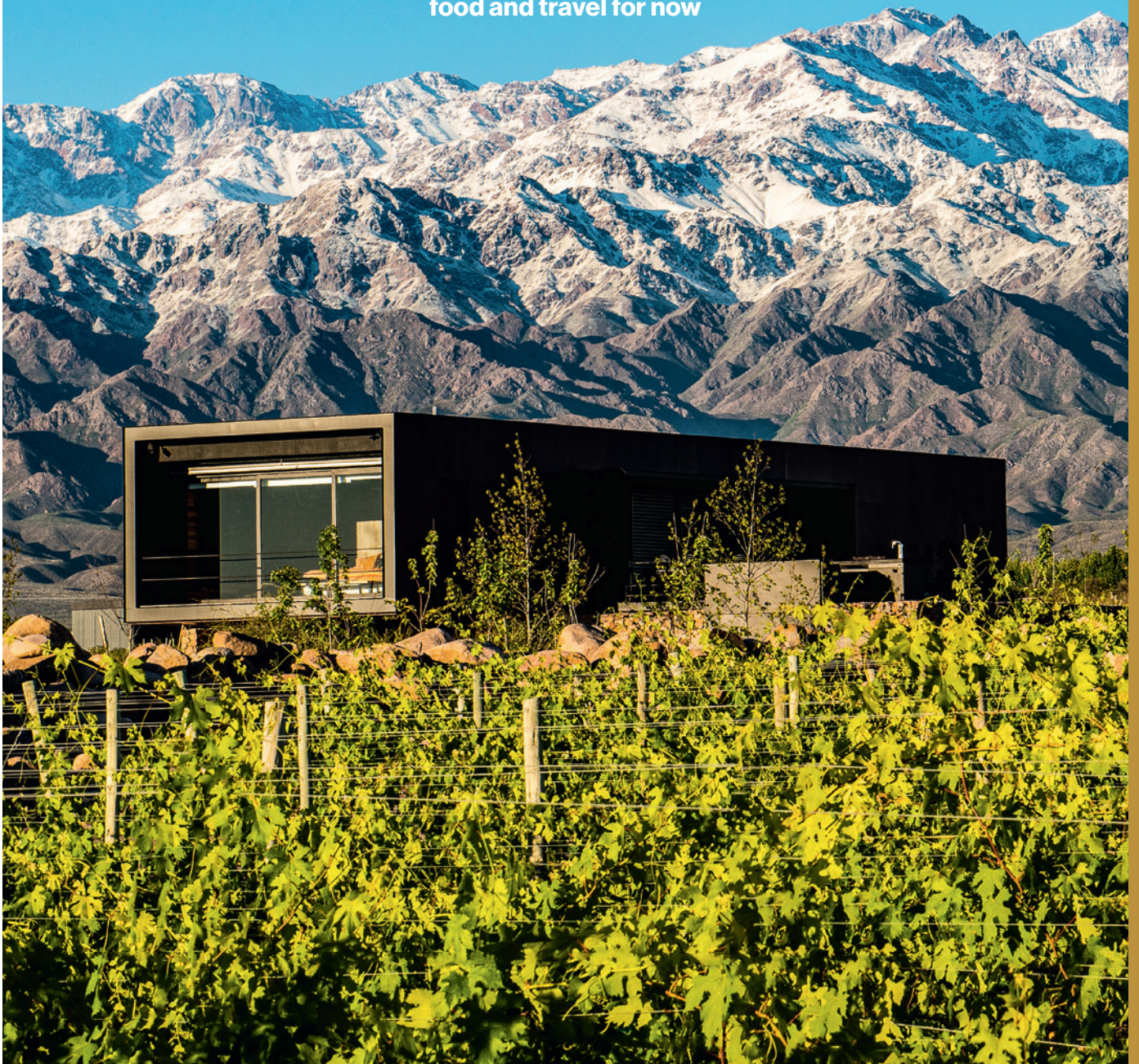


CLUB ENOLOGIQUE

The Americas

Mendoza to Mexico, Colchagua to
California – the wines, spirits,
food and travel for now





Left: in the relative cool at 5am, a *jimador* contemplates the day ahead, harvesting the ripe agave. He carries a *coa*, a long-handled, rounded steel blade as sharp as a machete. Behind him, faint in the morning haze, can just be seen the jagged lip of the Tequila volcano

Above: a lamp at La Rojeña serves as a makeshift *perchero*



The Mexican way

Before it was a spirit, Tequila was a town.

Today it remains at the forefront of production, as captured in this atmospheric photo essay of the agave harvest

Photographs by Allan Jenkins

Tequila is one of the world's noblest spirits, with a heritage that stands equally proud. It has been produced in the same region of Mexico since the 18th century, it is capable of great barrel ageing, and the finest examples are prized by collectors, sometimes reaching astonishing prices.

If there is sometimes confusion over the difference between Tequila and mezcal, a simple analogy might be that if Tequila is Chardonnay, mezcal is every other white wine variety. Mexican government regulations state that while mezcal may be made from some 50 different varieties of agave in different regions of the country, Tequila must come from one of five areas: Jalisco, Nayarit, Guanajuato, Michoacan or Tamaulipas. It must also be made from a single species of agave, the Blue Weber.

In practice, more than 90% of Tequila is produced in Jalisco, home of the town of Tequila and the Volcán de Tequila, the

extinct volcano whose classic jagged cone dominates the skyline. Jalisco is also the home of Jose Cuervo, founded in 1795 by Jose María Guadalupe Cuervo and run today by his descendant Juan Domingo Beckmann, the sixth generation of the Cuervo family to take charge of the business. Jose Cuervo is the world's largest Tequila producer, making some 35m litres a year at its headquarters, La Rojeña, the distillery that was built in 1812.

It was here that Allan Jenkins took his remarkable series of photographs, capturing, as he puts it, 'the unseen aspects of this fascinating industry that we know so little about'. In Jenkins's evocative black-and-white images, *jimadores* – agave farmers – wield tools their distant ancestors would instantly have recognised. In the steel glint of a razor-sharp *coa* or the proud sweep of a sombrero brim, we see a way of life and method of working that have changed little in 300 years.



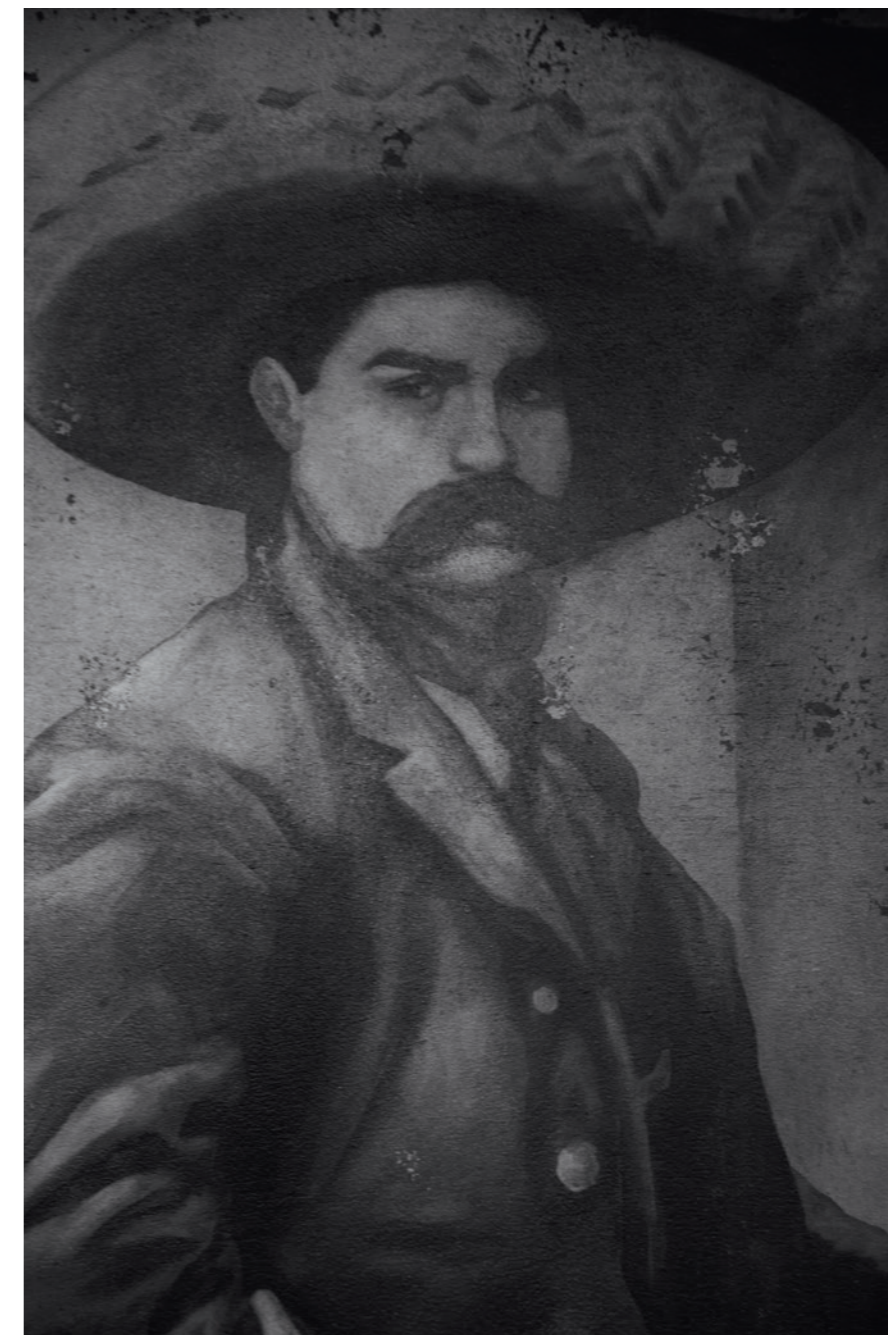
Wearing protective goggles in front of a brick-lined oven, a worker prepares chopped agave plants for the next stage of processing. The *piñas* (they resemble nothing so much as vast pineapples) will be cooked for 18 hours at more than 100°C, their carbohydrates slowly and gently turned to fermentable sugars



Workers at La Rojeña show off tools that have barely changed in 300 years. The ubiquitous *coa de jima*, top right, is used by the *jimador* in the fields to cut the agave at the roots and to slice off the leaves to reveal the core; the *hacha* (axe), bottom left, splits the *piñas* before cooking; the *hoz*, a sickle-like blade (top left and bottom right), is used as a heavy-duty chopper in the field and distillery

Deep in a field of Blue Weber agave, in the early-morning cool, a *jimador* with *coa* begins the process of preparing the plant for the distillery, slicing off the spiny leaves





Two images of Mexico erase the passage of 100 years. A contemporary *jimador* wears sombrero and bandana against the ferocious desert heat (left), similar in style to the revolutionary and agrarian reformer Emiliano Zapata, here in a mural at the Jose Cuervo distillery. Zapata is most famously depicted in a painting by Diego Rivera carrying a sickle, or *hoz*, a symbol of communism and a tool used in the preparation of the agave



Above: at dawn, a *jimador* stands sentinel against the rising sun, the blade of his *hoz* resembling the sword-like leaves of the agave



Above: the agave plant as crucifix in a mural at the La Rojeña distillery



Left: the oven being loaded with *piñas*. They will be steam-cooked for around 18 hours, which will turn them sticky and very sweet. According to Aztec legend, this process was discovered when an agave field was struck by lightning, causing a honey-sweet liquid to ooze out of the plants

Below: Tequila served ice-cold in a celebration at the distillery, with mariachi music and dancing. Like the drink itself, mariachi music plays a key role in Mexico, where it is used to celebrate the people's struggles, joys and growth, as a staple of baptisms, weddings and even funerals ☺



The new cult vineyards of South America

As the terroir focus in South American wine continues to sharpen, the spotlight is increasingly being cast on the vineyard, says Amanda Barnes, with certain sites not only becoming known for their distinctive wines but also accruing cult status for themselves



Until the 1990s, when it came to the wines of South America, brands and winery owners ruled the roost. Then, an era of flying winemakers in Argentina and Chile made the consultant winemaker the sales teams' marketing pin-up, soon to be overshadowed by the local star winemakers (see p.22). In recent years, however, the most exciting advances have been through the turbocharged quest to best represent 'the place' in the glass – whether that place is a subregion, appellation, single vineyard or even a single block. And as winemakers push beyond the traditional wine regions on the balmy valley floors, single-vineyard wines are becoming thrillingly diverse – from the wind-battered depths of Patagonia, to the lofty heights of the Andes Mountains or the edge of the bracing Pacific Ocean.

Here are eight of the most remarkable examples, all made from relatively new vines and subregions that are leading the pack in South America's thirst for unique, terroir-driven wines.

Uspallata vineyard, Mendoza, Argentina

The newest cult vineyard to emerge in South America – and a truly landmark one at that – is Estancia Uspallata. Although creeping further up into the foothills of the Andes and planting on its alluvial soils is common in Mendoza, few have ventured beyond and into the mountains. Between Mendoza and Santiago lies more than 100km of the largely impenetrable Andes mountain range, in which Mount Aconcagua, the world's highest peak beyond the Himalayas, stands proud at 6,959m. The mountain pass is filled with rugged beauty: striking natural murals of multicoloured minerals on bare mountain sides, treacherously steep ravines and snow peaks towering in the distance.

There are only a few mountain villages en route, including the Argentinian settlement of Uspallata. Here, in the middle of the

proverbial nowhere, lies one of the most exciting new vineyards in Mendoza: 4ha of mainly Malbec and Pinot Noir, surrounded by mountains (see also previous spread).

'The vineyard has this unique mix of colluvial soils,' explains winemaker Alejandro Sejanovich. 'It's also a really dry place with lots of wind and has a totally different climate from Mendoza.' All this combines to create a completely unique profile of Malbec, which is the highlight of the Uspallata portfolio for me: herbal, floral and filled with spice. The wines are fragrant, fresh and really rather breathtaking – just like the vineyard itself.

Estancia Uspallata, Malbec, Mendoza, Argentina 2018, N/A UK

Catena Zapata, Adrianna vineyard, Gualtallary, Argentina

There is no lack of excellent wines coming from Gualtallary in Mendoza's Uco Valley. A hotspot for top-notch Malbec, the region is increasingly renowned for its Cabernet Franc and Chardonnay, too. One of the wineries that put Gualtallary on the map is Catena Zapata. As one of the greatest dynasties in Argentinian wine, the family needs little introduction, and as with most of the country's wine families, Catena's roots go back to eastern Mendoza, where it first set up shop in 1902. But it wasn't until 1992 that it planted its vineyard in Gualtallary, which has blossomed from a brave experiment into a 110ha vineyard and vinous Shangri-La, now producing all the family's top wines.

For me, the cuvées that have really

given this vineyard cult status are the two Chardonnays, White Bones and White Stones. So named for the soil composure of each block, White Bones has calcareous deposits and limestone from fossilized bones, while White Stones has oval stones covered with a thin white layer of calcium.

'The character of the wines is due to three fundamental variables,' explains winemaker Alejandro Vigil. 'The region is very cold; the calcareous soils have a better hydric relationship and give a mineral character; and lastly, our greater understanding of the place.' The duo, first released with the 2009 vintage, are undoubtedly world class. Pure, elegant and chiselled, they reflect the thrilling direction in which Gualtallary is leading Argentina.



Catena Zapata, Adrianna Vineyard White Bones Chardonnay 2018, £78.68 Grand Vin Wine Merchants

Otronia vineyard, Chubut, Argentina

Argentinian billionaire and oil magnate Alejandro Bulgheroni isn't a man who does anything by halves. It took him barely three years to transform virgin terroir in Uruguay into his outstanding, award-winning 240ha wine estate Garzón. When he set his sights on planting the southernmost vineyard in the world, on the shores of Lake Musters at 45.33°S, his consultants Alberto Antonini and Pedro Parra told him in no uncertain terms that he was mad. Not only was this an unexplored vinous latitude (Central Otago reaches 45.25°S) with an enormous frost risk, but Patagonia is also notorious for its winds, which can reach more than 100km/h. Needless to say, they planted 50ha of vines that year.

'With the cold temperature, the high luminosity, the ferocious wind and the poor soil, this is an extreme terroir,' explains winemaker Juan Pablo Murgia. 'And the wines reflect extreme Patagonia.' Extreme is certainly the word. But despite an average temperature of only 11.5°C, the sunshine hours at this latitude give an incredible intensity and ripeness to the wines, which easily reach 14% alcohol, while retaining laser-sharp acidity. The single-block Chardonnay has already garnered cult status for its muscular style with a feminine flair of white blossom and peaches. And having just tasted the new duo of traditional-method sparkling wines, due for release in the autumn, I'm sure they'll also hurtle along at top speed.

Bodega Otronia, Block 3 & 6 Chardonnay, Patagonia, Argentina 2017, £43.99 All About Wine

Cerro del Guazuvirá vineyard, Lavalleja, Uruguay

In Uruguay, where the climate is rather uniform and rarely extreme (it shares similarities with Galicia or Bordeaux, depending on the vintage), winemakers have been focusing on the range of soils for their new ventures. Uruguay, barely the size of Washington State, has 99 classified soil types. Among those is a volcanic outcrop in Lavalleja, where one of Uruguay's most promising young winemakers, Santiago Deicas, planted a vineyard in 2015.

Part of the explosion of new vineyards on Uruguay's eastern coast, it benefits from strong ocean breezes and stands at 400m above sea level – the highest in Uruguay, but small beer compared to Argentina. Nevertheless, this is one of the few vineyards in Uruguay that requires irrigation. The bedrock is so hard it had to be broken up by dynamite before planting. Fireworks and irrigation weren't the only initial cost or setback: the first two vintages were gobbled up entirely by a herd of Guazuvirá deer and a singular of wild boars. An electric fence and a couple of vintages later, though, and Cerro del Guazuvirá has proved it was worth fighting for. Familia Deicas's Extreme Vineyards blend of Merlot, Tannat, Petit Verdot and Viognier is one of Uruguay's most sought-after wines, with a remarkable graphite-like tension and freshness, plus trademark malted barley, flower and bramble aromas. Like the tireless effort behind it, it embodies just how riveting Uruguay's modern terroir Tannat wines can be.

Familia Deicas, Extreme Vineyards Cerro del Guazuvirá, Uruguay 2018, £25.99 Wines of Uruguay



Alcohuaz vineyard, Elqui, Chile

Nestled in a steep valley at 1,650–2,206m above sea level, Viñedos de Alcohuaz is Chile's highest commercial vineyard and makes some of Chile's raciest Mediterranean blends. The site, at the heights of Elqui, is, perhaps, more Chile's equivalent of Priorat that the vineyard Torres sought out with the same intention (see overleaf). Elqui has some of the clearest skies in the world, making it a major stargazing destination, and sun-loving varieties suit the intense conditions at this altitude, where luminosity is high, conditions are arid, and summer temperatures can drop

from 23°C to 5°C overnight. With poor, granite soils and steep slopes (up to 30%), this extreme terrain has similarities to the Douro as well as Priorat, and the wines are just as age-worthy.

Behind this incredibly exciting project is one of Chile's top winemakers, Marcelo Retamal, and since the first vintage (2011), the wines have steadily gained a cult status. Rhu is the apex of Alcohuaz's portfolio: a Syrah, Grenache and Petite Sirah blend crushed by foot in stone lagares and left to ferment with native yeast before being aged in wooden *foudres* for three years. Time has

harnessed the natural power of the wine, which exudes deep notes of blackcurrants, black olives, spice and graphite, with electric acidity and a textural, tongue-tlingling finish. Although the vines thrive in a good year in Alcohuaz, the location isn't without its drama. In 2016, more than 80% of the crop was lost to a springtime snow. 'Great wines come from marginal climates,' says Retamal. 'And if you want to make great wines, you have to take great risks.'

Viñedos de Alcohuaz Rhu, Elqui, Chile 2012, £43.83 Blanco & Gomez Wine Merchants



Casa Silva, Lago Ranco vineyard, Osorno, Chile



Over on the Chilean side of Patagonia, a handful of vineyards has also emerged in the past two decades. None has yet reached the status of Casa Silva's Lago Ranco. Nestled between the dormant volcanoes and sky-blue lakes of Chile's Los Ríos region, the Silva family's estate had been a breeding ground for their prized polo horses. Then, in 2007, the famed wine family from Colchagua decided to plant a few vines and see how they fared in this cool, virgin terrain. After a couple of years, they became convinced that the lake, just 600m away, offered enough protection from the bitter frosts, and the vineyard became 14ha, planted on slopes facing Ranco Lake on deep volcanic soils.

The wines – a Sauvignon Blanc, Pinot Noir and Riesling – have quickly earned a name as some of the most distinctive in Chile. The Lago Ranco Riesling is my pick of the bunch, with tangy minerality, heady notes of kaffir lime and pea shoots, and a searing acidity that leaves you dribbling. It also ages like a dream. The



greatest challenge here, in fact, has not been the climate but the isolated location – 800km from their winery in Colchagua and surrounded by forests and lakes but very few people. 'Training a viticultural team in a cattle-breeding region isn't easy' admits

viticulturist René Vásquez. 'Making wine in Osorno is a challenge, but these wines fill us with adrenaline.'

Casa Silva, Lago Ranco Riesling, Austral, Chile 2017, £20.25 Palmers Wine Store

Miguel Torres, Escaleras de Empedrado vineyard, Maule, Chile

It was some inner soil-searching that led Miguel Torres to plant its epic Escaleras de Empedrado vineyard in Maule. The Spanish wine family are no strangers to schist, found in their famous vineyards in Priorat, but locating schist in Chile wasn't an easy feat. After six years of looking, in 2002 the family acquired a 369ha forest in Empedrado, within which they planted a handful of mainly Mediterranean varieties on steep slate terraces running from 250 to 500m above sea level. They had hoped this would be the ideal combination for making Chile's equivalent of Priorat. But at this southerly latitude, and just 21km from the coast, it proved too cool for Garnacha and Carignan to ripen, and instead the dark horse of the trial, Pinot Noir, was planted on the steep terraces.

'It isn't only the very cool climate that is the challenge here, but also the fact that it's a small vineyard oasis right in the middle

of a forest,' explains winemaker Eduardo Jordán. The first three years of grapes were consumed by the forest residents – birds and rabbits. Each vine is now netted, adding to the considerable cost of the project, which is already one of Chile's largest vineyard investments of recent years. But Escaleras de Empedrado has been worth the chase, and within just a few vintages the region achieved its own DO status, built a cult following and inspired other slate-vineyard wines in Chile. 'Making Pinot Noir from vines on slate soils is really interesting,' adds Jordán. 'It gives you a mineral sensation, high acidity and structure, which makes wines with great ageing potential. 'All extreme projects have additional challenges, but that's what makes it interesting and pushes you to understand the place better.'

Miguel Torres, Escaleras de Empedrado Pinot Noir, Chile 2015, £69.95 Vivino, Cru



Viña Tabalí, Talinay vineyard, Limarí, Chile

Limestone is many a winemaker's holy grail, anchoring the vines of Champagne, Burgundy, St-Emilion, Barolo... and Limarí, which boasts the highest concentration of limestone of any Chilean wine region. Within Limarí, however, one vineyard in particular stands out: Viña Tabalí's Talinay. Why? Most of the vineyards in this cool coastal region are planted 20–30km inland on soils with calcium carbonate deposits brought down from the mountains by rivers (not dissimilar to those of Gualtallary and other regions in Argentina's Uco Valley), with a metre of clay topsoil. But Talinay's soils – just 12km from the sea – are pure marine limestone that starts right at the surface and runs incredibly deep. Add to this the region's bracingly cool *camanchaca* sea fog and the

sunny, breezy afternoons, and you get a recipe for rather remarkable wines.

'Talinay has totally unique conditions,' explains winemaker Felipe Müller. 'It's a cold and dry climate, which isn't common, and the soil is an ancient sea bed. Talinay produces very distinctive wines with a marine sensation but also elegance.' Sauvignon Blanc is, of course, Chile's coastal star, but I'm most excited about Talinay's Pinot Noir and Chardonnay. With racy acidity, chalky minerality and a precise, mouthwatering finish, these are complex yet refined wines that are changing the shape and texture of Chile's wine scene and blazing a trail for others to follow.

Viña Tabalí, Talinay Chardonnay, Limarí, Chile 2020, £14.79 All About Wine 

White-knuckle ride

Today, it stands as one of California's most high-end wineries. But for its British polymath owner, the journey from Silicon Valley to Knights Valley was far from straightforward. Sir Peter Michael talks to Adam Lechmere about tech, wine and family

Portraits by Julian Anderson

The Peter Michael Winery must be the least well-known famous winery in California. If you're a certain type of wine lover, the name will be perfectly familiar, but many who are intimate with the celebrated vineyards of Napa and Sonoma still find it – and the name behind it – hard to place.

There are several reasons for this. For a start, you're never quite sure if the winery is in Sonoma or Napa, though this only adds to the slight air of enchantment that surrounds it. It's actually set in the Sonoma County AVA of Knights Valley, which is almost unfeasibly remote. Indeed, as its website reports, it's one of the few places in California that's become *more* rural over the past half-century. There was a town, but most of it burned down in the 1960s. There are no hotels or tasting rooms, no post office. The wineries – there are a couple of others besides Peter Michael, and big Sonoma operators like Arrowood and Clos du Bois have vineyards there – use a Calistoga mailing address.

The winery's founder, Sir Peter Michael, is no less self-effacing. 'I like to keep a low profile,' he says. 'I do things in my own time, and I don't really like the media following me around.' He was brought up in Shirley, a stolid, resolutely unglamorous London suburb. A successful high-tech engineer – Quantel, the company he founded in 1973, developed Paintbox, a revolutionary forerunner of Adobe Photoshop – he's also a prolific entrepreneur, starting a new company every year for 30 years. ('Some of them are still going,' he says in his mild way.) In 1991, having just netted £60m from the sale of the global electronics company UEI, he put £3m into the founding of the radio station Classic FM. He loves music, yes,

but one suspects a powerful motivation was the fact that everyone told him a commercial classical music station would never work. 'We went to 50 financial analysts, and 49 of them – including the *Financial Times* – said it would fail.' He was cornered at a party by the head of BBC Radio 3. 'He was known as the toughest guy in the media, and physically a very big man. He was jabbing a forefinger at me and saying, "No one will listen to classical music with adverts. You're going to go broke."' Classic FM now has a weekly audience of 5.6 million. 'It's brought more pleasure to more people than anything else I've done.'

Knighted 30 years ago for services to industry, at 83 Sir Peter is still actively engaged in pioneering technology. He peppers our conversation with references to new bits of vineyard tech he has an interest in: an electric tractor that he's working on with the Mondavi family; and an activated carbon bagging device that he has developed with the University of Adelaide to protect grapes from smoke taint. He's also a key member of a team at Imperial College London working on a coronavirus testing system. When I ask what part he plays in this project, his reply gives an indication of his skill-set. 'Software, micro-electronics, micro-fluidics, biochemistry, biology, manufacturing, commerce, regulations et cetera. I've done all that many times. So that's my contribution.'

The story of how Sir Peter got into wine is well documented. He inherited his father's love of Bordeaux and Burgundy and was entranced by a bottle of Chateau Montelena Chardonnay sometime in the late 1970s (he was running businesses simultaneously in London and Silicon Valley at that point) so decided to buy a





Putting the knight in Knights Valley: even in the 1980s, when his flagship Les Pavots vineyard was planted, Sir Peter's signature Panama hat betrayed his British heritage. The winery's aesthetic (right), however, remains resolutely Californian



Opposite page: with son Paul and daughter-in-law Emily in the grounds of their Berkshire hotel, The Vineyard



ranch to make wine in the great tradition. The original ethos was 'Mountain vineyards, classical winemaking, limited production', and that is still stamped on every back label.

The undertaking was by no means an impulse purchase: he'd looked at some 40 properties and drawn up some basic criteria. 'It had to be within reach of San Francisco because I was working in Silicon Valley; it had to be big and liveable, and I had to be able to grow grapes. This particular square mile had a river running through it. The moment I saw it, I bought it. I paid a million dollars.' This was 1982, and there were very few people making wine on the hillsides in Napa and Sonoma. 'The locals were pretty condescending. They said, "It's going to cost you two or three times what it costs on the valley floor, and you're going to get half the yield out of it."' One vintner told him his wine tasted 'like cat's piss'.

He was undeterred. 'They told me I was going to go broke. Well, I didn't think so,' he murmurs. Peter Michael Winery today has 149 acres (60ha) of Knights Valley, plus vineyards on the Sonoma Coast and in Napa's Oakville, and there's no doubting the esteem in which the winery is held. (The wines are reviewed by Alder Yarrow on p.90.)

It's been 'a driving force for truly fine wines that capture the unique sense of place', says Christopher Barefoot, vice president of communications at Opus One. Will Harlan, whose father Bill is the same age as Sir Peter, calls him 'a wonderful vintner to share the industry with'. Jamie Ritchie, head of Sotheby's global wine business, credits the winery with 'laying the path for all the best-quality Chardonnays' from the region and 'setting a new benchmark of quality as a role model for classically structured California Pinots'. The flagship Bordeaux blends Au Paradis and Les Pavots, Ritchie told me, 'will define their places in the highest-quality Cabernet firmament over the next 15 years'.

I meet Sir Peter Michael first over Zoom and then, later, with his son Paul and daughter-in-law Emily, at The Vineyard at Stockcross. He opened this luxury hotel and spa 40 miles west of London in

1996 and gradually turned it into a centre of excellence for US wine. The hotel – and its wine merchant arm The Vineyard Cellars – together have one of the most comprehensive American wine lists in the world. In person, Sir Peter is small and spare and fit-looking. He has the air of a man who is still quietly in command, although he's handed over the day-to-day running of the business to Paul and Emily. (Besides the winery and the hotel, there's the nearby Donnington Valley hotel and spa, a no-less-luxurious counterpart to the Vineyard.) 'I'm just the old man. I'm content to sit back and criticise and leave them to sort out the problems,' he says drily.

Over lunch with Paul and Emily, I get an impression of a gradual shifting of priorities aimed at raising the winery's profile. There is no doubting the closeness of the family, but they're not going to let that stand in the way of progress. Emily has just appointed a marketing director for the first time, which entailed a battle. 'Oh, I fought. I had to persuade [the board] that it's not just the importance of what's in the bottle.' They have also just been taken on by the Bordeaux négociant CVBG; from September, the flagship Les Pavots and Au Paradis will be sold through the Bordeaux Place. CVBG managing director Mathieu Chadronnier loves the wines but acknowledges, 'Peter Michael is not as well known as wineries of similar quality.'

It's not that Sir Peter didn't promote his winery – and California wines with it. The Vineyard hotel, for example, was renowned for its extensive wine list a generation ago. Don Weaver, director of Harlan Estate, credits Sir Peter with creating 'an excellent, somewhat unique platform and showcase for California wines in the 1990s' and recalls that he 'used to get lavish orders for Harlan' as a result. No expense was spared on the ground either, Sir Peter always employing the very best winemakers in the business – from Helen Turley in the early days, then the Epernay-based Nic and Luc Morlet, to the newly appointed Robert Fiore, a highly respected winemaker with a background in geophysics who has just been recruited from Tim Mondavi's Continuum.



While he has the air of a man still quietly in command, Sir Peter has handed over the day-to-day business to Paul and Emily. 'I'm just the old man. I'm content to sit back, criticise and leave them to sort out the problems'

TOP: CENTRE: JULIAN ANDERSON



**'This particular square mile had a river running through it.
The moment I saw it, I bought it. I paid a million dollars.
The locals were pretty condescending.
They told me I was going to go broke'**

- Sir Peter Michael



Above and right: Sir Peter's latest forays include the development of an electric tractor and a device to protect grapes from smoke taint

Previous spread: overlooking some of the winery holdings in Knights Valley

Paul and Emily taste all the parcels individually but don't join blending sessions. 'I've thought about that, but it's not how we've done it. I'm not a winemaker or a hotelier – I'm a businessman,' Paul says. It's a typical understatement. The family is intimately involved: in normal times, Paul will fly out several times a year, as his father would have done, and the whole family is there for the summer months. When in the UK, they communicate with the winery daily, Paul says. Like all good owners, their skill is in employing the right people. Paul conducted the recruitment process for Fiore, but his father must have been in the back of his mind as he made his decision: 'When we'd decided, I told him, "You're going to like this guy – he's a scientist."'

Paul has his father's reserve and, I suspect, prefers to be interviewed with Emily, who is not reserved at all and has a loud laugh that punctuates our conversations. The business is still very much a family operation. The huge yurt-like tent they put up at the hotel during the pandemic is decorated with about 50,000 corks hanging on wires, all threaded by Emily and the children and whichever employees happened to be there. 'The whole family has been involved in one way or another – we had to, because we'd furloughed 300 staff.' Lady Michael – Maggie – who runs the pedigree herds and organic crops of the family's Berkshire farm, also takes a close interest in the farming at the winery.

The importance of continuity is enshrined in what Paul describes as '100 by 100: 100% ownership and 100% commitment for 100 years'. How certain are they that their children (who are in their late teens and early 20s) will want to come into the business? 'That is the idea of 100 by 100,' Emily says. 'I want my children's children in 100 years' time to be authentic and to be telling the next generation's story.' She's talking about sustainability, about 'what goes into the ground', but there's also a strong generational angle here. When Sir Peter was starting up, he took orders by fax and telex (they still have a working fax machine) and would not have had to field too many questions about the sustainability of his farming methods. Now, Paul says, 'we can't take for granted that we can always sell the wine. The generations have different attitudes: they're looking for more authenticity; there are climate factors and local factors they want to know about. There are many more choices out there. If you can't see what the winery's values are, why bother?' It would be wrong to give the impression that a new generation is busily sweeping aside the attitudes of the old. The founding ethos – mountain vineyards, classical winemaking, limited production – is as important and as relevant now as it was in 1982. It's just going to be a bit more visible from now on.

The word 'passion' is overused in the wine world, but you know it when you see it. Sir Peter's achievements in the engineering field are considerable and lasting, and they made him a fortune – many fortunes. But of all he's done, it's his winery of which he is most proud. 'It's one of the joys and wonders of my life,' he says. He might bridle at the description of his first years in Knights Valley as hobbyesque. 'It was a real white-knuckle ride,' he says. 'The money was very significant. Some might say, "Here's this business guy just dumping a few spare bucks for a bit of fun," but it wasn't like that at all.' Throughout his career, there have been doubts, he says, and sleepless nights. (The list of his start-ups that didn't make it is surprisingly long.) 'But I'm not prepared to talk about that. I'm only going to talk about the good bits. In this life, you try to do as many things as you can, and you hope that you make more right decisions than wrong ones. The winery turned out to be one of the best.' ○

'In this life, you try to do as many things as you can, and you hope that you make more right decisions than wrong ones'



The unstoppable
growth of

MEZCAL

GREG BUDA PHOTOGRAPHY

From humble origins it rose to prominence on the New York bar scene. Now, says Liza Weisstuch, this beguiling spirit is expanding its reach further afield – and into collectors' cellars

On a Saturday evening in July, before the sun went down, there wasn't an empty table in the outdoor seating area at The Cabinet, a mezcal-focused bar in Manhattan's East Village. Inside, the bar that extends the length of the dark, narrow space was completely occupied, too. Among the guests sipping colourful cocktails and frozen Margaritas – a summer necessity amid the city's stifling humidity – a few drinkers sampled from line-ups of small glasses arranged on a wooden board before them. Some slices of orange and a bowl of small, crispy cricket carcasses rounded out the presentation – one culture's palate-cleanser is another culture's curiosity.

A server delivered my quartet of samples and gave me a rundown of the one-ounce pours. She explained different agave variations – arroqueño, cuishe, tobala – and the flavours they impart: mineral, grassy, fruity, earthy, herbal, smoky. Each was indeed wildly different from the last. I'd go so far as to say as different as bourbon is from a pot-still Irish whiskey.

As a spirits category, mezcal may be one of the most challenging – or the most exciting and engaging, depending on your outlook. What's clear is that American imbibers are up for the challenge. Mezcal has become, in no uncertain terms, a phenomenon, growing quickly from cultishly popular tipple among industry insiders to mainstream darling.

The numbers tell it best. Recent figures from the Consejo Regulador del Mezcal show mezcal's value grew from 6.9bn pesos (\$349.5m) in 2019 to 8.2bn pesos (\$413.3m) in 2020. According to research group IWSR Drinks Market Analysis, mezcal is one of the fastest-growing categories in the United States, with sales increasing by nearly 15% by volume in 2020 over 2019. Sales are forecast to grow 49.2% by volume between now and 2025. Many credit that steady growth to imbibers' deeper knowledge of other spirits, which has led curious drinkers on an Indiana Jones-like pursuit of the next big thing.



'It's actually whisky drinkers – and to a smaller degree, rum drinkers – rather than Tequila drinkers who are moving into mezcal,' says Justin Lane Briggs, an agave spirit expert and consultant who developed The Cabinet's collection of 300-plus expressions and cocktail list. 'People who are into funky Jamaican and Haitian rums make the jump pretty easily. It's also whisky drinkers looking for the next thing, rather than Scotch drinkers looking to exchange smoke for smoke. It's bourbon drinkers coming at it from an understanding of small-batch exclusivity. They're interested in one-offs like they can experience in the whiskey world – a batch the producer only released once as a commercial variety, say.'

So, what is it that attracts drinkers long committed to other spirits? You've likely heard mezcal explained as Tequila's smoky cousin. This is an extremely inadequate description, because it brushes over the many elements that make mezcal unique. While Tequila can legally only be made in the state of Jalisco, its Consejo Regulador allows mezcal production in nine different states within its sweeping denomination of origin. And while Tequila must be made with Blue Weber agave – one species among nearly 200 – mezcal producers can employ 40 to 50 species, each of which can encompass several varieties. Espadín, a variety with a relatively short growing time of six to eight years, is used in about 90% of mezcal production.

To make Tequila, agave hearts are usually steamed before fermentation. Mezcal-makers typically fire-roast their agave in pits or stone ovens, which contributes the spirit's smoky notes. But as Briggs noted, what makes mezcal particularly intriguing is its small-batch, truly hand-crafted nature and its ability to express terroir, in terms of both geography and distinct generations-old techniques, most of which are quite labour-intensive. Altitude,

weather, soil, sunlight, roasting techniques, fermentation vessels and ambient yeast are just a few of the factors that determine a mezcal's character.

Many credit Ron Cooper for unleashing the mezcal craze. In 1995, when he began exporting mezcal to the US under his Del Maguey label, Americans knew mezcal as rough, industrially produced stuff, a far cry from the small-batch products made with generations-old recipes on individual palenques. In his effort to highlight the human element, the personalities that give each expression its character, he referred to the products he bottled as single-village mezcals. Cooper sold a controlling interest in the brand to beverage giant Pernod Ricard in 2017.

'Ron recognized the parallel between the language of mezcal and wine, so he started going to food-and-wine events and talking to people who understand complex flavours and the vernacular of different varietals, different terroirs and things we didn't exactly talk about in the spirits world,' says Misty Kalkofen, who works for Del Maguey in a largely educational capacity under the title 'godmother'. 'Ron focused on the growing craft-cocktail movement of the time. Cocktails weren't so much about hiding flavours like we saw earlier, coming out of our vodka stupor. They were about creating layers of flavours. Spirits like mezcal resonate with bartenders making strong and stirred drinks.' Kalkofen adds that in the past decade or so, consumers have become increasingly focused on where their food and drink come from. 'People want provenance and history and these are all things you find in mezcal. It was a perfect storm. A lot of things happening within the food and drink world have themes that mezcal speaks to.'

Danny Mena is a partner in Mezcal de Leyendas and Pelotón de la Muerte, two growing brands. He serves a négociant-like role, bottling far-flung producers' spirits for export. The former was

Right: mezcal has become a staple at New York's Brandy Lounge, whose founder says it appeals to those who want small-batch spirits with personality

Left: the Koch El Maguey Madrecuishe mezcal (£66.45, The Whisky Exchange) took a Gold Outstanding award at this year's IWSC, where it was praised for its 'amazing aromas of limes, blackcurrant, chocolate and rose petals', while the palate 'combines smoke elements with freshness of minerality and citrus fruit zest'

DEBORAH WASTIE





Left and right: orange, rather than the more clichéd lime, is the recommended accompaniment for samples of mezcal, US sales of which are projected to grow by almost 50% over the next four years (all bottles courtesy of The Whisky Exchange)

started in 2006 by the founder of the first mezcal bar in Mexico City. Other outposts have since opened around the world. Despite his deep involvement in the world, Mena is endlessly amazed at the variety he encounters. 'Nothing compares to how artisan it is. Between the natural yeast and fermentation – some even ferment in leather hides – every batch of every product is so unique, so special,' he says. 'When you look at the bottle, you're never sure what you're gonna get.'

Mezcal has taken off in cocktail bars, to be sure. The Oaxaca Old-Fashioned, a smoky twist on the standard, was created in 2007 by New York bartender Phil Ward, who worked at acclaimed cocktail bar Death & Co before opening Mayahuel, his own agave bar. Now it's a modern standard, known in any watering hole worth its weight in bitters and artisanal ice. As all this has happened, bar managers at many high-end establishments, often destinations for whisky drinkers, have bulked up their inventory with mezcals.

Meanwhile, a young generation of chefs is working with bar staff to develop recipes that pair well with different mezcal expressions. At De Mole, a Mexican restaurant in Brooklyn, beverage director Daniel Flores, whose family owns the spot, has created imaginative cocktails involving things like chamomile- and saffron-infused mezcals. But ask him about the spirit, and he speaks enthusiastically about the mezcal-infused smoked salmon.

Now the spirit is moving beyond popular culture and into the collector's world. Options that make up a brand's core range,

like Del Maguey's Vida, run at a user-friendly \$35 or so, while the more fascinating Pechuga, which harnesses chicken breast in the distillation process, fetches around \$200. A safe bet for a higher-end heritage mezcal is about \$150; some esoteric bottlings have been known to sell for several hundred dollars.

Whisky-drinkers who are on the hunt for limited editions and collector's edition releases may find a whole new thrill in mezcal in that many *mezcaleros* can be equated to fine wine producers. Nearly everything they make is a vintage, and once it's gone, they'll have to just wait and see what's next. A lot of committed mezcal drinkers will discover a producer they particularly like and track his or her releases.

Flavien Desoblin, who opened New York's whisky-focused Brandy Library in 2004 and the more laid-back Copper & Oak in 2014, has begun to see the mezcal cult of personality emerging. He calls out Berta Vasquez, a veteran distiller who produces for the Rezipiral label, as having a particularly committed following. 'It's so artisanal, it's so craft, it's so small-craft. Generally speaking, those who are into unique spirits – whether it's rye or Armagnac – want to try mezcal,' says Desoblin. 'We find some people spending money on whatever's the weirdest or oddest or most expensive mezcal because it offers them this edge. If you have a very expensive example, it's going to grab their attention, for sure. It's another degree of sophistication. But now is just the beginning of the mezcal movement. It's in its infancy.' ○

DEBORAH WASTIE



**Mezcal is moving
beyond popular culture
and into the collector's world.
Some esoteric bottlings
sell for hundreds of dollars**

California's most collectable

Giles Cooper of London merchant and broker Bordeaux Index picks out the must-have wines of the Golden State – both for the cellar and the investment portfolio – as well as highlighting the ones to watch

To consider California as a single wine-producing region is rather like treating France or Italy as one giant homogenous wine territory. With more than 900 miles of coastline, from San Diego in the south to Crescent City on the northern border with Oregon, and 600 miles of this with land under vine, California boasts huge natural variation of latitude, altitude, aspect and soil types – the consequences of ancient tectonic events. The net result is a variety of microclimates that begets a huge number of tiny estates, making minuscule volumes of world-class wine that can fetch significant prices. Furthermore, the wines are so delectable in youth that they are often consumed on or shortly after release, creating a supply squeeze that dovetails with increased demand as the wines realise their actual qualitative potential, which can take 20 years or more for the Cabernet-based wines.

Despite this diversity, at the very top end, the relatively small enclave of the Napa Valley still dominates. And having long been available domestically only through individual wine clubs or direct-to-consumer models, more and more of Napa's stunning wines are finding their way on to the global market as a new generation of owners and winemakers look to reach out across the planet. Many of their traditional domestic buyers are ageing, already with deep cellars and offspring less willing to pay top dollar for new releases.

This – in addition to the owners' desire to see their wines rubbing shoulders with the biggest names of Europe on the tables and in the cellars of the cognoscenti – sees a natural widening of the market that, with a little more education and understanding, is likely to lead to a rise in consumption and thus prices.

From an investment perspective, as my colleague Matthew O'Connell, Bordeaux Index's head of investment, wrote for *cluboenologique.com* recently, 'We believe the outlook for US wines is largely positive and that the broader "rare Napa" category is a sleeping giant. The question with such segments is always when the catalyst will come for a market step change – in this case, the combination of education and distribution changes driving significantly greater demand.'

For this reason, Matthew recommends Ridge Monte Bello (despite recent price gains) and a few of the rare names such as Harlan, Colgin and Sine Qua Non, with a more cautious approach to Screaming Eagle and the rarer names in Napa. 'The region definitely merits close observation over the next two to three years, and more ambitious investors could start to take positions in the lesser-known Napa wines, assuming even the current price per case is not a deterrent,' he says.

My remit here is broader, spanning wines to lay down and eventually drink. Regardless of investment potential, the following all merit a place in any collector's cellar.



The big four

Harlan Estate

In essence, the Harlan story is one of maverick prescience and a long, relentless dedication to perfectionism that has few modern parallels. Because Harlan Estate is not on any maps, directions to the winery come with references to trees and gateposts rather than Google 'pin drops' or GPS coordinates. Occupying an eagle's-nest overlook in the hills of western Oakville, this amphitheatre vineyard, while relatively small, is divided into innumerable steep hillside plots planted primarily to Cabernet Sauvignon. Since the estate's foundation in 1984, the Harlan family has overseen more than a third of a century of rigorous selection and development that has crystallised into one of the world's most iconic and ageable wines. Distribution is strictly controlled; the current release, the 2017, trades at around £2,900 per three-bottle case, while the 100-point 2016 has already risen more than 20% to around £3,250 for three bottles.

Screaming Eagle

Surely on a level with Petrus and DRC in the pantheon of 'world's most famous wines', Screaming Eagle has become one of the most exclusive and most sought-after bottlings for collectors. Founded just two years after Harlan, it wasn't until 1992 that the debut vintage was released – to the surprise acclaim of 99 points from Robert Parker ('one of the greatest young Cabernets I have ever tasted'). With its vineyards located on the eastern side of the valley where the Oakville Crossing meets the Silverado Trail, at the foot of the Pritchard Hill section of the Vaca Mountains, it benefits from incredibly complex soils and some stunning old vines that combine to fashion an unforgettable Cabernet experience. As an outlier in price, at an average of around £7,500 for three bottles, the opportunity manifests with recent 100-point vintages such as 2018 and 2015 trading at £6,800–7,300 for three bottles, while the equally ranked 2010 and 2007 are some 15–20% above this.

Dominus

In the late 1960s, Christian Moueix, son of the eponymous Bordeaux company's founding father Jean-Pierre, travelled to California to study. Having arrived back home in 1970 to manage the family's great châteaux, he longed for the warmth of the West Coast. Returning to the States in 1981, he discovered that the legendary Napanook Vineyard, responsible for some of the greatest wines to be made in California during the 1940s and '50s, was for sale. He entered into a joint venture with the owners before buying them out in 1995, elevating this exceptional but underdeveloped terroir into something that could produce one of the great wines of California and, indeed, the world. Dominus was born under the premise of 'Napa terroir but with a Bordeaux spirit'. One of the few top-end Napa wines to be made in good volume, it is liquid enough to have the market set prices through active trading. The perfect-scoring 2015 looks an opportunity at £2,400 per six, some 50% below the 100-point 2013.

Ridge Monte Bello

Not a Napa Valley wine but arguably the most famous Cabernet from outside that region, Monte Bello is a true California first growth. High atop the Santa Cruz Mountains south of San Francisco, California's coolest Cabernet-producing area, the Monte Bello vineyards are just 15 miles from the Pacific, range from 1,300 to 2,700ft above sea level, and boast complex limestone subsoils, the likes of which are not found in either the Napa or Sonoma valleys. Wines have been made here since the 1880s, but the vineyards fell into disrepair during Prohibition. They were resurrected in the 1940s before the modern story of Ridge began in 1959, when a group of Stanford Research Institute scientists decided to take over. Under the genius Paul Draper, their hippie-inspired hands-off winemaking showed exactly how good the terroir here was. Monte Bello is a wine of intense purity, power, finesse and chalky minerality, with staggering ageing capacity – hence it can be slower to gain in price. Recent releases were around £1,000 for six bottles, while a mature high-scoring vintage can fetch twice that price.

With Dominus, Christian Moueix has elevated an already legendary vineyard into something that can produce one of the great wines of California – and, indeed, the world



Sonoma stars

Aubert

Napa Valley born and bred, Mark Aubert made his name at some of the region's finest producers. At legendary estates including Peter Michael and Colgin, notably working under the great Helen Turley, Aubert encountered some of the finest Chardonnay and Pinot grown on the West Coast. A Burgundy obsessive, he was wildly driven by the belief that he could find 'grand cru' sites for Chardonnay in Sonoma and certain parts of Napa; working hand in hand not only with his wife Teresa but also Ulises Valdez (considered by many to be the finest grape-grower in Sonoma), he has set about doing just that. His vineyards are planted and managed plot by plot, clone by clone, and harvested and fermented piece by piece in order to maximise the potential for each site. Accessing stock as early as possible is the key here, because prices rise sharply after release, even if they do tend to stabilise somewhat immediately after. Most wines are available in the region of £150 per bottle.

DuMOL

Founded in 1996, DuMOL works with both estate and leased vineyards of distinction across the Russian River Valley, Sonoma Coast and Carneros (where the Napa and Sonoma valleys separate at the southern base of the Mayacamas Mountains). Viticulturist and winemaker Andy Smith, now with 20 years' experience at DuMOL, is committed to the vision of site expression. It therefore takes time, working with each individual vineyard, to discover its defining characteristics. And it can take even longer to make sure the right winemaking techniques are being employed in order to show sensitivity and highlight the vineyard characters in the wine. While the wines of DuMOL compete with the very best in the area, they remain extremely well priced. At under £400 for six bottles on release, the current 2018 vintage is more of an investment in the cellar than the portfolio.

Occidental

There are few bigger names in California winemaking than Steve Kistler. Having started his career jobbing with Ridge, Kistler founded his eponymous estate in 1978, and his world-class Chardonnays have been fixtures on top restaurant wine lists for decades. While he was making top Pinot Noirs and Chardonnays from his Russian River sites, Kistler had long been in thrall to the coastal vineyards of western Sonoma, at the extremes of where Pinot could be grown. The cooler days and warmer nights made it a very different environment from the sheltered Russian River Valley, and the fruit, which ripened more steadily and maintained more freshness and purity of character, made for wines of a very different profile, more akin to Burgundy than anything else from the north of the state. In 2011, Kistler founded Occidental Winery, where he produces world-class Pinot Noir from the Freestone-Occidental area. As with Aubert, securing stock on release is vital; the single vineyard 2018s are available in the region of £480 per six, while 2012s or 2010s can be as much as 40% above this.

Hartford Court

Don Hartford is one of many legal eagles who have taken the leap from court to vineyard. Alongside his wife Jenny, daughter of the late California wine scion Jess Jackson, Hartford farms some of the most spectacular and rugged vineyards across Sonoma, producing world-class Chardonnay and Pinot Noir. Many of the vineyards are at such climatic extremes that they can take until late October or even November to ripen, meaning the wines are driven as much by intense freshness as by luxurious California fruit. There is no doubt that they are following a trajectory set by the likes of Kistler, Kongsgaard and Aubert – and while the quality is incredible, the prices are yet to catch up. The downside of that, of course, is that tiny volumes and friendly pricing mean very little is available later. The range extends to more than 20 wines – from £180 per six for the estate wines, to £500 per six for some single-vineyard cuvées.



OCCIDENTAL

Freestone-Occidental



The outlaws

Sine Qua Non

In the early 1990s, Manfred and Elaine Krankl began to explore the potential for Rhône varieties in vineyards just north of Santa Barbara, founding the now-legendary Sine Qua Non estate. Based primarily on Syrah and Grenache, not only did the results themselves push the boundaries of how wines could taste, feel and develop, but Manfred Krankl's artistic, naturally rebellious personality showed through in the bottles and labels. Produced in tiny quantities and selling to a cult-like mailing list of committed fans, each wine carries a unique name in each vintage, and their distinctive, often controversial labels have lifted them into a new realm of collectability. While the ultra-rare magnums and double magnums are hugely sought after, the most impressive price gains are made by the 75cl bottles, which are far more likely to be consumed. Prices are hugely affected by *Wine Advocate* scores, with serious premiums for 100-point vintages; on release they are around £1,650 for six bottles, but mature vintages can fetch double this or more.

Fingers Crossed

They say the apple rarely falls far from the tree, and this is certainly true of Nikolas Krankl, son of Elaine and Manfred of Sine Qua Non fame, and his Fingers Crossed label. But while the focus here is on the same varieties prized at SQN – Grenache and Syrah, along with a little Roussanne – and a certain amount of the 'wine as art' philosophy surrounds the project, Nikolas is no mere copycat. Krankl and his wife Julia have not shied away from the natural ripeness delivered by hours of perfect California sunshine, but they have added a more Old World-inspired restraint to their wines. They are clearly inspired by the legend of SQN – and there are far worse inspirations to take, let's remember – but they have their own unique style. Production levels are below 500 cases, and we predict huge things for them, even if it is too early to tell how they will perform price-wise.

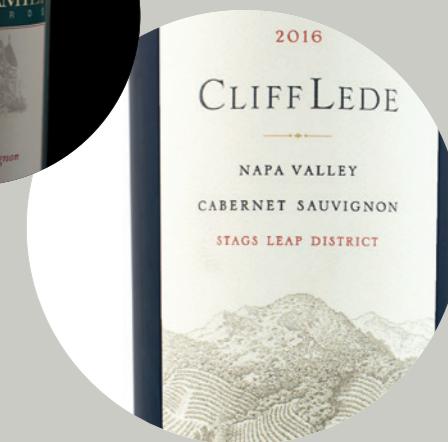
The next big names

Grace Family Vineyards

It might sound ridiculous to talk of Grace Family Vineyards as being 'next', given that it was one of the 'modern originals' of Napa Valley, being planted in 1976. But with the sale of the estate to a young couple – Kathryn Green and her husband Jeremy – expect even greater quality developments ahead. Comprised of the tiny Estate and Cornelius Grove vineyards west of St Helena (close to Colgin's famous Tychson Hill Vineyard) and the Blank Vineyard further south in Rutherford, Grace Family Vineyards is managed by old friends master gardener Kendall Smith and winemaker Helen Keplinger. Together, they fashion tiny-production Cabernets that, while deeply loved domestically, seem likely soon to be propelled on to the world stage. A five-case lot sold for \$35,000 at this year's Premiere Napa Valley auction, so new limits have been set; time will tell where the new owners look to position themselves.

Cliff Lede

Having made his fortune with his family construction business back in Canada, in 2001, Cliff Lede (pronounced 'lady') threw himself into life in the Napa Valley with the acquisition of an estate on the corner of the Stags Leap District and Yountville AVAs. Lede bought 60 acres of serious, high-quality vineyards on loamy soils, followed by a group of long-desired hillside vineyards next to Shafer's Hillside Select blocks. These southwest-facing plots on shallow volcanic soils brought to Lede's mind the famous Robert Louis Stevenson quote 'Wine is bottled poetry', which is why he renamed the collection of plots The Poetry Vineyard. But this is Napa, so Lede – who cut his wine teeth drinking first growths while listening to classic rock – named the individual plots The Rock Blocks: Sultans of Swing, Sympathy for the Devil and Ziggy Stardust. The ambition is here, so expect prices to head north as demand and fame grow. ○



American whiskeys

With the bourbon market expanding into ever more premium bottlings, Joel Harrison looks at some of the major players, via the top performers at this year's IWSC

The recent rise in demand for bourbon whiskey is no accident. Within the realm of dark spirits – those matured in casks – bourbon has historically lagged behind its peers from France and Scotland when it comes to status and price. But the quality has always been there (and has increased in recent years, too), meaning bourbon has long been the smart drinker's spirit of choice.

As Clay Risen documents on p.70, the past decade has seen a significant rise in prices at the top end amid a drive for premium bottlings. Increasingly, this is a category that is seeing a flurry of highly sought-after and often limited-edition bottlings, as the quality of American whiskey improves beyond even its own high standards. There is, however, still value to be found – see, for example, the Eagle Rare 10-Year-Old, or the Four Roses Single Barrel, both accessibly priced offerings, even if their value has risen slowly over the past few years.

One such brand that has gained a cult following, slowly garnered over the past decade, is Blanton's. Blanton's has always been highly regarded, and finally, along with a series of single-barrel expressions and special editions, it is being mentioned in the same breath as great spirit brands from other parts of the world.

Blanton's is produced at the Buffalo Trace Distillery, a

facility that makes a variety of different brands including Weller, Elmer T Lee and George T Stagg. The latter's annual release has been one of the star performers at auction in recent years, with bottles going for substantially more than the initial release price – the result of a market that undervalued, underrated, and undersupplied whiskey in the past. Collectors have finally caught up with the quality of the releases, but supply is still scarce for these aged products.

The practice of multiple releases from a single distillery is a well-worn ideal in the world of bourbon – not just at Buffalo Trace but also at distilleries such as Heaven Hill. The practice is partly the result of the Prohibition-era decimation of distilleries, followed by a consolidation in the industry and the employment of more modern equipment; it shouldn't be taken as a negative that individual sites can produce so many different brands. Each label should be judged on its own merit, style, balance and complexity – all of which are constantly improving.

Today, there is a raft of single-brand, craft whiskey distilleries opening up across America, inspired by the growing appetite for first-class bourbon. It will be these new players, alongside the already established powerhouse brands and producers, that should ensure a long and illustrious future.



98

Blanton's, Gold Edition, Single Barrel Kentucky Straight Bourbon Whiskey

Blanton's horse-racing-inspired stoppers hide a thoroughbred whiskey. Distilled at Buffalo Trace, this has a truly beautiful bold and spicy nose, with cinnamon-sweet intensity and an elegant balance of wood. Stone fruits stand out, with ripe corn and rye spice. Deliciously hot, with a lengthy finish. 51.5%

From £130 (sold out), £1,000+ on secondary market; £9.95 (3cl) Whisky Exchange

98

Parker's, Heritage Collection Rye Whiskey

One of the leading lights from Heaven Hill Distillery, Parker's Heritage rye carries notes of Black Forest gâteau with chocolate malt and burning vanilla embers on the nose. A strong rye spice leads the palate, with hints of peach and some menthol highlights. Well-integrated rocket leaf meets cola cubes, with balanced heat intensity, breadly dryness and an entirely moreish finish. 60%

£259.95 Master of Malt



98

Redemption, Barrel Proof 9-Year-Old Bourbon Whiskey

Redemption's Barrel Proof 9-Year-Old Bourbon hails from Indiana and has a mash bill of 75% corn, 21% rye and 4% malted barley. The nose is big and oily, with a complexity of crisp ripe pineapple, floral high notes and a backbone of chocolate oakiness. Deeply syrupy and spicy, with a chilli kick, intense heat and a super-lengthy integrated finish. 52.85%

N/A UK

98

William Larue Weller, Kentucky Straight Bourbon Whiskey

Another from the famed Buffalo Trace Distillery, this rare edition has an abundance of cherry, plum and stone fruit richness, with high notes of coffee on the nose. Very complex, with a tannic toffee backbone, cedar dryness and nuances of sweet, charred oak. The addition of water releases sherbet zinginess, bursting with flavour to a long, rounded finish. 64%

£1,500 (2015 release) Whisky Exchange



97

Eagle Rare, 17-Year-Old Kentucky Straight Bourbon Whiskey

A rare bourbon aged for nearly two decades and only available in small quantities once a year, in autumn. Sip this polished, well-aged whiskey to appreciate why patience is such a virtue. Sensational abundance of tropical fruit, caramel and sweet almond notes. Elegantly poised and well balanced with clean oak, nutty complexity and hints of chocolate, culminating in a deeply satisfying finish that goes on for an eternity. 45%

£1,500 (2016 release) Whisky Exchange

96

Elmer T Lee, Single Barrel Kentucky Straight Bourbon Whiskey

Named after Buffalo Trace master distiller emeritus Elmer T Lee, this bourbon carries a delicate, fruity nose with hints of nuts and sweet confection. Rounded and full, with appealing leather notes, balanced oak fruitiness and mouthfeel. Hint of caramel in the deeply satisfying finish. 45%

N/A UK



96

Four Roses, Single Barrel Straight Bourbon Whiskey

One of the drinks industry's most lauded bourbons, distilled and matured at the Four Roses Distillery, Kentucky. This edition is gloriously tropical, with bold orange wax and grapefruit, barley sugar and subtle floral notes on the nose.

The palate is perfumed and bold, with a heady mix of stewed fruits, rich cinnamon, nutmeg and walnut. Excellent integration; weighty and releasing immense length in the finish. 50%

From £40.89 Master of Malt, Whisky Exchange

96

Maker's Mark, Wood Finishing Series, 2020 Limited Release Bourbon

From the famed Maker's Mark Distillery, known for its wax-dipped bottles, this experimental bourbon uses different oak staves in the barrel for additional flavour. It results in a richly complex nose, with an abundance of blackberry and chewy toffee, nut and treacle characters and hints of coffee. The palate of blackcurrant liquorice sweetness balances with elegant oak and leads to a long satisfying finish. 55.4%

£149.95 Hard to Find Whisky



95

Colonel EH Taylor Jr, Kentucky Straight Rye Whiskey

Straight rye whiskey has experienced a strong recent resurgence in the US whiskey landscape, though Colonel Edmund Haynes Taylor Jr was making this style more than 100 years ago. This bottling shows ripe orchard fruits, candied oranges and lifted floral notes, with hints of menthol on the nose. Warm fields of mellow rye integrate seamlessly with dark grain and fresh grapefruit citrus to complete the palate. Bright capsicum balances elegantly with warming oaked spice for a summery finish. 50%

£120 Harvey Nichols

95

Thomas H Handy, Sazerac Rye, Kentucky Straight Rye Whiskey

Named after the New Orleans bartender who first used rye whiskey in the Sazerac cocktail, this features elegant cinnamon and subtle cardamom spice, with expressively deep caramel and roasted coffee undertones. Bold and forthright, with an abundance of rye, cocoa nibs and juicy stewed fruits. Sensationally integrated, with an astoundingly zippy finish. 64.5%

From £650 Whisky Exchange

94

George T Stagg, Kentucky Straight Bourbon Whiskey

One of the most sought-after bourbons on the market, George T Stagg is released annually and chosen from barrels matured in different warehouses at Buffalo Trace. An upfront spice with abundant oak, brown sugar and buttery caramel notes on the nose. The palate is delicate, with menthol, fruited creamy depth and a lingering sweet finish that seems to last forever. 65.2% (2020 edition)

£1,250 (2014 edition) Whisky Exchange

93

Blanton's, Original Single Barrel Kentucky Straight Bourbon Whiskey

The dumpy round bottle has made Blanton's a standout bourbon on any bar and in any collection, and this single-barrel offering gives apricot patisserie with vibrant citrus peel and toasty aromas on the nose. A gently warming, expressive note, with vanilla-pod nuances, peppercorn burst and a hint of cinnamon, creating a palate that resonates well into the long, warming finish. 46.5%

From £130 (sold out), £1,000+ on secondary market; £6.75 (3cl) Whisky Exchange



93

Old Forester, 1870 Original Batch Kentucky Straight Bourbon Whisky

Blended from barrels from three warehouses, each barrel from a different day of production, with a different entry strength and different age profile. The result is warm tobacco notes with standout oak tannins and a hint of menthol on the nose. The caramel sweetness is underpinned by pepper spice, bread characters and citrus top notes. A rounded dark cherry finish. 45%

N/A UK

93

Rittenhouse, Bottled-in-Bond Straight Rye Whisky

'Bottled-in-bond' can only be mentioned on a label if a bourbon has been distilled at a single distillery and aged for more than four years. It must also be bottled at 100 proof (50% ABV). This spicy rye whiskey shows mocha notes with hints of liquorice, elements of menthol and lifted notes of citrus on the nose. The palate is all rich chocolate orange cake with stewed fruits and lively intensity. 50%

£42.95 Whisky Exchange

92

Blanton's, Straight from the Barrel Kentucky Straight Bourbon Whisky

The individual stoppers in bottles of Blanton's each show a horse at a different stage of gallop, with a letter from the word 'Blanton's'. Each bottle of the Straight from the Barrel series has a handwritten label, and this bourbon gives soft stone fruits, elegant floral notes and velvety moss-like elements. Deeply characterful and broad in style, with spiky heat intensity and a lingering finish. 64.4%

From £130 (sold out), £1,000+ on secondary market; £9.95 (3cl) Whisky Exchange

92

Elijah Craig, Rye Whiskey

From the Heaven Hill Distillery in Bardstown, Kentucky, this rye whiskey was the first to carry the name of Elijah Craig, the distiller who some claim created the concept of ageing whiskey in charred oak barrels. This rye boasts notes of French coffee and croissant with glacé cherries and fresh gingerbread on the nose. The palate is green apples and menthol, with floral hints and a vanilla mellowness leading to a long, satisfying finish. 47%

N/A UK

92

Uncle Nearest, 1820 Premium Single Barrel Whiskey

A Tennessee whiskey named after the first African-American master distiller on record in the US, Nathan 'Nearest' Green. This single-barrel edition is matured for a minimum of 11 years and selected from just 1% of the stocks of Uncle Nearest whiskey. An elegant crème brûlée nose with caramelised orange zest and ripe tropical fruits on the palate; full-bodied, with drying oak tannins and bold sweetness on the tasty finish. 55.2%

N/A UK

91

Eagle Rare, 10-Year-Old Kentucky Straight Bourbon Whiskey

One of the most accessible bourbons on the market, Buffalo Trace Distillery's Eagle Rare is aged for more than a decade. The result is a sweet, fruity nose, with rounded nutty nuances and appealing confectionery notes. Pleasingly balanced, with a mildly tannic backbone and a brisk finish. 45%

From £34 Master of Malt, Whisky Exchange

91

Elijah Craig, Small Batch Bourbon

One of Heaven Hill Distillery's signature bourbons, the Elijah Craig Small Batch uses 'level three' charred-oak barrels to lend a subtle smoke note to the nose, with caramelised toast and popcorn aromas. The palate gives sweet grain complexity with peanut skin nuances and a balance of sharpness and menthol on the tannic finish. 47%

From £41 Master of Malt, Whisky Exchange

91

Evan Williams, 1783 Small Batch Bourbon

This whiskey celebrates the year Evan Williams founded Kentucky's first distillery. Chosen from fewer than 300 barrels distilled at Heaven Hill, its nose has delicate apples, lightly fragrant with a balance of caramel and fruit on the soft palate. Delightfully dry, complex and smoothly rounded, with sweet cherry on the finish. 45%

£30.90 Master of Malt

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Transatlantic gastromome

As French-born chef Daniel Boulud opens his long-delayed new restaurant in New York, Bill Knott asks him about the move away from meat-based menus and the future of fine dining, post-pandemic

Portraits by Ball & Albanese

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aniel Boulud is fond of saying he lives 'above the shop'. The shop in question, however, is not a humble *bouchon* in his native Lyon: its address is 60 E 65th Street, on Manhattan's opulent Upper East Side. Restaurant Daniel, the flagship of his fleet, holds two Michelin stars and is regularly ranked among New York's top five; in 1998, Boulud took over the building from Le Cirque, where he had once been head chef, to launch his own place, and the apartment above the restaurant has been his Manhattan home ever since.

Boulud's latest project would have been ambitious even without the chaos wrought by the Covid pandemic. Housed in the new \$3bn One Vanderbilt Plaza skyscraper, between Grand Central and the Chrysler Building in Midtown, Le Pavillon boasts 17-metre-high ceilings, acres of blond wood and dozens of trees – *rus in urbe*. The place has a decidedly Japanese aesthetic and a menu that is fashionably heavy on seafood and vegetables and light on meat – 'although we cook a very nice *côte de boeuf* as well', says Boulud. 'I love the fact that four out of five diners will choose seafood and vegetables, but we're not a spa restaurant, there's no tasting menu, and we're open for lunch and dinner. I want it to be a restaurant for New Yorkers, as well as visitors.'

Le Pavillon is named in homage to the restaurant of the same name that opened in New York for the World's Fair in 1939 and remained until 1972. 'It was a huge success,' Boulud says. 'It really took French fine dining to New York, and their kitchens trained thousands of young chefs. We are not trying to replicate the original, though – just to acknowledge its legacy. My idea for the new Le Pavillon was to create a connection with a new generation of diners but also to indulge my passion for seafood and vegetables.'





Boulud's new restaurant is housed in New York's \$3bn One Vanderbilt Plaza skyscraper and carries a distinctly Japanese aesthetic, with blond wood and trees



Boulud is keen to emphasise that Le Pavillon's menu is not a kneejerk response to any perceived trend towards meat-free dining, pointing out that he has been scouring the East Coast and elsewhere for top-notch seafood since he was at Le Cirque. 'And my menus at Café Boulud 23 years ago included one named Le Potager – "kitchen garden" in French – which was completely vegetarian.'

Those early days as a chef-proprietor still resonate with him today. 'One of my other menus – Le Voyage, which could feature dishes from Louisiana, Mexico, Greece, Vietnam – was partly based on the different nationalities we had in the kitchen. Of all my restaurants, it was the most exciting. I felt like I was conducting a full orchestra. In any case, there is never just one trend in food anymore: the world is more complicated than that. New York is

famous for its steakhouses, for example, and I don't see them going bust anytime soon.'

Unlike many great chefs, Boulud is also a first-class businessman whose various restaurants appeal to a wide range of tastes and budgets. The pandemic, however, has forced him to rethink his operations – and the nature of fine dining itself. 'I get told that fine dining is over, but I don't think so. A great meal will always spark memories: it might just be in a different form in the future – less pomp and circumstance, perhaps, but still with precision, refinement and attention to detail. A good meal with good wine and friends – that is what we all crave right now.'

Boulud's training as a chef could hardly have been more traditionally French. Born and raised on a farm outside Lyon, at the age of 14 he apprenticed under two-star chef Gérard Nandron,



Boulud is adamant that a heavier focus on vegetable-based dishes isn't trend-driven: 'I had a vegetarian menu at Café Boulud 23 years ago'

THOMAS SCHAUER

a great friend of the legendary Paul Bocuse, who would come into the restaurant for coffee. A year later, Bocuse asked Nandron if he could borrow some apprentices, and Boulud found himself in the kitchen of L'Auberge du Pont de Collonges, Bocuse's gastro-temple on the banks of the Saône.

Nearly 30 years older than Boulud, Bocuse had trodden a similar path: his mentors included Mère Brazier, the formidable, self-taught chef who, along with many other *mères de Lyon*, had kept the flame of classic Lyonnais cooking alive. In the mid-1970s, Bocuse took Boulud under his wing, and they formed a firm friendship that lasted until Bocuse's death in 2018. As an ambassador for classic French gastronomy, bundling up his knives and travelling to the US, Boulud had an impeccable pedigree: 'It was in my DNA, and I carried it over the Atlantic.'

Growing up among the stellar appellations of Burgundy and the northern Rhône, young Boulud took an early shine to wine, too, 'although the wine we made on the family farm was much more humble. Our farm was in the hills, not on the plains, so we kept animals, made cheese, and grew vegetables and grains – classic mixed farming. And we had a vineyard as well.' The vines were planted not to Pinot Noir or even Gamay but to Baco Noir, a cross between Folle Blanche and a North American vine, created in the late 19th century to resist the predations of phylloxera, which was sweeping through France at the time. 'It was raw and tannic – *brut de décoffrage*, as we say in French, rough around the edges – and we had three 675-litre barriques. Each September, I helped my father fill them, and I was in charge of tapping bottles from the barrel. It stained everything it touched; to be honest, it was like drain cleaner. Put it this way, I don't think Riedel has made a glass for it.'

With his wages from Nandron, Boulud could explore the crus of Beaujolais on his motorbike, and they are wines he still enjoys today. 'I can get as much pleasure from a bottle of Beaujolais from one of our small suppliers as I do from a grand bottle of Burgundy,' he says. Today's diners, Boulud thinks, look for provenance as much on the wine list as on the main menu. 'It wasn't always that way in Beaujolais. As a grape grower, you used to have a choice between selling to the local cooperative or to Georges Duboeuf, who, by the way, did a lot for the region. "Go big, or go broke" was the message. But now we have relationships with many small producers who are as passionate about their wines as our artisanal suppliers are about their cheeses or charcuterie. And our diners appreciate that.'

**'I get told that fine dining is over,
but I don't think so. It might have less pomp and
circumstance in the future
but still with precision and refinement.'**

– Daniel Boulud



The menu at Le Pavillon is heavy on seafood and vegetable-based dishes. From top: Bang Island mussels soup; girelle pasta with chanterelle mushrooms; monkfish braised in red wine

THOMAS SCHAUER

He earned his spurs in New York as head chef at a string of smart hotels, then as the much-lauded head chef at Le Cirque, but – thanks to his upbringing in Lyon, where good food is a birthright, regardless of your station in life – Boulud has always had the knack of understanding more mainstream dining, too. Famously, in 2001, he launched the DB Burger, its patty studded with slow-cooked short rib, foie gras and black truffle: it spawned a host of copycat gourmet burgers and is still on his menus today. ‘The thing you have to understand when you look at a dish like a hamburger,’ he explains, ‘is to take pride in it. Use classic combinations of flavours, use impeccable ingredients, and don’t let any one flavour overwhelm the others. The tomato sauce, for example, is reduced and reduced, so it is very intense, but we use very little.’

Boulud concedes that Americans have a different palate from his. ‘It depends on the type of food, but there is often an underlying sweetness [in American dishes]. My palate is French, so I am more tuned in to mustard, horseradish, acidity – like the classic Troisgros dish of salmon with sorrel, for instance. That had so much acidity from the reduction of white wine that I’m not sure it would have worked in the USA.’

Dinex Group, his 19-strong restaurant empire, spans North America from Miami to Montreal, with outposts in Dubai, the Bahamas and Singapore. While they all have the Boulud DNA, ‘it’s important that they aren’t just cookie-cutter places,’ he says. ‘We curate each menu and try new things everywhere we go.’ One high-profile site has recently closed, however: Bar Boulud at the Mandarin Oriental in London. ‘First they had the big fire, then the pandemic... It became very difficult.’ But Boulud still has a hankering to open another restaurant in the city. ‘I love London. I can get all the produce I want from France, as well as amazing seafood – the Dover sole you get in London is superb – so I can’t wait to do something there again.’

While the Baco Noir of his childhood came from America to France, lending vigour to moribund French vineyards, Boulud’s journey has been in the opposite direction but with a similar purpose: exporting French savoir-faire to reinvigorate American haute cuisine – although you might not want to accompany a plate of food from Boulud *fils* with a glass of wine from Boulud *père*.

But his proudest achievement, Boulud thinks, is training a new generation of chefs. ‘[It’s] a family, really. If you look at any new, good restaurant in New York, you can bet for certain that the chef has learned his or her trade in one of New York’s best kitchens. I am thrilled that so many of them come to my restaurants to learn their craft.’ ○



Boulud has been based in New York for three decades but still finds a clear demarcation between American and French tastes

‘There is often an underlying sweetness in American dishes. My palate is French, so I am more tuned in to mustard, horseradish, acidity’