. "This is important because the cool climate and daily winds make for good growing conditions."

Uruguay falls within what he called the "premium wine belt of the Southern Hemisphere," positioned at the same latitude (around the 34th parallel south) as the Barossa Valley and the Apalta region in Chile's Colchagua Valley. Yet the country receives more rain than Bordeaux. "We still have to irrigate not only because the wind dries the vineyard out



very quickly but because of our soil," said Wylie. "We're sitting on the oldest granite on the planet—it's the mother rock that broke in Pangea. And this meteorized granite is basically like a sponge. We have excellent drainage, so we can't dry farm. We have to drip irrigate." The granite, referred to as *balasto*, forms the ceilings and walls of Bodega Garzón's barrel room. Large granite boulders also pepper the lush estate, along with the occasional palm tree.

On the property's hillside slopes, 500 acres of vineyards are planted. "We have more than 1,500 little plots, and that's impor-

tant, because in one estate we have a lot of different microclimates. And that allows us to grow other international varieties like Albariño or Sauvignon Blanc on the slopes facing the ocean, whereas [on] the slopes facing north, looking at the winery, we have a lot of red grape varieties. Tannat covers the most ground," Wylie said.

He referred to these plots—and the entire estate, for that matter—as a sort of grand experiment. "Bodega Garzón is a vision and long-term commitment for [its] proprietor, Alejandro Bulgheroni," Wylie explained. "He and his wife have been investing in Bodega Garzón for the last 20 years." Contributing to their success, according to Wylie, was the consultancy of Alberto Antonini, the renowned Italian enologist who helped to develop the property. (For more information, see page 86.)

The Bodega Garzón 2018 Single Vineyard Tannat is a 100% Tannat that's fermented with ambient yeast and then aged 12–18 months in untoasted 25- and 50-hectoliter French oak. "We don't want you to taste vanilla or any notes that are not part of our place," said Wylie. "It's very fruity and smooth with a nice natural acidity, thanks to all the rain." The wine is doing incredibly well all over the world, especially in the U.S., the cheeky veteran winemaker added, pointing out that Tannat has 2.4 times more resveratrol than Cabernet Sauvignon—"so cheers to long life."



The sun sets at Bodega Garzón in Uruguay.

Grapes: Corvina, Rondinella, Molinara, Oseleta

WINERY: MASI

REGION: VALPOLICELLA, VENETO, ITALY

PRESENTER: KRISTINA SAZAMA, WINE EDUCATOR, SANTA MARGHERITA USA

Although the first thing that comes to mind when one thinks of Valpolicella is usually the region's rich and powerful Amarone, those in the know understand that its bright and perfumed red blends are equally mesmerizing. "And the wines we're going to talk about today," said Kristina Sazama, wine educator at Santa Margherita USA, "combine both the fresh Valpolicella and distinctive Amarone styles: the Masi Campofiorin and Masi Brolo di Campofiorin Oro." The duo simultaneously confirms Masi's position as a heritage producer in the region and nods to its innovative reputation.

Its almost fabled history dates back to 1772, when the Boscaini family purchased their first vineyard in the small town of Vaio dei Masi, which inspired the winery's name. In the 1950s, Masi helped to introduce Amarone—a wine made by the appassimento process, which involves the partial drying of grapes before fermentation—to the world. Like most Amarone producers, the Boscainis believe this process is very much intrinsic to expressing Valpolicella's terroir.

Today Masi is run by the sixth and seventh generations of the family, who remain committed to not only Valpolicella's traditional methods but also its indigenous grapes. In fact, one of them has the winery to partially thank for saving it from extinction: Oseleta. "It's an ancient grape but was largely abandoned post-phyloxera," Sazama explained. "Oseleta went nearly extinct, but fortunately mixed viticulture is also a tradition in this area," so it made its way into field blends nevertheless. "In the late '70s, Sandro Boscaini found

PHOTOS COURTESY OF MASI



some Oseleta in a friend's vineyard, took cuttings, and started to propagate the vine. The berries [and] clusters are really crazy-small, so there's a high skin-to-juice ratio, which adds structure to the wine."

some Oseleta in a friend's vineyard, took cuttings, and started to propagate the vine. The berries [and] clusters are really crazy-small, so there's a high skin-to-juice ratio, which adds structure to the wine."

The rare grape represents 10% of the Masi Brolo di Campofiorin Oro, which also contains 10% Rondinella; the remaining 80%, of course, is Valpolicella's most revered grape, Corvina, which dominates the region's blends thanks to its higher acid, velvety texture, and cherry flavors. Sazama told the audience to think of the wine as a riserva version of the flagship Campofiorin, as the former includes a higher proportion of partially dried grapes (30% versus 25%). What makes them equally

special, however, is that they go through what Sazama referred to as "double fermentation," whereby fresh grapes ferment conventionally in a tank while others undergo appassimento for a few weeks, after which they are crushed and added to the same tank—"thus inducing a second or double fermentation." At the end of her presentation, the always well-informed educator got a bit poetic: "These are modern wines with an ancient heart," she said. "Masi is showcasing indigenous grapes and delivering the best of the two famous styles of the region: the fresh[ness of] Valpolicella and the integrity of Amarone using those partially dried grapes."





The vineyards of Masi in Valpolicella.



Grape: Nebbiolo

WINERY: PIO CESARE

REGION: BAROLO, PIEMONTE, ITALY

PRESENTER: CESARE BENVENUTO PIO, PROPRIETOR

Piedmont native Cesare Pio was an incredible winemaker, but before he established Pio Cesare in 1881, he was an astute businessman. "In our office, we have one of his old passports with places like Paris and Brussels," said proprietor Cesare Benvenuto Pio. "In the late 1800s [and] early 1900s, it was very difficult to travel, but he understood the importance of bringing Barolo outside of Italy. Pio Cesare was one of the first ambassadors of Barolo in the world." Benvenuto Pio represents half of the fifth generation to run the family-owned winery, with the other half represented by his cousin, Federica Boffa Pio.

Today Pio Cesare produces 400,000 bottles annually from 75 hectares of estate-owned vineyards located in both Barolo and Barbaresco. Located between the two communes, it's the only winery still operating in the heart of Alba, which is surrounded by walls built by the Romans; 2021 marked 140 years of making wine within the ancient enclosure. Benvenuto Pio told the audience that it's his family's commitment to his great-great-grandfather's "recipe" for Barolo that defines Pio Cesare as a producer: "This Barolo is coming from seven different villages," he said, further explaining that those at Pio Cesare take offense when it's called "regular" entry-level wine just because it's not from a single vineyard: "This is seven single



PHOTOS COURTESY OF PIO CESARE

Proprietors Federica Boffa Pio and Cesare Benvenuto Pio.

vineyards in one bottle, and it reflects the philosophy of Pio Cesare and the history of Barolo and Barbaresco," where blending Nebbiolo from different sites is long-standing tradition.

The Pio Cesare 2017 Barolo is made with 100% Nebbiolo, whose name, as Benvenuto Pio reminded the audience, comes from the word *nebbia*, meaning "fog" in Italian. This humid fog is part of the terroir that many believe is the only real home for

the late-ripening grape. The Nebbiolo is fermented in stainless steel and aged in large French *botti* for about 30 months; it spends a bit of time in *barriques* as well. The proprietor noted that 2017 was an underrated vintage for Barolo but also that, thanks to its sourcing from multiple vineyards "and what [we've been] doing for five generations," Pio Cesare is less vulnerable to vintage variation: "Regardless of the vintage, we are always very consistent quality."

Pio Cesare's winery and vineyards in Monforte d'Alba.





The limestone caves of Bouvet Ladubay in Saumur.

Grape: Chenin Blanc

WINERY: BOUVET LADUBAY

REGION: SAUMUR, LOIRE VALLEY, FRANCE

PRESENTER: JULIETTE MONMOUSSEAU, CEO

"Like Cesare, I'm part of the fifth generation to run our family winery," said Juliette Monmousseau, CEO of Bouvet Ladubay in Saumur, as she showed us a fairy tale–like image of the Château de Saumur overlooking the Loire River. "You can see the hill of limestone behind the castle. Its white stone has been excavated from underground galleries [in] this hill. The vineyards grow over this hill." Created during the Middle Ages, the hollowed caves serve as a cellar as well as a symbol for Bouvet Ladubay; what's more, Monmousseau noted, the limestone on which the vines grow imparts a minerally freshness in the wines.

In 2021, Bouvet Ladubay marked 170 years of winemaking in Saumur: The winery was founded in 1851 by Etienne Bouvet and his wife, Celestine Ladubay, with the purchase of 8 kilometers of



the aforementioned underground caves. As for Monmousseau's family, they began making sparkling wine in nearby Touraine in 1886; her great-grandfather purchased Bouvet Ladubay in the 1930s. "We make some still wine, but mostly what we love to do is sparkling," said Monmousseau.

The example she presented was the Bouvet Ladubay Crémant de Loire, composed

of 80% Chenin Blanc (along with 20% Chardonnay) that spends a minimum of 18 months on its lees. Monmousseau told the audience she's tasted Chenin Blanc from all over the world—South Africa and even India included—and found some lovely versions, but she still considers the Loire Valley, as the grape's home, an ideal place for it to grow: "Chenin Blanc adapts to any climate, but mostly it likes a [mildly cool] climate, which is what we have in the Loire. It buds very early but then has a very long cycle, which is why it's also possible to make a late-harvest Chenin. It has relatively small berries and great acidity, which leads to making great sparkling wine."

The CEO is a champion not only of the Saumur AOP but of the Crémant de Loire AOP in general. "The Crémant de Loire appellation's total production will reach 23 million bottles this year. And the appellation as a whole is growing by 5% in vineyards per year. It's really the future for the Loire," she said.



Grape: Pinot Noir

WINERY: CLINE CELLARS

REGION: PETALUMA GAP, SONOMA COAST, CALIFORNIA

PRESENTER: TOM GENDALL, DIRECTOR OF WINEMAKING AND VITICULTURE

Although our tour via SommGeo stopped briefly in Contra Costa County, where Cline Cellars carefully looks after its 100-year-old blocks of Zinfandel, the producer's director of winemaking and viticulture, Tom Gendall, focused on one of its estate vineyards: Catapult Ranch in the Petaluma Gap subregion of the Sonoma Coast AVA.

"The Petaluma Gap is the only region in the world distinguished by its wind pattern," said Gendall. Established in 2017, the young AVA is named after its main geological feature, a coastal mountain opening that funnels powerful winds, averaging about 10 miles per hour, and subsequent fog from the Pacific Ocean into the area. "The [ocean] is only a half-an-hour drive from this vineyard," he noted. "We're picking a month later than the Russian River thanks to the proximity to the ocean, the wind tunnel, and the fog that comes along with it."

It's these conditions that Gendall be-



PHOTO: MEGAN CLINE

lieves contribute to a characterful Pinot Noir: "I love these wines from Petaluma Gap because that extra-long hang time really helps develop a lot of the fruit flavor. So you get

amazing, ripe berry-fruit [qualities]—but with the fog and the wind, you're also getting thicker skins, smaller berries, and more development of flavor. So there's also this wonderful earthy character—a lot of forest floor and mushroom in the wine."

Presented as evidence was the newest addition to Cline Cellars' portfolio, the 2019 Fog Swept Pinot Noir, which contains 86% fruit from the 119-acre Catapult Ranch; the other 14% comes from the estate's Diamond Pile Vineyard, also in the Petaluma Gap. The bright and fresh yet earthy wine aged 15 months in (50% new) French oak.

Cline Cellars sustainably farms its 650 acres of vines in the Sonoma Coast subregion—as it does its other estate properties in Carneros and Oakley—but Gendall noted that its farming practices go well beyond sustainability:

"We're a big family winery and we basically want to do our best. We have our own method of organic farming where we use things like compost teas. We stopped using pesticides and herbicides in the early 2000s and only use sulfur as a fungicide. We've been really hands off in the vineyard since then and we're reaping the benefits today."

PHOTO COURTESY OF CLINE CELLARS

Fog funneled through the Petaluma Gap fills the vineyards of Cline Cellars.

Agaves: Bruto, Chino Silvestre, Cupreata, Espandincillo, Verde, Tequilana, Manso Sahuayo

DISTILLERY: LA LUNA MEZCAL

REGION: MICHOACÁN, MEXICO

PRESENTER: SALVADOR PICAZO CHAVEZ, FOUNDER AND CEO

A mezcal producer might seem out of place at a wine-centric webinar, but La Luna Mezcal fit right in, drawing obvious parallels to winemaking as it strives to reflect its terroir through both varietal and blended mezcals. In fact, its production process may be even more thoughtful and involved than some of the winemaking that takes place today: “We use traditional methods at La Luna,” said founder and CEO Salvador Picazo Chavez, “the same way it would have been produced 500 years ago.”

Much of the mezcal production in Mexico takes place in Oaxaca, but La Luna is located in the mountains of Cotija and Indaparapeo in Michoacán. “It’s a coastal state, and many have said we have a lot of salinity in our mezcals,” said Chavez, whose family is from Michoacán; however, he grew up in Sonoma, California. “So this idea of terroir was always around me—I’m an avid wine drinker.”

In that light, it’s worth noting that, as an artisanal distillery, La Luna is referred to in Michoacán as a *vinata*,

a reference to another historical local term: *vino de mezcal*, or “wine of agave.” Explained Chavez, “Agave is synonymous with mezcal. Mezcal is synonymous with maguey. So this concept of *vino de mezcal* [is that] it was a wine made [from] this plant.”

Established after Chavez’s return to his family’s home state in 2016, La Luna sources six different varieties of agave, some wild and some semi-cultivated: Bruto, Chino Silvestre, Espandincillo, Verde, Tequilana, and Manso Sahuayo, all growing at elevations of over 2,000 meters. Chavez shared an image that showed each as distinct in size and color. Most striking was the Bruto; reaching up to 10 feet, it sometimes takes 25 years to mature. But “they all produce different flavors and aromas,” said Chavez.

Once the mature *piñas* (hearts) of these agaves are cooked in a conical earth oven, they’re shredded and added to an open wooden container with water. Called a *tina* or *pila* depending on its shape, each goes through 100% open-air fermentation with ambient



PHOTOS COURTESY OF LA LUNA MEZCAL

yeast; then the juice is twice distilled in a copper *cazo* and pinewood still (or in a clay pot still). Similar to a wine-making technique, the runoff from the crushed agave is collected by Chavez and his team and fermented separately. The concentrated liquid is added into the *tina* or *pila* on about day three of fermentation.

La Luna offers 20 different mezcal expressions, most of them “ensembles,” which Chavez noted are not cold-blended; rather, the agaves are co-fermented, “which is where the magic happens for us,” he said. **SJ**



The La Luna Mezcal distillery in Michoacán.

Mexican Spirit, CALIFORNIA STYLE

WITH ITS RED WINE BARREL-AGED TEQUILA,
CALIROSA AIMS TO REDEFINE THE CATEGORY

Tequila brand Calirosa was co-founded in 2021 by Maroon 5 frontman Adam Levine, his model wife Behati Prinsloo, and Roberto Real, whose family has been growing agave and running the Tequila Selecto de Amatitán distillery in Jalisco, Mexico, for 80 years. According to Real, they have a saying: *Somos [familia] de campo, arraigados a la tierra como el agave mismo*, which translates as “We are a family of farmers rooted to the land, the same way our agaves are.” His father, Dionisio Real, built the distillery in 1942 “after working the agave fields for many years,” says Real; ever since, his family has been “involved in the business, from growing agave to participating in the production.”

Calirosa got underway when Levine and Prinsloo visited Mexico and tried red wine barrel-aged tequila for the first time. Fascinated by the experience, they decided to start a label of their own; after sampling several examples from distillers in Jalisco, they singled out the juice from Tequila Selecto as the clear winner. Prinsloo says that



Adam Levine, Marina Real, Roberto Real, and Behati Prinsloo at the Calirosa launch party in West Hollywood, CA.

PHOTO COURTESY OF CALIROSA

the couple “kept going back to Selecto, as their story, [their] product quality, and what they stood for really resonated with us.”

The tequila is derived from Blue Weber agave that the Reals farm in calcium- and phosphorus-rich luvisolic soils at over 4,100 feet above sea level. It's relatively warm and arid in the town of Amatitán, though drastic diurnal swings stress the plants, resulting in greater character that in turn creates a tequila with a nuanced profile. The agaves are harvested when fully matured—after seven to nine years—and the piñas are cooked in old-fashioned brick ovens for 30–40 hours. The juice from the caramelized agaves is then fermented for more than two days and double-distilled. The heads and tails of the distillate are removed to leave only the heart, which Real says maintains the true aromas and flavors of the agave.

Calirosa Blanco Rosa undergoes a

relatively brief maturation process of 30 days in California red-wine barrels to produce a liquid that manifests vegetal and herbaceous components along with subtle notes of red berries and roses from the wine, the devil's share of which naturally tinges the spirit a translucent pink. Calirosa Añejo takes on a darker amber hue after being aged for 18 months; woodier notes abound on the palate along with caramel, vanilla bean, orange zest, and cocoa. As for the Extra Añejo, aged for 36 months, it showcases aromas of butterscotch, leather, and honeycomb, with notes of toffee and spiced nuts on the palate.

The Calirosa team has their sights set on redefining the tequila category. And between the Reals' time-tested production quality and Levine and Prinsloo's celebrity, they're likely to succeed—so expect to see the brand on retail shelves and backbars soon and long into the future.



All Eyes on CHAKANA

THIS ORGANIC MALBEC FROM ARGENTINA IS
ONE TO WATCH by David Ransom

Founded in 2002 by Juan Pelizatti, Chakana has quietly gained a global following to become one of Argentina's most respected and awarded wineries. In pursuing his passion for wine, Pelizatti, a former telecom engineer whose family emigrated from Italy's Valtellina region after World War II, quickly took a view that good wines come from the vineyard rather than the winery per se.

You're saying to yourself, "I've heard this before," and you're right, but what sets Chakana apart is that Pelizatti didn't simply hire production personnel to bring his vision to fruition: He enrolled in Schumacher College in the U.K., earning a master's degree in ecological farming and studying under the late Alan York, a key figure in the wine industry's adoption of biodynamic farming principles. As a result of his efforts, all 300 of Chakana's vineyard acres are certified organic and, as of 2016, Demeter certified as well.

Chakana sources its grapes from three estate vineyards of varying altitudes and soil types to make its wines. The largest at 200 acres is Finca Nuna in Luján de Cuyo; situated at 3,120 feet above sea level, it features a soil composition of loam and clay with gravel and limestone. The other two vineyards are located in the Paraje Altamira area of the Valle de Uco, which sits at 3,600 feet above sea level: Finca Ayni (65 acres) and Finca Los Cedros (37 acres), both of which comprise soils of sandy loam and gravel.

Chakana produces about 150,000 12-bottle cases per year at its winery in Agrelo and exports to over 30 countries; about a third comes to the United States. Like most Argentine wine producers, it makes a diverse array of wines, as its climate and soils allow for growing a wide variety of grapes. Bonarda, Cabernet (both Franc and Sauvignon), Chardonnay, and Torrontés all play a role in winemaker Gabriel Bloise's production agenda, with good results across the board.

Not surprisingly, however, it's Chakana's Malbec that stands out from the pack and routinely commands top respect in the global marketplace. Sourced from all three estate vineyards, the Estate Selection Malbec is most recognizable in the U.S.



Chakana 2019 Estate Selection Malbec, Luján de Cuyo, Mendoza, Argentina (\$27)

100% Malbec sourced from the winery's estate vineyards is fermented on indigenous yeasts and aged in 70% used French oak/30% concrete for 12 months prior to bottling. Notes of ripe plum, sour cherry, and gentle spiciness interlace with herbal nuances of lavender and thyme. 13.5% ABV.

KYSELA PERE ET FILS, LTD.

PHOTO COURTESY OF CHAKANA/KYSELA PERE ET FILS, LTD.

Chakana sources its grapes from three estate vineyards: one in Luján de Cuyo and two in Paraje Altamira.

Fabric of the Land

JOSEPH WAGNER'S **QUILT** LABEL IS A TESTAMENT TO HIS ROOTS IN NAPA VALLEY by Allyson Reedy

Tributes can come in many forms, among them poems, recipes, songs, or, as is the case for fifth-generation Napa Valley winemaker Joseph Wagner, a bottle of wine—the medium he knew best when it came to crafting a delicious ode to the region he loves.

Wagner grew up in Napa, where his family has worked the land for more than 150 years. While conceptualizing the lineup of wines for the label he launched in 2014, Quilt, he decided not to focus on a single vineyard and produce yet another expensive Napa Cabernet Sauvignon. Rather, he aimed to spread the love, both in terms of the number of Napa AVAs he incorporated into his portfolio and the number of wine drinkers he could delight by pricing his flagship at an approachable SRP of \$55.

“When I was growing up, Napa was much more of an agricultural community,”

Wagner says. “Wine was a big part of it, but ag took the front seat . . . and I love that part of the community. Over the years it’s evolved into the wine mecca it is today, and while that evolution has brought great things, Napa also started to build up those barriers of wine being an elitist or special-occasion product, outpricing [itself] and bringing more of an ego play to it. Quilt is not just [representing] my family’s history in Cab and growing up around that but trying to bring something to the market that people can have at an accessible [price] and still have that iconic Napa Cab style.”

That style is, of course, bold and fruit forward, which Wagner achieved by blending fruit from multiple sites for not only the Cab but also a Cabernet Sauvignon Reserve, a Chardonnay, and a red blend

PHOTOS COURTESY OF QUILT



called The Fabric of the Land. Showcasing its sources’ diversity of soils, elevations, and climates, he’s imparted abundant complexity into Quilt.

The label has been well received by beverage professionals like Jordan Otterbein, managing partner at River Jetty Restaurant Group, which includes Southern California’s CdM and A restaurants. “Our somms love it because it pairs so excellently and elegantly with our chef’s steaks,” says Otterbein, who also enjoys pouring Quilt at home. “Our restaurants’ atmospheres lend themselves to just wanting and needing a juicy, full-bodied red.”

Quilt is Wagner’s expression of reverence for Napa, one that’s cultivated, fermented, aged, blended, and bottled—which, in our biased opinion, is the best sort of tribute.

Quilt winemaker Joseph Wagner’s family has been in Napa for more than 150 years.



Waxing Poetic

BELLE GLOS CREDITS ITS DISTINCTIVE PACKAGING FOR ITS ENDURING SUCCESS

by Allyson Reedy

The first thing you'll notice about Belle Glos Pinot Noir is the bottle—or, rather, what's coating the bottle. The hand-dipped red wax seal has become instantly recognizable, and with good reason: It covers half the bottle, barely leaving room for the classic script of the label. But if you can peel your eyes away from the stunning presentation long enough to try the liquid inside, you'll promptly notice that the wines in the California producer's lineup are a dazzling expression of their terroir—and that's what will stick with you.

"Our goal is to showcase the diversity of each vineyard site, because they deserve it," says owner/winemaker Joseph Wagner, noting that people call Pinot Noir thin-skinned because "it is very expressive, very prone to showing flaws. But most importantly, it has the ability to capture terroir better than any other grape. . . . All of the sensory thresholds are much lower with Pinot Noir, so you are able to experience the pure essence of one place at a given moment in time."

Given the diversity of soil and climate among the winery's sources, each of Belle Glos' five single-vineyard Pinot Noirs has its own identity. Take the Taylor Lane Vineyard on the far west side of Sonoma County, where daily fog moves in and sits just below the hilltop property, keeping average daily high temperatures down and lengthening the ripening season; in the finished wine, that results in intense flavors of blackberry, tilled earth, and ripe cherry, balanced by bright acidity. The Clark & Telephone Vineyard, meanwhile, is the oldest still-producing vineyard in Santa Barbara County's Santa Maria Valley, and its location on a coastal mesa 13 miles from the Pacific imparts bold flavors of strawberry, clove, and nutmeg as well as a rich texture and long finish.



PHOTOS COURTESY OF BELLE GLOS

Considering that the wines are named for his grandmother Lorna Belle Glos, it's no surprise Wagner strives for high levels of quality. "She was a big part of my life—in fact, my office was her garage until 2014!" he says. "She was a lover of Pinot Noir, and I wanted to create a wine to honor her and our family history."

Now, back to that bottle. Wagner says he was merely trying to differentiate his top-quality Pinots from his entry-level wines when he began generously dipping them in red wax, rather than attempting to make a major statement—but that's exactly what happened, and he credits the choice with helping Belle Glos endure far beyond the Pinot boom of the early 2000s.

"I didn't realize it was such a strong visual play—I just thought it looked good," he says. "It helped keep us relevant through the *Sideways* craziness when every producer came out with Pinot Noir. People may not remember our name, but hopefully they'd ask for the bottle with the red wax drip." Now, 20 years in, they remember the Belle Glos packaging and the name—not to mention the wine. *sj*

Belle Glos Pinot Noir is instantly recognizable thanks to its hand-dipped red wax seal.

On Premise With Belle Glos Clark & Telephone Pinot Noir

Zach Kameron, beverage director, Peak, New York City: "I started tasting Belle Glos ten years ago, really getting introduced to the wines and starting to know the single vineyards. For me, it's about quality, structure, and style. I took time off from the wines and revisited them last year; stylistically, [they're] as beautiful as ever. I think they've become more reserved in their use of oak, which helps the overall profile of the wine. . . . If I'm drinking a Santa Barbara Pinot or one from the Central Coast, I like to feel the essence of that place in the wine, and I've felt like [Belle Glos has produced] very pure expressions of [its] terroir. Our guest reaction to the wines is extraordinary, really. It's very recognizable and iconic packaging, especially [for] the magnum. A lot of people's eyes light up when they see they're getting a wine from a magnum."

Luis Coronado, beverage director, The Langham, Pasadena, California: "Joseph Wagner produces a genuine style of California Pinot Noir that is layered, complex, fruit forward, and rich. I love how he expresses the uniqueness of each vineyard across the Belle Glos brand. . . . We also love the sleek, attractive, recognizable bottles; we pride ourselves on our ability to provide a true luxury experience throughout the hotel, and being able to both display and offer Belle Glos to our guests adds real value to our wine program."

Joe Billesbach

LEAD SOMMELIER, KIMPTON SYLVAN HOTEL, ATLANTA, GA

by Michelle M. Metter



PHOTO: ANDREW THOMAS LEE

THROUGHOUT HIS CAREER,

Joe Billesbach has been compelled by his fascination with the hospitality industry to learn all he could about it from the inside out. He has worked as a cook, bartender, dishwasher, server, wine sales rep, wine director—and the list goes on. Now settled in Atlanta, Billesbach brings his vast knowledge of perfecting the guest experience to the Kimpton Sylvan Hotel.

Q: Tell us about the wine program at the Sylvan. How does your approach differ for its two outlets, Willow Bar and The Betty?

The wine program at the Sylvan is really exciting. I get the chance to work [in] very different venues with completely different concepts. The Betty [presents] a modern take on the classic American “fancy” restaurant wine list: It has a balance of Old World and American wines with a strong emphasis on classic regions. Willow Bar is the complete opposite because it is more focused on natural wines from emerging regions and producers.

Q: What did the past year look like for the property with respect to the pandemic?

[It was] an interesting year. Opening [last] February, we didn't have high expectations, but they were quickly exceeded as our Buckhead neighbors really embraced what we were doing with our new concepts. For the first time in my career, there was no summer slowdown, but now each new [coronavirus] variant is taking a bit of business with it.

Q: What are your predictions for 2022, and how will they affect your approach at the Sylvan?

[It] will hopefully be more of a return to “normal” for us; however, I am being cautious with my outlook. In the end, guests want unique experiences, so I want to provide wines that are just as unique as the food.

Q: What is the wine community like in Atlanta? How are you supporting each other?

The wine community in Atlanta is amazing. It has not only the usual tasting groups on the certificate track but also lots of great wine shops like Perrine's [and] 3 Parks that are engaging and nurturing the next generation of wine professionals.

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

One glass? Burgundy, Henri Jaye 1999 Cros Parantoux, with my wife and daughters. 

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

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Advanced Sommelier Paul Krikorian joined The Lodge at Torrey Pines in La Jolla, CA, in 2011 and now serves as its wine director, restaurant manager, and maître d'.

Setting the Bar for Service in San Diego County

ADVANCED SOMMELIER **PAUL KRİKORIAN** PROVES HE'S THE CONSUMMATE HOSPITALIAN AT THE LODGE AT TORREY PINES

story by Michelle M. Metter / photo by Rafael Peterson

BACK WHEN SAN DIEGO was but a fledgling dining community, there shone a few stars that were culinary sanctuaries for people like me who fawn over the chefs, winemakers, sommeliers, and spirits pros who fill our cups and plates with consumable memories. In those days, I relished any opportunity to head to The Lodge at Torrey Pines, a AAA Five Diamond property located alongside the Torrey Pines State Reserve. Though I don't remember him from my first visit to The Lodge's famed restaurant, A.R. Valentien, it's a distinct possibility that its wine director, restaurant manager, and maître d', Paul Krikorian, was there.

Anyone lucky enough to have been mentored by Krikorian knows that his sense of hospitality was deeply ingrained during 13-year and ten-year stints, respectively, as the wine director at the La Jolla Country Club and the executive chef at Paragon Restaurant Group. His role at The Lodge, where he landed in 2011, is a little bit different than that of a traditional sommelier or wine director position: In

Krikorian's words, "My day-to-day is as much about developing a culture of hospitality, guest relations, and guest retention as it is about wine service. . . . Sometimes the most effective marketing is offering a small complimentary taste of wine to a guest that is very interested in learning about the region, varietal, et cetera—it's just one way we personalize service. My ultimate responsibility is ensuring the guest dining experience is memorable and that guests feel our warmth without [us] being intrusive, as I constantly remind our very excellent staff that it's more important to demonstrate how much you sincerely care than how much knowledge you can recite."

Developing that culture also involves focusing on the "small things," Krikorian adds. "For example, if a guest is unfamiliar with an ingredient, I may bring out a whole dragon fruit or let them smell some za'atar or wild mushrooms. If they are unfamiliar with a particular liquor, I may bring out the bottle, tell the backstory or history, and let them smell and taste. Sometimes the small things make the biggest impact. . . . I think

it's important to give attention to all the guests, not just the squeaky wheels that can dominate our time."

Focused exclusively on California and Oregon wines (with the exception of Champagne), the list features an impressive 300 selections, including over 20 100-point wines, cult favorites, and older vintages that cater to the restaurant's demographic of mostly wealthy, well-traveled older adults as well as younger, highly sophisticated guests with a healthy interest in food and wine. But it's equally important to offer value, says Krikorian. "Whether it's pricing, quality, or just a great story about the wine, it won't matter if the value does not match up."

Krikorian planted his roots in San Diego the moment he met his future wife on his first day in the city 36 years ago, and since then, he's continued to shape its hospitality scene, recently expanding to a series of signature events at The Lodge, including his "Beyond the Cellar" and "Celebrate the Craft" fêtes. A Master Sommelier candidate, he plans to sit for the exams later this year. **SJ**

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Too Tough to Shutter

LAS VEGAS IS BOUNCING BACK, AND SO ARE ITS WINE PROGRAMS

by Richard Carleton Hacker



Pat Rost, wine director at Piero's Italian Cuisine.



Carbone lead sommelier Christian Iliev.

PHOTO COURTESY OF MGM RESORTS INTERNATIONAL



Anthony Ramirez, wine director at One Steakhouse.

TOMBSTONE, ARIZONA, MAY be “The Town Too Tough to Die,” but Las Vegas, Nevada, has definitely become “The Town Too Tough to Shut Down.” Although shuttered for months after the pandemic swept the U.S. in March 2020, Vegas has gradually been reopening, and now its casinos and restaurants are again in full swing. Among them are a number of new hot spots such as Resorts World Las Vegas, a megacomplex with dozens of restaurants on the north end of the Strip; Virgin Hotels Las Vegas, which replaced the former Hard Rock Hotel just off the Strip; and downtown’s Circa Resort & Casino, with its soaring multitier swim complex and the longest outdoor bar on the pedestrian attraction known as the Fremont Street Experience. It all reflects a dramatic rebirth of the hospitality scene, including the return of wine directors and sommeliers to Sin City’s celebrated venues with wine programs actually enriched by lessons learned during the shutdown.

“I was very fortunate to not be working for only about four weeks,” says Alam Leyva, director of food and beverage at Top of the World and The STRAT. “I spent a lot of time with my daughter, Sophia, which was incredible. The one thing that carried over from that experience was gratitude. I appreciate others around me more than I ever have. It reminds me how lucky we are to be doing what we are doing. I get to make people smile with every dish and glass we serve.”

Meanwhile, Anthony Ramirez, wine director at One Steakhouse, used his downtime to more closely explore the relationship between food and wine. “I love trying new recipes,” he says. “I then got to practice my wine pairings with [my home-cooked] dish of the night. Knowing what flavors and aspects pair well in food and wine is essential for any sommelier.”

After returning from their mandatory hiatus, many wine directors also observed new trends among their customers. “This year specifically, I’ve seen a notable increase in guests ordering wine by the glass,” says Pat Rost, wine director at Piero’s Italian Cuisine. “Our patrons are shortening their dining experiences and are not as likely to sit at a table after dinner to open a second and third bottle of wine for their party. To me, this means we need to keep our wine-by-the-glass selection unique and assorted, not just our bottled offerings.”

Troy Grenstiner, lead sommelier at Tom Colicchio’s Craftsteak in the MGM Grand, is also a believer in maintaining his by-the-glass program, what with 40-plus selections on offer. However, he adds, “We are seeing that people [staying] at home due to the pandemic now want to let their hair down. They haven’t dined out and are now going for the big bottles they have desired.”

Master Sommelier Douglas Kim, director of wine at MGM Resorts International, has some of the same observations. “Many of our fine dining restaurants, such as Picasso, Joël Robuchon, and Le Cirque, offer . . . multiple tiers of by-the-glass wine pairings,” he says. “[But we are also] seeing an increase in demand in more high-end bottles. The rarer an item or a wine, the more the guest wants it.”

“I will say that we do have a higher demand for more expensive wines,” agrees Hristian Iliev, lead sommelier at Carbone Las Vegas. “It appears that many people focused on learning about wine during the pandemic, which now leaves them curious and open-minded about regions, varietals, and producers. I rarely come across guests that are set in their wine choices, while in the past it was much more common.”

In short, says Kim, “It seems everyone is hungry for wine knowledge, not just our sommeliers. We are starting to roll out a program where anyone within our company can get tuition reimbursement for successfully completing a wine course such as [those] provided by the Court of Master Sommeliers, Americas.”

But he remains mindful of his clientele’s comfort zones. “While we took a pause on purchasing last year, the increase in tourism has changed our strategy to keep up with demand,” Kim adds. “When we consider building back our wine programs, I think of it as ‘back to basics’—[we’re] continually think[ing] of classic and recognizable regions such as Napa, Champagne, Burgundy, Bordeaux, Piedmont, Tuscany, Rioja, et cetera. While we still love smaller producers and regions [that] we support, we want to have a sense of familiarity for our guests when they look at a wine list.”

Vegas’ wine programs may have changed during the pandemic, but some things never do. **SJ**



Troy Grenstiner, lead sommelier at Tom Colicchio's Craftsteak.



Alam Leyva, director of food and beverage at Top of the World and The STRAT.



Douglas Kim, MS, director of wine at MGM Resorts International.

PHOTO COURTESY OF MGM RESORTS INTERNATIONAL

PHOTO COURTESY OF MGM RESORTS INTERNATIONAL

A Sequence of Events

THE MATHEMATICAL CALCULATION KNOWN AS THE GOLDEN RATIO IS THE MIRACLE THAT CONNECTED GUSTAVO GONZALEZ WITH **MIRA WINERY**

by Meredith May

Mira Winery winemaker Gustavo Gonzalez believes numbers influence our lives more than we may know.

WHAT DO MATHEMATICS and nature have in common? The Fibonacci sequence offers one famous example: The ratio of the numbers in the sequence, as it goes to infinity, approaches what's known as the golden ratio, enabling mathematicians to calculate a logarithmic spiral whose growth factor equals the golden ratio. This spiral can be found in seashells, pine cones, leaves and petals, and the seeds of a sunflower; it's also found in architecture, galaxies, and, surprisingly, the stock market.

The numerical phenomenon has been a source of fascination for winemaker Gustavo Gonzalez for many years—one he happened to share with entrepreneur Jim “Bear” Dyke Jr. in addition to their mutual passion for wine. They discovered this when they met by chance in 2005 and hit it off, and although Gonzalez was satisfied with his prestigious position as red winemaker for Robert Mondavi Winery, where he was working under famed winemaker Genevieve Janssens, the opportunity arose to form a partnership with Bear to start their own Napa Valley winery.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF MIRAWINERY





Mira Winery owner Jim "Bear" Dyke Jr.

"We didn't even realize the meaning of the name we chose," Gonzalez explains of the moniker they adopted, Mira Winery. "We discovered it was from the Latin root for 'miracle' and is also Greek for 'destiny.' I can't believe no one chose this name before we did."

Their first fruit purchase was from Hyde Vineyard in Carneros, and Gonzalez is now also making single-vineyard, single-varietal wines, including a Cabernet from Schweizer Vineyard, next to Shafer's famed Hillside vineyard in the Stags Leap District (it's the first wine the Schweizer family has allowed to feature their name on the label), and another from Alsace Vineyard in Oakville. He's also replanting Mira's estate vineyard in Yountville to head-trained, dry-farmed Cabernet Sauvignon as well as Petit Verdot, Merlot, Sauvignon Blanc, and his newest projects, Sauvignon Gris and Cab Franc, the latter of which he partially used to make a white wine during the 2021 vintage.

"The idea is to take small steps in the sequence," Gonzalez says of establishing the small-production winery he's long been preparing for. "I keep building on the number before, and the leaps become larger and larger: That's what I think in terms of my relationships with growers and grapes. I have dreams to create a broad scope of wines. That dream is becoming more of a reality than a miracle." S

Mira Winery and its Hospitality House in Napa Valley.



Mira Winery 2017 Cabernet Sauvignon, Yountville, Napa Valley (\$75) The nose is so opulent that there are great expectations for lushness of flavor and texture: Scents of violets, graphite, tilled soil, and toasted oak are almost indulgent. Brilliant, fleshy boysenberry and a coating of licorice initiate the bold flavors and determined grip. Violets and slate tannins run in tandem with black olive, soy sauce, sage, and black pepper. From the Chandon Vineyard, a site with abundant morning sun and good water retention, it aged for 18 months in (75% new) French oak. **96**

Mira Winery 2016 Syrah, Hyde Vineyard, Carneros, Napa Valley (\$89) A striking lineup of scents, including ripe plum, dried violets, and sandalwood, takes one's breath away. Black pepper alights gently on dark plum as base notes of clove and cedar mingle. Grilled meats burst in on the satin-textured palate, and a tingle of spice is left behind on the dense and lengthy finish. **96**

Mira Winery 2015 Petit Verdot, Alsace Vineyard, Rutherford, Napa Valley (\$89) Both savory and floral, this big single-vineyard red aged in (50% new) French oak and comes in at 15.5% ABV. A pop of brushy heather, violets, leather, and tilled earth is a telltale sign of the wine's prowess and magnitude. Clove and other holiday spices work in tandem with teeth-coating tannins as anise, bittersweet chocolate, and black plum swirl in the liquid maelstrom. **93**



Mira Winery 2015 Cabernet Sauvignon, Schweizer Vineyard, Stags Leap District, Napa Valley (\$233) "This is a Grand Cru vineyard by Napa Valley standards," winemaker Gustavo Gonzalez points out. "With Shafer's Hillside as a backdrop, the volcanic soils from 25-year-old vineyards slope down to the Silverado Trail. The wine reminds me of St. Julien, with more acidity than Oakville and Rutherford." Indeed, the high pitch of the fruit proves that point. Dappled with white and red pepper and a whisper of cumin, the wine offers a flourish of violets, black plum, and graphite. Espresso whooshes in on the finish, percolating with dark berries and earthy sage. **94**

Prescription Vineyards' 2019 Clarksburg Chardonnay and its newest release, the 2019 Alexander Valley Cabernet Sauvignon, were on offer at its recent tasting in Austin, TX.



House Call

PRESCRIPTION VINEYARDS EXPLORES NEW MARKETS AS PART OF ITS “WE LOVE TEXAS TOUR” *story and photos by Lori Moffatt*

JOEL QUIGLEY, DIRECTOR of marketing communications for California brands Lloyd Cellars and Prescription Vineyards, is feeling celebratory these days. The latter label recently inked a deal with Republic National Distributing Company (RNDC) for distribution in Texas, a state that ranks fourth in U.S. wine consumption behind California, Florida, and New York. And Quigley knows that Texans, speaking broadly, have a taste for lush, bright Chardonnays and juicy, velvety Cabernet Sauvignons—which is just what the doctor ordered, as those flavor profiles happen to be Prescription’s specialties.

A project from grower James Reamer and Lloyd Cellars owners Rob and Bonnie Lloyd, Prescription originated in 2014 as a Chardonnay house. Rob, a winemaker, has a thing for Chardonnay; enticed into the wine business after earning a degree in economics, he eventually earned a master’s in enology at the

University of California, Davis, and went on to make wine for some of California’s most successful Chardonnay producers before founding his own brands. For his Prescription Vineyards 2019 Clarksburg Chardonnay (\$20), he aims for lushness “balanced with perfect acidity,” in his words, obtained from grapes grown in a cool microclimate along the Sacramento River. The newest addition to the lineup, the Prescription Vineyards 2019 Alexander Valley Cabernet Sauvignon (\$30), owes its soft tannins and juicy notes of blackberry to a south-facing vineyard set at an elevation of 1,700 feet in the Mayacamas Mountains.

Last November, in the wake of the deal with RNDC, Quigley and director of sales Greg Moore brought Prescription to Texas as part of what Quigley dubbed the “We Love Texas Tour,” setting out to show the state’s residents how “we enjoy overdelivering on price point,” according to Quigley, who has built a ca-



PHOTO: @SMALTIOMMAVRA



New Waterloo Hospitality Group director of partnerships and community Taylor McClurg, director of hospitality Justin Spencer, and director of brand partnerships Meredith Hubley.



Event attendees filled the Lobby Bar during the “First Thursdays” party at the South Congress Hotel in Austin, TX, where Prescription Vineyards hosted a tasting to celebrate its new distribution deal in the state.



Prescription Vineyards director of marketing communications Joel Quigley and director of sales Greg Moore.



Bray and Lauren Brownrigg, visiting from Oklahoma City, enjoy glasses of Prescription Vineyards during the tasting.

reer on showcasing wine through mediums like music, art, fashion, and film. Kicking off in San Antonio with an event called “Art of the Sip” at the Blue Star Arts Complex, the event series continued to Austin for a “First Thursdays” party at the South Congress Hotel. “We’ve been very active in multiple markets to reach new audiences,” says Quigley. “We’re ready to show RNDC that we have great wine, activity, and strategy.”

Quigley and Moore offered early-bird guests tastes of the aforementioned Prescription wines, and as evening fell and the weather cooled, more than 400 people filled the hotel’s Lobby Bar, party space, and outdoor amphitheater, where local musician Harry Edohoukwa would take the stage later that night. In the bar area, DJ Trey Lopez spun a mix of Latin music, hip-hop, and reggae as guests mingled and enjoyed additional drink specials from Austin’s Ranch Rider Spirits and Rambler Sparkling Water.

The South Congress Hotel is part of the New Waterloo Hospitality Group, which operates hotels and restaurants in Texas as well as in Colorado and New Mexico. “Part of our company brand is that we support the communities we’re in,” says Meredith Hubley, New Waterloo’s director of brand partnerships. “We partner with nonprofits, charities, musicians, artists, and producers . . . all the people that make up the culture of the city we’re in” in order to create an authentically local experience. “We try to keep things fresh by reaching out to musicians, partnering with art museums, or hosting a salon series at a hotel so we’re getting new ideas,” adds Hubley, who plans the company’s experiential marketing events with colleague Taylor McClurg, New Waterloo’s director of partnerships and community. Whether it’s promoting (and paying) performers or showcas-

ing a small local product, “we’re also just really passionate about giving back, and every single one of our chefs and general managers is passionate about it too,” she continues.

This approach of giving back to the community through dynamic cultural events is what attracted Quigley to collaborations with both the Blue Star Arts Complex and the South Congress Hotel as Prescription stakes its claim in Texas. “Nationally, our approach to returning to market focused on partnering with and promoting hospitality businesses hardest hit by the pandemic,” he says. “For us, this was restaurants, lodging, and musicians. Along with partnering on the South Congress Hotel’s ‘First Thursday’ event, we also sponsored Tampa Bay Restaurant Week in June 2021. We plan to contribute to the recovery of the hospitality sector in our own small way throughout 2022.”

{ events }

At Monarch Restaurant in Dallas, TX, Lars Leicht, VP of education for The SOMM Journal, addresses fellow dinner guests Carlos Cisneros, sommelier at Bocca Ristorante in Birmingham, AL; Luis La Torre, Texas Italian wine specialist at Republic National Distributing Company in Dallas, TX; Chris Costas, managing director at Indian Springs Resort in Calistoga, CA; and Jacob Gragg, Ca' del Bosco USA brand ambassador at Santa Margherita USA.



A Toast to Gathering Together

LEADING FRANCIACORTA PRODUCER
CA' DEL BOSCO CELEBRATES A CAUTIOUS
RETURN TO WINING AND DINING

story by Lars Leicht / photos by Jason Kindig

IT WAS, AS they say, just like riding a bike. After 20 months of webinars and meetings via Zoom, Skype, Webex, and FaceTime, the sommelier community was finally able to gather in person again for TexSom, an industry conference held annually in Dallas, Texas. Socializing not only came naturally to this bunch but was downright therapeutic. And what better way to toast the occasion than with a glass of bubbly from Ca' del Bosco during a dinner co-sponsored by *The SOMM Journal*?

Jacob Gragg, national ambassador for the renowned Franciacorta producer, was there to do what he does best: bring a group of professionals together to discuss wine in its ultimate context, at the table. He worked closely with host venue Monarch Restaurant to craft a celebratory and memorable evening.

It kicked off with the first of several courses sent out by the chef, featuring Alaskan king crab served in a lettuce wrap with Vietnamese herbs and in a Dallas rendition of what would otherwise be called a New England crab roll. That was accompanied by fritto misto, which was another perfect foil for the first wine: the Ca' del Bosco Cuvée Prestige, also known unofficially as Edizione 42. (With the 43rd release of the multi-vintage sparkler in 2021, Ca' del Bosco initiated the Edizione designation to indicate the subtle evolution of a wine that otherwise reflects a consistent house style through blending.) Made in 2017, the Edizione 42 also contains small lots from the 2014, 2015,



Kyle Kazor, sommelier at Monarch Restaurant, uses a levagraffa to remove the staple closure on a bottle of Annamaria Clementi Franciacorta Riserva for Kristina Sazama, wine educator at Santa Margherita USA.



Carlos Cisneros; Luis La Torre; Ken Freeman, on-premise wine specialist for the Regal Division of Republic National Distributing Company in Dallas, TX; Rob McDonald, wine director at the High Museum of Art in Atlanta, GA; and Jacob Gragg share a laugh during the dinner.



At Monarch Restaurant, Alaskan king crab was paired with Ca' del Bosco's Maurizio Zanella proprietary red blend.

and 2016 harvests; it's composed of mainly Chardonnay from 149 different vineyards in nine of the 19 communes in the Franciacorta zone. "What you have here is a wine that represents the place as much as the producer," Gragg said, "or certainly represents the region in the lens of Ca' del Bosco." This particular disgorgement (there are about three per year) spent 30 months on the lees, he added.

He also pointed out that though the wine is labeled Extra Brut—defined as containing 0–6 grams per liter of residual sugar—it could at 1.5 grams technically be classified as zero dosage (0–3 grams). "This wine embraces that Chardonnay fruit but does so in completely dry execution," he noted.

The next wine, elegantly presented by Monarch sommelier Kyle Kazor, was the 2016 Satèn. Ca' del Bosco proprietor Maurizio Zanella was an advocate for the Satèn designation, now trademarked exclusively in Franciacorta for bottle-fermented wine that 1) is made only from white grapes (predominantly Chardonnay—85% in the case of Ca' del Bosco); 2) has less than five bars of pressure; and 3) contains less than 12 grams of residual sugar. Ca' del Bosco's rendition has .5 grams per liter, again making it technically a zero-dosage wine.

Gragg defined it as food friendly: "It's meant for the table." When it was accompanied by more king crab with gnocchi in a pink sauce, the table took notice. "The richness and roundness of the pasta, with that subtle sweetness of the crab, goes

very well with the Satèn," said Ken Freeman, on-premise wine specialist for the Regal Division of Republic National Distributing Company (RNDC). Luis La Torre, Italian specialist at RNDC, agreed: "It's not just the lees contact, it's not just the barrel—there are layers of complexity."

Carlos Cisneros, sommelier at Bocca Ristorante in Birmingham, Alabama, mused aloud as to why Franciacorta was not more well known—thereby kicking off a lively discussion as to how best to educate trade and consumers. "First, we as somms need to gain the trust of the customer," said La Torre. "Champagne tends to be a heavy-handed, top-end thing," Freeman opined. "There is so much sparkling wine from around the world that people can enjoy." Cisneros declared that Ca' del Bosco could "rival anything out there. This is quality-driven wine from Italy."

Gragg pointed out that of the roughly 350 million bottles of Champagne produced, about half are exported, with the U.S. receiving a significant quantity that is marketed more like a big-budget spirit than a wine. Franciacorta, on the other hand, sells nearly 90% of its production in Italy. And though it is not as established or storied as Champagne, it actually imposes stricter rules on its producers. "The rules do not make a good wine," he said, "but the rules set a minimum expectation of what the wine is all about, and that's an important message to get across."

In a departure from the evening's theme, Gragg next presented Ca' del Bosco's 2016 Maurizio Zanella, a proprietary blend of

Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, and Cabernet Franc. It is labeled as a Sebino Rosso IGT, the designation for non-Franciacorta wines coming from the same geographic area. This full-bodied red paired surprisingly well with the centerpiece dish of king crab legs roasted in Monarch's wood-burning oven. It also did justice to a salt-crusted, wood-fired whole fish seasoned with fennel, herbs, and espelette pepper. But for pairing purists, the bistecca alla Fiorentina stole the show, charred on the embers with minimal seasoning in the Tuscan fashion.

The feast culminated with the 2011 vintage of Ca' del Bosco's icon wine, Annamaria Clementi, a Franciacorta Riserva made with 75% Chardonnay, 15% Pinot Noir, and 10% Pinot Blanc. Boasting 0 grams per liter of residual sugar, it is a true zero-dosage expression sourced from 22 vineyards with an average age of 33 years. Rather than being enclosed in a cage, the cork is sealed with a sort of staple, a traditional closure that requires a custom "staple remover," or *levagraffa* in Italian. Naturally, Kazor had one on hand: Of the 180 six-packs that came to the U.S., Monarch received the highest allocation of the vintage.

As is often the case when somms are one's dinner companions, the evening was as educational as it was festive. Grateful for both the gastronomic experience as well as the insight into Franciacorta, our guests left Monarch inspired to bring their stories back to their own customers. "It's our job," said Cisneros, "to convince our guests that this wine is amazing." ❖



Ernst Loosen's Pinot Project

J. CHRISTOPHER WINES
ARE MADE IN THE
WILLAMETTE VALLEY WITH
OLD WORLD SENSIBILITY

by Meridith May

ERNST LOOSEN IS known for his Mosel wines. As a longtime fan of Pinot Noir, however, the German-born winemaker also established a presence in Oregon's Chehalem Mountains as the new owner of J. Christopher Wines in 2010. Handcrafted in small lots, these exceptional wines are made with fruit sourced from his *Appassionata* estate vineyard as well as from other great sites in the Willamette Valley, including vineyards in Dundee Hills and Eola-Amity Hills. They possess an Old World style, showing perfect acidity, minerality with an earthy core, and, above all, refined elegance.

The Appassionata estate vineyard in the Chehalem Mountains is home to J. Christopher Wines.



J. Christopher 2018 Basalte Pinot Noir, Willamette Valley, Oregon (\$30) Named for the rocky basalt soils of the Willamette, this full-bodied red is sourced from both the Chehalem Mountains and Dundee Hills AVAs. Scents of red licorice, cinnamon sugar, and black cherry are captivating. Joining high-wire acidity and a full mouthfeel, notes of pencil shaving intermingle with tart cranberry and tobacco leaf. **92**

J. Christopher 2018 Lumière Special Selection Pinot Noir, Eola-Amity Hills, Willamette Valley, Oregon (\$40) The Pommard clone comprising this brightly lit red comes from two vineyards in the Eola-Amity Hills AVA, where a notch through the Oregon Coast Range allows cool ocean winds to keep temperatures low. Volcanic soils influence the flavor and texture of the juice, and although it's aged 18 months in barriques, notes of just-ripened cherry, persimmon, sweet tobacco, and white pepper stand tall thanks to high-toned acidity. Cinnamon and clove tickle the palate on the finish. **92**

J. Christopher 2018 Pinot Noir, Bieze Vineyard, Eola-Amity Hills, Willamette Valley, Oregon (\$60) With a longer hang time, fruit in this high-elevation vineyard ripens slowly, and its acid structure and savory nature come through in droves. As bold as it may be, this red also possesses freshness (again, the high-toned acidity speaks here). Black cherry, spiced cedar, and sage are highlights within a dense mouthfeel; the transition at mid-palate is an even bigger, juicier experience. A dusting of cinnamon has a monumental effect on lush berry fruit. **94**

J. Christopher 2018 Pinot Noir, Medici Vineyard, Chehalem Mountains, Willamette Valley, Oregon (\$60) The oldest blocks of this vineyard were planted in 1976; J. Christopher took it over in 2015, converting it to organic viticulture. While there's earthiness on the nose, the initial burst of red tea and cranberry is startling. White pepper and a chalky minerality; ribbons of red floral tones; and a garden of chervil and sweet basil with a hint of soil adds personality-plus. Winemaker Tim Malone describes this vineyard as "a culmination of soil, age, clone, aspect, and long-term farming decisions that has reached its pinnacle. I find the wines from this site are some of the best expressions of place that we work with." **96**

PHOTO COURTESY OF J. CHRISTOPHER WINES

Amador Cellars winemaker Michael Long prunes his vines.

PHOTO COURTESY OF AMADOR CELLARS



Flavors of the Foothills

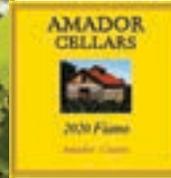
KNOWN AS THE “HEART OF THE MOTHERLODE,” AMADOR COUNTY’S SHENANDOAH VALLEY PROVES THAT ITS WINES ARE LIQUID GOLD—INCLUDING SOME TRUE GEMS FROM **AMADOR CELLARS**

by Meridith May

LARRY LONG AND his wife, Linda, bought a 22-acre site in Amador County’s Shenandoah Valley in 2000, when it was planted to only 15 acres of Zinfandel and a few acres of walnuts. Since then, the estate—which sits at 1,500 feet above sea level—has been grafted over, and 7 of the 15 vineyard acres have been replanted to an acre each of Tempranillo, Grenache, Mourvèdre, Syrah, Aglianico, Sangiovese, and Sauvignon Blanc in the Sierra Foothills AVA. The Longs’ son, Michael, is now winemaker, overseeing the remaining 8 acres of Zinfandel, in which seven different clones are interplanted for complexity.

“My winemaking style has been evolving since I took over for my dad,” explains Long. “We are believers in taking a hands-off approach to winemaking and spending most of our time in the vineyard to ensure the finest ingredients are coming out. . . . At crush, we don’t add anything to our must other than dry ice, depending on the lot. More and more of our fermentations over the years are conducted with native microflora.”

Tasting through these wines, we see what Long looks to accomplish in terms of fresh, lively character: “I love sensual and authentic wines, which is a big reason why I’m so adamant about adding and taking away as little as possible from our wines,” he says. “For the most part we do not filter our wines unless the style is unstable, such as partial or no malolactic fermentation. We do not fine our wines; instead, we appropriately bottle age before release. Additionally, we believe in racking our wines as little as necessary, allowing the natural elements of the wine to soften and enrich [it].”

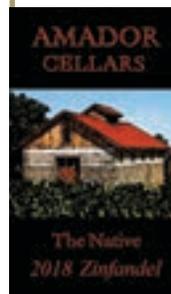


Amador Cellars 2020 Fiano, Shenandoah Valley of California, Amador County (\$28)

A distinctive nose of sunflower seed and salted honeydew melon precedes a palate that’s creamy, nutty, and savory. The good body weight and intense flavors of this complex wine, including baked pear and pine nut coated in creamed corn and orange peel, culminate in a long finish. **92**

Amador Cellars 2017 Reserve Grenache Noir, Shenandoah Valley of California, Amador County (\$30)

Fennel, oregano, and rosemary season bright notes of raspberry. Taut acidity alerts white pepper, tomato leaf, rhubarb, and orange peel to perk up the palate, which ends on an earthy note. Superb! **93**



Amador Cellars 2018 Native Zinfandel, Shenandoah Valley of California, Amador County (\$36)

The use of native yeast and aging in neutral barrels emphasize both sense of place and the varietal character of this sublime Zinfandel. Tilled soil, wild strawberry, black-peppered cedar, and bright yet earthy mushroom bloom from the glass. The wine closes on a salty mineral component. **92**

Amador Cellars 2016 Tempranillo, Shenandoah Valley of California, Amador County (\$32)

Rhubarb and beetroot are elegantly appointed on a chalky bed with a fine acid structure. This juicy red is wired with a pop of white pepper along with beautiful blue and red floral tones on the nose and palate. Red-tea tannins, spiced cedar, and a spark of matchstick and flint complete the journey. **94**

An Elegant Turn of Praise

THE WINES OF **TURNBULL'S PETER HEITZ** SPEAK WITH DISTINCTION

by Meridith May

THANKS TO ARCHITECT William Turnbull, the late founder of Turnbull Wine Cellars, a tribute to Napa Valley Cabernet has a home in Oakville. When Patrick O'Dell, a newspaper publisher and vineyard owner, acquired the winery in 1993, he added three prestigious growing sites to its estate vineyard at Turnbull Home Ranch: Leopoldina and Fortuna vineyards, also in Oakville, and Amoenus Vineyard in Calistoga.

goal was to ensure that everything we did in the vineyards and the winery shone a spotlight on the depth and diversity of these extraordinary sites."

Turnbull's 2019 reds have now been released, and they are impressive, big beauties. Never having tasted the brand's flagship Black Label Cabernet Sauvignon, I was honored to sit down with Heitz to discover its awe-inspiring quality; he

Heitz sees a "holistic balance" in the wine despite its youth. As he put it, "The goal is to create elegant, enduring, and structured wines that are rooted in our estate vineyards while striking that perfect balance between interesting and delicious."

In parting, Heitz turned to me with some praise of his own. "As a 14th-generation vigneron, I am both passionate and practiced in the growing and crafting of wines that convey their sense of time, place, and purpose with authenticity; in my years as a winemaker, I have come to realize that such wines don't always tell their own stories very loudly, and that it can take the eloquence of an accomplished wine writer to convey what makes them so fascinating," he said. "Writers are an essential partner in sharing these stories and sustaining an audience for these more intimate wines. While what's in the bottle must always stand on its own merits, without a clear and knowledgeable voice to carry the news from the fields and cellars, many of the very finest wines would languish, their stories unheard." SJ



Turnbull winemaker Peter Heitz.

Turnbull's reputation is further enhanced by 14th-generation winegrower Peter Heitz, who has been overseeing its small-production, terroir-driven winemaking since 2007. "With four remarkable vineyards on some of the most cherished land in Napa Valley, Patrick had established an unrivaled estate program for a small winery," says Heitz. "As winemaker, my

claimed this vintage is the best in his 15 years as winemaker. The grapes for this 100% Cabernet Sauvignon are sourced from both Leopoldina and Fortuna, but it's Leopoldina—which climbs upwards of 860 feet atop the Oakville Bench, where it sits on red volcanic soil with high iron content—that has the dominant voice here (91%).

The Leopoldina Vineyard climbs upwards of 860 feet atop the Oakville Bench, where it sits on red volcanic soil with high iron content.

Turnbull 2019 Black Label Cabernet Sauvignon, Napa Valley (\$160)

This bottling is a selection of individual barrels that prove "dark and hedonistic," in winemaker Peter Heitz's words. With dark chocolate-covered cherry leading the way, Black Label is brooding, but its nature is more sensual than temperamental. Graphite and cassis smooth out the meaty mouthfeel, bathed in spiced plum and violets. As deep and haunting as this wine is, it rises to a crescendo of brightness on the finish. **98**



Parallel WINES

RECAPPING OUR WEBINAR ON WINEMAKING IN THE SOUTHERN HEMISPHERE

by Jessie Birschbach

There are 32 countries located south of the equator; yet it's no surprise that all but one of the wineries presented in the latest installment of our Winery Close-Ups webinar series, "Southern Hemisphere: Location Is Key but Elevation Can Be Pivotal," are South American. From Chile's reputation for well-made, value-driven wines to Argentina's status as the fifth-largest wine producer in the world, South America has certainly created a name for itself in the New World—as has South Africa with its incredible Cabernet Sauvignon and more.

In his introduction, moderator and *SOMM Journal* VP of education Lars Leicht examined the meaning of the webinar's title, questioning whether winemakers in the lower half of our globe operate in essentially the same manner as their northern counterparts: "Is winemaking in the Southern Hemisphere about mirror images or a brave new world? Terroir changes but basics remain the same, with parallels to be drawn—pun intended."

As much as we appreciate our readers' support of this series, which is presented in association with SommFoundation, you've been missing out if you haven't been watching it live, as the organization has been giving away essay contest scholarships as well as awarding cash prizes and access to Greg Van Wagner's SommGeo wine-map platform. For more information on upcoming installments, visit sommjournal.com.

WINERY: Viñas Queirolo

Location: Peru

Presenter: Luis Gomez, winemaker



Had the webinar audience taken a sip of the velvety, concentrated Viñas Queirolo 2018 Intipalka N° 1 each

time winemaker Luis Gomez said the word “desert,” we’d have likely gone through the entire bottle of the Peruvian Malbec/Tannat blend. But how can we blame him: Peru’s Ica Valley (Valle de Ica)—widely considered to be the most prestigious wine region in the country—is certainly arid, owing its climate to two major influences. The first, the Andes Mountains, “are like a big wall preventing humidity and rains from the east, especially from Brazil and Bolivia,” said Gomez, “but most important is the marine current in the Pacific Ocean” known as the Humboldt Current, which “stirs up the cold water from the bottom of the sea and brings it to the surface.” This not only cools the air off the coast but prevents precipitation, especially in southern Peru, according to Gomez.

And yet the grapes grown in the



vineyards of the Ica Valley thrive, especially Malbec and Tannat, developing to possess considerable aging potential. Located roughly 37 miles from the Peruvian coast, Viñas Queirolo’s 600-hectare estate straddles the Ica River and is surrounded by hilly dunes. Considering that the valley sees less than 20 millimeters of rain every year and more than 350 days of sun, it’s no wonder that the wine’s name, Intipalka,

translates to “sun valley.” “Most important for the quality of grapes is the high thermal range” between the highest and lowest temperatures, which is “more than 18 degrees,” said Gomez.

Situated at 500 meters in altitude, the winery’s mountain vineyards benefit from a rocky, calcareous soil profile, resulting in wines of higher concentration compared to its flat vineyards roughly at sea level, whose mix of sandy, limestone, and clay soils produces wines with more acidity. These differing characteristics work to Gomez’s benefit when it comes to blending, he noted.

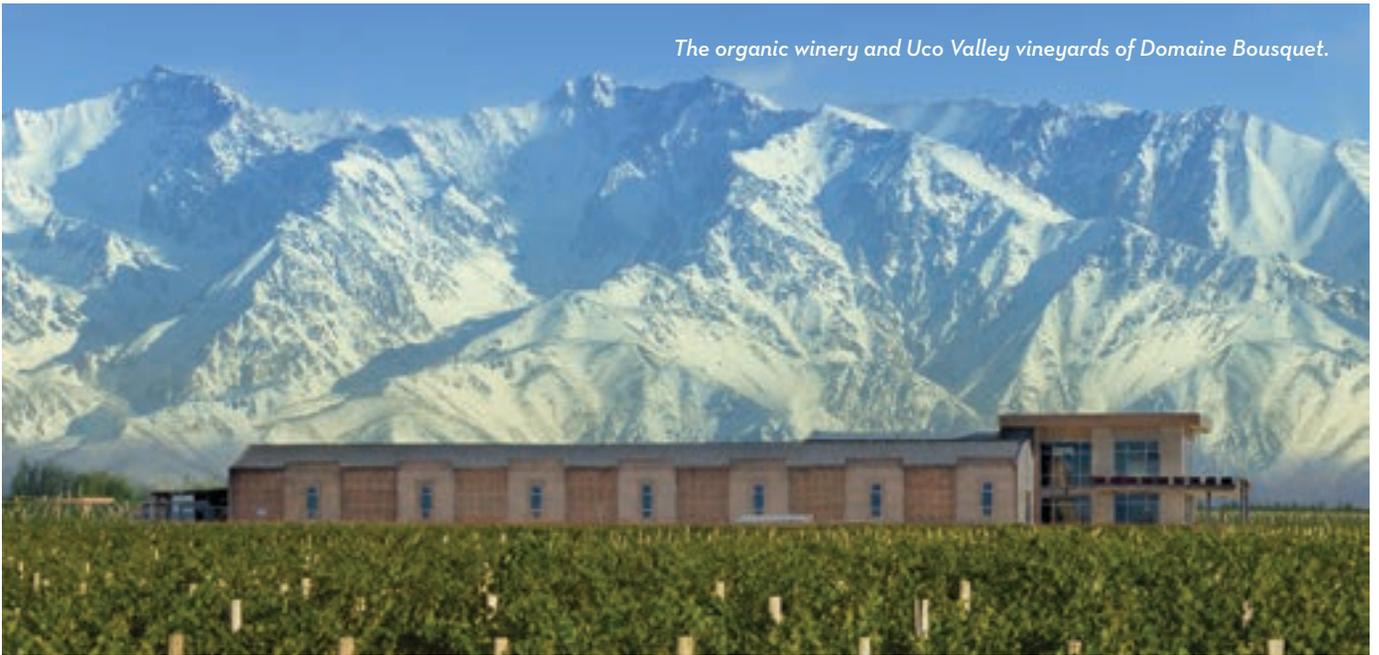
The Queirolo family established Viñas Queirolo in 1880, selling their wines and pisco in their namesake tavern in the district of Pueblo Libre. Following nearly a century and a half of expansion, acquisition, and, more recently, renovation, the winery is run today by the third generation of the family, along with viticulturalist Alejandro Sejanovich, Gomez, and, of course, the desert. Drink!

Viñas Queirolo 2018 Intipalka Gran Reserva N° 1, Ica Valley, Peru (\$50) This showpiece blend of 55% Malbec and 45% Tannat, sourced from high-elevation desert vineyards that influence its concentration, is luxury unleashed. Aromas of cherry, coffee, and terroir come through. The acidity is augmented by flavors of sour cherry, while earthy notes of soy sauce, mulberry, beetroot, and blackberry are deep and inviting. **95** —*Meridith May*



The Hotel Viñas Queirolo is situated within the vineyards of Viñas Queirolo.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF VIÑAS QUEIROLO



WINERY: Domaine Bousquet

Location: Uco Valley, Argentina

Presenter: Franco Bastias, chief agronomist

Leicht grinned as he described Franco Bastias as “a man who knows his rocks.” The young and vivacious chief agronomist for Domaine Bousquet laughed at the description, but Leicht wasn’t joking: The majority of the crop-production expert’s presentation on the winery, which is Argentina’s largest producer and exporter of 100% certified organic wines, examined the topic of soil from multiple angles.

Domaine Bousquet’s 270-hectare site in Tupungato, Mendoza—a Geographical Indication (GI) within the Uco Valley—was established by Frenchman Jean Bousquet, who first planted vines there in 1997. Bousquet was attracted to the previously untapped area’s sandy soil and the high-desert conditions, factors he knew would help to mitigate vine disease, and in 1998, he and his team discovered a water table 495 feet below the surface of the property—an indispensable resource for farming in the desert.

Although Bousquet’s daughter Anne and her husband, Labid al Ameri, have been involved with the winery for years, they have had full control since 2011. The couple has helped to develop what they call a “360-degree sustainability commitment” that not only concerns farming



organically but aims to meet goals regarding the reduction of Domaine Bousquet’s carbon footprint and water use as well as community development and employee capability programs. These range from obtaining a Fair for Life certification in support of fair trade and corporate responsibility to the donation of over \$113,000 to local children’s homes and assistance for those experiencing economic hardship and social exclusion.

This year, Bastias noted, Domaine Bousquet is taking its natural practices a step further and has begun converting some of its vineyards to biodynamic farming; it has also helped over 30 of the winegrowers from which it sources grapes with the transition to organic farming.

Bastias shared an image offering a bird’s-eye view of three alluvial terraces

within Tupungato. The second terrace, where Domaine Bousquet’s vineyards are located, includes calcareous soils that over time have formed into a hard rock called *caliche*, which Bastias strongly believes is ideal for growing Cabernet Franc. “I know you expect us to talk about Malbec, but we want to talk about Cab Franc. I think it’s a huge expression in the Uco Valley, and thanks to the calcareous soil, we make beautiful [varietal wines from it],” he said, noting that Domaine Bousquet’s Gaia Cabernet Franc is grown at 4,000 feet in altitude near the foot of the Andes.

Domaine Bousquet 2019 Gaia Cabernet Franc, Gualtallary, Mendoza, Argentina (\$20)

Made from organically farmed grapes in the Uco Valley, this wine offers an expressive and inviting nosing of herbs, pomegranate, rose, and tilled soil. It’s charming from the start, with notes of mocha, cherry, sandalwood, and heather appearing within a streamlined mouthfeel with enough weight to balance the concentration of flavor. Chalky tannins keep the palate engaged. **93** —M.M.



WINERY: Keermont

Location: South Africa

Presenter: Alex Starey, winemaker



“We’re what some would refer to as a boutique winery,” said Alex Starey, who’s served as winemaker for Keermont in Stellenbosch since 2005. To be more precise, Starey and 14 other team members—including the Wraith family, who purchased the two plots of land encompassing 370 acres in the Western Cape in 2003—work closely together to produce about 6,500 cases a year from 70 acres planted to vine.

Stellenbosch is world renowned for both its beautiful landscape and its Cabernet Sauvignon, and Keermont is no exception. Rather than share slides filled with stats, Starey offered picturesque images of the producer’s steep, terraced vineyards crawling their way up both the north-facing side of Helderberg Mountain and the west-facing side of Stellenbosch Mountain.

The mountains create a sort of amphitheater around the winery and its vineyards, which are surrounded by lush vegetation and harbor 13 different varieties of grapes that perform well in the area’s microclimate. “We’ve got pretty warm



[and] dry summers and cold, wet winters,” Starey noted. “The average rainfall here at the farm is about 1,000 millimeters. Being in the valley, you have cool air that settles in at night, so we have big temperature variations between cool evenings and then quite warm days. We believe this leads to very good tannin development and color development[, with] quite good sugar accumulation as well.”

The rainfall combined with the water-retentive red clay loam soils—layered



over time from the gradual erosion of the mountains—means Keermont rarely needs to water the vineyards from one of the neighboring springs. “We’ve got a high clay content and the soils [are] fairly acidic. This creates red wines that are full-bodied [and] generally quite high in tannin and color,” said Starey.

As evidence of this, he presented the deep, dark, and structured Keermont Cabernet Sauvignon, noting that he and his team try to use traditional practices

Keermont’s vineyards in the Stellenbosch region of South Africa.





PHOTOS COURTESY OF KEERMONT

The Keermont winery.

like open-top fermentation with wild yeast for the winery's reds. "We don't do a lot of mucking around—no adding acid or enzymes," said Starey. The wine then spends about four to six weeks on the skins before it's pressed, aged in mostly used French oak, and bottled unfiltered.

Starey described the Cab that results—and all Keermont wines for that matter—as "a little more Old World, but with the power that comes with [the] New World because of the sunlight that we get down here."



Built in 1920, Kaiken's winery is located within the Luján de Cuyo region of Argentina.

WINERY: Kaiken

Location: Argentina

Presenter: Gustavo Hörmann, manager and chief winemaker

 "To really understand Kaiken, you must first understand our founder," said chief winemaker Gustavo Hörmann. "Aurelio Montes founded Viña Montes [in Chile] in 1987, but after a while he got restless and decided to explore the region of Mendoza." Traveling back and forth across the Andes inspired the name of Montes' Argentine winery, founded in 2002: Caiquén are wild geese that migrate over the same mountain range, crossing over both Chile and Argentina.

Kaiken's mission is to represent the best terroir of its home country, particularly Mendoza, the region that produces roughly three-fourths of Argentine wine. The producer owns property in the Uco Valley, Salta, and Luján de Cuyo subregions; its winemaking facilities are located in the latter within the district of Vistalba at the foot of the Andes. The winery, built in 1920 with large river rocks and brick, is capable of producing 7 million liters of wine.

Certified sustainable through Bodegas de Argentina and vegan through The Vegan Society, Kaiken owns and manages two vineyards within Luján de Cuyo that take advantage of the area's silty loam soils, which help to mitigate vine disease: a 28.5-hectare site in Vistalba and a 70-hectare vineyard roughly 1,828 meters above sea level in Agrelo. Planted with classic grapes like Malbec, Cabernet Sauvignon, Cabernet Franc, Sémillon, and Sauvignon Blanc are less common varieties such as Ancellotta and Marselan; there are also plantings of Bonarda, which is the second most-planted grape in the country and is genetically related to Corbeau (aka Douce Noir) from southeast France.

Hörmann also drew attention to Kaiken's 150-hectare Los Chacayes Vineyard within the Tunuyán district of the Uco Valley, whose 36 hectares planted to vine include Malbec, Cabernet Sauvignon, Petit Verdot, and Cabernet Franc. The agronomist noted the difference in soils in this property alone: "In the north bank . . . we have the oldest geological formations, around 80 million years old, which give a lot of mineral character to our wines. The south bank is younger [and] full of large boulders. The wines we made from there [show] . . . very dark fruit with some hints of spiciness and [also] express a lot of minerality," Hörmann said while presenting the Kaiken 2018 Ultra Malbec.



PHOTOS COURTESY OF KAIKEN

WINERY: Antigal Winery & Estates

Location: Argentina

Presenter: Miriam Gómez, head winemaker



5,300 feet) as well as its sandy soils and hot, dry climate. La Dolores Vineyard, for example, experiences “high solar exposure, so the grape skins are dramatically thicker” than vineyards at lower elevations, said Gómez, adding that this produces “very strong character in color, concentration, and structure not only for the red wines but for the whites too.”

Gómez explained that the Uco Valley can be further divided into high zones and lower zones. The former offer coarser, more shallow soils and great sunlight intensity, while the latter have more fine-textured soils like clay and silt as well as lower temperatures, which translate to

higher acid levels in the grapes. Reflecting the high zone are Antigal’s Los Dolores (3,900 feet) and Doña Ángeles (3,400 feet) estate vineyards; its La Nonna estate vineyard in Maipú at “just” 2,800 feet, meanwhile, represents the lower zone.

Antigal’s UNO label is a 100% Malbec made with a blend of grapes from the winery’s Uco Valley properties. “UNO Malbec represents those everyday heroes and celebrates the uniqueness of each individual, inviting you to be the one, to be yourself, to connect with others in the community, and to tell many stories with our wines. We say, ‘Choose one, tell many,’” Gómez concluded.

 Owned by the Cartoni family, Antigal was established on the site of a historic winery in Maipú, Mendoza, whose origins date back to 1897.

The 125-year-old landmark, one of the oldest wineries in Argentina, was restored in the early 2000s and now houses a state-of-the-art facility with a gravity-flow system that allows for a largely hands-off approach to winemaking.

From vineyards in the Uco Valley (Gualtallary and La Arboleda) and Maipú, Antigal boasts a distinctive portfolio that seeks to showcase the most authentic expression of its terroir. The brand has won numerous international awards while earning a global reputation for its unique packaging, including the metal #1 created from barrel staves on the front of its premium ONE and UNO lines; it also remains committed to sustainability and continuous improvement.

The Uco Valley, a western subregion of Mendoza, is known for its high-elevation vineyards. The flagship ONE label offers two single-vineyard 100% Malbecs from Antigal’s estate properties: the La Dolores Vineyard in the Gualtallary district and the Doña Ángeles Vineyard in the La Arboleda province. “In the Uco Valley, we are known for our high-quality wines,” said Miriam Gómez, who ranks among the most respected and accomplished Argentine winemakers.

This quality is the result of the region’s elevation (ranging from roughly 2,800 to



Antigal 2018 UNO Malbec, Mendoza, Argentina (\$15) Deep garnet color and a rich, aromatic nose. Silky and fresh, with tangy, succulent style; notes of blackberry and spice; and good depth. A charming Malbec at a great price. **91** —*Anthony Dias Blue*

PHOTOS COURTESY OF ANTIGAL WINERY & ESTATES

WINERY: Gimenez Mendez

Location: Uruguay

Presenter: Sebastián Gonzatto, export area manager

A panoramic view of Gimenez Mendez's vineyards in Uruguay.



As Gimenez Mendez's export manager, Sebastián Gonzatto, shared a slide revealing Uruguayan traditions like beef, fútbol, tango, and dulce de leche, he added that "the best-kept secret about Uruguay is how we can produce a soft, elegant, food-friendly wine from a very tannic variety such as Tannat."

Although the country doesn't have an official appellation system, it does of course encompass different growing areas, including the district of Canelones not far from the Río de la Plata, which harbors about 66% of Uruguay's vines. But perhaps the most interesting thing about its wine industry is that of its 1,271 registered vineyards, an estimated 928 (73%) are under 5 hectares, meaning that many are family-owned.

The Giménez Méndez family are among these growers. Having run a wine business since 1950 in the capital of Montevideo, Luis Alberto Giménez eventually established Gimenez Mendez in Canelones with his wife, Marta Méndez. The couple set out to create world-class Uruguayan wines, bringing along nearly all of their family members in pursuit of their mission—including Marta's son Mauro Giménez Méndez, who makes the wine with Luis Giménez Méndez and Gastón Vitale. Described by her family as being as "powerful as Tannat," Marta became the first president of the Wines of Uruguay promotional organization and helped to build Gimenez Mendez to its current annual production of 700,000 bottles sold in 25 countries.

All of Gimenez Mendez's grapes are



hand-harvested from one of its three estate vineyards, adding up to 80 hectares in total: Los Cerrillos, Montevideo, and Las Brujas, the latter of which is 25 kilometers from the Río de la Plata and was described by Gonzatto as the winery's "most important vineyard." All three properties sit on rich, water-retentive Uruguayan clay, which prevents the need for irrigation. "However, in the summer, the soils dry out," said Gonzatto, "allowing the plants to be subjected to a moderate water deficit, which stops [vine] growth and allows for accumulation of sugar and other components in the berries." Cool winds from the south and southwest, meanwhile, contribute to a prolonged ripening period.

Although Gimenez Mendez is known worldwide for its tamed yet concentrated Tannat and is the leading exporter of Uruguayan Malbec, Gonzatto presented the Gimenez Mendez Sauvignon Blanc during the webinar. The V-shaped lyre training system that the producer employs provides shade for the grapes to retain their signature acidity: "We've been very successful exporting this beautiful Sauvignon Blanc," said Gonzatto. *SJ*

Gimenez Mendez 2020 Alta Reserva Sauvignon Blanc, Canelones, Uruguay (\$24)

This unoaked white shines with green herbs, grapefruit zest, pea tendrils, and superb acidity and shows exotic floral notes within a steely mid-palate. A pop of nectarine on the finish adds to its crystal-clear clarity. **91** —M.M.



Gimenez Mendez 2017 Alta Reserva Tannat, Uruguay (\$31)

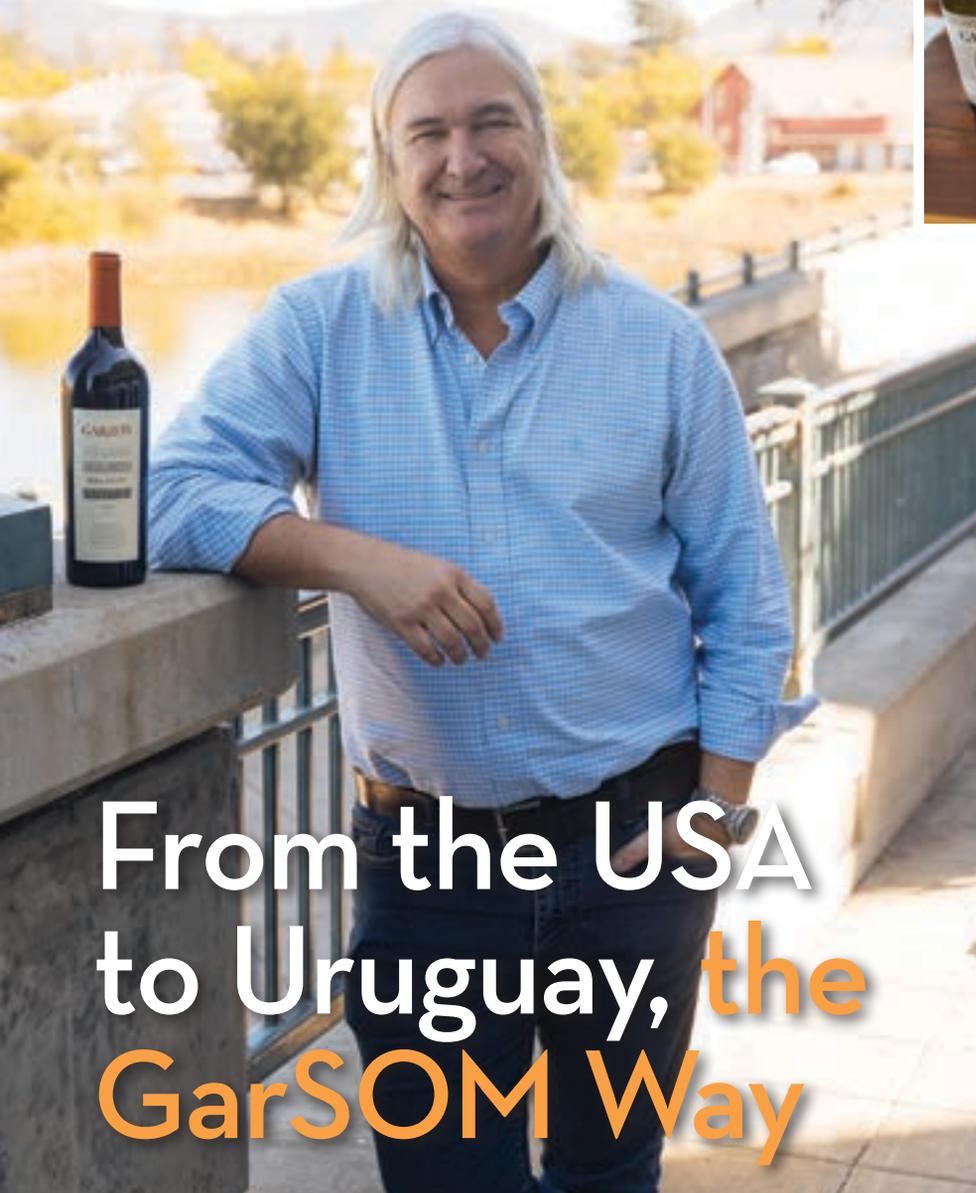
This iconic grape of Uruguay—considered one of the "healthiest" varieties due to its high levels of antioxidants—shows itself here as tarry and chalky, with blue sage and black plum appearing within a shadowed, haunting frame. It becomes tamer on the mid-palate, revealing brown sugar, cedar, and boysenberry. Aged nine months in French and American oak. **93** —M.M.



KYSELA PERE ET FILS, LTD.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF GIMENEZ MENDEZ

Christian Wylie is managing director of Bodega Garzón in Uruguay.



With lifted minerality and a saline edge, the Bodega Garzón Albariño Reserva makes a stellar match for oysters.

From the USA to Uruguay, the GarSOM Way

INTRODUCING A NEW PROGRAM FROM **BODEGA GARZÓN** THAT AIMS TO INVIGORATE, ENGAGE, AND EDUCATE THE FINE WINE COMMUNITY

story by Jonathan Cristaldi
photos by Alexander Rubin

CHRISTIAN WYLIE, THE managing director of one of Uruguay's most celebrated wineries, Bodega Garzón, is keenly aware that those in the restaurant business have been hit especially hard by the events of the past two years—and he wants the trade to know that the producer, which is part of the Alejandro Bulgheroni portfolio, has been considering ways to lighten the burden.

To that end, its team has cooked up an intriguing idea. If you're an on-premise fine wine buyer, you could find yourself participating in GarSOM—an invitation-only trip to Uruguay to take place annually. Held in partnership with renowned Argentine chef Francis Mallmann, the winery's

culinary ambassador; it will include not only educational components focused on both viticulture and the winemaking process but also an emphasis on food and wine pairing and appearances from guest educators and speakers.

Typical restaurant roles have shifted due to the pandemic, and Wylie says he's seen "a real camaraderie and focus [among those] putting in long hours and doing more jobs than they'd signed on for—like beverage directors and somms cleaning and bussing right along with the rest of the staff. We want to bring these hard-working people on the excursion of a lifetime. This is not just a trade trip, it's also to enjoy some much-needed R&R!"

For those new to Garzón, which debuted in 2016, it's perhaps best described by Wylie, who has been there for all six harvests and refers to it as "paradise on earth." The winery is situated in Uruguay's eastern Maldonado region, roughly 11 miles from the Atlantic Ocean and the coastal towns of Punta del Este and José Ignacio, which are popular resort destinations among celebrities and wealthy travelers. The proximity to the ocean ushers in a cool, breezy maritime climate that is "quite Mediterranean, somewhere in between Galicia and Bordeaux, but we get more rain because latitude-wise we're a bit closer to the equator," explains Wylie.

Garzón's 4,000-acre estate is divided into over 1,000 parcels, with Tannat, Albariño, and Cabernet Franc comprising the majority of plantings. Its sprawling winery is situated on a 1,000-acre parcel and surrounded by roughly 500 acres of vines treated to numerous microclimates and exposures. The first facility of its kind outside the United States to be completely Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED)

certified, it's replete with not only a hospitality center and hotel boasting eye-catching architecture but also a PGA golf course, luxury wine club, and restaurant designed by Mallmann that features an open pit for traditional wood-fired cooking.

The winemaking program is helmed by legendary consultant Alberto Antonini—"one of my heroes," says Wylie, "who really expresses the terroir of our estate without imparting his own personal preferences." Assisting Antonini is local winemaker German Bruzzone, and while the combined talents of the duo are already ensuring consistency in quality, even better things are sure to come as the vines mature on the estate, snaking deeper into the porous, well-draining soils. "I like to say that the best part of Garzón is the future," Wylie tells me over a plate of oysters at Morimoto Restaurant in downtown Napa, California. "Garzón planted the first crop of vines in the history of this special land, which has a secret weapon," he says, motioning to the ground. "It's what's below," he continues, lowering his voice to a whisper: "Balasto soils, which are meteorized granite—it's like a sponge," storing nutrients while prompting the vines to struggle in a way that eventually yields grapes with immense concentration of flavor and a distinct mineral component.

As he's met with on-premise fine wine buyers recently, he's noticed an interest-



The Garzón 2021 Pinot Noir Rosé Reserva is accompanied by spicy tuna tacos at Morimoto Restaurant in Napa, CA.

ing trend. While beverage directors and sommeliers from San Francisco to Las Vegas to New York City are particularly intrigued by the wines of Garzón simply because "we're in Uruguay and it's something different," Wylie says, he's also been happily surprised by a growing faction of somms who believe that the winery's wide and varied use of Marselan, Tannat, and Albariño is a harbinger of things to come in Bordeaux. As climate change continues to exert pressure on growers clinging to beloved yet more vulnerable varieties, a focus on these grapes, which perform well under climactic stress, makes Garzón seem almost prophetic.

Currently available in the United States are Garzón's six-wine Reserva Range; its Single Vineyard Tier, which includes Albariño, Pinot Noir, Petit Verdot, and Tannat; and its flagship Balasto, a red blend of Tannat, Cabernet Franc, Petit Verdot, Merlot, and Marselan that debuted at La Place de Bordeaux in 2018. The Reserva Range is perhaps the most widely distributed, but the Single Vineyard reds and whites that we explored at Morimoto are taut, energetic, and extremely food friendly. Representing Garzón's terroir at its best, each wine is a selection of the top-performing vineyard blocks for its respective variety.

The Single Vineyard Albariño comes from southern-facing vines that are protected from direct sunlight and less influenced by chilly ocean breezes; the finished wine shows lifted minerality with rich stone and citrus fruit marked by a saline edge. The Pinot Noir grapes, by contrast, are refreshed by those Atlantic breezes and are rooted in mineral-rich soils, which are reflected by deep fruit flavors in the glass. The Petit Verdot vines face north, taking in the maximum available hours of sunlight to reach full maturity and obtain serious concentration and power. And the Tannat is a massal selection from some of the coolest blocks with the steepest slopes, resulting in an elegant yet full-throttle red with layers of red fruit, tobacco, and dark chocolate.

Will you be among those fortunate enough to taste these singular expressions at Garzón? Pending pandemic-related developments and safety concerns, the first trip will take place later this year; those interested will be able to participate in a competition as well as a lottery for a chance to win. To register for updates, visit pacific-hwy.com/garsom. 



Tasting Notes

Garzón 2018 Single Vineyard

Tannat, Uruguay (\$30) Chewy, dry tannins are armed with graphite and espresso. With muscle and grace, this red made from the iconic grape of Uruguay stars in a balanced narrative interweaving bold blackberry and an earth-laden sense of place. Chocolate and sandalwood appear on the finish. 13.5% ABV. **94** —*Meridith May*

Garzón 2021 Albariño Reserva,

Uruguay (\$20) Minerality and salinity prompt rich lime, persimmon, and honeyed pear in this white that brims with personality. The flavors travel all over the palate, zinging with peppery verve. **93** —*M.M.*

Garzón 2021 Pinot Noir Rosé

Reserva, Uruguay (\$20) Extremely expressive notes of rose petal, cherry, and slate give way to watermelon and cantaloupe, which usher in a juicy middle. **92** —*M.M.*

Garzón 2018 Balasto, Maldonado,

Uruguay (\$100) A blend of Tannat, Cabernet Franc, Petit Verdot, and Marselan from the Atlantic coastal region of Maldonado, this remarkably aromatic red has a perfume of chocolate, gingerbread, and plum. Roasted coffee and spiced blackberry are enhanced by a dry tannin structure, while the boldness of the wine is tempered by earthiness that arises mid-palate in a wash of blackberry. Slate and salinity appear on the finish. **96** —*M.M.*

Beaulieu Vineyard chief winemaker Trevor Durling.

Harvest Highlights

FOR OUR FINAL WEBINAR OF THE SEASON, WE WENT BEHIND THE SCENES AT **BEAULIEU VINEYARD** by Stefanie Schwalb

PHOTOS COURTESY OF TREASURY WINE ESTATES



Beaulieu Vineyard assistant winemaker Megan Twitchell.

SEASON FINALES ARE always a powerful draw for TV audiences. Featuring exciting plot twists, they often leave viewers on the edge of their seats in anticipation of what will happen next in their favorite series. (Think *Ted Lasso*.) The same could be said of the final fall episode of *SOMM Sessions*, "It's a Wrap!" Recorded last November, it did not disappoint, with Treasury Wine Estates education manager Gillian Ballance, MS, and *SOMM Journal* VP of education Lars Leicht hosting the discussion of Napa Valley's Beaulieu Vineyard (BV) and its 2018 Rutherford Reserve Cabernet Sauvignon as well as reviewing recent harvests in the region. The webinar also guest-starred Megan Twitchell, BV's assistant winemaker, who provided intel on the winemaking process and shared the highlights of the 2021 vintage.

The Growing Season

The session got underway with a quick primer on the annual growth cycle of the grapevine. "When we talk about the wrap for the harvest, it's important to talk about what got us here in the first place," said Leicht, "because we all know that there are many different phases." In fact, there are seven, and each step is vital in the development of wine grapes: bud burst, flower-cluster initiation, flowering, fruit set, berry development, harvest, and dormancy. "Each of them [has] very specific timing and duration, subject to the grape variety, the climate, and seasonal conditions," Leicht explained. "Harvest comes when you have the appropriate balance of sugars, acids, phenols, and the nitrogen-bearing components. The aromas and flavor compounds start to build and the minerals come into play, whether they're potassium, sodium, iron, or phosphate sulfate. Then picking gets underway, and it's a big, exciting time."

A Review of Vintages Past

"I thought it would be nice to recap the last several years in Napa Valley because sometimes it's easier to remember specific vintages when you can compare them to others," said Ballance. Starting with 2016, she revealed that although the wines are still fairly young, the vintage is one of her favorites. The near-perfect growing season started early, saw ideal weather conditions throughout, and experienced a relatively steady July and August. Thanks to a series of warm days leading up to the beginning of harvest on July 28, grapes were able to progress to perfect ripeness. "This was such a perfect year," she noted. "For winemakers, one of the characteristics of a great vintage is even weather—no spikes in heat, no rain at the wrong times—and this was certainly the case." Describing the wines, she added, "It's all about aromatic expression."

By contrast, 2017 was a mixed bag. It began with abundant rainfall followed by a mild spring, resulting in extended flowering with little shatter. Harvest began on August 7; a Labor Day heat wave kicked it into high gear before cooler weather allowed sugar development to return to normal. Then, about a month later, the BV team had to contend with the Tubbs Fire. Fortunately, nearly 90% of their grapes were already in. "We experienced some significant fire activity, particularly on the eastern side of the valley," explained Ballance. "The fruit was already picked, so [it was] in fermenters, but that's not to say it wasn't challenging. If you have fire activity near your winery, guess what? You can't get there to check [on things]. You probably have no power, and you have active fermentations going on." While noting that the vintage produced some delicious wines, she admitted that they're more fruit forward and not as classic in style: "They're definitely showing the heat of the year, so to speak. But Mother Nature throws curveballs, and winemakers catch them."

As for 2018, it was another fantastic vintage for Napa Valley. There were abundant rains in February, followed by lots of filtered light in spring and early summer. Bud break and flowering occurred a bit late, but under ideal weather conditions, they created a plentiful and even fruit set. Summer was mild, with plenty of sun during the day and cooler marine influences that were virtually uninterrupted by major heat spikes. Fall saw extended sunshine and



Beaulieu Vineyard 2018 Reserve Cabernet Sauvignon, Rutherford, Napa Valley (\$80)

The inaugural 2018 Rutherford Reserve Cab won us over with a juicy, concentrated swath of boysenberry preserves on the luxe entry. Once the dust settles, it leaves behind a sensation of powdered mocha and mulberry. Dynamic on the mid-palate, the wine releases graphite, dried rose, and cherry skin to keep you salivating. A hint of blue sage on the finish also comes through on its continuing perfume along with some toasty cedar. Aged in (80% new) French oak, with some Malbec and Petit Verdot blended in. **97** —*Meridith May*

TREASURY WINE ESTATES

moderate heat that resulted in near-optimal conditions for the fruit to accumulate flavor complexity with gradual increases in sugar levels. Harvest began on August 15, and there was a 20–30% increase over average crop quantity. "We got excellent quality, excellent concentration," said Ballance, "and some phenomenal phenolic development. The aromatics are outstanding." It was a Goldilocks vintage, added Leicht, "where everything was just right."

Tasting the Beaulieu Vineyard 2018 Rutherford Reserve Cabernet Sauvignon

"The Rutherford Reserve is this incredible new wine that we basically released to be a second tier to our Georges de Latour Private Reserve [Cabernet Sauvignon]," said Twitchell. "It's this great highlight of what the Rutherford appellation is in Napa Valley." When the BV team was reformulating the wine to bring it into the reserve tier, they were able to shift a lot of their

fruit sourcing away from growers and back to their estate group. "This wine is nearly 100% estate fruit, and so with that, we were moving more toward the western Rutherford Bench—more of that alluvial soil," she explained. Leicht appreciated the impact of the oak, though the wine is not what one would describe as "oaky": "I'm getting some beautiful dark fruit. The color is stupendous, and there's a nice little smoky character to it," he noted. "To me, it's one of those wines that you can see has benefited from oak in that it's been able to breathe and open, but it hasn't been influenced. It's not a carpenter's wine, as we would like to call it." Meanwhile, Ballance praised its tremendous ageability, courtesy of great terroir: "It retails for around \$80–\$85 a bottle," she added, "so this wine offers the Cabernet connoisseur, the collector, consumers, and restaurants an incredible quality-to-value in the bottle that's coupled with BV's history and pedigree—and, of course, the incredible talents of the winemaking team."

A Look at 2021

While Ballance said she had not yet tasted the results of 2019 and 2020 (the latter of which presented its own set of problems due to the pandemic), Twitchell happily reported in with an update on the current vintage. "It was such an interesting [one]. . . . [Chief winemaker] Trevor [Durling] and I, toward the beginning of harvest, looked at each other with a little bit of concern, because . . . the vines [were] feeling stress from multiple years of drought finally catching up. There was a lot of variable growth where you'd have [some] vines with this great canopy growth and beautiful structure and then others that were a little smaller and not quite developing the way that we would anticipate," she explained. "As the season progressed, though, yields started to drop because of natural drought effects. With that, the vines were able to balance each other out. We wound up with some great concentration and incredible colors." It was an early harvest, so the team was able to maintain lots of natural acidity and a great level of freshness across the board. "We have these great wines that feel classic right now," she added. "It's still early, but I'm excited to see in a year or two—after we get a little bit of barrel aging and more tannin refinement—what these wines will look like." 

SOMM|CON® & THE SOMM JOURNAL

Concours d'Spirits



2021 Results

ALTHOUGH SOMMCON 2021 did not happen in person, we're happy to say that our competition in partnership with the organization, Concours d'Spirits, did, held on a warm November day at Julep in San Diego as part of the San Diego Food & Wine Festival. Though *The SOMM Journal* team, getting together for the first time since the start of the pandemic, anticipated a little rustiness, the competition ran quite smoothly: For us, categorizing, flighting, and entering the data for hundreds of spirits was like riding a bike. Several beverage industry professionals from America's Finest City showed up to judge; our volunteers were on time and helpful. And, of course, everyone was vaccinated.

Concours d'Spirits might have returned to a different world, but the passion for spirits remains ever-present. Read on for our list of medalists!

JUDGES

Maurice DiMarino, wine and beverage manager, Cohn Restaurant Group

Luis Garcia, restaurateur

Liza Hoar, lead bartender, Noble Experiment

Shawn Monnin, head bartender, Coasterra

Lisa Redwine, general manager and wine director, Market Restaurant + Bar

Michael Skubic, founder, Old Harbor Distilling

Frankie Thaheld, director of mixology, Snake Oil Cocktail Co.

Levi Walker, director of sales, Cutwater Spirits

DOUBLE GOLD MEDAL WINNERS

Argonaut Saloon Strength Brandy, USA (\$28) E. & J. GALLO WINERY

Bowling & Burch Gin, USA (\$40) LIMESTONE BRANCH DISTILLERY

Duke Founder's Reserve Extra Añejo Tequila, Mexico (\$150) LEGENDS SPIRITS LLC

Duke Kentucky Straight Bourbon Whiskey, USA (\$42) LEGENDS SPIRITS LLC

Familia Camarena Tequila Añejo, Mexico (\$30) E. & J. GALLO WINERY

Germain-Robin Alambic Brandy Select XO, USA (\$125) E. & J. GALLO WINERY

Germain-Robin California Alambic Flagship Brandy, USA (\$75) E. & J. GALLO WINERY

High Noon Sun Sips Pineapple Seltzer, USA (\$10/4-pack) E. & J. GALLO WINERY

La Adelita Black Añejo Cristalino Tequila, Mexico (\$80) LEGENDS SPIRITS LLC

New Amsterdam Original Gin, USA (\$15) E. & J. GALLO WINERY

REY SUPREMO Tequila Blanco, Mexico (\$42) DESFRA MEXICANA S. DE R.L. DE C.V.

RUM Co. of Fiji BATI 2 Year Dark Rum, Fiji (\$20) PARADISE BEVERAGES

RUM Co. of Fiji RATU 5 Year Dark Rum, Fiji (\$35) PARADISE BEVERAGES

Smoke Lab Classic Vodka, India (\$20) NV DISTILLERIES & BREWERIES

TILL American Wheat Vodka, USA (\$18) MGP INGREDIENTS





GOLD MEDAL WINNERS

Amaro Cinpatrazzo, USA (\$40) BEPPE & THE ARCHITECT, LLC

Argonaut Fat Thumb California Premium Brandy, USA (\$50) E. & J. GALLO WINERY

Argonaut Speculator California Premium Brandy, USA (\$68) E. & J. GALLO WINERY

Argonaut The Claim 2nd Edition Brandy, USA (\$200) E. & J. GALLO WINERY

Corralejo Extra Añejo Tequila, Mexico (\$79) INFINIUM SPIRITS

Crystal Head Vodka Aurora, Canada (\$54) INFINIUM SPIRITS

Duke Founder's Reserve Reposado Tequila, Mexico (\$65) LEGENDS SPIRITS LLC

E&J VS Brandy, USA (\$10) E. & J. GALLO WINERY

Empress 1908 Gin, Canada (\$40) VICTORIA DISTILLERS

Familia Camarena Tequila Reposado, Mexico (\$19) E. & J. GALLO WINERY

George Remus Straight Bourbon Whiskey, USA (\$40) MGP INGREDIENTS

Green Hat Gin Original Batch, USA (\$30) MGP INGREDIENTS

High Noon Sun Sips Peach Seltzer, USA (\$10/4-pack) E. & J. GALLO WINERY

High Noon Sun Sips Watermelon Seltzer, USA (\$10/4-pack) E. & J. GALLO WINERY

La Adelita Blanco Tequila, Mexico (\$42) LEGENDS SPIRITS LLC

Lo-Fi Aperitifs Gentian Amaro, USA (\$17.50) E. & J. GALLO WINERY

New Amsterdam Vodka, USA (\$15) E. & J. GALLO WINERY

Remus Repeal Reserve Straight Bourbon Whiskey Series IV, USA (\$85) MGP INGREDIENTS

Royal Mash Vintage Vodka 2020, United Kingdom (\$50) ROYAL MASH

RUM Co. of Fiji BATI 2 Year White Rum, Fiji (\$20) PARADISE BEVERAGES

RUM Co. of Fiji RATU 8 Year Signature Rum, Fiji (\$40) PARADISE BEVERAGES

The Bad Stuff La Mala Reposado Tequila, Mexico (\$50) THE BAD STUFF INC.

Zaya Cocobana Rum, Trinidad & Tobago (\$29) INFINIUM SPIRITS

SILVER MEDAL WINNERS

Crystal Head Vodka ONYX, Canada (\$65) INFINIUM SPIRITS

Crystal Head Vodka Original, Canada (\$49) INFINIUM SPIRITS

E&J Apple Brandy, USA (\$10) E. & J. GALLO WINERY

E&J Peach Brandy, USA (\$10) E. & J. GALLO WINERY

E&J Vanilla Brandy, USA (\$10) E. & J. GALLO WINERY

E&J VSOP Grand Blue Brandy, USA (\$10) E. & J. GALLO WINERY

E&J XO Brandy, USA (\$40) E. & J. GALLO WINERY

Familia Camarena Silver Tequila, Mexico (\$17) E. & J. GALLO WINERY

High Noon Sun Sips Black Cherry, USA (\$10/4-pack) E. & J. GALLO WINERY

High Noon Sun Sips Lime, USA (\$10/4-pack) E. & J. GALLO WINERY

High Noon Sun Sips Mango, USA (\$10/4-pack) E. & J. GALLO WINERY

Lo-Fi Aperitifs Dry Vermouth, USA (\$25) E. & J. GALLO WINERY

Rossville Union Master Crafted Straight Rye Whiskey, USA (\$40) MGP INGREDIENTS

RUM Co. of Fiji BATI 2 Year Spiced Rum, Fiji (\$20) PARADISE BEVERAGES

RUM Co. of Fiji RATU 5 Year Spiced Rum, Fiji (\$35) PARADISE BEVERAGES

RumHaven Caribbea Rum with Coconut Liqueur, Barbados (\$30) E. & J. GALLO WINERY

Skrewball Peanut Butter Whiskey, USA (\$28) INFINIUM SPIRITS

Smoke Lab Aniseed Flavored Vodka, India (\$20) NV DISTILLERIES & BREWERIES

Solento Organic Tequila Blanco, Mexico (\$62) AZIONE PR

Tahoe Blue Vodka, USA (\$18) TAHOE SPIRITS, INC

The Bad Stuff La Mala Plata, Mexico (\$40) THE BAD STUFF INC.

The Bad Stuff Reserva Especial Extra Añejo, Mexico (\$180) THE BAD STUFF INC.

Zaya Alta Fuerza Rum, Trinidad & Tobago (\$39) INFINIUM SPIRITS

Zaya Gran Reserva Rum, Trinidad & Tobago (\$29) INFINIUM SPIRITS

A Match Made in

MEXICO

TWO ICONIC TRADITIONS MEET IN THE
EL LUCHADOR TEQUILA COLLECTION

by Deborah Parker Wong





Tequilero David Ravandi's new El Luchador Tequila Collection is inspired by Mexico's revered lucha libre wrestlers, also known as luchadores.

When tequilero David Ravandi first introduced El Luchador Overproof Organic Blanco Tequila in 2013, the industry responded with a show of enthusiasm akin to being ringside at a *lucha libre* match. Given the overwhelming success of the brand, which merges two of Mexico's most revered cultural icons—100% blue agave tequila and the colorful sport of *lucha libre* wrestling—Ravandi is following it up with the debut of his El Luchador Tequila Collection.

Three of the collection's four expressions—El Luchador Blanco Tequila, El Luchador Reposado Tequila, and El Luchador Distill-Proof Blanco Tequila—were released in January; El Luchador Añejo Tequila will launch later this year. All four aim to rival the best in their class, according to Ravandi: "Mexico's history is as intertwined with the traditions of *lucha libre* as it is with the production of tequila," he adds. "I hope to inspire agave-spirit enthusiasts by offering several different El Luchador expressions."

Ravandi's 123 Spirits is widely recognized for crafting spirits that reflect both the extraordinary terroir of the Jalisco Highlands and demanding production standards. The estate-grown agave for El Luchador comes from Los Altos de Jalisco, where it's planted at an extremely high altitude of 6,500 feet in a combination of limestone and dark, iron-rich volcanic soils.

With mild winters and enough rain during the growing season, the Highlands are ideally suited to agave cultivation, and the region also benefits from a marked diurnal shift of as much as 50 degrees—the direct result of which is a different mesoclimate for every 100 feet in altitude. "Agave grown at this altitude is stressed and constantly seeking water," Ravandi explains. "The more fibrous it becomes, the more concentrated the flavors in our tequila will be." (Plants grown at lower altitudes, by contrast, are referred to as "lazy agave," with a high water content that results in less desirable aromas and flavors in the tequila.)

With notes of fresh agave and bright citrus culminating in a saline finish, El Luchador Blanco (40% ABV; \$40) is the anchor of the collection. The go-to for classic cocktails, it serves as the base of the other expressions, each of which can be enjoyed in their purest form as a sipping tequila.

One of the first tequileros to adopt and perfect the process of aging in French oak, Ravandi was marketing French oak-aged tequila way back in 1998, when the industry standard was used bourbon barrels. Now, in the new collection, the El Luchador Reposado and Añejo tequilas spend time in French oak that once held Puligny-Montrachet white wine. "I am always challenged to do something different, and this was the perfect opportunity to evolve El Luchador's agave-forward flavor profile," Ravandi says.

After spending four to six months in the white-oak barrels, El Luchador Reposado (40% ABV; \$45) is imbued with complexity and finesse, showing notes of roasted agave, bright citrus, and vanilla; a bold mid-palate; and white pepper through the finish. The añejo and extra añejo categories, meanwhile, continue to have tremendous appeal for brown-spirits enthusiasts, and Ravandi is slow aging the El Luchador Añejo (40% ABV), which will make its debut in late 2022 after aging 14–16 months rather than the prerequisite 12 months. “That additional time in oak adds increasing layers of complexity, with notes of deeply roasted agave, caramelized citrus, and dark vanilla,” Ravandi says, adding that he plans to release an El Luchador Extra Añejo (55% ABV; \$50) within the next three years.

Finally, El Luchador Distill-Proof Tequila (55% ABV; \$50) has high viscosity and a stealth attack. With robust notes of fresh agave, juicy citrus, and a slightly smoky and saline finish, it’s ideally suited for using as a foundation for cocktails or enjoying as a digestif.

According to Ravandi, the El Luchador Collection is arriving at a time when the market demand for aged agave spirits is at an all-time high; although blanco tequila remains the spirit of choice for use in a Margarita, consumers have been eagerly trading up to enjoy aged tequila expressions neat or over ice. “When it comes to exceptional flavor and authenticity, El Luchador delivers on both fronts,” he says. 



This play on a Zombie cocktail features El Luchador Blanco Tequila.

SANTO CONTRA LOS ZOMBIES

- ★ 2 oz. El Luchador Blanco Tequila
- ★ 1/4 oz. D’Aristi Xtabentún Liqueur
- ★ 1/2 oz. Combier L’Original
- ★ 2 oz. fresh orange juice
- ★ 1 oz. fresh lemon juice
- ★ 1/2 oz. fresh pomegranate juice

Serve over crushed ice in a Hurricane glass with an orange slice and a pineapple leaf.

The estate-grown agave for El Luchador comes from Los Altos de Jalisco and grows at an extremely high altitude of 6,500 feet in a combination of limestone and dark, iron-rich volcanic soils.



“I AM ALWAYS CHALLENGED TO DO SOMETHING DIFFERENT, AND THIS WAS THE PERFECT OPPORTUNITY TO EVOLVE EL LUCHADOR’S AGAVE-FORWARD FLAVOR PROFILE.” —**DAVID RAVANDI**





2022 COMPETITION: MARCH 21 - APRIL 1



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Author Nicole Loewenstein (center), with fellow sommeliers Amy Waller and Madison Petit, enjoys some Cabernet Sauvignon at Larkmead Winery.



PHOTOS: BILLY NORDMEIER

Setting the Table With Stories

REFLECTIONS ON SOMMFOUNDATION'S SOMM CAMP 2021

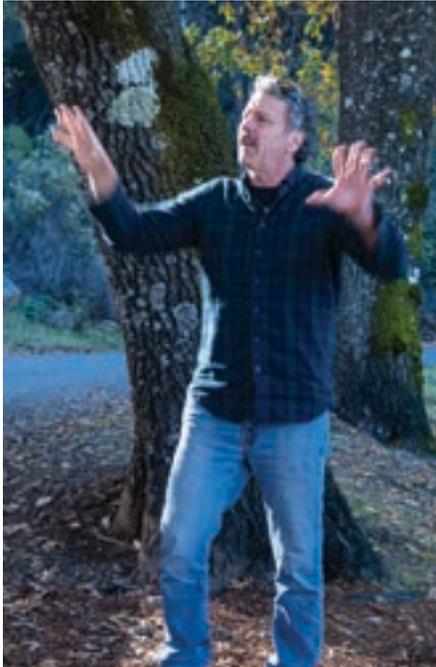
by Nicole Loewenstein

AS HUMANS, WE love the art of story-telling; it is, perhaps, one of the greatest joys life has to offer. We rejoice every time we get to follow Julia Roberts on her journey in *Pretty Woman*; we hang on every lyric of a Janis Joplin tune; we revisit the world of wizardry in *Harry Potter* again and again; and we remember every detail of how our parents met.

Wines, like music and art, have their own story to tell. They have a beginning, middle, and an end. Their creators make them so that, once they arrive at your table, they become that bottle you had on your first date or that cork you popped when you purchased your first apartment. They become part of your story.



The Somm Camp class of 2021 with SommFoundation co-chairman Thomas Price, MS (fourth from left).



Winemaker Chris Carpenter captured mid-thought during a tour of Mt. Brave Vineyard.

As a sommelier, I am constantly seeking ways to connect the wine I'm selling to the people I'm selling it to, and there is no better way to do so than to go to its source—to see firsthand what makes it special and then share those unique qualities with my guests. So when I received the news from SommFoundation that I'd been selected for Somm Camp 2021, I was elated. The wines of Napa Valley and Sonoma would no longer just be a label, a vintage, a price, or a dot on a map that I'd memorized. Now I would see a place, a winemaker, and vines that I knew. I would truly be able to tell their story.

It is amazing how wines are so reflective of their producer: how the latter's viticultural practices and even personality are transmitted into the liquid that gets poured into your glass. This first dawned on me when we arrived at Frog's Leap Winery in Rutherford. I was immediately taken by the property, its pristinely manicured grounds alive with the chattering of frogs, the light hum of bees, and a gorgeously lush vegetable garden. There's far more being cultivated here than just grapevines—there's an entire ecosystem. This should come as no surprise, as Frog's



Winemaker John Williams at Frog's Leap Winery.

Leap has been certified organic since 1989, and its team believes that, as winemaker John Williams puts it, "inviting life back into the farming system" allows the vines to grow and the grapes to ripen in a way that is natural and unaffected.

Williams, who has been at the helm of Frog's Leap for over 30 years, speaks about his work in a way that is passionate and warm. We were invited in for a tasting of some of the winery's back vintages (the 1999 Zinfandel was insane!) and a lunch courtesy of John's lovely wife, Tori. The care that this family has for their vineyard as well as their guests is reflected in the precision of their wines. As we waved goodbye to the couple, I knew that the magic had only just begun.

We drove over the Mayacamas to Sonoma's Kistler Vineyards—Chardonnay heaven, though the Pinot Noir is not to be overlooked—and were greeted by its tall and bearded winemaker, Jason Kesner, who was ready to get down to business. The winemaking practices at Kistler are built on consistency, and I would describe Kesner as nothing short of scrupulous when it comes to maintaining the wines' classic and delicious style. Kistler has been

working with just one clone of Chardonnay, imported from Burgundy in the early 20th century, for all its production since the mid-1980s—no exceptions. The wines undergo whole-cluster fermentation and are not fined or filtered in keeping with the philosophy of "trusting the fruit," in Kesner's words. And my goodness, do I ever trust this fruit! The single-vineyard Trenton Roadhouse is one of the most beautiful California Chardonnays I've had the pleasure of tasting: With resounding minerality and bright citrus, it's a rich yet balanced wine that could only be achieved by relentless attention to detail.

After many other incredible stops, we concluded our trip on the steep slopes of Mount Veeder, where the air was fresh and the temperature noticeably cooler. We all smiled through Cabernet-stained teeth upon meeting Chris Carpenter, the winemaker for Cardinale as well as Lokoya, La Jota, and Mt. Brave. He is commanding in stature, with a low, gravelly voice that makes you lean in and listen closely. He's also a lover of music (he played bass guitar in high school), and he regularly describes winemaking in musical terms. In referring to the Cardinale blend of Cabernet and Merlot, he compared a winemaker assessing and blending a vintage to a conductor knowing the strengths of each section of their orchestra and building pieces around those strengths. He brings this fanciful analogy to life with tons of experience as he creates gorgeous mountain-fruit blends with tremendous aging capability.

When I walk into a wine shop now and see Frog's Leap Sauvignon Blanc, I envision Williams' garden with butterflies fluttering around my shoulders. When I pour Kistler 2019 Chardonnay by the glass at work, I remember those tiny green berries I held in my hand at the vineyard. When I taste a powerful Mt. Veeder Cabernet Sauvignon, I picture Carpenter, baton in hand, conducting his blend and helping it sing. These stories are mine to tell now. Thank you, SommFoundation, for giving me the opportunity to share them. *sj*

Nicole Loewenstein is a sommelier at The Lobster Club in New York City.

Out of the Shadows

SHEDDING LIGHT ON COOL-CLIMATE SYRAH

by Brooke Herron

SYRAH HAS NEVER been at the top of most American consumers' minds; as a result, production has declined along with demand over the past 14 years (according to the Wine Institute, just 82,846 tons were crushed in California in 2019, compared to 126,945 tons in 2007). Ironically, that very decline may explain why the grape is finally beginning to get the respect that it deserves.

The winemakers who focus on Syrah now do so in the shadows, crafting wines that they know will receive less attention from the general public than more popular varieties like Pinot Noir do—but that will appeal to consumers who have already put their trust in the brands in question and are open to broadening their horizons. While these producers believe the varietal is capable of yielding truly great wines and would love to see more people embrace it, many are also happy to have the freedom to concentrate on making the best wines they can versus chasing trends and market preferences.

Thanks to their resistance to plush, bombastic, warm-climate expressions, there's been a growing buzz around cool-climate Syrah for the past decade. Those who love the Northern Rhône and hold a great appreciation for its key noble grape are championing its largely untapped potential in U.S. vineyards to create bright, elegant wines with structure, tension, and immense aging potential.

But how is cool-climate Syrah defined? When winemakers and somms speak about sites that are well suited to produce it, they generally refer to the Côte-Rôtie or other parts of the Northern Rhône as their inspiration. But that isn't, by definition, a cool-climate viticultural region, and Syrah isn't an early maturing cool-climate grape. As Jancis Robinson puts it in *The Oxford Companion to Wine*, "To ripen fully, Syrah demands a warm climate." It's only "if temperatures are too high [that] its telltale fragrance is lost."

So it would seem that the best places to plant Syrah may be cooler sites within warmer regions (the Sonoma Coast is a great example) or warmer sites within cool-climate regions (such as Oregon's Willamette Valley).

Andy Smith is winemaker/partner at DuMOL, which makes Syrah on California's Sonoma Coast.



PHOTO COURTESY OF DuMOL



PHOTO COURTESY OF DREW WINES

Jason Drew of Drew Wines at Valenti Ranch Vineyard in the Anderson Valley.

Across the board, winemakers in sites like these agree that what they are looking for from their cooler-climate Syrahs are higher-toned, leaner, and more balanced wines with more persistence and length. Most also reference the tension or nervousness found in Northern Rhône wines as a quality they only get from relatively cool vineyard sites. “When it’s grown somewhere it can get to the right acidity, [Syrah] gets a tension and structure that it just doesn’t get elsewhere in hotter regions,” explains Robert Brittan, winemaker and owner of Brittan Vineyards in the Willamette Valley. What’s more, says Wells Guthrie of DuPuis Wines in the Anderson Valley, “Cooler-climate wines have more elevated aromatics, often even floral. The weight on the palate is also lighter.”

As far as flavor profile goes, the consensus is that Syrahs grown in cooler sites tend to exhibit more red and blue versus black fruit and white rather than black pepper as well as notes of tea; herbs such as sage, oregano, and thyme; and earthiness. Tom Gerrie, winemaker at Cristom Vineyards also in the Willamette Valley, says that “a cool-site Syrah is brighter [and] higher toned . . . at a lower alcohol level.”

That said, according to Doug Frost, MS, MW, there are qualities that “one can always expect to find in Syrah whether grown in a warm or cool climate, such as campfire or smoked notes,” due to the reductive nature of the grape. **SJ**

Seven Cool-Climate Syrahs to Try

Brittan Vineyards 2016 Estate Syrah, McMinnville, Oregon (\$50) Bright and tart with a slightly sharp acidity, this lean Willamette Valley Syrah displays aromas of pomegranate and fresh cranberry along with tart red fruit, cherry cordial, and hints of clove and thyme on the palate. Very youthful and a bit tight. Aged 15 months in 35% new French oak. 12.5% ABV. brittanvineyards.com



Cristom 2017 Estate Syrah, Eola-Amity Hills, Oregon (\$54) Notes of white pepper; savory spices like rosemary and thyme, plum, leather; and roasted meat, with a bit of black tea leaf lingering in the background. Aged 17 months in 25–30% new oak. 13.5% ABV. cristomvineyards.com



Drew Wines Valenti Ranch Syrah, Mendocino Ridge (\$55) Sourced from vines located at 1,300–1,450 feet 6 miles from the ocean along the Greenwood Ridge in the mountains above the Anderson Valley. On the fresh nose, the wine, co-fermented with 5% Viognier, displays black cherry, bergamot, and earth. It’s bright on the palate, with elevated acidity and red fruits like pomegranate and cranberry mixed with cool, woody, earthy notes. Aged 11 months in neutral oak. 13% ABV. drewwines.com

DuPuis 2018 Baker Ranch Syrah, Anderson Valley (\$50) Baker Ranch is situated at 1,700 feet in the Western Highlands, above Boonville. This expression displays the classic profile of Syrah grown in the coastal ridge vineyards of the Anderson Valley: spiced floral aromas, bright red fruit, pepper, and earth. A finely structured wine with a silky texture and lightweight body. 100% whole cluster; aged 20 months in neutral oak. 13% ABV. dupuiswines.com



Donelan 2016 Kobler Vineyard Syrah, Green Valley of Russian River Valley (\$60) Kobler Vineyard is located in one of the coolest pockets of the Russian River Valley, where early-day mist halts sugar development so flavors have time to develop more fully. This elegant wine offers tart and floral aromas

with a whiff of dried meat as well as raspberry, cassis, and savory herbs on the palate. A bright, smooth, silky wine co-fermented with 10% Viognier. 14% ABV. donelanwines.com



DuMOL 2018 Estate Vineyard Syrah, Sonoma Coast (\$85) A delicate, nuanced wine with a silky mouthfeel and a slightly taut structure that smooths out with decanting, this wine comes from the estate’s coolest Syrah site, a ridgetop vineyard near Occidental. It offers aromas and flavors of dried flowers, blue fruit,

black pepper, and savory herbs like rosemary and thyme, with a touch of anise lingering in the background. Aged 16 months in (20% new) French oak. 14.3% ABV. dumol.com



Brick and Mortar 2016 West Block Syrah, Petaluma Gap (\$36) From windblown, sunny vineyards positioned between the coast and the San Pablo Bay, this Syrah offers a combination of aromas, flavors, and structure that tells a story of the unique climate, site, and position of the vines. On the nose and palate are both floral notes and black fruit along with savory herbs (fennel, thyme, and bay). brickandmortarwines.com

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HERE COMES THE
CAPPUCCINO MAN

*(and the
Latte
Ladies)*

HOW A HUMBLE COFFEE CART
LAUNCHED A MINI-EMPIRE

BY NELL JEROME



Sarah Lewkow runs Cappuccino Man Michigan.



IN 1993, ELLIOT and Gayle Lewkow relocated their family from Los Angeles to Michigan with a simple plan to sell espresso machines and coffee products to restaurants. Almost three decades later, Cappuccino Man is a second-generation luxury brand that creates gourmet coffee experiences at more than 1,000 events a year in two states. Elliot and Gayle's daughter, Sarah—who became a barista at age 10—took over as co-owner and general manager of Cappuccino Man Michigan five years ago; her brother Noah had already shifted from a career in skateboarding to launch Cappuccino Man California, the Los Angeles-based operation, in 2013.

Cappuccino Man baristas travel with their carts to venues of all kinds, providing customers with creative coffee drinks. It only takes 45 seconds to make a cappuccino with two baristas working in assembly-line fashion, and the team can produce 90–95 drinks an hour. They can be served iced or hot, caffeinated or decaffeinated, black or with various dairy and non-dairy creamers and flavorings. Tea and fruit smoothies are also available.

"For the right person, this is a game-changer at a wedding or a party," Elliot explains. "Some of our clients . . . don't drink alcohol—and this elevates coffee. For them, we are the only bar at the party!" Adds Noah, "We have to inquire in advance if there will be alcohol served at the event. If [not, and we] don't mentally prepare to get slammed, we will be nonstop serving for two hours."

The company was initially called Picchierri, which customers often mispronounced. But when its first cart arrived for events at the Ritz-Carlton in Dearborn, Michigan, banquet manager Dan Truitt would announce to his employees, "Here comes the Cappuccino Man!"—and a new name was born. Truitt, for his part, remains a customer. "The Ritz is all about service, and I knew I could count on Cappuccino Man to provide it. When I worked at MGM Grand Detroit, Elliot was able to supply us with two carts for 24 hours—with the logo [in the foam] on every cup," Truitt recalls. "Caffeine is a big thing for hospitality workers, and the employees were really impressed." Today, in his current position at Andiamo Catering and Event Management, he relies on Cappuccino Man to service social events, corporate events, and festivals. He even calls on the company for personal events, including his daughter's high school graduation. "Elliot and his team have not changed the quality they deliver on and have been able to maintain their excellent level of service," Truitt notes. "Companies will often use a cheaper product to maintain a reasonable price point, but Elliott has found a way to [offer premium products affordably]."

The operation, whose team is 90% female despite its name (they unofficially call themselves the Latte Ladies), has evolved over the years; for instance, latte art has become a signature specialty, ever since a customer at a car show in Detroit asked if they could have a snowflake on top of their drink. Elliot designed a stencil and created one using cocoa. The customer loved it. "Next, we added the Swoosh logo at a Nike event, and people lost their minds," Noah explains. "The personalization we offer is the cherry on top." For corporate parties, logos are the most popular choice, and for weddings, the bride and groom's



Cappuccino Man California's Noah Lewkow (right) serves customers at a wedding.

names are the top request. With the latest technology, Cappuccino Man can even turn a photograph into a stencil.

Granted, the road to success hasn't been all snowflakes and cherries. The family has faced business challenges from power needs (they have their own generators) to pricing due to cost increases to, most recently, the pandemic, says Elliot: "COVID came around, and we had to stay solvent and keep our heads above water." The team reconditioned the carts with plexiglass, sanitized them, and followed both California and Michigan's changing safety mandates and restrictions.

That said, Elliot and Noah have noticed a positive shift in consumer behavior, noting that customers are less price sensitive. As Noah puts it, "People are just happy to be out. They tell us how glad they are to hear we are doing well, and they feel good about supporting [a] local business."

According to Elliot, Cappuccino Man's customers are a combination of caterers and party planners, corporate entities and individuals. At least half of its business comes from repeat customers and referrals, while new customers come primarily from Google ads and the website, where they can fill out an online form and receive a quote within 24 hours.

Noah often gets asked when they are "going to go on *Shark Tank*" and whether Cappuccino Man will franchise. The answer is no, and the reason—besides quality control—is the fact that, in his words, "I just don't trust anyone else to do this outside of us." ❧



TRACKING THE ARTISTRY OF
THE DUCKHORN PORTFOLIO

Taking *Flight*

AS THE DUCKHORN PORTFOLIO spreads its wings, we continue to be in awe of its family of wines. Here's just a glimpse of our recent impressions after tasting a collection of the company's Pinot Noirs and Chardonnays.



KOSTA BROWNE

Kosta Browne's success and fine reputation rest on its ability to partner with some of the most sought-after vineyards in California. Meanwhile, the properties in its magnificent estate series, Bootlegger's Hill in the Russian River Valley and Cerise Vineyard in the Anderson Valley, demonstrate the artistry involved in producing stellar Pinot Noir and Chardonnay. Says wine-maker Julien Howsepian, "These are wines that we have literally created from the ground up."

Made from Wente clone grapes grown on the coolest section of its namesake site, the **Kosta Browne 2018 Cerise Vineyard Chardonnay (\$165)** aged in horizontal foudres for 16 months before it was moved to barrels for the final two months. While the entry is rich, the wine also shows a steely side thanks to notes of basil and crushed stone. With ripe pineapple and "after-the-rain" tonality, it reveals peach and marzipan on a toasty finish. **94**

The **Kosta Browne 2018 Bootlegger's Vineyard Pinot Noir (\$200)** is a blend of eight different clones and blocks across the property, which comprises sandy Goldridge soils derived from an ancient seabed; the fermentation process took place in stainless steel, concrete, large-format casks, and French oak. On the palate, cherries and spice show tension that's relieved by a garden of roses gilded with cinnamon and orange tea. There's an umami quality to the wine but also a touch of sweetness on the finish. **96**



GOLDENEYE

Dan and Margaret Duckhorn launched Goldeneye in the Anderson Valley in 1996, years before Pinot Noir earned eminence in California. Comprising fruit from three estate vineyards, the **Goldeneye 2018 Ten Degrees Pinot Noir (\$130)** features a wildly aromatic nose of briar, balsamic, and earth. Soil-drenched blackberry jumps forward on the palate, accompanied by dried leaves, cigar leaf, and anise. Dusty cocoa and mulberry envelop leather and a hint of mint on the finish. **95**

Newer Dijon clones grown on the east side of the Gowan Creek Vineyard account for the showy personality of the French oak-aged **Goldeneye 2018 Gowan Creek Vineyard Pinot Noir (\$88)**, while older heritage clones planted on the site's west side bring in savory tones. The wine is deep and concentrated, with notes of black pepper and wet leaves. Blue and black fruit integrates with Worcestershire sauce, black bean, and roasted coffee. **95**

MIGRATION

Migration winemaker Dana Epperson crafts Pinot Noir and Chardonnay from the Sonoma Coast, Russian River Valley, and Sta. Rita Hills. What she loves about the latter's Drum Canyon Vineyard is its high concentration. "The grapes are voluptuous, [with] almost berry pie-like layers of blackberry and blueberry. At the same time, wild sage grows all around the property, which adds this really intriguing element to the finish." We also found that earth, black pepper, and soy sauce punctuate the intense red-cherry and pomegranate character of the **Migration 2019 Drum Canyon Vineyard Pinot Noir (\$72)**. Spiced oak keeps the palate perked up on the finish. **95**

Meanwhile, the **Migration 2020 Rosé of Pinot Noir (\$32)** from Running Creek Vineyard, the winery's dry-farmed estate property on the Sonoma Coast, is one of the prettiest and most expressive pink wines we've tasted. Perfumed notes of rose, raspberry, and crushed stone compose a meticulous symphony of flavor that's almost exotic in its expression. **93**



CALERA

In 1975, Josh Jensen founded Calera high atop the limestone-rich Mt. Harlan in the Gavilan Mountains along California's Central Coast. While the winery is best known for the vineyard-designate Pinot Noirs from its six small estate vineyards on Mt. Harlan, here we've chosen to focus on the **Calera 2019 Chalone Vineyard Pinot Noir (\$50)**. Also planted on limestone-rich soils, this famous Monterey County site reaches an elevation of 1,800 feet. Notes of beetroot, spiced cinnamon, and black cherry bring out the wine's delectable vibrancy. **94**



We find a soulfulness in all of Calera's wines: silky generosity built on mineral-acid keenness. That comes through in the wonderful perfume of heather and strawberry exuded by the **Calera 2018 Ryan Vineyard Mt. Harlan Pinot Noir (\$80)**, which possesses a grippy tannin profile and herbal center. **96** ST





Production Value

A LOOK BEHIND THE SCENES AT TWO OF DENVER'S MOST AMBITIOUS RESTAURANTS *by Ruth Tobias*

THE WOLF'S TAILOR and BRUTØ are two of the most exciting restaurants in Denver right now, period. They're also two of the most indescribable, other than the fact that they both revolve around tasting menus with optional pairings. But Caroline Clark, beverage director and sommelier for the Id Est Hospitality Group of which they're a part, is game to try.

"I know that people really want to box culinary ideas by nationality or ethnicity, [but] the conversations around technique and ingredient are very important to us," she says. "So when people ask about The Wolf's Tailor, I tell them there's a wood-fired oven and a robata grill, and we do a lot of noodles, and we're focused on grain. That opens the door to [our] chefs' ideas around that space."

For instance, chef Taylor Stark's current (if ever-changing) menu is heavily informed by Asian cuisine "that's really balanced: The dishes are designed to be all-encompassing, to have the right amount of acidity, the right amount of spice, the right amount of sweetness," be it a chicken meatball with lemongrass and makrut lime or clay-pot black rice with lobster cooked in miso and sesame alongside *sunomono* (Japanese pickled vegetables). "There's so much going on—so when it comes to incorporating beverage, it's a different story than [it is with] European food, where the dishes are really intended to go with wine." Her solution? "I can't quit orange wine," she says. "It's so athletic and it's got a little bit of tannin, but not too much; it's got umami [to pair] with all of these rich mushroom dashi and [other] bases that are super-savory, very earthy; [and] it's still got really good acidity that can [also] play off more earth tones."

BRUTØ, meanwhile, is "rooted in

PHOTO: JIMENA ZAMORA



◀ *Caroline Clark is beverage director and sommelier for the Id Est Hospitality Group, which operates restaurants in Denver and Boulder, CO.*

[into] a lightly tart, slightly sweet, refreshing beverage. As we were developing our masa program we were having a lot of waste, and . . . we do try to work with a zero-waste ethos as much as we can, so that's been one of my favorite discoveries. It's something that you can serve nonalcoholic or find a way to incorporate a fun spirit and . . . play off that sweetness of the corn. . . . Or it can play off of chiles and bring an added layer of complexity."

As for BRUTØ's wine program, Clark says, it establishes its narrative around "the movement of grapes from Europe into

Mexican tradition but certainly global in influence," says Clark. "We don't ever want to box ourselves into one historical cuisine but rather bring those stories [together] to tell a larger one about people and place." The incredibly complex results from chef Michael Diaz De Leon might range from scallop aguachile with rose apple and ikura, paired with either a saké or a kombucha boilemaker, to bison tartare with umami aioli and a purple potato crisp, accompanied by either a blend of Carignan, Malbec, and Syrah from Chile's Itata Valley or beet tejuíno. Of the latter, Clark explains, "It's a pretty typical Mexican nonalcoholic beverage that's made with day-or-two-old masa that [isn't] usable for tortillas anymore but still consumable, so they ferment it

the Americas. A lot of the wines that we feature maybe began in France or on the Iberian Peninsula; maybe they made it to the Canary Islands before they made it to Baja California—you can track that path of grapes getting planted by the missions [in] vineyards [that,] in some parts of Chile and Mexico, are older now than the European vineyard sites because of the devastation that took place in the 1800s. I think that's important in the culinary story that we're telling."

Whether everyone who visits The Wolf's Tailor or BRUTØ grasps the moral of that story—which I like to say is a celebration of production almost more than product—is hard to say. But the thrill of consuming it is undeniable. **sj**



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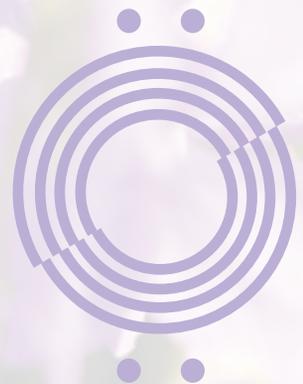




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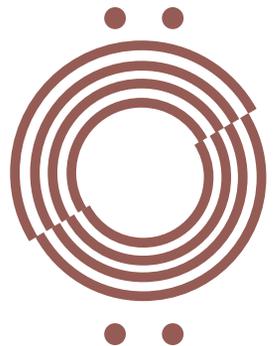




Summer parties and Öömrang eau de vie



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So, after three days of incessant brandy drinking, he had burned out the youth from his blood, and achieved this kindled state of oneness with all the world, which is the end of youth's most passionate desire.”
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