

■ THE SOMMELIER JOURNAL

DECEMBER/JANUARY • 2019/2020

\$10.00 US/\$12.00 CANADA

THE **SOMM** JOURNAL

THE **OLDEST WORLD**

IN THE MIDST OF A RENAISSANCE,
WINES OF ISRAEL
OFFERS DIVERSITY AND HISTORY
FEW REGIONS CAN CLAIM

PHOTO: DAVID SILVERMAN



► Harvest in the Judean Hills.

Italy's first

certified organic

producer is
**coming to
the U.S.!**



CAMPAGNA FINANZIATA AI SENSI
DEL REG. UE N. 1308/2013
CAMPAIGN FINANCED ACCORDING
TO EU REG. NO. 1308/2013



A Love Story with Nature Since 1985

- ▶ Mont'Albano was founded in 1985 in the heart of the Friuli Venezia Giulia region by Mauro Braidot.
- ▶ Contrary to the trend at the time, he intuitively converted his initial 5 hectares (12.3 acres) of vineyard to organic production.
- ▶ The winery quickly grew with its outstanding wines of Friuli and soon began working with organic grape growers in the neighboring Veneto region as well. of the winery
- ▶ Firm belief in – and evangelical zeal for – sustainable organic viticulture is not a return to the past; it is innovation that combines the best elements of contemporary technology with the hands-on experience of a seasoned winegrower.
- ▶ The desire to preserve the inherent character of the land using natural products, preserving flavor and typicity.
- ▶ Purity of the wine is sustained through traceability along every step of winegrowing and winemaking.

Starting January 2020, the organic wines of Mont'Albano—Pinot Grigio Friuli DOC, Lugana DOC, Amarone della Valpolicella DOCG, and Rosso Venezia Giulia IGT—will be available in the U.S. through **Romano Brands**.
Visit romanobrands.com, email wine@optonline.net, or call 516-681-5159.



THE SOMM JOURNAL

DECEMBER/JANUARY 2019/2020 • Vol. 7 No. 1

PUBLISHER/EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Meridith May
mmay@sommjournal.com

MANAGING EDITOR

Jessie Birschbach
jabs@sommjournal.com

SENIOR STAFF EDITOR

Kate Newton
knewton@sommjournal.com

CONTRIBUTORS

Jeremy Ball, Devin Berko, Kyle Billings, Ian Buxton, Leanne Chau, Krista Church, David Denton, Laura Donadoni, Amanda M. Faison, Christy Furman, Melody Fuller, Orietta Gianjorio, Nick Klein, Jess Lander, Rachel Macalisang, Michelle Metter, Michael Morse, Jennifer Olson, Rebecca Peplinski, Alexander Rubin, Courtney Schiessl, Mark Stock, Karen Vierbuchen, Irene Virbila, Ruby Warrington, Angie Webb, Alexa Weber, Todd Westphal, Peter Wilke, Doug Young

CONTRIBUTING EDITORS

Rachel Burkons; Carl Corsi; Janet Fletcher; Jay James, MS; Karen MacNeil; Chris Sawyer; Erik Segelbaum

FOLLOW US!



@Sommj • facebook.com/SommelierJournal • instagram.com/SommJournal

Published six times per year
ISSN 1944-074X USPS 02488i

The SOMM Journal is published bi-monthly for \$52 per year by The SOMM Journal, The Sommelier Journal, 6345 Balboa Blvd.; Ste 111, Encino, CA 91316. Periodicals postage at Van Nuys, CA and additional mailing offices.

Subscription rate:
\$52 One Year; \$100 Two Years.
Single Copy; \$10
For all subscriptions, email:
subscriptions@sommjournal.com

POSTMASTER:
Send address changes to:
The SOMM Journal
6345 Balboa Blvd.; Ste 111
Encino, CA 91316
818-990-0350

©2019 The SOMM Journal, The Sommelier Journal.
All rights reserved. Reproduction in whole or part without written permission is prohibited.
Sommelier Journal USPS 024881, ISSN 1944-074X

VP/SALES & MARKETING

Bill Brandel, CSW
818-322-5050
bill@sommjournal.com

VP/COMMUNICATION & TRADE RELATIONS

Lars Leicht
lars@sommjournal.com

VP/FINANCE DIRECTOR

Anna Russell
818-990-0350
arussell@tastingpanelmag.com

SENIOR ART DIRECTOR

Michael Viggiano

SENIOR CONSULTING EDITOR

Anthony Dias Blue

SENIOR COLUMNIST

Ruth Tobias

DEPUTY EDITOR

Eric Marsh

SPECIAL PROJECTS EDITOR

David Gadd

GLOBAL WINE EDITOR

Deborah Parker Wong

EAST COAST EDITOR

David Ransom

FEATURES EDITOR

Michelle Ball

EDITORS-AT-LARGE

Randy Caparoso
Jonathan Cristaldi

LONDON CORRESPONDENT

Steven Spurrier

Reflecting on a

CENTURY

KETTMEIR'S ORIGIN STORY IS FORGED FROM ITALIAN HISTORY

Stefano Marzotto, chairman of Tenute Santa Margherita—Kettmeir's importer and principal owner since 1986—cuts a cake while celebrating the winery's 100th anniversary with founder Giuseppe Kettmeir's grandson Franco.



PHOTO: LORENA BENANZO

PHOTO COURTESY OF KETTMEIR



Lake Caldaro is surrounded by the vineyards of Italy's Alto Adige region.

first press



by Lars Leicht

IN 1919, LIKELY NOBODY in Alto Adige was in the mood for a party. A brutal conflict fought on sheer rockfaces, steep cliffs, and deep ravines had just ended, removing the region from Austrian control and resulting in what was essentially for the young Kingdom of Italy a Pyrrhic victory—it won the war, but at a tremendous cost.

Skilled winegrower Giuseppe Kettmeir decided to make a new start with a fresh perspective in the wake of this upheaval. Banking on indigenous varieties like the then-little-known Pinot Grigio, he shifted production from red (for which Italy already had reliable and prestigious sources) to white. The road ahead was long, but Giuseppe persevered, with the region—and his descendants—following suit.

A century later, the circumstances certainly call for celebration, as the winery's centennial cannot help but prompt reflection on just how far Alto Adige has come. Kettmeir's pioneering helped turn the area from a backwater to one of Italy's wealthiest regions, and its accomplishments—particularly culturally and enologically—were evident to the 100 guests who gathered at the Kettmeir winery in early September.

After a tour that showed the latest developments and expansions as well as a generous reception with the requisite speeches, the drama of the occasion set in. Winemaker Josef Romen and wine educator/brand ambassador Alberto Ugolino took command of the long table stretching through Kettmeir's aging cellar to begin a multisensory tasting thoughtfully orchestrated to various lighting setups and music selections. Perhaps most remarkable was the call for silence during the tasting—not an easy feat in the wine world, especially in oh-so-social Italy—but the hush added reverence to the occasion.

The room turned aquamarine and filled with the sounds of “A Stream with Bright Fish” from Harold Budd and Brian Eno's 1984 album *The Pearl* to show off Kettmeir's sparkling Brut Rosé Pas Dosé. Inspiration came from its salinity and fresh-



A slice of Kettmeir's Alto Adige vineyards.

PHOTO COURTESY OF KETTMER

ness, with the ambiance recalling the sea and the movement of the wine's bubbles.

Next, bright yellow filled the space to reflect the floral aromas of the Pinot Bianco. The musical accompaniment, “Diferencias sobre ‘Guárdame Las Vacas’” by 16th-century Spanish composer Luis de Narváez, featured the *vihuela*, an ancient instrument that's essentially a cross between a guitar and a lute, with soft tones that invoked the character of this subtle white wine.

Orange, meanwhile, was chosen to high-

light the exotic fruit, spice, and lively acidity of Müller Thurgau. Inspired by traditional Indian music, the composition “Moola Mantra” by contemporary German artist Deva Premal expressed the exotic nature of the crossed variety. And as part of the dramatic finale, the room turned ruby red and resounded with Antonio Vivaldi's “Chamber Concerto in G Minor, RV 107” in homage to the evolving complexity and harmony of Pinot Nero from Alto Adige.

The subsequent dinner built on the theatrics of the tasting, with guests ascending

from the cellars to find the winery's portico—which overlooks the picturesque village of Caldaro (aka Kaltern) against a mountainous backdrop—fully transformed. Here, another elongated table was bathed in candlelight, which reflected off of the stemware and chargers. With a sense of harmony that mimicked the musical works heard earlier in the evening, this four-course and “four-hands” dinner was executed by two local chefs. Claudio Melis of In Viaggio in Bolzano presented a smoked beetroot antipasto paired with Lago di Caldaro Classico; his second course of suckling pig was prepared four ways in the styles of Orvieto, New York, Tokyo, and Sardinia and was accompanied by the sparkling Extra Brut. Anna Matscher of Zum Löwen in nearby Tesimo offered her first course, risotto with three types of yellow tomatoes, to complement Kettmeir's Chardonnay, followed by her aromatic herb soup dessert with a Moscato Rosa.

The meal, while familiar in feel, reflected the dual Italianate and Germanic dimensions of Alto Adige's distinctive culture. There are moments here where one isn't quite sure if they're actually in Italy; Local dialects sound distinctly Teutonic, the architecture is decidedly Alpine, and the approach to affairs both personal and professional certainly puts more emphasis on precision and efficiency than is stereotypically expected of the country.

In fact, one would be hard-pressed to find the Italian national flag while traveling in Trentino–Alto Adige. The motives, both social and political, are partially driven by sour memories of the fascist era; speaking German was strongly discouraged at the time, though the majority of the local population considered it their mother tongue (and still do). That hardly means, however, that the residents wish to return to Austrian control: Italy has granted broad autonomy to both provinces, so regional flags fly highest and proudest here.

The elegant celebration at Kettmeir was, of course, completed with a birthday cake cut by Stefano Marzotto, chairman of Tenute Santa Margherita—Kettmeir's importer and principal owner since 1986—and Giuseppe's grandson Franco Kettmeir. Giuseppe's motto, “Progress within tradition,” never rang truer. *SJ*



PHOTO: LORENA BETANZO

A handful of the 100 guests, from left to right: Lana Bortolot, Eric Crane, Peter Plaehn, Gregory Mayer, Jacob Gragg, Cate Hatch, Alvin Brantley (kneeling), Lorena Betanzo, Christopher Coker, Tiffany Tobey, Emily Tolbert, Lars Leicht (kneeling), Trevor Wood, and Jon McDaniel.



PHOTO: LORENA BETANZO

Guests enjoyed a four-course meal and tasting while overlooking the picturesque village of Caldaro (aka Kaltern) against a mountainous backdrop.

THE SOMM JOURNAL

PHOTO: TODD WESTPHAL



THE SOMM JOURNAL
CAMP



112 LOVE AT
FIRST SIP

*Profiles in Heroic
Winegrowing at the
2019 Paso Robles
Rhône Camp*

Linne Calodo wine was served with tacos and crisped crickets during a recent Rhône-themed SOMM Camp in Paso Robles.

COVER STORY

84 **THE OLDEST WORLD**
*In the Midst of a
Renaissance, Wines of Israel
Offers Diversity and History Few
Regions Can Claim*

FIRST PRESS

5 **REFLECTING ON A
CENTURY**
*Kettmeir's Origin Is Forged from
Italian History*

FEATURES

60 **ACID TRIP**
*Silverado Vineyards
Effortlessly Channels Terroir in
Northern California's Stags Leap
District and Coombsville AVAS*

68 **BACK TO ITS
BORDEAUX ROOTS**
*Murrieta's Well Celebrates Its
30th Anniversary*

90 **EMBRACING THE
CHALLENGE**
*Scholarship Winners Reflect on
the Biggest Teachable Moments
of the 2019 Treasury Wine
Estates Luxicon Tour*

96 **ROMANIA RISING**
*Jidvei Impresses
the Experts with Its
Unconventional Wines*

100 **THE CHOSEN
LAND**
*Livio Felluga Continues to
Evolve by Balancing Its
Founder's Legacy with an
Experimental Approach*

106 **DESCENDING ON
DENVER**
*Area Buyers Gather for an Epic
Blind Wine Tasting at Local
Italian Restaurant Tavernetta*



VINEYARDS GONE WILD



SAND POINT
FAMILY VINEYARDS



©2019 LangeTwins Family Winery and Vineyards, Acampo, CA

Committed to habitat restoration **SINCE 1987** | SandPointWine.com

To Another Great Year



To Another Great Deal!

Internationally unrivalled.
Uniquely professional.
ProWein 2020.

THE WORLD'S NO.1

15-17 March 2020

International Trade Fair
for Wines and Spirits
Düsseldorf, Germany

www.prowein.com

For show information: Messe Düsseldorf North America
Tel. (312) 781-5180 _info@mdna.com
www.mdna.com

For hotel and travel arrangements: TTI Travel, Inc.
Tel. (866) 674-3476 _info@ttitravel.net



THE **SOMM** JOURNAL

DEPARTMENTS

- 12** Reader's Corner
- 14** One Woman's View
- 16** The Ransom Report
- 18** Sense of Plate
- 20** Bottom Line
- 22** Steven Spurrier's Letter from London
- 24** Sparkle Motion
- 26** Wheying In
- 28** Good Somm/Bad Somm
- 30** Wine Clans: Valentina Abbona
- 32** Technology: Wine Rescue
- 34** Elevating the Rockies
- 36** Three Finger Jack
- 38** Business of Wine
- 39** Organic Viticulture: Mont'Albano
- 42** Spirit au Courant: Skrewball Peanut Butter Whiskey
- 44** On the Job: Chris Chamberlain
- 46** Industry Dossier: Robin Akhurst
- 48** Burgundy: Maison Louis Latour
- 50** Brick and Mortar: Gary's Wine & Marketplace
- 52** Italy North to South: Abruzzo
- 53** Fortified Wine: Madeira
- 54** Scents & Accountability
- 55** Beer'd Science
- 58** SommFoundation Letter
- 64** New Ventures: Millinery Gin
- 66** Cannabis: Lowell Cafe
- 67** Olive Oil: 2019 Harvest
- 70** Central Coast: San Luis Obispo Winemakers
- 74** Cava: Garcia Carrión
- 76** SOMM Jury: Talley Vineyards, Pio Cesare, Gelson's
- 80** Viewpoints: Sober Curious
- 81** Trendsetters: Lyre's Non-Alcoholic Beverage
- 82** Washington: Walla Walla Valley AVA
- 95** Epicurean Events: Pacific Wine & Food Classic
- 122** The Last Word

MYSTERIOUS TRANSYLVANIA

Discover Transylvania with Mysterium
from Jidvei, the wines that come
to life in the dark



Campaign Financed with EU Funding.

Available in the US market through:
EXCLUSIVIO LLC
www.exclusivio.us, 703-508-3852

Book Tasting

THE WORLD ATLAS OF WINE, 8TH EDITION

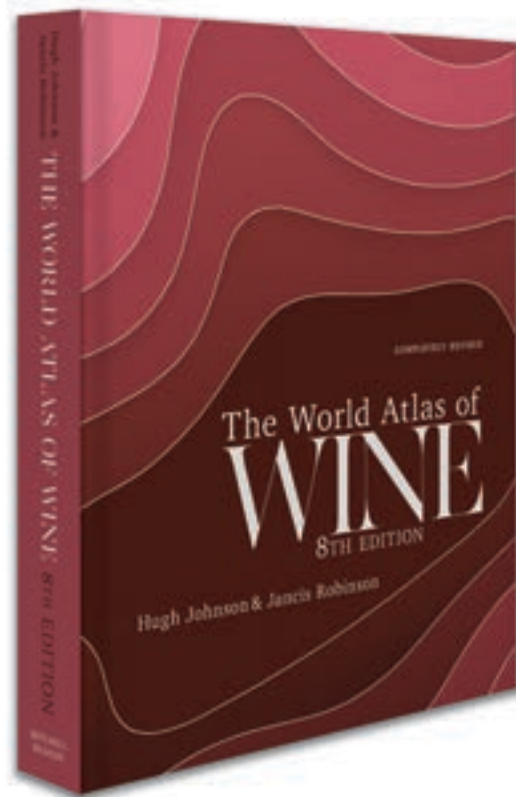
by Hugh Johnson and Jancis Robinson

THIS BOOK HAS become such a staple for sommeliers that it hardly needs an introduction: We all know it's chockful of wine maps—covering regions, vineyard areas, and appellations—and also offers an introductory overview of subjects like winemaking techniques, terroir, grape varieties, climate, and vineyard management on a global scale.

Published by Mitchell Beazley and distributed by Hachette Book Group, this latest edition—the eighth—not only maps out Israel, British Columbia, Uruguay, Brazil, Cyprus, Lebanon, and St. Helena for the first time but also adds to existing sections, including those focused on China and California's Central Coast. As if that wasn't telling enough of the authors' desire to stay on trend, it also touches on topics like climate change, natural wine-making, and wine fraud, to name a few.

Complete with a nice new redesign, *The World Atlas of Wine* has managed to make itself all the more essential for every sommelier's library.

—Jessie Birschbach



Somm
Foundation

SommFoundation Launches the Global Diagram of Wine

THE FUTURE OF wine study is here, all at the tips of your fingers. SommFoundation is proud to announce the launch of the Global Diagram of Wine, through which you can explore vineyards, see the terrain, and learn about your favorite places and producers, running the gamut from Burgundy, Napa Valley, and Piedmont to Sherry and Scotch.


Created by Greg Van Wagner of Aspen, Colorado, the Global Diagram of Wine was born out of the concept that everything in the world of wine, spirits, saké, and beer originated from a tangible place that can be navigated to

both physically and virtually.

As part of the Diagram's 3D experience, you can view an entire region or zoom in on a single vineyard, down to the meter. Read up on technical information on the associated area and producers by clicking on pop-up links. Delve into detail on varieties, bottlings, climate, vintages, production techniques, terms, soils, history, laws, parcel connections, producer summaries, and other information to make you the best professional you can be.

In addition to supporting the education of beverage professionals worldwide through scholarships and

enrichment trips, donors will have access to this new educational tool. Beginning the first quarter of 2020, those who contribute \$125/year or more toward SommFoundation's education programs will receive complimentary annual access to the Global Diagram of Wine as a thank you for their support. To learn more, visit sommfoundation.com/tools and click on the Diagram Preview video link.

Annual access to the Global Diagram of Wine is a \$125 value. Consult your tax professional about contributing to SommFoundation, a 501c3 tax-exempt organization. 



HAHN FAMILY

— WINES —



©2019 Hahn Family Wines

WHAT DOES SOCCER HAVE TO DO WITH MAKING GREAT PINOT NOIR?

Everything. Because at least a couple times a week, our cellar crew takes a break to play a pickup game of soccer. At Hahn Estate, we celebrate the teamwork, pride and drive that every employee has to produce outstanding wine. So, next time you visit the Santa Lucia Highlands, stop by with your sneakers and look for Izzy, Luis and the rest of the crew...you just might be invited to play!

Visit Hahn Estate, 37700 Foothill Rd, Soledad, CA 93960





A Conversation with Bill Harlan

WHEN BILL HARLAN was a young man, Robert Mondavi took him on a multi-week trip to Bordeaux and Burgundy that changed the trajectory of his career. Now on the cusp of his ninth decade of life, Harlan has followed in his mentor's footsteps to become Napa Valley's leading visionary—but unlike Mondavi, he's a quiet man who shuns the limelight. Read on for excerpts from a conversation I recently had with him, but first, some background.

Harlan's best-known wine, Harlan Estate, has garnered eight 100-point scores from *Wine Advocate*. Retailing at \$1,500 a bottle, it's one of the most expensive and sought-after expressions in the United States. Another Harlan producer, BOND, offers five estate wines, each of which is also highly rated and available for \$750 per bottle. Meanwhile, The Napa Valley Reserve, a private wine club with a refundable initiation fee of \$165,000 and some 600 global members, has also been successful.

Harlan is also a partner in Meadowood in Napa Valley; one of California's few three-Michelin-starred establishments, it's a member of the Relais & Châteaux luxury hotel and restaurant group. Finally,

he co-founded Pacific Union, a diversified real estate development firm in San Francisco, which he and his partners reportedly built into a billion-dollar business before later partially selling to GMAC. Not bad for the son of a father who worked in a slaughterhouse and a mother who didn't finish high school.

Q: Karen MacNeil: What was the toughest part of your early years?

Bill Harlan: Carving out the time necessary and figuring out how to realize our vision, which was to become a First Growth of California. We acquired our first land in the Napa Valley in 1979. Our first winery was the old Sunny St. Helena Winery, which Robert Mondavi's father, Cesare Mondavi, established just after the repeal of Prohibition. We converted it to Merryvale. It became our study and our training ground.

Q: Harlan Estate has a very definitive image. Did you envision exactly what you wanted the brand to be when you founded the winery?

Our vision was not about building a brand;

it has been about working toward our 200-year plan to build a winegrowing domain that can last for centuries.

Q: Is wine good for a society or a culture?

We see winegrowing as an art—a collaboration between human beings and nature. Picasso once said about art, "It washes away from the soul the dust of everyday life." If we can do that in some small way throughout decades of vintages, we feel we will realize our purpose.

Q: Tell us something about you that would surprise people.

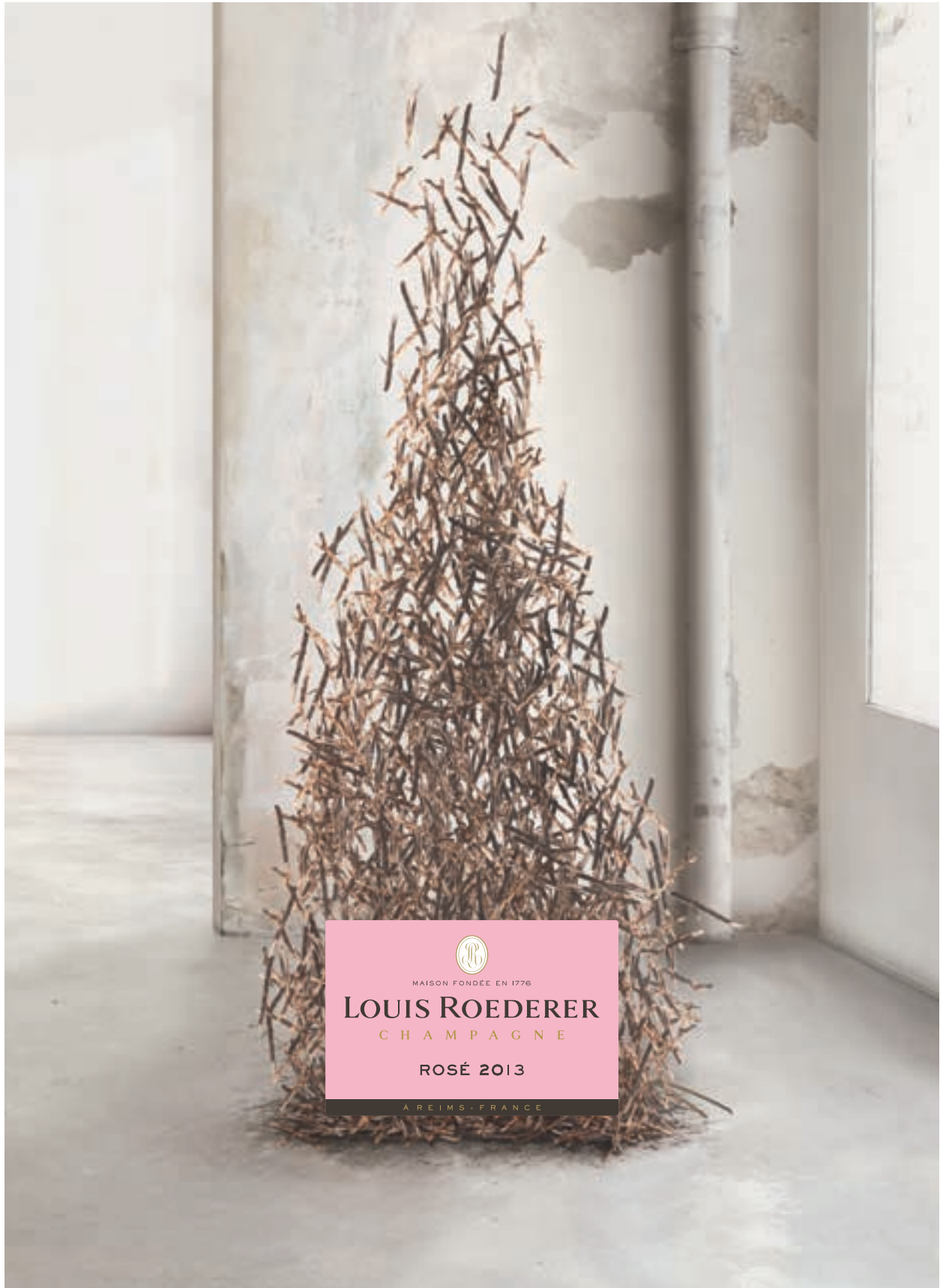
Roughly 50 years ago, after Alcatraz had closed as a prison, I swam out from San Francisco around the island and back. When I was a kid, I'd heard that no one could escape from Alcatraz by swimming through the currents and cold waters. I wanted to see if it could be done. *SN*

Karen MacNeil is the author of The Wine Bible and the editor of the digital newsletter WineSpeed. Contact her at karen@karenmacneil.com.



The hilly vineyards of Harlan Estate in Napa Valley.

PHOTO COURTESY OF HARLAN ESTATE



LOUIS ROEDERER
HAND IN HAND WITH NATURE



Going All in on Gran Selezione

CHIANTI CLASSICO'S NEWEST EXPRESSION IS FINDING ITS GROOVE

THE WINES OF Chianti Classico have long held a place on the American table due to their high quality-to-value ratio and broad appeal. So, when producers announced in 2013 that they were creating a new category within the DOCG regulations to join the already available Chianti Classico (normale) and Chianti Classico Riserva expressions, the decision was, as expected, met with a fair degree of fanfare.

What is Gran Selezione? Stylistically, it's envisioned as a wine that a given producer considers as its premier cuvée. "Chianti Classico has gained in quality over the last decade or two, and we felt the timing was right to raise the bar and come out with a DOCG, not IGT, wine that we feel deserves a place at the table next to Italy's top wines," says Francesco Ricasoli, owner of Barone Ricasoli (imported by Folio Fine Wine Partners). "The Gran Selezione is that wine."

As for how it's produced, here are a few details on the winemaking requirements: A Gran Selezione must contain a minimum of 80% Sangiovese, have an alcohol content of at least 13%, and be made exclusively from estate-grown fruit. After these criteria are met, the wine's path

is pretty much up to the winery, though it must age for a minimum of 30 months—including three months in bottle—before release (there is, however, no set oak-aging requirement).

These rules leave a lot of room for interpretation. Most producers create a blend, but some, including Elisabetta Gnudi Angelini of Borgo Scopeto (imported by Vineyard Brands), insist on making their Gran Selezione from 100% Sangiovese. "It's our most important grape," says Gnudi Angelini. "I feel our most important wine should reflect this."

As with many wine regions that broaden their horizons, Chianti Classico's first efforts at making Gran Selezione were hit-and-miss, and I think some producers were having trouble differentiating their Gran Selezione from their Riserva. Recently, though, I've found cohesiveness within the category's ranks, and as a keen student of Tuscany and Chianti, I'm delighted at the way things have progressed. Five years later, there are still some critics, but their numbers are depleted; the wines, meanwhile, are starting to carve out their own sections on lists, showing that this top-end Chianti Classico is here to stay. **SJ**

The Colledilà Vineyard grows Sangiovese for Barone Ricasoli's Colledilà Gran Selezione, which comprises 100% Sangiovese. The producer also makes a blended Gran Selezione.



PHOTO: DAVID RANSOM



FRESH LOOK,
SAME AWARD-WINNING WINE

TRY OUR LATEST VINTAGE

91
POINTS*

ANTHONY DIAS BLUE
BLUE LIFESTYLE

“There is an opulence that still leaves room for the bright Riva Vineyard fruit to shine through. Creamy, citrusy with poached pear and thread of salinity.”*

- JESSIE BIRSCHBACH
Certified Sommelier

WENTE
VINEYARDS



CHARDONNAY
ARROYO SECO • MONTEREY
RIVA RANCH VINEYARD
2017

ESTATE GROWN

*VINTAGE 2015

FAMILY OWNED. ESTATE GROWN. CERTIFIED SUSTAINABLE.



Broadening His Palate

KEN FRANK, CHEF/OWNER OF NAPA VALLEY'S LA TOQUE, FOLLOWED HIS HEART THROUGH A PROLIFIC CAREER

KEN FRANK, CHEF/OWNER of the one-Michelin-starred La Toque in Napa Valley, remembers the exact time and place he became smitten with wine. It was 1972 in Paris, just off the famous market street rue Cler, where his parents' friends François and Maude DeMaussion lived. On that day, François pronounced 16-year-old Frank mature enough to drink wine—with a meal. The bottle in question was a Minervois from Provence, and the rest, as they say, was history. "This is pretty good. I like this," he remembers thinking.

When his parents moved back to California after spending a year in a small Swiss village on the French side of Lake Geneva, Frank was desperate to stay. "The food, even at school, was the best I had ever eaten in my whole life," he recalls. He quickly found a job at a hotel restaurant nearby and roomed with a school friend's family; by the end of the summer, he'd moved up from washing dishes to helping out in the kitchen. Back in Los Angeles his junior year, he cooked burgers after school to earn what he needed to return to the same hotel the next summer.

The following year, Frank became even more entrenched in hospitality while working as a pantry man in a French restaurant in Pasadena. He lasted about three months as a pre-med student at the University of California, Riverside, before dropping out to follow his heart. Restless and eager to learn, he moved from place to place, cooking at legendary L.A. spots like Perino's, La Chaumière, Ma Maison, L'Orangerie, and La Guillotine.

At 21, he was hired as the opening chef at the influential Michael's in Santa Monica, where he began contemplating wine seriously for the first time. The talented sommelier there, Phil Reich, "made the wine list rock," says Frank. "He really got wine and thought the kitchen had to be tightly connected to the sommelier staff."

In 1979, at 23, the third-generation Angeleno opened La Toque on Sunset Boulevard, where he cooked for celebrities and newly minted foodies. The restaurant, which relocated to Napa Valley in 1998, celebrated its 40th birthday last October; its cellar, meanwhile, holds 2,300 wines from all over the world. "Over the years, I've developed a very broad palate," says Frank. "People up here have some amazing cellars."

Frank meets with Wine Director Richard Matuszczak, sommelier Beki Miller, and chef de cuisine Scot Livingston virtually every day to tweak dishes and try out wine pairings. The restaurant's signature dish—steak in a red wine sauce, served with pearl tapioca cooked with lots of cheddar—is built for Cabernet. "The cheese is a really good foil for [the wine]," Frank says. "The fat and salt and umami can handle all the oak, tannin, fruit, and alcohol in a big, young red."

Still a couple of years out, Frank's next project is Table 14 at La Toque, a rooftop restaurant at an extension of the Westin Verasa Napa hotel that has yet to be built. He says he's itching to create a U-shaped counter where chefs can engage with diners face to face and notes that the experience is going to be very special—not to mention expensive. Better start saving up now. **SJ**

PHOTO COURTESY OF LA TOQUE



Welcome to the world of

LYRE'S



EXPLORE OUR RANGE OF 13 IMPOSSIBLY CRAFTED
NON-ALCOHOLIC SPIRITS

Curious? Get in touch to explore the range
(562) 926-2000 | southernglazers.com | lyres.co



PHOTO: WENO VIA ADOBE STOCK

Putting Umami to Good Use

WHEN IT COMES TO WINE, “THE FIFTH TASTE” IS PERHAPS THE MOST IMPORTANT

I ADMIT THAT after over 40 years in the business, I still gloss over umami when teaching the basics of wine tasting. I find it easier to put everyone through the paces by focusing primarily on body, acidity, tannin, dryness/sweetness, and aroma.

But that doesn't mean that umami isn't key to the tasting process. In fact, in our industry, it might be the most important sensation of them all for the simple reason that it significantly impacts our perception of food. All too often summarized as the elusive “savory” taste, umami is hardwired directly to the brain by specific taste buds identified some time ago by scientists Charles Zuker and Nick Ryber as T1R1 and T1R3. These receptors are sensitive to foods high in glutamates or amino acids and, interestingly, are positioned throughout the palate. (Those tongue maps that claim to pinpoint taste buds sensitive to sweet, sour, bitter, and salty sensations have been conclusively disproven, yet many wine professionals still use them as teaching material.)

To get a complete picture of umami, it's important to understand glutamates, the salts of an amino acid known as glutamic acid. Glutamates are found in natural

concentrations in more foods than we can probably count, such as tomatoes, mushrooms, fish and shellfish, sea vegetables, soybeans, and, as we long ago discovered, human breast milk. Consequently, the processes of food preparation—cooking, fermenting, brewing, braising, stewing, curing, aging, and so on—result in further concentrations of amino acids, triggering the savory umami sensation. Parmigiano-Reggiano and extra-aged Gouda, for instance, are umami overloads, as are sausage meats, soy sauce, fish sauce, tomato sauce, and the stock reductions, sauces, essences, broths, or nages fashioned by restaurant chefs. Focus on these elements when you want to create umami effects in dishes to match specific wines.

The kicker, for our purposes, is that wine itself is also full of amino acids. To quote scientist Fernanda Cosme in the *Journal of Food Science and Technology*: “The major free amino acids found in the most varieties of *Vitis vinifera* grapes are arginine, proline, alanine, and glutamic acid. Usually the highest concentrations are found in the final phase of the ripeness of the grapes.”

Because these amino acids are distribut-

ed in grape skins, “red wines contain significantly more amines than do white wines,” wrote Pekka Lehtonen in his 1996 paper *Determination of Amines and Amino Acids in Wine*. This explains what many of us have learned instinctively or through observation: That lighter or matured red wines—moderate enough in tannin, alcohol, and oak to allow amino acids to be perceived with clarity by the tongue—are usually better than whites when it comes to pairing with high-umami foods such as seafood broths (e.g. bouillabaisse and cioppino), tuna and salmon dishes, cooked oysters, or everyday “umami bombs” like cheeseburgers (preferably with umami-laced ketchup and mustard) and BLTs.

I recently presented nine sommeliers with a rich dish of lobster macaroni made with three cheeses (including Parmigiano) that we tasted with a barrel-fermented Chardonnay and a big, spicy Petite Sirah. Despite the meal's Chardonnay-friendly creaminess, everyone preferred the Petite Sirah, which was no surprise. Umami, when you play it right, has a huge impact on how wines and foods interact, so maybe it's time for all of us to taste—and teach—accordingly. **||**



THE STORY OF AN ESTATE

Making wine is a beautiful experience. There is nothing quite like growing fruit in the vineyard and crafting it into something people enjoy. At Murrieta's Well, this is especially true.

No one else can tell the story of our vineyard.

Located in the heart of the Livermore Valley, the story of our estate began in 1884 with cuttings from Chateau d'Yquem and Chateau Margaux. The story continues today with our small lot approach to winegrowing and winemaking. We farm acre-by-acre. We craft our wines barrel-by-barrel. And through the art of blending we harness the true potential of the vineyard to share the best story of our estate with you... vintage after vintage.

MURRIETA'S WELL
ESTATE VINEYARD

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Robbie Meyer".

Robbie Meyer, Winemaker for Murrieta's Well



On the Up

IN ITS FIFTH YEAR, THE JUDGMENT OF BC SHOWCASES THE EVOLUTION OF THE OKANAGAN VALLEY

WITH 185 REGISTERED wineries now operating within its borders, the Okanagan Valley comprises roughly 84% of British Columbia's total vineyard hectareage (3,575 out of 4,249). Planted largely to classic grapes like Merlot, Pinot Gris, Pinot Noir, and Chardonnay, it's situated on the 49th and 50th parallels, making it the northernmost world-class wine region in the world. The valley's low hills and oblong lakes

of the same variety and with a comparative price; this year's competition, however, had flights of ten wines—six from B.C. and four from other regions, as had been the case in the Judgment of Paris. To illustrate the evolution of Okanagan Valley wines in just a few short years, here are the top three wines, in descending order of how they placed, in each flight since that inaugural event.

Pinot Gris in 2017: Kim Crawford 2016, Marlborough, New Zealand; Zind-Humbrecht 2014 Turckheim, Alsace, France; 50th Parallel 2016, Okanagan Valley, British Columbia

Merlot in 2017: Checkmate 2013 Black Rook, Okanagan Valley, British Columbia; Duckhorn Vineyards 2013, Napa Valley; LaStella 2012 Maestoso, Okanagan Valley, British Columbia

Sparkling wine in 2018: Roederer Estate Brut, Anderson Valley, California; Veuve Clicquot Brut Champagne, France; Pierre Paillard Les Parcelles Bouzy Grand Cru Extra Brut Champagne, France

Bordeaux-style red blends in 2018: Poplar Grove 2014 The Legacy, Okanagan Valley, British Columbia; Laughing Stock Vineyards 2015 Portfolio, Okanagan Valley, British Columbia; Dominus Estate 2014 Napanook, California

Riesling in 2019: St. Urbans-Hof Wiltinger Alte Reben 2014, Mosel, Germany; CedarCreek Estate 2018 Platinum Block 3, Okanagan Valley, British Columbia; St. Hubertus & Oak Bay Estate Winery 2017 Family Reserve, Okanagan Valley, British Columbia

Chardonnay in 2019: Meyer Family Vineyards 2016 Tribute Series Donovan Tildesley, Okanagan Valley, British Columbia; 50th Parallel Estate Winery 2016, Okanagan Valley, British Columbia; Craggy Range 2017 Kidnappers Vineyard, Hawke's Bay, New Zealand

Pinot Noir in 2019: Arrowleaf Cellars 2016 Archive, Okanagan Valley, British Columbia; La Crema 2016, Monterey County, California; Sokol Blosser 2015 Estate, Dundee Hills, Oregon

Syrah in 2019: Tightrope Winery 2016, Okanagan Valley, British Columbia; Le Vieux Pin 2016 Cuvée Violette, Okanagan Valley, British Columbia; Stag's Hollow Winery 2016 Amalia Vineyard, Okanagan Valley, British Columbia



PHOTO: MAXDIGI VIA ADOBE STOCK

were formed by the retreat of glacial ice between 9,000 and 11,000 years ago, which left behind large deposits of gravel, silt, and sand. Grapes benefit from cool nights, allowing them to retain their natural acidity, and there's no rain during the autumn, making for a long, dry harvest.

My visit late last October was at the invitation of Lana Popham, British Columbia's Minister of Agriculture, on behalf of the Okanagan Wine Initiative. Tastings at the organization's founding wineries reinforced that the region is now producing exemplary wines in a wide variety of styles, but if proof was needed, it came in the form of the Judgment of BC.

The annual tastings, which I last attended in 2015 (the inaugural year), are the brainchild of Canada's top wine critic, DJ Kearney, whose husband is one of the partners in Haywire Winery. The earlier iterations pitted flights of six British Columbian wines against six from around the world

Chardonnay in 2015: Soumah 2013 Single Vineyard, Yarra Valley, Victoria, Australia; Kumeu River 2012 Hunting Hill, Auckland, New Zealand; Hamilton Russell 2014, Hemel-en-Aarde, South Africa

Syrah in 2015: C.C. Jentsch 2013, Okanagan Valley, British Columbia; Langmeil 2012 Orphan Bank, Barossa, South Australia; Vincent Paris 2013 Cornas Granit 60, Rhône, France

Riesling in 2016: Weingut Max Ferd. 2013 Richter Graacher Himmelreich Riesling Kabinett, Mosel, Germany; CedarCreek Estate 2013 Platinum Block 3, Okanagan Valley, British Columbia; Wild Goose 2013 Stoney Slope, Okanagan Falls, British Columbia

Pinot Noir in 2016: Bouchard Père & Fils 2012 Beaune 1er Cru Clos de la Mousse, Burgundy, France; Bachelder 2012, Willamette Valley, Oregon; Felton Road 2014 Bannockburn, Central Otago, New Zealand



SKREWBALL

PEANUT BUTTER WHISKEY

An unlikely duo has been born -
the new peanut butter whiskey sensation
that people are going nuts over!



**Platinum Medal / Best in Class
Innovation Award**
SIP Awards 2019



**Double Gold
Best Flavored Whiskey**
NY World Spirits Competition 2019



Gold Medal / Best of Category
Los Angeles Intl. Spirits Competition 2019



  @skrewballwhiskey

Sparkle Motion

"Sometimes I doubt your commitment to Sparkle Motion," moans one frenzied pageant mom to another in a scene from the cult-classic film *Donnie Darko*. Well, don't doubt ours. In this column, the editors 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, send an email to rtobias@tastingpanelmag.com and jabs@sommjournal.com.



Argyle 2016 Vintage Brut, Willamette Valley, Oregon (\$100/3-bottle set)

Bubbly was made for the holidays, but this Art of Sparkling gift pack is particularly appropriate for two reasons. First, it's gorgeous, with three different labels designed by scholarship-winning students at the Pacific Northwest College of Art as part of an annual collaboration with Argyle. Second, the 2016 vintage—a blend of 55% Chardonnay, 35% Pinot Noir, and 10% Pinot Meunier—smacks of the season, with aromas of candied pear, butter cookie, and sugared almond paving the way for flavors of ripe golden apple with a hint of pineapple. The creamy texture, meanwhile, is reminiscent of cassata. Luscious as that may sound, it all coalesces around a through line of seabreezy minerality.



Herzog NV Lineage Momentus, USA (\$20)

Showing pale yellow with a silvery tint, this off-dry sparkler is a charmer that bursts with notes of ripe citrus—lemon, lime, pink grapefruit—as well as honeysuckle and croissant. It wears its residual sugar well, balancing creamy lime curd plus a touch of pith with a suggestion of salted taffy, and would pair nicely with vibrant, smoky Thai curry and South Indian fare.



La Vieille Ferme NV Réserve Sparkling Rosé, France (\$15)

Venerable Rhône producer Famille Perrin added the first sparkling expressions to the lineup of its value brand, La Vieille Ferme, last year; this rosé is a blend of Grenache, Cinsault, and Pinot Noir. Appealingly cantaloupe colored amid a light but lively perlage, it starts with aromas of tart strawberry, ripe pear, and orange cream-sicle, which continue on the palate along with cider apple and a touch of herb in a rush of mouthwatering acid. There's not much of a finish, but it's fun while it lasts.



VINEYARD BRANDS



MAN Family Wines NV Sparkling Chenin Blanc Brut, South Africa (\$16)

From dry-farmed vineyards in the Agter-Paarl region, this sparkling Chenin has an energetic mousse and bright notes of lime leaf, ripe grapefruit, and honeydew plus a sprinkling of salt. Yet it's softer in texture than you might expect from that description, delightfully bringing to mind melted sherbet.



VINEYARD BRANDS



Schramsberg 2010 Réserve, North Coast (\$120)

What a beauty. Almost rose gold in the glass, with a bead that fairly zigzags, this blend of 84% Pinot Noir and 16% Chardonnay from the first name in California sparkling wine offers ripe d'Anjou pear, brioche au sucre, and a hint of miso caramel on the nose. On the palate, tarte tatin and cinnamon-poached pear show as enticingly as the display in a pâtisserie window, even as a jaunty ribbon of fresh green apple unfurls toward a long, fine finish. SJ



DON MELCHOR

2014	2015	2016
2011	2012	2013
2008	2009	2010
2005	2006	2007
2002	2003	2004
1999	2000	2001
1996	1997	1998
1993	1994	1995
1990	1991	1992
1987	1988	1989

*Celebrating the
30th vintage*



WWW.DONMELCHOR.COM

Built for Dessert

GOUDA IS TAILOR-MADE FOR SATISFYING SWEET TOOTHES

by Janet Fletcher

A CHEESE THAT tastes like a salted caramel is never a hard sell. Americans, by and large, have a sweet tooth, which is why aged Goudas perform so well at cheese counters. They smell like butterscotch and brown sugar and have the texture of fudge. The cloying ones tend to satiate after just a few bites, but the best examples—those that are decidedly more complex—lure you back.

For sommeliers, aged Goudas are a sales opportunity: an excuse to nudge customers toward an end-of-dinner bottle of Port, Madeira, Rivesaltes Ambré, Oloroso Sherry, or off-dry sparkling wine. They're also brilliant with bourbon and Cognac.

Although the Gouda recipe originated in Holland, the U.S. makes some superb versions. The Dutch have never protected the name with a PDO (protected designation of origin), so it doesn't have a strict definition. By Dutch law, Gouda is made with cow's milk, but that regulation is largely ignored: Variants made with goat's and sheep's milk abound and merit a look.

The conventional recipe calls for curd washing, a technique that involves draining the whey and rinsing the fresh curds with water. By drawing off the lactose-rich whey, the cheesemaker deprives bacteria of the milk sugar they seek to ferment. The

result is a lower-acid, "sweeter," and more mellow cheese.

Keep an eye out for these Gouda superstars and accompany them with new-crop walnuts, dates, or fig preserves. With the right wine, they make a sumptuous dessert.

L'Amuse: This cow's milk Gouda is widely considered one of the Netherlands' finest. It's made by CONO—the dairy co-op that also produces Beemster—and matured for almost two years under the direction of Betty Koster, a respected affineur with a shop near Amsterdam. A gorgeous amber wedge with a powerful butterscotch aroma, L'Amuse starts out waxy on the tongue but dissolves into creaminess.

Brabander: Another winner whose affinage is overseen by Koster, this goat Gouda originates at a co-op and then moves to a climate-controlled aging facility for six to nine months. Under its lightly waxed rind is a firm ivory interior with an aroma reminiscent of dulce de leche. Brabander has enough acidity to balance that goat-caramel sweetness and is typically creamy enough to shave with a cheese plane.

Beemster X-O: Aged for at least 26 months, X-O is the most mature Gouda in the Beemster line. The name derives from the Beemster polder, a section of reclaimed land in North Holland that was created by dikes the Dutch constructed centuries ago. Age intensifies everything about this dark-amber, caramel-scented cheese, which is concentrated in flavor with a hint of piquancy. On the tongue, it's dense and fudgy, with abundant protein crystals.

Point Reyes Farmstead Gouda: In development for several years, this lovely cow's milk Gouda is now produced in sufficient volume to spread the word. You probably already know and admire this California creamery's blue cheeses and snackable Toma; prepare to love its Gouda, too. Matured for two years or more, it has an aroma of pale caramel, cooked cream, and pineapple. Concentrated and creamy yet crunchy due to its protein crystals, this newbie is going places. SJ

PHOTO: IRYNA MELNYK VIA ADOBE STOCK



Easy as...
Cherry Pie
1-2-3!

ONE VARIETAL

TWO WORDS: PINOT NOIR

THREE COUNTIES



Welcome home.

Cherry Pie California Tri-County Pinot Noir showcases the best of each county to create a wine with a distinct sense of place. From gravelly, well-draining sites in Monterey which create rich, concentrated earthy flavors, to the cool climate of Carneros in Napa which results in bright red, juicy flavors, and warm, sandy soils in Santa Barbara which provide intense aromatics and acidity. Each cluster begins with the influence of its surroundings.



Dear Good Somm/Bad Somm,

My GM wants to saber bottles of Champagne on New Year's Eve and is leaving me in charge of the biggest bottle. It could be cool, but I have so much anxiety about sabering a Nebuchadnezzar. What would you do?

Sincerely,
Playing with Swords

Good Somm

Dear Playing with Swords,

It sounds like your GM has a lot of respect for you, so put your fears aside and be honest about your concerns. I've seen videos of Nebuchadnezzars being sabered, and it's usually a catastrophe. Creative risk taking shouldn't set you up to fail, and if you refuse, what are they going to do, fire you? Quite the contrary: Being open with them might help improve your working relationship.

As far as compromises go, perhaps you could pour the 15-liter into a Champagne tower and use 750-milliliter bottles for sabering. That would still provide plenty of exciting showmanship for the evening.

*Best of luck,
Good Somm*

BAD SOMM

Dear Playing with Swords,

Now is the time to pull out the Jedi Master Handbook: You can, in fact, pull off this extraordinary feat of physics. Here are the steps.

First, make sure the bottle is properly chilled and that you're in a big enough space (for safety reasons). Remove all of the foil as well as the wire basket from the bottle and locate the seam in the glass. Rest the blade against the seam, with the blunt edge facing the cork, and quickly trace up the neck to the ring at the top of the bottle. This should cause it to separate and fly off. Then take a bow for a job well done—it's time to ring in a new decade!

Happy New Year! I hope my awesomeness doesn't intimidate you.

*Regards,
Bad Somm*

Dear Good Somm/Bad Somm,

I've recently adopted a ketogenic diet and I'm feeling great, but I need drink suggestions. Which wines and spirits do you recommend?

Sincerely,
Fitness Goals

Good Somm

Dear Fitness Goals,

I see life is testing your keto skills! Carbs can be challenging to avoid, but fortunately, you still have plenty of options. Pure spirits like vodka, gin, rum, brandy, and tequila all have zero carbs and can be paired with a low-carb mixer like seltzer water, bitters, or sparkling water.

Unfortunately, most beers are full of carbs—and the light ones are devoid of flavor—so it's best to stay away altogether. But the good news is that wine, especially when dry, is a fantastic choice; in terms of low-carb offerings, sparkling wines like Cava or Champagne as well as Sauvignon Blanc and Pinot Noir are your best options.

Something to watch out for are hidden sugars. Avoid dessert wines, fruit juices, flavored alcohol, syrups, or frozen Margarita mixes. In addition, while on ketosis, people tend to have a lower tolerance for alcohol. As always, drink responsibly and stay hydrated!

*Yours truly,
Good Somm*

BAD SOMM

Dear Fitness Goals,

Keto? More like veto. It doesn't sound like a sustainable diet or even a compatible lifestyle when you work in the hospitality industry. And besides work, what about your social life? Why deny yourself something if it makes you happy while also defining your career? One of the biggest perks of being in this industry is the access to killer food and wine. Don't give in to fad diets, because in the end, most don't work anyway. In fact, the only one I'd ever recommend is the seafood diet, in which you see food and, you know, eat it. 🍷

*Respectfully,
Bad Somm*

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

The Essence of Place, Expertly Crafted

J. LOHR VINEYARD SERIES



“ J. Lohr Hilltop Cabernet Sauvignon is a true expression of Paso Robles character in a style that only J. Lohr can deliver. It showcases the best of our decades-long experience in the vineyard and in the cellar. ”

~ **STEVE PECK**

Director of Winemaking



© 2019 J. Lohr Vineyards & Wines

J. LOHR
VINEYARDS & WINES

JLOHR.COM | @JLOHRWINES

Writing the Newest Chapter

MARCHESI DI BAROLO EXPORT MANAGER **VALENTINA ABBONA**
SEES TO IT THAT HER FAMILY'S STORY LIVES ON by Eric Marsh

WHEN VALENTINA ABBONA'S great-great-grandfather Ernesto Abbona and his siblings purchased the Marchesi di Barolo cellars in 1929, the label was already over a century old. Their efforts to keep its prestige alive were furthered by the eventual acquisition of the entire estate, and as the portfolio has expanded over the years, it's clear that the success that Ernesto and kin saw in their own lifetimes has only continued to flourish with subsequent generations.

As the winery's Export Manager, Valentina keeps her family's legacy alive by traversing the globe to educate buyers and consumers about Marchesi di Barolo wines. But it wasn't always her dream to work in the industry. Of her upbringing in Barolo, Valentina says, "It's a town of just over 700 people. My class consisted of five students and all of our parents worked in wine-related businesses."

Growing up in the area may be an immersive enological crash course in itself, but small towns tend to invoke a sense of wanderlust in their residents. Valentina was among those bitten by the travel bug, and after studying economics and business at Bocconi University in Milan, she headed east to Shanghai, where she worked for a consulting company. It wasn't until a year later, when her mother—Marchesi di Barolo owner Anna Abbona—took her on a work trip through Southeast Asia, that Valentina's interest in a career in wine was piqued.



Valentina Abbona.

Though she was far from her native Italy, she says, "I felt at home talking about my family's wines [and] my hometown."

Her newfound enthusiasm was solidified when she realized she could combine her role in the family business with her passion for travel: Valentina is on the road roughly 200 days a year to promote Marchesi di Barolo, which is exported to 68 countries. And with the label currently offering 30 different wines—which, beyond several expressions of Nebbiolo, includes reds like Dolcetto and Grignolino as well as whites

like Arneis and Cortese, not to mention a Barolo Chinato (a fortified, aromatized Nebbiolo macerated in botanicals and spices, most notably tree bark) and a selection of grappas—she has no shortage of territory or information to cover.

While Barolo producers have traditionally recommended serving their wines with regional delicacies like truffles, veal chops, and wild game, Valentina learned from her travels that they handily accompany a variety of international cuisines, too. In Mexico, she discovered that Marchesi's Barolos "pair perfectly with mole, which has some of the same flavors, like cocoa and coffee," she says; during her journeys in Asia, meanwhile, Valentina found that the label's "Gavi, which is crisp [with] mineral [notes], pairs well with sushi and Thai food ... with any spicy food, really."

As cultural borders are crossed and unconventional pairings become more common, the notion that "Every glass of wine tells a story" gains more nuance. In the case of the Abbonas, that story already spans 90 years, and if family ambassadors like Valentina have anything to do with it, it would seem that the end is nowhere in sight. **ST**



SAN SIMEON

PASO ROBLES

YOUR INDULGENT VOYAGE STARTS NOW



The Wine Rescuers

AN UNDER-THE-RADAR INDUSTRY HELPS PROVIDE SOLUTIONS FOR **ENOLOGICAL ISSUES** by Mark Stock

WHILE WINE RESCUE remains a mostly unnoticed trade that seems to unfold under the cover of night, companies like ConeTech and American Winesecrets have devoted themselves entirely to providing remedies for cellar situations gone afoul.

Based in Santa Rosa, California, ConeTech serves producers all over the globe, offering both disposal options and aid for enological issues like stuck fermentation, volatile acidity, and the need for the adjustment of alcohol levels. According to Director of Operations Jessica Smith, the company is increasingly working with smoke-impacted fruit and wines as wildfires occur more frequently.

To mitigate the effects of smoke taint, "ConeTech utilizes vacuum distillation to remove the delicate flavors from the wine to be held separately," Smith explains. "The wine that has been stripped of aromas is then treated through a proprietary process that has an affinity for binding the undesirable smoke compounds. Once the process is complete, the aromas are added back to the wine," enabling treated expres-

sions to "[retain] a good portion of [their] original character."

The treatment is far from cheap, but it's hard to put a price tag on premium wine, salvaged or otherwise. Working with batches of at least 1,000 gallons, ConeTech charges about \$1 per gallon plus a service fee.

American Winesecrets offers similar services from its 47,000-square-foot Santa Rosa headquarters. Lillian Thomas is a production winemaker with the Sonoma County firm, which is also dealing with more smoke-tainted wines; her team is currently working on a method to address smoke impact using multiple membranes and filters. Their process, Thomas says, removes unwanted molecules that are both free and bound: in other words, the ash-tasting matter that floats around in wine on its own and attaches itself to other compounds, like glucose. Lillian says dealing with both is key, as the paired-up matter is known to come back to life in bottled wines—even after treatment—and render them undrinkable.

Another method, reverse osmosis, is called upon for a host of other wine hiccups, among them volatile acidity (VA) and the need for alcohol adjustments. It's also used to combat smoke taint and even to impart concentration. "If a wine seems watery or too thin, we can concentrate it to add texture and body and intensify color," Thomas says.

As part of this purification process, a specific membrane is selected according to the issue at hand. As the wine runs through it, the unwanted molecular material is removed. To mitigate VA, for example, a tight membrane and an ion exchange canister are used to draw out the acetic acid and ethyl acetate; a similar process uses distillation to adjust alcohol levels, essentially separating the alcohol from the rest of the wine.

All in all, the extremely fine, molecular-level filtration of reverse osmosis generally captures the problem areas without sacrificing character. "The great thing about it is the good stuff in the wine is protected," Thomas says. **JSJ**

Companies like ConeTech are increasingly working with wineries impacted by wildfires, like this one raging near a vineyard in Sonoma, CA.



PHOTO: SSMAIL/OMUZH VIA ADOBE STOCK

Callia

FRESH NEW LOOK
— SAME —
DELICIOUS WINE!



RELAX WITH CALLIA

Take a break from the daily grind and reward yourself with Callia's fresh, food friendly wines.

Now in bold, new packaging, Bodegas Callia produces distinctive, easy-drinking wines in Argentina's San Juan Valley.

CALLIAWINE.COM

  @BODEGASCALLIA



NEW
LOOK!



TAUB FAMILY SELECTIONS
taubfamilyselections.com



Brett Zimmerman (far left), the Master Sommelier behind the Boulder Burgundy Festival, with winemaker Jean-Marc Roulot (standing directly behind the table); to the right of Roulot are Frasca owner Bobby Stuckey, MS, and Wine Director Carlin Karr.



When the Côtes Come to Colorado

AN INSIDE LOOK AT THE BOULDER BURGUNDY FESTIVAL

ORGANIZED BY MASTER Sommelier Brett Zimmerman, the Boulder Burgundy Festival has become one of the most prestigious wine events in Colorado, annually attracting famous producers as well as some of the biggest names in wine education and hospitality—from Guillaume d'Angerville and Étienne de Montille to Raj Parr and Jancis Robinson.

festival's tenth anniversary now coming into view, I spoke to Zimmerman about its exceptional success.

Burgundy. Getting the somm community involved also fueled a lot of future success.

Q: **Ruth Tobias: What inspired you to launch the Boulder Burgundy Festival back in 2010?**

Brett Zimmerman: I had just purchased the Boulder Wine Merchant, and I wanted to engage with the community; I thought this would be a good platform to do it. [Normally,] it's such a challenge to get allocations of these wines; if I, as a Master Sommelier, can only get two or three bottles, what does that mean for the average consumer? So the festival's a great opportunity to educate our customers and elevate what we're doing in this market.

Q: **What were some highlights from this year?**

The Outer Borough Burgundy seminar was totally eye opening. The idea was to capture the undiscovered pleasures of the region and break down the barriers that make Burgundy seem like it's only cut out for collectors. Laurent Mouton's wines come from Givry in the Chalonnaise; he's absolutely one of the top three producers there, and he showed four different wines with four completely different terroirs. Ludivine's domaine is on the south side of Nuits-Saint-Georges; her Ladoix white is amazing. Burgundy is never going to be dirt cheap, but we can give people some perspective: "You know what, I don't need to spend \$500. I can afford Santenay for \$30."

Q: **How has it evolved?**

I didn't realize it would become quite what it's become. The first year it was pretty mellow, with me and [fellow Master Sommeliers] Bobby Stuckey and Richard Betts doing a little talk on white Burgundy. [Later, at a dinner in New York,] Jeremy Seysses of Domaine Dujac said, "I understand you're doing this event, and I'd like to be part of it." He sent six vintages of Clos de la Roche and said, "As you're reaching out to [other] producers, use me as a reference." He basically catapulted us from being this tiny little event to a showcase for some of the greatest producers in

The tasting with Jay was a rare, rare opportunity; some of the wines in the SommFoundation cellar are becoming more scarce, so we'll see if Jay has more '34 Pomard, '37 Volnay, and '59 Beaune la Montée Rouge to share with the crowd next year. And the Grand Tasting was the best we've had. Our consumer base has gotten quite educated; this is not your regular mountain wine tasting where the people are there to party. They're asking great questions, and one supplier said to me, "It's really great to be serving them wines." **SJ**



PHOTOS COURTESY OF BOULDER BURGUNDY FESTIVAL

A partial lineup of the wines featured at the Grand Tasting.

The 2019 edition, held October 31–November 4, was no exception, with a schedule that included dinners with winemakers Jean-Marc Roulot, Ludivine Ambroise, and Laurent Mouton; a tasting and auction of old and rare Burgundies with Master Sommelier Jay Fletcher to benefit SommFoundation; a seminar with Master of Wine Ashley Hausman on the region's satellite appellations; and more, in addition to a Grand Tasting. With the

Consorzio di Tutela



PROSECCO SUPERIORE
DAL 1876

1969
2019

50 years of Stewardship
Three centuries of Heritage



1969 2019

50 Years of Stewardship: Three Centuries of Heritage

The Conegliano Valdobbiadene zone is celebrating the 50th anniversary of obtaining D.O.C status – which then became “Garantita” in 2009 – thus setting the seal on the relationship between this high elevation region and its principal wine, Conegliano Valdobbiadene Prosecco Superiore.



Chasing an OUTLAW

Chef Lena Ciadullo and Cheryl Indelicato, family ambassador and founding board member of Delicato Family Wines, at Marta in New York, NY.

DELICATO FAMILY WINES STRATEGICALLY RELEASES A NEW LODI-BASED CABERNET SAUVIGNON

story by David Ransom / photos by Karen Vierbuchen

DELICATO FAMILY WINES has been a leader in California wine production since founder Gaspare Indelicato planted his first vines in the Lodi region nearly 100 years ago. Still family-owned and -run four generations later, Delicato has expanded from its humble beginnings to become one of the top-ten wine suppliers in the United States, with annual sales in excess of 12 million cases.

Yet even in the midst of all of this success, the Indelicato family still finds time to raise a glass together as they share the stories steeped in local history that form the backbone of their Lodi legacy. “Lodi and the Sierra Foothills have so much history dating back to the gold rush era,” says family ambassador and founding board member Cheryl Indelicato. “Growing up, we’d gather ‘round the fire pit in summer and fall to cook open-fire meals and tell tall tales about some of the legendary characters who roamed the area back in

the day. One such person, the real-life outlaw Three-Fingered Jack, was the inspiration for our new Cabernet Sauvignon.”

Launched earlier this year to pay homage to this family tradition, the Three Finger Jack East Side Ridge Cabernet Sauvignon was made with grapes grown in vineyards at the edge of the San Joaquin–Sacramento River Delta below the Sierra Foothills in Lodi. Bold and a bit spicy, it’s filled with abundant fruit notes and soft tannins, making it a ready accompaniment for festive foods and grilled meats.

“Part of the impetus for creating Three Finger Jack was based on researching consumer demand. We found that the \$15–\$20 Cabernet segment was up 10% versus a year ago and was helping to drive wine-category growth,” says Indelicato.

Intrigued, the Delicato winemaking team set out to craft a Cabernet that would resonate with their consumer base—or, as Indelicato describes it, to “make some-



thing special and intriguing.” With a price point of \$22, Three Finger Jack is just that and more, with a non-traditional vintage broad-shoulder bottle that helps it stand out on the shelf. “Our consumer seeks out a big, juicy style of wine,” says Indelicato, “and we felt this wine deserved a visual look on par with the wine insider to fully capture the spirit of Three Finger Jack and help communicate the story behind it.”

Another key part of the Three Finger Jack equation are the grapes themselves. While Lodi may be most known for Zinfandel (Delicato’s wildly popular Gnarly Head Zin is a prime example), the region is also gaining a reputation for producing excellent Cabernet Sauvignon. East Side Ridge’s nutrient-poor soils help the cause by heightening vine stress, which ultimately imparts the resulting wines with an exquisite, deep color.

“Lodi Cabs are different than Napa Cabs, and [Three Finger Jack’s] signature profile offers a big, structured, dense, tannic wine with bright fruit aromas, flavors of black cherry and cassis, and hints of pepper. The full mouthfeel leads to a long and lingering finish,” says Indelicato, adding that the winery “always tries to overdeliver.” Judging by the aforementioned growth, the philosophy is clearly working: Three Finger Jack is already a hit with consumers, who feel a connection not only to the wine but to the family behind it and the legend of its namesake outlaw. **»**



Cheryl Indelicato and George MacDonald, Portfolio Director for Transcendent Wines (part of the Delicato Family Wines collection), at Marta.



Dear Somms: Your Job Isn't Quite What You Think It Is

SUPERIOR JOB PERFORMANCE ENTAILS A STRONG HANDLE ON FINANCE, OPERATIONS, AND TRAINING

PHOTO: OLIVIER LE MOAL VIA ADOBE STOCK



WHEN IT COMES TO the extent of their professional duties, most sommeliers think something like this: "I love wine, therefore I study wine, talk about wine, and sell wine—that's my job." Yet this is a fundamental misunderstanding of what their role in the wine community actually is, and as a result, they're not properly equipped to perform it correctly.

Above all, a sommelier's job is to operate—and occasionally build—an efficient, well-organized, and financially viable beverage program that:

1. Is designed to drive and continually increase revenue for their organization.
2. Controls costs. This necessitates an understanding of concepts like blended CoGS (an acronym for "cost of goods sold"), contribution margin, gross profit, time value of money, and healthy inventory turnover; to name a few.
3. Has impeccable printed and/or digital collateral devoid of spelling, typographical, and formatting errors.

4. Is designed as a sales tool, not simply a list of what's available for purchase.

Also of the utmost importance is a well-trained staff that understands the ethos of the program and how it's organized, as well as how to effectively guide a guest toward a selection.


When that's all said and done and all orders are transmitted, POS programming completed, invoices coded and sent to accounting, purchase prices verified, and wine lists updated, then—and only then—is it the sommelier's job to "study wine, talk about wine, and sell wine."

As representatives of our respective businesses, we have an obligation to our employers to provide solid ROI on their (often significant) financial investment while concurrently overseeing programs that suit the concept of the operation and the desires of its guests. A wine program should not be a playlist of your favorite esoteric songs; rather, it should be a care-

fully curated and mastered album that complements all levels of the operation. By all means, have a special selection of unique wines, but don't alienate guests by losing sight of the business' core identity.

Sadly, there's no educational infrastructure that exclusively teaches sommeliers how to operate beverage programs. (*Editor's note:* It bears mentioning that there are programs, including the Wine Business Institute at Sonoma State University or UCLA's Wine Education and Management Extension certification, that do explore these topics at length.) In the course of my nearly two-decade-long sommelier career, mostly as a corporate multiconcept beverage director, I have interviewed hundreds of candidates at all levels, from green in experience to green in pin. But when I've inquired about relatively simple economic concepts like the cost of goods formula, I've found that a very slim minority is able to answer correctly and confidently.

When these candidates are then asked to pretend that I'm a server whom they're training on their favorite wine, the usual response is riddled with technical minutiae: "Wine X is from such and such region, spent this amount of time in oak, and came from such and such soil." But all of that is rarely relevant to a guest. What you should be training on is not the what, but the how and why. How does a server actually go about the sale? Why would it work well with a certain dish? Why is it the best choice for a certain category, price point, et cetera? Why does it represent such a great value? These are the things that matter.

So, dear friends and colleagues, put as much effort into reading P&L statements as you do into tracing maps, and aim to spark passion in your staff through your training. I promise that you'll be a better sommelier for it. 

The organic vineyards of Mont'Albano are harvested by hand.

Conquering a Category

PHOTO COURTESY OF MONTALBANO

MONT'ALBANO, ITALY'S FIRST CERTIFIED-ORGANIC WINERY, IS SET TO MAKE ITS U.S. DEBUT by Lars Leicht

REFLECT ON THE YEAR 1985: A good chunk of this publication's readership was likely born in the 1980s, but if, like me, you've spent a bit more time in the profession, you know how different the world was back then. When this young distributor rep started "dragging the bag" that year, there were certainly no organic wines in it. I don't think we were even aware of the term.

Fortunately, visionaries like Mauro Braidot—who might have been considered "granola" at the time—would soon change that. In 1985, when he founded Mont'Albano's organic vineyard in the heart of the Friuli-Venezia Giulia region, he saw what his compatriots and neighbors did not: the need to bring winemaking back to nature.

I still remember enjoying genuine natural wines during my visits to Italy that decade. They were made by subsistence farmers

for hyperlocal consumption; meanwhile, my uncles in Lazio were still following lunar patterns, making wine much the same way their grandfather had. Commercial Italian winemaking, though, had gone a different way altogether by wholeheartedly embracing technology. Visions come to mind of helicopters spraying vineyards.

Published in 1980, Burton Anderson's seminal tome, *Vino*, chronicled the start of this halting passage from post-war industrialization back to the country's agrarian roots. The first steps involved the simple evolution from "rosso" and "bianco" in demijohns or 2-liter screwcaps to cork-finished bottles of single-vineyard varieties. Yet the word "organic" wasn't in *Vino's* index.

By contrast, Braidot set out that decade to make producing organic wines both a professional mission and a way of life. He

believes this approach is key to expressing the region's winemaking identity: "Doing what you believe in and spreading faith in sustainable organic viticulture is not a return to the past," Braidot says. "It is innovation that combines today's technology with the experience of the wine-grower who wants to preserve—and not exploit—the land."

Braidot points out that the use of natural products in viticulture preserves inherent flavors and grape typicity. "We do our best to promote our territory," he says, adding that "the question of ethics is fundamental" when it comes to avoiding the use of chemical treatments in the vineyard.

Keep an eye out for Braidot's exceptional Mont'Albano wines, which will be imported by Romano Brands beginning in January. They're delicious—and did I mention they're organic? **»**



2020
APRIL 20-23
CAESARS PALACE
LAS VEGAS



WSWA 7TH
ANNUAL

CONVENTION
& EXPOSITION

**RAISE
THE
BAR**

REGISTRATION IS NOW OPEN!

The WSWA Convention & Exposition is *the* premiere 3-day event for suppliers, service providers and retailers. Featuring high-level informational panels, buy-sell engagements, wine and spirits competitions and C-suite level networking.

WSWA CONVENTION & EXPOSITION

Tastings & Mixology
Competition Sponsored by:

THE **tastingpanel**
MAGAZINE

THE **SOMM** JOURNAL

WHERE THE INDUSTRY GOES TO...



Check us out at wswaconvention.org



Black Sheep UNITE

**SKREWBALL PEANUT BUTTER WHISKEY
AND COSTA MESA'S STRUT ALIGN IN
EMBRACING NONCONFORMITY**

story by Jessie Birschbach / photos by Michael Morse

WHEN STEVE AND BRITTANY YENG first released Skrewball Peanut Butter Whiskey in California and Arizona in summer 2018, they were not only aware that their brand was different, they were unapologetically proud. Brittany's label design honors this very idea with its black sheep logo, which symbolizes Skrewball's position as the odd spirit out within the whiskey category.

This outlier status might present a challenge to some brands, but for Skrewball, it's ignited a meteoric launch: In addition to winning both the Best of Class and the Innovation prizes at the 2019 SIP Awards International Spirits Competition, the flavored whiskey has received prestigious accolades at other competitions and earned national media coverage on the likes of the *Today* show, *Fortune*, BuzzFeed, and more. Perhaps Skrewball's most telling achievement, though, is that it managed to gain national distribution a matter of months after partnering with Infinium Spirits last March.

Not far from the Yengs' home base of San Diego, Aaron Reid and his business partners saw the need for an LGBTQ-friendly establishment in the Orange County city of Costa Mesa. In October, they opened STRUT, a gay club on the west side of town that's already been met with a warm reception from the community; that



Aaron Reid is the Director of Operations at STRUT in Costa Mesa, CA.

Kerry Harris, Brand
Ambassador for Skrewball
Peanut Butter Whiskey.



Under His Eye

- 2 oz. Skrewball Peanut Butter Whiskey
- 1 oz. Chambord

Combine Skrewball and Chambord, shake vigorously, and add a float of $\frac{3}{4}$ oz. home-made whipped cream. Garnish with a peanut butter cup.

includes Costa Mesa Mayor Katrina Foley, who has visited the bar and is “now flying the Pride flag at city hall 24/7, 365 days a year,” says Reid, who serves as STRUT’s Director of Operations. “And we were a big part of that! That’s so special to me.”

Skrewball has become a fitting brand to help STRUT in its endeavor to embrace all the colors of the rainbow, and not just because of the club’s popular Under His Eye cocktail, which features the peanut butter whiskey. (See left for recipe.) “Everything STRUT stands for is synonymous with Skrewball,” says Skrewball Brand Ambassador Kerry Harris, adding that the Yengs set out from the beginning to make the spirit’s branding as broadly appealing as the liquid itself.

As an experienced bartender (he worked at OB Noodle House restaurant in San Diego’s Ocean Beach neighborhood, where Skrewball was born), Harris knows firsthand how versatile the whiskey can be, especially as a cocktail ingredient. Having lent his palate to the Yengs to assist in developing it, he couldn’t help but notice the parallels between Skrewball and STRUT’s successful debuts. “It’s awesome being here in this beautiful space and getting to watch STRUT break the mold in Orange County,” he says. “It seems to be flourishing in just a short amount of time and feels quite similar to our story. . . . We’re breaking the chains of what it means to be a flavored whiskey.”

During a recent visit to STRUT, Harris exchanged Skrewball cocktail recipes with Reid as they connected over their experiences of running a busy establishment and what it means to bring people together in a welcoming space. “STRUT is bigger than a venue—we’re building a community,” said Reid. Harris echoed a similar sentiment that’s also shared by the Yengs: “[Skrewball] is a brand that’s for everybody. There’s unity in diversity, and that’s what Skrewball stands for.” S|

Chris Chamberlain served his New Amsterdam BCG&T (Brandied Cherry Gin & Tonic) for ten of Denver's top spirits buyers during a recent cocktail speed tasting.



Chris Chamberlain

PHOTO: JEN OLSON

MANAGER OF BEVERAGE DEVELOPMENT, E. & J. GALLO

by Meredith May

CREATIVE. VIVACIOUS. OUTGOING.

Characterizing Chris Chamberlain is akin to writing a tasting note that describes a wine or spirit with edge and verve. Adjectives like complex and original follow, and the finish? Well, for someone who's already come so far in the industry, he still has a long way to go.

Over the course of his lengthy career, Chamberlain has washed dishes, managed bars, and filled many front- and back-of-the-house jobs along the Eastern Seaboard; for the past 15 years, he's worked on the distributor/supplier side. He currently acts as cocktail strategist, ambassador, and spokesperson in his role as Beverage Development Manager for E. & J. Gallo, whose portfolio encompasses a number of well-respected brands.

He crossed the family-owned company's radar when Michael Sachs, his former marketing director at Philadelphia Distilling—where Chamberlain served as portfolio manager and helped redesign the newly reconstructed distillery bar, which just won Nightclub & Bar's 2019 Distillery Bar of the Year award—went to work for Gallo. Soon after, Chamberlain was offered the opportunity to help assist Gallo's Spirit

Business Unit in expanding its capabilities. "It was the company's focus on family values and Ernest Gallo's vision concerning his plans for the growth of its spirits portfolio that solidified my decision—this is where I should be," Chamberlain says.

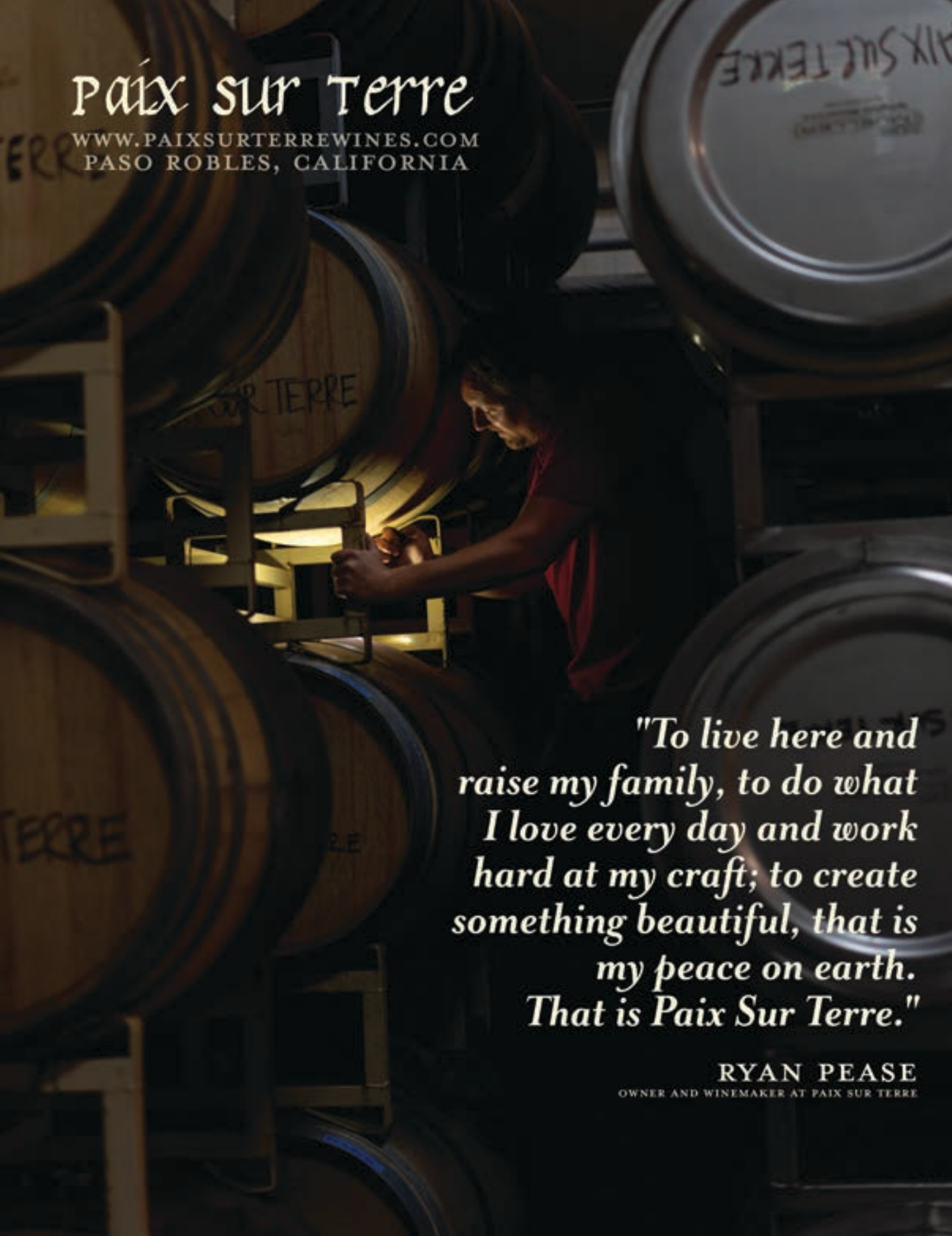
Revered labels such as Diplomatico Rum, Montenegro Amaro, Premium California Brandies Germain-Robin, and Argonaut, as well as the Whyte & Mackay portfolio and New Amsterdam Vodka/Gin, are among the high-status names that Chamberlain has at his fingertips to promote to the trade.

Working in tandem with the brand teams, sales network, distributors, and internal marketing at Gallo, Chamberlain prioritizes collaborating with both on-premise and national-account partners on cocktail ideation and training programs. His innovative recipes and personal rapport with buyers have enabled him to land signature drinks on menus across the United States. "It's cocktail ideation and activation within the menu that provides brand awareness and volume growth within the on-premise," he explains. "As our portfolio expands, we are excited to explore the cross-poli-

nating brands within one focused cocktail program, such as the use of our Select Aperitivo and LaMarca Prosecco within the classic Venetian Spritz."

Chamberlain says he's energized by traveling around the country to preach the gospel of cocktail trends. "What's not to love? The word hospitality is just part of my nature and such a huge part of my past, present, and future," he adds. "I thrive on the opportunity to work with and train bartenders, refine and define new ideas with accounts, and motivate our distributor partners."

Chamberlain recently worked with our sister publication, *The Tasting Panel*, at a cocktail speed tasting in Denver; where he flawlessly presented a unique take on a classic concoction to ten of the area's top spirits buyers; named the BCG&T (Brandied Cherry Gin & Tonic), it featured New Amsterdam Stratusphere Gin and Amarena cherries infused with Gallo's brandy stock. "Our purpose should be to drive innovation in order to advance the capabilities of each bar we visit," he says. "Educating bartenders who are eager to advance their skill set is one of the most fulfilling things I do." ■

A woman in a red shirt is working in a wine cellar, surrounded by wooden barrels. She is leaning over a barrel, possibly inspecting or working on it. The scene is dimly lit, with a warm glow from a light source. The barrels have "PAIX SUR TERRE" written on them.

PAIX SUR TERRE

WWW.PAIXSURTERREWINES.COM
PASO ROBLES, CALIFORNIA

*"To live here and
raise my family, to do what
I love every day and work
hard at my craft; to create
something beautiful, that is
my peace on earth.
That is Paix Sur Terre."*

RYAN PEASE

OWNER AND WINEMAKER AT PAIX SUR TERRE

VINOSUMMIT

PRESENTED BY FLORIDA WINE ACADEMY



I enjoyed participating in the inaugural VinoSummit. It was very well organized and I believe it will grow into one of Florida's major annual fine wine events for serious wine enthusiasts.

Eric Hemer MS MW
SVP at SGWS
VinoSummit 2020 Presenter

WE INVITE YOU TO JOIN US FOR THE 2ND ANNUAL
VINOSUMMIT WINE CONFERENCE IN MIAMI
MARCH 8TH AND 9TH, 2020

vinosummit.com / info@floridawineacademy.com



THE **SOMM** JOURNAL

THE **tastingpanel**
MAGAZINE



FOLIO
FINE WINE PARTNERS



We Could Be Royals

MAISON LOUIS LATOUR OFFERS A BREADTH OF BURGUNDY AT THE BEVERLY WILSHIRE HOTEL

by Kyle Billings

Maison Louis Latour in Burgundy.

IN CENTURIES PAST, a rivalry ensued as French royalty continuously debated the respective merits of Champagne and Burgundy. But across the pond in Beverly Hills, California, a modern entente of sorts was recently established at the Beverly Wilshire Hotel, where American Wine & Spirits and Maison Louis Latour showcased some of Burgundy's finest in the ornate and aptly named Champagne Room.

Maison Louis Latour's demonstrated tradition of Burgundian renown dates back to the producer's inception more than 200 years ago. Half of its current holdings are Grand Cru, the largest such collection in the region. The current proprietor is the seventh Louis Latour, and he furthers the legacy of the 11 generations that preceded him as he oversees the house.

Upon entry, members of the trade were handed a Riedel Overture Double Magnum; described as the "true all-purpose glass," it served as the tasting vessel for more than 50 expressions of some of the most vaunted villages, vineyards, and vintages of modern Burgundy.

The first selection of bottles comprised Chardonnays from Simonnet-Febvre, including recent expressions—among them two Grand Crus—of Chablis. The courtly procession then continued southward with the exhibition of Louis Latour's Chardonnays from the Côte de Beaune. Still in their vibrant infancy, 2016 and 2017 wines from vineyards in Meursault, Puligny-Montrachet, Corton, and Montrachet were a study in freshness and potential.

Often the prize of nouveau som-

meliers, Cru Beaujolais was center stage thanks to a selection from Brouilly producer Henry Fessy. The company picks its harvests manually and prides itself on its sustainable practices and high quality, sourcing from nine different crus. From vines no younger than 40 years old, Fessy's three offerings featured fruit from Morgon, Fleurie, and Régnié.

Attendees were finally treated to the archives, with Louis Latour unveiling a fall library of older vintages (1999 to 2012) spanning from Puligny-Montrachet to Romanée-Saint-Vivant. It was a murderers' row of Cote d'Or big shots: Demonstrating a plenitude of diversity in style, quality, soil, and vintage, it spoiled wine buyers with an embarrassment of riches fit for royalty of any era. **W**

FOR ALL THE MOMENTS WE STAND UP

Since 2008, *Major League Baseball*[®] has supported Stand Up To Cancer in its mission to fund groundbreaking research and get treatments to patients faster than ever before. Join us as we stand united to show our support for loved ones affected by cancer.

Visit StandUpToCancer.org/MLB

UZO ADUBA
Stand Up To Cancer Ambassador



Photo By
ANDREW ECCLES

Adam Pechel, the chef for the new St. Helena location of Gary's Wine & Marketplace, has designed robust menus for breakfast and lunch.



You from **Jersey?**



Gary Fisch, owner of New Jersey-based Gary's Wine & Marketplace, has made frequent visits to Napa Valley since the 1980s.

EAST COAST-BASED WINE RETAILER **GARY FISCH** OPENS A NAPA-CENTRIC SHOP IN CALIFORNIA

story by Jess Lander / photos by Alexa Weber

ON HIS FIRST VISIT to Napa Valley 40 years ago, Gary Fisch met Louis Martini and drank Barbera out of a 3-liter jug. Since that encounter, which he recalls vividly to this day, he's made annual pilgrimages to the region—often centered around Premiere Napa Valley, held every February—and in October, he opened Gary's Wine & Marketplace in the St. Helena space that formerly housed upscale grocer Dean & DeLuca. It's the fifth store and the first West Coast location for his popular New Jersey-based chain of wine shops.

"When I drove into the valley in 1980 and when I drive into the valley [now], the same thing happens. It feels like I'm home," says Fisch. "If you don't feel better and more relaxed when you [come here], then there's something wrong with you."

An avid coffee drinker, Fisch was a loyal patron of Dean & DeLuca during his visits. The store would often provide inspiration for his own businesses back home: "I was always taking pictures," he recalls. "It was always buzzing; there was always energy and new things."

But when he pulled in for his usual cup during Premiere week last year, Dean & DeLuca was a shell of its former self. On yet another visit in May, he found it practically empty and decided that he simply "had to have it."

“We’re going to support Napa Valley like no other retail shop supports Napa Valley. We’re going to have more SKUs and more dollars of inventory on hand of Napa wines than anybody else that I know around here, but we’ll also have wines for the Napa people who taste Napa wine every day and want something else.” –Gary Fisch, owner of Gary’s Wine & Marketplace



This case is packed with roughly 200 cheeses from all over the world.



Domaine de la Romanée-Conti, Harlan, and Screaming Eagle. Twenty-four wines—at least four of which are considered cult-level—are available by the glass from argon gas-driven units.

Gary's also carries craft beer and spirits, highlighting local producers as much as possible. After exhaustive taste testing, Fisch and his

“I’ve never been that impulsive, but this was not a business decision,” he insists. “It was a must-have because of the community here.”

In many ways, Gary's is similar to its predecessor, and not just because Fisch made a point to hire back many of Dean & DeLuca's former employees: It's a one-stop shop for customers looking to pick up coffee on their way to work, supplies for a wine tasting, or a bottle to go with dinner: Fisch, of course, is focusing first and foremost on the wine selection. “We’re going to support Napa Valley like no

other retail shop supports Napa Valley,” he says. “We’re going to have more SKUs and more dollars of inventory on hand of Napa wines than anybody else that I know around here, but we’ll also have wines for the Napa people who taste Napa wine every day and want something else.”

The roughly 1,000-SKU inventory includes an extensive selection of sparkling and imported wines with an emphasis on Italy and France, a \$25-and-under wall, half bottles, magnums, and a corner of ultra-premium bottlings from producers like

team chose Petaluma's Acre Coffee as their official provider; and the store offers kombucha on tap, a nitro iced tea, and a few fruit smoothies as well. The cheese case, meanwhile, is packed with roughly 200 selections from all over the world, and chef Adam Pechel has designed robust menus for breakfast and lunch, including hearty toasts, breakfast bowls, frittatas, salads, and sandwiches.

Fisch may be an East Coaster through and through, but it seems as if he'll fit in just fine on the West Coast. **»**



A Time of Transformation

ON A QUEST TO REINVENT ITSELF, **ABRUZZO** YIELDS REMARKABLY BALANCED AND AGEWORTHY WINES

ALONG THE PICTURESQUE Adriatic Coast of central Italy—surrounded by Le Marche to the north, Lazio to the west, and Molise to the southeast—lies the historic and charming region of Abruzzo. Dating back to the rule of the Etruscans in the fourth century B.C., winemaking has played an integral role in the agricultural landscape of Abruzzo; however, there is additional evidence that suggests that its vineyards date even further back, to the sixth century B.C.

The region's population declined for several centuries during the Middle Ages; monasteries kept the wine trade alive, but only in the past 50 years have Abruzzo's vineyards proliferated with the aid of established producers. During this time, the local winemakers have updated their methods as they work with fruit from these newly rediscovered sites, producing expressions that adapt the terroir into a contemporary context.

Abruzzo's mountainous, coastal landscape is enhanced by the lush greenery of its national parks and forests. The region experiences ample rainfall and sunshine, with an arid climate on the coast and a continental climate inland. Together, these factors contribute to a highly conducive

environment for grape growing, with the use of pergolas further establishing ideal conditions both for ripening and balancing acidity.

Montepulciano, the most-planted red grape in Italy after Sangiovese, is known for its delicate flavors, low acidity, deep color, and soft, mild tannins; it's most notably grown in Le Marche and Molise as well as Abruzzo, where it's typically made into a traditional rosé known as Cerasuolo. It derives its name from the dialectal word "cerasa," meaning cherry, due to its deep ruby-pink color.

Predominantly grown in Abruzzo, Trebbiano Abruzzese is thought to be the white counterpart of Montepulciano. It ripens rather late and is able to adapt to various terroirs, yielding mineral-tinged and ageworthy wines. Meanwhile, Pecorino—another white grape grown primarily in central Italy—has endured a complicated history, as it was briefly overshadowed by the ubiquitous Trebbiano due to its low-yielding nature. However, Pecorino has recently undergone a revitalization in Abruzzo, especially at higher altitudes, and because of its high acidity and sugar content, it's capable of producing wines with a complementary balance of alcohol and acidity. *SJ*

A Trio of Must-Try Abruzzo Wines

Tiberio 2016 Pecorino, Abruzzo (\$23) This medium-bodied white features an intriguing nose of peaches, white sage, and green figs. Bright acidity leads to a food-friendly, sapid finish.

Masciarelli 2018 Villa Gemma, Cerasuolo d'Abruzzo (\$20) The Montepulciano grapes macerate for about 10–12 hours, imparting intense notes of cherry and pomegranate as well as a touch of tannins in the wine. The perfect pairing for pizza or tomato-based fish soups, it should be served chilled.

Cataldi Madonna 2016 Malandrino, Montepulciano d'Abruzzo (\$27)

This is one of the flagship wines of this historic winery, which has produced wines in Abruzzo for over a century. Situated at a high elevation with abundant exposure to sun and diurnal temperature swings, its vineyards produce remarkably ageworthy reds.

Castello di Semivicoli is located in the district of Chieti in Abruzzo.

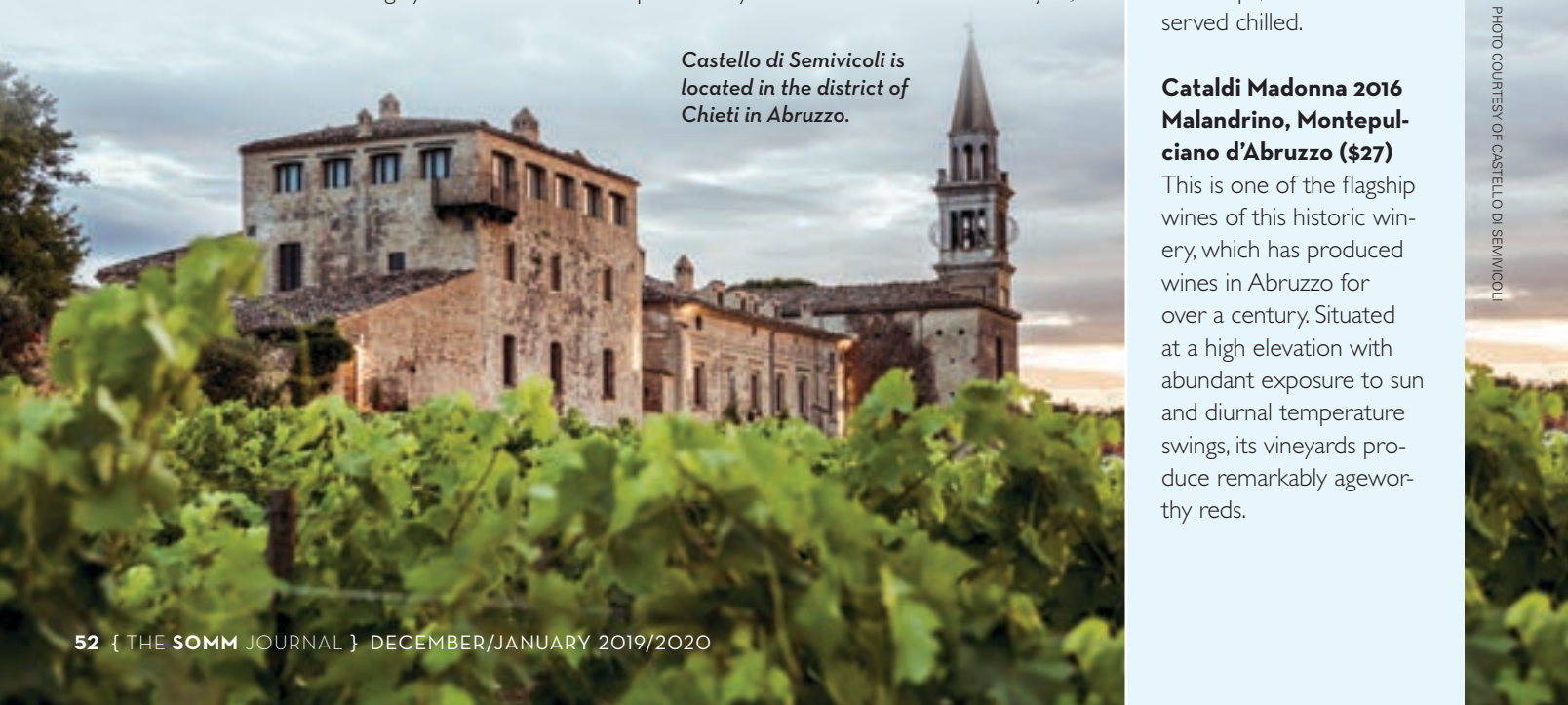


PHOTO COURTESY OF CASTELLO DI SEMIVICOLI

The Henriques & Henriques winery on the island of Madeira.



PHOTO COURTESY OF HENRIQUES & HENRIQUES

The Pride of the Founding Fathers

ASSESSING THE PAST AND CURRENT STATE OF **MADEIRA** by Ian Buxton

JUST IMAGINE HOLDING a 75% share of the U.S. market. It seems improbable, but that was once the remarkable status enjoyed by the wines of Madeira, a Portuguese island in the Atlantic Ocean some 700 kilometers off the North African coast.

In May 1768, an attempt by an overbearing British excise officer to tax John Hancock's shipment of Madeira caused a riot in Boston; meanwhile, George Washington, Alexander Hamilton, Benjamin Franklin, and John Adams are all believed to have appreciated the wine's qualities. Thomas Jefferson, who toasted the Declaration of Independence with Madeira, was another notable fan.

Such dominance could hardly last, however, and Madeira eventually fell out of favor, acquiring a reputation as a mere cooking wine. But as a recent visit to the cellars of Henriques & Henriques (H&H) vividly demonstrated, nothing could be further from the truth.

Though still relatively modest, Madeira's total shipments to the U.S. have been growing steadily as connoisseurs come to appreciate the category's breadth, versatil-

ity, and ability to achieve great age whilst retaining vitality and distinctive flavor.

The four styles most frequently encountered are the dry and slightly acidic Sercial, which shows complex almond notes and is particularly delicious as an apéritif; Verdelho, which is somewhat less assertive and brings smoky flavors to the fore; the dark-colored Bual, with sweet hints of raisins; and Malvasia (aka Malmsey), an after-dinner alternative to Port whose trademark acidity balances its high sugar content and rich, mouthcoating flavors of caramel.

Due to the estufagem aging process—meant to mimic the effect of a long sea voyage through tropical climates on the barrels—the best wines are incredibly long-lived not only in the bottle but also, quite remarkably, once opened, making them a reliable by-the-glass option. During my visit, I was privileged to join H&H CEO Humberto Jardim in tasting wine from the 1900 vintage, which remained fresh and very drinkable. The winery's private cellars contain bottlings dating back to the late 18th century, and these treasures would still be more than worthy of gracing any

significant celebration.

"Interest in low-proof cocktails and growing recognition that aged, oxidative wines share a certain commonality with bourbon, Scotch, and other brown spirits in terms of their flavor profiles point to a slow but steady groundswell of interest" in Madeira, says J. Henahan, the Operations/Wine Portfolio Manager for H&H's U.S. importer, Haus Alpenz. "Certain, and often surprising, segments of the market are also more open to wines which are not simply about their primary fruit. We believe these 'umami wines'—which can only be achieved through the forces of time, oxidation, and, occasionally, heat—are becoming increasingly relevant with the most open and adventurous wine drinkers, both in the trade and beyond."

Madeira indeed strikes me as a wine for the curious drinker, particularly those looking to explore products with heritage and authenticity. Pragmatic yet stubborn, the best producers—such as H&H, Blandy's, and Justino's—are full of pride in their noble tradition: The Founding Fathers would surely approve. **SJ**

The Bitter Truth

BIASES HAMPER OUR PERCEPTION OF WINE

by Deborah Parker Wong

ACCORDING TO NEUROSCIENTIST

Camilla Arndal Andersen, how consumers describe the taste of food can be misleading largely due to inherent biases. Among the most problematic is the “courtesy bias,” which comes into play when people respond with what they perceive as a socially acceptable opinion that doesn’t accurately reflect how they feel. There’s also the “bias blind spot,” in which we think we’re less biased than others. In short, we’re biased about our biases.

We see the courtesy bias at work in the wine industry when consumers say they prefer dry wines but, when given a choice, favor wines that are off dry or have much higher levels of residual sugar. Arndal Andersen points out that even trained tasters aren’t immune to bias; for example, foods that contain vanilla are rated sweeter by professionals even if they lack sugar. This can be explained by our long association between the two ingredients, which is based on a lifetime of exposure to their use in baked goods and desserts.

One of the few low-threshold odors we still find pleasant even past the point of overexposure, vanilla—aka 4-hydroxy-3-methoxybenzaldehyde—is known to have 170 volatile compounds, of which vanillin is dominant. The vanilla flavor wheel used by the flavoring company FONA International identifies 29 distinct flavor characteristics for natural vanilla that it groups into ten main categories: smoky, spicy, botanical, sulfury, sweet, creamy, medicinal, cooked, fatty, and floral.

Like wine grapes, natural vanilla grows in different places—among them Madagascar; Mexico, where it originated; and Tahiti—and has different taste profiles and potency. For example, Madagascar vanilla, typically

called Bourbon vanilla, is highly sought after for its rummy taste and sweet aroma.

The demand for vanilla flavoring, however, has long exceeded the supply of vanilla beans. Natural and synthesized vanillin are used to create the impression of sweetness in foods, as seen in the mass-market chocolate industry’s practice of adding synthetic vanillin to products to counter the bitterness of cocoa. Considering the growing popularity of sweet red blends, it’s no surprise to find that vanilla/vanillin is a dominant flavor descriptor for this category, as it undoubtedly helps mask bitterness imparted by tannins.

When I recently tasted across a commercial-quality range of single-varietal and blended red wines from California as part of a sensory project, the use of aging

alternatives like vanillin-infused oak chips and staves left a ubiquitous stamp across the brands and varieties tasted. While the organic polymers known as lignins that are present in oak serve as one source of vanillin, few consumers know that an estimated 85% of the world’s supply of synthetic vanillin is derived from petroleum or crude oil. (The other 15% comes from the manufacture of cellulose.)

As for the perception of sweetness that vanillin can contribute to red wines, while we may be aware of the existence of unconscious biases, there’s little scientific evidence that supports the idea that heightened awareness will reduce the occurrence of bias in general. In other words, it’s very likely that we’ll still perceive vanillin-dominant red wines as tasting sweeter. SJ

PHOTO: NORBERT VIA ADOBE STOCK

The Acrid Ghost of Daniel Wheeler

A BALANCED **IMPERIAL STOUT** IS PERHAPS LESS ROASTED THAN TRADITION DICTATES by Jessie Birschbach

AFTER I HUNG up the phone with Bob Kunz, founder of Los Angeles-based Highland Park Brewery (HPB), I wondered if Daniel Wheeler, the inventor of the patented malt drum roaster, was turning in his grave. In 1817, for the first time, the rotation of Wheeler's cylindrical iron roaster kilned malt to a high degree of darkness without burning it altogether. This breakthrough resulted, among other things, in the black patent malt, which ultimately led to the dark-and-roasted style of stout.

According to the Beer Style Guidelines of the Beer Judge Certification Program (BJCP), in an Imperial Stout, "generous quantities of roasted malts and/or grain" are used along with pale malt to achieve that dark, roasted character (to varying degrees). But Kunz says a growing number of brewers are opting for less black and more brown in the style: "There's this sort of new wave of Imperial Stout brewers who are, for the most part, eliminating those malts that are kilned at very high [temperatures] and are just focusing on, say, a chocolate malt, which doesn't impart a whole lot of bitterness or char."

The good-natured brewer compared the evolution of HPB's Imperial Stouts from when the business opened in 2014 to today by example of its first Imperial Stout, the Griffith J. Griffith. That beer, he says, was "fairly attenuated and dry" with less residual sugar, as well as "pretty firm in bitterness. [It] used a fair amount of those more charred, acrid, focused malts" like the black patent. By contrast, most of HPB's newer Imperial Stouts feature more residual sugar and substantially less roasted malt.

Kunz attributes this not only to the open dialogue HPB keeps with its fan base but also to the brewery's natural evolution (and his own maturity as a brewer). "It really is about trying to find what's appropriate for each style," he says. "What I love about Imperial Stouts is that they're decadent." Case in point: HPB's Luxury Event Imperial Stout, currently served on tap at its Chinatown location.

Wheeler's ghost can rest in peace, though: Kunz believes that the other extreme—like *only* using chocolate malt—results in lack of balance, too. And anyway, Wheeler didn't invent the style—he really just made it possible for brewers to add color and roasted flavor to any beer without having to use a ton of darker malts that are less enzymatically powerful (compared to paler malts, which have more enzymes/are able to convert their own sugars for healthy fermentation).

At HPB, Kunz is also throwing the staves of aromatic wood



The Luxury Event Imperial Stout is currently available at Highland Park Brewery's tasting room in Los Angeles' Chinatown.

varieties into the tank (as opposed to aging longer in barrel) to avoid a less-oxidative character, which has led in part to his perhaps unconventional opinion that Imperial Stout tastes better when it's "fresh" (relatively speaking). With a high ABV range of 8–12%, the Imperial Stout is one of the few beer styles that *can* age, and many beer nerds feel that it actually improves with cellaring. Regardless of the aging debate, though, one thing is for sure: Unlike the luscious, rich Imperial Stout, Kunz's perspective on the style is refreshing.

If you can't get to HPB's Chinatown tasting room in L.A., look for the widely available Founders CBS (Canadian Breakfast Stout) Imperial Stout. Brewed with chocolate and coffee, it's aged in bourbon barrels that previously contained maple syrup. **SJ**

IMPERIAL STOUT

Loosely according to the 2015 BJCP Style Guidelines, this style is a dense, dark ale that ranges on the scales of roasted malt, bitter hops, fruity esters, and alcohol. The best examples are full in the mouth, complex, and intense.

IBU: 50–90

Jessie Birschbach is a Certified Cicerone and substandard homebrewer.

THE
tastingpanel
MAGAZINE

THE **SOMM** JOURNAL



INVITE WINE PROFESSIONALS TO:

L U X I C O N

TREASURY WINE ESTATES

2020 TOUR: FINAL STOP



TREASURY
WINE ESTATES

Register for the Luxicon Tour at SommJournal.com/Luxicon



RSVP NOW — LUXICON IS COMING TO A CITY NEAR YOU!

Join us for an educational “Techniques of Tasting” session led by Gillian Ballance, MS. **Guests will have a chance to win one of three professional certification scholarships valued at \$1,200.**

The session will end with a rare opportunity to taste limited-production wines from the Treasury Wine Estates portfolio. For more information or to reserve a seat, visit SommJournal.com/Luxicon.

JOIN US:

Tuesday, January 21, 2020

Miami

Rusty Pelican, 3201 Rickenbacker Causeway,
Key Biscayne, FL 33149

1–2 p.m.

“Techniques of Tasting” Seminar

2–4 p.m.

Luxury Tasting Session



Gillian Ballance, MS, will lead an exclusive “Techniques of Tasting” session.



THIS COULD BE YOU!

Master Sommeliers Gillian Ballance and James Bube flank the Luxicon Chicago scholarship winners: Timothy Evans of Binny’s Beverage Depot; Christian Shaum of Nesso Restaurant; and Michael Dietrich of Francesca’s on Chestnut.



Somm
Foundation

Why Lodi?

by Krista Church

A SOMMELIER'S
TRIP TO THE
CALIFORNIA
REGION DEFIES
EXPECTATIONS

*Eight somms selected by
SommFoundation stand
among a few of Lodi's
winemakers during their
trip to the region.*

WHEN I FOUND OUT I was selected to be one of eight sommeliers invited by SommFoundation to experience harvest in Lodi, most of my colleagues' responses could be summarized by one question: "Why Lodi?"

I understood their incredulity. The name conjures big reds with a capital B: fruity bulk wine meant for end-capped case displays. I don't know what I expected when I arrived, but I know that the actual experience defied anything I could have imagined.

Lodi is considered an "emerging" region, yet it's home to some of the oldest extant vines in the United States. I started my career as a paleoanthropologist, so thinking about the coevolution of these vines in a changing landscape is fascinating. They're survivors that have endured Prohibition, negligence, bad weather, and depressed economies, and they're still standing quite heartily on rootstock the diameter of small palm trees. Older than air conditioning and the automobile, some were already 20-something when the Titanic sank.

The product of a hundred years of hard work and land stewardship, many of Lodi's vineyards have been in the same family for generations. The majority of these winemaking clans are farmers first, taking great care to preserve the land that will be passed down to their descendants. Among them is Jessie's Grove Vineyards winemaker Greg Burns, who tends the same vines his family has maintained since his great-great-grandfather established a vineyard in 1886 after a failed stake in the California gold rush.





The oldest continuously farmed vines in Lodi are ungrafted Cinsault planted in 1886 in the Bechthold Vineyard.

The wines made from the region's old and gnarled vines are still huge, but there's an underlying elegance and maturity at their core. Some of the best examples we tried on our trip were part of the Lodi Native line, a collaborative project focusing on single-vineyard, old-vine Zinfandel produced with minimal intervention; the aging protocols prohibit the use of new oak, and the grapes were farmed under the LODI RULES set of sustainability benchmarks for vineyards. Launched in 2005 after ten years of development, these standards were the nation's first third-party certification program for sustainable practices and have since served as inspiration for similar programs across the country and around the world.

Zinfandel is king in Lodi, but the crown is being contested by a new wave of winemakers exploring grapes outside of the norm. There are over a hundred varieties grown in Lodi, more than 50 of which can be found on a single property (some encompassing just a single row) tended by the Koth family, who have a lengthy record of land stewardship at their vineyard, Mokelumne Glen. Markus Niggli of Markus Wine Co. makes *Nativo*, a stunning blend of Kerner, Riesling, and Bacchus, from the Koths' estate. Other international grapes are heralded throughout the region, including classic white Southern Rhône

varieties at *Acquiesce* and Spanish varieties at *Bokisch*.

During the trip, we gathered at Jessie's Grove's Royal Tee Vineyard at dawn to help Greg La Follette and Steve Matthiasson harvest grapes for their 2019 vintages, with Matthiasson's pick designated for the first Lodi wine in his Matthiasson Wines label. After La Follette blessed the vineyard with a tune on the bagpipes, he turned our attention to the massive Zinfandel, Carignan (pronounced "Kerrigan" by the locals), Mission, Flame Tokay, and Black Prince (aka Rose of Peru) vines that dotted the landscape as he taught us how to tell the difference between them. We also discussed the legacy of sustainability in the region with Matthiasson, which was particularly special considering that, just out of enology school, he coauthored the workbook that eventually led to the creation of LODI RULES. To stand in such a historic vineyard with these titans of wine at daybreak is an experience I'll never forget.

On our last day in Lodi, we had a restorative breakfast at Bubbles 'n' Birds—a necessary move after visiting local watering hole Know Place the previous evening. I tried my best not to embarrass Team Texas in a high-stakes game of table shuffleboard against Team NYC (we won, with absolutely zero help from yours truly). After breakfast, we assembled for a

roundtable discussion on our impressions of Lodi and our thoughts on how the Lodi Winegrape Commission should proceed in the future. The consensus was that there was a place for Lodi wines in the market, especially on farm-to-table menus, but there currently isn't the infrastructure, support, and distribution needed to get the word out.

The answer to the aforementioned question "Why Lodi?" is increasingly easy to answer. The region has been a well-kept secret in the California wine world, but there's a new horizon in view for its farming families and innovative winemakers, and it's an honor to be on the front lines of this movement.

I would be remiss if I didn't extend a multitude of thanks to the people who made this trip truly exceptional—first and foremost to SommFoundation for making our Lodi dreams a reality. Thank you to Randy Caparoso for somehow juggling triple duty as a tour guide, camp counselor, and seasoned sommelier contributing depth and passion into our exploration of the region's wines. Finally, thanks to the rest of the team for making sure we didn't get burnt to a crisp or left in the vineyard; to all of the growers, winemakers, chefs, harvest workers, and vineyard cats for enriching my understanding of Lodi in an indelible way; and, of course, to my fellow trip attendees. Lodi rules! *SJ*



SILVERADO
VINEYARDS
WINEMAKER
**JON
EMMERICH.**

ACID TRIP

SILVERADO VINEYARDS

EFFORTLESSLY
CHANNELS TERROIR
IN NORTHERN
CALIFORNIA'S STAGS
LEAP DISTRICT AND
COOMBSVILLE AVAS

STORY BY JONATHAN CRISTALDI
PHOTOS BY ALEXANDER RUBIN

Since 1990, winemaker Jon Emmerich has charted a singular course: producing ripe, beautifully structured, acid-driven, site-specific wines at Silverado Vineyards, which is situated in the northeastern portion of Northern California's Stags Leap District AVA.

Emmerich could pass as a stunt double for a younger Ian McKellen, the Shakespearean actor famous for playing King Lear. But whereas that tale begins with the monarch stepping down from the British throne, Emmerich has made it clear that he isn't going anywhere as he marks his 30th anniversary at the winery.

Emmerich is following in the footsteps of founding winemaker Jack Stuart, who he says instilled in him "a real appreciation for acidity" and a penchant for avoiding the use of 100% new barrels. "Jack was always about one-third new barrels, and today, we mix it up with French, American, and Hungarian oak," Emmerich explains. "Jack's class at [the University of California, Davis,] turned out a lot of great winemakers who were all about acid and judicious use of oak."

Emmerich's associate winemaker, Elena Franceschi, is also celebrating a noteworthy anniversary in 2020: her 25th harvest with Silverado. Franceschi previously worked at sparkling wine houses Chateau St. Jean and Mumm, where acidity was always top of mind.



The Silverado Vineyards winery is located in Napa's Stags Leap District appellation.

“THERE’S
A LOT OF
BALLYHOO
ABOUT
THE WORD
TERROIR. AT
SILVERADO,
IT’S JUST
WHO WE
ARE.”

**SILVERADO
VINEYARDS
PRESIDENT
RUSSELL WEIS**



Naturally, these career-long acid trips have a significant impact on what ends up in the bottle of Silverado’s reds from both the Stags Leap District and another Napa AVA, Coombsville—particularly those that feature the winery’s own Disney-Silverado clone of Cabernet Sauvignon. “There’s a lot of ballyhoo about the word terroir. At Silverado, it’s just who we are,” says President Russell Weis. “Silverado combines everything for me when I think of terroir: the pedigree of the vineyards that go back 150 years, the modern history of a site through field selection that created [the Disney-Silverado clone, also known as UC Davis 30], [and] working with that clone on the same site that gave birth to [it].” He also stresses the role people themselves play in the final expression of terroir, making sure to note the aforementioned anniversaries of the winemaking team.

Silverado founders Ron and Diane Miller are something of a legend both in Napa and in Hollywood. Diane is the daughter of Walt Disney, but the couple established Silverado in 1981 as its own

entity. Weis notes that the Millers entered the wine industry much like any other family who fell in love with Napa Valley in that era, “but with Ron and Diane, it was all about ‘how’ and not ‘why.’ They set Silverado apart by assembling a historic estate, creating a winery for that estate, and

ensuring the wines were bottled [there]. The Millers were native Californians who were sure their home state could make wines that could stand among the greatest wines of the world. For them, the best way to do that was to be a ‘grown, produced, and bottled’ wine estate.” SJ



Cabernet Sauvignon from Silverado’s estate vineyard is used to produce SOLO, a member of the winery’s Premium Collection that serves as an annual expression of the Heritage Disney-Silverado Cabernet clone.

A SPOTLIGHT ON **MT. GEORGE**

Longtime readers of *The SOMM Journal* are likely familiar with our editors' past recognition of Silverado Vineyards' more widely distributed Cabernets, SOLO and GEO. But at a recent tasting with Emmerich, we tasted a lineup of the winery's single-varietal bottlings from grapes rooted on the higher-elevation slopes of Mt. George in the Coombsville AVA.



The powdery white volcanic tufa of Silverado's Mt. George Vineyard.

"Ron and Diane have bought a lot of sites that have viticultural history," Emmerich explains. "This site was owned by Henry Hagen and was one of the first vinifera plantings in Coombsville. The [white volcanic tufa] soils are really powdery. For our Classic Collection, we wanted to make wines from Coombsville that are varietal-specific for our wine club and for high-end on- and off-premise accounts."

The Classic Collection single-varietal wines are available in six-packs, making them an appealing option for restaurant buyers.

Silverado Vineyards 2016 Merlot, Mt. George Vineyard, Coombsville, Napa Valley (\$40)

A downright steal at this price—and perfect for by-the-glass pours—this limited-production wine aged in French and Hungarian oak comprises fruit from 30-year-old vines in the vineyard's K, P, and E blocks. Beautifully savory tobacco notes appear alongside black and red cherry, spiced plums, grippy tannins, and zesty acidity. It's fresh and nice, with great mid-palate weight and a mocha finish.



Silverado Vineyards 2016 Cabernet Franc, Mt. George Vineyard, Coombsville, Napa Valley (\$65)

This vintage is the first of this expression that's available to on- and off-premise accounts. Made with Clone Cabernet Franc I (UCD01) planted on 3309 rootstock, it's beautiful in the glass, with fresh, herbaceous aromas that mix with heady tobacco spices, coconut, and a hint of cured meat. Terrifically ripe red fruit appears upfront before powerful chalky tannins and deep notes of mocha and spice glide to a long, mouthwatering finish that brims with acid, garrigue, and cedar. A tremendous New World effort with Old World structure.

Silverado Vineyards 2016 GEO Cabernet Sauvignon, Mt. George Vineyard, Coombsville, Napa Valley (\$75)

Delivering abundant black cherry, blackberry, spice, and rose petal, this expression is poised and polished. Ample weight, a touch of blood orange, and powerful, volcanic tannins wrap around zesty acidity. The finish is long, revealing pops of cinnamon, clove, and tobacco.



Silverado Vineyards 2016 SOLO Cabernet Sauvignon, Stags Leap District, Napa Valley (\$125)

Hand-picked and separated by block in the winery, the fruit is blended just before bottling. Emmerich believes it's best to blend toward the end of aging, and he and his team use this technique to craft SOLO, tasting around 30 lots every month. (They've been doing it this way, in fact, since SOLO debuted in 2002.) Teeming with freshness, this powerful wine exudes minty aromas and notes of black cherry, cocoa nibs, and rose petal. Profoundly chalky minerality persists, as does serious grip and vibrant acid. Marvelous garrigue appears on the 45- to 60-second finish.

Silverado's Mt. George site was one of the first vinifera plantings in the Coombsville AVA.



A TIPPLE OF THE HAT

MILLINERY DISTILLED DRY GIN HAS THE POTENTIAL TO CREATE A NEW SUBCATEGORY

story by Jessie Birschbach
photos by Devin Berko

Phillip Dunn, Wine Director for Spago in Beverly Hills, CA, released his Millinery Distilled Dry Gin in December.

IT'S A COMMON phenomenon among talented career sommeliers: After years spent ascending the ranks by working on the floors of restaurants—often aiming to reach the pinnacle of wine director—they naturally start to think of their next move. Typical routes include advancing into a higher-level position in a restaurant group, running multiple programs, or making a hard left into distributor sales.

For his part, Advanced Sommelier Phillip Dunn—the Wine Director at Spago's flagship location in Beverly Hills, California—has a stratagem steeped in juniper. Although, for the record, he's loved all six years he's spent helping run one of the country's best fine-dining restaurants, and he's certainly not opposed to remaining part of the Wolfgang Puck empire. But Dunn is also a gambling man, and he's betting big on his own palate with a new endeavor:

Somehow, on top of managing Spago's mammoth beverage program, Dunn has found the time to create Millinery Distilled Dry Gin: an uber-smooth, citrus- and floral-forward spirit accented with fresh green herbs and soft juniper notes. The first thing that stands out, though, is the bal-



TASTING NOTE

Pronounced top notes of orange blossom, cucumber, basil, and soft juniper settle over an earthy base. The mouthfeel is surprisingly rich considering the body's lighter 80-proof weight. A hint of rainwater remains on the petrichor-driven finish.



Spago mixologist Andrew Kim makes the Millinery Gin & Tonic with Millinery Distilled Dry Gin.

ance. “With this gin, it’s all about the blending,” says Dunn. To accomplish this, he called on his decades of experience in the industry and what he’s learned creating the blends for Puck’s namesake private labels: Puck Chardonnay, Puck Pinot Noir, and Puck Sauvignon Blanc, all made in partnership with Steve Clifton, as well as the Puck Schramsberg 2014 Blanc de Noir and the Puck Sangre de Lobos (with Lewis Cellars). He also assisted with the private-label blends at Seattle-based Canlis.

In the early stages of developing Millinery Distilled Dry Gin, Dunn sat down with Spago’s mixologist, Andrew Kim, to come up with the formula. “Andrew’s been helpful with the blending trials,” says Dunn. “He’s also the one that suggested I keep it [at] 40% ABV, as there are far fewer larger gin brands at this lower percentage.”

As masterful as he is at mixology, the ever-humble Kim blushes when he mentions that the gin’s distiller claimed that Dunn’s recipe was one of the most well-thought-out gins he’s tasted, down to its pH balance.

The spirit’s softer yet earthy character inspired Dunn to name the brand after his great-grandmother Mary Summerlin, who herself was graceful yet hardworking. Born in 1889, Summerlin worked as a cigar binder in a factory in Savannah,

Georgia, during her twenties; at a time when it was uncommon for women to work, she was also a skilled buck dancer and theater performer. She eventually met her husband, Clyde Burton, and moved to Montgomery, Alabama, where Dunn would one day be born.

Family lore also says Summerlin loved a good hat and the occasional visit to the millinery; hence the name Millinery Distilled Dry Gin. Adorned in a derby hat, Summerlin’s likeness now graces the art deco-inspired label.

Largely funding production with his own savings, Dunn has produced roughly 3,600 bottles, each of which will have an SRP of \$28–\$30 and an FOB of \$19. (“I want the bar business,” Dunn says of the latter price.) Making 350-gallon batches at a time might cost a bit more, but the small-scale approach ensures quality control, he adds.

Dunn believes that Millinery shines best in a Gin & Tonic with an orange twist, but he also notes how easy it is to sip. Likewise, given its citrusy and herbal tones as well as its medium-bodied weight, it’s incredibly food friendly—which makes sense given that the gin was formulated in a restaurant celebrated for its local ingredients and seasonally driven fare. Like Puck, known as the forefather of this brand of California cuisine, perhaps one day Dunn will be credited for creating a new class of gin. *sj*

Millinery Distilled Dry Gin is now available in California through Southern Glazer’s Wine & Spirits and is a product of Dunn Spirits. Follow the brand on Instagram @dunnspirits and @millinerygin.

THE MILLINERY® GIN & TONIC

A variation on the classic created by Andrew Kim, mixologist at Spago in Beverly Hills, CA

- 2 oz. Millinery Gin
- 2 dashes orange bitters
- 4 oz. Fever-Tree Tonic

Garnish with a basil leaf and sliced English cucumbers.



High Hospitality

WEST HOLLYWOOD'S LOWELL CAFE SETS THE TONE AS THE COUNTRY'S FIRST CANNABIS RESTAURANT

by Rachel Burkons

"SO, HOW DOES this work?" the guy next to me at the bar asked while reading through an elegantly designed menu at Lowell Cafe in West Hollywood, California. It's a fair question to ask at any business exploring novel service models, concepts, and cuisines, but it's a particularly appropriate query at the country's first licensed cannabis restaurant.

Two checks, two servers—one for cannabis and another for food and beverage—and even two addresses are some of the workarounds Lowell Cafe has had to implement in order to comply with state and local regulations. This long and intensive process began in 2018, when the City of West Hollywood announced its plans to allow businesses to apply for 16 onsite consumption licenses: eight for edibles only and eight that also allow for smoking and vaping. The country's leading cannabis pre-roll brand, Lowell Farms, was the first to push through, opening the cafe to national fanfare late last September.

To curate its food and beverage offerings, the business partnered with Andrea Drummer, already an established cannabis chef, and Los Angeles-based bar operations group Houston Hospitality. The result is casual California fare—salads, burgers, and snacks, with plenty of vegan options—served in an unfussy manner. Found alongside the food menu is the main attraction: a small bound booklet of cannabis offerings that looks just like the kind of craft cocktail list you'd find at other Houston Hospitality spots.

Its contents, though, are decidedly different: The cannabis menu offers a range of individual joints (delivered alongside a Lowell-branded matchbook and ashtray) as well as flower, vape pens and concentrates, and packs of pre-rolls; the edibles

list, meanwhile, features THC-infused beverages and sweets. Pipes and bongos are available for rent and guests can bring in their own cannabis, as long as they pay the \$30/per person "tokeage" fee.

One thing you won't find at Lowell

site, that's currently prohibited.

At the moment, Lowell seems more than satisfied with offering a comfortable place for a wide variety of consumers to explore cannabis publicly, many for the first time. But while the cannabis servers,



PHOTO COURTESY OF LOWELL CAFE

A variety of dishes and a gravity bong await service at Lowell Cafe in West Hollywood, CA.

Cafe is alcohol—for now, at least. While California regulations disallow the sale and consumption of cannabis and alcohol in the same space, they also state that cannabis retailers can't sell food. Lowell cleared this hurdle by building on a property that had two addresses: one where cannabis could be sold and the other designated for the kitchen and food sales. Ironically enough, this has also opened the door for Lowell to sell cannabis on one side and alcohol on the other, though it remains to be seen how this would work in practice. It also means that while the cafe originally sought to make cannabis-infused food on-

known as "flower hosts," are designed to guide guests through the experience, the young woman who helped me when I visited on day two didn't seem to know much about specific products, other than her assurance that "everything is really good." Not arming its front line of employees with the necessary knowledge isn't going to hold Lowell back at a time when guests are thrilled just to have this experience, but it won't help push cannabis-driven fine dining forward as a concept, either.

In short, the "ganjier" experience isn't quite there, but there's always potential for growth. **»**



The Sevillano olive cultivar grows at Darioush Winery in Napa, CA.

A Nuovo Vintage

REPORTING FROM CALIFORNIA'S 2019 OLIVE HARVEST

PHOTO: JEFFREY GRIFFIN

THERE'S A COMMON belief in the olive-oil industry that olives should only be harvested every other year, and in California, 2018 was one of these off years. Production of olive oil in the state fell from approximately 4.2 million gallons in 2017 to roughly 1.6 million gallons, with several phenomena accounting for the decline: Warm temperatures at the beginning of the year resulted in premature blooming, while freezing temperatures and wind slowed the pollination process.


The crop was also compromised by fruit flies, which break the skin of the olives and cause them to oxidize—resulting in a waxy-tasting olive oil. The flies also lay eggs that hatch into larvae, and olives harvested with larvae will ultimately produce a “grubby” oil; this term references a secondary sensory defect that results in a taste reminiscent of dirt. As a result, the oil will not be labeled as extra-virgin.

Olive-oil makers, known as millers, are powerless to address this, as any intervention will be picked up by mandatory lab and sensory tests. Only pristine olives harvested and processed with the highest care within a short amount of time will deliver a high-quality oil worthy of the extra-virgin label.

Not to worry, though: As of press time, it appeared that 2019 should yield a remarkable crop, with the California Olive Oil Council (COOC) predicting that production will return to the range of 4 million gallons. The first product to hit shelves will be **Olio Nuovo**; similar to Beaujolais Nouveau, this oil should be consumed quickly, as Olio Nuovo is rarely raked or filtered and sediments compromise its longevity. Once you've opened a bottle, aim to consume the full contents within six to eight weeks—as with all olive oils—but if you've had an unopened bottle for more than three months, it's probably no longer usable.

Next to arrive will be **Early Harvest** oils, which are more robust, as they're produced with olives harvested early in the season and therefore greener. Unlike those designated as Olio Nuovo, Early Harvest oils are raked and possibly filtered, and they'll have a longer shelf life as a result.

Regardless of whether you prefer Olio Nuovo or Early Harvest—or decide to wait for the release of the standard 2019 oils—just make sure you stay away from oils labeled **Late Harvest**. Olive oil is not Sauternes, and olives harvested later than January are probably too mature to deliver a high-quality olive oil with the potential health benefits we need from a liquid fat.

So, good luck to all orchard managers and millers out there, and likewise to the COOC Taste Panel members as they taste and certify the 2019 oils! 

Did You Know?

Senate Bill 65 (signed in 2015 by former Governor Jerry Brown, reversing previous legislation) states that if “California” is used on the label of an olive oil, 100% of the oil must be made from olives grown in the state. If a specific area in California appears on the label, 85% of the oil must be from olives grown in that area, and if a specific estate is on the label, 95% of the oil must be from olives grown on that estate.



Back to Its Bordeaux Roots

AS IT CELEBRATES ITS 30TH ANNIVERSARY, **MURRIETA'S WELL** ENSURES ITS 135-YEAR-OLD CUTTINGS FROM MARGAUX AND CHÂTEAU D'YQUEM CONTINUE TO THRIVE IN THE LIVERMORE VALLEY

by Meridith May

WITH CATCHY PROPRIETARY monikers like The Whip and The Spur, Murrieta's Well has made a name for itself—among its industry peers and with consumers—for high-quality blends that show off the largesse of the terroir in California's Livermore Valley.

Winemaker Robbie Meyer defines his grape-growing philosophy acre by acre, farming all of the components of his blends separately. But he and the winery also set out with intention to celebrate the original vines, which were first planted 135 years ago.

The French Connection

Farmer and viticulturist Louis Mel, who first discovered the Murrieta's Well estate in 1884 and built a gravity-flow winery on the property, was a well-connected visionary. Thanks to his associates in Bordeaux, Mel was able to help Charles Wetmore acquire cuttings of original Château d'Yquem clones and transport them to Livermore.

"The Murrieta's Well estate has thrived for 135 years," Meyer told *The SOMM Journal*. "To think that the genetics from these clonal selections have been continuously farmed for that many years makes California winemaking history. With Sauvignon Blanc as our core for The Whip, we can further connect to the d'Yquem origins—I can build the other whites around it. I have at my fingertips a broad palette of estate fruit that makes my job exciting."

Meanwhile, The Spur—which is Cabernet Sauvignon-driven—is not "formula-based, but rather an artistic ap-



PHOTO: JAMESTRAN

▲ Robbie Meyer is Director of Winemaking for Murrieta's Well.

The 500-acre Murrieta's Well property is one of California's original wine estates. In front of this historic tasting room is the Louis Mel Vineyard.



PHOTO: ORBIE PULLEN

proach,” explained Meyer, who is growing small lots of Merlot, Petit Verdot, and Malbec, among other grapes. “Any given year, the Cabernet Sauvignon will express itself a certain way with other varieties for the ultimate expression. . . . The goal is to craft balanced, delicious, food-friendly wines.”

With a focus on the label’s eponymous estate—a dynamic site with diverse soil types and elevation aspects—Meyer works to ensure each variety is situated in a location that will bring out its best assets. “For instance, the Merlot thrives on the clay-composition soil, while the Cabernet Sauvignon and the Sauvignon Blanc [perform well] near the sandy, gravelly arroyo,” he explained. “It’s about picking by individual lots of each variety and building from there.”

In contrast with the north-to-south aspects of Napa and Sonoma, the east-west positioning of the Livermore Valley allows cool air to flow directly from the Pacific. “It’s like a big alleyway straight off the ocean,” Meyer said, noting that it plays a vital role in the health of the ten-plus varieties grown on the estate.

When asked about his own signature style, Meyer remained modest. “I’m continuing on a tradition started by Phil Wente in 1990,” he insisted. “It was his vision to revitalize the winery [with Sergio Traverso], and I wish to continue paying homage to its rich heritage.” SJ



Left Banking on Bordeaux

To kick off the 30th anniversary of Murrieta’s Well and its connection to Margaux and Château d’Yquem, Meyer will lead a series of lectures and wine tastings for guests on a river cruise around Bordeaux from April 30 through May 7, 2020. Sailing along the Garonne River and its surrounding estuaries, vineyards, and port cities, he’ll educate and

entertain the group with comparative tastings of Murrieta’s Well and its not-so-distant French relatives.

“This will be my first time on a river cruise,” said Meyer. “It will be wonderful to discover how the regions are the same and how they differ in terms of flavor profiles and winemaking techniques—then and now—[as well as to lead] an exploration of Bordeaux terroir and its history.”

If you would like to join the Bordeaux cruise aboard the AmaDolce, contact Wendi Cartwright of VinoDestinations at wcartwright@dreamvacations.com or call 877-288-2202.

PHOTO COURTESY OF MURRIETA’S WELL



Robbie Meyer has served as Director of Winemaking at Murrieta’s Well since 2015. During a previous stint at Peter Michael Winery, he met fifth-generation winemaker Karl Wente, and the pair became fast friends before Wente entrusted Meyer with Murrieta’s Well.

PHOTO COURTESY OF MURRIETA’S WELL



Descended from Celebrated Vines

Murrieta’s Well 2018 Small Lot Sauvignon Blanc, Livermore Valley (\$38) This small-production white is made with fruit from the descendants of the original Château d’Yquem cuttings planted by Louis Mel in the late 1800s. The vineyard has an elevation range of 575–715 feet and offers well-drained, gravelly soils ideal for this variety. Aged sur lie for seven months in neutral French oak barrels, the wine produces aromas of ripe and tart key lime, orange peel, and tropical fruit. Honeyed peach, baby’s-breath, and grapefruit line the palate, and although barrel fermentation adds weight, there’s exquisite balance thanks to the bright acidity. 94



THE RIVERS OF FOG that roll into San Luis Obispo from the Pacific can be so dense some mornings that what lies 20 feet in front of you is a mystery. One stream comes from Morro Bay to the north, the other from the south near Arroyo Grande; they meet in Edna Valley—the heart of the heart of San Luis Obispo’s coastal wine country (or the SLO Coast, as locals refer to it). When the fog is especially thick, one can look out over the valley from the Santa Lucia Mountains and see nothing but the peaks of the *morros*. These now-extinct volcanos were pushed up from the ocean floor—along with the rest of the land—by geological uplift millions of years ago.

More than 20 types of soil can be found here: In addition to those dominated by

volcanic material are soils rich in fossilized shells, soils formed from ancient sand dunes, and soils that change from marine shale to clay loam within an acre. The diversity makes for nuanced expressions from each of the SLO Coast’s 30-plus wineries.

Cool-climate varieties like Chardonnay and Pinot Noir do best here, as well as aromatic whites like Gewürztraminer and Albariño, and—perhaps surprisingly—Syrah and Grenache. Rarely do temperatures exceed 80 degrees Fahrenheit, and in tandem with the fog and maritime wind, they pave the way for one of the longest growing seasons on the West Coast. What essentially all SLO Coast wines have in common is the energetic acidity that results from these marine conditions.

“That acidity comes from the cold nights



PHOTO COURTESY OF EL LUGAR WINES

El Lugar winemaker/proprietor Coby Parker-Garcia with his daughter.

WHERE THE

Fog

ROLLS IN

ON THE CALIFORNIA
COAST, **SAN LUIS
OBISPO WINEMAKERS**
CRAFT BOUTIQUE
WINES WITH
ENERGETIC ACIDITY

by Eric Marsh



PHOTO COURTESY OF CROMAVERA WINES

Croma Vera winemaker Jeremy Leffert and owner Mindy Oliver at Spanish Springs Vineyard.



PHOTO COURTESY OF SLO COAST WINE COLLECTIVE

Vineyards on the "SLO Coast" average just 5 miles' distance from the ocean.

and the shortness of warmth during the day," says Peloton Cellars owner Bill Kesselring. A grower as well as a winemaker, Kesselring has worked in viticulture for 24 years in locales from Napa to Mexico. "Grapes don't photosynthesize at night, but they do respire, and if it stays too warm overnight, they breathe off acid," he explains.

While SLO Coast vineyards are located just 5 miles from the ocean on average, Sinor-LaVallee Wines' Bassi Ranch and Spanish Springs properties are two of the closest at only a mile and a half away. Many local producers procure at least a portion of their grapes from Spanish Springs, including Oceano Wines, Peloton Cellars, and Croma Vera Wines.

"We call this area 'ultra-coastal' because it's the wine region closest to the ocean in all of California," says Mindy Oliver,

owner of Croma Vera Wines. "This makes for a much longer growing season—which is great for Albariño, because there's very little heat stress and the grapes are able to stay on the vine [and] develop full flavors while maintaining acidity." On the nose, her 2018 Albariño has notes of ripe peach, tangerine zest, and something subtly akin to Taleggio. The palate, meanwhile, presents stone fruit, grapefruit pith, spirited minerality, and vivacious acidity, with mouthwatering salinity on the back end.

Lively acidity is another defining characteristic of the region's Pinot Noirs: They're not only bright but also tart, mineral, savory, and earthy all at once. El Lugar's 2017 Pinot Noir from Rincon Vineyards is a key example, with winemaker-proprietor Coby Parker-Garcia describing it as a "structured wine where you get iron-y,

rusty components, but then also dark fruit, blueberry, and raspberry tones as well." It's refined and lasting—the kind of wine to drink with your eyes closed and discover something new with every sip.

Speaking of getting lost in something, a visit to the idyllic SLO Coast is an excuse to turn off the GPS and let the morros guide you. Called the Nine Sisters, they lead in a linear fashion from Edna Valley to Morro Bay: Follow them to where frothy waves lap the beach and then head north on the coastal highway to Cambria.

From there, turn the GPS back on and type in Stolo Vineyards. Inquire in the tasting room about the Gewürztraminer, which shows rose-petal and raw vegetal aromas, followed by flavors of white peach and wet stone. Then drive farther inland to Niner Wine Estates and be ready to fight for the last bottle of its Jespersen Ranch Reserve Pinot Noir.

That could be the only complaint about SLO Coast wine: These boutique wineries don't make all that much of it (some production yields fewer than 200 cases). But its scarcity makes it all the more valuable.

A final directive: Circle back to Edna Valley in the afternoon, after the fog has burned off, and have a picnic at Biddle Ranch Vineyard along with a bottle of its estate Chardonnay. A cool breeze will blow in from the sea to cool your sun-warmed neck and arms and kiss your cheeks; however faint, you'll swear you can taste the sea on your lips. SJ

Volcanos and fog are among the distinctive features of San Luis Obispo wine country.



PHOTO COURTESY OF SLO COAST WINE COLLECTIVE

A high-speed photograph capturing a dramatic splash of amber-colored liquid, likely whiskey or bourbon, against a stark white background. The liquid is captured mid-air, forming a complex, multi-lobed shape with intricate patterns of light and shadow. Several clear, square ice cubes are suspended in the air, some appearing to be falling or having just been tossed into the liquid. The overall effect is one of energy and movement, emphasizing the texture and color of the liquid.

**MAKE A
SPLASH**

CIA SUMMIT for BEVERAGE PROFESSIONALS

The Culinary Institute of America Sommelier Summit

March 1-3, 2020



THE CIA AT COPIA

Enrich your career with the **CIA Summit for Sommeliers and Beverage Professionals**, a premier educational experience from The Culinary Institute of America. You'll advance your knowledge and discover new ideas in the heart of the Napa Valley!

Join beverage authorities and colleagues for lively coaching sessions, interactive panel discussions, creative seminars, fun and challenging tasting exercises, and more. What makes this program so unique is the one-on-one access you'll have to summit presenters. The connections you'll make will last a lifetime—and take your career to the next level.

Registration is now open!
ciabevpro.com

Here are just a few of the many confirmed speakers to date:



CHRIS TANGHE, MS

CHIEF INSTRUCTOR, GUILDSOMM



JULIA CONEY

WINE WRITER, EDUCATOR, AND CONSULTANT



CARLTON MCCOY, MS, CIA '06

PRESIDENT AND CEO, HEITZ CELLARS



KELLI WHITE

SENIOR STAFF WRITER, GUILDSOMM

Proud sponsors of CIA BevPro:

THE **SOMM** JOURNAL



napa valley vintners

{ SOMMjournal.com } 73

Coming Up

Cava

WHY THIS SPANISH SPARKLING WINE MAY BE THE BEST ALTERNATIVE TO CHAMPAGNE

by Nora Buck



BUBBLES CONTINUE TO create buzz as the Champagne and sparkling segment stands out as a key driver of growth in the wine business. According to Information Resources Inc. (IRI) data gathered from May 2018 to May 2019, Champagne/sparkling wines outperformed the overall wine category with a gain of 7.7%, reaching \$1.2 billion in sales.

While the precise history of Champagne is muddy, it's generally believed that the first examples arose in the early 17th century, followed later by Prosecco sometime in the 19th century. While the former is made using the traditional method, Prosecco is typically produced using the tank method and is considerably less expensive than Champagne. Over the past decade, Prosecco's share of the spotlight has increased as consumers continue to seek out new growing regions, styles, and price points.

Another contender to watch in the sparkling category, Cava, has been a presence in Spain for almost 150 years; it's largely produced in the Penedès region with Chardonnay and local grapes such as Xarel-lo, Parellada, and Macabeo and follows the same traditional method (aka *método tradicional*) as its more famous counterpart.

Champagne and Cava also undergo a secondary fermentation, with a long lees-aging period of nine months or more for Cava and a minimum of 12 months for Champagne—a process that helps give them their signature creamy style. Prosecco, however, typically doesn't age on the lees, and as Wine Folly co-founder Madeline Puckette states on the resource's website, this is "the key to why Cava is much better competition for Champagne than Prosecco." Due to the warm Mediterranean climate of its home country, Cava also typically boasts lower acidity and astringency than Champagne, which softens its texture.

The grounds of Bodega Jaime Serra in Barcelona, Spain.





Expanding the Category

The industry is indeed catching on to the secret of Spanish sparkling; according to Wine Folly, U.S. imports of Cava Reserva and Gran Reserva have grown by over 50% in the past five years. In *Beverage Wholesaler's* 2019 list of sparkling trends, "Cava Comes Out of the Shadows" made the top five, with the publication including a nod to its quality: "Exciting, traditional-method bubbles come from all over the world, not just in the region that made it famous."

So who, then, are the producers to watch in the Cava craze? Family-owned J. García Carrión, which ranks among the largest wine producers in the world, will celebrate its 130th anniversary in 2020 and has increasingly gained recognition for its outstanding Cava portfolio. "As shown by the growth of Prosecco, U.S. consumers are realizing that quality sparkling wine is not limited to Champagne," says Tom Bernth, National Sales Manager for J. García Carrión-CIV USA. "Spanish Cava is particularly appealing to educated wine consumers and Champagne drinkers because they recognize the similarity in production process between Champagne and Cava. Cava offers consumers a similar quality and taste to Champagne at a price lower than Prosecco."

At last year's New York International Wine Competition, where it featured its Jaume Serra Cristalino and Pata Negra Cava, J. García Carrión won Cava Producer of the Year; Jaume Serra Cristalino is

available in Brut, Rosé Brut, and Extra Dry, which is aged on the lees for a minimum of 12 months. Jaume Serra also recently launched two new Cava expressions: Jaume Serra Ice Cava and Jaume Serra Ice Cava Rosé. Like the brand's existing releases, both are made in the traditional method but see the addition of a slightly sweeter liquid during dosage, resulting in a lower acidity level and an even creamier mouthfeel. Available in 750-milliliter bottles, they're recommended to serve over ice.

Also in the García Carrión family is Pata Negra; located in Barcelona, the winery occupies a 17th-century castle surrounded by a roughly 300-acre estate of vineyards planted to Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, Tempranillo, and Chardonnay. (Its name derives from a Spanish term that refers to items of the highest quality.) Well known for its classic Spanish still wines, such as the lauded Toro Roble, Pata Negra debuted its own Cava portfolio in the U.S. in 2017, releasing a Brut Reserva (aged 18 months), a Brut Organic, a Brut Rosé, and a Brut Organic Rosé.

An Opening with Millennials

According to Nielsen data, stateside sparkling wine sales from Memorial Day to Labor Day 2018 accounted for 28.9% of the category's annual domestic sales, up from 26.7% in 2015—indicating that consumers are increasingly reaching for sparklers when the weather heats up. While Cava fits right in as an ideal summer sipper, like its French and Italian cousins, Cava sales

WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN CHAMPAGNE PROSECCO & CAVA?

HOW IS IT MADE?

TRADITIONAL METHOD
Secondary fermentation in the bottle
CHAMPAGNE & CAVA

CHARMAT BULK PROCESS
Secondary fermentation in big tanks
PROSECCO

CHAMPAGNE & CAVA ARE MADE USING THE SAME METHOD

HOW LONG DOES IT TAKE TO MAKE?

Method	Time (months)
Traditional Method (Champagne & Cava)	15 to 36
Charmat Bulk Process (Prosecco)	9 to 34
Charmat Bulk Process (Prosecco)	3 to 6

*Time periods shown are averages

WHERE IS IT FROM?

SPAIN/CAVA (Spain)

FRANCE/CHAMPAGNE (France)

ITALY/PROSECCO (Italy)

BUBBLES

SOFT (Champagne, Cava) vs. FROTHY (Prosecco)

Cava has a lower acidity due to a warm Mediterranean climate

HOW MUCH MIGHT YOU PAY?

Method	Price
Traditional Method (Champagne)	\$45
Charmat Bulk Process (Cava)	\$12
Charmat Bulk Process (Prosecco)	\$14

2019 **GARCIA CARRION** SINCE 1889

also spike during celebratory occasions like the holidays and Valentine's Day.

Given its more accessible price point, however, consumers can opt for Cava as more of an everyday item. And while all generations are embracing the sparkling craze, Cava is gaining a cult-like following with millennials, a coveted demographic that is seeking high quality at a value.

Cava seems primed to attract this expanding market, so when stocking shelves in response to the growing demand for sparkling, savvy retailers should be sure to include Cava as an exciting alternative to Champagne at a much lower price. **\$**



THE SOMM Jury

In each issue, the editorial team at *The SOMM Journal* will deliberate on wine submissions before releasing final judgment on select wines that garnered scores of at least 90 points.

Keeping Score for Talley Vineyards

COMPRISING 159 ACRES, Talley Vineyards' six estate vineyards in coastal San Luis Obispo County span the cool-climate growing regions of Arroyo Grande and Edna Valley. Proprietor Brian Talley, a third-generation farmer, sent *The SOMM Journal* new vintages so that we could share tasting notes with our readers.

Talley Vineyards 2017 Oliver's Vineyard Chardonnay, Edna Valley (\$48)

Aged 16 months in 20% new French oak, with only 18 barrels produced. The site, named for Talley Farms founder Oliver Talley, was originally planted to vine in 1991. Unique notes of blue flowers greet the nose as unctuous lemon peel fills the palate with a hint of salinity. Vanilla and honeysuckle define the weighted mouthfeel, which is sweetened by apple pie as well as ripe melon and kiwi. **94**

Talley Vineyards 2017 Rosemary's Vineyard Pinot Noir, Arroyo Grande Valley (\$75) Overlooking the Pacific Ocean, this is the farm's coolest site, with chalky shale soil that contributes great acidity and ageability. Aged 17 months in French oak, the wine offers up scents of tomato leaf and brandied cherry. It's an earth mother from treasured ground, with spiced cherry, cinnamon, cedar, and white pepper. **95**

Talley 2016 Syrah, Rincon Vineyard, Arroyo Grande Valley (\$42) With a nose of sweet tobacco, espresso bean, earth, and dark plum, this expression shows off the complexity of this variety's cool-climate character. A nuanced palate of grilled meat and candied violets stays in place through the charming finish. Blueberry and banana peel come in midway as plush tannins complement the layers of flavor. **95**



Talley Vineyards winemaker Eric Johnson with Brian Talley.



PHOTO COURTESY OF TALLEY VINEYARDS

Pio Cesare Releases Its First Single Vineyard Barolo in 30 Years

FAMILY-OWNED AND -OPERATED since 1881, Pio Cesare is located in central Alba in Italy's Piedmont region. The town was built during medieval times on top of Roman walls dating back to 50 B.C.

From the Monforte d'Alba commune, **Pio Cesare's 2015 Barolo Mosconi (\$200)** is the winery's first vintage of a Barolo produced exclusively from its Mosconi Vineyard. Made with fruit from the oldest vines on the property, it's only Pio Cesare's second single-vineyard release in 30 years.

"Mosconi is thought to be one of the true 'Grand Crus' of Monforte d'Alba," explains proprietor Pio Boffa. "Its soils and microclimates allow Nebbiolo to grow exceptionally well and produce Barolo with great structure." We found distinctive aromas and flavors of rosebuds, tilled earth, tart cherries, and cinnamon, with opulent tannins. **98**

The **Pio Cesare 2015 Barolo Ornato (\$144)**, meanwhile, hails from the family's Ornato estate in Serralunga d'Alba. It was fermented in stainless steel with skin contact for 15 days and aged in French oak for 36 months (70% in new barrels and 30% in 660-gallon casks). Situated at an elevation of over 1,450 feet, the vineyard is steep, with great drainage and soils of white limestone and clay. The wine is intense and elegant, with perfumed, ripe fruit and flavors of salted strawberry influenced by tarry tobacco and rosebud. **97**

Pio Cesare is imported exclusively by Maisons Marques & Domaines (MMD USA).



PHOTO: JEREMY BALL

Pio Cesare's Ornato Vineyard is located in the acclaimed Barolo region of Serralunga d'Alba.



PHOTO: SUZANNE BECKER BRONK

The Superlative Private Label

GELSON'S PARTNERS WITH WINEMAKER JULIEN FAYARD TO OFFER A LIMITED-EDITION COOMBSVILLE CABERNET SAUVIGNON

WHEN IT COMES TO the assumption that a grocer's private-label wine must be low in quality, winemaker Julien Fayard has some (admittedly biased) opinions. "It may say 'Gelson's,' but my name is on that bottle too," he says of his collaboration with the SoCal-based company, which, he adds, isn't just your average grocery store. The upscale chain is known for its first-rate offerings, so one would suppose that if a winemaker could choose any business of its kind to partner with, Gelson's would be ideal.

During a recent phone interview with both Fayard and Jake Cheung, Sr. Marketing Manager for Gelson's, one thing was abundantly clear: the trust each side had in the other. "You have to have good people behind the wine to understand how they are going to sell it," said Fayard.

Given the success of this partnership's initial effort, a private-label rosé released in 2018, Gelson's has once again employed Fayard's expertise for two more expressions: an atypical, high-caliber, and limited-edition Coombsville Cabernet Sauvignon as well as a Malbec made with Oak Knoll District fruit. Both hit stores early last November.

Fayard describes the former release as a "Coombsville Cab with French restraint," which isn't just the natural result of the winemaker's heritage; beyond cutting his teeth at Bordeaux bests like Château Lafite Rothschild and Château Smith Haut Lafitte, he's also learned from the likes of winemaker/enologist Philippe Melka (BRAND, Hundred Acre, and Cliff Lede, among others). Fayard's soft-handed winemaking honors the fruit's character, which he describes as having a "real freshness, with beautiful, bright black and purple aromatics, plus a richness of tannins and anthocyanins."

Available for under \$50, with only 124 cases produced, the wine is a steal for a Napa Cab. Any savvy connoisseur will appreciate its value. **81**



Tasting Notes

Gelson's 2018 Fair Play Rosé, Sierra Foothills With a color akin to a golden rose and onion skin, this blend of Syrah, Grenache, Cabernet Franc, and some Barbera is Fayard's second Gelson's release. Aromas of melon and chamomile lead to a sumptuous palate of apricot nectar while a tangerine sweetness softens peach-pit bitters. The wine's Provence-like delicacy offers a lingering, dusty salinity. **94**

Gelson's 2018 Malbec, Oak Knoll District, Napa Valley This youthful beauty wears a stunning carmine-purple robe of color. A savory scent of grilled meat threaded with iron notes is seasoned further with black pepper, violets, and wild cherries. As a dusting of cocoa powder and tea leaf emerges on the palate, it's enhanced by dark chocolate and a finish of earthiness and new leather. **95**

Gelson's 2017 Reserve Cabernet Sauvignon, Coombsville, Napa Valley Aged for 20 months in 100% new French oak, it's perfumed with cherry cola, heather, licorice, and a dash of black pepper. This silky siren opens to teeth-gripping, espresso-bean tannins and plush notes of super-ripe blackberry, which are accented with sage and herbaceous seasonings. As the wine opens up, the generous fruit fills out the palate, where it's balanced by fine acidity—making this a great match for food. **96**

Go Beyond the Classics With **JACK'S BLACK BOOK**

In partnership with sister publication *The Tasting Panel*, *The SOMM Journal* is on the hunt for bartenders across the country who can craft an original and modern take on the classic Jack and Coke cocktail. The winner will earn a spotlight in the 2020 edition of *Jack's Black Book*, a curated collaboration with Jack Daniel's that showcases a who's who of mixology talent in the U.S.



PHOTO: DEVIN BERKO

Jack Daniel's U.S. Brand Ambassador Eric "ET" Tecosky behind the bar at popular haunt Jones in West Hollywood, CA.

Jack & Coke Tennessee Tiki



- ▶ 1½ oz. Jack Daniel's Tennessee Whiskey
- ▶ 1½ oz. Coca-Cola
- ▶ 2 oz. fresh pineapple juice
- ▶ 1 oz. banana puree
- ▶ ½ oz fresh lime juice
- ▶ 2-3 dashes Jack Daniel's Cocktail Bitters

Shake all ingredients but the Coke with ice. Add the Coke and strain into a tiki glass or mug. Garnish with a Dirty Sue Whiskey Cherry and a mint sprig.

Until now, all featured bartenders have been hand-selected by Jack Daniel's U.S. Brand Ambassador Eric "ET" Tecosky, but this time around, you could find yourself and your recipe included among them. Show us your best riff on a Jack and Coke by midnight on January 1, 2020, for your shot to be featured in *Jack's Black Book Volume V*. Send a photo and complete recipe to jackandcoke@tastingpanelmag.com or post to Instagram with the hashtag #JBBJackandCoke and tag both @TastingPanel and @JackDanielsUS.



Discover Portugal's Alentejo wine region.
Authenticity. Diversity. Tradition.
Savor the Alentejo in each and every bottle!

<http://www.vinhosdoalentejo.pt/en> | #WinesOfAlentejo | winesofalentejousa winesofalentejousa @winesofalentejo



WINES OF ALENTEJO

Naturally Unique.

Be responsible. Drink in moderation.

The Dry-Bar Trend

AUTHOR RUBY WARRINGTON TOUTS THE MANY BENEFITS—AND PLENTIFUL OPTIONS—OF A NO-ALCOHOL LIFESTYLE

2019 WAS THE YEAR we officially got “sober curious.” When I’m asked what I think is driving the trend, I typically point to a confluence of factors: In a culture obsessed with #wellness, it’s becoming harder to write off the unhealthy side effects of drinking; social media means people no longer need brave the noise and bravado of bar culture to make connections; and with cannabis becoming more readily (and legally) available, there are other swift and effective ways to switch off and unwind.

But I think the term itself has something to do with it, having given language to what a lot of people have wondered for a long time: Why do we rely so heavily on alcohol as a social lubricant? What would it be like to live hangover free? And why is there often so much pressure to drink when we might just not be in the mood?

In tandem with the terminology, a whole new industry has sprung up to meet the demands of the growing sober-curious consumer base. While options for non-drinkers used to range from a sickly sweet mocktail (at best) to a begrudgingly proffered glass of warm OJ at the dreariest of networking events, a fresh breed of “spirit-free” non-alcoholic brands are flooding onto the market.

Whether it’s non-alcoholic craft beers from the likes of Athletic Brewing Co. and Grüvi (which also does a super zero-proof Prosecco); mood-enhancing social elixirs from Kin Euphorics and British alcohol-free distillate Seedlip; or “dry” bars such as Sans Bar in Austin, Texas, and Brooklyn’s Getaway, there’s suddenly no shortage of novel options to entice the newly sober curious. Meanwhile, CBD-infused sodas, hoppy water, shrubs, and sparking iced teas are all far-healthier alternatives to traditional sodas and juices, rounding out alcohol-free menus with flavor, sophistication, and verve.

Amid this competition, Australian brand Lyre’s (see opposite page) is upping the stakes with a line of 12 “impossibly crafted” variants that mirror the taste, aroma, and even the consistency of traditional spirits. Named for the country’s native Lyrebird, which is known for its uncanny ability to mimic all kinds of sounds, the idea is that it’s now possible to enjoy all of your favorite mixed drinks without the slurred speech, regretful texts, or queasy aftereffects.

The brainchild of Mark Livings, a marketing and tech entrepreneur who’d become disillusioned by the hard-drinking culture of corporate life, Lyre’s also has its sights on America’s not-so-sober-curious establishments. Blurring the lines somewhat, its team suggests subbing one traditional cocktail ingredient for one of their zero-proof offerings (for example, making a Cosmopolitan with regular vodka and Lyre’s Triple Sec) for a low-alcohol alternative.

Whether all of these offerings are suitable for those who identify as alcoholics is debatable. The 0.5% alcohol present in most non-alcoholic beers is enough to be considered a relapse, while the ritual of mixing a spirit-less Manhattan, say, could potentially trigger an urge for the real thing. But for the sober curious, never waking up with a hangover is no longer the only benefit of going alcohol free. **»**

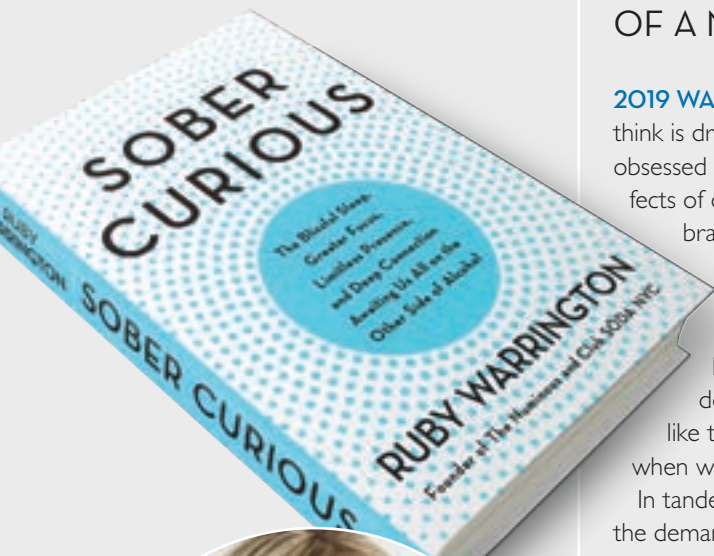


PHOTO: RUVAN VILASOORIVA



*Ruby Warrington is the author of **Sober Curious: The Blissful Sleep, Greater Focus, Limitless Presence, and Deep Connection Awaiting Us All on the Other Side of Alcohol.***

Free Spirited

LYRE'S LEADS THE WAY AS THE NON-ALCOHOLIC CATEGORY EXPANDS

story by Declan Barnes / photos by Devin Berko



Lyre's Global Brand Ambassador Jeremy Shipley.

“Lyre’s is a proprietary blend of essences, extracts, and distillates [that] impart the same aroma and taste of the original spirits that [the brand] pays homage to.”

—Lyre’s Western Regional Manager Josh Carlos


OUTFITTED WITH A floral button-up and Kiwi charm, native New Zealander Jeremy Shipley, Global Brand Ambassador for Lyre's, achieved the seemingly impossible on a recent visit to Los Angeles: getting a room full of bartenders to agree on something.

A group of some of the city's finest mixologists gathered at Brentwood venue Bar Toscana to appraise some of the newest selections in Southern Glazer's Wine and Spirits' Artisanal Group portfolio. Flanked by Lyre's Western Regional Manager Josh Carlos, Shipley commenced proceedings by demonstrating the potential of the world's first premium range of non-alcoholic spirits.

Lyre's is the creation of CEO Mark Livings, who was inspired by a growing global desire for low- and no-alcohol options that don't come at the expense of social inclusion: A constant traveler, he'd grown weary of the notion that any successful venture requires copious amounts of alcohol. So, as he imagined a world where well-crafted libations could be enjoyed without the risk of lingering side effects, Lyre's was born.

As the attendees acquainted themselves with the 12 spirit-free expressions, including American Malt, London Dry, and White Cane, Carlos provided insights into the production process behind the range, noting that “Lyre's is a proprietary blend of essences, extracts, and distillates [that] impart the same aroma and taste of the original spirits that [the brand] pays homage to.”

Even among these discerning members of the cocktail cognoscenti, neat pours of Lyre's Italian Orange—inspired by a classic Italian bitter liqueur—earned fervent nods of approval and hushed affirmations. Equally well received was the featured “cocktail,” the Bianco Spritz, which featured Lyre's Dry Aperitif, Lyre's Orange Sec, and Fever-Tree Mediterranean Tonic garnished with mint, cucumber, and lemon. “I thought it was well made and offered something so unique in this category,” said Josh Renfree, Bar Manager at BOA Steakhouse.

Carlos emphasized that as they set out to showcase the depth of their portfolio, the Lyre's team is eager to further their goal of creating a better experience for “people at the bar, behind the bar, and at their home bar.” “It's really important to us ... to give people that choice,” he said. 



◆ *The Lyre's team concocted the alcohol-free Bianco Spritz “cocktail” for a group of beverage professionals at Bar Toscana in Los Angeles, CA. Made with Lyre's Dry Aperitif, Lyre's Orange Sec, and Fever-Tree Mediterranean Tonic, the libation was garnished with mint, cucumber, and lemon.*

New World

Terroir

THE WALLA WALLA VALLEY AVA LENDS ENTIRELY NEW MEANING TO “SENSE OF PLACE”

by Michelle Ball

Hillsides once dominated by orchards are now prime vineyard land in the Walla Walla Valley. The McClellan Estate Vineyard (below), planted by Casey and Vicki McClellan, sits opposite an organic apple orchard amidst the backdrop of the Blue Mountains in the southern reaches of the region.

ON THE SURFACE, Walla Walla, Washington, is a simple prairie town with fewer than 33,000 residents and a longtime reputation for growing wheat, apples, and sweet onions. But a deeper dive into the surrounding topography of the emerging Walla Walla Valley wine region reveals promising terroir that may very well rival the best of the Old World.

Its growth started slow, with only 20 wineries bonded between 1977–1998, but those first few expressions set the tone for the rapid ascent of this appellation, which now boasts over 120 brands. The expansion happened so quickly that it seems like every producer is eager to stake out its place in the lineup—as if to say, “I knew this was cool before it was cool.”

Situated at the 46th parallel, which straddles the border of both eastern Oregon and Washington, the Walla Walla Valley AVA is a high desert. Its bedrock was poured by a series of lava flows several stories high; together known as the Columbia River Basalt Group, they’re responsible for the breathtaking, layer cake–like bluffs just west of the region that frame the Columbia River.

The landscape was further shaped by a series of catastrophic floods—considered by geologists to be among the largest in history—that took place several times during the Ice Age and filled the valley with a deluge of gravel and silt. Windblown loess, a very fine-grained silt with the consistency of cornstarch, makes up the top layer of soil across nearly all of the region (excluding The Rocks District of Milton-Freewater). Varying in depth before they give way to

PHOTO: MICHELLE BALL

a basalt foundation, these soils are low in nutrients, especially nitrogen; their texture, however, gives them decent water-holding capacity, enabling vintners to make use of drip irrigation in an otherwise arid province.

The heart of the growing season is filled with abundant sunshine and large diurnal temperature swings that intensify in September as the days shorten. There's a noticeable dusty edge to many of the red wines, which are also defined by fine, mocha-like tannins and a vibrancy of fruit that tingles the edge of the tongue. "I think Walla Walla is somewhere between the New World and the Old World. You have the intricacy of the Old World, but we still have richness because of all of the sun," says Pepper Bridge Winery winemaker/partner Jean-François Pellet, who moved to Walla Walla from Napa Valley in 1999.

Although the predominant grape is Cabernet Sauvignon, the environment is ideal

for mid-ripening varieties like Merlot and Syrah, as they can evade the cold spells that sometimes hit earlier in the season. "I feel like Merlot surpasses Cabernet in this area," says Bobby Richards, associate winemaker at Seven Hills Winery. The business' founder and longtime winemaker, Casey McClellan, planted the first commercially viable Merlot blocks in the region with his father in 1982; he continues to care for the same vines today in what's now referred to as the Seven Hills Founding Vineyard.

The winery produces single-varietal bottlings of the six primary black Bordeaux grapes, but McClellan has also dabbled in making Spanish- and Italian-style wines in the past. Because Walla Walla Valley is well suited to such a wide range of red wines, there's still no shortage of experimentation; some winemakers, however, are calling for a narrower focus, including winemaker Derrek Vipond of Walla Walla Vintners.

Historically, the winery produced more than 20 different bottlings each year, but Vipond—who joined the team at the beginning of 2019 and has worked at several wineries in the area, including Abeja and Long Shadows Vintners—wants to streamline the portfolio to emphasize their strengths. Among those assets are their estate plantings in the Mill Creek division, which is situated in the northeastern corner of the AVA; the annual rainfall (18–22 inches) there is higher than that of the surrounding area, and many producers dry farm their vineyards.

"We can do just about everything really well, but Merlot is something that we do better than just about anybody in the world. I say that being from here—I'm a total Homer," Vipond says with a laugh. "I've tasted a lot of wines, and these [Merlots] are just as good as some of the best in Bordeaux." SJ

Exploring The Rocks District of Milton-Freewater

If it weren't for the rows of vines and orchards, this pocket of land would look like a moonscape. Referred to by most as "The Rocks," it's essentially one giant pile of basalt cobbles, aka Freewater cobbly loam. Renowned winemaker Christophe Baron was the first to see the potential of this area in the 1990s, and despite skepticism, he went on to found Cayuse Vineyards, which quickly garnered praise (and a long waiting list). Now all eyes are on The Rocks, specifically when it comes to producing Syrah that exudes sense of place.

The well-drained rocky alluvium radiates heat and is rich in iron, calcium, and magnesium. Its uniformity also helps to create what many refer to as a singular expression, "meaning the wines taste like they came from this one place," says Saviah Cellars owner/winemaker Rich Funk, who manages three estate vineyards in The Rocks. "When I started, that was my goal."

According to geologist Kevin Pogue, who helped define the boundaries for the region's AVA petition, 97% of The Rocks is made up of a single soil series—a characteristic that's virtually unheard of in every other North American appellation.

At Saviah Cellars, Syrah is the superstar, yielding wines of singular character in Funk's broad portfolio (which includes Barbera and Tempranillo). "The wines have a very distinctive aromatic profile. They tend to be more savory and not so fruit-forward—they remind me of walking into a delicatessen," he says, adding that one of the jokes in the cellar during harvest is, "Who stuck a leg of prosciutto in the fermenter?"



Saviah Cellars owner/winemaker Rich Funk is pictured at the Funk Estate Vineyard in The Rocks District of Milton-Freewater. There's no topsoil in sight, just basaltic cobbles—some the size of basketballs.

{ cover story }

THE *oldest* WORLD

by Erik Segelbaum

PHOTO: ALEXANDRA TROCHIMUK

Fossils in a vineyard in Israel's Upper Galilee region.



Recanati's Biodynamic vineyard in Netua.

In the Midst of a Renaissance,

WINES OF ISRAEL OFFERS DIVERSITY AND HISTORY FEW REGIONS CAN CLAIM

Regarded as the Holy Land by several of the world's major religions, Israel also represents, for many, the holy land of wine production. The country can trace its enological roots back over 5,000 years, and archeological evidence confirms that it was one of the world's first winemaking sites.

It would be false, however, to classify Israel as Old World—or New World, for that matter. Instead, it could be considered “the oldest world,” but despite its documented winemaking tradition, many modern consumers have little to no understanding of Israeli wine. When polling most Americans about the category, two somewhat inaccurate themes tend to emerge.

First, there's a prevailing belief that Israeli wine equals kosher wine. Many hear the latter term and think of the sickly sweet plonk used for religious ceremonies, but while many Israeli wines are coincidentally kosher, the classification's rules and standards are by no means a defining factor and have absolutely no impact on quality. In fact, many kosher winemaking practices are also employed by organic, Biodynamic, and natural-wine producers: Letting land lie fallow every seven years to promote soil health is one prominent example. Kosher wines are typically organic and, by definition, made naturally, as production laws make it near impossible to use chemicals or additives. Consider that a Biodynamic wine isn't necessarily delicious because it's Biodynamic; however, a delicious wine can certainly be Biodynamic. The same parallel can be drawn with kosher wines.



An ancient wine press found in the Shomron Hills region.

The second common misunderstanding stems from Israel being considered part of the Middle East. While this is politically true, the reality is that Israel's climate could much more accurately be described as Mediterranean. When one envisions the Middle East, it's unlikely that snowcapped mountains and verdant fields and forests come to mind, yet much of the country's winemaking occurs in exactly these areas. The Golan Heights harbor high-altitude and cool-climate production, while the Galilee and Shomron Hills regions are fertile and green. Meanwhile, the Coastal Plain, Central Mountains, and Judean Hills have more in common climatically with Provence or the Languedoc than other Middle Eastern locales.

So, what defines Israeli wine? Simply put, the category has it all, particularly distinguishing itself through its mix of Mediterranean, indigenous, and classic varieties; its high-altitude winemaking; and its burgeoning international influence. Read on for an exploration of each of these assets.

Mediterranean Varieties

Israel's climates are so welcoming to Mediterranean grapes that plantings of varieties typically found in southern France are increasing exponentially. Syrah has been a mainstay for many years, and while Grenache vines are

barely ten years old in their oldest Israeli sites, they yield expressions that can rival some of the best of the Rhône Valley.

As a result, some wineries have dedicated significant resources to expanding the presence of Mediterranean varieties. Dalton, one of the pioneering producers of the Upper Galilee, is well known for its Syrah-Grenache blend, Alma-Scarlet, and also makes several expressions of Syrah/Shiraz; it recently added Viognier to its repertoire and has leased a plot of old-vine Carignan and Grenache Blanc, which the winery will harvest for the first time in 2020. In addition, CEO and owner Alex Haruni intends to plant Cinsault soon and is exploring potential additions to Dalton's Mediterranean portfolio. (Look for a series of winemaker blends in early 2020, which will be heavily influenced by these varieties.) The decision to expand the winery's use of Mediterranean grapes came fairly easily. "Israel needs to grow varieties that perform well in warm climates, and Shiraz and all its friends perform very well in our region," says Haruni, noting that their success was the impetus for Dalton's experimentation with southern Italian and Greek varieties.

Another key player in this arena is boutique producer Jezreel Valley. Only seven years old, it has gone all in on Mediterranean varieties, with delicious results: Its



PHOTO: ALEXSANDRA TROCHIMUK

Samples of indigenous varieties in the lab at Ariel University.



PHOTO COURTESY OF WINES OF ISRAEL

Marawi (aka Hamdani) is an indigenous Israeli grape.



PHOTO: BENYUSTER

As Recanati's Executive VP, Gil Shatsberg aims to showcase Israel's indigenous grapes.



PHOTO: BENITZHAVI

Dr. Shivi Drori, chief winemaker at Gva'ot, inspects a row of vines.

Argaman—an Israeli crossing of Souzão and Carignan—is a benchmark for warm-climate winemaking. Syrah, autochthonous variety Dabouki, and Carignan (which continues to yield exemplary results by nearly all who work with it) are among the other varieties the winery works with.

Winemaker and CEO Yehuda Nahar notes that when Jezreel Valley opened its doors, people thought they were crazy

because, at the time, “almost all premium wine in Israel was with a French style.” However, that didn’t deter Nahar and fellow co-founder Jacob Ner-David, who had set out from day one to catalyze an Israeli winemaking revolution. Today, every wine they make is based on their desire to “infuse an Israeli identity [into their] wines that the whole industry can be proud of,” Nahar says.

Indigenous Varieties

Because grapes best suited to Mediterranean climates are leading the charge in the Israeli wine renaissance, it should come as no surprise that there’s a significant groundswell compelling producers to utilize indigenous varieties. These include the aforementioned Argaman and biblical-era examples such as Bittuni, Marawi (also known as Hamdani), Jandali, and Dabouki.

A view of vineyards in the Golan Heights in autumn.



PHOTO: COURTESY OF WINES OF ISRAEL



Carmel Winery's Kosher Supervisor, Mordechai Cohen (right), looks on as a colleague takes a barrel sample.

Many producers are achieving praiseworthy expressions of these grapes, though lack of available vine material presents a challenge. Undeterred, a group of wineries, including Recanati, is working hard to proliferate indigenous varieties. Executive VP Gil Shatsberg explains that the Recanati team first encountered Marawi and Bittuni through world-renowned Ariel University wine researcher Dr. Shivi Drori, who also serves as chief winemaker at Gva'ot winery and whose work has been instrumental in helping prove the viability of native Israeli grapes. After they tasted several small-scale experimental lots from Drori's research team, "[Marawi and Bittuni] stood out as worthy for commercial production, so we started with them," Shatsberg says.

When asked about the response to these highly uncommon varieties, he happily notes that "the initial reaction ... was amazing. It was as if the market was wait-

ing for something unique and authentic." This was also clear to Ido Lewinsohn, chief winemaker at Barkan winery and former winemaker for Recanati, where he was instrumental in establishing a program for autochthonous varieties. Says Lewinsohn, "When I started working for Barkan, it was obvious to me that I would make as many indigenous varieties as I could." He echoes the concern that there is not yet enough area under vine, though new indigenous plantings are increasing yearly.

Classic Varieties

While Mediterranean and indigenous varieties are gaining traction, the modern Israeli industry was founded on classic Bordeaux grapes. Indeed, those in the Cabernet family continue to dominate the country's wine scene, a role that was solidified by the significant investment of Baron Edmond de Rothschild (of Château Lafite Rothschild) in the region during the late 1800s. More recently, many producers only had access to classic varieties, as they comprised the only vine material available in Israeli nurseries for much of the 1990s and early 2000s.



Ido Lewinsohn is the chief winemaker at Barkan, which has fully embraced high-altitude winemaking.

One of the baron's many initiatives was the founding of Carmel winery, whose first vines—and indeed the first brought into Israel from a foreign source—were Cabernet Sauvignon. Classic varieties tend to thrive in the high-elevation regions of Golan Heights, Galilee, and Judean Hills, but they can be found all over the country. Carmel crafts expressions of Bordeaux varieties that range from entry level to premium, including those under the umbrella of Yatir, its highly acclaimed boutique winery in the famed Yatir Forest.

Founded by four families who have grown grapes since 1901, Tabor is another winery rooted in classic varieties. Their descendants can trace their heritage back to the Rothschilds, who originally established the Kfar Tabor village and vineyards, but heritage is not the only motivator for working with grapes in the Cabernet family. As head viticulturist Michal Akerman explains, they grow Cabernet Sauvignon in the Upper Galilee because the area's soil type and climate conditions are perfectly tailored to Bordeaux varieties: "The high altitude brings about a wide amplitude between day and night temperatures during the growing season," and the proliferation of limestone and clay stones forces roots to "plunge deeply to find moisture, placing them under ideal stress levels." She goes on to draw parallels between Israel and Bordeaux; regarding the difference between Left Bank and Right Bank terroir, she explains, "In Israel, we see both . . . so we fit the terroir to the varieties. And as is practiced in the Old World, we are trying not to inject too much of ourselves while the grapes grow."

Varying expressions of Bordeaux grapes can be found across all of Israel's growing regions. The same varieties can show different flavor characteristics depending on where they're rooted.

High Altitude

Given that the Dead Sea, the lowest place on Earth at nearly 1,400 feet below sea level, is in Israel, most people don't associate the country with high-altitude viticulture. However, significant plantings can be found at high elevations. Take the Yarden Blanc de Blancs, a sparkling wine

from Golan Heights Winery's premium tier that's made via the traditional method: The vines that produce this 100% Chardonnay are planted on a volcanic plateau between 1,300–3,900 feet above sea level.

As exemplified by its Altitude Series, Barkan has also fully embraced high-altitude winemaking. Each bottle displays the elevation of its vineyards, which range from 1,900 to 2,600 feet above sea level. White varieties thrive at these heights, and some of Israel's most exciting dry Rieslings are planted in high vineyards. As the industry here continues its renaissance, one can expect to see a continued push for high-elevation plantings.

Wineries is another Israel-based head winemaker who boasts an extensive international resume, including stints at prestigious domaines in Napa Valley, the Languedoc, Niagara, and Western Australia. As he applies the expertise gleaned from his wide-ranging experience, Soroka says he's proud to witness Israeli wine-making improve as it continues to command international attention. One can only expect that influence will continue to evolve as more talent flocks to this growing industry.

Few (if any) winegrowing areas can claim the history and diversity of Israel. Despite ranking among the key birth-



Built in 1857, Jerusalem Wineries' Montefiore Windmill also serves as a tasting room.

International Influence

The global wine world is looking in on Israel almost as much as Israel is looking out. One of the best examples of this status quo exists at Covenant Israel, whose co-owner and winemaker, Jeff Morgan, previously had an illustrious winemaking career in California. Intrigued by Israel's soil and climate, which he perceived as similar to Northern California and the Rhône Valley, Morgan saw what he describes as the "copious amount of limestone interspersed with terra rossa" as ground tailor-made for growing Rhône varieties.

Canadian Sam Soroka of Jerusalem

places of wine, it feels simultaneously like a fledgling region and a well-established one in the midst of renaissance. Whether you consider Israel New World, Old World, or oldest world, one thing is certain: This tiny country has an extraordinary gift to offer to the global wine community. Whether they're classic, Mediterranean, or indigenous, the wines of Israel are certain to surprise and delight. **SJ**

Editor's note: Advanced Sommelier Erik Segelbaum is an ambassador for Wines of Israel. He is also the founder of SOMLYAY, a hospitality consulting company.

{ luxicon }

EMBRACING THE

Challenge

Master Sommelier Gillian Ballance, Education Manager for Treasury Wine Estates, is pictured during Luxicon's stop in Atlanta. The tour also visited San Francisco, Los Angeles, Chicago, and Washington, D.C., and will end in Miami in January.

PHOTO: ANGLE WEBB



SCHOLARSHIP WINNERS REFLECT ON THE BIGGEST TEACHABLE MOMENTS OF THE 2019 TREASURY WINE ESTATES LUXICON TOUR

In her role as Education Manager for Treasury Wine Estates (TWE), Gillian Ballance, MS, has spent the past several months barnstorming the U.S. as part of the 2019 Luxicon tour, which has thus far made stops in San Francisco; Los Angeles; Washington, D.C.; Chicago; and Atlanta (it will conclude in Miami in January).

In each city, she hosted a “Techniques of Tasting” session and awarded three scholarships; valued at \$1,200 each, they aim to help recipients in their efforts to obtain professional certifications. Each stop features a packed itinerary, but in Atlanta, Ballance made time to talk with *The SOMM Journal* about what the tour means to her. —Lars Leicht

Q: **Lars Leicht, SOMM Journal VP/ Communication & Trade Relations: Tell us about your inspiration for this seminar and how Luxicon fosters mentorship.**

Gillian Ballance: My job is so demanding that I don’t have a lot of time to mentor, and that’s one of the major commitments you make when you become a Master Sommelier. Luxicon allows me to do that and still accomplish work for my company. Being able to connect with people aspiring to advance to the MS level is very important to me.

Q: **This is a non-promotional investment for a company like TWE. How much of a challenge was that in this world of tight budgets and stiff competition?**

It is a challenge, so we take a twofold approach, offering scholarships and a mentoring workshop for many younger sommeliers that aren’t exposed to our historic brands, which—for me—is important too. Yes, it is non-promotional, and yes, we use other [non-TWE] wines in our seminars, but we aspire to engage with buyers and

get to do so with this event. We touch over 30 buyers and sommeliers in each city; how could that not be worthwhile? This is the way we achieve balance.

Q: **What is the single greatest challenge of a blind deductive tasting?**

Simply narrowing it down. There is so much wine in the world! A lot of tasting groups lose time tasting things that are not classic. The challenge is finding the right peer group—it was a challenge for me. I didn’t go for the MS until I was in my 40s; we are so much fresher and our senses keener in our 20s, so I had to take a different approach. The biggest challenge is not overstepping yourself. There is so much we won’t ever know about the science of tasting and the senses, and a lot to be discovered. But right now, going through a blind-tasting exercise, there is a little bit of luck involved every time you do it.

The Rhythm of Taste

LUXICON IN WASHINGTON, D.C.

story by David D. Denton / photos by Nick Klein

The Ritz-Carlton in Washington, D.C., is no stranger to VIP guests, opulence, and great wine, and early last October, the Luxicon tour brought all three. Ballance topped the bill, costarring with Erik Segelbaum, founder and “ChiefVinnovation Officer” of his own beverage consulting company, SOMLYAY LLC (he formerly served as the corporate wine director for Starr Restaurants).

Together, Ballance and Segelbaum led an engaging and informative tutorial on the Court of Master Sommeliers’ deductive tasting grid. “[Blind tasting] can be a very humbling experience, but you have to get used to that,” warned Ballance, “because you won’t always be right. But the deductive tasting method is great for helping you decide what the wine is *not* to help you get to what the wine is.”



Erik Segelbaum (far left), Advanced Sommelier and founder of SOMLYAY LLC, and Master Sommelier Gillian Ballance (far right) flank the blind-tasting winners in Washington, D.C.: Sean Rapoza, GM/sommelier for Max’s on Broad; Sam Stronach, Wine Director for Buckhead’s Restaurant & Chophouse; and Devin Sparks, Beverage Director for Perry’s Restaurant.



Somms blind tasted a trio of Syrah/Shiraz wines: the Alban Vineyards 2016 Patrina from Edna Valley, the Penfolds 2016 Bin 28 Kalimna Shiraz from South Australia, and the Domaine Vincent Paris 2017 Les Côtes Saint-Joseph.



Wines from the Treasury Wine Estates portfolio were served during a walkaround tasting.

Having earned his Advanced Sommelier certification, Segelbaum is no stranger to the art of blind tasting and said it’s a matter of setting a pace and falling into a rhythm. “The tasting grid is a song,” he added. “Download a metronome [app] and let that [set] your rhythm as you read through the points on the grid. That way, when you’re in a testing situation, you will have the music already in your head. You won’t have to think about the next point on the grid; you can just focus on calling the wine.”

He went on to note that exhibiting a sense of flow will not only help boost one’s confidence but also help project that confidence to testing examiners. “But don’t get so caught up in your song that you forget to listen to yourself!” Ballance added. “Listen to the markers you are finding in the wine so that your theory can kick in when you are bringing it all together to form your initial conclusion and, finally, to identify the wine.”

After the blind tasting, attendees adjourned to an adjoining ballroom to compare notes—and, of course, to

second-guess themselves. But as they were drawn to a table of wines from TWE’s Luxury Portfolio, they were reassured by the fact that at least this time they knew what they were sampling. As an added bonus, they had the rare opportunity to taste three vintages—2013, 2014, and 2015—of Penfolds’ famous Grange, all of which demonstrated the wine’s signature complexity and power. Another standout was Beaulieu Vineyards’ 2013 Rarity, a Cabernet Sauvignon dedicated to the winery’s pioneering winemaker, André Tchelistcheff. Culled from Beaulieu’s best Rutherford vineyards and only bottled in magnums, it was youthful, clean, and elegant, with an amazingly long finish that foretold a long lifespan.

After Ballance announced the winners, everyone raised a glass in congratulations to the lucky three: Sean Rapoza, General Manager and sommelier for Max’s on Broad in Richmond, Virginia; Sam Stronach, Wine Director for Buckhead’s Restaurant, also in Richmond; and Devin Sparks, Beverage Director for Perry’s Restaurant in Washington, D.C.



Master Sommeliers James Bube (far left) and Gillian Ballance (far right) with the winners of the Chicago blind tasting: Timothy Evans of Binny's Beverage Depot, Christian Shaum of Nesso Restaurant, and Michael Dietrich of Francesca's on Chestnut.



Stags' Leap Winery is one of the crown jewels of the Treasury Wine Estates portfolio.

Intense Competition **LUXICON IN CHICAGO**

story by Christy Furman / photos by Rebecca Peplinski

Three wines and 15 minutes is all that stood between a buzzing room full of wine professionals and three \$1,200 scholarships on the Chicago stop of the Luxicon tour. Hosted by the Godfrey Hotel, the event started with the Techniques of Tasting seminar, led by Ballance and local Master Sommelier James Bube, who serves as Wine Director for Hogsalt Hospitality Group.

As Ballance and Bube reviewed the deductive tasting grid, they shared tips and tricks for novice as well as veteran tasters. Ballance compared deducing color contrast to turning the contrast knob on a TV or, to modernize the reference, adjusting the brightness scale on Instagram. Bube, meanwhile, noted that contrast can be checked by envisioning one's glass as a clock and looking at 4 o'clock and 6 o'clock. Their advice made an impression: "The best part of the lecture was the in-depth explanations of what to look for with the deductive-tasting format and how to bring all your findings to a conclusion," said Timothy Evans, Wine Manager at Binny's Beverage Depot.

The room went silent at the onset



Gillian Ballance and fellow Master Sommelier James Bube, Wine Director for Chicago's Hogsalt Hospitality Group, have a bit of fun during the seminar.



Learning tasting techniques from Master Sommeliers isn't all work.

of the blind-tasting competition, which featured three Chardonnays from different countries: the Penfolds 2017 Bin 311 Chardonnay from southeastern Australia, the Héritage de Calcaire 2017 Pouilly Fuissé Vieilles Vignes from Burgundy, and the Stags' Leap 2018 Chardonnay from Napa Valley. Needless to say, it was a difficult lineup to crack.

While the judges tallied the scores, everyone went up to the rooftop for a walkaround tasting. Michael Dietrich of Francesca's on Chestnut called the Penfolds lineup "a personal favorite," as it allowed for an "educational" comparison of the Grange Bin #407 and Bin #389 (aka baby Grange).

At last, the moment of truth arrived: Evans, Dietrich, and Christian Shaum of Nesso Restaurant were announced as the scholarship winners and made their way to the front with surprise and joy splashed across their faces. "I was confident in my calls, but you just never know what's going to happen," Shaum said. "Also, there was a good amount of skill and dedication in the room, so I'm sure the results were separated by inches."



The somms take notes during the blind-tasting seminar at SunTrust Park in Atlanta, GA.

The Players Take the Field

LUXICON IN ATLANTA

story by Lars Leicht / photos by Angie Webb

“The sting of loss was fresh in SunTrust Park on that October day—that should be your lede,” Joe Herrig, who oversees Fine Wine Key Accounts at Georgia Crown, told me as we gathered for Luxicon Atlanta.

He was referencing a sore subject for Atlanta Braves fans. A month earlier, the team clinched its second consecutive National League East championship, but then lost in the most painful fashion: by becoming the first team to allow ten runs in the first inning of a playoff game, just 13 days before Herrig and company gathered at the park for Luxicon.

But as the autumn sun shone on the third base line, three somms felt like they’d just hit homers. Wilson Oswald of Ruth’s Chris Steak House in Alpharetta, Christopher Gonzales of Atlanta’s Horseradish Grill, and Vincent Steward of La Grotta, also in Atlanta, were recognized as the top scorers.

Earlier, Ballance pointed to the result of her own efforts, the coveted red Master Sommelier pin, describing it as “the most expensive pin I ever bought in my life.” She hoped the scholarships would go a long way in helping their recipients pay for wine, books, travel, and more in their own quests for professional advancement.



Gillian Ballance, MS (second from right), with the Atlanta winners: Wilson Oswald of Ruth’s Chris Steak House in Alpharetta, GA; Christopher Gonzales of Horseradish Grill; and Vincent Steward of La Grotta.



The Sterling Vineyards Platinum series from Napa Valley is part of the Treasury Wine Estates portfolio.

After walking participants through the grid, Ballance put the somms to the test. A brave volunteer stepped forward to take on a red; after ticking through the necessary steps and calling out Bordeaux descriptors, he was convinced it could be Sangiovese, Chianti, or Nebbiolo. “It doesn’t have those screaming tannins or orange color,” Balance hinted. Others suspected Napa Cabernet, though it lacked tannins and dark fruit.

The wine was ultimately revealed to be Penfolds’ Bin 407 Coonawarra Cabernet

Sauvignon. “The initial calls were accurate—listen to yourself,” said Ballance with a Yoda-like undertone. It was a lesson that Oswald, Gonzales, and Steward clearly took to heart when they and their colleagues went through the process with the three remaining wines, though they surprised even themselves when they emerged as victors.

While Atlanta may not have won any World Series rings this season, at least Luxicon did its best to bring some sommeliers closer to the MS pin. *sj*

PHOTO COURTESY OF THE PACIFIC WINE & FOOD CLASSIC



At the 2019 Pacific Wine & Food Classic, Trevor Frerking, Kayla Frerking, and Chet Button poured Copper Cane Wines: a festival highlight and guest favorite.

Third Time to Charm

THE PACIFIC WINE & FOOD CLASSIC WELCOMES EPICURES TO NEWPORT BEACH'S BACK BAY

by Leanne Chau

HELD AUGUST 17-18, 2019, at the Newport Dunes Waterfront Resort & Marina, the Pacific Wine & Food Classic drew epicures to the shores of Back Bay in Newport Beach, California, for the third year in a row. The award-winning, fan-favorite event offered attendees summer-inspired cuisine from more than 40 top Southern California restaurants as well as fine wines and delicious, handcrafted cocktails.

Welcomed with a Lillet Spritz, the guests strolled down the sand on the scenic waterfront as they explored over 100 highly rated wines provided by American and Southern Glazer's Wine & Spirits; standouts included expressions from Belle Glos, JUSTIN Winery, Gérard Bertrand, and DAOU Vineyards and Winery. On the far end awaited the Bubble Bar, which harbored plentiful pours of G.H. Mumm, Gloria Ferrer, and Scharffenberger Cellars.

Despite its relative youth, this first-class event has gained widespread recognition. It recently placed on *USA Today's* "10Best" list of U.S. food festivals in 2019; was recognized by the International Food, Wine and Travel Writers Association as one of the top ten food and wine festivals in the world; was named one of the best events in Orange County by the *Los Angeles Times'* TimesOC readers' poll in 2018; and earned an *OC Weekly* People's Choice award for best food event in 2017 and 2018.


When the Pacific Wine & Food Classic returns August 15–16, 2020, it will continue to support the Golden Rule Charity. The nonprofit aims to "help the hospitality industry in times of need . . . one individual at a time, one community at a time," according to its website. 

PHOTO: JOE KATCHKA



Attendees were welcomed with a Lillet Spritz.

{ native varieties }

ROMANIA

Rising

**JIDVEI IMPRESSES THE EXPERTS
WITH ITS UNCONVENTIONAL
WINES IN CHICAGO**

story by Ruth Tobias / photos by Rebecca Peplinski





Jidvei Export Manager Ioana Benga, second from left, with Master Sommeliers Peter Granoff, Madeline Triffon, and Tim Gaiser.

After a whirlwind day of seminars and tastings that touched on every region and variety under the sun, the opportunity for participants in this year's Full Circle Beverage Conference to focus on a single, small, and little-known corner of the wine world in a relaxing and intimate setting was surely a welcome one. The opportunity to do it in the company of not one, not two, but three Master Sommeliers? Incredible. And that's exactly what awaited attendees of *The SOMM Journal's* Wines of Romania dinner at Joe's Seafood, Prime Steak & Stone Crab in Chicago in September:

Co-hosted by Ioana Benga, Export Manager for Jidvei—whose wines accompanied the four-course meal—it proved a learning experience for all involved, even our illustrious guests Peter Granoff, Tim Gaiser, and Madeline Triffon. As the latter admitted, "I'm thrilled to be here tonight, because I truly don't know the first thing about this subject. I've read about it, but . . . only when you taste a wine, you stare at a map, and you have someone talk to you about it does it become three-dimensional!" Granoff concurred: "Here's a country that has hundreds of years of wine history, yet all of that was concealed behind the Iron Curtain," he pointed out. "We have an opportunity to discover something that has been hidden from all of us, and that's really exciting."

Certainly Jidvei's story illuminates that of the Romania's burgeoning modern industry as a whole. In the winery's home region of Transylvania, according to Benga, viticultural tradition stretches back at least a couple of millennia, developing over the centuries through (among other factors) the expertise of migrants from Germany's Rhine and Mosel valleys—only to stagnate in the era of communist rule. Under state control, vineyards were designed for the maximum production of international grapes; indigenous varieties, Benga explained, "were mostly uprooted because wine was a currency for export—it made more [economic] sense to plant Sauvignon Blanc and Chardonnay for the whites and Merlot and Cabernet for the reds. At some point, we were sending wines to the U.S. and getting back Pepsi concentrate."



"THIS IS EXACTLY WHAT THE INSTAGRAM GENERATION WANTS. THEY WANT SOMETHING AS DIFFERENT AS POSSIBLE, SOMETHING THEY CAN SHOW THEIR FRIENDS THAT THEY'RE DRINKING THAT EVERYBODY ELSE CAN'T FIND."

—TIM GAISER

According to Tim Gaiser, MS, the Jidvei 2018 Classic Fetească Regală “actually stood up to the steak.”



The 1989 revolution ushered in a period of privatization, during which Jidvei was purchased by the Neculescu family. “They got a good price, and the European Union was invested in trying to revive viticulture in Romania, so they benefitted from that,” Benga recounted. But it was an uphill climb from there. Though they had an agricultural background, they had to learn the wine business from scratch; what’s more, it turned out the vineyards were in such disrepair that about 400 of all 600 hectares had to be replanted. The same went for the equipment: “They had to replace everything in the winery and cellar,” said Benga. “They learned the hard way.” Learn they did, however, and today, the third generation of the family operates what is now the largest facility in the country, producing a staggering 50-plus wines from 2,500 planted hectares. (Most of them don’t reach our shores, but those that do are available in more than 20 states.)

In general, Romania’s climate is continental, though cooler to the north of the Carpathian Mountains—where Transylvania sits—than to the south and east. Despite the region’s long growing season, precipitous drops in nighttime temperatures mean that “it doesn’t get warm enough for the black grapes to ripen,” according to Benga. Except for a few entry-level reds, then, Jidvei concentrates on the production of sparkling wine, whites, and rosés,

along with the occasional late-harvest and ice wine.

That focus perhaps came as no surprise to our guests. What did open the eyes of everyone around the table, however, was the precise varietal composition of the wines we tried, which were striking both as showcases for Romania’s few remaining local grapes and as highly unusual blends.

Consider, for starters, the use of white Fetească Regală both in a traditional-method Brut with Pinot Noir and Chardonnay and in a still varietal wine. A cross between Fetească Albă and Grasă de Cotnari, “It was developed [in the 1920s] at the Research Institute located right next to our vineyards—so it’s as local as it gets,” said Benga. “It’s usually thought to be very good for fresh, young wines without aging potential, but this year we sent the 2009 Brut to the Concours Mondial de Bruxelles and it got a grand gold medal.” Certainly the grape intrigued Granoff:

“The aromatic quality reminds me a little of Greek Malagousia, where you get a refreshing, ultimately dry wine that has a floral component in the nose,” he said. “Southern Italian varieties do this as well.”

Aforementioned parent grape Feteasca Albă also made an appearance with Pinot Noir and Chardonnay in the still white blend Mysterium PN+CH+FA, which we tasted with the main course alongside the Mysterium RR+SB, combining Riesling and

Sauvignon Blanc. In keeping with the name of the series, Benga explained, Jidvei “tries to do blends you don’t see that often,” while packaging them in dark bottles with a luxe gold label resembling a maze: “The idea was to give to them a mystery all the way through. Under black light, the wine name turns blue. They’re a bit harder to sell at retail, because they don’t look like white-wine bottles—but they’re cool!”

Our guests agreed. In reference to the RR+SB, Derrick Westbrook of Chicago wine bar 1340 observed, “I was thinking, ‘This is gonna rip my face off.’ But there’s a surprising amount of roundness and some weight to it.” Rebekah Mahru of City Winery Chicago, meanwhile, noted that many of her customers find it “interesting to have indigenous varietals blended with varietals that [they] recognize,” as in the PN+CH+FA; agreed Benga, “It’s good for export, because people will buy it for the Pinot Noir or Chardonnay, and if they like it, they might buy the 100% varietal!”

As for the Jidvei Classic Rosé, she said, “We only started doing it about five years ago. It was not a big thing in Romania until then, when it kind of exploded, like everywhere else in the world.” The exact percentages in the blend of “the only three black varieties that we have in our vineyard”—Pinot Noir, Cabernet Sauvignon, and Syrah—change annually; the 2018 we tried, she added, “was a really good vintage

because the Cab managed to ripen a bit more, which doesn't happen often." The result charmed Triffon, who said, "I don't think we've ever seen these guys dance together. It's delightful."

Bubbly, rosé, and distinctive blends: It's a lineup tailor-made for trend-conscious buyers. And yet, admitted Benga, "The biggest problem for us is that one initial sale, because why would you get a wine from Romania when you can get one from a place you've heard of?" Although "they're really good, especially for the price"—the Fetească Regală, for instance, retails for about \$8—she has found that even affordability can be a drawback until a baseline of comfort is established. "I was speak-

ing with the owner of a wine bar here in Chicago who was really interested in the sparkling wine," she told us, "but then he was like, 'I don't want it to be that cheap. [My customers] aren't going to trust me that I'm giving them a good wine.'" Granoff sympathized. "To me what you're describing is one of the great ironies of the wine industry in the U.S.," he said wryly. "Consumers complain constantly about wine pricing—but when you actually give them a real value, they don't want it!"

Gaiser, however, was plenty optimistic about Romania's future among savvy younger drinkers. "This is exactly what the Instagram generation wants," he pointed out. "They want something as different as

possible, something they can show their friends that they're drinking that everybody else can't find. I did two seminars at the VIBE Conference last year, and in both, we veered right down the rabbit hole of millennials. All of these big chain buyers were saying, "We have to keep 10% of our list in constant rotation, because people want to try new things constantly!"

While noting that novelty only goes so far—"In terms of a return sale, you've gotta deliver"—Triffon agreed that Jidvei had surpassed expectations: "You've certainly opened our eyes." Gaiser agreed. "We're going to talk about this," he promised. "We'll tell people that tonight, we tasted some Romanian wines—and they're very good." *ST*



Rebekah Mahru of City Winery Chicago observed that Romanian wines are poised for recognition now that "people are starting to care more about where what they drink is coming from—they want to know the story."



Chicago-based buyers Aaron Kinkeade of Levy Restaurant Group and Derrick Westbrook of 1340 with Peter Granoff, MS.

Tasting Notes

Jidvei NV Sparkling Wine Brut, DOC Târnave, Romania Lime curd, ripe green apple, and leafy green herbs such as parsley on the toasty nose precede similar notes in the glass. Soft and creamy mouthfeel. —*Ruth Tobias*

Jidvei 2018 Classic Rosé, DOC Târnave, Romania "Classic" is right—despite the unusual blend of Cabernet Sauvignon and Syrah with Pinot Noir; this light orange-pink rosé is pure strawberry and Rainier cherry refreshment laced with a hint of tea rose, though the acidity's perhaps a touch steelier than that of your average porch pounder. —*R.T.*

Jidvei 2018 Classic Fetească Regală, DOC Târnave, Romania "It's very different—very clean and well made. I've had Fetească Regală before and it wasn't nearly this good." —*Tim Gaiser*
"It's got a really nice, gentle mouthfeel, and it's well balanced." —*Madeline Triffon*

Jidvei Mysterium PN+CH+FA, DOC Târnave, Romania Frankly not knowing what either locust-tree flower or wild lily smell like, we can only report that Jidvei's own tasting notes attest to the presence of those aromas in this white blend of Feteasca Albă, Chardonnay, and Pinot Noir (macerated on the skins only briefly). But we can certainly confirm the mingling of white blos-

soms and yellow stone fruit with red berries on a palate that's more generous than expected. —*R.T.*

Jidvei Mysterium RR+SB, DOC Târnave, Romania "[Riesling and Sauvignon Blanc are] such a neat combination—unusual without being odd. There's an attractive firm acidity to this and a nice, cleansing citrus aromatic. I like it very much." —*M.T.*

{ friuli-venezia giulia }

The vineyards of Abbazia di Rosazzo are tended today by the Livio Felluga winery; to the right of the abbey sits the first vineyard parcel purchased by the winery's eponymous founder in the 1950s. These terraced hillsides lie within Friuli's Rosazzo subzone, which was granted DOCG status in 2011.



THE
CHOSEN
LAND

STORY BY MICHELLE BALL
PHOTOS BY JEREMY BALL

LIVIO FELLUGA

CONTINUES TO EVOLVE BY BALANCING ITS FOUNDER'S LEGACY WITH AN EXPERIMENTAL APPROACH

Few would dispute that Friuli-Venezia Giulia is home to some of Italy's greatest white wines—if not the world's—which are on par with the nobility of the country's reds from Brunello di Montalcino and Barolo. And while this part of northeastern Italy has an extensive history of grape growing that dates back to Roman times, modern winemaking and the prestige that Friulian wine enjoys today have developed much more recently.

“We have thousands of years of traditional winemaking in this part of the world, but my father was the one who helped bring viticulture back to life,” explains Andrea Felluga, CEO and Director of Winemaking at his family's company, Livio Felluga. His father, Livio, first visited the hills of Friuli (known as Collio) in the 1930s and became entranced by the potential of its gentle slopes. He ranks among the handful of producers credited with restoring high-quality viticulture to the region by focusing on the hills rather than the plains, where farming is easier.

Livio grew up in Isola d'Istria, roughly 50 miles south of Friuli, and learned viticulture from his grandfather, who cultivated Malvasia and Refosco. World War II reshaped the landscape and the political lines of Europe, and after being held as a prisoner of war, Livio started anew in the Collio villages. At that time, hillside vineyards were



Andrea Felluga, Livio Felluga's CEO and Director of Winemaking, in front of a panoply of fermentation and maturation vessels.

“WE ARE WILLING TO KEEP EVOLVING AND DOING THINGS BETTER AND BETTER WITHOUT LOSING OUR TRADITIONS. IT'S NOT A MATTER OF REJECTING THE PAST BUT OF KEEPING THE PAST ALIVE IN A CONTEMPORARY WAY.”

—ANDREA FELLUGA



Director of Communications Laura Felluga, who recently joined the business, says that her family is protective of the legacy her grandfather built and wishes for the estate to keep evolving as they maintain the values that Livio taught them.

considered a poor investment, but he convinced the bank to give him a small loan to purchase a few acres in Rosazzo (a subzone of Friuli that was awarded DOCG status in 2011). "This, for us, is the chosen land," says Livio's granddaughter Laura, who serves as Director of Communications.

Today, the historic winery owns over 400 acres of hillside vineyards in Friuli and exports to more than 65 countries; Italy, however, is still its dominant market. Livio Felluga's success is indelibly marked by its founder's painstaking commitment to quality farming and his early adoption of modernized winemaking techniques, including the use of refrigerated stainless-steel vessels and limited oxygen exposure to preserve delicate aromatics. That spirit of innovation persists today: "We are willing to keep evolving and doing things better and better without losing our traditions. It's not a matter of rejecting the past but of keeping the past alive in a contemporary way," says Andrea, who is constantly experimenting in the cellar and investing in the vineyards.

In spending time with the meticulous winemaker, who apprenticed with his father before officially taking the reins in 1994, it's obvious that he wrestles with an incessant desire to achieve perfection. Despite the fact that the Terre Alte, Livio Felluga's signature white blend, is consistently recognized as one of the best wines of its kind, Andrea is always pushing for more. At the winery, we tasted through nearly two dozen Friulanos, Sauvignons (Sauvignon Blanc is labeled as simply Sauvignon in Friuli), and Pinot Grigios from 2019—each a result of a different yeast strain or fermentation vessel. Although the winery's expressions are predominantly vinified and aged in French oak or stainless steel, Andrea continues to conduct trials that employ various oak profiles (such as wild cherry, mulberry, maple, and acacia) as well as ancient amphorae like terracotta and cocchiopesto. "I know it's impossible to stop. There's always room to grow, to improve, and to look forward," he says.

A WHITE WINE MECCA

Friuli has been occupied by many countries at one point or another, which has had a significant impact on which varieties are grown here; native grapes such as Picolit and Refosco are planted alongside various international cultivars that took root long ago. Even Friulano, originally from the Gironde in France, shed its given name of Sauvignonasse (or Sauvignon Vert) to pay homage to its new home.

Due to this history, DOC laws in Friuli give producers greater flexibility than what's typically experienced in much of Italy and the Old World. The Alps that flank its borders generate cool, dry winds, which offset the warm, humid air from the Adriatic Sea to the south; these conditions, along with ample rainfall, free-draining soils, and terraced hillsides, create a hospitable environment for a wide range of varieties.

Friuli is particularly synonymous with high-quality Pinot Grigio, offering a stark contrast to the simple examples that dominate much of Italy's export market. So why does the grape do so well in this part of the world? "Because we care," says Andrea. "Pinot Grigio is a noble varietal that expresses the quality of the terroir in the hills of Friuli." Because it exhibits the same tight bunches and small clusters as its mother vine, Pinot Noir, he stresses the importance of growing Pinot Grigio in soils suited to the variety and maintaining vine balance to achieve the right concentration of flavor.

"However, we need to not only provide quality—we need to give the wine a soul," Andrea stresses. "Each wine needs to have character and . . . meaning to exist." To that end, Livio Felluga has narrowed down the amount of varieties it utilizes, replanting sections of its vineyards with grapes that the family feels best express the region's terroir.



Fifth-generation vintner and viticulturist Filippo Felluga examines the prized Friulian soils. Known locally as ponca, they consist of compacted marl and sandstone as well as marine fossils that originated in the Adriatic Sea.



The Livio Felluga label, which debuted in 1956 and has evolved over the years, was inspired by this old map of the territory. Livio adjusted it to portray the hills of his vineyards so patrons from all over the world would know where his wines were from.

TASTING NOTES

Though each has its own inherent characteristics, Livio Felluga's single-varietal whites share a tingly thread of salinity and white chalk. When tasted together, they offer a more complete expression of place.

Livio Felluga 2017 Friulano, Friuli Colli Orientali (\$27)

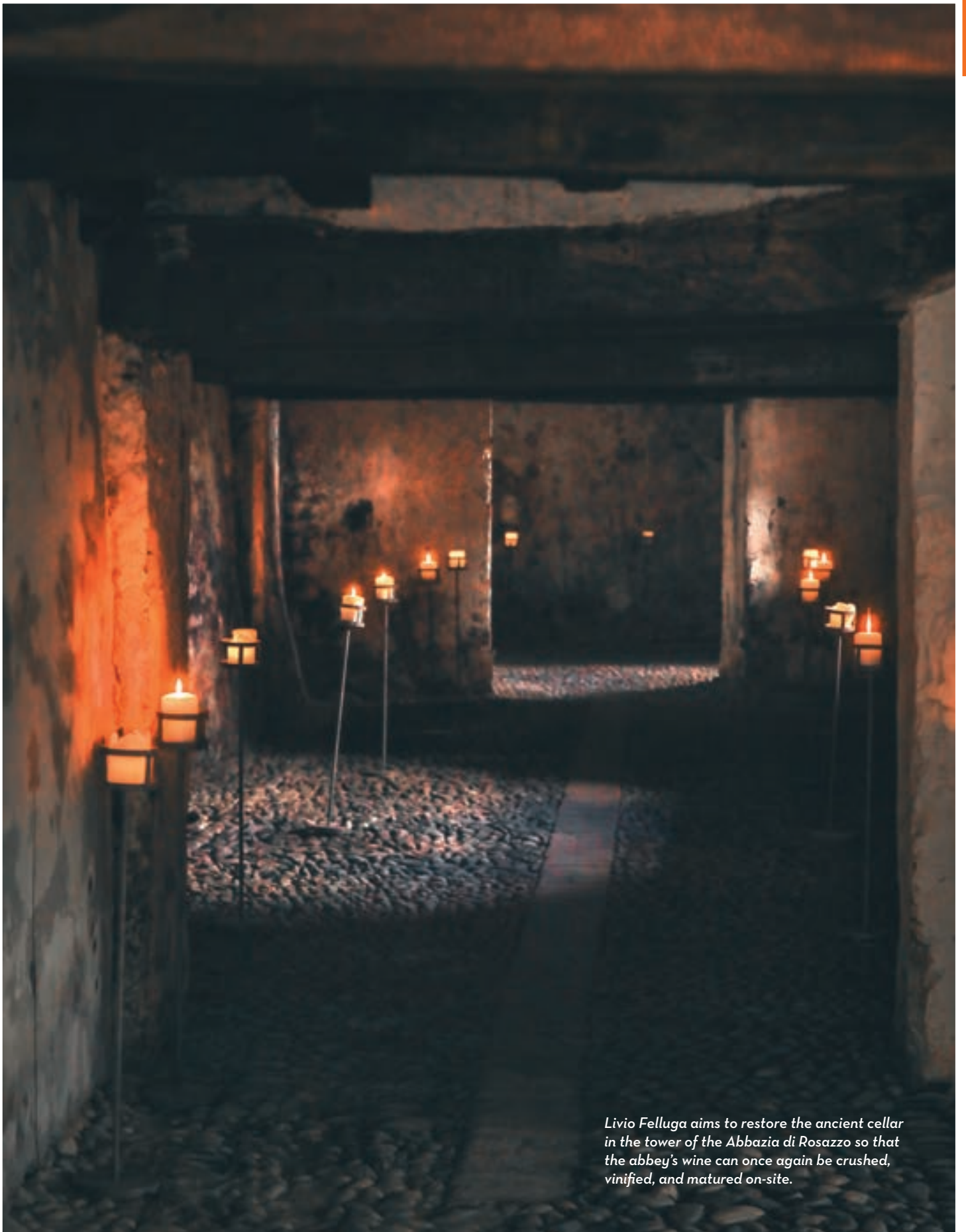
An exotic interplay of zesty lime and ginger aromas mingles with hints of marzipan and cardamom. The palate is fresh, with lemony concentration and a mineral texture that tingles the palate with flavors of orange peel, yellow curry spice, and a touch of saline.



Livio Felluga 2017 Pinot Grigio, Friuli Collio (\$27)

Warm lemon curd, floral notes, and hints of fenugreek combined with a round mouthfeel (from partial malolactic fermentation) are balanced by prickly hints of lemon-peel marmalade and firm acidity.





Livio Felluga aims to restore the ancient cellar in the tower of the Abbazia di Rosazzo so that the abbey's wine can once again be crushed, vinified, and matured on-site.

THE WHITE BLENDS OF ROSAZZO

The prestigious white blends of Rosazzo are expressions of two different vineyards: Livio Felluga's historic Terre Alte property and the Abbazia di Rosazzo (located on the property of the abbey of the same name). The former, which primarily comprises Friulano as well as Pinot Bianco and Sauvignon, was established in 1981 and continues to impress critics, some of whom deem it Italy's finest white wine.

In 2009, the curia of the Abbazia di Rosazzo entrusted Livio Felluga with the future care of their vineyards. The winery chose to produce a single expression from the site—a Friulano-dominant blend with a balanced combination of Pinot Bianco and Sauvignon as well as smaller amounts of Malvasia and Ribolla Gialla. It wasn't until 2011 that Rosazzo was granted DOCG status, which permits the production of only one wine: a white blend with a minimum of 50% Friulano and varying percentages of the other white grapes.

As the winery's most premium offerings, both wines undergo vinification and aging in French oak casks. Although they are somewhat similar in their composition, their personalities are distinct, with each expressing the character of its place of origin on the hills of Rosazzo.

TASTING NOTES



Livio Felluga 2016 Abbazia di Rosazzo, Rosazzo (\$50) This wine quickly evolves in the glass, beginning with white peach before it blossoms with ample notes of fresh grapefruit and makrut lime. Rich layers of cardamom butter cookies, hazelnuts, and yogurt are balanced by flavors of fresh Meyer lemon and lively acidity.



Livio Felluga 2016 Terre Alte, Rosazzo (\$80) True to its reputation, the wine transforms in the glass and leaves you searching. I found myself toggling between high-toned flavors of lemon and kelp as well as plush, concentrated stone fruit; hints of brioche; and endless notes of salted lime zest.



Golden and concentrated, these meager Picolit clusters are coveted for the production of Livio Felluga's late-harvest dessert wine.

FOR THE LOVE OF PICOLIT

By the first of October, harvest was nearly over for Livio Felluga, and all that remained on the vines was Picolit. Known for producing late-harvest dessert wine, it has its own subzone—Colli Orientali del Friuli Picolit DOCG—and was served historically in royal courts across Europe, often competing with Tokaji. A genetic mutation in this native Friulian grape makes pollination more difficult, and much of its pollen is sterile, which results in low yields. In addition, the grapes may be dried to concentrate the sugars, thereby reducing volume even further. But in spite of these challenges, a small group of wineries continue to produce Picolit, including Livio Felluga.

In the vineyard on that October morning, workers carefully selected bunches and gingerly placed them on trays to ensure each cluster was given ample space. However, these selections won't actually make it into the final wine. "It's sort of a green harvest. We will use them for the blend of Illivio, our barrique-fermented white wine," said Filippo Felluga, Livio Felluga's viticulturalist and Andrea's younger brother. Instead, he pointed to a sparse cluster still on the vine and said, "This is what we are looking for."

After several passes are made through the vineyard, each lot is vinified separately before the winery team evaluates the wines and decides if they're worthy of being labeled as Picolit. In Andrea's words, "We make it for passion." SJ

*These wines are exclusively imported by
Maisons Marques & Domaines.*

{ speed tasting }

Descending on **DENVER**

AREA BUYERS GATHER FOR AN EPIC
BLIND WINE TASTING AT LOCAL ITALIAN
RESTAURANT TAVERNETTA

story by Ruth Tobias / photos by Jennifer Olson

Like its Boulder sibling Frasca Food and Wine, Italian restaurant Tavernetta in downtown Denver, Colorado, is a nationally renowned destination for enophiles. What better place, then, to host a lunch gathering for a group of top area buyers? On September 30, seven beverage professionals joined *The SOMM Journal* for a blind speed tasting of nine wines, sharing their assessments with us on paper before the big reveal, when representatives from each producer took turns presenting their entries in the lineup. Here's a full recap.



Pictured from left to right: Jason Chovanec, wine buyer, Nocturne and Noble Riot; Chad Michael George, partner, The Way Back; JP Taylor, Wine Director, Coperta and Beast + Bottle; Ryan Fletter, owner/Wine Director, Barolo Grill and Chow Morso; Carlin Karr, Wine Director, Tavernetta and Frasca Food and Wine; Patrick Houghton, Wine Director, Mercantile Dining & Provision; Matthew Bennett, wine buyer, Stoic & Genuine.

B SIDE

On a hit vinyl single, Don Sebastiani & Sons Mountains/Plains Regional Manager Kent Savitt explained by way of introduction, "The B side was where you'd often find the best track. 'You Can't Always Get What You Want' was a Rolling Stones B side." Whether any of that resonated with the digital natives on our tasting panel, the general concept at hand—



Don Sebastiani & Sons West Division Manager Steve Pearce.

that of exploring the path less taken—certainly did.

It's an applicable one in the case of the 2017 Cabernet Sauvignon that Savitt was presenting with Don Sebastiani & Sons West Division Manager Steve Pearce: Labeled a Napa Valley wine from its launch in 2005 until 2016, it's now a North Coast designate so as to give Don & Sons' winemaking team more leeway to play in their own backyard. "Switching to a North Coast AVA allows us to source from quality sub-appellations to deliver wines with depth and character," Pearce asserted.

Though the 2017 vintage still contains a majority of Napa fruit, grapes from Alexander Valley and beyond do their part to round out the blend.



B Side 2017 Cabernet Sauvignon, North Coast (\$20-\$25)

Beefy, with black fruit and sweet tobacco. Bold, dark shadows, tart acidity, and chewy tannins. —*JP Taylor, Wine Director, Beast + Bottle and Coperta*

Ripe red and black cherry; bright with black currant and a hint of spice. Well-structured and good acidity. —*Matthew Bennett, wine buyer, Stoic & Genuine*

SPOKEN BARREL

Having worked at Beringer, SIMI, and Robert Mondavi Winery, winemaker Megan Shofield has long “had her hand in Napa Valley Cab,” said Brooke Michaels Medosch, Regional Manager for TRU Estates and Vineyards under the Constellation Brands umbrella. “She just wanted to play in Washington.”

That’s exactly what she does for Spoken Barrel, sourcing fruit from three sub-AVAs in the Columbia Valley: Wahluke Slope, Yakima Valley, and Horse Heaven Hills. Crafted with 12% Syrah and 3% Merlot, the 2016 Cabernet Sauvignon is fermented in stainless steel before undergoing malolactic fermentation; it then ages in 60% stainless steel and 40% small American, French, and other European barrels.

On the bottle, the brand name—which deliberately evokes the concept of bespoke production—appears in sturdy white all-caps above the words “Bold and Complex” (as well as the number 42, a reference to Washington’s chronological place in the union). It’s an attention-grabbing look for a wine that’s still new to the market, the current vintage being only its second; according to Medosch, the design is “trying to speak to our target audience of craft-spirits and -beer gentlemen,” bringing them out of the woodwork (so to speak) and into the world of wine. Not that men alone can appreciate the expression: In the October 2019 issue of *The Tasting Panel*, Publisher and Editorial Director Meridith May praised it for its “aromas of spiced black beans, dark chocolate fudge, black plum, and baking spices,” supplemented by flavors of cherry pie and supple tannins.



Brooke Michaels Medosch is the Regional Manager for TRU Estates and Vineyards under the umbrella of Constellation Brands.



Spoken Barrel 2016 Cabernet Sauvignon, Columbia Valley, Washington (\$20)

Red fruit presents at the back of the aromatics. Bacon and dark chocolate are up front of dry, dusty tannins. Black pepper is subtle with earth and coffee. —Patrick Houghton, Wine Director, Mercantile Dining & Provision

Dark floral notes of violet and hibiscus. Cooked blackberry and vanilla oak. Nice, long finish—certainly picking up Syrah notes. —Jason Chovanec, wine buyer, Nocturne Jazz & Supper Club and Noble Riot

It’s an attention-grabbing look for a wine that’s still new to the market.

MT. BEAUTIFUL

It may come as a surprise that a country synonymous with Sauvignon Blanc “is really starting to wrap its arms around Chardonnay”—but New Zealand is doing just that, according to Karl Ziegler, National Sales Manager for Mt. Beautiful. The winery is located in the North Canterbury region, which “is a little warmer than Marlborough—but not a lot,” Ziegler explained; except for Pinot Noir, its estate vineyards are devoted entirely to the cultivation of Riesling and Pinot Gris as well as Sauvignon Blanc and Chardonnay.



Karl Ziegler is National Sales Manager for the Mt. Beautiful winery in North Canterbury, New Zealand.

Grown on dry-farmed, hand-harvested blocks, the latter weathered a difficult 2017 vintage that culminated in a late harvest, taking place throughout April (the equivalent of October in the Southern Hemisphere). The result, however, was clearly worth the struggle. Fermented half in stainless steel and half in barrel with minimal malolactic treatment and aged in 30% new oak, it impressed many of our panelists, whom it struck as distinctly Old World, with abundant minerality.



Mt. Beautiful 2017 Chardonnay, North Canterbury, New Zealand (\$23)

“Aromas of salted apples, lemon verbena, and chamomile. Custard and hazelnut, salty pears, and a fine mineral core. Lean and savory with green herbs and green olives. Very Chablis-like.” —Ryan Fletter, Wine Director/owner, Barolo Grill and Chow Morso

“Leesy with stony minerality and yellow flowers.

Lemon curd and citrus rind come through with a finish of fresh-baked brioche.” —Carlin Karr, Wine Director, Tavernetta and Frasca Food and Wine



Santa Margherita USA Wine Educator Kristina Sazama.

CANTINA MESA

“Sardinia is a huge outdoor museum of soil types,” Santa Margherita USA Wine Educator Kristina Sazama said as she introduced the panel to the Cantina Mesa 2016 Primo Scuro Rosso Cannonau di Sardegna DOC, adding that sand, limestone, clay, granite, and basalt all come into play. That kind of diversity is always intriguing to wine lovers, but it’s hardly the only distinctive aspect of the Italian island’s ancient terroir; especially in the southwestern region of Sulcis Iglesiente in the Valle de Porto Pino. Cantina Mesa—a relatively new winery (established in 2004) that Santa Margherita purchased in 2017—is located just over a mile from the shoreline; here, the *maestrale* (or *mistral*) blows across the Mediterranean Sea from France to cool the vines during the long, warm, dry growing season, helping to thicken the generally thin skins of the Cannonau (aka Grenache) grapes while also carrying the sea salt that factors into their organoleptic profile.

In observing “lots of herbs” in the wine, Mercantile Dining & Provision Wine Director Patrick Houghton picked up on another notable aspect of the landscape. Sazama concurred, noting that “on Sardinia, there’s *mac-*

chia, similar to [southern French] garrigue. While I was there recently, I smelled it everywhere." To preserve all that local character, winemaker Stefano Cova ferments the hand-harvested fruit at a slightly cooler temperature than is typical for reds, then matures the wine in stainless steel. So it didn't faze Sazama that some of our guests compared the final product to a Pinot Noir: "I find the wine more elegant than flashy, as a lot of Grenaches can be," she said.

**Cantina Mesa 2016
Primo Scuro Rosso
Cannonau di Sardegna DOC, Italy (\$15)**

Aromas of earth and mushroom with a wonderful Old World, warm-climate character. Red berries and roses on the front of the palate with a dash of white pepper. Discreet tannins and a sense of heather (garrigue).
—Ryan Fletter, Wine Director/owner, Barolo Grill and Chow Morso



This shows like an Old World Grenache. Pale, translucent ruby-red color. Wild strawberry and rose hips spread across the palate. Spicy and herbal—tastes Mediterranean in character.
—Carlin Karr, Wine Director, Tavernetta and Frasca Food and Wine

“Sardinia is a huge outdoor museum of soil types.”

*—Santa Margherita
USA Wine Educator
Kristina Sazama*

LANGETWINS FAMILY WINERY AND VINEYARDS

Based on its appearance, our panelists could only have failed to glean clues as to the identity of the wine presented by LangeTwins Family Winery and Vineyards District Manager Kim Jimenez if they had been literally blindfolded. As Ryan Fletter, Wine Director and owner of Barolo Grill and Chow Morso, pointed out, “It’s incredibly purple and intense—the densest wine on the table.”



Kim Jimenez is District Manager for LangeTwins Family Winery and Vineyards.

The fruit for this Petite Sirah was grown in the One Hundred Vineyard, named for the number of acres it occupies in Lodi’s smallest AVA, Jahant, which sits on floodplain deposits in close proximity to the Mokelumne River. Certified sustainable—like all of LangeTwins’ wines—through LODI RULES, the 2017 vintage is the hard-won result of a tricky vintage that saw heavy rains through spring and delays in the onset of harvest. Perhaps the winery carried a little favor with Mother Nature, however, through its bottle design: Explained Jimenez, “Our designer collected soil from the vineyard, and after splattering it on paper, incorporated it into the label through a digital rendering.”



LangeTwins 2017 One Hundred Vineyard Petite Sirah, Jahant AVA, Lodi (\$32)

Sweet fruit dominates floral tones. White pepper, vanilla bean, cherries, and fudge. Cedar on the finish is subtle.
—Chad Michael George, partner, The Way Back

Black, opaque color with intense black fruit and rich chocolate notes. Alcohol is up there, so I am guessing a warm-climate Petite Sirah.

Soft tannins with good acid.
—Ryan Fletter, Wine Director/owner, Barolo Grill and Chow Morso

YARDEN

After asking the group to identify the provenance of the wine he was presenting, Yarden Inc. West Regional Manager Bill Henry didn't wait long to drop a big hint: "It's a New World region that's been making wine for 5,000 years." That region, it turned out, was Israel.

Specifically, the Yarden 2016 Cabernet Sauvignon comes from the Golan Heights of Galilee, which "is a very special growing area," Henry asserted. "The key is a couple of things: great volcanic soil and elevation from 1,000 to 4,000 feet." That terroir is responsible, he added, for the combination of high acidity and "high alcohol for the Old World" that delighted our tasters, more than a few of whom likened the wine, aged in 100% French oak, to a Bordeaux.

Yarden is the flagship brand of Golan Heights Winery. Jointly owned by seven kibbutzes, it's one of many producers at the forefront of rapid change in the Israeli wine industry, which has been garnering worldwide attention for quality in recent years. "Think about Napa in the 1960s: That's kind of where we're at," said Henry. But given how far its production has evolved while still modernizing—note that Golan Heights Winery boasts one of only two optical laser sorters in the entire country—it seems likely that Israel's on the fast track to world-class status.



Yarden Inc. West Regional Manager Bill Henry presented on behalf of Wines of Israel.

Yarden 2016 Cabernet Sauvignon, Galilee, Israel

What a gorgeous Bordelais nose: coffee, cassis, cigar box, and brandied blackberry. Old World acidity, with a presence of terroir: soil and dried heather. My favorite wine of the flight. —*Carlin Karr, Wine Director, Tavernetta and Frasca Food and Wine*

Great, powerful nose of beechwood, cinnamon, and

nutmeg. Good structure and a smooth finish—one of my favorites of the tasting. That's my style of Cab.

—*Chad Michael George, partner, The Way Back*



WESTWOOD ESTATE

Sonoma County's Westwood Estate has its own Biodynamically farmed 37-acre vineyard, Annadel Gap, but it also sources grapes from top sites throughout Napa as well as Sonoma with an eye toward ensuring that "everything we do is organic or Biodynamic," according to Managing Director David Green. Between that fact and the estate's



Westwood Estate Managing Director David Green.

partnership with illustrious winemaker Philippe Melka and Atelier Melka Director of Winemaking Maayan Koschitzky, the 2016 vintage of Bordeaux-style blend Legend was destined to be an exemplar of power and purity alike.

So it is. Composed of 55% Cabernet Sauvignon from Cornell Vineyard in the Knights Valley AVA along with 24% Grenache, 14% Syrah, and 7% Mourvèdre, the bottling was praised for its "focused tannins" by Mercantile's Patrick Houghton, who added, "It isn't over the top." Agreed Green, "There's a tendency to get too opulent with a wine like this. We want it to pair with food—that's kind of our wheelhouse." Indeed, sales of the Legend are mostly to on-premise accounts.



Westwood Estate 2016 Legend, Annadel Gap, Sonoma County (\$60)

Dark chocolate and dark fruit, with centered aromatics that mirror the palate. Savory and rich with black olive, black pepper, and gliding, silky tannins. Delicious. —*Matthew Bennett, wine buyer, Stoic & Genuine*

Gorgeous ruby hue; bright, ripe red-fruit profile. Well-rounded body with structure and a smooth finish. Well balanced. —*Chad Michael George, partner, The Way Back*

J. WILKES

"Pinot Blanc is an endangered species—there are less than 300 acres left in California," Miller Family Wine Company consulting winemaker Wes Hagen lamented to the group. "But I'm a true believer in it—we make more Pinot Blanc than any other domestic producer, period." Also a fierce advocate for Santa Barbara County, where he remains "the only winemaker in America to write the petitions for four AVAs," Hagen was a naturally delightful guide for the J. Wilkes 2018 Santa Barbara County Pinot Blanc before us.

It was, he slyly allowed, a "purposely confounding" choice for a blind tasting, not least because it's not a monovarietal wine: The own-rooted 1973 planting from which it's sourced includes what he claims are some of the "oldest Pinot Blanc vines anywhere outside Alto Adige," but upon analysis it was discovered that a small percentage of other grapes were in the mix too, among them Melon de Bourgogne. "I love that it's a field blend," he said, adding that he "played with a little bit of skin contact" along with partial malolactic fermentation "because I like that beeswax character you get" on the palate. Such willingness to experiment is certainly in keeping with the philosophy of the brand's pioneering namesake, Hagen pointed out: "J. Wilkes was way before his time. We're proud we get to continue his legacy brand."



J. Wilkes 2018 Pinot Blanc, Santa Barbara County (\$20)

Aromas of pear nectar and honeyed jasmine. You can taste and smell the salted sea breeze as well as wet stone and just-ripe peach and tangerine. Acidity is high and it finishes with a nuance of beeswax. —*Jason Chovanec, wine buyer, Nocturne Jazz & Supper Club and Noble Riot*

White flowers and dried herbs punctuate the aromatics. Well-integrated oak and good acidity work well to bring out ripe white peach and tart green apple. —*Matthew Bennett, wine buyer, Stoic & Genuine*



Wes Hagen is consulting winemaker for Miller Family Wine Company.

SOLOMON HILLS

Also under the Miller Family Wine Company umbrella is the Solomon Hills estate in the Santa Maria Valley AVA of Santa Barbara County. It's home "to the second-coldest vineyard in the country," according to Regional Sales Manager Janet Hammer; organically farmed just 10 miles from the Pacific Ocean in "extremely sandy soils," it rests atop what is "basically a 12-million-year-old seabed," Hagen added.

Hagen's passion for the site shone bright as he introduced the panel to the Solomon Hills 2016 Estate Pinot Noir: "This is the most temperate climate on planet Earth," he swore, "and you can taste it in the verve and acidity of this wine"—which, he also had us know, is fermented with "feral yeasts deposited by wasps. Baby wasps are born with wine yeast in their tummies—that's the sexiest insect fact you'll learn today."

Aged 16 months in French oak (33% new), it proved one of the day's biggest hits, which came as no surprise to Hagen. "Santa Barbara County is the Loire Valley of California—underappreciated and underpriced," he said. "But the geeks know and love what we do."



Miller Family Wine Company Regional Sales Manager Janet Hammer.



Solomon Hills 2016 Estate Pinot Noir, Santa Maria Valley

Earthy nose and ripe fruit lead to round tannins, with flavors of sour cherry, cedar, and cinnamon. Acidity has verve. Finishes savory with mushroom and oregano. —*JP Taylor, Wine Director, Beast + Bottle and Coperta*

Sour cherry, rhubarb, violets, and rose petals—tastes feral and reminds me of either a Bur-

gundy or a Cerasuolo di Vittoria from Sicily. Expressive and earth driven. —*Ryan Fletter, Wine Director/Owner, Barolo Grill and Chow Morso*

Tasting whole-bunch stems, rose hips, sandalwood, and Indian spice box. Smells like a complex New World Pinot Noir, and a very elegant one at that. —*Carlin Karr, Wine Director, Tavernetta and Frasca Food and Wine* SJ

Colorado-based sommelier Sean Costa swings over the Bone Rock block in Saxum's James Berry Vineyard.

Love at First

SLIP

**Profiles in Heroic
Winegrowing at the 2019
Paso Robles Rhône Camp**

**STORY BY RANDY CAPAROSO
PHOTOS BY TODD WESTPHAL**

You can read all about a region like Paso Robles, but you won't really understand it until you walk it. A case in point is Law Estate in the Adelaida District AVA: the first stop of *The SOMM Journal's* 2019 Paso Robles Rhône Camp, held late last August and attended by 25 sommeliers from near (L.A., Manhattan Beach, Los Altos, Bakersfield, and Larkspur) and far (Hawaii, New York, Illinois, Texas, Florida, Nevada, Minnesota, Arizona, Colorado, and Washington, D.C.).

Honolulu-based Master Sommelier Chuck Furuya recalls our arrival on the scene: "We jumped out of the vans after what seemed like an eternity of perversely winding, narrow roads and walked the breathtaking, high-elevation [1,400 feet ascending to 1,900], steep hillside estate vineyard with winemaker Philipp Pfunder."



Law Estate winemaker Philipp Pfunder (right) with Carrie Lyn Strong, sommelier at Casa Lever in New York, NY.



The campers gather at the top of Linne Calado's Trevi Ranch estate.

Because the camp was timed to give the sommeliers an opportunity to view—and taste—grapes on the vine, Pfunder was able to guide us through plantings of the exact components that comprise his **Law Estate 2017 Soph:** Roussanne (57%), Marsanne (15%), and Clairette Blanche (28%). Furuya deemed it "classy, mineral-driven, elegant, suave, and refined," a description upon which Pfunder elaborated: "The Roussanne gives the wine its broad, viscous, golden-pear quality and the Marsanne a floral, tropical, pineapple/candied lemon character, while the Clairette Blanche supplies the acid and mineral tension, keeping the wine from being too big and sharpening its focus."

Adds Furuya of the trip, "While Paso Robles is historically thought of as hot, the nighttime temperatures while we were there were in the 50s. The most compelling aspect, however, is the soils. There are marine-based soils seemingly everywhere, which can innately create minerality in the finished wine and a buoyancy—a wine thought of as ripe, opulent, and lavish seem[s] lighter than it actually [is]."



Clos Solène owner/grower/winemaker Guillaume Fabre (right) shares a taste of Clos Solène La Rosé with Tiffany Tobey of SÉR Steak + Spirits in Dallas, TX.

In short, the Law Estate Soph was not just an example of how good Paso Robles wines can be: It was an illustration of the region's approach to winegrowing, which could perhaps be summarized most succinctly as heroic. The local industry is led by vintners so convinced of Paso Robles' potential for Rhône varieties that they are gladly willing to roll that stone up the hill, planting on parched slopes more suitable to native chaparral, scrawny oaks, and bare rocks while eschewing grapes that are easier to grow and sell in today's market.

Following our first vineyard walk, 13 more vintners joined us at Law Estate's hilltop winery for an all-rosé dinner; there, they presented 14 dry rosés made from the classic black-skinned grapes of southern France (Grenache, Mourvèdre, Syrah, Cinsault, and Counoise). If we had to pick one that many of the sommeliers couldn't stop talking about, it was the almost-magically pure, graceful, and distinctly mineral-nuanced **Clos Solène 2018 La Rosé** (52% Grenache/20% Cinsault/28% Mourvèdre), as it epitomized the ease with which Rhône varieties have adapted to the region.

“There are marine-based soils seemingly everywhere, which can innately create minerality in the finished wine and a buoyancy—a wine thought of as ripe, opulent, and lavish seem[s] lighter than it actually [is].”

—Master Sommelier Chuck Furuya

DAY 1: Sensory Introductions

The first full day of the camp started with a pilgrimage to Tablas Creek, where partner/GM Jason Haas put the sommeliers through the paces with a tasting of no fewer than 12 of the classic Châteauneuf-du-Pape grapes bottled as single-varietals, plus another five proprietary blends. Even after 30 years of pioneering these varieties in California, Tablas Creek has never stopped innovating: Said Haas, “We still think of ourselves as a start-up.” Tiffany Tobey of SÈR Steak + Spirits in Dallas, Texas, singled out the white wines made with Roussanne as “majestic,” while Paige Bindel of Pèppoli in Pebble Beach, California, described a rarely seen 100% Terret Noir as “Gamay with attitude!”

Our next stop was Epoch Estate's Paderewski Vineyard in the Paso Robles Willow Creek AVA, where we met with winemaker Jordan Fiorentini. We stood at the top of the property, taking in—in Furuya's words—“a breathtaking, panoramic view of the undulating hills” made up of light, siliceous gray limestone. In Block B,



Gary Russell of the Ritz-Carlton Orlando, Jason Haas of Tablas Creek, and Rick Arline of L.A.'s Auburn hang out after a tasting.

Fiorentini poured her **Epoch 2015 Block B Syrah**, which exuded a perfume laced with the minty and sage-like scent of the



native vegetation on the surrounding hills. Bindel likened tasting it to an “aha moment,” adding, “I was impressed by how pretty, elegant, and not over-extracted the wine was, with minerality [that] really express[ed] a sense of place.”

Then, at the Linne Calodo winery, we washed down a homemade taco lunch (which included sides of nopales and crispy crickets) with nearly a dozen of winemaker/owner/grower Matt Trevisan’s fascinating blends of Rhône grapes entwined with varieties like Zinfandel and Graciano. One memorable example? The hunky, violet- and framboise-tinged **Linne Calodo 2016 Overthinker**, which



The neatly trellised Grenache of Cass Winery.



Epoch Estate winemaker Jordan Fiorentini pours Block B Syrah for camper Christian Barion. Behind them is Rust Wine Company’s Lannon Rust, who helped lead the camp.

mended Syrah, Grenache, Mourvèdre, and Carignan.

The meal was followed by an arduous walk to a hilltop overlooking Trevisan’s Trevi Ranch property, where we studied trellised Syrah and Grenache as well as head-trained Carignan planted in the Calodo series soil—essentially shallow, rocky soils formed from weathered

calcareous shale and sandstone—that’s pervasive throughout the Paso Robles Willow Creek District and Adelaida District appellations.

By the time we reached the Cass Winery estate in the Paso Robles Geneseo District, it was nearly 2 p.m., but Furuya recalls a cool breeze mitigating the afternoon heat—no easy feat when



Epoch Estate’s Paderewski Vineyard in the Paso Robles Willow Creek District AVA.



Linne Calodo winemaker/owner/grower Matt Trevisan leads the campers through his Trevi Ranch property.

“the temperature gauge on the van dashboard read 101 degrees.” Owner/grower Steve Cass tasted the group on his silky and spicy **Cass 2017 Grenache** as well as his refreshingly dry **Cass 2018 Rosé**, a muscular yet effusively scented blend of Mourvèdre and Grenache; he described the latter variety, grown in the sub-AVA’s loamy calcareous soil, as “Paso’s Pinot.”

The day ended with a celebratory dinner at Epoch Estate that was preceded by a tasting of more than two dozen white wines. Proffered by 18 wineries, they were made from a full range of southern French varieties, including Piquepoul, Clairette Blanche, Grenache Blanc, Viognier, Marsanne, Roussanne, and Vermentino. Our host winery commenced the evening with a three-vintage vertical (2015, 2016, 2017) of its **Epoch White**; replete with palate-slaking minerality and acidity, these absolutely luxurious blends of Grenache Blanc, Viognier, and Roussanne proved remarkably restrained in terms of oak influence and held promise for the long haul.

DAY 2: Drilling Down

First thing the following morning, we set out for Steinbeck Vineyard in the Paso Robles Geneseo District, where we walked among Syrah vines planted in 1988 from material known as the Estrella selection. Also called the Eberle clone, it was originally sourced by Gary Eberle from a University of California, Davis, block in 1973 and planted in Paso Robles for the now-defunct Estrella River Winery.

“Professor [Harold] Olmo at Davis had a relationship with Maison M. Chapoutier, from which the original cuttings are said to come,” Eberle, the founder of Eberle Winery, told us. “This became the source of over 90% of the Syrah now planted in California, since this selection has proven to be more suitable to California than any other



Gary Eberle, one of the founding fathers of Paso Robles, is the outspoken proprietor of Eberle Winery.



fumes; recurring mineral notes, meanwhile, ranged from flint and wild chaparral to resinous kitchen herbs.

We then tasted 13 more spectacular Syrahs—poured by Booker, Cass, Clos Solène, Denner, Epoch, Jada, Law, Torrin, and Vina Robles—during a walkaround tasting on Eberle Winery's outdoor veranda. The variety tends to reign supreme wherever it finds a conducive climate, but in Paso Robles, Grenache may be even more ideal. This statement was tested after our vans huffed and puffed up a hilltop to Denner Vineyards' Block 4A in the Paso Robles Willow Creek AVA, where

different acids, tannins, grit, and taste can be [between similar samples]."

Following lunch in the Denner winery, a panel of eight vintners presented an astounding range of Grenache-based reds in a formal tasting: Eric Jensen's pure, silky **Booker 2017 Ripper**, which showed floral and herby notes with hints of cherry; Carl Bowker's coiled, mineral-inundated **Caliza 2016**; Yount's bright, peppery, gingery, and exotic **Denner 2017 Estate**; Jordan Fiorentini's super-spicy, perfumed **Epoch 2016 Sensibility**; Philipp Pfunder's cherry bomb-like **Law Estate 2016 The Nines**; Smith's profoundly dense and

clone of Syrah introduced since." The **Eberle 2017 Steinbeck Vineyard Syrah** was marvelously meaty yet svelte, with dark-fruit qualities and garrigue-like complexity.

In the underground barrel caves of Eberle Winery, we sat for a formal Syrah seminar presented by seven winemakers: Austin Hope (showing his high-toned, acid-driven **Hope Family 2015**), Jeremy Weintraub (the flashy, flowery, strongly mineral **Adelaida 2016 Viking Vineyard**), Bob Tillman (the **Alta Colina 2016 Old 900** with distinctive umami-like savoriness), Damian Grindley (the beefy and brawny yet supple **Brecon 2017 Reserve**), Neil Collins (a **Lone Madrone 2016**, which showed Northern Rhône-like finesse and spicy meatiness), Justin Smith (the powerful, multifaceted **Saxum 2016 Booker Vineyard**), and Eberle himself, who described his **Eberle 1997 Steinbeck Vineyard** as redolent of "beef and blood." The common thread running through all of the wines was remarkable acid balance atop soaring varietal per-



Pictured from left to right at Eberle Winery's Syrah tasting: Saxum winemaker Justin Smith; his son, Colin; Chuck Furuya, MS; and SOMM Journal Publisher Meridith May.

winemaker Anthony Yount greeted us with Grenache clusters and a field tasting of three barrel samples.

Furuya describes the experience: "We were shown three sets of two grape bunches each. One set were grapes from the lower part of the hill, the next set from the middle, and the third from the top. The clusters could not have been more different in sight—from green to ripening [and] colored—and taste. Then there was another set from yet another hill—the same grape, but grown on a different rootstock. It really is amazing how

layered **Saxum 2015 Rocket Block**; Scott Hawley's flowery, pepper-nuanced **Torrin 2015 The Maven**; and Cris Cherry's pungent, full-blown **Villa Creek Cellars 2017 Garnacha**.

"As growers, we love Grenache because Grenache loves us," Smith told us. "The grape has probably been grown in the Mediterranean for at least 3,000 years. We have lots of varieties growing in Paso Robles [46 cultivars, according to data from the Paso Robles Wine Country Alliance], but this is a Mediterranean region, and Grenache loves the heat and dryness



Denner Vineyards Vineyard Manager Aron Nevarez proudly displays Grenache clusters bound for the winery.



Campers examine the calcareous soil and bedrock in a freshly dug trench within the Glenrose Vineyard.

... [It] puts down deep roots to find moisture in our soils, much of it in limestone bedrocks, which soak up winter rain like a sponge and make water available to vines even through our driest summers."

At our next stop in the Adelaida District, we stood under a lone oak as we

looked directly at the 1,600-foot peak of Glenrose Vineyard, planted to Mourvèdre on terraces carved into white limestone bedrock. Paix Sur Terre winemaker/owner Ryan Pease tasted us on three of his vineyard-designate 100% Mourvèdres, which, despite being vinified the exact same way,

distinguished themselves as distinct, terroir-driven permutations (epitomized by the meaty, iron- and mineral-suffused **Paix Sur Terre 2016 The Other One Glenrose Vineyard**). "No photo captures the feeling of awe standing in Glenrose, feeling the relentless winds and smelling the desolate, untamed countryside," Furuya said.

Then we went from pillar to post, taking a muscle-stiffening climb up a nearly 45-degree slope to the Bone Rock block in Saxum Vineyards' James Berry Vineyard. There, freestanding Syrah is trained on vertical cordons atop terraces dug into siliceous shale bedrock; due to the high free-lime content, even ultra-ripe grapes can hold their acid. (The block is called Bone Rock because fossilized whale bones were found when it was excavated.)

Atop the hill, we caught back up with Smith, who shared 2017 barrel samples of the high-toned, ferociously concentrated Bone Rock cuvée (56% Syrah with Graciano, Roussanne, and Mataró). We also tried the peppery and intense yet seamless Grenache blend with Petite Sirah, Syrah, and Tempranillo from the vineyard's Hexe block.

As if taxing mountain hikes weren't enough, the camp wrapped up with two grueling yet illuminating tastings of red Rhône blends: The first round featured 26 bottlings presented by 14 vintners in the caves under Bone Rock. After a brief break, another 22 red blends were presented by eight vintners at Cass Vineyards, where we also enjoyed a farm-to-table dinner generously co-sponsored by the winery and the Paso Robles chapter of the Rhône Rangers group. As you may suspect, the wines that wowed were too numerous to recount, but among those that stood out were expressions with beguiling dashes of Cinsault or Counoise, Graciano or Tempranillo, Tannat or Petite Sirah, and even splashes of Cabernet Sauvignon that rounded out classic Grenache/Syrah/Mourvèdre/Carignan frameworks. As Las Vegas-based sommelier Devin Zendel neatly summarized it: "That's Paso Rhône for ya—just like the south of France . . . the region is truly a blenders' paradise!" **SJ**

Participating Paso Robles Rhône Camp Wineries

Adelaida Vineyards
Alta Colina Wine
Booker Wines
Brecon Estate
Caliza Winery
Cass Winery
Clos Solène Wine
Denner Vineyards
Eberle Winery
Epoch Estate Wines
Jada Vineyard & Winery
Hope Family Wines
Law Estate Wines
Linne Calodo
Lone Madrone Winery
Paix Sur Terre
Saxum Vineyards
Tablas Creek Vineyard
Thacher Winery and Vineyard
Torrin Vineyard
Villa Creek Cellars
Vina Robles Vineyards & Winery

Participating Sommeliers

Rick Arline II, Auburn, Los Angeles, CA
Christian Barion, Love & Salt, Manhattan Beach, CA
Karen Bennett, Café Med Restaurant, Bakersfield, CA
Paige Bindel, CS, Pèppoli at Pebble Beach Co., Pebble Beach, CA
Robert Brzostowski, Le Cirque, Bellagio Resort & Casino, Las Vegas, NV
Anibal Calcagno, Indian Accent, New York, NY
Sean Costa, Zach's Cabin, Beaver Creek Resort, Avon, CO
Kristin Evans, BlackSalt Restaurant, Washington, D.C.
Chuck Furuya, MS, DK Restaurants, Honolulu, HI
Nial Rhys Harris García, Conrad Hotel, Washington, D.C.
Jamie Harding, Picco Restaurant, Larkspur, CA
Matthew Kaner, Bar Covell, Augustine Wine Bar, Dead or Alive Bar (Palm Springs), Los Angeles, CA
Justin Lipsky-Sugita, Breaking Bread Hospitality Group, Honolulu, HI
Ivy Nagayama, DK Steakhouse, Honolulu, HI
Timothy O'Neal, Cavé Vin, Grill Hall, Minneapolis and Maple Grove, MN
Eric Perejda, Beano's Cabin, Avon, CO
Gary Russell, The Ritz-Carlton Orlando, Grande Lakes, Orlando, FL
Jared Sowinski, The Phoenician Resort, Scottsdale, AZ
Andrew Sparling, CS, Los Altos Golf & Country Club, Los Altos, CA
Carrie Lyn Strong, Casa Lever, New York, NY
Micah Suderman, Azure Restaurant, The Royal Hawaiian Hotel, Honolulu, HI
Davin Teta, TAG Restaurant, Denver, CO
Tiffany Tobey, SĒR Steak + Spirits, Hilton Anatole Convention Center, Dallas, TX
Michael Winterbottom, Senia, Honolulu, HI
Devin Zendel, Rivea by Alain Ducasse at Mandalay Bay, Las Vegas, NV

Master Sommelier Chuck Furuya in Steinbeck Vineyard's historic Syrah block in the Paso Robles Geneseo District AVA.



SOMMELIER EXTRAVAGANZA

Set for January 2020

200+
WINES

3
DAYS

5
MASTER SOMMS

1
INTIMATE
EXPERIENCE

Wine Speak Paso Robles is set to return for a third annual campaign on January 14-16, 2020, advancing its momentum as a premier trade event featuring an all-star cast of master sommeliers, wine industry leaders and hospitality professionals. Wine Speak 2020 spans three days in the Paso Robles wine country, starting with two days of winemaker-sommelier panels and concluding with professional development seminars and workshops.

"Wine Speak is all about gathering luminaries from around the world to share their knowledge, wisdom and experience, so that everyone attending can have an opportunity to learn," said master sommelier, Chuck Furuya, who co-founded Wine Speak with Amanda Wittstrom-Higgins.

Generously sponsored by

THE **SOMM** JOURNAL

PUBLIC TASTING EXPERIENCES

While Wine Speak 2020 is first and foremost a trade event, wine consumers are invited to join in on two remarkable public tasting experiences:

"Wines of The World" on January 14

At this public grand tasting, local chefs will present wine-friendly small plates and an international cast of winemakers will showcase some of their finest reserve and library bottlings. The aim is to give guests a sense of wonderment as they taste wines from Paso Robles, Germany, Portugal, Italy, Spain, Argentina, France and beyond.

"BYOB Dinner" on January 15

BYOB Dinner is an opportunity to gather with wine friends from near and far. The casual setting is ideal for mingling and meeting winemakers, sommeliers, wine professionals and other real wine lovers. Attendees bring bottles of their favorite wines to share—and everyone is always amazed at what they get to taste.

WINE SPEAK
PASO ROBLES, CALIFORNIA

SOMMELIER & WINEMAKER PANELS

Featured master sommeliers at Wine Speak 2020 include Fred Dame, Madeline Triffon, Emanuel Kemiji, Nunzio Alioto and Chuck Furuya. Together with some of the world's top winemakers, they will steer panels and seminars designed to inspire, inform and foster community.

JANUARY 14, 2020

"Sense of Place" with Tegan Passalacqua (Turley Wine Cellars, Paso Robles) & Laura Catena (Bodega Catena Zapata, Argentina)

"Paso Robles Overview" with Jason Haas (Tablas Creek), Jordan Fiorentini (Epoch); Steve Peck (J. Lohr) and Mike Sinor (Ancient Peaks), moderated by Amanda Wittstrom Higgins (co-founder of Wine Speak / VP of Ancient Peaks)

"Talk Story" with Bruce Neyers (Neyers Vineyards), the Wine Yoda

"Talk Story" with Lionel Faury (Domaine Faury, Northern Rhône Valley, France)

JANUARY 15, 2020

"Inside/Outside—From the Wine Journalists' Point of View" with Matt Kettmann (Wine Enthusiast) and Randy Caparoso (The SOMM Journal), moderated by Amanda Wittstrom Higgins (co-founder of Wine Speak / VP of Ancient Peaks)

"Dream Big Darling—Wine from a Different Perspective" with Master Sommelier, Madeline Triffon, moderated by Amanda Wittstrom Higgins (co-founder of Wine Speak / VP of Ancient Peaks / President and Founder of Dream Big Darling)

"Inside/Outside—Crazy Red Blends" with Stephan Asseo (L'Aventure, Paso Robles) and Emanuel Kemiji, Master Sommelier (Clos Pissarra, Priorat, Spain)

"Inside/Outside—Cabernet Sauvignon" with Thomas Brown (Rivers Marie, Napa Valley) and Fred Dame, Master Sommelier (DAOU, Paso Robles)

HOSPITALITY & PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT SEMINARS

Wine Speak 2020's hospitality and professional development seminars are designed to empower winery, restaurant and hotel employees with essential professional skills and knowledge:

JANUARY 16, 2020

"Talk Story on Blind Tasting" with three legendary master sommeliers: Nunzio Alioto, Fred Dame and Madeline Triffon

"Talk Story on Hospitality" with three legendary master sommeliers: Nunzio Alioto, Fred Dame and Madeline Triffon

"Wine & Food Workshop" with Randy Caparoso, editor at large for The SOMM Journal and Chef Jeffery Scott



FRED DAME, MS, SPEAKER



AMANDA WITTSTROM-HIGGINS,
CO-FOUNDER



JANUARY 14-16TH
WINE SPEAK PASO.COM



MADELINE TRIFFON, MS, SPEAKER



A portion of the proceeds benefit Dream Big Darling a non-profit 501C3 and all of the community charities it serves. The Dream Big Darling nonprofit will be responsible in collecting all donations and tickets sales.

Color Matters in France

MELODY FULLER REFLECTS ON HER VISIT TO EUROPE

STUDYING THE REDS, whites, and pinks of France—not to mention the blacks (Cahors), yellows (Champagne), and browns (Cognac)—was my mission when I made an intensely exciting investment in my professional education this year: a trip to ten French winegrowing areas, among them the Loire and Rhône valleys, Bordeaux, Languedoc-Roussillon, and Provence.

Under the American flag, I am a black woman who works in the wine, spirits, and food industry. When I encounter the words “for professionals only” or “not open to the public,” I do more than pause—I pray. Here in the U.S., my decades of wine education, collecting, purchasing, publishing, editing, writing, journaling, judging, consulting, and advocating do not mean much to some. The fact that I am a president of two corporations, a founder, a pioneer, a scholar, an innovator, an award winner, and more does not tip the scales or evoke a courteous reply where one would be warranted.

Elated to be free from pointed inquiries about my professional identity, I easily secured all but two of my 100-plus desired appointments over the course of my trip. Not being asked to discuss my race and origin or the subject of diversity was liberating, as was not having to explain over and over again exactly what I do. My name, my professional title, and the date and time of my requested visit was good enough—meaning that, for the French wine, spirits, and food industry, I am good enough. You have no idea what that feels like, but I do: It is humanizing. I am one of their peers, and they wished to see me.

On one visit to a chateau included in 1855 Bordeaux classification, I was transported in a small open-air vehicle around an amazingly scenic estate, taking in the various lots and landscapes. Savoring a



PHOTO COURTESY OF MELODY FULLER

Melody Fuller with Alfred Tesson, the proprietor of Château Pontet-Canet.

stunning view of the property's entrance, I reflected on how the owner of this world-class winery had personally greeted me, enveloping me in his arms as if I were a beloved member of his family. We had communicated prior to my visit, becoming fast friends in the process. My host, another member of the chateau's leadership, said, “Mademoiselle Melody Fuller, in honor of your visit, we fly your flag next to our flag and the flag of Bordeaux.” She motioned for me to follow her outside of the vehicle.

I got out, looked at the three flags, and said nothing. I could not. In my life, I had never been so proud to be an American as I watched the red, white, and blue ban-

ner wave high and jubilantly beside the gold-and-blue coat of arms of Bordeaux and the tricolor flag of France. In my soul, I heard the words: *Did you not know we were waiting for you?*

Through my gaze, it's deeply significant that this girl from Oakland, California, mattered enough to the French people of Bordeaux that they flew her country's flag in her honor. It meant more than can be expressed that fellow industry professionals saw me as they see themselves. **SJ**

Melody Fuller, MPA, MFA, is the founder and President of the Oakland Wine Festival, the Oakland Wine and Food Society, and the newly launched Exceptional Vine Initiative.



The Man Behind the Brands



CERTIFIED
Organic

★ EL ★
LUCHADOR



ORGANIC
TEQUILA
100% de AGAVE



TEQUILA[®]
100% de AGAVE

MEZCAL
CRÁNEO



ORGANIC
MEZCAL ARTESANAL
100% AGAVE
OAXACA



123spirits.com



LIFE IS
MEASURED
BY MOMENTS



MAKE IT MOMENTUS

ESTATE GROWN SPARKLING WHITE | CLARKSBURG, CALIFORNIA

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

HERZOGWINE.COM



